

BEYOND FIREFIGHTING

A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CULTURAL CHANGE

ABOUT

In response to critical reports such as the Opinion Research Service (ORS) report (2023), the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) Culture Review Report (Morris 2023), and the Independent Culture Review of the London Fire Brigade (Nazir, 2022), CIWG was established. Our mission is to assess the current state of MAWWFRS and the broader fire service profession, culminating in an actionable plan spanning all divisions.

The Culture and Improvement Working Group (CIWG) comprises volunteers from across the service, including representatives from both grey and green book positions.



KEY OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the current organisational culture within MAWWFRS.
- Identify areas for improvement.
- Develop an action plan to address identified issues and promote a culture of inclusivity and excellence.
- Provide ongoing support and resources for managers to effectively navigate and influence organisational culture.

DEFINING CULTURE

Assiri (2023) emphasises the importance of culture in employee engagement. Assiri explains how people practices should centre on creating positive and inclusive work that fully aligns with the organisation's values. Similarly, Dyer (2018) defines culture as encompassing both the visible facets such as vision and values, as well as the subtler norms of behavior, beliefs, and power dynamics.

Within the Fire and Rescue Service we need to take note of the work of Ebert and Griffin (2019) who differentiate between culture and subculture. We see subcultures emerging across the regions, divisions and most notably, at watch level.

By adopting a critical perspective on organisational practices, we empower ourselves to make informed decisions and cultivate inclusive environments that empower traditionally marginalised groups within the service, as noted by Butler and Rose (2000).

Baker (1980) aptly describes culture as the social adhesive that binds an organisation together. It falls upon managers to facilitate the application of this adhesive and ensure its firm setting. This is a difficult endeavour, with many variables and conditions that try to destabilise the application process.



Culture is the social glue holding everything together

Baker 1980

INFLUENCING CULTURE CHANGE: EMPOWERING MANAGERS

Managers wield significant influence in understanding, shaping, and leveraging organisational culture to attain strategic objectives and cultivate an inclusive work environment. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) underscores the critical importance of fostering good work, which not only enhances individual well-being but also cultivates a resilient economy and efficient organisations. Brinkley (2023) delineates seven dimensions constituting good work: pay and benefits; contracts; work-life balance; job design; relationships at work; employee voice; health and well-being.

To initiate tangible progress, our focus lies on immediate actions targeting work-life balance, job nature, workplace relationships, employee voice, and well-being. We are committed to equipping managers with the necessary guidance, support, and training to ensure the provision of good work and safeguard the overall well-being of the workforce. Our efforts are consolidated under three overarching themes: 'Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging' (EDIB); 'Value-Led Leadership'; and 'Internal Communications'

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VALUE BASED LEADERSHIP

Our next priority revolves around the planning and development of value-based leadership. Hesketh and Cooper (2019) underscore the pivotal role of values in fostering wellbeing and providing an ethical framework for our work. They contend that strong values enhance the purpose of an organisation and inclusive leaders articulate and help embed values so that everyone can take meaning from their work. They help employees to navigate and adapt, which is essential for cultural improvement. Mcleod and Clark (2009) elaborate on the interconnectedness of values, behaviours and cultures being inextricably linked. Additionally we draw inspiration from Khan's (1990) three dimensions of employee engagement, which are vision, strategy and emotion. Kahn emphasises the importance of positive interpersonal relationship effective group dynamics and leadership styles that foster psychologically safe and trusting environments for all.

Burt (2019) discussed the idea of nudge theory, which entails subtly guiding employees toward making beneficial decisions and taking desirable actions. Nudging operates on the principle of instigating small actions that can yield significant effects when adopted across the organisation. We aim to explore the application of nudge theory to modify behaviors, particularly in areas where past choices have contributed to unhealthy or toxic work environments. By nudging engagement we hope to break negative patterns and lead sustainable change

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Our third priority, internal communication, stems from the insights gleaned from the ORS findings, indicating that 68% of individuals receive information through departmental, watch, or team meetings, while 52% receive information informally via line managers.

Berger (2008) defines the reciprocal relationship that exists between communication and culture a notion further expanded upon by Men and Bowen (2017), who emphasise how managers' communication of values and mission through both formal and informal channels shapes culture.

Recognising the diverse needs of watch teams and departments, we advocate for a contingency approach to communication, as endorsed by Adair (2009). Adair stresses the importance of considering team dynamics, task requirements, and individual needs as overlapping and interrelated factors in effective communication. Employing this approach empowers managers to select strategies, methods, modes, and messages tailored to specific situations. Research by Pasaribu et al. (2022) underscores the positive impact of situational leadership styles on job satisfaction. Effective communication, as defined by Dyer (2018), necessitates both downward and upward flows within the organisational hierarchy. However, current communication practices, lack consistency and efficacy, perpetuating subcultures that may harm the service. The CIWG is actively exploring avenues for improvement in this regard.