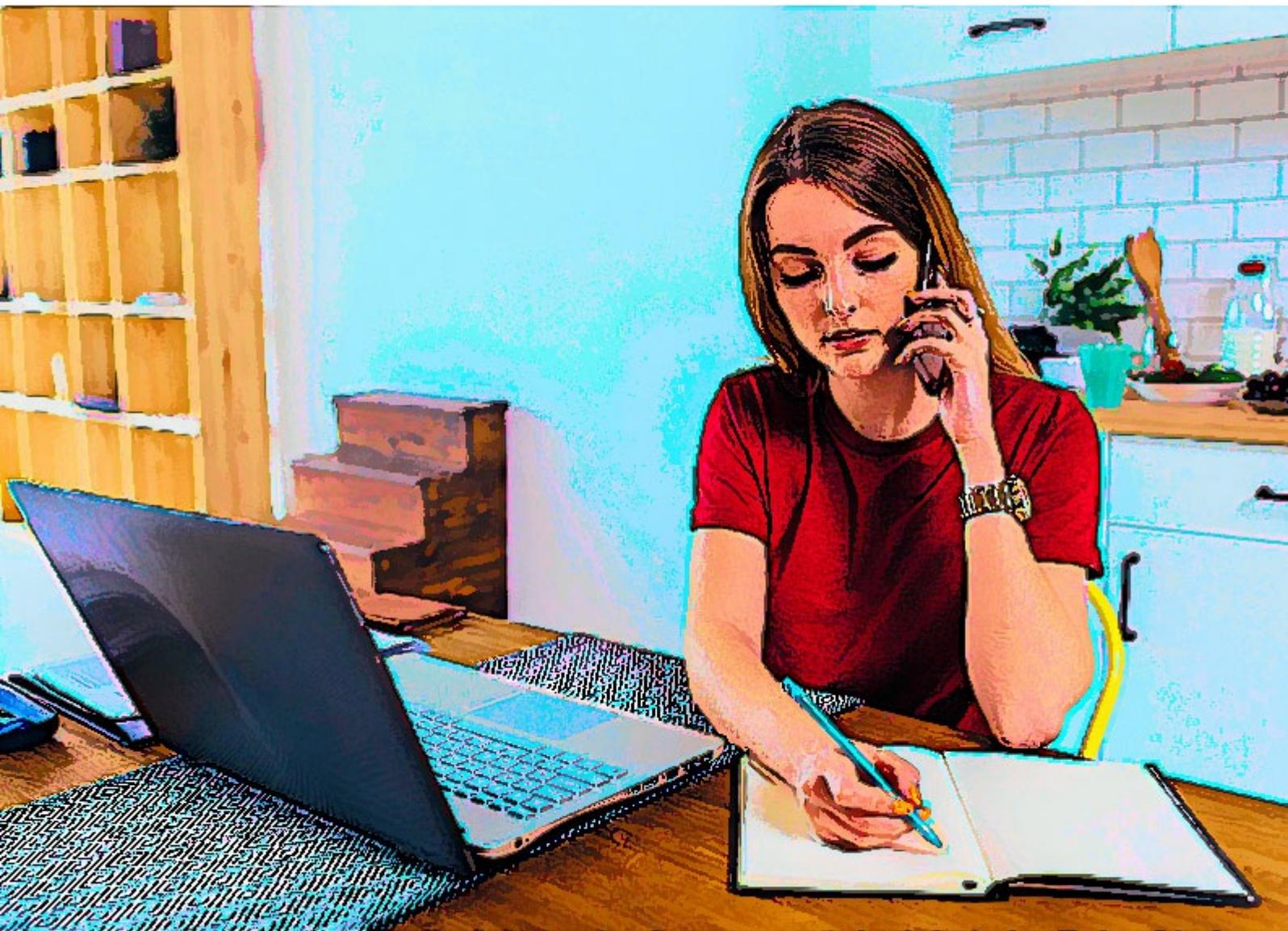


Eric Linin

Working from Home

Leading and Managing Flexible, Agile and Remote Workers



ERIC LININ

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LEADING AND MANAGING FLEXIBLE, AGILE AND REMOTE WORKERS

Working from Home: Leading and Managing Flexible, Agile and Remote Workers

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Linin is a learning and development professional with over 40 years of business experience including more than 25 years in the development field.



Most recently Eric was Head of Leadership Development with Lloyd's of London, a role he left in 2018 having launched the award-winning Lloyd's University, conceived the Lloyd's Market Learning Week and established a number of highly acclaimed leadership and coaching programmes. As a 'Baby Boomer', Eric has himself had to adapt to the challenges that many managers and leaders face in acclimatising to the new working environment of an Agile Workforce. Many of the examples used in this book are from his own personal experiences.

A highly respected speaker, facilitator, specialist in Leadership and Management Development and an experienced leader and manager in his own right, he now works independently, specifically working with new leadership teams to help them to come together into a cohesive and effective unit. He also works with Senior Leaders who are undertaking Masters Degrees in Business Administration, coaching and mentoring students as they develop their portfolio of evidence to meet the exacting demands of the End Point Assessor.

Outside of his professional interests, Eric is a keen sports fan – mainly as a spectator these days. He is a season ticket holder at the Oval and hopes to spend more of his leisure time following the England Cricket Team on overseas tours. He also enjoys hiking, live music and travel.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Coronavirus (COVID 19) and its Impact on Working from Home

When I began working on this book, little did I know what effect the events of the first quarter of 2020 would have on the way people work, on a global scale.

The full impact of the Coronavirus (COVID 19) is still unknown at the time of writing. However, given the fact that the vast majority of the UK, and indeed the global working population is now compelled to work from home in a bid to lessen the spread of the virus, the skills proposed in this book have been brought into sharp focus. Therefore, I felt that developing the right skills and behaviours to enable managers to feel confident and empowered to manage the business continuity, and show personal leadership, in this most complex of situations would be of paramount importance and interest to today's workplace.

I have therefore included in this book an entire chapter dedicated specifically to the impact of Coronavirus (COVID 19) - in particular aimed at giving employees at all levels some practical advice to help them acclimatise quickly to working from home en masse.

Future updates of this book will include thoughts around lessons learned from Coronavirus (COVID 19) and further hints, tips and approaches to help managers feel equipped for whatever the new way of working will be.

This eBook contains a number of activities for you to consider as you work through the book. As it is not possible to add your own text into an e-book we recommend that you write your thoughts into a separate note book.

1 THE MODERN OFFICE – MY HOW IT'S CHANGED!

When I first embarked on the world of work, back in 1977, for a small private bank in London, the office environment was largely the same as it had been for the previous twenty or thirty years. In fact, the most transformational events that had happened to the office in the previous two decades had been the move from manual typewriters to electronic ones – and fewer bowler hats. Computers existed but were huge unwieldy machines used purely for data input and extraction.

To a large extent, the office layout had also remained unchanged by the passage of time, as can often be seen from the photograph below of a 1960's office, with three or four desks clustered together for clerical officers, and a separate desk for supervisors. Managers had their own offices, sometimes on the same floor in the corner of the room or, if they were really important, on a hallowed upper floor where colleagues spoke in hushed tones and lights were even dimmer than on the 'workers' floors', creating an atmosphere of gravitas and status.

There were some other very noticeable characteristics of the office in those pre-digital days.

- Most desks had 'in trays' brimming with paper, and 'out trays' filled with documents heading for filing cabinets that lined the walls, for one of the filing clerks to file away.
- Everybody turned up in the office for work wearing a suit or smart, formal clothes; you were expected to be physically at your desk to work unless you were ill or were given some kind of authorised absence.
- Your supervisor or manager, usually white, middle-aged and male, was situated in the same room or, at the very least, in the same building as you.
- In the main, people worked a 9 to 5 routine, with occasional late evening working (with claimable overtime) to finish off a particular piece of work to meet a deadline.
- Communication was by desk telephone, accessed externally via a central switchboard, or by typed memoranda dictated to one of the pools of shorthand typists who sat in a separate room and used standard electric typewriters, or occasionally very primitive Visual Display Units (VDUs).
- Colleagues smoked cigarettes at their desks or in the communal coffee area.

- When it snowed, or there was a rail strike, we still did our level best to get into the office, sometimes walking a few miles before giving up, pleased that we had at least 'made the effort'.

Activity: Look around your office and compare it to the [picture of a 1970s office](#). What pieces of technology stand out that were not available to the office worker of the past? What was the pre-digital version of that item?



Then, from the mid-1990's it all began to change. Technology went digital and is still evolving. Personal computers started to appear on everybody's desk, and not just in the 'typing pool'. From that point, the office began to evolve into what we see around us today. The way we used to communicate changed: initially through the use of email and then through full digitalisation with internet access, Voice Over Internet Protocols (VOIP), mobile telephones and latterly smartphones, electronic storage facilities, in-car mobile telephone access, social media and social networking sites. The digital age had Arrived with a capital A and brought with it global organisational transformation. Let's look at the key ways in which this transformation has impacted our working life.

1.1 THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE

Communication between employees, or from managers to their teams, or even management to management has become instantaneous. We can send each other emails, instant messages and even conduct a video chat with colleagues and managers through Outlook, GMail or social networking apps (like WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, etc.) and often expect (and get) an immediate response. With the development of "agile" or other new approaches to working, we no longer need to be physically present at our workplace to remain in constant touch and be communicated with by our managers and colleagues.

1.2 THE WAY WE ORGANISE OURSELVES

Our digital office is designed to make the business of keeping ourselves organised much easier. Collaboration tools and similar software help us in creating, delegating, and managing tasks, enabling managers to oversee workplace activities and keep to deadlines and objectives. In a project management environment, this can sometimes mean the difference between delivery and failure for key projects.

1.3 THE WAY WE COLLABORATE AND WORK TOGETHER

In our digital office, Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) mean that we are able to connect securely with people anywhere and at any time (remembering to be mindful of time zone etiquette). This leads to improved collaboration between co-workers and far better communication to ensure we work more effectively with each other. This new inter-connectedness encourages teamwork and cross-team collaboration. Sadly though, it doesn't seem to have cut down the number of meetings we are expected to attend in the working day.

1.4 THE PLACE WE WORK

One of the most significant changes that the digital office has brought about, and probably the most important from the point of view of this book, is that it has enabled remote (away from our desk) working to become commonplace and accepted. The ability of workers, at all levels, to be able to undertake their jobs wherever in the world they are and at any time of the day, has only been made possible by digital enhancements.

This has also led to the potential for co-workers sharing the same desk space ('hot-desking') which has completely reshaped the workplace of the past – and has the added benefit of significant savings on premises costs. I will look at the case for remote working in more detail in chapter 3.

Activity. Can you think of any other benefits, from a global and business perspective, that reducing the number of employees travelling in to work on a daily basis would have?



I wonder if you put something about home working being more environmentally friendly? It seems there are contradictory arguments regarding how much of a reduction in carbon footprint homeworking may have, as the article [here](#) suggests. Whilst initial reports are favorable that a reduction in carbon emissions at an organisational level is achieved through homeworking, many more factors need to be considered such as; the efficiency of an employee's heating at home, is this offset by the cost of commuting or is it in fact, adding to the net global carbon footprint?

Mobile technology and home internet access, using secure technology hardware, provides workers anywhere in the world with instant, secure remote access to the firm's computer systems, files, their emails etc. As a result, workplaces have become fully (and globally) interconnected – you might even say 'hyper-connected' such are the many strands of connectivity platforms available to us. This is facilitated further by innovations such as video-conferencing, remote and secure connection and portability – remote workers can even base themselves in the local coffee shop – and save on their own utility bills.

So, technology has streamlined processes, created hyper-connectivity, increased efficiency and production and with all these innovations the digital office of today is a far cry from the laborious paper-intensive offices of the past. As a consequence, therefore, you might imagine that life has become very much easier for managers and leaders in ensuring these offices work effectively and efficiently.

Not so.

The digital office brings with it a large number of potential challenges for the manager, particularly those who are from a less technologically savvy generation or background, and who may find the new-found freedom available to employees is very much at odds with their previous experiences of people management. As a result, they can find adjustment very difficult. For example, the concept of enabling individuals to work from home is anathema to some leaders who fear losing control over their input. 'Shirking from home' is just one

of the terms I have heard used by experienced leaders unable to adjust their style to the new skill sets required in managing teams in a digital environment.

It's not just remote working though. There are a number of other areas that present a challenge to managers, all of which I will be exploring in the remaining chapters of this book, where I will examine, and consider solutions to, each of the following questions.

- What really is the case for remote, flexible or agile and, more recently, dynamic working (and what is the difference between these terms)?
- How do I manage people who aren't as familiar with the technology available to them?
- How do I get the best out of people when they aren't working in the same office as me?
- How do I manage their productivity and ensure they deliver against their objectives?

In chapter 3, I will begin to tackle these questions by examining these new ways of working: Remote, Flexible, Agile and even Dynamic. I will explore what these terms mean and look at the economic and business case for organisations embarking on these new working patterns. But first, I want to consider the key issue of generational diversity in the workforce and how this impacts on the way we work together.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The working environment has changed dramatically in the last 30 years particularly with regard to:

- The way we communicate
- The way we organise ourselves
- The way we collaborate and work together
- The place we work

New technology has enabled new ways of working which not only improves our efficiency but could also improve our organisation's carbon footprint and cost base.

New terminology has entered the workplace vocabulary, including Remote Working, Flexible Working, Agile Working and most recently, Dynamic Working.

Managers and leaders still need support in managing their teams effectively in this new working environment.

2 THE PEOPLE IN YOUR OFFICE – THEY AREN'T ALL FROM THE DIGITAL AGE!

I've lost count of the number of times new managers have said to me, either individually or within the context of a management development workshop, 'I like to think I manage my team in the way that I would like to be managed, and that seems to work ok' – or something similar.

Whilst this is a very worthy and understandable approach, it overlooks one very important factor – the people you work with are not you. People are fundamentally different and don't always behave in the way we might expect. Think of the different ways in which people in your office might differ from each other. Write your thoughts here:



I'm sure you came up with some of the more easily distinguishable differences such as gender and cultural background, you may even have mentioned age (but did you mention generational differences?). Did you also think of their personalities?

There have been many books written, and I am sure you will find a number of them here within Bookboon, on the different aspects of personality behaviour identified by psychometric measurements, such as Myers Briggs. I don't intend to major on this topic here, as it covers too wide an area, but in summary, people who have certain behavioural and personality preferences might lean towards a particular style of management. For example, an individual with a preference for introverted behaviour, who is reflective in style and gets their personal energy from within rather than from interactions with others, may well need to be managed differently from those with a more extraverted personality type. Extraverts tend to be more outgoing, energised by their external environment. I'm sure you can think of some of the

differences there might be in managing these individuals – in how they behave in meetings for example. You may well already be managing individuals with different personality types and have had to flex your management style to suit them

There is no one style that fits all and fundamentally, people want to be managed in different ways so it is essential that managers spend time understanding each individual's unique needs and learn to manage them accordingly. That's not to say that a manager should simply accede without question to an individual's stated preference. For example, an individual who declares that they do not need to be closely managed yet tends to make regular unnecessary errors, might indeed need some higher level of supervision until these errors are eradicated, whether it is their preference or not. Their motivation to change will be to 'earn' the right to be managed in the way they would prefer.

A key differential I want to focus on in this book is generational diversity, because it is central to the way people work in, or manage in, the modern working environment. Management styles, techniques and tools will continue to evolve either organically or methodically in order to address the unique 'generational diversity' existing in the present-day workplace, as this chapter will go on to demonstrate.



Whilst it could be argued that placing vast numbers of people into a small number of 'boxes' cannot be an accurate assessment of them all as individuals, it is nevertheless true to say that time and again the characteristics set out below can be reflected (to a greater or lesser extent) in each generation, both in terms of individual and of collective behaviour.

So, what are these 'generations' and what are the characteristics?

2.1 BABY BOOMERS: BORN BETWEEN 1946 AND 1964

The Post War generation, benefiting from the years of post-war prosperity. For many baby boomers, their formative organisational years were the late 70s and 1980s where Thatcherism and Reaganomics largely influenced their thinking. Baby Boomers can be competitive, have a strong work ethic and are loyal.

2.2 GENERATION X: BORN BETWEEN 1965 AND 1980

Generation X people grew up in a time of technological advance, and straddle the digital and non-digital ages. Generation X are not technologically reliant but do know how to benefit from it having acquired their skills as an adult (digital immigrants). They are often independent and self-sufficient, are logical problem solvers and place great value on work/life balance.

2.3 GENERATION Y/MILLENNIALS: BORN BETWEEN 1981 AND 1996

Millennials are very much in the news at the moment, often referred to pejoratively as 'snowflakes' by baby boomers because their outlook on life generally is so different and overlooking the very many positive attributes they bring, especially to the workplace. Digitally savvy, more often than not digitally native, they show curiosity and an innovative spirit, self-confidence in the face of change and are often prepared to question the status quo. Their natural desire for flexibility means that they are very well equipped for a more agile working environment.

2.4 GENERATION Z: BORN AFTER AROUND 1997

This generation, currently going through education or just started work, has never known a world without technology. They are confident, idealistic, entrepreneurial and ambitious, but personally rather than organisationally. Having lived all their life in the world of instant technology, they tend to have shorter attention spans and work best in short bursts.

The boundary years on each of these generations is fluid and can be up to 5 years either way and – rather like any assessment of individuals – not every characteristic will necessarily apply. Which generation are you? Do you identify with the characteristics? Make a note here of the characteristics that you think you display relevant to your generation, the Internet

contains many more generational descriptors to help you. For more information, you might want to look at this article '[How to manage Generational Diversity in the workplace](#)' from Harver.com



What about your line manager – what generation are they? It's a fascinating moment in time where it is very possible to have representatives of each generation working side by side with each other. So, what problems does this bring from a management context?

Well, the first clear differentiator is technology. Baby boomers and, to a lesser extent, Generation Xers are constantly having to adjust to new technology in the workplace and the benefits it brings. Baby Boomers in particular will see technology as a threat, partly because it is taking over the work/ tasks they have traditionally completed by hand, and partly because it is such a complex arena to understand. Conversely, Millennials and Generation Z will feel entirely comfortable with technology: seeking out YouTube videos to learn new skills, communicating fluently across a range of social media apps and railing against what they perceive as out of date processes and protocols. In any case, each generation will see its own way of doing things as the best way of doing them. This inevitably leads to a clash of ideals.

Another clear differentiator is in the way we communicate. Baby boomers and Generation X, having grown up in such an environment, will favour meetings and face to face interactions – “seeing the whites of their eyes” – in order to get things done. Millennials and Generation Z will be entirely comfortable communicating digitally (for some even e-mail is now outdated) and sharing documents and information in real-time.

I'd like to go back to my earlier point, that you can't manage people as you'd like to be managed as this brief exploration of generations demonstrates. Generation is just one diversity lens you can apply to a workforce. Once you start to overlay personality, gender, culture, ethnicity and all the other factors in which people differ from one another you can see the difficulties faced; maybe you have even experienced them. Think about your

own team and the people you manage – what is the generational diversity and what are the challenges you face?



It is clear that for a Baby Boomer manager, understanding the needs of a Millennial in their department might present a challenge. It may even be vice versa, with a millennial managing a Gen X or even a Baby Boomer. It's no wonder that working in a flexible or agile environment can be complex to manage.

Through experience and many consultations with colleagues, I have identified several simple steps that if implemented assist in effective management. Here are my top five tips for managing generational diversity:

2.2.1 COMMUNICATE

Get to know how people in your team like to be communicated with, and how often – ask them the question, don't make assumptions. When you have found out, use that method with them when and where you can. It may not be the fastest most efficient approach, but it will ensure effective open communication channels.

2.2.2 BE FLEXIBLE

Whilst generational characteristics and personality assessments give us a generalised overview of what behaviours to expect and how to manage people, it is also important to consider the person as an individual and to flex your management style according to the individual as not everyone will fit neatly into a stereotypical box.

2.2.3 CONSIDER MENTORING

Introduce the concept of mentoring and reverse mentoring into your organisation. Standard mentoring relationships can be great for passing down nuggets of wisdom from someone who has seen it all before, yet it also works well in reverse, aiding in bridging the generational gap. I have seen some excellent examples of a millennial mentoring a baby boomer and giving them some fascinating insights not only into the way they think, but also into how they might make better use of – and be more open and accepting of - new digital technology. Mentoring becomes a two-way street; you may find you learn as much from your mentee, as you expect them to learn from you.

2.2.4 BE OPEN TO IDEAS

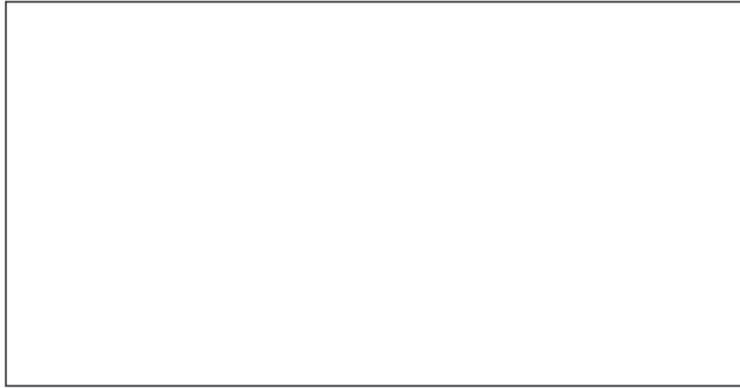
Accept that everyone is different and has something positive to bring to the table. Embracing ideas on a multi-generational level where experience harmoniously meets exciting new perspectives and technological concepts can create formidable solutions to problems which in turn empowers and promotes collaboration within the team.

2.2.5 LISTEN

People want to be heard, valued and acknowledged. Yet not everyone is a strong communicator. Understand the messages they are sending you, in whatever medium, remaining aware that some of these will be implied, subliminal and difficult to gauge. Consider all ideas - embrace and explore them and deliberate on how they can be adapted. This is the single best way to engender trust and engagement within your team and also creates exciting new solutions. Just because something has 'always been done this way' doesn't mean that it should always continue to be done that way.

As we bring this chapter to a close, I'd like you to review all of the points you have learnt about the differences between people within your workplace. What does this mean for you as a manager? What does it mean for you as an employee?

Note down THREE actions that you will commit to doing, or modifying, in respect to your own working practices to reflect your new understanding of generational diversity. This might be as simple as reviewing your own characteristics in respect of your own generation or to read more widely on the topic. Alternatively, you might want to talk to your colleagues to find out more about them as individuals in order to flex your own style accordingly. Small shifts in behaviour can have a huge impact.



2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

We must learn to manage our people in the way that they want to be managed

Factors impacting this culture shift to working in an agile organization include personality, cultural diversity and generational diversity

We have identified four generations and their characteristics currently seen in a work environment:

- Baby Boomers
- Generation X
- Millennials
- Generation Z

Five tips to manage a generationally diverse workforce.

- Communicate
- Be flexible
- Introduce Mentoring
- Be Open to Ideas
- Listen

3 THE AGILE AND FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

In the first chapter of this book, we looked at the ways in which working practices have changed over the past few decades, culminating in a completely new office environment with much looser requirements in terms of physical attendance and alongside this, the introduction of four new terms to describe, progressively, the way people now work and the trust between managers and their teams namely Remote, Flexible, Agile and Dynamic working.



First of all, let's tackle the terminology here:

3.1 REMOTE WORKING

The Cambridge English Dictionary describes **Remote Working** as “*a situation in which an employee works mainly from home and communicates with the company by email and telephone*”. So remote working simply transfers an employee's working day from the office to their home, or sometimes to a local office other than where the manager of the team is located. Remote workers keep the same hours but have the benefits of little or no commute and less stringent dress requirements. It is the responsibility of the employer to make sure that they have a suitable environment, technologically speaking, to facilitate this shift.

Very often workers who are remotely based, find it easier to do things that they weren't otherwise able to do during the day, such as the school run, going to the gym or grocery shopping when the shops aren't so busy. As a result, remote workers began to enquire whether they could 'flex' their hours by working slightly different times so that they could fit these little extras into their day. Thus 'Remote Working' evolved into 'Flexible Working'.

3.2 FLEXIBLE WORKING

Flexible Working is an extension of Remote Working, referring to (again from the Cambridge English Dictionary) "*a situation in which an employer allows employees to choose the times that they work so that they can do other things such as spend time with their children*". Flexible working does not have to be remote. Flexible working can involve coming to the office and not working a standard 9 to 5 pattern. Generally, employers will be sympathetic to flexible working requests as long as it is not detrimental to the operation of the business. Guidance has been issued by the UK Government regarding employer approaches to requests for flexible learning. This can be found [here](#).

3.3 AGILE WORKING

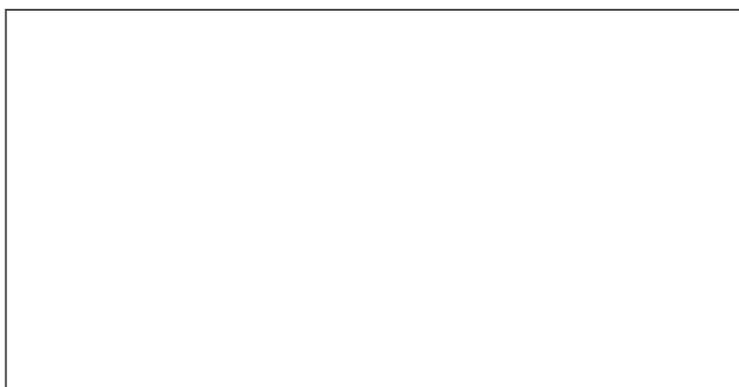
More recently, employees have been looking at an Agile Working approach, which extends and combines the previous two definitions to describe a way of working in which „an organisation offers employees the ability to further improve their flexible working arrangements, through the use of mobile technology... [giving them] an increased level of control and independence over their working arrangements“. [Enei: What is Agile Working?](#)

3.4 DYNAMIC WORKING

Interestingly, a new term is beginning to increase in its currency and application – **Dynamic Working**. Dynamic working recognises that employees' lives do not neatly fall into a typical 9-5 schedule and that individuals are productive at different times of the day. Remember how in Chapter 2 we identified that all employees are different. The principle of dynamic working is to focus on the outputs and key deliverables of an individual rather than the number of hours spent at work. 'Dynamic Working' takes the view that ultimately if output levels are high and all responsibilities are taken care of, then it doesn't really matter where and when they are achieved.

You will have noticed some degree of overlap between all of these definitions and indeed, to some extent organisations view them as somewhat interchangeable so that ‘Agile Working’ in one organization is largely the same as ‘Dynamic Working’ or even ‘Flexible Working’ in another. At the end of the day, the terms themselves are less important than you understanding that the idea of working in this new and remote technology enabled way is very much the way forward for many of today’s organisations.

Activity: Take a moment to think about your own organisation. To what extent do you think your organisation offers these opportunities to employees? Do you think the policies it operates in this area are generally known to all employees? What barriers do you think there are to these policies being implemented successfully at your own workplace? Note your thoughts here:



“I go to work at 7.30 in the morning and I leave around 5.30 in the evening, I pretty much know what my day is going to comprise of. That’s a typical job isn’t it?” Office Worker in a Professional Services Firm.

To what extent does this describe your job? Are the hours you keep largely standard? Is one day pretty much the same as the next? If your job isn’t like that, you are already working flexibly, if it is – then flexible working is probably still on the horizon.

The philosophy at the heart of and driving the appetite for flexible work is the pursuit of a reasonable work/life balance. Recruitment specialists Capability Jane cite some interesting figures regarding the rise in demand for flexible working:

81% of UK employees feel that flexible working makes a job more attractive to them.

79% believe flexible working would make them more productive.

80% of women want flexibility in their next role.

52% of men want flexibility in their next role.

Full article [here](#)

So the demand is there, but what is the organisational business case for Flexible Working? A [study](#) from Stanford University found remote-working increases productivity by 13 per cent, reduces employee turnover by 50 per cent and improves diversity amongst the workforce.

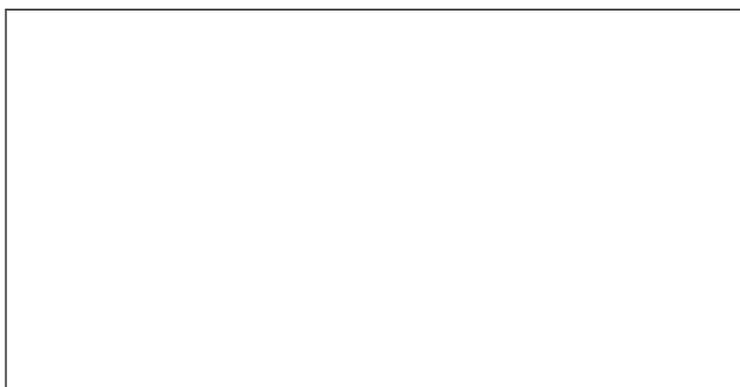
So there are benefits that are both economic and human, but these benefits cited by Stanford aren't the only ones that can be applied to flexible working. What others can you think of?



I have listed a few below that you might have come up with, this list is by no means exhaustive and you may have listed other, equally valid ones:

- People are free to pursue other interests, bringing a wider perspective to their work
- Morale goes up because people feel respected, trusted and valued as individuals
- Significant overhead savings on office space and facilities
- Time-efficiency and cost reduction from reduced commuting
- Competitive advantage in the battle for top-tier talent for companies that embrace flexibility soonest

You might think then, that the case for flexible and agile working speaks for itself. However, there are a number of issues that it brings with it – which ones can you think of?



Again, I have listed a few here but you may well have come up with others.

- The blurring of work/home lives decreases productivity and increases stress
- Not all employees are eligible which breeds resentment
- It may not be possible to agree with flexible working contracts for all employees because of the type of work they do, or where cover is needed
- Not all employees have a home environment suitable for home-based work
- Employers lose control over, and visibility of, output
- Employees become lonelier, more disconnected from one another
- Decision-making, communication and inter-team trust declines

So, having looked at the issues of generational diversity, and then overlaid the lens of flexible working, can you now imagine how complicated it can be to manage across both generational and locational boundaries. It's no wonder then, that many of today's managers, the majority of which currently come from the baby boomer or Generation X segments, find it difficult. So, what can be done to help managers to be more effective at getting the best out of their agile workforce? The next chapter addresses this in greater detail.

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are four defined terms to describe the new ways of working:

- Remote working
- Flexible Working
- Agile Working
- Dynamic Working

Studies show that there are benefits, both economic and human to working flexibly, but there are also some disadvantages.

When you overlay the complexities of generational diversity and flexible working, it is clear that managers need guidance on how to manage effectively in the new working environment

4 MANAGING IN AN AGILE AND FLEXIBLE ORGANISATION

Let me say right from the outset that, in essence, the skill set required to manage people regardless of location is exactly the same. But if managing people was generally THAT easy, then there wouldn't be any need for the hundreds of books and development programmes that exist on this topic, and that are being added to on a daily basis. So, if you think you are a good manager, and the evidence demonstrates that you are achieving both great results and excellent feedback from your employees month on month, year on year, then my advice is 'just keep doing what you're doing'. If however, like me, you think you could use a little support from time to time, then the next part of this book contains my ideas on how you might be able to make some small changes to the way you manage that will enhance results.

Essentially, it all comes down to three key areas:

1. Clear and effective communication, between you and your team ensuring everyone is on the same page
2. Keeping your team engaged and motivated, regardless of location and/or timezone
3. Being really clear on what you expect from them

Let us look at each in turn:

4.1 CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When communication is done well, few problems occur, but all too often the intended message somehow gets misinterpreted between sender and receiver, and this can lead to a spiral of misconceptions as the diagram below illustrates:

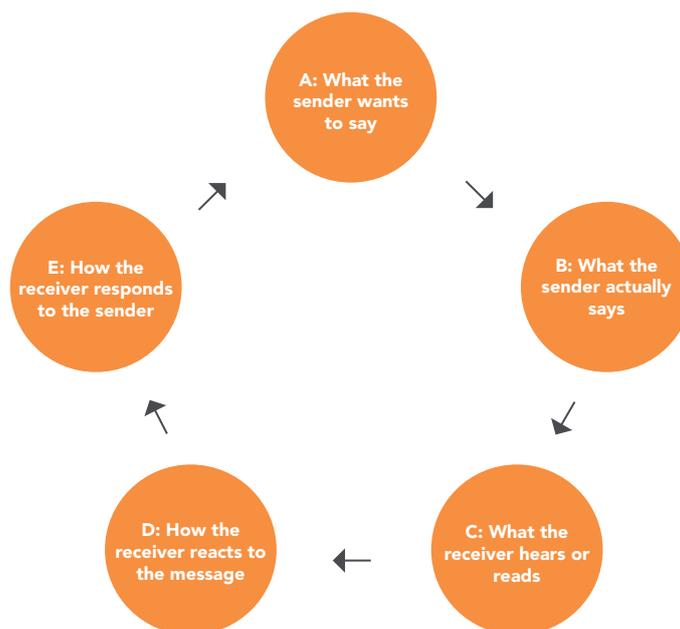


Diagram 1: Cycle of Communication

So, if points A and B are compatible, i.e. the message conveyed is that which the sender wants to convey, then the communication has a better chance of being successful. However, sometimes the receiver can misinterpret the message, which can lead to unsuccessful communication, if then in turn, the receiver relays a negative or unhelpful response back to the sender the communication cycle is broken and has to start over.

Let's look at the kinds of thing which might lead to these negative steps occurring, alongside some suggestions for avoiding problems at each step:

The Message was not clearly or accurately expressed

- Read and reread the message, or better still ask someone else to
- Don't just dash off a message without adequate thought and preparation

The Sender made incorrect assumptions before sending

- Double check your message with someone else before sending to make sure the meaning in the message is clear

The message was sent at the wrong time

- If you can, send messages early in the day, to give recipients time to receive, read and respond with any questions
- Sometimes it's a good idea to hold on to the message overnight, re-read it again in the morning with a new eye, and then send it once you are sure you are happy with it

The message was not sent to (all) the right people

- Ask yourself the question 'who exactly do I need to ask/communicate this to?'
- Don't include people who don't need to see it – far too many communications are copied in to unnecessary recipients thereby unnecessarily escalating the seriousness of the issue at hand.

The wrong medium was used for conveying the message

- For important messaging to one or a small group, use face to face or video conference (Skype etc.) and constantly check understanding with the other person.

The message was too long or complex in content

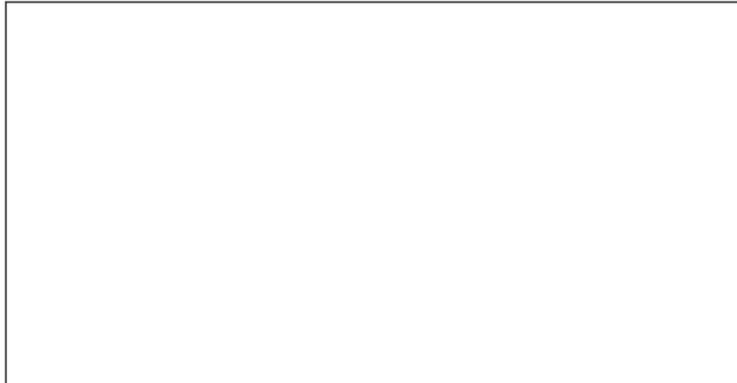
- Wherever possible keep the message concise and to the point
- If you can, try and keep to one topic per communication

The receiver did not listen or read carefully or made incorrect assumptions

- If you cannot convey the message face to face, send a follow up message or make a phone call to check and confirm understanding

Cultural differences between receiver and sender meant that the intention of the message was not fully understood

- Sometimes, the same words can mean different things in different cultures. Re-reading your message can help you to spot and correct anything that might be misinterpreted.



It might be that you can think of other reasons why a miscommunication can occur, and I have left a box for you to add any further ideas you might have.

A major issue with communicating with workers who are remotely based is making sure you use the right medium. The chart below reflects the varying degrees of effectiveness of the three main methods of communication in terms of reaching remote employees.

	Face to Face, including video communication	Phone - voice	Email/Text
Visual (appearance, body language, alertness)	High effectiveness	Low effectiveness	Low effectiveness
Vocal (tone, pitch, pausing, volume)	High effectiveness	High effectiveness	Low effectiveness
Verbal (e-mail, words, sentence length, engaging and interesting)	High effectiveness	High effectiveness	High effectiveness

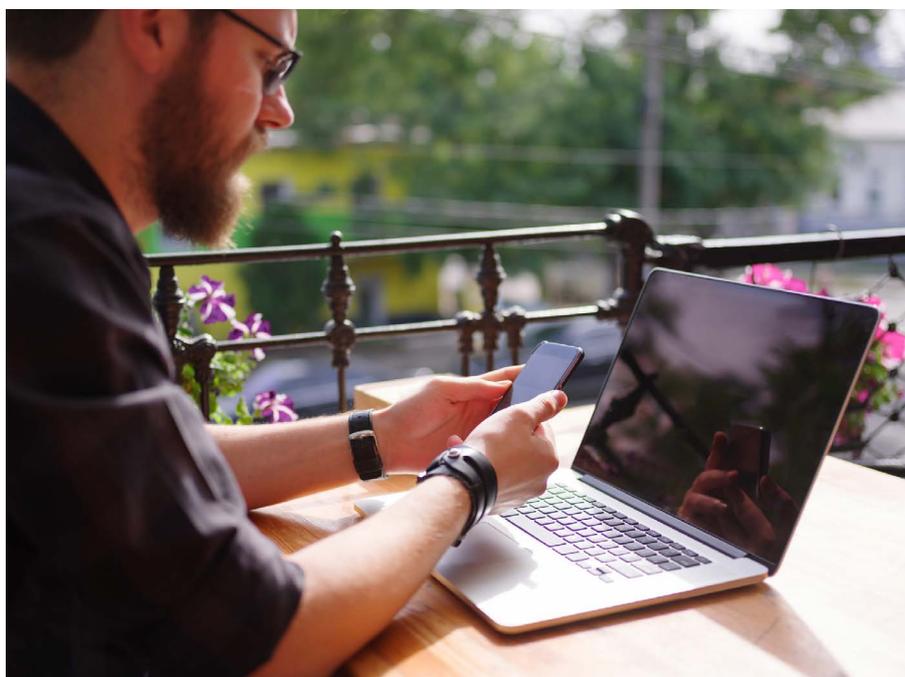
Diagram 2: How Different Forms of Communication reach Employees

As the table demonstrates, if the communication is relatively straightforward, to a large group of employees, and requires little in terms of additional explanation, then one or other of the ‘low effectiveness group’ will still probably work very satisfactorily. However, where the message is specific to one or a small number of employees, is complex or contentious

in nature, or where there might be the potential for any misunderstanding, then one of the 'high effectiveness group' should be chosen – preferably the face to face/video option, which would ensure both the reaction to the communication and the understanding, can both be checked and confirmed by the message sender.

By far the most important aspect of communicating with employees working remotely is to make sure you communicate regularly, in some cases, and particularly for those who are new to remote working, this might be daily, but at the very least it should be weekly. Working remotely can be lonely, remote workers can feel forgotten or left out of the loop, so even if there is nothing new to communicate, you should still check in with your remote worker as this is important for their inclusion, morale and motivation. We will look at the problem of keeping remote workers engaged and motivated next.

But first, can you think of a communication that you have sent that has been misinterpreted. Given what you have learned above, what would you do differently if you could send it again?



4.2 MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Self-motivation and a strong work ethic can be key characteristics to look for in the interview process when seeking to recruit a remote worker. However, there can also be certain situations that suddenly arise, for business continuity purposes, that require a team to disband and work remotely from the office environment (see the following chapter 5 for a contemporary example). It is therefore important to understand some of the feelings remote workers experience and how to manage these feelings to ensure your remote worker is engaged, productive and efficient.

I have touched on how lonely and isolated it can feel working from home. This can be particularly apparent for employees who are more extraverted in personality type and thrive on the energy from interactions with other people. In the normal office environment employees have the opportunity to meet at the coffee machines, stopping at a colleague's desk, meeting for lunch or even a cigarette break. If they have a problem, it's usually easy to find someone to talk it through with. Logistically remote workers forfeit this social interaction and as a manager, you will need to find ways of keeping remote and agile workers engaged and feeling a valid part of the team especially in the case of a worker who is new to working remotely.



Experienced remote workers have offset being part of the office environment by embracing the benefits of working flexibly. Don't therefore, be surprised if you phone a remote employee to find that they are in a coffee bar, at the gym, or doing the school run. These interactions are important for morale so make it clear to your team members that you actively encourage them in order to give them some breaks for the day thereby reinforcing the benefits that they initially saw in working from home. Yet this flexibility also needs to be managed and

as the next section details, it is imperative that you set clearly defined expectations and distinctly communicate their deliverables and any deadlines they need to meet in order for them to manage their time and outputs. For example, on more than one occasion I have spoken to an employee while they were in the supermarket doing the weekly shop while it was less busy. I had no problem with this provided that if they had deadlines to meet that week, they achieved them. If that meant that they needed to work in the evenings, that is a call they could make as a quid pro quo for a hassle-free shopping expedition. That is the very best of agile working in action.

As discussed in the previous section, communication is key. Managing and motivating people solely over the phone is not ideal. You cannot read their body language or be sure that your message has been fully conveyed and understood. It is therefore important, if you are able, to meet with them face to face either at a local office, coffee bar or using video conferencing (it would be inappropriate to visit them at their home). Also, get to know them and understand them as individuals, ask questions to find out about their family, interests and what motivates them. It really shows you are listening and are interested if you are able to remember family names or key things that are going on in their lives – be personable and friendly as this promotes engagement. Ask how they are finding their work arrangements and what else you could do to make it work better for them. If they raise an issue and it is within your ability to fix it, then do so.

For global teams it may not be practical to visit them face to face on a regular basis. In this instance, it is essential to make use of technology and schedule regular video conferencing meetings (making sure you make use of the video function and not just the voice element). If you too are working remotely make sure you have access to a quiet area, free of personal clutter and distractions so that you are able to video call in a professional manner.

Also, with globally located teams, be mindful of the issues of time zones. Don't set up a meeting which is convenient for you and inconvenient for employees in Asia or the USA. You could consider rotating meeting times to accommodate all time zones, or for really important messages you may need to hold a meeting twice – once in the morning to accommodate those in Asia Pacific time zones and once in the late afternoon to accommodate trans-Atlantic time zones.

You may even choose to have some team members work staggered hours once a week (early/late start and early/late finish) to be available for globally located colleagues.

Conversely invite remotely located workers to the 'mothership' office from time to time, for team meetings or just to show their faces to colleagues for a social event. Holding your own team meetings at remote offices sometimes can also show inclusivity.

Create your virtual team. Encourage members of the team to make use of the technology available and have 'ad hoc' conversations. Create a virtual 'coffee room' using the technology available to you and your organisation, where employees can just pop in and chat – pop in yourself from time to time to make sure it is being used properly (and call out any inappropriate posting). Instant messaging facilities like Jabber or even text or WhatsApp messaging both to individuals or groups are great for disseminating short pieces of information quickly but they are also good for building rapport and a sense of belonging to the team. It is also a more informal way of generally keeping people aware of what's going on.

As important as it is managing your remote team, you may also need to manage the infrastructure to support remote working. Whilst email is a fast and effective form of information sharing, it can also get very overwhelming with numerous emails and cc's being sent every day and information can be easily lost or overlooked. Make use of your organisation's SharePoint or similar technology and if possible, create a page/site purely for your team as it is good practice to have a fully accessible central repository where all of the team can access and share information.

4.3 BEING REALLY CLEAR ON WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR TEAM

One key thing to keep in the forefront of your mind throughout all of this is that the main purpose of people coming to work is to get a job done. No amount of effective communication, motivation or engagement will be considered effective if it doesn't result in employees completing the tasks they have to do, on time, on budget and to the correct standard. When your workers are based remotely this can create a whole new problem for managers who may feel that their ability to control output is hindered by not being able to see what their employees are doing.

Therefore, as well as making sure that remote employees feel communicated with and involved, a key role of a manager in these situations is to make sure that people know exactly what they should be working on, on a daily or weekly basis. This is not micro-managing, it is just making sure there is clarity on both sides as to what is required and whether any additional support may be needed.

In most respects, this process is exactly the same as it would be for all employees, but sometimes for the busy manager it can be a case of 'out of sight out of mind' and for the more, shall we say, 'resourceful' employees it can be an opportunity to 'coast' unsupervised – thereby fulfilling the sceptical managers' preconceptions about the dangers of remote working.

The following diagram lays out the process which should generally be followed to manage performance:

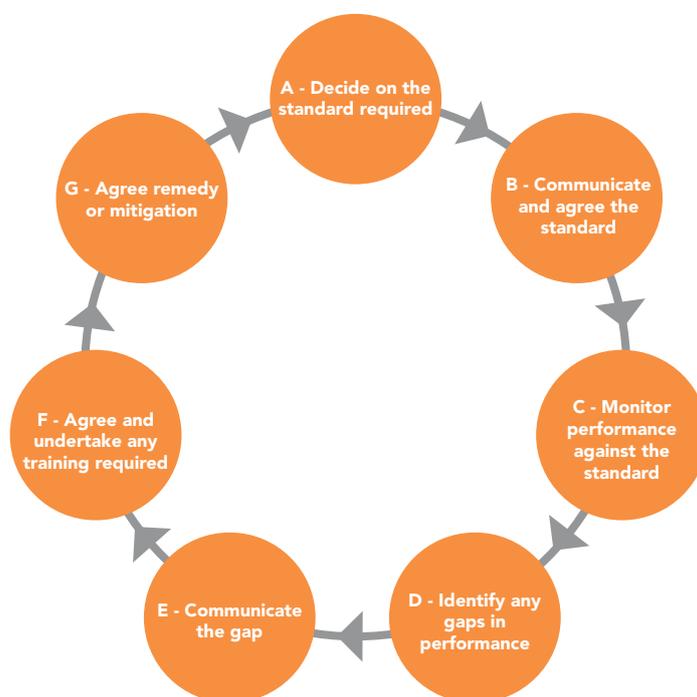


Diagram 3: Managing the Performance of Agile Workers

The stages that become more complex when you are dealing with remotely located employees are stages B, C, E and G where effective communication between the manager and the employee is of paramount importance. This can be achieved through following one or more of the following steps:

- Checking and rechecking mutual understanding of the task and the standard required
- Giving feedback / assistance and managing performance in real-time - between timezones
- Ensuring visibility on day to day actions planned
- Effective use of open questions (who, how, what, when, where) when discussing performance
- Maintaining a shared document of daily/weekly regular team tasks with clear assignments noted to avoid confusion
- Checking in at regular 1:1s, checking team-level metrics at regular intervals

4.4 CASE STUDY IN MANAGING FLEXIBLE WORKERS

Before we end this chapter, let's just bring all the learning together with a simple case study that looks at a typical situation that a manager with remote employees might encounter.

Rachel has asked to have the opportunity to work flexibly. She lives around 30 miles from the office, is extraverted in nature, has a seven-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter and her partner works in the local town. Her role involves report production and interpretation, and she needs to communicate with colleagues based in a number of offices across the UK. She is a consistently good performer in her role.

From your conversations with Rachel, it is quite clear that she is motivated by feeling part of something, working as part of a team, and contributing to the overall team goals. She does not like feeling dictated to or being given conflicting instructions, or unclear objectives.

You are meeting with Rachel today to discuss how this new arrangement will work. Based on your learning from this chapter, list here the kinds of things you might like to suggest to/discuss with her which will make her new working arrangements most effective both for her and for the organisation.



Here are some of the things you might have considered, although you may have got many others which are equally valid:

- What technology support does Rachel need?
- What hours would she like to work – does she need time out for the school run? Find out the names of the children and husband if you don't already know them
- Does she have a suitable space at home to work, undisturbed?
- How would she like to check in – what are the best times for a catch-up call?
- Are there any aspects of her job which might be difficult for her to manage remotely?
- Does she need any training or development to support her?
- How often could she visit the main office for a catch-up

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Effective management of remotely located employees comes down to three key areas:

1. Clear and effective communication
2. Keeping your team engaged and motivated
3. Being really clear on what you expect from them

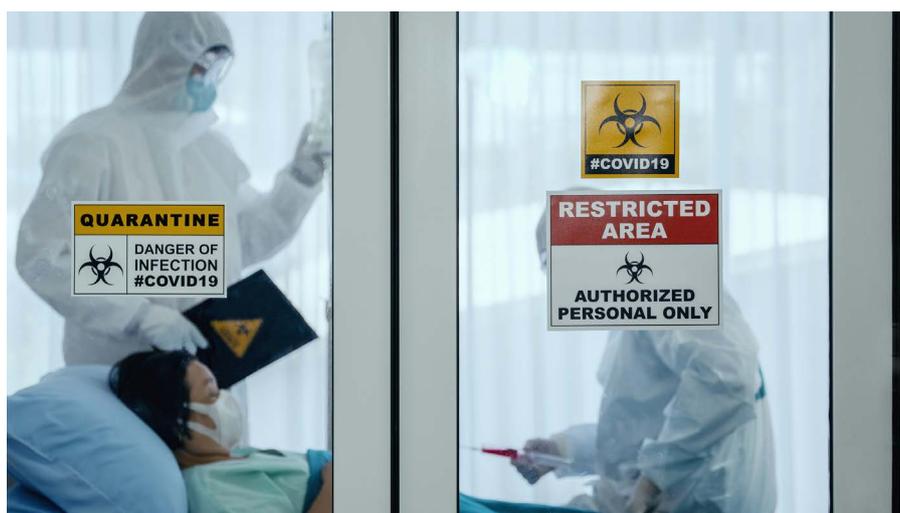
There are a number of reasons why communication can go wrong, and many ways in which managers can reduce the incidence of these problems

Keep your team engaged by making sure remote workers feel valued, and part of the overall team

Make sure you are clear on objectives and outputs and manage teams in line with normal performance management disciplines

5 CORONAVIRUS (COVID 19) – A NEW ERA IS FORCED UPON US

New Year's Eve 2019: News began to emerge that a new virus, causing flu-like symptoms and pneumonia, had been reported in Wuhan Province in China. The virus was given the reference Covid 19 by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Currently, no specific treatment options exist for the treatment of this particular pathogen and as a result, the spread has been rapid and by the end of January, evidence of COVID 19 infections had been identified worldwide, including the UK, US, Australia and Italy. Particularly vulnerable to the virus were elderly people, classed as over 70, or over 60 with underlying medical issues such as heart disease or respiratory issues, but the sheer quantity of the potential number of cases – one estimate has around 70 – 80% of the population contracting Coronavirus (COVID 19) with a 1% mortality rate – meant that enormous pressure would be placed on medical facilities across the world.



On the 11th March 2020, after 118000 reported cases and more than 4000 deaths across every continent except Antarctica, the WHO declared the Coronavirus (COVID 19) outbreak to be a pandemic.

By this time, Governments across the world had begun to mobilise their responses to varying degrees of severity in order to reduce the rate of contraction of Coronavirus (COVID 19) – to 'flatten the rate of infection curve' thereby enabling health services to cope better with the numbers involved. From full 'lockdown', including the closure of towns, offices, shops etc. and home confinement, to advice to workers to avoid travelling to work if they could, suddenly a large portion of the workforce globally have found themselves working from home – whether they wanted to or not.

As a result, many and varied levels of advice has been shared around office workers and managers on how best to deal with this, and whilst much of this has already been discussed, in previous chapters, I offer below a distillation of the best of these suggested tips as they might provide you with additional ideas on how to deal with this unprecedented situation and implement effective home working as fast as you can within your teams, departments and organisations.

5.1 A CHECKLIST OF TIPS TO SUPPORT WIDE-SCALE HOME WORKING

5.1.1 SECURE YOUR TECHNOLOGY

- Keep your information safe by using a Virtual Private Network (VPN) instead of commercial internet providers, together with installing strong antivirus protection
- Use strong, unique passwords and regularly change them

5.1.2 GET ORGANISED

- Create a proper workspace, not everyone has a home office so move furniture around to give yourself room to work. This is essential if you are not the only one working from home!
- Clear clutter, make yours a tidy home to work in
- Ensure other family members respect your workspace and vice versa
- Hide the TV remote control from view! Make 30 minutes TV viewing a reward for getting something done
- Set out your working hours. Some people even have them written on a card on the wall.
- Develop a routine with clear times for breaks

5.1.3 BE DISCIPLINED

- Have a clear distinction between where you sit for your 'work mode' and where you sit for your 'home mode'
- Dress for the working day, and watch out for your appearance if you video call someone (including checking what is in the background)

- Work in short bursts and be realistic about what you can achieve in a day.
- Don't work on the same task all day long, vary the levels of intensity and complexity
- Manage and minimize distractions
- Be sociable – don't forget to speak to other people, or to check in using instant messaging technology
- Have a clear closure to the day and make sure your manager knows you have stopped work for the day, and managers – respect that closure and stop sending questions!
- Managers - be respectful of childcare commitments, which will inevitably occur.

5.1.4 TAKE CARE OF YOUR OWN WELLBEING

- Don't overlook personal hygiene: shower, shave and dress for the day
- Don't forget to take breaks – coffee, lunch, walk the dog. Send yourself daily diary invites to remind you
- Even if you don't have a dog, get some fresh air and exercise even if only in the garden
- Locate yourself somewhere with plenty of natural light, and brighten your workspace with flowers
- Don't feel guilty about phoning a friend for a chat, you need to overcome the feelings of isolation and if you were in the office, you'd spend some of the time chatting wouldn't you?

5.1.5 SET UP STRONG COMMUNICATION LINKS ACROSS THE WHOLE TEAM

- Set clear objectives for each day/week and have a ten-minute catch up at the start and end of each day
- Make the communication richer by using conferencing tools and a more friendly tone
- Managers - acknowledge the stress everyone is under, especially after a prolonged period of enforced home working. Be the cheerleader, break down the isolation and try and establish a feeling of normality to keep spirits up: send chocolates, set up virtual lunches or pizza parties using conference tools (see below)

Remember though, that not all these ideas will appeal to you, or even be necessary for you, so pick and choose what works for you. These are simply suggestions and if, for example, it feels right to do the first few emails of the day from your bed, then do it! There will be times when you'll need to be patient, with a neighbour, a child, a partner and even a delivery man. We have never been through this before and everyone is doing the very best we can.

I am hugely grateful to the following contributors whose websites many of these tips are from (with links included to the original article):

- [Judith Bitterli, Vice President of Consumer Marketing at McAfee five tips](#)
- [Karen Eyre White, The independent Working from home tips](#)
- [Brian Lufkin, The BBC working from home in a pandemic](#)
- [Gretchen Ruben coping with COVID19 - work from home](#)

5.2 MAXIMISING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT HOME WORKING

I have already mentioned in other parts of this book that technology is there to support the concept of home working. However, you may not be fully familiar with what is out there – we are not all millennials! So I have produced here a synopsis of the broad genres of tools available to use, how and when to use them and some of the major providers of each solution which you might have available in your home-based working environment. Before using any of the software tools mentioned, you should speak first with your own IT department as they may have preferred applications and security protocols that need to be observed. I have not included email in this list as it is covered fairly extensively in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 INSTANT MESSAGING APPLICATIONS

These apps provide the opportunity to send brief, chatty messages in real-time to individuals and groups. Great for asking that quick question or checking in on progress or how someone is. Instant messaging applications can work from phone to phone or from computer to computer. Set up an instant messaging group for the team and help everyone feel connected. A downside is that if the app is on your phone, it's never off so managers in particular need to use it with care outside normal working hours. Examples of Instant Messaging apps include Slack, WhatsApp, Jabber and Google Hangouts

5.2.2 TELEPHONE AND VIDEO CONFERENCING

For lengthier communications or where you want to go face to face with your colleague, or a group of colleagues, telephone and video conferencing is ideal for home workers. These apps enable you to set up two- or multi-party conference calls, or video conferences between colleagues based anywhere in the world. The video calls do take a bit of getting used to and initially, you may not feel comfortable using the webcam facility on your laptop but do persevere, because the benefits gained from interacting face to face will help you to feel far more connected. These applications also have the capability to share information real-time using a share screen facility, excellent for that quick change to a presentation or to check on progress. Examples of conferencing applications include Zoom, Skype, Webex and Microsoft Teams

5.2.3 DOCUMENT TRANSFER APPLICATIONS

If you work with large files and documents, document transfer software is really useful in enabling the secure exchange and delivery of documents and data across a network, it is particularly valuable in sending files that may be too large for an email attachment. There are many options here including Dropbox, Wetransfer and Google Drive

5.2.4 COLLABORATION TOOLS

Where you are needing to work together with colleagues on a document or project in a collaborative way, collaboration software is useful in allowing two or more individuals located anywhere in the world jointly to work simultaneously on a project document or spreadsheet to achieve a common goal. Proprietary software in this category includes Office 365, Sharepoint, Slack and Asana.

5.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

To help stop the spread of Coronavirus CORVID19, huge numbers of people have been compelled to work from home

The many hints and tips that have been provided for those unaccustomed to home-working, can be grouped into categories:

1. Secure your technology
2. Get organised
3. Be disciplined
4. Take care of your own wellbeing
5. Set up strong communications links across the whole team

There are many very useful technology tools which can facilitate effective homeworking

6 GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Agile Working: Empowers people to work where when and how they choose - with maximum flexibility and minimum constraints – to optimise their performance using communications and information technology best suited to their needs.

Baby Boomers: The Post War generation, born between 1946 and 1965, characterized by a spirit of competition, self-sufficiency and commitment to the work ethic

Collaboration Tools: A technology application that allows two or more individuals located anywhere in the world jointly to work on a project document or spreadsheet to achieve a common goal.

Conferencing Applications: Technology applications that enable users to set up two- or multi-party conference calls, or video conferences between colleagues based anywhere in the world

Digital Immigrant: Someone born before the 1980s and who has had to develop technological skills as an adult

Digital Native: Someone born in the ‘digital age’ so from the early 1980s onwards and who is completely familiar with modern age technology

Document Transfer Software: software-based services that enable the secure exchange and delivery of data across a network, particularly valuable in sending documents that may be too large for an email attachment.

Dynamic Working: Enables employees to work in the most effective way for them by recognizing that their lives do not neatly fall into a typical 9-5 schedule and that individuals are productive at different times of the day.

Generational diversity: Reflects the fact that workplaces contain people of all ages, each of which brings something different to the workplace, particularly around their familiarity with technology and the digital age

Generation X: Largely pre technical generation, born between 1965 and 1980 seen as resourceful and logical problem solvers.

Generation Y: See Millennials

Generation Z: Born after 1997 and never known a non-digital world. They identify as confident, idealistic, entrepreneurial and ambitious

Flexible Working: A situation in which an employer allows employees to choose the times, and location that they work so that they can do other things such as spend time with their children.

Hot Desking: A way of office working where no individual has an allocated desk but works from whichever workspace is free at the time.

Hyper-connected: The use of many systems and devices so that employees are always connected to their workplace and data sources

Instant Messaging: Technology applications that provide the opportunity to send brief messages in real-time to individuals and groups.

Mentoring: A working relationship between a more experienced or senior employee and one with less experience with the aim of helping the latter to develop their skills and experience

Millennials: The digital generation, born between 1980 and the late 1990s. Digitally savvy, if not digitally native, they show curiosity, self-confidence and are prepared to question authority

Remote Working: A situation in which an employee works mainly from home or a more local office and communicates with the central office by email and telephone

Reverse Mentoring: A mentoring relationship where an employee of a younger generation supports an older employee in understanding new ways of working, particularly around technology.

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs): A method of extending a private (organisational) network across a public network to enable file sharing and data access whilst maintaining internal security protocols.

Voice Over Internet Protocols (VOIP): Technology enabling voice and video communication over the internet, bypassing traditional telecommunications methods

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I am also very grateful for previous training provided by friends at Speak First, the global communications training specialists for providing me with a number of ideas I was able to adapt and expand on within this eBook. Speak First can be contacted at <https://www.speak-first.com>