The New How: Creating a fair and inclusive hybrid workforce

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When the pandemic hit in Spring 2020, the first lockdown presented an unprecedented challenge for those organisations unaccustomed to remote and agile working. Many would say a positive outcome from the pandemic is recognition by the vast majority of senior leaders that remote working has not affected productivity levels. As a consequence, there has been much talk of a 'new norm' – new ways of working where organisations are open to having more of their workforce operating remotely. The division of teams may present a challenge for managers however, and it is important to consider contributing factors at the outset.

In this white paper, we consider the importance of fairness and inclusivity when it comes to a hybrid workforce – key contributors to attracting and retaining talent and a successful, high-performing organisation. The paper also includes some recommendations and strategies to help create a fair and inclusive hybrid workforce.

It is a complex challenge which organisations need to address if they are to successfully navigate the new 'norms' and behaviours which once were short-term adaptations to the pandemic, but now sit as long-term expectations in the minds of employees.

If you have any thoughts on this white paper or would like to discuss any of the issues raised in it, please do get in touch.

All the best,

Caroline.

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The new appetite for hybrid workforces

A webinar delivered in September 2020 by the CIPD stated that:

"The number of staff working from home in the future is expected to double in comparison to pre-pandemic levels."

As many organisations elect to accommodate flexible working post the pandemic, they will need to avoid creating a two-tier workforce - those who are present and visible in the office and those who work at home/remotely. Managers will need to act with intention if they are to include everyone in the day-to-day discussions and ensure that unconscious bias does not creep in with them favouring those people they can see most.

Consideration will need to be given to people who can't work from home and also thought must be given to those people who have to work from the office.

In either scenario, the important thing is that the reasons are understood and communicated appropriately.

Fairness

'The quality of treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable'

Perceptions of fairness in the workplace

Organisational justice focuses on the effect that social relationships in the workplace have on performance. The theory suggests that an individual's perception of fairness relating to aspects of their work influences their behaviour. This in turn can have a negative or positive affect on their performance.

Fair vs equal... is there a difference?

If people believe that fairness is everyone getting what they deserve, whilst equality is about giving everyone the same thing, then we can see some conflict arise. Hence it is very important for organisations to be clear about what it means for them, particularly when many organisations have or are beginning their journey towards a more equal and diverse workforce.

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that organisations that treat their employees with fairness, integrity and sensitivity are more likely to find that those employees respond with increased commitment and productivity (Senge 2006).

"

"A person's motivation depends a lot on what he or she considers to be fair."

Redmond 2010

So, if there is a direct link between fairness and productivity, how does an organisation develop and evidence a culture of fairness?

Fairness
continued

Three important aspects to consider:

1. **Transparency –** a great organisation ensures that there is a high level of transparency regarding decision making, thus employees can see for themselves how a decision has been taken and indeed - in process - has been applied correctly.

2. **Communication –** in order to judge if something is fair, a person needs all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to make a sound and balanced judgement. Overcommunication from leadership cannot be under-estimated, but this is only one side of the coin. Employees also need to feel that their voice is heard and valued. Without that level of trust in their views being applied, the culture is never truly a fair representation of what people's engagement is like.

3. **Consistency –** at the root of fairness is the need for everyone to be treated in the same way and here consistency plays its part. A high performing organisation will have in place the right process, people and governance to oversee the organisation's approach and to represent its people. Traditionally this would sit with the HR function, but it must also be adopted within all areas of the business if they are to be considered high performing.

$$Performance = Potential - Interference$$

Feeling like your workplace culture is unfair acts as interference in the equation above, hence undermining the individual's potential and ultimately, their performance.

Schumacher et al (2016) showed in their research that the perception of fairness has a stronger impact on employee's affective commitment at the start of the change process, than at the end. In a world where change is constant, this will be a key differentiator and enabler when businesses need to be fleet of foot.

What is inclusivity and how can organisations achieve it?

'The quality of treating people equally or in a way that is right or reasonable'

Going forward inclusion won't just be about under-represented minorities, it will be concerned with how workplaces include those who can and wish to work from home, as well as those who can't or don't want to work from home, whilst ensuring that the same rules apply regarding access to development, feedback, opportunity and resources.

In order to make this happen, organisations need to focus on ensuring that there is a high level of psychological safety.

Psychological safety – what is it?

Psychological safety is the belief that anyone can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation and is a key driver of high-performing teams. Good managers have learned to create environments that enable honesty around traditional work topics. But as hybrid and remote working environments become increasingly complex, managers must make staffing, scheduling, delegation and co-ordination decisions which take into account employees' personal circumstances – something which was previously not as important.

Summary

In order to ensure that talent performs in this new hybrid world, managers must focus on the human rather than the metrics which they perhaps once relied on. If they can ensure the right conversations are had, with the correct amount of candour, then performance should come as result.

In summary, those managers and employees who are able to lean into the conversation with honesty will find solutions quicker and hence be more adaptable. They will also understand all of the dynamics at play. To ultimately be successful they will need to work with all of the information they have and make decisions **with** their talent and **not on behalf of** their talent.

For more information, please contact us. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

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Further reading:

SENGE, P.M. (2006) The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization. New York: Doubleday.s motivation

Explaining the relation between job insecurity and employee outcomes during organizational change: a group comparison, Desiree Schumacher, Bert Schreurs, Hetty Van Emmerik, and Hans De Witte, Human Resource Management, September-October 2016, Vol 55 No 5. pp809-827

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