



# The Value of Creating a Culture of Trust

Consumer, Retail and Food Sector insights

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# Introduction

This study, commissioned by BSI and undertaken by the CEBR, provides a comprehensive analysis of the implications of investing in workplace wellbeing for organizational performance, at a time when many economies are plagued by low productivity, high rates of absence, and demographic challenges.

Creating a culture of trust is increasingly recognized by many experts in people management as a fundamental driver of a productive, resilient, and engaged workforce. But beyond its intrinsic value to employees, it plays a central role in shaping business outcomes, influencing absenteeism, presenteeism, retention and overall efficiency.

As structural changes, including shifting demographics and technological advancement, reshape the labour market and workplace, understanding the factors that support or hinder employee health and wellbeing (HW) should be a strategic priority for businesses.

In the full study, we examine the relationship between workplace wellbeing and productivity through a detailed assessment of employee experience, workplace readiness, and associated economic impacts. Drawing on primary research, the study poses the following questions:

- How does confidence (to approach employers when someone is faced with a HW issue) relate to productivity?
- Does confidence in approaching an employer mitigate the productivity loss associated with HW challenges?
- Is there therefore a 'productivity premium' that comes from being confident (i.e. is there a material impact on the business beyond the individual feeling more supported)?
- If so, what is the monetary value of this 'productivity premium' to businesses and national economies?

This analysis is complemented by an assessment of employers' readiness to provide support, alongside an examination of the role workplace standards play when HW issues arise. We then provide actionable insights for businesses and policymakers seeking to improve workforce outcomes and unlock productivity gains.

Learn more about the research, methodology and full findings [here](#).

# Insights

Workplace wellbeing has climbed steadily up the corporate agenda over the past decade. Policies, initiatives and conversations have all increased, but the question remains: has the employee experience improved for people in the food or retail sectors?

What we found is that not all health challenges are treated equally. At the top of the hierarchy sits physical health, but then the picture fragments. Confidence with psychological challenges is split almost evenly between those who feel able to seek support and those who do not. 40% of those in the Consumer, Retail & Food sector say their employer offers no listed mental health support service. This tension, between recognition and provision, defines the current state of mental health in many workplaces.

Support for neurodiversity is even less consistent. In some cases, employees report reasonable levels of flexibility or managerial support. In others, confidence is low and adjustments are unclear or unavailable.

The picture is most stark for menstrual and menopause health. Confidence in raising these issues is low, support provision is limited, and the majority of employees report no formal support at all. This is the area where workplace readiness is most visibly lagging behind employee need.

**Only 48% feel confident raising menstrual and menopausal health challenges**



Absenteeism is the most obvious and visible signal of poor workplace wellbeing. Presenteeism is a more hidden challenge - and is far more widespread.

Across all health and wellbeing challenges categories, a large majority of employees report continuing to work even when their ability to perform effectively is reduced:

- Mental health: 82%
- Physical health: 76%
- Menopause: 92%
- Neurodiversity: 86%

Consequently, employees report meaningful productivity impacts. Tasks take longer - often up to one or two additional hours - and performance is visibly affected. When multiplied across teams and organizations, the cumulative cost is significant to both organizations in the sector and the wider economy.

The implication is clear: many organizations are underestimating the true impact of health challenges because they are not captured in absence data alone.



Our survey found that despite support and provisions sometimes being in place, this didn't necessarily mean people were accessing it. When facing psychological health challenges, only one in five employees felt confident raising these issues with employers.

This is even more pronounced for menopause and menstrual health. The data highlights a stark difference depending on who the conversation is with. Confidence in approaching a male line manager is extremely low, but significantly higher with a female line manager.

This points to a deeper issue: wellbeing is not just about provision, but about psychological safety. Employees in these sectors are constantly assessing who is safe to speak to, what is appropriate to disclose, and what the consequences might be. Without trust, even well-designed policies risk going unused.

**Only 6% felt confident speaking to a male line manager about menstrual challenges.**



# Barriers to action

The findings point toward a clear direction of travel for organizations in the food, drink, retail and trade sectors.

- There is a need to move beyond one-size-fits-all wellbeing approaches. Different health challenges require different types of support, and employees experience them in very different ways.
- Organizations must address presenteeism as a core issue. This means shifting focus from absence to everyday performance and capacity and giving employees permission to adjust as needed.
- Managers are critical. They are often the first point of contact, but currently not always trusted as such. Building capability, confidence and consistency at this level is one of the most powerful levers.
- Specific gaps must be addressed more directly. Menopause support, in particular, stands out as an area of significant unmet need. Neurodiversity also requires more consistent and visible approaches, particularly in workplace design and adjustment.
- Culture matters as much as policy. Without psychological safety, openness and trust, even the best-designed initiatives will fail to reach the people they are intended to support.

**Presenteeism is the hidden cost: 92% of CRF employees work while unwell**



# Key takeaways

## 1. Support isn't matching the reality

The data covering the sector suggests a complicated picture. While some areas of health and wellbeing are relatively well supported, others lag significantly behind. More importantly, there remains a clear disconnect between what employees experience, what they feel able to say, and how organizations respond.

## 2. Mixed picture around employee confidence

Not all health and wellbeing challenges are treated equally.

Employees are generally most confident raising physical issues with their employer, and organizations appear better equipped to respond. Beyond this, the picture fragments quickly.



### **3. A confidence problem, not just a provision problem**

Even where support exists, employees don't always feel able to use it. Confidence is low, particularly for mental health and more sensitive topics. In many cases, only around one in five employees report feeling confident raising issues.

### **4. Gaps in structure, clarity and communication**

The data also reveals clear organizational maturity gaps. Only a third of employees report the presence of formal policies or a named individual responsible for wellbeing. Many employees saying they have heard of policies but are unsure what they include.

### **5. Wellbeing challenges can pose a career risk**

Mental health stands out as a major driver of career disruption, with over half of employees reporting negative effects on progression. It also affects confidence, motivation, and ambition.



## The role of workplace wellbeing standards

The modelling makes clear the value of workplace HW support and identifies the premium available if employees are confident that they can come forward and that help would be on offer.

Creating an environment in which employees feel confident about support on offer and comfortable coming forwards is not achieved simply by an employer telling them they should feel this way. True confidence – and therefore the associated premium – requires more than just words or tick-box exercises. This is where workplace wellbeing standards, such as those published by ISO or BSI, have a critical role to play.

Crucially, such standards are practical and clear guides, flexible enough to align to different types of workplaces and different employee and employer experiences.

Importantly, while many workplaces will have these in place, these may not always be visible or explicitly communicated to employees. Generally, employee familiarity with standards (generally, as opposed to specific ISO or BSI standards) was limited, yet once, employees felt they would be valuable in creating confidence.



## Food and Drink

	DE	UK	US	Total
Very familiar	24%	22%	28%	57%
Heard of them, but not sure what they include	38%	48%	42%	38%
Not familiar at all	29%	26%	25%	26%

Table 9: Familiarity with workplace wellbeing standards / best practice guidance implemented by your employer

	DE	UK	US	Total
Very valuable	30%	41%	48%	40%
Somewhat valuable	34%	36%	30%	36%
Neither valuable nor invaluable	19%	11%	9%	12%
Not very / not at all valuable	10%	8%	7%	8%

Table 10: Perceptions of value of workplace standards / best practice guidance for employee wellbeing and performance

## Retail and Trade

	DE	UK	US	Total
Very familiar	23%	26%	34%	57%
Heard of them, but not sure what they include	42%	48%	41%	38%
Not familiar at all	30%	24%	20%	26%

Table 9: Familiarity with workplace wellbeing standards / best practice guidance implemented by your employer

	DE	UK	US	Total
Very valuable	28%	34%	44%	40%
Somewhat valuable	37%	40%	33%	36%
Neither valuable nor invaluable	16%	11%	12%	12%
Not very / not at all valuable	14%	9%	6%	8%

Table 10: Perceptions of value of workplace standards / best practice guidance for employee wellbeing and performance

**“This report highlights a significant opportunity for food, drink and retail organizations to strengthen wellbeing as a driver of performance and retention.**

**“With presenteeism reaching up to 92%, and only around a third reporting formal wellbeing policies or a named wellbeing lead, support must become more consistent, visible and trusted.**

**Organizations that create a culture of psychological safety, in which employees feel confident to raise concerns and access appropriate support, will be better placed to protect productivity, improve engagement and retain talent.”**

**Todd Redwood, Consumer, Retail & Food –  
Global MD, BSI**



# Conclusion

A clear and consistent narrative emerges linking workplace confidence and availability and awareness of support with improved productivity outcomes. While everyone has moments where their physical or mental wellbeing are not optimal, the support they receive at these moments from their employer could be the difference between them needing merely a brief moment to recuperate or a protracted absence or even exit from work – impacting not only the individual but the organization and wider society.

Lower confidence to approach employers with health or wellbeing challenges and lower expectation of accessing support is consistently associated with higher productivity losses, driven by longer periods of absenteeism and a higher presenteeism risk. From the research we can draw the following conclusions:



## Build confidence that support is available

We all have times when our health or wellbeing impacts our ability to work. But our research shows that confidence in how this will be handled at work is critical - and has real economic impact. Employees who feel less confident approaching their employer tend to have bigger productivity losses, from both more time off and greater presenteeism. Low confidence also means employees are more likely to leave their job or take long periods of leave when health challenges arise.

This means that having support on offer is not enough. Going further to remove stigma and ensure employees are comfortable talking about ill-health or wellbeing challenges and reassured that they will receive support is vital.

## Early intervention can translate into long-term gains

Employees who feel less able to approach their employer are more likely to experience extended absences or job separation. This suggests problems escalate when issues are not raised or support is not forthcoming. As a result, low confidence not only amplifies day-to-day productivity losses but also contributes to more severe and sustained disruptions to workforce participation. Thus, employers do have the power to shape outcomes even if the fact someone is unwell is out of their hands, by prioritizing early intervention.

This requires a mindset shift, towards long-term thinking. Supporting employees with health and wellbeing challenges may feel like an outlay beyond an employer's direct obligations, but only when viewed from a short-term perspective. As our data makes clear, there is a not insignificant potential premium to be gained, but it must be seen as an investment in the future.

## Structured provision can move the dial

Employers generally want to do the right thing, but, currently, support remains inconsistent. This is especially the case looking beyond physical health, as many workers report receiving no support at all when needed. Yet where clear workplace support is in place, it brings identifiable benefits. In these cases, absence is lower, showing that structured provision, often underpinned by formal health and wellbeing standards, can help build confidence and reduce productivity losses.

HW workplace wellbeing standards and related workplace provision represents an effective lever for reducing productivity losses associated with HW challenges, while also improving overall workplace responsiveness and resilience.

## Generating the confidence premium

Ultimately, most employees want to be productive and contribute to a company's success, especially on arrival in a role. They do not want to be impeded by health and wellbeing challenges. Similarly, most employers are well-meaning and genuinely want to support the health and wellbeing of their team. But they are facing competing priorities, a changing world of work, and ongoing political uncertainty. Truly delivering health and wellbeing support and generating that premium can feel daunting.

For employers looking to foster greater confidence among employees, strengthening workplace provisions via HW standards is a practical means of building employee confidence, signalling that an organization is prepared and willing to offer support.

This is where [standards](#) can be a vital tool to build a culture of trust in the sector.





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