

# Shifting culture with mindset

Transformational change in an organisation cannot be achieved by a mere change in self-belief; rather, it requires a fundamental shift in the way individuals perceive and value their relationships and responsibilities towards others. This change in mindset has the potential to revolutionize the entire organisation.

The culture of a workplace can have a significant impact on both team productivity and the overall wellbeing of employees. In fact, it has long been recognized as a crucial factor in attracting and retaining talented staff. A study conducted by Harvard Business School revealed that almost half of employees who experienced a discourteous work environment chose to reduce their effort and spend less time at work.

An unhealthy workplace culture can be a serious vulnerability that is often concealed through coping mechanisms until it erupts, causing widespread and long-lasting effects. However, employees are now becoming more empowered to call out such environments for what they are. Recent research shows that a noxious work culture is the primary reason people give for leaving their jobs. Unlike the past "like it or lump it" mentality, workers today have more options and can choose to leave if their current work environment is unpleasant, dangerous, or unethical.

## What are unhealthy behaviours?

Unhealthy behaviours obstruct creating and sustaining a quality work culture. In the workplace, and can take several forms:

**There's little to no enthusiasm:** bad attitudes create negativity and fuels a gloomy work environment. And worse, it hinders everybody's ability to get things done. Workers are less productive when they collaborate with people who have poor attitudes.

**Non-inclusive:** where members across gender, race, gender identity and orientation, disability and age don't feel they are treated fairly, welcomed, or included in key decisions.

**Disrespectful:** or lacking in consideration, courtesy, and dignity for others.

**There's a pervasive fear of failure:** when employees are in an environment that punishes perceived failures, they can feel paralysed and unable to perform at their best. A clear lack of psychological safety, which refers to how secure employees feel in taking risks and making mistakes, is another significant sign of a harmful workplace culture.

**There's constant dysfunction and confusion:** nobody is clear on their roles or responsibilities. Crossed wires are common, and people are always left out of the loop. Team members can barely tell which way is up.

**There's never-ending gossip and drama:** a little bit of office hearsay is normal. It's when gossip is taken to an extreme that noxious workplaces become clear. It might seem harmless, but this maliciousness takes a toll. Workplace bullying is correlated with psychological burnout, depression, anxiety, and aggression.

**There's high employee turnover:** there's a revolving door of employees, and it seems like you can't keep anybody around for the long haul.

There is a prevailing notion that unhealthy behaviours are typically prevalent in large corporations, where competition is intense, and accountability is low. However, it is crucial to recognise that the same damaging culture can also exist in smaller, less hierarchical organisations.

## How to deal with a unhealthy work culture

Traditional approaches to change involve leaders attempting to drive cultural change by implementing new programmes that aim to address multiple behaviours in order to "fix" their organisation. However, these efforts often fall short of expectations or outright fail, resulting in learning that is not applied on the job and further exacerbating the time and cost of unhealthy behaviour.

Resistance to these programmes is common, and even seemingly positive changes are often based on compliance rather than true commitment. As a result, any change that does occur is often fleeting and labelled as the "flavour-of-the-month." This highlights the fundamental reason for their failure: these programmes are only addressing surface-level behaviours that are symptomatic of underlying mindsets driving the behaviours.

**Inward Mindset** with an inward mindset, colleagues are viewed not as people who matter, but as objects to use, blame, or ignore.



When organisations approach change from an inward mindset, they tend to rely on compulsory measures to enforce change, which can often feel like they are being "weaponised" during implementation. This approach typically invites even more resistance and justification for the very behaviours the initiatives are designed to eliminate, resulting in increased tensions.

Even the best plans for creating a healthy workplace culture can fail if they only focus on changing surface-level behavioural symptoms without addressing the underlying inward mindset first. Therefore, it is critical to prioritise shifting the inward mindset before implementing any new initiatives or programmes to ensure the long-term success of organisational change efforts.

According to a study conducted by McKinsey, organisations that identify and address pervasive mindsets at the beginning of change efforts are four times more likely to succeed than those that ignore this critical stage. Leaders therefore play a crucial role in this process: when they adopt an outward mindset, it naturally inspires the rest of the organisation to do the same.

By prioritising mindset as the first step, leaders can create the conditions for success that go beyond achieving incremental change at best. This approach sets the foundation for lasting and meaningful transformation within the organisation.

## Where to start changing an unhealthy workplace

Could it be that an inward mindset is the root cause of organisational challenges within your company? If this is the case, then the crucial factor in achieving lasting change is to fundamentally shift to an outward mindset. Sustainable change and a healthy culture are only possible through a mindset-first and leader-first approach.

The most significant catalyst for change is not simply a shift in self-belief, but a fundamental transformation in how individuals perceive and value their connections and responsibilities to others. The way people impact one another hinges on whether they hold a self-centred inward mindset or an impact-focused outward mindset.

**Outward Mindset** shifting from an inward to an outward mindset can unlock a whole new level of collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness among individuals, teams, and the organisation as a whole. The potential value of this approach far exceeds the high cost of being stymied in an unhealthy culture.

Creating an inclusive and innovative culture of accountable people begins with seeing others as individuals who matter and taking their needs, goals, and challenges into account. It involves being responsible for our impact on others. The outcomes that result from this approach have a compounding effect that elicits the full potential of individuals and the organisation.



Only through an outward mindset approach can organisations effectively avoid the detrimental effects of inward mindset thinking, which is significantly different from traditional approaches. This approach is a refreshing departure from ineffective trends of the past and creates conditions where sustained change can be achieved.

Incorporating outward mindset principles and tools into the culture is essential to achieving a unified outcome.

Great leaders recognise and appreciate the commitment of their teams as they strive to meet increasing demands and navigate unprecedented circumstances. When leaders consider the foundational human aspect of their work in addition to the technical aspects, they realise that positive change depends on our ability to see the truth in every situation, unclouded by bias or deception.

The way we perceive others and ourselves significantly impacts our behaviour and ability to identify innovative new opportunities and rise to challenges together.

## **Final Words...**

Leaders showing the courage to disrupt the inward mindset inertia holding back teams from their very best work will continue to spark an organisational transformation that is not only possible, but essential.

Partner with us to change mindset and realise the benefits of a programme of organisational culture change for your organisation.

Learn more about our approach to organisational culture change.

## **Connect with us**