



CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE:

IMPACT OF SUPERVISOR
SUPPORT AND COMPANY
CULTURE

Making Change in Workplace Mental Health

Mental Health America (MHA), formerly the National Mental Health Association, was founded in 1909 and is the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and promoting the overall health of all Americans. Our work is driven by our commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; integrated care and treatment for those who need it; with recovery as the goal.

MHA's research is part of an ongoing commitment to uncover workplace disparities and addressing the psychological needs of the workforce. MHA seeks to explore factors in work environments that influence employee engagement, workplace stress, and mental health. The research results help inform programs that can be developed and guidance we can give companies to make all workplaces in America successful and healthy.

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Creating Mentally Healthy Workplaces

Major Findings

Mental Health America (MHA) conducted a survey with Qualtrics to explore similarities and differences in answers to our Work Health Survey questions across two different populations. MHA's [Mind the Workplace 2019 Report](#) synthesized findings from our 2019 Work Health Survey of nearly 10,000 individuals from 2018 and 2019. The Qualtrics survey was given to 1,000 individuals in 2019. The comparison of findings is summarized in this report.

The results of both surveys demonstrate that the factors necessary for creating a mentally healthy workplace are the same in both a help-seeking and non-help-seeking population. Whether people are happy or sad, satisfied or unsatisfied, the elements that makes a company successful in creating mentally healthy workplaces is the same.

Our collective findings from both surveys reveal that:

- **Supervisors matter.** Having a supervisor who checks in regularly, is supportive, and who values feedback is a protective factor for a company. Positive supervisor relationships were correlated with the greatest number of positive outcomes including satisfaction with work, employee motivation, employee confidence, pride, and ability to report ethical violations and areas for improvement in the workplace.
- **Safe and transparent company culture is a protective factor.** Creating a culture of safe and open communication provides staff increased opportunity and willingness to provide constructive feedback on improving workplaces. It also is highly correlated to reporting unethical or unfair practices that put a company at risk for legal issues.
- **Safety and pride impacts perceptions.** Feeling comfortable to report dishonest or unfair practices was most correlated with pride. Staff who feel safe in their companies are more willing to recommend their workplace to others and speak positively about their company.
- **Good company practice fosters good will.** Among all employee well-being measures, pride was the most correlated with supervisor communication and a company culture of safe and open communication.
- **Silence is the most damaging.** People who are the most stressed also reported they were in companies where it was safer to remain silent about their personal problems.

Across both a help-seeking and non-help-seeking population, an organizational culture of safe and open communication and supervisor support and guidance are important for increasing employee engagement and well-being and creating an overall mentally healthy workplace for all employees. Therefore, it is imperative that supervisors and other company leadership take action to create a culture of communication and support that will benefit not only those employees that may be seeking resources for their mental health, but every employee in the workplace. Doing so will ultimately improve overall operations.

MHA Screening and Qualtrics Work Health Survey

MHA Screening

The MHA Work Health Survey was launched in April 2018 and closed February 2019. It was available to the public through MHA's website, as part of MHA Screening, and collected 9,802 responses in 10 months.

Measuring Needs Among Those at Highest Risk

The respondents to MHA's 2019 Workplace Health Survey were likely to have found the survey when searching for mental health support through www.mhascreening.org. The sample weighs heavily among users who are experiencing other mental health concerns or are experiencing problems with work that might exacerbate mental health concerns. Rather than reflecting the general population, MHA's survey respondents represent individuals who are most at risk of burnout, low employee engagement, and poor employee wellbeing. The convenience sample allows MHA to evaluate the challenges and opportunities that will impact those with the highest needs.

Recognizing the differences between MHA's convenience sample and the general population, MHA worked with Qualtrics to administer the same survey to a non-help-seeking sample representative of the general population, to analyze potential differences in workplace mental health between groups.

Qualtrics

The Qualtrics Work Health survey was launched in April 2019 and closed May 2019. It was available through Qualtrics, a survey panel aggregator. Qualtrics utilizes several panel providers, each with their own method of recruitment and incentives, to generate survey responses from the general population. Respondents may choose to join a panel through a double opt-in process and are asked to input basic data about themselves to better inform which surveys are relevant for them to take.

When a Qualtrics survey is created that an individual is qualified for, they are notified via email and offered an incentive. The email notification does not tell them the topic of the survey at that time.

The Qualtrics Work Health Survey collected 1,000 responses in 1 month.

Survey Questions and Demographics

Survey Questions

The 2019 Workplace Health Survey included 15 questions exploring topics of supervisor communication, company communication culture, and employee engagement and well-being.

Individuals were asked to rate each question/statement below on a six-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree.

2019 Survey Questions

1. I am comfortable sharing new ideas with my supervisor.
2. My supervisor values all feedback on improving workplace culture.
3. In my company, it is safer to remain silent about things that need improvement.
4. My supervisor remains objective when dealing with workplace conflict (e.g. considers all parties' concerns in decision making).
5. I am comfortable reporting dishonest or unfair practices to human resources/management.
6. I feel comfortable recommending my workplace to others.
7. Supervisors regularly check on my workplace needs.
8. I receive enough guidance to perform my job well.
9. I feel motivated at work.
10. Workplace issues negatively affect my sleep.
11. In my company, it is safer to remain silent about my workplace stress.
12. To cope with workplace stress, I do unhealthy things (e.g. drinking, drug use, lashing out at others).
13. I am afraid of getting punished for taking a day off to attend to my mental health.
14. My workplace culture makes me feel less confident about my performance.
15. I spend time looking for a new position while at work or outside of work.
 - a. If so, how often: Several times a day, Once a day, Several times a week, Once a week, Less than once a week

Demographic Questions

Both surveys collected work environment information, including employment status (full-time, part-time, or independent contractor), industry type, size of the organization, benefits currently offered by the respondents' company, and benefits they believe would help workplace stress and mental health. It also collected respondents' age and gender. Providing work environment and demographic information was voluntary on the MHA Work Health Survey, but not on the Qualtrics Survey.

Respondents of the Qualtrics survey were capped to match the demographics of respondents of the MHA Work Health survey, based on gender, age category, employment status and industry, to reduce confounding.

A limitation of this comparison is that respondents were not asked about or matched on income level. The income level for an average user on Qualtrics is about \$45,000-\$55,000. The average household income level among MHA Screening respondents is less than \$40,000. While respondents in Qualtrics were matched with the MHA Screening respondents based on industry, the differences in income level may explain certain disparities in the comparative responses.

Methodology

- Survey responses were scored on a 1-6 Likert scale: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Somewhat Disagree, 4 – Somewhat Agree, 5 – Agree, 6 – Strongly Agree.
- Inverse scoring was used for negatively worded questions or statements.
- For example, in the question “I am comfortable sharing new ideas with my supervisor,” one point is assigned for every “Strongly Disagree” response, and six points for every “Strongly Agree.” For the question, “In my company, it is safer to remain silent about things that need improvement,” six points is assigned to every “Strongly Disagree” and one point to every “Strongly Agree.”

Interpretation

- Lower scores indicate an unhealthy workplace. Higher scores indicate a healthy workplace. The final score for each respondent represented the sum of all ratings, while the average was determined by a collective sum divided by all respondents.
- For the purpose of reporting results in figures, “Agree” includes all responses for Strongly Agree, Agree, and Somewhat Agree. “Disagree” includes all responses for Strongly Disagree, Disagree, and Somewhat Disagree.
- Correlation coefficients are represented in parentheses next to each analysis.

Differences in Overall Scores

The mean score for the MHA Work Health Survey was statistically significantly different from the mean score for the Qualtrics Work Health Survey ($p < 0.001$, $df = 8,256$), indicating that the two populations studied were statistically different. Based on survey scoring, lower scores indicated unhealthy workplaces, and higher scores indicated healthy workplaces. The significant difference between the MHA Work Health Survey results ($\mu = 49.41$) and Qualtrics Work Health Survey results ($\mu = 62.88$) was consistent with our hypothesis that the help-seeking population surveyed through MHA Screening was significantly different from the general population.

Employee Engagement and Wellbeing

Employee engagement refers to the extent to which employees are committed to organizational goals, invested in their work, and motivated to complete tasks and accept work responsibilities. Engaged employees have a positive relationship with their workplace as a whole.

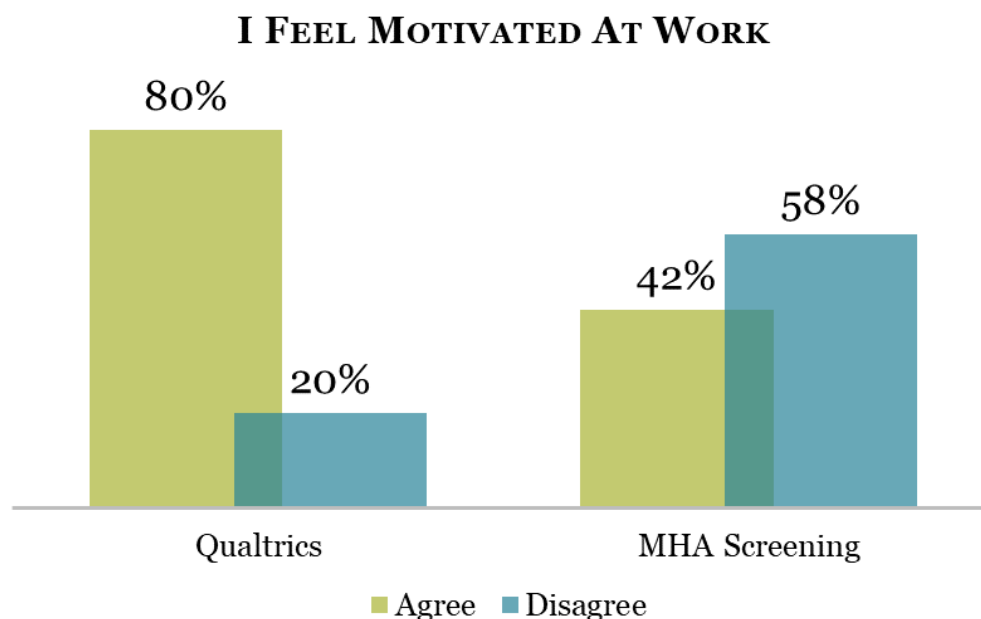
Employee engagement and well-being were measured by the following items. General concept labels are in parentheses.

- I feel motivated at work. (Motivation)
- My workplace culture makes me feel less confident about my performance. (Confidence)
- I feel comfortable recommending my workplace to others. (Pride)
- Workplace issues negatively affect my sleep. (Sleep)
- To cope with workplace stress, I do unhealthy things (e.g. drinking, drug use, lashing out at others). (Stress)
- I spend time looking for a new position while at work or outside of work. (Presenteeism)

Employees who took the Qualtrics Work Health Survey demonstrated greater engagement than those surveyed through MHA Screening in all three categories: motivation, confidence and pride.

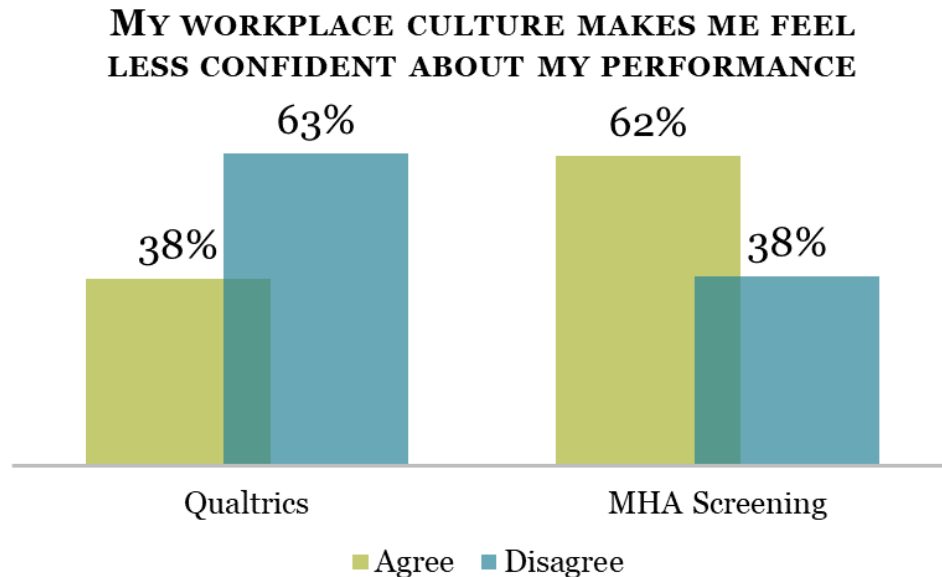
Motivation

Employees who took the Qualtrics survey were nearly twice as motivated at work as those surveyed on MHA Screening.



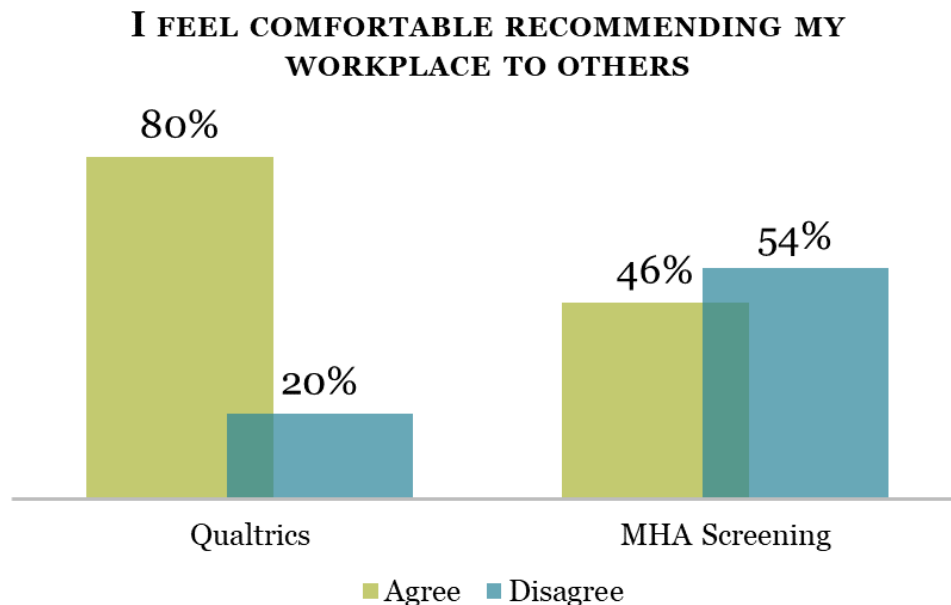
Confidence

For many employees, organizational culture can cultivate negative emotions related to self-confidence. Only 38 percent of Qualtrics respondents agreed that their workplace culture makes them feel less confident, compared to 62 percent of respondents from MHA Screening.



Pride

More than half of employees from the MHA Screening sample (54 percent) did not feel comfortable recommending their workplace to others, compared to only 20 percent from the Qualtrics sample.

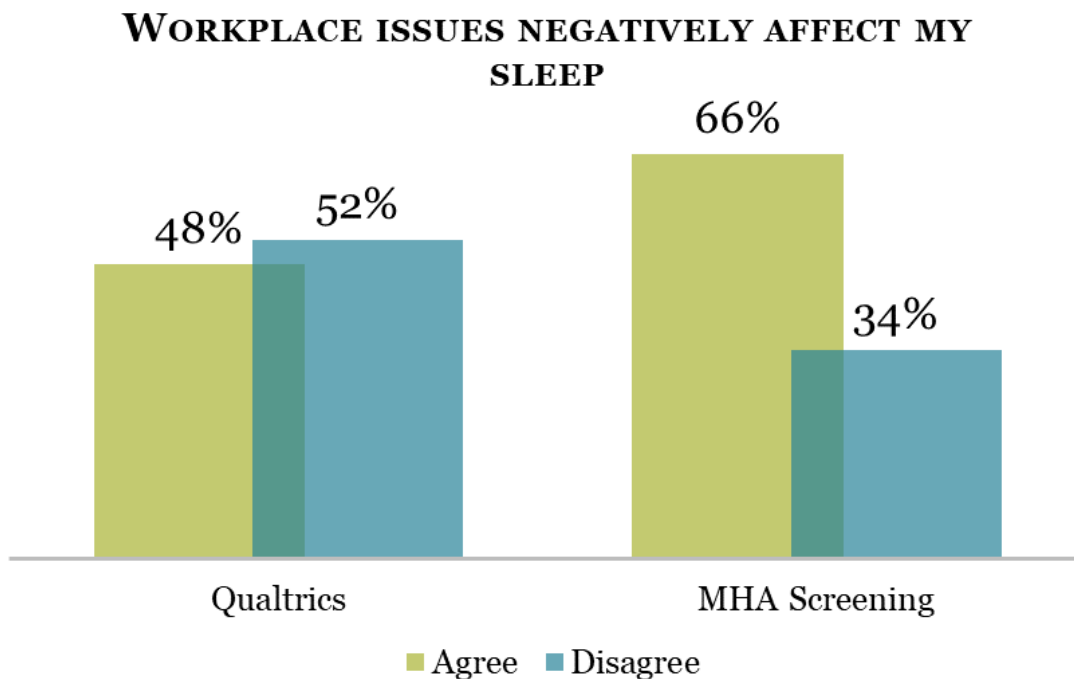


Sleep and Stress

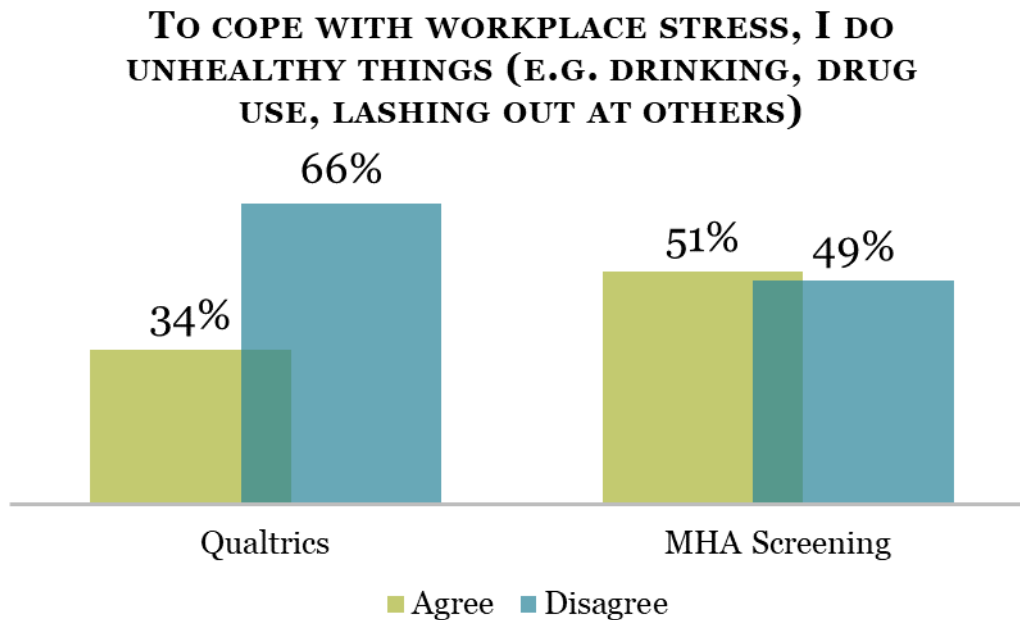
Workplace stress can contribute to the decline in employee well-being, significantly impacting their mood and behavior. Changes in behavior include those associated with motivation, sleeping patterns, and changes in appetite. These are also behaviors that are often symptomatic of mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

Differences between Qualtrics survey respondents and MHA survey respondents for measures of employee well-being were slightly less pronounced than those for employee engagement.

Sixty-six percent of MHA surveyed employees stated that workplace issues affected their sleep, compared to 48 percent of Qualtrics surveyed employees. A workplace culture that made employees feel less confident was moderately correlated to negative sleep patterns in both the MHA ($r=0.422$) and Qualtrics ($r=0.504$) populations.



Half of MHA respondents and 34 percent of Qualtrics respondents stated that they engaged in unhealthy behaviors in order to cope with workplace stress. Similarly to negative sleep patterns, engaging in unhealthy coping behaviors was moderately correlated with low levels of confidence in the workplace in the Qualtrics sample ($r=0.582$).

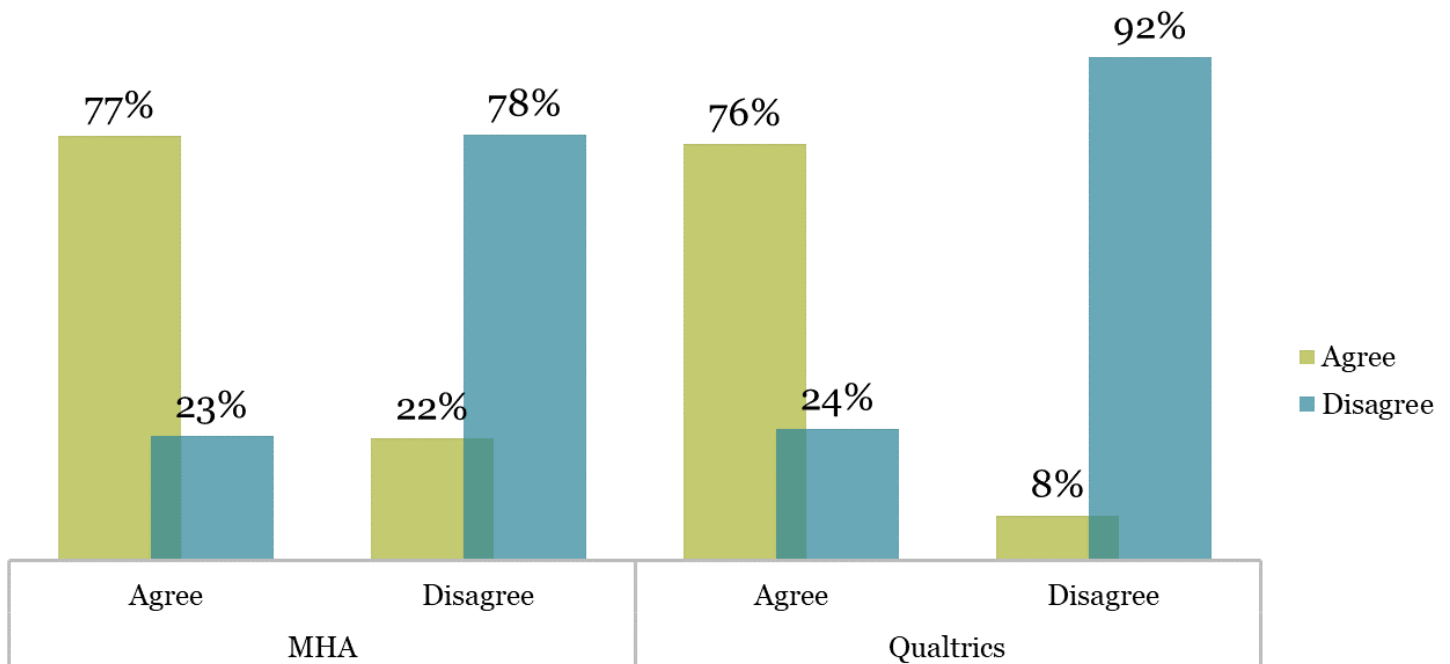


Presenteeism

A lack of motivation and upholding a negative perception or attitude towards a workplace is indicative of job dissatisfaction. Employees that are dissatisfied with their job feel a lack of attachment to the organization, making them less likely to feel any sense of commitment.

Qualtrics survey respondents were less likely to report that they spent time looking for another job – only 40 percent agreed. However, Qualtrics respondents who were unhappy with their current position searched for new positions more often than MHA survey respondents, with 59 percent reporting that they looked *several times per week*. Searching for a new job was moderately correlated to a workplace culture that made employees feel less confident about their work in both the MHA ($r=0.448$) and Qualtrics ($r=0.569$) samples.

I SPEND TIME LOOKING FOR A NEW POSITION



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: MY WORKPLACE CULTURE MAKES ME FEEL LESS CONFIDENT ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE

**Among MHA respondents
looking for other work**

45%

**reported looking for a new
job several times per week**

**Among Qualtrics respondents
looking for other work**

59%

**reported looking for a new job
several times per week**

Supervisor Communication and Support

The findings from our report reinforce the importance of supervisor communication and support in establishing mentally healthy companies. To optimally support staff, supervisors should hold regular meeting times for staff to provide feedback on work progress, appropriateness of current workload, discussions of accomplishments and anticipation or current feelings of stress. Maintaining regularly scheduled meetings helps create an expectation that an employee's every day well-being is important rather than scheduling meetings only when a challenge needs to be addressed. Developing a culture of open communication also protects the company by creating a space where staff feel comfortable addressing ethical violations or a place to discuss their views on potentially unfair practices.

Supervisor communication was measured by the following items:

- My supervisor values all feedback on improving workplace culture.
- I am comfortable sharing new ideas with my supervisor.
- My supervisor remains objective when dealing with workplace conflict (considers all parties' concerns in decision making).

In the MHA Work Health Survey, positive supervisor communication was positively correlated with overall healthier scores. Among the three measures, supervisors valuing all feedback on workplace cultures was most strongly correlated with overall scores ($r=0.746$). In the Qualtrics Work Health Survey, positive supervisor communication was also moderately positively correlated with overall healthier scores across the three measures of supervisor communication and support.

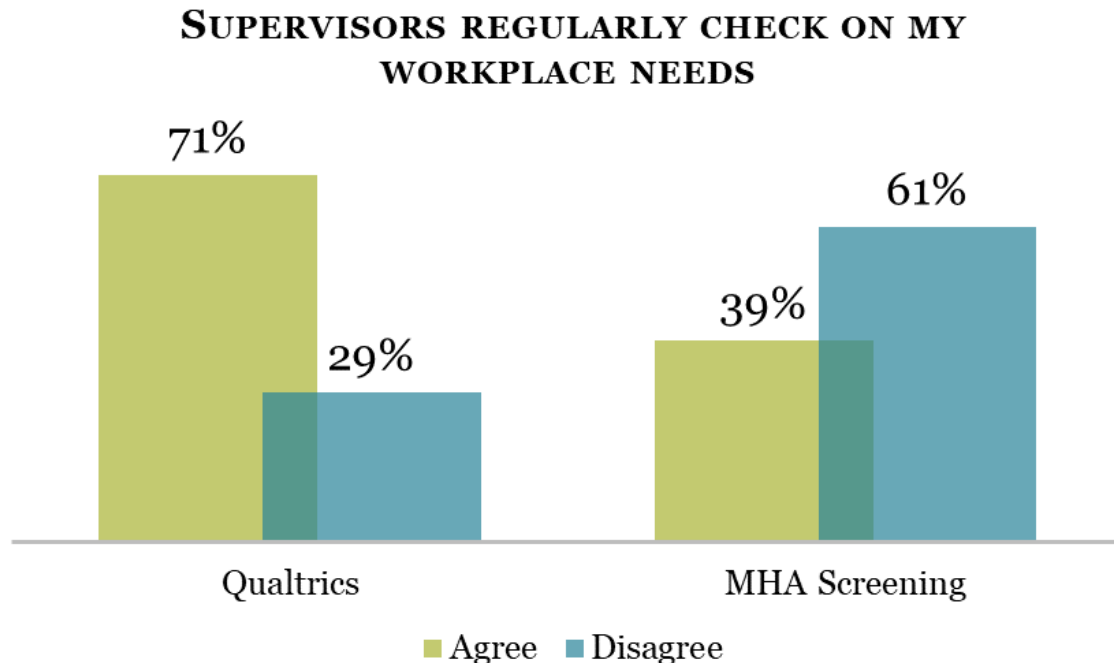
Supervisor Support and Guidance

Staff who do not receive regular support or guidance have no context for understanding if they are doing a good job or if they can make changes to improve their work, and do not have a space to bring up concerns in a timely fashion.

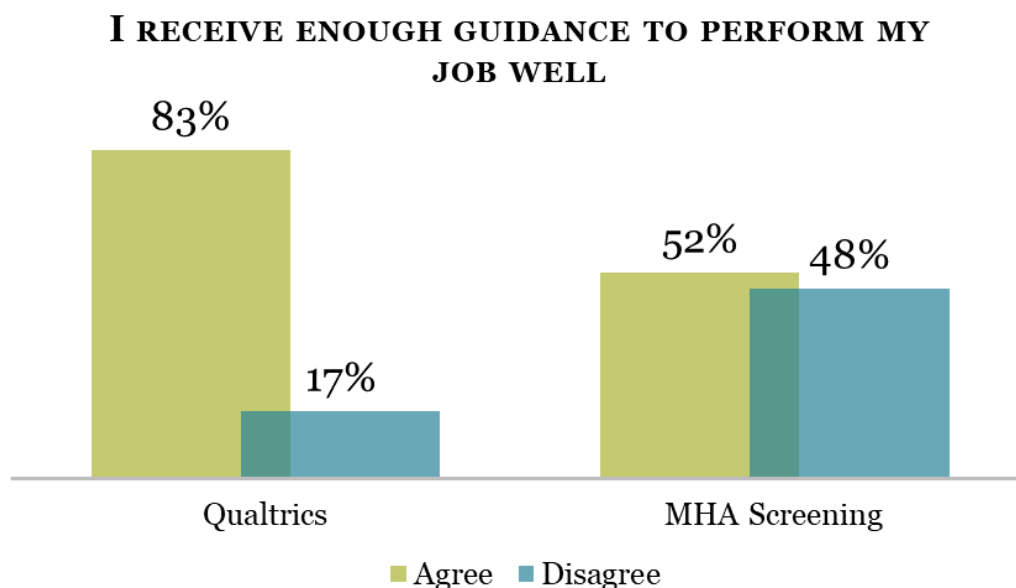
Supervisor support and guidance were measured through the following two items:

- I receive enough guidance to perform my job well.
- Supervisors regularly check on my workplace needs.

Qualtrics respondents were much more likely to report that their supervisors checked on their workplace needs. Sixty-one percent of MHA Screening survey respondents disagreed that their supervisors regularly checked-in on their workplace needs, while only 29 percent of Qualtrics respondents said that was the case.



Similarly, almost half of MHA respondents (48 percent) disagreed that they had received enough guidance to perform their job well, while only 17 percent of Qualtrics respondents reported a lack of guidance.



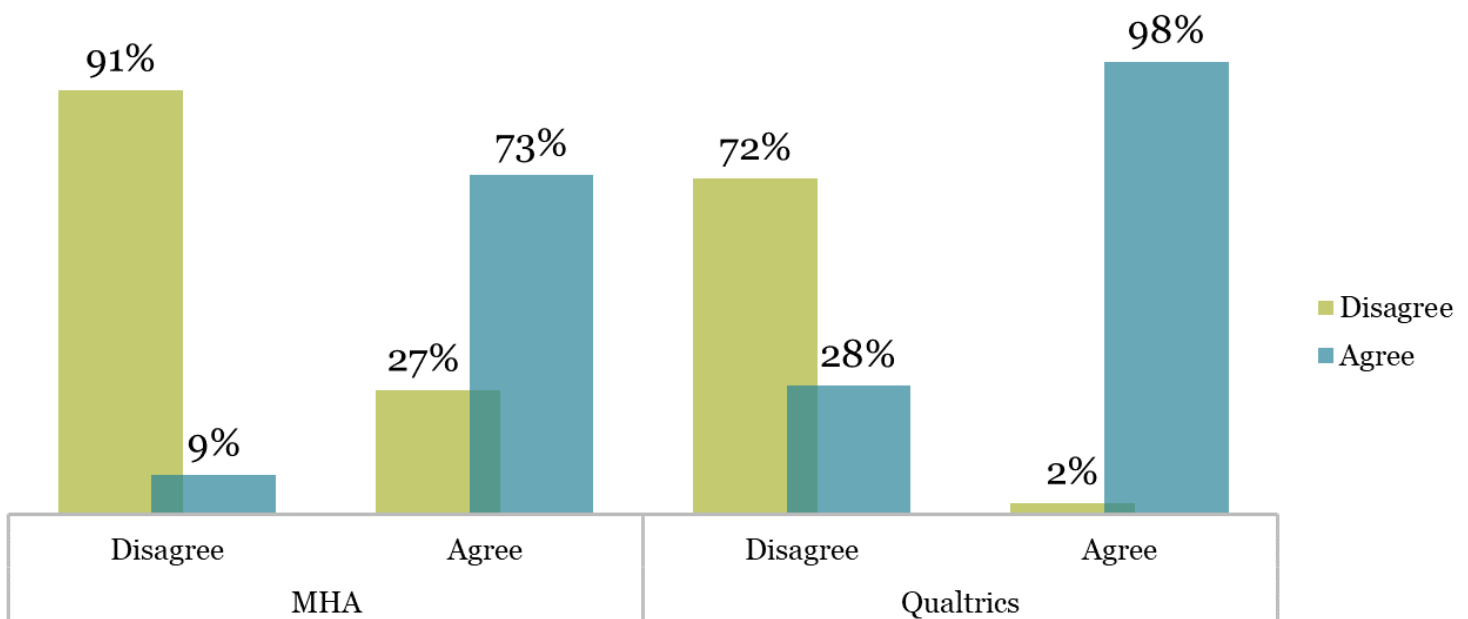
The Qualtrics respondents overall scores indicated healthier work environments. The differences in the MHA and Qualtrics responses indicate the value of regularly checking in and providing sufficient guidance as key factors in creating mentally healthy workplaces.

Impact of Little Supervisory Support and Guidance

However, the lack of supervisor support had the greatest impact on an employee's motivation and pride. Less supervisory support and guidance was correlated with lower motivation, less pride, and a decreased likelihood of reporting dishonest or unfair practices.

Both the MHA and Qualtrics results showed a moderate correlation between supervisors checking on their workplace needs (Qualtrics $r=0.598$, MHA $r=0.476$) and receiving enough guidance (Qualtrics $r=0.611$, MHA $r=0.518$) with how motivated they felt at work. There was also a moderate correlation between supervisors checking in (Qualtrics $r=0.610$, MHA $r=0.547$) and receiving guidance (Qualtrics $r=0.580$, MHA $r=0.531$) on how comfortable they were recommending their workplace to others.

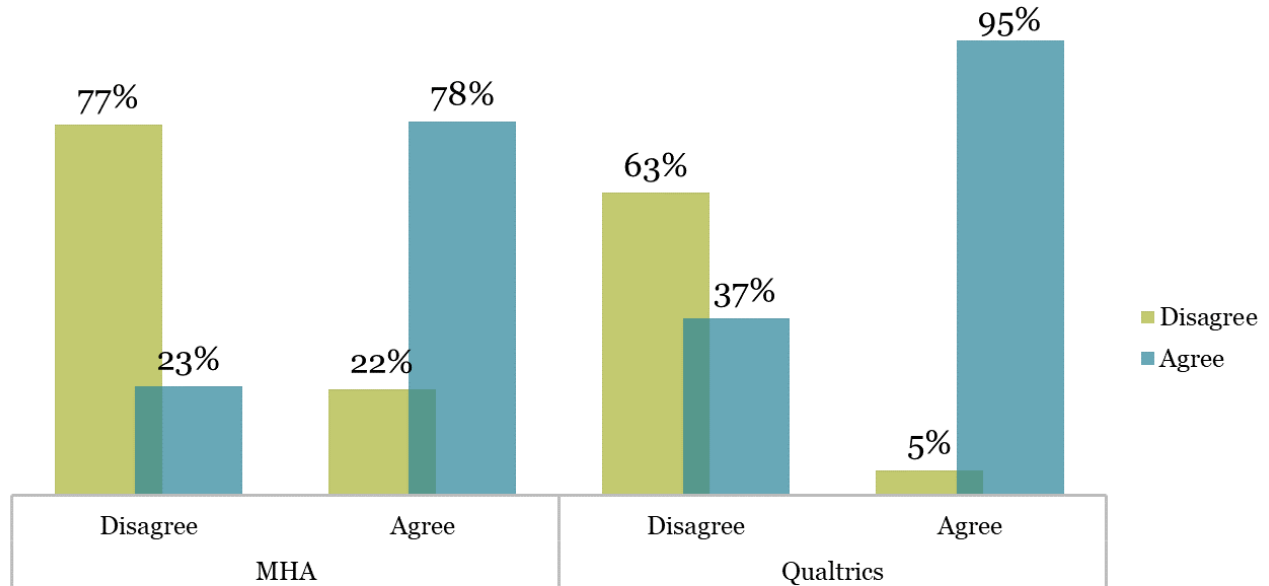
I FEEL MOTIVATED AT WORK



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: I RECEIVE ENOUGH GUIDANCE TO PERFORM MY JOB WELL

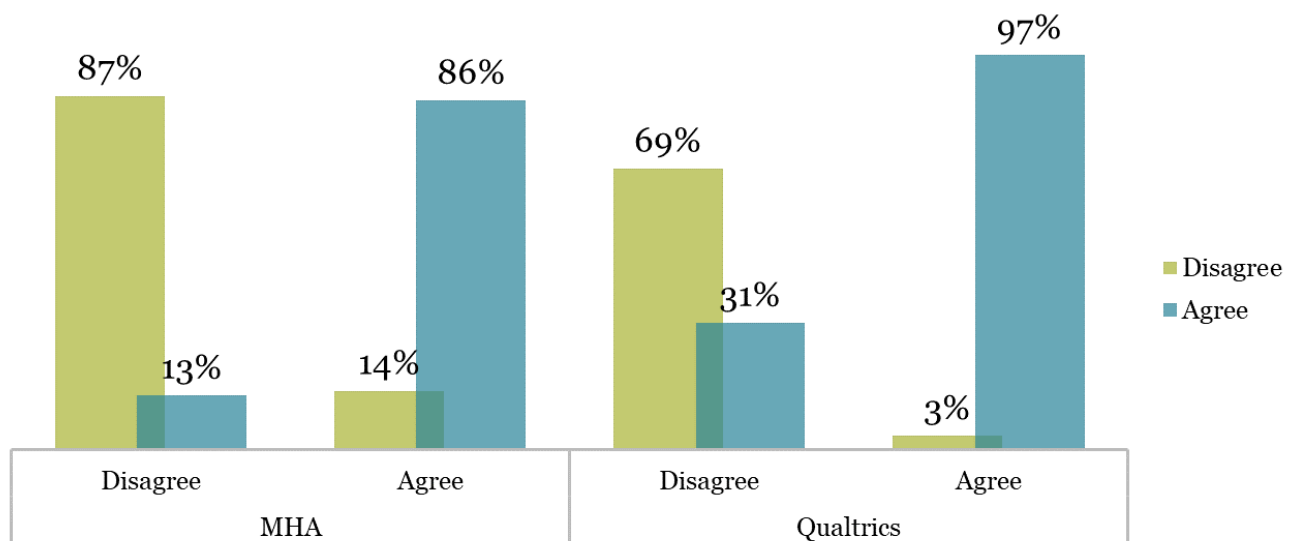
Supervisor support also had a large impact on employee safety, as employees who felt their supervisors check on their workplace needs in both samples were more comfortable reporting dishonest or unfair practices at their workplaces (Qualtrics $r=0.518$, MHA $r=0.412$).

I AM CONFIDENT REPORTING DISHONEST OR UNFAIR PRACTICES



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: SUPERVISORS REGULARLY CHECK ON MY WORKPLACE NEEDS

I FEEL COMFORTABLE RECOMMENDING MY WORKPLACE TO OTHERS



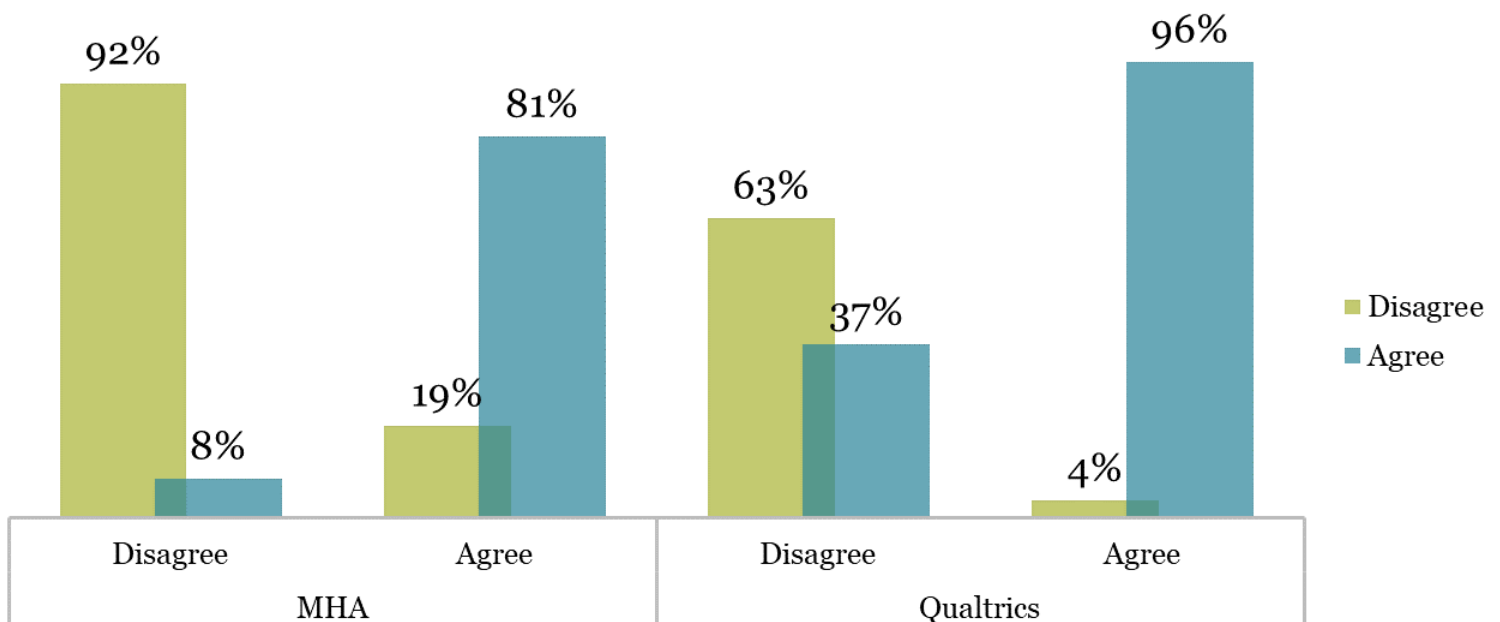
AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: SUPERVISORS REGULARLY CHECK ON MY WORKPLACE NEEDS

The Importance of Valuing Feedback

Valuing feedback is demonstrated by setting up times where supervisors intentionally solicit feedback, listens to the concerns, and responds in actions showing that the staff member's input has value and leads to needed changes at work.

Supervisors valuing feedback was moderately correlated with how much pride an employee felt in their job (measured by whether an employee would recommend their workplace to others) in both the MHA ($r=0.556$) and Qualtrics ($r=0.591$) results. Supervisors valuing feedback was also positively correlated with employee motivation in the Qualtrics sample ($r=0.539$), even more so than the MHA Screening sample ($r=0.454$).

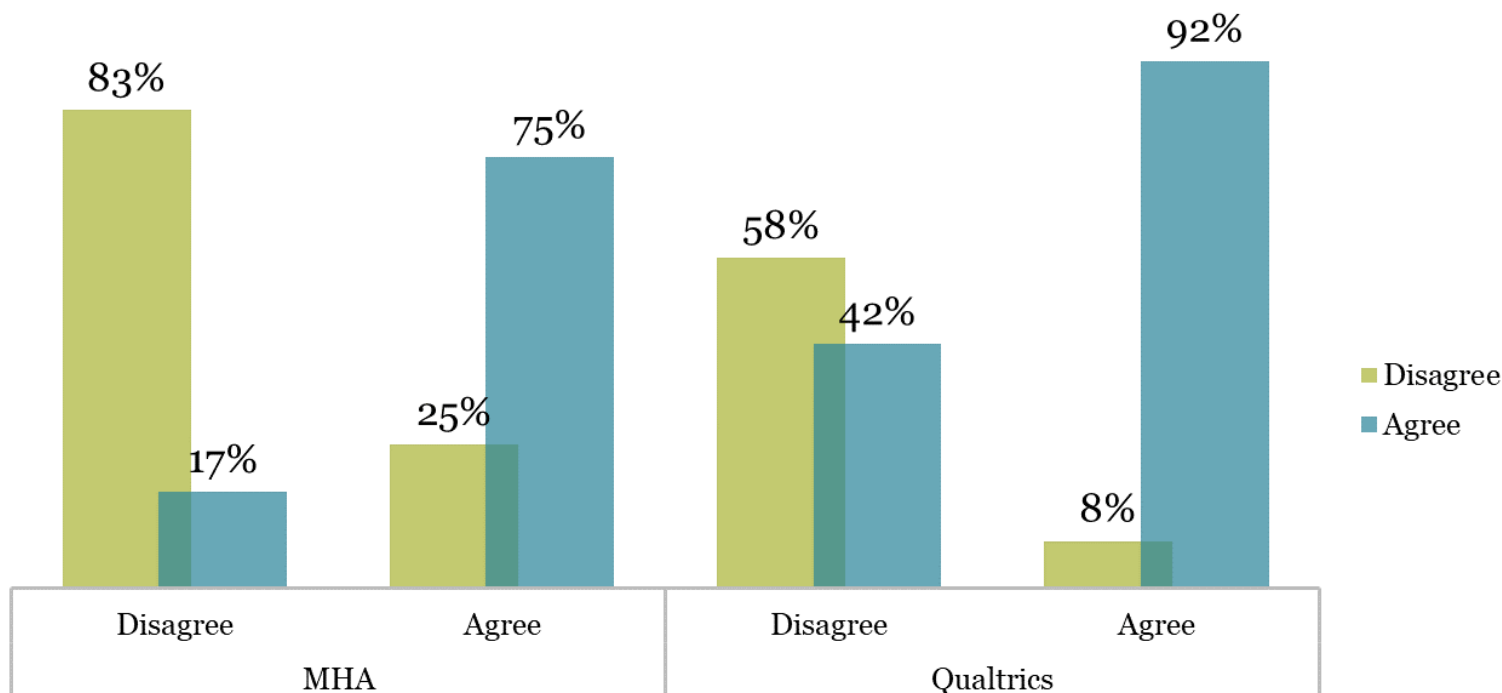
I FEEL COMFORTABLE RECOMMENDING MY WORKPLACE TO OTHERS



**AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: MY SUPERVISOR VALUES ALL
FEEDBACK ON IMPROVING WORKPLACE CULTURE**

How comfortable a person felt sharing new ideas with their supervisor and whether supervisors valued feedback were both correlated with whether an employee felt safe reporting unfair practices in both the MHA Screening sample ($r=0.429$, $r=0.445$) and the Qualtrics sample ($r=0.487$, $r=0.490$).

I AM COMFORTABLE RECOMMENDING MY WORKPLACE TO OTHERS



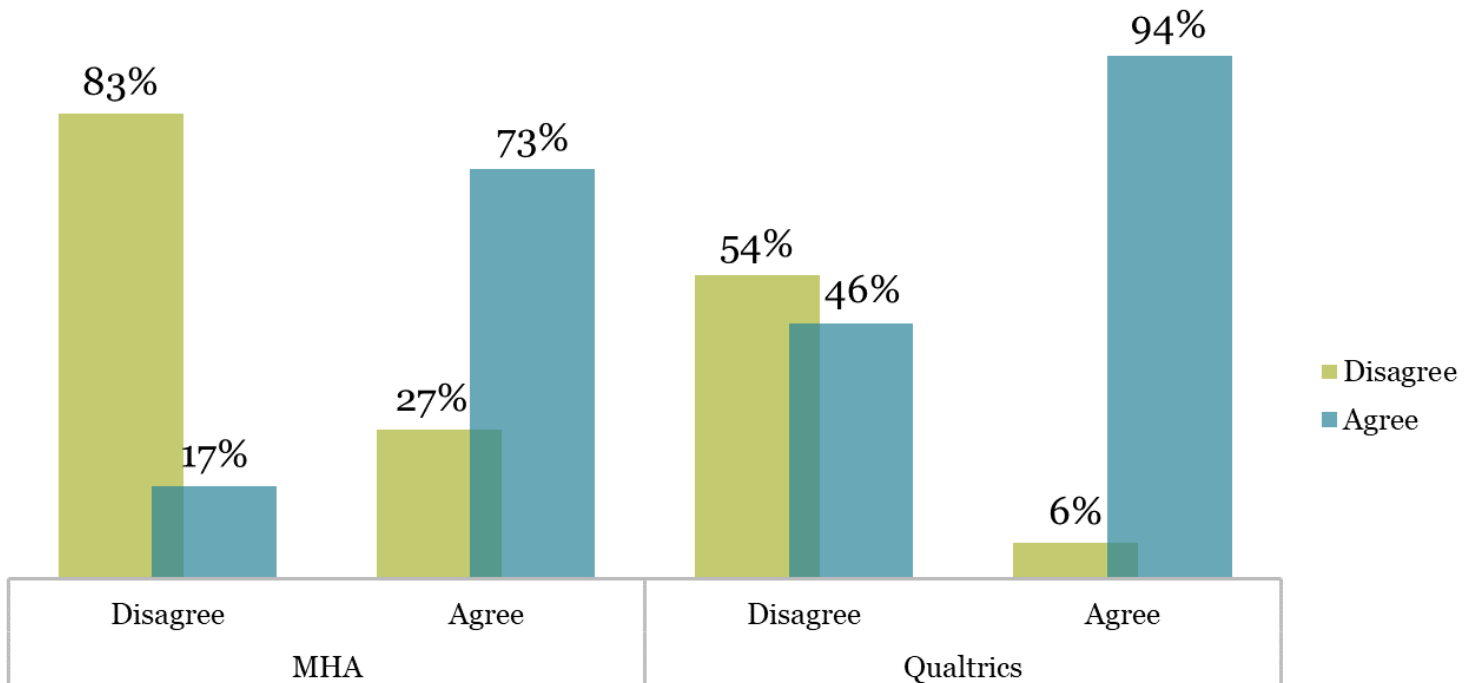
AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: MY SUPERVISOR VALUES ALL FEEDBACK ON IMPROVING WORKPLACE CULTURE

Supervisor Fairness

Supervisors who are perceived as biased or subjective when dealing with workplace conflict are discouraging employees from reporting workplace issues that may impact organizational stability.

While Qualtrics respondents were overall more likely to report that their supervisors remained objective when dealing with workplace conflict, the perception of supervisor objectivity was equally correlated with how safe they felt reporting unsafe practices ($r=0.462$) as in the MHA Screening sample ($r=0.434$).

I AM COMFORTABLE REPORTING DISHONEST OR UNFAIR PRACTICES



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: MY SUPERVISOR REMAINS OBJECTIVE WHEN DEALING WITH WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Organizational Culture

Whether employees perceive their workplace practices and policies as ones that value their work, care about their well-being, or support their professional growth are measures of organizational climate. Which policies are developed and how they are implemented are equally important in understanding organizational culture and its influence on employee engagement.

Remaining silent about workplace issues can perpetuate an unhealthy climate and culture that leads to an unsafe workplace and defiant behaviors. Defiant behavior is behavior that goes against an organization's values and mission. Its prevalence affects levels of productivity and results in higher turnover rates, ultimately hindering organizational success.

Organizational culture is measured through the following items:

- In my company, it is safer to remain silent about things that need improvement.
- I am comfortable reporting dishonest or unfair practices to human resources/management.
- I am afraid of getting punished for taking a day off to attend to my mental health.
- In my company, it is safer to remain silent about my workplace stress.

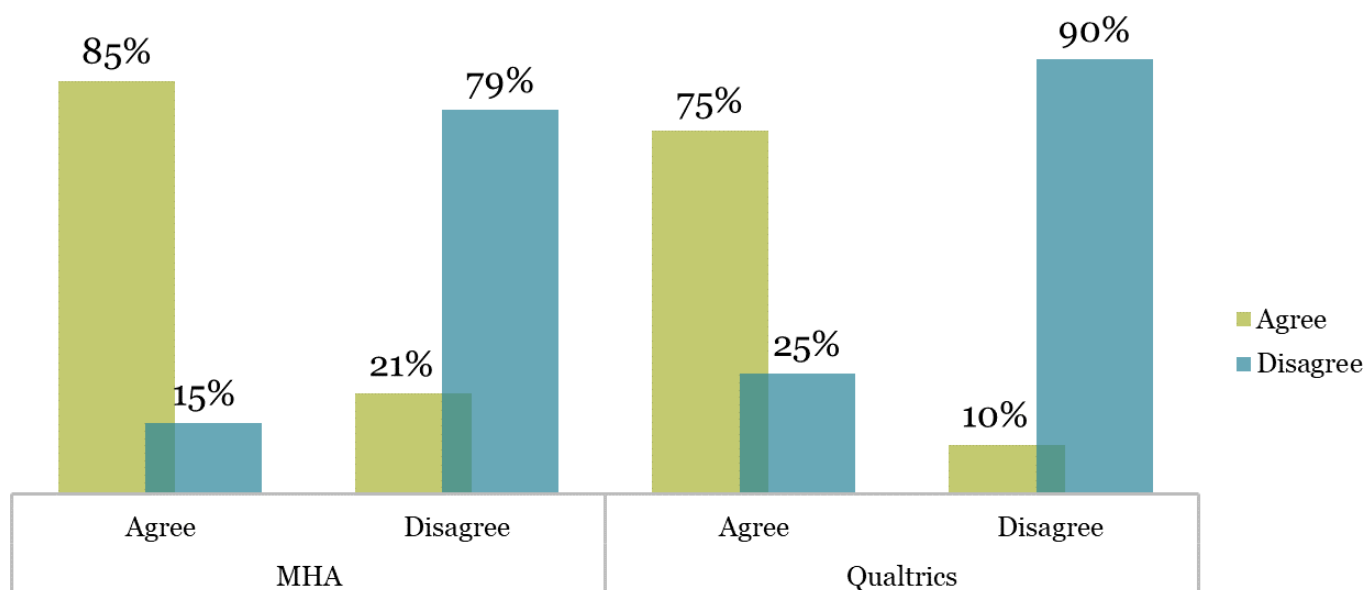
A Culture of Feedback

Valuing feedback is important at a supervisory level and at a company culture level. Organizations create cultures of feedback by providing opportunities for staff at all levels to provide anonymous feedback about their work, their supervisors, their coworkers, changes needed in the company, and evaluation of workload, stress, mental health, and burnout. A company can demonstrate that feedback is valued by transparently reporting the outcomes of the assessment and developing and executing a plan to improve the workplace as a response to feedback from staff.

Both Qualtrics respondents ($r=0.549$) and MHA respondents ($r=0.480$) showed a moderate correlation between feeling it was safer to remain silent about things that need improvement and that their company culture made them feel less confident.

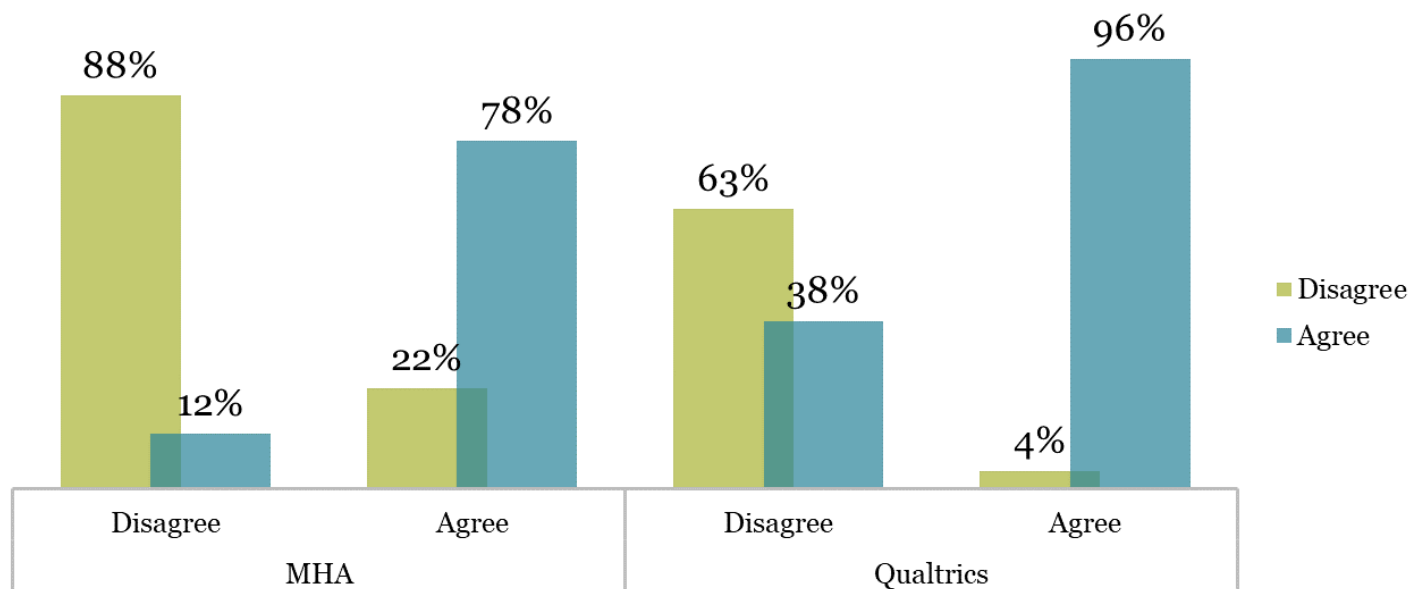
In both MHA and Qualtrics samples, employees who felt comfortable reporting dishonest or unfair practices were more likely to have pride in their organizations (Qualtrics $r=0.566$, MHA $r=0.509$).

MY WORKPLACE CULTURE MAKES ME FEEL LESS CONFIDENT ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: IN MY COMPANY, IT IS SAFER TO REMAIN SILENT ABOUT THINGS THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT

I FEEL COMFORTABLE RECOMMENDING MY WORKPLACE TO OTHERS

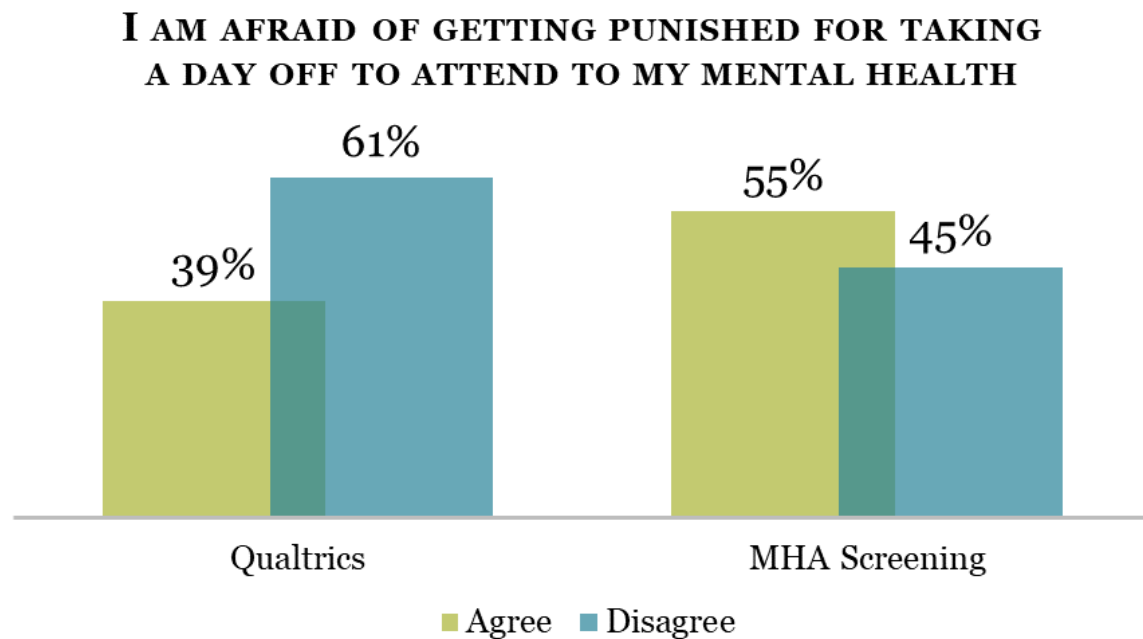


AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: I AM COMFORTABLE REPORTING DISHONEST OR UNFAIR PRACTICES

Fear of Punishment

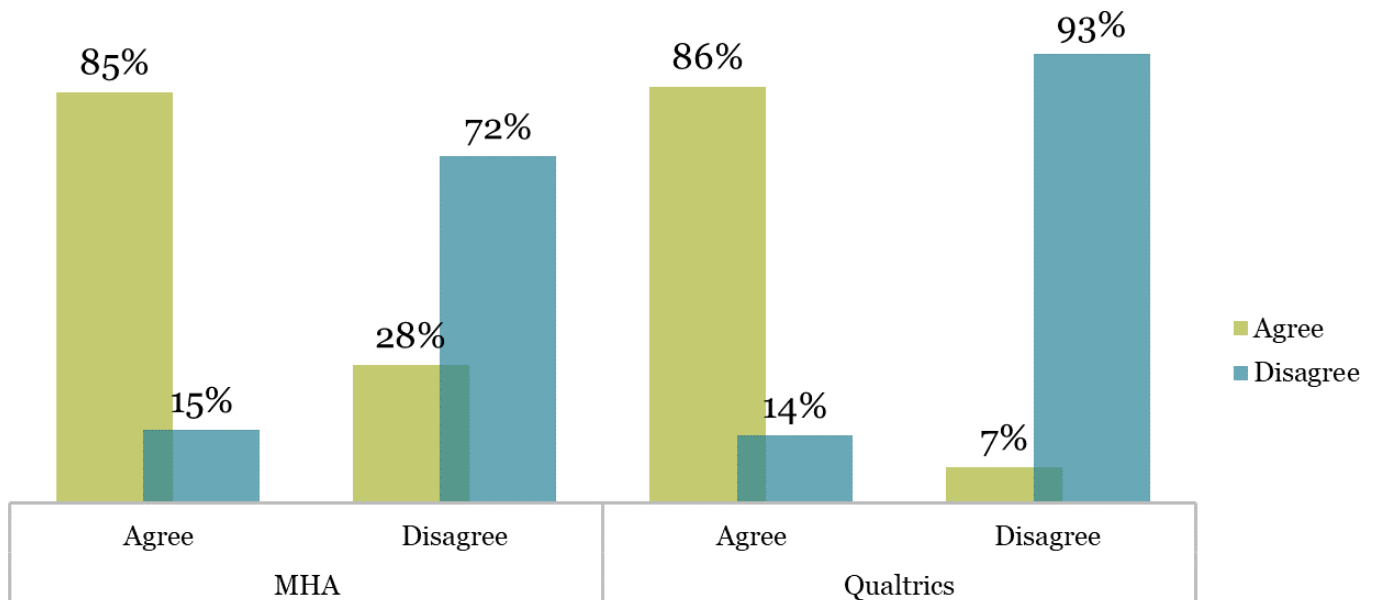
Fifty-five percent of MHA surveyed employees, and 39 percent of Qualtrics surveyed employees agreed that they feared punishment for taking a day off to address their mental health needs.

This represented the smallest difference between groups on the Work Health Survey, indicating the pervasiveness of fear among employees to openly address mental health in the workplace, both in the MHA Screening sample and in the general population.



Fear of punishment for taking a day off to attend to one's mental health was also correlated with employees' workplace culture making them feel less confident in both samples (Qualtrics $r=0.676$, MHA $r=0.459$).

MY WORKPLACE CULTURE MAKES ME FEEL LESS CONFIDENT ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE



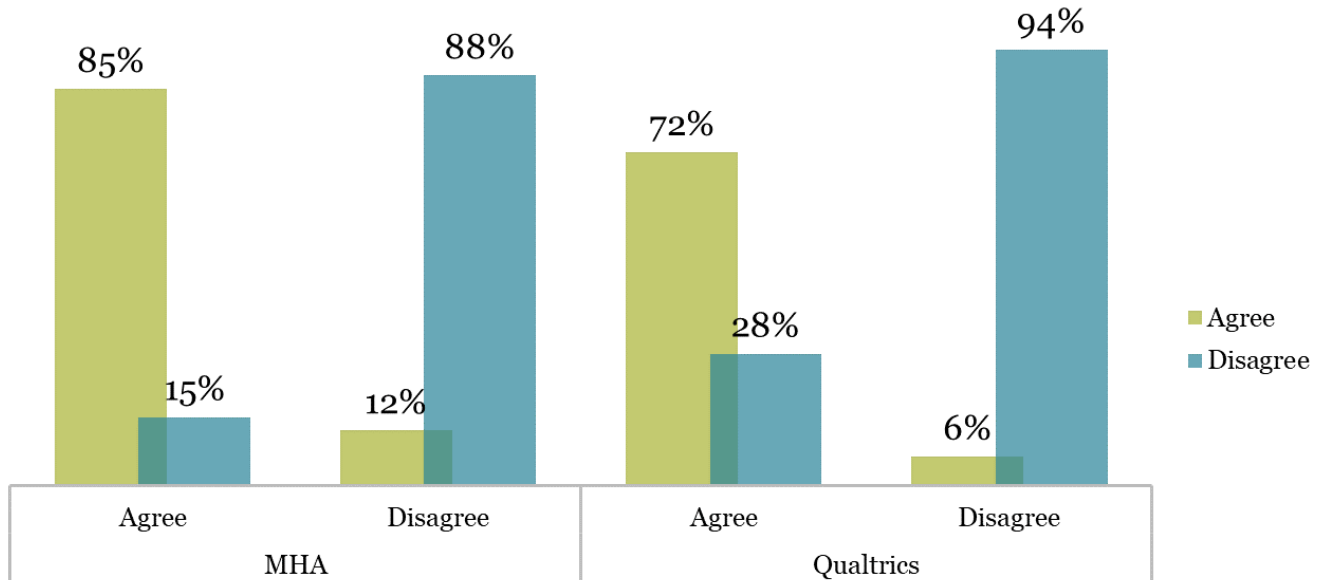
AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: I AM AFRAID OF GETTING PUNISHED FOR TAKING A DAY OFF TO ATTEND TO MY MENTAL HEALTH

A Culture of Personal Silence

In addition to remaining silent about workplace issues, employees were also hesitant or fearful of informing their supervisors about any personal issues affecting their ability to perform in the workplace.

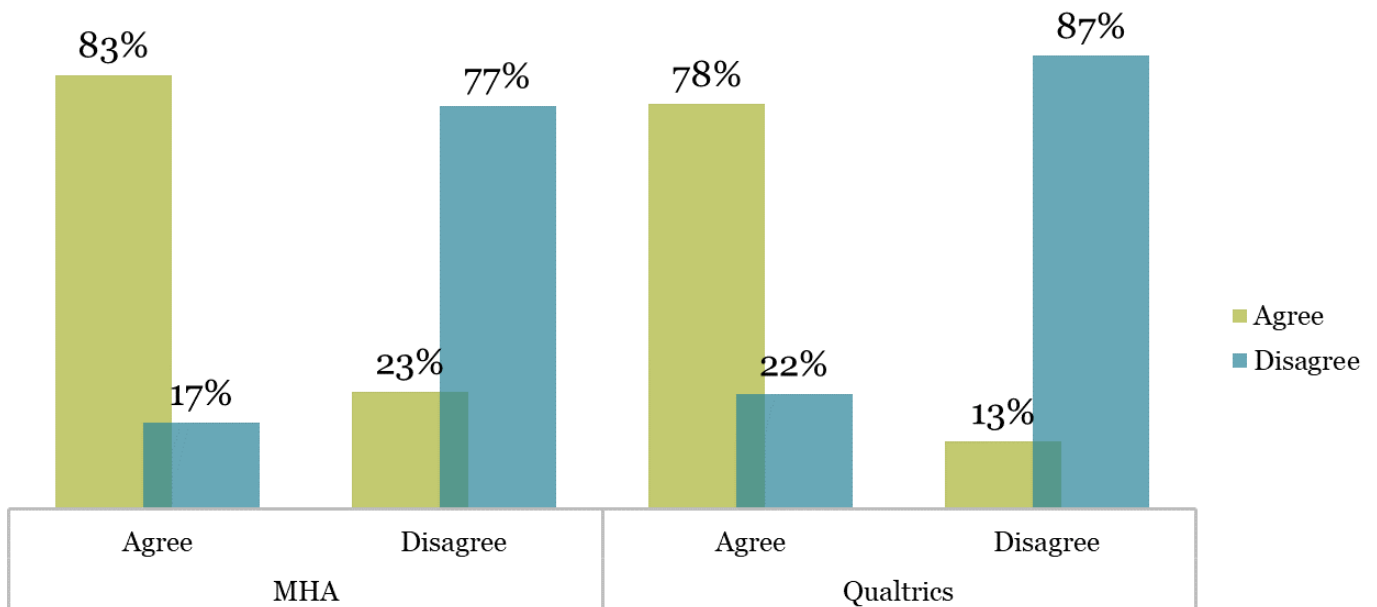
Employees fear of speaking up about the workplace stress they were experiencing was correlated with lower confidence in the workplace (MHA $r=0.539$, Qualtrics $r=0.561$), as well as measures of employee well-being such as disrupted sleep (MHA $r=0.437$, Qualtrics $r=0.532$), fear of punishment (MHA $r=0.466$, Qualtrics $r=0.507$), and lower presenteeism (MHA $r=0.405$, Qualtrics $r=0.516$) in both populations.

MY WORKPLACE CULTURE MAKES ME FEEL LESS CONFIDENT ABOUT MY PERFORMANCE



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: IN MY COMPANY, IT IS SAFER TO REMAIN SILENT ABOUT MY WORKPLACE STRESS

WORKPLACE ISSUES NEGATIVELY AFFECT MY SLEEP



AMONG THOSE WHO ANSWERED: IN MY COMPANY, IT IS SAFER TO REMAIN SILENT ABOUT MY WORKPLACE STRESS

Implications and Conclusions

While Qualtrics respondents were a statistically significantly different population from users who took the Work Health Survey through MHA Screening, the analysis of their responses demonstrated that the factors necessary for creating a mentally healthy workplace are the same in both a help-seeking and non-help-seeking population.

Qualtrics respondents were less likely to report unhealthy conditions in their workplaces and were more satisfied across questions, however, the questions that were correlated, along with the direction and strength of the correlation were consistent across both MHA Screening and Qualtrics data sets. Thus, while the general population surveyed through Qualtrics is overall healthier than those who seek mental health help through MHA Screening, as we hypothesized, those in the population who are unhappy in their workplaces are affected by the same factors that we found in the previous report.

Across both populations:

- Supervisor communication and a company culture of safe and open communication are correlated with an employee's motivation, confidence, and pride.
- Supervisor communication is correlated with safety in reporting ethical violations and areas for improvement in the workplace.
- Feeling comfortable to report dishonest or unfair practices was most correlated with pride (whether you would recommend your workplace to others).
- Among all employee well-being measures, pride was the most correlated with supervisor communication and a company culture of safe and open communication.
- People who are the most stressed also reported they were in companies where it was safer to remain silent about their personal problems.

Across both a help-seeking and non-help-seeking population, an organizational culture of safe and open communication and supervisor support and guidance are important for increasing employee engagement and well-being and creating an overall mentally healthy workplace for all employees. Therefore, it is imperative that supervisors and other company leadership take action to create a culture of communication and support that will benefit not only those employees that may be seeking resources for their mental health, but every employee in the workplace, which will ultimately improve overall operations.

For more information on how to assess your company culture, policies and practices, or for more resources to improve workplace wellness at your organization, visit <https://mhanational.org/workplace-wellness>.