



# Building a respectful culture

KPMG Board Leadership Centre



Inappropriate behaviour at work is one of the most pressing issues facing HR, challenged by the complexities of managing a multi-generational workforce where diversity includes different personalities, work styles as well as race, gender, religion and philosophical beliefs like veganism. The issue is so prevalent with employers ill-equipped to handle misconduct, that The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recently released a seven-step guide to help prevent and deal with sexual harassment at work. While according to the CIPD, a quarter of UK employees believe bullying and harassment is overlooked, with less than half (40%) of line managers trained in preventing and addressing inappropriate behaviour.

Organisations that want to thrive and attract the best talent, must create a respectful, accountable and diverse culture, encouraging openness and intolerance on issues like sexual harassment and discrimination. This leads to a more positive and engaging workplace; and one where boards are better placed to fulfil their legal responsibilities for protecting employees against bullying and harassment.

But culture change is no easy feat. The key to a 'respect for people' culture is to take a holistic approach that's driven top down. It's not about one thing such as training managers. Real sustainable change requires embedding respect into every part of the business and through every point of the employee's lifecycle from recruitment through to a positive exit. Getting it right is a three step process: 'CALM' – Culture check, action and leadership, and maintain to sustain.

## Culture check

Change starts by taking an honest look at the company's cultural climate and its weaknesses. Ask questions such as:

- Is the leadership team leading by example, walking the talk, being respectful to all?
- Are they driving a positive culture from the top down?
- Do employees understand the company's purpose for a respectful culture?
- Do internal policies and processes encourage an accountable environment?
- Are all employees being treated fairly and with respect?

- Are line managers empowered with the skills and confidence to openly drive change?
- How confident are employees to voice concerns, and how early on?
- Are line managers supporting their teams, and handling issues when they arise?
- How is respect championed at every stage of an employee's lifecycle?

Cultural change has to be driven from the top to succeed. Having this cultural lens gives provides the insights necessary to get senior executive buy-in and to establish a clear set of visions and values around respect that become core to the business. Behavioural expectations start with the Board and they should lead by example, and how the business will be a champion of diversity and inclusion.

## Action and leadership

Next, make radical changes that address weak spots identified at the 'culture check'. For example, if employees are unclear on the company's stance on bullying and harassment, implement clear policies on the company's position and procedures on inappropriate behaviour. Include your purpose behind these policies so employees know they're working towards a positive goal.

Ensure an open grievance procedure is established so employees and line managers feel supported and confident in making or handling a claim with no career repercussions. Clearly communicate all these policies to the employee from the start such as in contracts and new starter handbooks, with behaviour competencies in place.

Support the policies with regular, in-depth management training, coaching and mentoring. Building a respectful culture goes beyond managers knowing how to handle a complaint – they must be able to spot and address unacceptable behaviour in others so conflict can be swiftly resolved which means demonstrating the values themselves.

### **Maintaining your positive culture**

Implementing cultural change is one thing, but sustaining it is another as employees come and go.

Appoint credible culture change ambassadors and set targets against areas like processes, performance, attitudes and wellbeing. Constantly seek ways to engage the whole organisation – think about run regular ‘culture check-ins’ with employee feedback.

Appraisals and exit interviews are an effective way to establish what is and isn’t working culturally. Is the company cultivating a truly diverse environment that’s living its vision, values and behaviours? If not, consider your recruitment strategy to reach a more diverse talent pool.

Finally, technology helps refine culture – use analytics to identify patterns of complaints and to make reporting of wrong doings, easy. Adopting a “speak up” policy that encourages reporting while protecting confidentiality, will foster trust and ensure that diversity and inclusion can thrive.

There’s no quick fix to building long term cultural change where respect for people is embedded into the very fabric of the business. It’s not enough to just to ensure executive are trained or to set a new policy. It’s a universal approach that embeds change from the top down and from recruitment to exit. It’s having a strategy where the culture is regularly reviewed and refined; where people take accountable action; and where the board and senior management lead by example, creating an open and honest environment that supports managers and employees in reporting wrongdoings. The end result is a more positive, engaged and productive team, all respecting one another – a win-win for all.

**By Suzanne Hurndall, Relationship Director at hr Inspire, specialists in outsourced HR consultancy support and cultural change**

---

## **The KPMG Board Leadership Centre**

The KPMG Board Leadership Centre offers support and guidance to non-executive directors, whether managing a portfolio non-executive career or embarking on a first appointment. Membership offers you a place within a community of board-level peers with access to topical and relevant seminars, invaluable resources and thought leadership, as well as lively and engaging networking opportunities. We equip you with the tools you need to be highly effective in your role, enabling you to focus on the issues that really matter to you and your business.

Learn more at [www.kpmg.com/uk/blc](http://www.kpmg.com/uk/blc).

### **Contact us**

Timothy Copnell  
Board Leadership Centre  
**T:** +44 (0)20 7694 8082  
**E:** [tim.copnell@kpmg.co.uk](mailto:tim.copnell@kpmg.co.uk)



The information contained herein is of a general nature and is not intended to address the circumstances of any particular individual or entity. Although we endeavor to provide accurate and timely information, there can be no guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No one should act on such information without appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of the particular situation.

© 2020 KPMG LLP, a UK limited liability partnership and a member firm of the KPMG network of independent member firms affiliated with KPMG International Cooperative (“KPMG International”), a Swiss entity. All rights reserved. The KPMG name and logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of KPMG International.