

EVENT INSIGHTS

Empowering Line Managers to Build Thriving Teams

Being a line manager is more than just a job; it's a profound act of leadership and care.



The panel discussion brought to light a crucial truth: a manager's impact on their team's mental health can be more significant than that of a doctor or therapist. This conversation explored the challenges faced by line managers and revealed how organizations can empower them to create a high-performing, sustainable culture built on empathy and trust.

Key Insights from the Discussion

- **Emotional Leadership:** Many first-time managers are promoted for their technical performance, not their people skills. This transition requires a fundamental shift from task delegation to emotional leadership, where the ability to connect and understand a team's needs becomes paramount.
- **Psychological Safety:** Drawing from Google's Project Aristotle, panelists emphasized that a sense of psychological safety is the most critical factor for a team's success. It's the foundation that allows individuals to speak up, admit mistakes, and share their struggles without fear.
- **Vulnerability as a Tool:** When leaders model vulnerability—sharing personal challenges and openly seeking support—they humanize themselves and make it safe for their team members to do the same. This builds trust and strengthens team bonds.
- **Self-Care is Strategic:** Managers must first learn to recognize their own stress signals. Like putting on an oxygen mask before assisting others, self-care isn't selfish; it's a strategic necessity for effective leadership.
- **Listen Over Fix:** A manager's most valuable skill isn't always fixing a problem. It's the ability to actively listen and provide a supportive presence. Knowing when to "signpost" to a professional is a vital part of this role.

- **Continuous Training:** The need for training in soft skills like compassionate communication, boundary-setting, and resilience is not a one-off event. It requires ongoing reinforcement to truly embed these practices into a manager's daily work.
- **Micro-moments Make a Macro Impact:** A genuine 5-minute check-in can do more for a team's well-being than a formal hour-long meeting if it's sincere. These micro-moments of intentionality are crucial for building trust and creating a supportive culture.
- **Culture Over Policy:** You can't train your way out of a bad culture. Support for mental well-being must be visible, consistent, and championed from the top. A healthy culture is the bedrock upon which effective policies can truly thrive.

These insights are best understood through the experiences and stories shared by the panelists, which underscore the real-world challenges and successes of modern leadership.



The Journey from Manager to Leader

The transition to a line manager role is fraught with **unexpected challenges**. Panelists shared personal stories of navigating new environments, language barriers, and the immense pressure of managing large, diverse teams for the first time. It became clear that managers often feel unprepared for the emotional and relational demands of leading a team. For example, one manager was promoted for their technical skills but lacked the training to manage people, leading to a work-life imbalance where they spent their day solving their team's problems and their nights doing their own work.



A key theme was the importance of **psychological safety**. This means creating an environment where team members feel respected and safe to be vulnerable, share their struggles, and seek support without fear of retribution. Leaders must set the tone by demonstrating vulnerability themselves. By openly sharing their own challenges, such as seeking counseling services after a traumatic event, leaders humanize themselves and make it easier for others to do the same. This vulnerability fosters a culture of trust and mutual support, where a team can say, "we have each other's back."

Organizations also play a vital role in creating a sustainable support system for their managers. For instance, one firm introduced an on-site psychotherapist. What was initially a four-month trial—with fears that no one would turn up—was so successful that the sessions were overbooked and have now been running for eight years. This demonstrated a deep commitment to de-stigmatizing mental health discussions. Furthermore, organizations can



embed care into their core values and performance metrics, such as through manager assessments that include a "care about me" component. This ensures that managers are not just held accountable for numbers, but for how they lead and support their teams.

As we reflect on these insights, it becomes clear that true leadership is not about being in charge, but about taking care of those in your charge. By prioritizing the well-being of line managers and fostering an ecosystem of empathy, organizations can create a workplace where every individual not only survives but thrives.