

**Description:** What do leadership, quiet-quitting, and employee engagement have to do with the company culture? We sat down with Lisa Pook, MRA's Organization Development Director, to find out the answer and so much more.

**Listen to Discover:**

- Leadership plays a huge role in sustaining a positive culture. They articulate the values of the organization, which drives that culture. They have to model the behaviors they want to see in the organization as a whole.
- During conflict within a team, a manager needs to ask themselves why their team is not working well together and what they need to do to fix that.
- Employee engagement goes hand-in-hand with company culture. The biggest driver of employee engagement is the relationship between the supervisor and the employee. An employee who feels their supervisor cares about them as a person is more likely to feel they are a part of a positive culture.

**Transcript:**

*Transcripts are computer generated -- not 100% accurate word-for-word.*

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Intro

Hello hello, everybody, and welcome to 30 minute THRIVE, your go-to podcast for anything and everything HR, powered by MRA - The Management Association. Looking to stay on top of the ever-changing world of HR? MRA has got you covered. We'll be the first to tell you what's hot and what's not. I'm your host, Sophie Boler, and we are so glad you're here. Now it's time to THRIVE.

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Sophie Boler

Hello everybody and welcome to this episode of 30 minute THRIVE. Today I'm joined with Lisa Pook. She's our director of organizational development here at MRA, and just a pleasure to work with, so I'm really glad you're here today, Lisa. But Lisa's focus is really helping members build an organizational culture that helps engage employees while also achieving business success, whether it's working on talent management strategies or change management, facilitating workgroups to improve teamwork, coaching individuals and everything you can think of,

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Sophie Boler

Lisa really focuses on all of those. So thank you for joining us today and talking about culture today.

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Lisa Pook

I'm delighted to be here with you, and you are just a delight to work with as well.

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Sophie Boler

Thank you, Lisa. Before we get started, we like to really kick off the episode with a couple of fun questions. So I think the first thing we can talk about is about books. So is there a book that you're currently reading or have just read that you would recommend to our listeners today?

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Lisa Pook

Sure! My book club that I belong to, this month's book is "The Red Tent" by Anita Diamant, which is an older book. But it's interesting. It's a kind of historical fiction taking place in biblical times. So that's just kind of interesting. And it just focuses a lot on relationships between women, I think is one of the things that I took out of the book.

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Lisa Pook

So I really enjoyed it.

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Sophie Boler

Okay, well, that's good recommendation. I'll have to check it out. And then the other question we have for you is a this-or-that question? So this morning, I mean, walking to my car, it was a little cold out and I'm still a little chilly today. So our this-or-that today is: winter or summer? What kind of person are you?

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Lisa Pook

Summer.

Sophie Boler

You are?

Lisa Pook

Yeah, but maybe like later summer toward fall. I like that time.

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Sophie Boler

That's a good answer. It's like where it's not too hot and you're kind of transitioning.

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Lisa Pook

And not like a 90s kind of a temperature.

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Sophie Boler

That's too hot. Thanks for answering. But all right. Well, let's dove right into our topic for today and that's culture. So my first question for you is what impact is leadership have on company culture?

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Lisa Pook

It's a huge impact because leadership of the organization, I think, first of all, is the group that articulates what the values are of the organization, which drives that culture. So they're articulating it. They're also in the position that their behaviors, they have to model the behaviors and their behaviors are very visible. Others with The words that they use are really important and have an impact on how that culture is sustained through the organization.

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Lisa Pook

And I think it's also really important that leaders are giving a consistent message. So you're hearing the same thing. You're seeing the same thing. You're observing those values throughout that leadership.

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Sophie Boler

And I think it's just important to note that culture stretches so much more than just your leadership team. They are the ones giving you examples, you wanna, they're leading by example, but it comes down to so much more than leadership. So do you have any advice for leaders to just, around culture in general?

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Lisa Pook

I think it's really, really important for leaders to be very closely tuned in with the people that they're leading. So whatever level you are in the organization, I think leaders need to make a point of asking questions and listening and really paying attention to what their employees are telling them or maybe not telling them.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. Yeah. So we're hearing more about the employee value proposition, EVP. Can you talk a little bit more about what this means?

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Lisa Pook

Yeah. So when we're talking about employee value proposition, it's really the it's what the employee gets from the employer for being an employee. So culture, I think, is a part of it, a piece of the value proposition. It's probably an important piece of it, but it's not everything that the employee is getting from the employer. I think it makes sense to pay attention to that.

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Lisa Pook

And it's certainly something that can help new employees, you know, make the decision that they want to come and work at your company or not.

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Sophie Boler

So I'm not too familiar with what exactly is employee value proposition. So how would you explain it to someone who doesn't really know what that phrase means?

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Lisa Pook

Yeah. So it's kind of the what the company is saying to the employee that says this is what you're going to get by working here. And so I've heard it described also as externally it's the company brand. That's the external message. But the internal message is the EVP, or the employee value proposition, and that, really smart companies are listening, asking and listening to their employees.

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Lisa Pook

So it's really something that is created based upon what employees are telling them is important to them.

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Sophie Boler

Okay. Thanks for clarifying.

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Lisa Pook

Sure.

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Sophie Boler

So another issue we're hearing about is quiet quitting. That's kind of been the buzzword for a while now. So how is this really impacting culture in the workplace?

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Lisa Pook

Well, you know, I think that the idea of quiet quitting is wrapped up with employee engagement. Right? And so that whole, people started talking about quiet quitting as kind of this way that people are doing just enough. They're doing their job, but they're not necessarily volunteering for above and beyond or going the next step or maybe not even looking at, you know, how can I be more creative or innovative or things like that.

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Lisa Pook

So, you know, if we take a look at employee engagement, we say engagement is maximizing the time and your effort for the company, using that time in that discretionary time and effort towards your company. Right? So if now we're seeing that people aren't necessarily looking at that and just doing what's required of them, I think that now has an impact on the culture overall because again, culture is the stuff that you're observing, the look, the feel, how we do things around here.

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Lisa Pook

So probably has an impact like that. I think ultimately though, I was reading a couple of articles that were talking about quiet quitting and what one of the articles said, in essence, quiet quitting—that whole label might be more of a thing that management has labeled. This author kind of suggested, it's kind of a cop-out to say, you know, my team isn't working well because they're quiet quitting.

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Lisa Pook

And I think a manager needs to say, my team is not working well together. What do I need to do about that? So I think it's kind of, maybe an interesting thing to explore, but I don't know that we necessarily are capturing all the things that's important with it.

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Sophie Boler

That's some good advice. I feel like I've seen that word and that phrase so much even over social media and articles, like you said. It's like, what really is this and why is it happening?

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Lisa Pook

Well, and I don't think employees say "I'm quiet quitting." It's employees' managers saying, "Don't know what you're doing. We're going to call it quiet quitting." You know, again, that goes back to this whole idea of we know that the biggest driver of employee engagement is that relationship between the supervisor and the employee. An employee who says, my supervisor knows me and cares about me.

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Lisa Pook

That's going to engage me more. And that has a piece of the overall culture of the organization.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. Well, it's certainly something, like, maybe we will start getting more comfortable with or learning more about, like you said. But so culture in the work environment, how can we enhance the workplace that contributes to a positive culture?

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Lisa Pook

So you're talking about work environment, like just the physical work environment, right?

Sophie Boler

Right.

Lisa Pook

Things that are ... and I think it's nice to come to a place that's comfortable, right? And it's nice to move into a new building, perhaps, or have new, have it remodeled. And I think that sends a message to employees: We care about the environment that we're in.

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Lisa Pook

We want you to feel stimulated or we want you to feel good about where you're coming. So I think that has a that has a big impact on it. It's that visual that that makes us feel like, hey, it's a comfortable place to be working, you know, and I know there's there's the examples of the companies that have the ping-pong tables and things like that.

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Lisa Pook

I mean, I guess for some people that appeals to them and that's part of something that's going to be fun or energizing or whatever for employees. So I think that it has an impact on it. I don't know that there's one that you say across the board, this is what an environment needs to look like.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah, exactly. And going off of that, Lisa, about how you said the ping-pong tables and I think even just speaking for MRA, we have a very open work environment and we've got some cafes and that just helps the open work environment, helps with collaborating with team members and kind of drives the point that culture is more than having ping pong tables.

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Sophie Boler

I don't know if you have anything to add on to that, but.

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Lisa Pook

Well I think that's just a good point. It's not, the culture isn't, you know, just having some activity place or having the, you know, the free lunches or all of those kinds of physical things. Those are nice. And it certainly makes people, can make people feel really good about working in it. But culture is much more sophisticated than that.

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Lisa Pook

It's not just things.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. And as we see more companies kind of transitioning to a remote environment, a virtual environment, how does that come into play with culture and, you know, not having people physically in the office—how would that affect culture?

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Lisa Pook

Yeah, I think companies are feeling the effects of that and trying to figure out what they want to do or how they maintain some of those values. I think it's hard with remote workers—remote relationships are hard, right? So culture, a lot of culture depends on those interactions that we have with others, whether they're coworkers or colleagues in a different department or with my manager or with senior leadership.

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Lisa Pook

All of those interactions and relationships are important. So when you have people who, when you've got people working in areas where it's harder to make those casual interactions, we gotta figure out ways to make those happen. Now, we've got companies all over the place that have multiple sites, right? And so there are people who technically work remotely from each other all the time.

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Lisa Pook

And that works. That works. But I think when you're talking about teamwork, we probably have to put a little more effort into structuring some of those remote interactions, particularly when people are completely remote, where there's no opportunity to get together.

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Sophie Boler

I did a capstone project on remote work and coworker relationships, peer relationships, and that's what I found was that it's, it's not like you have to force the conversations remotely, but it's, you have to put in more effort on maybe we don't talk about work 100 percent of the time we're on the call. Maybe I try to get to know this person and maybe we do a group activity where it's a game or something where you might need to put in a little more effort, but it'll be worth it.

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Lisa Pook

Right. And I think I think that's what teams are finding, that you do have to put a little structure around it. And yeah, the you know, the, the opportunity to just talk about stuff.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah.

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Lisa Pook

So and it can be awkward when we've got six people on a screen and I want to talk to you, Sophie, but everybody else is in the room too. So I've also had examples of, you know, some managers will even use the breakout rooms so that you can have a little bit of more one on one or a couple of people to communicate that way.

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Lisa Pook

And then coming back to the whole group, doing the round robin. You know, the question, like I loved your this-or-that question or the book question, just some of that type of stuff to get people to share, I mean, that's important.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely and kind of going off that, technology is playing a big role in this as well. So how can technology help with creating a culture, helping with company culture?

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Lisa Pook

Well, I think technology can make things efficient for us.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah, absolutely.



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Lisa Pook

So in terms of culture and efficiency, helping me do my job better and more easily is huge. And I think the other thing is, you know, maybe this goes along with that the whole environment when it's, when it, when we see that our company is investing in things that make our work better, that says something about what the company values.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely, completely agree with that. So the next question revolves around measuring culture, which I know sounds like maybe that's not doable in measuring employee experience. So what can you comment about that?

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Lisa Pook

I struggle with that because some of our members come and say we want to do, we want to measure culture. And I think culture, you need to know what questions you're asking. What do you want to know, which isn't necessarily measuring the culture. I don't know that you can actually do that. I think we can observe the culture and we can ask questions and we can listen and we can go to our employees and ask them what makes it a good or not-so-good place to work and act on those.

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Lisa Pook

And that's the qualitative way of measuring culture, right? When we take that information and do something with it. I think if you want to do surveys of employees, then what you need to ask is what is it that we want to know? And I don't think you can survey people with kind of broad cultural questions. I think you've got to be thinking about it.

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Lisa Pook

So if it's employee engagement, if it's satisfaction? We can measure those things. If it's something around diversity and employees' perceptions of diversity and inclusion initiatives in the organization, we can measure that. We can ask those types of questions. So I think organizations that are looking at their culture and want to have some sort of measurement data need to really look inside and decide what their questions are.

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Sophie Boler

Absolutely. I think it's harder to survey culture, like you said. A statement I've heard is, "Culture is something an organization has" or "Culture something in organization is." And I agree with that "Culture something in organization is" statement. So I think that just statement kind of says it's more it's a natural thing. It's not something you can really force upon people.

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Sophie Boler

You can't just have a culture. It's the people, other things that you've mentioned make up a culture.

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Lisa Pook

And I think you can influence that. Absolutely, you can influence it. I mean, it goes back to your leadership question. That's where, you know, that's a real strong force and management, employer-employee relationships is a strong way of influencing culture. And we all know examples of bad cultures, right? And we can go back and say, well, what influenced that? Was it relationships?

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Lisa Pook

Was it all sorts of things that forced us to that negative culture? But I think you're right. You can't take it in exclusion of everything else, right? It's very, you got to look at the whole system. And once you start messing or tweaking parts of it, it's going to shift everybody else too.

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Sophie Boler

It's a bigger thing than most people think. Culture influences everything.

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Lisa Pook

Yeah, absolutely.

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Sophie Boler

Yeah. So as we just kind of wrap up our time for today, do you have any lasting thoughts to share with our listeners today?

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Lisa Pook

Sure.

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Sophie Boler

That's a hard question.

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Lisa Pook

No, I think, I think if we are really concerned about the culture of our organization, then leaders in our organization need to listen to employees. And I think employees on that end need to constructively and clearly give feedback about what's working and what's not working. I think good conversations give you a lot of information about where the culture is, the current state of it, and if things need to change, that's where you're going to get your information as well.

00:18:29:00 - 00:18:54:04

Sophie Boler

That's some great advice. So thank you, Lisa. But thank you again for joining us today and speaking on the workplace culture topic. It's something that really makes a business unique and it affects all aspects of business too. So, happy to have heard your input and your advice on this. But make sure to connect with Lisa. We have linked her email as well as her LinkedIn profile in the show notes along with some resources.

00:18:54:04 - 00:19:13:22

Sophie Boler

So if you'd like to continue the conversation or ask her any questions I'm sure she'd be happy to connect. But other than that, make sure to leave a comment or review if you like the episode and found it beneficial. Next week we will be discussing the nontraditional candidate and recruiting, so you won't want to miss that.

00:19:14:08 - 00:19:35:22

Outro

But other than that, thank you again, Lisa. It was a pleasure talking to you. And we will see you guys next week.

And that wraps up our content for this episode. Be sure to reference the show notes, where you can sign up to connect for more podcast updates. Check out other MRA episodes on your favorite podcast platform. And as always, make sure to follow MRA's 30 minute THRIVE so you don't miss out. Thanks for tuning in and we'll see you next Wednesday to carry on the HR conversation.