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WORKPLACE WELLBEING STRATEGY

How to build a mentally healthy workplace: What works?

Webinar, 11 March 2025

MindForward Alliance, the global expert in workplace mental health, hosted a panel discussion to answer the question: *How can businesses take a successful and sustainable approach to workplace mental health?*

Key questions that the panel addressed were:

- [Why workplace mental health should be a business priority](#)
- [What is the most successful approach to workplace mental wellbeing](#)
- [How do leaders help to create a psychologically safe culture and challenge stigma](#)
- [How can businesses support people managers to support employee wellbeing](#)
- [How to measure employee wellbeing to shape your workplace mental health approach](#)
- [How to roll out a workplace mental health strategy across international offices](#)
- [What challenges remain](#)

For those who missed the discussion, the [recording of the whole event can be accessed here](#). MindForward Alliance's **Thriving at Work Framework** was referenced throughout and the [Framework can be accessed here](#).

ABOUT MINDFORWARD ALLIANCE

We support businesses to build mentally healthy workplaces, where people and businesses will thrive. We provide expert insights, practical tools and share knowledge across industries and regions.

Our [membership programme](#), [workplace mental health assessments](#), bespoke [training](#), consultancy and [Leadership Pledge](#) and [resources](#) support businesses to achieve meaningful change.



Summary of insights

Why workplace mental health should be a business priority

Poor employee mental health is a growing challenge worldwide. **Depression and anxiety alone result in 12 billion lost working days globally, costing \$1 trillion in lost productivity¹.** Indicators of stress, burnout, and unhappiness are higher than ever before.

Citing the latest academic evidence, Sarah Cunningham said that as well as there being a moral responsibility to support employee mental wellbeing, there is a strong **business case**. Better employee mental wellbeing boosts productivity, talent attraction, retention and financial performance.

- Research reveals that a **one-point increase** in employee wellbeing (on a 0-10 scale) can lead to an average **12% rise in productivity**, increasing to **20% in roles requiring social and emotional intelligence².**
- A study of **24 million jobseekers** found candidates were **14% more likely to apply** to positions at companies with an average or above-average wellbeing score, compared to those with a low score³. Furthermore, employees who provide a low review score for the company they currently work for are **twice as likely to seek new jobs⁴.**
- Companies with high employee wellbeing outperform major stock market benchmarks such as the S&P 500, Nasdaq-100 and Dow Jones Industrial Average⁵.

Read more evidence for why this is a business priority on **page 5 of the Framework**.

REFERENCES:

1. [Mental health at work](#)
2. [Does Employee Happiness Have an Impact on Productivity? | Management Science](#)
3. [Workplace wellbeing and firm performance - ORA - Oxford University Research Archive](#)
4. [Workplace Happiness and Employee Recruitment | Academy of Management Proceedings](#)
5. [Workplace wellbeing and firm performance - ORA - Oxford University Research Archive](#)

What is the most successful approach to workplace mental wellbeing

All panellists agreed that a successful workplace mental health approach is one that is holistic, which considers factors that impact on wellbeing across the whole organisation, at both a team and individual level.

Will Fleming cautioned against a common mistake of relying solely on individual-focused interventions, like mindfulness apps or resilience training. Without addressing broader workplace stressors - such as consistently heavy workloads or poor line management - these efforts can be ineffective. They can even lead to employee resentment by shifting the burden for change solely onto them. Will, instead, recommends the holistic approach recommended by the Thriving at Work Framework and in the WWM's Work Wellbeing Playbook. You can read more about Will's research in Industrial Relations Journal⁶ or HR Magazine⁷.

The panel broke it down by pointing to the three areas that any business should address.

- 1. Organisational Culture:** create a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety where workplace mental wellbeing is prioritised.
- 2. Working Environment:** develop a mentally healthy working environment with good working conditions and positive relationships.
- 3. Resources and support for individuals (preventive and reactive):** provide and signpost to accessible resources and services so that people can get help when needed.

MindForward Alliance's [Thriving at Work Framework](#), a resource developed in collaboration with the World Wellbeing Movement and informed by the insights and experiences of 100+ businesses, outlines how businesses can achieve these three essential pillars.

A&O Shearman and PwC, who are also MindForward Alliance members, said that they rely on the Framework as a guide to help shape their whole wellbeing strategy.

How do leaders create a psychologically safe culture and challenge stigma

In the context of discussing Pillar 1 – create a culture of wellbeing and psychological safety - PwC shared how their senior business leaders have been acting to challenge mental health stigma and foster a mentally healthy workplace. They established the Mental Health Advocate Network, which is a group of Partners and Directors with knowledge or experience of mental health challenges, who will listen in confidence and without judgement. They create opportunities for them to have open conversations about challenges both personal and professional, and how they deal with them. This has helped to normalise the conversation around mental health and helped to create psychological safety across the organisation. More generally, PwC also mentioned how they encourage all business leaders to role model healthy behaviour – e.g. taking breaks after busy periods and talking about how they have sought support when needed.

REFERENCES:

6. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irj.12418>
7. HR Magazine - Individual-level wellbeing strategies aren't working

How can businesses support people managers to support employee wellbeing

In the context of discussing Pillar 2 – creating a mentally healthy work environment – everyone agreed on the important role of people managers.

PwC structured approach to career and wellbeing manager support

PwC shared how they support managers of client-facing employees, who often work across multiple projects, with different managers on each. To provide both with project-specific and long-term career support, PwC has developed a structured approach for managers.

In some areas at the start of a client project, managers will discuss working preferences and personal priorities, such as sports or caregiving responsibilities, with each individual team member. This early conversation helps managers get to know their team members from the start and allows them to balance priorities inside and outside of work. Beyond each project, employees have a career coach or talent coach - a member of the business who provides career guidance, oversees overall performance and supports wellbeing. These coaches help employees navigate their career paths while ensuring they feel valued and supported.

PwC provides mental health training for all career coaches and talent coaches. This equips them with active listening skills and the confidence to engage in sensitive conversations, offer appropriate support, and refer employees to additional resources when needed. This all helps to create a culture of psychological safety, where employees feel heard and supported, increasing their ability to thrive.

PwC also offers a career coach support team as a resource for line managers and talent coaches, ensuring they have the guidance they need. Through this multi-layered system, PwC works to create an environment where employees receive the right support at different stages of their careers.

A&O Shearman 'Ten Small Things' campaign supports manager conversations

A&O Shearman recognises that while some stress will be part of the job and can even be motivating, unnecessary stressors should be addressed. To address this, they launched the 'Ten Small Things' campaign, which empowered employees to improve their working environment through everyday interactions. In particular, the campaign encouraged managers to work with their teams to identify common stressors and work to find practical solutions. For example, ensuring proper handovers before annual leave to prevent employees from being contacted unnecessarily while away. By focusing on one small change each month, the initiative helped teams develop sustainable, positive work habits.

In addition, A&O Shearman recently worked with the Mindful Business Charter to develop guidance for transaction lawyers. The principles of the guidance promote effective people and project management and will be a key element of the firm's approach to creating a positive working environment that helps people to thrive and perform at their best.

Will Fleming cited studies showing that bringing a team together to identify stressors and challenging ways of working benefit everyone. He also pointed to line manager training as being an effective intervention for workplace mental health⁸.

REFERENCE:

8. [The relationship between line manager training in mental health and organisational outcomes | PLOS One](#)
Milligan-Saville, J. S., Tan, L., Gayed, A., Barnes, C., Madan, I., Dobson, M., Bryant, R. A., Christensen, H., Mykletun, A., & Harvey, S. B. (2017). Workplace mental health training for managers and its effect on sick leave in employees: A cluster randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet: Psychiatry*, 4(11), 850–858.

How to measure employee wellbeing to shape your workplace mental health approach

Sarah recommended that, as a first step, businesses should start by establishing a baseline to understand their workforce's current wellbeing. She recommended measuring four key dimensions of employee wellbeing: job satisfaction, happiness at work, stress at work, and sense of purpose.

However, she noted that these questions only tell you *how* employees feel, and not *why* they feel that way. To further understand *why* employees feel as they do, the next step is to measure as many of the 12 evidence-based key drivers of workplace wellbeing as possible, which include manager support, flexibility, trust and belonging. The aim would be to identify the poorest performing drivers of work wellbeing within an organisation and focus workplace wellbeing interventions on these specific areas as a starting point.

Further, while work wellbeing surveys are vital to establish a baseline of how employees feel and to start analysing why they feel that way, there are many other valuable measures that can and should be considered - many of which most organisations already measure. See page 24 of the Thriving at Work Framework for a table of suggested data measurements.

For more details on measurement, see page 23 of the [Thriving at Work Framework](#). Find out more about the 12 drivers of wellbeing in the [Work Wellbeing Playbook](#).

How to roll out a workplace mental health strategy across international offices

Designing a mental health strategy will give your business a clear plan of action to help you to achieve your goals and is something which you can measure progress against.

A&O Shearman has developed a structured approach to implementing workplace mental health initiatives globally. Their goal has been to drive consistent progress across their multi-region business, while addressing regional priorities and cultural differences.

To achieve this, the firm has established a governance system led by a **Global Wellbeing Advisory Board**. This board, which includes partners from across the network, plays a key role in shaping and measuring the success of their global workplace wellbeing strategy.

A&O Shearman has also set **minimum global standards** for workplace wellbeing, based on MindForward Alliance's **Thriving at Work Framework**. The global wellbeing team collaborates with local offices to determine which of the ten global standards should be prioritised based on regional needs. At the end of each year, progress is reviewed across offices and reported back to the Global Wellbeing Advisory Board.

For measurement, A&O Shearman uses an **employee survey** that includes questions on mental health and wellbeing, including psychological safety and working environment. Analysis of results helps to identify trends, such as the positive impact of supportive teams, effective communication and meaningful work on wellbeing.

Additionally, the global law firm uses [MindForward Alliance's Thriving at Work Assessment](#) to benchmark their strategy against evidence-based standards and industry peers. "The Assessment, and follow up expert consultancy, helps us to refine our approach, identify new priorities, and ensure we are aligned with best practices."

Page 22 of the Framework has advice about how to design an effective workplace mental health strategy.

Challenges remaining

The panel ended the session by reflecting on the organisational challenges that are barriers to an effective approach to workplace mental health, which still need to be tackled.

- There will still be people in the organisation who don't yet understand workplace mental health and there is still work to be done in bringing those "hard to reach" people on this journey
- The people who have the remit for employee mental wellbeing don't always have the resources and support they need to do the job they are given. It is important to get this onto - and keep it on - the boardroom agenda
- There is more need for measurement and evaluation of workplace interventions so that we can identify those that have the most impact.

MindForward Alliance will continue to focus on these challenges and more. To keep in touch with us on events and resources, please [sign up to our newsletter here](#).

Resources mentioned

- [Thriving at Work Framework](#) – an evidence-based guide to help your business make the case for, design and execute a sustainable workplace mental health strategy.
- [Thriving at Work Assessment](#) – a comprehensive evaluation and benchmarking tool to help measure progress in workplace mental health.
- [Work Wellbeing Playbook](#) – a list of evidence-based interventions categorised by 12 key drivers of workplace wellbeing.
- [Guidance for transactional lawyers](#) – from A&O Shearman and the Mindful Business Charter.
- [MindForward Alliance training](#) – tailored workplace mental health training, including for line managers.
- For a wider range of workplace mental health resources and guidance, please go to Page 27 – 29 of our [Thriving at Work Framework](#), which has a comprehensive list of workplace mental health resources that will support your business.