How Do We Nurture Inclusion at Pluribus Whilst Working Remotely?

Written by Sarah Pujol, with the contributions of the Pluribus Backoffice Team
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As advocates for diversity, equity and inclusion, we understand that we cannot authentically promote DE&I values externally if we do not embody them internally. At Pluribus, one of our key ethics is to "**Walk The Talk**"; the core values we uphold are not merely principles on paper, but are a living and breathing ethos that guides us daily. We recognise we are ourselves on a continuous learning journey and how important it is to take the time to reflect on how we can be the most inclusive team possible.

In the last four years, Pluribus has significantly increased the number of backoffice members! Along with this exciting expansion came some exciting challenges, particularly on how to ensure inclusive dynamics for everyone. Isabelle Pujol, Pluribus CEO & Founder (based in Belgium), expresses how at Pluribus, *"we often pride ourselves on being a laboratory for inclusion, and it's important we always act ourselves as role models for inclusion."* Alan De Bruyne, Pluribus Business & Strategy Director (based in Belgium), asserts *"it's in the DNA of Pluribus to have the right tools to practice being inclusive"*, and with the context of our growing team, we truly saw this inclusion experiment come to life.

What is inclusion for us?

We recently asked each other how we felt Pluribus created an inclusive working environment, and more particularly, with the added challenge of being an entirely remote and global team. Indeed, working remotely has become the norm for many individuals and companies worldwide. While it offers flexibility and convenience, it also presents challenges in maintaining focus, motivation, well-being and the overall feeling of belonging and inclusion. At Pluribus, we feel so fortunate that our physical distances can be bridged by digital connections, and continuing to foster an inclusive environment has become an exciting challenge over the years.

Rachel Desbois, Pluribus Lead Moderator & Operations Assistant (based in Portugal), provides us with a glimpse into the reality of our team: "*we live in different countries, time zones, speak various languages, have different nationalities, experiences, and so on. But for us, this has never been an obstacle.*" As such a diverse team, we looked at what inclusion meant for us, and Stefania Straga, Pluribus Project Manager (based in Canada), defined it as "*being part of a work environment where (we) feel valued and respected, regardless of (our) background, accent, identity, or location. It's about celebrating the diversity of perspectives and contributions of each team member.*" All the elements Stefania and Rachel share resonate for all of us at Pluribus. However, the real question is, how do we manage to encompass these desired values effectively, while being completely remote?

Connection and availability

A genuine approach that reflects the heartbeat of our inclusive culture is organising frequent virtual team building and check-in sessions, as well as ensuring we are all approachable for spontaneous calls throughout the week. During these regular check-ins, we talk about both our personal and professional lives, and we always amaze ourselves at how authentic and vulnerable we can be. *"We ensure inclusion through the quality of our interactions; taking the time to do check-ins, so we can really build authentic connections"*, adds Isabelle. There is a lot of honesty displayed, and even though it's through a screen, it has a true impact in building relationships amongst our colleagues. We can connect and bond on a deeper and personal level. *"It almost feels natural to work with each other as a remote team. The physical distance is never really felt"* explains Alan. Our team communication enable us to feel like our colleagues are sat right next to us! Our weekly interactions become very important for everyone involved, having a direct impact on team motivation, and generating a *"real sense of inclusivity and engagement within the Pluribus team"* explains George Tibil, Pluribus Finance & Admin Officer (based in Belgium). In our remote work experience, staying connected is not a mere recommendation; it's a shared commitment, and therefore remaining available for each other is crucial. Working remotely full time can sometimes feel lonely, but *"when you have a supportive and inclusive team, you don't feel that at all"*, explains Lauren Cirsch, Pluribus Maketing Manager (based in Israel). What we truly appreciate amongst our team is *"how available and willing we all are to always help each other in whatever way we can, despite being in different countries or on different continents"*, emphasizes Bianca Banica, Sales Operations Officer (based in the Netherlands).

Work-life balance

At Pluribus, we truly encourage all our team members to have a balanced work and personal life approach, no matter what time zones they are working in. Work shouldn't be the reason you can't live your life the way you want to; it shouldn't be the reason you can't travel, have hobbies or other personal commitments. Promoting and supporting flexible hours play a huge role in building a sense of balance, as explained by Rachel: *"I am also able to attend a mid-day appointment if I need to, or to simply take a short break to recharge in between tasks; whether it's a gym workout or playing the guitar."* Flexibility, adaptability, and understanding is a key component to running our remote team successfully. *"Some of us will travel and work from one country in one month and be in another country the next month, and this has never been seen as a problem, as long as the work is completed on time and to standard, and this makes me feel trusted to do my job"*, Rachel adds.

Trust within the team

Certainly, trust plays a big part in running a successful remote team. How can there be trust when you are not in the same office and when you're not physically with each other on a regular basis? Perhaps years ago, in a time prior to COVID and the new ways of working we witness today, this would not have been considered or even seen as feasible. But at Pluribus, we truly work hard to empower our team members across all their responsibilities, no matter where they work from. With this sense of trust, we have seen our team members ending up being more dedicated, continually raising the standards of their work, becoming accountable, and developing professionally. *"Being connected remotely with the Pluribus team has been a very rich experience, not only in working terms but also with regards to my personal development"* explains George. Furthermore, this sense of trust is reinforced by removing all sorts of micro-management methods, or unnecessary repeated meetings to oversee every step of a project; instead, we have clear and effective communication channels and tools (for example Monday.com and TeamUp) for continuous updates on all projects and clients, which can be accessed by anyone in the team, at any time. Bianca shares: *"Thanks to the advanced technology we can leverage, it's a lot easier to keep each other updated, have access to each other's calendars and work collaboratively on projects, making it feel as if you're next to each other in a "virtual office" helping and updating each other in a timely fashion."* As a result, responsibility for the success of Pluribus becomes shared ownership for our backoffice team, a proud collaboration built on transparency and understanding, whether the team member is in France, Portugal, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands, Romania, Israel or all the way on the other side of the world, in Canada.

Sense of belonging

Collective responsibility and celebration really help to build a sense of belonging. Evidently, Bianca further underscores the importance we give to creating an inclusive space, where every team member feels they belong, by explaining: *"it's a feeling that you can openly share your ideas without being judged, and the fact that your views are heard, valued and considered, not just listened to."* Brené Brown, professor and author, impactfully says *"the opposite of belonging is fitting in"*. At Pluribus, we don't ask our team to fit in; we emphasise each person to truly show up as themselves. This is apparent when we organise our yearly face-to-face events, where we all get together to experience a few days of connection, celebration, continuous learning and co-creation; which help to reinforced our relationships and develop thinking amongst the team. *"I always leave these meetings recharged, motivated and grateful to work with such a great team"* conveys Rachel. The sense of belonging in a remote team is challenging but when achieved, brings such a sense of accomplishment. *"I've never felt more part of a team despite never having met some of them in person, and to me, that says it all!"* voices Lauren.

Establishing a healthy work environment

Ultimately, in order to "show up" authentically when working in a remote team and foster an inclusive culture, we truly believe creating healthy remote working spaces and habits play a huge part. This is why, at Pluribus, we highlighted some tangible tips to cultivate a wholesome work environment for ourselves when working from home. We identified these insights at the beginning of the pandemic, and although they resonated strongly then, we acknowledge that their relevance and importance persist today. Below, you will find the list of effective tips and tricks for working remotely we have put together. We are confident these are not just individual practices but shared principles, that contribute to the well-being, motivation and productivity of our entire team.
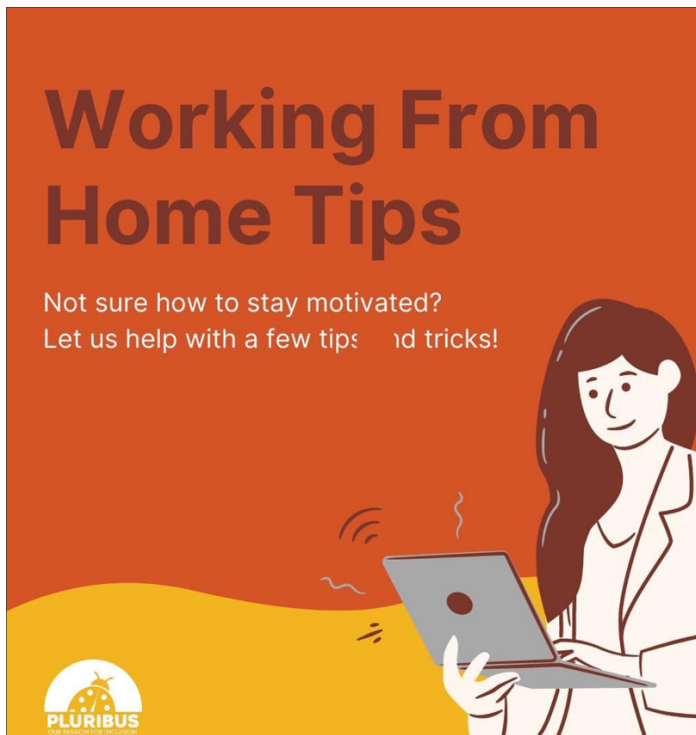
1. Declutter Your Home Office
A cluttered space can lead to a cluttered mind. Studies suggest a correlation between cortisol levels (the stress hormone) and clutter. To enhance productivity, start by organising your physical workspace and decluttering digital files. This will help foster clarity and provide a sharper focus.

2. Reward Yourself
Motivation often thrives on positive reinforcement, so celebrate accomplishments, no matter how small. Treat yourself to your favourite snack, take a short break to indulge in a hobby, or have a moment of self-appreciation when you achieve a goal or meet a deadline. These mini celebrations can boost your morale and motivation.

3. Take Regular Breaks
Incorporating short breaks into your routine can rejuvenate both your body and mind. Engage in stretching exercises, take a walk, or spend time with your pet. These moments recharge you for better focus and efficiency and can boost your productivity.

4. Disconnect

Amidst the digital world, it is crucial to detach yourself periodically. Take short breaks away from your screen every hour of just of 5 to 7 minutes, to prevent eye strain and mental exhaustion. Establish a routine of stepping away from your workstation to give your mind a chance to recharge.

5. Check In

Working from home does not mean isolation. Schedule regular times throughout your working week to take a break and use those times to specifically connect with family or friends. Engaging in conversations can alleviate feelings of loneliness and provide comfort and a refreshing break from work-related tasks.

6. Embrace Nature

Introducing plants to your home office not only adds aesthetic appeal, but it also reduces stress levels and increases productivity. Additionally, whenever possible, step outside during one of your breaks to soak in some natural light, breathe in some fresh air and reconnect with nature. Your mind and body will feel revitalised.

7. Recentre

Take a moment of silence each day to focus on your breathing, calm your thoughts and reset your mental state. Mindfulness exercises help in regaining focus and making clear-headed decisions, particularly before making decisions or entering the next meeting. By cultivating mental clarity, you can significantly enhance decision-making abilities and enhance your productivity.

Conclusion

Our endeavour to nurture inclusion as a fully remote team has been a true testament to our commitment to "Walk The Talk". Through shared experiences and collective efforts, we delved into the intricacies of cultivating a thriving and inclusive team dynamic. From embracing our rich diversity to fostering heartfelt connections, we've forged a culture that goes beyond physical boundaries, ensuring that the heart of Pluribus beats with authenticity. The true conclusion of the story is: nurturing inclusion whilst working remotely is possible! Moreover, we now feel appropriately equipped to support our global clients and partners in navigating this same challenge. In this continuous learning journey, we hope to keep carrying forward the ethos of Pluribus—a culture that prioritizes trust, and the genuine celebration of each team member's unique contribution. The insights shared here by our team members – Isabelle, Alan, Rachel, Stefania, Bianca, Lauren and George – paint a picture of how our pledge to inclusion isn't a mere concept; it's our lived experience, contributing to the very mission of Pluribus; creating a world where everyone belongs.
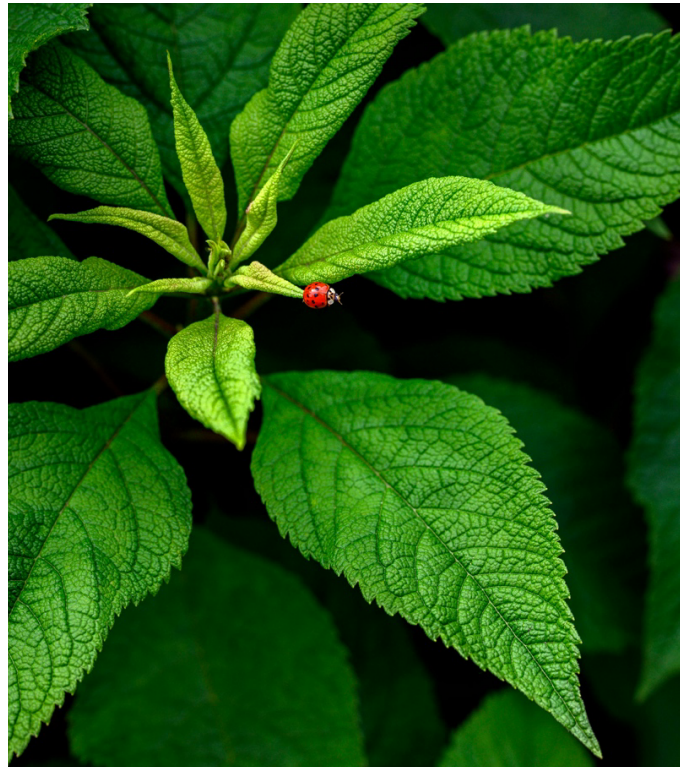
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