





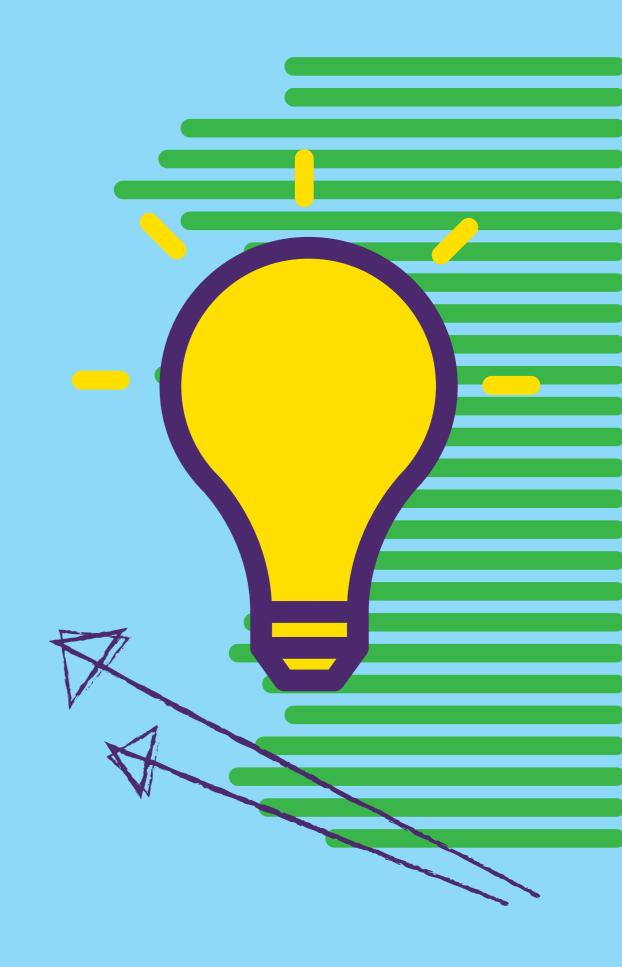


# ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS SPECIAL WELLBEING REPORT:

COVID-19 RECOVERY & EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH

THE ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS WELLBEING THOUGHT ACTION GROUP MARCH 2021 CHAIR GETHIN NADIN, CO-CHAIR YVETTE JANSE VAN RENSBURG

**EXPERT FOUNDING MEMBERS:** HANNAH JOHNSON, MAGGIE WILLIAMS & ROOPA NAGORI, **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:** BEN TOWERS & LINDSEY ARMSTRONG



THIS REPORT MARKS 10 YEARS
OF ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS, THE
GOVERNMENT-BACKED MOVEMENT
PROMOTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
AS A BETTER WAY TO WORK THAT
BENEFITS INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES,
TEAMS AND WHOLE ORGANISATIONS.

This special report following the global Coronavirus pandemic has been written by the Expert Panel and Associate Members of the Engage For Success Wellbeing Thought Action Group (TAG). The report aims to summarise the challenges employers will face over the coming years and through the collective experience and thought leadership of the TAG, share our advice and recommendations.





## WE ARE GRATEFUL TO BENEFEX FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN THE PUBLICATION OF THIS REPORT.

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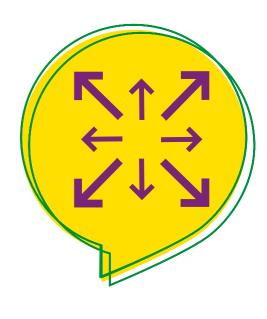
# ABOUT ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS

Engage for Success is a growing, dynamic, voluntary movement promoting employee engagement as a better way to work that benefits employees, teams and whole organisations.

Engage for Success's vision is that in 2025 the UK's working population is healthy, happy, and able to realise their potential. They are supported by their employers, are motivated and committed to contribute to organisational success and understand the part they have to play.

Engage for Success' thinkers and doers include practitioners, academics, researchers, consultants, service providers, representatives from membership organisations and professional bodies, all with extensive experience in the theory and practice of employee engagement.

# ABOUT THE EFS WELLBEING THOUGHT ACTION GROUP



The original Wellbeing Thought Action Group was established in 2013 with the publication of a white paper called 'Why Wellbeing Matters: Sustaining Employee Engagement and Performance'. The paper sets out the evidence for the linkage between employee engagement and wellbeing, and the consequential impact on individual and organisational performance.

As employee wellbeing has continued to climb the HR and CEO agenda, the new Wellbeing Thought Action Group was created in 2019 to assist UK employers in understanding the increasing body of workplace wellbeing research evidence and to produce tools and education to drive the business case for employee wellbeing. The group is currently run under the stewardship of Gethin Nadin as Chair.

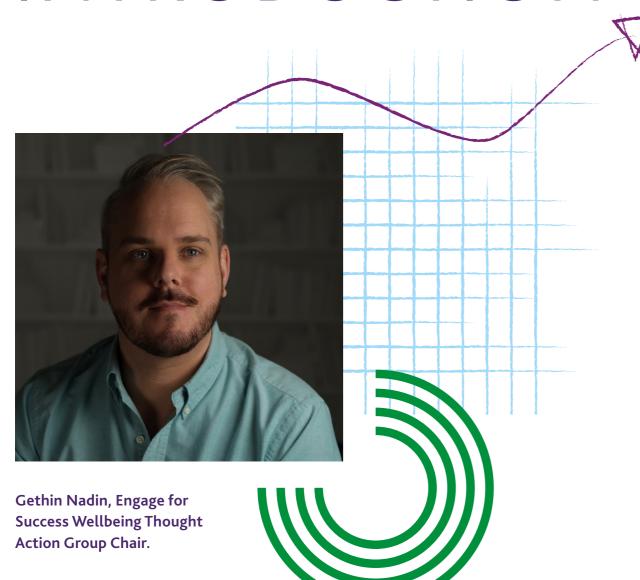
#### **OUR MISSION:**

The intention of the EfS Wellbeing TAG is to improve workplace wellbeing by providing employers with the support, education and research they need to create healthy and thriving cultures.

By using our combined expert knowledge, experience and energy, we aim to help employers to focus their efforts in the most effective way to achieve higher levels of performance and engagement through improved employee wellbeing.

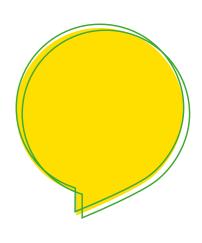
This unique group of experts have come together to share their expertise, forecasting, vast experience and time, to ensure that employers of any size understand the value of committing to improving employee wellbeing and have the evidence to do so.

## INTRODUCTION



Gethin Nadin is a psychologist and bestselling author who has worked in the HR tech space for two decades. Gethin is a frequent keynote speaker and writer on HR issues, employee engagement, employee experience and wellbeing. As well as the most well-known HR magazines, Gethin has been published in The Financial Times, The Huffington Post and The Guardian. Gethin has been awarded a place as one of the world's Top 101 Employee Engagement Influencers in 2019 and 2020, is a Top 5 HR Influencer, regular employee experience and wellbeing judge, and a HR Zone Culture Pioneer Ambassador.

"AS WE ENTER THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PANDEMIC, WE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT HOW WE CAN SUPPORT EMPLOYEES IN THE LONG TERM. WE ARE NO LONGER REACTING TO A QUICK CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES, SO MORE ROBUST, EVIDENCE-BASED INITIATIVES ARE NEEDED IF WE ARE GOING TO OFFER REAL SUPPORT."



#### MENTAL HEALTH PANDEMIC

At the start of 2020, 79% of British employees said they commonly experience work-related stress. This is 20% higher than in 2018. It is estimated that 1 in 4 people will be affected by poor mental health at some point in their lives and in early 2020, poor mental health was costing employers up to £45 billion a year according to Deloitte.

Globally in 2020 our mental health was challenged like never before. Even before the pandemic, the global economy lost more than US\$ 1 trillion each year due to depression and anxiety. Around the world, mental health conditions contribute to 25% of years lived with disability. Depression is now a leading cause of disability, affecting more than 264 million people. The extraordinary increase in mental health we saw this year put huge pressure on already underfunded and stretched mental health services in almost every major economy.

While it was difficult to predict a widespread virus was coming and how we would react to it in countries that hadn't had one before, with the knowledge we gained in 2020, we can make some confident predictions about mental health in 2021 that can help employers to make quick and decisive action to support their people.

#### **EVIDENCE OF THE IMPACT IS EMERGING**

One of the primary reasons experts were so quick to warn of the impact of lockdowns and isolation on our mental health was that previous pandemics had given us the evidence of what might happen. The global outbreak of SARS in 2003 was linked to an increase of 30% in suicides for those over the age of 65. The psychological impact of quarantine and isolation caused symptoms like post-traumatic stress, depression and loneliness.

Historically we know that the mental health impact of things like disasters take longer to recover from than the disaster itself. Twenty-five years after the Chernobyl nuclear accident, researchers found that levels of post-traumatic stress and depression were significantly higher. When we think about Coronavirus and the impact it has had on employees, we must understand that it is wide scale trauma that we have all been through and it will affect some employees in much the same way as devastating accidents and natural disasters.

The third lockdown in the UK was a significant part of the unprecedented mental health crisis brought on by the pandemic. The state of the nation's health is now so bad we are formally in a mental health pandemic too. From mild to serious mental health problems, employees of all ages, from all backgrounds and working in all industries have been profoundly affected by more than a year of stress, anxiety and worry brought on by the pandemic. The mental health of children has been of a particular worry as almost 20% of those aged between 5 and 16 years say they are experiencing a probable mental disorder.

Evidence is emerging to show specifically how the pandemic has affected people's mental health going forwards. It's been shown to increase the risk of obsessive compulsive disorders in young people for example.

One of the UK's leading charities, The Prince's Trust says their annual survey of young people's happiness has produced the worst results in its 12 year history. The devastating impact the pandemic has had on young people in the UK means that 1 in 4 now say they feel they are "unable to cope". Around half of the young people surveyed cited political unrest, Brexit and the pandemic as all affecting their mental health. More than half of 16 to 25 year olds say they feel anxious 'always' or 'often'.

Increases in alcoholism and substance abuse have started to emerge too. But most alarmingly, it's estimated that 1 in every 17 people who caught the virus could not be diagnosed with anxiety, depression or insomnia for the very first time, and 1 in 5 survivors of the virus will be diagnosed with anxiety, depression or PTSD. In fact, just catching the virus is likely to double the risk of developing a new psychiatric illness.



### RECESSIONS ARE BAD FOR OUR HEALTH

The 2008 global financial crisis hit all major economies and led to the deepest UK recession in 50 years. Prior to that recession, UK suicide rates had been declining, but reversed around the time we entered a recession in 2008. Similar rises were seen in countries throughout Europe and in the US. Unemployment, poor financial wellbeing and debt all increase someone's risk of depression and suicide – particularly in young men. But we also have evidence that wage cuts and reduced hours can contribute to suicidal behaviour.

Following the 2008 recession, we know that mental health in and outpatient visits in the years that followed increased among all types of employees. The negative impact of a recession even extended to the mental health of those individuals and groups typically considered low risk. What we also know is that declines in mental health following the last recession were still evident for several years after the end of the recession. Based on our expected economic recovery in the UK, the mental health impact of Coronavirus will be with us until 2025 at least.

#### THE VACCINE IS JUST THE BEGINNING

While a vaccine might remove the physical risk of Coronavirus, unfortunately the psychological impact it is having on your people is already taking place and is a wave that we are unable to stop. The only thing employers can do is to plan how they are going to support their people over the next 5 years and beyond.

At the time of writing this special report, the UK Government has announced a major reform of the Mental Health Act in a bid to empower patients and tackle racial disparities. A package of reforms has been set out in a wideranging new Reforming the Mental Health Act white paper, which builds on the recommendations made by Sir Simon Wessely's Independent Review of the Mental Health Act in 2018. Most notably, the reform will seek to improve access to mental health support.

#### THE EXPERT VIEW

I've spent the last year helping large global businesses with their approaches to workplace wellbeing and it is clear that one of the biggest challenges is creating a wellbeing strategy that will support a business in the short and long term.

When the pandemic hit, most employers needed to react quickly to support their people. Employers introduced new technologies to help the mental health of their people and many organisations offered free tools and support. But as we enter the second year of the pandemic, we should be thinking about how we can support employees in the long term. We are no longer reacting to a quick change in circumstances, so more robust, evidence-based initiatives are needed if we are going to offer real support.

Having a formal strategy helps employers to do a number of things; it helps you to audit the support you currently offer; it identifies areas that need attention and it helps everyone in your business understand your approach and mission when it comes to employee wellbeing.

To support employers in creating effective wellbeing strategies as we enter this period of recovery, I have asked the Engage for Success Wellbeing TAG experts to share their advice for employers in 2021.

**Gethin Nadin, Chair** - Engage for Success Wellbeing Thought Action Group.





Co-Chair – ACE Organisational Wellbeing: A Human-centric Approach

CIPD and CMI Level 5 accredited, Yvette has over a decade of experience in the Recruitment and Facilities Management sector, both on the frontline and behind the scenes in various roles spanning People, Talent and Development Management for SME and FTSE organisations. Over the years, Yvette has become a Licensed Practitioner for Motivational Maps®, an accredited motivation Coach with a focus on mindset and mental wellbeing and a Royal College of Psychiatrists accredited i-act (for positive mental health & wellbeing) instructor, putting the skills gained through these qualifications into practice regularly. Working as an Associate Consultant with Hedroc, Yvette delivers Mental Health and Wellbeing training to organisations globally.

#### "EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING NEEDS TO BECOME A CRITICAL PILLAR IN THE ORGANISATIONS' STRATEGY, IT'S NO LONGER A SECONDARY ISSUE."

Taking a human-centric approach to minimise the effects and lasting impact of the pandemic on personal, professional and organisational performance, involves placing workplace wellness top of the boardroom agenda. Employee mental health and wellbeing needs to become a critical pillar in the organisations' strategy, it's no longer a secondary issue.

According to statistics from "Thriving at Work: A review of Mental Health and Employers', commissioned by the UK government and published in 2017; 300,000 people lose their jobs due to mental health issues every year. That (back then) was a significant loss of our working population and limiting those individuals' life experiences, imagine what this statistic will look like 12 months from now. As we're looking toward the next 12 months of 2021, leaders must pay closer attention to the wellness of their workforce and invest in creating mental wealth within the organisation.

What do I mean by Mental Wealth? It is the measure of an organisations' ability to innovate, problem-solve, collaborate, remain resilient in the face of challenges, take initiative and create. The direct result of how an organisation fosters the mental health of its people. (Diaz and Goulding, 2019)

#### 1. A POSITIVE ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE -

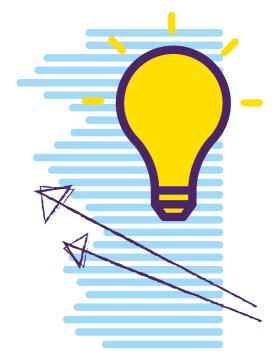
The absence of bullying, harassments, stress related absences and mental health crisis – raising awareness of these issues and challenging the stigma.

- 2. DIVERSITY IN VALUES AND STYLES Embracing individuality and curtailing behaviours which diminish or demean another person.
- **3. INCLUSIVE BEHAVIOURS** A culture of belonging where everyone is treated fairly and respected.
- **4. HIGH PERFORMANCE CULTURE** An environment created to drive creativity, empowerment, continuous learning and growth mindsets.

### Organisations with a high degree of mental wealth are characterised by;

We're examining two critical elements here – the organisations' culture, going beyond the cognitive (mission, vision, values) and moving through the emotional (psychological safety) as well as functional (decision making) culture of the organisation, and the holistic employee experience, taking into consideration the wants and needs of your workforce.

It's not about the presence or absence of mental wealth, but the degree to which it exists and what strategies an organisation is using to develop this. There is no cookie-cutter framework for developing mental wealth and every organisation will need to assess their own needs' and formulate an approach based on the degree of impact they want to create – short term responsive or long term preventative, as mentioned earlier by Gethin. My approach to workplace wellbeing, focuses on three main areas which takes the conversation away from the bottom line and more appropriately focuses it on a human approach – Awareness, Continuous Learning and the Environment.



An approach where employees' lives are enriched, acknowledging their roles within the workforce but also as people.

#### THIS INCLUDES;





3 WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT:

The Time to Change initiative, since starting in 2007, has made significant inroads in changing peoples' perspective(s) on mental health and wellbeing. Their latest data from "2018/19 shows a 3.1% improvement in attitudes amongst the adult population compared to their baseline data from 2016/17. This equates to a 12.7% change – that's 5.4 million people with improved attitudes since the campaign began." (Time to Change).

Our efforts need to continue within the workplace raising awareness of mental health through talking about the risk factors, driving anti-stigma and discrimination campaigns and embracing our keyholder responsibility for opening the doors to more conversations taking place within the workplace surrounding mental health and wellbeing.

Anti-stigma/ discrimination campaigns, albeit a critical pillar in the mental health conversation, seems to begin and end with raising awareness but does very little to improve knowledge. Delivering behaviour change within the workforce towards understanding mental health and the reaction to ill mental health, is no easy feat, but we are looking to embed lasting change – so it shouldn't be easy.

We should be challenging people's beliefs, their attitudes and their perception of mental health. This starts with educating ourselves on exactly what mental health is and how this impacts our wellbeing. Organisations should invest in programmes aimed at giving both managers and employees a fundamental understanding of various mental health issues, the risk factors accompanying those and what their responsibility is in managing and promoting good mental health within an organisation. Ensuring the appropriate policies and procedures are in place to support this movement.

Are the unforeseen hurdles, created by the pandemic, perhaps an opportunity for organisations to re-evaluate the "health" of their buildings with the wellbeing of its workforce in mind? The healthy building movement suggests looking at a holistic approach to workforce wellbeing – examining the impact the indoor environment, where employees usually spend 90% of their time, and subsequent workplace policies and procedures, has on the physical and mental health of the employees. No-one knows what the next 12 months will look like in terms of building occupation, but what can you do right now, to revisit some of the practices driving your workplace environment?

Our employees and corporate workplace have undergone and will continue to undergo significant changes over the course of the immediate future. The proverbial rug has been lifted on subpar responses to corporate mental health and wellbeing challenges.

The goals for many organisations are and always will be to create an environment in which people can flourish – one where people are engaged, motivated, happy and productive – and as the needs of our employees shift and the corporate workplace as we know it change, so should our approach to wellbeing in 2021 and beyond. Conversations about mental health and wellbeing should be top of the list – it's no longer viewed as optional.



Expert View: Hannah Johnson, Expert Founding Member – Due to The Uncertainty of Covid-19 and Brexit, it is Now More Important Than Ever For Both Organisations and Individual's to Take Ownership of Wellbeing.

With five years of experience improving employee engagement and a MSc in Organisational and Business Psychology, Hannah aims to help create optimal workplaces that people will thrive in. Currently working on the People Strategy at Centrepoint, Hannah has expanded her HR expertise and is making a difference through meaningful work. This is achieved by focusing on improving the experience of Centrepoint's employees through a series of projects improving engagement, wellbeing, inclusion, culture, leadership, manager capability and processes.

"THIS YEAR AND LAST, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY ISOLATED IN BRITAIN DUE TO LOCKDOWNS, WHICH WILL MOST DEFINITELY HAVE AN IMPACT ON WELLBEING."

Wellbeing in general, may decrease nationally, due to the current economic climate, leaving employee's feeling less secure.

Uncertainty can be stressful, so organisations should be doing all they can to be open and transparent with their communication to employees. This does not mean luring employees into a false sense of security to be made redundant at a later point in time. It means creating an atmosphere that we are all in it together, and being honest with employees rather than allowing them to come to their own uninformed, speculative conclusions. There are a number of wellbeing practices that employers can encourage and support to increase their employee's wellbeing.

#### LIVE BY EXAMPLE

Overall wellbeing can be supported by encouraging managers to promote healthy behaviours such as taking lunch breaks to go out walking in urban nature, switching off at reasonable times and noticing the positives in life and the good in their colleagues. As working from home has led many people to be constantly switched on, we will likely see more initiatives around digital wellbeing. It is the individual's responsibility to ensure that they have healthy digital hygiene habits and the organisation's responsibility to support and enable it. As humans, we tend to notice our role model's behaviours (Bandura, 1977), and if they have extended work days with back to back meetings, it could be the case that employees are imitating these behaviours or are unsure of the consequences of not conforming.

#### CONNECT

This year and last people have been increasingly isolated in Britain due to lockdowns, which will most definitely have an impact on wellbeing. Barnes, Carvallo, Brown and Osterman (2010) argue that the human need to be connected through social interactions, is as necessary to physical and emotional well-being as safety and food. For this reason, good relationships and social interactions are correlated with positive mental wellbeing (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Organisations can support employee's emotional wellbeing by encouraging collaboration and team working. Rather than having one person working on a project working bring the team together with regular updates, problem solving, strategy planning and improving daily operations so employees feel less disconnected. This could help meet the need for connection and being able to relate to other people by sharing a sense of belonging and commonality, helping to form and maintain stable and positive interpersonal relationships.

Peer support, such as mentoring schemes, would also encourage employees to dedicate their time to helping colleagues and it would also build toward their professional development, thus improving wellbeing through learning, altruism and social interaction. This could contribute towards a culture of recognition and appreciation.

#### **LEARNING**

Jenkins and Mostafa (2015) found that there was a positive correlation between learning activities and wellbeing. They found that informal types of learning activities were associated with increased wellbeing.

Organisations can support wellbeing through learning by providing training offerings, action learning events and development planning. The training offering should be focused on the less formal or non-business-related studies that could have a social support element, such as art or music, as these are the ones that have been reported to improve wellbeing. Goal setting should be encouraged around employees' learning, for example creating a professional development plan, where employees build their knowledge in their personal areas of interest and set their own goals, encouraging autonomy and a sense of control over their working lives.

#### **BE ACTIVE**

The benefits of being active to wellbeing are undeniable. The physical benefits include an increase in cerebral blood flow with maximum oxygen consumption and a reduction in muscular tension (Querido & Sheel, 2007). The emotional benefits have been associated with increased self-esteem (Sani et al., 2016), control (Weinberg and Gould, 2018) self-efficacy (Rodgers et al., 2014) and competency (Craft, 2005). Being active has also been shown to reduce anxiety (DeBoer et al., 2012) and depression (Mammen and Faulkner, 2013), therefore is a worthwhile endeavour for organisations to support for physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

An assumption of the theory of Energetic Cost Minimization (Cheval et al., 2018) is that biochemically gratifying behaviours come with a reward. Organisations can help support this by offering rewards for employees reaching exercise goals.

#### TAKE NOTICE OF NATURE

The correlation between wellbeing and taking notice of nature has been investigated usually with cross sectional studies (McEwan et el., 2019). In a two-week wellbeing intervention, where participants paid attention to their daily environment and what feelings it evoked, Passmore and Holder (2017) found that participants that took notice of nature reported higher prosocial orientation, increase in positive feelings and a greater sense of connectedness- to nature, people and to life! Organisations can support this while employees work from home by encouraging employees to take regular breaks, in addition to their lunch hour, to take a walk in nature.

It is important to remember that wellbeing is a very personal topic and it is not a one size fits all approach. The best way to figure out how to collectively improve employee wellbeing? Talk to them and empower them to contribute to problem solving and solution finding. While it is an individual's responsibility to look after their own wellbeing, it is also the organisation's responsibility to ensure they are not directly or indirectly encouraging practices that could be detrimental to their employees' health.



Expert View: Maggie Williams, Expert Founding Member – 2020 Wasn't a One-off: Let's Learn the Wellbeing Lessons it Taught us

Maggie Williams is a freelance business writer and editor with more than 10 years' experience in employee benefits. She is also Content Director for the Reward and Employee Benefits Association (REBA). Her specialisms include financial wellbeing, reward and employee engagement. Before working freelance, Maggie was founding Editor and Publisher of Reward magazine, as well as Editor and Publisher of Pensions Insight.

"EVEN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND WEALTH WERE ALREADY POSING A POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE UK'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS."

For many of us, 2020 will be a year that we'd like to forget. But while it might have been 12 months like no other, when it comes to workplace wellbeing 2020 wasn't just a blip or an isolated outlier.

Covid-19 showed the pivotal role of employee wellbeing in business planning, and accelerated employers' plans to invest in the health of the workforce. But many of the key concerns – such as mental wellbeing, inclusivity and financial wellbeing – were not new problems. They are long-term issues that have been pushed further into the spotlight by the pandemic.

Now, as Covid-19 vaccines become a tentative reality and we hope the pandemic starts to recede, those long-term wellbeing trends will need to remain priorities, driving genuine shifts in business behaviour and employers' attitudes towards staff wellbeing. We can't just go back to offering the same benefits and following the same practices that we did in the past. The outcomes from 2020 and the lessons it has taught us must drive permanent change.

Here are three examples of employee wellbeing that will remain crucial in 2021 – and beyond:

Financial wellbeing starts with fair pay. Even before the pandemic, inequalities in health and wealth were already posing a potential threat to the UK's economic, social and political systems. The lowest paid in the UK have been hit the hardest by Covid-19, with redundancy, furlough and intermittent work patterns causing both short and long-term damage to financial health.

Research from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Destitution in the UK 2020, showed that destitution increased 54% between 2017 and 2019 (so, even before the current pandemic). But 14% of people who are destitute are in paid work, often with irregular hours and fluctuating income levels. And there are big gaps between the highest and lowest paid: the High Pay Centre's analysis of pay ratios in the FTSE 350 found that the median CEO to lower quartile employee ratio was 71:1 in 2020.

Prioritising improvements in low pay, possibly over those of executive and senior pay, must be at the heart of employers' financial wellbeing strategies. This is also about thinking beyond traditional financial wellbeing benefits, to help the lowest paid in practical ways, such as the best deals on their utility bills, subsidising broadband contracts, or helping with affordable rent, for example.

Wealth and health are intrinsically linked. If we are to help employees improve their overall wellbeing, it starts with credible pay.

Good mental wellbeing can't be bought. The Reward and Employee Benefits Association's 2020 Employee Wellbeing

Research report found that 78% of businesses rated 'stress caused by deadlines or workload' as a key mental health risk It also found that organisational change is posing a major threat to employee wellbeing – with a 235% rise in the number of companies saying this is a concern.

Businesses will be under ever-increasing pressure to adapt and return to profitability over 2021 and 2022, and the strains on employees' mental health risk becoming more intense than ever. Even before Covid-19, in 2018/19, work-related stress depression or anxiety accounted for 54% of lost working days.

While employers are aware of importance of looking after employees' mental wellbeing, addressing this isn't as simple as investing in an app or a training programme (although both of those can help).

Good employee mental health might require changes in the way that leadership, line managers and employees act; building a more compassionate culture, and working with benefits providers to recognise and act on mental ill-health in the same way as physical ill-health.

#### Workplace wellbeing and inclusivity go hand-in-hand.

No-one can be at their best if they feel excluded from the environment they work in, or are not treated fairly in employment or life. George Floyd's murder in 2020 shone a spotlight on the different experiences of black colleagues, and the extent to which wellbeing services such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs) were able to support them. Making sure that workplace practices and wellbeing benefits

are genuinely inclusive is a priority if everyone is to be able to feel well at work.

The lockdowns of March, November and early 2021 forced remote and flexible working into the spotlight, although demand for more flexible working arrangements is a longer-term trend. It has the potential to improve inclusivity, open up recruitment and create equality of opportunity for groups such as carers and disabled workers.

But flexible working has simultaneously caused divisions between those who can and can't work remotely, and introduced new wellbeing issues such as digital fatigue. There is still a lot of thinking to do before remote working becomes a robust part of our daily practices and is properly aligned with business needs – but it's important that we retain the advantages and use it to drive a more inclusive work environment.

There's no doubt that 2021 will continue to be a difficult time for businesses and employees alike. Wellbeing must remain centre-stage if employers are to make sure staff are engaged, enthused and enabled to do their best. It's impossible to (re)build a thriving business without helping the people within it thrive too.

Expert View: Roopa Nagori, Expert Founding Member - The Links Between Remote Work, Employee Engagement and Wellbeing

Equipped with twenty-two years of experience in HR Consulting, Training and Education, Roopa is a Senior Lecturer at Coventry University London Campus. Her previous experience includes projects with the Singapore Productivity Board, The Open University and University of Hertfordshire. As a chartered member of the CIPD (MCIPD), she regularly participates in HR seminars and networking events and presents papers in international education conferences.

## "REMOTE WORK RESULTS IN BLURRING OF WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES, WITH MOST REMOTE WORKERS REVEALING THAT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO SWITCH-OFF AFTER WORK HOURS"

As a result of the social distancing measures introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic, in April 2020 there were 49.2% of adults in employment working from home (Eriksson & Petrosian, 2020). Thanks to changing attitudes and ever-improving network capabilities this number is expected to continue its upward trajectory over the next 3 years, with half the UK workforce expected to be working remotely by 2025.

Inspite of business owners concerns that, working remotely, their employee output will reduce, the opposite is in fact true. Productivity and morale increase exponentially with remote work (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). It's clear that corporates are undergoing a massive shift as more people migrate to modes of remote working that offer them a better work-life balance and a schedule that fits around their own schedule. Organisations should now put in place adequate support so a remoteworking model can guide employees.

Restubog et al (2020) are of the opinion that anxiety caused by the pandemic could result in the unpredictability of the workplace, the challenges to balance health and work and also the issue of balancing family responsibilities and workplace responsibilities. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) highlight that remote workers had higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational commitment than workplace-bound workers. However, consistent with the predictions of the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker et al., 2007), evidence suggested that this was at the cost of work intensification (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Currently, remote workers interviewed have expressed their opinions that it is technological overload or Technostress that is causing them to work long hours. In addition, remote work results in blurring of work-life boundaries, with most remote workers revealing that it is difficult for them to switchoff after work hours. Also, workers are facing professional isolation as there are fewer opportunities to interact and speed decisions with colleagues. It is at this time then employers need to focus on improving well-being as the link between engagement and wellbeing has been established in various studies (Bakker et al., 2004; Charalampous et al., 2019; Guest, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017).

Engaged employees feel inspired, focused and this improves productivity and customer retention. This is of significance as research by CIPD (2016) showed that only 35 per cent of UK employees feel inspired and motivated by their employer. In addition, employee engagement levels have been low in UK since the uncertainty of Brexit. The result of lower engagement levels is reduced motivation and increasing employee turnover rates (Radda, Abubakar et al., 2015) and therefore it is even more crucial now that we focus on improving engagement and wellbeing levels.

Figure 1: Challenges and Opportunities in Remote Work (Nagori, 2020)



A few recommendations to improve employee engagement and wellbeing for remote workers are included below. Organisations should now put in place adequate support so a remote-working model can guide employees. A few high-impact practices to guide managers to organise a model for remote working that can be customised to their context are provided below;

- Provide resources to help people make sense of this change in work, especially
  to deal with Technology overload or Technostress. Training in new technology,
  organised in advance as well as available on-demand would help employees deal
  with Technostress.
- Establish structured and frequent check-in for employees with managers so goals to prioritise work and time can be mutually decided
- Provide several different communication technology options in addition to e-mail, such as video conferencing and asynchronous forums that can prevent social isolation
- Set-up quick collaboration that can help mobile-enabled individual messaging functionality (like Slack, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.) which can be used for simpler, less formal conversations, as well as time-sensitive communication.
- Create new "employee journey maps" for the remote world, provide flexible work options, rethink experience for a remote/mixed workforce.
- Learn from employee feedback/ input in a way that improves organisational success and individual well-being. Employee Voice is a powerful tool in improving employee engagement and wellbeing.



Expert View: Ben Towers, Associate Member – We are the most connected yet disconnected generation.

Ben is one of 'the most influential entrepreneurs on the planet' whilst still only being 22 years old. He started in business aged 11 and has since successfully exited his marketing agency, invested in disruptive start-ups, advised Governments & PLCs, and inspired millions. In 2019 Ben was the Communications Director at GlaxoSmithKlein for a year, following this he co-founded Tahora (the workplace culture and wellbeing hub). He is on a mission to create an environment where all employees belong and feel supported.

"FOR US TO TRULY ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF MENTAL ILL-HEALTH WE NEED TO EXECUTE ON STRATEGIES THAT BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND REIGNITE OUR NATURAL DESIRE FOR CONNECTION TO OTHERS."

As a generation, we have access to more services, resources and people than ever before. We can order a taxi in seconds, have food arrive in minutes and connect with anyone across the world without leaving our sofa. Surely this connection should lead to a generation that feel connected and supported? Instead, we are seeing the opposite, a generation craving likes on a picture over true intimate friendship. A generation who are feeling lonely whilst in a crowd full of people.

The UK charity, Mind, report that loneliness is associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems and increased stress.

Research compiled by Johann Hari and reported in his book "Lost Connections" that of the 9 factors causing depression, 7 are psychosocial and include disconnection from work, people, meaningful values, respect and hope for a better future.

For us to truly address the underlying causes of mental ill-health we need to execute on strategies that bring people together and reignite our natural desire for connection to others. This is beyond rolling out messaging tools that seemingly bring people together, bringing community and wellbeing into the heart of the business culture so that all employees feel as though they have a network beyond work.



## SUMMARY

#### TIME TO ACT

We know for a fact that your employees will struggle with their mental health this year and when they do, this will negatively impact your business. No longer seen as a cost, an investment in employee mental health is now also one of the best ways to invest in your company's recovery from the pandemic and any associated recessions.

When employees are supported and cared for, they work harder, they get back to work quicker, they are more engaged, and they better support your customers. Investing in the mental health of your people is not only the right thing to do in 2021, it will be one of the most sensible business decisions an employer can make.





Expert View: Lindsey Armstrong, Associate Member – In Conclusion

As an employee engagement practitioner and content writer, Lindsey has spent fifteen years working with organisations across the private and public sectors creating engagement diagnostics and supporting businesses in the use of research to better understand what motivates their people. Recently, Lindsey has worked with the charity, Health Action Campaigns, researching wellbeing at work in a post-Covid era, contributing content to an employer guide and articles on the subject. Lindsey is also a member of the British Psychological Society.

# "TO BUILD A THRIVING BUSINESS WE NEED TO CREATE A FRAMEWORK FOR EVERYONE WITHIN IT, REGARDLESS OF WHERE OR HOW THEY WORK, TO THRIVE TOO."

As Gethin identified at the start of this report, the race to vaccinate is picking up pace, and a post-Covid era creeps closer. It is now time to shift focus from the short-term strategies that organisations have used to fire-fight the past year, to longer-term ones that can endure after we find some form of normality again. This paper has examined the opportunities to build back better after the pandemic and offers practical steps through which to do so.

If we reframe mental health as mental wealth, we understand why it is in an organisation's interest to prioritise wellbeing. Mental wealth's role in creating positive, inclusive and high-performing cultures offers a route map to resilience that will stand us in good stead against future disruptors, be they health, economic, political or climatic.

Creating a psychologically safe culture and an employee experience in which wellbeing can flourish, requires a collective effort: a values-driven narrative from leaders that sets a precedent for inclusivity and tolerance; a managerial team trained to support and encourage positive behaviours at the team level; and a communication strategy that considers diverse needs, with the functionality for employees to voice their views back through the system.

Culture is the foundation, but it needs the transitional support of policies and procedures, benefits, and nudges. Now, more than ever, this support needs to be differentiated and targeted. From financial wellbeing advice for the low-paid, to initiatives that encourage increased activity and healthy eating, to prompts that reduce the technostress, digital fatigue, and isolation of remote workers.

Taking these steps will provide the basis for a long-term strategy towards workplace wellbeing, but it needs a mechanism in place to measure the outcomes. Track how your people feel along your journey towards better mental health and how it impacts on employee engagement, absence management, customer satisfaction and overall performance. Assess what works and what doesn't, and use the data collected to tweak your strategy.

To echo Maggie Williams' words from earlier in this report, to build a thriving business we need to create a framework for everyone within it, regardless of where or how they work, to thrive too.

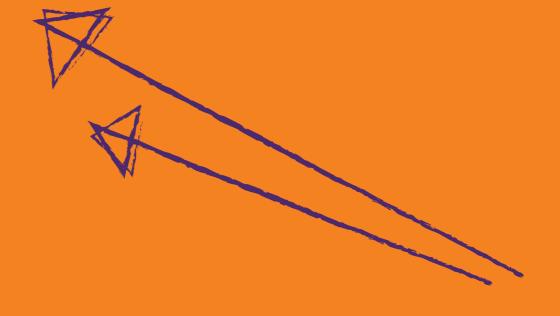
# ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

We are always looking for new associates to form part of the group. As an associate, you will have an interest in, or be working within HR/Wellbeing and commit to attending regular TAG meetings, participating in the creation of thought leadership content and running events – all aimed at supporting employers of any size to build healthy and thriving cultures.

If you would like to apply to be an associate member, please visit <a href="https://engageforsuccess.org/wellbeing">https://engageforsuccess.org/wellbeing</a>

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