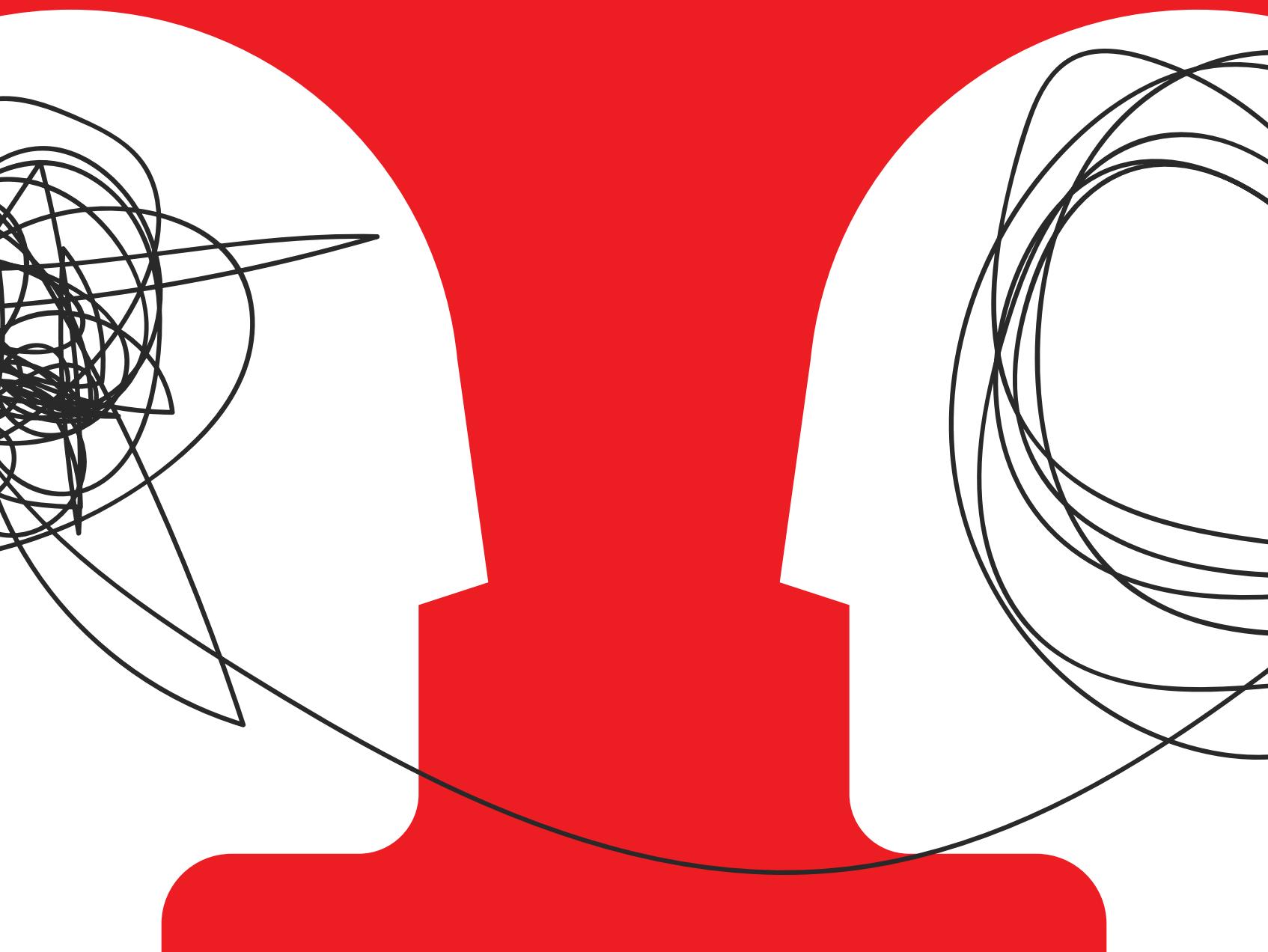




Opening the Conversation: Mental Wellbeing in Marcoms





Forewords

Part of my role at The Drum is head of The Drum Network, a membership product we have that is specifically for agencies. It focuses on supporting all aspects of their business, and as you'd expect we have a lot of conversation around new business, pricing, dealing with clients, M&A etc. But over the last year in particular the mental well-being of staff is probably a daily topic of conversation too. Great. We're talking about it more than ever. But it's conversation and anecdotal. As an agency community we want to take action, but we need more evidence, more insight. As if by magic the next week we found our friends at Opinium have conducted similar research in other industries, meaning not only can we get some data, we can benchmark it to other industries. By the end of the next week we were planning the first Agency Well-being study. I hope it's just the beginning. There is simply no argument against making the key currency of an agency, it's talent, happier people.



Matt Sullivan,
head of product,
The Drum Network

After developing the first workplace mental wellbeing audit with Warwick University Medical School, we were so delighted when the The Drum agreed to partner with us and help us audit the marcoms industry.

Mental health was a rather taboo topic in the not too distant past, but progress has certainly been made in recent years. Though there is still a way to go, particularly with regards to mental health and wellbeing at work.

We are delighted to share this report with you, which we hope will accelerate change. As you'll see throughout the report, we've uncovered some of the key issues companies need to address, as well as various initiatives that workplaces can implement along with their impact on mental wellbeing. Addressing mental wellbeing at work may seem like a mammoth task, but it's a journey, and making that first step in the right direction will kick-start wider organisational change which will benefit everyone involved.

This is the first of its kind, and the first of many.



James Endersby,
CEO, Opinium

Mental health was a rather taboo topic in the not too distant past, but progress has certainly been made in recent years.



Introduction

We all have mental wellbeing...

As the world has woken up to how important it is to protect and nurture our mental wellbeing, conversations have been sparked amongst businesses and organisations to try and understand how they can best support their employees and help them thrive.

However, this is easier said than done. In the same way that different plants need different conditions to thrive in, the same sunlight, water and soil doesn't work for everyone. The type of support and initiatives that work for one industry or company can be completely different to

what works for another. Those that would be welcomed by one level of seniority may be completely useless and irrelevant to another.

So how can employers begin tackling this complex issue and understand what they can do to best support their employees? This spurred Opinium on to create a tool to allow employers understand their employee's mental health in a robust and replicable way, and ultimately to help accelerate change in workplaces across the UK.



Measuring mental wellbeing in the marcoms industry

With this in mind we wanted to further understand the pressures and mental well-being of those working in the marcoms sector specifically. By partnering with The Drum Network, Opinion were able to share their audit with The Drum Network's member's database to further understand what can be done to support marcoms professionals specifically with their mental health. We reached 433 employees working in marcoms - by comparing the results from this audit with Opinion's nationwide employee survey we've been able to identify some important differences between Marcoms employees and the UK working population more generally.

This report will cover

- Overall wellbeing and stress at work
- Taking time off for mental health
- Sharing mental wellbeing struggles
- Helping employees thrive – top 3 takeouts for employers

The hope is that this audit will bridge a divide between employees and their employers and help Marcoms organisations create working environments that are beneficial to everyone's mental wellbeing.

A partnership with Warwick University

With an issue as complex and abstract as mental health it is important that any research into the subject is rigorous and methodological which is why Opinium partnered with the University of Warwick Medical School to incorporate their mental wellbeing scale into the audit.

Not only does the scale give the audit a robust method for measuring mental wellbeing it also distinguishes the approach from the myriad of other mental health surveys by giving a benchmark to work with that is underpinned by academic research.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)* was designed by the University of Warwick with funding from NHS Health Scotland. The scale comprises positive statements, e.g. “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future”, “I’ve been

feeling useful”, “I’ve been feeling relaxed” and so on. Participants are then asked how often they have felt this way in the past two weeks; “None of the time”, “Rarely”, “Some of the time”, “Often”, “All of the time”. The positive nature of these statements marks the WEMWBS out from other mental wellbeing scales in that it captures feeling good and functioning well, not just an absence of mental ill-health, which is important as mental wellbeing is about thriving, and not just surviving.

Taking an average of their fourteen answers a wellbeing score can be assigned to an individual which can then be determined in terms of whether it falls above or below the national average. The scale enables us to quantify mental wellbeing, thus promoting wider understanding of mental wellbeing as a whole.

General wellbeing and stress

According to our research, 91% of those working in Marcoms say they have struggled with their mental health in the past 12 months, which is considerably higher than 62% of the general working population. Looking at the individual statements that make up the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, some alarming statistics were revealed. For example, two-in-five (44%) say that in the last two-weeks they rarely or never felt relaxed compared to 25% of the general working population.



Heightened stress levels in marcoms

In line with the above, stress levels are heightened amongst marcoms workers. Over a quarter (26%) of marcoms professionals say they find their job very stressful (giving it a score of 8-10 with 10 being extremely stressful), compared to just 19% of UK workers overall. Reported stress levels rise even more for men working in the sector (35% rate 8-10, versus 22% of women).

So, what is causing stress amongst marcoms workers? Three-fifths (48%) of workers surveyed feel that heavy workload is causing them stress at work. Unclear expectations (47%) and impending deadlines (47%) also appear high on the list of stresses.

Top sources of stress at work

- My workload/ having too much to do **48% (vs. 30%)**
- Unclear expectations **47% (vs. 16%)**
- Impending deadlines **47% (vs. 18%)**
- Not feeling good at their job **46% (vs. 13%)**
- Demands from clients **44% (vs. 18%)**



Taking time off work

Physical and mental health – a level playing field?

While taking time out for rest and recovery is always top of the list of what the doctor orders, when we experience a dip in our health there is a clear difference in how we approach this for our physical and mental wellbeing. Just 32% of marcoms employees who have struggled with their mental wellbeing in the past 12 months took time off work for their mental wellbeing compared to 67% who took time off for their physical health.

So how does this compare to the national worker picture? Marcoms professionals are slightly less likely to take time off for their mental health.

Over a third (36%) of UK workers who have struggled with their mental wellbeing in the past 12 months took time off for this, compared to 32% amongst marcoms professionals. By contrast, taking time off for physical health is actually a touch more common in marcoms than the national picture (67% for marcoms vs 59% amongst wider workers).



Just keep working...

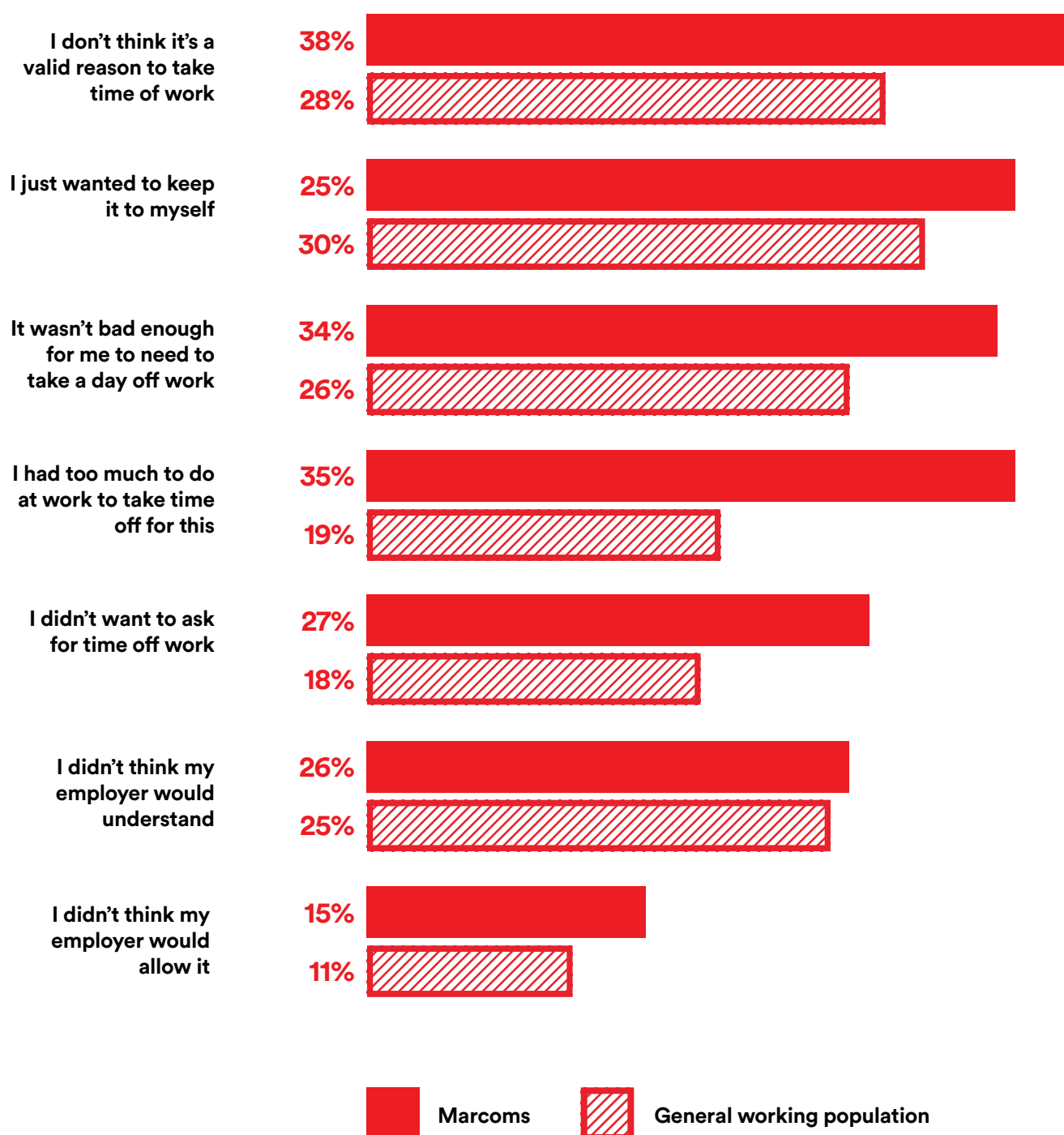
As well as clear divide between attitudes to taking time off for physical health issues compared to mental health issues, there are also stark differences between those in marcoms and the general working population.

Those working in marcoms are more likely to cite a number of reasons for not taking time off for mental health reasons than their peers in other industries. The most stark difference is with regards to workload - 35% of those in marcoms said they didn't take time off for a mental health issue because they had too much to do at work, compared to 19% of the working population. Similarly, 38% said they didn't think it was a valid reason to take time off compared 28% of UK workers. Other differences are shown in the chart below.

When asked about how taking time off for mental health made people feel, a mixed picture emerged. On the one hand many reported benefits; for example, 58% of those working in Marcoms said after taking time off they returned to work feeling much better (vs. 54% national workers). Similarly, two-thirds (65%) said the quality of their work improved after taking time off to recuperate (vs. 59% national workers).

However, many still felt guilty about taking the day off for their mental health (71%) which is considerably higher than national workers (54%).

Why didn't you take time off work for a mental health issue?





Talking about mental wellbeing

Making mental wellbeing conversations commonplace at work

Compared to the wider worker population, as an industry the marcoms world is ahead in terms of employees feeling able to discuss mental health at work and feeling like employers are taking their mental health seriously.

While 47% feel they can talk to their colleagues openly about their mental health, almost half (49%) feel they can talk to their manager or employer openly. In comparison, only 38% of UK workers feel they can talk openly to their colleagues and 40% to their manager or employer. However, there is progress to be made as these numbers are still low at less than half of workers in the industry.

Only half (50%) feel their employer takes the mental health and wellbeing of their employees seriously, though this is slightly higher the national 44%. Promisingly, 69% feel that their colleagues would be supportive if they were struggling with their mental health, considerably higher than the national 49%.



Opening up about mental health struggles

Of those in the marcoms industry who have struggled with their mental health, 42% have told an employer about this, higher than the national average of 30%. Three fifths (61%) of those who told their employer said that they were understanding and supportive (considerably higher than the national average of 38%).

The importance of a support network

Strong employee relationships are key to facilitating open conversations around mental health struggles in the workplace. Many felt they ‘had no choice’ when it came to sharing – often having reached burnout. Employees speak of getting to a ‘point of no return’ – unable to hide their feelings from colleagues with public panic attacks, negative effects on work performance and genuine fears of how this would impact their professional reputations.

On the flip side, all success stories centre around having a trusted, empathetic, approachable and non-judgemental 'someone' to hear them out. In most cases, this role was identified as managers. These qualities were reported as crucial in enabling a safe space to voice concerns:

They've always been incredibly approachable and human about things and set the example of sharing difficult times for them too.

**Female, Digital Agency,
Marketing Manager / Director**

I wrote a company-wide email when I needed to change my hours to go to Mind sessions every week. It was terrifying to send, but the response was overwhelmingly positive. It started conversations, and the team started talking about their own mental health. They regularly cover my time during sessions and ask afterwards how they went. I've never given reasons why, or specifics and no one's ever asked. It's amazing to feel supported and my reasons respected.

**Female,
Creative Director**

The hidden dangers of professionalism

Those that decided to keep their struggles away from work commented on a need to keep their professional identity away from their personal life, deeming it inappropriate to integrate the two.

There were many concerns when it came to sharing: Lack of understanding from others, fear of appearing weak and unable to do their job, anxiety of judgement, and at times denial that it was even happening.

This worry of emotional leakage is perhaps justified when we think of our 'professional' armour. Our fears of admitting struggles are not always on our job descriptions or openly spoken about at work and this was unashamedly exposed in the data.

There is a very real and genuine fear of being truly seen and heard, particularly those in positions of seniority. In the words of Brene Brown on 'the power of vulnerability' – she speaks of how vulnerability or perceived weakness is the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness. However, vulnerability is also the birthplace of joy, creativity, belonging and love.

How do we achieve transparent and open working cultures? It all lies in the openness and honesty of employees about their own struggles and willingness to speak about them. When we make space for vulnerability, we make space for connection with others.

“It sometimes doesn’t feel like a professional thing to do - it was early on in my role so felt like it was a sign of struggling at managing to do the role, which would look bad on my performance.”

Male, Agency,
Digital Strategist



I think there is still a stigma in the society of making mental health issues public to your boss/ employer as it could have the impression that you are not resilient enough and not suited for the job and hence, has a negative influence on how they assess your goal achievements... which as an effect could be stopping them from promoting you/ giving you a pay raise... and honestly who would want to risk that.

Female, Agency, Brand Strategist

I was worried that it would be perceived as a weakness, an indication of an inability to cope with the demands of the job. I also tend to cry (against my will) when I have to talk with people about how stressed out I feel - I've done this before and my employer understood it to be due to lack of resilience (which I would strongly argue isn't the case).

Female, PR & Marketing Agency, Account Executive



Helping employees thrive

Throughout this report we've highlighted some key and concerning issues that certainly need addressing in order to help support and improve employee mental wellbeing. We've cultivated 3 key takeouts to better enable employers to take action on this important issue.

Top 3 takeaways for employers



1

Recognise the impact of workload on mental wellbeing and encourage employees to flag up when they are struggling with their workload

With workload being the top source of stress in marcoms, it's important that employers acknowledge and monitor this and, in turn, introduce effective workload management processes to support people before it gets too much for them to handle.

Further to this, employees should be actively encouraged to flag up when they are struggling with their workload to avoid stress

levels getting to boiling point, thus protecting against poor mental wellbeing.

Workload is also a key reason people don't take time off work for their mental wellbeing, effective workload management processes would also help people feel more comfortable taking time off as they'd feel that their work would be covered by other members of the team.

“Large scale surface level initiatives aren't enough. They need to put in place a support network that can be accessed and adapted on an individual level so that people feel supported.”

**Male, Media Agency,
Brand Strategist**

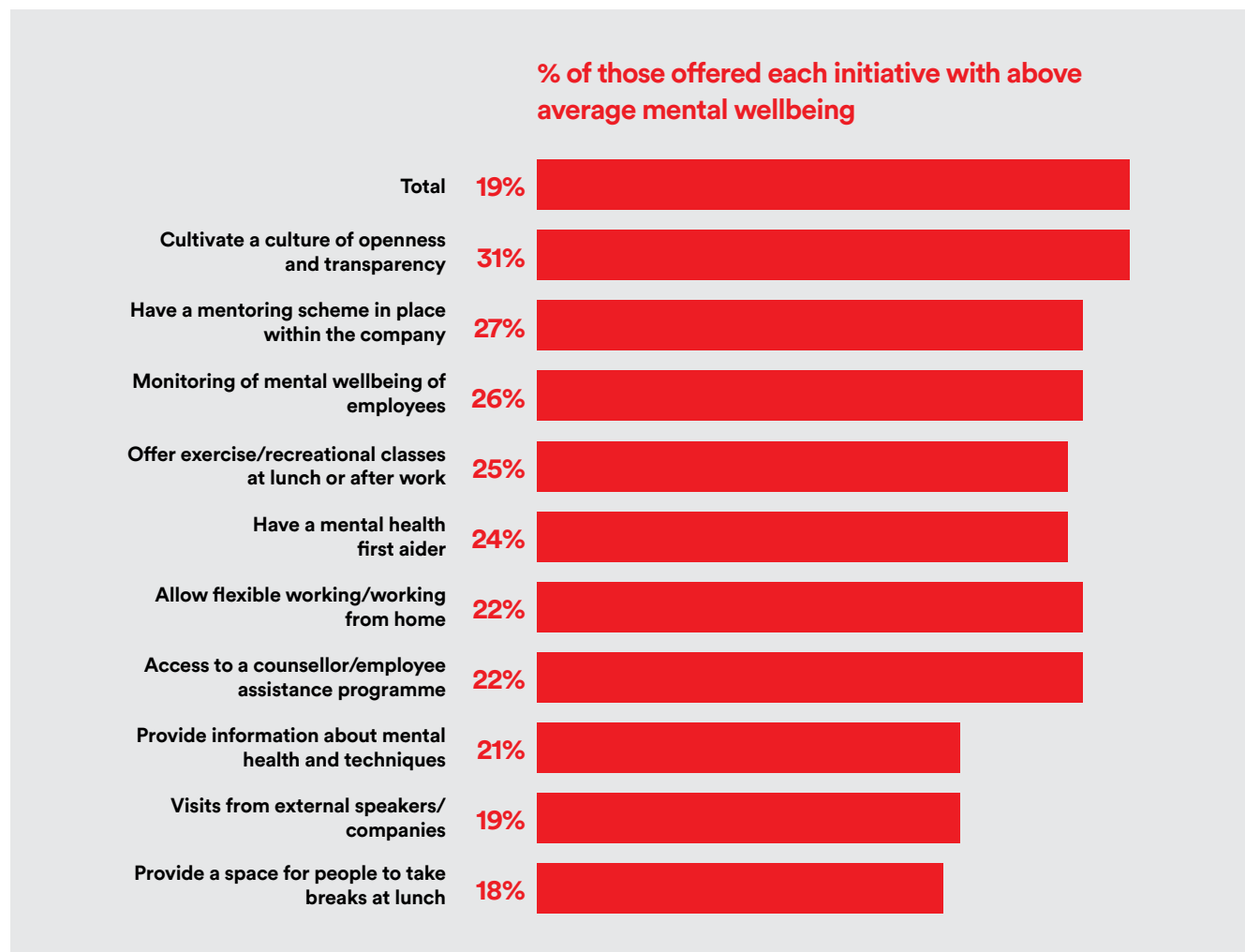
2

Offer and encourage usage of mental wellbeing initiatives that enhance mental wellbeing

Our research shows that marcomms professionals offered certain initiatives had significantly above average mental wellbeing as defined by the WEMWBS. We found that the most effective initiatives were cultivating a culture of openness, internal mentoring scheme and monitoring of mental wellbeing via employee surveys. Based on these findings, employers should aim to introduce these

initiatives into their businesses to help support employee mental wellbeing. Every business is different and so it's important to listen to what employees want as well.

Further initiatives and their impact on mental wellbeing are shown in the following chart (vs. the % of the total sample with considerably above average mental wellbeing).



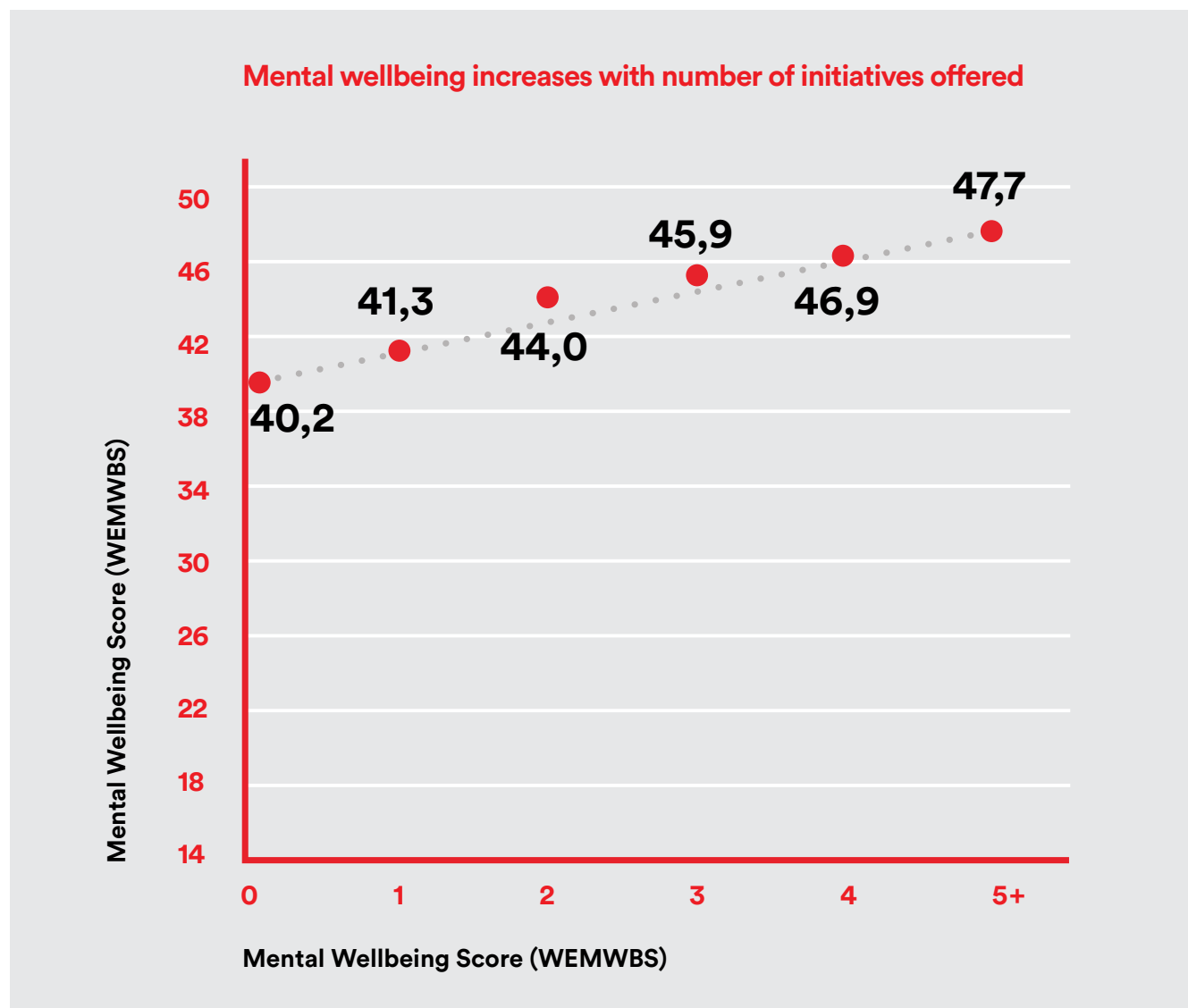
3

Embrace mental wellbeing throughout the whole organisation

Offer multiple mental wellbeing initiatives to have the greatest impact on employee mental wellbeing.

The number of initiatives also has an impact on mental wellbeing, with those who are offered

more initiatives having higher mental wellbeing. But the greatest impact is when there are more than just one or two initiatives – looking after employee mental wellbeing is more than just a tick-box exercise.



Nurture a company culture where people can be open about their mental wellbeing without feeling it is unprofessional or inappropriate.

It's important for employers to have the appropriate support systems and initiatives in place to help nurture employee wellbeing, but if employees do not feel comfortable accessing support at work or talking about mental health, then these are made redundant. For this reason, it is vital that employers strive to embed mental wellbeing

into their company culture and have open conversations about mental health.

Strong support networks are key when it comes to encouraging these open conversations about mental wellbeing. But it is also key for employers to stress that struggling with mental health is not a sign of unprofessionalism, nor is it inappropriate, which will naturally enable workers to feel more comfortable bringing their full selves to work.

“Not only implementing a mental health program, such as Headspace, but actually encouraging usage of them. Also encouraging time off for mental health, checking in with staff when things are evidently tough in the workplace and offering opportunities to unwind: team activities - yoga, days out, perks etc. It's one thing to implement something once but, it's how it's followed up and carried on that matters.”

**Female, Agency,
Digital Strategist**

We all have mental wellbeing...

We all have mental wellbeing and employers should not only be supporting this, but actively encouraging openness across the entire business. By talking more about the topic of mental health at work and sharing experiences, we will create an environment where it's commonplace to discuss mental health and where everyone can thrive.

Although the marcoms sector performs well in some areas compared to the national worker population, there is still progress to be made. We hope this report will allow agencies to accelerate change in their businesses, and ultimately improve the lives of marcoms workers across the UK.



“Employers NEED to take work-life balance a lot more seriously. Working from home should be allowed more, financial target need to be realistic and shouldn’t make employers feel like they are burning out just so it lines the pockets of their employer. Employers should openly encourage their employees to discuss mental health in the workplace and have an open forum for ideas to ensure a healthy, happy workplace.”

Male, Head of Department/ Team

Authors



Sophie Holland (Opinium)

Sophie is passionate about mental health and holds a BA Hons in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford. As well as heading up Opinium's workplace mental health research team, Sophie works on a variety of different projects from design to delivery, ranging from large-scale quantitative research and international studies, to in-depth qualitative pop-up communities. Sophie is heavily involved in the brand and comms space, charity sector and social research.

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Joe Curran (Opinium)

Joe works with both quantitative and qualitative research methods across a number of practice areas. Most recently he has helped clients in the social policy space understand how public attitudes are changing and the implications this will have for businesses and government.



Joanna Dorling (Opinium)

Jo specialises in running qualitative research studies across a range of categories and markets. Recent projects include leading focus groups for the government equalities office exploring attitudes towards gender in the workplace. Jo is also a qualified yoga teacher and is passionate about all aspects of wellbeing and healthy living.

About Opinium

OPINIUM is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people think, feel and do. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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About The Drum Network

The Drum Network is a membership product in The Drum portfolio that is specifically for agencies. Being a member of the Drum Network gives agencies access to 200 other agencies with shared learning, collaboration and support. In addition to being a part of the wider network there are smaller communities so that everybody in the agency can meet with their peers and benefit from the membership at an individual level. We have highlighted five key areas of agency life: Commercial, Talent, Client Services, New Business and Creative & Technology. At least every quarter each group has the opportunity to meet in person over breakfast. The Agency Wellbeing study was driven by the Talent group. A huge thanks you to all the agencies that took part.

www.thedrum.com

If you would like any more information or support about any of the topics covered in this report, you can find more information at the Mind website: **www.mind.org.uk**