Work from home Quick guide

Technology & Behaviours

Key things to consider when setting your team up to work from home

written by

Anika Roberts

introduction

Why work from home?

Whether it is about helping your team have a better work-life balance by cutting down on their commute, doing your bit for the environment by reducing train, plane and car travel, or even keeping your team safe from a potential national pandemic, as is currently the case in the UK, there can be many reasons to give working from home a go. Working from home saves time, money and energy without compromising quality of work. Today's technology is so good, that many teams have given it a try – whether that is having a regular 'wfh' Friday or just being able to informally log in and check emails on the go.

The benefits of having a flexible working culture are manifold, including increased trust and collaboration (if done well), a more engaged workforce and as a result happier clients. As with all things, there are limitations too, but these can be minimised by following the few simple guidelines set out here. At the end of the day, although nothing can replace an embrace, or a pat on the back when you meet up at work, working from home is about helping people get the most out of work *and* home life – even if it is just for a few days a week or month.

all about the

technology

Having the right technology is a key enabler to working from home successfully – and can mean the difference between getting frustrated and feeling isolated or excluded from a meeting, or feeling empowered, energised and enabled. Most organisations have great technology in place – even if they may not realise just how powerful it is to support successful home working. But even if your company doesn't, there are now great free tools out there that work just as well. The following guide gives an outline to key tools in Microsoft and how to use them, plus good free tools to use and how.

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The second most important thing that will either mean working from home is a success or complete disaster are the behaviours that leaders and teams demonstrate. Working from home is about focussing on outcomes rather than 'bums on seats' or monitoring when individuals are online and available. It is about working in a culture of trust and mutual respect, collaborating together to achieve common goals. It is about agreeing frameworks for delivery together, setting expectations but then giving individuals the freedom to be the best they can be and deliver, shine and exceed – because they are engaged and enabled. This guide outlines top tips on how to get this right.

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Top two 'must haves' to be successful

First of all, communicate with your team what you want to do and why. Then allow them to get involved and shape the 'how' of implementing working from home. Your team will have many different experiences, both from previous jobs and their private IT capabilities to contribute to best practice. **Secondly**, make sure you build in ways to connect with your team little, but often virtually so that you stay in touch and continue to know where they are at.

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The vast majority of businesses are either on Microsoft or Apple, and there are now numerous tools on both these operating systems that support working from home and make staying in touch with your team and collaborating easy. Below a brief outline of the top tools – what they do, how to use them and why they are good.

Microsoft Office 365
MS Teams – This is a very powerful tool that has a whole host of applications that make remote working and online collaboration easy and effective. The tool allows you to host audio, video, and web conferences with anyone. You can get features such as scheduling assistance, meeting note taking, meeting recording, and instant messaging. There are also additional elements, such as **Teams live events** which allows you to hold any meeting live—large meetings, webinars, company-wide events, and presentations with up to 10,000 attendees inside or outside your organization. Another element is **Teams chat** where you can follow up or get individuals to comment or post questions during a team presentation or webinar.
There are so called 'channels' (like TV channels) that you can set up for individual projects or groups that you collaborate with and where you

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can save and share everything in one space – from instant messaging chat feeds to saving project documents and sharing the use of particular applications. This can be customised for different groups, too – so you may use the 'Power BI' application for sharing financial forecasts in one channel, and Powerpoint in another. MS Teams is particularly powerful, as you can add anybody who has a valid business or consumer email address – not just those within your organisation. These are simply added as 'Guests'. You can also screen share with colleagues which allows teams to effectively and genuinely collaborate. (for more information see https://products.office.com/en-gb/microsoft-teams/online-meeting-solutions?rtc=1)

Apple's tools
Apple has a number of built-in tools such as **Facetime** and **Messages** where you can not only have video calls and instant message others, but you can also **screen share**. You can even let someone else take control of your screen, if you want to. To screen share, you go to the Messages app on your Mac, send a message to the person you want to share with, then click the Screen Share button (in Details).

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Then you can either choose to invite to share your screen, or to view your colleague's screen you click "Ask to share screen". When the screen-sharing request is accepted, an audio call begins automatically (so you can talk while you work) and the Screen Sharing app opens. Apple provides a detailed guide with more help here: https://support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/messages/icht11883/12.0/mac/10.14.

With **facetime** you can call up to 32 people, meeting the need for most **team calls** - and this can be done from your laptop or your iphone. Other applications such as QuickTime Player allow you to audio or video record sequences to create messages or videos to share with others.

With **iCloud File Sharing**, you can share any kind of file or document in iCloud Drive with other iCloud users. You and the people you invite can view and even work on your documents. The people who receive your invitation can click a link to download the shared file from iCloud to any of their devices. Everyone views the same shared document. If you allow others to make edits, they can change and save the document and you see the updates the next time you open the document on your Mac. (https://support.apple.com/en-gb/guide/mac-help/ mchl91854a7a/mac)

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Free tools
What's App, Facebook and Zoom have become hugely popular over the past years – and each allow for easy video calls and collaboration.

Zoom is a web-based video conferencing tool with a local, desktop client and a mobile app that allows users to meet online, with or without video. Zoom users can choose to record sessions, collaborate on projects, and share or annotate on one another's screens, all with one easy-to-use platform. The basic plan is free and offers a host of features, including free meetings. Users can try Zoom for as long as they like – the basic plan has a 40 minutes time limit on meetings with three to up to a total of 25 participants. To get the Zoom app, you simply go to Google Play Store and download it. You need the app to host a meeting, but a Zoom account isn't required to attend a meeting. Anyone can join a meeting using the Zoom mobile apps or desktop applications for Windows and Mac. See https://zoom.us/about for more information.

What's App has been hugely popular in helping individuals make free (web and voice) calls – especially internationally from your mobile. But you can also use the app on your laptop and

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the functionality includes screen sharing your desktop, too. To install whatsapp, you go to www.whatsapp.com from your browser and then download it from the Apple or Microsoft store. WhatsApp can only be installed on your computer if your operating system is Windows 8.1 (or newer) or macOS 10.10 (or newer). For all other operating systems, you can use WhatsApp on your browser. For more help go to https://faq.whatsapp.com/en/web/ 26000010.

WhatsApp has updated it's technology to make **group calls** easier with a change to the way its mobile app works. Before, users would have to start a 1:1 video call, then add participants. Now, you can go to the group whose members you want to call, then tap on the phone icon at the top-right corner of the screen to get started. From the next screen, you'll tap the contacts within the group you want to call, then tap the voice or video button — depending on what type of call you want to make - but it is still limited to 4 participants.

To **screen share** to WhatsApp directly from your desktop or laptop browser you need to add the AddThis Share Buttons.

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Facebook Messenger now allows you to add more friends and family members to your audio and video chats while they're still in progress. To add someone while you're on a video or audio chat, tap on the screen and select the new "add person" icon, then tap on the people you want to add. After you've hung up, you can message everyone in the conversation in an automatically created group chat in your Facebook inbox. The feature is available now on both Android and iOS. Group video chat on Messenger allows you to see up to six people at a time, but up to 50 people can join a call. Once more than six people are on a call, the main person talking is shown on-screen to everyone. Facebook also allows you to screen share by installing their 'screen sharing' extension'. This Chrome extension allows you to share your screen in video calls on Facebook or Messenger. Choose which windows or tabs to project during your call. The extension will not save images of your screen during your call or share your data with other apps or websites. You can also share your screen during your Facebook Live videos. Facebook also launched its '**Workplace by Facebook**' functionality that includes a free version that offers a series of services, like photo and video calls and unlimited file, photo, and video storage. Screen sharing is also enabled.

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Free document sharing

The web-based versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and OneNote, and the equivalent Google offering, G Suite (with Docs, Sheets, Slides, Forms, Drive, and more), allow you to easily share a document with others and have them add inline comments or make their own edits. And, you can work on the go with nearly full-featured mobile apps, too. If you need a central storage space you can access, from any device—computer or phone—you can do this for free too. This is critical for collaboration. And it doesn't have to be complicated. Just save a file to the shared folder and you and your other coworkers will instantly have the latest changes.

Dropbox is one of the most popular online storage and file syncing tools because it's so easy to use (just save a file to the Dropbox folder), was one of the first cloud storage services, and it syncs files more reliably and faster than competing services. Its integration with many other apps really makes it shine. A basic Dropbox account with 2GB of storage is free, but there are paid versions that add more storage, advanced management capabilities, and corporate security controls.

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To work from home successfully you not only need the right tools in place. You also need to change the way you work – and this includes the behaviours of not only you, but of the whole team and the leadership, too.

Trust
One key component is trusting your team to work and deliver results, even when you are not there to look over their shoulder. This is something that is becoming increasingly wide-spread, with most leaders shifting how they manage their team and allowing them to get on with their work without micro-managing. But if your organisation is a lot more traditional, the concept of focusing on teams delivering outcomes rather than how much time is spent in the office, can be daunting. Not all jobs can be done at home – service industries such as frontline health care, retail or hospitality for example – but for the majority of desk-based jobs this is now a huge possibility. With the recent outbreak of Coronavirus even UK Parliament has been toying with the idea to find ways to think outside of the box and work together without being physically present.

The best way to start building trust in your team when you embark on working from home is to **first**

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get together (either virtually or in person before the home working period starts) and together agree what needs to be delivered, by when and by whom. This will mean everybody knows what they are responsible for and set the tone for expecting individuals to be trusted to deliver specific results.

The **second** thing that also needs to be agreed collectively up front is whether there are any times that everyone needs to be online at the same time. Teams may agree working hours similar to those in the office (e.g. 9am to 6pm, with a lunch break) or be much more fluid and only have a few hours a day where everyone is expected to be available. This might be more likely for global teams. In many ways, what is agreed will depend on the nature of the work, how closely individuals need to collaborate to deliver results and whether there are regular times where clients expect to be able to get hold of the team. In that sense, what is agreed is irrelevant – what is important is that everyone is clear on what is expected of them.

The **third** thing that is then important is to put the above into practice, 'let go' and get on with working remotely. Really have trust in the fact that your team is busy delivering. Even though you may not be able to get hold of

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someone instantly when they are working from home, don't expect the worst. Just like when they are working in the same office as you – they cannot always be at their desk – and are likely to have just popped out to grab themselves a sandwich, make themselves a cup of tea or go for a comfort break. There will be exceptions of course (just like in the office – and these need to be dealt with just the same) but 9 times out of 10 there is no need to panic. Give remote working a chance and learn a different way of working together. If done well, the whole team will benefit – as individuals will feel empowered, trusted and enabled and not only deliver great results, but also develop goodwill for you and the organisation.

Keep in touch
When you are working from home, it is important to keep in touch with the team – both formally and informally – otherwise it can quickly feel lonely. Make sure you put the tools in place to be able to collaborate quickly and effectively, so teams get into the habit of quickly 'pinging' a colleague a question via chat, or picking up the phone, if they get stuck, rather than struggle on alone. After all, in the office, they would likely wander over to someone's desk and get advice.

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It may be a good idea to create a **virtual 'drop in'** for team members to be able to talk to you with any issues they may have. This is especially important if your team regularly comes to find you in the office. You could block out 2 hours a week in your diary and communicate to the team that they can give you a ring and have a 1 on 1 chat in this time, as required. Make it clear that this does not mean they can't also pick up the phone or drop you a message when they need support more quickly day to day. The drop in session is an additional opportunity to connect and be available – not instead of.

Virtual team meetings are just as important as in person meetings and should be scheduled at least twice a week – but ideally not be longer than 1 hour or a maximum of 90 minutes. They need to be fast paced and inclusive so that everyone gets the opportunity to speak up and be heard, but the meeting is still a reasonable length. **Screen sharing** can help ensure everyone stays focussed and on the same page. And if the meeting is on the long side – make sure you build in a comfort break and spend a bit of time at the beginning and end of the session keeping things light hearted and informal, enquiring how people.

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It is a good idea to set up a **team chat** – either for the whole team, or by project – so that individuals can post questions and support each other quickly and informally throughout the day, just like they would in the office. Encourage colleagues to connect with each other often and **pick up the phone** too rather than just email or text – what might get lost in translation or misunderstood over email is much less likely to do so on a web or telephone call.

If you have a reasonably small team, it could also make sense to schedule **pro-active catch up** calls with each team member – either weekly, or every two weeks. This gives individuals the chance to bring you up to speed on where they are at and it will flag any issues or concerns to you early on.

Finally, to keep everyone feeling part of the team, it could make sense to arrange weekly (or monthly – or however often works for your team) virtual social get togethers – an example might be having a **10am bacon or veggie buttie** on Friday mornings. This could be done as a video call and the aim would be to have a bit of a laugh and banter as a team. This can work especially well if the team works remotely for the majority of the time, or maybe is a global team that rarely gets together in person.

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Home working can mean the boundaries between work and home become blurry very quickly and teams may struggle to switch off.

Define your time
It is easy to end up working too hard when you work from home and it is important to define clear boundaries for yourself (and others) about when you are working and when you are not. This applies to yourself, as much as it does to the rest of your team, and your family. They too must understand and respect when you are 'in work mode' and when you are not. There are time and task tracking tools such as Slack, Trello (and others) that can really help here. They can give the rest of the team and leaders insight into what you do and you a clear set of targets to try to meet.

Getting distracted vs taking regular breaks
Working from home can mean you get lots done because you are not being distracted by colleagues, but on the flip side, you may end up not taking enough breaks – so make sure you have lunch away from your desk, or go for a quick stroll to get some fresh air. Equally, you may have days where your thoughts keep wandering and you struggle to focus. Here the 'pomodoro' technique can help – where you work in short, focussed bursts.

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Communication

While it is important to be able to keep in touch with the team (as outlined above), there may be times when **too much communication** is going on and you are constantly getting instant messages or calls. If this is the case, let others know that you need to focus and get the team to agree on one form of immediate communication (Slack, email, FaceTime?) It's important to be consistent and to ensure everyone you work with is using the same tool, or you may end up spending your day rotating between multiple conversations in multiple applications, impacting on your concentration. If you need to 'switch off' for a bit to get a particular slide presentation or report done, let the team know this, too – then they will know not to disturb you and respect your 'silence'. Having said all of that, at the end of the day, it may still be useful to have a quick video team call to touch base and feel part of the team again.

Task management

To get the most out of your day and stay focussed, it may make sense for you to schedule specific parts of the day for different tasks – for example

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set times for writing, researching, communications, meetings and so on.

Share what you are working on
Sharing what you are working on, including your target goals with others (even virtually) can help you meet the schedule you set yourself, and also makes it easier to identify when people are slipping behind and may need help. It's much less invasive than your employer hassling you with endless IM calls guaranteed to wreck your concentration. **Trello** can be a great tool when working in teams. It has a card-based task management interface which makes it very easy to share your goals across the rest of your project team and provides all involved with a good insight into project scheduling.

Make a good work space
Most home workers say they benefit from having a defined workspace away from the chaos of family life. It can help you differentiate between your own time and work time. According to one online blogger, some take this further and wear a suit during their remote workday as they believe it helps them focus. Either way, it is very important to choose a chair and work surface (desk, table, or otherwise) that are the correct height for you so that you avoid back problems.

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Stick to a regular routine
When you first start working from home, you can feel slightly lost. It can help to stick to a similar schedule as you would when going into the office. Get up at the same time, get dressed (even though it is tempting to stay in PJs all day!), and use your normal commute time to do something for yourself – like read, or go for a walk or run. Or maybe, if you have children, spend that time having breakfast together and take them to school or nursery. Getting out in the fresh air before work is a great way to start the day and get motivated.

Once you are in 'work mode' make sure you give yourself regular break times, too – to make a cup of tea, to grab a sandwich for lunch or sit in the garden or your balcony for a bit of sunshine and fresh air. Working from home can be a great way to keep household jobs going, too – as long as they don't interfere with work! Break them down into little chunks that can be done 'on the go': for example, you could load or unload the dishwasher while you wait for the kettle to boil, when you make yourself a cup of tea.

At the end of the day, use your normal commute time to go for a quick walk around the block, to help you 'decompress', or spend it doing something else that you love – like going for a swim or cooking a delicious meal.

Summary

Steps to success

Overall, the key things to do to successfully launch working from home are:

1) Prepare together with the team, so that everyone is clear on what needs delivering, by whom and when;

2) If you can, do a test run so that you can see whether the technology you have will support home working as you envisage it;

3) Trust your team – and focus on outcomes and deliverables rather than who is online when;

4) Keep in touch to support people to feel part of the team – what and how much will depend on your team and your needs!

5) Practice healthy self care – for you and your team. When working from home, the boundaries between work and home blur.

I hope you will give home working a go - it can be hugely satisfying and successful. If you want more information, such as our Weekly working from home planner or Infographic for home working, simply email me at anika@arpartnersconsulting.com.