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Sample whitepaper: Workplace review

Attract & Retain: How to Win the War for Talent

See inside:

- Brand and culture – how to ENGAGE your workforce
- Workspace design – using it to INSPIRE and MOTIVATE
- Open plan offices – why they MUST change

Can YOU Win the War for Talent?

Attract and retain top performers with workplace design and branding

Read our FREE report

Award-winning workplace consultant and interior designer reveals the importance of place in in people management and recruitment

In the War for Talent, are YOU a winner?

With booming numbers of SME tech startups competing against global industry giants and established players, where do you sit strategically? You're trying to attract your talent from the same pool of high performers as everyone else. But once you've got them, you need keep them. Despite your best efforts, they can be easily lured away or disengage from you. How can you see off the competition and attract and retain the talented workforce you need?

Standing out from the crowd is a vital part of being a successful brand, and this quality also applies to attracting the right people to work for you. You need to offer them more than a substantial salary, career progression and standard benefits.

More and more people want work to feel meaningful and make a difference in their lives. They want something that is different, engaging and that will improve their life experience. They want to feel their work adds value, to others and themselves. They want to be in a position where they can collaborate and feel like they're making a positive contribution.

What you need to offer them is the complete package, and this means the total workspace experience.

This boils down to three critical elements:

- Culture
- Environment, and
- Technology.

We're going to look at all three, and explain why they need to be amazing if you're going to win the war for talent.

1: Brand is a Whole Culture

What does a killer brand do? It should attract interest like moths to a flame. But what if it is killing off your business, rather than the competition?

A brand needs to look good, but it should also have substance. It needs to be both original and meaningful. Your brand has its own culture, in fact it *is* a culture. It has an impact on everything you do.

Ask yourself:

- Does your brand stand out?
- Does it have a distinctive flavour and personality?
- Do your brand values reflect what your business is about?
- Does your brand resonate with your audience?
- Do your employees buy in to your brand?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, you should look carefully at your brand and seek to improve or even change it.

What gives a brand culture depth? Its values should extend into the physical working environment. Smart organisations understand this, embodying their brand's values into office concepts to reinforce its culture.

These environments are strategic spaces for brand and identity, making careful and clever use of unique and bespoke features. They use colours, imagery, surface finishes, lighting, graphics and furniture to create a comprehensive and resonant style palette.

Effective workspaces live and breathe their brand values, capturing a vivid sense of place and personality. When you enter a space like this, you gain an immediate impression of what the company represents, what it does and why it does it.

And how do employees respond to this unique environment? The culture that surrounds them helps to motivate them, and harmonises how they feel they fit into the bigger picture.

This sense of belonging, and of feeling that your employer is investing in your environment, is a powerful aspect of brand-building and creating a positive workplace culture.

Brand culture creates and reinforces a sense of purpose. Employees who understand the *WHY* of their work and its impact on the wider world are more engaged and feel actively empowered to do their best.

This can have a profound impact on the calibre of person your brand can attract and retain. If they share your values, this becomes a powerful driver for your brand's success.

2: Your Space Should Inspire

There is a process in recruiting talent, and the interview is a pivotal point in it. However, this process is two-way. You might have found the talent you're looking for, but are you what they want?

From the moment a candidate steps through your doors, your physical space should be working to attract them. Workplace surroundings have a real impact:

“Space not only effects how we feel but also our attitudes and our behaviour by making us more compliant and ready to conform to a greater and more powerful will.” – Colin Ellard, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Waterloo, Canada

Unfortunately there are still many work environments that evoke outdated office concepts such as suspended white ceilings, stark lighting, and dull, neutral shades of wall and carpet.

These spaces are anonymous, and you would have no idea who was occupying them if you removed the corporate signage. These environments conform to an older status quo, and they can have a detrimental impact on the people who work in them.

On average, we spend half of our waking lives at work. This takes up a big chunk of the average life experience, and it's a long time to waste in an uninspiring, bland environment that saps energy and can damage health and wellbeing.

We are sensory animals, and much of what we see affects how we feel and behave. The physical spaces we work in influence our performance, and our feelings of engagement.

If our environment can truly shape us, then it follows that the working environment is critical for how employees respond, perform and behave.

What can you do with your physical workspace to make it more inspiring?

The materials you use in office design should reflect what your brand stands for. Unless your brand really is best-represented by anonymous white desktops, ditch them for something more natural-looking.

Think about bespoke elements and accessories that will highlight the personality of your brand and express the overall tone of your workplace culture.

Lighting is important too. Where you don't require task lighting, consider subtler mood lighting, and match the lighting you use with the function of each workplace zone. There's plenty of choice when it comes to modern lighting technology, offering versatility and energy-saving advantages.

The time you spend on researching the design of your workspace can pay off in long-term benefits, with better employee engagement, improved productivity and the firm foundations for attracting and retaining the talent your enterprise needs.

3: A Human Approach to Open Plan

The open plan office has developed a bad reputation. This type of design can feel toxic to the employees working in it, contributing to their decision to jump ship. More informally-designed open plan office spaces date back to the 1950s, when they represented a more modern approach to work.

But they have since become symbolic of an unadventurous design solution that fails to take the human element into account.

Conventional open plan layouts are too noisy and too obtrusive. They are a barrier to concentration, they lack privacy or the scope for personalisation, and are too inflexible overall. Open plan offices can have a negative effect on performance, productivity and staff retention.

Too many organisations treat open plan as an opportunity to flood spaces with bench desks. There's no research into individual working needs. The linear conformity of bench desks can create a kind of stadium crowd effect, where it feels like people are shouting across at one another. This amplifies the volume of the workspace significantly.

This type of layout also feels very inorganic and forced, adding to its negative effect on how people feel.

Modern workspaces are complex ecosystems, and the traditional open plan approach rides roughshod over these complexities. What these spaces require is a human-centred approach to design and layout.

This should address all employee pain-points to harmonise the environment. Give teams cluster-room, and centre this on organic desk layouts that break up the unnatural monotony of endless clean lines. Look at innovative storage solutions and sound-absorbent screens, and use finishes and materials that absorb noise.

These include fabrics, foam, cork, wood and rubber. Plants and other greenery can also lessen the impact of noise in an open plan office.

When planning the use of space, take an empathic approach and put yourself in the position of the employees occupying various areas:

- What would it be like to sit here all day?
- Is there enough natural light, and access to an outdoor view?
- How many people will be walking directly past my workstation in the course of a day and be able to see my screen?
- Is this space safe and private enough?
- Is this somewhere where I can focus, or is there a nearby alternative?

Again, lighting is a hugely important factor. Headaches from bright lighting and screen glare impact on health and productivity. At computer workstations, recommended light levels are between 300 and 500 lux.

The more control people have over their workspace lighting, the more satisfied they are at work.

Don't omit your branding from your open plan design. This should run throughout it, reinforcing its presence and its values for everyone working in the space you provide.

4: Align Environment to Employees

A recent survey from Leesman, *The Workplace Revolution Part 2*, reveals one in five workplace change programmes bring only mediocre results. This is especially true for supporting individual and concentrative tasks.

The lesson is that if your workplace doesn't fully support your employees, how can you expect them to fully support your business?

When fitting out an office, the typical approach is for the client to provide a brief, which includes an employee head-count, room types, departments, existing storage needs and future expansion requirements.

Often it involves rapid decision-making without involving employees in creating an environment that will suit them best. The office concept and their needs are misaligned from the start.

Instead, the approach should be to explore how to create the optimum work environment with employees. Therefore, when choosing a designer for your office, be sure to ask the right questions about their practice:

- What is their process and their thinking?
- Do they have post-occupancy survey results from previous projects?

The workplace is a detailed and diverse landscape, and for design professionals to provide the right kind of advice, they need to reflect this.

You should expect a clear rationale for the use of materials that doesn't just come down to cost.

A critical part of the process is a workplace analysis, involving employees through surveys, interviews and workshops. Persona profiling based on workplace activity will help to align different groups with the building's features and internal spatial layout.

This supports a more informed choice of office furniture, finishes and acoustics, which you can tailor to various task and role-based requirements.

Remember: offices are spaces for individuals as well as teams, and that these individual needs can be as important in enabling and improving productivity.

This contributes to an holistic approach to office design, that enables you to create an environment that tackles the welfare and wellbeing of your workforce.

To align your environment with your employees, you must make sure everyone has a voice. Do this, and you can create a workspace that helps you hold onto your workforce.

5: Right Tech = Right Tools

“You don’t build a business. You build people, and people build the business.” – Zig Ziglar

You should give your employees the right tools to work with, or risk losing them. Equipping your workforce with technology that supports and enhances how they work is a big benefit when it comes down to the overall employee experience.

Top performing enterprises provide the tech that puts employees in control of how they work, helping them make better decisions and giving them morale-boosting autonomy.

A major source of employee disengagement is outdated, slow and error-prone technology. If people feel you’re not investing in the right tools, then they will take from this that you’re also not investing in them.

It’s vital that as part of your workspace design, you understand what tech tools your workforce needs. These tools can be quite diverse, and reflect individual roles and ways of working. Don’t assume that there is an easy, blanket approach to this.

Some people work with more than one monitor screen, for example, or will need to integrate remote devices into their working patterns.

Furniture comes into this as well, as it is a fundamental workstation element. Not everyone’s job involves them sitting at a desk all day long, if they are attending meetings and workshops.

Having a solid understanding at design stage of how people work will enable you to specify furniture that supports this, and doesn’t impose ways of working that are unsuitable.

Doing your research also supports careful budgeting, allowing you to install more expensive workstations for more or less permanent users, and be more economical where there is only occasional need.

The technology different roles and tasks require should integrate with your choice of furniture, so that the overall design optimises comfort and productivity, collaboration and communication within the office environment.

People want to put in good performances and excel in their roles. Technology is an enabler of these things.

A well-equipped office environment sends out a positive brand message and demonstrates to employees that you value them and the work they do.

6: Employee Experience Drives Engagement

According to an OC Tanner survey, for 92% of employees their employee experience is their everyday experience. But only 42% rate this employee experience as positive.

People strive for good experiences in life, but work often feels like it gets in the way. We forget how much a part of daily life work is.

It's important that employees focus on their own experiences in work as well as aiming to make their customers' lives better.

Employees who feel fulfilled, who are able to express themselves through work and thrive in a supportive environment, are also more likely to interact with each other and customers better. They are happier, more motivated and more engaged.

The engaged employee is absorbed in their tasks, and works enthusiastically for the benefit of the brand that employs them.

How do you inspire and engage employees?

- By nurturing a culture they can identify with,
- By giving them an environment that supports them, and
- By providing the right tools for them to do their work effectively and efficiently.

A positive employee experience helps attract talented recruits, and helps to retain a talented, motivated workforce.

Creating this positive, engaging employee experience is not easy. It takes time and effort.

You need to listen carefully, to learn and collaborate. The perfect workspace requires diligent prototyping, designing and implementation.

But it is achievable, whether you're refurbishing existing premises or having something purpose-built. Offices and workspaces can vary enormously, but if their culture, environment and tools are in harmony, then they will create positive experiences for employees.

Conclusion

Recruiting and retaining the right workforce for your enterprise requires more than packaging up your job offers attractively.

The prospective employee has to be the right fit for you, but your brand, culture and workspace has to be the right fit for them too.

Your employees are your most important resource, and if they don't fit, then you risk damaging your culture and hampering your productivity and growth.

When it comes to communicating the essence of your brand, lead with your WHY – your purpose and your values. And embody these in the physical environment of your workplace, so that both existing and future employees are fully immersed in your brand and culture.

Brand is the glue of a good workplace culture, and you can express brand in more than just branding. It comes through in office environments, in technological tools and in how a workplace makes employees feel.

Environments shape us, including the places where we work. They can have a positive, and negative, mental and physical impact, depending on the type of experience they help to create.

If you want to win the war for talent, then you need strong, fundamental values and effective leadership. But you also need the right physical workplace conditions.