### **Transformation**

## Productivity in the UK

How culture and values can help grow and sustain workforce productivity

July 2024





# Productivity in the UK – How culture and values can help grow and sustain workforce productivity

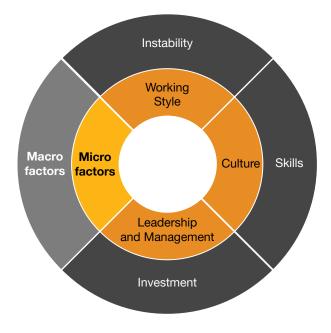
### The UK has a productivity problem

UK productivity growth has been lagging behind global peers for over a decade, and is less than half the average annual rate before the global financial crisis. The answer to the problem, however, is not straightforward and it is not yet solved.

The digitised, knowledge-based economy is expanding, with intellectual capital, innovation, and technology driving growth. Rapid advancements in technology, including GenAl, and decarbonisation demand business and policy transformation. PwC's 27th UK CEO survey revealed that 1 in 5 UK CEOs believe their organisation won't be viable in the next 10 years on its current path.¹ Additionally, businesses face persistent and deepening disruption, offering potential for significant productivity improvements and a path to a greener, smarter future. Can the UK unlock growth and regain global competitiveness, or will the puzzle only become more complex? And where does culture fit in? Our values, workplace environments, and culture are increasingly crucial in solving the productivity puzzle.

PwC UK, alongside Brand with Values, recently engaged over 6,000 employees across the UK in a culture and values study to understand UK PLC's culture and values, and what shifts might be needed at a macro and micro level to grow and sustain workforce productivity.

(Macro and Micro)

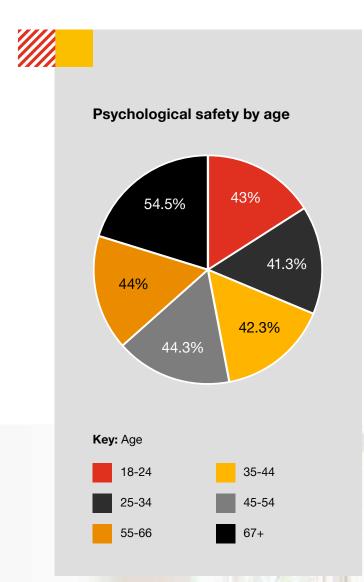


<sup>1</sup>PwC, 27th CEO Survey



### **Macro Factors**

Macro factors are the social, political, and economic drivers that shape the overall environment and context in which work takes place. They create opportunities and challenges for organisations and workers to adapt, innovate, and compete in a dynamic and uncertain world. Three key macro factors impacting UK productivity levels are instability, skills/training, and investment.



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### Instability

There are a number of factors impacting the stability of the UK socio-economic and political environment, from volatile energy costs, inflation, interest rates and financial markets, to the net zero agenda and operational transformation in response to emerging technology, as well as public policy uncertainty and other ongoing geopolitical tensions. Over 60% of workers believe they have experienced more change in the last year than the 12 months prior.<sup>2</sup> This instability fosters uncertainty and inhibits productivity.

At an individual level, workers are motivated by, and experience in their workplace, safety and tradition, which are among the top personal and workplacevalues in the UK.

### Personal values:

22% 15% 13%

Community Tradition Safety

### Workplace values:

15% 15% 14%

Success Community Safety

To some extent safety is necessary in the workplace, for example psychological safety can increase productivityas teams feel safe to take risks.

However, this is not a feature of UK workplace culture; UK workplace psychological safety is 43% (100% being optimal). From ages 25+, the older the worker the more psychologically safe they feel in the workplace. The least psychologically safe industries are Private Equity & Sovereign Wealth Funds (35.6%), Energy Utilities and Resources (41.7%) and Technology, Media and Telecommunications (41.2%). The greatest psychological safety is in Government & Health Industries (43.8%) and Financial Services (44.4%).

The key to psychological safety is a combination of safety and courage, where small-scale failures and dissent and debate are encouraged. However, there is a mismatch in perception between workers and CEOs on how much managers encourage dissent and debate, and tolerate small-scale failures. Only 27% of UK workers think that their manager encourages dissent and debate, while 57% of CEOs think that their managers do this.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, only 36% of UK workers think that their manager tolerates small-scale failures, while 46% of CEOs think that their managers do this.<sup>4</sup>

### Innovator: Adventure and independence

23%

of UK workers see innovator values in the workplace, and only

21%

of workers are motivated by innovator values.

Moreover, only 23% of UK workers see innovator values in the workplace, and only 21% of workers are motivated by innovator values. Innovator values, such as adventure and independence, embody the mindset that embraces change, learning, and innovation, which are essential for productivity in a volatile environment.

Unsurprisingly, older workers are more likely to value safety than younger workers 18-34 year olds value community, success and tradition whereas 35 year olds and above value community, safety and tradition. This is potentially because at the 35-year mark, impacts of failure become more detrimental, such as children, mortgage repayments, etc. The ongoing cost of living pressures and high interest rates exacerbate the problem for many workers, especially first-time buyers, who have an average age of 34 in England.5 There is a need to harness the success of younger workers and find ways to sustain it as other external and internal pressures mount on older workers, and influence their approach at work. Alternatively, there is a need to find ways to reduce the macro pressures that impact how people approach work.

% of workers that describe their workplace as hierarchical by seniority:

**12**%

15%

0%

**Junior** 

Senior

Director+

Safety: In the form of structure – also continues to permeate UK organisations. Junior workers are more likely to perceive their workplace as hierarchical (15%) in comparison to senior workers (12%). Additionally, no workers above the director level choose hierarchy as a workplace descriptor. Increased hierarchy can decrease productivity as it creates process-heavy, bureaucratic environments, where innovation and agility are stifled.

### Skills/training

Skills are the abilities that workers need to perform their tasks and roles effectively and efficiently. Skills shortages could hamper productivity and growth, as technology, business models, and emerging skill sets change rapidly. Organisations need new ways to define and develop the skills they need for the future, and to overcome a cautious and traditional mindset that resists change.

More than two-thirds of UK businesses (71%) have been hit by labour shortages in the last 12 months, and 79% of businesses believe access to skills threatens the UK's current labour market competitiveness.<sup>6</sup>

The World Economic Forum estimated that by 2025, globally 85 million jobs may be displaced by a shift in the division of labour between humans and machines, while 97 million new roles may emerge. 41% of CEOs say that a lack of skills is inhibiting their company from changing the way it delivers and captures value, and 78% report some extent of skills shortages. Between now and 2027, businesses predict that 44% of workers' core skills will be disrupted, yet few UK workers believe that their skill set will change significantly over the next five years.

Only 26% of workers agree that the skills their job requires will change significantly in the next 5 years, but younger are more acutely aware of the skills evolution; 31% of GenZ and Millenials believe their skills will change significantly, and 47% of these age groups agrees that the opportunity to learn new skills influences their decision to stay with a current employer or switch to a new one.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>PwC, Hopes and Fears 2023 survey <sup>4</sup>2021-2022 English Housing Survey

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>PwC, Hopes and Fears 2023 survey

 $<sup>^7 \</sup>rm WEF$ , The Future Of Work: Embracing Al's Job Creation Potential  $^8 \rm PwC$ , CEO Survey 27th

<sup>9</sup>WEF (2023) Future of Jobs 2023

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> PwC, H&F 24

A skills-first approach can help future-proof organisations, drive engagement, innovation, and productivity, and unlock the labour market for 100 million people globally.11 Using skills to find the right people for the right job could also reduce the skills gap and mismatch in the UK, which costs the economy £120 billion a year.12

The skills that are needed today may look different to those skills required in the next five years. It is important to embrace a growth mindset, in order to be fluid and agile as and when these skill demands change. With workers having the right skills, deployed to the right tasks, organisations can maximise the impact of their effort to drive performance. growth, resilience, innovation, and agility. With a workplace culture of Safety in the UK, it is important for workers to make a conscious effort to respond to changing skills requirements through leveraging innovator values which underpin the growth mindset.

Six in ten workers will require training before 2027, but only half of workers are seen to have access to adequate training opportunities today.<sup>13</sup> Training workers to utilise AI and big data ranks third among company skills-training priorities in the next five years, and will be prioritised by 42% of surveyed companies.14 The highest priority for 2023-2027 is analytical thinking, followed by creative thinking. Employers also plan to focus on developing workers' skills in leadership and social influence (40% of companies), resilience, flexibility and agility (32%), and curiosity and lifelong learning (30%).15

### Investment

Investment is the allocation of resources to acquire or improve assets that generate value in the future. Investment can take various forms, such as physical capital, human capital, research and development, and technology. Investment is crucial for productivity, as it enables organisations to improve their efficiency, quality, accuracy, and innovation, and to gain a competitive edge in the market.

CEOs and leaders are under no illusion that they need to transform in order for their organisations to survive; 21% of CEOS say their organisation will not be economically viable within 10 years on its current path and 53% of UK CEOs are taking personal responsibility and sponsoring transformation within their organisation<sup>16</sup>. They are investing in their organisations and understand the importance of leading by example when it comes to having a transformative mindset. However, there is a gap in what leaders and staff are experiencing intheir workplace.

https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/LGA-2019\_ SkillsGaps\_FINAL.pdf

Top 10 descriptors vary by seniority

Junior Workers	
Top 10 words	%
Friendly	34
Independent	29
Creative	27
Respectful	26
Reliable	25
Relaxed	25
Honest	25
High quality	22
Enjoyable	21
Safe	21

CEO/Founders	
Top 10 words	%
Friendly	34
Independent	29
Creative	27
Respectful	26
Reliable	25
Relaxed	25
Honest	25
High quality	22
Enjoyable	21
Safe	21

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>PwC, Putting Skills First <sup>12</sup>Learning and Work Institute

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>WEF, Future of Jobs Report

<sup>14</sup>WEF. Future of Jobs Report

<sup>15</sup> WEF, Future of Jobs Report

<sup>16</sup>th CEO survey

If junior staff are not aligned with the long-term vision of the organisation, they are less likely to embrace new transformative behaviours and the benefits of investment may not be realised. 77% of workers understand, and 74% believe in, their organisation's long term goals and strategy.17. Additionally, this year's Hopes & Fears survey shows that junior workers particularly have the highest trust in their senior executives (across communication, competence, reliability, benevolence and listening) in comparison to other age groups.<sup>18</sup> Organisations need to ensure they are bringing workers on the transformation journey and leveraging the trust workers hold in their leadership to provide the necessary skills and upskilling opportunities forsuccessful transformation.

For example, investment in advancing technologies such as GenAl has the potential to transform workforce productivity across every sector and industry. GenAl has the potential to boost UK productivity growth, with 53% of UK CEOs expecting GenAl to improve their efficiency.<sup>19</sup> This year, 62% of UK workers believe Al will improve the quality of their work and 57% believe it will increase time efficiency<sup>20</sup>. Whilst UK workers recognise the benefits that GenAl can bring, this is not translating into regular usage. 47% of UK respondents report using GenAl at work in the past year, far fewer are using it on a consistent basis. <sup>21</sup>

Values of adventure and independence, from the innovator quadrant, were two of the lowest values within the UK, but are the values that most embody the mindset thatembraces GenAl.

To drive efficiency and to remain at the forefront of technological advancements, leaders must proactively adopt new strategies and be willing to take calculated risks and cultivate agility, drawing upon the expertise of the more digitally literate populations within their workforce. More importantly, they need to be able to bring their employees on the journey, integrating cultural considerations into strategic decision making and operational change. They must address the ethical, social, and environmental implications of GenAI, and ensure that workers are empowered, not replaced, by GenAI.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>H&F 24



<sup>17</sup>H&F 24

<sup>18</sup>H&F 249

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>CEO Survey

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup>H&F 24

### **Micro Factors**

At a micro level, there are also organisational drivers which impact productivity. The Culture Decoder shows at the individual and organisational level why productivity may be slowing down in the UK. These are work culture, work environment, and leadership and management. The impact of these micro drivers on productivity vary across different industries, sectors, and sizes of organisations. They reflect the nature, type, level, and demand of work, as well as the resources, capabilities, and strategies of organisations.

### **Examples**

Technology, Media, and Telecommunications (TMT) organisations tend to have higher cultural health, belonging, and productivity. They operate in a dynamic, competitive, and innovative environment that requires a growth mindset, a flexible work environment, and an empowering leadership and management style.

Government administration organisations tend to have lower cultural health, belonging, and productivity. They operate in a stable, regulated, and bureaucratic environment that requires a defender mindset, a rigid work environment, and a hierarchical leadership and management style.

Overall, workers experience similar values in the workplace, yet workers have different motivators (personal values) and desired workplace values. To increase productivity in the UK, we must utilise personal and desired values to tailor workplacesand therefore drive productivity.

### Culture

Cultural health is the degree of positivity or negativity of workplace culture and values, as perceived by employees with belonging referring to the alignment between personal and workplace values.

Cultural Health in the UK is

82%

and belonging in the UK is

67%

Negative cultural health signals employee disengagement, a lack of alignment with organisational purpose, and a reluctance in discretionary effort to complete tasks, all of which contribute to decreased productivity. Employees use negative descriptors such as demanding, cost-reducing, long-hours, poorly planned, and hierarchical to express their dissatisfaction. Additionally, a significant portion of the workforce, one-fifth, find their workloads unmanageable due to pressure, uncertainty, and inefficiency.

This is unsurprising given UK worker burnout sits at 6.7% (where 0% is optimal). Burnout increases rapidly as workers age and the highest burnout is in sectors like Government & Health (9%), Consumer Markets (8.2%) and Private Equity and Sovereign Wealth Funds (7.4%). Industries with the lowest burnout rate are Energy, Utilities and Resources (2.1%) and Technology, Media and Telecommunications (3.5%).

The link between organisational success and cultural health highlights the importance of fostering a positive culture, as higher-performing organisations exhibit cultural health scores of 90%, while average performers score 82%, and below-average performers score a mere 56%. An analysis of value descriptors further emphasises this dichotomy, with low-performing organisations characterised by poor planning, instability, and short-term focus which may reflect a failure to adapt to changing needs of work whereas as high-performing organisations embody a culture of success (17%), honesty (20%), and collaboration (21%).

Various industries and sectors exhibit distinct value systems and work environments, influencing their cultural health and sense of belonging. Disparities in the nature of work, task types, compensation levels, emotional demands, and resource requirements contribute to these variations. For instance, the Technology, Media, and Telecommunications (TMT) sector boast the highest cultural health at 86% and a strong belonging score of 75%, characterised by the absence of negative descriptors in their top 10. Conversely, the Professional, Educational, and Financial (PEF) sectors, along with Government and Health Industries (G&HI), struggle with lower cultural health scores of 79% and 80%, respectively, and belonging scores of 55% and 64%. Negative words like hierarchical, bureaucratic, short-term focused, and confused dominate their top 10 descriptors, reflecting challenges in fostering a positive workplace culture and a sense of belonging.

Not only does the sector impact cultural health, but so too does the organisation's size. Smaller organisations tend to embrace a growth mindset, fostering innovation, learning, and resilience, while larger counterparts often adopt a defender mindset, prioritising the maintenance of the status quo, risk aversion, and adherence to rules. These mindsets shape how employees perceive and approach challenges, opportunities, and feedback, ultimately influencing their motivation, engagement, and performance. A growth mindset is generally associated with higher productivity levels, as it encourages adaptability, feedback-seeking behaviour, learning from mistakes, and pursuit of excellence. Conversely, a defender mindset tends to lead to lower productivity, breeding resistance to change, fear of failure, complacency, and stagnation.

Smaller organisations, comprising fewer than 10 employees, boast a cultural health of 91%, with none of their top 10 value descriptors being negative. On the other hand, larger organisations, with 10,000 or more employees, exhibit a cultural health of 77%, with 60% of their top 10 descriptors carrying negative connotations, highlighting the challenges inherent in maintaining a positive workplace culture at scale.

Evidence suggests a link between prioritising health and wellbeing and sustained business performance, ultimately leading to increased productivity. PwC's Work Well survey revealed that a significant 83% of workers acknowledge the influence of their wellbeing on their productivity levels.<sup>22</sup> Total wellness encompasses various facets, including reward systems, physical health, mental wellbeing, and financial stability. The current economic landscape, characterised by inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, has left many workers grappling with financial strain. PwC's Hopes and Fears survey corroborates this, indicating that workers are feeling financially worse off compared to the previous year.23 This economic stress has a knock on impact on physical and mental health, subsequently impacting workplace productivity and employee engagement. Recognising and addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a work environment conducive to optimal performance and wellbeing.

### Leadership and management

Leaders and senior management play a crucial role in shaping the organisational culture and behaviours. They establish the tone from the top, demonstrate desired behaviours, and set the organisation's strategy, which can have a knock on impact on how employees engage with the organisation's long term goals. Effective leadership involves a balance between experience and adaptability to change in order to foster an environment that is more innovative, adaptable and reflective of the diverse landscape of the UK.

A management style that is rigid, top-down, or short-term oriented could limit the engagement and empowerment of employees, their belonging score, and ultimately their productivity. An example of this is the Government Administration sector, which has the lowest cultural health score (74%) with negative words such as bureaucratic, hierarchical, demanding, poorly planned and cost-reducing chosen in the top 10. Findings from PwC's Hopes and Fears survey indicate that 64% of respondents feel their managers are intolerant of small-scale failure.<sup>24</sup>

Fostering curiosity and openness toward beginning ideas, creativity and energy to the workplace whilst adopting technology with the proven ability to unlock capacity and improve productivity.

As individuals climb the hierarchy within their organisation, they often develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose tied to the organisation's mission and goals and are more aligned with leaders and senior management. More senior workers are likely to see the direct impact their actions have on business performance, and are more likely to be remunerated because of this. It is potentially harder for junior workers to connect their individual actions to the wider organisational mission. Belonging within the company varies across different levels of hierarchy: entry-level and junior managers report a belonging score of 63%, whereas managers and senior managers score significantly higher at 96%. Directors, senior directors, and executives also exhibit strong belonging scores ranging from 67% to 79%, while non-executive directors (NEDs) score 70%. Senior workers typically exhibit a stronger sense of belonging tied to the company's mission and goals, reflecting their deeper integration into the organisational DNA. Additionally, there is a notable distinction in values between executive board members and founders, who prioritise independence, and other staff grades, who emphasise safety, albeit with a shared value for community and success.

Many junior workers may be incentivised on a more short term focused basis with weekly wages, sales targets and KPIs. In an unstable economic climate where the cost of living crisis is causing workers to question their ability to make it paycheck to paycheck, productivity gains and 'buying' into long term organisational vision may be far from the forefront of junior workers minds. This short term vision is unsurprising; many workers report that they are struggling to make it paycheck to paycheck, with 68% of UK workers struggling to, or can't, pay their bills every month.

A perception of hierarchy and focus on short term incentives and outcomes may result in junior workers missing out on the opportunity to develop a deeper sense of belonging to the organisation and its long term vision, which is a key driver of productivity and satisfaction. Junior workers are also more likely to describe their organisation as hierarchical compared to senior workers (15% vs 12%), with no workers above the director level choosing hierarchical to describe their workplace.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup>PwC, Work Well Survey

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup>PwC Hopes & Fears 2024

### Conclusion - The way forward

To enhance productivity in the UK, organisations can take the following tangible steps:

### **Invest in Skills Development:**

- Provide continuous training and development opportunities for employees.
- Partner with educational institutions to create ailored programs that meet industry needs.
- Promote upskilling and reskilling to keep pace with technological advancements.

#### **Foster a Culture of Innovation:**

- Encourage risk-taking and experimentation within the organisation.
- Create an environment where failure is seen as a learning opportunity.
- Reward creative solutions and innovative ideas from employees.

### **Leverage Technology and Automation:**

- Adopt new technologies to streamline operations and reduce manual tasks.
- Implement data analytics to improve decisionmaking and efficiency.
- Invest in digital tools that enhance collaboration and remote work capabilities.

### Enhance Employee Engagement to improve overall organisational culture:

- Conduct regular surveys to understand employee needs and concerns.
- Develop initiatives that align organisational values with those of employees.
- Recognise and reward employee contributions to increase motivation and loyalty.

### Strengthen Leadership and Management:

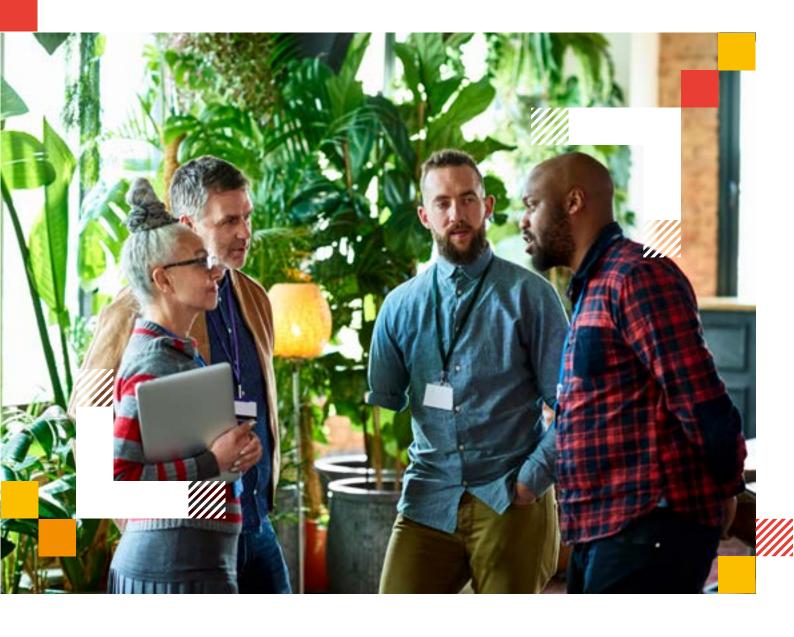
- Train leaders in effective communication, conflict resolution, and team management.
- Encourage transparent and open communication between management and employees.
- Foster a leadership style that is supportive, adaptive, and collaborative.

By focusing on these areas, organisations can create a more productive, innovative, and engaged workforce, ultimately contributing to the overall productivity of the UK.

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## Appendix – Methodology

Founded in 2015 Brands with Values has been on a mission to revolutionise how business leaders grasp and measure culture in their organisations.

We have always understood the direct link between corporate success and corporate culture; however, we have been frustrated that there wasn't a clear way to measure this. Proxy measures like engagement surveys haven't offered business leaders a 360-degree view and grasp of their current Culture. By combining the expertise of academics, business leaders and data scientists over the last decade, we have been able to make culture tangible and measurable through our Culture Decoder Platform, giving business leaders actionable data on which to build their future people and business strategy.

### **The Culture Decoder**

The Culture Decoder is a transformative culture diagnostic and people organisational tool. The Culture Decoder works by asking participants to describe their personal, workplace and desired workplace values. Respondents were presented with a word wall of 81 sentiments for each question, the words span a comprehensive spectrum of human values. The question about observed values has an additional 19 words (see below), bringing the overall selection to 99 words.

Participants were asked:

- What are your personal values?
- What values do you observe within the industry?
- What values would you like to observe within your industry and workplace?

### **Metrics**

Various metrics are referenced in this paper. See definitions below:

### 01

### **Cultural distance**

This 'Cultural Distance' is a calculation made between the Desired Values of Leaders and other groups within the organisation.

The Distance Calculator has a scale of between 0 and 100, where 100 shows no distance between two sets of data and 0 shows the greatest possible distance.

### ()2 Cultural health

Refers to the degree of positivity or negativity of workplace culture and values, as perceived by employees. Participants in the survey had the option to choose 99 words to describe their culture, both their personal and workplace. These words were both positive and negative. It is therefore possible that an organisation had a culture of citizenship, but in a 'negative' way, and vice versa. If participants were to choose words at random, there would be a 20% chance that those words would be negative. Therefore, the benchmark for a healthy rating is 80%.

### 03 Belonging score

This score calculates the distance between the Personal Values and Workplace Values. The algorithm also takes into account any potentially unhealthy sentiments respondents may have selected within the Workplace Culture question.

### 04 Burnout

The Burn out percentage highlights how many respondents have selected words that pertain to burnout:

- Demanding
- Long hours

The optimum is 0%

### 05 Psychological Safety

The Psychological Safety rating calculates the percentage of respondents who have selected words that evidence our 4 pillars of Psychological Safety:

- Open Communication Trust
- Healthy Challenge
- Conflict resolution

The optimum is 100%

### **Quadrants and categories**

The four quadrants in the value wheel are based on the academic work of Shalom Schwartz. The quadrants are defined below as well as the categories sitting in each quadrant.

### ) Guardians (stability)

Guardians protect order, traditions and people, valuing consistency, safety and stability.

- Tradition: Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
- Safety: Safety, harmony, and stability of society and relationships.

### 02 Champions (self)

Champions strive for success, recognition and authority, valuing achievement, ability and power.

- Authority: Social status and prestige, control, or dominance over people and resources.
- Success: Success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
- Pleasure (shared with innovators): Pleasure and sensuous gratification.

### 03 Innovators (change)

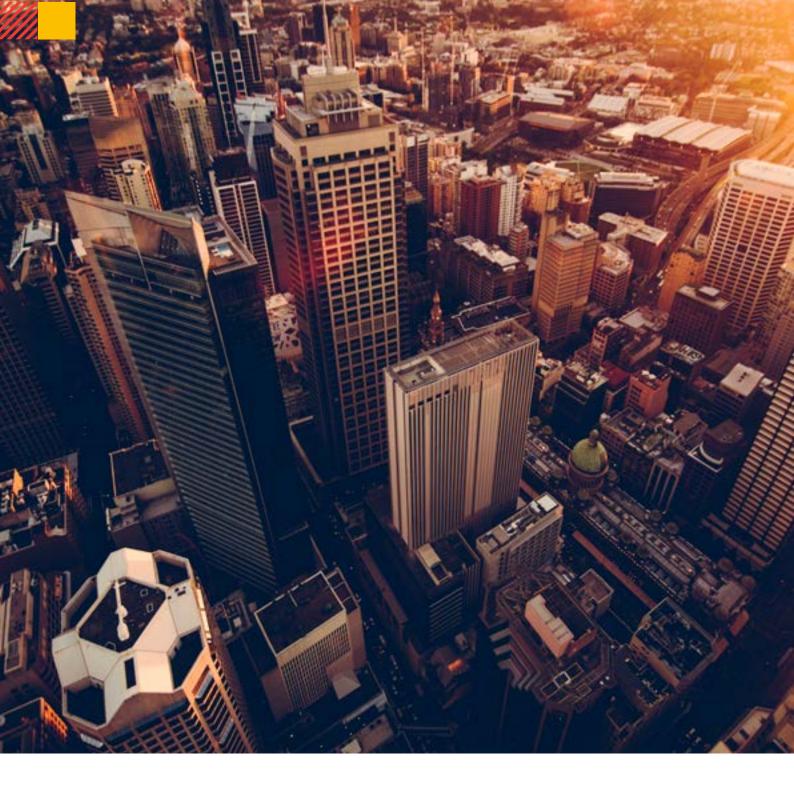
Innovators explore new ideas, experiences and approaches, valuing discovery, experimentation and independence.

- Pleasure (shared with champions): Pleasure and sensuous gratification.
- Adventure: Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
- Independence: Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring.

### O4 Citizens (others)

Citizens consider their place in communities and the world, valuing ethics, relationships and helping others.

- Selflessness: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
- Community: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.



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