

The Work Revolution

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The office is dead! Long live the office!

Technology is banishing old, static ways of working in favour of agile innovations, says *Alison Maitland*

At Automatic, the company behind blog-creating tool WordPress, there are 470 employees distributed across 45 countries, and work practices have evolved to suit the business. Staff work where they want, communicating via blogs and Slack, the chat tool, rather than email. They travel to team or company meetings three to four weeks a year. Like Netflix and a growing list of other companies, Automatic has an open vacation policy with no set number of days.

Such a set-up is not for those who crave structure, and a corporate document for employees at Automatic admits that recruits may feel they encounter "chaos" working remotely with colleagues around the globe. But employee benefits include sabbaticals and allowances for home offices, mixing desirable aspects of workplace and home-based practices.

Agile, or smart, working policies are far from being the preserve of young tech companies though. "The ability for people to work in different ways through technology has encouraged some employers to think more creatively about the way we employ people... and that maybe work doesn't naturally occur in 35-40 hour weeks," says Clare Kelliher, professor of work and organisation at the UK's Cranfield University School of Management.

Telus, the Canadian telecoms provider, is a big company that moved early, with striking results. The idea for its "Work Styles" initiative came from younger employees a decade ago as a



Getty Images/Image Source

way to offer people flexibility, save on office space and reduce carbon emissions, says Sandy McIntosh, executive vice-president of people and culture.

Seventy per cent of its 27,000 employees in Canada are now "mobile" – working from home, office and other locations – or fully home-based.

"It's a tremendous cultural change," she says, pointing to the challenge of persuading older leaders to accept results-based management. "We started to accelerate when all the senior leaders truly embraced the concept of why this was good for employees, for the environment and for cost reduction."

Employee engagement scores have jumped from 54 to 87 per cent in the past six years, says Ms McIntosh. Telus saves more than \$40m a year in real estate costs, and commuting has been

cut by nearly 33m km, reducing carbon emissions by 8,000 tonnes a year.

Some may scoff at the 35-hour week Prof Kelliher mentions as a distant dream, but employers and governments acknowledge that something has to be done. To tackle digital overload in today's always-on work culture, the French government is introducing a "right to disconnect" from laptops and phones outside work hours. The measure calls on enterprises of more than 50 people to consult workers on technology use to ensure that holidays, rest and personal time are respected.

The French move, which follows action by large German companies to curb out-of-hours emails, highlights the tricky question of how to balance the benefits and drawbacks of the technology-enabled work revolution.

The pace of change presents employers, policymakers and individuals with opportunities but also challenges. Alongside concern about work intensification, there is fear that the rise of robots could soon leave many people idle. Ageing societies require new ways to sustain longer working lives. Yet the "gig economy", with its temporary, piecemeal work, offers neither security nor career development.

In a call to action, the World Economic Forum says many big businesses have been slow to act decisively to address the challenges ahead. Only 53 per cent of the human resources directors it surveyed at leading global employers were reasonably or highly confident about the adequacy of their future workforce strategy.

The property savings derived from freeing people from offices are a big reason companies, even in traditional sectors such as the law, are taking tentative steps towards agile working. But early adopters report a range of wider benefits, most notably that productivity rises when people can pick the time and place best suited to the task in hand.

A nine-month experiment by Stanford University with Chinese call-centre workers found that those who worked from home completed 13.5 per cent more calls than their office colleagues and quit at half the rate. The results "blew me away", Professor Nicholas Bloom told the Harvard Business Review.

Enthusiasm for the work revolution varies around the world. The UK is close to the point at which working away from the office becomes more common than working solely at a desk, 9am-5pm, says Lancaster University's Work Foundation. Its research indicates that more than 70 per cent of organisations will have mobile working practices by 2020. But its authors say there is still much to do to ensure "employees are

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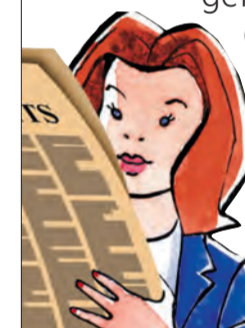
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Executive Appointments

Beware agile working's charms, which can conceal contradictions



THE FUTURE OF WORK

Azeem Azhar

Like many an office novelty, agile working is becoming a corporate mantra. It has been on trend for at least 20 years and rather more commonplace since the arrival of the mobile phone and broadband.

It seems like a win-win: employers measure employees' output without sweating the time taken for a long lunch; employees gain a newfound autonomy that is unprecedented in postwar business practice. In some ways, it nostalgically mirrors student work styles: do it in your time, at your chosen place or indeed in your pyjamas.

Agile working is increasingly popular. According to a recent UK Labour Force Survey, nearly 10m people work remotely some or all of the time, and a study in February 2016 by Lancaster University found that about half of all employers planned to adopt agile or flexible working by 2017. But it may also be the case that agile working has hit a tipping point.

Today's agile working is a far cry from the simple flexitime of the 1980s. Now it involves working wherever you like, including from home, while you are connected to the office via chat systems,

intranets and emails; flexitime simply meant coming in later every so often.

Agile working has attained more popularity based on the proposition that if you get your work done, you can take as much time off as you want.

Compared to the old cumbersome mode of work, which involved commuting to an office, punching in, sitting at a desk, taking a break at an anointed hour and then the same in reverse, today work can be more flexible: arrive when you like, where you like, and leave when you want.

But herein lies a contradiction: the ability to produce work that is inclusive, fit for purpose and aligned to group goals is not always easy when you are working by yourself. Yes, withdrawing into the home office without interruptions has advantages, not least that you can think deeply through a problem without being interrupted. But the structure, rigour and discipline of systematised collaboration in a team are a prerequisite to much work.

So, agile working by itself might not lead to agile thinking. Water-cooler disruptions can be annoying but they can also be creative. Workspaces can be oppressive, but a nomadic style that masquerades as agile work may lead to procrastination and thinking blocks. Regular encounters between colleagues in a safe space that is professional and nurturing can be the most productive. We call these offices.

Let us not forget that for all the braggadocio of agile working and

The ability to produce work that is inclusive, fit for purpose and aligned to group goals is not always easy when you are working by yourself

autonomy, it can be equally hard not to burn out – because we don't log out. Documents are electronic, devices pocket-sized, bandwidth plentiful. But with the perpetual access comes the perpetual workday. You need never leave the office because it is in the palm of your hand, and the calm moments before you drift off to sleep are snatched away by sending "one last work email". The hard boundaries of rigid work at least kept it out of our homes and out of our beds.

If a buzzing BlackBerry in bed is bad, unlimited paid vacation has its hurdles too. When Buffer, a software firm, introduced the policy for its employees in 2014, the founders came to a simple realisation: "It was only over time that we noticed, in our own experience, that we weren't taking any." And why not? For one reason, because a high achiever could always find one more thing to do, only in this case it was not an email at 11pm at night, it was working throughout the year. The solution at Buffer was to pay people \$1,000 to have a vacation.

This does highlight the limits of agility: we need to have some parameters, a recognition that shutting the office door behind you and turning off your email is a necessary discipline for employees. Otherwise, agility might lead to sclerosis and fatigue.

Azeem Azhar (@azeem) founded PeerIndex, acquired by Brandwatch in 2014. He works at Schibsted Media

The office is dead! Long live the office!

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working smarter, rather than longer". In the US, 20 to 30 per cent of the labour force works at home more than once a month, says consultancy Global Workplace Analytics. But demand for choice of time and location is much higher, at more than 80 per cent, says Kate Lister, president: "Two to three days a week seems to be the sweet spot that allows for a balance of concentration work at home and collaborative work at the office."

As some governments and companies intervene to stem the digital deluge, individuals are finding novel ways to regain control. Tinna Nielsen, a social entrepreneur and WEF Young Global Leader, decided six months ago to focus on developing her business, answering emails only on Fridays.

"The impact on my work is just magic," she says. "I feel like I work less because I am much more efficient. I have more fun and do more development work and feel more creative. I have more time to meet with people, and I spend more time with my children and my husband. It feels right for me."

Marketing Director

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Executive Appointments

Direct sales empire survives despite hard knocks

At Work with the FT
Doug DeVos
 President, Amway

His company has faced many lawsuits but still endures, says *Sharmila Devi*

Doug DeVos is used to a life of controversy. He is the president of Amway, a US multilevel marketing (MLM) company, for which people sell consumer products ranging from cookware to make-up, often from home to friends and family, and who can be compensated for the sales of others they recruit.

The company has persistently fought off allegations about its practices and managed to grow. In 1979, the US Federal Trade Commission failed to win a case alleging Amway was a pyramid scheme. In 2010, the company settled a class action suit for \$56m after some of its salespeople also alleged it was a pyramid scheme.

The lawsuit claimed, among other things, that Amway's website "contained material false representations regarding the wealth that would be achieved" if distributors bought company materials and attended its functions. Amway instituted "certain reforms in its business" afterwards, it said in the settlement.

The company, co-founded by Doug's father Richard in 1959, has been dogged by legal troubles in other jurisdictions around the world.

"I don't feel defensive because we've proven in market after market and over the years that we have great products and great consumer protection guarantees," Mr DeVos says. "You can't stop people complaining and some people want to wilfully misrepresent the industry. We just have to be transparent and take the mystery out of it."

Over the last couple of years, Wall Street has been gripped by a hedge fund battle over another MLM company, which could affect Amway should it lead to new US regulation over the industry.

The FTC is investigating the practices of nutritional supplement company Herbalife; the company says the investigation will exonerate it. At present, there is no clear definition in US federal law of a pyramid scheme and com-



"You can't stop people complaining and some people misrepresent the industry. We just have to be transparent"

plaints are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Herbalife has been most forcefully attacked as a pyramid scheme by Bill Ackman, whose Pershing Square hedge fund made a \$1bn bet against Herbalife stock.

"Herbalife's a good company and [the attacks are] being driven by financial issues," says Mr DeVos, 52. "I'm not worried."

In fact, he was cheerful on a flying visit to London where he met some of Amway's "independent business owners" (as its salespeople are called) at a session held in a central London hotel. He spends half his time on the road around the world and loves meeting members of the Amway "family". (Amway is short for "American way".)

"I wake up in New Delhi, Moscow, London or wherever and think, 'Not bad for a mid-western boy,'" he says, referring to his childhood in Ada, Michigan, where the company is headquartered.

He is in fact the scion of a prominent Christian, Republican family. The book *Dark Money* by Jane Mayer published this year features the DeVos family in its examination of how wealthy donors, including the Koch brothers, owners of multinational corporation Koch Industries, helped to create the modern US conservative moment.

He seems resigned to controversy and shrugs it off, such as a boycott by some LGBT groups for his family foundation's donation of \$500,000 to the National Organisation for Marriage, which opposes gay marriage.

"Amway is an equal opportunities company and we believe in free enterprise and advocate for the right of people to set their own goals," he says. "I believe integrity is a value that defines who you are even when no one else's looking at you."

He was involved in the company from a young age, helping to entertain his father's business guests at home. After studying management at Purdue university, he formally joined the family firm and became president in 2002.

Flotation is constantly discussed but never seriously considered an option by the DeVos family. "We want Amway to remain a privately-held, family-run company," he says.

He is bullish about Amway's future despite it posting a 12 per cent fall in sales – to \$9.5bn – in 2015. He attributes the fall to the downturn in China and to foreign exchange losses, but expects sales to stabilise next year. The company did see growth in countries such as the US and South Korea, he says, and it continued to invest in R&D, manufacturing and farms around the world to grow the crops needed for its nutritional supplements.

Direct selling, which many associate with Avon ladies offering make-up to housewives or with tupperware parties, is thriving with the help of the internet, says Mr DeVos.

"From the early 1990s, when I was a part of a strategic planning group, I knew the internet would help our salespeople to reduce costs. They don't need a catalogue, people can go on online to check our products, it helps with training," he says. "But technology doesn't demonstrate how a product works. People still very much go by personal recommendations. We are social creatures and our salespeople will always play a vital role."

He said it was too difficult to give average earnings of its salespeople in the UK or other countries but they amounted to a "couple of hundred dollars" per month in the US. People who work full-time and are dedicated can earn much more, he says.

Practices that led to the class-action lawsuit, such as perceived pressure to buy costly training materials and to attend inspirational speeches, were a thing of the past. "Any lawsuit is a big deal but the claims leading up to it were from many years ago," he says. "We have moved on from those days."

Mrs Money Penny Enable us to fix the UK's disability employment gap



I am reflecting this week on whether the promises made last year in the Conservative party manifesto have actually been kept. No, not the most famous one: "David

started giving some thought to what constitutes a disabled person and how to make more jobs open to them. I even had to consider recently if I were disabled.

Applying for a non-executive role with a government department, the form asked if I had a physical or mental impairment with a "substantial and long term... adverse effect".

Further, it told me, I should not take into account the effect of any medications, treatments or adjustments to reduce impairment. Without them, it asked, would I consider myself disabled? Take my hearing aids out and I cannot do everyday things like cross the road: I cannot hear the traffic. I interview people for a living and without hearing aids would not be able to listen to the answers. On that basis I would therefore be classified as disabled.

Of course, it is no use the government — or anyone — asking prospective candidates all these questions about disability, or indeed about gender or ethnicity, unless it intends to do something about it. Judging by the scant closing of the disability employment gap, no one yet has. So what do we do?

Put my hearing aids in and I can hear just as well as everyone else, so it is about identifying the barriers to disabled people working and then giving them the chance to break those down. Give people the right training, support and physical access and they will deliver just as well — and maybe better — than more mainstream hires. For better or worse, the government has kept one of their manifesto promises; it is now time for the rest of them.

It is no use asking questions about disability unless we intend to do something about it

Cameron has committed that he will only lead a government that offers an in-out referendum." (This is on page 72, if you happen to have a copy.) I am thinking of one that has had less limelight.

This promise is on page 19: "As part of our objective to achieve full employment, we will aim to halve the disability employment gap: we will transform policy, practice and public attitudes, so that hundreds of thousands more disabled people who can and want to be in work find employment."

What is the "disability employment gap"? It is the difference between the employment rate among disabled people (46.7 per cent at the end of 2015) and non-disabled people (80.3 per cent). To halve this gap would require bringing an extra 1.2m disabled people into work. How is the government doing? Over a year into this parliament's life, the disability gap is closing so slowly that the Learning and Work Institute, a think-tank, suggests that it will take 200 years to fulfil the promise.

Setting aside the fact that I rather wished they had taken 200 years to fulfil that other manifesto promise, I have

On the Desk

Doug DeVos' desk is at Amway's HQ in Ada, Michigan. He notes his desk is only tidy when he is travelling, which accounts for about half his working life. "Even when I'm in the office, I'm hardly at my desk because I like to stay active and talk to people."

The large photographs of various yachts owned by the family over the years attest to their love of the sport, his father having taught him to sail on the Great Lakes when he was young: "Sailing became a passion for me."

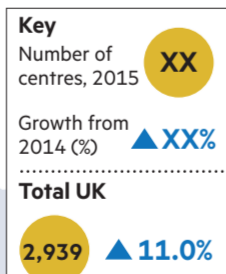
Among the many family photos, there is one taken at President Gerald Ford's 90th birthday party, which was hosted by President George W Bush. "I first met him when I was in third grade and he was a congressman. Then he was vice-president and then he was president and I thought, 'Boy, I should have paid attention!'"



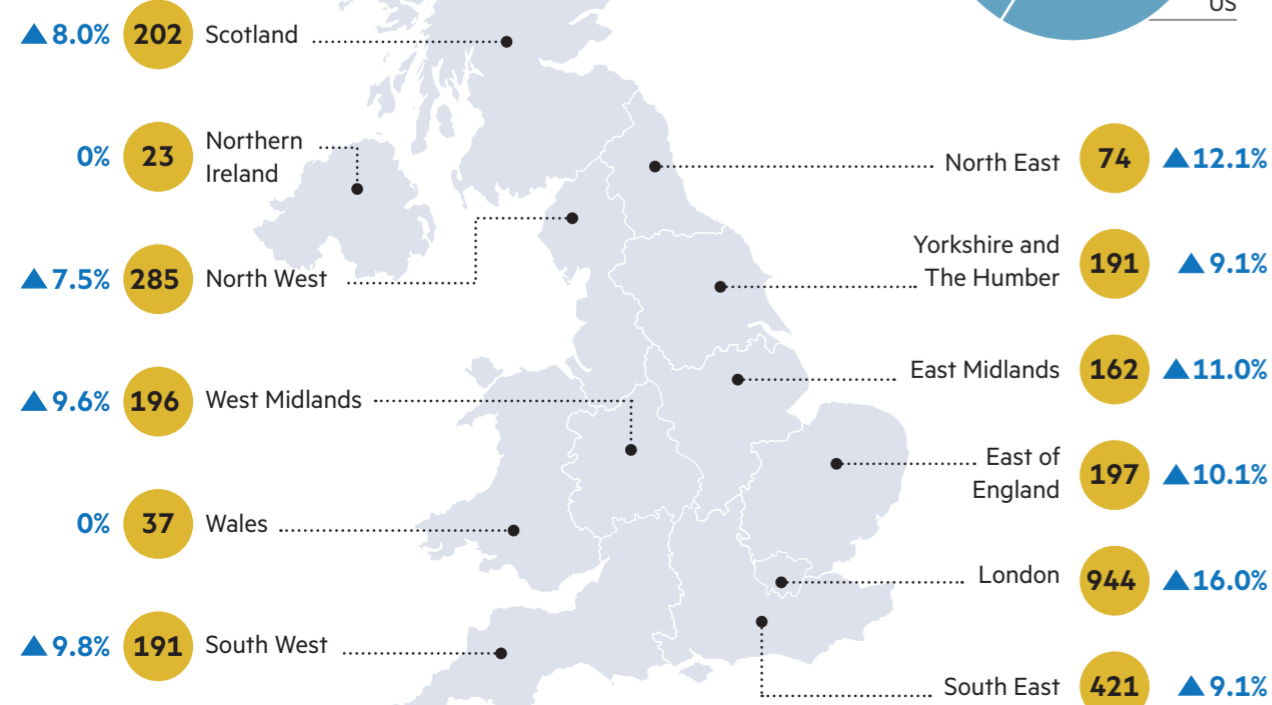
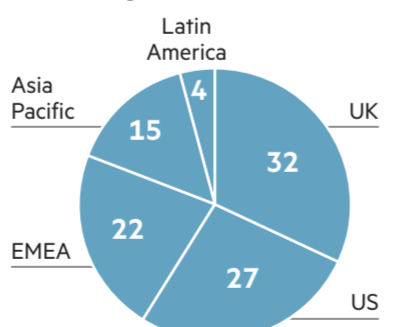
The books on his desk include some written by his father, like *Simply Rich: Life and Lessons from the Cofounder of Amway: A Memoir*. Mr DeVos also likes to have quotations from these books close to hand, such as: "The only thing that stands between a person and what they want in life is the will to try it and the faith to believe it is possible."

In a Blink The UK flexible workspace market

Serviced offices offering flexible workspace



Share of global market, 2015 (%)



FT graphic. Source: Instant Offices

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Executive Appointments **The Work Revolution**

How are agility and flexibility different?

Q&A If you want to know what each is and what they mean for you, *Alison Maitland* has the answers

What is the difference between agile and flexible working?

People often use the terms interchangeably. Flexible working arrangements, which have been around for a long time, are individually negotiated, require management permission and are seen primarily as an employee benefit and an exception to the norm. Agile, or smart, working is business-driven, harnessing technology to create a new norm where everyone may work anytime anywhere, provided business needs are met. It is based on evidence of benefits such as higher employee productivity, lower office costs, a reduced carbon footprint and more motivated workers. It requires a change from management by inputs (time and presence) to management by outcomes – it's about what you do, not where you do it. Balancing business and individual needs is not always easy, but smart working can bring all-round advantages if it is implemented thoughtfully.

How does one begin to institute agile working?

Recognise that it will challenge command-and-control leadership and culture, and make sure that your senior team is on board. The strategy needs to be business-wide, with heads of departments such as finance, human resources, IT and property driving it together. You must also build the case for your organisation. What are your key goals and how could agile working help? There are resources available: the UK government this year launched a smart working code of practice, PAS

3000, developed by the British Standards Institute. Global Workplace Analytics in the US provides a wealth of evidence on the pros and cons of smart working. The UK charity Working Families last month launched a "multidimensional business case" tool for member employers.

How can middle managers be persuaded to accept such significant change?

They need to know what is in it for them. Get them to open up in a confidential setting, not just to air and address their misgivings, but to discuss how they could benefit and develop their skills. Agile work requires managers to let go of micromanaging and become coaches and enablers. Show them how leading dispersed teams is an essential skill for promotion to senior leadership.

What happens to meetings and collaboration if everyone is working in different locations?

There are many ways to handle this according to the work context. Meetings and teamwork need to be planned. Some dispersed teams have a day a week when they are all in the same office. Others hold quarterly off-site meetings. Smart working is a good reason to question the purpose and

Agile work requires managers to let go of micromanaging and become coaches



Agile adviser: *Alison Maitland*

length of meetings, and cut out the ones that waste time. Provide broad guidelines and let teams work out the specifics, according to the tasks they have to accomplish. You should ensure everyone has well-functioning technology to meet virtually and keep in touch socially with colleagues – people need to feel they belong, wherever they are working. Collaboration can be very successful in dispersed teams if everyone contributes and supports others in achieving joint goals.

How will new recruits understand the company culture if they are working remotely?

It is a good idea for new people to spend time working alongside colleagues to start with. This does not have to be every day, but frequently, so they learn about the subtle aspects of how things get done and what the company's values are in practice. Some virtual companies have discovered as they grow that they need a physical workplace to meet each other and clients and to enable new employees to shadow colleagues closely.

What do I need to do as a leader?

Show you mean it, both by words and actions. A small change – working from home one day a week – gives huge permission to others. Reflect on your own style of leadership and whether your default mode is to be in control. Challenge your assumptions about physical presence being a demonstration of commitment.

Alison Maitland is co-author of Future Work: Changing Organisational Culture for the New World of Work

The private sector must learn to bend like its public rivals

Agile working

The state and voluntary sectors are much better at accommodating employees, says *Kaye Wiggins*. What do they know that private companies do not?

Birmingham residents who phone the council to query their tax bill or ask about bin collections might be surprised to learn that their call is being answered not in a town hall or call centre, but in a council employee's living room.

Birmingham city council, England's largest local authority by population, uses agile working – such as allowing part-time contact centre staff to work extra hours from home – to cope with peaks and troughs in the number of calls it receives at different times of the year.

"When you issue council tax bills, you know you'll get a lot of calls," says Mark Rogers, the council's chief executive. "Allowing people to work from home brings extra capacity. If residents are used to call centres being in India, they're unlikely to mind talking to someone in Kings Heath."

Its enthusiasm for agile working is shared widely in the public sector, where, according to figures published by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee in March, 86 per cent of employers offer part-time working, 69 per cent offer job shares and 65 per cent offer flexitime.

Agile working is similarly widespread in the voluntary sector, where 84 per cent of employers offer part-time working, 49 per cent allow job shares and 56 per cent use flexitime, according to the same report, which drew on figures from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Yet in the private sector the figures are much lower: 70 per cent of firms offer part-time working, 25 per cent job shares and 33 per cent flexitime.

Those with agile arrangements enthuse about business benefits that

help the bottom line, such as improved productivity and the recruitment and retention of a more diverse workforce. So why are not-for-profit employers the keenest adopters?

Dr Ksenia Zheltoukhova, a research adviser for the CIPD, says the public and voluntary sectors employ higher proportions of women, who may have driven demand for agile working arrangements.

But she says lower pay in these sectors is also a cause. Public and voluntary sector employers use agile working options as "part of a deal that allows [them] to attract talent, especially where they can't match the levels of pay offered by private sector companies".

Valerie Morton, a management consultant who advises charities on recruitment, says tight budgets can prompt an agile approach: charities will "decide on a full-time salary they can afford to pay, and offer that whole salary for reduced hours to the right person".

Yet in the charity sector at least, agile working has deeper roots. It has

emerged from decades of experience of managing volunteers, who are the ultimate agile workers because volunteering has to fit into their lifestyle – and this has brought important lessons.

"As an organisation, if your culture is one where you're expected to meet volunteers' demands for flexibility, it's not a huge stretch to think the same way about your paid workforce," says Karl Wilding, director of public policy and volunteering at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

He says this has helped the sector to attract talent and to give more thought to what motivates staff, which leads to good retention rates. "If you want to get the best out of people, pay isn't necessarily the best way to do it," he says.

"It's about how you involve people in decision-making about their workplace environment, and how you fit in with their lifestyles."

Companies understand the benefits of this approach, says David Nash, senior policy adviser at the Federation of Small Businesses. But he says agile working can be difficult for smaller employers.

"They've got to be prepared to respond to changing consumer demands," he says. "Some allow flexible working informally but are reluctant to formalise it where it means changing contract terms, because it will be difficult to revisit that if circumstances change."

Neil Carberry, director for employment and skills at the Confederation of British Industry, says this informal approach means it is likely that more agile working takes place in the private sector than the CIPD figures would suggest.

But he says companies can learn from the approach taken by not-for-profit employers. "One thing businesses can do that the public sector has been better at so far is having a presumption of flexibility," he says.

He says private sector employees "are often cagey about asking [for agile arrangements] even though the answer would more than likely be yes."

Firms, then, should let employees know that they are open to requests and will take them seriously, he says.



Birmingham city council's office, with a flexible sculpture in front of it

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Bosses must learn to master remote control

Team management
Distant staff need careful attention from corporate leaders, writes *Alison Maitland*

A quiz on arcane facts about Bollywood and cricket might seem an unusual way to start a teleconference between workers in the US and India. But the game, used by US insurer MetLife when training its Indian IT team in new processes, has proved powerful in breaking down cultural barriers and building trust.

"We heard them laughing and joking with each other about the questions," says Janet Conn, who led the virtual training at MetLife and now works at technology company Cisco. As an American unversed in cricket and Bollywood minutiae, she consulted Indian contacts to make sure the questions were suitably challenging.

"In India, people are less likely to jump in and ask questions than in the US, and we wanted them to feel comfortable enough to begin to speak up and give us the feedback needed for successful collaboration," she says. The questions sparked the Indian workers' curiosity.

The importance of the human element cannot be overstated. Ms Conn says the Bollywood-infused training increased connection and discussion between far-flung colleagues. "Too often, offshore teams are treated like a machine rather than a group of people who have useful input. We're all humans . . . and you have to figure out how to find the commonalities in order to build collaboration."

The role of today's manager is becoming more demanding with teams dispersed across locations, time zones and cultures. Not only do they need the skills of a good "people manager", such as empathy and adaptability, they also have to put more effort into planning, communicating and thinking creatively.

"I see it as increasing the level of good management across the company," says Isla Ramos Chaves, a senior executive at

Agile workplace Not every employee likes the freedom offered

A study by the Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion (ENEI) used personality tests to show that different employees responded in very different ways to what the ENEI describes as an "agile" approach, in which they decide when, where and how they work and are judged by their results.

Those with an "influential" personality type, who thrive in team environments where they can influence others but are easily distracted from tasks, seemed to have the greatest difficulty.

Just 44 per cent of influential employees said agile working improved their productivity, compared with 92 per cent for other personality types. Managers should give such staff "much more direction and expectation-setting", said the report.

By contrast, workers in the "conscientious" category, crudely summarised as hard-working perfectionists, were in many ways well-suited to a more flexible approach. But managers must "ensure they are not working long hours and burning themselves out", the report warned.

The law firm DWF, which sponsored the ENEI research, is putting its findings into practice as it encourages staff to become agile workers. Ty Jones, the company's director of corporate social responsibility and engagement, says the study found his firm's employees were more likely than staff at other organisations to fall into the conscientious category. As a result, training managers to be mindful of wellbeing and prevent burnout is "top of mind", he says.

The shipping and ecommerce company Pitney Bowes discovered the importance of employees'

working preferences when it offered remote working options to 50 per cent of its UK employees as part of a wider business overhaul in 2012.

David Denney, its vice-president for international human resources, says that while many thrived, some who had enjoyed the camaraderie of an office — perhaps the influential types — felt "lonely and disconnected". In response, Pitney Bowes offered extra contact time to these staff and worked with a team of business psychologists to develop a questionnaire that determined how well-suited to remote working other employees would be. The company uses the results to help decide how often an employee should work remotely and what extra support they should be given.

Mr Jones says that the onus is on managers to help employees adapt. Those who are "managing people they can't see" must be "better readers of their people" to understand what motivates them.

"A line manager can't just think, 'My job is to make sure they get the job done,'" he says. "You're much more than a task manager. You've got to get an insight into what will allow each employee to be fully-functioning but also maintain their own wellbeing so they're there for the long term."

"You have to take the blinkers off and see that it isn't a waste of time to be concerned about what makes different people productive."

Mr Denney agrees. Understanding what makes your employees tick is "not rocket science", he says, but it "takes on a sharper focus when you're not able to physically go and talk to your team".

Kaye Wiggins



Getty Images/Compassionate Eye Foundation/Chris Windsor

'The team needs a clear vision so they know what direction to go in without being micromanaged'

Lenovo, the computer company. Keeping people motivated is even more important if they are remote than if they see each other every day, says Ms Chaves, who has led virtual teams of between five and 200 people across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

She says managers need to articulate clearly, both to individuals and the team, how they are contributing to the results of the business unit or wider organisation. Failing to do so can lead to staff feeling isolated or unimportant.

She emphasises carving out dedicated time for each team member. "You have to create a virtual space with people, so you say, for example: 'On Monday

between 9am and 10am, I'm all yours. Whatever happens, this is the time we spend together."

Hybrid teams, where some members are in the same office and others work remotely, pose particular challenges. Managers may allocate lesser tasks to the remote members — but the opposite can happen too.

In conference calls with hybrid teams, Ms Chaves asks everyone to use the phone, including those who are in the office, so they have the same experience and there is less sense of "them and us".

Virtual team leaders have to manage by results, rather than how many hours employees are tied to their desks.

Objectives need to be clear from the outset, and methods agreed between manager and employee on tracking progress and giving each other feedback.

"The team needs a clear vision so they know what direction to go in without having to be micromanaged," says Marc Decorte, vice-president of connected digital technologies at Royal Dutch Shell, the energy group. His team is dispersed around the world. "Performance contracts need to be based on the value of what people deliver, because that's the value to the bottom line, not the quantity of work or the way it's done."

The introduction of technology to virtual teams also has to be handled

carefully. Trust can be undermined if remote workers perceive new requirements, such as use of a webcam, as a form of surveillance.

Managers with no intention of spying on their teams need to make that crystal clear, says Wayne Turmel, co-founder of the Remote Leadership Institute, a US consultancy. "An open and honest discussion about why these tools are valuable, as well as how and when the team should use them, will go a long way to lowering the fear level. On the other hand, if you are using webcams to 'bust' your people, or make sure they are where they are supposed to be, maybe they aren't the ones with the issue."

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