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Business Mindset II

How to Create a Work Culture Where People and Business Can Thrive

How to Create a Work Culture Where People and Business Can Thrive

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Through coaching, training and consultancy, Kate's expertise and support transforms the way people think and behave, helping people and businesses to thrive.

How positive is the culture in your company?

Are you and your employees genuinely happy to work there? Do each of you feel engaged and energised by your work, enjoy the work you do and get the opportunity to learn and develop?

When we can tick all these boxes, we and our employees will be thriving at work and we are likely to be experiencing much better business success. Thriving at work is essential for sustainable organisational performance. So how can we create a positive culture that we and our employees are genuinely happy to be part of?

This article provides an overview of the benefits of a positive culture, summarising the latest research evidence on what makes a difference, the things you can do as a business leader and where to start.
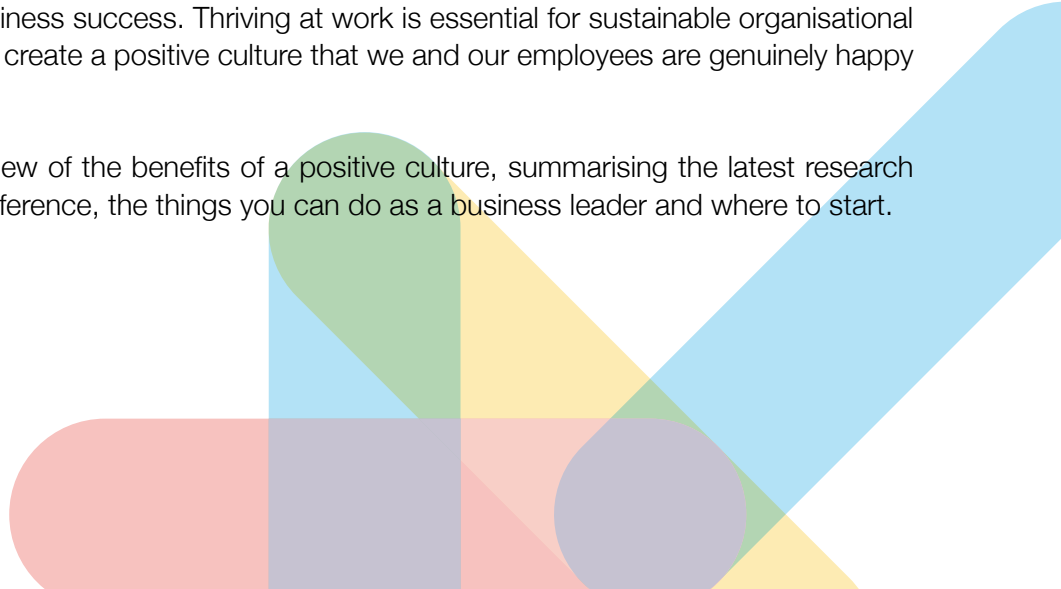
What are the benefits of a positive culture?

There is solid evidence to show that when we are thriving at work we are much more likely to feel good (e.g. job satisfaction, happiness and life satisfaction), enjoy better health and have improved business performance (e.g. productivity, creativity and profitability).

In contrast, when we do not feel enjoyment or get the chance to grow and develop, we become disengaged and demotivated. We might start 'quiet quitting'. These feelings impact our behaviour. We only put in the minimal amount of effort required to get the job done. We become less inclined to be proactive or 'go the extra mile'. Does this sound familiar?

Of course, it is unrealistic to expect ourselves and our employees to be bouncing out of bed every single day, full of excitement about work. But if negative feelings and behaviours prevail and persist there will be a negative impact on people and on business, from increased stress to increased staff turnover.

The business case is clear. So, how do we go about engaging and motivating our staff? What can we do to build a positive, thriving culture?

What can I do as a leader/ business owner?

There are many things you can do as a business owner to create a culture where people and business can thrive while making your company a better place to work.

It can be tempting to focus on simple token gestures such as free fruit or more plants in the workplace. These things are quick, low-cost, and visible. If only it were that simple! This can create a nicer working environment, but the impact of these surface-level changes is limited. A pleasant working environment is important but it is meaningless if larger issues are not addressed.

And it is certainly not about displaying trite quotes about positivity on the wall (e.g., 'failure is not an option' or 'think happy thoughts'). A culture of forced positivity ('toxic positivity') can be damaging as it can come across as dismissive and people may not speak up about challenges or issues that need to be addressed.

How can we make a meaningful difference to work culture?

As a business leader you set the tone for your company culture through what you say, how you say it, and what you do. Here is what the latest research evidence says we should be focusing on...

1.Communication and relationships

Communication and relationships are key to thriving at work. The aim is to create a culture where everybody treats one another with:

- integrity
- dignity
- respect
- trust
- support.

There should be an open and welcoming environment for all people and cultures and appreciation of one another's strengths. This is demonstrated by making sure everyone feels included, inviting contributions and by **genuinely listening** to what people have to say. The value of genuine listening cannot be overstated. It makes people feel respected, valued, and enables us to learn from their perspectives and ideas.

The need to provide a physically safe environment is obvious. Psychological safety is also key. In other words, it is important as a leader to enable people to feel safe to speak their minds and voice different opinions without fear of any negative impact. When people feel safe to be themselves and say what they think they feel **accepted, respected,** more **trusting** and are more likely to show commitment to their work.

1.Communication and relationships cont.

In many businesses there is a culture of competition, with employees competing against each other to get noticed or rewarded in some way. While some people find this motivating, overall, a culture of **collaboration** – where people help and support one another - is much more beneficial. As business leaders we need to make sure that we are providing enough **support** and resources for people to do their jobs well otherwise this can lead to frustration, stress, and burnout. We need to respect boundaries between home and work time. It also helps if employees can feel safe to share anything they need to about life outside of work that might be impacting their wellbeing and performance. This helps build genuine strong relationships and offers a chance for employers to be truly supportive.

It takes time and effort to build these relationships. People need the **opportunity to connect** with one another and to build trust. We need to encourage healthy work relationships through regular check-ins and social gatherings (ask employees what they want this to look like and take everyone's views into account). It is important to be effective and efficient at work but if we are always purely focused on the task then relationships at work may suffer. As business leaders we need to take the time to get to know our employees, what is important to them and what support they need.

When there is a mutual sense of **trust**, we become more willing to 'put ourselves out there', take risks, and think creatively. This is associated with better cooperation, more information sharing, and learning. Be aware of what can undermine trust (gossiping, for example) and instead focus on how we can inspire people to bring out the best in each other.

2. Work with meaning

A second key factor in research into thriving at work is the importance of everyone understanding why their work is important and how it contributes to the purpose of the business. Do you have a clear **mission and purpose** for your business and does each employee know how what they do contributes to the bigger picture?

It is important to show gratitude towards employees for the work they do. Celebrate the big wins and the small wins (and don't forget the people behind the scenes). When employees feel valued and that their wellbeing is important, they are more likely to feel motivated.

3. Autonomy

As business leaders it can be tempting to micromanage or to avoid delegating. But an **empowering leadership style** is strongly associated with thriving at work. We can empower staff by setting challenging but achievable goals (that align with their career aspirations) and providing the support they need to meet these goals.

If things don't go to plan then an empowering leader will prevent employees from feeling discouraged and help them to learn from mistakes.

When we empower staff in this way, they get the opportunity to grow and develop, we build their competence and confidence and everyone benefits from a mutual sense of trust.
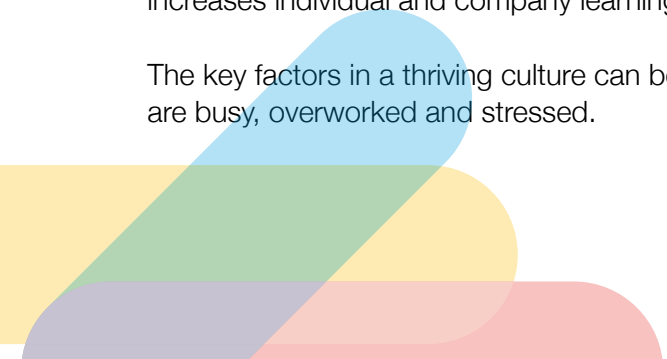
4. Approach to challenges

Most people face challenges at work. Stress can be caused by a range of things from too much work, ambiguity in our role or conflict and tensions in the team; any situation where we don't feel we have the resources to deal with it. So, what can we do about it?

Firstly, as leaders we must aim to provide the **resources** people need to do their jobs so that stress at work is minimised. It is important to ask employees what support they need (whether it is more time, more support, or further training, for example).

Secondly, the way that we talk about and respond to challenges is vital. There is strong evidence that as leaders we should promote a **growth mindset**, framing challenges as opportunities to learn, grow and improve. When something goes wrong - rather than looking for someone to blame (however tempting that might be!) - mistakes and failures should be treated as a chance to learn and improve. This increases individual and company learning, increases coping ability and builds resilience.

The key factors in a thriving culture can be difficult to build and maintain, especially when we ourselves are busy, overworked and stressed.

Making improvements

Depending on your current company culture, the factors outlined above may or may not feel like a big shift. It's likely that you feel confident in some areas, but other areas could do with some work.

As with many changes, start small and build up.

It is not possible to change a culture overnight but if you get clear on what you want you can start chipping away at it. You can focus on one area to start on and eventually aim to support the culture in the way all elements of your business are run, from defining your values to your recruitment and rewards processes. The things you choose to reward and recognise - through your actions and company processes - speak volumes.

How do I sustain this?

There is a lot of responsibility as a business owner to create the right culture. It is important to look after your own needs so that you can do this effectively. If you are not feeling positive about work it will be difficult to encourage others to feel this way. Your messages may come across as insincere and fall flat.

Research shows that being an authentic leader - genuine, self-aware, and transparent - is key to enabling yourself and others to thrive at work. You can help yourself by thinking about what you need in order to thrive. Think about your values and your 'why'. Ask for feedback to enhance your self-aware-ness. If you think you will struggle with some of the areas outlined seek support from peers, a coach (to build motivation, confidence and/or self-awareness) or a mentor (if you're looking for advice). Leadership can be a lonely place and so support from others is an active investment in yourself and your business.
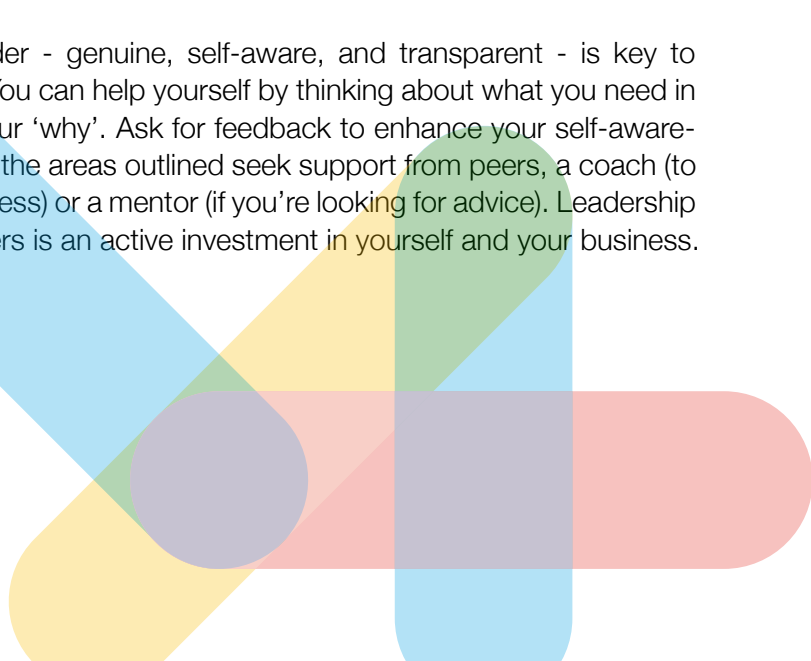
Is it all down to me?

No. As a leader you are the role model and you have the authority to influence policies, procedures, and resources. However, it is also down to employees to positively contribute to a thriving work culture.

Some employees may have more of the sorts of qualities that are known to help people to thrive at work than others (and people will vary over time, too). For example, some people may have more self-belief, be more determined, more optimistic, more proactive or have more resilience than others. But these qualities do not exist in a vacuum. Work context and the leadership support they receive is vital. For example, we can help build a person's self-belief by recognising their hard work, their wins, and encouraging them to take a growth mindset. Research shows that certain interventions, for example coaching, can also help people to develop these qualities.
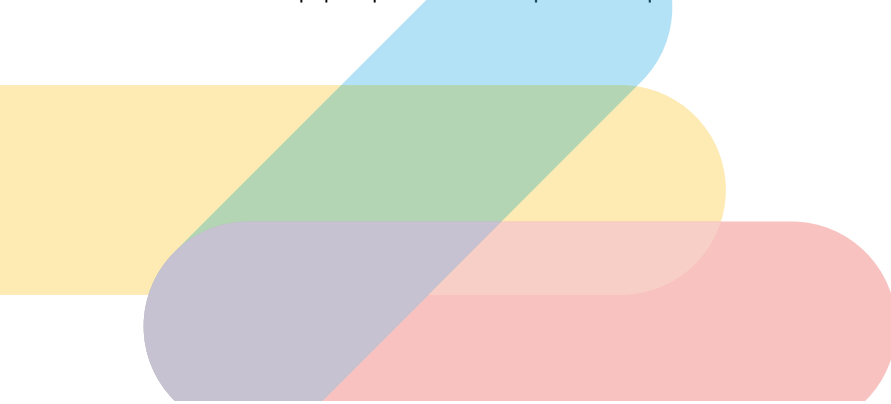
Where do I start?

The first step is to get an idea of your current company culture. How well do you currently address these factors? You could ask yourself the following questions:
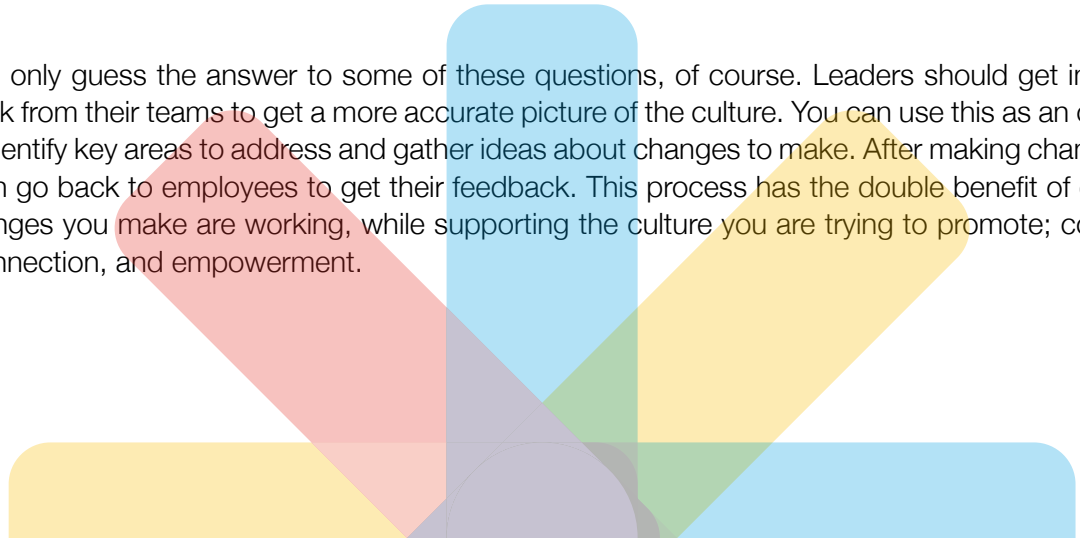
1. Do you give your employees freedom and choice about how they do their work? E.g. working from home versus in the office.

2. Do your employees have access to the knowledge and information they need to do their work? Or do they feel underequipped and therefore undermined?

3. Do you work in an environment where trust and mutual respect reign? For example, how do people talk to each other? Do people take time to really listen to each other? Is diversity genuinely welcomed? Do people show empathy for one another? Do you trust people enough to delegate to them?
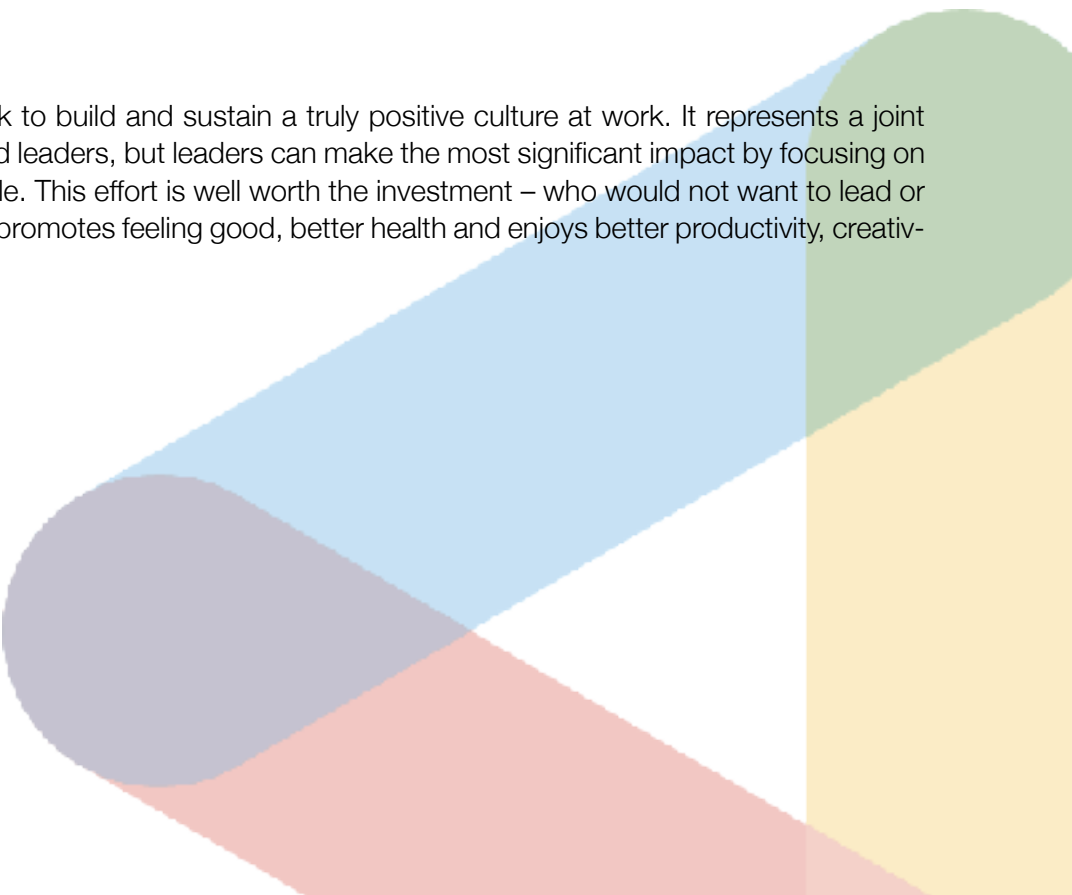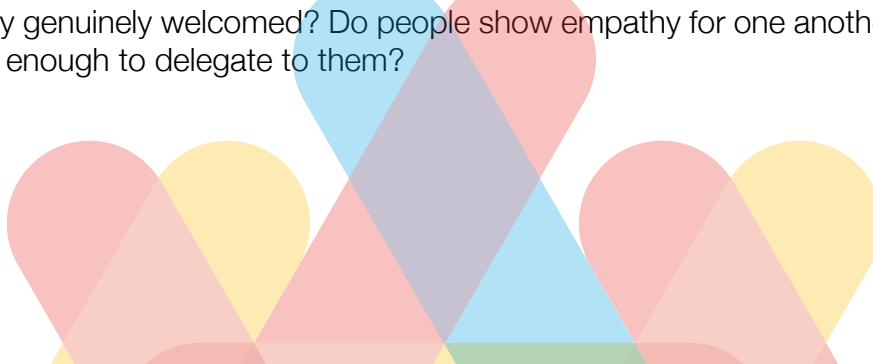
Where do I start cont.?

4. Does everybody know how their work fits into the bigger picture? E.g. Do they feel part of a team doing meaningful work?

5. Does everybody feel like their work matters? How do you show appreciation?

6. Does everybody view problems as an opportunity for learning and growth?

You can only guess the answer to some of these questions, of course. Leaders should get input and feedback from their teams to get a more accurate picture of the culture. You can use this as an opportunity to identify key areas to address and gather ideas about changes to make. After making changes you can then go back to employees to get their feedback. This process has the double benefit of ensuring the changes you make are working, while supporting the culture you are trying to promote; collaboration, connection, and empowerment.

Conclusion

In summary it is no small task to build and sustain a truly positive culture at work. It represents a joint effort between employees and leaders, but leaders can make the most significant impact by focusing on the areas outlined in this article. This effort is well worth the investment – who would not want to lead or work for a business that truly promotes feeling good, better health and enjoys better productivity, creativity, and profitability?

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