

CASE STUDY:

Values-driven small business



Victorian Workplace
Mental Wellbeing
Collaboration

Vokke

Vokke is a small business with a strong social conscience. Founded in 2015, the Melbourne-based software company has a firm focus on creating a workplace culture that supports the health and wellbeing of staff.

“We may be a small business, but we believe we can still play our part in making workplaces in Australia safer, more aware and more supportive. It’s part of our vision.” Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Values are key to Vokke’s approach to creating a positive workplace environment. Its supportive culture is evident in the organisation’s business and community values. Staff were involved in defining the values and identifying how these are expressed in the workplace. Their business values include innovation and respect, while their community values emphasise social justice, equality and accessibility.

These **values are embedded** across business operations and are visible in day-to-day practices. For example, the values are talking points at weekly staff meetings, guide decision-making across the organisation and inform staff recruitment. This ensures that **supporting wellbeing at Vokke is ‘business as usual’**. For example, Vokke’s organisational support for diversity includes supporting those with mental illnesses who need more flexible work arrangements.

“We believe that work is just a portion of people’s lives, and that work should complement other aspects of life. By being more accommodating, we’re hoping everyone can lead a more sustainable and happy lifestyle. As long as the arrangement remains commercially viable for both parties, we’re flexible.” Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Strong communication

“We’re constantly asking staff about how they’re feeling and about ways we can improve their work/life balance. Having a 10–15 minute conversation is easy and has tremendous value. The payoff is huge.” Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Vokke promotes **open and honest conversations** in the workplace, including discussions around mental health and wellbeing. In addition to ongoing informal communication, Vokke have a number of formal processes in place including:

- Weekly staff meetings at a coffee shop
- Weekly group discussions to monitor workloads
- Quarterly one-on-one discussions, which include feedback on the performance and future development of both the employee and employer.

Philosophy of taking action, experimenting and ‘fast feedback’

“Small problems can grow into big problems, so we’ve embraced a philosophy of ‘fast feedback’ to ensure we are always reflecting and inviting feedback. This helps us to proactively manage risk and improve the way we work.” Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Vokke has **a culture of continuous improvement**. Their philosophy of acting, experimenting and reflecting using ‘fast feedback’ helps the company to be nimble, responsive and constantly improve. This is particularly evident in Vokke’s staff debriefs which occur at the conclusion of projects. Staff debriefs elicit feedback from staff and help to identify and document aspects that could be improved in the future.

Flexible work arrangements

Vokke acknowledges that everyone is different, therefore work practices are tailored to meet the different needs of staff. This includes flexible work hours and innovation time.

- **Flexible work hours:** All staff partake in flexible working hours. Some people take Mondays off, others start their day later, and one employee works on Saturday. The organisation is currently trialling a 9-day fortnight based on staff feedback. Technology such as knowledge portals and secure online document storage is used to overcome the tactical challenges associated with flexible work hours.
- **Innovation time:** The entire organisation practices 'innovation time' one day per fortnight. Innovation time is not spent on traditional billable work, but instead staff undertake their own projects or a work-related project to promote self-improvement and cross-functionality (e.g. upskilling sales staff in software, and vice versa). The guidelines for innovation time are kept purposely loose to demonstrate trust and promote staff autonomy: the only criteria is that it is time spent improving yourself, your role or the business.

"We've had rich outcomes in terms of innovation: many of the processes we use internally, and even the software we use internally was developed by team members during innovation time. This has directly resulted in productivity boosts."
Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Leadership commitment to mental health and wellbeing

"Some managers feel that they need to create an image of strength and show no weakness. On the contrary, I am human and have feelings and I admit that I get stressed. Seeing me being honest and vulnerable also helps my team to open up – they know that it's OK to be stressed or to have a bad day, and we can talk about it."
Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

When the company was founded in 2015, the directors made a strong commitment to supporting wellbeing.

This focus stemmed from their own personal experiences with poor mental health and their awareness of how common mental health issues are and the stigma often associated with them.

Vokke **leadership is actively involved in promoting wellbeing**. The directors promote discussion about health and wellbeing and visibly support initiatives in order to create a supportive and productive workplace, tolerant of people's beliefs, circumstances and life experiences.

Benefits

"We rely on qualitative feedback to measure results, and we collect it often as part of our 'fast feedback' approach. At least once a week we all meet and discuss how things are going, how people are feeling and discuss productivity. Productivity is tracked numerically, weekly and as a team. We've seen improvements month-on-month in performance and productivity."
Adrian Grayson-Widarsito, Director

Vokke's focus on wellbeing has delivered many benefits, including:

- ✓ Positive workplace culture
- ✓ High staff morale
- ✓ High retention of staff
- ✓ High levels of productivity
- ✓ High work quality
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Enhanced workforce cross-functionality

<http://vokke.com.au/>

The Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration is a partnership between SuperFriend, VicHealth and WorkSafe Victoria. We are working together to help workplaces create positive and supportive work cultures and environments by focusing on organisational leadership and encouraging workplaces to implement positive mental wellbeing strategies that enhance existing policies and processes.

For more information, please visit:
www.leadingwellvic.com.au

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