



Creating an Authentic Workplace

The bedrock of an authentic workplace is open dialogue that encourages people to be their true selves. **Payal Vasudeva**, Executive Sponsor of Human Capital and Diversity at Accenture, explains why such dialogue is the building-block of an authentic culture and is also good for business

As businesses continually strive to engage their workforces and figure out what drives employee satisfaction, people often talk about the importance of an 'authentic workplace'. But what does this really mean? Why should businesses try to create it? And where's the best place to start?

In my experience, the single most important attribute that breeds an authentic workplace culture is open and transparent dialogue. This enables everyone to bring their true selves to work and say what they really think without

feeling the need to self-edit. If all the conversations in your workplace add up to an honest ongoing discussion about what matters most to people then you are well on your way to achieving authenticity.

And authenticity fosters inclusion. We've all experienced times in our lives when we feel we don't belong. But in an authentic workplace, individual differences are embraced and celebrated, everyone's views are valued, and everyone is included in the conversation. This creates an environment where all talent can thrive.

Why Self Awareness – and Storytelling – are Key

An authentic workplace forges better human connections. Yet to make these connections as meaningful as possible, self-awareness is very important.

Why? Because better understanding our own situation helps us empathise with what others might be going through, and we start to see them as whole people – both in and outside work. For example, if we recognise the pressures we face ourselves in balancing work and home >



life, we are likely to be more attuned to understand how others may be feeling in similar situations. And this makes us more willing and able to help each other.

At Accenture, we think about these issues a lot as we've set ourselves the goal of becoming the most truly human organisation in the digital age – which means simply that we want to help our people succeed both professionally and personally. As part of that, it's essential to see the person beyond the work persona, and with this in mind we've taken a number of steps to encourage and foster a more 'human' workplace.

For example, a couple of years ago we overhauled our performance management system to become more open and transparent, moving away from the formal, annual appraisal process to frequent, frank conversations about strengths, growth and career aspirations.

And on a more personal level we regularly draw on the power of storytelling through initiatives such as 'Inclusion Starts With I', in which employees share their experience of what makes them feel included – and excluded. Other examples include 'Dare to Share', a campaign which gave employees the opportunity to record a short video on their smartphone revealing an aspect of their lives that's important to them which their colleagues may not know about.

Not everyone feels comfortable sharing their personal experiences at work and that's fine. But as human beings, we are inspired by connection and meaningful interaction with others, and the response we've received to these initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive.

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Whether they've actively participated or simply watched one of the videos, our employees welcome the sense of connection it fosters, and it helps to spark conversations about important topics that might traditionally be considered taboo in the workplace.

Why Invest in Authenticity?

These are just some examples that demonstrate how an organisation can enable its people to interact in more meaningful ways to create a culture of authenticity. But why should employers invest time and resources in doing this? The answer's simple: it's the right thing to do – for people and the business.

Those who work in an authentic culture, where they can be themselves, are happier, more fulfilled and more engaged at work, which makes it easier to attract and retain talent. This in turn boosts workforce productivity and organisational performance, and enhances collaboration and innovation.

Mapping out the Route

When it comes to creating an authentic workplace, all organisations are at

different points of maturity and there is no one size fits all formula. Here are five steps to consider:

1. Explore why authenticity is important to your organisation
2. Decide what needs to change and build senior-level advocacy – authenticity will flourish if leaders are role modelling the desired behaviours
3. Start small, co-create with your people and be prepared to learn as you go – it is a journey
4. Measure the results using quantitative (e.g. people metrics) and qualitative (e.g. focus group) approaches
5. Use the insights to course correct and maintain a relentless focus on continuously improving over time

The message is clear. Authenticity is good for people and organisations – and it begins with breaking down some of the workplace barriers and encouraging honest dialogue. Micro actions effect macro change in the culture of a place, and we all have a role to play - so let's start today. ■



Payal Vasudeva
Managing Director
Accenture Strategy

Payal Vasudeva is a Managing Director in Strategy based out of Accenture's London office. She is part of the global leadership team for Accenture Strategy's Talent and Organisation (T&O) Practice and leads UK & Ireland T&O. Payal is passionate about the future of HR and the changing workforce in the context of digital, advising senior client leadership teams on the subject.

Contact Payal through:
www.criticleye.com