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the perfect marriage

In an interview in these columns, Michael Lee Stallard had spoken about the importance of a connection culture in addressing six specific human needs in the work context: respect, recognition, belonging, autonomy, personal growth, and meaning. This, he says, is drastically different from a culture of control where individuals with power, control, and status rule over the rest. To ensure productivity and growth, make sure to create an energizing environment wherein employees feel valued.

The concept of corporate culture has changed significantly over the years. Today, most companies recognize that while the work that is done is extremely important, it is equally important to build an image that is ethical, fair, and employee-friendly by introducing deliberate steps in its work culture. They are consciously trying to carve out their own culture and shape their individual identity that would

improve overall performance and steer their companies towards growth.

A major part of this identity is dependent on the people that are employed as well as the domain of the industry. Companies now recognize that human talent needs to be the best fit not only in terms of their expertise and academic qualifications, but also with regard to their personalities. However, there obviously are multiple

opinions on what could be defined as an ‘attractive’ company culture.

decoding organizational culture

Organizational culture is a set of shared assumptions that support the companies’ mission and vision and guides what appropriate behavior is in various situations (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). It affects how people and groups interact with each other, clients, and all other stakeholders. It may also influence how employees identify with their organization (Schrodt, 2002).

These shared values have a strong influence on employees and dictate team dynamics, boss-subordinate relationships, client relationships, and attrition rates. In an indirect way, it can also influence dress codes, HR policies, and the overall work atmosphere.

The culture of a company finally distills into a code of conduct that is perceived as ‘fair’ by the employees. Not all may be able to identify with it from the first day. The key is to understand how the values and beliefs of the company can be utilized by each individual to maximize his or her growth and development as well as contribute to the progress of the company.

The concept of company culture has changed over the last few decades. It has shed its work-focused angle and embraced one that attributes significance to the people who form the organization. In modern times, policies are more inclined towards creating an atmosphere of collaboration and acceptance of diversity. This transition was necessary owing to a multitude of factors. For Strand, whose business spans software technology as well as dry and wet lab science, creating an environment that encourages

collaboration and integrates a workforce of diverse backgrounds is crucial to success.

increase in female employees

The increase in the number of women in the workforce has brought in its own demands. Companies recognize that even within the same task, women and men bring diverse views, which complement each other and improve the overall performance of the team. Consequently, to retain this diversity, companies are expected to examine their policies from a gender perspective. This and other government policies have prompted organizations to take measures that ensure that their female employees feel comfortable, safe, and enjoy equal opportunities. For example, Strand Life Sciences has over 50% female employees who dominate the life sciences section and are on a par with men in the software sector, the two major talent pools in the company’s workforce. It is not surprising therefore that Strand operates a fully functional crèche within the office premises, which allows working mothers to take care of their children without compromising on their productivity. It also allows flexible work hours and ‘work from home options’ on a case-by-case basis.

a balance in your work life

A recent study by economists at the University of Warwick found that happiness led to a 12% spike in productivity, while unhappy workers proved 10% less productive. So what makes employees happier at work? Many would argue that the right work-life balance will do the trick.

The demand for work-life balance has increased markedly over the last decade. Employees are no longer

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happy being confined to cabins, meeting deadlines, being refused personal time off, and focusing [only] on deliverables. Scientific studies have shown the severe negative impact such high-stress atmospheres bring upon the physical and mental health of employees and how it affects the organization's productivity in the long run. More and more organizations are making explicit efforts to devise strategies for improving employee health and keeping them happy at work. Team outings, off-site trainings, and team-building activities are now becoming an essential part of every HR portfolio. At Strand, employees are encouraged to take a break at work for a game of carrom, a session of yoga, or a round of table tennis.

In India, this consciousness about creating a workplace conducive to having happier employees is shaping up as a number of multinational firms have become a part of the Indian employment landscape. With that, we are becoming familiar with the employee-friendly policies that have been a trend in the West.

Last, but not least, the average age of the workforce shapes the environment employers need to create for a conducive culture. In India, the age of the workforce is reducing every day. More than 65% of the population is below 35 years of age, and with a younger group of employees come newer expectations from the employer. Millennials are making their way into the scenario and most of them are looking for a workplace that provides them with growth, purpose, and fun. But this is just the beginning of well-being. At the very least, well-being is the ability to attract and retain people in an organization.

the loyalty factor

A person's need to stay back in an organization is often determined by the way in which his or her career and personal goals align with that of it. Without this, it is impossible to engage with a market such as the healthcare or diagnostic sector where the need is for highly skilled employees. For these employers, it is important to arm the company culture with a special set of tools to ensure continuous engagement, performance, productivity, and retention.

opportunities for growth

While well-being and employee-friendly policies dictate retention, growth opportunities are equally important. The higher one climbs up the ladder, the need for more intellectual stimulation, attractive financial packages, and 'newer opportunities' in the line of sight. A recent Gallup survey found that only 13% of employees are engaged at work, meaning the vast majority of working adults does not enjoy their work. All individuals want to prosper in their career and achieve greater milestones. Companies need to identify challenges to be thrown at a person that can stimulate productivity and propel them to give their best. While the challenges could be technical or managerial, the best of the talents often stay for the 'love of the job' than any other factor. This mostly applies to male employees in India who are less constrained to move jobs and where family constraints are less likely to be binding.

In turn, this raises the question of how an individual's growth contributes to the bigger picture. Every person has his or her own unique goals and expectations from life for

themselves, and is seeking opportunities to fulfill these. In some cases, it could be purely financial. In others, it could be more philanthropic in nature. In most cases, especially in domains that are heavily invested in healthcare, it is a mix of both. It becomes equally critical that the companies recognize the impact their products have on society and weave the concept of 'the greater common good' into the employee's perceptions. For example, in the healthcare sector, even the sales and business development teams with the vision of increasing company profits need to be motivated by the impact of their 'sales and strategies' on public health.

creating a relaxed atmosphere

A motivated and happy employee is more productive, and therefore creates good quality work that adds value to the company and its business. Small factors that can help create a happy work environment are: encouraging employees to leverage their strengths, allowing them to express their work styles at their own discretion, not imposing dress codes, not enforcing fixed timings, and allowing liberal leave systems with some supervision. Further, an environment to facilitate industry-academic interaction gives them the choice to brush up and add to their skills.

doing away with the cabin culture

A company's reporting structure, hierarchies, and boss-subordinate equations form a major part of its culture. An organization with a flat reporting structure—that allows its employees to work independently, question their managers on technical aspects and own their deliverables—creates a self-driven work culture. In the same vein, many

companies, including Strand Life Sciences, encourages open cubicles in the work space as opposed to cabins. Owing to its Indian Institute of Science origin, at Strand, even the CEO of the firm refuses to sit in a cabin, which makes it an extremely open organization and fosters an academic-style intellectual exchange of ideas 'across the table'.

influence of globalization

India traditionally has a work culture that has often been criticized for lack of motivation and accountability. For generations, we have been given the examples of government jobs and how they often underutilize their resources. With the entry of multinational firms, this perception of workforce has been altered. The global trend of creating a balanced workspace that is safe and competitive for its employees has been a major industry demand. In keeping with that, most companies have transformed into inclusive and understanding work environments.

According to Jim Harter, Gallup's chief scientist of workplace management and well-being, many studies show that change happens because of our social environment. Norms are shared in a way that is contagious, and companies and managers can help set those norms. However, the team will carry them forward.

A company's health, therefore, can be gauged by the perceived satisfaction of the employees. The perfect combination of their motivation to remain in the company as well as their growth curve is indicative of the good work the company is doing in maintaining a laudable work culture which contributes to the overall health of its human resources. ■

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