



4 Culture Trends for Higher Education for 2020



For institutions of higher education, building great workplace cultures can be challenging, especially with a rapidly changing workforce, rising enrollments, and decreased public funding. Here are four of the hottest culture trends that will impact higher education in 2020.

Update: The way we work shifted dramatically overnight. In Q1 of 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic hit. Businesses and their employees are being forced to change how they work in some unprecedented ways. While most employees transitioned to remote work, many are left working on the front lines with new social distancing requirements. Confusion, anxiety, and fear are palpable. How will employees

adapt to this change in work environment, process, and roles? How can companies help employees be calm, productive, and healthy?

O.C. Tanner pulse surveys show 40% of employees globally are worried about losing their job, while 60% worry about lost income. 65% of employees report feeling a “tense” work environment, and 46% of employees say they are less productive at work. There’s a 221% increase in fearfulness among employees, and a 135% increase in feeling isolated.

During a time of great uncertainty and change, many companies are struggling with how to take care of their people and keep their businesses operating.

WHAT COMPANIES CAN DO: In times of crisis, it is a company’s responsibility to help employees thrive. This includes many things: ensuring employees are safe at work, giving them access to the tools and resources they need to do their jobs, prioritizing employee wellbeing, and communicating honestly, accurately, and frequently. Organizations are taking the necessary steps: 92% of companies took appropriate actions to make sure their employees were safe at work. Video communication from senior leaders nearly doubled. The number of flexible leave policies increased 95%. Now is the time to make employees your most important asset. Take care of their needs, help them stay connected in a time of physical disconnection, and show appreciation for their work and efforts, especially those on the front line. If you take care of your people, they will take care of your business.

This means we need to understand how employees are feeling and what they want from work. Here the 4 culture trends for 2020 (as they existed before the pandemic):

Culture Trend #1: Employees in higher education are burning out.

According to the 2020 O.C. Tanner Global Culture Report, 42% of employees surveyed in academia reported that they are experiencing mild, moderate, or severe burnout. The workforce continues to evolve and according to the American Association of University Professors, 73% of faculty are now non-tenure-track positions. These faculty members often receive lower pay and fewer employer sponsored benefits. Workloads have increased as overall enrollment and demand for distance learning and career development training continue to grow.

The results are costly. The Harvard Business Review estimates that burn-out costs U.S. employers between \$125 to \$190 billion dollars in healthcare spending each year. Stressed employees are far less likely to be engaged with students which can hurt the academic mission of the institution.

WHAT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CAN DO:

Keep in mind that those in academia often see their work as very personal. Many feel their job is an important part of who they are. Encourage them to take breaks and foster a healthy work/life balance. Focus on creating positive everyday experiences where employees feel connected to their department, peers, and your organization. This is especially critical for non-tenure-track faculty who may lack a sense of belonging. Include them in staff meetings and celebrate their accomplishments. Creating a great workplace culture can help mitigate, and even prevent, employee burnout, even in the most demanding faculty positions.

Culture Trend #2: Traditional leadership practices are outdated.

In a recent survey, Gallup found that only 34% of faculty and staff reported being engaged at work. One reason today's workforce is experiencing burnout and lack of engagement is because they expect to be managed differently than those of past generations.

Management in higher education has not yet responded to this shift in leadership style. Tasked with achieving high performance metrics, managing tight budgets, and student affairs, many leaders resort to micromanaging their people instead of inspiring them. Only 47% of employees in higher ed say their leader advocates for their career, and 47% say their direct manager helps them be part of something bigger.

In today's workforce, employees are looking for jobs with autonomy, mentorship, and a sense of empowerment. Leaders need to shift from a legacy, top-down administrative approach to one that connects people and inspires great work.

WHAT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CAN DO: Institutions of higher education must be willing to help staff understand how they



contribute to the mission of the institution. Remove red tape and barriers to allow your faculty to do what they do best—inspire students. Allow them the autonomy to innovate and use their talents to further the mission of the institution. Leaders should provide guidance, coaching, recognition, and connection. Reinvent leadership by having leaders focus on connecting their people to 3 things: a meaningful purpose, accomplishment, and one another.

Culture Trend #3: One-to-one meetings are a better performance management tool than what most organizations are using.

Employees in higher education want leaders who are available, engaged, and invested in their success. This means moving away from simple performance metrics, setting aside time for one-to-one meetings, and using more holistic ways of looking at an employee's contributions.

More than a review or rating, one-to-one meetings are ongoing, real-time, honest, informal conversations which help your people feel connected to their leaders and their work. They inspire employees, provide mentorship, and help employees grow.

It's not uncommon for one-to-ones to simply feel more like an annual review—in fact 35% of higher ed employees say they do, which causes 30% of faculty and staff to dread these meetings. While one-to-one meetings may be occurring, they aren't being done well.

WHAT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CAN DO: One-to-one meetings are a great performance management tool if they are done in a meaningful way. These meetings should occur

regularly (we recommend weekly) and should allow for time to talk about current roles and ask questions, but also provide an opportunity for recognition, mentorship, and career development. Include a discussion on goal setting and ask for employee feedback. One-to-ones should also be informal and safe, and institutions should provide tools for leaders to track, schedule, take notes, and give recognition during meetings.

Culture Trend #4: Intentionally built culture is key to attracting talent.

According to a study by PWC, institutions of higher education can face many challenges when attracting and retaining top talent. Strict budgets can mean lower staff salaries when compared to the private sector. Many hiring processes are manual and create a clunky process to advance candidates. Additionally, the pool of qualified individuals for some positions may be limited. As baby boomers retire, the next generation waiting to fill these roles are looking for organizations with a strong and compelling organizational culture.

Institutions of higher education are realizing that workplace culture must be intentionally created. The best workplaces don't just happen

by accident. Culture is defined by what the organization intentionally chooses to do, how it behaves, and how it interacts with its people.

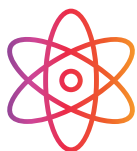
WHAT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

CAN DO: Thoughtfully design, with intention, the workplace culture you want to create. Our Culture by Design approach recommends starting with understanding where you are currently. Conduct a culture assessment to understand your workplace's unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. How do employees really feel about the organization? What is their employee experience currently like? Is there risk for burnout? Then plan, activate, and optimize initiatives that are in line with very specific, measurable culture goals.

Learn more about current culture trends in our 2020 Global Culture Report.

Want to start designing a great workplace culture with meaningful employee experiences? Talk to one of our Culture By Design experts.

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DISCOVERY

Audit culture
Pinpoint opportunities
Define success
Establish baselines



PLANNING

Develop strategy
Align to purpose
Design experiences
Gain consensus



ACTIVATION

Rally champions
Educate and inspire
Establish solutions
Promote and grow



OPTIMIZATION

Examine insights
Assess impact
Sustain momentum
Raise the bar