



**“Technology should free
us up to enjoy more
human experiences”**

Dave Coplin



Dave Coplin, author of 'Rise of the Humans' and CEO and founder of business consultancy, the Envisioners. For more than 25 years, he's been helping organisations and individuals realise the potential of technology. He's worked with tech giants Google, Microsoft and Facebook and large businesses such as Barclays and Ernst & Young, as well as public bodies including the Crown Prosecution Service, UK Parliament, Cambridge and Oxford Universities.

In this article for The Access Group as part of the "Emotionally Charged" report series, he makes the case for a 'people-first' approach to tech adoption at work.

Our relationship with technology has probably changed more in the last 18 months than it has in the last 10 years. Despite the terrible circumstances, the pandemic has given us the push we needed to reframe our relationship with technology, allowing us to fundamentally change the way we live, work and play.

Millions of workers have finally discovered the opportunities (and some challenges) provided by flexible working, which for the most part gives people more control over both their work and personal lives. The irony for me is that the technology that makes this possible has been with us for almost a decade, we just lacked the ability to understand fully what it could do for us.

As we emerge from the devastation of the pandemic, we do so with renewed expectations for the potential that technology can deliver for the world of work. **Through adversity we have discovered how a richer relationship with technology can empower us to have better experiences across all aspects of our lives, and this will continue to shape our expectations and ambitions for the foreseeable future.** Employers and brands need to understand this and build this heightened ambition into the plans they have to empower employees and customers.



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Powerful Feelings

Technology is increasingly personal, and increasingly powerful because it allows individuals to achieve more across all aspects of our lives.

However, just like all powerful technologies, such power can be misused (either unintentionally or deliberately). It's the disparities in how technology is used that fuels such strong emotions in people. This is why, if you really want to get great results from your use of technology at work, you need to focus not just on the technology itself but also on the people that use it.

Flexible working provides a great example of this. Business software provides a consistent opportunity for all employees to work flexibly, but different teams will often have differing views on what flexible working means for them. A policy for one team may be implemented differently to another and it's often these inconsistencies that fuel a lot of the debate, or cause resentment among employees.

Emotions are inherently subjective but that doesn't mean they can't be measured. As we have seen, **understanding how people feel is the first step in building a productive and successful team.**



A force for good

For me, the point of technology is to help us humans achieve more than we could on our own. Technology should not be used to replace us, but instead to enhance us, enabling us to achieve greater outcomes faster.

That's the guiding principle we should all be looking for as we seek to adopt technology into our business (and our lives). How can this help us grow? How does it enable humans to offer more value to the people we care about most (i.e. customers and employees)?

It's this 'human first' approach that helps to ensure that we can maximise the potential that technology can bring us while minimising the risks. It allows people to spend more time on the things we're inherently good at, rather than on admin. For example, care workers can focus on delivering the best care to their patients, while hospitality staff are able to create memorable experiences for guests.



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A changing landscape

The level of automation being offered by technologies like AI is a really important debate right now. Thanks to such technologies, we now have the ability to automate the laborious, repetitive aspects of work. If we can free the humans from tasks that can be better done by the machines, we open them up to be able to offer more value to themselves and their employers by focusing on the tasks that cannot be automated. When done well, this results in happy customers, more engaged employees and better results.

However, some organisations see such automation as an opportunity to cut costs and increase output. Whilst this might deliver short term results, what you sacrifice is the ability to continue to grow the value you offer your customers.

We are better together and organisations really need to understand that the best approach is finding the right balance between the cold predictable logic of the algorithm, with the warm (sometimes chaotic) intuition of the humans.



Taking frustration out of work

Instead of envisioning robots taking over from humans, we should look at automation as a way of 'taking the robot out of the human'. If I can free you from doing the boring, repetitive stuff, I free you up to be able to focus on the things that offer more value and are, quite frankly, always more enjoyable. Automation should be all about empowerment rather than enslavement and I think organisations that realise this are setting themselves up for long term sustainable success.

Over time, the automation algorithms will get better and better which will enable them to automate more and more of what the humans can do. Unlike some others, I don't see a dystopian ending to this, where the robots take over our jobs and we sit around doing nothing. I see a much more utopian future where technology frees us to be able to focus on the fundamentally human aspects of our roles and our businesses. As a result, we can offer better experiences, products and services that take us continually further forward.



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Employee wellbeing

Wellbeing is such an important topic, especially given the increasing importance our relationship with technology plays in the way we work.

It's worse now, given the challenges of the pandemic, but in reality we have always struggled to find the right balance in our use of technology.

Some of you may remember the Blackberry 'epidemic' from the turn of the millennium (and at least a decade before the smartphone revolution started with Apple's first iPhone). A portable device that provided easy access to our work email regardless of time and location drove a lot of people to over-work and burnout. It wasn't the technology's fault, we just lacked the established etiquette to understand how to use it in a way that provided a balance between workplace productivity and personal well-being.

It's the same issue today only on a much bigger scale. Back at the turn of the millennium all you had access to was email, now we spend our waking hours with email, video conferences, workplace collaboration platforms not to mention an even longer list of even more compelling experiences across our personal life.



“If we want to help strike the right balance, we all need to work together to make proactive choices about what we do and how we use the technology.”

Of course, technology can help us find a balance, but in itself, that's not really the answer. If we want to help strike the right balance, we all need to work together to make proactive choices about what we do and how we use the technology.

As employers, we need to be mindful of the culture we create, and how we place expectations on our teams and employees to use the technology. We have to find their perfect balance so they can provide their best value to both the organisation and themselves.

Equally, as individuals, we need to be accountable to ourselves about how we use technology to empower us to do better at work, and ultimately better at home.

When used well, technology should free us up to enjoy more human experiences - but it can't do it alone, it requires us to do the right thing in order to make it possible. It's about how we can harness the potential of technology to deliver better, more human results for all of us.

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About The Access Group

The Access Group is one of the largest UK-headquartered providers of business management software to small and mid-sized organisations in the UK, Ireland, and Asia Pacific. It helps more than 60,000 customers across commercial and non-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud solutions transform the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more of what's important to them. Founded in 1991, The Access Group employs approximately 5,500 people.

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