Resource 1

Introduction to mentally healthy workplaces

mind.org.uk/work

mind
for better mental health

Right now 1 in 6 workers is dealing with a mental health problem such as anxiety, depression or stress. This can stop people performing at their best.

We're Mind, the mental health charity. We're here to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for advice and support.

Smart employers know that organisations are only as strong as their people – they depend on having a healthy and productive workforce.

They also know that people perform better when they feel able to put everything into their job and when they are confident, motivated and completely focused on doing that. Good mental health underpins this. By positively managing and supporting employees' mental wellbeing, employers can ensure that staff perform to their potential – and this allows the business to achieve peak performance.

Simple, inexpensive measures to support staff mental health and wellbeing can:

- increase productivity, efficiency and innovation
- increase profits and reduce business costs
- improve staff morale and performance
- reduce sickness absence, presenteeism and staff turnover
- enhance your reputation as an employer
- help to honour your duty of care as an employer.

Employee engagement

The strong relationship between levels of staff wellbeing and motivation and business performance is often called employee engagement. Increasing engagement is a major priority for UK leaders because engaged employees have been shown again and again to deliver improved business performance.

Studies show that organisations with higher levels of employee engagement benefit from better productivity, profitability and stronger staff commitment. In the public sector, this brings better outcomes and better quality customer service.[1]

Engagement is about recognising that employees, if they are to perform at their best, must be respected, involved, heard, well-led and valued. Making changes that have a positive impact on employees' experiences at work are integral.
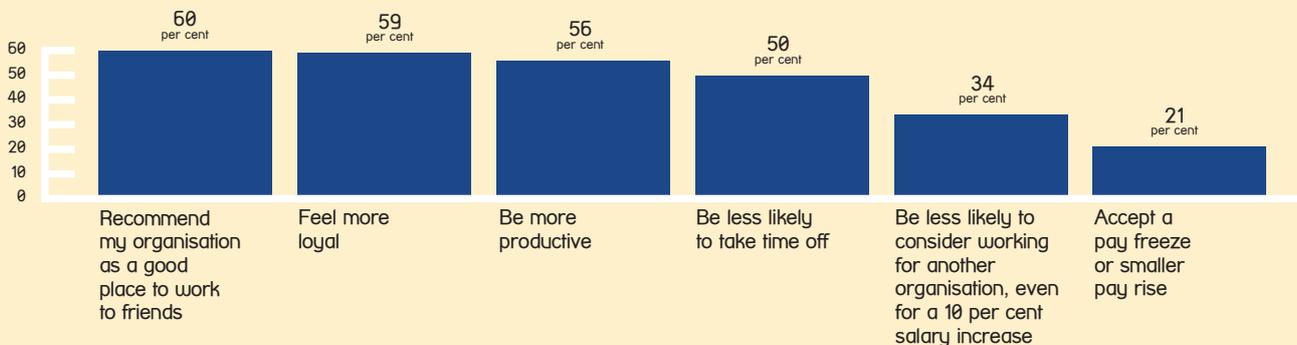
Approaches such as flexible working, building resilience and staff development contribute to good engagement.

The way we work together is also changing – team work, collaboration and joint problem solving are increasingly demanded by employers, but these working processes cannot thrive in an environment where there is not mutual trust between employers and employees and where staff's abilities are not valued.

Engagement cannot happen without good mental health – research shows that when staff wellbeing is not supported, employee engagement declines, motivation and performance levels drop and staff retention is affected. But a recent survey highlighted that if employers take steps to support employee mental wellbeing, this would have a positive impact on levels of staff motivation and loyalty.[2]

Respondents were asked to consider how they would feel about their workplace if wellbeing initiatives were offered.
Q: If my employer took action to support the mental wellbeing of all staff, I would:

60 per cent	59 per cent	56 per cent	50 per cent	34 per cent	21 per cent
Recommend my organisation as a good place to work to friends	Feel more loyal	Be more productive	Be less likely to take time off	Be less likely to consider working for another organisation, even for a 10 per cent salary increase	Accept a pay freeze or smaller pay rise

Source: Populus poll for Mind of 2,060 adults in England and Wales in employment – polled between 6 and 10 March 2013.

- The twin goals of increasing employee engagement and creating a mentally healthy workplace are interdependent.
- Positively managing mental health underpins good employee engagement and benefits everyone – employees, employers and the bottom line.
- If you look after your employees' mental wellbeing, then levels of engagement will rise and so will staff morale and loyalty, innovation, productivity and profits.

[1] Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement, David MacLeod and Nita Clarke, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (July 2009).
[2] Employee wellbeing: taking engagement and performance to the next level, Towers Watson, New York (2010).

The cost of not acting

> Ignoring the mental health of your staff comes at a high price. And will only make problems worse.

Lower productivity

Workers may come to work even though they are unwell because they are concerned that if they disclose a mental health problem, they will face prejudice. Reduced productivity costs UK businesses up to £15.1 billion a year.[3]

Lost work days

Stress and other mental health problems are the second biggest cause of work absence, accounting for 70 million lost working days every year.[3]

Higher recruitment costs

Valued employees are lost when employers do not invest in mental health. Staff turnover as a result of employees leaving their jobs due to mental health problems costs £2.4 billion each year.[3]

Increased conflict at work

Stress and mental health problems can lead to costly and time-consuming work conflict. Stress is the second biggest cause – employees spend a day a month dealing with it.[4]

Tough times

> 40 per cent of employers reported an increase in staff sickness levels due to stress in the last 12 months.[5]
>
> 44 per cent of employers saw an increase in reported mental health problems in the last 12 months.[5]
>
> One-fifth of employees reported an increase in conflict at work between colleagues in 2012.[6]

The economic downturn is impacting significantly on wellbeing and stress levels. Work pressures and job insecurity have dramatically increased, along with financial demands at home. Many people tell us they are struggling to cope.

But in tough times, people are even more reluctant to raise workplace issues or disclose mental health problems. A recent survey found that while stress has forced one in five workers to call in sick, 90 per cent say they have lied to their boss about the real reason for not turning up.[7]

Prioritising mental health and building resilience right now is the best way to get through the economic downturn. Open and supportive workplaces benefit everyone – employees, employers and the bottom line. Weathering the storm together puts an organisation in a strong position.

---

[3] Mental health at work: developing the business case, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, London (2007).
[4] Fight, flight or face it, OPP, in association with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Oxford (2008).
[5] Absence Management annual survey report 2012, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, in partnership with Simplyhealth (October 2012).
[6] Employee Outlook: Spring 2012, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (May 2012).
[7] Populus poll for Mind of 2,060 adults in England and Wales in employment – polled between 6 and 10 March 2013.

How to create a mentally healthy workplace

The twin goals of increasing employee engagement and creating a mentally healthy workplace are interdependent.

Fundamental to both is the need for strong leadership and a positive, transparent and clear organisational culture which values staff. Employers – especially line managers – need to take the first step by sending a signal that staff mental health is valued and that people can feel confident that disclosure will lead to support, not discrimination.

> **To achieve this, we recommend employers adopt a three-pronged strategy that:**
>
> 1. Promotes wellbeing for all staff
> 2. Tackles the causes of work-related mental health problems
> 3. Supports staff who are experiencing mental health problems.

1. Promote wellbeing

Effective management and open dialogue are fundamental to unlocking the potential of staff, reducing uncertainty and preventing stress – and having an effective, empowered employee voice is integral to this relationship.

A workplace culture where employees feel able to voice ideas and are listened to, both about how they do their job and in broader decision-making about the organisation's direction of travel, is also a key driver of employee engagement. This is because employees feel more committed to the organisation's goals when they feel that their work is meaningful and valued.

Raising awareness and promoting discussion of mental health and wellbeing also drives engagement, helps to overcome prejudice and means that employees will be more likely to disclose issues sooner.

Encouraging a good work/life balance, developing good communication, supporting flexible working practices, and promoting positive working relationships and social activities are also important.

Investing in these approaches and promoting them to staff sends out a clear message to staff that their mental health is valued by the organisation.

2. Tackle the causes of mental ill health

Considering how much time we spend at work, it's not surprising it can affect our mental health. The way that managers behave is often key in shaping whether being at work has a positive or a negative impact on staff.

Effective managers help employees to manage their workloads, create opportunities for coaching and learning, and promote a culture of open dialogue – all of which help to boost staff mental wellbeing and employee engagement levels.

Research on engagement has identified some essential manager behaviours that help employees to feel valued and well supported to do their job:

- offering clarity
- appreciation of employees' effort and contribution
- treating people as individuals
- ensuring that work is organised efficiently and effectively.

Training managers to recognise mental health problems and support staff will help maintain employee wellbeing. Managers can spot the signs by being alert to the potential triggers, such as:

- long hours and no breaks
- unrealistic expectations or deadlines
- high-pressure environments
- a poor working environment

- unmanageable workloads or lack of control over work
- negative relationships or poor communication
- poor managerial support
- job insecurity or change management
- high-risk roles
- lone working.

Regular supervisions or one-to-one meetings are crucial to build trust and give employees a chance to raise issues at an early stage. Providing mentoring or on-the-job coaching also helps to develop this relationship.

Improving the physical environment and publicising available support pathways, such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) or occupational health (OH) can also help tackle the causes of mental health problems.

Carrying out an assessment of your workplace can give a clear picture of the state of the organisation as a whole. This enables you to understand what factors affect staff mental health in your workplace and what needs to be done to make improvements. The next resource in this series explains the key areas of your business or team that you should look at when assessing mental health in your workplace and provides practical step-by-step guidance on how to collect this data.

3. Support staff with mental health problems

Promoting wellbeing and tackling the causes of mental health problems will create an environment where staff can feel confident to talk to their manager.

If mental health problems are suspected or disclosed, the first step is to establish honest, open communication with the employee, and this should be maintained if people take time off for sickness absence. If possible, the frequency of contact should be agreed before someone takes time off.

How you respond to an employee experiencing a mental health problem is a fundamental test of your organisation's values. Trust and integrity are key drivers of engagement – employees need to see that the organisation lives its values and does what it says it will in terms of treating its people well.

But standing by people when they experience problems is not only about keeping hold of a valuable staff member – it also sends a message about your organisation's values to staff and external audiences. Supportive organisations find

they reap the benefits in terms of loyalty and commitment from all staff.

Everyone's experience of a mental health problem is different, so managers should be supported to work with staff to develop a personal action plan which identifies triggers and what support the employee needs.

Clear policies on workplace adjustments and phased returns to work are crucial for reducing the length of mental health related sickness absence. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), occupational health or psychological therapies can also contribute to a comprehensive support package for staff. Small businesses can access the free Health for Work Adviceline service provided by NHS occupational health services.

If people are being redeployed or made redundant then this can have a significant impact on their mental wellbeing. People being redeployed will need to be supported through the process and properly inducted into their new role. Redundancy polices should consider mental health aftercare for staff and signposting to appropriate services.

Case study: Expedition Engineering

> For Expedition, the business benefits of prioritising employee engagement and wellbeing could not be clearer.

Expedition is a cutting-edge engineering and design consultancy. Their award-winning success is built on a strong commitment to the wellbeing of their 40 members of staff.

Staff are involved in corporate decision-making, encouraged to manage their own workload, work from home and contribute ideas to improve the workplace in dedicated 'free thinking' space. Staff are offered a menu of benefits to choose from to suit their needs. Options include travelcard loans, bicycle loans, private health insurance and gym membership. They have also introduced a scheme where staff have every tenth working day off.

As a result, the company enjoys minimal staff turnover and strong loyalty from customers who return again and again because they love working with the staff.

For Expedition, the business benefits of prioritising employee engagement and wellbeing could not be clearer.

Checklist

To get started, we recommend you consider your current approach to ensuring a healthy workplace.

If you work in HR or are on the senior management team:

- How are mental health and stress talked about in your workplace?
- What policies for managing mental health does your organisation have?
- Does your organisation offer flexible working practices?
- Does your organisation offer formal wellbeing support?
- Does your organisation provide stress management training to line managers?
- Does your organisation provide stress coaching to individuals?
- Does your organisation prioritise learning and development among its staff?
- Does your organisation run an annual staff satisfaction survey? And if so, does it ask about mental wellbeing in the workplace?
- How does your organisation manage change and redundancy processes?
- How well do you involve staff in making decisions about internal changes?
- How do you look after your own mental wellbeing at work?

If you're a line manager:

- How are mental health and stress talked about in your team?
- What policies for managing mental health does your organisation have?
- Do you regularly ask your staff about their wellbeing?
- Do your staff have a good work/life balance?
- Do you have regular catch-ups or one-to-ones with your staff?
- Do you communicate staff responsibilities and expectations clearly?
- How do you help your staff to effectively manage their workloads?
- Do you support your staff with personal development?
- Do you praise staff and acknowledge their efforts?
- Do you feel equipped to support staff who are experiencing a mental health problem?
- How do you look after your own mental wellbeing at work?

mind
for better mental health

We're Mind, the mental health charity.

We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We're here for you. Today. Now. Whether you're stressed, depressed or in crisis. We'll listen, give support and advice, and fight your corner.

Our Taking Care of Business campaign aims to give employers simple, inexpensive and practical ways to improve mental wellbeing and employee engagement.

mind.org.uk/work
work@mind.org.uk

Support us

Mind is a charity and we rely on donations to continue our work. Please visit mind.org.uk or call 0300 999 1946 to find out how you can support us.

Join us

Help us make change happen. Be part of our work. Become a Mind member today.
mind.org.uk/get_involved/membership

Contact us

Mind Infoline: 0300 123 333
9am to 6pm Mon – Fri

Mind
15-19 Broadway
Stratford
London
E15 4BQ

Find your local Mind at mind.org.uk/mymind

t @MindCharity
f facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth