

Structure of the Systems Theory of Change

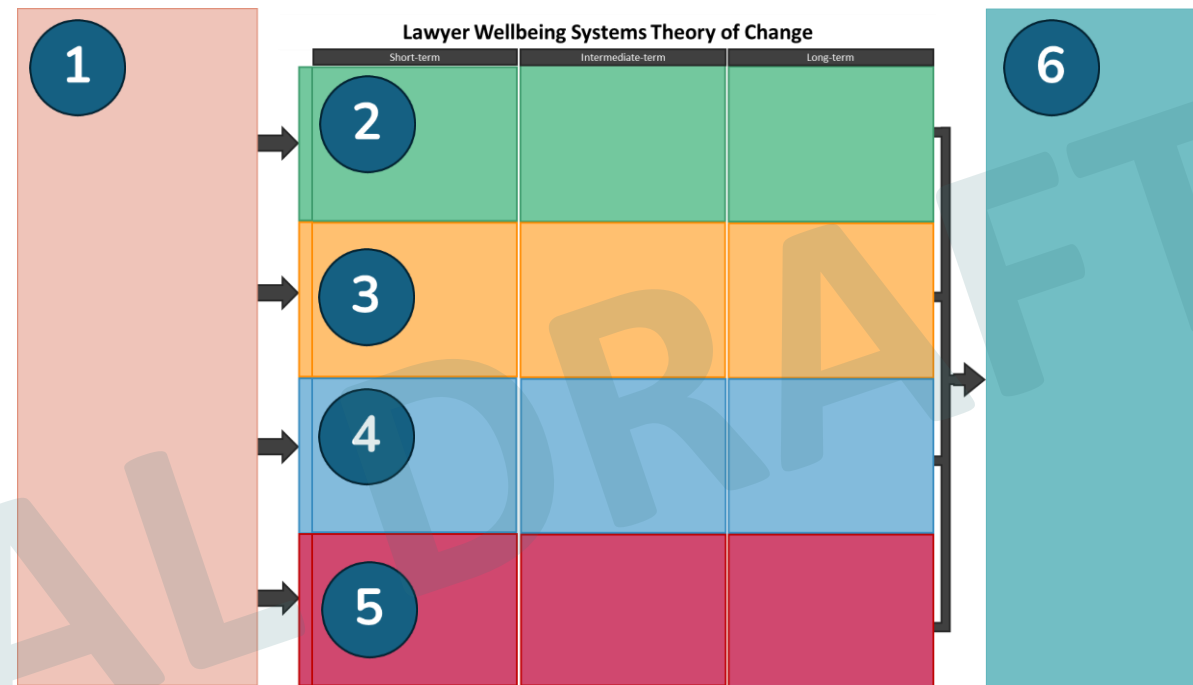
Theory of Change models are tailored to their context which makes them meaningful – but this also means that they can look very different. The model to the right presents the structure for the Lawyer Wellbeing Systems Theory of Change.

A typical Theory of Change is like a roadmap that explains how and why a desired change is expected to happen. Think of it like plotting out a journey from where you are now to where you want to be, while presenting the steps in between.

The main difference with this Systems Theory of Change is that the starting ‘problem’ is defined from an explicit systems perspective which is provided by the System Effects results (see the last page of this document).

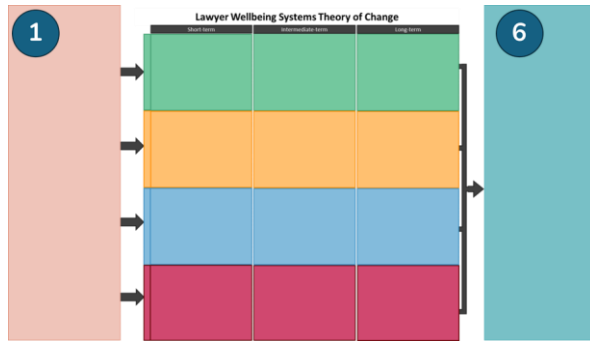
This model is read from left to right. This structure reflects the need to address four concurrent pathways across the individual, interpersonal, organisational, and sectoral levels in order to achieve the vision for lawyer wellbeing.

The following pages presents each of these components followed by the full Lawyer Wellbeing Systems Theory of Change.



- 1 The Current Challenge**
Summary problem statements reflecting the four levels and the factors identified as most influential in driving poor lawyer wellbeing.
- 2 Individual Level Outcomes**
The outcomes that need to occur at the individual level in the short, medium, and long-term to help improve lawyer wellbeing.
- 3 Interpersonal Level Outcomes**
The outcomes that need to occur at the interpersonal level in the short, medium, and long-term to help improve lawyer wellbeing.
- 4 Organisational Level Outcomes**
The outcomes that need to occur or manifest at the organisational level in the short, medium, and long-term to help improve lawyer wellbeing.
- 5 Sectoral Level Outcomes**
The outcomes that need to occur or manifest at the cross-organisational or sectoral level in the short, medium, and long-term to help improve lawyer wellbeing.
- 6 Vision for the Future**
The desirable future state for lawyer wellbeing that will manifest as a result of all outcomes across the four levels occurring.

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The Current Challenge and Vision for the Future bookend the Systems Theory of Change model. They reflect what the current situation is, and where we hope to end up.

- 1 The Current Challenge** Summary problem statements reflecting the four levels and the factors identified as most influential in driving poor lawyer wellbeing.

The Current Challenge

We know that poor lawyer wellbeing is driven by a complex and simultaneous interplay of factors across four levels:

- **Individually**, lawyers grapple with work-life balance, high stress, and the emotional toll of supporting high-needs clients. This is compounded by insufficient boundaries and unhealthy coping mechanisms, which erode resilience and exacerbate burnout.
- **Interpersonally**, lawyers experience unrealistic client expectations, adversarial dynamics driven by the nature of the legal system, and hyper-competitiveness which diminishes collegiality and collaborative practice.
- **Organisationally**, excessive workloads, poor leadership support and capability, and rigid hierarchies perpetuate toxic working cultures. This is exacerbated by resource constraints and, for some environments, a focus on billable hours over staff wellbeing. These foster unsustainable work environments and erode staff morale.
- **Sectorally**, lawyers experience expectations of perfection, regulatory pressures and an unsupportive legal system. Deadlines, increasing volumes of work, entrenched discriminatory practices, and underfunded systems exacerbate pressures including insufficient opportunities for mentorship, learning and growth.

- 6 Vision for the Future** The desirable future state for lawyer wellbeing that will manifest as a result of all outcomes across the four levels occurring.

Vision for the Future

The Victorian legal system fosters a connected and empathetic legal professional that values wellbeing while delivering services to a high standard for clients.

The profession supports and sustains its members and respects the humanity of all involved.

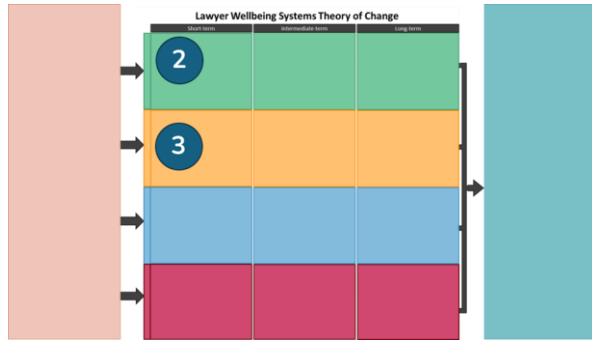
Lawyers are valued as people and professionals, promoting excellence, diversity, inclusivity, and connection.

Personal and professional growth through meaningful mentorship, development, and balance is encouraged and supported.

Successful performance and outcomes for individuals, organisations and the sector are redefined through models grounded in values and equity.

Leaders promote and model boundaries, good mental health in practice, and respectful engagement.

Structure of the Systems Theory of Change



To achieve the **Vision for the Future** progress must be made in the short, intermediate, and long-term across four levels.

These outcomes are interrelated, meaning that progress in one area or level will support or reinforce progress in other areas or levels.

2

Individual Level Outcomes

These outcomes manifest within or are focused on an individual.

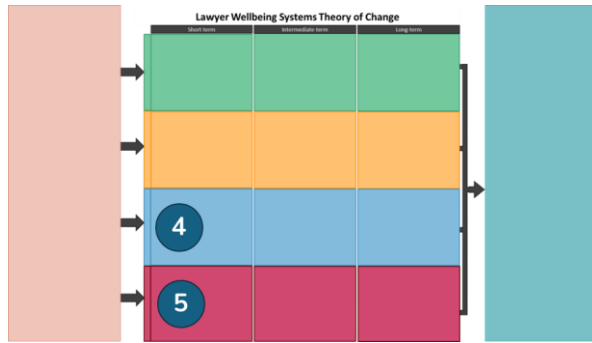
3

Interpersonal Level Outcomes

These outcomes manifest between individuals – usually as part of interactions.

	Short-term	Intermediate-term	Long-term
Individual	<p>Lawyers understand the relationship between good wellbeing, their practice, and their own capacity for action.</p> <p>Lawyers develop their individual resilience through different learning opportunities, while also seeking help when needed.</p>	<p>Leader's role model setting boundaries and prioritising personal health to their staff, peers and clients.</p> <p>Lawyers are actively undertaking reflective practice and engaging with peers and colleagues around them.</p> <p>Lawyers have time to develop and practice interests and passions outside of work.</p>	<p>Lawyers practice reflection and engage in personal health and leisure interests outside of work.</p> <p>Leaders make the time to actively listen and support the staff for whom they are responsible.</p> <p>Lawyers recognise their duty to themselves as part of their broader duties in the legal system.</p>
Interpersonal	<p>Lawyers take up learning on how to engage and communicate the legal process to clients and stakeholders.</p> <p>Lawyers take up opportunities to collaborate on projects with peers across the legal system.</p> <p>Lawyers see meaningful debriefs with peers, colleagues and clients as an integral part of effective practice.</p>	<p>Stakeholders, including clients, understand the basics of legal process, and appreciate their lawyer's role in it.</p> <p>Lawyer leaders and legal educators are demonstrating the value of respectful and collaborative practice.</p> <p>Lawyers form and maintain networks with like-minded peers to support connection and shared growth in skills.</p>	<p>Lawyers are respected and their contributions, including as mediators, are appreciated by those they engage with in the legal system.</p> <p>Lawyers actively value collaboration, and healthy competition, with peers and colleagues.</p>

Structure of the Systems Theory of Change



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4

Organisational Level Outcomes

These outcomes occur or manifest within organisational settings in the legal system.

	Short-term	Intermediate-term	Long-term
Individual	<p>Leaders understand the relationship between staff capacity, workloads, and ways to manage wellbeing.</p> <p>Leaders value positive workplace culture as an investment in staff retention, growth, and performance.</p> <p>All organisations offer appropriate and accessible wellbeing supports for staff.</p>	<p>Organisations recognise staff that support the development of others, not just themselves.</p> <p>Improved management and leadership skills among leaders enables effective support of staff and their workloads.</p> <p>Organisations respect their staff, their lives and interests outside of work, and value staff wellbeing.</p>	<p>Processes to appropriately manage workloads and stress at all levels are in place and consistently working well.</p> <p>Positive workplace cultures is reflected in improved staff retention and performance.</p> <p>Alternatives to billable hours as performance measures are adopted and promoted as best practice.</p>
Interpersonal	<p>The legal system fosters cross-sectoral opportunities for networking and growth.</p> <p>“Soft skills” are treated as critical skills and embedded into professional development processes.</p> <p>Cross-sectoral organisations, including the VLSB+C, develop responses and supports to improve lawyer wellbeing.</p>	<p>The legal system embodies the ‘right to disconnect’, whilst supporting the use of technology to improve efficiencies.</p> <p>The legal system embraces learning opportunities from all professional experiences, good and bad.</p> <p>The legal system prioritises meaningful timing and scheduling over arbitrary deadlines.</p>	<p>The legal system advocates for high standards of practice, not perfection.</p> <p>Lawyer wellbeing is championed as a cornerstone of effective practice.</p> <p>The legal system operates transparently, where appropriate, including career opportunities, appointments, and dispute resolution.</p>

5

Sectoral Level Outcomes

These outcomes manifest across or between organisations and the legal sector as a whole.

Lawyer Wellbeing Systems Theory of Change

The Current Challenge

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The Foundations for the Systems Theory of Change

System Effects Results

System Effects asks people to answer questions based on their own experiences of an issue – in this case poor lawyer wellbeing. The unique aspect of this process is that people go beyond the surface-level factors to find the deeper causes of the issue in question. Their answers produce maps of the factors that reflect their experience. These can be analysed and synthesised into a single systems map.

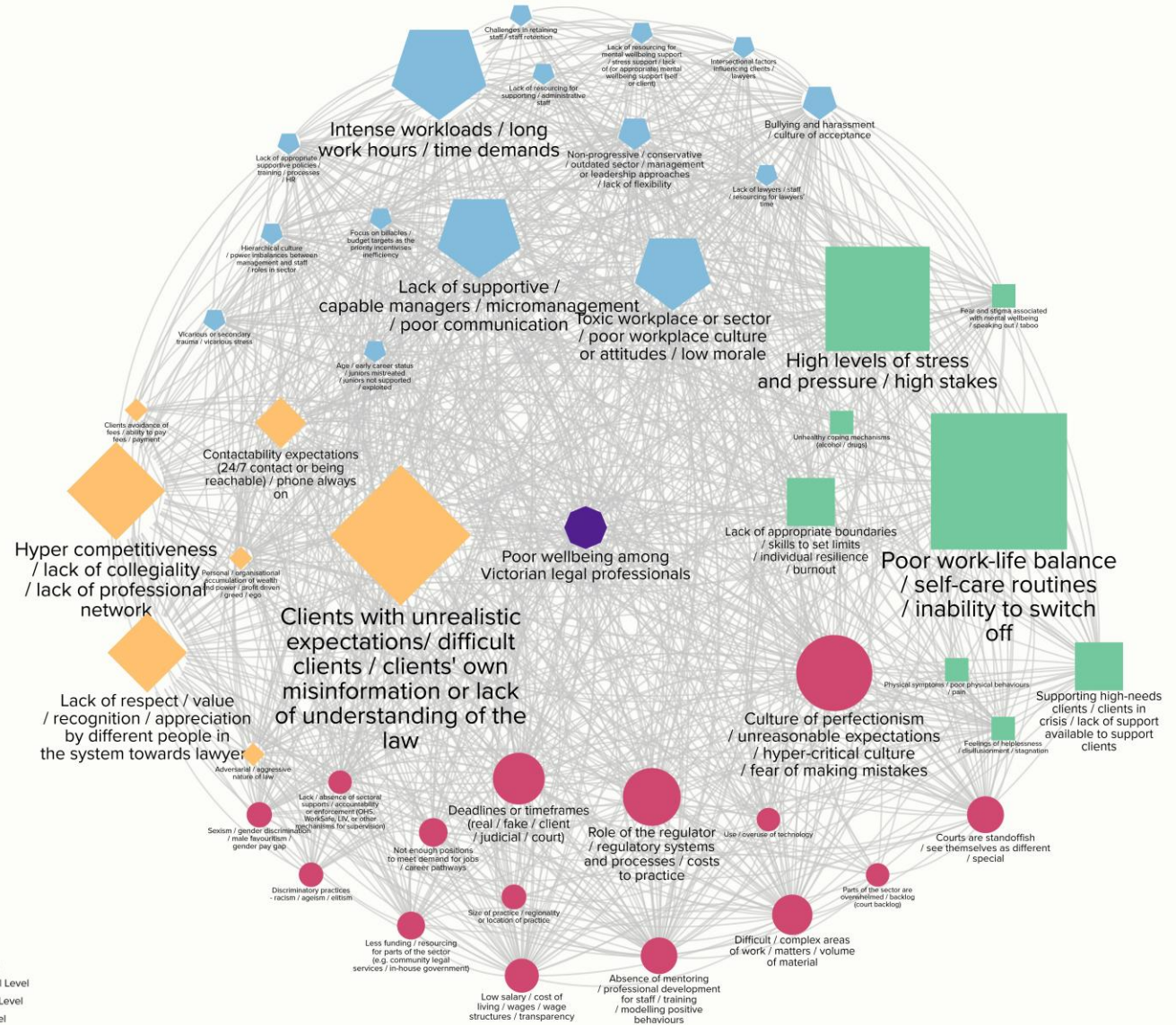
We heard from more than a 1,100 people within the legal sector who identified more than 5,000 different factors that drive poor lawyer wellbeing. Following a rigorous thematic analysis process, we found 45 unique factors with over a 1,000 connections between them, surrounding the central issue – poor lawyer wellbeing.¹

These factors and their connections are represented in the map to the right. As part of this process we identified that there are four ‘levels’ to the systemic nature of poor lawyer wellbeing. These, along with the factors that our analysis found to be most influential at each level, are:

Level	Most Influential Factors
Individual	Poor work-life balance; high levels of stress
Interpersonal	Clients with unrealistic expectations; lack of collegiality
Organisational	High workloads; manager capability; workplace culture
Sectoral	Culture of perfectionism; deadlines / timeframes; and the role of the regulator.

While the analysis identifies the most influential factors within each level, it is crucial that we recognise that factors are also influencing across levels as well. As such, a holistic effort across the whole range of factors will be crucial.

More detail can be found in the full [System Effects report](#).



¹ First Person Consulting (2024). *Systems-Level Theory of Change for Lawyer Wellbeing Project: Results from the System Effects Survey*. Prepared for the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, Melbourne, Victoria.