

# WHY SOCIAL WELLBEING IS CRITICAL TO WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY AND HOW TO ADDRESS THIS DURING COVID-19



OUR SOCIAL WELLBEING IS A KEY COMPONENT OF OUR OVERALL HEALTH. AS HUMANS, WE'RE NATURALLY SOCIAL BEINGS AND RELY ON CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER PEOPLE TO FEEL HAPPY AND HEALTHY IN LIFE. WHETHER IN OUR PERSONAL LIVES OR AT WORK, BEING PART OF A COMMUNITY, MAINTAINING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND FEELING VALUED BY OTHERS ALL CONTRIBUTES TO OUR SOCIAL WELLBEING.

By why is it important in the workplace?

As we already know, the overall wellbeing of employees can have a tremendous impact on workplace productivity and engagement. So, it comes as no surprise then, that the social wellbeing of your employees will in turn have a huge impact on how they feel on a day-to-day basis and therefore how they operate. In fact, research has shown that employees with 'excellent social wellness' are more productive than those with 'poor social wellness'.

Since lockdown began in March, social wellbeing has become dramatically more significant in the workplace and beyond. This new era of social distancing and remote working has disrupted our social connections and plunged people into a working environment that is lonely, isolating and, for many, uninspiring and disengaging. As a result, employees' productivity levels are at risk of dwindling, and it's up to businesses to come up with new ways to break down social barriers, promote communication and reconnect people.

## WAYS TO NURTURE YOUR EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL WELLBEING DURING THE PANDEMIC

There are a number of different initiatives you can introduce to further support your employees' social wellbeing during this challenging time.

### ORGANISE VIRTUAL MEET-UPS

Thanks to Zoom, Microsoft Teams and the like, it's very easy for remote workers to stay connected with other people, but we miss out on the informal conversations and 'water cooler' moments that used to form an essential part of our working days. For many of us, coffee breaks are now a lonely experience and we are no longer having in-the-moment conversations with colleagues about our weekends, Netflix recommendations and other non-work-related topics.

That's why virtual meet-ups are a great idea. They essentially replicate those 'water cooler' moments in a virtual space, so that employees can catch-up and re-connect with each other from wherever they're working.

We've been doing these twice a week for over four months now, and they've had a such a positive impact. Invites are sent out to everyone in the business ahead of time and they can join the call if they're available to simply chat with colleagues for half an hour. Speaking from personal experience, just having a conversation with someone from work, possibly even someone you haven't spoken to for a while, can make a huge difference to your mindset. That small, seemingly insignificant social exchange can set you up in a positive and productive headspace for the day ahead.

### COMMUNICATE REGULARLY

To feel socially connected to their colleagues, part of a positive community and productive, your

employees need to be in the loop and know what's going on, which means you need to be communicating with them regularly. Whether you send out quarterly newsletters, weekly check-in emails, post updates on your employee hub or organise virtual events, it's important to keep your employees informed and ensure there's a regular open line of communication. Being 'in the know' will reinforce your employees' sense of belonging and strengthen team spirit which will stimulate productivity.

Technology has reshaped the way we communicate at work, but it's valuable to make sure you add that human touch to your internal communications. Of course, you still want to get specific information and messages across to your people, but, where relevant, using more personable methods and injecting a bit of emotion will have a bigger impact. You'll then really drive the message that you're all working together as part of a team – thereby supporting your employees' social wellbeing and enhancing their productivity. This is especially critical during this challenging time with so many changes happening and there being so much uncertainty about the future.

### ENCOURAGE RECOGNITION

Feeling valued and part of a community is key to social wellbeing and maintaining productivity in the workplace. That's why it's important to not only celebrate your people but encourage them to share their gratitude and appreciation of each other. Peer-to-peer recognition is a really useful tool because it helps build a culture of appreciation and makes saying "thank you" an everyday part of life at work. Employees are empowered to nominate other people in the business and highlight what they've achieved or how they've excelled. Not only does being recognised by a colleague emphasise how valued an individual employee feels, it demonstrates how they contribute to the wider team.

On top of that, peer-to-peer recognition is a truly inclusive tool that facilitates communication and promotes positive co-worker relationships. Any employee from any area of your business can log in, nominate a colleague and equally interact with other instances of recognition. Your employees' individual voices are amplified across the business, which opens up new lines of communication and provides an alternative way for them to connect with each other, no matter where they're working.

There are a number of other ways you can nurture your employees' social wellbeing at this time and help them maintain their productivity levels. While we've faced new challenges this year, it's important to note that social wellbeing should be a year-round priority and part of your wider employee wellbeing strategy. Your culture plays a huge part in this and should be inclusive, foster a healthy work-life balance and promote social interactions.

