



Culture change case study: Building a more positive workplace culture



Gumtree

Gumtree is the number one classifieds site in the UK. It is used by one in three adults every month – enabling them to buy, sell and discover anything from dream jobs to clubs and classes.

Faced with market disruption, Gumtree turned to Rubica to support it in gaining a greater competitive advantage through its workplace culture.

The challenge: responding to a difficult landscape

In 2018, as competition intensified and fuelled by insights from its internal employee survey, Gumtree chose to respond to the market through its people – seeing an opportunity to bolster the way everyone worked together.

“Put simply, company culture is what makes an organisation unique. It’s created by what we believe and how we do things. It’s important because it builds the character of the organisation and it can make or break a business strategy” says Rubica project lead, Caroline Gosling.

The solution: shaping a new culture across the business

Gumtree brought Rubica onboard because of our solid experience and success in culture change projects, along with our practical approach to changing workplace cultures.

Our work began by listening to the business – signalling to employees that this wasn’t a top-down project conducted by senior leaders with megaphones, but one where everyone in the company would have a voice.

Everyone had the opportunity to share their experience of the existing company culture. They could do this by recording video interviews, leaving voicemails in an audio booth or writing on comment cards and posting them. This process gave useful and early qualitative data, which was shared with the leadership team.

It was also used as the foundation for a one-day story builder workshop, which co-created a clear narrative for the culture change, rooted in the current reality for colleagues but with a strong and compelling vision of ‘what could be’.

Mobilising a team of influential advocates for change

In parallel, a group of ‘Beacons’ were identified - influential people within Gumtree who would help to spread the message about the new culture. They acted as role models for important behaviours, such as cross-functional working, and as powerful peer advocates for the whole culture change programme.

The Beacons proved instrumental in involving other employees in the project and connecting the leadership to the rest of the population. Informally, they listened to people’s feedback and let the business know when elements of the programme weren’t ‘landing’, enabling the approach to be refined as we went along.

Could your culture use a kick-start?

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What's helping and harming our performance?

A series of Appreciative Inquiry-based interviews and a Culture Diagnostic survey identified the cultural beliefs and behaviours that were helping and harming Gumtree's performance.

Interviews were conducted with a range of high-performing individuals and cross-functional teams across the business to get underneath surface level behaviours and to the beliefs and assumptions that were driving these.

In parallel, we distributed the Culture Diagnostic Survey. Rather than sending this out via an email from senior leaders, we asked Beacons to talk to employees about the reasons behind the survey and explain why we wanted to hear their thoughts. This approach had a positive effect, with a good proportion of the employee population completing it.

Building Gumtree's Culture Canvas

All data was gathered to inform a 1-day prioritisation workshop with the Gumtree leadership team to create a Culture Canvas. This process creates a clear focus and easy-to-implement next steps built on an understanding of WHY some behaviours are currently happening and others are not.

Specifically, the Canvas:

1. Outlines the beliefs and behaviours that would support a high-performing culture at Gumtree, prioritising those few that would help change happen most quickly and can be focussed on first.
2. Builds understanding around best practice behaviours for leaders, teams and individuals to reinforce helpful beliefs and limit unhelpful ones.
3. Support Gumtree to help desired behaviours happen more often and more widely through specific-to-Gumtree mechanisms in categories like reward, recognition, communication, involvement, processes and measures.

The results: Impressive fast-track culture change

The Gumtree Culture Canvas has enabled an organisation-wide understanding and focus on the beliefs, behaviours and subsequent mechanisms that will best support Gumtree's culture and future direction.

In turn this has equipped Gumtree to 'own' their culture and introduce additional key initiatives that will support the cultural aspiration e.g.:

- Monthly All Hands (company-wide meetings) are repeated 3 times to smaller groups – encouraging active involvement and dialogue at all levels of the business. A broader range of colleagues are featuring in these meetings too, including Gumtree Beacons.
- Best-practice stories are being actively shared – encouraging cross-functional working and co-operation across the business.
- Clear two-way communication channels now exist across the organisation – encouraging debate on culture change, sharing issues and successes. This has had a two-fold effect - increasing employees' sense of involvement and encouraging them to work better together.
- The introduction of a new training programme – designed so managers can best support the learning and development of individuals within their team
- The introduction of an inclusive leadership programme - focusing on important topics such as diversity and inclusion.

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It is through this work that significant results are shining through. In 2019 employee survey scores associated to every part of Gumtree's culture had improved for both full-time (FTE) and contracted employees (AWF):

- **Culture:**
 - ↑ **10 points** = FTEs believe their actions are consistent with the Gumtree culture
 - ↑ **5.1%** = AWFs believe their actions are consistent with the Gumtree culture
- **Learning & development:**
 - ↑ **3 points** = FTEs believe they have good opportunities to learn and grow
 - ↑ **5.9%** = AWFs believe they have good opportunities to learn and grow
- **Great place to work:**
 - ↑ **7 points** = FTEs would recommend Gumtree as a great place to work.

This marked shift in employee sentiment demonstrates Gumtree's success in enhancing its culture and how everyone works together - ultimately supporting it to strengthen its position in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

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