The Open Culture – Combine. Collaborate. Distribute. Modify. Use.

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An organisation's culture is as important for its success in business as is its corporate strategy. Research confirms this.

Culture can be an organisation's biggest asset or fundamental liability. While some experts have likened culture to the character or personality of a workplace, I think it is a blend of explicit and implicit aspects that are referred to as "the paradigm by which people operate" at work.

In layman's terms, it's "the way we do things around here."

Do we work top-down?

Do we walk the talk when we say our people are our greatest resources?

Do we hire only 'yes' folks?

Is the bottom-line our only bottom line?

Do we nurture like-minded, as well as dissimilar individuals to form communities, all working towards a shared vision of innovation?

Do we encourage our talent to go beyond the bottom line, and find something truly meaningful?

The answers to some of these questions will give us a sneak peek into the culture of an organisation.

Having said that, I believe that the future belongs to an open culture. I do not doubt that the future belongs to participation. It belongs to a flat and open org structure.

Look around, and you'll notice its power.

It encourages individuals to strike out and take new initiatives, while also facilitating a conducive environment for everyone to pitch in. When everyone participates, it becomes a melting pot of new ideas, new solutions and growth.

So here's looking at some ways which the open culture works well for any organisation

Everyone is equal

In his exceptional book *The Open Organization*, Jim Whitehurst, the CEO of Red Hat, talks about the "elephant in the room" – A place where no one, despite being aware of what's wrong, says or does anything to remedy the condition for fear of offending the boss. In organisations that espouse an open culture, employees – irrespective of whether they are interns or managers – are encouraged to speak out. Traditional hierarchies are broken down, facilitating an honest exchange of ideas, and thereby increasing efficiency, accountability, transparency, teamwork, and a sense of belonging among employees.

All on the same page

Imagine being part of a relay race and not knowing where the finish line is! Most employees know that feeling only too well, as they are rarely part of discussions regarding the company's mission and vision. When organisations embrace an open culture, well-defined goals of the company are conveyed to all employees from time to time, helping them make meaningful contributions. As Daniel Pink says in his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, there is a natural human tendency to seek purpose and be part of a greater cause. Open organisations tap into this "purpose motive" to drive employees to do their best at work.

Employee engagement

What does it take to increase productivity at work? An engaged workplace that sees value and recognition in their job. Red Hatters embody the open culture that not only makes the office a happy place but also drives the bottom line. When organisations support employees with regular training and development as well as recognise and appreciate good work on a day-to-day basis, talent retention ceases to be a Herculean task.

Employee sentiment

Workplace stress is not uncommon in any culture. In a closed structure, every individual is an island – expected to deal with her/ his emotional baggage. However, in open organisations, we realise that human beings are not machines and we need to build bridges that facilitate candid conversations about employee sentiments. It's important to align the objectives of the organisation with the diverse employee sentiment quotient.

Business agility

In a recent survey of senior executives, 94% of respondents were of the opinion that "agility and collaboration" are high priorities to their organization's success. However, only 6% said they were "highly agile" as on day. Business agility calls for an open culture. Because agility is primarily a mindset, not just a process or methodology. A bottom-up, agile, open source approach will pave the path for business agility as well.

Innovation readiness

When we think of innovation, we invariably think of swanky new products or features. But then, there are varied kinds of innovation – from routine innovation (built on existing technological competencies and business model) and disruptive innovation (entails new business model, though not always technological advancement) to radical innovation (characterised by technological breakthrough) and architectural innovation (combination of technological and business model disruption).

Only organisations with an open culture can be ready to inspire employees to experiment, be creative, and develop innovative solutions to varied problems across business verticals.

Meaningful collaborations

Collaboration is the only way. As we build the ability to pool resources with peers, we quit having to worry about organisational barriers. An open organisation is structured more laterally, enabling knowledge sharing and collective creativity.

Our experience shows that people working together in an open, transparent environment are more capable of solving problems. Studies corroborate that collaborative workplaces are high on productivity and innovation - the two factors that drive success in today's world.

As we embrace digital evolution, it's pertinent to realise that cutting-edge technology alone cannot guarantee growth. New-age organisations need to create an open, people-centric company culture that focuses on honest exchange of ideas, innovative processes, and engaging professional journeys.

(The author is the Managing Director, Red Hat India)

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