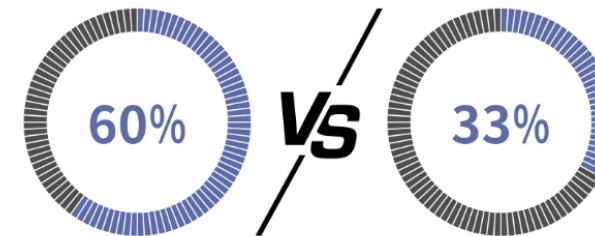




The Mindful Business Charter

An introduction

Mental health in the legal profession



Legal Sector

General Population

Reporting high levels of anxiety (Law Society, 2023)



Almost a quarter of lawyers feel unable to manage their stress levels (The Law Society, 2019)

42.2

Where the cut-off score for high risk of burnout is 34.8, the average score from legal sector professionals is 42.2 (LawCare, 2021).

X2

Lawyers are twice as likely to contemplate suicide as the general population (Krill, 2023).

It is a global issue for the profession



IBA 2021 Mental Wellbeing in the legal profession report Discrepancy in Wellbeing Index scores

61 - Ages 55-59

56 - Men

52 - Cause for concern

51 - Average global score for lawyers

47 - Women

47 - Ethnic minority

45 - With disability

43 - Ages 23-29

Based on WHO-5 Mental Wellbeing Index

And things are not getting any better



- A majority looking to leave their jobs in next 5 years
- A third looking to leave the profession
- 60% report poor wellbeing
- High risks of burnout
- Average score of 44 on the WHO-5 Mental Wellbeing Index

“I love the law but the industry is bad for its people”

Life in the Law – LawCare

Business case – findings overview

Areas of needless expenditure

- Costly mistakes
- Absence
- Presenteeism and burnout
- Resignations

Areas to increase revenue

- Increasing performance
- Better recruitment/retention

Wellbeing programs are not interchangeable

- Ineffective individualised programs vs systemic change/prevention and stress reduction



Mistakes

28.4%

of those suffering from poor mental health due to work stress made a mistake which wouldn't have occurred otherwise (The Law Society, 2019).

11X

Highly stressed employees are eleven times more likely to make mistakes than low stress employees (WONE, 2025).

"It can be safely said that stress reduces our ability to gather information and that it impairs our ability to analyze using the working memory." (Selart and Johansen, 2011, p.139).



Areas of needless expenditure

Absence, presenteeism, burnout and retention

\$33.3
million

Lost by the average law firm due to mental health related issues- based on 10.2% of annual staffing costs (Unmind, 2024).

8X

Those who are highly stressed take eight times as many sick days as those who report low stress (WONE, 2025).

51%

of all long-term sick leave is due to stress anxiety and depression (Health and Safety Executive, 2024).



3X

Presenteeism – working while sick – costs businesses three times as much as absence (Greenburg et al., 2015).

4x

High stress employees are four times more likely to have low engagement (WONE, 2025).

\$5.6
million

The cost of associate attrition a US firm of 100 associates can expect annually (Levit & Linder; Reich, 2020).

75%

of associates cite burnout as the primary reason for leaving their firm (University of Miami, 2019).

Areas where revenue can be increased

Meeting client needs, AI, billable hour, increased performance,



12%

- **Productivity has been seen to increase by 12%** when organisations focus on positive wellbeing (Oswald et al. 2015) with other studies showing **increases in collaboration and interpersonal relationships** (Whelan and Zelenski, 2011), as well as **client loyalty and profitability** (Krekel, Ward & De Neve, 2019) and even in **better negotiation outcomes** (Carnevale et al., 1986).

1/3

- A study in Australia suggests that only 50–70% of hours worked are billable, (James, 2017) but over time that gap seems to have widened – only **a third of an eight-hour** day is spent by lawyers on billable work according to Clio in 2022.



Recruitment



- In separate studies, both Gallup (2021) and Price Waterhouse Cooper (2013) found that the number one thing that those born 1980 onwards look for in an employer is one who cared about wellbeing, in contrast to older employees who were more likely to prioritise a high salary or a “job for life”.



- 59% employees – 66% managers, 71% C-Suite looking to leave their jobs for one that better supports their wellbeing (Deloitte 2024).



What works – and what doesn't

68%

of workers don't even access workplace wellbeing resources, as they are too time consuming, confusing or cumbersome (Deloitte, 2023).

- Dr William Fleming at Oxford University published a study looking at over 46,000 workers. **His research concluded that individualised interventions don't make any discernible difference to workplace wellbeing.**
- Reports from a variety of countries and sectors all find that individualised, reactive or "trendy" wellbeing initiatives simply don't make meaningful lasting improvements to employee wellbeing (McKinsey Health Institute, Wu et al., Fox et al.,)
- **All these studies identified that a better way is to reduce stress within the role – changing the role, not the employee.**



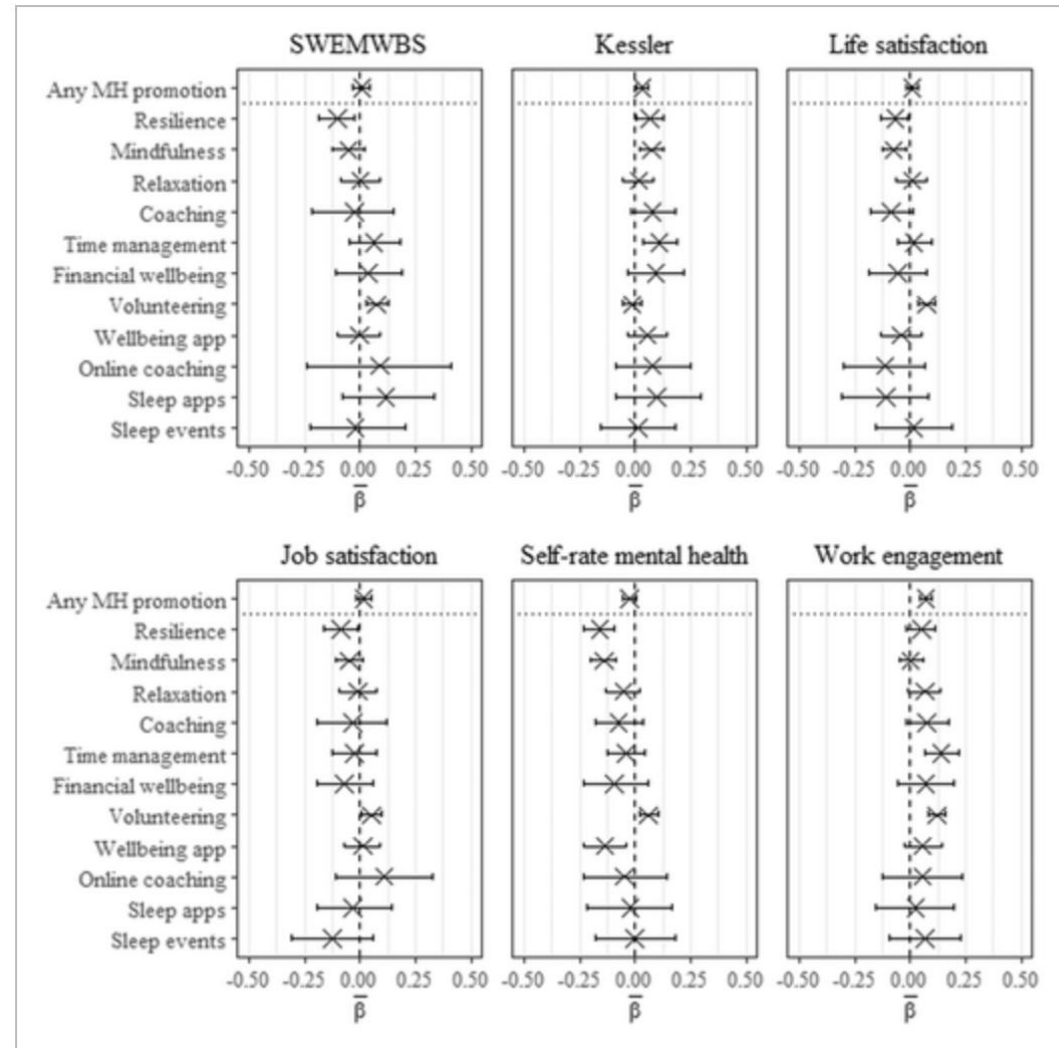
2024 research from William Fleming, Oxford University



- Evaluated 11 different types of universal individual-level wellbeing interventions
- Universal means they should help everyone and individual-level means they target the individual employee
- Analysed 50,000~ employees across 240~ companies across industries

From and with thanks to Wellbeing Research Centre,
University of Oxford

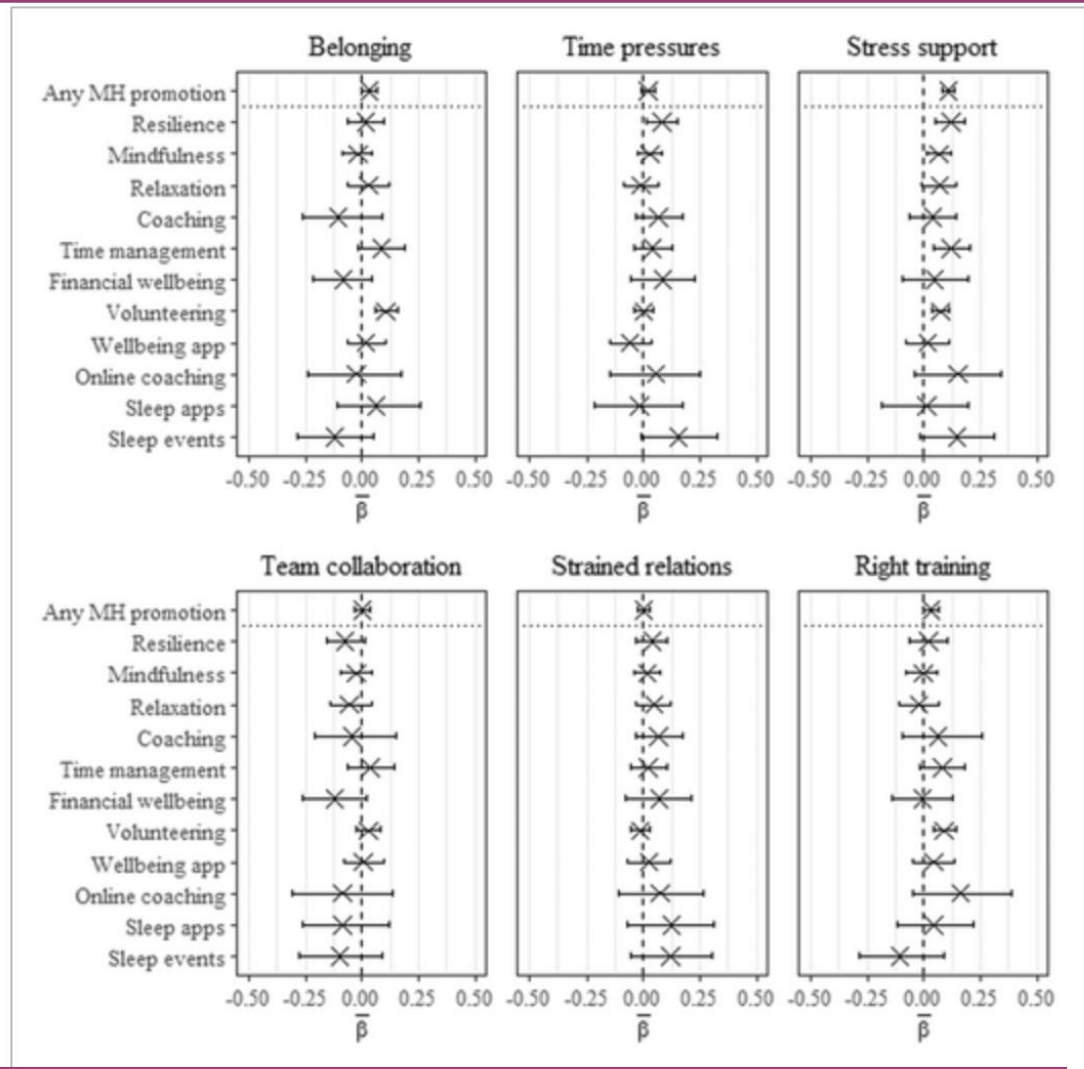
- From and with thanks to Wellbeing Research Centre,
University of Oxford



More results

- Null effects across indirect outcomes
- Across different types of employees
- After controlling for selection bias

From and with thanks to Wellbeing Research Centre,
University of Oxford



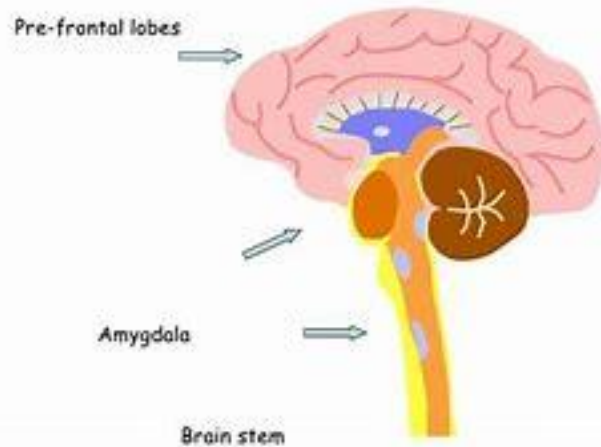
A better way forward

- Studies have shown that organisational level interventions improve work-life balance, workload management, improve retention rates and increase employee happiness (Teoh et al., 2023).
- Reducing unnecessary stress and improving wellbeing through better job design has also been shown to reduce sickness absence (Cooper et al., 2004, Powell et al., 2014).
- “Dropped curb theory” – improves things for everyone.



Why MBC started

The “Amygdala Hijack”

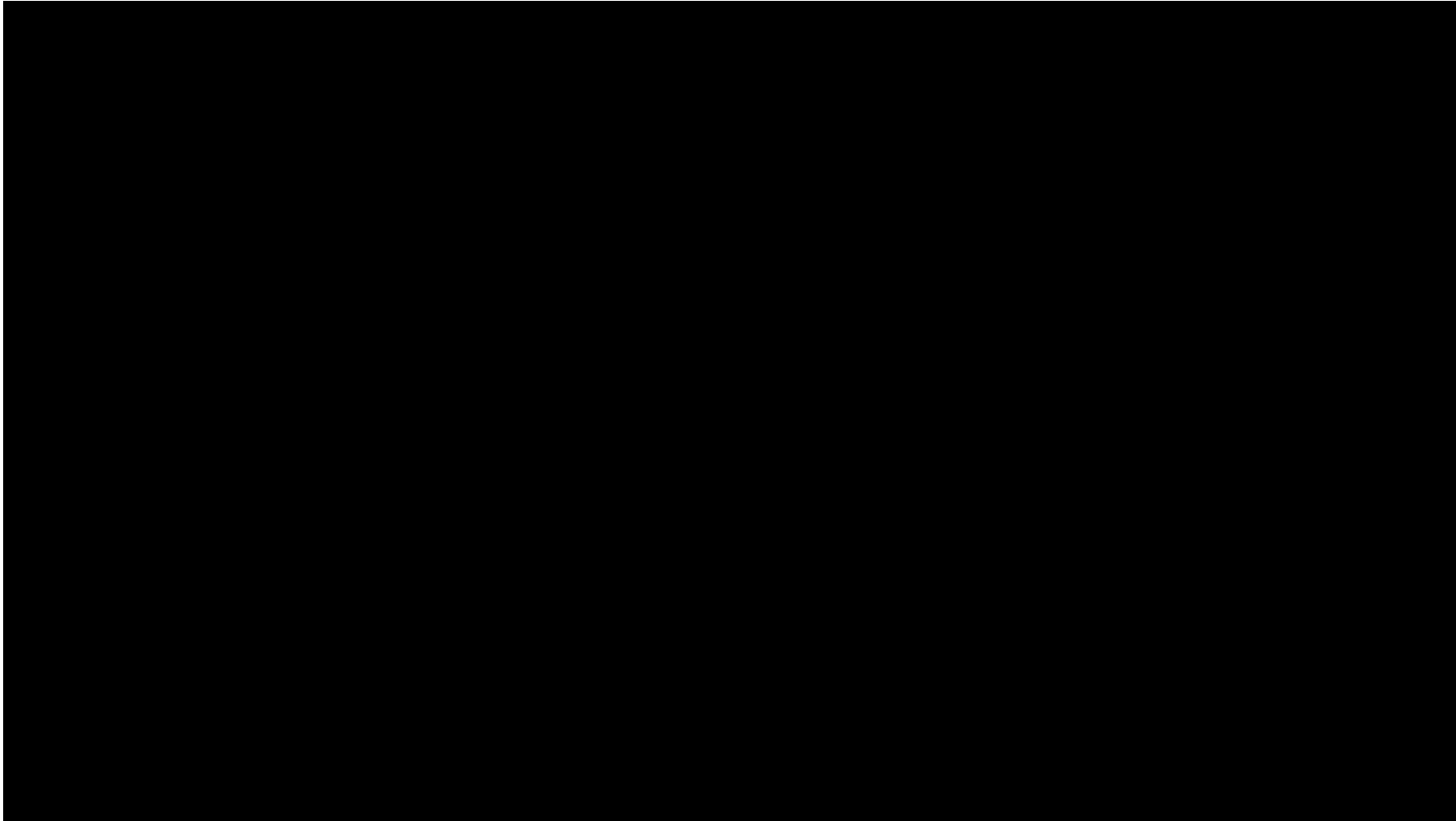


The effects of stress in the workplace

- Stress is one of the major causes of physical and mental illness for professionals.
- Stress lowers cognitive ability, memory function and ability to problem solve
- We make poorer choices, more mistakes and have lower morale.

Burnout results from “chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”
World Health Organization’s International Disease Classification (ICD-11 2019)

An animation to explain



Four main sources of workplace stress

The nature of the work we do.

Some stress is inevitable – the MBC focuses on removing the unnecessary stress

The way our brains work.

Including the sometimes unhelpful thinking patterns we get caught in.

How we work.

The processes and procedures we undertake.

The way we interact with each other.

Within and between our organisations.

The premise of the MBC



Given the nature and effect of stress, most of us would not want to inflict it on ourselves and others if we can avoid it – but we do and then we don't talk about it.

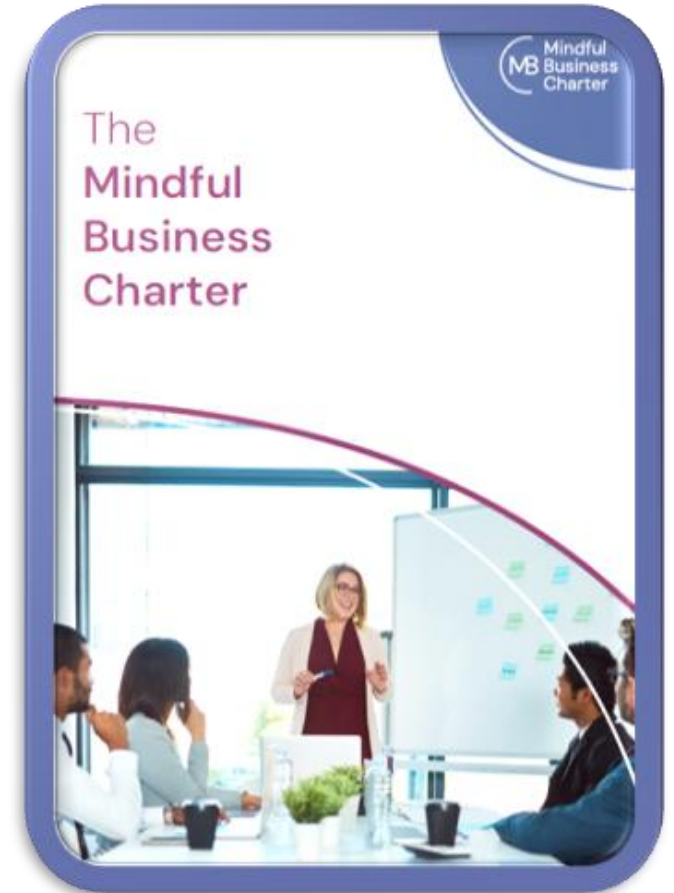
What if:

- (1) we could all try to be a little more aware of the impact of how we are behaving – on ourselves and each other; and
- (2) we gave each other the permission to talk about it?

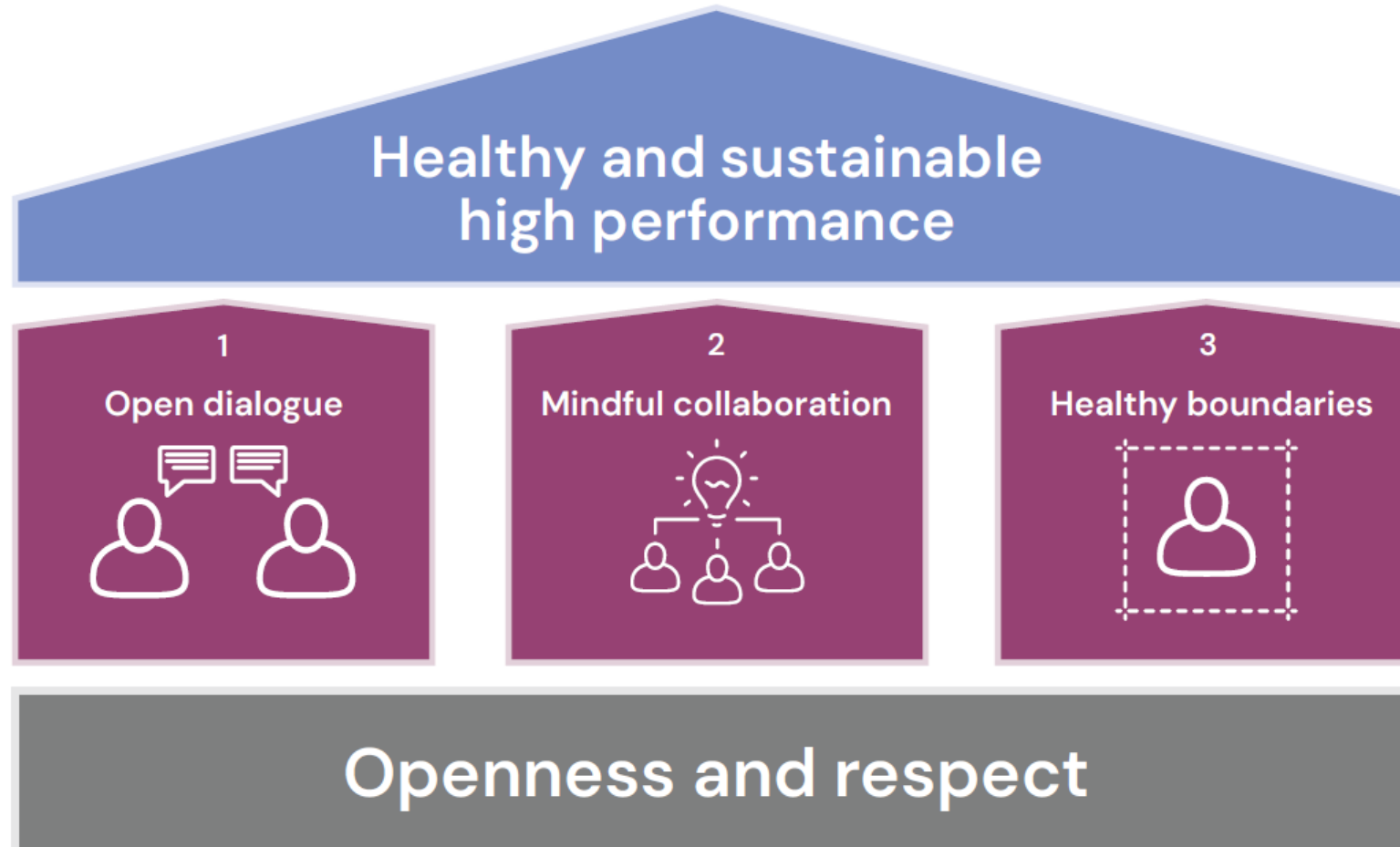
Then we might be able to remove the unnecessary causes of stress and work both more effectively and more healthily.

Accessing the Charter

- You can access an interactive version of the Charter via the public area of the MBC website [here](#)
- In addition, you can download 2 versions from the Members area of the website:
 - [The Charter](#) (2-page document)
 - [The Charter - our community and your commitments](#) - extended to explore our community and the commitments we ask our members to make.



The key elements of the Charter



Openness and respect

Openness and respect

- ✓ Adopt and demonstrate an attitude of professional respect and courtesy towards others. Maintain concern for the wellbeing of colleagues and external contacts.
- ✓ Be thoughtful and inclusive in how you interact with others, being conscious of the impact of your actions and not just your intent.
- ✓ Be clear on your and your organisation's expectations of others.

For example:

- Actively project manage work to ensure minimum impact on the wellbeing of those involved.
 - On a regular basis, ask for and provide informed and respectful feedback on behaviours and their impact.
-

Open dialogue



Open dialogue

- Establish a positive environment for open communication and dialogue, providing team members with clarity and confidence to deliver their best work.
- Create and contribute to opportunities for people to share feedback on working practices generally, within and outside your team/organisation.
- Create and contribute to a culture in which people can ask for help, including to achieve their best work. Respond respectfully and positively to such requests from others.
- Create and contribute to cultures in which people can admit to mistakes. Use mistakes as a learning opportunity and not to shame.



- » Within your team/organisation, and where possible externally too, respectfully challenge behaviours that appear at odds with mindful and responsible working practices
 - » Respond respectfully to challenges you receive.
-

Mindful collaboration



Mindful collaboration

With regard to communications:

- In today's climate of reduced person-to-person communication, be more conscious of your behaviours around technology and their impact.
- Discuss and agree with others their preferred methods of communication.
- Be thoughtful about the use of e-communications.



- » Avoid over-use and unnecessary copying in of other people.
 - » Use clear subject lines in messages and ensure these reflect the message's content.
 - » Work (and encourage others to work) offline where necessary for focussed work.
-

Mindful collaboration



Mindful collaboration

With regard to meetings:

- Be thoughtful and respectful of others' time when planning and conducting meetings.
- Create space in team interactions for everyone to contribute, being particularly attentive to colleagues who may feel less able to speak up because of seniority, background, language, neurodiversity, disability or other factors.



- » Be flexible around the use of hybrid meetings.
 - » When planning meetings, consider accessibility needs, time zones, caring responsibilities and religious observances.
 - » Plan meetings carefully. Consider who needs to attend, giving appropriate notice and setting clear agendas and objectives.
 - » Schedule the time and duration of meetings thoughtfully and avoid last minute cancellations.
-

Mindful collaboration



Mindful collaboration

When asking others to work for or with you:

- Be respectful of the needs and priorities of the other person or team.
- Consider the impact of your request and how it is made, looking beyond your personal needs and intent.



- » Provide sufficient context and information, ideally including the purpose and the form you want the end product to take. Invite the recipient to summarise their understanding of your request and to seek clarification if needed.
 - » Discuss rather than impose deadlines, remaining transparent where possible on the wider timetable. Promptly communicate timing changes when they impact others.
 - » When given a task, ensure that the above has been done and be confident to flag when a deadline is unrealistic and / or unachievable.
 - » Give people as much notice as possible of when their input is likely to be required to reduce unexpected urgent demands.
-

Healthy boundaries



Healthy boundaries

- Actively embrace and encourage the opportunities for flexibility that modern technology and hybrid working patterns allow.
- Where reasonable and practicable, respect the individual working patterns of others and the needs they have to manage their wellbeing. Recognise that people manage their work and non-work responsibilities differently and that flexibility can be especially important for disabled colleagues, carers and those with mental health conditions.
- Be mindful of the needs of, and impact on, others in relation to your working patterns.
- Avoid creating a culture of overwork, presenteeism or constant availability, which can undermine psychological health and disproportionately affect some groups.



- » Consider the use of delayed delivery functions in communications.
 - » Agree systems to contact people outside of their working hours where necessary to avoid the expectation that they should be constantly checking their devices.
 - » Consider the inclusion of working hours in email footers.
 - » Use out of office messaging to manage your own as well as others' expectations.
 - » Unless necessary, avoid contacting people while they are on leave or outside of their working hours.
 - » Be clear in communications when something needs to be read/actioned.
 - » Actively plan ahead for holidays to hand over work and hopefully avoid being disturbed, or at least set boundaries around when you will be available for work issues while on leave.
-

An organisation's commitment

An organisation's commitment

As a member of the MBC Community, we will endeavour to:

- Embed this Charter throughout our business activity and create mechanisms to share MBC resources with staff across our organisation.
 - Implement, in so far as they are relevant and as we are able, the recommendations and guidelines published by the MBC Community from time to time.
 - Provide the necessary resources to support our commitment to the MBC.
 - Develop transparent and evidence-based mechanisms to track progress.
 - Share our progress, the resources we create, the successes we achieve and the challenges we face so that the MBC community can learn from, support and be inspired by all its members.
 - Embed mindful and responsible working in our procurement processes and as a standing item in our key client and supplier review meetings.
 - Encourage our suppliers and clients to join the MBC community.
 - Be mindful about the introduction of new technology to achieve the best results from it – technology should enable better work, not accelerate unhealthy urgency.
-

What we ask of leaders

What we ask of leaders

As a leader in a member organisation:

- Recognise the opportunity and responsibility you have in modelling mindful behaviours and self-care.
 - Support your organisation in delivering upon its commitments and in embedding mindful and responsible working practices in your team and organisation.
 - Foster a culture of openness and inclusion, and actively promote psychological safety and respect in your team and in its dealings with others inside and outside your organisation.
 - Give explicit permission to yourself and those you work with to raise concerns, ask for help and challenge how work is done without fear of negative consequences.
 - Make mindful and responsible working a standard item in your team discussions.
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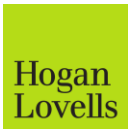
What we ask of everyone

What we ask of everyone

As an individual within a member organisation:

- Support your organisation in delivering upon its commitments to embed mindful and responsible working practices in your team.
 - Seek to ensure your behaviours reflect the expectations and guidance of the MBC.
 - Recognise your agency and ability to challenge behaviours that are not in line with the MBC.
 - Where you feel safe to do so, ask for what you need to perform your role to the best of your ability.
 - Be mindful of the impact of your actions and words on colleagues, including those with different backgrounds, identities and needs.
 - Together, we will build professional environments that enable people to thrive, deliver outstanding work, and create lasting value for clients, organisations and society.
-

A selection of our members

 **ADDLESHAW
GODDARD** **EVERSHEDS****Akin Gump**
STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP **Freshfields**The Paul Hastings logo, consisting of a dark grey square with the words "PAUL HASTINGS" in white, uppercase letters.The Allen & Overy logo, featuring a red rectangle with the words "ALLEN & OVERY" in white, uppercase letters.The Goldman Sachs logo, featuring a blue square with the words "Goldman Sachs" in white, with "Goldman" above "Sachs".The Pinsent Masons logo, featuring a stylized red and white circular icon above the words "Pinsent Masons" in a sans-serif font.The Ashurst logo, featuring the word "ashurst" in a lowercase, sans-serif font.The Hogan Lovells logo, featuring a green square with the words "Hogan Lovells" in white, with "Hogan" above "Lovells".The Siemens Energy logo, featuring the word "SIEMENS" in blue above the word "energy" in a green, lowercase font.The Barclays logo, featuring a blue and white circular icon to the left of the word "BARCLAYS" in blue, uppercase letters.The Linklaters logo, featuring the word "Linklaters" in a pink, sans-serif font.The Squire Patton Boggs logo, featuring the word "SQUIRE" in blue above the words "PATTON BOGGS" in a smaller, blue, uppercase font.The Clifford Chance logo, featuring the words "CLIFFORD CHANCE" in a small, black, uppercase font.The DLA Piper logo, featuring a blue square with a white circular icon to the left of the words "DLA PIPER" in blue, uppercase letters.The Lloyds Bank logo, featuring a black silhouette of a horse above the words "LLOYDS BANK" in green, uppercase letters.The Womble Bond Dickinson logo, featuring a stylized orange circular icon to the left of the words "WOMBLE BOND DICKINSON" in blue, uppercase letters.The EDF logo, featuring an orange stylized flower icon to the left of the word "EDF" in blue, uppercase letters.The McDermott Will & Emery logo, featuring the words "McDermott Will & Emery" in a black, sans-serif font.The Visa logo, featuring the word "VISA" in white, uppercase letters on a blue background.

“By sharing “non-negotiables” within the team, we’ve found that not only do we know when not to disturb each other and what can’t be cancelled, but we understand each other better.”

Barclays Legal

The MBC Community

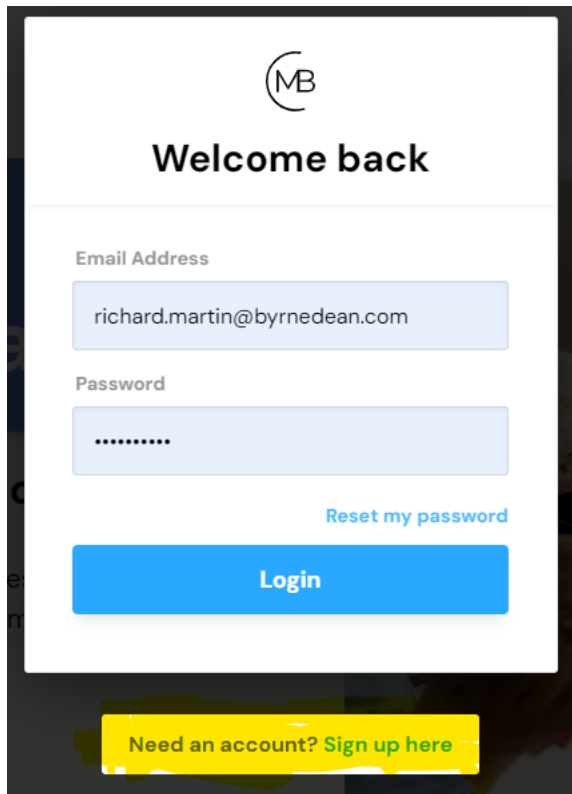
As a community our purpose is to create healthy and sustainable high performance in the workplace by removing the unnecessary sources of stress in the ways we work. The community of employers seeks to share best practice, successes, challenges and resources so we can learn together and encourage and inspire each other with what is possible. Members have access to:

- Webinars
 - Resources
 - Conferences
 - Thought leadership
 - 121 support
 - Workshops
 - Collaboration with other members
- ... and much more



Getting involved

Register for website access – www.mindfulbusinesscharter.com

A screenshot of the login page for the Mindful Business Charter. It features the MB logo at the top, followed by the text 'Welcome back'. Below this are two input fields: 'Email Address' with the value 'richard.martin@byrnedean.com' and 'Password' with masked characters. A blue 'Login' button is positioned below the password field. A link 'Reset my password' is located to the right of the password field. At the bottom, a yellow box contains the text 'Need an account? Sign up here'.

Frequently asked questions

This is about slacking and giving people an excuse for an easy life, right?

No. MBC acknowledges that we have busy, high-pressure jobs with demanding deadlines and expectant clients. It is about how we deliver our best work most sustainably. Remember – healthy and sustainable high performance.

Another HR initiative to get in the way of getting my work done, right?

No, this is about how we can do that work more effectively and we are not giving you rules about what you can and cannot do, but rather permission and language to think about what works best for you and your team.



This sounds great but won't work in practice when the rubber hits the road.

This requires all of us to engage. If we do nothing then nothing changes. If we all try to make a difference, then small steps start making big changes. We will get out of it what we put in. Try to focus on what we can do rather than what we can't.

How does this sit with existing initiatives, eg around DEI?

MBC can absolutely complement and be part of other activity. By being more inclusive, by building psychologically safe cultures and so on, we reduce the unnecessary stress in the ways we work leading to healthy and sustainable high performance.

Contact us:

info@mindfulbusinesscharter.com

www.mindfulbusinesscharter.com

Updating the Charter – the context

- Eight years since the Charter was launched
- Lots of change in the meantime to how we work
- Eight years of experience of working with the Charter
- We are increasingly global and wanting to expand sectors
- What we do as a community has evolved



What we set out to do

- Not change for change's sake
- Reflect who we are and where we are going
- Future proof as far as possible
- Respect the commitment our members have already made



Themes that emerged



- Wanting a greater sense of the community
 - Granularity vs principles
 - Flexibility to adapt to different cultures
 - Brevity vs comprehensive
 - Inclusion
 - Clarity of expectations
 - Visuals matter
-