InsideOut®

Transitioning to the new normal: A mental wellbeing guide for employers

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The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Organisations, Workplaces, Work practices and Employees

In March 2020, the world, its workplaces and our workforces endured sudden and unprecedented challenges, when national lockdowns were announced in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Our generation was confronted with great uncertainties and was faced with the reconsideration of freedoms we have taken for granted for much of the last century.

This phenomenon created a continuum of personal impact, where for some, the lack of normality, loss of routine and inability to meet freely with friends and colleagues was traumatic. The fear of physical illness and the unexpected loss of loved ones greatly compromised many people's wellbeing (physical, social, financial and emotional). Paradoxically, others gained time and space, within which there was an opportunity to reconsider their values, habits, relationships and purpose for the future.

Crucially, in the workplace the myriad of potential effects of lockdown such as furlough schemes, key worker status, redundancy, working from home, hybrid working and reasonable adjustments on employee mental health, cannot be ignored. For many organisations and individuals, mental health and wellbeing gained a new level of focus.

Despite historical stigma creating a barrier to discussing mental illness, companies have been forced to talk more honestly and openly about concepts such as burnout, stress levels, the importance of flexible working and a host of underlying issues, which were already cause for concern before the pandemic commenced.

At the point where many are returning to the office or adjusting to hybrid working models, opportunities have formed to maintain the momentum of proactive, preventative, wellbeing initiatives. Investment in long-term strategies can safeguard mental health, whilst workplaces and workforces go through the next transition. By investing in such an ethos, organisations can realise the human and economic capital from nurturing the mental health of their teams.

Purpose of this guide

At InsideOut, we understand the importance of maintaining a positive workforce wellbeing and are here to help you achieve this. This guide aims to help organisational leaders, Human Resource, Wellbeing Teams and Occupational Health, to plan or upgrade their proactive and preventative mental health strategies to support the transition to a new working world.

Our guide explains the importance of taking a whole-person approach to wellbeing. It highlights key considerations to forming your initiative, from capturing and applying data, to personalising care and supporting a dispersed workforce. We have collated this information from rigorous evidence-based psychological studies and advice from renowned wellbeing leaders. We highlight our expertise and successes using real-world insights on return to work challenges and initiatives, plus testimonials as to how our platform has assisted our partner organisations.

We set out clear strategies for hybrid working and returning colleagues to the office which allows individuals and their co-workers to be on the lookout for signs of anxiety, burnout, stress, low mood, depression and other causes of poor mental health in themselves and their peers.

Finally, we offer easy to implement hints and tips which relate to InsideOut's "11 Areas of Mental Fitness". We believe this document is an invaluable asset to anyone leading the protection and support of employee wellbeing in ways that are effective and scalable.

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The Rationale For Wellbeing Strategies to Support Return Hybrid Working Models

The Rationale For Wellbeing Strategies to Support Return to Hybrid Working Models

With yet another change to the working guidelines and the forthcoming minimisation of isolation restrictions, a chance to transition to a new normal will undoubtedly be very exciting for some, but the prospect of going back to work and engaging with colleagues may be daunting for others.

In fact, a whopping 73% of working age adults have reported being worried or anxious about returning to the workplace[1]. This is expected to increase once the isolation restrictions are fully lifted.

Globally, it has been estimated that 1 in 2 adults will have a mental health challenge and 1 in 3 will deal with an addiction. In the UK specifically, 1 in 4 adults have experienced loneliness because of the COVID-19 pandemic[2].

73%
of working age adults have reported being worried or anxious about returning to the workplace[1]

1 in 2
Adults will have a mental health challenge in 2021 due to Covid-19

(WHO 2020)
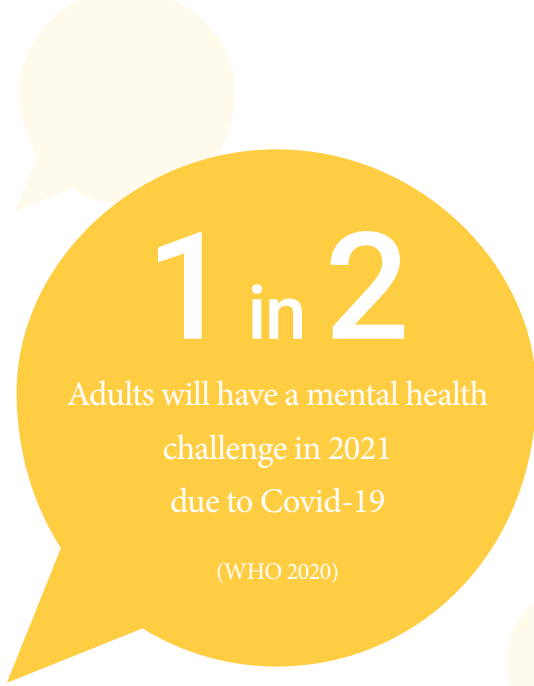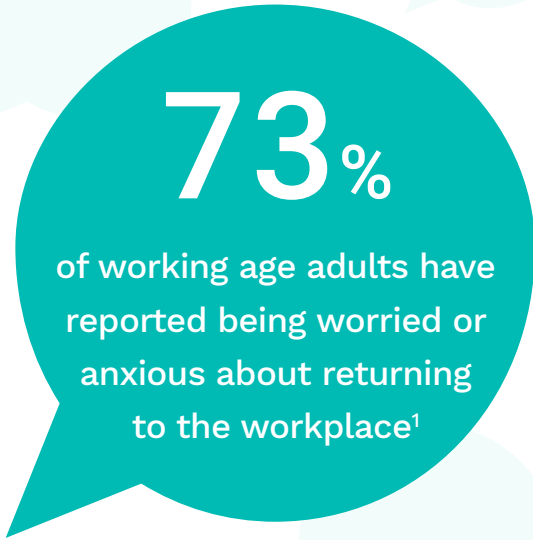
When it comes to returning to work and as restrictions ease again, 46% of people stated that the pressure of socialising was their biggest concern. Another 36% said they were happy to stay at home, 20% were anxious about returning to work and another 23% were anxious about the prospect of having to use public transport[3].

It is estimated that the impact of COVID-19 has worsened mental conditions for 60% of adults, with 57% reporting symptoms of anxiety[4]. Another study found that 37% of respondents said that stress-related workplace absence had increased in the last year[5]. This is on top of the already high 54% of all working days lost due to poor mental health in 2018/2019[6]. Some industries will have been impacted worse than others. For example, a study conducted in the marketing and creative industry found that 95% of respondents reported that their workload has negatively affected their mental health[7].

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Poor mental health is now costing UK businesses up to £45 billion a year, a huge figure which was broken down to be between around £1,500 and £2,000 per employee, depending on geographical location[8].

This newfound data underpins the rationale for responsive and proactive wellbeing strategies.

54%

of all working days lost due to poor mental health in 2018/2019[6]

"Pre-pandemic, we already had a focus on holistic wellbeing. However, the crisis pushed mental wellbeing way up the agenda so we recognised the need to build this into our policies through manager training and easy to access solutions, including for homeworkers. We have found that hybrid working support initiatives have had a hugely positive impact when managed the right way. Our wellbeing policies are founded on direct and honest communication and as we transition back into workplaces, we are operating the strategies on a trial basis and it will no doubt evolve over time. Our board and executive committee ensure they discuss how it is performing on a regular basis.

— *Mica Ross, Head of HR, Numis Securities Ltd.*

Return to hybrid working:
7-Step Action Plan

Return to hybrid working: 7-Step Action Plan

The multiple lockdown periods have created a very steep learning curve for businesses, staff teams and support services alike. The demand for flexible working has taken place alongside the need to manage our own wellbeing needs, whilst supporting our colleagues' emotional health. It has been a tough, long road for everyone involved.

Interestingly, 70% of UK workers believe hybrid working will bring personal benefits, including improved work-life balance, with 50% stating hybrid working will improve their mental health[11]. A recent ONS survey suggested that as many as 85% of workers expect a hybrid approach to work, recognising the value of both home and office work, with the primary positive of the office environment being easier collaboration[9].

70% of UK workers believe hybrid working would bring personal benefits[11]

50% of UK workers state hybrid working would improve their mental health[11]

Many organisations' employees are still divided into those who continue to work only from home, those who will be full-time in the workplace and those who are hybrid workers. It is increasingly important that you take steps to transform your approach to how you manage your teams and ensure that your employees' mental health and wellbeing remains at the forefront of strategic priorities.

In this section, we share our advice on how you can create a strategic plan to lead your hybrid team effectively, simultaneously ensuring that your employees continue to receive the support they need during these uncertain times.

We have created a 7-Step Action Plan, which you can adapt and amend to suit your particular organisational needs and context:

Step 1
Planning: Develop or refine your Company's wellbeing strategy

Step 2
Policy: Develop and refine corporate policies

Step 3
Training: Upskill leaders and managers

Step 4
Planning: Plan a COVID safe workspace

Step 5
Preparation: Create a wellbeing calendar

Step 6
Mental Wellbeing Support: Embed accessible tools & promote services

Step 7
Evaluate: Measure and review KPIs

Step 1
Planning: Develop or refine your Company's wellbeing strategy

It is important to consider how you can continue to support and enhance the wellbeing of all of your employees regardless of their location to avoid proximity bias, after all, your employees are key to the success of your business. If you don't already have a Company wellbeing strategy, now is the time to put one in place, or if you do have one, you may wish to consider reviewing and updating it.

Providing a clear articulation of the rationale behind your wellbeing strategy, its contents and highlighting how initiatives align with your corporate strategy will help support adoption. To form the most effective, relevant and engaging wellbeing strategy, it is essential to listen to your employees' needs. This data can be collected using a wellbeing or mental fitness audit, such as the InsideOut Mental Fitness Survey. Your employees' responses will inform your strategy and action plan.

Commence by asking whether your employees have everything they need to be happy and productive working from home or in the office. This fact-finding process is a bottom-up approach and will enable team members to feel heard and valued, regardless of their position. Focus groups and online surveys can help individuals share their useful insights, which can then inform the new strategic wellbeing plan for your hybrid workplace.

It is important to open a two-way dialogue and create a space for teams to share ideas, raise their concerns and be vulnerable. This will provide an invaluable initial understanding of their unique situation. Once this collaborative communication system is in place, it can be maintained as part of a review and update process for future iterations of your wellbeing strategy.

Ensuring that your wellbeing initiatives are financially well resourced and can continue is critical for maintaining employee happiness long-term. It is worth developing a plan upfront to support the sustainability of successful initiatives so they can be maintained long-term and the raised expectations of staff teams continue to be met e.g. investing in training for peer-led interventions.

A compassionate and authentic leader takes a genuine interest in employees through empathy. Being honest about your own struggles makes you both more relatable and approachable. It is important to practice what you preach.

Step 2
Policy: Develop and refine corporate policies

As an employer, you have responsibility for the wellbeing of your staff, whether employees are in the workplace or working remotely. Now is the time to make sure hybrid working policies are updated or developed if you don't already have any, with ways of working clearly defined and proximity bias eliminated for hybrid and remote workers.

Proximity bias suggests that team members who go into the office and are physically closer to other team members and leaders, are perceived to be more dedicated and therefore may become more successful compared to those who work remotely. Team members in the office may get more time with leaders, whilst remote team members may feel isolated and not included in meetings and events. It is of utmost importance that promotions are considered for all employees in a fair and equal way.

Your policies and procedures should cover most issues, including employee mental wellbeing, health and safety, reasonable adjustments and so on. Alongside the statutory and mandatory adjustments for disabled staff covered by The Disability Act, additional flexibility may be considered as compassionate reasonable adjustments for staff with changed or challenging circumstances such as carers and those looking after the vulnerable. For example, their hours may need to change to allow them to manage personal commitments, or there may be aspects of their role that need to adapt to help them carry out their job, or additional training, mentoring or support required to help them cope.

When employees are hybrid working, it is your responsibility as their employer to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing whether they are in the office or working remotely. Employees also have responsibilities to keep themselves safe and to protect their organisation. Policies should detail health, safety and wellbeing when working from home; how your organisation will keep the workplace safe during the COVID-19 pandemic; and how you will meet the latest employer requirements detailed on the Health and Safety Executive government website.

Organisational responsibility remains for managing the performance of employees regardless of their working location. New policies may be required to cover the performance management of home workers; if there is a need to monitor employees' performance how would it be monitored? Consideration should be given about how to be consistent with monitoring the performance of home and office workers to avoid proximity bias. Any policy and procedure should respect the employees' privacy in order to maintain trust, reduce stress and enhance productivity. In some circumstances, inequitable policies could also breach legal and human rights.

Training for policy producers and dissemination of new policies across workforces should be provided to ensure smooth rollouts. You should continue to review and update your policies regularly. It is important to take note of any changes to ways of working as directed by respective Governments and update your policies as required.

Step 3
Training: Upskill leaders & train Wellbeing Champions

Ensuring that senior executives, board members and managers are aware of the link between hybrid working, wellbeing and performance and productivity is mission-critical. Implementing mental health training for all senior leaders and managers across the business will contribute to the successful embedding of a positive mental health culture organisation-wide.

You may wish to consider setting up a team of Wellbeing Champions. The responsibilities of the Champions is to ensure that all employees are aware of the latest hybrid working guidelines, wellbeing initiatives and understand what support is available to them if needed.

Champion teams should comprise staff from all levels of the business. This should include board members, senior management leaders, HR personnel, mid-tier and junior colleagues to form a diverse representation of the whole workforce. Once you have set up your Champion team, make sure you provide them with relevant training to upskill them accordingly. This may include mental health first aid training or mental health workshops delivered by companies such as InsideOut.

You should also train all Champions in your wellbeing strategies, wellbeing interventions and wellbeing tools. To be able to assist colleagues most effectively, your Champions should know how to signpost employees to external wellbeing support platforms, such as InsideOut, and understand what types of support can be accessed/which may be most suitable e.g. 1-2-1 talking sessions with accredited Coaches

and Therapists or preventative tools, such as InsideOut's Mental Fitness Programme – a whole-person programme designed to enhance and maintain holistic health.

Events, such as InsideOut's HR Manager Series, are a great way to ensure all staff, regardless of location, are upskilled in topics such as communicating effectively with hybrid team-mates; managing hybrid teams remotely; maintaining work-life balance; promoting equality and team building and preventing proximity bias.

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Step 4
Planning: Plan a COVID safe workspace

Many employees are concerned with going back into the office. Recent research shows that factors including being in a closed environment, proximity to others, childcare implications and the daily commute are causing employees heightened levels of anxiety.

If you are considering adopting or reinstating a hybrid working plan, now is the time to review your Health and Safety risk assessment for COVID-19. This may include implementing, for example, regular workplace COVID-19 screening, providing free masks, installing readily accessible hand sanitiser dispensers and where possible, distancing desks and opening windows.

Evidence-based checklists, such as "SALIENT" (see below)[10], are a great way to encourage your employees to create a safe home or office-based working environment. Whether you are re-configuring your office or home workspace, think about how you can optimise the following elements:

Sound
For some, focus and attention is drawn to unpredictable sounds e.g. some people need background noise while others need silence or have hypersensitivity to certain sounds

Air
We are affected by airflow, temperature, source and scents

Light
Our behaviour is influenced by the source and brightness of light and this should be adaptable for personal preference

Image
We are stimulated by certain imagery and affected by clutter

Ergonomics
We adapt best to personalised furniture and equipment e.g. standing desks, creative spaces or comfortable, informal lounges

Nature
We are affected by exposure to natural elements e.g. plants, windows with views of nature and fresh air

Tint
Our behaviour is affected by the presence of different colours

Designing a workspace is about more than just having a space that looks attractive and inviting. Enhancing workspace safety will be key to boosting productivity and performance. It will contribute to how employees feel about coming into the office and their desire to do so.

It is important to take time to plan how the space could be shaped to support colleagues in doing their best work. Work with colleagues on any redesign by asking them what they need to feel comfortable and productive. Questions on what set-up they had at home, how they want to use the office space and what would make a difference in helping them make a successful transition back to the office, will help boost their focus and productivity. It's important to acknowledge that everybody has different and varying preferences and needs.

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Step 5
Preparation: Create and/or update your wellbeing calendar

Included within your Wellbeing strategy should be an organisational, team and individual wellbeing programme of events that encourage healthy, active lifestyles. The events should cover the four pillars of health: Financial, Mental, Nutritional and Physical. We recommend including activities and events that cater for a diverse range of needs, circumstances, learning styles and preferences. You may wish to develop a calendar with all the events listed and share this with your employees so they know what is happening and when.

Try not to describe wellbeing activities for employees based in separate locations differently, this will help avoid any feeling of proximity bias, segregation or isolation. Make sure the wellbeing calendar is easily accessible, highly visible and promote it regularly. Track uptake of the various events to monitor engagement levels to see what works best. We suggest gathering data on the direct and indirect wellbeing impacts of the events and activities to assess cost-effectiveness and assist future scheduling. Think about using inspirational and engaging tones which positively promote your messaging about your wellbeing-centric ethos.

It is necessary to be realistic and focus on personalised outcomes as well as the meta-level company mission. Asking for feedback and seeking suggestions for improvements will help you inform plans and events.
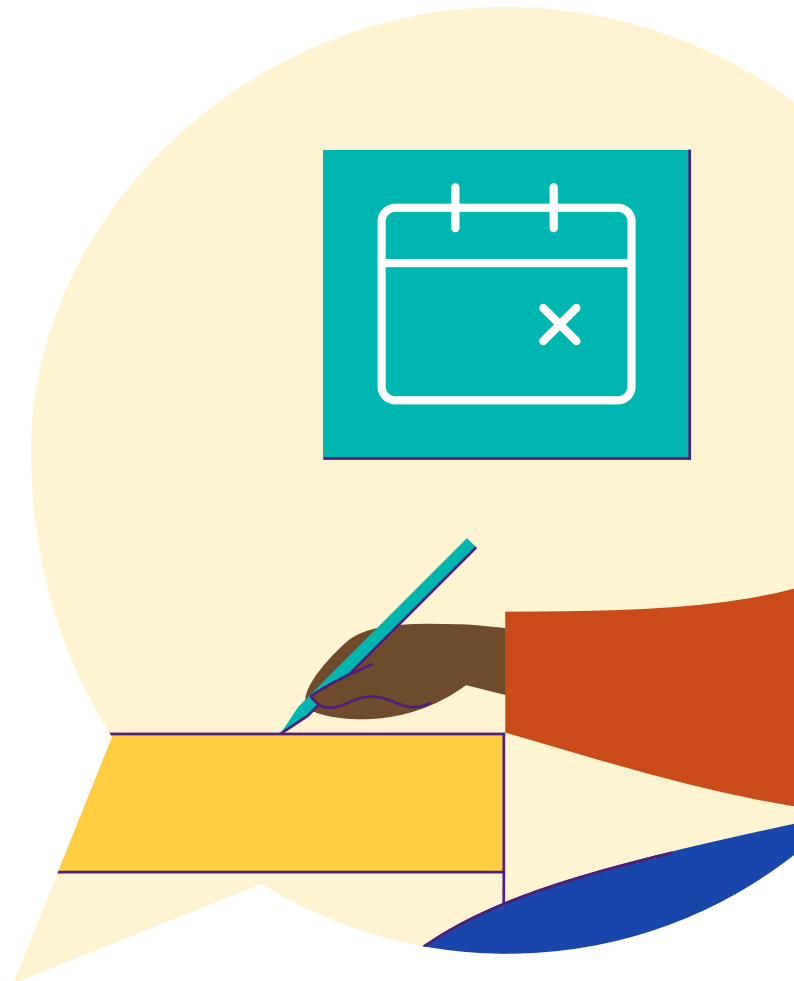
Step 6
Mental Wellbeing Support:
Embed accessible tools & promote services

Clearly communicate and provide details of wellbeing services e.g. Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or Private Medical Insurance (PMI) products that you have purchased or any other external innovative mental health support platforms, such as InsideOut is a digital solution providing 1-2-1 video or telephone sessions intelligently matched to expert Coaches, Therapists and Clinical Psychologists without the need to triage calls and personalised, preventive self-help tools.

Multiple modes of support services are required over and above an EAP or PMI as a one-size-fits-all approach does not cater for a wide variety of needs, learning styles, availability, motivation levels and personal preferences.

Clearly communicate the details of external support services and how they can be accessed — this will promote wider adoption. This is especially important for those who struggle with internalised or perceived stigma around mental illness - this can often lead to barriers in asking for help when needed. We also recommend considering the messaging you use to promote your wellbeing tools, support services and resources. Make sure it is self-empowering, inclusive, proactive and positive.

Support services or resources should be made available across all locations and to all employees regardless of grade to avoid any sense of (proximity) bias within the organisation. Clear signposting, especially for self-opt-in support platforms such as InsideOut, will enhance ease of access and uptake of your wellbeing and support toolkit - they should all be easy to find, understand and utilise!

Step 7
Evaluate: Measure and review KPIs

Your Return to Hybrid Working and Wellbeing plans should include soft goals and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are measurable. During the implementation phase, data should be collected to measure the impact so that early barriers can be identified and removed.

The team leading on the implementation of the plan should feel able to give informal feedback and provide suggestions in a formal meeting or around the water cooler. A whole team review process should be encouraged whilst also making room for individual views that highlight variance.

Developing long-term third-party relationships with mental health providers such as InsideOut will help to deliver your long term wellbeing goals. For example, you could set up appropriate impact measures such as those related to the InsideOut Mental Fitness Index, which covers 8 areas of wellbeing. You will then be able to identify and resource areas of greatest need and sustainably empower employees to be self-managers.
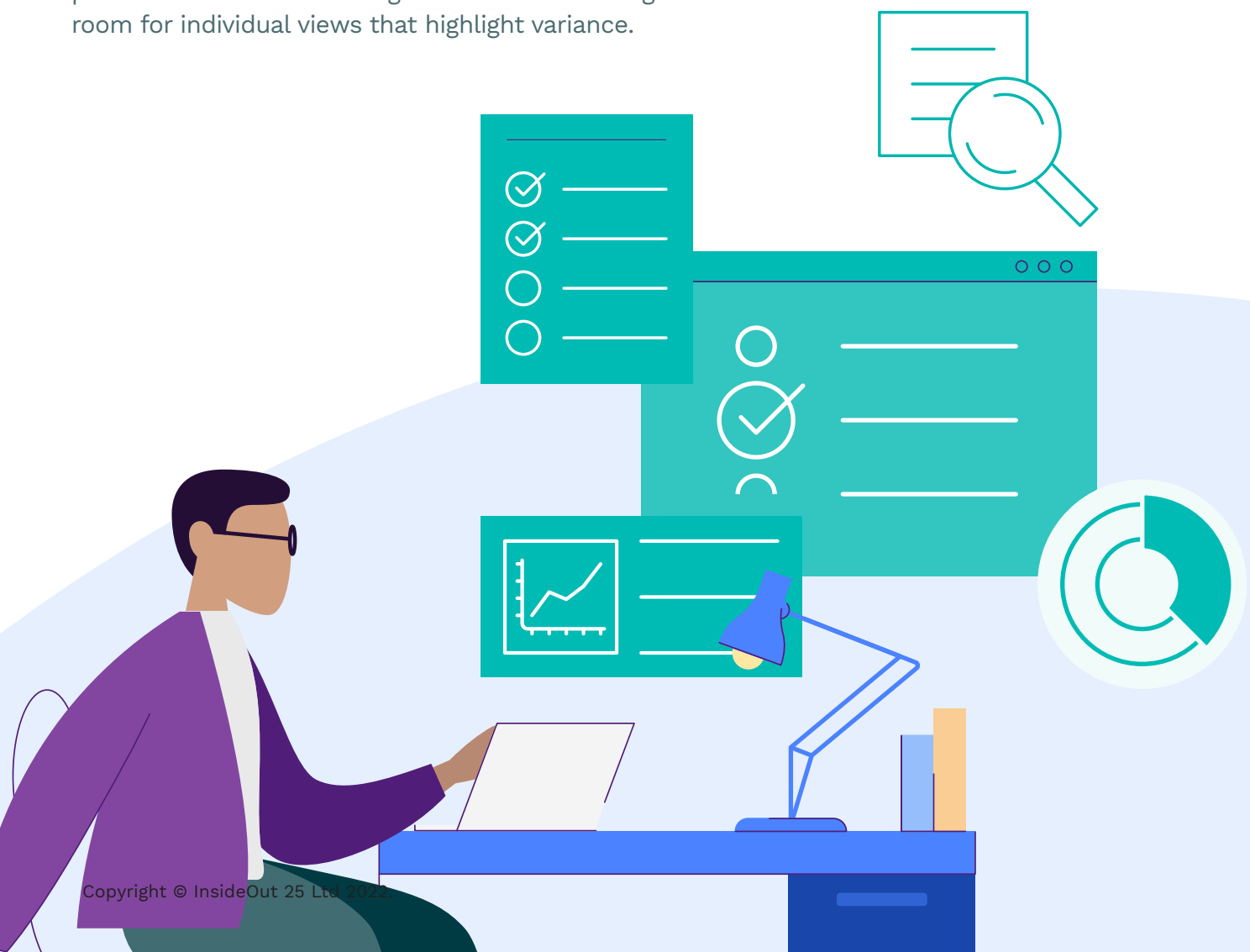
Adopting Your Plan:
Taking a proactive, preventative approach to employee wellbeing

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Adopting Your Plan: Taking a proactive, preventative approach to employee wellbeing

Every employee has mental health. Every mind is unique and each employee's mental resilience and response to a struggle, challenge and change is different. Each employee will be at a different point from surviving to thriving; disengaged to engaged; struggling to being focused.

Understanding the links between our mental, physical, nutritional and financial health allows for a proactive and preventative approach to be taken to workplace wellbeing. From here, we can support employees by being responsive to their circumstances and needs whether they work full time at home, in the office or somewhere in between.

The severity of mental health challenges that we can experience ranges on a spectrum from mild stress to severe depression, for example. Building mental fitness and resilience through increased mental literacy gives us tools to remain happy and productive when we are in a good place, or the ability to cope if life throws an unexpected challenge our way. Challenges may come in the form of financial worry, work-related stress, chronic illness, relationship struggles, poor diet, poor sleep and so on.

Moving the conversation forward to that of a preventive one, enables us to encourage employees to focus on building mental fitness to help prevent serious challenges from arising at a future point.

Our BEST-Self model ©InsideOut

Investing in a hybrid working wellbeing-centric ethos means you can improve performance and productivity by empowering your employees with the bespoke and personalised resources they need to thrive in work and life. Company cohesiveness is augmented as workforces are united by shared values and comprehensive support.

Whilst the pandemic has been an extremely challenging period for everyone for different reasons, we have an opportunity to take lessons learned and build upon them when designing our organisational strategy for returning to a hybrid way of working.

Overcoming common concerns: Learning from Industry

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Overcoming common concerns: Learning from industry

Our hybrid working planning recommendations are based on expert advice and scientific studies, however, there is no prescriptive one-size cures all approach. Reviewing with your team the interventions that you put into place, checks that they are effective in the context of your workplace and relevant for the variety of needs of employees within your team.

Here, we look at 6 of the common concerns that survey studies have shown employees have about returning to work and provide tips and examples of industry best practices for each. These are:

Coping with social anxiety

Managing burnout

Understanding mental health challenges

Managing proximity bias

Re-establishing relationships

Adjusting to the new normal

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Coping with Social Anxiety

Overview

Moving out of lockdown and the easing of protective measures, involving more travel, more social ways of living and working, may mean employees need to more come into closer proximity with other people. The prospect of interacting with different people, managing new timetables and engaging in noisier social settings can be a daunting thought for some people. It may trigger increased levels of stress for many and even deeper anxieties for others.

Figures

46% of employees stated they were worried about coming into close contact with other colleagues and 42% were concerned about keeping adequate social distance from other people. 38% of employees have stated that they are concerned about catching or spreading Covid-19 while commuting and 37% whilst in the workplace[11].

Top Tips

- Allow for a transitional period for employees, where productivity and output may be lower than usual levels.

- Recognise that staff will need the time and mental space to adjust to new routines.

- Build time for mindfulness activities upon arrival at the office.

- Make any reasonable adjustments to workspaces for those who struggle with proximity.

- Acknowledge that anxiety is often caused by uncertainty and fill communication gaps with clear and compassionate information.

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Coping with Social Anxiety
Case study

"Overnight we asked 3,000 employees to work from home, and immediately adapted frontline working practices, including a campaign highlighting our role as key workers to keep employees safe, creating hundreds of Covid-secure workplaces. In addition to these plans, Anglian Water recognises the vital impact that flexibility and openness to different working needs can have on employee health and wellbeing. As we quickly adapted our workplaces to be COVID safe, they were opened up to staff who needed to come in for a physical or mental wellbeing need (i.e. unsuitable home working conditions, domestic abuse). Now, we have adapted our offices to be a space for collaboration and connection where people will come for large meetings and social interaction, rather than to sit at a desk all day".

— Vicki Sloan, Head of Wellbeing, Anglian Water

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Managing Burnout

Overview

According to a recent report, Britons work an average of 42.5 hours a week, putting them above the European average of 41.2 hours[12]. Burnout can develop if a person has been under stress for a prolonged period of time. It may feel like a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion. Sometimes people develop burnout as a result of compassion fatigue where they have been supporting other people to the detriment of their own health and wellbeing.

Figures

One study found that 52% of survey respondents are suffering from burnout in 2021, a rise of almost 10% since pre-pandemic levels. 27% are worried that returning to work will negatively impact their current work-life balance[13].

Top Tips

- Create a culture of daily check-in, taking proper lunch hours, having regular screen breaks, getting up to move around and having time-outs in intense or long meetings.

- Ensure your employees make time to switch off after work and unwind. Look out for adverse signs, such as emails being sent out of hours. Make sure there is a clear distinction between working hours and non-working hours.

- Encourage your employees to switch off at the end of their day and spend restorative time with their family or friends, undertake a hobby, do some physical exercise or engage in relaxation techniques.

- Make sure your employees take their full holiday allowance, especially at a time when travel is limited and there is less facility to go abroad.

Role modelling all of these elements makes them more credible, valid and increases engagement. It is important to encourage senior leaders to role model these behaviours.

Managing Burnout
Case study

"During lockdown we very quickly revamped our interview process, our hiring process, and in particular our onboarding process. We believed that was very important to do because stress, anxiety and burnout often go hand-in-hand with joining a new company at the best of times. We adjusted the onboarding for home workers and made sure we really put some effort into setting initial conversations up between new joiners and people in the business, sending them all lots of equipment, and inviting them to a zoom lunch since we couldn't take them out. We found that small nuanced changes like this actually had a really big impact."

— Cali Gold, Head of People, Yulife

Understanding Mental Health Challenges

Overview

Understanding mental illnesses can be a complex and daunting task for many people. There are around 300 mental health disorders identified in one of the diagnostic textbooks for mental health professionals (DSM V)[14]. The 7 main areas described are mood disorders; anxiety disorders; personality disorders; eating disorders; psychotic disorders; trauma-related disorders; and substance abuse disorders.

Pre-pandemic, the most commonly diagnosed conditions you were likely to come across amongst your team were depression and general anxiety. The impact of the pandemic has confused matters further with higher levels of symptoms of health and social anxiety, agoraphobia, post-traumatic stress, obsessive-compulsive disorder and complicated grief.

There is even research into a new mental illness known as post-pandemic stress disorder. This, coupled with unhealthy habits and behaviours of avoidance and withdrawal from normal functioning, makes keeping employees safe from mental illness an even greater challenge than ever before.

Figures

The SARS global outbreak in 2003 was associated with a 30% increase in suicides in people over the age of 65[15]. So far data has shown that more than 42% of people surveyed in the US in December 2020 reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in December, an increase from 11% the previous year. Data from other surveys suggest that the picture is similar worldwide[16].

Top Tips

- Normalise the conversation around mental health by sharing personal stories to help reduce stigma.

- Be aware of the signs, symptoms and durations that show us a team member is having an acute or chronic period of mental illness that requires help and support.

- Undertake Mental Health First Aid training, to recognise that there are 7 main groups of mental disorders.

- Recognise that we all develop different coping strategies in our lifetime and there is no single one size fits all solution when it comes to maintaining a positive state of mind.

- Reduce stigma by fostering an honest dialogue about mental illness and an empathic support culture where staff can ask for and receive help as and when needed.

Understanding Mental Health Challenges
Case study

"We deployed PDF guides on working remotely, managing and engaging teams virtually, managing your mental health and physical wellbeing, building resilience and maintaining energy levels. We also established virtual classrooms with over 80 teachers for employee's children so that it created space and time for our employees who were trying to balance home-schooling, work and wellbeing. These all proved very impactful and the experience has shaped and informed the way in which we've blended in the themes of mental wellbeing, resilience, and energy management into our learning and development offerings – from entry level to our most senior leaders."

— Marc Howells, VP, Astra Zeneca

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Managing Proximity Bias

Overview

Working from home has brought with it a wealth of practical benefits for many including reducing the commute, financial savings, being home for their children or other relatives' care needs. For others, lockdown brought with it financial hardship, isolation, loneliness and Zoom fatigue. As some employees transition back to the workplace or hybrid working, others are left to work at home which can prompt proximity bias and isolation.

Figures

Studies show an increasing reliance on using online sources of information and support since the commencement of the pandemic. One study showed that 33% of under 30 year old employees looked up information on and sought support for mental health issues online. 92% of internet/intranet users reported higher confidence, awareness and understanding of issues. 76% feel in a better position to support the mental health of those around them. 88% experienced an improvement in mental wellbeing, workplace issues or relationships[17].

Top Tips

- Remember that everyone has a different set of circumstances to navigate as restrictions ease.

- Showing empathy and support for those who are in need is crucial.

- Educate and engage your employees on practical challenges in relation to transition back to the workplace or into hybrid working models by making these a part of your daily conversation.

- Keep reviewing what is working and what is not - don't be afraid to try new things!

- Constantly invite dialogue with employees to gather their feedback.

Managing Proximity Bias
Case study

"In terms of impacts of the lockdowns, we have given considerable focus to financial wellbeing. As key workers we concentrated on keeping our people employed, but we appreciated that for some, the impact of Coronavirus affected overall household income and led to significant challenges. In response to this, we created a novel fund (Employee Assistance Fund) to give extra financial support to colleagues who were experiencing financial hardship because of the Coronavirus pandemic."

— MVicki Sloan, Head of Wellbeing, Anglian Water

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Re-establishing Relationships

Overview

Going forward as we transition to the next era of work-practices, it is important to take proactive steps to foster good interpersonal interactions. Employees will likely be concerned about how their professional relationships have changed during the pandemic. Inclusion was at the top of the list for many HR leaders pre-crisis and following the initial stages of the pandemic it has become increasingly important[18].

Figures

Multiple studies have found that employees who felt they had a "connected culture" in their workplace were twice as likely to be more productive compared to those workplaces without this sense of connection.

Top Tips

- Practice being emotionally open and honest with yourself and your employees, the more we practice the easier it becomes. When feeling vulnerable it can be very easy to feel like we are the only ones struggling, but sharing our emotions allows us to connect to others on a deeper level and build our support network.

- Encourage connectivity and bring your hybrid team together by ensuring everyone feels included. This is even more important when teams are divided and everyone is not physically present in the room.

- Alongside formal work events and regular team check-ins, arrange informal opportunities for employees to connect with one another e.g. through fun interactive weekly online quizzes.

- As rules relax and you feel more comfortable in social situations, attending in-person social meet-ups and having regular face-to-face events will help to build deeper relationships, especially with those you have not met outside of Zoom!

- Use interactions as an opportunity to cement your company values and build on your shared identity, celebrating your achievements as a team and building a compliment culture.

Re-establishing Relationships
Case study

"Employees are always our most important assets and it was pretty obvious that the disruption Covid was causing would put many professional and personal stresses on them and their relationships. The first thing we did to mitigate this was to ensure open lines of communication between managers and staff, based on understanding the need for flexibility. It was essential to encourage dialogues about mental health and provide access and opportunities for inter-connectivity between teams."

— Mica Ross, Head of HR, Numis Securities Ltd.

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Adjusting to the New Normal

Overview

It may be tempting to rush back to the old way of working, whilst for many employees, we are now in a phase of adjusting to a 'new normal'. Some people are naturally more resilient to change, are curious about it and thrive on the challenge of newness. For others, uncertainty around change can create underlying anxieties which can manifest as worries or catastrophic thinking patterns.

Figures

Studies show that the majority of people believe that for the foreseeable future, we will still continue to suffer the same things that we are experiencing now, just with less social isolation. Large numbers of survey respondents said that the idea of resuming normal routines was not sparking positivity[19].

Top Tips

- Set SMART goals that focus on manageable changes in areas that they can control and reinforce mental wellbeing. This could take the form of a 3H Plan - Health, Holistic, Habits.

- Educate employees to be patient and committed to new practices - it takes anywhere from 18 to 254 days for a new behaviour to become habitual (20).

- Encourage employees to communicate regularly with colleagues and their Line Managers about how they are feeling about the 'new normal' and hybrid working set-up.

- Self-empower employees by suggesting they make a reflective journal and use apps to track their mood, such as InsideOut, to see what changes are helpful and which are hindering.

- Ask staff to trial the daily practice of gratitude exercises, using an app such as InsideOut, which are proven to build resilience to future change.

Adjusting to the New Normal
Case study

"As part of our move away from (the old normal of) performance management to enhancing outcomes we have rolled out a new company-wide approach to building support and feedforward capability in the organisation. For example, to enhance wellbeing during the return to workplace phase we have created a space for line managers and their team members to have quarterly check-in's, and for staff to have monthly coaching conversations. These have contributed to our employees feeling supported with their resilience and developmentally stretched to grow."

— Marc Howells, VP, Astra Zeneca

Transitioning to the new normal: A mental wellbeing guide for employers

Summary

Summary

Each employee's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns has been unique to them, with many facing one-off, or enduring multiple challenges that have negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing.

The pressure of increased workload, changing responsibilities, adapting to new ways of working and the requirement to balance competing personal responsibilities with work has been extremely tough for many organisations and their employees. More favourably, one great outcome has been the greater focus, particularly from a leadership perspective, on mental health and wellbeing to ensure those who need support, receive it in a timely way.

Now is absolutely the time to be prioritising employee mental wellbeing as we work towards a smooth transition to a new normal.

We hope you benefit from this guide and wish you all the best for a strong recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

Take care and be well.

If you would like to explore how InsideOut can help you with your transition to hybrid working or the re-development of your wellbeing strategy, the InsideOut team would love to speak with you. Drop us a line at hello@lettheinsideout.com.

Platform options

Bespoke Package

Whether you're looking for a preventative mental fitness tools or early intervention talking therapies and coaching sessions, we've got your back. We can tailor our platform's features to meet your needs.

Holistic Care

Health is holistic. All elements are interlinked. By addressing physical, mental, nutritional and financial health we empower employees to take control of their wellbeing.

Personalised

Integrated interactive tools and exercises, personalised to the employees' needs help to minimise symptoms and prevent chances of relapse.

Evidence Based

We work with leading industry experts. Using a unique range of evidenced based, clinically backed interactive tools we cater for anyone wanting to improve or maintain their mental wellbeing.

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#itsoktonotbeok

To find out more about how InsideOut can help support you and your organisation or book a demo email **hello@lettheinsideout.com**

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