



POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURES

PRINCIPLES GUIDANCE

*A REVIEW OF WORKPLACE CULTURE IN THE PUBLIC
SERVICE*

OVERVIEW

A positive workplace culture is the outcome of a number of organisational system factors going well. These factors include health and safety, wellbeing, pay equity, diversity and inclusion, and capable leadership amongst others.

When a workplace culture is thriving, productivity, innovation, engagement and retention all elevate. Conversely where workplace culture is toxic, worker wellbeing and business productivity is threatened.

This makes it crucial for businesses to continually improve systems, programmes, and policies to ensure they are fit for purpose and aligned with best practice for the betterment of both the organisation and its people.

Through partnering with government agencies in the Positive Workplace Cultures Programme and reviewing a range of reports on workplace culture within the Public Sector, consistent themes emerged. These were used to inform a set of principles and actions for employees and employers to collectively enhance workplace culture.



REPORT THEMES

Four consistent themes were identified that organisations should consider when examining their workplace culture:



LEADERS WEREN'T EQUIPPED OR SUPPORTED

Leaders must be supported to drive positive workplace behaviours and relationships



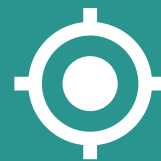
SYSTEMS WEREN'T EFFECTIVE

Systems must be effective to create safe and positive workplaces



COMPLAINT HANDLING WASN'T CLEAR

Complaint handling must be clear to detect and remove negative workplace behaviours and relationships



IMPLEMENTATION WASN'T PRIORITISED

Implementation must be prioritised to ensure workers understand the purpose and function of different activities



PRINCIPLES

Leading Positive Work and Teams

✓ RECRUITMENT

Leader selection considers people leadership competencies and technical capability proportionally

✓ CAPABILITY

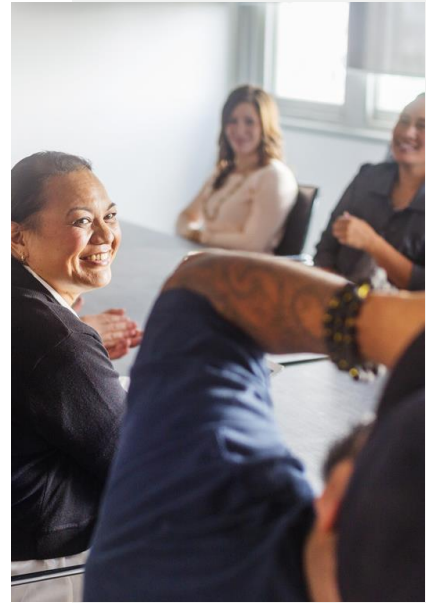
Leaders build core competencies necessary to perform the role such as addressing conflict, resolving disputes and managing difficult conversations. Participating in continuous development opportunities to ensure they understand, live and model their organisation's visions and values

✓ COLLABORATION

Leaders should collaborate with their peers, sharing ideas, challenges they face and approaches they've found successful

✓ ACCOUNTABILITY

Leaders must be provided explicit and reasonable expectations in order to better understand their accountabilities



PRINCIPLES

Creating Safe Systems of Work

✓ DESIGN

Work should be thoughtfully designed by considering different workplace factors, how they interact and how they can best be organised and managed

✓ PREVENTION THEN RECOVERY

Systems of work should emphasise prevention by eliminating and minimising risk, thereby reducing potential for harm. When things go off-course response plans exist to limit and mitigate harm rather than relying on prevention or becoming complacent

✓ RESILIENT

Systems of work should be resilient, with capacity to respond to incremental changes, or substantial disruptions, by considering how the entirety of a system works together rather than as a collection of isolated parts



PRINCIPLES

Learning, Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

✓ QUALITY

Measures used should be:

Reliable Consistently measuring the same construct over time to increase confidence in data

Valid Measures the construct claimed to measure enhancing confidence in conclusions drawn

✓ CONTINUITY

Organisations should focus on continuity by measuring the same constructs several times over a select period, allowing for learning and continuous improvement to occur

✓ REPRESENTATIVE

Organisations should prioritise participation and engagement to ensure their data is representative of the organisation and in turn, that any changes made are effective.

✓ ACTIONABLE

Agencies should select measures which inform action. It's vital to understand both the context and what drives this context, as these drivers are where changes can be made to improve performance.



8 enablers of positive workplace culture



1) TRANSLATE VISION AND VALUES INTO ACTION

The organisation's visions and values are translated into clear, tangible and actionable behaviours that are understood by leaders and workers and ensures that these are enacted in day-to-day practice.

2) RECRUIT, TRAIN AND SUPPORT PEOPLE LEADERS

People leaders are recruited for their ability to lead teams well and their organisation continues to ensure they are equipped to lead and enable a positive working environment by addressing both interpersonal relationships and work-related factors.



3) ESTABLISH NETWORKS FOR WORKERS

Employee-led networks are established and supported by the organisation to enable workers to build relationships across the business with peers and to enable the safe provision of feedback to management.

4) DESIGN AND MANAGE WORK WELL

Work is designed, managed, organised and resourced in a way that is healthy and safe for workers and is conducive to a positive working environment.



5) CREATE MULTIPLE WAYS FOR WORKERS TO SPEAK UP AND RAISE ISSUES

There are multiple two-way mechanisms for employees to speak up and raise issues relating to culture, relationships, and work, and for the organisation to respond in confidence.

6) MONITOR AND PULSE CHECK

The organisation has established indicators of culture and mechanisms for gathering feedback. The organisation actively monitors and reports on these. The organisation eliminates bias and discrimination from all policies and practices,



7) ENABLE ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

The organisation enables an environment in which people feel able to share their experiences and perspectives so that it can learn about what does and does not work to create a positive workplace culture in their context.

8) CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE

The organisation harnesses its learnings about what is and is not working to create positive workplace culture and uses this to inform how it may enable sustained change and improvement.



ACTIONS

01

Ensure your recruitment, selection, induction and training process enables people to be effective leaders

02

Clarify the visions and values of your organisation and teach leaders how to model these through their actions as well as their words

03

Embed effective processes, policies, and procedures throughout organisational systems to facilitate sustainable and good work

04

Verify that complaint handling processes are timely, fair, trusted and that there are a range of channels to engage with.

05

Plan and resource implementation efforts to enhance the delivery of different activities and initiatives

06

Consider the different groups impacted by an initiative and what effective communication looks like for them so that they may also benefit from the activity.



THE REPORTS

THE FIRE AND EMERGENCY NEW ZEALAND (FENZ) POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE REVIEWS



In 2018–19, Judge Coral Shaw conducted an external independent review of Fire and Emergency New Zealand's (FENZ) workplace policies, procedures and practices to address bullying and harassment. The review was not a reaction to any particular event, but rather it was a commitment towards understanding and, where necessary, improving its approach towards bullying and harassment. Shaw and their reference group sought to assess the approach of FENZ at the time in comparison to best practice models in New Zealand, to identify which existing policies, procedures, and practices were fit for purpose, and how those that were not could be modified to achieve their goals.

Parliamentary Services Bullying and Harassment Reviews



In 2018, Debbie Francis conducted an external independent review on Bullying and Harassment in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace. This report was commissioned following concerns of bullying and harassment within parliamentary services. Throughout the report, Francis examined the nature and extent of bullying and harassment as well as the systems, policies, and procedures in place to prevent and manage incidents of bullying and harassment. This was followed up on in 2023 when the Department of Internal Affairs commissioned another review to assess Parliamentary Services' progress to date.

ALLEN AND CLARKE LITERATURE REVIEW ON POSITIVE WORKPLACE CULTURE



The Allen and Clarke literature review was commissioned by Te Kawa Mataaho in 2021. Allen and Clarke were asked to review the academic and grey literature on positive workplace culture and relevant interventions from the past decade. This sought to support understanding of workplace cultures and the type of interventions which could establish and maintain such a culture across different contexts.



REPORTS CONTINUED

REVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING INAPPROPRIATE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOUR



In 2015, a joint project involving members from Ministry of Justice, Department of Corrections and New Zealand Police was initiated. Following this project, there was an inquiry into the appointment of a Deputy Commissioner due to concerns raised about inappropriate workplace behaviour of Wallace Haumaha who was appointed Deputy Commissioner of Police in 2018. This inquiry provided a detailed factual narrative of the events and examined the process of appointing a Deputy Commissioner. **However, there were outstanding questions pertaining to Corrections and Justice actions in receiving and handling the bullying allegations.** In 2018, the State Services Commissioner thus saw a need for a review which assessed whether the allegations of wrongdoing were handled proportionately, appropriately, and expeditiously. This was achieved by comparing the conduct of Corrections and Justice to the State Services Commissioner's model standards.

Report of investigation into whistle blower treatment within the Ministry of Transport



In 2017, an inquiry was conducted to address concerns raised with the State Services Commissioner regarding potential disadvantage to employees at Ministry of Transport who raised their concerns about aspects of Joanne Harrison's behaviour in her position as General Manager Organisational Development. Ms. Harrison served a custodial sentence for defrauding the Ministry of a large sum of money. The inquiry reported on whether there were any disadvantages to employees who raised their concerns about Ms. Harrison, what redress should be offered and any recommendations on the implementation and management of complaint mechanisms within the public service.

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONDUCT AND BEHAVIOUR OF THE RETIREMENT COMMISSIONER



In 2019, an investigation was conducted to address complaints about the conduct and behaviour of the Retirement Commissioner, Ms Diane Maxwell. A range of employees from Ms Maxwell's time in office were interviewed about their experiences and specifically, these included staff who alleged bullying or inappropriate conduct by Ms Maxwell as well as staff who were largely supportive and do not report any such behaviour from Ms Maxwell. This review investigated whether the allegations were substantiated and examined the agency's systems and policies to support appropriate and efficient management of staff concerns or complaints.



LEADERS WEREN'T EQUIPPED OR SUPPORTED

What did we learn?

Leaders are the most significant driver of workplace culture, behaviours and relationships. Their preferences are communicated throughout the organisation, influencing how workers engage in their roles. Leadership has the ability to create positive, strategic, and organisation-wide change when equipped and supported with the right tools. For instance, recruitment, induction, and ongoing development should ensure leaders understand, live, and model the organisation's visions and values.

This communicates an aspirational and unified message from leaders to the rest of their organisation about how they want to be seen. More specific examples of leadership development include training for managing difficult conversations, resolving disputes and managing conflict.

Beyond these examples, leaders may also benefit greatly from ongoing coaching that is tailored to their leadership development needs. This coaching, paired with peer-to-peer accountability, provides leaders a clearer picture of potential opportunities for development.

More explicit performance expectations can also improve the accountability for leaders and it has been demonstrated that leader performance often improves against these recommendations. In summary, leaders have a critical role to play across the whole organisation and by resourcing quality selection and training of leaders, they have the greatest potential to shift organisational culture.



SYSTEMS WEREN'T EFFECTIVE

What did we learn?

Effective systems are key to ensuring predictable, repeatable, and consistent results. Without quality systems in place, there is a dependency upon exceptional workers for desirable outcomes. Processes, policies, and procedures which facilitate a positive workplace culture should be embedded within and throughout the organisation. This creates reliable outcomes and a sustainable approach not vulnerable to a single point of failure.

Having a holistic view of the system improves its ability to learn because there are a range of data sources that can be understood in the wider context of the system. Importantly, a systematic approach that allows for proactivity and prevention must also be balanced with responsiveness to the current needs of an organisation. Although forward-thinking is key, it cannot be at the cost of the organisation and its present needs.

Another benefit to the systematic approach is that it has the ability to influence an entire organisation rather than compartmentalising. This mitigates the risk of failing to realise how different parts of the organisation may impact each other, especially as things naturally develop over time.

Considering the organisation in its entirety through this approach enables a greater emphasis on prevention, as the system can be designed with foreseeable risks and corresponding controls implemented before an accident rather than in response to one.



COMPLAINT HANDLING WASN'T CLEAR

What did we learn?

Complaint handling processes are important to an organisation's workplace culture. They provide a fair and just process which enables workplaces to detect and respond to negative workplace behaviours and relationships, discouraging such behaviours and reducing prevalence.

There are several factors to consider when designing an effective complaint handling process, policy, and/or procedure. For example, there needs to be a range of channels through which parties can voice their concerns. This ensures that the diverse needs of workers which make up a workplace, have equally diverse and fit for purpose channels through which they can speak up. There needs to be a variety of options for resolution which range from informal to formal allowing parties to select the approach best suited to their circumstance as opposed to a one-size-fits-all option.

As this process is conducted it is important that all parties involved in the matter are regularly updated. In doing so the parties are more likely to trust the process, engage with it in future, and recommend it to their colleagues. Some other ways to foster trust in this function include having impartial decision makers, a timely process, and a sense of fairness in the outcomes.



IMPLEMENTATION WASN'T PRIORITISED

What did we learn?

Implementation determines the success of an idea; it is the step which translates a concept into an outcome. Without good implementation, an excellent activity may fail to deliver whereas with quality implementation, even a mediocre activity can deliver results. Part of the reason for this is that effective implementation improves engagement with the activity by clearly illustrating its purpose and making it accessible.

It is also important that implementation is consistent over time and across the entire organisation, particularly for groups who may be underrepresented or face more barriers in accessing these resources creating continuity and fairness. In addition, it reduces the potential for conflicting interpretations of an activity's purpose or function and bolsters understanding.

Another crucial facet to quality implementation is communicating it through a range of channels so that the diverse needs across an organisation are more likely to be met and the activity is more accessible. Through prioritising implementation, great ideas are more likely to succeed and make a meaningful difference for the whole organisation, including those who need it the most.

