

Key takeaways

Productivity and skills

The small stuff matters: solving the productivity puzzle is about trying to “better understand how people interact at work, the policies they use and how their jobs are designed.”

Lack of trust is a drag on productivity: “management and employees can waste time second-guessing each other and employees will be wary of change.”

Employment relations can be a good teacher: “three beacons can light the way towards a much better use of skills and increased productivity: the effective management of ability, motivation and opportunity.”

Atypical contracts

Zero-hours contracts can offer flexibility but there are also deep-rooted problems: “there may be a significant loss of trust in the employment relationship, characterised by a sense of power imbalance.”

Quality of work is an issue: this often comes down to “how atypical employees are managed in the workplace in practice and how concerns are addressed.”

The impact on society and the economy are likely to be profound: “atypical workers will mostly be earning low wages, not paying very much tax or national insurance and not spending very much.”

Managing conflict

Conflict management needs to be seen as a high value activity: it can be “a powerful tool for building trust, opening up channels of communication and helping create more harmonious and productive workplaces.”

Line managers lack confidence and HR are risk averse: “many HR managers see their bottom-line role as protecting the organisation’s reputation.”

Mediation can be a powerful tool: it can help “to create an environment which is conducive to early resolution through discussion as opposed to the rigid implementation of procedure.”

Social media and employee voice

The potential use of social media at work remains largely untapped: “many employers are attempting to use social media platforms as just another communication channel: with information delivered to employees in a controlled environment.”

Social media can help improve our listening skills: “to get the most out of enterprise social networks (ESNs), the culture of the organisation needs to be such that listening to employees is taken seriously.”

Social media is often a reflection of organisational culture: “senior management may be unlikely to agree to relinquishing their control through the use of social media.”

Flexible working and work-life balance

Managers don’t always like saying ‘no’: “Acas experience tells us that managers can find it very uncomfortable saying “no” to requests.”

Why not focus on output rather than ‘when’ and ‘where’: “an output-based approach to flexible working based on mutual trust between the employer and the employee could change perceptions around workforce flexibility.”

Flexibility is about being vocal: “for flexible working to succeed in the manufacturing workplace it needs to facilitate discussions between employers and employees.”