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Additional speaker responses to questions from the webinar audience

Questions for Paul Smith relating specifically to his presentation:

1. At what 6-month time period was this data collated from?

PS - The data I presented was from Jan to Feb 2020 in the office and March to August 2020 for the home working

2. As this data was collected in a situation that lacked normality (global pandemic), are you planning to repeat the study once we can go back to a more normal life? How much do you think the situation had an effect in some of the measures?

PS - We have continued to collect data for clients up to the present day in regard to home working and will continue to do so across Q2/3 of this year. It's difficult to say if we will produce a report in a similar fashion to the one that I discussed yesterday due to client confidentiality. However, we will continue to use our online platforms to provide useful insights around the data we collect to help inform and educate as much as possible. In regard to the pandemic affecting results, there can be little doubt that it had some level of impact, but to what extent won't become clear until we have an extended period of measurement when the world returns to some normality. Outlines why ongoing measurement is so important.

3. Do you think that if this WFH went on indefinitely that the mood, positivity and cognitive impact would stay high or decrease because of the negative issues you are speaking to (ie. Sleep, reduced activity)?

PS - It would depend on the individual and their persona. As I tried to stress in the presentation, taking data at an aggregated level has its uses, but also can be misleading as it misses the nuances that exist between different teams, personas and job types. Certain individuals will thrive working from home more regularly, whilst others will see wellbeing and performance continually decrease if it becomes a long-term solution. Understanding your people and identifying their needs to help them feel & perform at their best more often will be key.

4. What measures were used to quantify mental wellbeing (anxiety, stress, etc.)

PS - We collected subjective responses from employees using fortnightly pulse surveys and weekly questions built into our “Omics” performance App. The pulse survey questions are based on the ONS Scale (a scientifically validated measure) and require the employee to provide a score out of 10 for 6 different mental wellbeing metrics. The “Omics” questions provide an insight into employees’ mental wellbeing at the time they perform our cognitive tests, allowing us to see where relationships may exist

5. How did you control for some of the confounding variables such as the individuals’ family-related duties? Did you divide employees who have families from those who don’t.

PS - We were able to split employees into different groups depending on their home environment e.g. living with others, have dependants etc. Some of this detail is included in the full report but we can’t include all of it due to client confidentiality. However, we recognise that there are many contributory factors that we would not have collected (either due to privacy, client request, or resource) that will impact findings. In a real-world scenario, there will always be variables outside of the control of the research team. Our job is to try and concisely present the data we do collect, so employees and employers can identify certain variables they can control or affect, and then to measure if any initiatives/strategies had the impact required from a wellbeing perspective.

6. How did you manage the ethics with this level of employee tracking?

PS - Firstly, our tools and processes are fully GDPR compliant and also ISO27001 certified.

Secondly, from an employee perspective, our projects are all voluntary and opt in, so employees have to consent to take part (after they understand what they are being asked to participate in) and share their data with us, and they are free to stop sharing at any time. All employees are given a unique Project ID meaning their data is de-identified and anonymised at all times. Individual employee data is only shared with that employee themselves and never shared with the organisation even though it is anonymised. We also provide feedback to employees to try and help them to understand their data so they make small behavioural changes that will help improve their wellbeing in the long term.

Thirdly, employers are only provided with aggregated data which cannot be linked back to individuals taking part and is used to provide an overview of the key trends and relationships we find. This data is used to help inform their decision making around workplace and wellbeing, so they provide a more effective, healthier working environment for their employees.

7. How do these figures particularly with mental wellbeing fit in with the huge increase in domestic violence figures that is the result of home working?

PS - Unfortunately this topic was outside of the remit of the work we did in this study for our clients but is undoubtedly a very significant issue that needs to be explored and analysed further. That includes not just looking back on data from the last 12 months but studying the data closely as we move towards a new hybrid model to ensure all employees are safe and have the opportunity to speak up when needed.

8. Decrease in sleep due to working from home or pandemic anxiety?

PS - Difficult to tell what the drivers of lower sleep were for certain individuals but a very valid question. Highlights the importance of continuous monitoring to understand how the data changes over time once we return to the office/start a hybrid model of working to ensure decisions and strategies are meeting the specific needs of employees at all times. Whatever was the driving force behind the decrease, if employees are getting poorer sleep, then they are at a higher risk from a wellbeing and performance perspective, so helping them solve that issue should be a priority for organisations.

9. Would there be any initial thoughts on changes in expected data for work from home through later lockdowns?

PS - As I mentioned in the presentation, we have continued to measure employees at home since this report. Whilst I cannot go into detail due to client confidentiality, the trends we reported in this study have, in the main, remained consistent throughout all lockdowns. Physical activity has decreased, sedentary time has increased, and cognitive performance on average has increased. Once you drill down into different personas, you see that large percentages do not follow the average from a performance and mental wellbeing perspective, with many struggling on both fronts.

10. But is this compensated for by increase in sport?

PS - The lack of general activity and increase in sedentary time, would not be compensated for by an increase in structured exercise. Structured exercise remained fairly constant throughout the period, but even if it has increased significantly, research has shown that regular structured exercise does not negate the negative effect of inactivity across a working day and WFH seems to be driving this trend in the wrong direction

11. Step count is only one measure, it would be interesting to see activities such as exercise classes

PS - Agreed, which is why we track 4 different metrics relating to physical activity (steps, active minutes, sedentary time and exercise minutes). As the report shows, structured exercise (which would include exercise classes) remained fairly constant throughout (increasing by 2%) but as the answer above outlines, the decrease in other forms of physical activity and increase in sedentary time would not be negated by this slight increase.

12. Can you really measure wellbeing related to working from home in the middle of a pandemic where people don't have access to all the things that help with their wellbeing usually (e.g. doing fun things, seeing family etc)?

PS - Completely agree that a pandemic is a one-off situation that changes behaviour and general everyday life. However, I would suggest that organizations are neglecting their duty of care if they don't measure/track wellbeing during such times, when employees would be at an increased risk of a decline in overall wellbeing for a number of reasons. Therefore, I don't think it's an issue of whether to measure wellbeing during a pandemic. The danger is in ONLY using the data from the last 12 months on which to base decisions relating to WFH in the long term. Organisations must engage with their workforce and track key metrics continuously to ensure the data they have reflects all possible work-related situations to allow evidence-based decision to be made.

13. You seem to be claiming causal results from correlational data. Couldn't it equally be true that the satisfaction of performing well causes a sense of well-being (quite as much as the other way around)?

PS - We are very careful throughout the report (and during the presentation) to not suggest any causation. We simply drill down into the data to establish any trends that may exist within certain groups e.g. are their common characteristics across high performers or do those with lower sleep duration exhibit similar outputs from a physical activity perspective? We are not stating that one causes the other, but are suggesting it could be a contributory factor and from a wellbeing strategy perspective, such factors are good places to start to try to have a positive effect on employee wellbeing. The point around wellbeing being driven by better performance could well be true and only more in-depth analysis and controlled interventions would clearly define which was the key driver.

Some additional questions from the audience answered by the other speakers:

1. Has anyone read about the psychological impacts of looking at yourself all day?

YL: Yes. Apparently, it is exhausting for the mind. The kind of narcissistic mirroring makes you critical of yourself while you're trying to have a meaningful conversation. Let's remember also, that you can't really look someone in the eye during these calls.

2. Going forward in what might be a hybrid-remote workplace, how do you cultivate belonging within the organisation?

YL: That is precisely the problem with remote and hybrid working.

CF: Maktuno addressed how he is approaching this during the webinar.

3. How are people managing Hybrid Working where people work 'in the field' or in manufacturing? Working in a manufacturing environment is tough to get a balance, some employees have to work in the factory but office employees can work from home! This can be perceived as unfair...

CF: Jane and Amanda responded to this question during the webinar

4. Has anyone tried allocating an individual wellbeing budget to people to enable them to invest in things which make a difference for them? [Follow up comment in chat: I think this is a real step forward in thinking (i.e. assigning a budget to employees to spend as they see fit in supporting their own H&W), I also think there's a real danger that this money isn't particularly well spent. I think it's important that if this were a model you adopt that you track its impact (i.e. has it improved their H&W?) and to do this you need data, as alluded to earlier by Paul.]

AL: We had a wellness fund at Three where our employees could submit requests for things to support either individual or team wellbeing activities. It was always well received and over-subscribed. So, I would say an allowance is a good idea.

- 5. Do we feel that WFH would be different once the country is open again and we're free to spend time with others and how that may affect output and productivity? 'Remote monitoring' is being widely discussed.**

YL: Are we happy to concede an even greater amount of our privacy for remote "Freedom?"

AL: I do feel that the last year isn't a true representation of Working from Home, I liked Jane's description that it's been more like sleeping at the office. In my experience output and productivity aren't driven by number of hours working versus socialising. If people feel they are treated with trust and associated freedom to get the job done in the best way for them the output is always better. Productivity is often measured in hours and yet it should be in sustainable results

- 6. Whether you are more productive or not working from home is personal and situational. Agree?**

YL: YES. Where are you more effective and happy?

- 7. Having a flexible approach is quite difficult because the people who need to be in the office will not have those other people to work with because those other people will not be in the office. How do you overcome this challenge?**

AL: I have always managed dispersed teams and there is always the challenge that everyone isn't in the office all together every day. You overcome this with working hard at team engagement, inclusion and then making sure for the activities that need you to be in the same room you all get together.

YL: This is why we will need tech patches and even more applications to support remote working. The tech companies are happy to ply us with new software. Teams, for example, made up their 5-year target customer base within the first months of the pandemic. Ultimately it will lead to greater stress; more time wasted to fill the gaps in communication. By the way, communicating is not equal to the value of true collaboration. In the old days, companies were conscious of too many time-wasting meetings. Imagine the further loss of efficiency from the added complexity of hybrid working.

- 8. Won't creating the 'perfect' workplace be hard with so many different kinds of people with different needs working?**

YL: It is a challenge. The answer lies in creating diverse experiences for the many tasks and personality types. There are many analogous spaces where diverse groups occupy the space in different ways, from a park, to a house party.

- 9. Workplace Ergonomics indeed plays a key role of boosting employees' productivity and improving their wellbeing. However, the process of implementing a new working design will need a lot of time/money and also organisational culture needs to be taken into account. What are the organisational values etc needed?**

YL: An organisation must value its people first. We must be aware that people are the key to business success. The idea that companies can downsize their real estate holdings and pocket the profit is a short-sighted measure - there will be a cost in the company's performance loss and competitive edge.

Other interesting comments in the chat:

1. I'm already hearing leaders talking about HYBRID working as working 2 days from home/3 days in the office - so already becoming prescriptive.
2. Creativity is not part of the 'adult', it's part of the 'adaptive child', it's about engaging how to play.

YL: Agreed - So is the current workplace conducive to play? I don't think so.

3. With the use of technology, it's about being intentional.
4. I believe self-development is important whether working from home or in the office, taking individual responsibility for physical and mental health has to be key and encouraged as part of company culture.
5. I agree with Paul, individuals, businesses and even teams are all going to work differently: Led by data - genuinely tuning into what your people are saying, as individuals not as averages
6. Things will change one way or the other. There is too much fear and anxiety around the uncertainty and the what ifs as well.
7. I liked Yorgo's argument, which I hadn't considered before. I also liked the point he made about whether we should be thinking about the environment and location of the office, to see how that can provide the tranquillity or positive aspects that some have found from WFH

YL: This is the future workplace I alluded to. The question is asked, 'what will the office of the future be?' The answer is, what do we want it to be? The workplace - a place of work, can be whatever we want it to be. It could be a place that we love going to.

8. Commuting costs/effort/time, caring responsibilities etc etc, all have impact on personal preferences here too. The perfect workspace that takes me 2 hrs to get to isn't perfect.

YL: This is an enduring problem.

9. Why are we not thinking or talking about flexible hours to help the wellbeing for our staff, 9 - 5 should be a thing of the past, do we all really want to get on packed train at 8am, when we get back to 'normal'?
10. Have to be careful of expectations of line managers. Many line managers are quite poor in the physical space and will be even worse virtually. It takes a lot more to be a virtual manager.