wellhub

From Metrics to Movement

The 2026 People Goals Playbook for HR Leaders

Our latest playbook, **The 2026 People Goals Playbook for HR leaders,** provides an evidence- based approach grounded in CIPD principles to help you turn passive data into active KPIs.

Inside this guide you will discover...

The 'People & Wellness' Scores: How to group KPIs to simplify senior leadership conversations.

The Listen-Diagnose-Act Loop: A structured framework to move from flagging symptoms to addressing root causes.

**Early Risk Detection:** Strategies to identify burnout risks and workload hotspots before they escalate.

Introduction

The start of a new year always brings a sense of possibility. It is a natural moment to reflect, reset priorities, and decide what success should really look like in the months ahead.

For HR leaders, 2026 is a chance to do more than set another list of people targets. It is an opportunity to focus on the changes that genuinely improve how people experience work and how organisations perform as a result. Many people strategies struggle not because the ambition is wrong, but because the execution falls short. Teams track dozens of metrics, run surveys, and produce reports, yet little changes day to day. The challenge is rarely a lack of data. It is knowing what to focus on and when to act.

This playbook is designed to help you set people goals that are not only clear and measurable but also inspire confidence in your strategic direction, ensuring they are linked to real outcomes. It also reframes wellbeing as a core driver of performance rather than a standalone initiative that sits to one side of the business.

To ground this approach, this guide draws on principles from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, or CIPD. The CIPD sets global standards for people professionals and provides evidence-based guidance on what good people practice looks like. Aligning your goals to these principles helps ensure your strategy is both credible, practical and actually moves the needle.
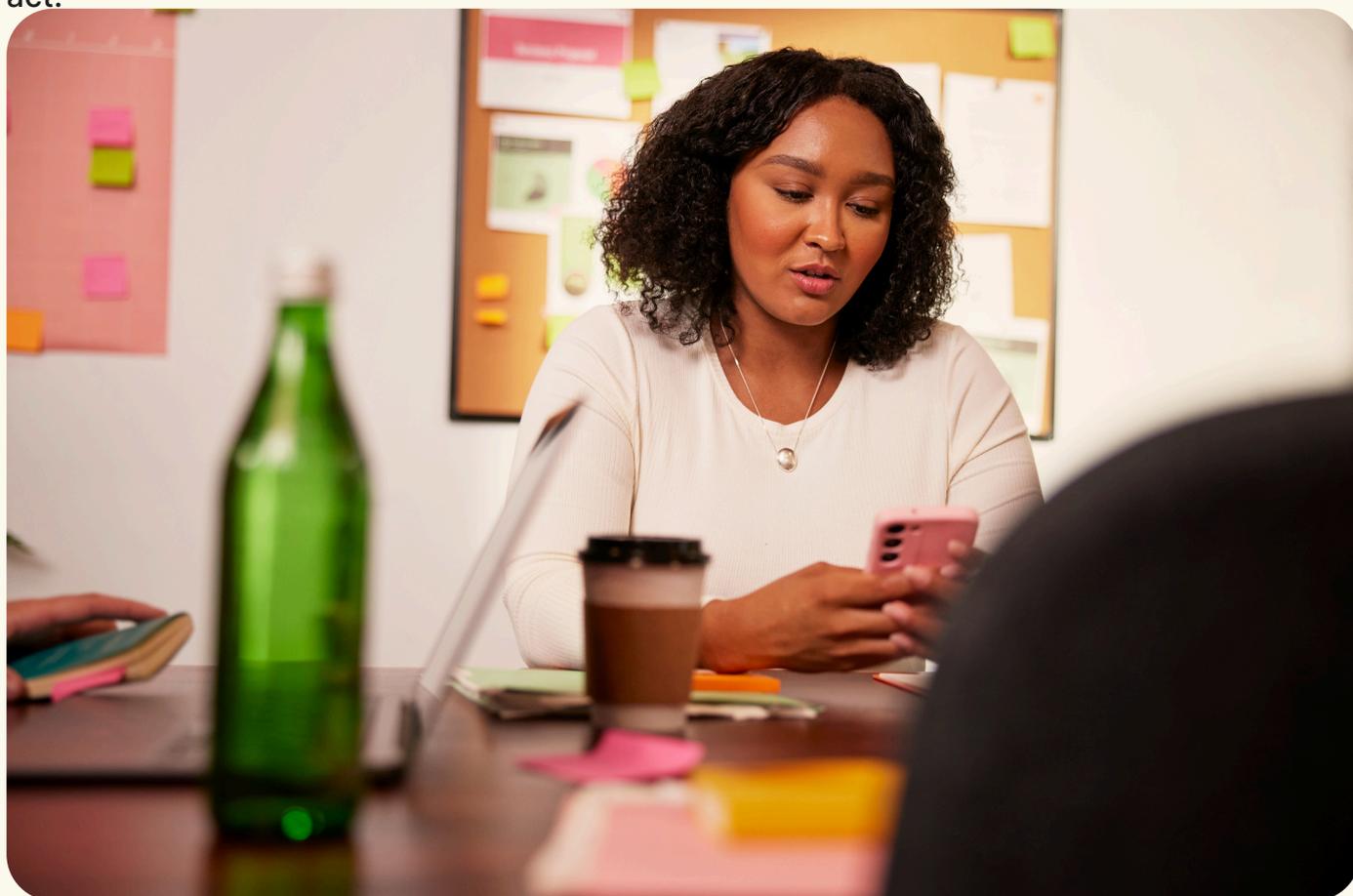
Section 1: Strategic Alignment & CIPD Principles

Correlation vs. Causation

People data often highlights patterns that appear connected, such as high absence alongside low engagement. While these trends may be related, one does not automatically cause the other. An evidence-based approach focuses on understanding what sits behind the data, helping HR leaders address root causes rather than just flagging symptoms.

Validity & Reliability

Metrics are only useful if they can be trusted. Validity ensures a metric measures what it is intended to measure, while reliability ensures results are consistent over time. Together, they help HR leaders track progress accurately and make confident decisions.

Holistic View.

Context matters, and individual data points rarely tell the whole story. Engagement scores, absence data, and performance outcomes become more meaningful when viewed together. This joined-up approach provides more informed insights.

A holistic people system like this brings engagement, absence, performance, and wellbeing into one connected view. Analysing these areas together allows organisations to spot emerging risks earlier and take more targeted action that supports both people and business outcomes.

Moving From Metrics to KPIs That Drive Behaviour

Most organisations already collect a wide range of people data. The difference lies in how that data is used. Metrics are helpful, but they are passive. They tell you what has already happened. For example, reporting how many training hours were completed last year.

KPIs are different. They are designed to guide decisions and prompt action.

A strong KPI has a clear goal, a named owner, a defined timeframe, and a trigger that signals when change is needed. Instead of tracking training hours alone, a KPI might focus on improving training effectiveness by a certain point in the year. If progress stalls, this prompts a review and a clear next step.

Concept	Definition	Example
Metric (Passive)	A data point or measure of activity (e.g., Total training hours completed).	Training hours completed: 1500.
KPI (Active & Strategic)	A metric with a target, an owner, a timeframe, and an action trigger linked to a business outcome.	Target: Increase Training Effectiveness Score from 75% to 85% by Q4. Trigger: If the score drops below 80% for two months, the manager training must be reviewed by the L&D lead.

There are four characteristics of effective people KPIs:

- Clear business outcome
- Named owner to clarify accountability
- Time-bound target
- Defined action trigger

This is where people data starts to earn its place at the table, enabling data-driven decisions, goal alignment, greater motivation, early detection of issues and empowering HR leaders to take targeted actions before problems escalate.

Section 2: Core People & Wellness KPIs for 2026

Performance & Engagement KPIs (The 'People' Score)

The CIPD recognises that wellbeing is not one-dimensional and therefore is not one-size-fits-all. When organisations focus on just one area, such as mental health support alone, chasms can appear. It's crucial that the entire wellbeing spectrum is addressed, including:

- *Mental Wellbeing*
- *Physical Wellbeing*
- *Social & Community*
- *Financial Security*
- *Spiritual Wellbeing*
- *Professional growth*

The CIPD's Good Work agenda reinforces the need for work that is skilled, healthy, and fair. Together, these elements create environments where people can perform well and stay well. What does this look like exactly?

Skilled work
Making sure people have access to the learning and development they need to build relevant skills and grow into higher-value roles.

Healthy work
Creating working environments that support both wellbeing and performance, helping teams work well together and stay productive over time.

Fair work
Ensuring everyone has equal access to opportunities, with clear pathways for progression and a workplace free from discrimination and bias.

To make this easier to manage and communicate, many HR teams find it helpful to group their measures into two simple lenses: a People Score and a Wellness Score. This structure supports clearer conversations with senior leaders while still capturing the whole picture.
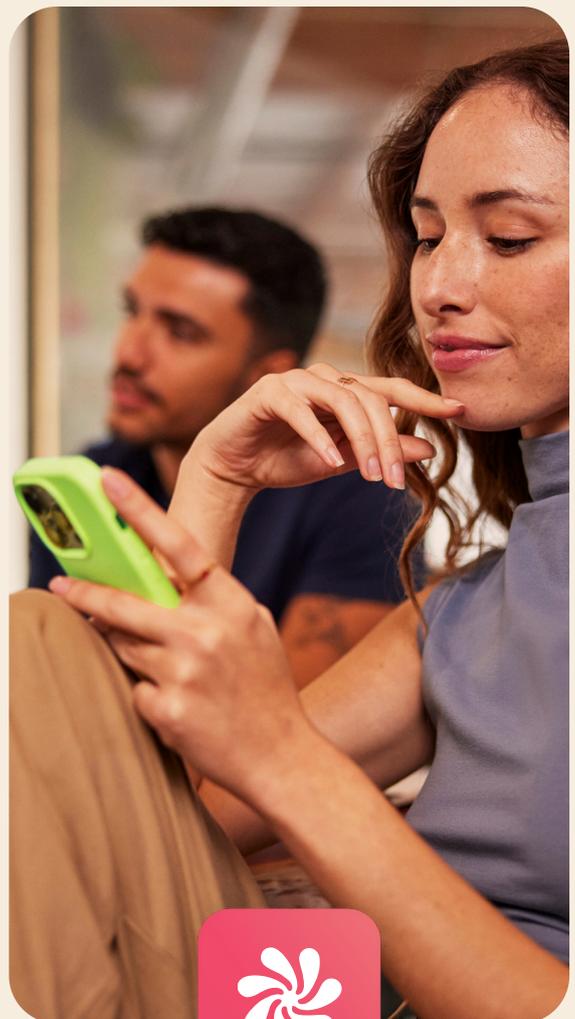
Performance and Engagement KPIs: The People Score

Performance and engagement are shaped by everyday experiences, from how supported people feel to whether they see opportunities to grow. The KPIs below help translate those experiences into clear signals that HR leaders can track and act on.

Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)
eNPS provides a snapshot of how employees feel about working for your organisation and whether they would recommend it to others. It is a valuable indicator of engagement, satisfaction, and potential retention risk. Strong eNPS scores often reflect a positive working environment aligned with the CIPD's Good Work principles.

Internal Mobility Rate
This measure shows whether people see a future within your organisation. A healthy internal mobility rate suggests that development opportunities are visible and accessible. It also supports professional wellbeing by reinforcing a sense of progression and purpose.

Manager Feedback Score
The quality of line management plays a major role in shaping day-to-day wellbeing. Employee feedback on how supported and coached they feel provides valuable insight into leadership effectiveness. Strong manager feedback scores are closely linked to lower burnout and higher engagement.

When this score drops, it often signals broader issues that deserve attention.

KPI	Formula & Goal	Wellbeing/ CIPD Standard
Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)	$\frac{\%Promoters-\%Detractors}{Total\ Responses}$ x 100 **Target: Increase score by 5 points**	Measures overall satisfaction, engagement, and advocacy. High eNPS correlates with a positive working environment and retention
Internal Mobility Rate	$\frac{Internal\ Moves\ (promotions/lateral)}{Eligible\ Employee\ Pool}$x100. **Target: Achieve >15%**	Measures career/intellectual wellbeing (Personal Growth). Indicates whether employees see a future with the organisation.
Manager Feedback Score	Average rating of managers from upward feedback (e.g., 1-5 scale on 'support' or 'coaching'). **Target: Maintain score above 4.0.**	Measures Good Line Management, a crucial element of the CIPD's Good Work framework, which is a major driver of team wellbeing and performance.

Health and Wellness KPIs: The Wellness Score

Each of these wellness scores focuses on the factors that influence employees' health, energy, and resilience over time. They look at the conditions that support or undermine health at work, helping HR leaders identify where people may be struggling and where support can make the biggest difference.

Cost of Absence (CoPA)

Absence data becomes far more meaningful when it is linked to operational and financial impact. Understanding why people are absent is just as important as tracking how often it happens. Patterns in absence can highlight workload issues, stress hotspots, or gaps in support long before they escalate.

EAP and Wellness Programme Utilisation

Usage levels tell a story about trust, awareness, and psychological safety. Low utilisation does not always mean there is no need for wellbeing initiatives. In many cases, it points to barriers in communication or confidence that support will be handled sensitively.

Burnout Risk Score

Burnout is no longer a fringe issue. With **91% of UK adults reporting that they experienced high or extreme levels of pressure or stress in the past year**, this represents a real organisational risk. Composite burnout scores, drawn from regular pulse surveys, help identify teams under pressure and predict issues such as presenteeism, errors, and turnover.

KPI	Formula & Goal	Wellbeing/ CIPD Standard
Cost of Absence (CoPA)	$\frac{\text{Total Labour Cost of Absence}}{\text{Total Working Hours}}$ **Target: Reduce by 10% vs. prior year.**	Measures the impact of Physical & Mental Health. The trigger must be a spike in absence reasons (e.g., if mental health-related absence rises, trigger a manager check-in training).
EAP / Wellness Programme Utilisation	$\frac{\text{Unique Employees Using Service}}{\text{Total Employees}} \times 100$ **Target: Increase by 20% (from typical 5%-10% baseline)**	Measures the **adoption and trust** in reactive/preventative support. Low use suggests a lack of awareness or a psychological safety issue.
Burnout Risk Score	Composite score from pulse survey questions on workload, control, reward, and community. **Target:** Reduce the percentage of employees in the 'High Risk' category by 8%.	Direct measure of **Mental Wellbeing** and potential for presenteeism (a hidden cost). High-risk triggers a mandatory work design review for the affected department.

Section 3: Tracking, Analysis, and Action (The 'How')

Once KPIs are defined, success depends on how they are used. This section looks at how to bring people and wellbeing data to life through clear dashboards, structured analysis, and an approach to measurement that supports teams rather than creating resistance.

1. Creating the HR Leader Dashboard

Effective dashboards should prioritise focus over completeness. Executive teams benefit most from a concise view of six to eight critical KPIs aligned to strategic goals.

By using clear visual indicators, such as red, amber, and green statuses, against SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) allows leaders to quickly understand where attention is needed.

Segmentation is equally essential. Breaking KPIs down by department, tenure, manager, or working pattern helps uncover localised risks and inequities. For instance, high turnover in one department alongside stability in another may point to leadership or workload issues rather than organisational culture as a whole. Well-designed dashboards support clearer, more productive board conversations.

2. The CIPD-Aligned 'Listen - Diagnose - Act' Loop

Collecting data is only the first step. The real value lies in what happens next. HR leaders must move beyond reporting numbers to generating insights and driving action. This includes:

- Listening through consistent data collection
- Diagnosing root causes through analysis
- Acting through targeted interventions

Step	HR Leader's Responsibility	Example Action Trigger
1. Listen	**Data Collection**: Ensure consistent, frequent, and anonymous data collection (e.g., monthly pulse surveys, quarterly absence reports).	**Data Point:** Q2 Absenteeism Rate is 1.5% above target.
2. Diagnose	**Root Cause Analysis:** Segment the data. Overlay with other metrics (e.g., is the high absence linked to low Manager Feedback Scores in the affected teams?).	*Diagnosis:* The spike is clustered in the Tech department and correlates with a significant project deadline and high overtime hours.
3. Act	**Intervention & Follow-up:** Implement a targeted, measurable intervention. The Manager owns the action, HR owns the system.	**Action**: HR implements a mandatory Workload Review/Risk Assessment for Tech managers, followed by a 90-day pulse survey to check for behavioural change.

3. How to Introduce People & Wellness KPIs Without Creating Resistance

People and wellbeing metrics can raise concerns and create a rift if people feel they are intrusive or unclear. Being open about why data is collected and how it will be used helps build trust. Here are 4 ways to temper your approach:

Be transparent about purpose
Clearly explain why the data is being collected and how it will support better decisions, healthier teams, and improved ways of working rather than simply measuring performance.

Separate insight from punishment
Position metrics as tools for learning and improvement, not as a way to single out individuals or teams, so people feel safe sharing honest feedback.

Share trends, not individual data
Focus conversations on patterns and themes at a team or organisational level, which helps protect privacy while still highlighting where action is needed.

Involve managers early
Bringing managers into the conversation from the start helps align expectations, builds confidence in the data, and makes it more likely that insights will translate into meaningful action at a team level.

When people understand the intent behind the data and feel included in the process, people and wellbeing KPIs are far more likely to deliver real-world impact.

Final Thoughts

For people goals to make a real difference in 2026, they need to be clear, actionable, and aligned with wider business priorities. Success really depends on shared ownership across the organisation. HR plays a central role in setting the framework, ensuring data quality, and turning insight into clarity.

Leaders then bring those insights to life by prioritising action and reinforcing the behaviours that matter most. Managers translate strategy into everyday experience, shaping how work feels and functions for their teams. At the top, the executive team sets the direction and models what good work looks like in practice.

When people goals are chosen carefully and acted on consistently, they become a powerful driver of sustainable performance. With that in mind, wellbeing is not a one-off initiative or a box to tick. It is an ongoing strategy that supports stronger retention, better productivity, **less absenteeism** and healthier organisations overall.

Wellhub helps organisations implement wellbeing programmes that reach everyone, not just a select few. By supporting **mental, physical, and everyday wellbeing** at scale, Wellhub enables lasting behaviour change that contributes to healthier teams, stronger engagement, and more resilient performance.

When wellbeing is embedded into day-to-day working life, it becomes easier to move the needle on the people metrics that matter most, from retention and absence to productivity and engagement.

If you're looking to turn your 2026 people goals into measurable progress, Wellhub can help you make that shift stick.