



Psychological Responsibility

Derek Mowbray

April 2014

Background

Over the past few years many organisations have been exposed as having serious issues around culture, leadership, whistleblowing, the interface with customers, clients and patients, the behaviour of staff with each other, the disengagement of the workforce from work and their employers and the disconnection between staff and managers. This adds up to concerns about the workforce, and raises questions about its capacity to provide high quality and effective services in the context of such discontent.

Engagement between a person, others, their work and their employing organisation is known to improve performance. Social engagement, also known as affective engagement, is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption, and is a feature of positive working cultures, good leadership, good working environment and resilient people. Social engagement is a goal worth aiming for, not only because of improved performance, but because the processes of attaining this form of engagement involves the reduction of psychopresenteeism – people being present at work in body but not in mind – and the associated costs, normally between one and a half and two times the combined costs associated with sickness, absence and attrition attributable to psychological distress. The OECD in 2014 calculated the total cost of mental health issues including presenteeism in the UK to be £70 billion per annum.

Calls for a change in culture are now frequent with the most recent being that from the Public Administration Select Committee in April 2014, over the public sector handling of complaints from the public.

Recommendations on how to change culture and transform the public sector have come from various sources, including (with respect to the NHS) The Public Inquiry into Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, followed by a Report on Improving the Safety of Patients in England, both published in 2013, both of which identified the catastrophic consequences of dis-engagement.

The impact of challenges facing the workforce in the NHS had been brewing for a number of years preceding these reports, as shown in the NHS Annual Staff Surveys and other major inquiries.

Amongst several initiatives to change and transform the NHS into a positive working culture that predate these reports was the publication of The Code of Conduct for Managers in Health and Social Care, based on the work of the author, launched by Dame Carol Black in January 2012 on

www.mas.org.uk

www.wellbeing-and-performance-group.org.uk

01242 241882



behalf of The Institute of Healthcare Management. This Code set out behaviours to achieve commitment, trust and engagement between managers and the workforce, leading to a culture based on psychological wellbeing and performance. It was a piece of work that involved all the major professional organisations, including the BPS, trade unions and representatives of the Welsh Government and the Department of Health. Efforts to promulgate this Code as the NHS Code have been thwarted (probably as a result of being caught up in the discussions about manager regulation and licensing) giving rise to speculation about the commitment of senior people in the NHS to genuine culture and leadership change, as this was the focus of the Code.

Psychological Responsibility

As part of his continuing development of approaches to transforming cultures, the author has brought together under a single framework the behaviours and actions that are known to trigger responses that can lead to individual and corporate peak performance as a consequence of embedding psychological wellbeing in the workforce. One of the main pillars of this framework is social engagement.

The framework is known as The WellBeing and Performance Agenda.

The WellBeing and Performance Agenda depends on the workforce adopting behaviours that trigger trust, commitment, engagement and kinship in others, as these are evidenced as being the behaviours that reduce the risk of psychopresenteeism and encourage psychological wellbeing.

Introducing into organisations the idea that everyone needs to behave in certain ways is a substantial challenge requiring changes in attitude by managers towards the workforce. The change needed is from approaches that exploit to approaches that nurture.

The global project to encourage organisations to adopt Social Responsibility (a responsibility for their impact on the environment) has had a major impact on the way businesses and services have changed their attitude towards their engagement with local communities. Those businesses and services that have adopted Social Responsibility are amongst the most successful in the world.

The idea of Social Responsibility has spawned in the author the idea of Psychological Responsibility which aims to encourage everyone at work (and elsewhere) to change attitudes towards themselves and others with whom they engage. The ultimate aim is to attenuate the risk of psychopresenteeism, improve social engagement and provide the opportunity for improved or enhanced personal performance.



Psychological Responsibility

To be responsible for:

The psychological wellbeing of oneself and everyone else

Think independently. Be attentive to others.
Act with humanity

©Derek Mowbray 2014

Encouraging everyone to adopt Psychological Responsibility is a process that requires people to think about themselves and their impact on others. It is, also, a process of developing a psychological culture, one that has the interests and wellbeing of people at its centre.

The slogan, above, that accompanies the Psychological Responsibility headline relates directly to the behaviours needed to enhance the opportunity of the workforce to achieve output behaviours of commitment, trust, social engagement and kinship at work. These output behaviours, when people are encouraged to focus on work, using motivation and provoking concentration, produce high level performance.

Think independently is linked to Attentiveness and Intellectual flexibility.

Be attentive to others links to attentiveness and encouragement.

Act with humanity links to attentiveness, reliability, conflict resolution and encouragement.

Responsibility is how people feel. People take it upon themselves to feel responsible for their own actions by being accountable to themselves for them. Therefore people who take Psychological Responsibility need to feel accountable to themselves for their own psychological welfare as well as being accountable for their impact on others.

This is being shown to be a powerful technique in encouraging people to think before they act and behave. Simply talking about Psychological Responsibility makes people more aware of their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. It is the beginning of a process to bring a cultural shift towards nurturing the workforce as opposed to exploiting it.

www.mas.org.uk

www.wellbeing-and-performance-group.org.uk

01242 241882



Nurturing people enhances their psychological wellbeing. The processes involved trigger key features such as, for example, attentiveness, challenges, encouragement, career progression, involvement, and openness.

People who feel psychologically well perform better than those who don't.

Feeling exploited, however, does the opposite. If a person feels exploited this plays to negative influences on attitude, on being personally valued, on self-esteem and self-worth. For those organisations seeking to perform at their peak, exploitation is to be avoided. In the NHS, the current excess squeeze on money, and the increased demand for more from less, combined with the reshaping of jobs and grades, gives rise to a sense of exploitation.

The idea of Psychological Responsibility, also, helps to counter balance the emergence of the isolation, frenetic experiences, quick fixes and the impact of social media on relationships, by encouraging individuals to think about other people, about the impact we each have on each other, and how this impacts on our psychological wellbeing as well as that of others.

Psychological Responsibility has a link to mindfulness, which is about being in the present. Mindfulness is, also, about taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings in the present. Used as a means of delaying reactions to events and other people, mindfulness acts as a moderator for behaviour and can calm people down in the face of a challenging event or difficult behaviour.

In the workplace when everyone adopts Psychological Responsibility they start the processes of being attentive to others, the processes of creating and sustaining trust, commitment and engagement. These behaviours play to psychological wellbeing and the reduction of psychopresenteeism. The benefits that arise include improved performance, the prevention of psychopresenteeism, a reduction in costs associated with psychopresenteeism, sickness, absence and attrition, and the creation of a culture that provokes social engagement, with the consequences of vibrancy, innovation, adaptability, corporate resilience, and peak performance.

Psychological Responsibility on its own isn't sufficient to bring the cultural and leadership changes the NHS needs. Embedding Psychological Responsibility in organisations requires the implementation of The WellBeing and Performance Agenda. This Agenda is designed to enable organisations achieve peak performance by sustaining psychological wellbeing in the workforce.

The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

The WellBeing and Performance Agenda transforms first level behaviours - attentiveness,

WellBeing and Performance Development Framework



© Derek Mowbray 2014

reliability, intellectual flexibility, conflict resolution and encouragement (Psychological Responsibility) into second level output behaviours (commitment, trust, engagement, kinship, motivation and concentration).

The overall process is shown in the image. It involves introducing **input behaviours** into organisations using the WellBeing and Performance Agenda to produce the **output**

behaviours that provoke commitment, trust, engagement, kinship, motivation and concentration. The result is the potential for peak performance from individuals and the organisation.

The underlying principle of The WellBeing and Performance Agenda is 'sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation'. This is the focus for each of the elements of the agenda.

The elements are - Adaptive Culture, Adaptive Leadership, Adaptive Working Environment and The Adaptive and Resilient Person. Each element has specific activities and actions to be put in place, which reinforce the utility of the Psychological Responsibility behaviours in achieving psychological wellbeing and performance. These are shown in the following image.



Adaptive Leadership, for example, is based on ‘sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation’ and is a process that ensures that all members of the workforce have the organisation and its future as their focus, not the requirements of managers. The ingredients that make this happen include – independent judgment is expected; elephants in the room are raised and dealt with; reflective and continuous learning is institutionalised; and leadership capacity is extended. A distinction is drawn between technical challenges for which solutions are known, and adaptive challenges for which solutions are speculative. As so many organisational challenges are adaptive, the need to capture the combined intelligence of the workforce is an essential ingredient to reaching decisions which reduce and limit their ambiguity. Adaptive Leadership processes eliminate the need for people to whistleblow.

The role of managers becomes that of a conductor of a choir, ensuring that all parts contribute effectively, whilst allowing each person to interpret the music and critique the contributions of others if they are felt not to be contributing to the overall success of the piece. In effect, each member of the choir acts as though they are the conductor, whilst recognising that one person has the oversight and needs to bring everything together.

There are certain behaviours needed to make this happen without everyone descending into chaos.



The Psychological Responsibility behaviours

The behaviours are those that provoke commitment, trust and engagement in others.

Attentiveness – is arguably the most important behaviour to demonstrate. If someone is attentive to you, and you feel they are being attentive, it is almost impossible not to reciprocate and to be attentive in return. This is the essence of successful interaction, but requires considerable skill, concentration and practice. Clinicians will argue that attentiveness is essential in the clinical setting to ensure appropriate assessment and treatment. Managers, however, tend to find attentiveness more difficult to achieve, as they are often more concerned about putting over their point to others than considering the thoughts and feelings of those with whom they interact. This can apply to others in the workforce whose consideration of others may not be at the top of their own personal agenda in interaction.

Reliability – is strongly linked to trust, which is derived from reliability. Trust is the absence of second guessing the motivation of others. Trust occurs when we take people at face value and expend virtually no resources in working out the persons' motivations for actions and what they say. We rely on people we trust. Reliability, leading to trust, is demonstrated by consistency of openness and transparency.

Intellectual flexibility – is a capacity to 'think on your feet'. This requires being able to think independently and respond to any situation by demonstrating thoughtful responses which are not obviously aligned to a known agenda. When this occurs, it is, also, a sign that those engaged in an interaction are 'free' to think independently.

Conflict resolution – is the capacity to negotiate in an interaction, and, where necessary, arrive at a compromise when a conflict is anticipated. This requires considerable skill, concentration and practice, as well as attentiveness and understanding the self interest of others.

Encouragement – is the support provided from one to the other in interaction to say and do things.

All the behaviours add up to humanity – tending and befriending others, in an environment of reciprocal kinship which contributes to mutual psychological wellbeing.

Implementation

The words 'Psychological Responsibility' conjures up many possible interpretations, and in many ways this doesn't matter. Introducing the words into everyday discussion at work has an impact, and makes people stop to think about what it means.

To date, the implementation of this idea has been part of the implementation of The WellBeing and Performance Agenda. This involves three stages of implementation – raising awareness of all the challenges and possible solutions using the Agenda, for example by presentations and



workshops; implementing the Agenda which follows the strategy of conviction and uses action research and learning methods, as well as mentoring internal champions for change and coaching in behaviours, for example, instead of saying I am going to talk to Miss Smith, say I am going to listen to Miss Smith. The third stage is embedding the Agenda which uses methods to reinforce change, such as ensuring the elements of the Agenda are regularly reviewed by managers with their teams.

However, there is no reason why the implementation of Psychological Responsibility should not be a stand alone project. Whilst it will not transform culture and leadership on its own it starts the process of change. This could involve the introduction of cards as a way forward with the slogan for Psychological Responsibility conveying its meaning. If every member of staff had a card with Psychological Responsibility and the slogan printed on it, it provides a physical reminder of what is expected in practice. Implementing the idea also requires articles to be written in Newsletters and elsewhere, so that it becomes a common phrase. It requires managers to place Psychological Responsibility on the agenda for their meetings with staff, and to encourage discussion about where the idea has made a difference to relationships between staff and between staff and their clients or patients.

Psychological Responsibility could, also, become a unifying feature for Applied Psychologists. Adopting the words could become a unifying purpose for applied psychologists working inside organisations and other communities – a purpose that is ultimately intended to change attitudes towards people, and to raise the level of consciousness about the importance of attentive and humane interactions.

Conclusion

Psychological Responsibility is an idea to assist with transforming culture in organisations from one of exploitation to one of nurturing and social engagement. This is achievable in any organisation if people think about their interactions with others.

Such an approach has an impact on the workforce, and in conjunction with implementing The WellBeing and Performance Agenda, would have reduced the risks of behaviours highlighted in recent Inquiries in the NHS.

Derek Mowbray



Derek Mowbray is an Applied Psychologist who specialises in the primary prevention of psychological distress at work. This means creating the culture and leadership environment in organisations that prevent the events and behaviours that may trigger a stressful response in others. The result is improved personal and organisational performance and a deeper interest, commitment and social engagement of the workforce in the organisation and the clients it serves.

Derek Mowbray is Chairman of The WellBeing and Performance Group, a Director of The Management Advisory Service (MAS), the Director of Organisation Health Psychologists (OrganisationHealth), and a Director of The National Centre for Applied Psychology.

Derek Mowbray is Visiting Professor of Psychology at Northumbria University and the University of Gloucestershire. At Gloucestershire he is tutor to the MSc in Wellbeing and Performance delivered through the Applied Psychology Centre, an innovation of his supported by the University.

He is a Vice President of The international Stress Management Association.



About MAS

We are:

Specialists in Organisation and Leadership Development
Specialists in Corporate and Personal Resilience

Our Programmes

We provide workshops and masterclasses on:

- The Wellbeing and Performance Agenda
- Personal Resilience
- Corporate Resilience
- Adaptive Leadership
- Organisational Health

Mentoring Scheme

Our mentoring scheme exists to mentor leaders, managers, Organisation Development specialists and others in the implementation of The WellBeing and Performance Agenda.

Our Guides

More information about the various aspects of The Wellbeing and Performance Agenda can be found in our 4 practical guides which are available on our website - <http://www.mas.org.uk/publications.html> .

Derek Mowbray's Guide to WellBeing and Performance
Derek Mowbray's Guide to Corporate Resilience
Derek Mowbray's Guide to Adaptive Leadership
Derek Mowbray's Guide to Personal Resilience.

For more information about our programmes and services, please email barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk or call +44 (0)1242 241882.