

The culture club

A workplace culture of trust and respect motivates staff and energises the company

Whenver two or more people come together with a shared purpose, they form a culture with its own written and unwritten rules of behaviour. Our families, workplaces and communities all have cultures, and these have a tremendous, though rarely recognised, impact on our behaviour as individuals.

In a high-pressure workplace culture (where every hour must be accounted for), now – more than ever – industry needs to value and recognise every employee and do its utmost to get the maximum from them.

The move away from corporate hierarchies has led to a new emphasis on motivational and communication skills, rather than impersonal 'process' management. This is a move towards 'enabling', rather than enforcing or administering, which in turn means taking an entirely different view of each employee's talents and how best to deploy them.

Creating a healthy organisation involves developing a culture of trust and respect, where recognition, flexibility, control, good communication and balance are all valued.

WHAT IS 'HEALTHY'?

A 'healthy' workplace culture is one where enterprise thrives. Enterprise is what makes organisations successful: encouraging them to look forward not back and constantly seek new opportunities. Enterprise prospers where employees are highly motivated and hungry for success.

"The move away from corporate hierarchies has led to a new emphasis on motivational skills"

It is also a culture where everyone works for the common good; ie, the success of the company. A business is like an engine – if one part goes wrong, it has a knock-on effect on the rest.

The aim should be for an inclusive culture where everyone feels part of the business, from the office cleaner to the CEO; where every person is just as important as the next and all employees work towards common goals for the overall success of the business.

In a healthy culture, team spirit is strong and employees support each other. 'An organisation's greatest asset is its people' has been a business mantra for years. However, companies do not have the time to simply pay lip service to this axiom. History has shown us that people respond to effective management and it is a manager's role to get the most out of their team. Where peer group support is strong, team spirit will also be strong.

Praise, thanks and recognition too must be the norm. Managers have to be accountable for the climate they create. It is a manager's role to build a 'listening culture', to have an 'open door' policy and to be behind it – or at least be accessible – when the employee needs them. If they achieve this they will increase performance, raise productivity and boost profitability.

Closing the effort/reward gap is another way to improve workplace culture. This means making sure that employees are recognised and rewarded appropriately for the effort they put in. The best way to make this happen is to ask employees what would make them feel recognised. Employers are sometimes surprised by what they hear. Many people will say it is as simple as saying 'thank you', 'good morning', asking them how they are and actually waiting long enough for a response!

Environment is also a key element – and the healthier the better. Staff wellbeing must be a primary consideration – internally and externally. Health screening programmes should be a part of normal everyday life, and the workplace needs to feel to staff more like a community than simply the place where they earn their living.

In a healthy culture, employees feel included within the vision of the business and have a sense of belonging. We spend at least half our waking hours at work so it is important to feel comfortable and secure in the workplace.

A warm, friendly and nurturing culture brings out the best qualities in employees, making them feel like they really do want to come to work and give of their best.

THE IMPACT

How does a healthy workplace culture benefit an organisation?

It enables sustainable success and growth: when organisational health is approached from a cultural perspective – rather than taking a programme approach

– there is a much greater likelihood of effecting employee wellbeing (mental, physical, spiritual, emotional and social).

When employees 'feel good' they are more energetic, creative, innovative and productive – qualities that are essential to an organisation's competitive advantage. These qualities lead to a healthier organisation.

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A sense of community, a shared vision and a positive outlook hold groups and organisations together and enable them to be highly productive and creative.

Staff are flexible and creative, and absenteeism is low: when morale is low, energy levels will be low and employees will be more prone to illness and taking days off.

Staff retention levels are high: many employers are concerned about attracting and retaining employees through the predicted labour shortage of the future. This is a challenge that many organisations may not see as a 'wellness' issue, but creating a healthier culture, and an environment that attracts and keeps the best talent is a smart solution to the problem.

Employees who feel empowered and respected not only benefit personally but are more productive and less costly to their employer in terms of health and benefits.

Profitable performance is more easily achievable: performance and productivity are ongoing challenges for UK plc. In order to overcome these challenges, employers need to truly understand what motivates their staff, and equip managers with the skills to turn this into increased performance.

These are just some of the major benefits of a healthy workplace culture. In the next article (March) I will look in detail at the major components involved in making it a reality.

Carole Spiers, MIHPE MISMA, is a business stress consultant