

Protecting the Mental Health of Employees : How issues from film & TV industry survey correlate with similar factors in other industries

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Work in the film industry is high pressured and the crew are almost exclusively freelance. They have little corporate support in terms of the HR, appraisal, health and training processes that we all take for granted in the more structured corporate world. It can be a lonely place and unfortunately in 2017 one of Matt's former colleagues took his own life, citing the structure of the industry as the reason for his decline into depression.

Matt co-founded a non-profit making organisation called 6ft From The Spotlight which aimed to prevent further loss of life through training and awareness of mental health issues.

Matt was invited by the Film and TV Charity to advise on their 'Through The Looking Glass' Survey which launched in July 2019 and solicited 9000+ responses.

The results show a prevalence of mental health issues twice that of the general population.

In his presentation for IChemE Hazards Conference, Matt will seek to highlight the findings of the survey and draw correlations that other industry sectors can seek to learn from in order to identify the early signs of mental health issues.

From this presentation delegates will have a greater understanding of mental health issues, how they can develop a culture that is more aware and committed to ensuring the wellbeing of employees, and how to implement strategies that can help to prevent workplace incidents and suicide caused by work related stress.

About the study

The reasons that lead to mental health issues are complex, but the study confirms:

- Crew move from production to production with little job security or support.
- Working hours are long, anti-social and away from home for extended periods
- The fear of not getting the next job leads to:
 - Presenteeism
 - Working longer hours to impress
 - Reluctance to raise health, safety and wellbeing concerns
 - Bullying
 - Poor management practices
- These arduous and uncertain working conditions can lead to stress and anxiety, substance abuse.

The early signs of mental health issues are overlooked or hidden due to stigma leading to full-blown illness.

Matt believes other industries can learn from these survey findings and has developed a strategy that is transferable to any industry.

During his presentation Matt will describe how this strategy aims to:

- Reflect the parity of mental health issues with physical injury
- Embed the principle that prevention is key.
- Advocate that intervention must be undertaken only by those clinically trained
- Prove that resilience and reasonable adjustments are necessary following an employees' return to work from mental illness
- How measurement of impacts is key to drive further improvement.

Whilst there are definite correlations that can be made with similar factors encountered in differing industry sectors, Matt will also highlight how the strategy should be adapted for the specific circumstances and industries, as a one size does not fit all.

Key Words: Mental Health, Wellbeing, Employees

Introduction

In August 2014 World Health Organisation stated

“Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

The positive dimension of mental health is stressed in WHO’s definition of health as contained in its constitution: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

“There is no health without mental health” -

‘Mental health’ is a term that is being used widely at present and there are many campaigns visible in both the traditional media and across social media to improve awareness of ‘mental health’. What is ‘mental health’? The term is often confused with mental ill health. However, as with physical health there are times when we all have periods where we enjoy good physical health and suffer poor physical health such as a cold virus or a broken bone. The same is true for our mental health. We all actively seek to improve our physical health, and yet do we consider our own mental health in the same way? Should we accept a period of stress or depression just as we do a cold or broken bone? Just as with physical health we all have mental health.

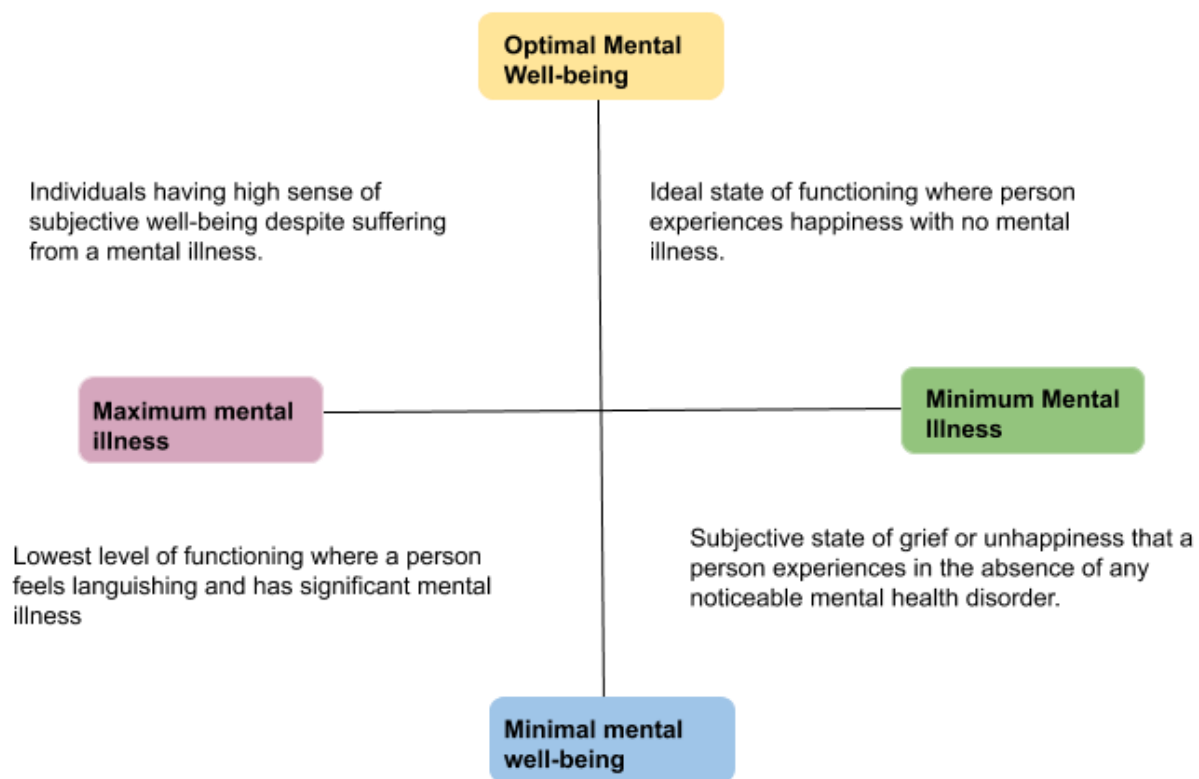


Fig 1. Dual continuum model of mental health – adapted from Keith Tudor (1996) and Corey Keyes (2007) from ref 1.

The dual continuum of mental health shows how just like physical health our mental health and wellbeing is fluid as we respond to life events or we suffer illness. The continuum model also introduces the concept that a person with a mental ill health diagnosis can recover and contribute to life and work if they are supported.

Traditional models for health and safety apparently place a greater emphasis on physical aspects of safety. In my experience the models rarely consider either the impact of an organisation’s operation on the mental health of an individual or just as importantly the impact the mental health and wellbeing of the employee can have on the safety of themselves or others.

Mental ill health is attributed as a reason for poor performance of an individual in the workplace and yet rarely is the inability of an organisation to protect and improve the wellbeing of its employees considered as the potential root cause. In my experience poor safety performance and poor culture in terms of management go hand in hand.

Prevalence of mental health issues in the general population.

According to the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey published in 2016, one in four adults in the UK are diagnosed with a mental health issue each year. This reduces to one in five adults for those that are in work and according to The Mental Health foundations report 'Added Value: mental health as a workplace asset' (2016) 86% of respondents to their health and wellbeing survey believed that work was important to protecting and maintaining their mental health. The report estimates that people living with a mental health problem contribute 12.1% of GDP or £226 billion. This is nine times the cost of dealing with mental health issues at work.

The stark statistics from the Office of National Statistics, show that 75% of the adults diagnosed with a mental health issue are women. When we consider the most serious outcome of a mental health issue which is suicide, 75% of the 6,507 people who completed suicide in 2018 were male. Further research by The Mental Health Foundation shows that 72% of the people who completed suicide had not been in contact with a GP or health professional to discuss their mental health before taking their own life. This indicates that men in particular, do not discuss their mental health but also casts doubt on whether GP's are actually equipped to deal effectively with mental health issues.

Suicide is the leading cause of death for men under 50 with one of the main reasons for this being that men are less likely than women to talk about their mental health and in particular their depressive or suicidal feelings. In addition, men are generally more aggressive and therefore seek more violent routes to end their life than women which are often more successful.

One person in five will consider taking their own life at some time and worryingly, one in fifteen will make a suicide attempt

Mental health condition	2007 (%)	2014 (%)
General Anxiety Disorder	4.4	5.9
Depression	2.3	3.3
Phobias	1.4	2.4
OCD	1.1	1.3
Panic disorder	1.1	0.6
Other disorder	9.0	7.8
Total	19.3	21.3

Table 1b: Prevalence of common mental health problems (adults 16+) from HSE statistics show an increase in Neurosis.

Workplace Impact

In the workplace, the Health and Safety Executive latest statistics (2018-19) state that stress, depression or anxiety account for:

- 44% of work-related ill health;
- 54% of all working days lost due to ill health;
- 12.8 million working days lost; and
- 21.2. days lost per case on average

These statistics make mental health the most prevalent cause of work related ill in the UK.

For businesses it is the relatively long time frame for recovery that is the main issue when compared to physical injury.

In addition, these statistics are thought to be lower than the actual figure due to the stigma attached to mental health issues. Employees will often self-certify with a physical issue rather than admit to a mental health issue. The impact of self-certification is very difficult to quantify due to a lack of data being available.

Prevalence of mental health issues in the Film and TV Industry.

In July 2019 the Film and TV Charity launched a mental health survey called 'Through The Looking Glass'. The survey was aimed at the estimated 180,000 people employed in the UK film and Tv industry including Production, Distribution and Cinema. The survey received over 9000 responses.

Previously very little data existed in the sector although anecdotally there was perceived to be a high incidence of burn out, staff turnover, bullying and suicide.

The results were alarming with 87% of respondents indicating that they had suffered mental ill health and most alarmingly some 55% having considered taking their own lives at some point. Nationally, 20% is the recognised figure.

The survey data can also determine factors associated with different job roles. For instance, those working in editing, which is a role performed in isolation, were more prone to depression than those working in set construction or accounts.

Specific data for the suicide rate is not specifically available. However, it is estimated that there are 45,000 people who work solely in physical production of films and TV programmes in the UK. In the last year the author is aware of 6 suicides showing a rate of at least 1 in 7500 versus the general population of 1 in 10000.

It is the reasons behind the rates found in the survey that can shed light into potential solutions and corroborate the findings of other studies.

Why is the Film and TV Industry difficult?

The film and TV industry has diluted accountability and leadership. The major production companies use smaller production service companies to deliver content to a fixed budget. The production service companies are usually staffed wholly by freelance employees with freelancers supervising other freelancers.

There is no support structure in place for freelance employees as the perception is that there is no real duty of care.

For example, one major film production had a turnover of £160m and yet lists just 1 employee in its year end accounts. The companies are in existence only for as long as the shoot process takes before the IP is returned to the parent company.

An analysis of ONS data shows that over 90% of companies in the sector have less than 10 employees.

Health and safety support is provided by external consultants who whilst specialising in Film and TV ultimately have no corporate targets to adhere to or accountability for the people they are trying to protect.

Workers in the industry move from production to production often several times a year. On each production they are exposed to different colleagues and work conditions.

In recent years budgets have decreased whilst expectations of content have increased with the entry of new players such as Netflix and Amazon into the High End TV (HETV) market. The goal being cinematic quality on a TV size budget.

From a welfare point of view the working facilities are temporary. This is especially so with location shoots where a marquee and a catering van are the normal provision.

The often-short timescales allowed lead to long hours and work away from home for extended periods.

Due to the lack of structure, career progression in the industry is generally ad-hoc. In addition, there is little or no management training and this can lead to bullying and harassment which are reputedly commonplace. The industry has no route for reporting issues so, even if the victim felt that they could speak out, having overcome the fear of not getting any more work, there is nowhere to go.

The desire to impress leads to presenteeism and often also working more hours that are paid for. All of which exacerbates the mental health issues.

All the above are key factors that lead to a high stress environment, this is challenging to change and influence, especially as the sector is seen to be successful and produces high quality output.

Why Should we drive Change?

Parity

From an ethical and moral standpoint, protecting mental health needs to be put on a par with physical safety. The author is aware of 6 fatalities from suicide in the Film and TV industry in the last 18 months. Had those fatalities occurred from a physical safety failure then action from regulators and company executives would have been swift and decisive. The companies would have been penalised and action to prevent a recurrence would have been taken. In 2016, Foodles Ltd which produced 'Star Wars, The Force Awakens' for Disney was fined £1.6m for health and safety failures that led to Harrison Ford sustaining a serious leg injury on set. Is it acceptable that no enforcement action is taken when several workers are driven to take their own lives by the failings of the industry to support the people behind the camera?

Legal Position

Whilst stress itself is not a mental health issue in itself and there is an argument that stress is needed in order to perform well, there is no doubt that toxic or prolonged stress is a pre-cursor to anxiety and depression. Stress that is not managed will lead to wellbeing and mental health issues in the workplace

Any organisation with more than 5 employees is required to record risk assessments and these assessments must include stress (Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999). The HSE has stated that whilst it would be difficult to enforce on a single case of stress at work, it will consider taking action where there are multiple cases in the same area that indicated a systemic failure to protect the health of employees

HSE Stress Management Standards

The HSE has set out 6 management standards to help organisations to implement adequate stress management in an attempt to foster a culture change and reduce work related stress.

The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the Standards cover the primary sources of

stress at work. Each of these hazards is present in the film and TV industry due to the working practices which could be seen as the worst-case scenario.

These are the hazards most likely to cause stress and the standards outline how to go about assessing the risks in each business and implementing changes to address those risks.

The standards can be tailored to suit the industry. It is recognised that there is no one-stop shop for stress management. Even within different departments in the film industry. For instance, the accounts department has very different stresses to a locations department or security team.

1 Demands

Includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.

In the film and TV industry the demands on staff are often excessive with reduced budgets and therefore the desire to get as much from staff for as little money as possible. This is a major issue. Work patterns are fluid with night shoots., weekends and often driven by the availability of actors and other talent. The work environment as discussed before is temporary.

2 Control

How much say do the people have over the way they work?

In the film and TV industry the staff generally have very little control over the way they work as this is set by the producers and directors who tend to have a micro-managing approach to keep creative control.

3 Support

Includes encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

Currently support is almost entirely lacking in the film and TV industry due to the organisational fragmentation. There is no HR department for most productions and no employee assistance program especially where freelance workers are concerned. The duty of care has been abdicated in places. There are however pockets of good practice in some of the more long term projects.

4 Relationships

Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Bullying has been an issue in the Film and TV industry but is being dealt with by some of the initiatives brought in following the 'Me Too' movement. The freelance nature of the industry with networks crucial to securing the next role. This issue requires a concerted effort across the industry to significantly change the culture and make the bullying of employees and freelance workers unacceptable.

5 Role

Do people understand their role within the organisation and does the organisation ensure roles are not conflicting?

With a lack of organisation and management training this is a moderate issue in the film and TV industry. The roles are usually well defined and understood by participants through on the job training and a historical etiquette.

6 Change

How is organisational change (large and small) managed and communicated?

Change is continual in the film and TV industry due to the fragmented company structures and freelance nature of physical production. The change frequency allows for an agile, dynamic industry and is accepted by the people working in it. However, there needs to be a balance to allow for more stability in certain circumstances.

For each standard there must be systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns. These standards are aspirational and define a desirable set of conditions for organisations to work towards.

The main learnings from the standards are that communication, discussion and collaboration are key to understanding what may stress your employees and how together you can reduce the risk of stress developing to the point where an individual is unable to cope.

There is also guidance on how organisations can help employees who are stressed due to external factors in their lives away from work.

It is recognised that many factors will influence whether stress in an individual will manifest a mental health issue. There may be relationship issues, loss of loved ones, financial pressures etc. However, research shows that those with support from work can address the issues and often perform better in the long term as well as becoming more loyal to the cause. A culture where the work stressors are managed as well as they can be and support is provided to employees will comply with the law and arguably improve performance across a range of measures.

If an employee is off with stress, whether work related or not, the actions of the organisation on return to work are key. As I will discuss later, early intervention is key to preventing and recovering from mental health issues.

If an incidence of stress is work related and no adjustments are made then logically a second incidence of work related stress is arguably foreseeable which could invite either a criminal or civil prosecution.

For non-work related incidents then best practice will dictate that adjustments on return will help bring the individual back and reduce the likelihood of another instance. A study by the Equality and Human rights commission showed that these adjustments cost on average £75 and most were at no cost.

A chronic mental health issue that lasts 12 months or so can be classed as a disability and hence is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and therefore reasonable adjustments are protected by law.

Commercial Considerations

One of the barriers to change and continuous improvement is the perceived cost. However, creating a strategy and a plan to protect and support the mental health of workers can minimise cost and even reduce cost in some areas.

Good management practice and communication will reduce cost. The reason the author started work in the film and TV industry was that costs on the Harry Potter VII and VIII shoot were spiralling out of control on truck and other hire equipment. Anecdotally, 17 telehandlers had been ordered on the same location most of which were not used at all. So arguably the same poor management practices and behaviours that cause stress and anxiety were also creating an overspend and wastage of resources. By resolving the management issues the author was able to save approximately 10% of cost on a £1.25m spend.

There are several management benefits to reducing stress in the workplace.

For individuals these include:-

- Higher motivation and commitment
- Higher morale
- Better performance
- More acceptance of change
- More likely to develop and learn

For Management these include:

- Reduced turnover of staff
- Fewer lost days due to sickness
- Fewer accidents
- Improved quality of work
- Improved organisational reputation
- Staff resolve other staff issues more effectively

All of this brings economic benefits

- Lower risk of litigation
- Improved return on training investment
- Improved customer care and client relationships
- Reduced sick pay, cover, overtime and recruitment costs
- With better performance cost reductions.

A study by Wang et al, published in the American Journal of Psychiatry estimated that for every depressed worker there was a productivity loss equivalent 2.3 days per month.

Safety Considerations

The mental health of employees can also have an impact on their performance in terms of safety. Do all organisations consider the mental health of employees who are working in a high-risk area in their risk assessments? Often the risk assessment will stop at training and competence and assume that once trained and competent the employee will perform safely.

In theatre and in stunt work, there is a reliance on rehearsal and repetition where some risks are not eliminated due to artistic or aesthetic requirements, usually working at height. A lapse in concentration or becoming distracted has led to accidents and injury such as falling from stage or set.

This is also borne out in industry as engineering and processes have evolved to improve safety performance the errors made by humans has come to the fore as a major or contributory cause.

A report in 2006 carried out by Richard Scaife and Ciara Amati on behalf of the HSE and BP attempted to investigate the links between psychological ill health, stress and safety. The research found that evidence was limited for proving that mental health

issues cause more accidents since those investigating incidents often did not necessarily consider the mental health of those involved in an accident. In addition, those who do have a mental health issue were often taking medication and the impact of the medication could not be separated from the impact of the issue itself.

The study did find strong evidence that the 'frame of mind' of those involved did have a significant impact on safety and could either cause or contribute to the severity of an accident. This was usually by behaving in an unsafe manner or by making an error. They found that the frame of mind of employees involved in accidents often mirrored the symptoms associated anxiety and depression such as distraction, inability to concentrate on a task, forget basic information including procedures and sometimes felt so demotivated or frustrated that they would deliberately sabotage.

Another study in the US by Hilton and Whiteford, estimates that those employees with both moderate of high levels of stress are 1.4 times more likely to have an accident than those with low levels of stress.

In film and TV, the highest risk activities in terms of physical safety are usually undertaken by the stunt performers. The author is working with the British Stunt Register to propose a framework for the support of the mental health of stunt performers.

It is therefore logical that reducing stress and dealing with mental health issues should form part of the health and safety culture and systems of any organisation. This should include both regular stress and task focussed risk assessments that include frame of mind considerations.

The Scaife and Amati study also found that employers often did not know that employees were taking medication for mental health issues and could be working in safety critical roles. Therefore, a more open culture was required to allow disclosure of issues that may impact safety.

It would also be beneficial to improve the self-awareness of individuals (situational awareness) who may recognise that they are distracted, unable to concentrate or otherwise may have impaired performance that may impact safety.

Creating a strategy and plan for mental health is complex and there are multiple hurdles to overcome.

The Solution

Creating a solution to mental health in the workplace is complex, there is no one thing that will dramatically improve culture and mental health. A combination of many programs is required. Any solution will need to address both cultural and systematic change. However, following the Demming model of Plan, Do, Check, Act used in many standard management system, the complexity can be broken down into areas that can be tackled over a period in a systematic and strategic way.

With Mental Health it is widely recognised that there is no 'one size fits all' solution, programs should be tailored to the specific needs of the industry and the people with in it. The film and TV sector is a fast moving and dynamic sector that allows many people to thrive and provides entertainment, learning and escapism to many around the world as well as contributing significantly to the economy. Any solution must allow the industry to flourish, grow, change and adapt as new players and delivery methods enter the market. Changing the industry to protect the wellbeing and mental health of the people working tirelessly and so creatively will allow sustainable artistic and commercial growth.

It is important to consider the value on investment rather than the return on investment. The value may not be directly attributable to investment in mental health and wellbeing improvements but its indirect benefits will be seen on both the top line and bottom line.

Four Pillars

Four Pillars for Mental Health

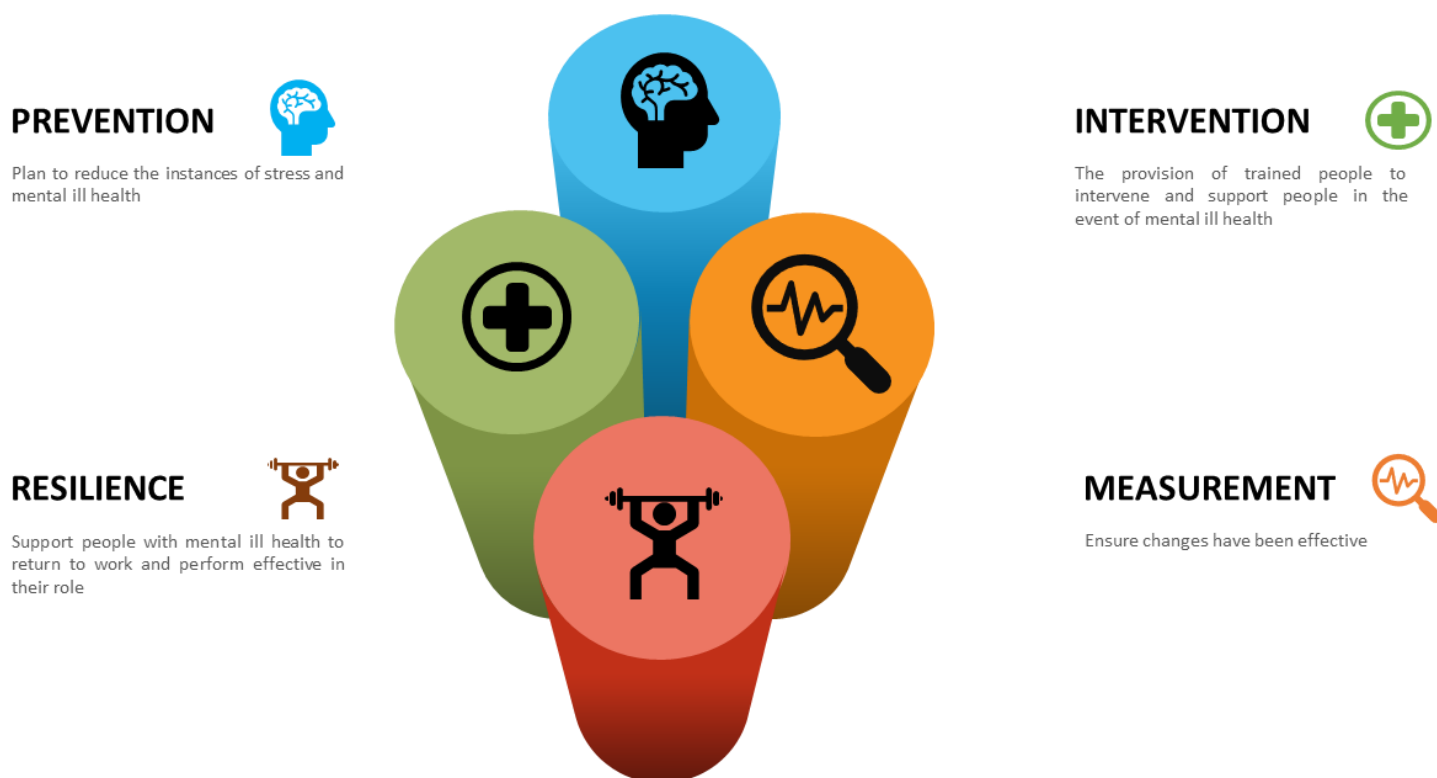


Fig 2 – Graphic from <https://www.presentationgo.com/presentation/group-four-pillars-powerpoint/>

In order to start to inform and guide the strategy to improve mental health we can break the task down to four pillars a strategy that is used by the National Air Traffic Control Centre.

- 1) Prevention – Plans to reduce instances of stress/mental health issues in the workplace
- 2) Intervention – the provision of trained people to intervene and support people in the event of mental ill health
- 3) Resilience and Recovery – supporting people with mental health issues or who have suffered high levels of stress to return to work, recover and flourish and
- 4) Measurement – checking that the plans are working and changes have been effective to inform the continuing strategy

Prevention

Firstly, prevention requires not only the buy in of leaders in an organisation but also for them to normalise the discussion around mental health. If the leaders can openly discuss their mental health and how they cope with the everyday stresses and strains of work and life, then it follows that it will be far easier for others in the organisation to do so. The aim being to break down the stigma attached to mental health issues. With the fragmentation of the film and TV industry plus the freelance nature this tone shift is more difficult to implement, however, there are high profile in the industry that can and do lead this discussion. It is the culture of an organisation that will allow improvements and end the stigma.

It is important that a supportive network that actually listens non-judgementally and takes appropriate action is embedded. When a member of staff does cry for help then action must follow otherwise attempts to improve culture and open the dialogue around mental health will fail.

Policy

Setting a policy and vision or even a manifesto around protecting mental health or explicitly mentioning mental health, stress and wellbeing in the existing Health and safety policy will help guide the direction of the organisation's management system. Some organisations have set the vision to become a wellbeing enhancing organisation and actively improve the wellbeing of their employees.

Training and awareness

Training, awareness and education will aid the understanding in an organisation of how work and outside life can impact mental health. Early recognition of the signs is crucial to preventing the normal reaction to events spiralling into ill health. Awareness and education will also help to reduce stigma and allow conversations around mental health issues to become normal. There are many different courses available, some aimed at managers such as i-act and others aimed at workers which are by the charity Mind among others.

Once managers are trained it would then be feasible to hold them to a standard which becomes part of the management system.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessments for stress are important as they can identify the hazards specific to certain areas of a business and controls can be put in place. The HSE Management standards are well researched and provide a framework to support the organisation through the process.

Existing task focussed risk assessments should be reviewed to consider the frame of mind of the individuals involved and consider situational awareness elements or training.

Wellbeing

Helping staff with their wellbeing can also aid prevention. When the author joined Monsanto in the 1990s there was a gym, sauna, onsite nurse, football, rugby and cricket teams as well as a social club. Many of these fell by the wayside as part of cost cutting that did not realise the true value of these elements for the staff's wellbeing and ultimately productivity. Now Sky have recognised the value of investment and have started to offer their employees, free TV, a family facility including cinema, gym, games rooms, beauty salon, healthy food canteen, yoga and Pilates classes at work as well as a free shuttle bus to public transport hubs in case staff are too stressed/fatigued to drive after work. It seems that we need to go full circle.

There are 5 main routes to wellbeing that can be considered in the workplace.

Getting active, giving, learning, connecting and being mindful.

Some workplaces have implemented wellbeing plans for staff which sit alongside their performance targets. They are also used where an individual has a diagnosed condition so that both the employee and their management/colleagues are aware of what the triggers may be along with pointers on how any impacts should be addressed.

Many workplaces offer quiet spaces for mindfulness or simply to get away from the fracas of the day if needed to reset and rest.

Stigma

To tackle stigma there are specific programs that can be implemented with little cost such as 'Time to Change'. Overall as awareness and understanding grows along with a supportive culture, stigma will reduce and be challenged. A reduction in stigma will allow people to report honestly on their health and allow both the employee and employer to work more effectively together to find a solution that fits the aims of both parties.

Intervention

Intervention is providing an array of support mechanisms to catch those that are struggling with their mental health. A simple chat with a colleague may be enough, others may need counselling or access to psychiatric services. In any organisation it is imperative that disclosure is made safe. Any cry should not go unheeded, it literally could be the difference between life and death.

Peer Networks

Peer to peer networks where employees in similar situations can discuss their issues have shown some success where it is a conversation with a like-minded colleague is required.

External Support

The NHS is stretched and whilst in the case of someone having suicidal thoughts is the only port of call, where possible the film and TV industry is attempting to become more self-sufficient via the great work of the Film and TV Charity and other support groups. Companies can create links with specialist providers in their area. The use of people who understand the specific rigours of an industry is vital to supporting those who have developed issues.

The use of external support should be reported, whilst maintaining confidentiality, so that the causes can be investigated where necessary and corrective action put in place just as with physical accidents.

Mental Health First Aid

The use of mental health first aiders is a consideration, but mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that MHFA's are supported and have the ability to step down should the need arise. There are pitfalls with MHFA in that the program is not tailored to the specific industry, some MHFAs become a 'crutch' for those with mental health issues or try to be counsellors when they should only signpost for further help. Some company's whole strategy is to bring in MHFA which is now being seen as a tick box response. Drawing the comparison with physical safety, the first aiders is used only after an incident has occurred.

In the freelance world the provision of MHFAs is difficult but not unsurmountable due to the fluidity of the work force. Other awareness programs that help managers especially spot the signs of mental ill health are also available as MHFA is closely controlled by Mental Health First Aid England.

Lone Worker Engagement

Lone workers and remote workers are at significant risk and so plans should include engagement programs that encourage and facilitate social connection should be promoted. It is important to recognise that social chat should not be seen as bad as those informal conversations will drive engagement.

The company or production should consider what is required to protect their workers and ensure protection is available just as it is with physical safety. Access to an employee assistance program is essential and its use should be monitored.

Resilience/Recovery

In this four pillars model resilience is about return to work and recovery to try to prevent a recurrence. This is done by understanding the position that someone has found themselves in, discussing the issues that they have had and trying to find adjustments and alterations to help where appropriate and reasonable to do so.

Both parties have a role to play just as they do with physical health. It should not just be the employee or employer; they are a partnership. The actions of one impact the other.

Recovery is often a journey and this can take time, so a stepped approach can be considered as with a football player returning to the game after injury or the Rugby Football Union protocols around head injuries.

One crucial point for recovery is that optimism and commitment from all parties is required. The recovery can go up and down and is not necessarily linear.

The practical learning is to plan a return to work and recovery period for an employee and to use any information that is necessary to improve the Mental health/stress strategy whilst obviously maintain confidentiality.

Measurement

Gathering data regarding types of incidents that involve mental health issues or are related to stress is crucial to informing the plan to improve mental health. Data is limited as accident investigations have tended to look at the physical situation and not necessarily the human element. As awareness and understanding increases then the systematic recording of data may improve. Training health and safety professionals in mental health/stress awareness is one route to obtaining more data systematically.

Allowances for confidentiality are required but the data is available for physical health so why can it not be done for mental health impacts.

The HSE has produced a stress indicator tool that can be used to measure how a workforce is impacted by stress. Careful consideration of the results is recommended.

Data that could be considered for informing KPIs with regard to an organisations mental health and wellbeing performance could include:

Staff retention, employee assistance program use, use of occupational health resources, exit interviews, staff surveys, audits, sickness statistics and incident report findings.

Building a Plan

Using the four pillars model as a reference, we can now look to build a plan to start the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle and put mental health into a systematic approach. It should be remembered that as with physical safety there is a duty of care to freelance employees.

Despite the fact that prevention is better than cure, in any plan the intervention strategy should be considered first. Simply because anyone who is assigned to support those with a mental health issue needs to have a network behind them. There is no point not knowing what to do when a colleague is ill if there is nowhere to go or the person providing support slides into ill-health themselves.

Training, education and awareness are next on the list to change the culture from the inside this will also help eliminating stigma and breaking down barriers to the improvements the plan is set up to achieve.

The plan should include positive elements as well such as wellbeing initiatives where possible. The plan is to prevent issues not just to deal with the aftermath.

The HSE management standards are well researched and provide a good grounding to underpin the plan with the relevant risk assessments and culture of communication to ensure compliance as long as it is tailored to the situation.

Conclusion

We all have mental health, the conversation and understanding of how we can help and protect our employees will drive performance improvements in terms of compliance, commercial and safety goals.

The mental health, stress and wellbeing of all employees should be embedded into the existing management systems to drive continual improvement and realise the maximum value on any investment.

It is important to recognise that the issues are complex and that there is no correct answer for any particular industry or company. It is therefore important not to wait until plans are 'perfect' before acting. Small steps can make a difference.

As with physical safety the worst-case scenario is a fatality. The majority of accidents have many causes and effects and it is the same with mental health. An organisation cannot affect all of the factors in terms of mental health but how it supports and interacts with its employees can affect the outcome and save lives.

The physical safety of a high hazard industry such as the chemical industry could be impacted by the mental health of its employees. Not understanding the mental health of your employees and working to prevent issues can lead to safety incidents. This is due to the way that the symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression can impair decision making and affect behaviour. Those behaviours are relied on at many points in the life cycle of a chemical plant from conception, design, build, operation, maintenance and decommissioning.

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