Tolerant bosses?

How UK managers are getting in step
with the new work–life rhythm

'Generation Y' helping to shape
new ways of working

- Seven out of ten managers (69 per cent) feel that the old idea of nine-to-five working is disappearing

- Six out of ten of managers (63 per cent) don't mind if staff do personal tasks during work hours

- Two-thirds of managers (65 per cent) ask employees to work outside work hours, at least occasionally

- Six out of ten managers (62 per cent) think smartphones and home-working have blurred the line between work and personal life

- Six out of ten managers (59 per cent) allow their employees to work from home.

Report

The changing world of work

UK businesses are competing on an increasingly global stage, and productivity, customer service and differentiation are fast becoming the cornerstones of success.

We are also seeing a fundamental shift in the way that people work. Driven primarily by a growing 'Generation Y', or 'Millennial', workforce – born after 1982 – for whom mobile technology is a natural part of their daily lives, a quiet revolution is unfolding in the workplace. Walls are coming down. The lines between 'work hours' and 'after hours' are blurring. And expectations of being always-on are becoming the norm.

For Generation Y, the mobile Internet is already a fundamental part of their lives. They are used to staying connected to friends and family, almost minute-by-minute, and they are bringing that expectation into the workplace.

But how are Britain's bosses coping? Whether it is in a small start-up business, or a large corporate organization, navigating the shift from old to new ways of working could be a minefield. From 'tolerating' personal activities during traditional work hours, to expectations that employees will be available outside the traditional nine-to-five, the first step in addressing the challenge is to understand the attitudes that exist.

Taking the work–life rhythm pulse

Vodafone polled 1,000 UK managers to find out how in tune they are with changing work patterns. The research covered businesses of all types, from two-person start-ups, through mid-sized business, to large corporates with hundreds of bosses, in both the public and private sector.

Our aim was to find out how UK managers view the new work–life rhythm that is taking hold: not simply their attitude to flexible hours, but what they think of people bringing personal activity into work. We wanted to investigate whether UK bosses think it is possible to be flexible in a way that benefits both businesses and employees.

These issues are important, especially during tough economic conditions when companies need to adapt quickly to changing market conditions. New ways of working enabled by the Internet and mobile technology don't just cut costs and improve productivity, they also enable people to fit work around their personal lives. What is more, they are a fundamental part of attracting and retaining Generation Y talent.

How can UK managers use the shift in workplace culture to their competitive advantage, whether they work in a start-up, an SME, a large corporate or in the public sector?

Report

UK bosses moving with the times

From our research, it seems UK managers are reasonably flexible and tolerant when it comes to balancing the needs of work and personal life.

The majority of managers (57 per cent) agree that if their staff are happy in their personal lives they are happy in their work life, and 81 per cent of managers want their staff to be happy at work. Managers in larger companies seem to be more concerned with employee happiness than those in smaller companies: 99 per cent of managers in companies with more than 250 employees like their staff to be happy, compared with just 64 per cent in companies with between 21 and 30 employees.

Flexibility works both ways

Overall, six out of ten managers (63 per cent) say that they do not mind staff doing personal things like calling family members or checking personal social networking accounts media, as long as they get all their work done.

The 'quid pro quo' of this is that nearly two-thirds of managers (65 per cent) ask their employees to work outside of traditional office hours, at least occasionally. On this issue, there is a significant difference between the private sector, where 69 per cent of managers ask staff to work outside normal hours, and the public sector, where only 58 per cent do.

In the private sector, a small but significant group of managers (15 per cent) say working outside normal hours is expected: in the public sector, only eight per cent say this.

There was also a difference between male and female managers: 15 per cent of male bosses say it's expected for staff to work outside of working hours, compared with 10 per cent of women. In addition, more female (39 per cent) than male (31 per cent) bosses said that they never ask their staff to work outside of normal office hours.

Of the managers who do ask their employees to work outside work hours, the vast majority (93 per cent) think that it's only fair that staff sometimes attend to personal tasks during work time. Interestingly, of these managers, more men (23 per cent) than women (17 per cent) answered an unqualified 'yes' when asked if they think it's fair if staff do personal things during work time in return – most (73 per cent overall) think it's OK in moderation.

Most UK managers are happy for employees to take personal calls (86 per cent), check social networking sites (75 per cent), book personal appointments (72 per cent), and send personal emails (68 per cent) during work hours, at least in moderation.

However, UK managers draw the line at certain personal activities during work time. For example, around two-thirds (64 per cent) say they take exception to staff doing their weekly shop online while at work.

Changing attitudes?

Few people would be surprised to hear that women are more tolerant of the blurring between work and personal life. It's a reflection of the dual role that many women have chosen to play for hundreds of years. What is more interesting is the number of men who have no objection at all to personal activity during working hours, as long as the job is done, and done well. It is this attitude – by bosses of any gender – that will attract top talent.

Male managers were more inclined to reprimand their staff for bringing their personal lives into work (30 per cent) than female ones (25 per cent). Men and women seem to be in complete agreement on one issue, however: that women are more likely than men to bring their personal problems into work (86 per cent of women say this, along with 83 per cent of men).

Overall, almost four-fifths of managers (79 per cent) count members of staff as their friends – 16 per cent say that most members of staff are their friends.

The concept of flexibility is one which people understand, in principle, but how can it be implemented successfully in an existing business?

Still some way to go

Generation Y has been entering the workforce for the past decade or so, and their influence is beginning to be felt at management level. How far has their influence spread, and how is UK management responding?

Looking after Generation Y employees isn't just about attracting top talent. Soon it will be a necessity in order to attract any talent at all. People who are used to being always connected and have grown up consuming media from multiple sources simultaneously are 'programmed' differently, and their work environment needs to reflect that.

Generation Y employees are more connected and technology-literate than any previous generation. They have powerful PCs, laptops and other portable devices at home, and they expect a similar experience when at work. They are comfortable processing vast amounts of data at the same time, and often use multiple digital devices simultaneously.

In addition, Generation Y employees do not have distinct lines between their work and social lives, and they are unlikely to value rigid hierarchy or an office-bound work environment. For example, 85 per cent of Generation Y workers want to spend 30–70 per cent of their time working from home. They tend to be highly networked, social and collaborative, and want to stay connected to their social networks at all times, wherever they are.

How is UK management responding?

Just over two-thirds (69 per cent) of managers feel that the old idea of nine-to-five working is disappearing in favour of more flexible working patterns that allow staff to fit their work around their lives, rather than the other way around. A slightly lower number (62 per cent) think the line between work and personal life has become blurred since people started using smartphones and working from home.

Among those managers who think nine-to-five working is on the way out, the overwhelming majority (89.9 per cent) say they are enabling their staff to work more flexibly, at least occasionally.

It seems the trends towards mobile and home working are well established, but still have some way to go. Of the managers surveyed, only 12 per cent equip their employees with smartphones as *standard* in order to work on the move, and only 15 per cent provide employees with the tools to work from home (such as laptops, broadband connectivity and remote access to systems).

However, around one-third (34 per cent) of managers say they equip *some* of their staff with smartphones, while 15 per cent reimburse employees for using their own smartphones for work. Just over two-fifths (43 per cent) of managers say their employees can work from home if they have the technology to do so.

The trend towards businesses allowing 'Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) — where companies allow staff to select and use their own devices, including laptops, notebooks and tablets, for work rather than issue them centrally — was also noticeable. One-fifth (21 per cent) of managers say this is the way to go; and a similar number (22 per cent) say it is definitely worth considering, as long as the right security measures and processes are in place. Only 12 per cent of managers think work and personal technology must be separate.

A matter of 'when' not 'if'

It's one thing to offer employees the ability to work flexibly using their own tools and technology. It's something altogether different to equip them with the tools they need to work effectively wherever they are. Soon, if businesses are to remain competitive and attract top talent, it will be a necessity not a luxury to offer this kind of support to employees.

Given the economic challenges facing many businesses these days, it is no surprise that employees are expected to go 'above and beyond' the call of duty. Of course, norms around 'working hours' need to be set, but with the ability to work anytime, anywhere, working hours that are tailored to individuals' lives can actually be a real benefit to the business. The technology to do that is already here. The challenge is as much about mind-set as it is about process.

With so much talk about changing the way Britain works, bosses could be forgiven for not knowing where to start. Here are just a few starting points to consider:

Company culture – do you have a culture of trust and flexibility? What's the average make-up of your employees? Are your employees accountable for specific results? Are you competitive when it comes to customer service?

Technology support – do you have the technology in place to enable your employees to work remotely? If not, why not? Do you know whether your employees use their personal devices for work? If so, what security measures do they have in place?

Infrastructure – take a look at your current infrastructure and question the relevance and importance to your business. Do you need office space, every day, for every employee? Could you move to smaller, smarter offices and be even more effective? Do you have the systems and processes in place to make it easy for people to work remotely (access to contacts, information, email, forwarding calls)?

Measurement – do you have strong KPIs for employees that would make it easy to measure productivity rather than presenteeism?

HR – are you actively addressing employee engagement? Is talent acquisition and retention important to you?

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Five-step process

Vodafone has developed a five-step process for adapting to new ways of working. It is designed to support businesses of all sizes to work smarter and see all the associated benefits by taking a holistic view of people, processes, space and technology.

It might come as a surprise that we don't start with the technology. In fact, we view technology as the enabler of new ways of working, not the driver, as follows.

1. Insight – the first step is all about understanding the dynamics of the current workplace environment. Through a number of simple studies, employee and leadership interviews and observation studies, we very quickly get a clear evaluation of the 'as is' state of the workplace.

2. Leadership alignment – step two involves getting management signed up to a common vision. This focuses on the leadership team and the organizational culture. We use the data gathered during the insight step to inform the strategic direction and leadership perception.

3. Profiling – in this step, the workforce is profiled by worker type. Through observation, e-survey and workshops, we build a clear view of how the workplace supports the four major worker types: fixed, fixed-mobile, mobile and home workers. This builds the foundation and business case for change by shifting the traditional fixed profile of worker to a much more flexible and mobilized workforce.

4. Change programme – step four defines the required 'degrees of change' to achieve the desired levels of new ways of working. The blueprint created at this stage will define how changes in space design, technology use, people behaviours and process simplification and enforcement will deliver the required vision.

5. Transition – in this step the new ways of working vision is embedded in the organization through a number of short-, medium- and long-term change activities. These changes will be physical and emotional as the organization sees how the new use of space and technology allows the business to realize the true benefits of new ways of working and how communications can support the workplace transformation.

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Vodafone research report – Tolerant bosses?

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