



Upstart

**Breakthrough
Strategy**

The What and Why of Workplace Wellness

**Is digital transformation helping or hindering our
journey to healthy working environments?**

Dominic Pride

November 2019

Does Digital Help or Hinder Workplace Wellness?

A recurring theme of digital transformation is the difficulty of bringing about change in organisations and individual behaviours. Tech vendors sell on promises of greater productivity, but this can be wiped out if employees become physically and mentally unwell. We look at how digitisation is making work unhealthy and helping provide solutions.

So?

In the last decade, discussion of workplace wellness has transformed from “hard” topics of health and safety and healthcare benefits to a wider conversation around mental health, wellbeing and employee engagement. In western economies, the shift to knowledge based work has taken away the dangers of land and factory labour, but brought with it a host of modern ailments ranging from musculoskeletal injuries to [burnout](#) and depression.

Since the start of the 21st century, digitisation has increased pressures on all staff. The information which mankind creates is rising exponentially, and the workplace is where much of that is created and shared at speed. Expansion of communication channels (e-mail, messaging and workplace social media), is leading to cognitive overload. AI and automation are setting expectations that more can be done with less, and that is speeding up the pace of functions such as customer service. Combined with overall productivity pressures, this is contributing to absenteeism and [disengagement with work](#) among low-and mid-level knowledge workers.

At the same time, workplaces are now being used as a delivery channel for health messaging and behaviour change programmes, addressing specific occupational health risks as well as wider health problems such as diabetes.



So What?

No surprise then, that these trends are driving a global market for Corporate Wellness which is [worth \\$53bn](#) and growing at around 7% CAGR.

There are defensive and proactive business reasons for employers to invest in workplace wellness.

Defensive: a key driver for programmes is reducing risk; the direct cost of litigation from workplace-related harm ranges from RSI from poor design through to stress-related suicide. Worldwide, employers are under increased pressure to act on lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes and obesity; they have a twin mission to reduce corporate health premiums and avoid future liability claims.

Digital tech has a role to play in both sedentary lifestyles and mental health. Email - and now messaging and group chat - can take the office workday round the clock, something identified as a known stressor.

Lack of downtime from office matters [has been proven to prevent recovery](#)

Proactive: there is also evidence that workplace wellness can improve productivity. Absenteeism is linked to workplace engagement. The unwritten “psychological contract” with workers can be strengthened by the belief that employers care for the overall wellbeing of their staff. Metrics from wellness providers show reduced absence through sickness for employers who engage with them: In 2010 a widely [publicised Harvard meta-study showed ROI for reduced health costs](#) and absenteeism. As the decade ends there is an increasing realism: earlier this year a [Jama study](#) showed greater rates of positive health behaviors but no significant differences in clinical measures of health, healthcare spending and use, or absenteeism.

Moving further away from direct impact on the bottom line, being a positive place to work impacts HR metrics, [namely retention and recruitment](#). Factors such as health benefits, environment design and workplace communities have an intangible yet “priceless” effect on attracting and retaining talent,

Digital tech can also provide solutions. In the US, key tools such as [Omada](#) and [Livongo](#) are tackling lifestyle related diseases, while digital programmes such as [Sanctus](#), [Calm](#) and [leso](#) are able to deliver mental wellbeing.

So Now What?

There are compelling reasons for employers to be involved in workplace wellness. Delivering best-in-class schemes is essential for any company which competes for talent globally and claims to have a stake in society.

While global employee benefits providers are able to package a bewildering array of services, introducing them into an organisation requires cultural awareness and a high degree of relevance; what works for a competitive New York brokerage may not be appropriate for an African bank with a high stake in society.



Conclusion

Execution is everything

We recommend understanding and thinking before considering how to introduce digital wellbeing solutions. Here are three things you should consider:

Metrics. What are the hard and soft metrics you want to influence ? How close to the bottom line are they, for example are you looking to deliver operational cost savings within the year or softly amplify your recruitment spend with positive employer branding in the medium term?

Culture. What is the organisation’s culture and learning style? How are new habits adopted and crucially, are all levels of management supportive of change?

Digital Skills. How digitally-literate is the organisation and its workforce, both inside and outside work? Digital initiatives can only work if underlying behaviours and tools are there. We suggest examining [national](#) and company-specific levels of digital literacy.

Digital technology is disrupting every business - **including yours.**

Change happens at unprecedented speed, but strategy consulting is broken, stuck in the slow lane of the 20th century.

Upstart is different. We provide Strategy as a Service, empowering your business to understand, think and plan in near real time.

Visit us at [**weareupstart.com**](https://weareupstart.com)

Or contact us at

[**upstart@weareupstart.com**](mailto:upstart@weareupstart.com)

