

Let's talk about Health and Wellbeing at Work

Derek Mowbray

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What is the problem that health and wellbeing programmes are aimed at solving?

It is well established that people who are physically healthy will perform better at whatever they wish to do. It is, also, the case that about one half of all sickness absence from work is attributable to physical issues and ill health, so keeping people physically healthy is preventing this problem from becoming worse. However, it doesn't prevent the problem in the first place.

Maintaining physical health and wellbeing doesn't tackle the problem of enduring under-performance, caused by events and behaviours that hijack the concentration of individuals and, if persistent and intense, can make them feel psychologically ill with anxiety, depression and stress.

Since 2009 the number of days lost to the workplace by stress related ill health has risen by 24%. Since 2008 the level of productivity in the UK has been low and flat compared with other countries.

Clearly, wellbeing programmes are not preventing this situation from deteriorating nor are they preventing the problem of stress occurring in the first place.

People coming to work in body and not in mind, otherwise known as Psychological Presenteeism, is estimated to be on the rise as well. There are no clear figures for this, but on the basis that most people who are off sick due to a stress related illness have been in work for an extended period before hand experiencing Psychological Presenteeism, the rise is equal or more than 24% since 2009. The costs to business and services of this group are estimated at about £70bn per annum, or two thirds the annual cost of the NHS.

Wellbeing should be linked to performance

Most people with physical ill health at work have a relatively short and immediate impact on performance. People become ill, maybe remain in work for a day or two and then, if necessary, go off sick, and their performance reduces to zero until they return to work.

Those who find themselves experiencing Psychological Presenteeism remain in work. They have their concentration diverted from what they should be focusing on, which effectively lowers their level of productivity and performance. Concentration is hijacked by thinking of something else, such as the excess demands on limited time; child care arrangements that have gone wrong; the lack of car parking spaces meaning having to spend ages looking for spaces and getting really fed up and tense; sharing a room with that monster of a manager; not having any time to spend eating lunch, so you eat on the run – all illustrations of routine everyday events that hijack concentration and lower performance.

The events may seem trivial and routine, but they come on top of other features of everyday life, such as living in a quick fix society, that spends long periods engaged in social media activities, creating a mirage of relationships and being concerned for the future, for their security, lacking in confidence in

government, and other public institutions, and a general feeling it is a slog to deal with people who should be providing us with a service. You must ignore quite a lot of these events not to feel battered. Sadly, a growing number of teenagers and early twenties haven't been able to ignore the effects on their daily lives and find themselves ill prepared, and lacking the resilience needed, for the world of work.

Many, of all ages, will be experiencing one or more of the effects of austerity- fear, shame, insecurity, isolation and powerlessness. These may be low lying sensations or background but they influence heavily our attitude, motivation and energy towards anything that becomes an added challenge at work.

Programmes on physical wellbeing don't have much impact on these events and your ability to handle them. Consequently, their impact on elevating performance is negligible.

On the other hand, programmes that focus on the psychological wellbeing needs of people provide the opportunity for a real and sustained effect of improving productivity and performance at work.

Organisations should transform to oases of tranquillity, high level productivity and performance.

Formal organisations are controlled working environments. They are controlled, either positively or by default, by managers, some of whom are leaders.

Interest in the psychological wellbeing of individuals at work is gradually expanding, but the huge wave of resistance to real progress is likely to remain until something dramatic happens to the training and development of leaders and managers.

Typically, managers are appointed to their roles on the back of being successful at doing something entirely different. Also, typically, managers have a background in matters that are technical.

The assumption is that managing people (which isn't a technical process despite the best efforts of some HR services) is easy and requires very little training and development. Until this attitude is changed to the reality that managing people requires highly sensitive people management skills combined with organisation psychological knowledge, the advantages that accrue from potential management actions to create and sustain a psychologically healthy workforce, and improve productivity and performance, will not be realised. Nor will the huge costs of Psychological Presenteeism be saved.

Leaders and managers are pivotal to the success of individuals and organisations.

But it's not all about direct contact between managers and their teams.

It is about creating the working conditions and environment that provokes individuals, including leaders and managers, to feel psychologically well. This means designing everything to eliminate the events and behaviours that cause peoples' concentration to be diverted away from what they need to focus on to perform at their peak.

The standard for organisational design should be to construct workplaces that the workforce voluntarily gets out of bed and runs to work because it is a place and environment that fulfils almost everything that stimulates and provokes psychological wellbeing and performance, and makes people feel terrific.

The world outside the workplace is generally chaotic and difficult. The world inside the workplace should be the oasis, the refuge from a chaotic world, characterised by tranquillity combined with high level productivity and performance.

Tranquillity aids concentration. It doesn't mean nothing is happening. It means more is happening because little is diverting concentration. So, if you need to take lots of actions all at once with many other team mates, the more tranquil you are the more likely you are to concentrate, make fewer mistakes, have less repetitions and no deviations, and get everything done fast and successfully.

Tranquillity has little to do with busyness. Busyness is the appearance of being productive, whilst not being. People being busy having loads of meetings with no time to do the action or reflect on what has transpired. People always on the phone but having no time to do the actions in between calls. People constantly talking without any opportunity of doing what you tell them you'll do. All busyness, but little productivity.

Tranquillity is about keeping calm, being disciplined, able to find the space to reflect, act and be productive.

Start with a culture of Psychological Responsibility

The type and form of culture influences how well the organisation performs and how productive it is.

Leaders and managers create, constructively or by default, the cultural environment for everyone else to work within.

A culture that pays little attention to the psychological needs of individuals may perform reasonably well, but the costs involved will be high, but, alas, not unacceptably high in the short term to cause a 'wake-up call'. The problems come with the need for these organisations to be resilient against a host of external and internal challenges over a longer period. Without a psychologically healthy workforce, organisational resilience is seriously compromised in the medium to longer term, often placing the survival of the organisation at risk.

The most obvious illustration of this in the UK is the NHS, where the red flag about the psychological wellbeing of staff has been waving vigorously for almost a couple of decades, without anyone paying much attention. Now the external and internal challenges to respond to changes of all sorts from demographics, technology to staff shortages, is rendering the organisation incapable of being resilient. Greater attention to the psychological wellbeing of all the staff would attenuate the risks to patients that is now a certainty, because of poor resilience. The current and anticipated costs of litigation, for example, are mouth wateringly enormous. It's not too late to rescue the situation, and prevent the heroic activities of tens of thousands of staff from being put further at risk.

A culture that has, at its core, the psychological wellbeing of its entire workforce, (including those at Board level who, for some unknown and incomprehensible reason think they are immune to the problems) creates the opportunity of achieving consistent high level productivity and performance. This is because such a culture provides the features that provoke people to feel well, be motivated and achieve success. Success breeds success; it's a sensation people love and want to repeat.

We shall call this a culture of Psychological Responsibility.

Psychological Responsibility

Psychological Responsibility, at its' core, is about individuals taking responsibility for their own psychological wellbeing, doing no psychological harm to anyone else, and helping to improve the psychological wellbeing of others.

For this to become embedded in organisations, the cultural environment needs to expect and encourage people to be open about their situations, and how they feel about them, and, if their psychological wellbeing is being compromised, for leaders, managers and others to act immediately to

rectify the situation. So, whilst the responsibility is placed on individuals to maintain their own psychological wellbeing, they cannot do this unless the organisation has a culture that facilitates the processes involved.

What are the elements that make people feel psychologically well?

Clearly, everyone is different. However, there are common elements that contribute to individual psychological wellbeing.

If organisations are designed to ensure these common elements are central to the way everything is run, the culture emerges and people will have their behaviour influenced by the culture.

The ingredients of psychological wellbeing



The image shows the common elements that make individuals feel psychologically well.

Everyone needs to feel safe and secure before they can begin to feel psychologically well.

Fundamental to many other elements is relationships of different types.

Self-efficacy, for example, will be partly developed by encouragement from individuals of significance. Similarly, with self-esteem, attachment, gratitude and empowerment.

Equally fundamental is appreciative awareness linked to some elements, such as purpose, hope, optimism, pleasure, meaning and success. Appreciative awareness is not only being personally aware of what is contained in the element, but deriving positive satisfaction from being aware. So, purpose is not any old purpose but a purpose of significance to the individual; something that the person thinks is really worthwhile. Success is not simply completing something successfully but completing something successfully that the person feels makes a real difference and is worthwhile.

Control is about mental control, being psychologically well enough to have clarity of mind. This is essential for resilience, which is having flexible strength of mind.

Flow is being completely absorbed and deriving energy from what you do, which requires an attitude of complete engagement.

What are the behaviours that do no psychological harm, and help to improve the psychological wellbeing of others?

The behaviours, which we call Intelligent Behaviours, that limit the risk of causing psychological harm and enhance the psychological wellbeing of others, are shown in the image.



Arguably the most effective and significant behaviour is attentiveness, as it helps to trigger good interaction.

Having a positive attitude to other people helps attentiveness and the other behaviours being demonstrated in a positive manner.

Humour is an attractor and can defuse any hint of deterioration towards strain and stress.

Encouragement provides others with the courage to do things they may be hesitating about.

Resolving conflicts as they occur is vital to the prevention of conflict ripple, or escalation.

Reliability is linked to trust, and is about consistency of behaviour so others don't have reason to question your motives for doing or saying things.

Intellectual flexibility is being able to think independently and on your feet.

Humanity is about treating people fairly, with intelligent kindness, and understanding the imperfections of people and accommodating these where possible.

Implementing a culture of Psychological Responsibility

An easy way to start the ball rolling is for everyone in the organisation to wear a badge as shown below.



This reminds the wearer, and inform others, that they are obliged to be responsible for their own psychological wellbeing, do no harm to others, and help others improve their psychological wellbeing.

Wearing a badge might seem trivial. However, it is an acknowledgement of the openness required to improve the psychological wellbeing of individuals throughout the organisation.

The badge wearing should be accompanied by leaders and managers being clear to everyone of their expectations that individuals can raise their concerns without fear of any form of comeback. It is, also, an acknowledgement that leaders and managers should rectify adverse situations immediately.

Staff should be encouraged to understand more about the reasons for Psychological Responsibility, and be supported in identifying how to improve their own psychological wellbeing.

Staff will need to brush up on their Intelligent Behaviours as these are critical to creating the culture of Psychological Responsibility.

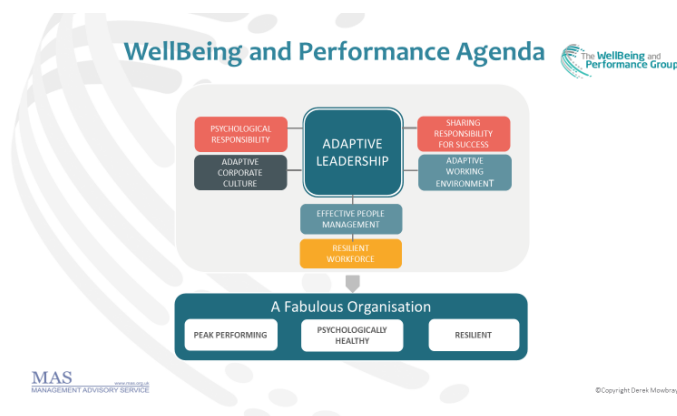
The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

However, adopting Psychological Responsibility on its own will not achieve a psychologically healthy and high performing organisation.

What is required is for the organisation to create the conditions that provoke everyone to feel commitment, trust, kinship, motivation, concentration and social engagement, as it is these attributes that make it healthy and high performing.

Psychological Responsibility is the starting point in the process to achieve these attributes.

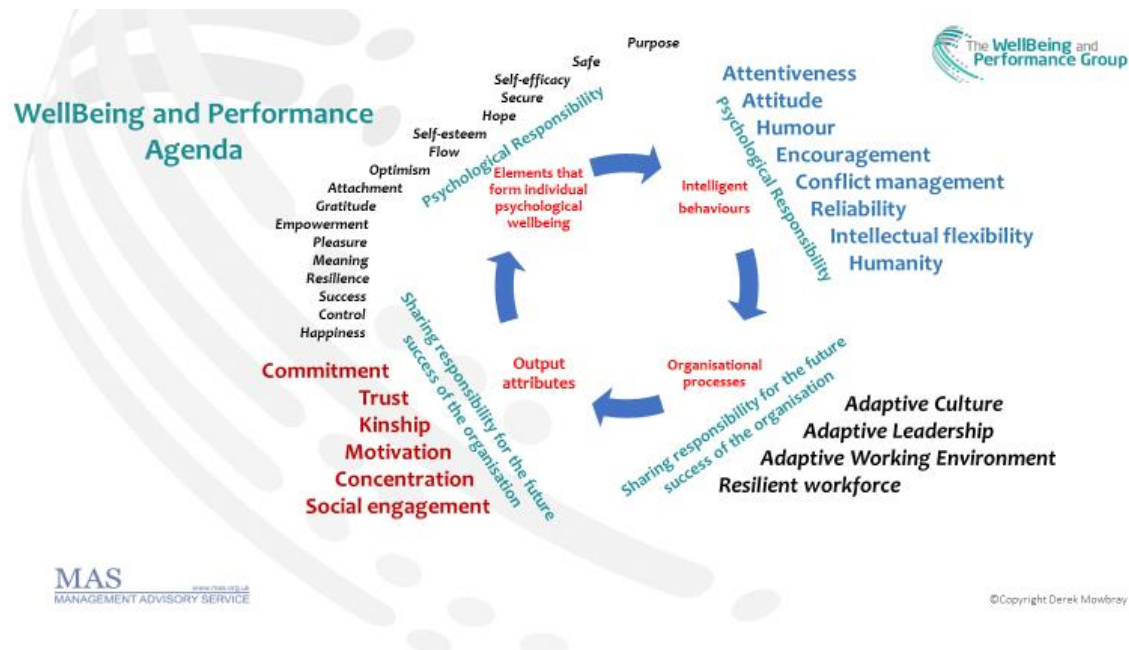
The framework for helping organisations become psychologically healthy and embed trust, commitment, kinship, motivation, concentration and social engagement, is The WellBeing and Performance Agenda. The key components are Psychological Responsibility, Sharing Responsibility, Adaptive Leadership, Adaptive Culture, Adaptive Working Environment and a Resilient Workforce.



Breaking the agenda down a little further, Psychological Responsibility is the starting point for Adaptive Leaders to action.

The behaviours of Psychological Responsibility need to be combined with the principle of Sharing Responsibility for the Future Success of the Organisation and embedded into the organisation to produce the desired outcome attributes, and behaviours, of commitment, trust, kinship, motivation, concentration and

social engagement.



The desired outcome attributes and behaviours reinforce the elements that support individual psychological wellbeing, to form a virtuous circle.

Each part of the agenda interacts with each other part. No single part of the agenda will achieve improved productivity and performance on its own.

A new Health and Wellbeing at Work Programme called The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

This article has introduced the outline of a programme designed to transform organisations into places of tranquillity, the oases in a turbulent world, but with the intend of improving productivity and performance.

For the WellBeing and Performance Agenda programmes to be implemented in its entirety requires time, starting with the development of leaders and managers who will start the ball rolling towards transformation by implementing Psychological Responsibility.

In outline the WellBeing and Performance Agenda programmes are formed of several inter-related programmes to make up the whole.

- The role of Leaders and Managers in implementing the WellBeing and Performance Agenda
- The programme for implementing Psychological Responsibility.
- The programme for implementing Sharing Responsibility for the Future Success of the Organisation.
- The programme to implement a resilient organisation
- The Role of Leaders and Managers in the Resilience of their teams
- The programme to Strengthen the Resilience of Teams
- The programme to develop Adaptive Leadership
- The programme to implement a Culture of Psychological Responsibility
- The programme to implement an Adaptive Culture
- The programme on the Psychological Contract
- The programme in implementing the Adaptive Working Environment
- The programme to Strengthen Personal Resilience.

Each programme is delivered to an agreed specification with clients. Whilst the principal themes remain constant (because they work) the detail is open to variation according to circumstances.

Each programme can, also, be delivered to teams, or segments of organisations, as a means of transforming parts of the whole organisation in a gradual developmental manner.

Different facilitated learning approaches are, also, available, including eLearning supporting live programmes, facilitated learning sets, coaching of individuals and groups and mentoring individuals.

Conclusion

Organisations are making little progress in reducing the incidence of stress and stress related conditions. This is contributing to under performance and is a significant aspect of the low productivity that has been present for almost a decade in the UK.

Continuing to focus on the physical health of the workforce does not address the main problems facing organisations.

There is a desperate need to focus attention of the psychological needs of the workforce.

The WellBeing and Performance Agenda and its constituent programmes provides the framework for organisations to take the necessary action to transform organisations into 'fabulous and high performing places to work'.

About MAS

Our work focuses on the prevention of stress at work. Why? Stress costs and inhibits performance!

There are three interlocking features that prevent stress at work –

- Creating and sustaining a culture and environment where managers and workforce are fully engaged with the organisation and are *provoked into peak performance*.
- Leaders and managers exhibiting the behaviours that encourage commitment, trust and engagement which will *provoke peak performance in others*.
- Building and sustaining personal resilience against challenging situations which will *provoke peak performance in individuals*.

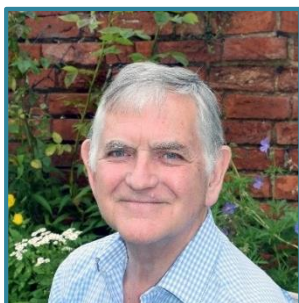
Our purpose is to help organisations achieve peak performance and productivity; to strengthen corporate and personal resilience and to prevent stress from occurring in the first place;

Our approach is to help organisations establish psychologically healthy workplaces by facilitating the implementation of our WellBeing and Performance Agenda framework.

Our services include consultancy; applied organisation health psychology; facilitation; assessments; cultural change; leadership and team development, tailored interventions, and one-to-one coaching.

Our programmes include topics such as:

- The WellBeing and Performance Agenda
- Creating a Culture for Wellbeing and Performance
- Adaptive Leadership – Leadership Development Programme
- The Manager’s Role in Resilience
- Team Resilience
- The Manager’s Role in Stress Prevention
- Strengthening Personal Resilience,
- Psychological Responsibility
- Brief Mindfulness
- Train-the-Trainer versions of our Resilience Programmes



The driving force of MAS and the Wellbeing & Performance Group is [Derek Mowbray](#), a Chartered Psychologist and Chartered Scientist, with a doctorate in the psychology of leadership. Derek specialises in the primary prevention of psychological distress. His work in the stress prevention field focuses on the problems at work that may trigger adverse reactions in people, causing them to feel unwell and under intense pressure resulting in under performance. His approach is to use positive psychology to help organisations create and sustain ‘the workplace as a fabulous and high performing place to work’ with a culture of psychological responsibility.

Derek’s mission is to ensure individuals have a fabulous experience from work and the workplace.

Our Products:

Personal Resilience ELearning

An in-depth programme designed to strengthen personal resilience. The programme could be branded for you and made available to your workforce.

<http://www.mas.org.uk/personal-resilience-elearning-programme.html>



Derek Mowbray's Guides – innovative, practical resources

- The Guide to the WellBeing and Performance Agenda
- The Guide to Corporate Resilience
- The Guide to Adaptive Leadership
- The Guide to Psychological Responsibility
- The Guide to The Manager's Role in Resilience
- The Guide to Personal Resilience
- The Guide to the Manager's Role in Stress Prevention
- The Guide to Team Resilience (Available Q2 2017)

The Guides can be branded and discounted for bulk purchases.

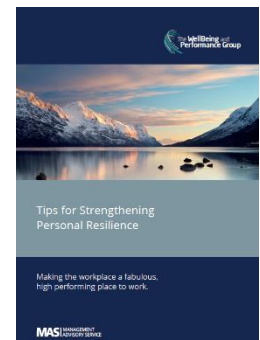
<http://www.mas.org.uk/publications.html>



Tips Booklets

We have an extensive range of high quality tips booklets which make great giveaways to accompany wellbeing initiatives. These could be branded for you.

- Tips for Personal Resilience
- Tips for the Manager's Role in Resilience
- Tips for Fabulous Managers
- Tips for Introducing Adaptive Leadership
- Tips for Taking Psychological Responsibility
- Tips for Creating a Culture of Sharing Responsibility for the Future Success of the Organisation



For details about our products and services, email Barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk or call 01242 241882