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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

How Company Culture Plays Into Virtual Team Building

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Today, 30 percent of the workforce is outside workforce! That number is expected to rise to 40 percent by 2020.

Today's workforce collaborates across time zones and geographic boundaries. Both geographic and business boundaries are dissolving. Technology and hyperspecialization are creating expanded business networks. There has never been greater access to

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global resources.

What's the result?

More virtual team building.

But how do you build traditional culture, so valuable to successful working teams, when you build up your virtual team?

The benefits of retaining a meaningful and prevalent company culture are huge. For virtual team building, there may be nothing greater.

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The rest of this article shows you how to develop a

meaningful company culture to enhance virtual team

building. The tips in this article are based research performed at Kean University, where researchers discovered that virtual teams face five core challenges:

1. Building Trust
2. Maximizing Process Efficiency
3. Feeling Like a Team (Not Isolated)
4. Remaining Interpersonal through Technology
5. Measuring Achievements (Virtual Resource Management)

Virtual Team Building via Building a Sound Company Culture

Here are the five core challenges virtual team building presents, and how to overcome them.

1. Build Trust

Building trust starts with knowing people, and the best way to do this is to meet in person.

In-person meetings

As you build your virtual team, schedule face-to-face meetings. Doing this in person is best. Your whole team won't have many chances to get together unless you organize a specific meeting to do so. Don't be afraid to spend money here, because investing in a team that *can* collaborate together and trust each other is the single most effective route toward achieving major feats together. If you can't schedule

the full team in person, use face-to-face technology
to get as close as you can to an all-team meeting.

Manifesto

In addition to having the whole team meet in person,
you may want to create a cultural manifesto. A
cultural manifesto guides every decision your team
members make. According to Workforce, having one
could help individuals and teams believe in a common
direction. Working toward that direction builds trust.

2. Maximize Process Efficiency

Your virtual teams need the right tools and
workflows in place to keep projects moving. MIT
reports that more than 40 percent of virtual team

members "always or frequently" feel frustrated or overwhelmed by disconnected and complex communication technologies.

The same article, however, also describes how with the right tools and processes in place, virtual teams can outperform those who work onsite together. This stems from having task-related processes, where tasks are distributed to specific team members. This makes everyone responsible for part of the project that is going to achieve the team's overall objective.

The right stuff

Tools can connect your people and processes. These are some of our favorite, must-have "things" at Mavenlink.

- Well-documented rules and workflows (e.g., cultural manifesto, task documentation, Gantt charts, org chart)
- Face-to-face meeting technology (e.g., Google Hangout, Facetime)
- Team member profiles (e.g., company photos, social profiles on Slack, on Google, and in our own Mavenlink app)
- Easy file sharing ability (e.g., the Mavenlink app, Slack, Google)

Regardless of the specific products you choose to enable efficient processes, remember that there are only three main measures of success your processes and tools must achieve:

- Task Completion and Performance
- Your Team's Ability to Communicate and Understand Each Other

- A Shared Sense of Teamwork (Rather Than Individual Executors)

3. Feel Like a Team, Reduce Isolation

Retaining company culture virtually is going to help you feel like a team. There are a couple ways to achieve this.

Regular one-on-ones

First, in a virtual team, schedule regular one-on-ones. Direct reports should meet with their supervisors all the way up the management ladder. This ensures you get a feel for how your subordinates and superiors are feeling, what's on their mind, and what's coming up and down the pipe. Schedule

weekly or bi-weekly one-on-ones. They don't have to be long, but they should be effective at opening dialogue for any professional concerns on either party's radar.

Create virtual social settings

Google Hangouts (or another free or paid service) is another very good way to keep in touch with your colleagues. Many professional teams enjoy at least semi-regular social gatherings. While you can't gather in person for most virtual teams, you can recreate these social settings with virtual hangouts. *The Leadership Advisor* recommends having daily video conversations with virtual team mates, so you stay connected.

4.

Twitter is being repositioned as the new water cooler, *according to* *Monster.*

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Interpersonal through Technology

Communication is key in any relationship. Today's technology lets you use a variety of visuals, animations, and punctuations to communicate your emotions. The nuances of your team's communication can greatly contribute to — and conversely, detract from — a sense of collaboration.

Show emotion

In any form of communication, whether written or verbal, really focus on listening to the needs of the person talking. Then, effectively communicate your understanding and your willingness to help. Use emoji, emoticons, and exclamation points when appropriate.

Be clear

Ambiguous language will lead to vague responses or no action being taken. When your team disagrees on a direction to take, respect that you may have to compromise, and feel comfortable doing this. The strong team will succeed, but a team full of conflicts and unwillingness to bend won't be able to.

Make an effort

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Finally, encourage positive interaction. It is better to err on the side of having a lot of communication rather than too little, in any working environment but especially virtual ones.

5. Measure Achievements and Manage Your Team

Managing a team from afar shares its own challenges. You won't be able to see your reports in the office every day and to check in on how their work is going. According to academia.edu, managers have three primary concerns about managing remote teams: communication, consensus on decisions, and hitting deadlines.

Communicate

We've already talked about communication in this post, so let's talk about it in the sense of creating consensus on decisions.

Create task-related processes

Your teams can hit their goals when big processes break down into clear tasked with associated deadlines. This means you'll need a process yourself for easily planning, launching, and monitoring the completion of major efforts.

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