

# My Whole Self: Guide to creating inclusive workplace cultures



My Whole Self





# Foreword from Simon Blake

In February 2020 we launched MHFA England®'s new campaign, My Whole Self for workplace culture change, to a packed room in the House of Lords.

I wasn't sure how My Whole Self would resonate but it was immediately obvious that it did, and positively at that. Those in the room, and beyond, recognised the importance of creating psychologically safe workplaces. By thinking seriously about how our diverse identities affect our experiences at, and of, work we can drive positive change where workplace mental health, performance, and equity fuel one another.

12 March 2024 is our fifth My Whole Self Day and despite, and sometimes because of, the turbulence of the last few years, My Whole Self has grown from strength to strength. More than 200 organisations have taken part, and over 10,000 people have downloaded and used our free resources.

As we continue to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of work, My Whole Self is an important anchor for creating cultures where people feel valued and empowered to bring their whole self to work. Wellbeing and productivity fuel one another; teams that feel safe and connected work better together. By focusing on creating psychological safety in the workplace we can change cultures for the better.

MHFA England is a social enterprise, and we aim to live the values underpinning My Whole Self every day of the year. We have developed this guide to give you the tools you need to create inclusive workplaces where everybody feels like they belong and are valued. Whether your workplace gets involved once a year on My Whole Self Day or you embed the campaign throughout the year, we have everything you need to get started.

A heartfelt thank you to everybody who has taken My Whole Self from an idea to a campaign that is influencing positive change. Lots already done, so much more to do.



**Simon Blake OBE,**  
Chief Executive, MHFA England



**My Whole Self**





# What is My Whole Self?

My Whole Self aims to create workplace cultures where people have the safety and freedom to choose which parts of their identity they share at work, without fear of judgement. It is a culture change campaign designed to help organisations empower employees to celebrate and embrace our diverse identities and experiences. By bringing together diversity and inclusion with health and wellbeing, we can drive positive transformation in workplace mental health and performance. Whilst My Whole Self Day is celebrated annually, it extends well beyond the calendar moment. It is about working towards building and embedding a psychologically safe culture.

At its core, psychological safety\* is about trust and respect. It means colleagues listen without judgment, leaders model vulnerability, and policies demonstrate fairness and dignity for all.

The campaign developed from conversations with people from all types of workplaces. We were hearing that organisations wanted to improve the mental health and wellbeing of their people, and they wanted to keep improving their work on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Despite being intrinsically linked, these areas (mental health and equity, diversity and inclusion) were being discussed, and thought about separately. At MHFA England, we believed that both are inextricably linked. By finding ways to think about mental health, diversity, belonging, and psychological safety more holistically, we could improve and transform workplace cultures for the better, so My Whole Self was born.

From its inception to today, we have built on the My Whole Self principles each year. We now have an evolving portfolio of activities and resources for workplaces to use on My Whole Self Day and at any time throughout the year.



**Research from Deloitte revealed the cost to employers from poor mental health has risen to**

**£56 billion**

**in 2020-21 from £45 billion in 2019.**

Mental health and employers: The case for investment - pandemic and beyond, Deloitte, March 2022

**6.9 million**

**UK employees felt discriminated against because of their background in the workplace.**

The Everyone Economy, Chartered Management Institute, June 2022



## Psychological safety

noun

\*At its core, psychological safety is about trust and respect. It means colleagues listen without judgment. Leaders model vulnerability. Policies demonstrate fairness and dignity for all.

Although several definitions of psychological safety have been proposed, the majority of studies have followed Edmondson (1999) by defining it as a shared belief amongst individuals as to whether it is safe to engage in interpersonal risk-taking in the workplace (Edmondson et al., 2007, Edmondson and Lei, 2014).

# Why get involved in My Whole Self?

By embracing My Whole Self, organisations have, and can, create workplaces where individuals feel empowered to be their authentic selves, whatever their personal identities, backgrounds, or experiences.

Individuals, teams, and workplaces thrive when all voices are encouraged to speak up without fear of embarrassment or retaliation. Psychologically safe work cultures are proven to unlock creativity, productivity, and belonging:

- Innovation thrives when people think boldly and are unafraid to challenge ways of working
- Engagement rises when people feel their unique talents matter
- Wellbeing improves when people don't feel they have to hide aspects of their identities, their experiences, and their struggles
- Retention strengthens when people feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are

Employers who create an inclusive and open workplace culture will see improvements in performance and productivity, as well as staff satisfaction and turnover.



**Google's Project Aristotle, a study conducted to identify the key factors that make a successful team, found those with high levels of psychological safety typically exceed their targets by**

**17%**

Project Aristotle, Google, 2018



“In times of economic downturn, investments in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) improve the mental health of the entire employee population and the overall prosperity (profitability) of organisations. In other words, centring DEIB as a key strategic lever is a business imperative. It's critical that we create workplaces that help everyone to thrive – not just a select few.”

**Dr Wizdom Powell,  
Chief Diversity and Social  
Impact Officer, Headspace.**



# Getting started

This guide has been shaped to give you everything you need to create workplaces where everyone is seen, heard, valued and where wellbeing and productivity go hand in hand.

Over the last decade, significant progress has been made on mental health in the workplace. There are three important principles for creating mentally healthy workplaces.

1. Mental health and wellbeing strategies must be holistic and systematic, based on data, and responsive to the specific context in which you are working
2. All work must be underpinned by equity, inclusion, and the embedding of psychological safety
3. The role of the manager is critical in creating safe, equitable workplaces

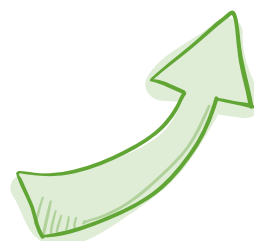
Change requires intention. But small consistent actions can create positive, inclusive cultures. From new starters to managers, and contract staff to senior leadership, we want workplaces where everybody is empowered and unafraid to bring their whole self to work, and we are here to help you do just that.

Whether this is your first time engaging with My Whole Self and you need an overview of the campaign, or you are looking to remind yourself of our resources and deepen your involvement, we hope you will find this guide helpful. To help you navigate it, we have broken it down into three key sections:

- [Building connected cultures](#)
- [Developing empathy and understanding](#)
- [Ensuring inclusive leadership and management](#)

The activities contained in this guide can be used on My Whole Self Day (the second Tuesday of March annually), or at any time throughout the year. They are designed to help people get to know each other and foster greater connections and understanding. Do remember that people have the right to opt out of any of these activities if they wish to do so.

As well as the activities, you will find guidance on addressing specific issues such as supporting racialised communities in the workplace and how to create healthy connections in a hybrid organisation.



**A University of Oxford study into happiness and productivity found workers are 13% more productive when happy.**

Research by Said Business School, University of Oxford, in collaboration with BT, October 2019

**Over half of employees (52%) - an estimated**

**10.6 million**

**people in the UK - feel they have been overlooked for opportunities in the workplace because of their identity over the course of their career.**

The Workplace Inclusivity Illusion, Chartered Management Institute, June 2022



“My Whole Self is not about sharing things you don't want to share or hitting targets. It's about helping to support our staff, some of whom are subject to upsetting and traumatic events, in the best way possible. If we can understand our employees' heritage, culture, and life experiences we can be better equipped to offer personalised, holistic care and foster an inclusive, supportive working environment.”

**Georgina Carter, Occupational Health and Wellbeing Manager and MHFA England Co-ordinator at the National Crime Agency**



# 1. Building connected cultures

My Whole Self aims to foster a sense of belonging and connection among employees. This helps support positive mental wellbeing and psychological safety, as well as a foundation for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Our tools will help you build this connection, wherever you and your people are working from.



A third (32%) of managers say it negatively impacts people's mental health when people are unable to be their self at work, and a similar number say productivity dips (36%).

My Whole Self research, March 2023

## Why not try?

### i) Creating and sharing My Whole Selfies

**What is this?** My Whole Selfies are a great way to start embracing the campaign. By sharing these, colleagues can start to learn more about one another and feel more connected, particularly as people are working in more flexible and hybrid ways.

**Who is this for?** All employees. Senior leaders. Mental Health First Aiders. employee resource groups. Project teams.

#### How to use:

- You can use our [template](#) to help create your My Whole Selfie
- We recommend that senior leaders share their My Whole Selfie and invite the whole organisation to take part
- Encourage people to share their selfies on an internal channel such as Teams or your intranet, as well as social media
- The selfie is a great way to mark My Whole Self Day which is celebrated on the second Tuesday of March every year
- You can also encourage teams to create and share selfies as an ice breaker on team away days or use them to introduce a project team to one another
- Consider including senior leadership My Whole Selfies in induction documents and internal briefings



"By being our whole selves, we gain a sense of belonging and feel recognised and validated. By sharing our My Whole Selfies, along with some personal anecdotes, we were able to see beyond the job title or person in the role and get to know a little more about each other as human beings. This allowed us to connect on a more personal level and add to our staff relationship.

By sharing our interests and experiences, we can help create a sense of community and compassion. Creating safe spaces to have conversations about our different life experiences helps to break down stigma and supports connection and a sense of belonging."

**Anna Rowen, Associate Director of Diversity and Inclusion at Solent NHS Trust**



## ii) Sharing our Healthy Ways of Working Guide

**What is this?** We have developed this [guide](#) to support people, whether working remotely, on site, or a mixture of the two.

**Who is this for?** All employees.

### How to use:

- Your HR teams or managers should share the guide with everyone
- You could include it in your induction pack for new starters
- Regularly share with your people to remind them of the guide



## iii) Encouraging regular wellbeing check-ins

**What are these?** Regular and supportive wellbeing catch ups with colleagues are a vital way to support one another's mental health. The [My Whole Self MOT](#) and [My Whole Self Talking tips](#) help you check in on your own and others' wellbeing and approach conversations with confidence and sensitivity.

**Who are these for?** All employees. Managers. Mental Health First Aiders or your mental health network. Relevant employee resource groups.

### How to use:

- Your HR team or Mental Health First Aiders could share the MOT and Talking tips on My Whole Self Day or another key moment in the mental health calendar. For example, Mental Health Awareness Week
- You could book a slot into your diary to check in on your own mental health and encourage others to do the same
- You could print off the MOT and put it up in a shared place in your workplace
- Support managers to use the two tools during meetings with their team



My Whole Self research in 2022, found that nearly half of all employees (48%) had no wellbeing check-in from their employer between 2021 and 2022 (48% up from 25% in 2021)

My Whole Self research, March 2022

“New hybrid ways of working have been beneficial to many of our staff, allowing them to balance home and work life. It does mean though that we may not always be able to keep hold of those important interpersonal and team connections.

Now is the time that we need to start thinking about how we look after our staff and future proof our talent management and so we have been actively looking at our health and wellbeing strategies.”

**Jane Eaton, HR Business Partner at CPI.**



## 2. Developing empathy and understanding

The highest performing workplaces are supportive and inclusive, where people feel safe to be and express themselves and demonstrate empathy and understanding towards others who have a range of different lived experiences and backgrounds. That includes background, sexuality, religion, gender, physical, and mental health.

We know that generally some voices are more privileged than others in workplaces. My Whole Self encourages us all to ensure people with diverse experiences and voices are really involved, listened to, heard, and valued in decision making. By increasing representation and ensuring diversity of voices across an organisation and especially in decision making, we can start to create a culture of belonging. This is key to supporting wellbeing.

By building diverse teams, valuing diversity of views and ideas in projects and decision making and building flexibility and autonomy we support wellbeing, creativity and innovation.

Our resources will support you to make non-discriminatory and inclusive workplaces the norm. The ideas below will help develop empathy and understanding amongst teams.

### Why not try?

#### i) Organising a My Whole Self Book club or Desert island favourites session

**What is this?** These informal activities help people get to know one another and understand more about their colleagues and the moments that have shaped their experiences. They are community-building exercises encouraging us to empathise with and understand the lived experiences of others, facilitated through the shared mediums of music, literature, food, etc.

**Who is this for?** HR team. Senior leaders. Managers. Mental Health First Aiders or your mental health network. Relevant employee resource groups.

This is an activity that can be led by HR or, if you have one, your MHFAider® network. All employees should be invited to take part.

#### How to use:

- Choose who will be leading your session and who will be invited
- You can use the activities to mark My Whole Self Day, as an ice breaker on team away days, or when new starters join
- Consider creating an organisational radio station. Dedicate a time when people can nominate themselves to play their Desert island favourites playlist, hopefully sharing what each song means to them and why
- You could theme your 'radio sessions' around key moments in the year. For example, hear from an LGBTQI+ colleague during Pride Month or a person of South Asian decent during South Asian Heritage Month



- Harassment and bullying in the workplace were more commonly experienced by those identifying as LGBTQI+ (38%)
- 1 in 10 disabled people had personally resigned from a role because they had been discriminated against

The Workplace Inclusivity Illusion, Chartered Management Institute, June 2022



## ii) Reading and sharing our guidance on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of racialised communities in the workplace

**What is this?** This **guide** provides advice on understanding racism and its impact, supporting the wellbeing of people from racialised communities, and how to become an anti-racist workplace.

**Who is this for?** All employees. HR team. Senior leaders. Managers. Mental Health First Aiders or your mental health network. Relevant employee resource groups.

### How to use:

- Make sure all managers have read and understand the guidance
- Circulate to everyone, along with any relevant internal policies, such as a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination
- Consider including it in your induction pack or meetings
- Use as a starting point to guide organisational conversations on racism and anti-racism
- Remind people of the resource at any relevant calendar moments that your organisation marks. For example, Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, etc.
- Share with your employees following world events which could impact people from racialised communities



**34% (6.9 million)** employees say they have been treated less favourably; received hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes/comments; or been harassed, or bullied in the workplace due to their identity

Those from minority groups were more likely to say they had experienced discrimination. This is particularly the case for:

- Those from Black backgrounds (63%)
- Those from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (55%)
- Those from Asian backgrounds (51%)

The Workplace Inclusivity Illusion, Chartered Management Institute, June 2022

“At Ford we see My Whole Self as a powerful tool to get people to be open about who they are and the journey they have been on. We are all on a different journey through life. Embracing who we are and truly accepting that our feelings and experiences shape, mould, and define us can be our superpower on that journey. Each year that we support and grow My Whole Self, we grow as a team.”

**Mark Wilson, Mental Health and Wellbeing Manager at Ford Motor Company**

### 3. Ensuring inclusive leadership and management

Inclusive leadership and management consciously invites and values contributions from people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. It creates environments where everyone is encouraged to participate fully as their whole self, spurring innovation, engagement, and excellence.

Your senior leaders and managers play a vital role in creating psychologically safe workplaces. Proactive steps from leaders and managers will drive significant progress and change. Whilst senior leaders should set the tone and direction in creating psychologically safe workplaces, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure they are creating an inclusive environment for all.

Use the following tools to support senior leaders create the change you want to see.



- In 2023, when asked what would help create a culture where everyone can bring their whole self to work, 25% of managers said a change in attitude from senior leadership
- Less than half of managers (44%) felt like they could bring their whole selves to work, but over a third (36%) believed not bringing your whole self to work impacts your productivity

My Whole Self research, March 2023

#### Why not try?

##### i) Reading, sharing, and using the My Whole Self: Managers' toolkit

**What is this?** The [toolkit](#) sets out principles and practices for Managers to help drive positive wellbeing. Working throughout the whole employee lifecycle, it can help to create environments where everyone is safe to bring their whole self to work.

**Who is this for?** Managers. HR teams. Senior leaders.

##### How to use:

- Share the toolkit with your managers and ensure they have the time to read and absorb
- Arrange a training/briefing session with your managers to talk through some of the key principles in the toolkit
- Include the toolkit in your induction pack for any managers or when people take on new manager responsibilities
- Review the template [one-to-one form](#) included in the toolkit, and add in specific considerations for your organisation, before circulating it with your managers
- Make sure managers are having regular one-to-ones with their teams



**33%** of managers told us they felt out of their depth supporting team members with mental health concerns.

My Whole Self research, March 2023



## Why not try?

### ii) Hosting a My Whole Self Panel Discussion

**What is this?** The [activity](#) invites senior leaders to share more about themselves and their experiences in a discussion. By leading from the front, they can promote open dialogue, demonstrate commitment, and drive positive change, creating a healthier and more supportive workplace for all employees

**Who is this for?** Senior leaders. All employees.

**How to use:**

- To embed this into the organisation, offer this panel discussion at all staff meetings/away days
- When a new starter joins you could share recorded versions of the discussions



76% of employees say they appreciate it when leaders discuss emotional and mental health.

A turn of the tide: Employee mental health in 2023, Headspace, May 2023

Life can be challenging and things that go on outside of work can have a huge impact on all parts of our lives. We shouldn't have to leave parts of our identity behind when we work. We want to continue encouraging more conversations, better relationships, and a kinder culture where everyone feels safe, secure, and comfortable to bring their whole selves to work."

**Wellbeing, Experience & Inclusion Manager at Abel & Cole**

## Are you ready?

Wherever you are on your organisation's My Whole Self journey, we hope this guide has provided you with the tools you need to create workplace culture change.

If this is your first step towards embedding My Whole Self into the DNA of your organisation, you could encourage your employees to take and share their My Whole Selfies. Or you could host one of our activities, such as the My Whole Self Book club. These initiatives are great ways to introduce the ethos of My Whole Self into your workplace.

If your employees are already familiar with My Whole Self, and they're embracing its principles, why not share our guidance resources more widely and incorporate them into your mental health and wellbeing strategy and policies? Or you could ask your senior leaders to take part in a panel discussion.

### Campaign toolkit

Finally, regardless of the stage you are at, our [campaign toolkit](#) has everything your organisation needs to share and promote your involvement in My Whole Self. From draft website and email copy to a template press release and social media assets, it's all here.



At MHFA England, we feel the benefits of people feeling confident and safe to show up proudly as their whole selves. We know that workplaces up and down the country are using My Whole Self Day and our free resources to create open, vibrant, and inclusive cultures where people and innovation thrives.

Imagine a world where everyone in every workplace felt seen, heard, and valued as their whole selves.  
Are you ready?

Adah Parris,  
Chair, MHFA England







**My Whole Self**

