

Bad Behaviours **TOXIC CULTURES**

**How employee
behaviours contribute to
organisational culture**

By: Steve Simpson



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report details findings from a study undertaken in late 2007 by Keystone Management Services. The study was a web based survey aimed at determining the extent to which employee behaviours contributed in positive and negative ways to organisational culture. We received 1004 responses from 32 countries, with around half at a senior management level, one third at a middle management level and 15% non-managers.

To what extent are positive behaviours observed in the workplace?

A pleasing finding from this study is that in many organisations, large proportions of employees demonstrate positive, culture-building behaviours. Specifically, these were:

- 📌 Modelling positive behaviour (71% of respondents reported this behaviour as being demonstrated either 'often' or 'very often')
- 📌 Having a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented (63%)

To what extent are negative behaviours observed in the workplace?

While some people report the existence of positive behaviours in their organisation, others report relatively high levels of negative behaviours. The most commonly observed negative behaviours were:

- 📌 Participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours (35% of respondents reported this behaviour as being demonstrated either 'often' or 'very often')
- 📌 Displaying negativity or taking a cynical view (28%)
- 📌 Complaining about or ridiculing management (27%)

How do people rank their organisation's culture overall?

A total 56% of respondents rated their overall culture 'better than OK', while 27% rated their culture 'worse than OK'.

Do non-managers, middle managers and senior managers see things differently?

The short answer to this question is 'absolutely'! This is where we found some startling results. Consistently, senior managers reported the existence of positive, culture-building behaviours more frequently than non-managers and middle managers. Similarly, senior managers reported the existence of negative, culture-blocking behaviours less frequently than middle managers and non-managers.

As an example, only 20% of senior managers reported the relatively frequent occurrence of 'displaying negativity or taking a cynical view'. The corresponding figure for non-managers was 41% and was 32% for middle managers. A total 19% of senior managers felt that

'complaining about or ridiculing management' occurred either often or very often. The corresponding figure for non-managers was 41% and was 31% for middle managers.

This different perspective is carried through into how people rate their culture overall. While 51% of senior managers rated their overall culture highly, only 29% of non-managers and 28% of middle managers afforded their organisation the same score. Predictably, a larger proportion of non-managers (42%) rated their organisation's culture poorly while the figure for senior managers was 18%.

Does the size of the organisation influence how people feel about their culture?

We found evidence of there being large differences in how people viewed their culture, based on the size of the respondent's organisation. Almost without exception, the smaller the organisation, the more people felt positive behaviours were exhibited. Likewise, the larger the organisation, the more people felt negative behaviours were exhibited.

What's the overall culture rating for those who rated 'high' on negative behaviours?

We found evidence to support the view that the existence of the 'negative' behaviours included in this survey will strongly impact on people's overall rating of their culture. While the overall culture rating for all respondents was 5.7 (on a nine point scale, where nine is 'about as good as it gets'), those people who reported a high incidence of 'resisting management requests' had an overall culture rating of 3.8. Similarly, those who reported a higher frequency of 'ridiculing management' had an overall culture rating of 4.0.

Are behaviours very different in organisations with a positive culture compared with those with a negative culture?

To answer this question, we sorted respondents into two broad groups, based on their overall rating of their organisation's culture - one group comprised those who rated their culture 'Better than OK' (i.e. 5 through 9 on a nine-point scale), the other group being 'Less than OK' (i.e. 1 through 4 on a nine point scale).

We then looked at the extent to which positive and negative behaviours were reported by each of these groups.

Those people with positive cultures reported a high incidence (84%) of people having a mind-set that is positive and solutions oriented. People in less positive cultures reported the incidence of this behaviour at only 30%.

In contrast, complaining about or ridiculing management occurred frequently in 62% of negative cultures, compared with 10% in positive cultures. Displaying negativity or taking a cynical view occurred frequently in 61% of negative cultures, compared with 11% in positive cultures.

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE STUDY

We believe there are a number of really important messages and implications that emerge from this study. These are described below.

Culture needs to be centre-stage in the minds of leaders. Over 40% of non-managers and over 30% of middle managers rated their organisation's culture as 'less than OK'. From our previous work and the work of many others, we know that poor cultures lead to poor performance, so the quest for a positive, productive culture must be a leadership priority.

There is a real risk that senior leaders perceive their culture to be positive while their middle manager and non-manager counterparts have very different views. Unless there are constant and various effective feedback mechanisms in place for senior leadership teams, they may be unaware of the scope of counter-productive behaviours occurring in the workplace. Our study showed that non-managers and middle managers observed much more than senior managers the existence of less positive and more negative behaviours being displayed in the workplace.

We now have a concise profile of positive and negative behaviours that provide a litmus test for the existing cultures within teams and across organisations. This study shows strong relationships among each of the specific positive and negative behaviours and people's ratings of their overall culture. A high presence of our profile of positive behaviours resulted in people rating their overall culture very positively. Likewise, a high presence of our profile of negative behaviours resulted in people rating their overall culture very poorly.

The profile of positive and negative behaviours from this study can be used in various ways within organisations. The positive, culture-building behaviours identified in this study can be used in various practical ways, including incorporating them into the recruitment and selection process, the performance management process, and as an important element of what gets rewarded and recognised within the organisation. The negative, culture-blocking behaviours can be used in the performance management process across all levels.

Key messages for senior leaders - clearly, this study shows that senior leaders often perceive their culture to be more positive than others in the organisation. This means that even if you think your culture is positive and productive, there is a chance that destructive behaviours are being exhibited without you being aware. It's therefore vitally important that you put in place multiple strategies to monitor various aspects of the culture - and that you act on the results from these feedback mechanisms. It's also critical your behaviour models the kind of culture you would like to characterise your organisation.

Key messages for middle managers - this study shows that your view of your organisation's culture is probably more in line with non-managers - this makes sense as your perception is based on interactions with levels below you and above you. You should also be heartened by the findings in this study that show you can have a strong impact on the organisation's culture. Your behaviour can, and does make a difference both through the behaviour you display, and through your own management style. A trap for you as a middle manager is for you to become cynical about senior management and to share these views with your people.

Key messages for non-managers - there is a clear message for non-managers from this study - the behaviours you display can impact heavily of the organisation's culture. There is no doubt that senior managers and middle managers heavily influence the organisation's culture - but your behaviours also impact strongly. This study gives you a personal behaviour template - positive behaviours to which you can aspire. The study also gives clear indications of the specific negative behaviours that you should avoid - in the interests of building a more productive and positive work environment.



THE FULL REPORT

The Full Report

Globally, there is pressure on companies to do more with less. Organisations everywhere have turned their focus towards maximising their resources, integrating their systems, managing their inventory more effectively, and looking for ways in which to better plan and then execute their vision of the future.

To this end we spare no effort in getting to better understand the core processes that make up our 'production line' - and this is as true of service industries as it is of widget-manufacturers. We seek to understand, so that we can plan and forecast... and then we measure and adjust until we get it right.

Yet, surprisingly, our work suggests that the single component that most impacts on business outcomes - that of the behaviour of the people who make up the organisation, and the resulting organisational culture - is poorly understood and often mismanaged.

This needs to change - at least if organisations want to ensure their success into the future, and if they want to make theirs a better place to be. Which means we need to develop our understanding of organisational culture... and that we need to start managing our culture as a critical business process.

And so we set out to help organisations do just that... which lead to the creation of the **UGRs**[®] concept by Steve Simpson more than a decade ago... and our ongoing research in this field - of which this study is a part.

Background

One major issue that many leaders confront when they wish to understand and improve their culture stems from the complex nature of organisational culture. Put simply, if managers do not understand culture in simple, practical terms, then they are unable to manage it.

That's where the concept of 'unwritten ground rules' or **UGRs**[®], plays and pivotal role. UGRs are peoples' perceptions of 'this is the way we do things around here'. Sample UGRs include:

- 👉 At our meetings it isn't worth complaining because nothing will get done
- 👉 The only time anyone gets spoken to by the boss is when something is wrong
- 👉 The company talks about good customer service, but we know they don't really mean it, so we don't really have to worry about it

UGRs dictate people's behaviour yet they are rarely, if ever spoken about openly. Importantly, they constitute an organisation's culture.

Much has been written about how leaders shape and influence culture. There's little doubt that through their words and deeds, leaders create and sustain UGRs, and therefore the organisation's culture.

Very little attention has been paid however, to how employees can and do contribute to positive and negative aspects of corporate culture. That's what prompted us to undertake research in 2006 to identify specific non-manager behaviours that contribute in both positive and negative ways towards UGRs.

That research uncovered some fascinating insights. We found that non-managers displayed the following behaviours that had a positive impact on culture:

- 👉 Modelling positive behaviour
- 👉 Having a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented
- 👉 Being proactive
- 👉 Challenging negative behaviour displayed by others

The following were identified as behaviours that contributed to organisational culture in negative ways:

- 👉 Participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours
- 👉 Focussing on fulfilling only the minimal requirements of the job
- 👉 Resisting management requests
- 👉 Displaying negativity or taking a cynical view
- 👉 Isolating people who do not comply with 'the way we do things around here'
- 👉 Complaining about or ridiculing management

Our latest research, reported in this paper, sought to examine the extent to which each of these positive and negative behaviours were exhibited in organisations, and to investigate the extent to which each of these behaviours influenced the organisation's overall culture.

The Results

We conducted an internet based survey from October through December 2007. A total 1004 valid responses were received.

Who Responded?

The table below shows that almost half (49%) of the respondents were senior managers. Non-managers made up 15% of respondents, while middle managers comprised 36%.

Level	Percentage	Total Number
Non manager	15%	142
Middle level manager	36%	334
Senior manager	49%	464

* A total 64 people did not respond to this item

Respondents came from organisations across a wide variety of sizes. The smallest proportion (18%) were from organisations with between 51 and 250 staff, while the largest group (34%) were from organisations with more than 1000 staff.

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Organisation Size	Percentage	Total
Less than 50 staff	26%	243
51 to 250 staff	18%	165
251 to 1000	23%	218
More than 1000 staff	34%	316

* A total 62 people did not respond to this item

While more than half of the respondents (64%) were from Australia, there was a very wide spread of respondents from different countries. Relatively large proportions were from the UK, South Africa, the US and New Zealand. In addition, we received responses from people in a further 27 countries.

Respondent's Country	Percentage	Total
Australia	61%	575
United Kingdom	14%	130
South Africa	8%	80
United States of America	6%	57
New Zealand	4%	42
Other (27 countries)**	6%	59

* A total 61 people did not respond to this item

** A full list of countries can be found in Appendix 1

To what extent are positive behaviours observed in the workplace?

We found evidence of workplace behaviours contributing in positive ways towards organisational culture. These, listed in the table below, show that some respondents report highly positive behaviours being exhibited by their colleagues. Just over one fifth of respondents (22%) reported that they observed 'very often' people with a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented. Equally positive is the finding that 71% of respondents saw people modelling positive behaviour often or very often.

Perhaps the most difficult 'positive' behaviour to exhibit in the workplace relates to challenging negative behaviour displayed by others. It's easier, and causes less friction, to let this kind of thing go. This is reflected in our findings - which show that only 28% of respondents observed this often or very often.

The average rating in this table (Table 1) and others that follow have been calculated on the basis of the five-point response scale, ranging from 1 (rarely) through 5 (very often).

We received a number of written comments in response to this question. Some of the more interesting and salient comments are provided below:

- ☞ OK in our particular business unit but in other areas of the business definitely not like this.
- ☞ Our organisation is characterised by avoidance - the elephant in the room is never visible
- ☞ Challenging negative behaviour can lead to accusations of bullying or escalate the emotional content of the event.
- ☞ Whilst our senior leadership promote a culture of challenging "the rain clouds" and asking them to leave the organisation, it rarely happens lower down the ranks, which I believe results from a fear of giving feedback.
- ☞ Still a fear of upsetting people by giving honest feedback
- ☞ Something the team needs to work on is being quicker to SAY something to someone displaying negative feedback instead of just frowning at them across the room. For example recently we had IT issues and someone was complaining that "IT was supposed to work" without sympathy for the person trying to fix it. His colleagues disapproved of his attitude but didn't actually say anything. He's not a mind reader - someone needed to say, lighten up.
- ☞ Positive behaviours are often 'over-powered' by union demands which leads to a 'I'll just do my job - what's the point' attitude.
- ☞ There is definitely no solutions-oriented culture, rather a blame culture centred on deflecting any problems to other areas or individuals in the organisation.
- ☞ Challenging negative behaviour in the past has resulted in grievance being lodged to avoid the real issue. People put up with the behaviour rather than to be the one to have their head above the parapet.
- ☞ Poor behaviour is never challenged nor addressed. It is tolerated. New staff have problems coping with this. I have been told of someone who recently missed out on her substantive job, and on finding out, destroyed company property (needed for the job) in anger. This has been accepted as "the way she is".
- ☞ Often those who display negative behaviours are just ignored and we all just get on with the job despite them.
- ☞ There is a 'niceness' factor at work here. People who are ready to challenge general wrongs in the world don't name the things that are going wrong in their immediate environment because it would hurt other people's feelings.
- ☞ Very strong leadership in our organisation- we try to model the Covey principles.
- ☞ Walking the talk is becoming important to our UGRs

Table 1.

	Rarely		Sometimes		Very often	Rating Average (5 point scale)
Modelling positive behaviour	2%	4%	34%	43%	18%	3.71
Having a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented	1%	7%	29%	41%	22%	3.75
Being proactive	3%	8%	33%	37%	18%	3.58
Challenging negative behaviour displayed by others	11%	22%	39%	21%	7%	2.91

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To what extent are negative behaviours observed in the workplace?

While there are a number of positive behaviours that contribute to organisational culture, we also found evidence of negative behaviours being exhibited relatively widely in organisations across the globe. Participation in gossip and/or spreading rumours was observed more than any other negative behaviours - with more than a third (35%) of respondents observing this either often or very often.

Next to gossip and spreading rumours, the most common negative behaviour was displaying negativity or taking a cynical view. Over one quarter (28%) of respondents observed this behaviour often, or very often.

Probably the most overt of the negative behaviours is 'resisting management requests'. Thankfully, this scored lowest, although 10% of respondents still observed this behaviour often or very often.

- 🗨️ As a company that has been purchased and merged with other companies, there is a huge "Us vs. Them" from the Old-school people within the various previous Organizations.
- 🗨️ There has been an amalgamation of three business units into one. No cultural integration.
- 🗨️ The management tend to "manage out" people who challenge the way things are done, especially those who question "the way things are done around here".
- 🗨️ I find that management are the main perpetrators of these negative behaviours. I am amazed daily watching them undermine their staff who have been brave enough to have a few suggestions on how to do things better.

Table 2.

	Rarely		Sometimes		Very often	Rating Average
Participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours	15%	12%	38%	21%	14%	3.08
Focussing on fulfilling only the minimal requirements of the job	27%	25%	32%	11%	4%	2.4
Resisting management requests	31%	29%	29%	8%	2%	2.22
Displaying negativity or taking a cynical view	13%	24%	36%	19%	9%	2.86
Isolating people who do not comply with 'the way we do things around here'	30%	26%	24%	13%	6%	2.4
Complaining about or ridiculing management	20%	23%	31%	16%	11%	2.75

Respondents were given the option to provide comments after the above ratings. Some of the salient comments are provided below:

- 🗨️ Things are not good, accusations of bullying & harassment but as a manager I have been bullied and threatened.
- 🗨️ I would describe the style of behaviour to an extent as passive aggressive
- 🗨️ This is rife amongst our sales force in particular plus one participant in the office. We are a small company of 10 employees
- 🗨️ People here do the minimum, very much a blame culture. Directors get a lot of "extra" visible benefits like them only being allowed to have melon for starter in the canteen and having the option of cheese on their jacket potato ...very stagnant, old fashioned and apathetic.
- 🗨️ Much of the negativism and complaining about management is a result of a change in senior mgmt in the last two years. The former group had a strong focus on the client/employee experience, while the current group has shifted focus to efficiencies. Front line employees and supervisors have tired of the insincere mentions of customer/employee within the context of no meaningful support.

- 🗨️ Was just whingeing in my head about this on my way to work this morning! Very timely... Our company is going through massive changes, management are secretive at present and staff are nervous, feel unnoticed when there is a problem and the culture at present is uneasy.
- 🗨️ Many of our people have an expectation that the world can change around them, but the work environment should stay the same
- 🗨️ We are Brits - we moan!
- 🗨️ Yeah, these behaviours are very commonly shown in the big MNCs
- 🗨️ Our organisation is impacted by state government amalgamation. These behaviours (above) have increased recently because of the unknown future we face
- 🗨️ You should have asked me BEFORE I changed organizations!!!
- 🗨️ Generally these negative behaviours are displayed by a minority but their impact level is high on other views and opinions

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Continued...

Who has the greatest influence on the organisation's culture?

We were interested in getting people's perspectives on the extent to which non-managers, middle managers and senior managers influenced the culture. Of course, conventional wisdom says that senior leaders have the greatest influence over culture - much less has been written about the influence of less senior people.

Our findings are somewhat surprising, in the degree to which people believed middle managers and non-managers influenced culture. Some 56% of respondents felt non-managers influenced the culture more than a moderate amount (i.e. a '4' or '5' on the five point scale). 71% of respondents felt middle management influenced the culture more than a moderate amount. This figure for senior managers was 83%.

✎ Middle and senior management do not role model very positive behaviours. We have a Director that in two years of being in that position, has never expressed a thought on any issue to the general staff in that Branch (via newsletter, email etc). What does that say to the general staff in that area? It says that the Director only is interested in communicating with Middle Management and that staff are not that important. This is basic stuff!!

✎ Activity is governed from on high, a number of non-management staff are not specifically represented at management level as this is a multidisciplinary environment, the culture is one of non inclusion at times until we raise our heads and question why. Difficult to influence culture when you are constantly "not at the table where decisions are made".

Table 3.	Not at all		Moderate amount		A great deal	Rating Average
Non-management staff	4%	10%	31%	21%	35%	3.73
Middle management	2%	5%	21%	28%	43%	4.06
Senior management	1%	5%	11%	22%	61%	4.36
Board	14%	17%	23%	15%	31%	3.32

NB: A 'not applicable' option was provided in the survey (for example, in cases where an organisation does not have a Board) - these have been removed from the calculations in determining percentages and average ratings

Once again, respondents were provided the option of making comments after considering the above. Some of the more interesting comments are provided below:

- ✎ I believe the level of influence of middle and senior management is related to how visible they are. If the managers are out there walking the floors and presenting at team meetings then they will have much more influence than they will have by sitting in an office and spraying email about.
- ✎ It's arguable that senior management have less influence on culture than they like to think
- ✎ Front line managers have the most impact on creating a workplace culture.
- ✎ The rank and file are the majority and they can have a negative/positive influence. Depending on the flavour of the day
- ✎ Cost underpins everything my company does. Any changes, ideas take a long, long time (mostly I've been told 2 years!) The CEO drives the culture on cost and no change, however senior management have become cynical so "don't do anything because nothing will change", this then is reflected more "childlike" in middle management behaviour who openly put down all directors and the CEO.

✎ Councillors (Board) have a significant impact when they aren't operating properly and interfering.

✎ Senior to middle management are the major influences, but I have seen instances where the board to senior management have sent wrong signals which have affected our current culture somewhat...

✎ If all management levels are positive, the rest of the workforce will follow

✎ The senior leaders seem to be the mirrors of our culture, not the creators of it.



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How do people rate their organisation's culture?

On a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ('About as bad as it gets') through 9 ('Ours is a brilliant culture'), respondents were invited to rate their overall culture. A mean of 5.66 reflected the fact that 56% of respondents rated their culture better than the mid point ('It's OK') while 27% rated their culture worse than the mid point.

On the one hand, these results are positive - over half the respondents are saying their organisation's culture is positive. Another way of considering these figures however is that more than one in four are rating their culture negatively, the impacts of which are likely to be substantial.

It should be noted that these findings inflate how positively people view their culture because of the larger proportion of senior managers in the respondent group. This is highlighted in a later segment of the report.

- There is no hope. I have given up. I read about some amazing organisations in yours and others publications, and I am thinking "I gotta find me one of those!!! (real soon)".
- Our culture seems to go in waves, at present though morale is low. We are a great bunch of people but undercurrents are negative, management decisions are questioned - i.e. recent promotions of staff members who are recognised as undeserving, higher wages and car etc given to new staff members while loyal hard workers are not rewarded. By the way, this is not me personally, but it does make me question management being out of touch with staff - no listening to the small voices. I find it particularly hard to positively motivate (as marketing officer) when this is going on.
- I am very proud to be a Woolworths employee & love being a part of it.

About as bad as it gets

It's OK

Ours is a Brilliant Culture

2%	3%	11%	11%	18%	16%	25%	12%	3%
LESS THAN OK 27%				OK	BETTER THAN OK 56%			

NB: Rounding has caused the total not to equal 100

After completing the above, respondents were provided the opportunity to make their own comments. Some of these are provided below:

- A change is needed - desperately
- I would rate it highly as evidenced by the staff retention and longevity rates. We are not the highest salary payers yet have strong staff commitment to our vision and mission as evidenced through our independent staff satisfaction surveys conducted by a well known Australian University.
- It is not sustainable. Staff turnover is currently at 30%. I have been here for 2 months and can see those employees who have so much potential not giving their potential because they think they can't. There is a "waiting" game going on as the CEO is due to leave in July (if he does) and his position will be taken over by our Group MD.
- Fortunately, attended one of Steve's sessions on UGRs: from this, we have often opened discussion about how we relate, and what culture we want to exist in our business for our selves, our customers and others
- In the past 12 months there has been a significant number of staff resignations from all levels of the organisation, but particularly from junior and middle management. This has been directly related to an organisational "re-alignment" or restructure which has been badly managed and planned by the senior management.
- Very positive. Great MD who has positively influenced senior management's behaviours & attitudes. This has flowed on to staff generally
- Good staff are leaving as they admit defeat against the negative influences
- Great place to work, prior to the amalgamation announcement. We've all been thrown a curve ball- we are trying hard to stay positive and find the challenges in a new organisation. Unfortunately communication with amalgamation partner is interesting and difficult
- I think that if our middle management truly empowered employees in the way that the board and executives intend, we would be capable of truly great things.
- Could be easily fixed by leadership being shown by Snr Management and ensuring all staff & management follow policy and not have the 'popular kids' allowed to do what they wish
- Many people say they love the culture, the atmosphere and the very supportive behaviour of colleagues and management. The commonest comment in exit interviews is "I've loved working here - but we need higher pay".
- Needs more top managers listening to the ground. Nursing is tough and the only reason most nurses work double shifts is because of the patients' needs and helping colleagues not because of the organisation

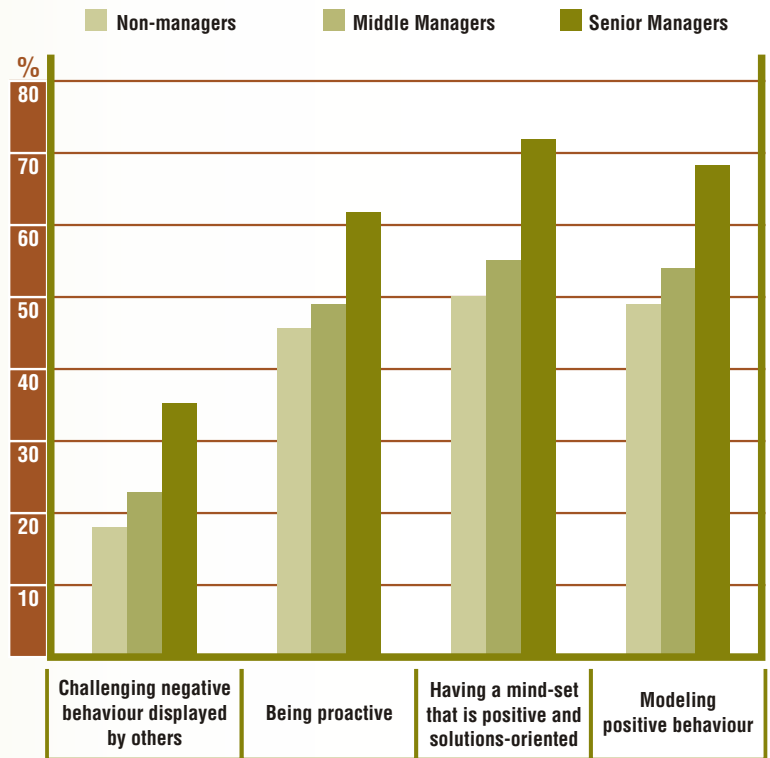
Do non-managers, middle managers and senior managers see things differently?

In short - absolutely!

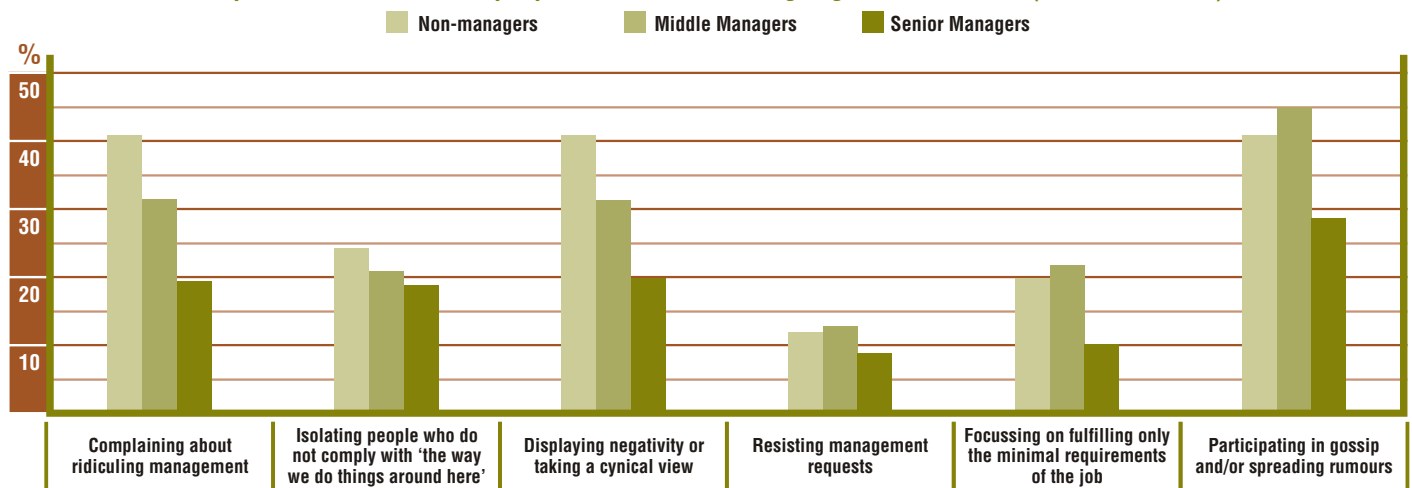
We analysed the results based on the position of the respondent. And the outcomes were startling.

The graph to the right (**Graph 1**) shows the percentage of respondents within each of the seniority levels, who observed positive behaviours either often or very often (i.e. 4 or 5 on a five-point scale). The results show stark differences among the groups - in particular, the results show that senior managers see their culture much more positively than both middle managers and non-managers. Equally, middle managers perceive there to be more positive behaviours being exhibited than their non-manager counterparts.

Graph 1. To what extent do people exhibit the following positive behaviours (% often or more)



Graph 2. To what extent do people exhibit the following negative behaviours (% often or more)



The graph above (**Graph 2**) shows the percentage of respondents within each of the seniority levels who observed negative behaviours either often or very often (i.e. 4 or 5 on the five-point scale). Again, these results show large differences among the three levels, with non-managers reporting the incidence of negative behaviours much more than senior managers. Middle managers also reported higher levels of negative behaviour - in some cases more so than non-managers - participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours, and focusing on fulfilling only the minimal requirements of the job being two such examples.

These results are cause for real concern. While 45% of middle managers felt participation in gossip was at a high level, the corresponding figure for senior managers was only 28%. A total 41% of non-managers felt displaying negativity was at a high level, in contrast to only 20% of senior managers.

These differences highlight the potential for senior managers to believe their culture is much more positive than their middle managers and non-managers. Put simply, there is a risk senior managers are seeing their culture through rose coloured glasses.

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Does the size of the organisation influence how people feel about their culture?

We analysed results based on the size of the organisation in which the respondent was employed. We found large differences.

The graph to the right (**Graph 3**) shows the percentage of respondents within each of organisational sizes, who observed positive behaviours either often or very often (i.e. 4 or 5 on a five-point scale). Clear and consistent differences can be seen. While 73% of people in small organisations (less than 50 employees) reported a high incidence of 'being proactive', the figure for large organisations (more than 1000 employees) was 50%. The graph shows that generally, the larger the organisation, the fewer incidences of positive behaviours are observed.

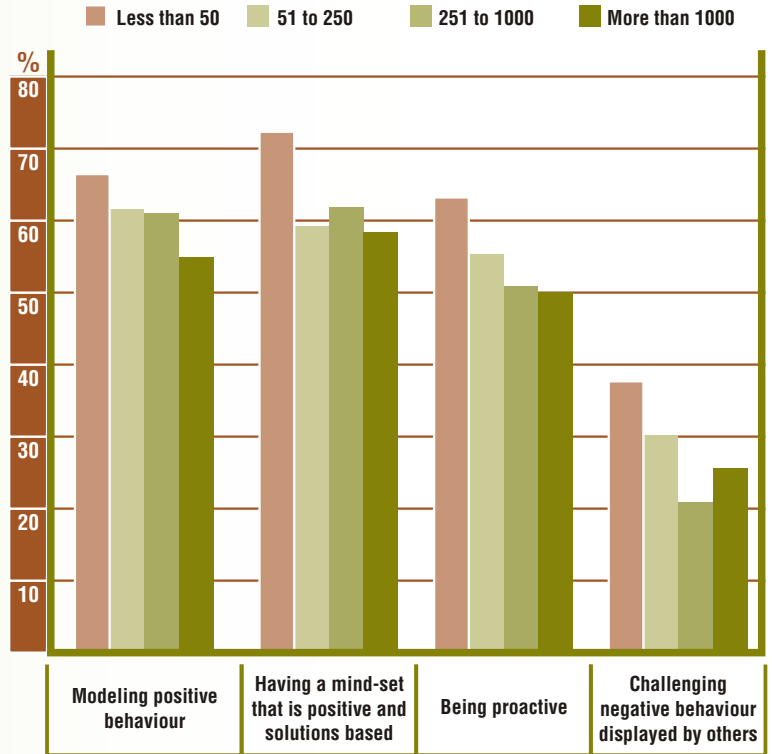
The graph below (**Graph 4**) shows perceptions of the extent to which negative behaviours are displayed broken down by the respondent's organisational size. Here there are some extremely large differences.

When it comes to participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours, 46% of respondents in large organisations (more than 1000 employees) reported this as occurring often or very often. The corresponding figure for small organisations (less than 50 employees) was 18%.

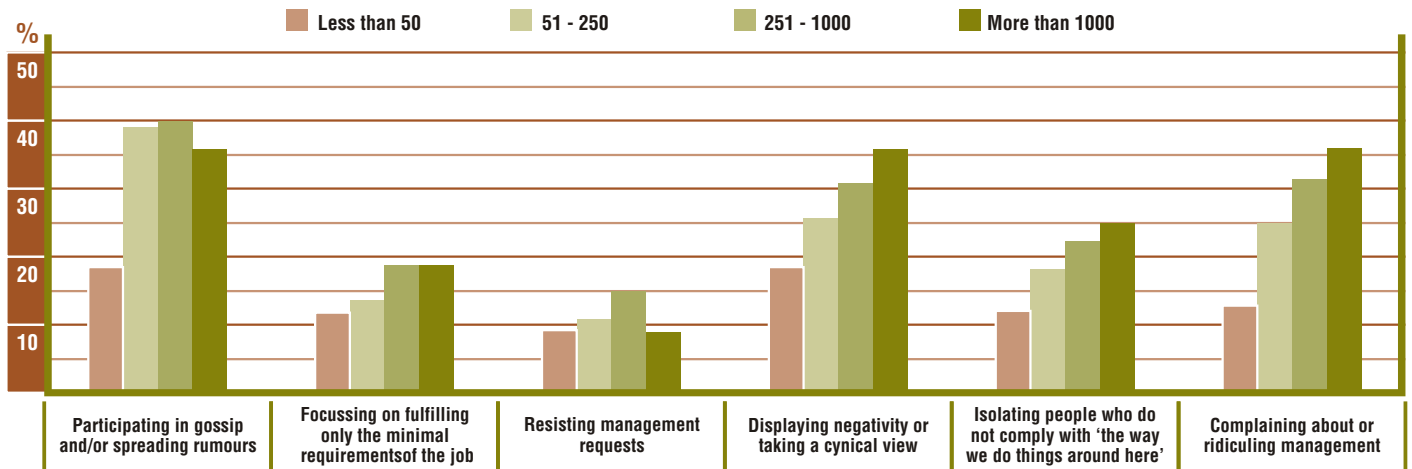
A large difference was also found with regard to complaining about or ridiculing management where 36% of respondents from large organisations viewed this as happening often, compared with only 13% in small organisations.

Again, the trend was fairly consistent - the larger the organisation, the greater the likelihood of negative behaviours being exhibited.

Graph 3. To what extent do people exhibit the following positive behaviours (% often or more)



Graph 4. To what extent do people exhibit the following negative behaviours (% often or more)



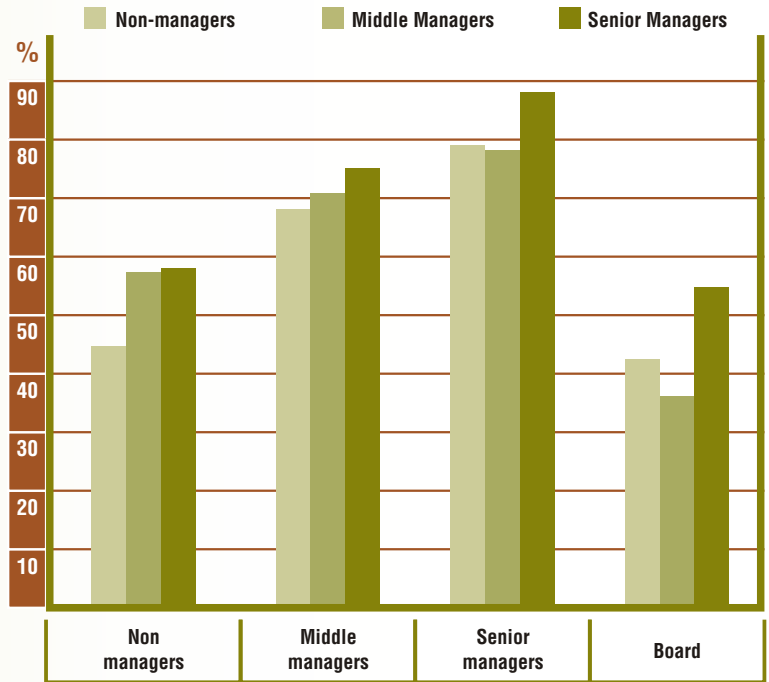
Who most influences culture?

On a five point scale ranging from 1 ('not at all') through 5 ('a great deal'), respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed each of four major groups influenced their current culture - these groups being non-managers, middle managers, senior managers, and where applicable, the Board.

Results are shown in **Graph 5**, with a breakdown by the level of seniority of the respondent. Interestingly, senior managers felt each of the four groups had a stronger impact on their current culture than the other levels. Overall, results were in line with what could be expected - although non-managers felt the Board had a greater influence over the organisation's culture compared with the view of middle managers.

The results should be of concern to Boards - to the extent they feel their role is to influence the culture.

Graph 5. Extent to which the following influence Culture (% '4' or '5' on five point scale)



Are there differences in how people rate their culture overall?

We asked people to rate their culture overall on a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ('About as bad as it gets') through 5 ('It's OK') with a maximum of 9 ('Ours is a brilliant culture').

It's reasonable to propose that a score of 7 through 9 could be considered a 'high' rating - and this is what is represented in **Graph 6**, broken down by the respondent's level of seniority.

Once again, our research identified some surprising results.

While 51% of senior managers rated their culture highly, the figures were very different for middle managers and non-managers. Only 29% of non-managers rated their culture highly, while the lowest proportion - 28% - of middle managers rated their culture highly.

Given the results from **Graph 6**, the following results should come as no surprise. **Graph 7** shows the proportion of each of the seniority levels who rated their culture 'less than OK' (i.e. 1 through 4 on the nine point scale).

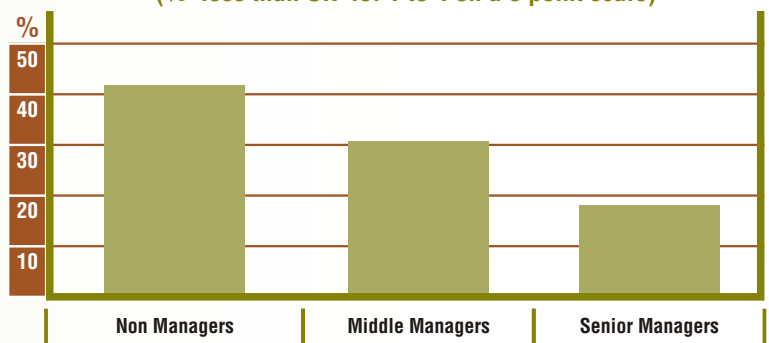
The results show clear discrepancies in views among the three seniority levels. A total 42% of non-managers rated their overall culture 'less than OK'. The figure for middle managers was 31%, while the figure for senior managers was 18%.

Clearly, there is an issue here where senior managers are seeing the culture much more positively than others.

Graph 6. How would you rate your culture overall? (% '7' to '9' on a 9 point scale)



Graph 7. How would you rate your culture overall? (% 'less than OK' ie. 1 to 4 on a 9 point scale)



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What's the overall culture rating for those who rated 'high' on negative behaviours?

The average overall culture rating, on a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ('About as bad as it gets') through 9 ('Ours is a brilliant culture') was 5.66.

We chose to analyse the overall culture rating for those people who reported a high incidence (i.e. '4' or '5' on a five point scale) of negative behaviours in the organisation - to explore the impact of these negative behaviours in the workplace. The results are shown in **Graph 8**, which also shows the average overall culture rating across all respondents, of 5.66.

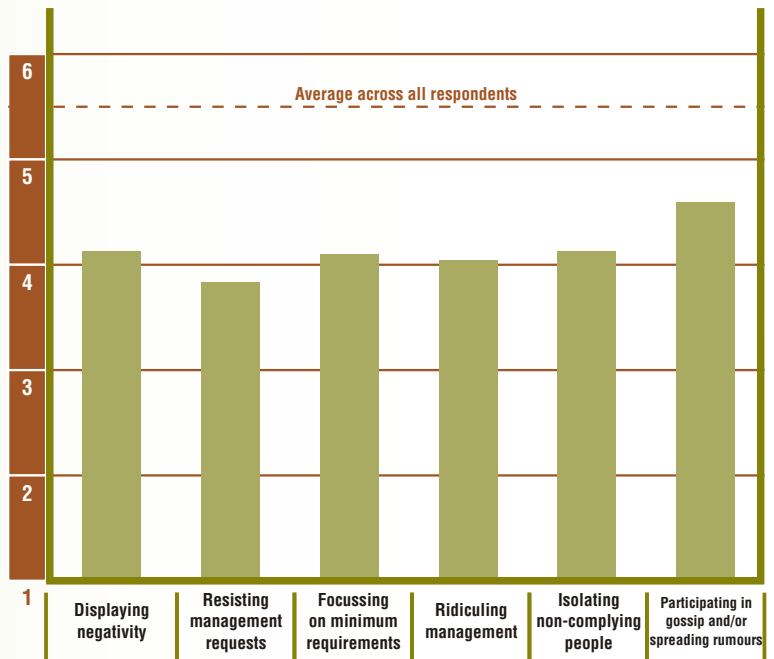
The results show that rating high on any of these negative behaviours adversely affects people's perceptions of the overall culture. However, our results show that different negative behaviours have varying negative impacts on people's view of the overall culture.

For example, rating high on gossip and/or spreading rumours resulted in an overall culture rating of 4.58. This was substantially below the overall culture rating of 5.66 - but nowhere near as low as in cases where other negative behaviours were rated high.

The lowest overall culture rating was achieved by people who observed a high incidence of people resisting management requests - with an overall culture rating of 3.81. The next lowest rating of 4.04 was achieved by people who reported high levels of ridiculing management.

Irrespective of the type of negative behaviour, culture overall suffers.

Graph 8. Average overall culture rating:



Are behaviours very different in organisations with a positive culture compared with those with a negative culture?

To answer this question, we sorted respondents into two broad groups, based on their overall rating of their organisation's culture - one group comprised those who rated their culture 'Better than OK' (i.e. 6 through 9 on a nine-point scale), the other group being 'Less than OK' (i.e. 1 through 4 on a nine point scale).

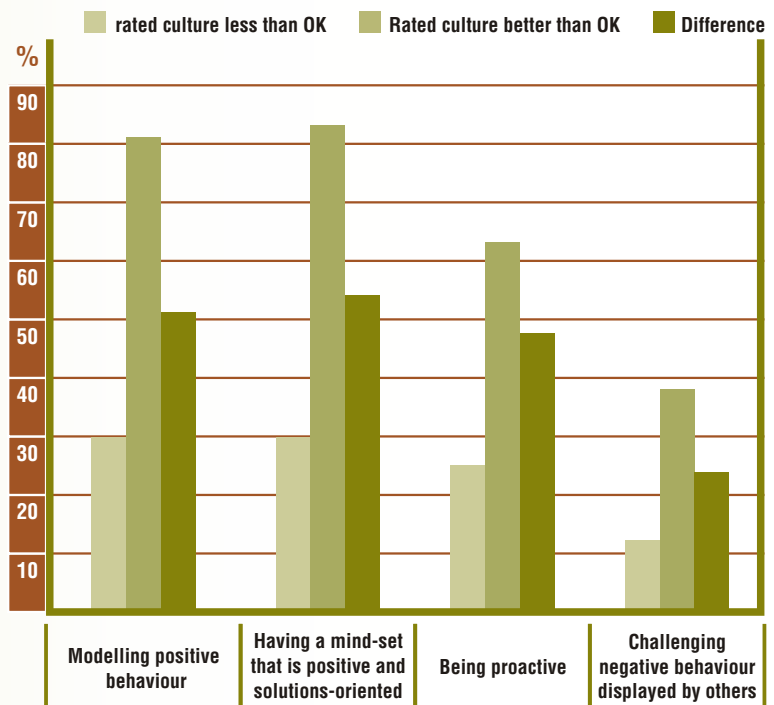
We then looked at the extent to which positive and negative behaviours were reported by each of these groups.

Graph 9 shows the percentage of each of these groups who reported positive behaviours being exhibited by people in their organisation either often or very often (i.e. 4 or 5 on a five point scale). It also shows the difference between the two groups' responses.

Those with positive cultures reported a high incidence (84%) of people having a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented. Modelling positive behaviours (81%) was also exhibited to a large degree by people in positive cultures.

When compared with people in cultures that were less than OK, the largest differences were with regard to having a mind-set that is positive and solutions-oriented (84% versus 30% - a difference of 54%) and modelling positive behaviour (81% versus 30%, a difference of 51%).

Graph 9. Differences between cultures rated 'Better than OK' and 'Less than OK'



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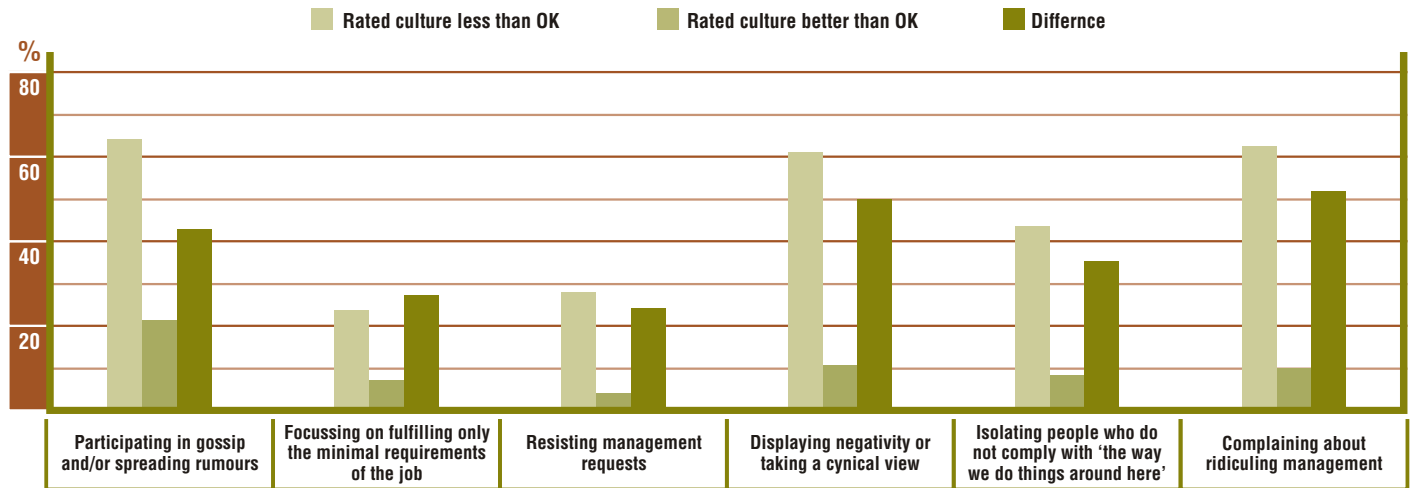
The graph below shows the percentage of each of these groups who reported negative behaviours being exhibited by people in their organisation either often or very often. It also shows the difference between the two groups' responses.

Three behaviours stand out in terms of the extent to which they are exhibited in negative cultures - participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours (64% of people in negative culture reported this behaviour being exhibited often or very often), complaining about or ridiculing management (62%) and displaying negativity or taking a cynical view (61%).

When compared with behaviours exhibited by people in positive cultures, the largest difference in the incidence of negative behaviours was with respect to:

- 📌 Complaining about or ridiculing management (62% in negative cultures, 10% in positive cultures, a difference of 52%)
- 📌 Displaying negativity or taking a cynical view (61% versus 11%, difference of 50%)
- 📌 Participating in gossip and/or spreading rumours (64% versus 21%, difference of 43%)

Graph 10. Differences between cultures rated 'Better than OK' and 'Less than OK'



KEY MESSAGES FROM THE STUDY

We believe there are a number of really important messages and implications that emerge from this study. These are described below.

Culture needs to be centre-stage in the minds of leaders. Over 40% of non-managers and over 30% of middle managers rated their organisation's culture as 'less than OK'. From our previous work and the work of many others, we know that poor cultures lead to poor performance, so the quest for a positive, productive culture must be a leadership priority.

There is a real risk that senior leaders perceive their culture to be positive while their middle manager and non-manager counterparts have very different views. Unless there are constant and various effective feedback mechanisms in place for senior leadership teams, they may be unaware of the scope of counter-productive behaviours occurring in the workplace. Our study showed that non-managers and middle managers observed much more than senior managers the existence of less positive and more negative behaviours being displayed in the workplace.

We now have a concise profile of positive and negative behaviours that provide a litmus test for the existing cultures within teams and across organisations. This study shows strong relationships among each of the specific positive and negative behaviours and people's ratings of their overall culture. A high presence of our profile of positive behaviours resulted in people rating their overall culture very positively. Likewise, a high presence of our profile of negative behaviours resulted in people rating their overall culture very poorly.

The profile of positive and negative behaviours from this study can be used in various ways within organisations. The positive, culture-building behaviours identified in this study can be used in various practical ways, including incorporating them into the recruitment and selection process, the performance management process, and as an important element of what gets rewarded and recognised within the organisation. The negative, culture-blocking behaviours can be used in the performance management process across all levels.

Key messages for senior leaders - clearly, this study shows that senior leaders often perceive their culture to be more positive than others in the organisation. This means that even if you think your culture is positive and productive, there is a chance that destructive behaviours are being exhibited without you being aware. It's therefore vitally important that you put in place multiple strategies to monitor various aspects of the culture - and that you act on the results from these feedback mechanisms. It's also critical your behaviour models the kind of culture you would like to characterise your organisation.

Key messages for middle managers - this study shows that your view of your organisation's culture is probably more in line with non-managers - this makes sense as your perception is based on interactions with levels below you and above you. You should also be heartened by the findings in this study that show you can have a strong impact on the organisation's culture. Your behaviour can, and does make a difference both through the behaviour you display, and through your own management style. A trap for you as a middle manager is for you to become cynical about senior management and to share these views with your people.

Key messages for non-managers - there is a clear message for non-managers from this study - the behaviours you display can impact heavily of the organisation's culture. There is no doubt that senior managers and middle managers heavily influence the organisation's culture - but your behaviours also impact strongly. This study gives you a personal behaviour template - positive behaviours to which you can aspire. The study also gives clear indications of the specific negative behaviours that you should avoid - in the interests of building a more productive and positive work environment.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Simpson

Steve Simpson is an international speaker, author and consultant based in Australia. Specialising in helping organisations to understand and improve their culture, Steve is the author of 'UGRs: Cracking the Corporate Culture Code', and a contributing author to a McGraw Hills publication, 'The Power of Culture'.

Described by UK based e-Customer Service World as 'Australia's leading corporate culture authority', Steve has been accredited as a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the highest speaker distinction recognised by the International Federation for Professional Speakers.

Steve has worked with organisations across the globe - including Australia, the UK, the US, South Africa, and various Asian countries.

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LIKE TO KNOW WHERE YOUR ORGANISATION STANDS?

We have a tool that can determine the extent to which each of these positive and negative behaviours are being displayed within your organisation. Contact Steve Simpson direct at steve@keystone-management.com to find out more.

ABOUT UGRS[®]

Further information about UGRs and how the concept can be used to boost culture can be found at the UGRs web site:

www.UGRs.net



APPENDIX 1

Full List of Respondents by Country

Country	Number of Respondents
Australia	575
United Kingdom	130
South Africa	80
United States of America	57
New Zealand	42
Canada	13
Malaysia	5
Ghana	4
India	4
Namibia	3
Philippines	3
United Arab Emirates	3
Hong Kong	2
Norway	2
Thailand	2
Uganda	2
American Samoa	1
Bahamas	1
Botswana	1
Greece	1
Indonesia	1
Ireland	1
Kenya	1
Maldives	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	1
Seychelles	1
Singapore	1
Suriname	1
Tanzania	1
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	1