

5 trends shaping great company culture

By  Helene Vermaak

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I believe that in 2020, we will see companies placing a greater focus on leaders becoming more intentional, purposeful and systematic about how they author, create and drive company culture.



Image source: Getty Images

Organisational culture is imperative to creating companies where people want to show up, rather than them having to show up. When we talk about company culture, this encompasses the employee value proposition (EVP) and employee experience, creating a psychologically safe environment where leaders are coaches and an atmosphere where people can support one another, while being open, honest and accountable.

I see the below five HR trends becoming evident throughout the course of next year:

#1: Culture by design

Leadership will continue to acknowledge that workplace culture has a significant impact on performance, employee engagement and the ability to retain and attract talent. Boards will actively become more involved in guiding management teams on the building of a company culture. Skilled, informed and innovative leadership is vital to creating a strong, vibrant workplace culture that supports all employees. The company culture should be a shared vision and mission; a culture by design rather than default.

Great workplace cultures don't happen by accident, they are designed.



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#2: The undeniable link between the employee experience and the customer experience

Leaders are recognising that the integrated employee experience is as valuable and can have as much, if not more of an impact on the customer experience strategy. The employee experience is the culmination of all interactions and encounters that individuals have during their tenure with an organisation, from their initial interactions to their exit, and beyond. The articulation of a differentiated employee experience, coordinated with all aspects of the work, workplace, and employee experience will be the differentiating factor. Positive employee experience drives positive outcomes, including engagement, employee retention and customer satisfaction. This in turn drives performance and shareholder returns. Inevitably, employees will cast their reality onto customers. The value an organisation wants their customers to feel, must first be given to the team.

#3 Psychological safety is the key lever

With so many organisations relying on effective ways of working together (especially those with knowledge workers), it's not surprising that psychological safety is getting a seat at the boardroom table, alongside employee experience and workplace culture.

Psychological safety in the workplace is about providing a safe space for employees to be themselves. This is characterised by interpersonal trust and mutual respect, so that individuals are comfortable expressing themselves.

Amy Edmondson, a leading Harvard Business School researcher on the topic, says

“ *psychological safety describes perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context such as a workplace.* ”

Psychologically safe employees feel confident that their team members won't embarrass or punish them if they admit a mistake, ask a question, or propose an idea. It makes it possible to give tough feedback and have difficult conversations without the need to tiptoe around the truth. Creating a psychologically safe environment isn't about being nice. It's about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes, and learning from each other.

Leaders will continue to realise that if they want commitment from employees so that they can innovate and solve problems, they have to be vigilant about creating a culture in which people feel safe, seen, heard, and respected.



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#4 Fear of speaking up vs Fear of not speaking up

Cultures that embrace the behaviours of honesty and transparency among employees find that those behaviours extend into

the company's dealings with customers and partners and, in turn, help to establish a trustworthy reputation.

A great company culture sets the foundations for real, tangible business growth. It's based on honest, productive conversations and helps companies to identify issues and collectively form resolutions. Leaders will continue to realise the importance of operationalising their values into teachable and observable behaviours that are used to train employees and hold them accountable. Behaviours such as "speaking up in moments of disagreement and disappointment" has a disproportionate impact on the employee experience and organisational performance.

This is about more than making employees feel heard. In many instances, it's about getting mission critical input and data directly from customers, the factory floor, or the front lines of the sales force. When the news isn't good, it's even more important to ensure that the people who are brave enough to raise the red flag aren't penalised for their honesty.

Companies who invest in building a corporate culture that values employee happiness, promotes honest dialogue, and uses technology to enable employees to collaborate more effectively and efficiently, will see those investments pay dividends over the long run.

#5 Managers will evolve from bosses to coaches

The best managers focus on the quality and quantity of their interactions with team members. Coaching relationships require more frequent, personalised interactions than are typically the case under more hierarchical forms of management.

Maximizing an individual's potential begins with knowing their strengths and building careers around this. Organisations need to develop these strengths rather than focussing on fixing the weaknesses of employees. What people really want is career development and a manager who takes an interest. This will help transform the culture.

Nothing works in the absence of great managers. Leadership doesn't work in the absence of great managers.

ABOUT HELENE VERMAAK

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