

Signs Your Organisation Must Change Its Workplace Culture

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At What Point Does the ‘Ideal’ Scenario Change from Idealism to the Expectation?



It’s easy to point fingers and blame, and often there are specific causes for an unenthused workforce, but as with every physical body, every limb has a role to play

We have all experienced employment at some point in life, where we found the prospect of going back to work the next day either daunting or anxiety ridden. Some of us are unfortunate enough to find it in our current workplace. In the words of a friend “I know most people don’t particularly get excited about work, but I was starting to feel unwell on a Sunday, fretting about what the week was going to be like this time”

When embarking on a journey of repair with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy clients experiencing anxiety or phobia around specific triggers, it’s important for us to be able to break down the root cause of fear and worry in great specifics. Like all fears, phobias and anxiety revolving around a certain place, person or thing, I like to

be able to do what I call “The Noun Smash Down”. We must ask ourselves: “what is it, in specific sentences, that I don’t like about this situation?” Is it the workload? Is it the content of the day-to-day work? Or is it the atmosphere? Perhaps it’s a specific group of people, or an individual that made us feel uncomfortable. It could even be that we feel either drained, intimidated or demotivated by general day to day conversations with colleagues. Or is it that we feel our pace of work isn’t proportionate to our capacity? And although it can provoke an eyeroll in many seasoned dispirited employees, there is absolute truth to the term “Don’t just come to management with a problem, bring me a solution as well” I know management that use this term and I believe it’s one of the most empowering statements any employee can hear. It’s sometimes easier to point fingers and blame, but as with any physical body, **every** limb has a role to play.



Indeed, an American worldwide employment website for job listings published an article in November 2021 detailing some typical signs of a toxic workplace:

- 1) **Poor Communication**
- 2) **High Turnover**
- 3) **Exclusionary behaviour**
- 4) **Unproductive leadership**
- 5) **A lack of employee growth and development opportunities**
- 6) **Unmotivated coworkers**
- 7) **Burnout**

You can view this article [here](#).

However, amongst many sweeping research-fueled generalisations, there are cultural and sub cultural variables that must be taken into consideration.

Moaning as a means of bonding?

Dr Vanessa Pouthier from University of Melbourne's Faculty of Business and Economics found that moaning at work serves a bonding function, and also an energising one, by helping staff move through their negative feelings. Whilst this is all healthy to a degree, we need to be able to look at how proportionate this is to productivity and positivity in equal measures.

Conversely, a study researched by Anna Breach demonstrated that there is little doubt that constant complaining is not an effective "vent" tool. Science shows it's bad for both physical and mental health since negative thoughts are likely to trigger a vicious circle in your brain, as the associated stress takes its toll on your body.

Ultimately, in most cases, it becomes social behaviour to establish a common ground with another individual in similar circumstances of discontent.



"It's one way to create rapport," Joanna Wolfe, a professor of English and communications researcher at Carnegie-Mellon University, tells the *New York Times*. For example, complaining about a late bus with other passengers "creates kind of a solidarity". "I call it co-miserating," says Eric Zimmer, host of *The One You Feed* psychology podcast. **"It can bring people closer, but there are healthier ways of bonding."**

In a column “In Praise of Complaining” the *Guardian*'s wellbeing writer Oliver Burkeman hails the way in which moaning forges a connection, which can lead to “a lasting, emotionally supportive friendship”.

So as important as creating bonds and trust in our working relationships are, you can see there is an ongoing lack of awareness around the long-term impact on our mental health – just by having a good whinge with a colleague.

‘Us V Them’ mentality

This common workplace mentality can be described as the tendency of individuals to view the social world in terms of an ingroup (“us”) and an outgroup (“them”). Consequently, people prefer to associate with those who are similar over those who are different, preferentially allocating resources to similar others and holding more positive beliefs about similar others.



Duena Blomstrom, a Former Contributor of Forbes magazine, Speaker, Author of Emotional Banking, Co-Founder and CEO PeopleNotTech, stated:

So why shouldn't we have any "versus"? Because the juxtaposition decimates empathy and goodwill and therefore honesty (what Amy Edmondson, the extraordinary Harvard professor and author behind the main study ever performed on the topic calls "candor" in this wonderful example from Pixar) so no Psychological Safety is being created and in the absence of Psychological Safety, no company can expect productive, innovative results.

"Open Door" Policy?

We've perhaps heard it from leadership that there's an "Open Door" policy should anyone need to raise an issue. But the true measure of the effectiveness of such a policy, is what transpires after these frank conversations have been held. Promoting transparency, following up with employees to update them and being united in an approach for resolution should never be "ideal" but the expectation. Simply put, the head cannot operate well without the use of the arms and legs and likewise the arms and legs need the head for purpose and destination.

