

# Why You Need An Integrated Approach To People And Data

There has been plenty of discussion recently about the growth in employee monitoring, and the impact that it can have on trust in the workplace. There are more and more tools out there in the market that enable this, and can help businesses, big and small, to run their business more efficiently and productively. This may include insights into the hours that people are working, so that those who keep putting in overtime can be recognised for it, or how many emails are being sent and to whom, so those facing unreasonable requests have evidence to back it up. The explosion in hybrid and remote working has meant that this is perhaps even more useful as an option for companies that don't see their teams day in day out. There is no doubt though that monitoring staff can be considered intrusive, even when done with the best of intentions. But, when it is done in the right way, you can build strong relations with those you work with and earn a reputation as a business that respects privacy and treats colleagues fairly.

## Fairer Decision Making

Whilst it may well be implicit rather than overt, cognitive bias will always impact decision-making processes, even when it comes to the most strategic leaders. This may mean, for example, that employers are susceptible to making promotion decisions based on subjective evaluations, perhaps overestimating the talents of familiar people or those more like themselves. This obviously risks offending people who feel they may have been overlooked, damaging the motivation and commitment of the individual, and the level of trust between employee and their employer. If an organisation can mitigate bias, and demonstrate a data-driven approach when it comes to decisions such as promotions or bonus levels, the process becomes clearer for

those involved and the decisions taken are far more likely to be accepted. It can build trust among employees, and ensure a supportive and productive working environment. This may include knowing how many changes were made on a document and by whom, or who contributed the most word count to a project, for example. This will be why recent research suggests that a majority of employees are comfortable with being monitored in a transparent way, with 61% saying that was the case, on the basis that it can help to provide employers with clear and unbiased information about their productivity.

It is often the case that those groups from less represented backgrounds feel most excluded from positions of power in the workplace, meaning that they can be more likely to feel less involved and less engaged. As a result it is disproportionately important to reach out to them, and ensure their voice and views are heard. The research shows that BAME employees are very likely, at 74%, to accept monitoring, with data helping to avoid biased personal decisions, and so a data driven approach can also support diversity and inclusion measures within a business.

## Create Transparent Processes

Businesses should look to make sure they have a consistent review structure with clear goals and expectations in place to reduce subjectivity, allowing employers to easily and transparently track employee performance. When promotion decisions are based on performance analytics, employees clearly understand what is expected of them and are encouraged to focus on doing well. It can also allow businesses to source proven talent from unexpected people - maybe the quieter one in the office who is less likely to shout about their performance.

A data-driven approach such as this will have the added benefit of allowing businesses to really understand their employees' strengths and weaknesses. This will mean they are far more likely to be able to excel in their role, be more engaged at work, and enjoy a greater wellbeing in the workplace, with productivity rising in tandem.

## Getting The Whole Story

There is always a risk with data that, without the context behind the numbers, you might not be getting the whole story. Business leaders need to make sure that they combine human oversight with data-based decision making to make sure that every angle is

covered. There is no doubt that data can help to give direction on, and make the case for, what needs to be changed in an organisation, but decisions about people should never be automated. An integrated approach of human insight and informed data will always deliver the strongest solution.

Finally, in order for data to be used to its best effect, leaders and HR teams need to be prepared to tell the true story of the data and not cherry pick in order to tell the business what they want to hear. They need to know the data, know the limitations of the data, and understand its commercial relevance.

When it is used properly, data can allow businesses to improve the wellbeing of staff, employee retention and inclusion in the workplace. As long as there is human oversight, better use of employee data in businesses can help to level the playing field and lead to fairer decision making and greater trust in the workplace. There are still many businesses that are yet to implement it to full effect, and benefit from the enhanced performance it can enable. Those employers that are looking to do so need to make sure that they put in place a clear and transparent process, and that their workforce are fully educated on their data rights.



## NATALIE CRAMP

Natalie is the CEO of data science consultancy Profusion. At Profusion she leads a team of 60 consultants, data scientists, data architects, developers and digital marketing experts. Natalie is responsible for Profusion's strategic direction, expansion of its product offering and the growth of its blue-chip client base. A digital marketing and start-up operations expert, she has more than a decade of experience leading private, public and third sector organisations through significant periods of innovation and change. This includes creating and scaling tech solutions for government organisations and developing the digital capability of third sector organisations.  
Contact: [hello@profusion.com](mailto:hello@profusion.com) or visit: [www.profusion.com](http://www.profusion.com)