

Keeping up with company culture

One of the concerns that frequently comes up when companies consider moving parts of their workforce home is how to maintain company culture when your people are physically dispersed.



John Woollam

The nationwide lockdown has forced this issue, and many companies have gone almost entirely remote as a result. While it remains to be seen what the long-term impact will be, in the short-term, it's critical that companies make an effort to maintain their culture, along with other operational aspects of their day-to-day business.

"Maintaining culture while you're working remotely requires deliberate and consistent action," says John Woollam, CEO at Euphoria Telecom. "It's easy to get caught up in the complexities of running day to day operations in a time of crisis, so execs need to make the time to build culture into their daily to do lists, as a priority."

Here's how to keep your culture strong and healthy, no matter where your workforce is:

- **Communicate** - communication is key to culture. If your company culture is relaxed and fun, ensure you communicate with your teams, customers and suppliers in a way that reflects this - both in your formal and informal communications.

- **Collaborate** - collaboration tools are critical to remote working, and can be used to drive culture quite effectively because they offer a means to communicate and reinforce the company's values and mission with every engagement. How you engage in that Zoom or Hangouts meeting is as reflective of your culture as your formal staff newsletter.
- **Delegate** - culture is driven from the top, but it's not just something the executive team does. Your management team needs to be instrumental in ensuring it filters down through the organisation, and out to other stakeholders. Conversely, if members of the executive and management team are behaving in a way that runs counter to your stated culture, that will show up in other places in the organisation and is something that needs to be deliberately and constructively addressed.
- **Build** - most people think of team building when they think of culture, and it is an important part. Remote team-building activities can be as simple as Zoom drinks every Friday afternoon, or a Monday morning coffee catch up (depending on how big your company is). Think competitions for the best 'home office selfie' or company fitness challenges or even team quiz nights. Technology offers many options, and they should be explored.
- **Adapt** - like every other part of your business, your culture needs to be a living thing that evolves as your company does. This means that working remotely, and the flexibility and other benefits it brings, might start reflecting back into your culture. For example, you might see people suddenly being more respectful of office hours as they come to appreciate their downtime more. As long as these changes are positive and beneficial to the business and its stakeholders, they should be actively encouraged and incorporated.

Remote working offers many benefits - from flexible working hours, greater work-life balance due to less time wasted in commuting reduced office rentals and happier and more productive workers.

"Remote working may have been forced on many organisations but don't let that mean that you miss out on the opportunity to take something positive from it," Woollam says. "Whether it's more actively working on your culture or considering implementing flexible home working schedules, we can learn a lot about ourselves, our businesses and how we operate during this time, and use these lessons to be more efficient and productive in future."

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