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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:

Earned several Employee of the Month awards



Volunteers to help coach new employees

Is usually the first to pick up extra shifts and sometimes works back-to-back shifts



Rarely takes time off

Overworks to make ends meet, while trying to take care of her personal and professional needs



Won't receive a promotion or a pay raise in the near future due to budget constraints



Looks for better opportunities at organizations that have a reputation for a great culture and outstanding benefits



Accepts an offer that will provide a more positive, healthy work environment where she can thrive



Resigns from your organization



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 those in the C-suite say improving wellbeing is more important than advancing a career.<sup>1</sup> 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 are 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 of 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 to 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 reasons employees give for leaving their job.<sup>2</sup>**

# Culture goals

So what elements contribute to a culture of trust and belonging? Thirty years of continual research by Great Place To Work® 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 more than 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. Trust is the foundation of a great culture. It's built on many moments in everyday work — moments that Great Place To Work research has broken down into nine behaviors that can build or break trust. Every leader should work on improving these behaviors and can leverage technology to do so.

As a leader, you can help your team focus on the right areas and use the questions in the prior section to champion a great culture through your people systems.



## Achieving organizational objectives High-trust behaviors: inspiring, speaking, and listening

Inspiring employees doesn't mean being a great public speaker; it means connecting employees to the organization's values and how they contribute to the greater purpose beyond financial goals. Speaking means sharing clearly, frequently, fully, and through a variety of channels to build a culture of transparency that enables employees to contribute their best. Listening is the foundation of all high-trust behaviors. It means proactively seeking the opinions and feedback of others and creating open systems for receiving that input while staying in a growth mindset.

✓ **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.

✓ **Surveying, listening, and measuring** are essential for understanding employees' individual experiences and developing strategies to support them. Use survey templates based on proven psychological frameworks to understand your employees' ever-evolving needs, and leverage artificial intelligence (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 as identified by authoritative sources such as Great Place To Work.



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

## Achieving organizational objectives (cont'd)

- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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 that leaders are honest and open and that bad news isn't withheld or sugarcoated.
- ✓ Centralize organization standards, documents, announcements, events, and communications in **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.







## Encouraging personal best

High-trust behaviors: thanking, developing, and caring

Thanking means creating a culture of appreciation in which people are recognized genuinely, frequently, unexpectedly, and in ways that are personally meaningful for their good work and extra effort. Developing is enabling a learning environment in which employees can discover and nurture their interests and talents to grow both personally and professionally. Caring means showing genuine interest in people's lives, both in and out of the office, and helping them balance and integrate their work and life needs. It means listening to and understanding their unique needs.

- ✓ **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 career paths and succession plans** for the different roles in 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 of their future.



## Encouraging personal best (cont'd)

- ✓ 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 and engagement, retention rates, and reductions in turnover costs.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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 in order to reduce employee anxiety about pay, minimize errors, and reduce payroll workload.







## Cultivating team spirit

High-trust behaviors: hiring, celebrating, and sharing

Hiring is the way you welcome new employees to your organization. It's not only about being technically prepared but also about how you welcome new hires and integrate them into your culture. Celebrating means genuinely recognizing and rewarding both personal milestones and organizational successes at the individual, team, and enterprise levels in specific and unique ways. Sharing your organization's successes, opportunities, and resources equitably with all employees is vital to creating an inclusive workplace. Employees should have equal opportunities to earn rewards.

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ Review compensation, and **close any pay gaps** between employees doing equal work.
- ✓ **Regularly evaluate key business practices**, such as candidate screening, onboarding, performance reviews, and succession planning, by 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.



# 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 will notice a substantial, positive impact not just on your people but on your business as well.



## Employee retention and acquisition

A culture of trust and belonging where your people feel heard, accepted, and valued for who they are attracts and retains top talent:

- ✓ In a Great Place To Work study of the U.S. workforce, a whopping **98%** of respondents said a great culture is important in their next job search.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ The cost of replacing an employee is **three to four times** the position's salary.<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ When millennials believe their organization has a high-trust culture, they're **22 times** more likely to want to work there for a long time.<sup>6</sup>



## Innovation and productivity

When you bring together people from various backgrounds and with different experiences, you'll benefit from fresh ideas, new perspectives, and better results from your workforce:

- ✓ Organizations that can reallocate talent in step with their strategic plans are **more than twice as likely** to outperform their peers.<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Organizations whose HR technology facilitates a positive employee experience are **1.3 times** more likely to report organizational outperformance.<sup>8</sup>
- ✓ Improved decision making, higher productivity, and better innovation among diverse teams all stem from **increased cognitive diversity**, which enables teams to solve problems faster and more effectively.<sup>9</sup>



## Customer satisfaction

Happy employees = happy customers. When you take care of your people, they'll take care of your customers:

- ✓ Organizations that excel at customer experience have **1.5 times more** engaged employees than less customer-focused organizations do.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ A whopping **90%** of customers who are highly satisfied with a brand say they are highly likely to return to that brand to make more purchases.<sup>11</sup>
- ✓ Customers' switching companies due to poor service costs U.S. companies a total of **\$1.6 trillion**.<sup>12</sup>
- ✓ A **2%** increase in customer retention has the same impact on profits as cutting costs by 10%.<sup>13</sup>



## Profitability

A standout culture increases employee engagement, which in turn leads to a better bottom line:

- ✓ Organizations with strong cultures saw a **4x increase** in revenue growth compared to their competitors.<sup>14</sup>
- ✓ Organizations that appeared on the Fortune annual **100 Best Companies to Work For** list nearly doubled the average returns for the market from 1998 to 2016.<sup>15</sup>
- ✓ Performance matters, and the great companies on the 100 Best Workplaces list are no exception. Revenue per employee — a key metric that many investors scrutinize — **doubled** for companies on the list.<sup>16</sup>



## Conclusion

The truth is that 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 resulting customer satisfaction, and improving performance and productivity — all of which are tied to your bottom line.

See how UKG can help you create a culture of trust and belonging.

GET THE TOOLS TO BUILD A STRONG CULTURE

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Great  
Place  
To  
Work®



# Appendix

## Culture Evaluation Worksheet

### How successful is your organization at building trust?



#### Credibility

1. How do employees feel about their managers?

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

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

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

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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?

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6. Are leaders transparent about the state of the business?

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#### Respect

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# Appendix

## Culture Evaluation Worksheet

### How successful is your organization at 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?

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

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3. How successful do employees feel your organization is?

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

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5. Do other organizations strive to be like yours?

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#### Camaraderie

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

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

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

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

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

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# Appendix

## Culture Evaluation Worksheet

### How successful is your organization at 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?

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

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

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

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

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# 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.

High-trust behaviors	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Inspiring, speaking, and listening			
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.			
Surveying, listening, and measuring are essential for understanding employees' individual 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 as identified by authoritative sources such as Great Place To Work.			
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.			
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 that leaders are honest and open and that bad news isn't withheld or sugarcoated.			
Centralize organization standards, documents, announcements, events, and communications in 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.			

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## Technology Evaluation Worksheet (cont'd)

High-trust behaviors	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Thanking, developing, and caring			
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 career paths and succession plans for the different roles in 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 of their future.			
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 and engagement, retention rates, and reductions in turnover costs.			
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.			
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.			
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.			
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.			
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 in order to reduce employee anxiety about pay, minimize errors, and reduce payroll workload.			



# Appendix

## Technology Evaluation Worksheet (cont'd)

High-trust behaviors	UKG	Vendor 2	Vendor 3
Hiring, celebrating, and sharing			
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.			
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.			
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.			
Review compensation, and close any pay gaps between employees doing equal work.			
Regularly evaluate key business practices, such as candidate screening, onboarding, performance reviews, and succession planning, by 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.			

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## About UKG

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. One of the world's leading HCM cloud companies today, UKG and our Life-work Technology™ approach to HR, payroll, and workforce management solutions for all people helps more than 80,000 organizations around the globe and across every industry anticipate and adapt to their employees' needs beyond just work. To learn more, visit [ukg.com](https://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](https://ukg.com/resources/great-place-to-work).

