

The Importance of Workplace Culture in a Hybrid Setting



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From 2007 to 2011, I dipped my toes in remote culture, both out of necessity and for success. My work required engaging with developers in the United States, Canada, Russia, France, China and other countries. Remote culture enabled us to build meaningful products faster and smarter than others.

When I launched Quantum Metric as CEO in 2015, advances in video conferencing and shared collaboration tools made it even easier for teams to work across time zones and geographies. It seemed natural to build a new company using a hybrid team that was "remote-first," taking advantage of finding the world's

best talent. Sure, we had our headquarters in Colorado Springs, with satellite offices in Denver, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C, but it was never a requirement that employees come to the office. Most of our employees were remote before 2020, a trend that will continue long after the pandemic ends and one that has proven to be wildly successful.

As the world navigates through the effects of a cyclic pandemic, many leaders are asking: Can businesses that were traditionally focused on office culture find the same success they've experienced with an in-person workforce?

Absolutely. There's no question that businesses can't just succeed, but thrive with a hybrid model. With greater access to talent, greater working hours and geographic flexibility, there's more reward than work in creating a successful hybrid work environment.

The key to a company's culture and success is not the location of the workforce, but rather the strategies and practices that companies put in place to build their cultures. Wildly successful tech companies, like LinkedIn, understand this and have stepped back from the one-size-fits-all approach to the workplace, opting to empower teams to decide how they will return to the office – if it all.

Creating workplace practices that empower your workforce from wherever they are

In today's digital-first world, mandatory days in the office can be a huge turn-off, especially for employees weighing possible risks to their health. Offering free lunch, exercise classes and other perks can be enticing. However, what most employees really want from their post-Covid workplace is flexibility.

As the world rebounds from the pandemic, it's important to recognize that the workforce has been operating under severe mental distress. For many, remote work has eased the anxiety of contracting the virus. Working from home has also enabled parents who are juggling childcare and remote school to keep their jobs. Some are even willing to take a pay cut to remain at home.

But that doesn't mean the in-person experience should be thrown to the wayside.

For some employees, the option to work in person at a satellite office can boost morale. Quantum Metric just launched a satellite office in Chicago thanks to popular demand, though our Chicago-based employees are by no means obligated to work in person. Instead, it's about providing our team with the resources they need to succeed. For some, that means collaborating in person alongside colleagues a few days a week. Our employees can do so at their own discretion and comfort level.

By giving employees the flexibility to work from wherever they are, businesses also open themselves up to recruiting top talent. The best person for a job might not be near the office, but that doesn't mean they should be pulled from consideration, right?

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Business leaders fear hybrid or remote work, but they shouldn't

Before the DotCom boom and the digital revolution, working from home was a rare occurrence.

With the advent of communication tools such as Slack, Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, companies started developing a tech stack that enabled more employees to work from home

while remaining in communication with their teams.

As great as that all sounds, current work-from-home setups have caused some serious headaches. Slow-to-adapt managers fear that their employees won't be working as much from home, that they will lose motivation or that they will squander all of their workday online shopping or scrolling through Twitter.

These fears often lead to ineffective micro-management, which stifles creativity and makes employees resent their work. It turns out that obsessing over every hour on your employees' calendars won't yield better results.

Instead, we need to be empowering, entrusting and embracing hybrid teams. Early on, I quickly discovered there were some team members not working well remotely and some who were thriving. I analyzed each employee's attributes and uncovered what would become the heart of our culture.

- **Passion:** Passionate team members come to work every day, self-motivated and energized to tackle today's challenges. There's no need for daily touchpoints. These members are entrepreneurial and, like me, often are excited to take on their daily tasks.
- **Persistence:** Persistent team members won't hit a roadblock and turn away. They will get things across the finish line without the need for micromanagement, a management tactic that usually fails.
- **Integrity:** Knowing you can trust your leader, peer, or direct report eliminates office politics and second-guessing motives. Even with customers, knowing we are all doing the right things and providing honest responses builds a strong sense of community.

With trust and culture solved, and with our team spread out across the country, you might be thinking, "How do we stay on

the same page?”

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Putting the customer first helps hybrid teams align around a common goal

I know my team is working hard all the time. But it's my leadership team's responsibility to ensure we are working hard on the right things.

How do we do this? My answer is simple.

Focus on aligning your team around a common goal: the customer. At Quantum Metric, we avoid internal mishaps and miscommunications by delivering value to our customers. We learned this from a design methodology we've developed called “continuous product design.”

Putting the customer at the heart of your business can help overcome the trust issues and micromanagement associated with the hybrid model. Amazon credits this approach with empowering its continued success – creating a customer-centric organization and culture.

Businesses need to build practices and invest in tools that empower innovation, but in a way that helps your customers achieve their goals. Your employees need the space to develop new ideas, the freedom to collaborate across teams and the opportunity to experiment. Some leaders like to say they fail fast, but I prefer to think of it as continuously iterating and adapting to the ever-changing needs of your customers, as well as your business.

One of the best ways to understand your customers is to build and recruit a team with diverse backgrounds, perspectives and

experiences. A hybrid workplace empowers teams to retain and recruit diverse talent.

A hybrid approach to the workplace can save your employees thousands of dollars, hundreds of hours and an unquantifiable amount of stress. This is not just good for your workforce – it's good for your business as employees break free from traditional office models to focus on their passions at work.

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