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WHERE WELLBEING BEGINS

WHEN CULTURE NEEDS ATTENTION

Weak workplace culture rarely announces itself dramatically. More often, it appears gradually. A team can hit its targets while its people are becoming exhausted. Employees can appear cooperative while avoiding difficult conversations. Managers can believe that everything is working because nobody is challenging them. That is precisely what makes cultural problems easy to underestimate.

Eventually, however, the hidden costs emerge with higher turnover, lower engagement, slower decision-making, conflict, resistance to change and, in some cases, burnout. This is why employee wellbeing cannot be separated from workplace culture.

WELLBEING NEEDS MORE THAN RESILIENCE

Organizations increasingly encourage employees to become more resilient, manage stress better, prioritize effectively and maintain healthier boundaries. Individuals can learn to manage their energy, recognize stress triggers, build more productive habits and become more intentional about how they use their time. But even highly resilient people struggle when expectations remain unclear, communication is poor or leadership is consistently unsupportive.

A healthy workplace does not mean eliminating

pressure. Pressure is part of working life, particularly in periods of transformation, growth or uncertainty. The difference is whether people have trust, clarity and support when that pressure arrives.

Employees cope with challenging periods far better when they understand what is expected of them, know which priorities matter most and feel able to raise concerns without fearing negative consequences.

COMPANY CULTURE IS WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN THE WORKSHOPS

Corporate culture is often associated with company values, leadership workshops or statements displayed on office walls. Culture is ultimately much more practical. It is what employees experience in everyday conversations, decisions, meetings, mistakes and moments of pressure. It is what happens when somebody disagrees with their manager. It is how a team reacts when a deadline is missed. It is whether people ask for help early or hide a problem until it becomes unavoidable. Those moments have a direct impact on both wellbeing and performance.

This also explains why a one-off workshop rarely changes company culture. A workshop is a great tool to create awareness, introduce a shared language or generate enthusiasm. Sustainable change, however, requires repetition, practical action

and continuous feedback. The real work begins afterwards.

CULTURE BY DESIGN, NOT ACCIDENT

Maintaining a healthy culture does not always require another large HR program. Often, the most effective actions are simple, provided they happen consistently.

- **Talk regularly.** Individual conversations help managers understand what employees are experiencing and reveal emerging problems before they escalate.
- **Be specific about behavior.** "We need a better culture" gives people very little direction. "We raise problems early" or "we challenge ideas without attacking people" creates something employees can actually practice.
- **Use Start-Stop-Continue.** Ask teams what they should start doing, stop doing and continue doing. It is a simple way to turn an abstract conversation about culture into tangible action.
- **Act on feedback.** Asking employees for their opinions and then doing nothing with the information can damage trust more than not asking at all. Employees need to see that speaking up leads to consideration, decisions or at least an explanation.
- **Develop managers continuously.** Leaders shape culture through

People stop speaking openly. Problems are discussed behind closed doors instead of being addressed directly. Employees become reluctant to admit mistakes. Trust declines. Changes introduced by management meet increasing resistance. People may continue delivering results, but beneath the surface stress, disengagement and frustration are growing. Do you have to imagine this scenario, or have you experienced it?

everyday behavior, not slogans. How they react to mistakes, pressure and disagreement teaches employees far more about company culture than any values presentation.

- **Protect priorities and boundaries.** When everything is urgent, nothing is truly prioritized. Clear expectations allow employees to focus their energy and make better decisions while supporting sustainable performance.

DEVELOP CULTURE IN FOCUSED CYCLES

Instead of launching broad initiatives around vague ambitions such as "building a better culture," organizations can make progress by working with one clearly defined priority at a time.

A practical approach is to use short, focused development cycles. For one quarter, the organization might concentrate on openness. The next priority could be accountability, trust, collaboration, responding constructively to change, etc.

The first step is to define what the chosen value actually means in everyday behavior. If the priority is openness, for example, what should employees see happening differently? Perhaps teams raise potential problems earlier, employees feel comfortable acknowledging mistakes, or that difficult issues are

discussed directly rather than circulating through informal conversations.

Management can then agree on specific action steps, discuss progress regularly and use coaching or short follow-up sessions to reinforce new behaviors. This approach makes cultural development manageable. Instead of trying to transform the entire organization overnight, the company gradually changes the everyday behaviors that shape employees' experience.

PERFORMANCE STARTS WITH PEOPLE

The strongest workplace recognizes that employee wellbeing and business performance are strongly connected. People are more likely to perform consistently when they understand what matters, trust the people around them, feel safe enough to raise problems and have the capacity to recover from periods of intense pressure.

A healthy culture therefore does not remove ambition, accountability or difficult conversations. It creates an environment in which those things can exist without employees constantly fighting against the system around them.

Wellbeing is not simply something companies offer their employees. It is something the workplace itself either supports or slowly undermines.