

7 Simple Solutions for Managing Modern Remote Workers

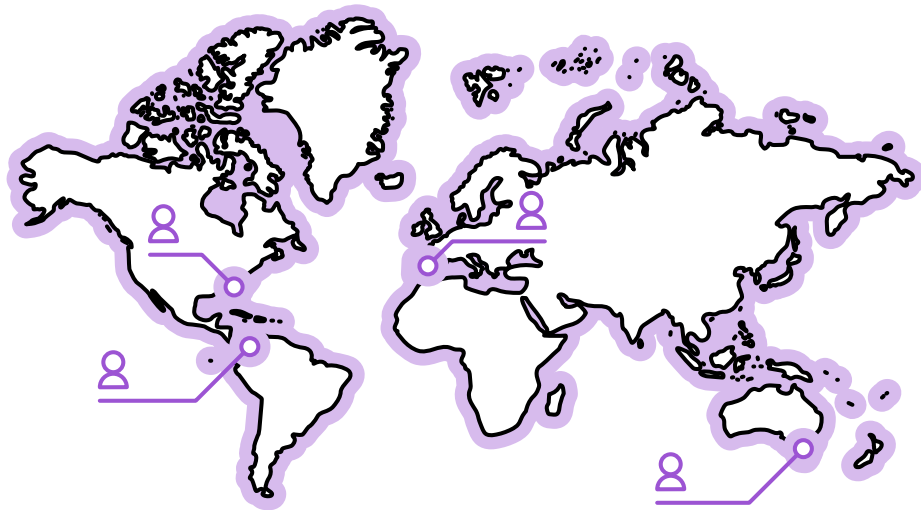


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7 Simple Solutions for Managing Modern Remote Workers

Remote work, virtual work, telecommuting, telework—it goes by many different names. Statistics show that more and more office workers are working from the comfort of their own home every year. Businesses are discovering the efficiencies of employing remote employees and the benefits they lend to the organization. But how do you know if remote working is right for your organization? Despite some of the negatives surrounding remote work, organizational behaviour experts believe the negatives are far outweighed by the positives. *Some regions will even pay you extra dollars to move there and work remotely from home.*



To many people, remote working privileges might seem like an obvious benefit to implement for employees. Instead of spending hours sitting in traffic on the way to the office, why not use that time productively working from home? Rather than increasing a business' overhead, why not eliminate some of it?

DEMAND FOR REMOTE WORK IS GROWING

In a 2017 [report from Global Workplace Analytics](#) on workforce telecommuting data, researchers unveiled some incredible insights:

- People who work from home, not self-employed, has grown 140% since 2005
- 2.9 percent of the total U.S. workforce work from home at least half of the time, up from 1.8 million in 2005
- Telecommuter population has grown by 11.7%, the largest year over year growth since 2008
- 50% of the US workforce holds a job that is compatible with at least partial telework
- 80% to 90% of the US workforce says they would like to telework at least part-time
- If those with remote-compatible jobs did so only for half the time, a typical business would save \$11,000 per person per year

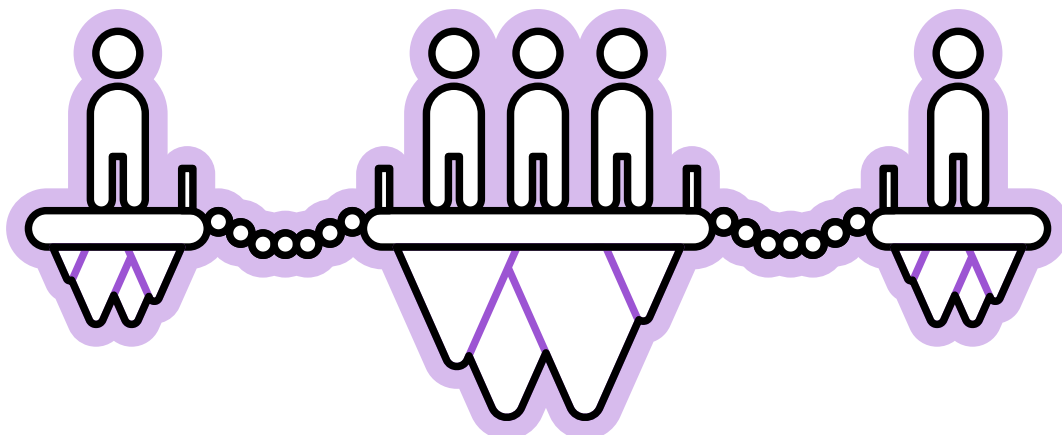
The data shows the demand for remote work is growing as more businesses have become open to the idea of a flexible work schedule. But like other contemporary business concepts, remote work has received its fair share of pushback, as dealing with a remote team presents its own share of unique obstacles. Implementing a remote work policy that fails to adapt to these challenges can lead to poor morale, engagement, or worse, turnover.

If you're thinking about implementing a remote work policy, consider these 7 simple solutions for managing remote workers. We'll discuss the pros and cons of remote work, identify common reasons for pushback, and provide you with useful tips to make your program a success.

Learn to spot disengaged remote employees

Spotting disengaged employees is one of the trickier tasks a manager deals with. But when you add in remote employees, it becomes even trickier. If body language, enthusiasm, and attentiveness are great engagement signals for employees inside the office, how can one identify a disengaged remote employee?

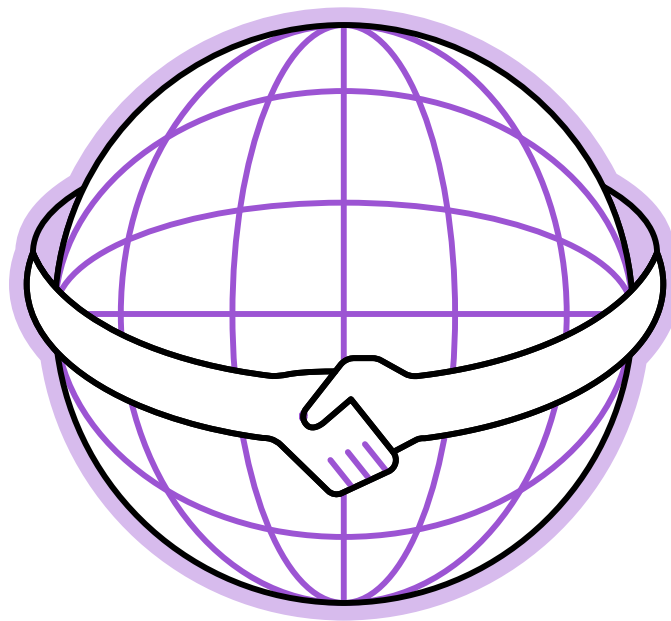
An open office filled with the hustle and bustle of productive employees is thought of as the image of a successful business. In the past, organizational thought leaders considered it imperative that employees be in the same location and in close proximity to foster collaboration and creativity in their work. [Dom Price, futurist at Atlassian Software](#), makes the point that if that were the case then no business would have expanded beyond a single office. Dom says, “Given the right environment, remote workers enhance your business rather than tax it. If they’re off on their own little islands or generally ineffective, that’s a people problem—not a proximity problem.”



Organizational behaviour experts tell us to pay attention to “virtual body language” when it comes to your remote workers. If leaders are missing the signals, it’s a people problem not a proximity problem. Behaviours like missing stand up meetings, slow or no reply to emails and messages, missed deadlines, or a lack of participation in team activities or chats are some obvious signs that something is up. A lack of communication must be addressed as soon as possible before any situation worsens.

As a best practice, daily or weekly “check-ins” are common for remote teams. New predictive analytics and sentiment analysis tools are also common tools that help managers analyze their team’s engagement according to the data. Effective collaboration requires a high level of trust no matter where the work gets done.

When you lay down the ground rules and give your employees the autonomy to make decisions, they’ll perform their best. Look over their shoulder every five minutes and micro manage every decision and they’ll soon disengage. The key is to develop trust and the practices that go along with it.



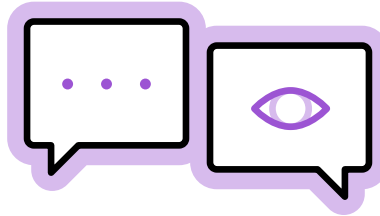
Find your unique path to productivity

For organizations considering remote work, staying on top of employee productivity is a concern. There's no debate that remote employees are harder to monitor than in-office employees. Remote employees are not present for quick check-ins or impromptu catch ups, which can be a hard pill to swallow for most managers. Yet [new research on open work spaces](#) suggests that increased crowding in the workplace and low levels of privacy lead to defensive behaviours and strain workplace relationships. So where does the balance lie?

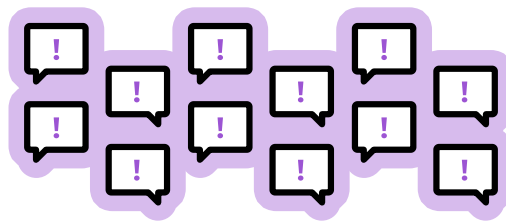
One approach to managing teams with both in-person and remote workers involves implementing the right software solutions. Project management tools like [Asana](#), [Basecamp](#), [Wrike](#) and countless others make it easy for teams to monitor project timelines and ensure all tasks are completed on schedule. Human capital management programs monitor employee milestones, data, and engagement levels.

In addition, a big part of maintaining team productivity involves investing in developing a higher level of trust amongst working relationships. A work culture with a strong foundation is built on open communication, autonomy, and trust. With this foundation in place, remote employees don't need to be virtually micromanaged if you trust that their projects will arrive completed and on time. In fact, the more you micromanage, the more it weakens trust. Responsible and hardworking employees should be trusted to complete tasks on time and to the best of their ability, but if you can't trust an employee to do that, why did you employ them in the first place?

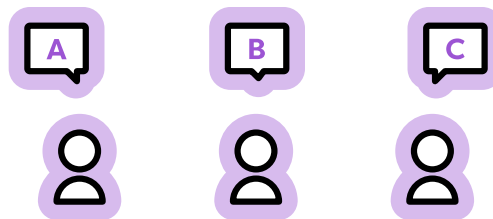
Here are three tips from Harvard Business Review to help you avoid productivity issues with remote teams:



- **Don't confuse brief communication with clear communication.**
Sometimes our efforts to be efficient with our online communication are lacking. Too much brevity often creates confusion and means more time wasted trying to interpret your message. Don't assume everyone understands your shorthand and jargon.



- **Don't bombard coworkers with messages.** Different mediums elicit different response times. Emails, for example, don't require an immediate response. Phone calls are generally preferred for important conversations. There's no need to follow an email up with a text and phone call. Respect your team's time and stay away from any sort of online intimidation.



- **Establish communication norms.** Lay out your communication expectations beforehand. Allow each team member to share their preferred communication styles and schedules. It makes life more comfortable and less stressful for everyone if they know what to expect.

Celebrate remote workers' milestones

As important as it is to recognize and reward employees, it is critical that you make the extra effort to recognize remote employees. Because remote employees are not privy to the day-to-day operations of the business, their presence is not as pronounced. Thus it requires more attention from a manager to celebrate or recognize the accomplishments of their remote workers.

Failing to recognize remote employees can have consequences that affect their productivity. Appreciation improves engagement and retention, and when team members see that their work is having a direct [impact on company milestones](#) it motivates them to contribute their best. Feeling unappreciated or segregated from the team hurts employee morale and sends a clear message that you simply don't care.

To avoid creating any problems or issues, consider developing an operating agreement with your remote workers. This type of plan should provide guidelines for questions like when to provide status reports, your preferred communication venues, what needs to be communicated and to whom, how information should be presented, and how often. An operating agreement creates accountability amongst team members with the added benefit of ensuring deadlines are met. Once implemented successfully, it gives you more reasons to praise remote workers in a timely manner for a job well done.

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Narrow the time zone gap

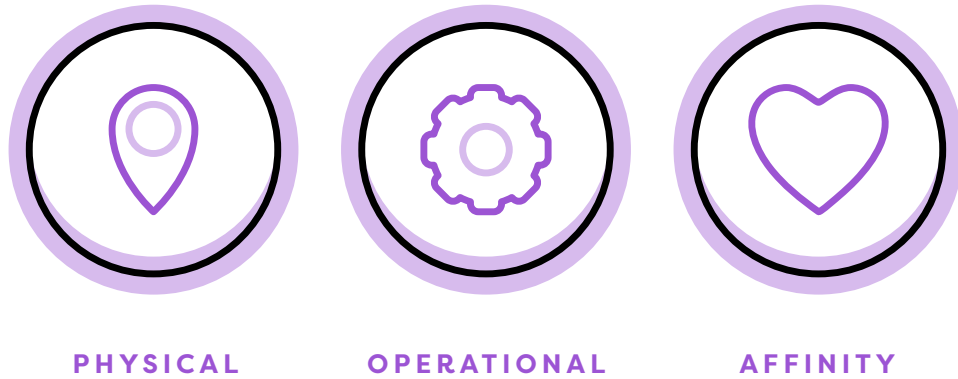
Remote teams are often spread across multiple time zones which can make coordination more challenging. First and foremost, make sure to note the time zone of each remote employee when scheduling meetings. It helps to attach each person's time zone to their username on Slack for example. The last thing a manager wants is to ignore an employee's schedule and cut into their lunch hour.

-  **Mandy** *UTC -8*

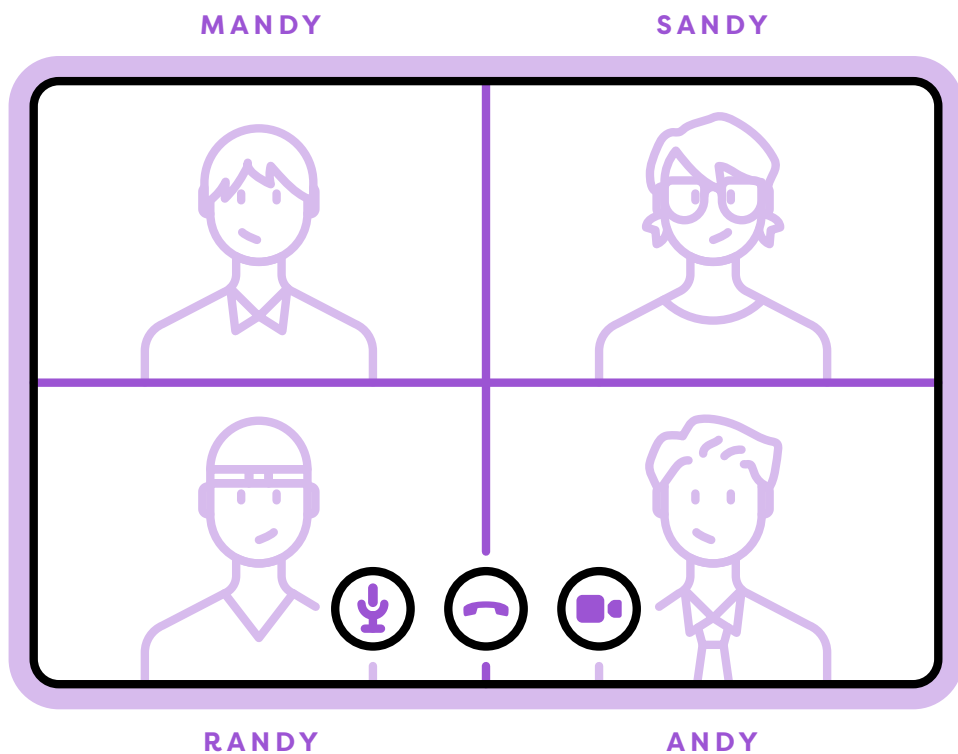
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Harvard Business Review writers and organizational behaviour experts Erica Dhawan and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic tell us, "There are three kinds of distance in remote collaboration: physical (place and time), operational (team size, bandwidth and skill levels) and affinity (values, trust, and interdependency). The best way for managers to drive team performance is by focusing on reducing affinity distance." To address affinity distance, the experts recommend all new remote teams to switch most of their communication to regular video calls. A small amount of instant messaging and emailing are fine, but an emphasis on video calls is preferable. They say video calls are the most effective at building rapport and empathy with coworkers who are unfamiliar with one another. Video is the most personal form of online communication because it allows viewers to take into account body language. And from what experts know, body language is essential for sincere communication.



05

Make time for open communication

In a traditional office impromptu conversations or meetings can pop up without notice. It happens naturally as employees mingle and interact—one of the benefits of having an open office. These kinds of casual interactions help strengthen employee relationships and build long term friendships. But without a physical presence in the office, remote or mobile workers aren't around for those organic interactions. They aren't there for water cooler chats about last night's game or current event discussions in the office kitchen. It's a problem because remote workers often cite feeling not as much a part of the company culture as in-office employees.

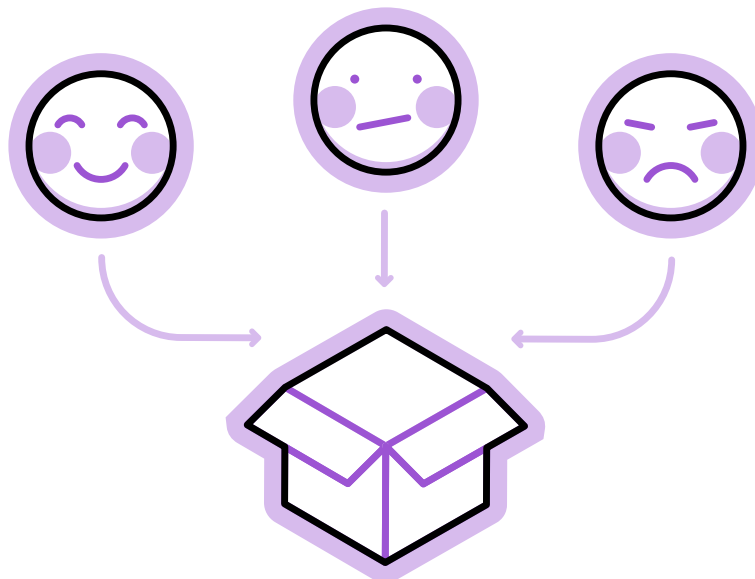
One solution is to schedule time for casual discussion such as daily or weekly "stand-ups" with your team to share what you're working on or problems you're having on projects. At the start of the meeting, make it a point to use the time to catch up with one another. Focus on any successes or problems from previous weeks or simply chat about last night's game. The goal at the beginning should be to share and keep it casual.

The second solution is to have a virtual "water-cooler" or platforms where your remote employees can connect and interact. Channels on Slack that are strictly for discussing sports, The Bachelor, TED Talks or yoga is one example. A little friendly conversation can go a long way in fostering employee relationships.

06 Focus on regular employee feedback

For any growing business, [collecting employee feedback](#) is important. We're not talking about a shoe box in the corner of the office that's labelled "opinion box". Opinions from in-office staff, good or bad, create an opportunity for improvement and growth. Collecting feedback from your remote employees should be no different.

Problems arise when managers hope to get a finger on the pulse of their remote workers because remote workers are not around for a quick check-in. In most cases, one-on-one feedback sessions via video conference are an ideal way to address this issue. Video leaves virtually no room for miscommunication. Other options like online surveys, questionnaires, apps and chatbots are common for collecting employee feedback. While these are useful tools, they are without a doubt less personal than a one-on-one conversation. But for organizations with employees that number in the hundreds or thousands a survey or chatbot is scalable enough to reach everyone.



07 Choose the right remote tools

Take the time to learn how each of your remote workers prefers to communicate. The communication tool that works best for one may not be ideal for another.

The first step to maximizing your remote employees' potential is to make sure they are set up for success. For example, instant messaging, video conferencing, and multi-user project management tools are ubiquitous across organizations of all sizes. Many of these tools such as Skype, Quip, Slack, and Google Hangouts offer a user-friendly platform for collaboration.

Cloud-based human capital management (HCM) can empower employees with access to their pay information and company resources, without having to submit requests to HR. Adopting a human capital management platform can solve a lot of these tiny issues that would otherwise impede a remote worker from completing tasks.

Lastly, ensure all of your tools utilize the cloud infrastructure, as remote workers rely on cloud-based systems to access all necessary files and documents, and most importantly, to stay in sync with their team. This way your remote team can access up-to-date data and information no matter where they are in the world.

What's right for your remote team?

Managing remote workers requires a lot of planning and careful consideration of your team's efficiency. Once you do your own assessment of each of these seven solutions, you'll be one step closer to tackling your own remote working strategy. Ultimately, the process of planning for remote working forces you to ask some difficult questions and address critical issues surrounding teamwork, motivation, and accountability to which you might have otherwise turned a blind eye.

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