BUSINESS NEWS LESSONS

The Me-myself-and-I file: why teams are sharing personal user manuals

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1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Is the CV an effective tool to help companies determine who to add to their teams? Why (not)?

2. What personal information could be shared among teams to increase productivity and cohesion?

3. Is it a good idea for team members to share personal user manuals? What kind of information would these contain?

2 Key words

a. Read the definitions and find key words in the article that match the definitions. The section number is given in brackets to help you. Check your answers and understanding of the words by using them to complete the example sentences immediately after each definition. Then read the complete article to see how the key words are used in context.

1. dig up _____ (paragraph 1)

    All the candidates _____ up emails and other pieces of evidence that could

    attest to their stellar performance.

2. something strange and unexpected about a person or an unusual habit

    _____ (paragraph 2)

    We believe successful teams talk about their flaws and embrace each other's

    _____.

3. also, in addition _____ (paragraph 2)

    He has an MBA, years of experience under his belt and a great network of potential clients

    _____.

4. a situation or event that causes a strong emotional reaction in someone

    _____ (paragraph 3)

    The more you are aware of what your anxiety _____ are, the better you can

    manage them.

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5. the state of working well together and being in close agreement _____

    (paragraph 3)

    It takes time to build trust and team _____; it all starts with a shared purpose

    and clear communication.

6. something that prevents something else from happening or makes it difficult

    _____ (paragraph 5)

    New businesses face many _____ to entry when entering a competitive

    marketplace.

7. reduce in size or importance _____ (paragraph 9)

    Not being explicit about your work values will _____ your chances of

    achieving job satisfaction.

8. the quality of being very detailed or exact _____ (paragraph 10)

    They failed because they didn't understand the _____ of the local

    business culture.

9. adjust something to suit a specific situation or need _____ (paragraph 10)

    We _____ all our software to our customers' needs. We offer basic

    packages, but they are all customisable.

10. a sudden wish or idea _____ (paragraph 10)

    She worked as a private chef, and as she will tell you, the _____ of a

    billionaire can be hard to satisfy.

11. changing suddenly and often _____ (paragraph 10)

    She has a _____ temperament, and her team is constantly walking on

    eggshells around her.

12. without emotion _____ (paragraph 11)

While Laura's approach can come across as a bit _____, Richard brought

warmth into their operations.

13. someone who publicly supports an idea _____ (paragraph 11)

They are strong _____ of the four-day working week.

14. saying what must happen by making a rule or giving an instruction _____

(paragraph 14)

Sometimes, I wish my boss was more _____ and would tell me what to do,

but she prefers to leave me to my own devices.

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Can I refer you to the Manual of Me?

SOME WORKPLACES ARE ENCOURAGING STAFF TO WRITE PERSONAL USER GUIDES TO HELP THEM GET ALONG WITH COLLEAGUES

1 Between dredging over work history, talking up achievements and struggling with formatting, updating your CV surely ranks among the most stressful of career chores.

2 But what if resumes asked different questions? Would it be more appealing – or useful – if we arrived at a new job armed with information about how we worked, our strengths and weaknesses, and perhaps a few hobbies and quirks to boot?

3 That is the thinking behind "personal user manuals" – accessible documents packed with details about what people are actually like in the workplace, from stress triggers to communication styles. A growing number of companies are adopting them, both as a way to introduce newcomers to teams, and to improve cohesion among existing staff.

4 A parent might note that they may take longer to respond to emails after school hours. A new joiner could write that they like interim deadlines that allow feedback before a final submission. Others (me) may say they focus better when listening to white noise, so if I'm plugged into my headphones, please just tap me on the shoulder if you need to chat.

5 At start-up marketing agency AMA, where freelancers and staff from creative, operations and technology fields are frequently thrown together in new teams, manuals help fresh projects hit the ground running. "We wanted to eliminate as many of the barriers that make it difficult for people to work together effectively," Kitty Day, global people director, says. "One of the most obvious was how to effectively communicate."

6 Freelance strategist Matt Knight also started using the manuals to quickly get to know new teams. The idea caught on, and he created a "Manual of Me" platform with templates and workshops for using personal guides.

7 "Over the years we've seen more businesses inviting staff to fill in documents with information like: these are the hours I work, this is what frustrates me, this is what excites me," he says. "But I found if you just gave people a blank sheet of paper asking how do you work, you were often met with blank faces… We wanted to help people find ways to think about it."

8 Knight is the first to admit the idea is not his own: the earliest mention he has found, in the mid 2000s, is by consultant Ben Dattner for a "managerial user's manual" in which new leaders explain to staff how they work.

9 The guide, Dattner writes, "greatly diminishes the possibility that misunderstandings will cause your new staff to view you as a 'toxic' boss". If a manager communicates they are not a morning person, for example, employees are less likely to take it personally if their approach before lunchtime is treated with disinterest.

10 Such preferences reveal one of the obvious problems of personal manuals. If everyone is asked to detail their workplace particularities, does that mean we have to tailor our own behaviour to cater to the various whims of every colleague – or, worse, a mercurial boss? It sounds demanding – and places an emphasis on individual demands over working as a team.

11 In reality, these user guides are not bloodless instruction manuals. Most advocates see them, first, as the basis of a discussion. Employees often write their manuals in special workshops, where they discuss answers and explore needs and personalities together.

12 David Burkus, an independent consultant, says he rarely sees them used just for reference. Instead they facilitate conversation, helping teams learn about each other, be vulnerable and create trust. "It helps teams find 'uncommon commonalities'," he says. That can lead to better work, too.

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13 At Deloitte, which makes regular use of the technique, discussion is also the most important element. "The piece of paper is just a prompt," says Kate Sweeney, head of human capital consulting. "If you set it up right it gives a space for people to share."

14 Knight is fairly prescriptive about this. "A document is almost worse, in a way, because it's removing the humanity," he says. "It's about building stronger relationships."

15 This discussion and collaboration, however, does create a file of sorts, which can be sent around, shared with teams, and used for applications. Ultimately, Knight says, it might even replace the CV.

16 "When you're hiring, you're interested in what somebody adds and what they're like when they work," he says. "The CV is a list of dates and things that you've done. This is about how I do it."

FT Bethan Staton, 02 March, 2024.

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3 Understanding the article

a. **Answer the questions. Provide details where possible.**

1. What does the writer think might be useful to add to our CVs?

2. What situations are companies using personal user manuals for?

3. What examples are given of things people might share in a personal user manual?

4. What is the main reason for using personal user manuals at AMA?

5. What did Matt Knight initially use the templates for?

6. Does Knight take credit for the idea? Why (not)?

7. What does Ben Dattner say about the original guide?

8. What does David Burkus see as being their main function?

9. How is the manual used at Deloitte?

10. Does Knight think the manual will replace the CV? Why (not)?

4 Business language – phrases

a. **Find phrases with the following meanings in the article. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.**

1. speak with enthusiasm about something ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 1)

2. experience difficulty and make a great effort to do something ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 1)

3. be provided with equipment or knowledge to complete a specific task ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 2)

4. contain a lot of something ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 3)

5. become popular or fashionable ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 6)

6. behave towards someone in a certain way ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 9)

7. provide; satisfy a need of a particular group or person ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 10)

8. show something is very important or worth giving attention to ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯ (paragraph 10)

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9. the most important facts or ideas from which something is developed _____ (paragraph 11)

10. arrange for an activity or event to happen or prepare something for use _____ (paragraph 13)

b. **Decide which phrases collocate best with the sets of nouns below. Sometimes, more than one answer is possible.**

1. _____ interest / (dis)respect / (dis)honesty

2. _____ arguments / details / facts / information

3. _____ balance / formatting / networking

4. an idea / new trend _____

5. _____ individual demands / differences / preferences

6. _____ your accomplishments / achievements / merits

7. _____ desires / needs / whims

8. be _____ a discussion

9. _____ a teambuilding activity / a group challenge

c. **Choose five collocations and use them in sentences of your own. Try to make your sentences relevant to your professional or personal context.**

5 Discussion

a. **Discuss these questions.**

1. Who in your professional or personal life do you most need a manual for?

2. In what professional settings do you think a personal manual could be most useful? For example, team building, newcomers, project initiation, etc.

3. What kind of questions do you expect to be answered in a Manual of Me?

4. What is best practice for sharing personal manuals?

5. Do you think personal manuals will eventually replace CVs? Why (not)?

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6 **Wider business theme – writing a Manual of Me**

a. **First, read the questions below. Decide which ones you find the most relevant for a Manual of Me.**

1. What basics should people know about me?

2. What are my working hours/arrangements?

3. What are my communication preferences?

4. How would I describe my personality?

5. What do my best working habits look like?

6. What do I need to do great work?

7. How do I add value to teams?

8. In what environments do I thrive?

9. What do I struggle with?

10. What is the best way to give me feedback?

11. How do I deal with stress?

12. What other things do I care about?

b. **Now choose five to eight questions and answer them to write your Manual of Me. Here are some action verbs you might find useful.**

adapt	conduct	conceptualise	customise	detect	devise
direct	establish	generate	integrate	overhaul	revitalise
review	secure	simplify	stimulate	systematise	

c. **Share your manuals with the rest of the group. Rather than just presenting your answers, use them to ask each other questions and engage in further discussion.**

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