

Thriving in Manufacturing

CHEP NZ's Experience



The *Thriving in Manufacturing* project is an ACC-supported pilot helping manufacturing businesses to identify work-related risks to their employees' mental health, and to work with employees to redesign work to eliminate or minimise those risks. It also helps businesses identify factors at work that support employees' mental health so these factors can be maintained and enhanced.



CHEP, a Brambles Company, was one of the companies involved in the pilot in 2023 and 2024.

CHEP supplies and maintains a range of pallets, bins, trays and containers to support customers' supply chain needs. It employs a high number of people with English as a second language at its Wiri and Penrose operations in Auckland, where it ran the pilots.

Here, the company talks about why it joined the *Thriving in Manufacturing* project, what it uncovered during the process, and how this work differed from other wellbeing initiatives. The company also offers tips for other businesses interested in adopting the approach.

Why did you join the *Thriving in Manufacturing* project?



Tracey Miller
Senior Human Resources
Manager, CHEP

We've been working in the mental health and wellbeing space for a number of years now. Initially we picked up the

work of Dr Hillary Bennett from Leading Safety and we looked at the *CEO Guide to Mental Health and Wellbeing*. What was useful about that guide is that it identifies four key areas that you need to work within to create a really robust wellbeing strategy. It emphasises that a good wellbeing strategy should cover all four of those areas.

Dr Bennett's research has found that New Zealand businesses over-index in the *Foster, Support* and *Reclaim* spaces – the spaces that are about supporting or 'fixing' the individual. But we under-index in the *Protect* space. This is the space that is about the organisation and how the work it is asking its people to do, and the environments they work in, is affecting their mental health.

We wanted to go deeper into that space and we saw the *Thriving in Manufacturing* project as an opportunity to help us do that. It provided a tool to help us better understand what things at work are impacting on people – both from the perspective of elements that could harm them and the elements that protect their mental health and wellbeing.



How does the project differ from other wellbeing initiatives?



Adam Pfeiffer
Country General Manager NZ,
CHEP

The project is an extension of the approach we have built globally across CHEP. In other regions, our programmes are

developed based on the gaps identified through questionnaires.

With the *Thriving in Manufacturing* project, we're able to localise and tailor based on site-specific information. This enables us to focus on the issues that matter to the people at that location, and to come up with ways to make their work, or work environment, better.

Having access to that detailed and localised information is really important for leaders as it enables them to verify that the actions being taken are actually going to fix the specific issues each work team is experiencing.

Describe the process you went through?



Richard Dunn
Health, Safety & Environment
Manager, CHEP

We ran two, four-hour workshops with two of our teams, one from the Penrose operation where they wash

crates, and one from Penrose where they condition wooden pallets. Keri Woods from Leading Safety facilitated the workshops, where employees went through the diagnostic tool Dr Bennett has created especially for the manufacturing sector.

What we really liked about the tool is that it enabled us to do psychosocial risk assessment. We haven't had a tool like that before. It's essential for businesses to identify psychosocial risks in the workplace, in the same way that they identify physical risks to staff. Is there bullying, are there job opportunities, is the workload too high, are the hours helpful? These are all examples of work-related psychosocial risks.

Attendees worked through the assessment and identified, then discussed, factors at work that might impact on their mental health, and those that support their mental health. That discussion was really important because it helped us really understand what people were saying much more clearly than if we'd just done a survey.

Their feedback was collated into a report. Then a couple of weeks later the groups met again for a facilitated discussion about the findings, to prioritise the most important issues and to discuss ideas for changing the work or the environment to remove or reduce the risks identified.

Their suggestions were then used to create an action plan, which we've worked through.

What did you learn at the workshops? What have you done about the issues raised?

Tracey Miller

We were surprised by some of the things that came out. We run engagement surveys and have multiple ways for staff to give feedback. But some of the issues they raised in these sessions were things they'd never raised before.

We found out that for some people, some of their PPE – such as the hearing protection and the face shields – didn't fit properly. The gloves they use when washing crates were too short on some people and their arms got wet. Some people didn't know EAP was available and didn't fully understand their sick leave entitlements.

So, we worked with employees to trial different PPE that's more comfortable for them, which we're now using. We've increased the cleaning regime because dust was raised as an issue. We also did a Samoan translation of their sick leave entitlements and ran through the EAP services available to them.

“ Everyone spoke. It was engagement at a level I hadn't seen before.”



What protective factors were identified?

Richard Dunn

The protective factors included job security, work variation, supportive workmates and bosses, and shift work – because it suited their family lives. There were actually more protective factors identified than harmful ones. So, one of the lessons for us from doing this work is how do we sustain and enhance those protective factors.

What was the level of engagement like?

Tracey Miller

This piece of work surprised me at the level of engagement that occurred. Everyone spoke. It was engagement at a level I hadn't seen before. The real gold came from the facilitated discussion and understanding why people gave particular factors the rating they did. The depth of the information we gathered from that engagement, and talking to the staff, is way more than what you would get just through a paper survey.

All the team members at the workshops were peers – there were no team leaders or managers there. I believe that helped create real psychological safety in the room – a level of psychological safety I haven't experienced before and I've worked in HR for many years.

About 95% of the workforce at the Wiri operation is Samoan. So, we had Tim Silva, our Customer Service Team Leader, at the workshop to translate where needed. It was very important for staff to be able to give feedback in their own language. That really contributed to the level of engagement we got, and the quality of the information.

How does a project like this help the leader of a business?

Adam Pfeiffer

The leader's role in promoting mental health and wellbeing at work is vital and it's to make sure that our people go home the same way they came to work, both mentally and physically.

The thing I wanted to get out of this project was a verification, or check, that what we were already doing was actually working. The project has been really helpful in doing that. It gave us a clearer picture of the key issues our people say are affecting them – including things we never thought would be issues.

So, for me as a leader, being able to identify those issues and create an action plan to deal with them has been vital.

What did you learn about running the process? What advice would you give to others wanting to run it?

Tracey Miller

I think with projects like this employers often worry that the outcome will be requests for massive capital expenditure, and a big redesign of the work. But that wasn't the case for us. The requests that came out of the process were actually quite small in the scheme of things. They were things we could change and we have changed.

The advice I'd offer others using this approach would be to have no managers in the room during the workshops. Team leaders and supervisors can unknowingly cast a 'leadership shadow' that can mean employees won't speak up. I understand from my Pasifika colleagues that a 'leadership shadow' can also be cast by Pasifika people who have a cultural title, which gives them a leadership position in their communities. So, when you are selecting people to be in the workshops you need to be mindful of that as well.

For more information visit:
forum.org.nz/resources/mw-chep

Richard Dunn

I think the biggest challenge to implementing this project is probably the time and resources needed to do it, and going forward how can we make it sustainable and broaden it to the whole business?

The advice I'd give to anyone considering a project like this is to check that your change management protocols cover everyone, because you can miss some people out of the process if you aren't careful.

I'd also recommend having a translator for any non-English speaking people as for us this was really helpful.

What feedback have you had from employees about the project?



Mefi Maimoaga Pallet Repairer / workshop participant, CHEP

The workshop was very important. It was good to share our thoughts and opinions with colleagues, to understand and

to build relationships with the team. In the previous years we haven't been given the same opportunity to talk about ways to improve our workplace and equipment used in the job. This workshop was a new beginning for us.

The company resolved all the issues we raised. We were glad to see all the new equipment introduced to support the work we do. We felt appreciated and happy to see everything that we asked for had been actioned.



Tim Silva Customer Service Team Leader / translator at the workshops, CHEP

The process has been very inclusive, involving every ethnicity. The fact that CHEP

is actually listening to our employees, and has done something about the issues they raised, shows the company values the voices of its employees. That means a lot to them.