

# Wellbeing trends 2024

Exploring health and wellbeing hot topics and search trends to help businesses get a head start on workplace wellbeing in 2024.





# Contents

**About this report** [3](#)

---

**Rethinking flexibility at work** [4](#)

---

The return-to-office debate rolls on [5](#)  
Trajectory: The demise of distance? [6](#)  
Reinventing work-life balance [7](#)  
Engagement, engagement, engagement [8](#)

**Consumer wellness in the workplace** [9](#)

---

The wellness craze conveyor belt [10](#)  
Do consumer wellness trends have a place at work? [11](#)

**AI and health tech** [12](#)

---

AI drives personalised health treatment [13](#)  
Health enthusiasts expect more from tech [14](#)

**The need for connection** [15](#)

---

Seeking support from a 'third place' [16](#)  
Loneliness in the workplace [17](#)  
The changing role of the manager [18](#)  
Vicky Walker: Community wellbeing in the workplace [19](#)

**Resources and further reading** [20](#)

---

Reference list [21](#)



## AI

was the Collins English Dictionary Word of the Year for 2023.

*Defined as ‘the modelling of human mental functions by computer programs’, AI has seen rapid growth in recent years — but do new tech developments represent opportunity for workers, or simply more uncertainty?*

## About this report

**“Our only security is our ability to change.”**

— Dr John C. Lilly, neuroscientist, writer and inventor.

It could be said we reach the end of 2023 in a contradiction of promise and uncertainty. New developments in health research and technology bring a glimmer of positive change, and as a nation we appear to be increasingly engaged with our health. Yet it often feels that we live with an ever-present undercurrent of anxiety driven by world events.

As we enter 2024, businesses will be looking to take these new developments and turn them into meaningful change — investing in the right support to help their people thrive.

In this report, we explore emerging workplace trends and topics, including work-life balance, health tech, consumer wellness and the human need for connection.

We’ll use data from sources including the NHS, Google search trends, academic reports and consumer data to investigate key wellbeing themes and help businesses get a head start on 2024.





# Rethinking flexibility at work

# The return-to-office debate rolls on

KPMG research suggests that 63% of top CEOs predict a full return to the office over the next three years,<sup>1</sup> but employee expectations around flexible working show little sign of change.

## ‘Remote jobs’

Google search trend over 5 years



For some people, remote working allows them to mould their working day around their home lives. For others, it feels like a blurring of boundaries that prevents them from truly ‘switching off’.

Whatever their preferences, it seems that many employees feel they have the power to choose, with flexibility being second only to salary in terms of job-seeker priorities.<sup>2</sup>

It’s a familiar theme: businesses who can support a variety of working styles will not only help their people to work in the way they’re most productive, but also see the highest demand for their job openings.



63%

of top CEOs predict a full return to the office by 2026.



# The demise of distance?

Over the past few years, the number of people working predominantly from home has gradually stabilised at around 25%. This translates to around 4.9m people who work from home *now*, but didn't before the pandemic.

With WFH becoming the norm in some sectors, office-based businesses find themselves competing with the commute. So what wider trends are being driven by these new remote workers?

In their report '*Who are the new WFH-ers?*' strategic insight and foresight experts [Trajectory](#) explore some of the consequences.

2/3  
of new remote workers say the pandemic changed their priorities in life.

TRAJECTORY

“ As work becomes less tethered to a *workplace* for many people the main trend it will drive is the demise of distance. Proximity – once an essential factor for interaction, commerce, business and leisure – is devalued as people can, and do, work from anywhere.

Humans have and will continue to desire experiences in physical space forever; proximity makes interactions better, but businesses and consumers have been exposed to the idea that it may not be essential all the time. And nothing will be as displaced as work: during the pandemic, at the drop of a hat (in the first few weeks of lockdown), office-based workforces went digital: a shift that could have taken decades happening in the space of weeks.

The clustering of industry will continue in the world's great cities, and most businesses will retain bricks and mortar headquarters – but the era of the five day week in the office, and the sometimes arduous and expensive commuting culture that supports it, could be over as individuals work more flexibly in time and space. These developments will significantly disrupt the industries that supported pre-pandemic working patterns: transport operators, property developers, food outlets and city-centre gyms are set to face difficulty.

The implications go further, however, with proximity to work a key factor in individuals' decision-making about where to live. As work is displaced, and people are less anchored to location on the basis of where their office is, there could be significant implications for the spatial organisation of society, and for our towns and cities.

One thing to remember, though, is that working from home is not the norm and in the foreseeable future will never be. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the workplace still has a role for many jobs that could transplant to the home but haven't, and won't: it provides an essential shared space for meetings, discussions and comradery. Secondly – and often overlooked – the office is not the default workplace. The majority of people work in places that are not offices: shops, building sites, schools, hospitals, warehouses, HGVs.

”



# Reinventing work-life balance

In 2024, work-life balance will mean more than just closing your laptop at 5pm. It seems our post-pandemic priorities are here to stay, and for many that means fitting work around their lives — not the other way around.

Our home lives remain a high priority, with over half of workers who've been working from home since the pandemic saying they plan to have more free time in the future<sup>3</sup>.

54%

of those who've been working from home since the pandemic say they plan to have more free time in the future.

This trend is particularly relevant to employees who are driven to seek roles that support their lifestyles, such as working parents, caregivers or those who are managing a health condition or disability.

Rather than a blanket demand for hybrid or remote working options, workers are now more aware of their own unique needs. And that could include anything from managing their periods, getting through a bereavement or 'unretiring' into a part-time role.

In short, companies who can support work-life balance are also supporting a more diverse workforce to perform at their best.

## Are you a splitter or a blender?<sup>4</sup>



### Splitters

- Prefer to fully separate work and personal lives.
- Prioritise 'switching off' outside of fixed hours.
- May find on-site or 'working near home' appealing to help them set boundaries.



### Blenders

- Overlap home and work tasks during the day.
- May choose to work outside of typical hours.
- Likely to seek homeworking options or fully flexible roles.

# Engagement, engagement, engagement

While WFH remains popular, it turns out location isn't everything. According to research by Gallup, engagement has 3.8x as much influence on stress levels as work location.<sup>5</sup>

This is good news for employers who want to support their people's wellbeing but can't offer the option to work from home.

Highly engaged employees are more likely to feel in control of how they work, even when remote working isn't possible.

While remote and flexible working are important considerations, engaged employees often feel less stressed and more motivated to perform at their best,<sup>6</sup> regardless of where they work.



Gallup's research reveals that over half of workers are 'quiet quitting' — putting in the minimum effort to get by.

How to win them back?

**41%**

want better engagement or workplace culture.



# Consumer wellness in the workplace





## The wellness craze conveyor belt

Trends such as ice baths, gut health, collagen supplements and nap pods have taken TikTok by storm, igniting public interest in wellbeing and promising silver-bullet remedies to common health worries.

But are these trends helping us to form healthy habits and drive lasting change? To understand where to focus our efforts, we increasingly find ourselves trying to separate evidence-based solutions from fleeting fads.

If 'the next big thing' turns out to be a flop, we're left out of pocket and disappointed, or worse — with actual damage to our health. And if people can't access and examine the latest research, it can be a real challenge to separate pseudoscientific marketing from tried and tested methods.



**300%**  
increase in searches  
for ice baths



**180,000**  
people on ZOE's  
health study wait list



**850%**  
increase in searches  
for nap pods



# Do consumer health trends have a place at work?

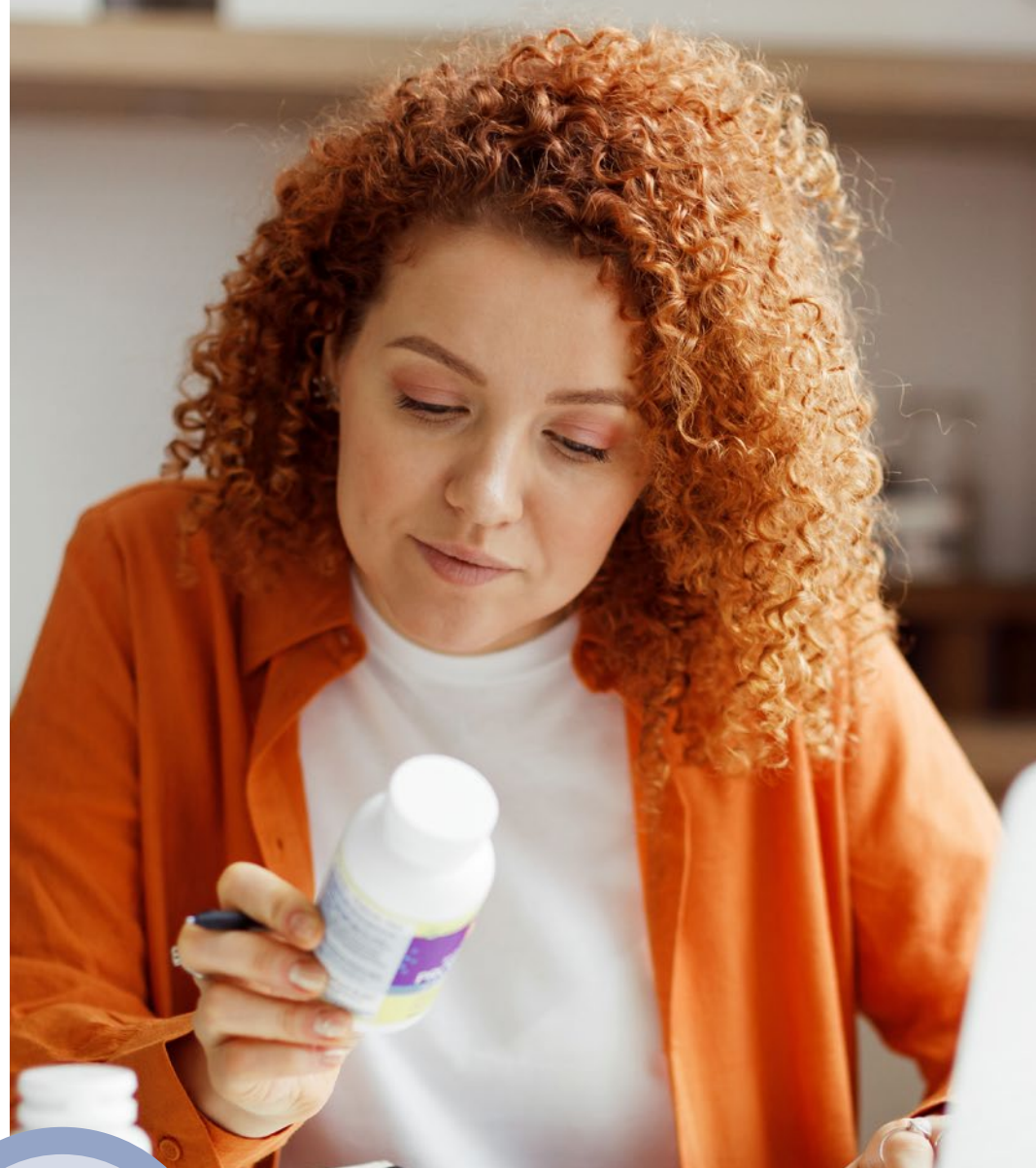
The UK's sickness absence rate is the highest it's been since 2004, and it might seem clear that herbal teas and workplace plunge pools aren't the solution to this on-going challenge.<sup>7</sup>

But if employees are engaging with wellness trends, it's likely because they're looking to make changes — however small — to improve their health.

With employees now expecting health support in the workplace, there's an opportunity for HR and Wellbeing professionals to harness this enthusiasm and turn it into meaningful, evidence-based action.

So how can businesses increase engagement without getting swept up in short-lived fads?

- 1 Draw on existing wellbeing research and choose tried and tested [solutions](#) before exploring more experimental options.
- 2 [Measure the impact](#) of your spend to demonstrate its value and know when to make changes to your approach.
- 3 Collect [regular feedback](#) on your wellbeing offering to prioritise the support people really need.



42%

of UK workers have never been asked to input on what wellbeing support they receive.<sup>8</sup>

# AI and health tech





# AI drives personalised health treatment

AI may be the buzzword of the year, but an array of technologies are providing innovative ways to support our health.

In June, the government pledged £21 million to roll out artificial intelligence across the NHS, helping to diagnose cancer, strokes and heart conditions.<sup>9</sup>

AI is already being used to analyse patient DNA, tailor treatment to individual needs and provide better outcomes through a personalised approach.

Research by the [Ada Lovelace Institute](#) predicts two main applications for AI in genomics:

“

**Genomic personalisation:** The ability to understand how treatment needs for the same condition might vary between different individuals or groups, and to tailor and adapt treatments accordingly.

**Genomic prediction:** The use of data to estimate the probability of different individuals or groups developing particular conditions, their responses to particular medicines or treatments, or to predict how their health might be affected by lifestyle factors such as smoking and diet.

”

**£21 million**  
pledged to  
continue AI roll out  
across the NHS.



## ‘AI health’

Google search trend throughout 2023



# Health enthusiasts expect more from tech

As health tech becomes increasingly accessible, people are looking beyond the step count for more meaningful insights into both their physical and mental health.

Popular fitness wearables now take inspiration from sports science to measure metrics such as readiness, stress and recovery and make personalised recommendations.

Remote health support is also on the up, as people seek online therapy and 24/7 GPs to avoid rising wait times for NHS appointments.

While it's encouraging to see more individuals taking a proactive, preventative approach to their health, many are likely to find these instant-access, high-tech solutions cost prohibitive.

## 'BetterHelp' — online therapy platform

Google search trend over three years



The global wearable fitness tracker market is projected to reach \$192 billion by 2030.<sup>10</sup>



Calls to Westfield Health's 24/7 DoctorLine service more than doubled in 2023.





# The need for connection

# Seeking support from a 'third place'

NHS wait times are at an all-time high, with many people facing a further 'hidden wait' for mental health services.<sup>11</sup> The Long Term Plan for the NHS made a renewed commitment to grow investment in mental health over the next five years, but many are now seeking support elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of this, there is an increase in people relying on third space environments — somewhere that is neither home nor work that is used for socialising — to discuss mental health.

## Third place *noun*

Social surroundings that are separate from the two usual social environments of home and the workplace. Examples include churches, cafés, pubs, gyms and libraries.

There have been investments in training for community venues to integrate mental health conversations into our daily lives, including mental health training for barbers and hairdressers.<sup>13</sup>

Searches for men's mental health spike around key awareness days in June and November, but men are increasingly looking for in-person support from community initiatives such as Andy's Man Club, suggesting a growing need for external sources of support.



'Andy's Man Club' peer-to-peer support group  
Google search trend over three years





# Loneliness in the workplace

11% of UK employees say they always feel lonely at work, whilst almost 50% feel lonely at least some of the time.<sup>14</sup> With loneliness now categorised as a global health concern,<sup>15</sup> it's important for employers to take preventative measures to prioritise wellbeing.

Levels of loneliness in the UK have risen from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has fundamentally changed the way many of us communicate. Some people have adapted quickly to this style of working while others may feel disconnected due to lack of face-to-face communication.



84% of on-site workers agree they feel close to their colleagues, compared to only 44% of homeworkers.<sup>14</sup>

Remote workers do not have higher levels of loneliness than on-site workers, but on-site workers agree they feel closer to their colleagues.

Different working styles allow employees to seek connection in their own way. Some employees find that in-person contact does help them feel connected, whereas others seek this engagement elsewhere.

**1 in 10**

UK workers say they always feel lonely at work.



The New Economics Foundation and Co-op estimate that loneliness costs UK employers £2.5 billion a year.<sup>16</sup> It's up to employers to establish where their people are struggling to connect and examine the impact not only on productivity but also on employee wellbeing.



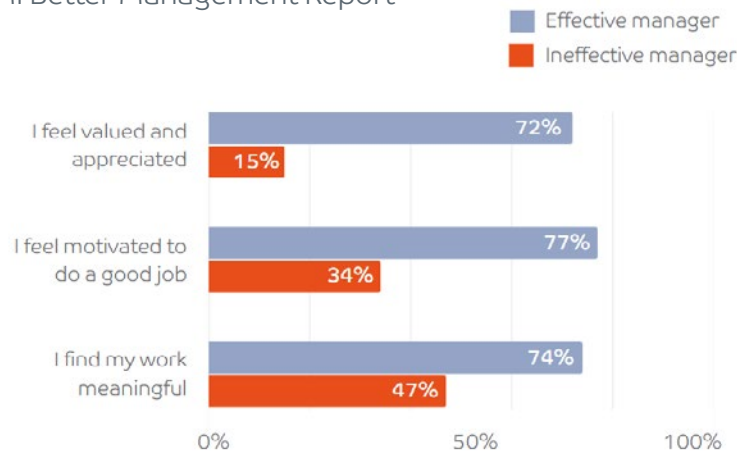
# The role of the manager

The type of support that people need in the workplace is changing, with 50% of UK workers who do not feel that their manager is effective planning to change jobs in the next year.<sup>17</sup>

CIPD cites seven key domains of wellbeing, including the need for values-based leadership. There's now a greater focus on emotional intelligence in leadership, with qualities such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and conflict management now being included in the skills that create a successful manager.<sup>18</sup>

## Employee experiences depend on how effective they find their manager

CMI Better Management Report



82% of managers are considered 'accidental managers' and may lack formal training in the skills required for values-based leadership.<sup>19</sup>



Half of workers who do not feel their manager is effective are planning to change jobs in the next year.

As the role of the manager becomes more complex, there is a greater desire for managers to humanise themselves to their employees, building more of a person-centric workplace culture and environment that supports employee wellness.



# A sense of belonging: community wellbeing in the workplace

Vicky Walker, Group Director of People at Westfield Health, explains how businesses can align company and employee values to support their people — and stand out in the job market.



“ Connection is one of **Mind's** five ways to wellbeing, but what does it mean to truly 'connect' in 2024? Our personal and work lives now require a different type of support to help us feel like we belong.

Creating a sense of belonging in the workplace is a crucial way to prevent loneliness. There is a growing need to know 'why' a company is a good place to work due to ethical considerations, corporate responsibility and what they value. It's no surprise that purpose-driven companies have a much higher retention rate.

Sharing a common ground is inclusive and gives employees a drive. To stand out as a great place to work, businesses should look beyond employee benefits and work-from-home options towards the values that it holds and a vision that appeals to employees and job hunters.

This is something that allows people to find a sense of purpose that aligns with their own personal goals and beliefs, which ultimately creates an on-going cohesion amongst employees.

There are many small changes that HR teams can make to create a positive, inclusive workforce with shared values as a priority. Some of the key focus areas include:

- Putting your purpose at the front of the recruitment process to encourage people that align with your values to apply.
- Making sure your onboarding process clearly embeds your company values so employees feel like they're part of the wider business goals and vision — beyond their job role.
- Supporting your managers to create community within their own teams by making leadership training a 'must' and encouraging vulnerable leadership.

”



## Further reading

### [NHS Live Well](#)

Advice, tips and tools to help you make the best choices about your health and wellbeing.

### [Mind — Five ways to wellbeing](#)

The five ways to wellbeing provide some simple steps to help people improve their day-to-day mental health.

### [CIPD — Hybrid working guidance for people professionals](#)

Advice on how organisations can manage and get the best from hybrid working.

### [Ada Lovelace Institute](#)

An independent research institute with a mission to ensure data and AI work for people and society.

## Our resources

### [Workplace wellbeing advice hub](#)

A collection of our free downloads, including reports, guides and factsheets for employers and employees.

### [Free course — Wellbeing Strategy \(CPD-accredited\)](#)

This free CPD-accredited course helps you demonstrate how employee wellbeing delivers value for your business.

### [Mental Health First Aider \(MHFAider®\) courses](#)

Certified training courses to help employees support each other with their mental health.

### [Smart Wellbeing](#)

A fully managed, digital wellbeing solution that provides support for your employees' mental and emotional health.



# Reference list

- 1 [KPMG: Global and UK CEOs grappling with multiple challenges](#)
- 2 Westfield Health Workplace Wellbeing Survey, January 2023 [[Video](#)]
- 3 [Trajectory Partnership: Who are the new WFH-ers](#)
- 4 [Gallup: Splitters and blenders - Two Different Relationships With Work](#)
- 5 [Gallup: State of the Global Workplace](#)
- 6 [CIPD: Employee engagement and motivation](#)
- 7 [ONS: Sickness absence in the UK labour market](#)
- 8 Westfield Health Workplace Wellbeing Survey, January 2023 [[Article](#)]
- 9 [Gov.uk: £21 million to roll out artificial intelligence across the NHS](#)
- 10 [Wearable Fitness Trackers Market Size is projected to reach USD 192 Billion by 2030](#)
- 11 [The Guardian: Patients turning to AGE as wait times for NHS mental health treatment spiral](#)
- 12 [NHS Long Term Plan v1.2 August 2019](#)
- 13 [NHS England » Training for barbers to spot warning signs of mental health problems](#)
- 14 [Loneliness at work report | research | British Red Cross](#)
- 15 [WHO Commission on Social Connection](#)
- 16 [The cost of loneliness to UK employers | New Economics Foundation](#)
- 17 [CMI\\_BMB\\_GoodManagement\\_Report.pdf \(managers.org.uk\)](#)
- 18 [Wellbeing at Work | Factsheets | CIPD](#)
- 19 [HR Grapevine: We're failing managers, and they're passing that failure on to staff](#)





## Get in touch today

[westfieldhealth.com/business](https://www.westfieldhealth.com/business)

Telephone: 0345 602 1629

Email: [businessenquiries@westfieldhealth.com](mailto:businessenquiries@westfieldhealth.com)

[Request a call back](#)

If your healthcare is looked after by an intermediary, please contact them in the first instance.

Westfield Health is a trading name of Westfield Health & Wellbeing Ltd and is registered in England & Wales Company number 9871063.

Westfield Health is a registered trademark.

Registered Office. Westfield House, 60 Charter Row, Sheffield S1 3FZ.