

National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work

Happier Connected Working

Tips for Organisations

This Guidance Note has been prepared by the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at Work with reference to the available literature and input from the member organisations with representation from industry, government, academia and the third sector.

The Challenge of Modern Work

We may have a *love-hate* relationship with our phones and email but they indisputably make staying connected easier than ever.

There are downsides to the technology we've grown accustomed to. Increasingly there's evidence that mobile phones have added extra hours to our working days (without any increase in what we produce), elsewhere many workers feel that the constant interruptions that email and instant messages create prevent them from getting work completed when it requires concentration. With even more technology coming at us all of the time it's probably time to think about creating some rule

The National Forum for Health and Wellbeing have created this set of guidelines to help workers balance their own well-being with the benefits of being connected.

A reminder of the benefits of modern working:

- Connected working is more inclusive - it can enable those with life demands to fulfill their obligations without being at their desks.
- Most workers love the freedom to shape their jobs in a way that suits them - technology can be powerful at enabling this freedom - and modern workplaces should support that autonomy.

The risks of modern working:

- Compulsive need to stay constantly connected - this can be magnified if managers (or other work contacts) create a norm for constant connectivity.
- Workers may feel pressure to work at a higher pace (or to multi-task across several different projects) with the result that they struggle to complete more complex projects that require concentration.
- The HSE stress management guidelines say a combination of these factors can create a sense of a lack of control for some workers.
- Good working exists in a balance with good rest and recovery. When workers can't switch off it can lead to stress, burnout and a reduction in productivity.

Recommendations

- Workplaces should set out expectations for productive communications. If you want to discourage weekend emailing (outside of emergencies) these norms are best laid out in simple guidelines - and then reflected in the behaviour of leadership.

What this might look like: "Respect your colleagues' rest time: we have a No Fly Zone for emails at the weekend. If you do want to write emails over that time press Save at the end and send it on Monday".

- The role of leaders and managers is essential in setting the norms in the business. The more vocal the company's commitment to expectations, the more employees will feel empowered to resist answering an 11pm instant message ping from their boss.

What this might look like: "Find the best way for you to work, but if that means not responding to chat messages whilst out of work understand that we're good with that".

- Introduce discussions of balanced use of technology at work. There's plenty of evidence that while technology can make offices more connected and faster to make decisions, we don't do our best work when we're connected all of the time.

What this might look like: introduce *balanced tech* discussions in wellness programs, remind workers of the power of switching off, maybe try ideas like 'No Email Friday' to bring some face-to-face chat to your office.

- Consider introducing good etiquette guides to communication in your office

What this might look like: some offices try to encourage emails that are less than five sentences, others discourage the use of Reply All. Many workplaces like to remind teams that email isn't advisable for gossip or joke distribution.