

The Dimensions of Wellbeing and Safety

Most workplace wellbeing effort concentrates in one place. That's usually why it doesn't last.

Send a well-supported person back into an unworkable workload, and the workload doesn't move, you've just raised the point at which they start to struggle. Build a psychologically safe team culture on top of unsustainable demand, and the team meeting becomes the place where the unsustainable demand gets discussed. Redesign the systems without the culture or capability to use them, and the redesign doesn't stick.

Wellbeing and safety aren't one variable to optimise. They're the product of three dimensions working together, and most organisations, without realising it, are only pulling one lever.

The three dimensions

Individual — personal resources

Self-care capability, emotional regulation, mental health literacy, and the capacity not just to withstand pressure but to adapt and strengthen through it. This is about building capability in people.

Practices — how people work together

Team rituals, communication habits, feedback loops, inclusion, and the everyday conditions that make it safe to speak up before a problem compounds. This is where psychological safety lives, and it's shaped far more by a leader's day-to-day behaviour than by any single program.

Environment — the structures and systems

Work design, workload, role clarity, staffing, and organisational culture. This is the dimension leaders most often under-invest in, and the one that determines whether the other two can actually work.



Why the model matters as a diagnostic

Each dimension, pursued alone, has a predictable failure mode:

- **Individual only** builds capability in people without changing what they're being asked to carry.
- **Practices only** improves how people relate to each other without changing what they're relating about.
- **Environment only** changes the structure without the human capability or team culture to make the new structure work.

Organisations rarely get stuck because they picked the wrong dimension. They get stuck because they picked only one, usually Individual, because it's the easiest to fund and the least disruptive to existing systems. It's also, increasingly, the one regulators are least willing to accept as a primary response.

Leadership behaviour is worth naming separately, because it doesn't sit neatly inside just one dimension. How a leader regulates themselves under pressure is Individual. The norms they set day to day are Practices. The systems and staffing they authorise are Environment. Consistency across all three, not effort in any one of them is what a leader's behaviour is actually judged on by the people working for them.

What this looks like in practice

We use this model to work out where an organisation's effort is currently going, and where it needs to go instead. In practice, that means:

- **Understand** — mapping which dimension current investment sits in, and where the gaps are hiding
- **Design** — building the specific, structural moves that close the Environment gap most organisations carry, alongside the Practices and Individual work that makes those moves stick
- **Embed** — making sure the changes hold once we're no longer in the room

It's a strengths-based starting point, not a deficit one. Most leaders already have more levers available than a fixed-workload, fixed-roster framing suggests. The model is a way of finding them.

Want the evidence behind this? Read our white paper, "You Can't Self-Care Your Way Out of Bad Work Design," on redesigning work for psychological safety in education and healthcare.