



Episode 5 – Relational/workplace culture

INTRO: Welcome to Trailblazing with Corbett Price, where we present new and fresh perspectives that challenge how you approach change to solve some of the biggest challenges faced by business and government leaders today. Here's our host, Andy Corbett to introduce the fifth episode in our series on organisational health.

ANDY CORBETT: Hello, everyone. I'm Andy Corbett, the Managing Director of CorbettPrice, and I just want to thank you very much for joining us once again for our podcast series on organisational health and the seven dimensions of wellness.

If you remember, in our previous episodes, we had the privilege of speaking with Trailblazers in various aspects of organisational health. This included organisational operating environments, agility, and resiliency. We spoke about the sort of financial and performance health of the organisation, as well as employee engagement as well. And so today, we're going to delve into the fifth dimension of organisational health, which is the relational dimension, focusing specifically on workplace culture.

If you remember, in our last episode we spoke with Rodger, who was excellent guest, had lots of things to say, and he had some really, really valuable insights on applying design thinking approaches to enhance the employee experience, really highlighting the common pitfalls organisations often encounter when implementing those kinds of practices. And I guess one crucial factor that significantly impacts the employee experience is an organisation's culture. In fact, [BambooHR](#) defines company culture as the personality of an organisation consisting of shared workplace beliefs, values, attitudes, standards, purposes and behaviours. And the importance of culture cannot be overstated. According to [Gallup's research](#), when employees feel a strong connection to their organisation's culture, they are 3.7 times more likely to be engaged at work.

They're also 5.2 times more likely to recommend their organisation as a great place to work and 68% less likely to experience burnout from work frequently or always. The significance of fostering a people centric culture is echoed in [LinkedIn's recent Workplace Learning Report](#), where it was found that 83% of organisations aspire to build a culture that puts people at the center. This people centric culture recognises that the success of an organisation nation depends on the success of its employees. So regardless of an employee's location, how can organisations shift their mindset and establish a strong culture that resonates with their workforce?

Well, here to help us discuss this further is Cherie Canning. Cherie has almost two decades of leading and developing leaders at Luminate Leadership and previously at Flight Centre Travel Group. Cherie is a passionate optimist, and with her team at Luminate, they aim to bring this positivity to create a lasting impact on organisations by designing and deliver bring extraordinary learning experiences. Cherie founded Luminate Leadership in 2020 with one purpose, to grow and inspire lead today's leaders to create a better tomorrow. She intends to embrace human based leadership traits such as connection, collaboration, courage, empathy, compassion and kindness and share these skills with as many leaders as possible, inspiring them to be the best humans they can be and bringing as much joy and fulfillment to their work and lives. So, Cherie, thank you very much for joining us today on this podcast.

CHERIE CANNING: Thanks, Andy. Great to be here with you. Appreciate it.

ANDY CORBETT: Excellent. Good, good. All right, so I'll start with the question I've been really wanting to ask, and I ask this to a lot of people because it's just such an important area in organisational health. In the past, people strategy and business strategy were developed in silos and unintegrated throughout the senior leadership team of an organisation. And so as these strategies converge, companies are now focusing on becoming people-centric to optimise the employee experience throughout their organisational lifecycle. So the question I've got for you, Cherie, is how do you define a people-centric culture and what attributes must leaders practice to help achieve this?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, great question. I feel any human in our organisations are contributing to outcomes. So it's very pleasing to me to hear so many people are wanting to move to being more people-centric. I think from a definition perspective, a people-centric organisation or culture is one where the organisation has their people at its heart. And when we say people, I think it's important to see it's the people that it serves, so it's customers or its clients or its end user, as well as the people in their team, so their employees as well, at every level.

So from there, being at the heart of the organisation then the business decisions and the strategies and whatever else needs to come with the outcomes and goals, whether regardless of the kind of organisation that the people are at the centre. Because, ultimately the headspace, the environment that they're working within is going to influence the outcomes and the outputs from each of those, and ultimately, then the organisational outcomes. So, yeah, what are your thoughts on that one?

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, I agree. I mean, you know, I guess some of the challenges that I've experienced in the past is this definition of people and whether it's employees or is it employees, is

it contractors, is it the suppliers that are working as part of the organisation? Is it any consultants that are sort of working with the people in the organisation, would you say there's quite a broad definition to the people, and does it matter as to whether that needs to be employees? Should they be treated differently to contractors or consultants? What's your perspective on that?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, that's a great question. Even within our own business at Luminare, we're a small team and we have contractors as well. And I think considering both as your team, I suppose as far as employee value propositions and what's included in their work, that may look different when you've got people in as contractors versus full-time or part-time employees. But as far as the environment that they work within and the culture that they work within, I think it's relevant for both.

I remember something that really stuck with me at my time at Flight Centre, actually, is they had ten philosophies or cultural values, really, and previously they've changed a little these days, but they were previously numbered. And number one was our people, number two was our customer, and number three was our profit. And the whole saying was one plus two equals three. I mean, it's pretty simple math, but it was all around. When we look after our people, they look after our customer. And when we look after our customer, that's when our profits are looked after. So it was really very simple. But that was in my, I guess, leadership upbringing where how we create an environment and what we do for our people will absolutely then project onto the experience the customer has. And without our customers, we don't have businesses or organisations. So, yeah, the two very much go hand in hand. So for me, that culture, I think if we talk about, well, how do leaders create it? I really believe that begins with creating an environment within the business or the organisation of psychological safety. And that's where I think from it, well, how do we create it? That's where the psychological safety is. The starting point.

ANDY CORBETT: How do you create a psychological safety?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, big question too, because it's probably something people throw around a lot at the moment. You're like, well, what is this? I think another if you start with definitions, when you break down like the four stages of psychological safety or four elements, so there's the inclusion safety, which is really when people go, I am worthy, I belong, it's safe to be here. So from a practical sense, I think that's when it's about diversity, inclusion and also it's actually about just helping people understand their strengths. Like on a practical level, when people do personality profiling or thinking preferences and just understanding who they are and how they contribute.

The second is learner safety. So in that case, I'm growing. It's safe for me to be a learner to ask questions and show up and not have all the answers. So that's that vulnerability and to be able to put your hand up and ask for help and assistance without the fear of that retribution and the growth, I think again, like just encouraging a growth mindset and encouraging people to share their failures, if you like, or to share where things haven't worked out without the fear.

And then the last two, contribution safety and challenge safety. So contribution safety is I'm making a difference somewhere, it's safe to contribute my ideas, my hopes and dreams. So I think this is where team contribution and potentially with a hybrid working or, you know. All remote learning is where if we don't give enough opportunity for people to contribute and have

meaningful contributions to their team and purpose, it can be a bit of a risk. But we might be touching on that a bit later, I think, and challenge safety. This one's about it's safe for me to challenge the status quo and fix what's not working. I think this can be on such a small level to a large level leading toward top sick workplace culture. So the small things could just be enhancing the customer experience, but then small little tweaks here and there or the employee experience and then I think you can look at those examples of there's just a handful of big stories where staff I think it's a NASA story. Now, I probably don't even get my I'm not getting my stories right here, but where people knew that something was going to be faulty and there was not enough trust or space for people to put their hand up and say, I don't think this is going to work with dire consequences. So I think it can be something minor in your workplace to literally putting people's lives at risk.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah. Excellent. And you touch on you mentioned that a toxic work culture. So I just want to talk about that for a second. They are still prevalent in many organisations, a toxic work culture, unfortunately, and sometimes leaders come in and they have to inherit these negative cultures that really undermine anything positive that they're trying to do. So what's your advice to those people? How can they turn a toxic culture into a positive one and what role the leaders need to play in really driving that cultural change?

CHERIE CANNING: Yes, it's a great question, especially with that inheritance of the culture. And you know a lot of we see it a lot. I mean, you know, sadly, we see the toxic culture a lot, but there's a lot of we often do work with leaders or the exec teams around changing that which it can be done. I think that's the first thing. It can absolutely be done. It does take time and it takes courage and it takes a lot of grit and resilience. So as long as leaders are walking in knowing that's part of the role, there's an incredible I don't know, Andy, if you came across this, but there's an incredible piece of research done. [There was an interview on Brene Brown's podcast](#) at a lead from son and father combo Dr. Donald Sull and Charlie Sull. It was an [MIT Sloan report](#) and it was all around how to fix a toxic culture. And so I highly, highly recommend that report because it is full of incredible stats research and also some practical tips. And one of the quotes that came out of it, or one of the sentiments that came out that I think is really worth sharing is and no surprise here, but when it comes to the toxic culture is that leadership consistently emerged as the best predictor of toxic culture. So assuming then we're taking over into that culture where it's not our path or our doing, but we've got to do something about it. It really is coming in.

I think the number one tip is to hold yourself accountable and hold the team accountable for that behaviour we don't want to see continuing. I think it's really setting that almost like a reset, isn't it? When some of the practical ways, I think, is to sit down as a leadership team and define, well, what is the culture that we do want? What do we currently have? And then what are those disconnects? What are the gaps there so practically and tangibly. What do we need to work on one of our clients? And I won't mention them because I don't want to throw them under a toxic bus because they're really doing some great things. I think there was a little bit of disharmony in the organisation rather than toxic. But one of the things we saw the new CEO do is came in and had those conversations with her exec, but then also put out a variety of different opportunities for the people to have a say and everyone in the organisation at every level. So some of it was anonymous surveys, which has its good and it's bad, but really just to hear those voices. And then she also took out every single person in the organisation for a one-to-one coffee and just wanted to listen and

listen and listen. And I think the key difference, one she invested all that time is that she actually started implementing changes because there's one thing to ask everyone for their opinion and there's another thing then to just go okay, thanks, or we won't do much with that.

So I think that can then undermine the whole culture. But yeah, I think the fast to sway to it. Keep the toxicity running is to actually not is to tolerate the behaviour. What's the old expression about the behaviour we walk past and that we tolerate is the one we accept. So what message is it actually sending to people if we're not addressing behaviours in a curious way too? So it's not a come in and command and control, but it's help me understand and getting curious to seek to understand where people deem that as acceptable behaviour and how we can change it moving forward, set some new standards.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, absolutely. And it's a quote that I read recently. You can't just see it on the walls. You've also got to see it in the halls as well. So you've really got to yes.

CHERIE CANNING: Isn't that the truth?

ANDY CORBETT: Visibly see the behaviours that you're trying to deploy across the organisation and the culture that you really want to set. Because I think there's another saying as well around the fish rots from the head. And I think the leadership plays such an important role in establishing the culture that's required. I think just we've spoken about lead is. Setting that tone and setting that standard around what culture they'd like to drive. Do you think there's a role as well for the employees in also really underpinning that, or do you think it's just the role of leadership alone?

CHERIE CANNING: I absolutely believe to see it work and to change it's everyone, I think from a leadership perspective, it's appreciating the emotional, often the grief curve. I think there's the change curve in organisational change as well, and the emotional curve that people will go through. So I think as a leader is accepting that people will possibly come in with skepticism. They may come in with a lot of fear, possible distrust. And so if we can walk in as leaders with the acceptance and the knowledge that that could be maybe the starting point with some of our teams is not to take that personally. I think it's then to start building trust with them so that then when we are making changes and we are bringing up new ways of doing things or giving feedback on what's okay and what's not okay in our culture, that trust has been developed.

And I think if I go back to that example where the CEO literally sat with everyone to have coffees, she wanted to know them. She wanted to know what was important to them as well. So then that trust was starting to be built. So then when there are changes and broader, bigger changes, there's trust in her. So then it is a dual responsibility for everyone to get on board. I do also feel like, again, you go back to that psychological safety. Depending on the experiences people have had, maybe it hasn't been safe for them to actually speak what they feel and what they mean and what their opinions are, because it's ended poorly in the past or it's had dire consequences for others. And they've observed that. So I think this must take time. The trust first. You know, the [Patrick Lencioni Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#)? Do you know that pyramid or that model?

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, I can recall. Yeah, I don't know.

CHERIE CANNING: I love it. Absolutely. We base a lot of work that we do on the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, and that first layer is about trust. The top is results. So if you want the results to change, we've got to look at that trust first. The second one is conflict. So that healthy conflict that we're not afraid to have the real conversations. And I think so often we can go into that corporate nod where everyone's like, yeah, that sounds great, and then we leave the meeting or hang up the zoom call and go, never going to happen. And so there's so much disharmony. But then it's about commitment, accountability and results. But first and always, I think it's building genuine, authentic, vulnerability based trust.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, excellent. I love that. And you've highlighted some references. There further information, so we'll include that in the notes for the podcast to access. So thank you for that. That's great. So, more stats for you. Employment Hero's Wellness at Work Report stated that 53% of Australian workers were feeling burnt out and 52% rating their work life balance as poor or average. And 56% of workers felt stressed about money. So employees bring all this stress into their workplace culture every day. And according to the same report, only 50% worked for companies that were very supportive of their mental health. So what key initiatives can leaders implement to help their employees combat fatigue and also improve their mental health?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, those stats, if you slow down and really take those in, they're very confronting and alarming, aren't they? They're frightening and interesting. I think even right now with the economic conversation going around as well, how that might impact these stats in this moment.

I find this a really interesting topic and something I'm extremely passionate about. The first thing I would say as a solution is actually having some literacy and awareness around what is mental health as an interesting conversation I had with my dad. And my dad's close to 70 now. He's a kind hearted, wonderful human being. Also, though, generationally has grown up in an environment where it's just a bit of like, well, toughen up, you'll be right, and definitely not coming from a bad place. But that's just the environment many people in the current workplace as well have been brought up in. And I remember speaking to him once around a close friend of ours had disclosed that they were suffering from depression and suicide ideation. It was very, very confronting and upsetting. And his immediate reaction was, well, what's he got to be sad about? It was not a great reaction. And I looked at him and said, you know what, that's why people in this state where they're not sharing because of the reaction you've just had. And he was quite confronted and it was quite an tense conversation.

Within the next month, he actually went and signed himself up to do the mental health first aid accreditation because he said, I don't know enough about this, and two other people that he knew in his, soccer community had actually died by suicide within the, the last few months as well. So it was, it was a real life example where there's a lack of understanding and awareness, but definitely not a lack of humanity, just a lack of understanding. And so that got me curious and I went and did the mental health first aid as well.

And actually now it's part of one of the offerings we offer at Luminare because just think it's something that we can talk about, but unless we actually know, well, what are the definitions? If

somebody fell over on the road right now in front of you and you could see they were bleeding and they're in a lot of trouble, most of us would know to run over and support, call Triple O, get them the support that they need and then the paramedics, the experts would come in and take over.

When it comes to mental health, I just don't think we've got that awareness of what to do, what to say. We don't have to be the paramedics, we're not the paramedics, we're not the psychologists or the counsellors. But how do we have the right conversations in the workplace and in our lives to get people the help or the support that they may need? For me, the first step actually is around that awareness. And whether it's mental health, first aid or something similar, it's quite relevant because only this week we're actually running a course with some beautiful clients of ours and the facilitator, he's an accredited instructor and he called me and said, oh, we've got some old world perspectives happening right now.

And it was really challenging the group and as challenging as that may be for him as a facilitator, I said this is why we do this. Because when we're talking about if somebody says they've got mental health challenges in the workplace or mental health challenges when you're at work, how do you respond? Do you give them time off? What's your leave policy like? Are you calling it sick leave or is it personal leave? Are we treating health as health or are we defining it as physical and mental health? Because I think one of the first things we want to talk about is health is health. And we need to give people the space and the support to have the time they need so that we're avoiding burnout, that we're treating any challenge that we've got the right way. So there's a bit of depth, I think, in all of that and just the importance of even the language that we use.

But. The other question I would ask leaders is when was the last time you spoke about mental health? Well, one, do you and how vulnerable are you? An appropriate vulnerability, of course, but how open are you? How much do you express? How much do you share? How much do you ask people how they're going? Because if those stats are true, which I believe I believe them to be, then half of our workplace is suffering in some way or another. How are we supporting them to get the support they need? Do you have an employee assistance program? Are you mindful of the hours people are working and the demands we're putting on people while still getting our organisational outcomes, just being aware of individuals needs and their situations as well.

ANDY CORBETT: Your training on mental health, I guess it's designed to make the invisible visible, is that right?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, correcting.

ANDY CORBETT: The science, like, have you got any could you provide some sort of key examples of how you can actually turn the invisible into the visible to help some of the listeners identify have spot those early signs of any mental health challenges with their employees?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, absolutely. And I suppose this definitely is not a full disclaimer, just ideas here rather than but Cherie said, yeah, absolutely. I think it's actually paying attention. So what I mean by that is if you then see a change in someone's behaviour so if you usually see someone really calm and that's their normal persona, and then all of a sudden they're irritable or something changes. Or someone who might be attending more social events starts not attending someone's.

Pattern may change and they start turning up late or they're more tired than they usually seem to be. So it's not always huge obvious things, but it's actually paying attention to that and actually asking. I think we see the are you okay? All the time. But it genuinely is asking someone, I've noticed this behaviour is everything okay with you? A question that we were told about in the mental health first aid and I think is incredible. And I think it takes courage to ask, and this is why maybe people don't always do it because they don't know what to say next. But he's actually saying, how's your mental right now? And then stopping and just allowing someone to answer.

There are so many support lines and different places people can go if they are unsure or how they're feeling. So there's not a we don't have to actually then solve the problem for them, but help them find the support. So it's really that assisting and then listening, giving support and encouraging and encouraging professional support. Because sometimes it's like, what do you need? Maybe what they need just the afternoon off or to come in a bit later tomorrow, because they just need some flexibility in their routine or whatever it may be. But sometimes it's, I need to go and speak to I need to go and speak to someone professionally. And I think allowing the opportunity for that to occur. Does that sound practical enough? I'm not sure if I've nailed that one for you or if that's useful.

ANDY CORBETT: I think it's useful, absolutely. And it's a complex topic. It's hard to go too deep in the time that we've got. But it's really helpful for listeners just to at least identify some early signs of where there might be some challenges with their employees. Because it's not always obvious, is it?

CHERIE CANNING: No, it's not. And I think as well, it's not actually always obvious to the individual. They don't actually always know what it is they're experiencing either. Which may sound a bit funny, but if we don't know how to put language around it, it's really important that we give people space and time to even reflect on how they're feeling themselves. And I guess going to that, if we think about some things from say mental health first aid, but in a workplace that people could put in straight away. Some of, I guess some ideas even from clients that we work with and ideas that they've had and that we see them do is we've got a couple of people that have wellness areas in their workplace.

It really depends on your physical workplace, but wellness areas, they give access to apps like Calm or the Healthy Minds apps and things like that. Also, I think some teams are just incorporating more movement because I think when it comes to mental health, there's some key things here around nutrition, movement, social connection, sleep. So if there's some key contributors, of course they don't eliminate all mental health, but they can absolutely assist. So we've got so many you hear so many teams go we do walking meetings or we have a meeting outside when the weather allows. We have workshops where people we do like goal setting and wellness wheels. So similar to the concept of this podcast based on the different wellness, we've got a little wellness wheel quiz people can do for themselves just to check in on what's working and where needs more energy. And I'd say as well, I think then just considering flexible work hours, flexibility of where people work as well, which is very commonplace now, which is really important.

ANDY CORBETT: That's great. And that leads me on to my next question actually, because I think onsite working arrangements between hybrid remote work in the office, it's all been shifting around in recent years and it arguably could be exacerbating some of the mental health challenges that we've just spoken about. I think also it really represents or it presents a new challenge, if you like, for leaders to ensure that their people feel connected to their company's culture. And there was a survey done in America from Gallup, it found that 23% of hybrid workers felt more connected to their company's culture when leaders focused on culture in hybrid models than 20% of employees overall. So from your perspective Cherie, how can leaders really help employees feel connected to their culture regardless of their location?

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, it's a great question, and I think it's actually one that the tip is that we need to ask ourselves that question within the organisation, because what are we in 2023 now? So I'd say 2021 for sure, and 22 to an extent, but in 2020 and 21, we were absolutely all in survival mode and uncharted territory. So we know that, and we just did what we needed to do to get through.

So now that things are stabilising somewhat, I think it's an opportunity to ask ourselves, well, what future do we want for our culture, and how does that work with the hybrid model? I'm literally working with an exec team next week, a business we've been working with for maybe about 18 months now. And the leader said, you know what? Our meetings is a virtual meeting. It's every fortnight. I just don't think they're getting what they need out of them. And so it's literally a reset session. So it seems very simple, but we put out a survey to the team asking them what's working, what's not, what's missing, what do they need, and then we're going to redesign it from here.

So it's simple, but it's literally just asking the question and then redesigning what works. I think that when we're talking about I was reading Harvard Business Review on this, and one of the quotes or one of the phrases was, [make workplace connection a ritual](#). So when we talk about culture, a big part of culture is feeling connected as human beings. And particularly if we think about extrovert or introvert personality, particularly the extroverted personalities, we need to give them that stimulation of the human connection. But also, there's so many stats with mental health, as we said, and isolation and loneliness. So it has to be a ritual that we've considered into a calendar, if you like, and intentionally, because there's none of that water cooler in the hallway in the lift chat as much, depending on how your setup is.

One of my teammates who's just actually started with us. She was working in another organisation that were based in Melbourne, and she was here in Brisbane, and she said, yes, they had scheduled things on the calendar, but literally, it felt like unless somebody connected with you or reached out, you had to just wait to the moment in your calendar to connect. And I think that's a missed opportunity where we're not actually allowing just a more free flow. We've gotten so structured in how everything needs to be, rather than just actually picking up the phone and checking in.

ANDY CORBETT: Um, yeah, I feel like just, you know, back in the day, a conversation in the hall now that's become a half an hour scheduled meeting and outlook on teams, isn't it? It just needs to just having those conversations.

CHERIE CANNING: Yeah, absolutely. And I think this is where we get really efficient rather than effective sometimes because we're like, let's just get in, get the meeting done. I've got meeting fatigue, there's no gaps in between. So when we get on, we get on the screen and we just get into business straight away or whatever the topic is. What I'd propose or what I'd suggest is that we need to have a look at how are we creating connection? And that connection is either to the company culture, it's to the team, it's to the customer, and that can be done. And I think these tips are practical, face to face and remotely, but even more important, remotely, some of the thoughts I have and some of the little habits that we have is just even opening a meeting.

And I don't mean a ten minute catch up, but if you've got a team meeting, a weekly meeting, you're opening that meeting, maybe with asking around, what are you grateful for? So it brings out things that are personal, but also positive psychology. You might bring up a meeting. Most companies got their core values, so you might say, have you lived into the core values this week? So you're linking to culture also listening to one another, another level you could take it, which would kind of force people to pay attention to others. Which is important for that connection is have you seen someone else live the values this week? So they're really simple and maybe it's pulling out. I'm a big fan of finding those little cards from Kikki K or you can just do online ones for free. Just little questions that aren't work related. But it's absolutely helping our work because it's building personal connection which builds trust, which then flows onto everything else we've spoken about. And without implementing that by design, it doesn't usually happen by default.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, absolutely. So look, unfortunately we've run out of time. I could talk about this for days. I think I've been saying that to the others as part of this podcast series. It's just one of those things you could talk about for days and days and days. But yeah, unfortunately we have to wrap it up there. But I really want to thank you, Cherie, for taking the time to join us today to provide those perspectives on this really important dimension of organisational health. So I appreciate you coming on the podcast.

CHERIE CANNING: Oh, my absolute pleasure. Thanks for having me, Andy, and look forward to hearing all the conversations from your other guests as well.

ANDY CORBETT: Excellent. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Thank you Cherie, for your insightful perspectives on the relational dimension of organisational health. Luminate Leadership will be hosting their annual Ignite Women in Leadership Conference in Brisbane on the 23 August. Tickets are available from their website www.luminateleadership.com.au, that's www.luminateleadership.com.au. We hope you enjoyed listening to Cherie today and found her insights and approaches valuable. As always, the transcript of today's episode is available to download from our website www.corbettprice.com.au/podcast, that's www.corbettprice.com.au/podcast. In our next episode, we will be talking with Pia Andrews about our sixth dimension, purpose and leadership.