



# THE POSITIVE WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK (PWF)

**A strengths-based approach for thriving workplaces**

The Positive Workplace Framework (PWF) is a made-in-Canada strengths-based approach to optimizing staff well-being, engagement and performance, with a focus on Mental Fitness, Resilience and Positive Leadership.



## Who hasn't been asked to do more with less?

“Doing more and more with less and less until eventually you can do everything with nothing” is a notion introduced by R. Buckminster Fuller in 1938 to describe situations where technology could be used. Today, the expression of doing more with less is commonly used when organizations strive to lower operational costs and increase productivity in the context of cutting back on human and financial resources without an equivalent reduction in workload and expectations.

Obviously, this logic has its limits. Employees are not robots and the extra pressure placed on them to do more with less can lead to unhealthy practices and interpersonal relationships, which increases everyone's stress. Toxic workplaces result, along with increased absenteeism, turnover, mental health problems and burnout.

In response, many deficit-based programs designed to improve workplace environments have been developed. First, they identify existing problems and then intervene to solve them. But a person's psychological well-being is not only influenced by the presence or absence of problems but also by the **existence of strength-focused factors present within individuals and their social settings** that contribute to positive growth and development.

Few initiatives focus on improving existing strengths in workplace environments. **The Positive Workplace Framework (PWF)**, *a made-in-Canada strengths-based approach that optimizes staff well-being, engagement and performance, is an excellent example of such an initiative.*

# The Positive Workplace Framework (PWF)

The PWF is composed of three distinct but inter-related domains: **mental fitness, resiliency, and positive leadership**. In each domain, research-based individual and collective practices known to create positive workplace environments characterized by high levels of staff well-being, engagement and performance are promoted.

## MENTAL FITNESS

the mental fitness domain is composed of three sub-domains relatedness, competency, and autonomy/support – that are referred to as “psychological well-being needs.” Seen as the PWF’s foundation, this domain aligns itself with the elements of self-determination theory.

**Relatedness** involves the development of our sense of connectedness with our co-workers. This need is met when workplace practices include welcoming others, having conversations or exchanges with and checking in on our colleagues.

**Competency** focuses on our collective sense of worth and value, to ourselves and to the workplace community. This mental fitness need is met when we recognize and use our strengths and build confidence in others.

Meeting our **Autonomy-support** need is also important in building psychologically healthy and effective workplace environments. This can be done by ensuring everyone has a voice and choice and opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues.

Creating psychologically safe and healthy workplace cultures where everyone can thrive, be happy and be at their best involves being intentional about fostering relatedness, competency and autonomy/support practices within team relationships and daily routines. When this happens, we experience a greater sense of personal well-being, demonstrate higher levels of motivation, and perform optimally. Targeted training for staff on practices that promote these conditions is an important initial step in optimizing a workplace culture.



## RESILIENCY

Resiliency has been defined as the capacity to adapt and realize positive outcomes in daily living despite challenging circumstances and as the ability to persist in the face of adversity, to bounce back when challenges are encountered, to effectively navigate support systems and to apply resources that sustain well-being. The American Psychological Association specifies that resiliency is not a trait that people either have or do not have but that it involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that anyone can learn and develop.

The PWF builds on this latter point and extends the concept of resiliency from the individual to the group. The PWF's second domain, resiliency, is comprised of five sub-domains (relationship, professional, attitudinal, emotional intelligence, and adaptation) referred to as assets that teams can learn and develop.

**Relationship assets** involve practices that build social networks of support and community. Teams displaying strong relationship assets have caring attitudes toward co-workers and ensure social support in difficult or challenging times.

**Professional assets** involve practices that build professional confidence, capacity, and problem-solving skills. Identifying and counting on the staff's collective knowledge and skills, and ensuring the availability and use of appropriate and targeted professional learning opportunities are evidence of a team with strong professional assets.

Teams that apply **Attitudinal asset practices** show increased optimism and positive dispositions even in the face of difficult situations or challenges. The theory supporting this resiliency asset.

**Emotional intelligence** involves the ability to understand and manage emotions, and to communicate in positive and respectful ways with others. Key actions associated with group emotional intelligence assets are understanding our own emotions and those of others, and ensuring positive communication with others in stressful times.

**Adaptation assets** involve practices that facilitate adjustment to changing situations through positive coping and thriving strategies. Strong adaptation assets are characterized by implementing plans proactively and solving problems as a team.

Teams that implement practices aligned with each resiliency sub-domain are better able to cope, learn, and thrive during challenging and stressful times and are better able to move beyond challenges and engage in new opportunities.



## Positive Leadership

The PWF's third domain pertains to positive leadership and consists of five sub-domains (leadership virtues, positive communication, motivational knowledge and skills, energizing skills, operational tasks) consistent with the work of Kim Cameron.

Leaders with strong **leadership virtues** foster compassionate behaviour among staff, accept and forgive honest errors and encourage expressions of gratitude. They regularly demonstrate gratitude, compassion, and forgiveness.

**Positive communication** occurs when supportive and affirmative language replaces negative and critical language. Supportive communication is honest, congruent, descriptive, specific and reflective. Strong leaders emphasize positive observations and prioritize solution-building approaches.

**Motivational knowledge and skills** refer to a leader's awareness of employee strengths and interests and their capacity to engage everyone in using these strengths in workplace routines and activities. Motivational knowledge and skills are evident when leaders promote a shared vision and encourage a personal investment on the part of everyone in meeting organizational goals.

**Energizing skills** are demonstrated when leaders keep staff feeling energized with their enthusiasm, vitality, openness, and optimism. They make time to listen to and understand people, are fully engaged in conversations, value and promote people's contributions and accomplishments, and follow through on their commitments.

**Operational tasks** refer to the ability of leaders to keep staff engaged by clarifying roles and expectations and providing opportunities for employees to grow professionally.

Overall, applying positive leadership practices improves organizational effectiveness and enables the implementation of mental fitness and resiliency practices, which lead to psychologically safe and positive workplace environments where everyone can thrive and be at their best.



## Does the PWF apply to my workplace?

The **Positive Workplace Framework** is used successfully across Canada in both official languages. Its implementation follows a train-the-trainer approach supported by numerous online resources and validated measures. This approach has the advantage of building capacity at the workplace level instead of creating a dependency on external consultants. A small team of “PWF champions” are provided with the knowledge, resources and strategic individualized plans for facilitating, modeling and promoting evidence-informed positive psychology practices that contribute to healthy and effective workplaces.

Practices related to mental fitness needs are introduced first, in order to establish a solid foundation for the resiliency and positive leadership practices. The PWF features two validated questionnaires, **the Mental Fitness and Resiliency Inventory (MFRI)** and **the Positive Leadership Inventory (PLI)**, which provide an objective profile of workplace environments for each of the 13 PWF sub-domains. Reports are accompanied by over 150 strategies that can be tailored to specific workplace settings based on their respective results and realities.

Organizations can access the **Positive Workplace Framework** online learning platform, where a wealth of resources such as short awareness and capacity building activities, e-books, targeted instructional videos, presentation resources for trainers, and adaptable implementation plans that provide rollout strategies, are found.

Finally, organizations use the PWF and its resources for more specific applications: for new employee orientation, leadership development programs, professional development activities, and to support individual growth plans and professional reviews.

**In an era when we are asked to do more with less, why not ensure we can thrive and be at our best in our workplaces by implementing the Positive Workplace Framework?**

