



What's Work Got To Do With Positive Workplace Culture?

Guest: Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capua, MD

Host: Anjali Rameshbabu, PhD, MS, MSc

Moreland-Capua: What I'm trying to get at is that every system has a desired outcome that they want. However, if the narrative doesn't match the desired outcome, it's really null and void. If we really truly believe in change and that people can change and things can change, then we have to have the narrative to support that, the conditions that support the idea that you are seen, heard, valued, appreciated, accepted, and belong.

Moreland-Capua: Because [00:00:30] if that is the foundation, then folks feel like they're not only surviving, they can thrive because those are the conditions for safety.

Helen Schuckers: Dr. Moreland-Capua is a physician, thought leader, educator, and the first African-American native Oregonian to become a licensed and board-certified psychiatrist. She brings her path breaking approach to solving deep, systemically-rooted community issues such as addiction, violence, and healthcare.

Helen Schuckers: At OHSU, she is the executive director of the Avel Gordly Center for Healing and has developed a national violence prevention program [00:01:00] called Healing Hurt People in Portland. Dr. Capua is also the founder of Capua Foundation, whose mission is to build a sustainable economy through healthcare, education, and agriculture in Angola, Africa.

Host: Anjali R.: Alisha, thank you so much for being with us.

Moreland-Capua: Absolutely.

Host: Anjali R.: So, excited to hear so much about all of the things you do. I'll start by saying your portfolio is just really undoubtedly prolific. You do a lot. But how about we start and just describe just from a basic level [00:01:30] what you do, the kinds of exciting you give a lot of talks

you, you hit a lot of hot topics and really important themes and we'd love to hear some of that and then we can dig deeper.

Moreland-Capuia: Absolutely. Well, thank you so much for having me, number one. I really appreciate any invitation to talk more about what I absolutely love and that is this concept of trauma and healing. So I am a trained board-certified addiction psychiatrist and I do honestly believe that every system is [00:02:00] attached to people. And if that, if we want systems to be healed and we want systems to be whole, that we have to tend to people and help people who work within those systems be healed and whole.

Moreland-Capuia: So that is really literally the basis and the foundation for the message and the motivation for the work that I do to say, hey, there's an opportunity to do some real incredible people work so that we all are happy, healthy, and can pursue those ideals as listed in our initial founding documents. Right? So it turns out [00:02:30] that the pursuit of happiness is intimately attached to our ability to be well, to be respected, to feel well, and to be supported.

Moreland-Capuia: A lot of my work has centered around that in particular, you would be probably blown away to know that. Fortune 500 companies are trying to figure out three things that either something has happened to folks will happen or is happening. You just think about how doors get opened, how lights are on, how computers work or phones answered. That's a person [00:03:00] right? A human being attached to a family that loves them.

Moreland-Capuia: And so, folks are trying to figure out not just how we improve the workplace in the wellness, but how we support the folks who make up the workplace. Healthcare systems are interested in it as well. Teachers are interested and just parents, people in general. So you can see that this is a human issue. Folks are like, "How do we as human beings find a way to not just live but thrive?" I know people always say, "YOLO, you only live once." And someone [00:03:30] said, "You know, that's actually not true. You only die once." Right?

Moreland-Capuia: And so daily that means that we are working through this process of living and finding sort of testing out ways of how to live better. And that's a daily process and it requires intention and thoughtfulness. And so to the extent that I can contribute to a body of knowledge that supports that idea I've done.

Host: Anjali R.: It isn't that the truth. Really comes down to looking at a person as a whole human being and [00:04:00] it's so simple and yet so profound

and compelling, and something that we're still trying to look at every day and every different realm. And in the end it's people that make up the system and the system that has all this impact. So it's really this holistic way of having to look at all of those aspects of that contribute to well-being.

Moreland-Capuia: Exactly.

Host: Anjali R.: So, you talk about the impact of workplaces and how you have a narrative and how the system all comes down to impacting a person and they have daily experiences. What [00:04:30] exactly do you mean by that?

Moreland-Capuia: Have you ever walked into a place and nobody ever had to tell you what was going on? You just stepped in and you're like, "Oh, this is what's going on here." Right? Not a word was spoken, but there's something that you feel, there's a subculture, there's subtext and you feel it. And it actually drives not only behavior, but it shapes actions, right? And then that drives outcomes. Oftentimes I'll talk with folks and I'll say it really is sort of like a cognitive behavioral therapeutic model, right?

Moreland-Capuia: So, it's this idea [00:05:00] that, I mean Descartes said it well before, I think therefore I am. So there are specific things that shape our thoughts and those thoughts dictate what we do. So if we go further upstream and we say if we want to change thoughts and actions and behaviors, we have to impact narratives. Like what if I said to you that all purple people were bad? Most folks would say, "That's ridiculous."

Moreland-Capuia: Then I asked him, I said, "But say you walked out of here today and you ran into a purple person, what would you think?" And most folks say, "Well, [00:05:30] I guess we would have to think, well, she did say that all purple people." Now I've associated something with purple people and I've called into question something that had not been put into question before. Right? So what it suggests is the power of words and narrative, and how they shape our perception and our underlying assumptions.

Moreland-Capuia: I do a lot of work in the criminal justice system. And when I had first started, initially folks were calling young people who were in the system, felons and I [00:06:00] started to think through this with them and I said, "So if you call me a felon or an offender versus someone who made a mistake, right? What's the difference?" And

the difference is one leaves the possibility and hope that you can change and the other one is so permanent or it feels permanent.

Moreland-Capuia: You are a felon versus you're a person who made a mistake and you're a justice-involved youth as opposed to a criminal. Every system has an desired outcome that they want. However, if the narrative [00:06:30] doesn't match the desired outcome, it's really and void. Right. And so if we really truly believe in change and that people can change and things can change, then we have to have the narrative to support that.

Moreland-Capuia: And not just what I'm saying to you verbally, but my policies, should also reflect that my procedures should also reflect that in my practices should reflect that.

Host: Anjali R.: Absolutely. Wow. You just hit on so many different points. [00:07:00] It's really speaks to how complex all of these issues are, but really it comes down to identity. It comes down to feeling safe. It comes down to being accepted and all of those things when you say you walk into a room and feel without a single word you can, it's the vibe. It's the culture. And at the same time it speaks to the practices and the policies and what's okay and what's not okay. We go to work every single day, five days a week, sometimes six days a week. And how we feel [00:07:30] at work, how we feel treated at work all has an impact on who we are, how we identify ourselves seems like in what we take back to our homes and families.

Host: Anjali R.: We have to look at every single layer that make up the worker. What our daily experiences and it's stress, safety on the job and how that impacts us when we go back. Does it matter who drives these narratives at work? And I guess it's a two-part question because the other part is I can also see that the narrative would affect different employees differently [00:08:00] within an organization.

Host: Anjali R.: And so, in that regard, maybe we can look at as contribution to some occupational health disparities because of how the narrative affects us. So how do we reconcile one with all of those things? And how do we bring it all together? If we had to talk about workplace building example.

Moreland-Capuia: And in any particular community or environment or workspace, there must be the conditions that support the idea that you are seen, heard, valued, appreciated, [00:08:30] accepted and belong. Because if that is the foundation, then folks feel like they're not only surviving, but that they can thrive because those are the conditions

for safety. So the first requirement for any workplace or system is to create community to create safety. And then it makes it a little bit more sure that that environment can support the things that happen outside of the institution and that happen inside the institution.

Moreland-Capuia: So, I'll give a recent example. There were a series of shootings that took [00:09:00] place of one young man that came up and it was brought up, I'll bring it up because OHSU mentioned it in their recent article. We live in it. We're in a geopolitical time where there's anti everything, anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-race, anti-everything. And it definitely does impact the people that come to work here. So while the institution can't change those things, they can do something to say to the folks who are impacted by, listen, we understand that what happened [00:09:30] may impact some folks differently. And we want you to know that if that's you, we are here with you. We want to support you. Here's a way that we can support you and here are resources.

Moreland-Capuia: That's a simple, simple way to just support the idea that the world that we live in is hard and it's impacting the folks who work for us and with us. And it's one simple way to start building community and to have people feel like they belong and to create safety, no matter what it is. Whether it's [00:10:00] our children at the border, whether it is immigration policies, whether it is wars happen. I mean there's so much happening right now.

Moreland-Capuia: People getting shot in the home, in the park, you don't feel safe anywhere. An institution has a responsibility to let people know that they see them, that they appreciate them and that they stand with them. Simple. And then to help mitigate some of that outside stuff. The narratives on the inside, they're changed too because now that I can appreciate the [00:10:30] outside influences, then I'm even that more sensitive to the things that I'm saying on the inside. So I have a heightened awareness and a heightened sense of consciousness.

Moreland-Capuia: And again, if the end goal is I want to see everyone in my institution well, because if they're well our system is well. It seems so simple, but it is so complicated because it requires folks stepping outside of the norm and stepping outside of their own little purview. So you have all these little sort of isolated [00:11:00] incidents of things and it was like if you really want this engine to run smoothly then tend to it. The check engine light has been on for four months.

Host: Anjali R.: Right?

Moreland-Capuia: Oil it up.

Host: Anjali R.: This is such an important time to be having this conversation. Alisha, I also wanted to ask, so if your organization is trying to improve the narrative that they're putting across the culture, improve their culture. What is a way that 1. They can evaluate the current [00:11:30] state of their organization 2. What sorts of approaches could they incorporate?

Host: Anjali R.: And I asked that because we can always have evidence. One part is the evidence behind it and you have evidence-based intervention. But then the other challenge to that is that organizations might adopt evidence-based effort, but other ones will say, "You know, we don't have the time for it. Why should we add this on it?" Especially if it's an that's looking at give me the ROI, for example. How is it going to pay off in the end. So what are some strategies again, [00:12:00] address both the evaluation piece and also the intervention piece?

Moreland-Capuia: Absolutely. I think it, I think that is a good question cause at the end of the day what folks are wanting to know is how will this benefit us and how will this help our organization move forward into buoy? Now I have been intentional in using words like wellness and outcomes and I want to continue to use those words because they do matter. So for any organization that wants to improve outcomes, which undoubtedly does translate into what I call the triple bottom line. And that is the mission, the money and [00:12:30] people that there has to be some intentional, thoughtful ways and how that's done.

Moreland-Capuia: So, from the very beginning, training is critical. But what we've realized in many situations is that training is not sufficient. So you can train and give knowledge, but knowledge doesn't really always translates into practice, right? Action. And so what we've learned and what I write about extensively in my textbook is there's training and then coaching, that's required afterwards. So it is how do you train and then help individuals actually [00:13:00] start to employ some of the themes.

Moreland-Capuia: How do you help folks start to operationalize some of the more theoretical things into their practice? And what I've found is that when you take the time to do the training and the coaching, training is giving someone a fish. But training and coaching is teaching folks how to fish, right? There are specific ways that you can measure

that. So the first piece is I'm doing the training and I simply want to know how well you learned it, right? So I give examples of pre and post-training questionnaires, right?

Moreland-Capuia: [00:13:30] And where I'm asking specific things, do you know about this? Do you know about that? What's your understanding of this? And to see immediately after the training if any of that understanding has shifted or changed. So that's one piece in one particular measure. Then with the coaching piece, which is a more sustained model, I'm assessing over time again with more questionnaires essentially saying, "How has this knowledge been employed? How have you been able to employ it and has it changed your practice?" Right? Which is the second piece.

Moreland-Capuia: And then the third [00:14:00] piece is that it will impact a particular outcome within a system. Like I'm working on a project now working with residents who are learning trauma-informed training and basically practices and approaches. They're going to be a train the trainer. So I'm looking at right now about how effective I was as a trainer to help just teach them to knowledge, which initial results look very incredible and promising.

Moreland-Capuia: And then the second piece is the coaching that I'll continue to do where I'm looking specifically at how they're able to take the neurobiology [00:14:30] of trauma and how folks operate or don't operate when they're afraid. How that translates into how they change some of their practices and policies and then we'll be looking at patient outcomes. So because you now understand more and you now know how to use what you understand because there's a difference, right? Is reading and comprehension, what impact would that have on patient care?

Moreland-Capuia: So, their multiple examples and ways and means outlined in the textbook so you don't have to have all the answers, you just have to have the will to do it and the resources right [00:15:00] there.

Host: Anjali R.: Right. What we do here at the institute, it's total worker health, right? It's exactly all of those things. Total worker health is about safety and wellness and really feeling well and like you belong. And being able to not just come to work and be productive, but also thriving on the job and then who you are as a person, all of that. I think we talked, for example, so much about initiatives within the organization, right? Organizational culture, positive culture that goes well beyond anything that we can put a finger on.

Host: Anjali R.: And when we talk about things [00:15:30] like diversity, equity, inclusion, I think it's a challenge for organizations to address these pieces without being aware of what's happening in our political climate. Because it's all such a system level occurrence. It impacts us everywhere. For example, when we talk about migrant workers who are experiencing either direct or indirect effects of these changes, how can narratives, like you said, and I think it's really helpful. Because you said these are things that organizations can draw attention to and say, "If you need the help we can give [00:16:00] it to you."

Moreland-Capuia: Exactly.

Host: Anjali R.: Right. And so in a way we can control everything, but certainly it sounds from what you're saying, that organizations can make their own policies and practices and define and develop their cultures in a way that facilitate belonging, that will help people feel like they are welcome where they are. Are there any other examples or tips or anything that you feel like in your own experience have helped organizations craft an inclusive workplace [00:16:30] narrative?

Moreland-Capuia: Yes, to that. And I want to back up and just contextualize it and build a little bit of frame around that. I think it is a misperception and maybe a false notion for any organization or institution to anticipate that their members would come and check their pain and stresses at the door. I think that's [inaudible 00:16:50]. So that assumption I think is far gone. The reality is that folks are human beings and they feel what they feel and much of the trauma [00:17:00] that is exacerbated outside of work is further exacerbated and compounded in the workplace because people are treated as though they're invisible.

Moreland-Capuia: So really what a lot of the policies around creating community is about is reducing invisibility. In doing so, it is, again, the assumption that something has happened, will happen, or is happening to folks. And so there's a daily check in. Right? And so I'll give a specific example. So I wrote a book [00:17:30] in this book, I have a wellness checklist that's called strong at the broken places and it is, it's this idea that we all have a few cracks in those cracks are actually meaningful because they let the light in. And so it's about this reframe.

Moreland-Capuia: It's like an eight-part assessment of wellness. So it goes through the multiple levels like the eight stages of wellness as outlined by

SAMHSA actually. So it looks like psychological, spiritual, physical. And so what would it look like if every institution with each of the... [00:18:00] We had each of the managers with their employees do this eight-part wellness assessment and survey, which would reveal to both the employer and the employee things that they could potentially help to support greater wellness.

Host: Anjali R.: And SAMHSA is?

Moreland-Capuia: Oh, I'm sorry, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Sorry, that's very good. No alphabet soup today. Although soup does sound good. So it asks a question about whether how many times a week you eat at your desk, right? [00:18:30] So it says, do you take time to eat somewhere else other than your desk? And a lot of folks will answer, "I pretty much eat at my desk." And so one particular respectful healthy challenge that I have for you is can you take, can you in this next two months, can you at least take one day a week where you are not sitting at your desk? And then we'll come back and we'll check in about that.

Moreland-Capuia: Because we know that it's a part of overall wellness, right? So there are specific tips that I actually do give and practical guidelines and examples that [00:19:00] any institution can take on and use that has been demonstrated as being helpful because now that we've done this assessment, now I've got some information about what I can do to better support you in being well and staying well, and sustaining wellness. So that's one particular example.

Host: Anjali R.: That's great. Again, every question, I feel like we touched on so many, so many great points, but the reason why I was thinking smart a lot through this one because we at our workplace we take breaks, [00:19:30] we get lunch and sometimes like, "Oh, I have so much to do, I don't want to do that." And what we think of just taking a break really is so restorative. It's beyond that and that's when we all get a chance to sit down and ask each other, "What was the weekend like? How's your week been? Are you doing something fun?"

Host: Anjali R.: And I think those simple check-ins, like you said, goes such a long way. And that's one of our... I'll bring it back to one of our trainings also as part of total worker health where it's just simple supervisor trainings like that, that [00:20:00] really focus on simple things like asking, supervising, "What's your day like, how is it going? How's your family?" Not in a way that's intrusive, but just saying how's

everything going is sometimes it's just a loaded question especially when you're doing so many different things, trying to meet deadlines, but I think it can kind of ground you and send to you in a way that replenishes your energy maybe in a way.

Host: Anjali R.: And I think that's... That's what I love about this conversation. But the other thing I also wanted to highlight, it takes many people, right? [00:20:30] So it really takes a village for this sort of a narrative to craft a good positive, holistic narrative. And it's not just a manager, it's not just the employee, it's not just a colleague, it's everybody. It's a whole system. And I think that's one of the things that is useful when we talk about total worker health and change and positive change at the organization level.

Host: Anjali R.: It's really at all the different levels from the individual all the way up to the entire because you belong in a whole system. I'd love to have [00:21:00] you talk about your book as well, but this... Because I think it kind of goes into our concluding segment, which is where we like to leave our listeners with some basic pointers and tips or even resources that they can say, "How do I even tackle this?" I'm a small organization or I'm a really large organization. How do I have an influence over how the employee that I never see as a leader? Maybe I see him or her once or twice maybe during evaluations or maybe I don't see them at all. How do I impact their well-being [00:21:30] day to day?

Moreland-Capuia: And there are just basic things to go back to your initial point, even walking into your building and saying good morning to every single person. Good morning, good morning. There is research that shows that that actually increases morale. It increases a sense of community. So these are very simple things that when they're done consistently and genuinely, they work. And any change that's going to be meaningful to support, sustain wellness over time, that has to happen from the bottom up and the top [00:22:00] down.

Moreland-Capuia: So, it has to be, everybody has to be committed to that effort. And so when you think about it, I do think it's interesting where people are like, "Well, there's so much to do" and there's a subcultural shift. Because what I'm talking about is really a subcultural shift. And when you talk about subcultural shifts or organizational shifts, folks are like, "Oh my gosh, that's just too much."

Moreland-Capuia: But then you think about it and you're like, if I can get everyone to just move an inch and if I've got 20 people moving an inch 20 times

an itch, that's pretty significant. Right? So, it's the incremental changes that [00:22:30] can be made up to that end as a resource to think about, because you're right when you think about it, it seems colossal. It's like I've got to meet these particular administrative deadlines, I've got to do this and that and the other, and this feels like one extra thing to do. And what I contend is that, no, it's not what one extra thing to do.

Moreland-Capuia: It's something you bake into the system so it becomes like breathing, therefore it's not an extra effort and everyone is buoyed. I have a textbook that actually does all of this that culminates all of the research on wellness, [00:23:00] all of the research on trauma, the neuroscience, but then it talks about, it gives very practical examples and solutions to how any organization who's committed to this whole idea of creating a sustaining wellness, what they can do.

Moreland-Capuia: And I'm pretty proud of it, which I cannot stand a boring textbook. I can't stand a boring lecture or a boring conversation. [crosstalk 00:23:20] So the book is entitled Training for Change and then the subtitle is Transforming Systems [00:23:30] to be Trauma-Informed, Culturally Responsive and Neuroscientifically Focused. It's published by Springer. It came out August 22nd.

Moreland-Capuia: All major bookstores have it. Amazon has it, Springer has it. You can search it and buy it, you can buy it on my website. But the cool thing about it gives you the research cause I think it's important to be able to attach it to data, right? So these are not made up things. It talks about the system, then it talks about the person and then it talks about how we help to impact the person so that [00:24:00] the person can impact the system.

Moreland-Capuia: And at the end of the day, that's what we want, right? For more efficient, healthy whole systems where everybody can thrive. It talks about how to create community specific examples. So I've given you some of them, I'm like, I'm not going to give it all away for free, buy the book, but there are specific practical examples and exercises that you can use immediately. You don't have to make them up.

Moreland-Capuia: If you're a teacher, you could benefit from it. If you are a parent, you could benefit. A healthcare system, any workplace, any system that is committed to overall wellness [00:24:30] would benefit from this textbook. So super excited about it.

Host: Anjali R.: Great. Thank you so much. I think this has been such a great talk and I feel like we have so many more questions we could ask but maybe that can be a second part.

Moreland-Capuia: A part two.

Host: Anjali R.: A part two, maybe. Thank you so much, Alisha. This has been wonderful.

Moreland-Capuia: Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it. Stuffy at all.

Helen Schuckers: You're listening to What's Work Got To Do With It, [00:25:00] your go-to resource on all things, workplace safety, health and well-being. This has been an episode of our podcast series where we invite you into the conversation as we discuss how our workplace conditions like work hours, occupational stress, job safety and other issues affect our lives at home and at work.

Helen Schuckers: We go into the science behind it all and talk about what we can do to reduce work-related risk and promote well-being. Thanks for joining us. This podcast is a production of the Oregon Institute of Occupational [00:25:30] Health Sciences and is hosted and directed by Helen Schuckers, Sam Greenspan and Anjali Rameshbabu.

Helen Schuckers: Our mission at the Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences is to improve the lives of workers through biomedical and occupational research. Home to over 75 scientists and research staff. The Institute explores a range of questions related to the prevention of work-related injury and disease and promotion of health in the workplace.

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