Article

Jul 2021

Future of Work - The Intentional Workplace

The questions we are asking ourselves about organisational culture in the Future of Work as companies increasingly become a blended environment with staff at home and in the office.



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"What are you up to today?"

"I'm working on project X"

"Going ok?"

"Yeah it's just that we are having problems with..."

"You should speak to X. He was great at that in a previous project."

Does that sound familiar? Or maybe it's just a distant memory?

Until recently, we would bump into our colleagues in passing, have a chat with a manager or senior leader whilst making a coffee – but if you are one of the many businesses which have made the necessary jump into remote working, these happenstance interactions no longer occur.

Every interaction is now on purpose; we have an invitation in an allocated slot in our calendar for a specific reason, and spend an allotted amount of time communicating before our time is up and we do something else.

Our remotely connected virtual worlds are just not quite as social; office osmosis™ is much more challenging. Do we really understand how much communication and influencing happened during these interactions? And how much we are now missing out on? Is that a bad thing?

It must be more difficult for managers to notice issues if previously they were sat in the same open office space, or for less experienced staff to get help without feeling like they are imposing. Observed behaviour has been replaced with direct conversation – does this make it more difficult to maintain the culture and values of our organisations? How can a leader espouse that culture remotely?

I believe at the very least our work lives are not as rich as they could be in this scenario and the worst outcomes are innovation slowing, people struggling with less support, and less social contact. Individual productivity may seem at an all time high but are we progressing as a team as much as we could?

This may not be a new phenomenon for some – branch offices, remote workers and project teams might have experienced a sense of disconnection from the main body of the organisation for some time; and, interestingly, lockdown may have temporarily levelled the playing field. What's interesting is if this difference might now appear between staff who attend office spaces in our new, lower capacity offices and those who remain remote.

Are you thinking about how you make up for this either by trying to encourage happenstance and serendipity in your 'new normal', or by increasing the more formal communication methods such as team meetings, company-wide communications sessions and one-to-ones?

With things as they stand, maybe a new approach is required to encourage communication and stimulate innovation. A new intent, dedicated to fostering creativity and productivity; to simulating the social aspects of the traditional office. Maybe we all need to make time to chat more; to bring to life the concept of the virtual water cooler in a remote, but intentional, workplace. Work, and the world, might just be better for it.