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XI's

**THE WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH
ECOSYSTEM**

A white paper by
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About the author



An organisational change management rebel with a cause!

Enjoying challenging the status quo I drive new ways of working along with new ways of thinking.

I have authored four books on organizational change management.

I am an author, speaker, coach, mentor, facilitator and trainer, with the desire to make a difference.

I am passionate about enabling individuals to be resilient and thrive in a rapidly changing and ambiguous world.

We need to be creative and innovative in the way we transition people through change so that it becomes embedded into the fabric of the organisation.

“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.” ~ Glenn Close

INTRODUCTION	4
THE ECOSYSTEM.....	5
POINT SOLUTIONS	6
MOODBEAM	6
MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS.....	7
THERE IS AN APP FOR THAT.....	8
STICKING PLASTER	9
THE X I'S.....	10
1. INTERCEPTIONS	12
2. INFORMATION.....	12
3. INSTRUCTION.....	13
4. INDIVIDUALIZATION.....	14
5. INDICATIONS.....	15
<i>Language</i>	15
<i>Behavior</i>	15
6. INTERVENTIONS.....	16
7. INTEGRATIONS	16
8. IMPROVEMENTS	17
9. IMMUNITY	17
10. ILLIMITABLE	18
THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT.....	20
DELOITTE	20
PWC.....	20
HEALTH AFFAIRS.....	20
HRZONE.....	20
NSW GOVERNMENT.....	20
THE HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA.....	21
SPEAK YOUR MIND	21
CONCLUSION.....	22

Introduction

If you read about me at the front in this paper, you would have noted that I have called myself ‘an organizational change management rebel with a cause.’

“What does that actually mean?” I hear you ask.

The “rebel” comes with challenging traditional thinking, pushing the boundaries of organizational change management as a profession and questioning the status quo that results from a mindset of indifference.

The “cause” in this paper, is the mental wellbeing of you and your employees.

The wellbeing of your employees is key to increased productivity and profitability.

Your healthy organization is a wealthy organization.

Because of my extensive work in organizational change management, I know that individuals can thrive in an uncertain and rapidly changing environment. They can be resilient. The foundation of their resilience is their mental wellbeing.

My cause is to make a difference and avoid the unnecessary stress, anxiety, and fatigue in the workplace that can result in employee burnout.

Is that a cause you can support?

I would guess that your employees hope so.

This paper is both a blueprint and guide, written so that you can consume (and share) new ideas in an easy to digest format.

If you are truly committed to the wellbeing of your people, I will show you how to create an ecosystem to achieve outstanding results.

The ecosystem

If you are truly committed to looking after the mental wellbeing of your people, you will create an ecosystem of **interceptions, information, instruction, individualization, indications, interventions, integrations, improvements, immunity and it is illimitable.**

These are the ten I's or as I have named the eco-system – the X I's.

The X I's are not bolted on to work as an afterthought, but you embed them into the fabric of your organization through both intentional and thoughtful design.

Many employers claim they are concerned about the mental health of their employees, but their actions do not support their assertions.

They invest in point solutions. You do not want to be one of those employers.

Let me explain why.

A point solution is an investment in one particular tool, product or service without regard to related issues, needs and dependencies.

Alone, they do not work. They are too narrow and shallow.

They are often the 'shiny new thing' and seen as a panacea for all issues related to mental wellbeing at work.

Employers invest in point solutions when they fail to see employee mental health as a priority against other business demands. They take a reactive approach to mental wellbeing rather than a proactive and preventative approach.

They make the dangerous assumption that a point solution will suffice and in turn be public testament that they really care.

There is a belief that seriously investing in an ecosystem for mental wellbeing will not be cost effective.

The X I's are not bolted on to work as an afterthought but embedded into the fabric of the organization through intentional and thoughtful design.

If you need proof of that, there is a list of reputable organizations and their return-on-investment findings, included at the end of this paper.

When I have convinced you that you need an ecosystem, get your CFO to read page 20 for the ROI research.

Point solutions

Let me provide you with some examples of point solutions and explain to you their shortcomings.

Note that if you use these solutions as part of a wider ecosystem, they can add value. As point solutions alone, they do not.

If you choose a point solution and believe it will take care of the mental wellbeing of your employees, you are doing them not only a massive injustice, but also putting them in harm's way.

Moodbeam

This month, in an article for BBC News, Suzanne Bearne, reported on wearable technology called Moonbeam.

The report read as follows.

'The gadget, which links to a mobile phone app and web interface, has two buttons, one yellow and one blue. The idea is that you press the yellow one if you are feeling happy, and the blue one if you are sad.'

Aimed at companies who wish to monitor the wellbeing of staff who are working from home, the idea is that employees are encouraged to wear the wristband (they can say no) and press the relevant button as they see fit throughout the working week.

*Managers can then view an online dashboard to see how workers are feeling and coping. With bosses no longer able to check in physically with their team, Moodbeam hopes to bridge the gap.'*¹

My issue with the solution and its reported intent is that it promotes management by abdication. You cannot delegate care for the mental wellbeing of your employees to technology.

The report implies that your managers can just check their dashboard and no longer have to check in with their employees.

You can certainly leverage technology but checking in with their employees IS THEIR JOB.

This sort of technology as a point solution is pointless and a total waste of money. As part of an ecosystem, it can certainly add value.

The eco-system must consist of *information* and *instruction* for your managers to enable them to analyze and interpret the data being presented to them. The Moonbeam dashboard presents comparisons of happiness rankings of individuals, teams and locations. How do

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-55637328>

your managers make sense of this information so that they can make timely interventions to prevent mental health issues occurring?

The eco-system must consist of *information* and *instruction* for your managers so they can have the right conversations and make the right interventions when their dashboard shows them action is needed.

The eco-system must consist of *immunity* – psychological safety – that is, a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking.

In the absence of an environment in which your employees feel safe to say, “I am unhappy, “I need help” or “I am struggling”, they will not share how they are really feeling for fear of repercussions such as discrimination.

Mental Health First Aiders

The introduction of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) into organizations is now a global movement with increasing popularity.

It is a good initiative and to be praised and encouraged.

But, without an eco-system that includes *immunity*, your employees will be reluctant to reach out for help.

A May 20, 2019 report from the American Psychiatric Association stated:

‘About half of workers are concerned about discussing mental health issues in the workplace; a third worry about consequences if they seek help.’²

In Australia, the Black Dog Institute reports:

“54% of people with mental illness do not access any treatment.”³

On its own, the provision of MHFA personnel is like you putting a sticking plaster on the gaping wound that is mental health support in the workplace.

Your eco-system must *inform* and *instruct* everyone about the role of the MHFA and what will occur when a first aider is approached.

Your eco-system has to include *interceptions* to prevent mental health issues occurring in the workplace. Without this, MHFA are just reacting to a situation that should have been prevented from occurring in the first place. As the title indicates, this initiative is about a first aid approach to mental health.

The provision of MHFA should not be an excuse not to *inform* and *instruct* everyone in the organization about how to identify and respond to mental health issues.

² [https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/about-half-of-workers-are-concerned-about-discussing-mental-health-issues-in-the-workplace-a-third-worry-about-consequences-if-they-seek-help#:~:text=%E2%80%94Roughly%20half%20of%20American%20workers,American%20Psychiatric%20Association%20\(APA\).](https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/about-half-of-workers-are-concerned-about-discussing-mental-health-issues-in-the-workplace-a-third-worry-about-consequences-if-they-seek-help#:~:text=%E2%80%94Roughly%20half%20of%20American%20workers,American%20Psychiatric%20Association%20(APA).)

³ https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/1-facts_figures.pdf

It should not be an excuse for the likes of HR, People and Culture, and the Chief People Officers in your organization to shirk responsibility to look after the wellbeing of your employees.

Your eco-system has to have *integrations* with MHFA including employee assistance programs, occupational health services, work health and safety, and medical professionals.

There is an app for that

The third, and final point solution I would like share with you is *the app*. The availability of mental health apps has exploded in recent years and seeing them as silver bullets is a real danger.

Many organizations have deployed these apps onto their employee's personal devices.

Once again, many of these apps have some value but only when you place them in an eco-system for mental health prevention and care.

In 2019, the Sydney Morning Herald referenced a study undertaken by VicHealth and Deakin University that found that even the “good” apps (scientifically verified and not too costly) were not recommended to be used as treatment on their own.

‘The 2019 study found that most health and wellbeing mobile phone apps currently available are not based on any scientific evidence, despite some costing as much as \$50 a month.

After reviewing 348 health and wellbeing apps, the researchers gave a whopping 75 per cent of the apps a score of 2.5 stars or less (out of five).

Some are great, and well worth your time and money, experts say. But others are a total waste of time – some can even be dangerous.”⁴

All of your employees who need mental health support should have access to an eco-system of high-quality resources (which could include an app) so that they can get the support they need, when and where they need it.

Apps are often focused on a singular approach to mental health such as mindfulness, meditation or gratitude. If one of your employees is struggling with adapting to change, problem solving, collaboration, or self-efficacy, these apps are not going to help address their stress or anxiety. They are not *individualized* and do not address the context in which an employee finds themselves.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health in the workplace.

⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/wellness-and-mental-health-apps-are-they-worth-it-20190312-p513if.html>

Sticking plaster

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health in the workplace.

When you create an eco-system, employees have access to the support they need depending on the situation in which they find themselves.

These were just three examples of point solutions I wanted to share with you. There are many more.

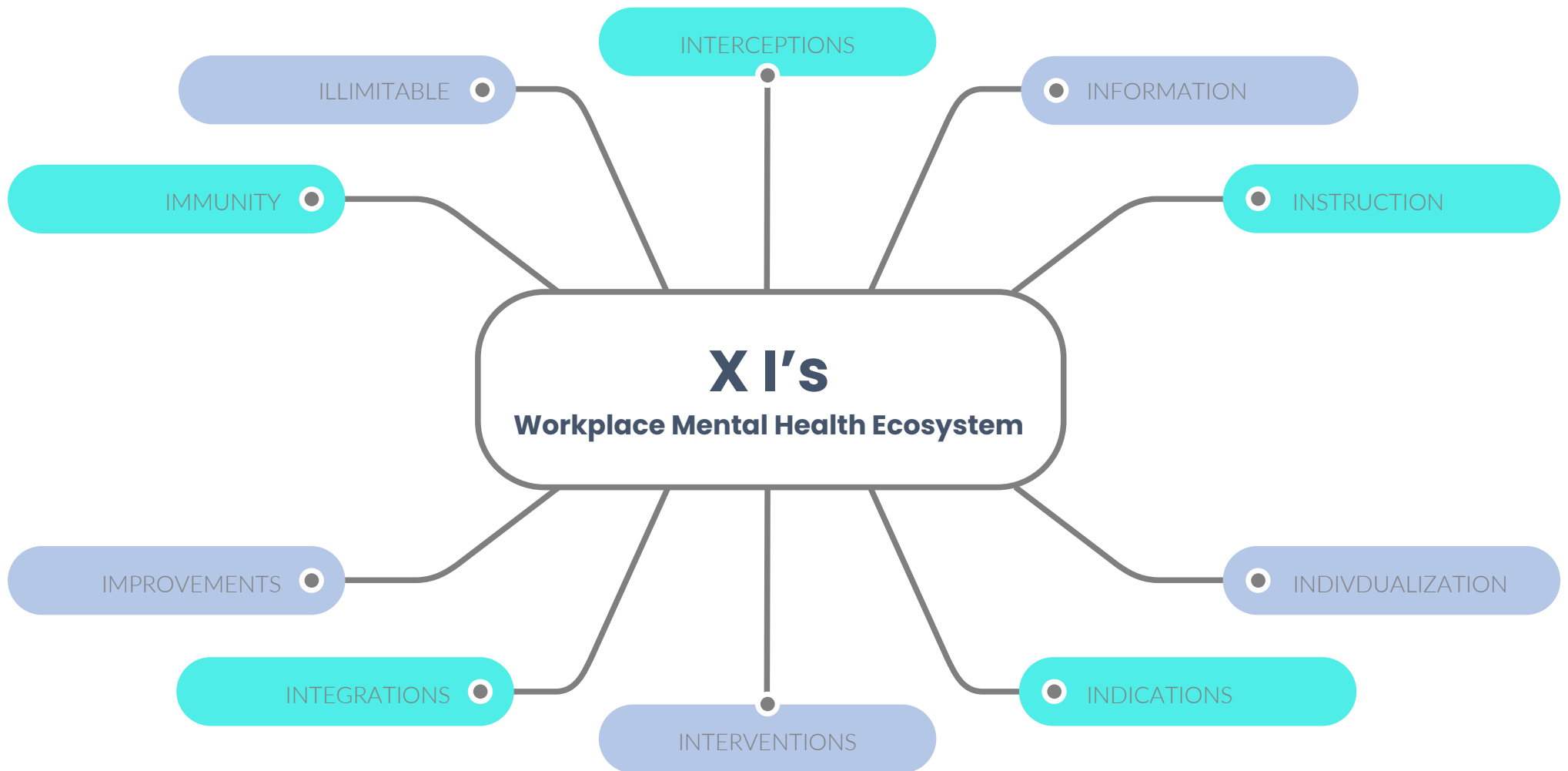
On their own they will have little impact on the mental wellbeing of employees.

When you embed them into an ecosystem of activities, tools, products, facilities and services, you can make a difference.

The X I's

What you need, is what I have termed the 10 I's – or X I's – that comprise the eco-system needed to effectively address mental health issues in your workplace.

These are **interceptions, information, instruction, individualization, indications, interventions, integrations, improvements, immunity and illimitable.**



1. Interceptions

The Oxford Dictionary definition of interception is “the action or fact of preventing someone or something from continuing to a destination.”

Your eco-system for mental wellbeing in the workplace must have at its core the proactive measures that are put in place to avoid mental health issues occurring.

Most of the existing point solutions offered to organizations are reactive and trying to address a situation which could have been averted.

You need to develop a positive work environment that supports and encourages the mental wellbeing of employees.

There needs to be workload balancing and appropriate rewards for employee efforts.

Your workplace needs to be fair and equitable and provide immunity (psychological safety) for all employees.

I like author [Timothy Clark's](#) description of psychological safety “*as an environment where you feel included, that it is safe to learn and contribute and that you can challenge the status quo – all without any fear of being shamed, embarrassed or marginalized.*”

There needs to be provision of information and instruction (education and training) to develop effective management and leadership capabilities and competencies across your organization.

There also needs to be provision of information and instruction (education and training) for all your employees on how *intercept* mental health issues.

2. Information

All of your employees need access to information and resources in regard to mental wellbeing.

In addition, your leaders and managers of people need access to information and resources that enable them to learn more about how to look after the mental wellbeing of their employees.

A person or team in your organization needs to be made accountable and tasked with regularly scanning for new information about mental health and making it easily accessible to those who need it. Everyone should be notified of the availability of new information that is pertinent to them.

In our rapidly changing environment, new sources of information are becoming available on a daily basis. New research and expert opinion will be frequently published or discussed.

This responsibility does not prevent every individual in your organization actively seeking out information themselves. However, when habitual use is made of systems and processes to

perceive and recognize external information relevant to mental health, the information moves from an individual capability to an organizational one.

Resources available to you include (but are not limited to):

- Publications
- Internet
- Forums
- Conferences
- Newspapers
- Magazines and journals
- Social media groups and channels
- Podcasts
- Videos
- Focus groups
- Professional associations

All of your employees should be encouraged and provided with the time to read and absorb the information made available to them.

3. Instruction

Instruction in relation to improving mental health can take many forms including presentations from both internal and external speakers, classroom training, e-learning, facilitated workshops, coaching, simulations, seminars and one-on-one sessions.

It is an imperative that all of your employees receive quality instruction about how to look after their mental wellbeing and that of others. This is not a one-off event. This instruction should be repeated on a regular basis introducing new concepts and ideas and reinforcing ones previously shared.

When habitual use is made of systems and processes to perceive and recognize external information relevant to mental health, the information moves from an individual capability to an organizational one

Instruction should provide an opportunity for participants to ask questions and seek clarification. It should allow for exploration of ideas and discussion on their application in the workplace. It should provide opportunity to provide feedback on approaches to improving mental health that had been tried and explore improvement initiatives.

Instruction for your leaders is essential for the mental wellbeing of employees.

Your leaders need instruction including (but not limited to):

- Removing the stigma of mental health
 - Challenging stereotypes
 - Being inclusive
 - Zero tolerance to discrimination
 - Encouraging discussion on the topic

- Being supportive
- Being careful with language
- Recognizing the early signs of mental health issues
- Using the right intervention(s)
- Having meaningful conversations
- Listening skills
- Leading with empathy
- Emotional intelligence
- Psychological safety
- Employee autonomy and empowerment
- Promoting self-care
- Cognitive restructuring
- Positive reinforcement

If your leaders are not enabled to create an environment in which resilience in the face of constant, uncertain and unprecedented change can thrive, and employee mental wellbeing is a core organizational tenet, embedded into its fabric, all other efforts are futile.

4. Individualization

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting the mental wellbeing of your employees.

Everyone is different with different needs.

The support and assistance required by your employees can change day-by-day or week-by-week. Your eco-system for mental wellbeing needs to reflect this reality.

The support provided to employees should be contextual – related to the current circumstances, the problem being faced, the adversity to be overcome, and the prevailing state of mind.



One of your employees may need assistance to overcome a complex problem which is causing them anxiety and stress. Access to resources and support in regard to effective problem solving, communication and collaboration will be far more appropriate than access to resources for mindfulness.

A few days later, the same employee may be suffering stress and anxiety due to a dramatic change in direction after having spent a significant time pursuing a particular outcome that is

no longer required. If this resulted in this employee going into denial, exhibiting angry behavior, blaming others and losing control then resources related to self-regulation, self-observation, and reframing would be more appropriate than access to resources for showing gratitude.

5. Indications

Everyone in your organization needs to be educated in regard to the indicators to look for which could indicate that someone could be having mental health issues.

If one of your employees feels that something is not quite the same with a colleague or they notice a change in behavior or language, these are indicators that should lead to a conversation and offer of support and encouragement.

The indicators maybe very small but that should not deter action. Your employees should trust their instinct and reach out.

Signs to look for include (but not limited to):

Language

- Moody
- Confused
- Irrational
- Angry
- Negative
- Abrupt
- Dismissive

Behavior

- Mood swings
- Withdrawn
- Loss of interest
- Reckless
- Change in appearance
- Signs of stress and anxiety

In Australia, there is a non-profit suicide prevention organisation called [RUOK?](#) It was founded in 2009 and advocates for people to have conversations with others.

In 2019 it conducted a national omnibus survey that revealed:

- Approximately two-thirds of people (63%) were not confident they knew the signs that someone might be struggling with life
- 41% hadn't asked someone if they were OK because they weren't sure they knew the signs

- Nearly 1 in 2 (49%) believed they'd be more confident starting a conversation if they knew the signs⁵

6. Interventions

It is imperative that as part of your mental health eco-system, everyone – especially your leaders – have the confidence and conviction to intervene when they believe someone may be having mental health issues.

I mentioned the R U OK? organization earlier. It is a terrific organization, and there are R U OK? days held each year, but I still find many leaders reluctant to ask the question R U OK?

This is a fear of not knowing what to do if some responds with “no I am not.”

All your leaders must understand that they are not expected to be medical practitioners, psychologist or psychiatrists. They must understand that they do not have to “fix” someone’s problems.

With this understanding they will be better prepared to ask the question.

The role of you leaders is to ask the question; listen with an open mind; encourage action and check-in.

Your leaders should try and determine what support the employee needs. This could be support from the leader themselves or helping the employee to find the right health professional to engage with.

Leaders should then check-in on a regular basis and find out how the employee is going and if they are able to manage the situation, they have found themselves in. Leaders should stay in touch and ensure the employee knows they are there to support them.

You must ensure that everyone has the capability and competency to make the right intervention at the right time and in the right way to effectively fuel the mental health eco-system.

A conversation could change a life.

7. Integrations

Mental health initiatives in the workplace should not be stand-alone or something bolted on as an afterthought.



⁵ https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/22b3e3c9/files/uploaded/RUOK_OmnibusReport_2019_LR.pdf

Your mental health eco-system should be embedded into the fabric of your organization and be integrated with other programs, tools, products, services and functions.

There should be effective integration with functions such as People and Culture, HR and programs such as Employee Assistance Programs.

There should be effective integration with services such as crisis supporting and suicide prevention services; counselling and support services; mental health professional services; advisory, referral and support services.

8. Improvements

Your mental health eco-system should be subject to continual and incremental improvement.

Improvement ideas can come from within and outside of your organization.

Employees are a great source of information about what works well and what could work better.

There is always new research and initiatives becoming available in regard to improving mental health in the workplace.

You need to ensure there are systems and processes in place to collate and analyze employee feedback as well as scan external sources on a regular basis.

Improvements should be based on both qualitative and quantitative data.

When you take the time to accumulate baseline data and take stock of the initiatives in place, a check can be made to see if the initiative is having the desired impact and adoption rate. If not, adaptations can be made.

As stated in a 2019 Deloitte paper “The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business”:

‘Performance measurement—tracking key performance indicators, assessing the effectiveness of interventions with employees, and regularly calculating ROI—is a key element of workplace mental health programs that is often overlooked. Putting in place mechanisms to measure performance can enable organizations to achieve desired program impact, improve adoption rates, and enhance decision-making.’⁶

9. Immunity

Without psychological safety – immunity from being judged, shamed, humiliated or punished – your employees cannot bring their whole selves to work, take risks, make mistakes and be vulnerable.

⁶ <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ca/Documents/about-deloitte/ca-en-about-blueprint-for-workplace-mental-health-final-aoda.pdf>

A 2020 Chandler Macleod article summed up the relationship between psychological safety and mental health.

‘Conversely, a psychologically unsafe work environment is characterized by a fear of sharing information, a reluctance to stand out and a need to fit in or go with the ‘status quo’, whereas the hallmarks of a psychologically safe environment are a sense of courage to speak the truth, a confidence reporting problems or mistakes, and a sense of freedom to express themselves authentically.

Given this, it is not surprising that employees’ who do not feel psychologically safe may be much less willing to reveal their concerns, and in some cases, their mental health conditions may be a direct result of a psychologically unsafe culture.”⁷

The mental health eco-system should be subject to continual and incremental improvement

As mentioned earlier, interventions such as conversations could change a life.

If there is no psychological safety, how can you have these vital conversations when your employees do not feel safe to reveal their concerns and their mental health?

We need an environment in which everyone feels safe to speak their truth.

Your leaders must recognize that despite every employee contributing to the workplace culture, they are ultimately responsible for encouraging and building a psychologically safe environment.

They need to lead with empathy and compassion. They need to actively listen and take appropriate action as needed. They need to encourage questions and feedback.

Aggressive and defensive language or behavior should not be tolerated, and leaders should work to create a team build on mutual trust and respect.

Everyone should feel safe.

10. Illimitable

To use a cliché, looking after the mental wellbeing of your employees is a journey not a destination.

Just like any ecosystem, your mental health ecosystem should be constantly evolving and transforming. It is never static as it is forever subject to internal and external forces driving change.

⁷ <https://www.chandlermacleod.com/blog/2020/09/mental-health-at-work-the-importance-of-psychological-safety>

Just as humans are dependent on natural ecosystem services to survive, your organization is dependent on a strong mental health ecosystem for survival.

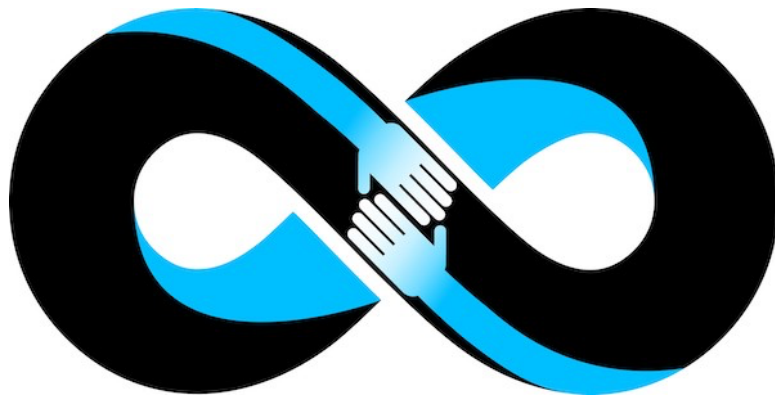
We must all continually seek ways in which to create supportive environments and optimize our employee wellbeing.

This is because we recognize that if we keep employees healthy, we also keep costs down.

Your ecosystem should be created in an iterative manner beginning with the areas that will have the greatest impact e.g., leadership training and preventative interventions.

Your organization should keep moving along a maturity continuum in regard to mental health in your workplace.

What you should stop – and stop now – is the investment of time and money in point solutions. Yoga classes on a Friday and gluten free snacks are nice-to-haves. They are not the must-haves which I have covered in this paper.



The return on investment

There is plenty of evidence from research and case studies that demonstrate the ROI to be obtained from good mental health ecosystems.

Still not convinced. Don't take my word for it – read theirs.

DELOITTE

ROI for every \$1 = \$5 (UK)

[Mental health and employers: Refreshing the case for investment](#)

ROI for every \$1 = \$4.10 (CA)

[The ROI in workplace mental health programs: Good for people, good for business A blueprint for workplace mental health programs](#)

PWC

ROI for every \$1 = \$2.3 (AU)

[Creating a mentally healthy workplace: Return on investment analysis](#)

HEALTH AFFAIRS

ROI for every \$1 = \$6 (US)

[Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings](#)

HRZONE

ROI for every \$1 = \$4.20 (AU)

[Getting evidence on good mental health ROI](#)

NSW GOVERNMENT

ROI for every \$1 = \$1.5 - \$4 (AU)

[Mentally Healthy Workplaces in NSW: A Return-On-Investment Study](#)

THE HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

ROI for every \$1 = \$5.81 (AU)

[Best-Practice Guidelines: Workplace Health in Australia](#)

SPEAK YOUR MIND

ROI for every \$1 = \$5 (Global)

[The Return On The Individual: Time To Invest In Mental Health](#)

Conclusion

A mentally healthy workplace has benefits for your organization and your employees.

I have illustrated the financial benefits of implementing an ecosystem for mental health.

Not only do you have a legal obligation to look after the health and safety of your employees, but you will need to do so to attract and retain talent.

A USA survey called “2019 Workforce Attitudes Toward Behavioural Health” found that 85% of people surveyed said that behavioural health benefits were now an important factor when evaluating a new job.⁸

Australian research found that nearly half of employees say a mentally healthy workplace is important when looking for a job, and that it was the second most important factor in an employee's decision to accept a new position, and this was ranked only behind salary.⁹

The research also found that when employees know their workplace invests in the right mental health initiatives, 60% are more committed to the organisation, and 60% say that they're less likely to seek employment elsewhere.

This means that looking after the mental health of your employees is a critical factor in truly becoming an employer of choice.

⁸ <https://go.ginger.io/Annual-Behavioral-Health-Report-2019>

⁹ <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/media-releases/media-releases/mentally-healthy-workplaces-vital-to-attract-and-keep-the-best-staff>

