Creating well workplaces
Helping employees to play their part
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During the 50 years I’ve been involved in the world of workplace wellbeing I’ve held one belief constant: employees come first. When that happens they feel happier and healthier, perform better and stay longer. In turn, their employers’ businesses become sustainably successful.

This is as true today as it was in the ‘60s. And that’s why I welcome this special report from Robertson Cooper, supported by The Bank Workers Charity, which aims to put the focus back on individual employees - in terms of the support they need and deserve from employers, but also the responsibilities they, themselves, have for both their own wellbeing and creating positive work cultures.

Amid ever more complex and interconnected waves of change that are hitting the world of work, I fear there is a risk that the individual is getting lost. Wellbeing strategies are important visionary enterprises, but very often their impact is not ‘felt’ by employees themselves. Meanwhile, at the operational end, wellbeing programs are becoming ever more productised and cost-driven, just as employee engagement programs did before them... this is seldom good for the individual worker.

All of this means it’s time for a fresh focus on the demands of Work 2.0 - new tech, new contracts, new skills and new employee expectations – that couldn’t be more different to those of Work 1.0. It seems obvious to say that all organisations need to align their people strategies with what’s coming, but in my experience many are still using the tools and structures of the past to manage and develop their workforces for the future.

So this new piece of research is timely. Drawing on several new data sources it provides insight into the new pressures inherent in the future of work, as well as the traits that are enabling employees to thrive in that emerging context. Importantly, it identifies what I think of as the ‘lost skill’ of self-management as a key factor for future success and outlines employers’ responsibilities for developing this skill across their workforces. It offers a practical takeaway for employers who want to maximise the potential of their investment in workplace wellbeing.

Finally, I would to thank The Bank Workers Charity for their support for this important piece of work. Their sector of interest, Banking, has seen huge changes in the last ten years and they have been at the forefront of the positive improvements that have happened culturally in relation to workplace wellbeing and the way it is valued by banks. I would encourage all employers to take a look at this research, there is learning here for anyone interested in how wellbeing can make organisations better places to work.

Sir Cary Cooper CBE
Good Day At Work President
Founding Director, Robertson Cooper
Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health University of Manchester
The proven links between high levels of employee wellbeing and improved business performance provide an obvious incentive for businesses to invest in workplace wellbeing. And over the last 5 years that’s what they’ve been doing. We’ve seen wellbeing rise rapidly up the corporate agenda and it’s done so for a number of reasons.

Employers are increasingly aware that an ageing population means health issues among employees are going to become more prevalent at work and that wellbeing programmes can do much to offset that. At the same time a commitment to wellbeing is becoming a differentiator in attracting the best people, with more employees placing a premium on their health and wellbeing needs. And a competitive business climate means organisations are becoming leaner and this can lead to a more pressurised working environment; wellbeing programmes can help build employees’ resilience, enabling them to remain healthy and manage their stress levels better.

In 2017, nearly half of UK businesses had a wellbeing strategy in place, up from just a third in 2016. UK banks have been in the vanguard of businesses treating wellbeing seriously. Many have developed comprehensive wellbeing strategies and all have an extensive range of wellbeing programmes in place. These go well beyond the disparate array of programmes that are common in some businesses and include forward thinking policies on flexible working and diversity at work. More recently some banks have introduced impressive programmes around financial wellbeing and mindfulness, as well as innovative initiatives to improve the way mental health is managed in the workplace. In all, this represents a thoughtful and joined up approach to workplace wellbeing that is making a big difference to the employee experience.

And there is a wider context to the banking sector’s prioritisation of wellbeing. In the wake of the financial crisis, UK banks have been engaged in a thorough cultural overhaul to restore public trust and to rebuild the morale of their employees and create a renewed sense of pride in their work. The focus on employee wellbeing is an important component in this cultural transformation and along with a strong emphasis on diversity, it is helping banks to create an environment in which employees feel valued and able to give their best at work.

Banks face challenges on a number of other fronts, not least the uncertainty for the sector created by Brexit. Banks are also in the forefront of the digital revolution with automation and artificial intelligence bringing widespread changes to job roles and content. The scale of these changes is throwing into question not just the nature of existing bank jobs but even the way that banking is transacted. In these circumstances bank’s wellbeing programmes assume still greater importance, as they help employees to build their resilience and navigate their way through this fast-changing landscape.

Bank Workers Charity’s goal is to build and maintain the wellbeing of bank workers and their families. We welcome the progress banks are making in creating a wellbeing culture and we will do all we can to support them in their efforts. We have a strong track record of working alongside banks to add innovative elements to their wellbeing offerings. As well as supplementing their staff support provision through the delivery of wellbeing services to employees, BWC has offered a variety of interventions that operate at an organisational level. In recognition of the crucial influence line managers have on the wellbeing of their teams, we have created a health app to support mental health campaigns and developed a series of wellbeing themed webinars that have been delivered at scale, in many of the UK’s biggest banks. We also developed a training programme to improve line managers understanding of, and ability to manage mental health issues at work. This was evaluated by CIPD and ran highly successfully in a number of high street banks.

Workplace wellbeing is a constantly evolving landscape, so BWC will continue to develop services that address employees’ changing needs. Just as importantly, we will work closely with UK banks to support their wellbeing strategies, to help them create a healthier working environment that benefits employees and the business alike.

John A Mallalieu
Chief Executive of The Bank Workers Charity (BWC)
A platform for change within the Banking Sector

While this paper explores the gap that needs to be addressed in terms of building capability for self-management and personal responsibility in the increasingly fast paced and complex world of work, some sectors are taking positive steps to ensure they are leveraging wellbeing as a way to respond to these challenges.

UK banks have become highly engaged with the employee wellbeing agenda. Examples of innovative programmes are abound in the sector. HSBC’s ground-breaking mindfulness programme started in the UK, for which it received a prestigious Parliamentary award and it is now going global. Barclays’ “This is Me” campaign, an imaginative and highly successful initiative to normalise mental health in the workplace is now being rolled out across a large number of businesses in the City of London. The growing recognition that employees financial concerns have a major impact on their overall wellbeing and particularly on their mental health has been noted, with a number of banks making financial wellbeing an important part of their focus. Meanwhile, banks continue to feature prominently in the annual Working Families Awards, which celebrate the best and most successful examples of flexible working schemes. In the 2017 awards, banks dominated the list of organisations with the best family friendly policies, with RBS, Lloyds and Barclays all featuring in the top 10. And diversity and inclusion networks play an important role in promoting wellbeing across the banking sector and these networks are flourishing. Indeed, Lloyds’ women’s network, Breakthrough, is the largest of its kind in the UK with over 15,000 members.
The rapidly changing face of work
As the nature of work undergoes breakneck change, how can workplace wellbeing help employees feel better and drive businesses towards a stable, high-performance future?

To claim that work has changed, and continues to change, is hardly revelatory. But the express rate at which its landscape is transforming, under pressure from a raft of influences, is leaving both workers and businesses struggling to deal with complex, interconnected consequences.

The reconfiguration of work is affected by many, independently shifting plates. The process of globalisation remains ongoing with seemingly no sector or community exempt from its reach. Economic instability, particularly in the decade since 2008’s financial crash, has kept organisations on their toes, searching for ways to minimise their exposure to risk. In the UK, the indistinct shape of a forthcoming Brexit and its potential to disturb the flow of employment adds to the uncertainty.

With the likes of Google, Amazon and Facebook appearing ready to take on every business, everywhere, even highly successful, global giants find they’re standing on shifting ground. The financial sector, for example, is already dealing with more stringent regulation and bruised public confidence. At the same time, traditional banks are confronting a drive for ‘digital’ initiated by consumer demand for online services, a surge of job automation and increased competition from challenger banks and fast-moving tech start-ups. The powerful combination is shaking the established order to the extent that UBS CEO, Sergio Ermotti, suggests 30% of current banking roles could disappear within 10 years.

That doesn’t mean that new jobs won’t appear to replace them (the decreasing ‘life expectancy’ of a job role means many people are engaged in a continual cycle of re-skilling) or that current roles are oversubscribed. Indeed, employers in tech, health, construction and more claim that far from onboarding candidates with the capabilities to flourish and help deliver company strategy, a talent shortfall often leaves them scrabbling simply to fill headcount. This dilemma is reinforced by PwC’s research showing that nearly half of CEOs working in the finance sector believe that the limited availability of key skills presents a serious threat to their growth prospects.

At the same time, employees across the spectrum of industry are seeking greater autonomy. This push for flexibility often suits both employer and employee but there’s evidence that neither is yet sufficiently equipped to handle the fresh demands that increased self-determination brings. Particularly as, in light of the economic factors above, directors, managers and frontline staff are routinely asked to do more with less.

The perspective of society towards the fusing of work and life is developing too, with a widespread sense that, like salary, a positive, healthy and supportive environment is a reward to be valued. Whether the growing willingness to discuss mental health issues...
such as stress, anxiety, depression and burnout has encouraged high-profile case studies – Alastair Campbell in politics, Dame Kelly Holmes in sport, António Horta-Osório in the City – to come forward or vice versa, the public conversation is becoming normalised in much the same way it has already for most physical illnesses. This is undoubtedly a positive shift for both society and its organisations.

And into this backdrop steps the rise of the workplace wellbeing program. Organisations have woken up to the fact that a happy, healthy workforce is good for business. The last ten years have seen a welcome increase in investment and there are now some outstanding examples of cultural change and performance improvement predicated on creating greater employee wellbeing: a more responsive attitude to flexible working, the ready availability of information and support about financial health and social connection, mindfulness training and the gradual breaking down of stigma around mental health at work are all part of the good news story.

But there’s still much more that can be done. As the nature of work evolves, and the perceived scarcity of talent threatens the ability of businesses to deliver their objectives, holistic and integrated wellbeing programs can be the magnet that attracts and retains the best staff. Wellbeing initiatives aren’t yet universally adopted and where they are, they all too often remain largely isolated from other business-critical HR strategies and processes, such as performance management, recruitment and talent development. In addition, although the duty of care it promotes is being taken more seriously, wellbeing tends to be imposed in a top-down, parental way. There are still few attempts to encourage employees to take personal ownership – at precisely the moment when workers are crying out for greater control over their experience of work.

In this difficult environment, the weight of implementing much of a business’ investment in wellbeing falls on the shoulders of line managers. There’s a sizable quantity of management training taking place in businesses now (resilience and stress management, for example), but most of it is rooted in a traditional, fast-vanishing model of work. Very little of it is preparing managers for the new world in which they’re being asked to operate. More and more, they head up remotely located, flexibly clocked, virtual teams, rather than static groups of single-task employees in a fixed location. Managing teams flung far-and-wide in a way that keeps them connected and mutually supportive requires specific, additional skills that rarely feature in standard management training courses.

At a senior level, the work of teams is increasingly assessed on delivered outcomes, rather than how present (or absent) workers are. And yet managers are not being coached in dealing with a workplace where they can’t oversee every individual, all the time. With such limited guidance, managers often have a tough time coping with the new expectations and behavioural demands placed on them.

Such is the volatile context for our research. Through the pages which follow, we highlight how the specific pressures of a changing workplace are felt by employees. We identify the traits needed to thrive within this new reality, including the ‘missing piece’ of self-management. We’ll also detail how organisations can draw on health and wellbeing, in partnership with managers and their teams, as a powerful stabiliser to drive their businesses forward during turbulent times.
New demands for a new world of work
So how does wellbeing help stabilise a business? It’s long been proven that employees with high levels of wellbeing are more productive² and perform better³. They’re more safety conscious⁴, better motivated⁵ and more innovative too⁶. Particularly crucially for modern work, positive wellbeing also correlates strongly with an enhanced ability to cope effectively with change⁷.

At the same time low levels of wellbeing are linked to higher costs, such as those related to sickness: more frequent and sustained periods of absence⁸, a 20% increase in colds⁹, greater frequency of long-term illness¹⁰ and a higher propensity to attend work when too ill to perform, potentially spreading further infectious conditions.

There are the costs associated with failure to retain staff too. Van der Vaart et al.¹¹ observed a clear link between wellbeing levels and intent to leave a business. The costs here are not purely financial. Finding replacement personnel who have the necessary adaptability to deal with the new demands of a fluid working environment may become increasingly difficult for recruiters.

The benefits, therefore, are evident but getting the scope right and determining who takes responsibility for what in today’s fluid working environment are perennial challenges. This is especially true when, as Robertson Cooper’s major new research has found, the factors that most significantly impact wellbeing at work are also changing.

As part of this report, we’ve commissioned three separate studies utilising the wealth of information gathered via Robertson Cooper’s ASSET measure of wellbeing and engagement and i-resilience personality questionnaire which is freely available online and has been used by 150,000 people.

The findings from ASSET are based on an analysis of five years’ worth of data, around 150,000 cases. From this resource, researchers have uncovered new insights regarding the factors which influence wellbeing outcomes inside organisations. It’s immediately apparent that as work has changed, so have the demands of workers.

**Job insecurity**
The need to feel that her/his role and skill set remain relevant to the organisation’s purpose amid a constantly changing workplace.

**Overload**
A sense of control over the influence, and capacity to manage, and the extent to which they can impact their wider quality of life.

**Unsupportive environment**
Feeling of being valued and trusted and a sense of social connection.

*Job insecurity* addresses an individual’s need to feel that her/his role and skill set have meaning and, in some way, remain relevant to the organisation’s purpose amid a constantly changing workplace. It also
incorporates a desire to engage with the rationale of business transformation projects.

**Overload** refers not simply to the sheer volume of work given out and experienced, but to each employee’s perceived control over the influence of that work on her/his life. This is an evaluation of whether the demands placed are reasonable and manageable, the extent to which they impact on the wider quality of life and one’s personal power to adjust that impact if needed.

**Unsupportive environment** concerns the quality of interaction between individual, peers and managers and is an aggregation of influences, such as, culture, physical working environment, the feeling of being valued and trusted and a sense of social connection.

These results are based on analysis of 56,000 cases of data gathered by Robertson Cooper over the last few years. This volume of data means there are high levels of confidence in the results. The challenges are clear. It’s also clear that there are opportunities for businesses who can make health and wellbeing part of everyday working life for employees. However, this is easier said than done and these findings raise questions about the extent to which this shift will be possible using current thinking and models of work.

Managers themselves are employees, struggling to find a personal response to the changing nature of work while also trying to support their people in doing the same.

For example, thinking a bit more about the role that line managers play: given the previously described pressurised, under-prepared position in which managers find themselves, there have to be doubts as to whether they have the current capabilities to transform the wellbeing of their teams in a way that positively benefits business performance. To make a tangible difference, they’ll need greater skills development to help them manage the dynamics of their often physically disconnected teams. And, of course, managers are themselves employees, trying to form their own responses to the insecurity and overload they face. Placing too much burden on this group risks creating more ‘under-pressure behaviour’ which in turn can generate the same critically evaluative and reactive environment that ultimately drives low levels of wellbeing.

These findings are reflective of the fact that even the most well-equipped managers can’t be solely responsible for their teams’ capacity to experience good days at work. If wellbeing and performance are to be sustainable employees must be prepared to accept some of the strain themselves; and, in fact, the likelihood of them doing so is based on not just their skills, knowledge and behaviour but also their underlying personality. This is another big shift that will be required if the challenges identified by Robertson Cooper’s analysis are to be addressed.

This is no mean feat because individual employees are very different in terms of how they see and experience work. In the second piece of research, Robertson Cooper’s founders, Professor Ivan Robertson and Professor Sir Cary Cooper, analysed the personality data obtained from the survey responses of 3,262 people. They found that those who have a stronger propensity to experience positive emotions and who have the self-discipline to motivate themselves, combined with a lower sensitivity to distress, are more likely to thrive in the new world of work. This finding holds regardless of an employee’s own work expectation, experience or behaviour.

In this context, the research shows that these kinds of personality factors are predictive of the extent to which people experience good days at work (15% of the variance explained). It’s in everyone’s interests for employees to be aware of the extent to which they possess these traits. Are they naturally positive and resilient? Or do they need to proactively take steps to build that resilience with the support of the business. Anyone can have the quality of resilience but there are many different routes to that outcome. Ultimately, despite the pressures of modern work, the capability to remain upbeat, resilient and focused is an effective aid to delivering at work in a sustainable and healthy way.

We therefore draw the conclusion that the contract between employers and employees needs to change fundamentally. As such, the responsibility for wellbeing – and the intent to achieve it – is accepted as a partnership that both parties understand and accept.
Finally, a third new analysis interrogated around 15,000 responses to questions appended to Robertson Cooper’s i-resilience personality tool between 2017 and 2018. The purpose of this survey was to find out how employees see the changing world of work and, in particular, the role that wellbeing should play in it.

One of the key findings is a growing acceptance by people that they have significant personal control over their sense of wellbeing, with 94% of respondents agreeing with that sentiment. It is a powerful realisation that a sense of overload can be self-managed and improved by one’s own actions. This is especially true when considering that the same cohort note the difference between the average number of good days they currently experience (3.5 out of 5) and the average number they believe they think they should have (4.2). Awareness is growing that a good experience of work is both attainable and ‘a right’ that all employees hold.

Once again, the important role of line managers in creating a supportive environment comes to the fore in these findings, with an encouraging 60% believing that their managers enable them to achieve their work goals and a healthy 66% also stating that their managers are open to wellbeing conversations. Both figures show promise for evolving the psychological contract but (again) also unfulfilled potential for creating a managerial tier capable of truly improving and embedding organisational wellbeing. The findings have uncovered an encouraging openness to holding a wellbeing conversation with one’s line manager, but there is still very little evidence of a corresponding capability to act on it amongst managers themselves.

While the trends remain fairly constant, there are some significant variations between the responses of different industry sectors. In banking, for example, only 84% of respondents felt in control of their own wellbeing (versus 94% overall) and the gap between actual (3.5) and expected (4.5) numbers of good days was wider. Also in this sector, there was a sizeable decrease in the belief that change is well-managed (31%), as well as in the perceived clarity of purpose (71%) versus the wider population (41% and 84% respectively). It’s likely that these results are reflective of an increased insecurity that perhaps stems from the sheer volume of change experienced by bank workers since the 2008 financial crisis. Tellingly, time spent creatively (37%) and the likelihood of recommending the workplace (55%) were both substantially lower for banking workers. This suggests that banks might bring improvement in the sector through reviewing their change management processes and communications, so that employees get a better understanding of the background and rationale for the changes and experience them more positively. Also a focus on each employees’ role and how it contributes to the overall success of the business could go some way to engendering a sense of purpose in work as well as of personal value.

Whatever the sector, of course, some will always point to a profusion of activity as evidence that plenty is already being done to create the right environment for high levels of wellbeing. And yet the findings laid out here offer this stark warning: the average person believes they’re only truly productive at work for 28% of their day. With productivity such a highly prized outcome of positive wellbeing we’ll now investigate whether, in the present climate, workplace initiatives are creating the right conditions to help employees achieve their maximum potential.
The changing nature of pressure at work

Our review of over 56,000 cases of data investigating peoples experience of pressure at work over the last 3 years indicates that the new world of work is presenting 3 core pressures staff need to be able to respond to and manage in order to succeed.

What’s needed to thrive in the new world

Recent research of personality data by Roberson Cooper Founders Professor Sir Cary Cooper and Professor Ivan Robertson indicates that certain personality characteristics can support success, giving insights into the types of behaviours and attitudes we need to foster in staff to help them succeed.

**In control**

Self-discipline to motivate and organise oneself in the face of pressure

**Glass half full**

The tendency to focus on the positive aspects of the things they encounter in life

The impact of these characteristics was substantial with those who have these traits reporting a significantly stronger likelihood to have a good day at work.

What are employees telling us about their experiences

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Banking Specific</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Good Days at Work per week</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change is well managed</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feel in control of their own wellbeing</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have clarity of core purpose at work</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<td>Time spent being creative</td>
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<td>Would recommend their business</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of time feeling fully productive</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Are employers maximising the potential of workplace wellbeing?
There’s no doubt that wellbeing has risen rapidly up the agenda in the last decade and there are some outstanding examples of excellent practice making a difference in people’s lives.

> The National Picture
Nationally, there have been some grand gestures in the form of thought leadership or reviews, but little that’s translated theory into practical, mass engagement. Matthew Taylor’s Good Work Review, commissioned by the UK Government and published in 2017, makes plain the need for employers to take a more joined-up approach to workforce planning. The status quo, it suggests, is harming the stability, fairness and quality of available work in the UK. The conclusion hasn’t yet led to widespread public change, although the report is relatively new.

Such reports are important influencers, but they are inevitably ‘top-down’ in outlook. And some of them wear their heart on their sleeve in terms of the model of work to which they subscribe – for example, a Government paper on the Civil Service skills gap talks of how to ‘manage change’, rather than provoking any discussion on how employees might be equipped to navigate their own way through the fast-flowing waters of modern work.

Some excellent initiatives have come out of government-commissioned reports though. One fine example is the Engage for Success movement, created by Nita Clarke and David MacLeod in the wake of their own 2009 review and report into UK employee engagement. Engage for Success is dedicated to growing awareness about the power and potential of employee engagement (among both businesses and individuals) and many organisations are using their blueprint to good effect.

Of course, governments clearly have more tools at their disposal than reports. By incentivising apprenticeships, the Government has pumped a lot of effort in recent years into deepening the talent pool of certain sectors. This should be applauded in the areas where it’s being implemented, but its application is rooted in traditional methods and workplaces and it is largely about the acquisition and development of technical skills. There is minimal consideration of the skills needed to cope with the rapidly expanding gig economy or other forms of future work.

Away from government, a number of organisations are pulling together diverse communities of businesses and workers to focus on how to deal with work’s new demands. For example, Work 2.0 and the Good Day at Work Conversation events are hosting these kinds of important discussions. Meanwhile, publications like the New Work Manifesto by Twitter’s European and UK CEO Bruce Daisley and Sue Todd, are changing perceptions and encouraging all parties to think about the rules of engagement for the emerging working environment. These initiatives are helpful and important but are still building critical mass.

> The Banking Sector
At the sector level, our view is that implementation is inconsistent but there are definite bright spots. A PwC report from 2018 concludes that since the financial crisis, banks, more than most other sectors, have invested heavily in developing soft skills and updating their culture. Engage for Success is dedicated to growing awareness about the power and potential of employee engagement (among both businesses and individuals) and many organisations are using their blueprint to good effect.

Of course, governments clearly have more tools at their disposal than reports. By incentivising
of work and wellbeing. The review of base values in this sense and the willingness to draw lines through to the role of wellbeing in creating a positive culture has been very timely.

The investment in cultural improvement has been welcome and successful although, as Robertson Cooper’s research findings suggest, although progressing significantly in the years since the financial crisis, financial institutions still have work to do when it comes to helping manage overload and insecurity. It seems that the result of these investments may not yet have hit all employees.

This is particularly relevant with the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence, and technology more broadly, in the banking sector. As such, many tasks may be at risk of takeover from AI, leading the CEOs of both JP Morgan Chase and Deutsche Bank to anticipate specific roles will suffer heavy job losses as a consequence of automation. But with that insecurity comes opportunity, demonstrated by both CEOs also predicting that most, if not all, of those job losses will be offset by the creation of new roles elsewhere in their organisations. The implications for employees are clear: adaptability, flexibility and proactive career management will become ever more critical. Workers can no longer expect employers to map out their careers for them while passively waiting for the next promotion. The watchwords now are self-determination to create clear goals and self-management to make them happen in a sustainable way.

> Line Managers
Historically, the preparation of line managers to deal with wellbeing issues has centred on strengthening the resilience of the team. More recently, the remit has expanded to cultivate an awareness of how to manage mental health concerns (such as Mental Health First Aid training). Again, these are positive attributes, but they fall short of arming managers with the requisite confidence and skills to alter their style and habits in a way that underpins the new partnership-based approach to team management described earlier. It must also be recognised that managers rarely display a marked uplift in their ability to manage energy, either their team’s or their own, after participating in any existing training programs. Instead, the often-institutionalised tendency is to either respond to pressures only once they become acute or to ‘sheep-dip’ managers through large-scale training programs and mistake that for being proactive. To be clear, the chances of a one-day resilience training program making any difference to a manager or her/his team without any broader or ongoing support is minimal.

> What next for employers?
Overall, the message is that the current state of the art as regards wellbeing strategy is generating results in some specific problem areas. However, when it comes to building a talent pool that goes beyond delivering the technical competencies required for specific roles to include behaviours likely to create a sustainable wellbeing culture, the gaze of organisations and government alike still rests heavily on the pressing need to fill vacancies. Crisis prevention and cost saving is the focal point; rising stress and musculoskeletal concerns are viewed as health issues, not as the result of any capability or performance gaps. Personal energy and self-management are near-universal blind spots as, overtly or otherwise, businesses continue to expect staff to work harder for longer instead of giving them permission to work smarter. Flexible working is still a policy rather than a cultural mindset for most. Robertson Cooper’s 2016 report, Making Flexible Working Work, argues that workers need to
be encouraged to consider how all their life roles align so that they can choose a complementary approach to integrating them.

Based on the findings of this research, we advocate a fundamental change of approach. Wellbeing can no longer be seen and managed in its own silo. To realise it’s true potential, it must be integrated with other mission-critical objectives and provide employees with the self-determination they seek. The future of work needs a cohesive, business-wide response that supports managers and staff to think differently and take charge of their own wellbeing.

Wellbeing can no longer be seen and managed in its own silo. To realise it’s true potential, it must be integrated with other mission-critical objectives and provide employees with the self-determination they seek.

This means the psychological contract must change so that workers are ready to shoulder their own responsibilities, safe in the knowledge that the business is creating the right conditions for this to happen and supporting them on their developmental journey. The perennial, operational firefight that only confronts short-term coping and basic wellbeing awareness is, in our view, preventing employers from engaging with the serious scale of the productivity and effectiveness challenge they face – this includes the role wellbeing can play in any solution. If sustainable levels of high performance and positive, productive work cultures are the goal, this is a gap that needs bridging fast. In the next section, we demonstrate how this might be achieved.
Practical guide to a future-ready wellbeing strategy
As we’ve shown, the huge amount of positive activity badged ‘wellbeing’ has created an important step forward but there is still much well-intended investment that is standalone and not translating into real change – either for businesses or their employees. This brief, step-by-step guide explains our recommendations for an integrated strategy that can empower workers and generate the productive environment that propels businesses forward sustainably.

This brief, step-by-step guide explains our recommendations for an integrated strategy that can empower workers and generate the productive environment that propels businesses forward sustainably.

Create a vision

Lots of wellbeing initiatives only try to fix a single, discrete issue or are inspired by a senior leader’s personal experience of a specific change program. Both starting points will limit reach and effectiveness.

For a moment, shift your focus away from the problems indicated by your employee engagement survey or the last piece of feedback you had from the business. Begin with a blank sheet of paper. In a world of constant change, challenge and competing demands, what’s your grand, cultural vision? What does a high-performance workplace full of motivated, happy and self-determining workers look like to you? How does this connect to the overall business strategy? A clear vision will help identify the behaviours, values and attitudes that form the basis of a new psychological contract to enable both people and the business to thrive. You’ll have to come back to the day-to-day reality of course, but it’s important not to let it constrain your thinking all the time.

Don’t decide this alone, or even as a senior leadership group. If you want to take people with you, be collaborative. Involve the wider workforce in shaping a collective vision and communicate clearly in a way that brings your goal to life through realistic, tangible benefits for everyone.
Take a temperature check

Once your vision is defined, pause. Review where your organisation is right now to understand how much effort is needed to achieve your aims. The length of the journey required will vary from business-to-business and team-to-team. We recommend taking a temperature check of:

> Energy levels
How well are the people in your workforce coping at present and how close are they to delivering sustainable high performance?

> Capability gaps
Does your existing talent pool demonstrate the base characteristics, capabilities and skills to adapt to a fast-paced working environment? Are they happy and ready to play their role in a culture of wellbeing? This includes checking whether managers have the confidence and resources to enable your vision.

> Cultural norms
Do employees already display the right attitudes and accept their own responsibilities sufficiently to push through change or do these capabilities need support and development?

> Personality types
What are the dominant personality characteristics across the people in your organisation? Are most people pre-disposed to experiencing positive emotions? Or not!? What sort of personality thrives in your present working environment and is that suited to thriving in the new version of work? Which teams will need the most support to get where you want to be?

Construct a response

As with any good strategy, once you know your destination and your starting point, it’s essential to plot your path using relevant milestones along the way... and to be realistic about what’s possible in the various phases of implementation. One important aspect of this should be to use the growing openness to wellbeing as a topic to make the connection, not just with personal health, but with performance too. This means defining and communicating what the new version of good looks like, then linking it to capability planning and performance management processes.

> The new contract
There’s no sense in enforcing new performance management processes and behaviours in a parental way. Workers need to be engaged with and accepting of how their own choices help achieve your shared view of a high-performance, well workplace. We’re talking about a new kind of dialogue that underpins a new kind of contract here. This acceptance of personal responsibility is integral to every element of a successful wellbeing strategy. Employees must be comfortable not only that they have permission to manage their own health and performance, but also that they have an obligation to do so as part of the psychological contract.

> Leadership
Although we’ve just discussed the need to avoid a paternalistic approach, that doesn’t mean that every necessary change will self-seed organically. It’s critical that senior leaders across the business agree with the necessity for transformation and its relevance to their own operational targets, otherwise implementation is likely to fail. Their buy-in is central to ensuring that managers throughout the business get the direction and empowerment they need to propagate change at all levels.

> Dialogue
We can’t stress enough the importance of good dialogue and of engaging routinely in wellbeing conversations. Too many well-intentioned initiatives fall flat because those championing them assume that their perspective is universal when, in fact, they’re some way out-of-step with the majority of staff. Often, this is a surprising finding revealed too late. Create and maintain mechanisms for listening and responding to
employees’ voices on key issues of how work, and the new relationship they want with their employer, should be.

As part of your response, a thorough review of current HR practices will help you ‘mainstream’ wellbeing into all aspects of people management. Ensure that standard – and contract – setting tools like organisational values and competency frameworks reflect the requirements of the new work context. The same also goes for induction, appraisal, recruitment, talent and performance evaluation processes. All your HR operations should model the example you want to set; CSR too. Check, as well, whether schemes for rewarding employees support or undermine your vision. For example, workers may be confused by directives to take time off and use all of their annual leave if they’re conversely rewarded for ‘going the extra mile’.

> Create infrastructure
It’s also important to invest in relevant infrastructure that will help you roll out your plans successfully. Networks of **Wellbeing Champions are becoming common in workplaces now and we think they can be a positive resource for far-reaching, long-lasting wellbeing programs – but only if they’re set up to succeed.** There’s a tendency for the same, enthusiastic faces to always take on the Champion role. We suggest recruiting a truly representative cross-section of your work population and set them on a well defined development path, even if that requires extra effort. Their role must be clear, and their function should be to give energy to an awareness-raising campaign among their peers. But more than that, they should encourage and enable personal responsibility amongst the workforce. And Champions shouldn’t be crowned in a blaze of glory and then abandoned: stay in contact and keep giving them fresh ideas and guidance, such a major new approach needs long-term commitment from everyone.

> Line managers
That necessity for infrastructure extends to building an adequate framework for line managers, who will need lots of structured support. They need to develop the understanding, skills and confidence to re-set the expectations of staff so that everyone is able to make proactive choices that help employees prosper. They require personal development to cope with their own pressures so that they see the value in staying in a good state of health and wellbeing. They will rely on new policies to back up the message that management priorities and behaviours are going to change. And they need a voice so that they can safely communicate the real-world problems they face that negatively impact wellbeing. Most of all, **they need help to understand that looking after their own wellbeing and that of their staff is part of, not additional to, their day jobs.** All too often wellbeing is seen as an inconvenient ‘bolt-on’ rather than something that can actually help managers do their jobs more effectively and feel better day-to-day.

> Employee-centred wellbeing
Finally, employees themselves need motivation and formal development opportunities to make the leap to self-determination. Depending on your organisation’s unique starting point, staff may not understand how to manage their energy levels in an overloaded environment, deal with the emotional weight of a more uncertain work context, stay proactive and positive under pressure or to be disciplined in more flexible employment structures. To a greater or lesser extent, they’ll require guidance to get used to the principles of a new psychological contract and deliver sustainable high performance and productivity within a successful, future-ready business.

It’s a big job, there’s no doubt, but the proven value that wellbeing brings to business is undeniable. It’s difficult to repeatedly find innovative, motivated, productive and high-performing employees to fill the merry-go-round of vacancies, so if you can attract top talent, develop and retain them through an integrated wellbeing strategy, you give your business the platform to soar. The task-by-task, training-led approach to managing wellbeing has been tried but, given the ever-changing nature of work and employee demands, it hasn’t worked. So, if we accept the importance of wellbeing, it’s time to try something different. Something long-term and joined-up that sticks. It may look like a tougher journey, but the destination will more than justify the effort you make to get there.
References


