

# FOSTERING WELLBEING AT WORK IN THE UK

## A FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

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# SUMMARY

The wellbeing of employees was top of mind for organisational leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the years following the pandemic, we find that the managerial shift away from wellbeing to other priorities is often creating a misalignment of expectations between leaders and employees. In this research brief, we take a five-year review of employee wellbeing in the UK using our Wellbeing at Work Index, comprised of data from Great Place To Work® – the global authority on workplace culture. This study highlights the rise and decline of employee wellbeing while noting differences by population demographics and industry sector. We find meaningful differences by age, gender, and managerial level, suggesting that a more nuanced approach may be needed to address all groups within the workforce. Based on the results of this analysis, we outline suggested management actions toward placing wellbeing at the heart of the employee experience.



## CONTEXT OF WELLBEING – A GROWING FIELD

In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, employee wellbeing had emerged as an increasingly important focus for organisational leaders globally, with notable momentum in the UK. Despite the increasingly large following however, not everyone bought in – especially in boardrooms – with many business leaders still viewing this as a nice-to-have, rather than a necessity or strategic priority at the foundation of employee experience and engagement.

In 2020, COVID-19 turned the world upside down, seemingly overnight, bringing unprecedented changes to the nature of working life. The pandemic created a crisis that escalated the focus on employee wellbeing across workplaces, with many employers quickly recognising an urgent need to support employees. Today, five years on from the dramatic onset of the pandemic, employee wellbeing continues to be a top priority at the heart of people strategy in many organisations around the world. In 2020 and 2021, HR leaders across the UK cited ‘Health and Wellbeing’ as the single most important people issue affecting their organisations, placing it ahead of ‘Talent Management,’ ‘Learning and Development,’ and ‘Adapting to COVID-19’ (Berndt & Silvonen, 2022).

Despite the increasing salience of workplace wellbeing, stress levels and poor mental health continue to be a workplace challenge. These experiences amount to substantial personal, societal, and economic costs: 776,000 workers in Great Britain experienced work-related stress, depression, or anxiety in 2023-24, accounting for 16.4 million working days

lost due to ill health (HSE, 2024). Besides causing a significant burden on the UK government and National Health Service, poor workplace mental health heavily impacts the bottom line of UK businesses, costing UK employers up to £56 billion annually (Deloitte, 2020) – the biggest proportion of which is due to productivity loss from presenteeism. This is consistent with other studies focused on mental health around the world, showing that more than 20% of employees are experiencing burnout at work (Brassey, et al, 2023), an extreme form of unmanaged chronic stress.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic wasn’t just seen in workplace wellbeing strategies; priorities and values shifted on both the employer and employee fronts. For the latter, possibly partly because of forced changes experienced during periods of lockdown, health and leisure time appear to have become more of a non-negotiable priority, with many expecting more from their employers in terms of wellbeing and work-life balance. This shift is likely to have been accelerated, rather than solely caused, by pandemic-related changes: between 1998 and 2022, weekly working hours in the UK fell by 1.3 hours (Office for National Statistics, 2024). This is consistent with a European-wide trend over the past five years of shortened working hours as employees seem increasingly willing to trade off reward and unsociable hours for greater leisure time, as the Bank of England has speculated.





## ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

The Johns Hopkins University Human Capital Development Lab, in partnership with Great Place To Work, continues to track trends related to wellbeing, organisational culture, and human capital factors around the world. In this report, we take aim at uncovering unique insights to advance our understanding of organisational environment factors that influence employee wellbeing in the UK. This report builds on our prior research over the last several years and leverages Great Place To Work flagship data, gathered using a their

proprietary Trust Index™ employee survey. Great Place To Work survey millions of employees across 170 countries globally, including the UK, every year. In this study, we analyse various organisational and individual factors that may be linked to employee wellbeing. Given the heightened awareness of wellbeing and mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic, we examine the trends and patterns related to wellbeing between individual demographic groups as well as organisations over the last five years.

To address potential labour shortages and productivity concerns, UK employers have a real mandate to facilitate people from various demographic groups participating in the workforce. How best to do this? By offering flexible and hybrid work arrangements for those who wouldn't otherwise work at all, improving work-life balance for those who do, and crucially by creating more meaningful, purpose-driven, good-quality jobs that people want to do.

Here lies the crux of a modern, progressive approach to workplace wellbeing: focusing on proactive and preventative measures within job design and the work environment to avoid issues such as chronic stress arising in the first place, rather than addressing them via programmes and interventions later down the line. Therefore, it is essential to create the conditions for thriving by designing jobs and the underlying fundamentals of the work environment correctly. Wellbeing at work is also no longer an isolated or peripheral function delegated to HR or people teams, nor occupational health and safety representatives, but rather a holistic, overarching perspective integrated

into all parts of organisational functioning. The responsibility is driven from the top by business leaders, reinforced and role-modelled by people managers, and ultimately carried by everyone in an organisation.

Proactively addressing employee wellbeing makes good business sense. Research exploring the link between employee wellbeing and performance has provided leaders reasons to explore how maximising these once-overlooked factors may be central to increasing productivity, engagement, and subsequently long-term organisational success (Weziak-Bialowolska, et al, 2023). Great Place To Work recently published a European Workforce Study (2025) across 19 countries, which found that employees at psychologically healthy workplaces – i.e. perceiving their organisation to be psychologically and emotionally healthy – were not only significantly more empowered to innovate, but six times more likely to stay and five times more likely to strongly advocate for their organisation. Employee wellbeing and sustainable organisational success are truly two sides of the same coin.

It is essential to create the conditions for thriving by designing jobs and the underlying fundamentals of the work environment correctly.





# WELLBEING AT WORK INDEX

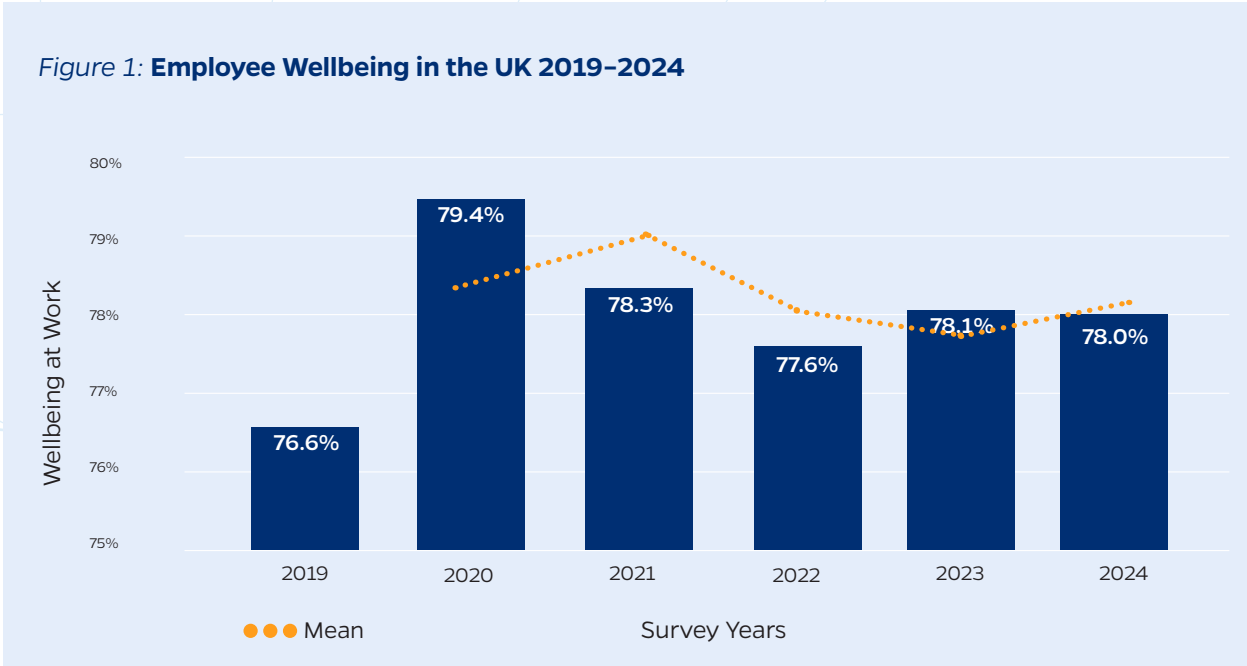
A positive employee experience around workplace wellbeing has been identified as a significant factor associated with engagement and work outcomes. To better understand employee perceptions of the work environment and workplace wellbeing, we launched a global research project. The Wellbeing at Work Index was developed jointly by researchers at Great Place To Work and the Human Capital Development Lab at Johns Hopkins University. We surveyed over 14,000 people from 37 countries to better understand trends in the average working person’s day-to-day experiences of wellbeing and their workplace. We were then able to contrast those findings with the Great Place To Work global database of millions of employee surveys to identify drivers and key practices used by the Best Workplaces worldwide to achieve stronger levels of employee wellbeing.



- In our study, we measure several key dimensions that have been shown to contribute to wellbeing at work. These include:
- **Mental and emotional support** – when employees sense that they have the mental support of others, they are more likely to have a positive or optimistic attribution, which can build energy, hope, and confidence.
  - **Sense of purpose** – when employees have a sense of meaning, progress, and fulfillment through their activities at work, they are more likely to have higher resilience and a positive view of their employer.
  - **Personal support** – when employees have support from their manager regarding their unique personal situation, priorities, goals, and interests, they are more likely to have positive engagement and commitment to the employer.
  - **Financial health** – when employees have adequate financial means to feel stable and there is equity in the compensation practices, they can avoid anxiety and fear.
  - **Meaningful connections** – when employees are able to develop social relationships with others at work, they are more likely to feel a sense of teamwork and belonging, which can enhance the employment experience.

To date, our findings underscore the importance of fostering the right fundamentals for employee thriving, including a psychologically safe and healthy work environment, healthy job designs with built-in safeguards, and a supportive, collaborative culture. It is important to note that the objective health and wellbeing of an individual requires a precise method of targeted questions outside the scope of our study. To provide an indicator at scale, we measure self-reported subjective employee wellbeing using survey questions mapped to the above factors. This approach is supported by other research studies seeking to measure the environment of wellbeing and thriving of individuals in organisational contexts (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014).

In this study, we examine the subjective workplace wellbeing of UK employees over the last five years, which provides unique insight on the changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The wellbeing experience over time is shown in Figure 1. The survey used to assess employee wellbeing was based on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Scores of 1 or 2 indicate a negative experience, a score of 3 indicates an inconsistent experience, and scores of 4 or 5 indicate a positive experience. To present the scores in a summary result form, we convert the numerical value to a percentage, which represents the average sentiment on a 1-100% scale.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, various facets of employee wellbeing were adversely affected, including job security, mental health, and social connection. However, our research shows that what many people experienced in the first year of the pandemic – employers rising up to address the global crisis –created a

temporary spike in employee wellbeing during this period. We note that subjective wellbeing levels before 2019 were more consistent with pre-2020 scores rather than those post-2020, indicating that the 2020 spike in scores represents the relative anomaly (rather than the low 2019 figure).

In the years following 2020, wellbeing trends have regressed from their peak levels observed during the start of the pandemic, though not dropping as low as pre-2020 levels. This aligns with workplaces adapting to new norms around remote and hybrid working, while others transition back to

pre-pandemic norms, partly or fully returning to physical office spaces. In this report, we examine the factors that influence wellbeing at work as well as the impact on various demographics and sectors of the workforce.

EMPLOYEE VOICES ON WELLBEING

“The pandemic has highlighted the saints and sinners of the business world. Without a doubt impact through the leadership of my manager has been absolutely focused on people and their families, and their wellbeing. He still sends a personal email every week, where he shares his thoughts, ideas, and support. He doesn’t always have the answers, but he is living these challenging times with us.” (2020)

BEST VS REST

Creating an employee experience around wellbeing takes commitment, hard work, and leadership involvement – and not all organisations prioritise this to the same degree. We also note that our sample of organisations self-selecting to work with Great Place To Work is likely to be biased towards a better employee experience in

the first place. To distinguish the highest-performing organisations from others, we compared the top five Great Place To Work listed organisations (‘Best Workplaces’) against the others ranked in the top 100. We find a significant and consistent difference between the best and the rest, as shown in Figure 2.



While this difference is not surprising, it illustrates the significant gap between organisations when it comes to nurturing their employees’ wellbeing. It is also worth noting that even the ‘Rest’ (listed in the top 100) in this case still score above the average for all organisations each year. The data also shows that the top 100 listed organisations have been improving slightly over this period when it comes to workplace wellbeing, closing their gap to the top five, whose scores have been steadily decreasing in the past couple of years.

Related studies have noted differences between the best and the rest in both employee experience and business performance. Economist Alex Edmans’ analysis of data from 2001-2023 found that UK’s Best Workplace organisations perform more than four times better than the FTSE All-Share Index (Great Place To Work Inc., 2024). In analysing data on the ‘UK’s Best Workplaces™, (formerly ‘Best 100 British Companies to Work For’) published by the Great Place To Work institute between 2001-2020, Sovbetov (2025) found that employee happiness significantly

enhanced stock performance – evidenced through a 3.86% annualised alpha over the benchmark – in that higher ranked firms outperform lower ranked ones. It is hardly a coincidence that the best organisations outperform others not only in wellbeing scores, but also business performance.



EMPLOYEE VOICES ON WELLBEING

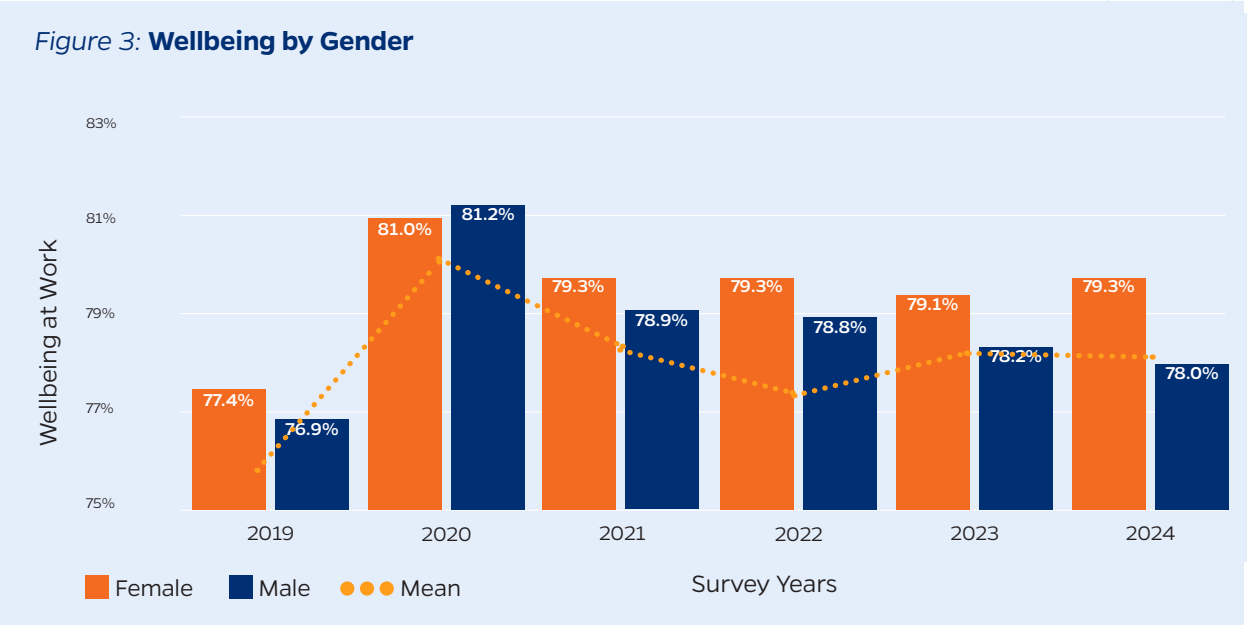
“Presenteeism beats productivity and mental wellbeing every time. There is no trust in the company from top down, which does not inspire trust from the bottom up... The pandemic forced us to trial a new way of working that turned out to be more productive and (despite lockdown challenges) better for wellbeing. We are now turning back to the old, restrictive way of working.” (2021)



ANALYSIS BY GENDER

To explore nuances in the wellbeing experience of UK employees, we took a closer look at the differences by gender. As shown in Figure 3, we find a slight difference between male and female respondents each year, traditionally favouring females

(a common finding for Great Place To Work survey scores), which seems to have become more pronounced in recent years – although this difference reversed briefly in 2020 when male scores were marginally higher.



The divergent pattern in 2020 may link to the unprecedented and sudden challenges around juggling work and family life, which may have disproportionately hit many working women. Perhaps the most interesting finding to interpret amongst the gender data, however, is the consistent drop in male scores after 2020, despite female scores remaining constant.

To understand this gender gap in wellbeing experience over the past five years, we drilled down into related aspects of employee wellbeing: psychological safety, teamwork, work-life balance, and belonging. Comparing gender differences over time across these key constructs, the distinct drop in male scores appears

largely carried by psychological safety over the other constituents of our wellbeing measure. Psychological safety refers to the degree to which individuals feel free to voice ideas, share feedback, and be themselves in the workplace – without fear

of retribution or consequence. Considering the heightened sense of uncertainty and job insecurity during and in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, such a drop may be intuitive – although the continued decline in male scores warrants further investigation.

EMPLOYEE VOICES ON WELLBEING

“At the moment, higher cost of living is a concern for everyone, and this impacts personal wellbeing directly. Employees should not need to worry about cost of living or loss of employment, so I believe re-assurances from management are most welcome.” (2022)

ANALYSIS BY AGE

Upon review of the data by age, we quickly note the differences between younger and older employees – specifically, the two youngest groups (employees up to 34 years of age) scoring consistently and significantly lower than their older peers. This gap was most pronounced in 2020, suggesting the younger segments of the UK workforce benefited the least from the wellbeing spike in the early days of the pandemic. This could be explained by various factors, including the relative importance placed on in-person social connectedness, learning and development in shared workplaces, as well as inferior working-from-home set-ups compared to older employees. In short, though it is difficult to generalise, the experience of isolation and social distancing may have hit younger groups the hardest.



As illustrated in Figure 4, the youngest age groups – those aged 25 and younger and 26 to 34 years – show a consistent decline since the pandemic, while the wellbeing scores of older age groups, particularly those aged 55 years and older, showed an increase in 2024. These findings suggest a nuanced understanding of wellbeing trends across different age categories and underscore the importance of considering age-related variations in wellbeing assessments and analysis.



Figure 4: Wellbeing by Age Group

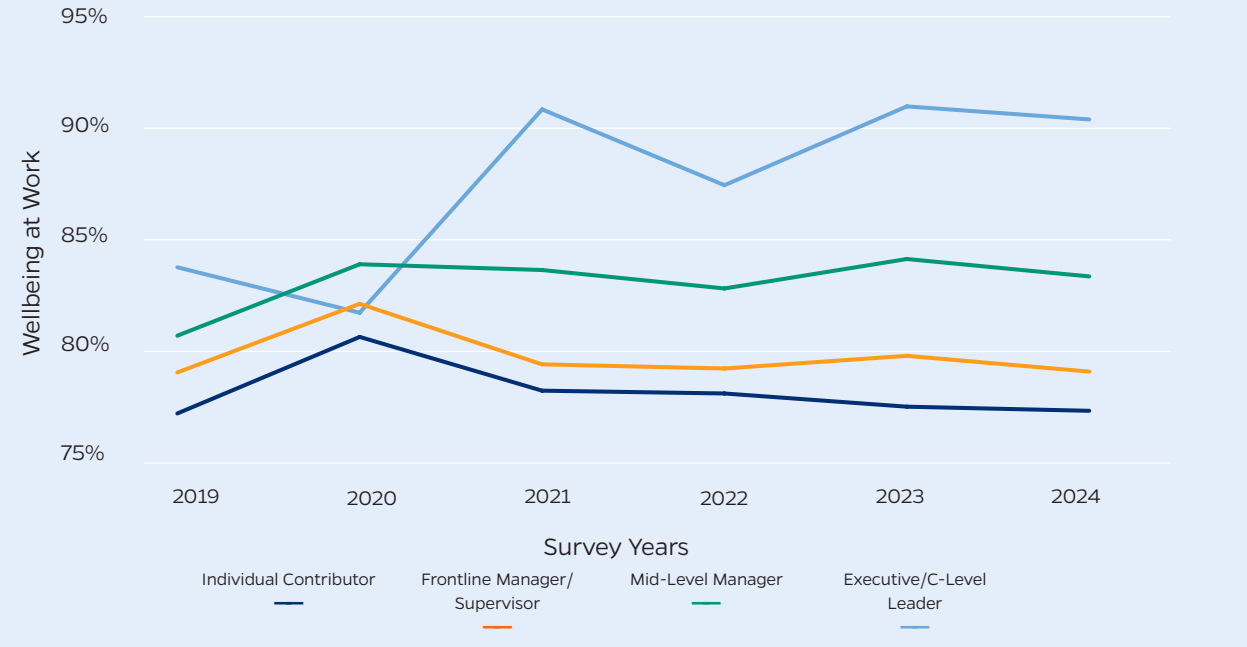


As with gender, we investigated age differences more granularly across our key constructs of psychological safety, teamwork, work-life balance, and belonging. Somewhat surprisingly, rather than observing key differences across the more social and cultural variables of teamwork and belonging, we again note a key difference in the experience

of psychological safety across different age groups, which appears to account for the overall gaps in wellbeing. This finding carries important implications for ensuring younger employees feel equally able to express their thoughts and opinions, and how this contributes to their overall sense of wellbeing at work.

ANALYSIS BY MANAGEMENT LEVEL

Figure 5: Wellbeing by Managerial Level



Finally, we investigated variations in wellbeing across managerial tiers. Employees were classified into four categories: Individual Contributors, Frontline Managers, Mid-level Managers, and Executive-level Leaders. We note an interesting pattern here: increasing wellbeing scores corresponded to higher management levels as shown in Figure 5 – with the exception of 2020, when executive leaders were the only group whose scores declined (while that of all other groups increased), dipping just below frontline managers. This is perhaps due to the UK working population having looked to business leaders to navigate a period of drastic global uncertainty, who would have hence been under disproportionate levels of pressure. This anomaly was, however, strictly limited to 2020, with executive scores jumping back up to levels higher

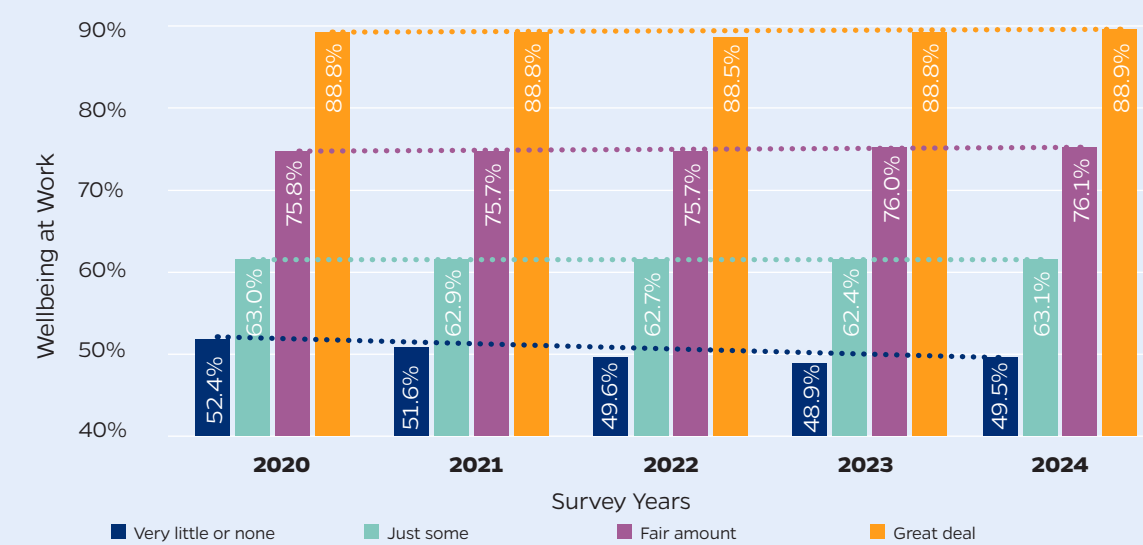
than, and showing a bigger relative gap to the other groups compared to, pre-pandemic levels. It is worth noting that the scores of frontline managers have been distinctly closer to those of individual contributors, rather than other managerial groups, demonstrating the rising workplace phenomenon of a ‘squeezed middle’ – where the frontline management tier tends to feel ‘sandwiched’ between demands coming from above and below, often with least levels of empowerment and autonomy, and indeed tends to report the highest levels of job-related stress. A population study conducted for Great Place To Work in 2023 suggested that nearly two-thirds of frontline managers feel excessively stressed because of their job demands often if not almost always – scoring 10 percentage points less favourably than the individual contributors in the tier below.



Our analysis is consistent with prior research that shows that senior level managers typically encounter lower stress levels than their subordinates (Skakon, et. al. 2011). While these managers contend with heightened job demands and conflicts, they also benefit from increased autonomy, superior management quality, and more avenues for personal growth. These factors, alongside elements like social support, influence, and the significance attached to work, contribute to the level of wellbeing experienced at a more senior level. Our analysis highlights the potential risk of these managers being out of touch with their employees. The ones that are able to continue to relate and earn trust with

their workforce, must do so by recognising that their own experiences are not representative of those of their employees. To illustrate the importance of earning trust with employees, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in management. We find a very clear linear relationship between the degree of confidence and wellbeing score as shown in Figure 6 – a relationship that has stayed notably consistent for the past five years. This continues to highlight how wellbeing in the workplace is closely associated with high levels of confidence in the judgement of leadership, indicating that the tone for workplace wellbeing is set from the top.

Figure 6: Wellbeing by Confidence Level in Management



#### EMPLOYEE VOICES ON WELLBEING

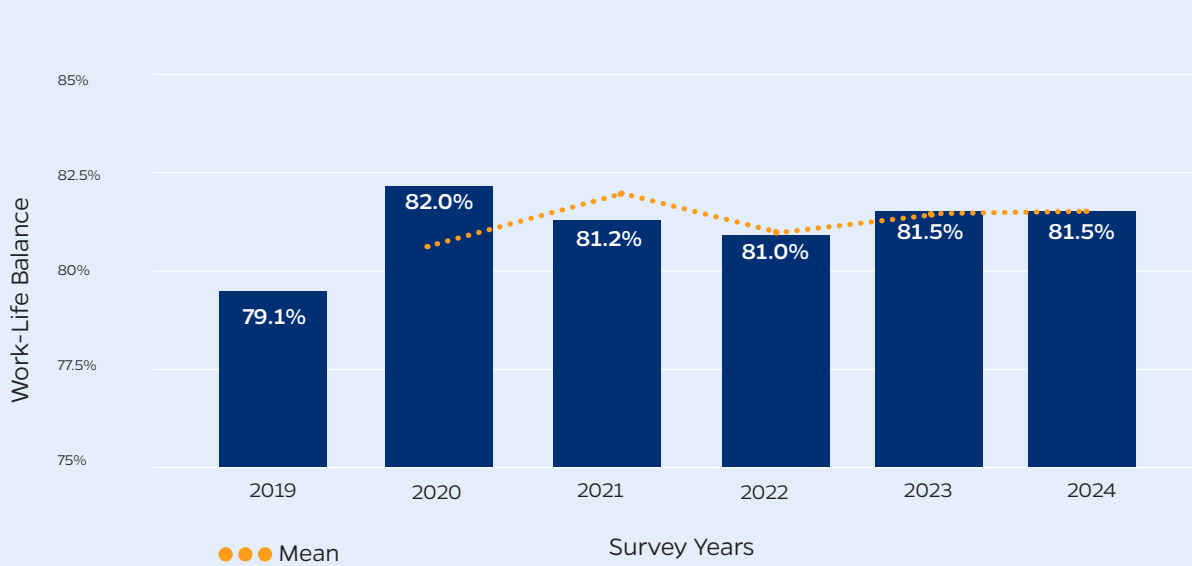
“My immediate line manager places a lot of trust in me and treats me very well. We have frequent discussions about wellbeing and pressures, as well as have made weekly check-ins with myself and my team to ensure they have programme visibility and awareness of recognition of their hard work as well as awareness of any issues and shortfalls.” (2023)

## BALANCE AND BELONGING

In the years prior to the COVID-19 crisis, many organisations were striving to address challenges associated with work-life balance. While some businesses were able to offer flexibility to employees, many were constrained with current practices that required work to be performed in the office – or leaders were under the unchallenged perception that this was the case. The pandemic quickly required remote and flexible work across many industry sectors,

which often created the opportunity for people to balance their work and home lives in new and different ways. While the pandemic was a terrible crisis, it may have opened more possibilities for work-life balance that continue in organisations today as shown in Figure 7. The increase in the perception of work-life balance has largely been consistent since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Figure 7: Work-Life Balance



Over the last several years, organisations have been working to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in an effort to foster higher levels of engagement and innovation. When organisations have a high-trust culture, employees are more likely to feel a sense of inclusion. Professor Lynn Shore and her colleagues define belonging as “an individual’s perception of connectedness and the extent to which they feel that others

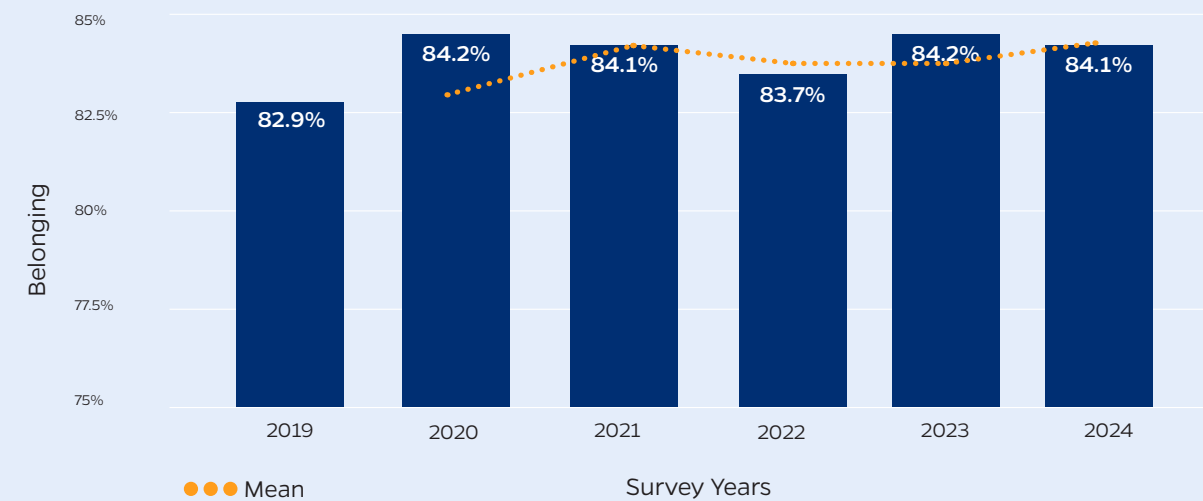
care about their wellbeing as an equal part of the group.” In other words, if managers and the organisation can create a practice and culture of inclusion, then we know it is working if people feel a sense of belonging. As we examine belonging, we note a significant improvement in the year 2020, which has largely been sustained over the last several years, as shown in Figure 8.



## EMPLOYEE VOICES ON WELLBEING

“It’s great to see they’re embracing home working, a lot of other companies are mindlessly mandating coming into work a percentage of people’s working week, which is causing other parents I know a lot of stress, loneliness, and money. We have embraced truly flexible working, but also put on events within the office to create a great atmosphere there too. I think we have got the post-COVID-19 way of working just right.” (2024)

Figure 8: **Employee Belonging**



The findings help to illuminate some of the challenges and positive trends in organisations today. Yet, each business and sector has its own context in terms of

external and internal factors that influence the employee experience. To highlight some of these differences, we turn our analysis to key sectors.

## ANALYSIS BY INDUSTRY SECTOR

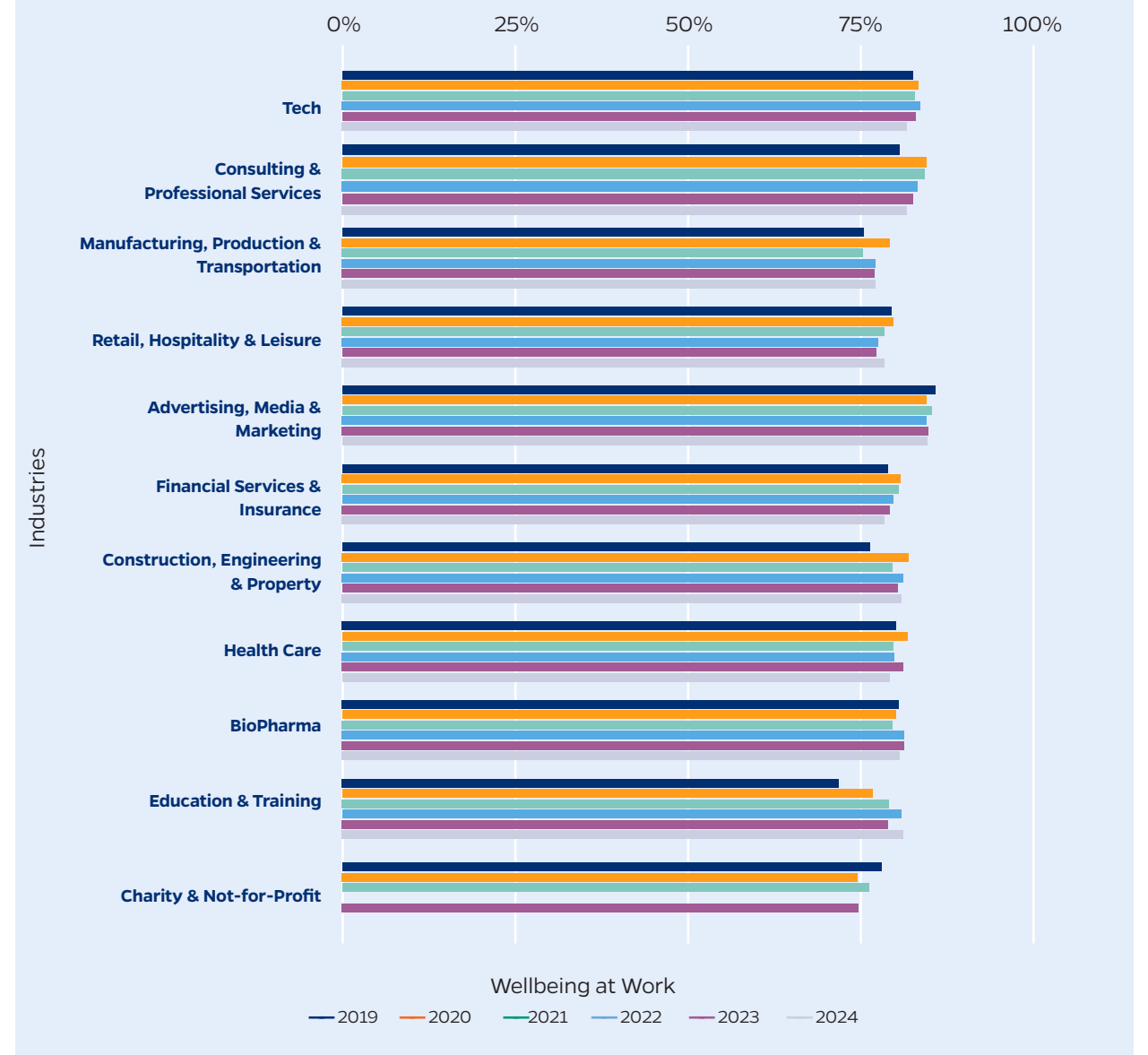
Due to the natural differences between major industry types, we note several variations in overall scores related to wellbeing.

To better understand some of the specific trends, our industry comparison shows tech, consulting and professional services as well as advertising, media and marketing as generally higher scoring sectors, with manufacturing, production and transportation, education and training

as well as charity and not-for-profit on the other end of the spectrum. These differences may reflect the typical lack of inherent flexibility and nature of the work in these industries. Interestingly, despite generally higher scores compared to other sectors, the former two show a consistent downward trend since 2022. Given the robust sample sizes of both tech and professional services, we delve deeper into these two sectors of interest.



Figure 9: **Wellbeing by Industry Sector**



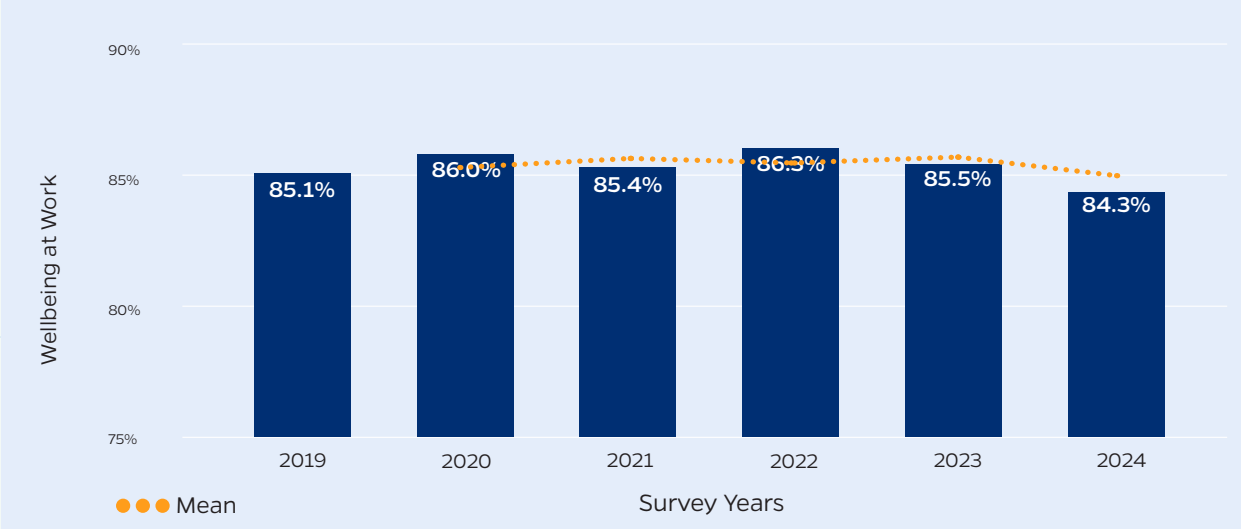
TECH – A CLOSER LOOK

The technology industry consists of organisations engaged in IT software, hardware, data services, e-commerce, and related businesses. Unlike some of the other sectors, tech saw a rise in both 2020 and 2022, yet has been on a steady decline since 2020. Historically defined by a fierce war for talent and often generous employer value propositions to both attract and retain talent, many organisations in tech are now affected by mass layoffs, restructures, and cuts to employee experience budgets, while many are redirecting budgets to AI and digital transformation. Redundancies also impact the wellbeing of those employees left behind, who inevitably take on additional burdens of workload and responsibility amid a climate of uncertainty and low morale.

Employee comments collected by Great Place To Work illustrate not only the post-COVID-19 decline in genuinely prioritising wellbeing at work, but the common contradiction of employees’ lived experience versus organisational messaging around wellbeing.

Some employers in tech, however, have responded to the pressures of economic uncertainty, shifting market priorities, and major skills gaps with practices such as reassignment efforts, outplacement services, and upskilling programmes, as well as creating tailored learning journeys via internal talent marketplaces connecting employees with relevant opportunities.

Figure 10: Wellbeing in the Tech Sector



“Not working people into the ground. With 2023 layoffs, we have seen ourselves lose our mental and physical health to try and keep up with workload, and management did nothing but push and push, knowing full well that people were getting sick. A company that prides itself in employee wellbeing, but in reality is quite happy to watch you succumb for the sake of deadlines when management is fully aware that the team was decimated? If you are going to make people sick for the sake of your deadlines at least stop bragging about caring about employee wellbeing. It’s disingenuous and insulting.” [Employee in Tech Sector, 2024]

Figure 11: Tech Sector Wellbeing by Age Group

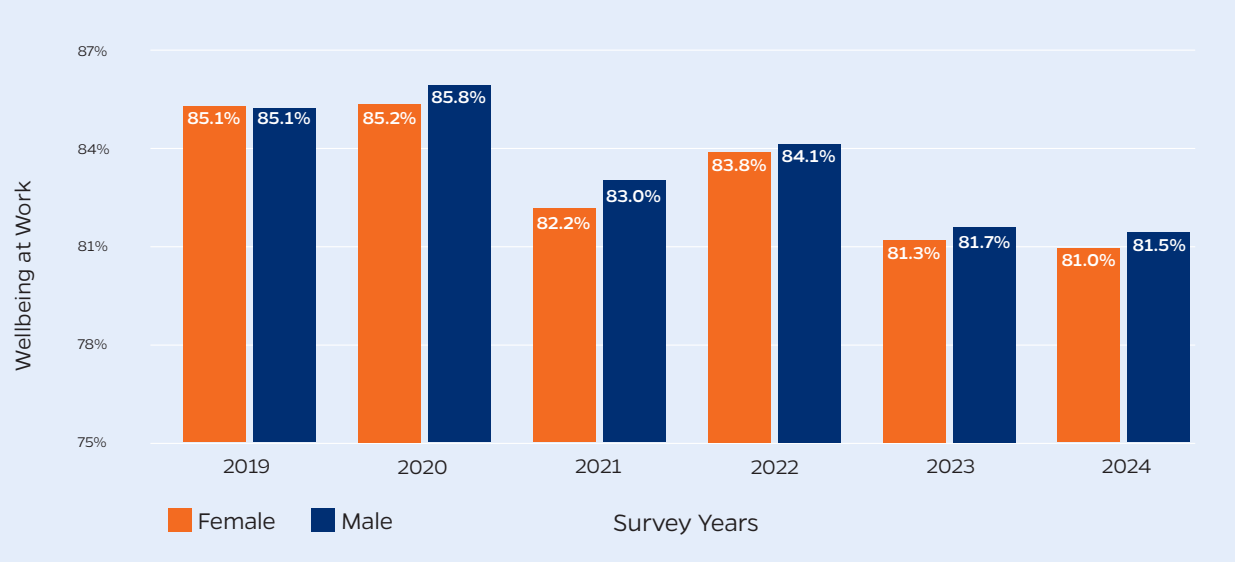


As we look at the demographic differences in the tech sector, we find that the tech sector is consistent with our overall findings when it comes to age group and gender differences. In Figure 11, we note the difference by age group and the dramatic fall in wellbeing scores amongst older workers. Over the last few years, the gap between age groups has reduced, suggesting the experience of wellbeing at

work, or of related challenges, are more shared between different age groups rather than specific to them.

In terms of gender differences, we see a divergent pattern in this industry relative to the overall UK averages. In the tech sector, there are only slight differences between male and female scores, with men often scoring slightly higher in most years of our study.

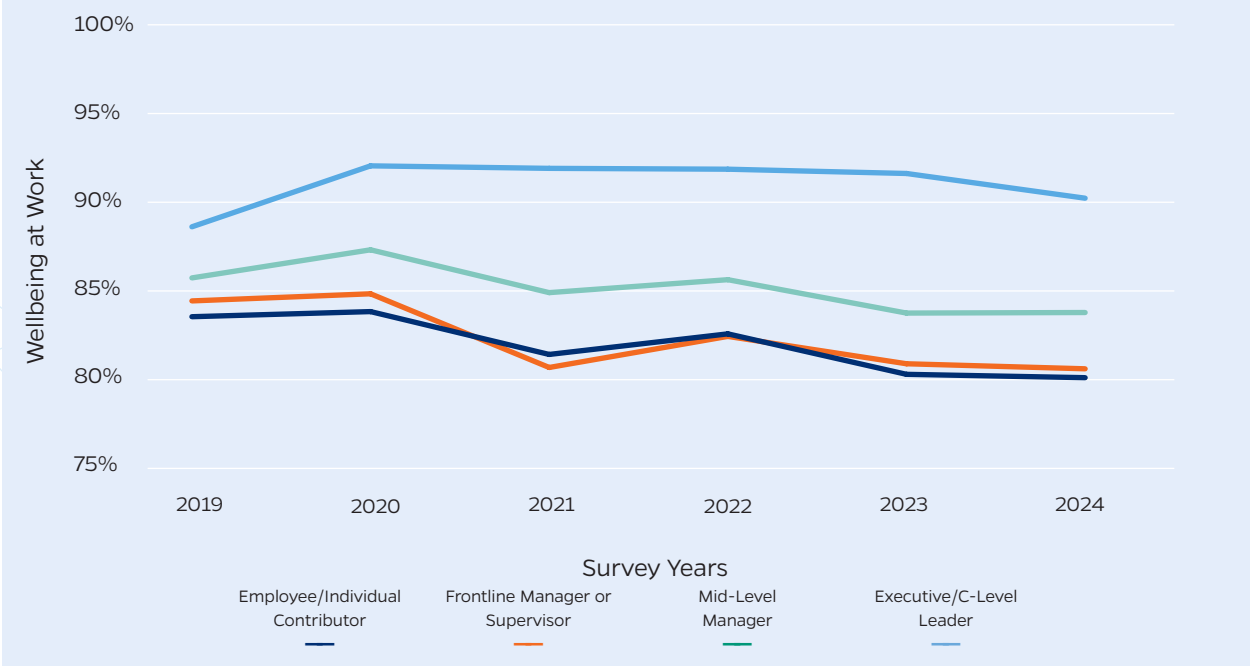
Figure 12: Tech Sector Wellbeing by Gender





As we examine wellbeing by managerial level, we note a striking and consistent difference between executives and other levels in the organisation within the tech sector, defying the overall trend of compromised scores amongst senior leadership during the early period of the pandemic. This may be due to the tech sector having been generally better equipped to deal with the sudden onset of fully remote work, and may have enjoyed relative business continuity throughout the period. Generally however, the findings suggest that leaders in tech should take care in listening to employees since their experience may differ starkly.

Figure 13: Tech Sector Wellbeing by Managerial Level

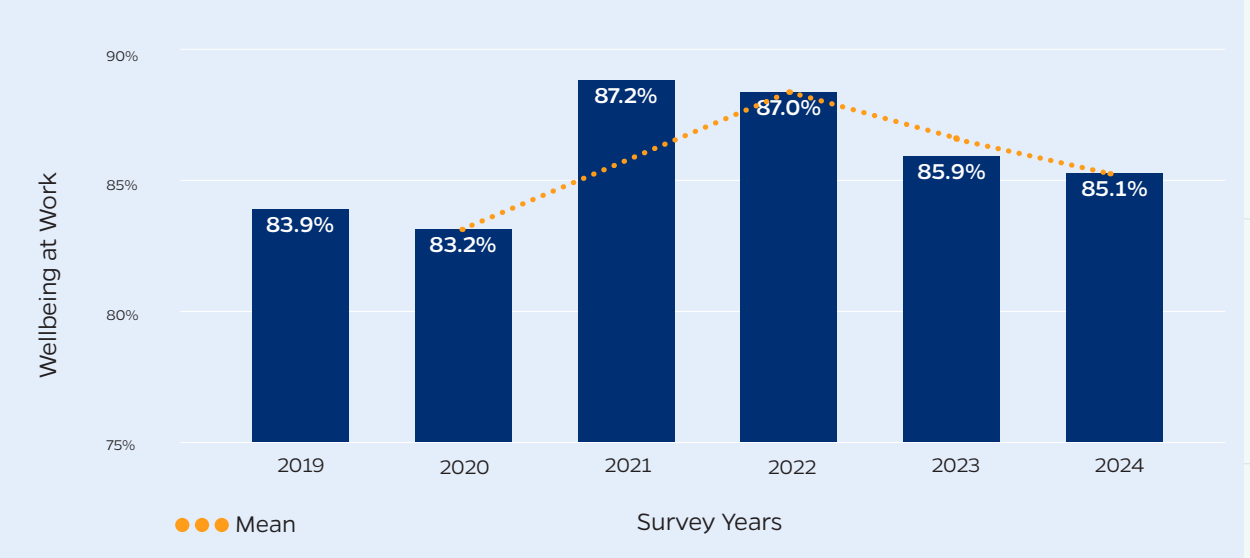


“I think the Exec teams are very disconnected with the people “on the ground;” the recent redundancies for example, have had a huge impact on staff morale and overall mental health and wellbeing for a lot of staff and have impacted many people in their day to day roles.” [Employee in Tech Sector, 2024]

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES – A CLOSER LOOK

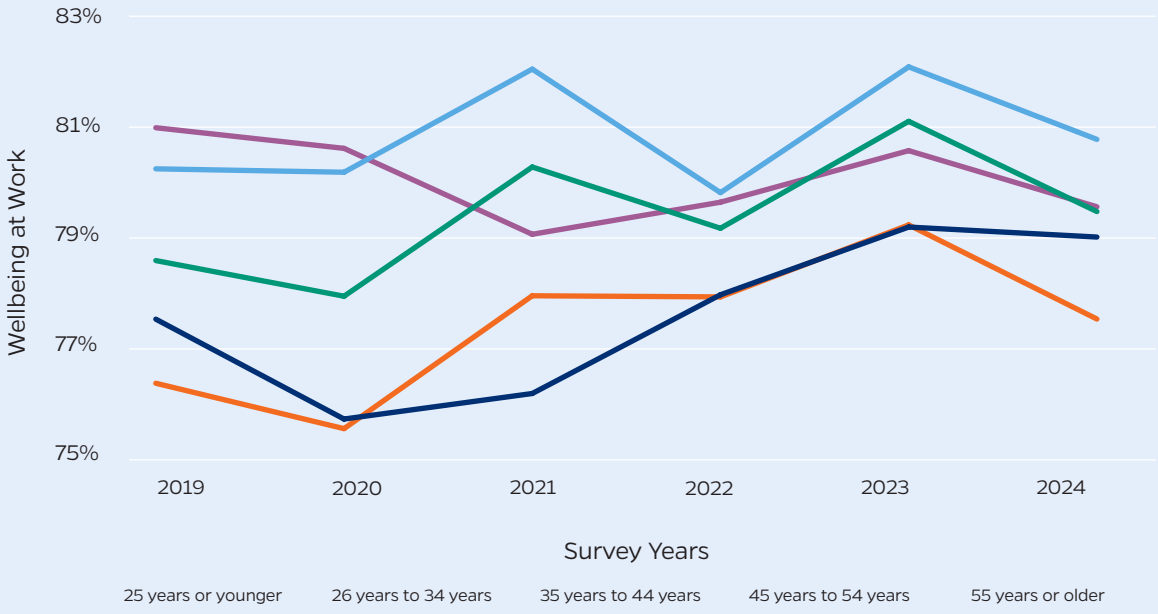
This sector includes consulting, accounting, legal, and other knowledge-based services to clients. Unlike some of the other sectors, the professional services industry saw a decline in wellbeing scores in 2020, followed by a major spike in 2021, and subsequently a consistent decline in the years since, as shown in Figure 14. The UK Professional Services sector, though continually evolving, has recently been particularly influenced by digital transformation, changing client demands as well as shifting workforce expectations, particularly around agile work structures and value-driven cultures. Leading workplaces in this sector have been meeting these challenges with practices such as orienting work to time zones instead of offices (with employees able to spend 90 days a year working outside their permanent time zone) and embedding sustainability into organisational policies and performance measures.

Figure 14: Wellbeing in the Professional Services Sector



As we examine the difference by age group in the professional service sector, we note a largely similar pattern to the overall UK trends, in that the two youngest age groups report the consistently lowest wellbeing scores, with the widest gap in 2020 and having closed somewhat since. As shown in Figure 15, we see higher scores in the 45-54 age group since 2020.

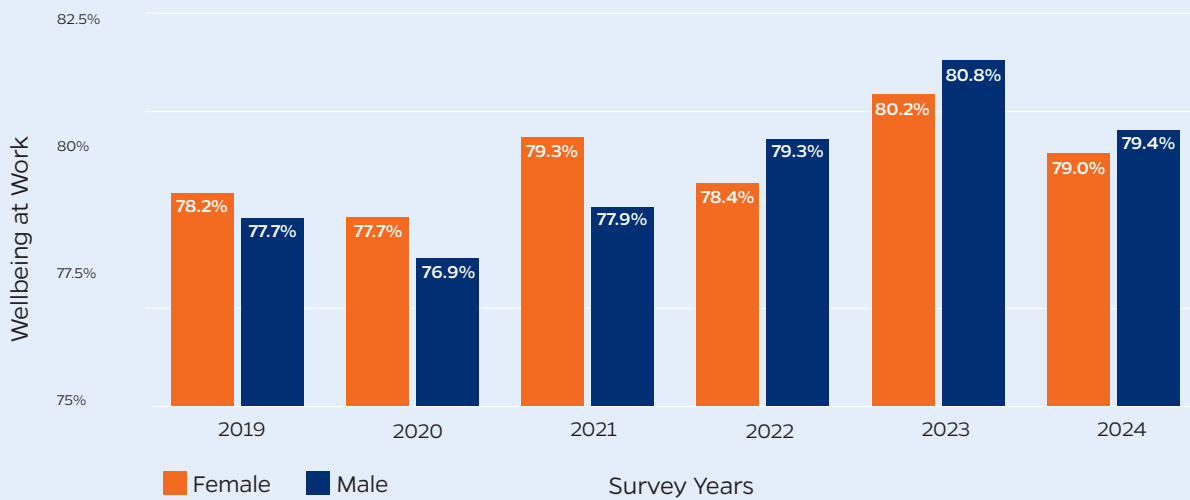
Figure 15: Professional Services Sector Wellbeing by Age Group



Turning to gender differences within professional services, we note a significant shift in the male and female scores as shown in Figure 15. During the period of 2019-2021, female scores were significantly higher than those of males. However, this

reversed in 2022 and continues with male scores showing slightly higher. More local industry or likely even organisation-level analysis may be warranted to understand how gender may affect the wellbeing experience, and how to close these gaps.

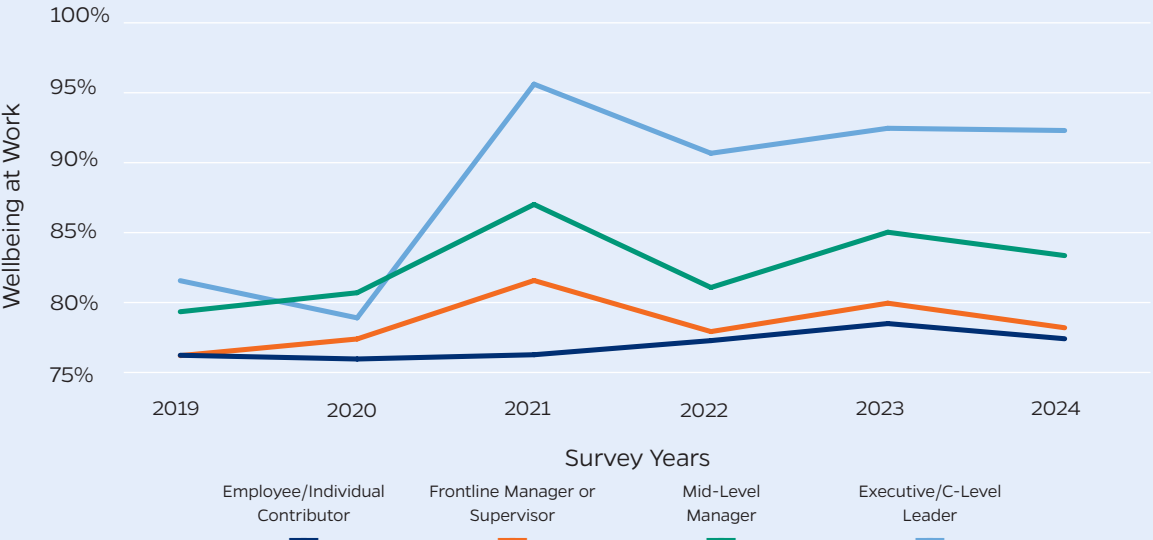
Figure 16: Professional Services Sector Wellbeing by Gender



Upon examination of the managerial levels in the professional services sector, we note a drop in executive scores during the start of the pandemic in 2020 (in line with the overall UK trend), followed by a dramatic rise in 2021 as shown in Figure 16, with year-on-year consistently wide gaps to other managerial levels. Once again, the pronounced differences between the scores

of the leaders and the rest – especially individual contributors and frontline managers – is testament to the need for continuous, active listening from the top. In this sector and across several other sectors, the data suggests that leaders should seek to listen to and understand their people, whose experiences may be quite different.

Figure 17: Professional Services Sector Wellbeing by Managerial Level



These industry sector differences highlight the varying contexts and dynamics associated with employee wellbeing in the UK. The recent downward trajectory within the technology and professional services sectors aligns with the narrative arising from open-ended employee comments of heightened uncertainty and job insecurity, coinciding with the rise of artificial

intelligence and automation. This has, perhaps disproportionately, affected such industries, as opposed to other generally higher-scoring ones such as advertising, marketing, and media, which still rely on a fundamentally human, creative element that is less likely to be automated or AI-driven.

“In recent years, the company has stopped and actively stepped back from putting people first. We have actively removed our people support roles, and this will 100% impact our employee health and wellbeing, inclusion and diversity, and employee engagement and recognition. The company does not value its people the way it used to pre-COVID-19. We are a second thought now.”  
[Employee in Professional Services Sector, 2024]





## SUMMARY AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This research provides a comprehensive view of the trends in employee wellbeing observed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. Despite the adverse impacts of the pandemic on various facets of employee wellbeing, including financial security and social connectedness, our analysis of organisational and employee data revealed a temporary spike in employee wellbeing during this unprecedented period. As this analysis has shown, when leaders make people a priority in the organisation (such as during the pandemic), the results can be rather striking. Unfortunately, this focus on employees and their wellbeing has not consistently continued, as evidenced by the data, although some high-performing organisations have managed to defy this general downward trend.

In 2025, even with “social distancing” and the “new normal” scrapped from the common lexicon, the UK labour market remains characterised by trends directly or indirectly shaped by events of the past five years. Perhaps most prominently, flexibility and hybrid/remote working arrangements remain top of many employees’ minds when choosing to join or remain at workplaces. In addition, more employee sensitivity

is heightened around managerial approaches to time in the office and environmental wellbeing in shared workplaces. Moreover, with restructures and redundancies on the rise amid market turmoil and rapid technological advances, employees are not only dealing with the acute threat of job insecurity but also having to do more with fewer resources. It is precisely in this challenging climate that strong leadership and compassionate people management skills provide more opportunities than ever to center the employee experience around wellbeing.

For business and people leaders, we find several important implications for the future. Our analysis highlights the multi-faceted nature of wellbeing and the need to continue addressing this holistically in organisations.

Whilst we have discussed the ‘best’ organisations and the top five listmakers, we encourage leaders, especially those nearer the beginning of their journey towards a culture of employee wellbeing, to move away from the pursuit of perfection and strictly ‘best’ practice, and rather aim for good, consistent management practice.



In creating an employee experience around the core concept of wellbeing, five fundamental pillars of good practice include:

### 1. Create a strategic priority from the top

As with most organisational changes, a focus on wellbeing starts from the top. Organisational leaders must buy into, and fully recognise the value in, treating wellbeing as a strategic business priority that directly impacts the bottom line. Many leaders may have other priorities given the changing geopolitical environment and potential disruption related to AI. Yet building a solid organisation that can adapt to changes starts with a strong focus on day-to-day employee wellbeing.

### 2. Listen continuously to understand experiences and challenges

Not all leaders get top-down communication right, but even fewer perfect the art of listening. The timings, channels, and frequency of information gathering vary with unique organisational needs, but employees should have multiple opportunities to have their voices, experiences, challenges, and ideas heard. This generally splits into more formal written feedback through pulse surveys, along with regular, informal feedback through one-to-ones or other more proximal methods.

### 3. Involve employees in co-creating solutions

Listening doesn’t stop after experiences and issues have been shared – commonly the best solutions to these challenges exist at the frontline, best heard straight from the horse’s mouth. When employees feel they have been actively involved in action-planning and the design of new initiatives, these efforts are far more likely to be embraced, making them more cost-effective.

### 4. Focus on the fundamentals, not plasters

Though it may be tempting to reduce the concept of wellbeing into tangible workplace initiatives such as awareness programmes, taglines, and wellness perks, these surface-level interventions should not be confused with the more integrative workplace fundamentals such as healthy job design, stress monitoring, and fair people management practices, which have infinitely more sustainable impact in creating a thriving workforce.

### 5. Empower your people managers

Finally, a huge amount of the day-to-day employee experience is influenced, if not determined by, immediate frontline managers, who often carry a significant burden in taking care of an entire team’s wellbeing, in addition to their own. As such, those with people management responsibility must be properly trained (or upskilled), empowered, and supported from above to successfully carry out this business-critical role.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a worldwide crisis, yet organisational leaders proved to the world that they can do better in taking care of their workforces. While this focus has waned in recent years, the bar has been permanently raised, and a new precedent set. As organisations navigate the evolving landscape of work, let these findings serve as a roadmap for fostering resilience, wellbeing, and thriving in the workplace of tomorrow.

# LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study is based on data gathered by Great Place To Work. The sample includes over 900 organizations and 300,000 survey respondents. While the data and process of analysis are robust for this study, there are limitations with this sample since organisations must choose to participate in the Great Place To Work process. This self-selection likely provides a sample that has higher scores than the average employer in the UK. While we have the benefit of a normative sample in the UK to compare with employees at great workplaces, the sample sizes are limited, and caution should be used to avoid generalising to all organisations in the country.

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As we consider future directions, we recognise that more work is needed to understand differences across gender and cultural background in the workplace regarding perceptions and experiences. Also worthy of further exploration is the linkage between voluntary employee turnover and wellbeing, along with a closer look at flexible and remote work arrangements. With more interest in work modalities, alternative work weeks, and flexible work arrangements, we wish to further test ideas and hypotheses related to future designs of work.

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