

29 Apr 2020

Well-being at work

Understand the links between work, health and well-being, and the role of stakeholders in adopting an organisational approach to employee well-being

Introduction

Fostering employee well-being is good for people and the organisation. Promoting well-being can help prevent stress and create positive working environments where individuals and organisations can thrive. Good health and well-being can be a core enabler of employee engagement and organisational performance.

This factsheet focuses on well-being in the workplace, explaining why it matters. We outline the domains of our well-being model, and look at the role of different stakeholders in cultivating a healthy workplace.

Explore [our stance on employee health and well-being](#) in more detail, along with actions for Government and recommendations for employers.

What is well-being at work?

Promoting and supporting employee well-being is at the heart of our purpose to champion better work and working lives because an effective workplace well-being programme can deliver mutual benefit to people, organisations, economies and communities. In our [Growing the health and well-being agenda report](#), we show that healthy workplaces help people to flourish and reach their potential. This means creating an environment that actively promotes a state of contentment, benefiting both employees and the organisation.

There's now a much broader understanding and application of holistic health and well-being approaches in many workplaces. However, it's also clear that there's an implementation gap, with many organisations not yet embracing the health and well-being agenda to full effect.

Investing in employee well-being can lead to [increased resilience](#), reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. However, well-being initiatives often

fall short of their potential because they stand alone, isolated from the everyday business. To gain real benefit, employee well-being priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation, embedded in its culture, leadership and people management.

The people profession is in a unique position to drive forward this agenda, to convince senior managers to make it a priority, and ensure that line managers accept and uphold its importance its importance.

Well-being in the time of coronavirus

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised concerns about people's health and well-being to the top of the business agenda. Employers play a vital role in protecting employees from the risk of infection by implementing stringent public health measures like social distancing. This means supporting large sections of the workforce to work from home wherever possible and putting in place vital safety measures for key workers such as health and social care staff.

The implications of the virus outbreak for everyone's health and well-being during and after the pandemic are significant, including their mental health. As well as worries about becoming ill, many employees are isolated, others face income or job loss, while working parents have to juggle caring responsibilities and work. Employers should ensure they have a holistic framework in place to support people's physical health and safety, and mental health, and offer sources of help such as counselling, an employee assistance programme and occupational health services where possible. They need to ensure line managers in particular have the ongoing guidance needed to support their teams, so they can have sensitive conversations with individuals and signpost to help where needed. All employees should be encouraged to have a good self-care routine including a healthy approach to diet, relaxation and sleep.

There's more on well-being in our coronavirus [factsheet](#) and [webinars](#) in our [Responding to the coronavirus hub](#). CIPD members can use our [Well-being helpline and resources](#).

A holistic approach to well-being

The importance of employee health and well-being has become more widely recognised in the UK over the past decade.

While risks to workers' health from physical hazards still exist, fatal and non-fatal injuries to employees have fallen significantly since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

However, there's been a rise in the number of reported mental health issues over the

past 10 years, and it's well recognised that in many cases the main risks to people's health at work are psychological. Our 2020 [Health and well-being at work survey report](#), in partnership with Simplyhealth, found that three-fifths of organisations had seen an increase in reported common mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, among employees in the past 12 months. This has led to a growing recognition of the need for employer well-being practices to address the psychosocial, as well as the physical aspects of health and well-being.

The survey report also found evidence of a range of unhealthy working practices such as 'presenteeism' (people working when unwell), with almost nine in ten respondents observing this type of behaviour among employees. Almost three-quarters of organisations also reported 'leaveism', such as people using their annual leave to catch up on work. This is not the sign of a healthy workplace and employers need to look beyond absence statistics to understand the underlying factors, such as unmanageable workloads, that are driving unhealthy working practices.

Complex changes in the world of work mean that people now face other organisational and wider environmental pressures. Our 2019 [UK Working Lives](#) survey (now called good Work Index) shows work acts as a considerable stressor for a worrying proportion of us. Intense and stressful working conditions – including feeling exhausted, miserable or under excessive pressure – are reported by up to one in four workers.

Employers also need to think carefully about how their well-being strategy builds on, and aligns to, an organisation's [health and safety policies](#).

The value of employee well-being

Traditionally, when articulating the business case for managing people's health, employers focused on quantifying the negative impact of ill health such as the cost of sickness absence. Recent thinking reflects a more positive business case.

PricewaterhouseCoopers research, commissioned by the Health Work Wellbeing Executive, points to 'a wealth of evidence' suggesting a positive link between the introduction of wellness programmes in the workplace and improved [business key performance indicators](#).

Our 2020 Health and well-being at work survey identified the top three benefits of employers increasing their focus on employee well-being:

- better employee morale and engagement
- a healthier and more inclusive culture
- lower sickness absence.

The research shows that health and well-being does not have to be treated as an 'add-on' or 'nice-to-have' activity by organisations – if employers place employee well-being at the

centre of their business model and view it as the vital source of value creation, the dividends for organisational health can be significant.

The UK Government has launched a Voluntary Reporting framework to support employers to report on disability, mental health and disability. This will help to ensure that an employer's approach to inclusive employment and progression is integrated across the organisation and taken seriously by managers and employees.

The CIPD's role in fostering employee well-being

We have set an aspirational agenda for workplace health and well-being. An effective employee well-being programme should be at the core of how an organisation fulfils its mission and carries out its operations, and should not consist of one-off initiatives. It's about changing the way business is done.

An integrated approach to health and well-being:

- benefits employees
- can nurture heightened levels of employee engagement
- fosters a workforce where people are committed to achieving organisational success.

Our well-being pyramid model

The key domains of well-being

We've identified seven inter-related 'domains' of employee well-being, guided by the principle that an effective employee well-being strategy needs to go far beyond a series of standalone initiatives.

There's no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to designing a health and well-being strategy; its content should be based on the unique needs and characteristics of the organisation and its workforce.

The underlying elements include examples of workplace initiatives and activities to support people's health and well-being.

Everyone has responsibility for fostering well-

being

Adopting an organisational approach to employee well-being carries with it distinct responsibilities for particular employee groups.

People professionals

People professionals have a lead role to play in steering the health and well-being agenda in organisations. They need to ensure that senior managers regard it as a priority and integrate well-being practices into the organisation's day-to-day operations.

They need to communicate the benefits of a healthy workplace to line managers, who are typically responsible for implementing people management and well-being policies. They need to work closely with all areas of the business and provide practical guidance to ensure that policies and practices are implemented consistently and with compassion.

Senior managers

Lack of senior management commitment to well-being can be a major barrier to implementation. Senior managers are crucial role models, and line managers and employees are more likely to engage with health and well-being interventions if they see senior leaders actively participating in them. Senior managers have the authority and influence to ensure that well-being is a strategic priority embedded in the organisation's day-to-day operations and culture.

Line managers

Much of the day-to-day responsibility for managing employees' health and well-being falls on line managers. This includes implementing stress management initiatives, spotting early warning signs of stress, making reasonable adjustments at work, and nurturing positive relationships.

Yet our surveys consistently show that 'poor management style' is a main cause of work-related stress. In our 2020 Health and well-being at work survey, more than two-fifths of respondents blamed management style for stress-related absence. Leaders and managers are important role models in fostering healthy behaviour at work, and this finding shows how harmful the impact can be if managers aren't equipped with the competence and confidence to go about their people management role in the right way.

Managers also need to understand the impact their management style has on employees and the wider organisational culture at work.

Occupational health

Occupational health (OH) is a specialist branch of medicine focused on health in the workplace. For this reason, OH practitioners are likely to work closely with people professionals and those responsible for health and safety in a workplace.

Employees

Employees also have a responsibility for looking after their own health and well-being, and will only benefit from well-being initiatives if they participate in the initiatives on offer and take care of their health and well-being outside work as well. Employers can encourage employees' involvement by communicating how staff can access the support and benefits available to them. It's also important that the organisation seeks employee feedback about its current offering so it can learn how to shape existing initiatives and plan new ones.

Useful contacts and further reading

Contacts

[Well-being helpline and resources for CIPD members](#)

[Acas – Health and wellbeing](#)

[Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#)

[Council for Work and Health](#)

[NHS Health at Work Network](#)

[Mental Health at Work gateway](#)

[Workplace Wellbeing Charter](#)

Books and reports

COOPER, C. and HESKETH, I. (2019) *Wellbeing at work: how to design, implement and evaluate an effective strategy*. London: Kogan Page and CIPD.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE. (2015) *Workplace health: management practices*. NICE guidelines, No NG13. London: NICE.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE. (2017) *Healthy workplaces:*

improving employee mental and physical health and wellbeing. Quality Standard QS147. Manchester: NICE.

WADDELL, G. and BURTON, A.K. (2006) *Is work good for your health and well-being?*. London: Stationery Office

Visit the [CIPD and Kogan Page Bookshop](#) to see all our priced publications currently in print.

Journal articles

BEVAN, S. and BAJOREK, Z. (2018) Workforce health: Why 'good work' trumps fruit and pilates evangelism every time. *HR Magazine*. October, pp42-44. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 82.

KELLIHER, C., RICHARDSON, J. and BOIARINTSEVA, G. (2019) All of work? All of Life? Reconceptualising work-life balance for the 21st century. *Human Resource Management Journal*. Vol 29, No 2, April. Reviewed in *In a Nutshell*, issue 87.

KIRTON, H. (2017) One in four workers doubt their organisation takes wellbeing seriously. *People Management* (online). 7 July.

SUFF, R. (2019) Financial wellness is the poor relation of employee well-being. *CIPD Voice*. No 18, 26 April.

SUFF, R. (2019) Health at work: prevention is better than cure. *CIPD Voice*. No 19, 5 July.

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This factsheet was last updated by Rachel Suff.