



International  
**Wellbeing** Insights  
People, Culture & Wellbeing

# The Case Against Stress Management

Taking you from distress to de-stress



DIAGNOSE



DEVELOP



THRIVE

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# The Case against stress management

Our mission has always been to create a happier, healthier, more resilient world, a world that no longer requires our services, to ensure corporate wellbeing is an integral part of how every organisation is run. It is our mission to transform the modern workplace so it supports and maximises your wellbeing (see our homepage guide on The Benefits of Corporate Wellbeing), however not everyone subscribes to our perspective.

Since our inception in 2003, we have heard almost every argument against developing a corporate wellbeing strategy. Some of these arguments don't bear close scrutiny, yet others appear on the face of it to be more 'plausible' and understandable. So let's take some time to investigate the case against wellbeing and begin to understand the barriers to implementing a culture of wellbeing, and consider ways to overcome them.

## 1. Let's talk money

The biggest barrier for organisations to take action to tackle stress and poor wellbeing at work is the cost. It's often seen as a nice to do, and a luxury. Business leaders like to take calculated risks and so evidencing a clear Return On Investment (or Return On Engagement) is crucial in the decision making process.

The biggest hinderance to this is the perceived lack of evidence on the cultural and commercial gain from a well thought through wellbeing strategy. Many workplaces aren't the ideal labs for research. For many, once the strategy has been defined, and initiatives are implemented, the lack of on going measurement to evidence improvements proves to be a challenge.

Are you aware of which initiatives have yielded the most impact and is your overall strategy bearing fruit? Data does exist, and it's worth taking the time to do the research to gather the evidence you need to create a strong and robust Business Case. We suggest looking at data from the UK's Health and Safety Executive (HSE), CIPD, COPSOQ, WHO, WEBWEMS, The Stress Management Society, Robertson Cooper, amongst others.

Also by conducting a Wellbeing Insights Audit and taking the time to understand the true cultural and commercial costs to your organisation, you can be clear regarding ROI. Effectively your wellbeing programme should be paid for through the money you are hemorrhaging through having a high stress culture. Stress and poor mental health is inevitably already directly and indirectly costing you money.

## 2. Stress in an individual issue. It's not the organisations responsibility!

Some organisations believe that stress is a personal issue and that it isn't their responsibility. It could be argued that, for many, the source of their employees stress stems from their home life; therefore absconding any duty of care. The question is, if you get stressed at work do you leave it at your workstation before you go home? Conversely if you get stressed at home by a situation in your personal life do you leave it on the kitchen table before you leave for work?

Regardless of the source of the stress, if it impacts an individuals ability to function optimally at work, it then becomes an employers duty of care responsibility to support them.

If we consider our mental and emotional resilience using our 'Bridge' analogy, it's important to bear in mind all the stresses and pressures we experience in life end up on the same bridge. We don't have a separate bridge for our home life and a bridge for work. Whether you like it or not, the reality is that all stress in your life, whether personal or work related is likely to carry over in to other areas of life and is likely to affect your work, productivity, relationships, sleep and general wellbeing.

Remember that 'Demand Exceeds Resources' so if you have a case of an individuals bridge bowing and buckling due to excessive stress/pressure than its important to consider what can be offloaded and what additional support can be provided to increase their resilience to cope.

## 3. Let's not talk about it in case everyone develops stress

One of the most ridiculous reasons we hear from an organisations that has chosen not to embark on the journey to creating a culture of wellbeing is that they feel if they start talking about stress, it will open up a Pandora's box. The belief is that if we don't mention stress then no one else will either, therefore the problem doesn't exist and it will all just go away. The reality is the reverse is true. You may not pick it up early, however if you are only registering the problem when it has already progressed you have exposed your self to some very serious risk management issues – accidents, injuries, death, high staff turnover and increased absenteeism to name a few of the consequences.

Not knowing or denying there is a problem doesn't mean there isn't a problem or that it will magically go away. Given how serious the problem is in modern society, and to give it some perspective suicide is the main cause of death in a man under the age of 45 in Europe today (approximately 84 men in Britain alone every single week), ignoring or failing to act is a very dangerous game to play.

Giving people the right channels to open up about stress doesn't in itself create stress. Bringing the issue and challenges into the open allow us to explore strategies to create a more positive culture. Be clear of the underlying causes of workplace stress, and engage your employees in being part of the solution. An organisation that attempts to hide its stress issues ultimately looks at best unsympathetic to its people and at worst is breaking the law. In the UK those laws include Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

## **4. We will deal with it when it arises**

This is a reactive approach to managing stress where an organisation only starts to look at wellbeing once an employee's wellbeing is compromised. While this is better than ignoring the issue (see approach 3 above) it is a short term solution for the organisation. In all likelihood unless the sources of stress and anxiety are tackled and/or the culture in the workplace is cultivated the problems are likely to reoccur. A more long term approach is the proactive managing of the wellbeing strategy of the company, fostering a culture of positive wellbeing and giving people the skills, confidence and tools to thrive.

## **5. It would just be a tick box exercise**

It is easy to see why people feel like they need to jump on the wellbeing bandwagon when there is so much in the press about stress and mental health. A wellbeing strategy is not a tick box exercise. That would imply you can do some one off initiatives that will fulfil the criteria and then you are done. Effective wellbeing needs to be ingrained in the DNA of your organisation. It should be part of the reason you exist and why people want to join you and turn up for work every day. Wellness is a right not a luxury and part of your legal and moral duty as an employer.

## 6. It is a nice to have but not essential

Ever considered having a wellbeing strategy and programme but feel it is not essential to your organisation? You are not alone. According to the CIPD only 8% of organisations have a wellness strategy. Yet we are in the midst of a stress epidemic with 86% of people saying that feel stressed at work at least one a week. Interestingly simply paying your people more isn't necessarily the best way to motivate or keep your employees. Whilst a wage increase will help temporarily boost moods, it is making your employees feel valued long-term with non-financial benefits and rewards that will bring about long term happiness. In fact workers stay in jobs where there is a good work-life balance (37%) and a good team (34%). Fostering a culture of wellbeing is essential for businesses to remain competitive and attract and retain talent.

## 7. We have not had a problem before so why do anything now?

We are delighted that you haven't yet experienced a problem of poor wellbeing in your organisation. Unfortunately the statistics show though that is only a matter of time that this issue will be finding its way in to your workplace. 12.5 million working days were lost due to work-related stress, depression and anxiety in 2016/17 (49% of all working days lost). That's the highest figure in almost a decade and a trend that has steadily climbed over the past 9 years.

It is far better and much less costly to prevent stress and poor wellbeing if you have a robust strategy in place rather than retrospectively tackle issues across your organisation.

## 8. It won't last!

If approached as one off initiative without any planning or strategy behind it that could well be the case. We are living in increasingly stressful times and the workplace is constantly changing. World mental health and stress figures all show that the issue is steadily rising and statistics on loneliness show we are becoming more disconnected than ever before. Add to this that younger generations of workers are increasingly expecting a workplace they feel valued and supports their wellbeing. The demand for cultivating a people, culture and wellbeing strategy is only going to become more prevalent.

## 9. Where would we even start?

Employers are rolling out wellbeing strategies at an unprecedented rate, but, for those who are new to the topic, knowing where to start can be a challenge. Close to half of UK companies currently have a clearly defined wellbeing strategy. Virtually all of those without a wellbeing strategy are planning to implement one over the next couple of years. For those looking to introduce a wellbeing programme, the process can seem a minefield. How do you get buy-in? What level of investment is required? What strategy would work and how do we evaluate it? The list of questions can seem endless.

It doesn't have to be a daunting task however. As with any journey you are making you start with the destination and work out where you want to go and that will help map out the course you take. Our Wellbeing Insights Audit acts very much like a SatNav by taking this GPS approach.

A challenge for any organisation is how to measure the efficacy of the programme when presenting results back to the board and to staff. As long as you have conducted an audit at the outset of the programme, you will have a baseline with which to compare the results against. The key things to measure include participation rates, impact on employee engagement and effect on insurance claims and absence rates.

**If you would like to explore how we can support you in developing the business case or conducting a Wellbeing Insights Audit please contact us today.**



**International  
Wellbeing Insights**  
People, Culture & Wellbeing

## FREE Business Stress Consultation

We provide a range of services across the UK and internationally. We are always happy to discuss how we can support you. Please get in touch today and take the first step in reducing the impact of stress in your organisation.

We look forward to supporting your wellbeing journey.

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