

A blue-tinted background image showing four business professionals (two men and two women) in a meeting. They are looking at a laptop. Overlaid on the image is a white bar chart with several bars of varying heights. Some bars have callout boxes with percentages: 5%, 65%, and 5%. At the bottom of the image, there is a horizontal timeline with four circular markers and dates: 01/07, 02/07, 03/07, and 02/07.

Mental Fitness Index (MFI) 2.0 Continuous Improvement Update:

An assessment tool that supports workplace psychological health and safety

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Part 1

Introduction to the MFI 2.0

Protecting workers from mental harm and promoting mental health: Why we created the Mental Fitness Index (MFI)

The workplace can have either a positive or negative impact on workers' mental (behavioral) health. Canadian Standards Association (CSA) [Z1003](#) Psychological Health and Safety Standard (2021) that was created in partnership with the Mental Health of Commission of Canada (MHCC) provides guidance on what employers can do to reduce workers' risk for mental harm and to promote mental health. The CSA [Standard](#) "Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation" (2013) defines a psychologically healthy and safe workplace as a "workplace that promotes workers' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways."

A core imperative for adapting or adopting the Z1003 Standard or to positively impact workers' mental (behavioral) health is to take a Plan – Do – Check – Act (PDCA) approach to facilitate a psychologically healthy and safe workplace.

Within the Plan – Do steps for workplace mental health, the Standard recommends to include the worker's voice with respect to their experiences in their workplace environment and, in particular, the influence of various draining psychosocial risk factors (e.g., isolation) and hazards (loneliness). In addition, there is value for employers to understand what protective factors (i.e., programs, policies and behaviors) are currently in place that may be having an impact, or where there are opportunities to foster protective factors. For example, the manager-employee relationship is a protective factor, which is why it is valuable for employers to train their leaders in how to be [psychologically safe leaders](#). A recent CSA [study](#) highlighted the benefits for employers to ensure they are collecting data in the Check step of the PDCA continuous improvement framework to measure and ensure that initiatives are having the desired impact on workers (Lee-Baggley & Howatt, 2022).

Protecting workers from mental harm and promoting mental health: Why we created the Mental Fitness Index (MFI) *(cont'd)*

The MFI has been designed to support employers in understanding what employers, leaders and workers are doing well to protect and promote workers' mental health, as well as discover opportunities for improvement. The MFI is an online 15-20-minute assessment completed by workers which measures their experience through a psychological health and safety lens. The MFI also measures workers' current behavioral health habits that promote mental health. Every worker who completes the MFI receives their own personalized confidential report that shows where they fall on a continuum from low charge (i.e., languishing) to high charge (i.e., flourishing) as well as recommendations to maintain, improve or engage in help-seeking and health promotion behavior.

In addition, employers receive a report based on aggregated results from the employees that can be used to understand what protective factors are having the biggest impact on their workforce, and where there is room for improvement.

Workplace mental health is a two-way accountability model wherein success is dependent on the joint efforts of employers, leaders and workers. In the same way that OHS initiatives need to be designed and implemented with intention to have an impact on physical health, there are key performance behaviors that protect workers and support their mental (behavioral) health.

The MFI is a validated psychological health and safety workplace assessment tool that has been used in applied research [studies](#) (Howatt et al., 2020) and is being used to power a National award called Psychologically Safe Workplace [Awards](#) which has been endorsed by Excellence Canada and MHCC.

The MFI is a tool employers can use in the Plan and Check steps to collect quantitative data. The MFI is an evidence-based assessment, and the purpose of this report is to provide decisions-makers an update on Howatt HR's commitment to PDCA. This document will provide insight on the MFI version 2.0 with respect to how well it is working from a statistical point of view as well as key insights from the MFI data.

Discovering the MFI approach

The MFI uses the metaphor of a battery to explain how daily interactions workers have with their environment can be a charge or drain. In addition, workers' personal psychological protection (PPP) involves their current mental (behavioral) health habits, which can predict their resiliency and capacity to cope under pressure. Our belief is that employee resiliency is dependent on what the workers experience within their environment (e.g., their leader) and their own behavioral health habits. The MFI unpacks what employers, leaders and workers are recommended to start, to continue, and/or to stop to improve psychological health and safety in the workplace.



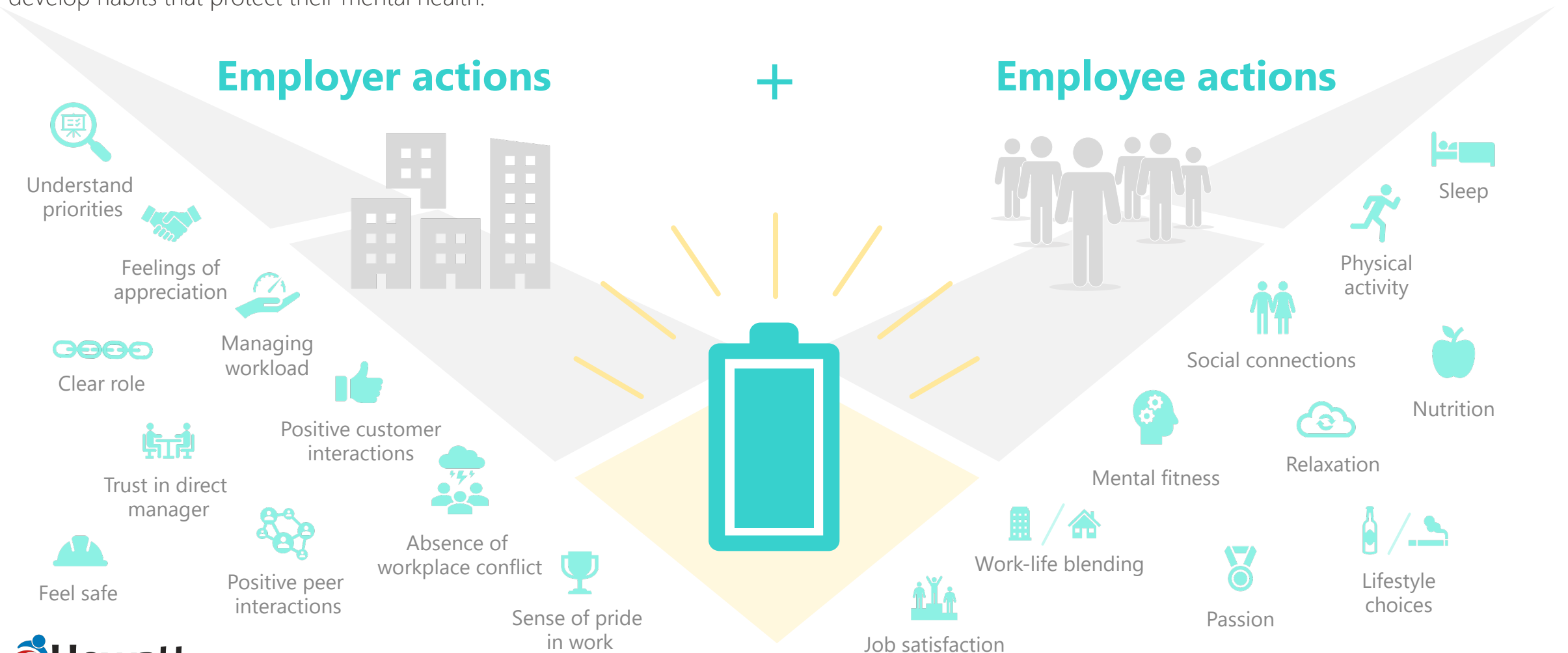
Mental fitness is a way to understand employees' individual and collective charge.

Workers' mental fitness is not dependent solely on what they do, it is also influenced by their experiences and environmental supports both in the workplace and at home. The MFI considers every worker through an inclusion lens.

The MFI leverages the work of [Corey's languishing to flourishing continuum](#) (2002) that purports workers who report higher personal MFI scores are more likely to be flourishing and are at lower risk for mental and physical illness, disability and presenteeism.

Protective factors come from both employers and workers

When looking to create a psychologically safe workplace, it is prudent for employers to be aware that there are levers the employer can pull (e.g., flexible work arrangements) that when valued by workers, can create charge and reduce drain. This is an example of how a policy can become a protective factor. The same holds true for workers who are provided the opportunity to develop a mental fitness plan and through practice, can develop habits that protect their mental health.



The business case for investing in psychologically safe workplaces

There is ample evidence to make the business case for CEOs creating psychologically safe workplaces. Gallup [reported](#) that, on average, 3 in 10 U.S. workers strongly agree that at work, their opinions seem to count (Herway, 2017). However, by moving that ratio to 6 in 10 employees through improving the employees' experiences in the workplace, employers could "realize a 27% reduction in turnover, a 40% reduction in safety incidents and a 12% increase in productivity." This once again demonstrates that how employees feel impacts the bottom line.

Organizations that reported the highest workforce treatment scores in [Just Capital's](#) rankings outperformed the Russell 1000 by 4.7% (Mahoney, 2020). In [2021](#), more than 3,000 signatories to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) recognized that mental health is a critical societal and workplace issue. BlackRock CEO Larry Fink's high-profile annual letter credited the firm's strong performance to his employees' overall health. One [Lancet study](#) suggested the possibility that employers can save \$2-\$4 in costs for every \$1 invested in evidence-based mental health programs (Chisholm et al., 2016).



Part 2

Overview of the Current Study



MFI Check: Annual PDCA tune up and statistical review

This report provides details from the MFI's continuous improvement journey, including changes that were made based on client feedback and the statistical review from MFI version 1.0. This section will report the MFI 2.0's current psychometric properties including reliability and validity, which is based on data collected using the MFI 2.0.

Statistical properties considered in reviewing MFI 2.0:

- For a scale to be useful it must be both reliable and valid.
- Reliability refers to the degree a scale consistently measures the construct of interest.
- Validity refers to the degree a scale measures the construct it is intended to measure.

Sample used for MFI 2.0 Statistical Review:

- 8,833 worker anonymized data from 18 client organizations from January 2021 to December 2021.

Sample for this statistical review

Industry	Number of Organizations	Number of total participants in sample
Educational services	1	3319
Public administration (government)	4	1540
Healthcare and social assistance	3	1079
Finance and insurance	1	865
Retail/wholesale	4	863
Mechanical and industrial engineering	1	546
Other (excluding public administration)	1	399
Utilities	2	144
Information technology and cultural industries	1	78
Total	18	8,833

Generation	Number of total participants in sample	Percentage of total sample
Generation Z (1996 - 2005)	311	3.5%
Millennials (1980 - 1995)	1816	20.6%
Generation X (1966 - 1979)	1649	18.7%
Baby Boomers (1945 - 1965)	665	7.5%
Traditionalists (1944 or earlier)	2	0%
Prefer not to answer	4390	49.7%

Gender	Number of total participants in sample	Percentage of total sample
Female-identified	2377	26.9%
Male-identified	1941	22%
Non-binary/Transgender	20	0.1%
Prefer not to answer	4495	50.9%



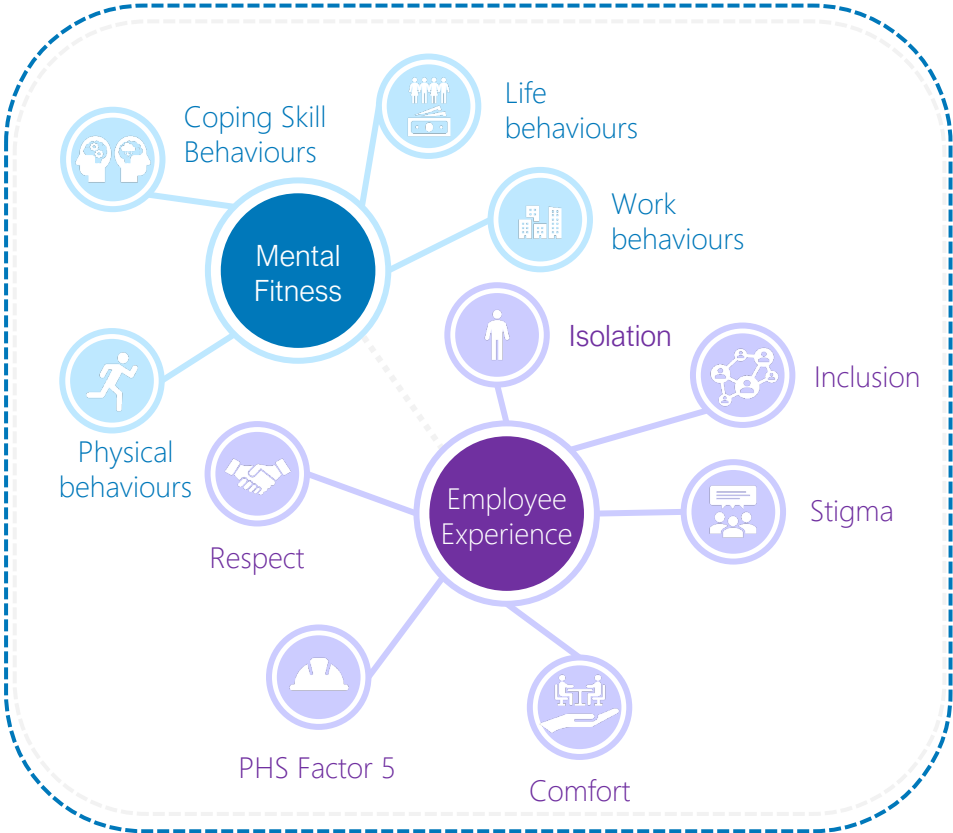
Part 3

Organization of the MFI 2.0



Section 1: PHS indicator score

Psychological health and safety indicator



Psychological health and safety indicator is a composite index of the (Mental Fitness indicators scales) and the environmental level (Cultural indicators scales)

Factor Factors psychosocial risk factors aligns with *Guarding Minds at Work* 13 PHS factors

Howatt HR's Factor 5	13 PHS factors included	The success of this factor...
Factor 1 – Management and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF 3 – Clear leadership and expectations • PF 7 – Recognitions and rewards • PF 11 – Balance of work and life 	Is dependent and will be influenced by the organization's management approach as well as the skills of each individual leader at all levels.
Factor 2 – Employee Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF 8 – Involvement and influence • PF 9 – Workload management • PF 10 – Engagement 	Can be positively influenced by employees' coping skills, personal decision making, persistence, self-advocacy, job satisfaction and confidence in their ability to communicate with their managers.
Factor 3 – Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF 1 – Psychological and social support • PF 2 – Organizational culture • PF 4 – Civility and respect 	Will be impacted by senior leadership follow-through and commitment to promoting and monitoring core values, employee value proposition (EVP), policies, and principles that define the expectations as to how the organization's community will behave.
Factor 4 – Strategic HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF 5 – Psychological competencies and requirements • PF 6 – Growth and development 	Will be influenced by talent management initiatives that are influenced by core competencies, job selection process, evaluation of job fit, learning and development, support to fulfill job requirements, and performance management.
Factor 5 – Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PF 12 – Psychological protection • PF 13 – Protection of physical safety 	Is dependent on employers facilitating policies, training, and employee participation in risk management, return to work protocols, accommodation, and functional assessment and close monitoring.

*Note: The MFI also collects data on **isolation** and perception of direct leaders being a **psychologically safe leader**

Section 2: Employer protective factors

- The MFI measures employee awareness of, use of, and perceived impact of employers' programs and policies.
- The degree these programs and policies are being used and are valued assist employers in understanding the degree they are protecting their workers from mental harm and supporting their mental health.

Employer Supports



Programs

- ✓ EFAP
- ✓ Wellness hub
- ✓ STD/LTD Program
- ✓ Not myself today
- ✓ Culture committee initiatives
- ✓ Paramedical services
- ✓ Mental health training
- ✓ Respectful workplace training
- ✓ Resiliency/coping skills training
- ✓ Health and wellness initiatives

Section 3: Thrive Index: Outcome measures






- Thrive index encompasses outcome measures that provide insight on the degree of risk with respect to productivity, psychosocial hazards, and PHS/OHS risk.

Thrive Index



Worker's MFI profile

How workers answer the MFI indicator scales will determine their overall MFI score on a range from 0 (empty) to 100 (charge). It is important to keep in mind the MFI score can be impacted by both the workers' behavioral health habits and their workplace experiences.

Bucket	Range	Description
 Thriving (Charged)	80-100	Experiences more positive moments than negative ones; established positive habits that support your quality of life. Coping well and has a positive outlook on your life both at home and work. Described as satisfied with current life circumstances, motivated to take care of your health and able to when needed to take on life challenges.
 Succeeding (Charging)	70-79	Feeling fine about personal life and work situation. Able to deal with what challenges during life's tough moments. Can sometimes feel overwhelmed and experience brief periods of stress that impact quality of life. Sometimes feelings of stress result in putting off physical activity or making an unhealthy nutritional choices. May at times be a bit short, question decision-making confidence, or avoid communicating with others. May look for an escape by taking a day off to get a mental break from work. Sometimes leaves work feeling mentally or physically fatigued.
 Surviving (Half-full)	60-69	Suggests that frustration and stress is not uncommon. Often struggles to get through the day, often feeling tired or not having as much energy as they would like. Source of your stress is commonly situational. Typically focuses on what can be done to avoid stressful situations. People with this profile may engage in at-risk coping skills to deal with stress such as over-eating, alcohol, extended internet use, etc. May not feel comfortable asking for help in challenging times. As a result, there is delay in asking for help, or sometimes not asking at all.
 At risk (Draining)	50-59	May be experiencing extended periods of stress that could be negatively impacting happiness, outlook on life and work, and overall health including mind and body. May be described by colleagues as stressed, down, generally not their usual self, or even unmotivated. May experience increased peer conflict, decrease in work performance, missing more work time, and even questions from manager on performance.
 Compromised (Empty)	0-49	Employees who score at this level may be struggling daily in some aspect of their life. May be described by colleagues as disengaged, grumpy and even unmotivated. May experience more conflict with peers, family, or managers. May be engaging in risky behaviour, such as drinking too much, doing drugs, gambling, or over-eating. Family and friends may be worried about and currently expressing their concern. It is common for person that fit this profile to be feeling stuck, unsure of what to do and uncertain of when things are going to get better.



Part 4

Psychometric Properties of the MFI 2.0



Reliability and construct validity of mental fitness pillars & Howatt HR's PHS Five-Factor model

Internal consistency refers to the extent that items of the scale “hold together” or are similar enough to each other that they are consistently measuring the construct of interest. Cronbach alpha is a statistic that measures the internal consistency of a scale. Established criteria are used to determine whether a measure has sufficient internal consistency.

- According to established norms for Cronbach alpha, values higher than 0.6 suggest acceptable reliability.
- We tested the reliability of the overall scale and their subscales within our sample.
- The results of the analysis supported the reliability and internal consistency of all the subscales included in this study.
- The details of the analysis and the Alpha Cronbach of each subscale is reported in Appendix A and B.

Construct validity refers to the extent to which the measure assesses the construct of interest. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to examine the construct validity of the MFI indicators scales and the Employee Experience Five-Factor PHS.

- The results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis showed an acceptable level of fit between the model and the data, supporting the construct validity of MFI indicators scales and Five-Factor model.
- Additional details of the analyses can be found in Appendix C and D.



Part 5

Results: MFI 2.0 Workplace Health Insights





Section A:

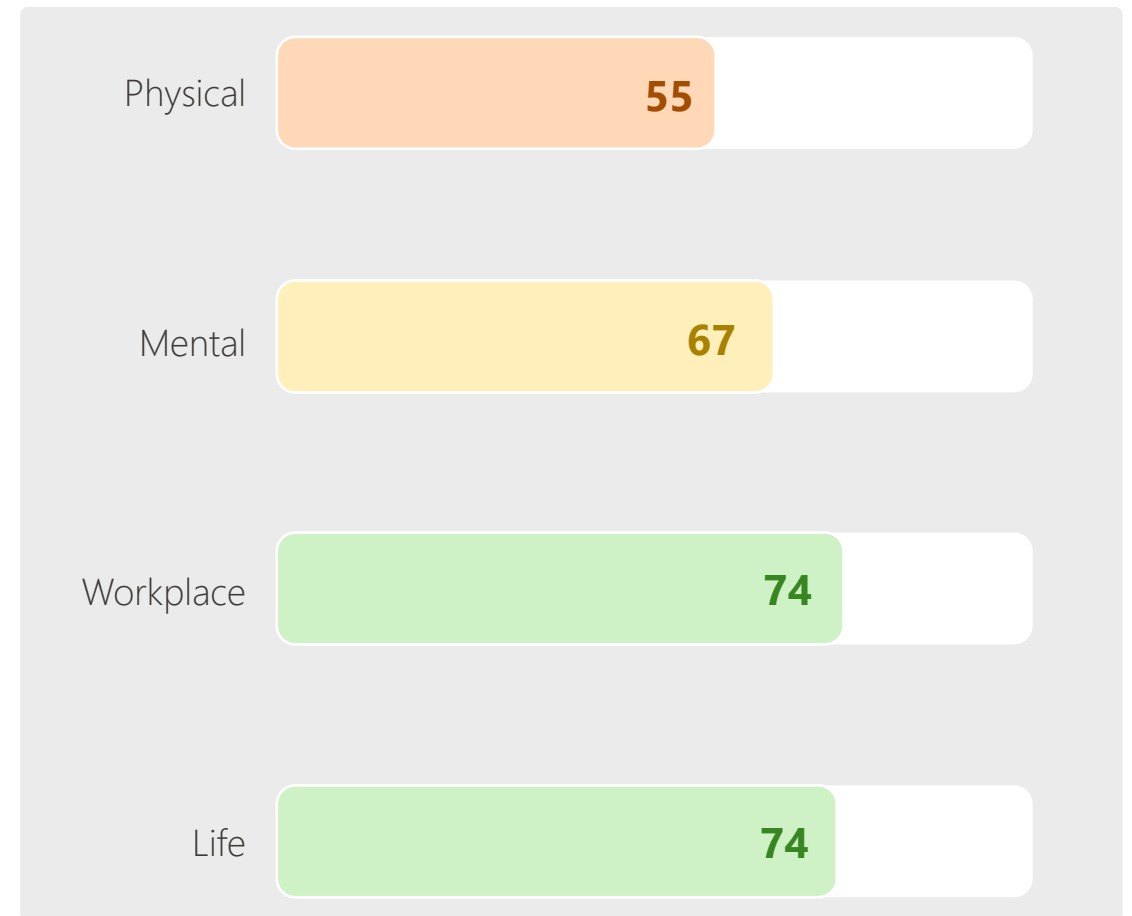
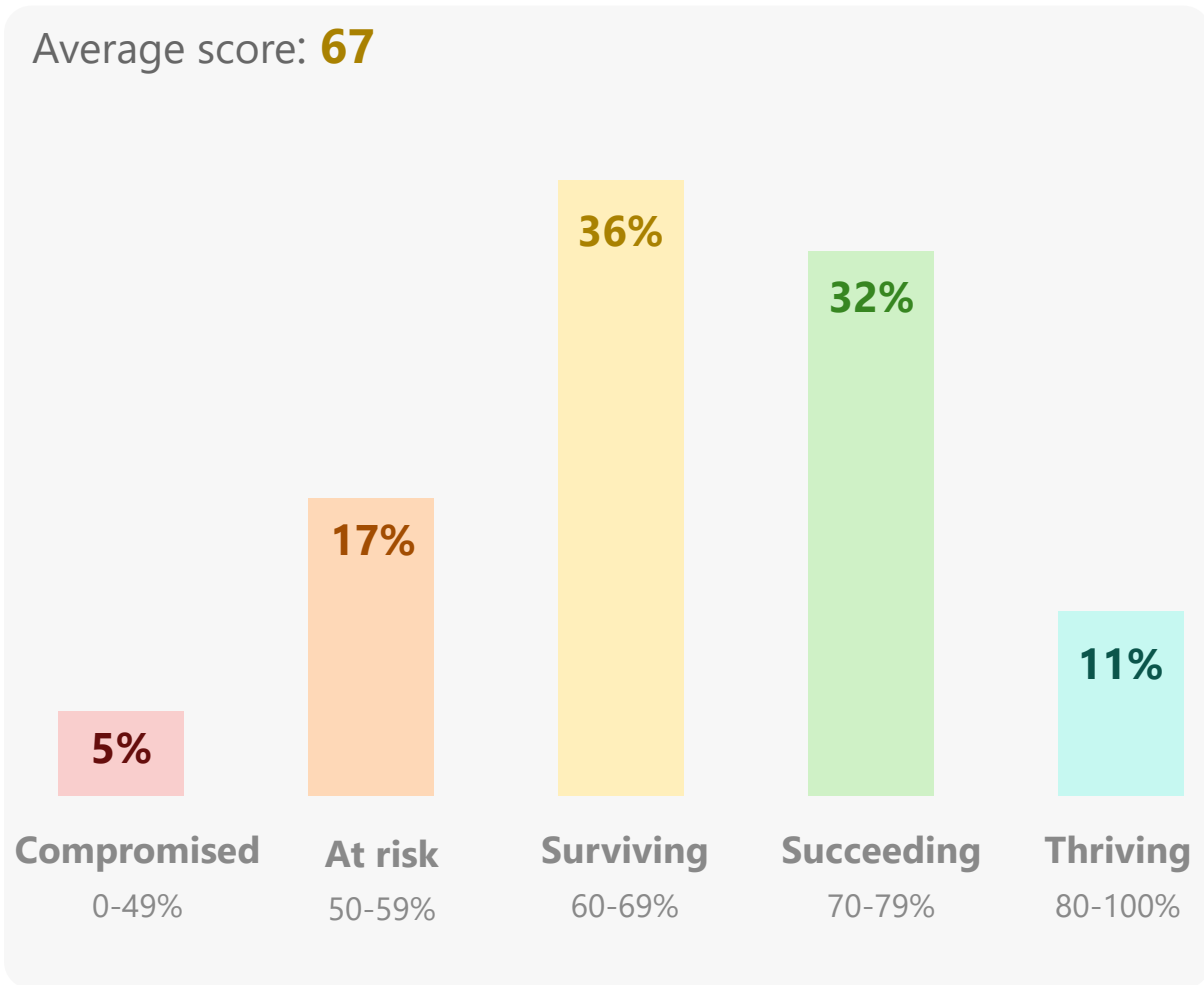
Psychological Safety Indicator Scores



MFI score

The MFI score reports on the behavioral health of workers with respect to the actions and habits they self-report across the below four scales. The higher the score on all four scales, the more likely the worker is thriving (i.e., flourishing) and at less risk for mental harm.

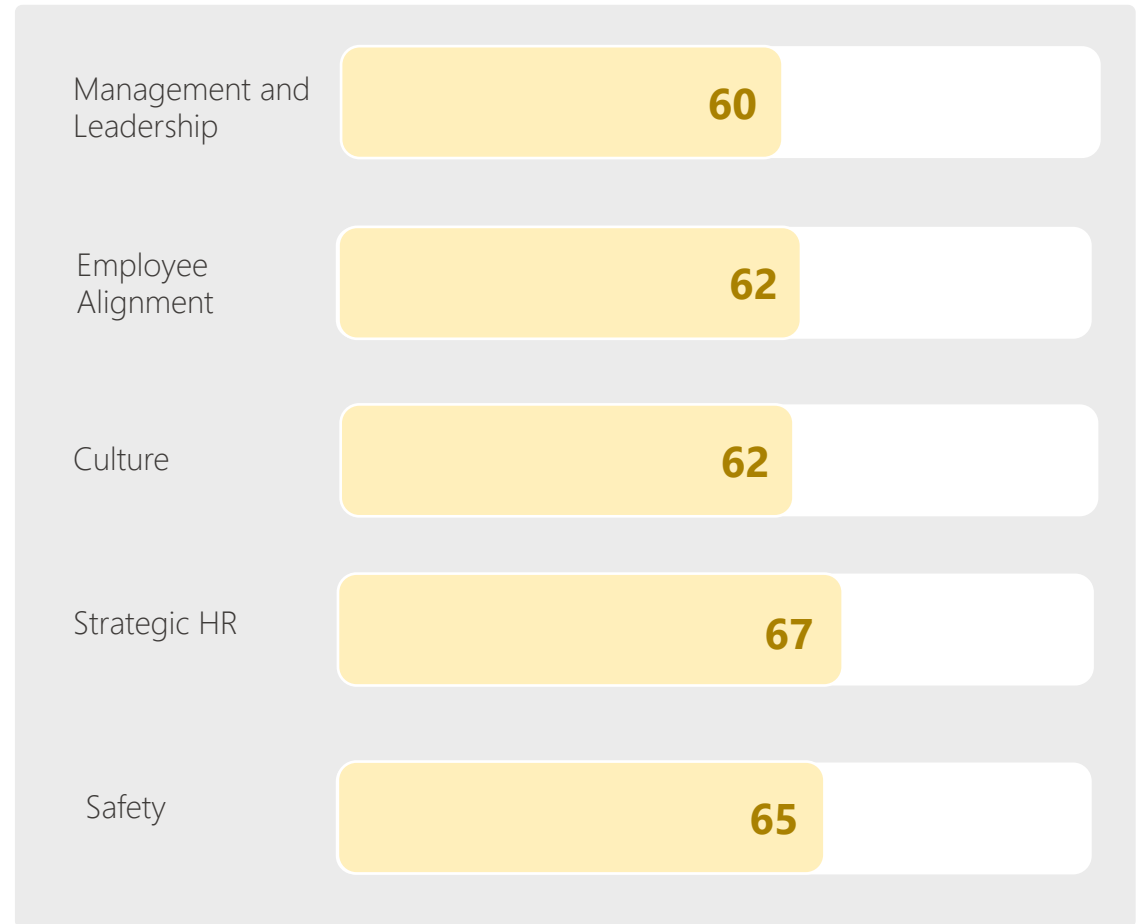
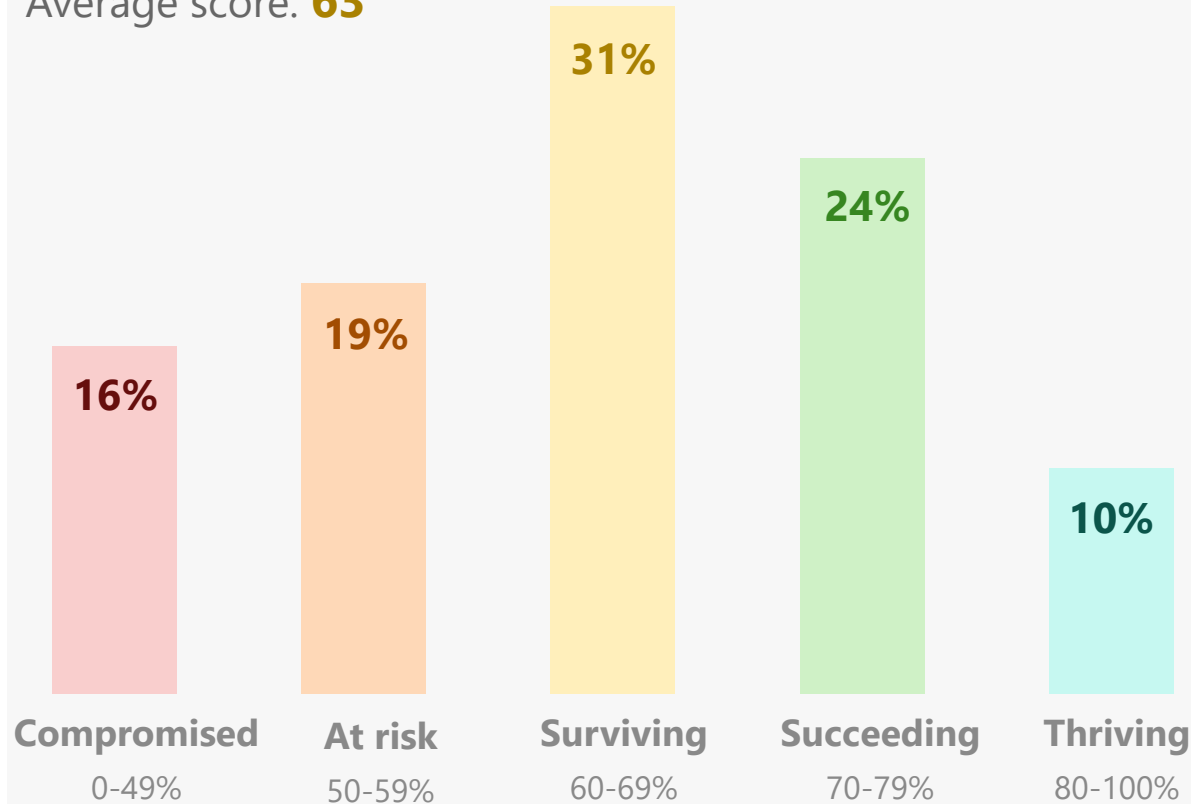
Average score: **67**



Employee experience score

Psychosocial factors are what the employee experiences and the degree of drain or charge each factor causes. The lower the score, the more drain and risk for harm. The data from this sample population suggests that 63% are surviving or worse, providing evidence on the impact the environment can have on workers' overall well-being.

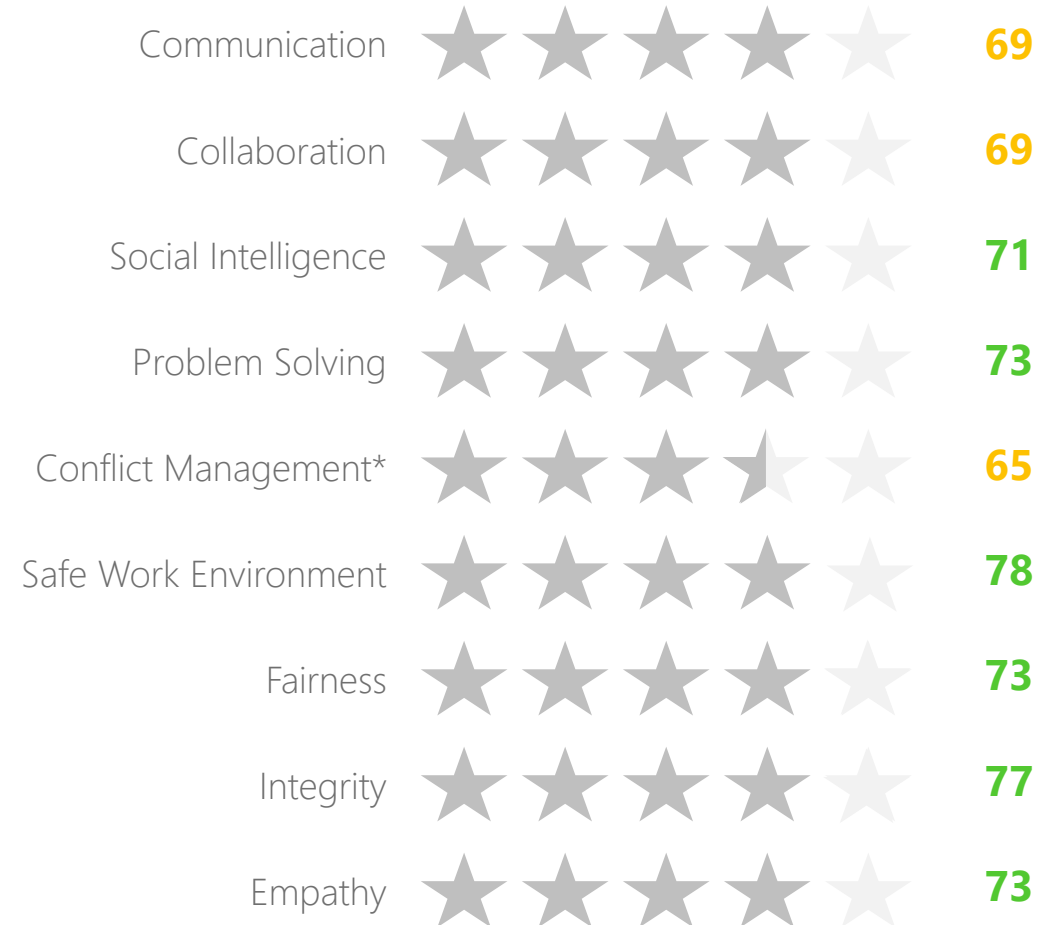
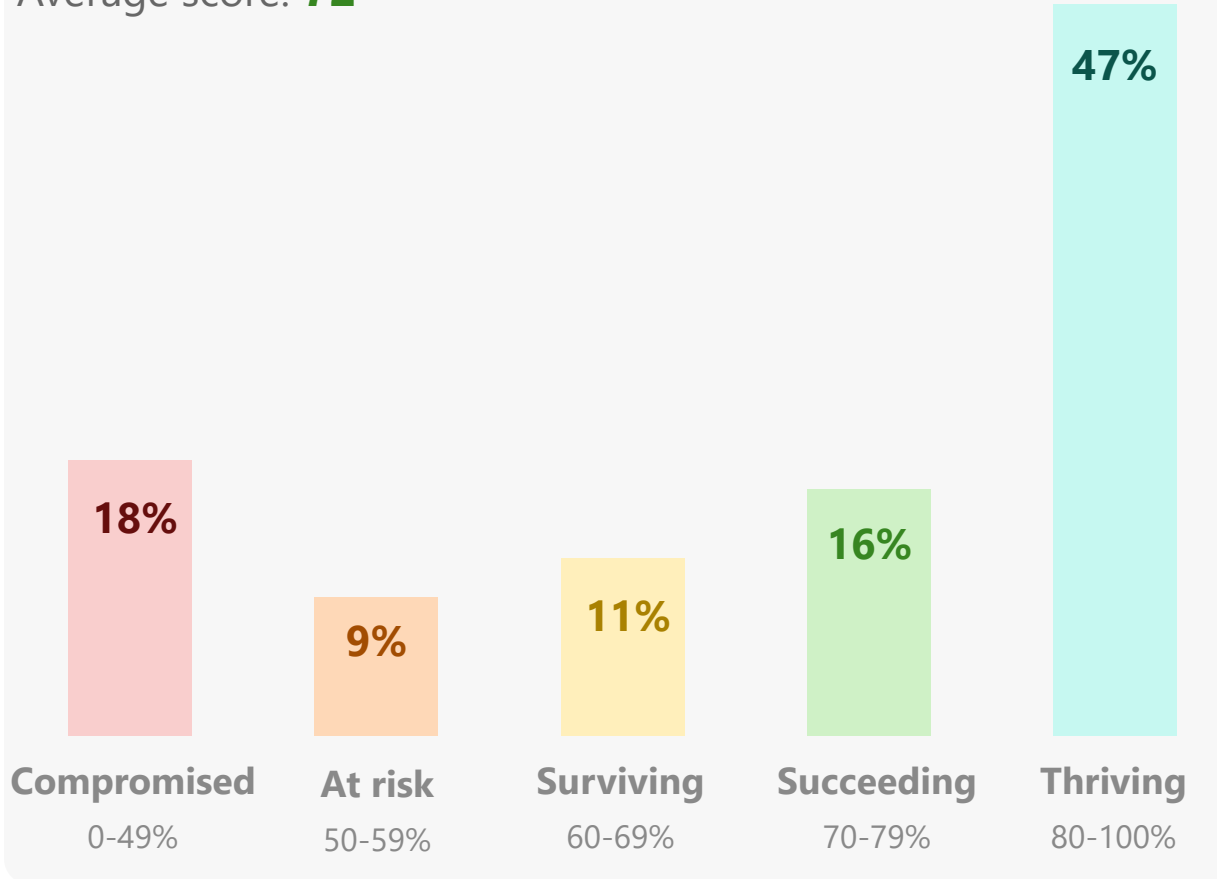
Average score: **63**



Employee experience indicators – PHS leader scores

Psychologically safe leaders can be a protective factor. The overall average in workers' reported confidence in leader's competency across nine competencies was only 72.

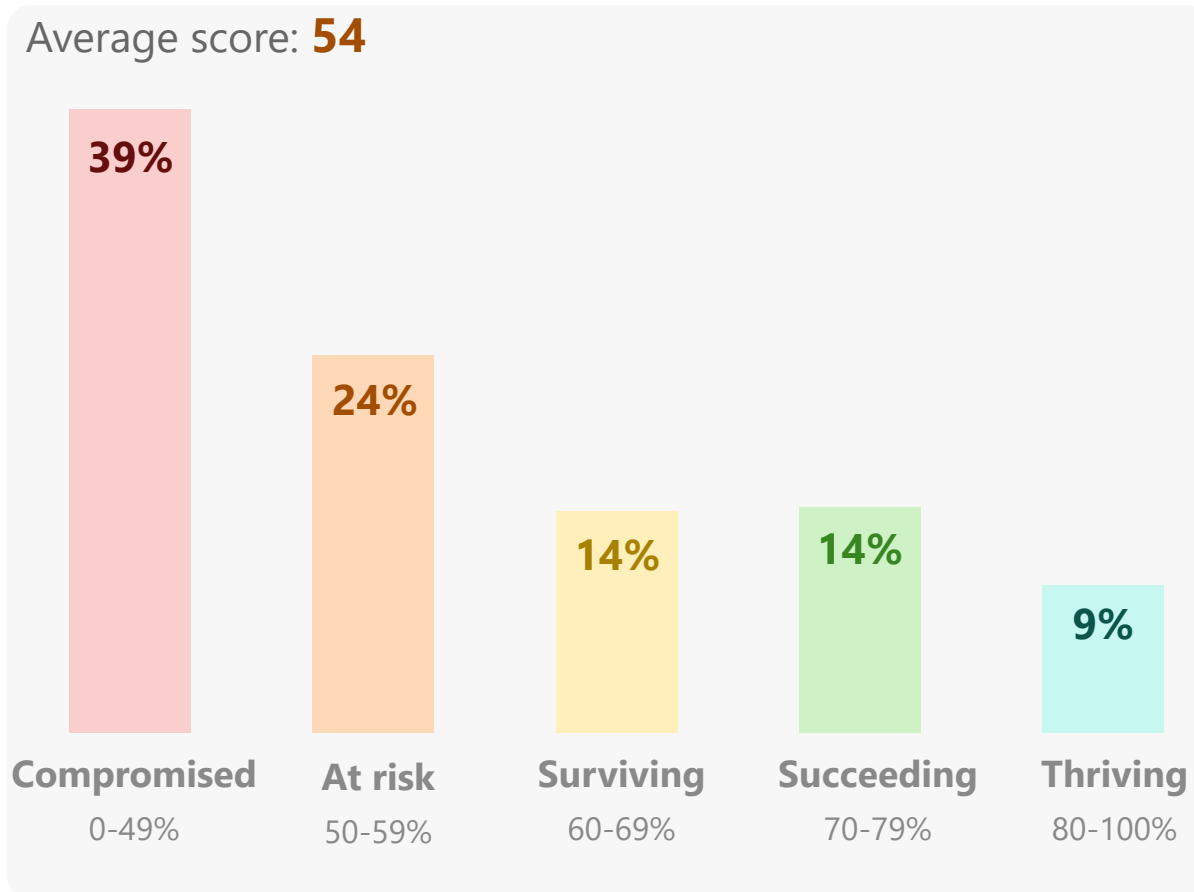
Average score: **72**



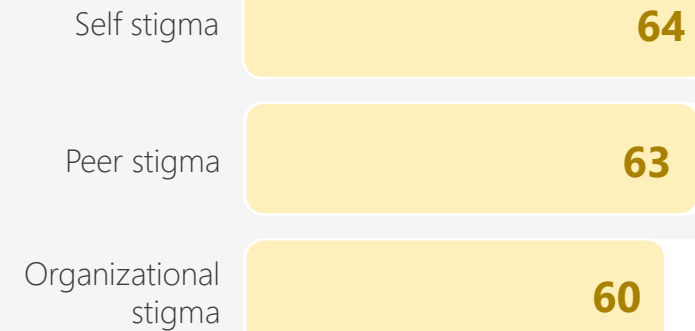
*Note: Conflict here refers to workers' confidence in their leader's ability to manage conflict when it arises.

Mental health culture

The overall Mental Health Culture score provides a comprehensive view of employees' overall comfort in seeking support when they struggle with their mental health. The overall score is calculated based on 6 different items evaluating stigma and support-seeking tendency in the workplace. In this study, on average, employees indicated a lower comfort in seeking support from HR reps and their managers compared to their co-workers and peers.



Stigma:



Comfort in seeking support:



Section A: Key observations



- Results from this study suggest that 58% of workforce is languishing.
- Management interactions and behaviors is the number one drain factor, suggesting the importance of training leaders in becoming psychologically safe leaders.
- The largest skill gap reported on psychologically safe leaders competencies was workers' confidence in their leader managing conflict when it arises, followed by communication and collaboration skills.
- Stigma continues to be a major challenge in that workplace and inhibits help seeking behavior.



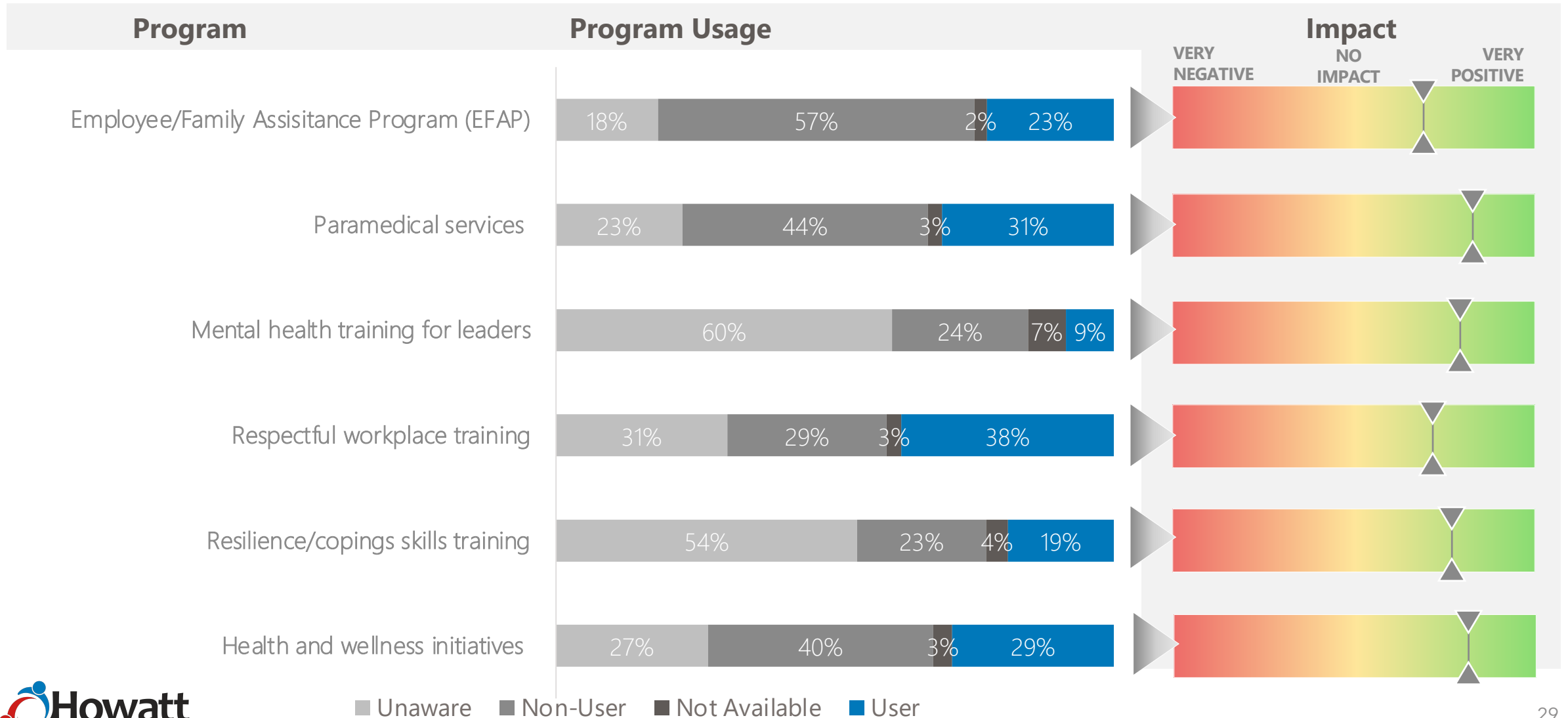
Section B:

Employer Supports



Program evaluation overview

When used with intention, support programs can be protective factors that protect and promote mental health. At the program level, many workers are not aware of the different programs. Of those who used programs, 9% to 38% reported a positive impact on their health, life, or work.



Section B: Key observations



- On average, 20-40% of workers are not aware of current support programs offered by their employer.
- On average, workers who were aware of programs reported they had some positive impact on their health, life, or work.
- This suggests the number of protective programs may not be as important as is workers' awareness and clarity on what they can access.



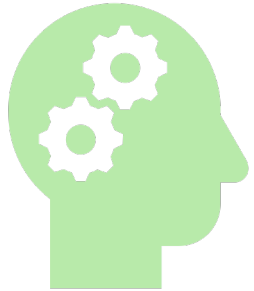
Section C:

Thrive Index – Outcome Measures



Psychological health and safety risk

The below provides an overview of the workers' experience within a respectful workplace context. It is useful for employers to pay attention to not only the experience level but those who reported action as well.



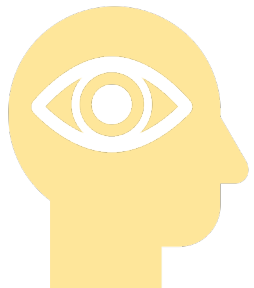
22%

Have not experienced any PHS risk events.



62%

Have experienced two or more PHS risk events



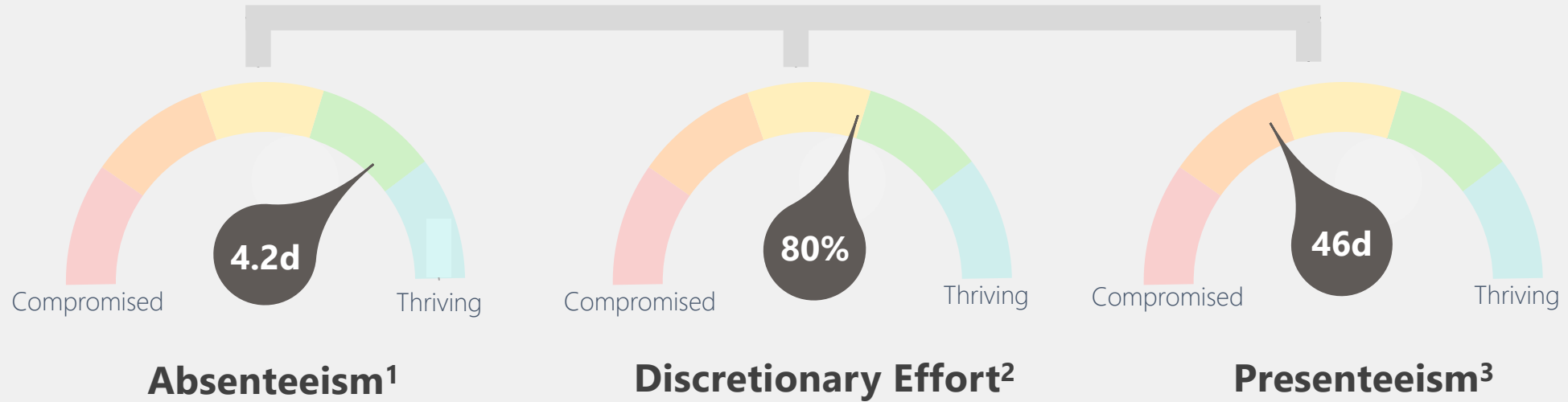
23% (48% reported)

Observed bullying, harassment, discrimination or violence (% reported in brackets)

Issue	Experienced	Reported or Took Action
Physical incident / accident	8%	83%
Misunderstandings	69%	44%
Rudeness (incivility)	50%	40%
Conflict	52%	50%
Bullying (psychological or physical)	18%	45%
Discrimination	13%	30%
Harassment	10%	52%
Violence	7%	81%

Productivity profile

The below provides an overview of the sample population's self-reported productivity levels across three different factors. Notice as the worker MFI score declines towards empty, the risk for loss productivity increases. This provides evidence for the importance of a psychologically safe workplace in supporting workers' MFI scores.

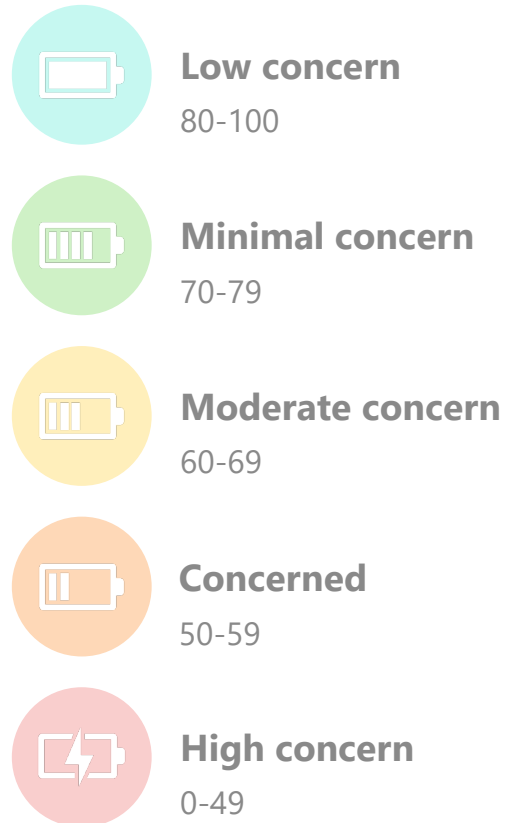


0 to 3.0 days	91 to 100 %	0 to 20 days
3.1 to 5.0 days	81 to 90 %	21 to 30 days
5.1 to 8.0 days	71 to 80 %	31 to 40 days
8.1 to 10.0 days	51 to 70 %	41 to 75 days
10.1 to 15 days	0 to 50 %	76 to 240 days

Note:

1. Employee days missed (excluding vacation days – e.g., sick day)
2. Effort willingly expended by employees on days in optimal health
3. The number of days unwell at work, per FTE, per year

How are the organizations doing on psychosocial hazards?



The following hazards were less of a concern across organizations...








The following hazards were more of a concern across organizations...



*Note: Conflict here refers to workers' level of concern with their time spent in conflict at work.

The link between mental fitness and organizational outcomes

This table highlights the validity of the MFI as it predicts relevant and important workplace outcomes across organizations and types of employees. As shown below, employees with a higher MFI score reported less absenteeism, presenteeism, and higher discretionary effort. For example, employees who indicated they were “empty” had 6 times more days unwell compared to employees who indicated they were “charged”.

MFI Profile	MFI Score	Days Missed (#)	Discretionary Effort (%)	Days Unwell (#)	Avg. Program Impact (1-10)
 Charged n = 683	85	3.5	86%	19	7.0
 Charging n = 2020	74	3.9	82%	29	6.0
 Half-full n = 2282	64	4.3	80%	43	5.3
 Draining n = 1103	55	5.1	75%	69	4.5
 Empty n = 312	44	5.2	71%	114	3.6
Total (n = 8,833)	67	4.2	80%	46	5.6

Section C: Key observations



- 62% of all workers experienced two or more PHS risk events (e.g., discrimination and harassment).
- There is a significant statical difference between charging workers and half-full works across all scales measured in this section. This highlights the importance of employers obtaining data on the percent of employees languishing. As the workers' battery charges drop, their risk for mental harm, mental injury and mental illness increases.
- Paying attention to the percent of workforce that is "drained" can help to mitigate risk, because drained employees have 1.5 more sick days, 15% lower productivity when at work, and 6 times as many days spent unwell as "charged" employees.



Part 6

Summary and Conclusion



Conclusion

Psychological Health and Safety

In the MFI 2.0 data analysis review of the 8833 workers, only 42% are flourishing. This study was done during the pandemic and our results are consistent with other mental health data which indicate that a large percent of workers are struggling with their mental health. The MFI is not a clinical measure nor does it measure degree of risk for mental illness. It is designed to provide data through a psychological health and safety lens on the degree the environment, leaders and workers are contributing to a psychologically safe and healthy workforce with the goal to mitigate harm and to promote mental health.

Changes from the MFI 1.0 to 2.0 at the item and scale level were statistically supported. The MFI continues to be a validated, evidence-based assessment tool that employers can trust is measuring what it claims to be measuring. The review finds support for the idea that MFI data can provide employers the information needed to assess risk and make program decisions. It can also be used to support the PDCA model such as obtaining benchmarks to measure year over year improvement.

The MFI 2.0 review provides evidence the MFI is a reliable and valid tool organizations can use to improve psychological health and safety and worker mental fitness, guide continuous improvement, measure organizational risk factors, and improve the employee experience.

Limitations and Future Directions

The sample of the current study is not representative of the Canadian workforce and therefore is not generalizable. It only provides a snapshot of the current conditions of the organizations that participated.

The MFI has its own commitment to continuous improvement. Results of this study were used to improve the items of the MFI 2.0. The next version of the MFI – MFI 3.0 - has incorporated these changes and will also be analyzed for continuous improvement. Recommended changes from the MFI 2.0 to improve the MFI 3.0 can be found in Appendix A - D.

The MFI has not been specifically investigated to determine its psychometric properties across diverse employees. Specific tests of its generalizability across diverse populations of employees would be an important next step.



Part 7

Appendices



Appendix A: Reliability of Mental Fitness indicators scales

The results below show that the alpha reliabilities for the various scales in the MFI met established criteria for acceptable reliability.

- **Total Alpha: 0.77**
- **Mental pillar: 0.72**
- **Workplace pillar: 0.66**
- **Physical pillar: N/A**
- **Life pillar: N/A**

The physical and life pillars of the MFI represent behavioural indicators. That is, unlike the other scales described here, they are not multiple items designed to assess the same construct. Rather, they represent the frequency of various behaviours (e.g., “How often do you engage in intense activity?”). As such, they are not expected to demonstrate internal consistency and are not included in the Cronbach alpha analysis.

Recommendations for continuous improvement for MFI 3.0:

- Change the physical and life pillar items to reflect the scoring of the other factors by having response scales reflecting 7-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) rather than frequency items.
- Change mental and physical pillar items to have 7-point Likert response scale to improve variability and reliability.

Appendix B: Reliability of Howatt HR's PHS Five-Factor model

The MFI PHS Five Factor structure is Howatt HR's adaptation of the 13 PHS factors. Values higher than 0.6 suggest acceptable reliability.

The results below show that the alpha reliabilities for the various scales in the MFI Five-Factor model met established criteria for acceptable reliability.

- **Total Alpha: 0.92**
- **F1: 0.65**
- **F2: 0.74**
- **F3: 0.75**
- **F4: 0.79**
- **F5: 0.68**

Recommendations for continuous improvement for MFI 3.0:

- Alter or delete items with low inter-item reliability to improve reliability.
- Change items to have 7-point Likert response scale to improve variability and reliability.

Appendix C: Construct validity of Mental Fitness pillars

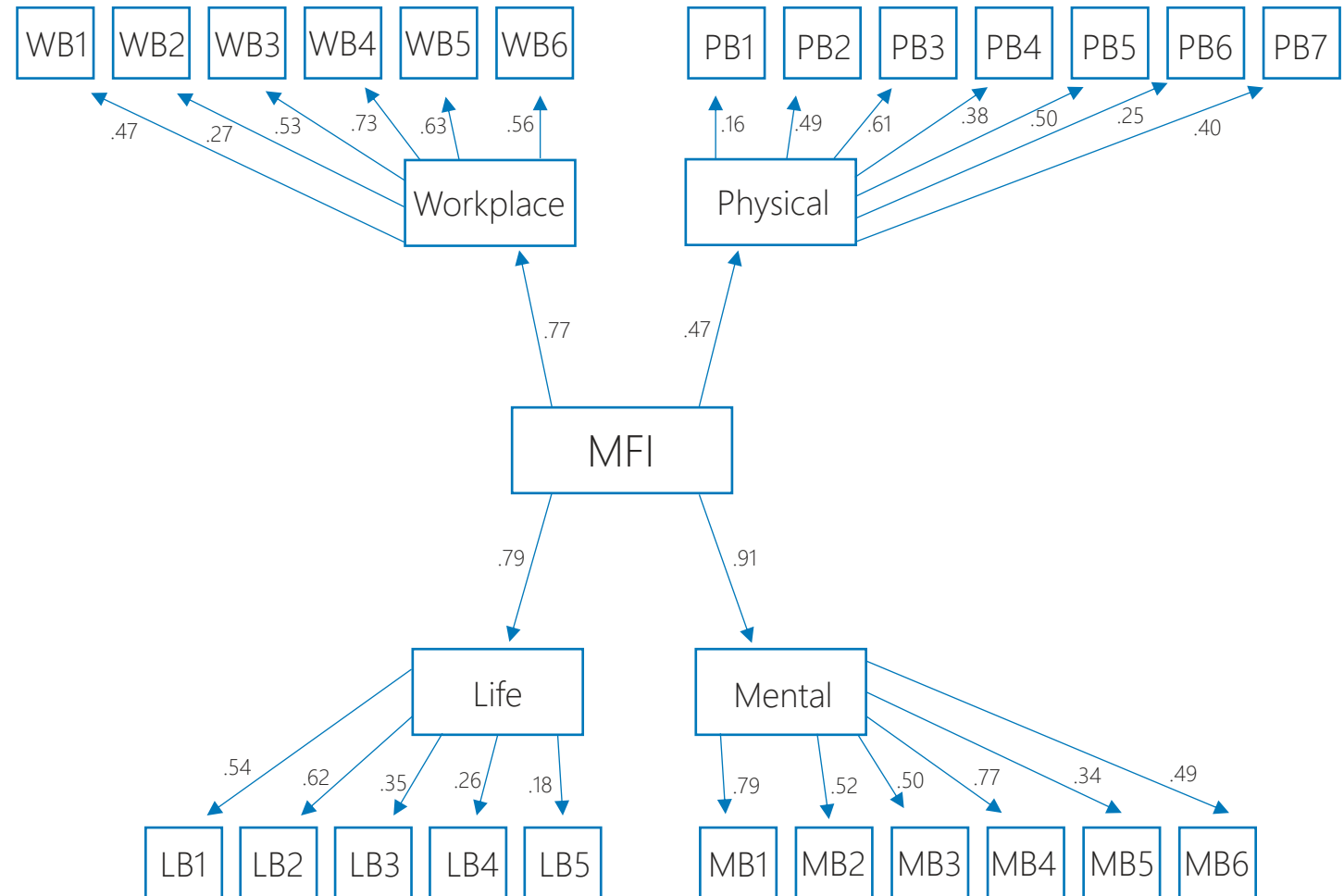
Construct validity refers to the extent to which the measure assesses the construct of interest. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the construct validity of the MFI indicators scales and the Five-Factor PHS.

In general, a comparative fit index (CFI) over .90 and a RMSEA under .08 indicate a good fit between the model and the data.

Here, the results of CFA showed an acceptable level of fit between the model and the data (CFI = .79, RMSEA = .021) supporting the construct validity of the Mental Fitness pillars.

Recommendations for continuous improvement MFI 3.0:

- Alter or delete items with low factor loading (typically factor loading lower than .40) to improve model fit.



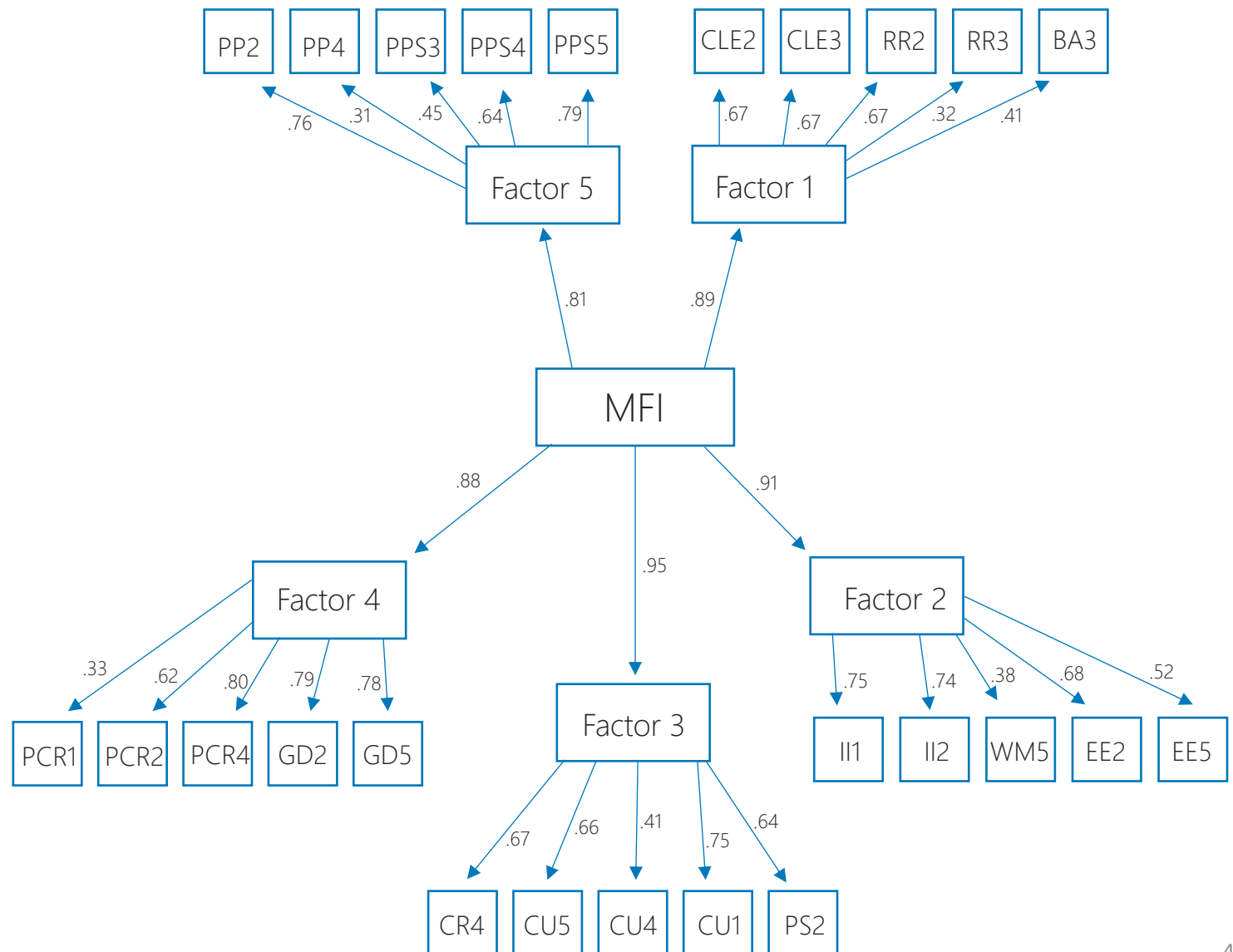
Appendix C: Construct validity of Howatt HR's PHS Five-Factor model

In general, CFI over .90 and RMSEA under .08 indicate a good fit between the model and the data.

Here, the results of CFA showed an acceptable level of fit between the model and the data (CFI = .85, RMSEA = .023) supporting the construct validity of Howatt HR's PHS Five-Factor model.

Recommendations for continuous improvement MFI 3.0:

- Alter or delete items with low factor loading (typically factor loading lower than .40) to improve model fit.



Appendix E: References

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