

# Editorial: We are what we talk about

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Javier Bajer

**T**hink of “culture” as the aggregate of *all* the conversations that happen in a given space. In short, what people talk about everyday *becomes* the reality of that organisation, the actual *culture*.

However, these conversations are often *very* different from what gets promised inside job posts, displayed on posters at the cafeteria or ritualistically broadcasted during townhall meetings. The problem is that incoherence causes cognitive dissonance at scale, fueling confusion and, eventually, turning into mistrust and disengagement.

Let me share an example. Last week, I gave a keynote at a technology firm. As I waited for the stage, I heard their passionate CEO rallying the crowds, inviting them to become more client-centric, repeatedly anchoring his speech onto an ingeniously catchy phrase.

That evening, I was invited to stay for the “apéro”. I managed to speak with many great people who are trying to do the best they can. Unfortunately, despite my many attempts to get them to talk about anything to do with their clients, I found myself immersed in very different conversations: people talked about the latest hybrid-work arrangements, their frustration with the new company car policy and many of them were open enough to share their plans with me, as they look for another job.

Knowing what people are talking about is a small part of the solution. The art is to design organisations where naturally/organically/spontaneously people talk about what is most important (clients, in this example). To do so, don't just focus on posters and speeches, but listen to your team's everyday conversations for cues as to what is distracting them from what's important for the organisation. Align those things with the direction of travel whenever possible.

Of course, there is a catch. *For this to work, enough people at the top need to agree as to what is most important for the organisation, something that can take more courage than time.*

Enjoy this great issue of Strategic HR Review!

Warmly,

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