

## HR Strategy

# The DNA of a healthy workplace culture

*Carole Spiers* considers the factors that are responsible for employees achieving their maximum performance.



**C**reating a healthy workplace culture means making a fresh evaluation of the job description and talents of every person in the workplace and how to utilise them more effectively. Organisations need to move away from an over-reliance on IT, systems and processes, and adopt attitudes that are more successful in employee engagement. They need to value the richness of cultural diversity and to exploit the range of abilities that are already within the organisation.

### Team empowerment

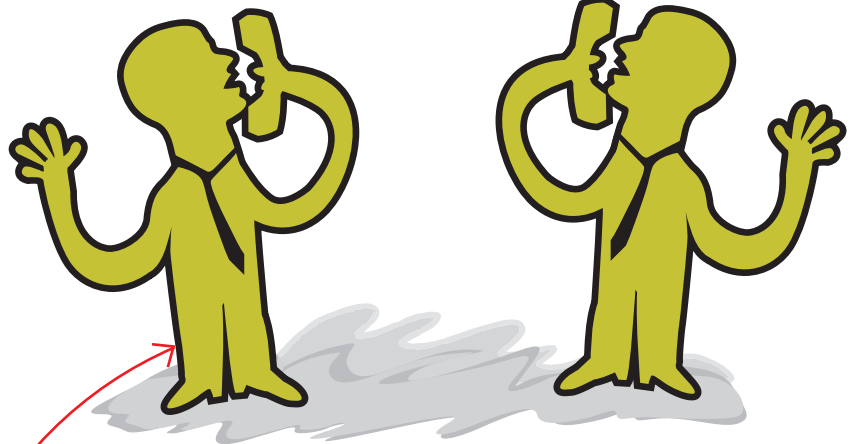
It is vital for managers to fully engage with their teams, but it has to be recognised that they cannot always be 'all things to all people'. Whilst they need to be firm but fair, they must always strive to be 'good listeners'.

Managers need a comprehensive toolkit of skills as well as having an 'open door' policy to encourage a two-way dialogue between themselves and members of their team.

It is always necessary to get 'buy-in' from them in order to establish loyalty and commitment in return. Whilst it may not be possible to pay more money, praise and recognition will encourage employees into 'wanting' to do more for their manager and for the organisation. Both line and middle managers reportedly spend a considerable amount of their day dealing with underperforming employees, yet middle management do not always have the necessary people-skills to manage their teams effectively.

Identifying the needs of individual managers and providing necessary coaching is therefore vital if they are to be able to fulfill their role and provide regular constructive feedback as well as being proactive, instead of always being reactive to daily problems.

Seeking to understand the reasons underlying poor performance and to address the causes thereof is an important part of a manager's role. It is necessary to ensure that a performance contract is a two-way agreement and includes details as to how a manager will contribute in enabling an



employee to achieve his/her maximum performance.

### Employee engagement

An 'engaged' employee is one who is fully involved in and enthusiastic about his or her work. Spending more time exploring individual needs and career aspirations is a key element in securing employee engagement and the retention of high performers. Empowering managers to manage staff and take responsibility for their performance review is a regular responsibility. This also means handling the team as a human entity - encouraging the 'feel good' factor- and allocating roles and responsibilities correctly.

### Effective communication

Communication within the company has to be effective at all levels, in order to attain efficient understanding and appreciation of goals, targets and deadlines etc. It is important to have a two-way dialogue between management and staff; 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 issue. Middle managers often find themselves promoted to a position with responsibility for a team without having 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 and therefore reduce the impact on the organisation.

### Creativity and innovation

Creativity and innovation is the lifeblood of any organisation and it can be stimulated by effective leadership. The mission of every leader should be to search continually for ideas and programmes that are superior to those already in existence and which can lead to a competitive edge. However, all too often, creative thinking is seen as the preserve of departments such as sales and marketing or research and development. Creative leaders have a mindset that enables creativity to happen, as if by chance.

Management needs to foster creativity and involve their teams with the challenges of the organisation. Creativity is contagious and ideas need to be nurtured. Formal brainstorming sessions can be established with individuals taking ownership to provide fresh insight into business challenges and solutions.

### Praise and appraisal

Nothing can be more important than giving praise for a job well done. A regular appraisal identifies strengths and weaknesses and allows for assessment of CPD and on-the-job training. An appraisal is a two-way

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process which enables the manager and employee to agree targets for performance and have an agreed work plan. Whilst an appraisal should be an ongoing process, it is also necessary to have a formal timetable for review.

### Recognition and reward

Being valued and recognised is an essential element within a healthy workplace culture and almost as important as the monetary reward on offer. Recognition and reward have to be commensurate with the task, but undervaluing skills at any level 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 wherever 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 and competitive advantage.

### Corporate inspiration

Team members need to feel that they are working for an organisation that is not only successful but inspirational - a place where others would seek to work if they had the opportunity. Its name and image

should suggest distinction, both internally and externally. The user benefits of the company's products and services should be made known to all employees, at all levels. There should also be clear evidence of high ethical standards in all the company's dealings. Increasingly, this extends to social responsibility in the outside world. In commercial competition, employees should still feel that they, and the organisation, have integrity.

### Anti-stress interventions

Stress needs to be managed from the boardroom right throughout the organisation. CEOs should attend stress management boardroom briefings so that they can fully appreciate that work stress can damage profitability as well as the health and safety of employees. A structured approach will be needed in order to grow a healthy workplace culture which in turn will ensure the sustainable competitive advantage of the business.

Resilience is also important to individuals at a personal level. Those managers and employees facing an uncertain future will need all the inner strength they can muster to energise themselves to take advantage of changing circumstances. Strengthening personal resilience will help retain performance levels.

Employers, faced with making changes to their staffing levels, will need to maintain a concern for their staff when they leave for reputational and sound business reasons, for there may be times when businesses and services need to recruit the same skilled employees once more from a shrinking pool of expertise.

### Positive attitudes and common goals

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

attitude is everything in a successful organisation. The moment negativity creeps in, creativity and motivation rush out! Positive affirmations from the boardroom to the workforce give an organisation more chance of succeeding and meeting its targets. A cohesive team will also have common goals and a positive attitude as team members will support both each other and the business.

### Corporate wellbeing

Organisations need to address not only their employees' cognitive capacity but also their physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing in order to fully gain the benefit of those capacities. A successful approach to sustained high performance must consider the person as a whole, addressing all these factors.

### Corporate entrepreneurship

Employees need to start working in a socially entrepreneurial manner; identifying opportunity for and championing socially responsible activity, in addition to helping the business achieve its business targets.

### Embrace diversity

Organisations can be enriched through the wealth of cultural differences there are within them but, again, this needs to be exploited in a way that everyone gains an advantage or benefit.

Organisations can implement a scheme of healthy workplace ambassador champions who will live and breathe the culture of the organisation and bring sustainable success to the business. It is not complicated to grow a healthy culture but it does need to be a priority in the minds of senior board members to ensure that it is followed through at all levels throughout the organisation.