



Leadership

is a key driver of workplace
wellbeing

Effective leadership in the workplace is a powerful driver of employee wellbeing and organisational performance. Unlike direct management (see Management driver), which focuses on organising, planning, and monitoring day-to-day work, leadership extends beyond role-based authority to shape vision, values, and organisational culture.

Effective leaders inspire a sense of purpose, build trust, and create the conditions in which both people and organisations can thrive. Decades of research demonstrate that leadership approaches emphasising vision, support, trust, and personal growth are consistently associated with higher levels of employee engagement, wellbeing, and motivation.¹⁻⁴



Leadership Interventions



Prioritise leadership development as a primary organisational intervention (1/2)

Leaders who prioritise wellbeing by actively supporting employees, encouraging open communication, and promoting fairness play a critical role in building resilient teams, reducing sickness absence and turnover, and improving overall organisational performance.⁵ Because leadership behaviours can either act as a root cause of workplace stress or a powerful protective factor, organisations must continuously invest in the development of their leaders to cultivate these essential capabilities.

Invest in strategic leadership development programmes:

- Leadership development should be treated as a **primary organisational intervention** for employee wellbeing, not a secondary or remedial approach. Evidence shows that well-designed leadership training causally improves leaders' supportive behaviours, which in turn enhance employee psychological health and reduce turnover.⁵
- Effective programmes focus on **observable, day-to-day behaviours** such as providing support, acting fairly, giving clear and respectful feedback, and consistently modelling priorities like wellbeing and safety, rather than abstract traits or one-off training events.⁵
- Investment should prioritise **frontline and people managers**, as leadership development at the direct supervisory level has the strongest and most immediate impact on employee wellbeing, engagement, and retention.⁵





Leadership Interventions



Prioritise leadership development as a primary organisational intervention (2/2)

Well-designed leadership development programmes that integrate evidence-based wellbeing practices are not merely a “nice to have”; they represent a strategic investment in team performance, retention, and long-term organisational health.

- Research shows that **mental health awareness training** for leaders does more than increase individual knowledge - it reduces stigma across teams and fosters a more open, supportive workplace culture.⁶ This is particularly critical in high-pressure or change-intensive environments, where unaddressed mental health challenges can quietly undermine team cohesion, engagement, and productivity.
- Similarly, training leaders in **sleep-supportive behaviours** such as modelling healthy work boundaries and actively encouraging restorative rest, has been shown to significantly improve employee job satisfaction, reduce turnover intentions, and enhance overall wellbeing.⁷ These benefits are especially relevant in industries characterised by long or irregular working hours, including healthcare, technology, and shift-based operations, where fatigue and burnout pose ongoing risks.





Leadership Interventions



Model vulnerability and authenticity at the top (1/2)



Authentic leadership is characterised by self-awareness, integrity, and openness in how leaders think, decide, and act. Authentic leaders consistently align their behaviour with their values, are willing to acknowledge mistakes, and are transparent about both their strengths and limitations.^{8,9}

By modelling this form of integrity and openness, authentic leaders build trust and psychological safety, signalling that speaking up and showing vulnerability are acts of courage that support learning and wellbeing rather than signs of weakness.^{10,11}

When senior leaders speak openly about their own challenges, mental health priorities, and wellbeing practices, they normalise honest dialogue and reduce stigma across the organisation.¹² This visible openness reinforces psychological safety by showing that vulnerability is compatible with effective leadership, supporting trust, inclusion, and sustainable performance.^{11,13}





Leadership Interventions



Model vulnerability and authenticity at the top (2/2)

- A structured authentic and positive leadership development programme was delivered to supervisors and managers across public- and private-sector organisations in Canada. The intervention focused on self-awareness, values alignment, ethical decision-making, and supportive leadership behaviours through workshops and guided reflection. Employees reporting to trained leaders reported higher trust in leadership and significant improvements in psychological wellbeing.¹⁴
- An authentic leadership development programme was delivered to managers in knowledge- and service-based organisations to strengthen day-to-day leadership behaviours that support employee wellbeing. To do this, the programme focused on building self-awareness, relational transparency, and an internalised moral perspective through structured learning and reflective exercises. Employees reporting to trained leaders demonstrated higher psychological capital (i.e., hope, optimism, and resilience) alongside improved job satisfaction, happiness, engagement, and reduced strain.¹⁵
- An authentic leadership programme used short, focused training sessions to help leaders actively “walk the talk” by clarifying their core values and applying them consistently in everyday decisions and behaviours. Employees reporting to these leaders experienced greater trust, stronger perceptions of ethical leadership, and increased openness.¹⁶





Leadership Interventions



Employ transformational leadership to strengthen employee wellbeing



Transformational leadership is a well-established, evidence-based leadership approach in which leaders coach, inspire, and actively support employee development.¹⁷ By fostering motivation, autonomy, and a shared sense of purpose, this leadership style consistently creates conditions that enhance employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and performance across a wide range of industries and organisational contexts.¹⁸

Organisations seeking to improve employee wellbeing should invest in leadership development that deliberately cultivates transformational behaviours.

- A leadership intervention within the Australian police force that trained supervisors in transformational leadership resulted in significant improvements in employee wellbeing, job satisfaction, and engagement.¹⁹
- Similarly, a study of 512 Canadian employees found that transformational leaders who supported employee autonomy contributed directly to enhanced wellbeing.¹⁷
- Evidence also suggests these benefits are sustained over time. In a longitudinal Swedish study involving employees across multiple industries, transformational leadership predicted improvements in employee health and work ability, reinforcing its long-term value in supporting workforce resilience and sustainable performance.²⁰

"It will no longer be enough for a leader to be technically brilliant, they will also need to have the ability to facilitate the potential and performance of those around them"

- Sir John Whitmore



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Making the most of this resource

1 Measure

Conduct an employee survey to assess four core dimensions of employee wellbeing: **job satisfaction, happiness, stress, and sense of purpose**. Collectively, these provide a scientifically validated, multidimensional view of how employees experience work.

Equally important, organisations should measure **the drivers of workplace wellbeing** - the underlying working conditions, relationships, and organisational factors that shape those experiences.

2 Understand

Once you've got the data, the next step is to **identify which drivers most strongly predict wellbeing outcomes within your organisation**.

Workplace wellbeing is multidimensional, shaped by a range of drivers, but not all drivers exert equal influence in every context.

By applying **data analysis at scale**, organisations can uncover which factors most powerfully explain wellbeing within their organisation.

3 Act

Once you have identified your priority drivers, the next task is to **select and implement interventions** that address them effectively.

The Playbook provides a curated selection of **evidence-based interventions** to help you act with confidence to choose interventions that are both empirically grounded and contextually feasible.

Don't forget to build **evaluation** plans into your intervention design.



Read [our guidance](#) document before getting started, to ensure you get the most out of the resources.

Sharing this resource



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Leadership

is just one key driver of
workplace wellbeing

These are just some of many evidence-based interventions recommended in the Work Wellbeing Playbook.



All recommendations and academic citations, organised by driver, are available for free on our website:

www.worldwellbeingmovement.org/playbook