



Wellbeing Index

02 | The Perfect Summer Storm

A quarterly in-depth look into the state of the nation's wellbeing, at home and in the workplace.



Staying resilient over summer

Introduction from
Dave Capper, CEO, Westfield Health



Ask any senior leader whether they manage to leave work at the office, and almost all of us will admit to checking emails in the evening or at the weekend. When it comes to summer, it's all too easy to continue those habits and let work sneak into our recovery time.

At Westfield Health, we've been working hard as a team to be 'well beings' – to practise what we preach. A big part of that is senior leaders setting positive examples and turning leadership principles into behaviours and then those behaviours into action.

Last year, I set myself a challenge: if I was going to walk the walk, I needed to safeguard my recovery time. I needed to make sure that I'd had enough rest to come back a refreshed, energised leader.

It took some planning. Rather than going on holiday in Europe, my family and I went to the US. With just a couple of hours overlap between the UK working day and our location, it allowed me to disconnect from the office, to take back some head space to truly relax and enjoy precious family time.

I was expecting to come back feeling more stressed as a result of my summer experiment; surely heading back to a packed inbox would undo all the good work of my holiday. But that wasn't the case.

By making sure I'd had enough recovery time, I was ready to come back. I was ready to perform at my best; ready to help us meet our ambitious goals.

This link between recovery and performance shouldn't come as a surprise. If we look at the world of elite sport, athletes have been putting this into practise for years. They know that after pushing their bodies in training, they have to put as much time and effort into recovery in order to be at their peak performance level.

Summer is often thought of as the perfect time for recovery with many of us taking annual leave to get a break from the workplace. But our latest Wellbeing Index has shown that actually our teams aren't getting this crucial recovery time in summer.

In fact, between busier social lives, fewer people in the office leading to heavier workloads and an always-on culture, it can be a recipe for burnout, impacting organisational productivity well beyond the summer months.

In this quarter's Wellbeing Index, we'll share our findings on how a lack of recovery time impacts the workplace, as well as looking at actionable strategies on how your organisation can avoid the perfect summer storm.

Perfect summer pressure

The first things that come to mind when we think of summer time are often holidays or lazy days in the sunshine. We see it as a time to switch off from day-to-day stresses and relax.

But our latest Wellbeing Index shows this may be more of a daydream than reality.

Despite recovery time being essential to wellbeing, our survey shows that summer can actually be a pressure-filled season that fosters burnout rather than recovery.

Definition: Burnout

Chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.



A vicious cycle

For many of us, a lack of recovery time in summer creates a vicious cycle that can lead to burnout.

Between picking up tasks from absent colleagues at work to busier social lives at home, summer can lead to increased pressure and stress.

When asked about summer workplace wellbeing, a shocking 57% of HR professionals say they sometimes or always notice colleagues suffering from burnout.

Even in the build up to summer, there's an increase in pressure: over the last three months the average amount of overtime has increased by 23% from 13 to 16 hours, and one in five employees say that job-related pressure has often or very often reached unmanageable levels.

This pressure starts to impact performance and attendance: over 41% of HR professionals say productivity decreases in summer and employees have taken four days off due to stress in the past three months.

There's also been a marked increase in significant absences since our last survey with 39% of HR professionals saying they've seen an increase in long-term sign off from work.

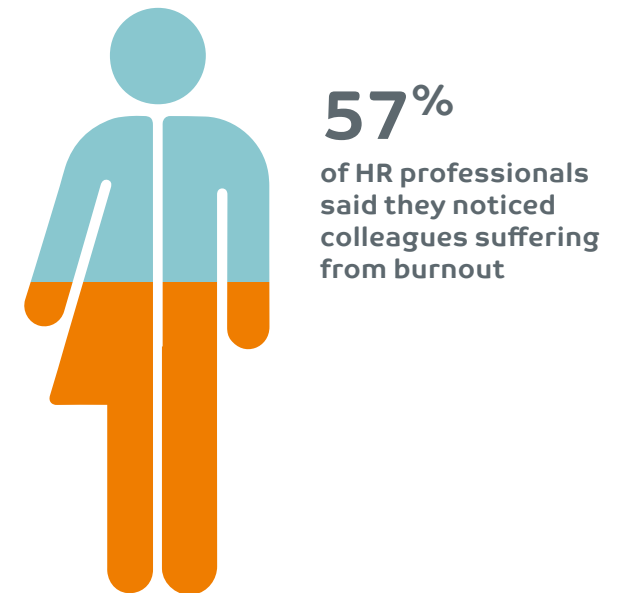
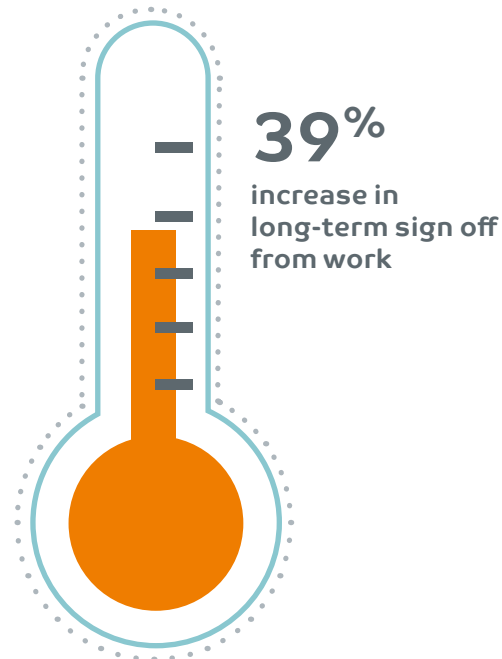
Increased absences, combined with other team members being away, puts more pressure on remaining staff, and the vicious cycle begins again.

Stats at a glance

The average employee has taken



The average employee has worked



Financial storm clouds

A recent survey by Nationwide found that over a fifth of people had to borrow money to go on holiday¹, with 61% admitting they overspent by an average of £250 on their last main trip.

On top of holiday costs, parents have the added pressure of childcare and entertainment over the summer months: over a third worry about not having enough disposable income to keep their children entertained, with 60% of working parents saying they have increased childcare responsibilities.

Who feels the pressure?

As well as working parents, results showed that under 34s were the most likely to be caught up in the summer storm.

The financial pressures to go on holiday or to socialise, combined with additional work responsibilities, lead to under 34s being the age group that are most likely to spend their summer worrying: 28% cite trying to balance friendships, relationships and work as biggest cause of summer stress.

Stats at a glance

UNDER
34s

most likely to spend their summer worrying due to work-life balance.

60%

of working parents say they have increased childcare responsibilities

1 in 3

worried about not having enough disposable income to keep their children entertained



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a yellow sweater, is talking on a silver smartphone. She has a serious expression. In the background, a young girl with her hair in a bun, wearing a black and white striped shirt, is looking towards the camera with a thoughtful expression, resting her chin on her hand. The scene is set indoors with soft lighting.

CHAPTER 2

Struggling to switch off

The build-up of pressure in spring quickly turns into the perfect storm when employees fail to disengage from work properly, missing out on vital recovery time.

Definition: Leavism

Working during non-paid hours or annual leave.

Unable to unplug

Though the out-of-office gets switched on, many of us don't manage to switch off: almost a fifth (17%) of all annual leave is spent worrying about work and 11% admit to actually responding to work emails or calls whilst on holiday.

But why do employees spend their hard-earned holiday time working? It comes down to company culture.

Over a third (36%) of respondents say they feel like their employer expects them to be on standby or thinking about work during annual leave.

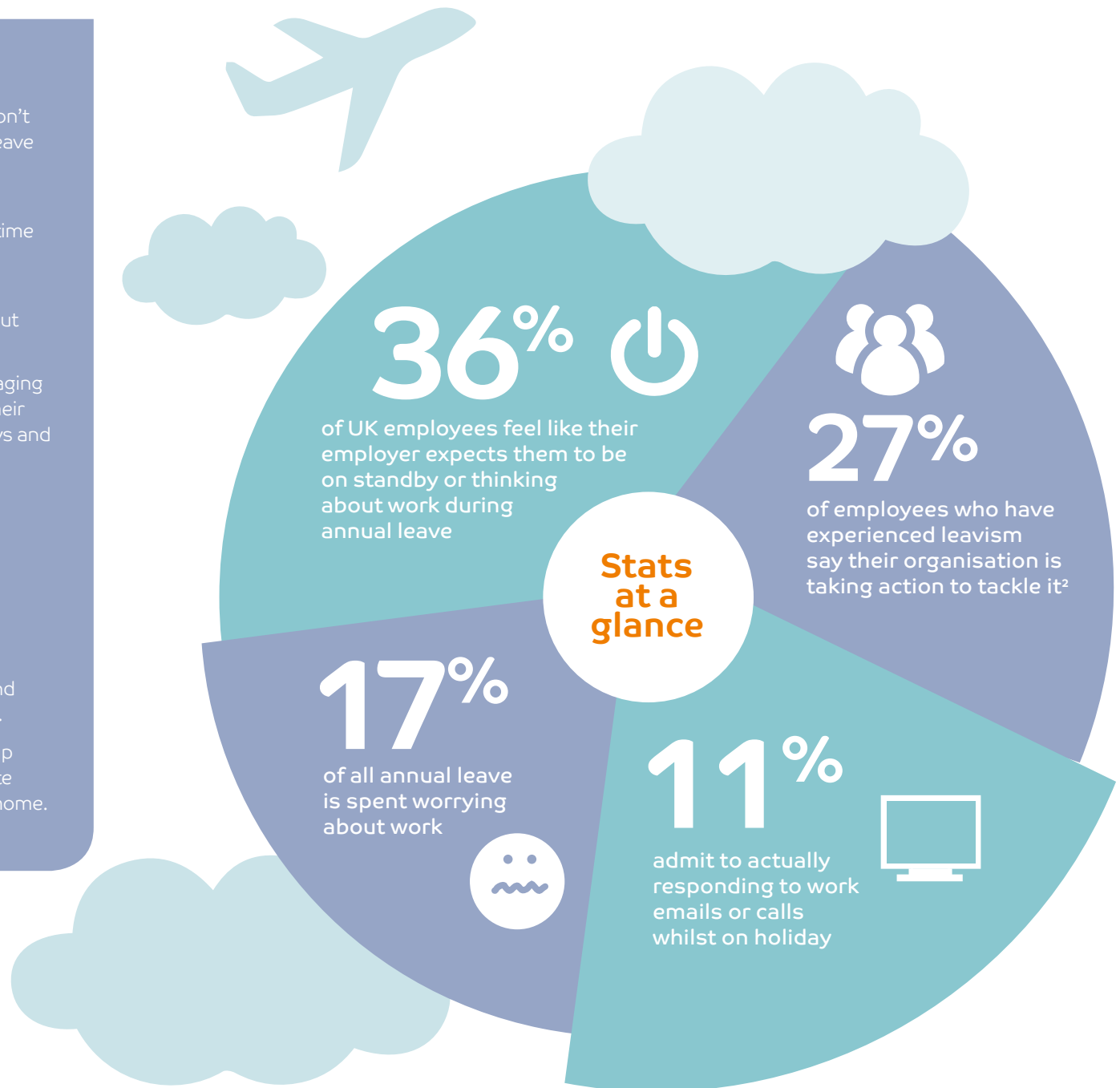
This may be linked to organisations not sufficiently managing workloads over summer: 37% of HR professionals say their workplace doesn't do enough to prepare for staff holidays and low team numbers over the summer months.

Prioritising resilience and recovery

Resilience is about our ability to "bounce back" from difficult experiences. It's the process of adapting in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy or other significant sources of stress.

Resilience is not an innate trait that some people have and others don't – it's a skill that we can all learn and develop.

Putting wellbeing initiatives in place at work can really help employees understand the importance of recovery, create time for it and perform at their best both at work and at home.



Strategies to reduce summer stress

Here are some top tips for employers to proactively introduce to help prevent the long-term impact that summer burnout has on productivity.

1. Implement policies that enable and encourage recovery

Organisations need to make sure there are clear policies in place to discourage unhealthy behaviours such as leavism and create enough time for recovery. This could be as simple as stating that employees must take all annual leave by the end of the year or more significant changes to ways of working such as flexitime.

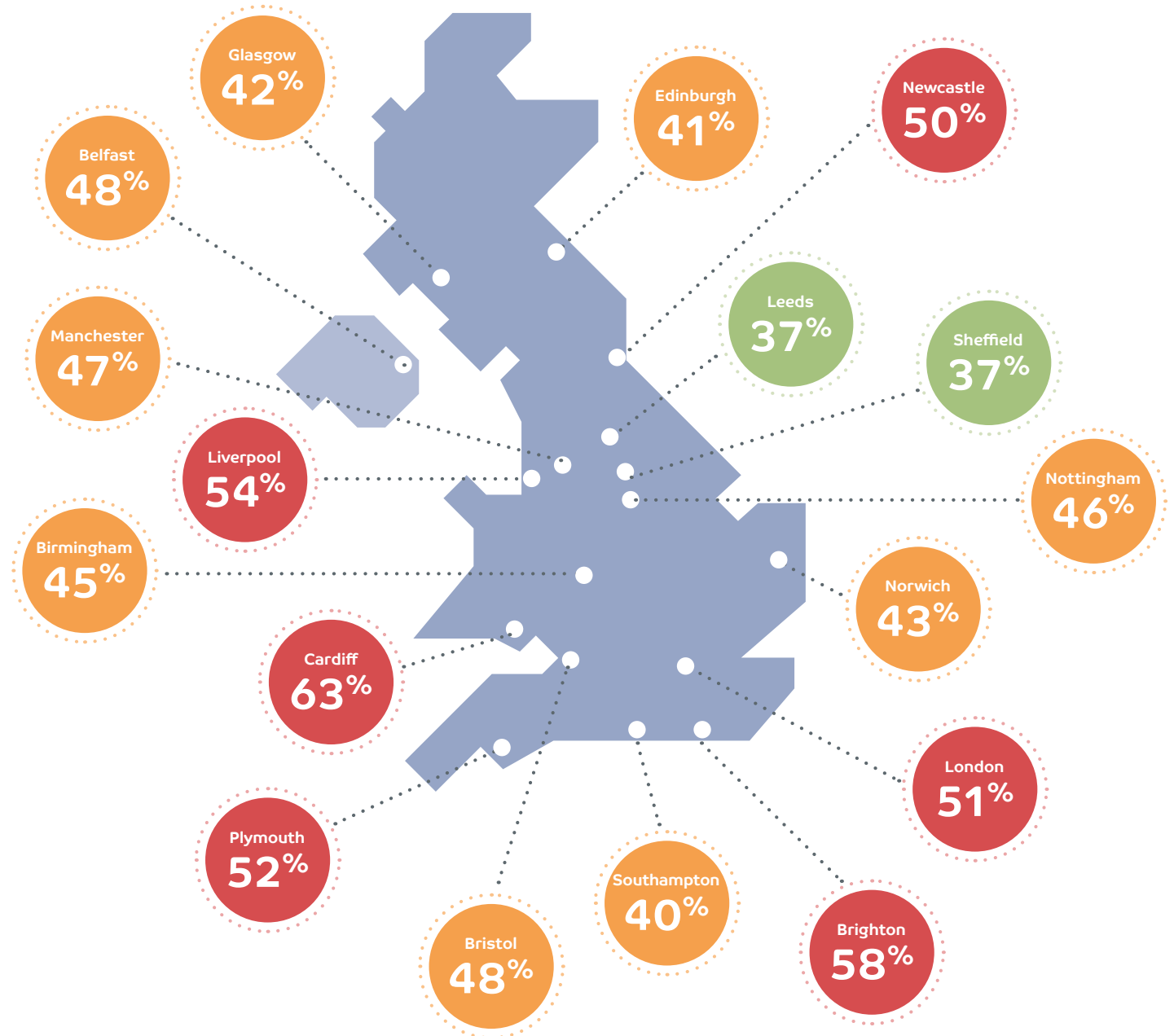
2. Create psychological safety

When employees see leaders practising what they preach, it creates the psychological permission to mirror that behaviour. Creating an open culture also allows employees to speak openly about how they're feeling, allowing managers to identify issues early and avoid a situation escalating to burnout.

3. Discourage unhealthy behaviours

Make sure managers know the importance of communicating policies and taking action if they see employees demonstrating unhealthy behaviours such as leavism. Offering additional manager training on team resilience or mental health first aid may help managers feel more equipped to handle these types of situations.

The UK's most stressed cities



The bigger picture

Our always-on culture means the lines between home and work are increasingly blurred. It's not realistic to think that employees leave personal stress at the door – that's why we also benchmark wellbeing at home as part of this Index.

Wellbeing at home

Almost four out of five Brits say they are happy or very happy with their home life.

The biggest concern over the last three months was money (37%), closely followed by lack of sleep (34%). Physical ill health and mental health also ranked as top concerns amongst the UK population.

However, we can see the summer storm clouds gathering due to the lack of focus on wellbeing.

Based on the NHS guidelines, one in five admit they had not done anything in relation to their wellbeing in the last three months. Only 43% said they had spent satisfactory time with their family and just 36% had been physically active.

Failing to make time at home for wellbeing, especially recovery, sows the seeds for burnout.



Temperatures across the country

Since our last Index, we've seen some significant shifts in the city league table, our benchmark for wellbeing across the UK which takes into account physical, financial, social and mental wellbeing.

We've taken each city's scores in the last and current index to give a cumulative city ranking.

Financial wellbeing

At a time when financial pressures are mounting, strong scores in financial wellbeing help boost a city's ranking.

Almost half (49%) of people in London and 46% of people in Nottingham are happy or very happy with their finances and disposable income.

In contrast, those who rank poorly for financial wellbeing find themselves slipping down the league table.

Around a third of people in Cardiff (28%), Brighton (33%) and Sheffield (34%) say they're unhappy or very unhappy with their financial situation.

Mental and social wellbeing

People turn to friends and family for support when it comes to their mental health, and over half of the population feel supported and accepted within their social circles.

In Brighton, 27% of people say they feel great, followed by a quarter of people in Belfast and 23% of people in Plymouth.

But whilst almost a third of people say their mental health is quite good, nearly a quarter say that their mental health is quite poor or very poor.

People in Sheffield continue to experience low levels of mental wellbeing with 26% of saying their mental health is quite or very poor. One in ten people in Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and Nottingham also suffer from very poor mental health.

Physical wellbeing

We're all aware of the benefits of exercise, but as a nation we're still struggling to achieve the recommended amount: 35% of people say they rarely or never get the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity a week.

The most inactive city is Leeds, where two in five people admit they never achieve the recommended amount of exercise.

However, almost 40% of us are hitting the NHS's physical activity targets. Belfast is the most active city with over two in five people saying they manage to get more than the recommended amount of physical activity.

The UK's overall wellbeing league table

	NEW	PREVIOUS	
London	01	01	◀
Nottingham	02	04	▲
Southampton	03	05	▲
Newcastle	04	03	▲
Norwich	05	14	▲
Birmingham	06	09	▲
Liverpool	07	08	▲
Bristol	08	02	▼
Plymouth	09	06	▼
Edinburgh	10	10	◀
Belfast	11	15	▲
Manchester	12	11	▲
Glasgow	13	12	▲
Leeds	14	07	▼
Cardiff	15	13	▲
Brighton	16	16	◀
Sheffield	17	17	◀

Staying resilient over summer

Recovery is essential to a resilient, high-performing workforce. Making sure your employees get enough time to recover not only creates a happier, healthier workforce, it also helps avoid burnout and increase productivity.

Despite recovery making good business sense, the majority of employers aren't doing enough, with 50% of employees saying they feel unsupported.

Looking both at policies and the culture that underpins them is essential to creating a resilient workplace where recovery is a priority.



Benefits that foster recovery

When asked how the workplace could best support them during the summer, working parents said flexible working (20%), working from home (18%) or an increased holiday allowance (14%).

Overall, the majority of workforces are mirroring these priorities in their benefits and policies.

Over half (57%) of workplaces currently offer flexible working, 39% offer working from home options, 34% offer childcare vouchers and 25% offer the opportunity to buy additional annual leave.

Learning from athletes

There's a lot we can learn from elite athletes when it comes to recovery. We've partnered with elite performance experts, EXOS, to bring their sporting expertise into our health and wellbeing programmes.

EXOS have identified four key pillars to performance: mindset, nutrition, movement and recovery.

Athletes put as much emphasis on recovery as they do training. In sports, sleep deprivation has been shown to cause slower reaction times, increased sensitivity to pain, immune system suppression, reduced concentration and more.

With just 6% of the nation getting the recommended eight hours a night, it's clear we have a lot to learn from our sporting counterparts.

Understanding and incorporating each of these four pillars is essential for recovery and for improving overall wellbeing.

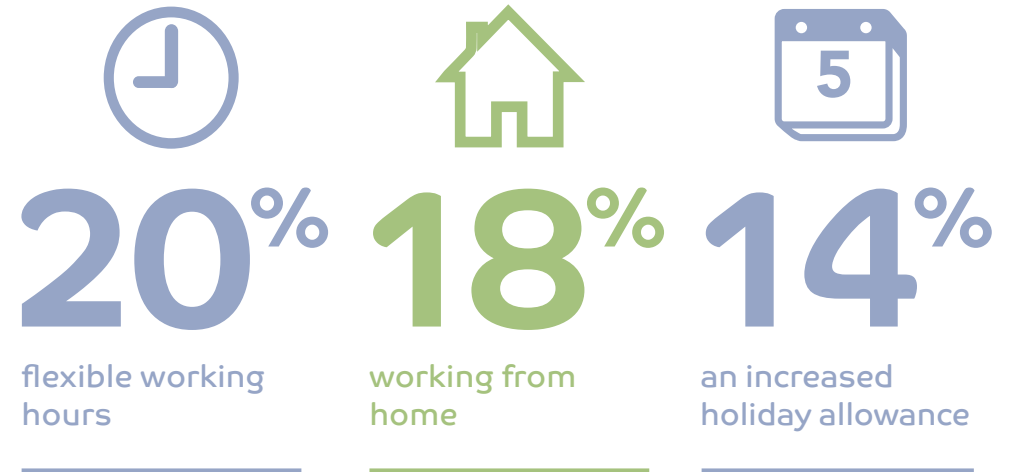
Changing an 'always-on' culture

Culture is the personality of an organisation. It's made up of a variety of different elements, including the physical environment, company mission and purpose, values, ethics, goals and expectations.

When thinking about how to avoid burnout, it can be tempting to just look at initiatives. But the answer might actually lie in your culture - there's no point implementing strict rules on leavism if senior leaders aren't visibly living those values.

Cultural change can take time and requires input from people across the organisation.

When asked how the workplace could best support them during the summer, employees said



Free CPD accredited course

Business leaders and HR professionals can learn more through our free CPD accredited course. Find out how to spot the signs of a toxic culture and effectively facilitate cultural change:

westfieldhealth.com/culturechange

We believe in **well beings**

Start your health and wellbeing
journey today:



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