

# A culture for the next century

Empowering employees to experiment and grow



Call for change

# Accelerating a cultural change

**Many companies have tried and failed to foster a company culture that's fit for the future. Scaling a shared set of behaviors and values remains an elusive goal, especially for multinational organizations. And there is often a disconnect between the kind of workplace culture perceived by leaders and by employees. In one Accenture research study, two-thirds of leaders (68%) felt they create empowering environments in which employees can be themselves, raise concerns and innovate without fear of failure—while only 36% of employees agreed.**

With ambitions to become a market-leading service provider and talent magnet, UNIQA Insurance Group, one of the largest insurance companies in Central and Eastern Europe, knew that it needed to change its company culture, but it couldn't do so overnight. The company is taking an unconventional approach to foster its target culture through Experimentation and Storytelling Journeys that invite every employee to make their own personal contribution to culture change.

The company faced a number of challenges on its way to creating a sustainable wave of culture

change. It's a complex organization of 15,000 employees spread out across 18 countries. Established in 1811, the company today has disparate geographies and offices that each have their own ways of working. An employee survey demonstrated that the company's existing culture leaned in favor of structure and planning. But UNIQA wanted to show up differently, in a way that enables people to react quickly, learn from mistakes, spread responsibility more widely and collaborate beyond conventional boundaries.

UNIQA 3.0, its corporate strategy, was its starting point. Next, UNIQA established a Culture Office to be a knowledge center on the topic of cultural change. Using the UNIQA 3.0 strategy as a base, UNIQA's Group Executive Board and Culture Office prioritized three Guiding Principles (Ownership, Community and Simplicity) in the company's goal to transform UNIQA into a compelling service provider that is relentlessly focused on its customers. The Culture Office worked with Accenture to develop initiatives that empowered UNIQA's people to become "Inspiring Coaches" who support customers by enhancing their lives.



When tech meets human ingenuity

# Sparkling new beliefs with stories

**UNIQA and Accenture recognized that an essential part of UNIQA’s future strategy would be developing spaces for employees to try new things and learn from failure. The Culture Office began piloting culture-change initiatives in which employees address and solve everyday challenges through small experiments and easy-to-apply methods. We believe that people will only change their behaviours if they change their beliefs. And they will only change their beliefs if they have new experiences. This is the foundation of experimentation.**

Rather than seeking a large, complex project, the initiatives deliberately encouraged “micro” experiments—that would eventually number in the hundreds and have the potential to impact thousands of employees through the reach that the experiments have, adding up to a wave of cultural change that contributes to their strategic ambitions.

Involving and empowering employees was a critical aspect of the highly participative process. The Accenture and UNIQA team facilitated “behavioral experimentation” proofs of concept and ultimately developed a “Train the Trainer” program to build the capability and confidence in UNIQA people to train others in Experimentation and Storytelling. The storytelling aspect of the journeys train Experiment Leads to engage and excite their colleagues on the art of the possible, through simple, compelling and visual stories, rather than slide decks and emails.

These newly minted Culture Trainers then led 23 cohorts of up to 12 Experiment Leads to kick-start their own experimentation and storytelling journeys with their teams. UNIQA’s people spread their stories about both their successes and failures to collectively support a workforce that will embrace experimentation.

A valuable difference

# The art and impact of storytelling

**In a matter of months, the Culture Office's initiatives positively impacted UNIQA's culture across geographies and functions. The Accenture team and UNIQA's Culture Office tirelessly refined a clear approach, designed high-quality culture workshop materials and provided various platforms for exchange to ensure communication and support.**

Participants designed and tested more than 200 experiments. UNIQA's people conducted individualized coaching and led workshops through which Experiment Leads received intensive training to ultimately empower their colleagues.

A survey among the participants of the first phase of the Experimentation & Storytelling Journeys shows the high degree of success in this early stage. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being strongly agree, "I feel like I understand the new direction we want to take for our target culture" rated 4.5 out of 5, and "I feel that experimentation gives me the opportunity to contribute to our culture change" rated 4.25 out of 5.

Based on the encouraging feedback, the Culture Office has decided to continue with this approach and is planning to conduct another set of training sessions to accredit more Culture Trainers throughout the organization.

The work that was done with UNIQA was highly commended in two categories at the 2022 Business Culture Awards—"Best large organization for Business Culture" and "Best Business Culture Team"—and received Silver in the Austrian HR Awards in the category "Strategy, Personnel Development & Leadership".

Employees throughout UNIQA are now empowered to actively face everyday challenges, take ownership and work better together. And using the art of storytelling, employees share with their colleagues their experiences of risk-taking and innovation—to turn culture change into a real movement.

"As we spoke to potential partners to help us on our culture journey, Accenture's capabilities to create an innovative approach to culture transformation truly stood out. We were energized about the prospect of doing something that felt truly different from the norm, something that meant we could empower our people to own our future culture and would leave UNIQA with the skills and capabilities to continue the journey in the years ahead. Over the last 18 months we've thoroughly enjoyed working with the team, have learned a great deal and are really excited about the impact we're having together."

**Jacqueline Go,**  
Head of UNIQA's Culture Office

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