

CREATING HEALTHY WORKPLACES

- The modern model of healthy workplaces focuses not only on physical wellness but on the closely tied components of financial, emotional and lifestyle wellness
- Workers are seeking an improved employee value proposition; they want to work for organisations that value all aspects of their health and wellbeing
- Only 59 percent of Australian workers feel that their contribution at work is valued
- Employees should feel psychologically safe in the workplace; this means safe to raise their opinions, safety from bullying and harassment, safe from discrimination
- Workplace camaraderie is important – employees who feel supported by their co-workers experience less stress and less burnout

“A psychologically healthy workplace fosters employee health and wellbeing while enhancing organizational performance and productivity,” Sodexo 2017 Global Workplace Trends

CULTURE IS THE KEY TO CREATING HEALTHY AND HAPPY WORKPLACES

Reventure, which collaborates with Converge International, is an Australian research organisation looking at the evolving future of workplaces. In a recent research report, titled Delivering purpose and meaning, Reventure found that only 30 percent of Australian workers think that their current workplace culture is healthy.

Reventure’s research also found that 20 percent of workers experienced high levels of negativity at work, indicating that many Australian workplaces are neither happy or healthy.

There is a way to turn things around as Reventure’s research points out, Australian workers want to be part of building and maintaining company culture: “For a culture to be maintained, ownership should then be given to employees to assist in forming the kind of culture they wish to be a part of.”

Overseas research has also shown the link between positive culture and healthy workplaces. Canadian-based workplace culture and happiness consultancy Plasticity Labs has found: “... employees who place value on their company culture are more satisfied, engaged, dedicated, absorbed, energetic, grateful and happy.”

In Delivering purpose and meaning, Reventure stated, “Culture is increasingly becoming one way to slow the impact of decreased productivity and lack of direction” at work.

KEY VALUES OF HEALTHY WORKPLACES; IT ALL STARTS WITH GRATITUDE

Does your organisation’s culture and its core values help to create a healthy workplace? Organisations which empower employees to shape their workplace experiences see the biggest contribution of staff to crafting a positive workplace culture.

What are some of the core values of healthy workplaces? Plasticity Labs explains: “One avenue to promote a positive working environment is to encourage gratitude at work. Certainly, one way to inspire gratitude at work is to promote the expression of gratitude (i.e., thanking coworkers, managers, etc.), but perhaps another way is to simply ask employees to reflect on the things they are grateful for at work.”

According to Delivering purpose and meaning, only 59 percent of Australian workers feel that their contribution at work is valued.

When employees feel unvalued, there is a cost, with Reventure estimating that up to 92 percent of workers have disengaged from their work and the impact of this disengagement costs the Australian economy between \$42 billion - \$52.8 billion dollars.

Practising gratitude at work drives real results. A recent study by email scheduling app Boomerang found that the best way to drive higher response rates to your emails lies in expressing gratitude in your sign off. Emails that were signed off “Thanks in advance”, “Thanks”, “Thank you”, “Cheers” or “Kind regards” received the highest response rates, as high as 66 percent. You could also apply this practise of gratitude to other interactions at work.

A warm email sign off isn’t the only way to express gratitude to your colleagues. Here are some other tips:

- Express your gratitude for a job well done or help provided by saying it out loud. Saying “Thank you” out loud to your coworkers helps them to feel a sense of happiness and fulfilment at work
- Building friendships at work leads to improved productivity, higher rates of employee retention and happier workers
- Providing for more flexibility at work around holiday leave, hours of work and work location (including the ability to work from home) has been shown to lead to greater productivity and happiness at work
- Create spaces or opportunities for staff recognition such as a bulletin board, a company email, a regular all-staff meeting or end of financial year/ calendar year awards to highlight the efforts of, and the successes of, your staff

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A HEALTHY WORKPLACE IS A SAFE WORKPLACE

Everyone should feel psychologically safe at work. But, what does this mean? A workplace culture that supports employee mental health is one where staff feel free to raise their opinions and experience no threat from bullying, harassment or discrimination. In a psychologically safe workplace employees feel accepted and respected.

Healthy workplaces are ones that encourage collaboration and have established methods for conflict prevention and resolution. "Sixty to eighty percent of all difficulties in organisations come from strained relationships (between staff), not from lack of skill or motivation," writes Daniel Dana, Founder of the Mediation Training Institute, in *Managing Differences: How to build better relationships at work and home*.

Managing conflicts and tensions between team members takes a lot of time and the longer it takes to get back to a more peaceful working environment, the greater the negative impacts will be to team dynamics and organisational wellbeing. Unresolved conflict can also impact on how productive and engaged staff members are at work.

How can your organisation act proactively to ensure a healthy workplace and to minimise conflict? According to *Fortune* magazine, in 2017 Google has been ranked as America's best place to work. Google has claimed the top spot for the sixth year in a row, with Googlers (people who work at the technology company) stating the company was a "safe and inclusive workplace". Workplaces can be safe and inclusive when we act on the findings of Google's own research into the characteristics such workplaces:

- Google's research found that when team members shared emotional conversations, those personal revelations created an atmosphere of trust and empathy that made group members feel safer in the group and more comfortable in sharing ideas
- The study found that when people talked to each other as individuals rather than just colleagues, they created the types of bonds that led to teams with greater collective intelligence. Google found this tactic got teams speaking more easily about obstacles to their progress, sharing frictions and annoyances without fearing repercussions. This approach can also open the door to driving and accepting change at work
- The research found that safe workplaces keep everyone in the loop and team conversations place a greater focus on how members of the group are feeling. Safe workplaces also monitor conversations to ensure that all team members participate in a roughly equal way to avoid a single person or a few people dominating the discussion and excluding others

- Google also found that people feel included when they know they have been seen, heard, and validated, not just as a staff member but as a human being. Leaders and managers should find ways to let their teams know that work is not all about efficiency and results, that people matter too. Managers and leaders can also play a role in building healthy workplaces by empowering their staff to share what they are feeling without fearing recriminations for sharing their views

PLAYING ON THE SAME TEAM MEANS FEWER CONFLICTS

Healthy workplaces are made up of successful teams, and we know that employees who feel supported by their coworkers experience less stress, less burnout and fewer conflicts. The World Health Organization states: "Employees are less likely to experience work-related stress when... support is received from supervisors and colleagues".

Google's research found that successful teams can positively answer the following questions:

- Can we take risks on this team without feeling insecure or embarrassed?
- Can we count on each other to do high-quality work on time?
- Are goals, roles, and execution plans on our team clear?
- Are we working on something that is personally important for each of us?
- Do we fundamentally believe that the work we're doing matters?

What are the answers for your team?

Some ways that you can build camaraderie on your team include:

- Take the time to get to know people on your team: What motivates them at work and in life? What are their ambitions? What are your teammates' hobbies or interests? What are their important relationships? What challenges do they face and how do they plan to overcome these?
- Get to know people on your team outside of the workplace: Consider going for a coffee or a drink after work, participating in team building activities or get involved in your workplace's social committee
- Being there to support your colleagues: This could mean simply listening and offering support to your work mates or, your organisation could provide Peer Support Training to equip staff to play a role in managing mental health and other difficult issues at work
- Managers can set projects for their team members that require collaboration

How does your team build supportive, trusting working relationships?

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