

Can you have workplace culture without a traditional workplace?

Issued by [icandi CQ](#)

7 Sep 2021

Is workplace culture still worth investing in? Are cultural activities still in fashion? In the lead up to Heritage Day this month, we look at how company cultures, diversity and inclusion intersect at the corner of brand sustainability.



You may be wondering if it's worth the time and effort to invest in your workplace culture, especially if your employees are still working from home or if your organization has made the decision to adopt a permanent WFH or hybrid workplace policy. However, when you break down "culture" into its working parts – diversity to the power of inclusion – it's clear that now, more than ever, companies need a solid cultural foundation to keep employees feeling connected and part of a greater whole. That, plus the fact that the changing working environment lends itself to a more diverse workforce, as more employees can be hired across cultural, provincial or even international borders. Your company culture needs to be ready for this.

Diversity needs to be supported by inclusion

It's not enough to have HR policies that attract diversity into the talent pool. A diverse workforce is only as powerful as the inclusivity of the policies, processes and practices that enable it to embrace diverse viewpoints and ideas. It pays to take a broader view on diversity that goes beyond race, gender and culture to encourage a cross-section of diverse ages (generational diversity), academic and professional backgrounds, experiences, talents, skills, opinions, and even personalities. In the end it all adds up to a rich melting pot of ideas and viewpoints to draw on when it comes to finding better solutions and innovations to a diverse range of challenges.

Culture is still a business imperative

Covid-19 aside, culture is still a business imperative, for other reasons too. Your internal culture – what you collectively value, how you do things, your common expectations – defines your organisation and the people that represent you. It doesn't matter whether your company intentionally defines or shapes its internal culture – it's already influencing the company's success, with or without your permission.

Don't forget that Gen Z and Millennials want (demand), that the companies they work for align with their values, commitments, and aims. Or they walk, to your more culturally sensitive competitor. This fits with a recent survey conducted

by [Glassdoor](#), which found that 76% of job seekers said a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers.

The bottom line? Any company disconnecting culture from profit or productivity is putting the company's future at risk. This idea of cultural profitability is further supported by a recent [McKinsey study](#), which found that racially and ethnically diverse companies outperform industry norms by 35%. So yes, culture is very much still "in fashion", if you have designs on your brand being around long after Covid-19 has been snuffed out.

Three ways culture activities can add value to company culture

Heritage month has a way of making companies scramble to find new and better ways to celebrate our shared culture. But if your activities are of the ad hoc or lastminute.com varietal, they probably won't have the desired effect, which is to align employees' behaviours with company values. Here's why:

1. **Culture activities have a purpose:** most cultural activities are usually fun in nature, but they have a purpose. They are there to help people build relationships and break down siloed behaviour. They need to be taken seriously when planned and implemented to align to the company's values and objectives.
2. **Cultural planning maps the way forward:** never underestimate the power of a visual roadmap to help align people in their shared goal. By drawing up a roadmap to explain how each culture activity connects to the company's values, you will have a cultural tool to use in several applications – from employee interviews to induction programmes and even in support of leadership, who can use these roadmaps to remind their teams that the company does live by its values and behaviours.
3. **Culture needs the support of champions:** to ensure that your cultural calendar is both engaging and inclusive, appoint champions comprising a diverse group of engaged employees from different business areas and even leadership. They can be charged with meeting, setting and implementing the cultural calendar for the year, while rallying to get buy-in and attendance from their fellow team members.

Ideas to add to your heritage month calendar

Get behind uBuntu

Heritage Day is a great time to get behind our uBuntu heritage. This could translate into activities for your company to offer up skills or donate money, clothes, toys etc. There are many great charities working in all areas, from education to children, animals and the environment. Choose a passion that aligns to your company's values and CSI strategy and let the Ubuntu magic begin!

Support a local business or artisan

Consider hosting a virtual market for staff and their friends and family to support local business. When you support a small business or local artisan, not only do you get to experience the wealth of talent and skills that South Africans have to offer the world, you are also helping contribute to a more diverse economy and stimulate further innovation.

Laugh it off

South Africans are very good at laughing at their own flaws and failures. We also have great comedians who know how to make fun of our cultural idiosyncrasies, in a way that makes us think as much as laugh at ourselves. Why not expand your cultural references and horizons by hosting a virtual comedy event.

Have a (virtual) cultural cook-off

We all have a favourite family recipe or cultural dish that we are proud of. Encourage employees to team up, swap recipes and make each other's proudly South African dishes in a virtual cook-off competition.

Explore the wild

Our natural heritage is worth celebrating and, better yet, exploring. Instead of going to the usual places or doing the same weekly walks, challenge your teams to explore a new route, natural park or area.

Need help with your company culture?

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