



ICF next+

Employee well-being

Three ways to implement a positive approach within your organization

By [Katrin Homer](#)

We're strong advocates of the idea that organizations need to be more proactive in their approach to employee well-being. And that the first step you can take to doing this is to put well-being at the heart of your hybrid strategy for the future of work.

We've talked before about the need to fold well-being into everyday working life, but how do we put this into practice as leaders? What does adding positivity to your approach to employee well-being actually look like?

Here are three practical ways you can implement a more positive approach to employee well-being within your organization.

1. Find your well-being story, and then personalize it

What's the best way for an organization to create a coherent, proactive approach to well-being?

First, find a core narrative to build your well-being communications upon. What's the story you want to tell your people about how your organization thinks and acts around this topic? Identify this central, compelling narrative and then build specific communication for different groups on that foundation. Have a consistent story around well-being across the organization—with messages then tailored to individual audiences—will help to create the sense of a shared mission. For even more impact, link it explicitly to your organizational values and your brand identity.

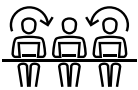
From there, personalization is key.

Ensure you're reaching the right people, in the right place, at the right time. Talk about well-being in a multi-channel way. Get relevant content out quickly and simply to the right audience, when and where they need it most. Use a mix of "always-on" push-and-pull communication, creating a blend of messaging that builds awareness, understanding, and encourages participation.



Example: for a remote team of engineers out on the road, you can create a well-being podcast that they can download and listen to while they're traveling between jobs. Or send simple, timely, nudge notifications to their phones and laptops that are relevant to whatever task they're doing at that time.

Personalization also means making your well-being messaging as relevant as possible to your audience. Different people have different needs. The 2021 World Trend Index report from Microsoft and Edelman suggests that taking a segmented approach to your communications will have a real benefit. For example, they found that most established leaders are thriving in the current climate, while almost the same percentage of new employees—64%—say they're struggling.



Example: Compare the well-being needs of three hypothetical employees. A 21-year-old, straight out of university, who is differently-abled. A single, child-free, and career-driven 30-year-old who is hoping to buy their first house. And 50-year-old, who is facing a few age-related health challenges, and whose children have just moved out. Each has very different needs, in terms of physical, mental, social, and financial well-being. The 50-year-old doesn't necessarily want to get a financial well-being tip or a nudge about how to buy your first home. But maybe would want one on how to cope with your 18-year-old leaving home for the first time or an invitation to a colleague interest group that deals with menopause.

Look carefully at audience segmentation. It will help you refine your approach to building well-being into your employee experience.

2. Create support structures that encourage meaningful relationships and boost social well-being

Increasingly, organizations are creating networks of trained employees to directly support their people with their well-being. These human support networks work alongside an organization's other resources—such as an employee assistance program (EAP) or a digital well-being hub. Properly trained and supported, these people can help to create a supportive culture where regular conversations with colleagues about well-being are commonplace. Crucially, these networks also help to build social well-being among a workforce.

What's the best way to create these structures within your organization?

The world of social anthropology has some helpful insights. The anthropologist Robin Dunbar looked at the most successful social networks that an individual has and discovered that they often don't exceed 150 people. We find it hard to have emotional connections with more people than that—and that has important implications for businesses.

Think about structuring your organization so that immediate departments don't include more than 150 people. Ask how you can make sure people feel they know each other—rather than having to interact with strangers.

Dunbar also noted that the closest network that people want to maintain is around five close associates or confidantes. These are the people that you go to when things really don't work for you, or you just need a shoulder to cry on. They're your immediate support and they will proactively look out for you. With many employees moving jobs and joining organizations where they've never met anyone face-to-face, helping new colleagues create these vital support networks is a critical part of the early employee experience.

Robin Dunbar's numbers for successful social networks

5

Confidantes

15

Close group

50

Acquaintances

150

Personal social group

3. Help your line managers to have the best well-being conversations

Line managers are key to setting the tone, role modeling behavior, and building the well-being culture you want. But don't assume they already know the why, how, and what of your well-being strategy. You'll need to explain it to them, make it relevant, and support them with the tools and resources they need to be effective.

Here are three practical ways to help your line managers to implement a positive, proactive approach to well-being across your organization.

A. Set well-being experience principles upfront

One way to begin this process for managers is to establish a set of agreed experience principles around well-being. These will act as a framework that everyone can commit to and use as a way of understanding how to approach talking about the well-being needs of different colleagues.

B. Use data from your employee engagement survey and hold focus groups

Digesting data from your engagement surveys and dedicated well-being focus groups can help everyone—including managers—discover and define what the most relevant needs are. They're also a chance to find out more about how and when employees want to be communicated with about well-being.

C. Support your managers with targeted digital resources

A dedicated well-being hub acts as a digital home for well-being resources for employees. But it should also include resources for your managers to help them to have better conversations. For example, these resources might include practical toolkits for managers to help them to run short, ongoing well-being awareness sessions with their teams.

To thrive in the future of work, we need to take a far more positive approach to well-being within our organizations.

Here, we've suggested three simple ways to start doing that, right now. Identify your well-being story and tailor your communications accordingly. Grow supportive and inclusive colleague networks that support meaningful relationships and promote an open, trust-based, and non-judgemental approach to talking about well-being every day. Give your managers the tools and support they need to drive a well-being culture where everyone can be at their best.

Author:

Katrin Homer

Principal Consultant, Colleague Practice

Katrin.Homer@icfnext.com

Katrin is a principal consultant in the colleague practice for our clients across Europe and Asia, focusing on financial services, tech and telecoms, aviation, pharmaceuticals, and other sectors. She is experienced in strategy and consulting, and helps clients within leadership, transformation, and culture where she designs, develops, and delivers large-scale programs.

Katrin is actively involved in creating “Accelerators for the Future of Work.” She is designing and delivering tools and frameworks, digital assets, and interventions to prepare employees for future ways of working.

For more information, contact:

hello@icfnext.com

+1.612.215.9800

[LINKEDIN.COM/ICF-NEXT](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icf-next)

[@ICFNEXT](https://www.instagram.com/icfnext)

[FACEBOOK.COM/ICF-NEXT](https://www.facebook.com/icfnext)

About ICF Next

ICF Next is a new breed: a consulting agency. We combine the deep creative capabilities that clients expect from a world-class agency with the expertise they require to navigate complex and business-defining milestones. Our team of mission-driven strategists, marketers, technologists, and data scientists works every day to build experiences that deliver active participation from the people who most influence change for our clients.

Our holistic approach to communications and marketing ensures we are moving customers and colleagues from a state of passive engagement to long-term brand loyalty, advocacy, and shared identity. Learn more at icfnext.com.

No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, or by any means for any purpose without prior written permission.

ICF NEXT + ICF INTERNATIONAL are registered trademarks of ICF and/or its affiliates. Other names may be trademarks of their respective owners.