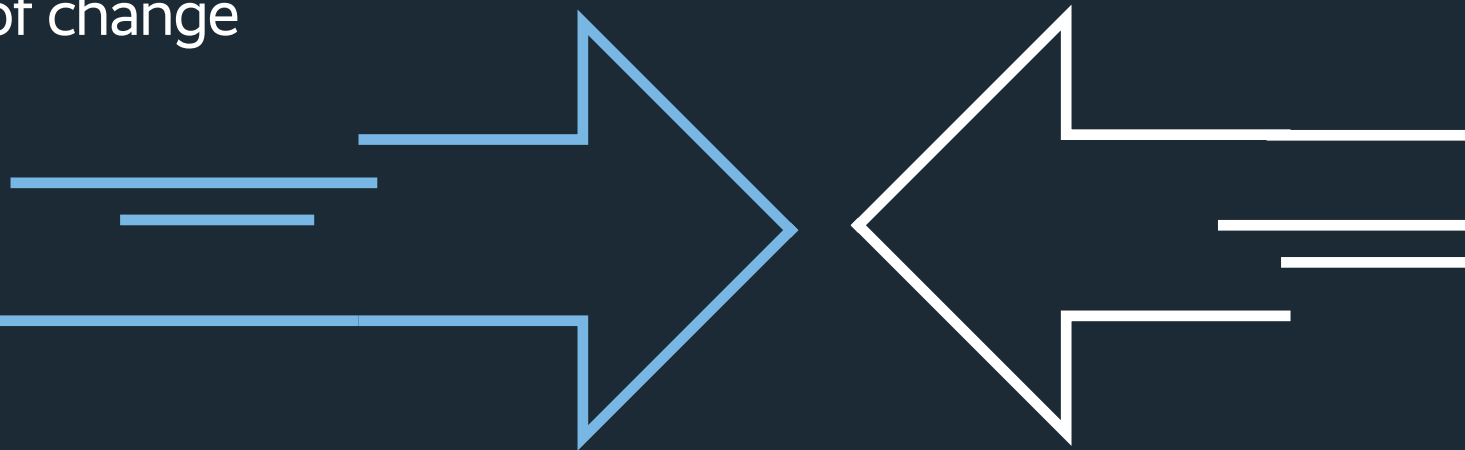


radley yeldar.

2021: Confronting the Culture Crisis

Understanding the levers of change
and how to use them



March 2021

**2021 is The Year
of the Culture Crisis.**
The world is hungry
for connection but
struggling to find
it at work.



This has profound implications for organisations both in the present “new normal” and the next.



As many of us now expect to work from home well into the second half of the year, this white paper explores key elements of culture and the corresponding levers that can be used to drive change and help businesses navigate this difficult time.

We've included practical steps along the way to help bring this journey to life.

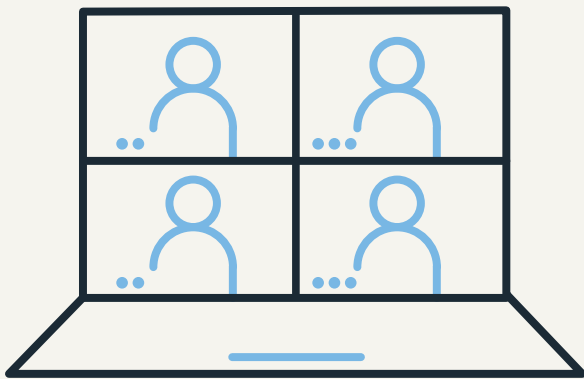
This year our award-winning employee experience team has been working with clients embedding strategy into behaviour, reengaging their people in a new world of work, and ultimately building belief in business from the inside out. Many of these projects have required a rethink of the fundamentals of internal communications.

This document reflects what we have learned in that time and includes practical advice to other organisations out there struggling with these culture challenges.

Jacob Guberg
Senior Employee
Experience Consultant

The challenge is real. The consequences, significant.

As our lives change around us - it's the intangible things we miss the most. The feeling bestowed by getting dressed for the office, the cold air on your face on the morning commute, the reassuring solidarity of a watercooler conversation. It's these intangible things – like culture – that are often the hardest to retain.



57% of companies anticipate “major” changes to their culture as a result of the pandemic. 39% of UK C-level execs believe company culture has already been damaged or diluted as a result of remote working.

57%

of companies anticipate “major” changes to their culture as a result of the pandemic

With over eight in ten of UK workers looking for a new job within the next year, organisations that are complacent on culture risk not only damaging engagement but an inability to attract to the talent required to fill vacancies and plug widening skill gaps.

39%

of UK C-level execs believe company culture has already been damaged or diluted as a result of remote working

Identifying the right levers for change

Often, we view culture as a monolithic concept – something vast and unwieldy. In some ways, this is true – those that speak of “culture change” as if it were no more than switching a pair of socks are deluding themselves. Culture is a complex blend of values, expectations, habits, and ultimately - behaviours. It is these elements that we can influence.

Like changing the output of a large machine, we don't need to tear it apart – we just need to pull the right levers. In concrete terms this can mean using recognition schemes to target and reward specific behaviours or embedding your values into the recruitment process, to attract the right people. It's in identifying the specific elements of culture that we wish to support or change that we can find the right levers to pull.

The acute lack of propinquity to our colleagues now that much of our work is carried out remotely strains the social bonds and shared reality that keeps us engaged in our work. It reduces the organic occurrence of the moments that matter – the ad-hoc career conversations with mentors, dreaming up passion projects with managers, recognition from senior leaders and peers. We've seen a panoply of ways that workplaces have supported social connection, from digital team lunches to photo competitions.



“Levers” are initiatives that a business can undertake in order to drive a desired impact. Like a mechanical lever, they have a ‘from’ and ‘to’ state: where you are now, and where you want to be. Pulling them all at once won't result in success - not only does it spread efforts too thinly, it means you can't pinpoint which initiative is responsible for improved results. It makes sense to focus on a single lever at a time - pulling the most impactful one - factoring in effort, cost and time.



**But don't get lost in the fog of organised fun
– making work engaging is serious business.**

The levers for change – your first three steps

1

Identify the key drivers of engagement for your people using data from employee engagement surveys, continuous feedback, or focus groups. This will tell us what levers will have the maximum effect.

2

Focus on the ‘moments that matter’ – employee experience touchpoints which impact engagement. In a culture that values growth and feedback, these could be performance reviews, in a culture that is driven by its impact, this could mean celebrating targets met.

3

Put measures in place to ensure they happen. This might look like support for managers in giving feedback or holding career conversations – or simply creating digital spaces and habits for people to organically connect and share ideas.

The importance of an EVP

However brightly your culture shines, your organisation will still experience natural attrition as employees retire, progress internally, or move on to external opportunities.

Add to this the widening gap in skills required to sustain digital transformation, and aforementioned [predicted spike in turnover](#) as people reassess their lives and attracting talent is suddenly high up on the agenda again. Here too, pulling the right levers of your culture can give your organisation an edge in the battle for talent.

Much has been written about the importance of organisational purpose in recent years – and rightly so. Research from Glassdoor states that [79% of adults](#) would consider a company's purpose before applying there. But as with all things culture, talking about it is not enough. An authentic purpose is one that is discovered organically in collaboration with employees, rather than imposed upon them. An effective purpose is one that permeates throughout daily life and provides a foundation for further values and behaviours to build on.

These values and expectations are communicated to prospective talent through your Employee Value Proposition. Your EVP is a statement which should communicate both what you expect of potential employees i.e., behaviours, attitudes, and what you can offer them in return i.e., opportunity to grow, purpose-driven business. Research by Gartner shows that delivering on an EVP can decrease turnover [by up to 69%](#). But this power cuts both ways. [Historic organisational psychology research](#) shows that people can live with not getting everything they want, but that transgressing expectations is hugely damaging. As with our organisation's purpose, our EVP needs to be authentic – reflecting both our vision for the company and its reality.

“Delivering on an Employee Value Proposition can decrease turnover by up to 69%.”

Maximising your EVP – three steps to take

1

Include a diversity of employees in the process of discovering or updating your purpose and EVP, through a variety of workshops, surveys, and focus groups. As well as giving insight into your culture, amplifying employee voice is itself a positive step to an engaged workplace.

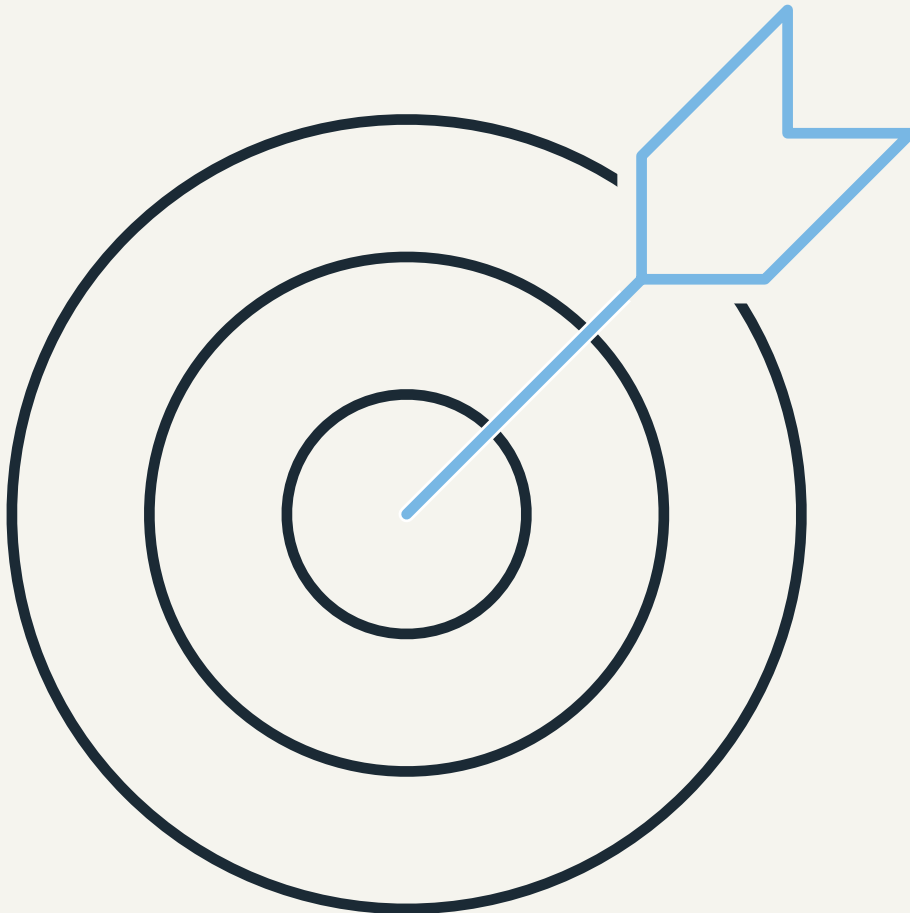
2

Lean into the disparity between vision and reality. There were employees let down by the EVP? What parts of the organisation's purpose don't ring true? The answers to these questions are like gold – they let you know which other levers to pull to improve.

3

Weave your purpose throughout your culture. If your purpose, values, and behaviours exist only on paper – they do not exist at all. Bring them to life by making them part of everyday habits and reinforce them with consistent internal communications.

Aiming for cultural maturity



Like an ill-fitting bedsheet – it seems that as soon as one element of your culture is locked down, another pops off. **Trying to keep up** with hiring drives, engagement survey results, and indeed global crises is exhausting.

Culture is too foundational to organisational success to approach it in such a reactive way, and rather than considering the much-discussed ‘culture reset’ we should instead look for a cultural maturity.

Moving away from one-shot initiatives towards a **long-term culture strategy** requires careful thought and engagement from stakeholders across your organisation – but **it will give you and your leaders with an operating manual** for something that was previously intangible.

Cultural maturity – three steps to take

1

Understand what defines your culture and map out how it supports your business, starting with an overarching purpose before extrapolating this out into values and behaviours, and the concrete habits and structures that reinforce them.

2

Identify gaps and pull the right levers by mapping your culture against your employee experience journey ensuring that it shines through in all the moments that matter – from onboarding to exit interview.

3

Empower your people to take ownership. For all employees, this means input and understanding on the purpose, values, and behaviours. For leaders this means buy-in to their role in upholding culture, and which levers they can pull.

**As our lives change
around us - it's the
intangible things that
we miss the most.**

**But workplace culture needn't be one of them.
By paying attention to the levers that influence
culture and building a strategy to support them
we'll thrive through this crisis – and the next.**



If you need any help, we're **Radley Yeldar**, an award-winning, independent London and Birmingham-based creative consultancy with more than 200 communications specialists.

We've been working with organisations of all shapes and sizes for over 30 years to help create a world that believes in business.

We can help you with crisis campaigns across all types of stakeholders, as well as sustainability communications, corporate messaging, employee engagement, digital experiences, and more.

Interested to hear more?
We'd love to chat

hello@ry.com
+44 (0)20 7033 0700

Visit us at ry.com



References

1. **2021 Global Culture Report**
<https://www.octanner.com/content/dam/oc-tanner/images/v2/culture-report/2021/GCR-2021-sm.pdf>
2. **Company Culture Top Concern For Flexible Future**
<https://www.thehrdirector.com/business-news/recruitment/company-culture-top-concern-for-hr-professionals-as-they-build-a-more-flexible-future/>
3. **Over eight in ten UK workers searching for their next job in 2021**
https://www.hrreview.co.uk/hr-news/over-eight-in-10-uk-workers-searching-for-their-next-job-in-2021/130595?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=over-eight-in-10-uk-workers-searching-for-their-next-job-in-2021
4. **New Survey: Company Mission & Culture Matter More Than Salary**
<https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/blog/mission-culture-survey/>
5. **Strengthen Your Employee Value Proposition**
<https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/insights/employee-engagement-performance/employee-value-proposition>
6. **When Employees Feel Betrayed: A Model of How Psychological Contract Violation Develops**
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/259230?seq=1>