The Version 1

Quick-Start Guide to Remote Working

VERSION 1

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Introduction

Whether you are rolling out a remote working policy due to a crisis, as part of a Business Continuity Plan, or considering a move to remote working over a longer period of time, the following guide is designed to arm you with practical tips and key considerations related to managing a remote workforce.

Access advice based on our experience of collaborating virtually across many geographical locations from several of our business departments including Internal IT, Security, HR, Employee Engagement, Software Development and more.

Why Remote Working?

Depending on an organisation's unique requirements, there are many reasons that employees will work remotely:

☑ Crisis Management

☑ Business Continuity Plan

☑ Parental/Personal Requirements

☑ Geographical Skills Shortages

☑ Greater Flexibility for Employees

☑ Reduction in Overheads (Start-Ups, Short-Term Projects, etc.)

Remote working (to a certain degree) won't come as a shock for many organisations and for many roles it's already the 'norm'; looking at work from home roles in the information economy, Forrester found that **"66% of information workers in North America and Europe already work remotely"** in the **Demystifying the Mobile Workforce study**.

How Organisations Can Support Remote Working

Although remote working is becoming the 'norm' for certain roles, it's very different when a whole department, business or organisation works remotely. While the preferable option would be to have clearly defined remote-working policies and plans in place, in times of crisis, this may not be feasible and many employees including management must come to terms quickly with working at home, and virtually collaborating with each other for the first time.

Organisations should ensure that all their employees have the capability to be able to work from home. There may be specific reasons as to why some people cannot work at home, with open dialogue and assistance provided where required. By ensuring that the required infrastructure is in place, the transition from office to remote working will be much smoother and ensures each employee will have the necessary resources to fulfil their role.

> *"Effective teamwork begins and ends with communication."*
> **Mike Krzyzewski**

Equipment & Key Requirements

The equipment and key requirements for an employee to carry out their tasks remotely can vary wildly depending on what their role entails. It's important to ensure that the necessary equipment is available to employees, and the typical requirements* in IT-related roles would be:

Computer or laptop

Mouse and keyboard

Work telephone

Software to enable the employee to work from home

Broadband
((Employees typically have their own set-up at home)

Some roles may require specialist additional items, or somewhat regular access to physical kit such as servers, scanners, printers, etc.

Section 2:
Technology & Security

Technology for Remote Working in 2020

Technology as we know it today has enabled conversations to happen across the world between people and teams. The growth of Cloud has allowed employees and systems to decentralise at any time, allowing remote workers to work from **any place, any time, anywhere**. This section will focus on Version 1's advice for maximising the use and investment in your organisation's technology when employing remote working.

1. Critical Systems

The most likely starting point on any journey to a more scalable and resilient service is a trusted cloud provider. Public or private, moving to cloud for any workload is a journey. Whether a migration of servers to Infrastructure-as-a-Service or a redesign of a system into microservices is needed, Cloud can provide these capabilities for your organisation. The elastic nature of cloud resources makes preparing for any increase in traffic or load relatively easy, with additional compute or memory being available within a handful of clicks or command line interface (CLI) entries.

Technology for Remote Working in 2020

2. Virtual Private Network (VPN)

A Virtual Private Network (VPN) has recently begun to play an increasingly important role when remote working. A VPN can be the link to your organisation's workplace servers and other internal resources, such as the IT support team. More than ever, these technologies will be relied upon to ensure that remote workers deployed globally are supported and connected to their colleagues.

3. Communication

For any team, communication is key. The nature of the messages may vary depending on the audience, e.g. project teams may want messages from their build pipelines or support teams may want notifications for new support tickets requiring attention, but the need to access information quickly and easily is the same.

Tools like Microsoft Teams, Slack, HipChat, etc., make inter-team and intra-team communication painless. Supporting voice, video and text content, meetings can be as interactive as needed. An investment into a headset speaker for remote workers can make a world of difference; whilst laptop speakers can work for a time, it can cause some issues for those on the other end.

4. Collaboration

A range of collaboration tools exist for remote workers, with each having its own advantages and disadvantages. Version 1 have pulled together a range of tools below, for your organisation to implement in accordance to business needs.

Internal Communication

- Microsoft Teams
- Amazon Chime
- Skype
- Amazon WorkDocs
- Slack
- Yammer

External Communication

- Email
- WhatsApp
- Mobile Phone
- Messenger

Video

- Microsoft Teams
- Whereby
- OBS
- Google Hangouts
- Zoom

Online Whiteboards

- Miro
- Klaxoon
- Mural
- Deon

Journey Mapping

- Smaply
- Custellence

Project Management

- Microsoft Teams
- Trello
- Asana

As mentioned in the previous section, the necessary equipment needs to be available to employees to carry out their role needs effectively. Some remote workers may take extra steps to utilise additional equipment for their preferences, such as ultrawide or vertical screens. Any IT-related support should be directed back to the organisation's IT helpdesk for guidance.

54% of HR leaders indicated that **poor technology and/or infrastructure** for remote working is the biggest barrier to effective remote working

Gartner

Security Concerns

"Security isn't expensive, it's priceless."
Jerry Smith

Security should always be a top priority when employees are remote working, as organisations are responsible for the security of information. This includes the security to protect the organisation, its employees and its clients from any potential security risks or breaches.

Organisations must reiterate current security policies for employees working remotely, to ensure they continue with secure working practices out of office.

Quick training sessions can be provided to employees to ensure they understand the landscape of threats and the risks of working remotely.

We strongly advise that all organisations (at a minimum) cover off our following security checklist when implementing remote working.

Security Checklist

- ✓ Ensure that employees connect to trusted networks

- ✓ No passwords should be written down, even if the employee is in their own home

- ✓ Use multi-factor authentication on accounts where possible

- ✓ Ensure that any screens or monitors cannot be seen by unauthorised people

- ✓ Stay mindful of printing sensitive documents

- ✓ Double check the source and recipients of emails

- ✓ Do not open any documents that are not expected and are unrecognised

- ✓ Verify any calls where the caller states that they are coming from your organisation, a customer or a partner

- ✓ Verify the people on a video or conference call are those that have been invited

- ✓ Only install software from recommended locations or make use of an internal software distribution application

- ✓ Understand how to report any loss of organisation equipment

Section 3:
Pitfalls & Positives

Potential Pitfalls

It's important to be aware of the potential pitfalls that can come with remote working. There are plenty of arguments and suspicion from organisations against the concept. This section will highlight what you should keep an eye out for and what can be done to counteract possible challenges to ensure remote working is successful for both organisation and employee.

1. Communication Issues

Excellent communication is essential when working remotely, however issues ranging from technical difficulties to deeper collaborative challenges can be challenging. Not being face-to-face with colleagues and customers means that it can be a lot more difficult to influence, and to read people's reactions. To ensure communication remains at a high standard, relationships should be formed amongst co-workers through tools such as video chats, conference calls, and regular one-to-ones with Line Managers. Email should be reserved for when it's strictly required, as it does little to build relationships, and there is no guarantee that it has been read or understood!

2. Distractions

There may be various distractions for remote workers, which could include the environment they're in, easy access to other technologies/multimedia, and lack of focus or direction. While it's difficult to ensure that employee productivity remains high, and that they are in a quiet and dedicated working space, a high degree of trust coupled with an ambitious plan of action agreed with a Line Manager should empower your employee to feel confident in working independently and productively to achieve their goals.

3. Poor Time Management

It can be difficult for employees to adapt to working outside of the usual 9-5 routine, without the morning commute and formal start to the day. Contrary to the popular belief that working from home means hardly working, the vast majority of remote workers report working longer hours with fewer breaks at home, struggling with their work/life balance and 'switching off' in the evening. Employees should be encouraged to maintain normal working hours at home, and quick morning stand-ups or 15-minute team catch-ups should help employees who might be struggling with managing their priorities for the day.

4. Isolation

Employees tend to feel like they are 'part of the company' when they are in the office brainstorming and socialising with their colleagues. Don't let employees fall into the trap of feeling 'invisible' while remote working. Combat the lack of in-person social events and relationship-building activities with virtual efforts! Encourage employees to set up social activities such as quizzes, scavenger hunts, 'Lunch and Learns', team competitions, fantasy leagues, and 15-minute 'tea breaks' to video chat! Other popular approaches to morale building include setting up channels on Teams and Slack for sharing of recipes, pet photos, favourite books, etc.

The Positives

We've covered the pitfalls to watch out for with remote-working employees, so now it's time to look on the positive side! There has been much debate about working from home and whether or not it's going to be productive or a drain on time. This section will cover some of the most popular and widely reported benefits of remote working.

1. Increased Productivity

A two-year study by Stanford professor Nicholas Bloom on the employees of Ctrip, China's largest travel agency, noted an astounding productivity boost among the remote workers, **equivalent to a full day's work**. 500 employees were divided into two groups; a control group (who continued working at HQ) and volunteer work-from-homers. The remote workers ended up working a true full shift (or more). Additionally, employee attrition decreased by 50 percent among the remote workers - they took shorter breaks, had fewer sick days, and took less time off.

2. Reduction in Commuting-Related Stress

Longer commute times are associated with increased stress, higher blood pressure, increased BMI, in addition to a reduction in the amount of time available for positive activities such as cooking, exercising and sleeping. By eliminating the daily commute, remote workers are reducing stress such as dealing with bad weather, traffic jams, accidents, delays, cancelled trains, etc. Remote workers are also reducing commuting-related expenses - for example, an employee who normally drives to the office is saving on expenses such as fuel, parking and the use of their car. Additionally, environment-conscious employees can feel better about reducing their carbon emissions from the morning commute.

3. Fewer Distractions

Although listed as a potential pitfall, many employees choose to work from home to "get work done". Working remotely may increase employee productivity due to fewer distractions from people dropping by their desk to chat, less talk in the office around them to distract them, fewer coffee breaks and the ability to create their own work environment. Studies show that it can take 20 minutes to refocus after interruptions and having periods of 2 hours' uninterrupted work enables employees to maintain focus and complete tasks in less time, to a higher standard.

4. Increased Employee Satisfaction

There are many reasons that Employee Satisfaction increases for remote workers with it all depending on the individual themselves. Many employees feel great relief working from home due to a more flexible schedule, the lack of commute, additional family time, and additional time for recreational hobbies and sports. Other reasons employees feel more satisfied with their role working remotely is due to a greater freedom to travel or work from a different location such as a family member's house in a different geographical location if required. Satisfaction can come from the simpler pleasures in life too, such as being able to prepare fresh food at home!

Section 4:
Employee Engagement

Enabling Remote Employee Success & Satisfaction

When remote working, it's crucial to ensure that home workstations are ergonomically correct. Below are a few tips from the **NHS** on improving posture and achieving a proper sitting position when working remotely.

1. Check out the following tips to improve home 'workplace' ergonomics:

- Choose the right height for your chair and desk
- Place screen at eye level
- Ensure you are a proper distance from your monitor/screen
- Make sure lighting in the room is adequate
- Ergonomically set up your equipment – keyboard, mouse, monitor etc
- Set the right temperature in your workspace to ensure comfort
- Have the keyboard straight in front of you
- Keep your mouse close
- Avoid screen reflection
- Make objects easy to reach
- Take regular breaks

2. Efficient/Productive Working

As previously mentioned in this guide, remote working can positively or negatively affect productivity levels. This section will focus on some useful hints and tips to ensure that remote working is efficient and productive.

- Remote workers should structure their day as they would if they were in the office as much as possible. Without a clear structure, this could create a trap of disengagement.

- If music helps with productivity, a motivating playlist at the ready can do wonders - as long as it doesn't create a distraction for your employee's style of working.

- Regular breaks should be taken throughout the day.

- Expectations and boundaries should be established when remote working, especially with anyone else that may be in the same environment during working hours.

- Continually check in with inexperienced remote workers to see what is working/what is not working and make the necessary amendments and changes. It will be a work in progress for a while until they figure out what works best.

- Remote workers should also be aware of their personality type. Extroverts will need interaction to be energised, whereas introverts often get their energy from themselves. Remote workers should adjust to ensure their interaction levels are in line with what their personality needs.

97% of over 3000 respondents in FlexJob's 2018 annual survey said that a flexible job would have a **huge improvement** or positive impact on their overall quality of life.
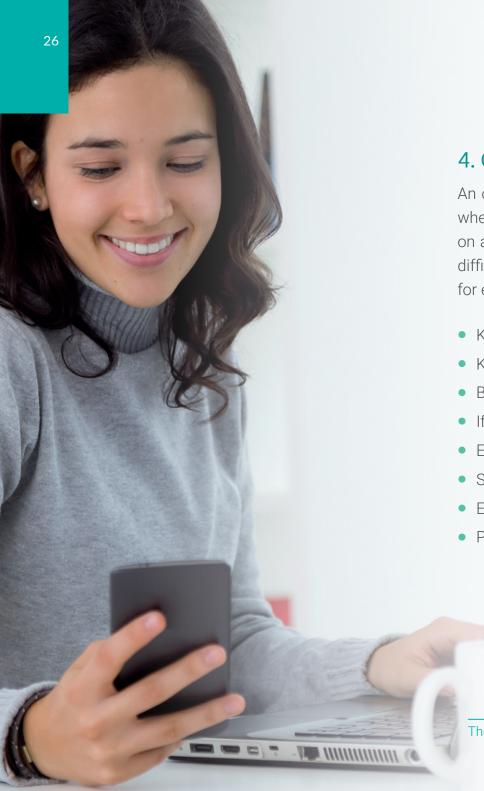
3. Team/Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is key to ensuring organisations consider all touch-points throughout their employee's lifecycle. Through strengthened engagement, remote workers can be empowered through a range of initiatives to increase the overall quality of their employee experience.

With remote workers often working in isolation, here are some of the main best practices from Version 1's Employee Engagement team on staying connected with teams and co-workers.

- Video call with co-workers when possible.
- Schedule weekly team calls for socialising that are not work related.
- Managers should check in with their teams regularly, calling rather than emailing.
- Take time at the start of meetings to check in with the team.
- Work on the same schedule as your team if possible, using coffee breaks as catch up time.
- Share resources – for example, if someone on the team likes yoga, share some articles of yoga at home, or share tips with those who have children at home.
- Utilise technology for social aspects as well as work – Version 1 have recently created online quizzes and scavenger hunts suitable for remote workers to facilitate employee engagement.
- Look out for one another – a quick message to a colleague on how their day is going can make a huge impact.

64% of today's professionals say they **could work anywhere** and remote work policies are in place at 71% of organisations.

Gartner

4. Conference Call Etiquette

An overlooked component of working from home is etiquette for conference calls, whether they be team catch ups or external third-party meetings. If you've ever been on a conference call where someone has showed up late, or experienced technical difficulties, you'll understand the importance of etiquette on calls. A few of our tips for ensuring the correct etiquette on calls include:

- Know where the mute and unmute button is, and how to use it.
- Know how to share desktops and applications professionally.
- Be on time – everyone's time is valuable so be punctual.
- If on video, ensure body language is positive.
- Ensure that there's no excessive background noise.
- Stick to the call agenda to ensure conversation doesn't stray far.
- Ensure all technology required for the call is working beforehand.
- Pay attention!

"To win in the marketplace, you must first **win in the workplace!**"

5. Health and Well-Being

As a certified Healthy Place to Work by Great Place to Work, Version 1 has been working to engage our employees in a variety of initiatives designed to promote a greater sense of wellbeing. Many of these initiatives can be hosted remotely and across various geographical locations. Our most popular initiatives to date have included:

- **The Step Challenge** – Employees compete in teams, logging proof of their total number of daily steps – tracked through their smartphones, pedometers, Fitbits, smart watches, etc. Prizes were allocated to the team with the top number of steps.

- **Sleep Matters Challenge** – A virtual talk was hosted for employees to understand the importance and benefits of getting proper sleep and rest. Version 1 challenged employees to get at least 7 hours of sleep for an entire month (tracking their progress) with prizes available for participants at the end of the month.

- **Hydrate Yourself Challenge** – Employees were encouraged to drink 2 litres of water a day for 21 days, and to track and share their progress with each other.

- **Give Recognition** – Employees were encouraged to say a sincere "Thank-You" to a colleague, give a heartfelt praise or undertake a random act of kindness over the period of two weeks.

Section 5:
Conclusion & Checklists

The number of UK workers who have moved into remote working has increased by nearly a quarter of a million over a decade, **according to the Office of National Statistics.**

Conclusion

While we don't want to give the impression that rolling out a remote working policy is a walk in the park, there is no need to panic as long as you can arrange a taskforce to support your business in addressing some of the top considerations outlined in this guide.

Kickstart your organisation with the most critical business continuity elements such as technology-enablement, security and equipment, and the rest of the list will be much easier with some of the pressure eased.

The last two pages of this guide include two checklists – one to remind yourself of the top business continuity areas to cover from this guide, and one to remind you to take care of yourself personally.

Best wishes,

The Version 1 Team

Remote Working Checklist for Business Continuity

☐ **Technology and Software** put in place to enable remote work, collaboration and communication

☐ **Security** measures put in place to maintain highest levels of protection and awareness while employees are working remotely

☐ **Line Managers** prepared to conduct meetings and one-to-ones with employees to maintain engagement, set objectives and drive productivity

☐ **Teams encouraged** to participate in weekly catchups to ensure employees remain 'visible' and no-one is isolated

☐ **Employees briefed** in Conference Call instructions and etiquette (particularly where large numbers of employees are working remotely for the first time)

☐ **Taskforce assembled** to drive Employee Engagement initiatives around Health & Wellbeing, Social Engagement, Learning, etc.

Remote Working Checklist for Personal Wellbeing

Get up and Fuel Up. Make your bed, get dressed, exercise or have your breakfast and coffee, whatever it takes to kickstart your day positively and create separation between waking up and "going to work" at home!

Set Goals. If you are not into setting daily goals and to-do lists, now is the time to start! It keeps your focus on what you have achieved as well as what there is left to do. You will feel a greater sense of satisfaction ticking off and completing items.

Maintain Structure! Try to stick to your usual routines. Take a proper lunch break every day and try to get a short walk in to reduce your sensitivity to stress.

Reach Out! Limit emails and increase face time interaction through tools such as Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Amazon Chime, Slack or whatever medium you have at your disposal to combat feelings of isolation.

The 20/20/20 Rule. Try to prevent eye strain from staring at a computer screen 8+ hours a day. Take a 20-second break from looking at a screen every 20 minutes. During the break, focus on an object 20 feet away, which relaxes the eye muscles. You can set a reminder on your phone to do this.

About Version 1

Version 1 proves that IT can make a real difference to our customers' businesses. We are trusted by global brands to deliver IT services and solutions which drive customer success. Our 1300 strong team works closely with our technology partners to provide independent advice that helps our customers navigate the rapidly changing world of IT. Our greatest strength is balance in our efforts to achieve Customer Success, Empowered People and a Strong Organisation, underpinned by a commitment to our values. We believe this is what makes Version 1 different and more importantly, **our customers agree**.

Visit **version1.com** to learn more

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