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Embedding Psychological health and wellbeing at work

# A brief guide to The Psychological Contract

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Transform the working world  
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## Case study

Once upon a time there was a government service that provided investigation, analysis, and expert advice to the Courts on certain matters. The workforce was 800 independent practitioners across England and Wales, and was a highly professional group of people with high level qualifications and extensive experience. They applied their professional expertise in forming advice to the Courts, following the guidelines of the Act that governed this kind of work. Their work, in advising the Courts, was almost universally appreciated by Judges, and there were not many cases when the Judges ruled against the advice that was offered by the service. The service was cheap to run, without a large management structure. There were no waiting lists of cases to be investigated. The independent practitioners provided a level of expertise that was the envy of the world; they were a responsive, hard working and effective group – an example of professional working at its best.

One bright day someone decided the service should be 'modernised'. The original idea was to 'modernise' the independent practitioners and encourage them to be 'more efficient'. The form that 'modernisation' took was to create a management infrastructure with regionalisation of the service and a central services headquarters. The next step was to develop a common approach to investigation, and to introduce a time limit in which an investigation could take place. The next was to introduce direct employment for the investigators, and to facilitate the reduction in the use of highly experienced and highly successful independent practitioners by changing their terms of engagement. The next was to introduce a monitoring process for Court reports that involved managers reviewing reports prior to submission.

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## Outcome

There are now very few independent practitioners working for the 'modernised' service, having been replaced by inexperienced directly employed (and newly qualified) practitioners. The waiting list of cases is now long; the management infrastructure is massive; the costs have escalated beyond recognition; the Courts complain about the standard of work, and the service has failed its review by its monitoring body on two consecutive occasions. Nevertheless, it's Chief Executive has received an honour from the government for his services to the public.

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## Brief guidance

1. The psychological contract is a personal and intellectual unwritten contract between an employee and his or her employer. It is based on a sense of fairness; that the employer is treating the employee fairly in all the circumstances.
2. Psychological contracts embrace commitment, trust, and employee engagement, and strong contracts usually indicate a psychologically healthy workplace, that works to a very high level of achievement.
3. Successful organisations ensure that all employees are treated fairly and that fair treatment is transparent to everyone.
4. Independent professional practitioners have the highest sense of personal responsibility; take the responsibility away breaks the Psychological contract.

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## Our role

- Our 3 step programme embeds psychological health and wellbeing into the workplace. Part of the programme is devoted to creating and sustaining strong psychological contracts between employees and their employers.
- We provide leadership development that focuses on the behaviours needed to generate and sustain commitment, trust and a strong psychological contract between leaders and employees.
- We provide individual coaching and support to all managers in developing skills to manage people effectively.
- We provide therapy and counselling and other forms of support for individuals with fractured psychological contracts.

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