



WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Part 1 of 4 Wellbeing series: **Research Findings & Insights**



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of research

This research explores the current landscape of wellbeing in the workplace and seeks to identify innovative practises and highlight what really matters to employees. This is an important field for organisations to take responsibility and employees to engage with. Promoting Wellbeing can prevent stress and creates positive working environments, as a result organisations and employees can thrive by increasing performance and engagement. As individuals the feeling of wellbeing is fundamental to our overall health and enables us to overcome difficult situations and achieve what we want to in life.

Work plays a crucial role in most of our lives and is more than just a source of income, it provides a sense of purpose, achievement and gives the opportunity to build friendships. Organisations have a corporate responsibility to support employees which can help prevent new mental health problems and support people with their existing mental health to stay at work and do well.

This research will provide readers with tips and insights gained from qualitative research, and highlights some key areas that are important to consider for Wellbeing in the workplace.



2.0 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

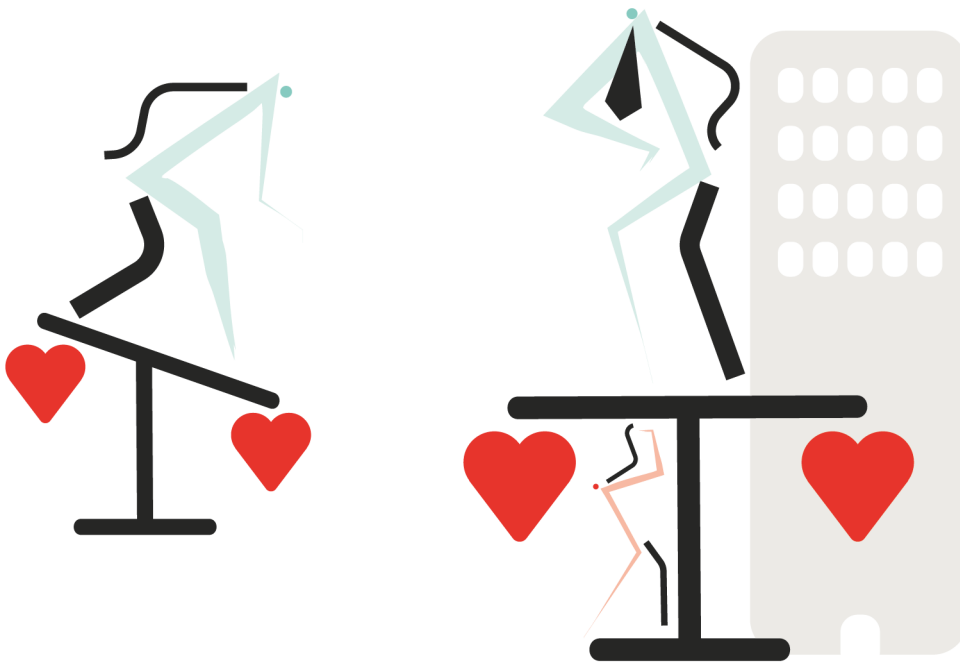
2.1 Economic impact of poor wellbeing in the workplace.

The reality of poor wellbeing in the workplace leaves a significant mark on employees, organisations, and the economy. The results of Vitality's annual Britain's Healthiest Workplace study in 2019, suggests that poor health related absence and presenteeism cost UK businesses and the economy an estimated £91.9bn, a £10bn increase since 2018. The survey data represents 26,393 employees and 130 businesses across the UK in 2019.

It is in everyone's interest to work towards a stronger support network for wellbeing as this improves not only the workplace but personal lives too.

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2.2 What is driving the focus of wellbeing in the workplace.

There are a range of contributing factors that are driving the focus on wellbeing in the workplace, our research has highlighted the following as key drivers:

Technology: There are more ways in which workplaces can be assessed and monitored on different levels of wellbeing. Devices that measure indoor air quality are inexpensive to purchase and easily accessible, so we have access to the technologies that enable us to accurately monitor the environments that are provided.

Standards: The existence of well-established standards that can benchmark organisations against how well buildings are to work in such as The WELL Building Standards. The appetite for the application of building standards increases when clients are aware of the standardised appraisal techniques, they can use to measure these standards too.

COVID19: During the pandemic people have been eager to make positive lifestyle changes and have assessed what works for them. The extent to which the pandemic has influenced attitudes and behaviours towards wellbeing has increased. Post COVID19 this will remain an expectation of employees and be at the top of the agenda for organisations.

Mental Health: Poor mental health costs the UK economy around £91.1 billion per annum. There is good evidence to suggest that tackling mental ill-health early reduces the subsequent problems, improves quality of life, and saves money for the economy. Wellbeing strategies can support mental health, as both a preventative approach and also to educate people to understand how they can make lifestyle improvements and increase their quality of life. In the workplace employees are the greatest asset, the most important capital and the largest expense.

2.3 Method

This research employed a qualitative approach. The insights and results of the research are based on real experiences of employees on the topic of wellbeing in the workplace.

Twenty-two interviews gathered in-depth understanding of current practise, innovative approaches, what matters to each interviewee, how people feel about wellbeing in the workplace and what people's expectations are. To the right are just some of the organisations that we spoke with and took part in our wellbeing research.

Job roles included a range of directors, CEO's, senior leaders, management, support staff and employees across private, public, and financial sectors. We purposefully interviewed people who either work in high stress environments or have worked with organisations that work within these environments. This was so we could understand what support is in place for people who must face some of the most difficult types of trauma in the workplace or are within industries known to operate in high stress such as the financial services or prison services. Within the mix we also interviewed specialists in the areas of wellbeing, researchers in the field of wellbeing and workplace consultants.

Our research included surveying 100 people across the public, private and financial sectors. Participants were in roles at all levels of an organisation and were from nine countries which included: Australia, Vietnam, France, South Africa, Ethiopia, UK, USA, and the Falklands. The results from this survey will be presented throughout our wellbeing series of articles.



3.0 WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We have summarised our findings and discovered what matters most to employees with regards to their wellbeing in the workplace.

3.1 Insights

We have learnt that employees are taking more notice of what they are being offered to support their wellbeing and our research has identified some pain points such as, organisations not deep routing wellbeing into everything they do, communication, trust, not feeling valued, not having choice, no dedicated physical spaces for wellbeing, services not being authentic, and the lack of training being offered to management.

Based on the synthesis of findings the key insights gained from the research process are shown to the right.

Most of the interview participants said that feeling supported goes a long way to feeling valued in the workplace and that trust is either a barrier or acts as a catalyst for accessing wellbeing services. These are the two most common themes identified across the findings. Focussing on the areas highlighted from our insights will enable organisations to create an authentic, purposeful, and supportive wellbeing strategy in the workplace.

#01

FORM STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYEES TO BUILD TRUST

#02

OFFER CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY BASED ON EMPLOYEE NEEDS

#03

BREAK UP THE PHYSICAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT SPACE TO CREATE AREAS TO ESCAPE AND UNDERTAKE WELLBEING ACTIVITIES.

#04

MANAGEMENT TEAMS ARE CREATING A BARRIER TO WELLBEING

#05

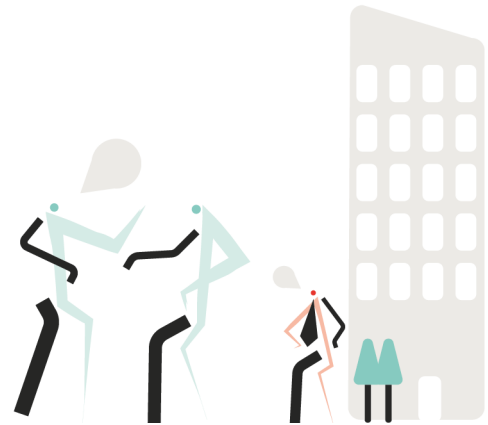
WELLBEING SERVICES SHOULD BE AUTHENTIC AND SPECIFIC TO THE NATURE OF THE JOB ROLE

#01

FORM STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMPLOYEES TO BUILD TRUST

Employee needs are not often asked or listened to, this negatively impacts the culture and means employees seek support from each other rather than the organisation.

This is affecting trust between employees and employers, relationships, and wellbeing within organisations.



“Employees need to feel they can share their feelings without it affecting their careers. Safety is key in an organisation and not being judged”.

“Creating and having strong relationships with people is very important for positive wellbeing”.

“Wellbeing in the workplace needs to be an integrated approach to home too. Both have an impact and need support available”.

“The demographic of people using the space needs to be reflected in the activities in the space. You must have buy-in from the users - find out what they want, what would work for them etc”

“Most importantly - you need someone to just listen to what will support you”

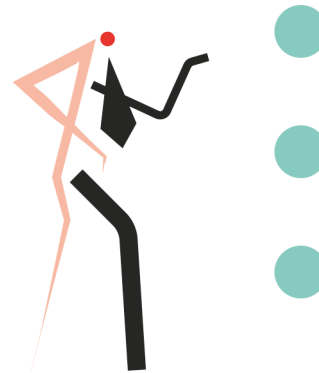
* Quotes taken from interviews

#02

OFFER CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY BASED ON EMPLOYEE NEEDS

Some organisations are not offering services that are inclusive for all employee wellbeing needs and are not offering enough choice in their services.

Employees want initiatives that will improve their working day and make them feel good. By offering a wide range of flexible choices an organisation can be more versatile in catering for ALL needs rather than some.



“...need flexible approach to work so people have control of their own wellbeing”

“Everyone has had different challenges over the last year and wellbeing initiatives need to reflect this”

“Wellbeing and productivity increase when you provide choice and leads to a positive mindset”

“Allowing flexibility at work, hours being more flexible if needed due to personal circumstances etc”

“Wellbeing in the workplace is about providing flexibility and versatility that enables employees to feel empowered and make their own decisions on where they want to work. Doing this will maximise their physical and mental wellbeing”.

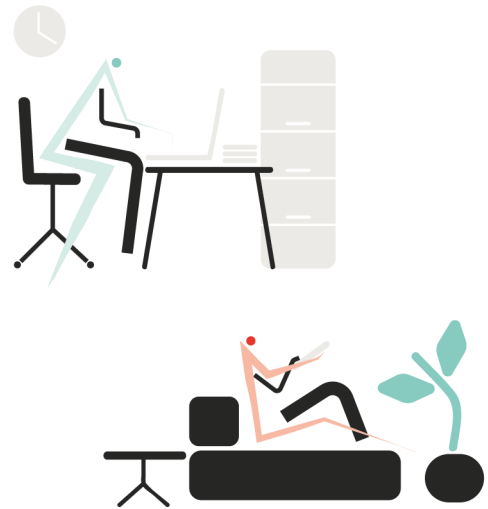
* Quotes taken from interviews

#03

BREAK UP THE PHYSICAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT SPACE TO CREATE AREAS TO ESCAPE AND UNDERTAKE WELLBEING ACTIVITIES.

Employees feel there is a lack of access to comfortable, dedicated spaces where they can escape from their desks for breaks and wellbeing activities. This is not offered in many organisations and where there are spaces provided, employees feel it is an afterthought due to the appearance and the multifunctional uses.

Employees are wanting to see and experience well considered environments that support their wellbeing in the workplace.



“A physical space needs to look valued by the organisation to make users feel like they care about their wellbeing”

“Needs to look different from the rest of the office...a wellbeing space is not about clients or the organisation it’s about the employees and their needs”

“Soft furnishings are important. Creating a home from home feel separates this space further away from work and brings in elements of comfort”

“Quiet spaces to go to at work are important to be able to step away from your desk”

“The environment is a direct link to personal wellbeing”

* Quotes taken from interviews

#04

MANAGEMENT TEAMS ARE CREATING A BARRIER TO WELLBEING

Management is lacking the training required to support teams with their wellbeing and, their behaviour creates barriers to using some wellbeing services enforcing negative stigmas.

Management needs to play a key role in modelling a positive attitude towards wellbeing services and be champions of those services alongside sharing knowledge and understanding of wellbeing.



“More training for line managers is needed to give consistent support to all employees and there to be an expectation of them to support wellbeing”

“Leaders need to demonstrate the behaviours they are encouraging the rest of the organisation to do”

“A positive work culture aids good wellbeing in the workplace - encouraged to take breaks, offered training, team days, acknowledgement of workload, not expected to work over hours etc”

“Trust is a barrier to people using wellbeing services. There needs to be one degree of removal from the organisation. More third-party engagement so employees can be open and honest without the concern of how it will affect their job”

“Trust from management vital. Not about always being visible but to be trusted by what you do”

* Quotes taken from interviews

#05

WELLBEING SERVICES SHOULD BE AUTHENTIC AND SPECIFIC TO THE NATURE OF THE JOB ROLE

If work related, employees feel deflated when they use wellbeing services such as hotlines or psychologists/ counsellors that don't understand what they are exposed to. They feel it takes up too much time explaining before discussing their needs. Employees want to have access to specialists that are either internal to the organisation or have a good knowledge of the work they do.



“Psychologists are accessible, but you spend most of your time with them trying to explain what your job is like as they do not understand”

“Hot line you can call if you need support but would not feel comfortable speaking to a stranger that does not understand the role you do so speak to family members instead”

“Hotlines - An internal person who understands the organisation and what employees are exposed to and have someone more familiar would really help and would be utilised more”

* Quotes taken from interviews

4.0 SUMMARY

We set out to understand the most common thoughts, experiences, and pain points for employees around wellbeing in the workplace. It was also encouraging to hear of great practices happening in organisations who have embedded wellbeing into everything they do, and the positive effect this has had on their employees.

The key insights in this research highlighted the importance of communication and the relationships we experience in the workplace, the topic of wellbeing at work is evolving fast and picking up more focus, some organisations are still understanding how to better support their employees, some are behind and others ahead.



5.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the interview and survey participants.

Thank you to everyone who was willing to get involved with our research and shared their experiences with us.



6.0 WHAT IS NEXT?

The next release of our wellbeing series looks at wellbeing and the employees, what are people asking for, employee's expectations, data insights from our wellbeing survey and tips from Michael Whitmore (Research Leader on Wellbeing at Work, at RAND) on how to increase engagement with wellbeing services in an organisation.



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