research in practice

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SWORD workbook:

KFP 5 Wellbeing Tasks

Dartington

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Box 5.1: Identifying psychosocial risk factors using the HSE Indicator Tool (staff questionnaire)

HSE has developed a self-report questionnaire – the HSE Indicator Tool – to help employers measure levels of risk across each of the six key work areas or potential hazards.

The questionnaire comprises 35 statements (e.g. 'I have unachievable deadlines'); practitioners are asked to tick one of five options to indicate the extent to which each statement applies to them. The work areas, or hazards, are:

1. Demands

Workload, pace of work and working hours

2. Control

Levels of autonomy over working methods, pacing and timing

3. Support

Peer support: assistance and respect received from colleagues

Managerial support: supportive behaviours from line managers and the organisation itself, including encouragement and the availability of feedback

4. Relationships

Interpersonal conflict at work, including bullying and harassment

5. Role

Role clarity and the extent to which employees believe that their work fits into the overall aims of the organisation

6. Change

How well organisational changes are managed and communicated.

The HSE's guidance on administering and scoring the questionnaire can be found here.

Box 5.2: Co-producing interventions with the workforce

Interventions developed with input from members of staff can be especially effective in improving wellbeing. The HSE resources include a serious of case studies, which highlight a range of benefits that co-produced solutions can offer. For example:

Earlier reporting of stress, due to increased awareness of the signs and symptoms	Reduced sickness absence
Greater ownership of change	Improved communication, particularly between managers and workers
Increased recognition of the need to encourage peer support	Better understanding among managers of the importance of listening without judgment.

Box 5.3: Using AI approaches to develop stress management interventions

KFP2 Sense of Appreciation describes the features of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and highlights its potential to generate options for self-determined change. The four stages of AI can be used in focus groups to identify simple but effective strategies to reduce stress and improve wellbeing. That process might involve:

Finding examples of current activities that work well (Discovering)	Using them as a basis for envisioning possibilities for change (Dreaming)
Identifying potential interventions (Designing), and	Implementing those interventions (Delivering).

Work-related stress is often perceived as an 'imbalance' between key aspects of the working environment and individual capacities and needs. The three models of stress described below offer potentially useful frameworks to help practitioners generate options for change.

1. The Job Demands-Resources model

(Demerouti et al., 2001) recognises the importance of resources in helping employees meet the demands of their work and remain healthy. *Demands* are aspects of the job – such as workload pressure, interpersonal conflict and insecurity – that require physical or mental effort, and so have the potential to drain energy. *Resources* are factors that: a) help people meet their work goals; b) reduce demands and the associated costs to wellbeing; c) facilitate personal growth. Key resources include the availability of support, control and feedback at work, as well as personal resilience-building attributes, such as self-efficacy and optimism. This simple model could be used via AI to identify resources that may help social workers meet the demands of their work more effectively and enhance their personal development.

2. The Conservation of Resources model

(Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) also recognises the value of resources in protecting workers against the negative effects of job demands. It is based on the premise that people are motivated to gain and protect things they value; stress occurs when they are threatened with resource loss or fail to gain resources despite considerable effort. The model specifies four types of resource:

a) objects (physical entities such as work equipment)

b) conditions (social circumstances such as status and respect)

c) personal (skills and attributes such as self-efficacy)

d) energies (such as knowledge).

People use their existing resources to help them manage stress and to generate further resources to sustain them in future. Those with more resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more capable of resource gain. This model could be used in focus groups to identify resources that might help buffer the effects of stress and create individual and collective 'resource reservoirs' (such as resilience) to offset the risks of future resource loss and build collective strength.

3. The Effort-Reward Imbalance model

(Siegrist, 2002) maintains that strain (such as mental and physical health problems) stems from an imbalance between the amount of effort people believe they put into their work and the rewards they gain. Efforts are things that make work more demanding, such as heavy workload and frequent interruptions; rewards are gained from three potential sources: a) money (salary); b) esteem (respect and support) and c) security/career opportunities (promotion prospects and job security). This framework could be useful in helping practitioners generate options for change by identifying the wider features of social work (e.g. meaningfulness and a sense of belonging) that help them feel rewarded, and therefore could restore their feelings of equity.

Box 5.4: Five signs of struggle

Expressions of distress

e.g. reports feeling stressed; emotional outbursts, such as irritability or tearfulness.

Social withdrawal

e.g. not participating in social activities; failing to engage in prosocial behaviours.

Extreme behaviours

e.g. being impaired by alcohol or drugs; expressing desire to self-harm.

Attendance

e.g. lateness or increased absenteeism

Performance

e.g. a noticeable decrease in the employee's quality/quantity of work; failure to meet goals or deadlines.

Box 5.5: Management competencies for preventing or reducing work-related stress

The framework comprises four broad managerial behavioural areas (and 12 specific behaviours) that have been identified as important for preventing and reducing stress.

1. Managing emotions and having integrity

- Managing emotions (e.g. approaches deadlines or crises calmly; doesn't pass their own stress on to the team)
- Integrity (e.g. is a good role model; is honest and consistent)
- Considerate approach (e.g. shows respect; prioritises people's work-life balance).

2. Managing and communicating workload

- Proactive work management (e.g. communicates objectives clearly; manages current and future workloads to minimise stress)
- Problem-solving (e.g. deals rationally with difficulties; is decisive)
- Participative/empowering (e.g. delegates work fairly; involves team members in decision-making).

3. Managing the individual within the team

- Personally accessible (e.g. communicates in person rather than by email; responds to requests promptly)
- Sociable (e.g. is friendly and has a sense of humour)
- Empathic engagement (e.g. a good listener; shows an interest in others and concern for their problems).

4. Reasoning/managing difficult situations

- Managing conflict (e.g. remains objective; deals with conflict promptly)
- Use of organisational resources (e.g. seeks advice and support from others to resolve difficulties)
- Taking responsibility for resolving issues (e.g. tackles bullying; follows up conflicts after resolution).

For more information and to download the tools, see **here**.

Box 5.6: Mental Health First Aid

MHFA England provides volunteers with training in critical areas of mental health first aid, such as the signs and symptoms of common mental health difficulties, and providing 'crisis' first aid for depression, panic attacks and acute stress reactions. Mental health first aiders can provide support by engaging in an initial conversation with someone in distress and, if needed, helping them access appropriate support.

Evaluations of MHFA training suggest it can increase participants' knowledge of mental health, reduce negative attitudes among the workforce, and enhance supportive behaviours towards people with mental health difficulties (Brandling & McKenna, 2010; MHFA, 2019).

Information on MHFA training and resources can be found **here**.

Box 5.7: Wellbeing Champions

Appointing Wellbeing Champions or Ambassadors can play a valuable role in helping to build a culture of wellbeing in your organisation. Champions can drive the wellbeing agenda (e.g. by being part of a wellbeing steering group), raise awareness of new initiatives and encourage colleagues to participate. Champions are often better placed than managers to encourage reluctant colleagues to engage.

Time To Change provides a range of resources for the workplace, including support for running a Champions programme, and practical tips on starting conversations about wellbeing and signposting support. For more information see **here**.

Box 5.8: Making a commitment to work-life balance

An organisation that is committed to maintaining a healthy work-life balance places this high on its list of priorities. Such an organisation:

Acknowledges that individuals are healthier, happier and more productive when they have a 'healthy' balance between their work and their personal life	Recognises that supporting work-life balance will benefit the organisation as well as its employees	Asks employees for their views on how best to support work-life balance
Adopts a flexible approach (people's work-life balance needs change over time), and offers a range of flexible working strategies and encourages their uptake	Ensures that work-life balance initiatives are equitable and don't support only working parents	Acknowledges that work-life balance is not just about ensuring people go home on time; strategies are also needed to help practitioners 'switch off' emotionally from work
Encourages practitioners to work efficiently and productively, and measures performance by output (not hours worked)	Encourages joint responsibility between individuals and their line managers to implement effective work-life balance solutions	Regularly reviews workloads to ensure duties are achievable in 'normal' working hours
Is vigilant for signs of over-commitment and over-involvement among employees	Encourages managers to lead by example by prioritising their own work-life balance	Ensures that employees who take up flexible working options are not disadvantaged in terms of promotion or progression
Makes sure employees take their full annual leave entitlement	Is aware of up-to-date innovations in promoting work-life balance	Evaluates the success of any strategies implemented to support work-life balance.

Box 5.9: Thinking errors

Magnification and minimisation:

recognising only the negative aspects of a situation and ignoring or downplaying the positive. 'My personal achievements are insignificant, but my mistakes are very important.'

Catastrophising:

ruminating about irrational worst-case scenarios and impending disaster. 'I couldn't get in touch with this family before the weekend – I just know something awful will happen to them.'

Over-generalising:

making broad interpretations from a single incident or a single piece of evidence. 'I made a mistake with this family, so I am an incompetent social worker and a bad person.'

All or nothing thinking:

over-generalising and seeing things in extremes. 'I never do a good enough job – I am always going to fail.'

Dogmatic demands:

believing that things should be a certain way can cause guilt and expectations of punishment if our rules are violated. 'I should do this/I shouldn't do that.'

Emotional reasoning:

the assumption that our unhealthy emotions reflect reality. 'I feel guilty, so I must have done something bad.'

Magical thinking:

a belief that one's acts will influence unrelated situations. 'I am a good person so bad things shouldn't happen to me.' (Or vice versa.)

Personalisation:

the belief that one is responsible for events outside of one's control. 'This person I'm supporting is upset. It's my fault; I haven't done enough to help her.'

Jumping to conclusions:

interpreting the meaning of a situation despite having little or no evidence. This has two strands: a) mind-reading: interpreting the thoughts and beliefs of others without evidence ('I wouldn't get promotion, as I am stupid'), and b) fortune-telling: believing that future events are pre-ordained ('Things will turn out badly, so why bother?').

Box 5.9: Thinking errors (continued)

Control fallacy:

beliefs about being in control of every situation in one's life. If we feel externally controlled, we are helpless and a victim of fate or chance: 'I did a bad job as I was given the wrong advice'); if we feel internally controlled, we assume responsibility for the wellbeing and distress of everybody: 'Why are you angry, what did I do to upset you?'

Global labelling:

generalising one or two personal characteristics into a negative global judgement about oneself or others. 'I'm such a loser'; 'He is such an idiot'; 'People always let you down.'

'Just world' fallacy:

the belief that the world is a fair place – good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. 'Nobody has that much bad luck. She must have done something to bring it on.'

Heaven's reward fallacy:

the belief that self-sacrifice and self-denial will eventually pay off. 'If I work hard enough, people will notice, and I will be rewarded.'

Box 5.10: Identifying thinking errors in meetings and supervision

Active listening – based on warmth, genuineness and unconditional positive regard – is necessary to enable formation of a trusting relationship.

Conversations should be collaborative and should involve feedback and reflection. Notice how people use words that might signify thinking errors. For example, most people exaggerate at times, but chronic 'all or nothing' thinking can make us see the world and other people in over-simplified terms and encourage pessimism and feelings of helplessness. Listen out for and challenge words such as 'always', 'never', 'everything', 'totally', 'everyone' or 'no one'.

A more structured approach can be used to examine specific incidents (i.e. activating events) where thinking errors have been used. By focusing on the following issues during supervision, managers can gain insight into how unhelpful behaviours and mood states are triggered – and maintained:

Situational: the environmental factors that were present	**Behavioural:** what the person did	**Cognitive:** the thoughts that were present at the time
Affective: the emotional reactions that occurred	**Interpersonal:** who else was present	**Physiological:** the bodily reaction that occurred.