

Leader's perspective





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How does culture play a role in institutionalizing psychological safety? How does this lead to organizational benefits in the long run?

Having a culture based on clear values is critical. We call them the Spirit of Wipro, and these values serve as our moral compass. Much of our ways of work and leadership role-modeling reinforce this culture. We articulated these values in action with our Five Habits early in 2020. The pandemic made them more relevant than ever as we adapted to new ways of working and started our cultural transformation journey. In addition to the Five Habits, two additional cultural traits help to drive our success:

- First, we steadfastly believe it is essential to speak up, to call out things that can be improved.
- Second, we firmly believe that leaders need to lead – they need to be visible ambassadors for our customers and our company, and the culture we try to live every day. It's about creating safe spaces where every employee can bring their authentic selves to work.

We also embrace change as a big part of our cultural transformation journey. It's often said that "change is the only constant in business," and that's true at Wipro. Embracing the constant presence of change encourages us to break down barriers and consider new, innovative solutions.

Our Chairman, Rishad Premji – highlights this during his immersive sessions on the Five Habits with leaders. He discusses how being vulnerable and respectful when we call things out makes a big difference in showing that change does not have to be threatening. Finally, we always believe it is a big strength for our leaders and our company to genuinely listen, constantly learn, and help us grow as individuals and as a business.

What role do leaders play in fostering psychological safety? Do you feel others in the organization also shape this aspect?

Leaders can build psychological safety by creating the right team climate, mindset, and behaviors. They need to show openness to feedback and new ideas and, as much as possible, operate from a vantage of transparency so team members can see the big picture. Those who do this best genuinely act as catalysts, empowering and enabling other leaders and team members. This works even with those with no formal authority; we always believe leadership is not a function of title or hierarchy but of how one approaches solving customer problems and collaborating across teams. Such a focus helps to cultivate psychological safety by reinforcing the behaviors leaders expect from the rest of the team. Our CHRO often says that leaders live in glass houses. That's true. Every move that a leader makes is watched and reflected on by teams. People put far more weight, appropriately, on what a leader does, not just on what they say. As leaders, we must exemplify behaviors that build safe spaces and our culture. In short, leadership calls on individuals to reflect, be vulnerable, be empathetic and encourage people to come forward with great ideas. Of course, ongoing communication is critical so that team members are always aware of the end goal – especially aware of changes that occur while getting there!

How do you think psychological safety impacts inclusion and diversity in an organization? What could be the challenges?

Wiproites today work in more than 66 countries, with diverse nationalities and a multi-generational workforce. By its very nature, this recognizes, supports, and celebrates the idea that diverse teams with diverse backgrounds and ways to solve customer problems will arrive at the best solutions. This is true for many global organizations today. Helping people embrace others with different beliefs and behaviors takes continuous, sustained effort and must be genuinely supported by senior leaders. This focus on diversity and inclusion also needs to be reflected in policies and processes, as is the case at Wipro today. For us, inclusion is a way of life and an ongoing journey. We move forward, learn, and improve – as individuals and as a team – by driving mutual respect for all.

How do you think calling things out and sharing candid feedback are instrumental in sustaining an inclusive organization?

Driving improvement – for our employees and our culture – means it's critical to be open to giving and receiving candid feedback in a thoughtful way. This enables continuous improvement that helps individuals and organizations grow and evolve. This is by no means an easy task. But it tends to create an environment where people feel secure while supporting authenticity and honesty in all communications. It is also essential to remember that people constantly evolve, and their experiences shape the long-term evolution of our culture and inspire our growth.

What efforts are required to nurture diversity throughout the talent lifecycle of attracting, hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent?

As Jesse Jackson, the American civil rights activist, once said, “When everyone is included, everyone wins.” Our focus is on creating and sustaining an environment where all Wiproites feel safe and respected and can do their best every day. We try to foster a culture of inclusion for all, irrespective of their backgrounds or identities. This requires much focus on creating more awareness about unconscious biases that can act as potential barriers to inclusion, thus, encouraging the best results from every individual. Inclusion and diversity are not just a “program” or a “department” in any successful company. They must be integrated into all aspects of business operations. That is why we have integrated inclusion into the employee experience lifecycle, from attracting, hiring, retaining, and promoting diverse talent to leading our ongoing success. Our CEO, Thierry Delaporte champions our I&D efforts. And he personally serves as the executive sponsor of our efforts, supported by central and local I&D councils to drive accountability deep into the business. Two key areas define our journey: Learning and listening. It's important to unlearn and learn as an organization. And it's equally important to listen to what is happening in the world, what employees are thinking, and new ways to truly create an inclusive environment. Across our focus areas, we have comprehensive frameworks that ensure our focus encompasses all aspects of talent management.

Every day we learn new things, and we are proud of our journey while realizing it is a never-ending journey.

How can having safe spaces in a culture add value to an employer's brand and business performance?

Creating a genuinely safe space for employees isn't just the right thing to do; it is a competitive advantage. It is central to how an employer brand can be experienced by diverse people in an organization who will come together to help a company succeed. Psychological safety impacts not just engagement but also the perception of an organization. Policies and processes that support and encourage inclusivity, ideation, and innovation play key roles in accomplishing the goals of an organization. The key? Creating robust organizations where people take pride in belonging. Here's a simple fact: Unhappy employees are less productive. That's why providing employees with a safe haven is critical to success. When there is no psychological safety in the workplace, people react and respond differently to situations. As a result, productivity and innovation drop, and revenue and profits fall. This translates into costs for the individual — such as health problems, poor decision quality, and low satisfaction — and into costs for the company, such as absenteeism, attrition, the inability to retain highly skilled workers, low engagement, low skill acquisition, low innovation, and low productivity. Eventually, such an environment translates into a poor employer brand and a sustained competitive disadvantage.

Tell us about some of your recent I&D initiatives designed to promote your employees' psychological safety and wellness.

The focus on our I&D charter has accelerated. While creating a safe space for our employees, we learned that only creating inclusive policies and processes alone may not help. A broader, inclusive ecosystem needs to be developed that enables all employees to come forward and speak up freely. Hence, we create awareness around unconscious bias, especially with our people managers, so they are well equipped with this knowledge and tools to overcome it as much as possible. We encourage Wipro employees to #BreakTheBias and have institutionalized an e-learning module on unconscious bias. We also recently completed our first year of Enrich program for high-potential women employees. It's a sponsorship program focused on strengthening the talent pipeline and creating an ecosystem of enablement. The key objectives include encouraging protégés to take on challenging assignments, enhancing visibility, and enabling networking with senior leadership and peers. To foster a culture of ongoing development, some of our senior leaders in key roles have been assigned executive coaches and enrolled in executive leadership programs at premier business schools around the world. We have another program called Begin Again, which provides a platform for women who have taken a career break to return to work.

This program has helped women develop confidence and enhance their skills to be ready to return to the corporate world. Watching them feel empowered has been fabulous, and there is a lot to learn from our success with this program. At Wipro, our employees' safety, health, and well-being are paramount. To address the challenges of new ways of working, employee well-being has become a critical success factor strategically. We took several measures to ensure our employees' emotional and mental well-being. A whole set of initiatives are planned around wellness calendars globally which encourage and engage conversations, interventions on various aspects of wellness and activities that can help people be more aware of their wellbeing and health. Nurturing Wellness platform, which offers 24/7 emergency care for employees. When it comes to inclusion and diversity, we know it is a long journey. There is no reason to say we know it all or have learned all there is to know. It is evolving and changing. What people see as opportunities and an environment to enable these are constantly transforming. Successful companies are those that embrace this change and learn from it.

