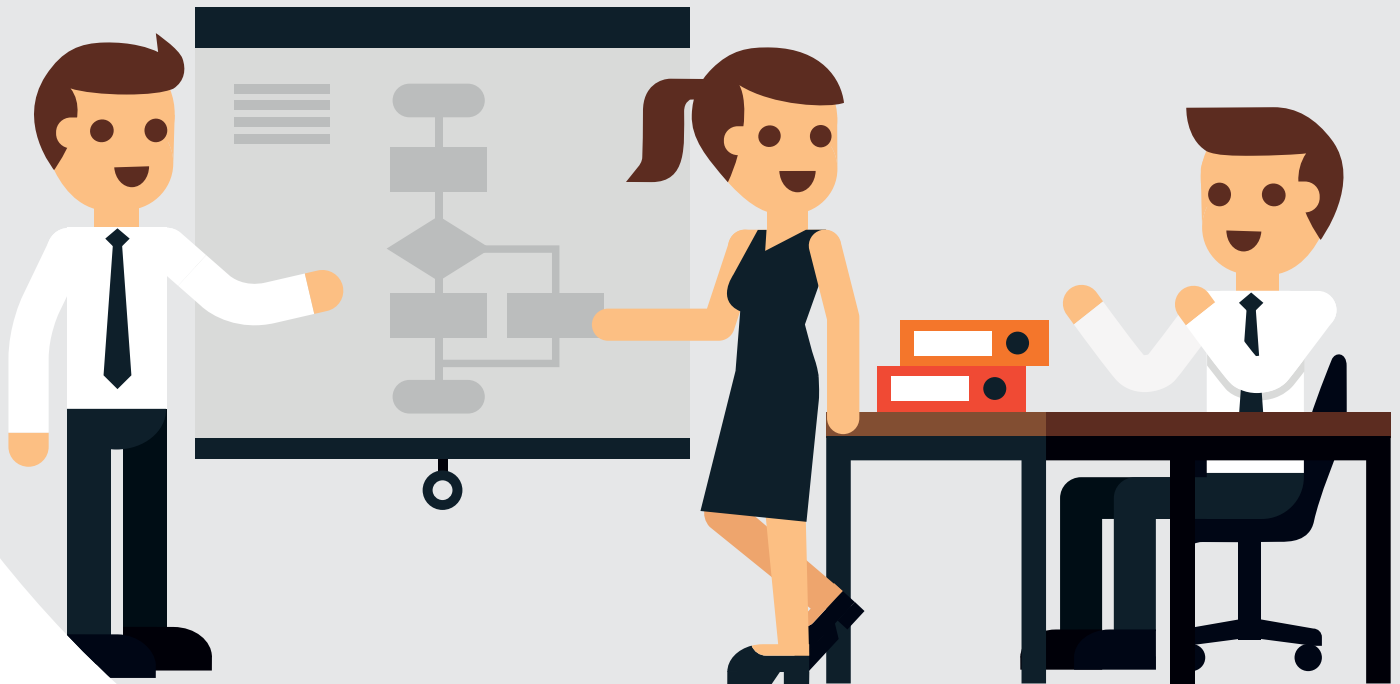




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x10 ways to improve employee productivity

Through applying Agile Working Practices

July 2015



How agile-working practices could help your organisation

What is an 'agile organisation' and how can it improve your productivity?

Agile working does not have a cookie-cutter approach. An agile organisation updates work practices, deploys new technologies and creates new working environments in order to be fully flexible and respond to challenges. This involves enabling people to work where, when and how they choose, to maximise their productivity and deliver best value to the organisation.

For Simon Collins, KPMG's UK chairman, an agile company must be able to adapt continuously to achieve a competitive advantage and sustainable growth. 'We learned the benefits of agile working when the market was at its most challenging,' he says. 'It's

now helping us to drive growth as a business. It means more than simply being flexible. In fact, to be truly agile requires tough decisions being made and clear ground rules.'

KPMG is part of The Agile Future Forum www.agilefutureforum.co.uk which is working on a research project to review the agility of Forum members, by surveying a sample population of their organisation. The Forum is inviting UK businesses to 'Take the Test' www.agilefutureforum.co.uk/agility-test as a first step to realising the benefits of workforce agility.



"of UK businesses believe that agility is key to economic growth..."

Yet many organisations have limited agile working practices."

Source

CBI <http://news.cbi.org.uk/>
Business lobbying organisation

The following 10 aspects have been identified as key in enabling businesses to become more agile and **create a win-win working practice...**



#01

Manage remote working effectively

Technology now makes remote working a reality for far more employees.

Petra Wilton, Chartered Management Institute (CMI) www.managers.org.uk director of strategy and external affairs suggests that 'to achieve more progressive and productive workplaces, we need a step-change in management cultures. Employees should be trusted and measured on outcomes as opposed to inputs. To make that change, employers need to invest in developing and training their managers to become every bit as effective with people as they are with tasks.'

There are critics such as Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer who is well-known for having banned staff from working from home, due to concerns over communication and collaboration. However, CMI head of external affairs

Patrick Woodman asserts that bad management is the main reason employees disengage, not flexible working. 'It doesn't have to be an either/or scenario. Good managers can reap the benefits of flexible working and preserve a sense of team spirit.'

'Of course, any organisation trying to put flexible working in place has to make sure its managers have the right skills, or it will fall down,' says Woodman. 'Like any change-management programme, it's about the people. Whether it's through short courses, management qualifications or coaching and mentoring, employers need to ensure managers across the business have the skills to make the most of new ways of working.'



#02

Engage staff for workplace wellbeing

Only 13% of employees are enthusiastic about their job...

Gallup, a research and consultancy company, polled workers across the world for its State of the Global Workplace study and found that only 13% of employees are enthusiastic about their job and therefore add value to their companies.

This lack of employee engagement is a real concern, says business futurist Gihan Perera. Instead of treating it as a general goal, Perera breaks it down into a phased strategy and cites these six elements as outlined by the Harvard Business Review, that make people want to work for employers.

- › Let me be myself
- › Tell me what's really going on
- › Discover and magnify my strengths
- › Make me proud I work here
- › Make my work meaningful
- › Don't hinder me with stupid rules

Also important to remember, is not to use the word 'engagement'. The specialist employee engagement coach Philip Hutchinson uses the term 'motivation' instead of engagement as he says employees can view it as manipulative. This observation in itself shows how important it is to ensure employees are 'on side'.

Managers can promote productivity by taking an approach that improves their employees' wellbeing at work. Gallup's study offered three key pieces of advice for businesses:

- A. Select the right person for the job
- B. Develop the strengths & potential of employees
- C. Enhance the wellbeing of employees



#03

Loosen up and work by broad principles

Build a culture of trust where people want to behave in a way that is best for the organisation

With modern work practices being driven by the expectations of employees and customers, as well as technological change, staff expect to play a greater role in business development and strategy. However, strict rules often prevent them from doing this.

In *Loose: The Future of Business is Letting Go*, Martin Thomas, a non-executive director of Sport England, argues that tight controls need to be replaced with a more relaxed management style. 'We are witnessing the unravelling of the most fundamental building blocks of the commercial world and a collapse of faith in tight, empirical models and ways of thinking.' Organisations with a looser mindset, he says, are more able to respond to changes and react to the demands of

staff. 'The companies that do best are the ones that work by broad principles,' says Thomas, who lists ASDA, Pret a Manger, First Direct and Unilever as examples. 'You have to build a culture of trust where people want to behave in a way that is best for the organisation.'

The challenge sits squarely on the shoulders of middle managers. 'Senior managers get it and the people coming into the workforce demand it. But in middle management there is fear; they don't have the authority to make the big decisions and so rely on management by the rulebook. This is where the blockage seems to be – and they have to learn to move away from their process, templates and rigid structures. You have to put a lot of time and effort into recruitment and training.'

A culture of trust is a thread that runs through these various elements of the agile working approach. In managing staff well, and empowering them, which in turn improves wellbeing, each aspect has an additive effect that gives a company a competitive edge.



#04

Explore workspace alternatives

In terms of location, there are a number of setups that support agile working by offering alternatives to the usual workspace, with a desk for each employee.

Hot desks

Mobile staff share desks

Quiet area/zone

Hot desks with computer connections but no phones

Touchdown workbenches

Drop-in areas with computer connections for short-stay

Team table

Adaptable table to support team working; shared hot seating

Rented work-hub desks

Rented office space for mobile staff

Home working

Staff are partly based at home working remotely

Multi-site

Staff are based at multiple locations

Mixed seating

Different roles are located together for collaboration



#05

Freedom in the where, when and what

Allowing employees to choose when and where they work can benefit both companies and employees.

Millennials ('Generation Y') in particular – as many as 92% in one survey – value freedom about where and when they work, reports the Harvard Business Review, and companies see the benefit too. Employers that allow their staff to work remotely at least three times per month are more likely to report revenue growth of 10% or more within the last year, compared to firms without such policies.

Staff also appreciate the freedom to choose what work they do. Companies such as videogame maker, Valve, use open workflows, allowing employees to choose which projects they work on and the roles they play. This is cited as one of its main competitive advantages in recruiting and retention.

Many large companies monitor the efficiencies they gain from agile-working policies. For example, Cisco

estimates that it saves \$277 million each year from productivity gains related to telecommuting employees. An LRN (Legal Research Network) www.lrn.com study released at the World Economic Forum in Davos found that companies in which employees displayed 'high levels of freedom' in their relationships were 10–20 times more likely to outperform companies with low freedom scores.

The Freedom Report published by LRN expressed the comparison succinctly: 'The perfect balance of freedom can be understood as the synergy between Freedom From – doing away with old systems of rules, top-down power systems, one-way communications, lack of transparency – and Freedom To – the aligning of behaviour around a system of shared values, combined with the harnessing of human potential for the achievement of common goals.

'Freedom translates into more innovation, better financial performance, and long-term success,' it concludes.

However, only 20% of the companies surveyed match this profile. Nearly half of the companies fall in the low-freedom category, which LRN has identified as less equipped to meet growing demands for innovation, new ventures and global collaboration.



#06

Make time work for you and your staff

Almost nine in every 10 firms offer some form of flexible working,

but a YouGov poll of nearly 1,300 workers for a survey by CBI, a business lobbying organisation, suggests many workers are reluctant to ask their employer about the options. While 40%

of those surveyed said they would feel comfortable asking their employer about working more flexibly, 42% said they would feel uncomfortable.

Creating roles that offer flexible working has the benefit of attracting a more diverse group of candidates. Changing the work patterns of staff provides incentives for those who'd like

to achieve more of a work-life balance. There are many options, as listed below, and some can be combined for greater flexibility.



Regular part-time working

Fixed, part-time contracts

Job share

Two or more employees cover one role

Flexitime

There is choice over when to work the weekly hours

Self-rostering

Staff choose their hours

Varied working hours

Irregular start and finish time

Working time accounts

The total hours are contracted but the working pattern varies

Annualised hours

Hours are agreed over the year; the working pattern varies

Staged retirement

Gradual reduction in working time before complete retirement

Shift swapping

Staff rearrange hours with colleagues

Compressed hours

Contracted hours are worked in fewer than the usual number of working days

Paid overtime

Ad hoc increase in hours for overtime pay

Voluntary reduced time

Offering unpaid leave to reduce staffing costs

Commission outcomes

Reward based on output

Seasonal blocks

Working hours follow seasonal changes in demand

Shift work

Groups of employees do the same jobs in rotation

#07

Address your work culture

Allowing employees to choose when and where they work can benefit both companies and employees.

As seen in the rating of high-freedom companies by LRN, above, agile working can only be achieved with high levels of trust and a performance-driven culture, with managers learning new skills, so that teams can work effectively, communicate well and maintain high levels of engagement and performance. The Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion www.enei.org.uk sets out the requirements for agile working in stark terms:

‘Where trust is not achieved, agile working could have a negative effect on staff and their working relationships, leading to poor motivation and decreased performance.’

VersionOne, a leader in agile lifecycle management software solutions, has released the results of its ninth annual State of Agile survey www.stateofagile.com. Regarding the causes of failed agile projects, two of the top five were related to company culture: 42% attributed to a company culture or philosophy at odds with core agile values; 36% linked to a lack of support for cultural transition.

‘For many organisations, **agile working** requires a **complete change** in corporate culture, from one where **staff are expected to work with frameworks** and guidelines designed to **control the workforce** and minimise risk, to one where **people are seen as genuinely valuable assets**, for the individuals that they are and the **difference they can bring**.’

#08

Choose the best remote-working tools for you

New tools make it easier than ever for remote team members to communicate and work together.

Companies such as Slack, Hipchat, Yammer, Trello, Basecamp and Asana are bringing fantastic new tools to the marketplace allowing team interaction and communication.

For an expert recommendation, contact a startup founder or other startups who are local to you. Alternatively, US agency Clarity has outlined a selection here <http://blog.clarity.fm/best-collaboration-tools-for-working-with-remote-teams/> split according to communication, project/task management and file management/sharing.



Messaging, archiving & search for modern teams.

www.slack.com



Hosted group chat and video chat built for teams.

www.hipchat.com



Private social network to aid collaboration.

www.yammer.com



The visual way to organize anything with anyone

www.trello.com



Everyone's favourite project management app.

www.basecamp.com



Enable teamwork without email.

www.asana.com

#09

Managing staff: Your no.1 asset

The importance of connecting with staff and colleagues whether in-house or working remotely.

'How you hire, train, and integrate new staff members will set the stage for the agile culture you want to create, eliminating resistance down the road,' says Alexis Monville, chief agility officer of eNovance.

He considers it critical that all staff, especially those who work in the office each day, understand what it's like to work alone. 'We encourage everyone to work at home as desired throughout the year, so that they see first-hand the importance of connecting with colleagues electronically when the convenience of chatting around the coffee machine isn't an option,' he says. 'Platforms such as IM, video conferencing, and wikis help create strong links among colleagues, regardless of where they are located.'

The Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion lists specifically what needs to be understood by employees in an agile-working scenario:

- › What they are expected to do
- › The method of agreeing/monitoring workload
- › How success will be measured
- › How this feeds into the performance management process
- › What communication is required from them
- › How the line manager will communicate with them



#10

Measure success for your business

Success in its purest form can be measured by how happy your customer base is with the product or service you provide for them.

'In the world of agile, success can look very different than it does in a traditional, fixed-scope environment,' says Chris Moody, agile coach for US consultancy firm Slalom. He outlines seven key ways to measure success:



Measure teams rather than individuals

Agile team should focus efforts on the outcome of a project rather than a single person's output

Keep track of the highest priority items being delivered

If a priority isn't achieved, this represents a coaching opportunity to help increase collaboration

Measure the team's satisfaction

This is part of its success

Evaluate your software

Measure if the work being done is truly solving problems

Provide a narrative, not just data

Sometimes writing a few sentences can give more useful information than a pie chart

Measure anything the business says is important

As a guiding principal, focus on what the customer is saying is important - Internal preconceptions often differ

Show the business value delivered

Have an idea of the value of a project

When researching the reasons for companies adopting agile working, The State of Agile survey found that **productivity** (53%) has moved to top three, outranking last year's #3 response-**improved IT & business alignment**.

For four years running, the top three benefits of adopting agile remain the same: **manage changing priorities** (87%),

team productivity (84%), and **project visibility** (82%).

While 87% of respondents said implementing agile improved their ability to manage changing priorities, **53% said that the majority, if not all, of their agile projects had been successful.**



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Whatever your opinion of agile working is, no-one can deny that attitudes towards work have changed and practices are evolving.

It's more essential than ever to be aware of those changes and move wisely with the times.

To view all our whitepapers visit:

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Creating spaces
where people
love to work