



THE H.E.A.R.T. FRAMEWORK

Your People Are the Pulse: Employees are the Heart of Every Great Organization

In times of rapid change, evolving priorities, and relentless pressure, it's easy to focus on systems, policies, and productivity metrics. But at the core of every organization—beneath the goals and the numbers—are *people*. And when people don't feel seen, supported, or safe, even the most well-intentioned strategies fall flat.

Your employees are the heart of your organization. They're the ones solving client problems, mentoring new talent, holding space for tough conversations, and carrying your culture forward in a million daily interactions. And yet, in the hustle to keep up, many organizations unintentionally treat people as a resource to manage rather than a force to champion.

If you want a workplace that performs at a high level, you need to build a culture that honors the humans driving that performance.

What Is a Human-Centered Workplace?

With so much uncertainty and change in our world, organizations must go beyond surface-level perks to create workplaces where people can thrive. A Human-Centered Workplace is one where flexibility, inclusion, and well-being are embedded into the culture, not treated as add-ons or afterthoughts. These workplaces focus on sustainable performance while prioritizing people as the drivers of long-term success.

Human-centered workplaces shift from individual responsibility to shared responsibility. They take a holistic approach to well-being and performance, recognizing that when employees feel supported, respected, and valued, they bring their best to work.

And here's the paradox mindset we embrace: you can prioritize people and deliver exceptional client service. In fact, when your people thrive, they serve your clients at the highest level. It's not either/or—it's yes, and.

The H.E.A.R.T. framework, which was developed in 2023 during the writing of *The Flexibility Paradigm*, serves as a blueprint for organizations ready to lead with culture, care, and curiosity.

The 5 Pillars of a Human-Centered Workplace: H.E.A.R.T.

A truly human-centered workplace is felt in the day-to-day experience of work. It's in the way people are treated, the expectations they're held to, and the freedom they have to do their best work. At the core of these workplaces are five powerful commitments. Together, they form the H.E.A.R.T. framework:

H – Holistic Well-Being

Organizations that prioritize true well-being do more than offer individual solutions, they take a hard look at how work is structured, delegated, and communicated—addressing the root causes of burnout, setting clear boundaries, and making sure workloads reflect industry realities. They understand that well-being isn't a “nice-to-have”; it's essential for long-term performance. In these workplaces, inclusion, care, and belonging are woven into the day-to-day experience, not saved for special occasions. A strong culture of belonging helps people collaborate, share ideas, and build the trusted relationships that drive engagement and resilience. When people feel valued, accepted, and free to show up authentically, organizations unlock their full potential.

E – Evolving Leadership

The most impactful leaders evolve their thinking and back it up with action. They lead with culture, care, and curiosity, understanding that true leadership is about inspiring and influencing, not commanding and controlling. Evolved leaders create environments where people feel seen, safe, and supported. They model inclusive behavior and intentionally shape culture by aligning everyday actions with values.

A – Autonomy & Flexibility

When people are trusted to manage how, when, and where they work, remarkable things happen. Autonomy fuels ownership. Holistic flexibility creates space for life and work to coexist. Together, they create the conditions for accountability, engagement, and innovation. In human-centered workplaces, holistic flexibility empowers people to work in ways that make them feel and perform at their best, driving stronger results for the organization as a whole.

R – Recognition & Growth

Everyone wants to feel like their work matters—and that they matter, too. Human-centered workplaces actively recognize effort, not just outcomes. They celebrate wins, provide ongoing feedback, and offer opportunities for growth that are accessible, inclusive, and transparent. These organizations don't just develop talent, they nurture it, helping every individual see a path forward and feel valued along the way.

T – Trust & Psychological Safety

Without trust, there can be no meaningful connection. No honest conversations. No true innovation. That's why human-centered workplaces build psychological safety into their culture. People are encouraged to speak up, set boundaries, admit mistakes, and share ideas without fear of judgment or punishment. Trust is a daily practice that allows teams to learn, grow, and thrive together.

TAKE ACTION: Lead With People at the H.E.A.R.T. This Month

Building a human-centered workplace starts with clarity—getting honest about what's working, where there's friction, and how your people are really experiencing work.

This month, we invite you to reflect on the five pillars of the H.E.A.R.T. framework using the questions below.

Holistic Well-Being

- Are workloads thoughtfully managed and aligned with industry expectations?
- Do your policies support employees' lives outside of work, not just their roles within it?
- How are you creating an environment of belonging?

Evolving Leadership

- Do your leaders actively evolve their approach—modeling curiosity, adaptability, and influence in fast-changing environments?
- Are leaders creating space for open dialogue, emotional well-being, and a sense of belonging across their teams?

Autonomy & Flexibility

- Do employees have meaningful control over how, when, and where they work?
- Are your flexibility practices designed to support both business outcomes and personal well-being?

Recognition & Growth

- Are leaders transparent about organizational priorities and paths forward for all employees?
- Are employees consistently recognized for their contributions and potential—not just outcomes?
- Do you offer equitable access to mentorship, feedback, and advancement at every level?

Trust & Psychological Safety

- Can employees safely speak up about concerns, boundaries, and burnout?
- Is inclusion practiced, not just promised, across teams and leadership?

Here are a few simple ways to integrate these reflections into your month ahead:

- Host a 30-minute team conversation using one H.E.A.R.T. pillar as a discussion prompt. Ask your team what's working, and what could be improved.
- Add one question to your next leadership meeting to start building awareness and shared language around human-centered culture.
- Use your strategy planning session and/or advisory hours that come with your DFA membership to explore your answers with us. We can help identify patterns, surface opportunities, and co-create next steps tailored to your context.

- Kick off a culture conversation at your next team meeting by using the H.E.A.R.T. framework as a grounding tool for how you want to work together moving forward.

Lasting change starts with small, intentional shifts. Begin by asking the right questions, and let the answers lead you to the culture you want to build.

And if you're ready to go deeper, bring in DFA to lead a H.E.A.R.T. workshop tailored to your team. It's a powerful way to kickstart dialogue, uncover opportunities, and build a workplace where people and performance thrive together.

We partner with you to move beyond policies, creating a culture that feels as good as it performs.