

BRITISH SAFETY COUNCIL POSITION PAPER ON WELLBEING

KEY POINTS

- **The workplace has an integral impact on workers' wellbeing, which is fundamentally linked to job quality.**
- **Leadership of health and wellbeing must come from the highest level within an organisation.**
- **Executive engagement and support are one of the most important tools for driving a culture of wellbeing. Having competent line managers is also vital.**
- **We advocate organisations adopt a holistic view of wellbeing. Our own approach is focused on training people to enable prevention to avoid poor wellbeing happening.**
- **Employers should not impose wellbeing on employees. For wellbeing to be taken seriously, it starts with active conversations with employees.**
- **Supporting the health and wellbeing of employees is in an employer's own self-interest – done well, wellbeing protects both the long-term health of a business and its workforce, as it improves performance and raises productivity and profitability. It can also reduce costs linked to absenteeism, presenteeism, disability and staff turnover.**
- **Employees that use workplace health interventions tend to report positively on the impact of these on their health.**

Wellbeing

There is growing awareness of the impact wellbeing has on individuals, organisations and society. The global COVID pandemic has both increased employer intent and action towards wellbeing.

British Safety Council recognises there's a lot that happens in the workplace which has an integral impact on wellbeing, be it the environment, the culture, the facilities, the quality of work and the leadership within the business. Indeed, wellbeing performance impacts company performance. Hence wellbeing, done well, has a positive effect on those involved and their families – simply by investing in workplace health, employers also impact positively on society. Wellbeing is more than a programme of individual initiatives, it is a people and performance strategy

British Safety Council uses its simple working definition of wellbeing, 'a description of an individual's ongoing state which enables a person to thrive or not'. We believe that harnessing the skills, talents and contribution of every employee should be at the heart of a successful business plan. But good employment delivers much more than just a strong organisation. It supports employees' good health - it keeps them healthy, mentally, physically and financially, and enables them to be independent. It also gives workers more choices and opportunities to fulfil their other ambitions in life.

While many employers understand and recognise the benefits of doing wellbeing properly, they need support to achieve this. For example, many do not consult their workforce ahead of developing a wellbeing strategy. This means the interventions offered do not always cater for the varied needs of employees and tend to offer vanilla options, such as free fruit. The result is that employer wellbeing programmes are poorly communicated to staff and therefore employee awareness about workplace health interventions offered by their organisations is low, as is the take up, which reduces their perceived value. The impact of employers not investing in workplace wellbeing initiatives is higher rates and costs associated with absenteeism, presenteeism, disability and staff turnover. Employers are failing to recognise a thriving workforce is a productive workforce that supports their business growth ambitions.

Evidence

There is a growing body of evidence on the impact of poor worker wellbeing. For example, according to the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) latest figures, in 2020, there were 1.6 million workers suffering from work-related ill health (new or long-standing). Notwithstanding the human cost, 38.8 million working days were lost due to work-related ill health over the same period¹. Of the 38.8 million days lost in 2018 in the UK: 55% were down to stress, depression or anxiety. Musculoskeletal disorders came in second at 27%.

According to the CIPD² (the professional body for HR and people development), mental health is the most common focus of wellbeing activity. In 2021, substantially more organisations are focusing on this area to a large extent (57%, up from 41% in 2020) – this may be because COVID has prompted a greater focus on mental health. The survey results also showed that the focus on other aspects of health and wellbeing remain similar to previous years. Most organisations make some effort to promote 'good work', collective/ social relationships, values/ principles and physical health. Financial wellbeing remains a more neglected area.

The Global Wellbeing Survey 2021³, conducted by Aon in partnership with IPSOS, revealed the top five employee wellbeing issues were (in order): work-life balance (65%), mental health (46%), working environment/ culture (44%), physical health (35%) and burnout (33%).

The link between health, wellbeing and productivity is clearly self-evident.

British Safety Council's own report, [Not just free fruit: wellbeing at work](#) (2018), examines the recent literature on occupational health and wellbeing. It offers guidance and information to help employers fulfil their legal obligations and establish effective preventative action, early intervention measures and appropriate risk management processes to safeguard workers' health, rather than reacting only after the worker has become ill.

Headline recommendations

To ensure wellbeing is fully understood and integrated within the strategic objectives of all organisations, and their workplaces, British Safety Council has developed the recommendations below as a guide to all organisations:

Employers

- Employers should adopt a holistic view of wellbeing focused on training people to enable prevention to avoid poor wellbeing happening.
- Employers must recognise that the quality of the work alongside a safe and healthy working environment, fair wages, mental health, relationships with managers and colleagues, job design, degree of responsibility and authority, workload, working hours, and career development are vital components of workers' wellbeing. This is because workers' wellbeing is fundamentally linked to job quality.
- Employers should invest in workplace wellbeing to create better working lives, better work performance, reduced staff turnover and increased productivity. Such investment is in their own self-interest.
- All line managers must be appropriately trained in wellbeing and the relevant support mechanisms, so they have the confidence to communicate with employees with care and sensitivity. Supporting managers is important – if these feel anxious/ stressed they cannot support others.
- Employers should not impose wellbeing on their workforce.

¹ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh1920.pdf> pg2

² https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-wellbeing-work-report-2021_tcm18-93541.pdf

³ <https://www.aon.com/global-wellbeing-survey.aspx> pg18, figure 8

Leadership

- The leadership of health and wellbeing must come from the highest level. Senior leaders of all organisations should ensure that a health and wellbeing strategy linked to corporate objectives is established, and actively drive its effective implementation.
- Wellbeing should not be seen as a programme of individual initiatives, but rather as a people and performance strategy.

Employees

- Workers must be given the opportunity to participate fully in the creation and development of initiatives designed to improve their own health and wellbeing. Effective dialogue, consultation and workers' involvement will help to ensure that wellbeing interventions meet the needs of employees, while at the same time increasing levels of engagement. Staff surveys in isolation are not sufficient.

Wellbeing reporting

- Organisations should make the reporting of wellbeing simple and integrate reporting into an existing system.
- Organisations should evaluate the impact and efficacy of their wellbeing interventions on a regular basis, to ensure they adapt and respond to the changing needs of their workers. Baselines will need to be established.