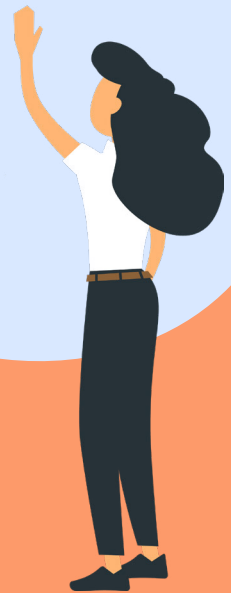


How to Adapt Company Culture for Remote Work



**A 5-STEP GUIDE TO ENSURING YOUR
WORKFORCE FEELS CONNECTED & VALUED,
REGARDLESS OF OFFICE LOCATION**

Introduction

Thrust into The Great Remote Work Experiment of 2020 without much preparation or warning, businesses and individuals around the world were in survival mode, experiencing various amounts of success and frustration in adopting legally enforced virtual work as they tried to maintain business continuity in a time of personal and professional uncertainty. Adaptation was critical to the success of each organization and individual. And through it all we learned that work is something that we do, not somewhere that we go.

After such a monumental change, it is impossible to “go back to normal.” A workforce might return to the office after the danger has passed, but the dynamics of their collaboration will forever be impacted. Elements of remote work like worker autonomy and video conferencing will permanently be integrated into our business operations, regardless of workplace location. Which prompts the question: will the future of our company’s unified success be compromised if we aren’t unified in location?

Location irrelevancy is the future of work, and the future is now. To adapt, we must remember that being in the same building does not ensure employee connection. It’s possible (and common) to feel lonely and disconnected in a sea of co-workers. Alternatively, it’s just as possible (and common) to feel loyal and engaged without ever having met in person.

The key to preventing isolation is to develop a thriving company culture in which team members feel individually recognized, valued, and committed. Remember, true culture is not about perks, proximity of team members, or the processes you have in place, it’s about inclusivity. In-office

perks like gourmet coffee bars and ping pong tables only serve to incentivize. They might symbolize what your culture represents, but too often it’s a misrepresentation or distraction from genuine core values. As you contemplate how your business will move forward post COVID-19, this is a prime opportunity to evaluate whether your “culture” is just a package of perks, or if it is the authentic personality of your brand.

In this step-by-step guide, we outline how to extend your company culture outside of the office. Each step is designed to be simple and actionable for immediate implementation, and the learning experience is capped with an interactive Virtual Culture Development Plan template for you to use as an instruction guide for next steps.

Remember, true culture is not about perks, proximity of team members, or the processes you have in place, it’s about inclusivity.

Table of Contents

STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR CULTURE	4
STEP 2: WATCH YOUR CULTURE IN ACTION	5
STEP 3: UPDATE LEADERSHIP MINDSET	7
STEP 4: DESIGN YOUR NEW WORKPLACE	8
STEP 5: SET EXPECTATIONS	10
SUMMARY & ACTION PLAN	11
VIRTUAL CULTURE DEVELOPMENT PLAN	13
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	16

Define Your Culture

The first step to building a strong culture is aligning vision, mission, and core values. This is true for all companies, regardless of where you choose to be located, so it's likely that you already have these defined. If that's the case, use this as an opportunity to revisit them and ensure they can continue to serve your brand and workforce well in the "new normal." In fact, we recommend collaboratively revisiting these three aspects of culture with your leadership teams each year to ensure they still apply to your evolving business strategy.

WHAT ARE YOUR COMPANY'S VISION AND MISSION?

Start by writing out your company's current vision and mission statements. If you don't have these already, a vision statement illustrates the impact your company will have upon the community or industry, and a mission statement serves to declare company purpose, defining the why, what, and who of your product or services. Avoid the temptation to make these too long or cerebral. For memorability and impact, simplicity is best, and will resonate more easily with your workforce.

WHAT ARE YOUR CORE VALUES?

This is a multi-step process to distilling what your company's ethos are. Think of them as qualities that make up your company's personality, an operating system for the way you are together, the way you do business, and what makes your company unique. The first step is to gather a team to collaboratively work to identify your values. As you define these words, consider questions such as:

- What traits are critical to team member success?
- What value does our organization provide to our clients, industry, and community?
- What makes us proud to work at our organization instead of with a competitor or other organization in general?
- Is there a communication style, work method, or shared objective that is unique to our team?
- Have we had any negative company culture experiences in the past that we would like to prevent?

The second step is to take a look at all of the words the team has come up with and see how to combine, prioritize, and effectively describe your core values with somewhere between 4 and 10 words, making sure they are action-oriented and easy to remember.

DO YOUR CORE VALUES REFLECT YOUR VISION AND MISSION, AND VICE VERSA?

If the answer is yes, you've completed Step 1 of defining culture. Congratulations! If the answer is no, take some time to reevaluate your vision and mission statements with these newly defined core values in

mind. Rewrite them if necessary until you can answer yes. Next, let's identify what converts them from aspirational vocabulary into an active employee experience.

STEP 1 RECAP

Define team culture with keywords and values

STEP 2

Watch Your Culture in Action

Too often, company culture goals get trapped on a motivational poster, but are rarely witnessed in daily work life. To activate your culture, don't just expect employees to miraculously sense your values when they join the team—integrate them into conversations and processes. Don't educate your team on what the values should be, allow them to experience them firsthand in the way you formulate objectives and goals, collaboratively develop ideas, and in the way you decide who to work with.

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL ALIGNMENT

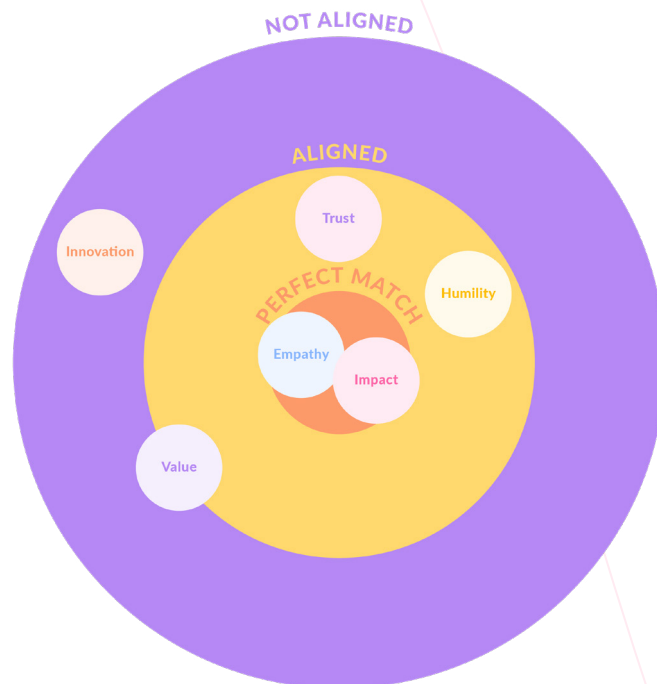
Internally

Ask the team to share specific examples of how team members live the culture. This can be incorporated into a regular practice of sharing culture being lived in a weekly newsletter, shoutouts in a regular team call, or a dedicated channel in Zoom Chat, Slack, or Microsoft Teams. Recurring examples help employees feel valued, appreciated and connected, and clarify the model for your company's core values. For example, we were impressed when we heard that one of our clients, Skillshare, combine and activate their key values of *Transparency* and *Wellness* by regularly hosting creative learning courses, virtual meditation sessions, and an "WFH AMA" chat channel for team members that are new to remote worker to glean advice about work-life balance from co-workers who are veteran work-from-homers.

Externally

Ask the team to share specific examples of external stakeholders like customers, partners, and vendors who align and exemplify your core values. Use these criteria as your North Star, giving the team more insight and decision-making power for organizations and individuals that are a good match to work with.

For example, here is a [Mural](#) that our team uses here at Distribute Consulting to visualize and measure the alignment of an idea to our culture. There are so many uses for it, such as screening a job applicant, evaluating a product idea, or screening a prospective B2B partner.






HOW TO MONITOR CULTURE VIRTUALLY

In a virtual environment, monitoring culture becomes more nuanced. When you no longer rely on environmental cues of people occupying the same physical space, leaders must more intentionally help team members feel appreciated and included.

Asking the right questions, and understanding virtual behavior are paramount to success, doing so in both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (not happening at the same time) communications.

COMMON SIGNS CULTURE IS NOT SUPPORTING REMOTE WORK

- 
Inconsistency - When surveyed, employees describe and give examples of company culture differently.
- 
Isolation - Individuals indicate they feel alone, are blocked in productivity, or are acting aloof or disengaged.
- 
Lack of trust and transparency - Leaders rely on micromanagement to supervise performance, question how much or when people are working, and generally lack empathy for the work-life balance of their team.

CAN YOU REGULARLY SEE EXAMPLES OF YOUR CULTURE IN DAILY OPERATIONS?

If so, you've completed Step 2 of activating your culture. If not, take a step back and check that you and your leadership team are leading by example. Work to identify where the breakdown is happening so you know where to focus some extra help. In Step 3, we'll update management methods to enable workers to activate the company culture individually.

STEP 2 RECAP

See culture in action during meetings and collaborative conversations

Update Leadership Mindset

In a virtual environment, leadership takes a new form. Instead of supervising only productivity, managers need to focus on results, while supporting productivity with trust, communication, and clear expectations. In the ideal case, managers empower and hold individuals accountable to doing their best work with fewer distractions, while focusing on department success and development. Doing so empowers the workers to self-manage their daily tasks, which promotes intrinsic motivation and less reactivity.

CREATING A RESULTS-ORIENTED ENVIRONMENT

For many businesses, 9-to-5 days in a centralized office are now extinct. Therefore, job performance cannot be assessed based on visual cues like arriving early or working in a cubicle through lunch. Creating and communicating clear objectives and key results (OKRs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) for your team members to achieve is foundational to a productive remote culture. This structure sets clear expectations for success, allowing individuals to independently track and report their productivity, and uniquely identify ways of embodying company culture.

AUTONOMY VS. ABANDONMENT

In supportive leadership, there is a big difference between giving someone an assignment and mentoring them through the process. You might not be accessible geographically, but stay “close” with consistent communication, encouragement, and empathy, without taking away control from the individual. Discuss work styles, resources, support needs, and check in on KPIs and OKRs with your team in 1:1’s so you have a clear understanding of how you can empower individuals to be more autonomous. Abandonment is a sure-fire way to sabotage company culture by putting employees at risk for feeling demeaned and under-appreciated.

BUILDING TRUST VIRTUALLY

When you can’t see someone across the room, it’s even more important to stay “visible” with frequent, transparent communication. Simple things like showing up on time to video calls, being available online when you say you will be, delivering work on time, or vulnerably discussing challenges or successes go a really long way in a virtual environment. But those are just the basics to being a good remote team member. As a manager, go above and beyond to build a trusting relationship by building an individual authentic connection and giving them more 1:1 time to witness cultural values in action. Pay attention, noting important milestones, interests, personal goals, and other special tidbits about your team members, making for genuine conversation that contributes to a trusting relationship. And most importantly, lead by example, sharing your own fears, failures, and challenges in activating company culture.

HAS THE MINDSET OF YOUR LEADERSHIP UPDATED FROM CONTROL TO COMPASSION?

Then you're ready to move on to Step 4, during which we'll move culture-building activities out of the break room by designing virtual gathering places for your team.

STEP 3 RECAP

Update leadership mindset to prioritize trust and enablement

STEP 4

Design Your New Workplace

Just because employees may not be coming into the office doesn't mean they don't need a "place" to gather and interact. If anything, that location and engagement is more important than ever to prevent remote worker isolation. But who said that place has to be physical? Virtual workplaces can be just as dynamic, insightful, and productive as colocated offices, giving team members that same "vibe" of our company culture when they are present. Designing a virtual workplace strategy consists of creating neutral, digital locations with software and processes that are equally accessible from the office as they are from a home or mobile office. How you choose to design your virtual workplace will play a big role in how connected and dedicated employees feel to the team and organizational success.

MAKING SPACE FOR CONNECTION

The break room water cooler may be a thing of the past, but the need for interpersonal chats aren't. With technology, it's now both harder and easier than ever to stay connected, so it's critical to use your core values to guide the creation of spaces for human-to-human connection. Instead of bricks and mortar, "structures" are built with meeting schedules, chat channels, and even on-site events, for both personal and work-related topics. For example, if one of your core values has to do with learning and curiosity, schedule a roundtable call for team members to review an interesting article each week. Or if you want to nurture innovation, hold a virtual expo where each employee presents a new, creative product idea (that may or may not be relevant to your business). If all else fails, creating a buddy system where employees regularly schedule a virtual coffee date or lunch with a random member of the team is a great way to foster structured, casual, connection between team members, leading to increased trust and well-being.



@SpaceIQ1: "This whole #WFH thing has the SpaceIQ team wiggling out" 27 March 2020, 11:54 a.m. Tweet.

INTEGRATING CORE VALUES INTO WORKFLOWS

When core values aren't painted on a common conference room wall, you have to be even more diligent and creative with how you encourage your team to continually be aware of performance expectations. Create awareness by discussing each value during onboarding, pointing out examples during training, then creating a celebration system when anyone spots the values in action during their workdays. You could even designate a chat channel for each value where team members can share examples of values being lived, or including values on all meeting agendas and performance feedback so your team is reminded of them to guide decision making and communication.

DO YOU HAVE A VIRTUAL WORKPLACE THAT IS EASY TO ACCESS AND HOSTS EXAMPLES OF YOUR COMPANY CULTURE?

Great! Last but not least, it's time for Step 5, which explores how to measure and monitor the strength of your location-irrelevant company culture long-term.

STEP 4 RECAP

Design a virtual workplace by creating clear locations for engagement

Set Expectations

Now that you've put in the hard work of defining your culture, watching it in action, updating your leadership mindset, and designing your workplace, it's time to make it sustainable by setting expectations with the team for how culture will be upheld and how they can maintain and elevate connectedness.

SIGNS OF HEALTHY VIRTUAL CULTURE

When team members are engaged with and committed to your core values, they feel connected and supported to do their best work, in a trusting and open team environment. This loyalty is as easy to recognize virtually as it is physically, if you know what to look for:

- **Intrinsic Motivation** - If team members are proposing ideas and solutions without being prompted or rewarded, it proves that they are eager to give back to a company they feel gives to them.
- **External Visibility** - If your culture is strong enough, it will overflow into external interactions and reward you with receiving compliments and referrals from clients or vendors, or job applications citing resonance with your culture as reason for applying.
- **Employee Behavior** - You may not have employees in the office, but you'll still be able to see if they're happy in their work by seeing positive behavior (like smiling, laughing, and meaningful small talk) whenever you get on a video conference.
- **Workforce Loyalty** - When you can take your job with you, your employees don't need to leave; when your team feels connected to the culture, they don't want to leave, so you'll see low turnover rates. In the meantime, you'll hear positive feedback about experience during performance reviews.
- **Personal Experience** - If you feel safe, trusted, and valued in your role, it's more likely that your coworkers do, too.

CADENCE FOR REVISITING CULTURE

Now that you've translated your culture to virtual and you're trying it on for size, make a commitment to adjusting as necessary, but give it a timeline. Make sure that once you've written down your values and communicated them to the team, you've opened the floor to hear any concerns or objections, giving yourself permission to make edits for alignment, but communicating clearly when the moment has come to commit to the stated values. Culture is ever evolving and should be revisited at least once per year to ensure strategic alignment, in the meantime pay attention to cues and feedback from the team, if you see signs of misalignment, isolation, or disengagement, you'll want to address cultural concerns more immediately. Involving the team in the evolution of your culture will help them feel valued and more connected to the company's success.

CAN YOU RECOGNIZE A VIRTUAL RED FLAG FOR THE DETERIORATION OF EACH OF YOUR CULTURE VALUES?

Congratulations! You now have a thriving, accessible company culture that isn't dependent on any location to feel connected to!

STEP 5 RECAP

Set expectations by articulating success metrics for your culture

Summary & Action Plan

Adapting your company culture to properly support remote work is one of the most important things you can do to set your company up for sustainable work-from-home success, or just the future of work in general. You've made the right decision to prioritize building a strong employee experience that will extend outside of the office, and you will certainly see the benefits within your company and employees long-term. This initiative prioritizes that you're a modern company who embraces change and believes in employee well-being, putting you on the path to join a growing list of organizations that are leveraging remote work as an integral pillar of their business strategy.

Soon you'll see signs that your culture is improving, and it's worth noting that even the strongest cultures can find ways to improve. If you pay attention, ask the right questions, and look for virtual cues, you'll find that your employees' performance, engagement, and general well-being are increasing. If this exercise signaled the start of a full cultural overhaul, you may also find that some employees are misaligned with the company mission, vision, and values. In this case, you'll be better equipped to make decisions on how these members fit into the organization, and will be all the more prepared to hire future culture-additive employees who will thrive in your organization, regardless of their geographic location.

5 STEPS AND KEY ACTION ITEMS TO TRANSLATE CULTURE TO A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT:

- Step 1: Define team culture with keywords and values
- Step 2: Watch culture in action during meetings and collaborative conversations
- Step 3: Update leadership mindset to prioritize trust and enablement
- Step 4: Design a virtual workplace by creating clear locations for engagement
- Step 5: Set expectations by articulating success metrics for your culture

BUILD AN ACTION PLAN TO DEVELOP YOUR VIRTUAL CULTURE

To get you started with implementation, we've created an action-oriented worksheet to help guide you through the process of translating culture for a virtual environment. With just a few hours of focused energy and collaboration from key stakeholders, you will be well on your way to developing your virtual culture.

Virtual Culture Development Plan

A step-by-step template for adapting your company culture to be location-irrelevant.

STEP 1: DEFINE

What are the vision, mission, and values of your organization?

Vision	
Mission	
Values	

STEP 2: ACTION

When working remotely, how does your team regularly experience and witness the vision, mission, and values in their day-to-day processes?

Daily	
Weekly	
Monthly	
Quarterly	

STEP 3: LEADERSHIP MINDSET

What are some leadership methods or rituals that encourage workers to autonomously apply your vision, mission, and values to their tasks and work style?

(Think about: communication styles, goal setting, infrastructure, meetings, teamwork, atmosphere, decision making, performance standards, rewards and benefits, etc.)

Vision	
Mission	
Values	

STEP 4: VIRTUAL WORKPLACE

What software, email address, or url do your team members virtually go to for each of the following task types? Do those locations and navigation processes feel simple and unified?

Reporting + Status Updates		Innovation + Idea Proposals	
Project Feedback		IT Troubleshooting	
Decision Making		Personal Conversations	
Company Announcements		Goal Celebrations	
Company Policy Inquiry		Human Resource Complaint	

STEP 5: EXPECTATIONS

Set success metrics by identifying a KPI and red flag for each cultural value that managers and mentors can use for measurement.

Value	Key Performance Indicator	Red Flag Warning
Vision		
Mission		
Value 1:		
Value 2:		
Value 3:		
Value 4:		
Value 5:		
Value 6:		

About the Authors



Distribute Consulting

Distribute Consulting is the world's foremost thought leader and consulting firm specializing exclusively in remote work. Our team of international telework experts help businesses optimize virtual workforces to solve corporate and socioeconomic concerns. Through webinars, sprints, consultations, and in-house roles, we eliminate virtual worker discrimination, prevent policy retraction, increase remote job accessibility, train distributed leaders, and design economic initiatives.

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Zoom

Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (NASDAQ: ZM) brings teams together to get more done in a frictionless and secure video environment. Our easy, reliable, and innovative video-first unified communications platform provides video meetings, voice, webinars, and chat across desktops, phones, mobile devices, and conference room systems. Zoom helps enterprises create elevated experiences with leading business app integrations and developer tools to create customized workflows. Founded in 2011, Zoom is headquartered in San Jose, California, with offices around the world. Visit zoom.com and follow [@zoom_us](https://twitter.com/zoom_us).