



# Digital Wellbeing 2016:

## An insight from industry leaders

Do Something Different and the University of Sussex conducted insight interviews with digital innovation and wellbeing professionals from Bupa, AXA PPP, Vitality, Cigna, South Western Ambulance Service, University of Wolverhampton, Edinburgh Napier University and Aston University to understand the role of digital in delivering employee wellbeing initiatives across various organisations and sectors.

*Our research interviewees are either in charge of developing digital strategies and services globally, or responsible for the wellbeing of employees in the UK.*

*Note: The interviewees are not necessarily clients of Do Something Different and kindly agreed to take part to support this industry research project.*

# Introduction

## Identifying trends in digital wellbeing

Employers in the UK are generally aware of the importance of employee wellbeing and understand that neglecting it has repercussions that will cost the company through absenteeism, sick days and reduced productivity.

Looking after employees is now widely seen as an investment in the future rather than an expense. However, as our previous research on workplace wellbeing concluded, there are still challenges that hinder the effective delivery of wellbeing initiatives.

This report looks at how digital wellbeing initiatives are perceived and what you can expect digital to deliver, now and in the future.

**It concludes that while many organisations are embracing digital in a contained way, few have embraced its full potential.**

Our experts believe that the real power of digital lies in helping employees to **prevent mental and physical health problems** before they become critical. And to self-manage health issues that they feel are important to them personally.

If you only read 3 sentences, read these:



1. Most employers currently use digital to deliver health education and data, primarily as a passive resource rather than an interactive self-management tool.



2. The biggest potential for digital according to global service providers is in the prevention of avoidable health conditions and self-management of wellbeing.



3. Digital programmes, delivered to mobile phones, (like those provided by Do Something Different) can deliver this now, without the need for complicated technical integration.

## A focus on the evolving role of digital in wellbeing

The Do Something Different [Workplace Wellbeing 2016 report](#) released in April 2016 identified three major challenges organisations face when delivering employee wellbeing: [accessibility, engagement and measuring return on investment \(ROI\)](#). To overcome these obstacles employers have started turning towards digital solutions realising the untapped potential of technology.

**Professor Karen J Pine** and **Professor Ben (C) Fletcher**'s long term research into behaviour change supports this new direction, as their findings confirm that [the use of mobile technology is efficient for inducing healthy lifestyles](#).

We focused our research for this report on the role of digital in delivering wellbeing in the workplace, and mapped trends in its current implementation.

Regardless of the massive variation in its existing forms, interviewees agreed that the reach of digital technology will increase in the near future, and it will have an important role for wellbeing going forward. The rise of digital has also facilitated a shift towards self-managing wellbeing and favouring preventative rather than reactive measures when addressing health and wellbeing issues in the workplace.

**Bupa** currently offers employees access to portals and applications with wellbeing content, though functional management of wellbeing is still in its infancy. **Alex Davidge, Head of Strategy Development and Business Architecture**, is certain that further digital solutions will dramatically change this in the future, both for the company and its customers.

*"At the management level in our organisation people fully understand - whether it's around behavioural change or collecting and analysing health and wellbeing data - that there is a huge role for digital employee health and wellbeing management."*



*"...there's a huge role for some type of digital employee wellbeing management capability."*

# 3 major trends

The in-depth interviews with the contributors revealed three key trends that are affecting the management of wellbeing in the workplace:



## TREND 1. The growth of digital

Although the use of digital is still fairly low, it will have a key role in employee wellbeing by 2020.



## TREND 2. Prevention

The long-term cost of preventable conditions, e.g. stress related mental and physical health issues, has highlighted the importance of investing in prevention as well as treatment.



## TREND 3. Self-management

Employees are increasingly encouraged to self-manage their own health and wellbeing. On and offline resources, apps and health trackers reflect this new approach where employers provide the necessary support that empower staff to be proactive with their own wellbeing.

## TREND 1: The growth of digital



We found that employers in the UK are switched on in regards to employee wellbeing. However, the differences in using digital to support wellbeing initiatives are significant across sectors.

Most participants reported using online resources and portals for accessing information, social media for communication and engaging staff, but other digital resources like apps, programmes and wearables were less frequently in use.

Participants in charge of digital innovation or strategy were more perceptive to the opportunities digital can offer in terms of improving wellbeing, whereas the health and wellbeing professionals interviewed were less aware of the extent of those.

**David Brannigan, Head of Digital for International Markets at Cigna**, gives an overview of the role that digital plays in employee wellbeing at the global health insurance service company:



*"With the boom of digital, we believe it is the main plank in driving health and well-being amongst our employees, which is crucial in creating a productive work environment. At Cigna, we offer a variety of digital programmes to our employees, such as Coach by Cigna which launched this year. It collects personal data including diet and sleep patterns and tailors health tips and provides advice directed at improving their overall health and wellbeing."*

**Simon Bradley, Head of Digital Delivery at Vitality**, confirms the importance of digital saying it is the main differentiator between the company and other health and life insurance providers. Vitality encourages healthy lifestyles for example through reward schemes that offer better discounts and benefits the more active the user is.

*"Last year we rolled out an active reward for Starbucks whereby if a member earns 10 points in the week they can get a free coffee. 10 points is 30 mins of activity at 70% of your age related heart rate or 12,500 steps in a day."*

Cigna and Vitality already have digital wellbeing platforms and programmes in place, but having such an extensive digital offering is still fairly uncommon.

**Clare Dickens, Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator at University of Wolverhampton** mention their current digital wellbeing offering is largely limited to providing information and services, such as mental health support, through a website and/or online portal.

**Matthew Ward, Corporate Innovation Manager at AXA PPP** predicts that in the future, prompting healthy behaviour change using digital technology will have a bigger role in employee wellbeing in the UK, which now predominantly consists of offering online access to information and services.

*"The growth of digital is inevitable. Mobile technologies addressing health behaviour challenges is the **number one thing** that will have **an impact on health going forward**. If you look at Silicon Valley, all the start-ups are to do with health now."*

Private corporations are not the only ones to put an emphasis on employee wellbeing. **Sam Fraser - Equality, Health and Wellbeing Lead at South Western Ambulance Service** appreciates the direction taken by the NHS.

*“Every year in the NHS we have CQUINs, which are incentives for NHS Organisations to focus on particular areas. This year the focus is on wellbeing - which it has never been before. This shows the NHS is really taking this seriously now.”*

The NHS 5 Year Forward View (5YFV) also makes a commitment to significantly develop the role of digital within organisations.

#### **DIGITAL NOW**

- Resource-based
- Mainly providing info
- Mainly internet

#### **DIGITAL IN 12 – 24 MONTHS**

- Action-based
- Changing behaviours/lifestyles
- Mobile phone-focused

## **WHAT’S STOPPING US EMBRACING DIGITAL?**

A recent CIPD survey found that most HR professionals recognise that digital is THE emerging technology but a major barrier to implementing it was the lack of confidence in implementing a new technology.\*

\*[CIPD Learning and Development survey](#)

## TREND 2: Prevention as the target



Our interviewees confirm what research has found to be an emerging trend—a shift towards the need for **prevention** of health and wellbeing issues. Putting interventions in place before people get ill reaps benefits such as lower absenteeism, greater productivity and enhanced employee engagement.

[Professors Pine and Fletcher \(2016c\)](#) analysis of the NHS 5 Year Forward View however highlights the current imbalance in the budget between funds spent on the treatment and prevention of avoidable illnesses such as diabetes.

Professor Pine concludes: *“Currently just 4% of the UK’s total healthcare budget is spent on prevention, while preventable long-term conditions call on 70% of the NHS budget” (2016c:1).*

The same is true in the private healthcare sector and for employee wellbeing. **Alex Davidge** recognises how this relates to **Bupa**:



"It's lifestyle related and preventable"

"When you consider your people, and in our case many of our customers, many of the costs embedded in products like health insurance or incurred by the low productivity or engagement of employees, can be traced back to non-communicable and lifestyle diseases. These could be conditions like stress, hypertension, or diabetes: much of it is lifestyle related and, thankfully, ultimately preventable."

**Matthew Ward** from **AXA PPP** follows with a similar view:

*"We have [products] that can detect stress levels, we have genetic tests and ongoing assessments for things that may be a problem in time, looking to **change lifestyles** to tackle them. So the big role for us is **tackling lifestyle** rather than tackling when you get ill when it's largely something you could have dealt with five years ago".*



"The big role for us is tackling lifestyle"

Putting emphasis on prevention reflects the perception of health and wellbeing in general, which **Clare Dickens** from **University of Wolverhampton** explains well:



"We look at it from a holistic point of view"

*"We look at it from the **holistic point of view**. We've gone along the 5-a-day wellbeing model. So it's more than physical and mental health – it's about how to stay connected, how to open up to somebody, how to talk, how to enjoy life also."*

## Prevention is about behaviour change

Addressing lifestyles starts with addressing behaviour. Knowledge around health issues is widely available, but **knowing does not equal doing**—if it did, obesity and smoking would not be at such problematic levels as people would take notice of the wealth of information and advice available.

Behaviour change is crucial to achieving positive results in terms of employee Wellbeing as **David Brannigan** from **Cigna** points out:



*“The key to achieving a healthy lifestyle is changing and maintaining positive behaviour, including all those small decisions that make up your day – like when you reach for that sweet mid-afternoon snack. Referred to as ‘nudge’ psychology, positive reinforcements and subtle suggestions are needed to influence one’s behaviour. With Cigna’s digital wellness programmes, we aim to motivate and encourage employees to adapt everyday behaviour to stay healthy.”*

## WHY DOES DIGITAL HELP WITH PREVENTION?

The power of digital lies in its ability to offer cost-effective, scalable interventions that are easy to access with everyday technology.

**Sam Fraser, at South Western Ambulance Service explains**

*“Digital technology is incredibly important. The workforce is changing. Younger staff are more open to using mobile tech and want it as well. It’s also vital because our workforce is spread across multiple locations.”*

## TREND 3. Digital meets the self-management need



All of our respondents agree that as employees embrace a digital world in their private lives – and all of the rich choices that brings – so they expect the same level of access and autonomy when it comes to wellbeing at work.

According to Ofcom, 93% of people in the UK own a mobile phone, and collectively they look at them over a billion times a day. We live in the era of self-tracking, where our daily activities can be logged, analysed and shared with the aim of monitoring and improving the quality of our lives.

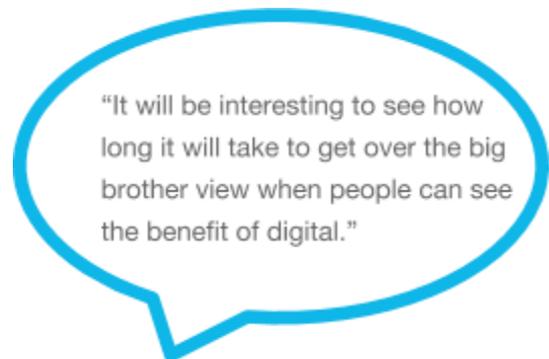
Smartphones have become extensions of our bodies, and they are an extremely personal channel through which to reach people. The wide reach of mobile phones affords easy accessibility to digital wellbeing initiatives, and allows more accurately tailored programmes to be delivered to individual users.

**Alex Davidge at Bupa**, says:

*“It is critical for companies to steer away from designing remedies in-house and ‘pushing’ them onto sceptical employees. There is real value in drawing in such capabilities from external and impartial experts, where both employers’ and employees’ needs are fully taken into account; otherwise you may struggle with an employer-employee trust problem. Fundamentally we need a paradigm shift in employee health and wellbeing across all industries. Companies are increasingly aware that matters need to materially change but exactly what - and how fast and in what order - is still mainly just a matter of conversation.”*

**Matthew Ward at AXA PPP** also pick up on the trust theme:

*“When it comes to tracking their health, once you get over the problem you have with large organisations of the big brother view (you know everything about me) then it will be used more. It will be interesting to see how long it will take to get over the big brother view when people can see the benefits of digital.”*



**Clare Dickens at University of Wolverhampton** is especially sensitive to the idea that pushing wellbeing at students or staff can backfire. She sees self-management as the key to success in helping people to change behaviours:

*“We’ve got no right to say what you’re doing is wrong but if you do feel it’s something you want to address, here are some of the tools that we can actually help you to get that angle, so yes – eating well, smoking.”*

**Susan Braithwaite at Aston University** told us:

*“Everything is about keeping staff happy and productive while they’re at work. To me that should be our main aim, not just providing opportunities to staff to learn about things. That’s the way of the future.”*

## Providing self-management choices

**Professor Karen Pine** from [Do Something Different](#) explains that the company has recently moved away from offering single digital wellbeing programmes in favour of wellbeing platforms. These digital platforms provide employees with a readily-available choice of programmes to suit their lifestyle and personal health challenges.

*“Our model used to be to work with a company to develop a single programme to target a specific issue. That might be about reducing stress or adopting more healthy behaviours. What we found is that employees don’t want to be told to go on a programme. They want to be able to choose a programme that suits their needs.”*

### **So it’s about offering a choice of digital programmes?**

*“That’s just the first part. They also want (expect) the programme to be personalised to their needs. After all, this is digital. You’re not buying a book that is printed and finished. You’re on a journey and you want a programme that helps you along the way.”*

## HOW DOES DIGITAL MEET THE SELF-MANAGEMENT NEED?

The flexibility of digital programmes is key to a quality wellbeing offering. You can offer a choice of programmes so people choose what motivates them. You personalise programmes so each experience is tailored for the individuals’ needs. You make programmes action-orientated. So you’re no longer just offering advice and information. You’re offering a genuine intervention that boosts self-management, autonomy and self-efficacy. And because your wellbeing programmes are digital, they are also accessible 24/7, anywhere in the world, whenever someone feels the need for support or the time is right for them to take action.

## Brought to you by Do Something Different

This Industry Insight was created by [Do Something Different](#), the digital behaviour change platform that delivers a range of personalised wellbeing programmes to mobiles, tablets and computers.

To find out more about Do Something Different online behaviour change programmes for health and wellbeing, please visit <http://dsd.me/business/>

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