

Created to Flourish: Wellbeing at Work

The contemporary workplace is in crisis. Only a small minority of employees report that they are truly engaged at work. The rest lack the emotional investment in their work to be fully productive and to create significant value for their organisations. In this article, Peter Heslam highlights how some companies are responding to this wellbeing crisis. He also suggests the essence of true wellbeing is a life of meaning and purpose.

Research evidence has been mounting for some time that the workplace is experiencing a crisis in human wellbeing. More recently it has been able to throw light on its cause and consequence. In some cases, it is burnout. In many cases, it is presenteeism. In all cases, it is poor mental health and a lack of wellbeing.

According to a recent survey, the proportion of employees experiencing poor work-related mental health is rising and currently stands at almost 40 per cent. At the same time, the report reveals, the proportion of employees who believe their organisation does well in supporting those with poor mental health is in decline and currently also stands at around 40 per cent.

This situation provides business with a commercial opportunity; the global wellness industry is in explosive growth


and is currently worth around \$4.2 trillion. But for most companies, the situation poses a direct threat, and some are starting to respond. 30 large corporations (including Virgin Money, E.ON, and Barclays) have signed a pledge to promote employee wellbeing and they call on other businesses to sign it.

Contrary to some popular perceptions, 'wellbeing' is about much more than happiness or positive feelings. It is about a meaningful life, with good work and relationships, and a sense of responsibility and freedom. This idea, often associated with Aristotle, is in fact embodied in the earlier and broader Hebrew notion of 'shalom' ().

Shalom is not merely about 'peace' in the sense of the absence of conflict. It's about God's blessing in every area of human life, including work. This is clear even from the passage of Scripture about peace most

commonly cited at military remembrance ceremonies around the world, Micah 4:1-4.

In this passage, peace is not about the burying of weapons ('swords'). It is about repurposing them, to become agricultural equipment ('ploughshares') that will increase the productivity of the food industry and allow people to enjoy rewards from their labour. Its picture of people sitting under 'their own vines and under their own fig trees' provides a magnificent metaphor for the true vocation of work: to satisfy human needs through the employment of human gifts.

This shalom is 'wellbeing at work', in both meanings of that phrase. It is the way things were for humans in the garden of Eden pictured in the book of Genesis, and will be for them in the coming city, pictured in the book of Revelation. In it lies the redemption of the contemporary workplace. 

In March 2020, Faith in Business was scheduled to hold a leadership retreat entitled 'Created to Flourish: Wellbeing at Work' in Cambridge. Unfortunately this had to be postponed until April 2021 because of the coronavirus outbreak.



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