



WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Part 2 of 4 Wellbeing series: **The Employee Perspective**



1.0 INTRODUCTION

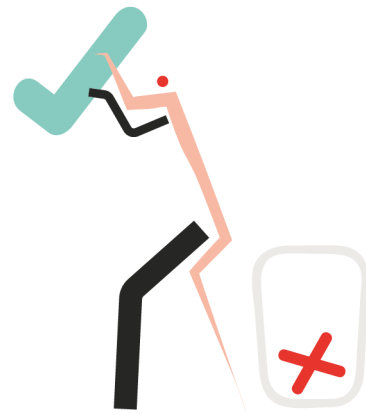
The purpose of this article release is to communicate further findings from our research into Wellbeing in the workplace. It provides readers with information which aims to encourage reflection upon effectiveness of current wellbeing services provided/ offered. This release will present what has been discovered during our research on the following:

- What do employees want
- What works well
- What is not working well
- Employee expectations
- Tips on how to increase engagement with wellbeing services

2.0 WHAT ARE EMPLOYEES SAYING?

Twenty-two interviews were carried out to investigate what the current landscape is around wellbeing in the workplace. The people who were interviewed all worked within industries that involve being exposed to trauma at work, high stress environments or workplace specialists/ researchers who have worked with organisations in these areas.

The information presented in this section highlights what the interviewees felt works well for them and what was not working well, barriers and pain points around wellbeing in the workplace.



2.1 What IS working well?

Our research highlighted the following key wellbeing offers/ initiatives as the most popular and effective:

- Flexible working hours
- Good working environment and set up (natural lighting, good air quality, not cluttered and well designed for the specific jobs needing to be done)
- Childcare services – employees offered limited free access to qualified nannies to support people with families whilst at work
- Spaces for wellbeing in the workplace that offer a range of different activities such as reading, somewhere comfortable to relax on a break, downloadable wellbeing resources and equipment for exercise such as yoga
- Gym memberships (paid for by the organisation)
- Access to convalescent homes (if appropriate to industry/ role)
- Reiki appointments (paid for and organised by the organisation)
- Qigong activities (A practise of mind-body-spirit which improves mental and physical health by integrating posture, movement, breathing technique, self-massage, and sound).
- Office massages (at your desk)

Interviewees discussed how being offered choice is important to them. Everyone deals with trauma or stress differently; wellbeing services, products or initiatives need to reflect this to be inclusive to the entire workforce.

Interviewee comments on some of these wellbeing services stated:

“Doing Qigong as a group activity once a week was a great way to spend time together as a team and helped with employees bonding. It also is a great way of relaxing, especially when you are in a stressful role and taking time out together”.

“We have great breakout spaces in the office that are away from the main working area, they get used all the time and is a nice place to get away to take a call or break away from your desk and other people working”

“At some points I have needed access to wellbeing support such as childcare services, this was great, and I felt supported at work. Other times I have benefited from flexible working hours and a gym membership, I do not always want or need the same services so a choice to pick from, depending on my circumstances and preferences, is what I prefer”

“Office massages for 20 minutes at your desk makes you feel great and more relaxed, works really well in our office and makes you more comfortable for the rest of the day”

Employees feel they are valued when they are being offered services that have been selected to compliment the roles they are doing, e.g., offering massages at your desk. Industries which require long hours sat at a desk overtime will begin to put pressure on the body.

Massages are not time consuming and provide immediate release and attention to the body to become more comfortable, relieving tension, pain, and discomfort. In return this leads to increased productivity and reduced stress.

The services stated above are said to be effective and appreciated by the employees interviewed. These types of services are offering support which subsequently increased the employee's ability to do their jobs well and maintain health and wellbeing.



2.2 What is NOT working well?

Our research highlighted the following as contributors to wellbeing services not being effective or utilised for some employees.

The list below were the most common pain points:

- Lack of trust from management
- Lack of wellbeing awareness from some management
- Not feeling safe to ask for help without being judged
- Not enough acknowledgement of workload and expectation to work over hours
- Not being heard – lack of response when asked to complete wellbeing survey
- Services offered are not helpful
- Wellbeing (in some cases) is felt to be an afterthought
- Spaces for wellbeing not looking valued by the organisation

Interviewee comments on some of these wellbeing services stated:

“we have a dedicated space in the office for breaks and to be away from desks, but it is full of posters about work and too corporate. Does not feel like our wellbeing is valued”

“...not all our managers have time for wellbeing, and this impacts the people they line manage. Training should be provided for all management. Wellbeing support expectations need to be set so everyone is receiving the same level of support from line managers across the organisation”

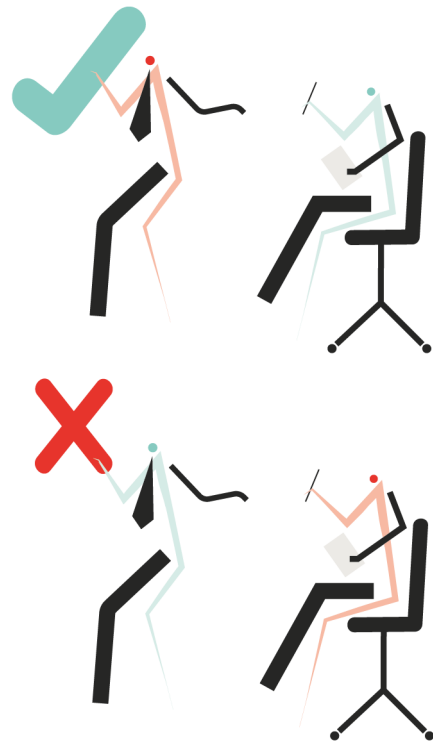
“...just sending out a questionnaire to discuss wellbeing does not feel authentic and people don't buy into it. We often do not get a response to questionnaires about leaderships response”

“There is a fear of being exposed as ‘not coping’ if you go to your manager for wellbeing support. I have been afraid this would affect future potential promotions”

Our research shows that employees are not all having a comparable experience when in the same company. There were some discussions with interviewees around the lack of training on wellbeing in management. There were some positive examples of where employees felt very supported by their line managers but unfortunately this is not consistent and the same for the majority.

Interviewees highlighted the need for all leadership and management roles to be provided with compulsory formal training in wellbeing. It was felt that this would enable employees to all have a more comparable experience with support for their wellbeing, despite having different line managers.

Our research found that the employees who were not experiencing wellbeing support from their line managers were less likely to engage with any of the organisation's wellbeing services or initiatives.



3.0 EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

Choice and **flexibility** in the workplace ranked highest in our research when asked what people expect from their employers. Employees more than ever are now expecting organisations to offer flexibility in the workplace and a choice of wellbeing initiatives and services. When referring to flexibility this is defined as two things:

When referring to flexibility this is defined as two things:

1. Flexible working hours: Employees wanting to choose the hours they start and finish to better fit around life providing a better work/ life balance.

2. Flexibility with hybrid working: Employees are wanting to make decisions on when and if they want to work from home, in the office or both.

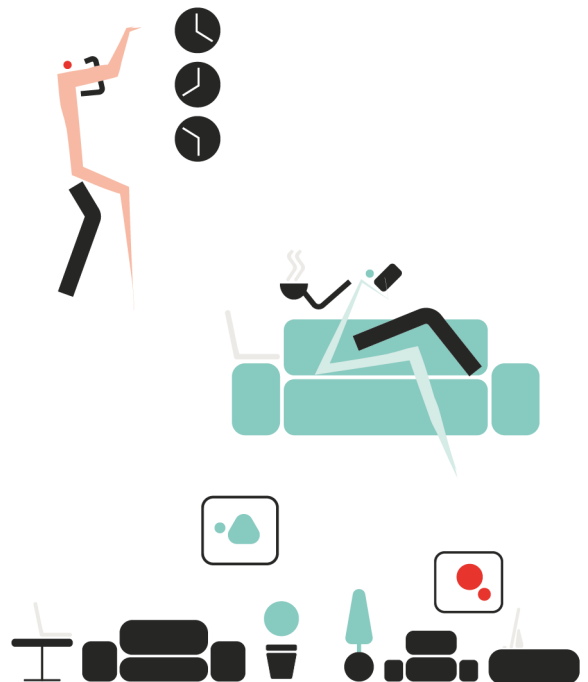
Flexibility in the workplace enables employees to achieve a greater work-life balance which leads to increased satisfaction and improved morale in the office. Employees have proven that working from home can be effective in most cases, following COVID19; people are not wanting to be forced to work in a way that works for just the organisation. Flexibility and understanding of individual preferences are a priority for employees especially since the pandemic.

The interviewees that were offered flexibility in their roles were happy and satisfied with their job. Those who were not offered flexibility had more work frustrations and were overall dissatisfied with their jobs.

The workplace is offering more choice for employees has a positive effect on their well-being, our research identifies employees see the following as choice:

1. Choice of wellbeing services/ initiatives and activities: Employees want choice to be able to decide what suits them best. By offering a wide range of wellbeing services organisations are avoiding excluding employees where services do not work for them.

2. Spaces: If flexibility is given on where to work, employees want to have choice as to what spaces they want to work in when they are in the office. The design of the office is important to allow for this, break out spaces to take breaks or have informal meetings, spaces for a range of wellbeing activities and a choice of types of seating to suit different activities is important to people.



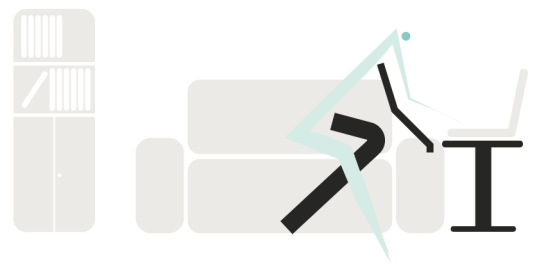
Ryan Anderson – VP Global Research & Insights at Herman Miller discussed choice in the workplace and explained:

“...data is suggesting that empowering employees increases their engagement and is more inclusive. Everyone’s needs are different, and we need to give people more choice to work how they want to”



Interview participants mirrored this statement and people are wanting to feel in control of decisions that are made about their own working day. Coming out of the other side of the pandemic employees are viewing their working life and environment differently. One participant said:

“I did not think I would want to work from home, but I get to spend more time with my family and on days where I need to meet with my colleagues to do collaborative work I can and enjoy the freedom of choosing how I want to do the work I do...”



In summary, the research findings concluded that flexibility and choice, offered in the workplace, contribute to increased happiness at work, greater team morale and individual enthusiasm which subsequently increase overall employee wellbeing.



4.0 SURVEY DATA

We surveyed 100 people in full time work about wellbeing in the workplace. Here we look at the survey results and some key statements made about wellbeing by participants. The first two questions allowed for multiple answers to be selected and an option to add another response. More results will be presented throughout this wellbeing series.

4.1 Survey responses

Q: What does wellbeing in the workplace mean to you?

The survey offered 5 options to this question and an opportunity to include other comments, the options were multiple choice. From the options given, the environment ranked highest at 81%. The results from this question match what was discovered during the phase of interviews; employees said that the working environment needs to be set up to allow them to do the work that needs to be done. The working environment set up is very important to employees, people expect an effective working environment to enable them to do the work they need to do. However, the environment was often discussed in interviews and it was noted that a lack of space, equipment, or current equipment such as legacy IT in poor working order. This caused pain points for employees who were keen to do a good job but were being held back by the environment they are expected to work in.

Basic environmental elements should be provided without the need for request, such as good air quality in the building and desks laid out to make the most of good natural lighting.

Evidence shows that lacking these elements can contribute to decreased motivation and concentration. Workplace trends this year indicate that there is an increase in popularity from employees who want to work in different environments. This may not be practical for some industries, however 51% of people said that to them wellbeing means they have the option to work in different environments whether that is in the office, from home, in a café etc.

Exercise scored the lowest but at 25%, employees feel that being able to exercise at their workplace supports their wellbeing. This, includes access to gyms on site, walking meetings, exercise classes during breaks or similar - there is a need to encourage exercise for one quarter of our respondents.

Results:

81%: I can work in a comfortable space that supports the work I need to do

51%: I can work in different places

48%: I can work in a space that provides good air quality

43%: I can work in a desk that provides good lighting

25%: I can exercise at my workplace

Survey participant comments to this question included:

“Supported mentally and physically by their organisation”

“Good work/ life balance”

“Being listened to”

“Work with people who support personal growth”

“Support to work in a way that supports my mental and physical health”

“Trust from management and not overloaded with work”

“Management are on board with well-being”

“Comfortable space with options to be alone, quiet or interactive, depending on the mood I am”

Wellbeing has different meanings to employees; this is important to recognise and discussions with staff on what works for them should be incorporated. Additional statements from the survey are shown above, these relate to some of the areas identified that are not working so well (2.2) from interviews.



Q: What would be your expectations on Wellbeing from a new employer in a new role?

This question allowed for survey participants to choose more than one answer from the selection and the option for additional comments. Flexible working came out top at 86%. This is inline with current workplace trends and interview research. The driving force for this was the pandemic which has opened opportunities for employees to have a better work/ life balance; moving forward employees will be looking at this as an expectation (if appropriate for the industry).

Our survey demonstrates the importance of organisational culture towards wellbeing; at 85% this expectation means something to employees. People want to feel part of a positive experience and that the organisation values wellbeing by providing authentic services/ initiatives. These results show an order of expectations that 100 employees look for from an organisation, this selection caters for choice with the addition of industry specific services and initiatives.

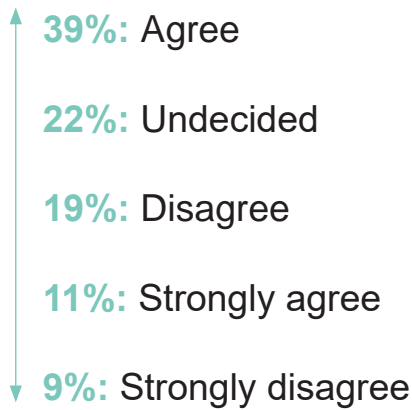
- ↑ 86%: Flexible working
- 85%: Positive work culture towards Wellbeing
- 60%: A working environment which has good natural lighting
- 59%: A separate space in the workplace to sit away from your desk
- 58%: Hybrid working
- 53%: A working environment which has good air quality
- 38%: Access to the cycle to work scheme
- 38%: Access to gym membership or onsite gym
- 35%: Healthy food offer
- ↓ 20%: External 121 support from a specialist in your area of work

Survey participant comments to this question included:

- “Mental awareness training”*
- “Counselling support”*
- “Being able to take time to do wellbeing activities”*

Q: Are you satisfied with how your organisation tackles Wellbeing?

There is not a significant percent of participants saying the same about their satisfaction with Wellbeing. However, our survey results suggest that there are many employees who are not satisfied to some extent with the wellbeing support they are being offered. 50% of participants are satisfied with how their organisation tackles Wellbeing, which includes people who said they agree or strongly agree. This leaves 50% who are either undecided or not satisfied. This shows that whilst there are organisations making a success out of Wellbeing there are still many that have not risen to the expectations or Wellbeing requirements needed by their employees. A 22% undecided response suggests that those employees have either not used Wellbeing services or are not aware of what is on offer to them.



4.2 What is the data communicating

Our survey results correlate with the interview findings, from both methods of research people were saying similar comments as presented in the previous sections. There is a consistent pattern around what is important to people and the areas of wellbeing that are effective.

5.0 TIPS: HOW TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH WELLBEING SERVICES

Evidence from this research has identified that whilst there is a lot being offered to employees for wellbeing some organisations are seeing that services are not being utilised as much as they could be.

If you are experiencing issues with employees not engaging in the wellbeing services offered, Michael Whitmore (Research Leader on Wellbeing at Work at RAND Europe) offers the following tips on how get the most out of the wellbeing services and increase engagement:

1. Analysis - If you are finding that wellbeing services are not well used the first thing to do is to review if the services offered are the right services for your employees. Analyse what the needs of your staff are and whether there are groups of staff requiring different approaches or a universal offer, analyse how to target these groups and consider whether you're aiming to improve wellbeing and health, employee engagement or both. The services should be targeted to what is going to provide helpful benefits and positive staff outcomes as well as considering equitable access and diversity. Getting this right will support wellbeing and productivity, it supports a shared value between employer and employee.

2. Understanding - Think about how you are taking employees on a journey of wellbeing. It's important that employees feel ownership of the wellbeing approaches being offered. Asking employees what is important to them and what they find helpful can be done using surveys, staff interviews, observation, discussing in team or organisation meetings, line management meetings or setting up wellbeing councils and wellbeing champions.

3. Strategy – Have a wellbeing strategy in place for services to work effectively. Measurement of wellbeing outcomes and intervention activities at a senior leadership level, preferably with senior leadership role modelling wellbeing behaviours, will build on wellbeing improvement whilst also monitoring spend matches the expected returns.

4. Communication – Review how these services are being communicated across employees. These services should to be accessible and discussed verbally in team/department meetings not just in email communication where it's easy to overlook. A successful uptake of the wellbeing offer will be dependent on a strong communications strategy with repeated touchpoints to information and that links the wellbeing approach as a coherent offer.



Michael Whitmore



6.0 SUMMARY

It is encouraging to hear organisations that are offering great wellbeing services that employees are engaging with and contributing to their overall wellbeing, there are some that are still behind and not integrating wellbeing into everything they do which is felt by the employee. Our research has offered experiences for what is working well and what is not working so well, hopefully this can provide an insight and trigger some reflection into your own experiences with wellbeing.

The key areas in this release are:

- **Choice and flexibility** – The highest- ranking expectations from employees.
- **The employee voice** – Allow employee voices to be heard, our research highlighted key wellbeing services that are working well and reasons why some employees were not finding the services effective resulting in things not working well.

Each organisation will be different but understanding the wellbeing needs of the employees is vital in knowing what services to provide that will best support everyone.

- **Increasing engagement** – Michael Whitmore's tips on how to ensure you get the best out of the services that are being provided.

7.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the interview and survey participants, your insights into your experience with wellbeing in the workplace informed this article, thank you to Michael Whitmore who also provided his thoughts on how to increase employee engagement with wellbeing services.

8.0 WHAT IS NEXT?

The next release of our wellbeing series looks at wellbeing and the organisation, this discusses what organisations need to stop and start doing, how wellbeing effects every level of the organisation, organisational outcomes from having a good wellbeing strategy, and the role of the organisation with wellbeing.

There will also be tips from Matthew Phelan, Co-Founder of The Happiness Index on 'how to create a positive Wellbeing Culture'.

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