



Healthy and happy

A healthy workplace culture – the key to sustainable success

By Carole Spiers

Whenever 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 upon our behaviour as individuals.

Each cultural environment provides a unique set of standards to which we must adapt. Our patterns of behaviour change dramatically from cultural context to cultural context. At work, for example, we are expected to behave

in accordance with certain social standards, while our home life is generally more relaxed. We may of course choose not to behave in accordance with these cultures, but if we do so we must be prepared for ongoing consequences

In a high-pressure workplace culture where every hour must be closely accounted for, now, more than ever before, industry needs to value and recognise each and every employee and do the 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 – towards 'enabling' rather than enforcing or administering. Now is the time to take an entirely fresh view of employees' talents and how to deploy them more effectively.

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

What is a healthy workplace culture?

A 'healthy' workplace culture is a culture where enterprise thrives. Enterprise is what makes organisations successful. Looking forward not back and constantly seeking new opportunities. Enterprise prospers where employees are highly motivated and hungry for success

The aim should be for an inclusive culture where everyone feels a part of the business – from the office cleaner to the CEO; where everyone is just as important as the next person; 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 said for many years. Industry does 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 be strong.

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

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 sure this happens 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 to staff the workplace needs to feel more like a community than simply the place where they earn their living.

What are the major components?

Human capital

Organisations have to move away from an over-reliance on systems and processes, and adopt approaches that are more successful in engaging employees. The missing ingredient in achieving effective performance management processes is frequently the fact that they are not motivating or inspiring, and often also lack leadership.

Team empowerment

It is vital for managers to engage with their teams, but it has to be recognised that they cannot always be all things to all people. Sometimes they have to be authoritarian and sometimes a 'good listener'.

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Managers need a comprehensive toolkit of skills and they need to have an 'open door' policy to encourage a two-way dialogue between themselves and the members of their team. It is necessary to get 'buy-in' from their team in order to establish loyalty and commitment in return. Whilst it may not be possible to pay more wages, praise and recognition will encourage employees into 'wanting' to do more for their manager and to give of their best. The team that engages – the team that is inspirational and motivational – will have the edge over its competitors.

Line and middle managers spend a tremendous amount of time dealing with underperformers, yet middle management does not always have the people skills to manage large teams. Identifying the needs of individual managers and providing coaching is therefore vital if they are to be able to fulfil their role and provide regular constructive feedback (and not just focus on attempting to remedy employees' 'weaknesses').

Seeking to understand the reasons underlying poor performance and address the causes is an important part of a manager's role. It is necessary to ensure that performance contracts are two-way and include an agreement as to what a manager is going to contribute to enable the employee to be successful.

Effective managers will stop focusing on the past at the expense of the future, and be accountable for the climate they create. Spending more time exploring individual needs and career aspirations is a key element in securing employee engagement and the retention of high performers. Managers should also review their approach – and make sure that what they measure encourages the behaviours and performance they want to see.

Empowering managers to manage staff and take responsibility for their performance review is a day-to-day responsibility and should not just happen once a year at the annual appraisal. This also means handling the team as a human entity – encouraging the 'feel good' factor – and allocating roles and responsibilities correctly.

Effective communication

The culture of the company has to be right for communications to be effective. It is important to have a two-way dialogue between employer and employees; between the CEO and the Board; and between the Board and line managers.

Effective communication has been found to be a weakness in many organisations – from the largest to the smallest, and not enough time and training is given to the subject. Middle managers often find themselves promoted to a position with responsibility for a team without the necessary communication skills to manage that team effectively.

Listening and non-verbal communication are equally as important as verbal communication. The careful listener can often identify potential stressors at an early stage and manage them accordingly – reducing the impact on the organisation. Key examples of these skills include:

- Inspiration through leadership
- Establishing a two-way dialogue

- Effective networking
- Non-verbal cues that can stimulate revealing questions or answers
- Formal study of body language and its rich, powerful vocabulary
- How to use silence – unspoken dialogue that may be full of meaning
- Effective listening as an active problem-solving and team-building skill

Creativity

Creativity is the lifeblood of any organisation. It leads to innovation which in turn leads to competitive edge. All too often, however, creative thinking is seen as the preserve of departments such as sales and marketing or research and development. Everyone has the capacity to come up with good ideas, but this means being prepared to step into the unknown, and dispense with the accepted rules of business which tend to be 'that's the way we do things around here...' or 'we've tried that before and it didn't work'. It is time to challenge

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conventional wisdom and not to let old or outdated processes and procedures obstruct the ways of new thinking.

Praise and appraisal

Nothing can be more important than giving praise for a job well done. Regular appraisal identifies strengths and weaknesses and allows for assessment of CPD and on-the-job training. Appraisal is a two-way process that enables the manager and employee to agree targets for performance and have a plan to work to.

Recognition and reward

Being recognised as an important cog in the business machine is almost as important as the reward on offer. Recognition and reward have to be commensurate with the task, but undervaluing skills at all levels can lead to low productivity and poor morale. Providing benefit packages over and above the basic salary is another way of expressing recognition and enhancing reward.

Effective corporate goal setting

To be effective within an organisation, individuals need to be aware of the corporate goals and if possible have a stake in achieving them. Bonuses and performance-related pay are great incentives for employees at all levels.

High morale

The morale of an organisation is fundamental to its success. High morale suggests a well motivated and energised workforce that is keen to succeed. Employees will be committed to meeting and even exceeding targets when morale is high and it is therefore an essential ingredient for sustainable success.

Positive attitudes and common goals

If you think a goal is achievable then the chances are it is.

Positive attitude is everything in a successful organisation. The moment negativity creeps in, creativity and motivation go out of the window.

Positive affirmations from the boardroom to the shop floor give an organisation every chance of succeeding and meeting its targets. A cohesive team will also have common goals and a positive attitude. Team members will support each other – and the business.

The DNA of a happy workforce

If you love what you do, then it won't matter so much if you work harder and longer hours. The long hours culture is here to stay and the only way employers will get more from their employees is by ensuring that they are a part of the growth process of the company, that their contribution is valued, and that they are needed and valued for what they do.

A happy worker is a productive worker. Enabling employees to enjoy their jobs and find meaning at work is a more effective method of improving performance than the use of incentives such as wage enhancement. Happy workers are more open-minded, tolerant and trustworthy, and more likely to contribute to team spirit and social harmony.

A life consumed with work will make GDP increase, but at the same time will lead to far less happiness. Constant work will lead to the demise of family life, and in time, the demand for greater efficiency and higher productivity will serve to dehumanise society.

Learning to be happy and choosing one's attitude in order to increase one's chances of success

What is the link between happiness and success? To be successful you really have to enjoy what you do, and the happier it makes you the more you want to do it and the more successful you become.

Happiness at work is fundamental to success. If you're happy



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you'll try harder, work longer and be less ill. That's good for you and for your business. Happiness at work is a basic ingredient of success, for both individuals and businesses: it is a fundamental business driver. Successful businesses understand the essential links between job happiness, being effective and profit. Happy employees are engaged, committed and productive; they are creative and focused on achieving the best outcomes. They don't waste their efforts complaining – and their attitude inspires and encourages others.

Being paid a fair rate for the job we do is important to all of us, but when it comes to achieving genuine happiness at work, money is surprisingly low on the priority list. 'Creative' fulfilment, good relationships with colleagues and the knowledge that we are doing a 'meaningful' job invariably outrank mere salary packages on the job satisfaction wish-list

Managing the aspirations of those at work

Organisations need to encourage employees to reach beyond their fears, by understanding and relishing their role, and the positive contributions they can – and will – make.

Entrepreneurship – where a motivational and engaging culture unleashes potential

Inspiring people is not easy – for most of us it takes time, effort and persistence. Few of us have the outstanding qualities of inspirational figures such as Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela. Nevertheless, we all have the ability to inspire employees in small yet meaningful ways. And when people are inspired, they become more enthusiastic, motivated and engaged, which invariably improves their performance. Inspiration is not a management tool that can be readily manipulated. It results from the creation of a positive psychological and emotional connection with an individual – it is about winning hearts as well as minds.

Management have to buy into 'inspiration' as there might not be instant results. And it is far better to coach someone to do a task than to tell them – this will have longer-lasting results and stand the test of time.

We have to use the wisdom we have learnt from the past and take it into the future. Legislation will not be enough to get to this healthy culture – the only way to get to it is via people, because motivated = inspired = involved teams that grow successful businesses.

Developing the leaders of the future

Understanding the importance of work/life balance and how to achieve it is a key management skill. Work/life balance needs to be implemented as part of an organisation's legal framework and company policy – as does building resilience.

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.

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 retention levels are high

Many employers cite their concern 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 is the best solution to this problem.

We are heading into an employee's market for the first time in decades, giving employees the freedom to choose where they work. Creating an environment that attracts and keeps the best talent is a smart solution to this issue.

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 costs.

Profitable performance is more easily achievable

Performance and productivity are ongoing challenges. In order to overcome these, employers need to truly understand what motivates their employees, and equip managers with the skills to turn this into increased performance.

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 odd days off.

The keys to a healthy workplace culture
Communication

New communication skills to motivate individual talent include 'active listening' techniques to identify and rectify grievances; understanding how a single word at the right time can turn around problem situations; techniques for effective announcing, interviewing and cautioning; getting important answers without appearing to interrogate; and defusing conflicts through key phrases that keep dialogue moving.

Employee engagement

First Contact Counselling teams – where volunteers from the organisation are trained to listen effectively to employees' problems – are just one example of how employees can be encouraged to commit 'more' of themselves for the benefit of their colleagues, their customers, their employer and the community. Employee engagement also means changing the attitudes and mindsets that hold people back from living their passion and realising their dreams.

Individual empowerment

Creative self-development is the new dynamic of career progress. Individual empowerment requires a greater understanding of the impact of positive attitude on individual and group performance; an increased resistance to those who

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sneer at effort, including each individual's own 'internal critic'; and the use of proven strategies including mind-mapping, problem reframing and lateral thinking.

New ways of working

Flexibility is the key to success

Organisations often lose valuable talent because of an unwillingness to be flexible, or to alter work patterns in order to cater for particular needs such as those of the disabled. Home working and buddying schemes – where new recruits are provided with an informal mentor – are just two examples of the new approaches that need to be taken.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Demonstrating a commitment to society isn't just about social conscience or doing what's right, it makes good business sense – helping to attract and retain the best employees, influencing customers and buyers, and powering long-term success.

A 'working together' culture – not an 'us and them'

Individuals need to celebrate and derive happiness from the talent of both themselves and their colleagues, together with the successes that can only be achieved by working together. Winning the 'war for talent' also means attracting the best and brightest recruits by improving the organisation's cultural understanding of diverse mindsets.

Ultimately, in a healthy workplace 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 that we feel comfortable and secure in the workplace. A warm, friendly and nurturing culture brings out the best qualities in employees – making them feel they really do want to come to work and give of their best.

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