APEX | ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

APEX Advisory Services for Executives

Reflections and Best Practices Guide for Organizations, its Leaders and Executives at all Levels

Fall 2022

We Influence and Go Beyond Service,
We Care!

Table of Contents

WHY DOES EXECUTIVE HEALTH MATTER?

The research is conclusive, a healthy work environment results in healthy and effective executives and cascades to the employee level, impacting culture. As executives have large numbers of staff and spans of control, they wield much influence on their teams. Healthy executives create healthy organizations. But the reverse is also true.

Consider the facts from the summer 2021 APEX Executive Work and Health Study (EWHS): Pride is at 88% and the majority of executives (57%) report a strong commitment and dedication primarily due to the sense of purpose which they felt in supporting Canadians through the pandemic. However, executive drive came at a cost. Burnout levels are at heights never before seen. Three out of four executives identified exhaustion to the point of burnout, combined with high rates of cynicism (39%). Home/work life balance was and remains, elusive. Effort/Reward Imbalance was also out of kilter (69%), as executives indicated they were not being recognized for the level of effort and contribution they were, and still are, putting forward. It should be underscored reward is not limited to compensation rather it is the frequent internal and external acknowledgement of their contributions, in the form of feedback and support from supervisors and peers.

As the numbers of those close to burnout is staggering, it threatens recovery and is more likely when executives:

- Generally do not feel that the work they are doing is good enough

- Feel unappreciated for their work efforts

- Have unreasonable demands placed upon them and therefore feel inadequate or incompetent

- Do not have good boundaries

- Are in roles that are not a good job fit

- Expect too much of themselves in the face of toxicity

Those particularly at risk in your organizations, other than EX01 and 02, are the highflyers. Their high expectations of themselves and their strong personal resiliency makes them easy targets for burnout.

Because it can be chronic in nature, affecting both the health and performance of executives at all levels of organizations, prevention strategies are considered the most effective approach for addressing workplace burnout.

The research is clear that much of the burnout and exhaustion is traced back to structures and systems and therefore is better tackled at the organizational level. However, individuals also have responsibilities, such as stating and committing to personal boundaries for recovery time.

Organizations can help by establishing guardrails for executives, leaders of executives can then have conversations and tailor and support establishing and respecting individual boundaries and can be role models themselves.

A supportive work environment reduces the prevalence, severity, impact and duration of mental distress. Furthermore, organizations that make the effort to address psychosocial risks and create a psychologically healthy workplace are much more likely to have healthier, happier executives and employees, and are likely to reap benefits in productivity, sustainability, and growth (a list and definitions of the 13 psychosocial factors impacting work is found in Annex 1).

It can seem daunting to prioritize and choose those evidence-based actions that are most likely to improve psychological health and safety in the workplace. The good news is that no one person needs to have the answers. One great way to approach the working issues of executives is to draw from the wisdom of crowds. Seek the opinions, validation, and solutions from your own executives. They have the best answers to make work life better for all.

We applaud your efforts in making the executive work environment better and hope you will find this guide useful.

Do you know how your executives are feeling, at all levels, right now? Are they supported in setting boundaries? Are you?

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

As you look at improving the work environment for executives, decide which perspective you will take. We have broken the guide into three separate levels: the organizational level, leaders who manage executives and executives as individuals. For each level, there are sections to prompt reflection, and suggested best practices to consider. Each section also contains an 8-step action plan model to help you as you embark on this work.

The tool is designed to help you set-up actions plans to tackle pain points executives (or you) have identified or raised in our 2021 APEX Executive Work and Health study (EWHS) and our APEX Advisory Services for Executives (ASE) practice, the Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) for your organization, and in other fora you may have data mined. You can decide how you define organization; it could be one intact team, one branch or the whole department or Agency. We invite you to go to the appropriate section in this guide and start planning your intervention.

We also encourage you to look at the APEX EWHS Model, found in Annex 1. It was developed specifically for executives in the PS, and highlights that the most toxic element of organizational health is harassment and that the best lever to create a positive work environment is inclusion. Also note that the ASE reports that 30-50% of their client situations in the last 5 years are harassment related. Consult Annex 1 and the APEX website for more information.

You may wish to consult free self-serve resources such as Guarding Minds at Work (https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/guarding-minds-at-work), to help you successfully do a plan of action based on the 13 psychosocial factors at work and monitor progress. We have provided you with the 13 factors and their definitions in Annex 2.

Trying to do too much all at once can have a negative impact if it creates stress and pressure on leaders and is unlikely to be successful. Instead, consider implementing smaller changes over time. Focusing on one initiative at a time may be ideal. After you incorporate these initiatives, or when they're no longer necessary, you can add more. It is to be expected that some trial solutions or actions may not work as anticipated. Make it clear that if one action is not successful, you will consider another solution.

> It is to note that workloads, 24-7 connectivity, and the cult of immediacy and urgency, as well as the future of work and inclusion are current top of mind issues for executives across the PS.

Some may worry that discussing pain points with executives will cause problems or invite unreasonable criticism. Our position is that avoiding or denying executive workplace issues will allow problems to worsen until they become a crisis and create or exacerbate toxic cultures.

As you begin, clearly communicate that the workplace will not become ideal overnight but will continue to focus on improving psychological health and safety and requires the contribution of all executives.

Remember, the good news is that no one person needs to have all the answers. One great way to approach the working issues of executives is to draw from the wisdom of crowds. Seek the opinions, validation, and solutions from your own executives. They have the best answers to make work life better for all.

There are no right or wrong answers, so go ahead and experiment, create your own plan, scan the environment for other ideas, go back to the drawing board and start something else if needed. Solutions vary depending on many factors, so they need to be reviewed periodically.

And finally, best of luck on this journey and thank you for caring about executive health. We will all reap the rewards of your efforts.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL
THE GOAL

Create a culture where every executive flourishes, leads their teams with vision caring, unwavering ethics while accomplishing phenomenal results for Canadians.

Psychological health and safety supports executive productivity and a healthy bottom line. Organizations or departments may believe that they do not have enough time or resources to invest in this however the data is clear that for executives to be healthy, the organization needs to be healthy and for employees to be healthy their executives need to be healthy. Not to do so is a risk as these issues will worsen over time and create toxic cultures.

In our recent APEX Work and Health Study (EWHS), EX-01's and EX-02's are languishing, as opposed to the EX-03's that are faring better and EX 04-05's who are defined as coping (despite having the highest workloads and high rates of incivility). EX-01's and EX-02's are the most diverse, have highest burnout rates, workload issues, intent to leave, and lowest level of decision latitude. They are at high risk.

Engage with your own executives in order to validate their challenges. Take a systems approach to executive issues. This can be done throughout your organization or in distinct teams. The conversation will be impactful as a sign of caring, hope and will lead to better action plans and engagement.

It can seem daunting to prioritize and choose those evidence-based actions that are most likely to improve psychological health and safety in the workplace. The good news is that no one person needs to have the answers. One great way to approach the working issues of executives is to draw from the wisdom of crowds. Seek the opinions, validation, and solutions from your own executives. They have the best answers to make work life better.

If hybrid or the future of work is a focus area you may wish to consult the APEX hybrid information at https://apex.gc.ca/resources/ewh-in-hybrid-work-environments/.

The following are suggested steps to consider as you embark on this work

8 Steps
1. Collect and analyze all data you have on hand from all sources (EWHS, ASE reports, PSES, etc). You should begin to see areas needing improvement.

2. Validate the pain points of your executive (s) against that data and clarify and prioritize one area of focus with them.

3. Obtain senior management support if you are tackling at the organizational level.

4. Be clear on what you want to improve and why. Determine the outcome you want to achieve, who is responsible for this work, how you will engage your executives, the supports needed to launch and maintain, what measures you will put in place to monitor, how you will measure success, and what your communication strategy is.

5. Brainstorm practical solutions with your executives (one or two per focus area).

6. Implement solutions.

7. Monitor, adjust and evaluate success.

8. Restart with a new focus area or refine the old focus area if adjustments are needed.

An Example

- Organizations may begin by looking at just one psychosocial factor or asking their executives to validate and prioritize the top pain point (s). Identify one or more which the leaders believe is most impacting productivity.

- One example is workload management. Effective workload management is rarely about doing less work. It focuses on doing work with less stress and distraction. This re-framed concept can open a new kind of dialogue based on reducing distractions and stress and help identify better solutions to do that.

QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN YOUR REFLECTION

General

- Do you know the state of health of your executives, at all levels? Have you analyzed the executive portions of the PSES and the APEX EWHS survey overall and for your particular organization, as well as the latest APEX Advisory Services (ASE) annual report and any other reliable data source your organization may have mined?

- Have you promoted frequent dialogues with your executives about their work realities, pain points, workloads, and other top irritants, in order to validate them?

Hybrid

- Consider the future of work, how has the pandemic helped shape a different way forward and keep the new efficiencies? How can we not lose the good parts we put in place during COVID?

- Are you able to apply as much flexibility to your executives and you will at the employee level? If not, what will the likely impact of this differing practice be on executives?

- Are you looking at hybrid work through the lens of executives with young children or aging parents and other personal circumstances, and their differing need for flexibility?

Workload Management

- Workloads and burnout are top of mind for executives. Have you considered what can be done to remove some of the pressures? Can deadlines be challenged, and priorities reset, including removing some?

- Are you more focused on planning and discussing what needs to be done vs empowering your teams to do the work?

- How recently have you reviewed the span of control of your executives? Is it reasonable? Is it consistent? Is there any way to adjust it to be more balance and relieve pressure for your executives?

Talent/Career/Performance

- Do organizational processes consider primarily the results achieved or does the organization take seriously the how they are achieved? (Is incivility allowed to obtain results, are there avenues for employees to truly raise concerns, are the concerns taken seriously, does staffing and talent management take this into consideration, is their fear of reprisal particularly at the executive level?)

- Is the performance and talent management processes achieving the desired objectives? Are they fair and transparent? How could you improve the processes within your organization? Are there biases that are impacting results?

- Is your executive succession pipeline healthy?

- When your EXs have "performance issues" or struggle, could an underlying cause to pursue with them be exhaustion and burnout?

Inclusive Leadership

- Have looked at your systems, processes, and practices through the lens of EEDI executives? The data shows that for most areas, EEDI executives fair worse than their non-EEDI counterparts.

- Research confirms that unconscious bias, or the subtle, more ambiguous forms of prejudice is more harmful in the workplace than explicit discrimination. Are you aware when this occurs in yourself? In others in the organization?

- What data do you have to assess how prevalent harassment levels of your executives? (remember, it is the most potent negative factor in organizational health).

- Is your organization an appealing place to attract and retain the most diverse and inclusive executives?

- Are your EEDI staying in your organization or leaving earlier than others?

Recognition
- How do you recognize your executives? Does the 'How' play a prominent role? Is recognition tailored to the individual executive?

BEST PRACTICES

General
- Acknowledge that people are your most important resource and that every action in an organization either reinforces or negates this statement. Recognize that if we weaken or destroy this resource, all aspects of our organizations suffer. Use this language in your communications and follow suite with **actions**.

- Create an environment where executives are encouraged to challenge the status quo, otherwise things cannot get better. As an example, if we believe that inclusion is not optimal, how can change that if we do not challenge the status quo that got us there in the first place?

- Assess signals such as turnover, churn, sick leave usage and survey results to understand where your organization is strong and where there may be issues that need further investigation (including workplace assessments, skip levels). Do not wait for executives to come to you. Open a channel that allows open feedback! This is the only way of ensuring you have the pulse.

- Set-up a 'Breakfast-lunch-round table for Executives' to network once a month for an hour in a safe space (facilitated by trusted sources) for frank conversations. Discussions subjects can be ranked by your executives, to ensure top priority items get addressed first.

- Conflict is the source of many issues for executives and organizations and abilities in the domain can always improve. Conflict competence expertise abounds. Make conflict competence a personal learning plan priority for all executives and those in the pipeline. You will avoid a multitude of issues in the future.

- Establish a simple mentoring program for all new executives. Choose one with the least amount of administration and factor in satisfaction results. You will equip them to be more effective.

- Look at structures, processes, and systems: are they inclusive, effective and all necessary?

- Survey feeder groups to the EX-cadre to better understand their career motivations and interest in becoming an EX and what factors need to be considered to attract the best and brightest to your Executive cadre.

Hybrid

- Consider allowing the maximum flexibilities for work with your executives, tailoring for job demands, preferences, family situation, etc. Consider their needs and not just organizational ones.

- Do you have some executives on telework? Since COVID, have you hired executives in locations not where their team is and is it working out well? They can be examples of success to build on or showcase.

- The bottom line is, if you trust your executives to do the work you hired them to do, does it matter whether they work on location or online? Does it always matter?

Workload Management

- Take a fresh look at hours of work, flexible work arrangements, work-life integration concepts to attract and retain executives and motivate them. Give them choices.

- Establish core working hours for executives. As an example; 8:30 to 4.

- Establish an organizational guideline for executive connections and meeting protocols and safeguards for your executive team, including after-hours urgencies. Establish connection protocols that make sense. Some examples are; no emails- meetings after or before a certain hour in the day, no response expected to emails prior to or beyond a certain hour in the day, weekend-free connection during prescribed times, all urgent issues will be sent via text or phone call after certain hours in the week and on weekends, rotation of who is the point person for emergencies in the evenings and on weekends, blocking certain days-times that are deemed 'meeting -free', scheduling recovery times after a heavy burst of work or milestone to allow executives to recharge.

- Task each intact team (branch, DGship) to further tailor those protocols to each team.

- Look for ways to reduce distractions for executives. For example, have blocks of time where there are no internal meetings, no devices in meetings, blocks of time to do emails with no distractions, put for yourself and respect anyone with out-of-office or unavailable statuses on systems.

Talent\Career\Performance

- Have a list handy of your top performance and high potential employees and executives. Do they apply for and are considered for promotions, acting opportunities, training, development? If they refuse, ask them why to see if there are improvements you can make to make these opportunities more appealing.

- Have you looked at how many executives you have lost in the last year and why they left? Perhaps implement a simple exit interview strategy would be useful.

- Make sure your staffing boards and hiring managers are inclusive.

- Look at the performance rating results of your executives. Are the top performers an inclusive group? If not, perhaps there are systemic issues preventing this.

- Review your staffing processes in light of high rates of non-advertised processes. Are you attracting and hiring the best candidates? Are you inclusive? Is staffing being done in an open and constructive manner? Is everyone given the same opportunities to apply, to be considered for opportunities? Have you asked your EEDI executives what barriers they have seen in your staffing processes? Have you looked at staffing and other processes through the other-abled and indigenous lenses? Do the same few names come up for all opportunities if so, why? Are your staffing board members inclusive?

- Survey feeder groups to the EX-cadre to better understand their career motivations and interest in becoming an EX and what factors need to be considered to attract the best and brightest to your Executive cadre.

Inclusive Leadership

- Is your team as inclusive as you would like?

- Research confirms that unconscious bias, or the subtle, more ambiguous forms of prejudice is more harmful in the workplace than explicit discrimination. Are you aware when this occurs in yourself? In others in the organization?

- Have you promoted frequent dialogues with your executives about their work realities, pain points, workloads, and other top irritants, to validate them?

- Have you done the same for EEDI executives?

- Allow your executives (and embrace) them sharing how they feel?

- Do you regularly discuss as a team, how to make the work environment better, including factoring in recovery times between heavy deliverables? Add this as a recurring item in your management meetings.

- Go beyond recruitment efforts to address inclusion. Once executives are hired, look at your systems and processes around recognition, development and create opportunities for them or they will leave. Review your programs: are there barriers for certain groups of individuals and can you remove them? Ask your EEDI executives how you can be more inclusive.

- Lead by example and take action - executives who observe behaviours inconsistent with stated institutional values (at the organizational, boss, colleague, or team level) have an obligation under the Code of Conduct to take action. Encourage your executives to come forward and call out these inappropriate behaviours and support them.

Recognition
- Ask each individual executive on your team, in your bilats, how they like to receive feedback and recognition. Note each preference and action accordingly. Each person is different. As an example, some dislike public acknowledgements and some revel in it.

LEADERS WHO MANAGE EXECUTIVES
THE GOAL

To be the best leader you can be and have your executive staff describe you as effective, collegial, caring, emotionally intelligent, a visionary, supportive, selfless, dedicated and a role-model.

You are central to your executive's well-being. It is widely known that the number one retention factor for employees (or reason for employee departure), is the quality of their relationship with their manager. As the leader of executives, you have a unique and powerful means of influencing the work environment for them and impact its whole culture. Your executive's teams need them to be at their best. As the direct supervisor of those EXs, they can greatly benefit from your help and full support.

The higher the demands at work, the more important it is for your executives to have some level of control. Your executives understand that it may not be possible to give them control over how their work is prioritized due to regulations, safety concerns, mandate and DM priorities and Minister demands. However, there are always solutions and options to consider that are realistic and remove irritants that become burdens for your executives. Just holding that discussion will energize and engage your executives.

Respect builds trust and building trust rests on your executives seeing how you and other organizational leaders care about their work-related concerns and well-being. There is no better magic pill.

In the APEX EWHS of 2021, EX-01's and EX-02's are languishing, as opposed to the EX-03's that are faring better and EX 04-05's who are defined as coping (despite having the highest workloads and high rates of incivility). EX-01's and EX-02's are the most diverse, have highest burnout rates, workload issues, intent to leave, and lowest level of decision latitude. All of which greatly impacts their well-being and effectiveness.

Without validating with your more junior executives what their world looks like, you will miss the opportunity to close an important blind spot and may misjudge, be less compassionate or open to your struggling EXs.

Remember that strong leaders buffer their teams, stand up for and support them, allow others to shine, are open to different ideas and are able to connect emotionally with others. Connecting, gives team members permission to speak freely about how we are really feeling, encouragement to set limits and boundaries, disconnect, tackle workloads as a collective and make maximum use of flexibilities. These are all solutions within reach if you engage in these conversations with your executives.

In their book entitled **The multiplier effect**, Wisemean, Allen and Foster describe two opposite types of leaders: The first drains intelligence, energy, and capability from their people and needs to be the smartest person in the room. They are considered Diminishers.   The second use their abilities to amplify and recognize the capabilities of their team members. They are considered Multipliers.

As you consider your executives' work life, follow these steps to help guide you to a personal action plan.

8 Steps to consider

1. Collect and analyze all data you have on hand from all sources (EWHS, ASE reports, PSES, etc). You should begin to see areas needing improvement.

2. Validate the pain points of your executive (s) against that data and clarify and prioritize one area of focus with them.

3. Let your executives choose which pain point they want to tackle first.

4. Be clear on what you want to improve and why. Determine the outcome you want to achieve, who is responsible for this work, how you will engage your executives, how you will measure success, and what your communication strategy is.

5. Brainstorm practical solutions with your executives (one or two per focus area).

6. Implement solutions.

7. Monitor, adjust and evaluate success.

8. Restart with a new focus area or refine the old focus area if adjustments are needed.

QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN YOUR REFLECTION

- Do you know how your EX direct reports feel at the moment?

- Have you analyzed the executive portions of the PSES and the APEX EWHS survey overall and for your particular organization, as well as the latest APEX Advisory Services (ASE) annual report?

- What climate is your outer office creating? Open, collegial or autocratic?

- Are executives routinely sharing with you how they feel? When they do, how do you react?

Hybrid
- Have you considered keeping some of the good work habits gained through the pandemic and allowing your executive to as well? What opportunities has the pandemic created that they do not want to lose?

- The bottom line is, if you trust your executives to do the work you hired them to do, does it matter whether they work on location or online? Does it always matter?

Workload Management
- Are your EX01's and EX-02's languishing? Are your high performers struggling?

Talent\Career\Performance
- Do you always get the top candidates for your EX-positions?

- Have you looked at how many executives you have lost in the last year and why they left?

Inclusive Leadership
- Is your team as inclusive as you would like?

- Research confirms that unconscious bias, or the subtle, more ambiguous forms of prejudice is more harmful in the workplace than explicit discrimination. Are you aware when this occurs in yourself? In others in the organization?

- Do you remind yourself that your actions speak louder than words and you are a role model?

Recognition
- Do you know your executive's feedback and recognition preferences?

BEST PRACTICES

General
- Regardless of position in a hierarchy, leaders are not expected to be perfect. Be curious and open and let others help you find solutions.

- Conflict is the source of many issues for executives and organizations and abilities in the domain can always improve. Conflict competence expertise abounds. Make conflict competence a personal learning plan priority for all executives and those in the pipeline. You will avoid a multitude of issues in the future.

- Establish a simple mentoring program for all new executives. Choose one with the least amount of administration and factor in satisfaction results. You will equip them to be more effective.

- Focus on outcomes and results and empower your teams to manage the what and the how.

- Support people courageous enough to step forward and raise issues likely have valuable information for us and are not the only ones feeling this way. Shutting them down, is a missed opportunity to make our workplaces better for all.

- Refer your executives who are respondent in workplace violence and harassment complaints to the APEX Advisory Services.

- Ensure that initiatives to support the health and wellness of employees are also focused on supporting executives.

- Surround yourself with truth tellers. Self-awareness is best achieved if we surround ourselves with truth tellers to give us real feedback. They are our best allies, even though we may not always be enamored with their message.

- Remain humble, while confident, keeps us open-minded which is needed for any kind of change, agility, innovation, inclusion and risk-taking.

- Make sure your outer office is creating a supportive and collegial environment for your executives and their support staff.

- On average, try to determine how much time per day and week you are dedicating to guiding, inspiring and motivating your teams. Try to improve the amount of time each day you allocate to people management strategies. Make strategic choices and challenge your assumptions, beliefs and ways of working. Try something new each day and no longer consider status quo an option.

Hybrid

- Consider allowing the maximum flexibilities for work with your executives, tailoring for job demands, preferences, family situation, etc. A cookie-cutter approach will miss the needs of your diverse team.

- Do you have some executives on telework? Since COVID, have you hired executives in locations not where their team is and is it working out well? They can be examples of success that give you the confidence to value work flexibilities for all.

- Invest in technology to ensure everyone's included, regardless of their location.

- Encourage trust and accountability; remind managers that being able to see someone in front of a computer doesn't mean they are being productive.

- Facilitate communications between teams so they can learn from each other and find solutions to the challenges they face.

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- Develop your approach in collaboration with employees.

- Build relationships and communicate regularly so people are confident to raise issues or seek support when needed. Don't assume people are okay.

- Build in regular time for teams to get together physically. Encourage employees to use the office purposefully.

- Accept that you might not have all the answers or that things might not work out, but be committed to putting them right.

Workload Management

- It is not the volume of work that creates a lot of the issues around this topic, but rather the distractions. In this vein, turn off your notifications, block work times, reduce meetings and encourage your executives to as well.

- Establish connection protocols that make sense. Some examples are; no emails- meetings after or before a certain hour in the day, no response expected to emails prior to or beyond a certain hour in the day, weekend-free connection during prescribed times, all urgent issues will be sent via text or phone call after certain hours in the week and on weekends, rotation of who is the point person for emergencies in the evenings and on weekends, blocking certain days-times that are deemed 'meeting -free', scheduling recovery times after a heavy burst of work or milestone to allow executives to recharge.

- Provide your executive team with boundaries (such as core team hours, emergency protocols) and guardrails (such as no emails after 6pm unless urgent and we will use texts for those few).

- Start your management meetings with a pulse check of participants (on a scale of 1to 5 or 10, how do you feel today). Just accept the responses without judgement.

- You could choose to add a message similar to this one in your signature block Our working hours may be different. Please do not feel obligated to reply outside your normal working hours.

- Respect your executives time, provide them with down time and time to balance work and personal priorities by implementing informal rules such as no early morning meetings or no meetings after a certain time or during certain blocks of time, only urgent calls or texts on evenings starting at 6 pm and on weekends, meeting free periods in the week or month, periods where executives are not expected to check their phones etc. An option is that if an after-hours e-mail is urgent enough to send, then a text is also sent to the executive, so they only need to react to text sounds. An alternative is that the DG must be copied on the e-mail. All other e-mails are held until working hours.

- Encourage your team to take breaks or take meetings while getting out of the house to walk etc.

- Assess the number and purpose of meetings. Are all required; can you reduce the number and time allotted per meeting; can you delegate some; limit participation to only those who need to be there, is there duplication, can they be run more efficiently? Have you asked your team for their idea on how to reduce meeting time?

- Determine if an e-mail is the most effective means of communication; will it lead to a chain of e-mails? would a phone call or another approach be more effective? Does everyone need to receive or be copied on the e-mail?

- Consider making oral briefing notes acceptable which may reduce workload and eliminate back and forth and multiple versions of written ones.

- Institute a rotational approach to who needs to be on call versus everyone to ensure that those who are not on call, receive the necessary time to rest and recover.

- Ensure that when someone is on leave a backup is named so that the person on leave can rest and recover.

- When employees are on training, arrange for backups so that they can focus on the training, networking and interacting with their peers rather than responding to e-mails, taking calls etc.

- Look for ways to reduce distractions for executives. For example, have blocks of time where there are no internal meetings, no devices in meetings, blocks of time to do emails with no distractions, put for yourself and respect anyone with out-of-office or unavailable statuses on systems.

- What is your office protocol around urgency – Do you really need to send that e-mail or make that call on a Saturday afternoon? Do you really need that briefing note for your week-end package?

- Address workload management and host regular strategic planning sessions to ensure resources are constantly realigned according to highest priority areas.

Talent/Career/Performance

- If an employee is having performance issues, understand what the contributing factors are (family, health, need training) and take the time to help the employee get back on track.

- Ensure that you are managing not only the results but how the results are being achieved and put words to that effect on each of your executive's PMA manager section.

- Provide support in how to provide feedback and where to go to get help to support you in managing an executive.

- When your EXs have "performance issues" or struggle, could an underlying cause to pursue with them be exhaustion and burnout?

Inclusive Leadership

- Research confirms that unconscious bias, or the subtle, more ambiguous forms of prejudice is more harmful in the workplace than explicit discrimination.

- Purposely use vacancies as opportunities to select diverse resources and integrate them with special care. Pulse check how they are doing often and ask for their suggestions on how to improve the workplace.

- A boss that is choleric is very destabilizing for a team. Commit to not speaking, texting, until you have calmed down.

- Go beyond recruitment efforts to address inclusion.

- Once executives are hired, we must have systems and processes around recognition, development and create opportunities for them or they will leave (especially members of your EEDI groups). Review your programs: are there barriers for certain groups of individuals and can you remove them?

- As a boss, asking your team "what can I (or we) do to make your next week (or other timeline) better?" has tremendous impact. It demonstrates caring, engagement, commitment and fosters hope that things can change for the better.

- Commit to having more regular and informal check-ins with your executives and go beyond lip service of; are you ok?

- Ask your executives what else they might need from you or the organization to support their success at work demonstrates caring.

- Assess how employees transition in your organization (think about reintegration from sick leave, transition to retirement, new executives). Are you creating a welcoming environment? Do you have data from those groups and those in EEDI? What suggestions for improvements do they have for you?

- Support your employees and colleagues who are suffering from health and mental health issues. Look at the needs of executives reintegrating to the workplace to see what are their needs and how best to support them?

- Provide a thorough orientation to new executives, provide them with opportunities to learn from you, encourage them to have mentors, coaches, to expand their networks. Provide them with their terms and conditions of employment and other applicable policies and directives.

- Make it a personal and team commitment to embrace inclusion by changing behaviours and actions. This is the best way to move the yardstick forward so that next year, we can finally see a positive difference on this file. More concretely, examine inclusivity at your management table (are your meetings bilingual, do you value the opinions of all participants, do all members feel that they can contribute and bring their authentic self to the table?) What bias do you have and what bias are embedded within the culture of your team?

- Create an environment based upon respect that creates trust but allows for inquiry, innovation and unleashes creativity.

- Ensure that conversations are two-way and that executives are given space to inquire, to speak, to flag concerns, seek your expertise.

- Ask your team what challenges they have and how you can help or support them.

- Reward the new behaviours you are trying to instill.

- Respect your executives' boundaries. Take time to notice who may be struggling and how you can help. (it is much harder to return from a burnout than it is to support someone earlier)

Recognition

- Ask your executives what type of recognition and frequency is the most effective for them and tailor your recognition modes to their individual answers.

EXECUTIVE AS INDIVIDUALS
THE GOAL

To take charge of your career and work life, as much as you can. To feel in control and that distractions are minimized, and stress is manageable. To feel proud, energized, and hopeful about your work life and who you are as a leader. To feel you have healthy boundaries and are productive but not overwhelmed most of the time.

Many executives feel that every day is still an endless series of video or other meetings, countless hours in front of a screen, little time for family, self, and real work, and still feel that they are not accomplishing or doing enough. Time is in short supply for executives and devoting more of that precious time to consciously communicate and connect with their teams, colleagues, and bosses is taking its toll.

The cult of immediacy, constant urgencies, work overload, connection 24-7 seems to be our new realities and the workplace seems to be less compassionate, human and kind. Without a doubt, the past few years and the uncertain future of work presents unique leadership challenges that continue to test executives and put their success at risk.

It is our belief that respect is the foundation of all human interactions and that without it, nothing is possible. We further believe that respect begins with ourselves. You are at the center of many people's lives and your well-being needs to be strong to lead your teams, be a good parent and partner, good family and community member, citizen, Canadian, and global individual. Give yourself the permission to put yourself first.

How can we improve our well-being? Many of us have been taught and believe that putting ourselves first is selfish, self-centered, or self-indulgent, especially for women who are socialized to put the needs of others first. Our belief is that we need to be self-critical in order to motivate ourselves to do better. In fact, research on self-compassion demonstrates this to be the opposite. The work done by Dr. Kristin Neff concludes that those who master self-compassion are far more resilient and have stronger mental health well-being.

You are important. Many rely on you. You matter. It is your responsibility to take care of yourself even if you feel your boss or organization do not seem to.

Some of the reasons we do not take charge, establish boundaries, act out of self-respect, and endure a situation far too long can be found in the lies we tell ourselves.

- I am fine

- I love my job

- I like the responsibility

- I need to prove xx to xx

- If I can get to this (milestone, point, date), all will be ok

- I am just tired

- You don't understand, no one else can do this

- People are depending on me

- I need to get back to the top of my game

- I'll take a vacation and then be okay

- If people just let me do my job, I would be fine

Most people believe these statements to be true and to a certain extent, many of them are. The "lie" is in denying that their current situation is damaging their health and well-being and that changes are necessary. Over time, this denial can eventually lead to burnout.

QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN YOUR REFLECTION

General

- How am I really feeling?

- How long have I been feeling this way?

- Are you feeling at your best at the moment? Do you practice self-care daily? Do you have healthy boundaries at work and have you minimized work life interference?

- What lies am I telling myself about the severity or needing to endure more of this?

- Do my family members and friends note that I am different? Distant?

- Am I sleeping and eating well?

- On a scale of 1 to ten, how effective and good do I feel?

Hybrid

- What positives did the pandemic bring (habits, flexibilities) that I do not want to lose?

- How has managing virtually worked for me? What were the positives? Challenges?

- I am willing to let others have as much choice as they need in the new work world?

- What are my boss' feelings, opinions about the future of work and are they aligned to mine?

Workload Management

- Am I feeling overwhelmed or under control? On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being totally overwhelmed), where do I fall?

- Am I concerned about my health and mental health?

- Have I sought help from experts (EAP, APEX Advisory Services, Doctor, coach, mentors)?

- Is my team overwhelmed? On the same scale, where do they fall?

- Are things pilling up and none are allowed to be removed?

- Have I shared my situation and feelings with my boss?

- What would their reaction be if I did?

- Am I concerned about reputation and reprisal if I do?

- What lies am I telling myself to endure this situation?

- Do I make the most out of delegating, to both manage better my workload and also to let direct reports expand their leadership experiences.

Talent\Career\Performance

- Am I fully in charge of my career?

- Do I need a change?

- Is my performance slipping?

Inclusive Leadership

- Are you aware when this occurs in yourself? In others in the organization?

Recognition

As you consider your work life, follow these steps to help guide you to a personal action plan.

8 Steps to consider

1. Look at your work life. What causes you the most stress, pain, ineffectiveness, makes you not sleep at night....

2. Write down one or two areas of focus that would most make your work life better (or that are your worst pain points).

3. Write an outcome statement for each. "If I tackle this focus area or pain point successfully, my work life will be better because ...". It will help you focus and visualize success.

4. Brainstorm practical solutions (one or two per focus area).
   Avoid changing too much all at once. Take small doable steps and actions that you can build over time.

5. Implement solutions. Experiment. There are no right or wrong answers.

6. Monitor and evaluate success. If something does not work as planned, tweak it or move on to another idea. Keep refining this for yourself, throughout your career as your situation evolves.

7. Celebrate wins.

8. Restart with a new focus area or refine the old focus area if adjustments are needed.

BEST PRACTICES

Consult the previous section Leaders of Executives for more best practices to consider.

General

- Conflict is the source of many issues for executives and organizations and abilities in the domain can always improve. Conflict competence expertise abounds. Make conflict competence a personal learning plan priority for all executives and those in the pipeline. You will avoid a multitude of issues in the future.

- Stand up to incivility, bullying, belittling and humiliation in the workplace within your team and when you see it within your organization.

- As the leader, lead by example and look at the work culture that you are creating. Is it somewhere you would like to work?

- Challenge the status quo! We cannot evolve if we stay the same.

- Use your leadership super-powers of self-awareness, humility, and courage. The first two keep you grounded, connected and open and courage propels you to act on it.

- Focus on outcomes and results and empower your teams to manage the what and the how.

- Focus daily on your accomplishments

- Avoid criticizing yourself unnecessarily

- Create a serene and peaceful space in your home

- Keep your environment organized and tidy

- Write daily in a gratitude journal to help refocus your mind on the positive things in your life

- Post a list of what's valued, enjoyable or precious in your life on your fridge or somewhere you'll see it daily

- Nurture your spirit using quiet reflection, meditation or prayer

- Be kind to yourself and others! If you do not take care of yourself, you will not be able to take care of all the other aspects of your life

- Am I self-compassionate? To find out, take the Self-compassion test (https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-test/)

Hybrid

- Have you developed good habits during the pandemic which you would like to keep? Make sure you make those a priority going forward. Have discussions with your peers, teams and boss on how to find ways to keep the pluses.

- Ask; what are the priorities and opportunities post COVID and for the future of work and what do these changes means for my work, our role, my team and do I need to reprioritize?

- Augment brainstorm meetings with digital collaboration tools such as digital whiteboarding. Focus on engaging diverse types of people (e.g., introverts) by allowing for idea generation ahead of idea review and creating psychological safety for diverse teams.

Talent/Career/Performance

- If your boss signals performance issues, consider that you may be in or close to a burnout and discuss this situation with your treating physician.

- Invest time in your networks, which is the best avenue to find a new position or challenge, since most staffing is through non-advertised actions. Be active in LinkedIn, connect virtually or physically with those you have been out of touch with.

- Manage your career! Take charge; no one else will do that for you.

- Continue to build and stay in touch with your network! (team, colleagues, mentors, people in and outside your functional community).

- Discuss your career with your boss to see where you stand in the 'ready for advancement' or 'ready for promotion' ETMS categories.

- Connect with your mentors and former bosses to see if there are opportunities around.

- Connect with the APEX Advisory Services to discuss your situation and options going forward.

- Choose bosses that are people-centric and who you trust and follow them.

- Do your homework on your potential boss before accepting any offers. Ask them if you can speak with some direct reports and do some informal chats.

- Make your last bilat agenda item with your boss always be: Performance, career, talent feedback.

Workload Management

- Establish connection protocols that make sense. Some examples are; no emails - meetings after or before a certain hour in the day, no response expected to emails prior to or beyond a certain hour in the day, weekend-free connection during prescribed times, all urgent issues will be sent via text or phone call after certain hours in the week and on weekends, rotation of who is the point person for emergencies in the evenings and on weekends, blocking certain days-times that are deemed 'meeting -free', scheduling recovery times after a heavy burst of work or milestone to allow executives to recharge.

- You could put a message similar to this one, in your signature block Our working hours may be different. Please do not feel obligated to reply outside your normal working hours.

- Look for ways to reduce distractions. We often respond to texts or emails which appear constantly and are rarely urgent, instead of focusing on planned strategic work. Shutting off alarms and sounds is one way to remain focused.

- You could have blocks of time devoted to do emails or reading and research, no internal meeting blocks, or no devices in meetings, and put for yourself and respect all out-of-office or unavailable statuses on systems and devices.

- Set boundaries tied to work and life.

- Assertively take charge of your calendar.

- Review the use and value of meetings: do you need them all? Could some be in the form of an update email if it is just a debrief? Can you shave off meeting length? There is no edict that they need to be in 30-minute increments. If you reduce a one hour to 45 minutes, you have just liberated 15 minutes between them to do other things. Be realistic about who really needs to be at the meetings to limit the participants as much as possible.

- Delegate as much as you can to your direct reports: it frees up your time and helps them better prepare to take on roles at your level in the future.

- Are you more focused on planning and discussing what needs to be done vs empowering your teams to do the work?

- Determine blocks of time during the week where are no internal meetings and put as busy in outlook.

- Reduce distractions as much as you can. Research tells us that humans are not good at multitasking. It reduces our efficiency and de-focusses our mind. We need to block out the noise (emails, alarms, pinging) and do one thing at a time. A main culprit is emails. We are programmed to look at those first. Ask yourself: is dealing with constant emails the best use of my time right now? Does it stop me from working on what I had planned, what is most important? If so, train yourself to block times for emails and do not look at them outside those blocks.

- Constantly check-in with yourself and ask: what will allow me to be successful at my job and still have energy at the end of the day?

- What will you commit to that will help you successfully manage your work and maintain your well-being?

- Block times to do emails or complex documents.

- Use unavailable status on teams and have everyone respect these.

- Establish connection and urgency protocols for yourself, with your manager and teams.

- Take a fresh look at hours of work, flexible work arrangements, work-life integration for yourself.

- Consider holding walking meetings, especially in bilats with your staff, if documents are not required.

- Schedule 15- minute pauses in your calendar, for you to go outside, stretch, have a healthy snack.

- On average, try to determine how much time per day and week you are dedicating to guiding, inspiring and motivating your teams. Try to improve the amount of time each day you allocate to people management strategies. Make strategic choices and challenge your assumptions, beliefs and ways of working. Try something new each day and no longer consider status quo an option.

- Take a fresh look at hours of work, flexible work arrangements, work-life integration concepts to attract and retain employees and motivate them. Give them choices.

- What is your office protocol around urgency – Do you really need to send that e-mail or make that call on a Saturday afternoon? Do you really need that briefing note for your week-end package?

Inclusive Leadership
- Reflect on your own management style and your strengths and areas for improvement. Reflect on your biases and how they may be influencing your decision making and your team.

- Take time to read! (For example, Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals, or The Workplace You Need Now: Shaping Spaces for the Future of Work)

- Establish core team hours, an approximately three- to five-hour timeframe when teams must be online for collaborative in-sync engagement. Free up individual flexibility in managing their work schedules beyond core hours. Make it possible for working parents, caregivers and people of all life stages to balance work with life responsibilities. For example, creating four-hour core collaboration hours that align with time zones versus physical locations.

Recognition
- Think about your feedback and recognition preferences and let your boss and direct reports know what those are.

- Do the same for your direct reports. We are all different and a faux pas in this area can do more harm than good, despite positive intentions.

CONCLUSION

We hope you have found this guide useful. It has been a pleasure to provide it to you in the hopes that it will lead to positive changes on an individual and organizational level. This is an APEX evergreen document, so please feel free to add, make suggestions or let us know of any positive results it has led to.
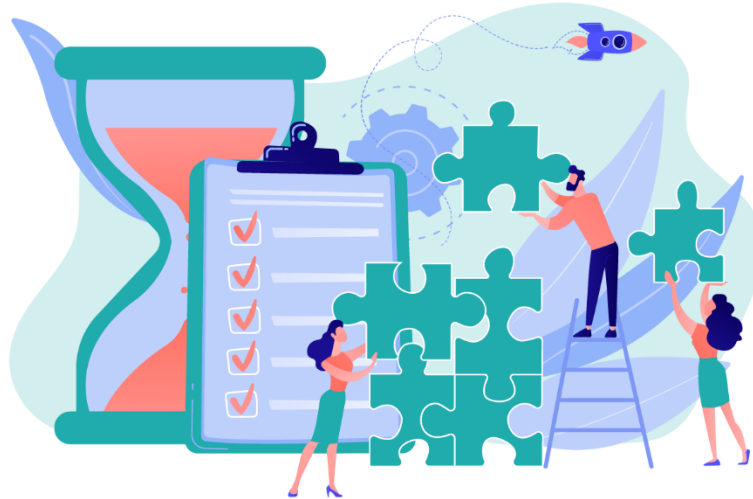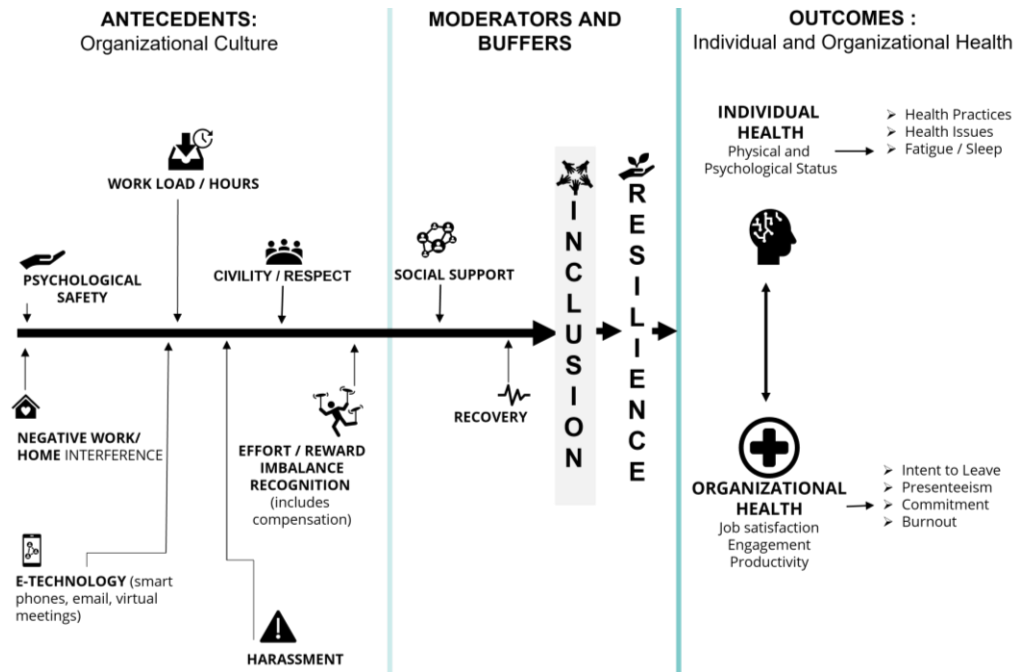
ANNEX 1

Executive Work and Health Study (EWHS) MODEL

APEX monitors causes and pathways to healthy outcomes.

This type of modeling shows how the work environment has a greater impact on health than do the individual lifestyle factors. Root causes need to be addressed.

- Unlike PSES or other surveys, the Health Study uses regressive analysis to identify the most potent drivers and interplay of factors.

- It was developed by a group of epidemiologists for APEX back in 1997. While designed with the Executive Work and Health Model in mind, it is the core of our global approach.

- In a nutshell, we may see and feel the impacts of executive and workplace health. But our analysis is based on the underlying factors shaping health.

- While the relationships aren't linear, the flow here is one to show the relationships between factors which also helps us to identify where best to intervene.

- The model clearly indicates that the health of the organization most strongly impacts the health of the executive.

- Starting on the left we start with the organizational culture – the factors that are at the organizational level with powerful impacts on individual and workplace health. The orange on this slide identifies the shifts in 2021. One of the strongest areas we saw in the ASE is the

impact of civility and respect. Further the imbalance that our clients have spoken to the need for appropriate recognition or reward based on the effort that they put in.

- The moderators or buffers in the middle lead us to the importance of resilience and recovery to a healthy outcome. The factors are dynamic & interactive.

- On the right we have the measures we use to track healthy outcomes.

- The most positive lever is inclusion and the most toxic element is harassment. Even in small amounts, harassment wreaks havoc on an organization.

The most recent survey (2021) indicates the following:

The factors that increase organizational health
- Work satisfaction- high (75%)

- Engagement: engaged (47%)

- Commitment: high (57%)

Factors that decrease organizational health
- Cynicism – severe (75%)

- Intent to leave – regularly (53%)

- Exhaustion – severe (75%)

The factors that increase individual health
- Resilience – high (61%)

- Social support – high (75%)

- Recovery – moderate (47%)

Factors that decrease individual health
- Negative work-home interference – (35%)

- Harassment (12%)

- Lack of recognition – severe (69%)

ANNEX 2

The 13 psychosocial factors assessed by Guarding Minds at Work include:

Balance
A work environment where there is recognition of the need for employees to be able to manage the demands of work, family and personal life.

Civility and respect
A work environment where employees are respectful and considerate in their interactions with one another, as well as with customers, clients and the public.

Clear leadership and expectations
A work environment where there is effective leadership and support so that employees know what they need to do, have confidence in their leaders and understand impending changes.

Engagement
A work environment where employees feel connected to their work, co-workers and their organization and are motivated to do their job well.

Growth and development
A work environment where employees receive encouragement and support in the development of their interpersonal, emotional and job skills.

Involvement and influence
A work environment where employees are included in discussions about how their work is done and have input into decisions that impact their job.

Organizational culture
A work environment characterized by the shared values of trust, honesty and fairness.

Psychological and social support
A work environment where the organization is supportive of employees" psychological health concerns and provides assistance as needed.

Psychological competencies and demands
A work environment where there is good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies, their job skills and the position they hold.

Psychological protection
A work environment where employees' psychological safety is ensured.

Protection of physical safety
A work environment where management takes appropriate action to address physical hazards in order to protect the psychological health and safety of employees.

Recognition and reward
A work environment where there is appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner.

Workload management
A work environment where assigned tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.

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APEX