

# Why should employers look to create a positive workplace culture?

**Why should employers look to create a positive workplace culture and how can you implement these solutions at work? We sat down with Dr Leena Johns, head of health and wellness at MAXIS Global Benefits Network, to discuss the often unseen impact of workplace culture and to discuss the solutions that can change this negative culture...**

## ◇ CULTURE

### Q: Why is workplace culture so important?

**Leena Johns [LJ]:** While people may not always be aware of workplace culture, it impacts everything from the health of every employee through to the performance and productivity of the workforce.

Culture is an important tool for recruitment and retention, too. A poor culture often means employees are not happy and will start looking for a new job, resulting in high turnover of staff. This is expensive for organisations in terms of recruitment costs and if you then factor in the productivity lag of training up a new starter, the expense can spiral quickly.

We conducted a survey in 2019 with 1,000 employees around the world and found that 82% of employees consider the culture of an organisation before accepting a job, so a positive culture is a vital recruitment tool.

### Q: Does workplace culture actually affect health?

**LJ:** In a word, yes. The World Health Organization considers the workplace a big enough factor in global health to



campaign on improving it for more than a decade.

Stress is one of the most significant health issues generated from the workplace. It can lead to immune system vulnerability as it causes the pituitary gland to emit adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH), a hormone that stimulates the adrenal gland into releasing cortisol, which hampers disease-fighting cells. Stress can also lead to an increased risk of heart attack as employees with low job control (a person's ability to influence what happens in their work environment and specifically their job) can have an exaggerated fibrinogen response – a tendency to form clots more easily.

Stress also often leads to other unhealthy behaviours like smoking, drinking and overeating, all of which can increase health risks for employees and, in turn, negatively impact healthcare costs for employers.

### Q: Can workplace culture be changed?

**LJ:** Yes, it can, but it is one of the most challenging projects a management team will ever face. The logical first step is for management teams to know what their culture is currently, so they know what to change. One way to go about finding out about your current culture is an employee survey, which can then be repeated and tracked as the cultural transformation takes place to see how successful it is.

Other tactics for improving culture include investing in training, encouraging

healthy lifestyles, positively reinforcing behaviour, encouraging volunteering and investing in the office environment.

The most popular organisations recognise that they need to take a holistic approach to workplace culture and understand how it affects people. Creating a culture that empowers people to pursue their passion allows employers to pave the way to financial success and build an outstanding reputation.

### Q: What can employers do to improve culture?

**LJ:** There are a lot of things employers can do. An HR department has an important role to play in creating and enforcing anti-bullying policies, a vital tool in guarding against negative workplace relationships. Employers should encourage a culture that allows employees to form positive relationships at work. This could be anything from a formal mentor/mentee programme, to team building and organised activities, and simple steps like encouraging employees to feel able to chat with each other during their workday.

Strong social support from peers has a real beneficial impact on health, helping not only to relieve job strain and stress but also increase job satisfaction. There's lots of evidence that social connectedness at work, alongside a high overall sense of social wellbeing, promotes better business outcomes and is a key differentiator of successful work groups.

### Six ideas to improve workplace culture

- ◆ Create a culture survey to know what your employees think of your culture
- ◆ Embrace and inspire employee autonomy
- ◆ Invest in your office environment
- ◆ Spend money on training
- ◆ Encourage healthy lifestyles
- ◆ Don't be down on downtime

*Dr Leena Johns, head of health and wellness, MAXIS Global Benefits Network*