

**6TH AAPAM STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE •
KENYA SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT, MOMBASA**

**MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS: PRIORITIZING
WELLNESS FOR PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERS**

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SESSION FOCUS

- **Why Wellness Is a Leadership and Governance Issue**
Healthy leaders are better positioned to sustain sound judgement, ethical leadership, effective relationships and institutional performance.
- **Mental Health in a VUCA Public Sector Environment**
Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA) can intensify pressure, mental exhaustion and emotional demands on public sector leaders.
- **Systems Thinking: Understanding the Whole Leader and Institution**
Wellness is shaped not only by individual choices, but also by organizational culture, workload, systems, relationships and leadership practices.

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SESSION FOCUS

- **Anticipatory Leadership: From Crisis Response to Prevention**
Move beyond reacting to burnout and workplace crises by identifying risks early and building preventive systems of support.
- **Digital Technology: Opportunity, Pressure and Responsible Use**
Technology can improve productivity and access to information, but constant connectivity can also increase cognitive load and blur work-life boundaries.
- **Practical Leadership Actions, Institutional Support and Next Steps**
Translate awareness into action through healthier leadership practices, supportive workplace systems, accessible professional support and measurable follow-up.

LEADING IN A CHANGING PUBLIC SECTOR ENVIRONMENT

- **VUCA is reshaping public administration**
Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity increasingly influence how governments plan, decide and deliver services.
- **Leaders are navigating multiple and interconnected pressures**
Health emergencies, cyber threats, climate shocks, insecurity and rising citizen expectations demand sustained attention and adaptability.

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LEADING IN A CHANGING PUBLIC SECTOR ENVIRONMENT

- **Reactive leadership is no longer enough**
Interconnected challenges require leaders to anticipate risks, recognize emerging trends and act before pressures escalate.
- **Future-ready institutions require resilient and adaptive leadership**
Leaders need to remain adaptable, grounded and citizen-centred while helping institutions respond effectively to change.

WELLNESS AS A FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

- **Wellness strengthens leadership capacity**
It supports sustained attention, sound judgement, healthy relationships and the ability to adapt under pressure.
- **A leader's wellbeing shapes the leadership experience**
How leaders manage pressure can influence team morale, communication, trust and workplace culture.
- **Wellness enables sustainable performance**
Prioritising wellness is not stepping away from performance. It is protecting the capacity to perform effectively over time.
- **Seeking support is a strength, not a weakness**
Healthy institutions create a culture where asking for help is accepted as part of professional responsibility.

DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

- **Emotional Wellness- Managing Pressure with Awareness**
Recognize emotions, regulate responses and remain composed when navigating demanding situations.
- **Cognitive Wellness- Protecting Clarity and Judgement**
Maintain perspective, focus and sound decision-making, particularly under sustained pressure.

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DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

- **Physical Wellness- Sustaining Energy and Recovery**
Prioritize adequate sleep, movement, nutrition, rest and healthy daily routines.
- **Social Wellness- Building Connection and Support**
Cultivate trusted relationships, belonging and constructive networks that provide encouragement and perspective.
- **Purpose and Meaning- Connecting Work to Public Value**
Stay grounded in personal values and purpose, with a clear sense that leadership contributes to people, communities and society.

HOW A VUCA ENVIRONMENT CAN AFFECT LEADER WELLNESS

- **Constant uncertainty can keep leaders in a state of heightened alert**
Sustained uncertainty may make it difficult to switch off, recover and maintain a sense of psychological safety.
- **Complexity can increase cognitive load and mental exhaustion**
Managing multiple, interconnected demands requires sustained mental effort and can gradually reduce attention and decision capacity.

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HOW A VUCA ENVIRONMENT CAN AFFECT LEADER WELLNESS

- **Ambiguity can create frustration and emotional strain**
When information is incomplete or outcomes are difficult to predict or control, leaders may experience greater tension and uncertainty.
- **Rapid change can reduce opportunities for recovery**
When urgency becomes the norm, rest and reflection can be displaced. Sustainable leadership therefore requires making recovery an intentional part of the work rhythm.

SYSTEMS THINKING: WELLNESS IS AN ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUE

- **Wellness is shaped by both individual choices and organisational design**

Healthy habits matter, but the workplace environment can either support or undermine them.

- **Workload, clarity on roles and workplace practices are interconnected**

Decision-making authority, meetings, communication patterns and organizational culture all influence how pressure is experienced.

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SYSTEMS THINKING: WELLNESS IS AN ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUE

- **Institutional resilience cannot rely on individual resilience alone**
Organizations must address the systems and conditions that create or amplify sustained pressure.
- **Identify and interrupt harmful feedback loops**
*For example: **pressure** → **reduced recovery** → **diminished capacity** → **increased pressure**. Breaking the cycle requires both individual and organizational action.*

ANTICIPATORY LEADERSHIP: PREVENTING BURNOUT AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

- **Recognize early signs of strain**
Pay attention to fatigue, withdrawal, irritability, reduced concentration and sustained feelings of overload, before they escalate.
- **Make recovery part of the work rhythm**
Build time for rest, reflection and recovery into schedules rather than treating them as something to consider only after exhaustion.
- **Use workload and risk reviews to anticipate pressure points**
Regularly identify periods, processes or roles likely to generate excessive pressure and address them proactively.
- **Build leadership continuity and delegation capacity**
Develop systems that allow leaders to delegate, take leave or step away when necessary without disrupting essential institutional functions.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: ENABLING PRODUCTIVITY WITHOUT CREATING DIGITAL OVERLOAD

- **Use technology to reduce administrative burden**

Automate repetitive tasks, simplify approvals and use digital tools to make information easier to access and manage.

- **Establish healthy digital boundaries**

Protect time for focused work, reduce unnecessary after-hours communication and clearly distinguish urgent matters from routine requests.

- **Practice intentional connectivity**

Set dedicated times to check email and messages instead of remaining continuously responsive throughout the day.

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DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: ENABLING PRODUCTIVITY WITHOUT CREATING DIGITAL OVERLOAD

- **Use AI as an assistant, not a substitute:** Apply AI and analytics to support analysis and decision-making while retaining human judgement, oversight and accountability.
- **Build psychologically safe teams:** Normalise conversations about workload, stress and well-being without equating help-seeking with weakness or poor performance.
- **Protect digital trust:** Ensure responsible use of data through strong attention to privacy, cybersecurity, ethics and transparency.

HEALTHY DIGITAL BOUNDARIES: LEADING BY EXAMPLE

- **Set clear communication norms**
Clarify what requires an immediate response, what can wait and who is responsible for taking action.
- **Protect time for focused work and recovery**
Create protected periods for deep work, reflection, breaks and recovery, where operational demands allow.
- **Strengthen delegation and escalation pathways**
Ensure issues are directed to the right person or level rather than creating an expectation that one leader must always be available.
- **Model healthy boundaries while remaining responsive**
Demonstrate that sustainable availability is compatible with effective leadership, while maintaining clear channels for genuine emergencies.

BUILDING A HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

- **Create space for people to raise concerns early**
Encourage staff to speak up about workload, stress, risks or challenges before they become bigger problems.
- **Distinguish accountability from blame**
Hold people responsible for outcomes while focusing on solutions, learning and improvement rather than fear or punishment.
- **Encourage respectful disagreement and learning from mistakes**
Make it safe to challenge ideas, ask questions and learn from setbacks without creating a culture of silence.

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BUILDING A HEALTHY AND SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

- **Recognize contribution and communicate priorities clearly**
Acknowledge people's efforts and ensure staff understand what matters most, what is expected and where to focus their energy.
- **Ensure staff know where to seek confidential professional support**
Make information about counselling, employee assistance and other professional support accessible, clear and easy to find.

A PRACTICAL WELLNESS FRAMEWORK

- **PAUSE**- Notice pressure, emotions and mental exhaustion.
- **PRIORITISE** -Separate urgent, important and deferrable work.
- **CONNECT**- Use trusted peers, mentors and professional support.
- **RECOVER**-Protect sleep, movement, reflection and non-work time.
- **ADAPT**-Review what the system is teaching you and change the operating pattern.

INSTITUTIONALIZING WELLNESS

- Embed wellness in leadership development and management practice.
- Review workload, meeting culture, leave, flexibility and role clarity.
- Provide accessible employee assistance and professional referral pathways.
- Use staff feedback and organizational data to identify recurring pressure points.
- Treat wellness as part of institutional resilience and sustainable public²⁰ value.

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENTS

- I will model healthy leadership behaviours.
- I will make space for recovery and reflection in demanding periods.
- I will create conditions where concerns can be raised early.
- I will use digital tools deliberately and responsibly.
- I will treat people as a core institutional capability and not an expendable resource.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The future-ready public servant is not simply a responder to change, but an anticipator, navigator and builder of institutional resilience.
- Wellness is both an individual responsibility and an organizational design issue.
- Anticipatory leadership means noticing and addressing wellness risks early.
- Digital transformation should strengthen human capability, trust and public value.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In a high-pressure environment, resilience is not the ability to operate under constant strain; it is the capacity to adapt, recover and continue leading effectively.
- Healthy boundaries do not reduce responsiveness rather, they make responsiveness more focused, sustainable and effective.
- Pause. Prioritise. Connect. Recover. Adapt. Sustainable leadership begins with knowing when to stop, reset and change course.

CALL TO ACTION: MAKE WELLNESS A LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

- **Protect one personal wellbeing practice**
Choose one habit that supports your physical, emotional or mental wellbeing and make it non-negotiable.
- **Introduce one healthy team practice**
Create one simple team habit that strengthens connection, communication, recovery or psychological safety.
- **Address one organizational barrier**
Identify one workplace practice, process or pressure that undermines wellbeing, and take a practical step to address it.
- **Review progress after 30 days, learn what worked, and adapt what needs to change**
Pause, reflect on the impact, celebrate progress, and adjust the approach where necessary.

CONCLUSION

- **Small, consistent changes can cultivate healthier leaders, stronger teams and more resilient public institutions.**
- **Wellness is not a one-time intervention. It is a leadership practice, an organizational responsibility and an investment in creating a sustainable public service.**

THANK YOU