The Abbey Theatre Culture Audit

DCU Business School – October 2023
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There is a deeper life than the life we see and hear with the open ear and the open eye and this is the life important and the life everlasting

Seán O'Casey

Executive Summary

Why was this culture audit survey undertaken?

The culture audit was commissioned by The Abbey Theatre as recommended as a condition of funding by the Arts Council. In July 2021, The Abbey Theatre leadership changed as two new co-directors, an Artistic Director and an Executive Director took up their roles. Since that time a largely new Senior Management Team (SMT) have also been appointed by the new Co-Directors. Through this audit, the new Directors want to establish what organisational culture progress has been made two years into their tenure, and to check whether the many procedures and processes that have been put in place are having an impact on legacy issues due to the change in leadership.

The results of the report point to eroded well-being of employees. This is as a result of a confluence of significant environmental factors. First, employees report some historic trauma in the organisation that has given rise to stress – and burnout in some cases – and remains somewhat unresolved. Second, the exogenous shock of Covid-19, which disrupted operations at the Abbey Theatre, also interrupted opportunities to fully resolve and recover from this trauma. Finally, in more recent times, further challenging external factors, such as the cost-of-living crisis, inflation and a lack of clarity around funding, present further stressors, which are having a major impact on the organisation and undoubtedly are impacting on employee well-being. However, the new leadership team is making strong efforts to encourage openness and inclusivity, where previously opportunities for employee voice seemed to be non-existent.

The Directors now want to get a sense of how people feel and what they can do to support this significant change in their day-to-day behaviour in a post-COVID context. They are cognisant that the organisation has gone through a difficult period and want to ensure that staff are aware that they are the organisation's main stakeholders. The new Directors are also aware that internal communications and other management structures may not be functioning in a way that best suited staff's experiences in the organisation. This has informed the Directors' leadership style and approach which they describe as open, available and engaged at all levels of the organisation.

It should be noted that the turnaround of an organisational culture can take many years, particularly following significant internal and external turmoil. It is also important to note that The Abbey Theatre is a unique workplace focused on making live theatre. The culture and dynamics of working there can change all the time. The subject matter of the work being made can affect the whole organisation subconsciously, including its audience. This can be manifested in behaviour, conversation and tone. A culture audit can help the organisation to capture this dynamic and help them to find solutions or create exit strategies from the subject matter. The Abbey Theatre also has the challenge of holding the responsibility of being the National Cultural Organisation, but without sufficient funding to do so effectively it needs to know how staff are dealing with "pinch points" that are emerging as a result. The culture audit creates an opportunity to hear individual voices; while tensions may be apparent, the Senior Management Team need to ensure that this happens in a way that people are empowered to give their perspective and be respected among their colleagues.

To this end, the Co-Directors with their senior management team see this Culture Audit as part of a process to put in place more solid structures and a more positive working environment. The Co-Directors are confident that the process towards this culture audit, the audit itself and what emerges from it will help the organisation to understand these feelings and create an opportunity for staff to express their frustration or give their reassurance about the changes being made.

Who managed the research?

The survey was managed externally by Prof. Yseult Freeney and Prof. Edel Conway, both organisational psychologists based at DCU Business School. They engaged with staff within the organisation to inform them about the content of the survey, but also ensured the anonymity and protection of the data collected. This report includes a detailed analysis of the qualitative parts of the research, aimed at giving employees an opportunity to participate in shaping the future of the Abbey Theatre.

Why is the research important?

Traditionally, organisations have tended to focus on job satisfaction as an indicator of a positive organisational experience based on an assumption that happy workers are productive workers. In more recent times, organisational psychologists have focused on work engagement, a state that comprises both motivation and well-being at work. While these indicators largely represent the relationship between individuals and their jobs, broader aspects of an organisation's culture are also important. These aspects include the ways in which management communicate with and support employees. The culture can also be reflected in the support that employees show towards each other and the extent to which everyone in the organisation interacts in a respectful way. In addition, employees' levels of commitment, their views on change and their evaluations of senior management are important indicators of a positive culture. The Abbey Theatre, therefore, set out to better understand aspects of its organisational culture and, by doing so, has committed to ensuring that employees' voices will be heard.

Who participated in the research?

A total of 70 employees responded to the survey. This represents a response rate of approximately 70% of the core Abbey workforce. The respondents provided a good representation of jobs across the organisation ranging from costume (13%), light and sound (13%), facilities, stage and technical (10%), furniture, props and production (7%), literary and new work (5%), communication, marketing, sales and fundraising (41%), finance and people and culture (6%), senior management (3%) and other (2%). The gender and tenure profiles of participants are reported in Figure 1 below. It is noteworthy that 50% of employees have a tenure of less than 2 years. In addition, 27 people from across The Abbey Theatre took part in six interviews and three focus groups, which is the focus of this employee voice report.

Survey Findings Summary
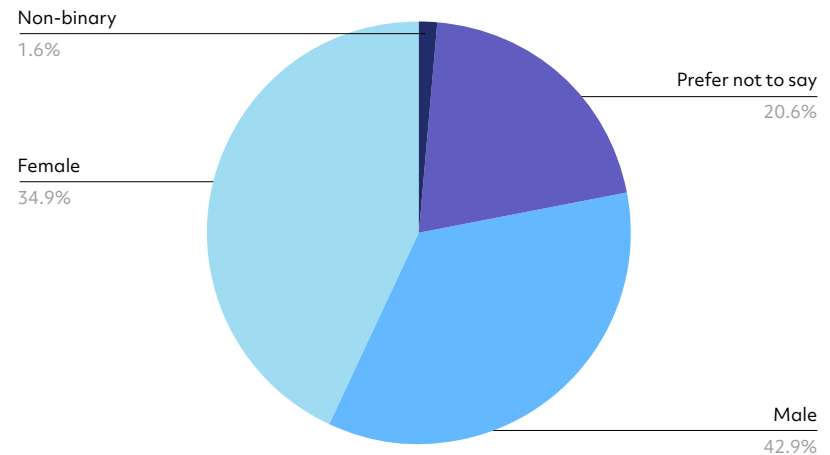
What is contained within this report?

The report includes the key survey findings; Employee insights from the survey, focus groups and interviews; and Key recommendations.

What were the key findings?

Table 1 presents a summary of the positive and challenging results. The 'index' scores reflect a calculation of every respondent's score based on a range of 0-100. These scores reflect the average score across each of the response options in a measure (e.g., where 'strongly disagree' = 0 and 'strongly agree' = 100). In all cases, higher index scores represent a more positive result.

Figure 1. Demographic breakdown

Gender

Non-binary 1.6%
Prefer not to say 20.6%
Female 34.9%
Male 42.9%

Tenure

3 – 9 years 21.8%
2 years or less 50.9%
10+ years 27.3%
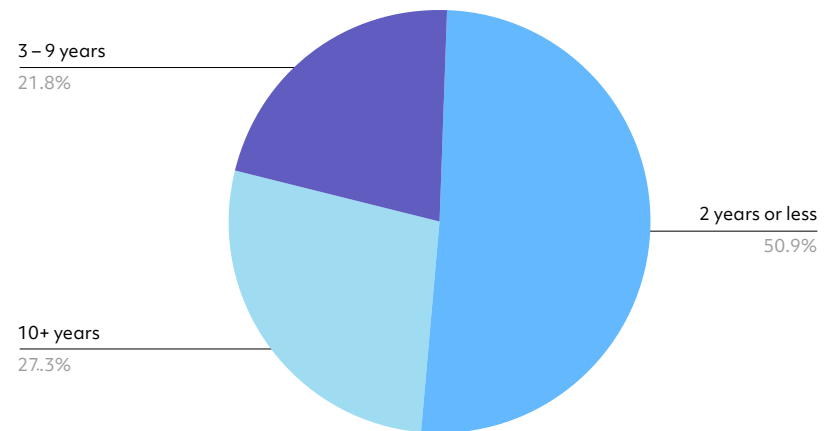
Qualitative Findings Summary

Overall, the survey findings reveal a number of positive findings, but also highlight a number of challenging ones that the organisation will need to address. On the positive side, staff feel competent in undertaking their work roles, they experience high levels of social support and respect, and their well-being is reasonably high. However, many of the findings suggest that The Abbey Theatre could be a healthier organisation, with only medium levels of meaningful work, engagement, job security, psychological safety, and low levels of autonomy, organisational commitment and identification, attitudes to change and welfare, trust in management, perceived job impact and involvement.

From a governance perspective, there is evidence that The Abbey Theatre is overseen by a very competent board and chairperson. There seems to be an acute understanding of the challenges facing the theatre and the need for a strategic approach to managing the organisation into the future. This is particularly important given that the organisation has been through tumultuous change over recent years, with the departure of its prior leadership and the appointment of two new directors. It would seem that The Abbey Theatre is chronically underfunded, which is evidenced in both concerns about the infrastructural environment and in its resourcing. Strategy and future planning require investment in resources and the current funding structure which follows an annual cycle is regarded as very restrictive.

Table 1. Positive and Challenging Results

Positive Results		Challenging Results	
78	Competence	56	Autonomy
75	Respect	53	Organisational Identification
73	Social Support	53	Organisational Commitment
70	Work Self-Efficacy	49	Attitudes To Change
68	Meaningful Work	49	Welfare Climate
64	Engagement	47	Trust In Senior Management
63	Job Security	32	Job Impact
61	Psychological Safety	30	Involvement Climate

Qualitative Findings Summary

Employee Voice: Interview and Focus Group Findings (Summary)

Participants described the working environment, initially, in many positive ways. The key positive feature of The Abbey Theatre working environment is undoubtedly the people. The qualitative findings illustrated a sense of community, camaraderie, and collegiality. It is evident people feel very passionate towards The Abbey Theatre and the arts in general, in addition to feeling pride in their role, their vocation and the skills they bring to The Abbey Theatre. Many spoke about a good, rewarding, inclusive, and satisfying atmosphere and work environment. The variety of projects also make The Abbey Theatre a stimulating, challenging and interesting place to work.

The Abbey Theatre work environment has some challenges. There is a sense of busyness, relentlessness, stress and cycles of high pressure points. This can lead to overworking and in some instances, burnout. The stressful workload is compounded by financial matters, notably pay and remuneration and employee turnover. The old building and facilities can also lead to feelings of disconnect amongst colleagues, health and safety concerns and frustration about having fit-for-purpose facilities for all the operations of a modern theatre.

The issue of funding emerged as a major impediment to the basic functioning of the organisation. This led to a lack of ability to plan ahead and to decide on future programmes. The current funding structure which follows an annual cycle is regarded as very restrictive as the organisation finds it difficult to plan or enter contractual arrangements beyond that timeframe. As one participant described it, the organisation is 'a prisoner inside the funding system' (P#23). One of the major issues that was raised both among survey participants and in the interview/focus groups was about pay and contractual arrangements. Participants referred to the hardship that they experienced as a result of low pay, which was exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. They often made direct associations between low levels of pay and turnover.

While there is some sense of psychological safety in the organisation, there is also a general apprehension about speaking up or out, despite the availability of many fora for employee voice. The higher up you go in the organisation, views start to shift. Here, there is a sense that positive changes have been made to improve communication and that there is a strong sense of inclusiveness, listening and greater opportunities for people to speak their minds (to the artistic directors, executive team) without any fear. It is perhaps a case of this needing more time to trickle down through the organisation. SMT visibility and investing time in listening to people 'on the ground' will help to cascade psychological safety through to every level of the Theatre.

Qualitative Findings Summary

Involvement and communication were dominant themes. This was a broad and far-reaching theme and reflects an organisation that is perceived as being split in an "upstairs – downstairs" way. Stories from the ground up differ significantly to perceptions from the top down, in terms of identifying root causes to involvement problems. There is a sense of "being in the dark", with things happening without relevant staff being informed. There is "no real kind of touch point to always know what's happening within departments" (P#11). This in some respects has created a sense that information is being retained and that people cannot be trusted with information. A strong positive arising from the interviews and focus groups was the sense that The Abbey Theatre employs a team of people who enjoy close, collaborative relationships. People were keen to stress that their work environment was mainly a positive one. However, there was a sense of 'disconnect' between senior management and the rest of the organisation. Yet, there was evidence of a shift in this regard, with greater efforts being made to change this situation and a strong desire among staff for this to happen.

While people have a huge passion for their work, there are signs that well-being is being slowly eroded due to stretched resources and piling demands. "Relentless" is the word frequently used to capture this (e.g. #P2). As independent researchers, participants were very open with us about how they were feeling and several reached out to us privately to discuss these well-being concerns. These conversations revealed some serious issues about the chaotic and stressful work environment that seems to prevail at The Abbey Theatre. Indeed, this was perhaps the most prominent theme to arise from the survey and one which must be addressed by the organisation as a matter of top priority.

Participants' views on training, development and career progression were not particularly positive. Views suggest that the performance review process is not functioning as it should and there is an air of cynicism about requests for training. In addition, the paths for career progression are not clearly set out. Some major concerns were raised about the level of turnover or employee "churn" in the organisation and the loss of key knowledge and expertise. The reasons for turnover were reported to be contract related, pay and working conditions.

Figure 2. Qualitative Themes Map
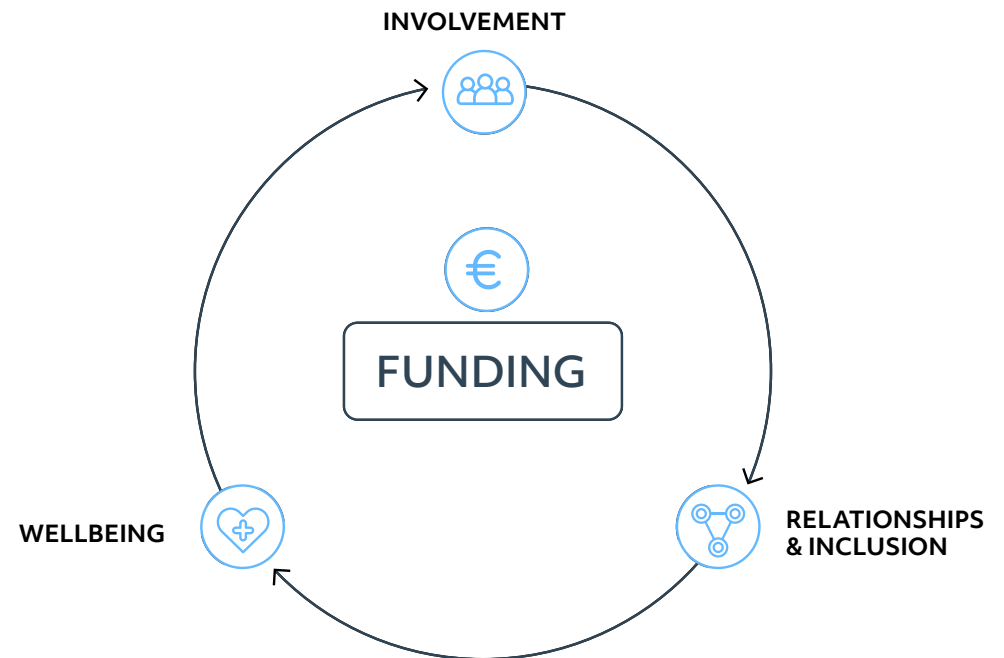
Recommendations

While we set out to do a culture "audit", we found the culture to be largely positive. The most challenging findings are centred around well-being, or more precisely, ill-being; "churn" or employee turnover; communication silos, which are common to most workplaces; people development and support; and funding. We set out recommendations across each of these areas, differentiating between urgent versus longer term initiatives that will take an investment of time and planning.

A clear suggestion for improvement that was voiced by participants was a need for more effective project management. We highlight this here as an important aspect of rolling out any recommendations arising from this report. Planning and measuring progress across the four areas will evidence a commitment to continued improvement of the working environment.

Table 2. Recommendations Map

	Urgent	**Short-term**	**Longer-term**
€ **Funding**	Triennial Commitment	Pay & Conditions	New Abbey Building
Involvement	Organisational Chart	Post-show Debriefs	Senior Management Visibility
Wellbeing	Acknowledge Stress	Recovery Opportunities	Employee Value Proposition
People & Culture	Job Charts	Learning & Development Strategy	Staff Hub

Funding

#1 The current funding model places The Abbey Theatre in a precarious, stressful and untenable position. It disables planning and creates a "last minute", "firefighting" cultural environment that breeds stress, misinformation and resentment. The Abbey Theatre needs to be able to plan for the longer term. To this end, we identify the need to move from an annual allocation of funding to a triennial model.

#2 We cannot evade the issue of pay and conditions, particularly against the backdrop of a recognised cost of living crisis. Not only do pay levels have to be examined within the funding model, transparency of conditions within contracts needs to be addressed. Participants surfaced many different contract conditions that should be made consistent across employees, particularly those working in similar units. Consistency is a foundational requirement for fairness and trust within organisations and a failure to manage and treat employees consistently inhibits engagement.

#3 We stress that a new building is essential for The Abbey Theatre to thrive in the future. The current building is not fit for purpose. Though we categorise this under funding, we recognise that a new building will significantly augment relationships and knowledge circulation, will provide a better and safer working environment, will enhance information sharing and, through spaces for employees to work more effectively and connect to each other, will have a positive impact on their well-being.

Involvement

#1 Create an organisational chart that is disseminated to all employees. There are vacuums of responsibility and knowledge and these are amplified as a result of employee churn. Understanding who employees should go to, who is responsible for what, clear job descriptions and how different departments connect to each other is a critical starting point to build and strengthen a culture of involvement for the future. This should also be shared with all new entrants through onboarding.

#2 Conduct show debriefs or "creative post-mortems" after every production. This is a good practice to support learning, celebrate success and achievement and improve communications. These are already typical practice in some departments but could be extended to happen within units regularly and across departments more periodically. Huddle boards would be welcomed as an approach to facilitate debriefs. Successes should be celebrated; there should be space to reflect on achievement.

#3 It must be acknowledged that there have been genuine efforts on the part of the SMT to engage with employees. More could be done to create a community where senior managers are more visible to employees, by taking time to "walk and talk" on the "floor". There has been a notable enhancement in inclusivity under the new directorship, yet some employees feel they do not have access to a senior manager. Creating a theatre-wide WhatsApp staff chat was also suggested as a simple tool for enhancing communication. Whatever the approach, a blueprint for communications, both top down and bottom up should be developed and modelled by all members of The Abbey Theatre.

Well-Being

#1   There is a sense that stress, burnout and contributing factors can be dismissed in the organisation. The word 'trauma' was a word that was used by a number of different participants in relation to historic events in The Abbey Theatre. In relation to this, employees feel hushed, which only worsens their ill-being. Working too hard, feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, disappointed, angry and frustrated were words used to describe how employees are feeling. There is a view that the workplace is simply unhealthy. As a starting point, stress must be acknowledged, and people need to be able to speak about it. They cannot be blamed for feeling overwhelmed and burnt out. A culture of welfare starts with openness about the challenges. There is recognition that it can be hard for everyone at every level but there is a sense that extreme stress is treated like a secret.

#2   In relation to the above, to prevent stress and burnout, employees need to be able to have some downtime from work. Choosing to work above and beyond is one thing but feeling obliged to removes the most effective shield against stress: a sense of control. Recovery needs to be available for all employees, being able to get a day off every week, to be not consistently working overtime and ensuring that TOIL is consistently applied across the organisation. People need to be able to switch off so ensuring work time directives are adhered to and that people do not have be on call 24/7 is of critical importance to fostering a healthy culture.

#3   There were a number of specific well-being initiatives that could be collectively captured by an employee value proposition. Where pay is perceived as low, organisations need to think creatively about what else they have to offer. Working in The Abbey Theatre is seen as a vocation by many but that vocational aspect can be perceived as being exploited. To value employees and recognise the need to support their well-being, suggestions included birthday cards, small Christmas gifts (e.g., hot chocolate in Pegeen's), an extra annual leave day and well-being days. Participants also discussed the possibility of negotiating a health insurance package for staff with VHI and for paying for all employees to be members of the staff council. Not all ideas need to be actioned, but it is pause for thought in terms of the wider employee offering, particularly when opportunities exist elsewhere.

People & Culture

#1   SMT should introduce job chats with their reporting line as an interim step before 'People and Culture' have time to develop a full learning and development strategy. These can help to build stronger connections between employees and their manager, build trust and present important opportunities for feedback and learning.

#2   A strategy and plan for supporting learning and development is called for to support employee capability. There have been successful initiatives focussed on dignity and respect in the workplace that have been welcomed. However, there is a need to support the skill development and careers of employees in The Abbey Theatre, through goal setting, competence building and opportunities to learn from more senior people in the organisation. Shadowing across departments would enhance learning and development but would also break down some of the silos that inhibit effective communication.

#3   The final recommendation to enhance the community for employees is to create a staff hub. While some staff make use of the green room, there is a lack of awareness amongst the majority as to where they can connect and socialise more informally. This is further exacerbated where employees are spread across more than one location. We recognise that a new building is required to follow through on this recommendation, but a staff hub must be core to design plans for any future building that is intended to house the national theatre but also the people who make up the theatre.

Survey Findings

Engagement

Engagement captures the sense of energy, connection and fulfilment that Abbey employees have regarding their work.

Commentary

The Employee Engagement result for The Abbey Theatre is 64%. This suggests that there is scope to foster greater engagement at work for staff at The Abbey Theatre.

I am enthusiastic about my job
- 22%
- 14%
- 64%

At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well
- 6%
- 3%
- 91%

At my work, I feel full of energy
- 24%
- 22%
- 54%

My job inspires me
- 29%
- 25%
- 46%

When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work
- 32%
- 19%
- 49%

I am proud of the work I do
- 13%
- 12%
- 75%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
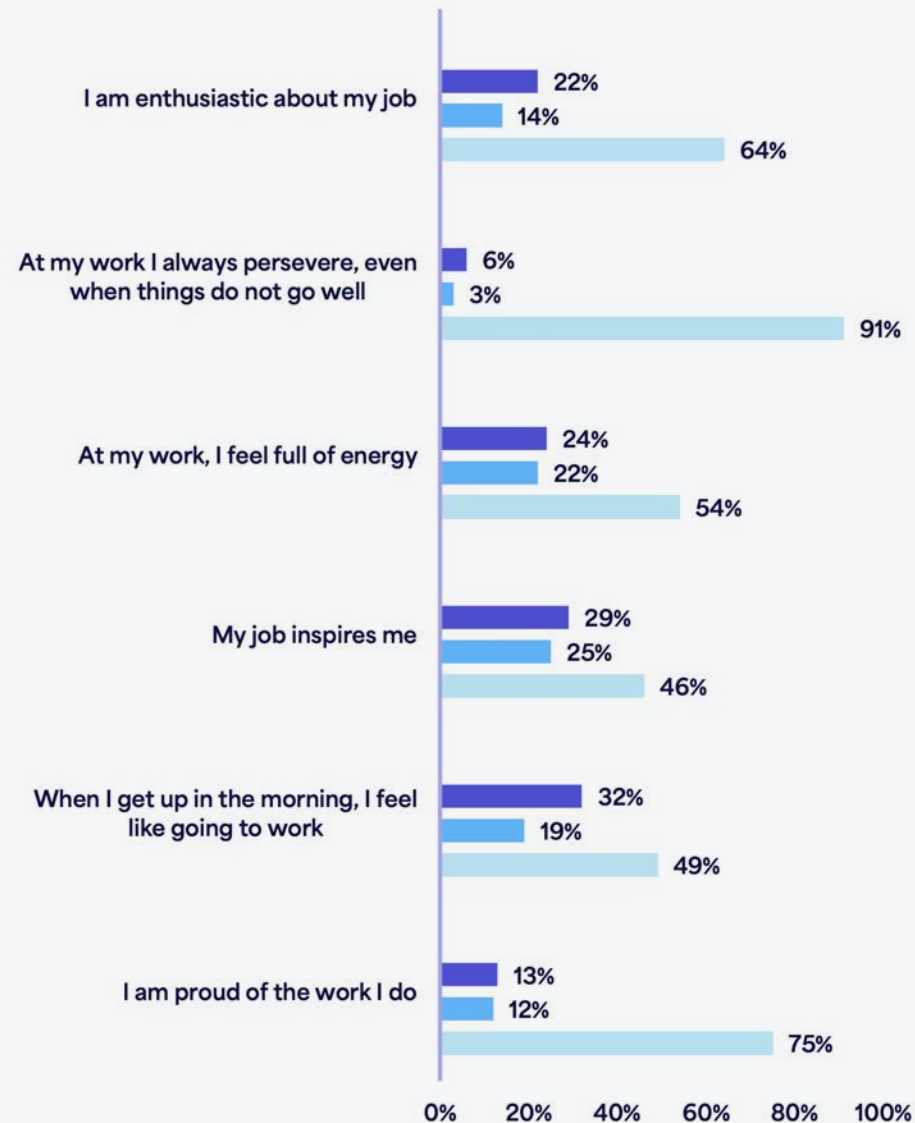
Often/Always   Sometimes   Never/Rarely

Work-Related Self-Efficacy

This measures the extent to which Abbey employees feel they are able to undertake their work activities effectively. It is one indicator of work-related well-being.

Commentary

At 70%, this suggests that The Abbey Theatre workforce is quite well equipped to deal with problems they may face in the workplace. It will be important to maintain this as well-being issues are addressed.

I enjoy my usual work activities
- 65%
- 22%
- 13%

I have confidence in myself
- 77%
- 9%
- 14%

I can cope with work problems
- 78%
- 10%
- 12%

I can concentrate on what I have to do
- 77%
- 12%
- 12%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Often/Always   ■ Sometimes   ■ Never/Rarely

Organisational Identification

Organisational identification refers to the degree to which employees define themselves as a member of the organisation and the extent to which they experience a sense of oneness with its values and brand.

Commentary

The overall score for organisational identification suggests that Abbey employees do not strongly connect with or identify with the organisation.

I am very interested in what others think of the Abbey
- Agree: 61%
- Neutral: 20%
- Disagree: 19%

If media criticised the Abbey, I would be embarrassed
- Agree: 42%
- Neutral: 17%
- Disagree: 41%

When someone praises the Abbey, it feels like a personal compliment
- Agree: 37%
- Neutral: 26%
- Disagree: 37%

The Abbey's successes are my successes
- Agree: 45%
- Neutral: 23%
- Disagree: 32%

When I talk about the Abbey, I say we not they
- Agree: 59%
- Neutral: 9%
- Disagree: 32%

When someone criticises the Abbey, it feels like an insult
- Agree: 30%
- Neutral: 32%
- Disagree: 38%

Legend: Agree | Neutral | Disagree

Organisational Commitment

This measures the level of attachment that employees have to The Abbey Theatre.

Commentary

The Commitment result at 53% would indicate that many employees feel a somewhat weak connection to the organisation. This may reflect a fairly typical attitude towards work in the current economic climate, where employees may move around organisations and where freelance opportunities are available for employees working in the Arts.

The Abbey Theatre is the best of all possible organisations for me to work for.
- 24%
- 26%
- 50%

I really care about the fate of the Abbey Theatre.
- 85%
- 9%
- 6%

I am extremely glad that I chose the Abbey Theatre to work for over other organisations I was considering at the time.
- 41%
- 28%
- 31%

The Abbey Theatre really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.
- 40%
- 20%
- 40%

I am proud to tell others that I am part of the Abbey Theatre.
- 64%
- 17%
- 19%

I find that my values and the Abbey Theatre's values are very similar.
- 37%
- 30%
- 33%

I would accept almost any types of job assignment in order to keep working for the Abbey Theatre.
- 9%
- 18%
- 73%

I talk up the Abbey Theatre to my friends as a great organisation to work for
- 38%
- 19%
- 43%

I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected in order to help the Abbey Theatre be successful.
- 61%
- 19%
- 20%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Involvement

This measures the extent to which employees feel that they are involved openly in decision making in The Abbey Theatre and that they have a sense of where the organisation is going.

Commentary

This is the least positive result for the organisation. Smaller organisations tend to have more opportunities for involvement but there is still room for improvement in The Abbey Theatre.

There are breakdowns in communication
- 68%
- 12%
- 19%

Information is widely shared
- 25%
- 24%
- 51%

Decisions are made over heads
- 69%
- 19%
- 12%

People don't have say in decisions that affect them
- 57%
- 19%
- 24%

Changes are made without the people involved
- 58%
- 22%
- 19%

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%
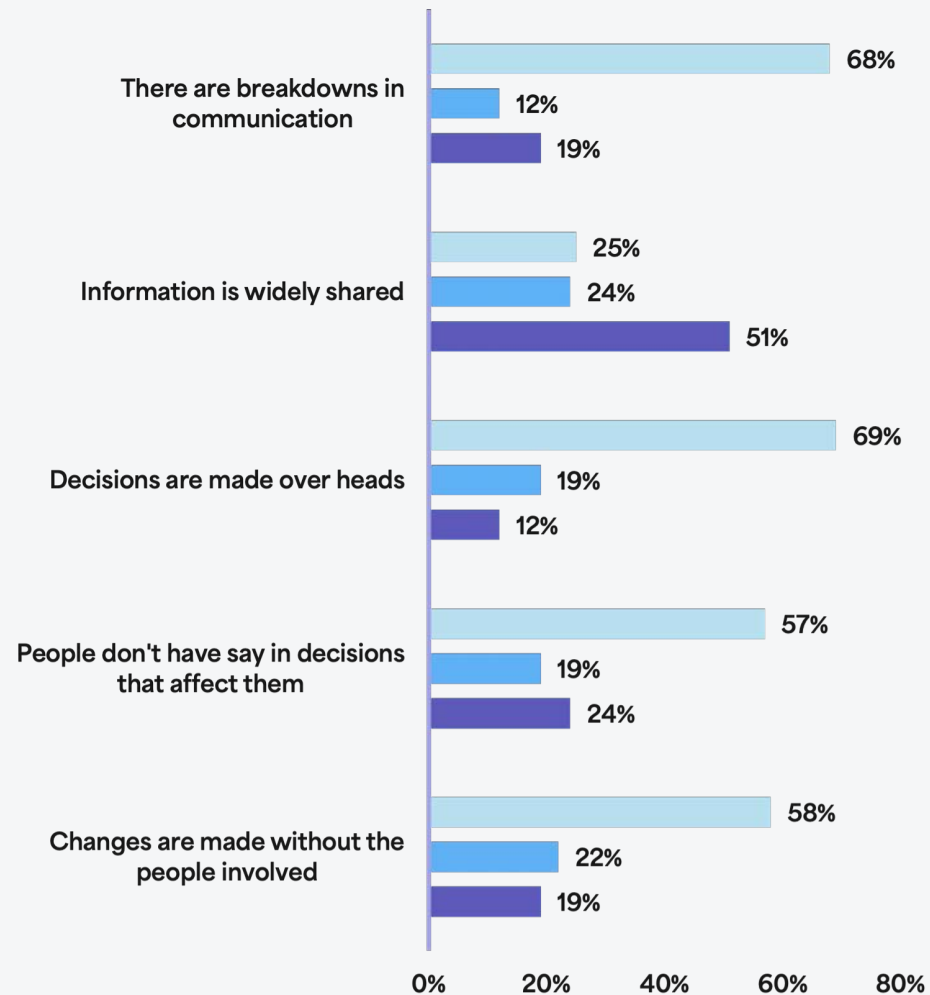
■ Agree   ■ Neutral   ■ Disagree

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety relates to an employee's belief that they will not face punishment or humiliation for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes in the workplace.

Commentary

This result indicates that there is a reasonable degree of psychological safety in the organisation. It signals an environment of inclusion, openness and helpfulness among employees.

My unique skills and values are utilised
- 54%
- 27%
- 19%

No one would deliberately undermine my efforts
- 49%
- 13%
- 38%

It is difficult to ask colleagues for help
- 7%
- 18%
- 75%

It is safe to take a risk in the AT
- 29%
- 40%
- 31%

People reject others for being different
- 12%
- 7%
- 81%

Members of the Abbey can bring up tough problems and issues
- 43%
- 28%
- 29%

Mistakes are often held against you
- 18%
- 23%
- 59%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
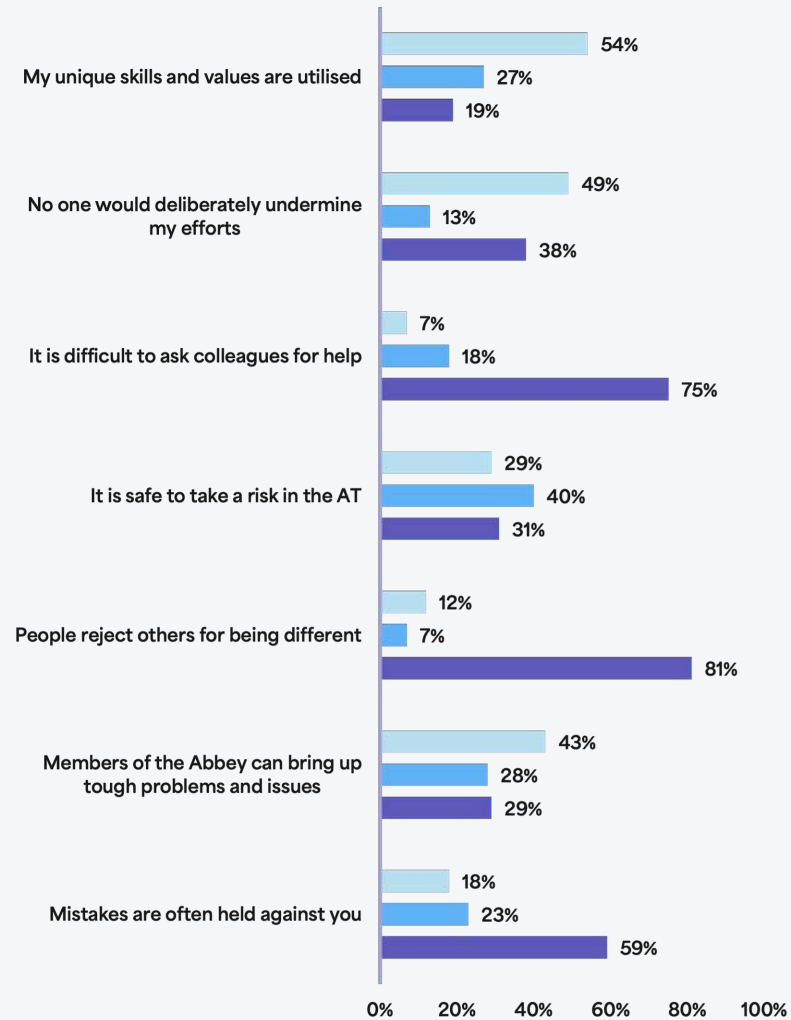
Agree **Neutral** **Disagree**

Welfare Climate

This measures the degree to which Abbey employees feel their organisation values their contribution and cares for their well-being.

Commentary

This result suggests that perceived organisational support could be stronger. In particular, it suggests that support for employees' opinions is quite low.

The AT provides support in times of need
- 52%
- 26%
- 22%

The AT considers my values
- 29%
- 24%
- 47%

The AT cares about my well-being
- 49%
- 16%
- 35%

The AT cares about my opinions
- 33%
- 23%
- 44%
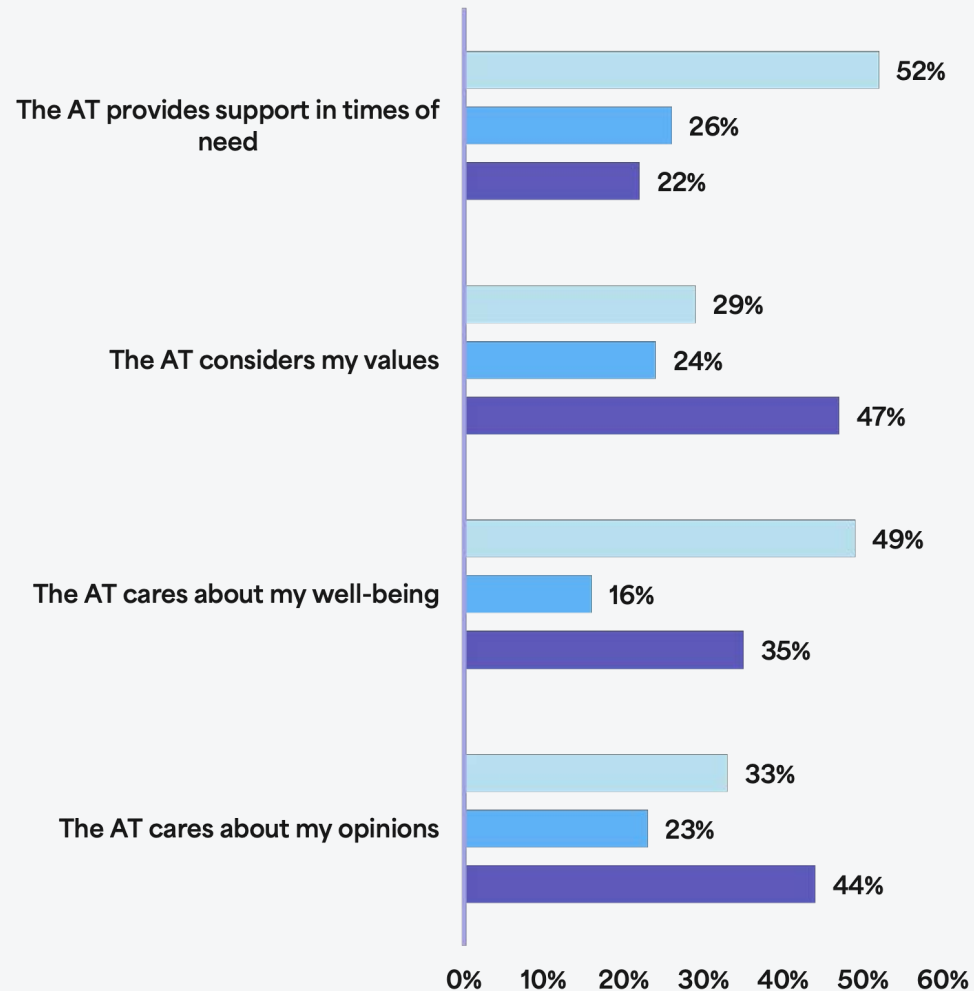
Legend: Agree · Neutral · Disagree

Trust in Senior Management

This measures the degree to which employees trust senior management, believe that they act fairly, and have confidence in their abilities.

Commentary

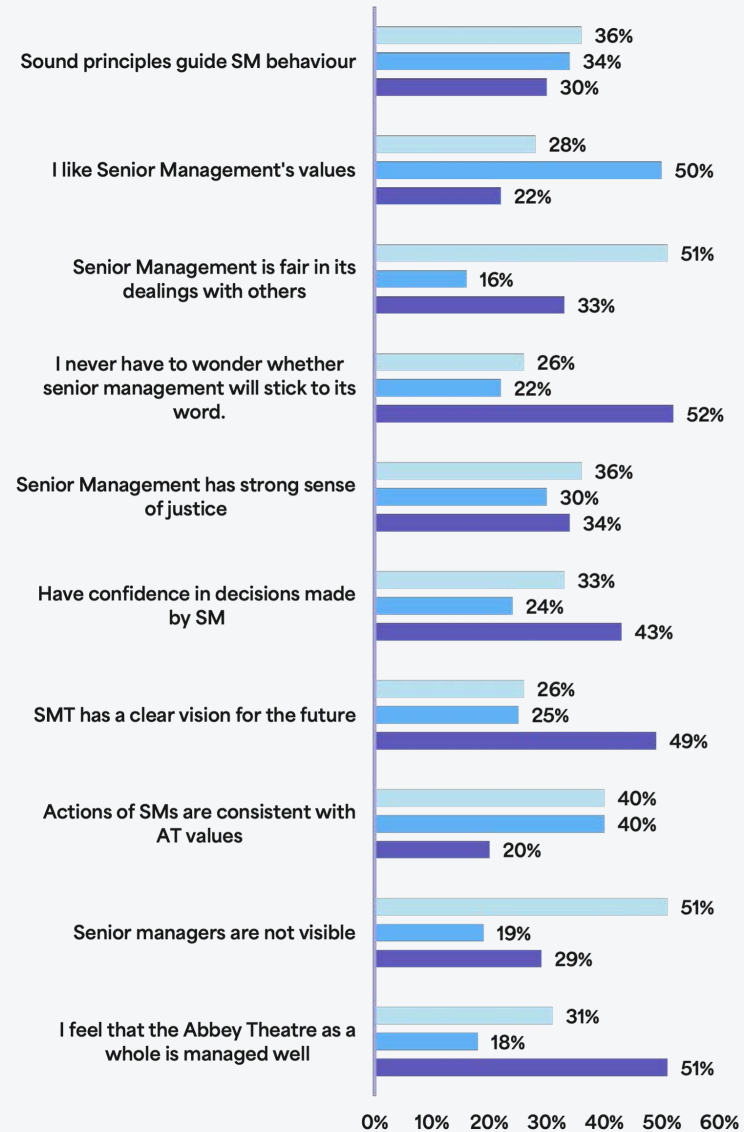Trust may have been impacted by recent events in The Abbey Theatre. This will take time to rebuild.

Sound principles guide SM behaviour
- Agree: 36%
- Neutral: 34%
- Disagree: 30%

I like Senior Management's values
- Agree: 28%
- Neutral: 50%
- Disagree: 22%

Senior Management is fair in its dealings with others
- Agree: 51%
- Neutral: 16%
- Disagree: 33%

I never have to wonder whether senior management will stick to its word.
- Agree: 26%
- Neutral: 22%
- Disagree: 52%

Senior Management has strong sense of justice
- Agree: 36%
- Neutral: 30%
- Disagree: 34%

Have confidence in decisions made by SM
- Agree: 33%
- Neutral: 24%
- Disagree: 43%

SMT has a clear vision for the future
- Agree: 26%
- Neutral: 25%
- Disagree: 49%

Actions of SMs are consistent with AT values
- Agree: 40%
- Neutral: 40%
- Disagree: 20%

Senior managers are not visible
- Agree: 51%
- Neutral: 19%
- Disagree: 29%

I feel that the Abbey Theatre as a whole is managed well
- Agree: 31%
- Neutral: 18%
- Disagree: 51%

Legend: Agree | Neutral | Disagree
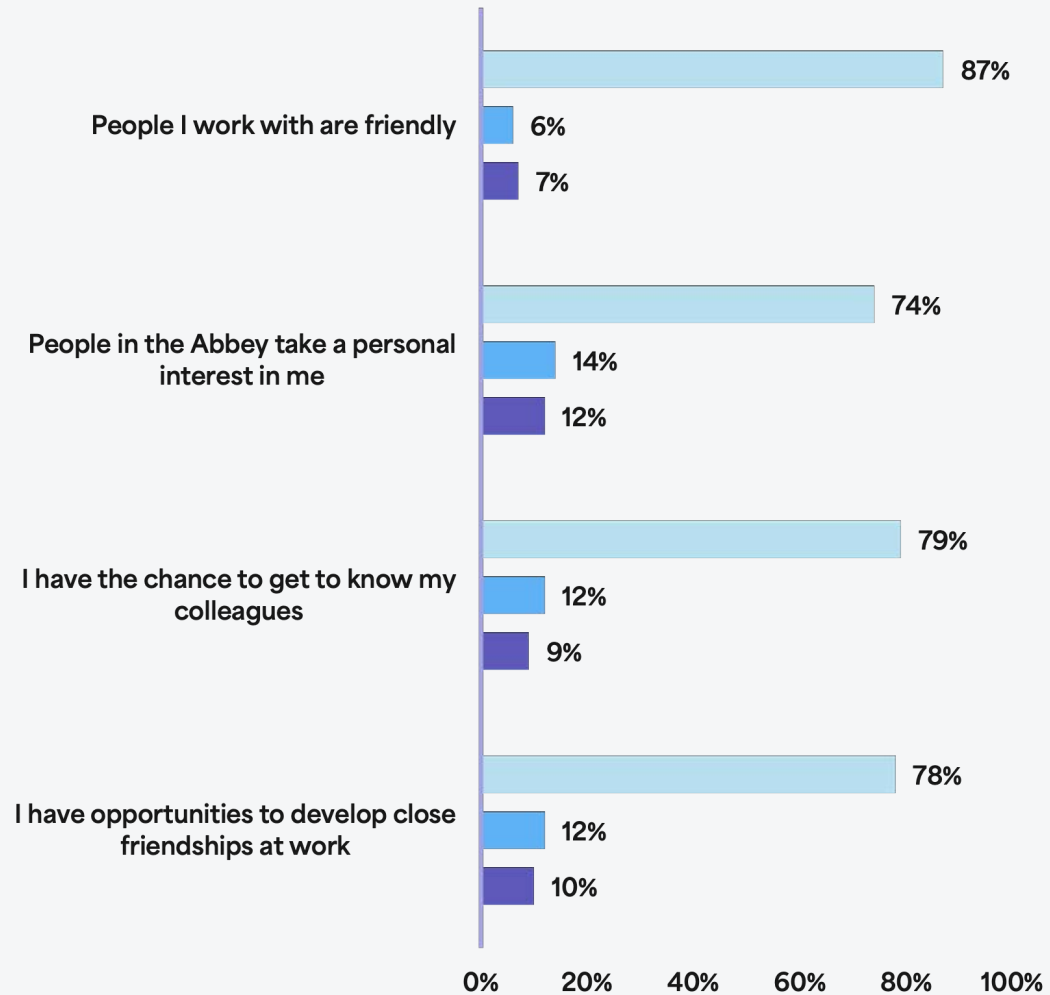
(x-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%)

Social Support

This measures the extent to which Abbey employees feel they have the opportunities to develop close relationships at work.

Commentary

At 73%, this was the third highest scoring dimension in the survey. This shows that the employees feel they have the opportunities to develop close relationships at work. This is very compelling and characterises The Abbey Theatre as an extremely friendly place in which to work.

People I work with are friendly
- 87%
- 6%
- 7%

People in the Abbey take a personal interest in me
- 74%
- 14%
- 12%

I have the chance to get to know my colleagues
- 79%
- 12%
- 9%

I have opportunities to develop close friendships at work
- 78%
- 12%
- 10%

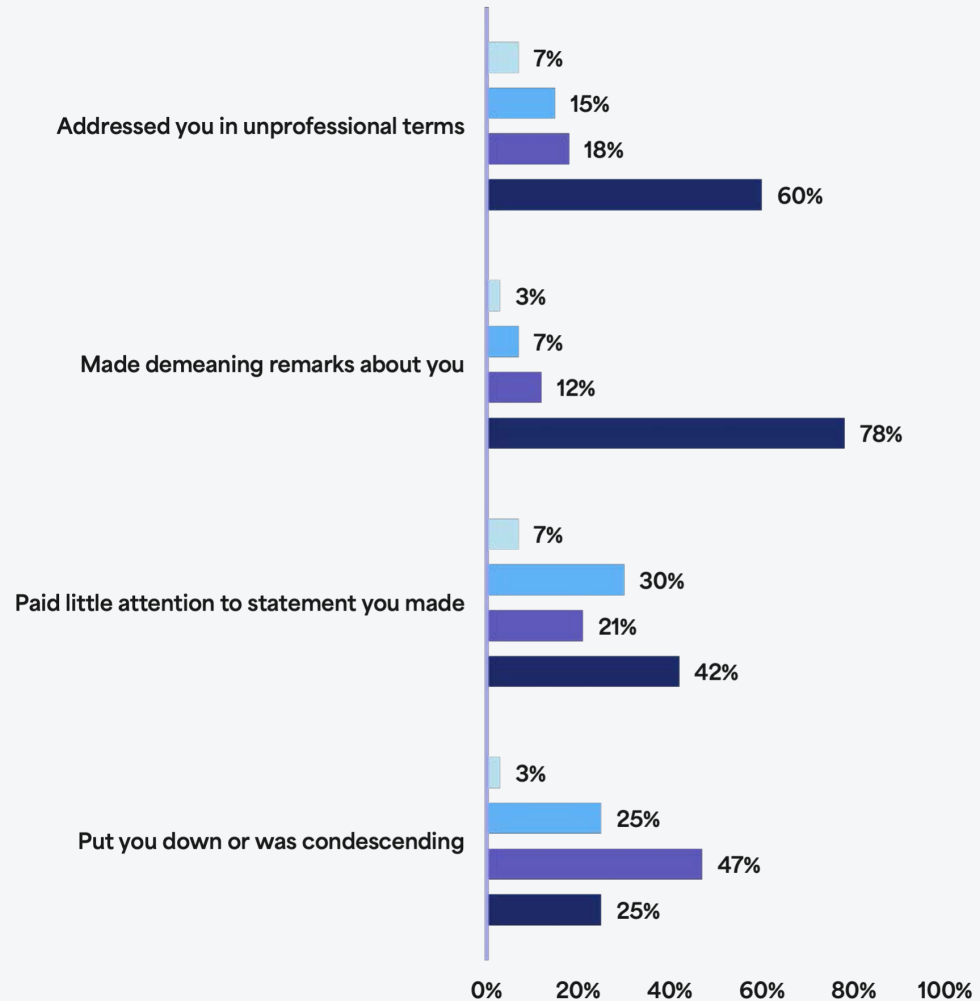0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Dignity & Respect

This measure captures the extent to which The Abbey Theatre is a workplace characterised by integrity, fairness, collaboration, professionalism and trust.

Commentary

At 75%, this was the second highest scoring dimension in the survey. This reflects the efforts that have been made to promote Dignity and Respect in recent times.

Addressed you in unprofessional terms
- 7%
- 15%
- 18%
- 60%

Made demeaning remarks about you
- 3%
- 7%
- 12%
- 78%

Paid little attention to statement you made
- 7%
- 30%
- 21%
- 42%

Put you down or was condescending
- 3%
- 25%
- 47%
- 25%

0%　20%　40%　60%　80%　100%

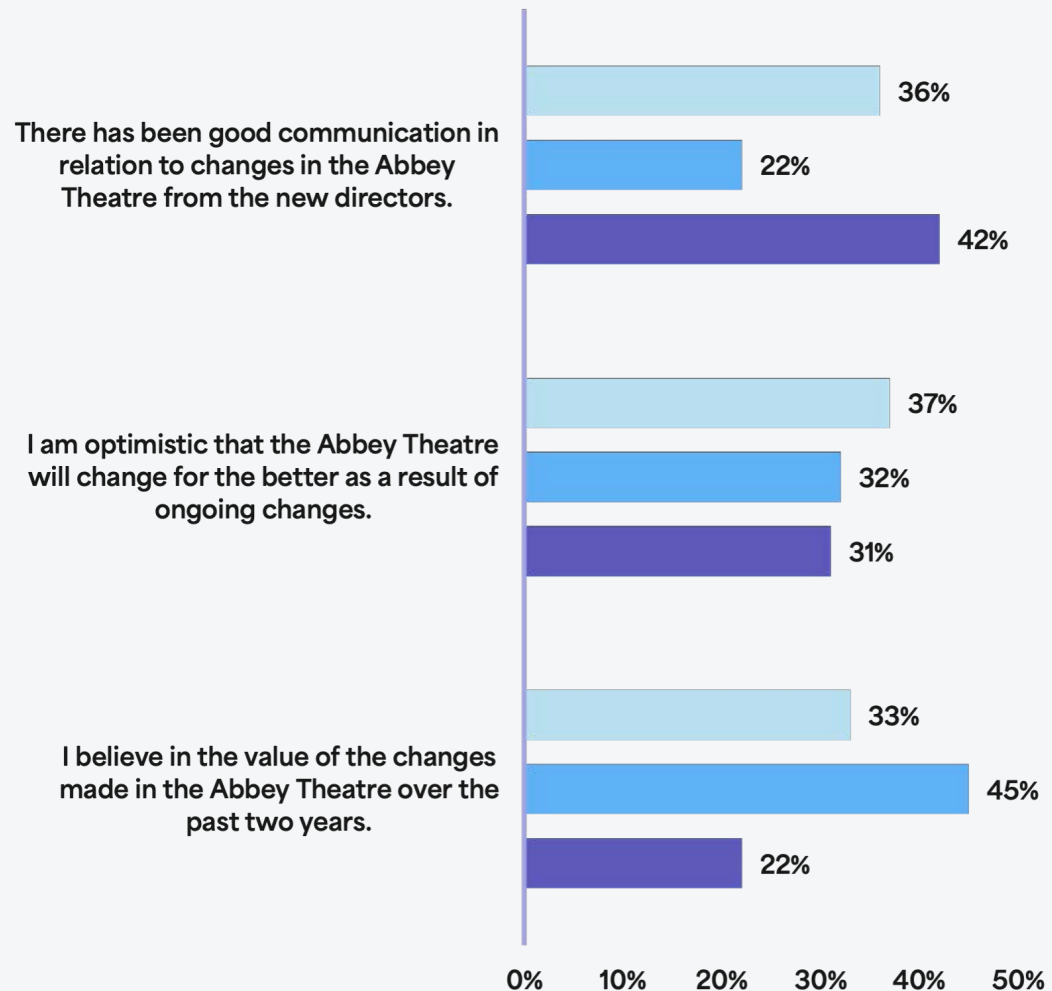■ Frequently　■ Sometimes　■ Rarely　■ Hardly Ever

Attitudes to Change

This measure relates to employees' views about the value of changes taking place and how well they have been communicated to them.

Commentary

At 49%, the score is one of the least favourable in the survey. Communicating about change and involving employees in the change will help to improve this.
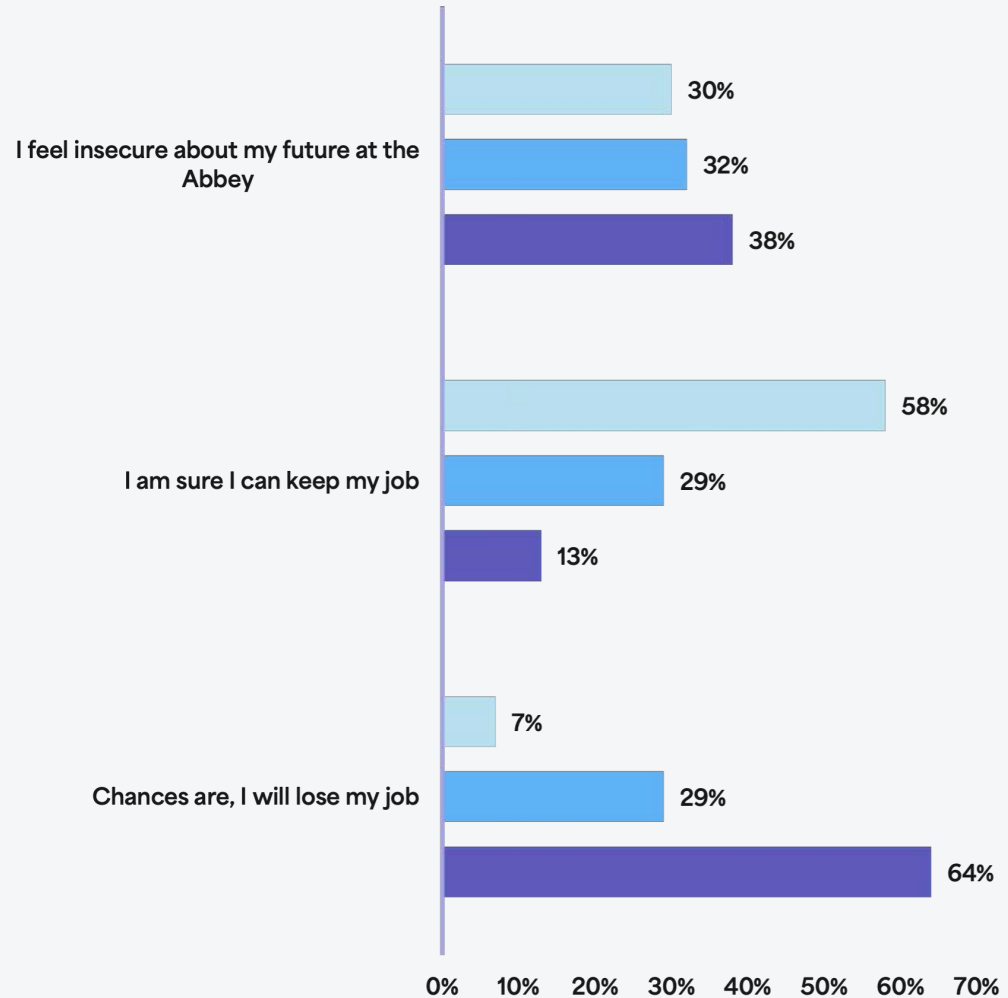
There has been good communication in relation to changes in the Abbey Theatre from the new directors.
- 36%
- 22%
- 42%

I am optimistic that the Abbey Theatre will change for the better as a result of ongoing changes.
- 37%
- 32%
- 31%

I believe in the value of the changes made in the Abbey Theatre over the past two years.
- 33%
- 45%
- 22%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Job Security

This measure captures the extent to which Abbey employees feel secure in their jobs.

Commentary

These findings are somewhat mixed, though this is perhaps reflected in different job types across the organisation. This suggests that a number of employees may plan to move on, rather than lose their jobs.
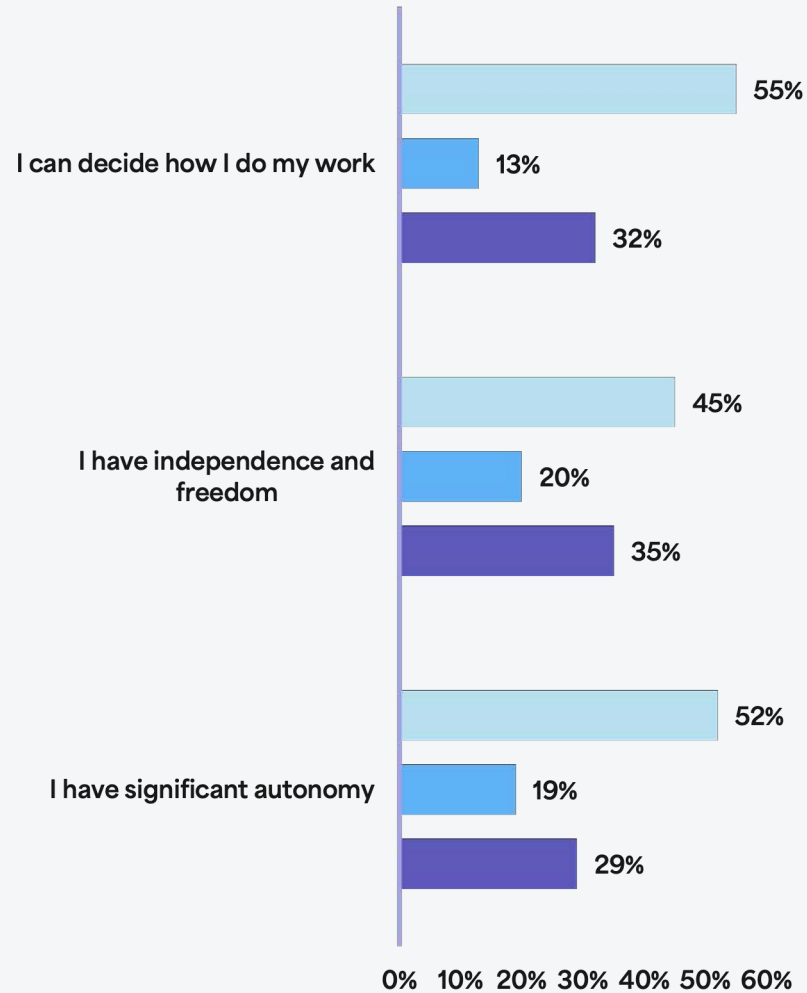
I feel insecure about my future at the Abbey
- 30%
- 32%
- 38%

I am sure I can keep my job
- 58%
- 29%
- 13%

Chances are, I will lose my job
- 7%
- 29%
- 64%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70%

Agree   Neutral   Disagree

Autonomy

This concerns the extent to which employees at The Abbey Theatre feel they have the freedom to influence how they approach their day-to-day work.

Commentary

This score for autonomy reflects suggests that Abbey staff have some autonomy in their work and some degree of decision latitude. The majority of employees report that they have the freedom to influence how they approach their work.
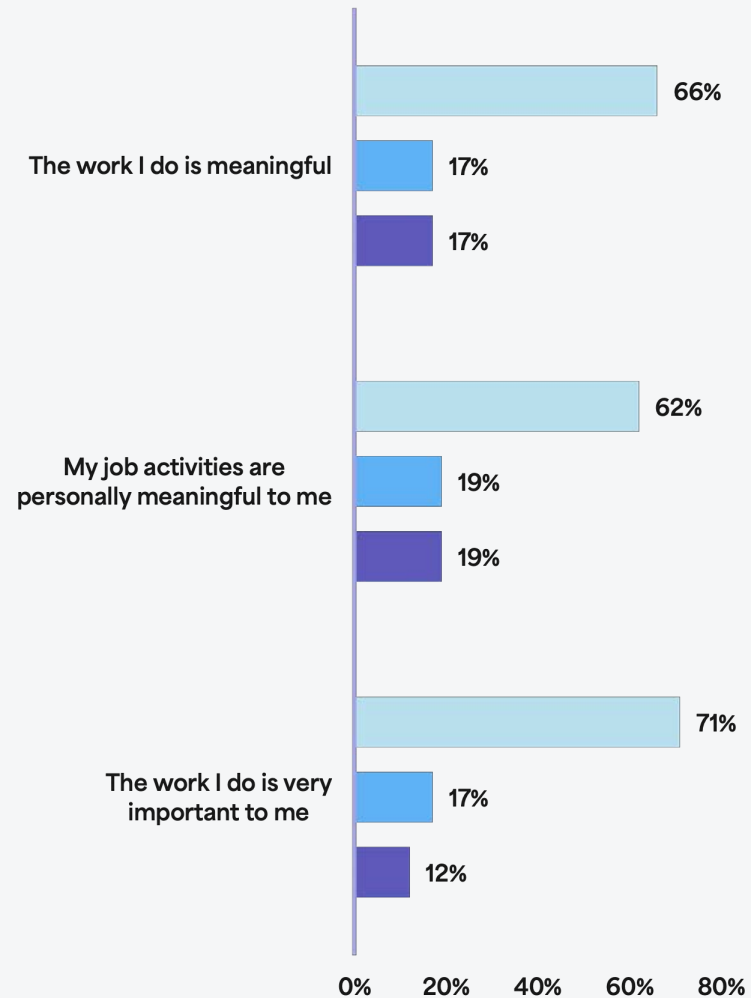

I can decide how I do my work
- Agree: 55%
- Neutral: 13%
- Disagree: 32%

I have independence and freedom
- Agree: 45%
- Neutral: 20%
- Disagree: 35%

I have significant autonomy
- Agree: 52%
- Neutral: 19%
- Disagree: 29%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60%

Agree   Neutral   Disagree

Meaningful Work

This measures the extent to which Abbey employees feel that their work has value, meaning and purpose.

Commentary

This is a high score for meaningfulness. The findings show that employees feel that the work they are doing is important to them.
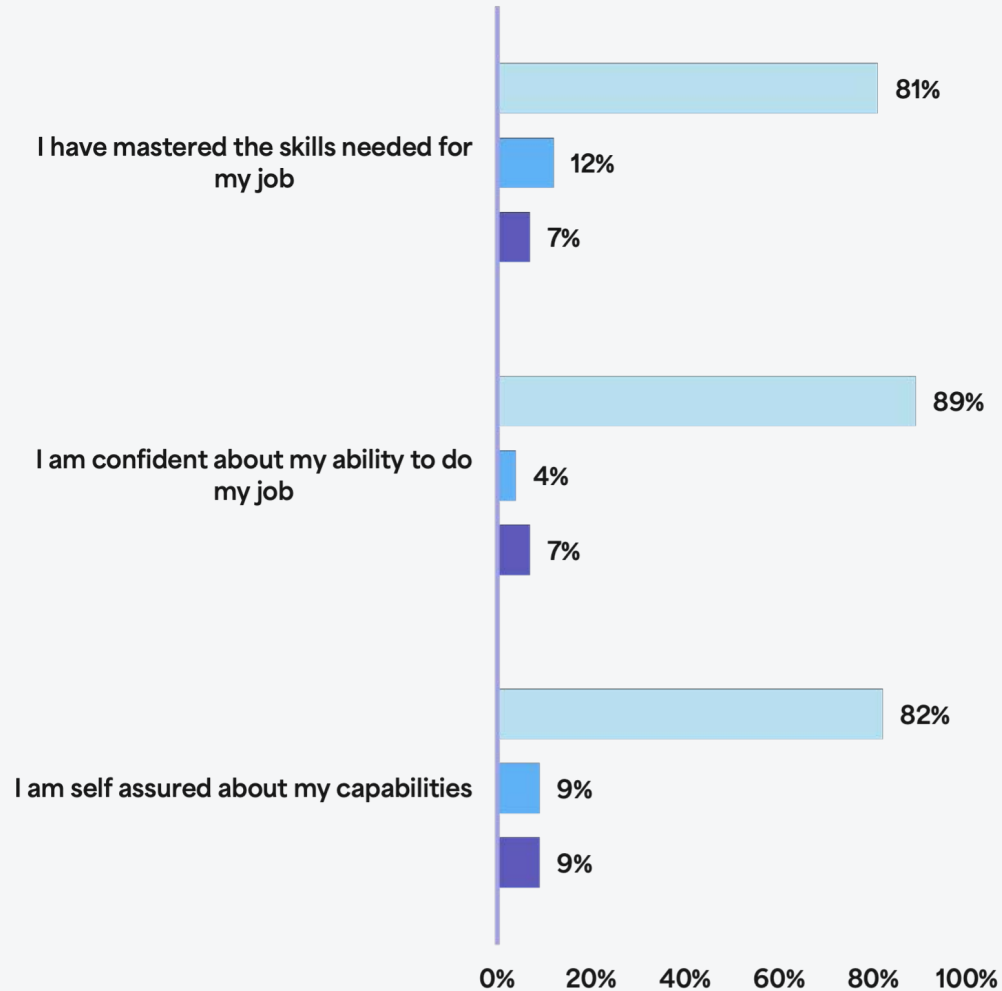
The work I do is meaningful
- Agree: 66%
- Neutral: 17%
- Disagree: 17%

My job activities are personally meaningful to me
- Agree: 62%
- Neutral: 19%
- Disagree: 19%

The work I do is very important to me
- Agree: 71%
- Neutral: 17%
- Disagree: 12%

Legend: Agree | Neutral | Disagree

Competence

This measures Abbey employees' beliefs in their ability and the skills required to carry out their work roles.

Commentary

This is the highest score in the survey and reflective of a highly skilled and competent workforce in The Abbey Theatre. Of note is the level of confidence that employees have about their ability to do their jobs (89%).
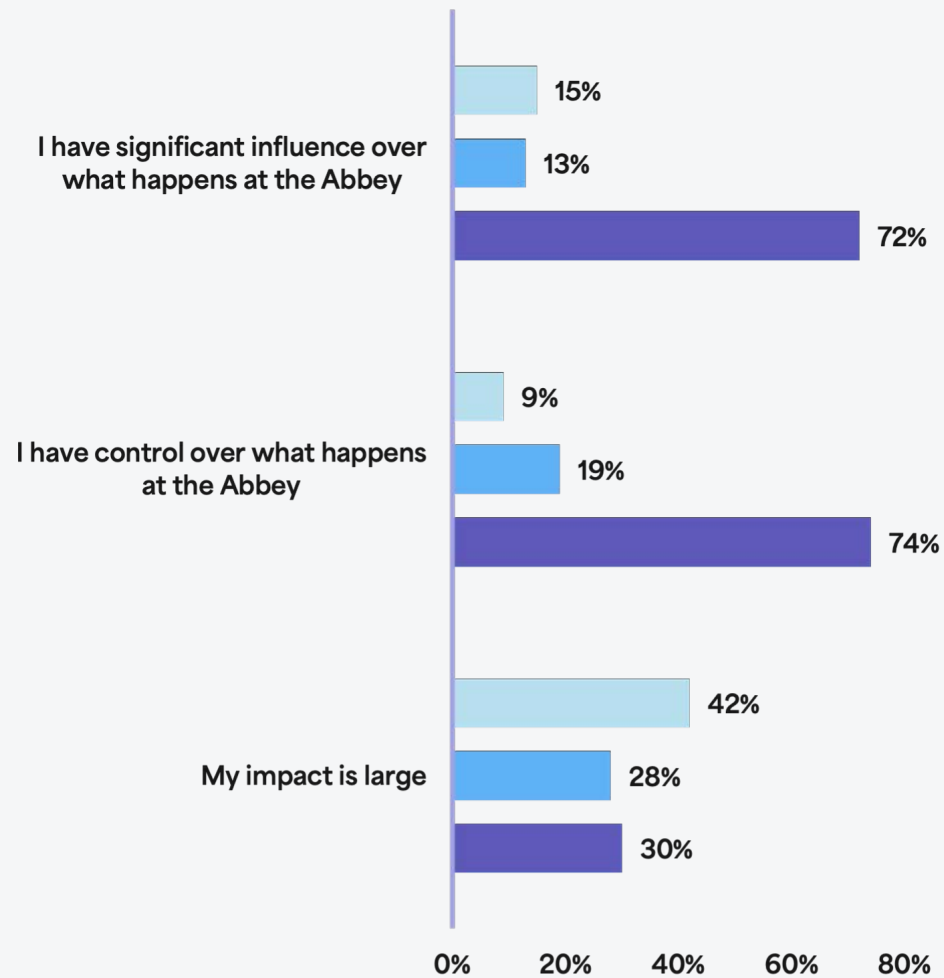
I have mastered the skills needed for my job
- 81%
- 12%
- 7%

I am confident about my ability to do my job
- 89%
- 4%
- 7%

I am self assured about my capabilities
- 82%
- 9%
- 9%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Impact

This measures the extent to which employees feel they have an impact on what happens in The Abbey Theatre.

Commentary

Employees do not feel they have an impact on what happens in their work, particularly the Creative side of the organisation who are significantly less likely to perceive that they have impact compared to other work areas. This overall score perhaps reflects the score for employee involvement, which signals that employees feel they have a lack of control over what happens at The Abbey Theatre.

I have significant influence over what happens at the Abbey
- 15%
- 13%
- 72%

I have control over what happens at the Abbey
- 9%
- 19%
- 74%

My impact is large
- 42%
- 28%
- 30%

Legend: ■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

Appendices: Sample Qualitative Quotes

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Psychological Safety	"In [department], it's a place where people can really adjust things as, as times change. And I've noticed, like, people of different levels can make suggestions. And they can be implemented depending on what budget will allow. But it's always felt like a safe space to come up with ideas, and brainstorm together and come up with plans for a year And then there's a sense of success if you achieve those" (P#18). "I think my department in particular feels like they can't really speak up or like, talk to senior management about certain things. Because I don't know if it's like fear or like they think like, they can't really address them" (P#27).
Communication and Information Flow	"Information is very closely guarded, and that you're not on a level to be able to have this information. And I feel like, what am I gonna do, stand out on the street and sell the secrets of The Abbey Theatre? … Like, I find that just a little bit like, slightly offensive? … I'm not important enough to know, and actually could have an effect on what I'm doing just to have this knowledge, I find that just it's a bit cloak and dagger" (P#9). "There can be a bit of a rumour mill and half-truths … So there's definitely room for improvement. But I don't know how to do it well or any better should I say. There are in persons, there are emails, there are all staffs there are staff councils, all the building blocks are there. But for whatever reason, not all the information gets to who it needs to, at the right time to make their working week function as it should" (P#19).
Relationships & Inclusion: **Access to Senior Management**	"One thing I sometimes find challenging is, is to be presented only with decisions as opposed to consultation. But I am also aware that sometimes, you know, there are so many people involved in decision making. You know, that, that it isn't always possible to include people" (P#17). "We were told that like, senior management and higher ups really care about every single person in our last all staff meeting, and they want to know everybody and it's [on a] person by person basis. And then we got an email [which] asked for a headshot so that they can put a face to our name. And it's like, can you not just walk around and ask my name, though? Can you not just introduce yourself?" (P#4).

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Relationships & Inclusion: Collegial Relationships	"The people here too, it's, it's, there's a lot of, there's a lot of warmth … you can see visibly that people are kind of enjoying engaging with each other" (P#22). "There are people with whom you have easier relationships, I find at the moment that my relationships with the artistic directors are very open, and very direct and very easy. That hasn't always been the case. So, for me, it feels like a much, yeah, it feels more collaborative" (P#17).
Well-being: Impact of 'professional/ infrastructural' divide on relationships The building was also identified as a barrier to both formal and informal communication, with the split across the two locations as an added challenge to the type of information flow that is important for maintaining engagement and trust. In some respects, this divide was physical, but it was also somewhat psychological.	"There is a very, like, strong divide between, like, people that work front of house, in backstage and everyone else. And like, they don't like my department … a lot of people … don't know who we are. And it was recently done that like, now we have pictures of everyone" (P#14). "I find the building is not sort of conducive to sort of, I feel like we're all in these little silos and that we never come together, and that we don't have any understanding of what somebody else may go through" (P#9).
Well-being: Workload and stress	"You could be running around like a lunatic all week and have achieved nothing at the end of [it] and that kills me. I would like to be able to say I did this. Whereas I used to be able to do 25 things in a day. Now I can't get anything completed and finished and signed off" (#P10). "There's been a lot of chaos, as you're probably aware of already over the last few years, including COVID. So there's an awful lot weight on everybody's shoulders, and depression, you know, all that kind of stuff. And some might even go as far as to say PTSD" (P#21).
Employee Turnover	"But it's really difficult that you spend time building relationships … but I look at departments from the time I started to what they are now and they're completely unrecognisable, there's no one left who was there originally when I started" (P#14). "I feel that morale is quite low due to the extraordinary rate of staff turnover. It can be very disheartening that friends and supportive colleagues move on from the organisation as they feel they can no longer afford to work here/feel that the work is detrimental to their health and well-being/that they have been subjected to undue stress" (S#3)

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Development & Career Progression	"I mean, I've been here nearly [X} years and I'm still discovering things I should have known that I kind of should have been trained in" (P#2). "I feel that there is a lack of options in relation to career progression in this organisation. There is a lack of transparency in relation to pay scales and career paths. One-on-ones with managers rarely happen and are superficial. Requested training is rarely provided" (S#60).
Vocation Many described work in the theatre as a vocation, something they are all drawn to, passionate about and cannot imagine a life without. However, there is a sense that, as with other recognised vocations, associations with extreme dedication can lead to exploitation, that it does not mean that they should be taken advantage of, expected to work relentlessly with little to no recognition, not least with pay that currently does not meet the costs of living.	"Because I always say most people who work in the arts sector, I would say, are people who care deeply. It's a passion, this is the thing that's used against us all the time. If you enjoy your job, it's not you'll never work a day in your life. But, but it's, it's a calling, its a vocation. But that's nonsense, when you cannot pay rent in the city anymore" (P#1). "saying if it's a vocation, there's only so much goodwill for that. And if you burn through it, that kind of stuff all the time then eventually people aren't that passionate about it" (P#24).
Funding: Pay/ Remuneration/ Contracts One of the major issues that was raised both among survey participants and in the interview/ focus groups was about pay and contractual arrangements. Participants referred to the hardship that they experienced as a result of low pay, which was exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. They often made direct associations between low levels of pay and turnover.	"In theatres [it's] just so much more, so tighter, in budgets and labour … you compare what we're, what theatre people are paid against film people, in a full-time capacity, it's very, very different" (P#21). "We like working in theatre, you know, there's so many pluses. But it is very hard to make a decent living. And, you know, if you want to buy a house, or if you have children, or all of these things, and that's, you know, a lot of reasons, not just with The Abbey Theatre, that people, especially since COVID, have left the industry because you just can't make a decent living. And that's, that's kind of a stress that's always there, you know, and it's, it's kind of sad" (P#9).

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Funding Model & Planning	"What they want is detailed planning, planning, planning … That's not always possible for them, because they're not getting the funding. And if they're not getting … [their funding], they can't say set the programme out a year in advance … For other parts of the organisation, if they don't know something six months in advance, then … they can't deliver it in the way they want to deliver it. So there's that dichotomy of the two, pulling in different directions, and the funding is actually a big part. We used to have three-year funding, we're back down to one year funding. That's, that's a problem" (P#15). "So the Arts Council gives you your funding in December, and you have to fulfil your calendar in January [….] you should be able to plan three years in advance" (#P21).
Building, Facilities and Resources A number of issues were raised about the physical appearance of the building relative to the stature of the theatre. Participants raised issues around its age, cleanliness, facilities and health and safety, which signalled a lack of pride and a sense of disappointment because of that. Lack of funding is also experienced in a reported lack of resources, including a sense there are simply not enough people to cover workload.	"It's the old building and the facilities … we work within rooms around the building that don't have the right equipment, or they're not fit for purpose, around the work that we do" (P#7). "Part of the expectations, we are supposed to be the National Theatre of Ireland, we're supposed to be the top organisation. And the fact that we're in a building, which I'm sorry, like, there are … high school theatres in the States, which are better equipped than this building. And it's just shocking" (P#20).