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Why diversity, equity and inclusion
have gained central
importance



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KEYNOTE INTERVIEW

Creating a 'culture of care' – at work and beyond



LaSalle's Darline Scelzo says employees want greater connectivity and a stronger sense of belonging

Darline Scelzo is global head of human resources at LaSalle Investment Management, which has grown its HR practice over the past decade to include coverage globally, across the Americas, Europe and Asia-Pacific. When the pandemic hit, the firm was already formulating a new strategy for diversity, equity, inclusion (DE&I) and employee wellbeing, which evolved into a comprehensive initiative it calls the Culture of Care.

“It was a seed we had started growing, but the pandemic really helped us shape it,” Scelzo explains. She discusses how employee desires and expectations have evolved and what LaSalle is doing to meet them.

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Q How is the Culture of Care different from what was in place previously?

Prior to the pandemic, employers focused on typical aspects of HR – career development, wealth creation, general benefits – and they really didn't intersect too much with employees' personal lives or wellbeing. In 2020 and thereafter, employee wellness and wellbeing really came to the forefront of what employers were being asked to listen to and act upon.

Wellness was spreading into so many different areas, spanning more broadly than just physical health. A lot of the issues that came up concerned mental wellbeing, emotional stability and isolation.

Those were significant concerns, particularly during the worst of the pandemic, and employers may or may not have had real answers to them. We created the Culture of Care to answer the question of what more, beyond the general table stakes, our employees needed.

Employees were asking for a place where they were happy to belong. How do they connect with colleagues? What is the culture of this organization? Does

“People cared about not just their own experiences within the organization, but also wanted to know what we are doing in our communities”

it care about the community and do the leaders care about the employees?

We saw lots of concerns that were interrelated. People cared about not just their own experiences within the organization, but also wanted to know what we are doing in our communities.

That is where the Culture of Care came into being and it is entirely underpinned by DE&I. At the center of it is thinking about how to create a culture where people feel empowered to be themselves and where they feel they belong.

The pillars of Culture of Care are wellbeing, DE&I and community, linked to ESG. That is how we have answered that big shift – the almost more paternalistic approach to HR that employees expect.

It is not just about the basic facts, such as what an employee is getting paid, what their title is and what their promotional path is. It is also about more emotional issues and connectivity.

Q Are there lessons from the pandemic that can be carried forward?

There were lots of lessons from the pandemic, and what we were seeing served to highlight the variety of issues that people were experiencing. It wasn't possible to have just one policy or program that would work well across the globe.

We had to understand how to take all these diverse needs and create something that could fit so many different issues. Part of the Culture of Care was coming up with a 24/7 service where employees could go to take a course, access resources on wellness or connect with others digitally. That has been a big part of answering the needs that people have.

We also had to bring some structure and order to different needs and create a global framework that could be used throughout the rest of the organization.

We created themes on a quarterly

basis so that we could better organize some of the answers to issues that we were seeing. For example, in Q1 we focused on equity, and so our communications, activities and training were programmed around that.

Offices in different regions and countries can then plan activities around that same broad theme. It really gives us an opportunity to take diverse ideas and approaches and start organizing them, so it all makes sense to someone who might ask themselves why they should take part, or how it connects to other activities in the organization. That is one of the great things that came out of the pandemic: taking these topics and putting them into usable and digestible formats.

Another part of connectivity, culture and belonging is bringing people together outside of work. For instance, we started a book and movie club. We take a topic – something related to equity, or personal wellbeing for our second-quarter theme – and bring employees together to read the book or watch the movie.

We have had our senior executives drive these discussions, which gave people the opportunity to interact with a leader outside of work projects and really get to know them. It also advanced what we want to see in our culture – that everyone belongs together and we should be able to have conversations about DE&I, or community, or wellness topics as one.

Q How does DE&I relate to the Culture of Care?

The corporate DE&I goals that you would typically see related to hiring practices, promotion, gender and ethnicity are very important numbers and do give an indication of where an organization is going. We also rely, probably more so, on some of the other measurements that we get from our people, through a series of surveys related to engagement, inclusion and retention.

Employees get an opportunity to



Q How does the Culture of Care extend to the wider community?

There are so many great causes that our people are passionate about. You can end up going in a lot of different directions, especially as you move across the globe.

The Culture of Care really helped us organize what we were doing and how we were spending our time, money and resources, by going back to the quarterly theme and asking, “does this fit in?” Having that assurance is important to figuring out how you sort through all causes that you can get involved with.

For example, some of our activities this year centered on the issue of climate change. We focused on that with a JLL/LaSalle Global Communities Week in June, giving people tangible ways to tackle this huge topic, whether it was by planting a tree or sustainable gardening. Then we tied that to Earth Day, adding that structure and connection.

The Culture of Care really took on the social aspects of ESG and we are starting to see clients asking us, as owners of the building, to help them organize and drive community-type events. They are also asking about the programs that we use for DE&I.

So, we are investing in helping the tenants of these buildings in our portfolio become more effective at community connection, taking a page out of the Culture of Care playbook; showing them how we do it; and helping them take it forward.

“We hear from people who want to connect more and to participate, to help us direct future activities. The metrics are important, but it really is what you do with those metrics that matters”

tell us how we are doing, and some of that feedback has helped to shape the Culture of Care. We hear from people who want to connect more and to participate, to help us direct future activities. The metrics are important, but it really is what you do with those metrics that matters.

Every employee in their annual goals has a DE&I Culture of Care-related goal, which changes based on level or role within the organization. So, senior leaders obviously have more accountability, because they have more

influence and ability on development, hiring and retention, and then for managers or individual contributors it is more about participation in the Culture of Care and the activities.

But it is establishing that expectation that we are all part of the Culture of Care. We all live it, although we may live it in slightly different ways based on who we are socially or our roles in the organization.

The Culture of Care is about inclusivity. It is important to have the organization providing leadership and

modeling of behavior, but it is not top-down; it is a ground-up way of creating a culture.

We have Culture of Care champions, who are on the ground talking to other employees and helping us understand more of what people want to see in those areas, whether it is employees’ wellbeing or DE&I. It has given us the capability to hear what people want rather than just guess and it has been instrumental in how we have been morphing what we offer and discovering what is really working. ■



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