

Managing Workplace Culture in a Hybrid Model

Nearly 2 in 3 employees say strong company culture is the main reason for staying at their job, according to a Glassdoor survey. Employers can leverage their company culture to attract and retain top talent in a competitive job market. However, a strong company culture could be at risk in a hybrid workplace as different on-site and remote workplace cultures emerge.

Organizational leaders should intentionally create, foster and nurture culture when people are working from everywhere. This article provides an overview of company culture and considerations for employers managing their culture with a distributed workforce.

What Is Company Culture?

Company culture is the personality and environment of an organization. Defined by more than just a mission statement or organizational values, company culture encompasses the unwritten norms of how employees interact with one another. Company culture can be broken into three broad categories:

1. Social—How individuals act and how authority and influence exist between different roles and teams.
2. Material—How people in a group make or achieve something, and the ways people work together and collaborate.
3. Ideological—How values, beliefs and ideals establish how individuals exist and interact.

Company culture has long been associated with the way interactions take place. In the absence of face-to-face conversations in hybrid workplaces, that same company culture translates through interactions via communication channels such as email, phone, video, instant messaging, employee intranets and more.

Why Does Company Culture Matter?

It's been proven that employees who identify with and feel a sense of belonging to a company's culture are more productive, happier and want to work for the company longer. Company culture is an innate part of the workplace, but culture management became more challenging as organizations went partially or fully remote during the pandemic. If different hybrid cultures develop, the in-person culture often dominates, isolating remote employees.

Despite these challenges, culture changes due to the shift to remote or hybrid work are generally positive. According to a Gartner survey, employees who reported that culture has improved since starting to work remotely are 2.4 times more likely to report high employee engagement and 2.7 times more likely to report high discretionary effort and intent to stay.

Regardless of the workplace model, a company's values and the culture it wishes to create help give employees a common purpose, which keeps their morale high. In return, retaining satisfied employees benefits the company's bottom line, as there's typically less costly turnover and lower employee absenteeism. High turnover can also harm the culture and cause remaining employees to become disengaged, unmotivated and thus unproductive.

Managing a Hybrid Workplace Culture

When employers develop their ideal hybrid workplace and return-to-work plan, it may be necessary to shift the organizational culture, which may also reshape organizational goals and objectives. The following topics can impact the hybrid workday and overall company culture:

- **Accountability**—The pandemic has exposed the need for understanding and empathy in hybrid workplaces as many people live, work and handle schooling and caregiving responsibilities from their homes. But it's equally important for employers to continue encouraging a culture of accountability. Accountability reminds employees their work matters and individual work is crucial to team and overall company success.
- **Collaboration**—To ensure remote employees aren't at a disadvantage, employers should set everyone up for successful and productive conversations and teamwork opportunities. Once the right tools are in place, organizational leaders and managers must develop and formalize processes and guidelines to support those tools.
- **Communication**—Similar to collaboration, employers need to plan how distributed communication is supported and facilitated. Communication tools like intranets and enterprise social networks can help both on-site and remote employees feel involved and able to contribute no matter their location or local time.
- **Inclusivity**—It's important to celebrate the differences of individuals and encourage authentic connections among employees. For example, some employees may not be comfortable having their personal home life on display during a video call. Some employees may worry that they are forgotten and left out by peers they spend less time with in the office. It's vital for employers to foster a culture of understanding and inclusiveness.
- **Performance**—A strong hybrid work culture ensures performance across all levels, from individuals to the overall organization. Along the same lines of accountability and transparency, information about performance expectations and results should be shared openly and often with all employees.
- **Recognition**—Hybrid or not, a workplace should prioritize recognition to demonstrate an appreciation for employees and their work. Some employers offer an online destination for employees to receive and submit values-based recognition.
- **Traditions**—Employees often look forward to companywide events or gatherings, so it's important for employers to find new ways to keep those company traditions alive or add a virtual component to what employees are used to.
- **Visibility**—It's especially vital for leaders and managers to be intentionally visible and accessible to employees. One way this can be done is by scheduling regular check-ins with employees.

A thoughtful hybrid workplace approach combines the best aspects of an organization's on-site and remote workplaces—and those of the organization's culture.

Summary

A positive and strong company culture vastly improves retention rates. Employees who identify with and feel a sense of belonging to a company culture are happier and more likely to stay at an organization longer. When it comes to the hybrid workplace, employers need to be proactive to foster a positive company culture.

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