The road to employee happiness:

How technology, infrastructure and company culture can create workplace happiness

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A happy employee is an engaged employee. In fact, according to McKinsey, people who report having a positive employee experience have 16 times the engagement level of employees with a negative experience.

They are also eight times more likely to stay with the company, and 13% more productive[1].

But without contact in the office every day, do you know if your employees are happy? Behind the screen, are they still smiling?

In this guide, we've collaborated with Professor Sir Cary Cooper, to define how you can keep your employees' minds calm and create a positive employee experience – both in the office and when working remotely.

Professor Sir Cary Cooper is a Professor of Organisational Psychology at the University of Manchester. He was the founding editor-in-chief of the Journal or Organisational Behaviour. He also continues to advise Anxiety UK, and is a former president of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

[1] https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2019-10-24-happy-workers-are-13-more-productive

Picture the scene. It's a normal working day with multiple employees working remotely.

"Can I use Teams? How do I set up a Zoom call? Do I have the right software? Does the client have the right technology? Is my printer working? What if my home internet cuts off?"

You'd be surprised if one of your employees hadn't asked themselves at least one of these questions in the last 18 months. In fact, you'd be surprised if they hadn't in the last week.

For some, it's an easy situation to shake off. They can get to the bottom of it themselves. For others, it can be a fairly stressful situation. And that's the thing about stress – it affects us all differently.

According to Professor Cooper, **"for some people who have good coping strategies, the line is very high. Where pressure mounts, you can cope with a lot of pressure before you get into the stress zone. If you have bad coping strategies as an individual, you don't deal well with pressure and can enter the stress zone easily."**

So, is technology tipping employees into the stress zone? With 86% of employees believing that technology has a negative impact on their wellbeing, it looks like it. And for small businesses, this can have a significant impact on the wider workforce. In March 2020, 57% of all long-term sickness was due to stress, anxiety and depression. According to data from the Health and Safety Executive from 2019/20, there were 828,000 workers in the UK affected by these issues.

It's a very real problem today, with COVID-19 making this stress more acute. More people have reported panic attacks and experienced symptoms of depression more frequently since the pandemic began.

With our working lives now looking very different to March 2020, small businesses must help their employees navigate this new working environment - and help bring the happiness.

Road to Happiness
Step #1:

Recognise that stress is a very real thing. See your employees as people and not just a workforce.
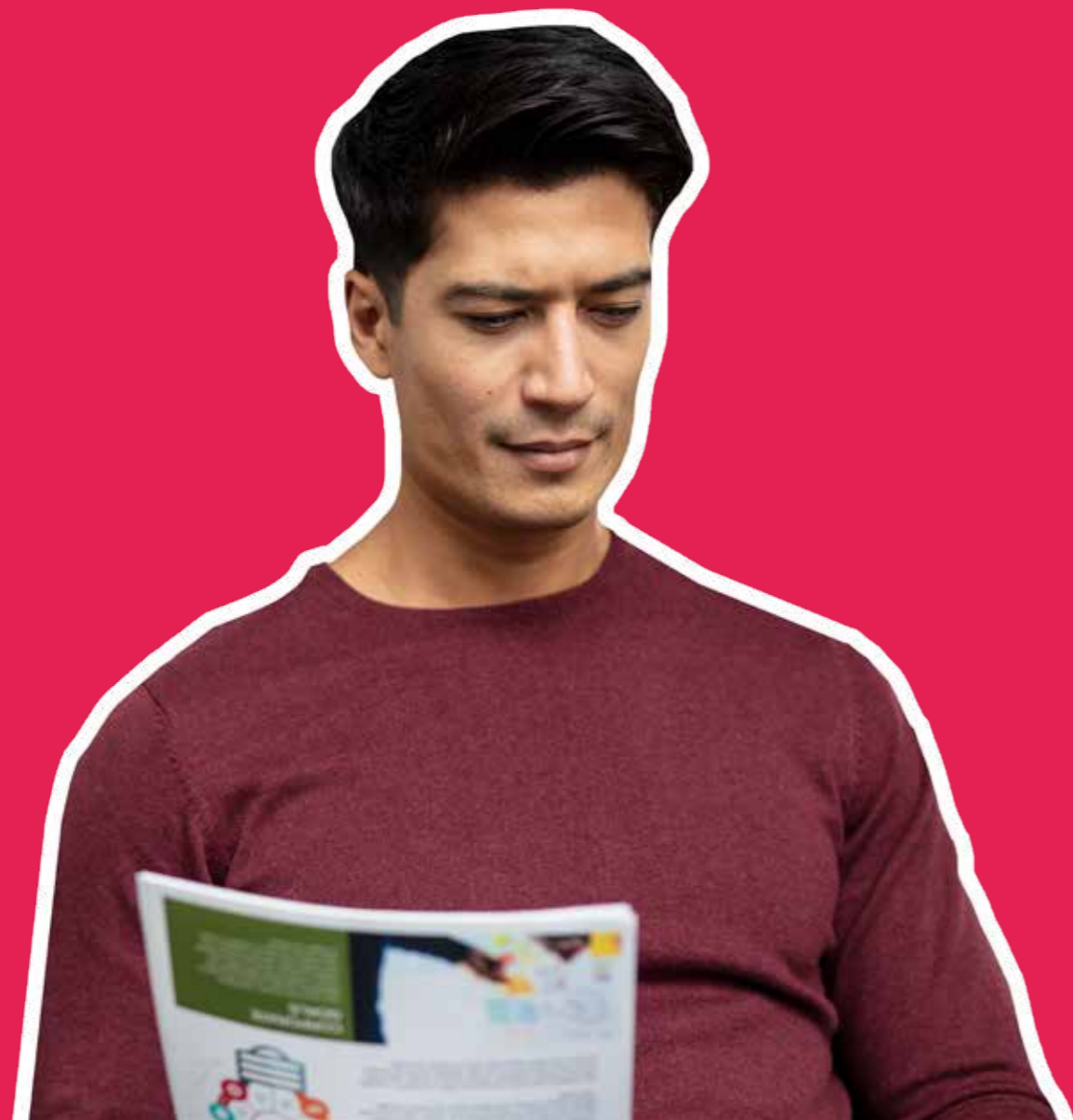
**Today's working environment can cause a perfect storm for stress or happiness:**

It's down to how you manage it to achieve a positive outcome.

"We actually know what causes people to get stressed at work, and it's a range of factors", says Professor Cooper.

"One is how people are managed, which comes down to the competency of their line manager. They're critical to employees' health and wellbeing at work. The hours people work is another. We know that people who consistently work long hours get ill. Another factor is technology itself. Excessive emails cause people stress. It's what we call technostress."

Let's focus on each of these factors.

Employee wellbeing can be negatively impacted by excessive emails and technostress.
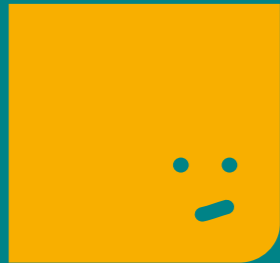
"Technostress is a very recent term. There is a substantial impact of emails. It's causing people enormous problems,"

says Professor Cooper. Email has been one of the leading causes of workplace stress in the last decade. A Washington Post report from 2016, found that the average worker spent around four hours a day responding to work emails. And that was five years ago. A Swedish study published in 2019, looked at long-term trends of close to 5,000 Swedish workers.

They found that the need to be constantly connected led to "suboptimal" health outcomes.

So, is cutting email out of day-to-day communication and switching it to team spaces, like Slack, the answer? Not necessarily. It might be the answer to solve email problems around high-message volume, but it has amplified the rate at which interaction occurs. **"It's the way we're communicating today that is causing people to become stressed"**, says Professor Cooper. Excessive use of instant communication and a pressure to be "always on" continues to have a negative impact on employee health and wellbeing.

It can be all too easy to expect employees to be always working. We've all been there in the last 18 months. A quick call before 9am as there's no commute. WhatsApp chats that replaced daily stand-ups continue to creep later and later into the evening. For the sake of your employees' wellbeing, it's time to get strict. "In France, they have the Right to Disconnect law, which means no manager can send an email out of hours to their subordinates. It's a good solution," says Professor Cooper. And one that is being adhered to – fines in France have been as high as €60,000, whilst Portugal has also recently adopted a similar law.

Road to Happiness
Step #2:

Give your employees the right to disconnect and build it into your company culture and ethos.

Employee happiness can hinge on how your technology works for your people.

When employees work with good, user-friendly technology, they experience a 37% boost in performance and can save as much as three hours of lost productivity in a workday[2].

When they work with bad technology it can lead to frustration, wasted time and stress. In fact, 35% of employees are continuing to face ongoing frustrations with the technology itself. Something that can be further exacerbated by hybrid working models.

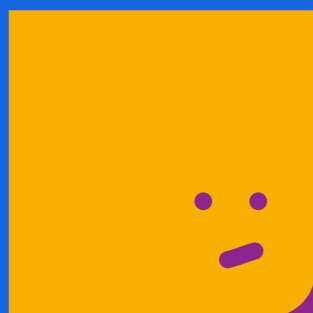**"Technology, whether it's computers, printers and all the paraphernalia associated with the software, now in a hybrid model, is extremely important, says Professor Cooper. "Because when you work in a central office environment, you have the infrastructure to help you cope with it if it went down. But how do you cope with it now you're operating substantially from home and only going into the office from time to time?"**

It's essential to invest in the right technology infrastructure to help your employees cope with their new working environment.

Choose high-performing technology solutions that:

- Save time and enhance efficiency
- Improve productivity
- Increase agility

[2] https://www.healthline.com/health-news/tech-issues-stressing-you-out-during-the-pandemic-youre-not-alone

For hybrid working models to work, employees need the same consistent experience wherever they work, whether in the office, at home or remotely. Take the example of video conferencing and collaboration platforms.

Employees need straightforward, intuitive and easy-to-use tools. When a platform is difficult to use and unnecessarily complex, it will be frustrating for some employees and potentially stressful for others. And video conferencing tools without video captions or the ability to embed third-party video captioning will cause further problems for any deaf or hearing-impaired employees.

Also consider information management. When employees are in the office, the process of printing, scanning, copying or faxing documents on old hardware or poorly configured software can be very frustrating.

Not to mention the downtime spent fixing malfunctions or waiting for ink-cartridges to be replaced.

Print management offers a solution that works with the needs of your businesses, that targets these problems and reduces the hidden waste of employees' time incurred on print-related tasks.

This frees up time to focus on more strategic initiatives, as opposed to day-to-day maintenance tasks. And with the ability to scan and save to the network, remote employees will also have ease of access to essential documents at the click of a button.

Other ongoing frustrations and potential stresses for employees include a lack of standardisation across technologies, coupled with questions of who they need to speak to when problems arise. Too often this causes time wasted by employees trying to find a quick fix or interrupting their co-workers when they have a technology problem. By opting for managed services, you solve the standardisation conundrum and also benefit from dedicated experts who are on hand to assist with any problems.

Road to Happiness
Step #3:

Build a technology infrastructure focused on your business and the needs of your employees to drive productivity.

Company culture also plays a key role in employee happiness

According to Professor Cooper **"today, employees will leave and go to work for another employer if they don't like the quality of the working life there. Where once employees would have stayed for financial reasons – to pay off their mortgages or their cars – today it is a very different scenario. Today's employees are looking for a good employer, where they can do good and valued work. And where they are valued as people too.**

Today, catering for the wellbeing of your employees has to be a strategic priority."

So, how do you make it a priority? By asking a key question, says Professor Cooper. **"How do we create the right kind of culture that trusts and values our people so that they want to stay with us and want to produce?"**

Look at how you're asking your employees to use technology.

"You hear it all too often these days, people saying they're "Zoomed out" from back to back video calls all day. This was an additional stress during the initial pandemic period when individuals were forced for months to just sit there in a room and use Zoom all day", says Professor Cooper.

We might be past what felt like the dark days of lockdown and working from home for many employees but, right now, are we reaching a technology tipping point? Have we taken things too far? In the last 18 months, we've seen a culture shift towards using technology as standard, when it isn't always necessary. Before the Zoom revolution, you could simply pick up the phone; now it no longer seems like the done thing. And it's tiring many employees out and affecting their happiness levels.
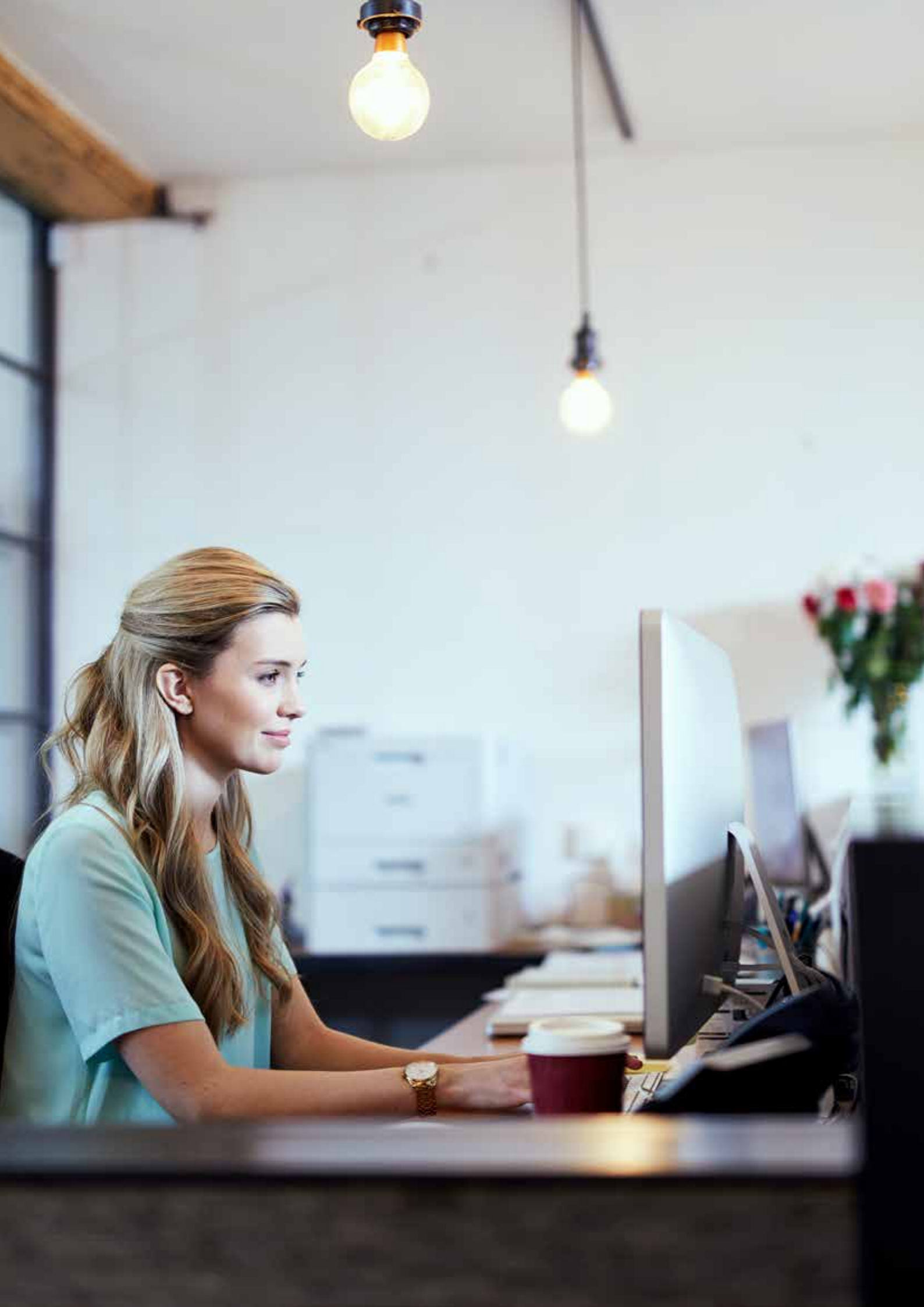
With a switch to hybrid working structures, it's key that you use this model to your advantage. The biggest thing that you can give your employees is trust. Don't simply demand their time on Zoom as a given to replace in-office presence, interaction and collaboration.

Trust them to spend their time working from home in a way that works for them, without the pressure to be seen to be working. Presenteeism doesn't need to be a factor any more. So, let your employees work with their line managers to define what their optimal working structures look like. Is Zoom really always essential when time in the office can be used for collaboration or for wider team meetings to discuss team performance, objectives and direction? And time at home can be used for effective solo work.

Look at your wider culture – from your line managers to senior leadership.

Yes, your line managers should be checking in regularly with hybrid employees, with a focus on their performance and career progression objectives. Employees need to feel trusted and valued, and that they have a key role to play in the future of the organisation, but line managers also have a fundamental role to play in employee happiness.

> "We have always promoted and recruited managers based on their technical skills, not their people skills. We need line managers who can manage people's insecurities and ensure they don't work long hours – managers who can recognise when employees are not coping and when they have unmanageable workloads or unrealistic deadlines. Too many businesses don't have this, and that's been the problem."
>
> **- Professor Cooper**

The first step is to recruit and promote well, based on an individual's personality and people skills, as well as their ability and performance. Adequate line manager training is essential, whether from within the company or via external experts. A supportive management structure is also key – employees should feel able to approach their line managers with any problems, whilst line managers should be empowered to implement tailored solutions for each employee.

Creating this culture comes from the top. "Six or seven years ago at many businesses we started to see directors of health and wellbeing appointed, says Professor Cooper. **"They are reporting directly into the HR Director or the Chief Medical Officer, or even the CEO or MD. We're now seeing tonnes of directors of health and wellbeing across the UK."**

This is something that many candidates actively look for when assessing potential roles. They want to know what policies, procedures and infrastructure are in place to protect their wellbeing before committing to a new employer.

Road to Happiness Step #4:

Make employee wellbeing a central component of your company culture. And prove it to your employees through training, support and commitment from the top of the business.

Building the road to happiness for each of your employees

Supportive management and an understanding of the individual nature of stress, coupled with a company culture that enhances the wellbeing of your employees can lead to happy and engaged teams, and ultimately business success.

To understand what this looks like in your organisation, **take our workplace stress self-assessment to understand your own wellbeing** in the workplace and how you can apply these learnings to benefit your employees.

But this must also be coupled with a technology infrastructure that can ease stress and increase efficiency. By choosing the right technology solutions – from effective video conferencing and collaboration platforms to Brother's Managed Print Services – you can not only increase productivity, reduce costs and improve your profit margins, but you can also reduce the technostress faced by your employees. With a lack of technostress comes the foundation for employee happiness in 2021 and beyond.

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