

Promoting a Strong Team Culture On and Off Campus

A team's culture has a huge impact on that team's success because it embodies the team's shared values and behaviors. What team members say, do and expect from each other creates this culture and, in turn, dictates how team members interact with each other and with those outside the team. So a team's culture isn't static but dynamic and evolving, and it affects everything from recruitment to engagement to retention as well as clients and work outcomes.

Managers play an important role in promoting and supporting a positive team culture. Here are some steps to keep in mind:

- Agree on the team's purpose, norms and values
 - The first step is for you and your team to collectively determine your purpose and values and how those fit within the University's mission and values. Activities like the User Manual exercise and this Values exercise can be a great place to start.
- Foster a culture of inclusion, support and trust.
- Promote and model well-being and work/life integration. Some examples:
 - Schedule a meeting at the beginning of each quarter for the team to schedule vacation days during the upcoming months. Discuss how the team can ensure that each person can disconnect when they're out on vacation as well as out for sick days. As a manager, you should be scheduling vacation days during that meeting as well, taking those days, and staying offline during that time as much as possible.
 - Schedule stretch breaks during long meetings, with the first scheduled no later than 60-70 minutes after the meeting's start.
 - Avoid sending emails outside of business hours or use Outlook's Delay Send feature to schedule those emails for the next day.
 - Take movement or stretch breaks regularly throughout the day and encourage others to do so, too. Consider participating in one or more [Your Daily classes](#) as a team.
 - For more ideas, take a look at these [Well-being Practices](#).
- Recognize people regularly not only for performance but also for exemplifying your team's shared values. Link feedback and goals to those values.
- Show Your Appreciation
 - Know what your direct reports are working on and proactively look for behaviors, effort and accomplishments to recognize and celebrate. Culture is created by people embodying values, so recognize that too.
 - Celebrate wins, both big and small, in a timely manner. It could be as simple as a thank you email – understand up front what meaningful recognition and appreciation mean to each of your direct reports.
 - Recognize calculated risks as well – the fact that they took that initiative and put in the effort means something and that's how innovation happens. Discuss as a team what was learned through that attempt so you build a culture in which people feel safe and empowered to take similar calculated risks.
 - Make your appreciation public by using [our Gratitude Wall](#).
 - Encourage every team member to show appreciation and recognition to each other and to partners across campus (again, [the Gratitude Wall](#) is a great place to do that)!

- Be clear, transparent and equitable in how you determine who and what should be recognized.
- Take advantage of today's digital tools: Northwestern IT offers [a variety of digital tools that support collaboration and communication among teams](#), whether those teams are remote, hybrid or fully on-site **These tools include:**
 - [Zoom](#)
 - [MS Teams](#)
 - [Smartsheet](#)
 - [OneDrive](#)
 - In addition to [general technology support](#), all employees can access related online courses and playlists featuring related videos, articles, books and more through [myHR Learn](#).
- Model the values you want to promote. Say something when your team values aren't being embodied or when they're being directly trampled on/violated/challenged.
- Learn, understand and support team members' interests and professional growth.
- Give timely feedback, both positive and constructive, regularly, openly and transparently.
- Be proactive in updating your team on any changes in goals, expectations, priorities, needs.
- Regularly perform a "culture audit" to assess what may need to be updated or replaced.

For Hybrid Teams:

Make the most of time on-site

The most important step is to survey your team about how being on campus supports their work, their sense of belonging, and their connection to the team, the University and the University's mission. Ask for suggestions regarding how best to use time on-site both as a whole team and as individual team members. Schedule team discussions regarding the results. **The more you can involve your team in creating a plan, the more engaged and invested the team will be.**

Once a plan has been implemented, be sure to solicit team members' input and feedback on how the plan is working and to work with them to adapt the plan accordingly.

Some suggestions to consider incorporating in your plan or to kick off discussion:

- Recognize the wins and challenges people had during the fully remote period. Discuss what team members have learned and how to incorporate these lessons going forward.
- Consider the "5 Cs": Connect, Create, Collaborate, Career Plan and Celebrate. Discuss which "Cs" are important for your team and how to build on-site time around them. Understand that this may vary by role and seniority; many new or junior colleagues may require more time to collaborate and connect while more senior colleagues may need to focus more on creating, for example.
- Agree on an "anchor day" when the whole team is on-site, whether that's weekly, monthly or at another regularly scheduled pace.
- Encourage team members to plan meetings and touch bases with colleagues in other offices. This will help broaden and strengthen their networks, increase information and knowledge

sharing across campus, and foster your team members' sense of being part of a broader university community.

- Stress that social interaction **is** part of your team's work and that days on-site can and should include both scheduled and impromptu social interaction. This can include 10-15 minute check-ins, joint break time, or team events. Establish a shared understanding that these types of social interactions may mean that there is less time for individuals to make progress on projects and that's ok.
- Team events such as lunches (can also be BYOL or drinks/dessert if budgets are tight), team-building exercises, etc. can build and reinforce connection. Be sure to prioritize inclusion and consider details such as dietary restrictions, event timing, accessibility needs, types of activities and more before organizing events.
- Practice good meeting "hygiene":
 - Commit to turning communications that require conveying a lot of detailed information or that don't require feedback (such as status updates) into a digital communication (email, Teams message etc.).
 - Send an agenda for the meeting at least 1 day in advance.
 - Rotate responsibility for leading the meeting among team members.
 - Schedule meetings 5 minutes after the hour and end meetings at least 5 minutes before the hour to give attendees (virtual or on-site) time to re-set between meetings.
 - Start meetings with 5 or so minutes of non-work conversation or an activity, such as a [wellness practice](#).
 - Try to avoid virtual meetings with each other or with other campus colleagues on days when you're on site.
- Agree on making documents accessible at all times using OneDrive and SharePoint.
- Sync on-campus days with fellow team and campus partner collaborators. As a manager, you can also intentionally create the conditions for serendipity by bringing different groups of people together when on-site.
- Consider how you might transform your physical office space into an ideal location for [design thinking](#).
- Encourage team members to identify mentors outside the team, whether through [affinity groups](#) and formal programs (like the [ANUW Mentorship Program](#)) or through informal outreach, and to meet with their mentors during their on-site days.
- If you have team members off-site when you and other team members are on-site, then make a point of including those off-site as much as possible. For example, you could commit to updating off-site team members on information that was exchanged during the day via Teams.
- Use on-site time for team and/or individual professional development by scheduling joint reflection time, using one of your [allotted Work/Life seminars](#) (which encompass everything from communication skills to emotional intelligence and more), or registering for an on-site course through myHR Learn.
- Use MS Teams to post a daily question, prompt or poll for your whole team. You can use [MS Teams Reflect](#), for example, to gauge how team members' social emotional state while maintaining team member anonymity.
- Volunteer together, either on campus or off.

- Experience campus together; many teams have enjoyed trips to the Block Museum in Evanston, team walks along the lake front in Chicago, etc.
- Get to know each other personally within people's comfort zones. People want to bring their whole selves to work.
- What do your team members need to do their best work? Be sure to ask and then make sure people have the resources they need wherever they are.
- Remember that you can do quick checks online with those off-site – your interactions don't have to be a 30-60 minute Zoom meeting.
- We're all still figuring out how hybrid teams work best so remember to regularly plan-do-review-reflect-adapt, in collaboration with your team.

Additional Resources

[Three Best Practices for Virtual Meetings](#)

[Culture in the Hybrid Workplace](#)

[The Four Deadly Sins of Work Culture](#), Adam Grant Work Life Podcast June 21, 2022.

[4 Modes of Collaboration are Key to Success in Hybrid Work](#)

[How to do Hybrid Right](#)