



PERSONAL WELL-BEING AND MANAGING STRESS FOR MANAGERS AND LEADERS

FACTSHEET 2: HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

As a manager and leader, it is important to consider your own mental health and well-being, as well as that of your team. The main focus of this factsheet is learning **how to improve** your mental health and well-being, while also touching on the impact you can have on others.

The most effective way to improve mental health and well-being is having a comprehensive approach that is refined to your needs and situation. You then need to ensure that it is consistently implemented.

A comprehensive approach includes:

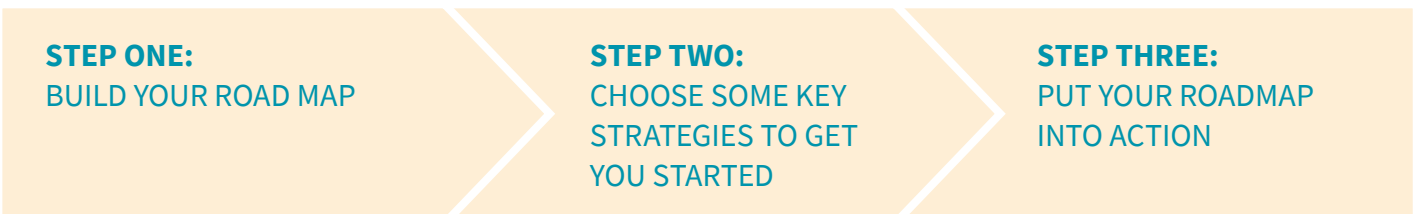
1. Knowledge around well-being, minimising adverse impacts of stress, mental health and resiliency, stigma.

2. Taking Action/Managing yourself; your own mental health and well-being (being proactive and knowing what to do when things are not going well).

3. Leadership/Management style; this includes communication, engagement, trust and discretionary effort, and enabling healthy workplaces.

THIS FACTSHEET WILL COVER:

- **Building your roadmap**
- **Choosing some key strategies to get you started**
- **Putting your roadmap into action**



STEP ONE: BUILD YOUR ROADMAP

The first step is understanding where you are, what matters most to you, and where you want to be.

BACKGROUND READING AND REFLECTIONS

The reflections in the Factsheet covering “*Why is Mental Health and Well-being Important?*” will help you to develop an initial review on where you are now.

We suggest you work your way through the resources on the website: <https://www.un.org/en/healthy-workforce>



What is my starting point?

- The “Take Action” reflections at the end of the Factsheet on “*Why is Mental Health and Well-being Important?*” will give you a sense of where you are now.
 - You could add to that by doing the stress profile in the appendix of this document.
 - If appropriate, seek advice for more refined assessment of the current state of your mental health and well-being from a Staff Counsellor/Staff Welfare and or Medical services.
- What are your current strengths in terms of well-being and mental health, including lifestyle habits, potential addictions and psychosocial risks?
 - An effective way to move forward is focusing on your strengths and building on them – doing more of what you are good at and what works for you, is a success strategy.

Ask Yourself:

- Where do you want to be?
- What matters most to me?
- What would “thriving” look like for me? What is my aspiration?
 - Write yourself a letter for a date in a year’s time, that describes what you would be thinking and doing, feeling and seeing, if you were to check-in with yourself? What would you notice about yourself?

- Describe the elements that are the most important for your personal attention. Identify one thing you can do to help prevent or resolve it under each of those headings:
 - Personal sense of well-being
 - Healthy lifestyle habits
 - Potential addictions- often started as coping strategies
 - Psychosocial risks in the workplace for you
- Think about your intentions and the approach you need for:
 - Protecting and promoting positive well-being
 - Preventing harm and/or poor mental health
 - Acting early to achieve better outcomes for yourself
 - Enabling and supporting yourself to thrive as a manager and leader.
- Be mindful of ways you **overextend** that may have an impact on your well-being. Three are noted below. You might have some other “overs” you can add.
 - Overworking
 - Overthinking
 - Overwhelming

You can use the appendix and workbook at the end of this factsheet to build your road map and action plan.



STEP TWO: CHOSE SOME KEY STRATEGIES TO GET YOU STARTED

These may include:

- **Build knowledge and engage your networks**
- **Be curious**
- **Get to know yourself and your staff outside of work context**
- **Notice how you communicate with yourself and others**
- **Pick a starting point**
- **Focus on addressing and reducing stigma as a priority**

A. Build knowledge and engage your networks:

Who do you need to engage and connect with to help

- Build your knowledge
- Engage practical support for you own well-being and health in general
- Assess your current mental health & well-being

Build knowledge might include:

- Being honest about your awareness and knowledge, strengths and gaps for well-being, managing stress, mental health and resilience.
- Be open to learning more, refer to the background reading mentioned above. Applying learning exercises to yourself and teaching others will help build your knowledge and skills.

Engage your network:

Your network could include:

- Your Manager
- The Staff Welfare, Counsellors Office and or Medical Services in your organisation
- Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services
- HR Advisor
- Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Focal Point/ Co-ordinator
- Colleagues or peers you can talk with and seek advice
- Staff Association

Identify people who will:

- Walk alongside you
- Nurture your journey and be there for inspiration
- Lend a listening ear
- Acknowledge your small step achievements and celebrate the big ones along the way
- Act as an accountability buddy (or buddies): this could be a colleague who is taking a similar journey, peer group, friend or coach.

B. Be Curious - ask bold questions and seek out information to help you discover the most important issues you are trying to resolve and or improve for yourself and for your whole workplace.

- What information do you have or already know and what inferences can you conclude from them? (For the workplace information this might include sick leave data, turnover, workplace surveys and assessments)
- Other tools you can use include doing a personal and or collective SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis with focus on well-being, minimising stress, managing mental health and resiliency.
- Seek help with measuring workplace psychosocial risks.
- Seek advice and help in assessing your health, stress and mental health in particular. The earlier you do this the better the outcome.



C. Get to know yourself and your staff as people, as human beings with strengths, characteristics and vulnerabilities we all have. This is so you can notice if, and when, changes occur that might be signals that you need to check in by asking “Am I OK?” or “Are you OK?”

- Develop your personal stress and mental health signature – your set of triggers and early warning signs so you can act early and prevent the downward spiral.
- You cannot do this behind a personal set of blind spots, or a closed office door; or if you have a style of leadership and or management that closes communication down or pushes people away.
- Building trust is critical here. If people don’t trust you, they are not going to open up to you or seek your help.

D. Notice how you communicate with yourself and others: Most people do not respond well to dictating, shouting, harassment and bullying where status and hierarchy take higher importance than strong, respectful working partnerships.

Our brains are hard-wired to experience this as a threat. This can put us into fight, flight or freeze mode, and will often close down the executive thinking function of our brain.

- Our inner critic, bias, feelings of not being good enough, shame, and negative thinking can be very harmful if we don’t catch it. It is important to recognise it for what it is and not get too caught up in it. Be kind to yourself.
- Learning strategies for responding to difficult emotions and thoughts is extremely helpful.

E. Pick a starting point:

- Starting with yourself may be the most logical but not always the easiest. Start with small steps, micro steps then build up. Think about one thing you can do today that you can do consistently. Set daily intentions.
- Awareness raising through communications, team discussions or events is also often a good place to start. Be the role model. Use your knowledge to share with others.
- Establish habits of noticing the positives as well as the signs of workplace stress, poor mental health both for yourself and in your team/workplace.

F. Focus on addressing and reducing stigma.

Does self-stigma exist in your personal thinking and beliefs about well-being and mental health? What are your attitudes and beliefs about well-being and mental health of others? Does stigma exist in your workplace?

- As a leader and/or manager you have a crucial role in addressing and reducing stigma associated with poor mental health, just as you have with other harmful workplace behaviours and attitudes e.g., harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, etc.
- Stigma, all types of stigma, are harmful.
- Stigma can impact whether you treat your own mental health with the same importance as your physical health and whether you seek advice or help when needed.
- Stigma shows up in the language you use, your attitude towards self and others, the way you respond to colleagues, family and friends.

If you are not proactive in this area, then you are either directly or indirectly condoning those harmful attitudes and behaviours and become complicit in their presence and the harm they cause.

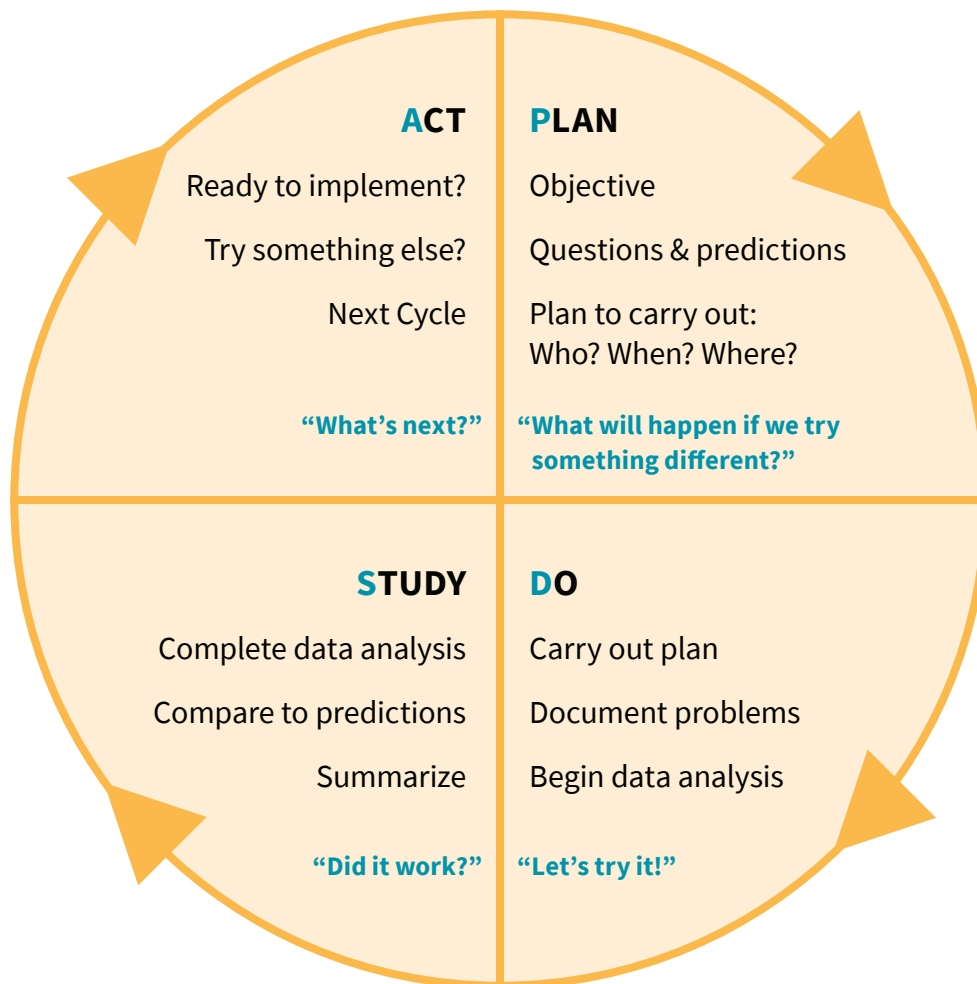


STEP THREE: PUT YOUR ROADMAP INTO ACTION

After you have tried some micro steps, design a 90-day plan to describe what you want to achieve for your mental health and well-being.

- Adapt your plan along the way as you learn about what works for you .
- PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) cycles are often a good way to give some process structure and sense of momentum to improvement initiatives.
- Create an accountability mechanism with a trusted peer so you can report on progress with clear and easy to collect measures of the benefits you to wanted to attain.

PDSA CYCLE





PLAN

- What will success look like for you?
 - Start with a personal 90-day action plan, this can be repeated as you develop and go from strength to strength.
 - Match “how”, with “what” you are going to do, selecting interventions or responses that have some evidence that show they work.
 - How will you measure impact/ evaluation?
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Do

- Test specific actions or initiatives, try a few things out.
 - If they do not work or do not feel right, try a different approach.
-

STUDY

- Review and measure: did it do what was intended (process and efficacy)?
 - Decide how to evaluate before you start implementing your plan
 - Include measures on the **impact** of what you put in place (was it effective, did it have the impact intended) and **how you implemented** it (did you follow through, did you engage outside resources when needed, etc).
 - Sometimes it is **not** the specific initiative or intervention that did not work but the way it was planned. Perhaps you tried to do too much too soon?
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ACT

- Spread the activities/ interventions wider if your results are supporting good outcomes.
- There is no point scaling up an initiative to a wider staff group or audience that does not get results and does not resolve the problem you were trying to address.
- Keep measuring if you are achieving the impact you wanted.
- Intentions without impact will not be an efficient use of time and resources.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR STRESS RESPONSE PROFILE

Take 5-10 mins.

Reflect & write down your answers to the following questions for each quadrant. You can use some of your answers to the questions above.

Start this exercise on your own. It is also helpful to get feedback from someone that you trust; we may not always recognize how we respond, our strengths and coping strategies.

QUADRANT 1: What are your triggers? What are the factors that cause you to feel stressed?

QUADRANT 2: What symptoms do you experience when you feel stressed? Think about physical, mental, emotional and behavioural signs/symptoms.

QUADRANT 3: What are your negative coping strategies? These are maladaptive strategies that that may seem to provide temporary relief but can actually increase your stress.

QUADRANT 4: What are your positive coping strategies? Positive coping strategies help you maintain your mental health and reduce stress.

QUADRANT 1: FACTORS THAT CAUSE YOU STRESS

QUADRANT 2: SYMPTOMS OF STRESS OVERLOAD

QUADRANT 3: NEGATIVE COPING STRATEGIES

QUADRANT 4: POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES



FACTSHEET WORKBOOK- TAKE ACTION

STEP ONE - BUILDING MY ROADMAP OF WHERE I AM NOW AND WHERE I WANT TO GET TO IN 90 DAYS

Summary from Fact Sheet on “*Why is Mental Health and Well-being Important?*”

What were your main insights?

Your Management and leadership style?

-
-
-

Your review of your discretionary effort?

-
-
-

Where are you now on the continuum in relation to your working life as a manager and or leader?

-
-
-

From this Fact Sheet

Key Insights from Stress Profile (appendix-1)

Quadrant 1: Factors that cause you stress

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-
-

Quadrant 2: Symptoms of stress overload

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-
-

Quadrant 3: Negative coping strategies

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-
-

Quadrant 4: Positive coping strategies

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-
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Ask yourself:

- Where do I want to be?
- What matters most to me?
- What would thriving look like for me?
- What is my aspiration?

Write yourself a letter for a date in a year’s time, that describes what you would be thinking and doing, feeling and seeing, if you were to check-in with yourself? What would you notice about yourself?

Letter to myself for Date: ___/___/___

Dear _____,

Describe the elements that are the most important for your personal attention.

What is **one thing** you can do under each of the headings below:

Personal sense of well-being - <i>my one thing is</i>	Healthy lifestyle habits - <i>my one thing is</i>
Potential addictions- often started as coping strategies - <i>my one thing is</i>	Psychosocial risks in the workplace - <i>my one thing is</i>

Does my approach include personal actions that:

Protect and promote positive well-being	Yes	No	Not Yet	Not Sure
Prevent harm and/or poor mental health	Yes	No	Not Yet	Not Sure
Encourage me to act early to achieve better outcomes for myself	Yes	No	Not Yet	Not Sure
Enable and support me to achieve best possible recovery and return to thriving as a manager and leader	Yes	No	Not Yet	Not Sure

Do I need to pay attention to any of the “over” vulnerabilities that impact my well-being?

You might have some other “overs” you can add:

- Overworking
- Overthinking
- Overwhelming
-
-
-



STEP TWO - KEY STRATEGIES TO GET ME STARTED

What knowledge do I need to build on?

-
-
-

With whom should I connect / re-connect?

-
-
-

Where do I need to be more curious in asking bold questions of myself and others?

-
-
-

What other information do I need to identify the important issues I am trying to resolve for:

1. Myself

-
-
-

2. My workplace

-
-
-

What information do I have or know already, and what does it tell me?

-
-
-



Personal SWOT:

Focus on well-being, minimising stress, managing mental health and resiliency.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

When I listen to myself, I notice..... (tick or highlight)

- I use negative demotivating words (inner critic)
- I am supportive and encouraging
- I recognise that sometimes mistakes do happen
- I tend to overthink
- I stay present and mindful
- I recognise the emotions that come with difficult thoughts

When I listen how I talk to others, I notice:

-
-
-

Starting with **SMALL OR MICRO STEPS, I will commit to these actions over the next 3 weeks**
(SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound)

Micro Step WEEK ONE	
Micro Step WEEK TWO	
Micro Step WEEK THREE	



STEP THREE - DEVELOPING MY 90-DAY ACTION PLAN

PLAN - DO - STUDY - ACT

PLAN

What will success look like in 90 days?
What I am going to do to get there?

DO

When and where will I try these few things out?

STUDY

How will I review/evaluate if it is working?

ACT

If it is working well, I will do more of
If it is not working well, I will ...

