

# Building a Company Culture Amid Remote Workers

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The pandemic has forced companies to switch to remote working and work from home models. This transition comes with its own complexities and difficulties, the most noticeable being the absence of office socializing and camaraderie.

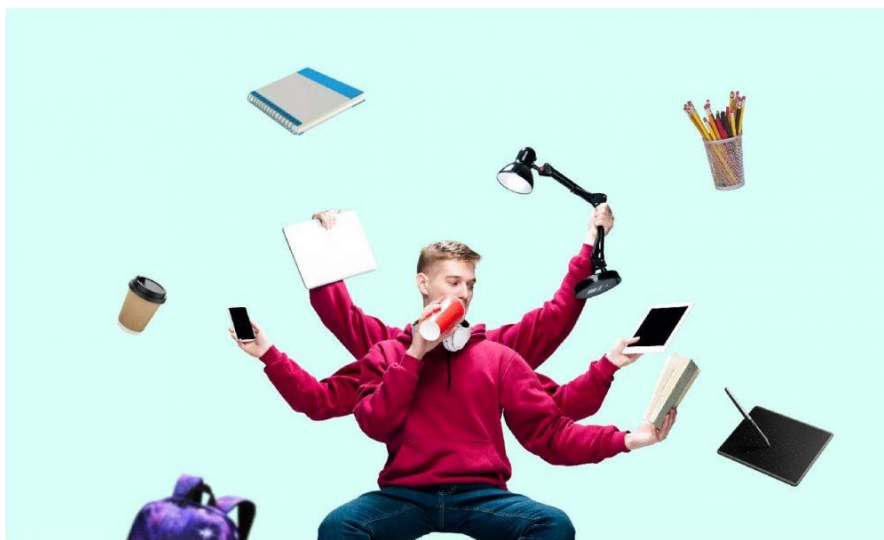
Building a company ethos and culture becomes difficult when people are sitting apart and communication is restricted to work only.

Jewell Parkinson, chief people officer at talent cloud company iCIMS believes company culture is everything.

“It is the catalyst for engagement, productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction and retention. The shared experiences of this past year and a half reaffirm that workplace experience matters,” Parkinson said. “The elements on which culture is built: purpose, values, behaviors, symbols, language, norms, rituals either serve to help or hinder during times of change and ambiguity.”

So how are companies planning to handle building a company culture amid a non-traditional work environment? How are companies reimagining building upon shared experiences, sharing and exchanging ideas beyond the work world, and forming an overall engagement built towards what entails working for a particular company?

A probable answer is hybrid work—division of workdays between home and office premises.



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Jeff Seibert, co-founder of Digits, said that hybrid work arrangements are “worst of both worlds, especially when it comes to company culture.” Without the latter, he said it’s “hard to see how a company can be successful.”

Hassan Osman, director at Cisco Systems and Udemy instructor who teaches a course on hybrid work management, warned that hybrid models could create a two-tiered class system for employees. Employees who spend more time in office will be given preference over those who work from home.

“There will always be a sense of inequity when part of a team is physically together while others are remote,” said Seibert. “To make up for it, remote team members constantly feel the need to travel to headquarters to be seen and are left out of important decisions, hallway conversations and team-building opportunities.”

According to a Blind poll conducted in 2020, half of the respondents believed working from home negatively impacted their careers and that remote work had reduced internal and external networking opportunities.

If an office is functioning fully remote, then at least there are no conversations happening in office premises that exclude those working remotely.

In a fully remote model, efforts can be made to get the team together physically to build team culture. It can be to mark significant milestones of the company and can even be an opportunity to engage on something beyond office and work.

Technology can also play a role in supporting company culture in a remote or hybrid arrangement. The recent great resignation that has seen many employees resign in droves in the US has again raised questions about the disconnect of employees with their workplace.

People feel stressed and overwhelmed with the continued interactions through a computer screen. The absence of physical interactions, body language clues and general screen exhaustion has taken its toll. Employees feel a lack of shared experiences, an aloneness in carrying out tasks, and a disconnect with the company.

Companies need to focus on the “evolving” needs of the workers as well as the importance of listening to understand these needs better, if they want to retain the good talent.

This new work experience is shared, but everyone’s situation is unique. A concerted effort has to be made to allow employees to initiate tailored company culture activities that empower them and create a more inclusive culture.