

MISSION LIT

THE ZINE

LIGHTING THE WAY
TO BETTER BUSINESS

Powered by
x+why



ISSUE #001 – Q2 2024

THE CULTURE ISSUE

Do Different. Be Different
Does culture really eat
strategy for breakfast?

**Hardcore, buttface, barefoot
or extreme suffering.**
What's the right culture
for your company?

When to be culturally relevant?
The new minefield
for businesses

MISSION LIT

THE ZINE

P4 Culture is Core

Hardcore or Kumbaya

What's the right culture for your company?

P8 Spark Session: 'With' on Culture

Activity by coaching consultancy 'With Diversity'

P10 Do Different. Be Different

Case study on Vivobarefoot

P12 The Culture Matrix

Plot your company on the graph

P14 Speak up or zip up?

How being culturally relevant became a minefield

P18 Cultural Exchange

Interview with x+why member Alex Clegg from Saboteur

P20 Community Corner

***Your business here* Shoutouts, events, community spirit**



**PENNY
FOR YOUR
THOUGHTS...**

**GET FEATURED
GET INVOLVED
VOTE ON OUR
NEXT TOPIC...**

**Welcome to the first edition
of the Mission Lit Zine**
(We had to Google 'Zine' too).

A quarterly mini magazine, powered by x+why, for the Better Business community by the Better Business community.

Full of research, hot topics, interviews, inspiration and guidance on running and being a part of future-fit businesses that lead with purpose.

Mission Lit, the book, is a toolkit for finding purpose, building culture around it and using both to outshine the competition. Having published the book in 2022 and since undertaking workshops and talks with the most incredible group of businesses and organisations, we wanted to create an approachable and inclusive way of continuing the conversation.

And here it is! Zine 001, guest edited by the Mission Lit author Richard Johnson (thanks Rich!). Each zine will have a set focus, engage expert voices and amplify the great work of the x+why community and beyond. It's a format that we want YOU to get involved with and contribute to, a chance to engage with a wide and fast growing network, and have some fun along the way.

For our first issue we are exploring Culture, both why and how to create an internal team culture, and also the importance (or not) of remaining culturally relevant as a business. Dig into examples from Nike and Vivobarefoot, and hear from x+why member Alex Clegg from Saboteur. There's even some provocations and activities to get you thinking about how to put this all into practice yourself.

Dive in and read on to see how. You can even vote on what the next topic will be and feature your business!

Huge thanks to all who have contributed.

We hope you enjoy, learn, question, share and take part.

Team x+why



x+why

missionlit.com
@wearemissionlit

IS CORE CULTURE IS CORE

Richard Johnson
Author of Mission Lit



In Mission Lit we explored the secret sauce of how some businesses turn a mission to enrich our world into the ultimate competitive advantage.

When trying to decode that recipe there is no more elusive ingredient than company culture. The intangible quality that arises to define the way a company does things.

Culture is an emergent property, made up of values, rules, systems and incentives. Culture defines behaviour, and behaviour defines culture; it's dynamic, responsive, evolving. A malleable, insubstantial thing, which can also prove immovable and difficult to change.

And, if the adage is correct, it's more important to business success than a good strategy. In fact, it eats it for breakfast.

If having a superior way of working is more important than having a superior plan, then we might draw some interesting conclusions into what contributed to the success of some of the most iconic companies of the last 50 years.

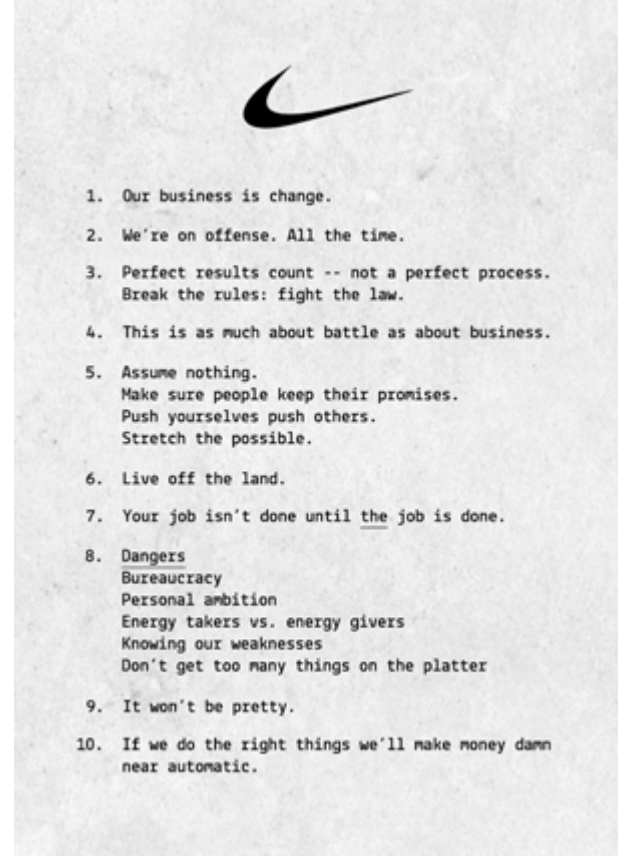
In a missive to Twitter employees in November '22, Elon Musk wrote that employees would need to be "extremely hardcore" to build a successful future for the company. He added:

"This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade"

Twitter might yet prove Musk's first large-scale flop, but we must assume the same approach helped him build world-beating companies in PayPal, Tesla, Space X and Neuralink. Musk's hardcore tenacity isn't atypical, in fact I'd say it's the dominant archetype of the uber-successful leader, and the cultures they create.

CULTURE HARDCORE

CULTURE IS CORE



In Nike founder Phil Knight's memoir, *Shoe Dog*, he reminisces fondly about the early leadership off-sites in the days of scaling the company:

“Buttface was the name we gave to our periodic retreats in those early days—we’d reserve a bunch of cabins at an Oregon resort, and spend a couple of days shouting ourselves hoarse in a conference room.”

Are ‘hardcore’ cultures still the blueprint for success today? Scottish brewer BrewDog are an interesting example. The company has achieved remarkable growth over the last decade, becoming Europe’s number one craft beer company. For a while they seemed to have it all: growth, customers who became fans and invested in the company, B Corp status and a well-respected sustainability strategy.

HARD CORE

CULTURE IS CORE

That was until 2021 when an open letter penned by over 100 employees – past and present – describing themselves as ‘punks with purpose’ claimed the company was run on a ‘culture of fear’. What followed was an investigation by B Corp certifier B Lab UK, who found enough damaging evidence to strip the company of its B Corp status - the first public dethroning of a B Corp in the UK.

The accusations were followed by an exposé of the company’s culture by the BBC titled *The Truth about BrewDog*, making claims which BrewDog’s CEO James Watt spent a year fighting to no avail. How negatively this scandal will affect BrewDog is yet to be seen, but in May this year James Watt stood down as CEO, and plans to take the company public via an IPO in 2022 are yet to materialise, which is no doubt giving some investors itchy feet.

Is BrewDog an example of a 20th century business culture hitting the buffers of a 21st century reality? Is ‘hardcore’ time expired, and if so, what is replacing it? Or is it all together more nuanced than that?

Let’s explore.



HARD CORE CULTURE



SPARK SESSION

“I like to say that ‘only highly connected teams can create moments of magic under pressure’ – and part of that connectivity comes from having a few, clear, shared ‘signals’ that we look to, that tell us if we’re in the right place, and heading in the right direction. I wonder what are yours?”

‘With’ design questions to help raise awareness about the texture and quality of your culture. They’re aimed at drawing out insights through description.

Here are a couple to get you started:

1. Every family, team or group has a culture – describe yours.

2. If you had to choose one person or event that has shaped your culture in a significant way, who or what would you choose?

SPARK SESSION CURATED BY WILL JAMES

Spark Sessions are conversation starters. Short activities or provocations for anybody working within any business. Get involved and enjoy!

‘With’ (www.withdiversity.com), by Will James, is a coaching consultancy that partners purpose-driven organisations to develop a coaching culture and unlock potential to achieve better outcomes for everybody.



www.withdiversity.com
[linkedin.com/in/will-james-coach](https://www.linkedin.com/in/will-james-coach)
Instagram @willjamescoach

See all 10 questions here:



DIFFERENT



DO
DIFFERENT
BE
DIFFERENT

DIFFERENT

DO DIFFERENT,
BE DIFFERENT

Every business wants to be different. Strategy is about deciding what different you want to be, and how you'll achieve it. Better, cheaper, more exclusive, more accessible, cooler, kinder, simpler, more reliable. This has always been true. Yet, the more the world around us changes, the greater the need to make more fundamental changes to keep up.

Over the last decade a common way to do this has been to change your company's purpose. A change which, in theory, leads to the right changes being made elsewhere. The problem is, it's very easy to say you will be different, and very difficult to do it.

The brilliant corporate analyst Marjorie Kelly observes that purpose is only one of five essential elements of business design. How a company is governed, networked, owned and financed have just as big an influence on how a company acts and how decisions are made. By changing their purpose, but nothing else about how they are designed, perhaps it's no surprise companies remain so fundamentally unchanged – so un-different.

Where does culture fit in? Is culture a subset of purpose, or governance perhaps? Or is it something separate entirely, something undesignable, or something Kelly just overlooked.

How many companies today have bold, world-changing stated intentions, but whose ways of working are completely ordinary. Doing the same things, just hoping for different results.

A company won't be different until it does different.

A company won't be better until it does better.

DO
DIFFERENT
BE
DIFFERENT

Established ideas of what an effective culture looks like can be hard to shake, and easy to reinforce.

You may think of Michelin star kitchens as the epitome of a high-performance culture. Disciplined, dedicated. A team united behind a goal, achieving it night after night. Yet, a recent academic study of chefs found a less obvious ingredient to these cultures: namely that suffering was a central part of many top chefs' identity. It had a unifying effect on chefs which allowed them to tolerate – even embrace – long (unpaid) hours, abusive bosses, tribal behaviour, and even threats of violence.

You'd be excused for not questioning hardcore, fear-led cultures when they get propped-up by workers' masochistic quirks, or until they blow up publicly like at BrewDog.

Perhaps most businesses are not questioning enough of what makes a culture effective. But sometimes an organisation sets itself a mission to be so totally different, the need to act differently comes into sharp focus.

Take the example of Vivobarefoot (Vivo), the company who creates shoes designed to mimic the biomechanics of walking or running barefoot. Their mission is to reconnect people with nature and describe themselves as being on a journey to becoming a 'regenerative' business. Underpinning everything they do is the idea that we are nature – nature is us – yet we live our lives like we are separate from it, to our own detriment, and to society and nature's too.

On a basic level a shoe literally separates us from the ground in an unnatural way. But just as important to Vivo, traditional ways of working separate us from how nature works.



This has led them to create a way of working known as 'living barefoot'. It does away with strict hierarchy and chains of command, parent-child relationships, and hyper-masculine stress. In its place comes a focus on listening, feelings, openness and embracing tensions.

The company is structured around autonomous, self-organising 'circles'. Home circles for your day-to-day work, Project circles for cross-cutting projects and Yin circles for peer-to-peer support and wider reflections. Leading a circle means playing the role of facilitator, not manager. Nature doesn't work by command and control, and so neither does Vivo.

The person responsible for helping Vivo to live barefoot is Ash Pollock, Head of Transformation and Culture. Ash is aware that what they are doing can sound a bit 'kumbaya', but stresses that it requires real courage.

Underpinning autonomy is open communication and maturity. It requires difficult conversations. We are creating a high-trust environment with constant, dynamic feedback informing decisions.

This is hardcore kumbaya, and it's working.

Vivo doesn't want to be the new Nike, and it measures success very differently. But even by the narrowest definition, they are a success. Its revenue for FY 21/22 was £50 million and in FY 23/24 it's expected to almost double to £94 million. This is self-funded, organic growth, not growth made possible by burning through VC investments. All done whilst investing heavily in R&D and sustainable practices. No corners cut here.

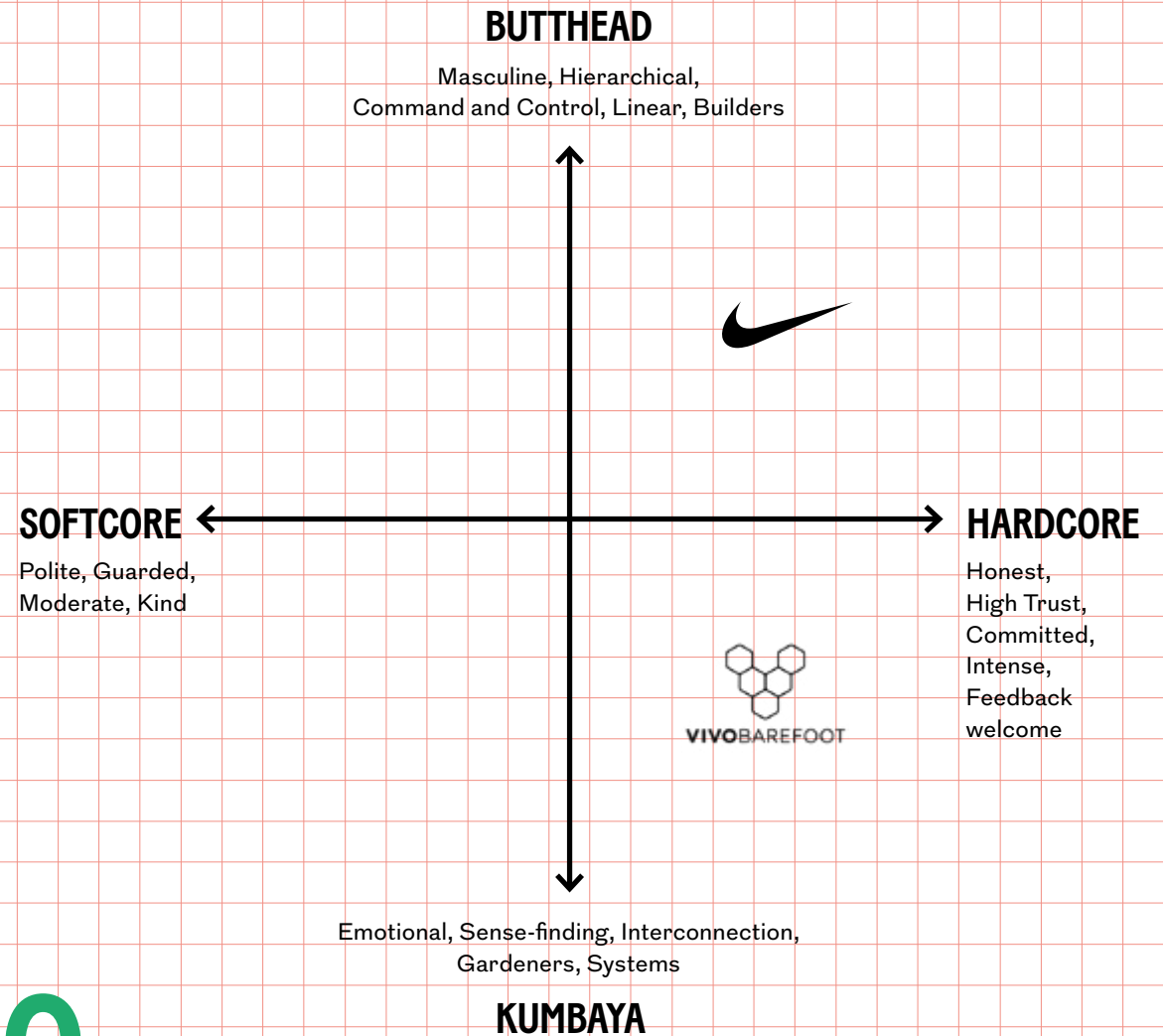
On the surface, they culturally couldn't be further from the Butthead meetings of Nike. They explicitly call out hyper-masculine behaviour after all. Yet I can't help but see similarities. Both created environments where people can be open, feedback is encouraged, and people are highly motivated. In both cases, people know what the organisation is trying to achieve, and they are really, really trying to make it happen.

CULTURE MATRIX

WHERE DOES YOUR COMPANY SIT?

DO DIFFERENT,
BE DIFFERENT

PLOT YOUR COMPANY AND WHAT MATTERS TO YOU.



DO
DIFFERENT
BE
DIFFERENT

SPEAK UP? OR ZIP UP?

Take a stance on me

Richard Johnson
Author of Mission Lit

When Adidas went from serious sports brand to cultural icon in the 80s, was it clever marketing or luck? Were they adopted by Hip Hop and skateboarding subcultures, or did Adidas intentionally adopt the subcultures?

When Guinness became the UK's most popular beer in 2022, was it a case of right place, right time, for the better-in-a-pub stout, as people fled the isolation of their homes post-pandemic? Or did their marketers shrewdly tap into a shift in consumers' desires, which others missed?

Either way, both brands became relevant.

Similarly, for the last decade Patagonia has captured a zeitgeist. The brand for consumers looking to buy into a brand which itself knows you shouldn't be buying into things.

**Don't buy this jacket?
I'll take two!**

Market insights firm Kantar claim their research shows companies with high cultural relevance grew nearly six times more than brands that have low levels when they crunched the numbers in 2016. More than just tapping into consumer lifestyles like Adidas and Guinness, relevancy, they observe, now means you have to tap into their values and beliefs too, like Patagonia has done so well.

In other words companies are now expected to have opinions.

**A new minefield for
business was born.**



Professor Alison Taylor of Stern Business School states 4 main reasons why companies now wear their values and their opinions on their sleeves:

1. Corporate value became more intangible
2. Society became more aware of the negative impacts of business
3. Social media made companies more aware people's perception of them
4. Political dysfunction saw business fill the void of civil society institutions

This captures the reactionary reasons why businesses who previously didn't feel the need to take a stance on issues, suddenly did.

But there has always been a small group of maverick entrepreneurs who spoke up because they thought it was the right thing to do. Because they could, and they wanted to use all the influence at their disposal. Patagonia's Yvonne Chouinard, Ben and Jerry, and Anita Roddick all made speaking up on issues a core part of their business. Anita once said of The Body Shop:

"You educate people by stirring their passions. You take every opportunity to grab the imagination of your employees, you get them to feel they are doing something important, that they are not a lone voice, that they are the most powerful and potent people on the planet."

Today companies find themselves at a confusing juncture between following a business playbook created by some mavericks, and needing to protect the fragile value of their companies.

WHAT DO EMPLOYEES WANT?

80% of people who feel strongly about an issue say they wouldn't be willing to work alongside someone who disagrees with them, according to Edelman's 2023 Trust Barometer.

When ideology becomes identity, it poses a real challenge for business. If a business wants to speak out on an issue, it is speaking on behalf of its employees.

The former Head of Global Activism at The Body Shop, Alice Mazzola, has some insights into why people now expect so much from their employer:

“Traditionally people would be a part of many different institutions which aligned with their values and identity -from churches, to unions, societies and political parties. Now someone's place of work may be the only institution they are a part of, so they expect more from it.”

STAY IN YOUR LANE OR GO OFF-PISTE?

Which approach is right?
You decide...

Take a stance on the issues relevant to your business?

“Pick a few areas close to the purpose of your company to really focus on”, says Niels Christiansen, CEO of Lego. He warns that having an opinion on “all things in society” could have consequences for the success of the business.

This is an approach which has certainly worked for choco changemakers Tony's Chocolonely. Tony's talks up a lot; loudly and creatively. But it is always about one issue: ending slavery in chocolate supply chains. They are consistent, they're committed, and they are experts on the topic.

Take a stance on the issues most important to the world, not your business?

“We believe we can always make doing the right thing the most interesting thing” says Kerry Thorpe, Head of Communications at Ben and Jerry's. That's the philosophy that's led them to not run activism campaigns on agricultural practices or policy, but the rights of refugees. From petitioning governments, to developing new ice cream flavours with refugees, they've gone all in on the topic.

Proof that you can take on divisive topics completely outside of your business footprint, and still make it work.

WHAT DO CONSUMERS WANT?

Some topics are more divisive than others.

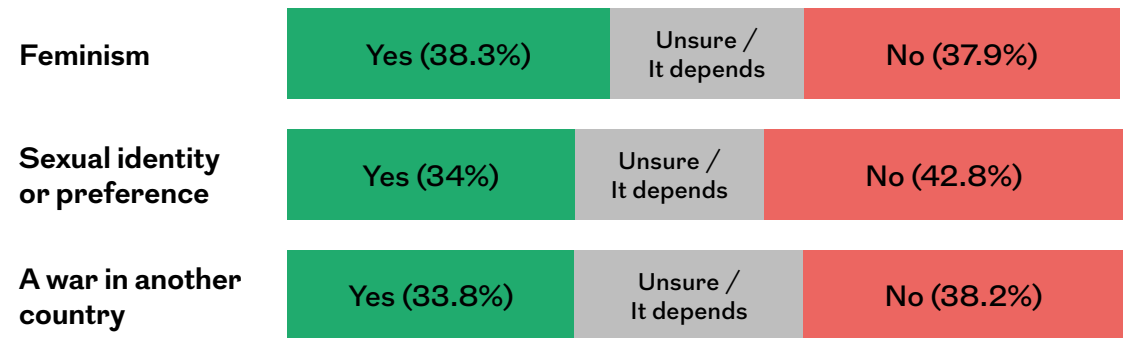
There is clear disagreement over whether brands should publicly express their views on Feminism, sexual identity and wars in other countries.

For some an issue being divisive might be more of a reason to take a stance – we need to show solidarity with the people with the correct opinion!

For some it might be a reason to avoid an issue – we're guaranteed to piss half the people off!

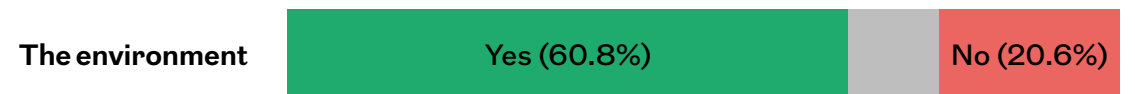
The most high-profile backlash of the last year, saw Bud Light post a 30% drop in Operating Profit after the brand was boycotted by conservative Americans. The heavily carbonated beer ran an ad with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney to celebrate one year since their transition.

“Should brands publicly express their views on the following topics, for example in a social media post or TV advert?” (%)



Some issues are less divisive

A large majority of people believe brands should express their views on the environment.



CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Alex has been a part of many a cultural exchange, running agencies across E. Asia before returning home to start Saboteur, an agency helping orgs set their brand free.



X+WHY MEMBER : THE KENRICK

SABOTEUR MISSION

SABOTEUR

INDEPENDENT BRAND STUDIO ON A MISSION TO SET BRANDS FREE

Rich: Where does the essence of a brand come from?

Alex: Slippery things brand essences... even the words sound slippery! On a more serious note, it's always important to remember that brands – and their essences – live in the hearts and minds of their audiences/consumers, rather than in the presentation decks of the organisations that 'own' them and the agency partners with which they work.

And when you think of it from that perspective a brand's real essence probably derives most directly from the impact it has on, and in, the lives of those people – whether they're employees, consumers or others. It's not so much about what the brand or founders 'think,' rather the focus is on what the brand 'can do' for the audiences it aims to serve.

At Saboteur we like to think about what freedoms – real or perceived – a brand can bring about. How can they set their audience free to do what they dream of doing, and become what they dream of becoming.

Is cultural relevance the right aspiration for brands?

The trick thing about culture is how fragmented it is in reality. We think we know what 'most people think and feel and why' but mistaken assumptions confront us time and again showing us that we really don't. There are so many communities and sub-cultures out there that we might not even know exist.

'Culture is hard to chase because echo chambers and bubbles are not easily visible. We tend to think of mass-market, giant consumer brands impacting culture. But increasingly it's B2B companies, technology companies, investment businesses, environmental innovators etc. who are shaping culture.'

As culture is just replicable behaviour, the best way to be relevant is to think about how you're impacting behaviour at scale rather than focusing on simply "looking relevant". Who is more culturally relevant these days? Coca Cola, or OpenAI?

Are the best brands always counter-cultural?

'Best' is a broad term. The most influential are often counter-cultural in that, when successful, they bring about change. And it's not as if we're living in an age where it's difficult to identify issues that need solutions!

How can brands evolve to stay relevant over time?

A lack of relevance definitely reduces the value a brand has, but not all brands should base the relevance to their audiences on how they track against the latest cultural trends. Superficial parroting of contemporary cultural mores is insincere and hollow and will only serve to undermine, rather than bolster, trust in a brand.

People's experience of a brand goes way beyond its branding per se, although of course the branding does play a key role as an official interface. Amazon have understood the priority of brand experience very well for years now.

Nonetheless, the culture of a brand and the organisation it belongs to are important. That culture shapes people's experience of the brand both internally and externally. The values and behaviours that underpin that culture therefore do really matter.

Especially given the level of company information that is now so easily accessible and available. There's no room for inconsistencies in terms of 'talking' and 'walking'.



We're here to amplify amazing activity across the x+why community, members and beyond. This could be you! Get in touch to share your ideas.

COMMUNITY CORNER

Here's where we get to celebrate, lift up and promote our amazing members, partners and readers :-)
letting you know what's on, and amplifying the amazing activity we see going on across our network and beyond.
Next quarter.....this could be you!



Get in touch
to share
your ideas!

JOIN THE VIRGIN STARTUP COMMUNITY

Over the past 10 years, Virgin StartUp has provided support and over £80m in Start Up Loan funding to help more than 5,500 founders build better businesses all across the UK. Businesses like Oddbox, DashWater, Castore, Ocean Bottle, UpCircle and many more.

But more than ever we need businesses to be at their best and to exist to deliver profit with purpose.

One of the things that founders at Virgin StartUp have come to value more than anything else is access to a community. A community of fellow founders, advisers, experts and mentors.

In May 2024, we'll be launching a brand-new online Community to provide just that. An exciting new space where founders can come to connect, share, learn and grow.

Including some exclusive events delivered in partnership with x+why!

Join us:
virginstartup.org/community/



WORKPLACE CULTURE 3 TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN 2024

It is no secret that a great workplace culture is the cornerstone for employee engagement and the heartbeat of any business. Workplace culture is about our day-to-day experiences at work and the way that makes us feel.



To reap the benefits of having a great workplace culture and positively impact attraction, retention and the bottom line here are our 3 top tips:

1. Have clarity of vision and values

This about knowing what you stand for and others knowing too!

2. Lead by example

Whether we like it or not actions speak louder than words and culture is curated from the top down.

3. Prioritise wellbeing

Creating an environment which fosters a sense of safety and belonging will be rewarded with productivity and commitment.

At Coops & Co we believe good people doing good business can be a force for positive change in the world. Through our bespoke approach and experienced team we can provide a different perspective and strategic advantage by working together to create a thriving workplace culture.



Website:
coopsandco.uk

Contact details:
info@coopsandco.uk or
ashley@coopsandco.uk

COMMUNITY CORNER

UPCOMING PUBLIC EVENTS AT X+WHY

We've got some fantastic public events coming up at x+why spaces across the UK



CLIMATE ANXIETY TO AGENCY WORKSHOPS WITH CLOVER HOGAN FROM FORCE OF NATURE

'Climate Anxiety to Agency' workshops with x+why member Clover Hogan, founder of Force of Nature - a 90-minute session which helps participants navigate strong emotions, identify self-limiting beliefs, and understand how to cultivate agency and resilience.



DO THE B CORP IMPACT ASSESSMENT WITH WHYB

Fill out the B Corp Impact assessment with expert guidance and support on hand across 3 afternoon workshops. The WhyB24 Programme by x+why - designed to motivate businesses as they complete their B Impact Assessment (BIA), the key to unlocking B Corp Certification, but also a valuable business planning tool.



DOCUMENTARY NIGHT GATHERING

'Earth Flicks & Chill' documentary screenings with DeeJ Phillips Films - an engaging bi-monthly gathering featuring inspiring documentaries on environmental issues, social challenges, and tales of human resilience.

DEEJ PHILLIPS

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

Get in touch to find out more.

Hosting an event? Our flexible spaces cater to gatherings of all sizes.

www.xandwhy.co.uk/enquiries

YOU&US

Need help raising money?

We help purpose-driven ventures raise millions of pounds so they can make the world a better place.

End-to-end fundraising support

- Investment Storytelling
- Financial Strategy Support
- Brand Marketing
- Pitch Deck Creation
- Investor Outreach

Book a free 30 min consultation
www.youandus.work

YOU&US

Investment Storytelling & Brand Marketing

Printed on EU Ecolabel
and FSC certified paper.

Printed by Newspaper Club who donate
to Trees For Life, a conservation charity
working to rewild the Scottish Highlands.