



Fostering Mental Wellbeing in SMEs in the Czech Republic

How can small/medium sized companies foster a healthy workplace and maintain performance through mental wellbeing initiatives?

Mental wellbeing is no longer a luxury—it's a vital driver of business performance. This presentation draws on insights from a comprehensive study involving over 100 professionals, alongside in-depth interviews with HR leaders. We'll explore practical, cost-effective strategies to foster a mentally healthy workplace, enhancing not only employee satisfaction but also overall productivity and organisational culture.





Our Roadmap to Mental Wellbeing



Why Mental Health Matters

Exploring the business case for prioritising employee wellbeing in the context of SMEs



Our Research Approach

How we gathered insights from cross-industry workplaces through surveys and interviews



Mental Health Toolkit

Practical strategies for SMEs to implement effective wellbeing initiatives



Implementation Roadmap

Step-by-step guidance for creating lasting change in your organisation

This presentation provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing mental wellbeing challenges in SMEs, with emphasis on practical, affordable solutions that deliver measurable benefits.

Executive Summary



The Challenge

SMEs in the Czech Republic face significant mental health challenges with nearly 40 % of employees rating workplace mental health support as satisfactory or poor. The COVID pandemic has worsened stress, anxiety and burnout across industries.

Our Approach

Through extensive research including surveys of 100+ professionals and interviews with HR leaders, we have identified key stressors, effective interventions, and implementation barriers specific to the SME business context.

The Solution

Our "Mental Health Toolkit" offers pragmatic, low-cost strategies tailored to SMEs, emphasizing flexible work arrangements, leadership training, and creating psychologically safe environments. These strategies are specifically designed to enhance both employee wellbeing and business outcomes.

This guide translates complex mental health concepts into straightforward actions that Czech business owners and managers can implement immediately, regardless of company size or available resources.



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Mental health, as defined by the WHO, is directly related to the work environment



The World Health Organisation (WHO) conceptualised mental well-being as **a state where the individual is able to understand his abilities, cope with normal life stressors, work productively, understand his abilities, and contribute productively to the community.** Mental health and well-being are broad concepts with a primary focus on the health of the workforce. Certain workplace factors, such as shift work, work demands, and work stress, can put an employee at higher risk of mental problems.

Poor mental health and lower well-being of the workers can lead to lower employee satisfaction, lower work performance, burnout, and increased risk of occupational hazards.

Investing in Mental Health is a strategic business decision that enhances productivity, reduces costs, and improves corporate reputation.

\$1T

Global Productivity Loss

Annual cost of depression and anxiety to the global economy according to WHO (World Health Organization)

35%

Productivity Reduction

Decrease in productivity for employees with unresolved depression

\$4

Return on Investment

For every dollar invested in mental health interventions, according to WEF (World Economic Forum)

22%

Profitability Increase

Companies with high employee engagement show 22 % higher profitability



SMEs recognise the need for resilient teams, but they face many challenges, particularly related to limited budgets and team capacity.



Wellbeing programs are too expensive

Reality: Many effective actions cost little or nothing – flexible working hours, open-door policies, and regular wellbeing check-ins can be implemented with minimal investment but significant impact.



Talking about mental health makes problems worse

Reality: Open communication actually reduces stigma and encourages early intervention, preventing issues from escalating and creating a more supportive environment.



Only large companies can support mental health

Reality: Even small businesses can create a big impact with simple actions like personal conversations, flexible work arrangements, and mental health days.



Mental health is a private matter

Reality: Employers directly impact stress levels and working conditions – supporting mental health is an essential aspect of responsible leadership.

Our toolkit offers a simple, practical starting point tailored to the SME business environment.



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Insights were drawn from a broad employee survey and conversations with HR representatives across sectors.



Bilingual Survey – Online Questionnaire

Distributed via LinkedIn and direct mailing in both English and Czech to ensure accessibility and broad participation across diverse industries.



Data Collection

Gathered over 100 responses focusing on current practices, employee experiences, and perceived effectiveness of mental health initiatives.



HR Interviews

Conducted in-depth discussions with HR representatives from three large companies operating in Prague to understand current initiatives and best practices.



Analysis & Synthesis

Combined quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights to develop comprehensive, practical recommendations for SMEs.

Our methodology combines wide-ranging survey data to identify patterns across various business landscape with detailed interviews that provided context and nuance about implementation challenges and successes.



Employee survey reveals mental health is still underestimated in SMEs, with a particular lack of structured support (EAPs, trainings, or policies).



Flexible Working Arrangements dominating mental health initiatives

- 72 % respondents' companies implemented flexi time or occasional remote work.
- 44 % companies provide Mental health awareness training for their employees, 32 % companies provide Free or subsidised counselling/therapy (32 %).
- 22 % respondents confirmed availability of Additional days off for mental health.
- **17 % respondents reported that their company does not offer any mental health initiatives.** These are employees of SMEs.



Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are mostly found in larger companies, but rare in SMEs

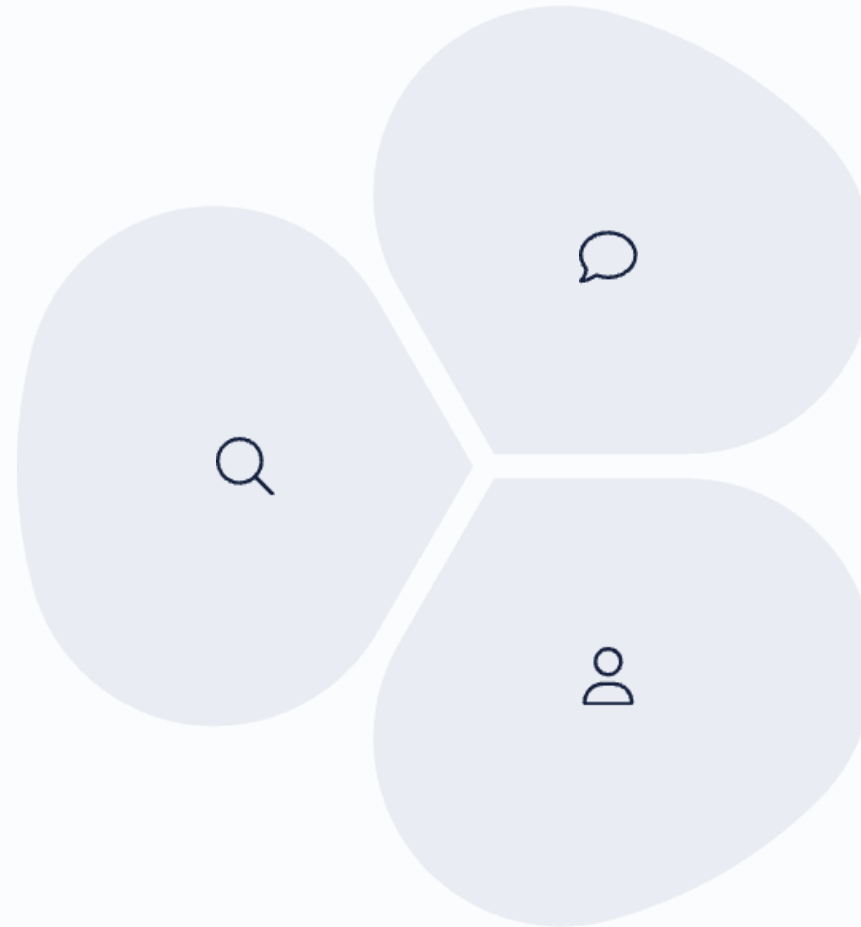
- EAPs are less common mental practice, mostly implemented in large companies that offer more comprehensive mental health support.
- Only a small fraction of SME employees reported having access to an EAP or on-call psychologist.

Survey findings reveal a significant perception gap between what companies provide and what employees actually experience.



Mental Health Culture

The **average rating of mental health culture at surveyed workplaces** is approximately 3.0 out of 5, indicating significant room for improvement across organisations.



Comfort Discussing Mental Health

Only 24 % feel very comfortable discussing mental health with their manager, while 36 % feel somewhat comfortable. A concerning 40 % report feeling uncomfortable, suggesting substantial barriers to open dialogue.

Perceived Employer Commitment

51 % feel their company cares somewhat about mental health but sees room for improvement, 32 % believe their company doesn't prioritise mental health at all, and **only 18 % report that mental wellbeing is a genuine priority.**

The discomfort with mental health discussions highlights the persistent stigma that must be addressed through cultural and communication changes.



Survey indicates that SMEs should start with flexible work arrangements as they are both highly valued and relatively easy to implement. The significant gap in comfort levels when discussing mental health points to the critical need for manager training and culture-building efforts to reduce stigma and create psychological safety.



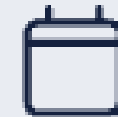
Expand Support Services

Improve access to EAPs and counselling with awareness campaigns



Flexible Work as Baseline

Maintain or expand flexible arrangements as the foundation of mental health support



Build Trust Culture

Normalise mental health conversations to reduce stigma



Train Managers and Staff

Implement regular mental health awareness and leadership training



All interviewed companies recognise mental wellbeing as essential to productivity, retention, and workplace satisfaction, despite differences in implementation approaches.



Key Similarities

Employee-centric approach
prioritising wellbeing

Diverse initiatives including Health Days and workshops

Transparent, multi-channel **communication**

Strong **feedback culture** through surveys and discussions

Acknowledgment of **measurement challenges**

Key Differences

Strategy Structure: From data-driven approaches with partnerships to more personal, grassroots initiatives

Accessibility: Range from flexible formats and cafeteria-style benefits to uniform activities for all staff

Leadership Involvement: Varying levels of manager training and leadership engagement in wellbeing culture

Best Practices for SMEs

Start with simple, low-cost actions like open-door HR policies

Build partnerships with NGOs or mental health experts

Create safe spaces **by normalising mental health discussions**

Utilise existing channels for sharing resources

Offer flexibility in how employees engage with wellbeing content

Internal surveys conducted by the interviewed companies reveal that employees value psychological safety and flexibility in mental health support, with a strong emphasis on normalising help-seeking behaviours and tailoring support to individual needs.



What Stress Triggers Companies Reported



How Companies Respond to Reported Triggers



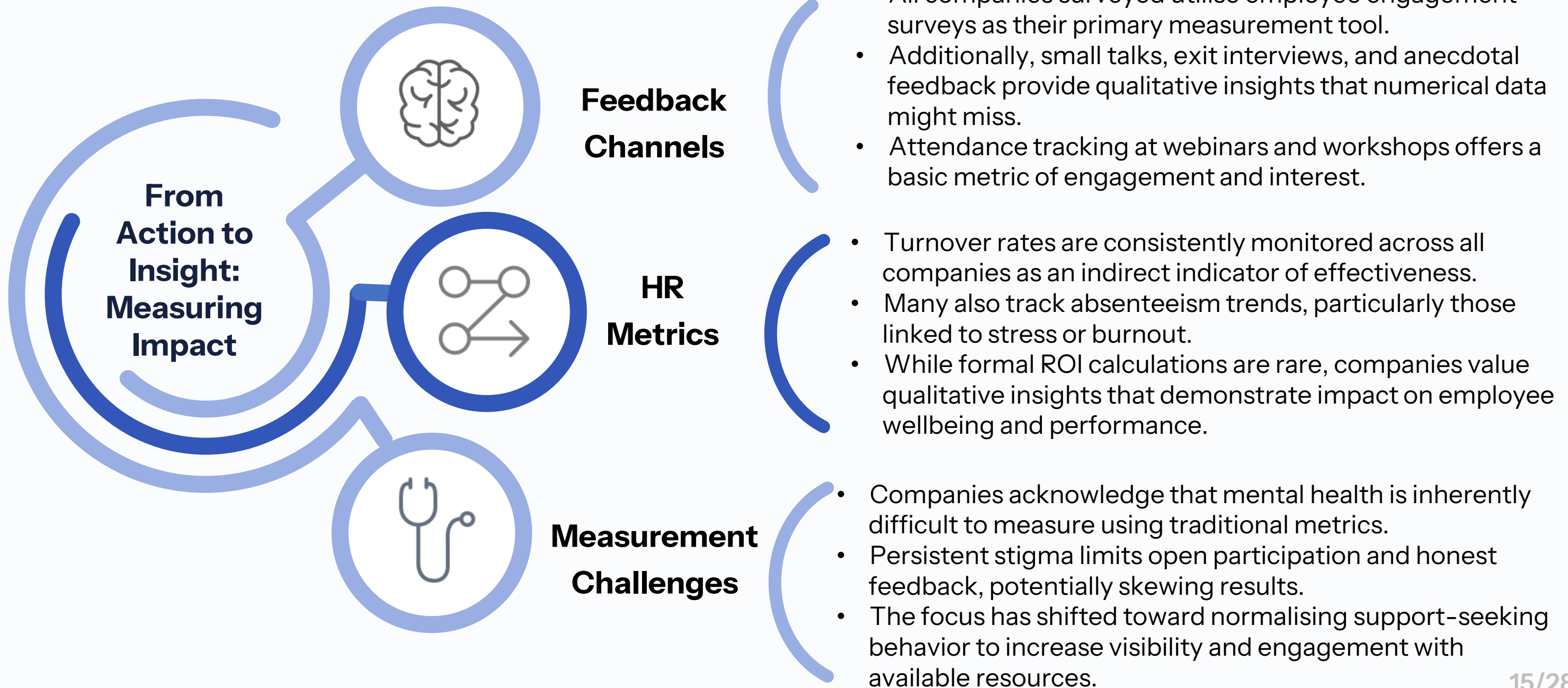
What Employees Need More Of

- High seasonal workload leading to exhaustion and absenteeism
- Burnout and isolation, especially post-COVID
- Increasing pressure from news, digital overload, and global uncertainty
- Emotional strain in sales and customer service roles

- Mindfulness sessions for resilience and focus
- Confidential counselling for personal and family issues
- Themed "Healthy Days" addressing burnout, digital detox, stress management
- Open-door HR policy and peer-level support networks
- Flexibility in working hours and benefit usage

- Safe spaces to ask for help without stigma
- Continued access to diverse resources (webinars, recorded content)
- Leadership visibility and empathy in mental health discussions
- Customisable wellbeing options for individual preferences and schedules

Evaluating the success of mental health initiatives is a challenging discipline. Pick a few metrics that matter most and track them consistently.



As the workplace continues to evolve, companies that proactively address mental wellbeing will gain competitive advantages in recruitment, retention, and productivity.



Future Trends in Workplace Mental Health

- Personalised wellbeing programs leveraging wearable health technology
- Gamification elements to boost engagement with wellbeing initiatives
- Continued emphasis on manager training as the cornerstone of effective support
- Greater focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in mental health access
- Hybrid work arrangements and flexibility becoming standard wellbeing infrastructure

Key Takeaways

- Mental health is a business-critical issue, not a soft topic
- Start small: simple policies can have significant emotional impact
- Partner with experts—you don't have to develop everything internally
- Culture shift begins with leadership normalising support-seeking

Call to Action and Reco for SMEs

- Review your current practices, identify gaps in your mental health support system, and pilot at least one low-cost initiative based on the recommendations in this guide.
- Measure the results and refine your approach based on employee feedback.



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Start with small steps, and create visible impact

Recognise the Need

Mental health initiatives aren't just nice-to-haves—they're essential business investments that impact productivity, retention, and overall company performance.

Start Simple

Begin with low-cost, high-impact changes that can be implemented quickly. These initial steps establish momentum and demonstrate commitment.

Build Consistently

Develop a sustainable approach by gradually expanding your mental health initiatives based on employee feedback and observed results.

Your practical guide starts with actionable strategies that acknowledge your resource constraints while maximising positive impacts on your workforce.





Share useful resources for your employees

Crisis Support

Mental health helplines provide immediate assistance for urgent situations. These services should be prominently displayed in your workplace and included in employee resources.

- National crisis intervention lines
- Regional support centers
- Emergency mental health services

Professional Services

Connect with consultants and platforms specialising in workplace mental health. These experts can provide tailored support.

- Wellbeing consultants
- Mental health platforms
- Specialised SME advisors

Educational Materials

Make relevant articles, training tools, templates and guides easily accessible to your team. Consider creating QR codes linking to these resources for convenient access.

- Wellbeing frameworks
- Mental health research
- Policy templates

Ensure these resources are visible and easily accessible through multiple channels, including your intranet, physical bulletin boards, and regular communication materials. Periodically review and update the information to maintain relevance.



Build a culture of trust and transparency and normalise mental health discussions

Why It Matters

Employees must feel heard and supported to perform and thrive at their best. A foundation of **trust creates the psychological safety** needed for people to bring their whole selves to work.

How To Do It

Establish a strict **open door policy** and designate at least one 'go-to' person with **strong empathy and communication skills**. Leaders should regularly demonstrate vulnerability by **sharing their own challenges** and successes.

SMEs Tip

"Nothing is more cringy and demotivating than when a manager always says 'do not hesitate to contact me anytime,' while always being too busy for their team members." **Model the behaviour you want to see.**

Remember that building this culture requires time, potentially some training budget, and most importantly, the right mindset from leadership. Your authenticity as a leader sets the tone for the entire organisation.

Encourage meaningful conversations



Regular Check-Ins

Schedule consistent one-on-ones that go beyond work tasks to include wellbeing discussions.



Wellbeing Related Events (Health Day, team building activities, regular team breakfast, etc.)

Create low/no-cost gatherings where colleagues can develop deeper connections.



Awareness Initiatives

Use internal resources as ambassadors to lead mental health awareness projects.



Appreciation Practices

Implement simple recognition activities like gratitude boards or appreciation cards.

When team members connect beyond work tasks, they develop deeper understanding and support for each other. This creates a foundation for better collaboration and increased psychological safety across the organisation.





Conduct Effective Management Training



Recognise Importance

Managers are often the first point of contact for employees in distress. Their ability to respond appropriately is crucial for early intervention.



Provide Professional Training

Equip managers with certified training in empathetic communication and appropriate boundary setting.



Designate Ambassadors

Appoint experienced, empathetic individuals as mental health ambassadors to provide additional support.



Schedule Regular Refreshers

Maintain knowledge through ongoing training and feedback loops to ensure continued effectiveness.

"Be careful to put more empathetic people in management roles," advises one SME leader. "The good will is there, but there needs to be more awareness at the top." Effective implementation requires time allocation for training and a budget for professional development.



Utilise Available Training Resources



Certified Mental Health Instructor

Comprehensive certification program for €495 per person. Provides managers with fundamental mental health knowledge and response strategies.



Workplace Options Manager Assist

Specialised programme focusing on equipping managers with tools to support employee wellbeing and handle difficult situations effectively.



Red Cross Mental Health Training

Respected program available at £311 per person, covering awareness, intervention techniques, and creating supportive environments.



Free Online Resources

Platforms like Alison offer free self-paced courses that can supplement formal training or provide options for businesses with limited budgets.

When selecting training, focus on meaningful, practical programs rather than "tick box" exercises. The right training empowers managers to create psychologically safe environments and respond appropriately to mental health concerns.



Enhance or Implement Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

Why It Matters

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides confidential external resources supporting employee well-being at no cost to them. These programmes offer counseling, coaching, and practical support for various life and work challenges.

AEP provides a route to professional help. It's important and can become a game-changer for employees dealing with serious stress, and it underlines the employer's commitment.

How To Do It

1. Assess current support landscape and understand what is available and what is needed
2. Choose the Right EAP Provider, create awareness and engagement strategies
3. Design a Communication Plan
4. Train Managers and HR Champions to support the programme
5. Constantly monitor, evaluate & improve

SMEs Tip

Many EAP providers offer packages suitable for SMEs (some have pay-per-use models or affordable flat rates for small teams). If an EAP is still beyond budget, an alternative is establishing a relationship with a local psychologist or counselor.

"Once our leaders started openly endorsing the EAP, uptake doubled. It made it okay to ask for help." (anonymous manager)

An effective EAP helps improve employee well-being, reduce absenteeism, and enhance productivity.



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Mental wellbeing is a journey, not a checkbox...



Engage Expert Support (EAP or similar)

Partner with external resources as needed



Train Leaders

Equip managers with necessary skills and mindsets



Build Your Ambassador Team

Engage internal champions to drive initiatives



Launch Quick & Visible Actions

Implement immediate initiatives to build momentum



Understand Your Starting Point

Map current state and identify key stressors



MONITOR & EVALUATE &
IMPROVE

As you implement each step, remember to measure and adapt based on employee feedback, participation rates, and relevant HR metrics. Communicate results using a "You Said – We Did" approach to demonstrate responsiveness and commitment.



Start Small. Care Deeply. Lead Well.

1

Start Today

Begin with just one initiative.
Even the smallest action signals your commitment to mental wellbeing.

2X

Double Impact

Small steps in mental health initiatives **create disproportionately positive effects** in SMEs due to the current low baseline.

100%

Complete Commitment

Authentic leadership requires genuine care, not just implementing programmes. Your personal engagement makes the difference.

Our survey indicates that the current level of mental wellbeing initiatives in SMEs provide an excellent opportunity for meaningful impact. Every step taken, even a small one, can produce significant positive outcomes for your employees and organization. Remember that your authentic leadership in this area will resonate deeply with your team.

We appreciate your commitment to creating a mentally healthy workplace



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Milena Uhrová



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Thank You!

Q&A

SESSION