



In *Mergers With The Benefit Of Hindsight* we recognised that culture is integral in M&A and it is also relevant in attracting and retaining talent.

Chambers surveyed associates in 2020 and asked them the most important thing to them when choosing a new firm. 90 percent said positive culture and social makeup. However, with hybrid working it is hard to maintain the values and culture of a firm that both differentiates and holds it together. After Covid firms have been able to look at culture, evolve their culture and think how to maintain a sense of community which helps employees thrive and want to stay.

You must define your culture or how can your staff contribute to it if they do not know what values, beliefs and behaviours you want as part of your culture? If your staff cannot connect to it then neither will your clients.

A set of core values that are lived by everyone is key and it can be something as simple as respect. Respect people at meetings so you do not talk over one another. Respect their time so they are not kept waiting or rushed. If as a leader you build this type of environment you are showing that regardless of job title, their input at meetings is valued and they will feel able to participate and share their ideas and opinions because they have a voice that is heard.

The Harvard Business Review states “Cultural fit is important, but what predicts success most is the rate at which employees adapt as organisational culture changes over time. The best cultures encourage diversity to drive innovation but are anchored in shared core beliefs.”

Culture is a combination of factors that create a work environment that gets the best out of individuals, to do that the firm must listen to their employees to find out what they want. More importantly they must ensure that what they as a firm believe is in reality how they are perceived by their staff and the experience they are encountering. Social media is a great starting point. We found for our book research a firm that said "We ensure we have a supportive culture." It was easy to find staff from the same firm who on social media said this "Biggest is not always best, they have forgotten about the people who got them there. We used to have a brilliant and supportive culture but as we have grown we've lost it." It is easy to assume that culture is aligned, we even found a business services employee from the finance team who said their team culture was lovely, however they also said "I do my best to avoid anyone who actually practices law."

Culture starts at the top of a firm but at every level people must be able to articulate what it is and everyone from the Managing Partner to the most junior staff member should understand what the culture is and live it. Do you listen to your employees about the culture they would like to be part of? Do you have regular feedback on culture?

Many of us see the surface level of culture. We have made sure we have re-imagined workspace and re-purposed buildings, so they look amazing and beautiful office space is important to well-being and getting people excited to be back in the office. That's the swan on top of the pond. Elegant, stylish, but what's happening underneath the surface? What are the values, does everyone know what they are and are they being practiced or are they being lost in the mire of the pond?

What do you as a firm do to drive successful behaviours? Sometimes money and benefits are not worth it if the culture of the firm is perceived as a toxic or if the firm is seen as a place where there is no place to grow and learn.

The thing with culture is that it has to please multi-generational levels that are in every firm who of course have different ways of looking at things. Leadership style is critical to cultural norms and will ensure that staff understand that why defining culture is necessary. A shared cultural vision gives a sense of identity and belonging that ensures staff become excited that work is a destination where they go to collaborate, learn and that they enjoy going in to.

As a leader what can you reimagine to create an organisational culture that multi generations want to be part of and how can you ensure your staff collaborate and motivate one another? Can you show them that they are valued and included by your firm and have a real sense of belonging? To retain staff in the current market you will have to provide them with an exceptional employee experience and show them that diversity and inclusion are part of your organisational culture.

Regular communication is key and in our next article in the series we will discuss the key importance of communication.

If you would like to discuss anything in this article, recruitment or M&A please contact Anne Harnetty or Martin Soulsby

aharnetty@jonsonbeaumont.co.uk

msoulsby@jonsonbeaumont.co.uk