

World Cup Fever in the Workplace: Leveraging the Event to Boost Employee Morale

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The 2018 World Cup is now in full swing, and the frenzy that surrounds this event can create low productivity for businesses, with staff focused on watching games—or perhaps debating the pros and cons of the recently-introduced video assistant referee (VAR)—instead of working. During the 2010 World Cup, a study found that the United States lost \$121 million in economic output; however, this is minimal in comparison to the United Kingdom's (UK) estimated loss of £5.5 billion.

Regardless of the accuracy of these estimates, the World Cup need not spell the end of productivity in the workplace and presents an opportunity for employers to take advantage of the positive impact the event can have on staff morale. This sporting event can be used as an opportunity to not only help bond immediate departments but also an entire organization.

There is, of course, no single prescribed way to manage potential productivity issues, as much depends on the type of organization, the number of employees, and the makeup of the workforce. The best method for employers may be to take an informal approach, allowing decisions to be made depending on the employee's workload or the company's needs at a particular time, as opposed to implementing a formal policy.

In the UK, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has suggested a number of ways for employers to manage productivity and create a positive impact. The TUC suggests:

- talking to staff in advance about arrangements for key matches;
- arranging for matches to be shown on company premises, if appropriate;
- allowing staff to work from home;
- allowing flexible working hours so staff can either come in late or leave early with the intention of making up the time; and/or
- being as flexible as possible with annual leave requests.

Employers that are more willing to fully embrace World Cup fever could also decorate offices with flags, relax dress codes, allow football shirts to be worn, or as is quite common, arrange an office sweepstake if legally permitted in the relevant location. (I'm participating in the latter and have promised to use part of any winnings to buy my colleagues one packet of biscuits to share.)

Ultimately, some of the suggestions above may not be practical for all employers, and it will be important that employers strike the right balance between celebrating the World Cup and ensuring staff are still productive. Whichever option is chosen, many employers find that allowing some level of flexibility during the relatively short duration of major sporting events helps to ensure minimal disruption in the workplace. Taking positive steps to manage the work environment whilst the World Cup is on could also have a valuable effect on employee relations.

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