

CASE STUDY

The Integrated Approach to Wellness



Consortium

Lysander, Swinburne University, McConnell Dowell, Decmil

Supported by

Worksafe's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund

Project Overview

This case study delves deeper into the journey to develop **The Integrated Approach to Wellness**, taking a closer look at the reasons that triggered the need for an industry-wide intervention, what the solution needed to be and how we developed it. We showcase exactly what's possible when leaders boldly embrace a need to deliberately engage in cultural transformation and development of strong leaders and how these underpin the essence of creating a mentally healthy and productive workplace.

The Issue

In 2018, an industry-wide survey and research report written by Professor Luke Downey from Swinburne University, shone a spotlight directly on the psychological impact of workplace stress and work-related factors that lead to mental health injury and burnout in the white-collar population of the infrastructure construction industry. The report showed evidence that levels of depression, anxiety and stress exceeded Australian population norms by 37% and were twice that of comparison industries.

Deeper research into the reasons why the industry is suffering to this extent uncovered the following six key Hazards and Contributing Factors:

1. **Pressure** - workload, work schedules and work environment
2. **Influence** - employee ability to control aspects of their workload and direction
3. **Promotion** - employee support, development, encouragement and resources provided
4. **Relationships** - positive relationships built on foundational rapport at all levels
5. **Role** - employee understanding of role in industry / organisation and description of that role
6. **Change** - how organisational change is managed and communicated



The Issue

Typically, the Australian infrastructure construction industry is challenged by both rising project costs and low profit margins. When coupled with the competitive tendering approach to winning work, it is not surprising that there is increasing pressure and stress to perform and stay on time and on (or under) budget. As a result, most project leaders struggle to find either the time or the resources to commit to anything that is not perceived to be essential to project delivery. While many recognise that stress, wellbeing and burnout are an issue, they feel either powerless or ill-equipped to address it.

At an employee level, many white-collar workers only know what has been role-modelled in the past and tend to accept authoritarian styles of leadership, inconsistent communications, unclear reporting lines and long hours as the norm. Reluctant to speak up because they don't feel psychologically safe, employees will either conform to a cultural norm or simply leave the industry creating a shortage of skilled resources.

With the issue now at crisis point and highly visible as a result of both the Downey-Swinburne report and COVID-19, industry leaders are gathering to address mental health and wellness as a collective. With such a complex issue and little real expertise in how to address it, the need is to build something accessible, clear and proven that companies can use to audit existing wellness initiatives and to focus and guide their efforts so that they can be confident that real, systemic and lasting change will occur.

The Goal

The Integrated Approach to Wellness is supported by WorkSafe's WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund and focuses on the prevention of mental injury and illness by building positive culture and changing leadership practices.

The consortium (Lysander, Professor Luke Downey from Swinburne University and Grant Fuller from McConnell Dowell | Decmil JV (MCCDJV), make up a passionate group of people who truly care about driving industry-endorsed change. It is recognised that effort was made to address psychological safety and wellness in the industry in the past with varying results. While some companies have been able to commit significant resources to leadership development and wellness initiatives, others have tried and not been able to gain sufficient traction to achieve the shifts they wanted.

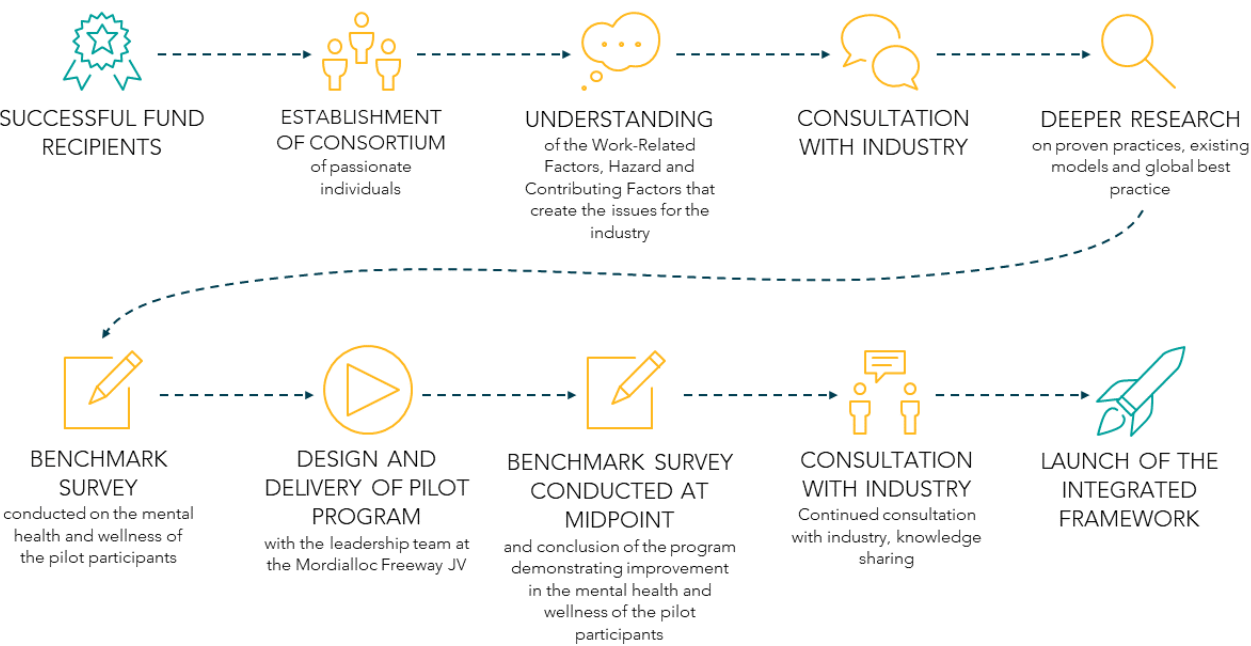
The Integrated Approach to Wellness outlines the critical success factors for any effective program, prioritises and steps people through an integrated process, showing how efforts in one area can be leveraged in multiple ways to drive clarity and consistency, and provides support resources and tools that can be easily put into practice.

The framework focusses on four key areas:

- **Constructive and Committed Leadership:** Gaining the support of committed senior leaders who also recognise what constructive leadership looks like and how important it is to effective performance
- **Culture and Connection:** A clearly articulated strategy that includes behavioural expectations that will drive a positive culture
- **Communication and Participation:** The ability to engage and motivate the broader organisation to participate in activities that will build psychological safety and prevent mental health injuries
- **Process, Systems, Tools and Resources:** Provision of, or links to templates, systems and processes that reinforce the desired culture and embed positive practices.

The Process

To achieve its goal of creating safe and mentally healthy environments so employees thrive and the risk of work-related psychological harm or mental injury is reduced, the consortium followed a carefully planned process as outlined in the Project Flowchart below.



Analysis and Research

Systemic change cannot be achieved without first understanding the core issues and contributing factors that impact mental health and wellness. The research that uncovered the six Hazards and Contributing Factors as outlined above, was undertaken with wide industry consultation in late 2018 in forums conducted by Professor Luke Downey and Grant Fuller.

Further research was undertaken in early 2020, with the Wellness in Infrastructure Working Group members to identify how these hazards were currently being addressed in the industry and the effectiveness of these activities. This not only allowed the collection of what was working, it also enabled deeper research into what was not working and why.

Key Learnings

- Issues were systemic to the industry and therefore overwhelming for 'safety and wellness representatives' to address independently.
- The industry believed itself to be 'incapable' of significant change.
- Due to the highly competitive nature of the industry and subsequent low profit margins, proven return on investment (ROI) was important in the decision making process around any discretionary spend.
- Even though there was awareness from senior leaders around the seriousness of the issues, there was reluctance to commit resources to change initiatives without evidence that it would return results.
- In a largely male dominated industry, there was (and still is) a reluctance to talk about emotions and mental health.
- Leaders did not understand how they could make a difference, fearing that the pressure and stress that impacts the industry was driven by the competitive tendering process.
- A focus on culture was not a high priority for many project teams, particularly in joint venture and alliances where employees from different companies tended to be loyal to their own processes, systems and ways of working.
- Without a broader strategy for integration, activities that were being undertaken did not always achieve the widespread change they were developed for and had inconsistent take-up and isolated results.

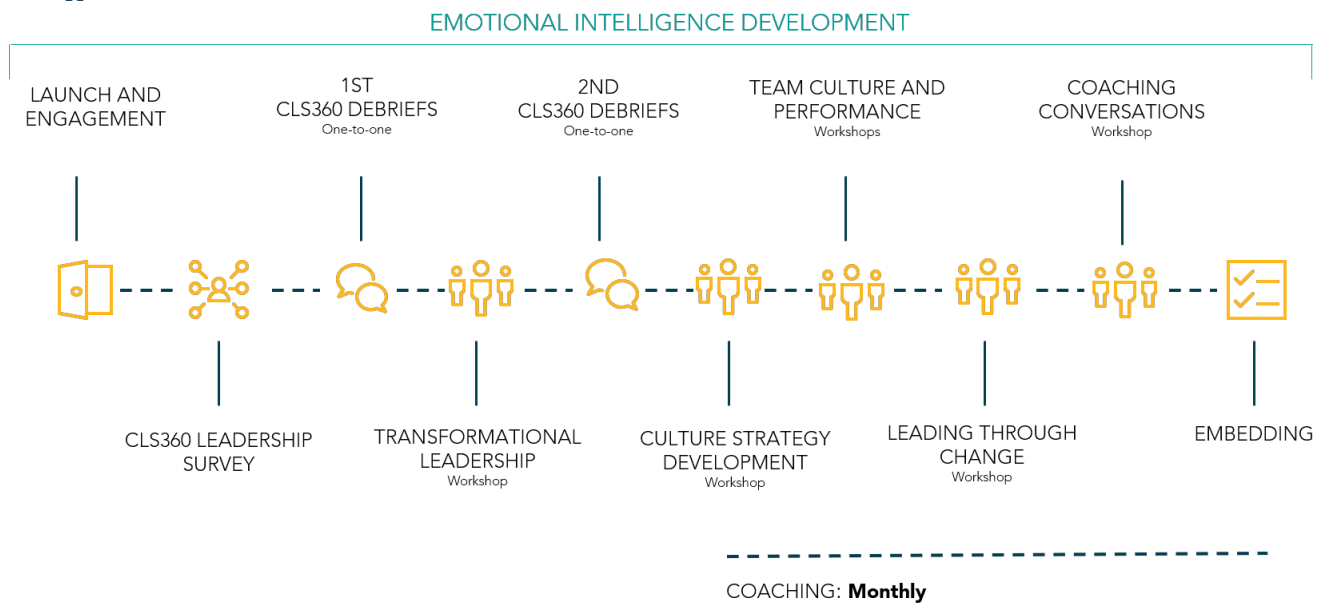
With a comprehensive understanding of some of the key blockers in the Australian infrastructure construction industry, Lysander then undertook deeper research to identify global models, success stories, case studies from other industries and ways to confidently address these.

Benchmark Surveys

What has been identified by the industry as important, is to have a proven process that will deliver significant improvement in wellness. To ensure that we were able to capture the data and quantifiably show improvement, Professor Luke Downey surveyed the 95 white-collar professionals at the Mordialloc Freeway Joint Venture (MCDDJV) using the same survey that was used when he conducted the initial survey in 2018. The objective was to survey the team prior to implementing the pilot program and then repeat the survey at the end of the implementation.

The findings of the benchmark survey at the start of the pilot implementation in June 2020 was consistent with those of 2018, even showing slightly elevated levels of stress, anxiety and depression. Using this data and the information gathered in the analysis and research phase, our next step was to test the consortium's proposed approach on a pilot audience.

The Integrated Approach to Wellness: Design and Delivery of the Pilot Program



Target Audience and Purpose

The Integrated Approach to Wellness takes a prevention focus and aims to address the work-related factors that cause workplace stress and pressure through three core objectives:

1. The establishment of a positive culture
2. The development of leadership capabilities to deliver it
3. The engagement and participation of the broader worker population to take ownership of everyone's mental health.

In seeking to provide solid evidence of the impact of positive culture and effective leadership, Lysander ran the pilot program with the Mordialloc Freeway Joint Venture (MCDDJV), a joint venture between McConnell Dowell and Decmil. The core process focused primarily on the Project Management Team (18 participants), which included a diverse representation of leaders from Project Director, Operations, HR, Communications, Finance, Safety, Sustainability, Quality and Environment, Design and included a number of project managers, supervisors and superintendents.

The initiative ran for approximately 12 months, loaded at the front end with a focus on culture and leadership, and shifting in the latter part of the intervention to focus on embedding new behaviours across the MCDDJV, supported by one-on-one coaching with the leaders.

The purpose of the pilot program was to deliver improved wellness through a strong focus on leadership development and Emotional Intelligence. At the launch of the pilot program, one of the key concerns expressed by leaders was their perceived inability to create change due to pressure and stress in the industry being largely caused by systemic resourcing issues falling out of the competitive tendering process. Being able to engage leaders to recognise that their own leadership style, how they engage with their colleagues and treat them on a daily basis and how they continue to take accountability for the impact their interactions have on others, became a critical success factor during the early pilot program implementation.

Purpose

By highlighting how leaders are perceived by their colleagues and direct reports using a 360-degree feedback approach, Lysander not only provided compelling data and a strong reason to change, we also provided clear direction of what needed to change and practical steps for shifting behaviour to align with what the Australian population believes good leadership looks like. For the infrastructure construction industry, this included a move away from styles of leadership that can cause mental injury – authoritarian and directive leadership - to more constructive forms of leadership – inspirational, coaching and participative.

As part of this pilot program, the broader 95 white collar professionals also attended sessions on building Team Culture and Performance with their immediate manager or supervisor. These were designed to create open conversation about ways to work more cohesively and collaboratively and to continue to build psychological safety and trust.

Culture Strategy

This focus on leadership was designed to help drive out a Culture Strategy – named ‘Walk the Talk’ by the MCDDJV. A Culture Strategy aligns the business or project vision, purpose, behaviour and priorities, providing the platform to cascade clear expectations and support through to the rest of the worker population. This Culture Strategy is the ‘single point of truth’ for the cultural expectations and is central to all aspect of the Employee Experience – hiring, induction, engagement, managing performance, developing career pathways and ensuring positive exit processes prior to redeployment. Having a single double-sided document that is foundational to all these activities simplifies the process of leadership and creates consistency and clarity for all employees.

Helpful at the start of a project, particularly in a joint venture or alliance, a Culture Strategy fast-tracks the articulation of the desired culture and is open and transparent for all parties associated with the business or project.

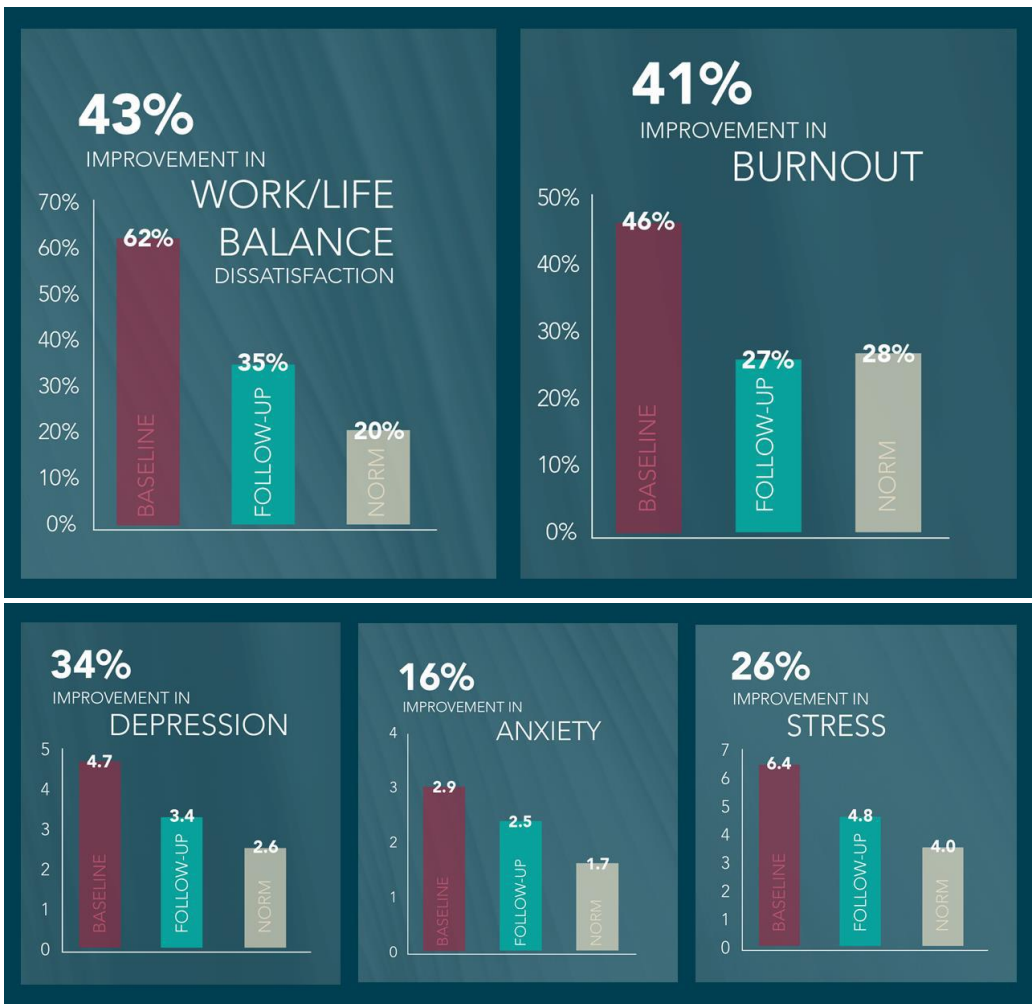
A Standardised Approach to Improving Mental Health and Wellness in Organisations

The output of Lysander’s pilot program and The Integrated Approach to Wellness, is a standardised, evidence-based framework that by using the construction industry as the core case study, can be applied to any organisation that is committed to improving mental health and wellness. It is essentially a map for any industry, helping to define strategic direction and shape culture, along with how to execute at an operational level through activities and tools across an organisation.

As organisations engage with the framework, those with existing organisational programs can address gaps and ensure that all their efforts are aligned and integrated to maximise wellness improvement. For those organisations just getting started, the framework will provide a clear plan, prioritise efforts, explain rationale and education, and ensure that the right initiatives will drive positive culture, have the desired results and most importantly, be sustainable well into the future. The framework will be available in the second half of 2021.

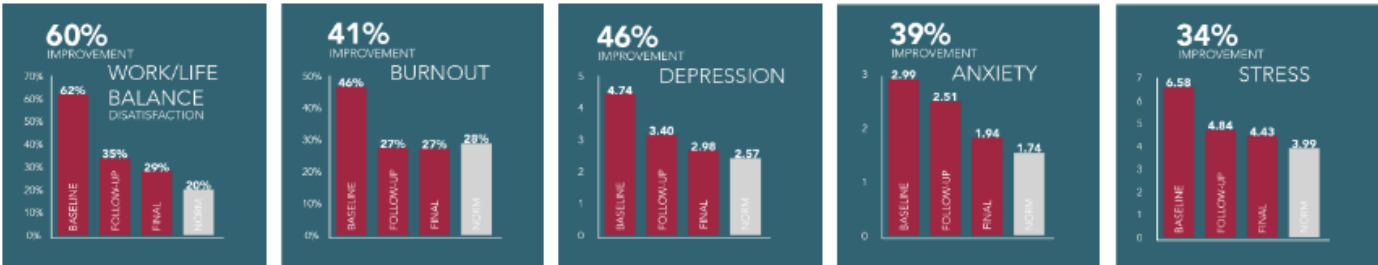
The Outcome As At April 2021

As discussions about mental health and wellness rose rapidly up the agenda of most corporations, small and large businesses during 2020 as a result of COVID, Lysander was unsure what to expect from the outcomes of the second benchmark survey. However, evidence of positive change was significant, with proven shifts seen in employee mood, work/life balance, burnout, stress, anxiety and depression. More detailed information on the mid-term results can be found at www.theintegratedframework.com.au.



This critical piece of work has demonstrated what is possible when taking a preventative approach to mental health and wellbeing. Working at the top of an organisation with senior leaders to develop leadership capability, build culture, encourage communication and participation and align systems and processes to support and reinforce this, can substantially impact people within the business. This enhances psychological safety, satisfaction with work, impressions of leadership and direction as well as having tangible impacts on individual mental health and wellbeing. And when this happens, not only do people thrive, but projects and businesses surprise themselves with the performance they recognise.

Final Results



Psychosocial Factors

Factor	June 2020	May 2021	% Change
That there is adequate communication and consultation when change is occurring	28%	51%	82%
That fairness is strongly demonstrated within the organisation	36%	62%	72%
That you are recognised for your efforts at work	37%	62%	68%
That there is alignment of direction by senior leadership across the organisation	40%	60%	50%
That senior leadership are committed to leading effectively through change	43%	62%	44%
Overall how satisfied are you with your job?	50%	71%	42%
It is safe to take a risk on this team	39%	53%	36%
Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised	48%	63%	31%
That you work well as a team with your colleagues which supports you to do your role effectively	74%	94%	27%
That you are supported to develop your career	49%	62%	27%
Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues	51%	64%	25%
That you feel safe from any bullying or harassment at work	71%	87%	23%