Creating a real sense of belonging in the workplace to maximise your talents' potential

Sadly, organisational culture is often thought of in pretty simple terms: Pot plants, company merchandise, gym memberships, and a free round of drinks on Friday seem to be the most obvious 'cultural' stamps of today's corporate world. But this is not enough

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Companies, and more specifically, fast-growth startups, need to adopt innovative strategies that supercharge their cultures – and place culture at the centre of their wider business strategies, too. After all, it can make or break the team's cohesion and, as a result, the success of a firm.

However, current systems don't reflect that. To put it simply, leadership teams will layer their organisation's structure without realising that this will impact their agility as they grow.

Titles and promotions, beyond the financial compensation, all represent a ceiling of knowledge. For example, once you promote someone to a managerial position, every junior member you recruit in that department cannot be more qualified than their manager. Of course, I'm not saying promotions should be axed from the corporate world; rather, they need to represent the qualifications of the person assigned to that position.

As a result of this layering, team members will often limit their view of the organisation to the feedback they receive from their close circle of managers. But this means staff can often make critical decisions based

only on the opinion of others. Biases, habits, and tendencies from their 'superiors' can creep in – and taint their view of any given situation.

In order to secure the success and growth of their companies, entrepreneurs need to keep their organisation's structure as flat as possible. This will guarantee their agility and ability to embrace change, which is essential in today's fast-moving global economy.

So, anytime an entrepreneur thinks about adding a layer to their organisation, they should ask: what value will this layer bring to my organisation? Is this my way of adding controls to my deliverables? If so, can't I just strengthen my controls through my IT system to achieve this objective?

Assessing the value of another layer is critical. It is much easier to add a layer than to remove one in the future.

In fact, the whole organisational system needs to be triggered by the cultural characteristics. Your recruitment strategy, your policies, your procedures, and, of course, your decision-making have to be centred around the desired culture. Redesigning your organisation at a later stage is a costly and draining process, so build it from the beginning and build it with your future ambitions in mind.

But that means culture cannot be an afterthought. Culture will dictate the success and efficiency of your internal operations – and will guarantee your talent are working to the best of their ability. After all, as found by the _University of Warwick_, happiness makes people 12% more productive at work. But it can dictate multiple other things, too, namely a sense of belonging among all employees.

If you let culture sit at the bottom of your entrepreneurial 'to-do' list, trust that the organisation will not work at full capacity. Shape your culture so that it supports your organisation throughout its whole lifecycle;

otherwise, your employees may find it difficult to follow new cultural policies. This will mean that – in a stage where your organisation should be in growth mode – your talent experiences growing pains.

So, to manage the culture in your startup, you have to devise policies – even if they are lenient – at the beginning of your venture. This will prevent any sudden 'cultural' shocks affecting your staff and cement a collective mindset geared towards growth, innovation, and success. Plus, as _Gallup_ found, if you create and prioritise your organisational culture – especially one that attracts top-tier talent – your firm could experience a 33% jump in revenue.

But, for this to happen, the leadership have a critical role. They need to recognise that the culture of the organisation is shaped by their own behaviour.

A layered organisational structure keeps leadership out of the loop and out of touch with any organisational issues their firm may be facing. No matter the stage of the organisation, no matter the revenue, the founding leadership of a startup have an obligation to shape the culture in a way that supports the resilience, sustainability, and growth of their organisation. Culture needs to be included among all the other company functions the leadership oversees.

Organisational culture is a vital pillar of company success. And, for innovative startups, a lean organisational structure, fast decision-making, and a system that produces an internal state of oneness are vital for remaining nimble, agile, and ahead of the rest of the game.

So, here's my advice for managing your startup's culture: prioritise your organisation's culture. Don't let yourself stoop to the current 'cultures' that dominate the corporate world, and don't see culture as a means to satisfy your team and react to their needs. Rather, see culture as the

immune system of your organisation, whereby the stronger the immune system the more resilient the organisation.

Your organisation should be a place where your staff feel a sense of belonging and happiness. So, to optimise your firm, re-structure it in a way that removes any limiting hierarchies, maximises your talent's potential, and sets your people on a collective path towards success.

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