

Final Question

What are the best practices for maintaining a collaborative culture and encouraging employees to embrace the company's values under the remote or hybrid work environment after Covid-19?

Introduction

Many companies have shifted from traditional in-office roles to remote and hybrid work environments since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of this transition, companies have had to reimagine their post pandemic workforce to ensure employees still embrace the company's culture and values. However, this transition has been a challenge for a lot of organizations, as many companies are still looking for the best ways to develop a culture that keeps its employees engaged. Companies need to develop a versatile environment that drives performance, builds trust, and buys everyone in.¹

Thus, we have conducted research on three strategies to foster connectivity among hybrid and remote workers: diffusing culture through the work itself, connecting through emotional proximity, and fostering microcultures.² We understand the complexity of the remote and hybrid work environment, and realize the ongoing changes that will be needed to maintain success with the practices outlined in this document.

Diffusing Culture Through The Work Itself

Empowering Employees: Managers assume that working from home will make workers less productive, rather they are often more productive because they have more time to do in-depth work. Companies should encourage their teams to set their own rhythms, which can be unique and fit the way they do their work, instead of operating under manager-dictated norms.² This allows employees to feel appreciated and embrace the company's values more. Effective organization of work styles requires mindful consideration of which tasks employees can perform remotely and which require face-to-face interaction.³

Transparent Communication: Companies should create formal structures and commitments to prevent communication breakdowns between team members. Three days in the office and two days remotely, based on specific job categories or locations is a great example.⁴ Employees should also be transparent with their coworkers about when and where they will be working. This includes knowing how to reach employees via group email, text, or other technology in case they need to talk immediately.⁴ It is important that the leaders of these companies discuss these areas open for communication to ensure employees are utilizing them the right way.

Connecting Through Emotional Proximity

In a hybrid work environment, you need to connect your employees through emotional proximity rather than physical proximity.² Connecting and communicating on a regular basis with employees can have remarkable results. Psychological safety, enhanced communication skills, the ability to resolve conflict and manage tension, and improved work structure and outcomes are just a few of the benefits we get when we make a regular and conscious effort to create a psychologically safe space.⁵

Company Activities: There are many examples of activities that increase emotional proximity. One company leverages virtual connectivity to organize events like trivia contests, coffee chats, song recommendations for work, and polls to remind employees of their connectedness.⁶ These events keep employees engaged and feeling a part of a team even if they are just looking at a screen. Another company is intentionally offering more company-wide outings during business hours to promote teamwork.⁶ Although this requires company time and money, it demonstrates the company's commitment

to its workforce and how much they value fostering a positive organizational culture. Another illustration is a paid volunteer time initiative. Employees are given three paid volunteer days and encouraged to form their own groups within the company by promoting and encouraging participation.⁶ This both engages employees with the community and grows them closer to coworkers outside of the normal work atmosphere. This is an excellent way to develop a collaborative culture within a company. Incorporating meetings with a gratitude exercise, such as writing down three things they're grateful for or by thanking another team member can also develop a collaborative culture beyond the meeting.⁶

Recognition Events: People who feel appreciated and valued by the company will work to deliver better results. That is why with a remote and hybrid environment, it is more important than ever for companies to take the time to reward and recognize their employees for their contributions. Employee recognition events can also serve as an opportunity for coworkers to come together and celebrate successes, which, will help to increase coworker connections and boost enthusiasm for a shared purpose.⁷

Office Design: Additionally, many organizations are designing different types of offices to maintain or enhance emotional proximity in hybrid work. For example, getting rid of "assigned seating" and now using activity zones, so when you walk into a space, it becomes a social hub.⁸ It's worth noting that there are many different ways to increase emotional proximity through office layouts, such as dedicated collaboration spaces and focused workspaces, and spaces where you can do both at the same time.⁸ By implementing a new office design, employees will feel more apart of a community and have a deeper desire to work together.

Fostering Microcultures

Better Results: With hybrid work, every organization must now balance a strong corporate culture with local micro-cultures. By aligning the organization's objectives with the personal goals of its members, the team can utilize autonomy in a way that benefits everyone involved. Instead of focusing on micromanaging how employees do their jobs, you can make evaluations fairer and reduce proximity bias by focusing on results. You can also use technology tools to share information about employee work activities and performance.³

Leadership: Leaders play the most important role in shaping microcultures and should favor delegated control in hybrid work.² It is the role of leaders in the hybrid work era to communicate with empathy and compassion, build trust, and create a micro-culture that encourages employees to share challenges and ask for support. They should check in regularly with employees to alleviate their isolation and support flexible and inclusive practices.⁹

Conclusion

With the rise of remote and hybrid work, it is crucial for companies to find ways to keep employees engaged and feeling connected to the company's culture. Based on our research, we feel that by diffusing culture through the work itself, connecting through emotional proximity, and fostering microcultures a company can set themselves apart and maintain a very strong culture since remote and hybrid work is here to stay. Each section mentioned has a variety of ways to effectively implement these into a company. We advise this CAHRS Partner company to stay up to date with new information and best practices as they look to implement these changes.

References

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