



7 trends that will shape workplace mental health in 2022

The year of
cultural change



The present is still uncertain, but the future of workplace mental health is shiny

If 2020 was about upheaval, the story of 2021 may well be uncertainty.

We continued to contort our lives around a global health crisis, while also learning the Greek alphabet. (The year started with Alpha, ended on Omicron, with a fat slice of Delta in the middle.) While vaccines gave vital protection, mental health challenges – like the pandemic itself – didn't go away.

The UK's second wave saw more deaths than the first. A lengthy lockdown, that came in within days of the new year, caused its own kind of pain. Once again, entire industries were shuttered. Kids stayed home from school. People (who could) worked from home.

Later, when we moved along a 'roadmap' towards some form of freedom, employers had the dual challenge of supporting employees' mental health in the here and now, while trying to curate a future-proofed tomorrow.

Deciding whether to embrace remote work forever, a wholesale return to HQ, or a hybrid mix of both isn't easy. Especially when uncertainty reigns and, let's not forget, this is all still so new. Decades of workplace rules are in-play – available for renewal, or the bin. And with worker wellbeing a mainstream concern at last, the future workplace must be built with mental health in mind.



To help you work it all out, we polled 1,500 HR decision-makers around the world about key workplace mental health topics. And also talked to some of our trusted partners, to provide some informed, on-the-ground insight. Combined, this pencils a picture of where we're at, as well as where we're headed.

So, if 2020 pulled workplace wellbeing into sharp focus, and 2021 was for figuring out our new normals, all signs point to 2022 being the year of action.

Here's to making it about just that. After two-years of upheaval and non-stop uncertainty, these could be 12 defining months where knowledge, empowerment, and mentally healthy workplaces become the *new, new normal*.

1 The rise of mental health training – at every level

Why it's trending

Empowering your people to protect and nurture their mental health isn't a single business decision, but a question of cultural change. This needs more than executive or senior leader buy-in – you need everyone, at every level, on board.

Our survey-takers flagged mental health training as the most pressing mental health initiative for 2022:

- A massive 87% said training is either very or somewhat important for managers, leaders, and all staff. Just 3% thought it's very or somewhat unimportant.

Not just necessary, training is fast becoming the norm:

- The majority of employers said they'll provide mental health training in 2022 – 53% will educate managers, with even more (54%) eyeing a company-wide training.

87% of HR decision-makers say training is either very or somewhat important at every level of the organisation.

What this means

It makes sense that, after two-years of ambiguity, companies want to take a structured, skills-first approach. To that end, a mental health education is not just obvious, but smart.

Just learning about mental health can boost individual wellbeing, and equip employees, and managers, to support the wellbeing of their colleagues. This makes training your chance to upskill staff, empower managers to have honest conversations with their teams, and create a culture of confidence – where no one is afraid to open up about their experiences of mental health.



"In 2022, training and skill development will be prominent, particularly for leaders and managers."



Dr James Mackie
SENIOR MANAGER MENTAL HEALTH, BP



How to get ahead

That's easy. Join the growing crowd of companies where, in 2022, training tops the to-do list.

There are heaps of learning options – with most providing a basic understanding of mental health, and how to spot mental ill-health in others. But all training is not created equal, mind you. So, before rolling out any programme, be sure to ask the following questions:

- What clinical psychology, or science, is the training based on?
- Does it focus on mental illness, or take a wider, whole-person approach – with mental health not framed as a problem, but key to a fulfilling life?
- What expectation is placed on those who complete training? Are course-goers urged to intervene, or direct colleagues to professionals?
- Does it empower leaders to drive cultural change around mental health, as well as boost knowledge among employees?
- Is the scheme a one-stop solution, or will it add to a wider culture to normalise, nurture, and celebrate mental health at work?

(Keen to learn more about the right way to roll out mental health training? You can find an Unmind handbook devoted to the topic [right here.](#))



“I believe mental health and wellbeing training shouldn't be a one-off event, but a continual process of engaging people in what is a broad and fascinating topic that we can all relate to as human beings.”

“For maximum impact, I always recommend a programme of training using various different formats – such as online self-learning, facilitated group sessions and smaller intimate sessions where a safe space is created.”



Charles Alberts
HEAD OF WELLBEING SOLUTIONS UK, AON

2 Wellbeing champs become a strategic priority

Why it's trending

No longer a nice-to-have, wellbeing champions are critical to culture change in organisations all over the world. In 2022, the role will become even more commonplace, as shown in our survey:

- Some 8 in 10 respondents said wellbeing champions will be (somewhat or very) important in 2022.
- Less than 1 in 50 thought wellbeing champions will be very unimportant.

What this means

The mental health version of an influencer, these internal advocates are vital to driving cultural change around wellbeing. Slotting in alongside (not instead of) HR, they are trailblazers, if not full-blown superheroes. Sometimes formal (and paid), other times not (and not), there's no strict rulebook for wellbeing champions, though duties often include:

- Helping colleagues understand what mental health is (and what it isn't), plus why this matters at work.
- Spreading the word about the company wellbeing offering (from fitness classes and digital tools through to the EAP).
- Developing employee support networks.
- Being a friendly (and, more importantly, informal) point of contact for colleagues worried about their mental health, and a resource for where to find expert help.
- Running events, internal comms, and campaigns for key dates in the mental health calendar (like Movember, or World Mental Health Day).

It won't come as a surprise that, here at Unmind, we're wellbeing champ superfans (so much so, we recently launched a regular blog series to spotlight firms – like [BAE Systems](#), [John Lewis Partnership](#), and [Centrica](#) – that are bossing it), but we'll take a stab that you are too?

After all, mental health investment nets an average return of £5 for every pound spent. This makes wellbeing champions in-house salespeople – who are shown to have a positive impact on workplace culture.

How to get ahead

If you're yet to roll out a wellbeing champion scheme (hey, no judgment – we've all had a lot on), here's a handful of things you'll want to consider:

1 Get top level buy-in

This bit shouldn't be hard. Remember, wellbeing champions aren't about making your organisation look good, but *do good*. It's a way to nurture employee mental health, in the form of a team (or person) who will, well, champion it. In doing so, your workplace should become more welcoming and inclusive, while kicking the L&D door wide open. Again, the benefits are clear, but if you need to inject some urgency, contrast the £45bn annual bill for poor mental health with the business case (5:1!) for spending.

2 Build it with staff

Getting execs on board is obviously important, but unless your people are a key part of the process, you won't know if the scheme is what they want, let alone need.

Engage with employees across every part of the business, including staff with an experience of mental health (that's everyone), plus anyone who has a mental health condition – so long as they're comfortable speaking about it – or has experienced mental ill-health. Last, while open conversation is vital to tackle lingering stigma, also think about sending anonymous feedback forms. People may feel more comfortable with this approach, which could in turn increase responses.

3 Understand it needs time *and* money

As the saying (that's attributed to, oddly, both Clint Eastwood and Jennifer Lopez) goes: you get out what you put in. So, to make a wellbeing champion scheme soar, you'll want to fuel it accordingly. This means ringfenced on-the-clock hours (in a recent survey of wellbeing champions at Unmind clients, 56% said finding the time to do the role justice was their biggest challenge). And budget – for the right training and L&D resources, as well as, if you're *really* serious, the role itself.

3 Digital and in-person care becomes key

Why it's trending

The pandemic sparked a mental health awareness surge, both in and out of work. It's logical that firms want to use this as a springboard for active support.

- In our survey, 85% said digital or online mental health tools will be important (either somewhat or very) in 2022. And nearly half (47%) plan to launch them.
- Meanwhile, two-thirds (66%) believed group therapy will play a part in the workplace, and 1 in 3 firms (30%) will offer it to staff.

We're stepping into a future where hybrid work is increasingly abundant. The number of employers that endorse WFH has more than doubled, with 3 in 4 employees keen.





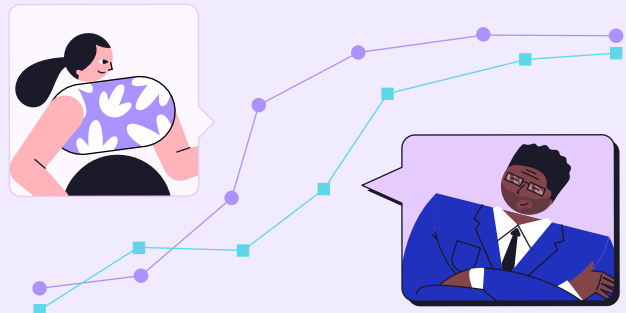
85% said digital or online mental health tools will be important (either somewhat or very) in 2022.

What this means

Remote work wasn't invented in lockdown. Yet the impact of an international (often, legally mandated) soft-launch for WFH did do three things, fast:

- ① Prove all manner of businesses can operate beyond the walls of a traditional office.
- ② Squash the silly, outdated myths about 'shirking from home'.
(In reality, it's more likely productivity will spike.)
- ③ Reveal digital innovation as more than a short-term fix, but a chance to grow, thrive and improve – not just in where we work, but how.

Now, organisations and employees alike are keen to apply this thinking elsewhere. What other corporate norms are ripe for review? Can online tools be harnessed to challenge the way we've always done things?



How to get ahead

First, ask: is hybrid *anything* right for us?

Sounds obvious, but just because mixing in-office and homework is possible (with proven plus points to match), that doesn't mean it's guaranteed to bolster your business. Or empower all of your people (don't forget, some will cherish their fixed desk at HQ).

But we wouldn't advise denying the creeping ubiquity of hybrid work *just because*, either. If three-quarters of employees actively support WFH, you'd be smart to game out the pros and pitfalls (ideally, in conversation with colleagues).

Embracing a whole new way of working isn't an easy call, but seeing employee wellbeing through a hybrid lens needn't be tricky. Broadly, it's about providing options – as everyone, every mind – is different. So, if you roll out an in-person therapy option, think about matching this with a digital mental health tool, too.

If the data above screams anything, it's that modern problems require hybrid solutions.

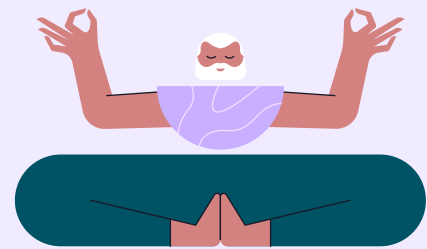
(And if you're in need of tips for making hybrid work *work*, check out Unmind's hybrid how-to guide.)

4 Proactive mental health support becomes the norm – though reactive measures remain vital

Why it's trending

More and more firms are learning they can harness wellbeing tools to serve the 6 in 6 who have mental health, and not just the 1 in 6 who experience mental illness each year.

- The most compelling stat in our whole survey: 98% of HR decision-makers said **proactively** managing employees' mental health is very much or somewhat a business priority in 2022.
- More than 8 in 10 survey-takers said digital or online wellbeing tools (85%) will be important, likewise mental health training for all employees (87%), and wellbeing champion initiatives (80%).



98% of respondents said **proactively** managing employees' mental health is a business priority in 2022.

But that's not to say reactive support is over.

- 4 in 5 organisations (82%) thought their existing EAP will play an important role in 2022, with similar numbers backing occupational health coaching (80%) and CBT (71%).

What this means

Here at Unmind, we've long preached the gospel of treating mental health like dental health. If you brush your teeth daily, you're far less likely to suffer a root canal, right? The same is true of proactively managing your mind.

Reactive treatment will never disappear, and nor should it. As we've noted, 1 in 6 people experience mental illness every year – in these cases, swift treatment is crucial.

Shifting the dial towards proactive care is subtle, but important. Doing so reframes mental health from something only talked about (or treated) in the context of a problem – like clinical depression or PTSD – to something every person has, every minute of the day.

As while 5 in 6 people do not reach the threshold of a diagnosis, we all experience symptoms of depression, or anxiety, across a lifetime. And the point of proactive support is to empower people to understand, nurture and ultimately improve their own minds.

As a result, it's possible individuals who would have otherwise reached the point of mental ill-health don't, as developing a daily practice of managing their mind (or brushing their metaphorical teeth), means a more balanced state of wellbeing.

How to get ahead

Every company can embed a proactive wellbeing strategy – that serves the whole person, and whole organisation – to complement existing, reactive structures.

To do so, think ‘mental like dental’, then make friends with any number of initiatives our survey-takers have hailed.

We’ve already explored the upsides of digital tools (no. 3), wellbeing champions (no. 2), and company-wide training (no. 1) – measures that mix a top-down and bottom-up approach to nurturing wellbeing, and all of which proactive.



"While in the past organisations have generally focused on reactive approaches to help individuals who are struggling, I expect to see a trend towards investment in more proactive approaches – helping individuals to grow their mental health and mental fitness."



Dr James Mackie
SENIOR MANAGER MENTAL HEALTH, BP

5 Workforces learn the language to smash stigma

Why it's trending

Quizzed on the most critical workplace mental health issues they'll focus on in 2022, the HR decision-makers who took our survey were clear:

- ‘To promote honest and open conversations around mental health’ came top.
- Followed by ‘To increase knowledge and understanding of employee mental health around managers and leaders’.
- With ‘Breaking the stigma around mental health’ in third.

This reflects an obvious, mentally-healthy theme. Especially as these bested business-minded factors – like employee value proposition, and the ROI of wellbeing schemes.

Though bold, our survey-takers were also balanced. Asked about the biggest barriers to employees using mental health benefits and initiatives, over half of respondents pointed to stigma.

What this means

Mental health awareness has rocketed of late – both in and out of the workplace. And the above findings shows a real desire, from employers, to move the conversation forward.

What's even more cheering is, though there's a well-known link between wellbeing investment and returns, firms are now 100% sold on the 'why' of mental health – caring about honesty, openness and understanding ahead of ROI.

But stigma still exists, and it thrives in darkness. What this means is, most of the misunderstanding around mental health comes from a lack of understanding, not empathy. If someone tells their workmate with anxiety to “Get a grip”, or consoles a depressed colleague by saying “It's not that bad”, it's rarely because they're nasty. More often, they're well-meaning, but lack the right information – and, as a result, language.

How to get ahead

To fight stigma, you need a whole-organisation approach. Like top-down comms, and leadership role-modelling, that make mental health conversation the norm. Plus employee-led schemes like wellbeing champions, storytelling initiatives, and peer-to-peer networks.

Remember, empowerment starts with knowledge. So don't be shy to go big on training (at all levels of the business), or digital tools that help your staff understand their own minds, as well as others'.

Lasting cultural change happens when people buy-in. A powerful first step to start the conversation? Asking senior leaders to go first. When employees see their bosses being open – vulnerable, even – about their experiences of mental health, there's a high chance others will feel safe to follow.





“Stigma around mental ill-health remains the biggest barrier to employees engaging with one another, and the benefits and services offered by employers.

“To tackle stigma, we need to consider what causes it – such as a lack of knowledge, or a perception that a negative view is commonly held. Employers have an opportunity to tackle stigma in their workplaces, through senior leaders engaging openly in the topic, colleagues sharing their own personal stories in a responsible manner, increasing mental health literacy, and clearly communicating the organisation’s stance on the topic.”



Charles Alberts
HEAD OF WELLBEING SOLUTIONS UK, AON

6 Leadership need to step up to the challenge

Why it’s trending

We asked, they answered:

- A third (32%) of our HR survey-takers said it’s senior leaders who need to improve their awareness of mental health.
- A quarter (24%) claimed more knowledge was needed at exec level, with 23% pointing to people managers.

Elsewhere, managers and leaders increasing their knowledge was pegged as the second most critical workplace mental health issue in 2022. And over half of all businesses (53%) plan to roll out training.



A third (32%) in our survey said senior leaders need to improve their awareness of mental health.

What this means

The data hints at a wider theme. It's not a company's employees who need to boost their wellbeing IQ – or at least not employees alone. Before they lead any culture that understands and celebrates mental health, leaders must first commit to their own learning.

How to get ahead

It's your classic 'show, don't tell' approach.

Do offer your people wellbeing tools, resources, L&D and more. But do this while also championing mentally healthy practices, policies and procedures. Remember: mental health isn't a box-ticking exercise, and employees will clock if it's being treated like one.

Instead, a collaborative method – that educates everyone, at every level, at the same time – is sensible as well as scalable. It's your way to deliver a clear, consistent message around workplace wellbeing.

Done well, you plant seedlings for a culture of knowledge, understanding, and honest conversation.



“With work-related stress, depression and anxiety at record levels, and increasing numbers of employees feeling worn out and burnt out by the events of the last two years, I believe the opportunity to genuinely improve mental health and wellbeing lies much closer to home – the workplace.

“How we manage people, the work and demands placed on them, how we communicate and engage with them are all opportunities to make a positive difference to people's work lives.”



Charles Alberts

HEAD OF WELLBEING SOLUTIONS UK, AON

7 Health and safety is reborn – covering physical and psychological factors

Why it's trending

Published in June 2021, [ISO 45003](#) is a first-of-its-kind framework that outlines how to manage – and protect – mental health at work. For wellbeing leaders, this global standard is the very definition of a 'game changer'.

Here's why:

- In 2018/19, workplace accidents cost UK firms [£5.6bn](#).
- Though a massive figure, it's tiny compared to the annual bill for poor mental health: [£45bn](#).

What this means

Where previous health and safety rules almost entirely focused on physical risks at work, ISO 45003 plugs the gap in current workplace safety guidance, by bringing 'psychosocial hazards' into play.

These hazards are anything that could affect an employee's mental wellbeing. From poor communication from a line manager, lack of work variety, or the risk of redundancy, through to digital surveillance, harassment, and violence.

Now ISO 45003 – a literal how-to for keeping your people safe – exists, no responsible employer should prioritise physical risks over psychological ones. These risks are not only equal, they quite often cross over.

How to get ahead

Committing ISO 45003 to memory would be a powerful first step. The guidelines dig pretty deep into planning, operation, support, evaluation, improvement and more, identifying a whole range of psychosocial hazards that – though very real – you might never have thought of. This knowledge alone may forever change how your organisation sees, and approaches, workplace health and safety.

Don't forget, this stuff has an impact at every level. So people leaders and execs have their own responsibilities around creating a mentally healthy workplace. The challenge (and opportunity) is to build psychologically safe environments, and champion emotionally intelligent teams.

Get it right, and your staff will thank you.

It's time for cultural change

The pandemic took what we knew about life, freedom, and work, then tore it into a billion pieces. In 2021, some wanted to try taping those bits back together – craving a 'before' that's no longer there. However, many more understand that every crisis *is* an opportunity.

After a year road-testing the future of work – one that doesn't just safeguard people's wellbeing, but celebrates it – 2022 is your chance to deliver on that promise.

This report is not trying to convince anyone about the power of whole-person, whole-organisation mental health support. We're simply holding a mirror to a growing, and powerful trend. Or seven of them, to be exact:

- ① Mental health training (for all), as standard.
- ② Wellbeing champions as a compelling priority.
- ③ Hybrid mental health solutions for a hybrid world.
- ④ Proactive measures become common, alongside reactive ones.
- ⑤ Workplaces start to break down stigma, for good.
- ⑥ Company leaders meet the moment.
- ⑦ ISO 45003 reinvents health and safety.

For the companies who adopt these trends, the mental health impact will go way beyond the next 12 months. Provided you get everyone on board (from the shopfloor to the boardroom), this can become a lasting shift – from uncertainty to certainty. Knowledge to empowerment.

Don't forget, this is less about workplace structure, more company culture. And if you successfully change your culture for the better, you – and your employees – will reap the benefits in 2022. And 2032. Plus '42, '52 and (you get the idea)...



About Unmind

Unmind is a workplace mental health platform. We empower employees to live more fulfilling and balanced lives by changing the way organisations think about mental health.



Proactive support for all areas of life

We work with clinicians, authors, and academics to provide digital tools that nourish all aspects of mental wellbeing. From sleep to calmness, fulfilment to happiness.



The right care at the right time

We all have mental health all the time. So wherever your employees are based – in the office, on-site, out in the field, or at home – they can access Unmind from any device, whenever they need.



On-demand mental health training

Self-guided, bite-sized, science-based learning that's built to scale. Training that supports the whole person, as well as the whole organisation. This means education for all, plus expert resources for your senior leaders, to lay the foundations for a psychologically safe workplace.



What gets measured, gets managed

Empower employees to track, assess, and understand their wellbeing – and how it changes over time. Enable leaders to make more informed decisions with aggregated and anonymous data.



An ongoing campaign for cultural change

Launch day is when our partnership begins. We'll help you to engage your people with the platform, and to continue experiencing the benefits of nurturing a healthy mind.

We're building more mentally healthy workplaces with...

Sainsbury's

Uber

Nationwide
Building Society

wework



BRITISH AIRWAYS

JOHN LEWIS
PARTNERSHIP

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