



# Stress

is a key driver of workplace wellbeing

**Stress** is the result of imbalance between the demands and expectations on people and the resources and abilities they have to manage those demands. Employee stress can pose serious risks to workplace wellbeing if left unaddressed, and can lead to several mental and physical health issues such as anxiety, depression and burnout. Interventions that help organisations identify and mitigate the main sources of stress are vital to achieving greater workplace wellbeing.

## Involve employees in workplace decision-making

Giving employees the opportunity to participate in workplace decision-making and allowing their ideas and concerns to influence workplace change can reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> This action is particularly important when implementing new interventions – asking employees to help co-design solutions to workplace problems can lead to greater success.

- A randomised control trial of a participatory problem-solving workshop showed a reduction in sick days and improvements in mental health among employees with stress symptoms or common mental disorders.<sup>2</sup>
- A 14-month participatory intervention rolled out across 6 Danish workplaces improved working conditions and psychological wellbeing among knowledge workers.<sup>3</sup>



### Sources

1. Astvik et al. (2021)

2. Keus van de Poll et al. (2020)

3. Sorenson and Holman (2014)

## Identify stressors in your organisation

Knowing the causes of stress for your employees is vital to reducing its impact. This is what is known as the psycho-social work environment. Only by identifying, understanding and minimising stressors can you help employees to thrive and deliver their best work.

Treating stress as an individual problem and not getting to the root cause is doomed to fail. Collecting data on your workplace will ensure you can target your interventions.

There are many tools for helping to identify the causes of stress. You can conduct a stress audit or stress risk assessment using multiple existing survey templates

- The UK's Health and Safety Executive Management Standards Indicator Tool measures demands, control, support, relationships, role and change
- A longer survey like ASSET: An Organisational Stress Screening Tool



## Customise jobs through crafting

Job crafting gives employees the autonomy to proactively reshape their work task and relationships to better align with their personal needs, goals, and skills. It involves identifying the conditions that are hindering their wellbeing or productivity and making adjustments to reduce or eliminate them. Under **supportive** conditions, job crafting can improve employee stress and adaptability.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of 826 social service employees revealed that job crafting predicted work-life balance, work engagement, and burnout above and beyond age, gender, or seniority.<sup>2</sup>



### Sources

1. Devotto and Wechsler (2019)
2. Slowiak and DeLongchamp (2022)

## Redesign jobs

How job tasks and duties are structured and scheduled can strongly influence job quality.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of job redesign can facilitate improvements to workflow that better support employee wellbeing such as task variety and role clarity. Job redesign means breaking the job down with employees and collaboratively developing solutions to the main problems.

A systematic review of 33 intervention studies found that employee wellbeing and performance may be improved through:

- Direct improvements to job design
- Training employees to improve their own job design
- System wide approaches that enhance job design

Successful implementation of interventions was associated with employee involvement and engagement, managerial commitment, and integration with other organisational systems.<sup>1</sup>



## Give employees flexibility & schedule control

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to alter how, when, and where they work on a temporary or permanent basis. A flexible approach coupled with managerial support can foster greater work-life balance, reduce stress, and improve job satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of over 1000 employees across 50 organisations in South Korea revealed that work-life balance programmes and scheduling control are positively associated with job satisfaction and mental wellbeing, and the association is stronger when employees enjoy the benefits of both.<sup>2</sup>



### Sources

1. Hwang (2019)
2. Jang et al. (2011)

## Take care of your leaders

Employee wellbeing is dynamically influenced by leadership. The **wellbeing** and **behaviours** of leaders are linked to employee stress levels, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. Thus, interventions that reduce leaders' stress levels and encourage positive leadership behaviours can improve overall workplace wellbeing.

- A systematic review of leadership studies revealed that workplaces with leaders who were perceived to be **considerate** and **supportive** by their employees had higher wellbeing scores and fewer sick related absences.<sup>1</sup>
- A meta-analysis of studies assessing the impact of leadership on employee stress and wellbeing showed that employees with leaders who exhibit high stress levels and low moods are more likely to report the same symptoms.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, the opposite is also true, suggesting that targeting leaders wellbeing has positive wellbeing spillover effects.<sup>2</sup>



### Sources

1. Kuoppala et al. (2008)
2. Shakon et al. (2010)

## Promote relaxation

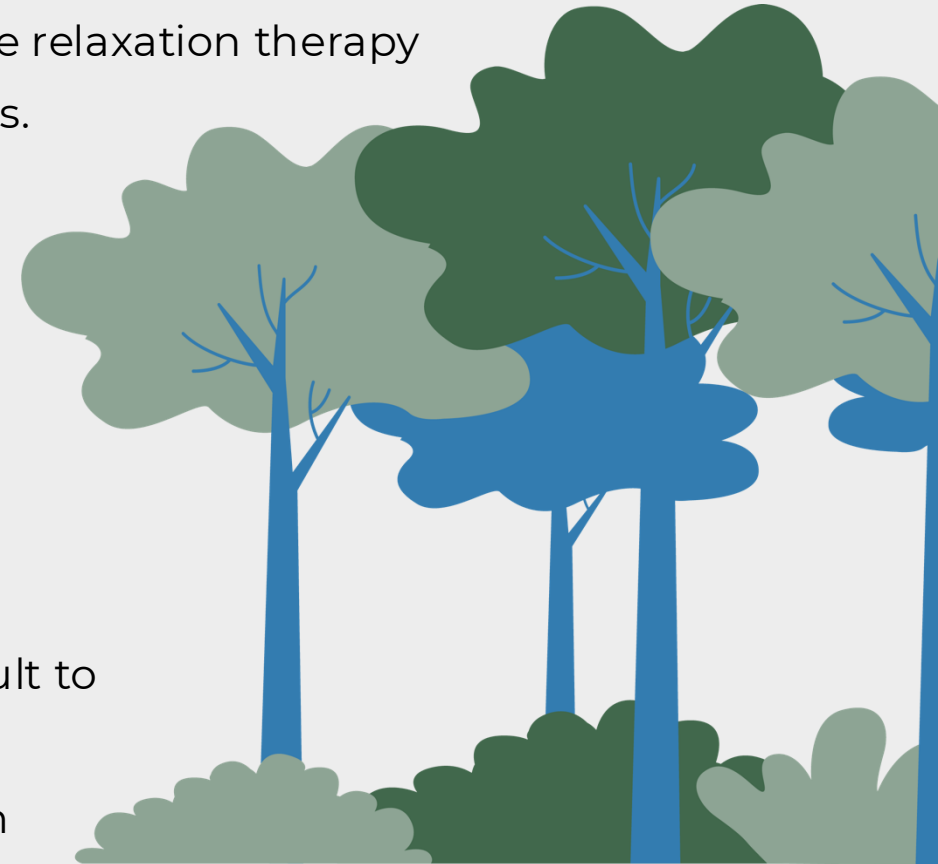
Relaxation techniques such as mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and muscle relaxation therapy can promote calmness and reduce work-related stress among employees.

- A randomised control trial of an 8-week relaxation programme (diaphragmatic breathing and progressive muscle relaxation twice a day for 20 minutes) administered to office workers across different workplaces showed significant reductions in stress-related symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- A meta-analysis of relaxation therapies implemented in workplaces demonstrated a beneficial effect to employee health and wellbeing, especially in regard to stress.<sup>2</sup>

Adherence is key to success with relaxation practices which can be difficult to maintain during periods of stress. Considering this, organisations should **not** rely on this approach alone and instead, implement it in combination with other interventions that improve working conditions.

### Sources

1. Alexopoulos et al. (2014)
2. Estevez et al. (2021)







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# Making the most of this resource



The Work Wellbeing Playbook is a concise guide derived from a systematic literature review of workplace wellbeing interventions. It offers a high-level summary of evidence-based interventions categorised by 12 key drivers of workplace wellbeing, distilled from over 3,000 academic studies.

Aimed at busy professionals, it provides accessible insights to improve employee wellbeing.

This playbook builds upon the World Wellbeing Movement's science-based recommendations for how to measure both [how employees are feeling at work](#), and [why they are feeling that way](#). You can then use the Work Wellbeing Playbook to address the areas for improvement within your organisation.

Business leaders are recommended to keep diversity top of mind when leveraging the playbook to craft a **holistic** employee wellbeing strategy for their organisation. While no single intervention guarantees success, combining multiple interventions across various levels and drivers of wellbeing can yield positive results for organisations.

# Sharing this resource



## Cite this resource:

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