

Wellbeing strategies in the workplace

Culture, leadership and communication

Executive summary

This white paper discusses the important roles that culture, leadership and communication play in developing successful wellbeing strategies in the workplace.

Professor Cary Cooper, a renowned expert in organisational psychology, discusses the reasons for implementing wellbeing strategies. Although creating a motivated, flexible and committed workforce may be the crucial driver for employers, they should also understand the moral aspect to improving employees' wellbeing. Employees will respond negatively to wellbeing initiatives if they believe they are merely being implemented to get them to work harder.

That is why harnessing the right culture within a workplace is important, so there is an environment where employee wellbeing can flourish. Leadership is key to developing this culture and its success relies upon the buy in and cooperation of all leaders from the board down.

Communication is then vital as engaging with employees about the wellbeing programme will help to demonstrate that it is ongoing and not just a fad. Continually surveying employees to seek their views on the programme will then ensure that it remains relevant and continues to meet their needs.

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Introduction



This is the third in a series of white papers by Simplyhealth designed to discuss the issues surrounding health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Helping to develop successful wellbeing strategies is at the heart of what we do and we understand that the culture of a company and a genuine commitment to wellbeing from senior staff is crucial. As a healthcare provider we can then help to ensure that the right health benefits are implemented to complement any other initiatives that are in place.

In this paper, we hear from our colleague, Cary Cooper, Distinguished Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health. Cary explains how wellbeing strategies must be implemented for the right reasons and developed from an existing culture that supports wellbeing. The full support of management, good communication channels and continual measurement are needed to ensure the strategy is an ongoing success.

The remaining white papers in this series will include:

- Good health is good business – Return on Investment (ROI)
- Combining Employee Benefits Packages – Making efficiencies
- Self funded health plans and tax efficient wellbeing

We hope that this white paper highlights the different aspects that contribute to a successful wellbeing strategy and gives you food for thought when developing your own strategy or advising a client.

Jack Briggs

Sales and Marketing Director – Employer Sales

“The culture of a company and a genuine commitment to wellbeing from senior staff is crucial”.

Wellbeing strategies in the workplace; Culture, leadership and communication

Professor Cary Cooper

Distinguished Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University, and founder of business psychology company Robertson Cooper.

The reasons for creating a wellbeing strategy will vary between organisations, but at the highest level, the most compelling motivation is linked to bottom line results. For the private sector, this means leveraging the full benefits from an untapped source of competitive advantage; in the public sector it is more likely to be about increasing efficiency and maximising effectiveness.

Underneath that, there may be a range of different drivers: a need to reduce sickness absence; improving customer satisfaction scores; increasing productivity; retaining talent and more. One of the benefits of investing in wellbeing is that improvements can have an impact in many of these areas simultaneously. Now more than ever people are being asked to do more with less in an ever changing environment. Improving psychological wellbeing and resilience is increasingly seen as a vital part of the overall business strategy to create a motivated, flexible, committed workforce.

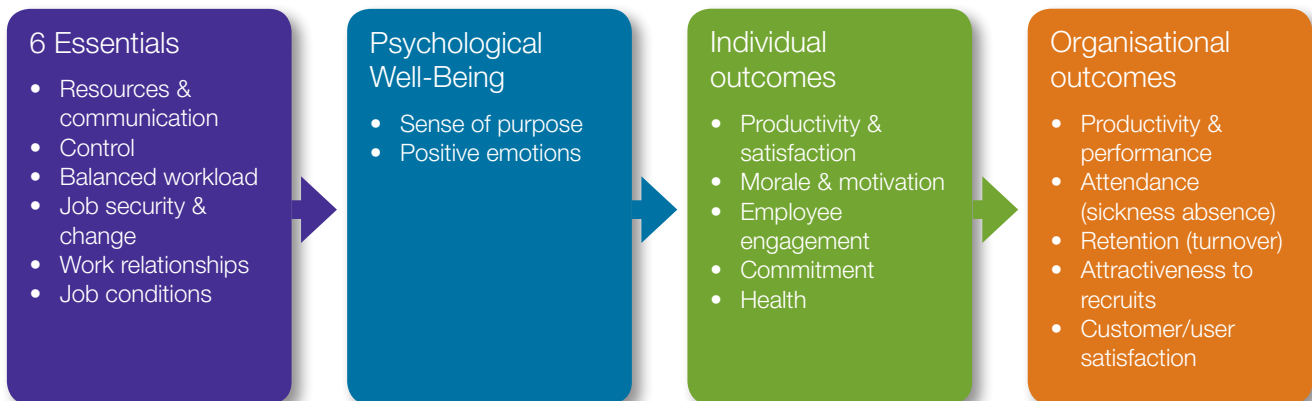
“Getting the culture right will release discretionary effort without breeding resentment”.

There is also a moral aspect to improving employees’ wellbeing. If organisations expect high levels of commitment and motivation, they have a duty to develop a culture and environment that fosters employee wellbeing. Wellbeing initiatives will be poorly perceived if employees feel they are merely a justification to ask them to work harder; getting the culture right will release discretionary effort without breeding resentment.

There is also a knock on effect to the employee brand, improving retention and attracting talent. If internal and external values are aligned, as they should be, it can be a positive part of the company brand as well.

When creating a wellbeing strategy buy in from the top to start with is vital. The board and senior management teams need to be won over to the cause. The best approach is a blend of a strong business case, populated by information and data from your own organisation, and an appeal to more emotional reasoning in senior people – painting a picture of what success will look and feel like.

Adopting a framework around which to build your actions can provide real direction and a greater understanding of objectives. At Robertson Cooper, we use the '6 Essentials' of workplace wellbeing, which are: resources and communication; control; balanced workload; job security and change; work relationships and job conditions. These factors drive psychological wellbeing, which in turn feeds through to individual and organisational outcomes.



Robertson, I.T., & Flint-Taylor, J. (2009). Leadership, psychological well-being and organisational outcomes. In Cartwright, S. and Cooper, C. L. (Eds), Oxford Handbook on Organisational Well-being, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Strategy can, and should, vary from organisation to organisation depending on their particular needs. Creating a strategy can become a bit of a 'chicken and egg' exercise when trying to get the balance between planning and action.

In order to make sure resources are going to the right places you will need to identify your starting point. This includes a review of all current activity, and ideally the results of a wellbeing survey (or an existing organisational survey that includes wellbeing questions). Once the survey has identified any problems you can go about trying to improve them. Major cultural change will take time and effort on a number of fronts, However, it's good to take action on some 'quick wins', to demonstrate to survey participants that their opinion is really valued, not just being gathered as part of a tick box exercise. Continued communication is vital from the very start of this process.

Also, don't forget to celebrate success and replicate it, as surveys should not just be used to identify problems. If a particular team or department is doing well, find out how it works and apply it to other areas. This is the best kind of case study as it's already going on in your particular context.

As already discussed, developing a culture that fosters employee wellbeing is important; however, culture will differ between organisations. It's something that is inherently difficult to define but you can certainly 'feel' when it's right, something strongly reported in David Macleod and Nita Clarke's report 'Engaging for Success'. When immersed in an unhealthy culture it can be

difficult to imagine anything different, so it's a good idea to visit other teams or organisations that have got this right.

As well as individual leaders and managers needing to model the behaviours they desire from other employees, the leadership 'blend' will play a part in determining the culture of an organisation. To ensure a balanced culture, an overall equilibrium between challenge and support is required. Over reliance on one approach or the other can cause problems; if this is aggregated across a company, the chance of creating a positive culture will be reduced.

While it can be difficult to define what a 'good' culture is, it's very easy to identify what you don't want: from a blame culture and unhealthy competition to apathy and indifference, there's a lot to be avoided. The '6 Essentials' provide a good starting point to develop a constructive workplace culture and practice, as breaking it up into manageable 'chunks' makes the process much more accessible.

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However, culture has to be developed from both a bottom up as well as a top down perspective; involving employees in the selection or review of company values can be a good way to start. This should not just be a generic list as seen on many company websites, but real and realistic aspirations that are relevant to the nature of your organisation and employees.

A resilient workforce has become increasingly important as many organisations are facing challenging times. Resilience is something that can be developed in individuals and should also be a consideration when developing culture.

Leadership is central to developing a culture that fosters wellbeing. There are many different types of leadership, from CEOs, to senior management and then line managers, to an individual's ability to lead on a particular project. All these types of leaders have different responsibilities when it comes to wellbeing.

The board need to buy in to the activity if it is to be co-ordinated and supported enough to achieve the best outcomes. They have the power to make far reaching changes, and to allocate the resources to make them happen. As mentioned above, the individual behaviour of senior management will also have a significant impact on the culture of the organisation. All leaders should demonstrate the behaviours they are advocating; you can't expect employees to take part in initiatives and change behaviours if the people above them aren't doing so.

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Arguably the most significant leader relationship is between employee and line manager. The line manager role includes creating the optimum environment for the performance of their team members, addressing each of the factors in the '6 Essentials' framework mentioned earlier, while also providing the right balance of challenge and support.

This can seem quite a big demand to make, so leaders and managers should be equipped with the training and resources they need to do so. One of the most important resources is information, more specifically access to staff survey findings. Too often they sit with HR, if not gathering dust then certainly not being as valuable as they could be. Once these have been distributed, managers will need guidance on how to develop action plans for their own teams.

Playing a role in creating a strong culture is about developing an attitude that this is part of their everyday job, not an add on. For that reason it has to be a key strand of leadership development programmes, along with development of effective communication skills that allow managers to interact with their teams.

Focusing on employee engagement in isolation may achieve improved survey scores, but in order for these to be sustainable, it needs to be underpinned by improved psychological wellbeing. Many clients approach us and say that while their employee engagement scores are high, the organisation doesn't actually 'feel' that positive. By examining these kinds of results through a 'wellbeing' lens, it's possible to get to the source of any issues. If leaders and managers understand this relationship, they can use the '6 Essentials' as levers for improving wellbeing, in turn reducing any risks to employee engagement.

When it comes to engaging people specifically with the wellbeing programme you must demonstrate that the commitment to wellbeing is ongoing, not just a fad. The strategy must be long term and this commitment must be frequently communicated. The best way to do this is to brand the activity so efforts are easily identifiable – from leadership training to physical activities.

I've mentioned the value of using a survey to measure the effectiveness of wellbeing already, and one of the benefits of doing this first is that it can serve as a benchmark within your organisation, and with others. Repeating the survey will give an indication of whether your activities have been effective and including questions around awareness of the wellbeing activity will help to explain take up rates.

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You should also tie in other data that you have available (sickness absence, turnover, performance, customer satisfaction). It's best to identify these at the start of the programme to provide focus to the strategy. It will also help to produce a robust business case in the future when comparing wellbeing benefits and costs to other budget demands.

Finally, don't be put off if you don't get the results that you wanted. If an element of your strategy doesn't work as well as you expected, knowing that you carried out enough evaluation to find this out before expending greater resources in it is a step well taken. By taking action and refining what works you are gradually embedding the wellbeing culture.

Simplyhealth's comments

Creating a wellbeing strategy is of paramount importance to any business whether it employs five staff or 5,000. Profitability and good business performance come from engaged employees, and the more engaged they are, the more likely they are to surpass what is required of them. In our first white paper, we talked about some of the benefits that might form a wellbeing strategy. Here, we focus on the importance of building the right culture, strong leaders and a good communications platform to make it most effective.

“Encourage employees to give all of their talents without fear of reprisal and you will experience increased creativity and productivity”.

In order for any organisation to flourish it is important to create, and continue to develop, a good organisational culture. To do this there must be an open and honest framework where employees aren't afraid to express their feelings. Encourage employees to give all of their talents without fear of reprisal and you will experience increased creativity and productivity. Don't be afraid of short term failings as these can breed success, and this success should be recognised and rewarded so employees can endeavour to exceed future expectations.

Creating this culture requires buy in from all members of staff from top to bottom and vice versa. It can be facilitated by a company ethos which encompasses a mission statement and a vision so that employees all have the same common goal. In the case of Simplyhealth this is to 'help more people feel better' and 'to inspire people to better health'. This is a common purpose for all staff, which is underpinned by a set of values that employees can relate and adhere to: friendly, confident, experienced, straightforward, accessible and responsible. These values form the basis of the Simplyhealth culture and enable our staff to fulfil the company vision.

Culture is about embracing necessary change, and never more so than in the current economic climate. It needs to be nurtured and allowed to evolve and adapt to internal and external factors. It shouldn't be confined by a right or wrong approach, as it's not a simplistic concept or easy to define. As long as employees are given the freedom to have their say, whilst being heard, and the business is willing to act on it, then the desired culture can prosper. A good culture and strong leadership go hand in hand and it is unlikely that a successful business can have one without the other.

Leadership is: “Characterised by a strong sense of inclusiveness, a model in which leadership is seen as distributed throughout all levels of the organisation, rather than being the sole province of a single individual or a small clique of senior staff; a model in which the nature of leadership is essentially about being humane, treating others with respect, valuing their contributions and seeing others as human beings rather than human doings.”

Shaping the future, CIPD 2008

There is a common misconception that leaders are the senior members of staff within an organisation that set business objectives and company strategy, and then engage their staff to fulfil those set objectives. The reality, however, is that engaging leadership requires champions at all levels. It involves giving employees greater personal responsibility and ownership so that they have the ability to shape and deliver the company goals.

Sir Terry Leahy, formerly of Tesco Plc and ‘Britain’s Most Admired Leader from 2005 to 2010’, according to Management Today, echoed these sentiments at the 2011 CIPD Conference. He said; “Leadership isn’t about you, but rather what you can get from others. If you trust in somebody, you give them the confidence to release exponential capacity. A leader will take you further than you will go on your own.”

“A good culture and strong leadership go hand in hand and it is unlikely that a successful business can have one without the other”.

Managers and employees alike should strive to build good working relationships with their peers by getting to understand each other. After all, everybody has a different working style and it’s the wrong approach to treat everybody in the same way if you expect the most from them. People should aim to inspire and develop their colleagues, which, in turn should create a good working environment.

Every company should create a leadership programme in which they identify key changes that they need to lead. These can be business strategies or indeed, psychological factors and there are several ways to put this into practice.

This is where communication is key, as getting together with your employees provides greater insight. You can do this in the following ways:

Senior managers to visit the shop floor: A divide can often form between the senior staff and the lower level employees of an organisation. To show that leaders are engaged at all levels it is important for top level management to engage with all employees. Here, visibility is king.

Encourage learning through internal and external training programmes: There is a wealth of information online that your employees can access to aid their development. The important thing is to notice that this forms part of their day job and they should, therefore, be encouraged to access it.

You can also draw upon the knowledge that you already hold. Internal training courses are inexpensive and effective as you are harnessing the knowledge of your staff and sharing information. Mentoring sessions are also a great way for people to learn from others and to develop strengths in areas where they may have weaknesses.

Use the communication tools at your disposal: Communicate regularly to your staff through different mediums. Employees like to be communicated to

in different ways, so it is important to use a variety of methods including email, staff intranet and internal newsletters or magazines.

Staff update sessions: Once a month, get together as an organisation and share your business performance with your staff. You can make these sessions more personable by introducing staff awards.

Staff forums or a staff consultative committee: This is an opportunity once a month for representatives of departments to get together and discuss staff issues, which can be raised anonymously and in confidence.

Focus groups: An ideal way to get your leadership objectives on the table and to discuss with employees at all levels. These should be as open and honest as possible and the results should be shared with staff in a timely manner to show that they are shaping the decision making process.

Engagement surveys: These are a good way to understand how employees are feeling, and are excellent benchmarks to improve the level of engagement and the psychological wellbeing of your staff. They can be repeated periodically to gauge results and so you can formulate an action plan to address any issues highlighted.

In creating your wellbeing strategy, you mustn't lose sight of your objectives and so it is important to continuously monitor your results. It may be that it improves sickness absence levels, staff morale, business performance, and ultimately the bottom line; all clear indications that a well cultivated and communicated wellbeing strategy is good for business.

Professor Cary Cooper profile



Cary L. Cooper is Distinguished Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University, and Founding Director of employee engagement, wellbeing and resilience specialists, Robertson Cooper. His groundbreaking academic work has developed our understanding of organisational psychology – covering areas including employee wellbeing, engagement, stress management, leadership and work life balance. Robertson Cooper has applied this work to help organisations realise the benefits of improving employee wellbeing.

He has authored or edited over 120 books, has written over 400 scholarly articles for academic journals and sits on a number of scholarly journal editorial boards. He is also a frequent contributor to national newspapers, TV and radio and in high demand as a public speaker

Cary was the lead scientist to the UK Government Office for Science on their Foresight programme on Mental Capital and Well Being (2007-2008). He was also appointed a member of the expert group on establishing guidance for the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence on 'promoting mental wellbeing through productive and healthy working conditions' in 2009. In 2010 Cary was Chair of the Global Agenda Council on Chronic Disease and Mental Health of the World Economic Forum. HR Magazine named him the 5th Most Influential Thinker in HR in 2011.

In 2001, Cary was awarded a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his contribution to occupational safety and health. His commitment to the field has also been recognised by Honorary Doctorates from Aston University (DSc), Heriot-Watt University (DLitt), Middlesex University (Doc. Univ) and Wolverhampton University (DBA); an Honorary Fellowship of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine, an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (Hon FRCP), a Life Time Achievement Award from the Division of Occupational Psychology of the British Psychological Society and an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (College of Occupational Medicine).

You can follow Cary on Twitter @prof Cary Cooper, read his blog at carycooperblog.com and hear from Robertson Cooper @gooddayatwork.

About Simplyhealth

Simplyhealth is a specialist in healthcare. Our heritage dates back to 1872, so we have the experience and knowledge to develop tailored packages to meet the needs of our clients. Our health plans include health cash plans, dental plans, private medical insurance and self funded health plans.

We help over 11,000 businesses with their healthcare, including major blue chip companies such as AstraZeneca, British Airways, John Lewis Partnership, Royal Mail and Tesco. We now cover nearly four million people with health plans; more than any company in our sector.

We pride ourselves on delivering exceptional personal customer service, from hands on account management to dedicated clinical care managers who'll support your employees through their claims. Our 1,640 employees are all based in the UK.

We follow mutual values and care about our communities. Each year we donate around £1 million to health related charities and good causes.

Find out about future white papers

If you would like to receive our future white papers, please join our mailing list. Just call 0845 075 0063 or email forbusiness@simplyhealth.co.uk and we'll send you our white papers as soon as they are published.

Our next white paper will be titled: 'Good health is good business – Return on Investment' and will focus on the measures that can be put in place to monitor the effectiveness of your employee wellbeing strategy.

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To take the Robertson Cooper i-resilience questionnaire visit:
<https://solutions.robertsoncooper.com/iresilience.aspx?source=simplyhealth>

or to read more about the '6 Essentials of workplace well-being' visit:
www.robertsoncooper.com/files/download/6_Essentials_FREE_Chapter.pdf



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