

Create a Wellbeing Experience Through Wellbeing Analytics: For a Well-Culture Start by Measuring Wellbeing

Written by Melis Abacıođlu, Founder of Wellbees

Summary

The problem

Since the pandemic first began, the issue of employee wellbeing has become a top priority for organisations. Recent studies have shown that the average number of employees who report being "well" is just 32%. Despite the large budgets spent in this area, employers have not been able to fully ensure the wellbeing of their workforce.

The solution

The first step towards solving this problem is to find the source of the issue. In order to do this, it is essential to change to a management style that "reads" and "listens" to the wellbeing of employees. Understanding employees properly is a tough challenge for companies. In order to build a healthy organisation, they will need to decide which, and how much, of their employees' data they will listen and pay attention to.

How to do it?

AI-based HR analytics can help organisations to measure wellbeing. While planning the analytics they will look at, human resources departments also need to include metrics that measure the wellbeing of employees - namely 'wellbeing analytics'.

New operating system of HR: Wellbeing experience

If the idea of employee wellbeing brings to mind eye roll-inducing activities like seaweed smoothies and eye yoga (yes, there is such a thing!), then we understand. I have been an entrepreneur in the field of employee wellbeing for the past 10 years and, believe me, Pilates with goats does not interest me at all (yes, there is such a thing too). During this time, employee wellbeing has increased in both scale and importance. Today, employee wellbeing constitutes a global market worth \$61 billion, according to data from the Global Wellness Institute - and it has been strengthened further by a consumer market worth \$1.5 trillion, according to figures from McKinsey.

Contrary to what I wrote in an article for HBR previously prior to Covid-19, employee wellbeing is no longer up for debate. It is now one of the main focuses of HR departments, and a crucial area of spending. According to data from the Future Workplace 2021 HR Sentiment Survey, 68% of human resources professionals placed employee wellbeing as their top priority. Similarly, research by IBM found that 77% of CEOs from leading companies said employee wellbeing would be their top priority after the pandemic. Despite this, data suggest that the reality is different. According to a survey conducted for Gallup's State of the Global Workplace, just 32% of global employees state: "I feel very good". If true, then where is all that money and effort going?

A 2021 report, *The Definitive Guide for Wellbeing: The Healthy Organisation*, by Josh Bersin - a human resources consultant, author and entrepreneur - looked at 100 institutions across five continents. Of the companies creating environments where the majority of employees said “I’m well”, they were 2.2 times more likely to meet their financial targets, 2.8 times better at adapting to changes and 3.2 times more able to engage with and retain their employees. However, there's a particularly exciting element to this – these companies are not just paying attention to their employees’ wellbeing as a box-ticking exercise.

It remind me of a quote by Sesil Pir, a member of the human resources board at Wellbees: “We all want to create great cultures, but we want to solve the issue by taking a pill”. Bersin’s research supports this too. He found that those companies building truly “healthy” organisations addressed the issue by creating different solutions at each level, considering whether they fitted into the culture and investing significant amounts of time in doing so. According to this model, let’s rank the steps companies can take to build the healthiest organisation:

Employee health and safety: This is an environment where employees are treated as simply workers, and there is insufficient - or an absence of - leadership support. The focus is solely on additional benefits, health and safety. (33% of companies are at this level.)

Individual wellbeing of employees: Organisations where personalisation is beginning to take place. Employees are treated as individuals, and different aspects of wellbeing are addressed. (24% of companies are at this level.)

Healthy work: An environment where the way of working and workload are compatible with wellbeing. Relevant opportunities for cooperation and individual growth are provided, there is importance given to accessibility and employees are treated as partners. (28% of companies are at this level.)

Healthy organisation: An evolving organisation where wellbeing is addressed strategically and holistically at the board level. It is an environment with active leader support and a culture where the focus is on business, employees and organisation. (Just 15% are at this level.)

To be able to visualise this, let’s imagine you were the CEO of an e-commerce company. If you were to consider employee wellbeing based on the Bersin model, your company would look like this at each level respectively:

1. There is a medical centre that is easily accessible for all employees, and healthcare staff can also be reached by phone. All health-related precautions are taken correctly and on time.

2. In addition to the above, there is an employee wellbeing program that is easily accessible to all employees.
3. Also, the working style of all employees (such as the breaks for packers and drivers) is considered in line with the wellbeing model. Those in management actively focus on helping things run smoothly for employees. Teams work together to reduce the workload by establishing a system, and this issue is actively discussed.
4. Along with the above, employees are offered opportunities for self-improvement and to take on new roles. Wellbeing is part of the company culture and the human resources department is not the only one responsible for it. What's more, all individuals, managers, and stakeholders play an active role as co-creators of an effective wellbeing culture.

At the LOOP Summit we held in 2021, the name we gave to Bersin's "healthy organisation" phenomenon was "wellbeing experience". This title is inspired by employee experience (EX) - and we believe that "wellbeing experience" (WX) is a superior, more modern approach that companies can take. Allow us first to explain what employee experience is, because this will help us to understand how to build a healthy organisation in the way mentioned above. As the poets say: "Do not turn the page yet! All these thoughts will become connected."

Scott Dinwiddie, an American human resources consultant and digital health and employee experience strategist, calls Employee Experience (EX) the new operating system of human resources departments. He dubs it as the grandchild of customer experience (CX) - and companies who update themselves according to this operating system will benefit from a 5-0 advantage, according to research. The numbers will make your eyes pop out of their sockets. According to findings from IBM and MIT, in companies where human resources strategy is handled through the lens of employee experience, there was 23% higher work performance, 25% higher profitability and twice the customer satisfaction.

Identifying the moments that make a difference

The employee experience approach is more than a simple design-focused thinking exercise - it is a real and permanent strategy, according to Dinwiddie. Sticking to this principle, we must group employees into different categories and map their journeys at work. Unlike annual employee surveys, we need to listen to their opinions across different areas every day, week, month and quarter, and identify the moments that make a difference for our organisation. To give a few examples of what these moments - which will vary for each company - may look like, it could be talking about the first day of work, the end of a project, an employee's newborn baby or even the resetting of a password to login to their account. Then, we listen to feedback about these moments and create initiatives for improvement. Then, we listen a little more and...you get the picture! We eat, we sleep and we update our practices for human resources management based on feedback, and then we repeat the whole process.

HR analytics for “listening”

As the title suggests, the key word here is “listening”. The most comprehensive way of listening is to use human resources analytics. However, when we look at the number of companies using them, it is clear that we are still at the beginning of the road - just 17% of organisations currently use this advanced practice. According to Bersin's report, companies who “listen” have a 7.3 times more engaged and retained employee population. They are also 2.6 times more likely to meet their financial targets.

When we look at the levels of human resources analytics, there are four parts: descriptive, diagnostic, predictive and prescriptive. The first step is to clean up the data that we have, which we call descriptive analytics. This is then followed by steps to diagnose, predict and prescribe. In short, by listening to employees using human resources analytics, we can learn what happened in the first step and why – and then work out what might happen next and what we should do about it.

For example, let’s say we are measuring with wellbeing analytics indeed and that we saw that the AI-supported sentiment analysis is currently decreasing. We can then compare this data with the average scores of self-reported emotion and sleep as well as previous data from the same data set, and reach the root of the problem through the word cloud. Voila! (Microsoft, with Azure AI technology, can perform a company-wide emotion analysis by analysing the sentences written by Wellbees employees without seeing any of their personal information.)

How can we listen to the employee?

The most important prerequisite for beginning to listen is to get permission. It is critical to work with teams in a transparent manner, and to find out where, how and to what extent we can listen to them in this way.

You might recall the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the penalty paid by one of the world's largest retail giants in 2020 for intrusive human resources analytics. Extracting analytical data from people's emails without their knowledge is creepy - both legally and in terms of human rights. For this reason, it’s important to be clear and empathetic when starting to listen. We also need to draw boundaries, and decide how many people it would be useful to listen to when looking at department-based data - because it is not about *how* many people we listen to, but *what* we listen to. Because if we are in a position to understand who shared what in a group by inference, you heard the bell, the contest is over, come back.

Lastly, and most importantly, in addition to establishing what we will listen to, we also need to decide what the purpose is...appearing to not pay attention to what we listen to risks dissatisfaction and unexpected resignations.

Once the prerequisite has been met, there are then three ways to listen: surveys, focus groups/interviews, and wellbeing metrics. In order to use these tools within wellbeing analytics, it is important to know what to listen to so that you can hear that the employees - and, ultimately, the organisation - are “good”. According to science, employee wellbeing has different building blocks. Different researchers suggest that there are various ways of measuring wellbeing. The PERMAV model was created by Martin Seligman, a psychologist, educator and one of the most prominent figures in the community looking at positive psychology and wellbeing theories. Scott Barry Kaufman's Theory of Self-Management with Maslow, and Bersin's "healthy organisation" are other models in this area.

I would like to surprise everyone by saying that the issue of which theory to choose for a wellbeing metric is a bit unclear. First of all, although all studies have a scale, it is difficult to capture this data quickly and frequently. Secondly, there is an absence of headlines for people to say: “yes, this is how wellbeing is measured.”.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider this issue through a more pragmatic lens. There is data that can be measured through wellbeing analytics and that, for the reasons above, may not be appropriate to measure or easy to capture. For this reason, we suggest embracing all of the theories mentioned above and measuring using a variety of tools.

Positive feelings: Sentiment analysis through artificial intelligence

Emotional health: Questionnaires, emotion measurements and focus groups

Physical health (such as step count, sleep, water and nutrition): Indicated through surveys, focus groups and phone apps

Social health: Analysis of healthy communication between locations or departments, the common interests of employees and analysis of texts shared in the open environment

Occupational health/commitment: Indicated through calendar integration

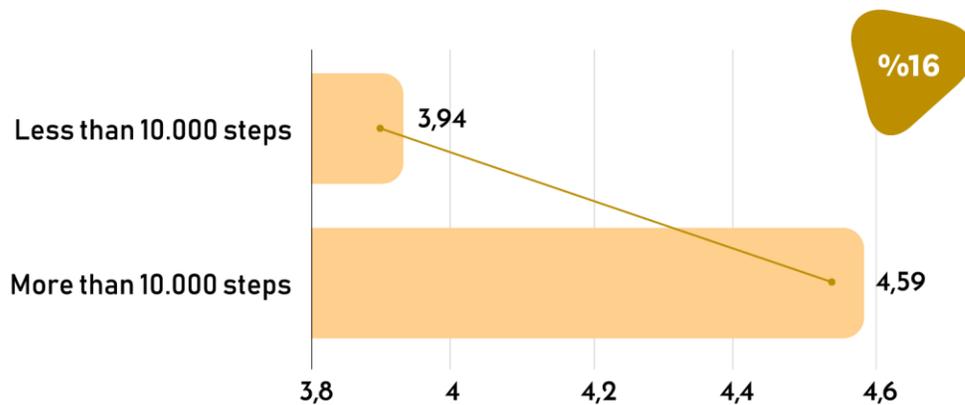
Wellbeing analysis can be conducted, through surveys and focus groups, on topics like the meaning of wellbeing and financial health. We feel it is best to follow a path that is set depending on the unique needs of individual organisations.

To measure or not to measure: that is the whole of wellbeing!

So, where and how can organisations begin to carry out a comprehensive wellbeing study? It would be useful for me to use, as an example, research we have already undertaken on employee wellbeing. Take the case study of 300 people working for a technology company. When we measured the wellbeing of the company, although it had a young and dynamic staff, we discovered that they were moving very little and were complaining about their quality of life.

WELLBEING METRICS EFFECTS

1000 < employee technology company



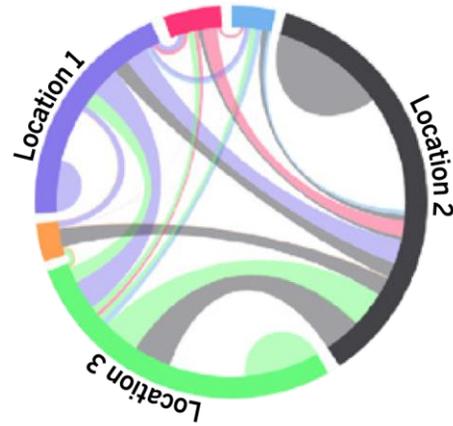
Those who take more steps feel **16% better.**

Seeking to increase general wellbeing, the company decided to conduct a study in the area of physical activity. We responded to these needs with a competition comparing the number of steps employees completed. This had the result of increasing the average number of steps company-wide by 73%. However, we did not stop the study here, but went on to analyse its secondary effects. We discovered that for employees who increased their average number of steps, there was a 16% improvement in emotional state. Due to the nature of the analysis, we didn't know whether the employees took more steps because they felt good, or whether they felt better because they took more steps. However, positive changes in these two areas at the same time was a result we wanted. Other research on this subject also shows (e.g. Kelly, P. et al., British Journal of Sports Medicine, 2018) that those who do more steps do indeed feel better. This proves that we are on the right track.

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

1000 < employee food production company

Employees who
socialize more with
their colleagues feel
15% better.



Taking another example, social interactions within a company were affecting the wellbeing of employees significantly. The company in question was a manufacturing business with more than 3,000 employees. Their greatest issue, especially during the pandemic, was that some white-collar employees from their headquarters did not come to the office while production continued. This situation created tensions among employees, and efforts had to be made to re-strengthen the bonds between them.

Our first step was to map out their social interactions to understand in which region(s), and between which departments, this issue was most pressing. This showed us where to start in rebuilding relationships. We then launched initiatives as a result of this digital data analysis, supported by focus groups. This included both in-person and online activities to prepare teams for a hybrid period while the relationship was strengthened. After this was put into place, we saw a 15% improvement in emotional state among the groups who had seen their social relationships simultaneously strengthened.

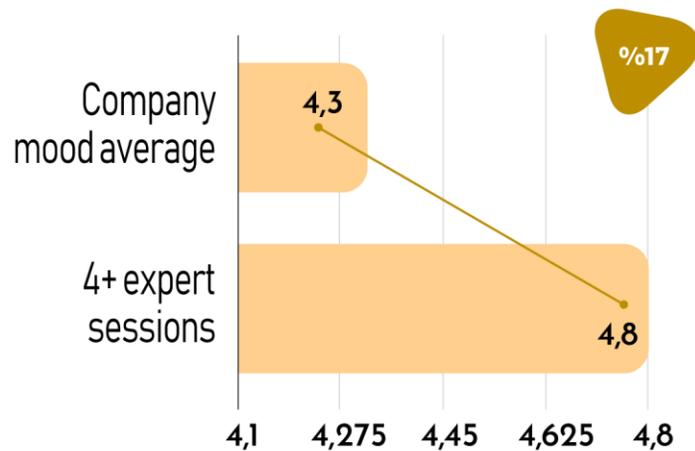
Of course, the wellbeing scale is not enough on its own. There is another important aspect that we discussed at the beginning: the experience of wellbeing. On its own, it is not enough of a metric for us to use. It is also necessary to listen to employees to understand whether the steps they take in their work lives are contributing to their wellbeing. I feel it is important here to reiterate my point about discussing with employees the moments that make a difference...

Then, take the example of an insurance company. The majority of the company's employees work in a call centre. They offer a support line within the framework of the Employee Assistance

Program (EAP) which can be accessed via the Wellbees app, that aims to help employees feel better throughout the day. The company, who developed a smart listening device while respecting employees' privacy, managed to collect important data on their wellbeing.

ROI METRICS I

Wellbees users with 4+ appointments with experts feel 17% better to reach an average of 4,79



How much is it used? Approximately 12% of the employees met with a specialist at least once during the year. (The data was cleaned and how much it was used at the zero point was measured.)

Why is it used? At the end of the conversation between the expert and the employee, both the satisfaction level and the reasons for speaking were examined by checking the answers given.

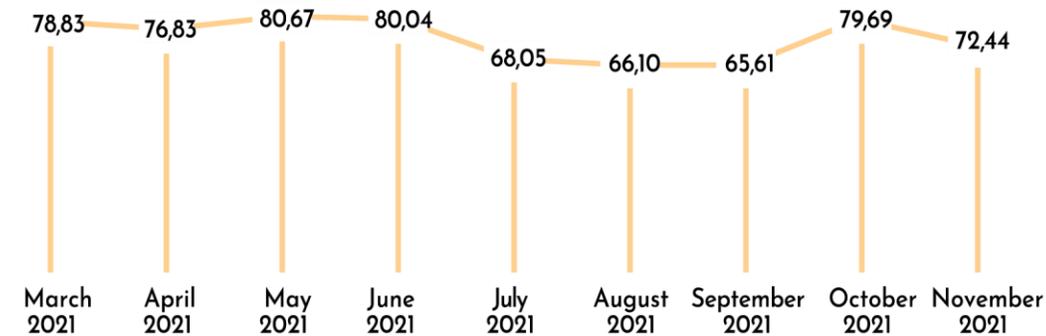
Why will it be used? Based on this, the link between this metric and the employee's wellbeing - especially their emotional health - was listened to. Given the employees were speaking to the experts, they felt better. With the data from this, it was then shown how the emotional states of the employees improved.

How do I support? With this in mind, human resources managers started to receive suggestions for the next step. This included providing psychological first aid training to the managers according to upcoming emotional trends, creating meetings for groups using different webinars and discussing any issues at board level in order to make necessary changes...

Finally, let's talk about a multinational pharmaceutical company. The story here was that the company needed to create a democratic solution that would reach all employees, including the production and white collar teams, working in different international locations.

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

1000 < employee pharma company



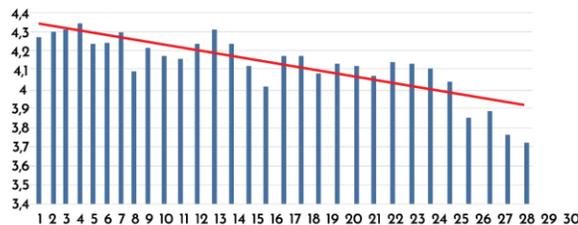
Emotion score was at its lowest level in September. With the right resource research and action plan, the score rose to June levels.

After getting started, we observed that the employee sentiment analysis stood at 80% - a very high number. However, when summer came, we saw that this number suddenly dropped to 60%. We quickly asked the wellbeing ambassadors at the company why this might have happened. The ambassadors said that at the beginning of the pandemic period they felt they were treated with care - but a year later they did not feel the same. The most important finding, that was brought to the attention of the board of directors, was that just one dynamic had changed during this period; the managers, at the start of the summer, had stopped holding their weekly one-to-one meetings with employees. This triggered feelings of "being disregarded" within teams. This soon reversed once the meetings were resumed.

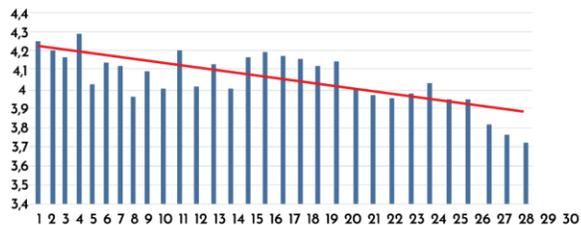
The most important reason why we focused on feelings was because of the observations we made on our platform. When we looked at the sentiment and sleep patterns of those employees who had left their jobs in the last 30 days, we saw a decline of up to 20%. This was how important it was to deal with the falling sentiment within the company.

TURNOVER CORRELATIONS

Last 30 days of an employee - Mood



Last 30 days of an employee - Sleep



As of the last 60 days before leaving the job, a significant decrease in mood and sleep status is observed, the fastest decrease is observed in the last 30 days.

Change, try, repeat

As in all cases, the Druckner-like message here is: “If you can't measure, you can't manage”. If the wellbeing experience is to be an indispensable new operating system for your team, the best plan of action is to listen to their wellbeing and take the approach of "change, try, repeat". Of course, it would be useful to make a small disclosure operation before finishing. The words you will read belong to a mathematician who gave her heart to humanity: “In short, I love tables, measurements, and making inferences from their results”.

However, wellbeing is a human phenomenon that you can't manage by measuring alone. Dinwiddie sums it up brilliantly: “Wellbeing is a spontaneous, contextual, and multi-layered outcome. Employee wellbeing cannot be calculated by how people interact with each other, with the environment in which they work, and it emerges as a by-product of many complex relations”.

He likens employee wellbeing to a butterfly that we will miss if we try to hold onto it for too long – how we might miss the moment when we rush to find happiness, therefore allowing important opportunities to slip through our hands. For this very reason, it is important to remember that measurement is only part of the story, because capturing the right wellbeing experience, and continuing to work in order to create the right environment, are the essences of our job.

Finally, I invite to the stage Josephine Monberg, head of culture and communication at SAP. He said: “You can't measure everything; I think the new KPI of the new era should be oxytocin”. It is not just about being one of the “healthy organisations” that Bersin mentions, but we also owe

it to everyone who spends 80% of their lives working at desks and on production lines. To a brand new era with our brand new success metrics: let the wellbeing race begin!

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