

# The workplace as an oasis in a challenging world.

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## Introduction

Right from the get go way back in about 2006 I have promoted the workplace as an oasis to which everyone who works runs to work because ‘the workplace is a fabulous place to work’.

The workplace needs to be the oasis in a challenging world, where everyone who works is infused with the triggers that make them feel a strong sense of success and happiness.

The workplace is a controlled community, controlled by leaders and managers who seek to ensure everyone is as productive as possible. They should also understand that when people are infused with the triggers to make them feel safe and psychologically healthy, their productivity improves, sometimes dramatically (depending on how poor it was in the first place).

Since the early days, organisations and their leaders have woken up to the need for people to feel well. In general, the trend has been physical wellbeing, supplied by opportunities to have a good physical environment, and support for physical activities.

Whilst physical health is obviously vital, it is psychological health that makes the big difference to performance.

Some argue that physical health is sufficient to improve psychological health. Physical activity can make a huge difference to psychological health in the short term. If the working environment doesn't trigger support for good psychological health then the need for repeated physical activity becomes the antidote to poor psychological conditions, and this doesn't improve the foundations for performance.

Performance relies on people being able to concentrate. Without concentration, all the skills, knowledge and experiences of people are wasted.

When people concentrate on something that gives them a real buzz of excitement, their performance goes through the roof. This is psychological flow where we become ‘lost’ in the world on concentrated activity and produce some amazing results.

Everyone should be facilitated by leaders and managers to feel the buzz of concentrated activity. It is a fabulous feeling that sports folk feel when their sport goes well for them.

The question is ‘how to make this happen?’.

If it was as easy as helping everyone with their physical health, it would have happened by now. Instead, the services for people focused on psychological needs tend to be almost exclusively remedial, doing something to restore people to health, rather than prevent the causes of mental ill health in the first place.

A starting point for making it happen.

A good place to start is to have an idea of what a fabulous place to work looks like.

Below is a description I use to make the various points clear in relation to what needs to be in place for a 'fabulous place to work' to exist.

## Wellbeing, Resilience and Performance Culture

**Purpose** that is clear and unambiguous, expressed as a simple 'big idea', an idea which all staff relate to closely, and are proud to discuss with friends and colleagues

**Atmosphere** that uses the combined intelligence of the workforce by sharing **responsibility** for the future success of the organisation, where all staff are encouraged to think **independently**, are **attentive** to each other, are kindly and supportive of each other, and act with **compassion**.

**Behaviour** that is **respectful** towards each other, value each other's views and opinions, work in teams which are places of mutual support, where anything is debated without a hint of humiliation, where the critique of individual and team work is welcomed, discussed and where lessons are learnt and implemented

**Staff** who project a **confidence** towards clients and customers, who 'go the extra mile' by providing unsolicited ideas, thoughts, stimulate each other, and where their interest in their customers offers something more than is expected, beyond **courtesy**, and beyond service, offering attentiveness and personal interest.

**Leaders and managers** who extract the best from their workforce by **challenging** their staff, providing opportunities for personal development through new experiences, and who treat everyone with **fairness** and **understanding**.

**An organisation** that is driven by its **values** towards organisational and personal **success**, Intellectually, financially, socially and emotionally.

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An organisation with the features above will provide the triggers needed to make the workplace a fabulous place to work and become the oasis in a challenging world.

The amount of personal stimulus that individuals receive from working in a positive working environment is enormous, and acts as a great boost to self esteem than enables the person to tackle the challenges of domestic existence, which, these days, are particularly challenging.

### Step 1 – develop leaders and managers.

**Leaders and managers** who extract the best from their workforce by **challenging** their staff, providing opportunities for personal development through new experiences, and who treat everyone with **fairness** and **understanding**.

To make this happen, leaders need the training and development that provides them with the ideas, attitudes, approaches and techniques to transform their existing organisation and teams into those that come close or exceed the description above.

The main focus for leaders should be to guarantee that the workforce is in perfect working order. This means, amongst many activities, leaders need to nurture and support their staff. They need to treat everyone with respect and with fairness in their decision making.

Part of the nurturing process involves assisting individuals in career development. This might involve secondments to places which provide a different set of skills that could be of use to the person in their future role in your organisation.

Such a development programme is available from MAS\*

## Step 2 – Purpose

**Purpose that is clear and unambiguous, expressed as a simple 'big idea', an idea which all staff relate to closely, and are proud to discuss with friends and colleagues**

Purpose provides a reason for people to be motivated to achieve something.

If the purpose of the organisation is expressed succinctly and in outcome terms, and accords with the principles, beliefs and values of the workforce, it creates a strong force for staff engagement and commitment.

The purpose of the organisation needs reflecting in team purpose and linked strongly to individual purpose.

When the individual purpose is strongly aligned with individual purpose and values then psychological flow becomes possible, and performance become significantly enhanced.

## Step 3 – Atmosphere

**Atmosphere that uses the combined intelligence of the workforce by sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation, where all staff are encouraged to think independently, are attentive to each other, are kindly and supportive of each other, and act with compassion.**

Leaders should use the fact that the combined intelligence of the workforce is far greater than that of its leaders and managers. This should mean to them that they use the intelligence of the workforce to achieve great success.

The starting point is an attitude that is about knowing that each member of the workforce is of equal value to each other in achieving success for the organisation.

Understanding this should shift the use of power from coercive power (with the overt or covert sense of threat) to status power where each person is treated as a sensible, helpful and valued individual who needs argument and persuasion, not threats.

Once the use of status power is introduced, other principles can start to be applied. For example, the cultural principle of sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation amongst everyone in the workforce.

## Step 4 – behaviour

**Behaviour that is respectful towards each other, value each other's views and opinions, work in teams which are places of mutual support, where anything is debated without a hint of humiliation, where the critique of individual and teamwork is welcomed, discussed and where lessons are learnt and implemented.**

Part of sharing responsibility is creating an atmosphere of psychological safety where everyone is expected and encouraged to speak openly without a hint of humiliation or threat of any kind.

The obligation to take Psychological Responsibility is placed on each person. This means doing everything possible to remain psychologically well, and to help everyone else in the organisation to achieve the same aim. It, also, means speaking out if you feel unwell for any reason, and you will receive the support needed from colleagues, as well as supporting services of the appropriate variety.

Coupled with cultural principles is the expectation, reinforced by leaders, that everyone will adopt Intelligent Behaviours towards each other. These include compassion, the desire to help others in some form of distress or difficulty.

In an atmosphere of openness, the intelligence of the workforce can become exposed and used effectively to achieve great success for the organisation. For this to become achieved successfully other techniques and approaches are involved, for example, the idea that all failures are successes waiting to happen, and all ideas are great.

## Step 5 – performance

***Staff who project a confidence towards clients and customers, who ‘go the extra mile’ by providing unsolicited ideas, thoughts, stimulate each other, and where their interest in their customers offers something more than is expected, beyond courtesy, and beyond service, offering attentiveness and personal interest.***

Part of the process of sharing responsibility for success amongst everyone in the workforce involves approaches that encourage individuals to offer ideas, critique any part of the organisation, stimulate ideas from each other, and focus on what needs doing to achieve great success for the organisation, such as focusing on the client and his or her interests.

Intelligent Behaviours includes attentiveness as a key attribute and behaviour. This is a vital behaviour for interaction between colleagues as well as between staff and clients.

By focusing on the specific interests of clients and customers there is every prospect that client will return time and again to the organisation to obtain the products and receive the services the organisation provides.

## Conclusion

***An organisation that is driven by its values towards organisational and personal success, Intellectually, financially, socially and emotionally.***

An organisation that implements the steps set out above will achieve the outcomes described.

This becomes the oasis for everyone to run towards as the organisation provides the positive supporting experience that boosts the individual so they can face the challenges of ordinary domestic life.

Clearly there is more to this than this article covers, and these are provided in the MAS programmes about organisational development.

\*MAS programmes include:

Leader development

Making the organisation a fabulous place to work

Making the resilient organisation and teams

The leader role in the resilience of their teams

Personal resilience

Please contact [barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk](mailto:barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk) for further information.

Please visit the MAS web site for a huge amount of useful resources to help you on your way – [www.mas.org.uk](http://www.mas.org.uk)