



Reinventing the world of work:

Is your organisation fit for the future?



CorporateCultureGroup

In this article we explore how and why taking a more human-centric approach to organisational culture can [help businesses reduce their exposure to risk](#) and support their people to thrive in the face of the unprecedented social, environmental and financial challenges we're experiencing today. The [five insights and ten recommendations](#) below can set your organisation on the right path to be fit for the future.

A transformative time

The impacts of global economic, social and political uncertainty are being felt keenly by organisations right now. The worsening cost-of-living crisis and sky-high inflation are stretching wages and driving industrial unrest, as [organisations struggle to remain profitable, meet changing customer needs and shareholder demands](#).

Simultaneously, we are experiencing the biggest shake up in the world of work for 100 years. The coronavirus pandemic accelerated a debate on the future of work. [Every employer is wrestling with the same issues](#): what are the implications for where and how we work, and our relationships with colleagues and customers? For many organisations, these considerations have primarily focused on the physical nature of their workplaces and spaces, and the processes to ensure full connectivity for employees able to work from anywhere.

But behind this are wider implications. In the opening up of geographical boundaries, [employees have greater opportunities](#). Some sectors (e.g., hospitality and care) cannot recruit due to better wages and benefits elsewhere. In others, a so-called 'war for talent' has emerged, and organisations are finding it harder to recruit and retain the skills and talents they need to remain competitive.

The pandemic also caused many employees to reflect on their lives, what matters to them, and their personal values. So they make changes – to their shopping habits, lifestyle habits, and working habits. Often this results in things no longer aligning, which has [implications for what people](#) are looking for from their employers.

Cultural challenges

There are some ensuing cultural challenges. Strengthening organisational culture becomes more complex in a hybrid working environment, as [culture has become even harder to enhance or maintain](#) for those that have historically relied on being present in the office to fully engage. Having employees at [increased risk of disengagement](#) also complicates talent recruitment and retention.

Leaders and managers are asking themselves what they can do to improve the mood of the organisation, and ensure employees feel cared for in turbulent times. In many sectors, organisations face a 'perfect storm' – a need for workplace reform, productivity improvement, or operational efficiency,



balanced with a swell of employee activism calling for a fair share of voice, for equity and diversity, for action on climate change. At first glance the needs of business and of employees might even appear to be contradictory. Certainly, [we are witnessing employee and industrial unrest not seen since the 1980s](#), as sectors struggle to reconcile business demands with employee needs.

It's safe to say [the way we work has changed forever](#). At the exact time organisations need it the most, the rulebook for culture, engagement and communications has been ripped up. So where does that leave us? How, in such a chaotic world, can organisations create a 'culture of calm' where colleagues can thrive, while still [addressing business-critical issues and continuing to be successful](#)?

The Human Organisation

It's clear that if organisations don't respond to the changing world, the future looks a little bleak. [So we need to be bold](#). Now is the time not just for the reinvention of the workplace, but the reimagining of the world of work in its broadest sense.

Easier said than done, most would agree. But at Corporate Culture Group, we believe the solution lies in [understanding human behaviour](#). Recent research shows that organisations that put humans at the centre of their transformation efforts are 2.6 times more likely to succeed¹. This knowledge, when used alongside specific organisational drivers, can help to redesign the workplace experience.

Enter the [Human Organisation](#), where a company's business-critical issues can be addressed using the collective human potential of its people; where those people can bring their full and best selves to work every day, and thrive; where [ways of working and culture support business and human needs](#); and where the employee experience is designed by the people, for the people.

Five key insights

A quick google will tell you there are hundreds, if not thousands, of answers to the question 'What does it mean to be human?'. Different disciplines all have different perspectives, some more relevant to organisational culture and design than others.

At its most basic, being more human can mean being people-centric rather than being focused on processes or systems, which most HR, change and culture professionals would argue is no bad thing. Running a 'business with a soul' is important, and encouraging principles of friendliness, empathy and humour into the workplace can ensure a more engaging experience.

However, there is much more to it. [The reality is that too few organisations truly understand what makes people tick, and how to get the best out of them](#). We do.

¹ 2022 research by EY and Oxford Said Business School based on a survey of 935 senior leaders https://www.ey.com/en_gl/news/2022/06/prioritizing-emotions-is-the-key-to-success-for-business-transformation



Taking the latest thinking from neuroscience and behavioural science we believe there are **five key insights** into human behaviour that can help organisations to 'be more human', and respond to the challenges they face today and in the future.

1. Bias, motivation and cognitive shortcuts

One of the fundamental lessons from behavioural science is that we overestimate the extent to which people think about things, and underestimate the extent to which they make decisions without thinking at all. As much as 95% of our decisions are made intuitively, and are heavily influenced in-the-moment by the physical, emotional, social, cultural, and situational contexts.

Often, in communication or engagement with colleagues, we ignore these cognitive biases, shortcuts and motivators that influence how people think and act. We talk about 'winning hearts and minds', assuming that a rational human being, given necessary information and any incentives or disincentives, will make informed decisions; and that appealing to emotions is about demonstrating empathy, kindness and integrity. These things are true, but wildly oversimplified. Yet they remain at the heart of most organisations' approaches to engagement and culture change.

A better understanding of human behaviour can help to design communications and interventions that work with, and not against, the quirks of human decision-making. Understanding what makes your people tick, their needs, perspectives and motivations can increase engagement and propensity to act – whether the desired action is increasing collaboration, being more customer focused, improving efficiencies, or reducing waste. An understanding of bias and motivation can reduce friction and improve the success of projects, lead to improved performance management, and better engagement of suppliers and customers.

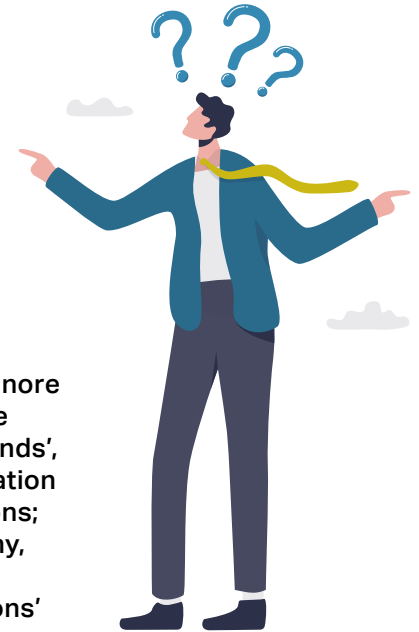
We recommend:

- Carrying out audience research, insight and diagnostics to better understand your people in order to shape communication, engagement and change activity.
- Embedding behavioural change thinking into transformation programmes.

2. A deep desire for meaning

We have an innate human need for meaning, hardwired into our brains. The Japanese have a word for it, *Ikigai*, meaning 'a reason for being' or 'life purpose'.

Millennials (or Generation Y) are known for their desire that their contribution has meaning and impact in the world. Reputation matters; in a recent survey, 60% of millennials said a sense of purpose was part of the reason they chose to work for their employer². With millennials expected to make up 75% of the workforce in just two years³, these views are important.



2 Centre for Generational Kinetics and Barnum Financial Group (2015) Unlocking Millennial Talent

3 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2022/06/27/millennials-and-gen-z-now-is-the-time-to-reshape-businesses-to-harness-their-power/?sh=7350c3ef5c98>

Since the events of 2020, more of us than ever have started to question our own purpose, and seek a deeper sense of meaning in our day-to-day lives. While this may, for example, lead some of us to move off-grid and set up a small-holding in the countryside, for most, we look to our work to provide that sense of purpose.

This has two implications. Firstly, the need to connect our own sense of purpose to the purpose of the organisation we work for. And secondly, to feel our work contributes to something bigger than ourselves.

There are significant benefits. Deloitte research⁴ shows a correlation between a strong sense of purpose and strong financial performance. Purpose can also help with multiple people measures, including retention and engagement. Another high-profile study⁵ showed that deriving a sense of meaning and significance from work had the highest single impact on job satisfaction and engagement, and likelihood to stay with an organisation, than any other factor.

We recommend:

- Developing/refreshing your purpose, and articulating it within and outside your business.
- Developing and sharing a strategic narrative that inspires your people.
- Using story-driven campaigns to bring your purpose-to-life.



3. Our social natures

People are social by nature: powerful, innate drivers shape the networks we form. If we doubted the importance of social connection, the pandemic was a wake-up call. When the world was in lockdown, what people reported missing the most was spending time with friends, family, colleagues and others. Sadly, many also discovered that isolation from social contact can adversely impact our wellbeing.

In an organisational context, it's not so much about engineering after-work events or lunchtime socials, albeit these things can help. It's more that providing opportunities for colleagues to connect and collaborate in meaningful and relevant ways aligned to organisational goals can have significant benefit. Social contact spreads ideas, which lead to innovation. Building connections also breaks down silos. Social connection can absolutely solve business problems.

We recommend:

- Engagement and connection programmes and interventions.
- Programmes to help organisations open-up and join-up across departments and countries.

4 Deloitte, 'Culture of Purpose – A business imperative, 2013 Core beliefs and culture survey'

5 Harvard Business Review and The Energy Project, 'The Quality of Life @ Work' study of c.20,000 employees across the globe.



4. Innate curiosity

As well as being social, humans are also curious by nature, our brain is hardwired that way. We like new ideas and new experiences. Studies have shown⁶ that people's curiosity to find out how a magic trick worked triggered activity in the same area of their brains as a hunger for food.

It seems apparent that organisations can and should take advantage of our curiosity to harness new, innovative or disruptive ideas, change behaviour, and even open new markets or revenue streams. Often however, this only manifests in how organisations think about communication – we talk about providing 'hooks' and creating intrigue through 'teaser' messages prior to launching new campaigns.

What can be more valuable is tapping into our human desire for new ideas, information, knowledge and understanding through programmes and initiatives that encourage open minds and active exploration of real business challenges. This can help create cultures of innovation that are solution-centric.

In addition, encouraging different ways of thinking improves cognitive diversity, which can prevent organisations becoming echo chambers whose survival is threatened in a fast-moving competitive market. Championing cognitive diversity can then help create inclusive cultures that enable and foster other forms of diversity, and an environment where people can bring their full selves to work.

We recommend:

- Strategies, interventions and communication programmes to foster collaboration and innovation.

5. Alignment of belief and action

Another basic principle of human behaviour is that what people believe influences what they do. Our beliefs dictate how we use our time, where we live, the friendships we form, the companies we work for and the politicians we vote for. When our beliefs don't line up with our actions, we experience cognitive dissonance. For example, eating meat as an animal lover, or regularly using air travel as a passionate environmentalist.

For organisations, it's important to define and articulate company beliefs (perhaps expressed as values or ways of working) so that colleagues are clear about the alignment between what they believe personally, and the organisation they choose to work with. Doing so can have a positive impact on recruitment and retention, as well as speeding up the decision-making process and helping colleagues to feel empowered.

⁶ University of Reading study referenced by BBC <https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/why-are-humans-so-curious/>

It can also align other workplace behaviours – so that colleagues are not asked to do things that are contrary to their own beliefs – and provide a framework for understanding strategic or commercial decisions and actions. This reduces the 'say/do gap', and protects organisational integrity, brand and reputation.

We recommend:

- Defining your beliefs or values, and communicating them with a clear compelling narrative.
- Developing frameworks to guide behaviours, speed up decision-making, and ensure organisation integrity.

Act now

It's more important than ever that you understand and implement the steps to being a more human organisation: it de-risks your business, empowers your people to thrive, helps to solve your critical challenges, and underpins the process of transformational change. We can help you get started.



Let's talk...

call Elaine on 0845 607 0000 or email elaine.smith@corporateculture.co.uk to explore how you can start your journey to becoming more human.



Read the report...

[click here](#) to download The Human Organisation report.



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