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# Why assess employee resilience and wellbeing?

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With the pandemic continuing to bring high levels of stress and challenge, employee mental health and wellbeing are at risk. So, what can employers do to protect their people from burnout? We know that understanding the wellbeing needs of employees is crucial to knowing how to respond. Here we show you how to assess employee resilience and wellbeing and why it is essential to support your people through difficult times.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO ASSESS EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING?

When employees struggle, we can quickly jump to conclusions about what they need. We might make assumptions based on our own experiences or what we hear from others. We might think that because one or two people voice concerns about things, the same problems apply to everyone else. But it may be that those people are just more vocal than the others.

If we base resilience and wellbeing interventions on our assumptions, they are likely to fall short of the mark. This may be costly for businesses and money ill-spent if the root causes of stress are not addressed.

In reality, we can't fully know what people need or want to boost their resilience and wellbeing unless we ask. Investigating the key sources of stress and overwhelm is the most important step to ensuring these needs are met.

By asking employees about the challenges they are struggling with, employers demonstrate that they are genuinely listening. Opportunity is created to not only listen but also to respond. When people see employers actively listening and responding, they feel more confident that their employers care. And this builds trust and collaboration. Trust is one of the fundamental building blocks of resilience and wellbeing in the workplace.

## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO ASSESSING EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING?

### Fear of what you will hear

Asking employees how they feel about their sources of stress and their wellbeing needs can be difficult. When employers ask these questions, it can feel like they are opening themselves up to a threat. They may not want to know the answers or like what they hear. They may fear being exposed or worry that they will be unable to fix the highlighted problems. It can be hard to acknowledge these fears. And this can become a barrier to assessing employee resilience and wellbeing.

### Pressure to act

Pressure to act can become another barrier to assessing resilience and wellbeing effectively. It is desirable to respond quickly to employee distress, manage sickness or resolve problems urgently. However, these sorts of pressures encourage employers to fall back on their assumptions about what may be going wrong. When they do this, they are more likely to rush into putting interventions in place before correctly identifying what is going on.

### Feeling criticised

For some employers, the fear of employee cynicism about resilience and wellbeing can prevent them from getting a complete picture. People who have lived with uncertainty, new challenges or overwhelm can become critical of their employer. They may feel upset and hostility towards their employer due to not feeling protected or supported.



This type of anger can threaten employers, and they may react defensively, becoming critical in response. This can break trust and make it more difficult for employers to listen to their teams. It can feel easier to leap in with an intervention without fully understanding what underlies negative employee emotions. Employees would then be less likely to engage with these interventions if they don't feel listened to, reducing their effectiveness.

### Sharing responsibility

Employers need to remember that resilience and wellbeing in the workplace are not just their team members' responsibilities. Instead, it is a collaboration between employees and employers that both commit to change. By assessing resilience and wellbeing, employers give employees the firm message that they are concerned and prioritise their people's mental and emotional state. This shows employees that their employer is not afraid to have those difficult conversations and accept that some of the difficulties may be due to their role as a leader. Ultimately, listening and responding to employees shows authenticity and genuine willingness to help.

## ASSESSING EMPLOYEE RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING

A survey is a great way to assess employee resilience and wellbeing. Gathering feedback on the main difficulties and challenges people face helps understand their impact. This critical information primarily provides employers with the tools to develop a clear strategy and action plan. Secondly, it offers the opportunity to measure the effects of interventions and assess employee wellbeing and performance improvements.

Perhaps more than ever, assessing employee resilience and wellbeing needs to be prioritised. The pandemic has posed numerous challenges to so many of us. People have faced considerable personal and professional challenges, which has taken a toll on their mental health. Assessing resilience and wellbeing challenges helps us understand the pressures people face at work and at home. It allows us to understand the impact on work functioning, which provides essential information to inform a wellbeing strategy and action plan.

## WHAT MAKES A QUALITY WELLBEING SURVEY?

Wellbeing is multifaceted, so a survey aiming to understand the challenges a person or team faces will need to investigate personal and professional experiences, considering the key social, psychological, and environmental elements.

Typically, a wellbeing survey will need to look at:

- Factors known to influence wellbeing. These may include social connection and belonging, feeling valued, daily routine, diet and exercise, work/life balance, self-care and sleep. Assessing existing sources of support and wellbeing within the workplace and how employees feel about these is also important.
- The sources and impact of threat. We need to evaluate the effects of demands, physical environment, change, conflict, job security and external factors. And we need to understand their impact on employee physical and mental health, work/life balance, alcohol consumption and finances.
- Standardised measures of mental health, resilience and wellbeing. These provide a more in-depth analysis of stress levels and functioning. They establish a baseline against which to measure the impact of future resilience and wellbeing interventions.

Employees need to feel confident that their responses are anonymous if we want them to answer questions honestly. When people think they might be personally identified, they will be less likely to complete the survey. Commissioning an external organisation to conduct your employee wellbeing survey can help to increase feelings of anonymity. It is also more likely to elicit better response rates and greater honesty. This will provide a more accurate picture of work challenges and workforce mental health.



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is a highly qualified and experienced clinical psychologist from the UK. Felicity is particularly interested in applying psychological knowledge to employee development. She helps people make lifelong changes to be the best they can be and live the life they want to live.