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Myths about workplace culture

A manufactured culture creates more resentment than inspiration.



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An inspiring workplace culture encourages employees to do exceptional work.

Many leaders have a tough time accepting that it's up to their employees to bring the most critical assets to an organization—creativity, compassion, innovation, ownership, and outside-the-box thinking.

Culture drives employee performance



As a manager, you can force those behaviors by creating key performance indicators (KPIs). Or you can create an inviting culture that will encourage employees to bring those behaviors to work. In the end, the organization is the sum of its employees' choices, and culture is the key to driving exceptional employee performance.

However, in the pursuit of engaging employees and creating an inviting culture, organizations often fall into several traps that result in creating a manufactured culture that produces more resentment than inspiration. Here are three common misconceptions companies often have about creating an inspiring culture.

Culture is not a formula

Managers at a company were told to follow a culture checklist created by an employee engagement firm. One of the items on the checklist stated, "employees who were told that they do a good job at a frequency of once in seven days report a higher engagement level." The checklist forced managers to say "good job" even for silly actions that were not worth the praise. Employees quickly realized that a formula is being followed and the praise was inauthentic. Instead of creating an inspiring culture, the manager praise resulted in employee cynicism.

It's a risky endeavor to follow formulas produced by an employee engagement firm. Culture is not created by following a checklist. Employees resent a formulaic approach that lacks authenticity and intention. Beware of the easy fixes and shortcuts that seek to create an authentic culture.

Culture is not a KPI

I recently had a client ask for my interpretation of their company's employee engagement study. When I looked at the results, I immediately knew they were concerned about their 37% response rate.

When the response rate is that low, it's clear the organization lacks an inspiring culture. The client was trying to force culture through KPIs.

If you want to create an inspiring culture, engage in a dialogue with your employees, and act on their feedback. Positive results will follow when your employees see the differences that emerge from the dialogue you created.



Culture starts with an individual not a committee

Asking a committee to create a workplace culture is the equivalent of asking 10 accountants to perform stand-up comedy. Creating a vision for culture requires a leader who understands its importance and shares a passion for creating an inspiring culture.

Find a leader who is truly convinced that an inspiring culture will drive better results in the organization. Many leaders do not believe in this equation. Instead, they view culture as a nice-to-have endeavor while they focus on the “real” work of achieving their goals. However, those leaders fail to see that their goals will be achieved by employees inspired by culture to deliver exceptional performance over average performance.

Exceptional employee work makes organizations stronger

An organization is the sum of its employees' choices. Every decision, program, email, interaction, product, and service call is an opportunity for employees to provide exceptional work or an average performance. The more employees deliver exceptional work every day, the stronger your organizational will become. Culture is often the reason employees choose to deliver exceptional work.

Every organization has a culture. The question is what type of culture does your organization have? An inspiring culture will accelerate success but a cynical culture will slow down growth. Does your culture invite employees to choose exceptional work over mediocrity? The real formula for a successful culture is infusing humanity into your organization's decisions and behaviors and focusing everyone on customer impact creation and not just following the processes. When employees are part of a human-centric culture with a focus on making a difference, they will rise to the occasion.

Organizations that want to create a culture of exceptional performance need to stop hiding behind formulas. Make your workplace culture personal and your employees will respond.