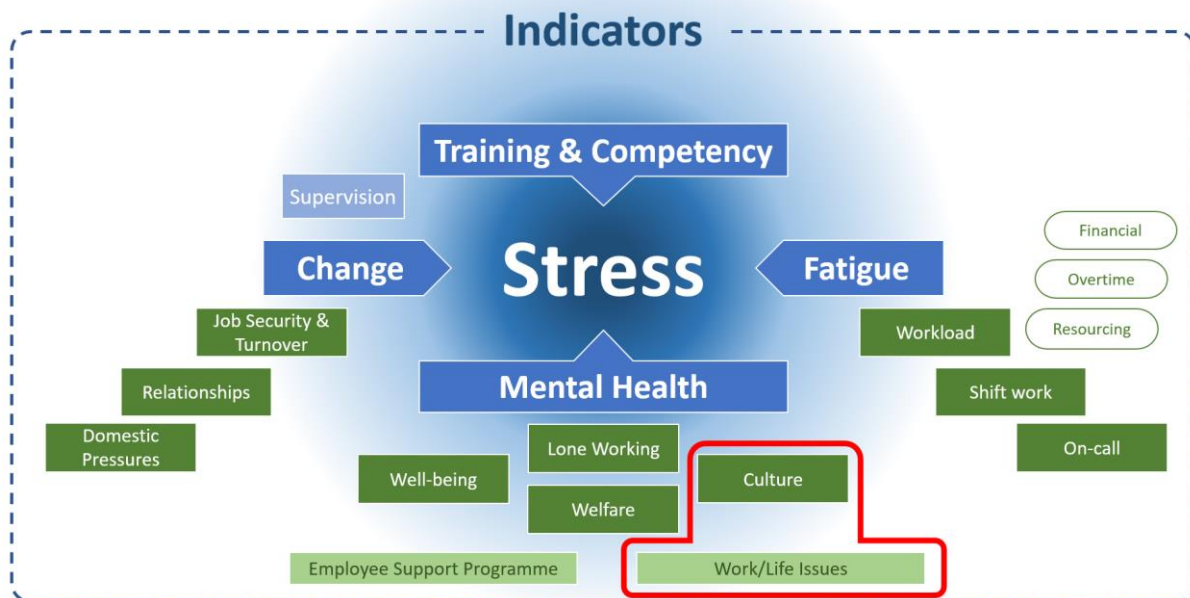


## CDOIF: STRESS – Mental Health: A guide to recognising and managing culture and work life issues in the workplace



Remember, we can all experience problems, so consider your own mental health, well-being and stress levels.

### What is culture and work life issues within the workplace?

Culture is the collection of the beliefs, perceptions and values that people share in relation to an organization, such as a workplace or community. In the workplace culture can be an important element in how workers perceive risks.

It is important to note that leadership plays an important role and has a significant impact on whether a culture is perceived as positive or negative.

Having a balance between work and your home life is essential to combat stress and a positive workplace culture will help support this. The stress associated with an unbalanced lifestyle is costly; it increases individual health risks and damages productivity. Employees who have the tools to balance their professional and personal lives are happier, healthier, and more productive.

### Why should an employer be concerned about stress in the workplace, the culture within their business, and how effective management can have a positive impact?

A positive culture encourages people to be open and thrive within the workplace, which has beneficial impacts on both the employee and the business e.g. high retention rates, acceptance of change, increased productivity.

Many employees place a high value on work-life balance. Any employer that supports a good work-life balance as part of their culture is likely to attract and retain better qualified candidates.

### **How do I know if I may have a problem?**

The following may indicate there is an issue.

- Gap in engagement between employees and management, an 'us and them' approach
  - Unwillingness to report or communicate issues and concerns
  - Staff say what you want to hear rather than what you should know
  - Lack of open-door engagement between management and staff
- Reluctance to go the extra mile
  - Overtime refusal
  - Reluctance to engage in or sponsor external activities (e.g. community schemes, voluntary work, 'development' opportunities etc)
- Increase in sickness / absence rates- e.g. struggle to reduce absence due to stress related illnesses.
- Drop in productivity and/or quality with signs of:
  - Poor motivation
  - Lack of recognition or appreciation
  - Not challenged
  - Boredom / disengagement
- High staff rotation or turnover
  - Poor employee retention.
  - Difficulty in recruiting.
- Disengagement of employees leading to possible increased accident/incident rate.
  - A poor culture results in lower engagement, increasing isolation and issues with communication and concentration which can lead to an increase in accidents / incidents.

### **What should I be doing?**

Ensure there are effective and robust leading and lagging indicators (KPI) in place to monitor and highlight potential or developing issues. For example, an indicator that illustrates an increase of staff turnover/employee retention.

Promote an open culture where people feel safe and comfortable to talk and raise concerns, either with their colleagues or management by implementing a open door policy between employees and leadership, as well as providing line managers with the skills to have sensitive conversations. Ensure that issues raised are documented and acted upon within a timely manner, and that feedback is given on any action (or non-action) taken.

Set clear goals to develop employees and provide opportunities for staff to undertake training to broaden their skill and knowledge base. In addition, demonstrate recognition and appreciation of staff efforts to go above and beyond their role.

### **How can I do it?**

- Implement and roll out a staff survey that includes questions around culture of the business [NB: Publish and act on the results – however painful this might be!]
- Need clear buy-in of objectives, both personal and business, demonstrated through visible leadership.

- Provide a company strategy & clear leadership regarding objectives.
- Structured engagement with employees in setting objectives and tracking their progress.
- Implement an appreciate and/or recognition scheme
- Instigate regular face to face open 1-2-1 meetings with line management (i.e. Safe to Say)
- Include culture and work-life management to site and /or Safety Rep meetings as an agenda item and encourage feedback and discussion.
- Look at work patterns, such as hybrid or remote working and set clear policy for managing these (e.g. flexible working policy)
- Consider developing engagement programs such as voluntary or community work

**By taking these steps and actively engaging and asking about the welfare of others, be that physically or mentally, the organisation will demonstrate that it cares about its workforce at all levels, and they matter.**

### Further Information

(1) HSE Stress website <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/index.htm>

(2) Mental Health and Work, (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2008)  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/212266/hwwb-mental-health-and-work.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212266/hwwb-mental-health-and-work.pdf)

(3) Tackling workplace stress using the HSE Stress Management Standards - TUC and HSE guidance for health and safety representatives (TUC/HSE 2017)  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/tackling-workplace-stress-guide.pdf>

(4) IOSH (Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) – Stress - <https://www.iosh.co.uk/Books-and-resources/Our-OH-toolkit/Stress.aspx>

(5) How to tackle work-related stress: A guide for employers on making the Management Standards work  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg430.pdf>

(6) [Stress Workbook \(hse.gov.uk\)](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/workbook/)

#### Disclaimer

*This briefing note is shared in order to promote learning and improve safety. You should seek appropriate guidance regarding the relevance, accuracy, and completeness of this information to your circumstances prior to implementation.*