

SHAPING THE FUTURE

A whitepaper by ODE Consulting®



TOMORROW'S WORKPLACE:

- Purpose
- People
- Processes

Today's workplace is undergoing a profound transformation, propelled by technological advancements, shifting demographics, and a growing commitment to sustainable business practices.

These factors are fundamentally reshaping how organizations pursue long-term success.

Companies are navigating a landscape brimming with both unprecedented challenges and exciting opportunities, influencing every facet of the workplace – ranging from employee engagement to leadership strategies, organizational culture, and processes.



(This whitepaper has been gleaned from insights contributed by senior executives and Human Resources leaders from various industries in Singapore in a roundtable dialogue hosted by ODE Consulting® entitled 'Tomorrow's Workplace: Purpose, People and Processes')



A decade ago, CEOs and their executive teams typically concentrated on four or five critical issues at a time; today, that number has doubled.

A 2022 McKinsey survey revealed that

“70% of approximately 1,000 employees believe their work largely defines their sense of meaning and purpose”

THE PURPOSE OF PURPOSE

To navigate this evolving landscape, organizations must first take a step back to review and rethink **what they stand for and their purpose.**

A clear, compelling sense of purpose is essential, as it anchors employees to a greater mission and provides direction amid change.

With shifting societal values and an increasing demand for purpose-driven work, companies are revisiting their core values, vision, and impact on communities and the environment.

Businesses now find that they must redesign work and how people work. This involves adopting flexible work arrangements, integrating technology to enhance collaboration, and fostering a culture that prioritizes work-life integration.



As employees seek more meaningful, balanced careers, organizations are moving beyond traditional office models to implement

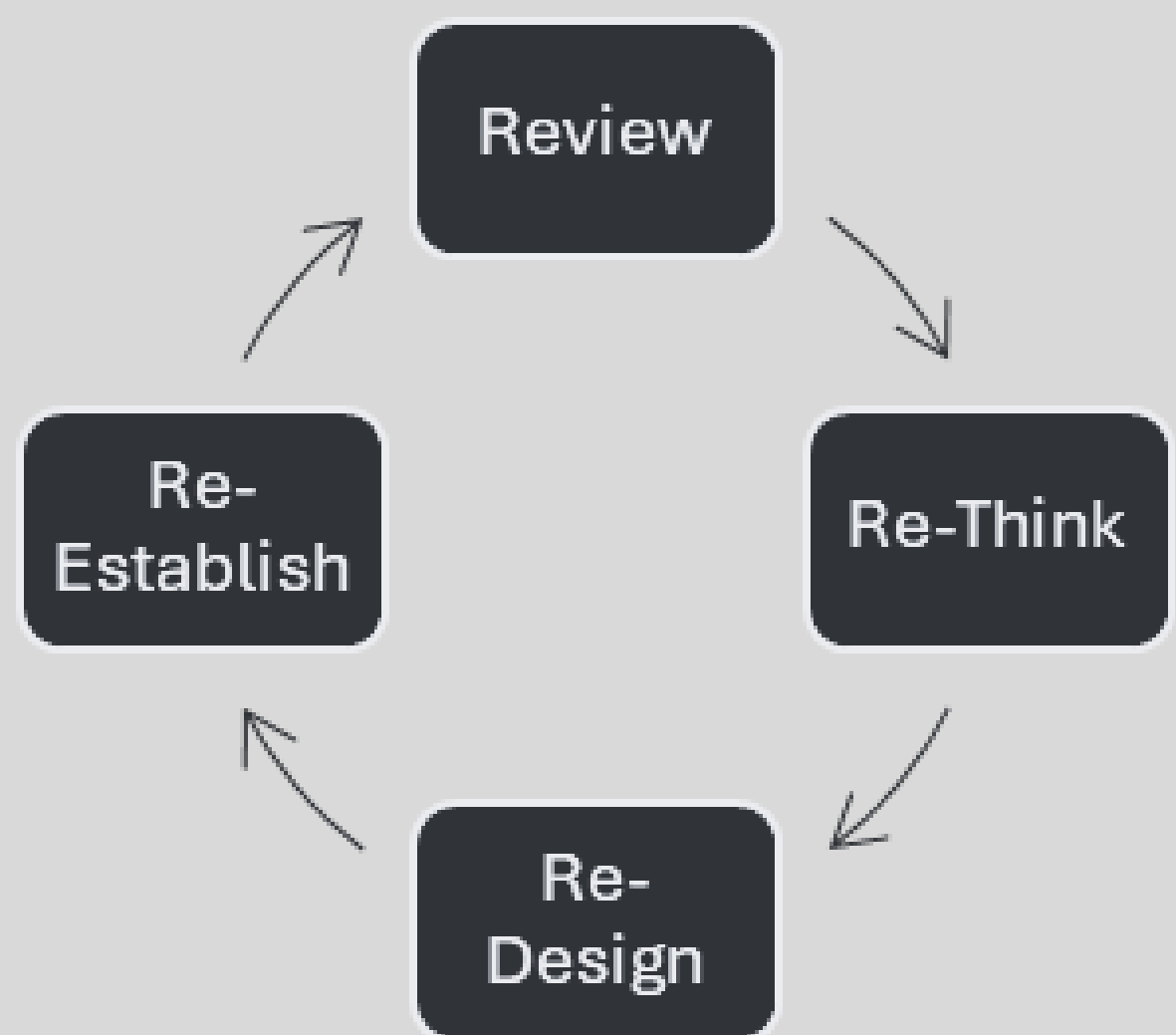
hybrid and remote work strategies.



To support this shift, it is critical for organizations to re-establish the processes enabling employees to be successful in their chosen ways of working.

Ultimately, it is not just about streamlining workflows, but about **creating agile, adaptable systems that allow for continuous learning and innovation.**

Effective processes must support the dynamic needs of both the organization and its workforce, ensuring that teams can thrive regardless of where or how they work.



2024 & Beyond: Workplace Trends

Today's workplace is undergoing profound disruptions driven by technological innovation, the confluence of AI advancements, shifting workforce dynamics and evolving workplace expectations. AI is reshaping job roles and workflows, leading to automation and the need for upskilling. Simultaneously, technology continues to transform methods of communication, collaboration and productivity – offering opportunities when leveraged, but challenges at the same time in adapting to new tools and platforms.



The ongoing debate over return to office policies adds a layer of complexity as businesses now must **balance the benefits of in-person interactions and the flexibility of remote work.**

One of the participants of the ODE round table dialogue who contributed to these insights, highlighted the delicate balance between engaging Gen Z employees who prioritise purpose driven work in flexible environments while also meeting the needs of older generations.

As these disruptions continue to reshape the workplace each day, the conversation increasingly centred around aligning evolving workplace dynamics with deeper employee needs and motivations. A key topic of discussion was around the fact that employees are no longer only looking for a pay-check at the end of the month.

“Passion is Critical...”

as aptly shared by the Managing Director of a leading technology company.

She also added that,

“despite technological disruptions, changing demographics and an increased emphasis on sustainable practices are **ALL** disrupting the workforce, and **one of the greatest challenges is ensuring that her people find their purpose**”.





Finding purpose and passion in the workplace isn't just a “nice-to-have” anymore — it's a strategic necessity for navigating the rapidly changing corporate landscape.

Building a Purpose-Driven Workplace: (with Gartner's Human Deal Framework)

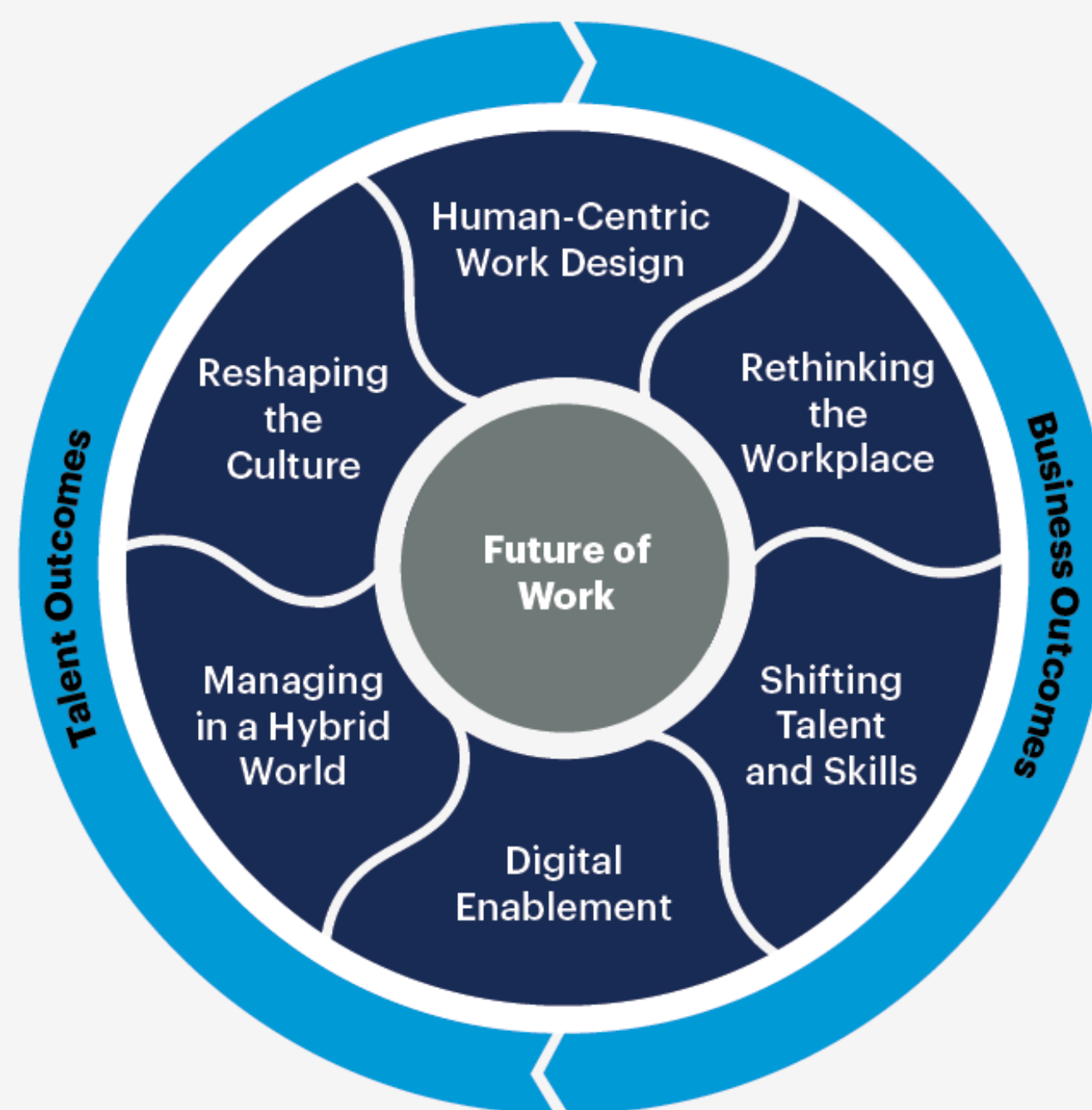
The **Human Deal framework** emphasizes a shift in how employees view their work, prioritizing personal value, purpose, and well-being over traditional factors. Employees now seek **deeper connections, radical flexibility, personal growth, holistic well-being, and a shared purpose** within their organizations. This shift is thought to stem from reflections triggered by the pandemic, leading employees to reassess their priorities and relationships with their company.



To adapt, organizations must **move beyond transactional models**, to embrace a more **human-centric approach** that fosters meaningful connections, values employees' authentic selves, and supports their overall growth and well-being.

Gartner's Human Deal Framework summarizes these components:

1. **Deeper Connections:** Feeling understood through family and community connections, not just work relationships.
2. **Radical Flexibility:** Feeling autonomous in all aspects of work, not just when and where it gets done.
3. **Personal Growth:** Feeling valued through growth as a person, not just as a professional.
4. **Holistic Well-Being:** Feeling cared for by ensuring holistic well-being offerings are used, not just available.
5. **Shared Purpose:** Feeling invested in the organization by taking concrete action on purpose, not just through corporate statements.



Source: Gartner
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Gartner®

How are we Creating Purpose Driven Workplaces?

Building a strong organizational culture requires leaders to live the behaviours – **displaying corporate values on the walls are not enough**. This shift ensures that culture is not only communicated but embodied at all levels of the company. When leaders **prioritize trust and purpose**, employees gain a clear understanding of their roles and their impact, reinforcing their sense of purpose and engagement. Ultimately, nurturing a supportive culture emphasising purpose is key to long-term success and employee well-being.



At some level, people are people. They want to have meaningful work. They want to have real connections with their co-workers and their managers; they want what they're doing to have broader purpose; they want to be fairly compensated.

McKinsey, 2023



Engaging in **'last mile leadership'** – creating opportunities for meaningful conversations and getting to know one's team better, on a personal level plays a critical role in reinforcing and cascading cultural values throughout the organization.

“Leaders must also emphasize the broader company mission to new joiners, reminding them that regardless of the role they are in, their work contributes to a bigger purpose”

– HR director of a technology company

A key element in this process is fostering and creating an environment of psychological safety, ensuring that all employees feel secure in voicing their thoughts and ideas. This is especially important in an intergenerational workforce, where there is a **“support structure in place to allow employees to speak out without fear”**.

Regular personal engagement with teams is essential to success – **leaders must prioritise time spent connecting with their own teams and modelling behaviours.**





For example, the CEO of a leading retail mall in Singapore employs an effective approach to recognizing and appreciating the contributions of all employees, by ***“making an effort to celebrate unsung heroes... walking around to personally thank outsourced partners such as cleaners... and highlighting the contributions of operations staff during annual dinner & dances... consistently expressing appreciation and gratitude for front-liners.”***

This approach helps foster a culture of recognition and gratitude across the organization.

Similarly, the President and CEO of a Japanese pharmaceutical company, known for its highly process-driven operations, emphasized the importance of the number of lives saved as a key reminder of the company’s mission.

By regularly highlighting the patients treated and helped, the CEO reinforces employees’ sense of purpose, ensuring they stay connected to the broader mission—even within the confines of strict processes.

At the core of it is ***“understanding the ultimate impact one brings to the customers served”*** – and understanding how to drive this.



The focus on purpose-driven roles underscores the broader need for organizations to integrate both business and people-centric goals. **A culture of coaching and mentoring** plays a pivotal role in this integration, helping individuals not only understand business objectives but also recognize their personal impact and growth alongside the company's success.

As organizations plan for the future, they must ask, "what do we stand for... how will we evolve over the next 50 years?"

By striking a balance between strong business KPIs and a deep commitment to employee development, companies can cultivate a sustainable culture that drives long-term success while nurturing and retaining talent.

People Strategies in the Face of Flexible Work Arrangements and the Changing Generational Composition in the Workforce

In tomorrow's workplace, navigating flexible work arrangements and the changing generational composition of the workforce will be critical to shaping effective people strategies. As businesses adapt to increasing demands for remote and hybrid work models, **leaders must rethink traditional approaches to employee engagement, productivity, and communication.**

At the same time, the growing presence of Gen Z in the workforce, alongside a multi-generational mix including Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials, requires a **nuanced understanding of varying expectations and work styles.**

Companies will **need to foster an inclusive culture that respects differences** in communication, feedback and working styles, motivations and priorities, and work values and expectations while aligning all employees with a shared purpose.

This balance will be essential in creating a flexible, adaptable environment where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to contribute to the company's vision and mission.

People strategies must evolve to ensure that both business needs and the well-being of a diverse workforce are met, fostering long-term success in a dynamic, purpose-driven workplace.



	Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964)	Generation X (1965 - 1979)	Millennials (1980 - 1994)	Generation Z (1995 - 2010)
Communication and feedback needs	"Performance review once a year is sufficient"	"Frequent, honest feedback"	"Immediate feedback"	"Frequent, prompt, swift and face-to-face feedback"
Working styles	Compete and grind your way to the top	Independent, divide and conquer approach	Highly collaborative & vocal, speaking up is important	Self-directed and independent approach to learning
Motivations and priorities	Recognition Staying relevant and useful	Provision	Find community, meaning and purpose	Supportive leaders, meaning and purpose
Work values and expectations	Driven "I am at my workplace for eight to 10 hours. If necessary, I will take work home"	Efficiency "I try to complete my work at the office. If necessary, I will take it home"	Work-life integration "This is a 24/7 world, I work until 5:00 and will log on tonight"	Work-life balance "I don't want to think about work after working hours"

Source: McKinsey

*The key to unlocking success across generations is incorporating **radical flexibility in the workplace – a culture of trust and openness**, where employees of all generations feel comfortable challenging decisions and contributing to better outcomes, is fundamental.*



A partner at a business advisory firm highlighted that **managing Gen Z effectively requires moving away from rigid structures** such as strict office hours or work locations as this generation is performance-driven, focused on deliverables, and takes ownership of their tasks.

They view leadership not as a function of position but as a reflection of one's actions and impact. To enable better outcomes, it is crucial to cultivate a culture of trust and openness, where **honest and frank conversations are the norm**.



The CEO of a retail company echoed this sentiment, noting that younger team members **resist micromanagement and thrive when they feel trusted**. While challenges are inevitable, addressing them openly and taking ownership of issues, engaging in transparent discussions, and collaboratively finding solutions ensures teams can navigate obstacles effectively and continue to move forward.



Critical Processes for a Disrupted Workplace

This roundtable dialogue highlighted **five key themes** related to critical processes implemented in response to workplace disruptions.

1

Virtual First – the concept of ‘virtual first’ is no longer ideal. Instead, flexible working arrangements must strike a healthy balance between online and offline engagements, recognising that flexibility should incorporate meaningful connections and engagement among teams.

2

Clear Deliverables – Leaders must have a clear view of each team members’ deliverables, ensuring that expectations and goals are aligned. This clarity enables better tracking of performance and helps create a purposeful and results-driven working environment.



3

Authentic Engagement – Authentic engagement is essential to success. Leaders must foster an environment of trust by sharing with employees and allowing them to take ownership of their work. True engagement goes beyond surface level interactions and requires a deeper connection between leaders and their teams.

4

Embedding Flexibility – Flexibility must be an inherent part of an organisations culture – it must be built in. Trust is the cornerstone to this approach, ensuring that employees feel empowered to work in a way that suits their individual needs while still aligning with organizational goals.

5

Process and Communication – Effort is needed to establish clear processes for communications between individual leaders and the broader organisation, especially in larger organisations. All leaders must be aligned in their approach to flexibility, ensuring that it is seamlessly integrated into their leadership style as well as into the organisational culture.

Implications for Leadership

In time of change, well defined processes are not enough.

While standard operating procedures provide structure – the principles and values underlying these processes must be clearly communicated.

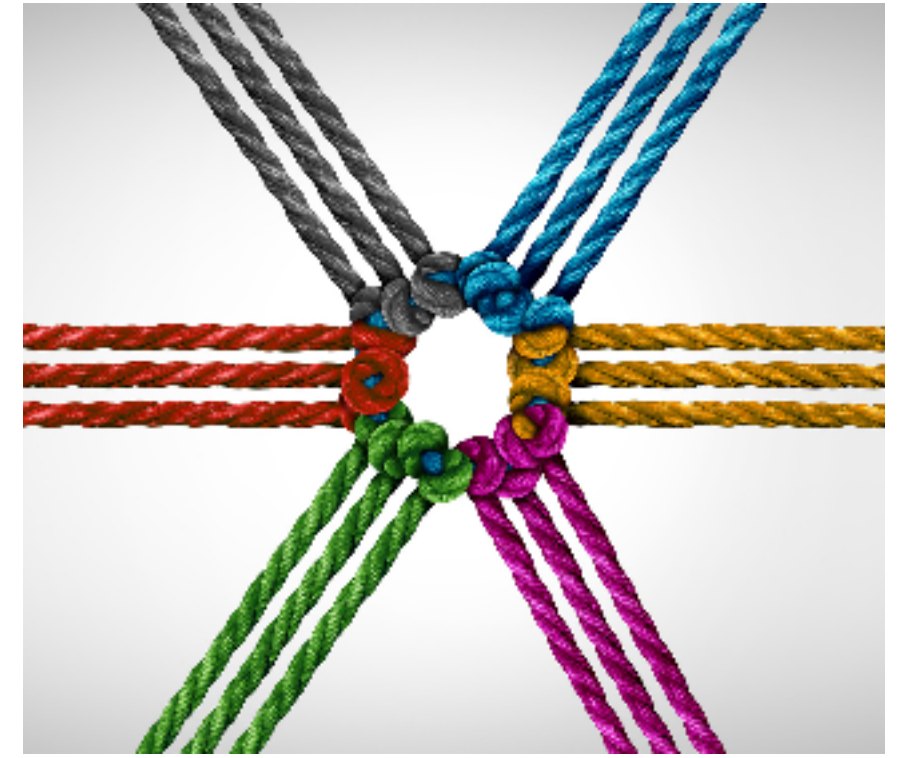
“Leaders play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between tasks and values, ensuring their teams have a clear understanding of not just what needs to be done, but why it matters”

This clarity enables employees to connect their work to the organisations broader mission, fostering a **shared sense of purpose** and alignment.

- One of the leaders in the roundtable, a partner at a business advisory
- company highlighted the **delicate balance that leaders must strike**
- **between empathy and discipline.**



Today's workforce often pushes boundaries – leaders must ensure that key processes are followed, without resorting to micromanaging their people. Providing team members with a sense of ownership, one where they **feel valued, trusted and invested in** cultivates an environment where employees feel psychologically safe and motivated to perform their best.



When team members feel trusted and valued, they are likely to grow their careers within the company.

Leaders must also juggle competing priorities while keeping their teams aligned. **It's critical to focus on what the 'north star' of the team is**, involve the team in key decisions, and adapt as needed. During cultural transformations, for instance, legacy processes may need to be revisited. Leaders who welcome challenges to outdated systems empower employees to take ownership of change. This flexibility not only drives innovation but also fosters a sense of accountability, as employees feel their voices are heard and their input matters.



Empathy plays a central role in navigating change, and it extends beyond traditional leadership approaches. Reverse mentoring, where experienced leaders learn from younger team members, is an example of how leadership is evolving.



The modern leader embraces humility and continuous learning, understanding that leadership today is not about knowing it all but learning it all.

– Managing Director of HR Consultancy

By admitting they don't have all the answers and being open to new ideas, leaders create an environment of mutual respect and growth. With a shift from the traditional "I know it all" mindset to the modern "I must learn it all" approach, **leaders must embrace continuous learning and model these values to drive transformation.**

Equally important is **creating a psychologically safe space for employees**, where they feel understood and supported while being held accountable for their contributions. Leaders must navigate the **balance between driving results and fostering a human connection**. It is this balance of achieving hard KPIs while being empathetic and adaptable that defines effective leadership during times of change.



At its core, navigating change with empathy and agility is about creating a **culture of trust, accountability, and shared purpose**. Leaders who are self-aware, willing to adapt, and committed to building meaningful connections with their teams will foster environments where employees feel empowered to embrace change.

Ultimately, culture is the foundation of any successful transformation, and the leaders who prioritize it are the ones who thrive in the face of change.



Balancing Purpose, People and Processes For Success

As we look toward shaping tomorrow's workforce, it becomes clear that organizations must strike a delicate balance between purpose, people, and process. Employees thrive when they feel a sense of purpose—a connection to shared values and challenges that give meaning to their work. Companies, in turn, must invest in their people, not just by creating supportive environments but by fostering trust, autonomy, and engagement. To achieve this, leaders must embody a paradigm of leadership rooted in empathy, adaptability, and continuous learning.

By focusing on key principles over rigid processes, leaders can build resilient teams capable of adapting to change while still upholding the core cultural values of the organization. Processes should serve as enablers, not constraints, evolving to meet the needs of a rapidly shifting workplace.

Ultimately, **leadership is the cornerstone of aligning purpose, people, and process**. By leading with empathy, modelling cultural values, and embracing an agile mindset, leaders can empower their teams to navigate challenges with confidence. In doing so, they ensure that their organizations not only survive but thrive in an environment demanding constant innovation and reinvention.





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As a leader in the area of **Learning, Coaching and Consulting**, ODE has **since 1996** embarked on a journey partnering organisations to drive transformation and change, embedding culture.

The pervasiveness of technology particularly AI, has precipitated the need for a more focused approach towards equipping individuals and organisations with soft skills. These **adjacency skills** that complement and partner technical knowledge and competencies are vital for flourishing and success in this age of disruption and transformation.

Want to hear more about how you can succeed in Tomorrow's Workplace?

Connect with the team at ODE Consulting[®] to co-create the strategy towards building tomorrow's workplace.

