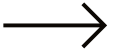


THE FUTURE OF THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Reimagining how you engage
your employees in 2021

PURE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP



FOREWORD

Over the last ten months employers have had to quickly re-evaluate how they engage with their staff. With the news and information relating to COVID-19 ever-changing and this affecting companies in various ways, organisations have had to work hard to build trust with their employees and to communicate effectively with them in a way that cuts through the increased digital noise.

Leaders are now speaking to a different employee audience than a year ago. An audience who has spent the last year adopting new behaviours and a differing mindset, adapting to new home routines and likely building a different sentiment towards their employer. These are employees that now have different needs and beliefs to a year ago, increasingly wanting to work for a company that has a broader purpose - a more conscious culture of looking after their people and the planet. Therefore, employee wellbeing must become a greater priority as companies look to address the new work/life balance, upskilling needs and the mental health impact around remote working.

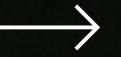
Flexible and hybrid working patterns also rose to the top of the agenda in 2020, prompting employers to look again at their long-held attitudes around these styles of working. As we see many companies announce that they will move permanently to a hybrid workplace model, organisations will have to consider how they cultivate their culture, building a communications strategy which doesn't create silos, boundaries and discontentment between the two audiences.

Furthermore, in 2020 we saw reward and recognition slip to the bottom of the pile, as companies adopted a 'lights on' approach to get through the pandemic. Companies who traditionally rewarded employees with bonuses, Christmas parties or awards were forced to rethink how they can achieve their sales targets and increase productivity through other motivational techniques, understanding what drives and retains their employees beyond remuneration and face-to-face activities.

As we move into 2021, leaders have an amazing opportunity to shape their 'next normal', based on how their staff really operate and want to be engaged. By truly understanding their employees adapting mindsets, their new work patterns and how they now want to consume content, they will be able to nurture, lead, captivate and build trust within their community of people - creating a tribe that has a shared interest in a common purpose and goal.

Charlotte Gentry
Founder & CEO, Pure Communications Group

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WELLNESS IN A PANDEMIC: SUPPORTING THE FUTURE HYBRID WORKPLACE

Businesses have long known that wellness in the workplace needs to be a priority. There is no question that the pandemic will have affected employees’ emotional and physical states in various ways including stress, disengagement and loneliness. But with companies having had to navigate constant change and disruption, often staff wellbeing has fallen down the list of priorities, as companies operate on reduced headcounts and reduced budgets. As we see a more permanent shift towards the hybrid workplace becoming the norm, are companies readjusting their wellness strategy in line with this new model?

With a hybrid workplace comes different working styles, needs and emotions. Remote workers may find the lines blurred between personal and professional, often working longer hours in place of their commute time, leading to higher risk of burnout. Organisational trust may also differ between the two audiences, with virtual employees feeling out of the loop from in-office conversations, leading to greater anxiety and stress. New starters joining remotely may feel lonely and disengaged from the offset, unsure of how to navigate their new role in a virtual workplace. Therefore, as we move through this year and companies adopt a more permanent hybrid approach, they will find their previous corporate wellness strategy has been disrupted and will need to rebuild a programme that looks after both audiences equally, whilst addressing their very different needs.

Whilst digital communications are undoubtedly a way to convey a message to both audiences, companies will need to pay as much attention to the human element as the tech element. Leaders will need to redefine what wellness means in a virtual environment. Adding a virtual layer to in-office wellness activities won't be enough. Companies will need to understand the behaviours, emotions, needs and touchpoints of each audience if they are to deliver a wellness strategy that fully supports a hybrid model. By fully understanding this, employers will avoid two organisational cultures emerging, where the in-office employees benefit from face-to-face wellness activities and remote employees feel increasingly disengaged and isolated.

Healthy cook-alongs, monthly team fitness challenges, recipe sharing and letterbox wellness kits are all simple ways for a company to bring wellbeing elements to a hybrid workplace. Overlaid with a communications campaign that could include fitness tips, meditation recommendations, stress management workshops and live broadcasts from professionals around key topics.

Assigning ownership of the wellness strategy will be a key factor in its success. Whilst larger firms may have fixed wellbeing officer roles that oversee the plan, smaller companies may have previously taken a more fluid and less strategic approach. By ensuring continued accountability throughout any disruptions, organisations are more likely to see motivation, engagement and enjoyment of work improve and in turn a happier and healthier employee.



THE FUTURE OF THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE: MOVING AWAY FROM A 'ONE SIZE FITS ALL' APPROACH

The employee experience (EX), defined as the employee perception of the way in which a company interacts with them from the day they're hired to the day they exit the business, has for many individuals dramatically changed across the last ten months. Employees may have previously undergone conventional onboarding, generic training modules, and standard HR processes at their workplace, but in 2020 this all changed. Employees experienced more flexible working approaches, furlough, job sharing, job role adaptations, colleague redundancies and virtual working - all of which shaped not only their sentiment towards their employer brand, but their overall employee experience.

Customer experience (CX) is always top of the list for any brand, usually with a highly targeted approach as they look to drive loyalty and advocacy of their service or product. But whilst CX and EX are intrinsically linked, often the individual employee experience is overlooked in comparison. Many blanket initiatives that are rolled out focus on the needs of the business or HR requirements and rarely on the individual employee experience. Does it create value for the employee? Does the supporting communication align with their needs? Does the initiative excite the employee to work there? If companies were to focus more on how they shape their employee experience, they would be more likely to attract and retain better talent, in turn driving greater business gains.

Pre-pandemic data previously gathered from employee engagement surveys and exit interviews will now be obsolete as companies will have to relook at what they are now asking to better help them understand their new employee experience. Leaders will need to assess the touch points throughout an employee's tenure which may affect their sentiment towards the organisation, planning where they can make an impact and deliver micro experiences. For instance, employees who start their role in a virtual capacity will receive a different experience to a new in-office worker, requiring more regular communication, a greater focus on integrating into a new team and increased collaboration opportunities. Disengaged employees may need more personalised training opportunities focused on their individual career progression whilst leaders will also need to evaluate the relevance of each initiative or communications for the different types of workers including fully virtual, in-office, hybrid, part-time and full-time roles.



By maximising micro-experiences across all channels, companies can create more engaging moments for their employees

THE NEXT GENERATION OF COMPANY CULTURE: BUILDING AN EVEN STRONGER TEAM IN 2021



It is no accident that companies like Google have a fantastic company culture. They will have spent time understanding the needs of their employees, how they like to communicate, what motivates them, how the pandemic has affected them, and nurturing trust and transparency within the organisation.

2020 was a litmus test for company culture. Companies who had previously relied on pub drinks, summer parties or lunchtime table tennis matches were quickly faced with the challenge of maintaining their face-to-face company culture in a virtual environment. Organisations which had traditionally built a culture of wellness had to work hard to sustain this in an online world, making sure they were looking after the emotional and physical wellbeing of both their furloughed and working employees. In addition, companies with innovation embedded into their organisation had to quickly assess whether their employees had the tools and technologies to foster this innovation remotely, ensuring there would be no risk of this culture dissolving.

Authenticity also became the buzzword of the year, as individuals craved content that was more 'human', highlighted by the overwhelming uptake of TikTok and its user generated content. Individuals also adopted more ethical behaviours, looking to brands with purpose, which translated into an expectation that their employers will adopt these similar values as part of their conscious culture.

No longer can CSR just be something to which organisations pay lip service. Employees will expect it to be fully ingrained in their company culture, cross-departmentally and with employees given opportunities to individually make an impact. This purpose will need to be woven into communication strategies, highlighting to both internal and external audiences a company's solid action plan around their CSR goals.

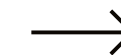
Whilst companies plan for a permanent hybrid or fully virtual workplace model, leaders will have to work to continue to instil an excellent culture. Companies should look to reinforce their values, vision and purpose which may have been lost in the past year. Equally for many companies, this may be the time to reassess their values. Do they match how the company will be structured post pandemic? Will employees feel connected to them? As the voice of the employee only becomes stronger around what they expect from their employer, now will be a pivotal time for companies to foster their future company culture to help drive organisational growth.

As greater emphasis is placed on a remote working world, organisations need to identify and reassess what makes their company a great place to work.



No longer can CSR just be something to which organisations pay lip service. Employees will expect it to be fully ingrained in their company culture, cross-departmentally and with employees given opportunities to individually make an impact.

THE CHANGING FACE OF REWARD AND RECOGNITION: REIMAGINING HOW YOU MOTIVATE STAFF IN 2021



For many organisations pay increases or bonuses are off the table for 2021, with companies forced to rethink how they can achieve their targets through other motivational techniques. Some may have traditionally focused on creating rewarding experiences, offering corporate retreats, incentive travel, award ceremonies or summer and Christmas parties as a way to reward their employees throughout the year. Whilst some may have offered exceptional employee benefits which are no longer deemed relevant in the employee's home environment. This new landscape requires leaders to now have big picture thinking as they plot out long-term employee reward and recognition programmes that will still be relevant in a post-pandemic environment.

So how do you galvanise a workforce who are used to financial incentives and face-to-face experiences as part of their corporate reward and recognition programme? Whilst incentive travel experiences can't be replaced until post pandemic, there are still multiple ways a company can reward and recognise staff whilst they're operating a remote workplace. Curated at-home events for top performers could include virtual private dining with a top chef, a luxury live streamed shopping experience or tickets to an exclusive online theatre production. Virtual celebrations can also go beyond a standard Zoom webinar and offer immersive entertainment, on-the-spot prizes and personalised recognition throughout.

And it isn't just experiences that can be treated as an employee reward. The pandemic has highlighted how people desire more flexibility around working hours and leave arrangements. Will we therefore see a move to companies increasingly offering more holiday or shorter work weeks as a benefit? Equally, as job security becomes more important for employees and they are often having to perform roles beyond their remit, bespoke training opportunities can and should be increasingly used as a reward. Whilst some employee benefits such as private health insurance may have been largely unaffected by the pandemic, many perks such as discounted gym memberships have become inactive. Therefore, companies may have to overhaul their benefits in line with employees' new expectations. Health and wellbeing are likely to be more at the forefront with access to virtual gym class memberships, meditation app subscriptions or online health workshops increasingly seen as an employee benefit.

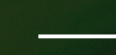
Virtual reward platforms will increasingly be used as an effective way to boost peer-to-peer recognition and will have a lifespan well beyond the pandemic. These tools allow top performance to translate to prizes, from digital gift cards to high-ticket items such as travel experiences when the restrictions allow.

With any change to a reward or recognition programme, internal communications will need to be closely aligned. This includes the launch of new programmes, teaser comms for the incentives through to announcing the top performers – this will be integral to their success.



As job security becomes more important for employees and they are often having to perform roles beyond their remit, bespoke training opportunities can and should be increasingly used as a reward

SHIFTING EMPLOYEES FROM A 'LIGHTS ON' MENTALITY TO A GROWTH MINDSET



2020 was the year of innovation. Many companies completely shifted their service offering, leapfrogging to their destination within a matter of days/weeks. Local retailers moved into e-commerce, pubs rebranded as bottle shops and we saw a rise in direct-to-consumer from food and drink manufacturers who rapidly needed to find new channels of distribution - all innovating to survive.

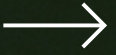
But for many companies in sectors heavily affected by the pandemic, adopting a 'lights on' approach was the only route. With swathes of employees furloughed, company websites and social media channels stayed still, external comms halted and revenue goals were quickly dissolved. However, as we move into this new year and the vaccination is rolled out, signalling that we may see some slow movement towards more face-to-face activity, how do we shift our employees from a business continuity to a growth mindset?

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella is said to have spent his first few months in role instilling a 'learn it all' rather than a 'know it all' culture. Google is also known for achieving many of their great successes by fostering an environment of learning. By creating a culture of continuous learning, you are not only investing in your employee's knowledge and instilling confidence in them, but you are giving them the tools to manage future change and operate with agility. Learning can often be approached begrudgingly as employees find it an arduous and dull task beyond their day job. Therefore, inspire them with peer-to-peer learning, external training for personal growth and different mediums and activities so they increasingly have an appetite for discovery.

Create ways to engage your employees in your growth strategy by gathering their input; are their customers' needs shifting? Have they identified any new opportunity areas? Do they feel they have the right skill sets for this new landscape? And if they don't feel they have the right skill sets, how can you as a company support them with their personal and professional growth.

Organisations now have the opportunity to re-architect their future workplace as they roll out new initiatives in answer to their new style of working. This can encompass building a culture of innovation from the day an employee starts with a company to the day they leave, adopting a learning environment and providing the tools, technologies and communications that will help instil a growth mindset.

Digital transformation programmes will open the door to a culture of innovation, allowing for greater agility and an increased understanding of your employees



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BUILDING TRUST: COMMUNICATING AUTHENTICALLY IN A CONTINUALLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Employer brands have increasingly been in the limelight during the pandemic as employees watched how their company dealt with the disruption. Did they operate with integrity? Did they still create opportunities for personal growth? Did they understand the importance of wellbeing? All of these factors contributed to how the employee perceived their company - whether they felt loyal to it and more importantly, whether they trusted it. →

Whilst trust is reported to have increased during the pandemic due to most companies being more proactive with their employee messaging, transforming their technology solutions and checking in more regularly with their staff, some companies haven't weathered the storm so well. They may have had to make tough restructuring decisions and pay cuts, or their communications may have been sporadic and unclear. So how does an organisation maintain trust in a continually changing landscape?

Trust spans four dimensions - emotional, physical, financial and digital. By understanding how each of these relate to the current environment and developing strategies and agile communications around them, leaders can help to build trust within their teams. Emotionally employees need to feel their company is honest and has their best interests at heart, physically they need to feel they have a safe environment, financially employees may require confidence that they will continue to be able to pay their bills, and digitally they want to trust that with any new digital infrastructure their data is safe.

By assessing these four trust dimensions and evaluating them each time there is a change in the macro or micro-environment, companies can open up a wealth of communication possibilities. When in-office working resumes, will they need increased communications around the cleanliness and safety of the space? Would personal finance workshops resonate with an audience who are feeling squeezed by pay cuts? Could improved communications around wellness build trust that the company is invested in employee wellbeing? Whilst business leaders can't control the pandemic, they can control their associated communications. By approaching the needs and concerns of their employees and being timely and more 'human' with their communications, companies will not only ride the pandemic wave but emerge even stronger.

ABOUT PURE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

We are an award winning creative communications agency with engagement at the heart of everything we do.

We work in partnership with our clients; to strengthen customer relationships which puts them ahead of the competition; to inspire and engage staff which creates loyalty and commitment; and we build experiential brand awareness campaigns which puts companies in the spotlight of their buyers.

We deliver these communication strategies by creating experiences through Virtual Events, Live Events, Digital Engagement, Experiential Campaigns and Content Design.

We are your partners in growth.

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