

What Employees Want from The Workplace In 2023

People Management | Rikia Birindelli-Fayne | May 17, 2023

Upholding people's rights and implementing genuine policies are just some of the factors staff expect from organisations today, says Rikia Birindelli-Fayne.

Traditionally work was a transactional relationship between employee and employer, but this is no longer the case for many. As the lines of home and work blurred during the pandemic, there has been a shift in employees' relationships with their employer.

More and more research reveals that it is becoming increasingly important for there to be an alignment of values between leaders and workers, as well as other enhanced expectations including empathetic leadership, and more focus on employees' health and wellbeing, with women's health at the forefront.

These changes are not going away and, while exacerbated at times of crisis, they are becoming the norm.

As organisations grapple with how the future of work looks, they need to take notice of the new alliance being forged between employers and their workers.

Policies must be authentic and genuine

Employees increasingly want to feel that businesses are doing 'the right thing', which matches their values. They want progressive leaders speaking out on global equity and purposeful action to advance marginalised groups, including women and women of colour, in the workplace.

Workers, however, see through performative policies. Announcing grandiose plans that then fail to materialise can lead to an organisation's ethics or values being brought into question. In a Catalyst survey of nearly 7,000 employees in 14 countries around the world, three out of four employees (75 per cent) described their organisation's racial equity policies, often as a result of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as not 'genuine'.

When employees do believe that policies to tackle inequality in the workplace are authentic and genuine they are more likely to be engaged in their work, and more likely to stay. Conversely, when staff think their organisations are inauthentic, trust in leaders and the company, as well as team performance and productivity, will suffer.

Leaders who demonstrate substantive policies to make the workplace a fairer place will benefit from a loyal and engaged workforce.

Empathy and adaptability: essential behaviours for leaders

The gap between private and working life was bridged during the pandemic and there is no going back. In the early days of Covid a new working culture of flexibility and understanding was forged. Leaders were needed who could speak authentically with care and concern for

employees during this time of crisis and this is not something, together with flexible work options, that workers want switched off now.

We know from global movements, including the 'Great Resignation' and the more recent 'quiet quitting' phenomenon, that employees expect leaders to continue to be empathetic to their personal circumstances and to support them in achieving a fair work-life balance. In addition, their leaders must be adaptable and able to adjust to new circumstances. For instance, having the ability to respond flexibly to new situations and information, as well as being able to see problems from different perspectives and not being phased if faced with ambiguity and uncertainty. Importantly, leaders should be open to change and view it as a chance to learn and improve.

Unfortunately, many employees say their boss does not have these skills.

In addition, when managers show empathy, together with adaptability, team members feel the greatest amount of inclusion, wellbeing and intention to stay. This also reduces the likelihood of burnout, which has been an enormous challenge in the workplace both during and since the pandemic.

Moving forwards, to be truly successful, businesses will need to set priorities on new perspectives, skills and solutions with adaptability being a key leadership behaviour at the heart of this strategy.

Wellbeing and women's health issues

Employee wellness programmes are becoming increasingly important in the future of work to promote employee wellbeing and reduce stress. We're also seeing more awareness and understanding of women's health issues. From supporting menstruation – with Spain leading Europe in introducing new work policies for women suffering from incapacitating periods – to de-stigmatising the menopause and the issue of abortion in the US, workplaces can no longer turn a blind eye to women's health needs – not, that is, if they want to support and retain women talent.

Indeed, the increasing role of organisations in employees' private sphere is illustrated by a recent survey of 33,000 workers in 17 countries, which found that three quarters (76 per cent) of respondents would consider leaving if they discovered their company had an unfair gender pay gap or no equity, diversity and inclusion policy.

The new workplace has a greater focus on equality issues and workers, particularly younger ones, expect flexibility and ethical leadership to be at the core of their organisation. Creating an inclusive workplace has benefits for all, including greater engagement, productivity and retention. In the race for talent in 2023, employees want and expect businesses to care about and uphold their rights, implement genuine policies to support marginalised groups and reflect their values.