

## Distinctive Conversations with Mark Lawrence



Mark Lawrence

**Mark Lawrence**  
discusses culture with

**Vikki Evans**  
Senior Associate  
Distinctive People



Vikki Evans

## Creating the Next Culture Club

It is hard to sum up organisational culture in a simple adjective, but as Vikki Evans tells Mark Lawrence, it is one of the single most important aspects in achieving success, and underpins everything that happens in an organisation.

Having a culture that works for an organisation and the individuals working there is not a prescriptive thing – everyone has different priorities and needs, and finding a true ‘fit’ between organisation and individual is not always easy. For some, flexibility is key. For others, being valued and having freedom makes the organisation what it is.

Vikki, part of the consultancy team at Distinctive People, says developing culture “doesn’t happen by accident or overnight”. She expands: “It takes time to evolve”.

With COVID-19 turning the world upside down, culture change has been brought into more stark focus.

Organisations have had to do a lot of adapting in the past few months, with many seeing their culture journey being accelerated faster than they would have planned, proving just how important it is to be agile. They are facing challenges around home working, technology, adapting services, empowering their workforce to deliver, whilst also looking out for their wellbeing, and keeping team and community spirit alive during lockdown.....and many organisations have risen to the challenge.

Vikki says she has been working with clients who are “surprised” by how quickly they have developed their culture.

She adds: “All these things that were on the horizon are now being delivered. It has given many organisations an idea of what that culture may be like in the future and seeing how positively staff have responded to the changes that have needed to be implemented quickly.

“There has also been real creativity in some of the delivery of services and in how teams are communicating.

“For organisations this culture change has been reactive, rather than a more proactive approach as set out in their vision or strategic plan, but it has given them a flavour of that future.”

But she is keen to stress that it not all organisations will want to maintain those changes moving forward.

“On the flip side, it is good to flag up that some organisations have had things highlighted to them that they may no longer wish to explore.

“For example, in looking at the whole home working culture, this is something that many organisations across the UK are working towards, but there is one organisation that we work with who has said they might rethink their strategy around this.

“The feedback they have been getting shows it isn’t likely to bring about as many benefits as they’d hoped and has flagged up some concerns too. They are thinking about what culture they want to create longer term and whether that might be just a bit more flexibility going forward rather than a complete shift to a flexible outcomes-driven home-working culture, which was what they had planned.”

One of the other things Vikki highlights is that the future is likely to be heavily driven by the workforce.

Employees will have learned a lot about themselves during this time, and their values, needs and priorities may well have changed - what used to matter to them may no longer be so important, so organisations may need to focus on listening rather than directing to make sure their long-term culture develops in the right way.

What is clear is that organisations who have adapted best in the recent circumstances are the ones who embrace creativity and flexibility, and have a real growth mindset – the ones who have the right tools to overcome challenges and maximise opportunities, and encourage the behaviours needed to do this.

So where does an organisation start in trying to measure how effective it is, and assessing its culture?

Vikki has just the answer: Matthew Syed Mindset Advantage tool.

She explains why this is the answer.

“This is a dynamic tool that helps organisations assess where they are currently and what mindset is needed moving forward,” she says. “We are proud at Distinctive People to be one of only two organisations to be partnering on this in the UK.

“The reason we are excited about using this is that it really aligns with our own thinking, is easy to use and can make a real impact on individuals, teams and organisations as a whole.

“This has a lot of potential as it can be used at all levels of an organisation, and is particularly important at the moment as organisations are striving for a culture of high performance, and understanding mindset and barriers is really key to achieving that.”

The culture tool looks at six key organisational characteristics which underpin a growth mindset: Valuing potential, ownership and commitment, freedom, trust, fostering innovation and supporting calculated risk taking.

Vikki adds: “For organisations looking to reflect on their culture and assess where they are, looking at things in those six key areas will give some real clarity in terms of what they want to work on moving forward.

“Having the right mindset is central to everybody’s success and on an organisational level in terms of achieving their long-term vision.”

As culture continues to grow in importance for organisations and how they recruit and maintain staff, looking at tools such as growth mindset and placing a real importance on developing that culture is now surely a must.

