

Business

Fostering a culture of productivity and engagement

By Laura Husbands

We are contracted to work eight hours a day, but we all know that most days we work more than that! In fact, now that many are doing remote work, the conversations are that we are working longer hours than when we were in the physical office. Whether we are more productive is debatable! For those who are working remotely and also assisting their children with remote learning, the work environment has changed significantly.

One of the roles of an effective leader is to ensure that the work environment is as conducive to work as possible. The Barbados' Best Employers (BBE) programme looks at this important area of employment by assessing both social and physical factors required for efficiency, collaboration, productivity, creativity and the overall well-being at work. The main component of the BBE is its **Employee Opinion Survey**. Through this medium leaders can "hear" from their people – what works well, and the areas for improvement or gaps that need to be closed to create an environment where people want to "show up" for work.

Best-selling author, keynote speaker, and futurist Jacob Morgan has written an article on **The Three Environments That Create Every Employee Experience**. These he described as the Physical, Cultural and Technological Environments. All three are assessed in the **BBE Employee Opinion Survey**.

The physical work environment

This includes the amenities that can be experienced once in the workspace. The BBE survey seeks to gauge how employees feel about the company's response to general office maintenance, including air quality and the care for the environment. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were concerns about the "health" of buildings; the cleaning practices, maintenance of air condition systems, and the use of harmful chemicals which have since been replaced by environmentally friendly products.

Today, the care of the physical workspace plays an even more significant role for those who have returned to work and how this is handled will impact productivity and engagement. Additionally, for those who are "friends of the environment", a focus on being eco-conscious (through recycling, energy conservation and so on) can positively influence employees' perceptions of the company.



The theme for BBE 2022 is **Working Better, Together!** Central to this theme is teamwork and this year we have included a teamwork indicator to assess this level of cooperation and collaboration.

The cultural work environment

From Morgan's article, the cultural work environment is about the "feel" of the company. It is the "vibe" that leadership creates in terms of how teams are directed and how they work with and treat each other. This pandemic has signalled, especially with hybrid and remote work environments that people can become isolated, even reclusive, focusing only on their tasks and not effectively communicating to achieve the best results. Teams may have operated like this when they were physically in the same space, but the lack of collaboration has become more apparent because of the pandemic.

In order to ride and thrive in today's challenging waters, leaders must create a positive and productive work environment which encourages employees at all levels to be creative and innovative, to make suggestions for improvements in their areas of responsibility and to feel that they can truly participate in a meaningful way in their respective areas of influence. This is important because every employee is valued.

The technological work environment

We are social beings and feeling connected to others impacts our overall wellness. This is also assessed in the survey and forms part of the indicator that measures employee engagement. Data from successive BBE programmes has highlighted that companies whose employees do not feel generally cared for by the company or who do not have healthy relationships at work typically rate their company as a "poor" or "very poor" place to work. Granted there are other factors that would impact this rating, but there is a direct correlation that cannot be refuted. A cultural work environment that embraces all aspects of teamwork, from effective leadership to participation at all levels is an environment that companies should strive for.

The survey seeks to assess not only the



Laura Husbands (FP)

availability of tools and resources to work, but also the willingness to embrace the technology to do one's job better. Never before has technology been so central to how we function in the workplace like it is today! Working from home has forced employees to find a suitable "quiet" space to work. Generally, companies provide laptops and cellphones as basic tools for work. They are now equipping home offices with printers, chairs and desks and some ergonomic assessment or training to ensure that the equipment is properly aligned. Companies should also have given some consideration to the payment of utilities to compensate for increased use of electricity and the Internet. Failure to make these types of accommodations could lead employees to indicate that they have not been provided with the tools and resources to perform their jobs well.

Finally, most of us have had to embrace the use of online platforms, portals, two step verification processes for access to servers, electronic banking and payroll processing and so on. We have adapted! There is no going back and those who hanker for how things used to be have surely missed the benefits of the technological work environment.

For more information on the BBE 2022 programme, please visit our website www.caribbeancatalyst.com.

Laura Husbands is Director, Caribbean Catalyst Inc. Founder and Organiser of the biennial Barbados' Best Employers programme, which is sponsored by The Nation Group.