

No Dignity, No Doubt...(of failure)



In a South African context, 'dignity' is a word that is often supercharged, laden with meaning and emotion.

Given our dark history where apartheid stripped whole groups of people of their dignity – and because of the prevailing gap between rich and poor, with South Africa having the highest Gini coefficient *in the world* – we not only have to believe in dignity, we must also strive to uphold it across all aspects of society. And in fact, this is very much the premise on which South Africa's remarkable Constitution is built.

Now, zoom into the local mining environment, where the prevailing culture is largely hierarchical and autocratic. That is not to say that people aren't treated with dignity, but when a high-pressure climate exists, people enter a state of fight or flight as the cortisol surges. In these cases, respect for one's co-workers often takes a backseat to meeting targets or dealing with the latest setback of the day.

It's here we often see organisational culture start to resemble a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde paradigm, as people operate from a place of anxiety that is compounded by poor planning and communication. *The danger of this?* Disengaged workers. Burnout. Substance abuse. Poor productivity. Absenteeism. Quiet quitting. And often, even an increase in injuries, as safety protocols are overlooked in a bid to Get the Job Done.

Now, let's take a step back to those things that can change the trajectory of a company – for better or worse – and which are within a company's internal locus of control. In other words, the things you can do

something about. These are *process, culture and the proficiency of the workforce*. If you want to effect sustainable change, you cannot drive change in one area without addressing the others.

Workforce proficiency involves training, coaching, learning and development, upskilling and all that goes into empowering people to better perform their jobs. Process –the ‘technical stuff’–involves creating tools that better manage the workflow of the organisation. While this may be an oversimplification of the heavy lifting involved in managing these aspects in the pursuit of operational excellence, these concepts are simple enough for one to grasp. Culture, though equally important, feels more ethereal and thus less tangible.

But what if I told you that creating a healthy culture can be tangibly protocolised? It can, and it all begins with the code of conduct.

Consider that in a multicultural society such as ours, the values and norms that form part of the fabric of your family, culture or community might differ from someone else’s.

Take the Dutch. Typically, they’re extremely direct and will give you (brutally) honest feedback. This is not considered rude in Dutch society – in fact, it is a sign of respect for another person to be upfront with them. However, to someone who grew up in a conservative British family, for example, this might be seen as very abrasive or even rude. This is why organisations, especially those with multicultural workforces, need to lay out acceptable behaviours clearly.

A code of conduct sets boundaries around what is acceptable for those in a company’s workforce. It shapes team behaviour, protects human dignity, builds trust and ensures accountability. It says, in no uncertain terms, “this is how we behave as individuals and as a team”. A code of conduct should always align with the values of the company, and it should *always* be consistently applied.

For example, if one of a company’s values is *respect*, the code of conduct will detail the action attached to this, which could be “We treat one another with dignity” or “We value one another’s opinions”. If the company value is *safety*, the code of conduct might state that “We implement and adhere to safety systems and rules” or “We look out for our own safety and that of our colleagues”. Once these actions are tangibly defined in the code, employees understand what behaviour is allowed and what isn’t – without fear or favour.

This is where leadership comes in. Without leadership enforcing and upholding the code of conduct, it will soon fall flat. Leaders need to show workers they are not exempt from the rules outlined in the code and demonstrate this in action every single day.

While OIM’s Supervisory Development Programme provides organisations with the skillsets and toolsets to drive operational excellence, OIM’s Culture Alignment Programme, which forms part of this, helps to ensure longevity long after we have left the mine, by addressing mindset change.

The Culture Alignment Programme focuses the workforce around the organisation’s strategy and goals, to ensure comprehension and buy-in. This purpose of the programme is to get your people to subscribe to

your vision, values and code of conduct, so their role in and contribution to this becomes clear.

This gives people purpose and shows them where you're heading while demonstrating what behaviours are acceptable on this journey. And it's not just for the *warm and fuzzies* that we champion it; we've seen this mindset change translate into radical behaviour change that has a notable effect on workforce performance.

And it starts and ends with dignity.