

CERM PI

Organisational Culture Study

Overview



Our research team [CERM PI](#) consists of a core team of 8 researchers and professional staff and is part of the research centre [C-EDGE](#). Both CERM PI and C-EDGE are housed within the College of Business and Law at Adelaide University, located at the City West Campus. The biography of key staff for employee engagement research projects are included below:



Dr Sarah Chua

Sarah is Chief Investigator on CERM PI's Organisational Culture Study and has led research for local government, including studies on culture, reward, and recognition. With a PhD in Business and expertise in leadership, diversity, and organisational behaviour, she brings both academic rigour and practical insight. Sarah is also a certified executive coach, passionate about embedding coaching cultures in organisations.



Dr Duncan Murray

Duncan is Chief Investigator on CERM PI's Organisational Culture Study and has led research for both local government and national organisations, including strategic projects for Polocrosse Australia and the Indigenous Land Council. He holds a PhD and qualifications in Applied Science and Psychology, with research interests spanning consumer behaviour, toxic leadership, and social media. A published author and keynote speaker, he has presented at major conferences including Parks and Leisure Australia.



Mr Olly Townson

Olly is the Business Manager at CERM PI, overseeing projects and partnerships across the Organisational Culture Study and broader research program. With an MBA and a background in hospitality, sport, fitness, and tourism, he brings strong operational insight and a focus on practical outcomes. He leads research on customer service quality, venue and operational management, and performance benchmarking, contributing to practical projects focused on culture, placemaking, and performance improvement.



Dr Michelle Zacharko

Michelle is the Research Assistant on CERM PI's Organisational Culture Study, leading data analysis and co-authoring reports for councils across Australia. With a Master of Business, a Grad Dip in Project Management, and a PhD (pending conferral) on the use of virtual reality to shift workplace attitudes, she brings a blend of academic expertise and over a decade of local government experience, providing strong insight into culture and values in council settings.

Introduction

For more than thirty years, CERM PI, located within Adelaide University, School of Management, has been a leader in benchmarking research focused on cultural performance, customer service quality, and operational management. Our team of internationally recognised management researchers provide detailed analysis and reports, enabling industry partners to develop and benefit from a culture of evidence-based decision-making that drives organisational performance improvement.

Since 2019, more than 30 organisations from across Australia have participated in CERM PI's Organisational Culture Study, engaging in one-to-six-year contracts.

Background

In today's dynamic operating environment, organisations are expected to be adaptive, transparent and responsive to both internal and external pressures. Rapid policy changes, increasing community expectations and ongoing resource constraints require organisations to develop and maintain an agile and resilient workforce. How ready and willing staff are to embrace change often reflects the underlying organisational culture. Some culture profiles support innovation and flexibility, while others (particularly in local government) tend to prioritise stability, tradition, and consistency.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE STUDY BENEFITS

CERM PI's organisational culture studies have been helping organisations:

- Identify and understand the strengths and areas of growth for their workplace culture
- Tailor workforce development and staff engagement strategies
- Better understand how staff perceptions influence behaviour, service delivery, and organisational performance
- Gain independent, unbiased insight to support strategic and operational planning

Background

The CERM PI Organisational Culture Study includes the following validated measures:

- Organisational Culture (OCAI framework)
- Organisational Climate - measuring trust, recognition, fairness, support, innovation
- Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) - measuring the extent to which leadership prioritises and supports psychological health and safety through organisational policies, practices, and communication
- Psychological Capital (PsyCap) - measuring resilience, optimism, hope and self-efficacy
- Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) - assessing altruism, civic virtue, courtesy, sportsmanship and conscientiousness
- Values alignment - assesses the degree of value congruence between espoused organisational values and those perceived, experienced, and enacted by its people
- Overall Satisfaction measure
- Open ended questions - to deepen understanding of survey findings
- Custom Questions - tailored to organisation-specific values, strategic plans or workforce initiatives

These tools can be used independently or in combination, allowing flexibility to meet the unique needs of each organisation.

While the culture and climate metrics directly measure the 'personality' and 'pulse' of the organisation, the OCB, PsyCap and Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) metrics provide further insight into the conditions that influence staff engagement, wellbeing and discretionary effort. PSC is particularly relevant in contemporary workplaces, as it reflects the extent to which organisational leadership prioritises psychological health and safety through policies, practices and decision-making.

Together, these measures help assess how supported, motivated and willing staff are to contribute to the success of their organisation. Staff scoring high in OCBs and PsyCap are generally happier, more productive, committed and satisfied with their work and workplace, while strong PSC scores are associated with healthier work environments, reduced psychosocial risks and more sustainable organisational performance. Including these metrics provides organisational leadership with valuable diagnostic insights and helps identify potential drivers for positive and lasting change.

Format Options

A range of flexible survey formats are available and can be tailored to suit the needs, priorities and timing of each organisation. Studies may include one or multiple surveys within a 12-month period, depending on the objectives of the organisation.

A commonly adopted approach includes:

- Main Study: A comprehensive survey with full analysis at the whole-of-organisation level and by subgroups (e.g., departments, tenure, gender, age), provided anonymity and statistical power (i.e., sufficient numbers in subgroups). This may include benchmarking where feasible.
- Optional follow-up 'pulse check' survey (typically 6 to 9 months later): A shorter survey designed to assess early impacts and progress following the main study (typically excluding culture due to its slower rate of change).

Additional survey formats can also be designed to support specific organisational priorities, such as targeted workforce groups, strategic initiatives, or organisational change processes.

Participating organisations can engage in one-year or multi-year studies. Multi-year engagement supports longitudinal tracking of organisational culture and climate, enabling organisations to monitor progress and inform continuous improvement over time.

Aims

- Establish an organisational culture baseline (including checking for alignment with organisational values and industry)
- Assess staff engagement, workplace climate and satisfaction across departments and demographics to determine how strengths may be leveraged
- Understand how employees' discretionary behaviours and mindsets contribute to individual and workplace wellbeing and service delivery to promote positive working environments where outcomes may be enhanced

Key Benefits

- Personalised service where we work closely with management to focus on the organisation's needs in order to produce specific and relevant outcomes
- Independent, confidential data collection underpinned by academic rigour that enables organisations to benchmark against reliable and tested cultural scores
- Longitudinal tracking of organisational culture to support transformation (particularly where a longer-term study is chosen)
- Unique insights from benchmarking (where available) across participating organisations
- Supports organisational efforts to listen and respond to staff and stakeholder expectations, concerns and needs
- Confidentiality of data ensured via the University's ethics protocols to ensure alignment with public sector values of transparency and fairness

Outcomes

- Tailored, confidential and robust surveys that assess workplace culture and climate
- Summary reports with clear interpretation of findings
- Reduced risk of social desirability bias and more open responses through anonymous data collection
- Optional focus groups to enrich interpretation and support action planning
- Final presentation to senior executive to clearly explain findings (optional)
- Optional assistance disseminating findings to staff through summary documents, online briefings and workshops (incurs additional cost)

Why Organisations work with CERM PI

“We have entrusted CERM PI with conducting our Organisational Culture Study, which has shaped the growth and inclusivity of our organisation over the past six years. Their thorough approach and professional guidance have enabled us to implement actionable recommendations helping us to improve member satisfaction. We highly recommend CERM PI for their dedication, professionalism, and commitment to supporting complex not for profit, volunteer-based organisations like ours.”

— Surf Life Saving SA

“We've introduced positive initiatives around communication, decision-making and staff wellbeing as a direct result of this collaboration.”

—Bega Valley Shire Council

Further enquiries

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