

DEMOS

STAND BY ME

MANAGING WELLBEING IN
THE CIVIL SERVICE DURING
TIMES OF CHANGE

A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR IDEAS AND CHANGE

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OCTOBER 2019

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The Charity for Civil Servants supports civil servants, past and present, when times are tough, listening without judgement and offering practical, financial and emotional support.

The Charity is committed to supporting the wellbeing of those in the civil service community and we wanted to know what more we could do to help. In January 2018, John Manzoni said; "Advances in technology, fiscal pressures, changes in society - and in what people expect from their government ... - have already provided the impetus for major change programmes across our Civil Service. But we have added exiting the European Union to those demands... We are already making fundamental - and necessary - changes to how we work, right across the organisation"

Change is a necessary process. It offers the opportunity for improvement and growth, though it is clear that people will always respond in different ways to the challenges presented. To explore these themes further, the Charity has been working with the think tank Demos to develop a handbook to support wellbeing during times of change and career transition for civil servants. As part of this work we have engaged with civil servants across the UK looking at different types of changes.

We believe that maintaining a focus on wellbeing during periods of change can offer some valuable benefits for everyone involved.

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To find out more about the Charity www.foryoubyyou.org.uk

The Charity for 
Civil Servants 

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This report is based on our research findings and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Charity for Civil Servants.

This report would not have been possible without the generous support of the Charity for Civil Servants. We are grateful to the charity, and its trustees, for their input and thoughtful engagement throughout the process.

Our thanks also go to the hundreds of civil servants - past and present - who shared their thoughts and experiences with us in the process of this research.

HM Revenue and Customs, the Cabinet Office and many senior civil servants also lent us their support and networks. Their openness and generosity deserves high commendation. The Civil Service Employee Policy Team offered insight and guidance at every step.

Our thanks also go to our colleague, Ellen Judson, who helped build and share our survey so widely. We are also extremely grateful to Polly Mackenzie for leading the first phase of this project with such vigour and energy.

Asli Atay and Ben Glover

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the second part of a two-stage engagement process designed by Demos with The Charity for Civil Servants to build a practical, evidence-based handbook for supporting wellbeing during times of change within the Civil Service.

Change will always be a necessary feature of working life in the Civil Service. It is an essential part of modernisation, improvement and transformation, but the evidence shows that periods of change can cause immense stress. Stress then affects people's performance at work. Our goal is to improve the experiences of individual civil servants and so, through improved wellbeing, better enable the Civil Service to meet its organisational goals.

Section One draws on the relevant academic and policy literature to set out the importance of workplace wellbeing to both employees and employers.

Section Two sets examples and case studies of steps that have been taken both within and outside the Civil Service to boost wellbeing of staff members across different types of change: day-to-day changes, systemic transitions and strategic pivots.

This good practice guide is intended to be a practical resource for line managers working in the Civil Service to help support the wellbeing of their team members.

Section Three sets out a number of specific recommendations for Civil Service departments to improve the wellbeing of their staff during times of change across three main themes:

- Strategic, high-level changes to embed a culture of wellbeing.
- Steps to better spread best wellbeing practice
- Specific, practical changes to boost the wellbeing of civil servants during times of change.

INTRODUCTION

Feelings of wellbeing are fundamental to the human experience. Wellbeing is something we all strive towards: a feeling of being happy, healthy and satisfied with our lives, both as individuals and within our society. It's vital to understand that wellbeing isn't something that happens in the time outside of work. If work is a source of stress and turmoil, our whole lives are affected. For the decades of our working lives, it is only when we are thriving at work that we can thrive completely.

This report looks at how wellbeing can be best supported in the Civil Service during periods of change. It builds on previous work, such as the pioneering Stevenson/Farmer Review of mental health and employers.¹ Change offers opportunities: for growth, for improvement, for success. To thrive, people, organisations and societies need to be open to change, and agile in response. Yet managing change remains one of the greatest challenges people, organisations and societies face. Knowing what to preserve and what to replace; designing new ways to respond to new situations; remaining resilient whilst navigating crises: we can all think of times when change has stretched us to our limits.

This report follows research that looked at the particular experiences of change within the Civil Service of the United Kingdom and how that change has affected individual civil servants' wellbeing. It has been conducted by Demos in partnership with The Charity for Civil Servants, an independent charity that supports current, former and retired civil servants when times are tough, offering practical, financial and emotional support. The Charity for Civil Servants identified that periods of transition and change can often be triggers for problems and specific challenges, and should be a focus for efforts to improve wellbeing across the Civil Service.

Like any large employer, the Civil Service is under constant pressure to adapt and reform to the changing landscape in which it operates. As technology and demographic change alter our country, the Civil Service has to modernise, sometimes at a fast pace. Our Civil Service needs to respond to a unique set of challenges: it must be ready to design and implement the ideas and ambitions of any government, or any new minister. That need for adaptability flows down to the requirements placed on individual civil servants.

The pace of change has accelerated in recent years. Turnover of staff has increased putting more pressure on the systems designed to integrate and train new civil servants, and increasing the need to preserve institutional memory as long-serving staff leave or retire. Technology is transforming our economy, our society, and our democracy. That puts enormous pressure on the Civil Service to design new models of service delivery and new forms of regulation - at the same time as embedding new technologies into the basic systems of government.

On top of this, in the last ten years, our elected governments have needed the Civil Service's support in delivering political change on an unprecedented scale. After the global financial crisis, the UK government implemented one of the world's largest programmes of fiscal consolidation: this was delivered not only by reductions and changes in public services, which had to be delivered, but also through substantial reductions in staff, and the closing of numerous government agencies, putting direct pressure on many staff.

Fiscal consolidation was followed by the decision to leave the European Union, bringing with it major machinery of government changes, including the new Department for Exiting the European Union and the establishment of the Department for

¹ Stevenson/ Farmer Review of Mental Health & Employment. October 2017. [online] Accessed at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658145/thriving-at-work-stevenson-farmer-review.pdf Retrieved on 2 October 2019

International Trade (demerged from the former Business, Innovation and Skills department). These new structures were put to work immediately, as part of our most complex international negotiation ever conducted in peacetime, and have led more than £4bn of no-deal planning.

There is plenty of evidence to show that overall the Civil Service is a good place to work. But as other research outlined in this report shows, when individuals feel worried and stressed, they do not perform at their best. We also go on to show that when individuals aren't performing, the ability of the Civil Service to deliver its goals can be jeopardised.

The good practice guideline and recommendations set out in this report are both based on an extensive period of research and engagement with civil servants and wellbeing experts, including:

- Discussion and engagement with 566 civil servants at Civil Service Live 2019 events across the UK in summer 2019
- A detailed literature review of the relevant academic and policy literature.
- A non-representative survey of 1,538 current and former civil servants.
- An online focus group with current and former civil servants.
- A roundtable with leading academic experts, wellbeing practitioners and senior civil servants.
- Ten semi-structured interviews with senior civil servants across a range of departments.

SECTION 1

WHY WORKPLACE WELLBEING MATTERS

Throughout this report we utilise the concept of workplace wellbeing, which covers all aspects of working life, from the safety of a working environment to the level of work satisfaction among employees.² Our goal is to understand how change affects workplace wellbeing, in order to inform our efforts to design policy change that will increase it.

We care about workplace wellbeing for two reasons. Firstly, we want to improve the experiences of individual civil servants in their working lives. To do this, we want to identify whether there is anything more that can better support civil servants during times of change within the workplace. We also wanted to look at how the workplace can respond when change happens outside of work - from the joy of new parenthood to the loss of family bereavement.

But we are also clear in our view that improved workplace wellbeing will improve the ability and performance of the Civil Service at the aggregate level, and better enable it to meet its organisational goals. When individual civil servants are thriving, the Civil Service will thrive too.

Many studies show a correlation between low workplace wellbeing and declining productivity. Research conducted with data from the Labour

Force Survey 2017/18 found that 1,800 in 100,000 (a total of 595,000 workers) were suffering from work-related stress, leading to the loss of more than 15.4 million working days in the UK.³

The American Psychological Association has published a study showing employees impacted by change are more than twice as likely to suffer from chronic stress.⁴ Moreover, research shows that workers who reported recent or current change within the workplace are more likely to struggle for work-life balance, feel negative towards others during the working day and have lower job satisfaction and less trust in their employers.⁵ Other studies have suggested increases in job demands predict burnout and that increases in job security predicts work engagement.⁶

“Every person responds to change in a different way: some of us thrive during ambiguity and look forward to new challenges, while others become paralyzed with fear of the unknown. When a significant change occurs, there can be many factors contributing to increased feelings of stress and pressure — including perceived unfairness of the change, frustration due to a lack of communication by leaders, or fear of future changes. In many cases, these thoughts and concerns can lead

2 International Labour Organisation. 2019. Workplace Health Promotion and Wellbeing. [online] Available at: https://www.ilo.org/safework/areasofwork/workplace-health-promotion-and-well-being/WCMS_118396/lang--en/index.htm, [Accessed 2 May 2019]

3 This research was conducted by the Health and Safety Executive in 2018 through analysing the Labour Force Survey (LFS) results of 2017/18. LFS is a household survey conducted in approximately 38,000 households across the United Kingdom. Further information can be found from: Health and Safety Executive. 31 October 2018. Work-related Stress Depression or Anxiety Statistics in Great Britain. 31 October 2018. [online] Available at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/stress.pdf>. [Accessed 8 May 2019]

4 American Psychological Association. 2017. Change at Work Linked to Employee Stress, Distrust and Intent to Quit, New Survey Finds.[online] Available at: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/05/employee-stress>, [Accessed 16 May 2019]

5 American Psychological Association. 2017. Change at Work Linked to Employee Stress, Distrust and Intent to Quit, New Survey Finds.[online] Available at: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/05/employee-stress>, [Accessed 16 May 2019]

6 Schaufeli, W. Bakker, A. and Rhenen, W. 2009. How changes in job demands and resources predict burnout, work engagement, and sickness absenteeism. Journal of Organisational Behavior. Volume 30, Issue 7. p.893-917. 21 January 2009.

to a lack of engagement — including lower productivity, distraction, and decreased team cohesion.”⁷

Dr Carolyn Mohler Wilson
Stanford BeWell

But of course, change cannot be abolished, nor would it be desirable to do so. Change will always be a necessary feature of working life in the Civil Service. It isn't possible to adapt to new ministerial appointments, or the new demands of our technological and demographic environment, without change in how we run our government. It is because change is both necessary and potentially stressful that we chose to focus on maintaining wellbeing during periods of change.

It is vital to note that the relationship works both ways: stressed people are less able to engage with and deliver change. Research argues that highly stressed individuals demonstrated less commitment and increased reluctance to accept organisational change interventions.⁸ Efforts to improve wellbeing, therefore, will improve the ability of the Civil Service to deliver the change it needs to.

Civil Service leaders already recognise the vital role of workplace wellbeing. Among a broad range of other initiatives, the Civil Service has already taken various steps to improve performance. According to the Civil Service People Survey, the Employee Engagement Index in 2018 was higher than ever before (62%).

Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Champion Jonathan Jones identifies five goals to provide visible leadership for health and wellbeing within the Civil Service: “encouraging an open dialogue on mental health, promoting a healthy lifestyle and national wellbeing campaigns and supporting people to stay at work or return to work”.⁹ A wide range of changes have been introduced: for example, flexible working hours are widespread and the ‘Happy to Talk Flexible Working’ logo has been adopted,¹⁰ the first Civil Service Mental Health Conference was held in 2018, 2,200 Mental Health First Aiders were nominated to support civil servants¹¹ and a Carer’s Passport was launched in 2018 by The Charity for Civil Servants to support civil servants with caring responsibilities.

At senior levels, the value of workplace wellbeing is understood and valued, but ensuring this is translated to the grassroots of the Civil Service can be challenging. That is why we have embarked on this project and developed, as set out in the next section of this report, a good practice guide for promoting wellbeing in the civil service.

7 Bewell Stanford. 2019. Coping with work transitions. [online] Available at: <https://bewell.stanford.edu/coping-with-work-transitions-2/> [Accessed 16 May 2019]

8 Vakola, M. and Nikolaou, I. 2005. Attitudes towards organizational change: What is the role of employees’ stress and commitment?. *Employee Relations*, Vol. 27 Issue: 2, pp.160-174

9 Jones, J. 2017. A New Commitment on health and wellbeing for the civil service. 10 July 2017. [online] Available at: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2017/07/10/a-new-commitment-on-health-and-wellbeing-for-the-civil-service/> [Accessed 17 June 2019]

10 Civil Service. 2019. Promoting Flexible Working in the Civil Service. [online] Available at: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/01/17/promoting-flexible-working-in-the-civil-service/> [Accessed 16 May 2019]

11 Civil Service. 2019. Positive Principles for Mental Wellbeing. [online] Available at: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2018/08/15/positive-principles-for-mental-wellbeing/> [Accessed 16 May 2019]

SECTION 2

A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING WELLBEING IN THE CIVIL SERVICE DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

We spend a lot of time at work. As a result, our colleagues, managers and office environment can have a significant impact on our wellbeing. We thrive at work when we are happy, satisfied and appreciated. When we feel stressed, anxious or unhappy, we are often less focused and our performance suffers.

Our research found that managers are central to a team's wellbeing. We know that during times of change, expectations of managers can be often higher and more complex. Even though managers may be concerned with their teams' wellbeing and overall performance, they may not have enough time and resources to support them. This section of the report aims to provide you with examples and case studies of good practice to support your team's wellbeing during times of change.

Line managers act as a bridge between senior leaders and staff in a department. Especially during times of change, line managers are critical in translating high-level strategic or organisational changes into action. As a result, they play a vital role in achieving a clear, structured and successful transition.

Our research shows that experience of change in the workplace is deeply influenced by line managers. Many of our survey respondents and participants in discussion groups at Civil Service Live events underlined the central role that line managers play in ensuring they have a positive experience during times of change.

This guide aims to provide line managers with additional tools to support their team's wellbeing during times of change. We provide examples of good practice and case studies that support wellbeing across three types of change: day-to-day

transitions, systemic transitions and strategic pivots.

1. DAY-TO-DAY TRANSITIONS

Day-to-day transitions such as joining, leaving or taking an extended break from work are found in every organisation: they are not unique to the Civil Service. Whilst such transitions may be common, they can have a significant impact on our mental health and wellbeing at work. People might feel anxious on their first day of work or feel uncomfortable when they need to take leave due to health conditions.

Day-to-day transitions are often managed by professional Human Resources teams in the Civil Service, but induction processes vary across departments. Where civil servants are happy with their induction, our research found it is often due to having a good manager and a timely, comprehensive process.

Some departments and professions in the civil service experience high turnover. This increases the effort needed to induct and manage new joiners and retain knowledge from those leaving. If your team is experiencing higher turnover rates or there are many people with additional needs, you might find it challenging to maintain your team's wellbeing during times of change.

Below are a number of examples and case studies for boosting wellbeing in your team. Many of these are useful during particular day-to-day transitions, for example bereavement training; others are activities that can be incorporated into your overall usual working patterns to maintain wellbeing throughout the year within your team

1. Events to raise awareness of mental health issues and to promote wellbeing
2. Mental health and stress awareness training
3. Bereavement Training
4. Wellbeing walks
5. Lunch and learn
6. Developing a wellbeing 'hub'

1. MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING

One in six people in England experience a common mental health problem every week,¹² though just one in eight people with mental health problems receive treatment.¹³ Therefore, it is important that our managers and colleagues take steps to promote good mental health in the workplace.

Many departments are already doing a good job of reducing stigma around mental health. Examples from across the Civil Service include:

- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has launched a partnership with the mental health charity Mind to deliver training to promote mental health and stress awareness.
- HM Treasury has organised a programme of events to raise awareness of mental health issues and reduce stigma. This includes talks by external experts on various conditions including depression and anxiety. Recently, the department held a workshop on imposter syndrome, with a panel of volunteers sharing their own experiences.



- The Department for Exiting the European Union is also working with Mind to deliver mental health training to managers and has recently undertaken a Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index benchmarking exercise to gain external validation of its mental health support.
- Senior managers at the Competition and Markets Authority organised conversations on a range of issues including issues relating to mental health and work-life balance. All staff were invited to these events and were encouraged to ask questions in a relaxed environment over a cup of tea.
- HMRC ran a 'Time to Talk' day - a series of networking, management and social events to reduce stigma around mental health. HMRC's choir performed at an event in London, civil servants completed a 21-mile walk and discussed mental health topics. In Ipswich a 'cake and crafts' day was held to discuss the right ingredients for creating a mentally healthy workplace.

¹² MIND. How common are mental health problems? [online] Accessed at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#.XZNU6udKg0o> Accessed on 1 October 2019.

¹³ Ibid.

2. BEREAVEMENT TRAINING

Losing someone affects people differently. Employees losing someone they love might feel anxiety or fear of going back to work or suffer from low confidence.

According to a survey of 2,000 people conducted by Sue Ryder Charity, more than half of respondents feel anxious about saying the wrong thing to someone who has recently lost a loved one. In addition, the majority of young people aged 18 to 34 years old don't know what to say.¹⁴

Research by ComRes for the National Council for Palliative Care and Dying Matters found that 56% of respondents considered leaving their job if their employer did not provide support if someone close to them died.¹⁵ Moreover, almost a third of people who had lost someone in the past five years said that they weren't treated with empathy.

It is important for line managers to notice the changes in their team members and understand

the symptoms of grieving. Changes in the workplace can also have a significantly negative affect on a grieving employee.

Bereavement training can help people to cope with these issues. It can equip people with an understanding of bereavement and inform them how to communicate effectively and respectfully with people from different cultures about bereavement. When colleagues don't treat people grieving with compassion, it can have serious implications for their wellbeing.

Bereavement training is provided by a range of different organisations and depending on the needs of your team, a day's training for yourself and your team members may be useful. The Department of Health and Social Care, for example, recently delivered Bereavement Training support people while developing and complimenting their skills.

3. WELLBEING WALKS

We know that sitting at a desk all day can have negative consequences for our physical and mental wellbeing. To address this, you may wish to consider walking activities and challenges for yourself and your team.

Walking is free and one of the easiest ways to maintain good health. Walking keeps your heart healthy, decreases stress, anxiety and depression,

and can give people more energy. One study, for example, found that being physically active reduces the risk of becoming depressed by up to 30%.¹⁶

Examples of healthy lifestyle promotion in the Civil Service include:

14 Hinde, N. 12 March 2019. Should Offices Have Bereavement First Aiders To Help With Grief At Work? In Huffpost. [online] Retrieved: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/grief-at-work-should-offices-have-bereavement-first-aiders_uk_5c877ea3e4b0ed0a0016e6cc?guc-counter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKeeYtGrIM_dj3MLJ8pGMGMZGawp_jf-5zwdgIFwbwwqPo-17kl010Zd9v5Gol5t28BABGKcLK_C-i6XrRRzCn3Vq6lcE6kmK5pQm4aYcAzOepPkohw9YCMXfY6O7sC726iN4z-m1y7zhRHODI9js9lvBVF6SGiHGXBTDLCM2_hZO1 Accessed on 20 September 2019.

15 Husbands, C. 23 March 2018. Hr Zone.[online] Retrieved: <https://www.hrzone.com/lead/culture/bereavement-at-work-what-is-the-impact-and-what-can-employers-do> Accessed on 20 September 2019.

16 Walking for health. Healthy minds.[online] Retrieved from: <https://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/get-walking/why-walk/healthy-minds> Accessed on 19 September 2019

- Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Champion Jonathan Jones describes how promoting an active lifestyle is one of the priorities of the Civil Service.¹⁷ This led to the cross-government Active Wellbeing Week, encouraging people to think about the possible ways to achieve both physically and mentally healthy life. If you haven't done so already, you can promote the Active Wellbeing Week in your department.
- HMRC organises 'Walk and Talk' sessions to promote a healthy lifestyle amongst staff.
- The Ministry of Justice encourages its staff to take part in the Walking Challenge, an established annual activity in the department.
- Every May The Charity for Civil Servants runs a walking challenge where it challenges civil servants to walk 10,000 steps a day for 50 days.¹⁸

Wellbeing walks can be organised as part of a team. Things to consider include:

1. Inform people about the benefits of walking.
2. Schedule a program and set the dates sufficiently far in advance to ensure wide attendance.
3. Announce your program and start recruiting people: this could be done with posters and emails.
4. Find incentives to keep people motivated: encourage people to keep them informed and engaged.
5. Don't worry if you don't reach the numbers you aimed for; the goal is to engage as many people as possible.

4. LUNCH AND LEARN

We all seek opportunities to develop our skills at work. Our managers help us in setting goals for ourselves and tracking our personal development. But during times of change, personal development can be neglected.

Holding Lunch and Learn sessions can be an effective way of giving your team a good opportunity for personal development. They can help to keep your team motivated and interested at work. It can be as simple as organising a speaker, a colleague or a specialist outside your department, and inviting people to bring their lunch and listen.

Lunch and Learn sessions can be considered as employee-led personal development opportunity where growth and learning are encouraged.¹⁹ According to the American Management Association, the key benefits of learn and lunch programmes are:²⁰

1. Excellent use of time which is limited throughout the day.
2. Informal setting that allows a better understanding.
3. Reinforces the company culture.

¹⁷ Jones, J. 2019. Tell us what you did in active wellbeing? In Civil Service blog. [online] Available at: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/12/tell-us-what-you-did-in-active-wellbeing-week/> Available on 19 September 2019

¹⁸ For more information, please visit: <https://thewalkingchallenge.foryoubyyou.org.uk/>.

¹⁹ Corporate Finance Institute. Lunch and Learn. [online] Available at : <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/other/lunch-and-learn/> Accessed on 1 October 2019

²⁰ Benefits of a Learn at Lunch Program. [online] Available at : <https://playbook.amanet.org/12-benefits-of-a-learn-at-lunch-program/> Accessed on 1 October 2019

4. Allows critical awareness for issues at hand.
5. Introduces new organisational initiatives.
6. Boosts employee morale.

The Competition and Markets Authority, for example, organises regular talks facilitated by senior leaders, sharing lived experiences about a range of wellbeing and diversity-related issues. All staff are invited to participate in these events and are encouraged to discuss the issues raised in a supportive environment. Topics that have been discussed in this series include dyslexia in the workplace, living with depression, balancing work and caring responsibilities and flexible working.

A few important points to bear in mind when organising lunch and learn sessions are that:

1. Because lunch and learn sessions are often held during lunch breaks, attendance shouldn't be mandatory.
2. It is also important that those working remotely are able to participate, hence livestreaming or conference call facilities should be considered.
3. Sessions can be recorded for people who are unable to make it to the session.

5. DEVELOPING A WELLBEING HUB

Many departments have their own tools to support workplace wellbeing. Although these tools might be just a 'click' away, they might not be easily accessible. If your team is finding it difficult to access wellbeing tools, it may be worth speaking to your HR team about creating a wellbeing hub.

To overcome this problem, the Learning and Development branch of HR at HM Treasury created a wellbeing hub on the department's learning platform. They scanned the resources already available, ensuring all relevant information is conveniently accessible and easily available.

The Charity for Civil Servants also has a wellbeing hub which brings together all their work and resources on wellbeing. They provide resources on tackling stress, anxiety and depression and ways to become more resilient.

2. SYSTEMATIC TRANSITIONS

Systemic transitions are changes adopted by the Civil Service to ensure it keeps up to modern society's needs and demands. Systemic transitions are usually initiated by senior leaders in a department and can take years to be implemented. Systemic transitions can often require major restructuring in the workplace or the workforce, meaning they can be challenging to implement.

The goal of becoming the most inclusive employer of the UK is an example of a systemic transition that the Civil Service is currently working through. Another example is the Government Estate Strategy which aims to make a significantly more efficient and cost effective use of the government's property.²¹

Organisational changes and stress have a direct effect on the employee's wellbeing and productivity.²³ If your team is going through a systemic transition, you might benefit from the case studies provided below to help maintain your team's wellbeing through these periods of change.

1. HMRC office relocation
2. Driver & Vehicle Standards Agency Driver Services: the road ahead
3. Incorporating health and wellbeing into regular 1-2-1 discussions between line managers and team
4. Wellbeing 'pulse checks'

1. HMRC OFFICE RELOCATION

HMRC is one of the largest departments in the Civil Service, responsible for processing all tax revenues except for Council Tax and Business Rates, and for ensuring economy-wide compliance with tax rules. The department announced a huge transformation plan in 2015, which it described as "the biggest transformation of the UK tax system in a generation." The department's plan goes on to say that it "involves making fundamental changes to the way the department works and the services it provides".²²

At the core of the plan is a move to digital services, data-led compliance and the use of customer insight to improve the quality of the services the department provides. The operational requirements to deliver this transformation include moving the department's operations from 170 offices across the country to 13 new large modern regional hubs, equipped with far better digital infrastructure.

Because this type of change can involve staff members potentially traveling further, establishing new ways of working can be difficult to manage. When HMRC relocated a number of offices to several hubs, they learnt a number of important lessons:

1. Let people know as far in advance as possible. HMRC gave its staff 12 months' notice, but they learned that staff would have found it easier to adapt to the change if they had been given more notice.
2. Inform people about the direction of travel as soon as possible. Workplace anxiety increases when people don't know why and how this change is happening. People feel more comfortable when they are informed by their managers about the details of the change.

21 Government Estate Strategy 2018.

22 HM Revenue and Customs. 2019. HMRC makes significant progress in its 10-year transformation to become a tax authority fit for the future. Updated 8 January 2019. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/issue-briefing-hmrc-announces-next-step-in-its-ten-year-modernisation-programme/hmrc-makes-significant-progress-in-its-10-year-transformation-to-become-a-tax-authority-fit-for-the-future> Accessed on 8 July 2019

23 Litchfield, P., Carry, C., Hancock, C. and Patrick, W. (2016), "Work and wellbeing in the 21st century", International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, Vol. 13 No. 1065, pp. 1-11.

Campaign for Social Science (2013), "Making the case for the Social Sciences No. 9 mental wellbeing", Available at: www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Making-the-Case-9-Mental-Wellbeing-Web.pdf Accessed on 20 September 2019.

3. Be aware of the diverse needs of your team. People with additional needs such as caring responsibilities or disabilities might face additional difficulties during office relocations. It is important that these additional needs are catered for through any transition.
4. Don't expect everyone to be outspoken about their needs or challenges. During times of major restructuring some people might not be able to communicate their needs with their managers. This is because they might think that you are already too busy or that there is nothing to do that could address the issue they face. Many civil servants said that they would prefer to be called for a one-to-one by their manager during times of change to discuss their needs.



2. DRIVER AND VEHICLE STANDARDS AGENCY (DVSA)

People feel more confident if they understand the mission and purpose of the change.

During a period of internal change, the DVSA produced a guide - 'The Road Ahead' - to inform staff members of the changes they can expect to see. This guide was particularly useful and effective because:

1. It makes the purpose and phases of transition clear and easy to understand. The guide describes different types of change and their potential impact on personnel in detail. The guide is designed using road signs to make it fun and relevant to the target audience.
2. It sets goals and deadlines for these goals. A timeline is provided at the end of the guide. This helps to make it easier to follow up on the current process and manage expectations from the future.
3. It embeds wellbeing throughout. Although the guide is designed to inform staff on the changes, it ensures that wellbeing is embedded throughout by keeping them informed and reducing the stress of the unknown.

3. INCORPORATING HEALTH AND WELLBEING INTO REGULAR 1-2-1 DISCUSSIONS

Systemic transitions might be challenging for some people, especially when it involves staff redundancy.

One of the most effective ways of supporting your team's wellbeing through these types of changes is by incorporating health and wellbeing into your daily management techniques. 1-2-1 meetings are a great way to frequently interact with individuals in your team. In your regular 1-2-1 discussions with members of your team, you might wish to include a section where you discuss their wellbeing and ask them the ways you can support them during the period of change.

How to prepare for 1-2-1 meetings?

1. Have the right mindset. These meetings need to be informal whilst focusing on your team member's wellbeing in general and personal development.
2. Keep it informal. To keep it informal you can chat over a cup of tea or go for a walk.
3. Make it a recurring meeting. To see the best benefits, 1-2-1s need to consistently and regularly take place.

4. WELLBEING 'PULSE CHECKS'

Measuring wellbeing at work can be challenging. The number of sick days taken is one measure of wellbeing frequently used in the civil service. However, this is unlikely to give a full picture of employee wellbeing.

Quarterly 'pulse checks' can be a more systematic way of checking and assessing the wellbeing of your team. HM Treasury holds quarterly 'pulse

checks' that measure wellbeing and work-life balance at a team level based on anonymous surveys completed by staff. These 'pulse checks' were implemented by the department's Mental Wellbeing Network.

3. STRATEGIC PIVOTS

The Civil Service has to deliver the priorities of the democratically elected government. This means that strategic goals for a department may change very suddenly. While some might find periods of rapid change exciting or satisfying, some might struggle in adapting to day to day implications of change.

The effect of reducing the number of civil servants during 2010-2015 was an example of a stressful situation for many civil servants. Brexit is one of the biggest challenges the Civil Service has ever faced and has likely caused significant stress for civil servants across government.

Here we outline a number of responses to unexpected and sudden transitions that aim to maintain workplace wellbeing through these times of change:

1. Resilience training
2. Protecting terms and conditions of employment
3. Tailored workshops
4. An interactive online forum for providing feedback
5. Wellbeing buddy network

1. RESILIENCE TRAINING

These types of transition may come with unclear tasks or ambiguities. Uncertainties in daily tasks and sudden transitions may increase stress and anxiety amongst your team members.

Resilience is the ability to recover from difficulties and the capacity to feel powerful. It is a learnable skill and resilience training provides tactics.

Resilience training helps overcoming mental challenges, stress and anxiety. It helps people to build better mechanisms to cope with daily difficulties and stabilise their emotional reactions to problems. Resilient people start to perceive problems as more manageable than before.²⁴

Benson-Henry Institute's Stress Management and Resiliency Training (SMART) Program suggests the following for building resilience:²⁵

1. Meditate: Practicing meditation can help you lower blood pressure, heart rate and stress hormones.

2. Reframe your situation: You might not be able to change the circumstances you are in, but seeing the upside rather than the downside will help you overcome that difficulty.
3. Lean on your social network: Everyone needs a support mechanism, whether it is your family, friends or colleagues.
4. Cultivate positive thinking: When stressed, it is easier to think about what is going wrong.
5. Laugh more: A simple step in coping with life is laughing more. Laughing can decrease stress hormones and give you another perspective.
6. Be more optimistic: Considering an upcoming situation and visualising the positive outcomes can help you build your resilience.

²⁴ eamscales. 4 Benefits of Resilience Training for Your Employees. [online] Available at: <http://blog.teamscaleslearning.com/4-benefits-of-resilience-training-for-your-employees> Accessed on 20 September 2019

²⁵ Harvard Health Publishing. November 2017. Ramp up your silence. Available at: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/ramp-up-your-resilience> Accessed on 20 September 2019.

2. PROTECTING TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

One of the main concerns raised by civil servants during our workshops at Civil Service Live events was changes to employment terms during times of change.

People may feel more comfortable if their employment terms and conditions are protected during times of change. For instance, someone who works flexible hours to meet their caring responsibilities may wish to work similar hours during times of transition.

Our research shows that people with additional needs may need extra support to adapt to sudden and unexpected restructuring in their workplace. One way to support your team's wellbeing is holding one-on-ones with everyone in your team to understand their needs during

this period of transition. Some people might want to avoid talking about their personal needs or fear to be misunderstood.

1. Be open about the direction of travel as soon as possible so that people can make arrangements accordingly.
2. Be aware of the diverse needs of your team.
3. Have 1-2-1s with every employee to discuss and listen to their needs.
4. Try to protect people's working adjustments prior to transition.

3. TAILORED WORKSHOPS

During strategic pivots your team members may have to work irregular hours or deal with unclear tasks. You might find that there are limited day-to-day resources to support wellbeing limited.

Workshops on wellbeing can improve your employees' self-motivation, ability to control stress and increase resilience.²⁶ Many organisations organise workshops on understanding and managing stress at work, mindfulness, self-care and financial resilience.

The Department for Transport is conducting tailored workshops to support colleagues working on the EU Exit. These workshops place focus on taking care of yourself and others during times of stress and high pressure. Tailoring workshops to the specific needs of your team is advisable.

26 Improveon. Wellbeing training. Available at: <https://www.improveon.co.uk/www/services/training/> Accessed on 20 September 2019.

4. INTERACTIVE ONLINE FEEDBACK FORUM

During times of sudden transitions, people might find it difficult to discuss the challenges they face or their work-related stress and anxiety. Civil servants told us that having an interactive online forum helped their team in discussing their problems related to wellbeing and supporting each other.

Many departments have their own internal communication software. Creating a forum to discuss issues specific to workplace wellbeing and mental health can provide invaluable feedback on how your team is dealing with the changes they are going through.

5. WELLBEING BUDDY NETWORK

A significant number of respondents to our survey said they would have benefited from having a mentor during times of change. This is likely to be particularly important in supporting wellbeing during times of real and fast change.

By teaming people up, a buddy system allows people to learn from their colleagues. Whereas it is widely used during onboarding processes, buddy networks can also be provided to help people overcome difficult times at work or improve wellbeing in general.

A wellbeing buddy scheme offers people a way of informal learning and boost the confidence of employees.²⁷ This way the responsibility of wellbeing of a team is shared between team members.

The Department for Transport recently rebranded its Mental Health Buddy Network as a Wellbeing Buddy Network, to recognise that mental health is not a separate issue from wellbeing.

²⁷ Jones, M. 2018. Implementing a Buddy System in the Workplace. [online] Available at: <https://www.breathehr.com/blog/implementing-a-buddy-system-in-the-workplace> Accessed on 20 September 2019

SECTION 3

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

This chapter presents a series of recommendations for the Civil Service to improve the wellbeing of its staff during times of change across three main themes:

- Strategic, high-level changes to embed a culture of wellbeing
- Steps to better spread best wellbeing practice
- Specific, practical changes to boost the wellbeing of civil servants during times of change

These recommendations have been co-produced with civil servants through an online focus group, workshops at Civil Service Live events and interviews with senior civil servants.

STRATEGIC, HIGH-LEVEL CHANGES TO EMBED A CULTURE OF WELLBEING:

1. Good leadership and performance management should recognise the impact of extensive and continuous change on resilience and wellbeing. **Therefore departments should assure themselves that their approach to performance management encourages and drives strong wellbeing behaviours when implementing change.**
2. To maintain wellbeing during times of change, departments should consider **protecting working practices**

and employment terms - such as flexible working and job sharing - that significantly affect wellbeing.

3. Existing measures of wellbeing are often overly narrow, focusing on the number of sick days as opposed to more holistic measures. This means that HR professionals may not have the information and data required to make fully-informed decisions to aid wellbeing in a department.

To address this, **new wellbeing metrics should be trialled that take a more well-rounded view of wellbeing and are able to paint a more accurate picture.**

Many government departments are already signed up to the Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index scheme²⁸ - this appears to be a more effective means of measuring wellbeing. This could prove a useful model and HR leaders in the Civil Service should consider using leverage the knowledge and expertise of external organisations, such as Mind, to help them design wellbeing metrics.

4. Performance review criteria can incentivise managers to implement change. However, this means that many civil servants now face extensive and near-constant change, which may negatively affect their wellbeing.

28 Mind Workplace Wellbeing Index. For further information please visit: <https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/workplace-wellbeing-index/>

Therefore, **performance review criteria should be reviewed to reduce the focus on change and to give more consideration to team members' wellbeing.**

5. Financial wellbeing is a vital component of overall wellbeing. Any of the Civil Service wellbeing strategies must therefore **give appropriate consideration and weight to strengthening the financial wellbeing of civil servants.**

The Charity for Civil Servants can provide financial assistance to civil servants and has a range of tools and resources to help with budgeting and making the most of your money.

6. Before change programmes are implemented, there is a need to take anticipatory and proactive measures to promote wellbeing; it is often too late to begin such action once the change programme has begun.

Therefore, **change programmes in the Civil Service should take significant preventative action before a programme commences to maintain wellbeing during the upcoming period of change.**

7. Middle managers play a crucial role in implementing wellbeing initiatives, however too often these are not effectively translated into changes for individual civil servants.

It is therefore vital to consider what steps can be taken to address this. This may include **more and better wellbeing training for middle managers and evaluation to ascertain which interventions truly boost wellbeing.**

8. Wellbeing for civil servants carrying out shift or part-time work can

sometimes be neglected in wellbeing strategies, which are often based around the model of full-time employees working regular hours.

To ensure these groups are not left out of wellbeing considerations, **wellbeing strategies should ensure that they give ample consideration to shift and part-time workers.**

SPREADING WELLBEING BEST PRACTICE:

9. Civil Service Local²⁹ aims to bring together departments and agencies within a particular locality. Steps should be taken to explore how **Civil Service Local can encourage greater sharing of best practice between different departments in a particular place or region.**

10. Digital tools and technology can help reduce barriers to sharing of best practice both within and between departments, particularly when units or departments are not co-located. The Charity for Civil Servants, for example, has developed an app as part of this research project to help line managers maintain wellbeing in the civil service.³⁰

To encourage the sharing of best wellbeing practice within and between departments, **the Civil Service should launch an online wellbeing forum allowing civil servants to post what has worked in their department and to learn from others.**

SPECIFIC, PRACTICAL CHANGES:

11. The Carer's Passport, developed by The Charity for Civil Servants, gives carers and their managers information about how that individual's caring duties affects their working lives.³¹

Inspired by this, the Civil Service

29 For further information on Civil Service Local, please visit: <https://civilservicelocal.blog.gov.uk>

30 For further information on the app, please visit: <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/charity-for-civil-servants/id1181053325>

31 For further information, please visit: <https://www.foryoubyyou.org.uk/our-services/caring/carers-passport/what-carers-passport>

should consider launching a wellbeing passport. This would help to ensure line managers are fully aware of the wellbeing needs and requirements of their team members.

However, it is important that any such passport is integrated directly into regular 1-2-1s between managers and their team to ensure that wellbeing is seen as a core component of regular check-ins, not a separate 'add on'.

12. Whilst many of us can cope fine working in a 'hot desk' environment, for others - particularly with disabilities, for example - it can pose more of a challenge. Therefore the transition to 'hot desking' could significantly affect an individual's wellbeing in the workplace.

To address this, departments should ensure that **adjustments are made for those that struggle in a 'hot desk' environment.**

13. Women are likely to face specific wellbeing challenges in the workplace, such as relating to raising children or hormonal changes later in life. To ensure that these needs are met, **specific facilities should be provided in all Civil Service departments to support women's wellbeing in the workplace.**

14. Too often handover processes in the Civil Service are poorly carried out, meaning that a new starter can face significant increased stress and anxiety in a new role. This is particularly important when we know that turnover rates in a number of departments is particularly high.

To improve this, **departments should put into place new processes to ensure that handover notes are properly written to ensure knowledge and good practice is not lost when civil servants change jobs.**

15. Getting to grips with new technology in the workplace can cause some people a significant amount of stress. Some need a longer time to absorb the new way of working; a one size fits all approach is at risk of leaving them behind.

Therefore, the Civil Service should ensure that it takes an **inclusive approach to training staff for the use of new technology.** This should take a mixed methods approach, recognising that different people learn in different ways. It should also ensure that people can go back to **training tools for refreshers,** if they require them, and **a buddy could be assigned** to help them through the onboarding process.

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