

The importance of line managers for employee wellbeing

Are the squeezed middle too squeezed?

Dr Zofia Bajorek, Research Fellow



ies

institute for
employment
studies

A blue graphic element consisting of a curved line that starts from the bottom left, curves upwards and to the right, and ends in an arrowhead pointing to the right.

Overview

- Why is health and wellbeing at work important
- ‘Good Work’ and what it means
- Line managers and ‘Good Work’
- Are line managers heroes or villains?
- The future of line management

Workplace Health and Wellbeing

- Mental health problems in the UK are increasingly becoming a common cause of long-term and short-term sickness absence.
- Dame Carol Black (2008) provided evidence that good employee health is good for business.
- Thriving at Work report – 15% of people at work have symptoms of an existing mental health condition.
- There is a large annual cost to employers of between £33 billion and £42 billion – with additional costs from sickness absence and staff turnover.
- Report concluded that there is a need to prioritise and invest more in improving mental health.

Workplace Health and Wellbeing

- The health and wellbeing of the working age population has become a focus in policy as well – Taylor’s report into the review of modern working practices, and the follow up report ‘Measuring Good Work’.
- There has also been the launch of www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk – the online gateway to resources, training and information to help change the way that mental health at work is discussed and highlights relevant tools available to help employers and employees to help those at work with mental health problems.
- But is work good for you, and how can we make work better?

Is work good for you?

“If a man has done much he is more contented after his labours than if he had done nothing whatever: for by work he has set his powers in motion.”

(Immanuel Kant)

“Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor: in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.”

(Studs Terkel)

“Work is generally good for physical and mental health and wellbeing...work can be therapeutic and can reverse the adverse health effects of unemployment...The provisos are that account must be taken for the nature and quality of the work and its social context; jobs should be safe and accommodating.”

(Waddell and Burton, 2006, Page ix)

Making ‘Good Work’



- “If you want someone to do a good job, give them a good job to do”

What makes a good line manager for you?

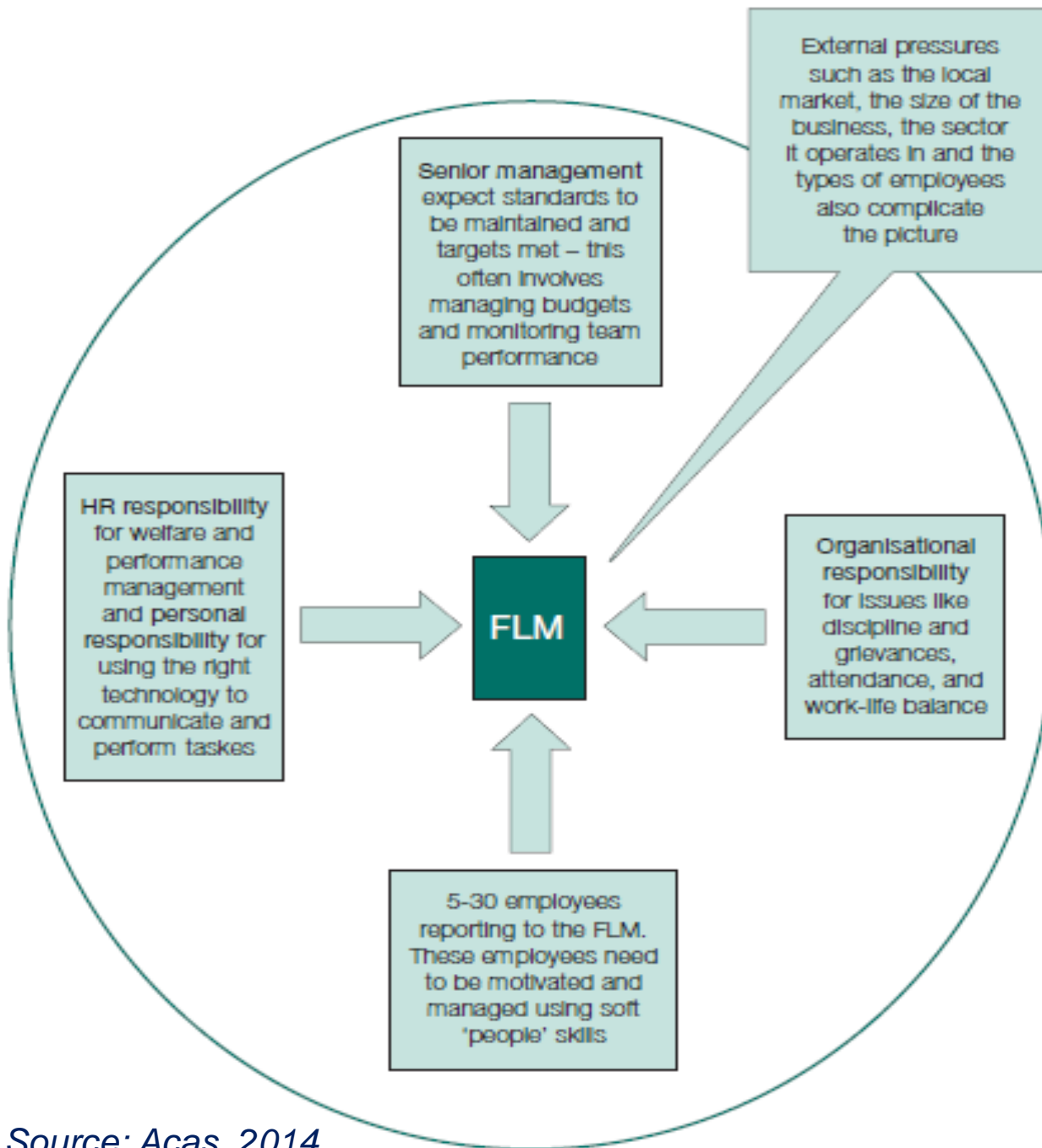
“If you ask good managers what they do, they will most likely tell you that they plan, organise, co-ordinate and control. Then watch what they do. Don’t be surprised if you can’t relate to these words”

(Mintzberg, 1990)

Line Managers

“If I could wave a magic wand, the one thing I would do is to improve the relationship between line managers and employees...the nature and characteristics of the jobs that employees are required to do in terms of satisfaction, reward and esteem and a degree of control in the task are vitally important to them. ***The line manager has a key role***”

(Dame Carol Black)



Line Managers: The Squeezed Middle?

So why is line management important?

“Employees are a company’s greatest asset. They’re your competitive advantage. You want to attract and retain the best; provide them with encouragement, stimulus and make them feel that they are an integral part of the company’s mission”

(Anne Mulcahy)

So why is line management important?

“Good management can lead to good health, wellbeing and improved performance. The reverse can be true of bad management. Good health equals good business”

(Dame Carol Black)

So, how are line managers doing?

“Part of it I think is because I know that I’ve worked so hard and my employer - and one particular line manager - knows how hard that I have worked. So from that respect I know that she would always be very tolerant and that I could more or less ask her for anything (in terms of adjustments).”

“When somebody comes into see you, they have to leave your office feeling better than when they walked in. That can be quite complicated to achieve, particularly when they come in with problems, or you may not be happy with their performance. But you have to make them feel that they’re in a better place at the end of the discussion than when they arrived.”

So, how are line managers doing?

“It took me a while to tell him I had MS. After they sacked me the manager told the tribunal that they’d ‘helped’ me by giving me a desk by a window”

“My line manager is rubbish, so I just go around him now. I don’t bother with him at all. I just go straight to the HR person...It’s just him personally. He’s just crap, he’s a rubbish manager and he’s a control freak as well. I prefer to just go to HR now, this is one of my strategies to reduce my stress, so I just go straight to HR, because ultimately they are the ones who will make the recommendations.”

Some Capability & Execution Gaps?

- Being 'advocates' rather than 'apologists' for organisational policy
- Giving bad news, difficult feedback & saying 'No'
- Managing the performance, rewards, development and careers of direct reports
- Managing & motivating teams
- Balancing fairness & the need for direction and decisiveness
- Communication during change – and with bigger spans of control

Realistic Expectations?

- *‘People join an organisation but leave a manager’*
- Easy to underestimate how tough the role can be to perform well & how pivotal the job can be to organisational success
- Investing time & energy in appointing, supporting & developing them is essential
- How often we consider the health of line managers themselves?

The health of the line manager

- It is also really important to remember the health and wellbeing of the manager as well
- How many line managers experience reduced mental health themselves?
- Evidence beginning to suggest that line manager health can have an impact on direct report health

Line managers of the future

- The last decade has been volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) – seems that the next few years at least will be the same – so what do managers need to prepare for:
 - Intergenerational workforce
 - Technological developments
 - Diversity

Line management top tips (from research)

- Recognise that good management matters
- Recruitment of managers should not solely be based on technical competencies
- Line manager training and support is important
- Include interpersonal skills as a training component
- Clarity is needed about the behaviours that good line managers have
- Encourage them to act as role models for wellbeing
- Equip them to look after their own health and wellbeing
- Effective management has to be displayed at ALL organisational levels

Thank you

zofia.bajorek@employment-studies.co.uk



[@DrZofia](https://twitter.com/DrZofia)

www.employment-studies.co.uk



[@EmploymtStudies](https://twitter.com/EmploymtStudies)



ies

institute for
employment
studies