

# EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE & WELLBEING

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# Poor mental health cost UK employers up to £45bn in 2020<sup>1</sup>

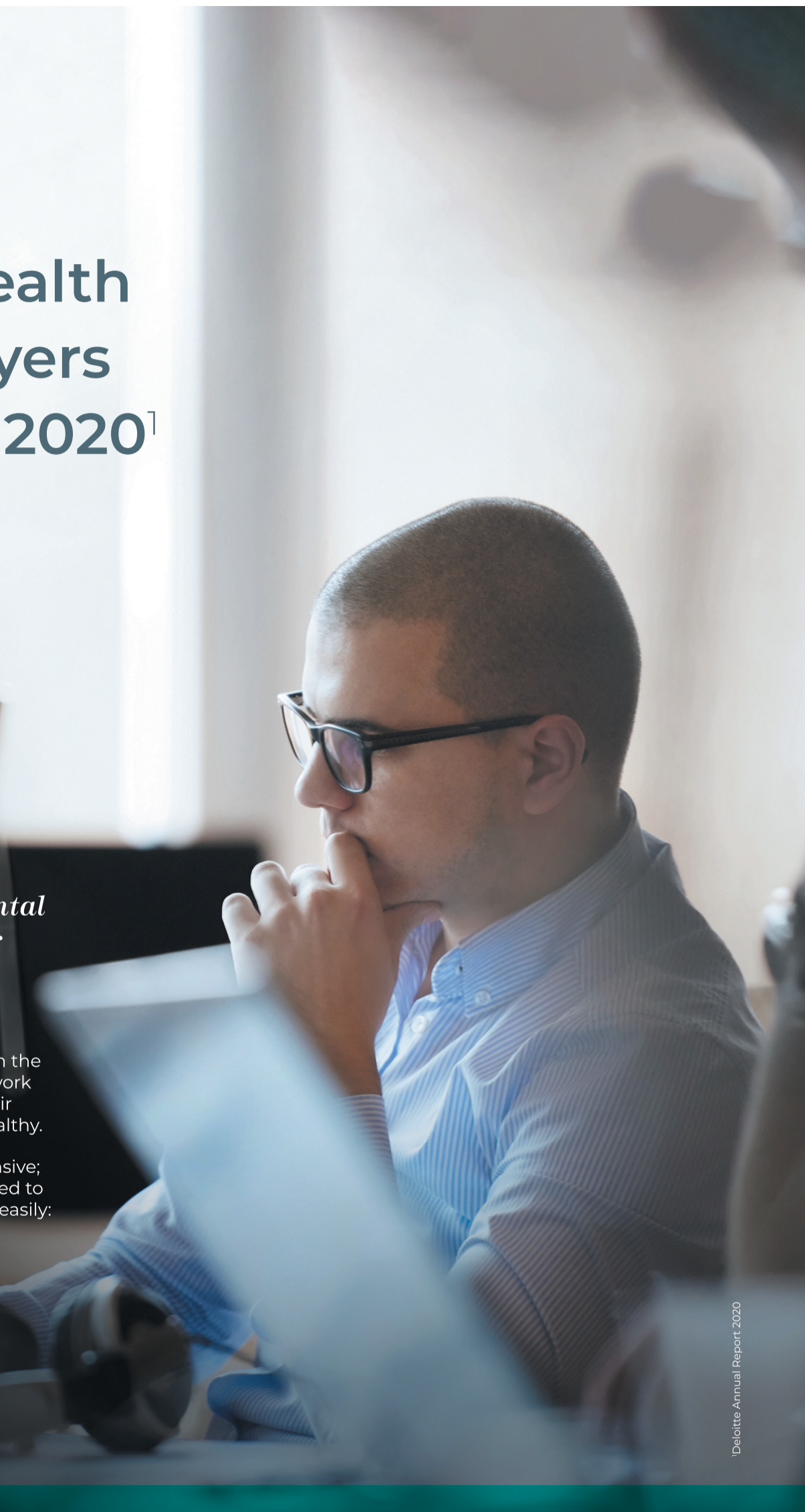
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Deloitte Annual Report 2020

## EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE & WELLBEING

Distributed in **THE TIMES**



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## WELLBEING

# Making mental health a C-suite priority

Employees now expect senior executives to care far more about their mental health. Forward-thinking companies are responding by using data insights and staff feedback to inform strategies and decision-making at board level

John Crowley

Where should employee wellbeing sit in a C-suite executive's list of priorities? For Bill Michael, chairman of accountancy giant KPMG, this year was the moment to tackle the subject head on.

Addressing 1,500 staff on a Zoom call in January, Michael was widely reported as telling them to "stop playing the victim card" and "moaning" about their current working conditions. He added that the concept of unconscious bias had been, for him, "complete and utter crap for years".

Even before the end of the call to KPMG's financial services team, Michael acknowledged he had gone too far with his comments. Those in the virtual town hall said he had also told struggling employees how to reach out for help. But the damage was done and Michael resigned a few days later.

With businesses still reeling from the fallout of Brexit and the coronavirus pandemic, there remains a temptation among the C-suite to pass responsibility for wellbeing either to human resources or down the chain of command. But the strong internal reaction to Michael's comments underlines a new employee expectation in a post-COVID world that those in the C-suite must lead, listen and show empathy around mental health.

The cost of overburdening a team can weigh heavily on a company as well as the individual. According to research by Gallup, an analytics and advisory firm, staff were 63 per cent more likely to take a sick day if they reported feeling burnt out, nearly three times as likely to seek another job and 13 per cent less confident in their own performance if they felt overwhelmed.

The most visionary organisations are now looking to their own data and asking staff for insights around productivity, sick days and retaining talent. This might feel a tricky subject to address when employee health rightly remains paramount, but an understanding of the cost and benefits of mental health helps push this wider subject into the boardroom.

Vitruve Health is developing technology to help clinicians assess patient motor function. Using a motion capture tool and musculoskeletal artificial intelligence (AI), a programme assesses a desk set-up and suggests improvements to make home workspaces more ergonomic. "It's incredibly important that we practise what we preach," says the company's chief executive Shane Lowe.

"I want my team to be able to work remotely and flexibly, but I don't want



services, asks its employees to complete the Workspace Wellbeing Index (WWI), an annual survey developed by the charity Mind. Together with its own internal surveys, this helps the company's leaders keep track of its wellbeing offering and get ideas on where it might be able to improve.

Chris Grove is national head of transaction services and sits on BDO's leadership team. Alongside these roles he is also chair of the firm's culture board. "Having wellbeing at the top of the agenda is nothing new for BDO," he explains. "But the challenges brought on by the pandemic, which have had an impact on both physical and mental health, have certainly meant it is more important than ever before."

Many of the firms' staff are parents or have other caring responsibilities. In response to feedback, BDO has increased its "agile working offering", which enables people to adjust hours to better suit their circumstances.

The company won a silver award from Mind's WWI initiative for its work in 2020. As part of the firm's three-month Winter Wellbeing Package, it is now working closely with a clinical psychologist to provide short videos on key topics around home schooling, sleep and resilience.

"We are also in the process of planning a live virtual event with the psychologist and a panel, including our managing partner, which we're expecting to see over 350 of our people attend," says Grove.

Healthcare provider Bupa says its 23,000-plus employees around the world "expect us to play an active role in their physical and mental health". Their Bupa Be.Me app is open to staff and regular People Pulse internal surveys allow staff to give anonymous, candid feedback.

"We use this as our barometer of culture and we take action based on our employees' insight," says Tom Webber, people director at Bupa UK.

A company's staff are its most precious commodity and the measurable benefits of a healthier and happy workforce are just as important as doing right by them.

Webber says investment in mental health is "not only the right thing to do, but it makes good business sense for talent retention and attraction, in addition to the bottom line".

He concludes: "It's no longer just an HR issue but something that should be on the boardroom agenda. While they don't necessarily need to lead on the day-to-day wellbeing strategy, CEOs can play a key role in shaping it, modelling it and ensuring there is accountability for it."

this to come at the expense of their physical or mental health. That's why I'm investing time and resources into protecting the wellbeing of my workforce."

In addition to offering the AI tool to the Vitruve team, an in-house physiotherapist hosts virtual sessions every day at 3pm. To build internal morale, the London-based team has developed a fitness and conditioning game based on a person's body movements tracked by webcam.

Lowe, who co-founded the company in 2017, is tracking the impact of these measures among his nine-strong staff. According to its own internal calculations, mental health and wellbeing measures introduced since April 2020 have reduced aches and pains by 43 per cent, improved morning energy levels

by 16 per cent and reduced burnout risk by 36 per cent.

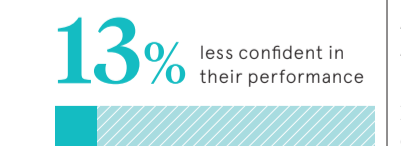
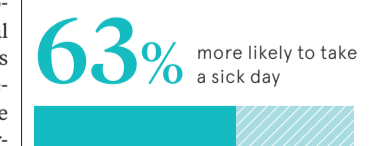
"Since staff wellbeing is intricately linked to business success, it's very important businesses tackle the issue collaboratively," he says. "If human resources teams are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of policies, the C-suite must be involved in the instigation and planning of robust, proven wellbeing initiatives."

The startup has published its own data on how wellbeing and mental health measures could reduce pain-related and associated productivity losses. Its research says an average company with 1,000 staff could save £1.4 million a year if it took reasonable efforts to tackle these issues among its staff.

BDO, which employs 6,000 people and offers tax, audit and other advisory

### THE WIDER BUSINESS IMPACT OF BURNOUT

Employees who say they very often or always experience burnout at work are



Gallup 2019



DIVERSITY

# How LGBT+ inclusive workplaces make business better

An increasing number of companies are taking steps to support lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender colleagues by setting up networks and training “straight allies”



Ella Braidwood

When Annie Newman joined pharmaceutical company GSK as a contractor in 2000, she wouldn't come out as a lesbian for more than a decade. “It wasn't because I wasn't comfortable being out in the organisation,” she explains. “It was because I wasn't comfortable myself. I didn't want to admit it to myself.”

After years in the closet, in 2011 Newman saw a stall in the office run by GSK's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) network Spectrum. She stayed in touch with a colleague from the stand, who helped her embrace her sexuality. “This connection was invaluable and gave me the courage to both come out to my family and, a few months later, come out to colleagues at work,” says Newman.

Since 2019, she has led GSK's Spectrum network in the UK. Founded in 1996, it also has branches in 37 other countries. The company is one of a growing number of businesses using networks to support their LGBT+ staff, often run by colleagues on a voluntary basis. At Spectrum, initiatives include reverse mentoring, where LGBT+ colleagues

share their experiences with senior leaders, and a leadership programme aimed at giving LGBT+ employees the confidence to apply for top roles.

Elsewhere, Lloyds Banking Group has been running its Rainbow Network for more than ten years. With in excess of 5,000 members, the group meets fortnightly and runs various events. These include regular “bi-talk” sessions for bisexual colleagues, a monthly lesbian book club and a “T” working group that explores ways to better support transgender and non-binary colleagues.

“Diversity and inclusion are vital to our business success and to create an environment in which everyone feels included, valued and empowered to be their best,” explains Anthony Francis, a role model for Rainbow and intersectionality lead at Lloyds Banking Group.

Studies have shown that LGBT+ inclusive corporations are more successful than those which are not. In 2015, 14 leading firms, including American Express and IBM, launched Open For Business, a coalition campaigning for LGBT+

workplace inclusion globally. Same-sex sexual activity remains illegal in around 70 countries. In a 2018 survey, the group found LGBT+ inclusive companies perform better financially, with higher market valuations, greater levels of employee satisfaction and better staff retention.

Training is key to raising awareness of the challenges faced by LGBT+ staff and those from minority groups. At Lloyds, employees complete annual mandatory inclusion training covering areas like unconscious bias. In October, GSK required all its staff to take diversity training.

International law firm Pinsent Masons' LGBT+ Allies programme has been running since 2013, offering heterosexual colleagues training on LGBT+ issues. It provides a forum for heterosexual colleagues seeking advice, such as how to best support a friend or relative who is LGBT+.

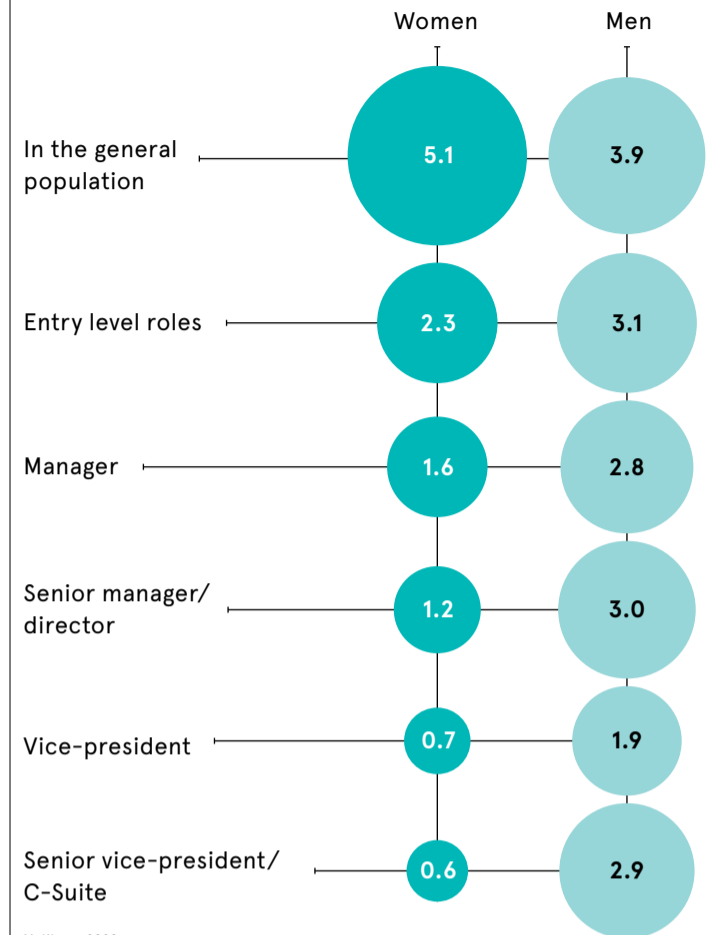
“Our Allies initiative has been one of the things that has made a huge amount of impact to our work in this area,” says Kate Fergusson, head of responsible business at Pinsent Masons.

Pinsent Masons has run its LGBT+ Allies programme since 2013

“If we can get workplace inclusion right, it would make a huge difference to people's lives

## THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY IS UNDER-REPRESENTED IN BUSINESS

% identifying as LGBT+ in the US



McKinsey 2020

Companies are also engaging with important events in the LGBT+ calendar as a means of supporting their employees and clients, such as sponsoring and marching in Pride parades. While coronavirus has paused physical events, the pandemic has not blocked support, with companies taking their efforts online. Last summer, Lloyds launched a year-round Always Proud online celebration, raising more than £10,000 for LGBT+ charities and sharing LGBT+ employees' personal stories. Virgin and Barclays have run similar campaigns.

While there is legislation to protect LGBT+ employees at work in some countries, including the Equality Act 2010 in the UK and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States, workplace harassment remains an issue. In 2018, LGBT+ rights charity Stonewall found that nearly one in five LGBT+ people (18 per cent) had been bullied at work, while more than a third (35 per cent) have hidden their identity for fear of discrimination.

“People spend most of their adult life at work, so if we can get workplace inclusion right, it would make a huge difference in the lives of so many LGBT+ people,” says Emma Kosmin, head of workplace consultancy at Stonewall, which also runs an annual Workplace Equality Index ranking the top 100 employers for LGBT+ people in the UK.

Companies looking to establish their own LGBT+ networks should start by drawing up a clear list of aims, says GSK's Newman. “Set up a charter and set out a small number of attainable objectives that you can get and then you can grow them,” she says.

David Page, executive sponsor of Tesco's network LGBTQ+ At Tesco, advises a top-down style. “Drive it from the top, formalise it in policy, continuously develop training and get that out to as many people as possible,” he says. Lloyds takes a similar approach, where Janet Pope, the company's executive sponsor for sexual orientation and gender identity, sits on the group's executive committee.

It is also important to represent the entire LGBT+ community, says Page. “In common with many organisations, we're probably strongest on the G [gay men] and so we need to constantly make sure we are doing everything we can to address the L, the B, the T, the Q, the plus,” he says.

Companies should accept that starting an LGBT+ network is a journey, says Pinsent Masons' Fergusson. “We have learnt that we sometimes need to take a step back, to consult and ask questions in a respectful way, and when we don't have the specialist knowledge internally, to seek external expertise and support,” she adds.

Ultimately, a workplace that embraces the LGBT+ community can mean happier colleagues and higher productivity. For Newman at GSK, having an LGBT+ network was transformative. “It actually became kind of a family to me,” she says. “For me personally, it changed my life and helped me on my journey to feel comfortable.”

OPINION

## ‘Choosing to treat the wellbeing of employees as a strategic priority is just the start. Moving from awareness to action is key’

Our mental health has been under fire over the past 12 months: isolation; fear; loss of social connections; financial uncertainty; bereavement; burn-out and anxiety all playing their part. We have seen the removal of the imposed discipline of the physical office, driving us to work longer hours with fewer breaks in the day and less time outside. Many people will also feel psychologically unsafe when returning to the workplace.

While the mental health challenges we are facing are there for all to see, there are silver linings. The pandemic has democratised mental health because most of us now know what it is to struggle, resulting in a greater degree of empathy and understanding for those who suffer regularly.

We have also witnessed the rise of authentic and vulnerable leadership in many workplaces. It was very encouraging to read in a recent survey of CEOs by Fortune/Deloitte that 98% say mental health and wellbeing will be a priority, even after the pandemic is over. I and many others have been campaigning for organisations to make this commitment for years.

Mental health and wellbeing are now firmly on the agenda and awareness is high, but how do we move to action? The answer lies in becoming more intentional.

We would all benefit from giving ourselves the gift of self reflection each day. We generally have good self-awareness in relation to our physical health, but less so with our mental health and wellbeing. It can be very helpful to build up a picture of what is driving our wellbeing: sleep, exercise, social connections, stress management, sense of purpose, helping others.

Our wellbeing is highly personal and individual, yet unless we have learned to manage a specific mental health challenge it is unlikely we have gained literacy in relation to what is driving it. Once we have this knowledge, proactively managing our wellbeing becomes a logical next step.

For employers, choosing to treat the wellbeing of employees as a strategic priority is just the start. Moving from awareness to action is key, alongside measuring the success of efforts in this space. It is encouraging to see some organisations adopting employee wellbeing as a measure of success alongside the creation of shareholder value.

Governments should also look to the wellbeing of citizens as a basis for building back better and tracking the success of the nations. At the very least, the government could incentivise employers to invest more in the wellbeing of employees through tax incentives. This should be a win-win as the resulting increase in productivity will ultimately lead to a greater tax take due to productivity gains and increased output from employees.

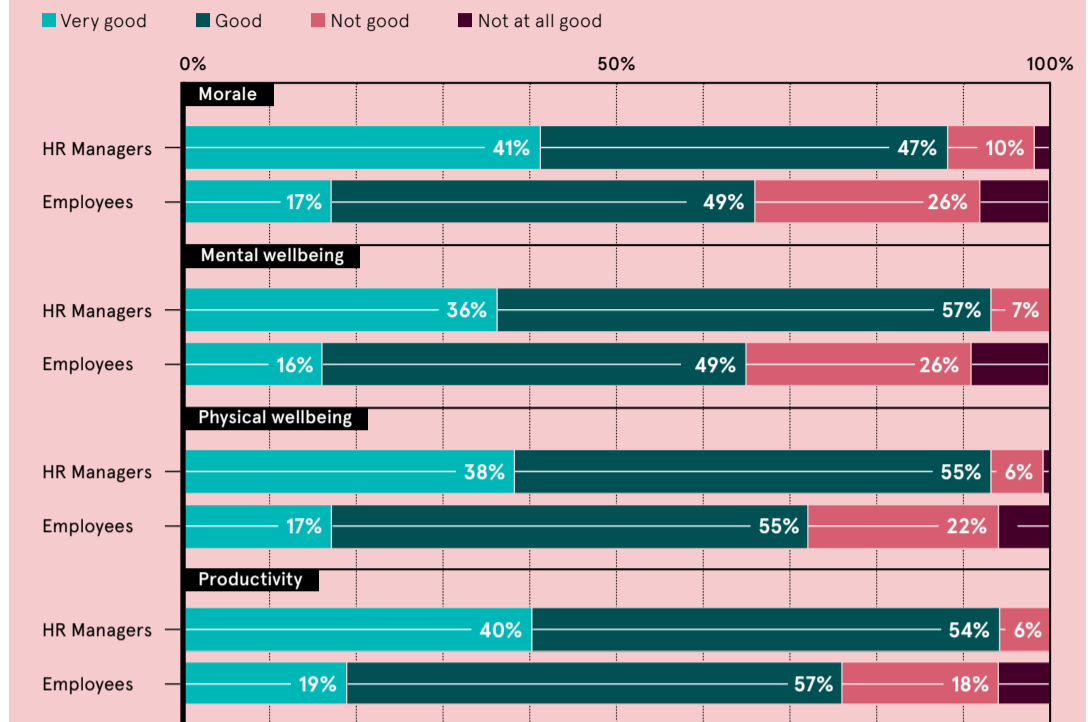
So, what type of future would you like to see? We stand at a unique point in time when we have an opportunity to create a more human world. Do we go back to the way things were before or do we look to move forward and create a world where the wellbeing of people is prioritised? Governments, employers and individuals all have a choice in this, and it starts with answering one simple question: “How are you today?”



Rob Stephenson  
Founder, InsideOut LeaderBoard  
CEO, Formscore

## DIFFERING WELLBEING PERSPECTIVES: EMPLOYEES VS HR LEADERS

Overall, how would you describe the following when it comes to staff at your organisation?



## ‘Our health is our wealth’

It's time to start seeing health and wellbeing as a critical business investment rather than an expense

The coronavirus vaccination programme is now well underway and offers a route out of what has been an extremely difficult period in our history. But the pandemic has left behind it a trail of devastation, not only for those directly affected by the virus, but in terms of the mental health of millions of people up and down the country.

Research by employee wellbeing firm Westfield Health paints a picture of our declining mental health and the damage this is doing to UK businesses. According to the study, the number of days employees took off as a result of mental health issues rose by 10 per cent in 2020 to an average of 3.2 days per person, and this now costs the UK economy £14 billion a year. A third of employees say there is poor mental health in their organisation and 36 per cent

concede their mental health affects their productivity on a weekly basis.

Dave Capper, chief executive of Westfield Health, believes the true scale of the mental health epidemic is likely to be under-reported. “There's still a taboo,” he says. “Some people will say they have a cold because they don't want their employer to know they're struggling. But there's also the issue of those who are struggling with their mental health in work. They're present, but they're not productive.”

The research also suggests a disconnect between the reality of employees' experiences and the perception of these by human resources leaders. While 35 per cent of employees admit their mental health is not good, only 7 per cent of HR leaders feel the same. And while just 20 per cent of employees are optimistic about productivity levels, this figure rises to 40 per cent among HR teams, suggesting the true extent of the issue may not be fully appreciated.

There are signs that businesses are starting to take steps to help staff with their mental health as 81 per cent of firms say they increased their spend on wellbeing during the pandemic and 36 per cent intend to do so further during 2021. But Capper warns not enough is being done.

“If business leaders don't prioritise health and wellbeing as a critical business investment rather than a business expense, we're not going to get on top

of this,” he says. “It was a crisis before COVID-19, but the pandemic just made it worse. I've always said our health is our wealth, but COVID has really brought that to the fore.”

The litmus test for any organisation is whether the issue of wellbeing is discussed at board meetings. “If it's not, it's not a critical business initiative and it should be,” says Capper. “Businesses need to ask themselves whether the wellbeing of their people is critical to their success and whether their actions back up that belief.”

If this is pushed by the senior leadership, it creates the conditions where wellbeing initiatives can thrive and make a real difference, he adds, rather than being a box-ticking exercise. Once the commitment and culture are in place, the next step is to speak to employees to find out what matters most to them. “You then work together to put in place measures you can afford and measure the results,” he says. This allows organisations to demonstrate a clear return on investment, reflected in fewer absence days and higher levels of productivity.

As the country starts to rebuild, Capper believes it's vital the government incentivises firms to invest in wellbeing, in the same way as it does with skills and training. “The risk of taking no action is the economic recovery, because one in three are struggling with their performance,” he cautions. “A happier, healthier and more resilient workforce is more likely to be successful and high performing.”

“A happier, healthier and more resilient workforce is more likely to be successful and high performing

Westfield Health is a not-for-profit organisation that can help businesses develop wellbeing services and mental health support. To find out how Westfield Health can support the wellbeing of your people, please visit [westfieldhealth.com/business](https://westfieldhealth.com/business)





## HEALTH

# How to deal with health crises in the workplace

The coronavirus pandemic has put the spotlight on health, with companies stepping up to support staff through issues such as long COVID, grief and the menopause

MaryLou Costa

From paid lockdown leave to encouraging set lunch breaks and even meeting-free days, corporate wellbeing policies are receiving more attention than ever, with the image of the ideal employer significantly remodelled over the course of the pandemic.

While the widespread effects of long COVID are prompting calls for greater employee support, addressing other situations that can cause disruptions to work, such as grief and menopause, are seeing empathetic employers step up. Here we spotlight companies removing the stigma around needing help.

## Dealing with grief

Tech giant Siemens has received more than 600 formal requests for compassionate leave in the past 12 months. This is part of the reason why it has joined a coalition of MPs, charities and business leaders calling on the government to

introduce a minimum two weeks' paid bereavement leave following the death of a close relative or partner, in light of the mounting coronavirus death toll.

"We believe in compassion and discretion on this issue and encourage a supportive and relaxed view on this. Our approach has enabled our people to 'bring their whole selves to work', knowing that, as an employer, we care about them. This has had a positive impact on the company's goals, its reputation and attractiveness as an employer," says Valerie Todd, human resources director for Siemens.

The company's policy, which includes regular managerial training, has been in place for more than ten years. It offers five days' paid leave, as well as time off to attend the funeral for family members, with further time granted at a manager's discretion. It also offers two weeks' parental bereavement leave for those



“Our approach has enabled our people to 'bring their whole selves to work', knowing that as an employer we care about them”

who lose a child under 18 or suffer a stillbirth after 24 weeks' pregnancy.

Its Employment Assistance Programme offers free bereavement counselling for employees, with internal Mental Health First Aiders on hand, plus company-wide training on mental health awareness, including a Wellbeing Festival.

"Being explicit about supporting your employees during such periods in their life and showing that, as an organisation, it's good to talk about what you're going through when you lose someone, will help our people cope better with their sad loss. It also enhances the sense of belonging and the long-term commitment to our company and its values," says Todd.

## Support through menopause

Almost a third (30 per cent) of women experiencing menopause say their symptoms have worsened during the pandemic, according to The Menopause Hub. But 90 per cent of UK businesses don't offer specific support. Yet 59 per cent of working women between 45 and 55 with symptoms say it negatively impacts them at work, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel

and Development, whose insights show women over 50 are the fastest growing workforce demographic, while the average age for menopause transition is 51.

With 13 per cent of its workforce women over 45, the launch of Channel 4's dedicated menopause policy in 2019 has resulted in 78 per cent of the TV channel's staff feeling better about the company as a place to work, while 10 per cent of female employees have used or plan to use the policy.

Launched on World Menopause Day with a panel event and employee videos, it includes flexible working, paid leave, quiet workspaces when in the office, awareness briefings to leadership teams and a Menopause Champion, alongside its in-house gender equality staff network 4Women. It recently partnered with Bupa Occupational Health to introduce cover under a new Menopause Plan and made its menopause policy public last year to inspire other companies to follow suit.

"What's exciting is that publishing the menopause policy has meant other organisations and partners are keen to hear our experiences and share theirs and, importantly, are increasing awareness and sharing what has worked," says Kirstin Furber, Channel 4's people director, who is also the executive sponsor of 4Women.

A key part of the process has been to embed the policy in company culture through regular, open conversations, while actively communicating how employees can access what they need. 4Women is now looking at other health issues affecting women, starting with a staff survey to better understand where to focus support.

## Understanding long COVID

Flexible workspace provider Clockwise has supported around 10 per cent of its workforce with issues directly related to COVID-19, with half experiencing ongoing needs. Clockwise is addressing each case individually, enabling a bespoke approach through a combination of company sick pay, flexible working, and access to physical and mental health support.

"Long COVID is a serious concern; those who are experiencing this illness are in effect 'patient zero'. It's such a new illness, with no clear path to recovery, so we're mindful to work in collaboration with those suffering with this," says the company's chief operating officer Alexandra Brunner.

"We want our people to rebound from any challenges, however we must appreciate this may be a longer process and the route to recovery may not be direct. This can intrinsically lead to frustration, so it's crucial conversations are ongoing and expectations are managed fluidly."

Recognising the emotional impact of such a debilitating, prolonged decline in health is just as crucial as dealing with the physical aspect, Brunner adds. All managers are therefore provided with mental health first aid training to take action pre-emptively to avoid a further decline in a team member's mental wellbeing.

But she notes it is also important to understand instances when, as an employer, it's not their place to solve an issue, but provide access to professional help.

"We are their employer and, while we might become trusted colleagues and friends, we recognise we mustn't act as parents or encourage this within the team," Brunner explains. ●

## 'Now is the time to truly make health a strategic boardroom priority'

Organisations are still only spending on average £150 per employee per year on health and wellbeing, according to a recent report by Westfield Health. While some progress has been made in recent years, and particularly in the past 12 months, my challenge to business leaders now is to be far bolder and more ambitious, building back with health at the heart of your board-level strategy.

Investment in IT and digital infrastructure pre-pandemic was between 8% and 10% of total revenues and over the past year has increased significantly. It's importance is now accepted as a strategic priority. Major investment over the past 12 months to ensure a company is fit to deal with the challenges from the pandemic has been essential to ensure productivity remains high and businesses are set up to work seamlessly. Likewise, investment in other critical areas of a business, such as marketing, sales, operations and finance, is high on the agenda for CEOs and ensures business success.

According to Deloitte's 2020 report, poor mental health costs UK employers up to £45 billion a year, a rise of 16% (or £6 billion) since 2016. And these are pre-Covid figures. Business leaders also spoke of the urgency and shared their views on the cost of mental ill health at Davos in January, where it was revealed that the global cost through lost productivity, absences and staff turnover was estimated to be \$2.5 trillion annually. If these numbers were seen in any other business department there would be significant action and investment. Now is the time to truly make health a strategic boardroom priority and not just a tick box exercise.

A handful of mental health-focused workshops or an offer of yoga classes once a week will not cut it. Would businesses cut corners and find cheap, quick fixes to their IT infrastructure when it is such a critical element of performance and success? It is time to go beyond a short-term plaster and be bold, holistic and inclusive. As investors focus more on an organisation's ESG, annual reports should include information on the health of their people. If it says on a company's

website and in its communications that people are the most important asset, they must live and breathe that statement.

In the seven years since I launched our global Wellbeing @ Work Summits series, there has been significant progress from business leaders and organisations across the world in developing truly holistic wellbeing and mental health strategies and programmes. I genuinely believe we are at a tipping point now and there are some game-changing technologies coming to market that will really make a significant difference. This means it is time to challenge ourselves even further and be more ambitious.

The evidence clearly demonstrates that effective wellbeing at work strategies encourage people to flourish and businesses to prosper. While the focus has rightly been on mental health in recent years, and particularly in the past 12 months, we need to take it to the next level. My call to action for business leaders is to build back with health at the heart of your strategy.

Never before has the health of all of us been in such sharp focus as in the past 12 months. As we bounce back from a challenging period, it is the health and wellbeing of our colleagues that will ensure success. Here is to a healthy, productive and purpose-driven workplace for everyone. ●



Chris Cummings  
CEO  
Wellbeing @ Work Global Summit Series  
www.fowinsights.com



# Leadership must focus on wellbeing

If leaders have learnt anything from the disruption of the last 12 months, it is the importance of inclusion, trust and psychological safety for the creation of sustainable performance and organisational growth during times of great uncertainty

The need to shift mindset and behaviours to develop inclusive leadership with an authentic focus on employee experience and wellbeing has never been more powerful or more pressing. Helping organisations to achieve this transformation is central to the work being done by global leadership development company, The Oxford Group. Chief executive, Olivier Herold, says: "In the new world of work, sustainable leadership calls for leaders to abandon old visions of the superhuman person who is superb at everything, and to challenge old ways of leading and managing talent that perpetuate this myth. Instead, leaders need to be real, open and committed to building a trusting, psychologically safe community in their organisations, connecting people instead of taking on the pressure to 'know'."

A recent study by the company collated the views of global development leaders on leadership priorities and the development focus for these disruptive times. These included a relentless focus on inclusion and diversity, highlighted by social movements such

as Black Lives Matter and Me Too, employee wellbeing, authentic leadership and emotional intelligence.

In the current climate, organisations are learning to lead in ways that balance innovation and management of risk, and they are doing this in the most challenging of live environments. In the volatile and unpredictable conditions created by a shifting global, digital economy and magnified by the global pandemic, the risk of getting things wrong is that much greater.

However, leaders who are vigilant about that risk recognise at a time when it is difficult to figure out the right questions, people at work are under huge pressure to apply rapid judgment and figure them out as they go. Asking the wrong questions results in getting the wrong information and mistakes being made. Under these conditions, success in creating sustainable working practices requires leaders to be more forgiving of human flaws and able to engender the deep trust that enables transformative change throughout the organisation.

As Caroline Taylor, director of client solutions and innovation at The Oxford Group, explains, leaders who are truly committed to building inclusive organisations and communities grasp the significance and value of creating high-trust environments. "In such environments, each person in the organisation feels able to share more of who they truly are. The barriers limiting authentic human connections can finally come down. Each person's potential can be released," she says.

Organisations that have inclusive leadership and psychological safety at the heart of the way they work will significantly enhance employee wellbeing and experience, thereby unlocking their full potential, leveraging the richness of

inclusivity and mobilising resources in the service of their organisation's goals.

Building inclusive leadership and psychological safety in the new world starts with creating an environment of space, safety and stimulus, and the individual and collective conditions for success that allow deep trust to be built and change and growth to happen.

Prioritising deep trust, where people have confidence and belief in others as well as themselves, underpins human thriving and performance, while psychological safety, the belief that you will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up or making mistakes, is essential to unlocking innovation and trust. Inclusion is so much more than simply not being excluded. It is being a valued voice and the extent to which people feel psychologically safe in being heard is significantly influenced by how much they trust their environment.

"Inclusive leadership and psychological safety are the bedrock of sustainable performance," says Elizabeth McManus, head of research and thought leadership at The Oxford Group. "Through deeper, truly receptive listening, seeking to hear all voices and creating a climate where people feel psychologically safe, the leaders of tomorrow are creating conditions for their people to succeed and thrive in the new world of work."

To explore how we can support you to develop inclusive leadership and psychological safety across your organisation get in contact via our website to start a conversation [www.oxford-group.com](http://www.oxford-group.com)

The Oxford Group  
A City & Guilds Group Business

63%

of women who had experienced the menopause said it negatively affected their ability to carry out day-to-day work

90%

of businesses do not offer workplace support for women experiencing the menopause

82%

of women say they were never offered help when experiencing the menopause

Forth With Life 2019



# THE GROWTH OF WORKPLACE MONITORING

The coronavirus pandemic has led to an increase in remote working, which in turn has led more companies to monitor their workforces in an effort to increase productivity and ensure staff are not shirking. But data suggests workers are actually working more at home than in the office and that offering more flexibility is more likely to lead to a boost in performance.

**48%**

of workers believe monitoring would damage the relationship with their manager

Prospect/YouGov 2020

**82%**

of workers say their home environment enables them to work productively

Leesman Index 2020

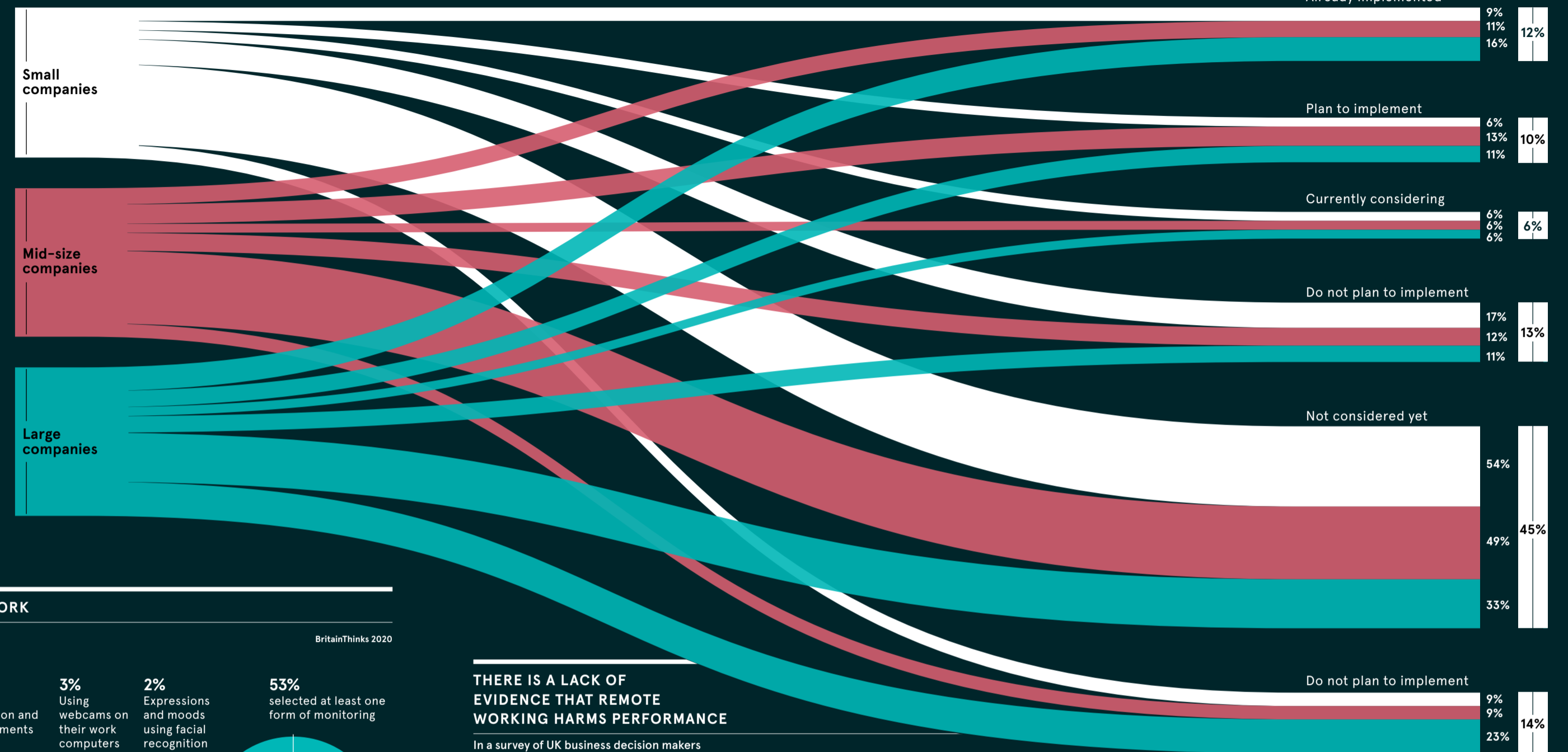
**63%**

of workers say their office environment enables them to work productively

## BUSINESSES ARE PLANNING TO INCREASE THE USE OF ONLINE SOFTWARE TO MONITOR EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY

NOTE: figures may not total 100% due to rounding

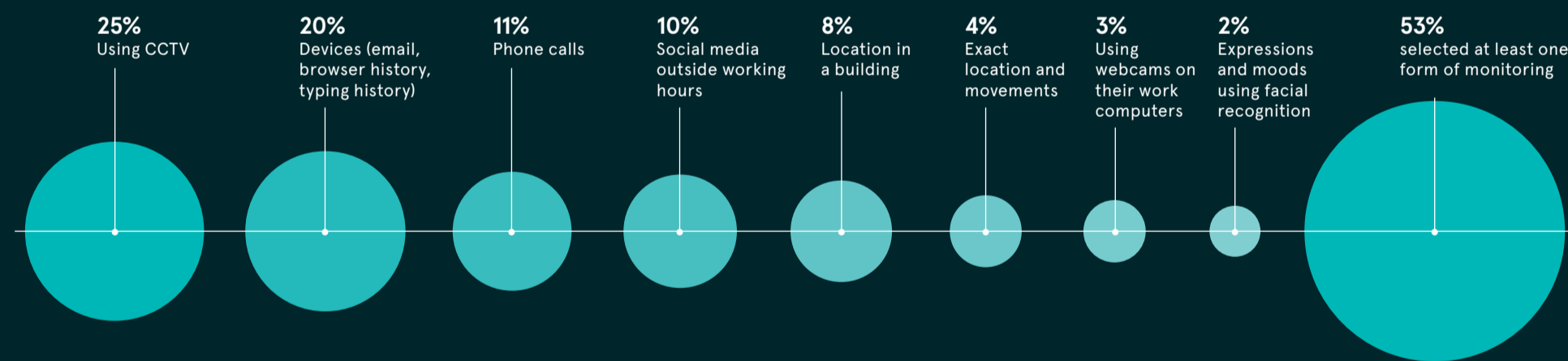
% of companies by size



## MORE THAN HALF OF UK EMPLOYEES THINK MONITORING HAPPENS AT THEIR PLACE OF WORK

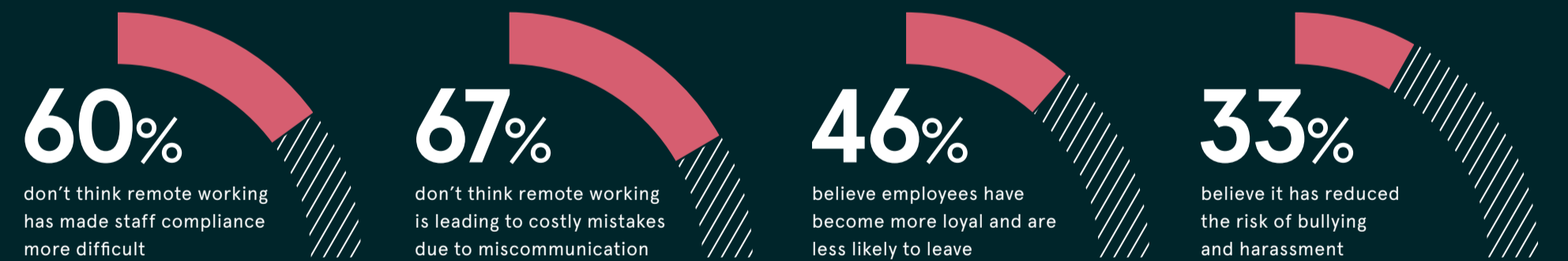
Staff who believe their employer uses these forms of monitoring

BritainThinks 2020



## THERE IS A LACK OF EVIDENCE THAT REMOTE WORKING HARMS PERFORMANCE

In a survey of UK business decision makers

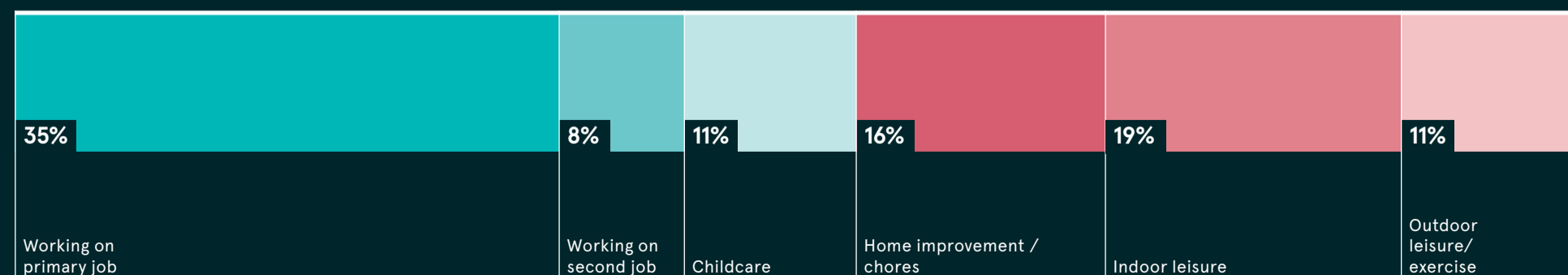


Skillcast 2020

## STAFF ARE SPENDING MORE TIME WORKING WHEN WORKING FROM HOME

Where additional time was allocated when not commuting

Becker Friedman Institute 2020



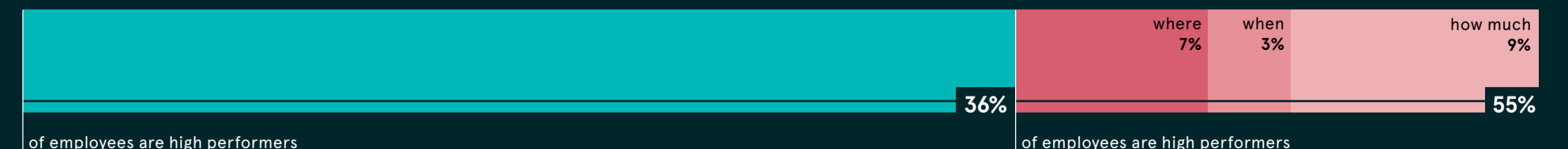
## COMPANIES THAT EMBRACE FLEXIBLE WORKING HAVE EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

% of companies with 'high performers'

Gartner 2020

At typical organisations where employees work a standard schedule of 40 hours per week in the office...

When organisations shift to allowing employees some choice over where, when and how much they work...





## RELATIONSHIPS

# Could remote work spark a rise in workplace harassment?

Remote work might bring with it a raft of benefits, but with professional and personal boundaries blurred, experts fear it could also fuel a rise in online harassment

Megan Tatum

In all sorts of ways, the widespread switch to remote work over the past year has been lauded as a major boon. It has created greater flexibility and freedoms for employees and eliminated long, stressful commutes. According to some studies, it has even boosted productivity, despite the backdrop of a global pandemic.

But when it comes to workplace harassment, there are concerns remote working may have the opposite effect.

According to a report published by King's College London in January, the migration to online communications and the blurring between personal and professional boundaries has meant exposure to workplace sexual harassment has risen drastically. In addition, with a 52 per cent increase in work communications during evening hours, according to Microsoft, and an increase in one-to-one online meetings, it is becoming increasingly difficult for managers to monitor all workplace interactions.

"It changes the game," says Gemma Dale, wellbeing and engagement officer at the University of Manchester, and co-founder of The Work Consultancy. Adoption of video conference calls means we're seeing

into each other's homes, for example, and while many parents are juggling home schooling and work, they may have to send messages or emails in the evening. Also many people are having to share personal numbers if they have not been given a work phone.

"All this means harassment has the potential to come into our homes. And some harassers may even be emboldened by this," says Dale.

While remote working eliminates common physical forms of harassment, such as inappropriate touching, brushing up against people or breaching personal space, it opens up other ways that harassment could be perpetuated, she says.

This could include inappropriate online communications, cyberbullying or gaslighting, a type of abuse where perpetrators purposely cause victims to question their own recollection of events by lies or manipulation, such as claiming credit for their work or setting unrealistic deadlines.

This can be hard to manage for human resources teams and senior leadership. "It is not physically possible to stop inter-employee contact and for task-achieving purposes contacts may well be necessary, as it would be in a 'normal' office," says Ian Ashcroft, associate director at procurement specialists Hawtrey Dene. "However, constant contact from one employee to another could be interpreted as harassment or even bullying."

Where incidents do occur, the more isolated nature of working from home can make the decision to report more complex too, says Karen Beardsell, an independent HR consultant and former director of HR at Stonewall.

"Most people who experience harassment might sense-check with a colleague or speak to a member of the HR team before raising an issue more formally," she says. "These informal chance conversations are not available anymore."

That is an additional blow when harassment takes on an insidious form, such as gaslighting. A 2019 survey on Twitter found 12 per cent of employees are not even sure if they've been the victim of gaslighting.



So what should HR teams and senior leaders do to ensure the rise in remote work is not accompanied by an increase in harassment?

One place to start is by proactively reiterating and reinforcing company values and expectations, says Ed Mayo, chief executive at charity Pilotlight. "Values underpin all behaviours," he says. "That's the most sure way to deal with these behaviours, not as when problems occur but by investing in and developing a positive culture. That gives people a reference point as to what behaviours fit and work well, and what, indeed, might not."

Leaders need to be seen to model these behaviours too, he points out. The failure to do just that led to the resignation of the UK chairman at KPMG in February, when he was captured on a video call telling staff "don't sit there and moan" about the pandemic and disregarded unconscious bias as "crap".

"I don't think enough companies have done that during lockdown, when it comes to being proactive in the management of their culture and conduct," says Bell.

Not all reports of harassment, bullying or gaslighting arise from the victims themselves. This means organisations should also offer bystander training, says Dale, educating staff on how to spot what is and is not appropriate. The importance of this type of training is even

**Leaders don't like to talk about this stuff, they see it as their dirty laundry**

Next, businesses need to ensure all employees feel able to speak up. In some respects, remote work can boost the incentive to report, says Lisa Bell, founder at harassment specialists Tell Jane, as staff are speaking up from a safe home environment. But in other ways, the mechanisms for how to do so can be more easily lost.

"Companies need to signpost people to where to report, and reassure people via communications that if they do raise a complaint it will be taken seriously and handled appropriately," says Bell.

This is even more crucial when, as is the case with many small and medium-sized enterprises, there is not a designated HR team or director and staff must report complaints to senior leadership, some of whom may also be the subject of the complaint. It is important companies demonstrate nobody is beyond reproach and that it takes all complaints seriously.

"I don't think enough companies have done that during lockdown, when it comes to being proactive in the management of their culture and conduct," says Bell.

Not all reports of harassment, bullying or gaslighting arise from the victims themselves. This means organisations should also offer bystander training, says Dale, educating staff on how to spot what is and is not appropriate. The importance of this type of training is even

greater during remote work as "the signals may be weaker when it comes to how to spot this", she says.

"So much of our communication is body language and it can be much harder to pick up through a screen," Dale explains. "But you can still be a remote bystander. If you see behaviour in a group chat that's offensive or inappropriate, or you're in an online meeting and see someone being bullied, you should be encouraged to either escalate it in the room or report it afterwards."

When an incident is reported, HR teams or senior leaders need to ensure they have a clear plan in place for what happens next, urges Bell. In some ways remote work can facilitate investigations as material or messages are often saved and can then be used as evidence. Also there are no legal issues in conducting disciplinary procedures or grievances via Zoom. But too often even large organisations do not know what to do when they are faced with a complaint of harassment.

"Leaders don't like to talk about this stuff, they see it as their dirty laundry," says Bell. "But it's happening in all organisations and I always encourage those I work with to deal with this constructively."

Regardless of the trajectory of the pandemic, remote work is set to be a mainstay of workplace culture for the foreseeable future. Failure to act on workplace harassment could see companies failing to reap its many potential benefits. ●



## Q&A Psychology at Work

As an increasing number of people struggle with their mental health, it's more important than ever that organisations put in place appropriate support from qualified professionals, says **Dr Annemarie O'Connor**, clinical psychologist and clinical director of corporate relationships at HelloSelf

**Q How big an issue is mental health for senior leaders and employees? Does it get the attention it deserves?**

**A** It's always been an issue, but more so than ever due to coronavirus and because everyone's circumstances have become more complex. Remote working means leaders and managers are finding it difficult to know how to approach the subject, even if they were confident before. They don't want to be overly intrusive, but when you can't bump into people at the watercooler, it's much harder to pick up on whether staff really are OK. Managers are having to be more proactive and people find that difficult. I think the issue of mental health is certainly getting more attention, but how to respond and what to do is still very much uncertain for most.

**Q Are people generally now more willing to admit now they may need some help?**

**A** Mental wellbeing is being talked about so much more at work now. It's become easier for people to say they're having a bad day, but it's still not easy for people to admit they are unwell, struggling or they haven't been OK for quite some time. Managers and colleagues are inquiring how colleagues are feeling and being creative at trying to find out how people truly are, which is great. Where they report having difficulty is how to respond and what action to take if someone tells them they're not well or if they suspect someone is not well. It can be particularly tricky when

all our conversations are taking place online or over the phone.

**Q Why is it important from a health perspective to take early action when people are struggling?**

**A** There is a huge body of evidence showing the importance of early intervention, whether in relation to physical or mental health. If you had an aching knee, after four or five days you'd be thinking about getting advice from your doctor. You wouldn't just endure it or ask for advice from someone unqualified to help you. Why do we set different standards for our mental health? Sadly, it's not uncommon for us to treat people who have struggled for months or even years with torturous levels of distress, often having gone undetected by those around them. HelloSelf places clinical psychologists inside organisations. When your employer provides this direct access to qualified experts, we see people at a much earlier point in their difficulty or illness. People attend because it's easy to; they don't wait for a personal arbitrary threshold to justify seeking guidance or help. We intervene early, positively and proactively, changing things for that individual; so much pain, distress and personal cost can be avoided.

**Q How would you go about trying to help someone who is struggling?**

**A** I can answer that proactively and reactively. Proactively, HelloSelf makes a huge impact working with employers to provide early, easy access to professional support. We also help companies to talk more openly about

mental health, equip them with the skills to develop their own wellbeing and guide them on how to proactively support the wellbeing of others, their peers, colleagues and loved ones. Senior buy-in is super impactful. This can actually prevent people getting into a place where they are really struggling. Reactively, it's about drawing on the wealth of evidence and science we have at our fingertips about cognition, behaviour, emotion, the brain, social connection, systems, the physical body, to deliver personalised, effective treatment. As a clinician, you tackle what will have the biggest positive impact first through collaboratively identifying changes to be made and how to make them. This process of goal-setting continues beyond recovery and into maintaining wellness and personal development. Facilitating this kind of change in someone, from being unwell to recovery

**“Psychological coaching, proactively working on your psychological fitness, is something all leaders should be doing. You're coached to be a good leader, why not get coached to be a good you?”**

and beyond, is a huge privilege and, as you can imagine, immensely rewarding. But doing it early in someone's difficulty is just how it's meant to be. If you know someone who is struggling, please encourage them to talk to a professional; it could change their life.

**79%**

of our members report reduced symptoms of depression

**77%**

of our members report reduced symptoms of anxiety

**79%**

of our members report improved levels of distress

**Q Why should this be a business priority in the current climate, particularly when the economy is suffering?**

**A** For most organisations, their assets are their people. They rely on people being able to function at their best. You know yourself if you're not well, you lack energy, motivation, the ability to concentrate, make good decisions, communicate; tasks that would ordinarily be well within your capability are a struggle. To me it's pretty straightforward; if someone is not OK, it's likely their work is not at its optimum level either. We know right now that millions of us are not OK; a proactive intervention is clearly indicated. If you intervene early in mild or moderate depression with evidence-based treatment, it takes around eight to ten sessions to get someone better and equip them with the skills to maintain that recovery. If someone is signed off work with moderate to severe depression, the average amount of time they will be off for is around eight months. The cost to the individual and the organisation is huge.

**Q Are there other benefits too, for instance being seen as a responsible employer?**

**A** Yes, it's just the right thing to do. Employers and the work we do have a big impact on our mental health. Employers can decide to be a positive influence or they can decide it's not their problem. Caring for your people can run through a company's whole culture. Businesses that look after their people get the best decision-making, the clearest thinking and innovation, high engagement, diligence and loyalty, they retain their people and attract new talent; they ultimately succeed. Interestingly, the feedback we receive from organisations is that even the people who don't directly access our team feel supported that it's available and the employer has thoughtfully invested in their wellbeing.

**Q What message would you have for business leaders who may themselves be feeling under pressure?**

**A** Lead by example. Leaders have an opportunity to walk the walk rather than just talk the talk. People

will only approach you if they feel their issue will be well received and lead to a positive outcome. The leaders we work with are forward thinking and are themselves saying they get help when they need it. They are explicit that this isn't something you can always do on your own and accessing professional help is not a sign of weakness or pathology, but instead is taking action for positive change. Psychological coaching, proactively working on your psychological fitness, is something all leaders should be doing. You're coached to be a good leader, why not get coached to be a good you?

**Q How can HelloSelf help businesses tackle the issue of poor mental health?**

**A** HelloSelf provides access to high-quality private sessions with clinical psychologists through its platform and app. The whole experience is tailored to make sure every employee achieves their personal goal, whether it's to recover from illness, understand yourself better, gain confidence, improve your working relationships or manage stress. Any company, however big or diverse, can get the benefit of the best psychological coaching and therapy for their team directly and swiftly. We help all employees identify and meet their own individual wellbeing needs. They learn the skills to get mentally healthy and stay well long term. It all leads to better outcomes for your employee and therefore better outcomes for your business.

HelloSelf provides online access to the UK's best clinical psychologists. To find out more please visit [www.helloself.com/workplace](http://www.helloself.com/workplace)

**HelloSelf**



HIRING

# Virtual onboarding: the new reality

Having to join a company virtually is likely to outlast the coronavirus pandemic as many companies shift to more permanent remote working. But this raises challenges over how to get new starters up to speed and feeling part of a company

Oliver Pickup

The deep trepidation felt by Jeevan Singh when she was appointed finance officer of influencer marketing platform Fanbytes in September is relatable for those who have endured a remote onboarding process in the past year, especially workers at the start of their career.

"Starting a new job in lockdown was terrifying," says the 23 year old, who in 2019 graduated from Royal Holloway, University of London. "I thought I'd feel like an outsider and lack the essential team-working environment. Above all, I was worried that I'd miss out on training and be left to figure out how to do things."

Fanbytes' suite of online collaboration tools and a "fantastic culture" of frequent, virtual meetings and social events soon allayed her fears, though. "For anyone looking to start a new job remotely or for businesses wanting to create a more inclusive culture, regular face-to-face calls and chats should be at the top of the agenda," recommends Singh. "While I haven't met any of my colleagues in person yet – and they may all turn out to be catfishes [creating a fake identity] – I nevertheless feel like I know them well."

Charlie Johnson, founder and chief executive of BrighterBox, a



Shutterstock/Eugeny Hmur

to get a feel for the team," he says. "So much human communication is performed through body language and experiencing a person's energy."

From the outset at MUFG, Parize was open minded and flexible, even agreeing to reschedule meetings so they didn't clash with Joe Wicks' workout sessions, and keen to display his human side.

"I encouraged video calls and switched my camera on, no matter how bad my outfit was," he says. "There was no pressure for others to do the same, but I was happy to see that through leading by example and slowly building up relationships, my team began to feel more comfortable, turning on their cameras. This change helped enormously to gain a sense of each individual."

Clearly, the coronavirus crisis has transformed hiring practices and talent management. While organisations are struggling to keep pace with the change necessitated by government-enforced remote working, the direction of travel is evident. "Virtual recruitment and onboarding are undoubtedly here to stay," says Jon Addison, vice president at professional social network LinkedIn.

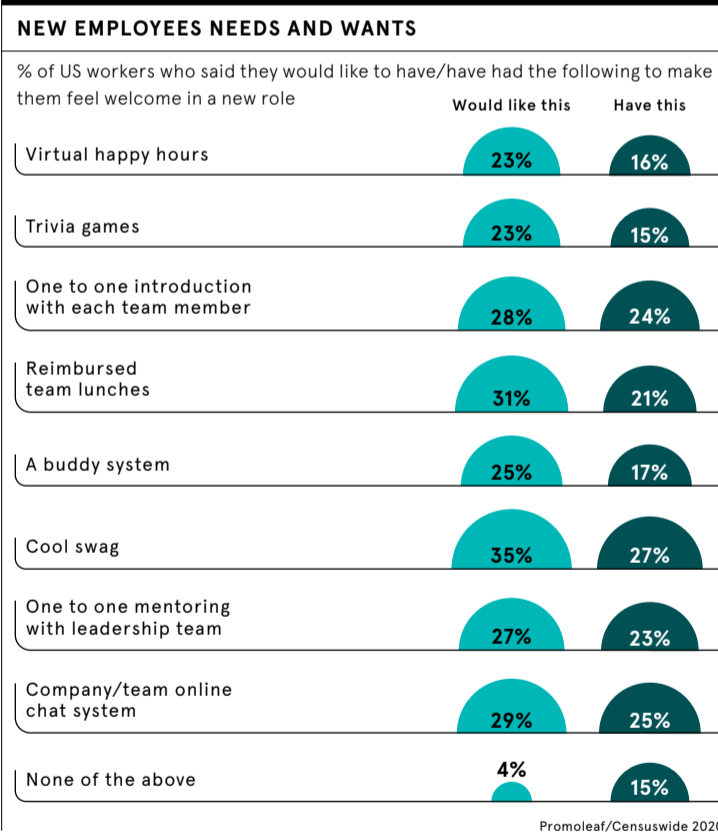
Indeed, 84 per cent of the 1,500 human resources and talent professionals surveyed from around the world for LinkedIn's *The Future of Recruiting* report predict virtual recruiting will outlast COVID-19.

Addison argues that as the war for talent intensifies, organisations must sharpen their remote onboarding, career development and training capabilities. "The first few days in a job are extremely important in setting up new joiners well," he says. "Remote onboarding can make that challenging, particularly for younger generations joining the workforce who may not know what to expect."

London-based recruitment firm that places graduates with start-ups, agrees that for younger talent beginning a full-time job virtually is particularly daunting. His organisation's research reveals that more than a third (36 per cent) of respondents feel less confident about starting a role remotely, although 44 per cent say it would make no difference. "Ultimately, what new starters are looking for in 2021 is plenty of contact time: one to ones with their direct managers as well as the wider team and virtual socials to get to know teammates on a more personal and less formal level," says Johnson.

What about remote onboarding as a new manager? Having amassed 16 years' experience working in financial services, Cedrick Parize was perhaps not as terrified as Singh when, last March, he joined MUFG as Europe, Middle East and Africa head of internal audit for the bank's global markets. However, 12 months after he took up his position, Parize is yet to meet any of the eight-strong team, two of whom he hired, in the flesh.

"Initially, with it being the start of the first lockdown, it was a challenge



**“An employee's experience in the first 90 days will have a massive impact on their happiness, productivity and longevity**



## Five tips to improve remote onboarding

### 1 Divide and conquer interview duties

Money Penny, a global outsourced communications provider, has recruited more than 350 new staff members since March 2020, and group chief executive Joanna Swash believes the secret to a successful hire is to divide and conquer. "We have two people to carry out remote interviews," she says. "This allows each person to ask different questions and enables them to watch body language while the other person is talking."

### 2 Use technology solutions to ease the load

Alexander Nicolaus, chief people officer at Paysend, a UK-based international money transfer fintech, urges business leaders to embrace technology solutions to improve hiring and training efficiencies. "We built an onboarding intranet that acts as a self-service toolkit for new joiners," he says. This facility relieves the pressure on the business and allows employees to access a wide range of information.

### 3 Build a remote culture

GitLab is a fully remote technology company that has 13,000 employees spread across 67 countries. Head of

remote Darren Murph says the key to successful remote onboarding is instilling a company culture. "The three key aspects are our commitment to working handbook first, being outcomes focused and having intentional communication," he says.

### 4 Buddy up new hires

Being assigned a work buddy is vital for remote hires, according to Nicole Alvino, co-founder and head of strategy at SocialChorus, a workforce communications platform. "We added 'sidekicks' early on in the pandemic to ensure every person would have a personal connection. The sidekick is a person who can help navigate the culture."

### 5 Introduce the CEO

In many ways remote onboarding has improved efficiencies, not least when it comes to including the C-suite in the process. "It has offered an opportunity for our chief executive to join the new hire training sessions," says Joan Burke, chief people officer at DocuSign. "Booking in time to lead a Zoom session is much easier than clearing his schedule for a face-to-face orientation session."

The most progressive organisations will start the experience well in advance of the new hire's first day. Addison says this is achieved by connecting them to their team, ensuring home office equipment arrives, if remote working is possible, and sending a welcome package that includes information about company culture and explaining what the coming days and weeks might entail.

As vice president of people and operations at ClassPass, the fitness and wellness network that hit a \$1-billion valuation last year, and with almost 400 employees distributed across 30 countries, Hollen Spatz has had to ensure her organisation's remote onboarding runs smoothly.

All hires join a programme coined "the 90-day warm-up". The onboarding process starts with "a few surprises in the mail, including some company swag" and a personalised note from the ClassPass leadership team. The programme consists of a series of

sessions introducing new team members to various aspects of the organisation over a three-month period.

"Onboarding and staff retention go hand in hand," says Spatz. "An employee's experience in the first 90 days of their role will have a massive impact on their happiness, productivity and longevity with a company."

To accelerate the assimilation, ClassPass has also created a series of virtual check-ins with managers so beginners are clear on their role expectations and have ample opportunity to raise questions.

Finally, Spatz acknowledges that the remote onboarding process requires continuous tweaking. "We used to send out gift cards for a welcome lunch over Zoom, but quickly realised people might not feel comfortable eating in front of new colleagues on camera," she concedes.

With remote onboarding and virtual training set to remain, there's plenty for business leaders to chew over to improve the recipe for success. ●

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RETENTION

# Career development post-pandemic: how companies should think about mobility

Can the internal mobility challenge be met by creating a happy and engaged, but flexible, workforce open to moving between roles and skillsets?

Jonathan Weinberg

When the return to workplaces begins, solving the internal mobility puzzle will become evermore important. As companies look to downsize their workforce, or adapt operations post-coronavirus, shifting priorities fast within a fully flexible workforce will become key.

According to Aon's *Future of Work* survey in December 2020, a third (34 per cent) of those questioned said "maximising workforce agility and resilience to address future disruptions or risks" was extremely important.

But with employees forgoing pay rises and promotions over the past 12 months or working from home amid uncertainty over whether their job will even exist in the "new normal", how can companies retain, repurpose or reskill staff, especially when many are reconsidering their career goals?

Danny Harmer, Aviva's chief people officer, believes a culture of internal mobility takes time and investment. The company advertises jobs to its own people, with around 30 per cent of vacancies filled by existing staff. It also offers a chance to experiment with new roles via a Tap Into Talent programme that allows people to spend up to 12 weeks in a different role so they can learn about the broader business, develop new skills and work with different people, while meeting a temporary business need.

"We've always championed our internal talent," she says. "Throughout



the pandemic, we've continued to invest in our people's learning and development. We recently offered a day-long introduction to coding workshop. Nearly 200 colleagues attended, the majority with no prior coding experience."

Some two thirds of Aviva's 540 UK apprentices are existing colleagues who have taken up the opportunity to continue or deepen professional skills associated with a current role or develop their learning due to a more senior move, with 20 per cent of contracted hours spent learning with no reduction in salary. A second scenario would be to keep working at the company, but in a different role in a different business area.

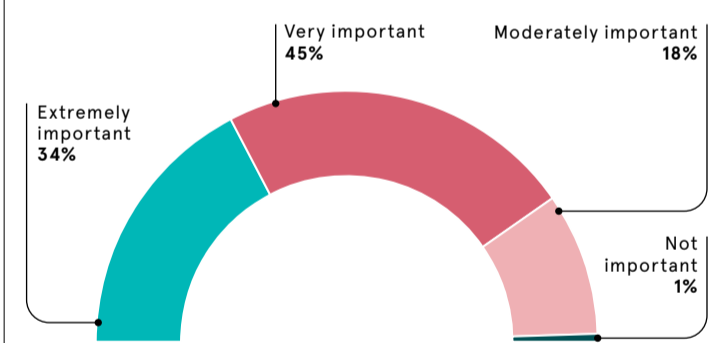
Kealey Chapman, human resources business director at Oracle, believes upskilling and reskilling will need to be "completely reimaged". She explains: "Time at home and away from the office meant time to rethink your path and your priorities. While prioritising personalisation, flexibility, on-demand access and growth opportunities is a strong start to a positive employee experience, it is not one size fits all. Every country, industry, organisation and team will have new employee expectations and demands, and it will be up to HR leaders to help reimagine them."

In the years ahead, changes to employee roles will increasingly be identified through artificial intelligence, says Chapman, adding: "Employers can find skillsets to support this within their existing workforce, but it's often difficult for employees to accurately pinpoint and describe specific skills."

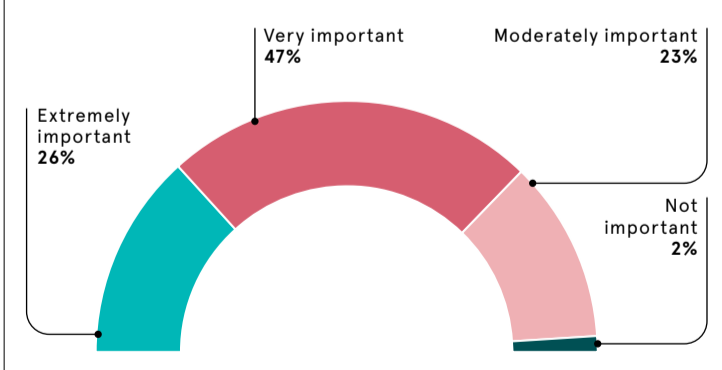
"Technologies like adaptive artificial intelligence and digital assistants can help employees identify,

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOLLOWING FACTORS IN HOW A COMPANY DEFINES THE FUTURE OF WORK

Maximising workforce agility and resilience to address future risks



Planning for the future of job roles, people and skills needed in the future



grow and describe their skills, and align them to what the organisation needs. With this clarity and opportunity, employees can use HR platforms to quickly match to new opportunities, ultimately fostering career advancement at a time when that might seem more difficult than ever."

Siemens is one company embracing such a future. It has worked with

Aon to design assessments looking at vocational interests and abilities, attitudes, learning styles and cognitive abilities, as well as an indicator of "willingness to change".

A complex matching algorithm then produces a report highlighting the top three best matches between employees' own interests and those identified as a future skill

for Siemens. From there, employees may apply to join one of 30 reskilling routes for courses, training and qualifications.

John McLaughlin, chief commercial officer of Aon's human capital business in Europe, Middle East and Africa, says: "Siemens' activity is an example of how employees are given access to tools to make informed choices about their career paths. It's not employer-imposed learning, development and training, their people are given the opportunity to learn how they can contribute to the future success of the organisation."

The pandemic has also brought about different ways to keep employees happy. Lisa Pantelli, of Simply Communicate, a community for HR and internal communication professionals, suggests "tokenistic perks will not only be irrelevant, but also physically impossible".

Instead, learning and recognition will lead the way, with Pantelli giving the example of Microsoft's new Viva digital employee experience platform, which can feed in learning courses direct to the employee from the likes of LinkedIn Learning and Coursera.

She explains: "Instead of a well-stocked office kitchen, people would much rather be able to have their voice heard through options such as a Zoom call with their CEO. As a result, businesses will need to work harder on the value proposition they bring to individuals rather than the fun office-based perks. We've seen a shift in reward and recognition programmes over the past 12 months, not just because new ways of working are demanding it but also because behaviours have changed."

Naleena Gururani, chief people officer at UK full-fibre broadband provider Hyperoptic, has adapted to this change, introducing practical perks, such as an hour a day where employees can take time for themselves, plus the offer of virtual home exercise sessions to encourage wellbeing.

"It is important to build a work environment that balances efficiency and performance while answering the 'what's in it for me?' question and creating moments that matter for us all. We have to become 'colleagues' rather than mere employees this year. In 2020, we saw peer-to-peer recognition really increase," says Gururani.

However, Pantelli strikes a note of caution: "The technologies on offer to support internal mobility are fantastic, but the right support needs to be in place for those who might not have access to these platforms, or the skills and knowledge to use them, to ensure they are not left behind. Be mindful of their limitations and explore the employee journey with everyone in mind." ●

# Sustained agility for business resilience

Agility, harnessing data and technology, and listening to real-time staff feedback are key to sustained business success in the new workplace

Last year was one of great change, uncertainty and complexity for business and 2021 promises more of the same, with the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, issues around Brexit and the spectre of a global recession.

The organisations that have survived, and in some cases thrived, through this flux are those that have been agile, able to pivot to new market demands, embrace technology at scale and support a reimagined way employees work.

However, with the pace of change unlikely to slow any time soon, ongoing uncertainty means businesses will have to practise sustained agility for a longer period of time. This can come at a cost to employee wellbeing, as constant alterations to working patterns, production schedules and organisational structure hit morale and productivity.

Initially, organisations need to look at how they can align their operations to

support new initiatives and pivots. This means ensuring functions as varied as human resources, finance, IT and sales are arranged in a way that contributes to a business's long-term vision. During a crisis, this vision can change and iterate rapidly, so building in flexibility and having tools to facilitate rapid organisational redesign is key.

So how can businesses adapt to this uncertain world and ensure they stay ahead of the competition?

Joe Ross, chief product officer at cloud-based workforce management provider WorkForce Software, believes real business agility is about combining strategic pivots and flexibility with employee engagement and feedback as part of a continuous loop.

"Change is hard and if you're changing often, it's compounding. It becomes evermore difficult for employees to adjust," he says.

"Sustained agility requires a balanced approach to driving the changes a company needs and assessing the impact it has on employee wellness and engagement. If you don't have the ability to understand how employees perceive change and adapt accordingly, the effect on employee performance and retention can have a material impact on a company's ability to execute over time."

It's also important to take into account differing employee needs. For example, an employee motivated by additional pay might welcome the ability to add new shifts, but another who has childcare issues might not. Flexibility, at scale, is key.

**Employee engagement during change**  
Qualtrics' 2021 Employee Experience Trends Report examined how the pandemic has affected employee attitudes across 11,000 employees in 20 countries. It found that, in the midst of a global crisis, new drivers are emerging when it comes to keeping employees motivated.

Chief among them was a sense of belonging to an organisation, which 73% of respondents cited as the most important driver of engagement, compared with opportunities for learning (60%) and confidence in senior leaders (53%) in the previous year's survey.

At the same time, belonging is highly correlated to actually being engaged, with just 20% of employees who feel they don't belong being engaged in their work, versus 91% who did feel a sense of belonging, which is more than 3.5 times higher.

However, organisations need to be aware of the difference between

thinking they're supporting employees and actually doing so.

A recent survey sponsored by WorkForce Software found 83% of employers believe they offer their employees flexibility in their schedules, but only 60% of workers agree. A further 83% of employers believe they have effectively adapted working practices during the pandemic, but only 69% of their staff agree.

"You can make all the pivots and adjustments to business strategy you want, but if your people don't embrace it because they feel you're not listening to them or understanding how they feel, you'll fail," says Ross.

Creating this sense of partnership between employees and employers is about continuous feedback, he believes. With so much change happening, the days when an annual employee survey held value are long gone. Instead, employers need to gather feedback from their workforce in real time, checking the pulse of employees as operational pivots happen and employees are impacted.

"In the end, employees are the critical human engine that must be fuelled and ready to go to ensure companies succeed through this period of continued uncertainty and change," says Ross.

## Digital transformation

Another driver of business success through longterm change will be the ability to use data and technology in meaningful ways to predict problems and prescribe corrective actions to avoid unwanted results. Digital transformation agendas that had long been discussed by businesses were suddenly accelerated in response to the significant disruptions from the pandemic. Many of these innovations have led to real change being implemented more rapidly than ever before.

According to a McKinsey Global Survey of 900 executives, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated internal and customer-focused digitalisation by



In a period of seismic change, successful businesses will be those that can embrace and adapt to uncertainty

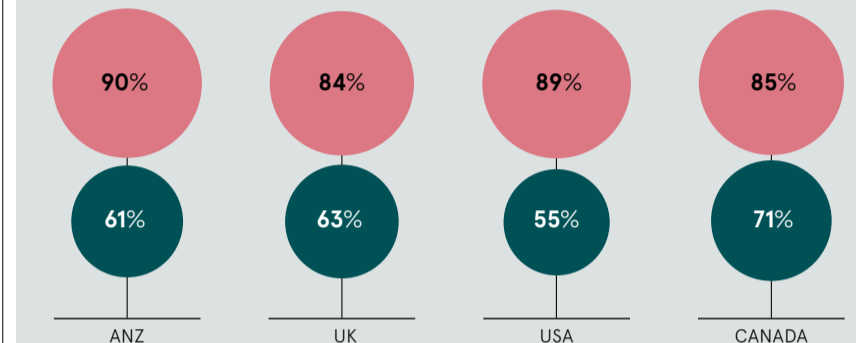
## FLEXIBILITY IN SCHEDULING

Does your organisation provide flexibility in scheduling?



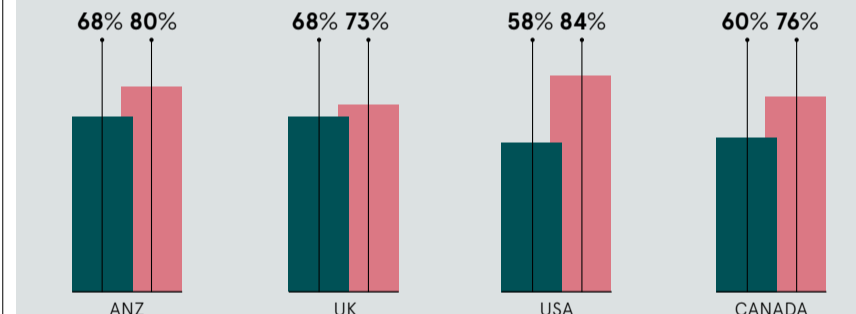
## CHANGES IN PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCE

Does your organisation help employees deal with disruptions to work schedules due to changes in personal circumstance?



## COVID RESPONSE

Has your organisation effectively adapted to the workplace scheduling challenges created by the global pandemic?



an average of three to four years, with the share of digital or digitally enabled products in their portfolios accelerating seven years.

Embracing this digital transformation is vital to staying agile in the workplace, particularly one that is seeing significant changes to the business, distancing regulations and a shift to remote working. Managers, who once could rely on face-to-face meetings with employees to gauge warning signs and subtle shifts in morale, can no longer do so.

Instead, companies can leverage data from workforce management systems to gain insights into the impact of decisions and predict new behaviours.

"Being remote, it's critical to monitor employee data to proactively identify signals and preemptively take action to limit negative employee experience. For example, you can use data to find correlations between last-minute changes to schedules and employee retention, or the effect of too much or too little overtime on job satisfaction," says Ross.

This early-warning system is vital when it comes to safeguarding your employees' wellness and work-life balance. Damage control after the fact is costly and can hit an organisation's attrition rates, productivity and brand reputation, particularly in an era when

employees and candidates increasingly expect businesses to be authentic about their values and purpose.

In a period of seismic change, successful businesses will be those that can embrace and adapt to uncertainty. However, the key to continued success will be ensuring you take your people with you on that journey.

"Sustained agility requires us to proactively plan for how we will continually measure employee needs, engagement and wellness from the beginning and test, learn and adapt our operational plans. The business strategy that requires agility can't be executed without a workforce that believes in its purpose and buys in fully to the changes they're making. The organisations that can practise this will be the ones outperforming their competitors and it has to be part of organisational design," Ross concludes.

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Instead of a well-stocked office kitchen, people would rather have their voice heard through a Zoom call with their CEO



To do list

~~Schedule mtg with finance~~

Prepare 121s

~~Review employee engagement results~~

Read The Times Wellbeing Report

Mental health/wellbeing strategy/plan

~~Call dentist for kids~~

~~Vet appointment~~

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