Future of (How We) Work Task Force
Meeting #8: Workplace Culture 11/10/20
Notes

While we continue to work remotely, how do we maintain our workplace cultures?
Workplace culture is a big part of what draws, retains, and inspires talent. While every company's culture is unique, we have all experienced challenges related to workplace culture in the transition from on-site to remote work. Some companies are finding ways to maintain the culture they had cultivated pre-COVID, while others are reimagining their culture altogether.

Speaker Highlights
At this Future of (How We) Work Task Force meeting, we heard from three speakers about how to enhance workplace culture while some employees return to the office and others work remotely.

- Michael McCarroll, Co-Founder, [Teamraderie](#)
  - Expectations are that, in the future, work will remain distributed
  - In distributed work, individual productivity rises while team productivity declines
  - Social connectivity is the most powerful lever for team productivity
  - Research has shown that the five needs of corporate teams are bonding, inspiration, discovery, overcoming, and celebrating

- Rebecca Silverman, Program Manager, Google Cambridge
  - It is possible to pivot an entire pre-pandemic program of in-person events to a virtual setting, but the labor and service costs can be significant
  - Communicating company gatherings across all possible internal platforms is a best practice, as is soliciting feedback quickly after each experience
  - Engaging local businesses, especially with a DEI lens, supports the local economy and makes employees feel more satisfied and engaged
  - Company-wide events are well attended when they break up a work day or enable employees to learn a new skill

- Lee McGuire, Chief Communications Officer, Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard
  - Establishing a COVID-19 Task Force, employee hotline, and intranet has been critical to maintaining confidence and productivity amidst the pandemic

- ○ Monthly Town Halls, public scientific talks, and regular emails from leadership are keeping employees invested and inspired
- ○ Monthly employee surveys have measured attitudes and needs relative to caregiving, mental health/anxiety, safety, and connectivity
- ○ Broad was one of many Kendall companies that gave employees election day off from work

Survey Highlights:
Ahead of this meeting, KSA surveyed attendees asking the question: *What are the greatest challenges you're facing in building and maintaining culture as we continue to work from home?*

- ● **Zoom Fatigue:** While a day full of in person meetings once felt exhausting, we all now realize that a day full of Zoom meetings takes an even higher toll. Survey respondents indicated that they are struggling to offer in-person company gatherings due to logistical issues such as finding space as well as comfort issues around meeting in person.
- ● **Organic Connections:** As we discussed in our last meeting, water cooler conversations and serendipitous sidewalk introductions are a big source of inspiration and collaboration in Kendall. This also applies to workplace culture; survey respondents indicated that they feel the organic culture building which comes out of informal interactions in the office has left a void.
- ● **Onboarding Remotely:** Kendall companies continue to hire new employees, but survey respondents indicated that integrating them into their company culture is difficult when they may have never set foot in Kendall Square or met any of their new colleagues in person.
- ● **Work/Life Balance:** Survey respondents indicated that prioritizing work/life balance into their evolving workplace cultures is a challenge as the boundaries of our workweeks have become blurred.
- ● **Providing Feedback:** Survey respondents indicated that providing feedback virtually is less ideal than doing so in person, be it constructive criticism or praise for success.
- ● **Equity and Inclusion:** Survey respondents indicated they are struggling to strike a balance between incentivizing employees who are returning to the office without disenfranchising those still working from home, especially caregivers who do not necessarily have the choice of whether they will go back to the office.
- ● **Engagement:** As we all struggle to keep our heads above water in the wake of COVID-19, keeping employees engaged with their work, connected to their teams, and invested in the mission is a huge challenge.

Discussion Highlights:

- Recognizing that low morale is a product of the pandemic, employers are encouraging and enabling volunteer opportunities that make employees feel good about themselves, their company, and their community.
- Employers have observed that employees are not using their vacation time, so they are enforcing time off with practices such as additional company wide holidays and Summer Fridays.
- In another effort to encourage balance and boundaries, employers are setting policies around schedules, such as setting maximums on the lengths of meetings and blocking off times where there should be no meetings altogether.
- Employers have had difficulty managing virtual meeting dynamics when it comes to distributing airtime, encouraging employees to share, and whether or not employees want to have their video on.
- Employers are developing creative ways for employees to safely communicate new norms around comfort for those who are back in the office, such as standardized signals around personal space.
- Employers are still brainstorming ways to safely facilitate organic interactions for those who are back in the office. Some have hired "return to work coaches."
- In an effort to reward employees working from home who cannot take advantage of on-site incentives, employers are sending packages to their homes, such as at-home fitness kits.
- Keeping company wide gatherings casual has proven successful, and making them family friendly takes it one step further. Some are sending kits home to employees for virtual activities. Some are holding gatherings in person/off site, but issues of logistics, equity, and comfort arise around those offerings.