



Creating a community culture for better workplaces

Here are a few ways to building a culture of community sense within your workplace to make it a better place

Two recent studies reveal that nearly half of India's private sector employees suffer from depression, anxiety and stress. Demanding work schedules, high pressure on key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to higher perquisites, and the "always-on" mobile phone syndrome are the top three culprits. Additionally, sleep apnea, relationship issues, poor eating habits, lack of exer-

cise, lifestyle issues such as EMI troubles and peer pressure to maintain luxurious lifestyles complete the list.

Stanford's Jeffrey Pfeffer and I questioned in one of our columns whether the "great/best places to work" are really the best in the manner by which they are rated or ranked. We also raised flags on ethical issues and serious bias by the agencies that do such ratings.

Worldwide, all types of employees resonated with

our conclusion – based on solid research data – that toxic management practices in some of the highly ranked companies in such lists cause serious health hazards to employees, even as the CEOs of the two rating agencies in India went on a denial mode in social media without answering the two

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ness and to their own career progress. It may result in asking questions and resolving business issues quicker, build stronger bonds with co-workers, and it can be used for improving recognition and retention programs.

Great workplaces aim for harmony and mental peace for their workforce. The first step to creating that begins with deploying a sense of community feeling within the organization. Cohesiveness brings in more productivity than dysfunctional workforce. Enhancing workplace morale prompts employees to deliver their best efforts to everyday work issues. They are also more likely to stay with the company longer even in an economy as bad as India's currently.

Here are a few ways to building a culture of community sense within your workplace to make it a better place:

- Corporate vision should be relooked at with ample inputs from employees – even if the CEO or board thinks the company has a great vision. The way to instilling the community sense is by earning the respect of every employee. Open employee participation or town hall meetings will eliminate boundaries and walls around different levels. Bringing forth the idea that the drivers of

the organization are the human capital and organization capital.

- Ensure that all levels of employees comply with corporate policy. It is important to announce that no one is above this rule of following the rules, not even the Chairman. When rules are bent for some individuals or positions, dissonance raises its head in parts of the organization, leading to workplace problems. The way employees will feel valued is when they realise that

the same rules apply to all. A simple analogy might be to compare how employees feel in Tata Group and Reliance.

- Bring as much diversity as possible into the organisation. Not just the fashionable LGBT these days with just one or two from each for campaign's sake. That's just the PR gimmick to get brownie points for HR. Do not just stick to the surface level with nice posters at campus recruitment. Not only should you recruit

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critical questions we raised: whether they are doing the listing as a non-profit and whether they would find room for improvement in their listing criteria.

The "management toxicity" is affecting more and more Indians just as it does in Americans. Of the eight hundred thousand suicides across the world annually, about 100 thousand are potentially employed Indians. India is the world capital for diabetics, and cardiovascular ailments are affecting people in the 30s. We therefore advocated two changes to the ranking methodology by including health related data and to shift the orientation of the rating agencies to non-profit to remove serious bias.

The companies that attract, retain, and motivate a great workforce, and the workplaces that keep their employees physically and mentally healthy do so not by offering people cute amenities. People are not that easily seduced by mere trinkets; sleep pods, free food, and letting people bring their dogs to work cannot make up for stressful work environments. I think even the HR heads know that but it is easier for them to keep a ranking as a way to show that they deliver a better work place without doing too much of tough real work. Why waste energy when a better ranking by an external agency on pre-decided



criteria could fetch them better incentives even if employees are unhappy and sick? Last fall, a very highly ranked best place to work revealed in an all-hands meeting that it was confronting soaring medical and prescription drug claims. Clearly, work place health and the best places to work ranking are not the same thing, even though the two seem to have high correlation.

Evidence suggests that having family and friends, and engaging in close relationships have a direct effect on health, and that buffers the effects of various psychosocial stresses. People who were less socially integrated had higher mortality rates and higher incidents of cardiovascular diseases, and even cancer. Which raises the question of precisely how companies can promote a culture of strong interpersonal relationships and social support.

Many corporate honchos I interact with expressed

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concerns such as wasting time on jokes, forwards, selfies, etc if allowed social media access on office systems or even in intranets. But even without allowing, chances are that they are doing it during work hours anyway. According to a research, 77 percent of employees admitted using social media at work.

Allowing employees access to social media such as Twitter, FB or Instagram is beneficial in many ways. Taking occasional mental breaks is good for the employees and in turn adds to productivity. Professional connections they make internally and externally can be helpful to both busi-

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ness and to their own career progress. It may result in asking questions and resolving business issues quicker, build stronger bonds with co-workers, and it can be used for improving recognition and retention programs.

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people of all castes and religion, but also make sure they feel respected, especially in these times of New India movement. Train people against biases, and ensure zero tolerance for hate or offensive comments or behavior. As Unilever and IBM have done, constitute a diversity directorate to bring in the workplace diversity for innovation. It can then conduct training for ensuring diversity at every level and also conduct events socially to sensitize employees to embrace diverse cultures through fun events.

- Foster positive energy at the workplace by letting people speak their minds without fear of punitive measures. Managers must encourage subordinates to open up and share their frustrations at work. Take employee complaints more seriously than ever and have a whistleblowing policy in place with timely redressal. Those who drive negativism should be trained and if no changes are visible, ease them out. It may be a good idea to reward consistent productivity by employees and teams.
- Constitute a new employee recognition program that will honour those who live the values of the organization. These recognition events can be done



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quarterly in different departments as a social get together. It will also be worthwhile to find internal candidates as much as possible to next level positions to continue with the value system. Tatas suffered this briefly when Cyrus took over as chairman and brought in a bunch of non-Tata folks to key positions.

- Encourage employees to discover their purpose and align it with the community. As Unilever CHRO was saying, for them, it is important to drive

purpose for work-life balance and the harmony within the community. If human capital is most vital for your organization, as it should be, recruit, nurture and align it with your organization strategy and vision. Those whose values and purpose match with that of the organization will stay longer and be happier. ➡

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