



The Work From Home Guide:

How to make remote working work for you.





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Chapter 1:

Yes, it's here to stay

We may not realize it, but we are all part of the largest workplace experiment ever undertaken. Until now, working from home/remote work was mostly reserved for freelancers or people dabbling in the gig economy. And while more and more organizations were incorporating work from home into their work week, it was largely a fringe employee benefit.

But over the last couple of years, the pandemic changed all that, leaving both CEOs and interns spending their workday on the couch and making important business decisions without leaving their homes.

Work as a concept has changed forever; and more and more our 'office' is wherever we decide it should be. This sudden spike in distributed teams- bolstered by the lockdowns has left organizations having to scramble to keep up. They have had to learn new techniques, adopt new methods and implement new processes. And while a lot of the learnings have come through trial and error, they are discovering that a permanent move to more remote teams is beneficial to both the organization and its employees.

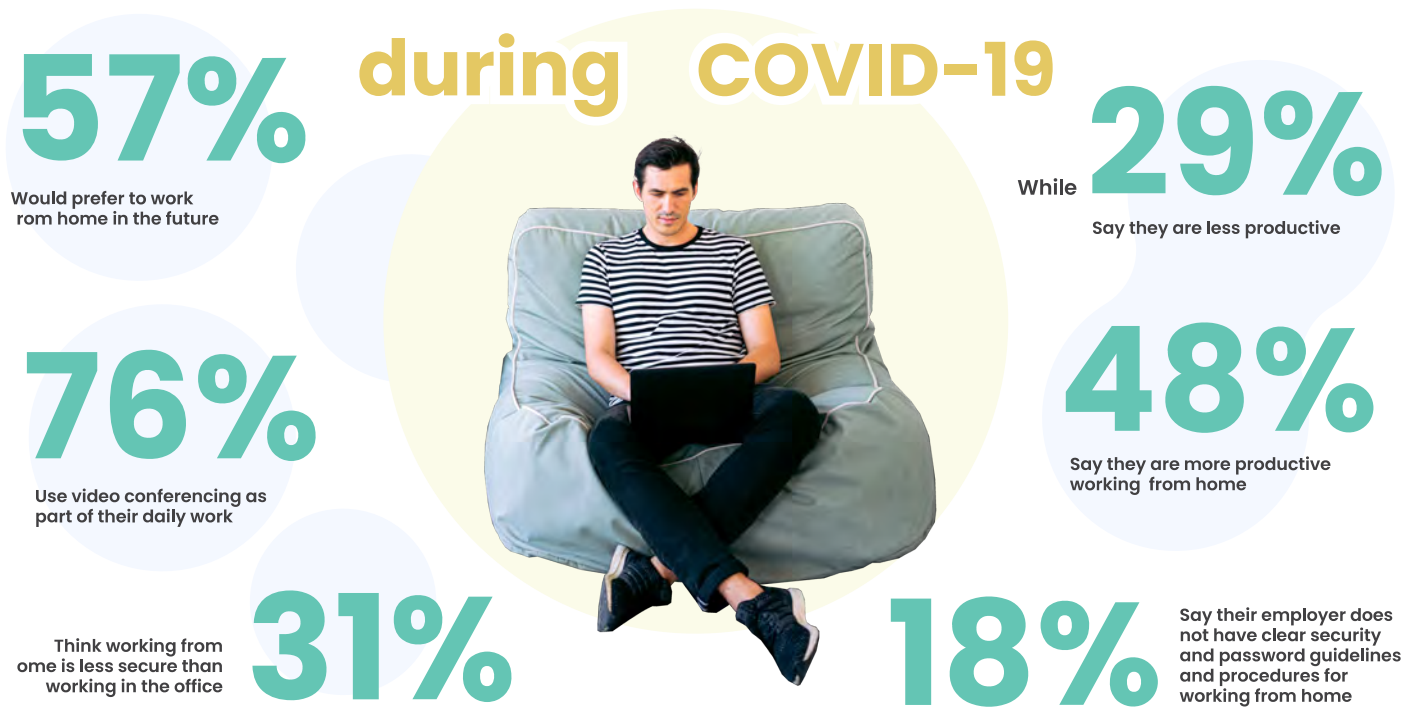
Some of the biggest reasons why organizations are implementing more long term remote working policies are:

Less commuting	Greater productivity	More savings	Job Satisfaction
Travelling to and from work has been linked to increased stress, more pollution and respiratory conditions. The average employee spends over 54 hours a year stuck in traffic.	A recent study conducted with over 150000 employees found that remote workers were 13 percent more efficient than their office-based peers**	Global Workplace Analytics estimated that people could save, on average, \$2,000 to \$6,500*** every year by not spending on things like gasoline and daycare. Companies could spend less on real estate.	The increased flexibility and ability to work on a schedule that works for employees has led to more satisfied workers and allows them to pursue other interests, causing them to be more fulfilled.

*Urban mobility report: <https://static.tti.tamu.edu/tti.tamu.edu/documents/mobility-report-2019.pdf>

**Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment: <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/130/1/165/2337855?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

***Global workplace analytics : <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/pros-cons>



But there are a lot of things that still need some getting used to. This e-book looks at some of the best practices that the most successful organizations have adopted in making the switch to remote teams and aims to provide you with practical tips that you can implement into your company/ workplace right away to get the most out of your remote teams. It will take you through everything from the tools you need to get started, how to implement an effective remote working strategy, some of the drawbacks to be mindful of and the changes in organizational policies required.

Chapter 2:

The tools you need

The future of remote work will only go as far as technology will take it. Setting up the right technological ecosystem to ensure seamless workflow is key to staying connected and getting things done efficiently. The right tools are ones that take away the friction of remote work and allow you to focus on what matters. With the sudden increase in WFH teams, there has been a huge increase in the number of remote working tools available, so much so that selecting the right ones has become its own challenge. Limiting yourself to a few, efficient and easy-to-use tools ensures better clarity amongst teams and sets up a system of better work dynamics. Here are some of the categories for which you need remote working tools and the best options available under each.

Chat/Communication:

Choosing the right tool to ensure the free flow of information is vital. With no more chit-chat around the water cooler or just walking over to someone's desk, you need to find a way to establish an efficient method of communication.



Slack



Microsoft teams



MatterMost

Documentation:

Individuals from remote teams need access to the same information, a quick and efficient way to make sure this information is updated and communicated to everyone who requires it is key to enabling teams to work together. Most collaborative work is on documents so it's important that teams are using real-time documents while working with each other.



GoogleDrive



OneDrive



Google Docs/ Sheets



Dropbox



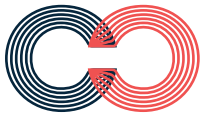
Microsoft 365



Work Management/ Visual Collaboration:

Planning, brainstorming ideas and concepts, designing solutions, and managing projects should be done visually for more effective results. Use a real-time collaboration and work management tool like Creately to simplify workflows throughout the organization and improve cross-functional team collaboration.

It is essential that it also supports good async, collaboration via comments and discussion threads.



Creately

Video conferencing:

There is no replacement for getting people together and having discussions face-to-face. Finding the right conferencing tool for your team allows better connectivity and more productive conversations.



Zoom



Google Meet

Project management:

With distributed teams, it is important to find a way to facilitate better coordination. Online task management tools get teams aligned and serves as a great hub for executing projects.



Asana



Trello



Favro



Todoist



Creately

87%

of high-performing companies use project management software

77%

of high-performing projects use project management software

71%

of people who use a management software feel it's easy to get an exact overview of projects in their workflow

2/3

of companies are communicating with clients using project management software



Chapter 3:

Creating a new normal

Everything about remote working is new. As organizations and teams adjust to this reality, it is important that they set up procedures to bring in a sense of normalcy and establish new ways of doing things. Many believe that working from home can disrupt the company culture; people become inefficient without proper face-to-face supervision, dwindling team spirit and poor, ineffective communication are a few of the many concerns for managers. Yet, it doesn't have to be the case. Here's how you can easily organize your remote teams to be truly productive.

The ground rules:

Clarifying how things are done is vital to avoid confusion. It is important to have a common document setting up the dos and don'ts that's accessible to all. This can be a wiki page, web page, PDF file, or an email - make sure that you share it company-wide and update it continually with newfound insights.

Let others know what you are working on

- Always be available on your chat platform when you are working.
- If you are stepping away from your computer, please mark as 'away' on the chat status.
- If you need to attend an online meeting/video conference, it's generally better to join with the video switched on

Personal status

- When starting your day, share your work agenda for the day on the relevant channel.
- If you move onto something different during the day, post that as well on the relevant team channel.

Share discussions and decisions

- If 2 people are to discuss something that may be relevant, please do that on a thread on the group chat so that others can see as well.
- If discussing something specific, it is best to do so on the document itself and share that link in your chat platform and invite others to collaborate.

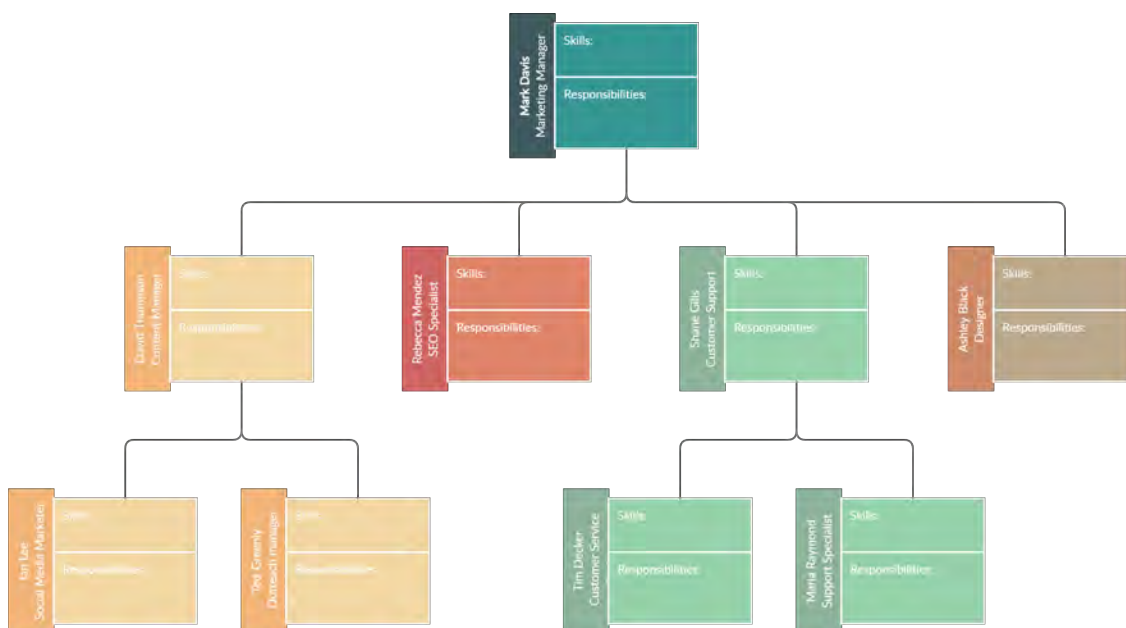
Plan meetings early

- If you need to have a discussion with 2+ people, send an invite at least an hour before or agree on a time a little earlier.

Team structure:

When working from home, the frequency of interaction within teammates is limited. This can cause assumptions to spiral out of control if not clarified quickly.

Setting up a clear team structure, establishing responsibilities of each individual and the reporting relationship between team members can go a long way in maintaining effective communication and keeping everyone aligned in following an established protocol. Communicating this structure and the changes in it can be done by creating organizational charts.



Org chart : <https://creately.com/demo-start?tempId=s9Ga66IGwE>

When in doubt, video call

- A call/ video call is a higher bandwidth way to discuss things. If the person is available on chat, ask if it's okay to call, and give them a call.
- It is much easier and effective to discuss matters over phone/video calls than typing them out on chat.

Prioritization and transparency

Making sure individuals are not working in silos is a constant effort. Have regular action plan meetings where everybody is aware of what the others are doing and clearly communicate to individuals the importance of each task. Having real-time meetings where plans are made allows team members to give useful inputs and identify blockers. Using visual tools to create work plans can serve as a great reference point.

Create rituals:

Regularly engage and share what you are working on with each other through daily online scrum meetings, or weekly all-hands video calls.

Action Plan Template						
Goal:						
Action Step	Responsible	Start Date	Milestones	Due Date	Resources	Desired Outcome

Action plan : <https://creately.com/demo-start?tempId=t6z9obQojni>



Smaller teams. Better conversations.

Once the 'big picture' is clarified, breaking into smaller teams to get into details of each task is a great way to streamline workflow. Having regular video calls creates a more informal setting where team members can bond, share ideas and communicate more freely.

Not everything is about work.

Set aside time so that you get to speak to others and bond before you get down to the agenda. Prioritize icebreakers and create an atmosphere where people feel connected to their fellow employees.





Chapter 4:

Good communication is half the battle

All teams working from home must have good communication strategies in place to survive and thrive. Where there is no proper communication, there is always confusion, misinterpretations and failed relationships.

When working in an office, a team has numerous ways to interact and bond with each other; whenever they want, they can walk over to the other person and start a conversation.

But a remote team doesn't have this luxury. They have their own unique communication challenges, such as having to coordinate around different time zones or language barriers, dealing with the distance that can affect the team spirit, etc. Here's how you can bridge the virtual gap between your remote team members with good communication best practices:

Have a limited set of tool for communication

Having too many tools will make it difficult for you to stay focused and get in touch with your team at the right time. Give the tools you use a specific purpose and use it primarily for that. For example, use Google Hangouts Meet only for video calls and Slack for instant messages.

Always incorporate visuals so what you are explaining can be simplified

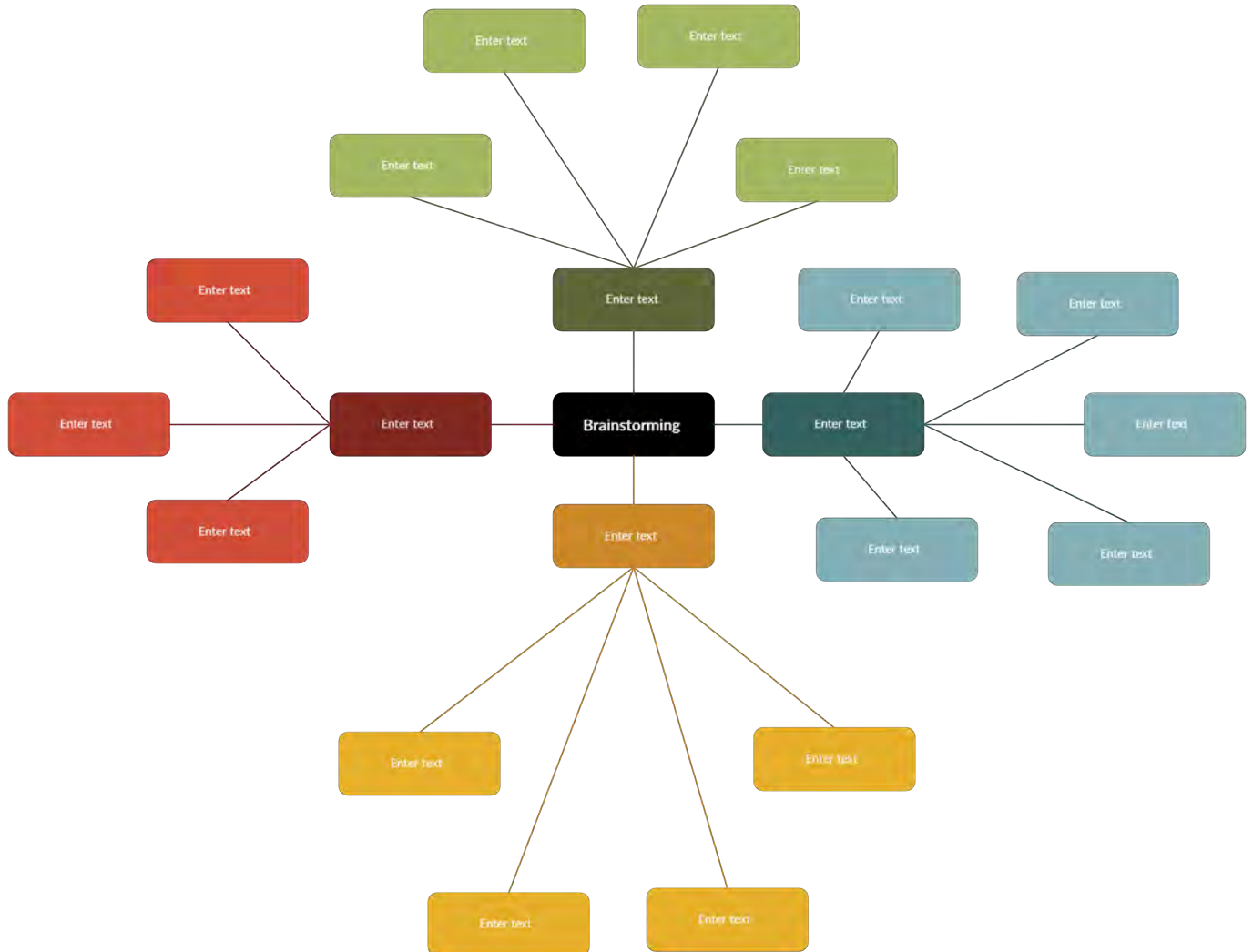
Fact: visuals help process information faster. If you need to communicate an idea, quickly break it down using a mind map and share it with others, or do so in real-time with a visual collaboration tool like Creately where everyone can contribute their ideas.

Centralize and index information for easy access and retrieval

Put documents, files, resources, and assets in a common place in a good organizational structure. You can use Google Drive and a well-defined folder structure so that everything is easily accessible to everyone.

Keep all communication public

While it's important to have specific channels dedicated to each team/ department (i.e. #marketing, #development, etc.), when a related issue occurs, discuss them in the relevant public channel. This will notify others and help gather the input of everyone.



Mind map (always incorporate visuals) : <https://creately.com/demo-start?tempId=pTc1cBqDHhu>

Recognize success

When working from different locations, it's easy to feel disconnected from one another. One may feel they are not recognized enough or their work is not appreciated enough. This can be prevented if the team makes an effort to constantly celebrate each other's work. Did someone hit a milestone? Give them a quick shout-out on the Slack channel or appreciate their efforts with a personal email. This will keep everyone motivated.

Be mindful of your tone

In written communication, the recipient cannot judge your tone or feelings. This often leads to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Avoid such situations by going the extra mile to write more than you intended to clearly convey your message. Add in an emoji or two to humanize and convey emotions. When talking about a sensitive matter, always switch to the video instead of chat.





Chapter 5:

How to develop culture

Culture can be the difference between a good and a great company. It consists of intangibles like team spirit, level of interaction, workplace morale and a lot more. Having eager, motivated employees is what builds truly remarkable businesses. Culture is not built overnight, it takes work and constant effort to create an environment where employees feel fulfilled and one where work isn't considered a chore.

To different teams, culture means different things. But overall it means how a company does things. It is usually manifested in how a team communicates with each other, behaves, makes decisions, and in the beliefs, attitudes and values they uphold.

Great team culture is an essential part of a high performing team. While teams working in an office easily have the chance to cultivate their culture through different types of shared experiences, a remote team has to put more effort and be more deliberate about shaping their culture.

Here are some effective steps you can take to build a positive company culture with your remote team while boosting their personal growth effectively.

Write it down

While culture is ever-changing, altered by new members to the team, you can always set the cultural foundation. This entails defining the values you uphold and you want your team to uphold. Document these and store them in an accessible location, preferably online, so anyone - including new employees - can easily refer to them whenever they are having doubts.

Choose tools that let you work and play

A co-located office develops its own personality through inside jokes, shared experiences, and a collaborative environment, such as a meeting room with whiteboards. A remote team needs to develop something similar. The easiest way to do this is with your day-to-day toolset. If you are trying to create a fun and relaxed environment, tools such as Slack allows you to have a separate non-work-related channel for fun conversations. Send memes, GIFs, and the occasional cat videos, and encourage employees to let loose whenever possible.

Find many ways to stay connected

The only way a remote team can interact with each other, share feedback, or inside jokes is online. While chat apps are great for random work discussions, encourage video calls so everyone can see each other as well. Slack video calls are good for one-on-one calls while for all-hands meetings, use a tool like Zoom or Google Meet. Trello and Confluence can be used for project management while a tool like Creately can serve as an online whiteboard.

Prioritize fun

When you are not working from the same location, you need to get extra creative about building your company culture. There are many team building activities that are effective in promoting employee happiness, engagement and productivity. Play games, even if they are silly, use Zoom calls for things other than work discussions, have a calendar with scheduled team building activities and remind employees that they share a bond beyond professional relationships.



Measure engagement

It's important to understand how your team feels about the values you have set forth. Are they happy with the way these values/ the culture affect the way they work or communicate? Encourage their feedback through a simple survey, one-on-one meetings, or even during all-hands meetings. Getting insight into their perspective is important in deciding the future direction of your company.

Identify mentors

A mentor - a more experienced and knowledgeable co-worker - can help an inexperienced or a new employee to quickly get familiar with the cultural and social norms within the company. They can also help new team members grow in their position and learn how to succeed in their job.

Establish one-on-one time

Let managers have 1-1 discussions with team members at least once a week. This allows them to recognize the individuals for excellent work and guide them where they need to be improved. They can also make this an opportunity to check in with the team members on work and non-work related issues.





Chapter 6:

Fostering innovation

Group brainstorming, even done on-site can be challenging enough. And if your entire team has just gone remote, the idea of a virtual brainstorming session might sound daunting. But there is a whole host of tools available to facilitate better collaboration. Getting teams to visualize ideas and processes is a great way to foster innovation. Remote teams need a canvas where they can discuss ideas, draw concepts and brainstorm in real-time.

Importance of Collaboration

75%

of employees regard collaboration and teamwork as important

Top 4

collaboration is one of the top four important skill for employees' future success

85%

Consider the primary reason for failed project and workplace failures is an overall lack of collaboration

83%

of employees rely on technology for collaboration

Use an online whiteboard

Whiteboards are great facilitators of brainstorming, and when brainstorming online, a virtual canvas software like Creately, can make all the difference. Create a shared board where everyone in the team can edit and contribute. You can start with a blank canvas where every one can collaborate on typing in ideas and adding images in real-time or you can kick-start things with a premade template for mind maps, mood boards, idea boards, etc. You can do this alongside a video or audio call to make things more effective.

Send out an introductory email with all the necessary details

This email should include the goal/ purpose of and the agenda of the session, links to tools or resources you'll be referring to during the activity, and the guidelines. It can help everyone understand what to expect so they can prepare themselves well ahead of time.

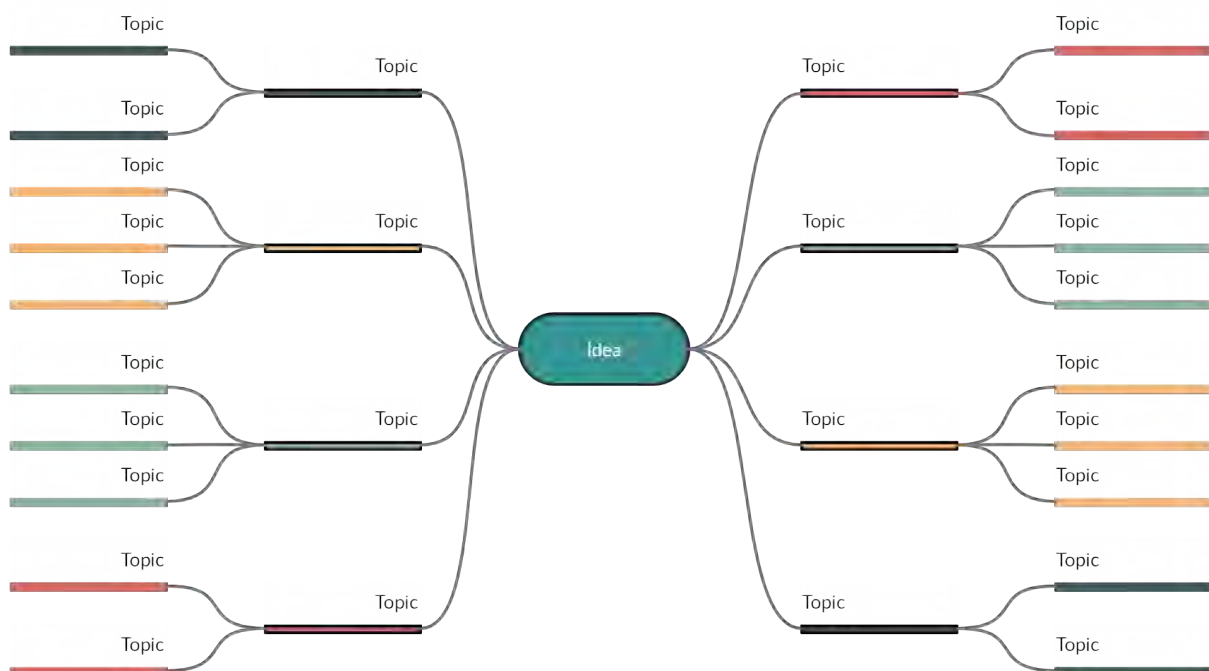
Clarify the guidelines for the brainstorming exercise before the session

Different brainstorming techniques have different guidelines. For example, to create an effective mind map, you should use single-worded keywords and images to make it pictorial. Explaining these rules beforehand and following them will help generate more effective results.

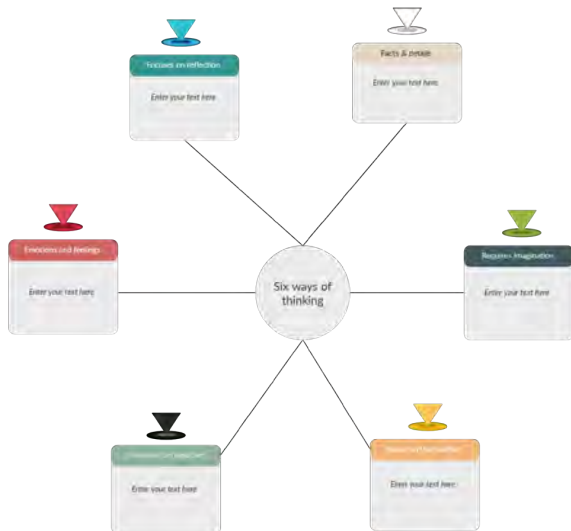
Use different brainstorming methods

There are many techniques you can use to carry out and simplify an online brainstorming session. Listed below are techniques and templates that you can start using right away to churn out ideas with your team. Each tool is linked to a resource that explains how to effectively carry out the method.

Mind Maps : <https://creately.com/demo-start?tempId=uEjkl9c7EK>



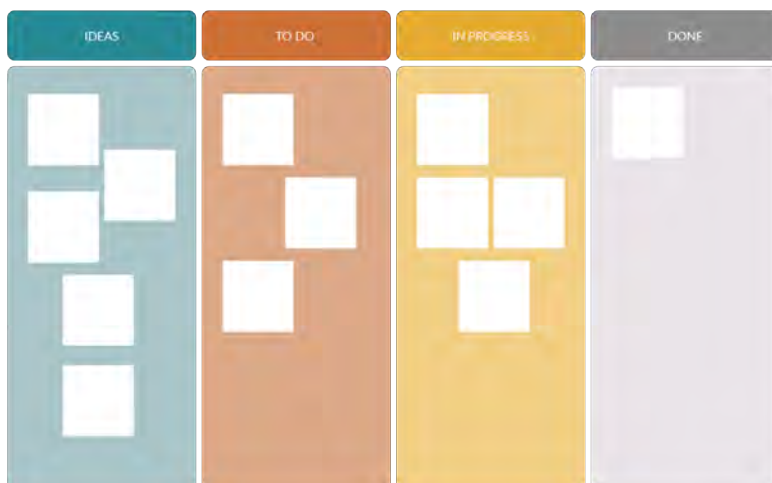
Six thinking hats : <https://creately.com/demo-start?templd=fPDlvUNhaLO>



Lotus diagram : <https://app.creately.com/diagram/Man9lwfdsub/edit>



Idea boards : <https://app.creately.com/diagram/create?templd=qMw9sigSkX2>





Chapter 7:

Dealing with isolation and lack of connection

Working from home has many benefits; zero commuting, comfortable clothes, flexible schedule, custom environment, etc.

But let's admit it. Working from home comes with some considerable challenges as well.

Loneliness, feelings of isolation and depression are common dangers of working from home. It can be tough for anyone, especially during a time like this, when the World Health Organization has declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic and you are in quarantine, lockdown or shelter-in-place - and will be for weeks to come.

Here are some tips that can help you survive these uncertain times and be more productive.

Have a dedicated space to work in

It can help you psychologically if that space is solely devoted to work. Plus it can help minimize outside distractions such as noisy kids. Although it doesn't have to be a separate room with a door that can close, having a dedicated workspace (a desk and a chair) will help you stay organized.

Establish working hours

Flexible working hours are a favorite benefit of everyone working from home. But when you work remotely, the line between work and personal time tends to get blurry. So you must maintain a schedule for work with planned breaks in between. Start and end your day around the same time every day and be mindful to notify others when you are away.

Schedule regular team meetings

Staying connected to your team over video calls, group chats, or phone calls is important when everyone is remote. These different methods of interacting with each other helps maintain the team spirit and avoid isolation. Keep in touch with everyone outside work as well; you can use WhatsApp or Facebook groups or separate Slack channels for fun conversations, have virtual lunch calls, etc.

Take occasional computer-free breaks

Use this time to go outside and get some fresh air or talk to someone at home while enjoying a coffee or tea. A change of scenery other than your computer screen will help you re-energize yourself.

Consider a coworking space

Working from home doesn't mean you have to work in solitude. Set up coworking days with your colleagues; you can spend these outside your home (i.e. at a coffee shop, your friend's place, or coworking space). This will allow you to be surrounded by other people and activity, which can be a much-needed change after days of working all by yourself.

Allocate time to work out

Schedule in some time to work out in your day to keep fit while working from home. This can be a powerful way to recharge your brain and emotional health. To keep things more interesting, you can join an online group fitness class. This will give you another opportunity to connect with more people. You can also create an informal online fitness group with office colleagues.





Chapter 8:

How to hire a remote team

The success of your remote team will depend largely on the members in it. It is important to hire suitable candidates that can thrive in this relatively new environment. There are added challenges with not being able to physically meet candidates during the hiring process and special efforts need to be made to integrate them into the system appropriately once they have been selected. Finding, training, and properly implementing the right talent into your business is the secret sauce and one that will allow you to execute projects remotely.

Hire doers

While working remotely you need people who are self-motivated. There is a natural loss of oversight with distributed teams and you need people who will get things done no matter what.

Hire people you can trust

There is no looking over someone's shoulder when you are working remotely. You need to find people who you have confidence, share the same values as your organization, and then trust that they are motivated by the right reasons.

Hire people who can write and are effective communicators

In a co-located office, a lot of information is shared in person. In a remote situation, almost everything is shared via written communication. Communication is one of the most important parts of a remote team. Therefore, effective communicators and good writers are critical to a team's success.

Hire people who are ok without a social workplace

It is important to try and create some social aspects with a remote team. But the truth is that remote workplaces are usually less social than co-located ones. People on remote teams need to be ok with that and have their own social support system. The best remote workers will thrive in this type of environment.



Conducting an interview:

Set clear expectations

Set clear expectations for the candidate prior to the interview. This entails clarifying to them when the interview will take place, the communication and other tools that they will be required to use during the interview, the names and titles of the other attendees, as well as the meeting agenda. You can use an email to notify them of these requirements in advance.

Set up your devices

Make sure that your internet connection is working, your devices are properly charged, and all the needed software is installed and logged in to at least an hour before the interview starts.

Get rid of distractions

Make sure that you are in a quiet place where no one can disturb you with a proper professional background (i.e. no messy bedrooms, TV screens, etc.). In addition, turn off alerts on your devices, and keep your movements to a minimum to avoid distracting the candidate.

Be prepared

Keep your interview questions ready beforehand. This will prevent you from prolonging the interview by trying to think of questions you should ask. Knowing what you should ask the interviewee will also help you evaluate them properly by having a meaningful conversation.

Dress professionally

Although you are working from home, you are representing your organization and talking to a stranger who you need to make a good first impression on. So dressing the part will work in your favor.

Don't make it too crowded

Limit the number of attendees. Since the interview takes place online, too many people will be a disturbance during the interview. If more than one person has joined the discussion, others should keep their mics muted allowing the one questioning the candidate to do so without causing interruptions.

Behave appropriately

Be mindful of your behavior, facial expressions, and tone during the interview. Smile and laugh and conduct yourself as you would have if you had done the interview in person. Wait a few seconds at the end of each sentence to make sure that you don't talk over each other and keep your eyes on the camera or the screen and not at your own image on the screen.

Have a backup plan

In case of an emergency such as a power failure, have alternate contact details (i.e. phone number) of the candidate close by. This way even if you lose access to the internet connection, you can opt for an audio conversation over the phone.

Helpful tools

Online appointment scheduling software:



Calendly



Google Calendar

Online meeting/video conference software:



Slack



Zoom



Google Meet



Skype

Behavior and time tracking software for online tests:



Timify.me

Online quiz/test makers for evaluating candidates' knowledge:



Google Forms

E-signature services to send, sign, track, and manage signature processes using a browser or mobile device:



Adobe Sign



Chapter 9:

The future of remote work

A survey conducted by global research company Gartner with 317 CFOs and business finance leaders found that 74% plan to move their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions post-COVID-19. Among this group, the biggest factor driving this permanent change was the cost-saving benefits of working from home — a factor that they have gotten a clear insight on during this current outbreak. These financial gains, when paired with the minimum disruption or effect on productivity levels and staff wellbeing, leaves little reason for many companies to move back to traditional working styles even after the pandemic ceases.

Technology will be at the core

For many companies, the ability to quickly pivot to a remote working setup was made possible by the availability of technology and tools. As more and more teams shift to remote working we will see more innovation in this field where software will remove the remaining friction that exists from teams not being co-located. Seamless integration of technology will allow teams to work like they are in the same room and will remove any need to go back to a physical workspace.

Company policies will have to adapt

Organizations will have to stay nimble and create policies that work for both the company and employees. The added flexibility of working from home gives employees options and creates a hybrid work environment where some may choose to come into an office, others may opt not to come at all. Figuring out a structure that maximizes the benefits of working from home while meeting the organizational needs will be the next challenge that organizations need to solve quickly.

New leadership styles will emerge

Simply being present in an office no longer counts for much, leaders will begin to assess employees solely on their output and not on the time put in. Employees will be given the freedom to decide how they spend their time but they will also have clear goals and expectations to meet.



Before COVID

29%

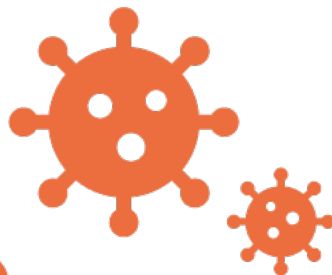


of FS companies had at least 60% of their workforce working from home at least once a week.



After COVID

69%



of FS companies expect to have 60% of their workforce working from home at least once a week going forward.

To experience the best visual workspace for remote teams
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Made by

