Shaping great work experiences

vaada
Victorian Alcohol & Drug Association

NADA
network of alcohol and other drugs agencies

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Acknowledgement of country

NADA proudly acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

We recognise, respect and value the deep and continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to land, water, community and culture.

We look to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for their cultural guidance, leadership and expertise.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

About VAADA

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association Inc. (VAADA) is the peak body representing publicly-funded AOD services in Victoria. We work to prevent and reduce AOD-related harms in the Victorian community by ensuring the people experiencing those harms, and the organisations that support them, are well-represented in policy, program development and public discussion. We do this by:

- engaging in policy development
- advocating for systemic change
- representing issues identified by our members
- providing leadership on priority issues
- creating a space for collaboration within the AOD sector
- maximising opportunities to build the capacity and capability of the sector
- keeping our members and stakeholders informed about issues relevant to the sector; and
- supporting evidence-based practice that reduces AOD related harms and maintains the dignity of those who use AOD (and related) services.

About NADA

The Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies (NADA) is the peak organisation for non-government alcohol and other drugs services in NSW. We advocate for, strengthen and support the sector. Our decisions and actions are informed by the experiences, knowledge and concerns of our members.

We represent 80 organisational members that provide services in over 100 locations across NSW. They provide a broad range of alcohol and other drugs services including health promotion and harm reduction, early intervention, treatment and continuing care programs. Our members are diverse in their structure, philosophy and approach to alcohol and other drugs service delivery.

We provide a range of programs and services that focus on sector and workforce development, data management, governance and management support, research and evaluation, sector representation and advocacy, as well as actively contributing to public health policy.

Together, we improve the health and wellbeing of people who use, or have used, alcohol and other drugs across the NSW community.

NADA has award level accreditation under the Australian Services Excellence Standards (ASES), a quality framework certified by Quality Innovation and Performance (QIP).

Shaping great work experiences

Your total work experience can be understood as a system of influences and processes that affect your state and behaviour at work, and thus how you can contribute to organisational and client success.

Organisations and their leaders cannot be satisfied by simply achieving efficiency and compliance. The remit is to craft a holistic work experience that is compelling, empowering and engaging, while spanning all organisational levels, members, and dimensions.

Scholarly research has identified an array of mechanisms that apply to anyone: frontline worker, executive, clinical expert, or team leader. Attention needs to be also directed at the work teams, organisations, and the wider sector, as well as their systems and structures within which the individual operates.

As no single aspect dominates your total work experience, not one intervention can address everything. This guide focuses on an architecture of subsystems that are malleable, providing a range of potential concepts and strategies you may choose to implement.

These actionable resources are designed to help you better understand your work experience and the phenomena in your organisation. All advice shared is deeply rooted in scientific evidence and converted to accessible explanations and practical suggestions so you can help yourself and help others.

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YOUR THREE-DIMENSIONAL PEOPLE STRATEGY

What is a People Strategy?

People Strategy refers to the set of principles, policies and practices that determine how your organisation attracts, motivates, leads, develops, rewards, and retains its employees to best accomplish the mission.

Why is a People Strategy important?

As the proverb goes: 'If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.' Without a well working people strategy, no one in your organisation can reliably make good decisions about how current and future employees help your organisation have a successful and sustainable future. Not hiring the right people, losing good people, and not realising the potential of the people you have, are among typical dilemmas that translate into severe organisational problems including low client satisfaction and retention, increasing recruitment costs, lost organisational knowledge, dwindling revenue and diminished productivity. Well intended workforce programs and activities may reside with individual roles or teams, yet they may not address the right problems, stand in conflict with each other, or do not receive the support they require. An overarching people strategy provides and aligns direction, which in turn give you and everyone else a shared understanding of how to approach organisational goals through your people.

How does a People Strategy operate?

A proper people strategy is a deliberate and declared philosophy about the relationship between your organisation and its workforce. It is related but distinct to a Human Resource strategy, which is typically more of a plan for managing logistics relating to employees. Your people strategy is a future-oriented framework for developing and implementing people related programs, policies and activities that address and solve your business problems and directly contribute to major long-term objectives of the organisation. Realising your people strategy means to define a position, accepting meaningful trade-offs, and forging fit among activities that affect how to recruit, retain, reward, motivate, lead, and develop a workforce so it delivers against your organisation's objectives.

How to address and align three strategic dimensions?

Three distinct dimensions of people leadership and management must be addressed and aligned:

Vertical alignment links the strategy of your organisation as a whole with the strategy to manage your people.

Horizontal alignment describes a coherent and consistent approach across all areas and levels of HR policy.

Action alignment is concerned with the actual implementation of the strategy during day-to-day operations.

What you and your organisation can do:

First, make sure there is an agreed and articulated business strategy. Don't have one? Get one! A brief recap: Organisational direction comes in several forms. The mission statement or purpose (Why do we exist as an organisation?) is your loftiest guiding light, and your least specific. This is followed by organisational ethics or values (What do we believe in and how do we behave?) as well as the vision or aspiration (What do we want to be?). Your business strategy are explicit statements about "What will be our game plan?"

	Organisation A	**Organisation B**
	differentiator	cost and service leader
Objective = precise, measurable, timely goal	*to reduce dependence relapse by 10% in five years*	*to grow to 12 service centres by 2027*
Scope = offering, customers, geographic boundaries	*for all referred clients by means of trusted care, peer support and constant monitoring*	*by offering convenient, effective services to families in NSW affected by harms related to AOD use*
Advantage = the unique activities or the complex combination of activities	*based on a new evidence-based model and support from a partnering university.*	*through expanding and integrating our partner clinic network.*

Accordingly, a well-defined and explicit business strategy describes your organisation's key priorities and boundaries, which should make it obvious to leaders and frontline alike which activities they should concentrate on and, more importantly, which they should not.

Next, broaden your understanding of People Strategy to include all 'tangible' structures, processes, technologies, and governance, as well as the 'soft' norms, culture, leadership, and work experiences. Align them vertically, horizontally and through action into a cohesive whole in the service of your mission.

Vertical	*Develop and maintain a highly skilled and loyal workforce that can establish effective, long-term client relationships*	*Establish an efficient system to recruit and train a growing workforce to meet minimum standards*
Horizontal	*Focus on policies that develop and retain highly skilled staff*	*Focus on policies that standardise recruitment, replacement, and roles*
Action	*Lead with high standards, give permission to fail, learn as a group, consider various voices when making decision*	*Lead through clear expectations, fairly recognise and reward performance, design stimulating work*

Vertical alignment: Make your People Strategy support your business strategy.

- Consider your workforce when (your upper leadership is) making decisions. Your existing people are not an afterthought to your business, they are your business.
- Include people responsible for human resources when your organisation is developing and deciding the strategic objectives of the organisation. Make them responsible, make them a partner.
- Work backward from your strategic plan to understand how many people you need when, what skills you need, who you need to fit with your aspirations. Your explicit responses then inform your approach to recruiting, renumeration, development, leadership, among others.
- Involve your line managers (or equivalent) to review that your people strategy continues to be relevant and usefully supports the business goals. Encourage them to suggest refinements.

Horizontal alignment: Make your HR policies consistent across all levels and topical areas.

- Create useful policies—explicit courses or principles of action—for how your organisation will attract and select, develop, promote, lead, reward and retain people. Make every effort to ensure these policies are mutually supportive. For instance, if recruiting for the best talent, also have an adequate reward and retention scheme in place. Or, if chiefly selecting by personality—fit, make sure you can train everyone the technical skills required to succeed.
- Make the policies available to everyone, actively promote them and explain what they mean. Check that everyone knows what their individual role is in implementing the people strategy.
- Involve your line managers and frontline to review that these policies continue to be relevant and usefully support the business goals.

Action alignment: Model your day-to-day behaviour so it reflects the ideas above.

- Line managers (or equivalent) are provided with the training they need to implement your people strategy and HR policies. They are also appraised against targets relating to the implementation.
- Attract and select new staff in line with the business objectives. Do not compromise.
- Develop and train all staff so they can maximally contribute to achieving the business objectives.
- Design all work and roles so people appointed can optimally do what they are asked to.
- Recognise publicly those people who 'live' your strategies. Consider making them leaders.
- Be (financially) prepared to reward, promote, and retain the people that contribute the most.

ENGAGE & EMPOWER

What are Engagement and Empowerment?

Engagement describes your commitment and connection to your organisation. Empowerment refers to your sense of being encouraged and enabled to address the challenges at work yourself.

Key elements of Engagement and Empowerment

Informing refers to you are being provided with complete and reliable facts and explanations, so you can understand workplace directions and operations, and make sense of what happens around you.

Participative decision-making refers to the use of your information, ideas, and input by your leaders to derive decisions that affect you, your organisation, or clients.

Concern describes the general regard shown for you as a person, by way of your peers and leaders keeping track of what is going on with you and your work, as well as taking the time to discuss concerns.

Coaching refers to guidance and facilitated introspection, so you can learn how to become more self-reliant.

Why are Engagement and Empowerment important?

Being empowered and engaged drives your proactive work behaviours and superior performance. On the contrary, without being given meaningful amounts of information and decision-making authority, you will not feel enthusiastic or immersed in your job and will tend to do the bare minimum at work. Undermining your agentic needs further over prolonged periods can lead to real psychosomatic illnesses. For your organisation, workers that are empowered will become engaged by the work itself, which in turn increases organisational citizenship, staff retention, innovation, performance, and client experiences.

How do Engagement and Empowerment operate?

When your overall sense of empowerment and engagement is low, this may be due to:

- being responsible for important outcomes but not provided the means to address them
- getting penalised for failure disproportionally more than rewarded for success
- your work goals and means being micro-managed.

In contrast, your chances to feel empowered and engaged increase, when:

- you are informed about everything important and involved in key decision making
- there is safety and support that allows you to show initiative, be proactive, and take control
- you are shown concern and coached to unlock your potential.

What you can do for yourself:

- Understand your need for information in type and scope. To perform or make progress, do you require data or facts, explanation about principles and dependencies, confirmation on your view, feedback about yourself, or some endorsement for something you aspire to execute? State what you seek to understand, and how much detail and context you require.
- Ask for the opportunity to share your views, concerns, or ideas to contribute to something important. State what decision you seek to influence. Understand and confirm who is the right recipient, when is a good time, what is the best approach, and how to best follow up.
- Solicit support when you need it. Be explicit and share when you are overworked, welcome advice, or need some kindness. Most people will gladly offer what they can. Respect if someone exhausted his or her capacities. Offer a gesture like a coffee run to show your appreciation.
- Become coachable by building your ability and stability to withstand the necessary constructive criticism needed to grow professionally. Accept that you are not perfect, everyone is a work-in-progress. Your shortcomings are no reason to be embarrassed if you take pride in improving them.
- Listen actively to feedback provided. Try not to be defensive and offended but hear a person out. Clarify what someone means just to be sure you understand it. Give yourself time to process, then envision what success looks like, and make a plan. Start implementing your plan. Free yourself from immediate results and focus on incremental improvements to entrench new habits.

What you can do for others:

- Lead by example: set high standards for performance by your own behaviour at work.
- Share information widely: push most critical and urgent information to your workers, make other information easily accessible so workers can find and process on their own.
- Encourage workers to express ideas, opinions, and suggestions. Actively listen and consider them. Respond and reflect on what is being said. Confirm your understanding. Use it to make decisions.

- Express confidence in others' abilities to perform their jobs autonomously. Share gradually more power with those who can rely ever less on precise ends or predefined means. Provide guardrails for what success looks like. Hold workers responsible for outcomes.
- Communicate who makes which decisions by clear rules on 'in scope' and 'out of scope'. Describe what criteria workers need to consider for when to just decide vs. seek more input vs. escalate.
- Be transparent about your own decision-making as it affects other workers. Offer insights on how you approach a given situation: democratic, autocratic, by consensus, or delegation by expertise.
- Explain the purpose and mechanisms of organisational decisions, policies, rules, and expectations.
- Interact with other workers and show concern for their work experience and challenges. Find the time to understand what work others do. Figuratively: walk in their work shoes now and then.
- Stay on the pulse of workplace wellbeing by relating to others. Respect their life. Be kind.

MOTIVATE

What is Work Motivation?

Work motivation refers to the psychological forces that shape your choice, effort, and persistence towards work goals.

Key elements of Work Motivation

Autonomy describes your sense of choice and endorsement in a task. You need to feel that most actions emanate from within and reflect who you really are, instead of being the result of external work pressures.

Competence describes your sense of mastery and efficacy in your activities. You need to feel that you are capable at what you do and largely can accomplish projects and achieve goals at work.

Relatedness describes your sense of social connections and concern for others. You need to feel that you are connected to others at work, have some caring relationships, and belong to a community.

Why is Work Motivation important?

No work will get done without being motivated. And if your work motivation is too low, you avoid tasks, work slowly, and give up early. Humans are intrinsically motivated by three deeply anchored psychological needs; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The extent to which these are satisfied influences your behaviours and thus outcomes of your work. For your organisation, demotivated workers translate to client dissatisfaction, low innovation, and impaired productivity. As an organisation, it is important to find ways to satisfy these self-determined needs and avoid undermining them in the workplace.

How does Work Motivation operate?

When your work motivation is generally low, this may be due to:

- being mostly extrinsically motivated by social norms, financial needs and promises of reward
- your work environment not addressing your needs for professional growth and social connection
- too little room for yourself to determine the goals and means of your work.

In contrast, your chances to sustain motivation and achieve more challenging work goals, increase when:

- the work environment allows you to satisfy your deeply anchored psychological needs
- you have sufficient control and self-direction over useful portions of your work life, goals and means
- experiences at work regularly lead to a sense of progress, mastery and connectedness.

What you can do for yourself:

- Explore the freedom and boundaries of your role. Ask about the extent of your job autonomy.
- Become good at setting your own SMART goals: *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic,* and *Timely*. Intentionally engage in actions that will bring you closer toward your goals.
- Take responsibility for your decisions and behaviours: take credit for success and accept the criticism for failures. Advocate for yourself.
- Improve your self-awareness, decision-making skills, self-regulation, and goal-setting abilities.
- Become more confident by reflecting on past mastery experiences relating to work and other life domains. Observe others, envision future success, and make the most out of feedback.
- Accept that the more you learn and practice, the more skilled and self-determined you will feel.

- Seek positive relationships with people at work who will support you in the pursuit of your goals.
- Forge close relationships with (a few) colleagues who will support you when work is tough.

What you can do for others:

- Reconsider extrinsic rewards: too few can lead to a sense that staff are not appreciated or fairly compensated and recognised, but too many can inhibit intrinsic motivation.
- Encourage workers to be more autonomous and active in their roles. Ensure they have control over their work and can make decisions regarding their roles.
- Model and share what autonomy mean. Instil that with freedom comes great responsibility.
- Be less prescriptive in assigning tasks and provide workers opportunities to express their ideas.
- Consult with those who are affected by your decisions and provide a rationale for decisions made.
- Do not micro-manage and reduce bureaucratic rules that dampen autonomy.
- Provide opportunities for development and learning. Together envision future success.
- Offer regular positive and constructive feedback. Remind about past successes and growth to date.
- Introduce mentoring opportunities. Let workers learn at their own pace.
- Build workers' self-esteem and confidence through challenging yet achievable tasks. Jointly explore stretch targets, innovation projects, role rotation, secondments.
- Build teams that share goals that matter. Team up workers so they must achieve together. Induct new members.
- Know workers' names, skills, interests, and family situations. Respect professional and personal boundaries. Share something about yourself.

SUPPORTING WELLBEING

What is Wellbeing at work?

Wellbeing refers to your physical, mental, and emotional states linked to your work experiences.

Key elements of Wellbeing at work

Job crafting describes your proactive changes about the physical, cognitive, or social aspects of your work. You may increase useful resources at work or renegotiate those job demands that deplete your energy.

Psychological detachment describes your mental distancing from job-related thoughts during non-work time.

Recovery describes your replenishing of exhausted mental and physiological resources once you are no longer occupied with work-related tasks.

Emotion self-regulation refers to your management of feelings and impulses through cognitive reappraisal of challenging situations and mindfulness.

Why is Wellbeing at work important?

Your wellbeing as it relates to work is fundamental to sustained health, happiness, and performance. If you feel fatigued or stressed too often too long, you will likely make more errors, miss scheduled work, empathise less with clients or co-workers, and heighten your risk of substance use and burnout. For your organisations, low worker wellbeing can mean an increase in worker absences, compensation claims, errors, and mistakes, all which have negative flow-on effects on clients and productivity.

How does Wellbeing operate?

When your overall wellbeing is low, this may be due to:

- working excessive hours, very fast, or with significant emotional or physical intensity
- Poor work-life balance, e.g., work carrying over into non-work time, or interfering with family life and responsibilities
- unpredictable situations, ambiguous goals and tasks, or unrealistic deadlines.

In contrast, your chances to feel physically, emotionally, and mentally well increase, when you:

- actively craft your job to harmonise demands and resources at work
- Allow yourself to detach from work experiences to recharge and recover
- practice regulating your emotions and how they affect you.

What you can do for yourself:

- Realise supporting resources: ask others for more information and your expected duties when your role is ambiguous, seek out tasks that fit your strengths and interests, reframe client or colleague dissatisfaction as opportunities to learn and improve, reallocate your available work time against the highest organisational priorities, and request help, expertise, or guidance, when needed.
- Reduce taxing demands: avoid ambiguous tasks or control their uncertainty, move away from roles that are incompatible with your strengths and interests, reduce interactions with acutely negative colleagues, and avert responsibilities that lack resources such as time, information, support.
- Detach from work during work breaks, in the afternoon or evening, on weekends, and during short or long vacations. Set and comply with your own boundaries between work and non-work environments: eat lunch away from your work desk, manage work emails and calls using a separate device that you can disregard, establish dedicated spaces at home to work or relax.
- Distance yourself from work stressors and problem solving when off the job: end your workday with a to-do list to leave behind, establish mental escape routines, avoid work talk over dinner.
- Recover by means of exercise, hobbies, meditation, entertainment, social activities—whatever distracts and energises you. Schedule these things regularly in advance. Sleep 7~9 hours daily.
- Reappraise seemingly taxing work situations by separating assumptions and emotions from facts. Do not dwell on the negative or catastrophe but take a step back and view your situation from a third-person perspective. Accept what you cannot change. Notice that you always have a choice.
- Be more mindful and consciously present in what you are doing at work, while you are doing it. Pay close attention to your physical sensations, thoughts, and emotions. Once you see them more clearly, you can act when you need to with what you need. Typical approaches include: brief exercises such as stop-breath-observe-proceed, single-tasking, regular breaks and rest, slowing down for more focus and getting stuff done quicker, expressing gratitude for the good things.

What you can do for others:

- Empower and transfer power to employees, acknowledge different perspectives, share a lot of information, encourage self-initiation. Offer opportunities for input and choice on distributing

work and roles, planning tasks and rosters, matching responsibilities to strengths, among others.

- Regularly monitor wellbeing and job stress levels among all staff via verbal check-ins or monthly mini surveys. Respond with immediate measures. Something, however small, can be done quickly.
- Train staff on means for psychological detachment and recovery. Create opportunities for staff to connect. Have weekly opt-ins for staff sport, yoga, or mediation.
- Establish formal and informal organisational structures to support the associated changes: discussion meetings to enhance teamwork, escalation protocols for problems, useful policies and practices for breaks and rest, communication norms for outside hours, among others.

SHAPE STIMULATING WORK

What is Stimulating Work?

Stimulating work refers to the degree to which your job requires you to use different skills and abilities, engage in problem solving, and perform a range of different tasks.

Key elements of Stimulating Work

Skill variety describes the degree to which your job requires you to use a variety of skills and abilities.

Task variety refers to the degree to which you perform a wide range of tasks in your role.

Problem solving describes the degree to which your job requires you to 'think outside the box'.

Why is Stimulating Work important?

Work that is not perceived as challenging and interesting can make employees disengaged, they have lower job satisfaction, and often do not grow professionally. Repeatedly unstimulating work can create boredom, disconnection and anxiety that may result in burnout, depression, and physical illness. For your organisation, it can mean impaired performance, higher error and accident rates, absenteeism, and turnover.

What does Stimulating Work look like?

When you experience unstimulating work, this may be due to:

- a restricted variety of tasks
- merely solving problems that pose few challenges and feel monotonous
- insufficient opportunities to meaningfully use your skills and knowledge.

In contrast, you are likely to experience greater stimulation on the job, when you:

- apply different skills and abilities to complete your work
- carry out a greater range tasks to achieve your goals
- are required to 'think outside the box' to create solutions to problems.

What you can do for yourself:

- Imagine your job as if it were really interesting: What are the missing elements? Make a list. Are there any items on the list that are viable to introduce into your role?
- Craft your job by changing the variety and difficulty of tasks, people you work with, skills to use.
- Where possible, do more of what you are interested in. Seek out an opportunity to trial something new.
- Alternate your day-to-day routines and responsibilities.
- Take on tasks that build on and build out your existing skills and strengths.
- Stretch your comfort zone and set yourself more challenging goals.
- Ask your manager for more challenging projects or assignments.
- Seek out learning opportunities such as trainings, webinars, and conferences.
- Learn more deliberately from and with others: observe others, adopt things that fit you.
- Ask your manager and peers about skills that you should acquire.

What you can do for others:

- Distribute similar types of tasks over different staff to avoid concentration and monotony.
- Help employees break up repetitive responsibilities with tasks that are varied and challenging.
- Design jobs and tasks so they are neither too hard nor too easy, customise this to everyone.
- Ask staff about their untapped expertise and skills that can be put to good use.
- Share information about your role and responsibilities so employees can link in with their skills.
- Mentor employees to help them see opportunities and become able to connect the dots.
- Consider job rotation and secondments so staff exit routines and grow professionally.

ENABLE MASTERY AT WORK

What is Mastery at work?

Mastery refers to the degree to which you receive clear information about your effectiveness in performing your job and understand the expectations that your colleagues and the wider organisation have about your role.

Key elements of Mastery at work

Role clarity describes the degree to which you clearly understand what you need to do and what is expected of you to do your job well. More specifically, mastery includes having a high degree of clarity about your job role and what your colleagues and the wider organization expects of you.

Feedback refers to the degree to which your job or others provide information about your performance in the role so that you know how well you are doing. This does not have to wait until the annual performance review is due; do it regularly and informally.

Task identity is the extent to which your job allows you to take a task from beginning to end, because this means you will gain a thorough understanding of how your work fits into the bigger picture of the organisation.

Why is Mastery at work important?

Work that does not support mastery increases your chance to experience job stress, poor well-being, and job dissatisfaction. It may even prevent you from professional growth and drive your decision to exit your job. For your organisation, it can mean impaired performance, inefficiency, and a lack of agility.

How does Mastery at work operate?

When you experience low degrees of mastery at work, this may be due to:

- excessive ambiguity about your role and responsibilities
- insufficient feedback and recognition about the part of your work that you do well
- working only on fragmented 'bits' of a process preventing a big picture perspective.

In contrast, you are likely to experience higher degrees of mastery on the job, when you:

- are clear on what to do and why

- receive performance feedback and recognition from supervisors, peers, and the job itself
- can complete a whole 'piece' or process of work with identifiable outcomes.

What you can do for yourself:

- Speak to your supervisor about the tasks you have been assigned and what is expected of you.
- Ask for clear performance criteria and understand how your performance will be judged.
- Ask what your work unit is trying to achieve? Your teammates can also help you to understand the responsibilities and expectations associated with your role.
- Ask for feedback from those that are closer to your work (e.g., colleagues) than others (e.g., your CEO). Ask whilst memories are still fresh, not six months past a project or event.
- Be clear about what you need feedback on, e.g.: your general performance in the role, a specific aspect of your work, elements of a particular project?
- Make it easy for others to give feedback, ask "What's one thing that I could improve on? What's something I am good at and can rely on?"
- Ask your manager to describe how your daily tasks or your team's efforts fit in the bigger picture and support the broader objectives of your organisation.

What you can do for others:

- Provide employees with clarity about the key objectives, core tasks and responsibilities expected of the role they have been assigned. Step through explanation using: What, Why, Who, How, When.
- Supply written position descriptions to increase clarity of role, define performance criteria, and enable competency gaps to be easily identified.
- Make clear how existing and new employee's tasks fit into the bigger picture and how the roles and reporting relationships contribute to the organisation's overall objectives.
- Reorganise work by combining tasks done by different people, so that one employee completes a full process.
- Use team meetings as a time to share and celebrate successes. Also provide internal and external stakeholder feedback directly to workers.
- Provide performance reviews to communicate what has been done well and provide constructive advice for future development that links rewards to job performance.
- Ensure workers get feedback on their performance, ideally from the task as well as from their supervisor.

ADD AGENCY TO WORK

What is agency at work?

Agency refers to the degree of autonomy, control, and influence that you have over where, when, and how you do your work.

Key elements of agency at work

Scheduling autonomy describes the degree to which you can organise your own schedule and decide the order in which things are done. For example, starting times, breaks, and time allocation.

Decision making autonomy describes the degree to which you can make judgements and decisions individually. For example, prioritisation of tasks, judgement of risks, and allocation of resources.

Methods autonomy describes the degree to which you can choose the methods and tools to achieve your work goals. Such as, comparing conceptual and practical approaches.

*Importantly, ensure your aspiration and actions for more agency comply with professional standards or formal rules - they exist for a reason. If in doubt, check with your supervisor and explicit documentation.

Why is agency at work important?

Overly restrictive work increases your risk of experiencing mental health issues and job dissatisfaction. Little room for input can limit your professional growth and engagement. For your organisation, restricting independent decision making can lead to lower productivity and safety risks.

How does agency at work operate?

When you experience low degrees of agency at work, this may be due to:

- a lack of flexibility or limited chances to provide input towards the scheduling and sequencing of tasks
- excessive bureaucracy and red tape limiting the availability of different work methods
- retribution and criticism for mistakes and micromanagement from supervisors.

In contrast, you are likely to experience higher degrees of agency on the job, when you:

- control the timing and scheduling of your tasks
- decide the best methods of completing a task, and are able to show initiative
- make decisions independently and feel empowered in doing so.

What you can do for yourself:

- Speak to your manager and consult professional standards to understand both the outcomes of your job and the formal restrictions under which you must operate.
- Identify more effective or efficient methods of carrying out your work, list and rank them for utility and urgency. Develop a sensible argument or business case to share with your manager.
- Ask for and take more ownership in (smaller) projects to develop and showcase your agency and abilities.
- Reveal your other well-developed skills that may not be directly related to your job (description) but useful for your organisation. Explore with your manager how you might put them to good use.
- Show more personal initiative and judgment in carrying out the work assigned, share what you do and how you do it, invite honest and fair feedback.
- Create and seize more opportunities for independence and freedom, start slow and be sensible.

What you can do for others:

- Consider opportunities for decentralisation and flatter structures that devolve some authority and autonomy to others.
- Explore with staff: ways of participative decision-making, optimal scheduling, and discretion in work method choices.
- Encourage your staff to take a more proactive approach. Engage in regular and reciprocal feedback about shifts in autonomy and the tweaks needed to reduce errors and friction.
- Accept that not everything will work and do not unnecessarily condemn mistakes. Move away from a blame culture and towards a solution focus.
- Use difficult decisions or organisational changes you have implemented as learning opportunities. Distil key learnings and your thought processes into short case studies to share with your team.

REALISE RELATIONAL WORK

What is Relational Work?

Relational work refers to the extent to which you experience a sense of support from your supervisor and colleagues. It also extends to how your work is valued by others, including people outside the organisation, such as industry peers and clients.

Key elements of Relational Work

Social support refers to the extent you feel supported by those you work with, including your supervisors, team members, and other colleagues.

Task significance describes how much you feel your work has importance to the lives of others and society more broadly.

Beneficiary contact relates to the frequency in which you interact or meet with people who meaningfully benefit from your work.

Why is Relational Work important?

Workplaces and work itself that does not involve some genuine connections and support are likely to reduce your job satisfaction, increase stress, and may negatively affect your mental health. For your organisation, low relational work will lower staff commitment to organisational goals, reduce sharing of errors, and increase turnover.

How to address Relational Work?

When you have few relational experiences at work, this may be due to:

- your peers, teams and supervisors offering insignificant social support to one another
- working on tasks that provide minimal, if any, feedback on their value within the organisation
- having minimal opportunities to feel valued for efforts by people outside the organisation.

In contrast, you are likely to have better relational experiences on the job, when you:

- support your peers and show personal interest, and vice versa
- work on tasks which add a clear sense of value to the organisation
- receive feedback from outside the organisation, leading to a sense of feeling valued.

What you can do for yourself:

- Prioritise what supportive resources will likely help you most: emotional, informational, companionship; tangible or intangible. Write it down and commit to make it happen.
- Ask your supervisor and peers for this kind of support in your workplace. Just ask. Be specific.
- Establish high quality connections by helping others succeed: share useful information and resources and offer time and advice. Others likely value your help and provide support in return.
- Invest in establishing a few high-quality connections through respectful engagement, active listening, and becoming emotionally accessible.
- Proactively build out your professional networks to include industry peers and past and potential clients. They add perspective and goodwill. Conferences and industry events are great platforms.
- Seek out more information and feedback to holistically understand how your job and contributions ultimately benefit clients or end users. Ask for feedback on the difference you make.
- Reframe how you view your role from merely being in a job to benefiting others.

What you can do for others:

- Demonstrate and model that you care about what others regard as important, and be there to help when others at work are struggling.
- Create opportunities for staff to briefly catch up (5-10min) on most days or shifts so they can raise any potential issues or areas where they may benefit from support.
- For distributed or remote work settings, establish a dedicated channel (e.g., on Teams 'Help'; a reserved email subject 'seek support') through which staff can reach out and respond to each other.
- Consult members outside your immediate circle of colleagues for guidance when creating project plans or undertaking new initiatives.
- Share targeted feedback with the relevant employees about how their efforts and work have assisted the broader context of the organisation.
- Help staff see how they contribute to the 'big picture' of client and organisational success.
- Create an internal recognition program so employees can feel a stronger sense of value and worth from their work. Do not make it competitive. Share positive client feedback publicly.

- Make yourself available informally in social settings such as lunch or coffee breaks. Invite and include all relevant team members or shift staff to occasionally share time during work hours. Also offer 1:1 time.

ENSURE WORK IS TOLERABLE

What is Tolerable Work?

Tolerable work describes the extent to which the demands of a job are reasonable and manageable. Typical demands relate to workload, time pressure, role clarity, physical and emotional requirements. People may have varying experiences and thresholds for what is too much (e.g., too challenging) or too little (e.g., too boring), yet everyone should have the sense that job demands are tolerable.

Key elements of Tolerable Work

Time pressure refers to the degree to which an adequate amount of time is provided to complete your work.

Emotional demands describe the degree to which your work creates emotionally demanding situations.

Role conflict refers to the extent that feedback, instruction and demands are inconsistent.

Why is Tolerable Work important?

Work that you experience as overly demanding can cause discomfort or strain. Over time, these experiences may feel intolerable, with potential to drive psychological distress, physical injuries, low performance, and burnout. For your organisation, intolerable work can result in errors that negatively affect clients, industrial disputes and litigation, absenteeism, and turnover.

How does Tolerable Work operate?

When you have too many intolerable demands at work, this may be due to:

- not having enough time allocated to complete the required tasks
- tasks that are too cognitively or emotionally challenging for you, leading to a sense of burnout
- receiving conflicting instructions or feedback with a high degree of unnecessary ambiguity.

In contrast, more tolerable demands involve:

- a manageable workload with reasonable time pressure and work hours
- tasks with manageable emotional, mental, or other pressures that create challenge without unnecessary or constant strain
- work without excessively conflicting expectations or instructions.

What you can do for yourself:

- Reflect on which aspect of your work is contributing to your challenging experiences. Make a list and be specific about what causes what (e.g., emotional clients > stress, long work hours > fatigue).
- Educate yourself on national and organisational policies related to fatigue management (including overtime, rosters, and shift work).
- Sit down with a colleague or friend to brainstorm potential solutions that can be raised with your employer. Approach the relevant organisational authority or role (e.g., supervisor, HR, shift lead).
- Discuss and negotiate your workload and deadlines with your manager. They may not be aware of the current length of time some tasks take to complete.
- Examine what truly rebuilds your depleted energy (e.g., a coffee, a chat to a colleague, calm or loud music), and build opportunities to realise what you need to detach and recover.
- Take an adequate number and amount of time for breaks. A quick ten-minute walk around the block can assist greatly with cognitively and emotionally demanding tasks.
- Seek clarification from your manager if you have received conflicting feedback and instructions about your job's goals, tasks, and outcomes. Confirm your understanding: 'So my role is ...'

What you can do for others:

- Seek open input from staff on experiences relating to workload, scheduling, autonomy, physical and emotional demands, interactions with colleagues and clients, among others. Jointly identify and prioritise themes, allocate time and resources to the most pressing. Get started.
- Educate yourself on national and organisational policies related to fatigue management (including overtime, rosters, and shift work).
- Monitor workloads during periods of high demands and provide additional support where required. Ask your staff what means of support might work best for most.

- Allow employees to take on-demand breaks or 'time out' from emotionally challenging work. Model such behaviour so it becomes part of the organisational culture.
- Use open communication during times of change, including clear explanation of the reasons behind decisions. Provide an avenue for staff to voice concerns and feel heard.
- Provide clear and consistent feedback and instructions. This becomes particularly important if feedback is shared within the team.
- Attend training to increase your understanding of how to safely allocate workload. Do not be afraid to regularly check in to make sure you are doing this correctly.

DEVELOP PROFESSIONALLY

What is Professional Development?

Professional development refers to relatively permanent changes in how you think, feel and/or act at work. It is more than just knowing something new, having participated in a training, or earning credentials; it means you do things differently at work so you can be and remain effective in your role.

Key elements of Professional Development at work

Professional growth means you either acquire something new or you modify something that already exists. To better unpack and plan for what you seek to change, you may use these learning targets:

Knowledge, you become aware of and understand facts or principles related to a subject.

Cognitions, you change how you think by way of processing and evaluating information in different ways.

Affect, you change how you regulate feelings or the way you feel about something, shifting your position.

Motivation, you change how you regulate your resources towards achieving some goal.

Skills, you change how you perform certain psychomotor activities, typically adding more ease or precision.

Abilities, you change a complex combination of the above, enabling useful decisions and behaviours.

Why is Professional Development important?

Work that does not advance your abilities to adapt and perform, conflicts with your innate need to master your environment, heightening your chance of experiencing job stress, poor well-being, job dissatisfaction, and career obstacles. For your organisation, deficient human resource development often translates to quality issues in products and services, increased errors and safety issues, and impaired productivity.

How does Professional Development operate?

Changing how you think, feel and act at work is the result of your interactions with the environment. Many experiences may be opportunities for learning, though they might present as more or less:

prominent or obscure, formal or informal, integrated or external, episodic or continuous, deliberate or opportune, voluntary or prescribed, individualistic or collective, actual or virtual, directed by you or someone else, structured or fluid, active or passive, and so on. Be open and solicit, seize, and shape learning experiences that benefit you or others.

What you can do for yourself:

- **SMART Goals:** (1) Envision and set development goals as performance goals: not what you want to learn, but what you want to achieve at work and the consequences. Make goals *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic,* and *Timely*. (2) Plan the implementation: *What, When, Who, How*. (3) Enact the plan. Seek support as needed. (4) Reflect on the outcomes and decide further actions.
- **Career Plan:** Plan your own career, thereby define the necessary pathways, and ultimately establish what professional development opportunities you need when.
- **Formal Learning:** Seek out training courses, seminars and/or conferences that are highly aligned with your needs. Set your own learning goals and create opportunities to use new skills.
- **E-Learning:** Seek out webinars, participate in online discussions and commentaries, and follow experts and key influencers through social media.
- **Experimenting:** Make time and space to deliberately search and test new methods and tools to do your work better.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Increase the exchange of thoughts and ideas with people in and outside of your organisation to become aware of important trends, tools, and other information.
- **Peer Learning:** Collaborate more with your co-workers. They often have something useful to share, and you learn when teaching them. Set shared goals and review the experience.
- **Reflection:** Regularly reflect on your work-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Consider what is important to you, and why. Make plans, follow through, revisit.
- **Professional Guidance:** Seek out a professional coach as an expert to guide you to insights or find mentors who will share with you their experiences, networks, and resources.
- **Professional Exposure:** Engage in job rotation, secondments, shadowing, or internships to expose yourself to new professional relevant experiences.
- **Expert Content:** Read more professional, specialist, or scholarly literature that gives you current and evidence-driven knowledge that you can use to your advantage at work.
- **Feedback:** Ask for more constructive feedback about your behaviour and performance at work. Be open, be deliberate, and be specific about what you need. Do it often.

What you can do for others:

- Understand what workers ought to accomplish at work, help to deduce learning needs. Jointly establish how new abilities will benefit workers and organisation/clients. Set SMART goals.
- Provide staff opportunities, time and resources for learning *and* application. Remove any obstacles that might prevent successful transfer of knowledge to professional practice. Boost motivation and confidence.
- Empower staff to make changes to current work practices and processes. Empathise with errors.
- Review progress and provide useful feedback. Be patient, specific, positive. Recognise even small changes and reinforce. Help to prevent return to old behaviours.

FOSTER A CULTURE OF LEARNING

What is a Learning Culture?

Learning culture describes your perception of the organisational values, beliefs, and structures relating to learning and professional development. It links to your organisation's activities and responses that provide you and others with opportunities to acquire the necessary skills to meet current and future job demands.

Why is a Learning Culture important at work?

If you are encouraged to, provided with resources for, and receive recognition for learning, you are more likely to seek out experiences that build new knowledge and skills. However, if doing things differently is deemed problematic, opportunities for development are scarce, or errors are not leveraged for learning, then you can neither optimally perform nor stay relevant in your industry. For your organisation, a deficient learning culture translates to client dissatisfaction, staff attrition, safety issues, and low productivity.

How does a Learning Culture operate?

When you experience an immature learning culture at work:

- there is no designated person or function responsible for staff development
- colleagues and leadership quickly reject potential new ways of working, tools, or technology
- errors are quickly dismissed as a mistake by someone, and thus often actively hidden.

In contrast, you will experience professional growth through an organisational learning culture that:

- tables and resources professional development as part of individual career plans
- recognises new ideas and experiences as potentially useful to improve work and outcomes
- analyses what caused errors to understand what needs change and who requires support.

How to address a Learning Culture at work?

Structural support refers to your organisation's setup to enable learning: someone responsible for learning and development, a training budget, L&D policies to manage expectations, regular needs assessments.

Social support describes how your colleagues and leaders recognise, reward, encourage, and model the acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills to the workplace.

Error management describes the typical practices by which people at work deal with mistakes, ideally minimising negative and maximising positive error consequences for shared learning and innovation.

What you can do for yourself:

- Educate yourself on formal support available for professional learning: speak to your L&D or HR officer, read the organisation's human resource policies, identify industry offerings on skill compliance.
- Understand the allocation and availability of a budget for learning and development. Negotiate access to a defined amount and demonstrate how it will translate to organisational value.
- Leverage performance review processes and career planning to articulate and agree on your needs and means for professionally developing relevant knowledge and skills.
- Proactively ask for guidance and feedback on which learning experiences to engage in, how to best sequence and demonstrate your professional growth, and what is valued.
- Seek moral or emotional support when needed. Learning and trialling something new is not always fun or easy, so build reliable relationships to lean on for the challenging times.
- Recognise and actively reflect on your mistakes, they are inevitable. Differentiate between symptoms and causes, then use your analysis to correct yourself until you master your goals.

What you can do for others:

- Work with executives, team leaders, the board, staff, and clients to define and communicate a vision for professional development and learning culture that are tied to organisational

objectives. This overarching philosophy guides more tangible structures, practices and behaviours that are to be shared and lived across all roles and levels of your organisation.

- Evaluate current roles, resources, systems, and channels relating to learning and training. Decide what structures to address. Bring to life dedicated L&D roles, resources, and responsibilities.
- Consider how embedded values and beliefs currently prevent or already support professional learning. Openly address what attitudes need to change, provide examples, model those shifts.
- Encourage, recognise, and reward reflection and feedback behaviours as part of day-to-day activities as well as via more formal leadership, coaching or mentoring settings.
- View individual and organisational errors—however challenging or annoying—as true opportunities for growth. Analyse errors, share insights explicitly and widely, and correct them right away.

MAKE WORK PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE

What is Psychological Safety at work?

Psychological safety describes your feelings about being able to freely share ideas, seek feedback, ask questions and take calculated risks, without fear of negative consequences to self-esteem, status, or career.

Key elements of Psychological Safety at work

Inclusion safety describes your basic human need to connect and belong. You need to feel accepted for who you are, including your unique attributes and defining characteristics.

Learner safety describes your need to learn and grow. You need to feel safe to ask questions, give and receive feedback, experiment, and make mistakes.

Contributor safety describes your need to make a difference. You need to feel safe to use your skills and abilities to make a meaningful contribution.

Challenger safety describes your need to make things better. You need to feel safe to speak up and challenge the status quo when there is an opportunity to bring about positive change.

Why is Psychological Safety at work important?

If you feel safe and respected at work, you share ideas and engage in healthy debate. In turn, this supports learning processes and performance. On the contrary, if you do not feel sufficiently accepted and respected, you will not speak up due to risks of humiliation or punishment. For your organisation, low psychological safety can result in staff not addressing important questions or mistakes, which in turn can lead to safety issues, staff withdrawal, lack of innovation and low productivity.

How does Psychological Safety operate?

When you have low psychological safety at work, this may be due to:

- experiencing or observing humiliation as a result of sharing questions or ideas
- real or perceived concerns of getting punished for speaking up or disagreeing
- low or no encouragement and gratitude for innovation and trying.

In contrast, you are likely to feel more psychological safe on the job, when you:

- speak up comfortably every time it matters, including asking 'naive' questions
- disagree respectfully now and then with the way things are to make a difference
- know that your team has your back, and you have their backs.

What you can do for yourself:

- Be both courageous and considered. Offer your thoughts in the best way possible or ask clear open-ended questions, then listen actively and intently to understand others' feelings and values, as well as facts.
- Accept that not all your ideas will be fully understood or celebrated. It is part of life. Do not let that discourage you as long as you are able to safely shape things from time to time.
- Say 'Thank you, tell me more' when feedback comes your way. Stay on topic, be civil, and review the substance once initial defensive impulses have disappeared.
- Agree to share failures, recognise that your mistakes are your opportunity to learn and grow. Ask for help, and freely give help when asked. Embrace expertise of others.
- Share if you feel not safe about being yourself, asking questions, making mistakes, speaking up or belonging. Express what you need. And show appreciation and gratitude to reinforce these opportunities.

What you can do for others:

- Make psychological safety and wellbeing of staff a priority for your organisation. Table the topic for the town hall, put it on meetings' agenda, measure and monitor levels of staff' psychological safety.
- Model how respectfully speaking up, disagreeing, and naive questions are best realised. Invite constructive feedback to your own contributions.
- Facilitate everyone speaking up by showing genuine curiosity and empathy. Be open-minded, make time, and actively listen when someone is brave enough to say something out of the box.
- Encourage experimentation and (reasonable) risk-taking including how to meaningfully learn from errors and failure. Share your own lessons learned from mistakes.
- Act quickly to correct problems/issues that affect employees' psychological health. Shut down any sabotaging behaviours that undermine well-intended contributions.
- Promote dialogue and productive debate and prepare so you can resolve topical and emotional conflicts productively.

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