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The Future of Work: Focusing on Building The Workplace Culture of Tomorrow

This thought paper has been authored by Anil Thankachan and Varun Sarin.

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An abstract graphic at the bottom of the page features a dark blue background. From the bottom center, a series of light rays in shades of yellow, orange, and red fan out towards the left. From the top right, a series of light rays in shades of blue and purple fan out towards the left, meeting the other rays in the center. The overall effect is a sense of dynamic energy and convergence.

Introduction

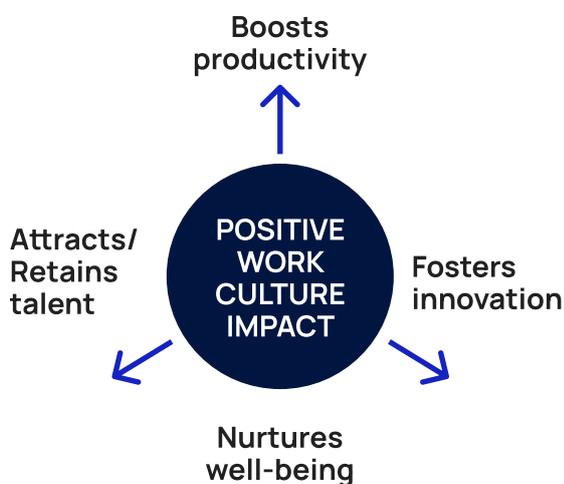
The average person will spend **one-third** of their life at work. Given how much time is spent at work, it's no surprise that the quality of this experience has a significant impact on one's overall well-being. This is where an organization's culture becomes critical. Workplace culture has long been recognized as a critical driver of employee well-being & engagement, innovation, and, subsequently, overall business performance. A poor culture is at the root of low productivity and high turnover, negatively impacting an organization's bottom line. On the other hand, **companies with positive workplace cultures have higher average annual returns.**

Over the past few years, workplace culture has made its way from the periphery of business discussions to the centre of urgent debates and conversations. The reasons are clear: the rise of hybrid and remote work, a more globally distributed workforce, and the growing influence of younger generations in the workplace—generations that are more vocal, values-driven, and digitally empowered than ever before. Such profound shifts have urged leaders to fundamentally reimagine how they define culture and what it takes to build it. No more cosmetic changes. A changing world demands more. Yesterday's playbook for culture, leadership, and employee engagement is no longer relevant. The future belongs to organizations that evolve with intention—aligning their culture with emerging realities while staying grounded in their core purpose.

In this thought paper, we not only explore why culture matters but also take a look at how it must evolve. Identifying the key elements that make an organization's culture **F.I.T. for the future of work**, we have highlighted three unanimous and essential focus areas for organizations.

Culture as a Key Differentiator

Let's talk basics. Why does company culture matter? Now we have all heard the following: happy employees create happy customers. This isn't just a philosophy or an adage, it's a research finding that establishes the correlation between individual happiness and business success. However, it might be helpful to highlight that the happiness referred to here has many layers. It is not about the pay, the designation, or the work hours—it is about well-being, about being prioritized, heard, valued, and feeling aligned with one's organization. In many ways, given today's increasingly competitive talent market, culture is becoming a company's most powerful differentiator.



The effects of a healthy work culture are felt across the board, loud and clear. So what are organizations missing? Where is the gap, and how can leaders address it?

Did you know, according to **research from Gallup**, [employee engagement](#) fell to its lowest level in a decade in 2024, with only

31% of employees engaged? Despite there being an increased focus on innovation and collaboration, only **23% of tech companies have reported to have cross functional teams**. [\[2\]](#)

Could there be anything more dangerous than when employees stay for the paycheck, are physically present but increasingly disengaged, less motivated, and distant from work they once found fulfilling?



For leaders, this is a pivotal moment. It's time to address this disconnect and build a resilient, thriving workforce for the future, workplaces where employees feel truly valued and engaged.

Don't Miss the Red Flags

Before leaders can build a better culture, they must first recognize how and when their current one is faltering. What are some of the warning signs of a struggling workplace culture?

- High turnover rates and difficulty retaining top talent
- Low accountability, where performance suffers and goals are missed

- Disengaged employees who are physically present but emotionally checked out
- A lack of innovation or initiative signals that psychological safety is absent

It has become increasingly clear that cultures that glorify constant availability, reward burnout, or chase short-term profits at the expense of long-term value are unsustainable. These approaches may have led to quick wins once, but in today's day and age, this approach is nothing but outdated.

Burnout is now fueling a wave of “silent quitting” ² – employees feel overwhelmed and unsupported, and often see exiting as the only solution, even if they don't act on it immediately. Cultures like these erode trust, stunt resilience, and affect employee loyalty over time. Employees, especially the younger generation, are realizing this, and they demand to be heard.

What Does the Future of Workplace Culture Look Like

Keeping in mind the numerous shifts and demands shaping the future of work, what does the workplace culture of tomorrow look like? We see future-driven leaders rebooting their priorities and bringing a sharper focus on powering flexibility and autonomy, building resilience, increasing D&I, and technological integrations.

F.I.T for the Future



- Flexibility & Autonomy
- Inclusion & Diversity
- Technology & Collaboration

Flexibility & Autonomy

Since 2020, the word flexibility has made an appearance in many a conversation about work-life balance and employee productivity. However, remote work or working for a limited number of hours or days in a week is a restrictive view of the concept. The roots of flexibility are in autonomy. It is not just about managing work and time but also having the agency and the independence to make decisions and take ownership of goals.

According to **research**, ² autonomous teams are **43% more likely to meet or exceed performance goals**. Making it imperative for organizations to balance executional flexibility (when/where to work) and decision autonomy (the authority to make work-related choices). How do they do that? Enabling a flexible workplace culture that empowers employees to be autonomous requires collective clarity of purpose, which in turn demands clear, consistent communication anchored in trust. It is not a battle between remote work and hybrid setups, but a well-rounded decision tailored to meet the needs of an organization's employees.

Inclusivity & Diversity

Inclusive organizations are 87% more likely to make better decisions. Higher gender

diversity can amp up company profits by 50%. ☑ The numbers are clear. But, inclusion is more than a metric. The future of workplace culture lies in building systematically inclusive environments.

It starts by recognizing that diversity is not about representation. Diversity is brought alive by integrating varying perspectives, cognitive experiences, and lived experiences into everyday decision-making. This includes but is not limited to diversity in gender, caste, socio-economic backgrounds, age, as well as abilities. Especially as we navigate an increasingly global and interconnected world, organizations cannot risk being homogeneous. And what helps diversity thrive? Inclusion. Cultivating environments where everyone feels heard and valued requires rigorous commitment. In the workplaces of tomorrow, inclusion will not be a 'nice-to-have' but a fundamental expectation—one that is embedded into hiring practices, leadership development, team dynamics, and even product and service design. It's how organizations future-proof themselves by becoming more human.

Technology & Collaboration

Technology—especially GenAI—is transforming the world of work, even as you read this. It's reshaping roles, workflows, and skillsets. But even as technology promises to advance at a relentless pace, the future of the workplace must be less focused on tech adoption and more on human adaptation, and future-focused leaders recognize this.

While the younger generation (Millennials and Gen Z) is familiar and largely positive about tech disruptions, their optimism also comes with significant apprehensions. **Many**

say that it helps them improve their work quality, but at the same time, over 6 in 10 also worry it will reduce the availability of jobs in the future. ☑ It is up to leaders to combat these concerns by preparing the current workforce to work with technology. The future is not humans Vs. machines, it is driven by collaborative intelligence, where people and systems work in tandem, defining the next wave of productivity. As automation rises, so must human connection. Which in the organizational context translates into stronger digital literacy across departments, and not just IT, that fuels a better understanding of how tech tools work, how data flows, and how decisions are influenced by algorithms, enabling faster adoption and more cross-functional collaboration. Leaders must ensure that organizations are harmonizing tools & technology with human contribution.

It's All About Rebuilding the Human Experience

“Companies constantly evolve, and they need new ideas all the time. Engaged employees are a lot closer to the best ideas. They’re thinking about the whole company and how they fit into it, and their ideas lead to better decisions.” - Jim Harter, Chief Scientist of Employee Engagement & Wellbeing, Gallup

As organizations rush to embrace AI and emerging technologies, one truth must remain central: Technology is built to enhance the human experience, not replace it. This means that today, more than ever, a people-first approach to building organizational culture is critical.

As highlighted above, today's pace of technological transformation can

alienate employees, especially if they feel underprepared, uncertain, or excluded from the innovation process. Leaders must pay attention to the signs to assess how their employees feel about the advent of tech, their concerns or fears about AI's impact on their roles, the growing skills gap, which may leave some employees behind, and disconnectedness among distributed teams. This means listening actively to employees, creating psychologically safe environments, and designing experiences that foster connection, especially for remote and hybrid workers, and are focused on boosting employee engagement. It also means empowering employees via aggressive but tailored upskilling and training initiatives. In short, the workplace cultures of tomorrow must be both digital and deeply human.

Do Leaders Need to Pause and Reflect?

As we move towards the future, what we need the most is a shift in mindsets. In a world that's marked by quarterly targets, hyper-innovation, and fast-moving markets, it is tempting to focus on short-term wins. But these wins come at the cost of long-term sustainability. According to the Deloitte Global Gen Z and Millennial Survey, the definition of success has changed. **Many Gen Zs and**

millennials are not determined to reach the top of the corporate ladder, instead seeking to optimize the right balance of money, meaning, and well-being while building the technical and soft skills they believe are needed to prepare them for the workplace of the future.

This survey is a call for leaders to examine and

alter their approach, building a culture that focuses on people, not on traditional ideas, to enable performance that compounds over time (delivered by teams that are energized, supported, and purpose-driven.)

Enabling such a culture calls for a shift in mindset. Where employee development, well-being, and inclusion are viewed not as “HR responsibilities” but as strategic imperatives embedded into the company’s operating

model. Corporate culture begins at the top. The C-suite needs to see the value in having a positive workplace culture and embody the behaviors that support this culture. Whether it’s collaboration, upskilling, or flexibility, employees need to witness senior leadership modeling the values they claim to prioritize in the culture. Maybe it’s time for leaders to reevaluate their roles in building workplace cultures.

In Conclusion

Workplace culture is a living system, shaped by everyday actions, behaviors, decisions, and values. And it cannot thrive in isolation—it demands active, ongoing commitment from the top. Leaders can no longer view culture as a “soft” issue delegated to HR or internal comms teams. It is a strategic lever, as critical to growth and innovation as product development or financial performance. The sooner we realize this, the better.

If organizations hope to succeed in the long run, culture-building must be embedded in their DNA. This means moving beyond performative wellness programs or once-a-year employee surveys and focusing on creating environments where people feel psychologically safe, deeply valued, and genuinely connected to the mission. It means designing work models that are not just efficient but also equitable and human-centered. And it means future-proofing the workforce by investing in learning, adaptability, and resilience.

About the Author(s)



Anil Thankachan

Co-Founder, Director at PeopleAsset

Anil is a seasoned Human Resource professional with the experience of working a significant amount of his career in scaling startups ground up. He brings more than 19 years of deep hands-on and consultative experience across Human Resources. Throughout his career playing multiple roles, he has been deeply involved with VC investors, founders and executive leaders in the area of people practices which have helped organizations grow seamlessly. His key contributions have been in:

- Talent acquisition across the hierarchy and functions.
- Creation of frameworks for performance management and talent engagement.
- Develop frameworks which enable in building diverse, high potential and performing teams.

In addition to his successful stints with large organizations like GE Capital (now GENPACT) and Avaya, Anil has had impactful stints with start-ups as well where he has scripted success stories for each one and helped them scale quickly and seamlessly. His stints have been with Tavant Technologies (Software Solutions), Mu Sigma Inc (Data Analytics – Sequoia & GAP funded) and SuperProfs (EdTech – Kalaari funded). In his last role, he played the role of CHRO at Innoviti Payments (Fintech - a Catamaran, SBI & Bessemer funded company).

Anil's deep experience spans functions, industries and geographies. His first principles-based approach to problem solving and thought leadership is deeply valued by clients and leaders alike.



Varun Sarin

Co-Founder, Director at PeopleAsset

Varun has over 20 years of experience in the corporate world, of which the last 15 years have been in executive search where he has led and managed critical client relationships across diverse industries. While working at EMA Partners, he managed engagements that span the sr. leadership suite with a special focus on Digital, Tech & IT Services, VC/PE-Portfolio and Professional Services. He was instrumental in developing firm's capabilities in the Digital & Technology space. Before co-founding PeopleAsset in December 2018, Varun was leading the tech practice at one of the fastest growing executive search and hiring firm, headquartered in India.

Prior to joining EMA Partners, Varun was associated with Korn/Ferry where he was

part of the Global Technology Markets (GTM) India practice. His areas of focus at Korn/Ferry included: Business & Professional Services, Business Information Services, IT/ ITeS, Electronics, Software & Emerging Technologies, Consulting, Big Data & Analytics, HR, and Finance. Earlier, between 2008-2011, Varun ran his own search firm before which he was associated with a niche economic, business and market research firm, IMA India.

Varun comes in with multi-domain, multi-functional expertise in Executive Search, and Leadership Coaching & Development. He had successfully completed Decision Dynamics Certification in the Executive Assessment Suite, is an Executive Coach, and regularly advises early-stage ventures/ entrepreneurs.

About PeopleAsset

PeopleAsset is a boutique Executive Search & Talent Advisory Firm geared to deliver high quality results. We help our clients dramatically improve performance through focus on leadership & talent.

Visit us at www.peopleasset.in for more information or write to us at info@peopleasset.in

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