

Editorial 29.3: Workplace culture

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An important aspect of fostering a culture of inclusivity at work is workplace culture, which must be inclusive at all levels and where employees need to feel valued. The term workplace culture is often used to explain “a company’s prevailing values, attitudes, beliefs, artifacts and behaviors that contribute to its sense of order, continuity and commitment” (Haworth, 2006; cited from [Cole et al., 2014](#), p. 786). Or, a workplace culture consists of shared values, understandings and norms ([DiMaggio, 1994](#)), which should be shared by employees and management alike. Workplace culture can enhance or obstruct work processes and thus affect workers’ performance and their experience of the workplace and workplace interactions ([Sanchez-Burks et al., 2009](#)). A conflict is created “if the institution is based on a different set of values and assumptions,” and employees can end up feeling “dissatisfied, distracted, uncomfortable and uncommitted” ([Newman and Nollen, 1996](#), p. 755).

Workplace culture has been traditionally understood as happening within a conventional office setting; however, hybrid working has been growing since before the COVID-19 pandemic, the latter further accelerating this already existing trend. In the context of a traditional office, workplace culture directly and indirectly shapes freedoms and constraints at work and how work is performed ([Cole et al., 2014](#)); however, workplace culture never existed outside of a broader cultural context and its influences. Some of these influences are national, but some of them can be institutional too. For example, there are differences in workplace culture between various sectors (e.g. government vs private sector), but in either case, workplace culture always influences practices such as dress code, personalization of the workplace and ethics and behaviors ([Brunia and Hartjes-Gosselink, 2009](#); [Burke, 2011](#); [Cole et al., 2014](#)). A behavioral aspect is particularly visible in informal structures, such as being able to engage in banter and with those whom one socially interacts within the office. In this, my research has shown that it is often those who are like us who get promoted and that while lots of positive progress has been made, a lot still needs to be done to increase women’s equality because it is often one’s behavior, mindset toward work and the ability to fit in that take one ahead. In the case of women, it is often those who can become *one of the boys* who progress in their careers due to understanding (and engaging with) masculine meanings at work, which form a masculine habitus ([Topić, 2021, 2023a, b and c](#)). Things did not significantly change during the pandemic because office politics to an extent moved online, but most importantly, a question opened on who wants to go back to the office once lockdowns eased, with some being less inclined to do so due to reduced discrimination when working from home. In other words, while one can face toxicity and discrimination in an online work setting, this seems to be less pervasive than when working from the office. For example, ethnic minorities, particularly women of color, were reported to dread a return to the office following the end of COVID-19 lockdowns ([Williams et al., 2022](#); [Bunn, 2021](#)).

Workplace culture continually changes over time, and while some aspects are passed from one generation to the next ([Inglehart, 1997](#); [Inglehart and Welzel, 2005](#)), there is a natural evolution that happens in response to the changed nature of work and the development of communication technologies. Organizational research has argued for decades that giving a voice to employees increases engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, retention and work productivity ([Bashshur, 2015](#); [Ruck et al., 2017](#)), and this then also links with business success and profitability ([Harvard Business School, 2013](#)). Studies argued that employee voice gives organizations a means of communication with management, and an employee voice can be used to communicate to instigate organizational change ([Freeman and Medoff, 1984](#); [Hirschman, 1970](#)). While organizational listening is an obvious solution to increased employee engagement, further questions can be asked on how organizations can keep employees



engaged, how they listen to them and make them feel valued in the context of increased hybrid work and the rise of AI and how they create (and preserve) and inclusive workplace culture.

One obvious answer, from the perspective of corporate communications, is internal communication within an organization, because communicating organizational affairs, particularly if this is done based on a two-way communication where employees are listened to, can indeed create excellent organizational practice. What is more, the internal communication basic postulate follows the premise of placing importance on employee voice because communication should happen at all levels of the organization; it should come from managers, coworkers as well as communication professionals (Dahlman and Heide, 2020); thus, we can argue that internal communication needs to be part of the organizational strategy as well as workplace culture because internal communication works towards achieving organizational goals. Internal communication involves the management of ideas, information, and emotions between an organization and its members to motivate, engage and co-create meanings (Tkalac Verčič, 2019) and also to influence behavior (Bahtijarević-Siber and Sikavica, 2001). Internal communication is relevant for workplace diversification, work/life balance and employee well-being as well as other aspects of organizational work such as heightened accountability and technological downsizing (Tkalac Verčič, 2021; Tkalac Verčič *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, if managed effectively, internal communication can contribute to organizational success (Dahlman and Heide, 2020).

Corporate Communications Journal (CCIJ) regularly publishes works on internal communication and contributes towards creating knowledge in this important aspect of corporate communications. The first papers on this issue started in 1996, right from volume 1 of the journal, when Dennis Tourish and Colin Hargie wrote a paper on key steps in improving organizational performance by arguing that communication between managers and staff is needed (Tourish and Hargie, 1996). While an important aspect of corporate communications and workplace culture, internal communication is still an unexplored issue. With recent changes to workplace culture and the disruption caused by the pandemic, a special issue analyzing internal communication became an obvious choice to explore what has changed in the field and what new challenges organizations are facing following the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, after two regular issues of publishing work tackling listening in various contexts (e.g. Topić, 2023b), this issue of the *CCIJ* presents a special issue on internal communication entitled “Shifting Role and Challenges of Internal Communication in an Age of Workplace Turbulence/Disruption”, co-edited by Dr Marlene S. Neill and Dr Minjeong Kang. In that, issue authors contribute to knowledge on workplace disruption caused by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and papers open some interesting questions linked to the current state and the future of the workplace culture. The papers in this issue offer perspectives on the importance of internal communication. For example, papers looked at issues such as employability culture, internal public relations, supportive team communication, internal job advertisements, leadership responses, employee health and well-being in times of disruption, supervisory verbal aggressiveness and its impact on the workplace culture, employee trust in the context of leadership and employee empowerment in the context of pro-environmental behaviors.

What all these papers have in common is that they look at ways internal communication can improve organizational processes and, fundamentally, a workplace culture because indeed, aggression in leadership, lack of listening of employees and a disempowering atmosphere do not create an inclusive workplace culture but quite the opposite. Papers provide evidence on how effective internal communication, listening and effective and supportive organizational leadership can improve not just communication but ultimately employee well-being and sentiments towards the organization, which ultimately affects organizational performance.

Several papers also offered a detailed elaboration on leadership and how this affects communication and employee sentiments towards work and organization, thus opening a question about the link between supportive and empowering leadership and workplace culture. We can indeed ask what kind of organizations appoint supportive leaders who empower and listen to employees and what needs to change for this to become a norm. Leaders influence workplace culture, and the type of workplace culture also influences leadership (Keyton, 2005; Modaff and DeWine, 2002). In the context of an ever-changing workplace and the rise of AI and communication technologies generally, these issues become more relevant than ever. What kind of leadership and what kind of communication are necessary to transform organizations to meet requirements of the changing world, and how do we communicate and manage these changes?

In sum, this special issue offers important insights into internal communication as an increasingly important aspect of corporate communication, and it provides a clear link on why effective and positive communication as well as a two-way communication model centered on listening to employees and achieving excellence, improves workplace culture and then organizational outcomes as a whole. When employing workers, organizations face a decision on how to motivate them, and while economic literature often talks about money and hierarchy, many authors rightfully argue that culture matters too (Leroch, 2014), and internal communication based on the notion of excellence and two-way communication can improve workplace culture and organizational outcomes as a whole.

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