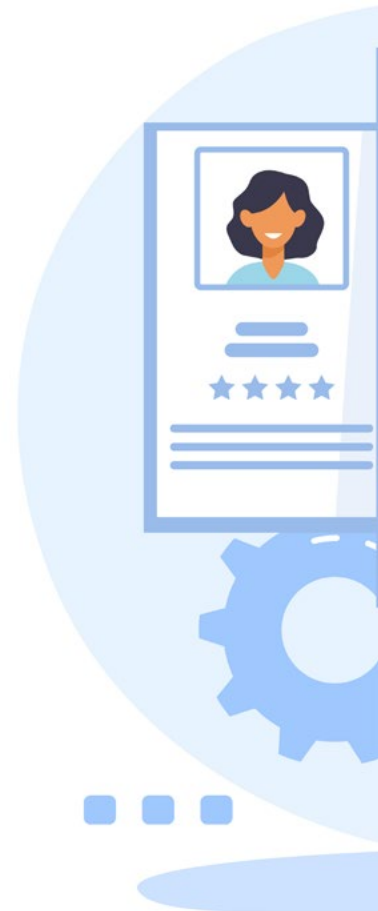


The future of work: compassionate, hybrid and equal



In these times of constant change in the work environment, companies are finding it difficult to deliver the value and purpose that people are looking for today when choosing an employer or opting to remain in their job. In turn, hybrid work threatens to dilute organizational culture. Against this backdrop, how should leadership and culture evolve to attract, develop and retain talent?

Resignations, the evolution of team management, the continuous use of technology and changes in work practices have redefined the rules of the game, forging a new path as people transition back to the workplace, with more exigent employees asking their superiors for new and improved terms. As such, the key to addressing today's workplace reality lies in fostering inclusion and creating purpose-driven cultures.

In this regard, Buck Rogers, an expert with more than 25 years of experience in organizational leadership and vice president of Keystone Partners' North Carolina office, suggests organizations consider a number of factors that may influence an employee's decision to resign or not: for example, taking into account employees' preference for remote work when managing the transition back to the office. Along the same lines, Anthony Klotz - an organization-

al psychologist and professor at Texas A&M University - claims that in today's era of constant change, there is an opportunity to reimagine the workspace and reexamine the role of work in our lives and what it means to each individual worker.

In order to meet workers' expectations, leaders and their teams must truly value people; that is, offer distinctive benefits to staff - for example, higher salaries and the



flexibility to work from home - and motivate them to work as a team to achieve common goals, in pursuit of a shared vision of success, not only for the company but also for employees' individual careers.

Leaders of change and new skills

In response to this scenario, to the current trend of resignations and to the transformations that are taking place in the workplace, the drive to innovate in order to improve employee retention and commitment to the future of the organization is something that cannot be overlooked. In this sense, although leadership has already evolved dramatically, the road ahead can still be unpredictable and requires further innovation. In any case, we are looking at a transition that can be prepared for,

where better inclusion is not a panacea but a journey, where talent retention tactics and the building of mission-driven cultures should not be forgotten.

In the same vein, we could speak of resilient leadership, which in turn has a direct impact on organizations and their culture. Agreeing, Tom Reichert - global leader of Digital BCG at The Boston Consulting Group - and his colleague Martin Danoesastro in their *A CEO's Guide to Leading Digital Transformation* consider that while a successful transformation depends on an organization's leaders, companies should not forsake their strengths and culture. An organization that has been around for 50, 100 years or more has enduring and proven qualities that do not suddenly disappear in the digital age. Likewise, BCG suggests, it is important to learn from

external examples. Digital natives such as Uber, Airbnb and Spotify, for example, have successfully disrupted the cab, lodging and music industries by meeting customer needs in new ways and leveraging technological innovation. These companies have created new operating models and new cultures. CEOs must then also look closely at how they can broadly apply new ways of working, new levels of customer service and new technology platforms within their own organization.

The truth is that new business models and working methods also require new leadership. Hybrid work environments require renewed leadership skills that emphasize the need for a more human, authentic, empathetic and adaptive approach to supervising staff and their work. While the core skills remain the same, leading

today's transformation in order to improve culture, attract and retain talent and create value, requires leaders who are willing to step out of their comfort zone and stretch themselves. New managers need to be open to change and acquire new skills in the process: they must redefine themselves in a flexible way if they want to stay current in a business world that continually and rapidly changes the rules of the game.

According to Danoesastro, in the face of these demands, leaders need to articulate a broad strategic framework, as well as be open to feedback from people within the organization, as well as customers and partners. In other words, in order to change the course of events, it is suggested that they implement an adaptive style of leadership. However, although in this hybrid context leaders must develop certain qualities, such as being innovative, empathetic, disruptive and entrepreneurial, it is important to remember that technology is only a means: the core of a business will always be its people. Organizations are therefore faced with the fundamental challenge of delivering the value and purpose that people are looking for today when choosing their employer or opting to remain in their job.

How to strengthen corporate culture

However, beyond reinventing leadership skills in order to retain and attract talent, the truth is that as hybrid work becomes normalized, there is growing concern about the dilution of corporate culture. According to Elisabeth Joyce, executive vice president at Gartner, "As employees work in distributed environments more frequently, executive leaders fear that their organization's culture will

become fragmented and weakened, leading to lower levels of engagement, performance and innovation." In other words, CEOs consider culture as an element that derives from face-to-face work policies and which needs to be worked on in order to align it with today's hybridism.

In response to this challenge, leaders need to learn new behaviors and let go of some old habits. The Agile methodology, for example, can help them: it is based on employee empowerment rather than rigid hierarchy and governance. In this sense, an agile organization helps strengthen the culture. In what way? Leaders establish context and purpose, ensure alignment and enable autonomy. Finding the balance between alignment and autonomy is the ultimate test of leadership during any transformation to remote or hybrid working arrangements.

On this topic, Angie Klein, CEO of Visible, a company that provides wireless technology services, shares practical advice on how to focus on organizational culture in order to retain talent. For her, "the key in times of so much professional mobility is to implement proactive retention measures while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of meaning and purpose". It also highlights the importance of thinking about specific benefits, such as pay and flexible working, in order to ensure a balance between pay and more intangible rewards.

Indeed, people management teams agree that the most challenging aspect of a hybrid strategy is adapting the company's culture so that it continues to support its employees wherever they may be. To reshape that culture, some suggestions include finding better, more meaningful ways for employees to connect with it, both

emotionally and in their day-to-day work and experiences. In this sense, the best way to respond to digital disruption is to adapt the company's culture so that it is agile and innovative.

On this point, Simon Sinek, an expert in organizational efficiency, explains why it is important for management to be open and honest in order to gain employee loyalty. Accordingly, he says, inspiration plays a fundamental role in a leadership model that overcomes obstacles, superseding authority. Thus, an inspiring leader who builds trust in their teams will be the catalyst for successful transformation that reinforces culture as a creator of value in itself. Ultimately, the leader has to care about each and every one of their employees. The responsibility lies in making them understand their value and their talent, while exposing them





to challenging situations where the leader guides them until they succeed. Therein lies trust building. Once the task has been accomplished, that person will help others and vice versa.

In other words, employees would be willing to take big risks if they knew the company would do the same for them: "If we don't love the work, we don't take care of each other. If we don't take care of each other, we get lonely. If we feel alone, negative things start to happen," Sinek says. In any case, it is about the leader making each person feel more capable than they believe themselves to be. That is the implicit power inherent in teaching self-confidence. The person who helps instill that confidence is remembered forever. For example, at Spotify, the "Work From Anywhere" initiative allows its employees to work from wherever

they choose, thereby indicating that the cornerstone of remote work is management's trust in its employees and vice versa: "Some of us work better in the office. Some of us are more productive at home. And many of us find we are more effective when we have options," the company says. "Work From Anywhere" allows Spotify employees to do as they choose, supported by a leadership that trusts them and thus encourages a free and productive way of working that also promotes collaboration among employees.

In this sense, Spotify is a clear example of the key factors to prioritize in this context of change: flexibility in the work arrangement and the promotion of a conscious corporate culture and purpose. Thus, business leaders must foster trust within their teams and ask their employees the following

questions: "How can we make you feel like you belong?" "How can we help you be more successful?" In this respect, dynamic environments, emotional intelligence and creative thinking must be the order of the day.

In short, to move into new work environments and respond to redefined employee expectations, managers must incorporate new leadership skills - namely by being innovative, empathetic, disruptive, and entrepreneurial. With people at the center, it is also essential to redefine a corporate culture that is adaptable to hybrid environments and that is based on trust in the teams and their freedom to work. Developing these corporate standards and management and leadership skills will make it possible to attract, promote and retain talent in the current context, where it is so necessary. ▽