

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress: A review of the research

Yarker, J., Lewis, R., Walker, S. (2023)



Overview

1. Background to the MCPARS
2. Early development
3. Research using the MCPARS
4. MCPARS in Policy
5. MCPARS in Practice
6. Key learnings from this review
7. What next?



Background to the MCPARS

Line managers play a vital role in the promotion, prevention, maintenance and support of health and wellbeing in the workplace. They are typically in direct and regular contact with an employee and therefore in a position to:

- identify and mitigate pressures placed on the employee;
- to affect work and job design and
- can buffer or exacerbate the impact of the work environment through their actions or inaction (e.g. Nielsen et al, 2006).



Unfortunately..

Leaders are consistently cited as one of the top three sources of stress by employees

Lack of trust in leadership is a key factor

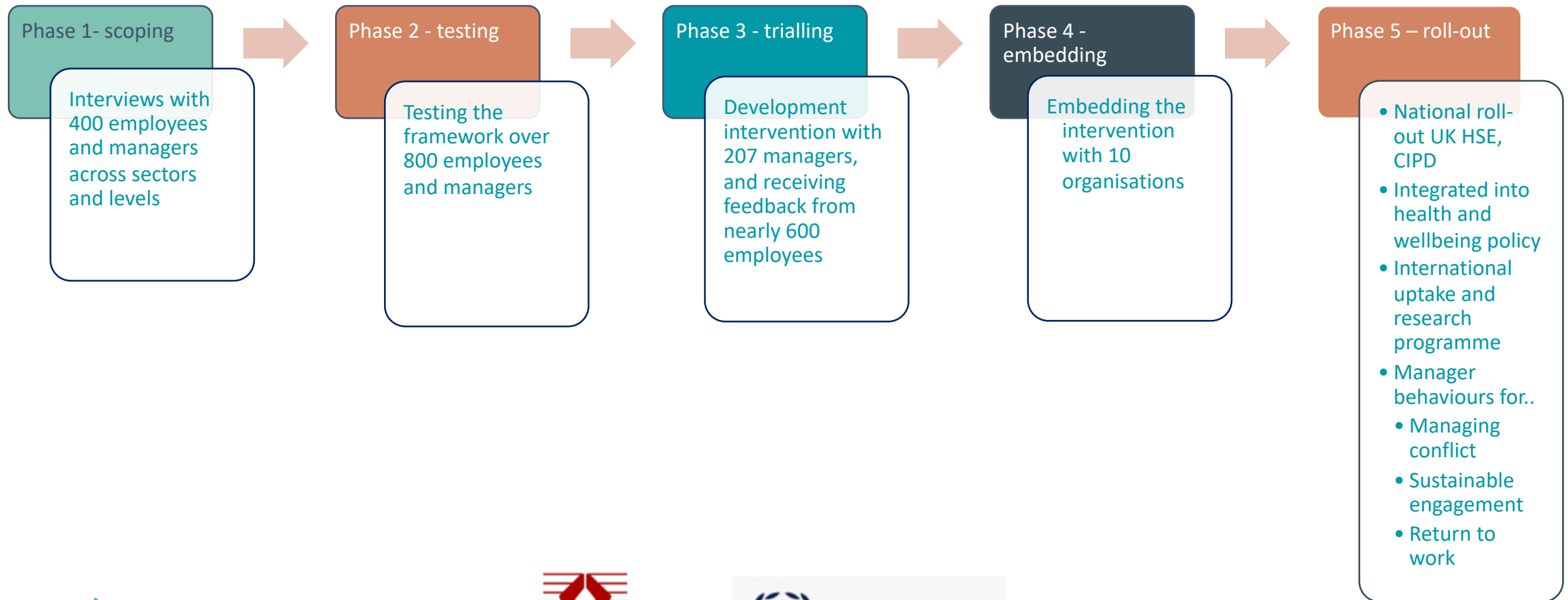
Only 11% of workers say they have discussed their mental health with their manager and less than half say they 'would'

Fewer than one in four managers feel equipped to address the challenges of work stress and mental health



Early development of MCPARS

Yarker, Donaldson-Feilder, Lewis, Flaxman (2007);
Yarker, Donaldson-Feilder, Lewis (2008);
Lewis, Yarker, Donaldson-Feilder, Flaxman, Munir (2010)
Donaldson-Feilder & Lewis, (2010);
Lewis, Donaldson-Feilder & Tharani, (2011)
Yarker, Lewis, Donaldson-Feilder, Munir, (2011)
Yarker, Donaldson-Feilder, Lewis (2021)



Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work



Being
respectful and
responsible



Managing and
communicating
existing and
future work



Managing the
individual within
the team



Managing
difficult
situations

Being respectful and responsible

Integrity

- Is honest and treats the team with respect
- Does not say one thing and then do something different

Managing emotions

- Acts calmly in pressured situations
- Is consistent in his/her approach to managing
- Is predictable in their mood

Considerate approach

- Does not create unrealistic deadlines for delivery of work
- Does not impose 'my way is the only way'



Managing and communicating existing and future work

Proactive work management

- Clearly communicates job objectives
- Develops actions plans
- Prioritises current and future workloads for the team

Problem-solving

- Is decisive when making decisions
- Deals with problems rationally and as soon as they arise

Participative/ empowering

- Correctly judges when to consult employees and when to make a decision
- Acts as a mentor
- Encourages participation from the whole team



Managing difficult situations

Managing conflict

- Acts as a mediator in conflict situations, keeping the peace rather than resolving conflict issues
- Deals objectively with employee conflicts

Use of organisational resources

- Seeks advice from other managers and HR when necessary
- Seeks help from occupational health when necessary

Taking responsibility for resolving issues

- Follows up conflicts after resolution
- Supports employees through incidents of abuse
- Addresses bullying head on
- Makes it clear they will take responsibility if things go wrong



Managing the individual within the team

Personally accessible

- Provides regular opportunities to speak one to one
- Prefers to speak personally than use email

Sociable

- Socialises with the team
- Is willing to have a laugh at work

Empathetic engagement

- Regularly asks 'how are you?'
- Makes an effort to find out what motivates individuals at work
- Treats team members equally



Identifying barriers and facilitators

- Time
- Knowledge
- Support
- Access to information
- Conflicting priorities
- Bureaucracy and pressure from organizational systems and Government



Learnings from our research

No one key behaviour:
all behaviours are important

Cross-sector, cross-level and cross-cultural relevance

Behaviours predict a range of individual, team and organisational outcomes

Behaviours can be developed through training and upward feedback

Managing mental health isn't an 'extra' requirement, it is a vital part of everyday management practice

The behaviours can be mapped onto existing competency frameworks to identify gaps

Research using the MCPARS - Cross sectional research

Reference	Method	Outcome
Toderi, S., Gaggia, A., Balducci, C., & Sarchielli, G. (2015).	178 employees from an Italian municipality and hospital completed questionnaire on competency and outcomes. “Managing and Communicating existing and future Work” competency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors' behaviours related to “Managing and Communicating Existing and Future Work” are linked to a better well-being of the employees and a better work team effectiveness.
Toderi, S., Balducci, C. (2018)	589 employees, 84 supervisors from Italian organizations across sectors. Supervisors and employees filled out the SMCIT (36 item version) as well as measures assessing their job-related affective well-being and work environmental psychosocial factors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisor self-reported competencies results in more positive and less negative affective states. Employees who rated their supervisor highly on competencies rated a better psychosocial work environment and more positive, less negative affective experiences.
Houdmont, J., Jachens, L., Randall, R., Colwell, J., & Gardner, S. (2019)	263 Devon and Cornwall police officers. Fill in indicator tool and resilience, wellbeing and engagement measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those identifying line managers with competency development needs had higher odds of experiencing psychological distress, lower resilience and lower work engagement than those with competent line managers

Research using the MCPARS - Cross sectional research

Reference	Method	Outcome
Moneva, J. C., & Nunez II, G. S. (2020)	103 secondary school teachers from 4 high schools in the Philippines. Completed competency tool indicator and burnout measures.	Managing emotions & having integrity is correlated with years of teaching experience (managers become more competent at managing emotions and integrity over time.) The competency of managing the individual is associated with the burnout component lack of accomplishment (poor ability= increased risk)
De Carlo, A., Dal Corso, L., Carluccio, F., Colledani, D., & Falco, A. (2020)	330 participants from 5 Italian companies from 5 different sectors (banking, retail, oil and gas, chemical and metalworking). Measured the respectful and responsible scale.	Supervisor integrity and ability in managing emotions was found to be crucial to increase work engagement, leading to enhanced employee performance.
Lecours, A., St-Hilaire, F., & Daneau, P. (2021)	22 semi-structured interviews labour market workers. Asking about manager behaviour, employee mental health and behaviours	The behaviours of managers in line with some of the competencies can influence the prime mental health of employees, but they also encourage employee engagement in positive mental health behaviours.
Chenevert, M., Vignoli, M., Conway, P. M., & Balducci, C. (2022)	159 Italian workers (60% worked at a large Italian social cooperative organisation). Manager competency assessment, bullying experience and PTSD symptomology	Employees with competent managers experience less workplace bullying in general and in the presence of other workplace stressors such as role conflict. Individuals with managers who possess higher levels of competencies experience lower levels of PTSD symptomology when exposed to bullying

Research using the MCPARS - Testing and development

Reference	Method	Implication for measure
Toderi, S., Gaggia, A., Balducci, C., & Sarchielli, G. (2015).	178 employees from an Italian municipality and hospital completed questionnaire on competency and outcomes. Developed a 9-item scale specifically for the “Managing and Communicating existing and future Work” competency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent psychometric properties of the supervisors' behaviour scale and confirmed the expected relationships with criterion outcomes (affective well-being and team effectiveness). • The brief version of the scale is a valid and reliable measure that can be easily used in practice.
Toderi, S., & Sarchielli, G. (2016)	303 Italian workers from 39 companies filled in brief-SMCIT (36 item they developed) and stress management indicator tool (original)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factorial structure of the brief SMCIT questionnaire and mainly supported the convergent validity and internal consistency of the scales. • Relations hypothesized between supervisors’ competencies and the psychosocial work environment were mostly confirmed, supporting the validity of the revised questionnaire and the UK HSE framework. • 36-item version can be used in practice and research.
De Carlo 2020	Used the first scale of the SMCIT (17 items). 330 participants from 5 Italian companies from 5 different sectors (banking, retail, oil and gas, chemical and metalworking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First scale of the measure (assessing manager integrity, emotion management and considerate approach) is reliable and suitable for use in different sectors in Italy (Cronbach’s alpha for the scale as 0.89). • Supervisor integrity and responsible behaviour have a positive, direct impact on employee performance. • Positive behaviours indirectly improve employee performance through partial and serial mediations of work engagement and workplace spirituality.

Research using the MCPARS - Testing and development

Reference	Method	Findings and Implication
Teoh, K.R.-H., Coyne, I., Devonish, D., Leather, P. and Zarola, A. (2016)	252 UK-based employees of a global data management company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supportive Manager Behaviours predicted job satisfaction and turnover intentions, but not engagement. Unsupportive Manager Behaviours only predicted job dissatisfaction but undermined the positive relationship between SMB and turnover intention. SMB and UMB may be on two separate constructs rather than one continuum- some research has then looked at one construct rather than both
St-Hilaire, F., Gilbert, M. H., & Lefebvre, R. (2018)	70 managers and members of staff in a major public service organisation in Quebec and 140 managers and members of staff from a variety of industries and job categories in France, semi-directed interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmed existing behaviours already in the framework But then went 'more concrete'- identified 92 behaviours/competencies for managers. Hasn't really been used in research or practice since
Pelletier-Bosshard, E., Freeman, A., Jauvin, N., & Côté, N. (2021)	Regional child protection services in Quebec- interviews with 11 middle managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Found similar competencies are required to effectively support those with emotionally demanding jobs- universal base competencies usable across industries/job types

Research using the MCPARS - Intervention research

Reference	Method	Intervention outcome
Adachi, H., Sekiya, Y., Imamura, K., Watanabe, K., & Kawakami, N.	53 managers, 465 subordinate workers in a financial enterprise business in Japan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 of 12 components of management competencies increased significantly following the intervention (integrity, considerate approach, proactive work management, problem solving, participative/empowering and empathetic engagement). Significant intervention effect on subordinate work engagement was not found. Integrity of managers showed significant multilevel correlation with work engagement of their subordinates - this increased most when a manager and a subordinate differed in gender
Tafvelin, S., von Thiele Schwarz, U., Nielsen, K., & Hasson, H. (2018)	159 regional hospital staff in Sweden. 0-24 months follow up questionnaires.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manager support does not have direct impact on outcomes but facilitates allowing the wellbeing interventions to work and enhance wellbeing.
Toderi, Balducci, Houdmont, Lewis, Yarker (under review)	Developed and delivered a three-phase L&D programs based on MCPARS framework to 50 supervisors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of framework supported Competencies can be developed using self-exploration if needed Managers need to recognise the importance of their behaviour on employee wellbeing to then be motivated to be aware of their own behaviours and development needs to then bring about effective action planning Impact enhanced when participants understand logic of activities and program- should be explained to them before the program

MCPARS in Practice

- Recommended by key stakeholders – CIPD, HSE, Acas, IOSH
- CIPD has developed interactive resources for managers and integrate the behaviours into manager guides across a range of workplace guidance
- Used in manager development programmes e.g. KSL, MHPP, SSPPT and advisory work e.g. Acas
- Noted in stress policies of local governments (5), police services (1), NHS trusts (2), higher education institutions (8), a private health care provider, Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland, The Royal College of Nursing, the University College Union and the Trades Congress Union
- Most seem to advise or require managers to complete the SMCIT on the HSE site as a self-assessment, only Deakin University talks through each competency, how it links to the management standards and then also provides the assessment tool.
- Used by Affinity for coaching and 180 assessment/feedback and training purposes (e.g. CFRS, Babergh, Asahi)



MCPARS in Policy

- BITC and PHE Mental Health toolkit for employers in response to Stevenson/Farmer 2017 review. Gov quote “provides a strong road map for the steps to achieving the changes that the review proposes.”
- Boorman 2009 NHS Health and Well-being report- identified as a potential good tool as part of training NHS managers to support staff particularly with mental health problems
- Government response to Carol Black 2008 review- mentioned as work in progress to directly address points made in Carol Black review.

Thriving at work

The Stevenson / Farmer review
of mental health and employers



Key learnings from this review

Strengths	Areas for development
Widely recommended by policy and practice stakeholders e.g. CIPD, Acas, HSE as their go to tool.	Name – inconsistent use of name makes it difficult to clearly capture impact e.g. MCPARS, MCIT, SMCIT. Positive management behaviour, behaviours to support health, wellbeing and engagement.
Good presence in policy reports and high level papers (e.g. NHS, Government responses)	Integration with HSE Management Standards: MCPARS is used in isolation – in research and practice MCPARS is not used/ referenced with the HSE Management standards. Opportunity to explicitly align and demonstrate managers can achieve the MS through these behaviours.
Growing evidence base – generalizable across sectors, regions, roles and outcomes at individual and organizational levels	Integration with other increasing priorities e.g. inclusion, safety. Are there behaviours that are fundamental to all outcomes, others that are key to wellbeing, inclusion, safety?
These manager behaviours improve health and work outcomes: New intervention research demonstrates positive findings in online and face to face formats (Collaborations with Nottingham University, Managing Minds as part of the MHPP; Toderi et al.).	Extend understanding of behaviour development MCPARS is mentioned as a tool that managers can use, but not how to build from that – limited forward plans or support Limited evidence for training and impact of training
	Refine and update framework and measure to reflect today's working environment e.g. hybrid working, explore changed needs and perceptions of what we expect from our manager



For further information, please contact jo@affinityhealthatwork.com

© 2023 Affinity Health at Work

All rights reserved

