

# Work Cultures and Work Relationships

ASSESSMENTS USING INTERVIEW AND SURVEY QUESTIONS

ITLA 29 COHORT

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## Context, Background, and Process

Prior to distributing questionnaires and surveys to staff and team members, please consult with your HR department.

To develop the interview and survey questions, the ITLA 29 cohort first defined what a ‘healthy culture’ and ‘healthy relationships’ meant. These definitions are essential in understanding the perspective that we had when taking on this challenge. As we finalized the definitions, we used them to guide the development of the interview and survey questions.

Below you will find a shortened version of the definitions we settled on. This information is for contextual purposes only; we wanted to share the process we went through. If you decide to use this assessment tool, you can use this information to update the definitions based on your needs and feedback from your team(s).

- **Definition of Relationships:** The way in which two individuals or groups behave toward one another.
- **Definition of Culture:** Work culture is the collective set of attitudes and beliefs that helps fulfill the physiological, societal and self-actualization needs of an individual.

During our research we defined several relationship types found in the workplace, we have listed them below:

- **Relationship Types:**
  - Supervisor / Direct Reports
  - Team Members
  - Mentor
  - Coworkers
  - Work Friends

Below is a summary of our findings on ways to impact workplace culture and some additional notes on the different relationship types:

- **Additional notes on Culture:** Actively prioritizing individual needs such as the need for childcare, acknowledging generational diversity in the workplace, and being transparent about performance output and work quality expectations will help to reduce employee anxiety. Striking a balance between providing autonomy to the team while ensuring they do not drift away – displaying trust and confidence in the team – will foster a culture of coaching. Expressing gratitude publicly and avoiding any notion of proximity bias will boost team morale and build a strong culture of belonging.

- **Additional notes on relationship types:** Traditional work relationships need to adapt to stay relevant in the era of telework. An intentional effort to sustain high quality interaction with your supervisors and colleagues will positively impact your professional success and job satisfaction. To forge a deeper connection with direct reports and mentees, be conscious of any perceived disadvantages when compared to a more natural in-person interaction. Elevating the social component of the relationship to be on par with the professional component will reduce employee isolation and boost inclusivity with team members.

## Interview Questions

The interview questions below are used to carry out an assessment of your team or organization's culture and workforce relationships.

The questions are designed to evoke thoughts, feelings, and open discussion points for your staff. They are best suited for a one-on-one dialog with staff members, managers, or executives but can also be delivered through a survey-based platform if a higher volume of responses is desired. The highlighted questions represent those that have evoked the most valuable responses for discussion.

Note: Some questions focus on assessing individuals working in a hybrid working environment, but most questions may be used for all working environments.

## Deployment Methods

### Mentor

The Executive, Manager, or Supervisor should encourage select staff (identified mentees) to participate in the face-to-face interview. The mentor-mentee relationship distinguishes itself from a typical "employer-employee" relationship by fostering a more personal and direct contact type of relationship. The face-to-face interview will promote a more open and candid discussion and should be conducted in a natural and fluid manner (i.e. a typical conversation) for optimal results.

### Team

The Executive, Manager, or Supervisor should encourage their staff to participate in the interview (face-to-face or survey-based). All staff on the team should complete the survey for maximum results, enabling the respective Executive, Manager, or Supervisor to make a more educated and informed decision.

*Method 1: Questions delivered via face-to-face interactions.* Executives, Managers, and Supervisors should discuss the purpose and benefits of the interview with their staff. Additional instruction, training, and guidance may be provided to define the number of questions posed during the interview, location, and target duration.

*Method 2: Questions delivered via a survey-based platform.* The survey-based platform may be leveraged to reach the team quickly. An email template has been drafted for your use and should be modified to suit your needs.

### Organization

Executive sponsorship of the implementation and utilization of the interview is essential for the success of the organization and staff. Obtaining senior leadership support will elicit a greater number of interactions and may help to nudge or fully implement organization-wide change based on the results. When addressing the organization, obtaining responses from the broadest range of personnel is essential. This will help identify if there are any significant differences between classifications, sections, staff, etc.

The methods of delivery used at the Team level also apply at the Organizational level

*Method 1: Questions delivered via face-to-face interactions.* Executives, Managers, and Supervisors should discuss the purpose and benefits of the interview with their staff. Additional instruction, training, and guidance may be provided to define the number of questions posed during the interview, location, and target duration.

*Method 2: Questions delivered via a survey-based platform.* The survey-based platform may be leveraged to reach the entire organization quickly. An email template has been drafted for your use and should be modified to suite your needs.

### Interview Questions

1. When thinking about a successful work culture, what words or values come to mind? If you had to pick just one word, what would it be?
2. How would you describe the leadership and management style within your organization?
3. What characteristics does a “toxic” culture have?
4. What should a team focus on to build a healthy culture?
5. Does work culture vary between the organization and team level? If so, how? Do the two have to be aligned?

6. Do you think there has been a change in work culture over the last two years within your organization? How so?
7. Are there any tools you or your organization uses to encourage a collaborative culture?
8. When thinking about an ideal work relationship, what words or values come to mind?
9. What characteristics does a “toxic” work relationship have?
10. What qualities stand out in a healthy mentoring relationship? Please specify as a mentor or mentee.
11. Considering a hybrid workforce, how critical is it to have a close-knit team? Have you seen a shift in these relationships over the last two years?
12. What challenges have you seen with staff camaraderie with a hybrid work model?
13. What successes have you seen with staff camaraderie in a hybrid working model?
14. Considering the hybrid work model, how would you grow and maintain healthy relationships within your team that may work different locations, different schedules, etc.?
15. What tools or methods do you use for teambuilding or establishing relationships in the workplace?
16. Do you feel a sense of purpose in your job?
17. Are you doing what you do best every day?
18. What kind of support do you need to be the most effective in your position?
19. What do you need from me (supervisor/manager) to do your best work?
20. How do you want to grow within the organization?
21. What are we not doing that you feel we should be doing?
22. What helps you feel like you are a part of the team?
23. How do you know when you are doing a good job?
24. Can you share a work experience where you felt valued or cared for by your team?
25. When have you had the most fun at work in the past six months?

### Recommended Platforms

Below are suggested web-based survey platforms if one-on-one interactions are limited or if a high-number of responses is desired.

- [Microsoft Forms](#)
- [Survey Monkey](#)
- [Guided Track](#) (Requires software development knowledge)
- [Google Forms](#) (may be blocked by your department’s firewall)

## Post Assessment Next Steps

### Assessing Results

After the initial assessment, it's time to review and develop findings from your responses. Reviewing the responses will help the supervisor, manager, and executive gain an improved understanding and awareness of how the individuals within the organization perceive the organization's culture and workplace relationships.

The methods outlined below enable the interviewer to determine what changes, if needed, should be implemented regarding the organization's culture and stance on relationships. Each organization is different and thus the organizational culture and relationships will be different as well. What may work at one organization may not work at another. Leadership must be able to review, interpret, and assess what, if anything, needs to be addressed based on the interview responses.

Here are three recommended methods to assess the interview responses.

*Review and Interpret:* This method involves reviewing the notes from the face-to-face interviews. As the interviewer, you may have captured non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, tone, volume of the respondent's voice, and eye contact. This information may be used to help assess the level of comfort, sincerity, openness, etc. of the respondent. After reviewing the notes, identify themes or keywords from the interviews, which may be used as indicators of how the organization, team, and individuals feel or how they assess the organization's culture and workforce relationships. Be attentive to outliers (those that stand out from the crowd) as this may indicate the individual respondent has a different perspective or experience that may support or detract from the organization's vision and mission.

*Read, Note, and Interpret:* Similar to the *Review and Interpret* method, this method involves reading through the responses from survey-based interviews. While reading through the responses, make note of and identify themes or keywords from the interviews, which may be used as indicators of how the organization, team, and individuals feel or how they assess the organization's culture and workforce relationships. Be attentive to outliers (those that stand out from the crowd) as this may indicate the individual respondent has a different perspective or experience that may support or detract from the organization's vision and mission.

*Automated Review:* This method is best suited for survey-based interviews with a large number of responses. Interviews and reviewing responses for themes and keywords or phrases is time intensive. If interviews are the method of choice, and result in an unmanageable number of responses, supervisors, managers, and executives may decide to leverage automation to identify themes and keywords. Using a keyword finder such as [monkeylearn.com](http://monkeylearn.com) will produce a list of commonly used words in the posted responses while eliminating words such as 'the' and

‘and’. This method is least intimate or personable; however, it will help identify themes and keywords. With this method, the interviewer (or assessor) will be able to identify potential outliers but may not be able to identify the individual.

### Follow Up Questions

Follow up questions will largely depend on the responses received during the interview. As information can be wildly different depending on the circumstances, the questions below are very generic in nature. One thought to keep in mind is that follow up questions should be designed to get at the root of the feedback – if something is unclear or there is no way to act on the feedback as-is, be curious about what drove the feedback in the first place. Why is this person giving this feedback at this moment? What do they think is the best way to resolve a situation? What does an ‘ideal’ solution look like? What does the environment look like after the solution has been fully implemented? What would happen if nothing was done?

Genuine curiosity (with no pre-set solution in mind) really helps in this step – if possible, find ways to “fall in love with the feedback or problem” versus falling “in love with a specific solution.”

### Communication Drafts

Below you will find three sample emails for your use to promote and initiate the interviews. These are designed to serve as a guide and should be tailored to meet your organization’s requirements.

#### 1. Executive Sponsorship Email Draft

Greetings *insert organization/team!*

I am working with *insert name* on the topic of “*building and maintaining a healthy culture and relationships*” within our organization. Over the course of the next several weeks, *insert name* will be contacting many of you to conduct an interview to help us better understand our organizational culture and relationships, and to assess next steps to improve ourselves, our team, and the organization. I am committed to supporting *insert name* as *he/she* strives to contribute to the betterment of our team.

- Should you receive an invitation to participate in the interview, please support *insert name*. If you would like to volunteer as an interviewee, please contact *insert name* at *insert email and phone number* by *insert date*.

I appreciate your time and consideration. *Insert organizational slogan/motto.*



*Insert Executive Sponsor signature block*

## **2. Interview Question Deployment Sample**

I am working with a team to address the topic of “*building and maintaining a healthy culture and relationships*”. We have designed an interview questionnaire to help *insert organization* leaders better understand the successes and pain points around work culture and relationships to build more meaningful tools and best practices for use across the *insert organization*.

I am asking for your assistance by participating in the interview. Your responses will remain anonymous and may be used for research and presentation purposes.

I am asking that you complete this by *insert date*, either face-to-face or using the survey-based interview. If you would like to complete the interview in person, please propose a date and time, but no later than *insert date*. Below you will find the link to our survey-based interview, which consists of 16 questions and should take less than 30 minutes to complete.

Survey-based Interview: *insert link*

I appreciate your time and consideration.

*Insert Interviewer signature block*

## **3. Interview Question Completion and Next Steps Draft**

Thank you for your participation and support on our research regarding “*building and maintaining a healthy culture and relationships*”. I could not have completed this research without you, and the *insert organization* will be better for it. I have developed a summary of your responses for *insert executive sponsor name* review. Don’t worry, your responses are and will remain anonymous unless you approved disclosure of your name for follow-up by *insert executive sponsor* or *his/her* staff.

Here is a summary of our research for your review and consideration:

Using a mixed method of face-to-face and survey-based interviews, a total of *insert number* interviews were conducted from *insert date* through *inert date*. You were asked to respond to 15 questions regarding workplace culture and relationships, ranging from 1-3 word responses to short paragraphs or responses. Responses indicated that openness, trust, honesty, and communication will result in a positive culture and work relationships while lack of transparency, micromanagement, miss/lack of

communication, and negativity may result in a toxic culture and unhealthy work relationships. Tools that encourage collaboration and team building include the use of Microsoft Teams, Zoom, open forums, encouraging a friendly atmosphere, and constant communication.

Using this information, we will be able to work on our areas of improvement, maintain and sustain the areas where we excel, and continue to develop and grow our cohesive team. Be on the lookout for changes to our operations and business model as we implement new and exciting ways to build and maintain a healthy culture and relationships within the *insert organization*.

Thank you again for your time and support.

*Insert Interviewer signature block*

## Survey Questions

The survey questions below are used to carry out an assessment of your team or organization's culture and workforce relationships.

These questions are designed to assess the status of team's or organization's interactions and cohesion. A survey designed around these questions could be used on a periodic basis by managers or leaders to gauge how the organization or team is doing. Surveys can be designed to be anonymous or require people to sign-in or use some token that identifies the respondent.

The survey used by the ITLA 29 cohort was anonymous. We recommend using anonymous surveys as they provide a feedback mechanism without singling out one individual and anonymous surveys appear to promote greater disclosure of sensitive issues and more detailed and honest feedback compared to non-anonymous methods.

## Deployment Methods

The survey should be sent out to all staff within a team, unit, division, department, or organization, depending on the scope of the inquiry. If a manager or supervisor wants to take a quick "pulse-check" of their team, then it should only be sent out to team members. If, instead, the scope of the survey is at the department or organization level, a notification should be sent out from a person with the appropriate authority, visibility, and clout (i.e. a supervisor of a unit may not be the most appropriate person to send out an organization-wide survey, instead it might be more well-received and responded to if someone in senior leadership made the request).

## Recommended Platforms

As with the interview questions, there are multiple tools that can be used to build and deploy the survey. Here are a few that we recommend:

- [Microsoft Forms](#)
- [Survey Monkey](#)
- [Guided Track](#) (Requires software development knowledge)
- [Google Forms](#) (may be blocked by your department's firewall)

## Post Assessment Next Steps

After the survey is closed, it is best to do some light data analysis on the questions that were most important. Below is one method of analyzing survey results:

1. Review survey responses in aggregate
  - a. Overall, is there a positive ("agree," "strongly agree") or negative ("disagree," "strongly disagree") sentiment
2. Review survey responses by position type (executive, team member, manager/supervisor)
  - a. Can only be done if there are enough responses
3. Group survey questions by category and review responses in aggregate
4. If used, review free-form text responses
  - a. What words or phrases appear most often?
  - b. Is it possible to group words or phrases into categories?

As the above questions are explored, trends may appear. As the trends or outliers become apparent, that information can be used to trigger a larger conversation with the respondents. Our recommendation is to explore solutions with the respondents; oftentimes they've been thinking about their challenges for a while and may have a proposal ready to explore.

## ITLA 29 Survey Design

Our survey was designed to be a quarterly survey that could be completed in under five (5) minutes (average completion time was 4 ½ minutes). The goal of our survey was to perform a quick "pulse-check" of respondents that would provide us information that we could follow-up on. Our survey is designed to follow a "ask-listen-act" model, where we're looking for quick responses which can be turned around within a week, analyzed and used as talking points to engage our teams.

As respondents see that we're listening and taking action, they see that their voice and effort are valued. This can help to increase the response percentage the next time the survey is sent out.

## Survey Questions

Below you'll find the list of survey questions the ITLA 29 cohort used in our survey. We have also included an Excel workbook with a bank of one-hundred-and-ten (110) survey questions that you can use to build a survey specific to your situation.

Depending on the question asked, we displayed different responses that the survey-taker could choose from.

- For questions 1 through 21 (sentiment-based questions), we used a 5-point Likert scale:
  - Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree
- For questions 22 – 24 (telework-based questions), we used the following responses:
  - Completely in-office, Completely remote, A hybrid of the two
- For questions 25 and 26, we encouraged respondents to enter values into a free-form text field

## List of Questions

1. We stay connected as a team
2. Our team meetings and discussions are effective
3. We have enough autonomy to perform our jobs effectively
4. I know how my work contributes to the mission of my organization
5. I feel I am part of a team
6. Other units collaborate effectively with us to get the job done
7. My supervisor helps me feel valued at my organization
8. There is open and honest two-way communication with my supervisor
9. We are encouraged to be innovative even if success is not guaranteed
10. I feel comfortable being my authentic self at work
11. I feel valued for the unique contribution I can make to my organization
12. I feel safe to take risks and fail within my organization
13. People on my team care about me as a person
14. People on my team share information with each other
15. My supervisor listens to what I have to say
16. My supervisor is available when I need them

17. I have measurable goals that are clearly explained
18. I achieve a good balance between my work life and my private life
19. I feel valued as an employee
20. I receive recognition for doing good work
21. I am treated fairly at work
22. Based on your experience over the past two years, which work setting do you find works best for **you**?
23. Based on your experience over the past two years, which work setting do you find works best for promoting **healthy work relationships**?
24. Based on your experience over the past two years, which work setting do you find works best for promoting **a healthy work culture** within your team?
25. Please enter up to three words or phrases that you associate with **healthy work relationships**
26. Please enter up to three words or phrases that you associate with **a healthy work culture**

You can find the full bank of questions in the “Survey Questions Analysis” Excel workbook.