What Is Company Culture If You Don't Have an Office?

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Before 2020, under 6% of the American workforce worked primarily remotely (and three-quarters didn't work remotely any of the time). By May 2020, that figure rose to almost 20%.

As a result of hybrid becoming mainstream, and staying mainstream even years later, many businesses and companies find themselves asking a pressing question: What is company culture if you don't have an office?

The office has always been an integral part of company culture, at least it was before the pandemic. It was where employees formed bonds and helped businesses thrive. Now, companies have to find ways to replicate that je ne sais quoi of the office remotely. So, read on to learn more about remote work culture, as well as how to build and maintain a work culture in a hybrid work environment.

An organization is only as strong as its work culture. But if leaders aren't thoughtful about their approach, hybrid work offers the potential to disrupt the human connection, engagement, and sense of belonging that leaders have been working for years to achieve.

In office-centric businesses, you see work culture emerge through face-to-face interactions and human connection. The shift to a non-office environment, however, needs more intentional effort. That's why remote businesses have been and need to continue taking initiative to establish and reinforce company culture.

Leaders in remote workplaces need to document what values define their work culture, and the tone they want to set with it. That way, whenever a problem arises, employees and management can refer to their company values to solve the problem.

Remote employees may be more prone to loneliness and burnout if they don't feel adequately connected to their organization or peers. That's why remote leaders need to ensure there's time for informal conversations and team bonding activities so the team has more opportunities to build relationships with their peers.

The negative effects of remote working on company culture

While hybrid work has sustained itself over the last few years, it is not without criticism from some. They may believe remote work makes it difficult for businesses to develop and maintain a corporate culture. Here are some of the potentially negative effects of working from home on company culture:

Cultural dilution

The term "cultural dilution" in a corporate context refers to the weakening of company culture as a result of rapid company growth.

In general, growth can put a strain on a company's culture. And a strong company culture is more difficult to establish and maintain in remote businesses. As a result, remote businesses are more likely to suffer from cultural dilution.

Having said that, many business leaders believe that a company doesn't have to choose between growth and culture. More often than not, when a company maintains a clear vision and values, its growth reinforces, rather than hinders, its culture.

Increased isolation

Working in an office allows you to interact with others, which helps build trust and mutual purpose.

In virtual workplaces, it can feel like if you're out of sight, you're also out of mind. When the majority, if not all, of your interactions are task-focused, it's easy to feel isolated from your coworkers. In fact, research shows that remote employees are more likely to feel excluded and ganged up on than non-remote workers.

Lack of motivation and enthusiasm

One of your goals as an employer is to instill enthusiasm and motivation in your employees. This task may be difficult if your teams don't work in the same location.

Social engagement and high spirits can be difficult to convey digitally if leaders aren't intentional. As a result, your employees may struggle to remain enthusiastic about their work, which can reduce productivity.

How to build and maintain company culture with a remote workforce

Keep in mind, just because the way people work has changed doesn't mean your culture has to suffer because of it.

Remote and hybrid companies can have a positive workplace culture. Proof of that is companies like Airbnb that have adopted remote-first or all-remote work. As a result, we've seen that building cultures that are more focused on flexible work and employees' needs can boost employees' satisfaction and performance.

Several innovative methods can assist remote workplaces in maintaining a strong company culture. So, here are six remote work culture strategies to help you maintain company culture:

1. Double down on human connection

According to research, workers have been feeling the following as a result of a more hybrid work model:

- 37% more anxious
- 31% more isolated
- 28% more overwhelmed
- 24% more demotivated

So, what caused this strain? By an overwhelming margin, 59% of those surveyed cited "less human connection" as the culprit. Feeling connected to your organization and fellow humans is key to creating a strong workplace culture. Whether employees are in the office, remote, or a mix of both, leaders need to foster belonging throughout the organization.

One way you can strengthen human connection among employees is through frequent and open communication. It can take the form of employee resource groups (ERGs), mentor-mentee programs, or even virtual happy hours.

Virtual happy hours or lunches – These are great for off-the-clock connection-building.

Mentor-mentee programs – Try pairing up new employees with veteran employees to gain a better understanding of each other's experiences. Or think about matching remote or dispersed employees with those working in the office to fuel unlikely bonds.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) – A network of employees with shared experiences, characteristics, or goals can help form authentic relationships among employees up and down the organization. Groups created by and for your people improve company culture while building camaraderie.

You can also use Social Recognition®, Workhuman's platform for employee recognition. It enables employees to publicly recognize and reward their peers for their efforts.

Incorporating a safe space into your company culture fosters connection and authenticity among all employees. Not to mention that increased communication makes your employees feel more connected to the company. As a result, they're more likely to stay.

Listen and learn

One of the most crucial aspects of how to improve company culture is listening to and learning from employees.

Listening to your employees lets you put yourself in their shoes and understand their wants and needs. Not to mention it will send the message that they're supported within the organization.

An empathetic leader understands that a hybrid workplace will always be changing and shifting. Organizational structures have changed, protocols will be developed and adjusted, and meetings will be a mix of people in a conference room and employees dialing in from home.

Leaders should be aware that these changes will affect everyone differently. Consider implementing monthly employee surveys to gauge the pulse of your people. If something is working well, great. And if something isn't, adjust it and keep moving.

Inspire shared purpose

Enlightened organizations have long been aware of the power that shared purpose can have on their bottom line, but this notion is now more important than ever. Shared purpose brings employees together while aligning their work with the company's mission and values.

In a hybrid work model, the shared purpose so essential to your culture may be harder to come by. Being together in the office allows employees to connect and collaborate in a way that more easily embodies a sense of community.

While this connection is still possible in a hybrid environment, now leaders must be much more intentional in communicating how each employee contributes to the greater company mission.

Recognize the culture champions

Employees implementing core values and principles that help them improve individually and collectively is what company culture is all about.

However, if you have culture champions who consistently go above and beyond to promote company culture, it's essential to give them proper recognition for their efforts. This recognition won't only validate their efforts, but it'll also inspire other employees to follow suit.

Celebrate often

Celebrating employee milestones, efforts, and achievements is critical for fostering all types of company culture. Life Events®, for example, allows employees to share and celebrate personal accomplishments and moments with the rest of the work community.

This won't only make employees feel appreciated, but it also fosters a sense of community in the workplace.

Now is not the time to pull back on the celebration – it's time to double down. Whether employees are back in the office, remote, or somewhere in between, organizations should empower their people and continue forging the essential connections for a human workplace.

Conclusion

So, what is company culture if you don't have an office?

The inability to return to the office has brought up thoughts and concerns about company culture that weren't as prevalent before. That's why creating a company culture when you don't have an office requires dedicated work to ensure your business continues to thrive.

In the end, culture thrives when employees thrive – which is a good place to get started.