

October 2021

Supporting a positive work culture – how we do things around here

People are your most valuable assets at work. A positive workplace culture allows everyone feel they are a valued part of the team, and supports people working together effectively.

A workplace culture reflects the dominant values, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that are present at work. How owners and leaders act and what they prioritise will influence workplace culture significantly.

A positive culture means that everyone at work:

- feels respected and included, and has equal access to opportunities and support, regardless of individual differences such as race, gender or sexual orientation
- is valued for their ideas and skills, and has their positive contributions recognised and celebrated
- feels safe to ask for help, or raise challenging questions about their work – or other things happening at work – without fear of negative reaction
- has a safe way to raise matters or give feedback.

A positive workplace culture improves job satisfaction, teamwork, and work performance.

Practical suggestions

1 Where possible, be flexible

Life is unpredictable, and personal events will sometimes get in the way of work.

Give people space to be human, and address things that come up unexpectedly in their lives. This might mean discussing different ways of working with people and finding a solution that suits you and the people you work with.

2 Spend time with the people you work with in informal settings

Getting to know them on a personal level means that you can develop an understanding of their values and perspectives, and build trust.

This understanding can make it easier to recognise when someone may require more support, and how you can best support them so they can continue to work well.

3 People are less likely to be overly stressed and make mistakes when they feel included and valued

Ask yourself how people could raise a concern safely about something happening at work (like being bullied or harassed, or feeling stressed) if they did not feel comfortable talking to their manager?

Do you:

- encourage people to bring up problems and tough issues?
- value different cultural perspectives?
- use the unique skills and talents of each person?
- make it easy to suggest new ideas or ask for help?
- challenge yourself about whether your workplace has clear standards for fairness, respect and inclusion, and lives up to those values in how you work?

4 Speak with people in a way that invites their ideas and questions. Make it clear that you welcome discussion, including about different ways of working

For example, when talking:

INSTEAD OF SAYING THIS...	SAY THIS...
Why are you doing that?	Tell me about what you are doing.
We all know what we need to do.	Let's discuss what we are doing today.
You have all the information you need to do the task.	Is there anything you need to know before you start?
The most important things we have to do today are...	Which job is each person doing?
Let's finish this off today.	Let's keep talking to each other about where we are up to so we can support each other.
We know what our challenges are.	What challenges can you see in this job?

5 Review and improve the ways people can make suggestions, raise ideas or concerns, or give feedback

With the people you work with, review the ways they can:

- suggest different ways of doing their work
- give feedback
- tell you about negative or positive experiences they have
- report mistakes, incidents or near-misses, or other concerns.

Ask yourself if everyone has the option to raise concerns anonymously with someone who is not their manager or team leader. This could be through a health and safety representative, if you have them.

If the current feedback process is rarely used or hard to use, develop a better process with the people it affects.

6 Include relevant people in incident reviews and when making decisions

When mistakes, incidents or near-misses happen, look at how the work environment has been set up. Listen to the people who were at the incident and use their feedback to change the work environment so it is safer.

When making decisions about how work is done or introducing changes to work, consider:

- who takes part in the discussions, and what point of view they will bring
- who is not present at these discussions, and why.

Respond to feedback promptly. Acknowledge the issue raised and let everyone at work know when they can expect a resolution. Involve them when seeking solutions.

7 Emphasise the positives

People are more likely to thrive at work when they are supported to use their personal strengths and feel highly appreciated.

- Do you have processes in place for recognising people's skills and celebrating their achievements?
- Are people encouraged to make suggestions for improving work design and practice, and are these actioned?
- Are people actively supported to find a good balance between work and home life?

CASE STUDY

James Fruean, of Wellington Pipelines, used to see health and safety as a 'drag'. Today it is a passion, with an approach based on tikanga principles boosting productivity through a strongly engaged workforce.

Learn more about their story: [Tikanga approach to health and safety builds a stronger business | WorkSafe](#)

For more information, go to: [A positive work culture](#)