

WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE

Part 3 of 4 Wellbeing series: **Workplace practises and the impact on employees.**



1.0 CURRENT PRACTISE

Based on our research analysis of interviews and survey data, the list below identifies the ten most popular wellbeing services/ initiatives that employees across a range of different roles and industries have found to be the most beneficial. This list is in order of popularity.

- 1. Flexible working hours**
- 2. Being provided with a comfortable working environment that supports the work that needs to be done**
- 3. Hybrid working offer**
- 4. A workplace that provides good natural lighting and air quality**
- 5. Time allocated to wellbeing within working hours**
- 6. Access to gym membership or exercise classes/ onsite gym**
- 7. Healthy food options available in the workplace**
- 8. A separate space to take breaks away from the desk and undertake wellbeing activities**
- 9. External 121 support from a specialist who understands the working environment**
- 10. Team activities/ challenges away from the office environment and within the working week**

Throughout our research we have not come across any organisation that offers all these services to their employees. Our research set out to identify what the most effective wellbeing services are for employees based on their experience and what they felt positively contributed to improved wellbeing. When asked, our interviewees responded with the following comments about these services:

“Our old office was in a basement and had very little natural lighting, we moved to a new office that has lots of windows providing good natural lighting and it makes a huge difference, I feel more awake and motivated at my desk. Even being able to look out of a window and look at the views occasionally I find helpful to my working day”

“Being able to discuss your problems with someone who understands the nature of the job I do I find helpful; it cuts out time explaining the job which you don’t want to have to do, and I have found it more useful knowing their advice is based on an understanding of what I am exposed to”

“There is a separate space to go to in the office, you can use this space for any non-work activity you wish to. This is a large space with different areas, so you have privacy, it’s a nice space, looks different to the rest of the office and feels like a living room which gives comfort away from the desk”.

“Workplace relationships thrive when employees are offered the opportunity to get involved in team activities/ challenges away from work. There is more buy in from people when this is done in working hours too”

1.1 Who is doing great work in this area?

Based on our survey responses, M&G plc (Municipal & General Securities Company) were highlighted as an organisation who are doing great work around wellbeing in the workplace. We interviewed Mark McLane who is the Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing at M&G plc who are an international savings and investments business.

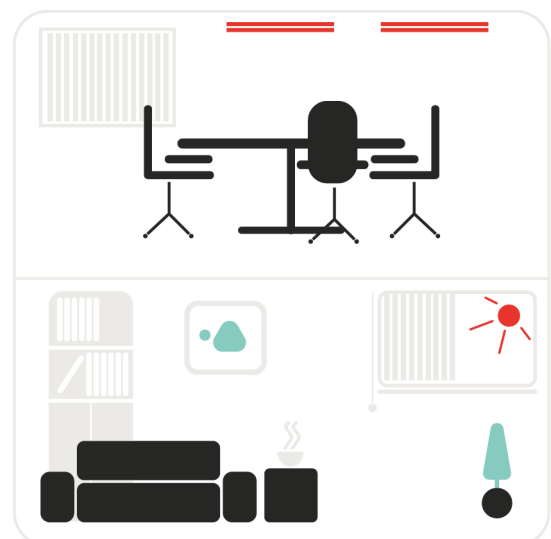
Interestingly M&G’s approach to Wellbeing is not about creating a strategy, they wanted to incorporate Wellbeing into inclusion, this approach has enabled the organisation to be more agile in their creation of a Wellbeing offering. Mark stated:

“Where organisations often fail with good intentions of Wellbeing is putting together strategy that becomes more important than delivery and intent”

In 2020 when the UK Government announced the first lockdown, M&G immediately recognised that whilst its colleagues were going to be all working remotely it was important to remind everyone of all the resources that were available to help and support them. All their Wellbeing services/ resources shifted to a virtual offering which expanded the reach and capability.

The ‘Wellbeing Hub’ was born to easily communicate to colleagues in a centralised location all services and support that was available.

Over the following months Mark McLane discussed how M&G continued to remind and communicate with colleagues what is available and listened to what people were saying they were finding difficult, needed or resources that were missing to enable M&G to continue to evolve and grow the Wellbeing Hub.



The virtual Wellbeing offer at M&G includes:

- **'This is Me'** campaign – a mental health and wellbeing initiative, launched by the Lord Mayor's Appeal, that helps change attitudes and build inclusive workplace cultures by encouraging colleagues to share their personal experience of health and well-being challenges.
- **'Talk it out'** - a wellbeing technique that helps reduce stress levels and increase self-awareness- usually this was a face to face tool but during lockdown it was advised that colleague went for a walk and called a colleague so they could still talk it out.
- **Invest in Yourself** – this campaign allows colleagues to share advice on what they are doing to maintain their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their family during lockdown.
- **GP and employee assistance service**
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy**
- **Access to Mental Health First Aiders**
- **Yoga, Zumba and online gym classes**
- **Music lessons**
- **'Lone Not Lonely'** – In collaboration with Mind Gym. A workshop that highlighted for colleagues that they were not alone, there were resources giving them things they can do and for managers to understand that the world we were in is very polarised and we have to address the needs of colleagues individually, making sure they had the resources for colleagues' individual circumstances.
- **GoVember** - Going into the holiday period mental health and wellbeing is often stretched, Christmas last year where people were not able to get together was a breakdown in traditions. M&G put together a month-long walking challenge and encourage colleagues to step away from their desk and go out for a walk. This was hosted by an app which enabled colleagues around the world to set up teams and track their progress across the month.
- **Wellbeing Wednesdays** (Started in February) - Every week for the entire year there are scheduled events of 25 – 50 mins

mins long and gives colleagues the opportunity to stop working and dial into an event. Events have included: Conversations with clinical psychologists discussing the challenges of the second lockdown, Meditation, yoga, Mental Health First Aiders sessions, session called 'Finding the words' for people who have lost a child, pet anxiety and the return to the office.

- **Wellbeing on demand** – All the workshops from Wellbeing Wednesdays were recorded and catalogued into a 'Wellbeing and Inclusion' app. This is a streaming service that allows colleagues to watch these recorded workshops through an on-demand channel which can be accessed via any device.

Mark discussed the idea of 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' is an opportunity to bring in new topics to see who signs up and how popular they are before making a commitment to a product or service. It's a space where we can test and try new approaches and evaluate colleague responses. Mark stated:

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"It is all about being agile, experimenting, testing and moving forward".

Whilst the approach M&G have taken to support colleague wellbeing is specific to what works for their organisation, the agile approach of Wellbeing Wednesdays or some of the services show good practise from an organisation who have successfully implemented a way of tackling a positive colleague experience, inclusion, and wellbeing which could inspire other organisations who are looking at ways to improve in the same area.



2.0 WHAT DO ORGANISATIONS NEED TO STOP DOING?

Wellbeing services/ initiatives can sometimes be too focussed on the individual level and often do not contribute to addressing organisational or cultural issues. Employees are wanting organisations to look inwards at elements of their internal culture that might be causing problems and having an effect of the overall wellbeing of employees.

The points below have highlighted the top five most common issues within organisations around wellbeing and suggestions for improvements - from the employee perspective. The issues highlighted by interviewees explained how they felt these elements had an impact on the overall culture of the workplace and what they feel would make an improvement.

Information taken from interview findings.

What organisations need to stop doing:

1. Wellbeing services feeling artificial. This is when wellbeing is not embedded in everything the organisation is doing. Employees want to see authenticity with the services beyond healthy eating options and access to a gym, deeper and more basic wellbeing considerations are not being met in all organisations.
2. Not having consistency across management attitudes and behaviours to wellbeing. This directly affects the employee experience of who they are line managing.

Suggestions (From the employee perspective)

Embedding wellbeing into every part of the working day begins with providing the basics such as good air quality and natural lighting in the office environment. Desk spaces or working areas also need to be fully equipped and comfortable to enable employees to be supported in doing their best work.

Management to be provided with mental health training (or similar) to better understand the needs of people with mental ill health and how to better support them. This is a good way to embed how people think about each other, learn about mental health, and begin to understand types of behaviours. To build wellbeing into the grain of the organisation you need to think about the steps and measures that can be taken to engage with people.



3. Sending out questionnaires to employees without responding back with the results creates a lack of purpose to providing feedback in the future. This impacts on culture and resistance to future engagement.

When instigating a survey, the process needs to detail what actions will be taken from employees' feedback. This needs to be easily communicated in forums such as meetings with teams. Where possible it's important to speak with people, create focus groups, generate ideas involving employees.

4. Expecting employees to work longer hours or through lunch breaks to get through the workload for nothing in return.

If employees were to be paid overtime, there is more incentive to work longer hours. Without an incentive working longer for nothing in return has a negative impact on employees professional and personal lives which contributes to a negative experience in the workplace.

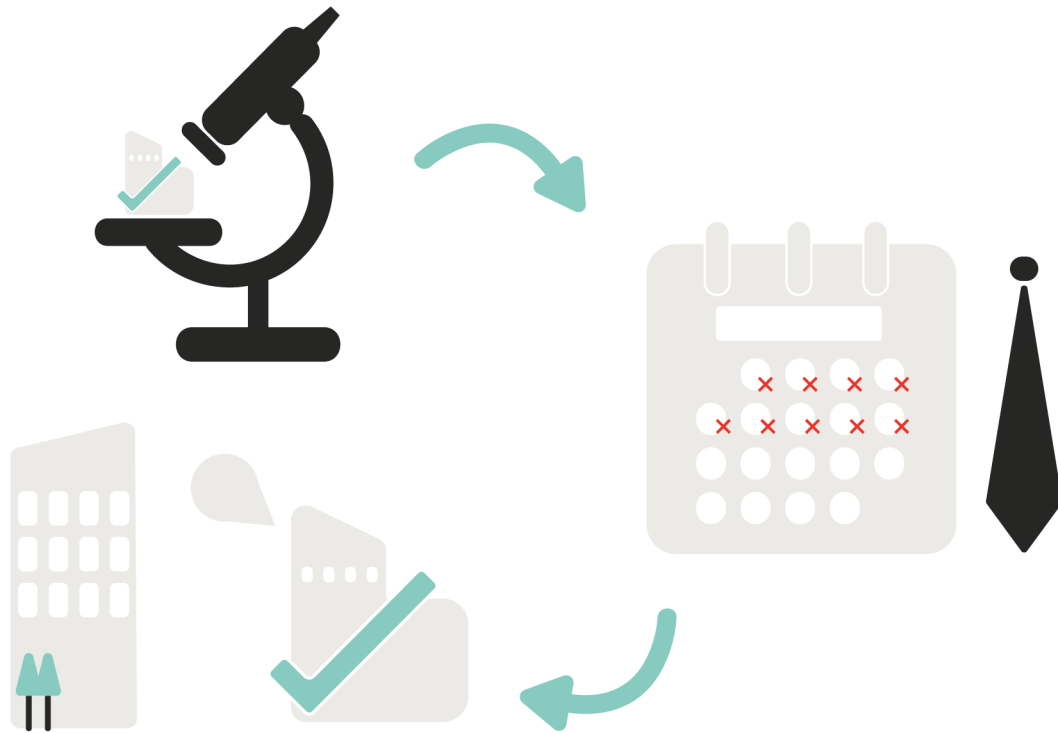
5. Remove corporate branding and work information/ posters in spaces used for employees to take breaks away from the workspace. Employees need to have a place to go to where they can remove themselves from their work to truly feel rested.

Dedicated spaces used for breaks etc. to have a different feel and design to the rest of the space. Replace working posters and information with art-work and include some home comforts such as plants and softer furnishings.

Before making the decision to change Wellbeing services it's important that organisations review why current services may not be working (if this is the case) and understand what will work to benefit their employees. The top five issues identified areas in organisations that are not working, reflecting, and taking time to review how Wellbeing services are received and managed can have an impact on their success.

Interestingly the five common issues identified in our research relate to the culture of an organisation rather than the Wellbeing services that are being offered, such as exercise activities, online resources etc. Employees see, experience and feel culture, people want to feel valued by their employer and feel their needs have been considered and catered for.





3.0 THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING ON AN ORGANISATION

If Wellbeing is well designed, it will benefit all levels of an organisation. Research suggests that appropriate Wellbeing services / initiatives in an organisation improves employee engagement, presenteeism and overall motivation of employees throughout all roles within an organisation. Prevention is better than cure, which is why it's vital that employee Wellbeing is at the core of the organisation and that people feel supported and valued.

Our research identified that people who work for an organisation which provide great Wellbeing services that are tailored to the employee needs, are more likely to stay in their jobs for longer and would recommend working for their organisation to others. This cycle supports retaining and gaining top talent through recommendations and reputation.

For this research, we spoke to Arti Kashyap-Aynsley who is the Global Head of Health and Wellbeing at Ocado. Arti discussed loyalty in the workplace and stated:

"...older generations came from a time where they stayed in organisations for 20-30 years, younger generations come from a time where they stay for approximately 1-2 years. The element of caring about employees will help in creating that loyalty and sense of belonging and attachment".

For employees to feel loyal, and have an attachment to the organisation, they need to feel cared for and valued. This will potentially increase the opportunity to retain employees and encourage people to stay in the organisation for longer, which is beneficial to the organisation.

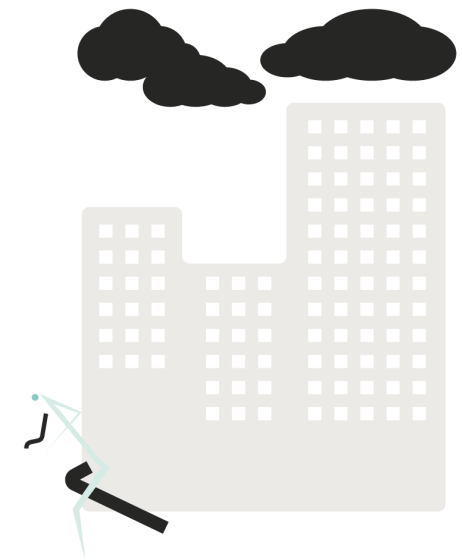
As our research previously highlighted, employees know if there is a genuine feeling behind what is being done about Wellbeing by their employer. Some organisations look at employee Wellbeing from the context of providing people with headspace or EAP's (Employee assisted programme).

These are advertised and shared to make the organisation feel they have a positive health and wellbeing strategy and are focussed. Arti commented on this and stated:

“Where this can have a negative impact is when the employee experience does not align. As an employee you go through each day doing your job, but if the relationship between you and your line manager is not great, you don't have flexibility, autonomy to say what you need to and do not have psychological safety. When all those things do not change, and you throw in a load of wellbeing services it becomes a negative culture to work in”.

Unfortunately, this is still happening in some cases and employees begin to seek new employment with the aim of feeling more valued.

Based on Arti's experience, the most significant outcomes for employee Wellbeing are the things that address operational challenges. You can have all the best Wellbeing Services in place to support employees but if the day-to-day experience of employees has operational issues, lacks transparent and supportive line managers, makes employees feel as though they can not bring their “whole selves” to work, etc., then it is these things that will begin to have an impact on employees and lead to a negative working culture and impacts on wellbeing.



Operational issues may be the starting point for an organisation looking to improve the employee experience and increasing positive wellbeing, Arti stated:

“It does not matter how many benefits and support items you provide employees such as EAP and wellbeing apps, if the day to day operations of the organisation itself contribute negatively to an employees health and wellbeing and the environment does not provide an element of transparency and psychological safety, than the fundamental challenges that need addressing need to be focused on in order to solve the employee health and wellbeing challenge”.

4.0 DATA FROM SURVEY RESULTS

All questions allowed for survey participants to choose more than one answer from a selection and the option for additional comments.

4.1 Survey analysis

Q: What wellbeing services are you offered by your employer?


Our survey results show that the most popular wellbeing service offered by organisations is online/ phone services at 67% with 29% of the survey participants having used these services. Whereas 59% of organisations offer flexible working hours as one of their wellbeing services. Flexible working hours scored the highest at 63% when asked what services employees have accessed.

Results from our interview and survey research highlights the appreciation employees have when they are offered the opportunity of flexible working hours, this reduces stress and provides a greater work/ life balance. Other wellbeing services offered are exercise incentives, with only 16% of survey participants having accessed this service. Our research identified that whilst this is important to employees and there is a need for this, to be an offer there seems to be no overall review of employee's workloads to enable them to take the time to undertake these activities despite wanting to take part.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for organisations to look at wellbeing services in isolation of the role and workload of employees; our interview research discovered the same outcome, employees wanting to engage with exercise initiatives and team challenges but not having the time to take out of their working day to get involved.

Healthy food being available in the workplace canteen / café scored 19%. Having a choice of healthy food is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle and compliments other services such as exercise or team activities if communicated effectively, 19% of survey participants also said they would be happy to pay for healthier food and do not expect this to be paid for by their organisation.

Results:

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- 67% Online/ phone services for confidential advice, resources, and support
 - 59% Flexible working hours
 - 35% Exercise incentives (E.g., walking meetings, cycle to work, gym access, team challenges, yoga classes etc)
 - 21% Team activities/ challenges (E.g., Running/ walking challenges, team cooking competitions, book clubs etc)
 - 19% Healthy food offers (E.g., Free fruit, healthy food options, healthy meeting drinks etc)
 - 17% Other - option to specify
 - 8% New parent room

Survey participant comments to this question included:

“None”

*“Mentoring and access to counselling”
“Training”*

*“Supportive for growth-oriented colleagues”
“Very little”*

“Wellbeing is an afterthought and anything offered is there to just tick a box, makes me feel not valued as a member of staff”

“Offered team activities but workload does not allow for the time to do any, feels like it has been offered so they can say what they offer employees rather than caring”

Q: What wellbeing services have you accessed that your employer provides?

The most used service based on our survey findings is flexible working hours, at 63% which is significantly higher than the rest. Flexible working has become an employee expectation since COVID19 emerged. It is encouraging to hear that this is being offered as a permanent feature to the workplace, for some. It is important to recognise this research spans over many different industries, countries and sectors of work and services are specific to certain areas of work.

However, it is also important to look outside of what is familiar to our surroundings and see where good or innovative practises are happening that could be tested or incorporated. Wellbeing in the workplace is becoming increasingly important, therefore services need to be kept up to date and reviewed to ensure employees are receiving efficient options to support their wellbeing. From our survey results online/ phone services and team activities have been accessed by 29% of our survey participants.

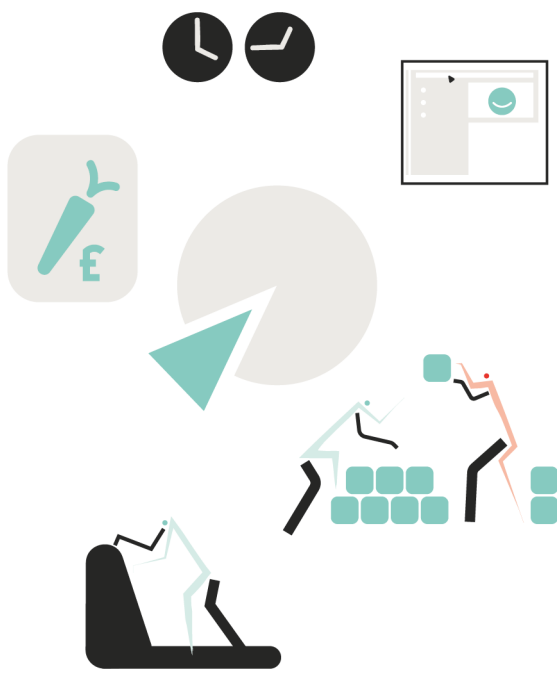
Results:

- ↑ **63%** Flexible working hours
- 29%** Online/ phone services for confidential advice, resources, and support
- 29%** Team activities/ challenges
- 19%** Healthy food offers
- 22%** Other – Please specify
- 16%** Exercise incentives
- ↓ **1%** New parent room

Survey participant comments to this question included:

“None”

“Dental treatments”



“None, the exercise activities are organised in working hours by SLT, management do not understand our workload, never had the time or been allowed to even attend any of the events”

“Sleep pods”

Survey participant comments to this question included:

“SLT do not encourage a positive well-being culture”

“Colleague’s support is more effective than wellbeing services we are offered”

Q: What has the biggest impact on your personal wellbeing in the workplace?

Survey participants felt that senior leaders and line management play a significant role on the impact of personal wellbeing, both at 62%. Our results suggest the behaviours of management and leadership roles in organisations have one of the biggest impacts on employee wellbeing. The behaviours role modelled by leaders and managers can either encourage employees to engage in wellbeing services and set out a positive workplace culture, or it can do the opposite.

Our interview findings identified that not all line managers have the same opinions about wellbeing, therefore employees are not all receiving the same support. Other comments from this question suggests that Wellbeing is not being made a priority by senior leadership teams; also, that this is recognised by employees which is having a negative impact on their views of the organisation.

Results:

- ↑ **62%** Senior leaders role modelling a culture of wellbeing
- 62%** Line managers role modelling a culture of wellbeing
- 30%** Staff association support employees with a culture of wellbeing
- ↓ **5%** Other – Please specify



Q: If you could change one thing about wellbeing services in your workplace, what would it be?

The result to this question highlighted 'being able to choose your own working hours without judgement' as being the one thing they would change about wellbeing in the workplace, at 55%. This suggests that some survey participants are experiencing judgement if they choose to work different hours, despite being offered a choice of working arrangements. This can compromise an employee's experience if they have chosen to work their own hours to fit around family life, important external commitments or to have a better balance of work/ life.

The second highest score to this question shows that at 43% employees want to be able to attend team activities away from the workplace and home environment. These activities are being organised but not all employees who want to engage are able to and also want these activities to take place outside of work or home. Organising events throughout the year for teams to get together, outside of the workplace, has been highlighted as something people are wanting to experience but to also have the time to do this during the working week.

Healthy eating offers differs from one organisation to another, some workplaces pay for fresh fruit for the office every morning or have similar approaches. However, employees are not all expecting organisations to pay out for this. The survey participants said they would be happy to pay for healthy food at work, they want to have it available in the food service areas, with 20% saying they would be happy to pay for healthy food which is higher than the 7% who said they expected their employer to pay for healthy food options.

11% of people said they would like to change the generic online/ phone services offered to them and would like to see these tailored to the environments they are working in and what they are exposed to.

It was also identified in interview findings that some of the online/ phone services do not understand the employee role and often employees spend more time explaining this than discussing the issues they are experiencing; this was particularly important to those who work within high stress/ trauma environments.

Other comments around this question discuss pay structures being fair, this can have a negative impact on wellbeing and how employees feel valued. Allowing 5% of working hours to be allocated for employees to attend or engage in wellbeing services/ initiatives was discussed as a great way to encourage people to take better care of themselves and engage with some of the services. Interviews identified an organisation that supported this, and the interviewee discussed how you can easily get involved in as many of the wellbeing services that you wish to support you to do your job to the best of your abilities.

Results:

55% Be able to choose your own working hours without judgement

43% Be able to attend team and activities away from the workplace and home environment

36% Be able to have time to take part in exercise incentives

20% Be able to choose more of a variety of healthy food options at work – I would be happy to pay for this

13% Tailor the online/ phone resources, guidance, and support to nature of job role

11% Be able to access facilities to support new parents



5.0 WHAT IS THE DATA COMMUNICATING?

7% Be able to choose more of a variety of healthy food options at work – I would expect my employer to pay for this

6% Other – Please specify

Survey participant comments to this question included:

“A time for non-core work like 5% time that’s adopted by all staff”

“A pay structure that is fair”

“Working from home to be a permanent option”

Between our two research methods, interviews and a survey, the results are communicating similar feelings, thoughts, concerns, and experiences around wellbeing in the workplace.

The highest scoring results from the questions asked in this section presented the following:

Choice without judgment: Employees want to be able to choose their working hours without being judged. Set hours do not fit everyone’s needs and work preferences, especially after being forced to work from home due to COVID19. This is seen to be the most popular change employees would like to see.

Flexible working hours: Our research results highlight flexible working hours as the most popular wellbeing offer in an organisation when offered.

Role modelling: Employees feel that for wellbeing to feel valued by an organisation they need to see management and leaders role modelling positive behaviour towards wellbeing that will contribute to an improved wellbeing culture.

6.0 TIPS ON HOW TO CREATE A POSITIVE WELLBEING CULTURE

Matthew Phelan is the Co-Founder of award-winning company The Happiness Index and Author of *Freedom to Be Happy: The Business Case for Happiness*.

Matthew has worked with many organisations and has extensive experience with focussing on wellbeing in the workplace with the aim for positive change and has offered some useful tips to think about on how to increase a positive wellbeing culture:

1. Create a safe place to listen – Before you do anything it is important to listen to your employees and allow them to feedback on current wellbeing. This can be done in different ways and will depend on the size of the organisation such as through technology, sending an email and asking for thoughts, meeting for coffee, and speaking to people etc. Creating options on how to communicate with employees their thoughts and feelings is important, not everyone is confident enough to get in touch and offer their suggestions.

Offering the chance to feedback anonymously too will get better responses, as it is often the case that the people who come forward and say the things that need to be improved can be viewed as the troublemakers.

2. Act on feedback – If you are going to listen, you need to be prepared to act on what people say and come back with solutions.

3. Open and transparent communication both ways – You need to be honest and open in responses with employees and where it is not possible to fulfil their requirements explain why and consider alternatives that are possible. Being honest with what you are not able to fix will open clear communication channels between leaders and employees making situations understandable.

4. Don't ignore the elephant in the room – Often within an organisation there is something going on that people know about, and no one is addressing it or talking about it to employees. This could be a positive or negative matter such as someone being off work, promotions etc., don't ignore these situations because others will fill the gaps of knowledge and untrue conversations begin to circulate.



Matthew Phelan

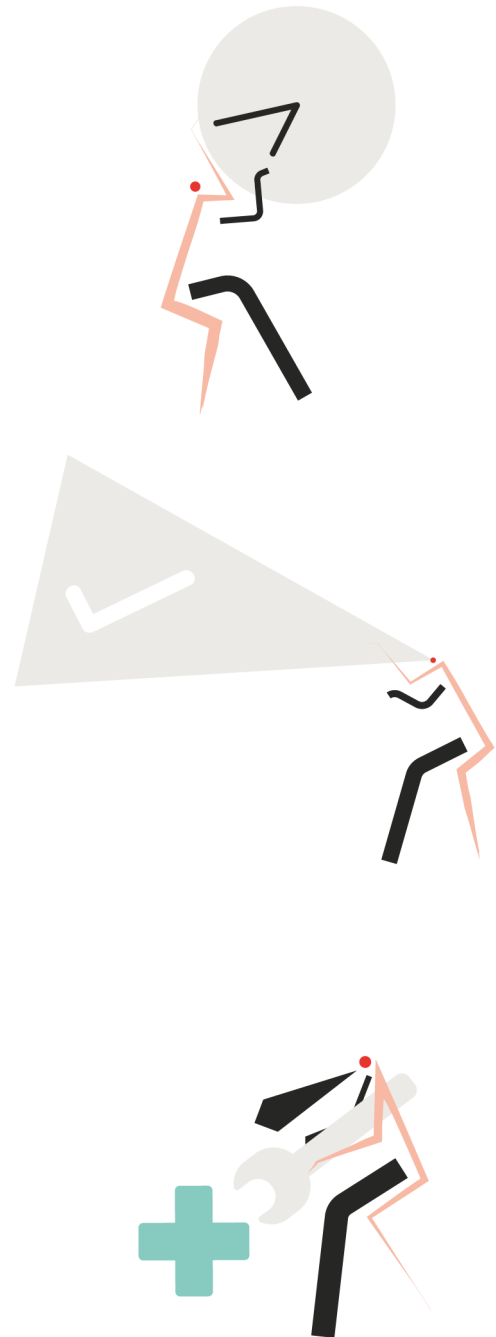
7.0 SUMMARY

Based on our research, employees are wanting to feel and experience a positive workplace culture and feel this has an impact on their wellbeing more than some wellbeing services have.

Our research offers information on the current employee experience, positive and negative, and communicates what is currently happening in some organisations.

The key elements in this release are:

- **Flexible working hours:** Our research identified that employees accessed the offer of flexible working hours the most and above all other offers, services, or initiatives. Participants also discussed how this was successful in supporting their wellbeing in and out of the workplace.
- **The employee perspective:** An important take away from this article is listening to employees as users of the services being provided and the overall employee experience. Often, it is employees who can hold suggestions that would encourage positive and successful changes for wellbeing.
- **Impact on employee's wellbeing to the organisation:** Participants in our research highlighted that their wellbeing in the workplace is mostly affected by the behaviours that comes from senior leaders around wellbeing. If positive role modelling is not happening this will be noticed by employees and contribute to less engagement.
- **How to create a positive wellbeing culture:** Matthew Phelan's tips on how to work on improving and creating a positive culture in the workplace towards wellbeing.



8.0 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 all the professionals that were part of our research process for this release and included:

- **Mark Mclane**, Head of Diversity, Inclusion and Well-being M&G plc, Commissioner at the Equalities and Human Rights Commission
- **Arti Kashyap-Aynsley**, Global Head of Health and Wellbeing at Ocado.
- **Matthew Phelan**, Co-Founder of award-winning company The Happiness Index and Author of Freedom to Be Happy: The Business Case for Happiness

9.0 WHAT'S NEXT?

The next release of our wellbeing series looks at the impact of design on employee Wellbeing, this discusses what is important for employees as the users of the workplace in terms of the design, functionality, and appearance of the workplace. We also look at two examples of organisations that have successfully considered wellbeing into the design of their workspaces.

This last release will also include tips from Dr Melissa Steach, Co-Founder of The Happiness Index on 'how to use design in the workplace to enhance wellbeing'.

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