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Responsible people management: Translating organisational culture, values into new work models



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Speaking about the organisational culture there is only so much the HR personnel can provide by way of orientation during the onboarding process.

It is now a cliché to say that adjusting to the Covid- 19 pandemic has brought on a new normal. In fact, the new normal is now so old that it is fast becoming the next normal.

In this next normal, who are your employees to you? Your most valued assets? That's good but it could get better.

Support

This was the take of Okechukwu Amah, Faculty and Research Director at Lagos Business School. He moderated a webinar organised by the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics titled ‘Responsible people management –translating organisational culture and values into new work models’.

Rabi Adetoro, senior HR Business partner for MTN Nigeria analyzed the different work models. As organisations explore whether to stick to the traditional work on-site or to adopt the newer and more flexible hybrid work or work from home, managers must keep in mind that there is no one work model that can serve every business. It is not a copy and paste, one size fits all, solution. The kind of work to be done, the category of customers to be served and the endgame must be balanced with the needs of the employees to determine which model is opted for. In essence, employers and their employees need to discuss this.

But multiple work models introduce additional complexity into the onboarding of staff. As the world of work becomes more fluid, more people are called upon to fulfil new roles including first time managerial roles. These ‘young’ managers as well as new addition to the team need proper onboarding. As the HR director of Coca Cola, Olumide Sholanke, noted, fortunately the pillars for a successful onboarding remain the same regardless of the work model(s) adopted. These pillars are the HR personnel and the line manager. The former’s role is to provide solid cultural orientation so that the employee is immersed from day zero in the work culture regardless of whether it is physical or remote work. And the line manager? The new manager should feel accompanied and supported. This is the task of the line manager. Olumide added that in Coca-Cola Hellenic bottling Co., a first-time female manager is given additional resources to help her settle in faster.

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In the new work models with zero tolerance for errors, humancentric management styles is the name of the game if employees, and therefore organisations, are to thrive.

Speaking about the organisational culture there is only so much the HR personnel can provide by way of orientation during the onboarding process. Our team's, the business, culture is how we work here, how we talk to ourselves, what is acceptable and what is not. The discipline shown by leadership within the teams is a key player in keeping intact this culture in the new work models. According to Tominiyi Oni of TGI Group, there is a dichotomy between the generation 'dinosaurs' who are the ones 'leading' the culture and the millennials.

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The older generation insists that the millennials come to work on-site because most of them think that when people are away from the office, there is a tendency to dilute the organisation's culture, but it is not an if A, then B situation. Where leaders are used to engaging team members, where feedback is expected and given, where team leads actually follow up on goals and KPIs, the team culture is preserved whether work is being done onsite or from home. To support a hybrid work model, what we need are management teams that drive performance not attendance. Delivery and output is critical now more than ever.

Weekly check-ins, one on one meeting is important. One advantage of hybrid and remote work is that everyone can attend these meetings rather than just the team heads in the board room as was done in the past. For organisations that are multi-layered, it is no longer a head office culture versus the subsidiary culture. Apparently non – key players can contribute to key decisions for the good of the organisation. Where the culture is one of transparency, openness, mutual respect for one another, it is enriched by this bridge of the head/branch offices divide.

Of course, one challenge is the absence of that sense you get from chit chat while on the corridors of the offices, catching up with colleagues from other departments; one may miss out on those input from non-team members into the

team. One way to manage this change is through company chat rooms and cross-functional project teams platforms.

Let us shift the focus now from team leads to team members. If you have only people who come to work just to earn a salary, then there is a big problem. Mercenaries do not win wars. How do we ensure employee engagement and alignment with the organisation's values and mission? Organisations need to ensure that regardless of the work model, the values and culture should, not only be consistent but should be evident day today.

For Oyiza Salu, Group head of Human resources at GTB, there are three sturdy supports for good employee engagement and alignment. The first is clarity in what the organisation expects from the employee. As a staff, I need to be able to articulate what my KPIs are and to realize that even if I am working from the moon, I need to deliver on these KPIs, but there must be flexibility in mind set to suit the fluidity at work. KPIs should be rethought to suit new work models. It is not a question of reducing or increasing the demands simply because work is now done remotely as the employees' work-life balance must be considered. What is important is that productivity does not tamper and if productivity remains at the required levels, remuneration should also not be cut.

Second support is clear and consistent two-way communication; from managers to employees and from employees to managers, from employees to HR and vice versa. Speaking on effective trust-building and communication across multi-located and diverse workplaces, Obianuju Momoh, Head, Human Capital and Admin at Capital Bancorp PLC, stressed that trust cannot be legislated. Instead, it is earned through empathy. Today's talents want high levels of flexibility as well as high levels of empathy. At work, management needs to build a level of trust so that people can come to talk to you. Talking, communication does not always have to be via email. Take the corridor chat – chat for example. The better the quality of communication – two way, consistent, sincere and multi-channel, the easier it is to earn trust. Dr. Amah added that for one survey respondent, the lack of communication before and after he was laid off his company was an indication of his value to the organisation. He felt that he was just a tool to the company to be dispensed with as and when they chose.

The third is fast decision making. To achieve this, it is important to de-layer the organisation and encourage low-level decision making. Having set down explicit expectations and given the right tools to work, the line manager needs to trust that the employee will do the right thing. Otherwise, the former ends up micro-managing the latter.

With the new work models, people are much more than your most valued assets. Employees don't just give you a competitive edge. People are, they want to be heard and to be treated as partners driven towards a common goal, co-creators of the organisation's wealth.

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