2020 workplace well-being research summary

The Myers-Briggs Company

Research study designed by:

Rich Thompson, Senior Director Research
Thomas Ticheuer, Research Intern,
Martin Boult, Senior Director Professional Services & International Training

Contents

Introduction

Overview

The well-being of many people in the workplace continues to be challenged in 2020 by multiple factors and particularly from the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. To obtain a current and comprehensive picture of workplace well-being globally, The Myers-Briggs Company conducted two studies using the Global Workplace Well-Being Inventory GWWI). The first study measured workplace well-being along with strategies for managing it and was carried out in March 2020 as many countries and US states implemented "lockdown" and "stay at home" COVID-19 mitigation measures. The second study was carried out in May–June 2020 as part of our ongoing longitudinal (five-year) evaluation of workplace well-being. This study again focused on workplace well-being but also included some items regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as supervisor perceptions. Both studies have an international sample, but participants are drawn primarily from the United States. Briefly, the results of the two studies demonstrate:

- Workplace well-being has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The level of workplace well-being has decreased from early to mid-2020.
- A positive relationship with one's immediate supervisor is related to higher levels of workplace well-being.
- There are actions that one can take to improve workplace well-being.
- Workplace well-being is stable in large, diverse samples of people.

What is workplace well-being?

The Global Workplace Well-Being Inventory expands on the previous work of leading well-being researchers, who found that positive well-being, or "flourishing," is more than just having feelings of happiness (Seligman, 2011; Diener & Tay, 2012). Our research shows that workplace well-being comprises six factors:

- Positive emotions—frequent feelings of happiness, contentment, pleasure
- Relationships—mutual feelings of caring, support, satisfaction
- Engagement—deep psychological connection and absorption in an activity or cause
- Meaning—a sense of purpose and direction
- Accomplishment—success or mastery for its own sake
- Negative emotions—low levels of anxiety, pessimism, depression

We refer to this model of workplace well-being as PREMAN (Boult, Thompson, & Schaubhut, 2019) later in the paper.

Samples

Characteristics of the samples for the two studies conducted in 2020 are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Sample characteristics of the studies

Sample characteristic	Study 1	Study 2
Sample size	2,230	2,405
Average age of respondent	45	45
Standard deviation for age	11.3	11.8
Percent male	35	33
Percent female	64	66

Note: For both studies, 1% of respondents preferred not to reply to the gender question or chose Other.

Results

COVID-19's effect on well-being, work hours, and work location

Study 2 included several items related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which are summarized in figures 1–3. The first item asked about the impact of the pandemic on workplace well-being. Figure 1 shows that 47% of respondents reported a negative impact. However, nearly a quarter reported a positive impact. The second item asked about the impact on work hours. Figure 2 shows that for about half of the respondents (49.8%), there was no impact on work hours; for about a third of respondents (32.3%), work hours increased; and for about 18%, work hours decreased. The last item asked about work location. As illustrated in figure 3, about half of the respondents (47%) indicated that they were now working from home instead of at their pre-pandemic work location, with an additional 22% working from home more than before.
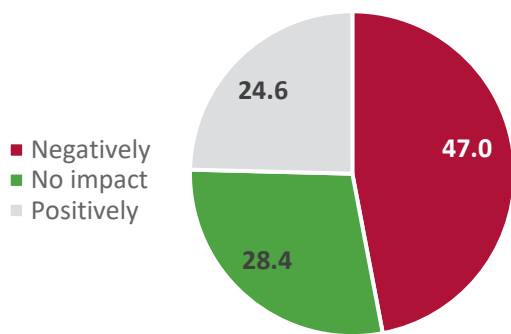

Figure 1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your workplace well-being? (percent)
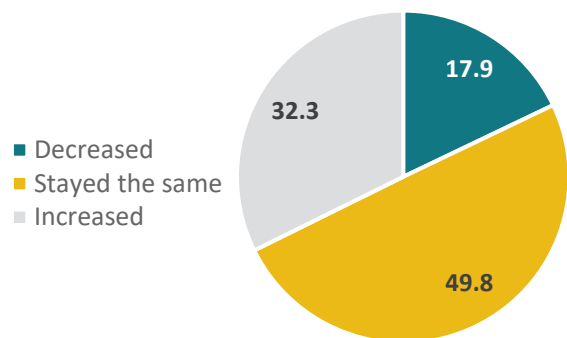

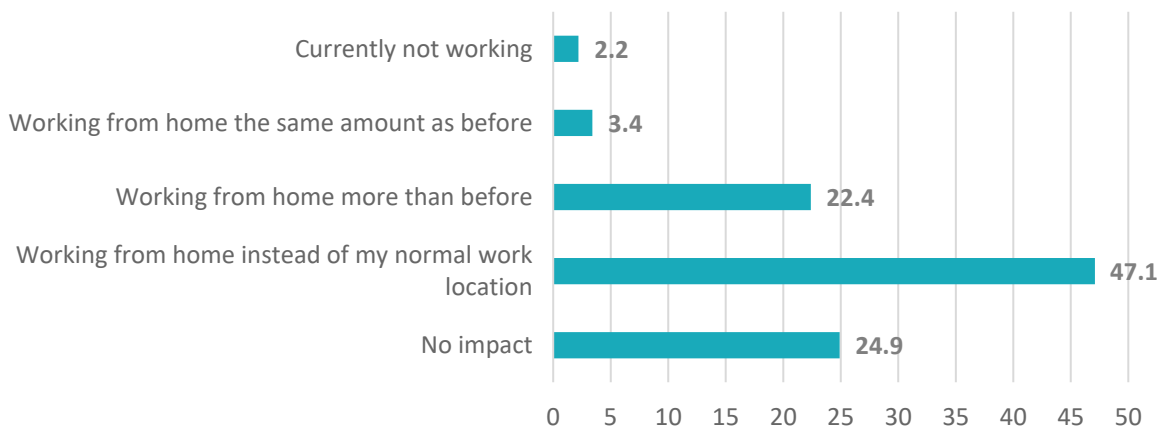Figure 2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work hours? (percent)

Figure 3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your work location? (percent)

Supervisor (manager) relationship to employee well-being

Study 2 also examined relationships between workplace well-being and perceptions of supervisor support and satisfaction with one's supervisor. Not surprisingly, it was found that higher levels of workplace well-being are related to higher levels of perceived supervisor support and perceived satisfaction with one's immediate supervisor. The results of this analysis are summarized in table 2. In addition, there is a high correlation between positive emotions and supervisor support and satisfaction with one's supervisor.

Table 2. Correlations among measures of workplace well-being, supervisor perceptions

	Supervisor support	Satisfaction with supervisor
Overall workplace well-being	.483**	.535**
Positive emotions	.456**	.502**
Relationships	.444**	.474**
Engagement	.396**	.438**
Meaning	.381**	.423**
Accomplishment	.381**	.431**
Negative emotions	.332**	.377**

*Note: ** statistically significant at $p < .01$.*

How to support well-being

In addition to measuring workplace well-being, Study 1 examined activities people engaged in pre-pandemic to improve or manage their workplace well-being. The results indicate that the following activities are helpful in terms of promoting workplace well-being.

- Engaging in positive thinking
- Developing and maintaining positive interpersonal work relationships
- Taking a break from work when needed
- Calming oneself and clearing one's head
- Engaging in training and development activities
- Focusing on one's purpose
- Finding work balance

Our well-being research has also explored the interaction between workplace well-being and personality, as measured by the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*® (MBTI®) assessment (Boult, Thompson, & Schaubhut, 2016, 2019). We highlight that the reported effectiveness of well-being strategies differs based on personality type preferences. For example, extraverted respondents typically rated activities involving others as effective for their well-being, while introverted types rated activities that did not involve other people as effective. These personality differences should be considered when selecting well-being activities.

Well-being 2016–2020

Finally, the data from the present studies are combined with data from prior research on workplace well-being in order to show trends (Boult, Thompson, & Schaubhut, 2019). The trends for workplace well-being found by the Myers-Briggs Company research program are summarized in figure 4, which shows that there are not large changes in the levels of reported workplace well-being. However, there is an interesting pattern for the data collected in 2020. When measured at the start of the lockdown in the United States (2020 Study 1), workplace well-being levels were unexpectedly slightly higher than in the preceding years (except for 2016). However, there was also a drop across all the measures when the data were collected after approximately 3 months of pandemic-related economic and social disruptions (2020 Study 2). However, while statistically significant, the drop is still relatively small. The trend data suggest that people are generally resilient when it comes to their self-reported workplace well-being.

Figure 4. Workplace well-being and PREMAN trends 2016–2020

Key findings

Employers and employees are facing new and unique challenges in 2020, largely resulting from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key finding from the 2020 workplace well-being research indicates that people, when asked directly, report a decrease in their workplace well-being as a result of the pandemic. In addition, approximately a third (32.3%) of people report that their work hours have increased this year, and the majority of people (69.5%) are now working primarily from home instead of at their pre-pandemic work location. This study did not directly investigate the potential interaction between workplace well-being, work hours, and work location. However, the reported lower levels of well-being may both affect and be affected by the changes in people's workplaces in 2020. The rapid and significant changes to many people's working conditions should be taken into consideration by employers and employees seeking to support or improve workplace well-being.

When we look at the trends, this self-reported drop in well-being can be seen in the small but statistically significant decrease in the level of well-being from Study 1 (early in the COVID-19 pandemic) to Study 2 (the most recent period of the pandemic). With people experiencing a decline in their well-being as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued, there is the potential that well-being may be further negatively impacted over the coming months if the issue is not addressed. Our earlier research (Boult, Thompson, & Schaubhut, 2019) demonstrated that there are multiple benefits for individual employees and organizations when actions are undertaken to support and enhance the well-being of people at work.

As the immediate challenges and disruption resulting from the pandemic subside, it will be even more important to implement practical and effective ways to support workplace well-being. A key finding this year was that people who have more positive perceptions of their immediate supervisor have higher levels of workplace well-being. This reinforces the importance of leaders (mangers, supervisors) being aware of their own well-being and that of those they lead. Our prior research and experience consulting with organizations highlight the most effective ways to support leaders as they evaluate and implement well-being strategies in their workplaces. Our 2020 well-being studies show the most effective strategies any individual can use to improve their workplace well-being.

References

Boult, M., Thompson, R. C., & Schaubhut, N. A. (2016). Well-being and MBTI® personality type in the workplace: An international comparison. The Myers-Briggs Company: Sunnyvale, CA. http://people.themyersbriggs.com/rs/788-YSM-155/images/Well-being%20WP%20FINAL.pdf

Boult, M., Thompson, R. C., & Schaubhut, N. A. (2019). Well-being in the workplace: Why it matters for organizational improvement and how to improve it. The Myers-Briggs Company: Sunnyvale, CA. https://ap.themyersbriggs.com/content/Research%20and%20White%20Papers/MBTI/Well-being_in_the_workplace_by_The_Myers-Briggs_Company.pdf

Diener, E., & Tay, L. (2012). A scientific review of the remarkable benefits of happiness for successful and healthy living. www.researchgate.net/publication/236272980_A_scientific_review_of_the_remarkable_benefits_of_happiness_for_successful_and_healthy_living

Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. New York City: Atria Books.