

Areas of Research Interest and Practice in Need of Evidence: Workplace wellbeing

By Dr Judith Grant, The Wellbeing Exchange
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About the author

Dr Judith Grant is Founder of [The Wellbeing Exchange](#) a Chartered Psychologist, Workplace Wellbeing Strategist, Consultant and Coach.

Judith has director level experience of managing occupational health and wellbeing in large global organisations as well as advising a range of public and private sector companies on their approach. She is focused on combining health research with business outcomes to create sustainable wellbeing programmes that not only support employees but also deliver results.

She holds a PhD in Occupational Health Psychology and Management and an MSc in Workplace Health and Wellbeing from the University of Nottingham, chartered membership of the British Psychological Society (BPS), certified membership of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and is a WELL Accredited Professional (WELL AP) with the International Well Building Institute.

About the What Works Centre for Wellbeing

We are an independent collaborating centre and the aim of our work is to improve wellbeing and reduce misery in the UK. We believe that this is the ultimate goal of effective policy and community action. By accelerating research and democratising access to wellbeing evidence, we develop and share robust evidence for governments, businesses, communities and people to improve wellbeing across the UK.

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Introduction

What Works Wellbeing commissioned Dr Judith Grant from The Wellbeing Exchange to carry out a rapid evidence collection on Areas of Research Interest and Practice in Need of Evidence in the UK.

Method

Fourteen interviews were held (of 16 set up) with practitioners representing circa 360,000 employees and with academic/practitioner experts.

Participants were gathered via LinkedIn posts and from a Substack newsletter article – as of 5th March these posts had 7700 interactions. An advert for participants was also emailed to circa 50 members of the National Forum for Health and Wellbeing at work. Membership of the group includes national and international employers, industry bodies, academics, and governmental departments.

The 14 organisations represented banking, construction, professional services, utilities, public sector, manufacturing, and academia. Organisation sizes ranged from 200 to 90,000 employees.

All participants received an information sheet and completed a consent form to take part in the study. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour and were in the form of a semi-structured interview. Participants were asked where wellbeing sits in the organisation, the activities they are currently implementing and what impacts their decision making. They were asked which areas of workplace wellbeing they were seeing success from and where they felt that more evidence was needed. Finally they were asked about how future wellbeing risks and opportunities may impact the workplace and the evidence that might be needed to meet these future needs.

Results

Eight themes emerged from the interviews:

1. Defining wellbeing
2. Organisational level outcomes and strategic approaches
3. Line Management
4. Leadership
5. Collaboration
6. Engagement
7. Risks and interventions
8. Technology

The themes form the basis of the ARI and PINE questions that follow.

1. Defining Wellbeing

- Analyse and explain what workplace wellbeing means to organisations? How does the organisational definition of wellbeing impact programme or intervention success for employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes (such as performance, retention, advocacy, customer satisfaction)?
- Analyse and explain how the different use of terminology influences organisational wellbeing approaches and outcomes? Do organisations differentiate between, or use terms, such as mental health, mental wellbeing, mental fitness, wellbeing, thriving, flourishing, resilience, and other terminology, interchangeably? Does terminology matter for wellbeing and in what context?

2. Organisational level outcomes and strategic approach

- Analyse and explain the impact of wellbeing interventions on objective organisational outcomes, including how wellbeing interventions impact organisational performance (e.g. productivity, retention, growth, profit, customer satisfaction, advocacy) and other areas such as sickness absence, health insurance costs and employee engagement. What are the long-term impacts of interventions on objective organisational measures?
- How can objective organisational outcomes from wellbeing approaches be effectively and consistently measured within organisations? How can wellbeing practitioners effectively demonstrate the value of interventions?
- Assess and evaluate the most effective methods for measuring wellbeing in organisations to develop a consistent approach for benchmarking between companies and industries. Explore the development of a standardised baseline monitoring and evaluation framework for wellbeing in organisations.
- Analyse and explain the impact of having an organisational wellbeing strategy? What is the impact of carrying out targeted wellbeing interventions as part of a broader strategy? What is the ideal duration of a wellbeing strategy?
- What data collection methods can organisations most effectively use for health and wellbeing in organisations? Assess the effectiveness of wellbeing dashboards in monitoring and managing wellbeing and organisations outcomes.
- What metrics can be effectively used by organisations to carry out predictive modelling of health risks and wellbeing, to enable more proactive and preventative interventions?
- Assess the effectiveness of different methods used by organisations to embed wellbeing at different stages of the employee lifecycle (including

attraction, recruitment, onboarding, retention, reward and recognition, development, and separation).

- Assess and evaluate wellbeing maturity matrices. What do approaches entail, how do they work, and do they result in improved organisational outcomes?
- Analyse and explain the impact of using organisational stress risk assessment frameworks to manage wellbeing in an organisation (e.g. HSE Management Standards; BSI ISO45003). How does a risk-based focus on wellbeing, and/or stress management benefit organisations? Does carrying out organisational stress risk assessments result in positive individual and/or team and/or organisational level outcomes? What works to carry out these approaches successfully?
- Assess the effectiveness of 'wellbeing accreditation schemes' on employee and organisational wellbeing outcomes? How do these schemes work and what impact do they have?
- Assess the impact of the design and implementation of organisational policies (such as sickness absence, time off for special leave, reward, diversity & inclusion, parental leave, ill-health retirement, menopause, wellbeing, carers, financial wellbeing, alcohol) on employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes.
- Assess the effectiveness of 'wellbeing charters' (wellbeing pledges, good jobs charters and similar named schemes) on employee and organisational wellbeing outcomes? How do schemes work and what impact do they have?
- How can organisations measure the 'value to society' of wellbeing interventions? How can wellbeing be linked with organisational approaches to sustainability and environmental, social and governance reporting frameworks? Do investments in wellbeing result in benefits in ESG?

3. Line management

- Does developing the emotional intelligence of managers lead to organisational benefits? What approaches are effective and in what contexts?
- What are identified as the key skills line managers need to have in order to be effective in their roles? How can organisations support line managers to support the wellbeing of their teams?
- How does the use of manager capability frameworks impact individual wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- What is the impact of 'wellbeing conversation' training for manager competence and confidence in supporting employee wellbeing? What content does the training require for it to achieve positive outcomes? Does wellbeing conversation training lead to improved wellbeing in employees and/or teams, and/or positive organisational outcomes?

- What management styles lead to greater employee engagement and wellbeing in organisations? How do training or interventions to modify management styles impact individual wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- How can organisations effectively monitor and manage the demands placed on line managers to sustainably support employee wellbeing and the wellbeing of the manager?
- Assess and evaluate the impact of individual coaching interventions on line manager capability and confidence. Does coaching benefit managers, what types of coaching are effective and in what context?

4. Leadership

- How does the behaviour (both verbal and role-modelling) of organisational boards or senior leadership teams influence wellbeing in organisations?
- Assess and evaluate board/senior leader wellbeing training/awareness approaches. Do approaches impact awareness and the effectiveness of organisational wellbeing programmes? Do approaches result in improved individual wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- Does having a non-executive director, Chief Wellbeing Officer, or Board sponsor for wellbeing impact individual wellbeing outcomes and/or organisational performance? What methods work for effective organisational wellbeing governance?
- Does the seniority of the wellbeing lead role in an organisation impact organisational and individual wellbeing outcomes?
- Does the location of the lead wellbeing role in the organisation impact the success of the organisational wellbeing approach (e.g. in human resources, occupational health, health and safety, inclusion and diversity or sustainability team, or other)? How can different organisational departments work together for optimum organisational benefits?
- To what extent would the professionalism, through regulation, qualifications, and/or professional accreditation, of Wellbeing Practitioners lead to better wellbeing outcomes for individuals and organisations?

5. Collaboration

- Analyse and explain the barriers to effective collaboration between wellbeing practitioners and academics. How can academics and practitioners work together to ensure better long-term evidence-based practice?
- What are the barriers for organisations in applying evidence-based wellbeing practice in their organisations? Identify what methods or communication modes improve the practical application of research

findings in workplace wellbeing practice? How can research outcomes be translated for practical use in the workplace?

- Identify and analyse the barriers to organisations sharing their approaches to wellbeing (both successes and failures) so that others can learn from their practice? What are the barriers to workplace wellbeing practitioners in sharing their approach to wellbeing practice outside of the organisation?
- How can public health agencies effectively partner with organisations to protect, promote, and support employees to benefit organisations and public health? How can organisations effectively access the public health agenda to engage employees with health messages?

6. Engagement

- How do employee perceptions of wellbeing interventions and/or topics impact their success? How can these risks be effectively managed in order to deliver improved engagement or wellbeing outcomes?
- Analyse and explain the impact of workplace culture on the employee experience of work, employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes.
- What works in preventing drop-out or disengagement from workplace wellbeing programmes or wellbeing apps? How can organisations sustain and maintain wellbeing benefits of wellbeing interventions over time?
- To what extent does change management in an organisation impact employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- Assess and evaluate the most effective methods for targeting wellbeing interventions to specific groups in the workplace? How can organisations engage with hard-to-reach groups, or with groups less likely to engage with standard wellbeing communication and engagement activities? How can tailoring interventions to specific job roles improve wellbeing outcomes?
- How is the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world we are living in driving employee wellbeing and what methodologies can be applied in the workplace to support employees and promote positive wellbeing?
- Analyse and explain the impact of generational differences in the workplace? Do Gen Z employees joining the workforce have different requirements than Millennials or Gen X in addressing wellbeing? How will the ageing workforce impact some industries and what methodologies can be used by organisations to support employee wellbeing at multiple life stages, manage sickness absence and ill-health, and achieve positive organisational outcomes?

7. Risks and interventions

- What is the impact of a risk of physical or psychological harm in the workplace on employee wellbeing? How can organisations effectively implement approaches to physical and psychological safety? How do organisational culture and behaviours influence employee perceptions of feeling safe at work?
- Analyse and explain what works in terms of peer support networks or employee resource groups (ERGs) and the organisational and individual wellbeing outcomes they produce. How are the groups structured and organised and what activities work?
- Analyse and explain the effectiveness of wellbeing/mental health champions/ambassadors in improving both individual and organisational wellbeing outcomes. What are the risks and benefits to an individual of being a wellbeing champion (or equivalent)? How can organisations ensure the safety and wellbeing of champions through the implementation and running of wellbeing champion networks. What is the impact on individual wellbeing of being a wellbeing champion (or equivalent)? What is the impact on overall employee wellbeing and objective organisational outcomes of wellbeing champion (or equivalent) networks?
- Analyse and explain the impact of Employee Assistance Programmes on employee and organisational wellbeing. How are EAPs effective and what elements of the EAP service deliver benefits?
- To what extent does early intervention for ill-health, through organisational policy, benefits (such as group income protection or functional rehabilitation services) or occupational health services, benefit employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- To what extent does a structured 'wellbeing calendar' of talks and events increase knowledge and understanding of health and wellbeing topics? What topics/events have the greatest impact? How does the context of the organisation (such as demographics, health trend data) influence outcomes? How can organisations improve access to events for all employees? What methods can be used to sustain benefits over time?
- Analyse and explain the impact of storytelling, living libraries and other lived experience sharing programmes on employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes.
- How can organisations assess the risks of work-related physical health issues such as musculoskeletal disorders, eyesight issues, hearing loss, respiratory conditions, and other potential occupational exposures? How can these risks effectively be addressed as part of a holistic approach to health and wellbeing (over and above meeting statutory health and safety requirements)?
- How can organisations implement effective approaches to mental health at work? Does the intent of the approach influence its success – is the

approach aligned to organisational and/or individual requirements? Is the programme designed to reduce stigma, increase programme engagement, reduce mental health related sickness absence or EAP usage, for employees with mental health conditions or at-risk groups due to workplace trauma? Does targeting interventions increase their effectiveness? How can organisations effectively implement a holistic approach?

- What is the impact of communications and/or interventions in the workplace for wellbeing factors (such as menopause, fertility, domestic abuse, addiction, health conditions, neurodiversity)? What approaches work and in what contexts?
- Assess and evaluate approaches designed to modify work patterns (e.g. 4-day working week, flexible/hybrid working) and their impact on employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes.
- What has been the impact of 'return to work' mandates, where employees have been asked to return to the office full time or in a hybrid way following the Covid-19 Pandemic, on employee wellbeing? How have communication and engagement in managing change impacted these mandates? How have changes impacted individual wellbeing or organisational outcomes?
- What methods could be best implemented to engage remote working populations with wellbeing? Analysis could include those who work from home, individuals who work in roles that do not require work laptop/mobiles (for example some construction, manufacturing, or retail roles) or those in offshore or physically remote roles.
- What is the impact of volunteering and/or charitable work accessed through the workplace on individual and organisational wellbeing?
- Analyse and explain the impact of climate change and environmental uncertainty on the health and wellbeing of employees. What methods can organisations use to address these impacts?
- Analyse and explain the impact of financial wellbeing approaches in the workplace? What approaches work for organisations and in what context?
- Identify and analyse how the design of office spaces can impact both individual wellbeing and organisational wellbeing outcomes?
- Assess the effectiveness of having a wellbeing room or dedicated wellbeing space in the workplace? What is the impact of having a personal space in the workplace, such as a locker or safe space to store belongings? What is the impact of having a kitchen area to prepare food during the working day or a safe storage area for perishable foods on individual wellbeing?
- What is the impact of wellbeing support/awareness training on employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- How can organisations ensure their approach to wellbeing is inclusive? How can organisations join up their equity, diversity, and inclusion

programmes with their wellbeing programmes? Should EDI and Wellbeing be part of one joined-up strategy?

8. Technology

- Assess and evaluate how organisations can support employees to adopt, adapt and interact with new technology. This may include new forms of technology, software, artificial intelligence, machine learning and wearable technology. How do different types of technology correlate with changes in jobs and wellbeing and what are the causal mechanisms?
- Analyse and explain the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the wellbeing of employees. Is AI perceived as a positive or a threat? Will it benefit groups of employees equally?
- Analyse and explain what works in terms of ensuring equal access to the benefits of technology for wellbeing in the workplace. How do different individual learning styles impact take up and adaptation rates to new technologies in the workplace? How can individual preferences be considered in technological change management and training for new technologies?
- Assess the effectiveness of interventions that promote the 'right to disconnect' from the workplace out of contracted working hours. What has been the impact of legislation in France and Belgium giving employees the right to disconnect? Assess the impact of workplace interventions or policies on technology or working time, on employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes?
- How can the implementation of more efficient organisational digital systems improve working lives and the wellbeing of employees? What methodologies work in effective implementation.
- Analyse the most significant causal factors that create benefits/risks to wellbeing from technological change. What is the impact of 'technostress' and how has the increase in connectivity impacted flexibility and work-life balance/integration? Does technological change impact different groups of employees in different ways?
- How can employers protect employees working in professions viewing distressing information online? What methodologies are effective in reducing risk and what supportive mechanisms can be used effectively to manage wellbeing following exposure to distressing content?