



TUC

Changing the world
of work for good

Improving line management

**Why better line management will help
improve work for everyone**

Contents

Short summary	3
Full summary	4
The importance of line management	4
Workers' perspective	4
How we can change this	5
Why line management matters.....	6
Impact on workers.....	6
Impact on productivity	10
The current state of line management.....	12
The number of line managers.....	12
The views of workers	13
Why isn't line management better?	18
Training line managers	18
Management culture in the UK.....	20
Algorithmic management?.....	20
What we want to see change.....	23
Better enforcement of workers' rights.....	23
Providing better access to training for everyone	25
Giving unions access to the workplace	25
Fair performance management procedures.....	26
Acknowledgements	28

Short summary

The work of a line manager is vital. A good line manager improves the working lives of those they manage, as well as enhancing the performance of the organisation they work for. A poor line manager, unfortunately, can have the opposite effect.

In this report, we set out why line managers are so important. We then look at workers' views on line management and discuss why line management isn't as good as it might be. We end by setting out some ideas and recommendations for how we can improve line management in the UK.

We argue that to be good in their roles, and to ensure that they're doing right by those they manage, line managers need training, support and time. Unfortunately, they don't always currently seem to be getting those.

We therefore need to create incentives for employers to improve line management. We want to see better enforcement of rights, unions allowed access to workplaces, and a legal requirement for employers to display workers' rights in the workplace.

Full summary

Line management is a big issue for the TUC and the workers we represent. It's important because it influences pretty much everything. Whenever we talk to working people, regardless of the topic, they usually mention their line manager. When we spoke to mums and dads about what support they got at work, for example, we heard about how line managers could make all the difference¹. The same was true when we surveyed workers about their experience of insecure work, harassment at work, and workplace monitoring.

The importance of line management

This reflects the reality of most people's working lives. Our line managers, the bosses that we likely have most face-to-face interaction with, have a big impact on our experience of work. We all remember a great line manager who allowed us to be our best. Unfortunately, plenty of us also probably remember a not-so-good line manager who made work miserable, whether intentionally or not.

Line management is therefore important whenever we talk about good work. There's recently been a lot of discussion about what makes a job good, including the Government releasing its Good Work Plan² in response to the Taylor Review, and the Labour Party publishing its twenty-point plan for a fair deal at work³. Line management should be an intrinsic part of any of these discussions. As we show throughout this report, so much of your experience of work depends on your line manager.

Workers' perspective

To gauge the current state of line management, we wanted to hear more about line managers from the people who are actually managed by them. We therefore asked workers for their perspective⁴. What we found is a mixed bag. While the majority of workers seem happy with their line manager, there's a worryingly significant minority who clearly aren't.

Within the results of the survey, it's easy to spot the general strengths and weaknesses of line managers. Strengths seem to lie in trusting workers to get on with their jobs, and

¹ Better jobs for mums and dads, TUC (2017):

https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Better_Jobs_For_Mums_And_Dads_2017_AW_Digital_0.pdf

² Good work: a response to the Taylor Review of modern working practices, GOV.UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-taylor-review-of-modern-working-practices>

³ A fair deal at work, The Labour Party: <https://labour.org.uk/manifesto/fair-deal-work/>

⁴ We commissioned GQR to conduct a poll of 2,145 working people in Great Britain aged 16 and over.

Fieldwork was conducted between 24 July and 3 August 2018. Results were weighted to be representative of the working population of Great Britain by gender, region, age, social grade, ethnicity, full/part-time work, public/private and industry sector.

setting out clear expectations. It's the trickier, more proactive skills where they begin to struggle. These include:

- **Helping to boost morale at work.** Almost one-in-five workers told us that the phrase 'my line manager helps morale at work' in no way reflects their personal experience. A further 27 per cent said it only reflected their workplace a little
- **Ensuring workers know their rights.** We asked working people how well the phrase 'my line manager makes sure I know my rights at work' describes their workplace. 18 per cent told us that this does not at all reflect their experience of line management. 26 per cent said it reflected it only a little
- **Actively making sure that workers feel supported.** Almost a third of workers don't think their line manager would support them if they had a problem at work. Only around a fifth of workers think 'my line manager wants what's best for me' is a very accurate summary of their workplace experience

The wider research on line management provides a reason why these more difficult-to-obtain skills might be lacking in some line managers. These skills require training, time and a knowledge of workers' rights. Sadly, it seems like a lot of employers aren't investing the money or time to improve the capabilities and confidence of their line managers.

When we look at the type of training provided by employers in the past 12 months, only 35 per cent of those that provided training had provided management training. As well as this, 'managers' are the occupational group least likely to be receiving training, and the only occupational group where less than half received training in the past year (49 per cent).

How we can change this

So how do we get them to start doing this? We believe we need to create incentives. There's currently little incentive for employers to disseminate knowledge of workers' rights, and ensure workers are accessing those rights, because government enforcement is weak. Better enforcement would increase the costs and risks for companies, and therefore encourage them to properly train their line managers.

We also need to provide workers with an alternative if their line managers aren't providing the support they need. Union representatives in the workplace offer this alternative. They inform workers of their rights, help to ensure these rights are enforced, and give workers a collective voice that strengthens their position when negotiating with their employer. They can also support any workers who have issues with their line manager.

This report is split into four sections:

- The first looks at **why line management matters**, bringing together literature and research on the importance of good line management
- In the second section, we look at **workers' views on line management**
- We then look at **why line management isn't as good as it could be in the UK**, looking in particular at the UK's management culture and training for line managers
- We end by setting out recommendations for **how we can improve line management**

Why line management matters

Line management is where a company's policies, and the rhetoric of CEOs and senior leaders, are translated into actual day-to-day practices. A well-trained and supportive line manager can make all the difference, helping to improve the working lives of those they manage for the better. A poor or ineffective line manager, on the other hand, can have a negative impact on both workers and the organisation they work for. This is particularly true for those in insecure work, where your line manager has a lot of power over whether you get any work^{5,6}.

Impact on workers

Plenty of the issues we see in the workplace often, at least partly, stem from poor line management. Poor line management can be a contributing factor towards:

- Conflict in the workplace
- Discriminatory performance management
- Gender and racial inequality
- A culture of sexual harassment
- Poor staff health and wellbeing
- Low take-up of flexible working

Conflict in the workplace

The most common form of interpersonal conflict in the workplace is with one's own line manager⁷. This can be due to attempts to manage the performance of individual

The role of a line manager

Acas explains⁶ that while the role (and title) of a line manager can vary, the duties usually involve:

- Leading a team of staff in a way that means they're engaged with work and support the aims of the organisation. This includes providing feedback and support when needed
- Looking after those in their team, and taking all reasonable steps to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing
- Ensuring that those in their team are aware of their employment rights, contractual terms, and the employer's policies
- Managing the work of their team so that tasks are correctly prioritised and completed on time
- Developing those they manage
- Dealing with any issues that might affect the performance of the team

⁵ Constantly on call: life in insecure work, Alex Collinson (2017): <https://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2017/06/constantly-call-insecure-work/>

⁶ Managing people, Acas: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5835> (Accessed 26 April 2019)

⁷ Getting under the skin of workplace conflict, CIPD (2015), https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/getting-under-skin-workplace-conflict_2015-tracing-experiences-employees_tcm18-10800.pdf

employees⁸. But it's not just performance management. Some of the main causes of conflict at work include poor management, unfair treatment, poor communications, poor work environment, and bullying and harassment⁹. It's easy to see the role a line manager can play in each of these.

Line managers also have a role in dealing with conflict. The most common response to conflict is an informal approach, and it's important this works, because the second and third most common responses are the staff member looking for another job and formal procedures¹⁰. Line managers are best placed to nip problems in the bud early on. Early conflict resolution, however, requires managers with the necessary skills, confidence, and support from HR and senior management to resolve difficult issues with staff.

Unfortunately, there's qualitative evidence that line managers are struggling with informal approaches due to lack of skills, support or time¹¹.

Discriminatory performance management

The Labour Research Department (LRD) views performance management as the key frontline issue in modern workplaces. It argues that it's becoming increasingly punitive and individualistic, worsened by the type of micro-management that's now possible due to technological change and vulnerable to all types of biases and discrimination¹². Research by the CIPD shows that performance management systems are vulnerable to line manager bias. This includes racial and gender biases, as well as factors such as whether your manager personally likes you, or whether it was them who hired or recommended you¹³. Line manager biases can have an impact on workers' pay if an employer uses performance-related pay. This can lead to pay inequalities. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has recognised this risk, calling performance-related pay a "*risky practice that may lead to unequal pay*"¹⁴.

An example of how performance management can be discriminatory has been highlighted by the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). PCS successfully campaigned¹⁵ against

⁸ Managing individual conflict in the contemporary British workplace, R. Saundry, D. Adam, I. Ashman, C. Forde, G. Wibberley and S. Wright (2016): <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/4/Managing-individual-conflict-in-the-contemporary-british-workplace.pdf>

⁹ Managing conflict at work, Acas: <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/j/o/Managing-conflict-at-work-advisory-booklet.pdf>

¹⁰ Getting under the skin of workplace conflict, CIPD (2015), https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/getting-under-skin-workplace-conflict_2015-tracing-experiences-employees_tcm18-10800.pdf

¹¹ Managing individual conflict in the contemporary British workplace, R. Saundry, D. Adam, I. Ashman, C. Forde, G. Wibberley and S. Wright (2016): <http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/c/4/Managing-individual-conflict-in-the-contemporary-british-workplace.pdf>

¹² Performance management and capability procedures, LRD (2016)

¹³ Research report: Could be better? Assessing what works in performance management, CIPD (2016): https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/could-do-better_2016-assessing-what-works-in-performance-management_tcm18-16874.pdf

¹⁴ Risky practices, EHRC: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/risky-practices> (Accessed 18 March 2019)

¹⁵ Performance Management Guided Distribution Scrapped - Next Year, PCS (2016) <https://www.pcs.org.uk/pcs-in-hm-revenue-and-customs-group/latest-news/performance-management-guided-distribution-scrapped-next-year> (Accessed: 18 March 2019)

a 'forced distribution' performance management system introduced across all government departments. Research by PCS, as well as research it commissioned, found that the system was highly discriminatory, and led to "significant differences in outcomes based on gender, age, grade and working patterns, and particularly in relation to disability and ethnicity". Dr Steve French, who carried out research for PCS, gave line manager bias as a reason for the discrimination¹⁶.

Gender and racial inequality

Line managers are vital in ensuring that an organisation's attempts to increase equality and diversity in the workplace actually materialise and have a meaningful impact. The CMI has shown the importance of line managers in delivering both gender¹⁷ and racial equality¹⁸ in the workplace. Both reports talk about the need for line managers to act as role models; behaving and managing in a way that creates and promotes equality. Unfortunately, line managers don't always live up to the role. For example, many of the women interviewed for the research on gender equality said they had "seen their line managers block, not champion, change". This was backed up the CMI's quantitative survey, which found that only a quarter of managers actively and visibly championed gender initiatives. Less than half of managers, for example, were ensuring that women and men received equal voice in meetings and when making decisions.

A culture of sexual harassment

The CMI report on gender equality emphasises the importance of 'fixing broken windows' – tackling seemingly small incidents, such as jokey comments that line managers let slide, that all contribute to a negative workplace culture. Some of what might be called 'broken windows' behaviours, however, can constitute sexual harassment. Previous research by the TUC has shown the extent of sexual harassment in the workplace¹⁹. More than half (52 per cent) of the women we polled and surveyed had experienced some form of sexual harassment while at work, with the most common forms being hearing comments of a sexual nature about another woman (35 per cent) and unwelcome jokes of a sexual nature (32 per cent).

Of those who experienced sexual harassment at work, over half told us that the perpetrator was a colleague. 17 per cent told us that it was their direct manager or someone else with direct authority over them. Four-in-five women did not report the sexual harassment to their employer. Of the minority who did, very few saw a positive outcome. In anonymous

¹⁶ PCS report highlights dangers of civil service performance management, PCS (2016): <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news/pcs-report-highlights-dangers-of-civil-service-performance-management> (Accessed 18 March 2019)

¹⁷ A Blueprint for Balance, CMI (2018): <https://www.managers.org.uk/~//media/Files/PDF/Blueprint%20for%20Balance%20Broken%20Windows%20Full%20Report.pdf>

¹⁸ Delivering diversity, CMI (2017): https://www.managers.org.uk/~//media/Files/PDF/Insights/CMI_BAM_Delivering_Diversity_2017_Full_Report_Website_Copy.pdf

¹⁹ Still just a bit of banter, TUC (2016): <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

survey responses, those who had experienced harassment told us about how managers were dismissive when complaints were made. This all points towards the fact that some line managers are not doing enough to counteract workplace cultures that allow sexual harassment to go unchecked, and, when it does happen, are failing to respond to complaints effectively or sympathetically. In some cases, they themselves are the perpetrators.

Poor staff health and wellbeing

The CIPD argues that good line management and supportive relationships appear to be the key way to support healthy working lives and help to avoid situations that are unhealthy²⁰. It's therefore concerning that further research by the CIPD has shown that only half of organisations agree that line managers are bought in to the importance of well-being. As an added concern, 'management style' is the second most common cause of stress at work, behind workloads.

Training is a clear issue here, with too many organisations simply not providing their line managers with the tools to support workers facing health issues. For example, a quarter of organisations that give line managers primary responsibility for managing short- or long-term absence haven't actually trained them in managing absence, and a similar percentage of organisations don't provide them with the support to do so.

Training for line managers on managing and supporting staff with mental ill health is particularly lacking. The percentage of organisations providing training to managers on supporting staff with mental ill health are rising but remain low (40 per cent). Given the lack of training, it's unsurprising that only 30 per cent of organisations reported that managers are confident to have sensitive discussions and signpost staff to expert help if needed²¹. This training is vital, for both the worker and the line manager, as dealing with health and illness issues can be damaging to both the line manager and the worker if the line managers lacks the skills, confidence and time to deal with them effectively²².

Low take-up of flexible working

All employees that have worked for the same employer for at least 26 weeks have the right to request flexible working²³. Line managers are vital in ensuring that those they manage can work flexibly, and they need to be trained and supported on how to effectively manage those who choose to do so. Line managers are key to the successful implementation of

²⁰ UK Working Lives Survey Report (2018), CIPD: https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/UK-working-lives-2_tcm18-40225.pdf

²¹ Health and well-being at work 2019, CIPD (2019): https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-at-work-2019_tcm18-55881.pdf

²² Health and well-being at work 2018, CIPD (2018): https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-at-work_tcm18-40863.pdf

²³ Flexible working, GOV.UK <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working>

flexible working²⁴, and resistant line managers can act as a barrier²⁵. Research into workers' experience of flexible working reinforces the importance of line managers, especially for parents and carers, with a supportive line manager often being the difference between whether an employee works flexibly^{26 27 28}. Getting flexible working right is important, as it has plenty of benefits for both employees and employers, including increased job satisfaction, improved well-being, increased productivity, and as a means of improving the gender pay gap²⁹.

It's important that line managers are trained on managing flexible workers³⁰, yet almost a quarter of organisations (23 per cent) have provided no training at all, and more than half of organisations have only provided training to a quarter (or less) of their managers³¹.

Impact on productivity

In terms of the business impact of poor line management, there's a growing amount of evidence that line management might help solve the UK's productivity problems.

For the past decade, there's been a problem with productivity in the UK. Productivity unsurprisingly slumped after the recession. Unlike after past recessions, however, it never recovered to its previous growth trend. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) refers to this long stagnation in productivity as the UK's 'productivity puzzle'³².

This decade-long productivity problem isn't something that's affecting all countries. Between 2007 and 2016, the UK has lagged behind, and dragged down, the G7 average for productivity growth³³. Our productivity performance is the second worst across the G7 countries during this period, with only Italy performing worse.

²⁴ Flexible working: making it work (p. 29), Unison:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/09/On-line-Catalogue225422.pdf>

²⁵ Flexible working and work-life balance, Acas:

http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/3/1/Flexible_working_and_work_life_balance_Nov.pdf

²⁶ Holding on or moving up?, Coram Family and Childcare and UNISON (2018):

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Holding%20on%20or%20moving%20up.pdf>

²⁷ Better jobs for mums and dads, TUC (2017): <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/better-jobs-mums-and-dads>

²⁸ Modern Families Index 2019, Working Families (2019): https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BH_MFI_Report_2019_Full-Report_Final.pdf

²⁹ Flexible working: the business case, CIPD (November 2018): https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working-business-case_tcm18-52768.pdf

³⁰ Flexible working and work-life balance, Acas:

http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/3/1/Flexible_working_and_work_life_balance_Nov.pdf

³¹ Top employers for working families: benchmark report 2018, Working Families (2018):

<https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/2018-Top-Employers-for-Working-Families-Benchmark-Report.pdf>

³² Labour productivity, UK: July to September 2018, ONS (9 January 2019)

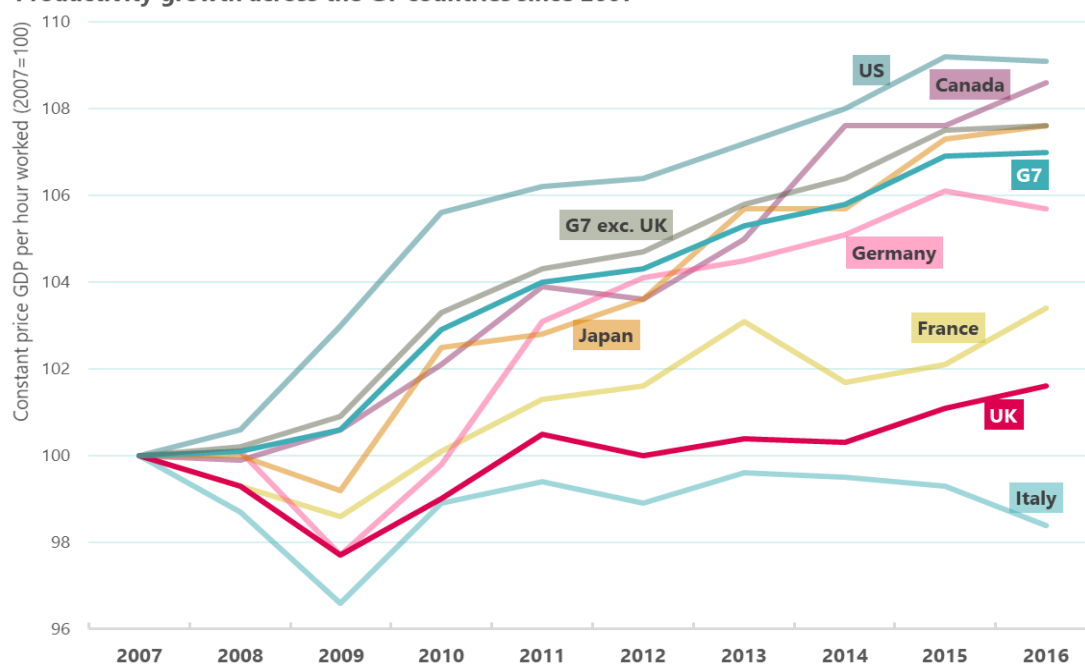
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/bulletins/labourproductivity/julytoseptember2018>

³³ International comparisons of productivity, ONS (6 April 2018)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/productivitymeasures/datasets/internationalcomparisonsofproductivityfirstestimates>

There's been plenty of debate about why productivity in the UK is so weak³⁴, with the TUC's view being that austerity policies, low wages, a lack of worker voice, and low investment have all played a role. There's clearly more than just one factor to blame, and an increasing amount of evidence points towards poor management practices being at least one of the other factors in the productivity slump.

Productivity growth across the G7 countries since 2007



Sources: ONS, OECD

Research conducted by the ONS "found a significant correlation between management practices and labour productivity" in both the services and production sectors. When management scores between 0 and 1 are given to firms, an increase in management score of 0.1 is associated with a 9.6 per cent increase in productivity. Put simply, improvements in management practices are associated with significant increases in productivity.

This is consistent with a broad literature on the link between management practices and productivity, such as the work of Bender³⁵, Bloom³⁶ and Van Reenen. The ONS research, however, is unique in that it looks at a broader range of industries than other studies, and focuses on the UK in particular.

The ONS clarifies that, at the moment these findings are 'not necessarily causal'. However, there's a clear correlation between improving line management and improving productivity that suggests better line management may contribute to solving our productivity puzzle.

³⁴ The productivity puzzle, Office for Budget Responsibility (2012): <https://obr.uk/box/the-productivity-puzzle/>

³⁵ Management practices, workforce selection and productivity, S. Bender, N. Bloom, D. Card, J. Van Reenen and S. Wolter (2016): <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1416.pdf>

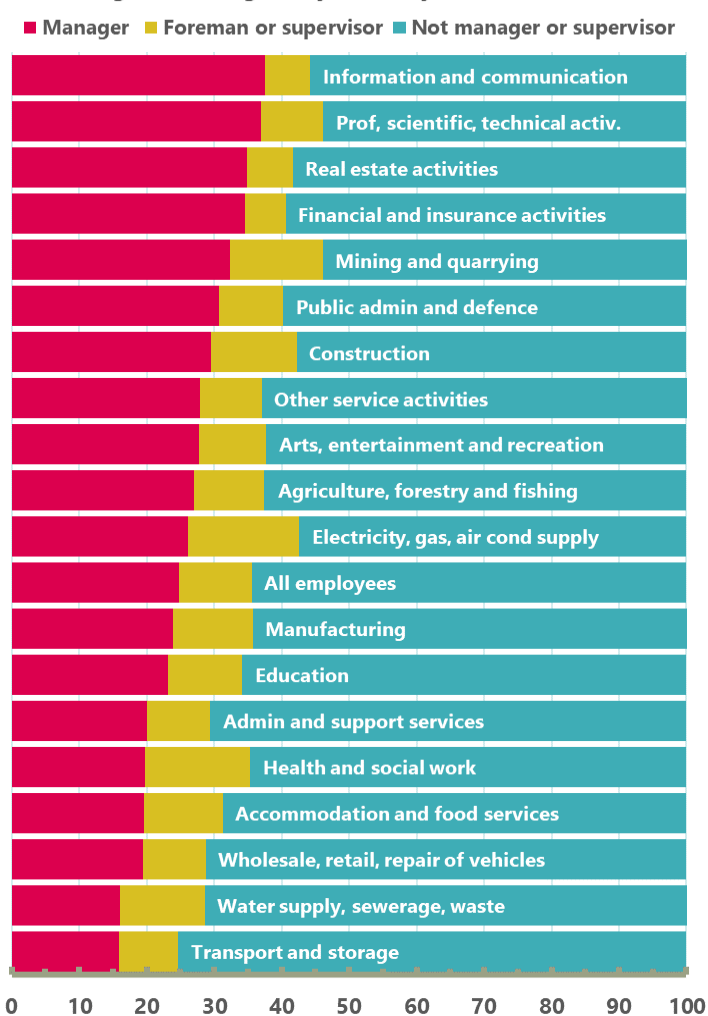
³⁶ What drives differences in management practices, N. Bloom, E. Brynjolfsson, L. Foster, R. Jarmin, M. Patnaik, I. Saporta-Eksten and J. Van Reenen (2018): <http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1470.pdf>

The current state of line management

The number of line managers

In 2018, according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS)³⁷, there were around 6.8 million managers in the UK. Managerial status is self-reported, which means that a quarter of all employees told the LFS that they were a manager. A further 11 per cent (3 million employees) reported being foremen or supervisors. The percentage of employees who are managers is pretty much the same as it was ten years ago, when 26 per cent of employees were managers³⁸.

Percentage of managers by industry



Source: LFS, 2018

Men are overrepresented in management, with 59 per cent of managers being male, compared to 51 per cent of all employees. This has improved little since a decade ago, when 60 per cent of managers were men. Middle-aged white men are particularly overrepresented. White men aged 30 to 59 make up 29 per cent of employees, but 43 per cent of managers.

The percentage of managers varies by industry. In some industries, over a third of employees report themselves as managers (e.g. information and communication, professional, scientific, technical activities, real estate, and financial and insurance activities). In others, such as transport, retail, admin, and accommodation, it's just on-in-five or less. The male/female split also varies by industry.

³⁷ LFS 2018, an average of the four quarters

³⁸ LFS 2008, an average of the four quarters

As you'd expect, there's a substantial pay gap between those who manage and those who don't, with the average manager earning £8.82 per hour more than someone who isn't a manager or supervisor (£18.90 compared to £10.08)³⁹.

But while being manager likely means being paid more than those in your workplace who don't manage, it doesn't necessarily mean being well paid. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) shows us that in 2018, hourly pay for managers in sectors such as hospitality and leisure, agriculture, and retail and wholesale was below the average pay for all employees⁴⁰.

The views of workers

Any discussion of line management needs to involve the workers who are being line managed. To capture their experiences, we commissioned GQR to poll 2,145 workers in July-August 2018. We asked workers how well a number of statements reflected their experience of work. These statements covered areas such as:

- Rights at work
- Feeling supported
- Whether they're trusted to do the job

Respondents were asked how well each statement described their workplace and line managers using a five-point scale:

- Very well
- Quite well
- A little
- Not at all
- Don't know

What we found had a few positives, but some big concerns. While the majority of workers feel supported and informed by their line managers, there's a much too significant chunk who don't. There are clear areas of concern. Too many workers don't feel like their manager helps morale at work, and an alarming number of people don't feel like their manager is making sure they know their rights at work.

Feeling supported at work

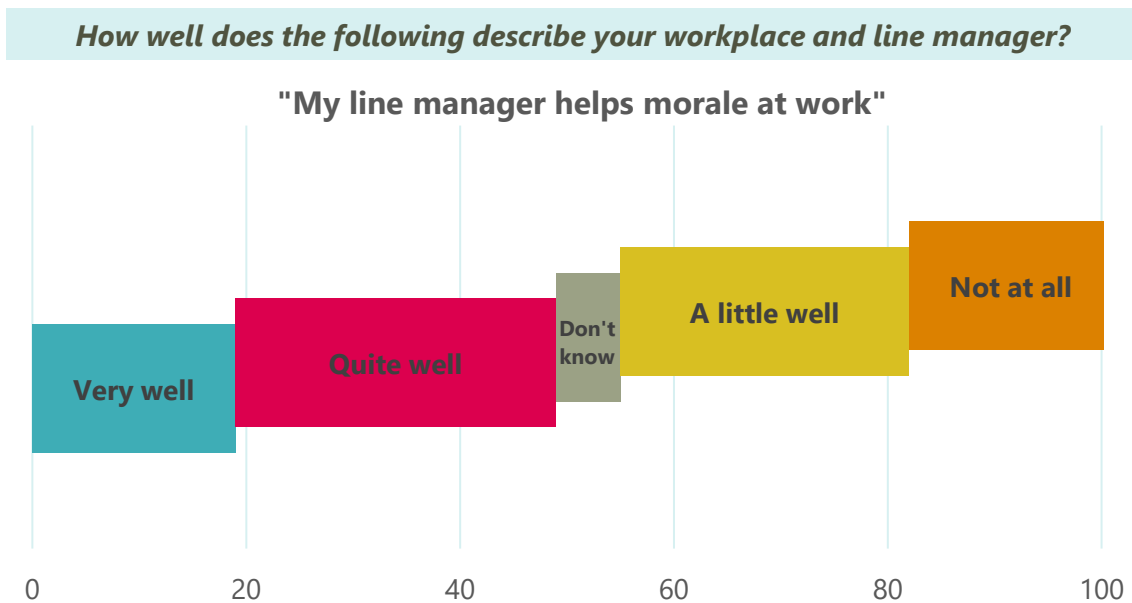
An essential part of the line manager role is providing support to those you manage. Line managers are often the first port of call for workers who need advice or help in the workplace, so it's important that they create a healthy and supportive work culture.

³⁹ LFS 2018, an average of the four quarters. Median gross hourly pay.

⁴⁰ ASHE 2018: Table 14.6a, ONS. Median hourly pay excluding overtime:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/occupation4digitsoc2010ashtable14>

Morale at work is an area that clearly needs improvement. Almost one-in-five workers told us that the phrase 'my line manager helps morale at work' in no way reflects their personal experience. The statement was met with the lowest net score (the score you get when you subtract the combined percentages for 'a little well' and 'not at all' from the total of 'very well' and 'quite well') of 4. The chart below shows the percentage of people who fall into each category.



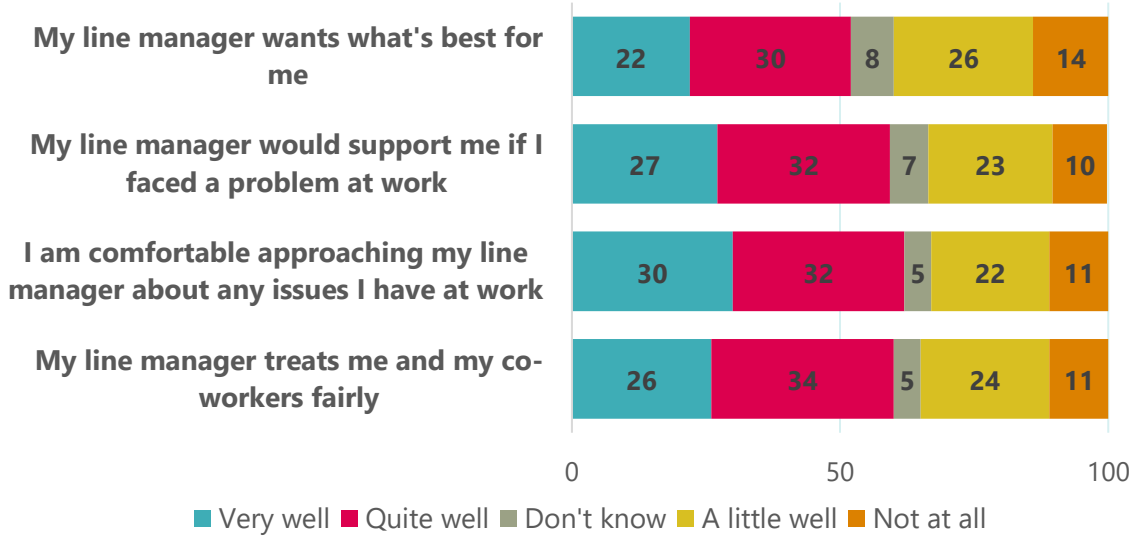
There are further concerns when it comes to being supported at work. A third of workers don't particularly feel that their line manager would support them if they faced a problem at work, with one-in-ten thinking they definitely wouldn't. As well as this:

- Almost a third of workers don't feel comfortable approaching their line manager about any issues they're having at work
- Only around a fifth of workers think 'my line manager wants what's best for me' is a very accurate summary of their workplace experience

It's fair to expect your line manager to have your back and want what's best for you, but for way too many people, that isn't the case. We also expect our line managers to treat us fairly, but this is another area where working people are being let down. 35 per cent of workers don't think their line manager treats them and their colleagues fairly at work.

The majority of workers do believe that their line manager supports them, treats them fairly, and would have their back if they had a problem. But in each of these categories, there's a worryingly large number of workers who think the opposite, or are at least sceptical about it. This is worrying, as the least any of us expect at work is to be able to go to our line managers with a concern, or to have that feeling that someone's there for us if something's wrong.

How well does the following describe your workplace and line manager?



Rights at work

In September 2018, the government began to measure public awareness and understanding of workplace rights for the first time. This was done as part of the public attitudes tracker carried out by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)⁴¹.

As part of the survey, employees were asked where they would go if they needed to find out more about their employment rights. Almost half of employees (46 per cent) said they'd ask their employer or HR department. This was the most common answer, with 'general internet search' and trade unions being joint second by quite a distance (21 per cent).

Given that a lot of workers are seeing their employer as the key source of information on employment rights, employers and line managers clearly have a role to play in ensuring workers know their rights.

Unfortunately, not all line managers are living up to this role. As part of our survey, we asked workers how well the following statement summarised their workplace and line manager:

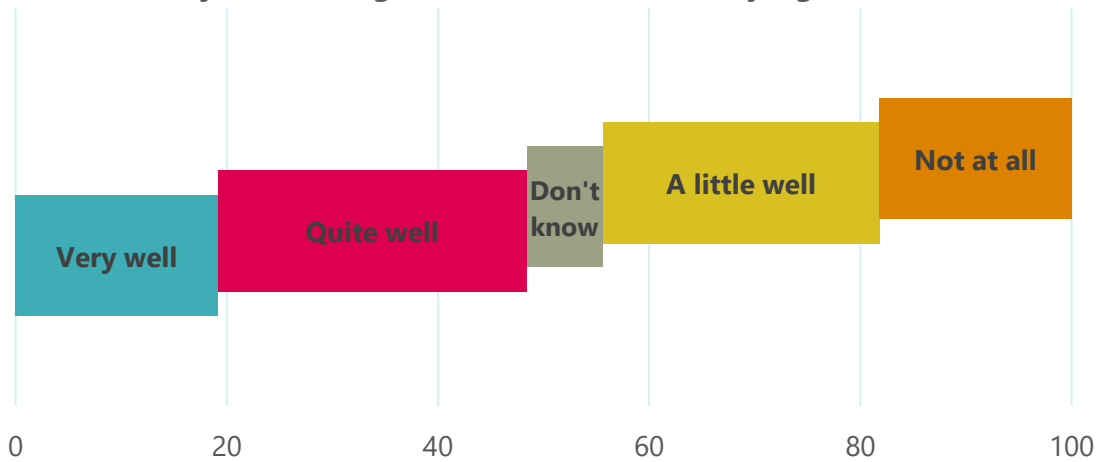
My line manager makes sure I know my rights at work.

18 per cent told us that this does not at all reflect their experience of line management. 26 per cent said it reflected it 'a little less well' than the more positive options available. Overall, therefore, around 44 per cent of the workers we asked didn't feel that it was accurate to say that their line manager is ensuring they know their rights at work. This statement received the lowest net score (4), joint with the statement on morale mentioned above.

⁴¹ BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker: Wave 27, BEIS, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/beis-public-attitudes-tracker-wave-27>

How well does the following describe your workplace and line manager?

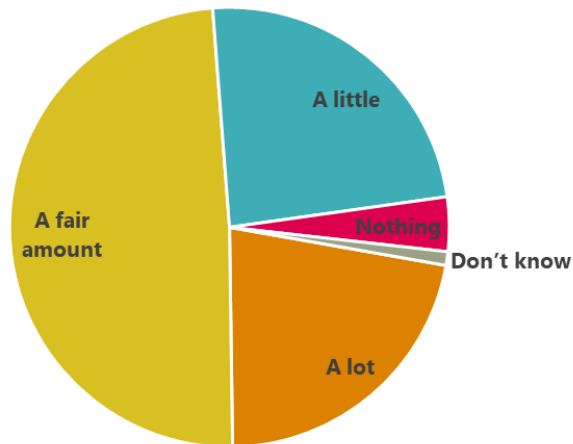
"My line manager makes sure I know my rights at work"



This is a clear concern, especially as Acas lists ensuring team members are aware of their employment and contractual rights as one of the duties of a line manager. It adds that managers should be ensuring that the team members actually receive all of these employment and contractual rights⁴². It also fits in with another finding from the BEIS survey: almost a third of employees have little or no knowledge of their employment rights.

The BEIS survey found that while around 70 per cent of employees said they knew 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' about their employment rights at work, a quarter of employees said they only knew 'a little'. A further 4 per cent said they knew nothing about them. This leaves 28 per cent of employees saying they know either nothing or just a little about their rights.

How much would you say you know about your employment rights at work?



Source: BEIS

Unfortunately, the survey does not test any knowledge of these rights, so we can't be sure how much someone who reports knowing 'a lot' or 'a fair amount' actually knows. We don't know if someone who says they know a lot knows about all the rights they have, or just knows a few and thinks that's everything.

⁴² Managing people, ACAS: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=5835> (Accessed 18th March 2019)

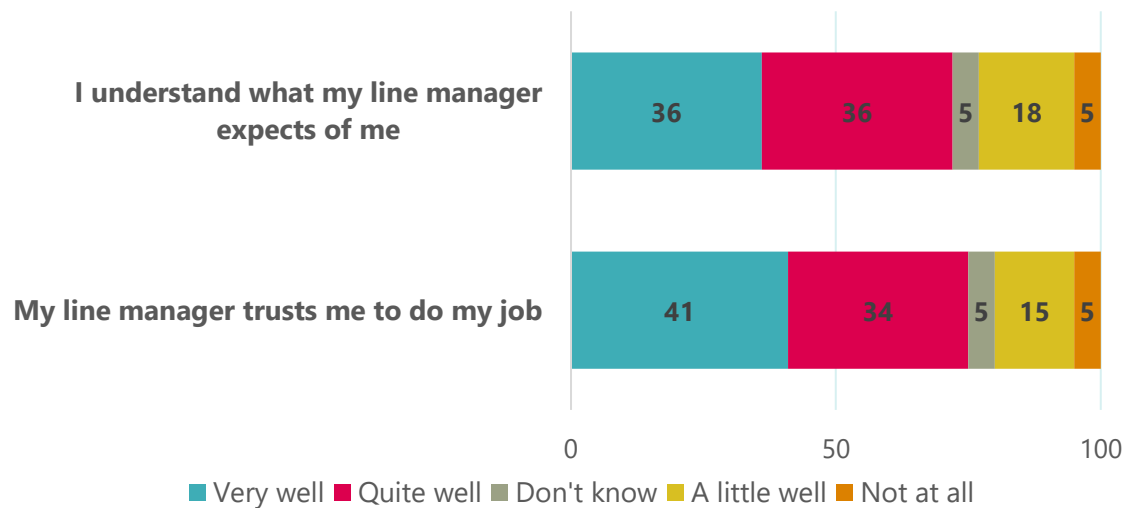
Trusted to do the job

One of the areas where line managers seem to be doing well is trusting workers to get on with their jobs and communicating what work they expect them to do.

When asked how well the statement 'my line manager trusts me to do my job' reflects their own line manager, 41 per cent of workers said 'very well' and 34 per cent said 'quite well'. This is therefore the statement that was most reflective of workers' line managers, having the highest net score of any of the eight statements (and the only net score to go above 50).

More than two-thirds of workers also feel like they understand what their line manager expects of them, with only 5 per cent saying that they're line manager is completely failing to communicate this to them.

How well does the following describe your workplace and line manager?



Why isn't line management better?

If we look at the areas where line managers are doing best and where they're not doing so well, there's a clear pattern that tells us a lot about why line management isn't better.

Line managers' strengths seem to lie in quite passive or instructional skills: trusting workers to get on with their jobs, and setting out clear expectations.

Areas that urgently need improvement are:

- Helping to boost morale at work
- Ensuring workers know their rights
- Actively making sure that workers feel supported

These are tricky skills. They require training, time to spend with those you manage, and knowledge of workplace rights. The problem is that line managers likely aren't receiving this training or time. Too many employers aren't investing enough in their line managers, and this is likely to have a negative impact on all workers.

Training line managers

We saw in the first section that there's evidence that plenty of line managers aren't receiving the training they need. This is reinforced by the findings of the UK Employer Skills Survey. The survey is one of the largest business surveys in the world, with responses from the over 87,000 employers. Conducted every two years since 2011, the most recent findings are from 2017⁴³.

One of the areas it asks employers about is training. When asked in mid-2017:

- Two-thirds of employers (66 per cent) had provided training over the last 12 months, meaning that a third of employers admitted to providing no training to any staff in the previous year
- The incidence of training increases in line with the size of the organisation, with a very big difference between small and large employers (53 per cent of employers with fewer than five staff members provided training in the past 12 months, compared to 96 per cent of those with over 100 staff members)
- 62 per cent of the workforce has received training in the past 12 months

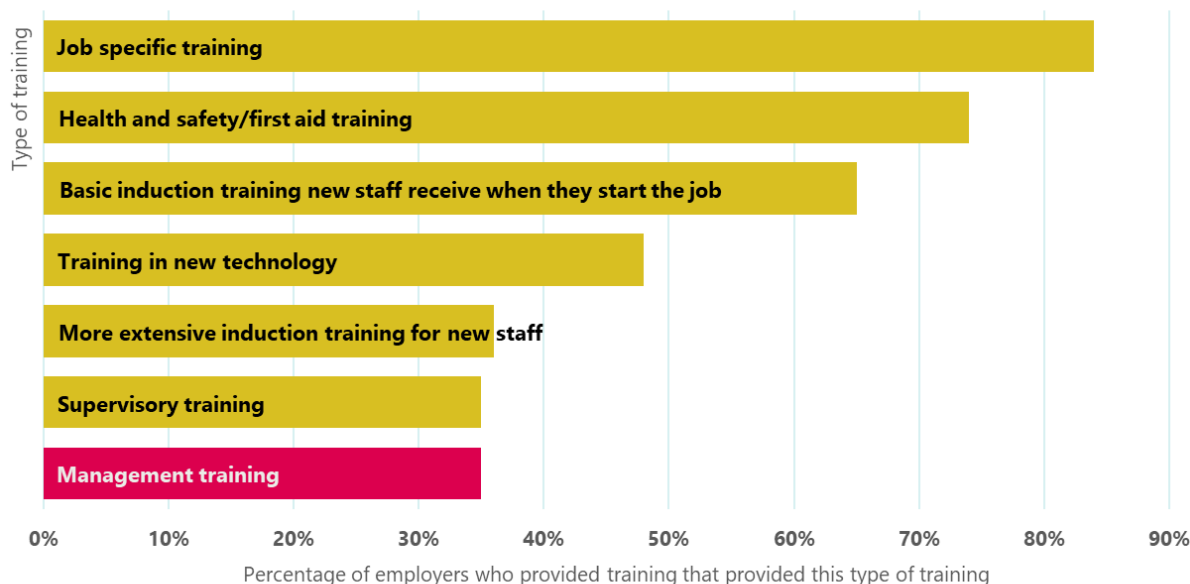
These figures have stayed largely similar since 2013.

In terms of the overall picture, therefore, it's not great. A third of employers provided no training to any of their staff in the most recent 12 months.

⁴³ Employer skills survey 2017: UK findings, GOV.UK – Department for Education (2018), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2017-uk-report>

However, even this not-so-great overall picture masks the much bleaker situation when it comes to training for managers. When we look at the type of training provided in the past 12 months, only 35 per cent of the employers that provided some training had provided management training, down two percentage points from 2015.

Types of training provided over the last 12 months by employers that train



Source: 2017 UK Employer Skills Survey

Occupational level data is also worrying. The occupational group ‘managers’ is the least likely to have received training in the 12 months before employers were surveyed, and the only occupational group where less than half received training (49 per cent).

Almost half of those who did provide training would have liked to provide more than they were able to. The two biggest reasons given for not being able to do so were not having the funds to pay for it, and not being able to give up more staff time for training.

The survey also found that when employers were asked about what skills were absent in their workplace, 37 per cent of those with a skills gap said that there was a lack of those able to manage or motivate other staff. Over half (53 per cent) said that the skills lacking were related to management and leadership.

There’s also problems in recruiting those with the skills to manage. 22 per cent of all vacancies are skill-shortage vacancies, which are vacancies that employers are struggling to fill due to a lack of skills, qualifications or experience amongst applicants. Employers commonly reported that these skills-shortage vacancies related to management and leadership. 35 per cent of skills-shortage vacancies, for example, were at least partly attributed to a lack of applicants who can manage or motivate other staff, and 33 per cent were at least partly caused due to no applicants being able to persuade and influence others.

There’s a link between skills and productivity, with the OECD arguing that skills are is one of the key determinants of productivity:

By increasing worker productivity, skills can strengthen incentives for firms to create jobs, offer higher wages and provide better non-wage working conditions. Skills can also make work more attractive to individuals as a result of better productivity, wages and working conditions.⁴⁴

It adds that to improve labour market outcomes, both in terms of job quality and quantity, it's essential that workforce skills are invested in throughout the working life.

Management culture in the UK

The lack of training for line managers fits in with common criticisms of the UK's management culture.

In their research into management practices and productivity, Bloom and Van Reenen (2012) have found that Great Britain lags behind other countries, such as the US, Germany and Sweden, when it comes to management. In terms of these management scores, Great Britain is part of a group of second-tier 'mid-European' countries, alongside France, Italy, Ireland and Poland. It explains that a big factor in cross-country variance in management "appears to be due to the presence or absence of [a] tail of bad performers"⁴⁵. Other research by Bloom and others has specifically mentioned the UK's long tail of badly managed firms⁴⁶.

The CMI has similarly criticised the UK's management culture, explaining the UK has too many 'accidental managers'. Accidental managers are those who were good at the job they got hired to do, and therefore got promoted into management. Unfortunately, once in management, they were left to sink or swim with little training or support. The CMI estimates that the 2.4 million of the UK's managers are 'accidental managers' who require upskilling and training. It therefore calls for a "*national focus on replacing 'accidental managers' with confident, competent, qualified managers*"⁴⁷.

Algorithmic management?

There's a temptation to believe that the future of management lies in algorithmic management. Algorithmic management is the use of data and algorithms to "*allocate, optimise, and evaluate work*". In the case of some companies, this allows a few human managers to oversee hundreds of workers, with very little contact between these human managers and workers subject to algorithmic management⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ OECD (2018), Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work: The OECD Jobs Strategy, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308817-en>

⁴⁵ Why Do Management Practices Differ Across Firms and Countries, Bloom and Van Reenen (2010): <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.24.1.203>

⁴⁶ Management practices across firms and countries, Bloom et al. (2012): <https://www.nber.org/papers/w17850.pdf>

⁴⁷ Leadership for change, CMI (2017): <https://www.managers.org.uk/~media/Files/PDF/CMI-Management-Manifesto.pdf>

⁴⁸ Lee, Min Kyung & Kusbit, Daniel & Metsky, Evan & Dabbish, Laura. (2015). Working with Machines: The Impact of Algorithmic and Data-Driven Management on Human Workers.

It's commonly used to describe how management works in companies in the gig economy, such as Uber. But this type of management by algorithm is also used in Amazon warehouses⁴⁹ and among staff who pick the items for online supermarket shops⁵⁰. As we've seen from Amazon and Uber, these are used to control and micromanage working people, pushing them to work harder and harder, often to the detriment of their health. There's evidence from a US Amazon warehouse that the company uses automated tracking to decide which workers aren't keeping up with productivity quotas and will therefore be sacked⁵¹. Workers in warehouses in the UK have been known to urinate in bottles to avoid a toilet trip damaging their data. And Uber drivers' livelihoods are dependent on the whims and positive ratings of customers⁵².

Not everyone is concerned about algorithms. Some argue that algorithms and data in the workplace can help to strip away line manager bias and the subjectivity of human judgement, therefore reducing the likelihood of discrimination⁵³. There's truth in this, and there's a role for the use of data and algorithms in employer decision making. But the reality is, as we see in Amazon and Uber, data and algorithms can also be mis-used, especially when managing workers. There's also been cases of algorithms simply reflecting existing biases⁵⁴.

Our findings suggest that algorithmic management is unlikely to provide companies with all the answers. There's plenty of workers out there who don't feel like they're being supported at work, and a worrying amount that think their line manager damages morale. It's difficult to see how an algorithm can solve this when, what's needed, is well-trained line managers who have the capacity and ability to support, encourage and manage workers.

As Michael Luca, Jon Kleinberg and Sendhil Mullainathan point out in an article in the Harvard Business Review⁵⁵:

In our work designing and implementing algorithms and identifying new data sources with a range of organizations, we have seen that the source of difficulty often isn't bugs in the algorithms; it's bugs in the way we interact with them. To avoid

⁴⁹ Workers' rights? Bosses don't care – soon they'll only need robots, The Guardian (2018): <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/dec/17/workers-rights-bosses-tech-amazon-profits-staff>

⁵⁰ Santa's little pickers: how one grocery e-tailer is gearing up for the yuletide rush, The Independent (2013): <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/features/santas-little-pickers-how-one-grocery-e-tailer-is-gearing-up-for-the-yuletide-rush-8987103.html> Accessed 4 April 2019

⁵¹ How Amazon automatically tracks and fires warehouse workers for 'productivity', The Verge (2019): <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/25/18516004/amazon-warehouse-fulfillment-centers-productivity-firing-terminations>

⁵² The truth about how Uber's app manages drivers, Harvard Business Review (2016): <https://hbr.org/2016/04/the-truth-about-how-ubers-app-manages-drivers>

⁵³ Dellot, Benedict (2017). The algorithmic workplace need not be a dystopia, RSA: <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-blogs/2017/11/the-algorithmic-workplace-need-not-be-a-dystopia>

⁵⁴ Amazon scrapped 'sexist AI' tool, BBC (2018): <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-45809919> Accessed 5 April 2019

⁵⁵ Algorithms need managers, too., Harvard Business Review (2016) <https://hbr.org/2016/01/algorithms-need-managers-too>

missteps, managers need to understand what algorithms do well—what questions they answer and what questions they do not.

When we use algorithms in the workplace, we need to realise what they're for. Ultimately, algorithms might have some use, but employees won't feel like an algorithm has their back. The current examples of how algorithmic management is used suggest the opposite. Algorithmic management is too often used as a substitute for a line manager – adopted by powerful employers to micromanage, overwork and mistreat low-paid staff.

What we want to see change

We've set out a clear picture of the current state of line management. Line managers are vital. They can be the difference between enjoying going to work, and absolutely dreading it.

A good line manager:

- Ensures people can work flexibly if they want to
- Helps workers to access their rights and entitlements at work
- Creates a supportive work culture that boosts morale
- Manages performance in a way that is fair

But to do all this, line managers need training, time and support. Unfortunately, not all line managers are currently receiving this. The reason behind this is that the UK lacks a people-focused management culture. Organisations are too often badly managed, with too many 'accidental managers' who aren't provided with the skills, time or knowledge to manage properly. There's too little concern about how this culture impacts on the working lives, rights and health of employees.

This is an issue affecting our unions. At its 2019 Health Conference, for example, UNISON passed a motion on line management in response to the "*alarming proportion of staff with line management responsibility [who] have had no management training, are unclear about how to tackle key workplace issues and are so busy dealing with gaps in staffing that they have little time to fulfil other management tasks*"⁵⁶.

We want to encourage a culture where employers are incentivised to provide this, so that all line managers can access the training they need. In turn, this will mean that all working people will benefit from a good line manager. We therefore need to look at how we can incentivise the behaviour that would lead to a more people-focused working culture in the UK. To do this, we need action from both government and employers.

Better enforcement of workers' rights

The first step is for the government to create incentives for employers. As the OECD argues, organisational practices are ultimately decided by the employer, but public policies play a role in promoting the adoption of good management practices⁵⁷. It's clear that too many workers aren't aware of their rights, and many aren't being told them by their line managers. This needs to be addressed.

⁵⁶ 2019 Health Conference Guide and Agenda, UNISON:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/2019-Health-Conference-Guide-and-Agenda.pdf>

⁵⁷ OECD (2018), *Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work: The OECD Jobs Strategy*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308817-en>

Government can do this by:

Incentivising employers to get better by improving enforcement

There's currently large-scale non-compliance with basic employment rights in the UK labour market, and existing enforcement mechanisms are failing too many workers⁵⁸. Weak enforcement of rights means that employers can currently get away with breaching these rights with little consequence. We can improve enforcement by:

- Increasing the resources of labour market inspectorates, who are responsible for enforcing employment rights in the UK. Our enforcement agencies don't currently have the resources to respond to complaints from workers and to carry out effective, proactive enforcement in sectors where non-compliance is rife. Compared with other countries in Europe, the UK enforcement agencies are inadequately resourced. For every 100,000 workers, the UK has 0.9 labour market inspectors (excluding health and safety inspectors). In France, there are 18.9 inspectors for every 100,000 workers
- Establishing a system of joint and several liability throughout supply chains for basic employment standards. Parts of UK employment law already provide for joint and several liability arrangements. The TUC has called for this approach to be extended, so that organisations who use strategies to transfer their obligations to other parties, can still be found liable for any breaches of the core employment rights of the people who do work for them
- Promoting collective bargaining as the primary vehicle for raising workplace standards and ensuring compliance with labour standards

Increasing awareness of rights

There's a few ways the government can help here:

- Working people would be more aware of their rights if it was clear what rights they're entitled to, and when these rights kick in. Our hodge-podge system of certain rights kicking at certain times for certain workers, or only being available to some workers, creates confusion and unfairly denies basic rights to millions. The government can instantly remedy this by giving all workers, regardless of employment status, the same basic floor of rights currently only given to those who are 'employees'. These rights should be available from day one.
- Employers are currently required by law to display the health and safety law poster that has been approved by the Health and Safety Executive (or provide the information in a leaflet to all workers)⁵⁹. We see no reason that there can't be an equivalent legal requirement to display an employment rights poster, or provide the information in a leaflet to all workers.

⁵⁸ *Shifting the risk*, TUC: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Shiftingtherisk.pdf>

⁵⁹ Display the health and safety law poster, Health and Safety Executive: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/display.htm>

Providing better access to training for everyone

In the UK, we're clearly not investing enough in training. We therefore want government to:

- Provide all workers with **access to a lifelong learning account** giving them a personalised budget for training
- Introduce a **requirement for a mid-life training/careers review for all workers** and a significantly strengthened entitlement for employees to request paid time off for job-related training
- **Reverse the cuts to college funding** in recent years and to widen access to education and training opportunities that working people can take up in their own time

These changes would allow many more line managers to access the training that they need.

Allowing unions access to workplaces would also help. Unions can support line managers in the workplace to make the case for better line management training, more support from senior leaders, and more time to offer support to those they manage.

We'd also like to see a **requirement for business studies courses to have core modules on employment relationships**, including employment rights and employer responsibilities, the benefits of positive employment relationships, and the importance of line management in ensuring that these benefits for both businesses and workers are secured. This would help to ensure that those doing such courses were equipped with the knowledge and expertise that would promote their capacity to support development of line managers.

Usdaw case study: how unions support both the manager and staff member

A member of staff was being disciplined for poor work performance. After the involvement of their union representative, it was established that the individual was covered by the Equality Act 2010, although their disability was not 'visible'. Reasonable adjustments were made to support the individual's performance rather than disciplinary sanctions.

The manager received further training from their employer on how to deal with such issues where individuals may not automatically be covered under the legislation and/or have a physical disability but are still covered when looking at the facts and therefore need further support. This case highlights the importance of managers having the appropriate training regarding equality issues to help them make judgements in what are often difficult, varied and sensitive situations.

Giving unions access to the workplace

While providing line managers with access to training and support should help, it's important that workers have someone else they can go to if they feel their line manager is letting them down, or if their line manager is the problem. Our polling shows that too many workers are being let down by their line managers. They're not being told their rights, and they don't feel like their line manager has their back and will listen to their problems.

Union representatives in the workplace offer this alternative. They inform workers of their rights, help to ensure these rights are enforced, and give the workers a collective voice that gives them a stronger position when negotiating with their employer. They can also support any workers who have issues with their line manager. It's therefore important for government to:

- **Give unions access to workplaces**, so that they can let workers know about the benefits of joining a union and explain the ways in which unions can help them
- Give workers the right to be accompanied by a union rep to certain meetings should be converted into a **right to be represented by a union rep in all meetings affecting the rights and interests of individuals**

Currently, workers have the right to be accompanied by a union rep or a colleague in certain meetings, such as formal disciplinary hearings or where an individual has concerns that their employer has failed to meet their contractual or statutory employment rights. The right does not apply to informal disciplinary or investigatory meetings. Workers also do not currently have a right to be represented by a union when they want to ask for a pay rise and better working conditions. We believe that the right to be accompanied by a union rep to certain meetings should be converted into a right to be represented by a union rep in all meetings affecting the rights and interests of individuals.

Fair performance management procedures

We've seen that performance management procedures are open to biases and can lead to discrimination. We therefore want employers to:

- **Involve unions when writing and updating their performance management policies.** Union representatives can help to ensure that performance management systems are fair, and aren't vulnerable to line-management bias and discrimination. As we saw from the PCS example, they can also organise against performance management policies that are having a discriminatory impact on employees.
- **Stop using performance-related pay.** It's a system that has clearly failed. It's unfair, ineffective, and its vulnerability to line manager bias can lead to discriminatory outcomes

Usdaw case study: the importance of line manager training

An Usdaw member was suspended by their line manager without pay pending their application for the right to work in the UK. This conflicts with the legal advice where individuals can carry on working while their application is pending.

Following advice from their union representative, the manager was advised that this was contrary to policy and the law and the member of staff was reinstated.

This was a genuine case of a manager not being clear on policy or law, and shows the importance of managers having clear advice and training on company policies and legislation, particularly on issues such as this where there are serious repercussions for the business and employee if the correct guidance isn't followed.

We believe that the policies set out above will improve line management in the UK. They'll make it easier for line managers to better perform their role, and improve working life for those they manage. Overall, they'll help shift us towards a more worker-focused culture, where employers ensure that people know their rights, invest in training for their staff, and enable their line managers to fully support those they manage.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the unions who met with and spoke to us for this report. We would also like to thank the organisations that took the time to talk to us: Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Acas, BeTheBusiness and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). All the input from unions and organisations was greatly appreciated and was a big help in the research and writing of the report.