

# THE VALUE OF EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE



**NICK KEMSLEY**  
EXECUTIVE FELLOW

For a copy of Professor Nick Kemsley's latest research [click here](#)

**W**hen undertaking some recent research into the world of talent management, one of the things that stood out was the changing nature of the relationship between employee and employer.

Organisations were beginning to take much more of an interest in how employment impacted staff at a personal level, in terms of the physical and mental health of individuals.

Consequently, we conducted personal interviews with HR and non-HR leaders to get under the skin of the topic, and to highlight common themes and differences. What soon emerged, was that an organisation's relationship with an employee wellbeing agenda is very definitely a journey, with a number of well defined steps:

**1. Keeping employees safe** – although of obvious importance, this is unlikely to drive benefits beyond a reduction in injury and absence, and does little to proactively drive the employer value proposition (EVP).

**2. Keeping employees productive** – the motto here is that **a healthy workforce is a productive workforce** and considers the working environment, flexible working and health benefits.

**3. Engaging employees and leaders** – this stage is characterised by the need to develop insights around the business benefits of wellbeing for business leaders and a move into a more educational and enabling

approach for employees, including nutrition and gyms.

**4. Supporting the whole employee** – here an organisation has moved from just physical wellbeing into mental wellbeing, opening up the challenge of culture, among others.



**5. Creating a culture of employee wellbeing** – this is where a number of factors build upon one another – from metrics through to the engagement of business leaders and employees, together with aligned processes and structures – creating a holistic offer. But what really differentiates here is that words are matched by actions; aligned messages and behaviours are role modelled from the very top.

The importance of employee wellbeing is growing significantly, driven by a number of factors, from the rising cost of healthcare insurance to the increasing co-dependency between wellbeing and EVP in the light of changing career models.

Nearly all organisations we spoke to were getting bogged down in attempting to transition from physical

to mental wellbeing. Where successes occurred, the common factors were an investment in line managers' awareness and capability and a role-modelling of the right attitudes and behaviour by the organisations' leadership.

The learnings for HR start with measurement. Employee wellbeing is the kind of subject that emphasises HR's long-standing capability gap around metrics and data analytics. The use of more insightful and relevant metrics helps HR to better articulate the case for a more proactive, holistic and extended application of employee wellbeing; this in turn helps to create the leadership engagement essential to the generation of real value in the arena.

The research also shows that in the majority of organisations, action lags behind ambition by a significant degree, and that the evolution into wider lifestyle change and mental wellbeing areas is dogged with challenges. Those who have managed to make some headway have done so by engaging senior leadership and creating a positive perception of care and authenticity in the approach among the employee population.

Measurement remains the Achilles' heel of HR, with difficulties in moving from an intellectual to commercial articulation of the issue being a critical factor in success or failure to engage an organisation. If there was one factor to focus on going forwards, this would be a good one to target.

To summarise the report's findings; HR needs to play catch-up with employee wellbeing, and focus on **six key areas**:



Wellbeing is a business issue, but it is also one that HR must play a lead role in championing and supporting. If the function can make progress in closing the lead that the topic has gained on them, then this will be reflected in a

better hit rate between the promises made to employees and the reality that employees actually experience in an organisation. This in turn will drive an improvement in business performance and, most importantly,

will help to manage the risks to employee health that can have an impact at not just the organisational level, but at the societal level beyond. This is the prize.

**NICK KEMSLEY IS AN EXECUTIVE FELLOW OF HENLEY BUSINESS SCHOOL.** NICK WAS A SENIOR HR LEADER, BEFORE SPENDING FIVE YEARS AS CO-DIRECTOR OF THE HENLEY CENTRE FOR HR EXCELLENCE.