



Employee Voice

is a key driver of workplace
wellbeing

Employee voice refers to the formal and informal channels through which employees share their views, ideas, suggestions, concerns, and dissatisfactions about work-related matters, with the aim of influencing workplace decisions.

When leadership listens, responds meaningfully, and demonstrates follow-through, employee voice can enhance wellbeing by fostering organisational trust and strengthening employees' sense of agency, fairness, and influence over their working conditions.



Employee Voice Interventions



Leverage multiple communication channels to amplify employee voice

Organisations that value their employees establish multiple voice channels, ensuring the right avenue exists for the right issue, ranging from formal, structured mechanisms for input and feedback to informal interactions that surface emerging concerns, tacit knowledge, and new ideas.

- **Formal channels** encompass structured mechanisms designed to capture employee input in a systematic and transparent manner. These include organisation-wide surveys, grievance and dispute resolution procedures, town hall meetings, formal consultations, and engagement with representative bodies.¹
- **Informal channels** refer to unstructured or spontaneous forms of communication that occur outside established organisational processes. Examples include everyday workplace interactions, both in person and via internal communication platforms such as Slack, as well as discussions on social media platforms.^{2, 3}
- **Confidential channels** are essential for enabling employees to share sensitive or high-stakes feedback without fear of negative repercussions.⁴ These have been shown to foster organisational trust and strengthen perceptions of psychological safety.⁵



Refer also to:
○ **Trust driver**



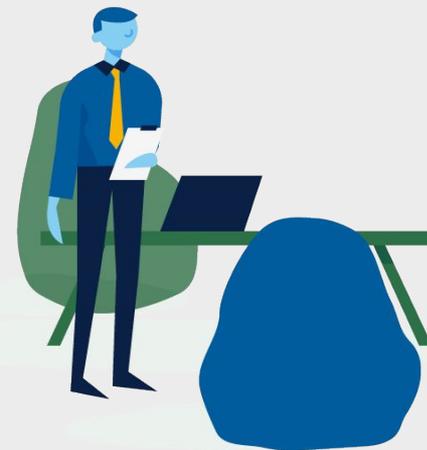
Employee Voice Interventions



Use employee surveys to drive insightful, impactful wellbeing action

Employee surveys, when designed thoughtfully and followed by action, offer a scalable and cost-effective method for identifying both the challenges employees face and the conditions under which they thrive. They form a foundational element of any workplace wellbeing strategy by creating a structured way to surface insights, prioritise interventions, and track progress over time.

- A randomised controlled trial conducted among Indian factory workers illustrated the **powerful impact of simply asking employees about their wellbeing**. Workers were invited to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their job and working environment. Remarkably, quit rates dropped by 20% in the group that received the survey, even though it came after a disappointing wage increase. This suggests that giving employees a voice can improve retention.⁶
- However, when surveys are not met with tangible action, they risk eroding trust and even harming wellbeing in the long run. When organisations respond to survey findings with visible follow-through, **they can foster a culture of trust, participation, and psychological safety**. For example, a Swedish organisation that used the results of a detailed employee wellbeing survey to co-create an action plan to improve working conditions saw measurable gains in employee health, productivity, and attendance.⁷





Employee Voice

Spotlight

Measuring employee wellbeing

An effective employee survey should capture both how employees feel about their work and the factors that shape those feelings. This dual approach allows organisations to track wellbeing outcomes, understand their root causes, and target interventions where they will have the greatest impact.⁸



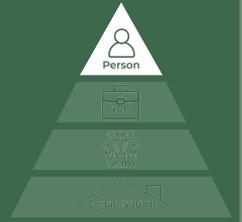
The **Work Wellbeing Score** is a composite measure based on four core dimensions designed to capture how employees feel about their work overall.⁹ It includes the following four dimensions:

1. **Job Satisfaction:** “I feel completely satisfied with my work”.
2. **Purpose:** “My work has a clear sense of purpose”.
3. **Happiness:** “I feel happy at work, most of the time”.
4. **Stress:** “I feel stressed at work, most of the time”.

Measuring the **drivers of work wellbeing** (i.e., aspects of the work environment that influence wellbeing) makes it possible to identify which factors are most strongly correlated with work wellbeing, uncover the underlying reasons why employees feel the way they do, and identify areas for targeted interventions. These are insights that are critical for designing effective, evidence-based workplace strategies.



Employee Voice Interventions



Train people leaders to support work-life integration through meaningful conversations

People leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive culture where employees feel safe to share personal challenges, whether related to family and caregiving responsibilities, health needs, or neurodivergence. Organisations that invest in training to equip leaders with the skills to engage in open dialogue often see stronger retention, higher morale, and improved wellbeing among their employees.

- Two studies evaluated a training program that equipped leaders with communication prompts and strategies to initiate conversations about employees' family responsibilities and identify potential schedule adjustments. The program encouraged supervisors to ask well-timed, supportive questions that enabled employees to share constraints and collaborate on workable solutions.^{10,11}
- In a retail grocery setting, the intervention significantly improved physical health, sleep quality, and job satisfaction among employees experiencing high family-to-work conflict.¹⁰ In a separate study with healthcare workers, the intervention increased job satisfaction and organisational commitment, while reducing turnover intentions.¹¹



People leader training to support work-life integration can be broad or focused on specific issues. For example, the UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) recommends training leaders to hold open, supportive conversations about sensitive topics such as perimenopause and menopause.³⁸ A 2019 study found that even brief online training can improve managers' knowledge and significantly boost their confidence in handling such conversations.³⁹



Employee Voice Interventions



Collaborate with employees throughout their return-to-work journey

Return-to-work (RTW) interventions aim to support a sustainable reintegration of employees following work-related absences due to physical or mental health conditions. Increasingly, research highlights the importance of employee participation in these plans.

- A field-based study across three large Dutch employers including a university, a medical centre, and a steel company, evaluated a structured, participatory return-to-work (RTW) intervention for employees on sick leave due to common mental health conditions. The intervention involved a **phased dialogue between the employee and their direct supervisor, facilitated by an RTW coordinator, to jointly identify and address work-related barriers**. This structured collaboration significantly reduced the average time to sustainable RTW from 120 to 55 days.¹²
- In a parallel study aimed at supporting temporary agency and unemployed workers sick-listed due to musculoskeletal disorders, a similar participatory approach focused on building consensus through structured meetings reduced the RTW period from 299 to 161 days.¹³



Shared factors for success:

- A structured, phased approach
- Open dialogue with supervisors or RTW coordinators
- Employees identified and prioritised barriers to returning
- Reintegration plans were jointly developed and tailored



Employee Voice Interventions



Empower employees to co-create wellbeing interventions (2/3)



Participatory interventions engage employees in identifying workplace problems and co-developing solutions to resolve them. The emphasis is not only on the outcomes of change, but also on the collaborative process of involving workers in the design and implementation of those changes.¹⁴

Research consistently shows that work wellbeing programs deliver greater improvements in motivation, satisfaction, and long-term impact when **employees are actively engaged in both shaping and implementing them**. Involving employees in this way ensures that initiatives are tailored to the workplace context and relevant to employees' needs.

Some of the most effective wellbeing interventions bring employees into the process from the very beginning, starting with problem identification and planning, and continuing through implementation and follow-up. Evidence suggests that this approach:

- Leads to higher psychological wellbeing, greater job satisfaction, and stronger alignment with organisational goals.¹⁵
- Enhances employees' sense of agency.¹⁶
- Drives deeper engagement with intervention and increases the likelihood of sustained, positive impact.¹⁶





Employee Voice Interventions



Empower employees to co-create wellbeing interventions (2/3)

A large Japanese manufacturing company implemented a **multi-faceted participatory program** designed to address mental health concerns among its white-collar workforce, particularly women.¹⁷

This initiative combined:



- **Work environment improvement teams** made up of employees and managers, tasked with identifying workplace stressors and prioritising issues for action.
- The **Mental Health Action Checklist**, a structured tool to help teams systematically assess risks, propose solutions, and track progress.
- **Employee-led planning workshops**, where workers designed and refined interventions to ensure they were both feasible and relevant.

This combination ensured that employees were involved in every stage including problem identification, solution design, and implementation. The results saw **significant improvements in self-reported mental health outcomes**, attributed to both practical changes in the work environment and the psychological benefits of having a voice in shaping those changes.



Employee Voice Interventions



Empower employees to co-create wellbeing interventions (3/3)

In an industrial workplace in Finland, an intensive participatory method known as a “**participative work conference**” was introduced to address organisational challenges.¹⁸ Large groups of employees from across the organisation took part in multi-day seminars designed to:

- Facilitate open dialogue between workers, supervisors, and management.
- Identify and prioritise problems from multiple perspectives.
- Co-develop a wide range of solutions, from operational adjustments to cultural and communication improvements.



The approach deliberately flattened hierarchical structures during the sessions, creating a space where all voices could be heard equally. This process led to **multiple workplace changes**, including improvements to the physical and psychosocial work environment, stronger communication flows between departments, and the dismantling of hierarchical barriers that had previously impeded problem-solving. A qualitative review highlighted increased **shared ownership and commitment** to the agreed changes, which enhanced their sustainability over time.



Employee Voice Interventions



Enhance flexibility in shift-based work through participatory scheduling

Shift-based roles often operate within rigid structures that limit employees' access to flexible working arrangements. **Participatory scheduling practices** such as self-rostering and collaborative schedule design allow workers in these environments to co-create their work patterns within operational parameters. This approach benefits employees through improved health, safety, and wellbeing, while organisations see reductions in absenteeism, higher engagement, and stronger team culture.

Evidence from multiple studies demonstrates the value of participatory scheduling:

- Hospital-based caregivers who could self-select shift start times and lengths reported better recovery, improved sleep quality, and enhanced overall health, highlighting how flexible scheduling can mitigate the physical toll of shift work.¹⁹
- In a Finnish hospital, a digital scheduling tool optimised shifts based on both operational needs and employee preferences, significantly reducing evening shift-related sleepiness and improving alertness and safety in a high-stakes environment.²⁰
- A multi-site study across 28 healthcare organisations found that three different digital self-rostering systems improved employee wellbeing and increased perceived support from supervisors and peers one year after implementation.²¹

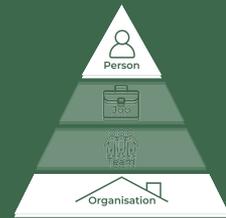


Refer also to other drivers:

- Flexibility
- Autonomy



Employee Voice Interventions



Give employees a say in budgeting decisions



Budget participation refers to the practice of actively involving employees in the budgeting process of a company or department. This may include providing input on budget allocations, contributing to financial planning, and influencing how resources are distributed. By engaging employees in this process, organisations can improve decision quality, increase transparency, and strengthen commitment to financial goals.

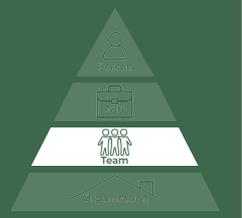
- A study of Portuguese real estate firms found that involving employees in the budgeting process had a positive effect on employee performance. These effects were explained by an increased commitment to budget goals, greater trust in management, and higher job satisfaction.²²
- In a randomised controlled trial, employees with mental illness enrolled in an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program were randomly assigned to receive either standard IPS or IPS plus a 12-month flexible “career account” valued at US \$950. Participants with a career account worked with a support worker to set employment goals and create a budget to achieve them. Compared to the IPS-only group, they had significantly longer job tenure, more days worked, higher total earnings, and better financial well-being. Notably, greater use of the budget was associated with stronger positive outcomes.²³



Budget participation is particularly valuable for employees whose daily work is directly affected by budgeting decisions, or for those who manage funds to meet performance targets and organisational objectives.



Employee Voice Interventions



Facilitate team dialogue for workplace problem-solving (1/4)

Giving employees structured opportunities to share experiences, analyse challenges, and co-develop solutions can drive both performance and wellbeing. Quality circles, dialogue groups, and employee problem-solving teams each provide a distinct format for strengthening communication, collaboration, and trust. When leaders act on employee-generated ideas, these approaches can yield measurable gains in job satisfaction, engagement, and operational results.

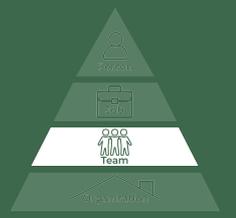
- **Quality Circles** are small, voluntary groups of 4–15 employees from the same work area who meet regularly under a trained leader to identify and solve work-related problems. They focus on refining processes, improving efficiency, and enhancing the quality of working life.²⁴
- **Dialogue Groups** are facilitated sessions for employees from the same professional group that prioritise open communication, reflection, and mutual support. Designed to build trust, psychological safety, and professional identity while jointly addressing workplace challenges.²⁵
- **Employee Problem-Solving Teams** are structured, cross-functional groups of employees who apply systematic, often tool-based, methods to identify and resolve operational or organisational challenges. These teams work collaboratively to enhance processes, service quality, and workplace experience, while promoting employee engagement, empowerment, and ownership.^{26,27}



The next three slides detail case studies for each of the above approaches.



Employee Voice Interventions



Facilitate team dialogue for workplace problem-solving (2/4)

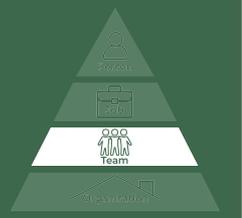
Quality Circles

- In a study of Iranian emergency nurses, small voluntary groups of 4–15 employees, led by a peer-elected leader, met regularly to identify, analyse, and solve work-related problems. After just three months, participants reported higher motivation, better health, greater job satisfaction, and increased perceived influence over their work environment. This structured yet employee-driven format makes quality circles a low-cost, scalable approach to addressing both operational and interpersonal challenges.²⁸
- In a study of U.S. Federal Mint employees, small voluntary quality circles composed of 5–12 members met regularly under employee-elected leaders to identify, analyse, and solve workplace problems. Over the course of the program, teams addressed issues such as workflow inefficiencies, equipment maintenance, and safety hazards, developing actionable solutions with management support. Participants reported improved communication, problem-solving skills, and teamwork, along with greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of influence over their work environment.²⁹





Employee Voice Interventions



Facilitate team dialogue for workplace problem-solving (3/4)

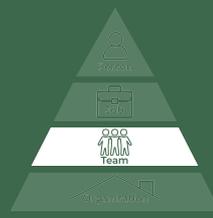
Dialogue Groups



- In a 12-month programme in the healthcare industry, physicians met in facilitated small-group dialogues to share experiences, reflect on challenges, and co-develop solutions for improving the work environment. Sessions focused on building trust, mutual support, and constructive problem-solving. Female physicians, in particular, reported reduced emotional exhaustion and higher job satisfaction.³⁰
- In a year-long programme with multidisciplinary primary care teams, participants took part in structured workshops to identify work stressors, prioritise issues, and design actionable improvements to workflow, communication, and role clarity. Facilitated by trained leaders, the process emphasised joint problem-solving, shared decision-making, and follow-up on changes. The intervention reduced emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation while improving teamwork, job satisfaction, and perceived quality of care.³¹



Employee Voice Interventions



Facilitate team dialogue for workplace problem-solving (4/4)

Problem-Solving Teams

- Tested in two Danish manufacturing companies, a 12-month, structured, participatory problem-solving approach used cross-functional teams to identify workplace challenges, generate solutions, and implement continuous improvements with management support. The intervention increased influence over work, role clarity, and social capital, while reducing stress and exhaustion in one company and improving recovery opportunities in the other.²⁶
- In the United States, an 18-month, team-based program equipped youth mental health service teams including clinicians, case managers, and support staff to identify and resolve organisational barriers to effective service delivery. By applying tools for teamwork, goal setting, and feedback, this intervention significantly improved morale, job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement, while reducing excessive bureaucracy and bottlenecked decision-making.³²
- In the Netherlands, a highly structured six-month intervention engaged hospital workers in collaborative problem-solving teams to identify their most pressing work stressors and design action plans to address them. Participants reported significantly lower emotional exhaustion over time, attributing improvements to clearer communication, stronger task support, and better workload sharing.²⁷





Employee Voice Spotlight

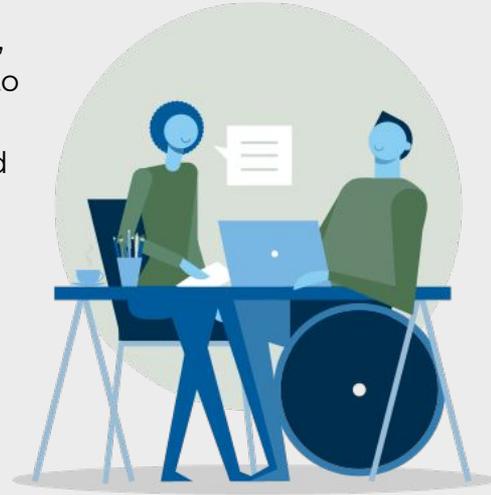
Psychosocial hazards and participatory interventions



A **psychosocial hazard** is anything that could cause psychological harm (e.g., negatively impact someone's mental health). Examples include excessive work demands, low support, unclear roles, poor working relationships, or harassment. Left unaddressed, these hazards can cause chronic stress and may lead to more serious conditions such as anxiety, depression, or sleep disorders.^{33,34}

Effective management requires more than routine risk assessments and control measures, it also depends on fostering **strong employee voice channels**. When employees feel safe to raise concerns, report hazards, and suggest improvements without fear of retaliation, organisations can detect issues earlier and implement solutions that are both practical and relevant.^{1,3}

Actively involving employees in hazard identification, decision-making, and evaluation ensures interventions address real challenges on the ground and fosters a shared responsibility for psychosocial safety. This is the principle behind **participatory organisational interventions**, which engage workers in identifying problems and developing solutions to improve working conditions. The emphasis is not only on the outcomes of change, but also on the collaborative process of designing and implementing those changes.¹⁴





Employee Voice Interventions



Start a health and wellbeing employee committee

A **Health and Wellbeing Employee Committee** (HaWC) is a small group of employees who meet regularly with management to raise concerns, suggest improvements, and implement practical workplace changes.



Access the
step-by-step
[start-up guide
for Managers](#)

A rigorous evaluation of HaWCs in U.S. e-commerce fulfilment centres saw improvements in employees' mental health within the first six months and a 20% reduction in turnover compared with control sites. The researchers estimated that achieving a similar retention effect through wage increases alone would have required a 1.5% rise in hourly pay.³⁵

Additional insights:

- **Visible action matters:** Sites completing more HaWC projects experienced greater retention, suggesting employees stay at an organisation longer when they see tangible change.
- **Participation beats suggestion boxes:** HaWCs outperformed “suggestion kiosks” that only collected feedback, underscoring the power of peer-led, participatory dialogue.

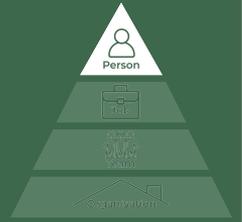


Two mechanisms drive success:

- **Instrumental** — concrete workplace improvements.
- **Symbolic** — employees feel heard, respected, and valued.



Employee Voice Interventions



Facilitate safe and informed employee disclosure



Employee disclosure is the voluntary sharing of sensitive or critical information such as a mental health condition with an employer or colleagues. Effective disclosure practices are supported by processes that foster **psychological safety** and uphold a **high degree of privacy and confidentiality**, ensuring that shared information is accessible only to those who need it. Such protections enable individuals to speak openly without fear of stigma, discrimination, or negative repercussions, while building trust in the organisation's commitment to employee wellbeing.

A randomised controlled trial evaluated the **READY?** decision aid, a web-based tool designed to support employees in deciding whether to disclose a mental health condition at work. The tool guides users through weighing potential benefits and risks, identifying personal priorities, and exploring disclosure options.³⁶ The tool:

- Reduced uncertainty and decisional conflict about whether to disclose.
- Advanced participants' readiness to make an informed decision.
- Alleviated depressive symptoms.
- Supported improvements in mental health outcomes for those who chose to disclose.

DCIDE is a free, web-based decision-support tool designed to assist workers with chronic, often invisible and episodic health conditions in making thoughtful, informed decisions about disclosing personal health information in the workplace.



Access here:
<https://aced.iwh.on.ca/dcide>



Employee Voice Interventions



Collaborate with unions to strengthen workplace wellbeing

Worker organisations, including trade unions, can serve as powerful protective factors for employee wellbeing by enhancing voice, security, inclusion and fairness. When management and unions collaborate constructively, they foster mutual trust and create the conditions for sustainable engagement.

A large-scale study of nearly two million workers across the United States and Europe explored how trade union membership relates to job satisfaction and broader wellbeing.³⁷

- Across Europe and the UK, union members have reported higher job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and happiness than non-members since the 2000s onwards. .
- Union members are less likely to feel stressed, worried, depressed, or lonely, and show greater trust in people and institutions. Positive associations also extend to perceptions of democracy, education, and the economy.

Re-examining the role of unions in today's workplaces offers a practical opportunity to strengthen employee satisfaction, fairness, and collective resilience—benefits that extend to both workers and the organisation as a whole.



How to [effectively work with unions.](#)



Employee Voice

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Making the most of this resource

1 Measure

Conduct an employee survey to assess four core dimensions of employee wellbeing: **job satisfaction, happiness, stress, and sense of purpose**. Collectively, these provide a scientifically validated, multidimensional view of how employees experience work.

Equally important, organisations should measure **the drivers of workplace wellbeing** - the underlying working conditions, relationships, and organisational factors that shape those experiences.

2 Understand

Once you've got the data, the next step is to **identify which drivers most strongly predict wellbeing outcomes within your organisation**.

Workplace wellbeing is multidimensional, shaped by a range of drivers, but not all drivers exert equal influence in every context.

By applying **data analysis at scale**, organisations can uncover which factors most powerfully explain wellbeing within their organisation.

3 Act

Once you have identified your priority drivers, the next task is to **select and implement interventions** that address them effectively.

The Playbook provides a curated selection of **evidence-based interventions** to help you act with confidence to choose interventions that are both empirically grounded and contextually feasible.

Don't forget to build **evaluation** plans into your intervention design.



Read [our guidance](#) document before getting started, to ensure you get the most out of the resources.

Sharing this resource



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Employee Voice

is just one key driver of
workplace wellbeing

These are just some of many evidence-based interventions recommended in the Work Wellbeing Playbook.



All recommendations and academic citations, organised by driver, are available for free on our website:

www.worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook