OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND?

Social relationships and interaction with co-workers and management are vital for staff wellbeing and performance[1]. Social interaction and cooperation at work are regarded as health-promoting characteristics[2]. A lack of interchange within a team is a stress factor which influences the team process[3].

Lack of interaction between people changes the climate in teams. What is involved here is a construct which relates to the quality of communication and interaction at work, which is perceived differently by different individuals[4]. Working from home undermines our need for social recognition, acceptance and belonging[6]. The human need to maintain and establish social relationships is massively impeded or even made impossible in the work context, which in turn can have a negative impact on health[5]. Communication channels should be used as actively as possible to counteract these negative impacts on team cohesion and job satisfaction. Social interchange with other team members can take place online or by phone/chat, for example, or be replaced by private arrangements. Staff should acquire appropriate in-depth knowledge and media competence in dealing with online communication tools. A reflexive ability to self-direct is central to the use of media. Companies need to ensure that employees have easy access to all data and processes. Cohesion within teams is not defined solely in terms of informal processes and emotional support[7]. Co-worker support, joint projects and the shared experience of success and failure have a formal dynamic. Exchanging ideas is crucial for remaining motivated.

FACTS

> Social relationships and interaction with co-workers and management are vital for staff wellbeing and performance.
> New online media and phone calls can help facilitate communication.
> When employees are absent for long periods of time, it is important that they have easy access to data and processes.
> Private relationships are important and should be developed to compensate for the loss of workplace relationships.

OPPORTUNITIES

Due to the coronavirus crisis, employees have been forced to use online media more often. Companies have expanded their pre-existing communication channels, opening up new avenues of communication. Teams have had to come to terms with this new situation and – after a transitional phase – find new ways to interact.

Straightforward, IT-supported communication media combined with appropriate training are essential in maintaining a sense of togetherness even at a distance. Companies can organise attendance days for team/project meetings or regular social events to encourage interaction. The lack of social connections at work can be made good in the private sphere.

RISKS

Employees working from home may get the feeling that they have to be permanently available. Many people find that this "always on" mentality is intrusive and undermines their personal autonomy. Paradoxically, however, very few people use their increased online presence for social interaction. This can lead to feelings of social isolation or even loneliness, which in turn can have a negative impact on mental and physical health.

RELEVANT OHM OFFERS
› Presence and absence management at a distance
› Healthy change management
› Resilience
› Stress
› Digital detox

Sources
[1] Schulze, H., and Gobeli, S. 2011
[2] Richter, G. 2000
[3] Drössler, S., et al. 2016
[4] Sinokki, M., et al. 2009
[5] Baumeister, R. F., and Leary, M. R. 1995
[6] Pereira, D., and Elfering, A. 2014
[7] Bacharach, S. B., et al. 2012

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