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Silicon Valley setting a trend

The often-intangible notion of 'corporate culture' refers to the beliefs and behaviours of a business, and how it conducts itself in the marketplace.[1] Attempts to differentiate from competitors and establish a unique culture of working often manifest themselves in employment perks. Tech companies are at the crest of this wave through their offerings of flexible working arrangements, free nourishment, pecuniary bonuses, and other miscellaneous perks to augment the experience of an employee or potential recruit.

Treatment of employees is indicative of the values of a company, and such perks leave an impression on the end customer that the company is a good one to buy a product or service from.[2] Silicon Valley, perhaps most famously, embodies this notion. Tech companies crave the talents of programmers, designers, and some of the brightest thinkers either straight out of university or from rival firms, and can entice them using some of the most diverse and alluring perks.

Some of the biggest companies in this space are famed for their tempting offerings to new employees, which projects a corporate culture of flexibility, respect for employees, and innovation. Where these perks can form part of a centralised and consistent corporate culture message, companies can benefit from an improved brand image - and happy staff equal productive staff. Moreover, over a third of employees say that perks and benefits are among their top considerations when accepting a new job.[3]

With the onus on Silicon Valley to continue to innovate and produce world-leading products and services, attracting the right talent is imperative. Enticing high calibre employees and projecting an image of a culture of generosity and creativity is central to the success of these tech companies, in a cutthroat marketplace.

New tests for the gig economy

The growth of the gig economy provides a potential difficulty in considering how companies can use employee perks as part of a corporate culture identity. Where workers are decentralised and often autonomous in the way they work it becomes more difficult to provide conventional benefits, and these companies may struggle to mould a coherent message regarding its culture through what it gives its staff.

If we are to see corporate culture as at least a partial reflection of the perks that a business provides its employees, then the gig economy has a problem. Recent discussion over the rights of gig economy workers has opened dialogue over the intersect of flexibility and job security,[4] and stands as a big opportunity to reassess how corporate culture is crafted.

Undoubtedly, flexibility is a key component of the gig economy and users of such services expect companies operating in this space to be nimble, efficient, and pro-active. Recent concerns over treatment of employees has raised questions over the culture of such firms and how workers are respected. This provides companies operating within this economic space with an opportunity to recalibrate their respective corporate cultures through new ways of building ties with employees, and establishing a better public image in doing so.

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[1] http://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/corporate-culture.asp
[2] https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/11/a-new-business-strategy-treating-employees-well/383192/
[3] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/google-asos-airbnb-20-best-perks-benefits-uk-employers-a6938716.html
[4] https://www.ft.com/content/bae24fae-8727-11e6-bbbe-2a4dcea95797

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Legislative action over employee relations in the area of flexible working remains on the cards, as exemplified by the recent outcry over zero-hour contracts. Employee access to holiday pay, the minimum wage, and other workplace rights remain contested, and companies that fail to willingly

offer these basics have been derided in the media.[5] As such, the notion of building a corporate culture that is equitable for all employees, whether they be at head office or on the ground, remains a lucrative task and one that makes perfect business sense. In short, happy employees are more productive and more engaged in the narrative of their company as a whole.[6]

Employees are at the centre of it all

Treatment of employees is of course one of multiple aspects of corporate culture, but it is one that a business has near complete oversight of. The potential gains in terms of both productivity and reputation through the constructing of a distinct corporate culture are compelling. A company cannot easily change its narrative, and certainly not its history, but it can adopt better ways of treating employees.

Business practices and employee remuneration make up one part of this culture, but there is an equal need for a company to be clear over its ethics, values, and responsibilities. Whether a company outlines its mission in a small statement or in a full corporate manifesto, the way in which it integrates values into its long-term vision is vital in making sure that a positive and encouraging corporate culture can be cultivated, and that business practices follow clearly defined aims, values, and ways of working.

Good business through good ethics is increasingly being talked about around the boardroom table, with greater emphasis on trust and transparency, many CEOs are starting to see the business sense in ethics.[7]

While providing employees with employment perks at the top of the market is certainly not a possibility for all companies, using a structure of clear and consistent values and ethics to drive better relations with workers is a clearway to help foster a corporate culture of positivity, with all workers pulling in the same direction.

The business case for doing this continues to grow. Employee retention, productivity, customer loyalty/appreciation, and reputational integrity are some of the clear benefits of fostering a strong corporate culture based on employee engagement. With new and ever-changing ways of working, businesses must be at the forefront of building employee relations into their overall corporate culture.

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[5] https://www.ft.com/content/b4d0256c-550a-11e7-80b6-9bfa4c1f83d2
[6] https://hbr.org/2015/12/proof-that-positive-work-cultures-are-more-productive
[7] https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertreiss/2017/09/11/top-ceos-place-high-value-on-corporate-ethics-and-social-responsibility-to-drive-business/#243676094473