Emotional

BY LOUIS CARTER

Emerging and newly established digital technologies are radically changing the way employees and managers interact and communicate within organizations. It's become tempting for leaders to succumb to the "digital distance" that electronic communications encourage, as CEOs and top managers can choose to see their employees not as human beings but as email addresses accompanied by thumbnail photos on a desktop computer. Office email fosters impulsiveness and reliance on the cheap shot, and wipes out the emotional nuances of a phone call, not to mention the interactions in a face-to-face meeting.

Digitization is causing employees to feel less connected to the people they work with and the work they do.

Disconnect

This digital distance has had a negative impact. In recent studies, there's a clear correlation between emotional disconnection due to digitization and employees' willingness to perform more and stay longer at their organizations. Disconnected employees are finding more and more excuses to not do their work.

In "The Impacts of Information Technology on Public Administration," James Danziger and Kim Virborg Andersen write, "The higher incidences of negative impacts tend to involve the more subjective effects of IT on people, in their roles as private citizens (e.g., privacy) or as public employees (e.g., job satisfaction, discretion)." These subjective effects can be corrosive and lead to lower productivity because employees feel a greater distance from CEOs and managers who may be tempted to use digital communications—emails, texts, even tweets—as a substitute for meaningful person-to-person interaction.

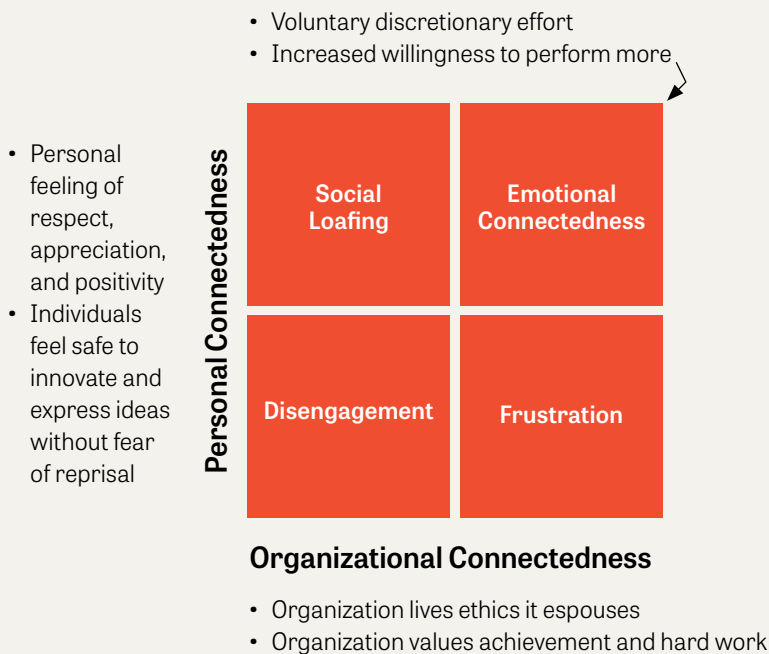## Use emotional connectedness to boost productivity

Studies show that CEOs can create an emotionally connected culture regardless of the technology used to communicate and manage information. There are many effective ways to bridge the digital distance, encourage emotional connectivity, and reap the benefits—in particular, increased employee productivity.

The Emotional Connectedness Grid (below) is comprised of personal connectedness and organizational connectedness as the measurement criteria to achieve employee and employer outcomes such as voluntary discretionary effort, retention, and engagement. The vertical scale represents personal connectedness (the dimensions are respect, appreciation, and positivity), while the horizontal scale represents organizational connectedness (the dimensions are ethical alignment and achievement).

"Social loafing," which is the phenomenon of employees exerting less effort to achieve a goal when they work in a group than when they work alone, increases when individuals believe their work is not valued or noticed by the organization (which is part of the achievement portion) and that the company is not living the values and ethics it espouses (ethical alignment). For personal connectedness (a feeling of respect from others), positivity and having opportunities to collaborate in a positive manner will enhance productivity.

One way to bridge the digital distance is to build great meetings designed by employees based on an open agenda and co-creation of what needs to be done. That builds a sense of ownership of outcomes and agreement on the shared definition of achievement. By bringing all the elements of the Emotional Connectedness Grid into daily interactions—personal, group, and organizational—dialogue and relationships begin to transform into opportunities

The Emotional Connectedness Grid

- Voluntary discretionary effort
- Increased willingness to perform more

- Personal feeling of respect, appreciation, and positivity
- Individuals feel safe to innovate and express ideas without fear of reprisal

Personal Connectedness

Social Loafing	Emotional Connectedness
Disengagement	Frustration

Organizational Connectedness

- Organization lives ethics it espouses
- Organization values achievement and hard work

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for growth and increased productivity.

Once employees feel more emotionally connected to the workplace, the chances that they'll move on to another job will decrease while their willingness to produce more will increase. They will become brand champions for your company and think in terms of what they can give to your company, rather than just what it can give them financially. That increases job longevity and voluntary discretionary effort (the willingness to do more voluntarily), and also could improve their careers.

Digitization makes many employees insecure about their jobs

Studies confirm that many dimensions of emotional connectedness are related to the benefits of digitization, to the detriment of the company's human capital strategy. The economic savings that follow digitization are needed, but the consequent loss of manual labor isn't often considered in the situation.

Digitization and technological innovation enables us to get to the next level of work where we can begin to feel more connected, innovative, expressive, and human because most of the grunt work is done for us but heightens awareness of our longevity. Devon Johnson and Sundar Bharadwaj, in their article, "Digitization of Selling Activity and Sales Force Performance: An Empirical Investigation," found that digitization has a positive effect on sales performance, but not surprisingly it harms employees' perception of job security.

Modern employees want emotional connectedness. And if they don't have it, another company will become quite attractive to them, and they will leave. And, perhaps worse, those who stay will produce far less and will not make any voluntary discretionary effort.

Real-world examples of success

The Best Practice Institute has discovered many ways that companies could help their employees reconnect while they continue to digitize their businesses. When companies use these strategies, employees feel greater satisfaction at work and offer fewer excuses about not completing work. In fact, they feel a bit pumped up to do more.

We surveyed 121 Fortune 500 companies and asked employees what makes them love and feel emotionally connected to their company. Some standout findings were revealed:

- Ninety-four percent of respondents reported they were between two and four times more likely to produce more for their organization if they loved their workplace.
- There are two types of emotional connectedness employees feel: personal and organizational.
- In emotionally connected organizations, the old, defeatist model of looking at the workplace, which blamed senior management for everything and centered on the idea of "it's me against the organization," was replaced by a new model. The new model was based on what employees could do for themselves. For example, they could be responsible for their behaviors and actions,

they could treat themselves and others with respect, or they could get better at having conversations with others at the company. Gone were ideas such as "People are so toxic here" and "My people are emotionless."

- Employees are rarely motivated by compensation or perks. They don't want to have friends at work either. They crave the feeling that they are valuable and respected.

In our surveys of top companies, we found that companies with robust and emotionally connected cultures found ways to bring their people together in real life, away from screens. In addition, our research has found repeatedly that a durable and productive emotional connection is made not just by offering casual Fridays, bagels in the break room, or even generous benefit plans. While such perks are initially attractive, the positive feeling quickly wears off and employees return their focus to what really matters: how they're treated by their colleagues and superiors.

A CEO who fails to bring her people together in a meaningful way day-to-day is not going to get the most from them. A robust emotional connection is forged one link at a time, over and over again, every day of every week. It does not get made when the boss signs a memo establishing a new employee perk program, sends out the news via an email blast, signs off on the corporate retreat, and then sits back in her office expecting to feel the love flowing toward her and the company like a river. That's not how it works. Our research shows that there's no substitute for hands-on, face-to-face contact with stakeholders at all levels.

If you want commitment from your employees, you have to ask for it and then say "thank you" when you get it.

Employees who avoid commitment are missing an emotional connectedness to the organization. It's easy to blame work problems on bad managers, not enough money or time allowed, not enough manager buy-in, and so on. The truth is that it has nothing to do with all these perceived obstacles and everything to do with how the company creates a culture of trust, respect, psychological safety, and appreciation. Leaders have to accomplish that by living the change and transformation without waiting for it to happen to them.

Five ways to make employees go above and beyond

The Best Practice Institute offers five factors to bridge the digital distance and make employees want to give 110 percent to their employers.

Collaboration and teamwork potential. How to use it in business: Co-create, agree, and follow through on the ground rules.

Respect and appreciation. How to use it in business:

- Craft a handwritten letter instead of an email.
- Have open dialogues with employees focused on their agenda items specific to your company strategy.
- Allow for equal airtime for employees.

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If you still want to use digital technology, there are ways to make it more human with respect and appreciation:

- Send a video e-mail to show your face, sincerity, and care for your conversations.
- Write a quick text from your last meeting to show your thanks for meeting (personalized).

Positive future. How to use it in business: Coaching with direct advice. Marshall Goldsmith describes "feed-forward" as advice for what can be done better in the future or present; it is far more valued than feedback that rehashes mistakes of the past.

Company achievement where all put forth effort for the common good of the company. How to use it in business: Have appreciative inquiry conversations, during which groups, coaches, and employees speak about what they do well and what can be done better rather than saying what is wrong, which reduces our cognitive functioning.

The emotionally connected work environment

The best way to explain the ideal type of environment is to paint a picture of what can happen at work when a problem arises and emotional connectivity exists in the workplace. Below is an example from our many case studies.

Mary has been assigned Project A, with a deadline of next Friday. She realizes that the project is dependent on the honest input of other people at the company. Thus, Mary goes to the heads of departments A, B, and C, each of whom willingly gives her the time and data she needs to complete the project. In fact, they even suggest a brainstorming meeting to help her finish before her deadline. Everyone involved attends and Mary is astounded at the sincerity she sees expressed in the meetings. Everyone works together to identify the problems so an answer can be found. She thanks each one graciously.

The team expresses its desire for Mary to find these solutions. They also express appreciation to her for tackling the problem.

Mary feels a sense of collaboration and peace when she leaves to go home. Now her brain is able to subconsciously process the data without any hindrances, opening the door to innovation.

As Mary finishes writing her report on the project, she realizes that the solution is not one that she could have ever come up with on her own. Therefore, she lists the other employees' names on the project as co-authors.

But there's something else that occurred: Mary has developed an innovative way to solve the problem at hand. Ever since Mary began her career at the company, she has seen innovation being rewarded and implemented. Her work will give her the satisfaction she needs to want to continue working at the company.

Mary loves the workplace because she feels secure psychologically. She wants to contribute and her efforts are applauded.

Foster a new workplace culture

Creating an ideal workplace environment starts with a facilitated and co-created culture. It's an easily learned, step-by-step process that involves small daily reminders to employees and group experiences that remind them that they are in a safe, secure environment. Results can be expected in a few short months. There are many benefits: increased employee longevity and willingness to produce more (lower costs in training), greater cohesiveness and emotional connectedness among employees, a strong sense of peace and contentment at work, and the satisfaction that you are making a difference in the lives of all those you work with every day. Change the workplace environment and you change lives.

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