

The positive impact of COVID-19 on culture

By Shane Michael Hatton, Leadership Coach



- Recent of managers examines how COVID-19 and working from home have influenced the culture in their organisation and team.
- Seventy-five per cent of managers rated their organisation's culture as very good or excellent despite the challenging times.
- Tighter restrictions have also forced people to think more creatively about the informal ways in which to connect and collaborate with fellow team members.



Culture is the unseen competitive advantage that sets great organisations apart. So as the dust begins to settle from two years in a global pandemic and we step back to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on company culture, is it all bad news for leaders?

In a McCrindle study we commissioned of 1,000 Australian managers, we asked them to share how they believe COVID-19 and working from home have influenced the culture in their organisation and team. It turns out there is some good news, with nearly two-thirds of Australian managers saying the pandemic has had a massive or moderate *positive* impact on culture.

While COVID-19 has undoubtedly brought many unique challenges, there appears to be a silver lining. When asked to evaluate the culture of their organisation, 75 per cent of managers rated their organisation's culture as very good or excellent despite the challenging times

We asked managers to share what they believe are the most important ingredients for creating a healthy culture in an organisation. When looking at their top five responses it's possible to see how the effects of the pandemic could bring about some positive outcomes for teams.

1. Collaboration and teamwork (53%)

During the pandemic, geographically dispersed teams have had the opportunity to connect more frequently and check-in without the additional expenses of travel and meeting in person. Tighter restrictions have also forced people to think more creatively about the informal ways in which to connect and collaborate with fellow team members. As a result, teams are finding new and more inclusive ways to work together across teams, locations, and departments to achieve goals.

2. Leaders are visible and approachable (52%)

Forty-eight per cent of managers said that absent or disconnected leaders are key contributors to unhealthy culture in an organisation. The last two years highlighted the importance of leaders being present to lead. Some organisations have gathered for the first time ever collectively to hear from their leaders, bringing those at the top down to the front lines of the business. Many senior leaders have shared more vulnerably as they join online town halls from a living room rather than a stage, all the while home-schooling children or coworking with other family members. As leaders share more frequently and openly, they become more relatable and credible.

3. Open communication and feedback (52%)

Prior to the pandemic, Microsoft Teams had roughly 32 million active daily users. [This figure now exceeds 145 million](#). Ask anyone that has spent the last two years in online meetings and that wouldn't be surprising to learn. During the pandemic, leaders have managed the tension of needing to communicate rapidly changing priorities while at the same time avoiding that message from getting lost in the noise of information. This tension has caused many leaders to reflect on best practices in organisation-wide communication.

4. Trusting relationships (50%)

As more people began working remotely during the pandemic the visibility of team members decreased. Leaders could no longer see people at their desks working. Managers were required to put an increased emphasis on new indicators of performance. Employee visibility and output shifted to an emphasis on autonomy and outcomes-based measures. This shift requires a high degree of trust that team members will achieve their goals and results in much less micromanaging from leaders, which two-thirds of managers in our study said contributes to creating a healthy culture in remote work.

5. Clear and realistic workload expectations (49%)

The global pandemic initiated a period of global re-evaluation. As employees set up offices at home during tough restrictions, the line between work and home became increasingly blurred causing people to personally evaluate and speak up about more clear and realistic workload expectations. Organisations were forced to evaluate their strategic priorities and any theoretical discussion around mental health and wellbeing was put to the test. As a result, businesses that thrived created greater flexibility to balance work and home life, which sixty-seven per cent of managers said was the most important action for creating a healthy culture in remote work.

Despite the very real challenges that COVID-19 has created, we can't be too quick to dismiss the positive impacts of remote working and COVID-19 on team and organisational culture. If it's nothing more than managers trusting a little more deeply and communicating a little more clearly and regularly then it is still progress worth taking time to recognise.

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