

How to win at company culture, despite the pandemic

By [Enid Lizamore](#)

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It's no secret that Covid-19 has completely changed our world of work. A larger emphasis on social distancing, workplace transformation, digitalisation, employee experience, and building a culture for a future world of work is becoming more and more essential.



Source: bolina – [123RF.com](#)

The introduction of the third wave in South Africa, although challenging, should not act as a deterrent to sustaining our company culture – which in this case is defined as “what our leaders and employees say and do that is unique to our company and causes our people to thrive”.

Articles such as the recent global Quartz study, which includes South Africa, highlights that up to 37% of people report an increase in company culture. The top reason for this is that employees feel an increase in communication, which allows them to feel a lot more connected. The second contributing factor was related to the flexibility that accompanied remote working.

A further sentiment survey conducted on Santam employees confirmed this, as Santam employees felt a lot more connected to their line managers and they reported to have been more productive despite having to work remotely. More recent engagement and pulse surveys conducted have shown that introducing further engagements and touchpoints within the employee life cycle, specifically when onboarding an employee, will ensure increased brand association, clarity of output, and a commitment to deliver on business objectives.

A culture that mirrors a brand's values and behaviour helps build a solid foundation and a clear path to success. In order to maintain this, there are certain areas that must constantly be addressed and reviewed, some of which include:

- Increased levels of communications: Networking is constrained given the impacts of remote working which makes it more challenging to learn about the culture and establish partnerships and relationships. What helps us thrive is that different business leaders across Santam schedules deliberate communication and engagement sessions with

employees to create more awareness and a deeper connection to the company's brand purpose – which then acts as an anchor during any tough/changing times.

- Structuring the organisation and introducing technology that enables collaboration, experimentation, reinvention, and recovery. By embracing digital solutions, we will create more fluid, engaged, and integrated teams.
- A system of recognition, acknowledgement and reward for behaviours aligned to our values and that demonstrate our brand promise.
- Diversity and inclusion initiatives that encourage internal employee growth and mentorship; and a holistic approach to employee experiences no matter where they are located.
- The elevation of well-being is also of utmost importance - not as something that balances performance, but rather as something that is integral to it.



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The truth is that hybrid working isn't just changing the way we work. It's also changing the relationship we have with work. A "new social contract" is required as we build healthy models for hybrid and blended ways of working, that integrates the demands of both employee's personal and professional lives.

Thus, empathy is vital to bringing out the best in everyone in a hybrid workplace. It's incumbent on every people leader to get to know their employees' unique situation and experience, so they can offer the right support and encouragement.

Understanding the context our people are faced with should guide the way we engage and re-create a 'workplace' to ensure that every person aims to be their best, and deliver on their exceptional best, despite the rapid change we go through on a continuous basis.

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