



Management

is a key driver of workplace wellbeing

Supportive management is fundamental to how people feel at work and to ensuring the job gets done. Management focuses on the day-to-day responsibilities of planning, organising, supervising and supporting employees to achieve shared goals. Managers provide clarity, feedback and practical guidance, helping employees understand expectations and access the resources they need to perform effectively.

Unlike leadership (see Leadership driver) , which extends beyond formal roles to influence through vision and culture, management operates primarily through defined responsibilities and positional authority. Evidence shows that supportive, accessible and communicative managers help reduce stress, strengthen engagement and promote trust across teams.



Management Interventions



Equip managers to succeed in promoting employee wellbeing

Large-scale evidence from Indeed's global Work Wellbeing research, conducted in partnership with the Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Oxford, shows that how work is managed and the quality of the manager–employee relationship are among the strongest predictors of workplace wellbeing.¹

When managers are equipped with the right skills and resources, they can positively shape how people experience work, improving both employee wellbeing and performance. Conversely, poor management is a major source of workplace stress. A global McKinsey survey reported that 75% of employees identified their immediate manager as the most stressful aspect of their job.²

Despite this outsized influence of managers, many are promoted into people leadership roles primarily on the basis of technical or functional expertise, rather than demonstrated capability in managing people.

Research in occupational health psychology consistently shows that such skills **do not develop automatically with seniority or experience**, and are often underdeveloped at the point of promotion.^{3,4}

Systematic reviews further indicate that many managers lack formal preparation in the behaviours most strongly associated with employee wellbeing such as providing support, managing demands, and fostering trust.^{4,5}

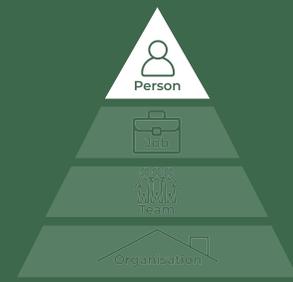
This presents a major opportunity to organisations.

To improve employee wellbeing at scale, manager development should be prioritised and addressed with evidence-based interventions.





Management Interventions



Invest in manager training

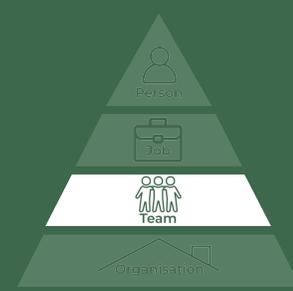
Managers' commitment to workplace wellbeing increases the likelihood of wellbeing initiatives producing successful outcomes.⁵ Continuously invest in managers' learning and development to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to support their team's wellbeing.⁶

- An evaluation of a manager training programme on mental health improved managers' mental health knowledge, changed their attitudes towards mental illness, and enhanced their confidence for managing mental health issues within their teams.⁷
- A two-year management training programme in health and safety significantly improved health and safety management and employees' satisfaction with their physical and social working environment, including their perception of manager support.⁸





Management Interventions



Encourage managers to use 'lean' management approaches



Lean management is a philosophy originating in the Japanese manufacturing sector that has since been adopted globally across industries.⁹ It is a multifaceted approach focused on maximising value for the end customer, reducing unnecessary activities (waste), and driving continuous improvement in business operations.¹⁰ When implemented well, certain lean practices have been shown to positively influence employee wellbeing. Crucially, these benefits depend on managers being properly trained in lean management approaches.

- One of the most widely used lean practices is **Kaizen**, which provides a structured, iterative, and participatory approach to improving workplace processes. Kaizen typically uses visual management tools, such as Kaizen boards, to make improvement ideas, actions, and progress visible to teams.¹¹ An evaluation of Kaizen interventions across two workplace settings found positive effects on employee mental health, with stronger outcomes when organisational goals and employee objectives were clearly aligned within the Kaizen system.¹²

- Further evidence highlights the importance of collective participation. A 12-month study of an employee steering committee intervention in the Danish Postal Service found that team-based participation in addressing working conditions was associated with higher work engagement, reduced burnout, and improved team functioning. Notably, perceptions of individual participation alone had no effect on these outcomes, underscoring the value of collective, manager-supported improvement processes.¹³





Management Interventions



Empower managers to support job redesign initiatives

Job redesign is most effective when it is led and supported by managers who are properly trained and actively engaged in improving how work is structured and experienced. Managers play a pivotal role in ensuring that redesigned roles do more than change tasks — they enhance autonomy, reduce stress, and promote employee wellbeing.

- Evidence shows that job redesign delivers the strongest wellbeing benefits when paired with supportive leadership. A job redesign initiative in the IT department of a large U.S. firm found that increasing supervisor support alongside structural changes significantly improved employees' emotional resilience to daily stressors and boosted overall wellbeing.¹⁴ This highlights that job redesign is not simply a technical exercise, but a leadership practice requiring sustained relational support.
- Leadership involvement also shapes employee trust and uptake. When leaders actively shape and communicate redesign efforts, employees are more likely to engage with changes, resulting in stronger wellbeing and performance outcomes.¹⁵ More broadly, successful redesign initiatives integrate changes to job structure with supportive management practices such as coaching, flexibility, and regular feedback.⁵

Refer also to other drivers:

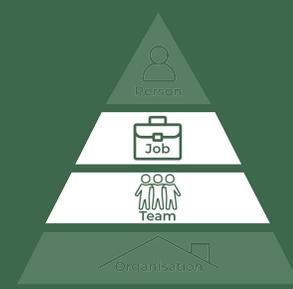
- **Job Security**
- **Autonomy**
- **Stress**



For organisations seeking to improve engagement and retention, building leadership capability to guide and sustain job redesign is a critical investment.



Management Interventions



Enhance managerial support and accessibility

Supportive and accessible managers play a critical role in protecting employee wellbeing, particularly during periods of organisational change or disruption. Employees who experience frequent, high-quality communication with their manager are more resilient to work-related stressors and uncertainty.

Evidence from intervention and longitudinal studies shows that improving managerial support can significantly reduce employee stress during change. At a large U.S. technology firm, an intervention designed to strengthen managers' support for work-life balance led to lower stress and fewer negative emotions among employees during a merger.¹⁴ Similarly, research with Canadian healthcare workers found that supportive, communicative management buffered the negative effects of organisational change on employee wellbeing.¹⁶



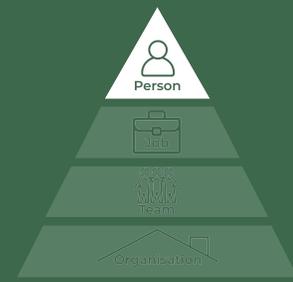
Effective managerial support looks like :

- Regular, predictable communication
- Visible accessibility and responsiveness
- Practical support for work-life balance
- Active listening and follow-through
- Clear guidance during periods of uncertainty





Management Interventions



Develop your managers' emotional intelligence (EI)



Emotional Intelligence (EI) encompasses qualities that go beyond general intellectual intelligence and technical abilities to include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social competency.¹⁷

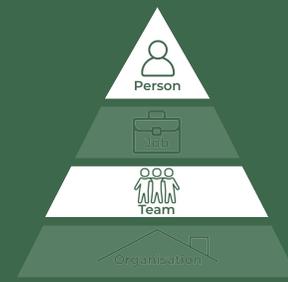


Managers with high EI make successful leaders because they are able to identify and manage their own emotions as well as the emotions of others. The good news for organisations is that EI can be strengthened through effective training.

A meta-analysis of 24 EI adult training evaluations showed improvements in EI that sustained over time.¹⁸ More specific to workplaces, training on emotional intelligence for managers over an intensive 15-hour training programme showed improvements in stress, wellbeing and relationships at work.¹⁹ 20 minutes of post-work journaling at the end of a workday can also help.²⁰ Repeated training over time is encouraged to produce optimal results.



Management Interventions



Support manager wellbeing to sustain leadership and team performance

Organisations increasingly expect managers to champion employee wellbeing, yet this expectation is difficult to sustain unless managers' *own* wellbeing is protected. When managers are supported, they are better able to lead effectively, foster team resilience, and create a positive work environment. Conversely, chronic managerial stress undermines leadership capacity and has downstream effects on team wellbeing and morale.^{21,22}

- Evidence shows that supporting managers' mental health delivers benefits beyond the individual leader. A four-month intervention targeting leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises in Australia found that a combination of self-guided mental health training and telephone-based psychological support significantly reduced psychological distress among managers.²² These findings are particularly relevant in small business contexts, where managerial roles are often isolated and carry high levels of responsibility.
- Similar effects have been observed in high-pressure environments. A study of middle-manager firefighters in Portugal found that a three-day stress management workshop led to higher levels of social support and vigour among employees whose managers had participated, compared to teams whose managers had not.²³ This suggests that strengthening leaders' emotional regulation and stress management capabilities can directly improve team dynamics and engagement, even in demanding, high-risk roles.



Protecting managers' wellbeing is therefore not a "nice to have" — it is a foundational investment that enables managers to support employee wellbeing effectively and sustain performance across teams.



Management

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Management

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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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Management

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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