

Employers over-estimate the health and wellbeing benefits employees gain from hybrid working

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Employers and employees have a differing opinion about the health and wellbeing impact of 'hybrid' working, according to new research¹ from GRiD, the industry body for the group risk sector.

Two thirds of employers (64%) believe that hybrid working has had a positive impact on their employees' health and wellbeing, but only 53% of employees agree.

Where they do concur is on the number of people for whom hybrid working can have a negative impact, with 6% of employers, and 7% of employees, acknowledging that it is not a positive experience for everyone.

GRiD believes it's important to recognise that although this might look like a relatively small percentage of people who feel that hybrid working has had a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, it represents a large number of employees. While many people feel that a flexibility in working location is beneficial, it's crucial that employers don't make assumptions or change their workplaces or working practises in a way that could potentially be harmful to their workforce.

Katharine Moxham, spokesperson for GRiD, said: "Employers have a slightly exaggerated view of just how much hybrid working is benefiting the health and wellbeing of their staff. It's clearly the case that many do find it a positive experience but employers should be careful not to assume this is a panacea for everyone. It's important to note that health and wellbeing support will still be required for everyone, and particularly for those who have found the change in working patterns more difficult to cope with."

The benefits of hybrid working for health and wellbeing

Of those employees themselves who felt that hybrid working has had a positive effect, mental wellbeing was the area that employees felt was most improved (68%), followed by social wellbeing (45%), financial wellbeing (44%) and physical wellbeing (43%). Although mental health is clearly seen as the largest beneficiary of hybrid working, and the reduced costs of commuting are associated with financial health, it's interesting that so many employees reported on the social and physical benefits too.

Katharine Moxham said: "Employers may have already seen the benefits to physical and social health by allowing staff to relinquish their journey to work, allowing employees to spend more time with family and friends and potentially using the time for fitness activities to improve their physical health."

Giving employees a choice on hybrid working

Half (50%) of employees say they have a choice about whether to work from the office or home which largely tallies with the statistics reported by employers: 22% of employers said that they have given all their employees a choice about where they work from, and 34% have allowed some but not all of their employees to make that decision.

While there is indeed a positive impact on health and wellbeing for many, employers must not consider hybrid working as a benefit in itself. It is no replacement for a comprehensive programme of benefits to support health and wellbeing, such as private medical insurance or group risk benefits (employer-sponsored life assurance, income protection and critical illness). When an employee struggles with a health or wellbeing issue, it's important to have a full suite of support available. Working from home may help some but not all and it certainly isn't a fix when more serious problems come to light.

Katharine Moxham continued "Employers who fully support the health and wellbeing of their staff through a programme of employee benefits and other flexible policies, will be rewarded with more a more engaged and more proactive workforce. Hybrid working can play a role but it's not the silver bullet."

1. The research was undertaken by Opinium from 9-22 January 2023 among 503 HR decision-makers and from 10-13 January amongst 1,212 employees at UK businesses.