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How remote working can increase stress

Adapted from theconversation.com, October 11, 2019, by Stephanie Russell

¹- Remote working is becoming more popular than ever. A Swiss study found that 70% of professionals work remotely at least one day a week, while 53% work remotely for at least half of the week. _____ (1) New technology makes all this possible. While there are certainly benefits, there are also **pitfalls**. As remote working becomes the new normal for many, it's important that companies adapt and put the right policies in place to ensure their employees feel part of the team and don't **burn out**.

²- Nearly 70% of **millennials** would be more likely to choose an employer who offered remote working. _____ (2) Employees value the flexibility it gives them, particularly if they have childcare commitments. People also appreciate escaping long commutes and avoiding office distractions.

³- But there are also concerns that people's mental health and well-being can take a hit when working remotely. In the UK, businesses lose 100 million pounds every year due to workplace stress. Research shows that always being accessible by technology while working remotely leads to the blurring of work and non-work hours, particularly if you work from home. A 2017 United Nations report found that 41% of remote workers reported high stress levels, compared to just 25% of office workers.

⁴- One of the reasons for this could be the "out of sight, out of mind" **mentality** that's **commonplace** toward remote workers, which leads to a lack of trust, feelings of being an outsider and a **tendency** for people to think their colleagues are talking negatively about them behind their back. One study of 1,100 workers found that the 52% who worked from home were more likely to feel left out and mistreated, as well as unable to deal with conflict between themselves and colleagues.

⁵- Navigating sensitive territory in a virtual team is an essential skill. Emails can be misinterpreted as being rude or too direct. _____ (3)

⁶- In a virtual environment managers may focus too much on completing tasks and too little on relationships. With more emphasis on deadlines and routine information, virtual workers can feel treated as a cog in a machine, rather than an essential part of the team. Such a leadership approach can worsen the sense of isolation that comes with working remotely and can contribute to virtual workplace stress.

⁷- University lecturers and students who work virtually report feelings of **isolation**, loneliness and being unable to "switch off", as well as a lack of social support.

⁸- _____ (4) Interviewees said a lack of feedback from line managers and senior colleagues gave them no benchmark to judge progress, which led to increased feelings of anxiety and a concern as to whether they were "up to standard".

⁹- When it comes to work, there are two kinds of stress - the good kind and the bad kind. The Yerkes- Dodson Law (drawn up by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson) points out that stress can be productive up to a point and then it results in reduced productivity. Being unable to report being stressed (or being uncomfortable doing so), is **detrimental** as pressure will eventually **outweigh** an individual's ability to cope over time. In contrast, one recent study found that colleagues who spend just 15 minutes socialising and sharing their feelings of stress had a 20% increase in performance.

¹⁰- The right kind of communication is key to overcoming the difficulties of virtual working.

¹¹- _____ (5) Bosses need to lead by example and create a culture where those outside the office feel valued.

¹²- Equally, virtual workers need to think about what makes them productive, happy and successful in everyday life, and try to **replicate** this in a remote setting - for example, taking a walk at lunch time, going to the gym, ringing a friend or reading a book.

¹³- If the future of work is heading towards more virtual working, then it is not something we can avoid. Instead we should implement ways of managing the stress associated with it, while enjoying the benefits.