

Productivity: What Psychologists can Contribute

Dr Alison Brabban

What is productivity?

Productivity refers to:

“the efficiency with which inputs (such as labour, capital, and resources) are converted into outputs (such as goods, services, or economic value).”

It is a fundamental concept in economics, business, and healthcare, often measured as output per unit of input.

Productivity = output/input

Examples include:

number of patients seen/per number of staff employed

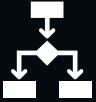




Improvement in outcomes/money spent on care pathway

The National Policy Agenda

- Increased focus on productivity – getting bang for buck.
- *“...improving access to care and reducing waiting has a clear impact on future economic growth. Improving population health and tackling sickness **in a more productive way** directly impacts on reducing the drivers of health related inactivity, which in turn **can make us more productive as a nation**”*
- Particular focus on ‘activity per WTE’ and length of stay in hospital.
- Requirement to deliver a sustained 2% year-on-year improvement in productivity over the next 3 years

The NHS has set out a requirement to deliver a sustained 2% year-on-year improvement in productivity over the next 3 years

Five productivity pillars around which NHS England productivity plan is structured

Operational & clinical excellence 	Healthy motivated workforce 	Health rather than illness 	Embracing 21st century technology 	Reducing waste 
<p>This not only translates to better and faster care for patients, but better value for taxpayers. Optimising processes means staff spend more time providing care.</p> <p>Delivered via Modern Service Framework, GIRFT, and driving adoption of less clinically effective treatments.</p>	<p>We know a thriving workforce enjoys better opportunities for training and development, and in turn uses their full range of skills in the delivery of their roles.</p> <p>Delivered via LTWP, National retention programme and maximising the use of valuable staff time.</p>	<p>Keeping people independent for longer and caring for people as close to home as possible i.e. neighbourhood health.</p>	<p>Improve patient access and experience, and for staff less time spent chasing patient data or waiting for their technology to work – whether the most basic tool, or innovative product.</p>	<p>Cutting duplicative work for our staff, while for the patient it means less time waiting for treatment and for the taxpayer, maximum bang for the buck</p>

Improvements in data and insight

Financial and non-financial incentives

Investing in modern facilities

Improvement and delivery capability

Mental Health and Productivity

Since the summer of 2024, the NHS England Mental Health Programme has been exploring potential opportunities to enhance productivity in the mental health sector. While specific priorities will need to be based on local contexts and the needs of local populations, improving productivity will be a key driver in advancing mental health care in the coming years and a **key theme across all strategic pieces** (including 10 Year Plan and Spending Reviews)

Example of themes and opportunities we are looking into at the national level across several productivity pillars

1	2	3	4
Operational & clinical excellence	Healthy motivated workforce	Health rather than illness ("transformational")	Embracing 21 st century technology
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pathway improvements to optimise flow and reduce unwarranted variation – e.g. optimizing number of treatment sessions, including relapse prevention, improving referral processes, ensuring a clear single point of access to services, establishing an achievable benchmark target for contacts based on current practice and known workforce constraints, localising care which costs more and elongates hospital spells, and optimizing team dispatch (crisis).• Releasing clinicians' time for patient care – e.g. streamlining business processes (supported by implementation of digital solutions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Optimising the capacity of the workforce through best practice standards of planning and deployment – e.g. improve capability of workforce, job planning in services enabled by demand and capacity planning, better integrated staffing models across pathways and settings• Improving retention and recruitment through improved career pathways, improved leadership and culture, and thus staff experience• Optimising skills by upskilling and the creation of new roles: Expanding training programs for MH nurses and psychologists, alongside increasing apprenticeships and developing more diverse entry routes, can address staffing shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increasing healthy life years and supporting the wide economy through secondary prevention - expanding coverage to MHSTs in schools and FE facilities• Improving access to core community services to prevent avoidable demand and deterioration and establishing new models of care across community and inpatient services – shifting care to more appropriate setting than currently often delivered at. Setting up 24/7 neighbourhood mental health centres and increasing therapeutic support provided• Improving effectiveness and responsiveness of all-age mental health crisis care	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Releasing clinicians' time for patient care – e.g. implementing EPR optimization and interoperability, record system interoperability and shared care records, using ambient voice technology• Optimising flow and reducing DNAs. Providing alternative to current clinician contact – e.g. patient engagement portals (PEPs), digitally enabled therapies (DETs)• Supporting operational excellence opportunities – e.g. digital front-doors (digital self-referral, assessment and triage), digital caseload management



Analogue to Digital shift



GIRFT principles – right care, right time, right setting



Neighbourhood Health



High quality care - described in Modern Service Framework, with focus on digital technologies where available.



Mental Health specific: reduce out of area placements, length of stay in wards, reduce unwarranted variation in care and increase contacts per WTE in community CYPS.



All Trusts to submit 5-year strategic plans – how to deliver 3 shifts and improve productivity.

Areas of Particular Focus

Models of Productivity

Era	Key Productivity Model	Focus	Healthcare Application
1910s-1920s	Taylorism (Scientific Management)	Efficiency	Standardised workflows, early hospital management
1930s-1940s	Assembly Line Thinking	Process Optimisation	Standardisation in surgeries & treatment
1950s-1960s	Systems Thinking & Quality Control	Organisational Efficiency	EHRs, hospital workflow optimisation
1970s	HMOs & Managed Care	Cost Control	Focus on preventing unnecessary procedures
1980s	Lean Healthcare	Eliminating Waste	Streamlining hospital processes
1990s	Six Sigma & Evidence-Based Medicine	Quality & Error Reduction	Reducing medical errors, standardizing surgical procedures; medication safety
2000s	Value-Based Healthcare	Patient Outcomes per Pound Spent	Focus on PROMS & what matters to patients.
2010s	Quadruple Aim & Population Health	Holistic Healthcare	Care integration, prevention reducing clinician burnout
2020s+	AI & Digital Transformation	Predictive Healthcare	AI-driven diagnostics, telehealth

What Can Psychology Contribute to Productivity?



Understanding motivation and engagement.



Increase staff wellbeing and reduce absenteeism



Change Management, Leadership and Culture Shifts



Outcome Measurement

How to Promote a Healthy & Motivated Workforce.

Satisfied employees are more confident in their abilities, engaged in their roles, positive in their mindsets, and experience higher levels of productivity

Meeting people's needs

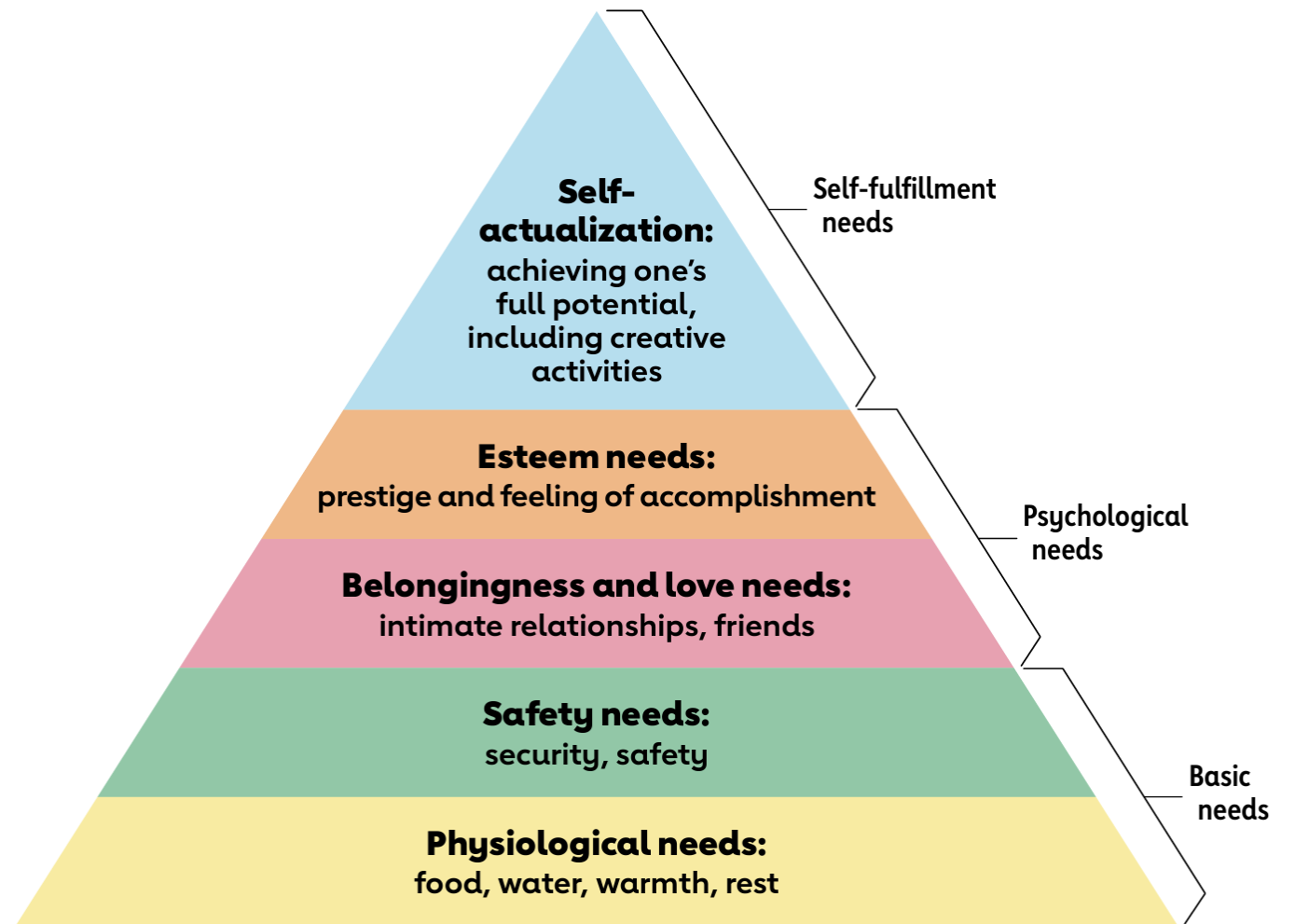


Image Credit: SimplyPsychology.org/Maslow, 1943

Positive Psychology: What makes people thrive?

- Positive emotions – the experience of positive feelings such as joy, contentment, and satisfaction.
- Engagement – the experience of being fully absorbed and focused on an activity, often referred to as '*flow*'.
- Relationships – the quality and quantity of social connections an individual has.
- Meaning – the sense of purpose and direction an individual has in their life.
- Accomplishment – the sense of progress and achievement in one's life.

A meta-analysis of over 200 positive psychology research studies found that happy workers are more productive, perform better, take fewer sick days, and are less likely to become burned out (Achor, 2011)

Project Aristotle: A Google Study (2012 - 2015)

The 5 Factors associated with the Highest Performing Teams

1. Psychological Safety.
2. Dependability of colleagues.
3. Structure and Clarity of Role.
4. Job felt Meaningful.
5. Personal impact.

Based on 180 Teams at Google

Project Archimedes Google Study

Most Effective Managers

- Managers need to care about their team's wellbeing (psychological safety is crucial)
- Technical Expertise less important than people skills.
- Strong managers acted as coaches not micro-managers.
- Effective communication is crucial
- Encouraging career development improves productivity
- Balancing task execution with team support is key

These two models align with what we know about motivation.

Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci): This focuses on intrinsic motivation and the importance of fulfilling psychological needs for long term engagement: Humans are most motivated when basic psychological needs are met: A sense of **Autonomy, Competence & Relatedness** are crucial.

Psychological Safety (Amy Edmondson): a shared belief within a team or organisation that individuals can speak up, take risks and express ideas or concerns without fear of embarrassment, rejection or punishment.



Are Services Promoting a Productive Environment: Psychological Safety and SDT

- Unrealistic expectation for there to be no Serious Incidents **i.e. good care = no deaths or harms**
 - Implication that if there is a serious incident it's because services or individuals have failed. (*blame cultures drives a fear of making mistakes/getting it wrong i.e. low psychological safety*)
- Service objectives often unclear (risk management; promoting recovery; protecting the organisation's reputation) (*Leads to **lack of clarity of role or purpose***).
- Lack of appropriate training, supervision and time to provide high quality care.
- Lack of resources to have greatest impact/outcomes. (*Staff don't feel **competent** to do their job*)

Creating a productive working environment

- Defined roles and clear (realistic) expectations.
- High quality leadership at every level is essential.
- Staff believe their personal opinion is valued and listened to and feel they can speak out without fear.
- Organisations, Teams and Practitioners have a shared understanding of their purpose and objectives.
- Staff have time, training and supervision to do their job well.
- The impact of the individual and the team is recognised and appreciated.

Factors impacting on Productivity

Psychological Models

Motivation and Goal Setting

Self Determination Theory; Intrinsic (internal drive)and Extrinsic Motivation (rewards and recognition) influence long term productivity

Cognitive Load & Focus

Cognitive Load Theory suggests that too much information at once reduces productivity.
The Pomodoro Technique (working in focused intervals) and Deep Work (minimising distractions) help optimise concentration.

Time Management & Procrastination

Parkinson’s Law: Tasks expand to fill the time available, meaning deadlines are crucial for efficiency.
Temporal Discounting: We tend to prioritise short-term rewards over long-term goals, leading to procrastination.

Workplace Environment and Stress

The Yerkes-Dodson Law: Moderate stress improves performance, but excessive stress leads to burnout.
Ergonomics and Workspace Design: A clutter-free and well-lit workspace improves cognitive function and efficiency.

Behavioural Psychology

Learning and Conditioning

Social and Team Dynamics

Hawthorne Effect: People work harder when they feel observed and valued.
Social Loafing: In group settings, individuals may contribute less unless accountability is emphasised.
Psychological Safety: Teams perform better when they feel safe to take risks and voice ideas.

Staff Wellbeing

Principles of Positive psychology

Taking a Psychological Approach

01

Assess the baseline position

02

Formulate the problem

03

Design and implement a psychological intervention

04

Measure outcomes and amend the intervention as necessary.