

Six steps to creating candour and accountability in the workplace

With the sudden introduction of virtual offices and at home working environments, many organisations are being faced with the change of its culture almost overnight. The company culture has been turned on its head, and there is no better time, than now, to implement a new one.



“In the past, when it came to adjusting an organisation’s culture, resistance would be encountered from employees who were used to doing things a particular way. However, during times of uncertainty, changing an organisation’s culture can be much easier and more easily accepted,” says Helene Vermaak, business director of corporate culture experts The Human Edge. “When the ‘normal’ of an organisation is under threat with a high possibility of change, the employees will look to the leaders of the organisation for direction.”

When creating this new culture, two important elements need to be included as core foundations, candour and accountability. This will help ensure that this new culture is one that can be effectively implemented and practised with fewer hiccups.

“Candour is not something that comes naturally to everyone, and it is not always appreciated,” says Vermaak, “but when it is used within a safe environment where employees know that they can voice their concerns without retaliation, it is easily accepted.”

Taking the first step to implementing a candour culture within an organisation will increase crucial conversations and grow accountability. Vermaak suggests the following steps:

1. **Send a clear message.** Let your team know that there needs to be a change in behaviour to match the change in the times. This message needs to be clear when it comes to your intent and should include an open dialogue of how issues experienced in the past can be avoided and addressed. This is a new start and open, honest communication needs to be embraced by all.
2. **Involve the right people.** The crucial conversations that need to be had first, need to be done immediately and with the correct people. Those involved need to be able to get the job done and implemented correctly the first time. Everyone on this team needs to be able to help make the right decision, and firmly agree with what the outcome will be. This is the time to insert candour into the conversation and show those involved that it is not something from which to shy away.
3. **Use the correct behaviour to implement your plan.** When putting your plan into place, it is important to identify which aspects need to be carried out first for employees to feel safe. It is also necessary to identify the behaviour you are going to use to implement these changes, as it will have an effect on whether the employees will agree to the changes willingly or with resistance.
4. **Feedback is welcome.** Employees need to know that they will be able to address problematic areas they encounter without backlash. Organising a weekly conference call meeting can be a place where everyone can voice their observations, their concerns and their thoughts in a constructive, safe environment.
5. **Teach virtually.** Our new 'normal' should include the leaders teaching. There is no waiting around for things to return back to the way they were for leaders to teach their employees healthy norms; it needs to be done now. This is the time to teach employees new ways of working, and a time to rid the organisation of unhealthy behaviours.
6. **Lead by example.** Leaders need to be role models when asking others to change the way they behave. They need to demonstrate candour in all communication, as well as display how one should behave when this candour is directed back.

Re-evaluating cultures within an organisation during times of change and crisis allows for businesses to survive and grow during these uncertain times. "Developing an accepted atmosphere of candour within crucial conversations and ensuring a safe environment in which to express one's views is a step in the right direction to changing the old, behavioural norms into adaptive, successful ones while at the same time growing accountability," concludes Vermaak.

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