

Workplace Culture Quiz

A self-scoring guide to work and social environments,
from openness to domination.

Choose the best-fitting answer (A-F) for each question. Write its points on the line at the right.
Assess one group over a defined period, based on behavior you have observed.

Environment/group: _____ Period: _____

Q1. What happens when someone disagrees or raises a concern?

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| A | Disagreement is welcome; concerns can be raised and considered without retaliation. | 1 pt |
| B | People soften criticism to preserve approval, but concerns can still be heard. | 2 pts |
| C | Insider status determines whose criticism is heard and whose is dismissed. | 3 pts |
| D | Disagreement draws punishment, threats, humiliation, or retaliation. | 4 pts |
| E | People are monitored, isolated, or kept dependent, making it unsafe to speak freely. | 5 pts |
| F | Independent judgment is treated as betrayal; loyalty to the leader or group must replace it. | 6 pts |

YOUR
POINTS

Q2. How are rules, opportunities, resources, and credit distributed?

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| A | Standards are consistent and explainable; decisions and unequal treatment can be challenged. | 1 pt |
| B | Conforming to unwritten expectations wins favor, but unfair decisions can still be corrected. | 2 pts |
| C | Connections, favoritism, and insider access outweigh consistent standards. | 3 pts |
| D | Rules and resources are selectively used to punish dissent or refusal. | 4 pts |
| E | Essential resources are controlled to create dependence and compel obedience. | 5 pts |
| F | A person's worth and entitlements are defined by unquestioning loyalty to the leader or belief system. | 6 pts |

Q3. Can people refuse demands and keep an independent private life?

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| A | People can say no, keep a private life, and maintain outside relationships. | 1 pt |
| B | Fitting in brings pressure to be available or agreeable, but boundaries remain possible. | 2 pts |
| C | Access and opportunity depend on joining insider activities or accepting unequal demands. | 3 pts |
| D | Refusing demands or asserting boundaries brings punishment or retaliation. | 4 pts |
| E | Intrusive control of private relationships, time, or resources substantially restricts choice. | 5 pts |
| F | The leader or group claims authority over all areas of life and personal identity. | 6 pts |

Continue with Q4-Q6 on page 2. Add all six answers once, at the end.

If you cannot answer a question, mark ?. Find your possible score range on page 2.

From Openness to Domination

OPENNESS

DOMINATION

Conditions can change. Feelings alone do not define a category; consider them alongside how people treat you.

APPLIES TO ALL SIX CATEGORIES

A single harmful incident or a pattern of harmful incidents can make a workplace or social group unhealthy, even when people can speak freely, disagree, and leave. A low score does not erase those harms.

When legal advice may help [9, 11, 12, 13]

An unhealthy workplace is not necessarily unlawful. A low score does not rule out a legal violation; a high score does not establish a claim.

Possible issues include discrimination or unlawful harassment tied to race, sex, disability, or another protected characteristic; punishment for protected activity, such as reporting discrimination; or withheld earned pay. Not every complaint or disagreement is legally protected.

A lawyer can also review resignation, severance, repayment, or future-work restrictions before you respond or sign, even without an established claim. Ask the lawyer which rights, deadlines, and options apply to your facts and location.

6-8 points

CATEGORY 1

Open & Accountable

People can disagree, question decisions, decline extra demands, and keep outside relationships. Leaders address complaints and correct mistakes; leaving does not bring retaliation. You may feel included and able to ask for help or admit a mistake without fearing humiliation. [1, 2, 3]

9-14 points

CATEGORY 2

Guarded & Conforming

People soften concerns or agree publicly to avoid disapproval. You may find yourself rehearsing ordinary questions, concealing disagreement, or worrying about disapproval. You may also join optional events to fit in, but questions can still be heard and decisions changed. [1, 2]

Next steps:

Aim: Clarify expectations and assess whether agreed changes improve your working conditions.

- **Ask your manager for one specific change.** Explain the problem and what would help. For example: "I have three urgent assignments. Which should come first?" or "Is attendance at this after-hours event required?"
- **Check whether the agreed change happens.** Confirm the agreement and a review date with your manager. If the change helps, raise other concerns the same way. If requests are repeatedly dismissed or punished, record what happened and explore transfers or other jobs.

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15-20 points

CATEGORY 3

Political & Exclusionary

Favored people receive information, invitations, credit, or opportunities others do not. Rules depend on who is involved, and complaints may be filtered by insiders. You may find yourself second-guessing your standing, feeling excluded, or becoming preoccupied with whose approval matters. [2, 4]

Next steps:

Aim: Document unequal treatment and seek fair access to information, credit, and opportunities.

- **Document unequal treatment.** Record the date, decision, and decision-maker when you are excluded from meetings, denied credit, or passed over. Keep relevant records you are entitled to retain.
- **Ask the decision-maker for a specific correction.** Use the recorded examples to request meeting access, credit for your work, or written promotion criteria. Set a review date with that person. If nothing changes, compare transfer and outside-job options.

21-26 points

CATEGORY 4

Punitive & Authoritarian

Saying no or raising concerns brings threats, humiliation, lost opportunities, or punishment. Complaints rarely receive independent review. You may find yourself anticipating punishment, repeatedly reviewing conversations, or staying silent to avoid attention. Others may avoid supporting you for fear of consequences. [4, 5]

Next steps: [9, 11, 13]

Aim: Document what happened and identify rights or exit terms that need review.

- **Record the sequence of events.** Note the concern you raised or request you refused, what your employer did afterward, dates, and witnesses. Keep records you may lawfully retain; consult an employment lawyer before copying confidential employer or client files.
- **Check whether the punishment may be unlawful.** If it followed a discrimination complaint or other potentially protected activity, give an employment lawyer your timeline and response deadline. Ask the lawyer about retaliation protections and filing deadlines; internal review may not pause them.
- **Review your options before resigning or signing.** If pressured to leave or offered a separation agreement, ask an employment lawyer which claims you may release, what obligations remain, and which terms you can negotiate. Legal advice can help even without an established claim.

From Openness to Domination

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27-32 points

CATEGORY 5

Coercive & Entrapping

People use control of pay, housing, transport, contacts, or private life to restrict your choices. Monitoring, threats, or withheld necessities make refusal or departure difficult. You may feel unable to refuse demands because essential needs or outside support are threatened. [5, 6]

Next steps: [8, 12, 13]

Aim: Reduce the practical barriers to leaving and preserve your income and employment rights.

- **Check whether withheld pay is owed.** Give an employment lawyer your pay records and agreed terms. Ask the lawyer whether you can recover unpaid wages, commissions, or bonuses.
- **Calculate your departure budget.** Compare living costs during a job search with available funds. List unpaid wages, the date health coverage ends, and alternatives to employer-provided housing or transport.
- **Review exit terms before resigning or signing.** Give an employment lawyer your agreements and deadlines. Ask the lawyer which repayment or future-work terms are enforceable and what severance to negotiate.

33-36 points

CATEGORY 6

Totalizing & Cult-Like

The leader or group demands loyalty above your own judgment. Outside views are dismissed; doubt is treated as betrayal; people who leave may be shunned or threatened. You may feel guilty for questioning, distrust your own perceptions, or fear losing your whole support network by leaving. [5, 6]

Next steps: [7, 10, 11, 12, 13]

Aim: Prepare to leave with independent advice and practical support for housing, income, and safety.

- **Find independent support.** Contact a trusted person from a device and account outside employer control. For threats or withheld pay, ask an employment lawyer which protections apply.
- **Prepare a departure plan.** Arrange funds, housing, transport, health coverage, and personal documents. Ask a lawyer to review notice, repayment, and future-work terms before you resign or sign.
- **Keep evidence after leaving.** Lawfully retain records of threats, missed pay, or interference with your next job. Ask an employment lawyer whether these support a claim and how to respond. For immediate physical danger, seek emergency help first.

Research & References

Research foundations

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Review of research on speaking up and interpersonal risk at work.
2. Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 386-400.
Research on fairness in outcomes, procedures, treatment, and explanations.
3. Van den Broeck, A., et al. (2016). A review of self-determination theory's basic psychological needs at work. *Journal of Management*, 42(5), 1195-1229.
Review of research on autonomy, competence, and connection at work.
4. Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised. *Work & Stress*, 23(1), 24-44.
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5. Rodríguez-Carballeira, Á., et al. (2015). Group psychological abuse: Taxonomy and severity of its components. *The European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context*, 7(1), 31-39.
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6. Saldaña, O., Rodríguez-Carballeira, Á., & Almendros, C. (2018). The Psychological Abuse Experienced in Groups Scale: Psychometric properties of the Spanish version. *Behavioral Psychology/Psicología Conductual*, 26(3), 421-436.
Study of abusive group experiences reported by former members in Spain.

Employment and safety guidance

7. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. (n.d.). Workplace violence: Overview. U.S. Department of Labor. Guidance on threats, harassment, and intimidation in the workplace.
8. U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration. (2022). Protecting retirement and health benefits after job loss.
Health-coverage options and retirement-benefit records after a job change or job loss.
9. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2017). What you should know: What to do if you believe you have been harassed at work.
Reporting and deadlines under U.S. employment-discrimination law; not all conflict is unlawful. Filing time limits.
10. National Domestic Violence Hotline. (n.d.). Internet safety.
Device-monitoring precautions from relationship-abuse guidance; the workplace context differs.
11. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2016). Questions and answers: Enforcement guidance on retaliation and related issues.
Protected EEO activity, retaliation, and harassment; not every disagreement is protected. Harassment guidance.
12. North Carolina Department of Labor. (n.d.). Promised wages including wage benefits.
North Carolina pay, commission, and bonus rules; terms and jurisdiction matter.
13. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2009). Understanding waivers of discrimination claims in employee severance agreements.
Reviewing releases before signing; no existing claim is required to seek advice on terms.

About this guide

This quiz provides general information and does not provide legal advice or a clinical diagnosis.

The questions, scoring, categories, and recommendations have not been scientifically validated. The cited research supports the underlying concepts across different populations and settings. The score concerns openness and control, not overall health. It cannot establish safety, diagnose a person or group, determine legal rights, or establish that a group is a cult.