

THE INAUGURAL ASSEMBLY · LEEDS

Stress resilience: from **mindfulness** to management.

Findings and reflections from the inaugural Workplace Wellness Assembly: a curated peer conversation for C-suite leaders and senior decision-makers.

DATE

2nd of June 2026

LOCATION

Leeds

FORMAT

By invitation

HOSTED BY

Abstract Group

Why this conversation matters, the people who shaped the evening, and the themes that emerged from the room.

Section one - The context

01	Foreword	P. 03
02	Introduction: the Assembly	P. 04
03	Our partner: Ultimate Performance	P. 05
04	Why this conversation, and why now?	P. 08
05	AI integration · the capability gap	P. 09
06	Executive burnout · the personal toll	P. 10
07	Workforce and engagement	P. 11

Section three - The key themes

01	Where the pressure really comes from	P. 18
02	What sits at the top of the risk register	P. 19
03	Leading others through relentless change	P. 20
04	The culture of disclosure	P. 21
05	Resilience built through practice and structure	P. 22

Section two - The personalities

01	Sally Macdonald	P. 13
02	Jonathan Grice	P. 14
03	Jasmine Gill	P. 15
04	Sean Murphy	P. 16

Section four - Looking ahead

01	What comes next	P. 24
02	About Abstract Group	P. 25
03	Contact and next steps	P. 26

Why we convened this Assembly



Minan Majid

Founder and CEO, Abstract Group

IN HIS WORDS

"It's our responsibility as leaders; particularly those at the forefront of technological change, to help build the support and conversations around wellness in the workplace, at the same pace as we're scaling productivity.

After all, technology is not just about automating and speeding up processes. It's about freeing people up."

Abstract Group was founded on the premise that the environment you build around people determines what they are capable of. We mean that literally and measurably. When people feel supported, motivated and genuinely heard, they produce better work, make better decisions and lead better organisations. When they don't, no strategy, technology investment or restructuring programme will compensate for the deficit.

The Workplace Wellness Assembly was created from that conviction. We didn't want this to feel like a conference, or another corporate wellness initiative, but as a peer conversation operating at the highest level: a curated room of C-suite leaders and senior decision-makers who carry real responsibility and face pressures that most wellness programmes are not designed to address. Resilience, in my view, is a leadership discipline. It's structural and cultural. It's something organisations build deliberately, or fail to build at all.

The inaugural event brought together a panel of voices that I am genuinely proud of: leaders in finance, technology, people strategy and performance who each brought something distinct and credible to the room. What struck me most was how comfortable people were asking questions, sharing thoughts and being themselves. There was genuine laughter, reflection, real emotion and open conversation, and that felt deeply true to Abstract: a place where people can speak honestly.

This paper sets out why this conversation matters, introduces the people who shaped the evening, and captures the themes that emerged from our discussion. It is my hope that it offers a useful reflection for those who joined us, and a welcoming introduction for those who weren't able to attend.

The Assembly

A curated peer conversation movement for C-suite leaders and senior decision-makers across Leeds and the North: a deliberate space for the people carrying the greatest responsibility to engage with one another honestly, thoughtfully and at the right level.

At the heart of the Assembly is a simple principle: every gathering brings together genuine wellness and resilience experts alongside senior leaders, so the room learns from both sides of the equation: those who carry the pressure, and those who specialise in addressing it. When a panel is part of the format, it is always built around distinct voices from genuinely different vantage points.

The format may vary from Assembly to Assembly, but the commitment does not: curation, candour and peer-level exchange remain constant. The inaugural Assembly was held at Abstract Group HQ in Leeds on the 2nd of June 2026, on the theme Stress Resilience: From Mindfulness to Management, and was fully subscribed.



THE INAUGURAL PANEL IN CONVERSATION · ABSTRACT GROUP HQ, LEEDS

THE QUESTION FRAMING THE EVENING

How do you build a high-performing organisation without burning out the people leading it, yourself included?

In partnership with Ultimate Performance



The inaugural Assembly was delivered in partnership with **Ultimate Performance**, the world's only truly global personal training business. Founded in London in 2009, U.P. now runs private gyms across nine countries and four continents, built on a single mantra: maximum results, minimum time.

Their reputation rests on rigour. Fewer than one in a hundred trainers who apply make the cut, and each completes more than 200 hours of education every year. The U.P. Method brings training, nutrition, data and accountability into one system, so progress is measured, visible and never left to chance.

WHAT EVERY GUEST RECEIVED ON THE NIGHT

Every leader left with a tangible head-start, not just good intentions. Each U.P. gift bag carried an invitation to a full **90-minute physical health assessment** and a **complimentary one-to-one training session** with a U.P. coach, alongside two evidence-backed supplements to begin the work straight away.

Creatine

One of the most researched supplements there is, proven to build muscle strength and power, with growing evidence it also sharpens memory and focus under load.

Vitamin D3

The vitamin most of us run short on. It helps absorb calcium for strong bones, supports immunity and muscle function, and steadies mood and energy.



More than a sponsorship



Sean Murphy · Ultimate Performance



Minan Majid · Abstract Group

A GENUINE INVESTMENT

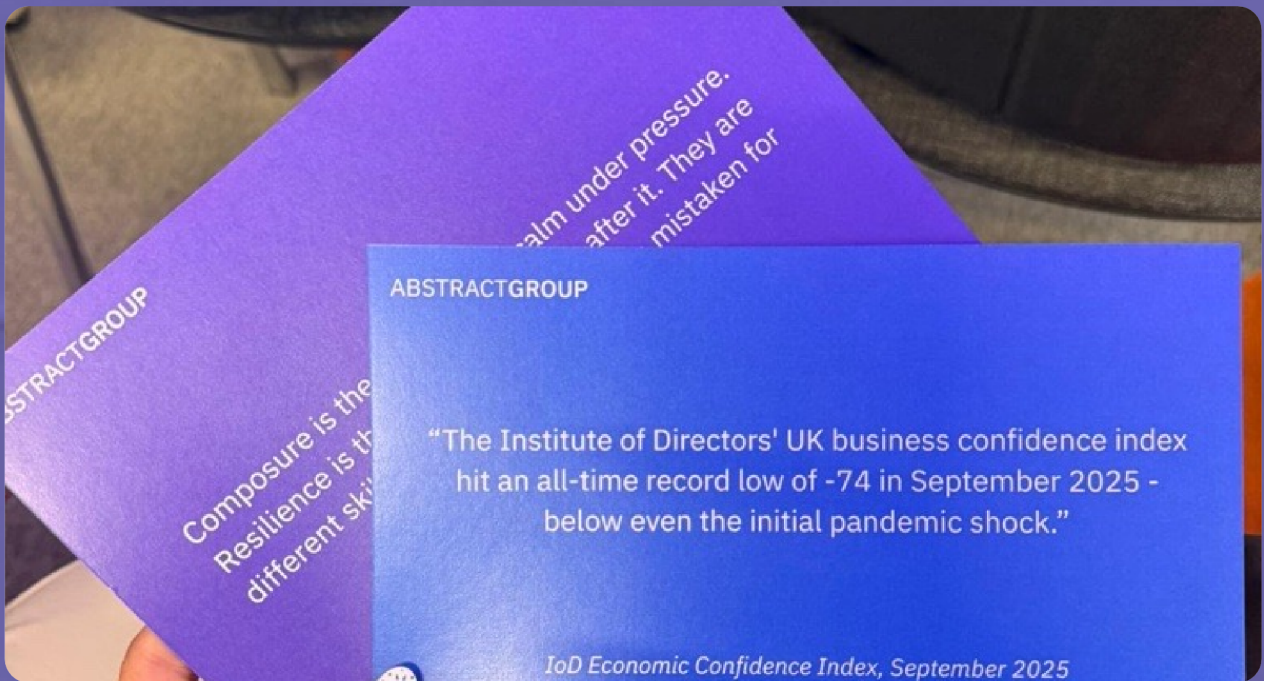
Abstract's founder and CEO Minan Majid has invested in the U.P. programme personally, and has put much of his senior leadership team through it. Sean Murphy's seat on the panel was a direct reflection of the value he places on the work they do.

"I'd seen first-hand what the U.P. programme did for me and my own C-suite, how it helped us build better patterns and lead from a stronger place. I wanted everyone in that room to feel that same benefit, to open an honest conversation about what building genuine physical and mental resilience really looks like in practice, and to give leaders tangible action points they can take away for both themselves and their teams."

Minan Majid · Founder and CEO, Abstract Group

The context

The pressures facing C-suite leaders are reaching unprecedented levels: structural, compounding and accelerating.



03 **Why this conversation, and why now?**

The case for the room

04 **AI integration**

The capability gap

05 **Executive burnout**

The personal toll

06 **Workforce and engagement**

The wider reality

Why this conversation, and why now?

The evidence is unambiguous. C-suite leaders are carrying a compounding set of pressures with no obvious peer forum in which to address them honestly. The confluence of forces is not cyclical or temporary, but structural and markedly accelerating.

AI transformation is moving at a pace that outstrips the capability around most boardroom tables. Economic volatility has seen business confidence fall to its lowest level since COVID-19. A workforce wellbeing crisis is costing UK companies £51 billion a year, all while leaders are simultaneously experiencing record levels of burnout and isolation themselves. These are not separate challenges; they are the same challenge, surfacing across the professional and the personal.

What makes the moment particularly acute is the absence of adequate infrastructure for these conversations. Most leadership development and wellness provision is designed for the workforce, not

for the people accountable for shaping it. C-suite leaders are frequently the architects of wellbeing programmes they themselves cannot access, because stepping forward would undermine the confidence they are expected to project, or because the provision simply does not exist at their level.

The Workplace Wellness Assembly was created precisely to address that gap: a peer-level conversation where the most senior people in a room can speak honestly about what they are carrying, and explore together what genuinely effective organisational resilience looks like when it is built from the top down.

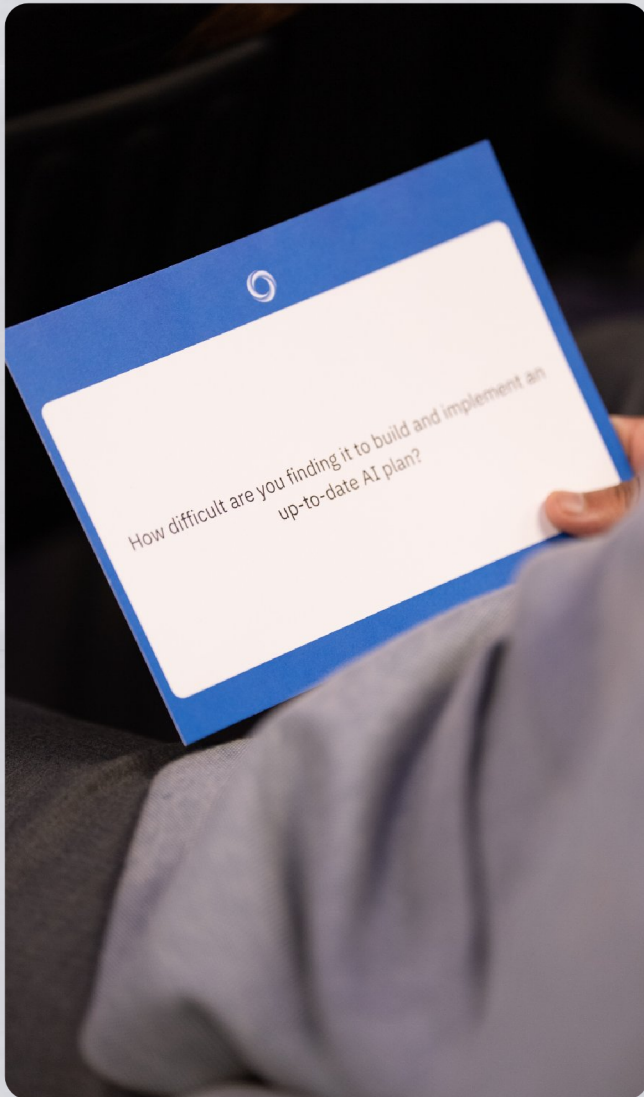


The three pages that follow set out the statistical landscape across three inter-connected pressures: AI integration, executive burnout, and workforce engagement.

Sources: Deloitte UK, 2024; IoD Economic Confidence Index, 2025.

The capability gap leaders are navigating

Across every sector, AI is no longer a future consideration; it is a present-tense leadership challenge. Yet the data reveals a widening gap between the pace of change and the capability available to manage it at the top.



QUESTION CARD · PUT TO THE ROOM

77%

Believe AI is a new era

CEOs who believe AI is ushering in a new business era, yet feel their executive teams lack the knowledge to lead it effectively.

42%

CEOs' number-one concern

CEOs whose primary worry is whether they are transforming fast enough to keep pace with technological change, ahead of innovation capability or long-term viability.

50%+

Non-CEO C-suite

Non-CEO C-suite leaders who believe the CEO or board should resign if the company loses market share due to an inadequate AI strategy.

Sources: Gartner, 2025; PwC 29th Global CEO Survey, 2026; BCG AI Radar, 2026.

The personal toll

Beneath the strategic pressures lies a personal and psychological reality that is rarely discussed at board level with the same rigour applied to financial risk. The data above describes a leadership cohort under significant strain, and one that is, by and large, managing that strain in silence. Cards passed around the room carried the figures back to the people living them.

55%

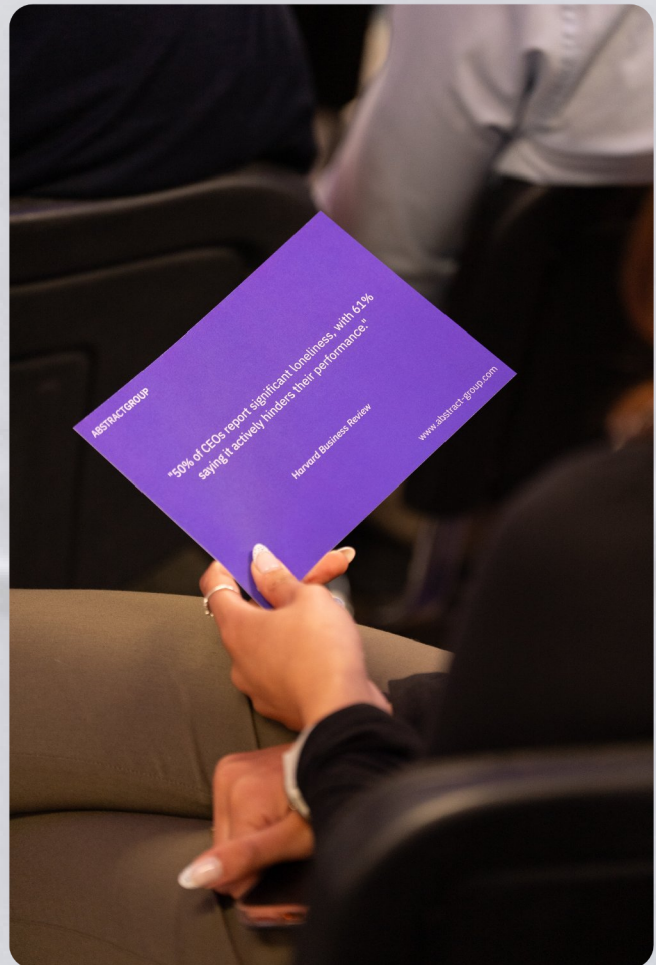
Mental health challenges

CEOs who reported a negative mental health issue in the past year, the steepest rise since the pandemic.

40%

Ready to step back

Stressed leaders who have considered leaving leadership altogether to protect their wellbeing, a measure of how isolating the role has become.



STAT CARD · CIRCULATED IN THE ROOM

71%

Considering leaving

C-suite leaders who would seriously consider leaving their role for one that better supports their wellbeing.

Sources: Businessolver, 2024; DDI Global Leadership Forecast, 2025; Deloitte, 2024.

The wider reality

The pressures on C-suite leaders don't exist in isolation; it is compounded by the state of the wider workforce they are responsible for leading. These figures describe the operational reality that lands on the desks of every leader the Assembly was built for.



£51bn

Annual cost

The annual cost of poor mental health to UK employers, across absence, presenteeism and turnover.

9.4

Average sick days

Average sick days per employee per year, the highest in over a decade.

10%

UK employee engagement

The UK's employee engagement rate, 33rd of 38 European countries and well below the 20% global average.

£4.70

Taken together, these statistics describe the working reality of decision-makers and drive home the case for talking about them honestly. The return is measurable too: every £1 invested in workplace mental health returns an average of £4.70.

Sources: Deloitte UK, 2024; CIPD Health and Wellbeing at Work, 2025; Gallup State of the Global Workplace, 2025.

The personalities

Five leaders. Five vantage points. One honest conversation about the cost of leading through relentless change.



01 **Sally Macdonald**

JPMorgan Japanese Investment Trust; Fidelity Asian Values plc; Allianz Global Investors UK; and boards within Thesis Holdings Group

02 **Jonathan Grice**

KPMG

03 **Jasmine Gill**

Coca-Cola Europacific Partners

04 **Sean Murphy**

Ultimate Performance

Sally Macdonald

Senior Independent Director & Non-Executive Director: JPMorgan Japanese Investment Trust; Fidelity Asian Values plc; Allianz Global Investors UK; and various boards within the Thesis Holdings Group of companies



TALK TOPIC

Emergency: which service do you need?
Lowering stress and building resilience through preparation.

A senior financial markets leader with more than 40 years' experience, including over 30 years as an Asian fund manager. For more than three decades she operated in Asian markets where crises could emerge without warning, geopolitical shifts could alter the landscape overnight, and decisions carried immediate and public consequence.

On the night: Sally made the case for resilience by design, walking the room through the risk register as a practical tool for weighing each risk by likelihood and impact, then acting only on what remains.

That sustained exposure shaped her judgment and her sense of what it takes to lead through stress. As Chairman of the Management Engagement Committee at Fidelity Asian Values, she thinks carefully about how senior leaders perform under pressure and make sound decisions.

Her continuing non-executive roles place her at the highest levels of governance, guiding leaders through an increasingly turbulent economic climate.

"Work out your most likely risks, do something about them, then put it in a drawer and sleep well, because you will have earned it."

Sally Macdonald

OUR HIGHLIGHTS

01

Build a risk register: weight each risk by likelihood and impact, then act on what remains.

02

Watch the stress signals: holidays not taken, late nights, rising sick days.

03

Don't face it alone: bring in independent outside expertise, run a strategy day, then train the workforce.

Jonathan Grice

Partner, Head of Cloud, KPMG



TALK TOPIC

Leading at pace without burning the system.

Jonathan spent more than ten years at KPMG UK helping organisations navigate digital transformation at pace, leading cloud and engineering practices across five countries and more than 640 people.

On the night: Jonathan spoke about leading at pace without burning out the system, naming three structural pressures and arguing that resilience is an organisational design problem, not an individual one.

He supported more than £350 million in revenue, making high-stakes calls on infrastructure, people and technology where the pressure was real and the scrutiny intense. He spoke candidly about leading AI and cloud transformation when the capability around the table was still catching up, board scrutiny was relentless, and the space to say "I'm not sure" was vanishingly small.

He brought a perspective both technically grounded and deeply human, carrying real organisational responsibility in a domain where the ground shifted weekly and easy certainty was rarely available.

"Are we building organisations that enable successful teams, or hiring superhuman people just to keep up with the change?"

Jonathan Grice

OUR HIGHLIGHTS

01

He identified three structural pressures: pace without clarity, accountability asymmetry, and constant transformation.

02

Design for recovery; resilience is protecting downtime, not just pushing harder until burnout.

03

Reduce the noise and prioritise. When everything is urgent... nothing is.

Jasmine Gill

Digital Talent Manager, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners



TALK TOPIC

Reducing uncertainty at work: how career visibility enables performance without burnout.

With over eight years at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners, Jasmine brought a rare end-to-end perspective that spanned the factory floor, employee experience and global digital talent strategy.

On the night: Jasmine spoke about reducing uncertainty at work, arguing stress comes as much from unclear career progression as from workload, and that skill-based pathways restore visibility.

From leading production teams of 60-plus to shaping Career Hub and Career Hub Learning, her journey gave her uniquely credible insight into people, performance and change in a fast-paced multinational.

Her mix of operational grounding and digital talent leadership made her voice especially valuable for leaders thinking about how to support people while performance demands keep rising. She knows the tension between how fast organisations want to move and the human reality of delivering it.

"Stress doesn't only come from workload. It comes from uncertainty, from not being able to see your own progression."

Jasmine Gill

OUR HIGHLIGHTS

01

Shift from role-based careers to skill-based progression, so people ask not "what's my next job?" but "what skills can I build, and where could they take me?"

02

Give colleagues real visibility of opportunities across the business: lateral, promotional, cross-function or even global.

03

AI is accelerating how we work and can simply add pressure; the real opportunity is to use it to create clarity, especially around careers.

Sean Murphy

Chief Personal Training Officer, Ultimate Performance



TALK TOPIC

The gap between knowing and doing.

Sean had spent 14 years at Ultimate Performance, a world-leading personal training company, starting on the gym floor and building his way to Chief Personal Training Officer, overseeing training standards and delivery across the group internationally.

On the night: Sean spoke about the gap between knowing and doing, arguing health is an execution problem rather than a knowledge one, and offering three habits: work in seasons, protect one anchor, and find someone in your corner.

His clients were C-suite executives and high-net-worth individuals performing under exactly the pressures this evening was built around. As Chief Personal Training Officer he sat at the C-suite table himself, so he knew what it took to build resilience in others while navigating the same pressures as the leaders he once trained.

His contribution was concrete and practical: where the conversation tended towards the structural and strategic, he returned it to the physical, the habitual and the actionable, the things a leader could do beginning tomorrow.

"One of the most impactful things you can do for your team's wellbeing is take your own health seriously, because it empowers everyone else to do the same."

Sean Murphy

OUR HIGHLIGHTS

01

Work in seasons: it takes about three times the effort to build fitness as to maintain it, so plan when to push and ease off.

02

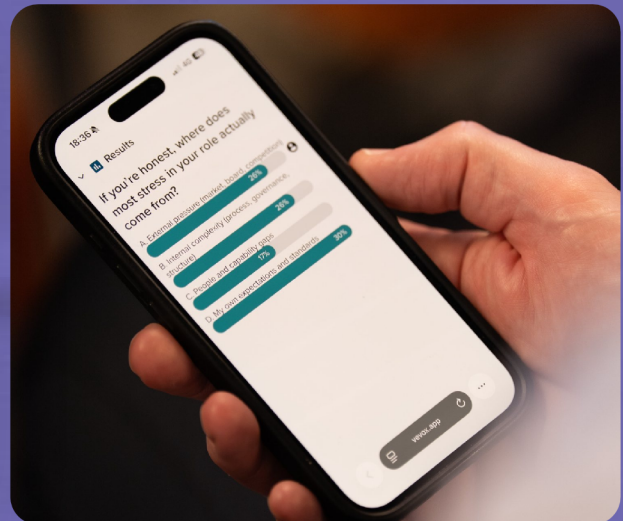
Anchor one non-negotiable habit and treat it like a client meeting, ideally exercise at a set time.

03

Get someone in your corner who understands you, not a book or an app, to challenge you to show up consistently.

The key themes

Real answers from the room, gathered live on the night and set against the national picture.



01 Where the pressure really comes from

The internal architecture

02 The top of the risk register

People as market risk

03 Leading through relentless change

Clarity as a tool

04 The culture of disclosure

Permission, not language

05 Resilience built through practice and structure

From mindfulness to management

If you're honest, where does most stress in your role actually come from?

One choice each, no hiding behind "all of the above". The biggest single source the room named wasn't the market - it was the bar they set for themselves.

FROM THE ROOM · THE RAW ANSWERS

What the room actually said



23 leaders · one leader = one figure



THE REFRAME

Three of the four answers live inside the building



your standards, your structure, your people

the outside world

30% named their own expectations and standards - the single biggest source.

"The best leaders reduce the noise and prioritise ruthlessly. In my world everything is urgent, so nothing is."

JONATHAN GRICE · KPMG

BEYOND THE ROOM Published research, not this poll

The national story locates stress externally. This room pointed inward - to its own standards.



You can plan around the market. The harder part is the bar you set for yourself.

What sits at the top of the risk register?

From the room

The biggest risk in the room is its people

Losing them, sickness and right-sizing - taken together, people risks outweigh the markets.

44% vs **32%**
THEIR PEOPLE vs THE MARKETS



 Their people loss of people, sickness, right-sizing	44%	 The markets economic and market crashes	32%
 Cyber security breach, ransomware, downtime	12%	 Something else everything not yet named	12%

WORKPLACE WELLNESS ASSEMBLY · THE RISK REGISTER

N = 25 · ONE LEADER = ONE FIGURE

Sally Macdonald, Senior Independent and Non-Executive Director, asked the room what sits at the top of their risk register. Taken on its own, economic and market shock led on **32%**. But group the answers by what they are really about, and a different picture emerges.

Losing people, staff sickness and right-sizing are all, at root, the same risk: people. Taken together they reach **44%**, outweighing the markets, with cyber security and other concerns making up the rest. This is a room that has internalised people risk as a category alongside market risk, a more sophisticated framing than most formal registers, where talent and culture rarely reach the top tier.

The financial logic supports the instinct. The average cost of replacing a UK employee is estimated at over **£30,000** (Oxford Economics, 2014), and much of that turnover is preventable, even as UK business confidence hit a record low in 2025 (Institute of Directors). Treat people risk with the rigour applied to market risk, and the case for investing in culture becomes structural, not just ethical.

"I can't tell you how many companies have teams of one reporting to teams of one. One person goes, and it all falls apart."

Sally Macdonald · Senior Independent & Non-Executive Director

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

51%

of US employees are actively watching for or seeking new jobs, the highest since 2015, and much of that turnover is preventable.

Gallup, 2024

Leading others through relentless change

From the room



50%

of the room say the hardest part of change isn't the work. It's **not knowing** what comes next, or what matters most.



 **Not knowing**
uncertainty + unclear priorities

50%

 **Capacity**
workload + the pace of change

42%

 **Not involved**
change done to them, not with them

8%

**Clarity is the cheapest
resilience tool a leader has.**

WWA · THE PRESSURE OF CHANGE

N = 24

The question came from panel speaker **Jasmine Gill**, Digital Talent Manager at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners: what creates the most pressure for your people during periods of change?

Workload rising faster than capacity came top, at **29%**. But uncertainty about what comes next and a lack of clarity on priorities and expectations drew **25%** each, so half the room named not knowing, rather than the workload itself, as the hardest part of change. Both sit squarely within a leader's gift: clear priorities, honest direction and legible change are among the highest-leverage, lowest-cost interventions available.

The pace and frequency of change drew **13%**, and the most telling answer was the smallest: just **8%** felt change was "done to them, not with them", yet Gartner finds **75%** of organisations still run change top-down (Gartner, 2022), the gap between how leaders see change and how their people feel it.

"When uncertainty sits in the system, it creates a chain reaction: uncertainty feeds stress, stress feeds disengagement, and disengagement leads to absence."

Jasmine Gill · Digital Talent Manager, Coca-Cola Europacific Partners

Can we talk about it: the culture of disclosure

The problem is not knowledge or articulacy. It is permission.



A majority of **59%** talking openly is ahead of the national picture and, on first reading, encouraging. But the conditions attached to the rest are where the honest signal lives: one-to-one only, peers only, outside the office only.

Nobody in the room lacked the language. These conditions are about safety, marking out where openness feels available and where it quietly does not.

The work ahead is to build the psychological safety that makes the conversation feel safe in the room itself, not only at its margins.

The wider evidence backs this. In Google's long study of what makes teams effective, **psychological safety** was the single strongest predictor of performance, ahead of talent, resources or the seniority of the people in the room. (Google, Project Aristotle, 2015)

"Look at how your leaders work with each other. Whether that's collaboration or competition, it cascades all the way down."

Jasmine Gill, on culture in the panel discussion

Resilience built through practice and structure

From the room



A year on, the room feels better.

Sean put a question to the room: compared to 12 months ago, is your physical health better, about the same, or worse?



59%

BETTER
17 of 29



34%

ABOUT THE SAME
10 of 29



7%

WORSE
2 of 29

WORKPLACE WELLNESS ASSEMBLY · PHYSICAL HEALTH POLL

N = 29 · ONE LEADER = ONE FIGURE

Chief Personal Training Officer Sean Murphy closed the panel talks by asking the room to compare their physical health with a year ago. Most reporting improved health is a welcome divergence from a workforce at a decade-high for sickness absence, partly explained by who was in the room: a self-selecting group engaged enough to give an evening to this conversation. It confirms that physical health is, for this group, the base layer on which cognitive

performance, emotional regulation and leadership capacity are built. The title marks a deliberate movement from mindfulness to management: the personal practice is necessary but insufficient, while structural design, organisational architecture and leadership accountability are where systems change happens. The most durable resilience is both: it begins in the individual and scales through the organisation.

"Treat your personal training sessions like a board meeting. That system will close the gap between knowing and doing. The rest follows."

Sean Murphy · Chief Personal Training Officer, Ultimate Performance

Looking ahead

From what was said in the room to what happens next.



01 What comes next

The continuing programme

02 About Abstract Group

The host

03 Contact and next steps

Register your interest

What comes next

The inaugural Assembly was fully subscribed. The quality of the room, the candour of the conversation and the depth of engagement confirmed what the Assembly was designed to test: genuine appetite, at the most senior level, for curated peer exchange.

The continuing programme will build on the foundation established in Leeds in June 2026, developing a calendar of gatherings across the second half of the year and into 2027. Each Assembly will be anchored around a distinct leadership and wellbeing theme, and will maintain the same format of curated panel, live polling, question cards, networking and dinner that made the inaugural event work.

Future themes reflect the most urgent questions raised on the night: psychological safety at executive level; the relationship between physical performance and leadership capacity; AI, decision-making and cognitive load on senior teams; and the design of organisations that sustain rather than deplete the people inside them. The Assembly remains deliberately small, with admission by application and invitation.



REGISTER OF INTEREST

Open now for all future Assemblies. Details on the last page.

WAITLIST

Limited places available. Early registration is encouraged to secure attendance.

UPCOMING THEMES

Follow our LinkedIn and Instagram for updates.

About Abstract Group

Abstract was founded in 2017 by Minan Majid, after 23 years as a software developer, with a clear ambition: to build a business that genuinely works for the people inside it as much as the clients it serves. Since then it has grown significantly: opening its headquarters in Leeds, establishing a team in India and forming a regional headquarters in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The business operates across three divisions: Transform, Tech and Talent. Each reflects a distinct capability, but all three are unified by the same belief: that technology is most powerful when it is shaped by, and in service of, the people who use it.

Abstract may be a technology specialist, but the conviction at the heart of it is simple: the quality of the human environment determines the quality of everything else. That belief runs through every client engagement, every hiring decision and every investment in the people who make up the business.

The Workplace Wellness Assembly is a direct expression of that belief: a genuine investment in the kind of peer conversation that senior leaders in the North need, and that does not yet exist anywhere else at this level.



FOUNDED

2017, by
Minan Majid

HEADQUARTERS

Leeds, UK

INTERNATIONAL

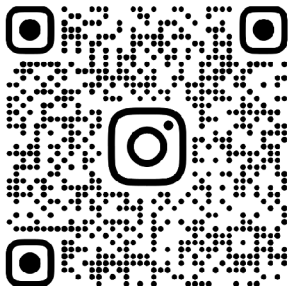
Teams in
India and
Riyadh, KSA

DIVISIONS

Transform ·
Tech ·
Talent

Register interest in a future **Assembly**

To register your interest, whether you would like to speak at a future Assembly or attend as a guest, head to the link in our Instagram bio. Follow [@workplacewellnessassembly](#) for updates, and connect with Abstract Group on LinkedIn. Places are limited and admission is by application.



WORKPLACEWELLNESSASSEMBLY

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**The quality of the human
environment determines the
quality of everything else.**

ABSTRACT GROUP