



What Are We Not Seeing And Hearing At The Watercooler?

Before the pandemic, a Gallup survey (Employee Burnout: Causes and Cures) reported that 28% of full-time employees felt burned out at work very often or always.

Post Covid, employers are announcing their hybrid working policies and those who have yet to form theirs must reasonably consider requests from employees. Employers can reject these requests on defined grounds, but this may prove difficult if employees can show that they have been able to work successfully from home for the last year.

Many managers have not physically seen their teams for over a year, bringing a whole new way of working along with new ways for wellbeing challenges to go under the radar.

So, how are you doing, really?

Despite many declaring that during lockdown they had found more time for themselves and their families, there is a growing recognition around the prevalence of burnout; a physical and mental condition described as an “occupational phenomenon” by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The World Health Organisation also states that organisations are responsible for the wellbeing of their employees and that alleviating burnout is the right thing to do. Wellbeing is also essential for a workforce to have the ability to develop and grow, something that is particularly important as we head into the new ways of working.

Envoys 2021 “Return To The Workplace’ report suggests a concerning increase in burnout, with 78% of respondents saying they felt close to burnout in the past year.

However, there are also some more specific trends to consider, with 88% of women reporting burnout in comparison to 68% of men and 97% of respondents in Gen Z feeling close to burnout in comparison to 50% of Boomers.

70% of employees believe that a hybrid working solution will benefit them, stating work life balance as the most appealing aspect.

As we get comfortable with hybrid working being here to stay, how can organisations recognise when things are, in fact, not really working for wellbeing?

WHEN IT DOESN'T SEEM POSSIBLE

When team members who have previously been positive, flexible and adaptable start talking in absolutes, instead of possibilities, it's a clear sign of decreased wellbeing.

Thinking and speaking this way, replacing phrases such as "this project is going to be really hard" with "this project is impossible" suggests that solutions thinking and creativity are not available. This shift in mindset could be due to higher levels of cortisol, known as the stress hormone, along reduced positivity hormones such as oxytocin, born out of connection and collaboration.

Without support this state of mind can lead further towards mindsets, such as catastrophising and only seeing the worst outcome, making it further difficult for others to connect and leading the employee further towards feelings of despair in both work and life.

DONT YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T

Perhaps it is because the connection is unstable, they are juggling childcare or they have had a long day, but a colleague who is noticeably absent on screen can be a sign of something more.

However normalised video meetings have become, for many they can cause increased anxiety around how they look on camera, how they feel they must interact to be heard in a virtual world or how their behaviour could be misinterpreted.

No matter what video platform organisations are using, the fatigue that video conferencing can bring is real and when coupled with a low mood the energy required to simply appear on screen, aside from interacting, can quickly become too much.

THE ALWAYS ON COLLEAGUE

It has never been easier to bounce between meetings and where many initially felt they had gained time in hybrid working, their days are now often starting earlier without the commute, leading to a day full of calls and then a days work still to do after the calls have finished.

Switching off, physically and mentally, has become a real problem for many leading to poor sleep and heightened anxiety as a result.

Those continuing to work in a hybrid format will need support to re-address the balance to ensure both their performance and, more importantly, their wellbeing is maintained.

What's The Solution?

Forward thinking organisations recognise that it is not always easy for employees to open up and that the use of anonymous surveys to explore their wellbeing, workplace factors and the impact of covid are critical. Across their recent client surveys Illuminate VR, who enable forward thinking companies to create happy, engaged and productive workplaces that are proactive about mental health and wellbeing found that:

- Anxiety is high, with average anxiety ratings at over 6 out of 10.
- Sleep is poor.
- Energy levels are low.
- Financial concerns are significantly increased.

“Basic mental health awareness training is fine, and useful to a point, but in order for leaders to develop the soft skills and awareness needed, training which enables them to understand who they are as leaders and empower them is needed first” suggests Lisa Whittleton, founder of Illuminate VR.

Practical Tactics To Advocate:

- Doing one thing at a time and doing it well, rather than multi-tasking.
- Don't schedule back-to-back meetings and take time to ask what else team members have scheduled in for the day.
- Be disciplined and don't allow the time to slip outside of the normal working day.
- Allow people to turn their cameras off during presentations, to minimise the daily screen exposure.
- Improve written communication, be clear and to the point so that not every task requires a scheduled conversation.

“As hybrid working is going to be adopted by most organisations who can, it is really important that we continue to upskill leaders in the softer skills of managing, supporting, training and communicating with their teams while they work remotely” suggests Lisa Whittleton, (Illuminate VR).

Whilst spotting the early signs of reduced wellbeing has become more challenging, subtle changes identified through regular touchpoints can be identified and lead more quickly towards a supportive conversation and a pro-active solution for both the employee and the organisation.

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