



Is it too late to prioritise mental health in the workplace?

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An OHI Company



Executive Summary

The short answer to the question is no. World Mental Health Day 2026, is centred on the theme “It Is Time to Prioritise Mental Health in the Workplace.” For Douglas OHI, this white paper reinforces our ongoing commitment to embedding mental wellbeing within our health, safety, sustainability and environmental (HSSE) culture across the GCC.

Within the construction industry, mental health is increasingly recognised as a critical factor influencing safety performance, productivity, workforce retention and overall project delivery. As organisations continue to strengthen physical safety

standards, equal attention must be given to psychological wellbeing and the creation of workplaces where people feel supported, valued and empowered to speak up.

This paper outlines the business case for prioritising mental health, explores the challenges faced by the construction sector, highlights Douglas OHI's approach to wellbeing and psychological safety, and presents a framework for strengthening workforce resilience across our operations.

Foreword

As HSSE practitioners our role extends beyond preventing physical harm. We must also recognise the psychological demands placed on our workforce and ensure we are creating environments where people can perform safely, confidently and sustainably.

Mental wellbeing is not separate from safety, it is integral to it. A strong safety culture is one where people feel able to speak up, seek support, and look out for one another without hesitation or stigma. It is also one where individuals feel psychologically safe to raise concerns, share ideas and contribute openly.

As our industry continues to evolve, organisations that prioritise both physical and psychological wellbeing will be better positioned to attract talent, improve performance and deliver projects safely and successfully.

This white paper reflects Douglas OHI's continued commitment to building a culture where everyone has a voice, wellbeing is valued and people are empowered to thrive.



Why Mental Health Matters in Construction

Construction remains one of the most demanding industries globally. Tight delivery schedules, commercial pressures, remote working environments and physically intensive tasks combine to create significant mental strain across all levels of the workforce.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression and anxiety cost the global economy approximately US\$1 trillion each year in lost productivity. In high-risk industries such as construction, the implications extend further, affecting decision-making, safety performance, workforce engagement and operational effectiveness.

In many sectors considerable progress has been made in reducing physical workplace injuries, mental health remains an area requiring greater attention. Organisations that actively support wellbeing are increasingly recognising benefits including improved employee engagement, enhanced safety performance, stronger retention and increased organisational resilience.

Mental health must therefore be viewed not only as a wellbeing priority, but as a core component of safe and effective project delivery.



The Construction Reality: Key Challenges

The construction sector presents a number of unique challenges that can impact mental wellbeing.



Project Delivery Pressure

- Fixed deadlines and contractual obligations
- High-performance expectations across multiple stakeholders
- Continuous programme acceleration on major infrastructure projects
- Commercial pressures and changing project demands



Workforce Conditions

- Long working hours and shift-based operations
- Extended periods away from family and support networks
- Multicultural and geographically dispersed teams
- Physically demanding work environments



Cultural and Behavioural Barriers

- Persistent stigma surrounding mental health discussions
- Reluctance to seek support or disclose challenges
- Traditional perceptions of resilience and toughness
- Concerns regarding judgement or career impact



Safety Implications

- Fatigue affecting concentration and decision-making
- Increased likelihood of human error
- Reduced situational awareness
- Potential impacts on safety performance and incident prevention



Mental Health Isn't a Binary Issue

Traditional safety approaches within construction have focused primarily on physical hazards. However, growing evidence demonstrates that psychological wellbeing directly affects human performance.

Stress, fatigue and emotional strain can impair judgement, concentration and decision-making in ways comparable to physical impairment. When individuals are struggling, their ability to identify hazards, assess risks and respond effectively can be significantly reduced.

For this reason, mental wellbeing should be viewed as an essential element of any mature HSSE management system. Safe operations depend not only on physical readiness but also on psychological readiness.

At Douglas OHI, we recognise that protecting our people means supporting both.





Psychological Safety: Creating a Culture Where Everyone Has a Voice

Psychological safety is the belief that individuals can speak up, ask questions, raise concerns, admit mistakes and share ideas without fear of embarrassment, criticism or negative consequences.

In construction and engineering environments, psychological safety plays a critical role in both wellbeing and safety performance. When employees feel comfortable speaking up, they are more likely to report hazards, challenge unsafe behaviours, seek support when they are struggling and contribute ideas that improve project outcomes.

Conversely, environments where individuals fear judgement or reprisal can lead to concerns being left unspoken, increasing risks to both people and projects.

At Douglas OHI, psychological safety aligns closely with our value of Everyone Has a Voice. We are committed to fostering workplaces where employees feel respected, listened to and empowered to contribute, regardless of role, experience or location.

Creating psychological safety requires:

- Visible and approachable leadership
- Respectful and inclusive communication
- Encouraging questions and feedback
- Learning from mistakes rather than assigning blame
- Supporting individuals who raise concerns
- Promoting open conversations around mental health and wellbeing

By strengthening psychological safety, we not only support mental wellbeing but also enhance collaboration, innovation, engagement and safety performance across our projects.

Douglas OHI's Journey So Far

Douglas OHI has taken important steps to strengthen mental wellbeing awareness across its operations, including:

- The It's OK programme, supporting open conversations around mental health
- The How Are You? campaign, promoting regular wellbeing check-ins
- Integration of wellbeing principles into HSSE communications and practices
- Access to support mechanisms and awareness initiatives across projects

These initiatives support a culture where speaking up is encouraged and wellbeing is treated as a shared responsibility.

The Douglas OHI Four-Pillar Framework for Mental Wellbeing

1. Everyone Has a Voice

In construction and engineering environments, psychological safety plays a critical role in both wellbeing and safety performance. When employees feel comfortable speaking up, they are more likely to report hazards, challenge unsafe behaviours, seek support when they are struggling and contribute ideas that improve project outcomes.

2. Do It Together

We encourage collective responsibility through peer support, leadership visibility and team engagement.

3. Take Pride in What You Do

We support sustainable performance and challenge behaviours that normalise burnout or overwork.

4. Bring Better to Life

We continuously improve through feedback, measurement and the integration of best practice in wellbeing management.

This framework aligns with Douglas OHI's core values and reinforces a consistent cultural approach across all regions.



Action Plan 2026 and Beyond



Leadership and Culture

- Mental health awareness embedded into leadership and supervisor training
- Visible engagement from management across all projects
- Regular inclusion of wellbeing in operational communications
- Promotion of psychologically safe leadership behaviours



Support Systems

- Expansion of confidential employee programmes
- Strengthening peer support and buddy systems



Awareness and Engagement

- Annual World Mental Health Day campaigns across all regions
- Regular workshops on resilience, stress management and wellbeing
- Integration of mental health messaging into HSSE programmes



Monitoring and Improvement

- Anonymous workforce wellbeing surveys
- Tracking of absenteeism, fatigue-related incidents and engagement trends
- Collaboration with external mental health and wellbeing specialists
- Ongoing review of programme effectiveness and outcomes

Measuring Success

Progress will be assessed through both quantitative and qualitative indicators, including:

- Improved workforce engagement and retention
- Increased confidence in reporting concerns
- Reduction in fatigue-related incidents
- Greater participation in wellbeing initiatives
- Reduced stigma surrounding mental health discussions
- Stronger perceptions of psychological safety across teams



Looking Ahead

The future of construction will be defined not only by engineering capability and innovation, but by how effectively organisations support their people.

Mental wellbeing will increasingly become a differentiator for organisations seeking to attract talent, deliver projects safely and achieve sustainable growth. Organisations that prioritise psychological safety, employee wellbeing and supportive leadership will be better equipped to navigate future challenges and build resilient workforces.

For Douglas OHI, this is an integral part of our long-term approach to safety, sustainability and operational excellence.



Call to Action

At Douglas OHI, our vision is clear: Ensuring Safety and Operational Excellence Every Step of the Way.

Achieving this vision requires more than robust systems, procedures and controls. It requires a culture where people feel supported, valued and empowered to speak up when they need help, raise concerns or contribute ideas.

Mental wellbeing and psychological safety are fundamental to creating high-performing teams, safer workplaces and sustainable business success. By prioritising mental health, we not only support our people, but also strengthen our ability to deliver projects safely, responsibly and effectively.

We encourage all employees, partners, clients and stakeholders to join us in fostering a workplace culture where wellbeing is valued, conversations are encouraged and everyone has a voice.

Together, we can build a healthier, safer and more resilient future.

It's not too late, now is the time.

About the Author

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In addition to being a Coach and Mentor, Peter Baker FloL is the Regional HSSE Manager at Douglas OHI, responsible for overseeing health, safety, sustainability and environmental performance across the Group's operations in Oman, the United Arab Emirates the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

With extensive experience in construction safety, environmental management and operational leadership, Peter works closely with project teams to embed best practice, strengthen safety culture and improve organisational performance. His approach emphasises the importance of both physical and psychological safety, recognising that workplaces perform best when individuals feel safe to speak up, raise concerns and contribute openly.

A strong advocate for workforce wellbeing, Peter is committed to advancing initiatives that support mental health, enhance employee engagement and foster resilient, high-performing teams across Douglas OHI's operations.





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About Douglas OHI

Douglas OHI is a leading construction and engineering group operating across Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. With a commitment to excellence, safety, sustainability and people, the Group delivers complex infrastructure and building projects while fostering a culture built on respect, inclusion and continuous improvement.

Douglas OHI believes that strong performance is achieved through empowered people, safe workplaces and responsible business practices. Through initiatives that support physical safety, mental wellbeing and environmental stewardship, the Group continues to build a more resilient future for its employees, clients and communities.

