

# MAS – leading the way with The WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda

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## Introduction

In a working world that constantly faces challenges of different kinds, organisations need to ensure they have a workforce that is in perfect working order, is agile and flexible, and able to perform at its peak most of the time.

Since 2006, MAS has been leading and facilitating the implementation of the WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda into all forms of organisations and their teams in the UK and elsewhere.

MAS makes the link between psychological wellbeing and performance.

It is gratifying that so many years later wellbeing is being considered as something significant in organisations.

Less gratifying is that wellbeing isn't mainstream, embedded into the culture and fabric of organisations and their teams. It remains delegated to others to introduce and pursue rather than being the main role and activity of leaders and their managers. In this respect there is a long way to go.

Also, psychological wellbeing hasn't developed as quickly as physical wellbeing. This is, presumably, because the 'quick fix' society demands instant solutions to complex problems, and physical wellbeing can be enhanced after a few minutes and activities can be perceived as 'trendy', 'competitive' and 'fun'.

Psychological wellbeing requires 'real' effort to change attitudes, and despite many so called 'quick fixes' the reality is that change takes time and requires constant reinforcement of the change needed.

Whilst physical wellbeing has an impact on psychological wellbeing, it is short lived. Sooner rather than later the physical activity is needed again to stimulate hormones and divert the mind away from the psychological distress that most of us experience. Physical wellbeing activities gives the mind a break for it to recover, take stock, and prepare itself for the next onslaught.

Physical wellbeing activities may be used as a solution to psychological distress. Physical activities don't address the psychological causes. They aren't the answer to the causes of psychological distress. At best they are a temporary diversion.

The MAS focus is on ensuring continuing high level performance in teams and organisations.

Performance is based on a personal ability and capacity to concentrate – to be able to concentrate for sufficient time to complete tasks effectively, without errors and without repeating the processes involved.

Concentration requires clarity of mind. This means the ability to take action and make decisions clearly, without any fuzziness or mental diversion. Concentration allows focus; focus on the task to be performed without any hindrance.

Interference in being able to concentrate can be either physical or psychological.

Normal and routine physical interference is relatively straight forward to prevent, largely through negotiation with others. Whether people make the effort to negotiate with others to reduce physical interference is another matter.

Psychological interference is a different story, requiring an examination of what causes this interference and preventing the cause from occurring in the first place. As most causes are behaviour based, seeking to negotiate individual behaviour to change is a challenge few wish to take on. Behaviour change needs to be culturally driven, and this in turn, is driven by leaders.

### [The WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda](#)

The WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda sets out the steps to create and sustain a working environment that reduces the risks of psychological interference with concentration by substituting adverse events with triggers that provoke psychological wellbeing.

Sadly, of course, there is no ‘quick fix’.

Even more sadly, because there is no ‘quick fix’, many, if not most, organisations place the responsibility for good mental health on the individual, without the organisation taking action to create a positive and supportive working environment that aims to prevent staff from experiencing triggers for poor mental health.

Poor mental health affects anyone in the workplace.

More revelations of C level executives experiencing poor mental health have focused a spotlight on what is happening in the workplace.

As with most adversities, once influential people experience something, remedies tend to follow. Once C level people experience poor mental health, remedies follow. Unfortunately, most remedies are of the therapeutic type, seeking to restore the person back to health, rather than preventing the causes of the poor mental health in the first place.

The WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda is concerned with preventing adversities in the workplace that may trigger stressful reactions from the workforce. The Agenda also includes strengthening the foundations of individual resilience so that when an adversity arises the person can make the choice to turn the event from being a threat into being a challenge, rise to the challenge, overcome it and move forwards leaving the event behind – all without experiencing the negative aspects of stress – strain and distress.

# WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda



## What's on the agenda?

How should leaders behave if they want a high performing and successful organisation or team?

Leaders, and everyone else in the organisation, should act on the premise that everyone in the organisation is of equal value to everyone else, and that no single person is any more valuable than anyone else.

They, also, act on the basis that the combined intelligence of the workforce is far greater than that of their leaders. It is the task of leaders to use the intelligence of the workforce to ensure great success for the organisation.

The leader's job is **to ensure the workforce is in perfect working order, knows where it's going, and knows how to get there.**

These basic foundations for the leader's role result in leaders using status power, power that is based on using persuasion, argument through conversation and debate.

It means leaders give control and don't take it, as the workforce is perfectly capable of working out what needs doing as long as a clear framework is established. People need to know the behaviours that are expected, the direction of travel for the organisation, and the route to be followed to get to the destination.

A leader's time is freed to ensure people feel psychologically safe and well, hold conversations with team members, helping to resolve dilemmas and ambiguities, ensuring everyone is working together to achieve aims, and able to think clearly and concentrate effectively.

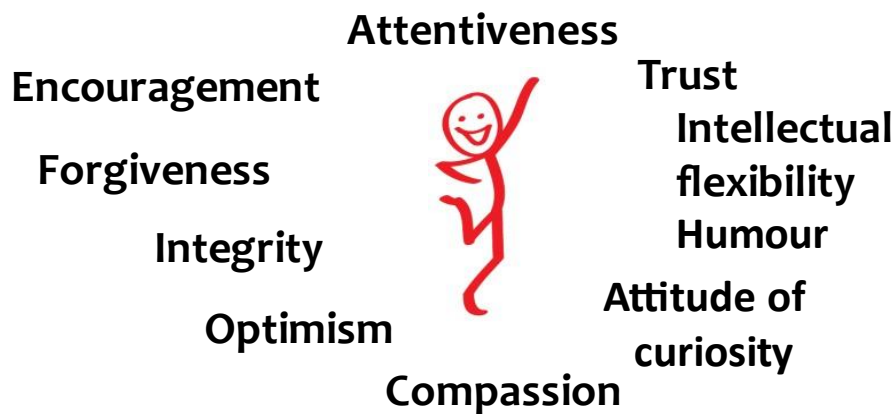
Leaders also help the workforce to be flexible and agile in the face of turbulence, and the need to be highly adaptive to respond the changes in the business and economic environment.

A leader's time is freed up to seek out ideas, innovative thoughts, novel discoveries to help develop strategies and visions for the organisation – another key purpose of leaders.

The behaviours that are required are Intelligent and Persuasive Behaviours.

These behaviours include attentiveness, which is a foundation behaviour on which other behaviours are based – for example, compassionate behaviour. You cannot show compassion without being attentive.

## Intelligent Behaviour



Persuasive behaviours include many of those cited above together with trustworthiness, wisdom, assertiveness, passion, direction with committed ambition, addressing individual needs and nurturing individuals.

### What form of leadership should be applied?

A key feature of a positive working environment, one that is psychologically safe and healthy which triggers high level performance, is 'sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation'.

Adaptive leadership uses this approach. It facilitates the sharing of responsibility by giving control and not taking it.

There are huge benefits of this approach – amongst them being the strengthening of individual sense of ownership of the organisation, and, therefore, their commitment, trust and engagement with it and what it does.

This approach represents the organisation and its leadership as a polyarchy, where the power is distributed amongst everyone, unlike many which are oligarch organisations with the power and influence vested in a few individuals.

### Outcomes and values led culture.

Culture is hugely influential on people's behaviour. This is because most people don't wish to stand out from the crowd but wish to blend in with everyone else at the time.

We tend to work out what a culture is like in any situation with several people – even a bus queue or a dinner party – in fact wherever there is an organisation, there is a culture.

Cultures don't simply arise. They are manufactured, largely unconsciously, by people. In organisations, these people are the leaders.

Leaders should be seeking a culture that triggers psychological wellbeing and performance.

The characteristics of an outcomes and values led culture contain triggers that influence people to behave in certain ways that produces high level performance.

Defining the outcome of the organisation is key. This is part of purpose, and if expressed as a big idea in a succinct way, it should trigger commitment by the workforce, especially if other aspects of culture are aligned with the values of the workforce.

Values are drivers. Therefore, if the organisation can capture the values of the people who work in the organisation and use these values as part of the expected behaviours and cultural values, the organisation will be tapping into the features of individuals that drives them to perform well.

Similarly, if leaders identify the key priorities that the workforce feel are important for the organisation to achieve, then the workforce will work at high level to achieve those priorities.

The same goes for ethical standards.

[The cultural principle of sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation amongst everyone in the organisation.](#)

Adaptive leadership facilitates the cultural principle of sharing responsibility.

This is not, simply, a notional idea but an active and real way to lead and engage the workforce in producing high level performance.

Normally, people like to take responsibility. This is particularly true when there is strong investment in an organisation by people working in it. People want organisations to succeed, especially those that provide all the triggers to individuals that make them feel psychologically well.

Leaders should ensure that individuals in the workforce are positively supported by enhancing self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation and mental control – four pillars of psychological wellbeing.

Sharing responsibility feeds each of the four pillars of psychological wellbeing, leading to high level performance.

[The cultural principle of psychological responsibility](#)

Psychological responsibility is an obligation leaders should be placing on everyone to do everything they can to ensure they feel psychologically well. This obligation must extend to include each person helping everyone else to maintain their psychological wellbeing.

The implication behind this principle is that the workplace is a psychologically safe environment, stigma free, and where everyone is expected to speak to colleagues, managers and leaders if they feel psychologically unwell for any reason. Equally, because some forms of mental ill health are difficult for the sufferer to identify, for example burnout, everyone should be on the look out and make enquiries should they suspect someone is suffering.

Everyone should expect the appropriate support service to be available to restore the person back to health so they can resume their working life effectively.

Part of this principle is facilitating individuals in their discovery of what triggers their psychological wellbeing so they can take specific action to seek out triggers to stimulate and enhance their wellbeing.

There are factors common to most people, but the detail behind each is idiosyncratic, requiring each person to explore their own factors in some depth.



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For example, what are your personal purposes in life and working life? You may have many, and you may have one or more major ambitions to achieve. These give you reason for getting out of bed each morning and taking action.

Having a focus on your major or big purpose will, also, reduce the impact of any adversities that may be irrelevant to your achieving your purpose, thus helping to reduce the risk of negative aspects of stress.

Another example is flow. Flow is when you get an enormous buzz from the activities you are engaged in. You effectively become energised by these activities, and your concentration and focus become completely absorbing. You feel great! The challenge is to find work that gives this level of buzz regularly.

#### Adaptive working environment

This refers to the physical environment in which people work.

MAS is not an expert in this area so only the outlines can be offered.

This aspect of the Agenda covers the physical environment, such as space, light ventilation.

The equipment that is used, whether this is ergonomically designed and appropriate for function.

Technology and whether this is helpful and supporting the person to complete their tasks.

Information technology and whether this is helpful. When IT goes down is there someone able to fix it, as IT breakdowns can create a negative impact leading to the negative aspects of stress.

The same can be applied to technological breakdowns. They, too, need to be fixed immediately to prevent the breakdown becoming a cause of the negative aspects of stress.

Nutrition – the appropriate food intake during the working day.

Exercise – the need to keep the cardiovascular system in good shape by taking exercise throughout the day.

### Intelligent management

This aspect of the Agenda is concerned about ensuring the background cultural aspects of the working environment are influencing the daily routine management practises of the organisation and its teams.

In our programmes to apply these principles and practises we offer twelve management activities, some of which happen regularly, others are less frequent in their occurrence.



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An example of transferring the cultural influences into everyday management practises is performance appraisal. Performance appraisal and reverse appraisal (the appraised appraising the appraiser) should be all the time, each day and conducted informally. The appraisal should be about how activities can be improved, building on what the person is already doing.

The principle of sharing responsibility includes the expectation that everyone can critique everyone else with the purpose of making tomorrow better than today. Therefore on a daily management practice basis, performance appraisal fits within the overarching principle of sharing responsibility.

Another example is mutual expectation. Establishing mutual expectations between people who work together not only eliminates the possibility of misunderstanding but helps to understand what everyone in the workplace actually does during the day. This reduces the prospect of the negative aspects of stress and increases the understanding and knowledge of everyone about those who work closely with each other.

This is a reflection of sharing responsibility and psychological responsibility being applied in practice.

### Resilient workforce

Resilience is a moderating process that enables people to overcome potentially stressful situations without experiencing negative stress themselves.

For this to happen, people need to maintain mental control when confronting an adversity. This is needed to overcome the immediate and impulsive emotional response to adversity, as well as needing to choose to transform the adversity from a potential threat into an exciting challenge to overcome.

People who see adversity as a challenge mobilise the energy required to rise to the challenge, overcome it and move on.

People who continue to see adversity as a threat will revert to coping strategies hoping the threat will disappear at some stage.

For adversities to be seen as a challenge, individuals need to see the benefit of overcoming the adversity. The major benefit in the workplace is to continue to work in a fabulous place to work. If the workplace isn't as fabulous as people would like, they may choose not to be resilient and to cope with the situation instead. Coping requires a range of strategies. If these strategies don't enable the person to tolerate the situation, they may become seriously ill and require specialist help.

For people to be resilient the four pillars of resilience need to be enhanced.

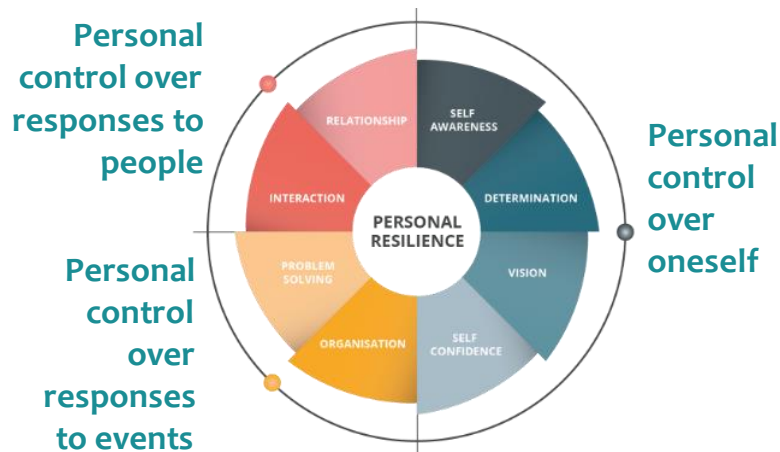


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In the MAS programme to strengthen the foundations of personal resilience these four pillars are enhanced by 8 elements as shown in the image below:

## The Personal Resilience Development Framework



Self awareness – is about exploring the factors that help enhance personal esteem and self-efficacy.

Determination - is about finding out the drivers of individuals by exploring their personal values and what these might be. The aim here is to ensure that personal values are aligned with the work people do, as this will enhance self-esteem, self-efficacy and motivation.

Vision - is about individual purpose and what each person wants from life. As mentioned earlier, purpose is key to psychological wellbeing. In terms of personal resilience, having a long term aim or purpose tends to diminish short term impact of adversities as well as providing a strong motivation to achieve stepping stones towards the vision. This, therefore, enhances the pillar of motivation.

Self-confidence – this plays directly to self-esteem and self-efficacy. In the programme a focus is applied to calming yourself when confronted with an adversity. The calming effect is key because of the need to tame emotional impulses to enable the person to think about strategies for dealing with adversity. Knowing you can do this enhances self-confidence.

Organisation – is about being able to manage chaos. This enhances mental control.

Problem solving – is about being able to tackle potentially complex situations, which plays to self-efficacy, motivation and mental control.

Interaction – is about knowing how to interact with anyone about anything and has a focus on assertiveness. This enhances self-efficacy and mental control.

Relationship – is about discovering individual important and strong relationships. Relationships enhance psychological wellbeing. In terms of resilience, having important and strong relationships are essential for support in very challenging and difficult situations. This plays to mental control

## Conclusion

Making sure your organisation is in perfect working order requires a systemic approach.

The WellBeing, Resilience and Performance Agenda is a framework to assist leaders in developing their organisation as well as themselves.

MAS has programmes to help implement this Agenda.

These can be delivered in different ways to suit the requirements of each organisation.

Facilitating the implementation of the Agenda normally involves action learning sets. Each set is provided with the information and support needed to implement each step in the Agenda.

Having an organisation with a workforce that is in perfect working order means that the organisation is strongly resilient against adversities, and is flexible, agile and adaptable to respond to different pressures for change.

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For a no obligation consultation about your needs please contact [derek.mowbray@mas.org.uk](mailto:derek.mowbray@mas.org.uk)