

A Compassionate Work Culture Can Really Benefit The Bottom Line, Too

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We know that being kind to others feels good, [helps us heal](#), and even makes us [appear more attractive](#). Now there's evidence that acting with compassion in the workplace can also have a profound effect on both the internal and external success of a business.

While the idea has previously been labeled "touchy-feely" and quickly discarded, creating an emotionally positive work culture can [boast big benefits for both customers and employees](#), according to [a new study](#) from researchers at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and the George Mason University School of Business. They found a clear, positive correlation between compassionate behavior, work satisfaction and company success. Their results were recently published in the journal [Administrative Science Quarterly](#).

In the study, researchers Sigal Barsade and Olivia O'Neill focused on exploring the idea of a compassionate love culture, which they describe as the following [in their report](#):

To picture a strong culture of companionate love, first imagine a pair of co-workers collaborating side by side, each day expressing caring and affection towards one another, safeguarding each other's feelings, showing tenderness and compassion when things don't go well and supporting each other in work and non-work matters. Then expand this image to an entire network of dyadic and group interactions so that this type of caring, affection, tenderness and compassion occurs frequently within most of the dyads and groups throughout the entire social unit: a clear picture emerges of a culture of companionate love.

Specifically looking at long-term care facilities, they observed 13 units of a particular company in the northeastern United States including 185 employees of various healthcare professions. They also gathered survey data from 108 patients and 42 family members to see how work culture impacted the quality of patient care offered. Everyone filled out questionnaires about their work culture, and then 16 months later when the researchers returned, they evaluated their answers.

They found that the units that operated with more compassion experienced less burnout, fewer unplanned absences from work, better team work and a higher job satisfaction. When it came to their patients, they visited the emergency room less, and experienced higher moods, satisfaction and overall quality of life. They were even more likely to recommend the care to other future patients and their families. (It's important to note that the study revealed a sort of correlation -- but not causation -- between compassionate love work culture and these benefits.)

Since most healthcare professions naturally rely on a component of compassion to some degree, so seeing how the results fared in different fields would be telling of just how interconnected kindness and these benefits are. Recognizing this limitation, Barsade and O'Neill surveyed approximately 3,200 employees from a variety of industries regarding their work culture, which led to similar findings. The more compassion experienced within a work culture, the higher rates of job satisfaction, accountability, performance and commitment.

“For decades, management scholars have encouraged leaders to take ownership of their cognitive culture,” [Barsade and O’Neill said in their report](#). “Similarly, leaders would do well to think about and take ownership of emotional culture.”

This new data aligns well with previous research that shows just how strong of an impact [having good friends at work](#) can have on your happiness levels, for in order to build and maintain such relationships, you must behave with genuine compassion for those around you. Feeling able to express yourself genuinely goes a long way in creating a productive environment and a strong culture -- both inside and outside of the workplace.