



Healthy people, healthy business

Embedding a culture of
employee health and
wellbeing

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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic consequences that it has given rise to in communities all over the world have brought the issues of health and healthcare to the forefront of the global political and economic agenda in a way rarely seen before.

The pandemic has provided a sharp reminder of the critical importance of health and wellbeing as the bedrock for prosperous societies and economies around the world. It has also prompted much reflection on what can be done to promote and protect health more robustly and equitably moving forward, putting us on course to realize many of the ambitions laid out in Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing.

Against this backdrop, in April 2021, WBCSD launched a new [Healthy People, Healthy Business](#) project focused on building a cross-sectoral coalition of its members to identify private sector priorities and opportunities to drive progress on health promotion and disease prevention.

One of the priorities of this project has been to leverage and operationalize the [Health & Wellbeing Pathway](#) laid out in [Vision 2050: Time to Transform](#), a framework launched by the WBCSD in March 2021 that provides the business community with guidance on how it can lead the transformations needed if we are to realize a shared vision of a world in which more than nine billion people are able to live well, within planetary boundaries, by 2050.

Vision 2050's health and wellbeing pathway sets out a goal of the highest attainable standard of health and wellbeing for everyone by 2050, calling for a world in which: people live healthy lives; health is promoted and protected; everyone has access to robust, resilient and sustainable healthcare services; and all workplaces promote health and wellbeing. The pathway then goes on to highlight the key transitions that will be needed to make this vision a reality, before underlining 10 critical action areas for business to help drive these transitions over the course of the next decade (see page 4).

One of these ten critical action areas calls on all companies to **"Implement programs that ensure the highest standards of health, safety and wellbeing for employees throughout global operations and value chains."**

This report seeks to provide insight on how this ambition can be turned into a reality. It represents the result of an exploration by companies from WBCSD's Healthy People, Healthy Business working group, and identifies some of the key levers that businesses around the world have at their disposal to maximize positive impacts across different dimensions of health and wellbeing for the individuals that sit at the heart of their operations.

If business is to realize its potential to contribute to our vision of the highest attainable standard of health and wellbeing for everyone by 2050, ensuring a culture of health and wellbeing among its own employees represents a critical and powerful starting point. It's time to get started.

Vision 2050 Health & Wellbeing Pathway: Action Areas for Business 2020-2030

1. Innovate and re-balance product portfolios to support healthy diets and lifestyles, while moving away from addictive and harmful offerings.
2. Influence consumer behavior towards more healthy diets and lifestyles via marketing activities, information campaigns, and collaborative education platforms. Refrain from marketing harmful products.
3. Scale business models to address indoor and outdoor air pollution, particularly in highly industrialized and densely populated urban environments.
4. Implement programs that ensure the highest standards of health, safety and wellbeing for employees throughout global operations and value chains, while expanding access to basic preventive services at places of employment.
5. Support efforts to safeguard biodiversity and eradicate the conversion of wildlife habitats to prevent the future spread of zoonotic diseases.
6. Collaborate with governments and inter-governmental organizations to invest in systems that build international health system resilience to respond to pandemics and other health risks.
7. Collaborate with policymakers to establish clear standards and guidelines to uphold data privacy in the context of an evolving digital healthcare system.
8. Develop new technologies that enhance capacity to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases, with a focus on ensuring access to health care in low- and middle-income markets.
9. Collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to eradicate anti-microbial resistance due to the misuse of antibiotic treatments and invest in new antibiotics to ensure their continued effectiveness in treating infection.
10. Fundamentally reshape perceptions of the boundaries of the healthcare system, underlining the importance of healthy lifestyles and cross-sector collaboration. Work to understand and account for the true value of health-related externalities.

TIME TO
TRANSFORM
HEALTH & WELLBEING



Executive summary

Work is the engine at the center of our economies. It lies at the heart of WBCSD's Vision 2050 where 9+ billion people live well, within the limits of the planet, and is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

If not managed well, work can be a direct contributor to poor physical and mental health. It is estimated that almost 2 million women and men around the world still die due to work-related accidents or diseases every year. At the same time, work can be leveraged to drive significant positive health impacts. By fostering safe workplaces and cultures that protect and nurture the wellbeing of employees, businesses around the world and across all sectors have the potential to make a significant contribution to promoting the highest possible standards of health for all.

Ultimately this also acts in support of the long-term success of each individual business. A healthy and engaged workforce is critical to business performance, and investing in and embedding initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of employees can drive a number of key benefits.

More and more businesses are now embarking upon efforts to prioritize health and wellbeing, and to embed it into their operations and culture. This report seeks to support businesses on their journey towards embedding a culture of employee health and wellbeing by providing insights and guidance in relation to three fundamental questions:

1. **Why is employee health and wellbeing business critical?**
2. **What is the role of business in protecting and promoting employee health and wellbeing?**
3. **How can business accelerate the transition to a workplace culture that fosters the highest attainable standards of health and wellbeing across a range of dimensions?**

Why is employee health and wellbeing business critical?

There are a number of factors why efforts to support employee health and wellbeing should be seen as business critical. This is at once an area where failing to take action presents considerable legal, reputational and operational risks, while proactive and innovative engagement can also generate a wide range of opportunities and benefits.

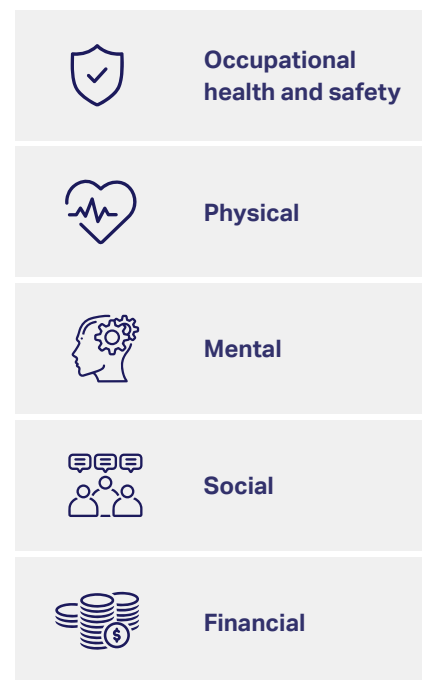
WBCSD members have identified five areas that are important for businesses to consider as key drivers for action when it comes to scaling up efforts to promote and protect employee health and wellbeing:



What is the role of business in protecting and promoting employee health and wellbeing?

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the workplace as one of the priority settings for health promotion in the 21st century. It is estimated that the average person will spend a third of their lifetime at work. Businesses from all sectors therefore have a significant opportunity and responsibility to ensure that the time their employees spend at work not only does no harm to their health, but also nurtures it.

This report identifies five dimensions of human health and wellbeing that business is well-positioned to foster through a variety of interactions with its workforce. These different dimensions of health and wellbeing are not felt in isolation, but rather, interact either to exacerbate or mitigate the overall impact on an individual.



How can business accelerate the transition to a workplace culture that fosters the highest attainable standards of wellbeing across a range of health and wellbeing dimensions?

In order to fulfil their potential to realize positive health and wellbeing impacts across these varied dimensions, it is important for companies to embark upon a clearly defined process to embed a culture of health and wellbeing more centrally into their organizational make-up.

Whilst every organization's journey may be different, the objective to move towards holistic employee health and wellbeing embedded in business strategy, should be consistent. Top-level leadership commitment, a culture of wellbeing, customized and impactful programs, and a sustainable future-looking approach should be the ultimate goal.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, although tragic, has presented businesses all over the world with an important inflection point to explore in more depth how they are interacting both negatively and positively with the health of the individuals that are the engine for their success. Businesses that fail to grasp this opportunity run the risk of being left behind as wellbeing continues to establish itself as a critical determinant of talent attraction and retention, as well as an important and material pillar of ESG analysis and performance assessment.



Introduction

Work is the engine at the center of our economies. It lies at the heart of WBCSD's Vision 2050 where 9+ billion people live well, within the limits of the planet, and is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, work can also be a direct contributor to poor physical and mental health if not managed well. Despite significant advances in workplace health and safety in recent decades, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that almost 2 million women and men around the world still die due to work-related accidents or diseases every year.¹

At the same time, work can be leveraged to drive significant positive health impacts. By fostering safe workplaces and cultures that protect and nurture the wellbeing of employees, businesses around the world and across all sectors have the potential to make a significant contribution to promoting the highest possible standards of health for all.

Ultimately this also acts in support of the long-term success of each individual business.

A healthy and engaged workforce is critical to business performance, and investing in and embedding initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of employees can drive a number of key benefits, including:

- Helping companies to **mitigate** operational, reputational and legal risks associated with accidents and ill-health;
- **Reducing** significant costs related to absences, presenteeism, and staff turnover;
- **Unlocking value** in terms of improved productivity, talent attraction, access to capital and enhanced reputation.

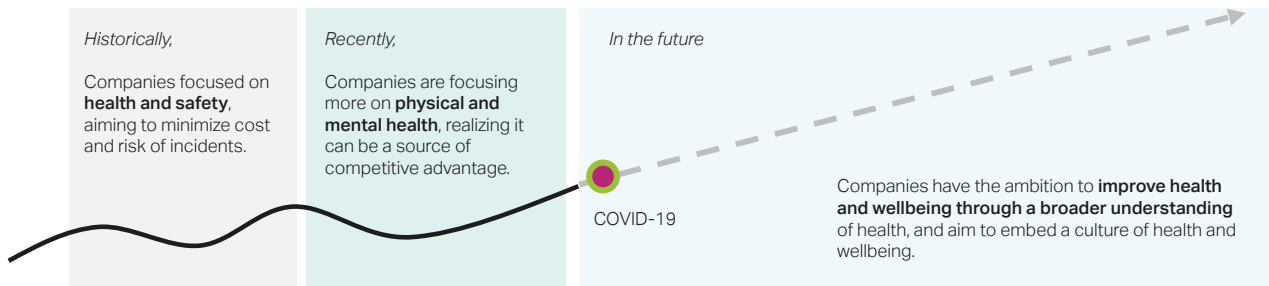
In recent years, recognition of the importance of supporting health and wellbeing within the workplace has become increasingly widespread, as organizations have realized how critical this is when it comes to retaining staff, preventing employee burn-out and driving productivity. COVID-19 has added significant momentum to this trend, with dimensions of health and safety in the workplace having been placed firmly under the spotlight, and with work and home having become inextricably interlinked for many.

More and more businesses are now embarking upon efforts to prioritize health and wellbeing, and to embed it into their operations and culture. While historically this might have meant a focus on occupational health and safety in the workplace, this is now expanding to consider employee health and wellbeing much more holistically incorporating elements of physical, mental, social, and financial wellbeing.

At the same time, evolving government regulations and policies in a range of geographies are continuing to raise the baseline in terms of the private sector's responsibility to protect the health and wellbeing of workers.

Against this backdrop, this report brings together insights from WBCSD member companies across a wide range of industries to explore: **why** employee health & wellbeing is business critical; **what** the role of business is in protecting and promoting it; and **how** businesses can accelerate the transition to a workplace culture that fosters the highest attainable standards of wellbeing across a range of key dimensions.

Figure 1: The journey towards Employee Health and Wellbeing



SOME KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
- **Wellbeing** refers to feeling good and functioning well. We consider the term to comprise each individual's experience of their life and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values. General wellbeing integrates concepts of physical, mental, social and financial wellbeing.
- **Physical wellbeing** consists of the ability to perform physical activities and carry out social roles that are not hindered by physical limitations and experiences of bodily pain.²
- **Mental wellbeing** describes a dynamic mental state. An individual with good mental wellbeing is able to:
 - feel relatively confident in themselves and have positive self-esteem
 - feel and express a range of emotions
 - build and maintain good relationships with others
 - feel engaged with the world in general
 - live and work productively
 - cope with the stresses of daily life, including work-related stress
 - adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty.³
- **Social wellbeing** refers to a sense of belonging, social inclusion and stability generated through an ability to make and maintain meaningful positive relationships with family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.
- **Financial wellbeing** relates to a sense of security that derives from feeling as though you have enough money to meet your needs. It is about being in control of your day-to-day finances and having the financial freedom to make choices that allow you to enjoy life.
- **Work-related stress**, as defined by the WHO, is the response people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their abilities, leading to an inability to cope, especially when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and little control over work processes.

- **Burnout** as defined by the WHO, is a syndrome 'resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed'. It is characterized by three factors: feelings of exhaustion or energy depletion; increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and reduced performance or efficacy at work.
- **Psychological safety** is being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career. It can be defined as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. In psychologically safe teams, team members feel accepted and respected.
- **Stigma** is a mark of disgrace that sets a person apart from others. When a person is labelled by their illness they are no longer seen as an individual but as part of a stereotyped group. Negative attitudes and beliefs toward this group create prejudice which leads to negative actions and discrimination.
- **Absenteeism** is defined as employee absence from work that extends beyond what would be considered reasonable and normal due to vacation, family emergency, and occasional illness.
- **Presenteeism** is defined as attending work whilst ill (physically or mentally) and therefore not performing at full ability.
- **Turnover** in the context of this report refers to employees leaving and being replaced in a workforce.



① Why employee health and wellbeing is business critical



① Why employee health and wellbeing is business critical

Companies around the world from all sectors continue to recognize the critical importance of efforts to support and nurture the health and wellbeing of their employees. Efforts in this field are increasingly seen as not just being a “nice to have” but as a key strategic pillar that sits at the heart of securing the company’s long-term license to operate, innovate and grow, and that offers significant competitive advantage.

There are a number of factors why efforts to support employee health and wellbeing should be seen as business critical. This is at once an area where failing to take action presents considerable legal, reputational and operational risks, while proactive and innovative engagement can also generate a wide range of opportunities and benefits. WBCSD members have identified five areas that are important for businesses to consider as key drivers for action when it comes to scaling up efforts to promote and protect employee health and wellbeing:

1. Talent acquisition and retention

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically accelerated an already emerging trend of employee awareness around health and wellbeing and how this is linked to their work. Existing and potential employees across all industries have mounting expectations of their employer when it comes to creating a workplace culture that protects and promotes physical and mental health. At a time when many organizations are facing unprecedented labor shortages, record levels of resignations⁴, widening skills gaps and an increasingly competitive war for talent, strong strategies around employee health and wellbeing are a critical ingredient when it comes to enhancing the employee value proposition, and attracting and retaining leading talent. Meanwhile failing to take action in this space has the potential to significantly undermine employee trust and loyalty.

Mercer’s 2021 Global Talent Trends report found that one in two employees prefer to join institutions that protect health and wellbeing, and the same organization’s 2017 National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans in the US showed that employers who create cultures of health see 11% lower

turnover than employers who do little to prioritize employee wellbeing. Meanwhile, a recent survey by Ginger, found that 85% of US employees believe behavioral health benefits to be an important factor when evaluating a new job.

2. Staying ahead of an evolving regulatory environment

Evolving government regulations and policies are, and will remain, a key driver for business action, setting the baseline standards for protecting citizen health and wellbeing in workplaces. Historically, the creation of legislation in many countries has sought to protect employees from physical hazards at work, resulting in an increased business focus on health and safety in the workplace. However, the rising public cost of treating a range of chronic diseases, combined with burgeoning public awareness around a number of conditions, particularly associated with mental health, have led many policymakers to start exploring measures to place greater pressure on companies to adopt a broader, more proactive role across employee health and wellbeing.

Increasingly, this is being reflected in the setting of higher standards, the tightening of regulations and the introduction of tax incentives. Figure 2 highlights some of the key policy, campaign and research developments that have emerged in recent decades. Companies that take a pre-emptive approach to engaging with the health and wellbeing of their employees will ultimately be better placed to stay ahead of the curve of this evolving legislative landscape.



Talent acquisition and retention



Staying ahead of an evolving regulatory environment



Improved business performance

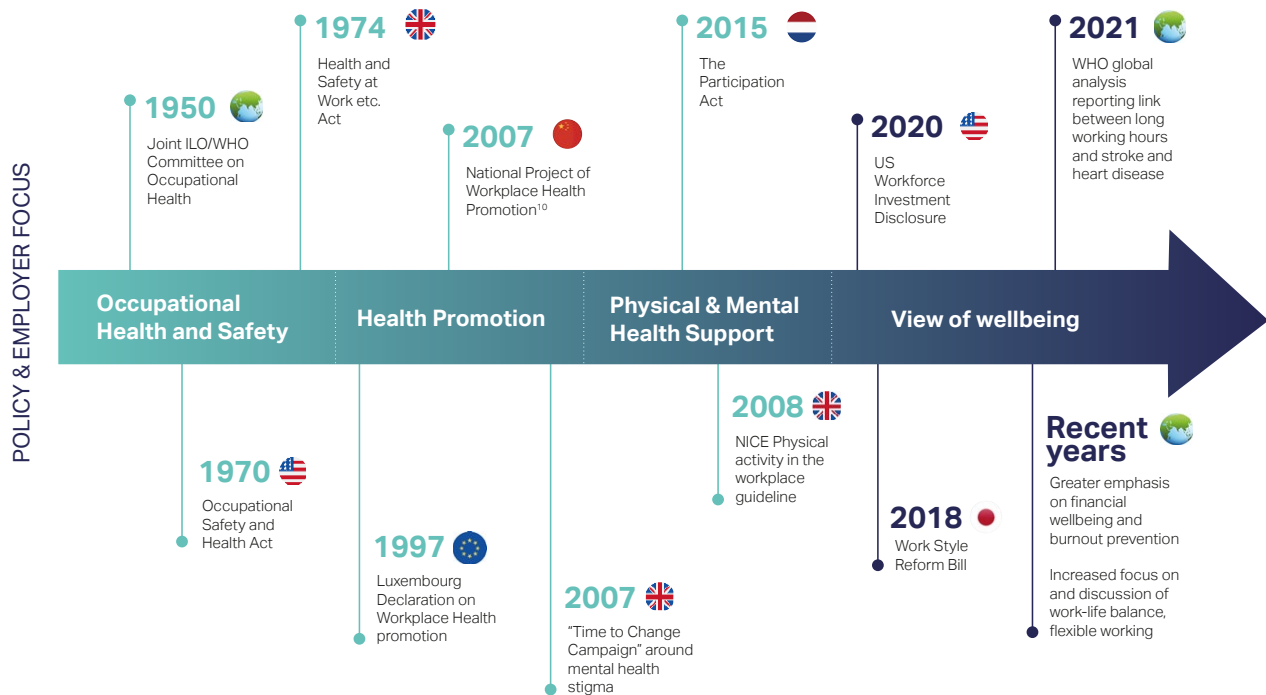


Reputation and brand value



Enhanced access to capital

Figure 2: Evolving policy, campaigns, and research for Employee Health & Wellbeing



3. Improved business performance

There is a strong correlation between business performance and a healthy and engaged workforce, with poor health among employees leading directly to increased costs and reduced productivity.

Workplace injuries have a major impact on an employer's bottom line. Liberty Mutual estimates that injuries at work cost US employers more than \$USD 1 billion per week in direct compensation to workers. This is in addition to a range of indirect costs such as the training of replacement employees, accident investigation and implementation of corrective measures, and repairs to damaged equipment.

More broadly, chronic diseases and mental health issues also represent a significant cost for businesses, leading directly to lower levels of employee engagement and productivity, and ultimately reducing the quality and quantity of human capital available.

In the US, poor employee health is estimated to cost business approximately \$575 billion per year³, linked to absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover costs. Research by Deloitte has found that poor mental health alone costs UK employers around £42bn – £45bn each year. This is made up of absence costs of around £7bn, presenteeism costs from £27bn to £29bn and staff turnover costs of around £9bn.⁵

Meanwhile the WHO estimates that work-related health problems result in an economic loss of 4–6% of GDP for most countries, fundamentally creating a less prosperous economic environment for businesses to operate in.⁶

On the other hand, proactively investing in a safe, healthy and engaged workforce has the potential to significantly reduce these costs and has been seen to deliver a clear and compelling return on investment. Research by WHO has demonstrated that workplace health initiatives can help reduce sick leave

absenteeism by 27% and healthcare costs for companies by 26%. Similarly, surveys conducted by Deloitte among UK companies found that for every £1 spent on workplace mental health interventions, employers received £5 back in reduced absence, presenteeism and staff turnover.

4. Reputation and brand value

A healthy workforce also has the potential to generate substantial reputational benefits for a company.

Customer-facing employees who are suffering from physical and mental health conditions are unlikely to be the best ambassadors for the company's brand, whereas healthy, happy teams will have greater capacity to be able to deliver enhanced levels of customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, corporate health and wellbeing strategies help to add depth to companies' brand identities, underpinning their reputations and demonstrating that they are putting words into action when it comes to how they treat their employees.

A clear and public commitment to employee health and wellbeing underlines that the business in question cares about its people and indeed about society more broadly. This provides an important opportunity for brand differentiation and chimes in tone with the expectations of consumers who seek to align with brands that share their values.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to further raise consumer expectations when it comes to employee wellbeing; a 2020 survey found that 90% of US consumers believe it is important that the companies they purchase from treat their employees well, and 49% said they see whether or not companies take care of their employees as one of their top five purchasing considerations.⁸

5. Access to Capital

Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) performance has become a critical consideration for businesses, investors and shareholders across all sectors. Focus on social issues in particular has ballooned in recent months, as COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on a range of social vulnerabilities and risks. In 2020, social bonds experienced exponential growth, emerging as the fastest-growing segment of the sustainable debt market.

Understanding and application of the key metrics that should be used to determine business performance around the “S” in ESG are evolving at pace. As these socially focused criteria continue to crystalize, there is mounting focus on employee health and wellbeing as a key material element that investors should be incorporating into their ESG analyses.

At the same time, health and wellbeing is being increasingly integrated into a range of emerging disclosure frameworks. Wellbeing is one of the key criteria that has been articulated by the World Economic Forum’s Measuring Stakeholder Capitalism initiative, while the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) has also launched a range of new resources to help companies integrate a new Culture of Health for Business (COH4B) Framework within their sustainability reporting.⁹

In the longer-term we envisage a clear direction of travel towards a market system that rewards companies with robust frameworks in place to foster social and human capital, and where strong corporate performance when it comes to promoting and protecting employee health and wellbeing is a contributing factor to lowering the cost of equity and debt.



② The role of business in protecting and promoting employee health and wellbeing



② The role of business in protecting and promoting employee health and wellbeing

WHO recognizes the workplace as one of the priority settings for health promotion in the 21st century. It is estimated that the average person will spend a third of their lifetime (around 90,000 hours) at work.¹⁰ Businesses from all sectors therefore have a significant opportunity and responsibility to ensure that the time their employees spend at work not only does no harm to their health, but also nurtures it.






WBCSD has identified five dimensions of human health and wellbeing that business is well-positioned to foster through a variety of interactions with its workforce: occupational health and safety, physical, mental, social, and financial (Figure 3).

These different dimensions of health and wellbeing are not felt in isolation, but rather, interact either to exacerbate or mitigate the overall impact on an individual. For example, precarious financial wellbeing can give rise to significant levels of stress, which in turn acts to worsen mental and physical health impacts. Similarly, the benefits of social wellbeing can also be felt positively across the dimensions of mental and physical health.

It is important therefore that these different dimensions are considered holistically and are all explored as parts of efforts to promote a healthy workforce. At the same time, it should also be recognized that a business's potential to impact worker health does not begin and end with the workforce that it employs directly. Companies also have significant opportunities to promote health and wellbeing throughout their supply chains and indeed among the families and communities that rely on their business's employment. Although many companies have made concerted efforts in recent years to improve occupational safety in the supply chain, enhancing the other four dimensions of health throughout supply chains and communities represents an important frontier moving forward.



Figure 3: Key dimensions of employee health and wellbeing¹¹

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
|  | Occupational health and safety | Occupational health and safety focuses on preventing injuries and negative health impacts that can result from the tasks that employees are performing in the workplace and from the quality of their work environment. |
|  | Physical | Physical health relates to the overall wellbeing of the body. The significant amount of time that employees spend in the workplace means that their working life, habits, and environmental quality of the spaces they work in, interact closely with their physical wellbeing. |
|  | Mental | Mental health is defined as a state of mental and psychological wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential and can cope with the normal stresses of life. Work-related stress, a lack of work-life balance, and the quality of workplace interactions can all aggravate or cause mental health problems like anxiety and depression. |
|  | Social | Social wellbeing encompasses the extent to which employees feel a sense of belonging, social inclusion and social stability. |
|  | Financial | Financial wellbeing is the state of mental and physical wellbeing that derives from a set of finance-related conditions and capabilities. It can be largely influenced by the economic security provided by employment. |

Occupational health and safety

Although workplace health and safety programs have now been commonplace across many companies for decades, there remains work to be done in terms of mitigating negative health impacts associated with work. The reality is that employees across a range of sectors continue to be exposed to a variety of risks due to their jobs and workplaces that have the potential to result in injury, long-term ill health or death.

According to joint research by the ILO and WHO, exposure to work-related risk factors results in almost 2 million premature deaths per year globally. Research emerging in 2021 found that the risk factors at work which cause the most deaths per year are long working hours (750,000 deaths); air pollution, gases and fumes (450,000 deaths); and injuries (360,000 deaths).¹²

Although global work-related deaths did fall by 14% between 2000 and 2016, deaths from heart disease and stroke associated with exposure to long working hours rose by 41% and 19% respectively, reflecting an important risk factor which needs to be at the frontier of business action moving forward. It is also important to note that a disproportionately large burden of work-related disease is observed in certain geographies, with WHO observing particularly high-risk rates in Africa, Southeast Asia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of maintaining robust occupational safety and health infrastructure, while also broadening the definition of the workplace to include employee's homes, adding a new dimension to workplace health and safety considerations.

In its first global analysis of the loss of life and health associated with working long hours, WHO and ILO estimate that, in 2016, 398,000 people died from a stroke and 347,000 from heart disease as a result of having worked at least 55 hours a week.

Examples of how organizations can take action

- On-site and off-site medical services
- Health and safety training
- Health and safety-centered work design and workload management
- Workplaces that prioritize indoor environmental quality
- Tracking of health outcomes based on risk categories and work exposures

Physical wellbeing

As well as working to mitigate health risks in the workplace, companies also have significant opportunities to leverage their interactions with workers to drive a range of physical health benefits.

Businesses can work to cultivate a culture of health and wellbeing throughout their operations, promoting the highest standards of physical health for everyone, and creating an environment in which employees are encouraged to prioritize self-care.

Efforts in this field can include: supporting employees with equitable access to healthcare services through providing health insurance in regions with no universal coverage, or developing onsite medical facilities; creating healthy workplace environments and facilities that foster and encourage healthy living; and proactively engaging with employees to promote and incentivize healthy lifestyles when it comes to factors such as diet and physical activity.

Examples of how organizations can take action

- Offer health insurance and support improved access to healthcare
- Promote and support healthy employee lifestyles
- Serve healthy food in company canteens
- Sponsor gym memberships and promote company sport networks
- Incentivize healthy commuting behavior
- Optimize indoor environmental quality, such as air quality, lighting, acoustics, and thermal comfort
- Provide ergonomic equipment and evaluations
- Introduce voluntary health-related apps and platforms loss tools, etc.
- Rethink how work is done, for example by building in buffer times between meetings, walking meetings, mid-meeting movement and team challenges, etc.

CASE STUDY: Creating a healthier work environment – Trane Technologies

Recognizing that indoor environmental quality can have a profound impact on the wellbeing and productivity of employees both consciously and subconsciously, Trane Technologies is committed to implementing measures that help promote confidence in the work environment.

In Louisville (Kentucky, USA), Trane piloted a program to improve and maintain the indoor air quality to help employees to thrive. This incorporated efforts to understand the uniqueness of the location, conduct relevant data analysis, and then implement the measures needed to improve and maintain optimal indoor air quality.

As a result of these efforts, the site applied for the WELL Healthy- Safety Rating certifying the improvements made to the physical environment. Moreover, employees had the opportunity to expand their knowledge of how to improve indoor environments for occupants through an accredited training system, which has enhanced Trane's efforts to support its customers in upgrading their indoor spaces.

CASE STUDY: Supporting healthy diet for employees - Workforce Nutrition Alliance

The [Workforce Nutrition Alliance](#) was launched by The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in October 2019. The Alliance is working to bring access to and knowledge about healthy nutrition to +3 million employees in member organizations and supply chains by 2025. The Alliance has developed a publicly available and user-friendly framework of six steps, as well as supporting tools and resources, to help employers deliver impactful nutrition programs to employees throughout their operations.

Mental wellbeing

One in four adults in the world is likely to be affected by poor mental health at some point in their lifetime. Meanwhile, the lost productivity resulting from depression and anxiety, two of the most common mental health diagnoses, is estimated to cost the global economy US\$ 1 trillion each year.¹³

Work can and should be good for our mental health. Unemployment is a well-recognized risk factor for mental health problems, while getting or returning to a job can be a protective factor. However, a negative working environment can also be an important driver of mental health issues.

Businesses across all sectors have a responsibility and an opportunity not only to ensure that they are mitigating negative mental health impacts in the workplace, but that they are supporting employees to realize the highest possible standards of mental wellbeing in all aspects of their lives.

There are a variety of risk factors for mental health that may be present in the working environment. These risks relate to interactions between the type of work that is being undertaken, the organizational and managerial environment that is in place, and the skills and support that are made available for employees to help them carry out their tasks.

A new ISO standard around psychological health and safety at work ([ISO 45003](#)), launched in 2021, identifies ineffective communication, excessive pressure, and poor leadership and organizational culture as particularly important risk factors that often result in negative mental health impacts.

In order to adequately address these risks, it is important that businesses use data, analytics and employee insight to identify the conditions, circumstances and workplace demands that are impacting the mental health of their people, while also taking action to address findings using targeted interventions as part of a comprehensive mental health at work plan.

It is also important that businesses make proactive efforts to enhance awareness around mental health issues and reduce the stigma around the subject. Independent studies in the US and the UK have found that only around half of employees are comfortable discussing mental health issues in the workplace, while a significant proportion worry about the consequences of asking for help.¹⁴ Shaping an organizational culture in which business leaders talk openly about mental health, and making relevant training, tools and support mechanisms broadly available have an important role to play in efforts to protect and promote mental wellbeing.

Currently only 3% of FTSE 100 companies disclose the rates of mental ill health amongst their workforce.¹⁵

Examples of how organizations can take action

- Mental health awareness training
- Resilience and mindfulness training
- Equip managers with the skills and confidence to address mental health
- Conduct prevention programs and screening for at risk groups
- Provide access to counselling and psychological support
- Promote flexible working and work/life balance
- Provide access to digital wellbeing solutions
- Provide enhanced access to green spaces



CASE STUDY: The Mental Health at Work Commitment

UK businesses and organizations joined forces with mental health charities in 2019 to launch the Mental Health at Work Commitment, providing a roadmap for employers to achieve better mental health outcomes for their employees. The commitment has been endorsed by nearly 1400 organizations and businesses and comprises of a set of six actions that employers can follow to improve and support the mental health and positive wellbeing of their staff:

1. Prioritize mental health in the workplace by developing and delivering a systematic program of activity
2. Proactively ensure work design and organizational culture drive positive mental health outcomes
3. Promote an open culture around mental health
4. Increase organizational confidence and capability
5. Provide mental health tools and support
6. Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting

CASE STUDY: Creating a global network of mental health first aiders to support co-workers, family and friends - Arcadis

Arcadis' global wellbeing vision is to build a healthy and resilient workforce by empowering employees to live life at optimum health. Recognizing that the workplace impacts on mental health are far and wide, with the COVID-19 pandemic worsening the situation, the company is working to strengthen wellbeing and resilience, and is committed to destigmatizing mental health and expanding benefits and support initiatives.

With the support of Mental Health First Aid, Arcadis has offered training courses to empower and equip individuals with the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to support a friend, family member or co-worker experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. Piloted in the UK, this network of mental health first aiders continues to be expanded across the company's global operations.



Social wellbeing

Many companies are currently expanding the scope of their employee wellness programs to incorporate social health and wellbeing, an emerging field which explores the degree to which an employee's interpersonal relationships, both in and outside of work, foster a sense of belonging, social inclusion and stability.

In the workplace, this encompasses relationships and interactions with colleagues and management, a sense of belonging and alignment with the company and its values, and a general feeling of being valued by one's employer. Outside of work, social wellbeing is about time spent with friends and family, and having the ability to commit to social engagements without fear of it clashing with work.

Poor social wellbeing not only results in reduced productivity and increased levels of employee turnover, but it can also lead to a range of mental and physical health impacts. A 2019 survey of 2,000 UK employees found that 31% were kept awake at night because of workplace stress related to interactions with colleagues.¹⁶

Meanwhile a number of studies continue to emerge regarding the tangible physical health impacts that can result from loneliness.¹⁷

Companies can encourage enhanced levels of social wellbeing by promoting a culture of collaboration, and working to build a workplace environment (either physical or virtual) where people can connect and build relationships with each other. Actions to support this can range from encouraging regular team meetings to investing in and fostering an active employee social network. Committing to a diverse and inclusive corporate culture should also be recognized as a critical pillar to improving social wellbeing.

Business can also take measures to help employees remain positively connected to their friends, families, and communities by taking steps to help them balance their work commitments and social obligations.

Examples of how organizations can take action

- Invest in and promote employee social networks e.g., sports teams, interest groups, etc.
- Run corporate volunteer and community action programs
- Establish social collaboration platforms and digital communities
- Ensure a culture of regular team meetings and team building activities
- Run corporate "buddy schemes"
- Advance initiatives to promote work-life balance and flexible working
- Commit to a culture of diversity and inclusion



Financial wellbeing

Financial wellbeing can be defined as a state of mental and physical wellbeing that derives from a set of finance-related conditions and capabilities.

All around the world workers are facing mounting financial pressures and risks. Basic necessities such as housing, healthcare and education are becoming more and more expensive, absorbing an ever-larger share of family income, while the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant economic consequences for many. There are substantial groups of people facing immediate financial difficulties and an even larger cohort who are likely to face financial vulnerability in the future.

Concerns about personal finances can take a considerable toll on the health of individuals, resulting in enhanced levels of anxiety and stress, and poor physical health. This in turn can have tangible impacts on an employee's productivity and increase the likelihood of absenteeism. A 2017 study by the UK's Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) found that 55% of employees identify financial pressures as a

factor that affects their behavior at work and ability to perform in their job, while 8% of the UK workforce admit to taking time off work because of financial stress.¹⁹ This risk of poor financial wellbeing can affect employees of all types and earning levels, but has been seen to be particularly prevalent among younger generations.

By recognizing the importance of financial wellbeing to the overall wellness of employees, and taking action to support the financial security and literacy of their workers, companies can make an important contribution to wider workforce wellbeing. Initiatives in support of this may include, providing education and guidance to employees on financial issues, and signposting sources of independent advice that employees can leverage. These efforts should of course also be underpinned by commitments to pay at least a living wage to all employees.

Examples of how organizations can take action

- Pay at least a living wage
- Conduct financial literacy training
- Introduce financial management programs
- Offer employee financial assistance programs
- Provide access to digital financial tools



③ Realizing a culture of health and wellbeing



③ Realizing a culture of health and wellbeing

The journey towards an embedded culture of health and wellbeing

As we saw in chapter two of this report, the dimensions across which businesses can take action to drive positive health outcomes for their people are varied and, in some cases, complex. In order to fulfil their potential to realize positive health and wellbeing impacts across these varied dimensions, it is important

for companies to embark upon a clearly defined process to embed a culture of health and wellbeing more centrally into their organizational make-up.

Whilst every organization's journey may be different, the objective to move towards holistic employee health and wellbeing embedded in business strategy, should be consistent. Top-level leadership commitment, a culture of wellbeing, customized and impactful programs, and a sustainable future-looking approach should be the ultimate goal.

As part of this journey companies will have to balance investments and interventions across addressing the immediate and urgent need to protect employees in the short-term, with efforts to build a holistic and organizationally embedded culture of health and wellbeing in the medium- and longer-term.

Figure 4 demonstrates a simplified health and wellbeing journey, showing the transition from being reactive to outside pressure, to embedding an integrated approach within the workplace and workforce.

Figure 4: The journey towards an embedded culture of health and wellbeing



Table 1: Maturity matrix towards an embedded culture of health and wellbeing

| | REACTIVE | EXPANDING | HOLISTIC | EMBEDDING |
|----------------|--|--|---|--|
| SCOPE | Responding and managing incidents | Specific health & wellbeing dimensions | All dimensions of health & wellbeing | Integrated approach to health & wellbeing, including suppliers and employee families |
| STRATEGY | No distinct EH&W strategy. Actions taken are reactive to clear external triggers or regulatory changes | Distinct EH&W strategy which is data-driven and proactively addresses employee needs | EH&W strategy is a key element of the business strategy | EH&W is integrated into business strategy and influences future strategic direction |
| COMMITMENT | No formal commitment and limited leadership support | Public commitment with leadership support | Addressed at executive level regularly | Addressed at boardroom level and enjoys parity with other business objectives |
| CULTURE | Culture does not always support or align with EH&W considerations | Culture is shaped to embrace and support EH&W and engage employees | EH&W is consistently considered in key business decisions | EH&W is a shared value, infused into every aspect of the organization |
| ACCOUNTABILITY | Siloed in specific functions like HR and HSE, but no full-time dedicated team | Dedicated team with cross-functional involvement | Cross-functional teams set up with EH&W business partners across the organization | Every employee at all levels is accountable and empowered |
| CUSTOMIZATION | Blanket programs rolled out and tweaked reactively | Some programs targeted at addressing specific employee needs | Pre-emptively addresses complexities across geography, industry, and employees | Personalized support for all individuals based on their unique needs |

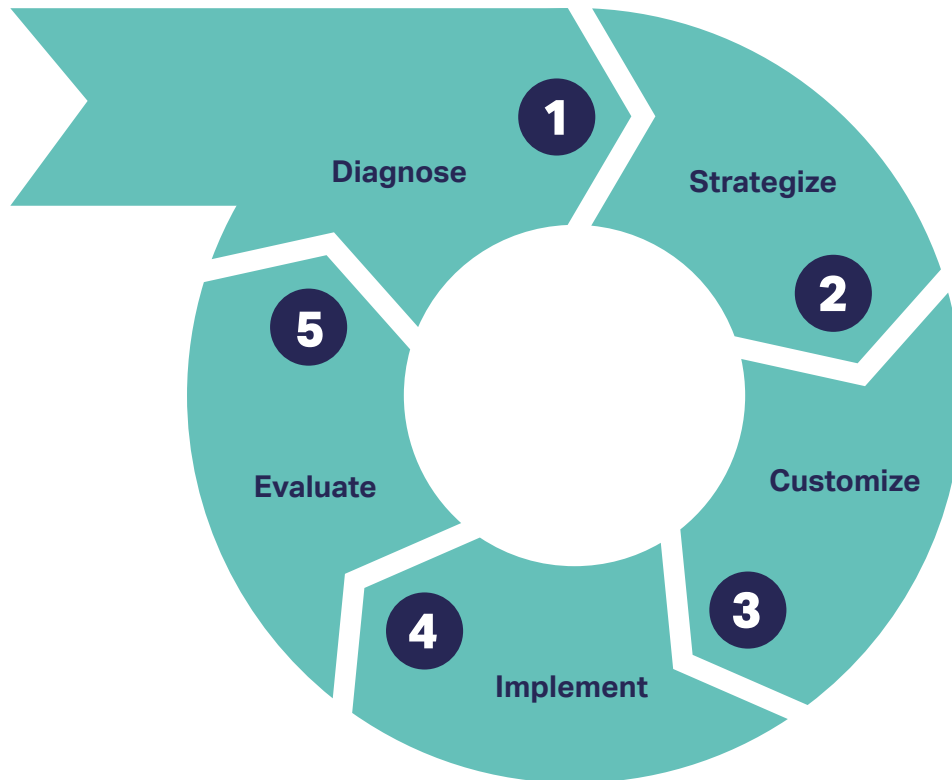


| PRIORITY ACTION AREAS TO ENHANCE MATURITY | REACTIVE | EXPANDING | HOLISTIC | EMBEDDING |
|---|---|--|--|-----------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an EH&W strategy aligned to business mission Build a cross-functional EH&W team Pilot prioritized interventions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widen scope to other dimensions of EH&W Start to tailor EH&W offerings for different employee segments Identify high impact interventions and continue to build business case for further investment Leverage digital and other solutions to personalize support Explore opportunities to promote health and wellbeing in the supply chain | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify opportunities to further integrate EH&W into core strategy Position EH&W as a key performance metric at all levels of the organization Extend employee health and wellbeing initiatives throughout the supply chain | |

Getting started: driving progress along the health and wellbeing journey

WBCSD members have identified a five step process that organizations can follow to help them find themselves within this maturity model and to drive progress along this health and wellbeing journey (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Core steps for organizations to progress along the health and wellbeing journey



CASE STUDY: Leveraging a strategic maturity model to identify local action areas – Novartis

In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, Novartis developed and introduced the Wellbeing Maturity Matrix to help all country branches across its global network advance on their wellbeing journey. The matrix outlines key ingredients of employee wellbeing across a 5-level maturity scale ranging from 'starting', 'developing', 'programmatic' to 'strategic' and 'transformational', where wellbeing is seen as being fully embedded across all business policies and being consistently prioritized.

The ingredients include wellbeing offerings (across physical, mental, and social dimensions), integration into the employee and business life cycle, measurement and impact, local advocacy (leadership), culture transformation alignment, governance and infrastructure as well as people engagement and communications.

The predominant purpose of the Maturity Matrix has been to support progress and assist country-level wellbeing strategy evolution while also allowing for local customization and contextualization. Country branches in partnership with the global wellbeing team, use it as an instrument to evaluate where they are on their journey and identify actions and strategic priorities.

Step 1) Diagnose: Diagnose maturity to identify where your business is today, and where you want it to be in the future

Before embarking upon efforts to develop or enhance an employee health and wellbeing strategy, businesses must first objectively diagnose their current level of maturity when it comes to supporting the health and wellbeing of their workforce. This is a critical starting point and helps the organization to really understand where it is today before considering where it needs to be in the future.

Given the multiple health and wellbeing dimensions that businesses have the capacity to influence, and the often complex and dynamic nature of health-related issues, it can be hard for many businesses who are beginning their health and wellbeing journey to know where to start. Efforts that are undertaken with a lack of systematic, long-term planning, often fall at the first hurdle and result in organizational confusion and employee cynicism.¹⁹ Utilizing a simple maturity framework, such as that shown in Table 1, can help as a first step to unify leadership around common objectives and a direction of travel.

Step 2) Strategize: Formulate and invest in a strategy to drive long term, sustainable business change

A recent survey of global businesses found that around 45% of companies do not have a well-defined wellbeing strategy, despite a clear majority (87%) having wellbeing initiatives in place.²⁰

Many employers tend to offer more fragmented and reactionary health and wellbeing solutions, rather than a cohesive and integrated whole-person strategy. Realizing corporate potential to drive positive health and wellbeing impact across multiple dimensions calls for a more strategic approach that not only consists of interventions and support, but also addresses the more structural challenges at play.²¹

Employee health and wellbeing strategies should not be seen as something that sits separately from broader corporate strategy, as the two are intrinsically linked and, indeed, co-dependent. In a recent survey from AXA Health and REBA, only 19% of private sector respondents said that their wellbeing strategy is closely linked to business strategy.²² Ultimately health and wellbeing strategies that are not integrated into wider business strategies are unlikely to receive the investment or prioritization that they require to really drive organizational change and deliver maximum benefits in terms of health outcomes and returns on investment.

53% of companies surveyed as part of Aon's 2021 Global Wellbeing Survey say that wellbeing is not being prioritized within their organization, and 51% of companies cite financial resources and investment as a key challenge to overcome as they embark upon wellbeing initiatives.²³ It is critical for executive teams to understand the degree to which employee health and wellbeing sits at the heart of long-term business success and how important it is to invest in it as an integral pillar of a robust corporate strategy.

Step 3) Customize: Build an approach that is customized for the organization's needs and those of its people

While all companies embarking on a health and wellbeing journey will have a common goal to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of their employees, the specific levers and pathways taken, the pace of progress and the end state will depend on the businesses' maturity and unique circumstances.

Due to diversity within and between businesses, every journey towards employee health and wellbeing is unique, requiring an understanding of the business context and local culture to create effective strategies. Employee health and wellbeing cannot be removed from its context and its success very much depends on how well strategies and interventions are tailored to provide the right solution, to the right person, at the right time. To support effective customization, it is vital that companies collect relevant local data and engage in meaningful dialogue with employees in specific regions. When customizing their approach businesses can also look to promote health and wellbeing throughout their whole supply chain operations.

Figure 6 below gives an overview of the areas in which businesses can tailor their health and wellbeing initiatives. Incorporating considerations for geographic differences, industry nuances and employee preferences into the foundation and design of health and wellbeing initiatives will drive higher impact and enable consistent and sustainable success.

Figure 6: Overview of the areas through which businesses can tailor their employee health and wellbeing offer



Step 4) Implement: Select and implement the right levers to drive change, while driving organization-wide capability and accountability

While the number of businesses introducing wellbeing programs has increased, many companies are seeing variable results in terms of the percentage of employees who actually participate in them. The Global Wellness Institute conducted a recent survey which found that despite 49% of participants confirming that their employer offers workplace wellness programs, only 31% of respondents had actually engaged with the program in question.²⁴

Once a targeted strategy for employee health and wellbeing has been created, it is essential to tactically implement this within the organization to drive real impact.

One of the key considerations for successful implementation is whether the organization's structure and governance is set up for effective deployment.

Many companies have a fragmented approach to employee health and wellbeing, with various teams such as Human Resources, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Health and Safety, focusing on different aspects of human health in silos. This often fails to address an employee's health holistically, while also duplicating efforts and introducing inefficiencies. To address this, companies should ensure clear communication channels are set up between teams, and consider establishing dedicated health and wellbeing leadership and local champions to ensure the closely interlinked aspects of health feed into one another.

Corporate culture is another essential ingredient for the successful implementation of any health and wellbeing strategy. Culture plays an integral role in creating safe spaces to discuss issues like stress, anxiety, and burnout. This of course starts at the top. Employees will be less inclined to engage in their health and wellbeing if leaders' actions do not match what they say, and

if they do not feel that efforts are authentic. Psychologically safe environments that enable employees to speak up about their health and wellbeing without fear of retribution, judgement or consequences are essential.

In order to realize such environments, employers need to foster employer-employee trust, while continuously being mindful of the boundaries of their employees' privacy.

Ultimately, there must be accountability at every level of the organization and for all individuals. All employees, from the c-suite to operational teams on the ground, play a key role in the successful implementation of programs and the embedding of health and wellbeing across all core business activities. While there is obviously an onus on management to introduce and encourage employees to take part in initiatives, at the same time all employees must also take accountability to utilize the resources available to them to actively address their own health and wellbeing.

Step 5) Evaluate:
Continually monitor performance, communicate success and utilize data to provide proof of value

Research by AXA and REBA emerging in 2021 found that nearly half of employers (47%) say the biggest barrier to understanding the effectiveness of their employee wellbeing initiatives is the lack of key performance indicators to measure against.

Employee health and wellbeing can be a particularly challenging area in which to measure progress. Quantitative assessments can deliver a certain degree of insight but these need to be complemented by detailed qualitative explorations of impact based on employee engagement and surveys.

In order to continually improve their understanding of performance, companies need to iteratively consider what data is currently available and what additional information would help to paint a clearer picture of success – all the while maintaining the utmost consideration for employee data privacy. Table 2 provides examples of performance measures to consider as a starting point.

CASE STUDY: Embedding health and wellbeing through a multi-disciplinary approach – Solvay

To implement its strategy and standards for a Better Life at work worldwide, Solvay has set up multidisciplinary committees at the group's corporate level and site levels that ensure development, cascading implementation and local contextualization of health and wellbeing action plans for all employees.

At the corporate level, the cross-functional committee is sponsored by the Chief People Officer and includes representatives from the employee body, human resources, medical staff, health and safety, and sustainable development. Site-level committees are already operational on many sites and continue to be rolled out globally and bring together managers from the site and operational units, human resources, health and safety, medical staff, sustainable development officers, and employee representatives.

This multidisciplinary approach ensures the sustainability of the wellbeing strategy within the company, drives high participation, and is fully backed by commitment from the top management.

CASE STUDY: Healthy Bodies, Healthy Workplace, Healthy Minds: a multidimensional health and wellbeing approach – OCP Group

OCP Group is committed to fully incorporating employee health and wellbeing into all aspects of their organization's decision-making processes. Roll out and implementation fall under the responsibility of the ESG/Ethics Committee with direct oversight of the Board of Directors.

To implement a holistic health and wellbeing approach, OCP Group has introduced the framework: Healthy Bodies, Healthy Workplace, Healthy Minds, aiming to address occupational, physical, mental, and social health dimensions.

Healthy Bodies seeks to provide best-in-class medical care to all employees and retirees, including preventive awareness campaigns, regular health checks and vaccinations. Healthy Workplace focuses on offering a safe workspace by mitigating risk exposure and providing support in ergonomics. The Healthy Minds component complements these dimensions with efforts around preventing psychological risks, as well as fostering a friendly atmosphere and good quality of life at work.

Table 2: Key elements that can measure wellbeing success within a business

| | EXAMPLES OF QUANTITATIVE INDICATORS | EXAMPLES OF QUALITATIVE INDICATORS |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accident, injury, and mortality rates • Absence rate • Compensation claims • Environmental quality results • Pandemic or emergency readiness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of safety / distress • Level of alertness and fatigue • Confidence in workplace protections |
| PHYSICAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to healthier choices e.g., food options, exercise, etc. • Access to quality healthcare • Level of physical activity • Prevalence of chronic disease and musculoskeletal conditions • Symptoms and comorbidities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy and comfort levels • Absenteeism and presenteeism (e.g., productivity levels) • Feeling of empowerment to be healthy • Intention action gap to make healthier choices |
| MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of workers with flexible arrangements • Prevalence of mental health illness • Use of leisure time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of self- confidence and personal resilience • Happiness and overall life satisfaction • Stress and anxiety levels • Engagement at work levels • Strong sense of purpose in relation to workplace tasks/projects • Confirmation that employees feel psychologically safe in the workplace |
| SOCIAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of participation in non-work-related activities e.g., volunteering, after work events, social groups • Use of annual leave | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of isolation and feeling unsupported • Quality and nature of interactions and interpersonal relationships • Feeling valued by the company • Sense of belonging, Sense of purpose and connection with organizational purpose and culture, - Progression and development opportunities |
| FINANCIAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of debt and savings • Planned vs. actual pension and retirement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of financial security and optimism |

Wherever possible, it is also important to identify and track KPIs that measure the impact of health and wellbeing initiatives upon business performance, alongside direct and indirect impacts upon employees. This is helpful in helping to maintain a strong internal case for continued investment and prioritization of employee wellness throughout the organization.

While collecting these datasets is useful in terms of driving internal decision-making, companies should also take measures to ensure that health and wellbeing performance data is also being publicly disclosed, in line with evolving stakeholder expectations.

While best-practice in this field continues to emerge as the “S” in ESG landscape matures, a number of existing resources such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)'s Culture of Health for Business (COH4B) Framework provide useful reference points.

Conclusion

This report has sought to underline the powerful role that all companies can play in contributing to the vision of a world with the highest attainable standard of health & wellbeing for everyone, by embedding a culture of health and wellbeing throughout their organization.

This represents an important opportunity not only to contribute to the realization of a healthier, happier society, but also to significantly improve long-term business license to operate, innovate and grow.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, although tragic, has presented businesses all over the world with an important inflection point to explore in more depth how they are interacting both negatively and positively with the health of the individuals that are the engine for their success. Businesses that fail to grasp this opportunity run the risk of being left behind as wellbeing continues to establish itself as a critical determinant of talent attraction and retention, as well as an important and material pillar of ESG analysis and performance assessment.

The journey towards embedding a culture of health and wellbeing is a continual one and relies upon ongoing efforts to explore and understand health impacts, driven by thorough assimilation of emerging insight and recommendations from the global medical community and frequent and open engagement with employees.

WBCSD's [Healthy People, Healthy Business](#) project will continue to explore opportunities to support companies on this journey moving forward and welcomes the opportunity for continued stakeholder engagement around this critical topic.



Endnotes

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WBCSD is the premier global, CEO-led community of over 200 of the world's leading sustainable businesses working collectively to accelerate the system transformations needed for a net zero, nature positive, and more equitable future.

We do this by engaging executives and sustainability leaders from business and elsewhere to share practical insights on the obstacles and opportunities we currently face in tackling the integrated climate, nature and inequality sustainability challenge; by co-developing "how-to" CEO-guides from these insights; by providing science-based target guidance including standards and protocols; and by developing tools and platforms to help leading businesses in sustainability drive integrated actions to tackle climate, nature and inequality challenges across sectors and geographical regions.

Our member companies come from all business sectors and all major economies, representing a combined revenue of more than USD \$8.5 trillion and 19 million employees. Our global network of almost 70 national business councils gives our members unparalleled reach across the globe. Since 1995, WBCSD has been uniquely positioned to work with member companies along and across value chains to deliver impactful business solutions to the most challenging sustainability issues.

Together, we are the leading voice of business for sustainability, united by our vision of a world in which 9+ billion people are living well, within planetary boundaries, by mid-century.

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