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Project Manager: **Emma-Jean Edwards**
emmajean.edwards@medioplanet.com Business
Development Manager: **Roz Boldy** Managing Director: **Alex
Williams** Head of Business Development: **Ellie McGregor**
Head of Production: **Kirsty Elliott** Designer: **Thomas Kent**
Digital Manager: **Harvey O'Donnell** Paid Media Strategist:
Jonni Asfaha Production Assistant: **Henry Phillips**
Medioplanet contact information: P: **+44 (0) 203 642 0737**
E: uk.info@medioplanet.com All images supplied
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Shifting the focus on **employee benefits** in a pandemic

Remote working for the past year has caused a shift in the way we incentivise staff.

“Same room, different laptop” is how a friend described their new job recently. Remote working has made workplaces which offer a cacophony of onsite perks, in order to attract and retain the best and the brightest, irrelevant to huge swathes of workers. Beautifully designed offices with onsite employee benefits lie largely silent in 2021.



WRITTEN BY
Debi O'Donovan
Director & Co-Founder,
Reward & Employee
Benefits Association

How to motivate employees

Employers are left wondering how to turn the tanker, to switch off the costs of onsite benefits and transfer the money into meaningful offerings that employees stuck at home in never ending restrictive tiers and lockdowns will appreciate.

Human resources and leadership teams ponder the conundrum on whether to renew building leases or to simply mothball the gyms and workstations. Meanwhile, there is an urgent need coming from the millions of homebound workers: their wellbeing is being battered about like never before.

The REBA/AXA Health Employee Wellbeing Research to be published in April, shows that while 52% of employers believe that remote working has had a positive impact on employee wellbeing and 88% say the same for flexible working hours, employers do have key concerns. Three quarters (76%) worry about the physical inactivity of staff, while 41% say the digital and screen overload is a high risk, with a further 53% saying it is a medium risk.



This means social wellbeing strategies are on the rise as we recognise the vital role of work to create connection and human interaction.

Changing workplace perks and benefits

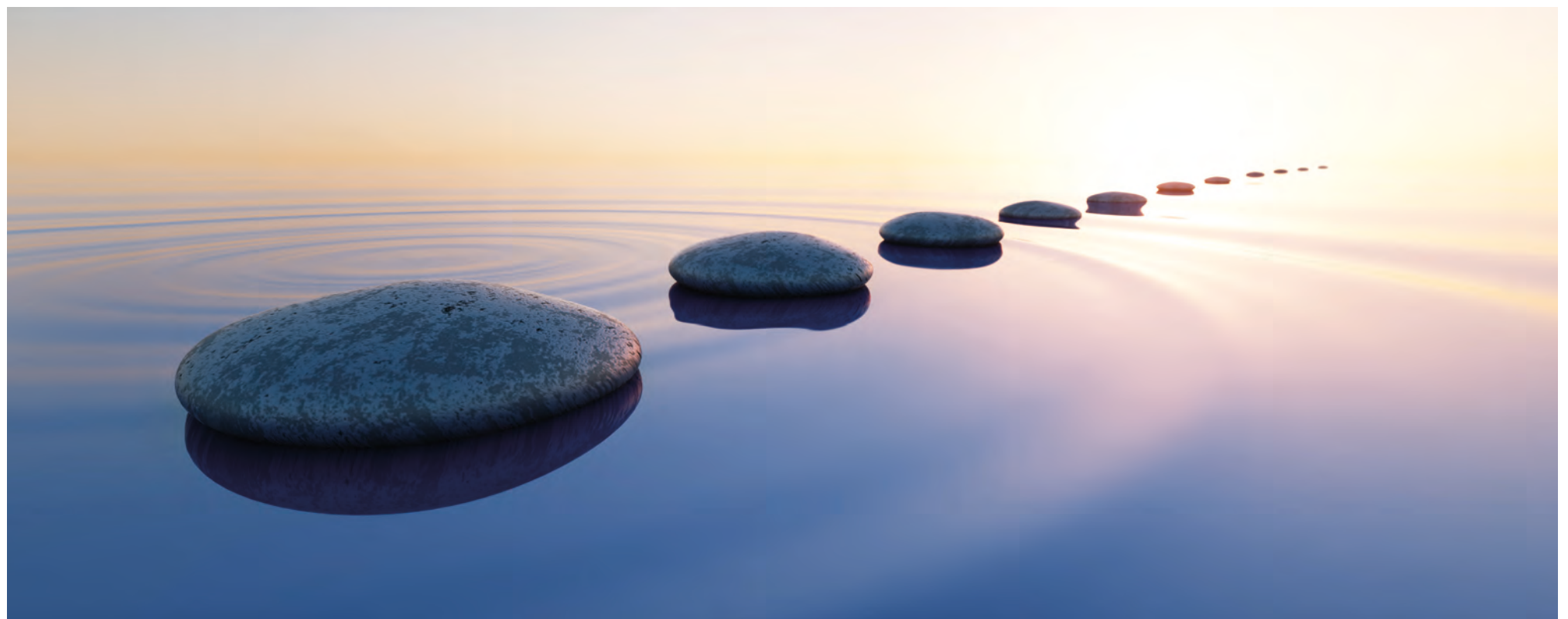
Thus, former onsite wellbeing benefits and perks on offer from generous employers are changing. The study shows that the proportion of employers offering virtual GP access shot from 37% in January 2020 to 61% in 2021 (up from 12% five years ago). At the same time, 48% of employers pay for staff to access wellbeing apps (up from 30% in January 2020, and 9% five years ago).

Employers are looking beyond converting traditional wellbeing benefits into ones that could be used from home. They have started to take into account who their workers live with and the communities they live in. This means social wellbeing strategies are on the rise as we recognise the vital role of work to create connection and human interaction.

There has been a huge rise in benefits for people living with the employee to use – from the ability to attend classes together, hire tutors for home schooling and treats to share together.

It is early days but expect to see a significant shift in wellbeing benefits during 2021 as we come to terms with the fact that remote working, in some form, is here to stay.

Read more at
[businessand
industry.co.uk](https://businessandindustry.co.uk)



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Employee wellbeing is no longer just a 'nice to have'

Employers are offering wellbeing services because when people feel well, they perform better - and so does the business.

As well as benefits like OnDemand GP and health insurance, many employers now offer preventive wellbeing measures that place emphasis on exercise, sleep, healthy food and stress reduction, which have a significant impact on preventing underlying conditions.

Even before the pandemic, workers needed support to help protect their health. In the current climate, employers should think about how their current provision will support a resilient and productive workforce.

COVID-19 has changed the game. Employee wellbeing is no longer an optional extra; it's essential if you want to recruit and retain the best people.



Many employers now offer preventive wellbeing measures that place emphasis on exercise, sleep, healthy food and stress reduction, which have a significant impact on preventing underlying conditions.

Five key reasons why ignoring wellbeing is a core business risk:

1. Attract excellent staff

Post-COVID-19, employees increasingly expect wellbeing support to form part of their benefits offering. An organisation that shows they value employees as people, not just production units, stands out in a crowded job market.

2. Improve your employee retention

With the cost of replacing an employee estimated at anything from a third to a fifth of their salary, it's no wonder that employers want to keep staff in posts and performing at their best for as long as possible.¹

3. Improve business productivity

Driving a high-performance culture without support for mental and physical health puts employees at risk of burnout. But with the right wellbeing support, your people feel empowered to perform at their best, day after day.

4. Boost employee engagement

Motivated and committed employees go the extra mile, the link between engagement and business success is recognised across industries.

5. Reduce presenteeism and absenteeism

Absenteeism caused by low engagement or poor health costs UK businesses millions in lost productivity. Even when employees are at work, they may not be delivering return on investment.

Presenteeism – where employees are at work but aren't functioning at 100% because of health or other issues – is another widespread problem.

What makes a successful wellbeing strategy?

A complete wellbeing strategy will make a long-term difference to productivity across the workforce. Mental, physical, financial and social wellbeing are all linked, a successful strategy needs to embrace all of these aspects.

For example, a Cycle to Work scheme links physical, mental and financial wellbeing. Employees save money on a new bike and reduced fuel costs, whilst regular cycling also has a positive impact on both physical and mental health.

Your wellbeing strategy also needs to have defined objectives and markers of success. Ultimately you need to see measurable outcomes for the company's bottom line. How will you collect information on the difference wellbeing initiatives make overall - absence figures, sick pay costs, engagement scores?



Mental, physical, financial and social wellbeing are all linked, a successful strategy needs to embrace all of these aspects.

But it's not all about hard data. Consider reaching out to your workforce for anecdotal evidence. This can be helpful when building the case for wellbeing investment to achieve less easily measured results, such as improved employee motivation and loyalty, with consequent gains for performance and productivity.

When we're feeling well, we're at our best. Healthy employees are more productive and take less time off, so it's no surprise that employers see that by helping staff be well, you are ensuring your business will do well.

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1. CIPD, Employee turnover and retention (21 Jul 2020). Accessed at <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/resourcing/turnover-retention-factsheet>



WRITTEN BY
Deborah Frost
Chief Executive,
Personal Group

Why is mental health and wellbeing is a boardroom priority

As we face a global mental health crisis, I believe that employers, a cornerstone of every society, can play a key role in our recovery.

I imagine if every employer built a culture which challenged mental health stigma and signposted to appropriate support, so that anyone who is struggling will feel comfortable to ask for help.

What if jobs and projects were designed to ensure that people thrive rather than burn out? Action such as this could help millions of individuals to stay mentally well. More widely, this combined effort across employers would contribute to society's recovery, reduce strain on the NHS and the economy. Prioritising workplace mental health is the right thing to do.

Leaders can't afford not to

It's also the business critical thing to do. Poor mental health costs UK businesses £45 billion and 70 million workdays each year, according to a pre-pandemic report from Deloitte. Meanwhile stakeholders – employees, customers and investors – are increasingly judging organisations on workplace culture. If there was an IT problem costing businesses thousands every month, as well as impacting on productivity and corporate reputation, the leadership team would take action.

Any sustained change to business culture requires leaders to commit to action and be accountable for progress. I am proud that CMHA members are leading the way on workplace mental health, and this success is down to the fact that in each of these businesses, the leadership team is engaged on the workplace mental health agenda.

I am also seeing these leaders innovate to support positive mental health in their wider ecosystem. Some businesses are including wellbeing clauses in supplier contracts and offering mental health awareness training to contracted builders and cleaning staff. While others are ensuring that their services are supportive of customers who may be struggling with their mental health.

As we emerge from this global pandemic, the concept of the workplace is being redrawn, while more boardrooms are considering their social conscience and purpose. Leaders have an opportunity to reshape businesses so that they play a role in tackling our mental health crisis, while also putting their organisation in a stronger position to weather future storms. Now is the time to act.

For workplace mental health guidance, see the [CMHA Thriving At Work Guide](#).



WRITTEN BY
Poppy Jaman OBE
CEO, City Mental
Health Alliance

How your employer can support your mental health

Many employees are struggling with their mental health as a result of the pandemic. If you are one of them, don't be afraid to ask your employer for help.



WRITTEN BY
Emma Mamo
Head of Workplace
Wellbeing, Mind

Now a year has passed since the initial lockdown, it's a good time to reflect on our own wellbeing and make the most of any support available from our employers. This time last year, many of us found ourselves hastily packing up our things in the office and began working from home for the first time. Few of us realised just how long these new arrangements would last or what other challenges might be thrown our way.

Mental health problems are common

It's completely understandable if you're struggling with your mental health more than usual. If you've noticed changes to your thoughts, feelings and behaviours that last longer than two weeks, keep returning and are affecting your daily life (including work and relationships), speak to someone you trust, ideally your GP.

Your employer's duty

It's in your employer's interests to look after your wellbeing. Those who invest in staff wellbeing typically report increased staff morale and productivity as well as reduced sickness absence and turnover.

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have a legal duty to put in place reasonable adjustments to support any disabled employees. This can include staff experiencing mental health problems in certain circumstances.

Adjustments could include changes to working hours, roles and responsibilities. We also encourage employers to offer support measures and adjustments to anyone who is



Those who invest in staff wellbeing typically report increased staff morale and productivity as well as reduced sickness absence and turnover.

experiencing poor mental health, regardless of whether they are covered by the Equality Act.

Adapting to the changes

Any wellbeing initiatives offered by your employer should be easy to access virtually. Mind employees are offered flexible working hours, access to an Employee Assistance Programme and reflective practice sessions with a trained counsellor.

Prioritising self-care

It's important we look after ourselves too. Try to get some physical activity into your day, ideally outdoors in nature. Get outside at lunchtime if possible, given vitamin D – even in low levels – can improve our mood.

We encourage managers to regularly create the space for staff to talk about any issues they're facing – inside or outside work so hopefully your manager is checking in with you.

Working from home can make it harder to find a work/life balance. At the end of the working day, try to put some physical distance between you and your workspace, such as by going for a walk, cooking, doing an online workout or contacting a friend.



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How better mental health support can change the world

More companies are realising the benefits of offering their staff mental health coaching and therapy.



INTERVIEW WITH
Charles Wells
Founder and CEO,
HelloSelf

WRITTEN BY:
Tony Greenway

Why did you set up the organisation?

Until 2011, I'd lived a rather exciting and successful life. I'd been a virologist and neurobiologist at Oxford; I'd worked in healthcare marketing; started and sold my first social media company and I was running an award-winning global advertising team. Then everything changed. I had a category five brain haemorrhage while running, woke up from a coma and realised that my previously successful life had been pointless.

So I promised, if I survived, to invest my energy in three things: being happy and healthy; the relationships that matter to me; and doing something world changing. With regards the latter, there are 600 million people globally who have stress, anxiety and depression. I decided I wanted to help at least some of them improve their psychological fitness with effective therapy or proactive psychological coaching.

Are people in the UK becoming more open to discussing their mental health?

People are realising that we all have mental health and that we can actively improve our mental health much like our fitness. COVID-19 has only accelerated the trend towards greater openness because it's made a lot of people realise what's really important to them.

As a result, employees are demanding mental wellbeing support now. It's also made most employers realise that their staff probably need more support and coaching than they had previously.

What are the best ways for companies to provide wellbeing and mental health support?

There are three things that all employers should think about doing. First: ensure staff have rapid access to content that helps support their mental wellbeing and psychological fitness. Second: give employees rapid access to treatment and therapy, because early intervention can make a huge difference to outcomes. Third: offer them proactive coaching to prevent illness and improve performance.

Can psychological coaching benefit people who aren't experiencing a mental health issue?

Absolutely. I find it interesting that companies put so much time, money and effort into coaching people to be a better time manager or leader, or people manager — but give no coaching about coping with stress, making clear decisions, or growing your 'self' and being your best self. Psychology is important for everyone — so everyone can benefit from psychological coaching.

Is it an employer's responsibility to provide mental wellbeing support to staff?

Wellbeing used to be a tick-box exercise. But now, good HR teams — usually led by passionate, people-centric CEOs — realise that it's essential to staff performance. So if employers care about their staff and want them to bring their best selves to work, they should 100% be giving them access to psychological coaching. Smart employers see this as a way

to attract and retain the best staff, create great cultures and get great work and decisions out of psychologically focused minds.



With regards the latter, there are 600 million people globally who have stress, anxiety and depression. I decided I wanted to help at least some of them improve their psychological fitness.

What trends are you expecting to see over the coming years in this field?

I think we'll see most employers start to offer their employees fast access to psychological coaching and therapy. This is going to be so necessary as we continue through the pandemic to our 'new normal' — and those companies who view this as an essential benefit, will soon be setting the minimum standard of what it means to be a 'good' employer.

In the medium term, I think we'll see a lot of the executive coaching budget move towards qualified psychological coaching, because it gives companies better decision-making which is a huge competitive advantage.

In the longer term, I hope that looking after our mental health will become the everyday norm for everyone. Imagine a world where we all live 1% more fulfilling lives, where we are 1% better to those around us, and we make 1% better decisions. Apply that over 6.8 billion people... and we really will have changed the world.

The office: It is the guardian of company culture

Much has changed in the last twelve months, particularly for those of us in the office industry. But is this really the end of the office?

We have heard increasing cries about the end of the office and whispers of a new way of working that's better for all. It seems to me that any analysis that does away with the office entirely is surface deep. While there are many benefits to working from home, it is not without its challenges or faults.

Loss of connections

In the last year we, as a workforce, have lost countless opportunities to connect with our peers, our clients and our colleagues. As mentors, we have lost precious moments to support growth and development. As individuals, it may feel we have lost our friends. These physical moments where we come together to connect are invaluable – they carry countless benefits for our mental health, but they benefit our businesses, too.

Company culture is often described as the character of an organisation. It is an intangible element of your business that is made up of your values, traditions and beliefs. Yet it demands a physical guardian to ensure it is nurtured and protected. It demands an office.

Workplace design and culture

Different work cultures demand different things from their employees. Naturally, then, it is not surprising different company cultures carry different design needs. Businesses with traditional or hierarchical cultures will upweight the value of individual space, space that encourages individuals to focus on tasks and procedure; spaces that minimise distraction.

Contrarily "clan cultures" will demand a space that reflect its focus on flexibility and teamwork. For these cultures, the office design is likely to include brighter colours and more collaborative, open spaces throughout.

And then there are those businesses, which is where most sit in today's world, that fall somewhere in the middle: they require an office that can do both.

Of course, there is no 'one size fits all' model, nor should there be. But there should be an office: a physical space that feels uniquely 'you' – where your employees come together and feel a part of something.



WRITTEN BY
Robin Brodie-Cooper
President, British Council
for Offices and Partner
at Gleeds



Times are so difficult right now, it's more important than ever that we take the time to consider and look after our mental wellbeing.



How world class athletes can help your **workplace wellbeing**

You might be wondering why you're reading an article by an Olympic swimmer in a campaign about employee wellbeing. However, there are clear parallels between the importance of wellbeing in work and sport.



WRITTEN BY
Adam Whitehead
Commonwealth Games
Gold Medallist and Head
of Athlete Training, Dame
Kelly Holmes Trust

You often hear athletes talking about a positive mental attitude and focussing on clear goals, but these aren't just cliches. Without the ability to think clearly and look after your mental wellbeing, your ability to deliver on the pitch, pool or court will be impacted. The same is true for the workplace.

Times are so difficult right now, it's more important than ever that we take the time to consider and look after our mental wellbeing. We've all seen sports stars encouraging people to get active, but we train athletes to work on a different level from that. Competing at an Olympic or Paralympic Games comes with the highest pressure imaginable. You have this one opportunity to deliver your best so it's crucial that you arrive at the Games in the best position possible to achieve that.

Learning how to take time out

To be able to consistently train at a high level, you need to know when to be able to switch it on to do those hard sessions and when to switch off and relax, to allow yourself to re-charge the batteries.

The same is true of the work environment. It's impossible to work at 100% capacity for 100% of the time, by stepping back and considering your mental wellbeing, this gives you the best opportunity to perform consistently at your best.

Tips to help employees thrive

Athletes spend their lives managing this process in order to succeed at the highest level and our athletes now work with businesses to deliver workshops around improving business performance and managing wellbeing. These wellbeing tips from our athletes can help organisations and individuals thrive in the workplace:

- **Get to know your colleagues, take notice of changes. Are they quiet, under more stress than usual, reach out to them to have a chat if so?**
- **Be flexible with staff, allow them time to get outside in daytime during sunshine hours to get some exercise or connect with the outside world.**
- **Train your staff – give them an understanding of mental health and stress management.**
- **Look at the Five Ways to Wellbeing – connect, taking notice, be active, keep learning and give.**
- **Build in time in your day to move, stretch and be active.**

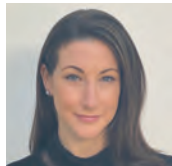


The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust works with athletes towards the end of their competitive sporting careers to help them transition into a successful life beyond sport. We train and develop these athletes to mentor young people facing disadvantage and also to support companies to improve their performance. damekellyholmestrust.org

Advertorial

Touchless coffee experience to boost employee wellbeing

How a high-end touchless coffee machine is turning the premium coffee experience from an executive perk into a source of workplace wellbeing for all employees.



INTERVIEW WITH
Tina Williams
Co-Founder,
Scanomat UK

WRITTEN BY
Linda Whitney

Thousands of valued employees are returning to offices offering a new perk – fresh coffee brewed exactly to suit their taste, ordered COVID safe through an app.

“Offering a personalised coffee experience, touchless via a single tap of a smartphone, or by voice control with Siri, is a practical way for organisations to show they value the health and wellbeing of employees and can help attract and retain new talent,” says Tina Williams, co-founder of Scanomat UK & Ireland.

“Hundreds of clients have installed our TopBrewer touchless coffee machine ready for employees’ return to the office. It is becoming the solution of choice in the workplace. There is also high demand in the co-working, co-living and hospitality sectors.”

Scanomat’s TopBrewer bean-to-cup coffee machines are hidden under-counter, with just a swan neck tap on view, making them popular with architects and interior designers. “You can order through a counter-mounted iPad, but it’s the capacity to order by phone app that means COVID-aware organisations are queueing to install TopBrewer. We pioneered touchless coffee 10 years ago but it has never been more relevant,” says Williams.

In the UK, 44% of coffee consumed out of home is drunk in workplaces and the amount of coffee we drink, as well as the quality expectation, is increasing.

Third most vital workplace facility

Employees rated coffee and tea facilities third in importance, after desks and chairs in research by global employee experience consultants Leesman.

This is borne out by Scanomat research, where 90% of respondents said that TopBrewer could improve their overall workplace experience.

Premium coffee and more

Today, any old coffee will not do. “Now all generations expect speciality coffee,” says Williams. “We’re all connoisseurs.” TopBrewer uses beans directly sourced from farmers by Scanomat’s Amokka Coffee Roasters, for traceability and sustainability. Scanomat found that 92% of respondents said the TopBrewer user experience was better, when compared to conventional tabletop premium bean-to-cup machines.

The TopBrewer tap can also deliver steaming hot water, hot chocolate, and even still and sparkling water. A second product also delivers juices and flavoured water, reducing the problem of bottle recycling.

Williams says: “From being a high-end perk for executives and VIPs, premium coffee is becoming a wellbeing benefit for everyone.”

Advertisement by
Scanomat UK

TopBrewer

Read more at
topbrewer.co.uk



©IMAGE PROVIDED BY SCANOMAT UK



Why investing in employee wellbeing is good for business

As the economy emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, organisations will thrive if they prioritise the wellbeing of their people.

Businesses that invest in improving their employees’ wellbeing and creating a culture of openness and acceptance around mental health will recover quicker after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kirsten Samuel, CEO and founder of award-winning employee wellbeing company Kamwell, says human health is inextricably linked to business

health, and wellbeing should not be viewed as a cost but an investment.

“We are poised for a mental health pandemic following COVID-19,” she says. “Wellbeing must become a priority for the C-suite with leaders playing a more strategic, visible and active role”.

Implementing wellbeing strategies

However, according to Aon’s UK Benefits & Trends Survey for 2021, only 44% of employers have an employee wellbeing strategy and one fifth do not intend to implement one in the near future.

This could be a mistake as research by consultancy Deloitte reveals that the cost of poor employee mental health has increased by 16% and is costing the UK economy £45 billion per annum. Deloitte claims there is a return of £5 for every £1 employers invest in mental health initiatives.

Samuel says companies perform better and retain and attract the best

talent if their employees are thriving physically, mentally, financially, intellectually, socially and spiritually.

Has the workplace changed forever?

“During the pandemic, we have seen a new style of leadership emerge; one that is compassionate, empathetic, authentic and vulnerable,” Samuel says. “The leaders of tomorrow must be more human-centred and people-focused –

we are all human and we want to know that our leaders are too.”

Kamwell advises that as the spotlight on our health and wellbeing has never been greater, there should be increased accountability for all of us to prioritise our individual and collective wellbeing.

Workplace wellbeing

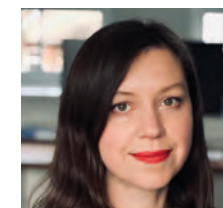
should be a partnership between the employer and employee – it’s about continuous feedback: asking the right questions, listening and taking action.

Kamwell’s COO Emma James says “If there is one thing COVID-19 has taught us, it is that wellbeing needs to be a strategic priority for every business. No longer can it be a tick-box exercise; no longer can it fall down the list of priorities.” James adds that “We’re becoming ever-more intentional about the organisations we align with, both as employees and consumers; in order to be future-proof, businesses need to place equal value on profit, planet and people.”

Written by: **Steve Hemsley**



INTERVIEW WITH
Kirsten Samuel
CEO & founder, Kamwell



INTERVIEW WITH
Emma James
COO, Kamwell

Paid for by **Kamwell**

Find out more at kamwell.com



Do employers really care about **employee wellbeing**?

If the last 12 months have shown us anything, it is that poor employee wellbeing is a core business risk.



WRITTEN BY
Maggie Williams
Content Director,
Reward and Employee
Benefits Association

As a result of COVID-19, we've seen commitment to employee wellbeing shoot up the corporate priority list, along with flexible working and remote collaboration.

Putting employee wellbeing first

For many forward-looking businesses, putting employee wellbeing at the centre of a positive workplace culture is nothing new. However, the scale of business commitment to at least some form of support has changed.

The Reward and Employee Benefits Association (REBA)/ AXA Health Employee Wellbeing Report 2021, due for release in April, found that 82% of private sector businesses now have some form of wellbeing benefits or strategy for staff. Roll back to our 2016 report, that figure was just 25%.

However, are employers really committed to employee wellbeing as a core part of business success and corporate risk management? This year's research found that nearly half of employers (47%) say the biggest barrier to understanding the effectiveness of wellbeing initiatives is a lack of key performance indicators to measure against.

Without that information, employers will struggle to build long-term wellbeing plans in their organisations and really understand employees' health needs.



Employee wellbeing will continue to be as crucial as ever, far beyond the effects of the current pandemic.

Linking wellbeing to business strategy

It's good news, then, that 91% of respondents said collecting more consistent data and management information is important or a key priority during 2021 – but what will businesses be measuring this data against? At present, only 19% of private sector respondents say that their wellbeing strategy is closely linked to business strategy.

One way to help forge closer links between day-to-day business and employee wellbeing could be to involve line managers more closely. Line managers have a dual role of contributing directly to business objectives and looking after employee wellbeing. But at present, just 25% of employers say managers are a part of their HR risk framework, and a mere 17% say positive team wellbeing is a performance indicator for line managers.

With high pressure working environments already cited as a high risk by 50% of respondents, and a medium risk by a further 45%, employee wellbeing will continue to be as crucial as ever, far beyond the effects of the current pandemic.

The 2021 findings show the extent to which wellbeing has become part of everyday business as a result of COVID-19. The next step is to make it a core part of corporate measurement, as vital to performance as profits and productivity.

What if work was **good for you**?



WRITTEN BY
Louise Aston
Wellbeing Director,
Business in the
Community

Our mental health shouldn't be at risk when we go to work.
It's down to employers to stop that once and for all.

Ensuring people feel safe at work should be the top priority for leaders. When we are at work, we don't expect to be physically injured and nor should our mental health be negatively impacted. However, the reality is that 41% of employees have experienced poor mental health caused by work in the past year.¹

Added pressure on employees

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the risk of burnout by the pressure for remote workers to stay online outside of working hours. In 2020, this meant British employees worked up to £24bn worth of unpaid overtime.²

As we shape our response to the pandemic, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to reinvent ways of working that enhance mental health and wellbeing by:

Commit to prioritising mental health at work. Make the Mental Health at Work Commitment, a simple framework designed for all employers.

Establish empathy, compassion and inclusion as core leadership competencies in your foundation by training senior leaders and line managers how to listen to employees and act with care.

Create an active listening culture. Understand how your people are feeling. Business leaders can organise regular surveys and active listening sessions to create safe places at work for employees.

Creating a safe environment

One of the biggest risks facing employers now is that their employees do not feel safe to speak up about their mental health without fear of being blamed or ostracised. Worryingly, we



Worryingly, we know that one in three employees who experience poor mental health admit to telling nobody and are left to suffer in silence.

know that one in three employees who experience poor mental health admit to telling nobody³ and are left to suffer in silence.

Tackling this means investing in psychological safety. That might sound like jargon, but it is really no different to operational safety: employees need to feel they can speak up when they see something that could be a risk to others.

Businesses need to treat mental health like a physical injury: preventing the causes, not treating the symptoms, should be their main concern. That means creating a culture in which trust and wellbeing are firmly fixed on the daily agenda and helping staff to feel that their workplace is somewhere that they really belong.

That's when work starts to be good for employees' mental health, not a challenge they have to overcome. And that's just good business.

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Thriving – not just surviving

Good mental health at work leads to better performance.
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Why businesses must boost employee experience in a hybrid work world

The workplace is changing, so people must have the right culture and tools as well as support to work from anywhere.



INTERVIEW WITH
Stuart Templeton
Head of UK,
Slack

WRITTEN BY
Steve Hemsley

Business leaders must take employee experience to the next level to benefit from the new post-pandemic trend of hybrid working.

This means creating a culture that boosts employee wellbeing and providing workers with the right tools to be productive at home and in the new-look office environment.

Stuart Templeton, Head of UK at the business messaging app which organises conversations into channels, Slack, says things have changed forever and organisations must think of employees as individuals.

“Managers must take time to connect with people and be more aware of their physical and mental health,” he says. “Many of us will want a hybrid working model in future. There are also strong financial reasons for businesses to support this trend.”

Templeton cites recent statistics from Slack’s consortium, Future Forum, revealing a flexible, hybrid working model remains the favoured choice among employees.

63% of knowledge workers favour the flexibility of a hybrid remote-office model and 20% want to work remotely full-time. Only 12% say they want to return to full-time office work.

The study also claims 43% of employees who have flexibility in where they work are more productive. With the right support, they can also experience lower levels of stress and anxiety.

Changing company culture

One example of a company already reacting to a desire among its

employees to work more flexibly is Octopus Energy.

It promotes an open culture and uses tools such as Slack and Zoom to let employees communicate with other team members directly, from colleagues to senior leaders and even the company’s CEO Greg Jackson. Since the pandemic started, Octopus have expanded the way they use these tools. For example, Octopus hosts a virtual get-together every Friday afternoon with the entire company, which already has more than 1,200 staff members globally.

Templeton says the culture of many companies has had to change with people more focused on business outcomes than the hours they work.

“Culture is now all about delivery and a strong alignment with, and clarity around, company objectives. These need to trickle down in an open and transparent way to teams and individuals,” he says. “The ‘command and control’ leadership style won’t work in a hybrid world where the management approach must be built on trust.”

He adds that giving workers the right tools and technology to do their job effectively from anywhere will boost collaboration and avoid silos.

Such tools like Slack also allow for emoji custom statuses, such as the lunch symbol, so that an employee’s time can be respected when signifying to their team how quickly they can respond to messages or if they are available.

When it comes to the physical office, the emphasis will be on

creating spaces with fewer desks where people can collaborate and get quality work done.

“There will still be times when you need to meet physically as many people thrive around human connection at work. The hybrid approach enables this and lets companies widen their talent pool nationally and internationally.”

Avoiding proximity bias

Templeton does warn employers against what he describes as ‘proximity bias’. This is where people can be overlooked because they are not in the physical office when meetings take place or key decisions are made.

“Before the pandemic there was a sense of expectation that if you wanted to be part of a project team you had to be in the office,” he says. “We all need to be careful not to inherently slip into proximity bias. There is evidence that people can be more productive and still part of a team with a hybrid working model and with the right tools at their fingertips.”

Rethinking employee experience: The business dos and don’ts

Do:

- Encourage asynchronous work.
- Offer flexibility for both working hours and locations.
- Adopt openness as the default management style.
- Seek a global talent pool.
- Make employee wellbeing a priority.

Don’t:

- Be bias towards proximity and only favour those in the office.
- Encourage 9-5 for all.
- Promote a one-size-fits-all approach to practices and policies.
- Rely on email for communication internally and externally.
- Continue viewing assigned desks and expensive, open-plan offices as the ‘gold standard’.



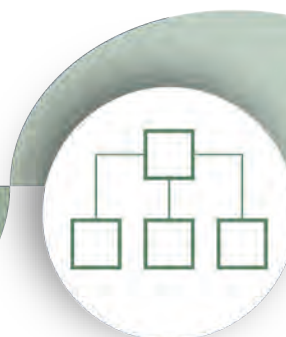
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Slack by numbers

156K+
paid customers



65
of the Fortune
100 companies



5B+
actions in Slack each
week, including

1B+
mobile actions



2300+
apps in the App Directory

Up 42% year-over-year

Mental health at work: another levelling up agenda?

'Levelling up' is a new phrase being spoken about across the Government and beyond. It refers to a rebalancing of the economy to create more equality between prosperous areas and those seen as 'left behind'.

If the Government was looking for a good template for the mental health policy agenda then, arguably, they could take a closer look at the levelling up that is happening in many workplaces between mental and physical health.

We still have a long way to go, but there are signs that the pandemic has created a new understanding of psychological wellbeing as well as how important this is to all sorts of metrics, including engagement, job satisfaction and productivity.

Good jobs equal good health

It's over simplistic but the basis of good mental health is often quality jobs. Recent work from Carnegie UK and the Royal Society of Arts has asked the question 'can good work solve the productivity puzzle?' - the answer is, broadly, yes.

The 'long tail' of poor productivity, identified by Bank of England Chief Economist Andy Haldane, is often put down to poor management practices - what is more important than the management practice of looking after people's wellbeing?

As we start to see the end of lockdown on the horizon, we must ensure the conversation about jobs is not just about the quantity but the quality.

Out of sight out of mind

Acas has seen a growing interest in its advice on managing mental health during the pandemic from employees, managers and business owners. For those working remotely it can be hard to spot the signs of distress or mental health issues in oneself as well as in others. So, it's important to encourage disclosure and to offer the right levels of empathy and understanding.

Everyone's resilience has taken a knock, especially in the recent dark weeks. But I sense that a growing literacy is emerging and, for the first time, many of us are beginning to consciously think about personal coping strategies.

We have been going through a period of national reflection (though many key workers have had precious little time to stop and think while safeguarding our lives!). If there is one lesson to emerge from this hiatus it is this: we need to look after the most vulnerable at work and in society. That includes you if you are not able to cope right now.



WRITTEN BY
Adrian Wakeling
Senior Policy
Adviser, Acas

We have an opportunity to design a better workplace – so long as we keep our space

The pandemic has created a discussion around the future of the workplace, with more employees wanting to return to the office, we need to use space to nurture productivity.



WRITTEN BY
Paul Patenall
Former President
of the BCO and Projects
Director at U+I

The pandemic has created a discussion around the future of the workplace, with more employees wanting to return to the office, we need to use space to nurture productivity.

Once, at the start of this pandemic, it was common to hear people sermonise about the end of the office. "It's over!" They proclaimed. "See how we can all just work from home!" Well, they were right - to an extent. We can only work from home. But we don't want to.

Independent polling, commissioned by the BCO, finds that most office workers want a return to the office, while working flexibly from home or satellite offices closer to home one or two days a week.

Reducing office spaces

And yet - there is talk of companies reducing their office space. The reasoning goes that, with workers spending more time at home, the number of workers in an office will be lower than pre-pandemic, meaning there is less need for space.

While the first part of this argument may be right - it is offset by the fact that offices will be less densely occupied - it is wrong to see this as a reason to cut space. Less occupied offices should provide an opportunity, not a cost saving.

For decades, the average British office worker - and especially the average London office worker - has been forced to work cheek-by-collared-jowl with their co-workers. Office space is expensive, so employees become less human and more sardine.

Giving workers more space

This approach has many negative effects. Workers work best when they have space, it boosts their wellbeing and so too their productivity. If they are denied it, their wellbeing and productivity suffers. They also work well when given natural light - something harder to find in cramped deep plan offices, often left for senior staff who are

allocated window seats.

Offices in other regions - particularly Scandinavia - follow these principles brilliantly and are full of space and light. The Danes have a word, *arbejdsglæde*, which means 'work joy'. It's a concept that's much easier to understand in a bright, spacious Copenhagen office than cramped workplace back here in Blighty.

Now, though, we have an opportunity to do better. Companies have vast office spaces - already costed for, already designed - that will now be less densely filled as social distancing pervades and as workers spend some of their time at home. Rather than cut space back, companies should retain the space and utilise it more effectively.

Space increases productivity

New space can lead to better workplaces. Workers can be given more room to breathe. More light, too. Space can also be used to create new areas that help workers work in different ways, with some areas providing solitude and others encouraging collaboration. No longer do we need to be crammed in.

An office is, after all, an investment to recruit and retain the best staff. A good office helps you get more from your staff and now, in a world where we can work from home, it also attracts them into the office in the first place. This is beneficial. Offices help foster company culture, provide learning opportunities and boost creativity. Without the promise of a good office to come into, workers may opt to stay at home in conditions bad for their productivity and isolated away from the company and their colleagues.

So, we return to the office, let's not see all this new open space as a cost, waiting to be cut. Let's see it as an opportunity to do better, to create offices that are more enjoyable and help us all be more productive.

“*Less occupied offices should provide an opportunity, not a cost saving.*”



How perfect audio can create a **productive and happy workforce**

Bad audio can have a detrimental effect on business and negative impact on the wellbeing of both staff and management.



WRITTEN BY
James Hill
Director, Integrated
Systems U.K. & Ireland,
Shure

How many times have you sat through a presentation that suffered from unintelligible sound and poor audio, wishing you were anywhere but actually 'here'?

Impact of audio issues

Meetings that are hampered by audio issues can have a detrimental effect on a business, from basic problems such as employees being unable to carry out tasks, poor communication between departments and loss of company time rescheduling meetings that have broken down.

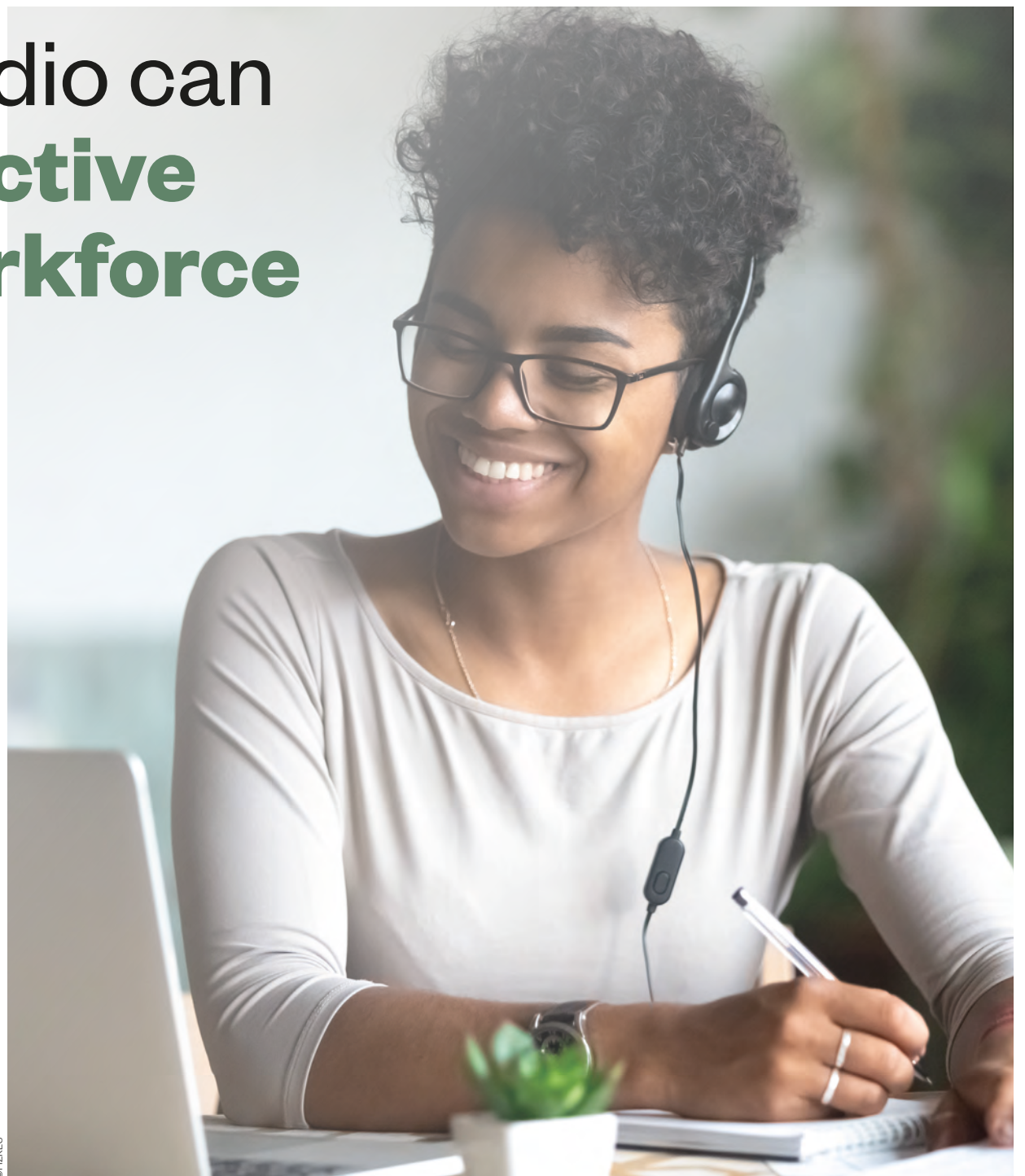
Poor audio can also have a direct and damaging effect on our emotional wellbeing; participants in a meeting who have to strain to understand a bad video conferencing call or presentation will grow frustrated, tired and will lose interest in the subject matter more quickly than the same participants in an environment where the audio is clear and concise.

Screen breaks are commonplace within many organisations, with some offering training and advice to reduce the stress and fatigue caused by staring at a screen. But what about training on good sound?

That feeling of wanting to be anywhere but 'here' could actually be your inner self telling you enough is enough. A recent study published in the Science Communication journal led by Eryn Newman from the University of Southern California and Norbert Schwarz from the Australian National University has supported this idea, suggesting that good and bad audio can have even greater effects on the emotional wellbeing and reactions of the listener. The report revealed that high quality audio in presentations makes people like you more, perceive you as being more intelligent and believing that the subject matter you're communicating is more important than the same presentation that suffers from poor quality audio.

Sound advice

One of the main culprits of poor sound is the space in which the presentation or meeting is taking place. Thankfully, hard office walls and big glass windows are now being replaced with acoustically treated spaces containing baffles to diffuse the sound, soft furnishings and curtains further help with unwanted noise through sound reflection and feedback.



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Successful audio can only be really effective at source itself, so investing in the correct microphone for use is a critical part of the audio chain. There are a number of different options from Shure to choose from; handheld microphones to desktop products, lavalier microphones and microphones that can be discreetly placed within the office ceiling, amplifying the sound through highly directional pickup lobes that capture participant audio from overhead. These microphones are not only sound exceptional, but they eliminate unwanted background noise, such as air conditioning units.

An elegant solution

With more people working from home, there's an even greater importance on good audio to help with concentration. Distractions are myriad, which can hamper a day's productivity. Add to this the poor sound from the inbuilt laptop mic and speaker or inadequate headphones and it adds to unwanted stress and fatigue. Investing in a good USB microphone and better headphones is not only a great asset for being heard, but it will also help with engagement and concentration levels, in turn helping with productivity and wellbeing.

Today, there really is no excuse for



With more people working from home, there's an even greater importance on good audio to help with concentration. Distractions are myriad, which can hamper a day's productivity.

having to endure a poor sounding presentation or meeting. As a market-leading audio specialist with a heritage of nearly 100 years in microphone design we can offer advice and support to enable organisations to meet and exceed audio requirements. Our portfolio of products has been designed to meet all needs and requirements, with USB microphones developed specifically for the home office, through to state-of-the-art solutions that use steerable lobe technology for an unobtrusive, natural sound.

By offering the best possible way to connect with your colleagues and clients effectively and effortlessly, with clear and concise audio, we aim to change that feeling of being anywhere but 'here' into a feeling of being heard.



Read more at
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