

Roots and wings: shaping our culture at BPDTS

Roots and wings

Growing up, I was really lucky to have parents who wholeheartedly believed in the principles of giving us 'roots' (= the knowledge we were loved, looked after and safe), and 'wings' (so we could fly, explore and be ourselves and, heck, even make a few mistakes along the way!).

I've always tried to adopt these principles with every team I've led. Giving the grounding necessary so colleagues feel safe to experiment and learn without fearing the predictable-unpredictableness of the workplace. And in return, this sense of learning, autonomy and purpose has resulted in people delivering way beyond expectations, and with a real sense of loyalty.

So, imagine everyone in your organisation feeling like this; like they belonged there, that they could be themselves, dream big, make their own decisions, gain lots of new skills...and were happy? That's an organisational culture I'm passionate about. I don't mean somewhere with ping pong tables and bean bags – I'm not saying they're bad, just that they won't fix your culture.

This is what we're committed to achieving at BPDTS.

The approach

In February, after a busy year of significant growth (BPDTS more than doubled in size, very quickly), Loveday and the Executive Team knew the focus needed to shift towards the health of the organisation and I was really pleased to be asked to carry out an initial piece of work to baseline where we were and identify actions to make things even better. We all agreed the following principles were crucial if we were going to be successful:

1. This had to represent the employee voice (not mine!). It's really important to me colleagues do not feel 'done to' and it's through our people we need to set the vision for the future. This needed to be driven bottom-up.
2. We needed to commit to being transformational. This wasn't about tinkering around the edges and if we were not feeling uncomfortable, then we were not being transformational enough.
3. We needed to make sure the entire organisational design, every policy and all our processes and practices supported the culture we wanted. This was not just for operations – but HR, Finance, Governance and all

our corporate service functions too.

4. An understanding from everyone that culture sits across everything. It's not a project on the side for just a few to care about; an optional extra, a tick in a box or something to pay lip service to – this was going to run through the DNA of the organisation or not at all.
5. We needed to be ready to listen to the feedback. It may be tough to hear but if we were really going to improve, we needed to rip the plaster off and see how bad the wounds might be.

What happened?

We ran workshops across all of our hubs to hear from as many of our colleagues as possible to draw out key challenges, what we can do as individuals to improve our own experiences at work and what actions we want to feed into the implementation going forward, as well as how people wanted to support delivery of that.

I was blown away by how generous people were with their time and just how open and honest everyone was about their experiences. People really cared about this stuff too!

The insight gained from over 200 people, shaped the outputs from the Discovery Work and we were able to develop a set of strategic outcomes, underpinned by our 10 cultural themes:

1. We support individual career progression and help people to imagine their own future and seek opportunities to fulfil it.
2. Our approach to recognition motivates all our people to do the right thing, in the right way.
3. We all focus on customer value in everything we do.
4. Our role designs inspire curiosity for all our people and help them to see the impact and value they are adding.
5. We focus on building a strong sense of community for everyone where people feel empowered to learn and share ideas.
6. Our career conversations harness a spirit of continuous improvement among all our people.

7. We do effective people planning to respond flexibly to the changing needs of our customers; focused on attracting and retaining the right people.
8. We encourage leadership behaviours; coaching all our people to deliver organisational outcomes.
9. We have a strong organisational identity where everyone understands our purpose and unique identity.
10. Our visible and adaptive governance process breaks down complexity in decision-making.

So how's it going

I've genuinely sensed a real shift across the organisation for the better. I often get asked how you 'measure' whether your culture is improving but really, it's about how it feels.

And it feels better.

We're blaming less, learning more, there's a sharper focus on outcomes and behaviours and we're coming together across the organisation more with a shared sense of purpose and direction.

We now know where we are, where we want to get to and (mostly) how we're going to get there. We'll share more in the future about how we're managing that, the lessons we've learned along the way and how we're measuring our success.

We've got a long way to go, in fact, culture transformation is never done. We know that lasting and meaningful change won't happen overnight, however, we can recognise the positive path we're on and the steps we've already taken.

I'm just really proud to be working with an organisation where the importance of roots and wings is so prevalent. It's here where the magic happens.

If you would like more information or would like to share your own experiences with us (we're always keen to learn), please [get in touch](#) and we'll get back to you.