

How to drive a positive workplace culture

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Your board's role

Your board sets the tone from the top of the organisation. You oversee the CEO or equivalent to help drive a positive workplace culture.

In this guide, we explain how you can use your organisation's People matter survey results to monitor and influence a positive culture.

For more information you can read our [resources to support Victorian public sector board directors, chairs and entities <https://www.boards.vic.gov.au/resources-boards>](https://www.boards.vic.gov.au/resources-boards) and [establishing portfolio governance arrangements <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/governance/portfolio-governance-arrangements/>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/governance/portfolio-governance-arrangements/).

Why workplace culture matters

Our [People matter survey results <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/people-matter-survey-data/>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/people-matter-survey-data/) and current research show that a positive workplace culture leads to better public policies, services, organisational outcomes and performance.

Employees who work in a positive environment are more productive, engaged, innovative and likely to speak up. For example, if they experience or witness negative behaviours.

They also take less sick leave and are less likely to report workplace health and safety issues.



Monitoring and shaping workplace culture is an ongoing process. But it's especially important to focus on improving culture during times of change or uncertainty.

How we measure workplace culture

Each year, employees across the Victorian public sector do the [People matter survey](https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/people-matter-survey-data/).

The results help us understand how they feel about their organisation and their work.

We analysed answers to the [2023 People matter survey questions](https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/about-the-people-matter-survey/2023-survey-questions/) to find out what improves workplace culture.

What the results tell us

To improve workplace culture, the public sector needs to focus on 5 key improvement areas and survey statements:

Organisational integrity survey statements

The survey statements we use to measure organisational integrity are:

- I believe the promotion processes in my organisation are fair
- I believe the recruitment processes in my organisation are fair
- I have an equal chance at promotion in my organisation
- My organisation does not tolerate improper conduct
- My organisation encourages employees to act in ways that are consistent with human rights
- My organisation encourages respectful workplace behaviours
- My organisation is committed to earning a high level of public trust
- My organisation takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Safety climate survey statements

The statements we used to measure safety climate are:

- Senior leaders consider the psychological health of employees to be as important as productivity.



- Senior leaders show support for stress prevention through involvement and commitment.
 - In my workplace, there is good communication about psychological safety issues that affect me.
 - All levels of my organisation are involved in the prevention of stress.
 - My organisation provides a physically safe work environment.
 - My organisation has effective procedures in place to support employees who may experience stress.
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Senior leadership survey statements

The statements we used to measure senior leadership are:

- Senior leaders provide clear strategy and direction.
 - Senior leaders model my organisation's values.
 - Senior leaders demonstrate honesty and integrity.
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Engagement survey statements

The statements we used to measure engagement are:

- My organisation motivates me to help achieve its objectives.
 - My organisation inspires me to do the best in my job.
 - I would recommend my organisation as a good place to work.
 - I feel a strong personal attachment to my organisation.
 - I am proud to tell others I work for my organisation.
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Wellbeing survey questions

We analysed these survey questions to measure wellbeing:

- Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel worried?
- Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel miserable?
- Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel happy?
- Thinking about the past three months in your current organisation, how often has your work made you feel enthusiastic?



- How would you rate your current level of work-related stress?
 - What are the main causes of your work-related stress?
 - In the last 12 months have you experienced any of the following negative behaviours: bullying, sexual harassment, violence and aggression, and/or discrimination?
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How to drive a positive workplace culture

Knowing what drives a positive workplace culture will help you find ways to improve it.

In this section, we'll explain the key improvement areas and provide tips and other research.

Organisational integrity

We need the community to have trust in how we work and what we do.

Organisations show integrity by:

- treating employees and the community fairly and with respect
- implementing fair and equitable policies and services
- providing full and frank advice to government.

Tips to improve organisational integrity

Boards should [monitor integrity <https://www.boards.vic.gov.au/integrity-guidance-board-directors>](https://www.boards.vic.gov.au/integrity-guidance-board-directors) in their organisation and work with their CEO, to:

- support and encourage regular integrity conversations at Board meetings and throughout the organisation
- actively monitor the organisation's integrity performance and risks
- implement clear and fair internal policies and procedures in line with [public sector values <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-values/>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-values/)
- ensure employees understand their [integrity obligations <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-integrity-framework/>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-integrity-framework/). For example, managing conflicts of interest, declaring gifts, benefits and hospitality.
- create a safe work environment for employees to report integrity concerns and address negative behaviours
- implement fair recruitment practices based on merit and equity.



Safety climate

Safety climate refers to how physically and psychologically safe employees feel at work.

Under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004](#)

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/occupational-health-and-safety-act-2004>, employers have obligations and duties to create a safe work environment.

When employees feel safe at work are more likely to:

- be their authentic self at work
- feel confident to speak up, share and ask questions
- report and respond to negative behaviour
- acknowledge mistakes and learn from them.

Creating a safe and mentally healthy workplace culture starts with senior leaders and managers.

Leaders can take practical steps to influence workplace culture. They lead by example and demonstrate behaviours and attitudes they want to see in their employees.

Evidence suggests that organisations that report a higher percentage of employees who feel their opinions matter at work had a reduction in turnover and safety incidents and an increase in productivity.

Tips to improve your safety climate

Boards should monitor the safety climate in their organisation and encourage their CEO to:

- check that systems, policies and processes support a safe and mentally healthy work environment
- implement mental health and wellbeing strategies that align with [Victorian public sector occupational health and safety guidance, policies and frameworks](#) <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/workforce-capability-leadership-and-management/workforce-management/managing-mental-health-and-safety-in-the-victorian-public-sector/>
- implement processes and procedures to identify, prevent and manage psychosocial risks
- raise awareness, share resources and educate employees about psychological safety
- implement a clear process for reporting and addressing negative behaviour
- respond early to reported issues using effective tools.



Senior Leadership

A strong workplace culture is built on leaders who model the [public sector values](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/ethics-behaviours-culture/public-sector-values/) and provide clear strategic direction.

Supportive leaders give employees clarity, appreciation, feedback and coaching.

This can make employees feel more engaged and connected to their work and organisation.

Tips for improving senior leadership

Boards should monitor the senior leadership in their organisation and encourage their CEO to lead by example and:

- model integrity, including remaining apolitical and providing frank and impartial advice
- implement organisational values and make these meaningful for employees
- provide clear strategic direction and set long-term organisational goals
- regularly engage with employees
- take leave and other entitlements
- provide opportunities for feedback and advice from the bottom up.

Engagement

Improving engagement helps organisations attract new talent, retain their employees and improve employee wellbeing.

Engagement and wellbeing are linked and affect motivation, productivity, retention and job satisfaction.

Engaged employees are much more likely than disengaged employees to recommend their organisation as a great place to work.

Tips for improving engagement

Boards should monitor engagement in their organisation and encourage their CEO, to:

- implement strategies that align with the Victorian Public Sector Commission's [drivers of wellbeing and engagement insights](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/data-sets-and-results/past-releases/2022-people-matter-survey-data/drivers-of-wellbeing-and-engagement/)



- empower managers to identify and provide meaningful work and growth opportunities
 - empower employees to have control over their work and how they do it
 - create an environment where employees feel safe to express their ideas, concerns and give feedback
 - communicate how you're addressing feedback and make continuous improvements.
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Wellbeing

Safe and healthy work environments benefit employees, employers and the Victorian community.

Research suggests that employees who report high levels of wellbeing are more likely to:

- be more engaged, creative and productive
- provide better customer service
- report more positive interactions with their managers
- be more confident to speak up
- be more satisfied with their job, career development and work-life balance.

Negative behaviours such as sexual harassment and bullying have an impact on employee wellbeing. Organisations need to implement clear reporting processes and respond appropriately.

Tips for improving wellbeing

Boards should monitor employee wellbeing in their organisation and encourage their CEO, to:

- establish or promote wellbeing measures and monitor and discuss as a board priority
- implement strategies that align with the Victorian Public Sector Commission's [drivers of wellbeing and engagement insights <https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/people-matter-survey-data/drivers-of-wellbeing-and-engagement/>](https://vpssc.vic.gov.au/data-and-research/people-matter-survey-data/drivers-of-wellbeing-and-engagement/)
- model respect and promote a culture that prioritises wellbeing
- provide opportunities to have honest conversations with employees at all levels
- create an environment where employees feel safe to discuss their wellbeing and ask for help
- acknowledge the impact of external stresses such as climate emergencies or events or organisational change.



Infographic on how to drive a positive workplace culture

This infographic shows a high-level view of:

1. the improvement areas
2. what drives change
3. potential benefits.

You can download a copy to help you start conversations with your board and CEO.



How to drive a positive workplace culture

PDF | 1.35 MB

</sites/default/files/2024-08/How-to-drive-a-positive-workplace-culture.pdf>



How to drive a positive workplace culture

1. Focus on an improvement area

To improve workplace culture, the public sector needs to focus on 5 key improvement areas. Taking action in one area will likely lead to improvement in others.



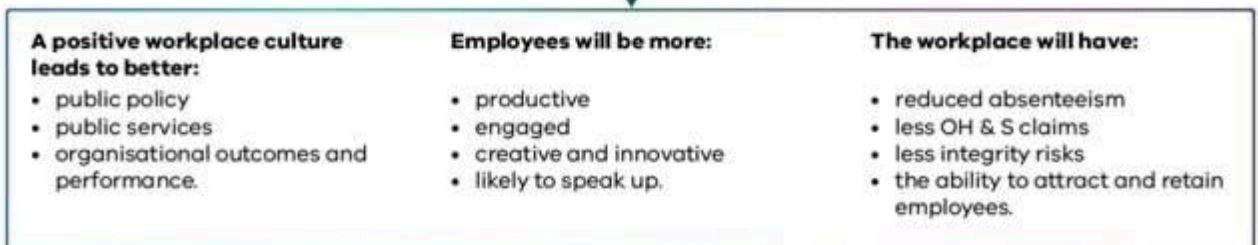
2. So you can impact these drivers of change



For example, encourage your CEO to:



3. Which can lead to these benefits



Victorian Public Sector Commission



Drivers that improve organisational integrity

The top 5 drivers that improve [organisational integrity](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/organisational-integrity-service-delivery-and-innovation-2023/) are:

- safety climate
- senior leadership
- learning and development
- safe to speak up
- collaboration.

Drivers that improve safety climate

The top 5 drivers that improve [safety climate](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/wellbeing-and-engagement-2023/#heading4) are:

- senior leadership
- organisational integrity
- workload
- learning and development
- safe to speak up.

Drivers that improve the perception of senior leadership

The top 5 drivers that improve the perception of [senior leadership](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/managers-and-leaders-2023/#heading4) are:

- organisational integrity
- safety climate
- learning and development
- collaboration
- job enrichment.

Drivers that improve engagement



The top 5 drivers that improve [engagement <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/wellbeing-and-engagement-2023/#heading5>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/wellbeing-and-engagement-2023/#heading5) are:

- organisational integrity
 - safety climate
 - senior leadership
 - meaningful work
 - learning and development.
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Drivers that improve wellbeing

The top 5 drivers that improve employee [wellbeing <https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/wellbeing-and-engagement-2023/#heading5>](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-data-state-of-the-public-sector/employee-experiences-in-the-workplace-2023/wellbeing-and-engagement-2023/#heading5) are:

- meaningful work
 - learning and development
 - job enrichment
 - safety climate
 - organisational integrity.
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