

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

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Do you think reading someone's CV is an effective way for someone to decide who to add to their team?
2. What personal information is important but usually not included on a CV?
3. Is it a good idea to share a personal user manual with your team? What kind of information could it include?

2 Key words

a. Write the correct word(s) from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Check your answers and your understanding of how the words are used by using them to complete the example sentences immediately after each definition.

adopt	advocate	barrier	cohesion	diminish	eliminate
facilitate	particularity	prescriptive	rank	tailor	trigger

1. be put on a position on a list that compares things in order of their importance, quality, etc.

Bad management _____ among the top reasons for leaving a job.

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

When someone dismisses my ideas at work, I usually feel very upset. I have come to understand that feeling ignored is a stress _____ for me.

3. accept or start to use something new _____

We decided to _____ new ways of working, and now many of our employees have more flexible working arrangements.

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

The trip to the conference was great for team _____. Spending time together outside the office helped us build trust.

5. remove or take away _____

Our business coach said that the idea is not to _____ conflict but to learn to handle it better.

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

Communication _____ are anything that prevents communicators from delivering and receiving the intended message.

7. reduce in size or importance _____

Over the past two years, the shares _____ in value and the company went bankrupt.

8. the quality of being very detailed or exact _____

They have shared a very general plan, but the _____ of the project haven't been revealed.

9. adjust something to suit a specific situation or need _____

It is a boutique firm that _____ to tech customers' marketing needs.

10. someone who publicly supports an idea _____

My boss is a strong _____ of the Pomodoro technique.

11. make something easier or possible; help people reach an agreement without getting involved in the discussion _____

They hired a consultant to _____ the discussion.

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

Their methods are very _____: they expect you to follow all steps exactly as instructed.

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."

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3 Understanding the article

a. Choose the right answers according to the information in the article.

1. What does the writer think might be useful to add to our CVs?
 - a. details about how people work, like stress triggers or communication styles
 - b. testimonials by colleagues of past working experiences
2. What situations are more and more companies using personal user manuals for?
 - a. to decide who to hire and who to fire
 - b. to introduce new team members and improve teamwork
3. What examples are given of things people might share in a personal user manual?
 - a. details about kids or pets; common interests
 - b. if you would like to get feedback before a deadline
4. What is the main reason for using personal user manuals at AMA?
 - a. faster, more effective communication
 - b. more time for people on new projects to get to know each other
5. Who first came up with the idea of a manual?
 - a. Matt Knight
 - b. Ben Dattner
6. What was the main selling point of the original guide?
 - a. avoiding being seen as a 'toxic' boss
 - b. quickly getting to know a new team
7. What does David Burkus see as the manual's main function?
 - a. to facilitate conversation and learn about each other
 - b. to help change people's behaviour to fit everyone's preferences
8. What phrase best describes the manual's use at Deloitte?
 - a. a discussion prompt
 - b. an official document
9. Which statement best reflects Knight's view?
 - a. Hiring is not about what someone's like when they work.
 - b. The manual could eventually replace the CV.

4 Business language – phrases

a. Complete the phrases from the article with the missing prepositions. The meanings and paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. talk _____ - speak with enthusiasm about something (paragraph 1)
2. struggle _____ - experience difficulty and make a great effort to do something (paragraph 1)
3. be armed _____ - be provided with equipment or knowledge to complete a specific task (paragraph 2)
4. be packed _____ - contain a lot of something (paragraph 3)
5. catch _____ - become popular or fashionable (paragraph 6)
6. treat _____ - behave towards someone in a certain way (paragraph 9)
7. cater _____ - provide; satisfy a need of a particular group or person (paragraph 10)
8. set (something) _____ - arrange for an activity or event to happen or prepare something for use (paragraph 13)

b. Complete the sentences with phrases from the previous activity.

1. One of our company values is to _____ everyone _____ respect and honesty.
2. We didn't expect our idea to _____ so quickly, but everyone is talking about it.
3. My boss has _____ a group fitness challenge at the office. We are all tracking our steps. The person who improves the most drastically gets a free gym membership.
4. As the conversation went on, I realised that she was _____ arguments and facts, and I was not going to change her mind.
5. I know you're shy, but in an interview, you should try to _____ your accomplishments.

6. We have over a thousand employees. I'm afraid we cannot _____ everyone's whims.
7. I think my area of opportunity is making new connections. I really _____ networking.
8. Wow, this article is _____ great tips to help you improve your teamwork.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

1. Think about the people you work, study or live with. Who do you need a manual for most?
2. What kind of questions should be included in a Manual of Me?
3. Do you think CVs will eventually evolve more into personal manuals? Why (not)?

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 four to six questions and answer them to write your Manual of Me. Here are some action verbs you might find useful.

adapt	compose	create	administer	analyse
assess	decrease	develop	establish	execute
fortify	interpret	investigate	introduce	organise
revise	shape	solve	streamline	support
research				

- 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.