

Intelligence at Work

How Successful Leaders Combine
Technology with Emotional Intelligence



We're Entering a New Era of Work

For the first time in human history, the global workforce now comprises five different generations. Workplace dynamics are shifting, and how we think about work and life is being redefined. New attitudes, new expectations – and new technology.

At Microsoft, we're passionate about creating technologies that empower people and organisations to achieve more and to meet the demands of the future workplace.

We know, for example, that work doesn't just take place in the office. By 2022, 43% of the global workforce will be mobile.

Our understanding of productivity is changing. Leaders are realising that 'just getting stuff done' isn't enough, and that work benefits when teams can embrace their creativity anywhere, and anytime, it strikes.

We know that success is dependent on keeping our work and our data secure.

But, while modern technology is at the core of a modern workplace – it's not the only piece of the puzzle. A successful organisation can't be built on technology alone. Leaders need to answer this question: what skills do my teams need to thrive in this new culture of work?

For instance, with an increasingly global and remote workforce, how do we keep our teams connected and feeling like they're part of something bigger than themselves?

With digital data mushrooming, how do we keep our employees from being overwhelmed? How do we help them manage their time and ensure productivity doesn't boil over into stress and burnout?

And, with advancements in technologies like AI happening at such rapid pace, how do we ensure people are equipped to use and interact with new tools in positive ways?

The successful workplace, then, is surely a mix of things. Technology, yes. But also people. Human dynamics. Getting the best out of our teams emotionally, ensuring they feel





connected and empowered. For deeper insight on this, we've turned to the experts.

The School of Life are one of the world's greatest exponents of emotional intelligence. Their unique blend of psychology, philosophy and culture have helped people the world over to live wiser, more fulfilling lives.

The School of Life feels like a perfect partnership for us. We create technologies to power the new culture of work, and The School of Life bring expertise to help us get the best out of people – nurturing a workforce that feels inspired, empowered and confident. Creating a culture that thrives.

The combination of both is the best possible way to set your workplace up for future success.

Nuno Alves Silva

Microsoft 365 Business Group Lead,
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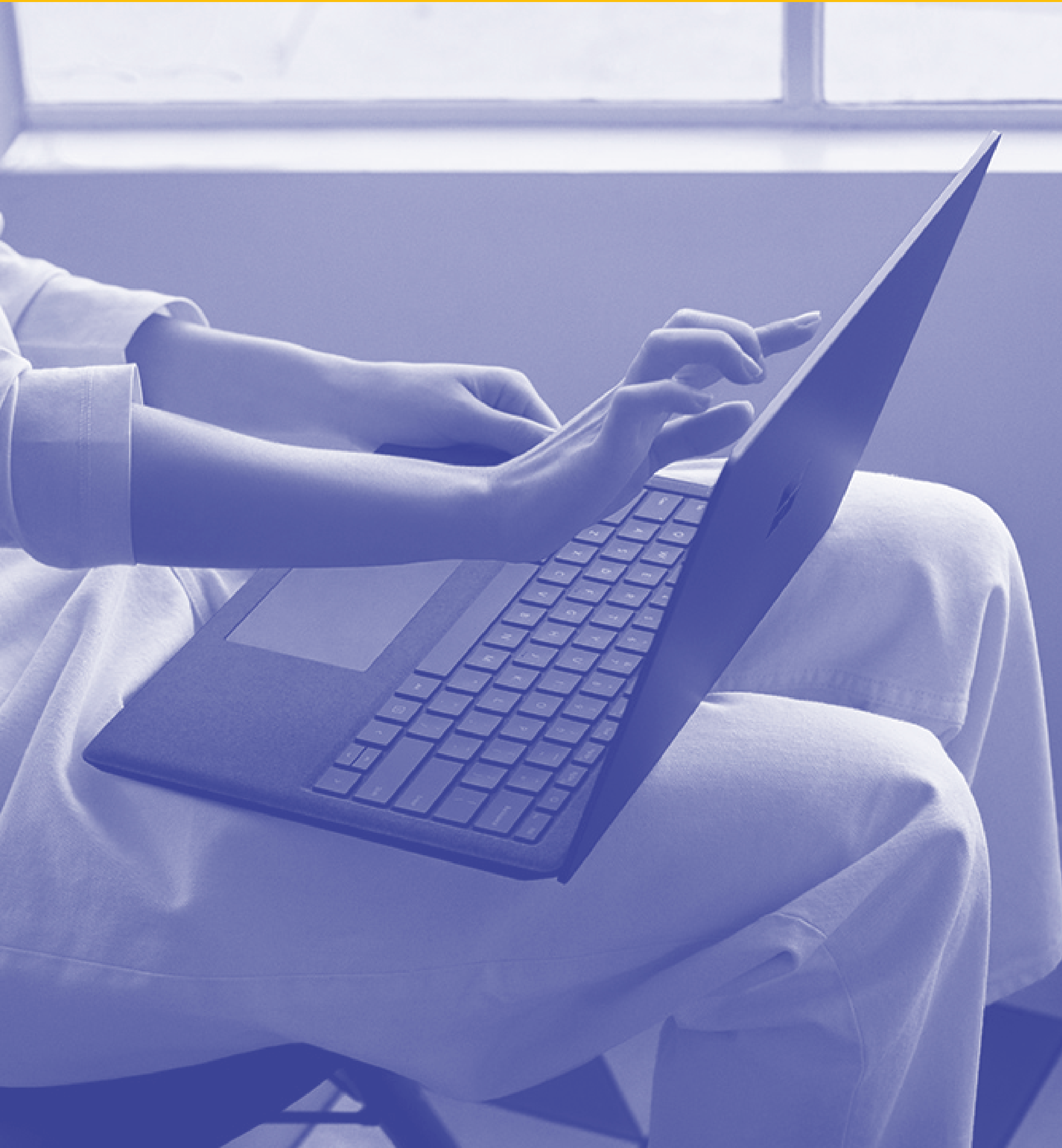
We are in the middle of an enormous, continuous technological revolution at work, one that has been happening for decades.

Offices have shifted from working with paper and faxes to computers to tablets, from file cabinets to hard drives to cloud storage. The next steps will be just as dynamic as we increasingly work with AI, facial recognition, and the internet of things.

While most of us are aware of these changes, we might be less familiar with the way working culture has also changed rapidly in the same period, often in tandem with these transformational technological changes. Today a relatively problem-free workplace is not enough for most people; we want to be creative, challenged, in a position for advancement, learning, and personal growth. More than this, many of us want our working lives and our personal lives not just to not interfere with one another but to actively support one another. A strict divide is no longer appealing; instead we want flexibility, so that we can bring the best of ourselves to all we do. This is especially true of millennials, who will soon make up half the workforce.

This can, of course, make things tricky for managers, leaders and organisations – because the higher expectations are, the easier it is to disappoint. It can be difficult to attract





and retain talent. The best and brightest minds now have very high expectations and if they find an organisation doesn't fit, they will be quick to move on.

The good news is that these challenges are not impossible to address. Companies and organisations can adapt to technologies but also to the new expectations we have around work. In fact, by recruiting for and helping to build the right skills, particularly emotional skills in the workforce, leaders can not only help employees find the growth and fulfilment they seek but also build more successful teams and organisations. To help their teams and organisations succeed in a technologically centred workplace, leaders should equip employees with the emotional skills that will allow them to use technology wisely, and thereby to flourish in work and life.



Why Technology Alone Isn't Enough: The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

The term 'emotional skills' might sound a bit bizarre: our wider culture still tends to treat these abilities like static traits; we often speak of a supportive person or a good communicator, as if they were simply born that way. Yet in over a decade of work at The School of Life, we have found that these skills are learnable. And today we need these skills more than ever because work increasingly isn't manual (as it was for most of human history) but emotional and psychological. We are working with our minds, and we won't work very well if we are upset, burnt out, unmotivated, or struggling to get along with co-workers. Even when work and life are problem-free, we will need emotional skills in order to come up with creative ideas, take feedback well, and keep growing and learning throughout our lifetimes.

To build these skills and thereby help employees not only do better at their work but also find greater fulfilment, leaders ought to be able to answer this question: *What new skills do the people in my team and my organisation need to thrive in this new culture of work?*

What Emotional Skills Do We Need in the New Culture of Work?

So many emotional skills matter at work that we might focus our thinking by considering a few broader areas, each involving a key set of supporting skills.

Collaboration

Many of the most important emotional skills have to do with **collaboration**. Our species has always relied on collaboration and it is part of the story of our evolutionary success: as Charles Darwin noted, “It is the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) that those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” But research shows that technology is making collaboration even more central to our lives than before: the time spent collaborating in organisations has grown by 50% or

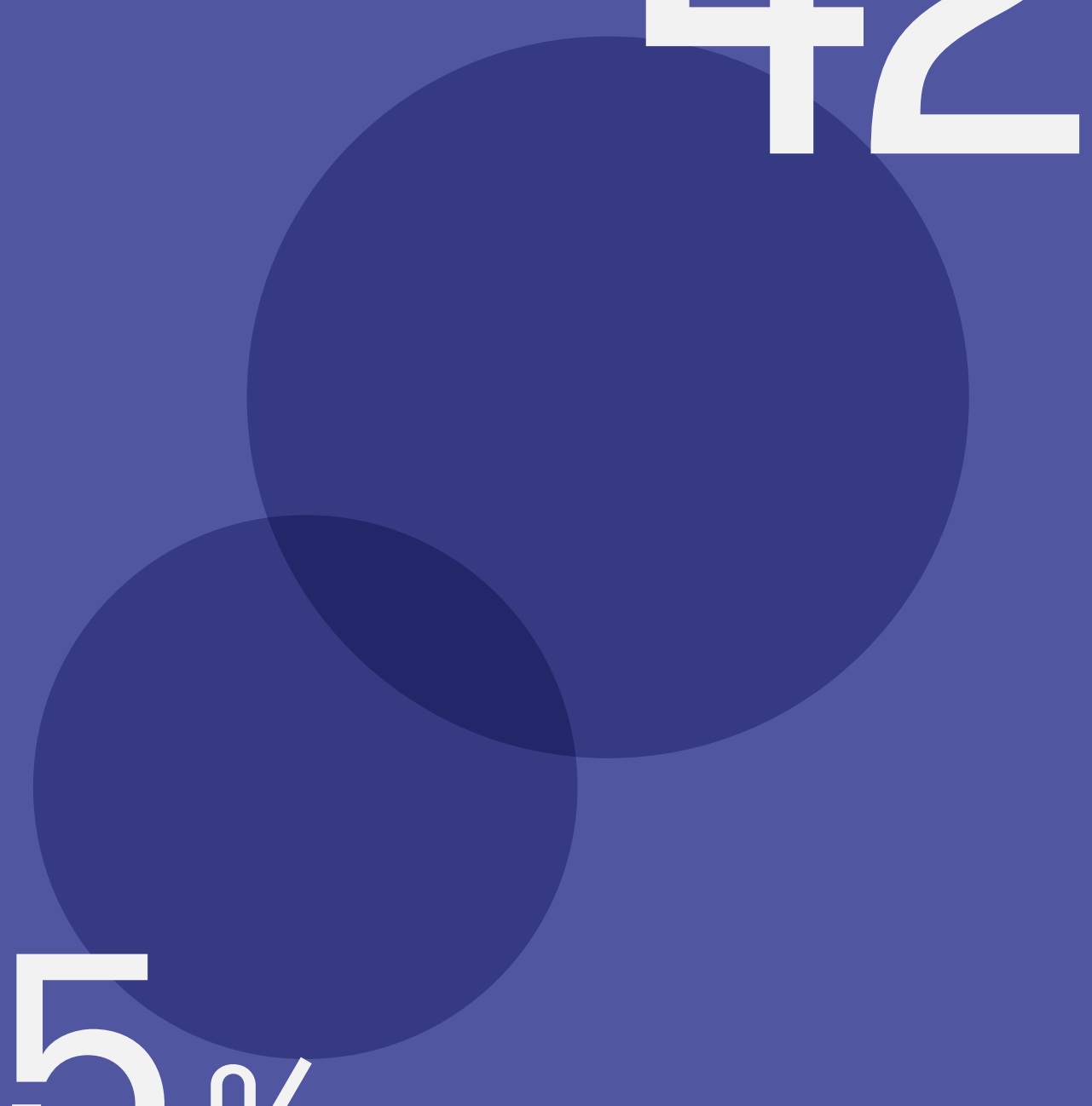
more in the last two decades. However, a few key collaborators in any organisation provide disproportional benefit. This suggests collaboration is not only increasingly important, but also important to get right. Due to technology we can now collaborate in real time, from anywhere, on pretty much anything: sharing our work in totally new ways, asking for advice with a quick text, interrupting one another’s attention at a moment’s notice and attempting to get across complicated information with little or no direct face-to-face communication. This is why we need the skills of collaboration, including communication, diplomacy, and empathy, to help us choose when to work with others and how to do so strategically. These skills help us to express ourselves clearly, listen better, align our assumptions within a team, build long-term trusting relationships with stakeholders, and manage conflicts when they arise. Good collaboration is especially important because increasing numbers of us are working remotely, in co-working spaces, on our mobiles, and while travelling.



42.5 %

42.5 % of the global workforce is expected to be working remotely by 2022, in just three years time!¹

¹ www.strategyanalytics.com



42%

35%

35 % of the US workforce freelanced in 2016, and this is expected to rise to 42 % by 2020.²

² www.tech.co

Influence

The ability to **influence** others involves yet another important set of skills, including eloquence, charm, innovation and supportiveness. New technologies allow us to share and present our work in amazing new ways – we can create beautiful presentations almost instantaneously and share them with colleagues on the other side of the world. But this won't do us much good if we don't have the skills to communicate and sell our ideas to stakeholders, to present a vision that is accessible, eloquent and inspiring. The skills of influence allow us to lead, whether in a formal or informal capacity. They are especially vital in a world where work is increasingly horizontal. We won't necessarily succeed in influencing people just by acquiring the right title anymore, especially when everyone's roles may change so quickly, even from project to project. Instead we will need to persuade people of the value of our ideas, sharing a powerful vision, motivating entire teams, and driving change at every level.

Flexibility

The emotional skills involved in **flexibility**, including adaptability, calm and resilience, help us cope with uncertainty and change. The need for this set of skills is great because many of us are, understandably, less agile than the technologies we use. After all, for most of human history, big changes were rare and often dangerous, involving war, famine, or death. We have accordingly, and unfortunately, evolved to pay more attention to the risks involved in change rather than the opportunities. Yet today work is defined by change for many of us, as we switch roles rapidly, undergo frequent organisational changes and put together portfolio careers: it's no longer usually possible (or even desirable) to do one job for our whole life. Seeking growth and ultimately **maturity** is therefore an especially urgent task in today's working world because we'll need to keep growing throughout our working lives in order to adapt to new technologies and the rapid rate of change.

Productivity

Other skills like creativity, decisiveness, effectiveness and entrepreneurship can help us all cultivate greater **productivity** of the most important kind. Getting things done has, of course, always been crucial, but now it involves more psychological agility than ever before. It won't be enough simply to put in extra hours; we need to think in new and better ways as well. Yet while leaders often recognise this and formally push for creativity and new technologies that will support it, there is rarely comparative support for the psychological skills that allow creativity to flourish.

Self Knowledge

Perhaps the trickiest yet most vital skills have to do with the way we relate to ourselves. At The School of Life we agree with the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (in many ways the founder of Western philosophy) who, when asked to sum up what all philosophical commandments could be reduced to, replied: 'Know yourself'. **Self Knowledge** is a crucial ability, for without knowing ourselves we're unlikely to be able to learn and grow, to make the most of our strengths or to recognise our weaknesses and blind spots. Abilities like self-awareness, confidence and a strong sense of purpose are in many ways a prerequisite for the development of all our other emotional skills, because only a self-aware person is able to recognise how they currently work and then adjust and improve where needed. This type of self-awareness is especially important as workplaces are increasingly horizontal and self-directed. Technology is designed to empower humans, but our very best technologies can only empower

87%

87% of leaders believe a culture that encourages creativity is a top 5 investment ³

3-6 www.steelcase.com

84%

84% of people believe new technology will help them be more creative ⁴



75%

Yet 75% of people think that they're not living up to their creative potential ⁵

3-6 www.steelcase.com

80%

80% of employees feel increasingly pressured to be more productive rather than more creative ⁶



us if we know ourselves: if we understand what we need to be effective and have a strong sense of what motivates us. Only then can we work wisely and make the most of the tools and opportunities available to us.

The skills mentioned can't be learned overnight, of course. Building these skills is more like going to the gym and building up muscle than learning a few new facts. We have to practise taking in feedback, communicating clearly, or thinking through what would motivate someone else, until these ways of thinking, feeling and behaving become quite literally our second nature. It might take years, and such progress would only ever be imperfect. But the benefits can be enormous – professionally, of course, and also in our personal lives.

How Leaders Can Help Build Emotional Skills

Because these emotional abilities will in many ways determine the success or failure of an organisation, a key task for any leader is to help others to develop these skills. Below are some ways that leaders can help build emotional skills in their organisations and in the work they do.

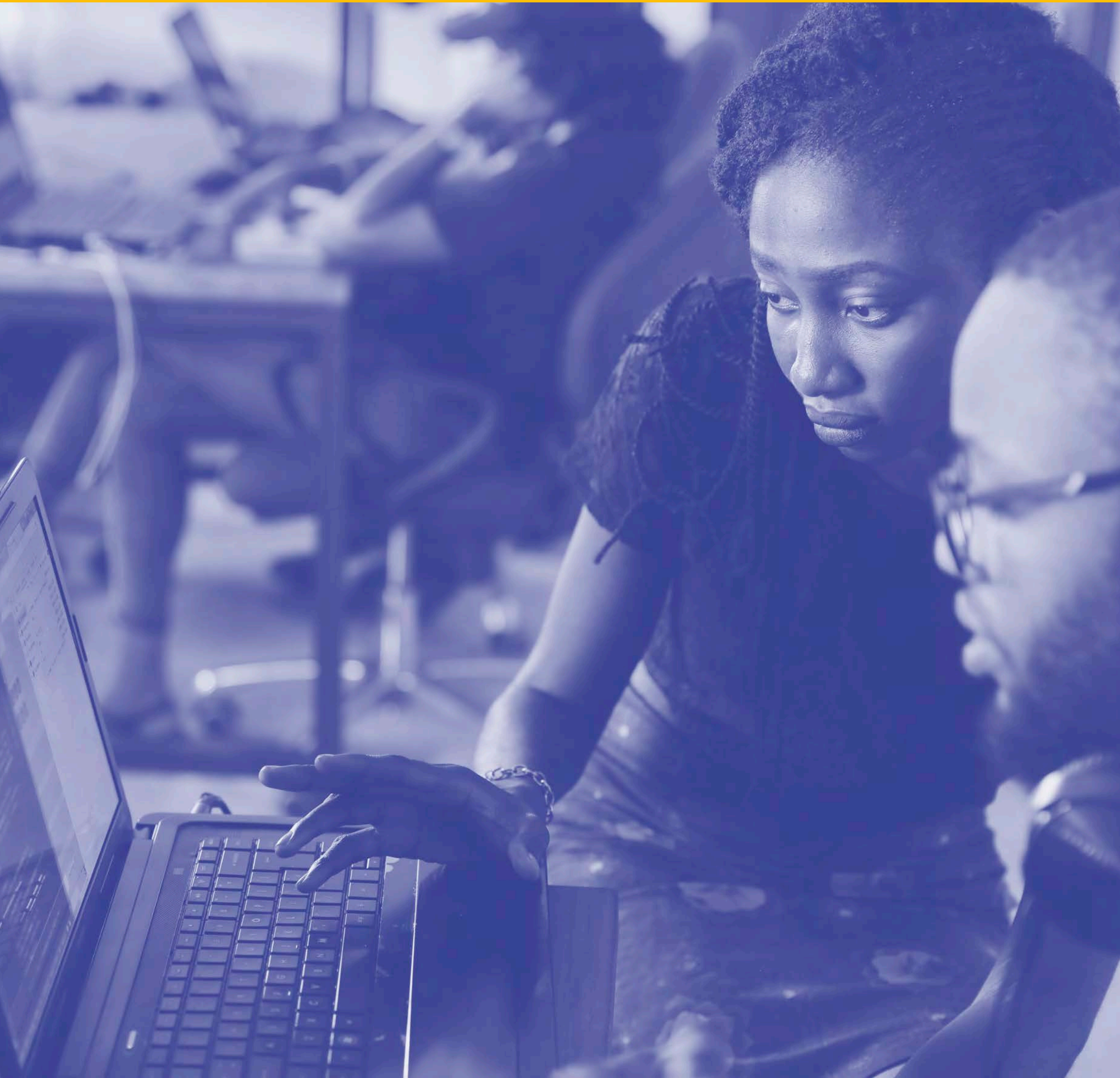
Leaders should model and champion the importance of emotional skills in the workplace.

- Leaders should set an example by taking the lead in this area, publicly communicating their personal yearly goals for improving their own emotional or interpersonal skills, and reporting back regularly on how these efforts have gone. While opening ourselves in this way (and admitting where we need to grow) can be tough, it can also be an extremely successful leadership strategy. In Tolstoy's *War*

and Peace, there's a critical battle scene when one of his main characters, Prince Andrei, is engulfed in a flood of fleeing soldiers. Desperate to rally them, but alone, Andrei jumps off his horse, grabs the regimental flag and starts shouting and running forwards. Soon the soldiers, impressed and heartened by his willingness to be on the front lines, follow suit. It's really an insight about leadership in general: modelling the behaviour one wishes for in the team (albeit on the battlefield of emotional growth) is one of the most influential and persuasive behaviours for any leader.

- Leaders should also seek collective feedback on their own emotional skills. This could mean anonymised or 360 style feedback about their work and leadership style, or asking their team to collectively come up with and present feedback to them.
- Leaders should consider how they can use new technologies more effectively as they seek to influence others (for example, practising communicating





better by video conferencing if this is a big part of organisational life, or getting feedback on their email style or the organisation's preferred method of informal day-to-day communication.)

- Where possible, leaders should tie emotional skills and emotionally intelligent behaviours to organisational values and lay out what it means to behave according to these values in practice, and what skills will be needed to do so.
- Leaders can make a point of publicly praising individuals who are developing these skills intentionally or using them effectively, perhaps in weekly or quarterly meetings or communications.
- Leaders should work to help those they lead in building these skills by encouraging them to solve their own problems (including interpersonal and emotional problems), rather than offering direct advice and solutions. The right open-ended questions ('why do you think this happened?'

'what do you think might help?') can help employees recognise for themselves what growth and emotional skills are needed to solve a particular problem.

Leaders can also change practices of recruitment, training, and company culture to prioritise the building of emotional skills and develop emotionally intelligent organisations.

- An emphasis on emotional skills should begin the first time a recruit meets the organisation. An organisation might ask applicants in their application how they would like to develop in these areas, perhaps even showing them the personal goals of their potential future boss and future CEO as examples to provide definitive reassurance that they were not being singled out.
- Workers moving from one team to another as they switch projects might also bring with them not just a resume or a portfolio but also an Instruction Manual for Myself. It might include technical things like ‘I much prefer video calls for difficult conversations,’ as well as emotional things, like ‘When I am hurt, I go cold’ or ‘I’m especially prone to be subservient and then not share my opinions.’
- It is also valuable to have people state their preferences around the use of technology before beginning collaborating.



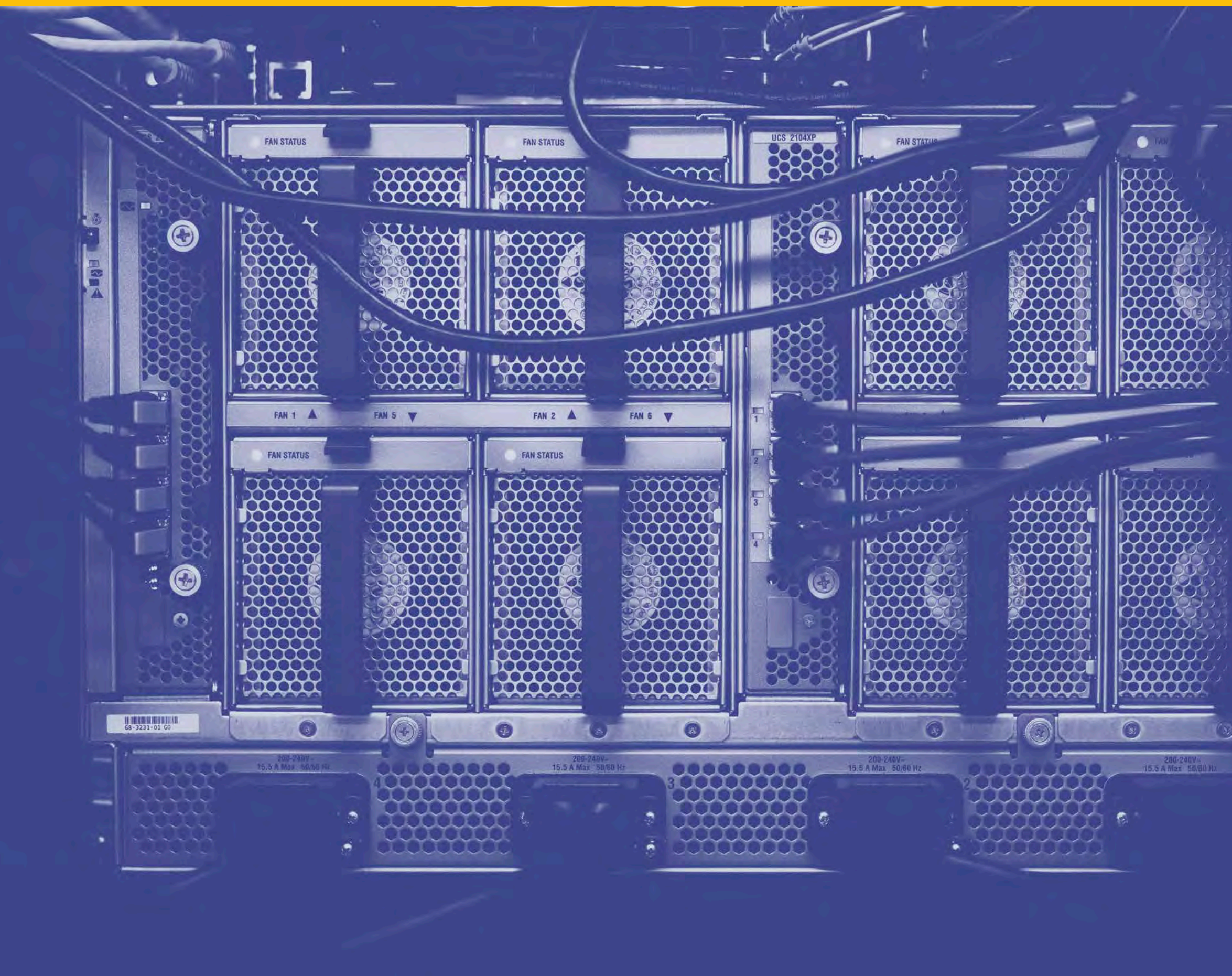
An emotionally intelligent office should think hard about its awaydays.

- Leaders can choose awaydays that are directly geared at greater psychological insight and understanding. The more we emerge as full human beings in the minds of others, the more likely we are to remain calm, kind and sympathetic towards others. We would ideally know a substantial amount about where our colleagues grew up, how their parents behaved around them and perhaps even what they looked like as a child (it tends to be hard to talk intemperately with someone once you've seen a picture of them standing in the garden, aged two and a half, in dungarees, holding a red firetruck and grinning at the camera with a gap-toothed smile).
- For those who work remotely, this might mean a virtual town hall meeting, or creative ways of introducing new remote teams to

one another, like the exchange of important photos that tell a story about the person as whole, rather than just their professional role.

People tend, nowadays, to pride themselves on their capacity for hard work. There is no harder work than that outlined above, especially when it comes to leading this type of change within organisations. It is yet underappreciated, unglamorous stuff, but, in terms of its effect on ourselves and the future of our organisations, it is possibly the most valuable work we could ever undertake.





The Future of Work, Technology, and Emotional Skills

Technology has been one of the key reasons why emotional intelligence has become so crucial at work – rapid advances in workplace technology have massively improved what we're able to accomplish, but also mean we have to adapt faster. Moreover, advances in technology means that jobs are increasingly about what can't be automated: human connection, relationships, and trust.

But, of course, technology can either help or hinder us at work: it can distract us – or help us focus; it can make us feel disconnected (as when working remotely, without the right tools or emotional skills) or help us connect to people around the world. It won't be enough to have the best technologies in the world if we can't also be intentional about the way we interact with those technologies and with each other. Much depends on the wisdom of its design and of its use – and the wise use of technology in the workplace means the strategic deployment and continuous development of emotional intelligence.

Future leaders will therefore help their teams adapt to the new culture of work by building a culture that combines the wise use of technology and the cultivation of key emotional skills.

The School of Life is a global organisation dedicated to developing emotional intelligence. Their guiding principle is that emotional intelligence is something that can always be learned, built and improved upon through reflection and practice. In ten branches around the world, The School of Life provides interactive classes, workshops and events, produces books and gifts, and runs a therapy service. The School of Life's YouTube channel now has over 4.5 million subscribers globally.

The School of Life for Business division teaches 20 key emotional skills to help businesses thrive through interactive and engaging workshops. They believe that alongside technical skills, employees who can master a range of sophisticated emotional skills are better able to work with others, manage themselves and excel at their work. Their tailored programmes are made up of 2-hour workshops designed to develop emotional maturity in the workplace.

4 ways from Microsoft to digitally transform your workplace

[Read more about how to prepare for the future of work](#)