Activity 2: Company culture study question
Answer notes and model answer

## Question

Alex has worked at a publishing company called ‘Quills’ for over 30 years, since it started. They started as a traditional printer that published books in the UK.

Now a manager, Alex has been involved in the company embracing modern digital technology and ensuring all employees are on board with recent changes.

Evaluate how Alex will need to manage the impact of digital working to create a positive workplace culture.

 [12 marks]

# Answer notes

## Command verb

* Evaluate. Consider various aspects of a subject’s qualities in relation to its context such as: strengths or weaknesses, advantages or disadvantages, pros and cons. Come to a judgement supported by evidence which will often be in the form of a conclusion.

## Evaluative impact of digital working on workplace culture

**Flexibility**

* Digital working can increase flexibility:
	+ potential for remote working and online meetings;
	+ where possible, it can allow flexible schedules and flexible locations.
* However, increased flexibility can blur the boundary between work and home life, and there can be a potential for isolation.

**Communication and collaboration**

* Digital working can reduce location-based barriers:
	+ making collaboration easier
	+ supports quick communication
	+ increases engagement
	+ provides instant access to workplace guidelines and policies.
* However, there are downsides, such as:
	+ danger of information overload;
	+ messages can be easy to miscommunicate or misinterpret (emotion in emails, for example);
	+ reduced face-to-face communication and socialising, e.g. ‘watercooler chat’;
	+ people expect instant message responses – impacting work/life balance;
	+ concerns about monitoring of work and communications.

**Inclusivity**

* Digital working can help accommodate a range of individual support needs through the use of digital technologies.
* However, there can also be increased support needs generated by requirements for using technology at home.
* Make sure any digital tools are accessible to everyone.
* Provide training and support for using the technology.

**Learning**

* Digital working encourages growth and development of skills through workplace training using online providers around the world.
* However, it can be isolating and stressful for those lacking technical skills.

## How Alex could manage the impact

**Balancing flexibility**

* Ensure that expectations around work hours and response times are well-defined.
* Encourage employees to disconnect after work hours to prevent burnout.
* Set expectations for out-of-hours communication.
* Define flexible working hours.

**Communication**

* Focus on staff awareness.
* Emphasise transparent and effective communication.
* Encourage both digital and in-person interactions and connections through regular team meetings, one-on-one check-ins, and open forums.
* Encourage social engagement.

**Encouraging collaboration**

* Blend virtual and in-person collaboration to maintain a sense of social workplace belonging.
* Consider occasional team-building activities and workshop sessions that bring employees together, either physically or virtually.

**Support and training**

* Provide training opportunities to help employees adapt to using digital tools.
* Ensure employees are confident if remote working – including safety advice.
* Create an environment where learning is encouraged and mistakes are seen as opportunities for growth.
* Ensure DSE assessments are done for all employees.

**Recognition and wellbeing**

* Use digital platforms to recognise employees’ efforts and achievements.
* Support and prioritise employee wellbeing by promoting mental health awareness.
* Offer resources for managing stress.

**Feedback**

* Ensure there are methods to feedback on the impact of the changes.
* Ensure that employees feel listened to and sincerely take on any feedback.
* Ask for opinions and encourage people to take part in the decision-making process where possible.

# Model answer

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| --- | --- |
| **Descriptors** | **Model answer comparison** |
| Level 3, 9-12 marks:* Demonstrates a thorough analysis of the situation by comprehensively breaking down the different aspects into their component parts (AO3)
* Demonstrates comprehensive application of knowledge and understanding that is consistently relevant to the context of the question (AO2)
* Demonstrates a thorough evaluation which comprehensively considers different factors/events and their relative importance leading to a conclusion which is well supported (AO3)
 | * Comprehensively decomposes the question and answers in clear sections.
* Clear knowledge and understanding of the technical opportunities.
* Understands the key technical terms of digital working and workplace culture.
* Understands how digital can help support employees.
* Conclusion is well supported throughout.
* Clear, concise language; correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.
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Digital working has a large impact on the culture of the workplace. There are both positive and negative aspects to each impact and Alex also needs to make sure the workplace has a positive culture, especially with a large workforce that have worked with lots of traditional methods.

The company can be more flexible with how people work, remote working from home and being able to take part in online meetings with colleagues and customers around the world. Workers can also adapt their work schedule around the home life, especially those with caring responsibilities. However, there is the danger of not being able to ‘turn off’ when at home and people can become isolated and miss the ‘culture of the workplace’.

Digital working can also improve inclusivity for employees with additional support needs. These may be physical needs, which may be met with home working, or the flexibility of working hours to support the mental health of employees. However, the reliance on digital technology can create additional needs and employees may need additional training and support to use new systems and adapt new ways of working, especially at home.

Employees have a great opportunity for new learning with digital working, such as taking online courses and receiving help and support from experts anywhere in the world. It is important, though, not to expect employees to learn everything online as it can be stressful if they are not confident with the technology to start with.

To create a positive culture, it is essential that all employees are involved. Increased flexibility is good for employees, but it is important that Alex sets clear rules about hours worked and encourages employees to have a schedule, which means they can disconnect from work and focus on home life. This might also mean setting rules about when to reply to emails and messages from work.

To maintain social interaction with employees, Alex could arrange some meetings and events to be ‘in-person’ so that not everything is done online. This could also include workplace team-building activities, which allow colleagues to build relationships.

To prevent employee anxiety about remote working and new technology, Alex should ensure there is support and training. This should include software, hardware and safely working at home and in the office, e.g. the rules about appropriate physical posture and safety also apply to remote workers. Training and support will also help promote inclusivity, improve confidence, and inform people how to ask for additional help when required.

Alex can recognise the abilities and achievements of employees using digital platforms to log individual awards and promote these across the business. It is also essential to promote the availability of wellbeing and mental health support and offer resources and advice for managing stress. Much of this support can be provided digitally.

Alex should involve employees in important decisions and regularly collect and respond to feedback about work life balance, the company, and the use of technology. This feedback can be used to provide improvements, perhaps through customised training and support.

In conclusion, by being aware of all the positive and negative impacts of digital on the workplace, Alex can promote a positive workplace culture that takes advantage of all the opportunities that digital offers to modernise the company but also supports and ensures job satisfaction of people working at ‘Quills.’

# Mark scheme guidelines (generic)

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| **Level** | **Mark** | **Descriptor** |
|  | 0 | No rewardable material |
| Level 1 | 1–4 | * Demonstrates a basic analysis of the situation by superficially breaking down the different aspects into component parts (AO3)
* Demonstrates basic application of knowledge and understanding that is partially relevant to the context of the question (AO2)
* Demonstrates a basic evaluation which partially considers different factors/events and their relative importance, leading to a conclusion which is superficial or unsupported (AO3)
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| Level 2 | 5–8 | * Demonstrates a good analysis of the situation by breaking down the different aspects into component parts (AO3)
* Demonstrates good application of knowledge and understanding that is relevant to the context of the question (AO2)
* Demonstrates a good evaluation which considers different factors/events and their relevant importance, leading to a conclusion which is partially supported (AO3)
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| Level 3 | 9–12 | * Demonstrates a thorough analysis of the situation by comprehensively breaking down the different aspects into their component parts (AO3)
* Demonstrates comprehensive application of knowledge and understanding that is consistently relevant to the context of the question (AO2)
* Demonstrates a thorough evaluation which comprehensively considers different factors/events and their relative importance leading to a conclusion which is well supported (AO3)
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