What makes a resilient e-worker? A competency approach supporting well-being

Dr Christine Grant
Occupational Psychologist & Principal Lecturer, Coventry University

Professor Gail Kinman
University of Bedfordshire
Employees technology usage increasing – fast (Golden & Geisler, 2007)

Created a culture of “Workplace connectivity” (Schlosser, 2002)

Employees adapting to “all the time, everywhere” (Tarafdar et al, 2007)

‘Switched on’ culture (Goodchild & Hodgson, 2006)

Little respite from being switched on, domain boundaries merging (Kossek & Lautsch, 2012)
Significance & Risk factors

- Frequent ICT usage has both positive and negative affects (Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013)
- E-working is growing but little evidence of organisations providing guidance on using ICTs in a healthy and sustainable way (Grant & Kinman, 2016)
- Extended working can lead to work intensity, lack of recuperation and health related problems (Grant et al., 2013)
- Technology by itself cannot increase job performance (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005 and Baruch, 2000)
- Overuse of technology can reduce performance quality (Kinman, )
E-resilience: an evolving concept

- Assumption that e-workers have an integrated and satisfying work and personal lives
- A number of risks from e-working remotely, blurred boundaries, over-working, poor relationships
- E-workers need to develop skills and competencies and to develop resilience

Working definition of e-resilience:

“The characteristics of individuals and organisations that help them engage with technology in a healthy, efficient and sustainable way”

Switched On Culture Group, 2016
Study aim: *to develop an e-worker competency framework enabling e-workers to manage their e-work-life integration*

**Research Objectives:**

- To identify key skills, attributes, knowledge and experience that contribute to the *resilient e-worker*.
- To develop a preliminary competency framework of the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the developed and undeveloped *e-worker*.

**Design & Method:**

- 34 semi-structured interviews mean age 45.7, 16 female, Majority working full-time from a range of job roles, within a UK software organisation
  - Criteria for inclusion – experience in e-working
  - Analysed using thematic analysis
- Thematic analysis
Competencies*

- Self management & Discipline
- Time Management Skills
- Self Motivation
- Prioritising
- Integrity
- Organisational Skills
- Developing Trust
- Managing social skills using technology
- Adaptability

- Self-care of health/Health Awareness
- Emotional self-efficacy
- Communication skills
- Tenacity
- Self-confidence
- Coping styles
- Self awareness
- Social support
- Cognitive flexibility
- Networking

*Sources: Grant PhD research on remote working, GK research on well-being & resilience
### Results & Findings

#### Quantitative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KSA</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Management &amp; Discipline</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management skills</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self motivation</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritising</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Highest priority**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KSA</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Flexibility</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lowest priority**
Five Key Themes

- Knowledge, Skills, Abilities & Behaviours
- Agile working
- Organisational Actions
- Management Styles
- Lifestyle & Personal Qualities

Results & Findings: Qualitative
Theme 1
KSAs & Behaviours

• Familiarity with tools e.g., Skype, Microsoft Lync, and the capabilities of email and Microsoft Office, as this can save time
• Wireless internet and accessing the company network
• Basic understanding of IT re problems

“So that side of it but I think also you need to be particularly confident, competent with IT, not as in any kind of professional qualification, there’s quite a lot of issues with connections and things so if you’ve got a little bit of the base knowledge of other than writing a Word letter, you know, a little bit I think it helps…”
Being self-disciplined (i.e., rated as the most important ability/skill) was suggested to be crucial since employees are missing office clues which help them to be in a work mind-set:

“Some people really do need that discipline of an office environment... I am very experienced so actually I know how to use technology to help me do my job well and quickly. But part of it is because I've built up those skills of a number of years...”

“I'm quite comfortable with not having face to face interactions every day? For some people this social side of it is really important but for me, I'm quite comfortable to communicate using technology”
• Large number of participants reported they work longer hours when working remotely.
• Reasons for doing so included checking emails more frequently due to smart phones [p2],
• the equipment is set up and ready at home and more hours are gained by not commuting and travelling to and from customer sites:[p7],

“Time comes into that, so I do, I do tend to work more hours....I think when I'm remotely working, throughout the day I'm at my computer and all of the relevant systems are often running. At the end of my working day whenever that is I can just walk away from my desk and you know, maybe go and pick the baby up or start cooking some food or something and then later on in the evening if I decide to come back and do some work, I just have to walk through my desk and everything is still there, all of the documents that I'm working on now are still open.” [p7]
• The majority of participants stated that managers must be approachable and ensure they have regular face-to-face contact with their team to avoid feeling withdrawn from the company and the team.

• Respect was also identified as an important capability, by being an active listener, keeping employees up-to-date on any changes, and ensuring that every member of the team feels like they are on the same level [p1].

“…building relationships within our remote team is more important even that in an office because you need to be able to understand what’s going on in people’s lives and what’s impacting their work and it’s hard to do that if you don’t have a good relationship.”[p14]
Theme 5
Organisation
Actions

• Majority of participants stated they are well supported by the company and they have all the resources needed to be able to effectively do their job.
• One participant argued that the company was not providing the resources that were essential for their job role and as such, the participant had to buy their own resources. This was also unavoidable due to changes in legislation and guidance that impact on their job role:

“I don't think it's acceptable for a company like ours, to leave it to the staff to keep themselves up to date without any guidance from the company at all....I don't think it's really right for any employer to leave it to us to buy our own things and to pay for own guidance and stuff like that. I think it's down to them if they want us to do a job properly.” [p36]
• KSAs (Boyatzis, 1982) = Knowledge, Skills, Abilities ➔ for excellent role performance

• Robust research on line manager competencies to prevent employee stress (Donaldson-Feilder et al 2011)

• New research on specific WLB competencies for managers and employees (Grant, 2013; Kinman, 2014; McDowall & Lindsay, 2014)
NEW!! E-Resilience Competency Framework

**E-Resilience**

**Personal Attributes**
- Self-Motivation
- Self Discipline
- Tenacity/Integrity
- Adaptability
- Self awareness/preferences

**Knowledge & Skills**
- Communication skills
- Time/self management
- Prioritising
- Developing trust
- IT skills

**Behaviours**

**Healthy**
- Self-care health awareness
- Emotional self efficacy
- Coping styles

**Unhealthy**
- Socially isolated
- Poor networking
- Lack of support

Source: Grant & Kinman, 2016
Conclusions

- Specific knowledge, skills and abilities are required
- Personal attributes are important when staying resilient.
- Differences across colleagues:
  - Age groups since young people are sometimes more confident with technology use
  - Personality, some people are more adaptable to change than others
- No single solution can help all types of user
- Wellbeing = the “fit” between our preferences and behaviours and those expected by others
- Organisational culture, behavioural and mindset changes are required
Dr Christine Grant:
Twitter: @grantmsc
Email: Christine.grant@coventry.ac.uk

E-Work life web site:
https://ework.coventry.ac.uk/

Prof. Gail Kinman:
Twitter: @Profgailk
Email: gail.kinman@beds.ac.uk

Switched on Culture Research Group Blog:
https://alwaysonculture.wordpress.com/