



Achieving Employee Wellness

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Summary

The importance of wellness in the workplace has been in the spotlight during the last few years. However, given the current level of work and life pressures it is unclear what is realistically achievable and what an organisation can do to really make a difference for its employees.

To date, a number of concrete issues remain unresolved in the field such as: the lack of role modelling and a top down-approach to wellness; severely restricted budgets; the absence of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and low employee involvement in the development of wellness programmes.

At Wellness London we believe that all levels of employee have the right to be well and that the workplace should be an environment that allows individuals to flourish. We also believe that individuals are complex and that there is a clear need to find an effective solution to balance basic physical, physiological and psychological needs.

We found that the answer to such complexity is a combination of:

- Stress management
- Posture
- Exercise
- Energy balance
- Disease prevention

These five elements represent the core of our Wellness 360° approach.

The delivery of Wellness 360° relies on well-rounded and immersive programmes for organisations of all sizes and types. From 1:1 in-office clinics, small group progressive training, large presentations, through to remote services (private gym classes, newsletters, webinars, e-mail support, and downloadable content) we offer multiple solutions.

Wellness London is fully dedicated to creating long-term solutions to tackle the wellness challenge in the workplace and to helping our clients develop a strong and unique wellness culture.

The Challenge: To achieve Employee Wellness

We often hear about the importance of wellness but, considering the current work and life pressures that constitute part of our everyday routine, it is unclear what is realistically achievable and what an organisation can do to really make a difference for its employees.

Wellness has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as: 'An active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life'.

Looking at the way industry has developed, in recent years' wellness had moved from an arbitrary obligation for the human resources department to being a central part of productivity in the workplace and a symbol of the value employers place on their staff. According to research from the Global Wellness Institute, workplace wellness is valued at \$40 billion globally with strong growth projections.

This is essentially due to:

- Increased sickness costs. The Office for National Statistics in the UK has reported that absenteeism in the private sector costs in excess of £8 billion per year. Stress is among the biggest problems in British workplaces, with the cost to the British economy being estimated at £3.7 billion per year, but added to this figure is the immeasurable amount of personal cost that stress and economic inactivity brings. The national average cost of a sickness day is close to £300. At a broader level, the WHO estimates costs to US businesses at \$300 billion per year from reduced productivity, employee absenteeism and turnover and higher healthcare costs.
- The realisation that investing in wellness programmes supports engagement in the workplace and promotes a stronger corporate identity amongst staff.

A company workplace with a happier, more contented workforce, where employees are engaged in their work because they are healthy and feel cared for, is an invaluable asset.

- A deeper understanding of what 'wellness in the workplace' means. It is now recognised that wellness is multi-faceted as opposed to including only "fitness" or "physical health". Wellness includes being able to manage constant pressure and thriving in life, rather than merely surviving. Another aspect of understanding wellness is the awareness that companies should address their wellness needs preventatively, not curatively, meaning stress and other illnesses would be picked up early, vastly reducing the risk of potential conditions worsening.

“
*Wow they really care,
I thought I wouldn't
get through the day
but now I feel focused
and ready*
”

C. Painter, EA, employee for a large investment bank serviced by WL, following attendance at a 1:1 wellbeing clinic, in-office

Despite an increased interest in the topic a few, concrete issues remain unresolved:

1. A lack of 'buy-in' from the top down

In the UK, the role of management in promoting wellness is documented and encouraged by the Health and Safety Executive. Nonetheless, wellness is not a boardroom priority in most organisations, and strong leadership and role modelling in the field is lacking.

This could be due to the absence in many companies of a detailed policy to manage wellness and mental health in the workplace, as well as the lack of training among managers in these areas. For example, in the UK, 78% of the workplaces do not have a formal mental health policy in place (ref 1) and a third of managers in Europe lack the resources and support to tackle depression at work (ref 2).

Due to their role and visibility in the workplace we believe that senior executives are in the best position to promote wellness and to foster a culture that is receptive to the wellness needs of their employees. A CEO who is seen making time to visit the gym, or eating a nutritious healthy meal, is most likely to have the attention of the entire workforce. Effective wellness-oriented behaviours attract more attention than just senior rank or an impressive job title: they generate interest in the person behind the title, and provide inspiration for those aspiring to be in those shoes one day.

2. A severely restricted budget and lack of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

A real challenge in achieving wellness in the workplace is the shortage or absence of sufficient resources to implement real changes. We believe that this is also due to inadequate, or inconsistent, measurement tools to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of a programme, and to the lack of clear KPIs.

A range of elements need to be taken into account when evaluating whether or not to invest in a wellness programme. Potential gains include decreasing current ill health costs, preventing risk factors, implementing early interventions, and maintaining optimal health conditions. Savings generated from improved employee productivity, increased company reputation and positive press coverage, will begin to generate a return on the company's investment (ROI).

In order to find the best possible value in a wellness service for an organisation it is essential to match the unique needs of that organisation with specific measurable outcomes from providers, as well as to set clear targets. For example, in 2013, Unilever created a programme to promote mental health amongst employees and set a target of reducing work related mental ill-health and days lost to mental ill-health by 10%.

Wellness London uses quantitative and qualitative KPIs to measure success - such as attendance rates, pre/post intervention surveys and employees' satisfaction with the programme. We work directly with the organisation to identify business specific KPIs.

3. Marginal involvement of employees in the development of wellness programmes

It is often the case that wellness initiatives are conceived, designed and implemented by HR and management teams. We recognise the wide knowledge of employees' needs held by managers and human resources staff, but we have also learnt the critical importance of seeking employees input before initiating a wellness programme based on possibly mistaken assumptions or expectations. In our experience, to achieve a substantial change in employees' wellness and to promote behavioural change it is paramount that front line staff have been truly listened to. Wellness London supports the use of 'Employee Opinion Surveys' (EOS) to allow employees to influence the development of the entire group and to help shape the individual working environment.

The Wellness London solution to achieving employee wellness

3.1 Our beliefs

We believe wellness is a necessary, indeed an important, consideration in any modern organisation.

All levels of employee have the right to be well and the workplace should be an environment that allows individuals to flourish. Stress levels have inevitably risen over the years; it follows that a good employer should train and encourage individuals to be well, right from the start of their careers.

We also believe the individuals are complex and that there is a clear need to find an effective solution to balance basic physical, physiological and psychological needs. We have found, that the answer to such complexity is a combination of exercise and good nutrition, stress reduction techniques, and postural care.

The existence of Wellness London stems from our passion for advocating wellness as a lifestyle not a short term intervention. Over the years, we have shaped our view around wellness; our approach is summarised in the following points:

- Wellness is not about “absolutes” and does not need to involve extremes or drastic lifestyle changes. Sometimes learning to take a walk with the family, having a mindful pause from the task at hand, or simply drinking more water throughout the day, can make a greater impact than complex interventions at a later date.
- We have learnt from extensive research that an employee who places an emphasis on his or her own personal wellness is better equipped to face life challenges, including dealing with stress and illness; is a happier person, enjoys better relationships and lives life to the full.
- Wellness is a skill that can be learned. It is possible to learn to take care of the body through mindfulness, exercise and good nutrition. It is possible to train your mind to be resilient and efficiently deal with everyday stress.
- It takes time and patience to cultivate wellness. Changing habits is not easy and it is normal to struggle to find balance at times. Helping people to understand the value of self-compassion and to turn the ‘struggle’ into a learning opportunity is key.
- Awareness is a core element of wellness. If there is an area of wellness that has been ignored or overlooked for a while, the simple act of recognising is a huge leap onto the wellness path. Understanding and respecting your current situation provides a great stimulus for engaging more in wellness-related activities.
- Wellness is not achieved with a pre-defined formula, it is unique to each and every person.

3.2 The Wellness London Approach

In order to succeed it seems imperative that the overall company approach aligns itself with the 'wellness as lifestyle' message. Wellness is, in fact, supported by the culture within which the employee operates. An organisation's culture is defined as 'the attitudes and agreed ways of working shared by the employees of a company or organisation' (Cambridge dictionary). In simpler terms, culture is what we describe as 'how things are done here'. To foster a wellness culture, we deem necessary the following:

3.2.1 A 360° Approach to Wellness

The central skill is to take care of an employee's total wellness, using a 360-degree approach. The greater number of employees who achieve wellness, the greater the shift in the culture of a workplace, to a more productive, more satisfied, less sick environment.

We believe that to focus only on one aspect of health is not enough to achieve a higher quality of life and work performance.

Further, it could have negative effects on other aspects of one person's health. There are numerous examples of high-profile achievers across a broad range of talent and position who once seemed imperious, travelling the globe and still fitting in exercise five times a week, but suddenly suffered a severe breakdown. We have wondered why this happens.

Often these people fail to respect one key aspect of total wellness. On the surface they look like a wellness warrior, but, in reality, they are lacking in nutrition, sleep, and hydration and are attempting to manage their stress through exercise alone - an unwell time-bomb, ready to explode: that is also why Wellness London offers a 360° solution.

Our 360° approach brings together:

- Stress management
- Posture,
- Exercise,
- Energy
- Disease prevention

Stress Management takes many forms, from improving resilience and memory, to learning the art of mindfulness. Stress is inevitable and, therefore, learning to face it openly and calmly is a key skill for each and every employee.

Posture is often the root cause of many distracting aches and pains, decreasing productivity. Posture needs to be addressed with expert assessment, correct ergonomics and education, and sometimes with hands-on therapy too. We support your energy at a physical (exercise) and psychological level. Nutritionists and psychology experts will guide you towards developing healthy eating habits and a strong, resilient mind using the latest evidence-based techniques. Mind and body combined can help reduce the incidence of disease and illness (disease prevention).

The delivery of 360° wellness relies on more than one service and Wellness London aims to deliver well-rounded and immersive wellness programmes to organisations of all sizes and types. From 1:1 in-office clinics, small group progressive training, and large presentations, through to remote services (private gym classes, newsletters, webinars, e-mail support, and downloadable content) we have multiple solutions.

All services must place emphasis on mental wellbeing, physical fitness and nutrition, and musculoskeletal health. Wellness London takes nothing for granted and focuses resources on what employees need the most, which is rarely one single thing.

3.2.2. Role modelling

A key factor in success in many fields is linked to 'who you surround yourself with'. If the working environment supports role models, people who inspire, people who listen, people who "do", then an organisation wellness programme's chance of succeeding will be greatly enhanced.

At Wellness London we aspire to involve senior executives in role modelling the wellness values of the company and we believe that they should, wherever possible, be ambassadors for the wellness programme. Nonetheless, Wellness London's staff pride themselves on being passionate wellness experts and every team member role models our values.

In your company, role modelling from the senior staff and our trainers will also aim to support employees during the change process, and to reduce resistance and overcome common barriers such as the fear of negative comments or of feeling isolated.

3.2.3. Preparing for & Measuring success: In depth needs assessment & training evaluation

Our philosophy is that we should add value to every project we undertake and that our clients should have a clear indication both of the cost of our services and of the value added by them. The evaluation and services offered by Wellness London are tailored to the particular requirements of your business and employees and your management goals. Below is a list of common indicators, we use:

Pre-intervention: Needs assessment

Wellness London staff questionnaire: a diagnostic tool for determining what wellness services and tools need to be implemented and how to best direct the wellness budget. This includes assessment of employees' physical and emotional wellness levels

Post-intervention: A) Satisfaction and Knowledge acquisition:

- Course satisfaction and recommendations for improvements questionnaire
- Summative assessment of new learning to be administered at the end of the course (for taught trainings). A sound examination following each wellness service can help

determine whether or not the content was assimilated and identify participants in need of further support

- Physical wellness indicators, for example a full health screening or simple measure such as increased joint range or an increase in strength.
- Behavioural change: what has changed in your employees' behaviour since the wellness services were launched.
- Pre/post wellness services level of mindfulness using the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) by Walach, Buchheld, Grossman & Schmidt H. Walach et al. 2006 (see Appendix 1)
- Pre/post training levels of perceived stress using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen (1998)

B) Measurable business improvement

We explore with our client what specific business indicators to change or improve as a result of the training. Those might include:

- Staff retention and staff morale
- Productivity levels
- Days lost to mental or physical ill-health
- Specific business indicators (depending on the business sector) such as improved customer relationships, or increased sales.

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Conclusions

Wellness London is dedicated to creating long-term solutions to tackle the employee wellness challenge in the workplace.

At Wellness London we embody our values and adopt a 360° approach to help our clients develop a strong and unique Wellness Culture.

References

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