

PARADIGM REFRAMED

Investing in soft skills will lead to a more productive, innovative and proactive workforce, says **Paul Findlay**. He looks at how to create a winning team through an award-winning culture.



A COMPANY'S CULTURE IS

like a fingerprint—a truly unique identifier. It is a factor that is distinctive to every business and an attribute that breeds a winning team. While achieving an award-winning culture in your business can be a steep task, investing in it can deliver extraordinary outcomes.

As Jim Collins of *Good to Great* fame once said: "In determining the right people, the good-to-great companies placed greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialised knowledge, or work experience."

Though while many could read Collins' wise words as being a key consideration in future recruitment, the management team of PD Training believes it should also be a key consideration for team development.

It is a philosophy that has been a foundation stone of our business since its inception, and one that has been behind our business and awards success. It was this thinking that saw us recently win gongs for the 'Training and Professional Development' and 'Recruitment and Onboarding' categories at the recent HRD Employer of Choice Awards.

While our team generally come with some level of soft skills, or EQ (emotional intelligence quotient), we invest in our people to further develop their skills in managing disruption and change, displaying courage, increasing collaboration, engaging and developing people, solving problems and displaying resiliency.

Not only has this resulted in enhanced productivity by individual team members, but it has also cultivated a contemporary working culture full of gratitude, team synergy, and overall contentment.

Now, there are those who say that the uniquely humanistic qualities which constitute the desirable soft skills of the workforce of today and tomorrow are unteachable. Entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson claims that "you can learn expertise and gain experience, but attitude is inherent."

This is one area where I will disagree with Sir Richard and many other business leaders, based on what I have witnessed from members of our team and many others who have participated in the various training programmes focused on the non-technical skills required for the workforce.

At PD Training, we have taken a unique approach to the content, activities and tools that help people enhance their soft skills. Some would say we have flipped the paradigm of how soft skills are approached by the human resource (HR) and organisational development (OD) industry.

The analysis of available data is both a powerful and essential way of tracking the development of a winning team.

Based on the reality that any HR or OD investment needs to be accountable and demonstrate real return on investment, we analysed thousands of data points from participants of more than 200 professional develop-

ment programmes to understand what evidence-based materials were consistently adopted and delivered real impact.

Then we undertook a meta-analysis of behaviours, attributes and surveys of workplace performance and psychometrics in a multi-year study with over 40,000 data points to develop statistically reliable ways to monitor personal growth and predict corresponding improvements in workplace performance.

This data-driven approach to training has created many powerful benefits and created an award-winning high-performing team with a positive workplace culture. These include:

- **Greater workplace courage.** Courage was the first virtue Aristotle spoke about, as it makes the other virtues possible. In addition to being an important human virtue, it is also powerful for business as it promotes innovation. From our experience, we've noted that by helping staff find their courage, they have the confidence to share their opinions and that there is less resistance to organisational change.
- **Increased collaboration.** Studies have shown that just the mere perception of working collectively on a work task can supercharge employee performance. In fact, participants in a recent Stanford University study who were put in a collaborative environment stuck at their task 64 percent longer than their solitary peers, and also reported lower fatigue levels and a high success

rate. We have noted a similar experience. Through providing tools to enhance collaboration, we observed our employees worked faster, did better work, were more innovative and had greater workplace satisfaction. It's clear that businesses that embrace a collaborative strategy are more likely to outgrow competitors and improve their profit.

- **Resiliency.** Resilience has become a growing focus area for employees in efforts to improve corporate wellness. A recent research report for Conduent HR services found 22 percent of companies have a resilience programme, with 28 percent set to offer a programme soon. The resilience programme we use helps build and maintain resiliency, assisting employees to rebound from setbacks, push through difficult situations and embrace change.

There is a range of other benefits we have witnessed through our focus on enhancing our teams' soft skills such as decision making, more effective communication, inspiring trust and valuing diversity.

But ultimately the result of our investment in soft skills is a positive team culture that has helped us achieve and sustain a more productive, innovative and proactive workforce. 

PAUL FINDLAY is managing director of PD Training, an Australian-owned professional development training company operating in 10 countries.