

# Digital Technologies for Wellbeing at Work:

## Opportunities, Tensions and Future Directions A Horizon Scanning Study

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### Wellbeing at Work

Wellbeing (WB) at work is a multi-faceted concept. For individuals, wellbeing at work encompasses one's physical safety, health and comfort, mental health, a preponderance of positive over negative affect, a positive attitude towards work (Cooper and Leiter, 2017). Individual work wellbeing has significant implications for one's general wellbeing and happiness and for organisational and societal productivity.



### Digital Technologies and Wellbeing

Digital technologies (DT) – including the internet of things, blockchains, big data, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, and augmented and virtual reality (Rindfleisch et al, 2017) – are often used by organizations to increase productivity, and, more recently, to support and enhance work wellbeing. Even when these technologies are not specifically designed or used to improve work wellbeing, they may still impact it in significant ways.

General DT used in organisations that impact work WB

Specific DT used in organisations to enhance work WB

### This Study: Questions and Methods

#### What:

- What is the impact of digital technologies on wellbeing at work?
- What are the benefits and barriers of applying digital technologies to support wellbeing at work?
- What are the challenges and opportunities in applying digital technologies for wellbeing at work?
- What should future research focus on?

#### How:

- Review of academic and grey literature
- Consultation and interviews with 19 practitioners and academics working at the intersection of wellbeing and digital technologies.



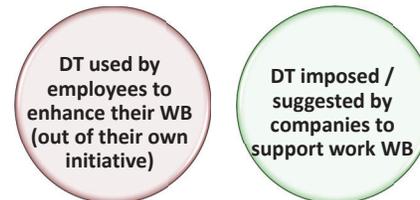
### The DT for WB Ecosystem

#### Stakeholders, their needs and functions

**Users:** employees who utilise DT at work, who need to be involved in consultation about their needs and DT usage patterns by the organisations they work for  
**Buyers:** often HR or IT managers / organisational leaders who require a solid understanding of what wellbeing at work is, how it can be enhanced and how existing or new DT can be used to enhance it  
**Developers:** IT experts specialising in the development of general or WB specific DT, who need a good understanding of the organizations where these technologies are implemented  
**Scientists:** organisational psychologists and other scientists who need to provide evidence to inform the development of DT to support WB and to adapt existing general DT to enhances work WB.

*“I think ideally that the developer should be getting input from all groups because oftentimes they only get it from one or two groups and then it falls flat in one area. Maybe the employees love it so much, but it's not based in good science. So then it doesn't work. Or maybe it's really science based, but then it's really boring and nobody uses it because I didn't talk to the employees about it.” (DT Practitioner)*

#### Types of DT relevant to work WB



- DT used by organisations or by individuals to **avoid overuse of technology** (e.g. reminders on how to minimise screen time, batching emails etc)
- DT purchased by organisations / made available via health insurance companies **to support and monitor the physical and / or mental health of employees**, often collecting biometric data (e.g. apps and wearables)
- Personal DT that some employees use at work to manage their WB out of their own initiative and needs, **not directed by an employer**
- DT that are necessary **to manage certain disabilities**, offered via governmental schemes, employers or purchased by individuals affected (e.g., hearing aids)
- DT that already exist in companies and **are adapted to support WB** (e.g. Co-pilot; Teams)
- DT that are particularly useful for people with some disabilities but are **rolled out and used by people across organisations** (e.g., noise-cancelling headphones)
- DT **completely outsourced to a sub-contractor**, often with limited control and monitoring (e.g., apps such as Udemy, Buddhify, Insight Timer).

### Tensions in developing/implementing DT for WB

- Tensions between the usefulness of gathering data about employees' WB vs. concerns about data misuse and privacy
- Tensions between using technology as an equalizer (e.g. everybody can work from home) vs. it inadvertently reproducing hierarchies of power
- Tensions between using DT to support WB vs. WB potentially being affected by the overuse of technology
- Tension between the “promise” of an add-on DT (e.g., WB apps) vs. the complexity of work environments
- Tension between the subjective nature of WB vs. DT being designed to be universal.

*“And I know that one of the criticisms in that area is that mindfulness, you know, the answer is I will right roll out a mindfulness app rather than addressing issues of, say, workload or toxic or management or whatever. So it's always about broadening the perspective, I think, to understand where digital technologies fit in.” (DT Practitioner)*

### What makes a DT solution for WB at work, work

- Understanding what WB means for the employees by engaging with them and taking a proactive approach
- Including people with different needs in the design and implementation process of new DT for WB and in the adaptation of existing DT
- Having non-digital alternatives for the same WB services where suitable
- Fostering an organisational environment where use of personal technologies for managing WB is being supported by managers and by employees
- Consider how technologically mature a company is when adapting a new DT for WB

*“This kind of holistic organisation thing it needs to be done subtly and cleverly where it doesn't seem like something extra that they are being added onto. So it's finding that right sort of line of giving people options and opportunities and opportunities but not forcing it on them.” (DT Practitioner)*

### Future Research Needs

- Do DT for WB actually work – limited actual research to demonstrate this
- Developing truly inclusive DT for WB and for work
- How to encourage collaboration between all relevant professionals
- Developing strategies for managing data privacy
- The emergence of AI and the data security challenges attached

### Please get in touch!

If you would like to receive a full report of our findings or just to have a conversation about DT, Wellbeing at Work, or DT and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, please get in touch with Maria ([maria.km@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:maria.km@leicester.ac.uk)) and to Cristina ([Cristina.galalae@open.ac.uk](mailto:Cristina.galalae@open.ac.uk)).