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The Culture Playbook

How trust and
belonging help
build a great
workplace for all



Introduction

Picture this. Your workforce features a few star employees who always put in extra effort to make your customers happy. One of those employees is Rachel.

Here's her story:



To change stories like these and help your people feel truly valued, you need a culture strategy — **so how do you get there?**

Creating a people-centric culture where your employees can grow and thrive is critical to succeeding in the modern employment landscape. And trust and belonging are the foundation of that culture.

According to Deloitte, 68% of employees and 81% of the C-suite say improving wellbeing is more important than advancing a career.¹ When you couple this shift in perception with the number of choices people now have about where and how they work leading to widespread retention concerns, it becomes clear that organizations must focus on building cultures of belonging to ensure their survival.

External factors beyond your control may make it seem like all you can focus on is operational stability and keeping the lights on, but even the way you see those activities can be reframed to appeal to the modern workforce. The key to getting there is centering the decisions you make about your culture, technology, and business goals on one key ingredient — trust — a critical component for the success of any modern organization. Championing great workplaces starts with culture, and modern employees expect to feel safe, valued, and heard wherever they go. This is considered table stakes for survival regardless of your organization's size or industry. It's mission-critical to know the proven standards for developing a strong, inclusive culture and operationalize those standards through actionable tools and processes at every level of your organization.

In this playbook, we share the different cultural elements needed to build feelings of trust and belonging, how you can reinforce those elements with technology, the benefits of taking these actions, and some practical resources to help you get started.



Lacking a sense of belonging is one of the top three most important reasons employees give for leaving their job.²

Culture goals

So what elements contribute to a culture of trust and belonging? Great Place To Work's 30 years of continual research has proven that the definition of a great workplace is one where employees trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with. With survey responses from over 100 million employees, Great Place To Work has found that five factors are instrumental in building a great workplace: credibility, respect, pride, camaraderie, and fairness. For each of the factors, we pose a few questions below and more in the appendix to help you think about how well your organization stacks up when it comes to nurturing trust.



How systems support culture

Cultural standards are important, but it's even more important to operationalize those standards and make them actionable if you want them to have a positive impact on your workforce. That means ensuring you've set up your HR and workforce management technology in a way that supports trust and belonging. As a leader, you can help your team focus on the right areas and use the questions in the prior section to champion culture through your people systems.



Belonging

DEI&B is more than just measuring workforce composition information and hiring for diversity — it's about taking action every day to build an environment where all your people can bring their whole selves to work, feel uniquely supported, and have opportunities to grow and thrive.

- ✓ **Establish DEI&B benchmarks** to see how you stack up against similar organizations and set appropriate goals. Make sure these metrics fuel automatic guidance and recommendations on next steps and standards to follow in areas such as pay equity, recruiting, employee engagement, and retention.
- ✓ **Ensure the systems you use prioritize accessibility** so everyone gets the benefit of using them. Support other inclusive experiences as well, such as allowing people to use preferred pronouns and names.
- ✓ **Regularly evaluate key business practices**, such as candidate screening, onboarding, performance reviews, and succession planning, using sentiment analysis to uncover and address unconscious bias, evaluating against targets and thresholds to expose outliers or opportunities for growth, and making correlations across the different areas of your people data to maximize the impact of changes.
- ✓ **Get prescriptive reminders** at the right moments to recognize employees for their contributions, develop their strengths, and demonstrate that you value their unique potential. This helps your people feel appreciated and cared for, which inspires them to continually perform well.



When everyone is empowered in an organization, **87% of employees** feel higher levels of belonging.³



Flexibility

To respect your people's personal and professional needs, it's critical to give them the freedom to easily adjust work to fit their lives and access helpful resources wherever and whenever they need.

- ✓ **Provide managers with leadership actions** and nudges in the moment that help them guide their teams through processes and encourage employees to take advantage of learning opportunities available to them.
- ✓ **Build a community** where employees and managers can discuss pay, benefits, onboarding, learning and development, performance, schedules, and other key areas with peers so your people can connect conveniently and feel supported.
- ✓ Give people the power to **self-schedule from any device** at the locations where they want to work and make time-off requests so they can balance personal and professional responsibilities; this also reduces manager and HR workloads. Also, ensure that the system being used learns on the fly from employee scheduling preferences and presents them with options aligned with their needs.



Wellbeing

Your organization's processes should foster physical, mental, emotional, and financial wellness among employees to keep them happy, healthy, motivated, and productive.

- ✓ Offer intuitive access to a variety of **voluntary benefits** that go beyond just healthcare coverage, such as employee assistance programs for mental health support, mindfulness resources, nutrition and fitness support, financial advice, or charitable gift matching. Justify any costs associated with these programs through the people data you track to prove the return on investment in terms of your team's productivity, engagement, retention rates, and reductions in turnover costs.
- ✓ Make pay accessible to employees through an **earned wage access** solution that lets them access what they've earned in a timelier fashion and includes tools for monitoring and reaching financial goals. Ensure your pay processes respond automatically to changes in time or schedules to reduce employee anxiety about pay, minimize errors, and reduce payroll workload.
- ✓ Center operational processes on your people's needs **no matter what environment they're working in**, such as automatically accounting for workplace safety in time and scheduling processes at in-person locations, offering flexible time and scheduling options to both remote and in-person employees, and giving managers the proactive analysis and outreach tools needed to support all employees as well as to detect critical situations, such as flight risk or burnout.





Transparency

Trust only happens when you communicate clearly and honestly, helping employees understand why decisions are made, how they influence those decisions, and how your vision for the future flows to their specific responsibilities.

- ✓ **Surveying, listening, and measuring** are essential for understanding employees' individualized experiences and developing strategies to support them. Use survey templates based on proven psychological frameworks to understand your employees' ever-evolving needs, and leverage AI-powered sentiment analysis to measure employee feelings quickly in a factual way. Then, make sure you're benchmarking your results against real data from organizations with standout cultures through authoritative sources such as Great Place To Work.
- ✓ Centralize organization standards, documents, announcements, events, and communications into **a single location for employee reference** so your workforce can easily keep up with the wider organization and understand your vision and goals. Nudge managers at the right times and in the right places to reinforce employee understanding.
- ✓ **Set clear, unbiased requirements** across the employee lifecycle and build them into your processes as rules, such as in the templates and descriptions you use for open job requisitions, onboarding processes for different roles, milestones to meet for different types of promotions, and other similar key moments in the employee experience.
- ✓ **Inform your workforce of progress** on new changes, and even provide a loose timeline on when employees can expect those changes to be enacted. Seek and consider employees' opinions in the lead-up to new initiatives so they feel included in final decisions, and show how their feedback affected those decisions. From the C-suite down, ensure leadership is honest and open and that bad news isn't withheld or sugarcoated.



Development

To keep your people longer and avoid costly turnover, show them how their accomplishments lead to specific career paths and learning opportunities.

- ✓ **Prioritize learning and development** and set clear outcomes, such as promotions, raises, bonuses, or performance goal completion, based on employees' hitting learning milestones. Actively track which team members receive certain opportunities to ensure equal access for everyone.
- ✓ **Map out career paths and succession plans** for the different roles within your organization, predict the readiness of different people in your organization to move up, guide managers to recognize those readiness markers, and have regular, planned discussions with employees on these topics to help them feel engaged in the process and have a clear vision for their future.
- ✓ Integrate career planning, mentorship, and learning opportunities into your **new hire processes** to start new employees off in a way that makes them feel supported and increases their likelihood of staying with your organization.



Business benefits

If you take the steps to create an actionable system for driving a culture of trust and belonging, the bottom line is that you'll notice a substantial, positive impact not just on your people but on your business as well.



Motivated people

A culture of belonging where your people feel trusted, heard, and accepted for who they are makes them better at their jobs and more productive:

- ✓ Organizations with strong cultures saw a **4x increase in revenue** growth compared to their competitors.⁴
- ✓ Business or work units that score in the top quartile of their organization in employee engagement have nearly **double the odds** of success.⁵
- ✓ Organizations that score in the **top 25%** on employee experience report **double the return** on sales.⁶



Purposeful HR and workforce management

When HR and workforce management professionals are empowered to drive a unique and compelling culture, they become a more strategic part of your business:

- ✓ Organizations that can reallocate talent in step with their strategic plans are more than **twice as likely** to outperform their peers.⁷
- ✓ Organizations whose HR technology facilitates a positive employee experience are **1.3 times more likely** to report organizational outperformance.⁸



Compliance as a competitive advantage

Investing in a people-centric culture means you're proactively doing the right thing for employees, which helps reduce potentially expensive compliance risk and keeps you ahead of regulatory change:

- ✓ Employer fines and penalties due to noncompliance **nearly doubled** from 2018 to 2020, from \$1.6B to \$3.12B.⁹
- ✓ **Nearly half** of HR professionals believe that Occupational Safety and Health Administration activity will continue increasing over the next few years, and **75%** of HR professionals have been concerned about lawsuits related to COVID-19.¹⁰
- ✓ The most diverse organizations are now **more likely than ever** to outperform in terms of profitability than their less diverse competitors.¹¹



Recognition in the market

A standout culture leads to a better bottom line as well as opportunities for certifications and awards that make it easier for your business to hire and keep top talent:

- ✓ Organizations that appeared on the *Fortune* annual "100 Best Companies to Work For" list nearly **doubled the average returns** for the market from 1998-2016.¹²
- ✓ The *Fortune* "**100 Best Companies to Work For**" list is based on employers that prioritize employee wellbeing, inclusion, purpose, listening, and caring.¹³
- ✓ The **No. 1 reason** candidates choose one job over another is organizational culture.¹⁴

Conclusion

The truth is you can't afford to ignore culture and its importance in the workplace because it plays an essential role in attracting and retaining top talent, improving employee engagement, increasing employee satisfaction and consequently customer satisfaction, and improving performance and productivity — all of which are tied to your bottom line.

See for yourself how UKG can help you nurture a great work environment where your people thrive.

GET THE TOOLS TO BUILD A STRONG CULTURE

Is your workplace great?
[Get Great Place To Work-Certified](#)

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Great
Place
To
Work®



Appendix

Culture Evaluation Worksheet

How successful is your organization in building trust?



Credibility

1. How do employees feel about their managers?

2. How much do managers trust employees to work independently?

3. How much do employees trust managers to set the direction for their teams, be transparent, and effectively run the business?

4. How well do the actions of managers match their words, and how well do they deliver on promises?

5. How do employees feel about the executives at the organization, and does that align with the culture and characteristics that your organization wants to be known for?

6. Is leadership transparent about the state of the business?

Respect

1. How easy is it for your people to meet their needs in both life and work?

2. How do you ensure your workplace is a physically, psychologically, and emotionally safe and healthy environment?

3. What resources, training, development opportunities, and benefits make your organization unique in how it supports employees?

4. How do you encourage employee feedback, suggestions, and ideas, and how does management respond to and implement them?

5. What options are in place for recognizing employees for extra effort and new, better ways of doing things?

6. Do employees feel like you value them and their contributions?

Appendix

Culture Evaluation Worksheet

How successful is your organization in building trust? (cont'd)



Pride

1. What characteristics of your organization make employees motivated to put in extra work, stay longer, and recommend working there to others?

2. What gives employees the sense that they're making a difference and contributing to the community through their work?

3. How successful do employees feel your organization is?

4. How well do employees think your organization delivers for its customers?

5. Do other organizations strive to be like yours?

Camaraderie

1. In what ways does your organization encourage people to bring their whole selves to work regardless of their background?

2. How do people at your organization demonstrate care for one another and collaborate?

3. In what ways does your organization welcome new employees or employees switching roles?

4. How does your organization celebrate events in people's lives and create a fun atmosphere?

5. Does your organization offer opportunities for employees to get together casually or for volunteer work?

Appendix

Culture Evaluation Worksheet

How successful is your organization in building trust? (cont'd)



Fairness

1. In what ways are you creating an environment where people feel respected and fairly treated regardless of their background?

2. What processes do you have in place to evaluate and promote pay equity?

3. What kinds of DEI&B initiatives is your organization engaged in, and how are they measured?

4. How clear are the paths to promotion at your organization and the standards/development steps needed to qualify for different roles?

5. In what ways are managers and leaders encouraged and educated to avoid bias in their decision making?

Appendix

Technology Evaluation Worksheet

Use this worksheet to ensure that vendors' human capital management/workforce management solutions enable you, at minimum, to execute the features listed below.

Culture Standards	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Belonging			
Establish DEI&B benchmarks to see how you stack up against similar organizations and set appropriate goals. Make sure these metrics fuel automatic guidance and recommendations on next steps and standards to follow in areas such as pay equity, recruiting, employee engagement, and retention.			
Ensure the systems you use prioritize accessibility so everyone gets the benefit of using them. Support other inclusive experiences as well, such as allowing people to use preferred pronouns and names.			
Regularly evaluate key business practices, such as candidate screening, onboarding, performance reviews, and succession planning, using sentiment analysis to uncover and address unconscious bias, evaluating against targets and thresholds to expose outliers or opportunities for growth, and making correlations across the different areas of your people data to maximize the impact of changes.			
Receive coaching and advice at the right moments to recognize employees for their contributions, develop their strengths, and demonstrate that you value their unique potential. This helps your people feel appreciated and cared for, which inspires them to continually perform well.			
Flexibility			
Provide managers with leadership actions and nudges in the moment that help them guide their teams through processes and encourage employees to take advantage of learning opportunities available to them.			
Give people the power to self-schedule from any device at the locations where they want to work and make time-off requests so they can balance personal and professional responsibilities; this also reduces manager and HR workloads. Also, ensure that the system being used learns on the fly from employee scheduling preferences and presents them with options aligned with their needs.			
Build a community where employees and managers can discuss pay, benefits, onboarding, learning and development, performance, schedules, and other key areas with peers so your people can connect conveniently and feel supported.			

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Technology Evaluation Worksheet (cont'd)

Culture Standards	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
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Offer intuitive access to a variety of voluntary benefits that go beyond just healthcare coverage, such as employee assistance programs for mental health support, mindfulness resources, nutrition and fitness support, financial advice, or charitable gift matching. Justify any costs associated with these programs through the people data you track to prove the return on investment in terms of your team's productivity, engagement, retention rates, and reductions in turnover costs.			
Make pay accessible to employees through an earned wage access solution that lets them access what they've earned in a timelier fashion and includes tools for monitoring and reaching financial goals. Ensure your pay processes respond automatically to changes in time or schedules to reduce employee anxiety about pay, minimize errors, and reduce payroll workload.			
Center operational processes on your people's needs no matter what environment they're working in, such as automatically accounting for workplace safety in time and scheduling processes at in-person locations, offering flexible time and scheduling options to both remote and in-person employees, and giving managers the proactive analysis and outreach tools needed to support all employees as well as to detect critical situations, such as flight risk or burnout.			
Transparency			
Surveying, listening, and measuring are essential for understanding employees' individualized experiences and developing strategies to support them. Use survey templates based on proven psychological frameworks to understand your employees' ever-evolving needs, and leverage AI-powered sentiment analysis to measure employee feelings quickly in a factual way. Then, make sure you're benchmarking your results against real data from organizations with standout cultures through authoritative sources such as Great Place To Work.			
Centralize organization standards, documents, announcements, events, and communications into a single location so employees can easily keep up with the wider organization and understand your vision and goals. Nudge managers at the right times and in the right places to reinforce employee understanding.			
Set clear, unbiased requirements across the employee lifecycle and build them into your processes as rules, such as in the templates and descriptions you use for open job requisitions, onboarding processes for different roles, milestones to meet for different types of promotions, and other similar key moments in the employee experience.			
Inform your workforce of progress on new changes, and even provide a loose timeline on when employees can expect those changes to be enacted. Seek and consider employees' opinions in the lead-up to new initiatives so they feel included in final decisions, and show how their feedback affected those decisions. From the C-suite down, ensure leadership is honest and open and that bad news isn't withheld or sugarcoated.			

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Technology Evaluation Worksheet (cont'd)

Culture Standards	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Development			
Prioritize learning and development and set clear outcomes, such as promotions, raises, bonuses, or performance goal completion, based on employees' hitting learning milestones. Actively track which team members receive certain opportunities to ensure equal access for everyone.			
Map out career paths and succession plans for the different roles within your organization, predict the readiness of different people in your organization to move up, guide managers to recognize those readiness markers, and have regular, planned discussions with employees on these topics to help them feel engaged in the process and have a clear vision for their future.			
Integrate career planning, mentorship, and learning opportunities into your new hire processes to start new employees off in a way that makes them feel supported and increases their likelihood of staying with your organization.			

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About UKG

At UKG, our purpose is people™. As strong believers in the power of culture and belonging as the secret to success, we champion great workplaces and build lifelong partnerships with our customers to show what's possible when businesses invest in their people. Born from a historic merger that created one of the world's leading HCM cloud companies, our Life-work Technology™ approach to HR, payroll, and workforce management solutions for all people helps 50,000 organizations around the globe and across every industry anticipate and adapt to their employees' needs beyond just work. To learn more, visit ukg.com.

About Great Place To Work

Great Place To Work® makes it easy to survey your employees, uncover actionable insights, and get recognized for your great company culture. We lead the industry with the most rigorous, data-based model for quantifying employee experience: The Great Place To Work Trust Model™. Since 1992, we have surveyed more than 100 million employees around the world and used those deep insights to define what makes a great workplace: trust. To learn more, visit ukg.com/resources/great-place-to-work.

