

ENVIRONMENT: STANDARD 5. PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

How to equip line managers to support the mental health of their teams

This interactive panel session and workshop offered practical insights and strategies on how organisations can equip line managers to support the mental wellbeing of their teams. Moderated by Jaan Madan, global head of training at MindForward Alliance, the session included questions with a panel of experts followed by an extended roundtable discussion that encouraged participant feedback.

“If we don’t start to recognise quality line managers and reward those doing a great job, there will be no incentive for people to do it well.”

Charlotte Carter, Culture and Engagement Director, KPMG



Watch the
session
recording

RESEARCH

41% of line managers have had any formal mental health training and 42% felt confident in opening a dialogue on the topic.¹

When managers are trained, their confidence to support their team rises from 58% to 83%. Furthermore, employees say when their managers are well equipped, feelings of lacking of interest, motivation or energy reduced from 49% to 37% and the desire to quit reduces from 33% to 20%.¹

REFERENCE

¹The Global Business Collaboration for Better Workplace Mental Health (2024).²Mental health in the workplace: a global picture.

SPEAKERS



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Key Takeaways

1

The role of the line manager has evolved in recent years to include not only commercial success but also to look after the wellbeing of their teams. Managers play a pivotal role in supporting employee wellbeing, for example through dictating workload and working practices, fostering inclusivity, and building trust and connection, making them essential to the development of a thriving, high performing organisation.

2

Looking at data from employee surveys and focus groups can help identify the key challenges line managers in an organisation are facing and how the organisation can support them in their roles.

3

Organisations should demonstrate to line managers that there is support for them in their roles. Examples include providing training and creating toolkits on how to have sensitive conversations about particular topics, set boundaries and manage performance with a focus on compassion and wellbeing. Some organisations have put in place ‘Employee Assistance Consulting’ with a clear pathway on who line managers can contact to get support on a particular team challenge. This support should be consistent and embedded across different touchpoints with the line manager such as other management training sessions.

4

Training line managers on how they can create mentally healthy working environments and support the wellbeing of their team is important. This can include giving them the skills to have compassionate conversations and to signpost to resources whilst maintaining boundaries and not being expected to solve every problem themselves. On balance mandatory training tends to be less impactful. Instead focus on making training engaging and having leaders visible in promoting attendance.

5

Managers should be made aware of what support is available for them and how to access it. For example, create an easily accessible wellbeing library on the intranet, featuring manager toolkits that support mental health and employee wellbeing. Communication is key to continually remind line managers on the support available to them. In addition, line managers should be made aware of where they can signpost employees to for additional support.

6

Senior leadership engagement on the mental wellbeing agenda helps to create a culture for line managers to prioritise the mental wellbeing of their teams. When senior leaders openly discuss mental health issues and demonstrate vulnerability, they set a powerful precedent, encouraging managers and employees to engage in honest, authentic conversations about their own mental wellbeing. Data-driven insights, such as demonstrating a clear link between employee wellbeing and increased productivity, can be vital in securing leadership backing for mental wellbeing initiatives.

7

Organisations should consider what skills line managers need to be good people leaders. Often people are promoted on technical ability but haven’t yet developed their people skills.

8

As organisations place further expectations on line managers to incorporate team wellbeing as part of their role, they should look at how this is measured and rewarded. A key challenge is the conflict between commercial interests and spending time on team wellbeing. Even if an organisation has great learning resources, managers may feel they don’t have the time to engage with it. To make team wellbeing a equal priority, some organisations have time codes associated with supporting team wellbeing.

9

Upward feedback and reverse mentoring can be effective ways for managers to hear about what their teams need. Line managers can be encouraged to spend more time with their teams to understand their experiences. For example, having more regular check-ins rather than one annual appraisal and incorporating creative approaches like a “walk and talk” to engage with their teams in a relaxed environment, fostering deeper conversations, which can unlock valuable insights that might not surface in the office.