BUILDING THRIVING WORKPLACES

GUIDELINES AND ACTIONS

*Promoting positive mental health and wellbeing
and unlocking organisational performance*

Super*friend*®

WHO IS SUPERFRIEND?

SuperFriend is a national mental health organisation influencing positive change in workplace mental health and wellbeing.

As an industry super funds' initiative, SuperFriend achieves positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes for super fund and group insurance workers and members. We partner with all profit to member super funds and group life insurers to create tailored solutions for mentally healthy workplaces by understanding the industry's unique needs. Through our collaborative partnerships, we have the potential to introduce mental health and wellbeing best practices for over half of Australia's workforce.

SuperFriend has a suite of workplace programs and resources to guide organisations in building more positive, supportive and high-performing teams. We focus on the positive aspects of the organisation that are working well, and build on those to create an optimal environment for all workers. The benefits are a reduction in business costs, and an increase in engagement, worker retention, wellbeing, productivity and profitability.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This work has been made possible through a number of generous contributions and collaborations. The following resources in particular have informed the latest edition of these guidelines:

- *What Works to Promote Workplace Mental Wellbeing?* A review of recent policy developments and intervention research[1]

- *Developing a mentally healthy workplace: A review of the literature: A report for the National Health Commission and The Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance*[2]

You can learn more about the resources we've consulted while preparing this edition on page 38, and about our work and purpose at superfriend.com.au

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FOREWORD

SuperFriend is proud to present the latest version of our most popular and widely used resource, **Building Thriving Workplaces: Guidelines and Actions,** featuring practical and proven strategies to help your employees thrive.

Featuring research and tips from our 2015 edition, *Promoting Positive Mental Health in the Workplace: Guidelines for Organisations,* this publication also contains the latest workplace mental health findings and advice, together with pragmatic feedback from first edition readers.

Inside, you'll find practical information on five evidence-based characteristics known as 'domains'—leadership, connectedness, policies and practices, capability, and culture—which are essential for creating positive and thriving workplaces. Our guidelines equip readers with evidence and a business case for building thriving workplaces, as well as simple and straightforward ideas to apply.

Positive workplace practices contribute to the improved and sustained mental health and wellbeing of workers by making appropriate resources available to them and enabling them to do their best work. These guidelines leverage growing research from thriving organisations and positive psychology, linking constructive organisational practices to better business outcomes.

We know that many Australian workplaces are focused on core business deliverables such as increasing productivity and performance, being more innovative, building customer engagement, and improving perceptions of their brand and organisation. We also know that these core deliverables are much easier to achieve in thriving workplaces.

Through our *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace* Survey and focused discovery sessions, we sought to understand the needs of workplaces when building thriving workplaces. Our research found that many organisations are:

* Looking for practical guidance regarding people and culture best practice
* Planning for organisational change or restructure
* Looking to improve worker engagement
* Wanting to reduce worker health and safety claims and attrition rates.

We also found that organisational culture, leadership and connectedness were seen as priorities for starting the thriving workplace journey.

All workplaces have an opportunity to maximise the potential and capacity existing in every worker and every workplace. These guidelines are designed to help leaders and people practitioners learn and apply practical actions through building awareness, confidence and capability.

Here's to a thriving and mentally healthy Australia!

Margo Lydon,
CEO SuperFriend

WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THESE GUIDELINES?

PEOPLE IN THE FOLLOWING FUNCTIONS:

People practitioners (e.g. Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Culture, Leadership, Development)

Senior leaders and people leaders (e.g. executives, senior leaders, team leaders, supervisors, shift managers, project managers, business owners)

Workplace champions responsible for and passionate about improving mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

THESE GUIDELINES AIM TO ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF:

- The business case for investing in the promotion of mental wellbeing to build thriving workplaces
- The five domains of a thriving workplace and how they can be applied to improve mental health and wellbeing in workplaces
- Evidence-based actions for building thriving workplaces.

"Psychological capital—the personal resources available to each worker within Australian workplaces—is an often overlooked asset that can be nurtured, developed and activated though workplace practices."

SuperFriend Workplace Positive Psychology Program Manager

PROMOTING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

Work has an important role in fostering positive mental health. Promoting mental health and wellbeing should add value and uplift the overall workplace, and research has shown that promoting wellbeing is positively correlated to work performance.[3]

Many workplaces now understand their obligations and the benefits that come from having effective strategies and practices to manage ill workers compassionately, prevent physical and psychological harm, and actively promote and support the mental health of workers in their workplace.

The focus of these guidelines is helping workplaces implement practices to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for all workers.

AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Promote the positive

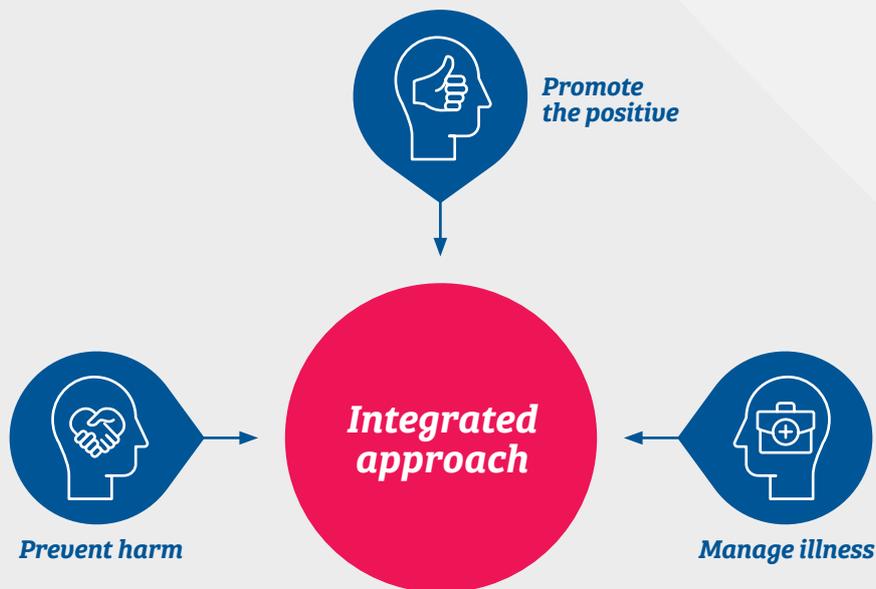*Integrated approach*

Prevent harm

Manage illness

Diagram 1 - Professor Anthony D. LaMontagne et al. Professor of Work Health and Wellbeing and Director of the Centre for Population Health Research, Deakin University[4]

THRIVING WORKPLACES

Positive mental health and wellbeing defined by the World Health Organisation is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It is a state of wellbeing in which everyone can:

- Realise their own abilities
- Cope with the normal stresses of life
- Work productively and fruitfully
- Contribute to work, family and community.[5]

Thriving workplaces are mentally healthy workplaces. They are environments where people can do their best and be their best.

Thriving workplaces promote the positive mental health and wellbeing of all people who participate in that workplace including; workers, leaders, contractors and consultants. A thriving workplace is achieved through alignment of activities across the domains of:

LEADERSHIP **CONNECTEDNESS** **POLICY** **CAPABILITY** **CULTURE**

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN WORKPLACES THAT'S HELPING WORKERS THRIVE?

Through a strengths-based approach SuperFriend examined the key characteristics present when workers stated they 'loved their job'. These workers are more likely to describe their workplace as the best or one of the best in the sector. They are also more likely to describe their workplace as having high levels of civility, effective team working and a supportive team environment. Workers who describe loving their job also indicate that managers set a good example of a happy, healthy and productive workplace and are accessible when you need them and will listen. These workers are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer in their role.

The main benefits reported by Australian workers regarding their personal experiences of a mentally healthy workplace are: increased feelings of being valued, greater ability to bring their best self to work and increased willingness to contribute more.[6]

DRIVERS TO CREATE AND SUSTAIN A THRIVING WORKPLACE:

LEADERSHIP

- Managers set a good example for a healthy, happy and productive workplace
- Inspirational leaders map out positive visions for the organisation including each worker's place within the organisation
- Praise and recognition for good performance and achievement exist.

CONNECTEDNESS

- Work feels like a community, with people supporting each other beyond work tasks
- Workers are involved in the planning of work and how it is carried out
- There is sensitivity to the needs of those who have children or other dependents.

POLICY

- Workplace programs exist to improve mental health and wellbeing
- Return to work policies and practices exist for those who have taken time off for mental health reasons
- Effective policies and practices against workplace bullying or harassment exist.

CAPABILITY

- Training is provided for all leaders in how to support workers with mental health issues
- Mental health awareness training is provided to all workers.

CULTURE

- People are effectively supported through change
- The culture encourages open discussion about issues that affect mental health and wellbeing
- Support is available to help people optimise their work-life balance.

"Work can be an essential part of our lives. Our day-to-day experiences and our identity of who we are as people can be enhanced through 'good work'. Workplaces are uniquely placed to provide the environment to support each person be their best self. By further investing in the psychological capital that exists within the people in Australian workplaces, a significant contribution can be made to both workplaces and the Australian economy!"

SuperFriend Workplace Positive Psychology Program Manager

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR INVESTING IN THRIVING WORKPLACES

1 in 5
Australians report having experienced a mental health issue each year.[7]

2 in 5
Australians report they have left a job because of a poor workplace mental health environment each year.[8]

45% of Australians will experience a mental health issue over their lifetime.[9]

38% of those on claim after experiencing a mental injury take more than two years to return to work.[10]

$2.30 ROI for every $1 spent on successfully implementing an appropriate action.[11]

WHEN WORKERS BELIEVE THEIR WORKPLACE SUPPORTS THEM TO THRIVE:

90% Say they will probably stay in their job over the next 12 months.

80% Describe their employer as the best-in-sector for creating and sustaining positive mental health and wellbeing for its workers.

75% Say they are rarely stressed or not stressed at all in their current job.

62% Report that they love doing their job.

Increased worker retention and enhanced personal and organisational performance,[12] will make workplace wellbeing an area of interest for organisations. In thriving workplaces, individuals can have positive mental health and wellbeing whether they are experiencing a mental health issue or not.[13] Thriving workers are more committed to workplace goals, build better relationships with their peers and produce higher output as dedicated team members.

BENEFITS:

Workers with good standards of wellbeing at work are likely to be more creative, loyal, productive and provide better customer satisfaction than individuals with poor standards of wellbeing at work.[14]

Positive practices (respectful treatment of workers) produce positive effects (satisfaction and wellbeing) which leads to positive individual behaviour (increased retention and engagement) resulting in organisational effectiveness (profitability and productivity).[16]

Worker performance is a result of both wellbeing and engagement.[15]

THE FIVE DOMAINS OF THRIVING WORKPLACES IN DETAIL

The following domains are essential to build thriving workplaces: **leadership, connectedness, policy, capability and culture.** The domains are all interconnected and when present, work to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of the workplace.[17]

We acknowledge that each workplace is unique. As such, these practices should be considered as a suite of potential offerings or opportunities rather than a list of actions that should be completed.

SuperFriend recommends addressing all five domains and considering the proposed actions and ideas when building a broader people and culture strategy that promotes a mentally healthy and thriving workplace.

The practices and ideas for action provided in these guidelines can form part of a workplace's people and culture strategy.

Small, consistent actions that can be easily embedded into existing systems, processes and leadership responsibilities can make a difference to a workplace.

LEADERSHIP

People leaders work with their teams using a strengths-based and coaching mindset. They are positive role models and set an example for healthy and productive workplace behaviours and interactions. Organisations should understand the importance of leader education, resources, time and tools to develop capable leadership.

CONNECTEDNESS

Positive, high quality interpersonal connections are essential to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing. They are the fabric of teamwork and collaboration. Having a shared vision and knowing how their role fits into the organisational framework can unite workers, creating purpose and meaningful work. Trust, fairness and social inclusiveness are outcomes of positive interpersonal connections.

POLICY

Organisational systems and formal processes drive the development of mental health-focused workplace policy. These policies are actively implemented in the workplace. A clear strategy or policy on mental health and wellbeing should exist, and be understood, visible and accessible to all workers.

CAPABILITY

Supporting positive mental health and wellbeing by building and applying workers' capabilities and skills is an organisational asset. When organisational systems and processes promote the use of these skills, it's a visible demonstration of the organisation's culture and values. This can help differentiate an employer brand and make a workplace desirable.

CULTURE

Positive organisational culture is essential to both individual and organisational performance. Organisational culture is the unwritten and unspoken guidelines for what is acceptable and what isn't within a workplace.

An organisation's purpose, structure, unstated norms, values, rules and routines form foundations of culture. When organisational culture includes a strong people focus, it creates a ripple effect for positive mental health and wellbeing and acknowledges that people are key to success.

The following sections help build an understanding of each domain:
- Its relevance, benefits and importance to a thriving workplace
- Observable practices and ideas for action that build thriving workplaces.

LEADERSHIP

Positive leaders work with their teams and others using a strengths-based and coaching mindset. They are role models, and their leadership promotes and enables healthy and productive workplaces. Just as people leaders can directly impact workers' day-to-day experiences, senior leaders, executives and board members are responsible for building and enabling a positive organisational culture.

A positive approach does not mean ignoring negative elements or poor performance; instead positive leaders deal with these issues in a compassionate and transparent way.

The most effective leaders look to develop personally and professionally through reflective practices and self-development so that they can lead themselves before they lead others. The practices described align to common leadership activities and day-to-day interactions leaders have with their team members and direct reports.

BENEFITS OF LEADERSHIP TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

Leaders who are open and approachable, practice self-reflection and act with integrity and balanced judgement are more likely to foster higher levels of inclusiveness, engagement, commitment, performance and wellbeing in their organisations.[18]

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP AND LEADERS IN BUILDING THRIVING WORKPLACES

1 Effective leadership increases worker morale, resilience and trust, and decreases worker frustration and conflict.

2 Under good leadership, workers have higher wellbeing and reduced sick leave.

3 A leader who demonstrates commitment to maintaining their own physical and psychological health can influence the health of workers (sickness, presenteeism, absenteeism), and the health of the organisation as a whole.[19]

THE ROLE OF LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP IN THRIVING WORKPLACES

The below practices reflect the day-to-day and regular interactions that leaders have with their team members.

LEAD FOR POSITIVE PERFORMANCE

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Ensure there is a match between the role and an applicant's qualities, strengths and attributes. This can enhance an individual's job engagement, commitment and likelihood to remain in the organisation.

Job descriptions should define the interpersonal, emotional and technical competencies required to do the job well. The interview process can include questions around behaviour that help the applicant understand the organisation's values. Best practice recruitment processes typically include competency-based recruitment methodology that support a good fit for the role.

Senior leaders are responsible for ensuring fair recruitment practices are adhered to. They are also responsible for teaching the value that fair processes can bring, such as increased diversity and a sense of organisational fairness and justice.

UNDERSTANDING AND LEVERAGING YOUR TEAM MEMBERS' STRENGTHS

Using strengths at work in new and different ways taps into intrinsic motivation and helps improve personal performance. Teams that understand the strengths that each worker brings to the group are able to foster a strong team connection and appreciation. Leaders can use these types of insights when considering work allocation and for job crafting (more on this the Policy section on page 26).

New team members will have greater appreciation for the talents and strengths they bring to the team if leaders include consideration of the strengths they bring. When introducing new team members, invite them to explore their strengths and how those strengths can help them achieve in their new role. Spend time together exploring and understanding each team members' individual and collective strengths.

Action Idea

Create a set of consistently used behaviour-based questions that reflect the workplace's values. A simple interview framework to bring these questions to life is called B.A.R (behaviour, actions, results):

- Start with asking the job applicant to describe a specific situation when they used a value or behaviour
- What actions they took
- What impact or results occurred.

Action Idea

Interview for understanding:
Three questions for leaders to use when onboarding new starters, helping build rapport and understanding:

1. What do you need from your manager or workplace in order to do your job effectively and return home with energy to spare?
2. What are you going to do for your own positive mental health?
3. How will I know, or how will you communicate to me, that you're struggling or need assistance?

Action Idea

Understand, explore and leverage your team members' strengths. Following are three steps leaders can use to guide team members through a strengths discovery approach:

1. **Understand:** VIA character strengths is a freely available strength assessment tool. Invite your team members to complete the survey and share their strengths with you.

2. **Explore:** Ask team members to reflect on their strengths and note:

   a) how their top strengths have helped success in the past and

   b) situations when they've used their strengths and how using these strengths has made them feel, together with specific achievements their strengths has enabled.

3. **Apply:** Ask them to pick one strength and create a plan to use it in a new, different or unique way at work (the VIA site provides great examples to support this activity).

SETTING PERFORMANCE, JOB-RELATED GOALS AND PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Having positive relationships between workers and people leaders is an important building block of thriving workplaces.

Making regular time to set and review goals using a coaching approach is an effective way to strengthen workplace connections. People leaders should be provided with:

a) time

b) education

c) resources to enable them to work with each team member on goal setting and regular reviews.

As part of goal setting discussions, leaders need to be clear regarding expectations for both performance and behaviour. Including behaviour expectations on how work gets done helps bring the organisational values to life.

UNDERSTANDING WORKERS' GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Seeking to understand the aspirations and development goals of team members is part of a leader's role. A leader should look for opportunities to develop workers' skills and expertise in alignment with their goals. It's also important for workers to proactively identify opportunities for their own learning and development and understand their own learning style.

Action Idea

Some of the most effective learning can be outside a formal classroom. When looking at development and learning options, consider a blend of formal learning (i.e. training courses and seminars) and learning from an expert (i.e. a mentor) with the focus on experiential learning (on-the-job focus).

Action Idea

A best practice approach to goal setting involves creating a mutually acceptable schedule to create goals and review progress – agreed between the leader and worker. These goal and growth-focused discussions should include:

- Potential obstacles and how they may be mitigated
- Different pathways to achieve goals
- Alignment of goals to personal values and strengths
- Ensuring goals are positively framed (i.e. describing what is wanted/desired) rather than what to avoid.

Leaders can support workers to build self-confidence and belief in their goals by creating opportunities to:

- Observe people who have achieved similar goals
- Get practice in achieving goals
- Receive positive feedback on progress towards goals
- Access relevant learning, development or mentoring to ensure they have the skills and capability to succeed
- Experience success (which in turn builds efficacy).

POSITIVE FEEDBACK FUELS PERFORMANCE

A strengths-based approach to performance feedback, whether in formal reviews, coaching conversations or day-to-day interactions, is a motivational approach. It helps build positive productive relationships, retains talented people and motivates workers to produce excellent work by empowering them to do what they do best. Leaders can develop valuable coaching and skills in providing feedback.

Action Idea

Simple ways leaders can incorporate a strengths-based approach is to look for opportunities to share observations with workers and:

- If you have to provide negative feedback, keep it constructive by focusing on specific learning or training actions that will help achieve improved outcomes

- Describe what the worker is doing that is working well

- Highlight the worker's specific achievements

- Highlight instances when the worker has used their strengths to problem solve, collaborate or achieve a desired outcome.[20]

Observations shared in regular coaching or feedback sessions provides opportunity for two-way feedback, open dialogue and strengthened relationships. If there are performance issues or conflict, the following can be included as part of a planned, respectful conversation.

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: DEALING WITH CHALLENGING ISSUES WITH COMPASSION

A positive leadership style does not mean ignoring performance challenges or issues. Leaders can use a practice of supportive communication[21] to provide critical feedback and deal with challenging situations without being defensive or invalidating others. Supportive communication is built on congruence; an alignment of a leader's verbal and nonverbal behaviour. When leaders display this style of communication it helps build more trusting and transparent relationships at work.

Action Idea

Leaders need to deal with challenging situations proactively, objectively, and in a timely manner. A supportive, person-oriented approach can be taken. Leaders should plan for these types of conversations, considering the following approach:

1. Host the conversation in a private room

2. Describe the event, behaviour or circumstance objectively

3. Describe the outcome, impact or consequences

4. Suggest alternative solutions that could resolve the issue

5. Ensure feedback is genuine, honest and works towards a solution

6. Follow up, provide support and ensure that respect, privacy, safety and the wellbeing of all individuals is achieved.

REWARD AND RECOGNITION

Thriving workplace practices provide relevant acknowledgement and appreciation of workers' efforts in a fair and timely manner. This includes appropriate and regular financial compensation as well as individual or team celebrations. The terms "reward" and "recognition" are used interchangeably, but as reward is financial and recognition is linked to behaviour, they are quite different.

Recognition and reward programs, when designed and executed well, can:

- Motivate workers
- Fuel a desire to excel
- Build workers' self-esteem
- Encourage workers to exceed expectations
- Enhance team success.

When workers receive appropriate recognition and reward they have more energy and enthusiasm, and a greater sense of pride and participation in their work. They are more likely to treat colleagues and customers with courtesy, respect and understanding.

Action Idea

Recognition practices can help build pride and purpose. Positive recognition practices are:

- Behaviour-based. For example, thanking a team member for delivering great customer service reinforces a culture of customer care

- Linked to organisational values. Saying 'thank you' has more impact if you tie a specific acknowledgement to a team or organisational value. This reinforces that how work is done can be just as important as what work gets done, and contributes to a positive culture

- Peer-to-peer. Local peer recognition programs can help build strong teams. Team members notice peers that go above and beyond, and have a way of nominating them for official recognition.

Reward programs are typically financial, and leaders should consider fairness and equity when allocating funds for reward programs. Consideration should be given to the behaviours financial reward programs encourage to ensure alignment between values and expected behaviours.

ENHANCE POSITIVE MEANING AT WORK

ALIGNMENT OF WORKERS' PURPOSE AND MEANING

Workers better internalise organisational goals when they understand how their job role fits into the organisation.

Workplace-based research found when effort was made to build and promote pride in work, there was increased worker engagement.[22] When leaders help their teams and workers have pride in their company and workplace, organisational goals become internalised. Instead of focusing on individual goals, workers direct their energy toward doing what's best for the organisation.[23] This is known as pro-social behaviour that promotes desirable activities such as collaboration.

Action Idea

Leaders can:

- Invest time in team meetings or other forums to help their team understand the workplace's purpose and mission, and how their particular job role relates to the purpose

- Create a shared vision for their team or project

- Encourage workers to create a personal 'elevator pitch' in which they describe their job function and linkage to workplace goals.

DEVELOP POSITIVE CHANGE LEADERSHIP SKILLS

BUILD CHANGE CAPABILITY AND ENGAGE OTHERS DURING CHANGE

Communication and leadership are important factors in managing organisational change effectively and mitigating the negative effects on workers' wellbeing.[24]

Change is occurring regularly and is an ongoing part of many Australian workplaces - be it organisational re-structures, offshoring, technology changes or job role changes.

Capable leaders should be equipped with the skills, mindsets and tools to positively lead themselves and others through change. Where possible, leaders should consider engaging in co-design—a positive change practice that seeks out and incorporates the voice, expertise and knowledge of workers as part of the change planning process.

The key component of a co-creative approach to change is the emphasis on workers' opinions, and an ongoing opportunity for dialogue. Open and ongoing communication can lessen resistance and helps leaders increase the likelihood of buy-in and commitment to change.

Ongoing change can be challenging for both workers and leaders; developing specific change leadership skills and building personal resilience are supportive practices.

Leaders who actively take a coaching and supportive approach can positively impact on the health and wellbeing of workers throughout times of change. One evidence-based way that leaders can do this is to help workers identify their potential growth or job role opportunities in changing environments, as well as challenging workers to think about old problems in new ways.

Being able to guide team members effectively through change using an appreciative lens includes: coaching workers to reflect on previous personal successes during times of change and transformation; describing the potential opportunities that may exist in the future (new skills and experiences); and sharing personal stories of change.

Maintaining open dialogue and a consistent message on why change is needed and expected benefits to individuals, teams and the workplace is also important. Where possible, also try to support workers in having some choices and autonomy in their next steps when impacted significantly by workplace change.

Action Idea

Some positive change practices that build workers' self-confidence and competence, that in turn can buffer against the stress of workplace change are:

- Providing support services such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Leaders hosting regular conversations, check-ins and coaching
- Providing additional training and the time for workers to learn and apply skills or a new way of working.

Action Idea

Leaders can use the following questions as part of their regular coaching conversations during change:

1. What are you most interested in doing when you think about how we will be working in the future?
2. What skills or experiences do you have now that you can see yourself using in a new way of working?
3. How can I best support you? What else might you need?
4. What do you have in place to support your wellbeing during this time of change? Is there anything I can support you with?

Action Idea

Build effective change leadership skills. Consider and research capacity building, human-focused frameworks for organisational change such as Appreciative Inquiry. Learn more at appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu

PROVIDE WORKERS A VOICE

Leaders should provide an opportunity for workers to have a voice and allow them to express opinions without interruptions in group settings. When leaders maintain an open mind and are open to worker ideas and opinions it helps provide the infrastructure of regular and ongoing feedback.

TRUST, HONESTY AND FAIRNESS

Low levels of organisational justice have been shown to be associated with poorer worker mental health.[25]

Where strong levels of organisational justice and fair processes exist, a culture characterised by trust, honestly and fairness is built. Workplace practices may include:

- Fair decision-making concerning workers
- Leaders following through on commitments and promises
- Reward and recognition programs are provided in a transparent way, are distributed fairly and linked to positive contribution (such as helping customers).

A culture that honours trust, honesty and fairness is a protective factor that helps maintain workers' psychological safety.[26]

BUILD SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND LEAD FOR WELLBEING

The following practices contribute towards the promotion of positive mental health and wellbeing:

Action Ideas

- Limit out of hours (late night and weekend) email
- Encourage workers to take regular breaks, use shared spaces, and to take annual leave
- Try out different meeting formats, including walking or stand-up meetings
- Promote physical activity by making stairwells accessible for walking between floors
- Consider healthy food options when catering is provided and review vending machine choices
- Make mental health and wellbeing resources available, such as:

  – access to an EAP

  – access to good quality resources that help individuals increase personal wellbeing.

Action Ideas

Consider regular leader communication channels and share information or links to resources with workers designed to support individuals with their personal wellbeing. Some good resources are:

- The Five Ways to Wellbeing
- Action for Happiness.

SUPPORT AND FACILITATE WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE INTEGRATION

Providing a work environment where there is an acceptance of the need for a balance between the demands of work, family and life. This can help workers to effectively manage stress, avoid burnout and increase resilience to a range of common mental health problems.

Flexible work policies recognise the need for balance between the demands of work, family and personal life. Worker mental health and wellbeing can be significantly influenced by the work environment. It can also be impacted when demands at home and work are in conflict. Research suggests positive outcomes occur when work and life integration exist:

- Workers feel valued and happier both at work and at home due to reduced stress and the possibility that home issues will spill over into work, or vice versa

- Workers can maintain their concentration, confidence, responsibility, and sense of control at work

- Workers' wellbeing is enhanced, as is their commitment, job satisfaction, increase in positive personal behaviour that benefits the organisation, job performance and reduced stress.[27]

UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE WORKPLACE STRESSORS

Effective and supportive approaches to actively manage workplace stressors demonstrate that leaders care for their teams and place importance on safety and wellbeing.

Leaders should look to understand and mitigate common work stressors such as:

- High levels of pressure from workload

- Scheduling or rostering that prevents enough rest and recovery or isolates individuals

- Perceived low support from team/leaders

- Ongoing, continued organisational change

- Difficult workplace relationships or conflict.[28]

Understand and acknowledge outside of work stressors that may impact workers such as:

- Financial difficulties

- Carer responsibilities

- Relationship changes or breakdowns

- Domestic violence

- Poor mental health

- Poor physical health.

Action Ideas

Practices for leaders to consider:

- Make time to understand relevant workplace policies and promote work and personal life integration and flexible working (aligned with workplace policies)

- Make time to understand what work-life integration means to individual workers and what they need to balance competing demands

- When leaders role model policies for work life integration - it's good practice and demonstrates the policies are achievable for all.

NOTICE AND APPRECIATE POSITIVE WORK EXPERIENCES

Savouring the positive and noticing what is working well is an evidence-based way to increase positive emotions, optimism, and boost wellbeing and resilience. Leaders can look for opportunities to include some of these practices into existing meetings as a way to increase team wellbeing.

Action Ideas

Positive emotions can be activated using the following approaches:

- Leaders can make time in meetings to incorporate moments of reflection asking, "what went well?" or "what are we most proud of?"

- Noticing and expressing pride in others' accomplishments

- Allow others to enjoy their moments of acknowledgement and praise

- Make effort to attend special events and ceremonies

- Actively reflect on things they do that make a good day at work and doing more of these

- Express gratitude to others.

Action Ideas

Increasing positive emotions can help build personal resources that contribute to increasing personal resilience.[29] Research has found that the optimal ratio of positive to negative emotions for personal wellbeing is 3:1.

Actively scanning for positive good news stories, reflecting and sharing successes and what went well helps build more positive emotions and personal resilience. Leaders can activate this through intentional focus using existing meetings or events by:

1. Starting a meeting with what went well

2. Asking a team member to reflect on a personal success.

Read more about this research and test your positivity ratios here.

> " Positive leadership enables thriving...rather than simply addressing obstacles and impediments. It helps bring out the best in human nature. "
>
> Professor Kim Cameron, Co-founder of the Center for Positive Organisation Scholarship

SuperFriend's *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace* Survey Insights[30]

When workers say their organisation is the 'best', they are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer. The most influential indicator to create and sustain a thriving workplace is that leaders set a good example for a healthy, happy and productive workplace.

CONNECTEDNESS

Positive interpersonal relationships and connections are essential protective factors in maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing. High quality interpersonal connections are the fabric of teamwork and collaboration. When positive interpersonal connections occur - that is, communication based on respect and civility - trust, fairness and social inclusiveness occur. When workers understand how their role fits the broader organisational purpose, this brings the workforce together for more meaningful and productive work.

BENEFITS OF CONNECTEDNESS TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

For individuals, research suggests high quality connections can:

• Provide resources when undergoing career transition or job changes[31]

• Support personal development and growth[32]

• Create moments of learning during organisational change.[33]

For teams, research suggests the following occur when high quality connections exist:

• Higher levels of psychological safety and trust. This contributes to learning from failure and increases cooperation and trustworthiness[34]

• Positive workplace behaviors such as helping and sharing resources[35]

• Team member attachments to workplaces or communities.[36]

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTEDNESS TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

Connections, respectful interactions and relationships that leave people feeling energised and enriched have been found to increase positive emotions, resilience, motivation, trust, creativity, performance and attention in workplaces. Therefore, positive emotions are a personal resource that help build individuals' wellbeing.[37]

CONNECTEDNESS: THRIVING WORKPLACE PRACTICES

ACTIVATE POSITIVE NETWORKS AND CONNECTIONS

Positive networks and connections create a sense of belonging, community and social wellbeing at work, and a culture that promotes civil and respectful interpersonal interactions.

NOTICE AND HARNESS PEOPLE WHO ARE 'POSITIVE ENERGISERS'

Positive energisers are people that others gravitate towards in the workplace. They are often identifiable by being genuine, engaged in lots of activities and have an appreciative outlook on life. They build belief and capacity in others, and seldom exchange in gossip or negative talk that erodes others. A key part of a thriving workplace is to identify positive energisers and find opportunities to leverage their skills and experience.

Action Ideas

Workplace practices that help maximise positive energisers are:

- Identify people who can create positive energy networks

- Place these people on important projects to attract others to the work

- Map organisational relationships and energy levels to track positive and negative networks.[38]

> **Being a positive energiser is a learned behaviour – not correlated to being an extrovert. The positive energy of leaders is especially important in affecting organisations and employees' performance.**
>
> Professor Kim Cameron, Co-founder of the Center for Positive Organisation Scholarship

FOSTER HIGH QUALITY CONNECTIONS

Relationships and connections are an essential part of our human DNA and are key to our evolutionary success. Research describes 'high quality' interactions as short-term, didactic and positive in terms of the subjective experience of the connected individuals and the structural features of the connection.[39] Many organisations rely on technology such as email, and don't maximise the potential to create or harness connections. When a culture that values human connections exists, people greet each other in the morning, smile, and make eye contact and say "thank you". All common courtesies that support positive mental health and wellbeing. Workers with greater wellbeing are a prerequisite to a thriving workplace.[40]

Action Ideas

Simple ways to foster high quality connections and promote interpersonal civility include:

- Include time on meeting agendas to check in with how people are feeling, offering space for stories or narratives

- Stopping to say hello or check in with a worker after a long day

- Enabling leaders to actively support others and model positive and respectful relationships

- Bring workers from different teams or workplaces together to work on initiatives

- If possible, maximise team opportunities for discussion and minimise reliance on each meeting member looking at their laptop.

CREATE PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE

Action Ideas

- Conduct worker opinion or engagement surveys, and share key findings, including workers in action planning
- Regular round table discussions or pulse-checks on action items can be useful to check on the progress and implementation of projects.

BUILD WORKPLACE COMMUNITIES

A sense of belonging in the workplace is important for positive mental health and social inclusion. A thriving workplace is built through workers having a strong connection to each other and the purpose and values of the organisation. Workers would describe it as feeling like a community, with people supporting each other beyond getting work done, and with leaders who are available and accessible.

Action Ideas

Leaders can look for opportunities to:

- Build team-based projects
- Host collaborative meetings that promote the sharing of ideas or working together on a business challenge or opportunity.

SuperFriend's *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace* Survey Insights [41]

When workers say their organisation is the 'best', they are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer. The most influential indicator to create and sustain a thriving workplace is a workplace that feels like a community with people supporting each other beyond just getting the work done.

POLICY

Organisational systems and formal processes should be in place to drive mental health policy development and ensure that it is implemented in the workplace.

Thriving workplaces have a stated strategy (comprehensive plan or goal) and policy (set of principles and rules) that support the safety for all workplace participants, covering both psychosocial and physical safety which have these embedded in practice across their organisation.

In terms of being a mentally healthy workplace, a strategy and policy should exist focused on mental health and wellbeing. These documents should be accessible to all and easily understood.

BENEFITS OF POLICY TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

1   Mental health and wellbeing policies demonstrate to workers that their psychological safety is important. When embedded in practice, this leads to greater job satisfaction, enhanced team learning behaviour and improved performance.[42]

2   Morale and engagement are increased, and workers are less likely to experience stress-related illness.[43]

3   When workers feel their mental health and wellbeing is protected, workplaces experience fewer grievances, conflicts and liability risks.[44]

IMPORTANCE OF POLICY FOR THRIVING WORKPLACES

There are a wide range of job, team and organisational factors that have the potential to affect worker mental health and wellbeing. Job stress and other work-related psychosocial hazards are the leading contributors to the burden of occupational disease and injury.[45]

POLICY: THRIVING WORKPLACE PRACTICES

CREATE VISIBILITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Workplace policies should focus on managing risk, ensuring compliance to relevant workplace legislation, and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. Workplaces that visibly provide an inclusive, fair and respectful working environment through anti-bullying and harassment policies, have good return to work policies. They typically consider mental health and wellbeing across all policies to build a climate of physical and psychosocial safety.

The following section suggests what to consider when researching and designing a mental health and wellbeing strategy and then implementing your policy.

Importantly, to be genuinely effective and produce real change, your policy needs to be brought to life through your day-to-day operations and practices.

WORKPLACE STRATEGIES

There are six research-informed strategies for designing mentally healthy workplaces provided in a report for the National Mental Health Commission and Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance.

They are:

- Design and manage work to minimise harm (i.e. job design)
- Promote protective factors at the organisational level to maximise resilience
- Enhance personal resilience
- Promote and facilitate early help seeking
- Supporting workers' recovery from mental illness
- Increasing awareness of mental illness and reducing stigma.

> *"It is critical to recognise that it is not only what senior leaders and organisations say about positive mental health and workplace culture, but more crucially how they act and 'live out' these policies and strategies."*
>
> Delphi Panel Participant, 2015

THE IMPACT OF JOB DESIGN – CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY AND ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN

According to research, the following factors may be either risks or protective factors impacting on workers' mental health and wellbeing. The following is an overview of the most important job design factors.

Demands of the job
The level of physical, cognitive or emotional demands the job makes of workers.

Resources and engagement
Workers having the tools, equipment and resources needed to achieve success in their roles. Having the support to control and deliver their role as required, with ongoing support during periods of change are also important. Workers' engagement in their role is boosted by leaders taking on a coaching leadership style where regular feedback and learning and development opportunities are provided.

Characteristics of the job
When considering the work and job, ensure workers have the potential to use a variety of different skills, engage in various tasks and be part of the whole (not just a fragment or piece of work disconnected from the bigger picture). Ensure the work has meaning and potential for discretion and personal decision-making.

In some instances, redesigning or undertaking minor modifications can create diversity in job tasks, therefore making the work more motivating and interesting.

Action Idea

Job design and job crafting are emerging as effective workplace practices, acting as protective factors for workers' mental health and wellbeing. These activities support work design to minimise harm.

Effective strategies, policies and workplace practices supporting positive job design include: work/life integration, flexible work arrangements, flexible rostering systems, job sharing, part-time hours and flexibility in core hours. (The Fairwork Ombudsman offers good policy guidance and templates).

Mechanisms that actively encourage worker participation include: feedback/round table discussions, open door policies, skip level meetings and more formal avenues such as surveys. These all provide opportunities for workers to share feedback, concerns and ideas for improvement.[46]

Job crafting is a collaborative activity between each leader and their team member looking to shape the job or tasks to help each worker bring their best self to their job. Job crafting is a skill that can be learnt by leaders and workers.

Job crafting activities can include looking at ways of:

- Enhancing flexibility around work hours (e.g. start times, rostered days off, time to attend doctor's appointments or be with family)

- Considering how you can provide some leave to refresh and recharge

- Encouraging worker participation (e.g. committees or problem-solving teams).[47]

In addition there are three areas that leaders and workers can explore together in the job crafting process.

- Allocation of specific tasks/deliverables (i.e. what needs to be done to best fit the skills, expertise and strengths of each worker)

- Explore the purpose of the task, and look for ways that the worker can complete the task end to end

- Consider working relationships (who the worker collaborates with and works with to achieve the requirement for the role).

FROM POLICY TO BUSINESS AS USUAL – A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The following approach is provided to help workplaces embed mental health and wellbeing policies into business as usual workplace practices. This approach may contribute to reducing the stigma around mental health, increasing the opportunities for support and help seeking behavior.

A mental health and wellbeing strategy or policy may be incorporated into existing Work Health and Safety (WHS) policy, or be a standalone policy that sits alongside WHS.

Many workplaces have policies and detailed processes such as risk assessments and registers that provide for physical safety.

Often these existing policies and processes can be expanded to include assessment of known psychosocial risks. These are workplace factors such as isolation, how work is scheduled, the work environment, the pace of work, workload and demands of the job.

- Explore a sample mental health and wellbeing policy template provided by HeadsUp

- Review psychosocial risk factor assessment information and tools. See People at Work (a SafeWork Australia framework).

EMBED MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

The following principles should be considered:

- Look for ways to incorporate key messages and content into existing workplace programs and activities such as; reward, recognition, worker development and goal setting

- Provide regular education to leaders and workers on workplace policies, helping them translate this into effective workplace practice.

COMPLETE REGULAR POLICY REVIEWS

Once created, audit policies regularly, creating action plans that are monitored for completion.

- Include workers in groups responsible for the implementation and continuous improvement of the mental health and wellbeing strategy

- Make investment to increase wellbeing through tools, resources and programs that increase knowledge and awareness of physical and mental wellbeing

- Provide leaders with support and resources to implement the mental health and wellbeing strategy at local levels.

MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT OF PROGRAMS

Create metrics to measure the effectiveness and impact of these strategies and policy:

- Ensure senior leaders and executives are accountable for workers' physical and psychological safety through inclusion into performance plans or KPIs

- Encourage a good level of organisational communication on mental health and wellbeing and safety promotion[48]

- Invest in mental health and wellbeing awareness activities and training.

SuperFriend's *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace* Survey Insights[49]

When workers say their organisation is the 'best', they are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer. The most commonly reported indicator for policy is that their workplace has effective policies and practices against workplace bullying and harassment.

CAPABILITY

Organisational capability is the skills and knowledge of leaders and workers. As part of regular planning and forecasting, organisations should determine their future needs and strategic direction and ensure that there are plans to build required skills, competence and capability.

Specifically, when building thriving workplaces, effort and investment is required to build the knowledge and skills of leaders and workers across the workplace. There is then workplace capability to support mental health and wellbeing policy and practices. Investment in building this capability visibly demonstrates the organisation's culture and values. This can help differentiate an employer brand and help a workplace attract and retain talent.
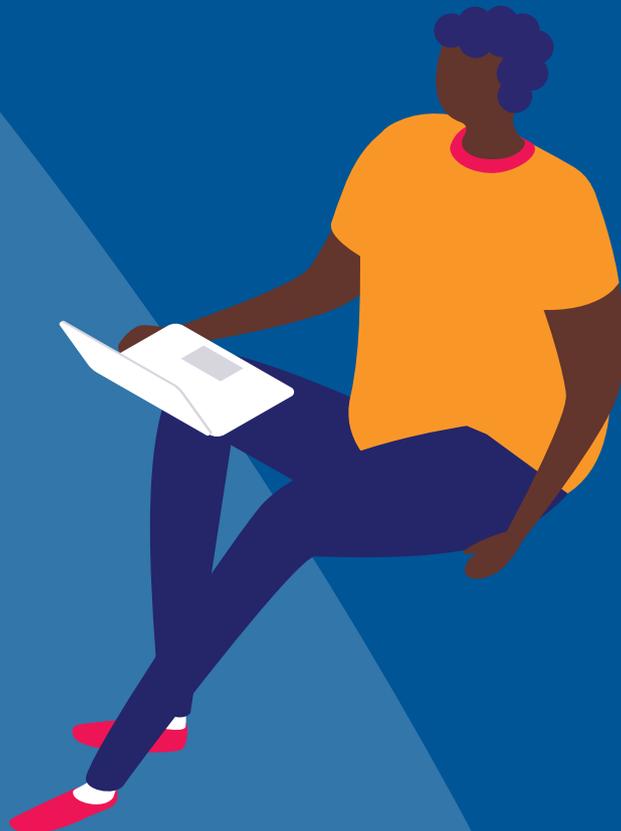
BENEFITS OF BUILDING CAPABILITY TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

1 Developing leaders' skills to be positive energisers increases team cohesion, innovation, orientation towards team learning, and team performance.[50]

2 Effective leadership increases worker morale, resilience and trust, and decreases worker frustration and conflict. Good leadership leads to individuals being 40% more likely to be in the highest category of job wellbeing, with a 27% reduction of sick leave.[51]

3 Effective leaders are important for team productivity, and can protect against workplace stressors such as change, low job control, bullying and harassment.

IMPORTANCE OF SKILLS AND CAPABILITY TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

It is an organisational asset when leaders' and workers' knowledge in the following areas is developed and enhanced:[52]

- Awareness and understanding of what mental health and wellbeing is
- Its relevance to the workplace and performance
- How developing specific, appropriate skills contributes to a positive workplace.

CAPABILITY: THRIVING WORKPLACE PRACTICES

ONGOING INVESTMENT IN BUILDING CAPABILITY

Structured and regular leadership training for existing and emerging leaders creates consistent capability among managers and supervisors to support the success of their teams.

COMPLETE A REGULAR LEARNING NEEDS ANALYSIS

Once strategy is determined, workplaces should understand the skills and capabilities needed to achieve this. When there is a focus on building thriving workplaces, SuperFriend suggests including mental health awareness training and coaching skills as a minimum.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY – THE SKILLS NEEDED

Developing the understanding of what a positive leadership style is and the benefits provided, is a solid foundation upon which workplaces can scaffold other leadership skills and capability. Other leadership skills include job crafting, effective change leadership, communication skills and more.

LEADING WITH COMPASSION

Training managers to increase awareness of mental health and reduce stigma has a positive impact on workers' mental health. This impact relies on all people receiving mental health awareness training and that it is up-to-date and refreshed regularly.[53]

### BUILDING COACHING CAPABILITY

Coaching is both a skill and a mindset. It is a way to work with others; supporting autonomy and helping workers build mastery. The coaching relationship builds stronger connections, trust and self-belief. Foundational coaching skills can be taught and used by all, and focus on asking affirmative open-ended questions, exploring the topic and then guiding a 'coachee' to set goals that matter to them. Goal setting and review creates energy and motivation. Organisations can look to build leaders' coaching capability and skills to; increase performance and psychological wellbeing, boost longer-term career development[54] and, as a result, create a thriving workplace.

SuperFriend's *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace Survey Insights*[55]

When workers say their organisation is the 'best', they are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer. The most common capability indicator in this group of workers is that management have the knowledge and skills to effectively support workers with complex mental health issues.

"Developing a mentally healthy workplace is a readily achievable goal for most organisations and workplaces, but requires a multifaceted approach and commitment across all levels of the workplace."

Dr Samuel Harvey, Black Dog Institute
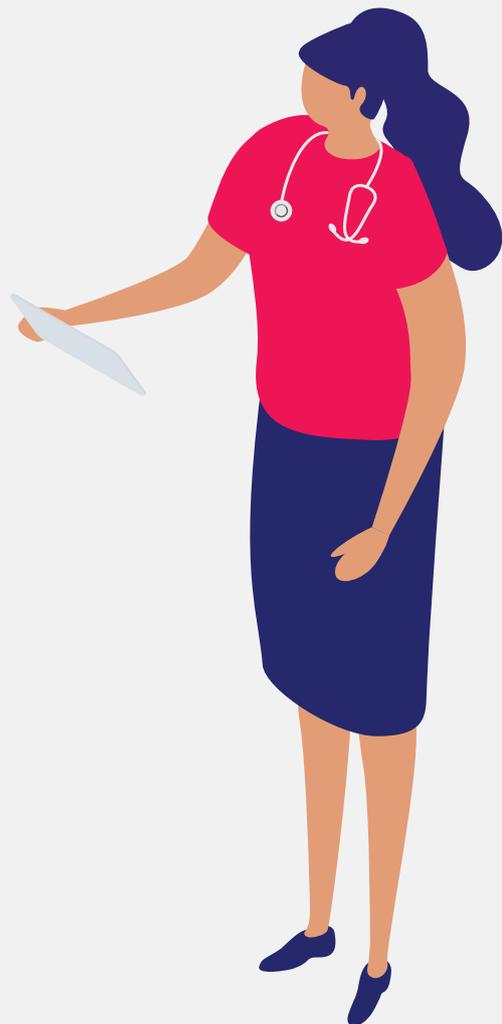
CULTURE

Positive organisational culture is essential to both individual and organisational performance. Organisational culture is unwritten and unspoken guidelines for what is and is not acceptable.

An organisation's purpose, structure, norms, values, rules and routines form the foundations of culture. Therefore, when organisational culture focuses on people, it creates a ripple effect for positive mental health and wellbeing, communicating the implicit and explicit understanding that people are key to success.

BENEFITS OF CULTURE TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

1 An organisation has a positive culture when people can be their personal best, and where workers want to stay longer and perform better.

2 A positive culture is part of a compelling worker value proposition, making it easier to attract and retain talented workers.

IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE TO THRIVING WORKPLACES

1 Organisational trust is crucial to building and maintaining positive and productive social systems in any workplace. Trust predicts cooperative behaviour, organisational citizenship behavior, organisational commitment, and worker loyalty, all of which help retain and attract workers.[56]

2 Worker wellbeing, job satisfaction and organisational commitment are all enhanced when an organisation has a health-focused culture.[57]

3 A work culture with social support enhances worker wellbeing and can provide a positive environment for workers who may be experiencing mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety.[58]

CULTURE: THRIVING WORKPLACE PRACTICES

ACTIVELY BUILD POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE

Positive workplace culture builds an engaged and committed workforce where wellbeing is valued.

It is important that the relationship between a supportive work environment, free from incivility and discrimination, and organisational performance is well established.[59]

Organisational culture can only be changed if it's measured first. In order for measurement and change to occur, workers should be invited to offer input and feedback on their perception of the workplace culture. There are a variety of workplace culture and engagement surveys available. Best practice includes regularly inviting workers to provide feedback and to share key findings and organisational actions. Leaders and workers at the team level can then identify practical actions to improve culture survey items with low scores and amplify survey items with higher scores.

Action Ideas

If there is no opportunity to complete a culture survey, consider a desktop analysis of factors that may indicate what the workplace culture is: attrition, exit interview data/themes/trends, feedback sourced from leader-led conversations and similar can provide good indicators of how positive the culture is.

Action Ideas

Other visible ways to foster positive organisational culture:

- Co-create positive organisational values with your workers, and bring them to life by offering specific examples of behaviours for each value

- Model values-based behaviours in day-to-day work practices such as meetings and collaborative work opportunities

- Set organisational goals that contribute towards building a better society or community

- Include values and behaviours into individual organisational performance scorecards at every level

- Recognise workers for modelling the values-based behaviour.

> *"Wellbeing comes from one place, and one place only – a positive culture."*
>
> Professor Kim Cameron,
> Co-founder of the Center for
> Positive Organisation Scholarship

SuperFriend's *Indicators of a Thriving Workplace* Survey Insights[60]

When workers say their organisation is the 'best', they are more engaged, perform better and intend to stay longer. The most influential culture indicator to create and sustain a thriving workplace is that people are effectively supported through change.

NEXT STEPS

POSITIVE CHANGE:
BUILDING THRIVING WORKPLACES

The following steps provide a framework for workplaces to act:

1

ENGAGE LEADERS

- Understand the return on investment and business benefits for your workplace to invest in building a thriving workplace
- Gain stakeholder commitment and support.

2

DIAGNOSE AND DETERMINE
PRIORITY AREAS FOR CHANGE

- Complete a desktop analysis to determine priority areas (look at attrition, sick leave, any data from employee surveys and feedback).

3

AGREE SCOPE TO IMPLEMENT
POSITIVE WORKPLACE PRACTICES

- Link strategy, policy and workplace interventions to existing priorities, plan or values to help make it part of an overall plan
- Highlight the positive things already in place
- Determine measures.

4

CO-CREATE INITIATIVES TO BUILD
THRIVING WORKPLACES

- Visit superfriend.com.au and look for *Making change guide*, a simple approach to planning for and making change, using Appreciative Inquiry change method.

"The questions we ask determine whether we eventually diminish our capacity to grow and develop, or increase it...framing questions with a positive stance and focusing on topics that enhance organisational learning...results in increased cooperative capacity."

Dr David Cooperrider, Fairmount Minerals Chair and Professor of Social Entrepreneurship, Case Western Reserve University, Faculty Director at the Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit at Case and Peter F. Drucker Distinguished Fellow

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