



Research insight

# Preventing stress Promoting positive manager behaviour

This Research Insight document was written by Emma Donaldson-Feilder, Rachel Lewis and Joanna Yarker of Affinity Health at Work (Rachel Lewis is also a lecturer at London Metropolitan University and Joanna Yarker is also a lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London). Emma, Rachel and Jo have been conducting the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' research programme since 2005.

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	2
<b>Summary of key findings</b>	3
<b>Why manager behaviour is important</b>	
– The importance of employee well-being/mental health and effective line management	6
– Research evidence of the links between management behaviour and employee well-being/mental health	7
– Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: the story so far	10
<b>Promoting positive manager behaviour</b>	
– The research study	16
– How the intervention made a difference	18
– Reflections on barriers and facilitators of positive manager behaviour and behaviour change	25
– Refining and improving the intervention	34
<b>Case studies</b>	36
<b>Discussion and the way forward</b>	40
<b>References</b>	46
<b>Appendix</b>	
– Sample workshop timetable	49
– Questionnaire measures	50
– Evaluation form completed by managers at the end of the workshop	54
– Process evaluation questionnaire completed by managers at the end of the process	56

# Executive summary

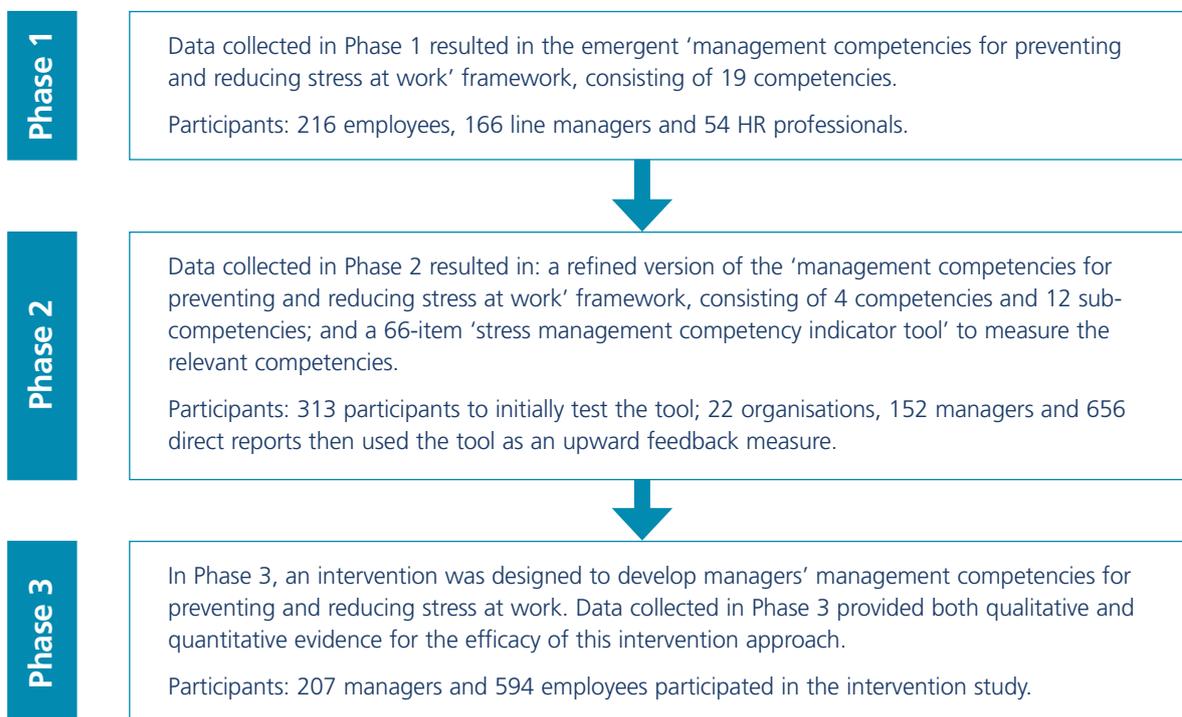
## Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study described in this Research Insight report was to create effective interventions designed to develop managers' management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work.

## The research story so far

The current study builds on considerable policy and research interest in the important role of line managers in relation to staff well-being. It is the third phase of an ongoing research programme. See Figure 1 for a summary of the research programme.

Figure 1: 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' research programme



# Summary of key findings

## Evaluating the intervention

### **Managers' evaluation of the workshop**

- The majority of managers found the workshop enabled them to explore positive manager behaviours and to increase awareness of their own behaviour. This was largely true whether or not the manager had received an upward feedback report, even though the exercise on exploring managers' upward feedback reports was a key element of the workshop. The majority of managers also felt that they had been equipped with the tools to further enhance their skills, and that they would be able to go on and apply their learning.
- Receiving an upward feedback report was found to be significant in terms of managers understanding their own behaviour. Although both groups improved, 13% of managers who had not received feedback felt their understanding of their own behaviour was 'poor' at the end of the workshop, compared with none of those that had received feedback.
- The upward feedback report was seen as the most useful element of the workshop. The case studies and scenarios explored in the workshop, the opportunity to interact with colleagues and understanding positive manager behaviours were also seen as useful.

### **Managers' evaluation of the intervention process**

- Results were encouraging in terms of manager commitment: 75% of managers felt that they had already been able to make changes to their behaviour following the workshop, and 85% were committed to taking action to implement changes.
- The majority of managers felt that their line manager had been supportive and would encourage them to make changes.
- Managers were less positive about the organisational input, with only just over half of managers feeling that their organisation had been supportive of them making changes, and half feeling they didn't have the resources necessary to make the changes at the moment.

## **Organisational learning and stakeholder suggestions for intervention process improvements**

- Stakeholders provided their views on how the process could be improved within organisations:
  - joining forces by using a steering group and gaining the involvement at senior manager level and across departments
  - rebranding the intervention to fit with organisational culture and goals
  - integrating the intervention into existing initiatives and policies.

### **Manager behaviour change**

Manager (self-report) data:

- Managers who initially scored themselves as 'ineffective' were the group that saw most significant positive changes over time. This was true whether they had received the intervention or not. It is possible that even without feedback, the process of completing the questionnaire encouraged managers to reflect upon their behaviour and seek to improve.
- Managers who had initially scored themselves as 'effective' saw themselves largely unchanged by the intervention. This could be as a result of managers perceiving that they did not need to make changes if feedback was that they were performing effectively. 'Effective' managers who had not received feedback or attended a workshop saw themselves as less effective at the follow-up point.

Employee (upward feedback) data:

- Employees' scores for their managers' behaviour suggest that the intervention process had the most positive impact on initially 'ineffective' managers. The managers who had received either feedback alone or the full intervention (feedback and workshop) were seen to improve significantly over time, compared with the group who received no feedback, who were perceived to remain largely unchanged and therefore still 'ineffective'.

- An interesting result appeared with regards to 'effective' managers. Mirroring the self-report data, employees' scores for managers who were initially 'effective' but received no feedback suggest they were perceived as significantly less effective over time. This may not be a result of actual behaviour changes, but rather employee frustration with the process, for instance, completing two questionnaires without seeing any results or actions.
- The same decrease in effectiveness over time was seen both with managers who received feedback and with managers who received the full intervention (feedback and workshop). Managers who received feedback alone were provided with reports, but not specifically encouraged to share the results with their employees: this may have led to frustration on the part of employees that their part in the process was not recognised. Managers who received the full intervention (workshop and feedback) were encouraged in the workshop to share their results with employees: this may have resulted in managers saying to employees that their results suggested that they did not need to make improvements, which may have been frustrating for employees. Alternative explanations for these results could be: that their high initial scores may have led to these 'effective' managers becoming complacent; or that the fact that they were given the feedback and workshop could have resulted in raised expectations of employees who, expecting their managers to behave effectively in all situations, were disappointed by any signs of ineffectiveness.

### **Reflections on barriers and facilitators of positive manager behaviour and behaviour change**

#### ***Barriers to managers displaying positive behaviours***

The barriers perceived by managers fell into four categories: individual level, organisational/other level, team/relationship level and personal barriers.

- Individual-level work barriers identified by managers include workload, short-term deadlines and demands, conflicting priorities, lack of resource and pressure from above.
- Organisational/other-level work barriers include bureaucracy, organisational processes, IT issues, excessive use of email, government-level/legislative requirements and inability to share all information with team members.

- Team/relationship-level barriers include competency/poor performance issues and team member attitude/behavioural problems.
- Personal barriers include personal/home-life issues, own levels of stress and pressure and perceptions of lack of competence and confidence as a manager.

#### ***Support requirements identified by managers***

- The key support managers say they require is further training, particularly in the areas of people management and managing conflict. Managers also requested ongoing feedback and appraisal on their behaviour, protected time to develop their skills, support from managers, peers and mentors and action learning sets.
- Three months after the workshop, nearly a quarter of managers had not been able to access any support, and only 4% had received further training; however, 38% of managers had gained support from their managers, and 21% from their team. This suggests that support is more readily available at the local level than at the organisational level.

#### ***Support provided to managers by stakeholders***

- Around half of the stakeholders taking part in the project offered limited or no support to managers outside of gaining participation. Even where support was provided, stakeholders reported a general waning of support and of manager interest after the initial launch.
- On reflection, stakeholders provided recommendations for how managers would be better supported in a future process:
  - support throughout the process, rather than just at launch
  - time taken to plan the project, both in terms of relationship-building with managers and planning choice of participant.

#### ***Gaining buy-in from managers and senior management***

- Stakeholders identified a series of barriers to manager participation in the project, including:
  - difficulties communicating with managers
  - managers being too busy/stressed to spend time on the process
  - managers' concerns with confidentiality
  - managers' concerns about implications of participation

- managers put off by the concept of ‘stress’
- managers not believing stress to be an issue
- lack of senior management buy-in
- managers resenting being told to attend
- managers not turning up to briefings/workshop
- managers struggling to get sufficient direct report responses.
- Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for how each of these barriers could be overcome in the future, focusing mainly on communications, ensuring senior management buy-in and embedding the programme into organisational practice and initiatives.
- Stakeholders also responded to the question of how senior management buy-in could be gained by recalling when buy-in had been received in the past. The following themes were found:
  - having a clear business case
  - linking the intervention to national goals/initiatives
  - threat/impact of legislation
  - having a senior manager with a direct responsibility for health and safety.
- Getting senior managers to role-model positive manager behaviours was identified as being important to encourage these behaviours at all levels of management. However, few of the stakeholders felt that senior managers in their organisation were providing this kind of role model. Suggestions for how this could be changed included:
  - showing that positive behaviour is associated with positive business results
  - recruiting the right people to senior management
  - having one or two key people to role-model the behaviours
  - placing positive manager behaviour in the business plan and appraisal process.

### Refining and improving the intervention

A range of improvements was generated and it was identified that the feedback report was of central importance to the intervention. Further refinements include:

- an opportunity to provide one-to-one coaching to managers about their feedback report, as an alternative to guided self-learning and exploration
- a greater emphasis on action planning and development following the session, particularly focusing on two or three key goals and actions
- improvements to organisational elements of the intervention, such as:
  - provision of project/process plan to stakeholders to build in time for consultation and manager engagement prior to the research
  - briefing documents to stakeholders detailing suggestions for successful implementation
  - supporting project champions/steering groups within the organisations to find ways of embedding the intervention in organisational practices and initiatives
  - working with project champions to find the most appropriate ‘brand’ for the intervention in their organisation
  - helping project champions to take a strategic approach to supporting managers throughout the intervention process
  - supporting project champions in gaining buy-in for the intervention from all levels of management.

### Implications of the research

The research has implications for policy-makers, future research, employers (health and safety, occupational health and HR professionals) and line managers, which are discussed in the final chapter.

# Why manager behaviour is important

## The importance of employee well-being/mental health and effective line management

Positive employee mental health/well-being and the prevention of stress are now recognised as significant determinants of performance and success in the workplace. A number of recent national reports have emphasised this point, including Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population (2008) and the Foresight Group's report on mental capital and well-being (2008). The CIPD has recently produced a guide on the business case for stress management (CIPD 2008b), which suggests that the financial benefits of improving well-being or reducing stress are multiple, including reduced sickness absence and staff turnover, improved performance and less risk of conflict or litigation.

Increasingly, it is recognised that line managers have a central role to play in ensuring positive mental health/well-being for employees in the workplace. The research literature reviewed below provides evidence for the link between manager behaviour and employee well-being. National reports and initiatives have also highlighted the issue. For example:

- Dame Carol Black's review of the health of Britain's working age population in 2008 pointed out: 'Line managers have a key role in ensuring the workplace is a setting that promotes good health and well-being. Good line management can lead to good health, well-being and improved performance' (p59).
- The Foresight Group's report on mental capital and well-being in October 2008, part of an extensive study involving over 400 leading international experts, specifically recommended 'better training for managers so they understand the impact they can have on mental capital and well-being' (p30) and identifies as a challenge 'the central role of management in realising future competitiveness and in ensuring well-being' (p9).
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises that 'good management is the key to managing

the causes of work-related stress' (HSE 2007, p3). While the HSE Management Standards provide guidance and a suggested programme of activity to support employers in reducing work-related stress, much of the responsibility for implementation and achievement of the Management Standards will fall on line managers. This is why the HSE was keen to explore the management behaviours that underlie the achievement of the Management Standards and has provided funding for the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' research.

- Investors in People (IIP) also recognise the significance of management behaviour in their work on 'health and well-being at work'.
- The NICE consultation document, *Promoting Mental Well-being through Productive and Healthy Working Conditions*, includes manager behaviour as one of the factors influencing well-being in the workplace (NICE/Baxter et al 2008).

The importance of line managers in the mental health/stress management domain is congruent with a broader picture in which the vital role of line managers and of good people management skills is increasingly being recognised. For example, CIPD research shows that:

- Managers are key to flexible working practices being embedded effectively (CIPD 2005).
- Line managers increasingly play a key role in developing, supporting and accelerating learning at work (CIPD 2007).
- Line management behaviour is key to individuals making a successful and supported return to work following ill-health (CIPD 2008a).
- Line managers are central to effective implementation of absence management practices (CIPD 2008a).

It is important to recognise that many line managers are themselves under considerable pressure and that many need support and development to be able to deal with the people management demands placed on them. Often individuals are promoted or recruited into management positions because of their technical skills and struggle to deal with the people management aspects of their role. This suggests that, to achieve high performance and well-being, resource should be targeted at ensuring managers are supported to develop appropriate people management skills. This can be implemented through both organisational and national-level programmes: the Leitch Review (2006), emphasising the need for improving management skills in the UK, recommended greater investment in management skills by both employers and the Government; and the Foresight Group’s report

suggested that Train to Gain funding be extended to cover people management skills training for small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Research evidence of links between management behaviour and employee well-being/mental health**

***Links between manager behaviour and employee well-being***

Reviews of the literature, conducted for previous phases of this research, show evidence of links between manager behaviour and employee stress/well-being. They also reveal an increasing research interest in managers’ impact on employee well-being. Table 1 summarises the findings of these reviews (see Yarker et al 2007 and Yarker et al 2008 for the full reviews).

Table 1: Summary of research linking manager behaviour and employee well-being

<b>Leadership/management model or theoretical perspective</b>	<b>Findings of research studies showing links between manager behaviour and employee well-being</b>	<b>Examples of theoretical papers and research studies</b>
<p><b>Task- and relationship-focused behaviour:</b>            Task-oriented behaviour refers to managerial actions focused on achieving the goals of a task, including planning, organising, assigning tasks, communicating information, monitoring performance, solving problems and clarifying roles and objectives. Relationship-focused manager behaviour includes supporting employees, showing respect for their ideas, increasing cohesiveness, developing and mentoring, looking out for employees’ welfare, managing conflict and team-building.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship-focused supervisory behaviours appear to have a positive impact on employee well-being.</li> <li>• High levels of task-focused behaviour may be detrimental, but this negative impact may be reduced if the same supervisors also exhibit relationship-focused behaviours.</li> </ul>	<p>Nyberg et al 2005; Sosik and Godshalk 2000; Yukl 1994; Seltzer and Numerof 1988; Sheridan and Vredenburgh 1978</p>

(continued overleaf)

Table 1: Summary of research linking manager behaviour and employee well-being (continued)

Leadership/management model or theoretical perspective	Findings of research studies showing links between manager behaviour and employee well-being	Examples of theoretical papers and research studies
<p><b>Transformational and transactional leader behaviour:</b> This model divides leader behaviour into three broad categories: transformational, transactional, and <i>laissez-faire</i>.</p> <p>Transformational leadership behaviour involves generating enthusiasm for a 'vision', a high level of individualised consideration, creating opportunities for employees' development, setting high expectations for performance, and acting as a role model to gain the respect, admiration, and trust of employees.</p> <p>Transactional leadership involves a more straightforward exchange between a leader and direct report, whereby the employee is suitably rewarded for good performance.</p> <p><i>Laissez-faire</i> leadership behaviour is characterised by an avoidance of action, a lack of feedback and communication, and a general indifference to employee performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformational leader behaviours, particularly those that involve individualised consideration, have a positive impact on employees' psychological well-being.</li> <li>Transformational leadership is associated with lower employee cynicism and higher professional efficacy; whereas <i>laissez-faire</i> leadership is related to higher exhaustion and cynicism in employees.</li> <li>Employees with transformational leaders experience more optimism, happiness and enthusiasm than those with leaders who do not display transformational leadership behaviour.</li> <li>Transformational leadership is linked to employees' well-being at least in part by increasing their experience of a meaningful work environment, clarity about roles and opportunities for development. <i>Laissez-faire</i> leadership may make employees' roles less clear, increase employee conflicts and be associated with employees' experience of bullying.</li> </ul>	<p>Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2001; Bass 1999; Bass and Avolio 1994; Hetland, Sandal and Johnsen 2007; Bono et al 2007; Arnold et al 2007; Hague, Skogstad and Einarsen 2007; Neilsen et al 2008</p>
<p><b>Leader-member exchange (LMX):</b> Focuses on the quality of the dyadic relationship between an employee and his or her direct supervisor: the central notion is that line managers tend to develop close relationships with only a subgroup of direct reports, and engage in higher-quality exchanges with that subgroup of individuals than with other members of the team. These quality exchange relationships may manifest in greater levels of mutual trust, respect, liking, support and reciprocal influence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better-quality leader-member relationships are associated with higher levels of employee psychological well-being.</li> <li>High-quality leader-member relationships 'buffer' the effect of negative work environments on work and health outcomes.</li> <li>An intervention to enhance leader-member relationships was effective in increasing both productivity and employee satisfaction.</li> <li>High LMX variability (extent to which leader-member relationships are perceived to vary within a team) was negatively related to both employee job satisfaction and well-being, over and above the effects of leader-member exchange itself.</li> </ul>	<p>Gerstner and Day 1997; Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Epitropaki and Martin 1999, 2005; Harris and Kacmar 2006; Van Dyne et al 2002; Scandura and Graen 1984; Hooper and Martin 2008</p>

Table 1: Summary of research linking manager behaviour and employee well-being (continued)

<p><b>Negative, abusive, hostile and bullying supervisory behaviours:</b> There are calls to broaden consideration of leadership behaviour to cover the impact of negative behaviours, rather than just consider poor leadership to be the absence of positive behaviours. This fits with the literature on bullying, abusive and hostile supervisory behaviour: although bullying is sometimes perpetrated by peers of the targeted employee, it is more common for the perpetrator to be the individual's supervisor or manager.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative leadership behaviours appear to be separate from positive behaviours and demonstrate independent effects on well-being.</li> <li>• Managers that show both positive and negative behaviours produce more negative outcomes than those showing negative behaviours alone, perhaps due to the lack of consistency demonstrated.</li> <li>• Numerous studies have found significant associations between experiences of bullying and psychological strain, physical strain and sickness absence.</li> <li>• Hostile supervisor behaviour (laying blame on others, providing negative feedback, a proclivity to argue and a low frustration threshold) is associated with poorer employee well-being; however, the impact of supervisor hostility on well-being is reduced if the employee has an 'enriched' job (that is, wider scope to their role).</li> </ul>	<p>Einarsen 2000; O'Connell and Korabik 2000; Quine 1999; Beswick, Gore and Palferman 2006; Yagil 2001; Duffy, Ganster and Pagon 2002; Schaubroeck et al 2007</p>
<p><b>Other supervisory behaviours:</b> Some occupational stress authors have highlighted the limitations of simply adopting prominent leadership theories and measures and have, instead, developed and/or employed other specific supervisor behaviour scales, thereby linking the management/leadership literature with wider research into work design and occupational health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of delegation and communication, higher levels of emotional support behaviours and lower levels of leader control (measured using the Survey of Management Practices questionnaire) are related to lower levels of employee strain.</li> <li>• Supervisory behaviours (measured using the Supervisor Practices Instrument) are related to employees' mental health, even after accounting for the effects of the other non-supervisory variables such as stressful work events and support from others at work.</li> <li>• Leadership behaviour and employee mental well-being are linked in a 'feedback loop'. This suggests not only that supervisory behaviour can enhance employees' well-being, but also that employee well-being can determine the nature of their relationship with their supervisors.</li> <li>• When supervisors are perceived to provide work planning and structure, communicate effectively and set goals, their employees are clearer about their roles, and hence experience lower levels of psychological strain.</li> <li>• Leaders' use of rewards, recognition and respect behaviours are associated with higher work attendance by employees.</li> </ul>	<p>Offermann and Hellmann 1996; Gilbreath and Benson 2004; van Dierendonck et al 2004; O'Driscoll and Beehr 1994; Dellve, Skagert, and Vilhelmsson 2007</p>

(continued overleaf)

Table 1: Summary of research linking manager behaviour and employee well-being (continued)

Leadership/management model or theoretical perspective	Findings of research studies showing links between manager behaviour and employee well-being	Examples of theoretical papers and research studies
<p><b>Behaviours underpinning supervisory support:</b> Because workplace support has been found to be associated with employee well-being, some research has focused on the role of the manager in providing support. For example, studies have considered three forms of potentially supportive supervisory communication: positive job-related communication, negative job-related communication, and non-job-related communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions of a supportive manager have been found to be related to higher job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions and less depression.</li> <li>• Positive job-related supervisory communication was the most beneficial in reducing employee strain, followed by non-job-related communication. Higher levels of negative job-related communication were associated with increased employee strain.</li> <li>• Greater frequency of non-job and positive job-related supervisory communication was related to lower psychological and physical strain.</li> </ul>	<p>Rooney and Gottlieb 2007; Fenalson and Beehr 1994; Stephens and Long 2000</p>

**Interventions to improve well-being by changing manager behaviour**

Only a small amount of research appears to have investigated the impact of supervisor-focused training programmes on employees’ well-being. Those studies that have been conducted provide good evidence that supervisor-focused interventions can have a beneficial impact on both work design characteristics (for example job control and workplace support) and employees’ well-being (Theorell et al 2001; Tsutsumi et al 2005; Kawakami et al 2005; Greenberg 2006). Such interventions also appear to have the potential to reduce the detrimental impact of organisational stressors, such as workplace injustice and inequity.

**Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: the story so far**

While the research reviewed above shows that numerous management behaviours have been empirically linked to employee well-being and the reduction of strain, a definitive list of the management behaviours specific to the management of stress/well-being in employees had not previously been developed. The ‘management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work’ programme therefore set out to fill this gap and enhance understanding of the skills, abilities and behaviours

required by managers to manage stress in their staff. The aim was also to provide a platform for integration of stress management with people management.

A behavioural competency approach was adopted, first, because behavioural descriptions put stress management into a language that is accessible to managers and is ‘business-friendly’, allowing a clear specification of the expectations upon managers to manage stress in others; and, second, because clarity about the management behaviours required paves the way for the development of interventions to help managers to manage employee stress effectively. The first two phases of the research were designed to explore the relevant management behaviours from first a qualitative and then a quantitative perspective to develop a competency framework.

**Phase 1 research**

Phase 1 of the research was published in March 2007 (Yarker et al 2007) and aimed:

- to identify the specific management behaviours that are associated with the effective management of stress at work, including identifying specific behaviours associated with each of the six Management Standards and behaviours associated with the implementation of the HSE Management Standards

- to build a 'competency framework for preventing and reducing stress at work'
- to explore the possible integration of this framework into existing management competency frameworks.

A qualitative approach was taken in which structured one-to-one interviews, workshops and written exercises were used to explore the behaviours associated with the management of stress in employees: 216 employees, 166 line managers and 54 HR practitioners participated from the education, healthcare, central government, local government and finance sectors. The interviews were transcribed and content analysis was used to extract themes and develop an emergent competency framework. Behavioural indicators were also generated from written exercises completed by managers and employees and workshop exercises completed by HR professionals. This latter data provided triangulation of the findings and a preliminary validation of the emerging framework. The research revealed 19 management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work.

Analyses conducted to identify manager and employee differences and sector differences revealed that the set of competencies was consistent across the sample: the same competencies were referred to by managers and employees, and by interviewees from all five sectors covered. The emergent framework was compared with the HSE Management Standards, which revealed that 15 of the 19 competencies appeared to be particularly relevant for the six Management Standard areas. Further mapping exercises were conducted to compare the emergent framework with: a) existing management frameworks; b) sector-specific frameworks; and c) national frameworks. These analyses suggested that, while all 19 competencies were covered by one or more of the existing frameworks, no single management, sector or national framework included all 19 of the competencies identified as pertinent to preventing and reducing stress in staff.

### **Phase 2 research**

Following the publication of the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework developed in Phase 1, anecdotal

feedback suggested that the framework was useful to practitioners. However, feedback also showed that, in many situations, it is unrealistic for organisations or individuals to assess and/or develop such a large number of discrete sets of behaviour. To enhance its practical value and make the framework more manageable for users, it was necessary to reduce the number of behavioural competencies. There was also a need to explore in more depth the ways that organisations can use the findings, to ensure that the research outputs were in the most appropriate and useful form for end-users.

In addition, there was a need to develop a quantitative measurement tool to examine the degree to which an individual exhibits the management behaviours set out in the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work'. While there were already a number of widely used measures of management and leadership, their psychometric quality and practical application varied greatly and their suitability for measuring management and leadership behaviour relevant to preventing and reducing stress at work was limited. Most existing measures drew from *a priori* models of leadership, so might not capture the behaviours specific to the management of well-being, health and stress of employees; indeed, none of the existing management/leadership measures appeared to measure all the behaviours included in the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework. The one measure that was developed specifically to capture behaviours required for the management of employee well-being provided only a conglomerative measure of a variety of supervisor behaviours, making it difficult to identify which specific behaviours explain differences in health and work outcomes.

Phase 2 of the research therefore aimed:

- to refine and revise the competency framework developed in Phase 1
- to examine the usability, range of uses for and best approaches to using the management competency framework developed in Phase 1
- to design a stress management competency indicator tool that measures the degree to which an individual exhibits management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work.

A combined quantitative and qualitative approach was taken to refine the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework and, at the same time, construct a 'stress management competency indicator tool' or measure. Behavioural statements were extracted from the Phase 1 data and tested qualitatively with stakeholders and experts and quantitatively with a convenience sample of employees. Following reliability analysis, a questionnaire consisting of 112 items was completed by 152 managers and 656 employees (direct reports of the managers) drawn from 22 organisations. Managers responded to the questionnaire with their perceptions of their own behaviour, and direct reports responded with their perceptions of their manager's behaviour. Reliability

analysis and exploratory factor analysis of the direct report data was used to establish the psychometric properties of the indicator tool and provide information on the factorial structure of the competency framework. To further validate the results, two workshops of stress experts explored the framework, named each factor and identified sub-clusters.

The research results revealed four factors, each of which was grouped into three sub-clusters, providing a refined competency framework of four competencies and 12 sub-competencies. Following data analysis and feedback from managers, stakeholders and experts, the final 'stress management competency indicator tool' was made up of 66 questions or items. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The refined 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' framework, also showing the items of the 'stress management competency indicator tool'

Competency	Sub-competency	Items (to be preceded by 'My manager...' for the upward feedback version of the questionnaire)
Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity	Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is a good role model</li> <li>• says one thing, then does something different</li> <li>• treats me with respect</li> <li>• is honest</li> <li>• speaks about team members behind their backs</li> </ul>
	Managing emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is unpredictable in mood</li> <li>• acts calmly in pressured situations</li> <li>• passes on his or her stress to me</li> <li>• is consistent in his or her approach to managing</li> <li>• takes suggestions for improvement as a personal criticism</li> <li>• panics about deadlines</li> </ul>
	Considerate approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes short-term demands rather than allowing me to plan my work</li> <li>• creates unrealistic deadlines for delivery of work</li> <li>• seems to give more negative than positive feedback</li> <li>• relies on other people to deal with problems</li> <li>• imposes 'my way is the only way'</li> <li>• shows a lack of consideration for my work-life balance</li> </ul>

Table 2: The refined 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' framework, also showing the items of the 'stress management competency indicator tool' (continued)

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Sub-competency</b>	<b>Items (to be preceded by 'My manager...' for the upward feedback version of the questionnaire)</b>
Managing and communicating existing and future work	Proactive work management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicates my job objectives to me clearly</li> <li>develops action plans</li> <li>monitors my workload on an ongoing basis</li> <li>encourages me to review how I organise my work</li> <li>when necessary, will stop additional work being passed on to me</li> <li>works proactively</li> <li>sees projects/tasks through to delivery</li> <li>reviews processes to see if work can be improved</li> <li>prioritises future workloads</li> </ul>
	Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is indecisive at decision-making</li> <li>deals rationally with problems</li> <li>follows up problems on my behalf</li> <li>deals with problems as soon as they arise</li> </ul>
	Participative/empowering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gives me the right level of job responsibility</li> <li>correctly judges when to consult employees and when to make a decision</li> <li>keeps me informed of what is happening in the organisation</li> <li>acts as a mentor to me</li> <li>delegates work equally across the team</li> <li>helps me to develop in my role</li> <li>encourages participation from the whole team</li> <li>provides regular team meetings</li> <li>gives me too little direction</li> </ul>
Reasoning/managing	Managing conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acts as a mediator in conflict situations</li> <li>acts to keep the peace rather than resolve conflict issues</li> <li>deals with squabbles before they turn into arguments</li> <li>deals objectively with employee conflicts</li> <li>deals with employee conflicts head on</li> </ul>
	Use of organisational resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>seeks advice from other managers when necessary</li> <li>uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems</li> <li>seeks help from occupational health when necessary</li> </ul>
	Taking responsibility for resolving issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>follows up conflicts after resolution</li> <li>supports employees through incidents of abuse</li> <li>doesn't address bullying</li> <li>makes it clear he or she will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong</li> </ul>

(continued overleaf)

Table 2: The refined 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' framework, also showing the items of the 'stress management competency indicator tool' (continued)

Competency	Sub-competency	Items (to be preceded by 'My manager...' for the upward feedback version of the questionnaire)
Managing the individual within the team	Personally accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prefers to speak to me personally rather than use email</li> <li>• provides regular opportunities to speak one to one</li> <li>• returns my calls/emails promptly</li> <li>• is available to talk to when needed</li> </ul>
	Sociable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brings in treats</li> <li>• socialises with the team</li> <li>• is willing to have a laugh at work</li> </ul>
	Empathetic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourages my input in discussions</li> <li>• listens to me when I ask for help</li> <li>• makes an effort to find out what motivates me at work</li> <li>• tries to see things from my point of view</li> <li>• takes an interest in my life outside work</li> <li>• regularly asks 'how are you?'</li> <li>• treats me with equal importance to the rest of the team</li> <li>• assumes, rather than checks, I am okay</li> </ul>

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A qualitative approach was used to explore the usability of both the competency framework and the 'stress management competency indicator tool'. Structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with 47 managers and 6 stakeholders and workshops were conducted with 38 stress experts; the data generated was transcribed and content analysis used to extract themes. Results showed the following:

- When asked how they felt the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework would fit into their existing HR/health and safety (H&S) policies and processes, participants' responses fell into two themes. First, it could be used in a stress management context: to review and develop policies, to inform the development of action plans for stress management at an organisational level, and to integrate with existing policies. Second, it would be of use in a leadership development/training context: to dovetail into existing frameworks and programmes, to develop new training programmes, or as a guiding structure or checklist for training.

- When asked how they felt the 'stress management competency indicator tool' would fit into their existing HR/H&S policies and processes, participants saw a dual use for this questionnaire tool. First, it could be used in a stress management context for providing information at the local level, to help 'tie in' managers to the process, and in specific scenarios, such as where a particular line manager was seeking help with problems that might be stress-related. There were requests for the tool to be part of a flexible 'toolkit' offered to organisations that would include training materials, case studies, guidance and sample tools. Second, the 'stress management competency indicator tool' would be useful in a more general management development context, used in conjunction with follow-up support or coaching, or as part of an overall development programme, rather than as a stand-alone exercise.

As in Phase 1, mapping exercises were conducted to compare the emergent framework with existing management frameworks. These analyses again suggested that, while all 12 sub-competencies were

covered by one or more of the existing frameworks, no single existing framework included all 12 of the sub-competencies. This suggests that, where organisations are operating an existing management competency framework, it probably covers some but not all of the management behaviours relevant to the prevention and reduction of stress in staff.

The full results of this phase of the research were published in June 2008 (Yarker et al 2008).

### ***Phase 3: the current study***

Once the management behaviours that are important for the prevention and reduction of stress at work were established, the next step was to convert the knowledge into interventions that develop managers' ability to prevent and reduce stress at work. This was not only foreseen at the outset of the research programme, but also reinforced by informal feedback and by the usability study conducted during Phase 2. Practitioners, stakeholders and line managers all mentioned a need

for support, interventions and tools to help managers show the relevant behaviours. There was therefore a need to design and test learning and development interventions to establish how best to help managers show the relevant behaviours/competencies at work.

The purpose of the current study was therefore to create effective interventions designed to develop managers' management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work. Within this overall purpose, three specific objectives were included:

- to create a learning and development intervention that develops managers' management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work
- to test the effectiveness of the learning and development intervention in developing managers' management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work
- to refine the learning and development intervention based on the results of the testing conducted.

# Promoting positive manager behaviour

## The research study

A longitudinal research design was used to explore the effects of a learning and development intervention for managers aimed at helping them show the management behaviours identified by earlier research as being important for preventing and reducing stress in their staff. This method has been successfully applied in the study of training evaluation (Kraiger, Ford and Salas 1993) and stress management interventions (Bond and Bunce 2001; Randall, Griffiths and Cox 2005). In addition to gathering 'before and after' data designed to explore the impact of the intervention on manager behaviour, a range of qualitative data-gathering exercises were conducted to explore barriers and facilitators to managers behaving positively and/or changing their behaviour.

## Participants

The research was supported by a consortium of 16 participating employer organisations (together with institutional support from the CIPD, Investors in People (IIP) and the HSE). Each employer organisation was asked to invite a group of managers to participate in the intervention. In addition, quarterly consortium meetings were held to enhance organisational learning and explore relevant topics. These meetings were attended by up to two stakeholders from each of the 16 consortium organisations, plus representatives of the CIPD, IIP and the HSE. They provided an opportunity to capture data on the process of implementing the intervention in organisational settings and particularly the barriers and facilitators to helping managers behave in ways that prevent and reduce stress at work.

## The learning and development intervention

The intervention was based on the framework of 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' that had been developed in the first two phases of the research (as described in Table 2, page 12). It was made up of two elements:

- *An upward feedback report* was provided to managers, generated by getting all managers and their direct reports to complete the 'stress management competency indicator tool', the questionnaire that was produced in Phase 2 of the research (as described above). Direct reports were asked to rate their manager's behaviour, whereas managers were asked to rate their own behaviour. Provided at least three direct reports responded to the questionnaire, a feedback report was generated, showing the manager how their behaviour was perceived in terms of the four competencies and 12 sub-competencies. The feedback report also allowed managers to see how their score compared with the average of their direct reports' score for each of the individual behaviours/questions. Feedback was generated at two different time points: initially (time 1) prior to attending the workshop; and then at a follow-up point (time 2) three months after the workshop.
- *A half-day workshop* was held for managers, which aimed to help them: explore the importance of positive manager behaviour; increase awareness of their own behaviour; and equip them with the tools to further enhance and/or develop their skills. This workshop was provided face to face to groups of up to 12 managers. It combined structured individual exploration of the manager's feedback report with developing an understanding of the behaviours included in the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' framework. The workshop design was highly interactive, including individual reflection, small group discussion, case studies, vignettes, plenary debate and analysis, and other exercises to help managers understand which behaviours they needed to develop and how they might do so. A sample timetable for the workshop is provided in the appendix.

The evaluation of the intervention's impact included a range of 'before and after' measures. These were completed by the participating managers themselves and, for perceptions of manager behaviour, by the managers' direct reports. Some of the 'after' measures were completed immediately after the workshop; others were completed at a follow-up point three months after the workshop. Drawing from the leading approaches to training and intervention evaluation (Kirkpatrick 1976; Kraiger, Ford and Salas 1993; Randall, Griffiths and Cox 2005), the intervention evaluation included:

- *manager reactions and learning*, evaluated through questionnaires completed by managers at the end of the workshop, and at the end of the research process (following time 2)
- *stakeholder reactions and organisational learning*, evaluated through group discussions at the end of the research process
- *manager behaviour change*, evaluated by comparing time 1 and time 2 self-report responses and upward feedback/direct-report responses on the extent to which managers showed the relevant competencies, as measured by the 'stress management competency indicator tool'. The behaviour change achieved by managers who had participated in the complete intervention was compared with the following control groups: those who had received only the upward feedback, not the workshop; those who had received neither the upward feedback nor the workshop.

Copies of the relevant questionnaires are provided in the appendix. In total, 112 managers attended the intervention workshop, 58 of whom completed questionnaires at both time points, and received a feedback report, and therefore provided usable intervention group data. Data across both time points was also received from a further 95 managers who formed control groups with which the intervention group were compared. Further, upward feedback data at two time points was received from 209 employees whose managers received the workshop and the feedback, and a further 385 employees whose managers formed control groups with which the intervention group were compared.

### **Exploration of barriers to and facilitators of positive manager behaviour and behaviour change**

A range of qualitative methodologies was used to explore the barriers and facilitators both for managers showing positive manager behaviour and for the intervention to achieve behaviour change. The specific questions explored were as follows:

- **What are the barriers to managers showing positive behaviours and how could these be overcome?** This question was considered through focus group discussions with managers, held during the manager workshops.
- **What support do managers need in order to show the behaviours identified in the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework?** Views on this question were sought both from the managers themselves and from the organisational stakeholders who were championing the process in each participating organisation. The managers were asked about their support needs in questionnaires at the end of the workshop and at the end of the research process. Stakeholders were asked for their views in a focus group at the consortium meeting held at the end of the research process.
- **How can participation from line managers, buy-in from senior managers and role-modelling of behaviours by senior managers be achieved?** At an early stage, it was identified that achieving manager participation in the intervention was not always straightforward: this prompted an exploration of the barriers to line manager participation and how they could be overcome. In addition, because gaining senior manager buy-in was identified as a crucial element in ensuring success of the process, further data was gathered specifically on how this could be achieved. Views on the role-modelling of positive behaviours by senior managers were also sought. These questions were explored through seeking stakeholder views in focus groups during consortium meetings.

## How the intervention made a difference

### Participant reactions and learning

#### Manager reactions to and learning from the workshop

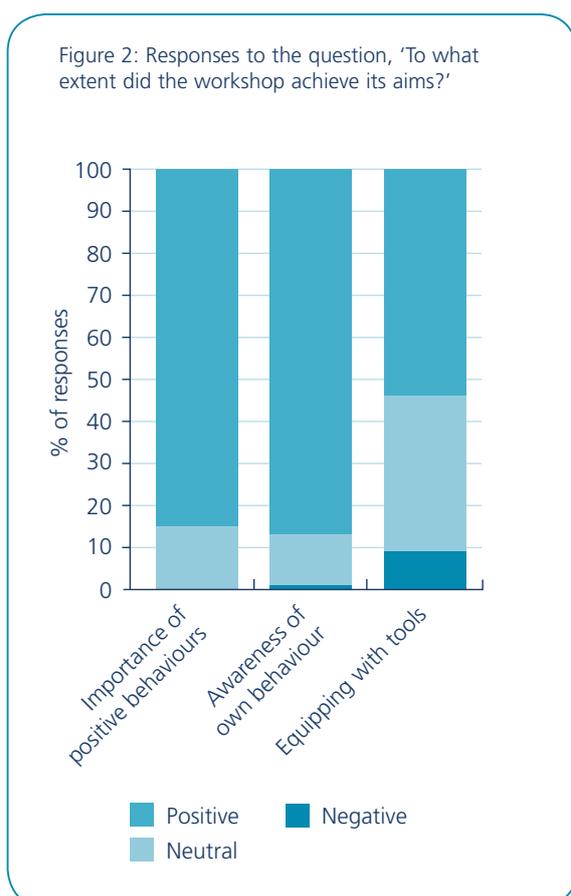
At the end of each workshop, managers were asked to provide feedback on their reactions to and learning from the session (see workshop evaluation form in the appendix). Responses came from 112 managers: of these, 16 managers had not received an upward feedback report.

#### To what extent did the workshop achieve its aims?

Managers were asked three questions about whether the workshop achieved its aims, which were the following:

- 1 to explore the importance of positive manager behaviour
- 2 to increase awareness of managers' own behaviour
- 3 to equip managers with the tools to further enhance and/or develop their skills.

Figure 2 shows the percentage responses from those managers who had received an upward feedback report.



- Eighty-five per cent of managers who had received feedback felt that they did explore the importance of positive manager behaviour. Despite not receiving a report, 62% of managers without an upward feedback report also felt they had benefited from the workshop in terms of understanding the importance of positive manager behaviour.
- Eighty-seven per cent of managers who had received feedback felt that they had increased their awareness of their own behaviour. The majority of managers who hadn't received an upward feedback report, although a smaller number (53%), also felt that the workshop had increased awareness of their own behaviour.
- Fifty-four per cent of managers who had received upward feedback reports felt that the workshop had equipped them with the tools to further develop and enhance their skills. Interestingly, 63% of managers who hadn't received feedback felt that they had been equipped with skills.

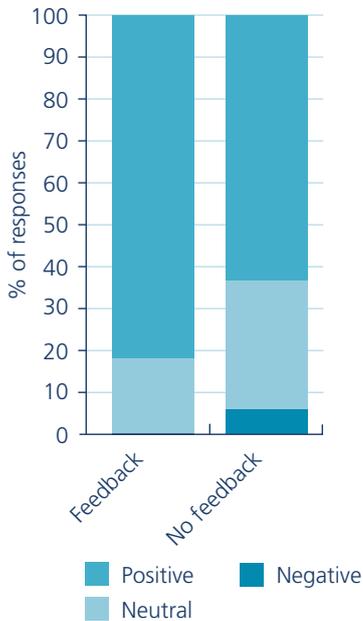
#### To what extent will you be able to apply learning from the workshop?

Managers were asked to what extent they felt they were able to apply the learning from the workshop into their work. Figure 3 shows responses from both groups of managers. Responses were positive whether managers had received a feedback report or not: 82% of managers who had received a feedback report felt that they could go on to apply their learning, compared with 63% of those who hadn't received a report.

#### Perceived change in behavioural understanding following the workshop

Figure 4 shows the percentage of managers who felt they had a good understanding of their own manager behaviour before and after the workshop. Although there was a strong improvement in understanding in both groups, those managers who had received a feedback report showed a steeper increase in understanding their behaviour.

Figure 3: Responses to the question, 'To what extent will you be able to apply the workshop learning to your work?'



An even clearer picture of the improvement in understanding appears when looking at those managers who felt that they had a poor understanding of their own management behaviour before the workshop. Of the managers who received an upward feedback report, 12% felt that they had a poor understanding of their behaviour before the workshop and none felt this following the workshop. Of the managers who did not receive an upward feedback report, 16% felt that they had a poor understanding of their behaviour before the workshop and 13% still felt they had a poor understanding after the workshop. This suggests that the upward feedback report and workshop worked in combination to improve managers' understanding of their own behaviour.

*Most useful elements of the workshop:*

Managers who had received an upward feedback report felt the following were the most useful elements:

- the feedback report/understanding the views of their team (57%)
- the case studies and scenarios explored in the workshop (30%)
- interaction with colleagues and sharing experiences (11%)
- understanding the positive manager behaviours (2%).

Managers who had not received an upward feedback report felt the following were the most useful elements:

- the case studies and scenarios explored in the workshop (54%)
- interaction with colleagues and sharing experiences (31%)
- understanding the positive manager behaviours (15%).

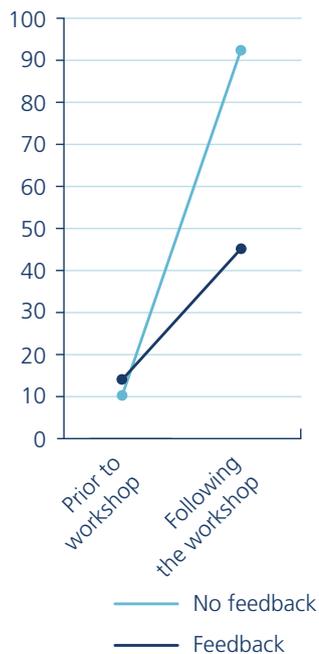
*Least useful elements of the workshop:*

Managers who had received an upward feedback report felt the following were the least useful elements:

- particular elements of the course content/scenarios (40%)
- issues with the feedback report/team responses (27%)
- lack of action planning/strategies going forward (13%)
- length of course – both too long and too short (13%)
- housekeeping issues (7%).

Of those who hadn't received an upward feedback report, all comments in this section referred to the lack of this report and the poor responses of team members.

Figure 4: Percentage of positive responses to the question, 'To what extent do you understand your own management behaviour?'



### Key points from the workshop evaluation

- The majority of managers found the workshop enabled them to explore positive manager behaviours and increase awareness of their own behaviour. This was largely true whether or not the manager had received an upward feedback report, even though the exercise on exploring managers' upward feedback reports was a key element of the workshop. The majority of managers also felt that they had been equipped with the tools to further enhance their skills, and that they would be able to go on and apply their learning.
- Receiving an upward feedback report was found to be significant in terms of managers understanding their own behaviour. Although both groups improved, 13% of managers who had not received feedback felt their understanding of their own behaviour was 'poor' at the end of the workshop, compared with none of those who had received feedback.
- The upward feedback report was seen as the most useful element of the workshop. Both groups also cited the case studies/scenarios explored in the workshop, the opportunity to interact with colleagues and understanding positive manager behaviours as useful.

### Manager reactions to and learning from the whole intervention process

At the end of the process, after completion of the second upward feedback exercise and issuing of time 2 upward feedback reports, managers were invited to provide their views on the process (see process evaluation questionnaire in the appendix). Forty managers responded.

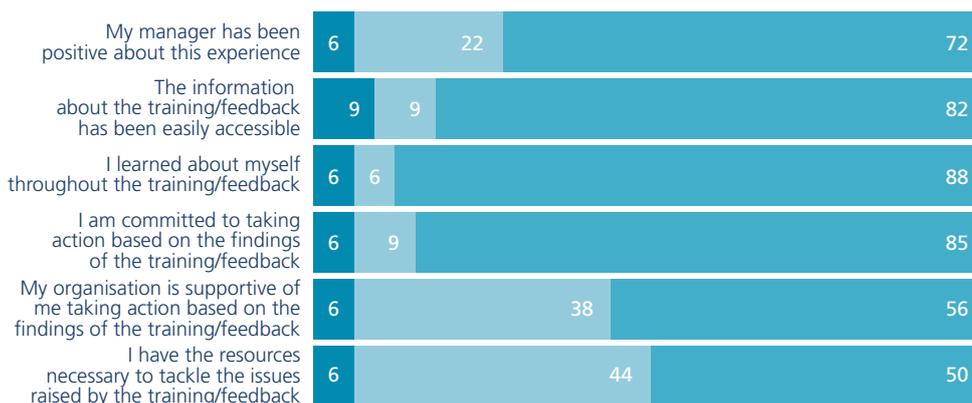
The majority of managers reported that, following the workshop, they had discussed their feedback with both their manager and their direct reports. Only 12 respondents had not discussed their feedback with their team members, and 10 had not discussed their feedback with their manager.

Seventy-five per cent (30 out of 40) of managers felt that they had been able to make changes to

their behaviour following the workshop. Of the ten that felt they had not been able to make changes, eight provided explanation for this. Three comments surrounded staff movement and team changes making it difficult to understand how they would enact changes, three felt that the feedback and workshop demonstrated that they had no need to improve and that they were doing as much as they could, one felt they had not had enough time to consider their development, and one found it difficult to pick one area to focus upon and therefore was feeling confused.

Managers responded to a series of questions regarding the process. Figure 5 provides a summary of their responses, with negative responses in red, neutral responses in yellow and positive responses in green. Percentages are provided within each box.

Figure 5: Responses to a series of questions about the overall intervention process



### Key points from the intervention process evaluation

- Results are encouraging in terms of manager commitment: 75% of managers who responded felt that they had already been able to make changes to their behaviour following the workshop, and 85% were committed to taking action to implement changes.
- The majority of managers felt that their line manager had been supportive and would encourage them to make changes.
- Managers were less positive about the organisational input, with only just over half of managers feeling that their organisation had been supportive of them making changes, and half feeling they didn't have the resources necessary to make the changes at the moment.

The responses provide positive indications of the process from a manager's personal development perspective, with 88% feeling that they learned about themselves during the process and 85% being committed to taking action following the process.

Responses in terms of the support offered by their manager and their organisation to take the learning and skills forward were more muted, and a reflection of the findings from the previous paragraphs. Although 72% of managers felt that their manager had been positive about the experience, only 56% felt that their organisation would be supportive of them taking action following the process, and only 50% felt that they had the resources necessary to tackle the issues raised by the process.

#### *Stakeholder reactions to and organisational learning from the intervention process*

In terms of organisational learning from the research process, stakeholders were asked to provide ideas for how the intervention process within each organisation could be improved in the future to improve both participation rates and user experience. The following is a summary of their responses:

- **Have a steering group to oversee the project:** The feeling was that it was difficult for one person to champion the whole project, and this left the project vulnerable if that person changed roles or left the organisation. It was felt that the inclusion of other stakeholders such as managers, H&S and senior management in the steering group would be beneficial for the profile of the project.
- **Present a united front:** Stakeholders felt that the project would not succeed if it was seen as a stand-alone HR, H&S or occupational health (OH) project,

but that it needed to involve HR, H&S, OH and senior management. This could be created by establishing a steering group, as previously mentioned.

- **Rebrand the research:** Different stakeholders felt that different approaches to branding would work in their particular organisation. For example, some organisations would benefit from changing the branding from a 'volunteer research project' to an 'organisational initiative'; others might want to change it from a 'stress project' to a 'management competency' or 'leadership skills' project. It was felt that choosing the correct brand within each particular organisation would improve organisational buy-in and participation in the project.
- **Integrate the project into existing organisational initiatives and policies:** Suggestions were to link the process to organisational strategic positioning on employee well-being and/or management training, make the project an essential component of management training, link to the organisational stress and well-being policy. It was also felt that the project should be embedded into performance management and development programmes such as personal development plans.

#### Manager behaviour change

Manager behaviour data was generated from both managers' and direct reports' responses to the 'stress management competency indicator tool' questionnaire\* at time 1 (before the workshop) and time 2 (three months following the workshop). Managers responded about their own behaviour (self-report), and direct reports responded about their manager's behaviour (upward feedback). Whether behaviour change had happened over the three-month period was explored by comparing time 1 data with time 2 data.

\* See pages 12-14 and appendix

### Key points from the process evaluation by stakeholders

- Stakeholders provided their views on how the process could be improved within organisations:
  - joining forces by using a steering group and gaining the involvement at senior manager level and across departments
  - rebranding research to fit with organisational culture and goals
  - integrating research into existing initiatives and policies.

To clearly identify whether behaviour change across the three months had in fact been a result of the intervention or whether it resulted from other reasons (such as additional experience or a less demanding work environment), control group data was gathered, that is, data from managers who had not received the full intervention and their direct reports. Both managers and employees were therefore categorised into groups according to the intervention that the manager had received, as follows:

- 'no feedback' (completed the questionnaire at both time points without any feedback report and no attendance at a workshop, though they received some information about the research and competencies when they completed the questionnaires)
- feedback but no workshop
- workshop but no feedback
- full intervention (workshop and feedback).

Usable data was defined as where a completed questionnaire had been received at both time points. This resulted in data as follows:

- **Manager data:** Usable self-report data from 58 'full intervention' managers, 84 'no feedback' managers, and 11 managers who had either received a workshop and no feedback or feedback and no workshop. It was decided that due to the size of the last two groups, analysis of the manager self-report data would compare the full intervention data with only one control group, which was the 'no feedback' group.
- **Employee data:** Usable upward feedback data from 209 employees/direct reports whose managers had received the full intervention (both workshop and feedback), 282 whose managers had received 'no feedback', 92 whose managers had received feedback but no workshop, and 11 whose managers

had received a workshop but no feedback. The latter group was deemed to be too small for analysis, so it was decided that analysis of the employee data would compare the full intervention data with two control groups: employees' perceptions of managers who had received 'no feedback'; and employees' perceptions of managers who had received feedback but no workshop.

The initial time point (time 1) data were categorised into three groups, in which managers' behaviour was rated (by themselves or by their employees) as 'ineffective', 'average' or 'effective'. Paired sample T tests were used to explore behaviour change by examining the significance of any differences between the initial score (time 1) and the subsequent score (time 2) in each of the three groups for each of the four competencies.

#### Manager data

- **Ineffective managers:** Managers who scored themselves as 'ineffective' at time 1 perceived themselves to be significantly improved in overall stress management behaviour whether they had received the intervention (feedback and workshop) or no intervention. Those in the full intervention group scored themselves higher on all four competencies at time 2, and for 'respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity', 'managing and communicating existing and future work', and 'reasoning/managing difficult situations', this behaviour change was significant. Interestingly, managers who had received no feedback also scored themselves higher on all four competencies at time 2, and for 'respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity' and 'managing and communicating existing and future work', this behaviour change was significant. This suggests that merely filling in the questionnaire may have helped managers reflect on and feel that they had shown more positive manager behaviour.

- **Average managers:** Self-report scores for managers who scored themselves as 'average' at time 1 were largely unchanged three months after the intervention, whether they had received the full intervention or no feedback. The only significant change was with respect to managers who had received no feedback feeling that they had significantly improved on the competency of 'managing the individual within the team'.
- **Effective managers:** Managers who had received no feedback scored themselves as significantly less effective at time 2 across all four competencies. This suggests that perhaps completion of the questionnaire may have led managers to be more aware of their behaviour and, in the absence of any support to achieve behaviour change, to feel less positive about their skills in these areas. Self-report scores of managers who had received the full intervention were largely unchanged three months after the intervention, except on the 'reasoning/ managing difficult situations' competency, where previously 'effective' managers rated themselves as less effective at time 2. While this drop in scores may seem counter to the desired impact of the intervention, it does concur with one of the key findings from the workshop evaluation, which was that managers felt they needed further training, particularly in conflict management, therefore suggesting that the intervention highlighted to managers a need to develop these skills further.

#### Employee data

- **Ineffective managers:** There were significant differences between groups for employee scores where the managers were rated as 'ineffective' at time 1. For managers that received no feedback, their employees' scores for their management behaviour were largely unchanged three months later, with the exception of the 'managing and communicating existing and future work' competency, where employees felt managers had improved. Where managers had received feedback (with or without a workshop), employees felt that managers significantly improved over the three-month period. For managers who had only received feedback, employees felt that managers had significantly improved in all four competencies, and for those managers who had received both feedback and the workshop, employees felt that managers had made significant improvements in 'respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity' and 'managing the individual within the team'.
- **Average managers:** Again, there were significant differences between groups where employees scored their managers as 'average' at time 1. For managers who had received no feedback, employee scores for manager behaviour were largely unchanged at time 2. Those managers who had received feedback but no workshop also received largely unchanged behaviour scores at time 2. Those managers who had received both feedback and the workshop were seen as significantly less effective at time 2 for the competencies of 'managing and communicating existing and future work' and 'managing the individual within the team'.
- **Effective managers:** For managers who were perceived as 'effective' by employees at time 1, whether the manager had received no feedback, feedback alone or the full intervention (feedback and workshop), employee ratings of manager behaviour were significantly lower at time 2 for three of the four competencies: 'managing and communicating existing and future work', 'respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity' and 'managing the individual within the team'. It is likely that the perceived fall in effectiveness is due to different causes for the different groups. For employees whose managers had received no feedback, the finding may represent frustration with the process, for instance, completing two questionnaires without seeing any results or actions, as opposed to actual negative behaviour change. Managers who received feedback alone were provided with reports, but not specifically encouraged to share the results with their employees: this may have led to frustration on the part of employees that their part in the process was not recognised. Managers who received the full intervention (workshop and feedback) were encouraged in the workshop to share their results with employees: this may have resulted

in managers saying to their employees that their results suggested that they did not need to make improvements, which may have been frustrating for employees. Alternative explanations for these results could be: that their high initial scores may have led to these 'effective' managers becoming complacent;

or that the fact that they were given the feedback and workshop could have resulted in raised expectations among employees who, expecting their managers to behave effectively in all situations, were disappointed by any signs of ineffectiveness.

Table 3: Manager self-perceptions of changes in stress management behaviour

	Manager initially seen as 'ineffective'	Manager initially seen as 'average'	Manager initially seen as 'effective'
No feedback group	↑	–	↓
Full intervention	↑	–	–

Table 4: Employee perceptions of changes in their managers' stress management behaviour

	Manager initially seen as 'ineffective'	Manager initially seen as 'average'	Manager initially seen as 'effective'
No feedback group	–	–	↓
Feedback only	↑	–	↓
Full intervention	↑	↓	↓

### Key points from the manager behaviour change data

Manager (self-report) data:

- Managers who initially scored themselves as 'ineffective' were the group that saw most significant positive changes over time. This was true whether they had received the intervention or not. It is possible that even without feedback, the process of completing the questionnaire encouraged managers to reflect upon their behaviour and seek to improve.
- Managers who had initially scored themselves as 'effective' saw themselves largely unchanged by the intervention. This could be as a result of managers perceiving that they did not need to make changes if feedback was that they were performing effectively. 'Effective' managers who had not received feedback or attended a workshop saw themselves as less effective at the follow-up point.

Employee (upward feedback) data:

- Employees' scores for their managers' behaviour suggest that the intervention process had the most positive impact on initially 'ineffective' managers. The managers who had received either feedback alone or the full intervention (feedback and workshop) were seen to improve significantly over time, compared with the group who received no feedback, who were perceived to remain largely unchanged and therefore 'ineffective'.
- An interesting result appeared with regards to 'effective' managers. Mirroring the self-report data, employees' scores for managers who were initially 'effective' but received no feedback suggest they were perceived as significantly less effective over time. This may not be a result of actual behaviour changes, but rather employee frustration with the process, for instance, completing two questionnaires without seeing any results or actions.

### Key points from the manager behaviour change data (continued)

- The same decrease in effectiveness over time was seen both with managers who received feedback and with managers who received the full intervention (feedback and workshop). Managers who received feedback alone were provided with reports, but not specifically encouraged to share the results with their employees: this may have led to frustration on the part of employees that their part in the process was not recognised. Managers who received the full intervention (workshop and feedback) were encouraged in the workshop to share their results with employees: this may have resulted in managers saying to employees that their results suggested that they did not need to make improvements, which may have been frustrating for employees. Alternative explanations for these results could be: that their high initial scores may have led to these 'effective' managers becoming complacent; or that the fact that they were given the feedback and workshop could have resulted in raised expectations of employees who, expecting their managers to behave effectively in all situations, were disappointed by any signs of ineffectiveness.

### Reflections on barriers and facilitators of positive manager behaviour and behaviour change

#### *Manager perceptions of barriers to positive manager behaviour and how to overcome them*

One of the themes that emerged from the workshops was that managers felt that, although they were aware of and fully intended to display 'positive manager behaviours' within their work and with their team, there were often barriers, or impediments, to the successful achievement of this within their organisations. To explore the range of barriers and how these might be overcome, managers attending the workshops were asked to give their views in a focus group discussion.

The data gathered in these discussions suggest that the barriers to showing positive manager behaviours fall into four key areas:

- individual-level work barriers
- organisational/wider-level work barriers
- team/relationship barriers
- personal barriers.

These are summarised in Table 5 (overleaf), together with the suggestions managers gave of how the barriers could be overcome.

Table 5: Barriers to managers displaying positive behaviours and suggestions for how they could be overcome

Barriers to displaying positive behaviours	How this barrier might be overcome
<b>INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL WORK BARRIERS</b>	
Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan.</li> <li>• Prioritise.</li> <li>• Challenge upwards and negotiate.</li> <li>• Delegate/find extra resource where possible.</li> <li>• Communicate honestly to the team what you are doing/trying to do.</li> <li>• Diarise time for reflection/contingency time.</li> <li>• Use 'surgery hours' rather than open-door policy for team.</li> <li>• Protect time to communicate with team.</li> <li>• Take 15–30 minutes each day to get free time/fresh air and think/reboot.</li> </ul>
Short-term deadlines and demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge upwards: request priorities and explain consequences for team.</li> <li>• Anticipate and plan for regular deadlines.</li> <li>• Communicate the strategy behind the deadline to the team.</li> <li>• Thank the team for their efforts.</li> </ul>
Conflicting pressures and multiple priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filter the work and prioritise.</li> <li>• Focus on the 'quick wins'.</li> <li>• Deal with work straight away.</li> <li>• Create an action plan.</li> <li>• Set out milestones – plan the year ahead.</li> <li>• Keep communicating with the team.</li> <li>• Clarify expectations.</li> <li>• Challenge upwards.</li> <li>• Say 'no' when necessary.</li> </ul>
Lack of resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a strong case to senior management.</li> <li>• Encourage teamwork.</li> <li>• Step in when necessary to get 'all hands on deck'.</li> <li>• Communicate honestly with the team.</li> <li>• Get advice from others.</li> <li>• Gather evidence on the problem.</li> </ul>
Senior/line managers (pressure, inconsistent management, lack of direction, undermining)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a team approach to solving problems.</li> <li>• Talk to peers about solutions.</li> <li>• Ask for directions in writing and clarify what is required before taking action.</li> <li>• Get involved in working groups and action planning sets to seek solutions.</li> <li>• Communicate the situation to the level above the problematic manager.</li> <li>• Know which directives to challenge, and which to accept.</li> <li>• Communicate the situation to the team.</li> <li>• Recognise your emotions and take time to get perspective before reacting.</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANISATIONAL/WIDER-LEVEL BARRIERS</b>	
Organisational barriers (such as processes and bureaucracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge the processes and make suggestions for improvements.</li> <li>• Create a steering group to focus on issues.</li> <li>• Speak to others.</li> <li>• Find ways round the processes.</li> <li>• Develop creative approaches.</li> <li>• Find a way to work within the system.</li> </ul>
IT issues, particularly excessive use of email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work from home.</li> <li>• Ignore/delete 'round-robin' emails.</li> <li>• Use 'out of office' or other messages.</li> <li>• Use a Blackberry to deal with emails on your journey to and from work.</li> <li>• Make senior managers aware of the issue.</li> <li>• Challenge those who excessively use email.</li> <li>• Make use of IT training.</li> </ul>

Table 5: Barriers to managers displaying positive behaviours and suggestions for how they could be overcome (continued)

<b>Barriers to displaying positive behaviours</b>	<b>How this barrier might be overcome</b>
<b>ORGANISATIONAL/WIDER-LEVEL BARRIERS (continued)</b>	
Impact of legislation, policy and government targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share ownership and responsibility where appropriate.</li> <li>• Consult specialists.</li> <li>• Admit when you don't know.</li> <li>• Make use of training and development.</li> <li>• Recognise the things that 'have to happen'.</li> </ul>
Not being able to share some information with the team that you would like to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build team trust so that they don't need proof.</li> <li>• Avoid favouritism.</li> <li>• Gain clarity about when to be consultative and when to be directive.</li> <li>• Be honest that there are things you can't share.</li> <li>• Increase team understanding of your role.</li> <li>• Refuse to give false information.</li> <li>• Take responsibility for your position.</li> <li>• Use your own support structures.</li> </ul>
<b>PERSONAL BARRIERS</b>	
Lack of progress/capability within the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deal with poor performance.</li> <li>• Make use of organisational policies.</li> <li>• Communicate honestly with the team member involved.</li> <li>• Increase one-to-ones with all team members.</li> <li>• Communicate objectives clearly.</li> </ul>
Problematic behaviours/attitudes of team members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face up to and take action on the situation.</li> <li>• Deal with poor performance.</li> <li>• Develop a case/note down all incidents.</li> <li>• Seek to find out the cause of the behaviour/attitude.</li> <li>• Reflect back to the team member on their behaviour and your feelings about it.</li> <li>• Use role-modelling.</li> <li>• Seek external advice and discussion.</li> <li>• Take a step back to enable reflection and preparation.</li> <li>• Clarify both their and your objectives.</li> <li>• Recognise your feelings and your behaviour.</li> <li>• Use humour.</li> </ul>
<b>TEAM/RELATIONSHIP BARRIERS</b>	
Personal/home-life issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise and acknowledge your own behaviour.</li> <li>• Talk to peers/manager/team/trusted colleague/mentor about it.</li> <li>• Use employee assistance programme or occupational supports such as coaching and mentoring.</li> <li>• Take time out/off.</li> </ul>
Lack of confidence in own ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for training and development.</li> <li>• Talk to/ask for help from peers/line manager.</li> <li>• Seek to improve team relationships.</li> <li>• Manage the expectations of your team.</li> <li>• Clarify what your role is to the team.</li> <li>• Set clear boundaries with your team.</li> <li>• Recognise your strengths and limitations.</li> <li>• Aim to be honest in all communications – say when you don't know!</li> </ul>
Feeling stressed/under undue pressure yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak to someone (peer, manager, coach).</li> <li>• Seek support for yourself.</li> <li>• Take a break/holiday/deep breath.</li> <li>• Recognise your emotions and know your stress triggers.</li> <li>• Apologise to your team and, if possible, be honest about how you feel.</li> <li>• Try to manage your own expectations of yourself.</li> <li>• Be realistic about what you can and can't achieve at work.</li> <li>• Focus on one thing at a time.</li> <li>• Take time before reacting; prioritise and plan.</li> <li>• Keep fit and healthy.</li> </ul>

### Key points on barriers to managers displaying positive behaviours

- Individual-level work barriers include workload, short-term deadlines and demands, conflicting priorities, lack of resource and pressure from above.
- Organisational/other-level work barriers include bureaucracy, organisational processes, IT issues, excessive use of email, government-level/legislative requirements and inability to share all information with team members.
- Team/relationship-level barriers include competency/poor performance issues and team member attitude/behavioural problems.
- Personal barriers include personal/home-life issues, own levels of stress and pressure, and perceptions of lack of competence and confidence as a manager.

### Support managers need in order to show positive behaviours

From the feedback reported above, it is clear that managers were, on the whole, committed to making positive changes following their involvement in the intervention process, but that many felt that they did not have the resources or organisational support necessary to make those changes. This suggests that further support and resources are needed to ensure managers are best placed to show positive behaviours. Both managers and organisational stakeholders were asked for their views on the support that might be provided and about what had actually been provided during the process.

#### *Support managers say they need*

Managers were consulted on the support they would need to develop their positive manager behaviour skills. To understand both what managers say they need and the support they tend to receive, researchers consulted managers at two time points in the process: immediately following the workshop and at the end of the process.

Immediately following the workshop, 61 comments were received from managers about the support they would need. Support requirements are listed in order of frequency of mention (the specific number of comments referring to each point is in brackets):

- further training, particularly in leadership and conflict management (23)
- feedback from further sources such as other direct reports, colleagues and manager (9)
- more time in schedule to focus on positive manager behaviour, and people management generally (9)
- a follow-up upward appraisal process in three to six months (8)

- support and buy-in from managers, particularly senior managers (6)
- development of action learning sets with other managers (4)
- tools on the HSE website when launched (1)
- recognition for attending developmental training (1).

At the end of the process, three months after the workshop, 42 comments were received from managers about the support they would like. Again, support requirements are listed in order of frequency of mention (the specific number of comments referring to each point is in brackets):

- further training, particularly in leadership (11)
- no further support needed/not sure/too early to say (10)
- continuing feedback and appraisal (6)
- supervision and mentoring from other managers (5)
- protected time to focus on people management (4)
- organisational changes such as changes embedded (2)
- further reference materials (1)
- tools on the HSE website (1)
- action learning sets (1)
- awareness-raising activities (1).

Thus, at both time points, managers felt that the most useful support would be further training, particularly in areas of leadership and conflict management. Figure 6 depicts the combined picture from both time points.

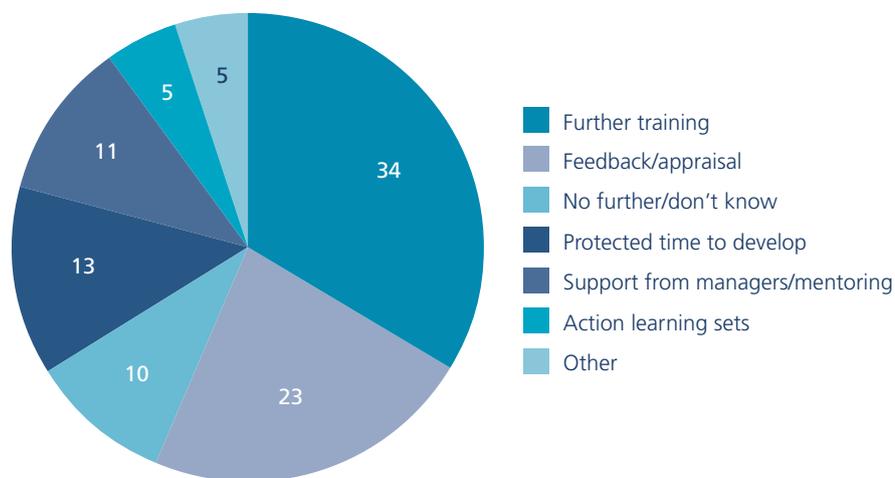
Three months after the training workshop, managers were also asked the following question: 'What support were you able to access to help you to make behavioural changes/develop skills following your feedback report/workshop?' Thirty-eight managers responded to this question:

- 23% of managers hadn't been able to access/receive any support in the three months following the first feedback report/workshop.
- 38% had got support from their line manager both in terms of further feedback and mentoring/supervision.
- 21% had accessed support from their team and colleagues.
- 8% had accessed support from HR or health and safety personnel.
- 4% had found the literature accompanying the workshop useful to refer back to.

- 4% had received further training.
- 2% had received access to mentoring.

Therefore, although almost a quarter of managers had not been able to access any kind of support following the feedback report/workshop, over a third of managers had got support from their managers and almost a quarter from their team and colleagues to help them to make behavioural changes and develop skills. Eighteen per cent of these managers had got support from both their manager and their team members/colleagues.

Figure 6: Manager support requirements to display positive manager behaviours (%)



#### Key points on support requirements of managers

- The key support that managers require is further training, particularly in the areas of people management and managing conflict. Managers also requested ongoing feedback and appraisal on their behaviour, protected time to develop their skills, support from managers, peers and mentors, and action learning sets.
- Three months after the workshop, nearly a quarter of managers had not been able to access any support, and only 4% had received further training; however, 38% of managers had gained support from their managers, and 21% from their team. This suggests that support is more readily available at the local level than at the organisational level.

### **Support stakeholders said they provided and would recommend**

#### *Support provided by stakeholders to managers:*

At the end of the research process, organisational stakeholders were asked, through a group discussion, to reflect upon the support that they offered to managers during the process. This revealed that the amount of support offered varied widely and over half the stakeholders had offered only limited or no support other than providing participant names to the research team.

For those stakeholders that did offer support, this was focused very much at the beginning of the process, with two primary objectives: to inform managers about the research process; and to increase questionnaire response rates. For those stakeholders with the first aim, managers were offered one-to-one discussions and meetings; and for those with the second aim, managers were offered protected time within their working day for both themselves and their team to complete questionnaires. One organisation involved one of the research team to encourage and alleviate the fears of managers to take part in the process. This direct support was seen as beneficial both by stakeholders and the research team, who saw high response rates for the initial phase of the questionnaire within these organisations.

The perception was that, even in organisations that had invested in the initial support process, both support offered to managers and support taken up by managers diminished over the course of the research process. Stakeholders cited examples where one-to-one consultations had been offered but managers did not take up the offer, and where managers had themselves suggested action learning sets to discuss follow-up actions but, when learning set meetings were arranged, they were too busy to attend.

Where stakeholders provided a reason for why support had tailed off during the course of the process, the reasons cited included work overload, project champion changes and organisational changes and restructuring, which had impeded the amount of attention that could be given to the project, and therefore support offered.

In terms of increasing questionnaire response rates, very limited stakeholder support was provided at the second questionnaire administration and the reliance was upon email reminders to managers from the research team. This had deleterious effects on the response rate. For example, in the organisation that offered protected time to complete questionnaires at the first administration, response rates at time 1 were almost 100%, but at the second administration, when no support was provided, response rates dropped to less than 60%.

*Support stakeholders would recommend providing to managers:* Stakeholders were then asked to reflect upon how they might improve support to managers if they were going to run the intervention process in their organisation again. The themes emerging from this discussion are summarised below:

- **Focus on providing support throughout the intervention process:** One idea offered was to define the support needs before the start of the process. Seeing the process as having a clear beginning, middle and end would enable stakeholders to consider the differing support needed at each stage, the milestones to be set and the communication needed with managers and direct reports. The view was that this would be more beneficial than having 'one big launch'.
- **Invest more time before the project start date:** Stakeholders felt that more time provided before the start of the project to develop relationships and communicate the aims of the project would be beneficial both to questionnaire response rates and to managers taking up support, such as one-to-one consultations.
- **Take a more strategic approach to choice of participants:** Ideas suggested included gaining participation from organisational areas that were 'hot spots' (that is, had specific problems/issues), therefore focusing more on the need for the intervention, and perhaps integrating it into an overall strategy, rather than seeing it as a 'nice to have' or bolt-on. Another idea was to cascade participation from senior managers first, to middle managers and down, both to role-model the behaviours and to encourage participation.

### Key points on manager support from stakeholders

- Around half of the stakeholders taking part in the project offered limited or no support to managers outside of gaining participation. Even where support was provided, stakeholders reported a general waning of support and of manager interest after the initial launch.
- On reflection, stakeholders provided recommendations for how managers would be better supported in a future process:
  - support throughout the process, rather than just at launch
  - time taken to plan the project, both in terms of relationship-building with managers and planning choice of participant.

### Gaining buy-in

#### *Organisational stakeholders' perceptions of barriers to manager participation, and how to overcome them*

The initial experience of setting up the 'preventing stress: promoting positive manager behaviour' process within participating organisations was not always

straightforward, particularly in terms of getting line managers to engage. To explore the barriers to manager participation and how they might best be overcome, consortium members were asked to give their views in a group discussion. Their responses are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Barriers to manager participation in interventions and how they might be overcome

<b>Barriers to manager participation</b>	<b>How this barrier might be overcome</b>
Difficulties communicating with managers to get them interested in participating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give the programme a high profile – for example through communications from the stress steering group or other influential body.</li> <li>• Spread information through existing networks and communication mechanisms.</li> <li>• Get senior management to endorse the programme.</li> <li>• Get senior managers to sign up and participate in the programme themselves.</li> <li>• Embed the process in management development programmes.</li> <li>• Target the programme at a specific layer of management.</li> <li>• Target the programme at managers who have been on other management development programmes.</li> </ul>
Managers are too stressed themselves or too busy and don't see it as a priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on 'selling' the programme by emphasising what is in it for them.</li> <li>• Embed the programme within existing activities, so that it is not seen as an 'extra' activity.</li> <li>• Link it with existing initiatives – for example, key performance indicators (KPIs).</li> <li>• Clarify links to the organisational culture – for example, show that it is part of a risk reduction approach.</li> </ul>
Managers are concerned about the confidentiality of their feedback data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use an external provider for the questionnaire and ensure data is only seen by the external consultants.</li> <li>• Build trust with managers – for example, create learning sets and/or make it part of a trusted management development programme; trust takes time to build.</li> </ul>
Managers are concerned about what participation implies about them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the objectives of the programme.</li> <li>• Ensure good communication about selection processes.</li> <li>• Build managers' trust over time.</li> </ul>

(continued overleaf)

Table 6: Barriers to manager participation in interventions and how they might be overcome (continued)

Barriers to manager participation	How this barrier might be overcome
Managers are put off by the inclusion of the word 'stress' in the title and lack a knowledge base about stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't use the word 'stress' if it is a barrier (will be a barrier for some organisations and not for others) – talk about 'managing pressure' or 'well-being'.</li> <li>• Focus on the links to performance and good management practice – talk about the importance of fundamental management skills.</li> <li>• Work on 'myth-busting' to build understanding of stress and create a culture shift; this will take time.</li> </ul>
Managers are complacent and believe 'we haven't got a problem with stress'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep up the pressure – for example by doing regular surveys and showing managers what the issues are.</li> <li>• Use local 'levers' to build momentum/motivation – for example, inspection by the Health and Safety Executive.</li> </ul>
Senior management not engaged/bought in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw on the evidence to prove the importance of preventing stress.</li> <li>• Link to saving money/business benefits.</li> <li>• Link to risk reduction.</li> <li>• Position to show alignment with other objectives – for example, KPIs, absence management and national public sector initiatives.</li> </ul>
Managers say they will participate but don't show up on the day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the workshop part of a scheduled training programme.</li> <li>• Provide continuing professional development (CPD) points.</li> <li>• Use a financial penalty to penalise 'no-shows'.</li> </ul>
Managers resent being instructed to attend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the programme voluntary.</li> <li>• Integrate the programme into management development or induction.</li> </ul>
Managers struggle to get sufficient direct report responses to provide upward feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it clear that no upward feedback will be provided without a minimum of three direct report responses to the questionnaire.</li> <li>• Suggest managers ask 4–6 direct reports to respond.</li> </ul>

#### *Achieving senior manager buy-in and getting senior managers to role-model positive manager behaviour*

Because senior management buy-in was seen as critical to ensuring success of health and well-being initiatives generally and this 'positive manager behaviour' process in particular, two stakeholder focus groups were conducted to explore thoughts about how to achieve senior management buy-in to health and well-being interventions. The majority of stakeholders involved in these discussions had had some success in gaining buy-in. A further consideration, highlighted by feedback from both managers and stakeholders, was that it was hard to get first-line and middle managers to show positive manager behaviour if their own managers and senior management were not doing so. The need for senior managers to role-model and set cultural norms of positive people management was reported as an important element for encouraging these behaviours at all management levels.

#### *What worked in terms of gaining senior management buy-in for health and well-being interventions?*

Stakeholder responses to this question can be summarised as follows (in order of frequency of mentions):

- **Having a clear business case:** Stakeholders felt that having objective data was crucial to build a business case and demonstrate the utility of taking up such an intervention. Examples included demonstrating that insurance premiums are driven down if stress is well managed or showing how much sickness absence was stress-related and how many (millions of) pounds in savings could be achieved if this was reduced.
- **Linking the intervention to national goals:** National goals mentioned included: governmental directives such as Dame Carol Black's report; numeracy and literacy targets (the lack of which was found to be associated with poor health and well-being); sector-specific goals such as Healthy Schools campaigns and NHS goals; and also contributions to targets such as Investors in People or being an employer of choice.

- **The threat/impact of litigation:** Stakeholders commented that senior managers would buy in to interventions if there was a link to a risk of litigation or to the risk of an HSE inspection or enforcement order. There were fears however that if senior management did buy in to the intervention for this reason, it was likely just to be a 'tick box' exercise.
- **Having a senior manager with direct responsibility for health and safety:** Suggestions were either to have a senior manager/board member with direct responsibility for health and safety or to get a senior manager to lead a health and safety steering group, stress steering group or working group. It was noted that this performed the dual objective of raising the profile of health and safety within the organisation, and demonstrating that health and well-being should be the responsibility of the whole organisation rather than just one department.

Other ideas for senior management buy-in included linking to individual stories of ill-health (such as senior managers who had themselves been absent with stress-related issues), gaining employee buy-in and interest across the organisation, and getting external support, such as external speakers and experts.

Stakeholders were also asked whether buy-in success depended on where the message came from. It was unanimously agreed that buy-in was easier when it was presented to senior management as a joint activity, for example HR, OH and H&S, rather than just coming from OH or H&S or HR separately.

#### *When gaining buy-in didn't work, why not?*

When asked why buy-in had not worked, stakeholders mentioned that it was generally due to interventions not being seen as part of corporate priority, so that only lip service had been paid to the project. Issues also mentioned included the need to gain wider leadership or senior executive approval, in that it was not enough just to get one individual bought in, and problems when the ownership for the project had changed hands.

#### *Are senior managers role-modelling these positive behaviours?*

The responses from stakeholders to this question were generally negative, with the key theme being

that, although there is verbal support for health and well-being interventions and initiatives, there is little role-modelling of the behaviours identified as being important for the prevention and reduction of stress at work. This is despite changes in the language used around well-being and it becoming acceptable to talk about stress and well-being issues. It was also mentioned that it was not enough for senior managers to demonstrate the behaviours; they also had to be genuine and natural.

#### *What are the barriers to senior manager role-modelling positive behaviours?*

In response to this question, the main theme was that there was still a feeling in some organisations that stress-related illness was a weakness and senior management could not be seen to be associating themselves with the issue. Allied to this, stakeholders suggested that some senior executives seemed to feel that an empathetic management style was not 'good for business' and so was a luxury that couldn't always be afforded. On this point, there was a view that senior managers were a self-selecting group and had perhaps got to their senior position by being hard-hitting and strong, and in some cases even bullying; it was therefore difficult to filter out these types of behaviour and model more positive ones. Other barriers were described as the demands of the job not providing room to develop or model positive behaviours, and the lack of exposure at senior management level to development opportunities and/or to new initiatives within the field of health and well-being at work.

#### *How could we encourage senior managers to role-model positive behaviours?*

Some ideas were generated, including:

- showing that positive and empathetic behaviour is associated with positive business results
- recruiting the right people to senior management
- having one or two key people to role-model the behaviours
- placing positive manager behaviour in the business plan and appraisal process (that is, giving management ownership).

### Key points on gaining buy-in from managers and senior management

- Stakeholders identified a series of barriers to manager participation in the research, including:
  - difficulties communicating with managers
  - managers being too busy/stressed to spend time on the process
  - manager concerns with confidentiality
  - manager concerns about implications of participation
  - managers put off by concept of 'stress'
  - managers not believing stress to be an issue
  - lack of senior management buy-in
  - managers resenting being told to attend
  - managers not turning up to briefings/workshop
  - managers struggling to get sufficient direct report responses.
- Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for how each of these barriers could be overcome in the future, focusing mainly on communications, ensuring senior management buy-in and embedding the programme into organisational practice and initiatives.
- Stakeholders also responded to the question of how senior management buy-in could be gained by recalling when buy-in had been received in the past. The following themes were found:
  - having a clear business case
  - linking the intervention to national goals/initiatives
  - threat/impact of legislation
  - having a senior manager with a direct responsibility for health and safety.
- Stakeholders indicated that, in many cases, senior managers were not role-modelling the management behaviours identified as being important for preventing and reducing stress at work. Suggestions for how this could be changed included:
  - showing that positive behaviour is associated with positive business results
  - recruiting the right people to senior management
  - having one or two key people to role-model the behaviours
  - placing positive manager behaviour in the business plan and appraisal process.

### Refining and improving the intervention

During this research process, the researchers kept a record of the improvements that participants suggested and that they identified in the process of facilitating the workshops. An initial pilot workshop was run prior to the main roll-out, following which a number of small improvements were made to the materials and exercises, particularly in terms of making the case studies and scenarios included in the intervention more relevant by using situations and quotations taken from the previous two research phases. The key finding, however, was that the feedback report was of central importance to the intervention; therefore, prior to the main study, the necessity of the feedback report was highlighted to all stakeholders and participating managers.

The revised workshop was then run in a second organisation to finalise improvements. Following this workshop, an additional amendment was made to one of the exercises. The workshop was then run a further 13 times for the main study. During each intervention, researchers requested feedback on improvements and amendments to the workshop. For consistency of the study, these refinements could not be made during the main study, but were actioned prior to the train-the-trainer workshop, which was provided for all participating organisations at the end of the process.

These changes include:

- an opportunity to provide one-to-one coaching to managers about their feedback report, as an alternative to guided self-learning and exploration
- a greater emphasis on action planning and development following the session, particularly focusing on two or three key goals and actions.

As a result of the organisational learning findings and recommendations from stakeholders, further improvements will be made to the intervention in terms of the organisational elements. In particular, these include:

- provision of project/process plan to stakeholders to build in time for consultation and manager engagement prior to the research
- briefing documents to stakeholders detailing suggestions for successful implementation
- supporting project champions/steering groups within the organisations to find ways of embedding the intervention in organisational practices and initiatives
- working with project champions to find the most appropriate 'brand' for the intervention in their organisation
- helping project champions to take a strategic approach to supporting managers throughout the intervention process
- supporting project champions in gaining buy-in for the intervention from all levels of management.

# Case studies

## British Geological Survey (BGS)

### About the organisation

BGS supplies objective, impartial, up-to-date geological expertise and information for decision-making for governmental, commercial and individual users. It carries out research in strategically important areas including energy, natural resources, environmental change, hazards and earth systems. It employs approximately 800 people.

Prior to involvement in the research project, BGS had a stress management policy and initiatives included provision of massages for staff, healthy eating, and personal fitness facilities including at one site a gymnasium, fitness suite and tennis courts and access to various fitness classes. These are strongly supported by management to ensure both that they are an employer of choice and that the staff are healthy.

BGS had an existing framework to specify the skills and behaviours expected of all staff called 'Core Expectations' but not specifically for managers. It also provided leadership/management development programmes, including: a leadership programme for NERC (Natural Environment Research Council); Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) accreditation courses in leadership/management; and a foundation course in management for non-managers. It also ran an Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)-accredited health and safety course, involving two days' training on managing safety in a research environment.

BGS had been involved in the 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' project in both previous phases of the research.

### Motivation for involvement in the project

- to ensure that existing frameworks and training were comprehensive and relevant
- to reduce stress in a time of corporate/organisational change.

BGS, at the time of participation in this phase of the research, was undergoing a process of widespread organisation change, including a new level of management structure and centralisation of administrative facilities.

### The research project within the organisation

The process was seen both as part of the organisation's stress management activities and as part of its management development activities, aiming to cope with a period of significant change. The process was led from within the HR team, which considered that engagement in the whole research programme fitted with an initiative for a working group to review the organisation's stress policies, the first policy having been created in 1995.

## British Geological Survey (BGS) (continued)

Manager participants were recruited by approaching a cross-section of managers personally, explaining why BGS was participating and asking them to consider it as a development opportunity. A nominated member of the HR team liaised with managers and their direct reports to ensure they responded to the questionnaires, which was no easy task.

The workshop was administrated as a formal training course. This showed the importance BGS gave to the topic. Time and advice were provided to managers who participated, through the relevant members of the HR team being available to answer questions and so on.

### Outcomes of participation

- As the organisation has been going through significant change, it has not yet been able to use the research findings in implementing revised policies and procedures.
- The research has provided the HR team with reassurance and evidence of the need to make managers aware of the impact of their behaviours.
- The research will provide the building blocks for changes to policy, training and, ultimately, ensuring the health of the staff.
- The process helps to bring together guidance and policy, for example by adding line management into the stress management policy.
- Benefits expected in the future include: improved relationships within teams, from the director down; and a healthy workforce.
- In future, the process will be embedded in line management training and core competencies.

Reflecting on the organisation's involvement in the project, the internal champion said: *'The project has enabled BGS to evaluate existing policies and procedures against a well-researched benchmark. The consortium has also provided excellent networking and the opportunity to review initiatives tested by other organisations.'*

## Probation Service (probation area in the West Country)

### About the organisation

The Probation Service's role is the rehabilitation of offenders and the reduction of crime. This particular probation area employs nearly 600 people.

Prior to involvement in the research, the organisation already carried out the following stress management activities: organisational stress risk assessment; individual stress risk assessment; and training for individuals on personal stress management.

The organisation already had an existing competency framework that specified the skills and behaviours expected of line managers and ran a National Probation Service course and NVQs in leadership/management development programmes. It also provided self-train modules for health and safety training over the intranet. While management/leadership development was perceived as being of medium priority, health and safety training was perceived as low priority by many.

(continued overleaf)

## Probation Service (probation area in the West Country) (continued)

### Motivation for involvement in the project

- high levels of absence
- maintaining employer of choice
- a sense of moral or ethical duty
- conscientious adherence to H&S responsibilities
- prevention of legal action by staff
- prevention of enforcement action
- to help give managers the skills to reduce stress

### The project within the organisation

The process was integrated with both stress management and management development. It sat within middle management: senior managers and the chief executive were not involved. The internal champion did much of the promotion for the process and was mainly responsible for the administrative tasks.

Manager participants were recruited by the internal champion sending out the briefing email provided by the research team and asking managers to participate, plus one personal invitation. Managers and their direct reports were encouraged to respond to the questionnaires by regular reminders.

Managers were also sent constant reminders via email and telephone about the workshops. To ensure that managers who participated felt supported, all emails sent to them ended with, 'If you have any questions, then please ask.' The aim was for managers to feel they had support from their colleagues. However, no other specific support was given and, if they were to do this again, provision of additional support would be considered. Out of the 12 managers who stated they would attend, only six turned up. This was probably due to their lack of commitment to the process. In hindsight, it was felt that the process could have been rolled out better and that the managers could have been given more time.

### Outcomes of participation

- Participation in the research has given the internal champion more ideas and skills to ensure better processes for managing stress.
- It has also given him the skills to review the current process and to make it better.
- The managers who participated in the research really enjoyed it and thought that it was worthwhile.
- While there is no observable impact at this early stage, potential benefits can be seen for the future. For example:
  - It will offer more development routes to help the managers to manage their staff. This will help to reduce grievances, disciplinary and sickness absence in general.
  - It will help managers to understand people more and it will provide a good measure of managers' competencies to manage people.

### Expectations for the future

- The questionnaire measure will be used as a competency tool and a way of measuring manager competency after training has been given.
- The internal champion would like to introduce it as compulsory training for managers to improve their capability at managing people.

Reflecting on the organisation's involvement in the project, the internal champion said: *'This project has been extremely beneficial to the organisation and, although no immediate effects were noted, I believe that, with a little tweaking, the organisation will benefit greatly from the introduction of this coaching and training course. The research team really understand the topic and have been a huge help in advancing my understanding in the area of occupational stress and how to manage it.'*

### About the organisation

This NHS trust includes 3 hospitals providing acute services, 14 other hospitals, comprehensive mental health services and 38 health centres and clinics. It employs 13,000 people, including 6,400 nurses and 1,100 doctors.

Prior to participating in the project, the trust already conducted organisational and individual stress risk assessments, provided individuals with training on stress management, offered individual advice, including to managers, and staff counselling.

The trust operates a competency framework that specifies the skills and behaviours expected of line managers and already provided ILM leadership/management development programmes to level 6. However, these development programmes were perceived as low priority by many in the organisation. It also already ran training courses for managers in various specific health and safety policy areas, but these were also perceived as low priority by many in the organisation.

### Motivation for involvement in the project

- conscientious adherence to H&S responsibilities
- prevention of enforcement action
- seeing manager behaviour as a crucial part of the well-being and performance agenda

### The research project within the organisation

The trust aimed to integrate the process with both stress management and management development to raise the profile of this way of thinking about the whole stress/well-being agenda and take a holistic approach. The process was a joint undertaking between education and learning and the employee well-being department.

Manager participants were recruited by the internal champion phoning colleagues, targeting people whom she thought would take part and be interested. Managers and their direct reports were asked to respond to the questionnaires through follow-up emails and conversations; no incentives were used.

Managers were invited and personally encouraged to attend the workshop. Support was offered, such as one-on-one consultation; however, no one took this up.

### Outcomes of participation

- The internal champion feels that she now has the language to talk about manager behaviour and its relevance to stress/well-being, which otherwise is hard to describe; it makes the topic accessible.

### Expectations for the future

- The internal champion is hoping the process can be integrated into the trust's management development programme.
- It is still too early to say what the benefits will be in the future, but it has potential to provide further benefits, such as:
  - At a cultural level people can talk about manager behaviour in an open and quantifiable way.
  - It can help individuals think about manager behaviour and stress/well-being in a structured way.

Reflecting on the organisation's involvement in the project, the internal champion said: *'Being part of this research initiative has enabled us to introduce some new ways of thinking about management and managers. It has helped us to highlight the crucial importance of manager behaviour when looking at the links between well-being and performance. However, unless manager behaviour becomes a key performance indicator – unless it is consistently put under the performance management spotlight – then consistent and embedded change may continue to be elusive.'*

# Discussion and the way forward

## Overview/summary of the research findings

### Evaluating the intervention

#### *Managers' evaluation of the workshop:*

- The majority of managers found the workshop enabled them to explore positive manager behaviours and to increase awareness of their own behaviour. This was largely true whether or not the manager had received an upward feedback report – even though the exercise on exploring managers' upward feedback reports was a key element of the workshop. The majority of managers also felt that they had been equipped with the tools to enhance their skills further, and that they would be able to go on and apply their learning.
- Receiving an upward feedback report was found to be significant in terms of managers understanding their own behaviour. Although both groups improved, 13% of managers who had not received feedback felt their understanding of their own behaviour was 'poor' at the end of the workshop, compared with none of those that had received feedback.
- The upward feedback report was seen as the most useful element of the workshop. The case studies/scenarios explored in the workshop, the opportunity to interact with colleagues and understanding positive manager behaviours were also seen as useful.

#### *Managers' evaluation of the intervention process:*

- Results were encouraging in terms of manager commitment: 75% of managers felt that they had already been able to make changes to their behaviour following the workshop, and 85% were committed to taking action to implement changes.
- The majority of managers felt that their line manager had been supportive and would encourage them to make changes.

- Managers were less positive about the organisational input, with only just over half of managers feeling that their organisation had been supportive of them making changes, and half feeling they didn't have the resources necessary to make the changes at the moment.

#### *Organisational learning and stakeholder suggestions for intervention process improvements:*

- Stakeholders provided their views on how the process could be improved within organisations:
  - joining forces by using a steering group and gaining the involvement at senior manager level and across departments
  - rebranding research to fit with organisational culture and goals
  - integrating research into existing initiatives and policies.

#### *Manager behaviour change*

##### Manager (self-report) data:

- Managers who initially scored themselves as 'ineffective' were the group that saw most significant positive changes over time. This was true whether they had received the intervention or not. It is possible that even without feedback, the process of completing the questionnaire encouraged managers to reflect upon their behaviour and seek to improve.
- Managers who had initially scored themselves as 'effective' saw themselves largely unchanged by the intervention. This could be as a result of managers perceiving that they did not need to make changes if feedback was that they were performing effectively. 'Effective' managers who had not received feedback or attended a workshop saw themselves as less effective at the follow-up point.

Employee (upward feedback) data:

- Employees' scores for their managers' behaviour suggest that the intervention process had the most positive impact on initially 'ineffective' managers. The managers who had received either feedback alone or the full intervention (feedback and workshop) were seen to improve significantly over time, compared with the group who received no feedback, who were perceived to remain largely unchanged and therefore 'ineffective'.
- An interesting result appeared with regards to 'effective' managers. Mirroring the self-report data, employees' scores for managers who were initially 'effective' but received no feedback suggest they were perceived as significantly less effective over time. This may not be a result of actual behaviour changes, but rather employee frustration with the process, for instance completing two questionnaires without seeing any results or actions.
- The same decrease in effectiveness over time was seen both with managers who received feedback and with managers who received the full intervention (feedback and workshop). Managers who received feedback alone were provided with reports, but not specifically encouraged to share the results with their employees; this may have led to frustration on the part of employees that their part in the process was not recognised. Managers who received the full intervention (workshop and feedback) were encouraged in the workshop to share their results with employees: this may have resulted in managers saying to employees that their results suggested that they did not need to make improvements, which may have been frustrating for employees. Alternative explanations for these results could be: that their high initial scores may have led to these 'effective' managers becoming complacent; or that the fact that they were given the feedback and workshop could have resulted in raised expectations of employees who, expecting their managers to behave effectively in all situations, were disappointed by any signs of ineffectiveness.

### **Reflections on barriers and facilitators of positive manager behaviour and behaviour change**

#### *Barriers to managers displaying positive behaviours*

The barriers perceived by managers fell into four categories: individual level (including workload, short-term deadlines, conflicting priorities, lack of resource and pressure from above), organisational/other level (including bureaucracy, organisational processes, IT issues, excessive use of email, legislative requirements and information-sharing), team/relationship level (including performance and attitudinal issues), and personal barriers (including home-life issues, own levels of stress and lack of confidence).

#### *Support requirements identified by managers*

- The key support managers say they require is further training, particularly in the areas of people management and managing conflict. Managers also requested ongoing feedback and appraisal on their behaviour, protected time to develop their skills, support from managers, peers and mentors, and action learning sets.
- Three months after the workshop, nearly a quarter of managers had not been able to access any support, and only 4% had received further training; however, 38% of managers had gained support from their managers, and 21% from their team. This suggests that support is more readily available at the local level than at the organisational level.

#### *Support provided to managers by stakeholders*

- Around half of the stakeholders taking part in the project offered limited or no support to managers outside of gaining participation. Even where support was provided, stakeholders reported a general waning of support and of manager interest after the initial launch.
- Stakeholders provided recommendations for how, on reflection, managers would be better supported in a future process, including support throughout the process and project planning to build in relationship-building and planning participant involvement.

### *Gaining buy-in from managers and senior management*

- Stakeholders identified a series of barriers to manager participation in the research including issues of communication; managers' concerns with confidentiality, the 'concept of stress', implications of participation and being 'told' to attend; managers not turning up, being too busy to spend time on the process, and struggling to get sufficient team response; and lack of senior management buy-in.
- Stakeholders provided a range of suggestions for how each of these barriers could be overcome in the future, focusing mainly on communications, ensuring senior management buy-in and embedding the programme into organisational practice and initiatives.
- Stakeholders also responded to the question of how senior management buy-in could be gained by recalling when buy-in had been received in the past. The following themes were suggested: having a clear business case; linking the initiative to national goals/initiatives; threat/impact of legislation; and having a senior manager with direct responsibility for health and safety.
- Getting senior managers to role-model positive manager behaviours was identified as being important to encourage these behaviours at all levels of management. However, few of the stakeholders felt that senior managers in their organisation were providing this kind of role model

### **Implications of the research**

#### ***Implications for policy-makers***

This research has designed an intervention to help managers develop the management behaviours to prevent and reduce stress. To gain maximum benefit from the work conducted, there is a need to promulgate the research findings as widely as possible to encourage employers to use both the findings and the intervention. This can be achieved through promotion of the research findings on websites, at conferences and through press coverage. The planned development of online tools based on the research will help establish wider usage of the learning and development materials produced.

From a broader perspective, bodies such as the CIPD, the HSE, IIP and other policy-makers can support the uptake of interventions such as this by emphasising the need to improve people management skills in UK organisations. Following on from the recommendations of the Leitch Review of Skills (2006) and the Foresight report (2008), the Government could consider how best to provide support, incentives and mechanisms to encourage employer organisations and individual managers to invest in people management skills.

The research suggests that raising manager awareness of how their behaviour is perceived by their staff, through upward feedback, is an important part of helping them to behave in positive ways. Thus, although the provision of an online self-report questionnaire on the HSE website is helpful, it should perhaps be accompanied by a recommendation that employers provide an upward (or 360-degree) feedback mechanism; the 'stress management indicator tool' can be used for this in its upward feedback version.

It appears that embedding this kind of intervention into organisational processes and integrating it with existing practices is important to ensure success. The most effective way of doing this is likely to vary between organisations, so employers need guidance on how they might best achieve integration in their own context. A range of case studies to show how different organisations have achieved effective integration should be developed and promulgated by the CIPD, the HSE and IIP to help guide other organisations.

The research also suggests that some effort is required to achieve buy-in to this kind of intervention, both from senior management and from line managers. In particular, getting senior managers to role-model positive manager behaviour is seen as important to set the context for positive management behaviour at all levels – establishing a cultural norm. Policy-makers can help employer organisations generate this buy-in and facilitate role-modelling by providing support on issues such as the benefits of effective people management and of staff well-being. Issuing guidance, such as the CIPD publication on making the business case for stress management (CIPD 2008b), could help with this.

This work is relevant to and therefore provides a potential vehicle for integration across a number of different government agendas. For example, it is relevant to the Government's 'Health, work and well-being' programme, particularly the development of a mental health strategy, and is also relevant to the Skills Agenda and building people management into the Train to Gain programme. It has implications for employee engagement and productivity, as championed by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, and is also a key way for the HSE to help employers meet their Management Standards for stress.

### ***Implications for future research***

While this research has made an important contribution to the consideration of how to support managers to behave in ways that prevent and reduce stress, further research is needed to explore the process of behaviour change. Qualitative evidence gathered in the course of this study demonstrates that many managers did not receive the organisational support needed to embed the positive changes. Future research should focus on an intervention programme that includes ongoing support to and follow-up for managers, as opposed to purely giving them a feedback report and/or one half-day workshop.

The results from employee behaviour change data indicate that largely similar results were achieved whether managers received only a feedback report or the combined intervention of a feedback report and a half-day workshop. A larger sample size would enable the comparison of data from the fourth group (managers who received the workshop not the feedback) to understand the utility of the workshop itself.

Future research should also aim to gather more qualitative employee responses over time. The quantitative data gathered demonstrates that employees who saw managers as 'effective stress managers' at the beginning of the study saw them as less effective three months later, whether managers had or hadn't received feedback and/or a workshop. It is important for future research to focus upon gathering employee qualitative data to unpick the reasons for the change in these perceptions.

While the current research has established a number of favourable outcomes from the intervention, it has not been possible to explore the impact on longer-term outcomes. For example, it would be useful to establish whether changes in manager behaviour were accompanied by improvements in employee well-being and performance and/or shifts in perceptions of the work environment (for example, employees feeling less exposed to stressors or negative working conditions). We recommend that future research look at the associations between manager behaviour/behaviour change and these outcome variables.

It appears that embedding this kind of intervention into organisational processes and integrating it with existing practices is important to ensure success. The most effective way of doing this is likely to vary between organisations and needs further exploration. We therefore recommend that case study research be conducted to look at the ways different employers integrate the research findings into organisational practices and explore what makes for effective intervention and integration. In addition, further process research is needed to explore in more depth the barriers, facilitators and process factors that are important in this context.

There is also scope to build on the finding that senior management buy-in and role-modelling of positive manager behaviours seems to be an important contextual element to facilitate the achievement of positive manager behaviour at all levels of management. Future research could explore the impact and importance of culture and behaviour norms in supporting line managers to show positive manager behaviour.

### ***Implications for employers (health and safety, occupational health and HR professionals)***

The research shows that, through provision of upward feedback and an interactive workshop, it is possible to help managers show the behaviours required to prevent and reduce stress in their staff. This particularly applies to managers who are perceived by themselves and their employees to have development needs in the behavioural competencies relevant to preventing and reducing stress. This suggests that a focus on 'hot spots' or areas within the organisation that have been

identified as having high levels of stress-related issues may be most beneficial. This intervention could be used by organisations to improve managers' capability to show positive manager behaviour and hopefully thereby reduce stress levels in employees.

It would appear that giving managers upward feedback from their direct reports is an important element to the intervention: while completing a self-report questionnaire will help managers reflect on the relevant behaviours, it will not help them understand how they are perceived by others, and managers often have a different perception of their own behaviour to that of their staff. Employers should therefore ideally provide an upward (or 360-degree) feedback system to ensure maximum support for managers to adjust their behaviour. Provision of case studies and opportunities to share experience with peers also seem to be important for helping managers benefit from this kind of learning and development.

To make effective changes to their behaviour, managers will probably need further support, such as:

- further training in specific skill areas, such as leadership and conflict management
- support from their own managers, peers and team
- ongoing feedback on their behaviour and performance
- time in their schedule to focus on people management.

There are a number of potential barriers to managers showing positive behaviour. These include: aspects of the job itself, such as workload, deadlines and conflicting priorities; organisational issues such as bureaucracy and processes; team issues such as capability and problem behaviours; and personal issues, including lack of confidence and managers' own stress levels. Where possible, employers need to help managers identify and overcome these barriers to help them show the behaviours that prevent and reduce stress at work.

Interestingly, the research suggests that many managers do not find their employer supportive and feel they lack the resources to make behavioural changes. In some cases, this may be due to lack of

communication about the support available as much as the actual absence of support mechanisms. To ensure that managers receive the support they need, the research suggests employers need to take a strategic approach to the provision of support to managers during this kind of intervention. For example:

- Establish a strategy for support that covers the whole intervention process, clarifying the support needed/to be provided at each stage.
- Gain managers' trust and establish good communication from the start of the process.
- Take a strategic approach to choosing participants.

For maximum effectiveness, these kinds of interventions need to be embedded into organisational practices. There is a range of ways in which this integration can be achieved, for example:

- Establish a steering group to oversee the process.
- Ensure that different professionals, particularly HR, H&S and OH, work together to drive the process forward.
- Find the 'brand' for the process that is most appropriate for the particular organisation involved.
- Integrate the process with existing initiatives and policies.

In many cases, getting managers to participate in and buy in to this kind of intervention will need some work on the part of project champions. In particular, good communication about the process and its benefits, senior management endorsement and role-modelling of the relevant behaviour, and integrating the process with other initiatives such as management development and performance management, will help to gain manager buy-in. To get senior management to buy in to these kinds of interventions and to role-model positive manager behaviours, the research suggests that the following may be helpful: establishing a clear business case and a link between positive manager behaviour and positive business outcomes; linking it to national goals/initiatives; linking positive manager behaviour to business planning and objectives; communicating the relevant legislation and/or threat of litigation; creating specific responsibilities; and presenting the initiative as a joint HR/OH/H&S activity.

### **Implications for line managers**

The overall message to line managers from this research is that it is possible to change their behaviour in positive ways to prevent and reduce stress in their staff, particularly if they perceive themselves, and their direct reports perceive them, to have development needs in this area. The intervention used in this research, which combined provision of upward feedback with an interactive workshop, helped support managers to change their behaviour. It increased managers' awareness of how their behaviour was perceived by others, helped them understand what constitutes positive manager behaviour and helped equip them with the tools to be able to make the relevant changes.

To get the maximum benefit from this kind of learning and development process, it would appear that feedback from others, particularly from direct reports, is needed. While managers can use self-report questionnaires to explore their own perceptions of their behaviour, this does not always match their staff's perception, so specific feedback on the latter is needed to achieve clarity. The increased insight and self-awareness provided by getting this upward feedback is a good basis from which to understand what behavioural changes would be appropriate.

Even those with a commitment to behave in ways that prevent and reduce stress may find that it is not easy to show the relevant behaviours. There will be barriers to behaving in positive ways. These barriers may be related to the job, for example workload, tight deadlines, lack of resources, conflicting priorities or the behaviour of their own manager. They may be organisational barriers, such as processes and bureaucracy, IT problems and email overload, organisational or national initiatives or restrictions on what they can say to staff. Team capabilities or problem behaviours and attitudes shown by members of the team may also be a barrier. And personal circumstances, pressures and stresses or lack of confidence may also be a barrier. To be able to overcome these barriers, managers will need to adopt a range of strategies and self-management approaches, such as: planning, saying 'no', challenging and clarifying demands, delegating, communicating, dealing with problem performance, getting training and development, and looking after themselves.

Behaviour change is not easy. Once managers have identified changes they want to make to their behaviour, it would be helpful to seek support from others in the organisation, including their manager, peers and their team. Additional training and development may also be helpful. Sharing experience with peers appears to be a useful part of the workshop used in this research, and further sharing could be beneficial to support the behaviour change process.

The advantage of managing stress through adopting positive manager behaviours is that it is a part of day-to-day people management. It does not require additional processes and activities; rather, it is about the way managers behave and interact with their staff on an ongoing basis. The 'management competencies for preventing and reducing stress' framework indicates that there is a range of behaviours that are relevant in this domain and which behaviours are most important will depend on the particular situation and individuals concerned.

Short guidance leaflets for HR professionals and for line managers are available for free download from the CIPD website:

**[www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/\\_Instrswrk.htm?lsSrchRes=1](http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/health/stress/_Instrswrk.htm?lsSrchRes=1)**

For further details about this research project or Affinity Health at Work, please contact Rachel Lewis, [rachel@affinityhealthatwork.com](mailto:rachel@affinityhealthatwork.com) or Emma Donaldson-Feilder, [emma@affinityhealthatwork.com](mailto:emma@affinityhealthatwork.com)

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# Appendix

## Sample workshop timetable

Preventing stress: promoting positive manager behaviour  
Manager workshop outline – morning version

Time	Content
09:00–09:30	<b>Introductions and welcome</b>
09:30–09:55	<b>Outline, aims and motivation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outline and aims of course</li><li>• Individual exercise: ‘Why prevent stress in your team?’</li><li>• Introduction to the project, ground rules and confidentiality</li></ul>
09:55–10:20	<b>Understanding your feedback report</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to feedback report and individual exercise for managers to explore/understand their own feedback report</li></ul>
10:20–10:35	Break
10:35–11:00	<b>Managing and communicating existing and future work</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small group exercise to develop understanding of the behaviours in this competency</li></ul>
11:00–11:25	<b>Reasoning/managing difficult situations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small group exercise to develop understanding of the behaviours in this competency</li></ul>
11:25–11:40	Break
11:40–12:10	<b>Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plenary discussion to explore the barriers to showing this competency and how to overcome them</li></ul>
12:10–12:40	<b>Managing the individual in the team</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual/plenary exercise to develop understanding of the behaviours in this competency</li></ul>
12:40–13:00	<b>Round-up and next steps</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summary of workshop</li><li>• Individual exercise: key strengths, development needs and actions</li><li>• Next steps</li></ul>
13:00	Close and completion of feedback form

**Please note:** timings are approximate and may be subject to change on the day.

## Questionnaire measures

Measure of manager behaviour: the questionnaire sent to direct reports

### About your manager

All questions in this section are prefixed by 'My manager...'

		No opportunity to observe	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	Monitors my workload on an ongoing basis						
Q2	When necessary, will stop additional work being passed on to me						
Q3	Delegates work equally across the team						
Q4	Creates unrealistic deadlines for delivery of work						
Q5	Follows up problems on my behalf						
Q6	Develops action plans						
Q7	Deals rationally with problems						
Q8	Is indecisive at decision-making						
Q9	Deals with problems as soon as they arise						
Q10	Reviews processes to see if work can be improved						
Q11	Prioritises future workloads						
Q12	Works proactively						
Q13	Is consistent in his or her approach to managing						
Q14	Panics about deadlines						
Q15	Makes short-term demands rather than allowing me to plan my work						
Q16	Sees projects/tasks through to delivery						
Q17	Encourages me to review how I organise my work						
Q18	Gives me the right level of job responsibility						
Q19	Gives me too little direction						
Q20	Imposes 'my way is the only way'						
Q21	Provides regular team meetings						
Q22	Encourages participation from the whole team						
Q23	Correctly judges when to consult employees and when to make a decision						
Q24	Listens to me when I ask for help						

		No opportunity to observe	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q25	Encourages my input in discussions						
Q26	Takes suggestions for improvements as a personal criticism						
Q27	Acts as a mentor to me						
Q28	Helps me to develop in my role						
Q29	Is available to talk to when needed						
Q30	Returns my calls/emails promptly						
Q31	Prefers to speak to me personally rather than use email						
Q32	Seems to give more negative than positive feedback						
Q33	Provides regular opportunities to speak one to one						
Q34	Regularly asks 'how are you?'						
Q35	Assumes, rather than checks, I am okay						
Q36	Shows a lack of consideration for my work-life balance						
Q37	Deals objectively with employee conflicts						
Q38	Supports employees through incidents of abuse						
Q39	Deals with employee conflicts head on						
Q40	Follows up conflicts after resolution						
Q41	Doesn't address bullying						
Q42	Acts to keep the peace rather than resolve conflict issues						
Q43	Acts as a mediator in conflict situations						
Q44	Deals with squabbles before they turn into arguments						
Q45	Acts calmly in pressured situations						
Q46	Passes on his or her stress to me						
Q47	Is unpredictable in mood						
Q48	Is a good role model						
Q49	Treats me with equal importance to the rest of the team						
Q50	Speaks about team members behind their backs						
Q51	Is honest						
Q52	Says one thing, then does something different						
Q53	Treats me with respect						
Q54	Is willing to have a laugh at work						
Q55	Socialises with the team						
Q56	Brings in treats						
Q57	Keeps me informed of what is happening in the organisation						
Q58	Communicates my job objectives to me clearly						
Q59	Makes it clear he or she will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong						
Q60	Relies on other people to deal with problems						
Q61	Takes an interest in my life outside work						
Q62	Tries to see things from my point of view						
Q63	Makes an effort to find out what motivates me at work						
Q64	Seeks help from occupational health when necessary						
Q65	Seeks advice from other managers when necessary						
Q66	Uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems						

Measure of manager behaviour: the questionnaire sent to managers

**About your working style**

All questions in this section are prefixed by 'I...'

		No opportunity to observe	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1	Monitor my team's workload on an ongoing basis						
Q2	When necessary, will stop additional work being passed on to my team						
Q3	Delegate work equally across the team						
Q4	Create unrealistic deadlines for delivery of work						
Q5	Follow up problems on behalf of my team						
Q6	Develop action plans						
Q7	Deal rationally with problems						
Q8	Am indecisive at decision-making						
Q9	Deal with my team's problems as soon as they arise						
Q10	Review processes to see if work can be improved						
Q11	Prioritise future workloads						
Q12	Work proactively						
Q13	Am consistent in my approach to managing						
Q14	Panic about deadlines						
Q15	Make short-term demands rather than allowing them to plan their work						
Q16	See projects/tasks through to delivery						
Q17	Encourage my team to review how they organise their work						
Q18	Give my team the right level of job responsibility						
Q19	Give my team too little direction						
Q20	Impose 'my way is the only way'						
Q21	Provide regular team meetings						
Q22	Encourage participation from the whole team						
Q23	Correctly judge when to consult employees and when to make a decision						
Q24	Listen to my team when they ask for help						

		No opportunity to observe	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q25	Encourage my team's input in discussions						
Q26	Take suggestions for improvements as a personal criticism						
Q27	Act as a mentor						
Q28	Help team members to develop in their role						
Q29	Am available to talk to when needed						
Q30	Return calls/emails from my team promptly						
Q31	Prefer to speak to my team personally rather than use email						
Q32	Seem to give more negative than positive feedback						
Q33	Provide regular opportunities to speak one to one						
Q34	Regularly ask 'how are you?'						
Q35	Assume, rather than check, my team are okay						
Q36	Show a lack of consideration for my team's work-life balance						
Q37	Deal objectively with employee conflicts						
Q38	Support employees through incidents of abuse						
Q39	Deal with employee conflicts head on						
Q40	Follow up conflicts after resolution						
Q41	Don't address bullying						
Q42	Act to keep the peace rather than resolve conflict issues						
Q43	Act as a mediator in conflict situations						
Q44	Deal with squabbles before they turn into arguments						
Q45	Act calmly in pressured situations						
Q46	Pass on my stress to my team						
Q47	Am unpredictable in mood						
Q48	Am a good role model						
Q49	Treat everyone in the team with equal importance						
Q50	Speak about team members behind their backs						
Q51	Am honest						
Q52	Say one thing, then do something different						
Q53	Treat my team with respect						
Q54	Am willing to have a laugh at work						
Q55	Socialise with the team						
Q56	Bring in treats for the team						
Q57	Keep my team informed of what is happening in the organisation						
Q58	Communicate my team members' job objectives clearly						
Q59	Make it clear I will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong						
Q60	Rely on other people to deal with problems						
Q61	Take an interest in my team's life outside work						
Q62	Try to see things from my team's point of view						
Q63	Make an effort to find out what motivates my team						
Q64	Seek help from occupational health when necessary						
Q65	Seek advice from other managers when necessary						
Q66	Use HR as a resource to help deal with problems						

**Evaluation form completed by managers at the end of the workshop**

**Preventing stress: promoting positive manager behaviour  
Workshop Evaluation Form**

We would be very grateful for your feedback on today's workshop.

Date

Tutor

Your name

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is the least favourable response and 5 the most favourable response.

	1	2	3	4	5
1 To what extent did the workshop achieve its aims: • to explore the importance of positive manager behaviour?					
• to increase awareness of your own behaviour?					
• to equip you with the tools to further enhance and/or develop your skills?					
2 How would you rate your awareness and understanding of your management behaviour: • <b>prior</b> to attending today's workshop?					
• <b>after</b> attending today's workshop?					
3 To what extent will you be able to apply what you have learned in your work?					

4 What did you find the most useful part of the workshop?

5 What did you find the least useful part of the workshop?

6 How could the workshop be improved?

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is the least favourable response and 5 the most favourable response.

	1	2	3	4	5
7 How much management development or management skills training have you received prior to today?					
8 To what extent did your manager play a role in encouraging you to participate in this project and attend today's workshop?					
9 How long have you been in a management position (managing staff)?	..... years				
10 What further support and/or training do you need to develop your knowledge and skills in the areas covered by the workshop?					

Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1–5, where 1 is the least favourable response and 5 the most favourable response.

	1	2	3	4	5
11 Did the tutor demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the subject?					
12 Was the tutor helpful and responsive to individual needs?					

Any further comments on the workshop?

**Thank you very much for your feedback.**

**Process evaluation questionnaire completed by managers at the end of the process**

**Preventing stress: promoting positive manager behaviour  
Questionnaire about your experience of this process**

Thank you once again for your ongoing support of this process. The provision of your second feedback report signals the end of this phase of the research project. We would really like to gather your thoughts on how you found the training/feedback process. If you would take a couple of minutes responding to this short questionnaire it would be much appreciated! Thank you again.

Name of your organisation:

1 Did you receive the following upward feedback reports?	Please circle: Time 1 Time 2
2 Did you attend the 'Preventing stress: promoting positive manager behaviour' workshop?	Please circle: Yes No
3 Following the feedback reports and/or training workshop, did you discuss the outcomes with your manager?	Please circle: Yes No
4 Following the feedback reports and/or training workshop, did you discuss the outcomes with your team?	Please circle: Yes No
5 Do you feel you have been able to make behavioural changes/develop skills following your feedback/workshop?	Please circle: Yes No

5a If you answered 'No' to the previous question, what were the reasons for this?

6 What support were you able to access to help you to make behavioural changes/develop skills following your feedback/workshop?

7 What support would you like to access to help you to make behavioural changes/develop your skills in the future?

Finally, please could you identify how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1–5, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
My manager has been positive about this feedback process and training.					
The information about the feedback/training has been easily accessible.					
I learned about myself throughout the feedback/training.					
I am committed to taking action based on the findings of the feedback/training.					
My organisation is supportive of me taking action based on the findings of the feedback/training.					
I have the resources necessary to address the issues raised during the feedback/training.					

Any additional comments you would like to make about the research?

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

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Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development  
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ  
Tel: 020 8612 6200 Fax: 020 8612 6201  
Email: [cipd@cipd.co.uk](mailto:cipd@cipd.co.uk) Website: [www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)

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