The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

Professor Derek Mowbray

What I am aiming to achieve?

My aim is to make the workplace a terrific place to work!
My aim is, also, to help organisations achieve consistent peak performance.

Why?

We spend a large proportion of our lives working and in workplaces. The better workplaces are led and managed, the greater is their performance; the more successful they are, the more satisfied is the workforce. Workplaces are controlled communities; places that can be the source of massive satisfaction, personal growth and success. They should be an oasis in a turbulent world.

Alas they turn out to be places of misery and unhappiness for some, in fact, for about a quarter of the workforce. Often their workplaces will, also, be under performing as businesses or services.

It is astonishing that some workplaces appear to be set up to fail and under achieve. You would think, wouldn't you, that there should be an ethical, commercial or public obligation on leaders and managers to ensure that businesses and services function at their peak, almost all the time. Under performing workplaces do not realise that a committed and engaged workforce can produce peak performance and organisational success.

There is no reason why workplaces shouldn't be the most rewarding places to be. They should be places where everyone fulfils their personal aspirations, enjoys the day and derives complete satisfaction. The workplace should be the oasis for people, a place that motivates people to get out of bed and run towards, knowing that their day is going to be brilliant!

The domestic world is full of challenges and events over which we often have little control whereas the workplace is a controlled community.

It’s in our gift to make the workplace **fantastic**.

The workplace needs to be a place which is alive, where all the skills, knowledge and experiences mix together to create an enriched environment. Only in this way will peak performance be attained.

How can this be achieved?
The image shows the emphasis on creating commitment and trust, the cornerstone of an enriched environment. Commitment and trust can lead to social engagement, a sense of attachment that provides energy to individuals – a buzz, focus and concentration that produces peak performance. The headings around the circle are all ingredients for generating commitment and trust. They translate into specific actions to be taken that focus on the outcome of commitment and trust, for example, worklife balance isn’t about the balance between home and work; it is about the ability of the organisation to respond to domestic crisis. You will find that, if the organisation supports an employee with a domestic crisis, the commitment of the employee to the organisation in return becomes more intense and stronger.

The organisation should be the oasis for personal enrichment; a sanctuary in a chaotic and challenging world; a place where we want to be; a place that provides us with the triggers to enhance personal esteem, self efficacy and confidence. If we have these triggers we are more likely to focus on our work and produce peak performance. We are more likely to want to go to work. We are more likely to feel psychologically fit and well.

The ingredients for creating such an environment are added to the ingredients in the first slide. They all add up to the ingredients we need in the workplace to produce the best chance for generating commitment, trust and social engagement, which, in turn, produces peak performance.

Once again, the headings have a particular slant towards generating commitment and trust. For example, training and development – we respond very well to acquiring new skills, knowledge and experience; we are driven to acquiring these things. If the organisation supplies these we become more committed to it as a result. Another example is rewards. This doesn’t necessarily mean rewards in a resource sense but genuine acknowledgement, publically, for work that is performed well – so the reward could simply be public encouragement. Such rewards feed our sense of psychological wellbeing; they demonstrate personal value to the organisation and, in return, strengthens commitment to it.
What is corporate resilience?

The key to corporate resilience is flexibility and adaptability; the capacity to respond purposefully and strongly to internal and external pressures. All organisations, as well as all people, need to change in order to survive, and this means being able to see ahead and adapt to the foreseeable climate and demands as well as responding quickly and successfully to immediate challenges.

So, let’s take a look at some general descriptions of organisations and see if you recognise any of the characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High personal wellbeing</th>
<th>Average personal wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good business performance</td>
<td>Poor business performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics:</td>
<td>Characteristics:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear purpose</td>
<td>Ambiguous purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment, Trust, Engagement</td>
<td>Poor terms and conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective recruitment practices</td>
<td>Average terms and conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good terms and conditions</td>
<td>Mismatched skills to jobs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team working; staff involvement</td>
<td>Laissez-faire management practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive leadership and management</td>
<td>Few company wellbeing programmes</td>
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<td>Customer and staff focus</td>
<td>Average company benefits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low sickness absence</td>
<td>Average sickness absence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low staff turnover</td>
<td>High staff turnover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low costs/high profits</td>
<td>High costs/low profits</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What we are trying to do is create organisations that resemble and have in place some, if not all, of the features in the top left hand side of the slide. Obviously we need to adapt the language to the sector, but you’ll get the idea. So, which quartile fits your understanding of you own organisations?

You will find, of course, that there isn’t a single description that fits the whole organisation. There will be features taken from each of the quartiles that make a hybrid version, but the idea is to make
some assessment of where you are now, and what you need to do to get to the top left hand quartile.

We need to start by seeking to understand what is meant by psychological wellbeing and performance.

**What is psychological wellbeing?**

If you feel well you perform better than if you feel unwell. Feeling well may have little to do with your physical health. Health is one ingredient to feeling well. There are many others. Feeling well is idiosyncratic and is provoked by a number of ingredients.

One is that if individuals know what they want out of life, and are reasonably clear about this even in general terms, they are more likely to feel psychologically well. The idea of what individuals want may change many times, but having something to aim for is a key component of feeling well.

Another comes from a range of ingredients, which are shown in this slide. The trick for individuals is the challenge themselves as to the personal ingredients that make them feel a sense of success and happiness/contentment – success and happiness being a proxy for personal survival. We strive to feel successful and happy, and when we don’t we feel uncomfortable and worse.

**What is performance?**

I have a specific focus on one aspect of performance that influences all other ingredients of performance – namely concentration. The ability to focus attention on tasks and complete them without diversion is, to me, the essential aim of peak performing individuals and organisations. The selection of the task for completion, and the marrying of appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to perform the task, is, of course, essential too, but without the ability to concentrate on the task all the skills, knowledge and experience in the world will not yield peak performance.

In my model, the circles in red represent the features that add up to concentration – no hesitation, deviation or repetition, taken from the Radio 4 programme ‘Just a Minute’. Anyone listening to the programme will understand how concentration is essential to play the game. So, too, in working life.
The point about this is that the organisation needs to create and sustain the working environment that provokes people to concentrate. There is no consensus on how long an individual can concentrate, so my rule of thumb is to aim for 50 minutes in every hour, with a ten minute break to relax the brain and do other things. This is obviously contingent on the type of task being performed, but the underlying approach is to secure relevant time for the individual to concentrate on the task.

The implication of this is to eliminate the interferences to concentration, whether they are interruptions or more ingrained features such as toxic cultures, poor management behaviours and practices, and poor working environment.

**Problems at work for which Corporate and Personal Resilience is required.**
The general risks to organisation and personal survival are listed in the following slide. Are you at risk to any of these features?
These may turn into actual threats. A range of threats occur at work, and the following image lists these:

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[Diagram showing various types of threats]
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**What is stress?**

The impact of risks and threats on individuals, and therefore, on organisations comes in the form of psychological distress or stress. Anyone experiencing stress loses personal control over their mind, which renders them less capable of responding to risks and threats in ways that enable them to be overcome effectively.

However, stress has a bad press and its existence is sometimes ignored by managers whose understanding of the implications of stress is less than basic. Also, stress, as a term, isn’t very helpful in disentangling the various features that can, also, be features of peak performance. So, I have devised the following spectrum of psychological distress to help understand more deeply what I am trying to achieve with the WellBeing and Performance Agenda.

We start with a definition of psychological distress:

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Mental stress is an extreme adverse psychological response to personal perception of uncontrollable pressure, tension and strain.
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The key elements of this definition are that stress is an extreme response to something perceived by the individual. The extreme response is important because stress, using this definition, means the individual loses control over their mind, and having lost control are less capable of focusing on the actions required to address an event or the adverse behaviour of other people.
Stress is at the ‘wrong’ end of a continuum that includes pressure, tension and strain.

Pressure is a stimulant. When we are under pressure to achieve a task, we tend to increase our concentration and focus to achieve the task at hand. This works when we remain in control of ourselves and can command attention to the task. It is not uncommon for people under pressure to complete a task to become so focused as the ignore others, tell them to go away, or even be rude in seeking to complete the task. People become irritable when interrupted whilst under pressure to complete something. So, pressure is a key to peak performance. It remains so only in so far as the individual can maintain control over their own mind. If, pressure is relentless and goes beyond personal control we may deteriorate into tension.

Tension is also, a stimulant. It is a stimulant because we can ‘feel’ tension. There is a sense of discomfort that we seek to get rid of. We don’t like feeling tense. We try to do anything to get rid of the feeling. This stimulates us to do things to get rid of the feeling, whether it’s to complete a task or buy a product (sales techniques can often include mounting tension to take action). However, if tension persists we can lose control and then we deteriorate into strain.

Strain is an impairment to performance. We think more about the cause of the strain and less about our work. This produces under performance. The causes of strain are many and varied, but no matter the cause, the impact is under performance. Unless we can regain control over our mind we are likely to continue to under perform and may deteriorate into stress.

Stress is a catastrophe as we can prevent most of it. People with stress have lost control over their mind. They become forgetful; look into themselves as self preservation, and tend to be incapable of doing anything very successfully. It is a dreadful feeling and causes misery. Un-treated, stress can deteriorate into some nasty physical conditions.

The loss of control over our mind can be a combination of how resilient we are personally, and the persistence of events and behaviours that impact on us. Even the most resilient of individuals may lose control because of the persistence of the events and behaviours surrounding us.
Psychological presenteeism

In a positive working environment, one that provokes us to concentrate and provides other elements that stimulate us to feel well psychologically, we can expect to perform at our peak. We can expect to be socially engaged with our work and our organisation.

Too often, however, there are elements at play that divert our concentration and lead us to underperform. This may cause us to come to work, to be present, but underperform. This is psychological presenteeism.

If we persist in coming to work and continue to underperform we may eventually find that the causes of our underperformance are too great to tolerate, and we escape. Once we escape we don’t perform at work. Once we escape we may perform perfectly well elsewhere, but not in the workplace that caused the underperformance.

As some people spend a substantial period of time at work underperforming before they escape, the costs of psychological presenteeism are very high. The current estimate of costs are about 1.5 to 2 times the combined costs of sickness absence and attrition attributable to psychological distress.

Calculating the costs is, clearly, a complicated thing to do, but they are derived from the increasing numbers of people employed to complete tasks, the length of time tasks take to be completed, the use of agency staff, the time taken up by managers to deal with situations, the time taken in repeating tasks, and more obviously the errors that occur, and in the NHS, the ‘never’ events that happen.

Proportion of losses attributable to psychological distress
The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

The WellBeing and Performance Agenda has been designed to eliminate psychological presenteeism.

The agenda is located to lift people out of the trough of under performance into peak performance, and to prevent people from deteriorating into under performance.

The elimination of psychological presenteeism, using the elements in the agenda, has the added advantage of provoking high performance. So the agenda has two benefits – achieving peak performance, and eliminating the huge costs associated with under performance due to psychological presenteeism.

Commitment and trust

The coathook on which peak performance can be achieved is to create the opportunity for individuals to concentrate on their work.

The two main elements that form the foundation for this approach are to achieve a) commitment and b) trust between individuals, their organisation, their managers and colleagues and their work.

Commitment is a sensation of attachment, committing oneself to something, in a whole person way where our energy, motivation, buzz and concentration is offered completely and unreservedly. There are no doubts or hesitation in our ‘giving of ourselves’ to the object of our commitment. At work, this commitment is to the organisation, its people and its products and services, its clients (who may help to create and deliver the products and services) and its recipients of the products and services (customers and patients, for example).

Trust is never thinking of the motivation behind someone doing something. There is an implicit belief that whatever anyone is doing they are doing for ‘right reasons’. These reasons have to accord with our own reasons for doing things. We trust the airline pilot to fly the plane properly because he or she also wants to get to the destination safely.
Commitment and trust can lead to social engagement. Social engagement is characterised by vigour, absorption and dedication. This is a more intense version of commitment.

Description of an organisation with commitment and trust
It is useful to have a general description of an organisation that we would like to work for. The following description has been derived from the characteristics of organisations globally with low sickness absence levels and high performance.

The description can act as a hymn sheet for organisations wishing to aspire to peak performance, and provides managers and employees with a clear aim.

I have used this description to create a Charter for WellBeing and Performance that organisations can adapt and use as their own hymn sheet (obtained from www.mas.org.uk)

- a clear, unambiguous purpose, expressed as a simple ‘big idea’, an idea which all the staff relate to closely, and are proud to discuss with friends and colleagues.

- an atmosphere of confidence, where all the staff are interested in each other, support each other, and project this confidence towards clients and customers.

- staff who behave respectfully towards each other, value each other’s views and opinions, work in teams which are places of mutual support, where anything is debated without a hint of humiliation, where the critique of individual and team work is welcomed, discussed and where lessons are learnt and implemented.

- staff who ‘go the extra mile’ by providing unsolicited ideas, thoughts, stimulus to each other, and where their interest in their customers offers something more than is expected, beyond courtesy, and beyond service, offering attentiveness and personal interest.

- challenges for their staff, that provide opportunities for personal development through new experiences, and which treat everyone with fairness and understanding.

- staff who are personally driven towards organisation and personal success - intellectually, financially, socially and emotionally.
Placing the workforce at the centre of corporate strategy

Unfortunately, many organisations forget they are constituted of a workforce, and frequently delegate the interest in the workforce to such groups as HR specialists, or Occupational Health specialists, committees with a wellbeing remit. The consequences are often serious for the performance of the organisation despite the best efforts of these groups of specialists.

What is requires is for the workforce to be at the core of the organisation, central to corporate strategy, where the questions are about how the workforce can achieve corporate objectives before the corporate objectives are defined to be implemented, not as an after thought.

A strategy for managing stress

Once placed at the centre of corporate strategy a strategy for managing stress is helpful in identifying what needs to be in place to prevent stress and manage those individuals who suffer from stress.

The strategic framework presented here was first introduced by me in 1990 and has been used in several different contexts for different purposes. It enables organisations to make an assessment as to where they are in the provision of services relating to the prevention and management of stress at work.
In order to prevent stress, and achieve peak performance, we focus on the prevention strategy – strategy 1. To sustain a focus on prevention we focus on strategy 5. All other strategies are concerned with those who suffer stress, which is not the focus of this presentation.

Phases in The WellBeing and Performance Agenda

The illumination of the prevention strategy is found in the WellBeing and Performance Agenda. This agenda is designed to eliminate psychological presenteeism and achieve peak performance.

Phase 1 – Discovery

Phase 1 is the Discovery Phase – where organisations seek to discover the level of psychological wellbeing of the workforce, and to discover the elements that impact on their psychological wellbeing.

I have found that staff surveys often fail to detect the elements that impact on the psychological wellbeing of the workforce, which is why it is necessary to undertake assessments with a specific focus on discovery.

The general approach to discovery is set out in this slide.
Phase 2 – The Culture
Culture influences everyone at work. We behave according to the cultural influences on us. In order to provoke concentration and peak performance there are several elements that need to be in place that form the culture of the organisation. These elements are designed to achieve commitment and trust.

Each element has a specific focus on generating commitment and trust. For example, a clear and unambiguous purpose, expressed as a ‘big idea’ has the capacity to provoke commitment. Another element – values – has the capacity to provoke commitment and trust if the values reflect the values of the workforce. Values are personal drivers, they explain the behaviours of people, and need to be captured corporately in order to capture the drivers of the workforce. Values that are aspirational carry less strength and are often ignored unless they are aligned with individual values. The interplay between corporate and personal values cannot be underestimated in terms of generating commitment and trust.

The rules are those which govern how the organisation is meant to work. They need to be defined in terms of how the organisation is going to create and sustain commitment and trust. There are thirteen rules that achieve this, and are set out in The Management Standards for WellBeing and Performance (obtained from www.mas.org.uk).

Phase 3 – The Management
Organisations are controlled communities, controlled by leaders and managers. Their behaviour and style of leadership and management are pivotal in achieving peak performance and the prevention of psychological presenteeism.

The elements in developing appropriate leadership and management are set out in the slide.

The style of leadership I promote is Adaptive Leadership which is based on the principle of shared responsibility. This has all the elements that contribute to generating commitment and trust, including a sense of ownership of the
organisation and its work by all the employees and managers.

The leader and manager behaviours are set out in The Manager’s Code (obtainable from www.mas.org.uk)

Phase 4 – The Working Environment
The working environment influences concentration. The working environment needs to eliminate all the features that prevent concentration and the slide shows the elements that contribute to a positive environment.

It should be noted that health is one of these elements and refers specifically to the ability of the workforce to exercise and obtain nutritionally positive food, food that energises and aids concentration.

Other elements include IT support – support that aids concentration and supports the achievement of tasks, not IT that is in constant need or repair.

Phase 5 – The Resilient Person
Personal resilience is heavily influenced by the implementation of the previous phases. If the context for working is supportive of concentration by provoking commitment and trust, then there will be fewer events and adverse behaviours that require individuals to be personally resilient.

Resilience is about personal control over their mind so that they may choose to adopt robust attitudes towards challenging events and other people.
In order to strengthen resilience attention needs to be applied to three areas – personal control, which is developed by strengthening one’s own capacity to be in control of oneself; control over responses to events, the capacity to be in control of oneself in chaotic situations with complex problems to be overcome; and control over one’s responses to other people – developing good interactive skills and having strong and important relationships with people who are intrinsic to personal success and happiness.

My development framework for strengthening personal resilience is in the image and shows the 8 elements I use in our personal resilience programme. The framework is limited to what can be achieved in a masterclass in developing personal resilience. Clearly, other elements can play a significant part, but these have maximum impact in minimum time.

**Conclusion**

My aim is to make the workplace a terrific place to work.

There is a large range of risks and threats that often make the workplace an unpleasant place to work, and which causes individuals and organisations to under perform.

To improve organisations and to help them become peak performing places I have developed The WellBeing and Performance Agenda, based on generating commitment and trust between employees, their work and their organisation.

There are 5 phases to the agenda, and each needs to be in place to achieve a peak performing organisation and a terrific place to work.

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Derek Mowbray is a Chartered Psychologist and Chartered Scientist, with a doctorate in the psychology of leadership.

Derek Mowbray specialises in the primary prevention of psychological distress at work, with a focus on promoting wellbeing and performance. He provides consultancy and facilitation in four areas:

- Building and sustaining healthy organisations
- Promoting and adopting adaptive leadership and management principles
- Boosting personal and corporate resilience
- Resolving lifestyle@work issues – impediments to wellbeing and performance

Derek focuses on organisation culture, the behaviour of leaders and managers in relation to their employees, personal and corporate resilience and on issues of lifestyle@work that impede performance. By helping managers to develop the behaviours that encourage commitment and trust, staff engagement and levels of personal performance are strengthened and improved; staff retention increased; absence and presenteeism levels will be reduced along with their huge associated costs.

In 2011 his management standards for A Healthy Organisation were published and are now widely used across all sectors. In early 2012 his Manager’s Code for Health and Social Care was launched by Dame Carol Black on behalf of the Institute of Healthcare Management. Derek Mowbray is now working on the next in his series of Guides - Managing your own stress at work, due for publication in 2014.

Derek Mowbray’s clients are from all sectors and are of all shapes and sizes. His work is being adopted throughout the UK and Ireland and overseas.

Derek is a regular contributor to HSE, CIPD, HSJ, and LinkedIn communities, and has made national presentations at conferences for the International Stress Management Association, NHS Employers, the HSJ World Class Workforce, the Health and Wellbeing at Work, The Royal College of General Practitioners, The British Psychological Society and the CIPD.

Derek is a visiting Professor at Northumbria University and the University of Gloucestershire.
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](http://www.mas.org.uk/publications.html).

More information about the processes, frameworks and assessments involved in this programme can be found in our Guides:

- 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.

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