Research: Work Cultures and Work Relationships

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS, DEFINITIONS, AND CATEGORIZATION

ITLA 29 COHORT

Definitions and Context

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 and more information can be found in the tables found later in this document:

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

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.

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.

Work Relationship Types

It is important to determine what type of work relationship you have with each person you work with.

1) **Coworkers:**
    a. **Relationship Type:** Varies
    b. **Description:** Coworker relationships can be professional, personal, or merely circumstantial. They are acquaintances through your company; beyond working for the same organization you may have very little interaction with them.

    c. **Role**: Coworkers can serve different roles professionally or personally. These relationships also serve a valuable role in that they are often the pool of people from which other more meaningful relationships can be established.

2) **Team Members:**
    a. **Type:** Professional Relationships
    b. **Description:** Team members are fellow employees who work on the same team as you, this could be the team you work with regularly, a committee you've joined, or a group working together for a single activity.
    c. **Role:** Team members are important because they are the people you accomplish work with. Together you plan, design, develop, execute, and track work related to your roles. The better your relationship with your team, the easier it is to get this work completed.
    d. **Three Sub-types of team members:**
      i. Friendly team members
     ii. Neutral team members
    iii. Confrontational team members

3) **Work Friends:**
    a. **Type:** Personal
    b. **Description:** Work friends or people who you interact with socially at work. You sit by them in meetings, go to lunch together, talk to them at work events and possibly even see them outside of work every now and then.
    c. **Role:** Work friends fill our social need and keep us sane from the daily grind. You might not be friends with them if not for the mutual employment of each other at the same company, but they serve as a support system throughout our work lives.

4) **Manager/Direct Report:**
    a. **Type:** Professional Relationships**.**
    b. **Description:** Your manager, the one assigning you the work, helping you succeed and ultimately impacting the work you do or don't do. **Direct reports** are the ones who report to you. You are their manager. They are also a factor in determining success.
    c. **Role**: The relationship between you and your manager is vital because they often play an important role in determining your rating, your salary, and your work plan. Direct Reports are also a large factor in your workplace satisfaction; they are essential and necessary to accomplishing business-critical activities.

5) **Office Spouse:**
    a. **Type**: Personal
    b. **Description:** Your office spouse is that person you spend a significant amount of time with they are your go-to for venting and advice. The role of the office spouse serves as your workplace best friend or go-to; a friend when you have a work predicament. They keep you grounded and help to provide another perspective on the challenges faced.

6) **Mentor:**
    a. **Type:** Professional
    b. **Description**: A mentor is one of the most important professional relationships you can have. It's similar in intimacy to that of an office spouse but it serves you professionally. Your

mentor is that person you go to for career guidance and help on the toughest of the tough problems.

   c. **Role:** Your mentor helps you think through the most challenging problems, provides perspective on how to handle the most challenging relationships and generally guides you to success.

7) **Life Friends:**
   a. **Type:** Professional.
   b. **Description:** the most intimate work relationship you can have, one that you don't even consider specific to work.

Relationships and Telework Impacts

Relationship	Type	Role	Details	Impact based on future telework policy
Supervisor / Direct Reports	Professional	Directly determine professional, financial success and workplace satisfaction.	High interest in mutual success, and is one of the most important relationships.	• Positive relationships will lead to greater job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, increased job performance, increase employee retention, and career progression. • Professional isolation from supervisor can lead to reduced opportunities for promotion, reward, or personal development. • Teleworkers who have little face-to-face interaction with supervisory staff are likely to have lower quality leader-member exchanges and can negatively impact the mental/emotional element of the relationship.
Team members	Professional	• Close partners, helping accomplish daily wins • Have a high value impact towards long term professional success.	3 subtypes exist: Friendly, Neutral, Confrontational. Probability of work success is directly proportional to dealing with each of these subtypes.	• Social and professional isolation negatively impacts individuals' sense of workplace inclusion. • Tools like Teams/Zoom are helpful in collaboration, but warmth of face-to-face interaction is vital to developing closer social relationships. • Perceived benefits of teleworking may lead to resentment from office-based colleagues, especially if they have to take on extra office tasks. This may lead to a "Them vs Us" sentiment and a breakdown in communication. • This relationship is affected by the amount of time people worked at home and the extent to which they were able to have face-to-face interactions. Negative impact is lessened if relationships were already formed prior to going virtual.

Relationship	Type	Role	Details	Impact based on future telework policy
Mentor	Professional	• Uses broad experience and domain expertise to help solve professional challenges. • Sometimes not part of immediate work team.	Unique relationship focused on investing in employee upskilling and sharing tribal knowledge for individual and organizational success.	• Communicate with mentees, but don't assume you understand their situations. Besides a career function, mentors now need to address struggles and concerns related to telework i.e., how to ensure mentees' work is noticeable when working remote and mitigate derailment of progress, advancement, and promotion. • Mentors can provide virtual opportunities for visibility by copying mentees on emails and including them in online meetings, which will help them in learning new skills and behaviors. • Be authentic by acknowledging vulnerability to aid mentees in sharing similar challenges. • Provide support by sharing strategies, skills and resources mentees can leverage rather than rescuing or fixing it for them.
Coworkers	Circumstantial	Serve as the broader pool from which other relationships emerge.	Can be transactional in nature, not much is common beyond employer.	• Telework reduces frequency of contact between employees and a lack of high-quality social relationships can impact the health of some employees. Limiting telework to certain # of days of the week is an alternative option. • Networking, spontaneous discussions and the exchange of informal information becomes less frequent, leading to reduced trust and team spirit. Establish clear rules and process in place to regulate availability and indicators of work overload to prevent overtime work. • Telework can lead to a lack of spontaneity and synchronicity of communication and may not be suited to transmit subtle emotions. Arrange for specific communication training, including for time management and work organization/prioritization techniques.

Relationship	Type	Role	Details	Impact based on future telework policy
Work friends	Personal	• Help establish a mutually beneficial social ecosystem at workplace. • Make work pleasurable.	Superficial relationships due to common workplace, which can develop into friendships outside of work.	Grab a coffee after work hours or weekends to maintain the social aspect of work.

Work Culture

What is a work culture?

Work culture is a collection of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that makes up the daily atmosphere in a work environment. Healthy workplace cultures align with employee behaviors and company policies with the overall goals of the company, while also considering the well-being of individuals. Work cultures determine how well a person fits into the environment at a new job and their ability to build professional relationships with colleagues.

Work Culture Hierarchy of Needs

Hybrid work culture reimagined per Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Attributes and Definition	Before Covid	After Covid	Solution
Physiological & Safety needs Salary and insurance coverage, trained security staff, government policies on labor laws, utility costs, proper office space, basic mental health, stability of job duties, safe work environment.	Taken for granted in an Office environment and was employer provided.	• Anxiety and Stress about new working conditions, additional utility costs, defined labor policies, lack of social interactions. • Safety concerns about return to work, proper ergonomic equipment. • Childcare concerns.	• Flexibility and a culture of shared responsibilities: Factor in individual needs (childcare, generational diversity) and demonstrate prioritization of self-care along with team priorities (physical workplace set up has been assessed for COVID). • Transparency/Oversharing/Public Chats to share priorities/expectations on performance assessment, quality of output to develop trust. • Get employee sentiment through feedback, surveys on what's working, what's not? (Helps boost employee retention). • Nudge people to a healthy lifestyle with digital mental wellness solutions. • Employee assistance programs and health apps.

Attributes and Definition	Before Covid	After Covid	Solution
Belonging Co-operative colleagues, basic social interactions, giving and receiving positive attention, supportive management.	Was accomplished by personal contact with colleagues and workplace camaraderie.	• Employees going remote, the flow of communication can be compromised. • No longer bonding over impromptu in-person meetings or discuss work over a cup of coffee. • Out of sight, out of mind.	• Conducting regular virtual meetings using Zoom, MS Teams to brainstorm or white board which fosters a collaborative work culture. • Mentorship helps to build relationships and a feeling of belonging. • Coaching culture and show trust by clearly communicating responsibility.
Esteem Recognition, feeling of self-accomplishment, respect from peers.	Appreciation from management and peers in real time and staff meetings. Accomplishments were visible.	Managers and peers may have difficulty in keeping the feedback loop going and recognize their remote employees in real time. Hard work may not be visibly observed.	• Implement digital rewards to maintain culture of feedback. • Express public appreciation and gratitude to demonstrate equity. • Avoid creating the perception of a two-tiered environment that favors those "visible and close to the decision-makers" i.e., proximity bias.
Self-actualization Lead others, develop subject matter expertise, function independently.	Generally managed by self but in a conducive work environment.	Motivation may be compromised due to limited infrastructure and communication channels, impacting pace of self-actualization.	• Providing online learning tools for remote workers. • Harmony and continuous learning opportunities. • Strike a balance between providing autonomy, while avoiding letting team drift away from each other.

Definitions and Considerations

Work Culture Impacts

Work culture evolves based on the behaviors of the people within the organization, from management to entry-level employees. Company leadership sets the tone for company culture through policies, benefits, vision, and the mission. Managers shape company culture by their hiring practices, where they can select applicants, whose personal vision aligns with a healthy work culture. The physical environment of a workplace also influences culture, with many offices opting for an open floor plan, natural lighting and the inclusion of perks such as in-office gyms and break room amenities. A new impact is now teleworking and how it impacts the work culture.

Elements of a Healthy Work Culture

Culture is a complex concept that constantly evolves in the workplace based on many elements. While some people may value a more traditional work culture and others want something more modern and fun. All healthy work cultures have many traits in common. Look for the signs of a prospering work culture when considering possible employers.

Accountability

When each person who works at a company is accountable for their behavior, that indicates a healthy work environment. A balanced workplace enables people to feel comfortable enough to take credit for their ideas and their mistakes. Accountability allows each employee to learn from challenges instead of avoiding them. Accountability fosters a work culture based on teamwork, open communication, trustworthiness, and responsibility.

Equity

Companies that treat all their employees equally often have healthy workplace cultures. Every position within an organization has value; giving everyone opportunities can increase employee morale. Favoritism in the workplace can be a sign of a toxic work culture and can cause feelings of distrust and resentment between coworkers, making an equitable workplace environment essential for any positive work culture.

Expression

People are generally happier, more productive, and more focused when they feel able to express themselves in the workplace. If employees have some freedom in their personal style and how they decorate their workspace, that indicates a level of comfort within their work culture.

Recognition

Thriving work cultures recognize employee successes and reward people when they do well. Management in a healthy workplace environment will look for positive attributes of everyone on the team and encourage use of their talents. Employee recognition ranging from regular verbal praise to competitive salaries can build a work culture of appreciation and mutual respect.

Communication

Open communication is critical for a productive workplace environment. Everyone within an organization must understand how to give and receive feedback, share ideas, collaborate, and solve problems. Teams may have interpersonal conflicts at times, but a functional work culture will allow them to resolve issues and work as a team despite any challenges. Avoid organizations with a work culture where people feel unable to speak up about conflicts or concerns, because there will not be much room for growth.

The Importance of a Positive Work Culture

People need healthy environments to thrive, and this is especially true in the workplace. The attitudes and behaviors that you interact with every day have an impact on how you feel both in the workplace and at home. A flourishing work culture influences all aspects of a business and the people within it.

Better Hiring Choices

Managers at an organization with a successful work culture know how to attract and select new employees who share their vision and the healthy aspects of the organization's and team's culture. You will likely be drawn to companies that share your values and the type of culture that you feel comfortable with. Healthy work cultures have like-minded professionals who are compatible with each other and work together toward shared goals.

Employee Happiness

Your satisfaction with the culture at work directly impacts your happiness with your job. Thriving workplace cultures help everyone find meaning and pride in their work, while a toxic workplace culture could make even the most passionate employee unhappy at work. One of the most important elements of a strong work culture is the balance between your career and personal life, and companies can contribute to the happiness of their employees by respecting their lives as a whole**.**

Employee Retention

Good work cultures provide stability for talented employees and allow them to grow within a company, instead of limiting them to a particular role or success level. Happy employees typically want to stay at their jobs, making work culture a major factor in reducing employee turnover and connecting qualified candidates with long-term careers.

Performance Quality

Employees who enjoy coming to work due to a positive culture will generally be more productive and produce high-quality work. The work atmosphere is a great motivator that encourages everyone to invest in their work, especially when prospering workplace environments recognize and celebrate hard work and success.

Reputation

Having a healthy workplace culture creates a positive, prestigious reputation for a company and the people who work there. An enjoyable workplace environment is an important asset for attracting talented people. Companies that have an uplifting mission that empowers their employees can create positive community relationships.