Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Work-related wellbeing: What good looks like

NEW ZEALAND WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE WELLBEING-ENHANCING FACTORS OF WORK

August 2022

WORKSAFE
Mahi Haumaru Aotearoa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A qualitative, exploratory research project was undertaken by WorkSafe New Zealand to understand more about what hauora[1] and wellbeing enhancing factors of work look like for New Zealand workers, and to inform the design of initiatives aimed at improving work-related wellbeing[2] Fifty-seven participants were interviewed or participated in group workshops and represented a broad range of demographics (for example, industries, ethnicities, skill levels, locations, organisation sizes, and age groups)

The workers we spoke with see their work and their wellbeing as strongly interconnected. Many workers had a holistic and interconnected perspective of wellbeing, consistent with Te Whare Tapa Whā model of hauora: te taha tinana (physical), te taha hinengaro (mental and emotional), te taha whānau (family and social), and te taha wairua (spiritual).

Most workers viewed the responsibility for work-related wellbeing as a partnership between workers and leadership. However, many indicated that in practice they would be reluctant to speak up about factors impacting their wellbeing, citing mixed success when speaking up in the past.
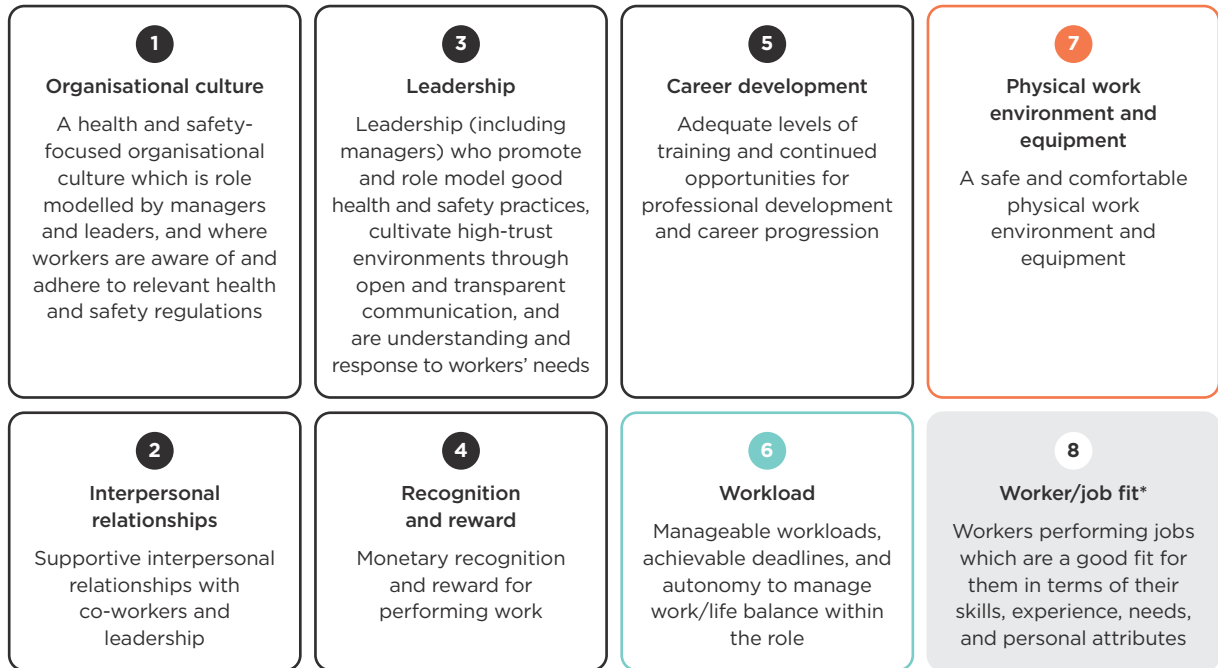
Participants see good work-related wellbeing impacting many facets of both work and home life. Improved productivity, quality of work, staff retention, interpersonal relationships, and life outside of work (for example, health behaviours, participation in social and recreational activities) were cited by workers. Workers with good work-related wellbeing were more likely to demonstrate commitment towards and be active promoters of the organisations they worked for, and were less likely to be absent from work. Most participants see the psychosocial impacts of work as having the most influence on their wellbeing, with many having experienced negative impacts at work as a result of psychosocial hazards[3] Some reported having left jobs in order to minimise the harm being caused to their wellbeing by their work.

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[1] Hauora, or 'health', is defined as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.' As defined in World Health Organization. (2020). Basic documents: forty-ninth edition (including amendments adopted up to 31 May 2019). Retrieved from: https://apps.who.int/gb/bd/pdf_files/BD_49th-en.pdf#page=1

[2] Work-related wellbeing is the impact that work can have on people's health and wellbeing.

[3] Psychosocial hazards refer to the 'aspects of the design and management of work, and it social and organisational contexts that may have the potential for causing psychological or physical harm'. As defined in Cox, T., Griffiths, A., & Rial-Gonzalez, E. (2000). Research on work related stress. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Eight protective factors were identified as positively impacting workers' work-related wellbeing and **What good looks like** in the workplace:

1

Organisational culture

A health and safety-focused organisational culture which is role modelled by managers and leaders, and where workers are aware of and adhere to relevant health and safety regulations

3

Leadership

Leadership (including managers) who promote and role model good health and safety practices, cultivate high-trust environments through open and transparent communication, and are understanding and response to workers' needs

5

Career development

Adequate levels of training and continued opportunities for professional development and career progression

7

Physical work environment and equipment

A safe and comfortable physical work environment and equipment

2

Interpersonal relationships

Supportive interpersonal relationships with co-workers and leadership

4

Recognition and reward

Monetary recognition and reward for performing work

6

Workload

Manageable workloads, achievable deadlines, and autonomy to manage work/life balance within the role

8

Worker/job fit*

Workers performing jobs which are a good fit for them in terms of their skills, experience, needs, and personal attributes

Relevant ISO45003 category

● Social factors at work

● Aspects of how work is organised

● Work environment, equipment, and hazardous tasks

The research also focused on understanding what good looks like for workers in specific industries (healthcare, construction, and manufacturing) and amongst specific worker groups (young workers, Māori, and Pasifika).

Note: The results of this research reflect only the views of those participants who were invited and opted to participate in the study. Due to the small sample size, the results are not intended to be generalisable and should only be regarded as a starting point for further consideration.

* Worker/job fit is not reflected as a specific psychosocial factor in ISO45003.

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1.0
Research overview

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1.1 **Research purpose, aim and objectives**

WorkSafe is motivated to reduce the number of New Zealanders suffering ill-health as a result of their work. We know that workers perceive a link between their work and their health and wellbeing. However, we need to know more about how workers see this relationship to help us design initiatives that will have the greatest impact. For this reason, WorkSafe wants to know what 'good' work-related wellbeing looks like.

Research aim: To gain insight into how workers see the relationship between their health and wellbeing and the occupational, personal, and social demands of work, to inform the design of initiatives aimed at improving work-related wellbeing.

Objective: To collect, thematically analyse, and report on qualitative data from workers to develop a nuanced understanding of:

– how workers understand the relationship between work and health

– what aspects of work and the workplace are likely to enhance health and wellbeing

– work-related equity issues that impact health and wellbeing.

– How perspectives vary across cultures, industries, sectors, and roles?

1.2 **Research approach**

A qualitative approach was adopted for this project to undertake an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of full-time workers. The data was collected using a semi-structured approach, with a discussion guide to address key research questions as well as free-flow conversation to explore issues of importance raised by participants. Participants were recruited predominantly through two research panels, as well as via networking by the research team.

Data collection took place between June and July 2021 and included 30 individual interviews (in-person and online) as well as six group workshops (focusing specifically on healthcare, construction, manufacturing, Māori, Pasifika, and young workers aged 18–24 years) which were audio recorded and fully transcribed. An inductive analysis was applied to the data to generate themes. It should be noted that the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand, and as such the results should be considered within this context. At the time of data collection, there was no known active COVID-19 cases in the community.

The research is exploratory and not intended to be generalisable, but rather represents the views and experiences of the participants who were invited and opted to take part. Due to the small sample size, the results are not intended to be generalisable and should only be regarded as a starting point for further consideration.

1.3 Participant demographics

Fifty-seven participants were included, all of whom were in employment for 30 hours or more per week. The participants reflected a broad mix of workers in terms of demographics. Table 1 provides a breakdown of participant demographics by industry, organisation size, role level, location type, gender, ethnicity, and age group. Three were self-employed while others worked across the public sector, private sector, and not-for-profit organisations. Participants were spread geographically across New Zealand.

INDUSTRY	(n)
Healthcare workers	13
Construction	9
Manufacturing	9
Education and training	4
Public administration and safety	4
Professional services/finance and insurance/real estate	4
Retail	3
Transport, postal, and warehouse	3
Information, media, and telecommunications	2
Accommodation and food service	2
Agriculture and forestry	1
Other	3

ROLE LEVEL	(n)
Mid-level skills worker*	19
Highly skilled worker**	16
Low-skills worker	11
Mid-level management/supervisory	8
Senior manager	3

ORGANISATION SIZE (NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES)	(n)
1–5	8
6–19	10
20–49	10
50+	29

LOCATION TYPE	(n)
Main urban	41
Regional city	6
Small town	6
Rural	4

GENDER	(n)
Male	33
Female	24

ETHNICITY†	(n)
European	30
Māori	14
Pasifika	9
Asian/Indian	6
Other	1

AGE GROUP	(n)
18–24	13
25–30	2
31–45	10
46–60	9
60+	6

TABLE 1: Participant demographics by industry, organisation size, role level, location type, gender, ethnicity, and age group

* Usually requiring a certificate or significant on-the-job training.

** Usually requiring a degree or diploma.

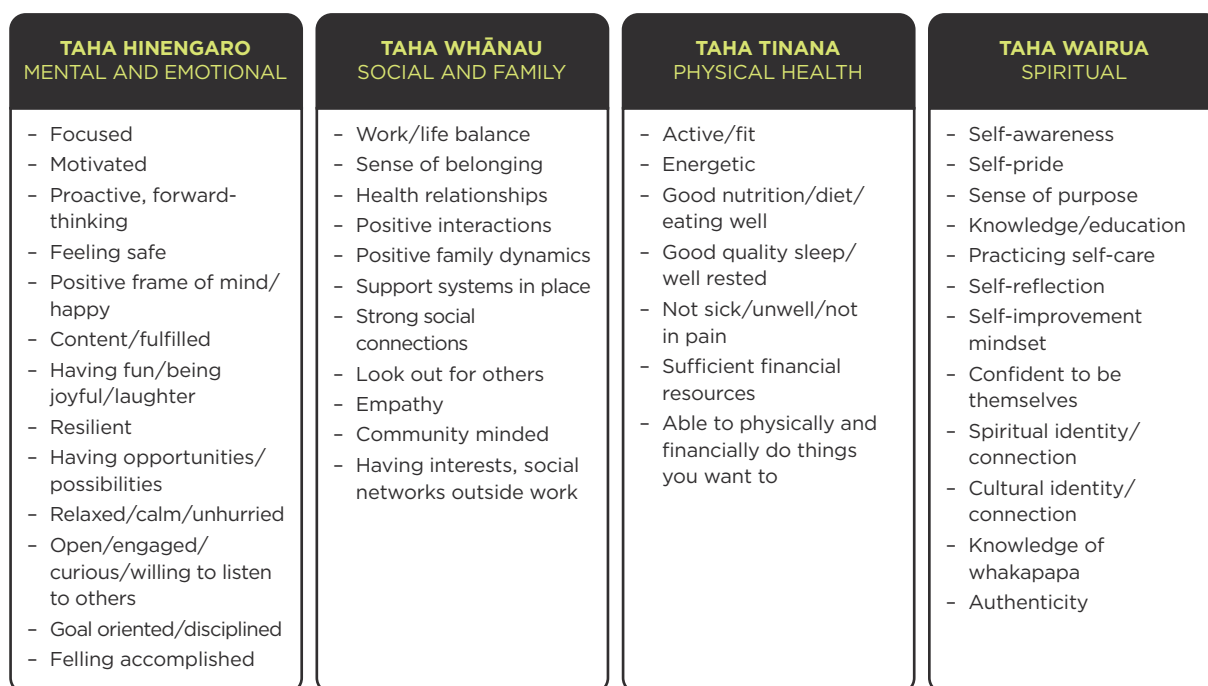† Multiple responses allowed.

2.0
How do workers perceive wellbeing?

Many workers demonstrated a holistic perspective of their wellbeing. Most feel that their wellbeing is made up of physical and mental health, as well as social and relational wellbeing (that is, having strong supportive social connections and relationships), all of which are interconnected.

> "Wellbeing is a state of mind and a state of presence."

> "It doesn't really matter how much you might exercise or eat right. If you're not in the right head space, you can get burnout. You could be so healthy working out three times a week but just be really tired mentally and not be able to focus on things because you're not giving yourself that mental space."

Participants offered a wide range of factors that constitute good wellbeing (see Figure 1), consistent with Sir Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā[4] model of hauora: te taha tinana (physical), te taha hinengaro (mental and emotional), te taha whānau (family and social), and te taha wairua (spiritual). Te Whare Tapa Whā demonstrates how wellbeing is made up of mutually reinforcing areas that support each other like the walls of a whare ('house'). The model emphasises how our overall sense of wellbeing is influenced by the resources we have within these areas.

TAHA HINENGARO MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL	TAHA WHĀNAU SOCIAL AND FAMILY	TAHA TINANA PHYSICAL HEALTH	TAHA WAIRUA SPIRITUAL
– Focused – Motivated – Proactive, forward-thinking – Feeling safe – Positive frame of mind/happy – Content/fulfilled – Having fun/being joyful/laughter – Resilient – Having opportunities/possibilities – Relaxed/calm/unhurried – Open/engaged/curious/willing to listen to others – Goal oriented/disciplined – Felling accomplished	– Work/life balance – Sense of belonging – Health relationships – Positive interactions – Positive family dynamics – Support systems in place – Strong social connections – Look out for others – Empathy – Community minded – Having interests, social networks outside work	– Active/fit – Energetic – Good nutrition/diet/eating well – Good quality sleep/well rested – Not sick/unwell/not in pain – Sufficient financial resources – Able to physically and financially do things you want to	– Self-awareness – Self-pride – Sense of purpose – Knowledge/education – Practicing self-care – Self-reflection – Self-improvement mindset – Confident to be themselves – Spiritual identity/connection – Cultural identity/connection – Knowledge of whakapapa – Authenticity

FIGURE 1: Factors identified by participants which constitute good wellbeing

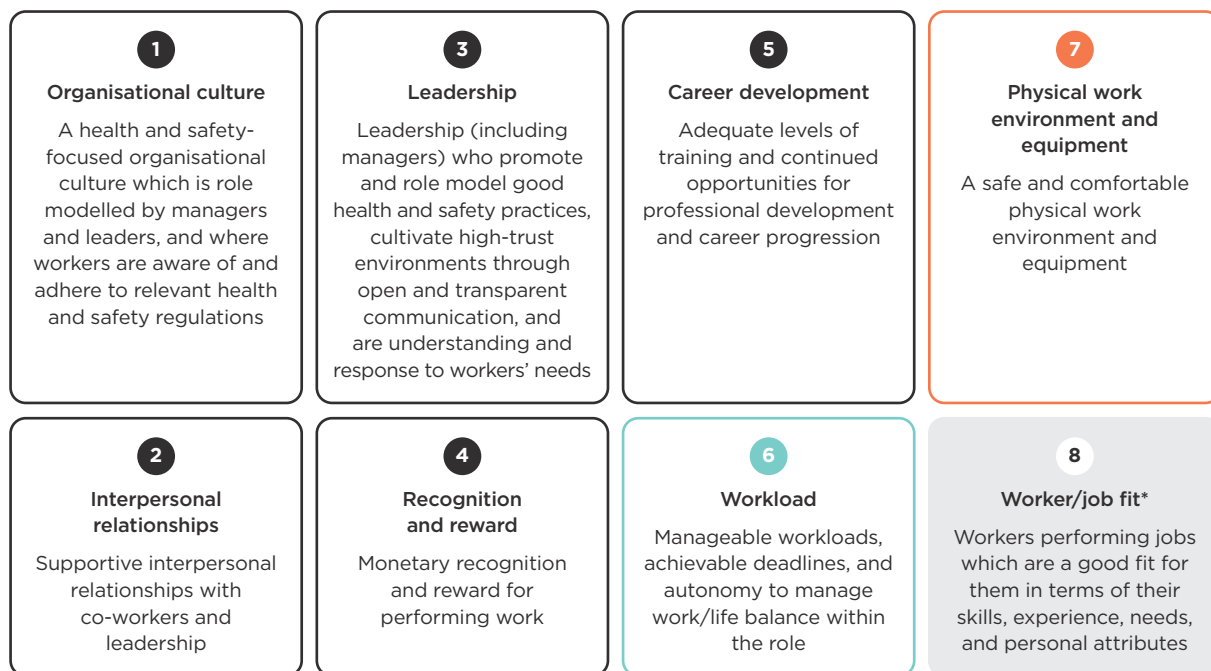4 Durie, M. (1998). Waiora: Māori health and development. Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford

3.0
Work-related wellbeing: What good looks like

IN THIS SECTION:

Workers identified a range of protective factors which contributed positively towards their work-related wellbeing (see Figure 2). These fit into eight broad categories and are explored in the following sub-sections.

1	**3**	**5**	**7**
Organisational culture	**Leadership**	**Career development**	**Physical work environment and equipment**
A health and safety-focused organisational culture which is role modelled by managers and leaders, and where workers are aware of and adhere to relevant health and safety regulations	Leadership (including managers) who promote and role model good health and safety practices, cultivate high-trust environments through open and transparent communication, and are understanding and response to workers' needs	Adequate levels of training and continued opportunities for professional development and career progression	A safe and comfortable physical work environment and equipment
2	**4**	**6**	**8**
Interpersonal relationships	**Recognition and reward**	**Workload**	**Worker/job fit***
Supportive interpersonal relationships with co-workers and leadership	Monetary recognition and reward for performing work	Manageable workloads, achievable deadlines, and autonomy to manage work/life balance within the role	Workers performing jobs which are a good fit for them in terms of their skills, experience, needs, and personal attributes

Relevant ISO45003 category

● Social factors at work

● Aspects of how work is organised

● Work environment, equipment, and hazardous tasks

FIGURE 2: Protective factors identified by workers which contribute to work-related wellbeing

Some of the workers identified protective factors for their work-related wellbeing relevant to the external environment but outside of the organisation's direct control. This included the impacts of immigration policy on appropriate resourcing levels, availability of government funding, stable supply chains, the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, and other new or proposed government policy changes. Whilst this may demonstrate workers' awareness of the broader environment, the following sub-sections pertain only to the factors in the participants' direct environment and which are within the remit of the organisation to affect change.

* Worker/job fit is not reflected as a specific psychosocial factor in ISO45003.

3.1 Organisational culture

Workers highlighted the significant impact that having a health and safety-focused organisational culture can have on their wellbeing. Having a culture which emphasises and prioritises health and safety helps workers to feel safe at work and provides them with peace of mind.

> "I have been impressed with the health and safety side of things, how seriously it is taken. Taking care of their employees is important to them."

Organisational culture has been defined as the 'learned patterns of beliefs, values, assumptions and behavioural norms that manifest themselves at different levels of observability'.[5] Organisational culture is intimately linked to each of the protective factors identified by this research. For example, if work is designed to allow for appropriate levels of attention to be paid to health and safety, this will help to support a health and safety-focused culture. However, for the purposes of summarising the results of this research, organisational culture is treated here as a separate variable. Any action taken to affect positive changes towards the protective factors in the subsequent sections are likely to contribute towards a health and safety-focused culture.

Workers highlighted the importance of an organisational culture where workers are aware of and adhere to health and safety regulations and good practices, and an environment of psychological safety so that staff can raise issues.

> "If you have a good culture, people are happy to put their hand up and talk about things".

When issues raised are followed through on and actions are taken to improve health and safety, this promotes workers' feeling of safety at work and helps workers and leadership to build trust with one another.

Workers also identified the importance of a supportive and high-trust organisational culture marked by open and transparent communication regarding health and safety (for example, where outcomes of raised issues are communicated back to workers). A culture that is supportive is likely to provide opportunities for external support for workers, for example in the form of a fully funded Employee Assistance Programme or other arrangement.

The workers we spoke with identified the pivotal role that an organisation's leadership (including senior management, people managers/team leads, business owners, and boards of directors) play 'from the top down' in setting the tone for their organisation's culture, which can have a significant impact on wellbeing. Many workers identified the importance of leadership in shaping culture by promoting and role modelling good health and safety practices. Other leader behaviours which can contribute to a positive and safety-focused organisational culture are discussed further in the 'Leadership' section.

> "There are so many policies in place, like no bullying, no sexual harassment and if anything happens, someone would get involved straight away. They won't let it slide. At the induction they said things that they won't tolerate."

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[5] Schein, E. H. (2017). Organizational culture and leadership. 5th ed. John Wiley & Sons.

3.2 Interpersonal relationships

Workers across all sectors and role levels emphasised the impact that their interpersonal relationships with co-workers and leadership have on their work-related wellbeing, with there being a general agreement that the 'people can make or break a workplace'. Supportive interpersonal relationships were seen to have a mitigating effect on other risk factors in the workplace.

> "When [boss] is reassuring and says "Hey, do you need help, what's going on?" Not that I do require help, but I know it's there. It doesn't mean that he lets me slack off, it means he has a high expectation and if it's not being met, whether he can help."

Characteristics that workers valued in their relationships included being supportive, helpful, accepting, friendly, collaborative, understanding, and accepting of diversity. In some organisations, co-workers can sometimes become like a work family/whānau.

> "Everyone might have had a stressful day but they're still smiling at the end of it because we've got a good bunch of people that we work with."

A high proportion of the workers included in the research also cite the ability to have a laugh or banter with co-workers as having a significantly positive impact on their workplace experience.

> "Small talk interactions are really great for your mental health, just being able to relate".

Participants noted that one 'rotten apple' can significantly diminish team morale. Often passive-aggressive or other types of toxic behaviour can be subtle and insidious and become embedded into team dynamics in a way that it is tolerated and normalised. Toxic interactions in the workplace can have a significantly negative impact on workers' wellbeing, motivation, and productivity within teams, sometimes leading to staff turnover.

> "I've been in workplaces where there is a whole lot of drama and it's awful."

Managers noted that it is not easy to remove a difficult personality from a team. Some managers reported that they are increasingly interviewing primarily for character, personality, and fit with the existing team when recruiting, rather than technical skills which can often be taught.

3.3 Leadership

The leadership of an organisation (including senior management, people managers/team leads, business owners, and boards of directors) were identified by participants as having a direct and significant impact on the experience and work-related wellbeing of workers, and playing a pivotal role in shaping the organisation's culture. Participants highlighted the following examples of leadership and management conduct and practice that promoted work-related wellbeing:

– showing workers they are valued and appreciated. This can be shown in multiple ways – see the 'Recognition and reward' sub-section for further details

– treating staff fairly and equitably, including not showing favouritism in the allocation of responsibilities and recognition

> "It's how everyone's treated [by leadership] that's going to affect wellbeing."

- 'walking the talk' – encouraging and role modelling the values of the organisation and a positive, collaborative culture in their own work and interactions with others
- seeing workers as whole people rather than a resource, that is, acknowledging that workers have lives and commitments outside of the workplace and being treated as such

> "The managers are so understanding... They understand that everyone's a human being and things can happen."

- cultivating high-trust environments by following through on commitments, encouraging open, two-way communication, and promoting staff autonomy. Excessive or perceived unnecessary surveillance and micromanagement of staff can erode trust. Workers want to be trusted by their managers and leaders, and to be able to trust them in return

> "My current manager has given me more responsibility. My old manager used to micromanage me. I would be in his office for two hours a day. It was very frustrating."

- having approachable, accessible, and visible managers, and leadership who are connected to staff

> "You want a manager that will be stern enough to solve problems, but also someone that you can go to talk to about stuff as well."

> "If I really wanted to speak to the CEO, I know I could."

- consulting with staff about internal or external changes impacting their work, and keeping them informed of what is occurring across the organisation
- providing growth and development opportunities for workers – see the 'Career development' sub-section for further details
- advocating for and role modelling good health and safety practices
- undertaking regular check-ins with staff to gauge wellbeing, for example, conducting anonymous staff surveys or suggestion boxes
- encouraging the raising of issues and providing clear processes or opportunities for all staff to do so. Younger and more junior staff are likely to feel a greater sense of participation and ownership of their roles

> "They encourage people to speak up, and make it known that you have the right to feel safe at work and no-one should be treating you badly."

- following through on issues raised or concerns that staff have and communicating outcomes back to staff
- having a 'finger on the pulse' of what is going on and demonstrating a mindfulness and awareness of issues
- providing support for workers when work is tough or stressful.

> "'[Manager]'s a special person, very kind and empathetic – but she has the heart of a lion. She just can't be knocked over. I am continually inspired by her. Working with someone like that helps me drag myself through my own failings."

> "He's level-headed, that things can get stressful and he realises it's stressful. If something goes awry, he has a dry wit about it."

3.4 Recognition and reward

Recognition and reward were considered important for workers and were perceived to take many different forms, both monetary and non-monetary. For many, non-monetary rewards (for example, verbal recognition, feeling a sense of achievement of job satisfaction) were equally if not more important than pay.

> "I've always been someone that doesn't really care so much how I'm getting paid as long as I'm enjoying what I'm doing."

Workers felt that an appropriate and fair remuneration for the workload, and their experience and skills was important, particularly when compensating for negative aspects of the role, for example, work being physically demanding or dangerous. Feeling underpaid can leave workers feeling undervalued. Remuneration appeared to be more important to young workers, Pasifika, migrants on temporary visas (who may be supporting family overseas), and those in low-skilled roles (likely also to be lower paid roles). However, while it is important to workers that they are paid fairly, many would forego higher levels of remuneration for working conditions that were wellbeing enhancing (for example, fewer demands, a better workplace culture).

> "I wouldn't go back and work in an unhealthy workplace for more pay than I'm getting now, it's not sustainable."

Workers also found it important to feel valued and appreciated via non-monetary forms of recognition and reward. Often small things which are inexpensive or free can make a big difference, and there were many aspects of work that workers could find rewarding, including:

– having an appropriate level of responsibility and being able to use skills and knowledge – see the 'Worker-job fit' sub-section

– receiving praise or recognition for work performed

> "It doesn't take five bucks to tell someone at the end of the day they've done a good job".

– being challenged

> "I get challenged every day. It's about motivation for me where I just need to be challenged with learning every day. I find I'm constantly adding new skills and that really drives me to stay in this role."

– being provided with learning and professional development opportunities, as well as clear pathways for job and pay progression (for example, via regular performance reviews and appraisals) – see the 'Career development' sub-section

– opportunities for problem solving at work

– having diverse or interesting work

– being fulfilled by meaningful work and feeling like you are making a difference

> "Doing something I love and knowing I am making a difference, that's everything to me."

> "You've got to have a purpose. Work creates a purpose, it's got to be beyond just paying the bills - meaningful work."

– a sense of achievement and job satisfaction

– having goals and targets to work toward

> "Having a sense of purpose behind what you're doing, especially if you're in a lower-level job. It's good to have a goal."

– workplace perks (for example, free coffee).

3.5 Career development

Workers highlighted the provision of training and professional development opportunities as a protective factor contributing to their work-related wellbeing. They spoke about the importance of being provided with sufficient training to undertake the duties associated with their roles safely and to the standard expected by the organisation. Those in lower-skilled roles highlighted the need for minimum adequate levels of training as a protective factor for their work-related wellbeing, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

> "I felt stressed because I hadn't been given enough training. I used to sit there at one or two in the morning hoping that nothing would fail. I just didn't have the knowledge to fix it."

Workers also spoke about the provision of ongoing learning and professional development opportunities in the form of training courses, attending conferences, as well as clear career progression pathways. Those in higher-skilled roles saw training as an opportunity for advancement and self-development. Participants highlighted that being provided with these opportunities helps them to feel valued and appreciated by their organisations.

> "Training gives you confidence and enables you to create more value. And it shows that the company values you, so you're not just another interchangeable part, they are investing in you."

3.6 Workload

Workers highlighted the demands of roles and job design as important factors contributing to their work-related wellbeing. Specifically, this included:

– Having adequate resourcing levels, manageable workloads, and achievable deadlines to ensure that workers do not have excessive demands put on them mentally, physically, and in terms of the hours they are required to work. This helps workers to feel happy at work and can reduce the likelihood of workers experiencing exhaustion, stress, and burnout. The shortage of migrant workers coming into New Zealand due to COVID-19 was noted as exacerbating resourcing and workload challenges.

> "We've got to a point where if we're busy... we haven't had breaks at all. Or we all just sit round and quickly scoff our lunch down and then carry on."

– Where workers have reasonable expectations placed on them and an opportunity to achieve these to a high standard, workers feel they are valued, and their work-related wellbeing is positively impacted. Conversely, unreasonable expectations (that is, setting the bar too high) makes workers feel like they are not achieving and can be demoralising.

> "We're quite a small company still so there's not a whole lot of people to cover if one person is away. Everyone else has to pick up the slack, and the work's very demanding. Sometimes I'll have days where I'll go home and I just want to quit."

– Workloads which allow workers to manage their work-life balance are critical to wellbeing. Participants highlighted the importance of (where possible) being able to leave work at work (including any psychological impacts of work such as stress and anxiety about the next day's workload), being able to leave on time, not having unexpected or continuous overtime requirements, and not feeling pressured to go to work on rostered days off or when feeling unwell.

> "They are really supportive of me being a working mum. Obviously, that takes a bit of a compromise sometimes when things come up that I have to deal with. They're very supportive of that."

– Having the opportunity to work flexibly, and to be able to fit their non-work life around their work, for example, being able to take time off for a doctor's appointment or school event, or being able to work from home.

> "There's flexibility – so yesterday, I finished a job at 2pm [in the field] so went and worked from home. That's a kind of peace of mind, I feel like that helps your mental state."

– Having efficient work practices which make their workloads more manageable. This supports them to perform their work more effectively, for example, eliminating unnecessary paperwork or meetings, and digitising manual processes where possible.

3.7 Physical work environment and equipment

Workers highlighted the importance of having a safe and comfortable physical environment and equipment, which was perceived to have a significant impact on workers' physical and mental wellbeing.

> "The working environment is very important. It's fun. It keeps you upbeat. The last thing you want is to be in an environment that's boring. I actually enjoy going to work."

Participants noted the following protective factors of work as contributing to their wellbeing:

– well maintained, fit-for-purpose machinery, and technical equipment that operates effectively without breakdowns and malfunctions

– the provision of adequate staff facilities (for example, bathrooms and changing rooms). This is likely to include an appropriate ratio of facilities to staff numbers, facilities for those with different genders as well as physical and privacy needs, adequate changing rooms for workers who require them, and secure places to store personal items (for those with non-desk based roles)

> "There is no proper place for us to go and have our breaks. We've got no changing room, so we get changed in the one patient toilet that we've got. We can't go outside unless we get changed into our street clothes, so that takes up time. Getting changed cuts into your break time. I would like more space for staff to go and take their breaks."

– provision of lunchrooms/break rooms with fridges (with capacity appropriate for the number of staff), ovens, microwaves, enough seating, and access to daylight and opening windows, doors. Optimal environments go above the minimum, providing comfortable and attractive relaxation spaces with couches and attractive décor. This contributes to workers' ability to relax/de-stress during break time and to feeling valued by management

- equipment and tools (for example, desks, chairs etc; including the option of standing desks in office environments) are likely to support good physical wellbeing in office environments and also contribute to staff feeling valued by leadership
- being kept physically safe through the provision of good security, safety guards on equipment, and the provision of sufficient, good quality safety gear where applicable.

3.8 Worker-job fit

Workers reported feeling their wellbeing was enhanced when their jobs were the right fit for them in terms of their skills, experience, needs, and personal attributes. When a mismatch occurred between what a worker would like to physically or mentally achieve and what the job could offer, workers experienced a diminished sense of wellbeing.

> "I feel that I'm doing something that I'm good at and I feel that I'm respected for that. I've worked out that I can make a difference."

Participants identified several worker characteristics that can impact on the worker-job fit and wellbeing, including:

- coping mechanisms and level of stress tolerance, for example, those with a low tolerance to stress or mental health issues find this is exacerbated working in roles with constant and tight deadline demands
- location – such as working in isolated locations or working away from family and friends

> "I would love to stay here in [small town] because of the work environment, but I know that the location isn't great for my wellbeing. I think if you're not in a place where you're healthy or you don't have a good wellbeing then you really should be looking at going somewhere else, even if it means a pay cut."

- physical characteristics – size, strength etc
- age
- gender
- migrant and visa status
- personal and/or family circumstances and commitments

> "If you really want to look after your employees and therefore impact their health and wellbeing, let them work the hours that are best suited to them. Because everyone's personal circumstances are different."

4.0
Workers' perceptions of the relationship between work and wellbeing

IN THIS SECTION:

4.1 Who is responsible for work-related wellbeing?

4.2 The impacts of work-related wellbeing on work and home life

Workers perceived there to be a strong interconnection between their work and wellbeing. All participants pointed to the proportion of their lives they spend at work as underpinning the strong relationship between work and wellbeing.

> "Work makes up a large part of your life. So what you do at work plays a pretty big factor on your wellbeing."

The relationship between work and wellbeing is perceived by participants as bi-directional, where work can have a significant impact on wellbeing and wellbeing can also have an impact on work. The impact of one on the other can be positive, negative, or both. There was consensus amongst participants that work should not impact negatively on people's wellbeing. Many also felt work should enhance wellbeing.

> "Your work shouldn't stop you from living your life. ... It should contribute to your wellbeing, not be a detriment to it."

This section will explore workers' perceptions of who is responsible for work-related wellbeing (that is, the impact of work on people's wellbeing), and the impacts of work-related wellbeing for both work and home life.

> "My work gives me a sense of belonging. I feel like I am doing something that I'm good at and I feel that I am respected for that by people whose opinions count. That goes a long way... to me feeling good about myself."

4.1 Who is responsible for work-related wellbeing?

Most workers viewed the responsibility for work-related wellbeing as a partnership between workers and leadership. Few mentioned the role of government unprompted.

> "Wellbeing is everyone's responsibility. It's a communal effort."

Leadership

Whilst some participants perceived organisations and their leadership (for example, boards of directors, senior management teams, and business owners) as having a responsibility to provide working conditions that are wellbeing-enhancing, others felt that a more realistic goal is to do no harm.

> "Wellbeing of staff needs to be something that is on the business' radar because work contributes hugely to people's wellbeing. They need to make sure they are not contributing negatively to people's wellbeing."

Most participants viewed work-related wellbeing as being heavily influenced 'from the top down' by the organisation's leadership, thus making them jointly responsible. Examples of the types of responsibilities and good management practices and responsibilities are identified under <u>Section 3.3 Leadership</u>

> "I think companies definitely do have responsibility to make sure that the workplace is at least a mentally safe space".

Workers

Some workers observed they also have a role in maintaining their own work-related wellbeing. Some felt strongly that workers had a responsibility to take steps to improve their work-related wellbeing and spoke about the actions they take personally to mitigate against the impact of harm caused in the workplace. This included engaging in self-care practices such as exercise, hobbies, and stress management techniques.

> "Making healthy choices as far as food as exercise and living situations. Doing stuff for yourself to keep yourself happy, whether that's taking time to yourself, putting yourself to bed early. Giving yourself what it is that you need."

Some participants highlighted that workers also have a responsibility to alert managers or employers to factors that have the potential to or are negatively impacting staff wellbeing.

> "I think it's also an employee's responsibility to make an employer aware if the work is negatively impacting their wellbeing."

> "Health and wellbeing is down to you. If you're doing something soulless, what are you going to do about it? I don't think of wellbeing as a birth right. You've got to work bloody hard for it."

However, in practice, many indicated that they would be reluctant to speak up. Actions that participants had taken to reduce the impact of harm and/or enhance their wellbeing at work included:

– requesting changes to the physical environment
– meeting with manager to raise training needs
– completing a wellbeing feedback survey
– entering information on a risk register
– alerting management to maintenance requirements for equipment.

Participants reported mixed success when speaking up. Some noted that when they had raised issues with managers, there were occasions when managers had taken no action, or even when negative actions had been taken against the worker raising the concern. Some reported that they didn't have the time or couldn't afford to take part in wellbeing-enhancing activities.

> "The question was asked, but there was never anything done if you continued to say that you were miserable. … I don't know if it wasn't looked at or whether they just didn't care."

Government

When asked whether the government should have a role in enhancing work-related wellbeing, most participants felt it should. Workers perceived the government's role is to put in place health and safety regulations and monitor these. Providing high quality services to deal quickly and effectively with physical work-related harm when it does occur (for example, hospitals etc) was also mentioned. Some participants also felt that the government has a responsibility to role model good employer behaviour regarding work-related wellbeing through the provision of fair pay and good working conditions for government staff.

> "The government can set the tone, model a behaviour that shows they are a good employer to their own staff."

4.2 The impacts of work-related wellbeing on work and home life

Participants perceived work-related wellbeing as impacting many aspects of both work and home life. For most participants the psychosocial factors of work were mentioned more commonly and were perceived as potentially more harmful than physical health and safety risks. Many participants had experienced negative psychosocial impacts as a result of work.

Participants identified having varying levels of tolerance for work conditions that were not wellbeing-enhancing. For example, those who see their current work as a means to an end whilst pursuing a longer-term career goal were less concerned about the immediate negative impacts of their work, whereas those working in their preferred or chosen career roles may be significantly negatively impacted by aspects of work.

Impact on life outside work

Many participants reported that their work impacts on their lives outside of work, and that this can be positive, negative, or have aspects of both. Those who had well developed coping mechanisms and who were able to effectively compartmentalise their work and home life were better equipped to prevent the negative impacts of work from spilling over into their lives outside of work. Those who had good wellbeing associated with work brought positivity home with them and were more engaged with partners and family/whānau.

Some workers found it difficult to compartmentalise their work and home lives and tended to carry the impacts of work with them when they get home.

> "If you're spending time at work and it's all negative, then you're going to pull that through into your personal life as well."

Those who had poor wellbeing at work experienced a range of negative impacts and behaviours, including:

– Using substances to cope with stress

> "I'll come home from work and I just seethe about what's happening during the day. I just think about it all the time but I try not to. I do take that stress home. It probably makes me drink more on those days."

– being withdrawn

> "You know you've got to go to work on Monday and if you're really stressed about it, that's going to get you down in the weekend and affect your mood. So, it's going to impact your time off if you are not happy at work."

– having a diminished interest in participating in family, recreational or social activities
– difficulties sleeping.

Impact on interpersonal relationships

The impacts of work often have an impact on interpersonal relationships outside of work, including partners, children, and the wider family/whānau group. Participants described the following impacts:

– bringing stress into the home

> "I spend so much time there and if that's having a negative impact on my wellbeing then, yeah, that's just going to flow over into home life and have a negative impact on my family."

– venting about work to partner, family/whānau, or friends

– reduced time and/or lack of energy to spend with family/whānau, including children

> "Companies will ask you to do things [and] you have the right to say no, but I can't do it. I'm just one of those that will just go, "Yeah, OK" to keep a good relationship with the bosses. But my family suffers because you're not around as much."

– being moody/angry

– cancelling social engagements or planned activities with others.

Impact on productivity and quality of work

Many participants indicated that their wellbeing has a direct influence on their motivation to perform high quality work and on their productivity. When they feel valued and appreciated by managers and/or employers, participants indicated they will go the 'extra mile'. This was however not the case for healthcare workers, who highlighted a strong sense of obligation towards their patients as a major motivator to perform their work to a high standard despite the presence of any work stressors.

> "I'm happy doing my job and that makes me want to put in a high standard, instead of hating my job and just doing sloppy work."

> "If staff are looked after, then the [department] runs well."

Workers highlighted becoming active promoters of the organisations they work for when they feel good in their work. Workers are less likely to be absent from work or take sick leave when their wellbeing is high. Managers also noted that staff wellbeing can have a positive impact on productivity, including fewer absences.

Workers want a mutually beneficial relationship with employers and will go the extra mile when they feel respected, valued, and have good work-related wellbeing. Employers will be rewarded with high levels of commitment when staff feel that their employers care about and invest in their wellbeing.

> "You push harder and do better when you feel really appreciated."

A collaborative and respectful work culture is also likely to improve productivity. When workers feel supported by their co-workers, they are more likely to provide assistance when needed in return.

> "You don't mind doing things for people because of the way they talk to you and ask you to do something. You're happy to help and go the extra mile or go out of your way, because they'd do the same for you."

> "I work hard because I have a high level of respect for my colleagues. It's team-based work, so I want to pull my weight."

Impact on staff turnover

Some workers reported that good work-related wellbeing would mean they were less likely to leave their jobs, even for roles offering higher remuneration. Participants cited longevity of employee-employer relationships within their workplaces as evidence of good work-related wellbeing experienced by workers.

> "I've been there 10 years, but some people have been there 20–30 years. I think that shows that there's a long-term focus. People don't just come for a year or two and get burnt out and leave."

Conversely, workers who did not experience good workplace wellbeing commonly looked for alternative opportunities and changed jobs when they could. Several workers reported having left jobs in order to minimise the harm being caused to their mental wellbeing by work. There were a range of reasons indicated for this, including lacking confidence to speak up, not knowing or understanding their rights, fear of repercussions, and having a lack of faith that concerns will be dealt with satisfactorily. Some workers also left after trying to achieve a change to their work conditions to improve their wellbeing, to which they reported mixed levels of success. In some cases, workers were considering leaving their professions altogether and retraining.

> "I love my job and I know a lot of other people who love their jobs but have actually left because of the management and the way things are run.

Many participants had left jobs for a range of reasons including:
– a lack of scope for growth and development
– toxic interpersonal relationships (for example, bullying, favouritism, passive-aggressive behaviour)
– a lack of follow-through from management on issues raised
– unreasonable workload expectations
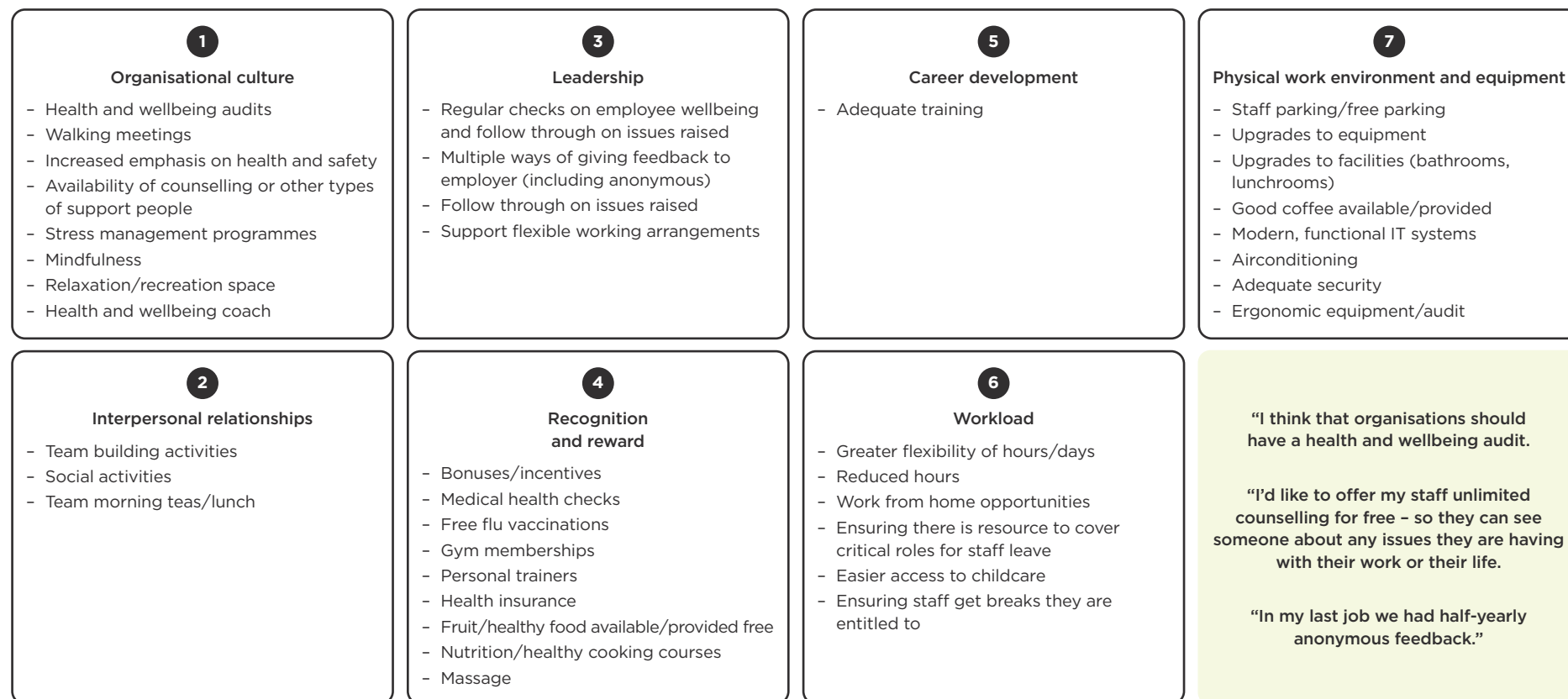– micromanagement
– safety concerns.

Appendices

IN THIS SECTION:

Appendix 1: Workers' suggestions for improving work-related wellbeing

The workers provided multiple suggestions for employers to consider when thinking about ways to improve workers' work-related wellbeing. Because this research is focused on workers' perspectives, the appropriateness of these should be considered within the context of the organisation and the specific protective factors that the organisation is looking to enhance. These suggestions should be considered as a starting point only.

1

Organisational culture

– Health and wellbeing audits
– Walking meetings
– Increased emphasis on health and safety
– Availability of counselling or other types of support people
– Stress management programmes
– Mindfulness
– Relaxation/recreation space
– Health and wellbeing coach

3

Leadership

– Regular checks on employee wellbeing and follow through on issues raised
– Multiple ways of giving feedback to employer (including anonymous)
– Follow through on issues raised
– Support flexible working arrangements

5

Career development

– Adequate training

7

Physical work environment and equipment

– Staff parking/free parking
– Upgrades to equipment
– Upgrades to facilities (bathrooms, lunchrooms)
– Good coffee available/provided
– Modern, functional IT systems
– Airconditioning
– Adequate security
– Ergonomic equipment/audit

2

Interpersonal relationships

– Team building activities
– Social activities
– Team morning teas/lunch

4

Recognition and reward

– Bonuses/incentives
– Medical health checks
– Free flu vaccinations
– Gym memberships
– Personal trainers
– Health insurance
– Fruit/healthy food available/provided free
– Nutrition/healthy cooking courses
– Massage

6

Workload

– Greater flexibility of hours/days
– Reduced hours
– Work from home opportunities
– Ensuring there is resource to cover critical roles for staff leave
– Easier access to childcare
– Ensuring staff get breaks they are entitled to

"I think that organisations should have a health and wellbeing audit.

"I'd like to offer my staff unlimited counselling for free – so they can see someone about any issues they are having with their work or their life.

"In my last job we had half-yearly anonymous feedback."

Notes

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