

CASE STUDY

SANTANDER: PROMOTING EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND INCLUSION

HOW SANTANDER PROACTIVELY ENSURE THEIR WORK DESIGN AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE HELP DRIVE POSITIVE MENTAL WELLBEING FOR THEIR COLLEAGUES.

In recent years, it has become more apparent to Santander that its colleagues desire true flexibility and choice in how, when and where they work, to achieve work/life balance and be most productive. Whilst Santander has been on this journey for some time, the need for change, and the opportunity to make it, has been brought sharply into focus during the coronavirus pandemic.

Introduction

The pandemic has been challenging for all, albeit in different ways and to varying extents, but it has also brought about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fundamentally rethink *how* colleagues want to work.

By embedding new ways of working, Santander is increasing the wellbeing of its employees, encouraging them to work in a way that works best for them, wherever possible. Santander aims to be the place where all employees feel they belong and can succeed by building a culture of belonging and psychological safety. Embedding new ways of working helps Santander to achieve this by challenging structural norms that have led to inequality in the workplace, such as gender, ethnicity, disability, and social mobility, and by removing or challenging historic blockers such as unequal caring responsibilities and geographical barriers.



Santander has been supported to make this fundamental shift by Business in the Community through active involvement in its wellbeing, race, and gender campaigns. This involvement provides invaluable knowledge exchange opportunities with similarly forward-thinking organisations.

What Santander did

Santander has been focused on improving job design, organisational culture and driving positive mental wellbeing since as far back as 2017 with the 'Smarter Working' initiative. The initiative started the shift by rethinking how space and technology could be used to be more productive.

This first shift led to increased productivity, but also saw a change in culture as more colleagues opted to work more flexibly, both in terms of location and hours.



The coronavirus pandemic exponentially accelerated this shift, so it was imperative to respond quickly and boldly to best support colleagues. This was a large change at a time of uncertainty, so providing the best support and building psychological safety was a primary focus. There were three main factors that enabled this to be achieved:

- Rapid, regular, and clear communication with employees from the CEO, senior leaders and line managers was essential to reassure colleagues. This helped colleagues have the certainty and support required to adjust to the pace of change, particularly regarding caring responsibilities where paid leave was provided if needed.
- Through the employee-led Mental Wellbeing Network, a heavy emphasis has been placed on Social Wellbeing through a weekly calendar of virtual activities, including guided meditation and a Tea & Talk session. Coupled with a companywide Wellbeing Hour each day, these sessions help colleagues stay connected when working remotely, reducing the impacts of social isolation while providing time and space for colleagues to focus on their wellbeing. The Network also helped launch Santander Social Circles – a chat forum where colleagues could engage around shared hobbies via text to help them stay connected while avoiding video fatigue.
- By adding live chat with trained psychologists to the Mental Wellbeing App from Thrive¹, qualified support was readily accessible to all colleagues, wherever or whenever they may be experiencing a difficult moment. This was in

addition to existing tools such as CBT training, mindfulness and meditation sessions.

Impact

The impact of support has been unprecedented. The key wellbeing metric shows that 79% of colleagues feel the organisation takes a genuine interest in their wellbeing – an increase of 13% during the pandemic.

Supporting metrics include colleagues experiencing a good work/life balance, feeling that they were kept safe and healthy during the pandemic and feeling that Santander is making strides to being a responsible business, which all sit at 88%.

The Mental Wellbeing App has seen over 5,000 downloads, with more than 1,000 colleagues seeking support through the app via the live chat feature or the employee assistance programme. The Mental Wellbeing Network has grown by over 500 to 2,000+ over the last year, after hosting over 100 events and 20+ communications throughout the year focused on positive mental and social wellbeing.

Call to action

Santander encourages all organisations to prioritise a culture of psychological safety where all colleagues feel they belong and are supported to succeed. This can be achieved by giving colleagues time to focus on their wellbeing and providing spaces for them to connect on a social level, as this will help see an improvement in overall wellbeing and create a thriving and supportive workplace culture.

¹ [Internal Communications & Employee Engagement Platform \(thrive.app\)](#)

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