

Can't delegate the culture

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We have hurtled into the future of work in the last few months. For many the workplace has ceased to be the office and we have instead participated in a giant pilot of home working

Some people can't wait for it to get back to "normal". Most never want it to go back exactly to that pre-Covid norm. Most of us in fact *prefer* working at home to being in the office, at least some of the time. Forbes reports that according to [Qualtrics](#), workers are in no rush to return to their old desks. Instead three out of five workers in the U.S., U.K. and Australia, who switched to remote working, say they prefer working from home. Just one in four workers under the age of 55 actually wants to go back to the office.

Of those who are still working from home after the switch, the majority (59%) want to

permanently switch to a form of blended work that allows working both in the office and at home.

Companies seem to have responded to this cultural shift. Some 41% of global respondents to the survey said their companies are now giving staff the option to work remotely some of the time.

How do we manage workplace culture if the culture of the workplace is no longer just the office?

Some businesses have regarded the workplace culture as just that. Something that can be controlled and monitored and nourished *inside* the office. So, businesses might paint corporate values on the walls, or in the lifts. They will offer sweets or a banana for snacking. The meeting rooms may contain beanbags to encourage creativity.

Frankly these moves were never enough to deliver a good culture. Whilst a coat of paint and a decent carpet can spruce up atmosphere, unless the emotional culture is right then everything else is masking reality.

Then there's office rituals. When I started out in media an afternoon ritual was often a game of cricket in the office. This notion of fun was not my notion of fun. This fun ritual made me feel excluded, not included. At least virtual online games are easier to swerve. I only fitted in when I moved to a business that was full of diverse types of people.

As we move to what many think will be a more hybrid office/home working pattern there are new challenges, and new opportunities to get culture right. To make sure that it is inclusive, that everyone has a sense of ownership, shared vision and empowerment.

This is not simple. It is not something that any leader should delegate to the people team, or specialist department. In perhaps every other aspect of the CEO's job a specialist, experienced, senior expert can deliver strategic advice and actionable tactics. A great CEO will always keep culture as their own deliverable and their own responsibility.

We are in uncharted waters. The social capital that has glued the workplace together in our sector has been largely earned through interactions in the workplace together. As we move to a situation where there are new norms the challenges multiply, and so do the opportunities.

Some careers have been built in the past in media and advertising on the golf course or in the pub. This has held back non golfers and light drinkers. Businesses with great cultures have reaped the rewards in terms of diversity of thinking because golf has not been the main path to promotion.

If casual encounters or serendipitous meetings become less likely in the future everyone will need to play a part in creating a positive inclusive culture where talent of every kind is encouraged, led in person by the CEO.

This article was originally posted [here](#) in Campaign Magazine.