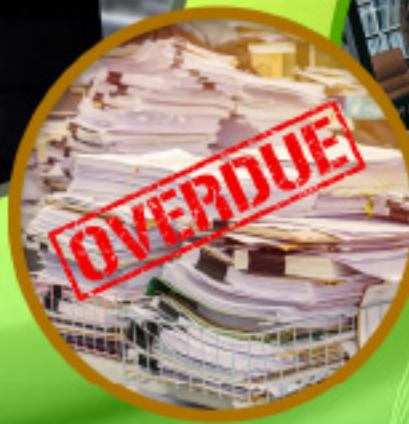





HUNTE WILLIAMS

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS NEWSLETTER

Why didn't the 'Remote-Work Model' work for my Company?



Let's be honest for a moment; where there is forced transition, there is no way that all companies will have optimal results. There has been no real rest from the stress or the additional pressures and demands on all of us over the past few months. In fact, stress levels are higher than ever right now. As a Manager or business owner, the frustration this can bring may feel unbearable at times. As a result, it can hold many of us back from feeling like remote working is an ideal way forward in the future.



The trend right now is for companies to find ways to switch to partially or fully remote ways of work. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, companies have been forced to make changes that many have resisted for years. If we really stopped to think about it, what we essentially did was force a new modus operandi onto a workforce whose mindset and culture were not given time to transition. There was no strategic transformation period, no step by step implementation process to help propel change.

Not all employees who were allowed to work remotely stepped into their new role and did it well. There were some who could not be found at times when needed, did not deliver on deadlines and whose overall performance and productivity levels dropped at a time when you needed the additional support and team work. Some teams became distant, silent, non-cohesive, maybe even despondent.

According to Zach Dubin in a recent article for Forbes.com, remote working reveals a Company's culture. He corrects the theory that these signs are as a result of remote work killing a Company's culture and attempts to help answer the question of whether it will eventually cause the "decay" of work culture¹. In his article, he interviews Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks, a Professor of Management and Organizations at the University of Michigan, who offers three main points to assist in combatting what may appear to be the downfall of work culture as a result of remote work.

His first bit of advice is that, despite the present Pandemic, it is important to have face to face interaction. Whilst we understand that this is not currently advisable on a physical level, face to face interaction is an important step in the remote-work process. When team members communicate face to face, they are able to learn each other's patterns and behaviours, thus making it easier for teams to relate.

He suggests that when having meetings online, do not encourage participants to take off their video; let everyone be able to look at each other as they speak. This allows team members to be able to pick up better on sarcasm or on how their colleagues really feel about the ideas being presented. It opens the door for more honest interaction and brings a sense of unity. Employees may feel more comfortable about making positive contributions to the meeting. According to Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks "non-verbal cues is one of the biggest drivers of collective intelligence"² and they should not be ignored.

Be direct about the positive guidelines that you want to make up the work culture at your organization and then reinforce them. Be intentional about how you want the work culture of your Company to develop. Do not allow it to grow out of control by not taking charge. Make it clear to your employees, remind them of it and commend behaviour that follows it.

Ensure that you create formal policies and set KPIs around them, to make it easier to develop methods of reward and recognition to help motivate the change you want to see. You do not have to give up on the remote working model just because it did not work well for you the first time. You simply need to be more intentional about it and create the culture and work flow you need to help your organization grow.

^{1&2} "Turn Remote Work from Culture Killer to Culture Creator" by Zack Dubin, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/servicenow/2020/08/28/turn-remote-work-from-culture-killer-to-culture-creator/amp/>

Please note that the information contained herein is not exhaustive on this topic. For further information and guidance, please contact us at kbobb@huntewill.com (1-868-360-6278).