

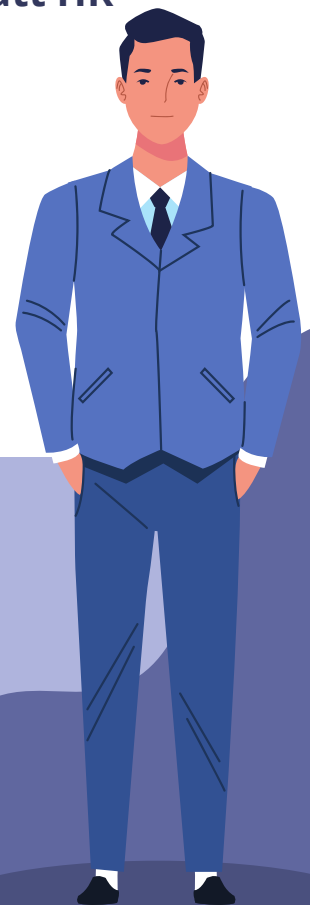
# CREATING PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE CULTURES AT WORK

HOWATT HR 2022



*Workplace mental health is no longer a nice-to-have. It is a strategic imperative for retaining and attracting talent, to reduce lost time costs due to mental injuries and maximize productivity and sustainability. Facilitating workplace mental health requires more than random acts of wellness, programs, and policies. It needs a clear line of sight on the key performance behaviours (KPBs) to facilitate mental health and reduce mental harms in an organization's culture. There are no shortcuts to psychological health and safety. It requires a Plan – Do – Check – Act approach hyper-focused on the Check (C) to ensure what is being done is working for the average worker and leader.*

**Dr. Bill Howatt, Founder and CEO, Howatt HR**



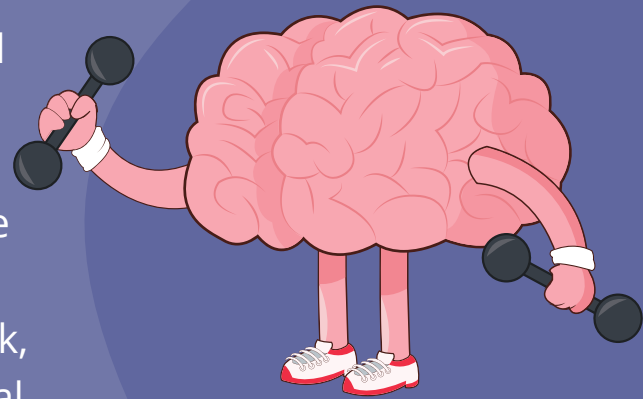
# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- **What is Workplace Mental (Behavioural) Health?**
- **The Purpose**
- **Lessons We Can Learn From Our Machines**
- **Are Machines Treated Better Than Workers?**
- **Why Are Machines Treated Better?**
- **Lesson #1**
- **Lesson #2**
- **Lesson #3**
- **Lesson #4**
- **In Closing**
- **About the Authors**
- **References**

**ISBN 978 - 1 - 926460 - 10 - 9**

## WHAT IS WORKPLACE MENTAL (BEHAVIOURAL) HEALTH?

Workplace mental (behavioural) health protects and supports workers and leaders to show up to work ready to perform at their best. It can be measured by the degree the average worker and leader perceives their emotional, psychological, and social well-being in the workplace. Their experience in the workplace directly impacts how they think, feel, and act. Workers' and leaders' mental (behavioural) health determines how they cope with unwanted stress and the choices and behaviours they demonstrate under stress.



Employees' and leaders' workplace mental health is influenced by the workplace environment (e.g., psychologically safe leaders), social determinants of health (e.g., financial health, food security, domestic violence risk) and their mental fitness (e.g., resiliency, emotional literacy, coping skills). Workplace mental health's impact is dependent on a two-way accountability model of shared responsibility between employers and employees. The last line of defence for employees is akin to personal protective equipment (e.g., masks). For psychological health and safety, it's personal psychological protection (PPP).

## THE PURPOSE

This e-book provides decision-makers that care about workplace mental health with a lens to reduce employees' risk of mental harm and injuries and promote mental health. Creating psychologically safe and healthy cultures can help employees connect, find their purpose, and feel a sense of belonging and value. Employees with good mental (behavioural) health (e.g., flourishing) is a super-currency that positively impacts employers' near- and long-term success and sustainability.



The **WHO** articulated why employers must care about workers' mental health. *"Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living, and enjoy life."*[1]

Employers who make psychologically safe and healthy cultures a priority and set a vision for all workers and leaders to feel included, welcomed, and psychologically safe increase innovation and human potential. Strained mental health increases workers' and leaders' risk of mental harm, injuries, and illness, including addictive disorders and death by suicide.

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) z1003, referred to as the **National Standard on Psychological Health and Safety**, suggests a lead practice for employers is committing to becoming “A workplace that promotes workers’ psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including neglect, reckless, or intentional ways.”[2] Though the Standard is a voluntary guide for employers to create a psychologically safe workplace, it has become a beacon around the globe for employers to make workplaces more human-friendly.

The mismanagement of how work is organized is killing workers worldwide. The WHO reported the first global study of its kind showed 745,000 people died in 2016 from stroke and heart disease due to long hours.[3] One study reported more than 120,000 deaths per year on average. Approximately 5%-8% of annual healthcare costs may be attributable to how U.S. companies manage their workforces.[4] Gallup’s State of the American Manager Report revealed that one in two employees quit a job because of a poor leader.[5]

Workplace mental health facilitates protective factors that charge employees while mitigating and eliminating psychosocial risks and hazards.



Workers' and leaders' mental (behavioural) health is influenced by the degree they feel a sense of belonging, valued, and purpose. One challenging question for every CEO to ask repeatedly:



**What percentage of our workers and leaders come to work each day because of the paycheque versus their work giving them a sense of purpose?**

## **LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM OUR MACHINES**

*“Humans are not machines — we are something more. We have feeling and experience. Material comforts are not sufficient to satisfy us. We need something deeper – human affection.”*

— Dalai Lama

COVID-19 has put mental health on the map as a critical factor for all employers to consider as the cost of doing nothing is escalating. Mental Health Research Canada reported that one-third of Canadians say their mental health affects their ability to function during the pandemic, with social and family life the hardest hit.[6] The **WHO** recently reported that the pandemic has severely impacted the mental health and well-being of people worldwide and raised concerns of increased suicidal behaviour. [7]



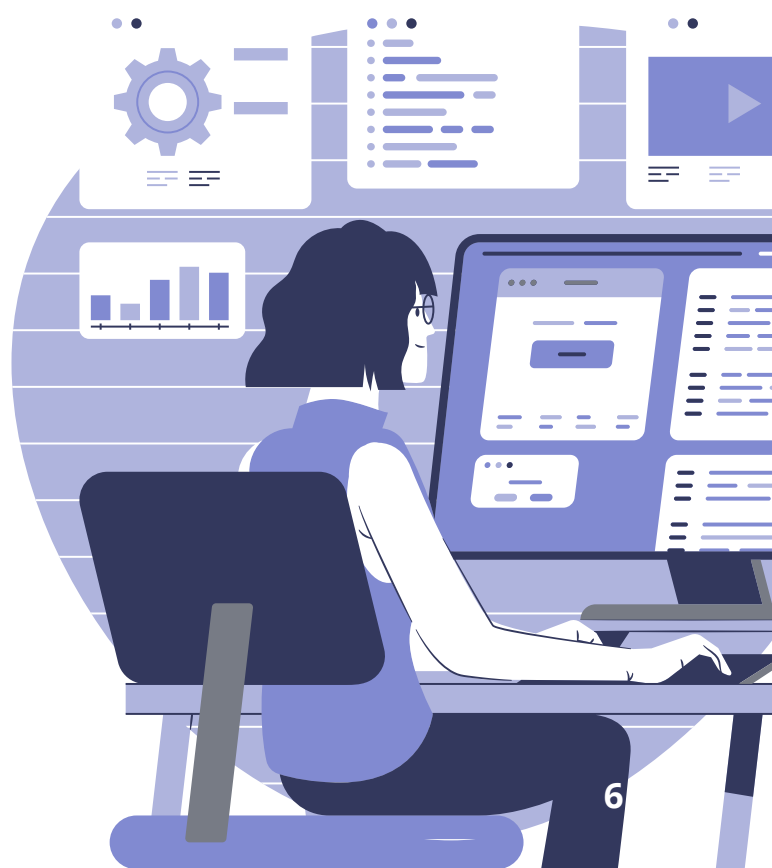
With the growing concerns and costs of workplace mental health, more employers are becoming aware and engaged in promoting mental health and are reducing mental harm by setting clear expectations around civility and respectful workplace behaviours.

Though more employers have good intentions, they lack clarity or understanding of impacting workplace mental health. Many are unsure where to start or the effectiveness of current initiatives on workers' and leaders' mental (behavioural) health, the organization's financial health, and operational sustainability.

## **ARE MACHINES TREATED BETTER THAN WORKERS?**

This question is not meant to be controversial, but it can grab attention. It can provide employers with context on what must happen to create a psychologically safe and healthy workplace. In most organizations, machines are viewed as investments and people as costs.[8]

There are no one-size-fits-all programs, shortcuts, or quick fixes for facilitating and maintaining workplace mental health. Like reducing physical injuries, improving workplace mental health requires constant commitment, follow-through, and monitoring to ensure that what is being done is achieving the desired outcome of zero lost time due to mental health issues.





Let's examine how some employers take care of their machines (e.g., photocopiers) compared to their workforce. The following analogy is meant to spark critical thinking around human behaviour regarding motivating, engaging, and protecting workers. It indicates what drives workers' and leaders' purposes, values, and sense of belonging.



## HOW DO YOU GAIN ACCESS TO THEM?

**Money** is needed to pay workers and leaders.

**Money** is needed to rent or buy a photocopier.

## HOW DO YOU PROTECT THEM?

**Money** is required to provide workers with benefits, insurance and leave.

**Money** is required to provide secure space and insurance for a photocopier.



**The need for money to gain access is common for both at this point.**

## HOW DO YOU CHARGE THEM?

There is no universally-accepted standard (i.e., belonging, value, purpose) for charging employees.

Providing electricity is a clearly-defined standard for operating a photocopier.



The difference is employers accept that a machine requires regular spending to keep it running. Keeping human capital charged is not standardized and is not considered a priority in many organizations. Pay and benefits are assumed enough.

## HOW DO YOU PREVENT BREAKDOWNS?

There is no mandatory or agreed-upon approach to preventing mental harm or promoting workers' mental health.

A preventative maintenance program ensures the photocopier is serviced to reduce breakdowns.

One takeaway from this analogy is that while money influences employees to join an organization, it is seldom enough to engage and motivate them to do their best work and feel an intrinsic sense of accomplishment, pride, and reward.[9]



## WHY ARE MACHINES TREATED BETTER?

Perhaps because it is much clearer on what must be done to build a machine and keep it running. All machines have parts with specific purposes and are designed to work day in and day out at a defined capacity. Specifications define their limits and what must be done to keep them operating at an optimal level.

Budgets are provided and employees are tasked with overseeing machines. It is understood that machines break down and time is lost, regardless of how good the maintenance program is. The concept of Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA) is ingrained into a machine's design and lifecycle. Employers can take lessons from how well they treat machines compared to people.

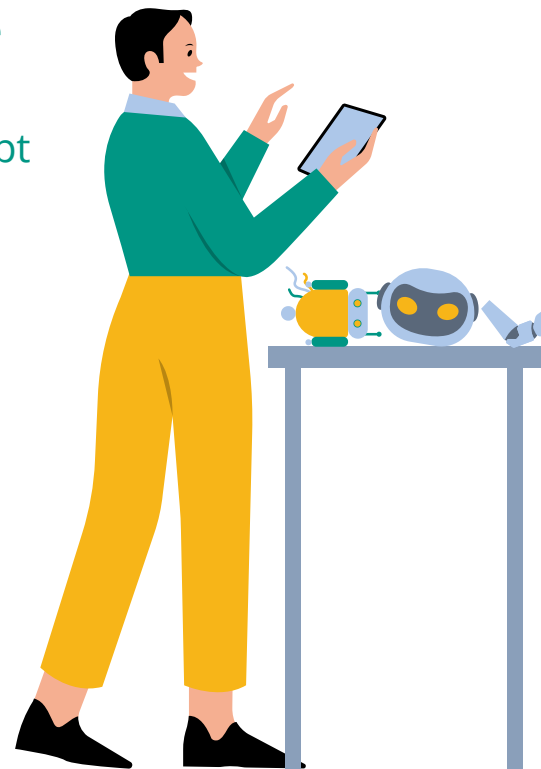
Following are some lessons to consider when thinking about machines, employees, and the intention required to create a psychologically safe and healthy workplace:



# 1

As in the photocopier example, typically, when employers buy or build a machine, they allocate resources to power it and keep it running. This requires a PDCA approach. The lesson is to adopt a similar PDCA approach for any workplace mental health initiative to support or protect workers.

A recent CSA study found that many employers focus only on the Plan and Do, and they could reduce mental harm and promote mental health by making the Check a priority.[10]



Investing in workplace mental health without evaluating programs prevents employers from determining if their good intentions create psychologically safe workplaces that drive employee engagement, retention, and productivity.

# 2

The primary workplace mental health strategy (e.g., programs and policies) goal is facilitating behaviours to prevent mental harm and promote mental health. Like the machine, having programs to protect workers dealing with crisis, mental illness, critical events, and suicide is vital. There is a lack of focus on the mental health prevention gap that metaphorically is the electricity that shapes a psychologically safe workplace.

Prevention programs can be transactional (e.g., one-time awareness-creating events) or transformational (e.g., habit-creating mental fitness journeys). Employers can create psychologically safe and healthy cultures by facilitating key performance behaviours (KPBs) for workers to develop mental fitness and leaders to be psychologically safe.

## **BENEFITS & DISABILITY**

More often reactive; use when needed

## **EFAP**

Helpful but often underused and thought of as for active problems, not prevention.

## **THE MENTAL HEALTH PREVENTION GAP**

## **PREVENTION**

Often not planned for developing psychological health and safety.

# 3

Every part has a clear function for a machine to achieve its desired output. The same logic can be used for a workplace mental health strategy. The first step is defining what core parts are needed. The four core parts required for a successful workplace mental health strategy are:

**Psychologically safe facilitators (PSF):** These persons are tasked with overseeing or supporting psychological health and safety policies and programs for reducing mental harm and promoting mental health. Facilitators can include a workplace mental health champion and committee members.

**Senior leadership team (SLT):** Workplace mental health requires buy-in and support from the top. Senior leaders can role-model and promote workplace programs, policies, and initiatives by participating and sharing.

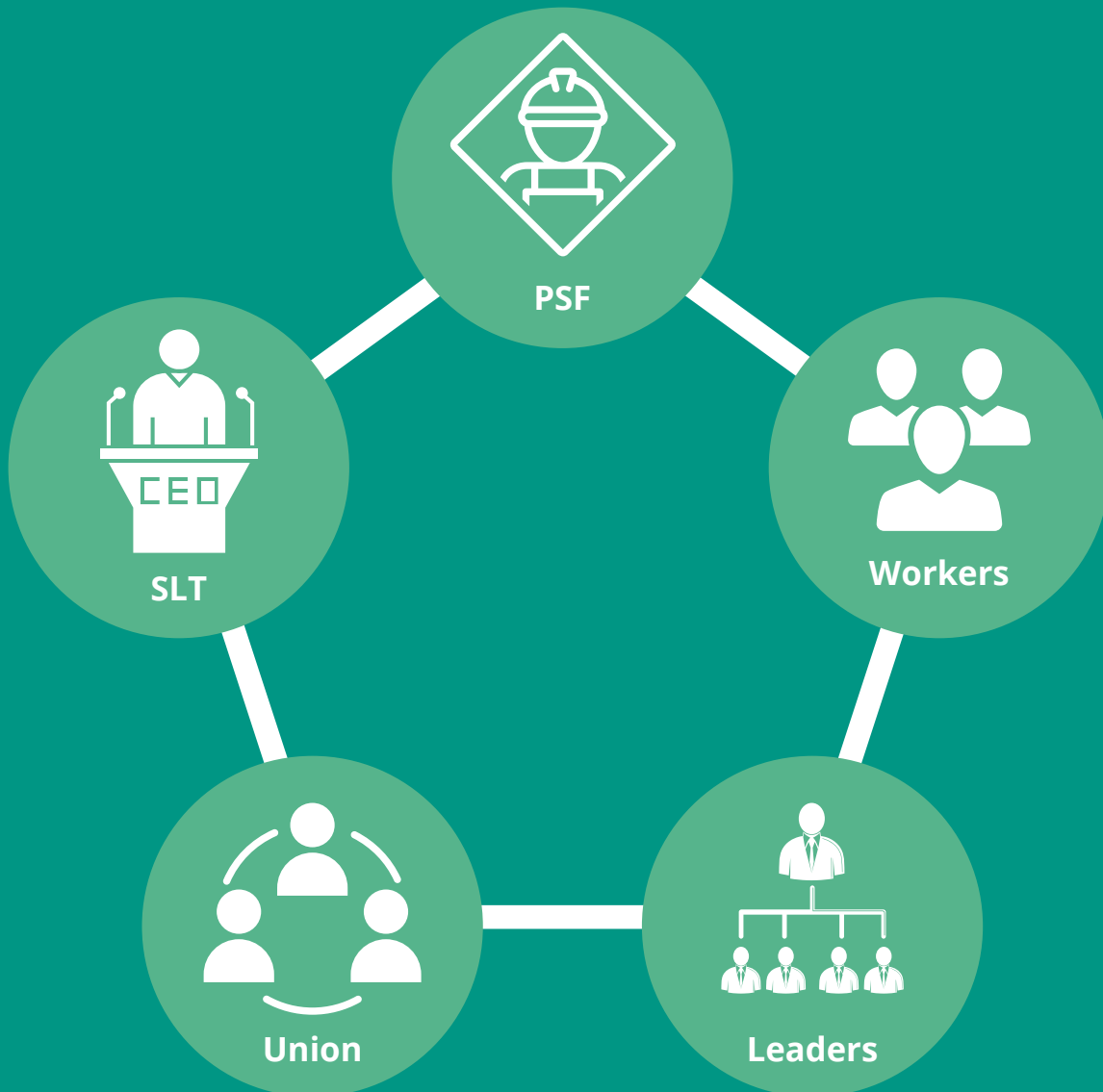
**Leaders:** Leaders are a critical protective factor for workers' mental health. Every interaction can be a positive or negative factor in the employee experience. Psychologically safe leaders eliminate fear and silence from the workplace.

**Workers:** Workplace experience affects workers' mental health. Workplace mental health requires two-way accountability for successful implementation and continuous improvement. Employers must allow workers to access and utilize programs to develop behaviours that support mental health and emotional well-being.



# 4

Define the key performance behaviours (KPBs) for each part. The workplace mental health strategy design should outline the KPBs required to facilitate a psychologically safe and healthy workplace. The organization's size, budget and resources will influence what an employer can and cannot do.



Notice in the visual how four parts (and if there is a union, perhaps five) are connected by a thin line. Workplace mental health programs and policies are often selected for a purpose. However, there is often a lack of focus on defining the specific KPBs for each part. A PDCA approach can help identify them.

The following indicates how an employer can determine their needs and desired KPBs, and implement a plan.



Examples of how Howatt HR assists employers to facilitate KPBs for each of the four parts



Current state, commitment, competency, and desired KPBs for each part.

- [Rapid Strategy](#).
- [Mental Fitness Index \(MFI\) test 1 baseline](#)
- [Leveraging the Psychologically Safe Workplace Awards for benchmarks](#)
- Employee experience scorecard (EES)



Actions to support and create habits to facilitate KPBs for each part.

- [Psychological health and safety facilitator training](#).
- Impact journey
- [Mental fitness journeys](#)
- [Mental fitness training](#).
- [Psychologically safe leader training](#).



How success will be measured and checked to ensure workplace initiatives are creating the desired KPBs

- [Listening tour](#)
- [Re-measure test 2 MFI & EES](#)

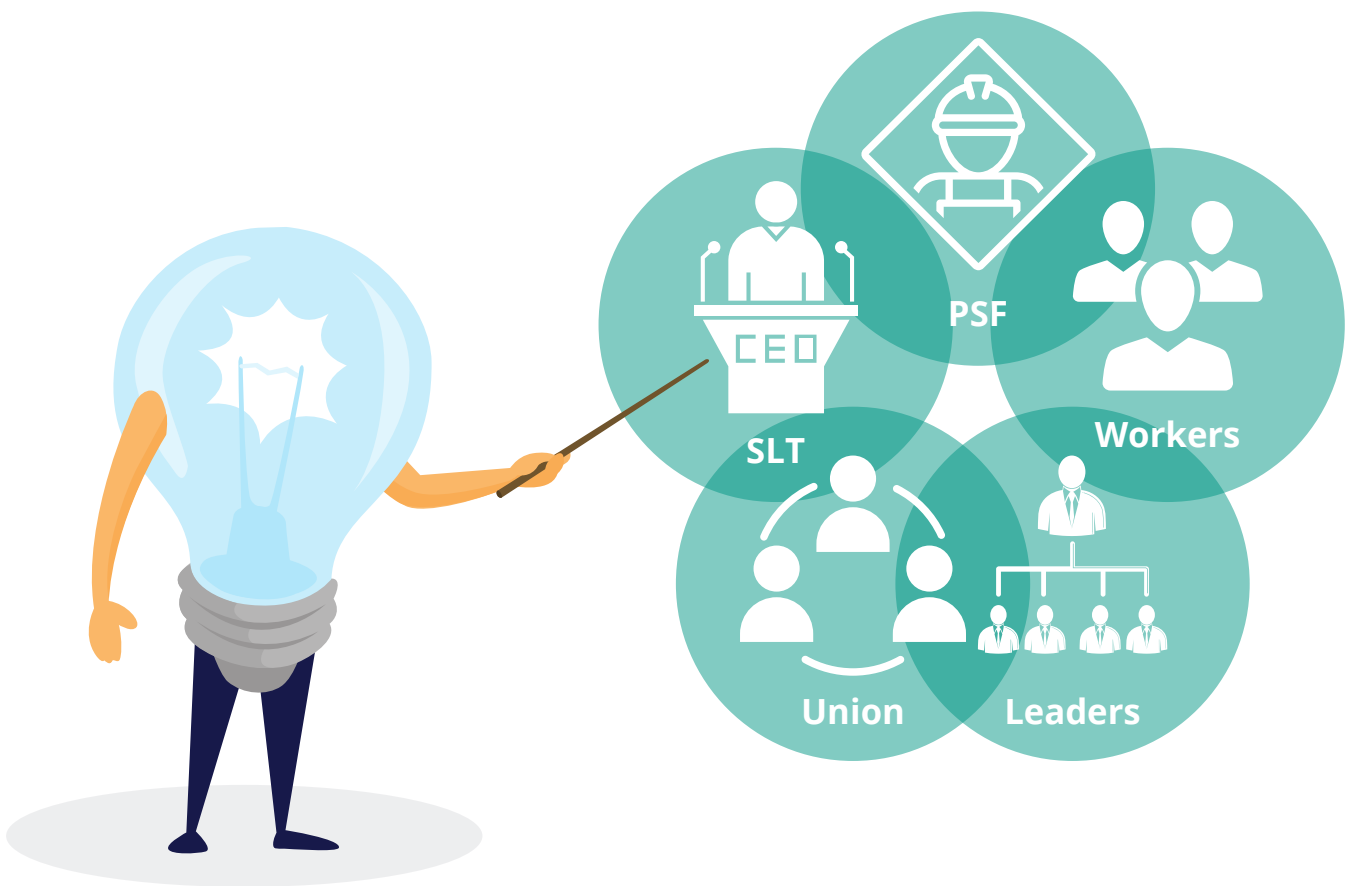


How continuous improvement will be made and monitored

- Employee Experience pulse check



Using the above PDCA framework, the goal is to move the four parts from an envisaged connection to a strong overlap where they are clear on reducing mental harm and promoting mental health. Workplace mental health success hinges on a commitment to continuous improvement.



Like electricity to run a photocopier, investment in workplace mental health facilitates KPBs for workers to feel safe, purposeful, belonging, and valued — the fuel that drives human behaviour.

## IN CLOSING

Define KPBs for workers, senior leadership, leaders, and workplace mental health facilitators. The next step is facilitating a PDCA approach to creating the habits required for a psychologically safe workplace and clarity for supporting workers at risk of mental illness or addictive disorders in the workplace.

Consider any union involved as a fifth part to be engaged and clarify the most desirable KPBs for supporting workplace mental health, KPIs, and outcomes. When all parts are integrated as in the above diagram, this increases for-profit employers' opportunity to drive positive financial results (i.e., return on investment) and non-profits to improve non-financial results (i.e., investment metrics such as improved Mental Fitness Index score).

There appears to be a growing trend with Environment (E), Social (S), and Governance (G) scorecards to focus more on the S regarding workers' mental health. More boards see workers' mental health as a critical factor in ensuring the workforce is secure and protected for employers to achieve their purpose and desired results (i.e., profitability and sustainability).

**Howatt HR** is committed to providing employers with guidance and practical solutions that result in measurable outcomes. Please visit [www.howatthr.com](http://www.howatthr.com) to learn more about Howatt HR.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### DR. BILL HOWATT



Dr. Bill Howatt is the Founder & President of Howatt HR Consulting, Chair of the CSA Standard on Substance Impairment Z1008, former Chief of Research and Development Life Works, and former Chief of Research and Workforce Productivity at The Conference Board of Canada. He is author of The Globe and Mail Best Seller The Cure for Loneliness. For details see [www.billhowatt.com](http://www.billhowatt.com).

### SPENCER MCIVER



Spencer McIver is a Senior Analyst for Howatt HR Consulting, joining the organization in early 2021. He is a graduate of Saint Mary's University's Sobey School of Business, working closely with Dr. Bill Howatt to develop and enhance the products and services offered by Howatt HR.

### DR. DAYNA LEE-BAGGLEY



Dr. Dayna Lee-Baggley specializes in behaviour change, both to encourage better health in individuals and to create healthier workplaces in organizations. She uses evidence-based practices to provide practical and applicable skills to improve behavioural effectiveness both in the workplace and at home. She also specializes in interventions for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. As a bi-racial daughter of a Chinese immigrant, she also brings the lived experience a visible minority and the immigrant experience to her work.

## REFERENCES

1. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>
2. <https://www.csagroup.org/store/product/CAN%25100CSA-Z1003-13%25100BNQ%209700-803%251002013/>
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-57139434>
4. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276857841\\_The\\_Relationship\\_Between\\_Workplace\\_Stressors\\_and\\_Mortality\\_and\\_Health\\_Costs\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276857841_The_Relationship_Between_Workplace_Stressors_and_Mortality_and_Health_Costs_in_the_United_States)
5. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2020/02/25/ineffective-leadership-and-the-devastating-individual-and-organizational-consequences/?sh=c95f89f1f2cc>
6. <https://www.mhrc.ca/national-polling-covid>
7. [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci\\_Brief-Mental\\_health-2022.1](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Sci_Brief-Mental_health-2022.1)
8. <https://www.management-issues.com/connected/2951/treat-your-people-more-like-machines/>
9. <https://www.amazon.ca/Why-They-Stay-Go/dp/1894338197>
10. <https://www.csagroup.org/article/research/psychological-health-and-safety-in-the-workplace-employer-practices-in-response-to-covid-19/>