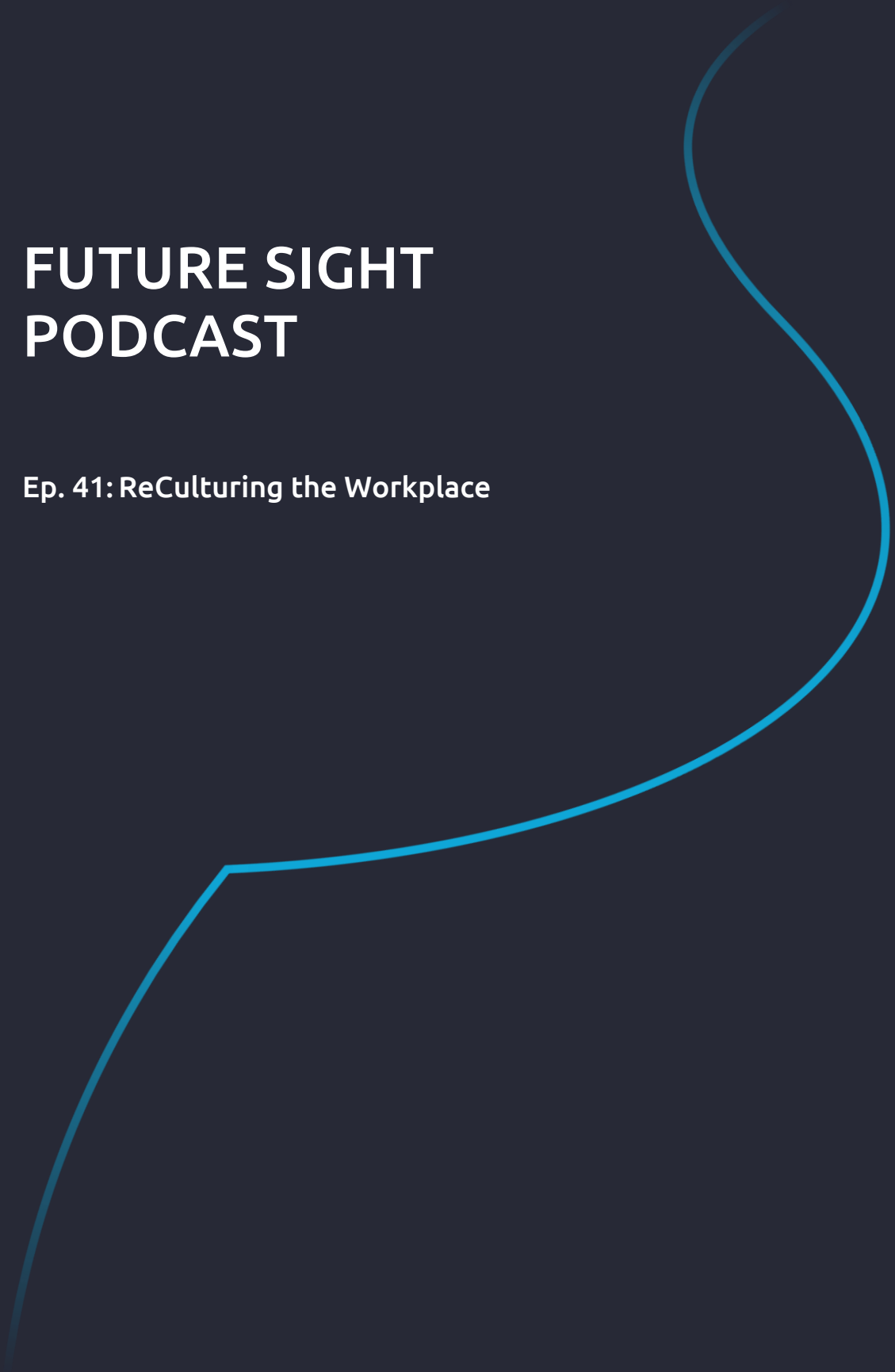


FUTURE SIGHT PODCAST

Ep. 41: ReCulturing the Workplace





Future Sight Podcast by Capgemini Invent

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Episode Transcript

Claudia: Hello, this is [Future Sight](#). A show from Capgemini Invent, where we explore emerging technology trends and new ways for you to adapt and grow your business. I am [Claudia Crummenerl](#), the Managing Director and Global Practice lead of Workforce and Organization at Capgemini Invent and co-host of Future Sight.

On today's episode, we're doing a deep dive into the fascinating topic of ReCulturing and culture change, proving how vital a company's culture is to its success. And the best approach is to achieve a productive workplace culture and employee experience. One of the top global minds, when it comes to thinking about company culture, [Melissa Daimler](#) is with me today.

Melissa: Hi Claudia. It's great to, to be here again. I think the last time we talked was over a year ago, so a few things have happened since then I am the Chief Learning Officer at [Udemy](#) and the author of the newly released book '[ReCulturing](#)'.

So, I've been in organizational development and learning for over 20 years, mostly in the tech space, I was at Adobe, Twitter, WeWork and I would say the theme throughout my entire career has been at this intersection between organizational systems and culture and learning, which is one of the reasons I wrote the book '[ReCulturing](#)'.

Claudia: Exactly, and this is one of the topics for our conversation today, how culture is important for organizations and what they need to do in order to build it. Maybe let's start at the beginning. So, when we talk culture, what do you mean by culture? What is, what is culture of an organization?

Melissa: That is a very good question. Culture is three things and when I share this definition, often people are surprised and even relieved because I think that one of the reasons, I wrote the book is I had no idea culture as a concept. Organizational culture has been around for 70 years. And I think you and I have talked about this in the past that it's a nebulous definition. There's a lot of fuzzy terms out there about what a culture is from. Organizational personality to what happens when the boss leaves the room to leaves on a tree, it was all very fuzzy and relegated to HR

Claudia: And very complex, usually.

Melissa: Yeah. And takes, years until you, you get to a certain end point. And so that's the other key thesis of mine is that culture is active. It's a verb versus a noun. And so, I think it's three things which you can operationalize much more effectively than some of these other definitions and its behaviors. So, if you go beyond just values, what are those observable behaviors you can see in others. Then there's processes interviewing, hiring process, onboarding process, feedback process, all of those things that we do anyway, but in a much more connected way with behaviors and then practices are more of the informal ways we work. So, the meetings we have, the way we communicate, the way we connect, the way we make decisions.

So how can we reinforce culture through those informal opportunities as well. So, behaviors, processes, and practices.

Claudia: So actually, the good news for our listeners is it sounds fairly simple. So, three things are easy to remember, like something you can cover, and you can cope with

Melissa: Mm-hmm.

Claudia: You mentioned a hypothesis, that culture is a verb. And also, the title of your book is ReCulturing. Is that somehow connected? What does it mean? That culture is a verb.

Melissa: Yeah. As I studied organizational culture for this book, I realized that it was more of a nebulous concept and it was, there was a start and there was an end, and it was usually relegated to HR.



And what I realized over the course of my career, 20 years being inside companies is that culture never really ends because just like strategy, we're always strategizing and continuing to pivot and figuring out at how we're evolving as a business, what I call more of the, what we're doing. We're also looking at how to work more effectively together, how to leverage the skills, how to leverage the interactions at work so that we can effectively impact the strategy and outcomes.

So those work together and they're ongoing. And so when I studied this, it was interesting because originally, I was thinking, maybe because of that evolution, we have to start over. And I, I learned a lot about this idea of un-schooling in that came about in the seventies when there were a number of parents and teachers who did not like the idea of the educational system, they just felt like there was a lot of work that needed to be undone. Could that be applied to culture and work and the original title was unculturing and then we realized, there has been so much goodness and learning from the past 70 years, there were a lot of things that worked, a lot of companies have implemented this idea of values.

And Netflix was a great role model with Patty McCord and the culture deck and how they went, one step further with behavior. So how do you honor the past and bring forth a lot of the good things that we've learned about culture and identify and create a concept that catches up to more of the modern world and even the situation that we're in now, post pandemic, you know, how do we kind of take the idea of culture and redo it to be in the context of this hybrid world, if you will.

Claudia: So, this could be one of the statements or one of the issues. That traditional belief is it's it, it's got an end. You define your culture, you communicate it, you put it out there, you disseminate it and then it's done, but it's actually something that we need to revisit it from time to time, like a strategy we revisit every three years or five years. The issue is that that organizations are not doing that enough today.

Melissa: Yeah. I, and I think it's, there's no one set time. I think, you know, I would say it's probably not to your point. You don't visit it and revisit it as much as strategy because, you know, especially in the last couple of years, we all learned.

We were pivoting our strategy and our OKRs or KPIs, whatever you use every other week, because things were changing in the world. So probably not as much as your strategy, but probably a lot more than you're doing now. And I would say at key inflection points of a company's life cycle are a good time to check in.

And an example that I used in the book was I was at Adobe for almost 11 years, and we didn't call it that at the time, but we recultured three times while I was there. Because we had major changes between CEO changes, new CEO that came in our business model changed from, you know, software to box to software as a service and subscription.

And then we acquired two major companies. So, at each one of those points, we had to pause and reflect and say our strategy shifting we are moving in a different direction. How are we integrating? Some of those behaviors are, is how we're working also needing to change. And so, it was a, it was a great moment just to identify what are some of those behaviors, processes, and practices that we need to potentially shift to help us align with that new strategy and to help us scale toward the future.

So, it could be in fast growing companies. It could be, every year, in slower growing companies, it might be every other year, or like I said, in major inflection points.

Claudia: So, we mentioned strategy already, and now in the market, there's a lot of conversation around the purpose. What's the connection between purpose, strategy and culture?

Melissa: Yeah, I think there is a very strong connection between the three. I think that they work well together and I also think that we don't leverage the opportunity for those to work well together. So, purpose as I see it, it's your, why it, why do we exist? Why do I do what I do individually? That then has me see why we're doing what we're doing as an organization.



And I think we've seen I, the note we've talked about this before that it used to be a nice to have that companies had this, you know, and, and employees looking for jobs were ideally wanting something that was more purposeful and answered that, why? Now, I think, especially again, you know, post COVID that why has to be there because people want that meaningful purpose, they want that meaningful experience.

So, the why has to connect ideally to the strategy, which is what I call the what. And then culture of course is the how so, I think the extent to which you can continue to connect those three to each other is such an opportunity just to bring more context into employee's everyday work, you know, just a small practice that, that we do at Udemy, is at, uh, many of the all hands before we even start talking and provide updates, we remind everybody and just do a level set. Okay. This is our purpose. This is, this is why we exist. We might share a few stories about how we've impacted lives through learning, and that ideally ties to some of the strategic objectives and then the cultural behaviors.

So, I think I've experienced times and worked with companies where those weren't connected, and it just got confusing to employees and meaningless. There isn't this feeling of one team and one consistent approach of working with each other, which then has problems down the road. Because as you're looking at career mobility and internal development and opportunities to grow across the organization, it just becomes, again, it just becomes confusing because you have these little micro cultures that exist.

Claudia: Actually, as you describe it, a very good opportunity to give meaning to the talents you're trying to attract, to give them transparency and guidance of where they're contributing. So, sense making in their work and why they should be motivated to contribute.

So. Why is it so hard for organizations to do that? Or what is stopping them or what is kind of hindering them on that journey? Because it sounds simpler than it actually is. So, what is the, the issue?

Melissa: Oh, there are so many details behind that. You and I know that yeah...

Claudia: That's for sure. So now you and I are believers but like to our listeners who may not be experts on culture. So, what do they need to watch out for? What are the issues they they're facing?

Melissa: I think the first thing is just reframing culture. I think just redefining culture from this static HR initiative, that is a list of values that gets thrown on your website to something that is active.

We have agency over, we are all co-creating culture. I often say to people. Who asked me, you know, why, why bother? Like I just have to, I have to focus on my results and still today, people ask that and it just seems like a lot of work. If you spend the time codifying these values into behaviors, it is, it takes some work to get to those behavioral statements.

And I laugh always at that question because we are building culture by design or default. So, we might as well design it. So, I think that's the first thing. I do think it takes some work. I think even though it's three simple words, three simple parts of a framework, we know frameworks can take some time to really stick and be used. So, I think it's really important to identify, and we're actually doing this right now at Udemy. We've just identified our behaviors and the work has just begun. So, we're now figuring out how do we integrate these into our hiring questions? How do we integrate these into our leveling framework as we look at people for promotion.

So, all of that takes time and I think it's, it's worth it. You, and I have also talked about the fact that, you know, 20 years in people still hate performance management, they still hate the feedback process and all of those things that seemingly are to your point, more complex than they need to be. I think they're more complex because we never took the time to codify what good looks like.

So, I think there's layers and there's definitely steps behind each of those three components, but I don't think people think about it in this way or do it because we've had 70 years of thinking about culture as just this set of values that sit somewhere and that we can't really leverage it to ultimately be more effective in our business.



Claudia: And I think it's a very powerful argument in saying whether you like it or not, or whether you influence it or not, culture is going to happen anyway. And so, you better purposefully look, what is the culture you're trying to create instead of just implicitly building a culture that you may not want and then you're surprised after is like, oh, this is what we're driving. So, I think that the message or the argument for people who are saying, okay, it's hard. It's going to take time. Why should I bother? If you don't bother you, create something that you may not want to create. And then it takes you years and more effort to revise that or to shift that, right?

Melissa: Yes. For sure. Yeah. I mean, I also think, you know, so often now I'm hearing this question. How do we get our culture back?

Claudia: Mm-hmm

Melissa: And I still feel that people are conflating culture with camaraderie and ping pong tables and free food. And I laugh at that too, because I think so much of what our culture was pre-pandemic.

We didn't love, you know, people didn't love the commutes. There were a lot of components that weren't great about being in the office. And so I think we have such a huge opportunity at this point in time, as we're all trying to figure out what work looks like. To design and reset our entire work experience, using culture as that as a strategic lever.

And so, I think regardless of how you're setting up your workplace, whether it's in person, hybrid, remote, I think there is a huge advantage to say that culture is agnostic of being in a physical office together. That culture is more of how we work with each other. And so, we can do that through our computers.

We can do that when we're in person, it doesn't matter as much, where we are. And so, I think that's a, a reset as well is to remember that we are creating culture. And I think it's lazy to think that culture can only be created when we're back in an office having free sandwiches.

Claudia: Maybe it's a good point to discuss of how we are building culture.

I mean, we talked about the three things, behaviors, process, and practices, and it almost sounds a little bit like there is a fake culture, like, you know, ping pong, tables, events, parties, or whatever is kind of pretending there is some culture, but it's actually more organizing fun. How do we really build culture?

When we address those three things.

Melissa: I totally agree with you. I think we've been hiding behind the ping pong tables and not really clarifying and identifying what it's going to take to be successful in your job. One of the things that I have noticed in my career, and I think especially now is I think people just want clarity on what it is they're supposed to be doing.

And I think when we're all working separately, it takes something more to be clearer about what you're ultimately accountable for. What are the results that you're ultimately supposed to be delivering individually? I think when we're in an office together, you can get a little lazier on that. You know, like if I don't, if I'm not totally clear with you, I know that you're going to be at the office anyway, and I'm going to be able to, you know, hey, Claudia's in the hallway or I forgot to tell her this, or I have to catch up with her on this.

There are opportunities to kind of be a little less clear, be a little looser in how you, you work with each other. I think the behaviors that we're talking about there are so many great ways to reinforce them and give examples and give stories and identify specific ways that somebody has exemplified, one of the behaviors to reinforce culture.

But again, that isn't necessarily, I'm not, I don't have the advantage of seeing you informally as much in an office. So, I'm going to have to be much more intentional and looking for those behaviors and in looking for opportunities to reinforce what it is we said was important. I also think there is this opportunity, you know, talking a lot about intentionality.



I love going into the office. I love, putting on something beyond Lululemon. I like, I like seeing people in person, but I think there is this need now, again, to be much more intentional about when we are seeing each other in person, because that isn't, as often as it used to be in most companies, again, it's this opportunity to figure out how we can work together more effectively, regardless of where we're working and including the in person.

Some people think that I'm now anti being in person as I talk about culture and that's not at all. It's I think there's just a way to leverage the in-person experiences differently and much more intentionally than we used to. I love ping pong too, and I love free food, but I, but I think those have that context has shifted, you know, I think we're realizing now.

Those are really opportunities to connect with people differently than, than we can normally.

Claudia: So, those two things, clarity and intentionality could almost be like success factors when you do cultural work. Are those the only two, or did you find any, any other success criteria when implementing operationalizing culture?

Melissa: Yeah. I mean, I think measuring culture is challenging. I think I look at it right now in, in two ways. One there's measuring the implementation of it, you know? So, for us the stage we're in, we're tracking the extent to which we've embedded all of our behaviors into all of our processes and making sure that that's done at least a, a first version of that is done by, you know, the end of the year.

Claudia: Mm-hmm

Melissa: Other factors that, that we're looking at ultimately is embedding the behaviors into our feedback process. And looking at just behaviorally what are some of those themes, you know, are there certain behaviors people are resonating more with? That people have an easier time expressing. So, looking at it through the feedback and performance process and understanding where there's gaps, common one is engagement, you know, so we're looking at it is embedding behaviors into our engagement survey and kind of measuring the extent to which even our managers and leaders are reinforcing those behaviors. And we're now just looking at what kind of, is that a frequency scale? Is that a likert scale? You know, one to five of, you know, how much they exemplify these behaviors. We're still trying to figure that out, but I think those are all good metrics that will help us gauge the extent to which the culture is, is being reinforced.

Claudia: Mm-hmm. So, this is where you are at Udemy. Did you find other interesting case studies where you've seen effective ReCulturing or at least start or some of the stages you describe as well of the ReCulturing process.

Melissa: Yeah, I mean, I, when we did this at Adobe and Twitter and I've done this with a number of companies over the last four years, just working with a number of startups and even larger companies who like Adobe were kind of reculture and resetting, I think some of the other metrics that we looked at over time were retention.

You know, I think when we kind of dug underneath. There, there was some inconsistency in how people were getting promoted and how people were getting recognized. Because again, we all had kind of a different playbook for what good looks like. And so, I think when you can be consistent, we talk so much about DEI now and inclusion and diversity yet there still is so much fuzziness and lack of clarity on, you know, what does that look like when we're creating a safe space? When everybody feels like they belong. When we have diverse perspectives. And so, when there's opportunities for employees to see a fair process, like promotions and why people are getting recognized and why I'm getting feedback in certain areas.

And that all ties back to the same playbook. Then I think that allows for people just to feel safer and ultimately want to stay longer. The noise that we normally have in a workplace around what does it take to get promoted or, you know, what kind of feedback am I going to get from my manager? Or what does it, what do they expect of me?

If we can get clear on that, then the politics and the noise of the questions that we have about ourselves can go in the background and then we can just do the work and really connect with each other much more effectively.



So, I would say another metric is, you know, we've seen retention go up. Attrition go down. Those are more kind of longer-term metrics. And I just found that doing this work and reculturing allows for clarity in not only your individual work, but how the team is working together.

Claudia: So, we already talked about quite a bit of the success factors in terms of clarity, intentionality, and also maybe measuring the success, measuring how you are, how effective you are in reculturing.

When we talk about how effective culture change is actually done. What is your recommendation to our listeners? What should they do? Is there a simple framework, like the three elements of culture that they need to address? Like how it, how is it done?

Melissa: I think the first thing to remember is that it is not a top down or bottom-up approach. It is something that's co-created. So, I think the first thing is just to, if you've never done your values or behaviors, I think just first as a leadership team, identifying what good looks like. So, when things are going well, what is actually happening? What decisions are being made when it's a good day, what are we doing? What are we not doing? What are high performers doing?

So just getting a level set on what good looks like. What's important to the organization as a first step. And then the extent to which you can identify that as a leadership team and then go out to employees and get their input. I think is a really important step.

I've often seen the leadership conversation be skipped initially and that's tough because I think employees starting from scratch or even giving their point of view before the leadership team has some insight is tough because that can be changed. So, I think you have to understand what the non-negotiables were and what are and what needs to stay. If there already our values. If there aren't, what is important that you want to make sure the employees talk about? So, there's a lot of interaction between the, you know, the leadership team. And then I would say a core set of employees across the company. I believe in at least 10% of the company having a voice. So, ensuring that you get every location, you get, every level you get every role, it has to be agnostic of any of those things. It's a messy process. We have done it through focus groups. We've done it individually. We've done behavior jams. You know, there's so many tools out there that I think you guys even have done this, where you bring together thousands of people and get their input.

And so, it's what I fondly call a twofer because you're not just getting to a place where you're identifying the behaviors but the way in which you're doing, it is also just such a great motivator for the company. You know that the company wants to hear my voice. They want to co-create this culture with me and that alone speaks volumes.

And then curating. I also believe that, you know, I have it in the book I talk about different ways to look at behaviors, the criteria, if you will. So, they need to be, as my colleague says, non-idiomatic, you know, so no cliches, no, don't sweat the small stuff. Nothing that could be misinterpreted globally.

They need to ideally be positively framed most of the time they're aspirational, you know? So again, just setting the context of what it is we're doing here and, and the kind of behaviors we're getting to, and then continuing to figure out how do we, once we've settled on that kind of first version, how do we now integrate that into looking at all of our processes?

And that takes some time that could. Three to six months and then continuing to communicate through stories.

Claudia: So, it's probably hard to say how long you would need to reculture. So, there's one thing that comes up in my mind and we haven't really talked about this before, but how do we prevent that reculturing is not becoming another leadership shore or another task leaders have to do that they tick off, but that they take seriously. How do we prevent that?

Melissa: Yeah, that's a good question. I think the way to prevent that is to make sure that even the exercise of embedding them into your different processes is thorough. So, I think if it is something that isn't just one. Task it isn't just us creating a set of behaviors, 15 behaviors, and we're done but you continue to get reminded about



the behaviors when the promotion cycle comes up, you get reminded when feedback comes up. You get reminded when you're pulling together a set of rewards or awards for a team, all of those ideally have behaviors that represent each of those areas.

So, ideally it isn't just this one-off exercise that's done once.

Claudia: You are mentioning for me another success criteria, actually, it's kind of the consistency that it's being held accountable by it. That it's not just for show, but that, for example, in the promotion process, if you're not displaying these behaviors, you can't be promoted, right.

There is a mechanism to enforce the desired behaviors. And there's also mechanisms to show that these are not the behaviors that we want you to display. So, it's kind of, yes, the consistency to make it easy. But it's also another element that you touched this reward, the pain gain kind of element.

Melissa: Yeah. That's a really good point.

I think that, you know, how many times have we been in talent reviews where a number of leaders sit around the table and say, so let's first talk about what good looks like and it's just, and everybody has these subjective points of view on, you know, how everybody's performance was and what their standard was for how this person showed up.

Versus if we've already done that, it's such a better place to come from to your point where, you know, we've already identified the behaviors and we know what good looks like. And so, we have a really solid place to come from in starting this conversation, you also brought up a really good point and some companies do this, which I think is really a good practice where they identify the behaviors and what good looks like, but they also have a list or some bullet points about what it doesn't look like. You know, some sentiments, or we've done that in some of our interview questions. So, here's what to listen for. Here's some gotchas or here's some sentiments that might imply that this isn't necessarily someone who will compliment or add to our culture.

So, I've seen a lot of companies go so far as to identify what good doesn't look like. What, what are the opposite of the behaviors that we've identified?

Claudia: We talked about some of the good practices, and we talked about what you do at Udemy what you've done at, at Twitter and at Adobe who are some of the best companies that to reculturing effectively. Is there a company you want to call out or is that difficult?

Melissa: I think there are a lot of companies that do a good job in identifying some of these behaviors that we've talked about. You know, Netflix is one that has been my role model 10 years ago when it first came out. The challenge with Netflix has been, you know, I think they now have 47 different behaviors.

So, I think it's gotten to be a lot, they've gone through some challenges over the last year or two I'm biased, but I think Adobe has done a good job in, you know, they continue to be successful on both the business side, as well as attracting amazing talent and you know people don't want to leave. The retention there is off the charts,

Claudia: Which is a good sign for culture.

Melissa: Which is definitely a good sign. I think the companies that do this well know going full circle back to where we started, that it's ideal when you can talk about your organization as a connected system where, you know, we're not just talking about our strategy, but we're also linking that back to purpose. And we're also talking about how we work with each other.

And so, you know, it's one of the themes of the book that I wrote is this idea of looking at the organization as a system and being a systems thinker. And so, I think the leaders and the CEOs who can be a systems thinker and know that when you pull on one, ideally, you're also needing to look at the others.



Those are effective organizations.

Claudia: So, if we, if you can give our listeners like a kind of takeaway from all the work you've done in this space, what would that be?

Melissa: I think, no matter what your role is in the organization asking a question about how culture shows up, you know, looking at your values and pushing on having some behaviors, like really understanding if there are just values, what does that look like in my organization? And that I'm really clear what that looks like if I'm going to be rewarded for it. So, I think that's, that's the first major step. And then I think it's what we've talked about beyond just the processes I think there's opportunities in your day-to-day work. In the book I even talked about how culture starts with us, our personal culture, as we're all leaders, you know, what are your own values? What are your behaviors? What are your practices? What are things that are working within your own system and how do those show up every day are they working?

And so, I think just start from your own system and think about your day-to-day work and what you can shift in your own practices.

Claudia: That's a very good systems thinking answer is that it starts. With yourself of what you can influence and who you can influence. And that is mostly yourself.

It's not waiting for others to do so.

Melissa: Right.

Claudia: That's all we've got time for today. Thanks so much, Melissa, for coming onto the show. And thank you all for listening in the show notes, you can find links to our other episodes, which look at topics related to organization and workforce and links to find Melissa's excellent new book too. Don't forget to subscribe to future site on apple podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

In our next episode, we will be returning to the topic of sustainability. As we explore the concepts and challenges behind sustainable investment. This has been Future Sight a show from Capgemini Invent. We'll see you soon.

About Capgemini Invent

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