



CASE STUDY

Jenny Taylor, IBM Foundation Leader, United Kingdom // IBM



IBM is a leading international information technology company. It is headquartered in New York, USA and has offices in 170 countries, including here in the UK.



We spoke to Jenny Taylor, IBM's Foundation Leader, about how their core values were developed; how they measure the application of these values in the work of their employees; why they're important and the challenges they've faced in instilling them.

Jenny's role is to manage early professional programmes – grads, interns, apprentices and trainees.

The Challenge and the solution

Operating across so many countries, time zones and cultures, the challenge was how to source ideas from everyone involved.

Clear communications in such a huge company has always been a priority, as is a focus on making sure staff feel connected with an active intranet. Communications come from the highest level throughout the organisation on a regular basis.

Language and time zones can also present practical challenges but they don't stop the company from creating a unified company culture - IBM's long history and well known reputation may have helped in this regard. To create an all-inclusive "jam", IBM was able to leverage its own digital platform. Originally created to allow its clients to conduct employee engagements such as this, it enables people to share their ideas online, analyse and extract trends and themes from the information provided.

Once the values were defined in 2003, the CEO released and promoted them. This was supported with an internal communications plan, which was supported at the highest levels.

IBM's values were updated and formalised in 2003 via a company-wide consultation process when people from across the business could participate to share ideas via a "worldwide company jam". This took the form of an ideas meeting which was structured to a degree, but allowed everyone to share their ideas and thoughts online from across the entire organisation.

As a technology company, they are extremely proud of the positive reputation they have cultivated for the highest standards of data security and privacy; and of their longstanding commitment to diversity.

The company has been outspoken in terms of its position on actions within government that do not align with its values. Based on candidate feedback, these values are a major factor in why people apply to work at IBM.



The Results

The core values of IBM are:

- Dedication to every client's success
- Innovation that matters for our company and for their world
- Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships

The values are underpinned by nine practices that define the behaviour of IBM'ers, and what the values look like in action. There is great emphasis placed on sharing expertise and celebrating "wild ducks." These are the less conventional employees who are fantastic innovators.

IBM doesn't foresee their values changing. Rather the ways in which the values are lived and implemented (its culture) will change and shift all the time. For example, they recently worked very closely with medical research companies in order to support them through the Covid19 pandemic.

The presence and execution of the values is measured in several ways:

- Annual assessments, which include looking at whether behaviour is aligning to the values
- Innovation-based goals for everyone - not only technical staff
- HR pulse surveys are conducted regularly to measure how staff are feeling and coping with challenges - this is part of the trust and responsibility values
- Staff are able to use an internal reward 'card' system to celebrate and highlight people who are good examples of living the company values.
- And while there is no formal process to ensure that value-driven decisions are happening, the CEO is vocally supportive of the values, referencing them in his regular podcast to staff.

In addition to these, a great deal of emphasis is placed on the notions of trust and responsibility throughout the organisation.

Key learnings

IBM's study into the use of values in leadership has shown:

1. Strong brands build their values around diversity and inclusion.
2. The values espoused by a company have an impact on recruitment, attracting candidates whose values align with the company's, and helping it to retain staff over the long term
3. When people from a range of backgrounds have representative groups within an organisation, they often act as ambassadors in attracting top talent from those groups to the company.
4. Values rarely change or shift, but company culture does.

