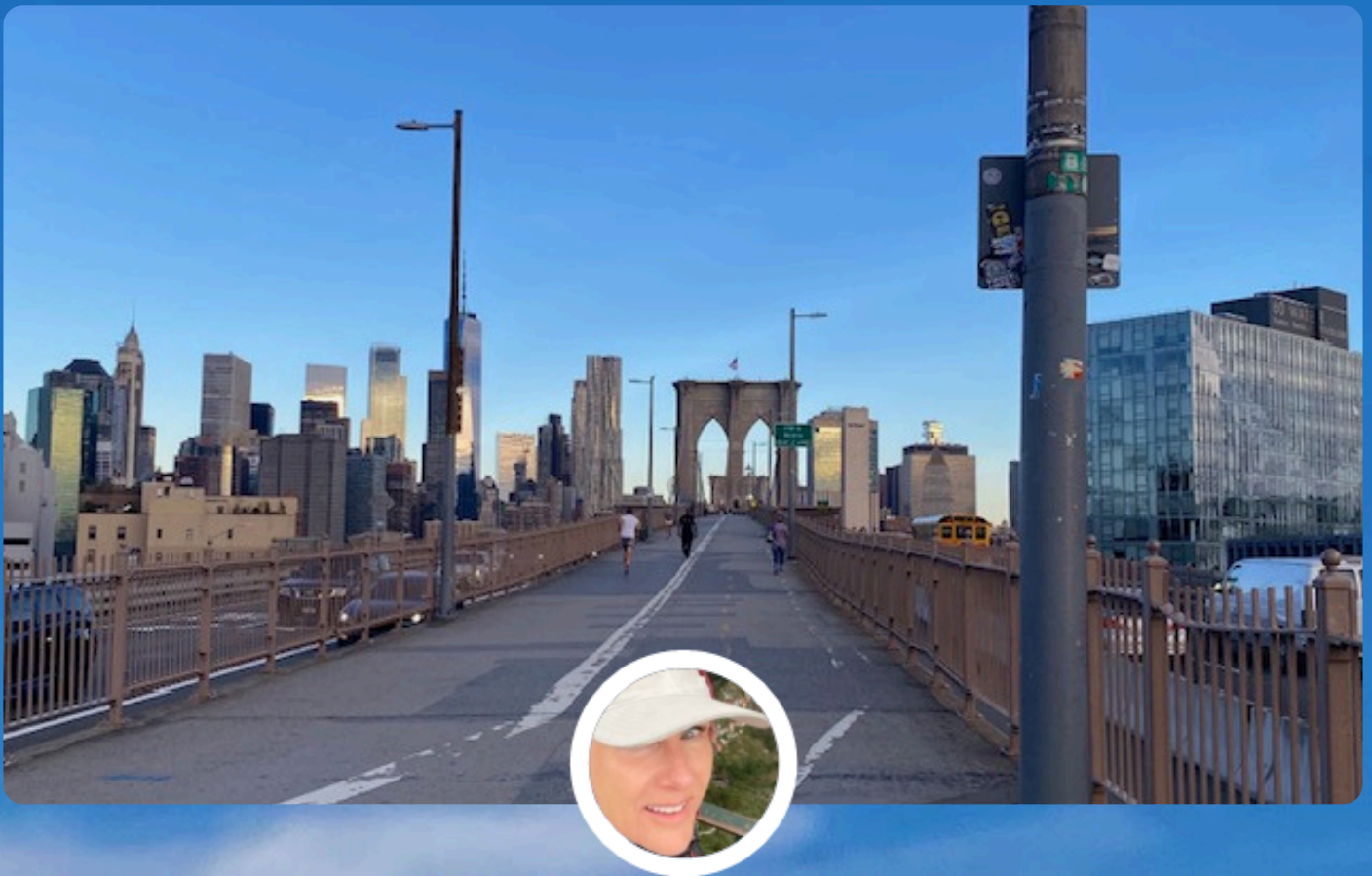


Humanising The Workplace

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The dehumanising of the workplace is nothing new and has been going on for centuries. It has now reached a fulcrum; a tipping point that companies need to urgently address or suffer the consequences.

That's a strong statement.

So, we'd better start to unpack the background, the current situation, the causes and the consequences.

As always, there is light at the end of this rather long and dark tunnel but the solutions do take thinking about and HR Directors may have to go cap in hand to the Finance Director for funds to sort this out. So, the spender is going to have to provide a compelling case to the saver in order to open the company wallet. Never easy, do-able but not easy.

Britain was the first country to unintentionally introduce dehumanisation in the workplace on a grand scale. Others followed quickly. Given that it caused so much misery and so many unintended consequences, how on Earth did this come about?



Driven by Tech, and Money, in the mid 18th Century Britain started to transition from being an agrarian economy. There was evidence of it starting in the early 1700s but rate of transition really took off in 1750. This transition was caused by the first Industrial Revolution. New technologies emerged and a nationwide programme of factory building and the establishment of mines, railroad networks, potteries and textile mills continued unabated until around 1900. The impact of these events were staggering in terms of social and economic change. In a short period of time, an economic underclass was created that worked in what the English poet, William Blake, called the “satanic mills” in his iconic piece “Jerusalem” written in 1808.



The mills, mines and factories of the period were very dangerous places to work and, across the country, serious industrial accidents were a daily occurrence.

The working conditions were cramped, insanitary and extremely unhealthy, leading to outbreaks of disease and a truncated life expectancy. The Industrial Revolution introduced the world to the traditional dirty, dangerous and heavy industries of Coal, Gas, Steam, and similar.

The first efforts to ameliorate this appalling situation was the Factories Act in 1833. This was the same year that slavery was outlawed in Great Britain. Sadly, nearly 200 years on, according the Global Slavery Index (2023 onwards), there are estimated to be about 125,000 modern slaves in the UK today. By any measure this is a shameful national figure. This is the equivalent to the entire population of Burnley or Cambridge or Norwich. The global figure is widely agreed as being 29.8 million.

Back to the Factories Act of 1833. This ground-breaking legislation banned the use of humans under the age of 9 years old from working in the factories. Not great if you were 10 years old or more.

Let's not descend too far into the gloom here. The factories were reformed continuously over the subsequent century and beyond. The key point is that dehumanisation of the workplace is not new, and the standards were allowed to go low.

Very low.

Over time these industries and the concomitant conditions were cleaned up and bodies like the UK Health and Safety Executive have achieved great things.

A further industrial revolution took place after World War II. This was hall marked by electrically powered machines. By now the workforce had changed radically and would continue to change. What was significant was that this revolution had an identical characteristic to the first industrial revolution.

And what was that I hear you ask?

Simple – the people using the new technology had to fit in with it rather than the other way around. *“Here are our new machines and this is how you will use them and fit in with them”* would have been the mantra in the 18th Century.

That mantra was repeated again over 100 years later when companies introduced the new company wide computer system. *"Here is our new computer system and you WILL fit in with it"*. Many of those who either could not or would not were shown the exit door.

Salad days for IT companies who got busy and rich installing and imposing their shiny new one-size-fits-all digital nightmares on the working population.

Funny how history repeats itself.

Not much seemed to be learned from the first Industrial Revolution. Consider a leading CRM and Lead Tracking system which has gained a reputation for generating more and more actions and tasks that it continually tells to hapless users to complete. The only

escape from this is to "lie" to the system and input fictitious data that will silence it – at least for a while. Personal creativity, individualism and to an extent, personal freedoms flew – at speed – out of the window with no soft landing.



However, technology alone was not to blame for the progressive **dehumanising** of the workplace. Target cultures prevailed, endless appraisals took place that were all numbers based and so on. An undesirable combination of technology, conflicting personal and team goals, poor corporate strategy, systematised work processes and procedures led to where too many of us are today.



Then add to this the Covid pandemic. We all know what happened, so no need for a recap on that. Clearly, lots of people today are often working from home where the only contact with co-workers is via a digital medium. This does not always suit a company and now many want workers to return to the office. But return to what? And why?

A fightback to humanise the workplace and work culture has started and the push back has been dramatic. During enforced home stays brought about by Government sponsored demands for isolation have caused lots of older workers in particular to reflect upon and reject work altogether. They make do with less money coming in but there is less going out. Commuting costs, sandwiches, daily lunches and the buying of work clothes disappear as a result. Post pandemic in the UK, over 500,000 people literally gave up working. They chose life quality over work. Originally it was thought that these people would end up drifting back into the workplace. That has not happened.

That's fine if you afford to do that but what about those left in a rather anodyne work environment? No simple solutions here but there is much that can – quite easily – be done.

Let's start with the technology. Our relationship with technology needs to be reversed. The tech we need for work **MUST** work **WITH** us and not the other way around. As people start to adopt portfolio income streams they need to be able to pick and mix from the IT services available to them. A person may use literally dozens of applications in the workplace to complete all the desired tasks in their work portfolio. These people will use IT from a vast menu of microservices – apps with a system that they choose and quite possibly shape and share to suit themselves. The tech will be compliant with the user demands and the user will be free to use the services and apps when it suits them to do it. Further, the IP could – and should – remain at the individual level. This is not a war between Collectivism and Individualism, it is where the individual is counted first and s/he works for the collective benefit.



Embedded in this menu of microservices, as we can label them, will need to be tech that **humanises** the workplace. This will cover a raft of areas including anonymous and personal space where Wellbeing can be freely and completely privately explored. The NoWorriesApp from NoWorriesApp.com is such a microservice. The data at the individual user level is secure and private but is accumulated across a community so that it can be viewed via a Digital Dashboard; hence serving both the individual, to recognise, manage and ease worry or concern and the collective community by shining a light on community specific policy interventions to support the humans at its core. What is really interesting about this NoWorriesApp.com product is that it provides a bridge between the shores of the human and those of IT.

Tech has been part of the problem, historically & can now be part of the answer



That leaves humans to make up the difference. Wellbeing has to be put right at the top of the agenda in the workplace. Work now has to fit in with the worker and not the other way around. Recent studies are showing that financial reward is not enjoying the prominence it once held. It's important but work/life balance is seen as critical. Equally important is engendering a genuine spirit of optimism in the workplace and the concept of being seen (the recognition for effort and contribution).



Change in the workplace has never experienced such pace. Driven by individual choice, type and availability of work, regulatory frameworks and the increasingly complex needs of organisations so they may thrive, mean that HR Directors must adopt strategies that will deliver against all of these requirements.

It could be argued that the role of the HR has never been so challenging. The words HR Directors both hear regularly and fear most are “How do you know this is the right strategy?” and “What are you doing about the emerging workplace problems?”

We can help you answer that!

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Article published on the Health&Wellbeing Magazine June 2025

<https://mag.foyht.org/>

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