



Employee Wellbeing

An HR Professional's guide to building and maintaining a healthy and successful workplace

Revised March 2021 for the post-Covid world of work

monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk



Why is Employee Wellbeing so important?

Even before the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt, data from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that 32.5 million working days were lost across 2019/20 due to work-related ill health. In 2018, research by VitalityHealth and The University of Cambridge estimated the annual cost to UK businesses of employee illness, both mental and physical, to be £77.5 billion.

Research by Deloitte on Mental health and Employers in January 2020 found that the cost of poor mental health alone to UK employers stood at £45 billion.

Yet, even with data like this, employee wellbeing wasn't the organisational priority it should have been. Now, post Covid, it's the number one talking point and with good reason. The fallout from the pandemic has seen widespread instances of anxiety, stress and burnout impacting employee mental health.

Employee wellbeing is now a significant issue for organisations as the line between work and home continues to blur, with the added risk that remote working may make spotting the cases where help is needed even harder. Employees are understandably sensitive towards anything that is seen to put safety at risk and organisations should expect employees to hold them to account.

What's more, it not only matters to employees, customers are taking a keen interest too, especially in how organisations are supporting their staff through the pandemic. Research by Edelman Trust found that 90% of consumers want organisations to apply their best efforts into safeguarding the health and financial security of their employees.

Employee wellbeing is not only a moral responsibility by employers, it also makes sound business sense and offers leaders an opportunity to create a healthier and more productive organisation.

The challenges of establishing a wellbeing programme

Establishing a meaningful wellbeing programme is not without its challenges, some of which may have made the effort seem greater than the results in the past. However, the pandemic and recent research on attitudes to wellbeing has served to strengthen the business case.

You may have experienced some of these challenges in your organisations:

1) It's hard to measure the success of a wellbeing programme, and any interventions you decide to do.

Increasingly, data is being found that shows the business benefits in tangible terms and supports a positive case for investment in by employers. Research by Deloitte in 2020 found an average return of £5 for every £1 spent on employee wellbeing and mental health initiatives.

There's also a perception that it takes a long time to turn around a sickness culture, and measuring success isn't going to be possible before the next budget run. This is classic short term thinking that removes any momentum for a wellbeing programme. It wasn't viable before the pandemic so it's certainly not going to be now.

2) People can be skeptical about taking up any help offered by their company.

Wellbeing issues go hand in hand with low trust in organisations, so it's easy to get stuck in a rut of organising things no-one takes up and therefore conclude it's not what people want. However, recent data suggests that employees increasingly believe that their employer supports their mental health. Business in the Community found, via their 'Mental Health at Work 2020' survey, that 63% of employees feel that their organisation supports their mental health - up from 55% in 2019. Perhaps greater support from line managers during the pandemic is partly behind this. Post pandemic, employees will be far more likely to welcome wellbeing support.

3) Wellbeing programmes often only tackle the surface issues so have unsustainable results.

If the underlying causes of employee illness are not addressed, wellbeing programmes will only touch the surface. That may have been the case in the past, but the pandemic has brought some very clear issues to the surface. Isolation, anxiety, concerns about safety and increasing cases of burnout all clearly need to be tackled. What's more, a well structured employee wellbeing programme includes physical, mental, financial and social health as well as awareness of work related issues. There's no shortage of deeper issues to manage.

4) There is still a stigma around employee wellbeing for a lot of Senior Management Teams.

Employee wellbeing can be seen as woolly and pandering by some, particularly those that believe people need to 'toughen up'. With this attitude in the leadership team, anything you do on the employee wellbeing front is unlikely to succeed. Certainly during the pandemic, leaders needed to display more empathy and reassure their people that it's 'OK not to feel OK'. While many stepped up to the plate on wellbeing, evidence suggests a sizeable number of leaders are still not leading by example. According to new Bupa Global research, 42% of board-level executives feel their reputation would be harmed if it became known they were struggling. This only feeds the stigma around mental health and does nothing to help raise awareness of the issue so it can be managed.

Although there are challenges to embedding employee wellbeing, the overwhelming need, driven by the pandemic, has put wellbeing centre stage and the issues are far more apparent - along with greater acceptance of the need to both talk about and address them.

There has never been a better time to focus on building a wellbeing culture.

The Problem: Dysfunctional Leadership Team

Whether you like it or not the leadership team defines the behaviour for the whole organisation. How they behave, to employees, each other and themselves will drive behaviour of others looking to get on. It's one reason why leadership is such a responsibility. Being a leader is much like being a parent in that your kids (employees) will do what you do, not what you say. If your leadership team are dysfunctional then this is a core problem that needs addressing for wellbeing to be integral in your business.

The key causes of employee illness and how to manage them

The Solution: Develop the Leadership Team

It sounds obvious, but a lot of senior people are resistant to be developed, either through fear of change, complacency, arrogance or fragile egos. Often HR professionals see this as a block they can't get past, but the smart ones realise there is always a way. Here are some:

- Put their dysfunction to them in tangible ways they can grasp, like lost hours spent in terminal meetings, time wasted fighting fires or money lost in severance pay or lost work time.
- Make their development tangible and business focused. Don't automatically think 'training course'.
- Strategy days could be facilitated by a leadership development expert who can weave awareness and development into the day whilst discussing business issues. We have seen this work well every time we have done it.
- A Coaching or Mentoring programme that starts with the leadership team can also work well. They will only want to work with prestigious coaches or experts in their field so choose wisely, ideally a provider whose founders have great credentials. Once the senior team are on board, the team of coaches can then work with people at other levels. Coaching can be expensive as it's one on one but, particularly where trust is low, it is excellent value for shifting to an improved culture.



“Make the leadership team’s development tangible and business focused”

The Problem: Long Hours Culture

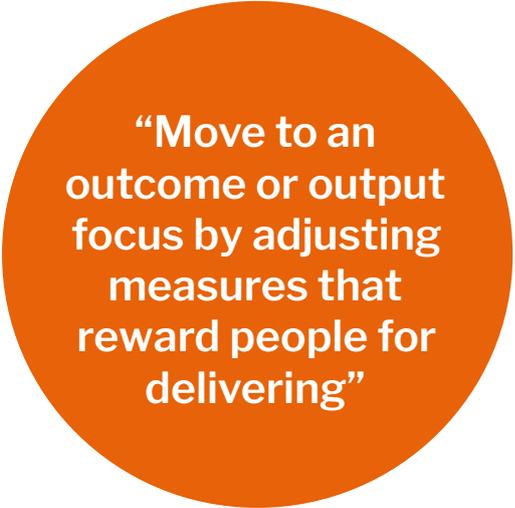
It doesn't take an Organisational Psychologist to work out that a long hours culture is a major contributor to employee illness. Not only that it's also really unproductive. We've worked in and observed enough long hours cultures to see what goes on in the workplace to bring about some resemblance of 'balance'. Procrastination, time wasting, too many meetings, too much focus on 'looking' busy, too many documents, no documentation - these are all strategies employees unconsciously adopt to cope with a long hours culture.

It's an old fashioned way of doing things now but many organisations still operate it because culture can take many generations to change. It also creates a double bind; employees are afraid to stand up to it because they might be penalised in some way and senior managers don't want to address it because they are afraid the workforce will become lazy and productivity will suffer.

The Solution: Outcome Focused Culture

In order to give up the long hours culture, senior management first need convincing that 1) it's not good for business and 2) there is a better way. Moving to an outcome or output focus can help to do this. It is developed by gradually adjusting all measures so that people are rewarding for delivering not for striving or sacrificing:

- Set realistic targets in projects and appraisals, or get people to set their own, and hold them to account (not blame or shame them).
- Banish any language that congratulates long hours - like 'well done for working through to achieve that' - we can still say well done for delivering, without attaching long hours to the cause. Some organisations now frame long hours as a 'training need' for time management training.
- Reward people for delivering their job role/ targets/ appraisal agreements. Do not let talk of long hours come into appraisal discussions, focus people on demonstrating competence through delivery not supposed effort.
- Get the senior management team, HR and other key figures to become role models, productive and effective and arriving and leaving at reasonable times. This doesn't have to be every day but most of the time. And if they love their work so much they want to keep going, get them to do it at home and avoid sending work emails outside of work hours. You can always time them to send the next morning at a reasonable time. This is all about stating the new rules around working hours, without actually stating them.



“Move to an outcome or output focus by adjusting measures that reward people for delivering”

The Problem : Increasing levels of Burnout

Cases of burnout have increased significantly during the pandemic. Anxious about proving themselves and with no one to see them 'at work', many employees felt the solution was to work even harder. As evidence of the growth in the problem, Google data shows that searches for symptoms with terms such as 'signs of burnout' increased by 24% throughout 2020 compared to the previous year.

Monkey Puzzle Co-Founder Karen Meager has studied burnout in partnership with Coventry University - finding that the condition is currently believed to affect between 10 and 18 % of the total working population.

Burnout is characterised in three elements, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of achievement (this could be real or perceived). Managers, leaders and HR professionals are particularly vulnerable. During the pandemic they have become what is known as 'Toxic Handlers' - a term used to describe people whose job it is to filter other peoples' painful emotions. They need to prioritise their own self care and organisations should provide additional support for this group of people through coaching or peer support groups.

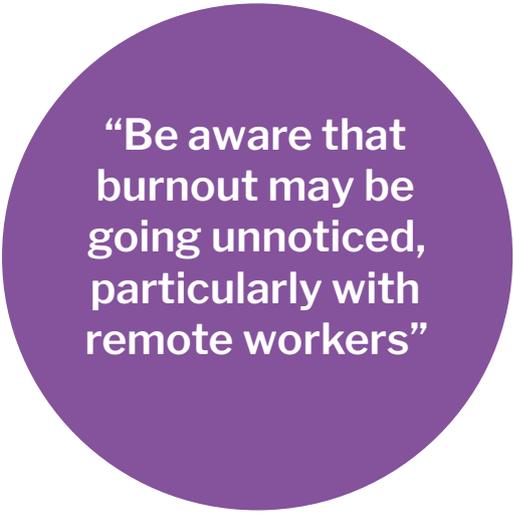
The Solution: Spotting the signs and Strategies for Recovery

Many people wrongly assume that the only solution to counter burnout is to leave their job. However, we've seen people who have been able to successfully recover without leaving and without the financial anxiety that goes with it.

The greater the awareness of burnout as a problem that needs to be addressed, the more likely people will be to recognise the signs. A classic scenario is a denial phase, often not noticed by the person themselves but that can be recognised by others that know them. Remote working has made this harder but if people are starting to feel compelled to work a lot, even when things aren't urgent or critical, work itself becomes unfulfilling and they no longer return from weekends or holidays feeling refreshed - burnout could be the cause.

One solution is to take a self assessment test, something that may suit someone who suspects something is not quite right but may not yet wish to share that with anyone. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), is the most commonly used tool to self-assess whether you might be at risk of burnout. It explores three areas: exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal achievement.

You can take the test, or refer anyone you feel may benefit from it, via this free resource from Monkey Puzzle. **Take the Burnout Self-Test.**



“Be aware that burnout may be going unnoticed, particularly with remote workers”

The Problem: Incompetent Management

“You join an organisation - but you actually leave your boss”. That's an often repeated saying, used to put the case for better line managers but there's more than a grain of truth. Research has found that 65% of employees who left a job were actually leaving their boss. Any incidents when budget has been cut back on management training usually creates a big talent gap in management generally.

We frequently come across managers who don't know how to do the basics well; handle staff issues, delegate effectively, conduct effective appraisals and manage workloads. Without this training they are also stressed and so do not always behave well, which dents their reputation and confidence.

An employees relation with their colleagues and line manager is the single most important factor in employee stress and wellbeing. A good manager can protect staff from bad senior leadership but a bad manager can unwittingly destroy a team effectiveness and morale. If they haven't been trained that's not their fault. And as most management issues involve people, online training is ineffective in this area.

The Solution: Train and Mentor your Managers

This doesn't need to cost a fortune, so don't panic if you don't have the budget for a big programme. Training people in the basics can often be done in-house through workshops and/or a mentoring programme where a more experienced manager can support, challenge and help develop a more inexperienced manager. Mentoring programmes are also excellent for talent spotting your future leadership potential.



“Train and mentor your managers to help develop your people and spot future leaders”

Employee Wellness – The Future

Employee wellness now runs through every aspect of your relationship with your people. It can become part of your organisational culture, part of your L&D Strategy and part of your Talent Development Strategy. It's a more sustainable way of embedding wellness and avoiding a sickness culture. Further to this, it's the best way to show you've recognised the commitment shown and the pressures experienced by your people during the pandemic and beyond.

The future of wellbeing is also about recognising how the workplace - or more accurately the way people are working - has changed due to the way the pandemic forced change on all of us. Employees now associate wellbeing with flexibility, personal safety, empathetic leadership. To be successful, post pandemic, the emphasis on employee wellbeing needs to shift, once and for all, from an 'initiative' to being embedded in the organisation's culture.

There are some key elements to implementing this successfully:

1. Choose your providers carefully.

Do a review of your current and potential L&D providers, how focused are they on general wellness? Do they recognise the issues we raise here? Are they 'well' themselves? We would caution against hiring anyone who's so rushed off their feet they always sound stressed when you speak to them. If they can't sort out their own issues, how can they teach your staff. It also helps to have people on board who have sound psychological training, particularly for senior development programmes.

2. Step by Step

Big initiatives can sound great and look great but if you want something sustainable it's best to introduce things one step at a time. Start with something you know you can manage and resource and then build it. Trust is often lost in organisation because big shiny initiatives get announced and then fade fast.

3. Develop your own understanding of wellness

If you are armed with sound knowledge about the link between stress and illness and dysfunctional culture and sickness then you can make well informed decisions with confidence. Training for yourself in an applied psychology like NLP, CBT or TA can give you a lot of knowledge in a short space of time.

Want to know more?

Look at the free resources on our website, including articles, relaxation audio tracks, quizzes to assess the health of your organisation, and a chapter of Karen and John's award winning books, "Real Leaders for the Real World" and "Time Mastery".

Go to www.monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk.

If you have any questions, or if you'd like to find out more about how we can help you maintain a healthy and productive workplace, please call us on **0117 4501407** or get in touch by email at info@monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

