

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE



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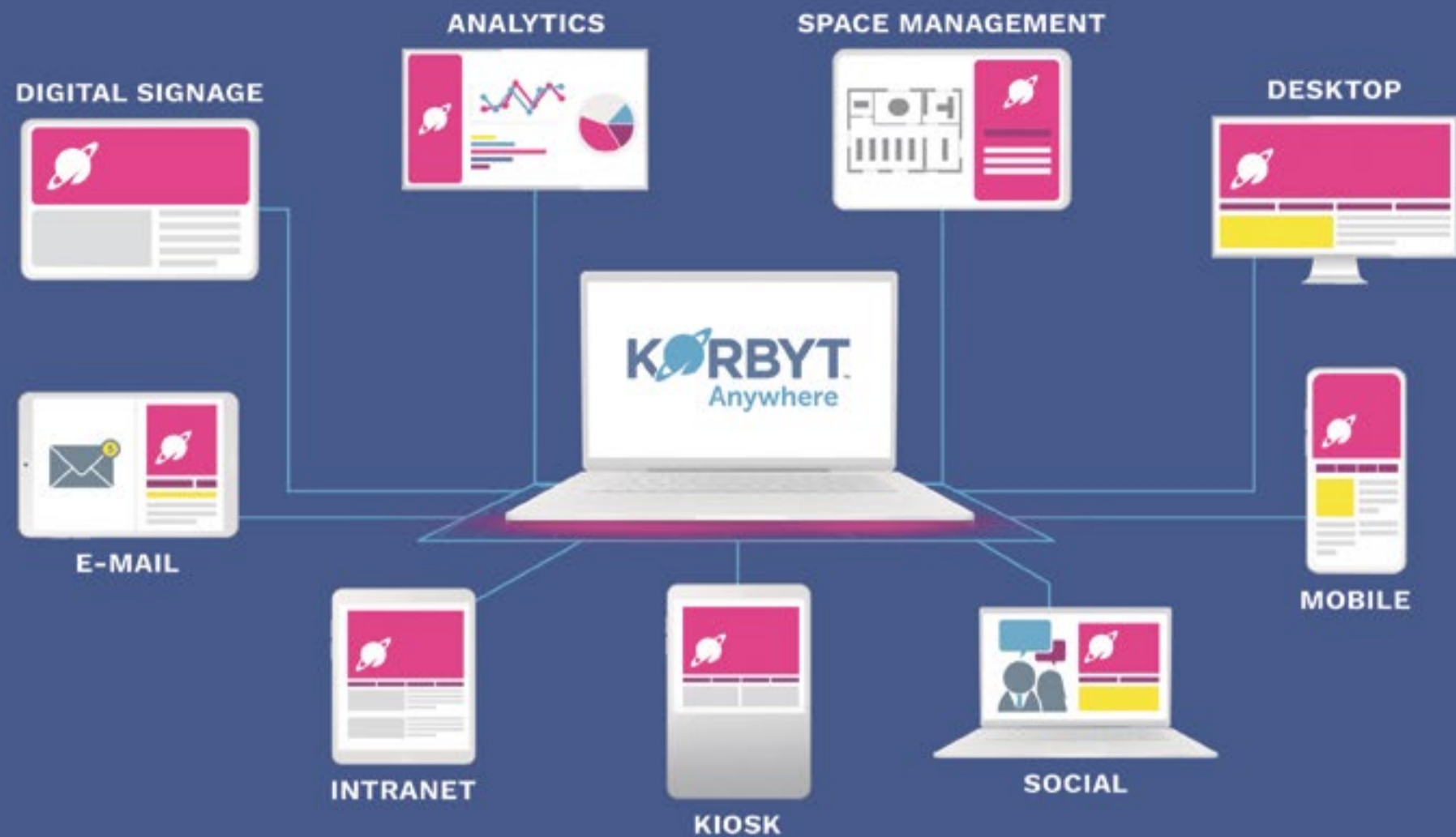


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EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

After Covid, the great employment re-engagement

Workers are re-evaluating their relationship with work. The employee experience is under so much scrutiny that businesses must act

Nick Easen

It has been 19 months and counting of Covid-induced change for huge numbers of workers across the globe. Many are burnt out, while others are fed up. As their priorities evolve, businesses must re-evaluate how they engage employees.

The stresses of juggling work and life, dealing with uncertain employment, accelerating business and digital transformations, working from home or not working from home, have created a great dislocation in the jobs market. And the numbers are stark. In the US, people have been quitting jobs at the highest rates this century.

The so-called 'big quit' may be an American phenomenon, but job vacancies in the UK soared to an all-time high recently. Employee engagement is a hot topic around the globe.

"In recent times, organisations have shunted the idea of resilience onto employees rather than themselves; that way businesses don't need to devote resources to being resilient," says Dr Adrian Madden, a senior lecturer in the Department of Management at the University of Huddersfield. "There is also the issue of trust between employers and employees. This has been significantly eroded as a result of Covid, not helped by a renormalising discourse of recovery, where workers should put aside these issues as the economy rebounds."

However, when attrition is high or when it looks as if workers are in demand, with calls from politicians for a "high wage, high productivity" economy, then the issue of employee experience matters even more. The 'great resignation', as it's also called in the US, should be met with a 'great re-engagement' by businesses around the world, especially now that skilled labour is in peak demand globally and attrition has indeed become an issue.

"Organisations must increasingly be genuine about putting the employee at the centre, and not just taking a utilitarian approach to staffing. It is no longer about optimising people as a resource for the benefit of the company," states Gal Rimon, CEO of employee engagement platform Central. "It's in a company's best interest to keep employees engaged and feeling valued, especially now. There's also a great deal of expense associated with recruiting and onboarding employees."



10 000 hours via Getty Images

While customer-centricity is a well-worn business phrase, the most forward-thinking firms realise it is time to focus on employee-centricity. But a lot needs to be done in this area. For instance, the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development, or CIPD's, annual Good Work Index finds that job quality in the UK still falls short, with too many workers reporting a lack of development and poor wellbeing.

Defining what excellence looks like when it comes to employee experience is, therefore, important. This goes beyond remuneration, an improved work-life balance, snazzy office spaces or free breakfasts. It is increasingly about

achieving happiness and meaning at work. It's personal, hard to define and evolving, with greater expectations among Gen Z and Millennials. Pulse surveys and real-time employee feedback help.

"The employee experience needs to change because our whole world experience has changed. The pandemic has taught people that the core of their job can be done in a way that suits them. Employee experience has also become about individuality in the workplace," explains Nathan Peart, managing director at law recruitment firm Major, Lindsey & Africa.

"Today, firms need to ensure staff can thrive, not just survive,"



Peart says. "The employee experience needs to be agile and exciting, otherwise people can just go elsewhere. The savviest companies are therefore prioritising growth and development that is tailored to the individual."

British multinational telecoms firm BT is aiming to upskill and motivate staff, with initiatives aimed at cybersecurity in particular. This is one of the fastest-growing areas of the company, but there's a shortfall of 3 million workers globally. The firm is keen to plug this skills gap through engaging its employees.

"We are training our own people to fill the void, given the job shortage in the global marketplace. Our business is moving from traditional to new services, therefore we need to make that transition from old skill sets to new ones," states Andy Newman, director of BT Security.

This is achieved by providing on-the-job microlearning, he says, but in a creative manner, different to what's been done in the past. "Making it interesting, making it engaging, as well as making it more enjoyable and fun."

For BT's staff, it's been about personal development, he says. "From an individual perspective all of a sudden employees have an expertise on their resume that they never had before to do with cybersecurity. As for the business, we have seen a material impact on our sales metrics."

Aligning business outcomes with the personal goals of employees – for example, lifelong learning or developing know-how – is a new imperative, especially with the shift to a greener economy in which new skills are needed. Peel Ports, the second-largest port operator in the UK, has committed to slashing emissions, but it also needs to embed this knowledge among its workers.

The company is going through an education process, "putting in courses on sustainability to raise awareness among our teams", says Lewis McIntyre, managing director of port services at Peel Ports Group. "We have 1,700 employees and we need to build expertise within industry."

There's no doubt the landscape for employee experience is shifting, and companies must adapt. The winners will co-create more shared value with their workers, align personal and business goals, and tackle some of society's most pressing challenges. ●



Gohar& via Getty Images

FINANCIAL WELLBEING

In tough times, employers expand financial support

With mounting bills forcing even higher earners into debt, organisations are putting emergency cash injections at the forefront of financial wellbeing

Virginia Matthews

The term 'in-work poverty' may be a convenient football for politicians. But for employers, the impact of rocketing fuel and food bills on staff mental and physical health is hurting the bottom line.

With the cost of absenteeism and presenteeism due to money worries costing an annual £1.56bn, according to a recent Aegon report, helping staff pay their debts has become a top-level business priority.

Anglian Water is one company trying to help. It launched a Covid Hardship Fund in 2020, funded solely by and for employees. It has already paid for funeral expenses as well as covering unexpected medical and childcare costs. Anglian Water chief executive Peter Simpson made a personal donation of £202,000.

With the knock-on effects of redundancy, furlough and reduced hours continuing to dent household incomes overall, Sally Purbrick, Anglian Water's head of reward,

believes the fund will need to run beyond the next financial year.

In common with others in HR, she's been surprised at the number of staff needing a financial lifeline – "after all, we pride ourselves on providing a fair salary structure" – and notes that the appeal of loans and advances is by no means restricted to modest earners.

"Whether it's someone who can no longer afford private education for their children or relationship breakdowns that reveal hidden debts incurred by a partner, as an employer you only ever see one side of someone's financial life," she says. "While it's tempting to assume that it's only people on lower salaries or in particular jobs who get into debt, this is clearly not the case."

The fund comes on top of a financial wellness and education package featuring debt counselling and an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provision. The business also provides loans to employees with

poor credit scores via the third-party provider Salary Finance.

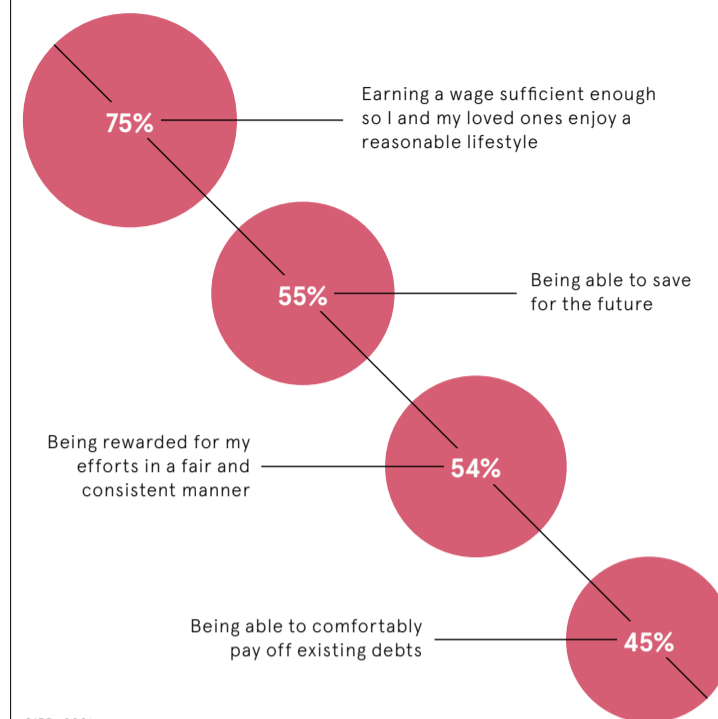
Like Anglian Water, Yorkshire Building Society is not in a sector associated with low wages and zero-hour contracts. However, the very real and universal stigma around financial hardship is even more pronounced in financial services, says total reward lead Michelle Elsworth. "Given that we are experts in looking after our customers' money, colleagues are often incredibly reluctant to admit that they themselves are suffering from financial hardship and loss of financial control," she says.

A zero-interest financial hardship loan of up to £750 – which must be applied for directly from the company – has already helped more than one YBS employee escape from an emotionally and financially abusive partner and start a new life.

More routine, low-cost loans of an average £7,000 – arranged directly via Salary Finance and

WHAT DOES FINANCIAL WELLBEING MEAN FOR EMPLOYEES?

The most important aspects of financial wellbeing according to employees



CIPD, 2021

repaid at source – have allowed other staff to consolidate borrowings and stay out of the hands of unscrupulous lenders.

In 2017, one of the organisation's chief officers talked publicly about his own financial problems, a move which Elsworth believes has helped foster a culture of openness.

"Having done so much work on mental and physical health since that time, we sense it is time to turn the spotlight back to the wholly related issue of financial wellness."

The term 'welfare officer' hasn't been in vogue for many years, says Charles Cotton, senior adviser for performance and reward at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), yet the basic need to keep staff afloat this winter could mark a return to the concept, he believes.

"As providers of income, employers have a central role to play in financial wellbeing and we may well see new titles such as director of people and welfare emerge as more staff find they are unable to put food on the table."

All organisations, Cotton argues, need to consider the impact of low wage or capped hours policies and consider joining the 7,000 UK businesses that have so far adopted the voluntary real Living Wage.

"Some firms don't like talking about in-work poverty because they feel some guilt or worry that they will appear intrusive or even paternalistic, but in my view there

"BT is a caring organisation and we want to look after people, but we don't want a return to either 1970s paternalism or Victorian attitudes to debt management," he says. "Colleagues are adults so it's up to them to make choices around their personal finances – the company's role is to provide the products, tools and education to help them make informed decisions."

Companies must deal with the basic needs of their people, offering them a decent living and an overall package that's fair, reasonable and sufficient, he says. "We are determined to do the right thing in difficult circumstances."

With BT now close to achieving real Living Wage accreditation, Matthews adds: "I do recognise that there is a moral subtext to the current debate around employee hardship and this can be uncomfortable for some employers." ●

is a moral obligation to think hard about such issues, particularly in the current economic environment," he says.

As the UK's longest-established provider of financial wellness services to employers, banking group Close Brothers takes a different line.

"I don't believe there is a moral obligation but we certainly see financial wellness and resilience as a business imperative, particularly given that very well-paid people get into trouble too," says Jeanette Makings, head of financial education. "Those who fear that their employees may fall prey to ruthless lenders will certainly want to offer loans, but for other clients, it's more about scaling back gym membership for greater emphasis on ISAs, savings plans and EAP."

Over at BT, which has provided loans to 13,500 staff since 2018, the urge to help colleagues in debt – whether through gambling, addiction or even maintenance costs – is genuine, says Drew Matthews, director of reward, employee relations, health safety & wellbeing.

"BT is a caring organisation and we want to look after people, but we don't want a return to either 1970s paternalism or Victorian attitudes to debt management," he says. "Colleagues are adults so it's up to them to make choices around their personal finances – the company's role is to provide the products, tools and education to help them make informed decisions."

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We see financial wellness and resilience as a business imperative, particularly given that very well-paid people get into trouble too

OPINION

'Focusing on the human side of work will have the biggest impact on business success'

Digital advances, as well as increased use of technology, are dramatically altering our experience of work. From frontline workers using handheld tech, working alongside robots and controlling drones, to desk-based employees on video calls, chat channels and toggling between apps, the impact of the fourth industrial revolution is inescapable. The digital workplace has arrived.

The Reward & Employee Benefits Association has done some research into this new workplace reality. Our *Technology change is business change* report, conducted by consultants Mercer Marsh Benefits and due to be released later in November, has found that more than half of employers expect further significant organisational transformation over the next two years due to automation. Nearly a third say this will speed up changes in their business models. Almost half of respondents are expecting even more adaptations in the day-to-day tasks of workers.

Such enormous automation-driven change has already impacted both business leadership and key talent within organisations. Our survey found that roughly four in 10 employers have brought in new leadership at board level in the past two years, with a third having hired key talent to drive digital change and more such hires expected over the next two years.

How people carry out tasks, as well as what tasks they do when working, is adapting and evolving as organisations move from talking digital to living digital. HR teams are having to map out, source and mobilise employee capabilities, while rethinking how roles are designed in order to ensure that leaders have the right people in their business to meet these new digital challenges.

But it is not just digital skills that employers are after. Social, emotional and enhanced cognitive skills will be in greater demand as automation takes out the need for more basic manual skills that can be carried out by robots and computers.

With nearly half of respondents to our survey planning to increase recruitment of employees with these newly required skills, we can see why the jobs market is hotting up.

Workers who have the ability to adapt and learn new skills are hugely valuable, which is putting pressure on pay. However, HR teams are aware that pay alone is a blunt instrument.

It may be a quick fix, but it does not always translate into long-term hires because pay does not change culture or enhance the employee experience in a meaningful way.

Instead, it is the broader employee experience that will attract, retain and engage talent in a sustainable way. But developing an exceptional employee experience when so many organisations are in a state of flux – busy formulating new strategies and drawing up business cases for new models of work – is a challenge.

That is not to say work in this area is not being done. Forward-thinking employers have started to remove old hierarchies in order to introduce more agility between roles and to expand experience and knowledge via lateral job moves, as well as investing in skills development.

Our research found that more than half of HR teams plan to focus on making their organisation a 'great place to work', with a big focus on employee wellbeing as the core to drive better corporate cultures. The vast majority of employers will be retailing workplace benefits to meet needs that have arisen due to the changing nature of work, with a definite switch in emphasis to digital offerings.

Employee social wellbeing has also risen sharply up the HR agenda, with nearly half of employers saying they will be working to improve connections and community throughout their workforce. This vital employee experience trend had been growing in recent years but became a far more formalised wellbeing strategy during the pandemic.

While automation is driving huge change in the employee experience of work, it is by focusing on the human side of work that employers will have the biggest impact on business success. ●



Debi O'Donovan
Director, Reward & Employee Benefits Association

Emotions, engagement and the employee experience

If employers want to deliver a great employee experience they need to be aware of the emotional interconnections between their staff and the organisation

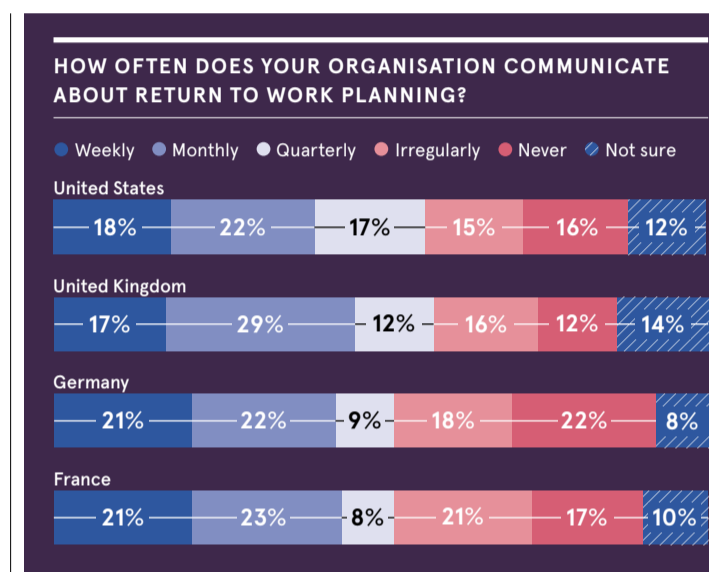
The employee experience (EX) is how all interactions with their organisation impact the way that employees feel about their work. Not surprisingly, employers are investing huge sums in resources to create the best EX, one that will keep people happy and engaged in their work and committed to the company. However, to succeed they need to truly understand the emotional side of EX.

Leading EX software company Limeade works with organisations all over the world, helping them to transform their EX by improving employee wellbeing, engagement and sense of inclusion, and reducing unwanted turnover and burnout.

Jon Gallegos, a researcher at The Limeade Institute, says: "Within the employee lifecycle are some significant moments, including getting hired, onboarding and building a team. While these are important for understanding the EX and ensuring it is a positive one, the most important moments in the EX are the small ones that happen in the gaps between each of the major events, those day-to-day experiences that are unique to each individual in terms of the emotions that they engender."

These small moments are crucial to understanding the EX because they focus directly on the interconnections between people, work and their organisation. And they can be captured by exploring employees' feelings, or their emotional experiences.

Listening and responding to employee feedback is the foundation of effective communication and building trust within an organisation. However, The Limeade Institute's Global Report on Employee Experience revealed that a relatively low proportion of global



employees (US 56%, Australia 67%, UK 56% and Germany 60%) feel connected to their company. Similarly, when asked whether they trusted their organisation, a relatively low proportion of employees (US 62%, Australia 71%, UK 62% and Germany 62%) gave favourable views.

Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings that hinder how employees relate to their work, their peers and their leaders, and can have a negative impact on how they feel while at work.

To provide a deeper understanding of the emotional connection with EX, The Limeade Institute conducted research that identified nine key areas: employee engagement, diversity, equity and inclusion, rewards and recognition, communication, learning and development, strategy/goals, feedback, corporate social responsibility, and wellbeing. Together, these provide a comprehensive, care-focused narrative of how employees are feeling, their emotions and how they are functioning at work.

Gallegos says: "When employees do well across all nine areas, they experience more positive outcomes. If employees feel included, recognised and rewarded, and engaged, you see increases in their overall wellbeing and decreases in feelings of burnout. You also see an increase in the likelihood of them staying at your organisation for a long period of time."

Equipped with this knowledge, employers have an opportunity to significantly improve the EX, yet many are unaware of just how important employees' emotions are and unsure how to measure them. Typically, organisations will invest in resources, programmes and initiatives to address issues around

wellbeing, inclusion and engagement without fully understanding the underlying cause of the problem. Bringing issues to the fore is important, but knowing which specific resources are needed is even more so.

Based on insights from its own research, Limeade has developed a range of EX software solutions that help organisations assess and measure how employees are feeling about their experiences at work, and identify ways of improving those feelings.

Employers can then invest in the most effective resources – the initiatives and programmes that help employees feel included, engaged and cared for, and that their wellbeing is genuinely important to the organisation. With further monitoring of employee sentiments to the changes, employers can evaluate progress and whether company actions are improving EX.

Gallegos says: "Having a clear understanding about how experiences impact people emotionally, and specifically in terms of those nine dimensions, is absolutely key. When you get that right you effectively create a culture of awareness, equipping everyone in the organisation with the emotional and cognitive tools that are essential to delivering a great EX."

Read Limeade's full global report on the Employee Experience at bit.ly/LimeadeGlobalEX

limeade

BENEFITS

Corporate childcare: the next big employee benefit?

Surveys of working parents show huge demand for childcare benefits. Is it time for businesses to contribute more?

MaryLou Costa

Working mum Isabel Mohan and her husband have spent about £90,000 on childcare for their two children over the past five years, she estimates. Now, for the first time in her career, Mohan is in a role that offers a £5,000 childcare allowance.

Mohan puts the money towards a childminder who collects her two children from pre-school and school, and looks after them for the rest of the working day. While the allowance is currently a one-off, it's set to become an annual benefit from her company..

"I've spent the past five years juggling childcare and work. It's been a huge cost, and it's really nice to work for a company where that's prioritised, because it's a lot of money," she says. "It makes me feel more valued and positive about my job. That makes me want to stay."

Mohan is head of content for Tiney, a startup that recruits, trains and onboards home-based childminders into its network. She pays her childminder in full, and then Tiney reimburses her.

The company has seen a growing interest in such benefits on a wider scale. It's about to launch its corporate offering and is already having discussions with large consumer tech companies about their employee childcare packages.

Childcare benefits are in greater demand than other employer offerings, such as gym memberships

and even enhanced parental leave pay, according to a survey of 5,000 UK and US professionals by recruitment platform Beamery. Despite the interest, just 11% of employers provide childcare as a benefit.

The same survey found that 53% of people are considering leaving their job in the next year, with 25% feeling their employer could have done more in the past 12 months to help with work-life balance.

The results resonate with Mohan, who's become more discerning over how employers cater to working parents.

"As much as I would love to benefit from free drinks and social events, that isn't always possible for a company where that's prioritised, because it's a lot of money," she says. "I'd feel more empowered now to ask in an interview, 'what do you offer for working parents?' If I wasn't able to get the childcare benefit elsewhere, then I'd want an extra £5,000 in my pay."

Corporate childcare provision isn't just about retention; it's also a driver of equality. Expensive childcare is linked with negative impacts on women in the workforce. According to data from women's rights charity Pregnant Then Screwed, around 62% of mothers who return to work either work fewer hours, change jobs or stop working because of the cost of childcare.

Founder and chief executive Joeli Brearley believes the corporate sector has a strong role to play to fill the gap.



Moko Productions via Getty Images

“Finding something that's easy to manage for a corporate that isn't a huge machine is an important aspect

"If employers want to employ the best people, then they need to consider what those employees need to be able to work to their full potential," she says. "I would love to see FTSE 500 companies establish on-site childcare. I think this will be the next policy we start to see from companies who lead the way on diversity and inclusion."

Brearley points to outdoor wear brand Patagonia, which provides on-site childcare for all employees at its US headquarters. At Patagonia, 100% of new mums return to the company, she notes, compared to an average of 79% across the US, while 50% of senior leaders are women.

For smaller companies and those

with staff working in a hybrid setup, on-site childcare might not be feasible. But employers could partner with childcare providers to offer other means of subsidised childcare, Brearley suggests.

That's why well-known nursery chain Busy Bees has relaunched its corporate offering. While it has operated an on-site nursery at Jaguar Land Rover's Solihull site for over 10 years, it's now extending its programme, allowing companies to buy places at Busy Bees nurseries or provide credits to allow employees to make bookings themselves.

"It's fostering workplace equality and enabling businesses to show they care about any type of parent returning to work. Childcare is investing in employees' time - it's right up there with medical care in my eyes," says Busy Bees' business sales director Antony Morrison.

Childcare startup Bubble specialises in booking babysitters and nannies. It's awarding £50,000 in childcare benefits to eligible startups, citing stats that show one in five women leave the tech industry due to poor work-life balance.

Bubble has recently launched its corporate offering, with the investment

bank Numis an early adopter. Numis has taken out 50 staff subscriptions, each worth about half a day a month of in-home childcare.

Head of HR at Numis, Mica Ross, says she is prepared to increase the number of licences and the level of subsidy if the demand is there. But what is most appealing is that a solution now exists to allow a smaller company to compete in the benefits stakes with larger institutions like Goldman Sachs, which provides on-site childcare in some of its offices.

"Five years ago, I don't know if I could have been thinking about this kind of solution. Finding something that's easy to manage for a corporate that isn't a huge machine is an important aspect of this," argues Ross. "It's the many small things you do that add up to you being a responsible employer that looks out for your people."

Ross and Brearley agree that it isn't wholly a company's role to provide full-time childcare.

"The issue should rest at the door of government. Childcare and early education should be available to all children, not just the children whose parents work for a forward-thinking company," Brearley says. ●

A learning culture is key to retaining talent. Here are five ways to create one

As the war for talent intensifies, a growing number of organisations are realising the importance of establishing a learning culture in order to recruit and retain the best and the brightest

01 CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

What it means

In a learning organisation, people must feel safe to ask questions and experiment.

How to do it

An atmosphere of psychological safety involves regularly asking team members for their ideas and showing appreciation for their input. Most importantly, leaders must give people permission to make mistakes by reframing them as opportunities to discuss, learn and improve.

Reading recommendation

Courageous Cultures, by Karin Hurt and David Dye, longlisted for the getAbstract International Book Award 2021: "Our favourite definition of culture comes from Seth Godin, who says culture is simply: 'People like us do things like this.' In a courageous culture, people like us speak up. They are willing to share their ideas. The default is to contribute."

Why it's important

"For criticism to be effective, leaders need to create an organisational culture that accepts it," says Michael Wiederstein, executive editor at getAbstract.

02 OBTAIN LEADER BUY-IN

What it means

For a learning culture to flourish, leaders must set the tone, emphasising that learning is a central tenet of the organisation's values and making their own learning part of their daily habits.



How to do it

Managers should incorporate learning in team members' goals and acknowledge when they've mastered new skills, while also enabling them to dedicate a portion of their working hours to learning.

What is a learning culture?

A learning culture includes fostering a curiosity-driven environment that supports a growth mindset. Organisations benefit from improved employee engagement and talent retention. Employees in turn benefit from development opportunities that can support vertical or lateral growth, and the chance to pursue new and relevant skills.

The pandemic has launched a global battle for talent, the likes of which haven't been seen for many years. Over two-thirds (69%) of employers are reporting difficulties filling roles, a 15-year high for the second consecutive quarter, according to a survey published in September by Manpower Group. Meanwhile, research by HR software provider Personio reveals that

over a third of employees (38%) are looking to change jobs in the next six or 12 months.

Remuneration and perks have a role to play but in order to recruit and retain talent, develop greater loyalty and improve productivity, more and more organisations are realising that it's essential to create a learning culture in their teams.

getAbstract discovers, rates and summarises knowledge from a wide range of sources, including books and articles, to help people make better decisions at work and in their private lives. In this feature, based on the getAbstract white paper, *Build a Learning Culture in 5 Steps*, authors and contributing experts offer their top tips for creating a vibrant learning culture.

Commercial feature

How to do it

Business leaders need to make internal and external knowledge readily available and encourage team members to seek out information. They should invite creative investigation with open-ended observations such as "I wonder why..." or "I wonder if..."

Reading recommendation

Return on Ambition, by Nicolai Chen Nielsen and Nicolai Tillisch, shortlisted for the getAbstract International Book Award 2021: "People who report a high return on ambition are very good at balancing achievement, growth and wellbeing over time. Our book helps people gain greater self-awareness and make more deliberate choices regarding their ambitions."

Why it's important

"Boiling ambitions and objectives to one guiding principle will free you up to reach for the stars - without going astray," says Sara Kuepfer, staff writer for getAbstract.

05 PROMOTE A MENTORSHIP AND COACHING MINDSET

What it means

During the 1960s, the Center for Creative Leadership outlined the 70/20/10 ratio of learning: people accomplish 70% of their learning from challenging experiences and assignments, 20% from a mentor, coach or other influential person and 10% from formal instruction, such as classroom work.

How to do it

Leaders should listen more rather than giving instant advice and should aim to ask questions that guide their mentees to discover their own best answers.

Reading recommendation

Lead, Care, Win, by Dan Pontefract, shortlisted for the getAbstract International Book Award 2021: "To become relatable - to be a beacon of forgiveness and kindness, to be humble enough to ask for help - affects the very heart of your leadership."

Why it's important

"Developing new leadership mind-sets, capabilities and behaviours is one of the most important things HR can do to set the organisation up for success as we emerge from the pandemic and transform our businesses," says Josh Bersin, founder of the Josh Bersin Academy.

04 FOSTER CURIOSITY AND A GROWTH MINDSET

What it means

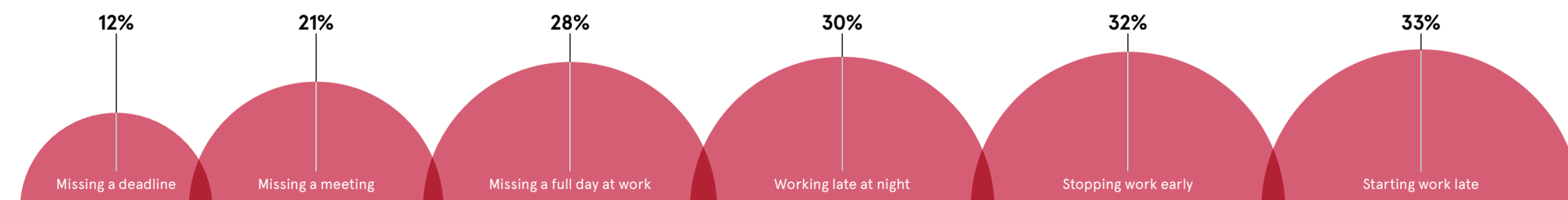
A curiosity culture makes organisations more innovative, as people ask questions and listen. This nurtures collaboration, cooperation, and trust, improving performance as people translate their innate desire to learn into action.

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compressed knowledge

WORKING PARENTS ARE FEELING THE PRESSURE

Share of working parents indicating that caring for their children has caused the following work issues

CNBC, 2020

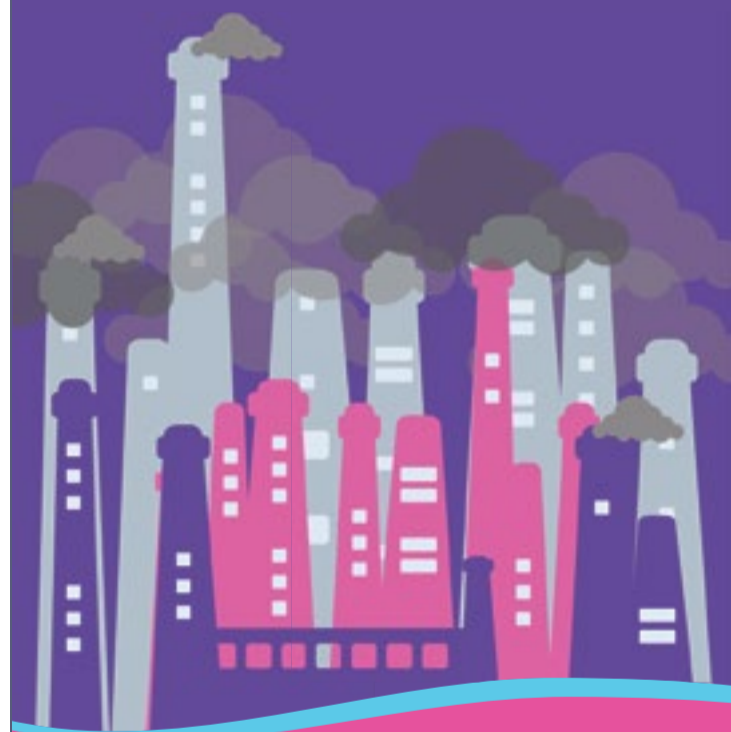


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SHED CARBON, GAIN POUNDS

INTERVIEW

'I very much hope we won't go back to where we were'

One of the pandemic's few beneficial effects is that it pushed wellbeing up employers' agendas, says Dame Carol Black, former government adviser on the relationship between work and health

Sam Forsdick

While many firms adapted quickly when they were obliged to adopt remote working models at the start of the Covid crisis, the consequences this has had for employee wellbeing have been harder to get a grip on.

It's one reason why 96% of HR directors polled recently on behalf of the software company Benefex agreed that the employee experience their firms provided had become more important during the pandemic. Moreover, 71% of the respondents agreed that "a commitment to employee wellbeing is very important to achieving a great employee experience".

This increased focus on wellbeing is welcomed by Dame Carol Black, one of the UK's leading authorities on the relationship between work and health.

"The pandemic has really put employee wellbeing near the top of the agenda for a lot of employers. I very much hope we won't go back to where we were," says Black, who has amassed decades of knowledge and experience in this field, serving as a medical practitioner, NHS

manager, academic and adviser to the government.

Her positions have included national director for health and work, where she conducted independent reviews into the health of the working-age population and sickness absence, and chair of NHS Improvement's advisory board on employee health and wellbeing.

Explaining the change in attitude from employers, Black says that the Covid crisis "has made people understand that we're all human beings and we all face similar challenges, whether we're at home or in the workplace".

She observes that, while wellbeing was an element of employee experience reviews before the pandemic, "it was never at the top of the list". But employers now understand that it's not something to which you can simply pay lip service. It's an essential component of talent retention and recruitment, and getting it right requires time, effort and investment.

More than a third of small and medium-sized British businesses have increased their support for mental and physical wellbeing since the start of the pandemic, according to a GlobalData survey. Investments have included creating posts such as head of wellbeing, offering paid 'mental health sick days' and providing mental health cover as part of a private medical insurance plan.

And employees are responding to this: 83% of the HR managers in the Benefex survey reported a year-on-year growth in the number of staff choosing wellbeing-based benefits over other types of benefits.

Throughout the crisis, many businesses have increased employees'

holiday entitlements in recognition of the added stress under which they've been working. App developer Bumble gave its 700-strong workforce an extra week of paid leave in June (see p26), for instance, while LinkedIn and Hootsuite offered their staff similar 'wellness weeks' in April and July respectively. Spotify is also granting staff additional time off at the beginning of November.

"Leaders understand that they have to be visible about wellbeing. The CEO or other senior executives are talking more about it, as they know that it's important," Black observes. "Boards are becoming more aware too. As much as they are interested in the financial wellbeing of the company or organisation, they know that their people's wellbeing is just as important."

But tracking employees' wellbeing and the effectiveness of corporate efforts to improve this can be difficult. Staff satisfaction surveys generally provide only qualitative data, making progress difficult to gauge. Meanwhile, Black has also noticed that many employers have committed the cardinal sin of failing to communicate clearly what wellbeing benefits are available to their staff.

"Organisations are very good at collecting governance data and anything financial – in other words, the things they're obliged to do," she says. "Why don't they collect their health and wellbeing data in the same way?"

Analysing presenteeism could provide an answer, according to Black. "It has been shown very clearly that your level of presenteeism is related to your mental health. People with high scores on being present but who aren't able



meaning and introduce any number of yoga classes and mindfulness groups but, if those interventions aren't matched to what your employees require, they're going to miss the whole point."

The emergence of hybrid working has complicated matters further for employers seeking to improve the wellbeing of their staff, she adds. "It worries me that, unless you're very well organised, you can start to mix up the things that are influencing you in your immediate environment that are related to home, not work, issues. I think it's going to be quite difficult to measure people's wellbeing in that hybrid situation."

With working habits and settings potentially differing so drastically among members of the same team, it will necessitate a more personalised wellbeing proposition, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Much of the onus for providing this could therefore fall on line managers.

Black explains: "There's a growing expectation that your manager will be able to hold a much better conversation with you about how working through the pandemic has been for you, where you are now and what you hope your work will be like. Managers will have to build more personal relationships to understand the wellbeing needs of all their staff."

Although the moral argument for looking after employees' wellbeing should be obvious, the business case is just as compelling, she stresses. "It has been shown quite clearly that investing in wellbeing improves performance and reduces absence."

For instance, the *Mental Health and Employers* report, published by Deloitte, in January argued that businesses could expect a return of £5 on every £1 invested in the wellbeing of their employees.

Black adds: "If you've got people at work who have a sense of wellbeing – that is, they feel good about themselves and the place they're in – they work better. It's not rocket science."

Now that wellbeing has become a high priority for employers, it is up to them to ensure that their people see the benefits. By assessing the mental health of their employees, employers can address wellbeing in a more personalised manner. If this is done correctly, the benefits for both employer and employee should soon become apparent. ●

“As much as boards are interested in the financial wellbeing of a company or organisation, they know that their people's wellbeing is just as important”

to work well have got more mental health issues than those with a very low score," she says. "There are numerous validated questions that employers can ask to get a very good idea of whether someone has got a sense of wellbeing and

whether they're functioning well at work."

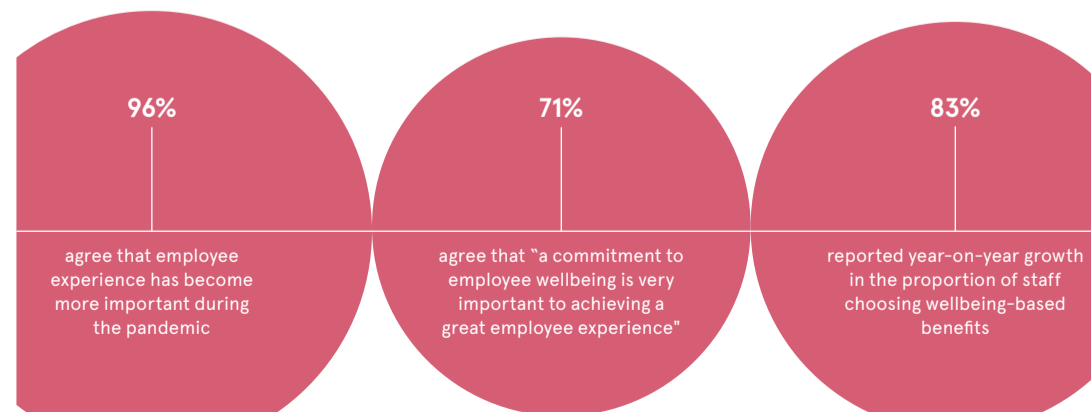
The UK Labour Force Survey by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that levels of occupational stress, depression and anxiety last year were "statistically significantly higher than in the previous period", accounting for 55% of working days lost to work-related ill-health. This increase in mental health problems accompanied some of the lowest levels of sickness absence since records began in 1995. Although measures such as furloughing, remote working and social distancing may all have had an effect, it's likely that presenteeism has been a common occurrence since the Covid crisis started in 2020.

"Most organisations have been good at introducing wellbeing interventions, but they rarely measure the impact from a baseline," Black notes. "You can be very well

PRIORITISING EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

HR directors' opinions on building a positive employee experience

Benefex, 2021



87%

of employees want their bosses to take action on climate-destroying pensions



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SHED CARBON, GAIN POUNDS

MEETINGS

Five ways to improve your company's meetings

As businesses adjust to the post-pandemic working world, many leaders are re-evaluating the need for meetings. Here's how to make the most of them

Nick Martindale

With the rise of remote working during the pandemic, chance conversations by the water cooler came to a halt. At the same time, the number of scheduled meetings increased exponentially, often through video conferencing services such as Zoom.

But as many businesses return to the office, some leaders are questioning the value of having so many meetings and are seeking ways to make them more effective – or even do away with them altogether. Here's how you can ensure your meetings don't harm productivity or add to employee frustrations.

1 Question whether they're needed

To start, ask whether a meeting is essential or if the same result could be achieved in a different way. "It's

easy for businesses to get into the routine of regular processes and this is very much the case when it comes to meetings," says Caroline Walsh, a marketing and management consultant and director of Solent Business School at Solent University, Southampton.

"Often, firms will continue with recurring meetings because they're scheduled rather than because they're worthwhile. Questions to ask when you're deciding whether or not a meeting is necessary include: What are you trying to achieve from the meeting? What are the actions following the meeting? Is there anything you need to prepare before the meeting?"

In the current climate, there's a particular risk that what could be quick conversations turn into formal meetings, warns Jennifer



Dorman, sociolinguist at the language learning app Babbel.

"As we experience less 'hey, I have a quick question' interruptions, we are forced to 'schedule' our discussions with colleagues via video," she says. "This often leads to 'maximising our time syndrome', characterised by the expectation that meetings must have an agenda, yielding decision and action items. People tend to build out a more expansive agenda, resulting in a greater burden of both participation and follow-up expectations for meetings."

Phil Perry, head of UK & Ireland at Zoom, says employees should go through the diary a day or a week beforehand to identify what could be cancelled, whether two conversations could be combined, or if a meeting could take place over a coffee or on a walk. "This also helps to ensure that when meetings do take place, they are productive, efficient and employees feel engaged," he says. Zoom imposes meeting-free Wednesdays, Perry notes, to help avoid meeting fatigue.

1,230%

the increase in virtual one-on-one meetings from Jan 2020 to Dec 2020

613%

the increase in virtual group meetings from Jan 2020 to Dec 2020

Doodle, 2021

2 Make sure attendees need to be there

Ensuring the right people are in the meeting sounds obvious, but it's often the case that too many people attend meetings who don't

need to be there, adding to everyone's meeting burden.

"The right people means those who are able to make decisions about the subject and anyone else needed to help make the decision better," says Martin Wilson, director and cofounder at software business Bright. "We have a clear team hierarchy and role definitions, so everyone knows which team and which individuals have the authority to make a certain decision. People from other teams don't need to be involved."

The important step here is to think in advance about who will be invaluable to the discussion, rather than sending out a blanket email invite, says Oona Collins, founder of leadership consultancy Potential Plus International. You want to ensure a mix of voices and opinions, she says, but having too many people with the same perspective can be counterproductive.

"Often the least obvious people could be the right people to have in a meeting – for example, rather than having four people from the same department you could bring in someone from a different

discipline who will contribute fresh ideas and look at a problem from a different angle."

3 Create firm ground rules

It's important to know what you want any meeting to achieve: that means being laser-focused on the outcome and meeting process. "It's vital to have a meeting agenda – even for shorter meetings – and to prioritise the most important items to prevent the trivial points from taking over," says Sir Cary Cooper, professor of organisational psychology at Alliance Manchester Business School. "Every agenda item should have a time limit too. Make sure each person reads the agenda before the meeting to avoid recapping at the outset as this can waste valuable time."

It's also important to ensure meetings take place at times that work for attendees, particularly if people are joining from different time zones. Sarah-Jane McQueen, general manager at CoursesOnline, is the firm's only executive member based in the UK, with most working from the company's headquarters at Melbourne. "Finding a time to discuss things that works for everyone is tricky given the 10-hour time difference," she says. "Quite often one half of those participating on the call are getting up in the morning or are shortly going to bed, which is hardly conducive to effective decision-making."

To overcome this, the company introduced the concept of 'black-out hours', when people can't be contacted unless in an emergency. "Like many others on the team with young children, I've got the school run and the kids' bedtimes listed as blackout slots," she says. "Since we introduced this approach around the turn of the year, there's been a notably more relaxed vibe in our meetings as we aren't thinking we have to get away by a certain time."

4 Keep them short

A time limit on meetings can help ensure people focus on the topic rather than getting distracted. Irene van der Werf, people and culture manager at Omnipresent, suggests a limit of no more than 25 minutes. "A shorter meeting keeps initial water-cooler chats to a minimum and lets everyone concentrate on the task at hand," she says. "It also helps keep people from multitasking during meetings because we are all guilty of writing an email or two while 'listening' to what is going on."

This is even more important if people need to attend back-to-back

78%

of employees that think their meeting schedules are always or sometimes out of control

29%

of employees say Tuesday is the best day for a meeting

47%

of employees say Monday is the worst day for a meeting

Better Meetings, 2020

virtual meetings. Ben Clarke, a member of the executive team at learning solutions firm Hensley Fraser, says his company has introduced the "45-minute hour": a strict 45-minute time limit on all virtual meetings, which are still booked in diaries for an hour.

"By booking out an hour of time but saving 15 minutes for participants to do whatever they like, we inject a new level of energy to the call and allow a reset for the next meeting," he says. "It's much more reminiscent of the office day we're used to and protects employees from becoming overwhelmed or burnt out."

5 Scrap meetings altogether

The nuclear option, of course, is to ban meetings altogether. This is advocated by Barnaby Lashbrooke, founder and CEO of virtual assistant platform Time Etc.

"Most meetings are a complete waste of time," he says, with minutes lost waiting for people to show up or troubleshoot their audio problems, then the small talk and preamble before getting down to the matter at hand. That's followed by "pressure to contribute something, anything, just to make the meeting feel worthwhile", Lashbrooke says.

"Meetings are largely unproductive, yield little value and disrupt the flow of the working day; that's why we've gotten rid of them altogether," he adds. "Of course, some meetings are unavoidable – to discuss sensitive HR matters or to make sense of complex legal or financial matters. For everything else, an email will generally suffice." ●

Revealed: the best way to engage and motivate employees

Blackhawk Network commissioned a survey of 2,000 respondents to provide deep insight to what employees really need in order to feel appreciated. Chris Ronald, vice-president EMEA, Incentives, shares the results

One of the most talked about challenges of the Covid recovery is talent recruitment, productivity, and retention. UK business leaders are facing significant skills shortages, due to a spike in employee attrition and competition for resources driving up salary offers. When it comes to employee engagement strategy, there seems to be a lot of guesswork still going on. We see businesses implementing new ideas on a whim, and a sizeable number are still not doing anything at all. So, what's the best way to truly engage and create loyal employees?

The main headline? Rewards and benefits work. 52% of employees say that receiving rewards and recognition would motivate them to exceed their goals, and a further 38% would stay with their employer for longer.

Yet 37% of employees say they are not currently being recognised or rewarded at work at all. This figure rises to 47% of people working in admin or managerial roles. It is clearly a missed opportunity for many employers.

A question often asked is what sort of reward to give. Our research tells us that a third want "a gift card to use at a variety of retailers" as one of their top three preferred rewards. Pair this with the indication that employees prefer rewards that link to their hobbies and interests, and you'll soon find yourself providing an appreciated, choice-based reward. When delving deeper into the most popular interests, the majority of employees cited food and drink (64%), ahead of 57% saying entertainment and events, and 39% who favoured sport.

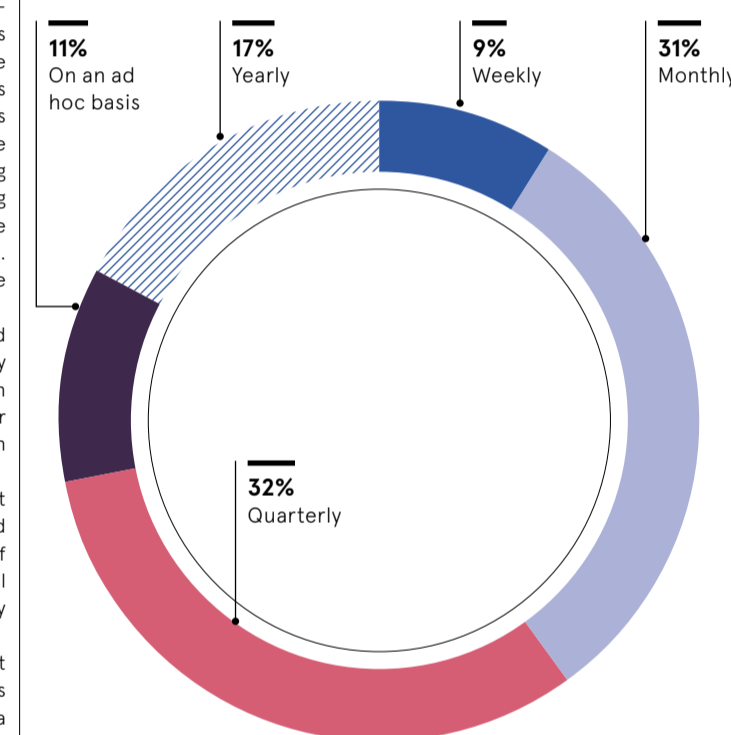
52%

of employees say that receiving rewards and recognition would motivate them to exceed their goals

93%

believe it is important for employee benefits to have a positive impact on mental health

HOW OFTEN WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE REWARDED OR RECOGNISED AT WORK?



Our data also shows that rewarding on a monthly or quarterly basis would satisfy two thirds of the UK workforce.

What do people expect to be rewarded for? Almost half say "for the ongoing effort I put in at work", which is in contrast to the typical approach of rewarding those who go above and beyond. The other major reason is for "achieving a major goal or milestone".

Conclusion? There's a spectrum of needs. No single workplace benefit or reward will cover all cases, but offering a range of solutions that aid mental, physical and financial health is likely to satisfy the majority.

We also asked which specific employee benefits are most valuable. Top of the list at 40% is "a [reloadable] prepaid card that offers rewards for everyday spending", tied with private healthcare. As the cost of travel goes up, it's no surprise to see 34% demanding travel expenses.

Naturally, we also wanted to find out which perks are overrated. Only 9% appreciate in-workplace rewards such as fruit baskets, free lunches, or free gym memberships as a top-three benefit.

A focus on mental health has now become a priority. Offering mandatory benefits such as a pension and

annual leave is no longer enough. Of the respondents, 93% believe it is important for employee benefits to have a positive impact on mental health, with three-quarters rating this as "very important". Only a few years ago companies barely considered mental health. It's a huge indication for employee engagement strategy in 2022 and beyond to see this rated as the top concern.

Conclusion? There's a spectrum of needs. No single workplace benefit or reward will cover all cases, but offering a range of solutions that aid mental, physical and financial health is likely to satisfy the majority.

Read the full report at: blackhawknetwork.co.uk

Blackhawk Network is a leading provider of incentives, rewards and benefits. We collaborate with our clients to engage with the people that matter most to their business.



Hybrid and remote working models only work if your tech does. 1 in 5 business leaders have an effective understanding of their employees' hybrid digital needs. Do you?

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“Often, businesses continue with recurring meetings because they're scheduled rather than because they're worthwhile

Hybrid working: companies must address digital inequality

Faced with serious consequences, business leaders are increasingly concerned about the impact of digital inequality among employees

The advent of hybrid working offers an opportunity for employees to choose when, where and how they work. It can also promote wellbeing and help create a better work/life balance. However, it could also widen equality gaps in the workplace. A common example is employees working on different continents – or even different regions within the UK – that use different infrastructure and have a different home broadband setup. A recent report from people analytics and consulting company, Actual Experience, reveals organisations are becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of digital inequality

THE URGENT NEED TO ADDRESS DIGITAL INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

70%

of businesses expect to shift to a hybrid workplace. But only...

19%

of C-suite executives were 'very effective' at understanding the link between digital tools and employee wellbeing

24%

of C-suite executives said they were either 'not very' or 'not at all' effective at understanding the digital requirements of employees. Only 18% believe they are 'very effective'

67%

of C-suite representatives are concerned about digital inequality in the future hybrid working model

10%

of an organisation's employees need to work an extra six days per year to do the same work as their colleagues on average

on employees, as hybrid working looks set to become the new normal.

Indeed, 67% of C-suite representatives surveyed say they're worried these new ways of working will introduce inequalities in how people access and use digital tools.

And for good reason. The company has found that, on average, 10% of an organisation's employees need to work an extra six days per year to do the same work as their colleagues.

"Our data reveals the hidden cost of an uneven playing field in the digital workplace. These six days of wasted time would mean a reduced work/life balance and increased work stress due to the frustration," says Actual Experience co-founder and CEO, Dave Page.

"This could also impact on time they could otherwise spend on personal or professional development, thus limiting their opportunities for career growth," says Page. "To the business, this means reduced work output, lost revenue, and wasted payroll. For larger clients, we've seen this run into seven-figure sums. Worst case scenario, if issues are not identified and fixed, staff may resign."

Other disparities can occur closer to home, perhaps where the internet in different regions of the UK varies greatly in quality. Employees with more disposable income might be more likely to purchase higher-quality broadband to access digital tools reliably and quickly – but this may not be affordable for everyone.

Despite business leaders' concerns about the impact of digital inequality, there are worrying signs in terms of business preparedness for making hybrid work in the long term.

Actual Experience reports that fewer than one in five (18%) believe they have a 'very effective' understanding of the digital needs of different employees.

This will cause a problem when it comes to hiring and retaining employees, says Page.

"CHROs are going through that journey right now. Business leaders are realising that, in the world of hybrid or remote working, it's now very easy for employees to move to a new employer. They are no longer limited geographically. Therefore, the landscape has become more competitive, and CHROs are all too aware that, to attract and retain the best talent, they need to ensure that the employee experience is positive – not just for big milestone moments but for the day-to-day too."

However, Page contends that the digital aspects of work have for too long existed in a separate silo from



the employee experience aspects. CIOs, who own the digital experience, have not been sufficiently aligned with people leaders, who own employee experience. As a result, companies' understanding of broader employee experience has been fragmented.

There are also some worrying indications that organisations aren't acting on employees' worries or complaints regarding their tech problems. Only 19% have a very good understanding of the link between digital tools and employee wellbeing.

"Typically, employers will run employee surveys to identify any issues. However, while surveys can be very useful, it only shows a snapshot of data at that time. Additionally, surveys are often anonymised, rely on the employee accurately reporting the issue they're experiencing, and do not offer insight on what the problem is," says Page.

Clearly, a failure to 'level up' those hybrid workers suffering in silence can have serious consequences.

“A failure to look after employees – the 'social' in ESG – can have a detrimental effect on a business's value to its investors

"Our reports identify millions in lost revenue opportunity and wasted payroll due to time wasted and reduced business output," says Page.

He believes a failure to look after employees – the 'social' in ESG – can have a detrimental effect on a business' value to its investors. With more and more investors prioritising ESG initiatives as a factor in deciding where to invest, companies which do not look after their people may suffer the consequences of reduced share price and negative attention in the media.

So, what can CHROs do to successfully navigate this problem and manage the new distributed workforce?

"This is a great opportunity for CHROs to act as a lynchpin between the HR/people function and IT to ensure that the right data points are continuously monitored and analysed, with tech issues investigated," says Page.

To help fulfil this, Actual Experience produces data analytics which act as a survey of all employees but without the need for any employee interaction. Unlike employee experience surveys, which offer a snapshot of data at a particular time, it's always-on people analytics offer measurements insight on root causes, over a period of time.

"We also identify precisely where and why the problems are occurring so we can advise on how best to overcome them, for example for specific employees requiring support, or for specific areas of tech that require investment," says Page.

Larger organisations are under pressure to report on ESG initiatives in

their annual report. Our Continuous Improvement Process of monthly or quarterly reports enables business leaders to report on tangible improvements in areas such as equality and inclusion and carbon emissions."

The transition to new ways of working is the greatest management challenge that companies have faced in decades. Companies need to understand how and why inequalities emerge in different working models and the usage of digital tools.

The consequences of failing to ensure that staff have the tools they need to do their best work, no matter where they are, can be hugely detrimental to employees and employers alike. For employees, it can stunt their personal and professional development of employees, limit upwards mobility, and widen equality gaps. For organisations, it can make sustainable business growth unachievable.

If HR/people leaders get hybrid right, they can pave the way for a fairer, more productive employee experience, a positive working culture, a strengthened purpose and better alignment between the customer and employee experience.

For more information please visit actual-experience.com



STRESS

How to extinguish employee burnout

Burnout levels among professionals are spiralling. What can be done to beat back the flames?

Katie Byrne

Burnout is on the increase. Granted, it is hardly a new phenomenon. But when the small matter of a global pandemic and the impact of working from home (WFH) on our ability to switch off is factored in, it's little wonder that professionals are mentally exhausted like never before.

Employment review firm Glassdoor has reported a 128% jump in references to 'burnout' in company feedback shared since April 2021. Reviews relating to the professional sector – including technology, business services and finance – have seen the highest usage of the term, accounting for 40% of all reviews this year that reference burnout.

"Many employees have been able to 'grin and bear' the impact of Covid-19 through 2020, but the one-year anniversary has proven to be a tipping point," says Jill Cotton, careers

advice expert at Glassdoor. "They're thinking again about their home and work lives, and we're seeing UK job vacancies reach a record high due to the 'great resignation'."

Covid-19 aside, a combination of over-work and under-rest is still playing its part.

"There's a grave danger in the glamourisation of overworking," says Ruth Cornish, co-founder and director of HR Independents (HRI) and chief people officer for Amelore. "Forgoing lunch breaks and weekends in favour of work is portrayed as a sign of passion, and chaining oneself to a desk until the early hours is seen as commitment. Wearing burnout as a badge of honour is as dangerous for the individual as it is for the company."

According to research by the UK Health and Safety Executive published in November 2020, 828,000

workers were affected by work-related stress, depression or anxiety between 2019 and 2020, with 17.9 million working days lost as a result.

In short, burnout is as damaging to businesses as it is to the staff affected, with UK employers footing a collective bill worth billions each year as a result.

Robert Ordever is the managing director at workplace culture specialist O.C. Tanner Europe. Recent research from the organisation found the pandemic has contributed to a 15% global rise in burnout, increasing to a jaw-dropping 81% in "non-thriving" company cultures.

"Frankly, even if it wasn't the right thing to do, finding ways to prevent burnout is imperative to running a thriving business," says Ordever, noting that his company's 2020 *Global Culture Report* found that even mild burnout causes a 220% decrease in the probability of highly engaged employees and a 247% decrease in the probability of great work.

A Mental Health UK study found that just 23% of workers are aware of the support their organisation offers to tackle burnout. It's vital that staff know they have your backing.

At O.C. Tanner, it's an open conversation. "We focus on education and maintaining awareness of the risk of burnout," says Ordever. "The foundation of our strategy is around our people and we articulate this by asking each of them to 'watch out, speak up and work safely'. We each take

“Even if it wasn't the right thing to do, finding ways to prevent burnout is imperative to running a thriving business



collective responsibility for the well-being of ourselves and each other."

An upfront approach is vital, agrees Cornish. "Talking about the concept of burnout, how it presents itself in both team members and C-suite, and agreeing on support for staff is crucial."

While symptoms vary from person to person, common signs of burnout include weariness, a negative outlook and procrastination. In 2019 it was recognised by the WHO as an "occupational phenomenon".

Dominic McGregor found himself burnt out in the summer of 2015, having given his all to Social Chain, the digital startup he co-founded, an exciting "rocket-ship" which went through "crazy-fast growth".

McGregor only realised he was burnt out when someone else pointed it out to him. "Everything was getting on top of me but I didn't notice," he recalls. "To recover, I had to either stop working or stop partying – and I would not stop working. I quit the party lifestyle and focused my spare time on getting rest."

McGregor recently launched Fearless Ventures, his new company which invests in entrepreneur-led ecommerce businesses. "My co-founders and I are implementing a number of things to prevent burnout, from a transparent structure to encouraging regular breaks and holidays," he says. "We want to give our team the confidence to switch off, rest and re-energise."

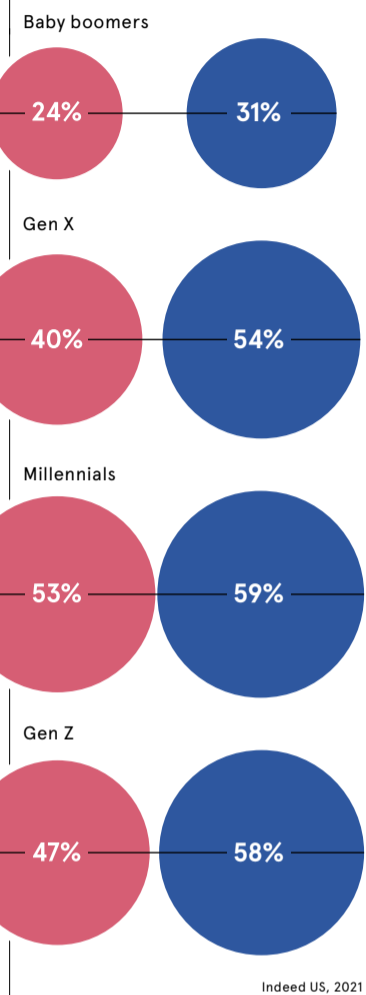
McGregor believes it is crucial for senior management to look out for and ensure they're not "flaming out", adding: "They should care about their team's mental health and demonstrate that their wellbeing is just as important as their performance."

If it becomes clear that someone on your team has burnout, it

BURNOUT IS AFFECTING EVERYONE AT WORK

Share of employees reporting feelings of burnout

● Jan 2020 (pre-Covid)
● Feb 2021



is important to assess what can be done to help them.

"Remove any and all unnecessary causes of stress," suggests Cornish. "Redistribute workloads where necessary and encourage the individual to make use of annual leave. If need be, investigate and resolve any contributory factors, such as bullying or harassment. Provide access to medical support, such as an Employee Assistance Programme."

Swapping a workaholic culture for one that values rest and recharging can help keep the burnout risk under control. Remind staff to step away from their desks during the day, for example, even if just for a five-minute stroll; regular breaks are proven to reduce the risk of stress and depression, as well as improving everything from productivity to focus.

Similarly, it's critical to set boundaries. Encourage staff to make the most of leave. Turn off the ping of email notifications and other forms of out-of-hours contact to help create a distinct separation between work life and home life, even if they're still working from home.

"The most important thing we do to prevent burnout at O.C. Tanner is set clear expectations," says Ordever. "We work hard to ensure that extended hours, excessive workloads and sustained pressures are simply not the norm." ●

EXPLORING THE VARIOUS WAYS THE PANDEMIC HAS CHANGED THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Almost 20 months after the first coronavirus-induced lockdown was enforced in the UK, organisations are now trying to reset and determine how best to work in a post-pandemic world. What does the ending of the furlough scheme mean in reality for workers, what are the anxiety levels of returning to the office – for leaders and their employees – and what is the latest thinking about making coronavirus vaccines compulsory for work? In this time of flux there are many questions, but hopefully these data insights will add clarity.

HOW HAS EMPLOYEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BEEN IMPACTED IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19?

Global percentages showing how workers have been affected by the pandemic

Workday, 2021



RECORD NUMBERS OF VACANCIES

Datapoints highlighting the unemployment level in the UK and across most industries

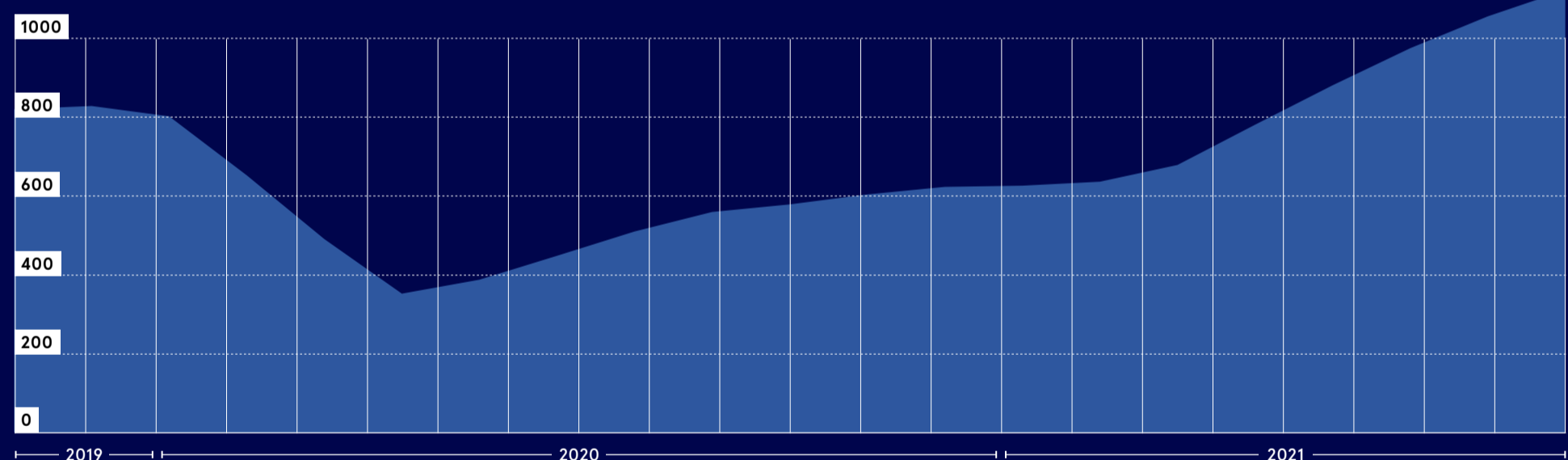
Office for National Statistics, 2021



LIFE AFTER FURLOUGH: HOW UNEMPLOYMENT HIT A NEW HIGH IN SEPTEMBER 2021

The number of vacancies in the UK, in thousands, seasonally adjusted, since the start of the pandemic

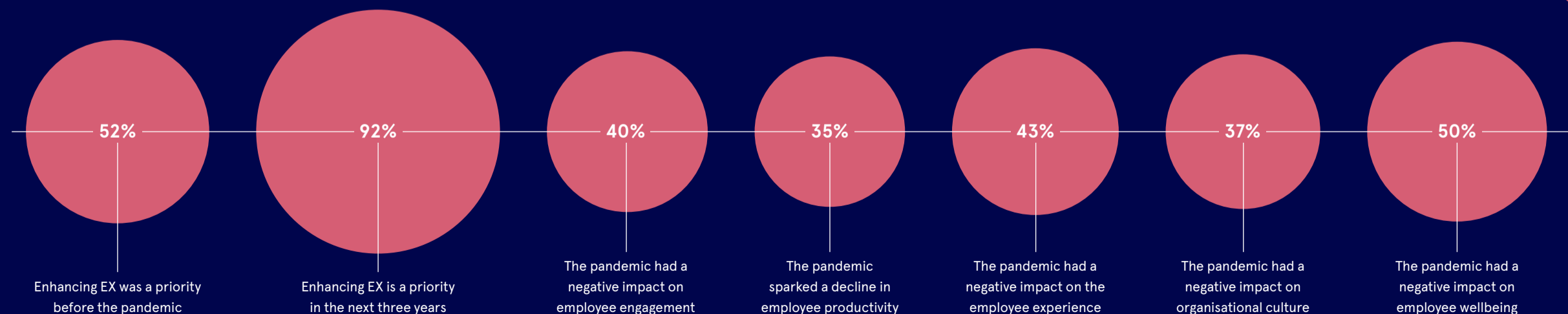
Office for National Statistics, 2021



HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC MADE ORGANISATIONS FOCUS ON EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE?

Percentages showing how 'EX' has improved globally since the start of the pandemic

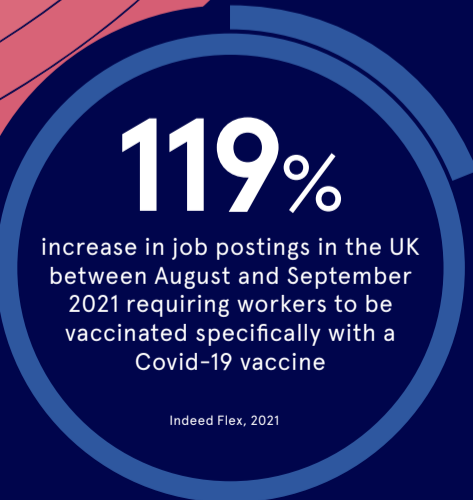
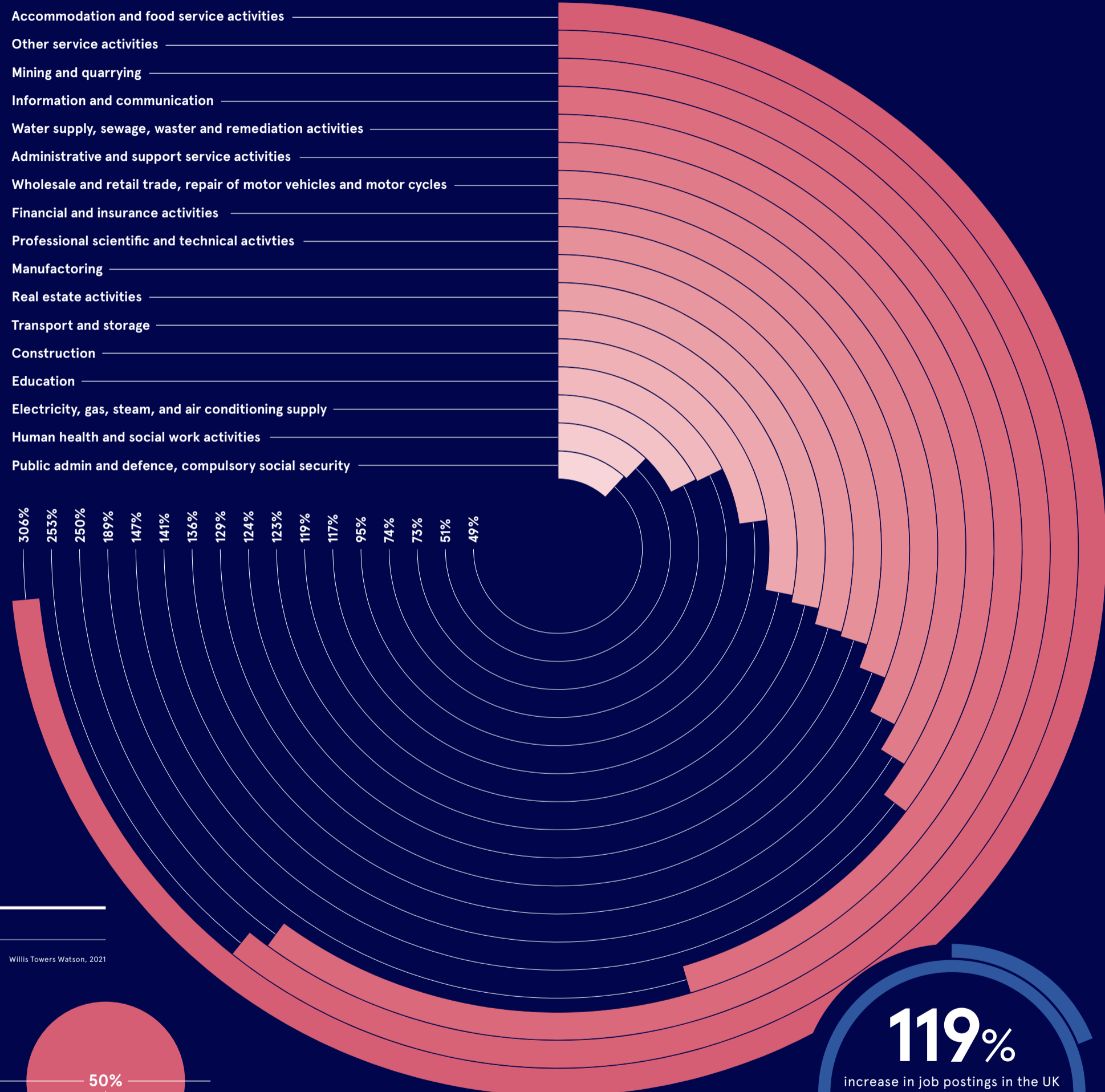
Willis Towers Watson, 2021



WHICH INDUSTRIES HAVE BEEN MOST IMPACTED BY UNEMPLOYMENT?

Selected vacancies in the UK according to category in September 2021, percentage change on year

Office for National Statistics, 2021



How to beat the 'great resignation' with a thriving culture

With employees seeking to leave employers in their droves, organisations must build a culture that retains talent through their productivity sweet spot, writes **Jack Altman**, CEO and co-founder at people management platform Lattice

A year ago the world was in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Amid a worsening pandemic, millions of people lost their jobs, millions more were only clinging on to employment due to government furlough schemes and vacancies had plummeted. Yet a year on and people are so confident in the economy that we are now witnessing what has been called the 'great resignation'.

While an eventual recovery post-Covid was a given, few could predict just how quickly it would happen. The number of open jobs in the UK rose to a record high of 1.1 million in the three months to August, according to the Office for National Statistics, and while supply chain chaos has somewhat stunted the resurgence, GDP is expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels in a few months.

With companies competing fiercely for talent again and an abundance of jobs across a number of sectors and disciplines, people are eyeing up the opportunity to leave their employer. But a triumph for the economy could be a new crisis for employers if they are hit by a swathe of resignations. In a recent study by Lattice, more than half of HR leaders reported significantly higher turnover in the first half of 2021. A separate report by Microsoft found that 41% of the global workforce are considering quitting their current employer this year. Nearly 4 million Americans quit their jobs in April alone, according to the US Labor Department's Job Openings and Labor Turnover Summary.

When you consider that the average tenure of an employee is only 22 months, the great resignation can have a huge impact on business productivity. The sports scientist Ben Darwin observed that when sports people move teams, their performance often dips and it can take them three years to get back to their peak. The same goes for employees. After onboarding and learning the ropes, several months pass before employees really start contributing. It is then typically three years before they reach full productivity, having thoroughly learned the technology stack, honed their skills, observed successful colleagues and developed through consistent feedback.

Companies invest in recruitment, onboarding and training, but if staff leave before reaching the three-year sweet spot then the majority of the workforce doesn't reach peak performance.



The trouble is, most organisations don't know how to fight back against employee attrition. In the early 2010s, many went down the golden handcuffs route, bribing staff into staying through tenure-linked equity. While this might keep employees for longer, it works less well at bringing out their best work – and in many cases even breeds toxic environments. Realising this, employers pivoted to creating attractive work environments with beer taps and table football, all of which appeared little more superficial than fun when Covid-19 triggered the acceleration of remote and hybrid work.

Savvy leaders are now changing their approach. Instead of thinking about how to persuade people to stay, they're looking at ways in which they can create a company that people don't want to leave. The answer is through culture.

Organisations that want to avoid the great resignation and retain talent for long enough to reach the productivity sweet spot must turn their culture to their competitive advantage. They can do this through three core pillars: purpose, community and growth.



Organisations that want to retain talent can turn their culture into a competitive advantage through three main pillars: purpose, community, and growth

Purpose is the pillar that most organisations are familiar with – the 'why' behind work. People find meaning in their careers by aligning their own personal purpose with the work they do every day. There is no single 'correct' purpose, but organisations do need to clearly define what theirs is. That purpose should be specific, sewn into the fabric of the company and be something they can rally their people around.

Community is increasingly important to a company's success because it's where people find trust, equality and

cooperation. It can range from small functional teams and social committees, to wider departments and the whole organisation. The strength of the community amplifies the collective efforts into something larger and better than any person could create on their own.

Finally, growth is key. A lot of companies, most notably those that are venture backed, need to grow to sustain their business model. But growth is also important to culture. An expanding business constantly challenges its workforce and provides new career opportunities. Employees can earn promotions faster and move into management earlier. They can sidestep into new departments and take on roles that didn't exist before. In Lattice's research study, HR leaders cited the lack of opportunities for career growth as the biggest driver of employee turnover after pay.

At Lattice, we want our company to grow all the time – and grow fast – because it's good for our people. If we stagnate, we can't offer developmental opportunities. When your best people hit their ceiling, it's tempting to lock them down through restrictive

or aggressive compensation. But that can undo all the great work done before. When you give people the right conditions, they'll grow into brilliant professionals. A lot of the time, they'll even race ahead of your company's growth.

These principles are also why we build the people management tools and platform we offer at Lattice. We want to help enable HR leaders, managers and employees to listen more effectively, deliver great feedback and give better transparency around development.

The three pillars create successful, meaningful cultures. They give employees the motivation and inspiration to work through challenges and turbulence. Crucially, with retention pressures ramping up, there's going to be a 'rich get richer' dynamic. Companies with the best cultures will attract great people and drive down attrition.

For more information, visit lattice.com



WORKING HOURS

The wide-awake club

Working nine to five doesn't get the best out of night owls or the extreme early birds among us. It's why some employers are letting staff match their hours to their circadian rhythms

MaryLou Costa

It is 5.30 in the morning and PR consultant Paul MacKenzie-Cummins is at his desk, taking advantage of his clear head and quiet surroundings to get ahead for the day. This very early bird will take a long break between 2pm and 4pm, when he'll often go for a run, do personal admin and even take a quick siesta. He aims to finish working at 6pm.

He encourages his staff at Clearly, the communications agency he founded in 2014, to take a similarly flexible approach. Team members are on all kinds of schedules, with some even working a split shift of 10am to 3pm and 7pm to 10pm.

"The days of the traditional nine to five have been consigned to the history books – and rightly so, because each person is different," MacKenzie-Cummins says. "I want to provide an environment where people can schedule their work at the times that enable them to get the best out of themselves."

Evenings are the most productive times for Sarah Canelle, the owner of online fashion brand canelle

bespoke. She prefers to spend her mornings exercising and running errands, before settling into work after lunch and wrapping things up between 9pm and 11pm after a dinner break.

Two-thirds of full-time employees polled by Glassdoor in October agreed that the ability to allocate whatever time they choose to work and personal activities is the modern definition of work-life balance. Research published by electronics firm Poly in the same month revealed that 69% of employees believe that the nine to five has been replaced by "anytime working".

Companies that take a flexible approach to working hours enable their staff to follow their circadian rhythms – that is, an individual's innate tendency to be more alert at particular times of the day and sleepier at others. Genetics largely dictate whether you're an extreme night owl, an extreme morning lark or, like most people, somewhere on the scale between the two. Circadian rhythms can even be split into more specific

chronotypes, or activity profiles, that outline when people with earlier or later wakefulness tendencies should get up, eat, exercise and do lighter or more demanding work.

Scheduling your work according to your particular chronotype means you'll operate at optimal capacity most of the time, rather than struggle within a default nine-to-five schedule that may be at odds with your daily fluctuations in wakefulness. So says Geraldine Joaquim, owner of wellness consultancy Mind Your Business.

"We all have our own optimal times for being focused, active and creative," says Joaquim, who is also a hypnotherapist specialising in sleep problems. "Holding regular 8.30am meetings with night owls and expecting them to be full of ideas at that time won't result in anything useful, for instance. Or, if your business is geared towards working late to accommodate the needs of an overseas office in a different time zone, say, expecting great things from your early birds may result in disappointment."

Accommodating the preferences of both owls and larks with flexible work schedules should help them to perform to their full potential,

notes Joaquim, who adds: "With so much talk about whether companies will be returning to the office full time, this is the best opportunity we've ever had to evaluate what works best for people."

Our prevailing societal framework is more suited to early birds, yet some studies indicate that night owls are more resilient and able to stay focused for longer. Despite this, they can be stereotyped as lazy, while other research suggests that they are at a higher risk of health problems, particularly dementia, which has been associated with the insomnia that owls can be prone to.

"As well as understanding your chronotype, it's important to know your optimum sleep time. It's between seven and nine hours a night for the average person, but it can be as short as four hours or as long as 11. Knowing these needs is crucial to your ability to face the day feeling properly rested, with enough energy to last," Joaquim says.



Holding regular 8.30am meetings with night owls and expecting them to be full of ideas at that time won't result in anything useful

She is a night owl, but has found her natural preference for sleeping and working later impractical since having children. Sarah Canelle can relate to this. She recently switched to a working day of 10.30am to 6.30pm, having accepted that her extreme-owl preferences were jarring too much with her family life.

Allowing people to work a range of schedules may prove a tricky management task, which is perhaps where firms such as Dropbox may be on to something with their recent adoption of a 'core hours' model. The company asks its staff to be available from 10am to noon and from 4pm to 6pm. They can schedule the rest of their working day as they see fit.

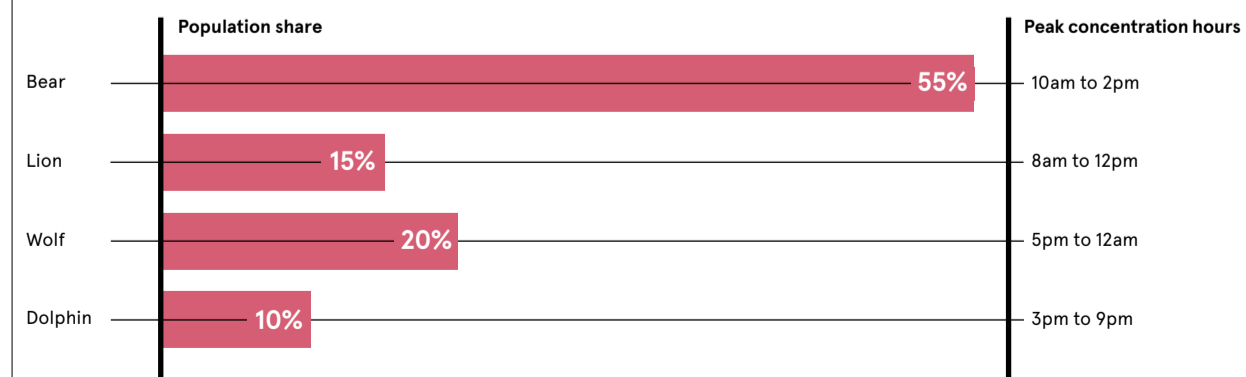
But this sort of approach does not go far enough, argues Anna McKay, another night owl and CEO of Zeet Sleep, a provider of tech designed to help people sleep better.

Enabling staff to work at their preferred times is a quick productivity fix, she explains, adding that firms that really care about their employees' long-term wellbeing should take a more holistic view, which includes promoting good sleep. This entails ensuring that people get the right kind of light and eat the most appropriate food for the time of day, spend enough time outdoors, take exercise in the morning and engage in more restful activities in the evening.

McKay has taken this approach herself and reports feeling better rested and more energetic than ever. She attributes this to living in alignment with her own unique energy patterns, which, if more employers were to embrace individual chronotype-led schedules, could go some way towards solving the growing problem of burnout. ●

WHAT'S YOUR CHRONOTYPE?

The population share and concentration windows of four primary chronotypes

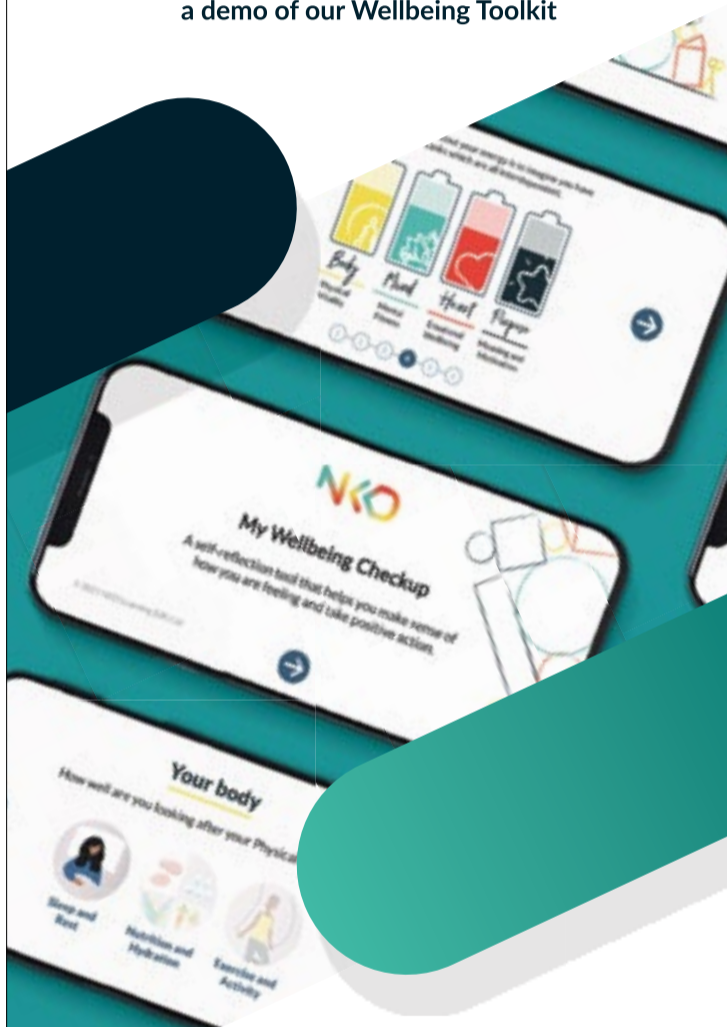




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DESIGN

Room for improvement?

Before they summon their staff back to HQ, employers would be well advised to check that their offices are as accessible and inclusive as possible to all users

Rebecca Hallett

An global poll of 31,000 full-time employees in January for Microsoft's 2021 *Work Trend Index* report found that 73% wanted to retain the option of working remotely after the relaxation of Covid lockdown restrictions. It's clear that many people aren't itching to resume office life five days a week after so many months of working at home.

"Many businesses are wondering why we're not all rushing back. Part of it might be a fear of infection," says Jean Hewitt, senior inclusive design consultant at Buro Happold. "But I've also spoken to many people who've been working in their garden shed or some other humble environment, yet have thrived in that space."

So what makes the shed or spare bedroom a more appealing place to work than the purpose-built office? Part of the answer lies in accessibility and inclusivity.

There are obvious benefits to working at home, ranging from the weighty – such as the freedom from commuting – to the trivial – such as the freedom to wear pyjama bottoms while videoconferencing. But one of the most impactful, yet less obvious, advantages has been the freedom

to customise your workspace. Even without workstation assessments and expensive ergonomic chairs, many people have found this transformational. Maybe they've moved their desk so that they can sit in natural light; perhaps they've kept the radio on in the kitchen; or they might have switched between sitting and standing throughout the day.

In exploring such options, people have realised that their problems with one-size-fits-all office environments are about more than preference. This may have contributed to an increase in the number of assessments for autism and other forms of neurodivergence. A reader poll conducted in May by ADDitude, a magazine for people affected by attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), found that 26.5% of the adult respondents had received a formal ADHD diagnosis in the preceding 12 months.

Nearly three-quarters of these newly diagnosed adults said that problems ensuing from the lockdown restrictions had prompted them to seek evaluation.

Even people who were all too aware of their divergent needs before the pandemic may have found out new

things about themselves while working remotely. And if they've found themselves more comfortable and productive when in full control of their surroundings, they'll be reluctant to relinquish that – even if returning to HQ does promise the benefits of community, better facilities and free teas and coffees.

When it comes to designing for inclusivity in offices, gender is a key factor. Although toilets are usually the first consideration, inclusive design doesn't stop at the bathroom door. Temperature, for example, is often overlooked. Most offices have their heating set to a level that tends to feel most comfortable to cisgender men. A 2019 research report by Tom Chang and Agne Kajackaite entitled *Battle for the Thermostat* concluded that the optimal temperature for cognitive performance for women is higher. Women experiencing menopause may also have fluctuating temperature needs.

Of course, you can't know whether someone is menopausal simply by looking at them. In the same way, you can't know their health status. About 22% of UK adults self-report as having a disability, according to the Department for Work and Pensions, yet many others don't disclose a disability or chronic health condition – often because they don't know themselves that they have one.

Kelly and Hester Grainger, who co-founded the neurodiversity consultancy Perfectly Autistic, both have experience of this. The husband-and-wife team have two children with autism and ADHD. During the depths of the Covid crisis, Hester found at the age of 43 that she had ADHD. Kelly, who'd had a successful career in the corporate world for more than two decades, was diagnosed with autism at 44 and ADHD at 45.

"There are lots of neurodivergent people who don't know they are neurodivergent," he says. "They struggle with certain things and simply imagine that these must be a struggle for everyone."

The Equality Act 2010 outlines inclusiveness and accessibility requirements for UK businesses, while the British Standards Institution has issued numerous publicly available specifications concerning accessibility. PAS 6463, Design for the Mind, is the first to focus on neurodiversity and the built environment. Hewitt was a technical author on the draft, which was released for public comment in October.

"For anyone, there will be times when you need to get your head down and finish some urgent work. This requires minimal interruption, noise or any other stimulus," she says. "So I think this PAS is really about helping everyone, whatever their neurological profile, from neurotypical all the way through to neurodegenerative."

So what are the main principles of inclusive design? One is physical accessibility – for instance, the provision of step-free access, automatic doors and desks suitable for wheelchair users. A second is clear wayfinding – for instance, using words and patterns as well as colours, clearly signing quiet spaces and adding

“There are lots of neurodivergent people who don't know they're neurodivergent”

81%

of employees aged 18 to 24 want to work for an inclusive company

40%

of employees aged 25 to 34 want facilities for new mums in offices of the future

26%

of employees aged 18 to 24 want gender neutral toilets in offices of the future

Penketh Group, 2019

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So what are the main principles of inclusive design? One is physical accessibility – for instance, the provision of step-free access, automatic doors and desks suitable for wheelchair users. A second is clear wayfinding – for instance, using words and patterns as well as colours, clearly signing quiet spaces and adding

braille to signage. And a third is controlled stimulation – for instance, switching vivid decor for muted colours, adding soft furnishings to absorb sound and using partitions in open-plan offices.

Adaptability is also key in inclusive design. Law firm Pinsent Masons was an early adopter of open-plan offices. Its director of HR and learning, Jonathan Bond, explains that the move "allowed us better flexibility, recognising that we wanted workspaces that were adaptable for future changes".

Employees are encouraged to work in zones of the building that best suit their needs – from low stimulation to high sociability – at any given time. They can book to reserve a desk anywhere in the office.

"Our office design, plus our hybrid working strategy, recognises this diversity of preference, so it offers a range of choices," Bond says.

While a full office redesign clearly isn't feasible in all cases, there are small and relatively affordable changes – for instance, adjustable lighting – that can have a significant impact. Designating a quiet room in which people can calm themselves in isolation can also make a big difference. If it doubles as a prayer space, a booking system ensures that no worshipper is interrupted.

Employers can draw on a range of resources to help improve their office design, including the CAE's access audits, Buro Happold's inclusive design services and Perfectly Autistic's neurodiversity awareness training.

"Don't be afraid to work with external partners," advises Hester Grainger. "If you want to learn about autism in the workplace, ask an autistic person who also has the corporate context you need."

But she adds that everyone's experiences are different. As well as working with experts, employers need to speak directly with their staff. Grainger recommends a return-to-work survey as a good starting point for such conversations.

Pinsent Masons benefits from having well-established employee networks, which can give the management team regular feedback about inclusivity matters.

"We've worked with these groups on key office design issues," Bond notes. "For example, the disability group road-tested our London office to ensure that it was wheelchair-friendly. A number of their colleagues (including me) later spent a day working in wheelchairs to understand their lived experience and determine any areas for improvement."

More inclusive office design will help encourage employees back into the office. Along with improved welfare, productivity and loyalty from staff with varied access and accommodation needs, employers may see increased engagement and a sense of unity in the workforce.

Looking forward to a post-pandemic world, Kelly Grainger argues that "getting your work environment right, making it inclusive, will benefit all employees. And making everyone happier and more productive surely benefits the business overall." ●



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The technology transforming the digital employee experience

With more employees looking to change jobs post-Covid, companies need to reimagine how to engage their workforce – and that means borrowing some of the strategies and capabilities of their marketing colleagues

The pandemic has presented business leaders with two major challenges in the form of managing remote working and retaining talent. According to a survey published earlier this year by Microsoft of more than 30,000 workers around the world, 41% said that they were considering leaving their jobs or changing their professions this year.

To manage both elements of this double whammy, business leaders need to improve employee engagement and communication. However, worryingly, this is something that many are failing to do. In a recent survey by Gartner, nearly three-quarters of those asked (72%) disagreed with the statement that “HR staff sufficiently involve employees when scoping and identifying business needs.” Another significant finding of the survey is that 79% of those asked still rely on formal, large-scale surveys as a way of understanding employees while just 6% ticked the “other” box.

This negative perception of HR and the reliance on traditional surveys are clearly related. Even though company leaders have to work harder than ever before to engage with their employees, many are relying on legacy communications methods and technologies. These systems can potentially create greater disengagement as they’re irrelevant or don’t align with today’s employee expectations. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and now HR and internal communications functions need to catch up.

“We find that when you start by asking some basic questions you learn that email is still the primary method of communication,” says Gregg Apirian, chief experience officer of leading workplace experience platform Korbyt Anywhere, whose clients include McDonalds, Toyota and BP. “Not only that, but many companies are sending these emails through Outlook instead of an email platform, which makes the design and delivery challenging. More importantly, without email analytics, communicators have no idea if their emails were received, opened, or if action was taken.”

Apirian argues that employee experience and internal communications professionals need to start using more sophisticated, data-driven communications platforms similar to those used by their marketing colleagues. Marketers know the value of targeting messages and then measuring performance – did the content reach its targeted audience? Did the audience view



it or engage further by clicking, liking, commenting on or sharing it?

On average across businesses, there’s only about one communicator to every 10,000 employees, Apirian points out. “These departments are often understaffed and underskilled and they aren’t operating with the modern technology and training they need in order to perform effectively or deliver an exceptional employee experience,” he says. “But, with talent on the move as never before, that’s got to change. Organisations that have done this right have seen the return of investment and now have the opportunity to gain considerable competitive advantage.”

He says: “It’s time to look beyond the traditional employee engagement methods. Digital workplace experience technology like Korbyt’s platform, Korbyt Anywhere enables communicators to create any type of digital content, target it to specific employee segments, whether it’s job type, department, or location. They can measure the performance of their content by channel, such as email, mobile, desktop or digital signage.”

Communicators or other functional leaders can measure communications in real time and use the reports and insights to optimise the performance of those communications. They can

then begin to share insights with company leadership the same way that marketers do, with the result that the C-suite appreciates the true value of these communications. Modern, data-driven communication methods remove the guesswork and enable internal communicators to understand the right content formats to use for the right employee segments, delivered through the right channels and devices.

“Content presented in an article, for instance, might receive higher engagement if it were delivered as a short video from a leader’s mobile device,” says Apirian. “Or perhaps it might be the other way around for a particular employee segment. The point is that

you need the tools and skills to measure and optimise.”

A growing number of companies are opting for the Korbyt Anywhere platform because it meets employees ‘where they’re at’, explains Apirian. “You can personalise the employee experience by giving your employees a choice to receive communications from their preferred screens or devices. As you target that content, as well, you’ll see employee engagement increase.”

Internal communications professionals appreciate the fact that Korbyt Anywhere is a single, intelligent platform that can be used for publishing a variety of content. Once a communicator creates some content, they can then target it either to all employees or specific audiences and ensure that it’s delivered to every screen and channel available to employees. That might be digital signage screens, mobile devices, desktops, web browsers, social media and email, among others. Multiple methods of authentication ensures that the content and information pushed and pulled through the platform is secure.

Modernising your employee experience technology is important, but so is having the right content strategy. Many organisations only communicate from a top-down perspective, meaning leaders and communicators convey what they

think, rather than what employees think the business needs to be saying.

Korbyt has found that although this communications flow still plays an important role, enabling other employees and leaders to also be communicators is where engagement really stands out because employees receive the essential mix of what the business needs to communicate plus the ‘what’s in it for me?’ that really appeals and engages. That could be a celebration such as a big contract win or an employee’s 20th anniversary with the company. As well as educating employees all year round about their benefits so that by the time annual enrolment comes along everyone knows more about their benefits and can complete the process in a timely and efficient manner.

“Just as the pandemic has transformed the way in which people work and how they regard their roles,” says Apirian, “the company leaders that transform their internal communications will be those who succeed in this new world of work.”

For more information please visit korbyt.com

KORBYT

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Remorse code

A corporate scandal is potentially disastrous for employee morale, but there are ways of keeping people onside when their firm’s name is being dragged through the mud

David Craik

The autumn of 2015 was not the best period for Nicolai Laude, director of litigation communications at Volkswagen, to be heading out on the town. That September, the company had been exposed for using engine management software known as a defeat device to enable its new diesel cars to pass emissions tests. This had allowed the firm to sell 11 million vehicles whose output of nitrogen oxides could be up to 40 times higher than the legal limit.

“I must have had hundreds of conversations when I was out socialising at that time,” Laude recalls. “People laughed at me for being a Volkswagen employee. ‘The company that cheated the world,’ they said. It was annoying, tiring and demoralising. Most of my colleagues were anxious, listening to the media reports and worrying about their jobs and the future of their company.”

Fourteen years earlier, Nicole Alvino was experiencing similar emotions. She was working for US energy giant Enron, which was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy after a massive accounting fraud was uncovered.

“I remember the stock price falling and the leadership team telling employees that everything was going to be fine and that now was a good time to buy Enron shares,” she says. “Two months later, the company was gone.”

More recent episodes that have left the reputation of a once-admired business in tatters include the departure from fashion retailer Ted Baker of its founder, Ray Kelvin, amid accusations of inappropriate behaviour towards staff; a lawsuit against gaming group Activision Blizzard making several complaints of “unlawful harassment, discrimination and retaliation”; and revelations of labour exploitation in factories supplying clothing retailer Boohoo.

To restore confidence among consumers, investors and, crucially, employees, each of the above companies acted decisively. Ted Baker arranged training for staff on acceptable workplace conduct. Activision

Blizzard hired an inclusivity expert, Julie Hodges, as chief people officer to instigate cultural changes. And Boohoo commissioned an independent review of its supply chain, refined its supplier audits and introduced training for garment workers.

It’s vital for any firm at the centre of a scandal to maintain effective communications with its workforce, stresses Jonathan Hemus, managing director of crisis management consultancy Insignia. He stresses that time is of the essence in preventing a scandal from crushing their motivation and wellbeing.

“Employees want to be proud of the company they work for,” Hemus says. “A scandal hits them personally. They’ll feel embarrassed, worried and betrayed. Communicating with your employees effectively is a top priority – and you need to do it quickly, transparently and frequently. They’ll be asking themselves: ‘Do my leaders care about me? Can they overcome what has happened? And do the corporate values stated on our website mean anything at all?’”

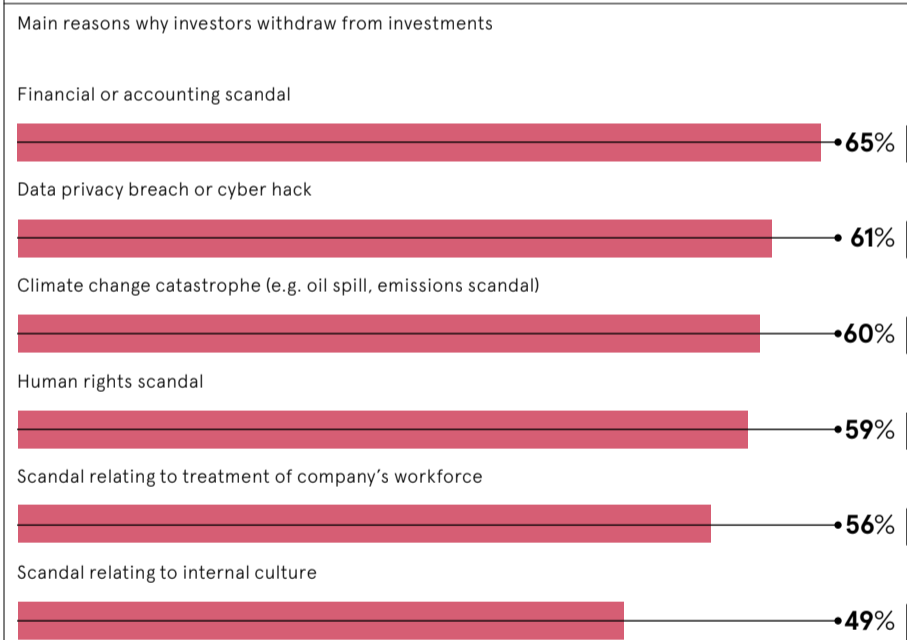
He advocates ensuring that all staff have someone they can approach who’ll keep them informed. Senior executives therefore need to brief line managers on keeping their doors open and displaying the right empathetic skills in the effort to preserve team morale.

Front-line staff, often facing the ire of customers and clients, should be given a script with positive messaging. This needs to state what action is being taken to address the scandal

“All employees want to be proud of the company they work for. A scandal hits them personally. They’ll feel embarrassed, worried and betrayed



CORPORATE SCANDALS DAMAGE A COMPANY'S MORALE AND ITS BOTTOM LINE



and give assurances that the situation will never recur.

Hemus advises employers in a crisis to provide their customer-facing staff with “up-to-date and accurate information, and a question-and-answer sheet. Get the tone of voice right. These employees can be your best ambassadors in putting across the right message.”

Seven years on from her Enron experience, Alvino co-founded a workforce communications platform called SocialChorus (since merged to form Firstup, where she remains chief strategy officer). She says that the most senior executive left standing should front up to the workforce as soon as possible.

“They need to deliver the message at a town-hall meeting or on

video,” Alvino says. “They need to be authentic and empathetic. They need to address the scandal head on and say this is not our culture and it never will be. Employees need to see the emotion and feel the human connection.”

She notes that employees at a company in crisis will experience something like the five-stage grieving process proposed by the influential psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. They will go through shock, denial, frustration and despondency before entering the right emotional state to see any positives in the situation.

“After any change, leaders need to know where employees are in this process,” Alvino says. “There is no point talking about how wonderful

the future will be if they’re still all in the second stage, for instance.”

Laude says the Volkswagen executive team’s first attempt to communicate with staff about the diesel scandal was held back by legal restraints and a lack of reliable information.

“At the start, we really didn’t know exactly what had been going on. All we could do was give employees the same public statement our leaders had made through the media and promise them that we’d investigate and provide information whenever it became available,” he says. “This wasn’t very satisfying from a communications point of view.”

What the company did manage to do quickly was roll out training for about 200,000 employees around the world. This reaffirmed the group’s cultural values, gave advice on regulatory compliance and set out a new code of conduct. Employees were encouraged to air their concerns and suggest corrective measures.

The company organised town-hall meetings, in which senior executives held Q&A sessions, and roadshows where its compliance and integrity teams talked of “the new Volkswagen”, Laude recalls.

Alvino argues that a crisis, if it is managed correctly, can even help to bring employees together.

“If your people can feel pride in how a scandal has been handled and someone down the pub asks them what is going on, they can be an advocate for your company’s recovery,” she says.

Laude points out that some employees of Volkswagen organised groups on social media, including one called “We Love Volkswagen” on Facebook.

“Our culture improved because it had to. It was common sense. We couldn’t survive another scandal,” he says. “This chapter hasn’t closed, and it will be with the company forever, but it does feel better – both at work and at play.”

COMMUNICATIONS

Where it's @ – comms for the Covid era

The pandemic has obliged many firms to take a technological leap to cope with remote working. How satisfied are they with the new collaboration tools they've adopted?



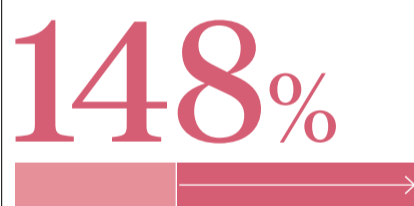
Martin Barrow

Zoom, Teams, Skype, Slack, Yammer... Welcome to the new lexicon of the workplace. From the moment we went into lockdown and adopted new ways of working, these platforms have become as familiar as the typewriter and Tipp-Ex were to previous generations. Many predate the pandemic, but the urgent need to stay connected with similarly isolated colleagues and suppliers required employers to open new communications channels as quickly as possible.

New platforms have proliferated, offering myriad, and often confusing, choices. While all of them offer the same basic function – helping people to stay in touch – these systems have different strengths and weaknesses, depending on their users' requirements.

Most people will be familiar with at least one of Microsoft Teams and Zoom by now. They are the most popular videoconferencing solutions. They share many features, including screen and app sharing, whiteboards, chat, voice calling, customised backgrounds and break-out rooms. They also both offer free plans, which are great for smaller businesses.

There's little to choose between the two. Generally, Zoom gets the thumbs-up for its user-friendliness and the quality of its videoconferencing, while Teams is preferred



increase in time spent in meetings among Teams users from February 2020 to February 2021

Microsoft, 2021



of companies don't have a long-term strategy for their internal communications

Workforce, 2019

but it's since become an ecosystem that colleagues use to operate the store through a single interface. We have about 80 applications that might be used from time to time. By embedding all these apps in Microsoft Teams, we feel as though we have only one."

Yammer is another powerful communication tool that offers features such as file-sharing and a context-based search facility. Like many of its peers, it helps employees in different teams and locations to both connect and collaborate. This application also comes under Microsoft's umbrella, which means it can easily be integrated with other MS products.

Slack is also proving popular. It has a clean and straightforward

interface with a few different channels. Channels are used to group conversations on different topics. You can also use private messages for direct, one-to-one communication or create private channels with a small number of colleagues. Slack Technologies was founded back in 2009, but the business has boomed during the Covid crisis. In July this year, it was acquired by US cloud software giant Salesforce for \$27.7bn (£20.1bn).

SocialChorus is an alternative platform that has been winning plaudits during the pandemic. It is particularly well suited for organisations with a dispersed workforce and who mainly rely on mobile devices to access information. This year, waste management company Renewi has

by the many people who are used to using the Microsoft Office suite.

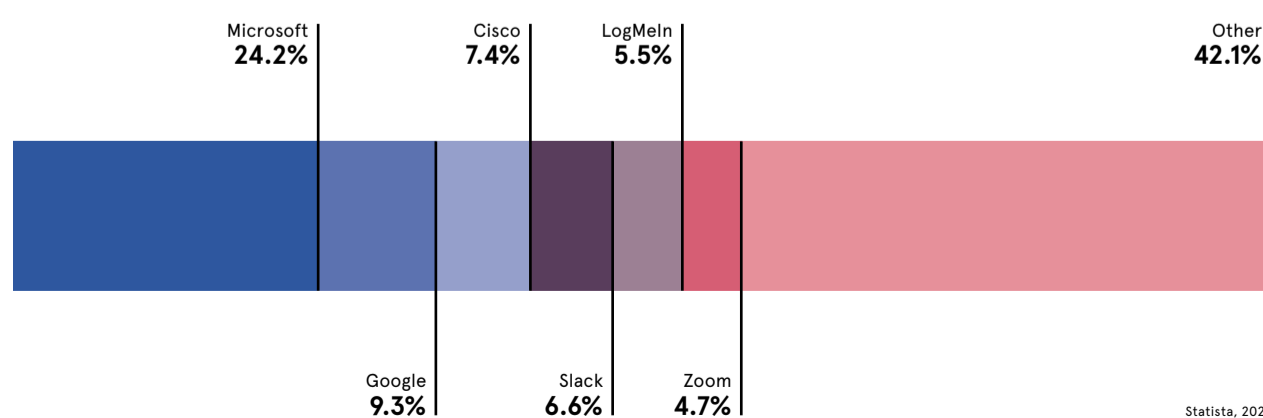
Marks and Spencer is a Teams adherent, having established a corporate partnership with Microsoft before the pandemic. Stephen Bolton, who is Microsoft Teams programme manager at the retailer, says: "Teams was the tool that supported our staff to continue working from home amid the pandemic. "We now have 95% of store colleagues using Teams. It's the collaborative workspace that everyone here uses daily to communicate, solve problems, ideate and get work done."

Teams has evolved beyond a communications tool for the retailer. For instance, a scheduling app that works through Teams makes it easier for employees to swap shifts, while the direct messaging function helps stores to respond to spikes in demand for particular product lines.

The company's head of technology, colleague experience and retail platforms is Andrew Redman. He notes that "people initially thought of Teams as a comms platform only,

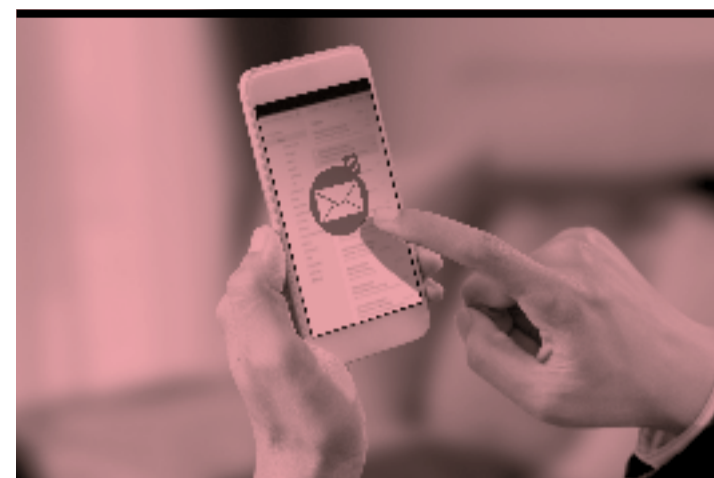
THE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS MARKET

Worldwide market share of companies in the collaborative software segment



Statista, 2020

“You'll never completely replace small WhatsApp groups, while certain things still need to be done by email



Email intuition: a new school for an old tool

With so many communications platforms on the market, traditional email can sometimes feel obsolete. But the reality is that we are still sending emails – and in huge volumes.

IT market research firm the Radicati Group estimates that 306 billion emails worldwide were sent daily in 2020 and expects the total to exceed 376 billion by 2025.

This might seem extraordinary when so many other options are available. But much of this global growth is because the internet is still gaining millions of new users each year.

When it comes to the business use of email in more mature markets such as the UK and the US, the picture is more complex. We are still using it, of course, but the question is whether the messages we send are having much effect. According to research by marketing software firm Campaign Monitor, the proportion of emails received that were actually opened last year fell to 16.4%.

Important emails from employers are often crowded out by the sheer volume of marketing material that gets through spam filters. This presents a challenge for companies, which generally still prefer to use email to convey their most important messages. Employers and employees generally agree that

it's inappropriate to deal with weighty matters on less formal platforms, such as WhatsApp.

This is why it's important to craft company emails that will stand out and be immediately obvious to time-pressured employees. So says Catrin Lewis, head of global engagement and internal communications at HR software provider Reward Gateway.

"While there are other tools out there, email is still an excellent way to engage your employees," she stresses. "It's a solid, favourable means of communication."

Lewis's tips for improving email engagement include choosing a strong subject line, a two-sentence summary and options to click through to the full story. Use the email to point readers to further content online. A good image can also help, although to avoid getting it marked as spam, a 60:40 text-to-image ratio is recommended.

Also make your email the start of a dialogue if that's appropriate, she suggests. People need to know how and when they can respond, so that they feel free to do so if they wish. You might not want a 'reply all' type of discussion to ensue, so provide clear signposting for anyone who wants to continue a conversation.

And one last piece of advice: ensure that every intended recipient of your important email can view it in its entirety on their mobile devices.

been rolling out SocialChorus to its 7,000 employees, most of whom previously used Yammer

The firm's CFO, Toby Woolrych, explains that "our comms team looked at numerous options before choosing SocialChorus. It is highly intuitive and easy to use. You can create as many communities as you like and send targeted messages. I think it will be a powerful pan-Renewi tool. We've started with it in our municipal division and the users' feedback has been very positive so far."

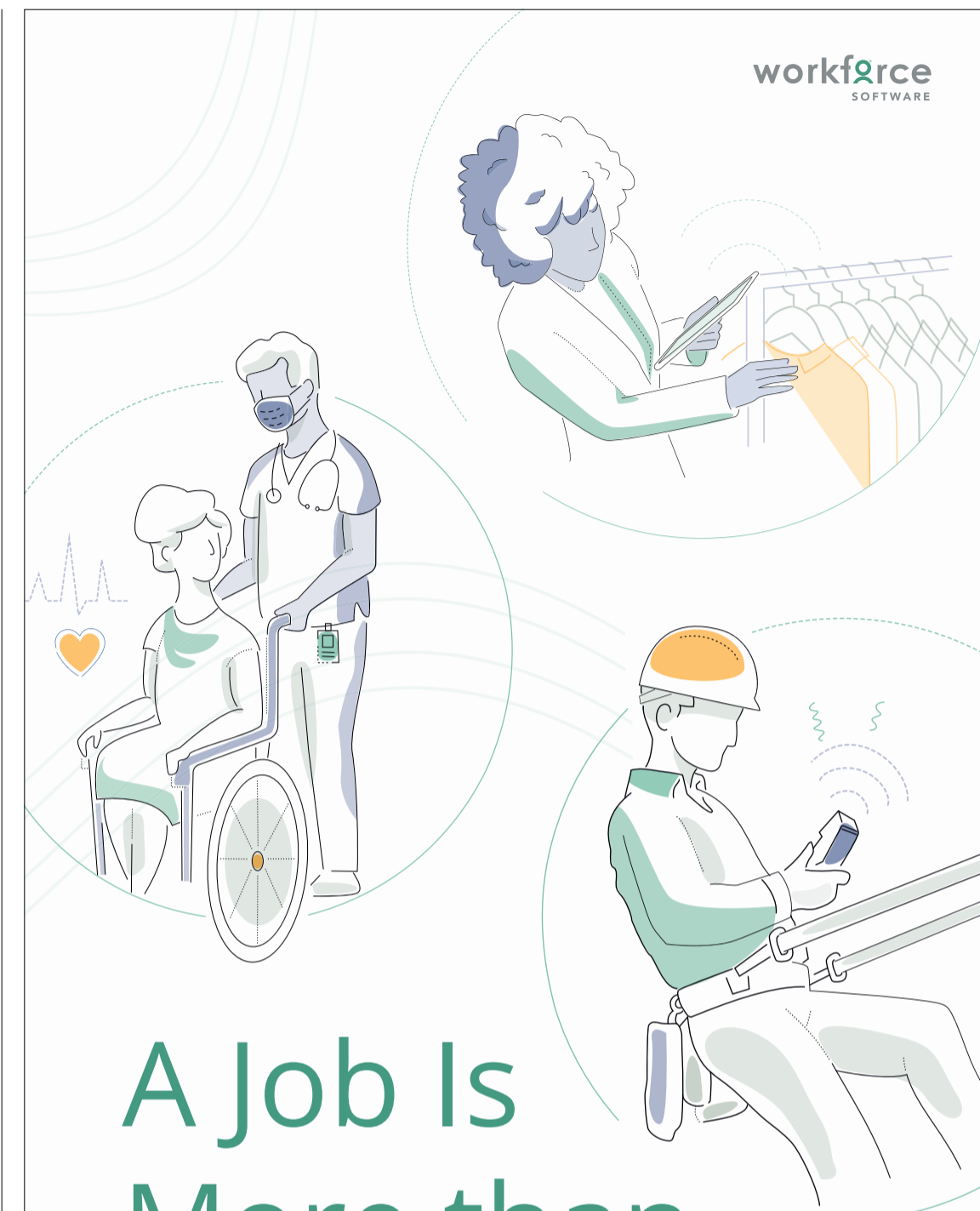
But Woolrych adds: "You will never completely replace small WhatsApp groups, while certain things still need to be done by email. In order to be effective, employee communication has to be multichannel."

Peter Gilheany is an owner of and director at PR consultancy Forster

Communications. It advises organisations on employee engagement. He believes that the ease of use provided by the latest generation of comms platforms have served to make organisations more flexible and less hierarchical in their internal communications.

But there is a downside, he adds: "These platforms have loosened the already tenuous division between work and home, opening a new route into private spaces, which can be uncomfortable and embarrassing. They also offer no buffer and relentless calls can leave people exhausted."

"They're a tool, not a total solution, so we need to focus on the flexibility and empowerment they provide, while guarding against their power to eat into people's lives outside their jobs." ●



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Eightfold AI is the next step in talent acquisition and management

Artificial intelligence holds the key to reducing bias and getting the best candidates across all talent processes

Hiring the right candidates can be difficult, but companies are increasingly using technology to help in the search for the right person to fill a role. Too much tech, however, is simplistic, using basic tools such as keyword filtering rather than looking holistically at the candidate's skills and exploring their potential.

This is where Eightfold AI comes in. Let's take an example. Instead of bulk rejecting applicants for not having 'leadership' included in their CV, the AI can dig deeper to gauge how someone's career trajectory may embody skills and experiences that demonstrate leadership. The ideal candidate may be the one you never considered in the first place.

As a result, employers are less reliant on questions like 'Where did you go to college?' and instead can focus on the skills being brought to the table. A candidate may very well have gained certain skills at university. Or, they may not have had the money. They may have built their portfolio through certifications, on-the-job learning, the military or other means.

What matters when people use Eightfold AI is what they know and what

they can do, regardless of where or how they gained that knowledge and skill.

On top of that, the AI takes into account adjacent skills. Let's say there is a gender imbalance in candidates who are proficient with a particular computer language, such that fewer women list it on their CV. Eightfold measures their potential to learn that language, not just whether they know the language now.

This means a woman who, based on her knowledge of one computer language, has shown the potential to pick up a second computer language quickly can be considered for hire. This opens up access to tech jobs for many women who may otherwise have dealt with systemic barriers to entry.

It's important to point out that personal characteristics such as gender, age or ethnicity are never used in making a match. The AI is purely focused on skills matching throughout the platform.

We also offer candidate masking to eliminate unconscious biases that may stem from CV items that could infer gender or race. For example, Jane Doe would become JD and a women's college education could be abstracted at the screening stage to avoid the inference that the candidate is female.

Additionally, Eightfold AI customers use diversity analytics. These aren't simply reports saying there is a diversity problem. They show where in the hiring process the challenges arise and in what department or location or under which manager.

It could be that people from certain underrepresented groups are dropping off the career site more often than others. Or, maybe they are dropping off after an initial screen, after

an onsite interview or after receiving an offer.

If a particular requirement is irrelevant to the job posting, but filtering out one group more than another, companies would be able to see this impact in real time and recalibrate the role requirements to be more inclusive. For instance, is requiring an MBA degree for an entry-level insurance role really necessary if it's cutting down your female candidate pipeline to 30%?

Eightfold AI talent intelligence platform integrates insights about employees – their skills, capabilities, experiences, career aspirations, performance, demographics, learning needs and development opportunities – and uses this information to help people find the right opportunities for them. In essence, it is the backbone of integrated talent management, matching people to opportunities.

AI talent management transforms how enterprises and public sector organisations hire, retain and grow a diverse global workforce. And an organisation that hires well significantly outperforms its competition.

Eightfold AI delivers significant return on investment with faster hiring, greater diversity and higher staff retention, empowering employees and giving them a better experience.

Good data creates great results and AI is the way to make the most of this opportunity. Learn more at [Eightfold.ai](https://eightfold.ai)



“Personal characteristics, such as gender, age or ethnicity, are never used in making a match

EMPLOYEE VOICE

Top of the vox pops

Finding effective ways to understand what people really want from their employers is becoming crucial for firms as they struggle to retain skilled staff. Is your company a good listener?

Cath Everett

Taking employee voice seriously will be key to recruitment and retention success in a period defined by widespread skills shortages, high levels of job-switching and the mass uptake of hybrid working.

So says Neil Hayward, who has just come to the end of his four-year tenure as chief people officer on the HS2 railway project. In a world of work that's transformed since he first became an HR director just over three decades ago, he believes it is impossible to improve the employee experience "without having embedded the idea that you're talking – and listening – to your people" into the organisation's culture.

For a long time, "UK business saw people as commodities", observes Hayward, who is now 'going plural' as an independent HR consultant. But the balance of power is shifting towards workers as the nation continues to suffer skills shortages, which will be here "for a long time to come. You can't just assume that the right people will be out there. You need to keep hold of the ones you have, so employee experience and employee voice will be crucial in the war for talent."

Yet in many organisations there seems to be a gulf between what employees are experiencing and what their employers think they're experiencing. For instance, research by Gartner has found that, while 75% of senior executives believe that

their organisations have a flexible culture, only 57% of their staff agree. Even more tellingly, while 77% of executives say that their employees have opportunities to give feedback on how to improve their experience of work, only 40% of their staff share this view.

Helen Matthews, chief people officer at the marketing agency Ogilvy UK, believes that ensuring that everyone's voices are heard is "critical" in providing a positive employee experience.

"You can only understand the needs and wants of your employees by talking to them – regularly," she stresses. "Their needs evolve continuously."

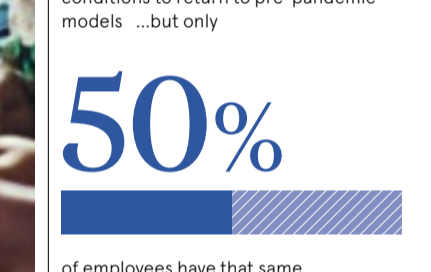
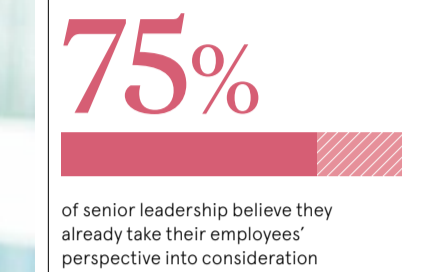
Yves Duhaldeborde, a senior director in Willis Towers Watson's work and reward business, agrees. He considers it vital to seek feedback from employees to uncover "underlying intelligence and organisational insight. You're missing out if you're not asking people what they think and understanding what could be done better."

In other words, Hayward says, there are clear and concrete business benefits to be gained from enhancing the employee experience and boosting engagement levels in the process.

"Research suggests that, as well as offering performance and productivity gains, high levels of employee engagement have a positive impact on retention, innovation and customer service. They reduce absenteeism and make people more likely to be advocates for their organisations too," he notes. "It's also clear that engagement affects performance more than the other way round."

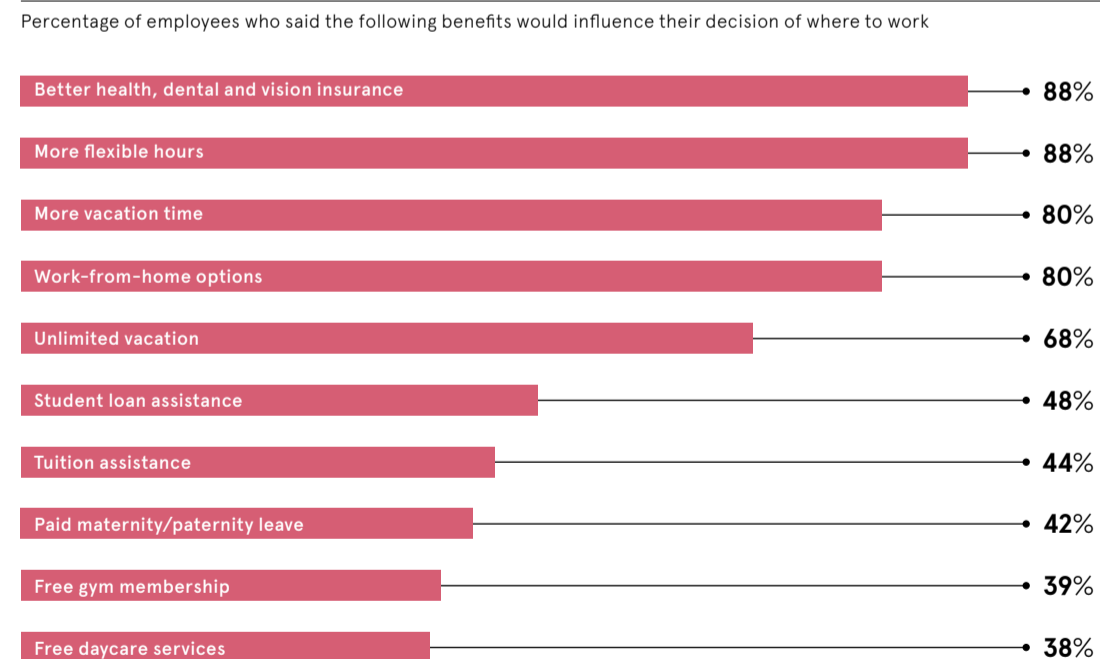
Despite the obvious role that employee voice can play in enabling such engagement, many organisations are failing to make the most of its potential. That's the view of Alexia Cambon, director of research at Gartner's HR practice. She believes that a key inhibiting factor is that, "while classic

“You're missing out if you're not asking people what they think and understanding what could be done better



Gartner, 2021

WHAT DO EMPLOYEES REALLY WANT? Harvard Business Review, 2017



techniques, such as annual surveys, worked when there was a consistent and office-based organisational experience, this static, quantitative approach isn't helpful in the new working environment, which is very inconsistent."

Under hybrid models of employment, where people's locations and working hours can vary widely, the use of listening methods that are

more dynamic and qualitative – for instance, frequent 'pulse surveys', focus groups and even one-to-one interviews – is becoming increasingly important.

Matthews, who has adopted such processes at Ogilvy UK, says: "We see employee experience as a live, continuously evolving project. This entails continuously understanding what our employees

want, so we look at any mechanism we can to collate feedback."

Although it has yet to be widely adopted, the concept of segmenting the workforce and asking different groups particular questions has great potential, according to Cambon.

She says: "It's how you'll understand where the gaps, tensions and divergences are, which is important

“Listening is the easy part. Asking with a clear purpose and intent to act is crucial. Otherwise, you won't reap the benefits

to consider when you're crafting your employee experience. You'll never be able to satisfy everyone 100%, but you'll be able to identify the 'moments that matter' for each segment, which creates more emotional investment."

An important, yet often neglected, aspect of seeking people's feedback is acting swiftly enough on the information provided and involving employees in implementing any changes. As Duhaldeborde says: "Listening is the easy part. Asking with a clear purpose and intent to act is crucial. Otherwise, you won't reap the benefits."

Hayward notes that there's even a danger that, by raising expectations and not fulfilling them, a company could actually disengage its employees. "If you ask people what they think and then do nothing to address their views, that's worse than not asking them anything at all," he warns.

Trust is key in this context. If employees have little faith in their leaders to start with, they will be unwilling to share any useful information. Instead, they'll either opt out of the process or simply tell their employer what they think it wants to hear.

Cambon's advice for employers is that "you need to make it feel like a partnership to build something better. When you're asking people for data, give them a clear reason why that is, stating a clear action plan. So communicate that 'we're collecting X data to do Y', for instance."

Claire Ross, head of culture and engagement at the IT company Advanced, agrees that this can be an effective way to build trust. "Explaining the 'why' behind decisions brings understanding, even if people don't agree with them," she says. "It's important to have a leadership team that's less about pushing its views out and more about having a conversation with staff."

As a final point, Hayward stresses that all members of the executive team need to be invested in the process of obtaining high-quality feedback from staff.

"The more that this is seen as 'just an HR issue', the more likely it is to go wrong," he warns. "Instead, it has to be rooted in wider strategic business thinking and an awareness that creating a positive culture takes time and effort. You can't just pay it lip service." ●

BENEFITS

Bust loose: the rise of leave without limits

Once seen as a quirky perk, the boundless holiday allowance is edging towards the mainstream. What are the practicalities of adopting such a policy?

Katie Byrne

Ditching a traditional system of fixed annual leave in favour of unlimited paid holiday is becoming increasingly popular with employers – and their staff – around the globe. For some firms, the move has been prompted by their enforced adoption of remote working. For others, it's always been the preferred approach.

"We've had our policy in place from day one," says Jenny Biggam, co-founder of the7stars, a media agency that has allowed staff to take as much holiday as they want since the company began trading in 2005. "When we started, I agreed with the other founders to 'just let each other know' whenever we were taking holiday. We thought this was really liberating, so we just kept doing it as the company grew."

The concept is relatively novel to Bumble, creator of the eponymous dating and social networking app. The company began offering employees unlimited holiday in June after granting staff a week off.



John Harper via Getty Images

"The past year has been an important time for us to reflect on the ways we work and how we can best support our teams around the world," says its president, Tariq Shaukat. "It has become increasingly clear that the way we need to work has changed."

Some other permanent benefits recently introduced by Bumble include bereavement leave in the event of a miscarriage and time off for carers and victims of domestic violence. Moreover, the full week off for all staff is set to become a biannual occurrence.

Reflecting on the response to the first company-wide holiday, Shaukat says: "A number of people said: 'I didn't have to worry constantly about what I was missing – I could actually disconnect. I had no idea how badly I'd been vacationing before that.' Our new policies reflect what really matters."

A key benefit of offering unlimited holiday is that it enables employees to better manage their work-life balance. It also "encourages a supportive, purposeful working environment and reduces employee dissatisfaction," says the founder

and CEO of HR consultancy Dare Worldwide, Rita Trehan. "Unlimited holiday packages are correlated with major reductions in time off for sickness and staff turnover. Relaxing control and trusting your employees may seem an immediate risk to traditional businesses, but it pays off in the long run."

The offer of unlimited holiday engenders greater trust between employer and employee, but well-defined ground rules are still required to retain this level of sentiment. Trehan advises employers to determine what the "acceptable use" of a limitless holiday policy looks like and how this benefit works alongside the wider objectives of the business.

"The system should help people live their lives and achieve their key performance indicators. They should recognise that it will be considered viable only if it continues contributing to their organisation's performance," she says. "Clear boundaries let people know what's acceptable. Leaders should set expectations of what can reasonably be achieved in a given period. Around this, employees should be afforded the flexibility to work how, when and where it's most conducive."

A written policy will minimise the potential for misuse, says Gillian McAteer, head of employment law at Citation, an HR consultancy that specialises in working with SMEs and third-sector organisations.

"Businesses that want to take the bold step of implementing unlimited holidays must be clear with their employees from the outset about any restrictions," she

stresses. "It will be much easier for them to tackle abuse if there's a written policy that identifies what is considered abuse and sets out what actions the business would take in such an event."

McAteer believes that "identifying 'reasonable' behaviour is at the heart of many employment disputes. An employer should therefore give examples of what could be considered unreasonable. An even better approach would be to say that employees are entitled to take unlimited holidays to the extent that it doesn't adversely affect their performance."

Seasoned employees who have never known anything other than a fixed holiday allowance may find the shift to a take-as-much-as-you-like system to be quite an adjustment. "When people join the7stars to start their first 'proper' job, our holiday policy feels natural, but it can be confusing for those who join from other organisations and aren't used to it," Biggam says. "They can even feel nervous about taking time off. I explain everything fully to new starters during the induction process and remind them to never feel guilty for taking holiday."

The benefits of a proper break are not to be underestimated, notes Trehan, who says that making this point clear to recruits should help them to embrace the system.

Unlimited holiday packages are correlated with major reductions in time off for sickness and staff turnover

"It shouldn't become a burden to those who aren't inclined to take holiday," she explains. "Staff must feel that they can take time off without looking lazy. This relies on open and clear communication with their managers."

To an outsider, unlimited leave may seem like a gimmick, compensating for a lack of other benefits. But, when it's incorporated into a package that genuinely puts the individual's wellbeing first, limitless leave feels natural, Biggam says.

"Giving people freedom is great for any business," she argues. "Not only does it create a great culture, but it also helps employees to fulfil their potential. I'm often asked whether people take more or less holiday under our unlimited policy than they normally would. I have no idea – we really aren't counting." ●

Managing the experience of the desked and the deskless

The needs of employees are more diverse than ever before. With eyes fixed firmly on employee experience, SaaS developer WorkForce Software is stepping in to connect employers with an increasingly varied workforce

Despite the adversity and pressures endured by deskless workers during the pandemic, the majority of this vast employee group have kept our societies running, and they now have a clearer view of what they want and deserve from employers beyond Covid-19. Those employers, in turn, must now give the deskless a louder voice, harness the data resulting from these communications, and create a more meaningful employee experience as a result.

Traditional, transactional and analogue employer-employee relationships, and top-down communications, are becoming methods of the past. In their place, more digitised and data-driven forms of employee engagement are needed to elevate the micro-moments that workers experience.

Issues around time capture and scheduling, role development and training, holidays and leave, the workplace environment, and any other parameter of job satisfaction now need to be drivers of employee engagement, of job satisfaction, and – critically – of ultimate business value.

This needs to be done as part of a digital, reciprocal feedback loop – as part of a yin and yang balance.

The balance between corporate and employee needs

Marc Gingras is senior vice-president of employee experience strategy at WorkForce Software – a global SaaS organisation that develops, sells and deploys modern workforce management solutions for a host of renowned brands including Converse, Pandora and Kurt Geiger.

He reflected on this new employee engagement paradigm: "We use the term 'yin and yang' to demonstrate that before, only corporate needs were served – in the form of driving profits, operational efficiencies and scheduling resources. Now this needs to be balanced with employee needs – having a voice, feeling heard, giving feedback, having flexibility.

"The companies that manage to find this balance between corporate and employee needs (the yin and yang) are now outperforming more traditional companies that remain only top-down."

Having been active in the market for 22 years, WorkForce Software is unique in its ability – and mission – to help organisations modernise their approach to workforce management in a way that elevates both employee experience and business outcomes.

This is achieved by connecting all strands of employee experience – from scheduling hourly workers to capturing employee sentiment in real time – in a quantifiable, data-driven way.

The right information for the right group

Inevitably, communication is paramount to this vision. Gingras continued: "Employees have different needs, different roles, different scheduling requirements, different cultural or regional considerations. You have to understand different employee groups – the desked, the deskless, the gig, the hybrid – so you can then cater your message and your strategy around 'what is the right information for the right group?'"

In this regard, Gingras added that progress has been made. Most decision makers, especially in the aftermath of Covid-19, recognise the need for better communication as a whole.

The next frontier is to better personalise that communication.

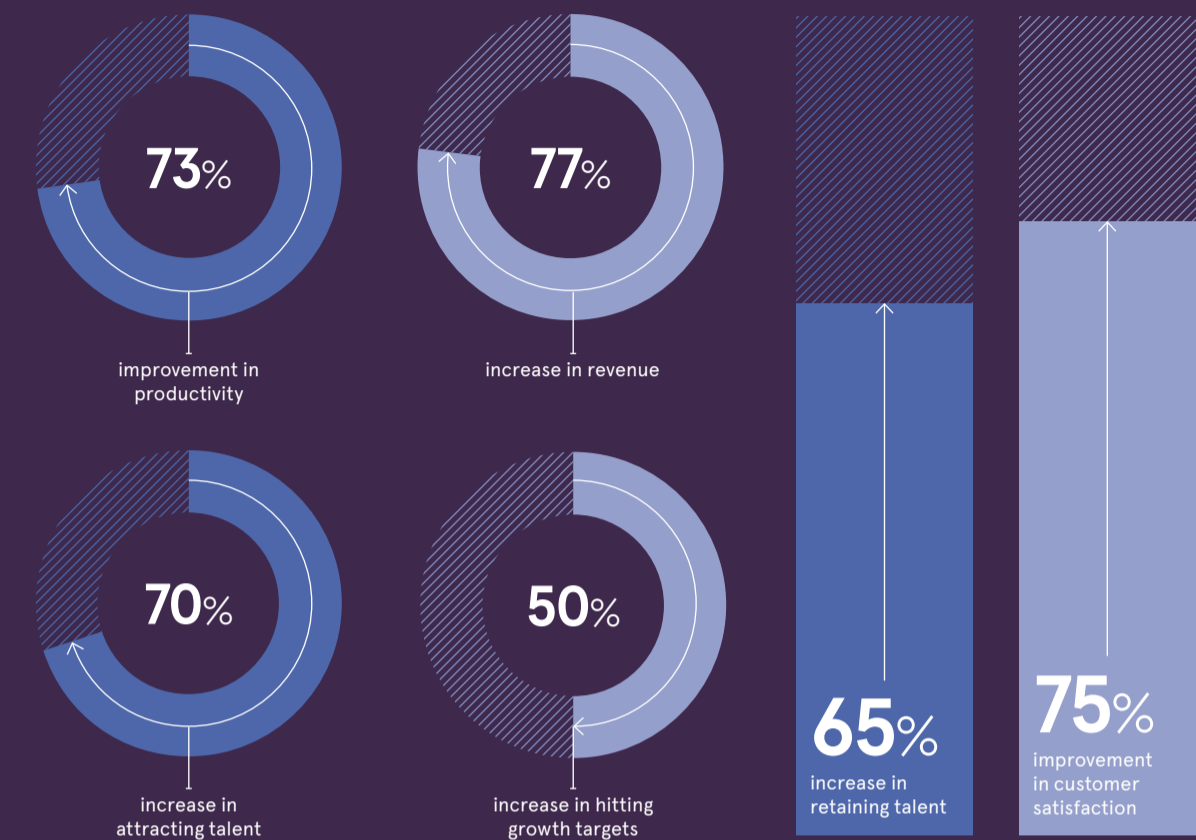
"That's definitely where employers need to focus their efforts to unlock the next wave of value," Gingras said. "Companies will look to digitise their communication strategies, but often from a perspective of 'one-size-fits-all'. They'll use tech to make it quicker and easier to create feedback loops. But they're not using tech to create individualised insight into what each employee group wants or needs – as epitomised by the concerns of the deskless workforce at present."

"And if the ambition is to make every employee feel valued and heard, then that's still a massive pitfall."

Commercial feature

THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Percentage of respondents to a January 2021 Forrester survey who cited the following



Forrester, 2021

“

You can really feel there's a better atmosphere and more of a connection between stores and the head office than there ever was before. People working in the stores feel like they have a voice and a platform to share their thoughts and be heard

Alice Millchamp, retail operations manager, Kurt Geiger

explained: "There was a great study by Forrester earlier this year which showed that companies who embrace a new way of thinking, moving away from 'command and control' or the transactional and towards the yin-yang balance, would enjoy four times higher profits, per employee, than those companies who resist."

"There is just so much evidence that this way of communicating and operating is a positive thing, but there's a gap between knowing it's a positive step and putting a strategy into action."

"That's where we come in, with a modern approach to workforce management that gives individuals a voice. And that ensures those voices lead to both a better employee experience and improved business value."

Every employee can be a brand advocate

This refined method of engaging with, supporting and managing the workforce isn't just about the big milestones in an employee's journey. It's also about instilling a confidence and positivity where workers feel their personal concerns and needs are being met in an ongoing way.

For example, within a one-size-fits-all approach, annual employee sentiment surveys issued by HR would include everything around the employee experience, which would often be irrelevant to many people. Why would someone who doesn't get offered overtime be asked about their feelings on overtime, for example?

"These annual surveys lack clear action and follow-up about how to improve the employee experience. They don't address or gain understanding around the micro-moments in each person's work life. They therefore miss out on important feedback,

which could be aggregated as communication across the organisation," Gingras said.

"It's all about scaling individuals' micro-moments into company-wide culture."

"I like to call it 'creating empathy at scale'," Gingras affirmed. "Communications has often been a siloed effort – the intranet, email, etc. But it's not been integrated into the small moments and feelings that make up every single day and that dictate a person's ultimate satisfaction."

By embedding communication into the everyday and gauging feelings on those micro-moments, companies can directly impact issues of talent attraction and retention that they cite as primary challenges in the modern climate.

"Beyond that though, organisations should be looking at the wider benefits," Speirs concluded. "An employee that has a great experience, that is treated well, that is given a voice and purpose, and that has a degree of control and consistency in their work schedule will do more for the business and will ultimately become a brand advocate for that business. And there's nothing more powerful than that."

Learn how to keep your employees informed and engaged with WorkForce Experience and industry-recognised insights at workforce.com/uk/hrxperience

workforce
SOFTWARE

ANNUAL LEAVE ACROSS THE GLOBE

International Labour Organization, 2012

Legally mandated minimum paid annual leave by country, including paid public holidays

