

Case Study

Transforming Workplace Culture

How we helped a client with a toxic workplace culture rebuild trust, engagement, and performance through a bespoke culture audit

In mid-2024, a medium-sized organisation employing 150 staff was grappling with a toxic workplace culture. The organisation had been experiencing a sharp rise in absenteeism, performance issues, presenteeism, formal grievances, WRC claims, and resignations. Morale was low, and there was a clear divide between leadership and staff – described internally as a "them versus us" culture. Employees expressed a deep mistrust in leadership, and the company's reputation as an employer was beginning to suffer.

The company had a standalone HR Manager, Karen, and a newly appointed CEO, John, who was keen to address the problems but had never encountered anything of this scale in his previous leadership roles. Concerned about the extent of the challenges, John reached out to Insight HR on the recommendation of a peer, who described Insight HR as people who could get to the heart of the toughest employee relations issues and help organisations steer through cultural crises.

This is a common story and situation we hear here at Insight HR, with many companies of this size, with a HR department of this size having these same challenges.

Here is the story of just one of the many clients we've helped, with not just analysis, but action too.



"A culture audit isn't just about diagnosing what's wrong - it's about listening deeply, building trust, and supporting real, lasting change. Every organisation's story is unique, so our approach is always bespoke and practical. We work alongside leaders and staff to uncover the real issues and create solutions that genuinely fit."

Megan Power, HR Consultant

The Challenge

John inherited a fractured organisation. Staff morale was at an all-time low, and there was a disconnect between leadership and employees. Leadership was viewed as authoritarian, and many staff members felt undervalued, emotionally drained, and unsupported. The HR function was overwhelmed, and the CEO was at a loss, regretting his appointment and unsure how to proceed.

The organisation was struggling to attract talent, employee turnover was high, and internal conflict was escalating. The CEO needed a clear, practical strategy to address the toxic culture and create a healthier, more engaged workplace – fast.

The Solution

Megan Power, Head of Change and Transformation at Insight HR, was engaged to lead a comprehensive culture audit. The audit ran over six weeks and involved:

Leadership Interviews

Megan began by speaking with the CEO to understand the organisation's mission, values, and the extent of the cultural challenges. John candidly described the disconnect he felt with staff and his concerns about his senior leadership team's motivation and effectiveness. Megan explained her confidential and impartial approach, assuring him that no individual grievances would be investigated through this process, but that collective themes and patterns would be reported.

Management and Employee Interviews

Megan interviewed the senior leadership team to assess their alignment with the company's values and vision. She also interviewed a representative sample of staff across different departments, roles, and tenure – selected in partnership with Karen to ensure diversity.



One of Megan's key questions to each interviewee was, "Who do you believe has the most impact in this organisation?" Remarkably, only one member of the management team was mentioned – the rest were frontline staff. This provided a stark insight into how disconnected leadership had become from day-to-day operations.

Tailored Organisational Survey

In collaboration with Insight HR's survey partner, Megan designed a custom employee survey to explore themes like trust, leadership effectiveness, communication, engagement, and psychological safety. The survey confirmed and reinforced many of the findings from the interviews.

Policy Review and On-the-Ground Observation

Megan conducted a full review of the organisation's HR policies and practices, paying close attention to how aligned they were with best practice in building and supporting a positive workplace culture. She also observed meetings across the organisation to witness interpersonal dynamics and leadership behaviours in action.

Focus Group

A cross-section of employees participated in a structured focus group to discuss day-to-day behaviours, leadership, communication, inclusion, and psychological safety. This helped further validate and deepen the findings from the interviews and survey.



Findings

Strong Connection to Mission

Employees were passionate about their work and deeply committed to the organisation's mission. Despite everything, there was a powerful emotional connection to the company's purpose.

Disconnection Between Leadership and Staff

The leadership team was viewed as distant, unapproachable, and lacking empathy. Employees reported "compassion fatigue," with many describing symptoms of emotional exhaustion, burnout, and detachment – common in organisations working with vulnerable populations. Staff felt that management was unaware of the pressures they faced daily and had been unresponsive for too long.

Lack of Leadership Impact

Apart from one individual, the management team and even the CEO were not seen as impactful or inspiring. Frontline staff had become the real influencers in the workplace – a situation that pointed to a breakdown in leadership authority and trust.

Pervasive Negativity and Cynicism

There was a culture of disengagement. Many staff members felt underappreciated, insecure about their future, and unsupported. Those who had spoken up were labelled troublemakers, and internal conflict was rife.

Unclear and Infrequent Communication

Staff felt that communication from management was poor – inconsistent, reactive, and often lacking transparency. This contributed to confusion, alienation, and a growing trust deficit.

Escalating Absenteeism and Turnover

The culture was driving people out. Complaints and resignations were on the rise, and the organisation was struggling to backfill critical roles. Workloads were increasing, fuelling more burnout and discontent.

No Clear Pathways for Development

There were limited opportunities for training or progression. Staff didn't feel invested in, and many described feeling stuck and unacknowledged.

Recommendations

Servant Leadership Development

Megan recommended a shift towards servant leadership – where leaders actively support, listen to, and empower their teams. This approach would help rebuild trust and improve engagement.

Management Development Programme

A six-week training programme was introduced for all managers, covering key skills such as managing grievances, holding difficult conversations, boosting team morale, handling performance concerns, and understanding dignity at work.

Monthly Leadership Circles

Megan facilitated structured monthly “Leadership Circles” to build collaborative leadership habits. These forums focused on issues like communication, motivation, and psychological safety. After three months, the circles continued as self-facilitated peer learning spaces.

Employee Resource Group (ERG)

Megan identified and brought together employees viewed as positive influencers to form an ERG. This group served as a structured communication bridge between staff and leadership, initially facilitated by Megan. Members were guided to represent collective concerns – not personal agendas – and feedback loops were created to ensure staff voices reached HR and the CEO.

Cultural Transformation Programme

A broader programme was launched to embed cultural change across the organisation. This included team-building, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence development, and regular feedback mechanisms like pulse surveys and town halls.

Policy and Procedure Overhaul

Insight HR reviewed and replaced outdated HR policies – particularly around grievance, disciplinary and dignity at work – with clear, fair, and user-friendly documents and management guides.

The Outcome

Within a year, the company had made significant progress. Communication improved markedly, employees began to feel heard, and absenteeism started to decline. The ERG became a key channel for engagement, while the Leadership Circles created space for reflection, accountability, and collaborative problem-solving.

Managers became more confident in handling issues proactively, and staff reported feeling more supported. Trust between leadership and employees began to rebuild. While the journey of cultural transformation continued, the foundations were now in place for a healthier, more sustainable and values-aligned workplace.

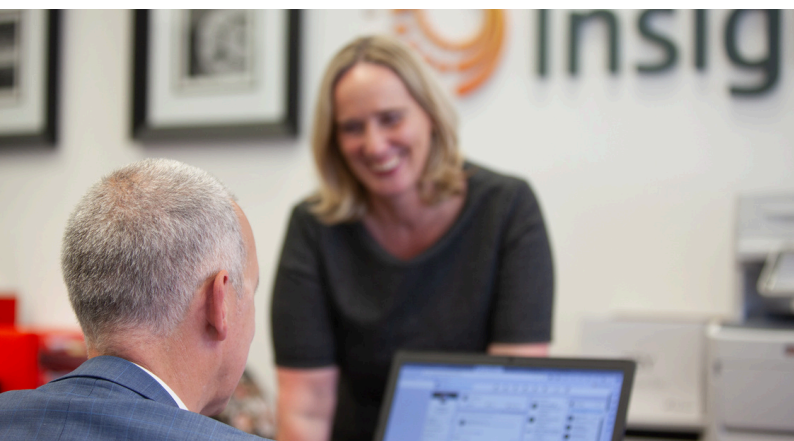
Why Choose Us?

We don't just hand you a report and walk away. Our culture audits are bespoke, confidential, and designed for organisations with limited HR resources. We partner with you from diagnosis to delivery, providing hands-on support and practical solutions that work in the real world.

If you're an Irish SME or professional services leader facing high turnover, low morale, or a reputation problem, you don't have to tackle it alone. We'll help you look under the bonnet, uncover the real issues, and build a workplace where people want to stay and thrive.

Ready to transform your culture?

Book a free, no-obligation consultation and discover how a tailored culture audit can help your organisation achieve lasting, meaningful change.



"Insight HR didn't just give us a report—they worked alongside us, listened to our real issues, and gave us practical steps we could actually implement. Their support made a genuine difference: staff feel heard, absenteeism is down, and trust in leadership is finally being rebuilt."

John, CEO

Get to know us!

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webinars, and everything else!

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