

# Achieving Better Mental Health Outcomes for Colleagues

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# Disclaimer

**The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenter and not necessarily those of the Society of Actuaries in Ireland**



# Agenda

- A Couple of Rhetorical Questions?
- Walking a mile in my actuarial shoes
- Actuarial Mental Health Control Cycle
- Back to Me
- Kindness and the Mental Health Control Cycle
- A Request
- Gratitude & Questions



# An Exercise in Honesty

- Consider two female Fellows of the Society
- Aged mid 20s
- Identical ability
- Same role



# OVER THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS



- will have two children
- take 24 months maternity
- plus some parental leave



- misses 11 months work
- over 3 different time periods
- coping with depression



# Rhetorical Question I

Which of those two young actuaries is more likely to be side-lined or made redundant over the 15 year period?





**Welcome to the Profession**

# Actuaries are known for many things:

- Asking Difficult Questions
- Assessing, measuring, monitoring, adjusting and refining models
- Being prepared to take responsibility
- Being intelligent
- Not always having the greatest social skills





# Rhetorical Question II

As:

- A profession
- Senior members of companies
- Individuals

Who all have the power to shape the business culture

Is there more we can do to ensure that the environment is conducive to better mental outcomes for staff and our fellow professionals?



# Reeling in the Years: 1986



- A musical desert
- Joined actuarial profession aged 26
- <1 Irish female fellows
- Daughter aged 1
- First job in UK
- A bright future in the profession





## Reeling in the Years: 1992

- Gorgeous son to bring it to 3 beautiful children
- Severe mood swings
- Sought safety in hospital
- Word to look up **Dysphoric**





# Reeling 1992-94

- Marriage ended 12 months after diagnosis
- Made redundant 18 months after disclosing diagnosis
- 17.999 months after my boss's boss instructed him to make me redundant
- Medication free for 14 years after initial treatment
- Continued to work and qualified as an actuary



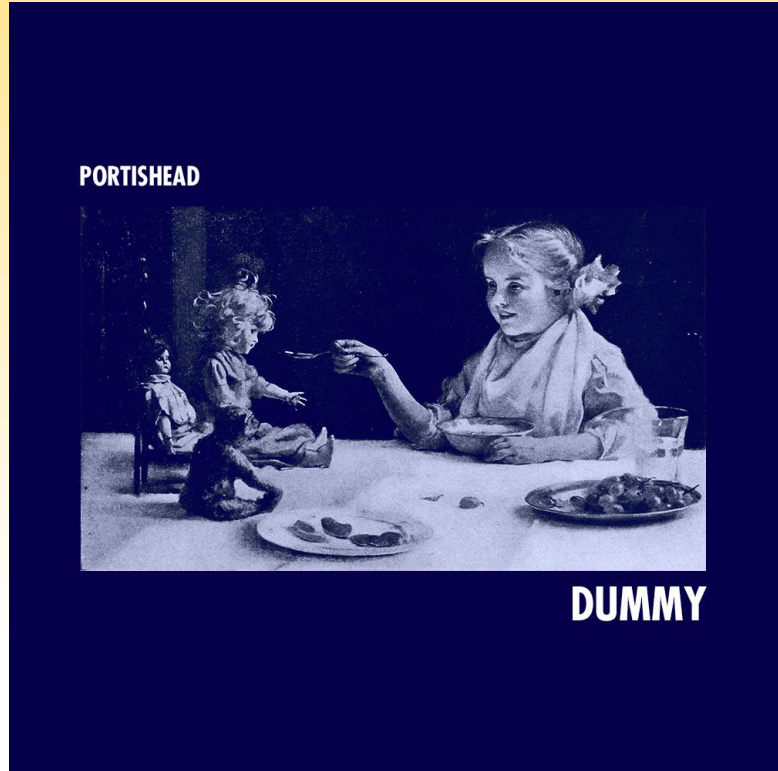
# Darkness Before Light

- Restarted career in the Isle of Man
- Feedback from Fellow of the Society
- I decided the time to return to Ireland hadn't arrived yet.
- Many other similar issues over the years
- We won't dwell on them
- But we will get back to kindness later



# Family Matters

- From 1995 on the kids introduced me to some great music
- Returned to Ireland in 2003
- Mood declined severely in 2009
- Asked to be admitted to hospital so I could see my 3 children grow up



# Comfortably Numb: Zombieland

## 2009-2010

- Who knows what happened?
- I don't
- Took redundancy but barely noticed

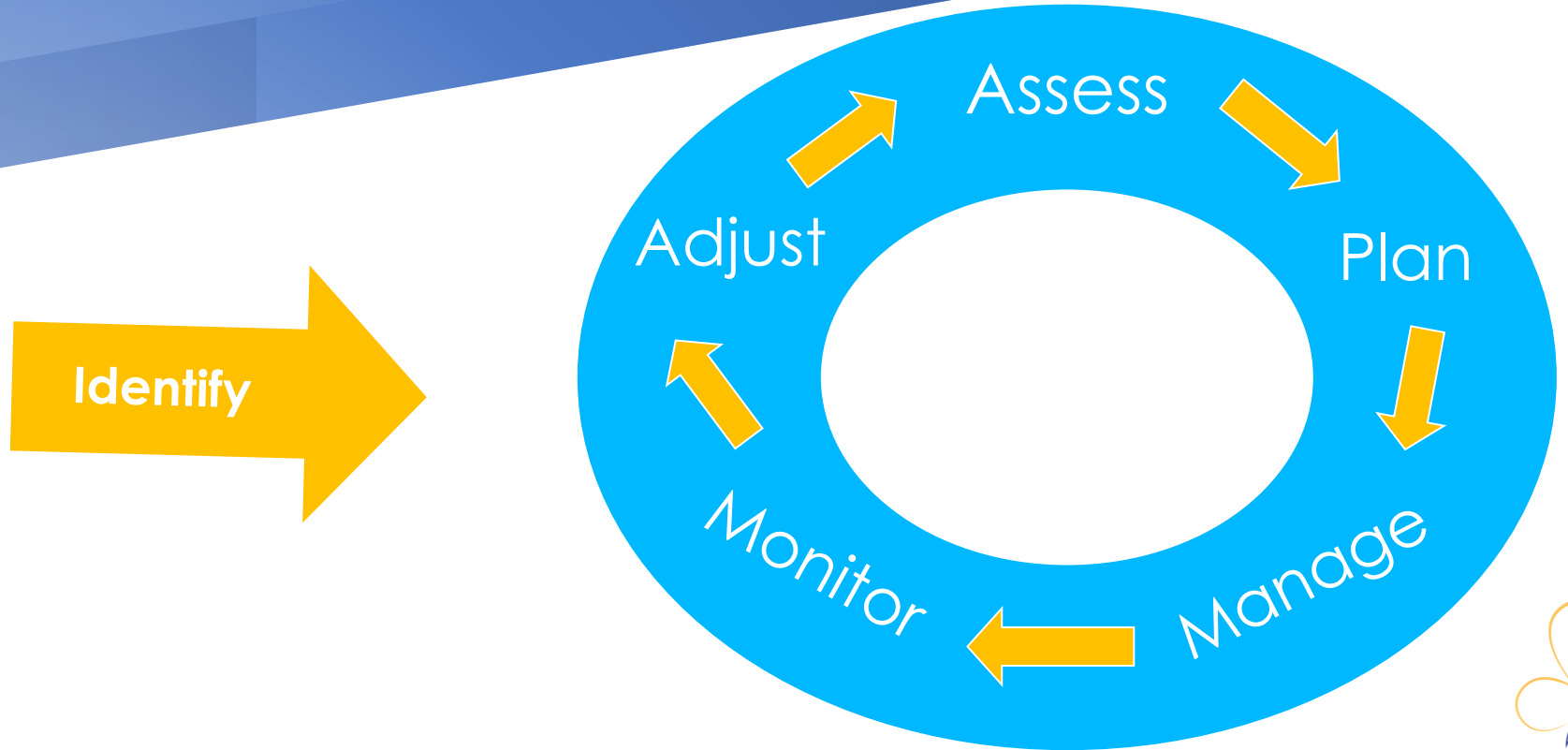
## 2011-2013

- Word to look up: **metastasized**.
- “He pulled himself back together to look after me.”
- Christmas 2013 – my beautiful boy died.

- Finally gave up the ghost in 2015 and headed to the river



# Actuarial Control Cycle





# Stress: Organizational Factors

- Working Conditions
- Work overload
- Work underload
- Responsibility
- Job security
- Change
- Personal Profiles
- Interpersonal Demands
- Relationships with Colleagues
- Role Ambiguity
- Role Conflict



# Stress & Personality Types

Perfectionist	Helper	Achiever
Artist	Observer	Supporter
Optimist	Leader	Mediator



# Wishing Well

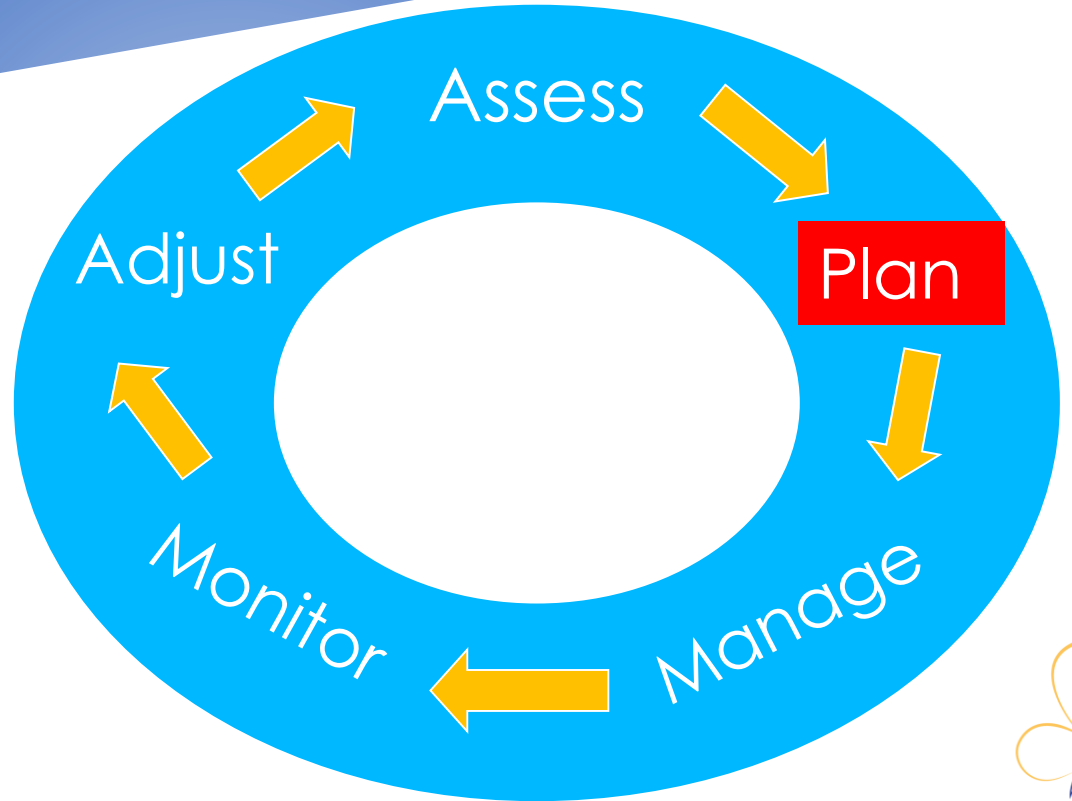
- Is wellness of staff a genuine input into business plan?
- Does it happen at lunchtime?
- How is it measured if at all?
- What, if anything, happens if the measurement says that the business model needs adjustment?
- Who has responsibility at senior level for Wellness as opposed to the Wellness Program?



# Actuarial Control Cycle



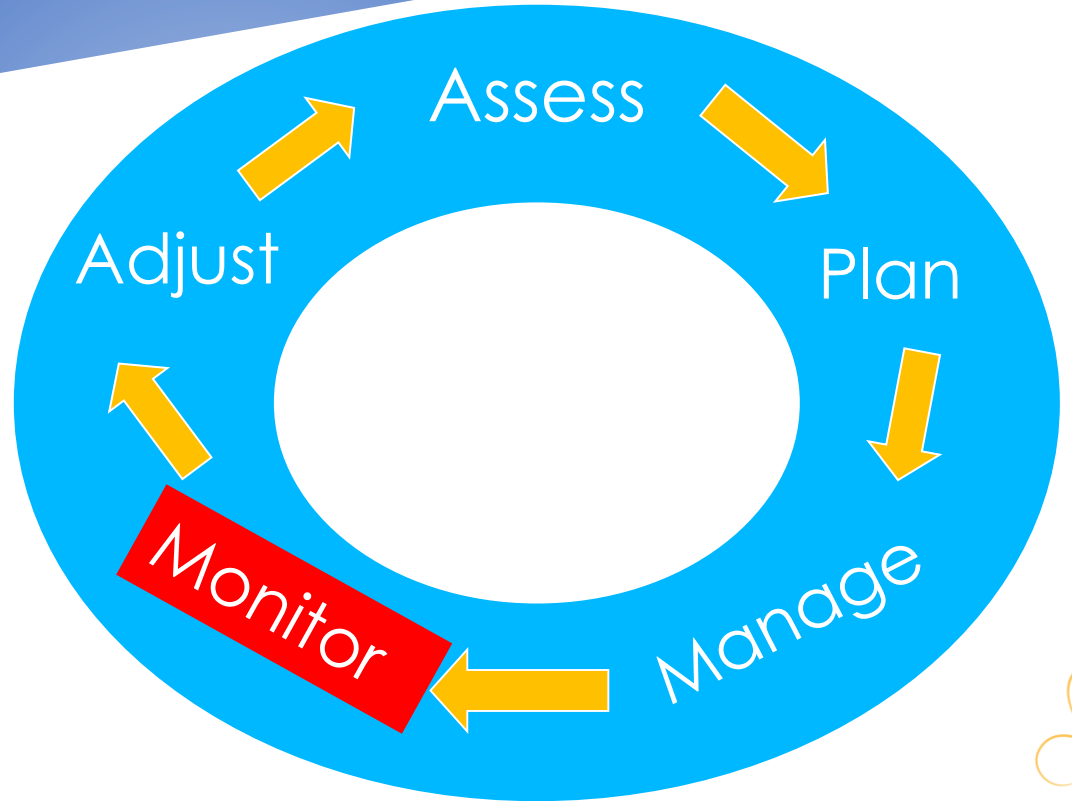
In planning strategy do we assess the impact of the model on mental health of our staff?



# Actuarial Control Cycle



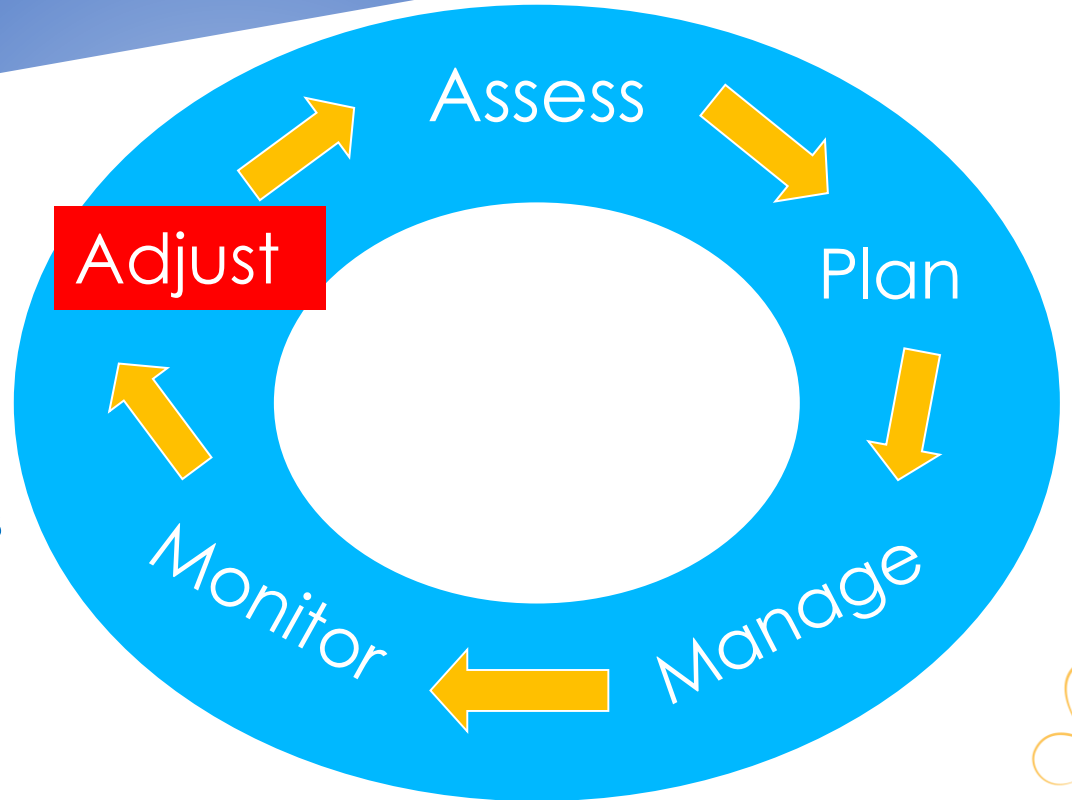
Do we monitor our business model to see if it has a negative effect of employee health?



# Actuarial Control Cycle



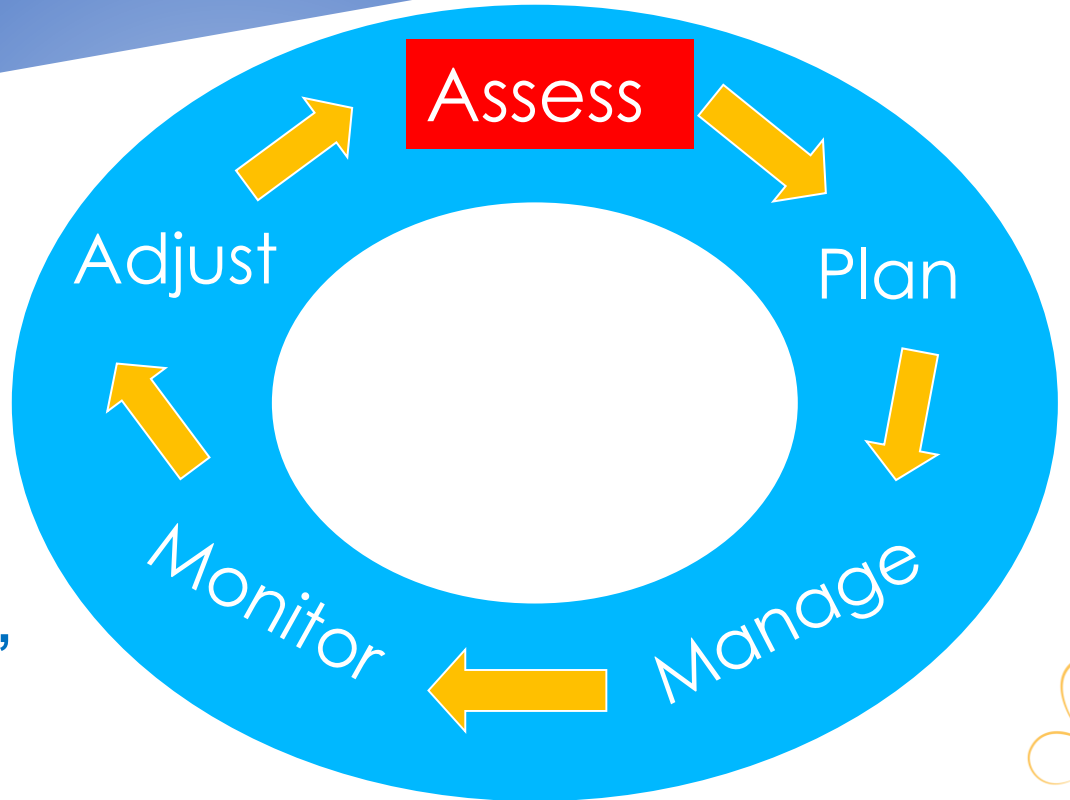
Do we adjust our business model if we find it has a negative effect on employee health?



# Actuarial Control Cycle



Do we collect data on mental health in exit interviews, culture reviews, employee assistance program analysis etc.?



# Ask Difficult Questions

- Is mental health a metric in your firm other than days lost to absence?
- Does your Employee Assistance Program have a feedback loop into the culture of the firm
- Does the firm do exit interviews as a rule?
- Do culture reviews ask if there are ways in which the business model impacts negatively on staff mental health?
- Are Wellness Programs an add on or is wellness core to the business model?





# Ask Very Difficult Questions

- Is there a pattern of those who have had mental health difficulties leaving the firm?
- If such a pattern exists – what message does that give to those encountering such issues?
- Does realising someone’s worst fears with a “generous” exit package actually help their long term mental health or does it just solve an internal “problem”?





## Ticking Boxes

Ticking boxes is dangerous in mental health welfare.



# Effective Personal Tools for Better Mental Health Outcomes

- Empathy
- Compassion
- Kindness



# Effective Personal Tools for Better Mental Health Outcomes

- Compassion does not prevent all suicides
- Kindness and compassion prevent many suicides
- Empathy makes life tolerable for many people
- All three reduce the risk of people becoming suicidal
- Non-suicides aren't observable
- We underestimate our positive impact on others



# Back to me: Kindness & Gratitude

- At my lowest points various professionals helped me out of kindness
- They probably didn't even realise how kind they were
- I am eternally grateful to them for their kindness
- So are those that love me



# Back to the River

- Gravel vs tarmac
- “Survived” again
- Weary of the battle
- **Decided to do one last beautiful thing before I died**
- **Kindness taught me how to live**



# Enjoying Life: creating and connecting beauty

- The album launch was in May 2017 – coupled with two sold out gigs
- Found that the “one thing I had to do before dying” led to a delightful series of questions



# Kindness is Addictive & Healing

- What next?
- Why is it that creating beauty and being kind feels so much better than I've felt in a long time?
- How can we show kindness and make beauty appear in other people's lives?
- What's the best way to make a difference?







## COMMUNITY SUPPORT RESOURCES

Supporting People-Focused Creative Programmes

## Community Support Resources

- Core to our company
- identifies and partners with small organisations of great intent
- Making an **immediate impact on marginalised people in the community.**



- 2018 worked with **BetterTogether** and **The Next Step Arts Group**
- With The Cork City Libraries, launched and supported a monthly open-to-all facilitated conversation group
- The Conversation Café is full every month.



BetterTogether Launch May 2018, Cork City Library



**Interview**  
**Sir John Curtice**  
When opinion polls miss the mark

**Life**  
The future of life insurance securitisation

**Environment**  
Developing effective corporate social responsibility

**Career development**  
Does polymathy hold the key to success?

Why wearable tech could be about to transform the life insurance industry



35 **MADE TO MEASURE**

“There is nothing in our small-scale model that is not scalable if companies make genuine Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) a business priority, allocate resources accordingly and employ people with the necessary skill-set to make a real impact.

In fact, I would suggest making CSR an integral part of the definition of Business as Usual should be the aim rather than CSR being merely a photo-opportunity or a marketing exercise.”



# A Request (in 7 parts)

- See the person not the illness
- Take responsibility for your colleagues' mental health
- Ask difficult questions
- Make your firm a real advocate of mental health
- Develop empathy
- Practise being kind and compassionate
- Even if you think it's not helping just keep trying





PLEASE  
BE KIND

Be Kind   
Be of Service

Thank you all for  
listening

Any questions?