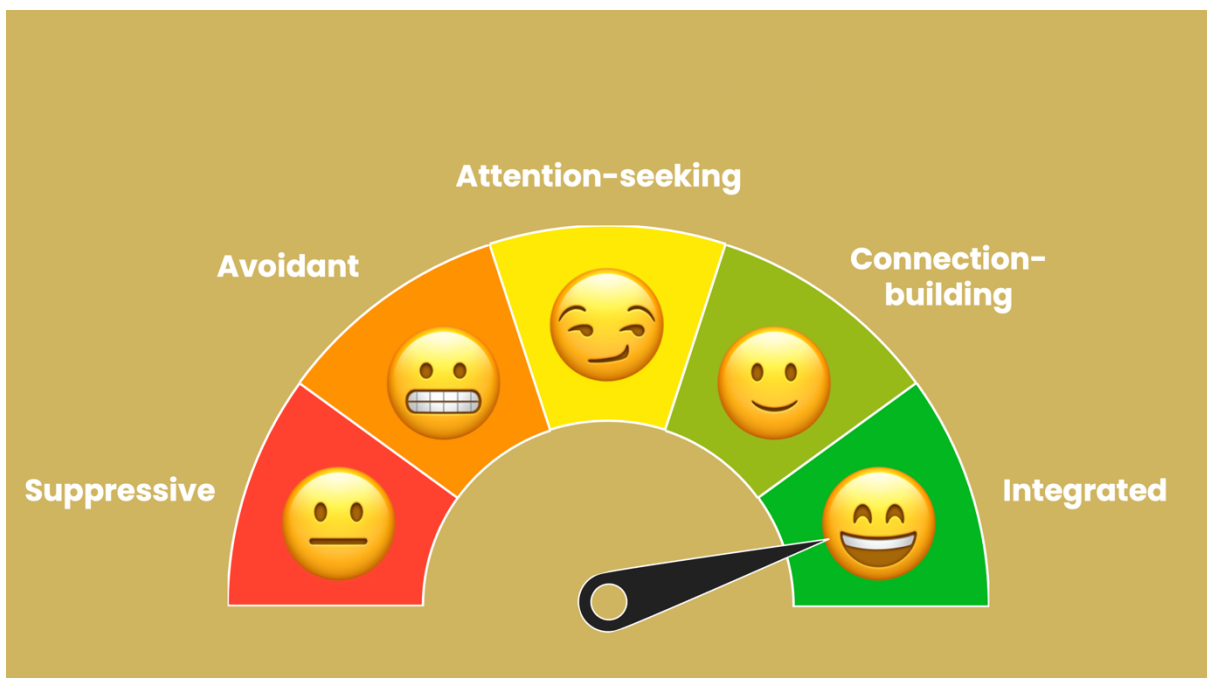


Meme Thinking Cultural Barometer

This framework not only evaluates the presence of humour but also its impact on workplace culture and communication. It delineates the progression from the absence or detrimental use of humour through to where it is being used constructively.

It's not that humour is the only important aspect of workplace culture, far from it. However, it is our contention that how humour presents in the workplace can be considered a useful proximal barometer for the quality of the culture in general.

The Meme Thinking barometer outlines five distinct levels, each representing a level of maturity of humour usage within an organisation that gives you a read on the state of its culture:



1. Suppressive

- **Characteristics:**
 - Humour is absent or discouraged.
 - Work environment is tense and overly formal or overly nice.
 - Employees may feel inhibited, like they are walking on 'eggshells', leading to reduced creativity and ability to engage with challenging topics openly.
- **Implications:**
 - Lack of levity can increase stress and hinder team cohesion.
 - Disagreement may build behind the scenes, leading to unexpressed resentment which leaks out in unexpected ways.

2. Avoidant

- **Characteristics:**
 - Humour is used to deflect or avoid addressing serious issues.
 - Jokes may serve as a coping mechanism to sidestep conflict or discomfort.
 - Important conversations are often derailed by inappropriate levity.
- **Implications:**
 - Avoidant humour can prevent the resolution of underlying problems and erode trust.
 - Humour can be used to dismiss serious situations or concerns that have been raised.

3. Attention-seeking

- **Characteristics:**
 - Humour is used primarily to gain attention or elevate one's status in the group.
 - Individuals may use jokes to dominate conversations, centre themselves, or seek validation.
 - Humour often crosses boundaries, with a higher likelihood of offending or alienating colleagues.
 - You can tell when humour is being used in this way as it will be at the expense of some 'other' person or group.
- **Implications:**
 - This type of humour may create a social bond for those in the 'in-crowd', but can create discomfort, exclusion, or resentment more broadly and can be culturally corrosive by demonstrating you never know what someone might say behind your back.
 - It may foster a competitive or ego-driven atmosphere rather than a collaborative one.
 - Over time, trust and psychological safety can erode if humour is experienced as inappropriate or self-serving.

4. Connection-building

- **Characteristics:**
 - Humour is used appropriately to foster positive relationships, by steering clear of using humour at others' expense, and using humour in a way that's inclusive to all the people in the group.
 - Humour is inclusive, respectful, and aligned with organisational values.
 - It focuses on acknowledging shared challenges and building people up.
- **Implications:**
 - Supportive humour can enhance morale, creativity, and collaboration when balanced effectively.
 - Inclusive humour may not result in fits of uncontrollable laughter, but the smaller the group and better you know them, the more you can push that envelope appropriately.

5. Integrated

- **Characteristics:**
 - Humour shows up regularly in organisational artefacts and communications as a tool for resilience and connection.
 - Teams use humour to navigate challenges, encourage open dialogue, and maintain perspective.
 - Humour complements, rather than replaces, serious discussions, acting as an intermittent pressure relief valve.
- **Implications:**
 - An integrated humour culture supports psychological safety, innovation, and sustained engagement.

By assessing where your team or organisation falls within the Meme Thinking Cultural Barometer, you can identify areas for growth and implement strategies to cultivate a more resilient and connected workplace culture.



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