

Factsheet – Improving Employee Wellbeing



Introduction

The world of work is changing at a rapid pace, with increasing demands being placed every year upon employers and employees alike. Understanding employee wellbeing and supporting your workforce to cope with the pressures of change will help your organisation to better respond to these demands.

This factsheet provides details of the latest thinking in employee wellbeing as well as ideas for how smaller social sector employers can improve health and wellbeing, create a positive working environment and drive organisational performance.

What is employee wellbeing?

The term wellbeing covers many aspects of the way people feel about their lives, which includes their health, their relationships with the people around them, their own character and their home and social life. It therefore encompasses how people feel about their job, their workplace and their relationships with colleagues.

Wellbeing is relevant to all organisations; however, the actions an organisation might take to assess and improve wellbeing will of course vary, according to the size, sector and other factors.

Impact of poor employee wellbeing

Employee absenteeism is estimated to cost the UK economy £18 billion paⁱ, with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reporting in 2018 an average of 7.3 days of absence per employee in the not-for-profit sector (this is slightly higher than the national average of 6.6 days per employee).ⁱⁱ

In particular, there has been a significant rise in the number of reported mental health issues over recent years. Poor mental health has a huge impact on employee wellbeing and can be a major cause of absence from work, with 1 in 6 British workers being affected by conditions like anxiety, depression and stress every year.ⁱⁱⁱ

However, the impact of poor employee wellbeing goes far beyond absence statistics. In addition to employees taking time off work due to poor health and wellbeing, other signs of poor employee wellbeing have recently been identified. The CIPD's Health and Wellbeing at Work Survey 2018 revealed unhealthy working practices such as people attending work when they were unwell ("presenteeism") and using annual leave or other forms of time off to catch up on work ("leaveism").

A recent Foundation for Social Improvement (FSI) survey revealed that small charity leaders are worried about workload which has been cited as the biggest challenge they are currently facing.^{iv} The report highlights the negative impact that excessive workloads have on the health and wellbeing of employees and the importance of organisations actively demonstrating they are investing in employee wellbeing.

Benefits of improving employee wellbeing

Employers can have a positive impact on employee wellbeing by how they run their workplace. Investing in employee wellbeing can result in increased workforce resilience, greater innovation and higher productivity^v, all of which helps to cope with and positively respond to change within your organisation.

Research carried out by the CIPD, FSI and the government identifies further benefits for employers of increasing their focus on employee wellbeing including:

- Better employee morale, motivation and engagement
- Healthier performance and a more inclusive culture
- Lower sickness absence
- Improved quality of service delivery
- Improved value for money / profitability.

In turn, employees who feel good about themselves interact well with colleagues, attend work more frequently and make an even greater contribution to the workplace.^{vi}

This all presents a compelling case for employers to invest in strategies to improve employee wellbeing.

What can organisations do to improve employee wellbeing?

There is no “one size fits all” approach to developing your employee wellbeing strategy as your approach will be best determined by considering the unique needs and characteristics of your organisation and workforce.

To help guide you in your thinking for your organisation, we have set out below our “10 Top Tips” to improving employee wellbeing; whilst it may not be practical for your organisation to implement all of them, just taking a few steps to improve employee wellbeing is likely to result in improvements in the performance of your workforce.

10 Top Tips to improve employee wellbeing in your organisation

1. Respond quickly and positively to employees saying that they are stressed

Stress is one of the biggest causes of poor mental health in the workplace. A supportive ear plus small changes to the workload, working hours or location can make a world of difference to a colleague who tells you they are feeling stressed. Let employees tell you what would help and implement it if you possibly can. If you have concerns about the stress levels of an employee, you should carry out a stress risk assessment to help identify sources of stress and implement support mechanisms.

2. Encourage healthy work habits

Encourage employees to take regular breaks and to use their full annual leave entitlement. As a minimum, you should carry out workstation / Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments and reimburse the cost of eye tests for employees who regularly work on a computer. You could also consider offering flexible working arrangements, which can be advantageous to both employees and your organisation.

3. Carry out an employee engagement survey

Employee engagement surveys are a great way to find out how your employees feel about working for your organisation and can enable you to increase the engagement and wellbeing of your team.

4. Promote healthy eating

Support employees to eat healthily in order to help improve their wellbeing. Simple ideas include encouraging colleagues to drink more water, and substituting the office biscuits with delicious and nutritious fruit.

5. Encourage employees to be more active

Encourage employees to get up and move around where possible; you could even try having a standing or walking 'meeting' or introduce a tax efficient 'cycle to work' scheme.

6. Introduce an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

EAPs are a confidential source of support to help employees deal with personal problems that might negatively impact on their performance, health and wellbeing. EAPs can be purchased from as little as £100 per year for your whole organisation.

7. Carry out a quick employee relations healthcheck

Have a look at your organisation's (anonymised) absence levels and reasons for absence, your turnover levels and the number of grievances and bullying and harassment complaints in order to help understand wellbeing levels in your organisation. What does this information tell you?

8. Introduce a Sickness Absence policy

Having a Sickness Absence policy is a great way of monitoring absence levels, providing support to employees and enabling the organisation to tackle the causes of absence.

9. Build autonomy and variety into job roles where possible

Research shows that enabling employees to have some degree of autonomy over how they do their job and including a variety of activities within their roles increases wellbeing at work. Try, wherever possible, to incorporate these aspects into the roles within your organisation, and encourage your managers to adopt this approach in how they manage their teams on a day to day basis.

10. Reinforce your mission, values and objectives

Clear communication about the mission and values of your organisation, the impact that individuals have and the difference made to the community you support or work within can improve employee wellbeing, as everyone understands their personal contribution to the overall success of your organisation.

Record keeping

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) applies to personal data. Managers should be aware that documents, notebooks, emails etc. that contain notes from meetings with team members about their wellbeing may contain personal data including special category data. Such data should be processed and stored in compliance with your organisation's Data Protection Policy.

Specialist advice from Roots HR

For further support on improving the wellbeing of your employees, please contact Roots HR on 01562 840060 / info@rootshr.org.uk. We can assist with stress risk assessments, provide guidance on rest breaks, annual leave and workstation or DSE assessments, advise on flexible working requests, develop absence policies and provide further information about Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and staff surveys.

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ⁱ Centre of Economic and Business Research: Change at Work: How Absence, Attitudes and Demographics are impacting UK employers

ⁱⁱ CIPD – Health and Wellbeing at Work survey 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ About Mental Health. Time to change. www.headstogether.org.uk/workplace/

^{iv} FSI - Taking the Pulse of the Small Charity Sector report December 2017 – February 2018

^v CIPD – Growing the health and well-being agenda report

^{vi} About Mental Health. Time to change. www.headstogether.org.uk/workplace/