# Making People Count: a workforce bulletin

## June 2022

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# Learning and Development

## Closing the digital skills gap

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** As anyone who’s inadvertently shared their holiday snaps on an MS Teams call instead of next year’s business plan will testify, a gap in digital skills can be a real draw back for individuals’ careers and the wider economy. It’s been estimated that 37% of workers in Europe don’t have basic digital skills and research by McKinsey and Co. found that 87% of companies say they currently have a skills gap, or expect to have one within a few years. Over half of companies say a shortage of digital talent has led to a loss of competitive advantage. In this article Lex Pedersen, the vice-president of Europe, the Middle East and Africa at O’Reilly Media, argues that companies need to rethink traditional training and embrace a culture of flexible learning, providing employees with education within the flow of work to minimize disruption and allow them to immediately apply their knowledge to drive real business results. Key steps include:

**Start at the top.** “Leadership by executive sponsor for learning programmes will give learning and development a priority that can filter down through management to the workforce.”

**Fill the gaps.** “Once the organization has made a commitment to learning, they will need to identify where their current L&D programmes are failing and explore solutions that facilitate intuitive learning pathways, promote productivity, and upskill and re-skill employees both for the job they have and the job they have the potential to fill.”

**Meet learners where they are:** Linear learning – online courses, books and conferences built around a specific topic – has its place but doesn’t always acknowledge that fact that many employees are already conversant with a range of technologies, leading to time wasted going over familiar ground. About half an employees’ “learning interactions,” are in the moment of need and a lot of additional learning happens on weekends when people can learn on their own time, and on their own terms.

**In the flow of work**. Organizations should try to deliver training in the flow of work, answering employees’ questions in the moment of need, and giving them the knowledge and tools to accomplish the next task.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/digital-skills-gaps-flexible-learning/>

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# People Management

## Ethical leadership and creativity

**Source:** Sustainability

**In a nutshell:** In this study a team of researchers, led by Xiu Jin, from Honam University in Korea, studied the links between ethical leadership and innovative behaviour and how “voice behaviour,” (the freedom, or lack of it, employees feel in having their say) affected this relationship. The researchers studied 296 full-time employees from small- and medium-sized enterprises in China. They found that “ethical leadership positively influences innovative behaviour through the mediating role of voice behaviour.” They also found that “psychological leadership significantly moderates the mediating effect of voice behaviour on the relationship between ethical leadership and innovative behaviour.”

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/9/5125>

## The servant leaders who come up with the goods

**Source:** Sustainability

**In a nutshell:** In this study Kalpina Kumari, from Greenwich University in Karachi, led a team of researchers studying 422 workers – managers and staff – in service and manufacturing industries. They found that there was a strong positive relationship between servant leadership and organizational citizenship behaviour and that employees’ emotional intelligence partially mediated this relationship. They concluded that “leaders who can serve their followers’ needs and expectations to the best of their abilities could promote and strengthen emotional intelligence among their employees, which eventually boosted their followers’ behaviour’s emotional and motivational aspects.”

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/9/5231>

## Are your workers on i-deals?

**Source:** Personnel Review

**In a nutshell:** Ideals can include a belief in a fairer society, freedom and liberty or, in my case at least, the abolition of sans-serif fonts. I-deals, on the other hand, are idiosyncratic employment arrangements which stand to benefit the individual employee, as well as their employer. In this study Can Ererdi, from Henley Business School, studied 3,624 employees and 107 supervisors from a security organization in Chile. They found that flexibility i-deals and performance motivation interacted and that performance motivation reduced people’s desire to find another job and their work-family conflicts.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-08-2019-0419>

## Five top tips for change management

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Piloting change management must be a little like being Thomas the Tank Engine faced with some sheep on the line. You can have a chat to them and persuade them it’s in their best interests to move on; you can sound the alarm and hope this scares them into action; or you can just carry on as usual and see what happens. In this study Bar Huberman, from XpertHR outlines five ways in which the process can be managed more effectively:

1. Explore the business case. Define what the organization wants to achieve and communicate the reasons why the change is being made and its expected effect.
2. Plan the change-management project. Put together a charter for change setting out the purpose of the change programme; this will serve as a starting point for the change and as a useful reference point during the project. Create a more detailed project plan, setting out information about how the change will be implemented. This should include details on key deliverables, dates, milestones, dependencies, communication with stakeholders, and costs
3. Tell key stakeholders about the change. Regular communication is vital to help people understand and engage with change. Identify who you need to communicate with and how you plan to do it, add a timeline for communication activities and bring it all together in a communications plan
4. Involve workers in change management. Involve people who are affected by the change in making the change. Give them the chance to influence the shape that the change will take before and during its implementation. People who are involved in a change are more likely to buy into it.
5. Learn from your successes and failures. Evaluate what went well and what did not. Assess what effect the change has had on the organization. Has it done what you thought it would do? And what is the return on investment.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/change-management-tips-for-hr-smooth-transition/>

## When talking the talk isn't always enough

**Source:** Journal of Management Studies

**In a nutshell:** In this study An-Chih Wang, from China Europe International Business School in Shanghai, led a team of researchers comparing Taiwanese people’s reactions to their boss’s behaviour and American’s responses. They found that for Taiwanese employees bosses who were “high in role modelling and low in ethical guidance,” received at least as high a moral evaluation as those who were high in both. However, for the Americans, bosses had to talk the talk as well as walk the walk. For the Taiwanese employees leaders’ ethical guidance was linked to a decrease in perceptions of humility and an increase in “follower depletion,” whereas a “say less, do more,” approach led to a higher perception of humility and lower follower depletion.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12821>

## Does a planning centre make a difference?

**Source:** Journal of Health Organization and Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study Annelies van der Ham, from Maastricht University Medical Centre, led a team of researchers investigating what effect a planning centre had in a real hospital. They found that after the introduction of the planning centre the overall network structure and coordination mechanisms remained “largely the same.” While integration and certain rules changed for specific planning tasks differentiation based on medical discipline remained. The number of local rules fell, whereas hospital-wide rules rose. Coordination mechanisms remained largely unchanged, primarily involving “mutual adjustment and standardization of work.” The researchers concluded that “overall, the hospital’s performance did not change substantially.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JHOM-10-2021-0375>

## The ambivalence advantage

**Source:** Personnel Psychology

**In a nutshell:** At times I think my children are the most-adorable beings in the Universe, whereas at other times I would cheerfully swap them for a cup of coffee and a one-way train ticket to Plymouth. Subjective ambivalence is the “psychological state of conflict associated with holding both positive and negative thoughts and feelings at the same time about the same object, person, or issue,” and in this study a team of researchers, led by Cristiano L. Guarana, from Indiana University, investigated the effect of leaders’ subjective ambivalence on teams’ performance outcomes. The researchers found that leaders’ subjective ambivalence had a positive effect on teams’ performance because it made both them and their subordinates seek out more information.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12516>

## The benefits of responsible leadership

**Source:** Sustainability

**In a nutshell:** Responsible leadership is “about making sustainable business decisions which take into account the interests of all stakeholders, including: shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, the community, the environment, and future generations.” In this article Wei Xuecheng, from the University Sains Malaysia, led a team of researchers studying responsible leadership, knowledge sharing and sustainable performance in a sample of 264 employees of Chinese manufacturing firms. The research found that responsible leaders influenced sustainable performance significantly and that part of this link was down to knowledge sharing.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/10/6020>

## Corporate social responsibility and turnover

**Source:** Sustainability

**In a nutshell:** In this study Erum Shaikh, from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University in Pakistan, led a team of researchers investigating the links between corporate social responsibility and employee retention in a survey of 300 bank workers in Pakistan. The researchers found that corporate social responsibility played a significant role in determining the organizational commitment and identification of internal stakeholders and employees.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/10/6030>

## Job crafting and work engagement

**Source:** Personnel Review

**In a nutshell:** In this study a team of researchers led by Deepika Jindal, from the University of Auckland, studied the links between work engagement and autonomy, job-crafting and performance in a study of 320 white-collar workers in an Indian manufacturer. The researchers found that “the level of job crafting is highest when both work engagement and work autonomy are high. Job crafting fully mediates the interactive effect of work engagement and autonomy on task performance and partially on contextual performance.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-11-2019-0646>

# Recruitment

## Are the sands of the labour market flowing towards the bottom?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have been analysing the UK job market and found that unemployed workers have more job opportunities to match their skills now than they did before the Pandemic; however, this change is offset by the fact that many of these roles are lower-skilled and lower-paid. The IFS analysed job data from Adzuna, combined with information from the Government’s Labour Force Survey and found that the mix of occupations being advertised is “rapidly returning,” to how it was in 2019; albeit with a shift towards lower-paid roles such as drivers or warehouse workers. The overall number of vacancies has been at least 20% above pre-Pandemic levels since Autumn 2021. Vacancies for drivers were 80% higher in the five months to February 2022, and vacancies for warehouse workers doubled. At the same time demand for nurses and midwives declined compared to pre-Pandemic levels.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/labour-market-ifs-low-skill/>

## Why disabled people need to mind the gap

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** New data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has found that the UK’s disability pay-gap was 13.8% in 2021, down from 14.1% before the Pandemic. The gap has widened slightly since 2014 though, when it was “only,” 12%. The gap has been consistently wider for disabled men than women. Wales had the narrowest gap at 12% and Scotland the highest at 19%. Staff with autism as their main impairment had a wider gap than those with other problems; their median pay was 33% less than non-disabled employees without a long-lasting health condition.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/uk-2021-disability-pay-gap-narrows-to-13-8/>

## Why the economy is like a fat man in a pair of budgie-smugglers

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** The economies of most European countries increasingly resemble a fat man in a pair of skimpy swimming trunks with a combination of disastrous inflation in the top half and uncomfortable constriction in the labour market. The latest report from the Office of National Statistics has found that workers’ pay fell 1.2% behind inflation from January to March 2022. Regular pay – excluding bonuses – rose by 4.2%, with pay including bonuses rising by 7%. This compares to a 7% level of consumer-prices index inflation and a 9% level of retail-price inflation; equating to a real-terms fall of 1.2% excluding bonuses and a 1.4% rise for those lucky enough to get a bonus. At the same time both vacancies (1.29 million) and job moves (994,000) reached record levels and the estimated number of employees on pay rolls also rose to a record high at 29.5 million. The UK employment rate increased by 0.1% to 75.7%.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/wages-january-to-march-2022-ons/>

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# Wellbeing

## Another company signs up to the four-day week

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Every so often parents of small children contemplate – flabbergasted – the lives of people who learn languages, write novels or fanny about with sourdough. Even a four-day week might not help us get to grips with Icelandic but it would certainly be a help. One more organization joined the move to a four-day week lately – search-engine marketing agency Marketing Signals. They have added half an hour to the working day and taken away one full day a week, resulting in a working week cut from 37.5 hours to 32. The company has also divided its staff in two with one half working Tuesday to Friday and the other half Monday to Thursday. Staff then swap over the following week. The move, which will include no loss in pay or benefits, will focus on improving work-life balance and is part of Marketing Signal’s aim to prioritize working smarter, not harder.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/marketing-signals-introduces-four-day-week/>

## Working from home. Dog’s dinner or cat’s whiskers?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** “Get two economists in a room and you’ll find three opinions,” goes the old joke. The same could be said about home working. Boris Johnson tells of walking to the fridge to get some cheese and forgetting what he was doing, whereas others are enthusiastic about the possibilities of getting their head down, uninterrupted by phone calls and turgid discussions of last night’s *Strictly Come Dancing*. The Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) have been asking people all about it. A quarter of employers want their workers to be in the office, or on site, all the time, whereas 39% of employees would like to work from home all, or most of, the time. However, 41% of employers polled in October/November 2021 said new ways of working had increased productivity, up from 33% a year earlier. At the same time fewer said that hybrid or home working had had a negative effect on productivity (18% in 2021, 23% in 2020). Nearly two-thirds of workers (63%) said their employer had not asked them about their future working preferences.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/hybrid-working-productivity-cipd/>

## How HR can deal with the war in Ukraine

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** In this article Phil Crowe – an employment law partner at Shoosmiths – sets out a few ways in which employers can support employees affected by the war. This can include being flexible and considering each person’s circumstances; signposting workers to employee-assistance programmes; and reminding people to look after their mental health. If an employee wants to work from home so they can take personal calls from their family in the Ukraine then employers should be sympathetic to this. Employees may also ask for time off to process the situation, or arrange practical help for family members who are based in the Ukraine. Employers should consider granting leave to employees for this wherever possible. Communicating with employees about the war is delicate. It’s good to have some level of communication but some employees might want to focus on their work as an escape for their own wellbeing and could become distressed if they have numerous reminders of the war.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/phil-crowe-war-ukraine-value-employee-benefits/>

## Are employers doing enough for hard-up workers?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** *Employee Benefits* has been running an online survey to find out what employers are doing to help their workers cope with the cost-of-living crisis. 12% said they were introducing some additional financial help for their workers and a further 38% said they were thinking about it. However the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that 27% of workers said their pay was not enough to cope with a £300 emergency without having to use their savings. 19% felt that their employer was not doing enough to support their financial wellbeing and 12% said that their pay was not enough to support an acceptable standard of living without having to go into debt to pay for food or bills.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/50-of-employers-have-not-introduced-extra-financial-support/>

## Four ways for employers to help with the cost-of-living crisis

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Whether you blame Covid, Mr Putin, Brexit or Rishi Sunak for the cost-of-living crisis it’s no fun for anyone. There’s a limit to what employers can do but this article outlines five relatively low-cost ways they can help.

1. Offer retail and discount schemes.
2. Let people sell annual leave. “If it’s approaching the end of the annual-leave period and people have unused holidays that they don’t really want to take, it could be a welcome option to be able to sell that leave back to the employer and see an increase in their wage that month.”
3. Salary sacrifices. Budgets can be boosted and costs off-set if the money is used on cycle-to-work schemes, electric-vehicle leasing, or interest-free season-ticket loans
4. Provide what you can tax-free. Staff working from home may qualify for a small tax-rebate for basic costs such as broadband and home-office furniture
5. Promote health cash plans. These allow you to support both employee health and financial wellbeing, providing money back on health services such as physiotherapy and purchases such as glasses

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/the-cost-of-living-crisis-5-creative-ways-you-can-support-your-employees/>

## Bosses call for extra Bank Holiday

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** We’ve already had one extra Bank Holiday this year thanks to the Queen’s Jubilee and the Confederation of British Industry, UK Hospitality and the TUC have joined forces in asking for another one next year as well. They say that the Government has overestimated the economic costs of an extra Bank Holiday and have not given enough thought to the potential social and health benefits. There are currently eight permanent Bank Holidays in England and Wales. Scotland has nine, Northern Ireland has 10 and France and Germany have 11. However City analysts have warned that the Jubilee celebrations could trigger a drop in quarterly economic output as nobody has any money to spend going to the pub or visiting tourist attractions and extra Bank Holidays in previous Jubilee years have led to sharp monthly reductions in GDP, as the costs of businesses closing for the day were not outweighed by the benefits from higher consumer spending.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/extra-bank-holiday-2022-permanent-campaign/>

## … but who needs a holiday when you can go to work?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Adding to one’s suspicions that professional fulfilment in a nice quiet office might be a happier state of affairs than simultaneously mucking out guinea pigs, cooking dinner, and brokering peace deals between children are Spencer Clarke Group, a recruitment agency based in Preston. They have launched an initiative called The Wellness Project for their agency workers. The project, designed to support the emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing of employees, consists of expert advice and toolkits to support all areas of wellbeing available through the wellness hub on the group’s website, as well as through a monthly wellness newsletter. The group has also launched Wellness Wednesdays where life and career guidance will be available on its social channels. Agency workers can enter regular competition draws to win prizes including wellness journals and books, skincare bundles, relaxation candles, and healthy snacks. The project aims to provide constructive advice and coping mechanisms to prevent workers from feeling overwhelmed.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/spencer-clarke-group-introduces-wellness-project/>

## Are we doing enough to tackle modern slavery?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** It is estimated that, around the world, 16 million people endure modern slavery. The Financial Reporting Council, UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner Dame Sara Thornton, and Lancaster University have been looking into whether UK organizations are doing enough to prevent it and have come back with a resounding “no.” One in 10 companies do not provide modern slavery statements, despite it being a legal requirement and when they do only a third of such statements are considered clear and easy-to-read. Most statements were fragmented, lacked a clear focus and narrative, and often contained “boilerplate,” content. Only a quarter had key performance indicators (KPIs) and only 12% said they had made informed decisions based on them.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/modern-slavery-statements-compliance-10-per-cent-fail-to-publish/>

## Unum keeps staff together in electric dreams

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Electric vehicles (EVs) are a good way of going from the thrill of the open road to nail-biting suspense as you get down to 5% charge and keep your fingers crossed nobody has beaten you to the charger at Morrison’s. Employee-benefits provider Unum UK has launched an electric vehicle salary-sacrifice scheme for its 800+ permanent employees which allows them to choose between a wide range of EVs with no up-front payment on a 24-, 36-, or 48-month lease. Employees get a yearly mileage allowance – up to 30,000 miles – and access to a team of EV experts to choose the right car, and pair them with the right charger and energy tariff. Unum has also increased its allowance for a cycle-to-work scheme; employees can spend the allowance on a new bike, clothing, and equipment, as well as making savings on tax and national insurance.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/unum-uk-introduces-electric-vehicle-salary-sacrifice-scheme/>

## This year’s must-have? A menopause policy

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** In this article Employee Benefits reports on a survey by law firm Debenhams Ottaway, and the Hertfordshire branch of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The survey found that only a quarter of businesses had a menopause policy, despite 43% of them saying that working women “faced difficulties,” because of their menopause. Before 2021 only 18% had read or come across a menopause policy and 32% reported encountering negativity or resistance to implementing one, or providing other supportive measure. Of those organizations who had implemented a menopause policy 78% thought it had had a positive impact; 73% said menopause champions were a good idea; and 40% had taken specific measures to encourage men to understand the menopause and it’s effect on women in the workplace.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/75-of-employers-do-not-have-a-menopause-policy/>

## I don’t know what Civo does, but they’re doing it in four days

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** There are some sentences, which, despite an understanding of the individual words contained therein, nevertheless remain distinctly mystifying. [Civo](https://www.civo.com/kubernetes-provider?utm_source=google&utm_medium=googleads&utm_campaign=googleadsBrandWorld&keyword=civo%20cloud&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI1fPF1a719wIVeCCtBh1VRg6gEAAYASAAEgL2FPD_BwE) for instance have been described as a “pure play cloud native service provider.” If they said “we polish all the ponies’ hooves in [Equestria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equestria),” I’d be just as inclined to believe them. Whatever it is that Civo do, they’re now doing it in four days a week, as opposed to five. All employees will work a new week of 34 hours, instead of the previous 36, meaning that teams will now be able to work 8.5 hours a day, across a four-day week. Civo found that four-day working supported both continued retention, and the attraction of new staff. Civo have also experimented with uncapped employee holidays – as long as people meet the objectives set by their managers, and it works with the rest of the business, they have the flexibility to take the number of annual-leave days that works best for them.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/civo-moves-to-four-day-working-week/>

## Neurodiversity. Legal minefield or golden opportunity?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** It’s thought that one in seven people in the UK have some kind of neurodivergence. Diagnoses have gone up 787% over the last 20 years, and prescriptions for ADHD drugs have octupled; and that’s just the people who can be bothered to go through the lengthy and time-consuming process of getting a GP appointment to talk about it. At the same time the number of employment-tribunal cases brought by people on the basis of being discriminated against because of neurodiversity rose from 70 in 2020 to 93 in 2021. While one rise in a small sample may not mean anything it’s still a good idea for employers to prevent cases going to a tribunal and to be aware of some of the issues. Tribunal claims often arise when employees feel sidelined or unsupported or that they’ve been dismissed for reasons linked to their disability. Employees with autism may suffer from sensory overload due to noise in the workplace or judging social cues in a professional environment, whereas those with ADHD may struggle to focus on tasks or manage their time. Employers should also think about the good things neurodiverse employees can bring to the workplace; many will excel in creative roles, strategic thinking, or problem-solving, for example so leaders should make sure that neurodiverse staff are properly understood and given tasks that play to their strengths.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/increase-in-employment-tribunal-neurodiversity-claims/>

## What becomes of the broken-hearted?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** One of the clichés of detective drama – and with two small children and a distinct shortage of babysitters\* I’ve watched a fair amount of it – is the detective breaking bad news to the family and saying “I can’t imagine how you’re feeling.” Like most clichés it’s got more than a grain of truth behind it; we can never really plumb the depths of another person’s grief which is what makes it so hard to say the right thing. Grief can affect people’s appetite, sleep, confidence and concentration. Some people can find work a helpful distraction although they might not perform at their previous level for quite some time. In this article Ken Akers, the head of HR at Marie Curie, gives a few tips on how managers can help workers who are grieving. These include:

* Helping staff to feel equipped and supported to talk about loss
* Finding the courage and time to talk
* Provide flexible and sensitive support
* Be aware of the impact on the wider team – either in loss themselves or picking up the slack for a grieving colleague
* Know your organization’s bereavement policy
* Be clear about the process of applying for leave
* Check other ways in which the organization can provide support

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/ken-akers-how-employers-can-help-employees-experiencing-grief-at-work/>

\*If interested please send in your CV. Must be DBS-checked.

## How music makes the work go round

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** In this article Marianne Rizhallah outlines some of the ways music can improve life in the office. Music affects both our autonomic nervous system, which manages our heartbeat, and our limbic system which regulates our emotions. Anxiety-reducing music should contain a steady tempo, a simple melody, and a relatively predictable harmony. Music without lyrics can give one’s mind the space to tune into one’s immediate surroundings; ideal when the office feels slightly overwhelming or you’re working to a tight deadline. Office playlists can be used to bond with colleagues and can be a good icebreaker. Faster music can boost your energy, with pop music being the most-popular choice for boosting productivity.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/how-music-can-help-to-ease-anxiety-at-work/>

## When women’s pension pots turn out to be thimbles

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** A new survey by Working Wise, sponsored by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, has found that half of women aged 45 and over fear they will have to continue working beyond state retirement age to make ends meet, with 53% of women saying their pension pot was not sufficient for financial independence. Of the 1,356 women aged 45 and over who took part in the survey 83% had worked part-time for at least a year and 27% had worked part-time for a decade. 71% had had to reduce their pension payments and 64% said they had stopped paying into a pension at all at some point. All of which means that there is a 37.9% gap between the sexes when it comes to pensions. 58% of those who took part in the survey did not understand their pensions. Only 19% of employers offered pension and financial-awareness sessions for their staff and only 12% of women said their employer had publicised an action plan to address pay and pension gaps between the sexes.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/gender-pensions-gap-half-of-women-expect-to-work-beyond-retirement-age/>

## Is mental health the biggest worry for employers?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** The league table of human discontents is as competitive as any Premiership season, albeit with less potential for a neatly-edited highlights package on Saturday evenings. Professional services company Barnett Waddingham have been studying the form and it found that 41% of employers think that mental health is currently the biggest HR challenge facing their business. This compared to 36% for recruitment; 31% for Covid-related absence; 29% for the skills gap and 26% for getting hybrid working up and running. 79% of businesses had reviewed their benefits offering since the start of the Pandemic and 49% had made changes as a result including increased health and private medical insurance options, and more wellbeing and mental-health days. 43% said they intended to retain flexible working after the Pandemic and 35% said they were keeping designated slots in the working day free from virtual meetings.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/41-of-employers-think-mental-health-is-their-biggest-challenge/>

## The four-day week. Is it only a matter of time?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Stopping change is a bit like trying to prevent a steamroller going downhill; you can huff and puff all you like but it’ll crush you in the end. Currently the four-day week is spreading all over the country like Japanese knotweed; the latest convert is London South-East Colleges, which teaches more than 12,000 students at its eight campuses across Bromley, Bexley, and Greenwich. It’s going to allow teachers specializing in English, Maths and STEM subjects to work a four-day working week as part of its recruitment plan. The pilot scheme, which will start in September, will offer candidates the opportunity to compress their full-time hours into four days, working 37 hours over four days, instead of the usual five.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/london-south-east-colleges-to-pilot-four-day-week/>

## MP campaigns for fertility protection

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Employees having treatment for fertility problems often struggle. Unlike employment legislation for pregnancy, maternity and paternity antenatal care, there is no requirement for employers to grant time off work for IVF, meaning staff often have to go outside working hours, take annual leave, or lie to their employers about their whereabouts. Many women are forced to schedule early-morning or weekend appointments, which can cost more, because they do not feel able to attend appointments during their working hours. Nickie Aiken, the MP for the Cities of London and Westminster has tabled a private members’ Bill to give workers having fertility treatment new legal protections against discrimination, including a right to time off work. It is estimated that infertility affects one in seven couples with 40% of women resorting to IVF being under 35. The bill has gained the support of business minister Paul Scully.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/mp-seeks-legal-protections-for-employees-undergoing-fertility-treatment/>

## Poor wellbeing: the hole you can’t dig yourself out of

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Insurance company Willis Towers Watson’s conducted a survey of employee wellbeing, *2022 Global Benefits Attitudes Survey*. They found that only 37% of UK employees reported good emotional wellbeing, with around one in eight saying their levels of wellbeing were “poor.” Those with poor wellbeing were more likely to be off work sick and were three times more likely to feel disengaged and burnt out at work. They were five times more likely to have suffered with anxiety or depression in the last two years; single women with children; those on low incomes; and those working in the retail and wholesale sectors were the most negatively affected. Over the last three years social wellbeing levels dropped by 40% - a trend that was particularly marked among older workers and lower earners. In the last year 42% had taken “significant,” actions to try to improve their wellbeing but high-risk employees found it difficult to translate action into noticeable improvements. Staff with low wellbeing were less likely to take action to improve it, and were less likely to report improvements even when they did take action.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/37-of-uk-staff-report-good-emotional-wellbeing/>

## How insecure work drags everyone down

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** It’s thought a million people in the UK are currently on zero-hours contracts, with 3.6 million being in insecure work, including low-paid self-employment; more than half of whom earn less than the minimum wage. And while we should reserve most sympathy for these latter-day Bob Cratchits the TUC also points out that skinflint employers reduce the Treasury’s take from national insurance and income tax, costing the Exchequer about £9.7bn a year. People in low-paid self-employment and on zero-hours contracts are also more reliant on social-security payments to top up their incomes, creating expense for the Government as well as reducing its income.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.employeebenefits.co.uk/tuc-insecure-work-treasury-coffers/>

## Is a lack of flexible working pushing women out of the workforce?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Not everyone is enjoying the benefits of flexible working and a new survey of 2,000 workers and 503 hiring managers by LinkedIn found that more than half (52%) of women say a lack of flexibility at work has pushed them to leave – or consider leaving – a job. 21% of women felt their career progression had been damaged by a lack of flexible working and 25% had taken a career break as a result. 80% of hiring managers said that they had offered staff greater flexibility since the start of the Pandemic. 73% thought that their workers were largely satisfied with their organization’s flexible-working policies and 78% though they offered enough flexibility to balance work and personal commitments. 74% of women said flexible start and finish times would be beneficial. 71% wanted more annual leave and 68% were in favour of a four-day week. The ability to work remotely on days of one’s own choosing was important. Other research from the Centre for Economics and Business Research found that the greater adoption of flexible working by employers could open up jobs for 1.3m more people in the UK, including those who have caring responsibilities, disabilities, or who live in rural areas.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/women-flexibility-at-work-linkedin-research/>

## What makes a happy remote worker?

**Source:** The International Journal of Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** Rather like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Financial Crash of 2008 the 2020 Pandemic marks one of those watersheds in human history; in the Pandemic’s case marking a more or less permanent shift to at least a degree of home working. But what makes for a happy home worker? In this study Eva Straus, from the University of Vienna, led a team of researchers attempting to find out. They collected information from 2,222 workers between March and May 2020 and 1,268 workers from between November 2020 and January 2021. They looked into the effect of a number of resources including:

* Personal
  + Self-goal setting
  + Self-efficacy
  + Home-office experience
* External
  + Equipment at home
* Organizational
  + Work-related
  + Social

Well-being and engagement decreased less when remote workers said they had high levels of social support and self-efficacy at the start of the Pandemic. An improvement in overall resources from the first measurement period to the second was associated with a reduced decline in wellbeing, productivity, and engagement.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2075235>