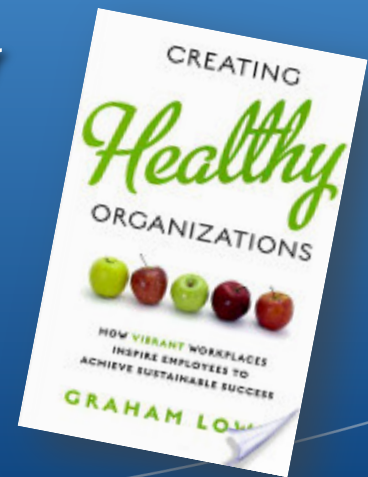


# Creating Healthy Organizations

by Graham Lowe

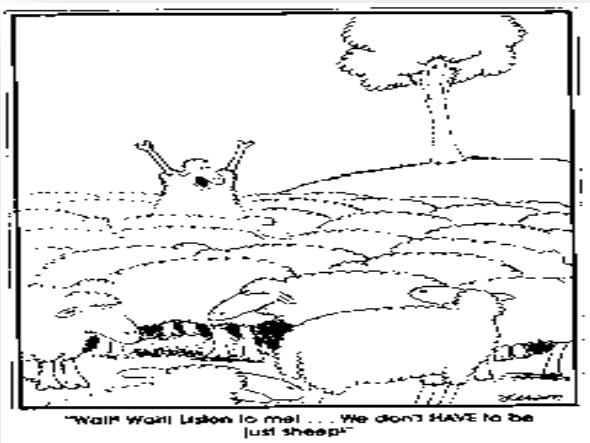
How **Vibrant** Workplaces Inspire Employees to Achieve Sustainable Success



## A Quick Overview of the Book

If you or your organization is looking for a one-size-fits-all approach to organizational change, there is no need in reading any further. However, if you or your organization is ready to look into a health-seeking integrative win-win approach, then author and workplace consultant Graham Lowe's *Creating Healthy Organizations* could be exactly what you are looking for.

Lowe's *Creating a Healthy Organization* is not a step-by-step program for organizational change. He succinctly encapsulated the book's purpose in the title's tag line "*How Vibrant Work Places Inspire Employees to Achieve Sustainable Success*" from the dust jacket. This is an organizational 'how-to' book of a different kind. Lowe offers an insightful, evidence-based diagnosis of the kinds of mindset, actions, principles, values, leadership, and culture required to strengthen the connections between people and performance in order to create a healthy organization that is more capable of sustainable success. Furthermore, he offers organizations the opportunity to traverse a different path – a decidedly more holistic, healthy path that requires the co-creation of a corporate culture that leads toward sustained success that benefits all stakeholders and the environment.



*"Everybody loves progress, but nobody likes change."* Anon

## Chapters

- Intro** The Healthy Organization Ideal
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“Above all, healthy organizations forge an enduring link between employee well-being and performance. This link must become central to the business’s philosophy, long-term strategy, and the way it operates day-to-day.” p. 8

Lowe begins by defining and offering examples of the healthy organization ideal. The eight chapters that follow the introduction answers three vital questions:

1. What are the building blocks of a healthy organization?
2. How can you move down your own healthy organization path?
3. How can you measure and sustain progress?

In *Creating a Healthy Organization* Lowe offers a long-term perspective and conceptual framework based on sound guiding principles, practical lessons, and examples drawn from a wide-range of organizations that he has personally helped to facilitate. In the end, what Lowe is broadly and specifically speaking of is the quality of relationships...healthy relationships point organizations in the direction of sustainable success. It’s all about relationships!

## Introduction

In the introduction, Lowe defines the audience, purpose, and fundamental concept of the healthy organization ideal. His intended audience the individuals or groups, such as managers, human resource (HR) practitioners, health and wellness professionals, and front-line employees within organizations charged with the task of bringing about change for their workplaces. Lowe refers to these people or groups as ‘change agents.’ This book is written with these individuals in mind, although it is not limited to them.

*Creating Healthy Organizations*, however, is not intended as a one-size-fits-all, quick-fix for organizational change. The task of each organization is to co-construct its own unique healthy organization trajectory.



## About the Author

Graham Lowe is a Canadian workplace consultant, workshop leader, conference speaker, and author based in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. He had a successful academic career at the University of Calgary as a Sociology Professor. He is currently the president of The Graham Lowe Group, which is a consulting and research firm established to help organizations in the private, public, and non-profit sections create healthy and sustaining workplaces.

His experience in international in scope and he offers his expertise and skills through a consulting firm know as the **Graham Lowe Group**. He has also written *The Quality of Work: A People-Centred Agenda*, **co-authored a text** *Work, Industry and Canadian Society*, and has written many articles, and reports. He is an active presenter and consultant. For individuals wanting to know more about The Graham Lowe Group has its own website: [www.grahamlowe.ca](http://www.grahamlowe.ca).



“Decades of research on the determinants of population health show that for people to thrive, they must live in environments that enable them to realize their human potential. In short, wellness and work performance go hand in hand.” p. 17

## Chapter One – The Healthy Organization

In this chapter, Lowe establishes the conceptual groundwork for the remainder of his book. He argues that over the past decade there has been a growing realization from many of the leading thinkers in various fields that the most successful interventions direct their attention to the underlying workplace and organizational factors. The result of this realization has led to a demand for a more systemic or holistic view of the determinants of employee health and wellness. The importance of healthy change is emphasized by a holistic approach.

As a starting point, Lowe employs the World Health Organization’s definition of health promotion, which is “*the process of enabling individuals and communities to increase control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their health.*” (p. 18) Lowe explains that healthy and productive workplaces are co-created by employees at all levels within the organization. Employees of at all levels are able to influence the culture and other key characteristics of the environment in which they work. Lowe believes that through the integration of individual health and organizational performance employees and employers are thereby strategically positioned to reap significant benefits.

Lowe contends that ideally, wellness goals should be embedded in the organization’s strategy and everyone in the organization should feel a shared sense of duty in achieving them. He cherry picks from various sources such as researchers, academics, health promotion,



Figure 1.0 Building Blocks of a Healthy Organization. (p. 22)

practitioners, human resources specialists, and business ethicists into a unified model of a healthy organization. In doing so, he unifies what might seem like divergent ideas into a practical, flexible, and actionable tool for organizational change. He is confident that this approach is far more useful than relying on workplace health promotion alone. Lowe says, “**Employee well-being is an organizational performance issue, not simply a matter of personal health.**” (p.17) The preceding point is critically important for change agents to understand where Lowe is going with his argument.

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“A vibrant workplace is really the centrepiece of the model, because this is the environment in which people work day in and day out. Vibrant workplaces do more than engage employees. They actually cultivate a sense of personal inspiration about the work in hand. An engaged employee is satisfied and loyal. An inspired employee is more than this, actively seeking out ways to develop and use skills, knowledge, and abilities to further corporate goals.” p. 21

Throughout the chapter he explains that while many employer’s current focus is on employee engagement and healthy workplaces, there are good reasons to move beyond. Lowe offers his model of a healthy organization as a guide for thinking in a holistic, long-term manner about the underlying drivers of well-being and performance. He provides practical ways that healthy organizations can implement conditions for sustainable success, renewing their workforce capabilities and relationships with customers and communities as well as benefit or protect the environment. Lowe delineates his healthy organization model in two phases.

First, he identifies the model’s four foundational building blocks:

1. Positive Cultures
2. Inclusive Leadership
3. Vibrant Workplaces
4. Inspired Employees

Referring to his model [Figure 1.0], Lowe briefly outlines each of the building blocks of a healthy organization saving greater detail for each individual block in subsequent chapters. Lowe encourages change agents to utilize his model as encouragement for integrative thinking about the “drivers” of well-being, human performance, and ethical business practices. Employing this approach creates enduring success.

Second, he discusses the logic of a healthy organization by adapting the concept of the value chain (employee-customer-profit). [Figure 1.1] Lowe claims, “new evidence has confirmed the importance of the employee link in the value



Figure 1.1 The Healthy Organization Value Chain. (p. 23)

chain.” (p. 24) When the ‘employee link’ is applied to healthy organizations Lowe notes that other links are important for creating a vibrant workplace.

‘Value’ within his model is defined as “what matters most to all stakeholders.” (p. 24) Lowe explains that the attributes of a healthy organization are mutually reinforcing and success generates an upward spiral that bolsters the workplace culture further, validates shared leadership, continues to inspire employees, and maintains the

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“In order for employees to apply their capabilities, they need relationships, resources, and systems that enable them to collaborate, When workers collaborate, the sum becomes greater than the parts: teams and organizations develop capabilities for performance, innovation, and creativity that far surpass what each individual member brings to their job – and to the organization, its customers, and society.” p. 41

conditions for a vibrant workplace. Lowe argues, “A positive culture based on strong people values will resonate with employees and managers, providing guidelines for the healthy and productive work behaviors.”(p. 22) He further asserts, “While leadership from the top for a healthy organization vision and goals is important, this alone will not mobilize the workforce down the healthy organization path.” (p. 22)

Therefore, he argues, “what is needed is an inclusive approach to leadership that empowers all members of an organization to take responsibility for healthy changes.”(p. 22) It is this last statement that seems so obvious, yet so often lost on all players in an organization.

Logically, it is the responsibility of everyone in a healthy organization to take for themselves and the organization in the healthiest way possible. Why? Because everyone benefits even

“Living the values is a hallmark of a healthy organization. One of the clearest expressions can be found in an organization’s people policies, programs, and practices – how it approaches all human resource management issues.” p. 23

from the smallest effort. But cumulatively the effect is much more pronounced. Without shared leadership, collaboration, and a positive, healthy organizational culture the linkages to the other attributes of his model are weakened.

Lowe strongly maintains that **culture** and

**leadership** are the two critical enablers of a vibrant workplace. These attributes are the bedrock of his model because they define the effective and supportive people practices within an organization.

“Wellness is not an end goal, but a natural result of healthy processes for involving individuals in improving all aspects of the organization’s operations.” p. 24

Vibrant workplaces are the context where all employees are inspired to continually develop and utilize their abilities and skills, which are mutually beneficial. Lowe believes and backs up his assertion with current research that satisfied and inspired employees actively engaged in learning, sharing their knowledge and skills, and applying it enthusiastically in the workplace. In a nutshell, inspired results in an organization rely on a network of positive and respectful relationships.

## Chapter Two – Beyond Workplace Health Promotion

The discussion focuses on how organizations can move beyond workplace health promotion in this chapter. Lowe presents what he has observed to be both the **limits** and **promise** of workplace health promotion.

He refers to the ‘limits’ to organizational health promotion as “the wellness paradox.” The paradox in wellness promotion is that despite rising investment by increasing numbers of organizations into employee health

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“Inspired employees do more than give extra effort. They channel their passion for their work and their commitment to the organization and its customers into how they work with others, how they acquire skills and knowledge and apply these in new ways for the benefit of the organizations and its stakeholders, how they set high standards for themselves and their team, and how they anticipate and respond to internal and external change.”

p. 27

and wellness programming, the realized performance benefits have been mainly limited to savings in lower absenteeism and benefit costs. Lowe argues that other innovative organizational transformations such as

“Meeting employees’ health and wellness needs becomes easier if they are active participants in the entire process, not merely end-users of health resources. In this way, employees take ownership – in other words, leadership – for the means and the ends.” p. 53

applications of information technology, improved knowledge management systems, and business process redesign have actually had more notable performance payoffs which has allowed people to create more value by working better. Lowe claims that the reason similar benefits have not been realized by healthier workplaces is that health promotion limits have been reached. Lowe insightfully resolves the dilemma of the wellness paradox by thinking more expansively and inclusively. Instead, he argues for a holistic concept of “organizational health.” He sums it up this way: “A single-issue approach using a standalone initiative is less effective than when it is integrated within a comprehensive set of measures to promote wellness as part of a company’s broader commitment to a healthy and productive workplace.”(p. 50) Reframing the situation in this manner allows Lowe to explain his beliefs about the mutual benefits of the healthy organizational value chain in a

broader more holistic perspective. [Figure 1.1]

Lowe argues the ‘promise’ of workplace health promotion rests in the linkages between positive health outcomes and performance results.

In short, it is profitable for organizations to embed health promotion as part of its operational strategy. Lowe explains that the issue is not whether organizations should introduce health promotion programs, but ‘how to’ design, implement, and evaluate them in order to achieve optimal and mutually



beneficial results for both employees and the organization.

Lowe believes that workplace health initiatives are a launching pad for achieving deeper improvements for employee well-being and organizational performance. Such programs align the building blocks for healthy

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“When it comes to employee health and well-being, there is much more to productivity than reduced employee costs. Managers who understand this are more likely to introduce organizational systems, policies, and practices that support employees to flourish in their jobs and lives outside of work.” p. 66

organizations, which contribute to more vibrant workplaces that actively involve employees in designing an organizational culture that is supportive, positive, and wellness-directed. Lowe insists “an organizational perspective

“The best route to excellent customer or client experiences is through excellent employee experiences. Or, according to the healthy organization value chain: vibrant workplaces = inspired employees = sustainable success. Improving organizational performance by putting employee well-being first may sound counter-intuitive. But it works.” p. 80

provides useful lessons on the ‘how,’ which underlines the importance of shared leadership and a culture of cooperation.”

When organizations systematically confront the underlying causes of absenteeism, ‘presenteeism’ (present, but non-productive), stress, and work/life imbalance these efforts can become part of a long-term strategy co-created in-house through a more holistic organizational mindset that links employee well-being with organizational performance. Lowe argues that employee health and wellness must be viewed as an organizational asset that contributes to a skilled and motivated workforce.

He also asserts that it is critical to understand the root causes of health and performance, especially the psychological and social aspects of work. Furthermore, an organizational common language needs to arise from within the organization for the discourse relating to health

and performance. This discourse must resonate internally and be embedded in the organizations operational philosophy. The healthy work environment becomes an enabling context for developing employee capabilities.

Lowe looked to sources such as *Fortune Magazine’s* annual list of “100 Best Companies to Work For In America” for common indicators of success. His research into the successful companies on this list and others reveals the key insight that “positive workplace cultures drive superior performance.” Of course, this makes perfect sense. Employees are more likely to perform optimally when they have a healthy, safe, supportive, and trusting workplace culture and environment. Lowe contends that “great workplaces have ‘high-trust cultures with strong core values, such as respect, fairness, and integrity.’” The level of trust within an organization is significant to an organizations success. An organization that is able to establish a relationship of trust among its employees will have a culture where people have pride in their work and feel a sense of camaraderie. As Lowe explains it, employees will be inspired to be creative and innovative because of the synergy between trust, pride, and camaraderie.

To sum up this chapter, Lowe convincingly argues workplace health promotional programs can provide the necessary springboard toward a comprehensive organizational approach that to

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Only by addressing the job characteristics, work environments, relationship qualities, and organizational supports that foster positive employee experiences and develop improved performance capabilities will the next level of organizational health and well-being.

**Relationships**

- Respectful relationships
- Friendly co-workers
- Caring and compassionate
- Open, honest two-way communication based on trust

**Job**

- Understand how job fits into strategy
- Employees are empowered to be innovative and take risks
- Involvement and ownership
- Cooperation and collaboration

**Team**

- Feel part of the team with common objectives
- Gain and share knowledge effectively, learn from each other
- Supportive managers who bring out the best in staff

**Supports**

- Values, recognize, and celebrate people's contributions
- Fairness, including in pay and benefits

His objective in this chapter is to encourage change agents to think about using employee workplace experiences as the grounding for organizational change and improvement. He delves into the psychological and social aspects of the workplace. For example, he discusses two attributes of the hierarchy of human needs that can be satisfied by the workplace: self-esteem and to develop potential by having opportunities to learn, grow, and apply inherent abilities. He goes further by showing how work is central to happiness. Lowe suggests an accurate way to gauge employee satisfaction and commitment, and for that matter their level of inspiration, is simply to ask employees to describe their ideal workplace. A useful way to do this is through an appropriately designed employee surveys,

Figure 1.2 Vibrant Workplace Vision p. 79

performance. Change agents can use these programs to cultivate wider employee involvement necessary to achieve sustained success.

**Chapter Three – How Vibrant Workplaces Inspire Employees**

In Chapter Three, Lowe investigates the vibrant workplace building block of a healthy organization from the employee's perspective.



focus groups, employee forums, or other consultation techniques. Lowe explains that the aspirations that employees bring into their workplaces offer a larger common vision of a 'vibrant workplace.'

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“Trust is a fragile property of all employee-management relationships. The level of trust in a workplace makes the difference between mediocre and exceptional performance.”  
p. 111

[Figure 1.2] Lowe emphasizes that a vibrant workplace is at the core of a healthy organization as illustrated in his model. [Figure 1.1] A vibrant workplace is a place where employees valued for their unique contribution. A vibrant workplace is a place where employees are encouraged and supported to learn, collaborate, and innovate in the interests of customers and society. A vibrant workplace energizes the whole organization by inspiring employees to continually determine ways to better serve the needs of their clientele.

The good news for change agents is there are basic steps that can be taken to improve the work environment and provide more inspiring work experiences. Lowe emphasizes that employee input on where to start is critical in transforming a workplace into a vibrant one.

#### Chapter 4 – Positive Culture

In this chapter, Lowe examines the culture building block of a healthy organization. He concentrates characteristics of a positive culture and highlights the critical role that culture plays in a healthy organization. He presents numerous examples, insights, and ideas that will allow change agents to support and strengthen the foundational culture building block of a healthy organization. [Figure 1.1] Lowe is emphatic about culture being the organization personified. He asserts, “An organization’s culture expresses its unique personality, character, and philosophy.” (p. 95) He adds, “A positive culture is based on strong and authentic people values.

It instills employee pride and loyalty, giving their work a greater sense of purpose and meaning.” (p. 95) This chapter is about the kinds and quality of relationships in a workplace and how they affect culture and the success of an organization. Lowe explains, when “the beliefs and values are embedded in the culture, they guide the organization’s leadership, help make it HR policies and practices, and make the quality of the work environment a priority.” (p. 98) In this kind of cultural milieu employees feel valued and as a result they value their workplace, develop a strong sense of ownership and commitment to “their”

“Healthy organizations consistently treat employees as the core business asset and the key to long-term success.” p. 117

organization. Lowe explains that a positive upward spiral of quality of work life and performance is generated by an energizing culture. Lowe advises that, “Successful cultural change is more evolutionary than revolutionary.” (p.107) Effective change is a process that occurs incrementally with persistent effort and must not be taken for granted. Careful attention should be necessary when modifying organizational structure.

Again, the importance of values comes up in this chapter. Lowe argues that values are the cultural glue that binds people and groups together in an organization. The qualities of the relationships and culture within an

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“Leadership in a healthy organization is a shared responsibility. Everyone has a role to play. While senior management support and actions are major enablers of progress, the quest for a healthier organization must provide opportunities for all employees to become involved in that process.” p. 143

organization have the potential to determine its future. Therefore, the key to long-term healthy organization success is for employees to be valued as *the* core business asset.

### Chapter 5 – Inclusive Leadership

In this chapter, Lowe explores the inclusive leadership block of a healthy organization. He contends that attaining healthy organizational goals insists on an inclusive approach to leadership. Everyone in an organization has the

“People thrive in environments that they have intentionally created to be health promoting.” p. 121

potential to participate in a leadership role. Employees need to be given the opportunity and supports needed to demonstrate leadership. Every employee can demonstrate leadership through their day-to-day relationships by the values-based behaviors that are both explicit and implicit in the culture of a healthy organization. These behaviors contribute to vibrant and inspiring workplace. Inclusive leaders are action-oriented, connected, caring, trustworthy, trusting, inspiring, and self-aware among other attributes. The tone, direction, and support for widespread leadership on healthy organizational goals is strongly influenced by management.

Lowe sources popular and influential thinkers such as Michael Fullan, Stephan Covey, and

Daniel Goleman, as well as practical examples, to strengthen key points in his argument in this chapter.

Lowe delineates and discusses the six qualities that anyone can bring to their roles and relationships:

1. Inspirational
  2. Caring and connected
  3. Trustworthy and trusting
  4. Action-oriented
  5. Empowering
  6. Self-aware
- (p. 127-130)

### Chapter 6 – Healthy Change

Lowe dissects the change process, focusing on the dynamics of how healthy organizations evolve in this chapter. He offers a practice framework and guiding principles toward healthy organization. He shares his own experience of the change process and offers actionable, practical lessons from a wide

“The test of a culture and its values is not what it is like in good times, but what it is like in tough times.” p. 149

range of organizations that are in the process of shaping their own healthy organizations. Lowe points out that only a small number of organizations have accomplished exceptional health. He explains that while much can be learned

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“A healthy organization strategy is an innovation because it introduces something new, institutionalizes its use, and diffuses the healthy practices and their supporting values more widely. After all, the goal is to make healthy practices a routine part of daily workplace activities... Thus, the creative part is designing and implementing change that fits an organization’s unique history, culture, market conditions, and employees characteristics.”

p.

from this top tier of organizations, their ‘best practices’ are not easily transferable. He highlights the idea that each organization is unique and therefore unique direction toward a healthy organization must be generated from within and through the direct involvement as possible.

Lowe outlines and then discusses at length the following five principles for healthy change:

1. Understand your organization’s readiness to change
2. Align structure and culture
3. Link people initiatives to the business strategy
4. Widen the circle of involvement
5. Make time for learning and innovation.

(p. 150)

“Shifting thinking is an important step in changing patterns in changing action patterns. Effective communication is the means to this end. New thinking can come about only if a common language can be found for talking about health and performance within your organization.” p. 165

The challenge for all organizations is to co-construct with others in the workplace the most acceptable way for them to link employee well-being, working conditions, and performance. Change needs a contextualized approach devised and developed with the unique circumstances, culture, characteristics, and

culture of the organization. Becoming a healthy organization is an ongoing journey instead of a destination.

Lowe points out that open and continual communication is critical to the success of moving an organization through the change process. Additionally, utilizing meaningful language is equally important to successful implementation of change. Lowe cautions about pushing for quick results and reminds change agents that vibrant workplace and positive culture attributes take time to develop and become ingrained in the culture.

### Chapter 7 – Sustainable Success

In this chapter, Lowe looks at the two main drivers of sustainable success: the quality of

“A core set of features that defines a vibrant workplace is important to all age groups: a work environment that is healthy, safe, and free from harassment and discrimination; training and other opportunities to develop skills and abilities; friendly and helpful coworkers; challenging and interesting work; good pay; and flexible work arrangements.” p. 190

relationship with stakeholders and the future capabilities of the organization to realize its long-term vision of a healthy organization. He answers the

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“The kinds of companies that will be attractive are moving at an impressive rate to ‘embed’ human and environmental criteria in their methods of conducting business and in every step in the product or service chain. Sustainability becomes a design feature.” p. 174

question of what makes success sustainable by exploring into the social, environmental, and human resource dimensions and then outlines and then discusses the four ingredients of sustainable success. Lowe also summarizes how to approach the renewal of relationships with society, workforce, and workplace. He reminds change agents that a healthy organization evolves organically and is in a constant state of renewal. Lowe advises that internal and external renewal strategies need to be merged. A healthy organization must be firmly situated in the present, but also has its eye on the future challenges and opportunities for innovative ways to balance the changing needs and hopes of all stakeholders.

### Chapter 8 – Measuring Progress

Lowe examines the limits and promise of measuring progress on the journey to a healthy organization in this chapter. He provides useful, practical advice and resources for measuring progress. This chapter focuses on how to devise, implement, and monitor the appropriate assessment tools that organizations need to gauge success and keep them on track towards a healthy organization and sustained success. Lowe says, “Data must spark ideas about how to do things better.” (p. 198)

Lowe summarizes the chapter discussion by offering seven guidelines for organizations to consider when planning, evaluating, and monitoring progress toward a healthy organization and sustained success:

1. Be goal-focused
2. Model your vision
3. Take a positive approach
4. Create a model
5. Integrate
6. Make metrics meaningful and actionable
7. Mine existing data (p. 218)

The key understanding for organizations is that by appropriately using evaluation tools (metrics) and responding to what is learned they are better able to move along the healthy organizational trajectory. Failing to do so puts the whole organization at risk.

### Chapter 9 – Designing a Healthy Organizational Strategy

In this chapter, Lowe provides a summary of all eight chapters into actionable key insights and practical suggestions. He encourages change agents and organizations to be creative and tailor the insights and suggestions offered to ‘fit’ their unique requirements. He presents the chapter summary questions as a catalyst for organizations to collaboratively design a change strategy that sends them on their own pathway to a healthy organization.

### Questions

Where is your organization on the healthy organization journey? What would you do to start your healthy organization journey?  
What are the key positive cultural attributes of your organization that you can build on?

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“Moving an organization further along a healthy trajectory, plotting its future course, and keeping it moving in that direction – this is hard work. That is why I have emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership, healthy change as a shared responsibility, and the need for managers and employees to co-create vibrant workplaces.” p. 231

## A Critical Evaluation of the Book

Graham Lowe’s “Creating A Healthy Organization” is a satisfying stellar riff on how to create healthy organizational sustained success. The book, however, is fundamentally about relationships, the interplay between management and employee, employee and customer, organizations and community, communities and the environment. Lowe shares his own substantial experience as a workplace consultant and adds to that the current understandings from academics and the practical experience in the everyday workplace. Lowe’s approaches the concept of organization in a holistic and organic way, which heralds an emerging trend. I appreciated his logical, well-conceived argument for the concept of a healthy organization and the way it can be implemented. He illustrates key building blocks, their interplay, and supports with a wealth of ideas, approaches, and resources to forge workplace relationships to be used to create an enduring organization.

What resonated most with me was Lowe’s proposal of an **employee-centered perspective** for organizational success and the importance of positive culture. It seems so patently obvious to me that when employees are holistically healthy and happy they will do their jobs more effectively. Healthy, inspired employees has to be a good thing for an organization, but this idea has not been fully realized by employers who seem to view employees as a necessary cost of doing business. An organizational shift in emphasis to a view of employees as an asset is a significant one.

### Structure and Style

The length of the book at nine chapters was appropriate. Each chapter had an average length of twenty-five pages. The inclusion of a table of a detailed table of contents and an index is also a positive. Each chapter was organized in a similar way, outlining key points that would follow and be discussed in greater detail. At the end of each chapter, there was a summary and a lead-in to the next chapter. Lowe’s inclusion of supportive quotations from leaders in their respective fields added weight and authority to his assertions. He also effectively used charts, diagrams, and illustrations to highlight points he way making. The final chapter is a useful touch for those who want a summary of each chapter’s key points and a place to start the journey to a healthy organization.

The good thing about this book is that it is not prescriptive, however, that may be its downfall for a particular segment of the population. By that, I mean many people wanting to make change happen quickly and with the aid a prescribed checklist. This book does not take that approach. Instead, they will have to do the hard work themselves by inviting the necessary conversations, inviting collaboration, co-creating a vision, mission, and guiding principles toward a journey along the road to a sustainable healthy

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."  
– Charles Darwin

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“Moving an organization further along a healthy trajectory, plotting its future course, and keeping it moving in that direction – this is the hard work. That is why I have emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership, healthy change as a shared responsibility, and the need for managers and employees to co-create vibrant workplaces.”

p. 231

## Application to Practice

The application of Lowe’s model for a healthy organization to an educational setting is feasible and would be of great benefit to administrators, teachers, students, families, and communities. Currently, the organizational structure in education has not evolved to the point where all schools are vibrant workplaces with inspired employees.

My personal experience and observation of the foundational nature of positive culture and inclusive leadership in an organization was verified by reading this book. The book provided me with new reasons why this is so and ways that school divisions and schools can move along the path toward healthy organization.

At beginning of the last decade, I was involved in a rare opportunity to be a teacher in a brand new public school in Saskatoon. Half a year before the school opened the new staff had regular monthly meetings in preparation for the big opening day. Our administrative team from the beginning was positive, enthusiastic, inclusive, professional, and personable. We went on a staff retreat to develop our vision, mission statement, and guiding principles. We had an inspired and energetic staff. We worked and played together. A positive culture grew out of our discussions and efforts. Our administrators were key enablers because of their positive personalities, the supports and resources they provided, and the positive feedback they offered. They initiated, but we co-created our school culture. The process took time, energy, resources, support, and thought. It was an exciting place to work, but it didn’t feel like work. I think that’s when you know you are in a healthy organization. Work doesn’t feel like work. In a sense we were a family. That’s the upward spiral that Lowe talks about when the foundational building blocks are in place. It was all about positive relationships built on trust, respect, and honesty.

It’s not like that at all schools! I have been in situation where I was the new teacher coming into a tense, unhealthy organizational culture. On one hand, the administrator had been unable to develop positive relationships with staff because of a heavy-handed, top-down approach, which came across as disrespectful. On the other hand, many teachers were stuck in their ways and were unprepared to adapt to the new administrative personality and her expectations. In my view, what was needed was an open and honest discussion to air grievances, hurt feelings, misunderstandings, and so on. As Lowe points out, we **all** have a leadership role to play in a healthy organization. The role I chose was that of a “leader from the middle” by offering ‘positive spin’ to situations, employing humor and levity, making person-to-person contact instead of e-mailing, avoiding gossip, making solid contributions in meetings, and participating in the extra-curricular life of the school.

Lowe’s ideas can be applied to school divisions who need to move boldly on the road of healthy organization terrain, particularly as it relates to the foundational building blocks of positive culture. As Lowe points out, stress and work/life imbalance are organizational problems that require organizational – not individual – solutions.” (p.65) The problems of job stress and burnout can be managed by offering teachers greater job resources, autonomy, flexible work situations, and team support. However, Departments of Education, school divisions, parents, and other stakeholders in education need to more fully understand the benefits to students when teachers are healthy, happy, and inspired. Everyone benefits!



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