DigiWorkWell

digital wellbeing in the workplace

DigiWorkWell Guide - Digital Wellbeing at Work

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01 Introduction

The DigiWorkWell Guide is a resource, developed by professional researchers, mainly oriented to SME managers and business educators who are willing to make analysis from companies' structure in order to improve their actual organisation and procedures related to remote work.

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Digital wellbeing at work is a relatively new workplace issue. It has many facets, including issues of workload, over-dependence/use of ICT, reduced social interaction. It also has implications for productivity, management style and practice and employee health and wellbeing. It has been brought sharply into focus by the Covid 19 pandemic, which has seen more and more workers teleworking.

Teleworking has been a feature of the work environment for many years with 5% of the EU workforce being considered as teleworkers in the period prior to 2020. The Covid pandemic brought about a near 250% increase in their numbers[1], and while there will be some reduction in the short term as the risks of Covid recede, the perceived benefits of teleworking, improving technology and a changing labour market mean that large scale teleworking is likely to remain.

Remote working brings **many benefits** for employees, employers, and for society as a whole. However, it is important that proactive actions are taken by all relevant parties to maximise these benefits and minimise potential risks. Unfortunately, the rapid expansion of teleworking has meant that workplace and leadership culture and practice has often been unable to keep up. There are many forms of teleworking - full time home working, centre based working, mobile working - and many teleworkers operate a combination of these in a hybrid way, with some time spent in the workplace and other time working remotely.

These **new forms of work pose challenges** to both employer and employee in relation to a wide range of issues, including management practice, meeting health and safety obligations, supportive collegiality, workload management and the policy and practice on how and when ICT technology is used to support the work process. For these reasons, it is crucial that measures addressing these issues focus on promoting the health of teleworkers within the wider context of workplace health promotion and health and safety.

This guide summarises the current understanding of digital wellbeing, teleworking, its benefits and risks, and how these benefits can be maximised and risks mitigated. It proposes a number of recommendations to help achieve this and is illustrated with case studies presenting examples of some of the main issues affecting digital workplace wellbeing and of current good practice.

03 Background and Context

Recent decades have seen a rapid growth in the type and amount of computer-mediated work for most of the labour force across Europe. Integration with telecommunications has enabled work to be performed at a distance from workplaces as well as increasing the level of communications through e-mails, videoconferences and social media. Taken together, these technological developments have transformed the nature and location of work, its timing during the work day, and how work is managed. They have increased the possibilities for productive work, the inclusion of groups who were previously excluded from the labour market and the skill levels of those who participate in it.

At the same time, these changes can have negative consequences for employers and employees. Workers are in danger of being 'switched on' or available all of the time, electronic workload monitoring may be intrusive and relationships with supervisors and peers may deteriorate. These can lead to health and wellbeing problems such as burnout.

In addition to these long-term trends, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many profound changes to all aspects of society. The most significant change in relation to work and employment has been the **explosion of digitally enabled teleworking**, with tens of millions of employees being provided with new and more flexible options on where, when and how they work.

We already understand the many benefits that digital technology brings to our working lives, including by enabling teleworking at scale, with huge increases in productivity, competitiveness and innovation. Equally, we understand the risks it brings to employee mental health with the unrestricted use of technology beyond the

traditional workplace increasing risk factors such as the negative effects of multitasking, the "always on" culture, long working hours and increased screen time and mobile device use.

Teleworking is not new, with many employees working this way for many years. We have the opportunity for the transition to be made over time and with appropriate staff engagement, leadership and the necessary technical and IT support.

The **rapid pace and scale of change** that took place due to Covid, was very different. While some employers had experience to draw upon in scaling up their response, many line managers and their staff, had none, and were left to navigate this transition on the strength of often limited and generic advice published as part of wider COVID-19 guidance.

> Studies find that while **23 per cent of firms with 5,000-plus staff increased provision of mental health initiatives**, **barely one in ten of SMEs have**

These changes have been a particular **challenge for SMEs**, the vast majority of which lack the dedicated Occupational Health and Safety and Human Resources support enjoyed by larger organisations. Moreover, the lack of such dedicated support has meant that as with workplace health risks in general, the health risks associated with teleworking have often not been well addressed.

They have also to concerns about **'digital wellbeing',** a phenomenon which needs to be actively managed and promoted if the possibilities for digitally based working for both employer and employee are to be realised so organisations would be able to provide the **'right to disconnect'**.

04 What is the Business Case for Digital Wellbeing at Work?

The business case for investing in health and wellbeing at work is well documented and compelling. It begins with the estimated costs associated with work related ill-health and injury and the scale of the problem continues to shock. New estimates show that work-related accidents and illnesses cost the EU at least EUR 476 billion every year, the cost of work-related cancers alone amounts to EUR 119.5 billion.[2]

Presenteeism, which is most simply described as the problem of workers being on the job but, because of illness or other medical conditions, not fully functioning - can cut individual productivity by one-third or more and is estimated to have a cost significantly in excess of work-related ill-health and injury.[3]

Findings from a large-scale review of the available literature and relevant case studies, undertaken in 2008 by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC),[4] supports the idea that **wellness programs have a positive impact on health** and other bottom-line benefits, suggesting that programme costs can quickly be translated into financial benefits, either through cost savings or additional revenue generation.

The review found that benefit-cost ratios, which measure the financial return for every unit of cost expenditure, were found to range from 2.3 to 10.1, with interventions on MSDs returning the highest cost benefit. Some published and peer-reviewed individual case studies indicated even higher positive outcomes for wellness programmes, ranging from 5.5 to 84.9.

A more recent review of 60 meta analyses undertaken for the Irish Government[5] supported these earlier findings, concluded that there is strong evidence of favourable effects by workplace health and wellbeing programmes on physical activity and smoking cessation, weight and BMI, stress/distress, anxiety and depression, mental wellbeing and on organisational outcomes of work ability and sickness absence. Recent cost benefit and cost effectiveness studies are also favourable for WHP programmes.

Due to its relatively recent emergence as a large-scale working practice, it is inevitable that there is little evidence specific to the cost benefit and impact of digital wellbeing at work, with a clear case existing for research in this area. It is, however, a reasonable assumption, especially given the heavy emphasis on MSD and psychological benefits arising from the literature in terms of wider WHP, that investment in digital wellbeing will result in at least an equivalent impact.

Workplace Health Promotion in SMEs

SMEs provide a highly advantageous context for promoting health due to their unique social, organisational and environmental attributes, something that largely comes from their size and the closer relationship between employees and the employer.[6] The benefits of WHP to SMEs and employers in general are well documented and are helpfully summarised by German Federal Ministry of Health.[7]

- Employee health and performance is protected.
- Employee motivation is increased.
- Employees remain committed to the company.
- Sickness absence is lowered, reducing production costs.
- Productivity and quality are increased.
- Company image is enhanced.
- Competitiveness and attractiveness as an employer are strengthened.

05

What is Teleworking?

Article 2 of the European Framework Agreement on Telework[8] states that:

> *"Telework is a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis."*

This definition of teleworking incorporates employees who are engaged hybrid work. In relation to digital wellbeing, there are specific issues that impact all employees, whether they work remotely or from a transitional office, though the impact of these issues is likely to be greater on those working the greatest proportion of their time away from an employer's premises.

How Widespread is Teleworking?

The Covid pandemic with its instructions to stay at home led to a rapid expansion in teleworking. According to EUROSTAT the proportion of EU workers classed as teleworkers was fairly consistent at approximately 5% for the decade preceding the pandemic, rising rapidly to 12.3% by May 2020,1 a figure that may have reached as high as 40% during the pandemic.[9] Even this figure may be low, considering 60% of workers indicated they would like to work from home (daily or several times a week) after the pandemic.[10]

Figure 1. People Usually Working From Home in the EU/EEA

■ **People usually working from home - 2020**   **(% of employed people aged 15-64)**
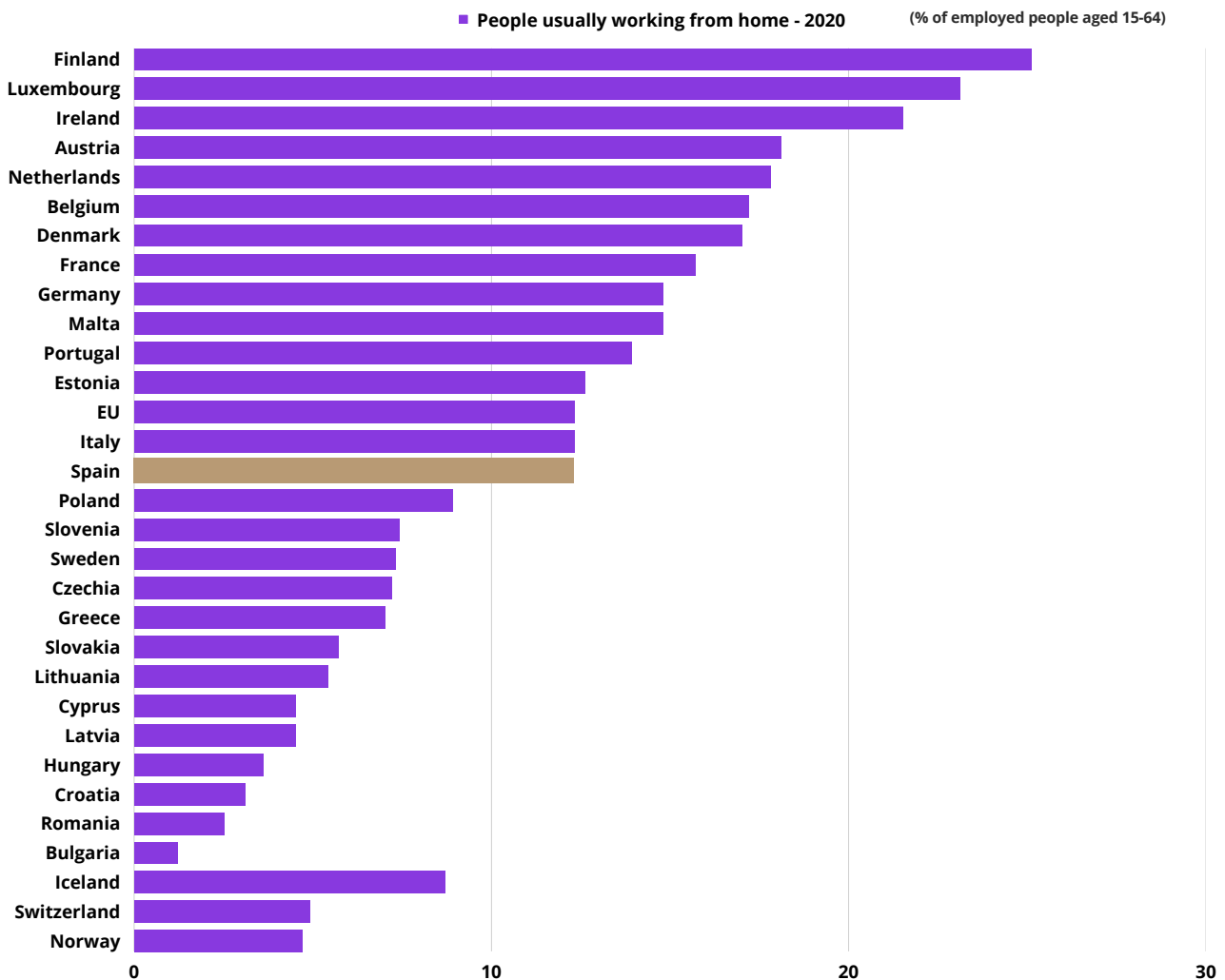
There are two points of note within this overall picture: **There is a significant variation in the levels of teleworking** across the EU as can be seen in the following graphic. Explanations can be found in differing approaches to Covid and stay at home mandates in different member states, the infrastructure that is in place to support teleworking, and labour market composition.

Despite strong mandates to work from or remain at home, a significant proportion of the workforce were unable to do so, most notably those working in health, social care, emergency services, logistics and the food chain, were unable to do so and it is unlikely they will be able to do so in the near future. More likely, it is continued growth in teleworking within those industries and occupational groups with the highest levels of teleworking prior to the pandemic, including (see Figures 2 and 3):

- Those working in highly digitised industries such as information and communications services, professional, scientific and technical services, and financial services.
- Workers in larger firms.
- Those with higher levels of qualifications.
- Better paid individuals; among well-paid individuals, with around 25% of workers in the top quarter of the EU-27 income distribution teleworking in 2018 – a share that declined to less than 10% among those in the bottom half.10

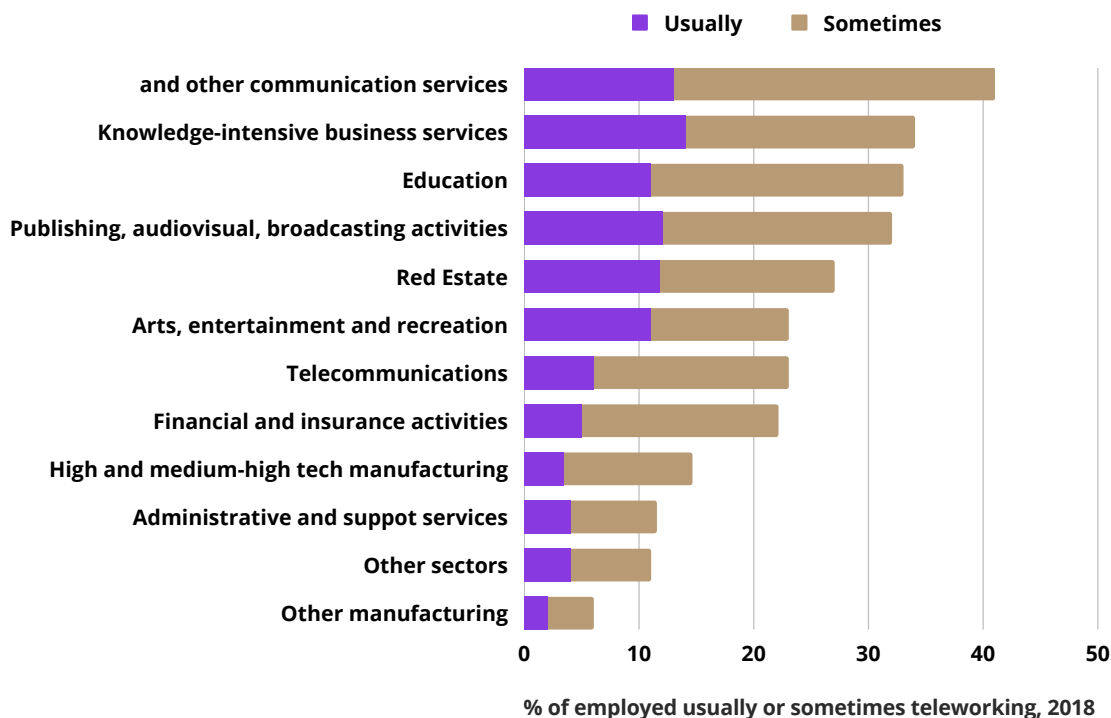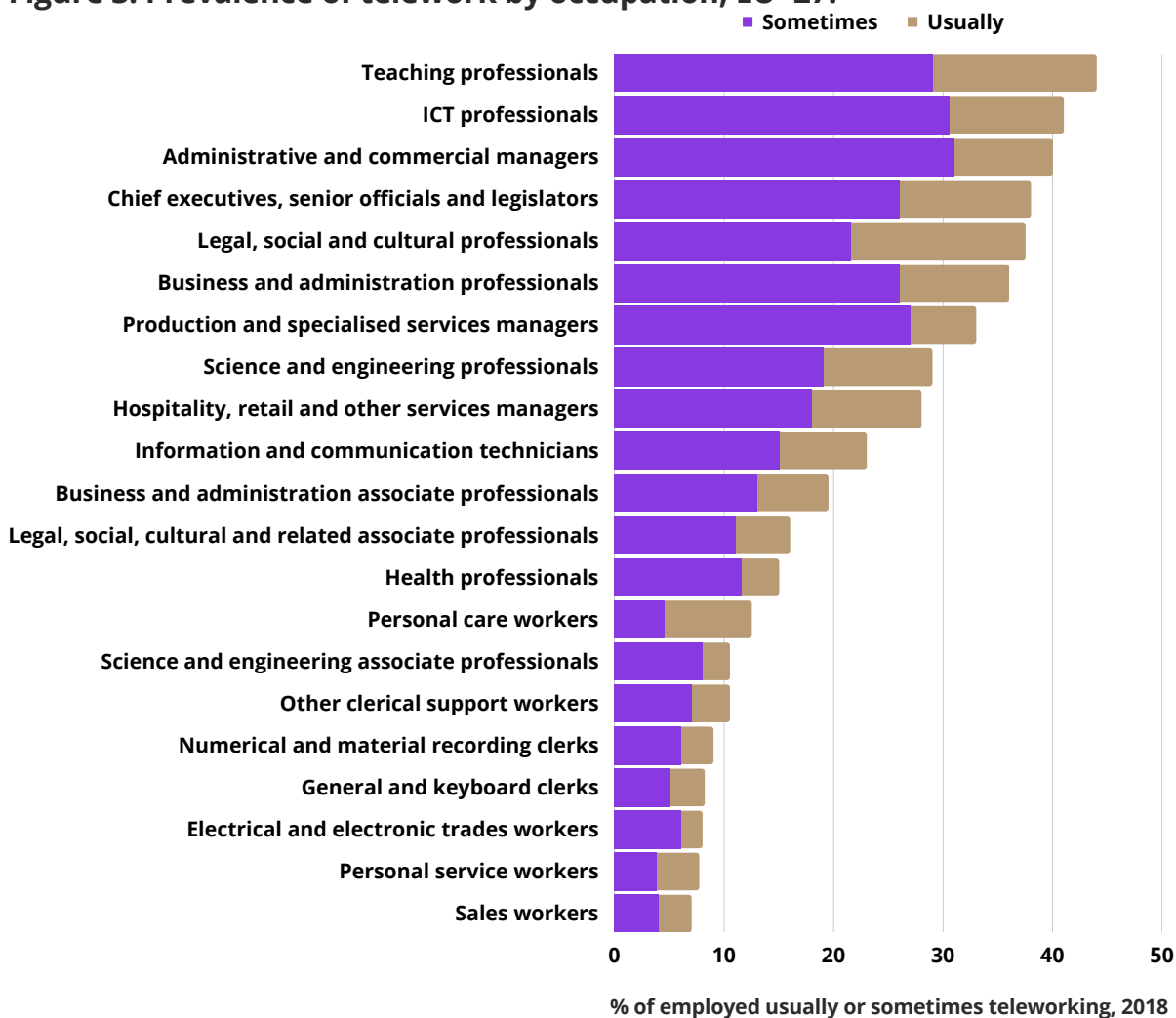## Figure 2. Percentage employed in teleworking by Industry, 2018.[10]

Legend: ■ Usually   ■ Sometimes

% of employed usually or sometimes teleworking, 2018

Categories (top to bottom): and other communication services, Knowledge-intensive business services, Education, Publishing, audiovisual, broadcasting activities, Red Estate, Arts, entertainment and recreation, Telecommunications, Financial and insurance activities, High and medium-high tech manufacturing, Administrative and suppot services, Other sectors, Other manufacturing

Figure 3. Prevalence of telework by occupation, EU- 27.[10]

Legend: ■ Sometimes   ■ Usually

% of employed usually or sometimes teleworking, 2018

Categories (top to bottom): Teaching professionals, ICT professionals, Administrative and commercial managers, Chief executives, senior officials and legislators, Legal, social and cultural professionals, Business and administration professionals, Production and specialised services managers, Science and engineering professionals, Hospitality, retail and other services managers, Information and communication technicians, Business and administration associate professionals, Legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals, Health professionals, Personal care workers, Science and engineering associate professionals, Other clerical support workers, Numerical and material recording clerks, General and keyboard clerks, Electrical and electronic trades workers, Personal service workers, Sales workers

What are the Health Benefits of Teleworking?

Teleworking brings a range of benefits for employees, employers and for society as a whole.

- For employers, teleworking can lead to **higher productivity and lower operating costs.** However this may be due to increased working hours in some cases, rather than from teleworking per se.
- For employees, benefits can include an improved work-life balance, opportunities for more reliable and family friendly working hours, more time for physical activity where less commuting time is required, and improved sleep hygiene. These can help improve physical and mental health, and social wellbeing. Reduced commuting costs will also have benefits for teleworkers, though this may be more than offset by the additional costs of running ICT equipment and heating homes, especially during colder weather.
- For society, reductions in carbon emissions and in traffic and particulate pollution levels, give direct health benefits for individuals as well as indirect benefits by mitigating the impact of climate change.

What are the Health Risks of Teleworking?

Without appropriate leadership, employee support, and a health promoting and health and safety culture and practices, **teleworking can negatively impact health and wellbeing** in a number of ways:

- Musculoskeletal and eye problems resulting from a poor working environment, inappropriate equipment and poor compliance with VDU guidance.
- Mental health related conditions such as stress, burnout, anxiety and depression.
- Increased sedentary behaviour and weight gain, particularly where the daily commute formerly included an element of walking or cycling, or where employers promote physical activity at work though promoting stair use or walking meetings, leading to raised cardiovascular risk and muscular skeletal problems.
- Increased alcohol consumption, particularly for employees working non-traditional hours.

The psychological impact of the Covid pandemic has also had a significant impact on many of these issues, and it is important to realise these risks have been identified before the pandemic. They therefore persist independently of Covid. Interventions to mitigate teleworking related health risks will also impact these Covid related health risks and vice-versa.

Case study: potential downsides of teleworking

Rita's workplace is far from home, and she often puts in overtime. She is in charge of graphic design at her company and is very good at her job. When her employer proposes that she teleworks from home, Rita is enthusiastic. All the equipment will be provided by her company, and she feels that at last she has the opportunity to organise her working time to suit herself.

But little by little, she notices that working conditions are not optimum. She does not have enough room and her working space is not ergonomically organised. She has trouble concentrating her attention on her work because of the activities of others in the home. Her neighbours are noisy. She has technical problems with mobile reception, which sometimes makes it hard to reach customers and work colleagues. Her working equipment is dangerous for her children. One of them had a fall when his feet became entangled in electrical wires. There is no lock on the door of the room where Rita works. Eventually, Rita finds herself working at night because it is the only way she can get enough peace. She is starting to have second thoughts about teleworking from home.

The Importance of Health Promoting Digital Leadership

The criticality of effective leadership to organisational success is well understood in business. Research indicates that companies in the top quartile of leadership outperform other organisations by nearly two times. Moreover, companies that invest in developing leaders during significant transformations are 2.4 times more likely to hit their performance targets.[11] In recent years, this understanding has also developed in terms of **digital leadership and health promotion leadership**, though not within a unifying construct.

Digital leadership is concerned with the strategic use of a company's digital assets to achieve business goals. It explicitly includes a focus on the culture, communications systems and support required by digital workers, and postgraduate programmes are now widely offered across the Europe, North America, Eastern Asia and Australia.
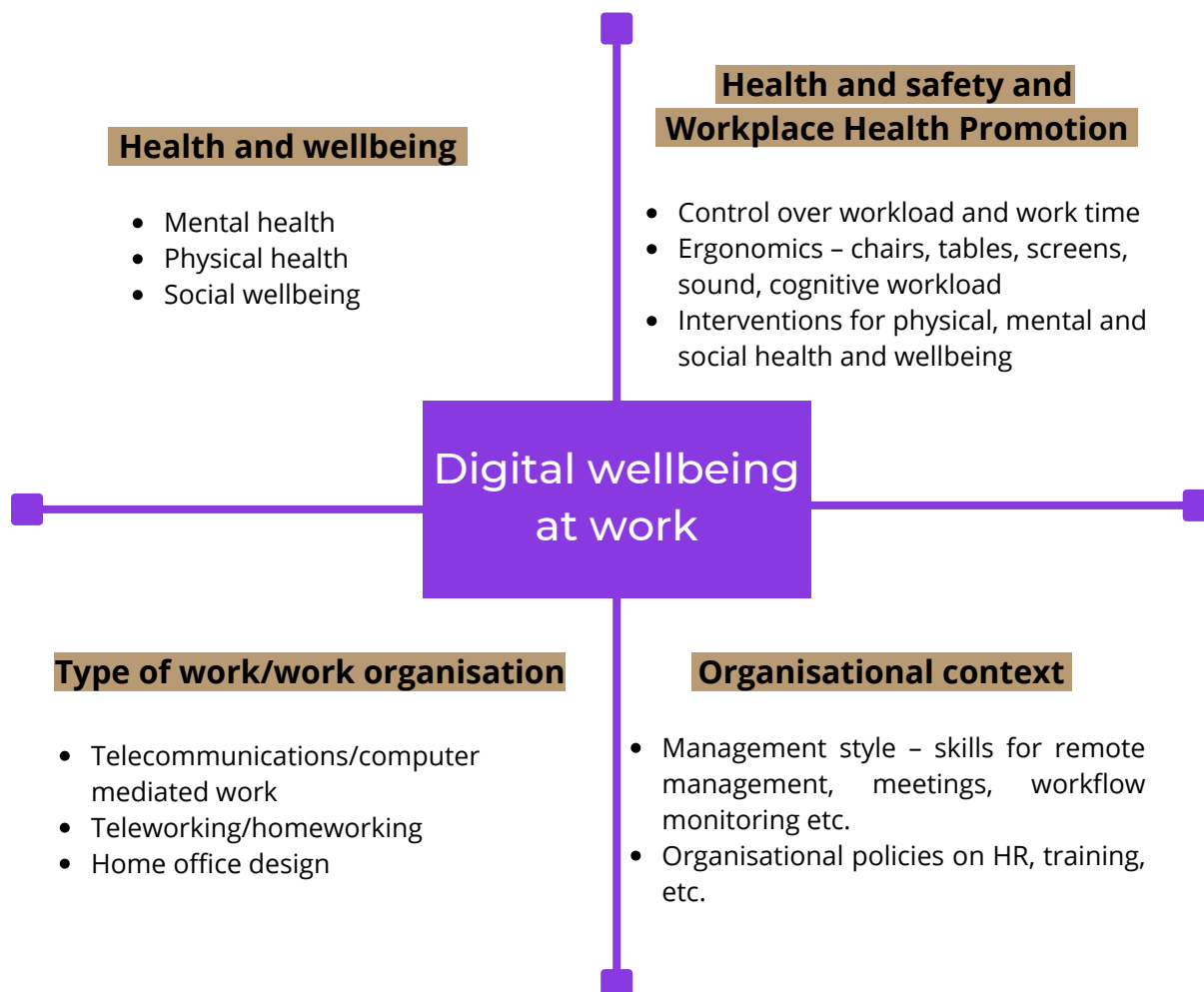
Health Promoting Leadership is clearly aligned with the employer's role within the Luxembourg Declaration.[12] A recent systematic review specifically highlighted the importance of leadership in cultivating a health-promoting culture and climate, focusing on health and wellbeing in their management practice, modelling behaviours and elevating employee health and wellbeing as a corporate outcome.[13]

Health Promoting Digital Leadership blends these concepts to focus on the role of the digital leader in supporting the health and wellbeing of all digital workers, including teleworkers within the four spheres of the Digital Wellbeing at Work. Without it, efforts to improve digital wellbeing at work are unlikely to succeed.

06 The DigiWorkWell approach

Digital wellbeing at work is a complex concept and contains elements relating to 'traditional' office-based ICT based work, physical, mental and social wellbeing, and the methods that might be used to help maintain and promote it. It also includes the ever more prevalent practice of teleworking. Figure 4 shows the four main elements that contribute to a holistic Digital Wellbeing at Work Model.

Figure 4. The Digital Wellbeing at Work Model

Health and wellbeing

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Social wellbeing

Health and safety and Workplace Health Promotion

- Control over workload and work time
- Ergonomics – chairs, tables, screens, sound, cognitive workload
- Interventions for physical, mental and social health and wellbeing

Digital wellbeing at work

Type of work/work organisation

- Telecommunications/computer mediated work
- Teleworking/homeworking
- Home office design

Organisational context

- Management style – skills for remote management, meetings, workflow monitoring etc.
- Organisational policies on HR, training, etc.

Health and wellbeing is central to digital wellbeing, not only because of its fundamental importance in the workplace, but because it covers all relevant dimensions of wellbeing. It also provides the foundation of well-established and evaluated methods of intervention which can be adapted to the specific demands of digitally based and/or remote work.

The World Health Organisation defines health as :[14]

> *"A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"*

This definition covers the 3 elements of health and wellbeing within the digital wellbeing model. **Maintaining and improving health and wellbeing** are goals of health promotion generally and Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) in particular.

Employers have a duty under Member State legislation to eliminate and mitigate risks to health and safety in the workplace, with hazard identification, risk assessment and risk elimination or reduction, as well as protection being essential if the demands of legislation are to be met.

Finally, the digital health model includes two non-health specific workplace elements:

- The type of work that is being undertaken and its organisation, with employers being alert to the specific risks and opportunities that the rise of the digital workplace and teleworking has brought about, such as the location of work (office, hub, home, mixed model), the design of the physical environment and the cognitive demands of work (number of hours worked, work intensity and complexity, shift work).

- The organisational context, which includes policies and practices on Human Resource Management (HRM), leadership skills, training for all employees involved, and the development of new policies and practices that take into account the specific demands of digital and distance working.

ENWHP: the Luxembourg Declaration

Workplace Health Promotion is the combined efforts of employers, employees and society to improve the health and well-being of people at work. This can be achieved through a combination of:

- Promoting active participation improving the work organisation and the working environment.

- Encouraging personal development.

Risk assessment for digital work wellbeing

Risk assessment and taking actions on the findings are key to maximising the wellbeing of workers and the benefits to employers of new work arrangements. Based on the Risk assessment instrument of EU-OSHA19, the following key areas of risk should be assessed and acted upon:

- How the work is organised
- The social aspects of work
- Identifying psychosocial hazards
- The family work-interface
- Safety and health and ergonomic risks
- Technical issues
- The physical work environment
- Occupational health

Risks assessments are essential for all workers, whether they are teleworking or not. The ensure compliance with legislation we well as maximising benefits to employees and employers.

07 Recommendations

These recommendations are at a high level – details on how to implement them can be found in an Appendix.

1. Identify a senior leader who will provide Digital Health Promotion leadership in the organisation.
2. Ensure effective collaboration between the employer, employees and social partners at Digital Health strategy level, and also between employees and their line managers in agreeing and implementing specific digital health measures.
3. Follow relevant OHS advice on lone-working, workstation and ergonomic assessments for employees engaged in teleworking.
4. Specific training for line managers in facilitating on-line meetings, objective setting, performance discussions and personal development planning.
5. Employers should encourage non-management facilitated video sessions, such as 'water cooler breaks' and 'virtual lunches,' to help maintain social interaction between colleagues and prevent feelings of isolation.
6. Employers should develop clear guidance for teleworking employees, with line managers taking explicit responsibility for discussing issues with their staff including the need to take regular breaks, manage boundaries around working hours, and building physical activity into the working day.
7. Ensure a Digital Wellbeing Risk Assessment is undertaken for all Digital/Hybrid Workers, and that line managers and staff are appropriately trained to undertake this.

Recommendations Document - PDF

Case study - Using Digital Technology to Promote Employee Wellbeing:

SAP have developed several HR technologies that can foster employee wellbeing and allow employees to work better. Smart, data-driven solutions are enabling HR teams to identify and address employees' physical issues, such as ergonomic discomfort or fatigue, and mental–emotional problems such as feeling overworked or anxious.

Similarly, SAP found that wearable technology, gamification of wellness goals and milestones, and fitness and wellness apps allow for high levels of engagement with beneficial technology for mental wellbeing.

Digital Wellbeing - an integrated approach

Marski Data Oy (Finland) has specialised in developing the digital wellbeing of different kinds of work communities through Modern Work services. The company believes that digital wellbeing comes from effective collaboration. It aims to harness technological solutions to support everybody's personal strengths and build workplaces where effective collaboration makes sustainable growth possible both for individuals and companies. In practice, Marskidata helps work communities to move into the digital and hybrid era by building communications environments that support the objectives of business and culture development. Marskidata also coaches people to collaborate in those environments according to common ground rules. Furthermore, company coaches individuals and teams in utilising technology in designing work: i.e., how to make their work more meaningful.

Case study: Good practice in addressing OSH for teleworkers

Strong leadership and employee participation in programme design was seen to be fundamental to success. Key activities included:

- Practical tips for a safe and comfortable work environment at home, including online workshops with a kinesiologist
- Analysing sick leave, risk assessment, and prevention activities planning, e.g. ergonomics and education.
- Providing additional work equipment and accessories and adjustment of workplaces, based on individual assessments e.g. wheeled backpacks, a special ergonomic mouse, specific seating and sit-stand desks.
- Advice and instruction to employees on ergonomic workplace arrangements
- Issuing leaflets to new employees and provision of training every three years
- Posters on correct sitting position.
- Providing 15-minute workplace back massages organised monthly.
- Providing a programme of subsidised health days tailored to young and old.
- Exercise session run by physical education teachers twice a week online.
- Employee training to promote an active lifestyle, healthy spine and movement workshops, building resistance to stress and burnout.
- Psychological support for employees

Outcomes included a decrease in sickness absence, large scale employee participation in exercise breaks and increased employee motivation and positive response to health days

08 Appendix: Some Published Guidelines from Official Sources

While some official guidance on the health and well-being of teleworkers existed prior to Covid, the upsurge in the number of teleworkers because of the pandemic has brought about greater interest in this area. It is likely that further advice, which is more specific to industry and employer size, will result.

Generic guidance has its place. However, its effective implementation typically requires the support of not only top leadership, but also dedicated Occupational Health and Safety and Human Resource competence, something that is often lacking in SMEs, and especially those with under 100 workers. Moreover, the lack of dedicated support within SMEs has meant that as with workplace health and wellbeing risks in general, the health and wellbeing risks associated with teleworking have often not been well addressed.

The guidance below is a sample of what is currently available:

Healthy and Safe Telework: Technical Brief: International Labour Organisation and World Health Organisation (2021)

This Technical brief[15] contains a number of key messages:

- Telework – the practice of working remotely using informational and communications technology has an important and growing role in the workplace, and has a potential impact on workers' health, safety and wellbeing.

- When organised and carried out properly telework can be beneficial for physical and mental health and social well-being. It can improve work–life balance, reduce traffic and time spent commuting, and decrease air pollution, all of which can, indirectly, improve physical and mental health. Telework can also have public health and social benefits.

- Telework settings may fail to meet the occupational safety and health standards available at traditional worksites.

- Poor physical environment and workplace design and inadequate equipment and support can result in musculoskeletal disorders, eye strain and injuries.

- Working within a digital environment in physical isolation from co-workers, coupled with potential difficulties in managing work-private life balance in premises outside the direct control of the employer, can result in mental health problems and unhealthy behaviours.

- Protecting and promoting health and well-being in teleworking requires a comprehensive set of measures to provide a healthy and safe work environment, including adequate organisation of the work.

- Governments, employers and workers all have a role in protecting and promoting health and safety while teleworking, including ergonomics, mental health and well-being, as defined by the ILO Convention on Occupational Safety and Health, 1981 and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006.

- Those employing teleworkers should develop programmes to promote healthy and safe telework. Such programmes should provide assistance for assessing and managing the risk factors for health and safety; workstation, computer and peripheral equipment, and remote ICT support.

- Occupational health services can offer ergonomic, mental health and psychosocial support.

- Workers should collaborate with employers on the implementation of these measures, cooperating with their employer and fulfilling their own health and safety duties to ensure decent and safe conditions for telework.

Preventing MSDs when teleworking – EU-OSHA (worker focused)

As part of its 2020-2022 Europe-wide campaign to raise awareness of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and the importance of preventing them, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has published a helpful information leaflet.[16] While mainly concerned with MSDs, it also touches on other health and wellbeing related aspects of teleworking.

Undertake a risk assessment in which both the employee and their line manager are participants. In addition to providing information essential to taking the next steps towards an action plan to prevent risks, it creates awareness among teleworkers and management.

Optimise workstation ergonomics and environment.

- Chair height
- Desk – large enough, adjust height
- Screen – height and distance, 20-20-20 rule (focus on an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes)
- Mouse and keyboard

Keep active
- Short walk/workout
- Stand up
- Avoid long sitting periods
- Adjustable height desk
- Walk at lunch time
- Move while sitting
- Regular exercises

Improve work life balance
- Separate home office, wherever possible
- Schedule the workday
- Respect 'normal' work hours
- Keep a good personal routine
- Plan after work hours
- Set up an out of office reply
- Take breaks
- Inform colleagues of availability

Stay healthy and connected
- Schedule regular contacts with colleagues and supervisors

Remote Working Checklist for Employers: Government of Ireland

The Remote Working checklist[17] covers seven thematic areas in detail:

- Is **organisational policy consistent** with request, blended remote working, employment contracts, performance management, voluntariness.
- **Organising working time and employment rights –** do contracts set out conditions for remote workers, working hours, rest breaks, daily and weekly rest, recording systems for working hours, privacy of any monitoring software, annual leave and public holiday pay, other forms of leave, arrangements for payment of wages, email response times.
- **Health and safety –** awareness of employees, updated safety statement, risk assessment, risks and controls, insurance, equipment provision, ergonomically designed equipment and furniture, appropriate training. Availability of mental health and wellbeing supports, casual chat methods, training for employees on boundary drawing, safety representatives.
- **Equality issues –** is policy consistent with legislation, equality of dealing with requests, potential to increase diversity, complaint handling, availability of all policies and practices that workplace non-teleworkers have.
- **Training –** remote access to training, remote work skills training.

- **Data protection –** updating policy and practice on data protection, security of data, appropriate software usage, separating personal and work related data on remote devices

- **Cybersecurity –** information and training, encryption, security of software infrastructure

09 Appendix: Current Regulations and Legislation

EU-OSHA – Regulating telework in a post Covid 19 Europe[18]

Typical benefits of teleworking include flexibility, autonomy, performance and work life balance. Typical negative aspects include psychosocial risks relating to the pervasiveness of ICT (extended availability and increased workload for employees), blurring of boundaries between work and non-work and isolation. There are also ergonomic risks due to difficulties on risk assessment and enforcement of regulation.

There are no direct 'hard-law' regulations for telework (there are no Directives) at EU level. However, there are two recent Directives that bear on the issues raised:

- The Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1152) requires that work contracts cover the issues of workplace and working patterns are specified.
- The Work-Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) entitles working parents and carers to avail of teleworking

In addition, the European Parliament has been drafting legislation on the 'right to disconnect,' minimum requirements for remote working and working conditions, hours and rest periods.

There is also the EU Framework Agreement on Telework (2002) which is an autonomous agreement between the Social Partners that commits signatories to work towards national implementation of its provisions. This Agreement deals with issues relating to voluntariness; reversibility; employment conditions; training and collective rights; data protection; privacy; equipment; safety and health; and the organisation of work.

Pre-Covid 19, 20 Member States had some national regulation in terms of statutory definitions and specific legislation - Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Spain, Germany, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Other countries either had no such provisions, or else they were dealt with under a range of different laws (Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Latvia and Sweden)

Since Covid 19 a number of countries have either been reviewing legislative provisions (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Croatia, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Austria, Cyprus, Ireland) while 5 countries have passed new legislation (Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Latvia).

10 Appendix: Model Risk Digital Wellbeing Risk Assessment for Tele/Hybrid Workers

What is a Digital Wellbeing Risk Assessment?

A Digital Wellbeing Risk Assessment is the process of systematically evaluating the risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of employees working in digital roles.

A straightforward five-step approach is proportionate to small and medium sized enterprises, with the model risk assessment presented below being specifically focused on tele/hybrid workers.

Step 1. Identifying hazards and those at risk - Looking for those things at work that have the potential to cause harm and identifying workers who may be exposed to them.

Step 2. Evaluating and prioritising risks - Estimating the existing risks in terms of their severity and likelihood, and prioritising them in order of importance.

Step 3. Deciding on preventive action - Identifying the appropriate measures to manage or eliminate the risks.

Step 4. Taking action - Putting in place the necessary preventive and protective measures through a prioritised plan.

Step 5. Monitoring and review - The risk assessment should be reviewed at regular, agreed intervals, to ensure that it remains current.

Risk Assessment Document - PDF

What is a Risk Assessment Checklist

A checklist can help identify hazards and potential prevention measures. The following, general checklist, which is based on earlier work by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and designed around the Digital Wellbeing Model, provides a good starting point for most SMEs, though it is recommended that it is adapted to your own particular workplace and sector.[19]

It is only a first step in carrying out a risk assessment. The risks it highlights should be considered in further detail and risk management measures put in place. Further information may be needed to assess more complex risks, and also to ensure that risk management measures to not lead to unintended negative consequences, and in some circumstances you may need to seek expert help.

It is also crucial that the risk assessment process, including agreeing any measures to be taken, is a shared endeavour between management/OHS and the employee. As such, it must not be seen as a mere 'tick-box' exercise, but instead as an ongoing process that is mutually beneficial for both the employer and employee.

N°	How the work is organised	YES	NO
1	Does the worker have access to physical activity breaks?		
2	Does the worker feel properly hydrated at all times?		
3	Is the worker able to take comfort breaks as required?		
4	Is it possible for the teleworker to regulate hours worked at home?		
5	Is there a balance between time spent in the office (min one day/week) and working time available at home?		
6	Are the tasks and responsibilities clearly defined between the teleworker and colleagues in the office?		
7	Is the agreement about telework understood by the teleworker?		
8	Is the work organised in such a way that the teleworker has regular breaks?		
9	Does the employee have enough information about any changes and difficulties in his/her work organisation?		
10	How is the teleworker informed if there are changes or problems in the company?		
11	Are there certain periods of the day when the teleworker is on call?		
12	Does the worker have the right to 'switch off'?		

Nº	Social aspects of work	YES	NO
13	Does the worker have enough contacts with colleagues?		
14	Does the worker feel isolated?		
15	Does the worker have regular contact with other people at work?		
16	Does the worker have direct feedback on work from their manager and their colleagues?		
17	Does the teleworker feel their colleagues accept their telework arrangements?		
18	Does the worker have access to informal time with colleagues that is not moderated by management, such as virtual lunch breaks and water-cooler chats?		
19	Does the worker feel involved in the decisions that affect their work context?		
20	Are there regular team meetings?		

Nº	Family interface	YES	NO
21	Can the worker separate professional and private life?		
22	Are the worker's families happy with their working at home?		

Nº	Safety and Health/ergonomics	YES	NO
23	Is the furniture (seats, table) and other basic equipment regularly checked at the teleworker's home?		
24	Is the chair stable and does it ensure free movement and a comfortable body posture?		
25	Does the height of the worker's desk ensure the mobility of the legs?		
26	Is the space in front of the keyboard and the mouse sufficient to support the worker's wrists?		
27	Is the electrical wiring safe and in good working order?		

N°	Safety and Health/ergonomics	YES	NO
28	Is all equipment correctly installed and properly wired?		
29	Are there any damaged plugs or sockets?		
30	Have dangers of fire been minimised?		
31	Is the VDU correctly installed without any glare or reflection inducing visual fatigue?		
32	Are the images on VDUs free from vibration?		
33	Has OSH guidance been provided to the worker?		
34	Do the employer, worker'representatives and/or relevant authorities have access to teleworker's workplace, within the limits of national legislation and collective agreements? Does the teleworker know that such access is subject to prior notification and agreement?		
35	Is the worker managing their working time appropriately?		
36	Has the worker been trained to meet job demands?		
37	Is the proper implementation of working procedures checked?		

N°	Technical issues	YES	NO
38	Can the worker separate professional and private life?		
39	Are the worker's family happy with their working at home?		
40	Is support provided to the worker for problems with software and hardware?		

N°	Physical work environment	YES	NO
41	Is the microclimate appropriate (temperature, humidity) according to national regulations?		
42	Does the room have natural lighting?		
43	Is lighting (and daylight) at the workplace sufficient to perform tasks efficiently and accurately?		

Nº	Physical work environment	YES	NO
44	Does the teleworker have a separate room so that they can isolate themselves from others while teleworking?		
45	Can the teleworker shut the office door at the end of the working day and keep work information confidential when necessary?		
46	Does noise distract the teleworker's attention? Could the teleworker suffer from an acoustic shock while using his/her headset during phone calls?		
47	Is there enough working space? Is storage space available?		
48	Is the working space properly cleaned and maintained?		

Nº	Occupational health	YES	NO
49	Does the teleworker receive guidance on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle when teleworking?		
50	Does the teleworker have access to regular mental health screening?		
51	Has the teleworker shown 'presenteeism?'		
52	Have arrangements been made in case of illness, for holidays, etc.?		

Steve Bell

Steve has worked in the field of workplace health for over 25 years occupying a national leadership role latterly as Director of Health and Work for NHS Health Scotland. He led the review of the Scottish Government's Health and Work Strategy, Fair and Healthy Work for All, that was published in 2019. Steve has been involved in ENWHP since 2005 and currently serves as a Director of the ENWHP where he is responsible for the Accreditation Division.

Richard Wynne

Richard Wynne, from Ireland, is a director of Work Research Centre based in Dublin. He is a founder member of ENWHP, which was established in 1996. He has 30 years of experience in the area of WHP and within the Network is responsible for the Research Division. He also lectures on WHP in University College Dublin.

BIC Euronova

Business Innovation Centre, from Spain. It is a company created with public and private capital, founded in 1991 through a European Community Commission initiative, to support the creation of innovative SMEs and promote the initiation of innovative activities of existing SMEs and public administrations.

Northern Chamber of Commerce, Szczecin, Poland

It is an independent organisation established to protect and represent the interests of local companies. It was established in 1997 and it currently represents nearly 1,500 companies and is the largest Chamber of Commerce in Poland.

European E-learning Institute (EUEI)

EUEI is committed to providing high-quality learning experiences and innovative educational programmes which engage learners from a range of sectors and socio-economic backgrounds. EUEI is committed to promoting social cohesion, inclusion, and sustainability across Europe. They specialise in the delivery of high-quality, responsive and innovative projects to educators and learners in the topics of pedagogic approaches, entrepreneurial competences, digital skills, inclusion, and sustainability.

European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP)

ENWHP is a European network of organisations interested in promoting employee health and wellbeing. Headquartered in Italy, it undertakes projects and provides advice to policy makers, workplaces and other workplace stakeholders on emerging trends in the workplace using the tools of health promotion and occupational health and safety.

XAMK

Based in Finland, XAMK is the technical university for southeastern Finland. It is a technical university with 4 campuses spread throughout the area. It undertakes a wide range of R&D and provides a wide range of educational courses in areas such as business and security, tourism and catering, shipping and logistics, design and restoration, the social sector and youth education, engineering and forestry and health, rehabilitation and exercise.

Momentum Consulting

For 20 years Momentum has been educating and innovating in Ireland and throughout Europe. Momentum is best known for its work on a European level. We create impact via EU education and innovation programmes by developing innovative curricula and tertiary educational strategies for many of Ireland's top HEI and VET bodies.

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RISK ASSESSMENT

01. **Identifying hazards and those at risk**

Looking for those things at work that have the **potential to cause harm, and identifying workers who may be exposed** to the hazards

02. **Evaluating and prioritising risks**

Estimating the existing **risks in terms of severity and probabilit**y of possible harm **and prioritising** them in order of importance

03. **Deciding on preventive action**

Identifying the **appropriate measures** to eliminate **or control the risks**

04. **Taking action**

Putting in place the **preventive and protective measures through a prioritisation plan**

05. **Monitoring and reviewing**

The **assessment should be reviewed at regular intervals** to ensure that **it remains up to date**

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify a senior leader at Director or senior leader **who will provide Digital Health Promotion leadership within the organisation**.

Ensure effective collaboration between the employer, employees and **social partners Digital Health strategy level**, and also between employees **and their line managers** in agreeing and **implementing specific digital health measures**.

Follow relevant OHS advice on lone-working, workstation and DSE assessments **for employees engaged in teleworking.**
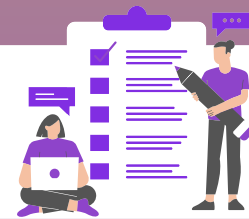
Specific training for line managers in facilitating on-line meetings, **objective setting and performance discussions and personal development planning.**

Employers should have **non-management facilitated V/C sessions,** such as 'water cooler breaks' and 'virtual lunches,' **to help maintain social interaction between colleagues and prevent feelings of isolation**.

Employers should **develop clear guidance for teleworking employees**, with line managers taking explicit responsibility **for discussing issues with their reports** including the need to take regular breaks, manage boundaries around working hours, and building physical activity into the working day.

Ensure a Digital Wellbeing Risk Assessment is undertaken for all Digital/Hybrid Workers, and that staff is **appropriately trained to undertake this.**

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