



Entry guide 2024

Everything you need to know
ahead of entering the 2024
Culture Pioneer Awards.



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What is the Culture Pioneer Awards?

In a climate where people-focused organisations have never been more important, the Culture Pioneer Awards shines a spotlight on organisations dedicated to cultivating a thriving workplace culture.

Run by digital publication HRZone, our mission is to raise the profile of leaders and organisations shaping a better working environment for their employees, and to demonstrate the critical business value of investing in company culture.

What differentiates us from most other business awards programmes is that we are not simply interested in the so-called 'best'. We're looking for inspirational leaders and organisations that are committed to an ongoing journey to sustain or improve their culture.

To support you in submitting a high-quality entry, this guide shares detailed category information, suggestions of evidence to showcase as well as hints and tips from the judges.

We hope you find the guide useful and wish you the best of luck with your entry!



Becky Norman

Co-creator of Culture Pioneers|
Managing Editor of HRZone



Culture Pioneers Judges

We've recruited experts in the industry to form our judging panel. This talented cohort will be selecting the finalists and winning entries for each category to showcase to our community of 159,000+ people professionals.

[Meet the judges](#)

Key Dates

Save these dates to your calendar to ensure you don't miss the deadline!



Categories

Find out what we're looking for from entrants across our five categories.



NEW CATEGORY

Leadership

Share how your leadership values, decisions and actions are shaping a better working environment for employees.

[Find out more](#)



Brand

Showcase how your organisation's internal culture is authentic to your external brand, employee value proposition and company values

[Find out more](#)



Wellbeing

Demonstrate your company's holistic approach to employee wellbeing and how it is positively impacting both your employees and organisation.

[Find out more](#)



Learning

Share how your organisation is enabling business-critical learning at an individual, team and organisational level, as part of the everyday.

[Find out more](#)



Inclusion

Illustrate the meaningful and sustainable improvements your business is making to equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.

[Find out more](#)

Criteria

Find out whether you are eligible to enter and what we're looking for from entrants.

Who can enter?

For the Wellbeing, Brand, Learning and Inclusion categories, we accept entries from organisations of any size and across any sector/industry. We are all about being inclusive after all!

For the Leadership category, we accept entries from senior leaders within the HR/people profession AND the wider business function. If you are nominating someone you know for this award, we require you to have permission from the nominee BEFORE starting your entry.

Please note: The award winners are announced at an in-person event in London, UK, and we therefore recommend you have a UK presence, so that it is easier for representatives to attend. But this is not essential.

Consultants will not be considered but can enter on behalf of an organisation they are working with.



What are we asking for within the entry?

You will be asked to demonstrate how your / your organisation's actions have contributed to creating, improving or sustaining a positive company culture, specifically related to the category you are entering. You will also be asked to provide evidence of how these actions have impacted both your people and the organisation.

Across all our categories, you will be asked four main questions that have been crafted to help you show the culture change journey your organisation has been on.

The questions are slightly different for each category so make sure you read them carefully, but they all relate to the following four areas:

1. The why

Tell us why your culture (related to the specific category) is important to you / your organisation, plus what your objectives, vision and challenges are for your organisation's culture.

2. The what

Share the actions you have taken to achieve your vision and overcome your challenges, paying particular attention to those actions that are unique and creative (remember we're looking for **Culture Pioneers**).

3. The impact on people

Provide evidence of how your culture-crafting actions have positively impacted employees across the organisation.

4. The impact on the organisation

Provide evidence of how your culture-crafting actions have positively impacted your organisation and wider communities.



Video submission

New to 2024, we require you to provide a 1-2 minute video of yourself (or a suitable representative) outlining why your organisation (or leader for the leadership category) should be recognised as a Culture Pioneer.

This is a great opportunity to bring your culture story to life! Provide us with the most compelling highlights from your written entry – your biggest achievements, your most unique activities and the positive impact your efforts have had on people and the business.

Videos can be filmed on your phone or computer camera (don't worry, we don't expect professional video production), ideally in landscape.

Please note that if your entry is shortlisted we may use this video to promote the submission.

How many categories can I enter?

You can enter as many categories as you like, provided you are creating a bespoke entry that answers the questions we require from you within each category. The Culture Pioneers team moderates the entries before they are passed to the judges, and we will reject replicated entries.

How much does it cost to enter?

In the spirit of inclusivity and accessibility, it is free to enter the Culture Pioneer Awards.



How do we define workplace culture?

Workplace culture is complex and means different things to different people. Culture Pioneers judge **Robin Hoyle** shares a few pointers on what we mean by both culture and culture change to help inform your entry.

What do we mean by workplace culture?

Organisational culture is the sum of workplace attitudes which inform daily action. It is the hidden thread that runs through our working days, binding people together.

This thread may be positive and supportive of individuals, and it may drive innovation and creativity. It may also be toxic, resistant to change and driven by a kind of dog-eat-dog mentality, which reduces collective performance.

Culture is always a choice, but unlike choosing simple things, it is a series of choices which need to be remade every time we make a decision or work with our colleagues.

In some definitions, culture is 'the worst behaviour we are prepared to tolerate'. If you want a coaching culture, what stops your managers coaching now? If you want an ethical culture, why might folk behave in a way which is unethical now?

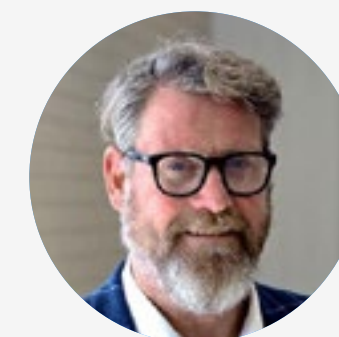
These disparities between the desired state and the reality rarely occur because people don't know what they should do. It is usually because it is easier not to; or there is a reward for not doing the right thing; or there is a tacit acceptance that people will bend the rules without penalty.

What do we mean by culture change?

Where culture change is part of the desired end state, it's important to recognise that culture emerges from what people do – it isn't delivered because the senior team describe it or the L&D team create some PowerPoint slides about the culture they expect to develop.

A meaningful culture change process involves, first, defining what people do when they are working in the culture you want to create or sustain and, second, making sure that the intervention focuses on those behaviours and actions.

Culture change is successful when the required behavioural change is taken well beyond the intervention and into the day-to-day work. When the behaviour is supported while no one is watching.



Robin Hoyle

Head of Learning Innovation, Huthwaite International,
Culture Pioneers Judge



Further category details

What evidence are we seeking
in your entry? We provide some
category-specific examples...

NEW CATEGORY

Leadership

The Culture Pioneer Leadership Award is for individuals in senior positions who are spearheading a thriving workplace culture.

We're seeking entries from leaders both within the people/HR profession and the wider business function. If you are a C-Suite member, director or head of department who is passionate about your organisation's culture – and making notable efforts to nurture it – then we invite you to enter.

This category offers entrants the opportunity to illustrate their ability as a leader to shape an exceptional culture where people love to work and thrive, and where employees feel supported and guided through critical times.



Judith Germain

Culture Pioneers judge for the
Leadership category 2024

Questions to inspire you

To help you create a comprehensive, high-quality entry, consider answering some (not all) of the following questions:

- Why is prioritising organisational culture important to you?
- When have you truly 'shown up' as a people-first leader and a cultural advocate (paying particular attention to challenging times)?
- How do you demonstrate leadership qualities such as emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, compassion, courage, adaptability, and resilience?
- What challenges or shortcomings have you faced as a leader striving to improve workplace culture? What lessons have you learned from these experiences?
- How are you encouraging and empowering other leaders to see the value in organisational culture?
- In what ways have your actions and behaviours benefited the working lives of employees within your organisation?
- In what ways have your actions and behaviours contributed to your organisation's successes?

“Entrants for the Culture Pioneer Leadership Award should demonstrate how they have created a culture where employees feel supported and can bring their authentic selves to work. We’re particularly looking for leaders who also demonstrate integrity, compassion, vulnerability, commitment and adaptability.”



Ritika Wadhwa
Culture Pioneers Leadership Judge

What evidence are we looking for?

Evidence of people impact

We're looking for evidence of improvements in indicators of, for example:

- Behaviours/mindset
- Skills growth
- Engagement
- Trust
- Wellbeing
- Psychological safety

Evidence of organisational impact

We're looking for evidence of improvements in metrics such as:

- Retention/turnover rates
- Financial performance
- Productivity levels
- Customer retention/acquisition/experience
- Operational performance
- Leadership
- Organisational adaptability/resilience
- Community impact

Types of evidence

Here are just a few examples of where to capture evidence:

- Employee survey results (if available please share before and after results so that we can see the benchmark)
- Anecdotal evidence such as employee social posts/comments, an employee email with positive feedback, qualitative survey feedback, exit interview feedback
IMPORTANT: Please provide physical evidence through, for example, screenshots, links to posts etc.
- Data and insights from HR/L&D platforms



Ready to start your entry?

Register and start your entry here. Save your progress and return to your entry anytime – but don't forget to submit before the closing deadline of **21 June 2024**

[Enter now](#)

CATEGORY

Brand

The Culture Pioneer Brand Award is for organisations that are committed to nurturing a company culture that represents their brand identity.

We're seeking applications from organisations of any size, and within any industry, that are on a mission to cultivate a culture that is authentic to (and supportive of) its brand. Organisations are welcome to focus on any brand type – e.g. employer, consumer or corporate – or a combination of brand types in their entry.

This category allows entrants to showcase the organisation's approach to creating (or sustaining) a great place to work – where company values are lived and breathed, and a strong sense of purpose is shared.



Questions to inspire you

To help you create a comprehensive, high-quality entry, consider answering some (not all) of the following questions:

- How do your brand values truly represent your people?
- How has your organisation navigated obstacles in your quest to improve/sustain your culture-brand connection?
- If misalignment between brand and company culture was present, how did your organisation address this?
- Looking beyond a single department, how have different teams and functions worked collaboratively to sustain or improve the connection between brand and culture?
- How did the organisation fit in this additional work with other demands? (Time, support, resource for delivery)
- How have senior leaders responded and contributed to positive change?
- How have teams and individuals responded to and contributed to positive change – including new behaviours?

“For the Brand category, we’re looking for entrants to tell us how their values come to life beyond words and mission statements. We want to see the soul of your organisation – what binds, bonds and builds you and your people to succeed.”



Perry Timms
Culture Pioneers Brand Judge

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CATEGORY

Wellbeing

The Culture Pioneer Wellbeing Award is for organisations that are consistently evolving their employee wellbeing strategy and taking a holistic approach to support the mental, emotional, financial and social needs of their workforce.

We're looking for organisations that are working towards creating an environment that cultivates a nurturing community, psychological safety, resilience and adaptability.

This category allows entrants to demonstrate how they are taking the responsibility of wellbeing seriously to create sustainable improvements for all employees, no matter their circumstances.



Questions to inspire you

To help you create a comprehensive, high-quality entry, consider answering some (not all) of the following questions:

- What are you doing to take care of the mental, emotional, financial and social needs of each of your employees?
- How are you making sure that nobody falls through the cracks?
- How has your organisation navigated obstacles in your quest to prioritise employee wellbeing?
- How have you gone above and beyond to look after your people?
- Looking beyond a single department, how have different teams and functions worked collaboratively to sustain or improve employee wellbeing?
- How did the organisation fit in this additional work with other demands? (Time, support, resource for delivery)
- How have senior leaders responded and contributed to positive change?
- How have teams and individuals responded to and contributed to positive change – including new behaviours?

“Organisations who are doing well when it comes to wellbeing are working hard to build a healthy and grown up culture, where people feel like they can do good work. This is what we will be looking for in entries this year, examples of where efforts are being made to build these types of cultures – and where leaders are taking ownership for curating a healthy environment.”



Natasha Wallace

Culture Pioneers Wellbeing Judge

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CATEGORY

Learning

The Culture Pioneer of Learning Award is for businesses that are cultivating a culture that proactively supports the way that their organisation learns, adapts and grows.

We're seeking applications from organisations that can demonstrate not only how they build business-critical skills, but also how they enable and harness the ongoing process of learning every day.

This category allows entrants to showcase their commitment to learning and development at an individual, team and organisational level, in a climate where skills development and inclusive career opportunities are vital components for talent acquisition and retention.



Coleg Sir Gar and Coleg Ceredigion
Learning Award Winner 2023

Questions to inspire you

To help you create a comprehensive, high-quality entry, consider answering some (not all) of the following questions:

- Why is prioritising a culture of learning important to your organisation?
- How has your organisation navigated obstacles in your quest to prioritise learning and development?
- Looking beyond a single department, how have different teams and functions worked collaboratively to prioritise a culture of learning and growth?
- How did the organisation fit in this additional work with other demands? (Time, support, resource for delivery)
- How have senior leaders responded and contributed to positive change?
- How have managers, teams and individuals responded to and contributed to positive change – including new behaviours?

“Entrants for the Culture Pioneer Learning Category should show us how they encourage sharing, celebrate learning and break down silos to accelerate the way that individuals, teams and organisations learn together.”



Laura Overton
Culture Pioneers Learning Judge

What evidence are we looking for?

Evidence of people impact

We're looking for evidence of improvements in indicators of, for example:

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- Skills growth
- Engagement
- Trust
- Wellbeing
- Psychological safety

Evidence of organisational impact

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CATEGORY

Inclusion

The Culture Pioneer Inclusion Award is for organisations that are creating meaningful, sustainable improvements in workplace inclusion and belonging.

We're looking for companies that are working to create a psychologically safe environment in which every employee feels respected and valued as their authentic self within the business.

This category offers entrants the opportunity to illustrate their passion and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion regarding all employees within the organisation – ensuring that no one gets left behind.



Washwood Heath Multi Academy Trust
Inclusion Award Winner 2023

Questions to inspire you

To help you create a comprehensive, high-quality entry, consider answering some (not all) of the following questions:

- How are you creating meaningful equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) improvements in your organisation?
- How are you making sure that nobody falls through the cracks?
- How has your organisation navigated obstacles in its quest to prioritise employee inclusion?
- How have you gone above and beyond to make your organisation an equitable, inclusive, welcoming place to work for everyone?
- Looking beyond a single department, how have different teams and functions worked collaboratively to sustain or improve EDIB within your organisation?
- How did the organisation fit in this additional work with other demands? (Time, support, resource for delivery)
- How have senior leaders responded and contributed to positive change?
- How have teams and individuals responded to and contributed to positive change – including new behaviours?

“I am looking for organisations that have tackled inclusion holistically like any strategic initiative, owned by the leadership, resourced, reported on and having a sustainable long-term impact”



Shakil Butt

Culture Pioneers Inclusion Judge

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Entry hints and tips

Bringing your culture change story to life can be tough. With this in mind, Culture Pioneers judge Laura Overton provides key pointers on what we're interested in hearing about.

What will increase the chances of success for our 2024 entrants? Judges will be looking for entries from those who see culture as an organisation-wide responsibility that needs to be modelled, enabled and encouraged by all. This means we are not simply looking for entrants to share the success of a single initiative. We want to see how a multitude of actions contributed to a more widespread change.

The awards programme is also not about celebrating 'best in show', grand gestures or big budgets. We are looking for ideas, strategies and programmes that have created

meaningful, measurable change – no matter how big or small. We want to hear about the activities that have led to results that matter, for the people that matter. With something as ethereal as culture change, it can be tricky to clearly demonstrate a positive impact from your activities. To help you craft your entry, I've outlined a few points we encourage you to explore within your entry.



Laura Overton

Author, facilitator & award winning analyst | Founder of Changemakers

In your entry, share:

- A clear vision or a bold statement of intent to demonstrate a holistic approach to culture and culture change, plus the plan in place to deliver this vision
- How multiple stakeholders are pulling together to achieve common goals across all parts of the organisation
- The company's or leader's commitment to people demonstrated through flexibility, transparency, trust, development and opportunity
- How culture is seen as a means of achieving mutual benefit, balancing the needs of organisation outputs and individual contribution
- How the organisation or leader is genuinely open to honest feedback and acts on it
- Any created frameworks and opportunities for culture to be modelled and practised
- Willingness to creatively explore culture change to achieve goals

Meet the Culture Pioneers of 2023

Last year, we received over 100 entries from organisations of all sizes, across a wide range of industries – including technology, consumer goods and health, as well as the public and charity sectors.

As a 2024 entrant, we highly recommend you explore the [stories of our 2023 Culture Pioneers winners](#) to better understand what our judges will be looking for from this year's entrants.



Wellbeing Award



**Washwood Heath
Multi Academy Trust**
Respect Collaboration Aspiration

Inclusion Award



colegsirgâr

Learning Award



Chivas Brothers
Pernod Ricard

Brand Award



Celebrating the heroes of culture change



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