

How Not to Waste Your Money on Wellbeing

A Leaders' Investment Guide

As Leaders, we're used to tough decisions and dilemmas, and they've been ramped way up by the Covid crisis. With restrictions easing, most businesses are starting to plan for the rest of the year and beyond, updating strategies and tactics for our new reality. With the economy heading goodness knows where, there's understandable nervousness about investment.



It's not just the finances that have been stretched more than ever by the crisis. So have your people. New ways of working, juggling work, home life and home schooling, fears of infection and extensive restrictions have all created new stresses... At the same time that lockdown and distancing took away so many of our usual recovery routes. Even a friend's supportive hug is off limits.... Which could be steadily building up to a second crisis, in Mental Health.

And so emerges another Leaders' dilemma. To leave wellbeing to look after itself, hoping that it'll recover as restrictions lift and the new normal emerges; or to recognise wellbeing as a strategic priority, boosting your organisation's ability to survive and thrive in the new normal...

Waste is a topic close to my heart. I've spent a good chunk of my career taking it out of processes and systems, improving a wide range of operational KPIs, and saving a good few £millions along the way. And for the last 10 years I've worked with individuals and organisations, embedding the skills for better mental wellbeing. Some businesses shy away from Wellbeing as being a bit fluffy - I'm an Engineer, I don't do fluffy. Or as being a distraction from more pressing priorities. We'll explore how Wellbeing can impact those other priorities, long before it escalates to someone going off sick.

Before lockdown, I spent months researching what a broad selection of organisations are doing around wellbeing – what's working, and what's not. And I found a lot of waste. It's frustrating to find so many organisations denying themselves the opportunities which effective wellbeing offers; or investing cash, time and energy in it, only to get patchy results.



This Guide explores the seven most common Wellbeing Wastes (time and / or financial), equipping you to avoid them. So that you can make your wellbeing offering effective in supporting a smooth-running organisation.



So let's start with what mental wellbeing really is...

Mental wellbeing is so much more than avoiding mental ill-health. It's yours and your people's state of mind, and your ability to stay on top form no matter what life's throwing at you. It has so many impacts, on both your people and your business. Let's start with a simple definition

Wellbeing = Resources ≥ Load



The load is made up of the worries, frustrations, challenges, anxieties and upset someone's facing.

The resources are both internal – their natural resilience, experience and coping skills; and those which they can access within their support network – such as the experience of a colleague who can help solve a particular problem, or the understanding ear of someone close.

The more resources someone has, the more load they can cope with without it becoming disruptive. Many people thrive on the right level of stress – as long as it's matched by the resources, it can bring out our very best. And so to the first common way that many organisations waste their time or financial investment in wellbeing...

Waste Number 1 – Not Agreeing Your Aims

Imagine you're looking to invest in a new piece of software for your business. You'd start out by really understanding your current state - what problems you're experiencing, or opportunities you're missing out on that the software might resolve. You'd get clear on your aims, then you'd start looking at your options, and progress to selecting the best software or supplier for what you want to achieve.

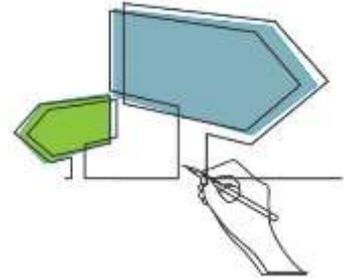
So why do so few organisations do that before investing in wellbeing? The most effective route to reducing mental-health related absences might be different to the most effective for reducing workplace tensions and conflicts. Getting clear on your desired outcomes has three key benefits

- It helps you to target your investment more effectively
- By aligning it with business needs it makes wellbeing a strategic priority, rather than something that gets attention only during awareness events
- And it helps you to track the outcomes, so you can tweak if needed

Someone experiencing wellbeing challenges, not being on top form, is unpleasant for them. And long before it escalates to an absence or resignation, it can impact the organisation in many ways.

How can wellbeing impact the organisation's performance?

Poor quality of decisions: Stepping back and objectively evaluating options takes a lot of resources. If we're already feeling stretched, we're much more likely to put off important decisions, or go with whatever's simplest or most familiar, to conserve those precious resources. So experiencing the raised alert state can hugely impact the quality of both our day to day and longer term decisions.



Reduced creativity and problem-solving: Fight-flight-freeze, the body's response to high stress, shuts down the more creative parts of the thinking - often leaving us unable to spot solutions which would be clear to the more relaxed mind. I've supported so many people who were convinced that there was nothing they could do about the situation causing the stress. But with a few straightforward skills to take the system off high-alert, creative insights and solutions emerge.

Reduced sleep quality: Sleep is one of our most effective ways of replenishing those mental resources. But when we're feeling worried or overwhelmed (and we most need it to be working well), sleep's often the first thing to suffer. It's a vicious cycle – poor quality sleep leaves us less able to deal with the issues and challenges, raising the system to high alert, and further reducing the quality of sleep. Reversing this effect is often one of the first changes people notice, as they improve their skills for bringing the mind off high-alert.

Increased resistance to change: When we feel stretched, we're naturally more resistant to anything which could use up our inner resources and stretch us further. And uncertainty and change are stretching... Taking the system off high alert reduces the natural desire to protect those scarce inner resources, improving flexibility and the willingness to embrace change, and to take on new responsibilities with confidence.



More frequent mistakes: The brain's conscious capacity is limited – we can hold only around 7 pieces of information consciously active at the same time. So using up any of that capacity, for example by worrying, reduces the amount available for focusing on the task in hand. Particularly for tasks requiring clear focus and concentration, this distraction increases errors and mistakes, which can have significant impacts on business performance and customer experience.

Increased conflict: The ability to listen openly, think objectively and see situations from different perspectives are also resource-hungry. So the more our resources are already stretched, the more we're likely to become protective of our own views and wants, potentially increasing conflict in both working and personal relationships.



I'd be willing to bet, with the possible exception of errors and mistakes, that none of these effects are on your KPI dashboard or your strategic business plan. But I'll also bet that almost everything which is, every facet of your business performance, can be affected by them. You can leave those effects to chance, or you can decide to be proactive.

Because managing each of these adverse effects as it surfaces is like playing whack-a-mole. You sort one out, only for the next to surface, and the next, and the next. It can get exhausting. Do you want to keep on managing those effects one by one, or would you rather take apart the mechanism so a lot less of them pop up in the first place?

By increasing the inner resources and bringing (or keeping) the system off high alert, the FAST Pathways skills have a proven track record of improvements in each of these areas. Now 'skills' is a word not often associated with wellbeing. It's often seen as less tangible, more of an innate ability. But if you have someone in your organisation who's really good at something, you'd want to work out how they do it and teach that to other people, so they get good too. That's how the skills I work with were originally developed - by finding people who were really good at dealing with high stress or particular challenges, and working out how.

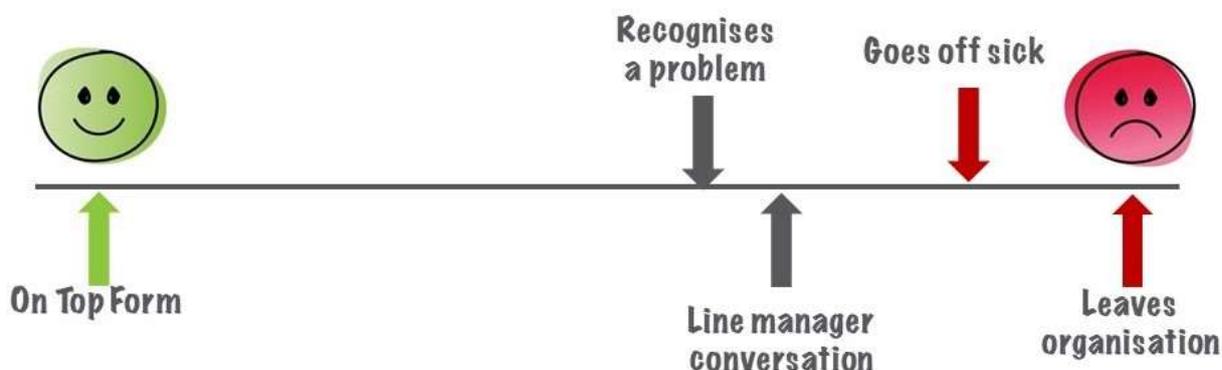
We all have the skills to take certain things in our stride – there'll be some obnoxious individuals you can deal with, without them getting you down. And some worrying situations that you're able to ignore without them keeping you up at night. Skills that with the right guidance, we can all improve.

There are hundreds of examples I could share... Angela's relationship with her boss had got so bad that she was about to resign - learning one straightforward technique to resolve her fight-flight got them back to working well together. Becky learned to confidently navigate the important conversations she used to do anything to avoid, and Jane overcame her fear of speaking up to contribute her expertise in team meetings. Charlotte and Luigi comfortably overcame their terror of presenting, which had been holding back both of their careers, and Donna resolved her health fears, which had caused her multiple work absences. You can read about these and a selection of other favourite skills successes at

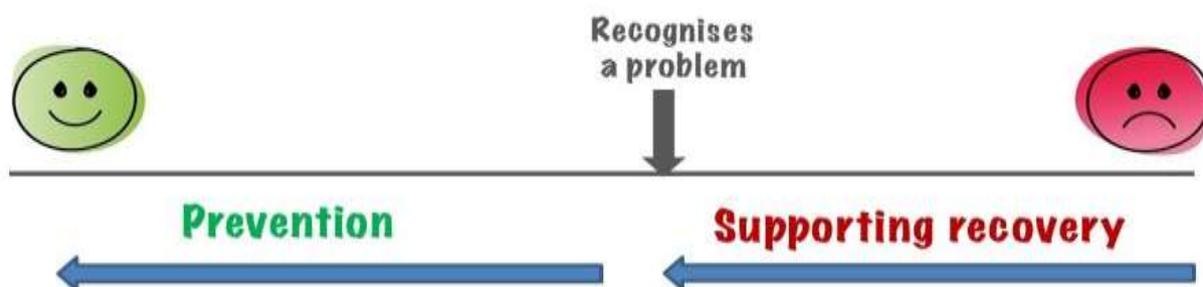
<https://www.fast-pathways.com/successes.html>

Waste Number 2 – Not Investing in Prevention

In selecting your wellbeing activities, it's important to consider where they take effect - because it's rare for someone to go straight from being on absolutely top form to catastrophic mental ill-health.



Usually, there's quite a slow a progression – they start out fine, then as the load starts to build, those resources get more stretched, and they start moving towards the right on the diagram. At some point, and it's usually quite a way along, they start to recognise there's a problem – that they're not just having a bad few days. There might be a conversation with their line manager. It might just escalate straight into them going off sick. And if it still carries on, it might escalate all the way to them leaving the organisation. Or worse...



Activities which take effect along the left hand side, before anyone's recognised a problem, are focused on prevention. On stopping the problem from building up, so the person stays well. The activities which apply to the right hand side, things like mental health first aid and access to EAP support, are about supporting recovery for someone who's experiencing mental ill-health.

So take a few minutes to think about the wellbeing activities which you're either already doing or you're considering, and mark on that diagram where they take effect. Are they prevention or recovery? Specifically, how does that activity stop the progressing issue, and what else needs to be in place for that to happen? So for example, if MHFA is part of your offering, is there a confidential space, and time away from the job, for those conversations to happen?

Because like any investment, it might not be the cheapest option which delivers the greatest returns.

Understanding how an activity stops that progression away from top form, how many people the activity applies to, and the size of change it can deliver, all support those informed investment decisions.

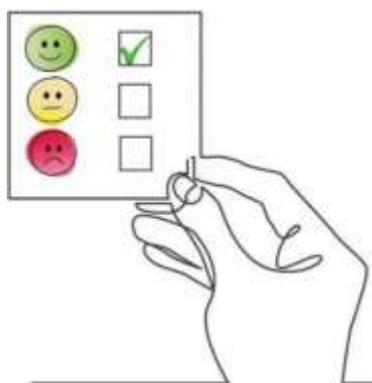
Many organisations are investing only in recovery – on reducing the stigma of mental ill-health so that people are more likely to seek help when they're experiencing problems, and better supporting those who are struggling. It's important, but on its own it's the equivalent of sending in our people to do heavy lifting with no manual handling training, then making sure there's excellent physio available for the resulting injuries. Prevention's just as important for mental health as it is for physical, and overlooking it is an enormous missed opportunity.

Because someone's performance can start to be affected as soon as they're anywhere to the right of Top Form. And the further they've moved away from top form, the more difficult and time-consuming it can be for them to get back there. So by keeping your people closer to the diagram's left, effective wellbeing provision gives you that access to more of their best, more of the time.

Waste Number 3 – Not Balancing the Mix of Activities

Building on that definition of Wellbeing = Resources \geq Load, to be effective, any activity should do one of three things

Reduce the load - removing or reducing something that's using up resources. If someone's route to work takes them through horrendous traffic at school drop-off times, letting them flex their hours to travel when the roads are quieter removes that resource-draining frustration of a horrible journey.



Reduce a load's effects – maybe minimising each person's exposure to highly stressful tasks, by rotating people regularly.

Or one of my favourite ways - by improving the ability to park a nagging worry to be able to concentrate on something else, or get a good night's sleep. The worry's still there, but its effects are much less. And it can be much easier to achieve than you might have thought...

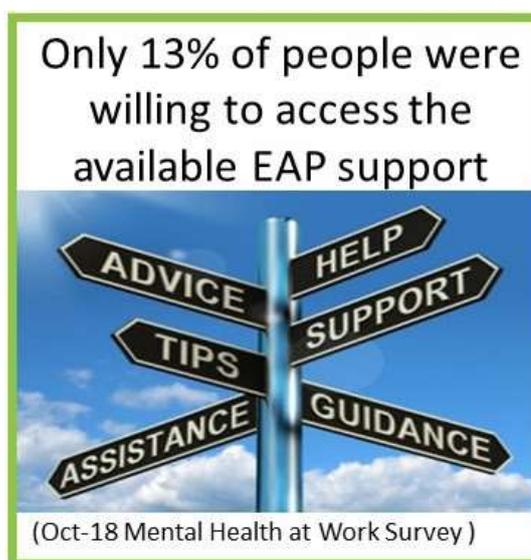
Increase the resources. For example, if someone has to deal with a lot of stressed-out customers, increasing their skills to not get mood hoovered by it. To not get triggered if someone's getting abusive, and to be able to put it completely out of mind when the conversation's over. Skills to increase those inner resources, and people's ability to deal with challenging situations comfortably.

As we emerge from the Covid crisis, it's also worth considering the additional loads which your people have been, or will be facing, such as

- Starting to travel to work again (or for those who've been furloughed, starting work again).
- Dealing with challenging working relationships or difficult conversations, which have been easier to avoid when working from home.
- Healing a split in the organisation's culture between those who've been furloughed and not
- Addressing strains in previously strong personal relationships, which may have resulted from either too much or too little distance during lockdown
- Continuing to deal with the ongoing fears and uncertainty of both the virus and its economic impacts

Waste Number 4 – Investing in Things Which People Don't Use

Providing access to effective prevention or support is only half of the story of successful wellbeing. Your people also have to be aware of what's available, and willing to use it.



Which leaves a lot of organisations investing in good faith, in support which they may not be even be aware that their people aren't using.

Many organisations have invested in Mental Health First Aid training – it makes sense to get ahead of it becoming a legal requirement. But it's a route that many have taken without fully understanding what MHFA is (and importantly, isn't). MHFA was designed for use by the general public. It's about being able to spot the signs of mental health problems (particularly for suicide prevention), and signpost someone in distress to professional help. That's all. But not everyone wants to talk to a colleague about what they're experiencing. And even if they're willing to, and willing to be signposted, in many areas the GP's waiting lists for support are over six months...

A recent HSE report concluded that “There is limited evidence that MHFA training leads to sustained improvement in the ability of those trained to help colleagues experiencing mental ill health.” Academic research has found that the training is good for raising awareness, but unproven as a strategy for improving mental health.



EAP access and MHFA can play an important role, with the necessary tracking and tweaking to make them effective. Tracking the take-up of support, effectiveness of the outcomes, and understanding the reasons for gaps between expected and actual are vital to identify issues with either engagement or effectiveness, which might need to be addressed for these investments to deliver returns.

Sustained engagement is just as important for prevention. Over the years, I’ve supported so many people who’d found themselves again and again on the wrong side of the Load-Resources balance. It’s one of the main drawbacks of trying to manage stress – it goes something like this....

The load starts to build to the level where it’s exceeding resources. It gets uncomfortable, so the person takes action. Whether that’s changing the way they prioritise, taking time out to exercise more often or talk things through, or practising mindfulness or meditation. If it works, the stress reduces, they heave a sigh of relief, and whatever they’d started doing differently tails off.

Because we’re rubbish at doing what’s good for us, consistently enough to maintain the results



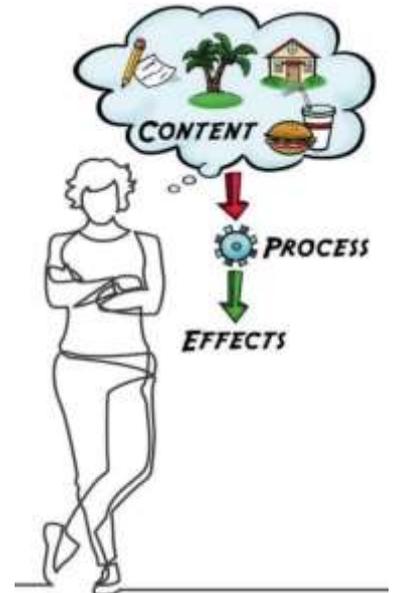
You only have to look at how few people eat their five fruit and veg, and get their 10,000 steps every day to see this in action. Like eating well and exercising often, trying to manage stress relies on changing behaviours – if it’s not sustained, it leads to that yo-yo stressing. Just like yo-yo dieting, and just as ineffective.

So I’ve spent years developing the FAST Pathways Academy programmes as an alternative to trying to manage stress... To build those inner resources, improving wellbeing and optimising performance. They work by re-training the outside-awareness thinking to do things differently all by itself. Meaning that the results last without on-going practice, bypassing that reliance on changing behaviours.

We can get very caught up in what we're thinking about (the content), and we notice how it makes us feel (the effects). But most people don't realise that in between them, thinking has a process, and its characteristics determine how those thoughts make you feel. So even without changing the situation itself, you can often change the way it makes you feel by tweaking the process.

Each of the skills takes only around 10 minutes to learn, so breakthrough results are often experienced quickly. This ability to change the way you automatically respond to a stressful or challenging situation has two key advantages

- It removes the reliance on having to change the situation itself (which isn't always possible) to resolve the discomfort.
- Ending the unpleasant fight-flight reaction, as well as feeling better, also re-enables your more creative thinking and problem-solving which shut down when you're under threat. So often, just by reducing that discomfort, new ways to address the situation become clear. Which can be good for business as well as your people...



When I'm speaking at events, one common question is where does the responsibility for wellbeing really lie – how much is with the organisation, and how much with the individual? To me, it's taking the horse to the water. As a responsible organisation, you can make that water as convenient, and as attractive as possible. You can lead the horse to it. Then it's up to the horse whether to drink. And not every one will. But if you've done your part right, most will. And you get those benefits to performance from every one of them who does.

Waste Number 5 – Not Measuring

I've set up many data capture, reporting and performance management systems from scratch, which has taught me that very often the data that you have, isn't actually what's needed to drive improved performance. So it is worth giving it some thought in your wellbeing offering.



Good metrics can help inform your wellbeing business case. The direct financial costs of absences and resignations are the tip of the iceberg, and without measuring what's underneath, you have no idea what's waiting to surface. That's what our National workplace stress survey aimed to do, with responses from across a wide range of roles and industries.

32% of people had often considered taking time off for stress

18% of people had often considered leaving their current role because of stress

And yet most businesses are unaware of what these numbers would be for their people.

In any investment, it's important to start with a solid financial business case – but it's not always easy to find the time when wellbeing's just one of many priorities. So like the other Wellbeing Strategy Routemap resources, this straightforward model was created to take out some of the legwork. You can access the Excel model and User Guide at



<https://www.fast-pathways.com/cost-model.html>

And of course, measurement and tracking aren't just about setting your business case. Very few solutions land absolutely right first time. If we think back to that example of the investment in a new piece of software – as it went live, you'd track its performance against those expected outcomes, and make the adjustments needed to get it as effective as possible.

Wellbeing isn't as easy to measure as your system up-time, but without tracking awareness, engagement and outcomes, you've no idea whether what you're doing is working. Which denies you the opportunity to tweak and adjust, the get the best outcomes.

Waste Number 6 – Not Building on What's Already Working

This is a waste which I've experienced (and been guilty of!) time and time again. As problem-solvers, we're naturally drawn to the problems, to what needs fixing. But this is another missed opportunity, for two reasons:

Firstly, noticing what's working as well as what's not shrinks the change, making it less scary. And secondly, transferring elements of what's working across to what's not – strategies or best practices - can get it all working much more quickly and smoothly than trying to create a solution from scratch.



Take stress, for example. One of my most popular interactive talks is 'Skills to Keep Stress Useful', which often gets a double-take, because people aren't used to thinking of stress as anything but disruptive. Stress can take many different forms - it's one little word which we use to describe anything from a traffic jam to a messy divorce, covering a wide range of emotions including upset, frustration, anxiety and fear.

Not all stress is bad – it can also be the challenges you rise to and grow from, even if they're not ones you'd have chosen. The skill you're determined to master despite the setbacks along the way. The loved one's challenges that you're supporting them through, strengthening that relationship. The stresses which give life meaning, and without them it'd be pretty boring.

Even just becoming more aware of those benefits tunes in your noticing, so you start to notice more of them. So one early effect for people taking my skills programmes, is that they often start to feel better just by that increased awareness that there's more to stress than the problem ones.

And many of your people's stresses – the difficult customer or colleague, tight deadlines or competing priorities, don't just affect how they're feeling. They affect the organisation's performance. So the more of those stresses get effectively actioned, the better it is for business.

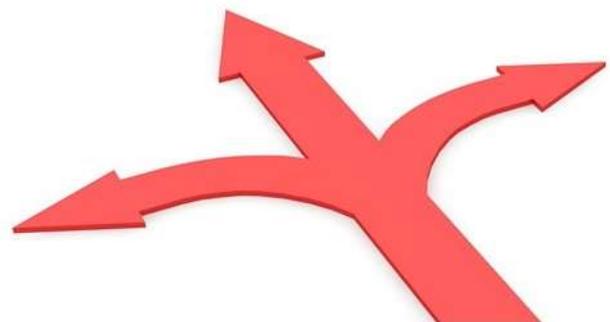
Waste Number 7 – Offering too Much

More is better, right? Not always, and not when it comes to Wellbeing. Because when offered too much choice, we're likely to either default to what's most familiar, or choose nothing at all. Imagine that you're in college, studying towards a degree. One afternoon, you're offered a choice of activities for that evening – either to attend a one-off lecture given by one of your favourite authors, or to go to the library and study.

Now I guess it might depend on what deadlines were looming, but personally, I'd go with the author option – much more enjoyable. So not surprisingly, of the people given that choice by psychologists Amos Tversky and Eldar Shafir in their experiment, only 21% chose to miss out on their favourite author and head for the library.

A second group were given a similar choice, but with the addition of a third option

- Attend the author lecture
- Study in the library
- Watch a film that you've been wanting to see for a while





Amazingly, 40% of students chose to study. Adding a third enjoyable option doubled the number of people who made the least enjoyable (but most familiar) choice. The same can just as easily apply at work – spend your lunchtime at a mindfulness class, a yoga session, or catching up on emails....?

That frustrating tendency to ignore good alternatives and stick with what's most familiar is part of the brain's natural efficiency routines. Making decisions uses resources, which we're hard-wired to conserve. So even when it doesn't make sense, it kicks in without us realising. So however tempting it might be to offer a little bit of everything in your wellbeing, hoping there'll be something for everyone, remember its more likely effect. And the more things you offer, the more complicated it becomes to track what's working, and what still needs tweaking

That same effect can kick in on organisational decisions too. When you're faced with such a huge array of choices of what to include in your wellbeing offering, it's easy to take the path of least resistance – choose what's most familiar, what everyone else is doing. It reduces the decision complexity, and reduces the effort of getting your people to engage with something they've never heard of. But that ease doesn't always make it the optimum choice.

The typical returns on investment

One of the most comprehensive studies so far was published alongside the government-commissioned Thriving at Work report. Now updated in 2020, data from 23 different programmes revealed that the average return on wellbeing investment of

£5.20 for every £1 spent

Data from MIND shows that among the FTSE 100 Companies, those which invest in wellbeing consistently out-perform those which don't – by 10%

So we've explored the seven most common wellbeing wastes. I hope we've equipped you to engage your fellow decision-makers, and avoid those wastes in your wellbeing provision.

Waste 1 – Not agreeing your aims

Waste 2 – Not investing in prevention

Waste 3 – the Load-Resources Mix

Waste 4 – Investing in things which people don't use

Waste 5 – Not measuring

Waste 6 – Not building on what's working

Waste 7 – Offering too much choice

Eliminating Your Wellbeing Wastes – What's Next?

The Wellformance audit is a leadership tool to address 4 wastes in one, helping you to cut through the noise and frustrations of competing priorities.

Waste 1 – Not agreeing your aims. It structures your discussion, so that you can quickly agree your aims and priorities - making wellbeing part of the wider strategy, and keeping it prioritized.

Waste 5 – Not measuring: It gives you a clear baseline against which to measure your progress.

Waste 6 – Not building on what's working: It helps you pinpoint what's already going well, to maintain and build on (and making what you've still to tackle less scary because you're not starting from scratch).

Waste 7 – Too much choice: It explores six big effects of wellbeing on performance, giving you a simple framework to target your activities for maximum impact.



It takes about 20 minutes from each stakeholder. We collate the results into your Wellformance Report... Supporting simpler, effective wellbeing decisions, to save you the lost time and frustrations of competing priorities and false starts.

You can find out more at

<https://www.fast-pathways.com/wellformance.html>

Sue Evans, FAST Pathways Creator and Lead Consultant



I spent the first half of my career delivering Operational Excellence and culture change for international organisations including Danone, Corning and Lloyds Banking Group. Highlights included leading a programme which more than doubled site productivity, and delivering £1.9M waste reduction in under 5 months. Leading these kind of changes, I experienced a fair amount of stress – and it wasn't always useful!

But it laid some solid foundations in understanding that we don't always do what's good for us, even when we recognise that what we're doing isn't working (like being told 'not to worry about it' when I presented a £1M, risk-free potential saving to my leadership team....). Changing mindsets and behaviours isn't easy. That's why trying to manage stress gives such patchy results, and why the skills I work with are such a powerful alternative.

Stress is a given in any organisation. Sometimes it gets in the way, and sometimes it can drive even better performance. I believe in every individual's right to a challenging and fulfilling working life, and in every organisation's right to reap the rewards of building and supporting a capable and motivated workforce. That might sound idealistic, but the right know-how can help to shape it. As a Professional Speaker and experienced facilitator, I understand the challenges of engaging your people to deliver sustainable results. The most popular ways of accessing my support include

- Straightforward training, both face-to-face and on-line, to improve both mental wellbeing and performance
- Speaking at events, from Conferences to Lunch-and-Learn sessions. Because the skills I share are fast-acting, delegates often start to notice differences right away
- Working one-to-one to deliver breakthrough results with individuals who
 - are experiencing Mental Health problems
 - have specific development needs
 - or are in high stress roles

I'm a Master Practitioner and Trainer of NLP (neuro-linguistic programming), and an Approved Havening® Practitioner, trained in each by the original creators. I have a Diploma in CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), a combined Diploma in Hypnotherapy, Coaching and NLP; and Institute of Leadership and Management certification as a Mentor and Coach.

and if you're curious about how I delivered that £1M step-change anyway, drop me a line!