



can your people strategies make you competitive?

By Linda Hughes

There are many strategies that contribute to achieving a competitive advantage but maximising your people strategies is a major contributor to achieving a competitive edge in the marketplace.



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Linking People Strategies to High Performing Companies

Organisations that leverage their people to achieve their business objectives, especially growth have more positive results – there's too much research to prove it! These companies have well-defined people plans that align with their company's business goals and values. Their employees stay employed longer and contribute positively to the overall financial performance.

Companies without a clear people plan are at risk of losing or never obtaining a competitive advantage.

What are the key people strategies that can help you gain a competitive advantage?

Each company has different business objectives that contribute to developing a competitive advantage but getting the culture right is the bedrock to achieving success.

Create your culture...

Having a set of values can really harness the direction your culture takes. And include your entire team in the development of your values – it can really boost engagement and create an inclusive culture as everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

Whilst it is great to end up with a list of words or values, it is also very important, even more so with a remote or distributed team, to document what you hope your company culture becomes.

The resulting document should be inspirational, clear, and articulate and obviously well written. It should clearly articulate the company culture to everyone in your organisation, new and old, right from day one.

It should be clear about expectations, how performance is measured, how you assess employees for cultural fit, and the like. No detail is too small to be not included.



This company culture should be constantly reassessed as you grow or change as well. Don't just spend copious time on it, and then shelve it somewhere inaccessible by everyone.

Consider putting your culture deck together and sharing it on the web for others to view as well; it is a great way to introduce possible candidates to your organisation too.

Inspirational Leaders who guide employees...

Organisations that understand the importance of having leaders in their teams who inspire, influence and guide people towards common goals to achieve organisational and personal development – make the difference.

Leaders create a flourishing environment that either promotes low or high performing teams, which ultimately affects the overall productivity. In essence, united staff and team management are equally important. While you may have the best experts, inefficient leadership will have them performing at a lower level.



Nothing will derail any team, no matter how good they are, except for seeing a leader who doesn't lead by example. The stories of great teams folding from a lack of congruence from their leaders are many, to say the least. That is why leading from the top cannot be overemphasised.

You need a leader that always lives by the organisation's values and team's goals. A high-performance team can weather significant setbacks under outstanding leadership.

Diversity & Inclusion...

In recent years, most successful organisations have started paying more attention to diversity and inclusion. As a leader, it's crucial to have an inclusive mindset to build a strong team.

Differences in race, gender, age, and ethnicity encourage high performance. This is what team diversity is all about, and although it is the initial and easier step, inclusion is what leverages diversity.

Besides a mixture of cultural backgrounds, age, and gender, a leader also needs to consider 'cognitive' diversity. This entails mixing individuals with different perspectives, thinking styles, and habits. If everyone on your team has one style, performance will be compromised.

When there are unique personalities, you benefit from the diversity of thought, skills, and experience, which go a long way in avoiding group thinking, enabling quicker decision-making, and achieving improved outcomes with greater quality.



Talent...

People are key to achieving organisational goals, so it's vital to have a strategy in place to manage talent.

Successful talent management offers many business benefits, from adding value to your brand and creating a positive company culture to improving organisational performance. To enjoy these benefits, your talent management strategy should be fully aligned to your overall business aims and objectives.



Talent management encompasses everything involved in attracting, engaging, motivating, developing, and retaining high value employees. And a talent management strategy is designed to support organisations through every stage of the recruitment and retention cycle, from attracting talent and developing talent to engaging and retaining high-quality staff as valuable resources.

Wellbeing the heart of the working environment...

Employee wellbeing isn't a nice-to-have, it's a must-have for companies with their sights set on success. However, for a long time, employee wellbeing and workplace wellness were dismissed as a "fluffy" initiative. Yoga classes were paid for, gym memberships compensated, and the programme considered complete. Employee wellbeing today is much more than physical wellness.



Wellbeing is a holistic understanding of someone's physical, emotional, mental, and social state. When people are in a state of wellbeing at work, they're able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build positive relationships with others, cope with the normal stresses of life, and make a meaningful contribution.

Thanks to ongoing research, we can see how a focus on employee wellbeing reverse employee burnout and reduce stress, turnover, and absenteeism.

Communication must be a priority...

The continued success of a high performing team depends on communication. Lack of it is a recipe for disaster — missed deadlines, conflicts, mistakes, and lost productivity.

For instance, it's common to think that you can give a summary because your team already 'gets it.' However, for the most part, that couldn't be further from the truth. It doesn't matter how intelligent you are; if you under-communicate parameters and expectations, your staff won't go anywhere. On the other hand, effective communication ensures they stay on top of their game.

Communication with your team members as their leader should be fine-tuned with time; it doesn't happen overnight. This process needs constant improvement.

One way of ensuring progress in terms of communication is to invite a neutral party in some of your meetings. A non-member can easily identify gaps and give feedback, which will help you streamline communication. Also, all the team members should easily and freely access all the information shared in the team. Moreover, each person should feel comfortable enough to voice their opinions and ideas.



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Engaged employees...



A work environment that fosters intrapreneurship and innovation typically has a high level of employee engagement – research shows that being intrapreneurial tends to elevate both employee engagement and productivity scores, and that short redesigns and even a simple reframing of an employee’s role can make their work more intrapreneurial and meaningful. High employee engagement will lead to high employee retention and increased productivity which leads to profitability.

People Team...

The impact of the current crisis has turned so much of our HR world upside down. Most of the clunky, annual processes feel irrelevant. There doesn’t seem to be any C-suite executive who hasn’t read about how other companies are getting rid of appraisals and are questioning what HR are doing about it – along with fixing the systems that don’t align. On top of that Millennials are making demands for greater flexibility and wanting everything on their Smartphone. And not least the acceleration of hybrid working arrangements to name but a few challenges!!!

More for less. More agility. More innovation. All HR professionals face the same challenges, regardless of sector.

Of course, focusing on the future HR organisation structure is not without its challenges!

Organisations need to ask some fundamental questions about what to do and how to it if they are going to deliver more productivity and innovation.

Here are 5 key trends in HR design that we’re seeing that will offer greater opportunities for real creativity, increased capacity to deliver and happily, should save money too.



From HR Manager / Business Partner to Account Management - this person does the strategic and commercial parts of the role, the relationship building, the diagnosis of what’s required, the resource planning and the oversight of the delivery. They then call upon the HR generalist and/or technical experts who can deliver the solution. The key benefit of this approach is there is a genuine strategic/commercial and separate HR advisory role. Either part can be delivered in-house or bought in or for larger organisations two separate roles.

The fundamental difference is that whilst the HR Manager may be the most senior member of the HR Team – their focus should not be on day-to-day matters of policies and transactional matters – but being part of the leadership team as the people specialist – not the process specialist.

HR Advisory – more than a transaction - the HR Advisory service is a key part of the employee experience, and one that should be recognised for its technical competence. But we also see a new trend – of the next generation of this role / service which is quite different to the current operations where the HR adviser deploys a big chunk of judgement weighing up the maturity of the line manager, the precedents that had already been set, the risks with this employee, etc, etc along with their own advice – with a new style of approach that involves empathy, understanding, capability development and the ability to assess risk.

Building capability not just compliance - this trend comes largely through a fresh response to a disrupted world where the abundance of employment policies and rules often stifle innovation and increase frustration of employees. Of course, rules matter. But they need to be relevant – we are now seeing fewer policies, more guides and more time being spent on developing the capabilities of our managers with less emphasis on “enforcing and monitoring” building trust and working partnerships.

Employee Experience not Centres of Expertise - by focusing HR on the actual experience that is desired at each stage of the employee life cycle through recognising the employee as the consumer, organisations can create a more joined up and holistic employee proposition that is greater than the sum of its HR parts. Driven by improved and genuine employee insight (a blend of qualitative and quantitative analysis), created through effective user-centred design and delivered in ways that are relevant to each segment of the employee “market” – there are huge opportunities to increase productivity and reduce wasted effort.

Contingent vs Permanent - this final trend has been evident in piecemeal form for many years. We have regularly deployed contractors, temps, and consultants to supplement or enhance our FTE levels. But we have rarely used them as a strategic choice – more as a tactical fill in. The accelerated pace of innovation in the HR space, the new freelance tech platforms, the continued pressure on costs and the need to deploy rapidly to resolve issues or bring about change all lead organisations to question whether a standing army of HR people is relevant in the future. This trend is about “Smart Contingency” – a belief that you can get a better level of innovation, a better resource flow and increased delivery capability if you include non-permanent resources as a key part of your HR team. This is more than getting in additional bodies to fix a problem or to cover maternity leave, it’s more than buying a consultant to give specialist advice – it is about building an eco-system of a mix of contingent HR capabilities that meet your medium- and longer-term needs. Contemporary HR teams are building up their abilities to commission work and to contract effectively to get the most from this growing resource.

At the end of the day, your people are your competitive edge...

They are the ones interfacing with your customers and producing your products and services. They are generating new ideas and solving problems. They represent your quality, value, and innovation. Make sure you have specific HR strategies to attract, develop and retain the people you need to be competitive.



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