

Technology & the Work-Life Conundrum

Is being connected 24/7 helping with or getting in the way of work- life harmony?

Without a doubt, communication technology has allowed much efficiency and connectivity in our world today. The use of smartphones, tablet computers, video calls and social media have become integral in every day work and life. For many of us, our mobile devices have become extensions of ourselves, whether we care to admit to it or not.

But ubiquitous use of mobile devices and rising mobile connectivity mean that the line that divides work and life has become increasingly obscure.

The individual, technology & the work- life conundrum

Technology has helped to create a more flexible and adaptable workforce. Many organisations today boast a boost of productivity as employees are given the freedom to work away from their desks at any time or any place - with just a smartphone or tablet computer.

But how employees integrate the use of technology into their daily routine of work and personal life hinges largely on individual choice – how much work invades personal life or vice versa lies very much on one's preference.

It is easy, even addictive, to get caught up with the constant onslaught of information, and keeping pace with it. Many executives feel obliged to be plugged in to work 24/7 because they feel it helps to ensure career advancement and livelihood – bosses' demands notwithstanding.

During hard times, the drive to stay connected is reinforced as people become more preoccupied with income survival and job preservation, and less about work- life balance. Many would be concerned that someone more connected and available could out-climb them on the corporate ladder, or possibly replace them altogether.

Managing expectations in a technology tsunami

The conversation about what is expected of workers beyond work hours is crucial to managing expectations.

For example, German telecommunications company, Deutsche Telekom, introduced a 'Smart-Device-Policy' that calls on workers to claim communication- free time when they are off work, in exchange for a promise that management will not expect them to read their emails or pick up the phone all the time. This helps to empower employees to have a greater stake in their commitment to work- life balance.

Managing expectations of both manager and employee should include clear policies on work connectivity and an agreement on deliverables. Work performance should be emphasised, and measured with proper key performance indicators that can be tracked by both manager and employee.

HR Takeaways

It is hard to deny the benefits of communication technology on work efficacy and managing work and personal life.

However, being on call 24/7 should not be needlessly encouraged. It doesn't equate to good performance, but give a false impression of good performance instead. It suggests poor distribution of work, and lack of communication between the manager and his employees, and among team members. It could also imply that the team is not adequately equipped or trained to cover duties of other team members who are unavailable at work. The litmus test happens when there is no proper hand-over of duties, and a staff is unable to return to work.

A culture of empowerment would also be cultivated in such an organisation – employees are given the authority to make certain decisions, leaving their managers or other colleagues to other pressing tasks. They are also able to cover the duties of their absent colleagues or managers effectively.