cezanne™

2022:
The Death of
Company Culture?

A report into the state of work culture.

1. Introduction

A company's culture could perhaps be described as it's 'soul'. It's the values it holds dear, the behaviours it considers vital for success, and the shared vision and goals for what it ultimately wants to achieve. Basically, it's what makes a company unique.

And the power of company culture shouldn't be underestimated. A healthy, well-managed culture has been shown to not only inspire and motivate current employees; it can also play a huge part in attracting and retaining the best talent.

With virtually every organisation looking for ways to navigate increasingly choppy business waters, the power of a positive company culture is often identified as a key supporting element to success. But, although company culture is considered vital by industry leaders, influencers and commentators, what does it really mean to the average employee?

Have cultures been affected by the pandemic? Have the widespread changes to the way many of us now work – driven primarily by the pandemic – fatally wounded the very concept of company culture and why it's Important to have one? And, what matters most to employees when it comes to defining what a positive company culture is?

With COVID-19, global economic uncertainties and Brexit all playing their part in turning the world of work upside down for large swathes of the workforce, Cezanne HR conducted a survey to understand the state of company culture in 2022, and what it really means to employees.

This report shares not only those detailed findings, but also includes practical advice and insights from a senior HR leader for a leading European engineering and technology firm on what HR can do to ensure an organisation has the right culture to help it, and their people flourish.

"Determine what behaviours and beliefs you value as a company, and have everyone live true to them. These behaviours and beliefs should be so essential to your core, that you don't even think of it as culture..."

Brittany Forsyth, VP of Human Relations, Shopify

2. About our audience

To gain an overview into the state of company culture, we conducted a survey of 1,000 employees in private sector roles across the UK and Ireland. Respondents came from a broad range of age groups, industries, job roles and organisational sizes, but excluded those in senior, managing director or ownership positions.
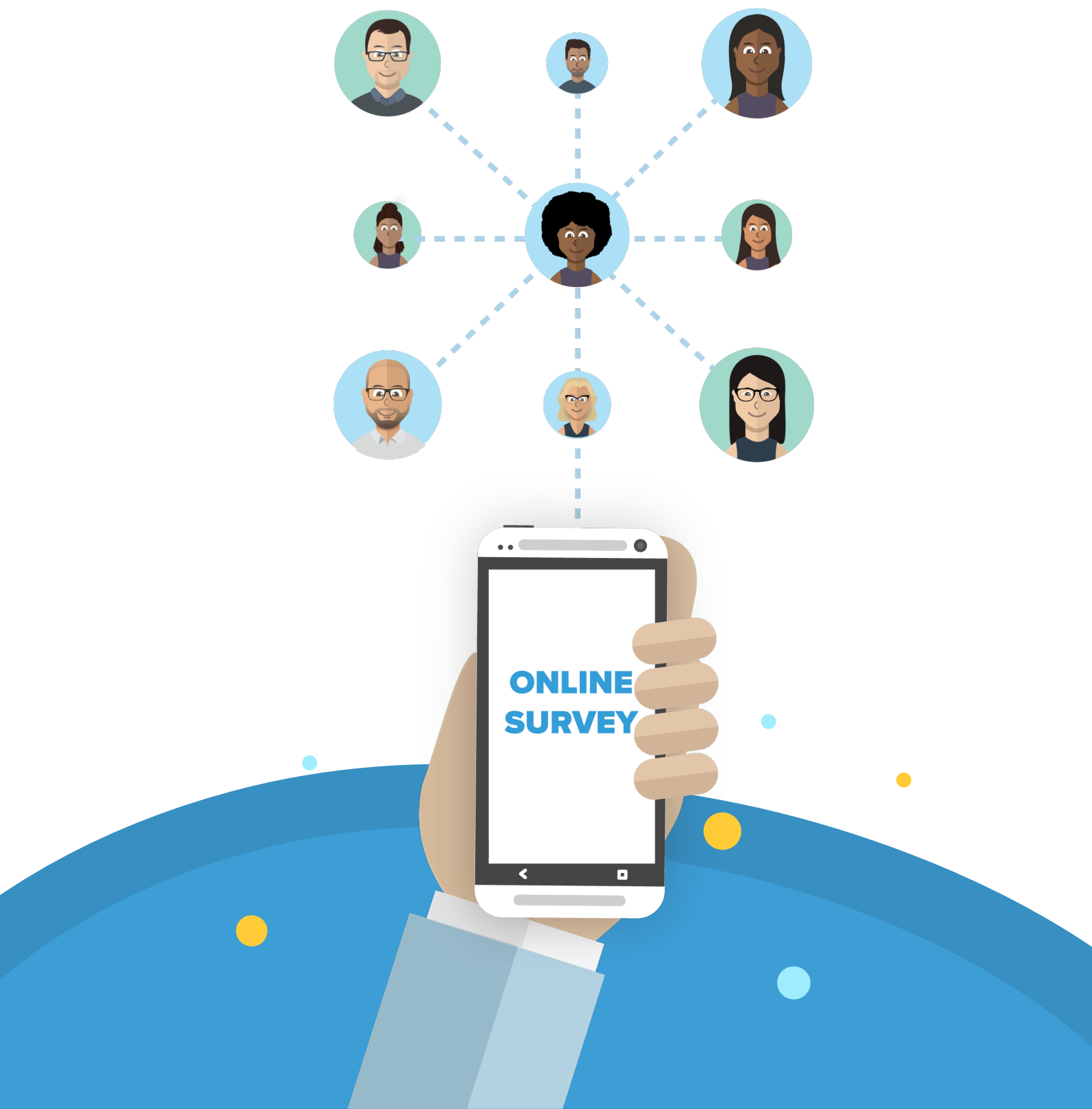
3. The results

What employees really think about company culture

Do you feel a company's culture is important?

Yes ▬▬▬ **84.5%**

No ▬▬▬ **15.5%**

To begin our survey, we asked if employees thought a positive company culture was important, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a whopping **84.5%** of them agreed that it was.

Now this of course makes sense. After all, a workplace culture is the very character and personality of a workplace – regardless of the physical location. When you have a positive workplace culture, your business will more likely enjoy benefits such as staff who are motivated, productive and keen to help achieve your shared business goals. In addition, it'll also be easier to attract the best people to your organisation and retain them, too.

It should be said though, that this result was not consistent across all age groups, with **only 60% of employees aged 18-24 believing that a company's culture was important.** This would imply that when it comes to the world of work, the attitude of younger workers to company culture is significantly different to those aged 25 and above – it's down to their organisations to discover what their priorities are to support more meaningful engagement with them.

Importance of company culture by age groups

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>54
60%	86%	91%	91%	92%

Although it was clear most employees felt a positive workplace culture was important, only **57%** said their company had a stated culture.

Does your company have a stated company culture?

57.2% Yes   **19.9%** No   **22.9%** Not sure
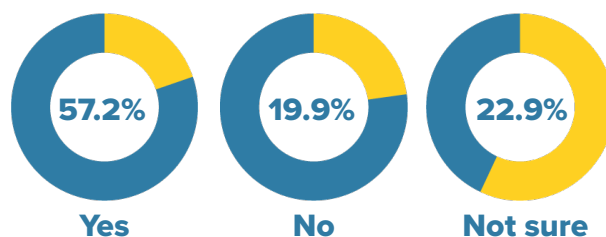
Could this be a sign that organisations are not taking their culture seriously enough? Our survey does indicate that a significant number of businesses are not giving their culture the attention it deserves. If employees don't know or don't understand their organisation's culture, it'll be extremely difficult for them to feel part of it, which can be a huge problem.

Does your company's actual culture reflect the stated cultures?

Yes, definitely ▬▬▬ **73.7%**

No, not at all ▬▬▬ **26.2%**

Of the employees who said their organisation had a stated company culture, more than **25% of them said their company didn't live up to it.**

Many organisations will have vision, values and culture goals outlined in new starter documents, or buried in their website's 'About Us' section. But if that's as far as an organisation's commitment to them goes, what's the point in having them at all? It would certainly account for these results.

For those who agreed their stated culture was accurate, it's likely they work for businesses who have incorporated their values across every organisational level – meaning they're visible and everyone is aware of what is expected of both them and the business.

You're being watched...

Given the importance of culture to the employees we surveyed, it's not surprising to learn that over 75% of them would research a company's culture before applying for a job – and this is something all organisations need to take seriously.

Would you research a company's culture when looking for a new role?

Yes — **75.2%**

No — **24.8%**

Although the UK's economy has taken a hammering over the past couple of years, the jobs market has bounced back, with the ONS[1] recording a record number of job vacancies at the end of 2021.

Whilst those numbers are never set in stone, it does point out the fact that organisations have their work cut out in attracting new people. This is where having a confirmed great culture can be a hiring organisation's trump card.
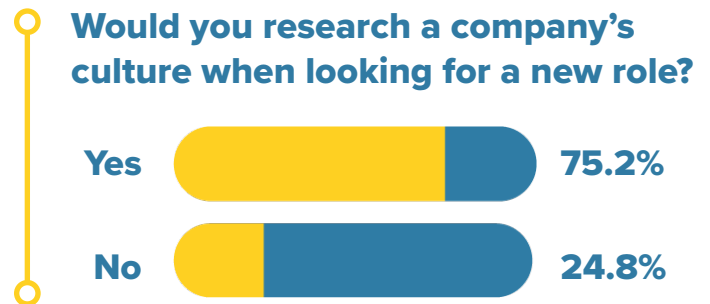
Job seekers don't take what is said on company websites or career pages at face value. Instead of believing how a company promotes itself in their job ads and marketing materials, they are carrying out their own 'due diligence' to see if a company's grand claims about being a 'great place to work' are true.

It's not enough for organisations to just 'talk the talk' when it comes to their culture: they must truly live up to the standards they set themselves and recognise the fact that employees are checking up on them.

"79% of job seekers say they are likely to use social media in their job search and this increases to 86% for younger job seekers."
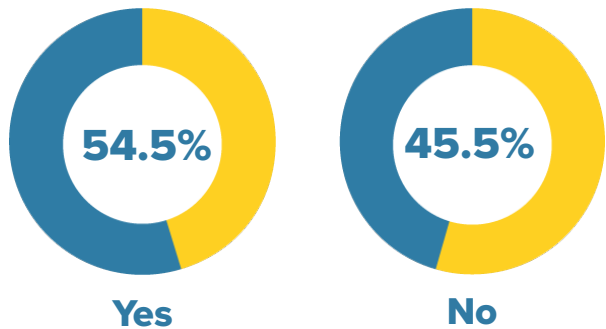
The Open University, 2019

Employees won't stick around if their company's culture is poor – especially younger generations.

54% of employees told us they had left or would leave a role if the company's core culture was poor. This indicates employees are more than willing to walk away from employers who don't support or care about a great working culture.

Younger generations in particular appear less willing to tolerate poor working cultures, with **61% of both 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 year-olds saying they were happy to leave (or have left) a business** because of it. However, given how important people thought it was to have a good company culture, it is somewhat surprising that 45.5% seemed to be happy to overlook it…

This result tells us that the expectations of younger workers are different to those of older generations. Organisations and their HR teams cannot afford to ignore the impact culture has on staff retention, and what it means to younger generations entering the workforce.

Their expectations of what makes for a great culture – for example, flexible working, employee wellbeing and diversity, inclusivity and equality initiatives - are a much bigger focus than they were even a decade ago. With that in mind, cultures shouldn't remain 'fixed'; they must remain fluid and adaptable to changing employee expectations.

Would you, or have you left a company because of their culture?

54.5%

45.5%

Yes

No

Employees who value positive company culture over higher salary by age range

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>54
61%	61%	53%	41%	45%

Does money matter?

It's generally accepted in the business world that, when it comes to keeping employees happy, a strong company culture trumps compensation every time.

Indeed, back in 2019, Chief Economist Andrew Chamberlain at leading employer review and job site Glassdoor stated that "Employers looking to boost recruiting and retention efforts should prioritize building strong company culture and value systems, amplifying the quality and visibility of their senior leadership teams and offering clear, exciting career opportunities to employees."

Andrew's statement accompanied research that discovered 56% of UK workers[2] ranked a strong workplace culture as more important than salary. But, given the global events of the past two years, have priorities changed?

When it comes to whether employees value culture or compensation more, our survey found that a positive company culture comes out on top — although only just. Overall, our survey revealed that just 52% of employees value a positive company culture over a better salary. However, that wasn't the case for everyone we surveyed...

For those aged 35-44, money proved to be a key priority with 54% revealing they valued a better annual wage over a positive company culture. Given that 84% of employees in this age range felt a company's culture was important, it's surprising to learn that salary has the edge when it comes down to what really motivates them.

What matters most to you: a higher salary, or a positive company culture?
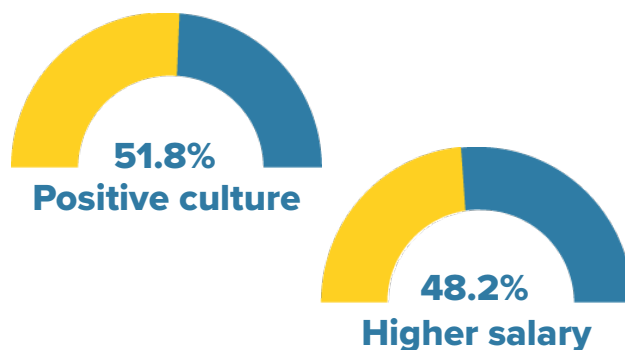
**51.8%
Positive culture**

**48.2%
Higher salary**

Employees who value positive company culture over higher salary by age range

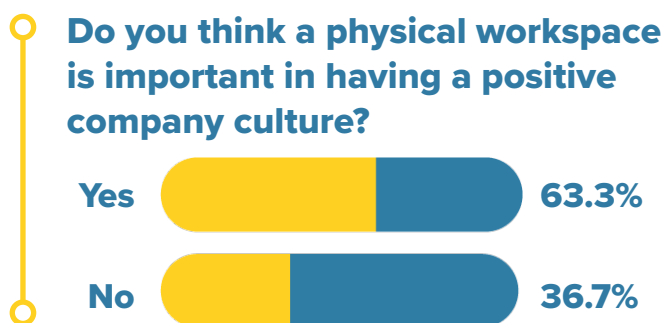| 18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>54
53%	54%	46%	57%	55%

While it's a close-run thing, our research suggests that it's important for companies to get both right. In fact, we found that in the eyes of employees, the two are closely associated. Could our survey be highlighting that we are on the cusp of a change in thinking when it comes to what employees really value from their experience of work? It would be interesting to see if this swing continues in the years ahead.

63% of employees believe you need to have a physical workspace to have a positive company culture

Although a lot of people have found working from home a positive experience during the pandemic, it seems many employees firmly believe that a place of work is still vitally important.

Our survey revealed **63% of employees believed the physical workspace was an important part of a positive company culture.** In fact, this feeling was even more evident with employees aged 54 or over, with a massive 85% of them saying that the physical place of work was vital.

Although home working has been made a lot easier through technology, it doesn't negate the fact that people can miss out on face-to-face collaborations, the chance to socialise and also have those all-important 'water cooler' moments with colleagues.

Do you think a physical workspace is important in having a positive company culture?

Yes 63.3%

No 36.7%

'Yes' by age range

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	>54
55.45%	62.06%	64.4%	60.87%	85.00%

"**For jobs that cannot be done remotely, such as those within the healthcare, retail, or service industries, people are looking for positive experiences in order to remain in their roles. This includes appropriate pay and benefits, but it also includes how they're treated while they're at work, how valued and engaged they feel, and how deeply they're made to care about the goals and results of your organisation.**"

From the Culture Partners' article
'Poor culture is fuelling the Great Resignation.'

31% of employees believe hybrid and remote working harms great workplace relationships

Social interactions play a huge part in supporting the culture of a business; if these have stopped or become limited to the occasional online meeting, it can be very difficult for employees to build meaningful workplace relationships.

This was reflected in our survey: **50% of employees saying that hybrid and remote working was not beneficial to supporting great workplace relationships. Rather worryingly, nearly 31% of them believed that hybrid or remote working were outright harming them.**

To maintain a positive remote workplace culture, employers need to establish and nurture virtual environments in which team members still feel connected. Us humans are social creatures, so sending a monthly update email or occasional MS Teams message simply won't cut it: employees need to feel that their team is just that, a team and that their opinions matter.

To achieve this, they must have regular contact with their manager and their colleagues. It's vital that HR and business leaders make sure this can be done effectively.

Do you feel hybrid and / or remote working harms great workplace relationships?
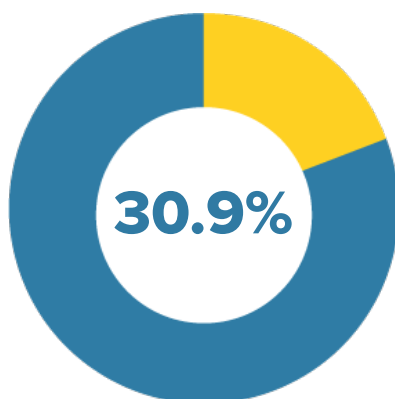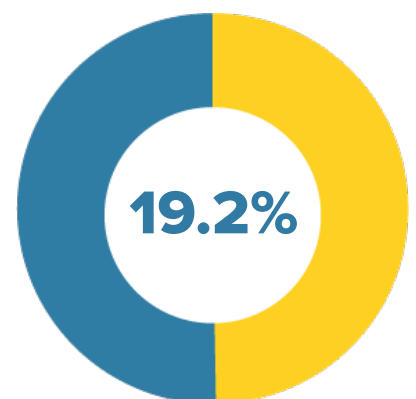

30.9%

Yes
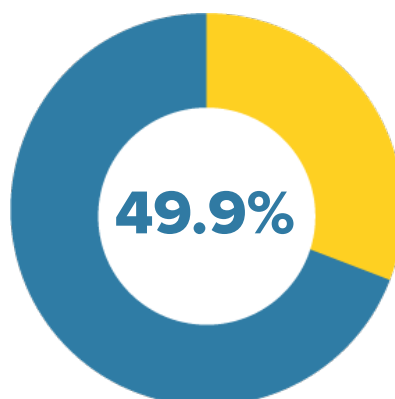
49.9%

No

19.2%

Not sure

COVID's impact on company culture

COVID's impact on the workplace was virtually immediate. Global lockdowns, work from home directives and widespread travel bans turned long-held assumptions about the nature of working completely on their heads, and also opened up a whole new way of working for many.

Research suggests[3] this is still a work in progress, with businesses that want staff back in the office – at least part of the time – struggling to get the balance right. Employees may be embracing the 'new normal', but their employers are finding it difficult to keep pace.

With that in mind, have organisations abandoned their focus on maintaining a positive culture in favour of simply 'getting things done'?

Our survey shows that despite the whirlwind changes of the past couple of years, the majority of employees don't feel their company culture has been negatively impacted, with only 29% of them believing it's deteriorated significantly since the start of the pandemic, and over 25% saying it's actually improved.

It's important to note though, this result was not consistent through the age ranges. **The Millennial generation felt their company cultures have deteriorated more significantly, with 33% of them saying their company's culture had gotten worse.**
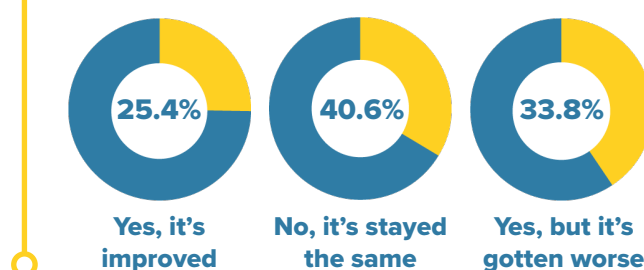
HR can play a vital role in discovering why cultures have either deteriorated or improved over the past couple of years. If your company's culture has improved, don't just think its job done; ask your employees what changes have led to an improvement.

Conversely, the same should be done if there's evidence to show a culture has declined through the pandemic. Their answers can help you shape your engagement strategy moving forward.

Do you think your company's culture has been affected by the pandemic?

26.2%
Yes, it's improved

44.1%
No, it's stayed the same

29%
Yes, but it's gotten worse
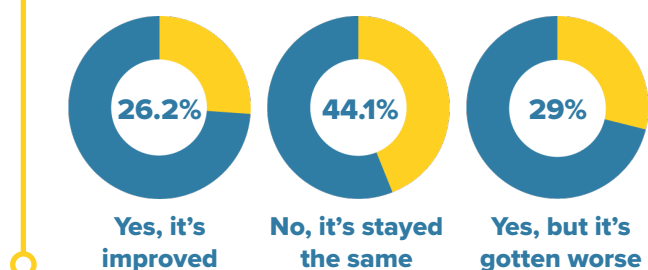
Filtered results: 25-34yr olds

25.4%
Yes, it's improved

40.6%
No, it's stayed the same

33.8%
Yes, but it's gotten worse

"A company culture takes time and effort to cultivate and maintain. The reality of the pandemic is that, for a prolonged period, regular day-to-day operations were put to one side. Business owners and HR departments were putting all resources into keeping the business going or grappling with new rules continually emerging."

ICS Learn, writing for the CIPD.

Recognition and rewards: key to positive company culture?

Your company culture is essentially your social operating system. It influences how your employees work together, how they complete their duties and how they treat your customers. With such an overarching influence on your organisation, how can you go about improving it?

Of course, unlike a computer operating system, you can't just hit a button to upgrade or improve your culture. However, you can begin to get an understanding of what resonates with employees by doing something brilliantly simple: asking them directly.

When we asked respondents what would improve their own company's culture, **26.6% of them said an improved rewards and recognition strategy.** This was followed by improved mental health and wellbeing initiatives (20.8%) and improved communications from senior leaders (19.1%).

The results were slightly different for the Millennial respondents, though. For employees aged 25-34, improved mental health and wellbeing initiatives came out on top. This highlights the fact that a 'one size fits all' approach to improving a culture won't work – it needs to be tailored to the specific demographics, preferred behaviours and values of your own organisation.

What do you think would improve your own company's culture?

Category	Percentage
Improved any rewards or recognition strategy	26.5%
Improved mental health and wellbeing initiatives	20.8%
Improved communications from senior leaders	19.1%
Created more opportunities to interact with other colleagues	18.6%
Improved Diversity, Equality and Inclusion initiatives	9.3%
Something else	5.7%

Filtered result: 25-34yr olds

Category	Percentage
Improved mental health and wellbeing initiatives	25.2%
Improved any rewards or recognition strategy	24.9%
Improved communications from senior leaders	21.1%
Created more opportunities to interact with other colleagues	14.63%
Improved Diversity, Equality and Inclusion initiatives	11.1%
Something else	2.9%

"Organisations often struggle to create a genuine culture and set of values that rings true across the globe. Employee recognition can make a real difference here. By being very clear about which behaviours are being rewarded, how and why, employers can clearly reflect the values that really matter to them."

REBA

Who do employees think is responsible for company culture?

It's generally accepted that the leaders of an organisation are the ones who can influence a company culture the most. After all, for any positive culture to truly take effect within a business, its senior leaders must lead by example. Their behaviours and attitudes can create a 'waterfall' effect, filtering down into the wider workforce.

This sentiment was echoed by our survey results, with **32% of employees believing the behaviour of senior leaders influence company culture the most,** closely followed by managers. Interestingly, the behaviour of HR was seen to have very little influence.

Senior leaders and managers must be seen as guiding examples of the culture their business needs to flourish. They need to be the ones stepping up and setting the example to follow. If there's a clear difference between their workplace behaviours and the desired principles of a stated culture, it can create a total disconnect between what a company thinks its culture is, and what it really is.

> **"Every employee impacts an organization's direction, but leadership has by far the largest and most direct effect on company culture, which revolves around employee engagement, environment, atmosphere and the success of the company and its clients."**
>
> **Forbes,** The Role Leadership Has in Company Culture

Who do you feel influences your company's culture the most?

The behaviour of Directors / Senior Leaders	32.8%
The behaviour of Managers	30.3%
The behaviour of Employees	22.7%
The behaviour of HR	7.2%
Someone else	7%

Who do you feel is responsible for promoting a company's culture?

Directors / Senior Leaders	40.5%
Managers	25.9%
Employees	17.5%
HR	16.1%

As well as being the focal point for their guiding culture, employees also believe it's down to senior leaders to promote them, too. **40% of our respondents agreed that directors and senior leaders are primarily responsible for promoting a company's culture.**
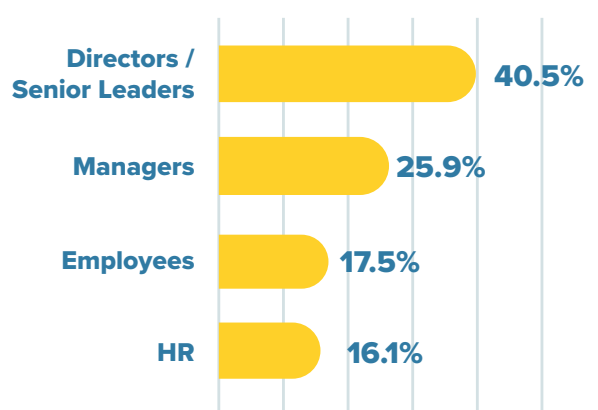
Our survey shows that employees will look to the actions and behaviours of senior leaders, so they must demonstrate the values they want to see in their workforce. A 'do as I say, not as I do' style of culture simply isn't enough.
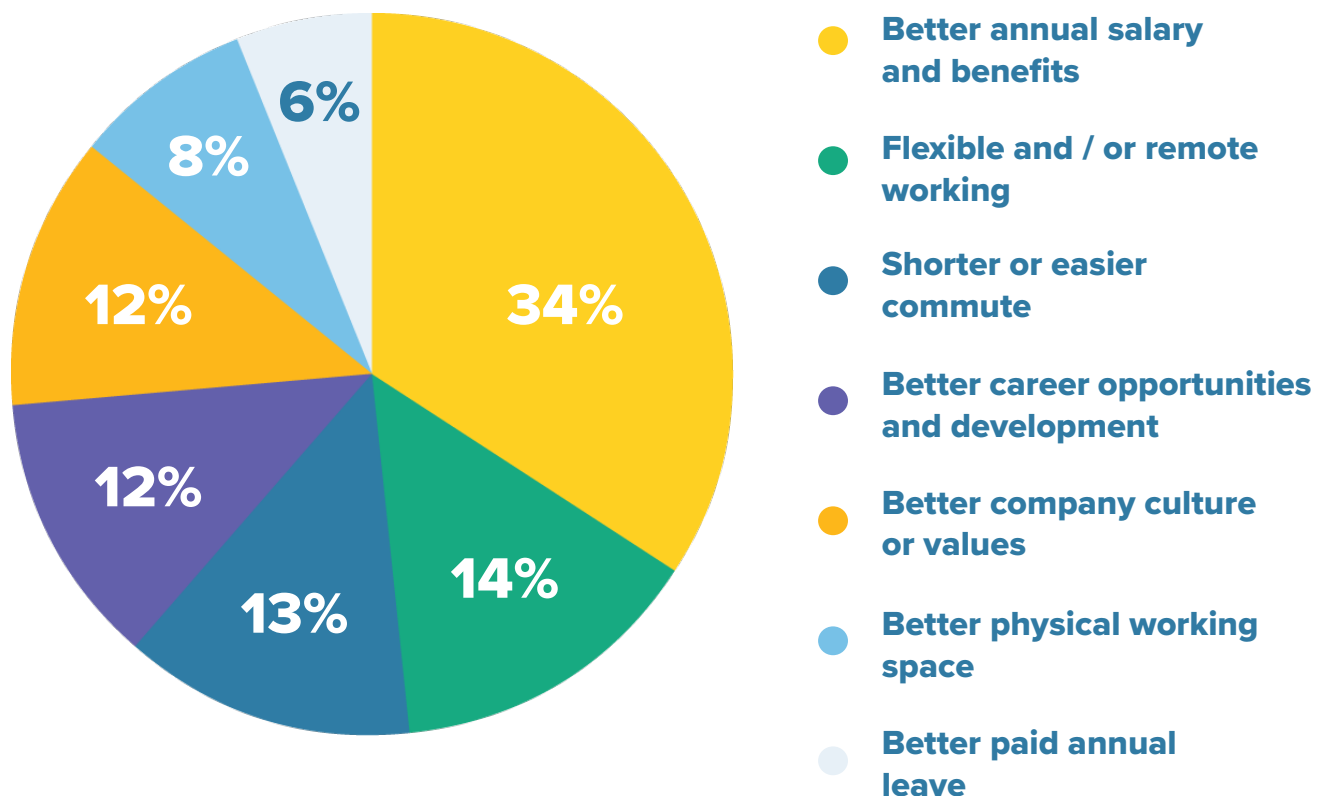
What matters most, salary or culture?

To complete our survey, we wanted to find out what employees valued the most when looking for a new job.

The overwhelming winner was better annual salary and benefits, with 34% putting it top of their list of priorities and 60% including it in their top three. Other popular first choices included flexible or remote working and a shorter commute.

That doesn't mean that culture isn't important to job seekers. Just over 10% flagged it as a key driver when looking for a new role, and 40% included

it in their top three. But, given the pandemic has accelerated conversations about working practices and opened a new world of working freedoms for many people, knowing what matters most to your staff will be key to developing more effective retention strategies.

In order of importance, what matters to you most when looking for a new role?

- **Better annual salary and benefits**
- **Flexible and / or remote working**
- **Shorter or easier commute**
- **Better career opportunities and development**
- **Better company culture or values**
- **Better physical working space**
- **Better paid annual leave**

34%
14%
13%
12%
12%
8%
6%

4. The view from HR

Sharon Quinn
Head of HR for
ByrneLooby

Sharon Quinn is the Head of HR for ByrneLooby, a thriving engineering, technology and consultancy business in Ireland. Ayesa recently acquired the company, which means it is now part of the world's largest engineering consulting and technology firms.

Working with a team of five HR professionals, Sharon has managed several different projects to improve processes and procedures within the business and enhance company culture. Her department has implemented the Cezanne HR platform to drive performance management employee engagement and ensure staff retention and attraction.

How have you maintained a positive company culture over the pandemic?

The last two years have been very strange and very difficult for people. From a HR perspective, I was very aware of that, and I put health and wellbeing initiatives into place– such as webinars around mental health, dealing with stress and financial management – via our Employee Assistance Programme. We sent out flu vaccination vouchers to employees and organised various fun online team events with small prizes as incentives.

During the pandemic, it was vital to focus on investing in our people. We actively promoted training and development during COVID, utilising Microsoft Teams to deliver online training.

We also worked hard to drive performance management. When teams don't see each other every day, it is vital that managers catch up with

their staff virtually to discuss how things are going. This was achieved through Teams chat and online meetings combined with Cezanne HR, which allows employees and their managers to work together to set goals and review progress using the online check-in and appraisal functionality.

Ultimately, all our actions were about promoting team collaboration even when we're not together. Last year, we launched a new reward and recognition platform where employees can nominate a team member for values that are seen as important by staff. These included leadership, teamwork, flexibility and many others.

At the end of the year, the company awarded a total of €12,500 in recognition vouchers, with teamwork being voted as the top value by our employees. That's a great result, considering we've spent over a year working remotely without seeing each other during that time!

How does ByrneLooby make its values, ethos and behaviours visible to the broader workforce?

We communicate our values, behaviours, and ways of doing business through our three pillars: technical excellence, investment in our people, and commitment to clients. Our Country Manager of the UK and Ireland, John Byrne, is very passionate about training and development. With his dedication and vision, we embed these pillars into every aspect of our business, from planning to performance assessment.

As an HR team, we communicate these core pillars into our training and development programmes and place them at the heart of our performance management and structured training programmes. In particular, the New Manager programme helps those who are making the jump from a technical role to a line manager role. They have the technical skills, but we want to help them make that transition to Line Manager responsibilities by providing soft skills training.

To maintain our ongoing commitment to clients, we help train our engineers to deliver technical excellence. We also reinforce our values through our rewards and recognition platform and training programmes.

Do you feel the pandemic has caused a shift in the priorities of employees when looking for a new role or when it comes to job satisfaction?

I believe it's made people think differently about their jobs and their satisfaction, yes - especially in regards to flexible working.

It is evident from our employee engagement survey that our staff want to keep the hybrid approach to working that we've become accustomed to during lockdown. Ideally, they'd like to have the option to work from home at least 2-3 days a week permanently. It's giving people more work-life balance so, without a doubt, it's something that has a much higher priority as it makes people happier at work.

Saying that I do appreciate it doesn't suit every role: a graduate who's still learning the ropes, for example, may benefit from spending more time with their manager. It's down to specific teams to figure out the best way of working and what works for them.

The pandemic has made many people realise that they can do their job without being in an office. A reasonable degree of flexibility and trust in your job performance and work delivery is key to making people stay. If they're doing the job and their contractual hours, it shouldn't matter where and when they do it.

Our survey revealed older workers believe the physical workspace is integral to a company's culture: why do you think this may be?

Technology may have evolved, but there will still be people who don't like change. Perhaps some senior leaders or workers who are used to seeing people in the office and are resistant to moving away from that. They like the sense of comfort in seeing employees at their desks every day. Although there are some situations where remote working cannot replace workplace interaction: Offices provide 'water cooler' chats that are difficult to replicate in a virtual environment.

In an office, you can maybe go for a coffee break and chat with other people, which can spark creativity or ideas. These ad-hoc meetings and coffee breaks don't work as well remotely as they can feel strange or ineffective for people.

Different people will have different circumstances. If they're living alone or feeling isolated, going into an office or shared place of work and seeing other people could be something they enjoy or need on a day to day basis. This could be a relevant factor when discussing diversity and inclusion within a business.

What role does your HR team play in maintaining your organisation's culture?

Like many companies, our culture comes from the top down. But, as a HR professional, it's my job to advise senior management what I think could be suitable for the organisation.

It's down to HR to positively influence our culture, and that starts with our recruitment team, who look to find candidates who complement and enhance our culture. Our learning and development team also play a crucial role in promoting training and effective performance management.

In addition, we take inspiration from our anonymous employee engagement surveys, In these surveys, we ask employees what they want, what's working, and what isn't. For example, the reward and recognition programme, which has been very well received, came about from our employee's survey feedback.

As a team, we're also working towards an international accreditation for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with the "Irish Centre for Diversity and Inclusion". We are creating a D&I awareness course that all our employees will be required to complete and this will also be included in our online induction process.

We ultimately cannot make the final decisions about how we can improve our culture. It's up to senior management whether they take our ideas and insights on board.

How do you measure the effectiveness of your company's culture?

We include questions about our culture in our annual employee engagement survey. For example, the questionnaire asks whether ByrneLooby has a good culture and respondents can strongly agree, agree, stay neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

We also include questions on Diversity, Inclusion, Quality, Safety, and sections for free text so employees can write their responses. Based on our summary of these responses, we can advise our senior leadership teams on the state of our culture and any priority actions.

It's important to say, though, that you can never have a perfect culture – it's always going to be a work in progress. We've acquired a business and been acquired ourselves: meaning we're now merging three cultures to form one new culture with Ayesa!

The HR team can continue to drive a better culture for everyone by driving new initiatives – diversity and inclusion or health and wellbeing, for example – and by engaging directly with employees.

What are the most important aspects of a successful organisational culture?

Definitely, rewards and recognition: all employees need to be recognised for their efforts. Speaking to other people in human resources and my professional network, I think flexible working is also hugely important. Everyone wants flexibility in some form for a better work-life balance.

Training and career progression shouldn't be ignored, either. Many people want to develop and learn from other people in the organisation or attend training courses as part of their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Also, I'm really passionate about diversity and inclusion as it promotes innovation, new ideas, people from different backgrounds... it's something I want to drive in the organisation and believe is vitally important.

Do you think company cultures means different things to different age ranges?

Yes, different things are bound to be vital to other people depending on what stage they are in life.

In our experience, employees starting off in their career want training and development, rewards and recognition and a fun environment to work in. Employees at a different stage in their career might be more concerned about career progression and investing in their pension, for example.

I also think the generation that are coming into the workforce now want to work for companies that drive corporate and social responsibility initiatives. Culture and development are essential to them and initiatives to lower carbon emissions and improve corporate sustainability.

How have you used your HR software to support or maintain your company culture?

Our HR system has fed into our culture of investing in our people. It's been beneficial for training, development and performance management. For example, employees can request training via the Cezanne HR system, and it goes into a simple workflow for managers to approve.

Using the system for performance management is something we are really promoting at the moment. I am working closely with our L&D Manager to deliver training on Performance Management which covers the importance of goal setting, performance appraisals, and check-in meetings.

What advice would you give other HR professionals looking to enhance their own organisation's working culture?

Listen to your employees and what they want. You need to know about the individual employees, what they think about the company, what they care about, their demographics... Employee surveys are a great way to do this, whether once a year, quarterly or monthly. I am looking forward to the new "Pulse" module that Cezanne is releasing this year as it will be a good way for HR to receive regular feedback from our employees.

It's always best to try and make positive changes based on employee feedback. But always be mindful that ideas and initiatives that employees want may be quite costly or perhaps difficult to implement. All you can do is listen, and make people feel listed to, and that their opinions mean something.

5. The key takeaways for HR
How HR can maintain and support a positive company culture

Employees consider a positive company culture vital to the employee experience: but employers need to do more to make them work in 'The New Normal'.

The initial goal of our survey was to find out whether the pandemic had affected company cultures and what they now meant to employees. Given the past couple of tumultuous years, many organisations have put their energies into simply carrying on with 'business as usual' in the face of global events – so, it wouldn't have come as a surprise to learn that positive cultures had suffered.

Thankfully, our research suggests that employees still genuinely value a company's culture. But, with the 'new' normality of hybrid and remote working, there is much for HR to do to ensure their company culture isn't just healthy now, but also remains fit for the future.

Poor company culture is fanning the flames of the Great Resignation – HR need to be the firefighters

Our research shows that employees are not prepared to put up with a poor company culture and will leave a role if it doesn't meet with expectation.

Given how competitive the jobs market is, it is in every HR teams interest to step up and investigate whether their culture is fit for the objectives and goals of the business, or if it's contributing to poor rates of employee retention and attraction.

How HR can help

You may want to start by finding out what the employee experience is really like for everyone in your organisation. The past two years have undoubtedly affected how your business operates – be it social distancing while in the workplace, switching to working from home or seeing big changes in your personnel. Conducting a culture health check is a great place to start.

HR can help facilitate this by asking managers to self-assess whether the way they manage their teams is supporting – or getting in the way of a positive culture. Some considerations might include:

• **Your company emphasises the importance of a strong work-life balance, but employees are working long hours and managers are contacting them outside of office hours**

• **Your senior leaders talk about having a relaxed work culture, but discourage casual conversations between colleagues online or in the office, or obsessively monitor employees remotely during work hours**

• **Your organisation claims to care about your employees' personal wellbeing but encourages presenteeism or facilitates an unnecessarily pressurised working environment.**

The sooner you can identify what your culture is really like, the quicker you can go about either trying to fix it or support it properly.

Do not underestimate the importance of stating your company culture

Our research shows that a positive company culture is something the majority of workers cherish – it isn't just marketing spiel. The problem is though, is that it looks as if not all employers are nurturing their own cultures as well as they should.

It would certainly explain why 43% of employees said they didn't know if their company had a stated culture. The danger is that without a clearly articulated culture, employees can lose sight of what their organisations truly stand for and what their ultimate aims and ambitions are, too. This is potentially a huge problem brewing.

For any business to be successful, it's vital its' workforce strives towards the same shared vision for success – a big part of what forms a company culture. But, if 43% of employees don't know what that vision is or what behaviours are conducive to success, then how can they work towards achieving the business's goals?

That being said, organisations need to also be aware that a company culture is not all things to all employees. So, discovering what truly motivates and engages their workforce's different demographics is the only way to build that all-important culture that works for everyone.

How HR can help

HR can play a vital role in making the culture of a business immediately obvious to its workforce. Some worthwhile actions include:

1. Make your company values visible

Share and embed your values into everyday HR activities. Communicate them on all your platforms: your company website, employee handbook, HR portal, HR software and even through the company's social media accounts. Not only does this ensure employees know the core beliefs and values of the business, but clients and potential job applicants can see and understand them, too.

2. Listen to your employees

Use internal surveys, confidential exit interviews, or simply talking to employees face to face to help discover the true state of your organisation's culture. Monitoring employee reviews on third party sites, like Glassdoor, is also useful in getting an unfiltered view of past and current employees' thoughts towards the company.

3. Coach your senior leaders to take the lead

As our survey has discovered, employees firmly believe senior leaders are the ones who influence a company culture the most. Strong leaders provide a sense of vision, purpose, mentorship, and inspiration to those they lead. But, if these qualities are absent or their behaviours are not contributing to the desired culture of your business, you might want to consider investing in leadership development or coaching.

Money and gimmicks are not long-term solutions to improving a culture

The hierarchy-of-needs model by Maslow emphasises that wages are important and are one of the most common motivators for labour. And, as our survey has discovered, the prospect of a better salary remains one of the top motivators for employees looking for a new role — especially workers within the Millennial generation.

This doesn't mean that enhanced salaries, monetary-based benefits or physical 'stuff' will ultimately enhance a company's culture. Sure, the prospect of a fair and healthy wage packet or attractive benefits package will undoubtedly appeal to some. But, if the cultural and self-actualisation expectations of your employees are not met — what then?

Our survey revealed that employees will leave a business if the culture is poor and throwing money at the problem won't necessarily stem the flow.

How HR can help

HR needs to help reinforce the fact that a positive company culture isn't something you can buy. It's not something that you can force by having a free coffee machine or ping pong table. It's not just the number of social events you have or giving away free beers on Friday afternoon. Nor is it just the amount of money your staff take home.

It's about how your organisation connects people to your values, drives behaviour and recognises all the good stuff that goes on. It's something an organisation must actively work on, and this is where HR can take the lead. For example, to work with the executive team and stakeholders to evaluate their current company culture, assess potential gaps or opportunities, and create a strategic plan to align the organisation's culture with its values and goals.

Reputation, reputation, reputation!

As our survey discovered, a company's culture is something jobseekers check. People are savvy to all kinds of marketing in today's social world: your job adverts are no exception!

Websites like Glassdoor and Indeed allow employees to give a real insight into what a business is like to work for. These sites are where candidates go to check on a company before they apply for a role. So, if your reputation on these sites is less than favourable, it's highly likely you'll be missing out on the best workforce talent.

What HR can do

You should actively monitor reviews posted about your organisation. Where appropriate, consider responding to comments promptly – even if the review is negative. Always keep in mind that people will not only read the posted review, but your response, too. How you react will help shape their opinion of both your organisation and its culture.

Employee review sites can be vital in helping you discover a 'no filter' view on how satisfied employees are in their job roles and working for the company. They can also give you essential insights on how they feel about the company's values, work practices and procedures, work environment, culture and leadership.

If genuine concerns are being raised, it makes sense to investigate them further and see what can be done to rectify them.

Creating 'culture' moments

The chance to work from home is something that has proven incredibly popular with many employees. However, our research shows that a large number of them believe it negatively affects company culture.

Employee's may not always want to work in the office, but the social interactions that come with working in a conventional workplace are something which are very difficult to replicate in a virtual or remote environment. As a result, finding a balance between the remote and the physical experience is going to be key.

How HR can help

• Reconfigure the workspace to facilitate face-to-face moments

According to research by Forbes[4], 84% of executives say they prefer in-person meetings for their ability to build stronger and more meaningful business relationships. But it's not just meetings you should be mindful of - it's also the everyday interactions of employees.

Ensure your shared workspaces are somewhere everyone feels comfortable to engage with each other. Open windows, good light levels, cleanliness and ventilation can all play an important, if subconscious, role in how relaxed and assured everyone feels being back in a shared workspace.

• Encourage managers to arrange regular face-to-face team meetings, either in or out of the office

Did you know a large proportion[5] of communication can be nonverbal? Whilst MS Teams and Zoom have made it easy to have collaborative team meetings online, they can be a lot less personal. So, instead of confining meetings to a video call or the traditional meeting room, why not encourage your team managers to mix it up a bit?

Meetings don't have to be at work. Chatting over a coffee in a local café, or going for a walk together, can be just as good for that all-important bonding moment. Don't be afraid to look beyond your office walls or computer screen for a little inspiration.

• Keep tabs on those that work remotely most of the time, and ensure they don't feel neglected

HR can help managers by providing some best-practice advice for managing team members who may work remotely full-time. Teams might want to introduce daily virtual check-ins, for example, where people can discuss priorities, update others on their progress and seek advice from colleagues.

Managers need to ensure this isn't perceived as 'checking up' on people to make sure they are glued to their laptops, but as an opportunity to maintain team spirit, keep everyone focused on their goals and avoid anyone feeling neglected.

• Cater to the different demographics of your workforce

As our research discovered, culture does not mean the same thing to everyone. With that in mind, investigate the demographics of your workforce before implementing any new strategy so you can introduce methods of engagement that will truly resonate with them.

Senior leaders are ultimately responsible for company culture: but they need the help of HR

Your senior leaders are the focal point of your company's culture, and their actions will be both seen and followed by your employees. But, although it is their vision, ambition and action that ultimately shape the culture of a business, they can't do it on their own.

What HR can do to help

HR need to be central in designing and implementing culture strategies and programs that cover all employees. After all, a culture is more than just one person, a team or department: it involves the entire business.

With that being said, HR need to support their senior leadership team. For example, HR can ensure key data – such as feedback from employee engagement surveys and social reviews - are continually updated and visible so that senior leaders can get an accurate picture of the company culture at any point in time.

It's also the case that HR shouldn't be afraid to call out behaviours at senior levels that are not conducive to a stated culture. If a senior management team is not setting the right example for a business, HR should be there to offer the right training, support or coaching – just like they would for any other employee experiencing difficulties in their role.

Rewards and recognition are central to a positive company culture

Our survey found that one thing employees believe is a crucial part of any culture is reward and recognition. It should be said though, that when we talk about reward and recognition, we don't just mean of the monetary variety: it's often the case that simply instilling a culture of saying 'thank you' can be enough.

What HR can do to help

For any rewards or recognition strategy to work, it needs to be meaningful, valuable, and absolutely built into a workplace culture at the very core. Here are some key things to consider:

• Make rewards and recognition part of your culture

A rewards and recognition strategy is most effective when it's tied into the preferred behaviours and values of a business. When people are recognised for behaving in a way that corresponds with the organisation's mission, vision and values, you'll be making it a lot easier to encourage the desired behaviours needed to drive success in your business.

• Celebrate success at all levels

An essential part of a positive working culture is making sure that everyone in a business gets to take part in celebrating success, and everyone has their own unique efforts and contributions recognised. When everyone can share in celebrating the organisation's success, they'll be more inclined to push for greater success in the future.

• Choose rewards and recognition that resonate with your employees

Lastly, consider what types of rewards or recognition would fully engage your employees. For example, not everyone would value a box of chocolates, a bottle of wine or city break for two – even if the sentiment was genuine.

By asking your workforce what would motivate them, you can plan a strategy that will ultimately be more targeted and engaging.

Flexible working is key to engagement

Employees are increasingly seeing the chance to work flexibly as an important part on organisation's culture. This sentiment is echoed in this survey, where it was a second-highest priority when looking for a new role, but also in our previous research that found it was the most used benefit by employees[6].

There is also growing support from professional organisations (including the CIPD who championed their own #FlexFrom1st campaign throughout 2021) to make the right to request flexible working a day-1 right, rather than having to wait the current 26 weeks.

It's clear that the demand from employees for a more flexible approach to when and where they work isn't a fad that's going to disappear, and organisations need to prepare accordingly.

What HR can do to help

HR can lead the way in implementing, facilitating and championing effective flexible working. Here are some key action points that can help make flexible working a vital part of a company's culture:

• Make your flexible working policies and procedures clear and transparent

When it comes to your flexible working policies and procedures, a key thing to remember is to ensure they're easily accessible and totally transparent. Having stated policies and procedures will not just set employee expectations, but also help maintain legislative compliance that safeguards everyone in getting a fair deal. Speaking of which...

• Make use of HR portals and shared workspaces

HR portals are a great way to make your policies and procedures accessible to your entire workforce. In addition, shared workspaces can act as communication hubs , making it easier for people to exchange information and work collaboratively, wherever they may be — truly enhancing the flexible working experience for everyone.

• Review your approach to onboarding

Are your onboarding processes fit for a flexible workforce? It's prudent to review if your onboarding policies and processes meet the needs of employees who'd work non-standard hours or in remote locations.

• Step up your internal comms

To counter any disengagement triggered by working remotely or non-standard hours, you may want to consider reviewing any internal communication strategy. Aim to use an internal comms platform that creates open, honest cultures where employees can connect, collaborate, and help to drive the business forward wherever and whenever they may be working.

6. Who we are

As a team, we have been designing and delivering HR software systems for over twenty years. We've worked with some of the world's largest and most demanding organisations, and many hundreds of small and mid-sized companies, from virtually every industry sector. In that time, we've learned a lot about what it takes to deliver robust, secure HR solutions that really work.

Cezanne HR was set up in 2013 to bring to market a new Cloud HR solution. From a handful of UK customers, we have grown to support employees in over 150 countries worldwide.

We're passionate about providing great HR solutions and services that help HR professionals and the employees they support increase productivity, streamline people management, connect with each other and help drive the overall success of their business.

Our world focus ensures we bring a unique perspective to our HR solutions that few other HR software providers can match. Our systems have been designed from the ground up to offer global capabilities that reflect our extensive international experience.

Customers range in size from under 100 to more than 5,000 employees, operate on both single and multi-country basis, and come from virtually every business sector: tech, finance, legal, utilities, pharma, consultancy, recruitment, aviation, shipping, publishing, health sciences, research, housing, leisure, charities and many more.

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