



Effective Engagement for Remote Communications

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Introduction

A rapid organizational shift to a new way of working is underway, and over a year into this change, companies are still reeling from the transition to a remote work environment. This past year has been exceptionally polarizing – with social justice and health safety becoming top priorities for both individuals and organizations. As we learn more about the impacts of these recent organizational changes, leaders are now focused on increasing workforce engagement and evolving company culture. This is in sharp contrast to the rash decision making we witnessed a year ago, where leaders were focused on acting quickly and worrying about implications later.

It has now become clear, that what may have initially seemed to be a short-term solution has led to unintended benefits and opportunities for employers to better meet the needs of their employees. Remote work is here to stay – if you're not adjusted and prepared to support a permanently remote workforce, you will miss out on new-age talent, lose out to competition, and employee engagement will suffer. While some employees are anxiously awaiting the "return to the office!" email, many others have benefited from the flexibility work-from-home has provided. The ability to accommodate a remote work environment has now become a competitive edge and in some cases a "must-have" for employees to stick around long-term.

In this paper, we explore best practices for shifting and maintaining enterprise communication strategies for a remote environment. We explore how to optimally deliver tailored support strategies for each level of the organization. Figure 1 presents an overview of the content and engagement strategies at each level of the organization, highlighting changes in tone and messaging as the target audience shifts downstream.

The solution to engaging your workforce in a remote environment is simple: communicate clearly, often, and validate that your message was received as intended. The secret to success is in how you execute. Firm-wide messages will impact individuals differently as they cascade through the various levels of the organization. As such, leaders at various levels of the company should personalize communications, confirm understanding, and clarify outstanding questions. Enacting a personalized approach to messaging will further drive workforce engagement – which must be maintained in remote environments. By tailoring communications to **personalities**, **team dynamics**, and **circumstances**, leaders can ensure clarity, improve reception, and **drive a stronger connection between the organization and its workforce.**



Best Practices

Leaders must continue to focus on driving connectivity and engagement. Effective communication tactics in a remote environment are key drivers of employee morale and the overall health of the organization. Below we introduce **R.A.M.P.**: a four-step guide to enforce transparency and create actionable change across the organization. After a brief introduction of each step, we will explore how to apply these best-practices at the enterprise, team, and individual level to drive stronger engagement.



RESPONSIVE

Solicit employee feedback early and often to inform future decision-making and allow for continuous improvement

ACCESSIBLE

Provide outlets for staff and/or teammates to voice questions / concerns and offer solutions; enact an open-door policy

MULTI-MODAL

Leverage multiple tools / applications to deliver targeted and customized messaging (email, chats, video portals, etc.)

PREDICTABLE

Be proactive; Create opportunities to support transparency, including recurring all-hands, AMAs, and team events

Engaging the Enterprise



Employees rely on senior leaders to define and uphold the organization's values, lead firm-wide strategic initiatives, and provide a transparent enterprise outlook all of which can become progressively difficult in permanent remote work environments. A leader's ability to accurately articulate these messages will directly impact employee engagement levels and drive overall morale of the organization. Leaders have an opportunity to establish a cadence with their remote employees that drives connectivity and transparency between leaders and teams on the ground.

R

RESPONSIVE: Provide a platform for anonymous submissions in advance of all-hands / townhall events and encourage its use. Ensure that leadership proactively addresses these questions and concerns to help drive buy-in. Remind employees that they are a priority and that their efforts, opinions, and contributions do not go unnoticed.

A

ACCESSIBLE: Encourage open-door policies that allow employees to expand beyond their traditional interaction points. Increase the frequency of open-forum Q&A and information sessions across the organization. Find creative reasons to bring together various levels and functions of the organization to provide fresh perspectives.

M

MULTI-MODAL: Employ creative branding techniques, such as video messaging, online message boards, and virtual forums to keep employees engaged and plugged into organizational culture. Ensure that your organizational priorities and values are communicated through a variety of mediums to appeal to all types of employees.

P

PREDICTABLE: Promote the collective unity and culture of the firm by hosting regularly scheduled meetings with updates on ongoing, key enterprise initiatives. Send follow-up messaging with highlights from previous town halls, all-hands, and other organization-wide events to reinforce transparency and availability of important information.

Engaging the Team



At the team level, remote-communication becomes more nuanced, personal, and critical. Employees look to the team and their leaders to drive employee morale, promote comradery, and communicate how the team's work feeds into enterprise strategy. With the shift to permanent remote work environments, team leads must find new and creative ways to maintain team dynamics.

- R** **RESPONSIVE:** Promote well-being and challenge employees to find new ways to maintain social interactions. Don't shy away from testing out new communication tactics and team-building activities; request feedback to determine the best ways to sustain strong team dynamics.
- A** **ACCESSIBLE:** Emphasize increased collaboration amongst teammates, both with and without the team lead(s) involved in the discussion. Virtual "open-door" policies can help simulate in-person interactions, including informal conversations that drive connectivity.
- M** **MULTI-MODAL:** Capitalize on the technological capabilities at your disposal. For instance, if you initially provided a verbal update, consider a follow-up email to reinforce the message. Explore innovative modalities such as online whiteboarding to support productivity and collaboration.
- P** **PREDICTABLE:** Establish recurring team check-ins as a means of monitoring work execution and team morale. Enable teams to be proactive and react in an agile manner, dedicating time to align on shifts in priorities and ensure expectations are clear and adjusted as needed.

Engaging the Individual



At the individual level, messaging should employ a combination of personalized engagement strategies aimed at providing detailed support and guidance. While the remote environment has clearly altered social dynamics and riddled our workforce with unforeseen disruptions, leaders are under more pressure than ever to support and empower their employees to effectively deliver remote work.

- R** **RESPONSIVE:** In remote work environments, interpersonal cues that could be easily identified in person may be lost in translation. As such, solicit feedback to better understand individuals' needs and the support mechanisms to enable optimum performance.
- A** **ACCESSIBLE:** Implement informal mentoring check-ins to provide an outlet for airing concerns and evaluating employee morale. Encourage employees to use the virtual environment as an opportunity to expand relationships beyond their traditional reporting interactions.
- M** **MULTI-MODAL:** As the proverbial water-cooler talk is no longer available, challenge employees to seek out opportunities to simulate in-person conversation. Be creative in managing day-to-day and ad-hoc interactions; explore new tools and collaborative work products.
- P** **PREDICTABLE:** Schedule recurring, 1:1 check-ins to monitor well-being and work execution. Leverage communication strategies unique to the individual. Be accommodating of unique at-home dynamics, and encourage transparency related to personal and family needs.

Conclusion

Employee engagement should not be neglected as organizations continue to navigate new work environments. The twelve aforementioned strategies are intended to build a more holistic outlook for organizations, equipping leaders with the necessary skills to attract and retain long-term talent. These recommendations are flexible and scalable, intended to provide guidance as organizations assess and determine their ever-evolving needs. While each strategy does have its own unique flavor, they are not completely independent from one another. At each layer of the organization, new opportunities surface, building on previous learnings and increasing employee morale, and accelerating organizational engagement.

With change comes opportunity, and organizations are now poised to differentiate themselves from their competition. Given your role, consider how you can engage in effective communication with your peers, direct reports, and management team. Success is more than just replicating the in-person work environment, it's identifying ways to more efficiently engage the workforce, working to make communication and morale stronger than ever.

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