

Creating Genuine Connections and Cultivating a Culture of Well-being in Team Events, Both In-Person and Virtual

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At MetaDocencia we actively work to ensure that the management of work teams secures our well-being value. We seek to make well-being guide personnel management.

In addition to daily attention through relaxed exchanges on our Slack or Whatsapp channels, sharing music, memes and personal news that bring us closer, internal communication is essential. All our work agendas begin with "How are we? Anything to change?" These questions encourage reflection and active listening, preparing us to make the adjustments that each individual needs in the various moments and circumstances they may be going through, whether professional or personal. Additionally, as we share in [this](#) post, the MEC survey is one of our most enriching tools for giving and receiving positive feedback.

Today, we want to focus on some **principles that we implement in our team events** to foster genuine connections and truly bond. Both in virtual settings (as we are an organization that primarily works remotely and is geographically distributed) and in-person gatherings, we pay special attention to bridging interests, enjoying our diversity, and ensuring that every team member feels included. In this post, we are going to share how we accomplish this.

Our in-person *a get together*¹ every April.

In 2023, for the first time, we met in person and were able to hug, share, and eat together at the same table! Just the way we like. To ensure the gathering was representative of everyone, we followed some guidelines that can serve as suggestions for other communities or spaces:

- We implemented **preferences form** previous to the get together, where we asked about transportation and accommodation alternatives, dietary

¹ Some organizations refer to this as a 'retreat'. However, that word did not resonate with us, so we voted for this alternative, which we chose to translate as 'a get together'.

preferences, team time utilization options, and even if anyone had any talents to share!



- As the venue for the gathering, we chose a **large location** with a garden that allowed us to be outdoors, have mate as many times as needed, and spend a day and a half together as if it were a vacation home. In 2024, we have promised ourselves a good barbecue, with a sub-team volunteering to light the fire.
- **We listen to each other.** Both in team-building activities and streamlining work processes, as well as during free time, we pay attention to what each person enjoys, motivates, and moves them. This was crucial for weaving conversation during the virtual sessions throughout the rest of the year. In 2023, we asked about everyone's favourite movie, knowing that we have different interests, backgrounds, native languages, and skills. The chosen one? "Back to the Future." We already know that science fiction brings together the vocation for science with the passion for storytelling. And after that movie, we also discovered several others!



- We exchanged gifts. We thought of **meaningful presents** that each person could take home as souvenirs. In 2023, it was a handcrafted pot made by Pao with MetaDocencia logo and a little plant for each desk. We also shared stickers, pins, mouse pads that Romi made with our logo, candied nuts that Pao brought from the north, ceramic apples made by Julián, Brazilian sweets brought by Meli, avocados from Laura's house tree, alfajores brought by Laurel from Córdoba, among many other gestures of generosity and affection.



Manzanita Awards: Creating a Culture of Well-being

The closing event of 2023, a complex year socially both locally and internationally, needed a strong reason to uphold well-being as one of the fundamental values of our community and thus prioritize the creation of

supportive, empathetic, and motivating workspaces. We asked ourselves, "How can we make people feel part of this collective project, appreciate their contribution, and recognize the contributions of others?"



The Manzanita Awards were created to make explicit the unique, special, and singular contributions of the people who are part of MetaDocencia, to promote well-being, motivate, and embrace the individualities that push the group daily towards a common goal. How did we do it?

- We planned the **script and hosting** of the event to replicate the tone of an awards ceremony like the Oscars, with musical interludes, acknowledgments, and explanations from the awards committee. We included a dose of humour because we wanted everyone to feel comfortable receiving each award, which was a surprise.
- **We organized the event** with a red-carpet wallpaper, we asked the entire team to dress up for the occasion and have a glass to toast with their drink of choice. We also included a voucher for "appetizers and canapés" in that month's billing to make the invitation complete. From an operations standpoint at MetaDocencia, this greatly simplified postal shipments to 17 geographically dispersed people, without neglecting the chance of each person to receive a small gift for the occasion. This is another example of how at MetaDocencia, we practice the value of well-being, making concrete decisions to reduce the burden on those organizing these events.
- **We awarded badges** to each team member recognizing their contributions through concepts as diverse as the awards themselves: "Planner Extraordinaire," "Polysemy," "Word Architect," "Guru," or "Team

Player." Each badge highlights virtue, generosity, and a sense of belonging to the MetaDocencia community. With a paragraph of description for each award, each person listened and had the opportunity to toast and thank for their virtual statuette. Emotions quickly surfaced, and we began to guess who was nominated for each award as the description unfolded, because getting to know each other is part of caring for and recognizing each other.



The 2023 Manzanita Awards aim to continue sustaining and creating a community culture of well-being through individual and collective recognition.

In conclusion

We outlined three fundamental actions to foster connection in our events: **taking care, recognizing, and valuing each other.**

Being individuals mostly from an academic background, each Manzanita Award was highly significant as it rewarded collaboration instead of competition, a value that we consider essential to our mission and vision.

Caring for those of us who make up MetaDocencia means attending to and responding to the needs, expectations, and emotions of each member of the community, creating a safe, friendly, and respectful work environment. It is

essential to create a culture of care, emphasizing the promotion of well-being, collective construction, and teamwork.

Recognition involves giving visibility and credit to the contributions of each team member, respecting their authorship, diversity, and uniqueness. It is about creating a culture of collaboration that fosters trust, construction, and shared learning.

Valuing, for MetaDocencia, means celebrating the contributions of each person who is part of the community, offering incentives and benefits that recognize their effort, quality, and impact. It also involves sharing, enjoying, and having fun with others, creating spaces for leisure, humour, and creativity. In other words, we strive to foster a culture of appreciation that stimulates passion, joy, and innovation.

As a team distributed across different cities and countries, it is important to create meaningful, emotional encounters that connect people and leave us with that valuable sense of internal transformation and human connection necessary for a team to work harmoniously. Great challenges await us because the team's enthusiasm increases with each encounter.

We would like to know what practices you carry out in your community to foster closeness. We look forward to reading about your experiences on our [Slack](#) channel. Until next time!

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