# OH Leadership Competency Framework

A framework for occupational health leadership

# Presenters

## Dr Lanre Ogunyemi

*Consultant in Occupational Medicine, Immediate Past President of the UK Society of Occupational Medicine, and Founding Chair of its Leadership Academy, established to develop future leaders and strengthen leadership across the occupational health workforce. A passionate advocate for education, leadership, and workforce development.*

## Dr Natalie Green

*Senior Medical Director at Health Partners Group and a Consultant Occupational Physician with extensive experience across public and private sectors. She leads a multidisciplinary clinical team delivering occupational health services to a wide range of commercial clients. Natalie is a compassionate and inclusive leader, committed to helping individuals thrive and encouraging leadership at all levels.*

## Prof Jo Yarker

*A Registered and Chartered Occupational Psychologist, Managing Partner at Affinity Health at Work, Professor of Occupational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London and Co-Director of the London Centre for Work and Health. Her work focuses on supporting healthy, sustainable work for all, particularly how we design work, lead teams, and support people during periods of challenge or change.*

## Nathan Palmer

*A Registered Occupational Psychologist and works as a Senior Consultant at Affinity Health at Work and supports a range of client and research projects – bringing together existing evidence and expert opinion to create new tools and more in-depth understanding of workplace wellbeing challenges.*

# Overview

- The need for leadership competencies in OH

- Researching occupational health leadership

- The Leadership Framework

- Using the framework in your leadership journey or supporting your teams

- How to access the framework and provide feedback on it

# SOM Leadership Academy

- SOM's home for OH leadership development

- Coherent, OH-specific leadership approach

- Focus on inclusion, impact, and application

- Supports leadership across career stages

- Leadership Competency Framework: first output

# Why a framework now?



UK faces a **work-and-health inflection point**: economic inactivity driven by ill-health is at record levels; employers are asked to lead workplace health. *(Keep Britain Working final report, 5 Nov 2025; ONS INAC01 SA updates, 2024–2025)*

**Effective OH leadership is decisive for measurable improvement in work outcomes** and ROI for employers across NHS and commercial settings. *(SOM Value Proposition, Mar 2022)*

**Generic health leadership guidance exists but does not reflect the cross-boundary practice unique to OH**.

This framework defines **what effective OH leadership looks like** to improve the quality and efficiency of OH services, ready to rise to the current economic and political challenge, and **nurture the development of OH leaders into the future**.

# The UK Work & Health Challenge

>1 in 5 working-age adults are economically inactive; ill-health is a primary driver.

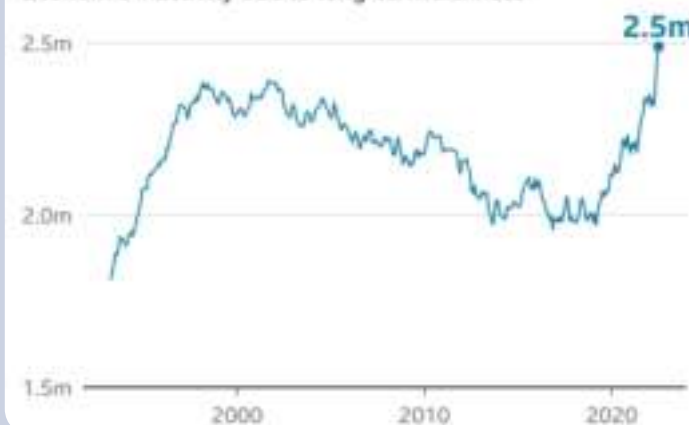Long-term sickness: ~2.8m people inactive due to ill-health.

Annual cost of ill-health preventing work: ~£212bn (~7% GDP); ~£85bn impacts employers directly.

Employers must lead prevention, early intervention, RTW support—with OH at the centre.

**Long-term sickness is highest on record**
Economic inactivity due to long-term sickness



2.5m

2.5m

2.0m

1.5m

2000    2010    2020

*Economic inactivity is at a record high. Proportion of those economically inactive by reason of ill-health has been steadily rising (2019 ~ 2 million; 2025 ~ 2.8 million = 40% rise). Without action, predictions suggest another 600,000 people could leave work by 2030.*

*Source: ONS data*

# Existing Health Leadership Frameworks
*(and their limits for OH practice)*

Established leadership competencies in the healthcare sector, some examples:

*NHS Leadership Framework*

*RCN Clinical Leadership Programme*

*Chartered Society of Physiotherapy Leadership Development*

*Royal College of Occupational Therapists Leadership Framework*

*GMC Leadership & Management for All Doctors*

**Strengths:** these are profession specific and set clear expectations for ethics, governance and quality. The focus on clinical leadership emphasises the importance of patient safety, team management, and evidence-based care. They also provide clinicians with clear structure for professional development within traditional healthcare settings, and align with regulatory compliance requirements.

However, all assume a hierarchical clinical environment and do not compute to an environment where clinicians lack *direct control.*

No emphasis on commercial acumen – rarely address ROI or business case development.

> While leadership skills have been incorporated into competency models for specific OH professionals, **a broader view of OH leadership remains lacking.**

# What Makes OH Leadership Unique?

Given its proactive and preventative nature, additional compliance requirements and multi-disciplinary approach, OH professionals work in a manner that is distinct from other healthcare professionals and inherently complex:

Dual accountabilities: employee health outcomes and employer performance requirements.

Non-hierarchical influence: leading across functions (line managers, HR, unions, clinical partners) without formal authority.

Clinical-to-business translation: turn evidence into business cases, service KPIs, ROI metrics.

System-level change: redesign services for prevention, early intervention, and RTW pathways.

Generic clinical leadership competencies are undoubtedly of relevance to our work, but not fully cognisant of the demands of it.

# The National Moment

| The national situation | The opportunity |
|---|---|
| **KBW report:** employers to lead on rehumanising workplaces, implementing systematic change (no piecemeal fixes), and 'race to the top' in provision of workplace health support. | **Effective OH leadership will enable service to shape pathways, policy, and employer behaviours.** |
| **Evidence base:** inactivity due to ill-health up ~800k since 2019; projections +~600k by 2030 absent decisive action. 3 outcomes that drive better practice to be focussed on: (1) reducing absence rates, (2) improving return-to-work rates, (3) increasing participation of disabled people (KBW final report, 5 Nov 2025) | National productivity dependent upon transformation of workplace health provision - high quality in-work support, preventative healthcare strategies, and data-driven RTW. **OH is uniquely placed to rise to this need.** (KBW final report, Nov 2025) |
| **Employer cost lens:** ~£85bn annual employer losses. (KBW final report, 5 Nov 2025) | Presents a clear business case for OH investment and leadership. |
| **Employer Surveys (2022 & 2024):** only ~28% of employers provide OH; common barriers: capital, time, expertise. (DWP, Sep 2023; DWP, May 2025) | Strategic gap: many employers lack OH provision or capacity to manage long-term absence. **Occupational health leadership will ensure that high quality OH services are primed to fill this gap.** (DWP Employer Survey, Sep 2023; May 2025) |

# Why a Competency Framework?

**Clarity for clinicians:** Defines the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed to lead effectively in OH—across self, practice, organisation, and profession.

**Development for managers:** Provides a structured roadmap for leadership growth, CPD, and succession planning—tailored to OH's unique challenges.

**Assurance for employers/services:** Creates a benchmark for recruitment, performance, and service quality—aligning leadership capability with organisational goals.

**Consistency across sectors:** Applies equally to NHS and commercial OH, supporting integrated standards and measurable outcomes.

**Future-proofing the profession:** Builds a pipeline of leaders equipped to navigate complexity, influence without authority, and champion OH at system level.



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Supporting occupational health
and wellbeing professionals

# Researching OH leadership

Developing the occupational health leadership framework

# The question

- What does good occupational health leadership look like?

- What is distinctive about it?

- What kind of leadership is needed to tackle current and future challenges in OH?

# The goal

To develop a comprehensive framework that will:

- provide a broad, structured approach
- specify the necessary leadership competencies to deliver and advance OH
- act as a guide for OH professionals
- provide practical guidance to inform leadership education

# Development Approach

Research Project 2021/2: Jennifer Napier, Drushca Lalloo, Christopher Peach, Jo Yarker & Clare Bowerman

- Aims: to better understand the requirements of occupational health leadership and develop an evidence-based pathway

- Activities: Systematic review and interviews with senior leaders in occupational health

Consultation and update 2025: Expert review group, input from FOM

- Refining of framework

- Update to competencies

- Definition of statements

- Preparation for publication

# The framework

Occupational health leadership framework

# Introducing the Framework

**Purpose**: clear, practical, aspirational guide across OH roles & career stages

**Alignment**: complements NHS/GMC standards; supports SOM Leadership Academy

**Use cases**: reflection, mentoring, development planning, recruitment & progression criteria

Download the framework [here](here)



Occupational Health Leadership Competency Framework

# Leading self

| Sub-domain | Competency |
|---|---|
| **Self-awareness and development** | Demonstrating self-awareness |
| | Acting with trust and integrity |
| | Managing personal resources and building resilience |
| | Being self-directed |

# Leading practice and people

| Sub-domain | Competency |
|---|---|
| **Clinical leadership** | Demonstrating technical excellence |
| | Applying evidence in practice |
| | Engaging with and translating research |
| | Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and reflective practice |
| **Relationships and communication** | Listening actively |
| | Communicating openly |
| | Influencing and negotiating |
| | Managing conflict |
| **People leadership** | Collaborating effectively in teams |
| | Mentoring and providing support |
| | Leading teams |
| | Leading change |

# Leading the organisation

| Sub-domain | Competency |
|---|---|
| **Business acumen** | Communicating effective in business contexts |
| | Demonstrating commercial awareness |
| | Being business and service orientated |
| **Vision and strategy** | Inspiring others |
| | Communicating with clarity |
| | Adapting and thinking ahead |
| **Organisational (and eco-system) leadership** | Navigating and collaborating within the organisation and beyond |
| | Influencing across the organisation |
| | Leading system-level change |

# Leading the profession

| Sub-domain | Competency |
|---|---|
| **External leadership and professional stewardship** | Building strategic partnerships |
| | Demonstrating contextual awareness |
| | Championing occupational health |
| | Developing future leaders in occupational health |

# Reflecting on your leadership journey

What brought you here?

# What one word or image sums up your career journey?

# What has shaped your career journey?

With the person next to you share the word or image that sums up your career journey, then pick one of these questions to answer.

- What have been the pivotal moments in your journey so far?

- Who has influenced you the most?

- What have been your greatest discoveries?

# The gear shift

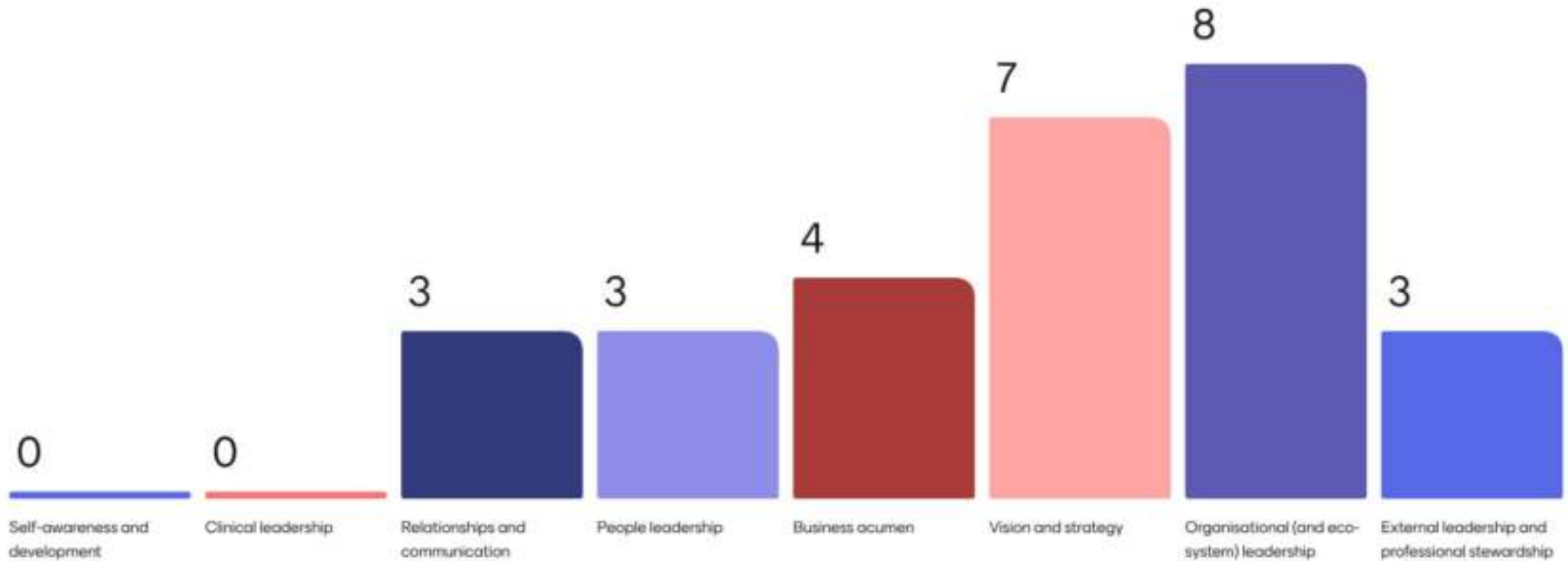## What got you here won't get you there

Marshall Goldsmith

# Assessing your own competencies

## Understanding your own leadership competency

# Which of these competencies are you most confident you demonstrate?

# Which competency is most relevant to you achieving your goals?

# Using the framework

The framework can be used to consider development:

- Individually – continue to use this as a tool for reflection and CPD planning

- As a manager – use it to support development conversations

- In teams – consider holding group conversations

- In organisations – review your development pathways and opportunities against the framework

# Using it in teams

In your own teams you could discuss:

- Which of the competencies would be most useful for you to develop?

- What opportunities are available to you to develop that competency, and how have others developed in this area?

- What has been helpful to your leadership development so far (i.e. how do you prefer to learn)?

- What would you find helpful to support you in the future?

# What one action will you commit to this month to grow as a leader in OH?

Develop the next generation of leaders for succession training and survival of the specialty in Northern Ireland

Clarify vision & strategy

Research improving communication of vision and strategy

Weave into conversations to drive engagement and commitment

I will use the framework with my team to understand strengths, identify areas for development, and work together on their long term goals

build relationship with stakeholders and make steps in developing vision and strategy.

Review my input into raising and developing a proactive/ preventative OH department

Listen

# What one action will you commit to this month to grow as a leader in OH?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Data skills | Find out how I can understand profesisonal leadership and stewardship | Review the framework and how I can apply this to my present role. | Reflection and focus |
| Support new OH nurses in the department through them shadowing me for a day | Openness to listen to new ideas and the ideas of others | Time. Work is busy, the focus needs to shift for development for all | Stakeholder engagement |

# What one action will you commit to this month to grow as a leader in OH?

people leadership improve appraisal and support

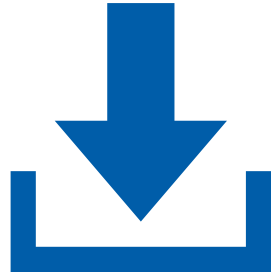Reach out, share and impact early career OH clinicians looking to develop

Research and data skills

Look in to how i can stregnthen areas i dont feel so confident in

Dialogue with leadership

Integrating framework into practical engagement

# Access and Feedback:



Download the framework



Complete the survey