

Well-Being at Work: The New View

The Business Well-Being Network Annual Report, 2008



Foreword

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As a government advisor and regular commentator on the subject of well-being, I have great pleasure in introducing Well-Being at Work: The New View - the first Annual Report of the Business Well-Being Network. It has been designed to provide you with a valuable overview of the current state of well-being and engagement in the UK – and, just as importantly, a vision of the future. It also contains guidance and tools that enable you to take an integrated, whole business approach to managing well-being at work – something which the members of the Business Well-Being Network have identified as a priority.

We are now at a crossroads with well-being at work – the evidence for the business benefits is becoming well-known and well-accepted by most organisations. What is less clear is how business leaders and well-being professionals should go about implementing this thinking. Government policy, the Foresight Programme and other key drivers will soon have an impact on most UK organisations - public and private sector. The pressure will be on in the next few years to find ways to take a strategic, integrated approach to the management of well-being at work in order to reap the proven benefits associated with a healthy and engaged workforce. In turn, this will help to create a better society and more buoyant economy which will benefit us all. Businesses that take this seriously in the next few years have an opportunity to leverage one of the last remaining untapped sources of competitive advantage: Well-Being.

I am delighted that this report has been stimulated by the creation of the Business Well-being Network. It is critical that professionals working in this area share their knowledge and experience freely and on an on-going basis. Now that we have the technology we have to use it – there isn't time to re-invent wheels and collectively, we need to blend our extensive, existing knowledge-base with creative thinking and debate about new solutions. As well-being practitioners, you are in a position to shape employee experience in your organisations and, in turn, inform best practice and research agendas - now and in the future.

I have long argued that well-being is not simply a luxury or 'nice-to-have', but a critical performance and business driver for the UK economy. This report includes a combination of existing information that you may be aware of and genuinely new insights for taking this beyond the conceptual to achieve productivity and performance improvements. I am confident that anyone who is responsible for making a real difference to working life will find it really valuable.

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Introduction

Over the past ten years well-being has gone main-stream. No longer is it a 'nice to have' or a soft concept that comes a poor second to more tangible 'bottom-line' outcomes. In fact, it is now generally accepted that well-being actually influences most of the success indicators that organisations value. You only have to watch a selection of TV adverts to see that countless businesses put well-being at the heart of their marketing campaigns; this is because they understand that people are always actively seeking ways to be healthy and feel good. This wider societal swing has also been reflected in the way that organisations treat their workforces as they increasingly buy in to the evidence that having happy and healthy employees means higher performance and happier customers.

In the opening section of this report we take a look at the UK's key drivers for focusing on well-being, both in and out of the workplace. The next section brings together well-being and another concept that is now seen as critical by more and more employers – employee engagement. The final section focuses on the practicalities of how to improve well-being. This guide is illustrated with case studies and our own experiences drawn from the work we have done with clients to raise well-being in a wide range of different organisations.