



Remote Working **2020**

Distributed working
in times of disruption



Produced by:



For:



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Introduction

In 1985, after four years working in offices in Sydney and London, I was sitting in my apartment on an early summer day in Notting Hill (London) with a basic “word processor” writing a speech for the CEO of a US bank. It felt strange yet liberating.

I was “working” because I was getting paid for my efforts – but it didn’t feel like work. “So, where’s the catch?”, I wondered. Was someone going to tap me on the shoulder and order me back to the office?

They never did.

For the next 35 years I’ve continued to work “remotely” as we now call this form of work – and, in the ensuing years, my then solo gig grew in numbers (via three companies I’ve founded), with my various teams working in much the same way as I did in Notting Hill back in 1985.

Digital Workplace Group (DWG) was founded 18 years ago and has around 100 people across Europe and North America. Everyone works from wherever they wish (home, co-working spaces, cafés, even in one case up a mountain). Right now as I write, due to COVID-19, everybody works from home only.

As the Coronavirus pandemic has unfolded, DWG has continued to work mostly unchanged from our habitual ways of working. We have adapted a little: there is no travel for meetings and in-person client and member gatherings have moved online. But the resilience, flexibility and adaptability of what we call “fully distributed working” has again proven its value – just as it has during so many previous emergencies and crises before (whether these be due to weather, transport, terrorism or any other potential major disruption to the “physicality of work”).

Over the years, I have often been asked about the upsides and downsides of “working from home”. Across parts of Europe and North America this has steadily grown each year as an alternate form of work. However, it has tended to be viewed as an acceptable but poor relation of the real work scenario of being based in the office or another work location – a viable alternate but somehow inferior in ways hard to pinpoint

COVID-19 has changed that view fundamentally – not just for the crisis period we are in but for the future too. I say that based on what we are being told again and again by leaders and managers in major organizations (corporate, public and non-profit) globally. The only question is how substantial this shift to remote working will be over time – and, as this report describes, there will be significant geographic, demographic and cultural variations in how this plays out.



by **Paul Miller**
CEO and Founder of DWG

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Remote working has for the coming months at least taken over from “office-based work”. And not just remote working but its most (potentially) isolating form – home working. For many of those who actually can work this way (and as referred to in this report, there are large numbers of people and sectors for whom remote working is either impossible or extremely difficult), this rapidly accelerated change to where work happens is often occurring in stressful conditions that are challenging on both a personal and a technical level.


This report produced for Avanade, the leading digital innovator, by DWG is intended to bring direction, practices and confidence to the many organizations across the world trying rapidly to embed remote working for the 2020s in these times of disruption. We draw not only on our own two decades of experience but also on that of other organizations who have pioneered what were once new forms of working – but are now just “work”.

The report inevitably has some limitations. It has been prepared on a tight timescale in response to the situation in order to be able to quickly share our learnings with the many organizations who are looking for guidance. Therefore, for reasons of expediency and to ensure reliable insights, it draws on past experiences as well as current insights relating to roles and situations where remote working from home was already and is currently possible. As a result, it focuses primarily on office-based work and on those roles where it has been possible to switch relatively easily to remote working.

That said, we are discovering as we write that what we might call non-office-based organizations, ranging from hospitals to banks to supermarkets and delivery companies, have swiftly switched or scaled remote working to cope as best they can during the unfolding COVID-19 crisis. These “newly remote” workers are innovating and adapting in real-time and we hope that the insights we are gaining around this can be included in an accompanying future report that will distill the best practices and learnings from this newly remote workforce.

To reassure you, much of the way in which many are now working is not entirely new. Much has been learned by others over a long period. This crisis phase has many familiar characteristics, so we can learn from the past – but just like every other crisis it also has its differences.

As we navigate this challenging journey, we can all learn from each other – and ensure we don’t journey alone.



This rapidly **accelerated change** to where work happens is often occurring in **stressful conditions** that are challenging on both a **personal** and a **technical** level.

2

Checklist for remote working 2020



EMPATHY



LISTENING



ADAPTABILITY



EMPOWER



CONNECTION



TRUST

Individual: For homeworkers



Wellbeing

- **A new commute:** create rituals to start and end your day
- **Household work:** don't feel guilty for not doing housework
- **Movement & nutrition:** look after your physical health
- **Boundaries:** define your working space and hours
- **Emotions:** be aware of your emotional state

Focus

- **Today's goals:** set clear goals for the day
- **Habitat:** optimize your surroundings for how you work best
- **Interruptions & distractions:** actively manage expectations
- **Breaks:** taking breaks produces better work
- **Flexibility:** work flexibly if you need to

Connection

- **Your needs:** know how much interaction you need
- **Preferences:** know your communication preferences
- **Virtual collocation:** find your best "virtual co-workers"
- **Virtual coffees:** have virtual coffees with colleagues

Team: For managers



Working together

- **Managing your team:** start with trust, and be an unblocker
- **Roles & goals:** review team roles, and who does what
- **Work modes & tools:** agree which tools you'll use for what
- **Online meetings:** find your team etiquette for online meetings
- **Team agreement:** document how you'll work together

Performance

- **Safety:** create a safe space for issues to be addressed
- **Transparency:** encourage people to "work out loud"
- **Deliverables:** focus on outputs, not how people get there
- **Flexibility:** recognize that people will need to work flexibly
- **Preferences:** understand people's communication preferences

Supporting each other

- **Team rhythm:** build in daily and weekly team checkpoints
- **Inclusivity & belonging:** include all team members
- **Normalize:** normalize different home environments for people
- **Stay on grid:** be mindful of anyone who's gone "off grid"

Organization: For leadership



Communication

- **Presence and role-modeling:** lead by example and be present
- **Official channels:** ensure trust around messaging
- **Feedback loops:** have processes to listen and then act
- **Clear guidance:** provide clear and helpful support
- **One size doesn't fit all:** work with organizational diversity

Employee services

- **Back to basics:** revisit support services' strategies
- **Shared technology:** issue scalable, resilient remote work tools
- **IT & HR support:** prepare helpdesk support
- **User journeys:** use digital portals to support key tasks

Readiness and resilience

- **Change management:** draw on frameworks and experience
- **Digital literacy:** harness internal experts & external resources
- **Familiarity:** familiar cultural references show resilience
- **Connection:** use social channels to support connection

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What is the same – what is different?

When dramatic change happens, it is worth stepping back and asking: so how is this familiar to the past and how is it different? What can we learn from that which is similar and how shall we approach that which is new?

The table below compares characteristics of different remote working roll-outs, across both managed and crisis situations, including a full description of each.

Understanding remote working across different scenarios	Scenario One: Managed roll-out (remote working program)	Scenario Two: Driven by crisis (weather crisis)	Scenario Three: Novel crisis (global pandemic)
Characteristics	Gradual, controlled, familiar	Rapid, planned, unfamiliar	Rapid, unplanned, unprecedented
Technology	Reliable tech for effective working	Some degree of capability	Unsupported, significant barriers, limited capability
Behavior change	Support those with challenges, cultural variation	Little preparation, listening, supporting	No preparation, adaptive, agile, listening
Managing teams	Adapt management styles, trust, results-driven	Adaptive, supportive	Empathetic, listening, leading
Security	High degree of control to minimize risk	Lack of control, shadow IT in use	Vulnerabilities from new patterns of working

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Scenario One: Gradual and managed roll-out of remote working

This is the scenario most familiar to us: the gradual, managed roll-out of remote working. What elements of our current environment are actually similar to this scenario?

- **Technology:** It is essential to make sure people have reliable technology to work effectively from anywhere; for example, individuals may struggle with VPN access, or have tablets but no keyboards, or lack decent headsets if their laptops have poor quality audio.
- **Behavior change:** Supporting individuals and teams who have specific challenges matters: creative, software development and legal teams, as well as many others, can find this style of work strange and uncomfortable. Also, cultural variations are important. Northern Europe and parts of North America have large cohorts who have worked remotely for many years, while in the Far East this is a highly unusual way to work.
- **Managing teams:** When teams go remote, how we manage them needs to adapt. The Industrial Age produced a traditional approach where those we manage can be seen (and therefore observed) and that gave a sense of control to many managers. If you can't observe those you manage, finding new ways to work is important, judging people far more on their output than input, and expecting "digital" rather than "physical" presence.
- **Security:** When work starts to be distributed, the technology division of your organization can oversee the security of systems being used and do so with a high degree of control as the roll-outs happen at a natural pace.

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Scenario Two: Rapid remote working roll-out driven by crisis

Specifics will vary by organization and geography, but we see this scenario come into force when “events” force alternate ways of working – not by choice but by necessity. Weather, transport, terrorism, political upheaval, and so on, often make coming into a physical workplace difficult or even impossible for a period of time.

In addition to the elements of Scenario One, our current environment has elements of this less common, but not unprecedented, scenario.

- **Technology:** Making sure people can work with at least some degree of capability – even if not the full suite of services – is better than no work at all. So, adaptability and ingenuity can help. What is achieved might not be perfect but, if it is effective, will be deemed acceptable for the duration of the crisis.
- **Behavior change:** In this “event-driven” scenario, people may be unprepared for what is required. Perhaps your organization has trained people in calmer times and can draw on that when the event happens. For others there may be little change from how they work normally. In DWG we have managed through numerous “events” (the 2008 crash, hurricanes, terrorism, etc.) and mostly noticed hardly any change in work effectiveness. But for others, these events have resulted in huge disruption to working habits; in these situations, listening, supporting and being tolerant of decreased levels of productivity proved essential.
- **Managing teams:** The lesson learned for managers reluctant to work remotely but forced to do so by events is often the surprising realization that managing people you trust remotely actually works well. While it might feel strange to be managing work remotely and not to be able to see colleagues physically, the experience has generally been a positive one.
- **Security:** The issue here is that in situations of emergency and crisis, it is easy to omit factoring in security. If people are using workplace services remotely, vulnerabilities in security arise. This is additionally the case when (with good intentions) teams create new collaborative groups on tools not sanctioned by the organization – simply to get work done. Use of shadow IT, particularly with tools commonly available commercially, can surface because individuals have used these services in their personal lives or earlier in their careers. Ensuring that the toolset available at a corporate level is fit for purpose is important, as is establishing that most of the remote workers’ needs are being met – or at least people know that for a period of time some work functions will not happen.

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Scenario Three: Rapid remote working roll-out driven by novel crisis (COVID-19)

What makes the COVID-19 crisis (as we write in March 2020) distinct is that, while this is a crisis for which we can draw on the learnings above, it is also an event without precedent (in the modern world of work). There have been pandemics before but the only one remotely similar to COVID-19 happened in 1918 when the idea of remote working would have sounded like science fiction.

The lack of precedent adds a unique layer of individual, team, organizational and societal stress to this rapid move to what is, in effect, not just remote working but enforced home and increasingly isolated working.

It is also affecting most (and eventually all) countries globally and indeed all human beings, meaning that each worker's close network – including partners, children, aging parents and housemates – are all impacted. This elicits unique challenges, as well as (if we look closely) some potential opportunities.

- **Technology:** The degree of enforced working from home can mean individuals and teams find themselves abruptly at home with whatever kit they have – and with little obvious support. For example, one major bank finds that while its relationship managers can still work, they only have Microsoft Office 365 and no access to client data or accounts. Organizations have been accelerating the rollout of upgraded digital workplace programs to cope with the urgency of need.
- **Behavior change:** This is perhaps the most significant difference and challenge. During this crisis, in the Far East, and now in Europe and North America, a “typical” remote worker has children also at home for an indeterminate period – who are expecting to be online for classes. In some regions, elderly parents might also be in the home, which may be a small apartment. In another situation, younger staff are finding themselves forced to work in restricted conditions alongside their housemates or, in some cases, parents. And then we need to factor in that some workers or cohabitants will be sick with the virus. Listening, empathy – frankly, humanity – are needed to support colleagues trying to do their best in highly stressful conditions. Humour, social conversation, video on, and pets on video can all help make this situation more tolerable. It is therefore essential that leadership teams are proactive and coordinated across a number of critical areas, including: employee wellbeing, the direction and guidance that is being disseminated, support for clients and customers, and reconfiguring the organization and business as required to maintain performance.

Listening, empathy – frankly, **humanity** – are needed to **support colleagues** trying to do their best in highly stressful conditions.

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- **Managing teams:** The situational stress above requires managers to be highly empathetic, sympathetic and adaptable. Taking a flexible approach to when people are able to work, showing empathy, and tolerating kids in the background will all be essential. Managers need to do what they can to support, drawing on best practices from reports such as this to help guide people. Plus, managers themselves are subject to all the same pressures, so asking those we manage to take account of our own needs is important too. We are all in this together.
- **Security:** It has been pointed out that this rapid, stressful shift to remote working maximizes the chance of lapses in security. It is essential for those tasked with security to provide the required security – while they themselves are also working remotely. Reducing functionality to improve security is a reasonable and acceptable trade-off. And organizations must draw on external support for this endeavour as security is a key vulnerability in these new “working systems”. In particular, organizations need to be mindful of and educate their people around emergent threats, such as the sudden spike in phishing emails related to COVID-19.

4

Responding right now: Lessons from 20 years of DWG

Human-centered remote working in 2020

During a time of crisis, where policies and different ways of working are having to be quickly deployed, it can be easy to lose sight of the human beings impacted by organizational decisions.

Guiding principles for remote working 2020

We believe, based on our experiences, that it is essential to underpin all activities with the following principles, embedding them in your decision-making, actions and beliefs.

- **Empathy:** Nurture empathy on all levels throughout the organization: leaders and their people; managers and their teams; colleagues and their peers. Seek to understand people's actual situations and be able to respond sympathetically and appropriately.
- **Listening:** Make sure there are good feedback loops to find out whether your current approach is working and if – and how – it could be improved.
- **Adaptability:** Be open and ready to change your approach quickly if it's not working or needs amending based on what you're hearing. Constantly learn from what's happening now to inform what you do next. This is not a time for bureaucracy or power politics.
- **Empowerment:** Make sure people feel empowered to work from home. Help them gain the skills, tools and knowledge needed to work remotely effectively. Point them to resources and colleagues who can help.
- **Connection:** As well as needing to be able technically to connect, people need to be able to feel connected, particularly in times of isolation. Remote working tools can be used to help create social connection between colleagues and across the organization.
- **Trust:** Having an element of autonomy while working from home is more effective than being micromanaged. Trust the people you hired to get their work done. Judge them on their results not on their process – and approach any issues from a starting point of seeking to understand.

Having these six principles infused throughout the organization as remote working is rapidly deployed will help create a shared culture of support during a time of high anxiety and stress.

4

Three tiers of remote working in 2020

Amid the sense of confusion that can be prevalent when a whole workforce suddenly needs to go remote, a clear framework setting out key areas of activity and guidance is vital.

There will be specific steps to be taken around IT infrastructure and security, as well as crisis communications and business continuity. But there will also be a need for a human-centered approach to deploying remote working that focuses on the practicalities of keeping work going as well as the human connection and support for people.

DWG recommends breaking tasks and guidance down into three tiers:

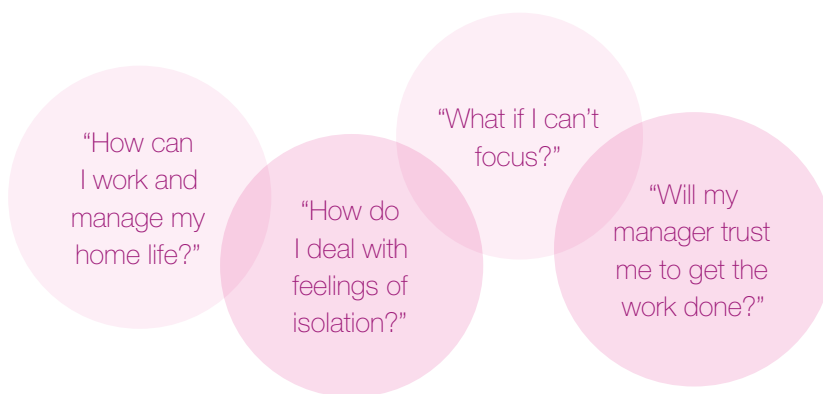
- the individual (each person working from home)
- teams (people working together, including their managers)
- the organization (leadership).

Within each of these areas, there are a number of key areas to focus on immediately to get people up and running, which we now look at in more detail.

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4.1 Individual: Guidance for homeworkers

How do I work from home if I'm suddenly remote?



Making remote working work for you

It's crucial in the current environment that leadership and managers root decisions and actions around home working in the individual, while also being mindful that they too are homeworkers who need to look after their own wellbeing and work practices.

At the heart of any remote working plan is a person sitting at home, possibly without a dedicated workspace, surrounded by their home life, and potentially with children out of school, elderly parents, flatmates, family members feeling unwell, pets – all trying to keep their work life going on in parallel. In other cases, it may be a person who is living alone and having to self-isolate, feeling disconnected and anxious.

Organizations should provide their people with guidance and help on how to work from home, specifically aimed at helping to manage their own personal experience. Providing clear tips such as those below, addressed directly to homeworkers, can go a long way to helping alleviate some of the anxiety and stress that people are feeling.

Three key areas to focus on at the individual level are: **Wellbeing**, **Focus** and **Connection**.

4

1. Wellbeing

- **A new commute:** Create habits that become your “new commute” and give yourself a set start time each day. This helps to create the mind shift from “home” to “work”. This new routine might include changing in and out of your normal work clothes, a specific meditation, making a cup of coffee in a dedicated work mug – find what works for you.
- **Household work:** Alleviate any guilt associated with the idea that just because you’re at home, you should be carrying out domestic duties. Create time to address any household chores, for example, first thing in the morning only or at weekends. Techniques such as the “Enough List” can help, where you set out what’s enough for today.¹
- **Movement and nutrition:** Make sure you move throughout the day. This might be stretching, changing location for different pieces of work, doing at-home exercises, or simply standing up from your workstation. Also, think about and plan meals and snacks in advance, such as your lunch, so that you’re not grabbing whatever’s at hand at the last minute. Drink water.
- **Boundaries:** Identify any boundaries you need to support your wellbeing and communicate them to colleagues, friends and family. These might relate to your working hours vs your non-working hours, the amount of time you need alone vs with others, solo vs collaborative work, and so on.
- **Emotions:** Be mindful of how you’re feeling, whether around work, from not being in the office, or from COVID-19 related stress. Be kind to yourself and create a “toolkit” that helps you manage stress and anxiety, if useful. This will be of particular help when communicating and collaborating with colleagues while emotions are heightened.

Identify any **boundaries** you need to **support your wellbeing** and communicate them to colleagues, friends and family.

4

2. Focus

- **Today's goals:** Set a clear list of goals you want to achieve each day and use your diary to plan out and schedule in your work. Book in “meetings with yourself” to help segment your work into clear blocks of time.
- **Habitat:** Learn which part of your home you work best in – and which situations can help you to focus.² Different people work better in different habitats, with some liking music, others needing silence, and a variety of preferences adopted as regards, for instance, lighting or levels of biophilia (connection with nature). Experiment and also consider using different parts of the house (if possible) as you change what you're working on or when you start to feel restless.
- **Interruptions and distractions:** Manage notifications from tools you're using. Set clear expectations with colleagues (and anyone you're living with) around response times and when you're available to be contacted.
- **Breaks:** Allow yourself breaks away from your work throughout the day, including for lunch. Far from being disruptive, this can help you refresh and refocus. Be clear on how long the break will last, treating it as another block of pre-booked time. Take a short rest in the day if that revives you.
- **Flexibility:** Work more flexibly. If you have children at home or elderly relatives, or if your colleagues do, you will need to flex between work and non-work more rapidly; acknowledge this and be understanding with yourself. If it helps, put time aside for when the household is quieter to get the more focus-intensive tasks done. Try to keep track of how many hours you're working so that you don't overwork.

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3. Connection

- **Your needs:** What level of social interaction do you need in order to feel recharged and what level of alone time? Some of us require higher levels of social interaction and others less. Find your balance in this.
- **Preferences:** Work out whether you prefer video, audio, and/or text to feel connected with people. For some, a quick text chat will be enough. For others, a video call is essential. Work out your preference and make sure you're getting enough (or a balance of all three) throughout the day.
- **Virtual co-location:** Consider ways to recreate the sense of being co-located virtually. This could be with colleagues but also potentially with friends too. Having an open video chat where you can see each other may help or perhaps a dedicated chat for non-work conversation would be beneficial.
- **Virtual coffees:** Schedule in time for a quick virtual coffee break with colleagues, or with friends and family who are also working from home. This can involve switching on your camera and having a quick catch-up over a hot drink.

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4.2 Team: Guidance for managers

How can I support my team while they're all working from home?



Making remote working effective for your team

For many teams and managers, this will be the first time they've worked together while not being co-located, relying extensively on digital workplace tools they're not familiar with to help them manage communication, collaboration, and connection.

Research has shown that people are more likely to communicate if they're within 10 meters of each other³, so extra care needs to be taken while remote to keep in touch with one another and communicate clearly and explicitly; what feels like overcommunicating can often be the right level here.

For managers, it's essential that they seek to support their teams through the principles of human-centered remote working 2020, bringing empathy, trust and empowerment to their managing styles. This also presents an opportunity for managers to review who in their team does what and to think through how work is allocated and progress is tracked.

For team members, the same principles can help foster a shared culture of openness and connection, as they work out and iterate on how to work together, maintain performance, and support each other.

Three key areas to focus on at the team level are: **Working together**, **Performance** and **Supporting each other**.

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1. Working together

- **Managing your team:** Trust is the foundation for managing within a virtual environment. Focusing on outputs rather than process can help team members feel empowered to manage their own time. The manager should ideally take time to check in with individual members one-to-one over the course of the week to see how they're doing, as well as hosting team calls. Create the space to identify any potential blockers, such as burnout, that they may be able to help unblock. The manager in a remote team is a facilitator, an enabler and a mentor, not a micromanager.
- **Roles and goals:** Take the opportunity to revisit everyone's role within the team – their objectives, responsibilities, skills, and capacity. This not only helps individuals to refocus on their core role, but also enables each member of the team to understand each other's areas of focus and strengths. Review how you work together as a team, how that translates to working remotely, and what needs to change to suit the new environment.
- **Different work modes and tools:** Identify the different ways that you work together, such as one-on-one, smaller groups collaborating on a specific task, full team to agree task allocation, brainstorming sessions, solo working, and so on. You will need a mix of asynchronous and real-time ways of working and to agree which tools you'll be using for which.⁴
- **Effective online meetings:** Agree the shared etiquette for team meetings, as this is often one of the biggest challenges for teams working remotely. Considerations include: switching on video or not (personal choice); how to manage connectivity issues in the moment; muting when not speaking; building in time at the start to cover any technical issues; sharing agendas beforehand with clarity of purpose for the meeting; assigning someone to take notes and actions; ensuring quieter team members are able to share their thoughts in a way that's comfortable for them; speaking respectfully to each other. Make sure team members have the right equipment, such as headsets, and consider creating test meetings to get to grips with technology and etiquette. It can also be important to make sure people don't feel embarrassed if their family life suddenly intrudes on a meeting, and to agree how such events will be handled.⁵
- **Team remote work agreement:** Consider capturing your agreed ways of working in a collaborative team remote work agreement, which covers what's been agreed on tools you'll use, how you'll keep each other updated on what you're working on, how feedback will be shared, how disagreements will be handled, how appreciation will be shown, and online meeting etiquette. This agreement can help create a shared understanding of how you'll work together and be treated as a "living document" that is reviewed regularly and updated as new practices and needs emerge.⁶ It can also be a way of onboarding new team members who need to learn the shared ways of working quickly without having the benefit of being co-located with their new team members.

Review how you **work together as a team**, how that translates to working remotely, and **what needs to change** to suit the new environment.

4

2. Performance

- **Safety:** Create an environment where any potential performance issues – such as missed deadlines or quality of work – can be raised and discussed in a compassionate manner. Try to understand any issues that could be impacting performance and seek to address these problems together.
- **Transparency:** Communicate clearly as a team with each other about what's being worked on, what workloads are like, progress, any potential red flags that might cause delays, and so on. The Working Out Loud movement, for example, is one which provides guidance on how to effectively share and “narrate” what you're working on, so that others are aware and can contribute.⁷
- **Deliverables:** Focus on what people are delivering, not how they're getting to the point of delivery. Research has shown that people working from home are more effective if given autonomy rather than being constantly monitored.⁸ Trust your people to get the job done.
- **Flexibility:** In order to maintain performance, it is likely that team members will need to adopt a level of flexibility in their ways of working, for example, to allow for family needs. Understanding each individual's circumstances and building these into the way the team works together will help create an adaptive, empathetic, shared way of working.
- **Preferences:** Understand each other's preferences for communicating, receiving information and, as far as possible, accommodate each other. Some, for example, may require information before joining meetings in order to prepare, while others are happy to brainstorm on the fly.

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3. Supporting each other

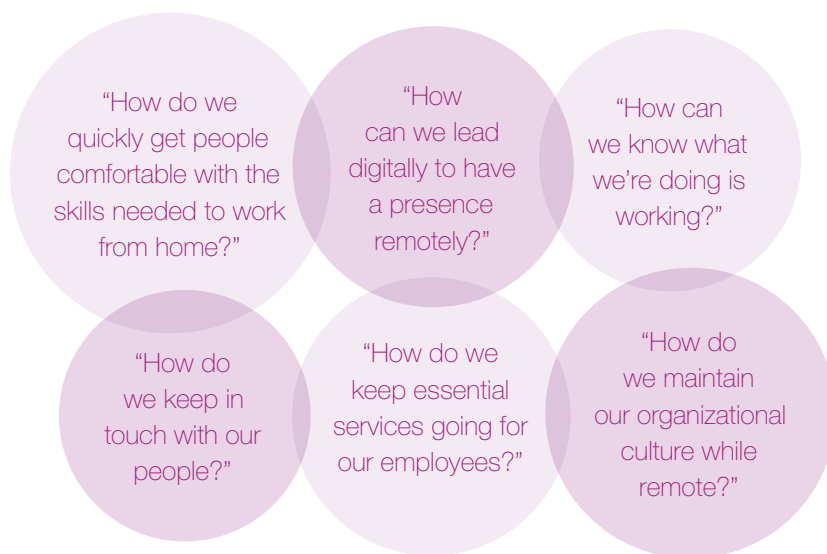
- **Team rhythm:** Create a daily and weekly rhythm as a team through regular check-ins. This could include a daily call in the morning to kick off the day and another before signing off, for those who are available, and/or a weekly team meeting to run through the week's calendar together. This will help everyone to understand each other's workloads and priorities, as well as any personal commitments.
- **Inclusivity and belonging:** Be mindful to take steps to include all members of the team and to create an environment where they feel they belong in the virtual team by, for example: ensuring that all voices are heard during online meetings; checking that people are able to use the shared toolsets; and supporting people to share not only their needs but also their ideas.⁹
- **Normalize home environments:** Take time to acknowledge and become familiar with the environments in which people are working. Not only will this help to manage expectations and create empathy amongst team members, it may also reduce any feelings of concern that people may have about showing their home environments on camera.¹⁰
- **Work together, play together:** Create moments to socialize outside of the work-related interactions you have together. It may seem trivial but take the time to talk about shared hobbies and interests, have fun on video calls, use emojis, GIFs, and so on. This will help to break up the day but also to build relationships that will make it easier to support each other, including encouraging each other to make time to focus on individual wellbeing as per the **Individual: Guidance for homeworkers section**. Consider also having a separate channel in your collaboration platform dedicated to "social" (or non-work) conversation.
- **Staying on grid:** Be mindful of any teammates who have "gone dark" and haven't been present on online channels or are behaving in a way that seems unusual for them. In times of stress and anxiety, it can be tempting to go off grid and that can become more pronounced when working from home. Reach out if needed.

Be **mindful of any teammates** who have "gone dark" and **haven't been present** on online channels or are behaving in a way that **seems unusual** for them.

4

4.3 Organization: Guidance for leadership

How can we lead as one organization while everyone's separated?



Making remote working work for your organization

For leadership teams, including those heading business services, a key challenge is how to keep the organization running as smoothly as possible, while maintaining a sense of shared culture and identity across people who aren't co-located.

In normal times, deploying a remote working policy allows time for user research, strategy formulation, establishment of governance, change management and training. In our current times, everything is being fast-tracked, with many people already having to work remotely and good practice having to be carried out retrospectively or circumvented by necessity.

While all the principles of human-centered remote working 2020 are important across the three tier levels, leadership in particular should focus on listening, adaptability, and empowerment, something that has often been called “servant leadership”. What seems to work today may not work tomorrow, and it's essential to have open lines of communication across verified channels, and feedback loops in place to know what's happening across your workforce.

Three key areas to focus on at the organization (leadership) level are:

Communication, **Employee services** and **Readiness and resilience**.

4

1. Communication

- **Leadership “digital presence” and role-modeling:** A crisis is a time when employees turn to leaders to provide clarity, direction and reassurance. Leadership communications that are calm, personable, authentic, clear and empathetic have the most impact. Leading by example and being a role model for desired behaviors can also positively influence both management and employees. For example, a video showing a CEO working from home and discussing their own domestic and work challenges can help to create a sense of connection.¹¹
- **Official channels:** In a difficult and fast-moving situation, it is very important that employees have clear information relating to working from home that they trust and which is authoritative. In a multi-channel communications environment where real-time communications may be happening at a corporate, divisional, local and team level, it is very easy to send out mixed messages that cause confusion. Having an official channel for updates on the situation including remote working (for example, the homepage of your intranet) helps to reduce ambiguity.
- **Feedback loops:** Organizations must be highly flexible and adaptive. Having feedback loops in place to listen to the concerns of employees and act quickly in response to any raised is important. This needs to happen at all levels from individual teams right up to the enterprise level so that senior leaders and support functions can make quick decisions and the right interventions. For example, having a remote working virtual “feedback box” (such as a simple form to complete) can help, as can explicitly seeking feedback through methods such as surveys.
- **Clear guidance:** Having clear policies and guidance for employees on arrangements relating to working from home is critical. Some of this may be high-level and explain the overall policies and how long these will be in operation; other guidance can be very specific, such as advice on ergonomics and the guidance given here in the **Individual: Guidance for homeworkers section**. For global enterprises, it may be necessary to translate guidance into different languages. A community space where employees can swap tips and tricks, or ask questions to experts, can also provide an effective companion to resources.
- **One size doesn’t fit all:** The situation happening across countries and cultures can differ widely, with varying levels of “lockdown” as well as differing local cultural acceptance and traditional practices around home working. Countries with smaller homes, or where it is very hot, tend to center work in offices. Organizations may need to vary arrangements to suit different parts of the enterprise.

A video showing a **CEO working from home** and discussing their own **domestic and work challenges** can help to create **a sense of connection**.

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2. Employee services

- **Back to basics:** Support functions, such as IT, Finance, HR and Communications, play critical roles in providing and co-ordinating different employee services that help their people to get things done and enable basic roles to happen. The implementation of remote working at scale may need to change the way these services are delivered. To this end, some support functions may need to go “back to basics” and revisit their strategy, governance and operational models to ensure these still work in the “new normal”, and review how their services are accessed and provided digitally.
- **Shared technology:** Digital workplace and collaboration tools, such as Microsoft Teams, will play a critical role in home working, and should be scalable and resilient. However, there can be pockets of the organization without access to them or who are using different tools. It’s important to ensure that the right tools are provided and equally important to provide guidance on which tools to be using in order to get through the crisis. To address shadow IT, it can help to ask people in a survey what tools they’re using at the moment (with no risk of punishment for unauthorized tools), put guidelines and processes in place for procuring new tools quickly, and educate people on the risks of unauthorized tools.¹²
- **IT and HR support:** Help desks play an important role in delivering employee services, in particular logging and resolving queries relating to IT and HR issues. Both IT and HR support may come under considerable pressure from the amount of questions and issues relating to homeworking. Appropriate measures and interventions may need to be implemented to cope with the volume and nature of the questions. Even something relatively simple like an FAQ page can relieve the pressure.
- **User journeys:** Despite the crisis, work does not halt and employees need to get things done. Providing clear information via your intranet or digital portal to allow employees to complete common tasks, such as logging expenses, booking annual leave or finding relevant applications, is crucial. Accessing up-to-date task, process and operational information gains importance in difficult times.

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3. Readiness and resilience

- **Change management:** Change management techniques are not easy to apply in crisis situations, but teams should draw on their experience of IT roll-outs, culture activations, training and support, peer-to-peer networks and organizational learning to manage the change.¹³ Models such as ADKAR¹⁴ or Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change¹⁵ can be useful starting points for those for whom this is new.
- **Digital literacy:** Digital literacy programs range from traditional training to reverse mentoring and peer-to-peer learning. When people are having to upskill rapidly, harnessing the passion and knowledge of the community by identifying experts across the organization and empowering them to teach their peers helps. Additionally, creating online communities of support, where people can ask the "silly" questions in a safe space, builds on the knowledge of the collective, as can setting up regular online drop-in sessions for those who need some extra help. Taking advantage of free training resources, often created by vendors, can be another quick way to deploy written and visual guidance. Driving targeted digital literacy interventions can support readiness and resilience relating to remote working, so running a survey for people to self-assess their levels of comfort with digital tools and behaviors can be a quick way of identifying both experts and those who need some extra help.¹⁶
- **Familiarity:** Organizational cultures have their own traditions, offbeat personalities, quirky routines and in-jokes that can be reflected and amplified across your digital channels. Having things which are familiar and reflect your culture, such as the regular message from your CEO delivered on the normal day of the month, or peer-to-peer recognition, or whatever it is, can show that normality hasn't completely disappeared, as well as using methods of storytelling, such as amplifying the voices of normal people across the organization. In a modest way this demonstrates resilience.
- **Connection:** Providing social and community channels that allow employees to connect with each other can help preserve organizational culture, provide a human connection, ensure people feel better supported, and provide some levity in what can feel like a dark situation. At DWG, for example, we have set up a channel on Teams for employees to talk about anything they want to during the crisis, with the emphasis on it being light-hearted. While this means pet videos, "end of the world" playlists and bad jokes, there are also check-ins to see if everyone is doing okay as well as tips and tricks on how to navigate working from home with a house full of people. Using collaboration tools such as enterprise social networks, guided by clear etiquette guidance, can play an essential role in helping to create connection.

When people are having to **upskill rapidly**, harnessing the passion and knowledge of the community by **identifying experts** across the organization and empowering them to **teach their peers** helps.

5

Learning in the moment, ready for the future

Perspective is important in testing times. Even while we are managing the immediate and dealing with often stressful dynamics at the technical, practical and behavioral levels, we need also to be learning from what we are doing now, during what is the largest exercise in remote working in global corporate history. This is an “experiment” at some level and, as with all experiments, it is essential that we analyze and learn from it.

This crisis is, of course, evolving at incredible speed, making the time to identify useful learning incredibly challenging; every day brings new developments and unprecedented challenges. We are writing this relatively early into the crisis, and there will no doubt be many outcomes that are hard to predict and will surprise us all.

Generally, organizations are still in the early phase of rapidly upscaling remote working to employees who predominantly work in offices or sit at desks. Many of these employees already have digital identities, equipment and an established digital workplace. Efforts are already starting to have results, with some organizations becoming more resilient by the day.

Organizations with either a relatively mature remote working capability, or who are particularly adaptive and have successfully scaled up remote working, may soon start to move into a new phase, operationalizing key use cases, processes or “moments that matter” within the new context of remote working. These could include employee onboarding, personal learning, performance reviews, key meetings, town halls, events, and more. We expect a swathe of new practices to emerge.

Beyond this, we can also expect some organizations, particularly in sectors with more firstline, field and deskless employees, to start to change the ways in which they deliver their core services in this new remote context. Roles that may have seemed very unlikely to be able to operate remotely, even just a few weeks ago, are being impacted. With schools shut, teaching is being delivered online; medical practitioners are delivering consultations by Skype; and yoga instructions are leading remote sessions via MS Teams.

Some of these innovations are not new. Remote medical consultation has been happening for a while in some areas, but it’s not yet at scale. Automation supports some niche remote operations, for example, driving heavy vehicles in the mining sector. However, the long-term impact of the crisis on sectors such as manufacturing, retail, healthcare, leisure, higher education and mining may fundamentally change the way in which services are delivered and brands interact with their customers. Remote delivery of services may become far more widespread as a result.

And so, if we take a moment to pause and reflect, what have we learned so far from the rapid deployment of remote working in 2020, and what might we expect to come?

The **long-term impact** of the crisis on sectors such as manufacturing, retail, healthcare, leisure, higher education and mining may **fundamentally change** the way in which **services are delivered**.

5

What are we learning from the present?

Adaptability: Very many people have adjusted, albeit with differing degrees of ease, to working remotely quite well. Whole swathes of the workforce in cultures totally unused to this way of working have mostly accepted the change and tried their best to make it work. This is really encouraging and shows that a large percentage of managers and teams who formerly felt such a thing was “impossible” have now realized that it actually is “possible”.

Limitations: We have also discovered, without much surprise, that there are huge areas of work where it is simply impossible to work either from home or even just remotely – physical retail, hospitality or travel being just a few examples. These sectors cannot be delivered from home. But we also see human ingenuity surfacing with much pivoting happening. Fitness studios are offering online classes, conferences are going virtual both delivered and “consumed” from homes, and education has teachers “in front” of students with both the educators and the pupils at home. We have also learned that technology in homes in many regions is insufficient to enable effective work, for example as young people in small shared accommodation struggle with low bandwidth.

Culture: We have seen that large organizations can adapt their “normal” culture if needed. At first, many organizations set about responding to the COVID-19 virus in China and surrounding countries with a traditional mandated approach, but soon realized that their workforce in those regions was under such intense stress trying to work in cramped living situations that listening, showing empathy and providing practical support was what was required. Cultures have become more overtly humane in real-time, with company cultures found to be far more flexible than expected.

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What will we apply to the future?

Travel decline: We have discovered that significant volumes of travel in all forms can be replaced by online connections. What was considered impossible to imagine has in many cases proved to be viable and, in some cases, may well become permanent. Organizations can and will travel far less and use alternate online services going forwards. The critical environmental and cost drivers for this have been obvious for years but this unique and unexpected “experiment” in new modes of work will drive down travel-based work. The only question is how great will that reduction be? Our view is that business travel will experience a sustained decline for environmental, economic, resilience and work-style reasons. 2020 will be seen as a watershed moment in work-related travel.

Business resilience: What we have discovered is that many organizations were either totally or largely unprepared to shift at speed to remote working. Many have performed relatively well despite the upheaval, but ahead of the “next crisis” hopefully every organization will be much better prepared. This is about business resilience with the need for systems in place to move at will to alternate modes of work when needed – acting rather than reacting.

Humanity amplified: As we have written, large organizations have been required to discover or develop an empathetic, human and authentic approach to colleagues. This has been helped by the reality that employees everywhere have been sharing similar experiences – at home, working. Once an organization increases its humanity and concern for others, it cannot return to a previous cultural norm, and all organizations will be expected and required to exhibit greater empathy and understanding in the future or otherwise find that no one wants to work for them (at least not for long).

Our view is that **business travel** will experience a **sustained decline** for environmental, economic, resilience and work-style reasons. 2020 will be seen as a **watershed moment** in work-related travel.

5

2020s: This is the “Decade of Courage”

In a December 2019 episode of Paul Miller’s Digital Workplace Impact podcast¹⁷, he ended with the reflection that organizations were moving into a new phase as well as a new decade, where they should no longer be considered as “organizations” but rather as “organisms”; as living systems or ecologies that are alive, rather than as machines.

He also described the coming decade as “The Decade of Courage”, the word courage being derived from the French *coeur*, meaning heart. We need to see the 2020s as requiring courage at all levels, with large organizations playing a key role in changing cultures.

The current COVID-19 crisis is almost overwhelmingly challenging for everyone, but if there is a quality that leaders, managers and people can gain from exhibiting in this period, it is courage. We should all now act with courage within our own work, work from our hearts as well as our minds – and (perhaps mostly importantly) always seek to encourage each other.

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Acknowledgements



About the author

Paul Miller is CEO and Founder of Digital Workplace Group (DWG). Paul hosts the Digital Workplace Impact podcast, is Executive Producer of the 24-hour global digital experience Digital Workplace 24, and hosted the pioneering internet radio show Digital Workplace Live for five years. His book, *The Digital Renaissance of Work: Delivering digital workplaces fit for the future* (co-authored with Elizabeth Marsh), was shortlisted for the Management Book of the Year 2016 Award, and

his previous book, *The Digital Workplace: How technology is liberating work*, helped to popularize and explain the term “digital workplace”.

See more about Paul on: [Wikipedia](#)



About the author

Shimrit Janes is Director of Knowledge at DWG. Shimrit works with DWG members to help them harness the full depth and breadth of DWG’s knowledge base, connecting them with research, good practice examples, and with each other. Shimrit is also a researcher and consultant for DWG, working with DWG members, clients and colleagues across a range of digital workplace, intranet, and Nature of Work topics.



About the author

Steve Bynghall is an independent digital workplace consultant and writer. He is Research & Knowledge Lead at DWG, where he works as a research associate, author, benchmarker and consultant. Steve also works with a number of other organizations, including Step Two and CMSWire. He recently co-founded Spark Trajectory, a training and consulting company helping intranet and digital workplace teams. Steve is based in London, UK.

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Remote Working **2020**

Distributed working
in times of disruption



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