



Powell Software

The Complete Guide to Preparing Your Team for Remote Work Success

WHITEPAPER



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| Remote work facts vs. fiction | 5 |
| The many faces of remote work | 8 |
| 10 essential remote working digital tools | 10 |
| How to build communication and collaboration within remote companies | 14 |
| Defining company culture for remote teams | 17 |
| Conclusion | 18 |



INTRODUCTION

So your team has decided to go remote. What comes next? Although many companies got a taste of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic, making the change permanent may seem like a daunting mission.

Transitioning to a work from home setup requires completely overhauling your business's day-to-day operations, realigning core values, and adopting new habits and technologies. But at the end of the day, remote companies dwarf competitors in terms of productivity and innovation – and often profitability.

This guide will walk you through everything you need to know to take your team remote, from choosing a remote work structure to the tools you need to make it happen.

REMOTE WORK FACTS VS. FICTION

Until 2020, nearly half of companies had never experienced remote working for themselves. We've found that those less familiar with remote work tend to make assumptions that aren't always based on fact. To dispel any rumors you may have heard, we've addressed some of the most common myths surrounding work from home.

FICTION: Remote workers will be so distracted by home life that they won't get anything done.

FACT: Remote workers have a higher capacity to focus on work-related tasks during the day. According to a survey by [Airtasker](#), remote employees spend 27% less time getting distracted than their in-office counterparts. Sure, there are plenty of potential distractions at home – but there are even more of them in the office. Since those who work from home don't need to waste hours every day getting to and from the office, they have much more free time to take care of potential distractions outside of business hours.

Remote employees also tend to have an easier time staying on topic when communicating with other team members. The Airtasker survey found that office employees spend more than an hour each day discussing non-work-related topics with their colleagues. For remote employees, this amount of time dropped to less than 30 minutes. While employees need to form relationships through these types of conversations, they don't need to take up an eighth of the workday.

The bottom line is that anyone can get distracted, regardless of where they work. Managers can help keep their remote teams focused by setting clear goals and checking in regularly for status updates. If someone is struggling to get their work done on time, a conversation can be had about what is causing the setback and how to move forward more efficiently.



FICTION: We'll lose our company culture if we go remote.

FACT: There's no reason that the culture you've worked so hard to build has to suffer just because everyone starts working from home. We won't lie, maintaining your company culture after a remote work transition isn't easy. However, with the many tools and resources available today, you can maintain your company culture.

In fact, there are many ways you can leverage remote working to build a better [employee experience](#), improve diversity and inclusion and drive [employee engagement](#), all of which contribute positively to company culture.

The important thing to understand is that today's talent pool actively seeks cultures that allow remote flexibility. According to a [Randstad survey](#), more than one-third of workers would leave their current employer for a company with a remote work culture. We've dedicated an entire chapter of this guide to company culture, so keep reading.

FICTION: Remote teams can be available at any time since their workdays are more flexible.

FACT: Although remote employees have more flexibility, setting clear boundaries between work and home life is essential. A study by the [University of Illinois](#) found that remote employees with better "boundary control" are less likely to experience stress and burnout. Remote teams need to work together to coordinate and communicate their schedules, making sure any required meetings occur during the hours that everyone is online.

Then comes the hard part: sticking to that schedule.

Managers should encourage remote employees to turn off notifications for company-related emails and messages outside of working hours. Without these measures in place, it's easy for workers to feel like they're constantly on the clock. This can quickly lead to burnout and kill productivity.



FICTION: Remote workers should stay online during designated work hours to prove that they're working and not just slacking off.

FACT: Employees that use time blocking techniques to designate offline hours for focused work are more productive overall. When managers can't peer over their screen to see who is and isn't sitting at their desk, employees sometimes feel the need to be online and ready to respond at all times. While getting back to your boss in two minutes may sound like a good way to demonstrate work ethic, it's actually a productivity killer.

Data from [RescueTime](#) shows that employees check emails and IMs every six minutes on average. At this rate, almost half rarely get more than 30 minutes at a time to focus on a task.

FICTION: Key conversations need to be had in-person to be effective.

FACT: Video calls are more inclusive and efficient than face-to-face communication. Companies that are used to having in-person meetings may have difficulty imagining a world in which important decisions are made through remote conversations. Yet researchers from [Cornell University](#) found that video calls draw more equal participation from groups that would typically feel left out of the conversation.

Of course, there are still some hurdles in communicating effectively during conference calls, but these are steadily being overcome by advances in technology. For example, Microsoft recently announced a new Teams feature called Together Mode that places all video call participants on the same background, making it easier for individuals to visualize themselves within the group and pick up on nonverbal cues.

THE MANY FACES OF REMOTE WORK

No two remote companies look the same. Some maintain physical offices and give employees the option to work from home for part of the week; others hire talent from all across the globe without ever having a tangible headquarters. As you decide what your company's remote structure should look like, there are three basic types of remote work to consider: flexible remote, local remote, and full remote.

Flexible remote

In a flexible remote structure, employees generally report to an office but can work from home occasionally as needed, perhaps one or two days a week. This type of setup is particularly popular among parents who want the flexibility to trade telework days with a spouse or partner and reduce the need for childcare.

One popular way to manage flexible remote schedules is to create a [flextime](#) policy. With flextime, employees are given specific times during which they need to report to the office every week. Outside of these hours, employees can decide when they complete the rest of their work. For example, a company might decide that workers need to report in from 10:00 AM until 4:00 PM from Monday through Thursday. The remaining 16 hours can be logged from home or the office, in the morning or evening, or even condensed into four longer days for a three-day weekend.

Generally, flexible remote working is best for companies that rely heavily on local business, which might include regular meetings with clients or offering services to walk-in customers. It has the benefit of giving employees more autonomy while still meeting customer expectations.

Local remote

When employees mostly work from home but still live within commuting distance of the office, this is referred to as a local remote setup. Teams might travel to work one or two days every week for meetings but complete the rest of their tasks from a home office. According to a [New York Times](#) report, employees who spend three or four days working from home are the most engaged, creating what the publication calls "the remote work sweet spot".



Local remote work is a great compromise for companies that want to give their employees more freedom, but aren't ready or able to take the leap and go full remote. The major downsides are that hiring remains limited to local talent pools, and companies still need to shoulder the cost of maintaining physical office spaces.

Full remote

In a full remote structure, companies distance themselves from the concept of a physical headquarters and operate primarily (if not entirely) in a digital workplace. Employees can theoretically be located anywhere in the world as long as they have a reliable internet connection. In the wake of COVID-19, full remote work is rapidly being embraced by major companies like Shopify and Twitter.

There are many advantages to a full remote setup. Businesses can expand their search for top talent on a global scale, creating opportunities to bridge the gap between a shortage of qualified candidates in areas such as IT and surging demand to fill these positions. The overhead costs associated with maintaining physical offices drop as companies downsize or eliminate spaces. Organizations that go full remote also see an overall trend of higher productivity; one study by Stanford University calculated a 13% increase on average.



10 ESSENTIAL REMOTE WORKING DIGITAL TOOLS

No matter how you choose to go remote, maintaining collaboration from a distance is only possible with the support of modern technology. You may be surprised to find that you already have several of the systems you need in place. In many cases, the framework needed to support a remote transition can be built off of your existing ecosystem with some additions and modifications. Below, we've laid out the [essential tools](#) you need to support employees in a remote setting.

1. A central hub

There's something special about walking into the office every morning and being greeted by familiar faces. When this routine is replaced by logging in from a desk at home, employees need a virtual space that feels just as welcoming as the office common room. In a [digital workplace](#), this is achieved with a corporate portal that functions as the central hub to your entire intranet.

The corporate portal's convenient user interface provides instant access to important updates, communications, and all the digital tools they use daily. At Powell Software, we take things a step further with customizable portals that can be personalized to each user with drag-and-drop widgets and support for different languages.

2. Email

Email is one of the oldest remote working tools, and it's probably not going away anytime soon. But today's email user looks very different from what it was at the turn of the century. To be efficient as a remote workforce, the program you use for email should integrate seamlessly with other tools like calendars and document management systems. Some clients such as Microsoft Outlook also support connections to third-party tools like Salesforce and Asana. This makes employee workflows more efficient by reducing the amount of time required to complete multi-step tasks.

3. Shared calendars

The value of shared calendars becomes more apparent than ever when teams go remote. Employees that work from home often have staggered schedules, taking advantage of the flexibility that remote work provides. With a shared calendar, team members can easily communicate their availability, identify the best times to schedule meetings, and spot conflicts with colleagues' schedules.

Many calendars – we'll use Microsoft Outlook as an example again – also support integration with other tools. In Outlook, all it takes is a few clicks to send a calendar invite with meeting call-in details, materials to review, and any other important information.

4. Instant messaging

Remote companies rely heavily on email for communication, but this isn't always the most efficient way to chat. An instant messaging tool is great for quick conversations between individuals or among groups, the virtual equivalent of popping by someone's desk to ask a question.

Microsoft Teams has emerged as a strong leader in workplace messaging in recent years. In the first half of 2020 alone, usage [grew 90%](#) as companies sent workers home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There's a reason that Teams is a crowd favorite; the platform supports well-organized group conversations by team, topic, or project in addition to one-on-one communication. Microsoft has also pooled resources into [providing more Teams integrations](#) to facilitate more streamlined collaboration on group projects that might involve shared documents or files.

5. Videoconferencing

Instant messaging and email each has their place in remote communications, but videoconferencing is an absolute must. Video calls simulate in-person meetings by allowing participants to see and hear each other in real-time, having conversations that would take far too long to write out. Many different videoconferencing tools have come into the spotlight in 2020, particularly Zoom, which surged in popularity only to be plagued with [security issues](#). Zoom also lacks many of the features businesses will find in Teams, which provides better control over the user experience and native integration with the entire Microsoft 365 suite.



6. Document editing

Every job function uses different apps to complete their work, but text documents, spreadsheets, and presentations are a fairly universal need. Team members frequently collaborate on shared documents. So your editing tools should support co-authoring by multiple users at once. Microsoft 365 supports the co-authoring of Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents in both desktop and web app versions, making it easy to open and edit documents from anywhere.

7. Cloud-based file storage

Once everyone moves offsite, your company's file storage needs to relocate to a universally accessible location. This is typically achieved with cloud-based file storage, a system which was already being adopted by many companies independently of remote working trends due to better cost effectiveness and scalability compared to on-premises storage.

For companies that use Microsoft 365, a cloud storage solution is offered through OneDrive, a file management system designed for businesses. OneDrive supports both individual and shared documents with easy access and collaboration from multiple devices. Of course, OneDrive also integrates with the rest of the Microsoft 365 suite. For example, users can locate and share files directly in Teams without needing to navigate out of the app.

8. Content management system

To stay on top of the large volume of information and content published on your corporate intranet, you should always make sure that your digital workplace tools include an [intranet content management system](#). A robust intranet CMS supports multiple devices and content types, offers a WYSIWYG user interface, and provides governance management including automation.

Not all workplace productivity suites include an intuitive intranet CMS. Powell Intranet offers an off-the-shelf content management solution for Microsoft 365 users that comes prebuilt with tools and templates that don't require any code.

9. Security

Managing [intranet security](#) is of the utmost importance in a remote work setting, especially as employees log onto less-secure personal wireless networks where hackers can more easily access passwords and sensitive company data. Intranet security best practices include strong password requirements, network security measures, and company-wide education on phishing scams. Security is something that we take very seriously at Powell Software and build into every one of our products, with user-defined security protocols such as automatic logout and multi-factor authentication.

10. Analytics

The best way to improve your corporate intranet is by looking at usage data to determine where changes are needed. Administrators of your intranet should have easy access to stats like which content is being accessed, how many pages employees visit, how much time is being spent on each page, and which paths users take through intranet content.

Powell Intranet brings analytics to the forefront with a [personalized user dashboard](#) where you can monitor engagement, generate reports, and track progress towards your intranet goals. These metrics can be used to justify future decisions on changes and investments in your company's digital workplace.



COLLABORATION WITHIN REMOTE COMPANIES

As your company learns the ropes on new digital tools, you'll also need to consider a strategy to maintain effective communication while working remotely. Studies found that [20% of remote employees](#) cite communication and collaboration as their top struggle while working from home, and another 20% point to loneliness as the source of their troubles. With the right measures in place, however, communication can be maintained in a way that doesn't hinder employees' remote working experience.

Be proactive

Even with tools like instant messaging and videoconferencing, easy communication isn't as readily available when teams aren't working in the same office. To compensate, everyone needs to be proactive in talking to each other. Managers should instigate this by checking in regularly with their employees and holding team meetings by video call. It's also key to set up instant messaging channels for new projects as they arise, making sure every potential conversation has a designated place to occur. If employees aren't sure where or how to discuss issues, they might avoid it entirely.

Set expectations

Communication can also be facilitated by setting clear expectations, a component that needs to come from the top down. Employees should have company-wide guidelines to follow regarding how frequently they're expected to check different channels like email and chat and what the expected timeline is for a response.

Managers also have an important role to play by leading through example and creating further expectations for their team.

Instead of assigning a final project deadline, team leaders can keep everyone on track by setting checkpoints throughout the project's lifespan and supervising progress along the way.

Share schedules

Remote companies handle schedules in different ways. Some require employees to be online during certain hours; others leave scheduling up to the team or even the individual. No matter who is in charge of each person's schedule, you should always make sure everyone on the team is aware of when their colleagues are and aren't on the clock. This includes sharing which time blocks are designated online hours and which have been set aside for offline task completion. Managers can make sure schedules are working effectively by tracking employees' online time and comparing it to their posted schedules, addressing discrepancies as necessary.

Use different channels

There are many different communication channels available to employees who work from home, the three most common being email, instant messaging, and videoconferencing. Each channel has a distinct place in remote work communications.

For example:

- **Instant messaging**
This isn't exactly a new commodity in the workplace setting, but chat tools have recently exploded in popularity to meet remote work demands. Employees should use instant messages for urgent matters that require a rapid response and to ask quick questions that can be answered in a few words. It's important not to overuse chat tools as employees can feel bombarded by the onslaught of notifications and might miss the messages that do need urgent attention. Remember that many instant messaging clients support the ability to mute certain channels, and employees should always feel encouraged to shut off notifications
- **Email**
This is the primary channel that members of your organization should use with external parties such as clients and partners, but it also holds an important place internally. Topics that don't involve a specific time frame are typically best discussed by email, although too much back and forth can start to feel sluggish. Email is also great for one-to-many communications, such as company-wide blasts and reminders.

- **Videoconferencing**

This is a useful virtual communication tool that serves as a platform for conversations and discussions. Remote teams might use videoconferencing for weekly meetings or when a chat or email conversation outgrows the capacity of that channel. Videoconferencing can also facilitate larger company-wide meetings; as of October 2020, Microsoft Teams is rolling out live video event support for [up to 20,000 attendees](#).

When and how to use each channel may not be intuitive to every employee, so it's a good idea to include specific guidance and use cases in your workplace communication policies.

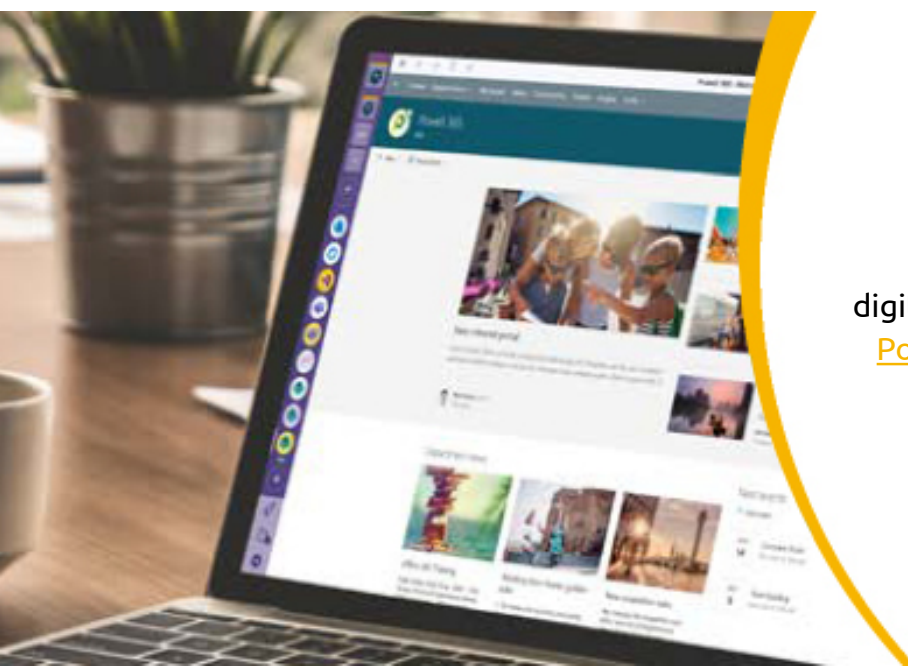
Make time for team building

Team building activities shouldn't go away after you start working from home. On the contrary, team building is even more important for remote employees. With one in five remote employees naming loneliness as their top complaint regarding work from home, reinforcing togetherness needs to be a top priority.

There are plenty of ways to support team-building initiatives, both company-wide and on a smaller scale. For teams and smaller departments, videoconferencing is your best friend; think coffee chats and trivia hour. Too many participants, however, and a video call presents less opportunity for participation. To improve cohesiveness at an organizational level, focus your efforts on creating more [engaging intranet content](#) and supporting an inclusive culture.

REQUEST A FREE DEMO

To find out more about how your business can benefit from a complete digital workplace with [Powell Intranet](#) and [Powell Teams](#), **get a demo** of Powell 365 today!



DEFINING COMPANY CULTURE FOR REMOTE TEAMS

It takes a conscious effort to maintain company culture while working remotely. Having said that, a transition to remote work can be an opportunity to improve culture by embracing flexibility and diversity. By combining these with the best parts of your existing culture, you'll have a chance to create an even better one from the ground up.

Start with core values

At the heart of every company culture is a set of core values. Whether your organization prioritizes collaboration and innovation or hard work and accountability, identify the driving forces behind your current culture and decide how they'll be represented in a virtual setting.

Welcome change...

Any initiative that involves significant change creates quite a culture shock. When workflows and habits that employees have spent years finetuning become obsolete, it can instill feelings of resistance and resentment. A well-planned [change management](#) strategy will help ease employees into the transition and even bring about excitement. The key is to shift mindsets first by uniting the entire organization behind a shared goal.

...but hold onto old rituals

Transitioning to remote work from home doesn't mean that you need to scrap every tradition from the old office. Find ways to continue the rituals your employees love in a virtual setting. For example, if you typically welcome new hires with a box of swag and a team lunch, have the gear delivered by mail and schedule a fun remote activity like a virtual cooking class for their first day.

Encourage feedback

Going remote requires constant reevaluation and adjustments to find the best way forward. Keep channels open to questions, constructive criticism, and suggestions, and take extra care to respond to and address each one. Employees feel most valued when they know their voices are being heard.

Meet diversity with inclusion

Facilitating remote work on a global scale means that your workforce is likely to experience rapid diversification. This is a huge asset for companies. Diversity is associated with better profitability, innovation, and engagement. Company leadership should anticipate this change ahead of time and be prepared.

CONCLUSION

Preparing for the move to remote requires proper thought and consideration to make it a smooth process.

After reading this guide you should now have a clearer understanding of remote work, and dispelled any misplaced assumptions. Understand that employees can be as productive at home, but that there needs to be barriers to ensure a work-life balance. Realize that company culture doesn't have to suffer, and that today's technologies allow for nearly all aspects of office work to happen remotely.

It's clear that there are many types of remote work, from flexible to local and full remote. Organizations should choose the one that best responds to their needs. Moving to remote doesn't have to be for every employee. Leveraging flexibility and ensuring everyone can work in their preferred environment is crucial.

Whichever type of remote work a business chooses, digital tools will be key. There are many types of remote tools, and getting these right will be the difference between success and failure. Creating a virtual workspace with a corporate portal for communication, and a collaboration platform like Microsoft Teams are fundamental.

Once the right tools are in place, HR and managers need to ensure these are properly used. Creating some best practices, such as sharing schedules and setting expectations will help.

Finally, with the right tools and best practices in place businesses will be starting off on the right foot to building a remote team culture.

Remote work is here to stay and organizations who prepare for it will be more agile and able to face new challenges. When making the move to remote work, ensure you are working with the right partners.

At Powell Software our mission is to connect employees. Our digital workplace solutions, built on Microsoft 365, are designed to improve connections whether employees are in office or remote. Be prepared for the workplace of the future with the digital workplace.

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