



# **WORKPLACE CULTURE:** HELPING OR HURTING YOUR BUSINESS?



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# Executive summary

## Why workplace culture matters

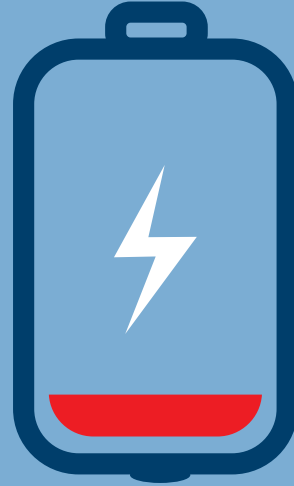
No management team wants to create a negative culture at work. No Human Resources (HR) department is going to actively look for ways to heap stress on employees. No university is teaching a degree in how to succeed by making your employees unhappy, unhealthy and unmotivated. This is not how anyone would choose to have their workplace operate.

And yet, there is no denying that a positive, healthy and motivating workplace culture is incredibly hard to engineer. For many organisations, the whole concept of workplace culture is still considered marginal. But it is something that employees care about. It matters. 82% of employees consider the culture of an organisation an important factor when deciding whether to work for an organisation<sup>1</sup> according to MAXIS GBN's survey of employees across ten of the largest economies in the world.

“82% of employees consider the culture of an organisation an important factor when deciding whether to work for an organisation...”



“Negative culture can stifle brilliant ideas and positive action.”



### Workplace culture and health

Not only is a company's culture an important aspect for employees looking to find a good fit for their future, when we begin to understand how different dimensions of workplace culture affect our people – and the price organisations can pay in lost productivity, motivation and talent – the ultimate question must be “how do we optimise workplace culture to deliver results?”

This report offers a glimpse into the nature of today's workplace, how it shapes employee health and wellness – and the ultimate impact on organisational performance.

MAXIS GBN's aim is to help you renew your focus on your workplace culture and offer ideas designed to help deliver healthier, happier and more productive workplaces.

“...the ultimate question must be ‘how do we optimise workplace culture to deliver results?’”

# What is workplace culture?

## The elements of culture

“Company philosophy. It seems to stand for the basic beliefs that people in the business are expected to hold and be guided by – informal, unwritten guidelines on how people should perform and conduct themselves. Once such a philosophy crystallises, it becomes a powerful force indeed. When one person tells another, ‘That’s not the way we do things around here,’ the advice had better be heeded.”<sup>2</sup>

**- McKinsey & Co. managing director Marvin Bower, 1966**

More than 50 years later, the same might be said of ‘workplace culture’. It’s the personality of a business, defined by the attitudes and assumptions of an entire group of people working together for a common cause. It’s created by – or, perhaps, emerges from – a mix of an organisation’s leadership, values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviours and attitudes.<sup>3</sup>

Workplace culture guides interactions between employees, managers and executive leadership. It manifests itself in the hours people work, their dress code, what benefits they’re offered, their workspace, staff recruitment and retention – and ultimately in customer satisfaction. Culture plays a crucial role in an employee’s motivation, relationships and progression.

“... the best strategy in the world can fail if the will of the people tasked with implementing it is lacking.”

In fact, it might be better not to use the word ‘culture’ at all. For many people, the word ‘behaviour’ is more appropriate. We can monitor and steer behaviours (and prescribe behavioural norms) in organisations in a way we can’t with culture because we can’t ‘see’ it. This is important when we consider how those norms – collectively, the ‘workplace culture’ – affect people’s health and performance.

## Strategy, culture and capabilities

There is a saying ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’. What this is trying to tell us is that the best strategy in the world can fail if the will of the people tasked with implementing it is lacking. Negative culture can stifle brilliant ideas and positive action.

And there’s another element that organisations need in order to succeed: capabilities. Strategy is the responsibility of senior management, while capabilities are the people, assets and finances at their disposal. Culture is where those two elements intersect. That’s why workplace culture is so critical to success. Get it wrong, and neither the strategy nor the capabilities can flourish.



A bad or negative workplace culture creates problems for any enterprise, no matter the size. The effects go beyond sullen employees or messy offices. Poor culture also breeds sickness in workers – driving up absences and suppressing productivity.<sup>4</sup> And it's not just physical health, of course. Stress and

unhappiness caused by workloads, workplace interactions, home life or worries about finances or health can be significantly damaging for workplace performance. As one academic study stated, “lower happiness is systematically associated with lower productivity.”<sup>5</sup>

## Workplace culture and its influence on health

The World Health Organization (WHO) usually deals with pandemics and chronic illness, but it considers the workplace a big enough factor in global health that it has campaigned on improving culture for more than a decade.

It says a healthy workplace is one where workers and managers use continual improvements to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of workers and the sustainability of the workplace, by considering:<sup>6</sup>

- physical health and safety concerns
- psychosocial health and safety, including organisation of work and workplace culture

- personal health resources in the workplace
- ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and others.

These four areas underpin the WHO's framework for a healthy workplace culture. It recommends clearly articulated ethics and values at the heart of the workplace; leadership that models those values; engaging workers; and then continually developing, assessing and improving workplace health initiatives.

## What influences employee health?

The best organisations recognise this holistic view of workplace culture and understand how it affects their people. They see employee health and wellbeing as a combination of:

- what workers bring with them to the workplace – their genetic make-up, personal resources, health practices, beliefs, attitudes and values
- what the workplace does to employees once they are there – in terms of organisation of work in both the physical and psychosocial sense.

The employer has total control over the second factor – and can exert a strong influence on the first factor. The questions then are:

- what impact does workplace culture have on individual health and wellbeing?
- what's the best way of influencing it positively?
- how does that shape organisational performance? Why should you invest in your culture?



# Why should you invest in your culture?

Designing and maintaining a positive workplace culture is a justifiable and worthy end in itself, but any such policy requiring corporate investment must also be accountable and deliver results.

Studies have shown that a strong corporate culture – one that allows the company and its employees to adapt with the changing world – is associated with healthy financial results. In 1992, a study into 200 firms highlighted the performance of 12

organisations with this type of culture – on average they saw a 682% increase in revenue growth over an 11-year period, compared to 20 firms without this culture whose growth was lower at 166%.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, there are many variables, but this indicates that a healthier, happier workplace drives business success and evidence to support the impact of positive workplace culture and healthier employees is plentiful. But how exactly does it work?

It is obvious that unhealthy or stressed employees are a burden in terms of decreased productivity, rapid staff turnover and increased healthcare costs and absenteeism.



## Staff turnover

- There's a strong correlation between poor workplace culture and staff turnover. When companies have a poor culture, almost 50% of employees may start looking for a new job<sup>8</sup> and unhealthy workplace culture contributes to 40% of turnover costs.<sup>9</sup>



## Healthcare costs

- "High job demands" generate \$46bn in annual excess healthcare costs.<sup>10</sup>
- On average, employers in the United States (US) can expect per-covered-member expenditure of US\$9,149 in 2025. Improving the health culture and decreasing annual costs by even 1% could generate a saving of US\$3,999 per employee over 10 years.<sup>11</sup>
- Employees may take up unhealthy practices like smoking, over-eating and drinking when stressed or having a difficult time. This increases healthcare costs by as much as three times and can make absenteeism rise by 50%.<sup>12</sup>



## Absenteeism

- Absenteeism – a key indicator of poor workplace culture – cost European Union countries a total €272bn,<sup>13</sup> while in Australia, the estimated cost of absenteeism is as high as AUS\$44bn annually<sup>14</sup>

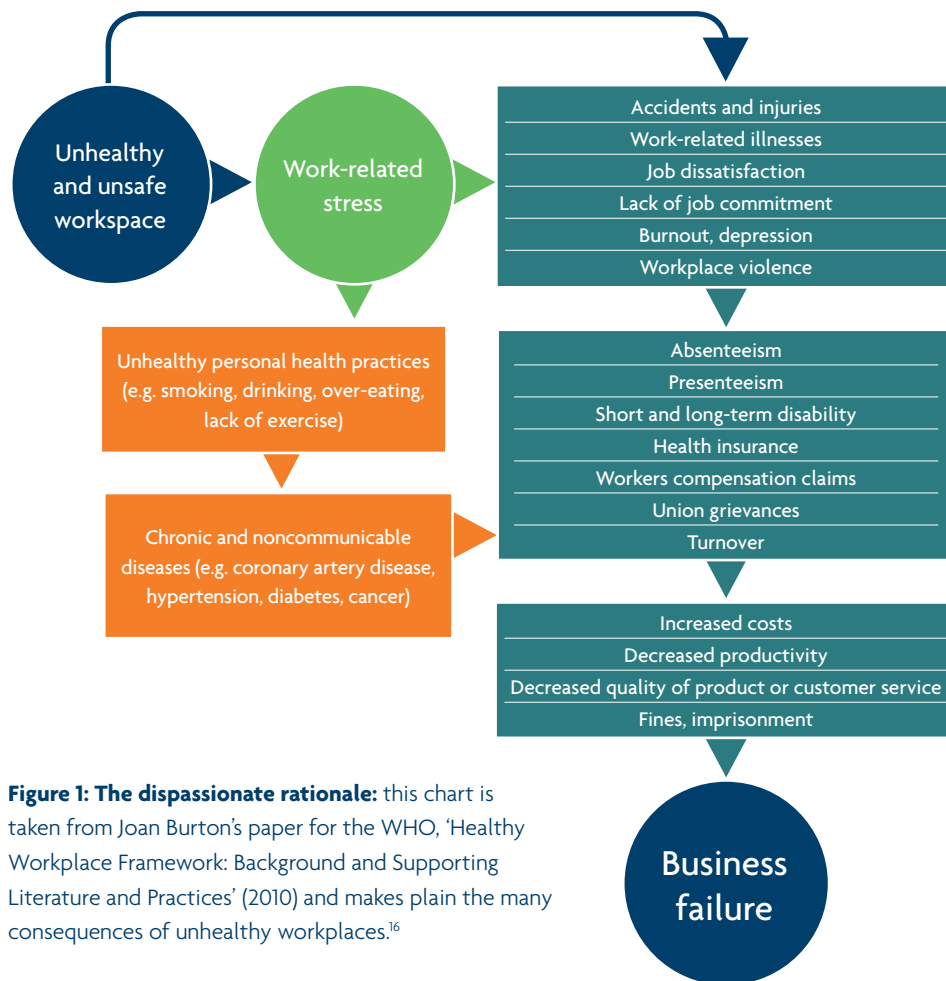


## Overall business success

- Companies strive to be seen as an "employer of choice" and by doing so, can not only create a positive and productive workplace for their employees, but can also succeed financially. The shares of companies that won a "Best Places to Work" award significantly outperformed (by 115.6%) the S&P 500 index. In contrast, a portfolio of 30 companies with the lowest employee satisfaction rates underperformed (by 29.5%) the market.<sup>15</sup>

The range of specific workplace health and cultural issues that drive performance is vast – but the journey to addressing them starts with recognising them and then bringing them into the light, whether or not they are immediately visible.





**Figure 1: The dispassionate rationale:** this chart is taken from Joan Burton's paper for the WHO, 'Healthy Workplace Framework: Background and Supporting Literature and Practices' (2010) and makes plain the many consequences of unhealthy workplaces.<sup>16</sup>

## Company culture: the extra mile

Beyond keeping employees happy so that they increase your revenue, having a positive company culture can encourage the discovery and delivery of solutions, inventions or innovations that might not have come to light in a less healthy environment. There's many examples of the returns a more open and supportive culture can bring.<sup>17</sup>

- The Post-It Note is a famous example of an innovative product that was created by 3M's "15% culture" which encouraged employees to set aside 15% of their work time to proactively pursue ideas that excited them.

- Similarly, Google started its own "20% time" scheme, which resulted in the creations of Gmail, Google Earth and Google Talk, to name but a few.
- Hewlett-Packard Labs gives its employees personal creative time during which new products have been created, such as clear bandages and optical films that reflect light.<sup>18</sup>

When your organisation's culture is aligned with your goals, you hire people who share your values and enthusiasm. By creating a culture that empowers them to pursue their passion, you are paving the way to financial success and building an outstanding reputation.

# What impacts culture in the workplace?

Given the compelling statistics and examples of why you should care about culture, it's important to look at the many factors that contribute to it. With everything from physical work space to company philosophy and the leadership of the organisation making up company culture, there are many factors to consider when addressing this issue.

When working conditions and human factors are in balance, a job can create a feeling of accomplishment and self-confidence. It increases motivation, working capacity, satisfaction and can even improve health.

If there's an imbalance between someone's ability to deliver and the demands we make of them, there can be a very different reaction.

Breaking down the different forces into categories can help.

- **The visible:** the work we do, the physical environment we do it in and the policies we put in place to define workplace culture.
- **The invisible:** the emotional states that arise at work and the personal behaviours that sit outside of an organisation's scope but affect workplace culture.



## Visible forces

In this section, we look at the visible forces that can impact workplace culture, including the work that employees perform, the physical work environment they do it in and the HR policies that help define the culture.



### Work overload

Having too much to do (quantitative overload) or facing work that's too difficult (qualitative overload) can trigger behavioural and health problems. Burnout, as a result of a consistently excessive workload can cause depression.<sup>19</sup> 32% of employees stated workload or lack of support was one of the greatest sources of stress in their life<sup>20</sup> and the problem is getting worse – people are twice as likely to report being “always exhausted” compared to 20 years ago.<sup>21</sup>

Proper performance reviews and consistent employee feedback are vital to check on both qualitative and quantitative overload. Quantitative overload may be an issue for managers, too. If they are under pressure to deliver unrealistic results, they may, in turn, exert undue pressure on their team.

“32% of employees stated workload or lack of support was one of the greatest sources of stress in their life”



### Working arrangements

We spend a third of our life at work, so it's no surprise that work schedules can affect almost every aspect of our health. Shift work, for example, affects biological rhythms, metabolic rate, blood sugar levels, mental efficiency and work motivation. But in the modern workplace, being an ‘always-on’ office worker in an ‘always on’ culture can also create major health issues. In the UK, 72% of workers say they reply to work-related email in their free time and 35% check their phone for work immediately before they go to sleep and as soon as they wake up.<sup>22</sup> The main impacts of this are poor sleep, stress and exhaustion.<sup>23</sup> In France workers now have a ‘right to disconnect’ enshrined in law, no wonder given the impact it can have on health!<sup>24</sup>

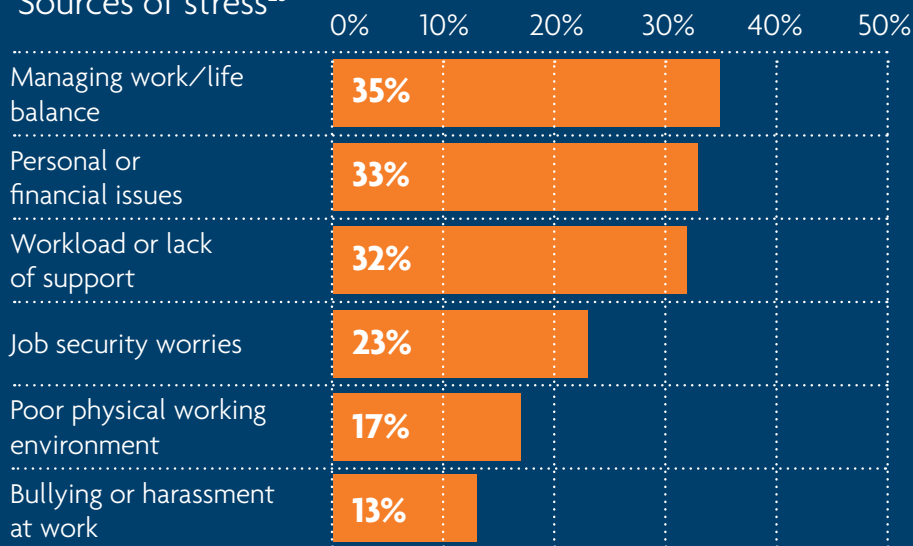
Business leaders need to act as role models in order to change this culture: working excessive hours and sending work emails out of hours, for example, means the ‘always-on’ culture cascades down through an organisation. Empowering managers to limit extra-curricular work and giving them the resources to plan shift work thoughtfully can make a big difference and conveys an important message.

## Workplace stress and its impact on health

According to MAXIS GBN's survey, workload is one of the most common causes of stress and was cited as a factor by 32% of respondents.<sup>25</sup> And the evidence of the physical effects of stress is huge. Some of the impacts stress can have on the human body are:

- increases in unhealthy lifestyle behaviour such as smoking, physical inactivity and poor diet<sup>26</sup>
- immune system vulnerability. Stress causes the pituitary gland to emit adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), a hormone that stimulates the adrenal gland into releasing cortisol, which hampers disease-fighting cells<sup>27</sup>
- increased risk of blood clots due to higher platelet count and levels of factors VII and VIII (blood clotting agents)<sup>28</sup>
- increased risk of heart attacks, as employees with low job control can have an exaggerated fibrinogen response (a tendency to form clots more easily)<sup>29</sup>
- higher body mass index (BMI) and white blood cell count for women<sup>30</sup>
- higher BMI, waist circumference, increased liver enzymes like alanine transaminase (an indicator of poor liver health), white blood cell count and lower high-density lipoprotein ('good') cholesterol that protects the heart in men.<sup>30</sup>

### Sources of stress<sup>25</sup>



“...researchers found that these types of stress at work can be as harmful to health as second-hand smoke.”



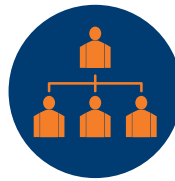
### Management practices

Bad management poisons workplace culture and consequently damages employee health. 75% of American workers say their boss is the most stressful thing about their job.<sup>31</sup> Another study found that half of all professionals had quit a job to get away from a manager.<sup>32</sup> A strong link between poor leadership behaviour and heart disease in employees has also been found.<sup>33</sup>

“75% of American workers say their boss is the most stressful thing about their job.”

Employees also suffer stress when they feel ambiguity about their role, face conflicting job demands or uncertainty about their place in an organisation. Role ambiguity has also been shown to have a negative impact on employee creativity<sup>34</sup> and researchers found that these types of stress at work can be as harmful to health as second-hand smoke.<sup>35</sup>

Management training is central to instilling and maintaining a healthier culture. Creating incentives around employee wellbeing and monitoring data such as absences, staff turnover and productivity can help uncover the bad managers. But, it is important to then bear in mind that those bad managers may well be a product of workplace culture as much as a cause of it.



### Organisational structure and climate

The formal structure and policies of a workplace create the foundations on which its culture is built. Office politics, unclear reporting lines, lack of effective consultation, lack of participation in the decision-making process or unjustified restrictions on behaviour can all have a negative effect on workplace culture.

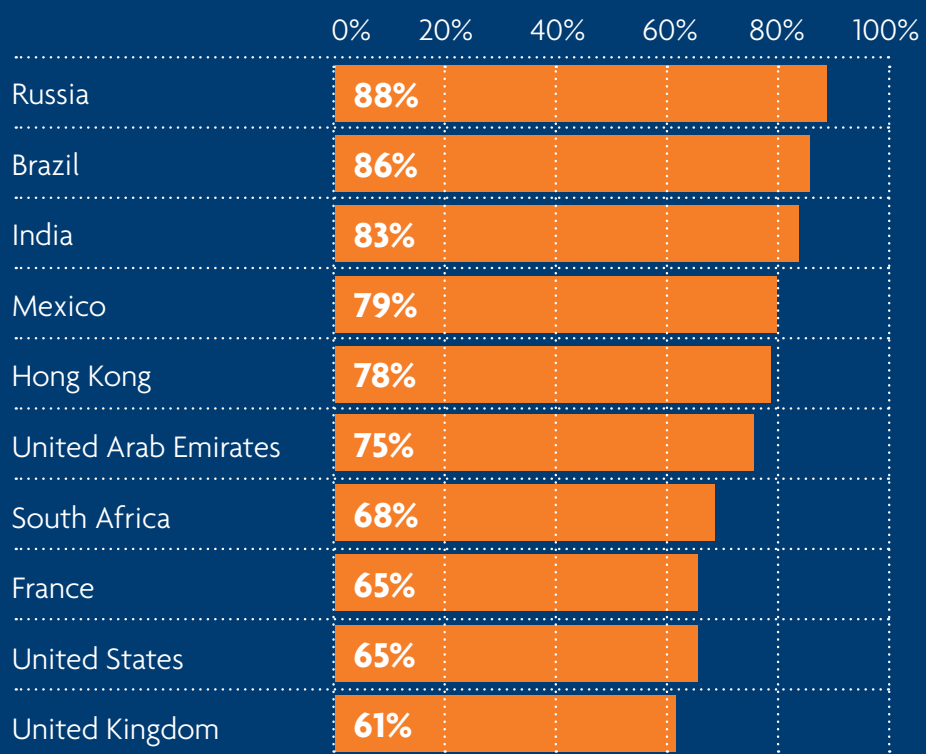
The simplest way to address this is to invite greater employee participation in how the organisation is structured. The results are impressive, leading to higher productivity, improved performance and lower staff turnover, as well as a reduction in physical and mental health problems.<sup>36</sup>

However, employers must be mindful that the ever changing way in which we work and particularly the growth of the gig economy, with its inevitably transient workforce, can test best practice.



## The 'always-on' culture

Over 70% of employees who were surveyed in Russia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates reported that they were contacted while on leave.<sup>37</sup>





### Physical environment

Work environments can affect health, mental and physical performance, stress levels, resiliency and sleep. It's been reported that temperature, noise and lighting in offices have an effect on an employee's ability to complete tasks, their job satisfaction, their productivity and even their mood and ability to sleep.<sup>38</sup> Health improves with good ventilation, good air quality, thermal comfort, good use of colour and a lack of irritants.<sup>39</sup>

However, an employee's physical work environment can also have a negative impact on their health. Manual workers are exposed to risks from lifting, bending, reaching, pushing and pulling heavy loads, working in awkward

postures and the danger of repetitive strain, among a variety of other risks. Office workers, in turn, risk back and neck pain, eyestrain, problems with the hands and wrists – and much more. Chronic back pain is directly linked to psychosocial factors at work – and the cost of medical interventions and loss of productivity related just to lower back pain have been estimated to be as high as US\$635bn per year in the US.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, it's not surprising that ergonomic furniture and greater flexible space – in addition to other environmental controls – can make a huge difference to productivity.

### MSDs: a chronic epidemic

Work-related muscular-skeletal disorders (MSDs) are estimated to cost US companies about US\$1,030 per employee each year.<sup>41,42</sup> Lost productivity linked to MSDs in the European Union (EU) is estimated at 2% of its GDP.<sup>43</sup> Specific complaints include strains, tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, tennis elbow and many more.

MSDs are frighteningly common. A detailed survey at a Kuwait bank found 80% of employees suffered at least one episode of MSD during the previous year – and 42% at least one disabling episode, with the neck (54%), lower back (51%), shoulders (49%) and upper back (38%) all problem areas.<sup>44</sup>

And it's not just physical labour and poor posture at the desk. Psychological factors such as stress caused by organisational influence, such as improper work/rest cycles and a lack of job enrichment, result in fatigue and a higher propensity to MSDs.



“...open plan offices have actually been shown to reduce face-to-face interaction by as much as 70%.”





### Open plan offices

While many organisations have turned to open plan offices in order to overcome space issues and create a more collaborative work environment, studies suggest that, in some cases, open plan offices have actually been shown to reduce face-to-face interaction by as much as 70%.<sup>45</sup>

UK research company Oxford Economics concluded that noise pollution in open offices has reached “epidemic levels” – 63% of employees said they lack quiet space for work.<sup>46</sup> And another study<sup>47</sup> concluded: “benefits of enhanced ‘ease of interaction’ were smaller than the penalties of increased noise level and decreased privacy.”

One survey found that 53% of employees say higher levels of noise reduces their job satisfaction and productivity.<sup>48</sup> Rooms set aside specifically for phone calls and areas designated for face-to-face meetings and interaction can help.

“The productivity gains from clean indoor air could be as high as US\$150bn in the US alone.”



### Sunlight and nature

A workplace that allows for natural sunlight is good for health as natural light is vital for good healthy activity patterns, sleep quality and a higher quality of life.<sup>49</sup> Sunlight lessens stress, reduces eye strain, increases satisfaction at work and improves mental health and social functioning.<sup>50</sup>

As well as sunlight, nature, for example having trees and plants in the office or on desks, can also have a positive impact on health.<sup>51</sup> Many architects design ‘biophilic’ buildings with trees and plants, indoor parks and skylights to help bring more sunlight and nature into the office environment. Employees who can’t, or won’t, take a break outdoors during the work day for natural light, air and exercise are limiting their ability to work.



### Ventilation and air quality

Poor office ventilation increases the risk of developing conditions such as the flu, common cold, pneumonia, tuberculosis and sick building syndrome symptoms (eg headache, nausea, fatigue, dizziness and shortness of breath).<sup>52</sup> Better ventilation delivers an 8% increase in productivity and improves cognitive performance – which includes information use and crisis response – by 61%.<sup>53</sup> The productivity gains from clean indoor air could be as high as US\$150bn in the US alone.<sup>54</sup>

## Invisible forces

While an organisation's physical office environment and the policies put in place have a significant impact on its culture, interpersonal relationships are also a less visible but defining factor when it comes to workplace culture.



### Unfair treatment and discrimination

More than one-third of Americans say they have experienced discrimination, bullying, harassment or other forms of aggression due to their race, gender, appearance, or age during their working career.<sup>55</sup>

Workplace discrimination causes lower job satisfaction, a lack of commitment, decreased job performance – and an increased intention to leave.<sup>56</sup> Discrimination is also linked to a decline in mental and physical wellbeing<sup>64</sup> and higher rates of depression – often for years after the initial incident.<sup>57</sup>

Researchers distinguish between formal (overt) and interpersonal (subtle) discrimination<sup>58</sup> – a reminder that the right policies and HR processes help, but are not always a comprehensive solution to a problematic culture.

Heightened social tensions around ethnic and cultural prejudice are helping to expose this problem but organisations should send strong messages about fair treatment and mutual respect to complement anti-discriminatory policies.

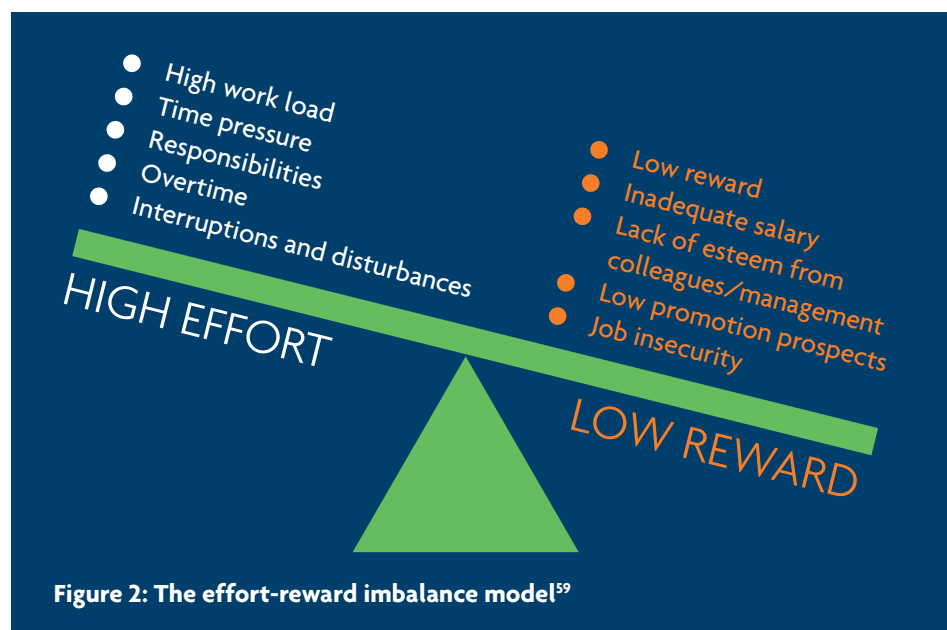




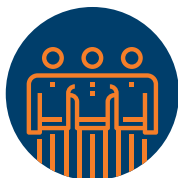
### Effort-reward imbalance

Fairness isn't just about who we are. It's also about what we do. The effort-reward imbalance (ERI) model (figure 2) shows what employees put in and the rewards they receive. Leaders who fail to reward employees for high effort bring out negative emotions and sustained stress in the employee.

But the positive emotions created by appropriate rewards promote good health, meaning any organisation's leaders and department managers should carefully monitor effort and reward and ensure the balance is maintained.



“Workplace discrimination causes lower job satisfaction, a lack of commitment, decreased job performance – and an increased intention to leave.”



## Relationships at work

Strong social support from peers can relieve job strain, moderates the effects of stress on health<sup>60</sup> and lowers the rate of burnout, as well as increasing job and life satisfaction.<sup>61</sup> There is ample evidence that social connectedness at work, alongside a high overall sense of social wellbeing, promotes better business outcomes and is a key differentiator of successful work groups.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, experts estimate that almost 75% of employees have been affected by bullying in the workplace, which has major organisational costs.<sup>63</sup>

It is impossible to create an HR policy that guarantees employees will be 'friendly'. But a workplace culture ought to be conducive to social interaction. And anti-bullying policies, such as 'speak up' hotlines, are a valuable guard against negative workplace relationships.

Workplaces that support the development of social capital among employees tend to see greater creativity – and increased levels of intellectual capital as a result.<sup>64</sup> Research suggests workplaces need space for discussion, action and interaction<sup>65</sup> – with plenty of opportunities to come together naturally for social activities.

“...experts estimate that almost 75% of employees have been affected by bullying in the workplace, which has major organisational costs.”

### Strong social connectedness leads to increased:



- job satisfaction
- productivity
- mutual trust between co-workers
- commitment to co-workers and the organisation

### Weak social connectedness leads to:



- job stress
- burnout
- desire to leave the company



## Sleep deprivation

Many people today are chronically sleep deprived. Consistently getting only six hours of sleep per night – an increasingly common problem – is hurting productivity.<sup>66</sup> Sleep deprivation leads to absenteeism, difficulty with concentration and organisation, avoidance of social interactions and lack of patience with co-workers.<sup>67</sup> A poor workplace culture could be impacting someone's ability to get a full and restful night's sleep.<sup>68</sup>

# So, how can we change workplace culture?

We've seen how workplace culture can have a hugely significant impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of employees, and we've described how that can affect an organisation's performance and its medical costs. But changing or improving a workplace culture is one of the most challenging projects a management team will ever face.

While every organisation is unique and should design its own individual approach to workplace culture, we have compiled some recommendations that could help inspire organisations looking to create and build a positive environment staffed by healthier, more productive, creative employees.

## 1. Know where you are

The first step is to identify the existing workplace culture. There are many consultancies and tools that can help do this – but simply taking a conscious, and objective, look at the workplace is a good start (see box).

Any initial assessment should be regularly augmented with feedback covering the same areas. Creating a survey can help determine how employees feel about work.<sup>69</sup> This is a tactic regularly employed by organisations looking to get a snapshot of their company culture. And evidence suggests employees are keen to get involved. In December 2018, one of MAXIS' co-founding members, MetLife, conducted a survey where 76% of its employees provided insight on their experience working at MetLife to help shape their company culture.

### Culture checklist<sup>70</sup>

#### When assessing workplace culture, consider:

- employees' perceptions of their managers/management team
- employees' perceptions of their colleagues
- whether staff see their job as meaningful or worthwhile
- whether they're satisfied with the level of decision-making authority they've been given
- if employees feel their work has an important role in the organisation
- whether the organisation values, supports and communicates appropriately with them
- how connected they feel to the organisation and that it's a good match
- how well the organisation caters to family needs and a good work/life balance.

## 2. Provide a sense of purpose

Employees want to be valued and to know that their contribution to the success of an organisation is noted and appreciated. Creating a sense of purpose helps drive earnings, too. One study showed:

- 85% of purpose-led companies showed positive revenue growth
- 42% of non-purpose led companies showed a decline in revenue.<sup>71</sup>

There's also evidence that the alignment of the company mission and the goals of its leadership is key to promoting a company-wide sense of purpose.<sup>72</sup> When corporate, departmental and individual goals are united, it can create a more cohesive organisation.

You can even try engaging employees by creating a mantra or values. Good, carefully-planned internal communications can help your employees develop emotional connections with your brand.<sup>73</sup> A common sense of purpose increases motivation and engagement. But most importantly, make your mantra meaningful so it unites employees without cynicism.

## 3. Embrace and inspire employee autonomy

No one likes to be micromanaged. It's ineffective, inefficient and does little to inspire trust. Let employees manage their responsibilities and let go of the idea that work has to happen a certain way at a certain time, within a standard 9 to 5 work week.

Help employees establish autonomous work teams, make their own decisions and rein in bosses and co-workers who hover or bully.<sup>74</sup> Team autonomy allows employees to make the sometimes difficult, but incredibly rewarding, leap from being held accountable to embracing accountability.

“Team autonomy allows employees to make the sometimes difficult, but incredibly rewarding, leap from being held accountable to embracing accountability.”





#### 4. Reimagine performance management

The annual performance appraisal has been linked to disengagement among employees because it's infrequent and lacks hard data. One UK survey found 73% of non-HR business leaders found the annual appraisal is ineffective.<sup>75</sup> In many cases, it also means managers don't engage in ongoing meaningful feedback that's crucial to employee engagement. There is no 'best practice' alternative.

Rather than abandoning performance reviews, organisations can ensure ongoing feedback, acknowledgement and development become management policy. They can consider:

- embedding pulse performance practices that encourage regular feedback, ongoing discussions and agile alignment to objectives
- investing in leadership development and coaching to provide feedback and 'what needs to be done next' rather than rating past performance
- using multiple sources to collect and analyse data on performance for a deeper perspective.

“...two-thirds of people say they feel ‘refreshed and excited to get back to my job’ after a holiday.”

#### 5. Practice flexibility

Workplace flexibility can mean many things. If it suits an employee to finish early to pick-up the kids from school and log back on once the kids are in bed, let them. Allowing your staff to work when they're most productive means you can accurately measure the quality of their work. Companies who granted employees more choice in how and when they work have been seen to grow substantially while reducing staff turnover.<sup>76</sup>

“When employees feel as though they're smashing goals every day, their motivation will be higher.”

Cloud-based collaboration, project management and document storage tools can keep a team connected at all times and many companies find allowing this type of working and flexibility improves morale and reduces turnover. MetLife's Employee Benefit Trends Study performed research in a number of countries and found that an average of 24% of employees stated flexibility was one of the biggest drivers of retention.<sup>77</sup>

#### 6. Don't be down on downtime

There are lots of ways employees can rest and recharge in order to deliver peak performance at work. Downtime during the day – even napping – is important.<sup>78</sup> The optimal work-to-break ratio is 52 minutes to 17 minutes.<sup>79</sup> Some companies encourage free time for side projects.

Also, ensuring employees take all their holiday is important – the proportion of US employees doing so has fallen over the past five years,<sup>80</sup> despite the fact two-thirds of people say they feel “refreshed and excited to get back to my job” after a holiday.



## 7. Spend money on training

Professional development fosters a community of empowered individuals whose sense of self-worth and self-determination increases, minimising stress and other negative health effects. Organisations reap the benefits when they put their newfound skills to work. Use tools that make learning fun and easy to access. Consider learning and development software to prove to employees you're willing to invest in their continuous, everyday learning, as well as looking at external or bespoke training options.

## 8. Encourage healthy lifestyles

Many people have a desire to be fitter, happier and more balanced and workplace campaigns to promote activity, healthy working practices and better diet can all help. Programmes range from discounted gym memberships to lunchtime yoga classes in the office – or could be as simple as replacing unhealthy snacks with fresh fruit. Try 'walk and talk' meetings to get up and moving. It's as much about creating healthy minds as it is about physical health – and needs to be supported from the top.

“The estimated cost of redesigning for wellness runs between US\$150 and US\$500 per employee. Even a 1% increase in productivity makes such a decision highly profitable.”

## 9. Positively reinforce behaviour

Studies have found that positive reinforcement is linked to employee performance.<sup>81</sup> When employees feel as though they're smashing goals every day, their motivation will be higher. Praise someone for finishing a task on time. Show you appreciate late nights with a day off in lieu. Rewarding desirable behaviour enhances your employee's self-confidence and also strengthens motivation and productivity. Small celebrations at frequent intervals work better than making a big deal occasionally.

## 10. Encourage volunteering

Show how your corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts can impact employees and explain how they can be part of it. Get them contributing CSR ideas they believe in, as well as developing and implementing initiatives. Volunteering allows employees to collaborate with each other, reveal new skills and develop an improved sense of purpose.

## 11. Invest in your office environment

With the links between an office environment, furniture and equipment and a variety of MSDs and other costly health concerns, a greater initial investment in the office environment could be a huge cost saver in the long run. The estimated cost of redesigning for wellness runs between US\$150 and US\$500 per employee.<sup>82</sup> Even a 1% increase in productivity makes such a decision highly profitable. Ergonomic equipment, more supportive supervision, more flexible work scheduling and in-work campaigns to promote frequent standing and good posture have been shown to deliver impressive results in reducing MSDs.<sup>83</sup>



## 5 ways employees can help build a more positive culture<sup>84</sup>

It is worth bearing in mind that creating a positive workplace culture is not just the challenge of the management and HR teams. Here are five ideas that employees should try:

### 1 **Start the day right**

A simple personal “good morning” can make all the difference. If you’re on the phone, wave and give a big smile.

### 2 **Listen without judgment**

When people tell you their problems, don’t automatically offer advice – and if they ask for advice, be brief.

### 3 **Focus on the problem, not the person**

“Let’s figure out how to prevent this from happening again” is better than “we (or you) have a problem.” Make it a team effort, “I know we can fix this if we work together.”

### 4 **Show you care**

Show up to occasions co-workers care about. Ask about other people’s projects – and listen without offering advice. And get to know what matters in their lives.

### 5 **Focus on one person**

Eye contact is everything – attentive, focused and personal.

To find more of our suggestions, download our flyer “**words into actions: how can employees contribute towards a positive workplace culture?**” from [maxis-gbn.com](http://maxis-gbn.com)

# Culture: a top priority for a healthier workplace

Organisations are missing a valuable opportunity if they choose to de-prioritise workplace culture or ignore the impact that it has on the health of their employees. There are considerable opportunities for businesses looking to address their culture.

First, the practical commercial dimension. Positive workplace cultures, where the environment and policies support good health and especially mental wellness, perform better. They're more creative, more productive and cheaper to run. Not only this, but the opportunity to address a variety of chronic conditions related to workplace culture promises healthcare cost savings in the long term.

Also, by fulfilling your duty of care to employees, you create a sense of loyalty where your staff are more engaged and less likely to leave your organisation.

“...the opportunity to address a variety of chronic conditions related to workplace culture promises healthcare cost savings in the long term.”

Protecting that positive operating environment means building a better workplace culture – one that respects family time and social engagement as much as the health of the individual. And now this is being made more difficult as the gig economy and a transient workforce is disrupting the traditional office environment and ways of working.

However, it is important to remember that a positive organisational profile adds value for customers, clients, citizens and all other stakeholders – including employees.<sup>85</sup> Given that almost every effort to improve workplace culture and benefit employee health and wellness actually generates a demonstrable return on investment, the question really should be: why wouldn't you make a healthy workplace culture your top priority?



## Methodology

MAXIS GBN commissioned research with 1,000 workers across ten global markets between 2-8 January 2019. The research was undertaken online by an independent third party.<sup>86</sup>

The research secured a representative sample of views with 55% of respondents working for a global multinational/multi-jurisdictional company. When it came to their level in their organisation, 26% described themselves as operating at the executive management level or above, 34% in middle and line management, 30% working as general employees and the remainder operating at a graduate/entry level.



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