A Guide to Employee Wellbeing

How to maximise your return on investment on workplace benefits

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The importance of wellbeing

Shifting demographics and changing working patterns necessitate a renewed understanding of what makes employees tick.

With initiatives that target organisational culture, employee engagement, and rewards and recognition, the objective is to develop an environment where employees feel appreciated and happy in their jobs. Collectively, these kinds of initiatives fall under the umbrella of employee wellbeing. Get them right, and you'll boost your productivity in no time at all.

In this wellbeing book, we take you through some of the issues facing HR to help you get a better understanding of all aspects of wellbeing, ensuring you get a better return on your investment in every possible way from redesigning wellbeing for work through to measuring its ROI.

Understanding employee wellbeing

Once upon a time, employee wellbeing meant curating an environment where workers were kept (relatively) safe from accidents and illnesses. But we've made significant progress since then.

On top of physical wellbeing, employers are now concerned with the mental (and emotional) health of their workforce. This may not always be an altruistic pursuit: it's been shown that higher employee wellbeing leads to increased productivity.

This seems fairly self-evident at even the most primitive level — Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that individuals are most motivated to do better when their physical and emotional needs are met.

Employee wellbeing and the bottom line

Still not convinced? Consider the phenomenon of presenteeism (where employees come to work, but their productivity is greatly reduced due to factors like injury, illness or stress).

The fix should come as no surprise: better company cultures (the fair treatment of employees and the provision of support when it's needed) and a more open environment with regards to mental health. In other words, employees should have a forum in which to voice their concerns to superiors who are trained to respond appropriately.

This approach can be rounded out with a more holistic approach to absence management — for instance, the CIPD recommends conducting return-to-work interviews to get to the bottom of the causes for the absence. They also recommend maintaining frequent contact in case of longer-term absences — with the sensitivity required to deal with potentially difficult personal situations.

The Centre for Mental Health

found that the cost to the UK economy was a staggering **£15.1 billion** per annum. The same report attributed a further **£8.4 billion** in losses to absenteeism.

Wellbeing cheat-sheet

Key domain	Questions to ask
Health	Do you adequately promote better physical health (e.g., with health benefits or employee assistance programs)?
	Are your workspaces and equipment safe? In addition, are employees trained in personal safety?
	Have you implemented mental health initiatives (e.g., stress management or occupational health support)?
Good work	Are your line managers effectively trained to sensitively handle people?
	Do your employees enjoy good work-life balance, clearly defined roles and job satisfaction?
Values & principles	Is your leadership grounded in strong values, trust and clear missions and objectives?
	Do your CSR initiatives enrich the community you operate in?
	Do you champion diversity through people and processes?
Collective & social	Are your employees' voices heard in decision-making processes?
	Do you foster an environment that rewards teamwork and encourages healthy relationships?
Personal growth	Do you provide a clear path to career development (e.g., via mentoring schemes or coaching)?
	Do you encourage continuous learning?
Good lifestyle choices	Do you promote employee initiatives for better physical health and healthy eating?
Financial wellbeing	Do you compensate your employees fairly?
	Do you offer adequate support for retirement planning?

Clearly, employee wellbeing is a complex, multifaceted puzzle that requires consideration of all physical, financial and mental factors.

However, with a careful audit of your leadership and organisational practices, you can implement, streamline and refine a workplace that attracts happy and healthy employees.

Measuring the ROI of wellbeing

Employee wellbeing is everywhere in the HR world but it can feel a bit woolly. How do you get quantifiable answers on which benefits are working and whether they're helping your employees to perform at their best?

To realise its full value, wellbeing requires a truly holistic approach, one that doesn't just 'provide a benefit', but monitors, reviews and ensures a return on investment financially whilst extending the employee lifetime value too.

Whilst we should support and measure the wellbeing of the individual, let's not forget it is intrinsically linked with measuring and understanding the wellbeing of the organisation in its entirety. Do you have an increase in absences? A benefits platform like Hapi, monitors usage of EAP and OnlineGP providers with complete anonymity, enabling the employer to identify issues before they become a risk.

So how do we measure the ROI of wellbeing?

Chances are the HR system you use to administer your reward and benefits package, including wellbeing, comes with streams of usage data. The average HR team is sitting on a data gold mine: data that can be used to improve decisions, make employees happier and optimise processes.

Imagine the value data like this can add to a company. In theory, you can find out once and for all that employees value and which wellbeing benefits are worth the investment. The challenge is how to leverage this insight to enable effective, validated decision-making.

Daily data

We are empowered by how technology enables us to access our own data. Think of activity trackers like Fitbit, where we can view and make informed decisions based on the data that is being reported back to us.

As an individual, we can use this data to improve aspects of our lives and potentially drive or change behaviour. For example, if we wanted to get fitter and increase our daily mileage, we could use our step count data to drive behaviours that would help reach the objective i.e. increase steps per day.

It should come as no surprise that the importance and versatility of personal data are continually being developed both for commercial purposes and in organisations, particularly for HR and people functions.

Previously, HR decisions could be perceived to be based on gut feel and not on solid research and analytics. However, HR are now much more sophisticated in capturing and analysing data, which helps us continually adjust our employee benefits to deliver maximum value and attract the best quality employees.

Here are three ways to measure how employees see your wellbeing benefits:

1. Demographics

By collecting data regarding the demographics of your organisation, you can determine a baseline breakdown of your organisation's makeup. In turn, this will help you deliver the most relevant benefits to each group. For example, younger members of the workforce may value **financial wellbeing** benefits like a **tech benefits scheme** or affordable loans, whilst more mature staff members may be balancing work with taking care of their family, so appreciate flexible work benefits like **holiday exchange**.

2. Analytics

By using analytics to see what's meaningful to employees (either via measuring uptake of benefits via your employee experience portal's management system, or by using methods such as surveys), and tailoring your benefits offer to fit the needs of your workforce, you can ensure that relevance is at the forefront of the reward agenda. Remember the importance of getting employees' views, since the analytics won't show you if something is missing or tell you why a benefit isn't being used.

3. Compare to averages

Keeping abreast of the trends both nationwide and in your sector will help give an indication as to how your offer stacks up next to the competition. Furthermore, by understanding what other businesses are doing, particularly businesses that are doing wellbeing right, you can find new ways to progress your strategy.

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Redesigning work for wellbeing

As much as we'd like to pretend otherwise, work takes up a massive chunk of our lives...

Most of us work an average of eight hours a day. Our salaries play a large part in our financial health. And our moods, of course, are shaped and sculpted by the ebbs and flows of our time, whether that's in an office, on the road, or at a manufacturing plant. Unsurprisingly then, workplace wellbeing matters. And not just on a personal level, but on a business level, too.

In fact, FTSE 100 companies who prioritise employee engagement and wellbeing **outperform the rest by up to 10%** – with staff reporting higher levels of morale, productivity and loyalty. But how do go about designing a healthy workplace – and making changes that make an actual difference?

Here are the three key pillars of office wellness.

Pillar one: Education

Are your staff aware of healthy emotional habits at work?

As an initial step, it's important that your employees **know the basics of workplace wellbeing**.

Conduct workshops which educate them on simple interventions they can do every day. This includes:

1. **Taking regular breaks:** if employees are glued to their desks all day or doing repetitive tasks with machinery, the pressures of work can feel all-consuming. A cup of tea here, a walk there and a full lunch hour can quickly snap people out of their stresses.

2. **Switching off after work:** when employees' contracted work hours stop, they should stop, too. This enables them to catch up on chores, see friends, exercise and regain a much-needed feeling of control over their time.

3. **Flagging heavy workloads:** employees should speak up when things get too much. By highlighting excessive expectations, rather than accepting them, your staff's baseline level of work stress can be massively reduced.

Pillar two: Culture

Is your office culture conducive to good mental health?

Individual staff behaviours can move the needle along somewhat. But bigger changes happen when **your culture changes as a whole**.

The entire workplace needs to be set up to protect and honour people's mental health, which involves weeding out any potential stressors in your company.

Here are the main things to watch out for:

1. **Overly pressurised working conditions:** a culture (or cult) of perfectionism can damage employees' wellbeing, especially if they're already experiencing things like anxiety or OCD. There needs to be a sustained acceptance of mistakes and risk-taking within your workplace.

2. **Unreasonable expectations:** employees can often find themselves doing two or three roles at once, with their schedules crammed full of tasks. If this happens regularly, it might be time to consider extending deadlines or **hiring more staff**.

3. **Miscommunication:** a lack of clarity around tasks can cause delays and conflict. Simple things like regular catch-ups, kick-off meetings and daily team update emails can clear up a lot of confusion – and clear out a lot of stress.

4. **An emotionally unsafe environment:** employees need to come into work knowing they won't be insulted, shamed or belittled by their colleagues. Even one bad agent in this scenario can impact the whole team.

Pillar three: Support

When people are unwell, are they given the help they need?

While we've covered a range of preventative strategies, there need to be mechanisms in place to help employees weather – and recover from – more difficult periods.

To help with this, you can:

1. **Train line managers in mental health support:** make sure they're able to help colleagues in a boundaried, effective way with training sessions, prescriptive guidelines on managing mental health and regular **one-to-ones with their team members**.

2. **Offer time off:** sometimes, things can get so overwhelming that employees need to pause and step away from work for a while. To make this initiative actionable, you should make it part of your overall HR policy and strategy.

3. **Conduct employee surveys:** find out how employees are feeling and what they feel they need in times of crisis. These should be carried out regularly, updated to reflect changing conditions like remote working, and constantly signposted to employees.

A final note: if one pillar falls, the others start to wobble

Needless to say, the everyday demands of any job mean that a healthy workplace requires constant effort, reflection and coordination.

So, to preserve your company wellbeing in a sustainable way, you should put equal effort into all three pillars mentioned above.

If your staff aren't educated on healthy habits, that'll impact your culture. If your culture isn't healthy, people won't have the breathing space to get support. And so on.

Each pillar feeds into the other. But when they're all maintained equally, you can create a rare and powerful thing in the world of business: a workplace that values employees' feelings more than anything else.

Support your employees dealing with invisible illnesses

Most employees don't want to take time off because they're chronically ill. With reasonable adjustments, they can continue to enjoy rewarding work.

However, many chronic health conditions are 'invisible illnesses' which can, in the wrong work environment, raise unfounded questions about a person's ability to deliver in their role.

Why supporting employees with chronic conditions shouldbe a priority

Around **12.8 million** (31%) of working age people in the UK have a long-term health condition. People of all ages can suffer from long-term illness, and chronic diseases are becoming more prevalent across generations.

That's potentially one of three of your employees dealing with a chronic condition or 'invisible disability'. It's an enormous talent pool and by supporting employees with long-term medical conditions, employers can help minimise loss of skills, improve employee retention and productivity, and help their people succeed.

So which **employee benefits** are most useful in managing chronic illness?

1. Flexible working

Truly flexible work arrangements can help both the employee and their organisation – allowing the employee to prioritise their health whilst causing minimal disruption to business as usual.

Common arrangements include additional breaks to eat, rest, or take life-sustaining medication. Employers may also offer reduced or condensed hours, work from home, or a change in role or location. Finally, flexibility is key when implementing a return to work plan after an employee has taken sick leave.

2. Listening to employees

Employees know their own workplace capabilities best. It is important to consider their suggestions and collaborate on a solution that works for everyone.

Scheduling regular check-ins with line managers is a good idea – both on how the employee is managing with their condition and their general wellbeing. Liaising with occupational health professionals can help ensure a supportive work environment too.

3. Employee wellbeing

As well as medical treatment, employees with chronic conditions may benefit from preventive wellness services, such as access to physical therapy, exercise classes and health screening.

Mental wellbeing services are also part of the wellbeing package. People with long-term physical health issues often suffer from mental health conditions as well and would value support to help them absorb the ups and downs of life with a chronic illness.

You can help by providing flexible support;

for example an EAP helpline. Employees can access the EAP confidentially, via their own device, in the privacy of their home – or indeed anywhere they feel comfortable. EAPs advise on a huge range of complex issues, and many also offer access to counselling sessions.

4. OnDemand GP

We all know that finding the time to speak to a doctor can be difficult, with extended waiting times and unhelpful surgery opening hours. Giving staff access to on-demand GP appointments means that staff can speak to a medical professional via telephone or video consultation, 24 hours a day, and often within a few hours of their request.

As well as being able to diagnose and prescribe, online GP appointments can help employees manage their long-term health conditions, preventing extended sickness leave. And it's available for the employee's family too, which can be helpful for reducing short term absence when parents need to care for a sick child.

5. Employee health insurance

EPrivate health insurance often tops lists of UK employees' most wanted benefits. It's reassuring to know that your employer will help you pay for swift medical care should you need it. But many policies exclude pre-existing conditions so don't necessarily help with the problem of managing chronic illness at work.

Plus, it's not a benefit offered in all jobs. Some companies face a dilemma: they want to keep workers safe and productive, but a limited benefits budget means they are unable to provide cover for ill health.

For these employers, the best solution may be to partner with an insurer who can provide workers with easy access to cost-effective, individual policies and cash plans. Employees also value the chance to safeguard themselves from the impact of ill health on their earnings.

Find out more about Personal Group's affordable **hospital plan**, **convalescence plan** and **death benefit**

Employees with chronic conditions make up a significant proportion of the UK workforce. The right employee benefits can help them manage their condition to improve their quality of life and ability to continue working.

How to use wellbeing benefits to help employees make healthy choices

January traditionally sees a surge of interest in health and fitness after the excess of the festive season. Brands are tapping into this with initiatives like Veganuary and Dry January that encourage making healthier choices. Yet this abstinence quite often doesn't last – so how can employers encourage staff to take care of their physical wellbeing in the long-term?

Physical inactivity and poor diet are among the top causes of ill health, which can subsequently negatively impact on our working life. Conversely when we're feeling well, we're at our best. We're more productive and take less time off sick, so it's no surprise that employers increasingly see that it makes business sense to support the health of their staff.

Nudging, not lecturing: No employer wants to alienate their workforce by preaching at them, so it's important that your initiatives strike the right tone. Talk to your employees and understand their working patterns and the support that could be provided. Try to ensure information and opportunities are available and suitable for everyone. Engaging shift workers is particularly important as shift work is associated with increased BMI, obesity and other health problems[1].

Taking everybody with you will help staff make healthier choices, creating solutions which are better embedded in their day-to-day working lives as they are co-produced and co-owned by and with staff.

Encourage staff to get moving

According to Public Health England, about a third of adults are damaging their health through a lack of physical activity. But employers can make a difference - promoting walk or cycle to work schemes and providing lockers, changing and bike storage facilities as well as encouraging staff-led lunchtime walking or running clubs all make it easier for staff to be active every day.

With so many staff now working from home it's harder for employers to have a direct influence on activity levels, but there's still potential for change. Managers could organise a friendly competition within teams using fitness trackers on mobiles to see who is doing the most steps. You could also encourage employees to take regular breaks/stretches from staring at a screen and promote the idea of taking exercise during a lunch break.

Access to healthy food

Employers who provide food for staff in the workplace may wish to consider whether they can improve their offering. Whilst is it impossible for employers to police what employees can and cannot eat, and unreasonable for them to want to do so, there are some ways in which they can positively impact the eating choices of their employees.

Employers should ask questions like: Do unhealthy options dominate the offering in our canteen or vending machines, could we subsidise healthier options and are there enough fridges so staff can bring fresh food or packed lunches?

1. https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2018/03/07/5-ways-businesses-can-help-employees-eat-well-and-move-more/

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