xoxoday

REMOTE WORKING GUIDE

Managing your remote employees

E-book by Xoxoday

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Chapter 1

What is remote working?

A brief historical context

Thousands of years ago, homo-sapiens transitioned from being nomads to settlers. The growth and spread of wheat and other crops as dependable, reliable, and abundant food sources, enabled this transition. Until the industrial revolution, human beings depended on local and self-sustaining communities that had their own skill resources like carpentry, agriculture, farming, or animal husbandry.

Nomadic

Travel from resource to resource

Settled

All resources available within a geography

Resource 1   Resource 2   Resource 3

Travel   Travel

Resource 1

Resource 2   Resource 3

Technological progress, availability of capital, and increasing demand that came with the industrial revolution, stimulated setting up of large factories and industrial plants. Several people within their local communities discovered that these newer opportunities brought them greater wealth and took up work at these factories. These new jobs urged them to travel towards these work-hubs and caused a major workforce migration.
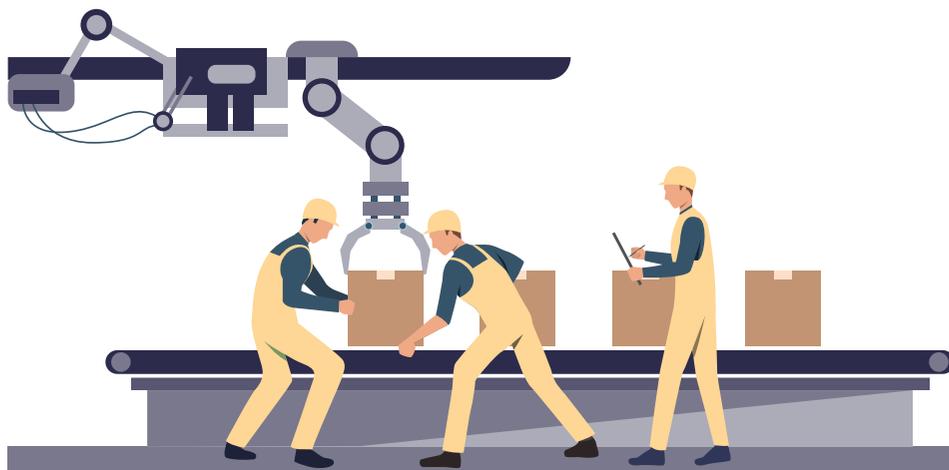
The industrial revolution was followed by the Information Technology revolution that further changed the dynamics of work across the globe. Large companies established extensive facilities that could accommodate innumerous employees that were housed within tech-parks (generally located off major cities and residential localities), and they set a new culture of traveling significant distances for work.

What is the current context? A general perspective

Thomas L Freidman, in his book, 'The World is Flat,' explains how any part of the world can now be reached and accessed anytime. Information Technology and the bustling service sector has played a pivotal role in bringing about this revolution. But to be able to do this, many employees had to be online and available across 24 hours. This brought in remote working that enabled workforces to work from their remote locations even during post-office hours to manage production issues, attend customer calls and manage projects. Remote working also helped these teams work form distributed time zones, helping them service customers across the globe.

What is the current context? A COVID-19 perspective

Post the COVID-19 crisis, nations across the globe have resorted to lock-downs. People are not allowed to travel to their work locations and require specific approvals for any sort of personal travel. In other words, COVID-19 has necessitated remote working for the majority of employees.

Apart from the 10-20%, who may not be able to avoid working remotely and must be present in the office physically for various reasons (e.g., medical professionals, essential service providers, or other support staff personnel), all other employees have to work remotely. This has created a unique circumstance that forces us to look at the various facets of remote working and come up with an offering or an arrangement that provides a win-win to all stakeholders.

What are the types of remote working?
Remote working can be broken down into the following broad categories
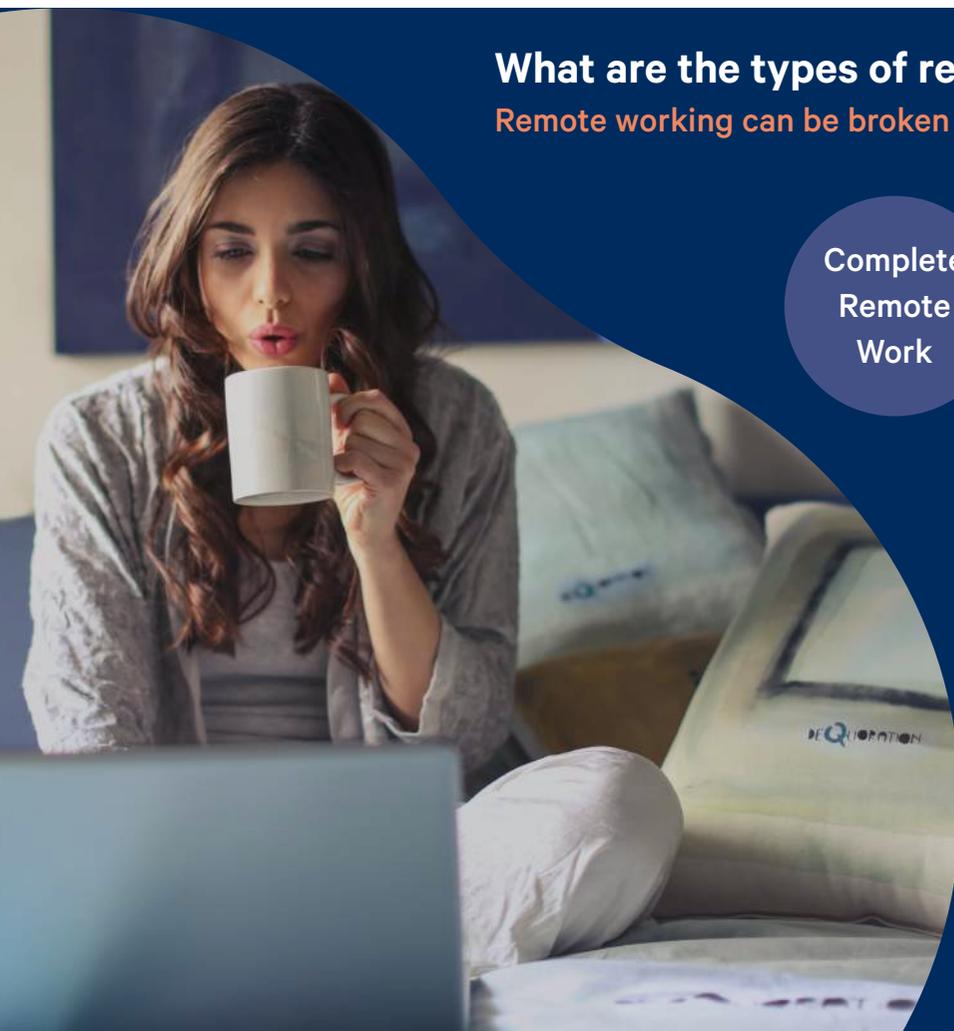
Complete Remote Work

Online Assignments

Partial Remote Work

Freelancing Work

Quick Tasks

Complete remote work

These jobs involve complete work from remote locations. They eliminate traveling to office premises for a job. Positions like these have many advantages. First, they do not require infrastructure setup at the workplace, leading to cost savings and equipment freedom. Second, jobs that do not require a full-time position can be easily created and enabled. Finally, the talent pool available for such positions is immense as anyone and everyone with access to adequate technology infrastructure and skills can aspire to be a part of such opportunities.

Partial remote work

These jobs do not have stringent requirements in terms of hours spent at the workplace. They offer flexibility and convenience in terms of work done from office premises or remote locations. Broadly, these can be divided into two categories:

Flexible Hours

Jobs like these let their employees work remotely for specific hours or for certain tasks in post office hours. These jobs enable employees to continue working on critical tasks without being in the office premises for extended durations.

Flexible Locations

Offices with multiple locations within a city, spread out in different tech-parks or commercial centers, offer the flexibility of working from any site based on the requirement. For e.g., sales staff can work from the location that is nearest to the customer being served on that day. Such arrangements eliminate the taxing travel between office and customer sites and let the workforce focus on delivering tasks.

Freelancing work

Part-time workers and freelance workers who are not employed by organizations but are hired on contractual workers and working in the online domain fall in this category. Online tasks that can be executed and completed from remote locations from home have gained popularity and prominence. Workers choose the work, load, timing, and deadlines of their liking and comfort and the work is delivered from the convenience of remote locations. Freelance work has mostly been a remote working category for many years now.

Online assignments

Ever wondered about the fantastic t-shirt designs flooding online sales channels? Or the various skill development classes being offered on online channels? These are a product of online-only businesses that have flourished thanks to the platform benefits of channels such as Amazon, Flipkart, and easy-to-build websites. These are mostly executed from remote locations, do not require a specific office premise, and the finished goods are shipped directly from the warehouse to the customer's location.

Quick tasks

This category of remote work is the most fragmented and voluminous of the lot. All miscellaneous tasks that can be done online without traveling to a specific location fall under this category. Book a ticket, purchase goods, send wishes, complete a survey, and many more. A lot of work and progress happens through these tasks.

Industry-wise remote working trends

According to the US telecommuting report the prominent industries offering remote working facilities are:

Medical & Health   **Computer & IT**   **Education & Training**   **Customer Service**   **Accounting & Finance**   **Travel & Hospitality**   **Sales**

These industries hold the majority share of the remote working workforce. Post COVID-19, many more have joined the list. Some of the prominent sectors who have enabled significant remote working avenues are:

Therapy   **Virtual Administration**   **Client Services**   **Tutorials**   **State and Local Governments**

This new shift towards remote working is here to stay. Organizations are discovering the remote working era and are evaluating the benefits of it. Industry expects to adapt to remote working in a big way for the years ahead. This is not just a one-time COVID-19 specific phenomena. Major IT players are exploring ways to make their majority of staff work remotely and making it a general business practice.

Chapter 2

Why remote working?

While specific industries such as manufacturing, aviation, transportation, construction, etc. can only accomplish a limited proportion of tasks via remote working; on the other hand, other industries (described in the previous segment) are enabled to perform a significant portion of the job from a remote location. These industries are now relying heavily on remote work to ensure seamless operation and customer satisfaction. The provision of remote work has also assured that a vast majority of the workforce in such industry continues to be employed in these demanding and unprecedented circumstances. Further, the travel ban and restrictions (Global and domestic) will continue to be in effect for long even after COVID-19 recovery. The relevance and importance of remote work will continue to grow with time (social distancing and the daily evolving rules around it are here to stay). What do you prefer? The daily grind of complex social distancing norms or a simple remote working opportunity.

Productivity, Less absence, Time-savings, Cost-savings, Talent pool, Loyalty, Flexibility

Security issues, Team management, Deadline slippages, Information loss threats, Lack of hardware support

Strengths

Threats

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Time management, Health, Technology issues, Hazy workload definitions, Miscommunication

Short-term and Long-term trends, Cost benefits, Asset light approach, Flexibility as an organizational value

Strengths

Productivity   Remote working offers the possibility of increasing productivity as a lot can be done and achieved within the same time limits. Access to family and the ability to resolve any issues instantly provides a fresh zeal of confidence and excitement to employees. This helps tremendously in focusing on the work at hand.

Low Absence   Since office commute is taken out of the equation, preventive measures and leaves (to avoid fatigue and infection spread) are no more a challenge. No calling in sick as employees can continue to work despite having mild issues (such as cold, low-grade fever, etc. that do not necessitate leave).

Time Savings   The absence of daily commutes (ranging from 30-mins to ~4 hours) provides significant time at hand for everyone. Since the travel time is hardly utilizable (stuck in traffic, cramped in a metro, in a carpool with your seniors and so on). The point is, utilize that free time to learn something new or complete the tasks that generally end up as backlog.

Cost Savings   Travel costs cut. No extra food purchases. No unwanted coffee breaks. And isn't it difficult to sneak out for a quick smoke when you are working from home? It might be frustrating and irritating, but the silver lining is that it is giving you unnoticed savings.

Talent Pool   Reach out to a lot more people, interview diverse candidates, and hire exceptional talent that was otherwise out of reach.

Loyalty   There is a positive correlation between employee satisfaction and retention. Remote working options are shown to increase employee satisfaction and can be effectively utilized to increase the switching cost of employees for changing jobs.
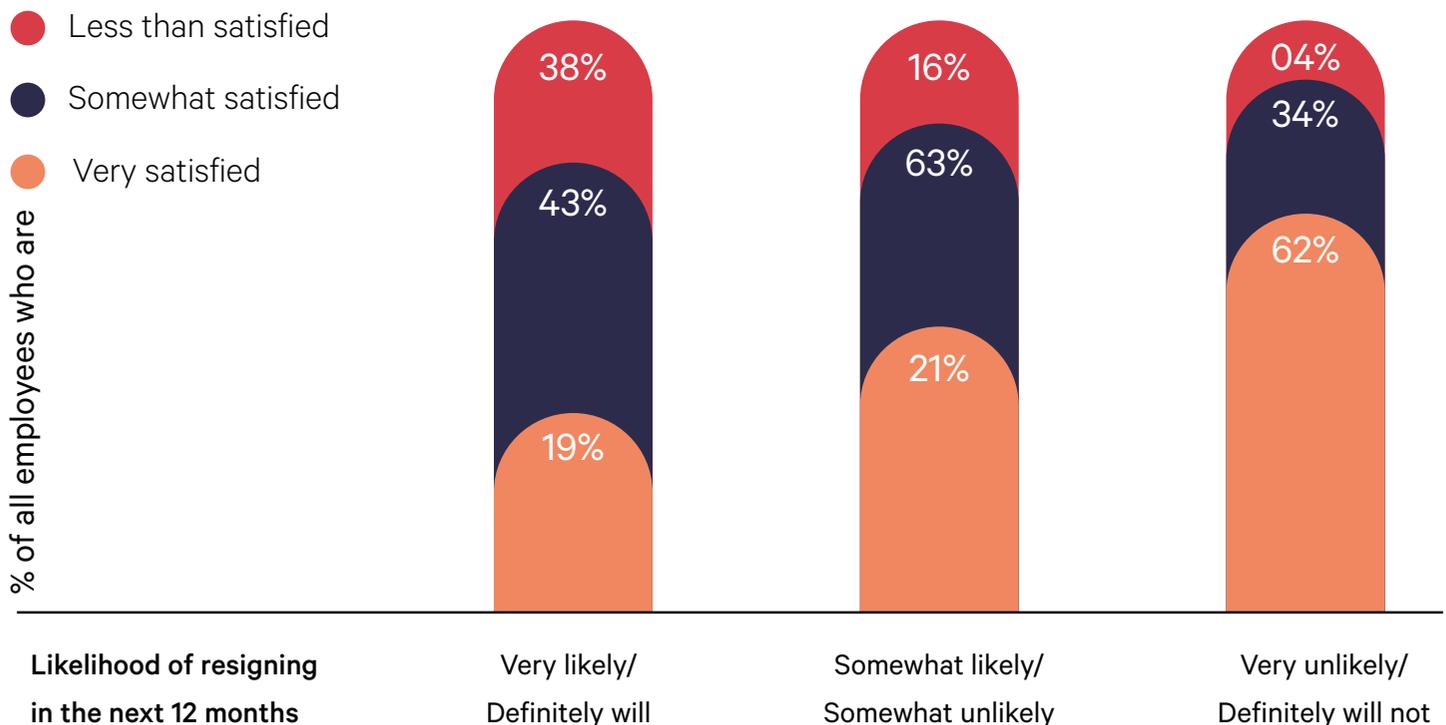
Perspectives in job switching

Withdrawal Perspective

People experience intentions to switch when they are dis-satisfied with their experiences in their present jobs (Meyer et al, 2002; Podsako et al, 2006).

Switching Cost Perspective

Whether satisfied with their present job or not, people engage in a constant evaluation of alternatives (Levy-Garboua et al, 2005). People experience intentions to switch when the sunk costs, setup costs and continuity costs associated with switching are lower than the benefits expected.

Flexibility   Higher flexibility to employees for taking care of personal and professional obligations in parallel. Complete a low priority task later in the day without having to stay in office premises.
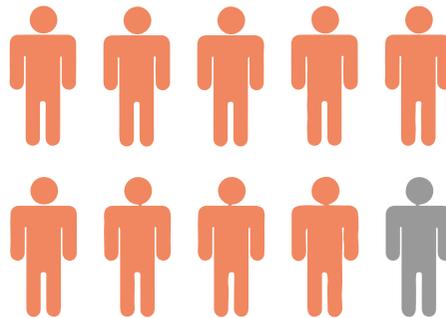
90% Of employees say more flexible arrangements would increase morale

Self-learning   The time that otherwise disappeared in non-accounted tasks can now be used to learn a new skill. Help employees complete that long-ignored certification that will take them closer to their promotion and success. (FYI: All major ed-tech platforms such as Udemy, Coursera, edX, etc. are offering a variety of free courses during the lock-down duration).

Weaknesses

Time Management

There are two sides to a coin. Time, unfortunately, is not isolated from this contradictory phenomenon. When you have fixed hours (~9 hrs. in office) to take care of the tasks at hand, you are super-efficient in time management. But when you have an entire day, you tend to give yourself slack and excuses. This is where the problem starts. Pay special attention to creating a time-plan for your tasks and adhering to it.

Personal Health

All work and no play make you a dull person! Remote working leads to an extended duration of no physical activity, binge eating, and unhealthy lifestyles. On the contrary, it is indeed a blessing in disguise. Why not explore the flourishing e-fitness apps and services and utilize the free time at hand!

Technology Issues

"Am I audible? Are you able to hear me? Can you see my screen?". These are the primary productivity killers. It is crucial to ensure your network and services are working fine. It is always advisable to keep a backup internet connection.

Hazy workload definitions

Focus on the unsaid part. Physical distances require extra effort in defining expectations and workload. Don't end up doing less than what is expected or way more than what is expected of you.

Mis-communications

Not everyone is good with emails and messages. It is not possible to follow-up with everyone when the team is scattered all over. Miscommunications can lead to severe delays and escalations. If you need someone's inputs, put in clear communication. If you have an issue, let others know. Remote working challenges can be managed using tools like Trello, Jira, etc. to effectively track and close items (more on this later).

Opportunities

Short-term opportunities[1]

- Remote employees work an additional 1.4 more days per month than in-office employees, which is nearly 17 additional workdays a year
- Remote employees take longer breaks on average that office employees (22 minutes versus 18 minute, respectively) but they work an additional 10 minutes a day.
- Office workers are unproductive for an average 37 minutes a day, not including lunch or breaks, whereas remote employees are unproductive for only 27 minutes.
- 15% of remote workers said their boss distracted them from work which is less than 22% of office based employees who said the same thing.

Long-term opportunities[2]

80%

Of Remote Worker

Experience Less

Job Stress

Cost Benefits

Remote working has significant cost savings for both the workers and organizations. Real estate, equipment, maintenance are strong recurring cost headers, and remote working relieves all of them. Further, for enabling a limited number of resources to work from office premises, remote working locations such as WeWork, Awfis, Innov8, etc. can be set up that have a pay per use structure as opposed to fixed costs of acquiring and maintaining all facilities. For employees, the savings in commute and other generic expenses are not small either.

Asset light approach

For organizations, costs are majorly divided into two heads -direct and Indirect Costs. Remote working yields tremendous savings in the Indirect Costs header.

Direct Costs	**Indirect Costs**
Expenses that directly go into producing goods or providing service	General business expenses that keep you operating
• Direct labor • Direct materials • Manufacturing supplies	• Rent • Utilities • General office expenses

Flexibility   Organizations now have a vast pool of enabled resources that can be rostered to manage customer accounts. Lack of necessary travel and physical presence provides greater flexibility for scheduling and staffing resources on various assignments.

Threats

Security Issues   Laptops, desktops, and mobiles accessing corporate networks should be secured. If you are working from a remote facility, make sure your machine is physically secure. Even at home, pay special attention to the physical security of your device. Keep it away from damage, fire, water, etc.

Data privacy issues   Ensure you have an active firewall and anti-virus subscription to keep your corporate data and customer artifacts secure. Data piracy is a significant concern and can lead to severe legal consequences for your organization.

Team Management   It is very challenging for team leads and managers to track and manage all members of the workforce individually. Limited time does not always allow one-on-one calls, and this leads to severe communication and trust issues. Give adequate confidence to your teammates that they can reach out to you when in need. Team and organizational communication platforms like Empuls can come in handy for these times.

Psychological disorders   This is as serious as it gets. Loneliness, social isolation, distractions at home exert stiff mental stress on employees. It is recommended to plan team meetings and virtual activities to keep the connection strong and continued.

Deadline slippages   In the event of a lack of efficient tracking, deadlines slippages are easy and costly. Remote working demands changes in regular work styles. Have proper tacking tools and alert mechanisms to inform and remind employees of the upcoming deadlines in advance.

Hardware support   This is tricky and easier said than done. A possible solution is, ask every employee to identify support personnel or outlets that can be reached out to in case of hardware failure. Having a plan of action in place will keep the downtime to a minimum.

Chapter 3

Where to work remotely from?

Work from Home

What to Avoid and Precautions

Co-Working Space

Home

A vast majority of the workforce works from home for the office tasks. Hence, to make your work from home rewarding and pleasant, here is a quick checklist to ensure you have a smooth job from home experience.

1. Fast, reliable, and secure internet connection.
2. Dedicate an office space in your home. Keep it free from personal interferences and other incursions.
.3. Ensure you have a working audio and video setup. A good microphone with working earphones or headphones is good to have for a pleasant call and meeting experience.
4. Make sure you communicate with your team members routinely according to a fixed plan. This will ensure information exchange at clear and defined times.

Co-working spaces

These are great places to work from. They provide the necessary infrastructure and a healthy environment to work peacefully. In case you do not wish to travel long distances and are uncomfortable working from home, these co-working spaces are a great alternative. Their convenient pricing plans and options offer flexibility depending on your needs and requirements.

What to avoid

Be cautious of some tangible and intangible elements that could contribute to inefficiency. Here is a quick list of things to avoid:

- Keep external noise out.
- Low or extremely bright light.
- Unhygienic places, waste, and litter around your working area.
- Do not keep a lot of food around your working area.
- Keep the site out of the reach of family members. It should not be a public place wherein anyone can walk in anytime.
- Establish a routine - a fixed login and logout time - and avoid disrupting it, no matter what.
- Avoid taking up tasks without priorities clarified. With tasks piling up time boundaries blurred, it is important to plan tasks well to avoid exhaustion.

Remote work timings
(for employees with flexible working hours)

Setting up a plan

Here is what a typical workday of an early riser looks like. Based on your biological clock, your plan might be shifted by a few hours. Identify the right plan for you and stick to it!
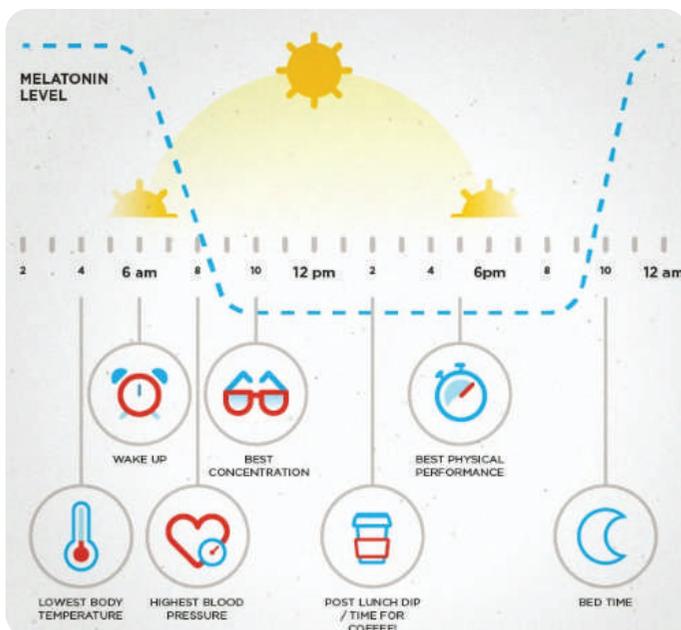
Source: www.toptal.com

Expected challenges

Get in touch with your IT team to identify the anticipated issues. Have a backup plan and the necessary contacts of support personnel ready.

Solutions

Have a handy troubleshooting guide to refer to in case of emergency. (Remember: if your internet is down, for example, no support personnel can take remote login of your machine to help!)

Keep slack for dynamic issues

Ensure to keep some buffer for such problems in your deadlines and plans. It is not advisable to proceed with the best-case scenario expectation.

Do's and Don'ts Checklist

The Do's

1. Maintain regular contact with your team
2. Dress appropriately
3. Invest in the right equipment

The Dont's

1. Snack all day
2. Work from anywhere
3. Forget to take regular breaks for food and water

How to Ace Work From Home

1 Experiment with your work setup

2 Create Work/Home Boundaries

3 Prepare for your meetings

4 Create Accountability for yourself

5 Be visible at work

6 Communicate Clearly and effectively

7 Work on your health

8 Set Clear Responsibilities

9 Take time to socialize

10 Talk with your team

Chapter 4

Who is remote working for?

Various organizations stand at different levels with having their employees enabled for remote working. Here is a quick stat:

What is your company's stance on remote work ?

40% ⬤ Part of the team is full-time remote and part of the team works out of the same office

31% ⬤ Everyone works remotely

16% ⬤ We can work from home as needed

9% ⬤ We can work remotely a certain number of days per week/month

4% ⬤ I am a solo business or freelancer and work remotely

State of remote report / **2019**

Source: buffer.com

What percentage of your company works remotely?

33% ⬤ 1% to 25%

30% ⬤ 100%

17% ⬤ 26% to 50%

11% ⬤ 51% to 75%

9% ⬤ 76% to 99%

State of remote report / **2019**

Source: buffer.com

Sectors that offer remote work

Remote working distributions differ with industry and career. Here is a quick list of the leading sectors providing remote working options.

- Information Technology – 29.2 %
- Marketing – 24.5 %
- Business Administration and Management – 4.7 %
- Mobile App Development – 4.5 %
- Shopping – 3.9 %
- Other – 3.5 %
- Education and Training – 3.3 %
- Arts – 3.3 %
- Human Services – 3.2 %
- Correction and security – 2.9 %
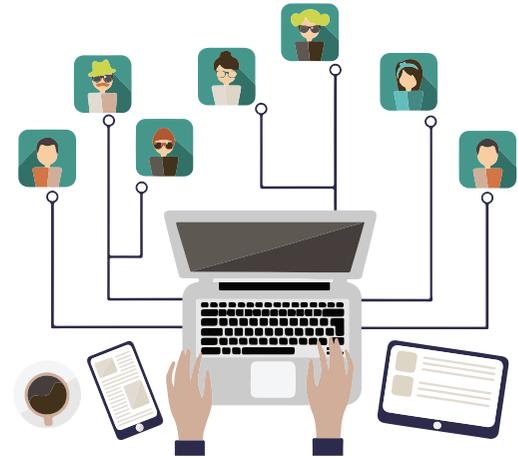
Stakeholders in remote work

Various stakeholder and their role in the remote working process

Organization   Provides the umbrella under which everyone executes the tasks. Organizational values guide the policies laid down for remote working and crisis resolutions mechanisms.

Management   Responsible for policy design, execution, and tracking. Adopts a visionary approach of identifying emerging trends and enabling the infrastructure and administrator to provide the necessary facilities to the workforce.

Workforce   Bulk of the staff that does the on-field remote working.

HR Department   Must come up with dynamic and updated policies to manage the workforce in remote working regimes. Usual policies are usually insufficient to.

IT Department   The backbone of the remote login execution. It is always on a war footing solving software, hardware, access, and other issues.

Chapter 5

How to Remote Work: Tools & Techniques

Even while working through the looming financial uncertainty using relief programs that are available, businesses need to keep their virtual doors open and the team productive to offer business continuity. For firms who do not have remote working capabilities below given is a quick walk through of the communication best practices, tools for staying connected and keeping your business moving through the current crisis and beyond.

Reinventing Communication

While in an office, there are so many easy opportunities to communicate - through a quick chat, team huddles and even a nod. As phone calls, chats and videoconferencing replace these essential in-person interactions, it gets challenging for both leaders and their teams to understand sentiments and opinions. This could lead to Intention of messages being misread. In essence, quickly, the way communication was done needs to be rethought of.

Helping team members feel informed, validated and empowered will take center stage. Frequency of communication needs to be drastically increased - making more, the better.

For instance, Xoxoday Empuls offers the following for helping teams with effective communication:

Internal Communication
Empuls offer tools to discuss and do everything related to on-boarding, policies, rewards, recognition, surveys, learning, announcements through groups. It helps teams stay connected and aligned through open discussions instead of creating silos.

Conversations and Chat Bot
Empuls helps building connections and culture with the use of groups and communities. Tapping into Empuls team-building capabilities helps keep employees engaged and increase transparency. Each of these solutions can be quickly accessed with the help of chat-bot.

Working together as a team to attain business goals becomes the focus and intent of all communication. Various platforms can help keep the communications flowing and offer to mimic the different ways teams typically communicate in the workplace.

Chat and Communication Apps

Team Instant messaging and chat apps help teams stay connected and in order to get into a quick discussion around their work day.

Empuls chat, groups, feeds and announcement features come in handy for such messaging. Accessible through both desktop and mobile apps, Empuls offers a chat solution if your business has projects with teams dispersed in remote locations, under different working conditions. Additionally, Empuls also allows creating channels for team based discussions and file sharing. These channels can be used to send important organisation wide and team wide information that helps them feel informed.

Other providers that offer chat:

- Microsoft Teams
- Facebook workplace
- Slack
- Signal

Video conferencing

When face timing becomes a necessity, videoconferencing can help bridge the gap that remote working poses. While many communication providers come with video conferencing features, a primary video conferencing provider makes the process mostly seamless-offering a bit more robust capabilities.

offers small businesses a free version to keep your teams connected. While the free version limits group calls to a duration of 40 minutes, 1:1 meetings do not have a cap. Additionally, Zoom also offers call recording and screen sharing options. It is critical to review Zoom's guidelines for hosting a secure video conference to avoid unprecedented security issues.

is one of the veterans in video conferencing and has all tools for getting teams connected. With call recording, file sharing, screen sharing and built-in chat functions, your team can easily connect via group calls with no time limits.

offers robust video conferencing capabilities. At no cost, your team can be up and on video in a matter of minutes, and all it takes is a Google account. Installing the Hangouts app, teams can make video calls right from their phones and be alerted for new conversations and meetings.

Conference Calls

When one or more team members have a feeble internet connection, video conferencing really does not work out. Conference calls fit the bill to ensure all of the team are reached. Below are a few tools to help with con-calls.

Uber Conference offers expanded call times and up to 50 participants in their free version. Businesses can use either the web-based platform for video or voice-only calls, or a standard dedicated phone number for dial-in meeting access. Despite not using video capabilities, the web interface still allows call recording and screen sharing.

Free Conference Call allows dial-up voice-only calls from your phone, and voice and video calling via its online platform. They offer call recording, breakout rooms and screen sharing, plus a mobile app, for those who can take calls only over the mobile phone.

Keep Your Business Moving

Tools to track productivity can help keep every team member on task. Using built-in tasks, reminders and accountability features, these tools can help team members quickly adapt to remote while keeping their tasks on a tab.

Trello is a simple project management tool and can help small teams track projects (on Boards) and tasks (on Cards). Trello makes it easy to track assignments and keep track of progress in a highly visual, easy-to-read interface.

Basecamp Business offers a 30-day free trial to help you get up to full speed even while new to remote working. It helps create multiple individual projects for several clients or business segments and is designed to help track productivity across multiple projects from a single dashboard.

Box, Dropbox Business and Google Drive can help with file-sharing instead of jamming up inboxes with overly large files. Google Drive offers free storage for up to 15 MB, Box offers 100 MB of storage and a 14-day free trial, and Dropbox offers up to 5 TB of storage and a 30-day free trial.

DocuSign and HelloSign can help with online signatures. These online signature services can get documents out to your customers fast and both offer free 30-day trials.

Notarize.com offers notarizing of official documents notarized even during lock-downs. One of their many notaries via video chat to verify your identity documents and then email you a copy of your fully notarized documents.

Boost Employee Morale

Engaging the employees and keeping their morale high is probably one of the most challenging aspects of remote work. At the lack of human contact, HR and managers would need to work extra times to cope up with the engagement efforts that are missed out. With the use of technology, even the seemingly intricate employee engagement initiatives can be made not only feasible but even more efficient during remote work.

Employee empowerment

Pulse Surveys	Stay on top of employee sentiment across the organization through remote engagement surveys. Use read-to-use survey kits like the ones that Empuls offers to quickly understand how your employee is coping.
Collect employee feedback	Encourage employees to share open and honest feedback using tools such as Empuls feedback survey. Give people managers regular actionable insights on areas of improvement.
Measure using eNPS	Run eNPS across all stages of the employee life-cycle, across departments and locations to understand the current issues in engagement and to work to improve them.

Employee Rewards and Recognition

Make appreciation a habit	Be it just a "thank you" or the annual directors award, give employees the power to share appreciation in the moment. Empuls offers peer to peer awards, spot awards, nomination based awards and jury awards that are completely configurable to organisational needs.
Reinforce company values	Educate users about the organizational mission, vision, and values and enable peer to peer appreciation on displaying these. Empuls, for instance, offers value based rewards for appreciating employees who live upto the organisational values.
Don't fall short on Celebrations	Make birthday, service anniversaries, wedding anniversaries and new parent celebrations almost as grand as they were at office by offering gifts and celebration rewards through social channels. Empuls creates special feeds for such special events and the whole company joins in with wishes and appreciations.
Point based rewards for remote redemption	Offering points as rewards aptly fits into the remote working context. Empuls points allow disbursal of multi-currency rewards with instant omni channel delivery, personalized messaging and flexible expiry of points.

Go live with rewarding using Integration	Solve the existing rewarding restrictions of your enterprise systems with integrations. Empuls, for example, can be integrated with your existing applications like CRM, HRMS, PRM, Survey and more for quickly starting reward programs.

Employee Benefits

Employee Perks	While employees need to purchase their essential goods even while remotely working, help them save money using perks. Empuls Employee benefits & perks help employees save money by up to $1000 every month on essentials.
Employee Discount Program	Many employees choose online services to cater to their hobbies and interests- and offer exclusive discounts to offer a better deal. Empuls offers exclusive discount programs ranging from Food ordering, Health, Fitness, Gadgets, Appliances, Fashion, Apparels, and more. Choose from global categories in gift cards and experiences.
Employee Benefits	Benefits become essential during health crises and economic slowdowns and ensure the employee receives the right benefit that they can put to use. Empuls provides employee benefits through loans & insurance for health, education, housing, and much more.

Recommended Remote work behaviours

Acquiring personal and behavioral skills for remote working

- Give yourself time to adjust. It is a new phenomenon asking for a sudden and drastic transition. You are bound to feel lonely, sad, irritated, or cranky. Let the new routing settle in. Take frequent breaks. Speak to friends and loved ones if you feel disturbed.

- Take regular breaks for food, water, or a general walk along with stretching exercise. Your eyes, too, need rest from constant staring at the screen. It is a good practice not to eat at your workplace. Move to a different room or area for food. This will give you a break from work and remind you not to indulge in excessive eating as you must get back to work.

- Track your working hours: Do not end up putting in excessive hours working. Just because you are always available does not mean you have to be up and working. Work-time, my-time, and family-time have to be defined and respected too.

- Physical fitness is essential. Make sure your postures and working styles are not detrimental to your physical health.

Remote Work etiquettes

- Maintain proper communication with your managers, supervisors, teammates, and subordinates. Do not leave room for miscommunications and doubts. Physical distances require more exceptional communication. Do not assume. Instead, state it even if it is obvious.

- Be aware of the remote working policies, what is allowed, what is prohibited, and what are the rules around tools, practices, and standards.

- Have a communication and escalation hierarchy setup. Let all your teammates know how they can reach out to you in case they are stuck and need support.

- Pay particular focus and attention to project tracking. Share progress with everyone regularly and make sure everyone is aware of the expectations, deliverables, and deadlines.

- Leverage the right tools and solutions that solve your problem without giving you excess learning headaches. Make sure your team understands how to work on the tools. If required, arrange for a quick training on how to use the tools.

- Personal wellbeing is essential and must always be taken care of. It is your responsibility. Make sure you do not neglect it under any circumstances.

Chapter 6

Overcoming the remote work challenges

What are the top remote work challenges and concerns?

Hardware

Legal

HR Department

Networking

Challenges &
Concerns

Workforce

Organization

Loneliness

Productivity

Hardware & equipment
The breaking down of expensive hardware is a major showstopper. Make sure your device is well maintained and is routinely checked by the IT department for any issues or failures. If you come across any malfunctioning, let the concerned team know immediately so that they can take preventive action. Remember the ancient adage: A stitch in time saves nine?

Workforce
Employees can get demotivated and left out. It is vital to keep them informed, motivated, and focused on their goals and duties.

Organization
Values can diminish as the organizational culture is lost in remote working circumstances. Organize frequent meetings and virtual get-togethers to keep employees aware of the values.

Legal
Distributing workforce and operations can create tricky situations and legal challenges. Keep your managers on alert to identify any failure, unethical, or unlawful activity in time.

HR	Address concerns of the people on priority. Define proper hierarchies and escalation points to manage issues and provide swift resolution to employees. Delays can have drastic consequences on the morale of the team.
Feeling of left out	Employees can get demotivated and left out. It is vital to keep them informed, motivated, and focused on their goals and duties.
Networking becomes more challenging	Do find the people you met over a virtual meet on LinkedIn and try to connect with them. Just because you did not meet the person in real life, does not mean you do not establish a link with them.
Productivity expectations	These can have different definitions for the same person based on whose perspective in context. But it is essential to bring all those diverse and diverging opinions on the same page and make them converge towards a common point.

Top remote work myths busted

1. **Remote work does not get things done:** Perceptions hold that remote workers are not serious. Things do not really move when it comes to remote working. Managers and leads should take routing updates and conduct frequent audio-video calls to ensure that the work is progressing well.

2. **Remote workers should continually prove themselves:** Relax! Remote workers are normal workers too. They are doing the same tasks that people sitting in offices do. Now that everyone is a remote worker, such myths no longer hold the fort.

3. **Remote work dilutes company values:** It is often feared that employees on long remote working stints are disconnected from company values and are prone to violating them. On the contrary, it is easier to reach out to them, communicate the values and their importance, and convince how important it is to adhere to them under all circumstances.

4. **I am supposed to work all day long:** Unfortunately, a trend has shaped that expected remote workers to be available at any time of the day. Heard of cases who refused office laptops just to avoid day-long work? It is not the case, and remote workers are expected to deliver their normal workload, which is not significantly different from what they would do from the office premises either. Hopefully, the globally spreading remote working trend will rest this myth.

5. **Remote workers are difficult to reach out to:** Just because you cannot physically meet and speak to a remote worker, does not mean they are difficult to reach out to. Reality is that remote workers who are aware of the physical barrier are a lot more careful about responding to any communication. Hard to believe? Just run a simple experiment. The miraculous A/B experiment. Make two groups. Group 1: remote workers. Group 2: non-remote / office workers. Now, send out a mailer to all of them asking for a response on a certain task. Now, record their time of response. Compile the group averages and see the difference. Yeah, I agree some of them must be busy with meetings or in calls and so on. But that is what the point is. Those will remain constant for both groups. So, it cancels out. And the result you get can be a close approximation of the prevalent trend.

6. **My important information is at risk due to remote work:** If this is a technical problem, there are solutions. (VPN, anti-virus, firewall, etc.) if this is a behavioral problem, speak to your IT team and learn why this is not a problem at all now. The presence of sophisticated and competitive alternatives have long ended this problem. (Is Polio still a major disease?)

7. **There will always be communication gaps with a remote worker:** Yes. That will happen if you want that to happen. If you do not want that, just do a simple exercise. Let the remote workers know of your expectations of communication, updated, and meetings. When you explain to them the work, deliverables, and deadlines, also speak to them about the communication you expect and at what frequency. That is about it. Rest, the remote workers are smart enough to ensure the resting of this myth.

8. **Remote meetings are a waste of time:** True. A lot of time is wasted on: "Can you hear me? Am I audible? Can you see my screen? There is noise in the background". Those are transition times, which come with the shift from a regular meeting to an online meeting. Soon, the practices are set, and remote workers adapt to the circumstances to ensure a healthy, productive, and on-time meeting. (Waiting for someone in a physical meeting room and waiting for a white-board marker are bad experiences too? Right?)

Conclusion

Remote working in post COVID-19 World

We expect some significant changes in the way business and work is done in the COVID-19 world. And these changes are here to stay. Since the organizations have gone on war footing to enable remote working for almost everyone in the organization, they intend to make these changes long term. If the experts are to be believed, the world might never return to what it was. Here are some things that will be disrupted significantly:

1. **Business Travel:** Social distancing is here to stay. Public places will continue to be risky. In such risky circumstances, organizations are focusing on reducing the global travel for work and getting the work done remotely and on virtual means instead. This puts increased emphasis on the remote working capabilities. Get used to doing business online. Physical meetings should see a severe drop.

2. **Business Continuity:** Businesses cannot be at the mercy of pandemics. They have tasted blood due to COVID-19 circumstances and are now gearing up to be prepared for such exigencies in the future. Remote working will be a major strength in overcoming such disasters. Dependency on people to travel to office, travel for engagements are showstoppers and the organizations are cognizant of them. Expect organizations to enable remote working and encourage employees to work remotely. This is not only essential for business continuity in the testing times, but also a game changer in the long run. It will play a supportive role in enabling organizations to overcome the major losses incurred and return to their former glory.

3. **New products and services:** The world has changed. To continue to stay relevant in this changed world, organizations must come up with products that are in sync with the evolving needs and demands of the now remote working workforce. And mind it, most of this innovation will also be happening remotely. Focus on collaborative working, come up with ideas and create solutions that solve challenges and problems. Also, take initiative, arrange calls and meetings and get things done. Do not wait for your manager to organize and sort everything out for you.

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If you'd like to learn more about how Xoxoday can align, motivate, empower and engage your folks during remote work,

we'd love to chat.

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