



THE INHERITANCE OF CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to identify the pluses and minuses of the various cultures involved in an organisation and how leaders or human resources executives can manage the varying circumstances with the ever changing times. *Index* —Cultures, Inheritance, Companies, Leaders, Diversity

Introduction

A company's culture is its lifeblood and a key valuable asset, which trickles down the very fabric. But how does one retain the same when new players with differentiated backgrounds join the team?

Way back in early 2000, when Satish Nair launched his new age technology services company, he picked a handful of likeminded people to mark on this journey with him. Together they developed a structure and a culture for the company.

In a few months' time the team expanded and the core team had few hands supporting them in their respective departments. As the company was young and on a growth trajectory, the middle and junior team members also imbibed the same culture in their DNA. They showcased similar emotions and were equally passionate for the company and its brand. It was like a one small joint family where every team member contributed earnestly towards the company's future.

Every team member, from division heads to the trainees got the opportunity to speak his/her mind, share his/her ideas and each one was heard patiently. It was rare that orders would be passed from the top to the bottom, as Nair believed in a democratic process. Decisions were taken based on what was right for the company and the best idea irrespective of who it came from met its full potential.

As time passed, Nair's company grew many folds and today it has grown from a team strength of 50 to 500 people. It has also forayed into new geographies, and people from across the world with differentiated backgrounds have joined the team.

Nair, now when he looks back, he doesn't find the same level of passion among several of his team members. It's not just the junior members; there are a few senior team players and division heads who behave similarly. At times, Nair feels that his vision and the culture that the core team had built over the years, is now slowly getting diluted. Newer team members come with a different mindset and have



different ways of handling and motivating his/her team member and not always a democratic process is followed.

This trend does worry Nair but he often tends to ignore till the time the company is on-track in terms of delivery and its clients are happy.

Is Nair's company an exception in this regard? Or, does it happen with every company which scales up from 50 to 500 or even more. There certainly has to be a way by which the core principles and the culture of the company is retained. How does one do it?

Hiring the right people

When an organization is created, it becomes its own world and its culture becomes the foundation on which the organization will exist in the world. This is why scrutinising candidates at the time of the selection process is imperative. Dr. Ganesh Shermon, Partner & Lead for Human Capital Solutions, TCS Canada Inc, strongly believes in the company's culture and identify candidates who fit into the same. Growth involves new employees, who look up to the top management for leadership. Rapid growth of an organization from a small business stage invariably lead to new employees being hired at all levels with each one bringing with them their own set of beliefs. If the prevalent alignment of culture in the organization is not strong, imbalances can set in, intruding the demonstration of expected behaviours, often at the risk of damaging the organizational reputation. Prithvi Shergil, Chief Human Resources Officer, HCL Technologies further adds that measures need to be taken to ensure realignment so the organization's identity and reputation can be protected, as once lost, it becomes nearly impossible to regain the benefits of a strong culture. This impacts employee engagement, reduces client trust and makes it difficult to attract and retain talent.

Dr. Sriharsha Achar, Chief People Officer, Apollo Munich Health Insurance opines that to avoid such a situation, the HR team must carefully recruit the 'right people' and install a sense of organisational culture right from day one. Increase in employees also lead to the decentralisation of power from the management cadre in a downward manner. This often results in an increase in internal politics, protectionism and dissension over what goals and projects the company should pursue. So again, it is important for the HR team to tread carefully while expanding each managerial level.

Welcome new employees

In the long run, companies become successful only if it is trusted by the market. Hence, it's important to make the new employee feel that they are welcome to the family. The onus is on the organization leaders. It is wrong to expect that people will and start imbibing the culture from day one. It's a voluntary exercise and can't be forced upon some like a rule. Often what happens is when a new employee is inducted into the system; some of the older employees may try to make that individual feel like an outsider. This has to go. If the company is able to make a fresh appointee



feel that he has joined a happy family and is welcome to be part of it, he/she will voluntarily accept it and move in a positive direction.

There are companies where employees find an absence of belongingness in the team, or they feel they are quite inconsequential. There might be companies where they are not treated with respect. In such a scenario, a culture can never prevail.

“Chilled out work places, thrive on trust, team spirit and have people who stand by what they consider as a commitment to one another. This sense of ownership and commitment builds a culture in the company and also retains it over a longer period of time. There are environments where, whether at an individual, group or at an institutional level, if a commitment has been made then it is expected that they are honoured. No matter what may be in store in an unknown future.” Says Dr. Shermon.

Learn and teach to delegate

When an organisation is small or in a start-up mode, team members need to perform multiple responsibilities. As the company grows bigger, multitasking needs to be replaced by specialised roles and responsibilities. This is when older employees need to learn to delegate and distribute responsibilities. Often this doesn't happen, older employees tend to be control freaks and a sense of insecurity prevails with the entry of newer players. The organisation needs to take the older employees into confidence so that a conducive environment is created in the company and the culture and ethos of the company are retained.

Creating employee engagement is highly critical to building lasting cultures.

Put your employees first

If employees are happy, they will deliver a good product and ultimately the client would also be happy. The companies that survive the longest are the ones that work out what they uniquely can give to the world not just growth or money but their excellence, their respect for theories, or their ability to make people happy. Some call those things the ‘soul’ of the company.

HCL is one company which has grown from small to huge. Its rapid growth is a direct outcome of its employees understanding their key role to enhance the ‘value zone’ in every interaction with clients and stakeholders, in line with the core belief of Employee First Customer Second, generating value through curiosity, creativity and competency often beyond the contractual ask”

It is based on Trust, Transparency, Flexibility and Value Centricity. These beliefs reflect the history of entrepreneurship, a trait which is still embedded in their way of working.

“Culture is an invisible fabric that is experienced through communicated promises and visible actions. It is critical to communicate the core elements of organisational culture at every employee touch point in any organization. Leaders not



only need to communicate but also demonstrate the actions they expect people to take. If an organization supports its core culture as ‘Open’ then its leaders must build employee trust by allowing for honest, transparent and regular communication” affirms Shergill.

Create an environment of trust and belief

Google is a company that has an organisation culture that speaks volumes of the trust that it has on its staff. From giving access to the cofounders and chief executive, to launching values to living them and celebrating them, Google ensures that the leadership team actively participates in the fine-tuning of not only the values, but also the enhancement of missions, vision, philosophy and brand promise statements. It is important for the leader to communicate the vision behind the growth plans, and help everyone understand their individual roles in the coming changes. This ensures that every employee in the organisation is on the same page. This will also help the organisation to maintain the value of the workplace culture through business growth, and keep those qualities that make the organisation a great place to work.

In face, for a company to be judged as a ‘Great place to work’, it has to score very high the trust index. Robert Levering, Co-founder, Great Place to Work, had once said, “A great place to work is one in which you trust the people you work for, have pride in what you do, and enjoy the people you work with”. And the golden rule when it comes to creating a culture of trustworthiness, is has to begin at the top and then percolate down the order.

Be flexible, not rigid

Often companies become rigid when it comes to adapting new practices. In an ever changing business environment, it is essential for the company’s leaders to reflect and adapt their core values to stay true to form. Accepting change and thinking ahead of time are the biggest qualities of good leaders. Leaders should understand that working styles change from time to time and when there is an influx of new employees, new working styles would have to be adapted to ensure productivity and goal achievement.

Examining the cultures of other companies can help one create a list of desired attitudes and behaves that the company seeks in the people it hires.

Besides, culture is never about one-size fits all approach. Building a thriving company culture demands instilling strong values from the start-up from phase of the business. Doing the right things right from the initial phase helps to avoid undesirable behaviours or ask employees to change their attitudes at a later date.

Always remember, the best of work places do not have rules. They only a vision; for themselves and for their companies! They practice that vision by believing, trusting, enabling and doing. This is where things happen because people act on what they believe is right, and perform together out of alignment. It is aligned when people



tell you stories about their company, its people that can be quoted and show excitement at any news about their company. They would introduce their company to people that care for and known as their own. They would have friends at work who to beyond work. These people take their company home every day, not just work. After all people seek identity, pride & belonging wherever they may be and whatever they may be doing. Work environments in which people have dignity, beliefs, and those that binds people to a common cause, in whatever profit motive context may it be, there is only an environment of joy, not rules. You are ruling!

The leader's responsibility

Any company's culture starts with its founders - what they believe in, what they value and how they work. It is often difficult for founders to leave behind their past and sometimes they are the cause for the downfall of the enterprise. According to Dr. Shermon, organisational cultures initially are created by the founders of organisations and subsequently are maintained by the founders' chosen leaders. They form organisations based on personal beliefs about how to interact with the environment and about the natures of reality, people, activities, and relationships. They make presumptions about what should or should not be, what works or does not work, and what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate organisational activity. "Therefore, in an ever changing business environment, it is essential for the company's leaders to reflect and adapt their core values to stay true to form. Accepting change and thinking ahead of time are the biggest qualities of good leaders. Leaders should understand that working styles change from time to time, and when there is an influx of new employees, new working styles would have to be adapted to ensure productivity and goal achievement," assert Dr. Achar.

Conclusion

Therefore, when a company matures and expands, it becomes essential for leaders to reflect on their core values time and again to ensure that percolates down the line. It has been observed that best of founder oriented organisations have an old fashioned character. There organisations are jargon free, have no quick fix techniques being deployed, have no surveys to tell them about employee engagement and do things in a thought through, as if it is in a pre-ordained way. They act on issues after substantive deliberation. Their people know that too. It takes time in these organisations, but when done, it is down well. They make distinctive difference between theory and proactive, they reflect on risks, cost and consequences; they belabour and agonise over impact of their decisions on values, culture, long-term implications. Their outlook towards future is about holding on to a strong present, preparing for a stable future and building a foundations that holds on a many do's and many don'ts in behaviours. People in such companies feel that they are led by responsible leaders and in whose hangs their life is safe!

Any organisation without constant evolution has the risk of becoming obsolete. It is therefore absolutely essential that the culture of the company derive the strategy as this ensures the organisation is keeping pace with the changing times.



Exceptional organisations continue to reinvent success on the strengths of a culture as they understand it to be the very reason for growth in the first place.

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