

Are your employees disconnected, from themselves and each other?

Psychologists have identified that the desire to feel connected to others is a basic human need, with interpersonal relationships having a significant impact on mental and physical health, behaviour and even mortality risk (Umberson & Montez, 2010).

Connection and connectedness can mean different things to different people. For some, having a connected team might mean that all team members are on the same page technologically, and for others, it may mean that a team has strong emotional connections, operating more like a family.

The extent to which an organisation and the people within it flourish, or not, can be dependent on the quality of the social relationships within it.

Psychosocial hazards or in layman's terms "work stressors", relate to the psychological and social conditions of the workplace. They include organisational culture, attitude, values, beliefs and daily practices, as opposed to the physical conditions of health and safety, and can be harmful to the mental and physical health of workers (Stoewen, D 2016). Whilst prolonged exposure to psychosocial hazards is related to increased psychiatric and physiological challenges, it can be balanced by managing positive social relationships among employees.

Positive social interactions also bolster physiological resourcefulness by stimulating the cardiovascular, immune and neuroendocrine systems, through both immediate and ongoing decreases in cardiovascular reactivity, strengthened immune responses and healthier hormonal patterns (Heaphy, E. D, & Dutton, J. E, 2008).

Whilst some have enjoyed not sharing a workspace with those who they may find challenging in behaviours or attitude, a survey by Envoy found that employees generally want to return to workplaces together, with half of respondents saying that their co-workers' presence, or lack thereof, would influence where they chose to work each day. This result indicates that employees see the workplace as a place to connect and collaborate with others.

Connection With Others:

Good relationships are important for mental wellbeing and, at a basic level, a good connection can:

- Help build a sense of belonging and self-worth.
- Gives opportunity to share positive experiences.
- Provides emotional support and ability to support others.

Connection With Yourself:

Research shows that learning or re-connecting with new skills can also improve mental wellbeing by:

- Boosting self-confidence and raising self-esteem,
- Building a sense of purpose,
- Increasing connections with others.

FOSTER THE CONNECTIVITY

Specifically promoting meaningful social interaction in the workplace ensures that a relationship centred approach doesn't fall by the wayside. Employees who are more satisfied with the overall quality of their workplace relationships are likely to be, and stay, more attached to the organisation.

Leaders who encourage informal interactions, such as out of hours social gatherings, on and offline, can foster the development of more positive connections, significantly influencing and improving employee satisfaction as well as engagement, productivity and employee retention.

CREATING A 360 CONNECTION

Employees who engage in positive social interactions also tend to exhibit more altruistic behaviours by providing co-workers with help, guidance, advice and feedback on work related matters. Equally the opportunity for peer to peer mentoring of junior staff members or staff members moving into new roles helps to further build connections for individuals, teams and also help them to meet organisational goals.

ENCOURAGE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Much research shows that connecting or re-connecting with skills leads to increased life satisfaction, optimism and improved ability to enjoy life to the fullest. Actively supporting employees to learn is also one of the most beneficial ways to treat mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

Workplace and external learning helps employees to meet others with similar interests, providing an opportunity for connection as well as building skills for organisational benefit.

AVOID THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

There are indications that wellbeing is enhanced through interactions when they are trusting, collaborative and positive, as well as when employees feel valued and respected (Mastroianni & Storberg-Walker (2014). Interactions lacking these characteristics detract from wellbeing and can negatively impact sleeping patterns, socialising, exercise, personal relations, energy, career progression and productivity.

Organisational leaders should be equipped to minimise negative interactions by, proactively mediating and resolving employee differences early on, to build a culture of open communication that fosters trust and good connection.

Building social connections in the workplace doesn't mean that all employees should be friends, but there should be an environment that supports mutual respect, trust and belonging among peers

Connection, and the quality of it, is integral to mental health, wellbeing and a well performing workforce.