adeva

Building and Scaling Remote and Distributed Teams

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Introduction

Whether you run or work on a remote team, or plan to transition your team to work remotely in the future, this guide contains bits of wisdom that can help you navigate the waters of the future of work.

The 20th century is long gone and with it, the idea that the workplace should be a windowless cubicle where employees work from 9 to 5. Modern employees are thinking differently. Millennials, which can be labeled as the drivers of the movement, are changing the way people view and perform work. And it's amazing!

Workers have found that they want a work/life balance. They want to be able to go to that morning jog, enjoy brunch with friends, and walk their dog at mid-afternoon.

Companies, on the other hand, have understood that happy employees are more engaged employees. Instead of having unmotivated employees sitting at an office desk, they'd rather have an enthusiastic employee giving their best from a co-working space.

In fact, 82% of millennials say they would remain more loyal to their employers if they had this kind of remote flexibility. That's one good reason for going remote.

So, if you're planning on building a company with innovative talent or want to be part of a team without the responsibility of working from 9 to 5, now it's a great time to be alive!

What is Remote Work?

In a nutshell, remote work is a working style that lets employees work outside of a traditional work environment. It's a shift from the belief that employees must complete their work in a specific place. Instead of wasting time commuting, they can work from their homes, a coworking place in Bali, or from a coffee bar like Starbucks. They're free to design their days as they please.

Companies benefit from not having to pay for office space, furniture or equipment. On the plus side, they're no longer restricted to one area to hire employees. The entire world becomes their talent pool.

As remote work becomes part of the fabric of our working lives, we need to find ways of embracing it and making it better.

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History of Remote Work

In the beginning, people were nomads who roamed the land for food and shelter. When the agricultural age arrived, they became farmers and worked the land. During the Industrial Revolution, there was a need for automation and the creation of factories. People had to be present in-house to work with huge machines and ensure large-scale production.

The first type of modern office appeared in America in the early 1900s, inspired by innovations such as the telephone, telegraph, and electricity.

Fast forward to 1926, and the five-day, 40-hour week began, introduced by Ford Motor Companies. It was in 1968 when Robert Probst designed the first cubicle. As the US economy strengthened, so did the rise in corporate headquarters, larger office spaces, and aisles of drab cubicles.

In the years that would come, three events would pave the way for remote work to thrive.

1. The first personal computers appear in 1975.

2. The internet is born in 1983.

3. Wifi is invented in 1991.

More and more people started to own personal computers and to log on to the internet. And the workplace tide was turned yet again.

Today, thanks to globalization and technological innovation, people from all around the world can acquire sought-after skills and work from anywhere. Whether working from an office, a coworking place or even a tablet, the internet paved the way for the development of cloud-based applications that allow workers to do everything they would do sitting in their cubicle. Using the same cloud-based applications, managers can track progress and manage projects.

In 2018, 70% of the world's population worked remotely at least one day per week. In 2019, 99% of remote employees said they would love to work remotely for the rest of their careers.

In the beginning, people were nomads who roamed the land for food and shelter. Today, they're digital nomads who are making a living from any location of the world.

How to Manage a Distributed Team

Can you pick the worst fear you have about transitioning your team to remote work?

- If I can't see them at the office, how would I know that my remote employees are not watching a TV show instead of working?

- How can the team communicate and be active during our working hours when there's a 6-hour difference?

- How will the team bond if there's no room for team-building activities?

If all the things above scare you, that's okay. When we at Adeva first transitioned to remote work, we had the same doubts. Fast forward to today and now we know that:

- You don't need your employees in the same office to know whether they're being active. You can tell by their progress and completed projects.

- We make sure to have an overlap for daily standups. What's more, we organize the work in a way that everyone can work independently and then sync.

- We discovered and came up with many team-building games for remote employees. The team loves them and we play them once a week.

So, how did we succeed in managing our remote team effectively? Managing a remote team effectively is not about measuring the amount of time your employees spend online. It's about:

- Choosing good team collaboration tools and sticking to them

- Holding regular meetings

- Creating procedures and implementing a project management system

Choosing good team collaboration tools and sticking to them

Working in different time zones can be challenging, especially when you have team members from different cultures, nationalities, and genders. Lack of good team collaboration tools can lead to unclear objectives, lack of visibility, and poor planning.

To avoid chaos and disorganization, choose your tools wisely and stick to them. You should also decide on the communication style for each situation. For example, if the situation is urgent, your team should use a chat room on Slack. If the situation can wait, you can email each other.

Holding regular meetings

It doesn't matter if your remote employees are at home, at a coffee shop, or traveling. Meet at least once a week and talk about ongoing projects, progress, or setbacks. Over time, you'll connect with each other and will feel more like a cohesive team that can talk about anything.

Make sure you avoid lengthy and pointless meetings that are only a waste of time. One study by Atlassian showed that 91% of all meeting goers daydreamed during meetings, and 39% slept during meetings.

With that in mind, the most effective meetings that should be on your agenda include:

- **Onboarding meetings:** great for welcoming a new employee to your team.

- **Daily (or weekly) standups:** very necessary meetings for keeping your team up to date, discussing progress or blockers and bottlenecks.

- **Brainstorming meetings:** amazing for encouraging innovation, creativity, and awesome ideas.

- **Kickoff meetings:** use them to inform your employees about the details of a project, their part in it, and any significant due dates.

- **Feedback meetings:** an effective way to discuss what went well with the project, and what didn't.

Creating procedures and implementing project management systems

We know how challenging it can get to stay up-to-date with projects and move forward in an orderly manner. That's why you need to create procedures and use project management tools that will keep the entire team in sync.

There are several remote project management tools that will help your team collaborate easier. You, as the project manager, will be able to keep track of the progress of each project and have the necessary information to ensure that everything goes as planned.

The top choices here are Jira and Trello.

Jira. Definitely go with Jira if you're leading a complex project that includes a lot of dependencies between tasks. The tool comes with Scrum and Kanban boards, lets you customize the way your tickets are completed, and lets you add workflows when moving the ticket from one phase to another.

Trello. Trello is a simpler project management tool and it's ideal for smaller teams. It comes with a clean slate where you can create your own planning board by adding columns of your choice. A common practice when using Trello as a planning board is to have the basic Backlog, To Do, In Progress, In Review and Done columns. Then, you move the tickets through these stages until they're completed.

How to Hire a Remote Team

How to Vet Your Candidates

When hiring remotely, you have to consider the fact that opening your doors to a pool of international talent will mean dealing with all types of people. People from different time zones, cultures, genders, and nationalities. It won't be long before you realize that hiring remotely requires a different approach than hiring locally.

Here are a few tips that will help you make sure your new hires will thrive in a remote culture.

- Write clear job descriptions

- Look for remote work qualities

- Create a skill-based test

- Conduct a detailed technical interview

Write clear job descriptions

To rule out unqualified candidates, make sure you craft your job descriptions carefully and as clearly as possible. Apart from the responsibilities, achievements and technical skills, you need to seek additional qualities in the remote workers. Make sure to explain the working environment and emphasize the importance of communication skills and independent working.

If you still don't have any training in place for working remotely, it also makes sense to look for candidates that are experienced remote workers. That way you'll avoid communication issues later on.

Look for remote work qualities

Beyond your usual technical skills, you need to look for other soft traits that are required when working in a remote setting. The focus of the initial interview should be to understand the personality traits of the candidate and their communication skills. If they already have a remote experience, it's important to ask about their biggest challenges when it comes to working with distributed teams. This will help you understand how they will perform in your working environment and where they'll need your help.

Here are some skills to check for:

- Great communication skills.

- Self-motivation skills.

- Time management skills.

- The ability to work independently.

- Reliability and adaptability to different environments..

- The capacity to work with a team that has common goals and values.

- Strong work ethic.

Create a skill-based test

There's a good chance that roughly 80% of the applicants who apply for your position won't be a great fit for it. To save time and focus only on further assessing only the top 20%, you should come up with a skills-based test that covers the main requirements and responsibilities that come with the position.

For example, at Adeva, we've created some coding challenges based on real-life work assignments. We are seeking engineers with a good grasp of software architecture, best practices and attention to detail, and that's exactly what these assignments cover. Apart from verifying the candidate's skills, this assignment helps us assess their dedication and responsibility.

Outline the most important skills for your job position and use it as a guide for creating an assessment like this. If you're hiring for engineering roles and you have a vast amount of applicants to deal with, it's a good idea to check automated screening.

Read more here: 5 Tools That Will Help You Assess Your Engineers.

Conduct a detailed technical interview

After assessing the results from the skill-based test, the next step is to take your candidates through a detailed interview with someone who's well experienced in the respective job position. As the initial interview covered the details of communication skills and personality traits, this one should focus deeply on technical skills.

The interviewer here shouldn't be a manager, but a person with a similar skill set to your candidate and, preferably, extensive experience in the area. There's a great chance that this person won't have the people skills required to conduct a good interview, so make sure to set the expectations upfront and provide some guidelines. It's good to talk about the previous experience in similar positions, best practices as well as most challenging projects and how the candidate approached them.

We've created some resources with interview questions for a variety of programming languages. If you're hiring for an engineering position, check them out here: Software Developer Interview Questions Directory for Scaling Software Engineering Teams.

Where to Post Your Remote Work Job Ads

Finding top-of-the-class engineers who can help you turn your idea into a product has become time-consuming, expensive, and not exactly a walk in the park. Luckily, there are many job platforms that help tech startups locate skilled remote talent.

When it comes to posting your job ad, chances are LinkedIn and Indeed are the first sites that cross your mind. However, there are a few other niche sites that cater specifically to remote work job listings.

Let's take a look.

Angel.co

If you head over to AngelList, a popular source for startup job listings, you can discover a world of remote talent. To post a job, simply click the "Post a Job" button and join 30,000+ companies recruiting on the platform. In fact, many big names in the tech industry find their talent here, including Medium, Coinbase, Crunchbase, and Uber. Posting a job is free. Meeting candidates is free. Hiring is free. With just one click, you can reach more than 2 million active candidates.

Here's how it works:

Step 1: Create a startup profile.

Step 2: Post a job by describing the position.

Step 3: Get matched with candidates.

Remote OK

If you were wondering where companies such as Amazon, Microsoft, and GoDaddy find their talent, it's here!

Remote OK is another platform that's worth checking out. And what makes it such a great place to find remote talent? Well, it tags all of the job listings, making it easy to set filters for the specific talent you're after.

You can choose to filter your job posting by location and write a detailed job description. You can outline the job responsibilities, job requirements, and how to apply instructions.

Step 1: Write the job post. Include job description, requirements, company info, etc.

Step 2: Review the job post. Make any adjustments.

Step 3: Purchase. Posting a job will cost you $299 and it will remain visible for 30 days.

We Work Remotely

Hiring skilled remote talent is also easy with a platform such as We Work Remotely. With over 2.5M monthly visitors, it's your ticket to finding talented remote employees. Some of the world's leading companies like Basecamp, Invision, and Google trust the platform to match them with exceptional talent.

Step 1: Post a job. Write your job description, job type, region, company info.

Step 2: Preview your job post. Modify it if you feel like important info is missing.

Step 3: Make a purchase. Posting a job will cost you $299.

How to Onboard New Members

Did you know that a strong onboarding process can improve new hire retention by 82% and productivity by over 70%? We can thank Glassdoor for bringing the stats into view. Regardless of whether your employees are in-office or remote, the onboarding process is meaningful and helpful for everyone.

When you have a well-designed onboarding process in place, your new employees will be immediately engaged in their work and feel more comfortable joining their new team. Successful onboarding programs can create a connection between your employees and the goals of the company.

To help you create an effective onboarding process, we've put together an onboarding checklist that will need tailoring to your company. You can easily adapt it to your needs and preferences.

Here are a few tips we'd like to share:

- Greet the new employee over a video conference session

- Have the new employee meet the team

- Help new remote employees complete their paperwork

- Introduce them to your company culture

- Get them up-to-date with the communication tools you'll be using

- Have detailed outlines of goals and expectations

- Bonus: Invite them on-site

Greet the new employee over a video conference session

Get off to a good start by meeting and greeting the new employee over a video conference. Your new employee will get the chance to ask questions and you'll be able to strengthen your personal bond with the person. A video conference will simulate a real-life environment of welcoming your new employee in your office. You can maintain eye contact, observe the person's body language, and learn more about them. We at Adeva love using Zoom for this purpose.

Have the new employee meet the team

Never underestimate the importance of social interactions and inclusiveness. As your remote employees can't make meaningful bonds over water cooler talks, make sure to introduce them at the virtual water cooler: Slack. Feeling welcomed by the whole team will help them feel like part of the family. , Your new employee can easily ask questions, get help, and get up to speed with how things function at your company.

Help new remote employees complete their paperwork

In the age of technology, you don't have to waste time with HR paperwork. Instead of sending the paperwork to your new employee, waiting for them to print it, scan it, and email you all copies, you can use a tool like HelloSign and DocuSign. These are e-signature tools so that the new hire can sign the paperwork digitally and send them over in a secure environment.

Introduce them to your company culture

Your company culture exists, whether your team is in an office or scattered around the world. Helping them understand your culture should definitely be part of the checklist. Here's what you can do:

- Share any documents that outline your mission, vision, and values.

- Give them any presentations you have on your company values.

- Send any recorded videos you have from meetings.

Get them up-to-date with the communication tools you'll be using

Inform them of the tools you and your team use to maintain communication. Make sure you:

- Give them the login info for the software they'll be using.

- Offer training or manuals for how to use the new tools.

- Create a company email.

- Share any software they need to download on their computers.

Have detailed outlines of goals and expectations

It's important to be highly organized and have detailed outlines of everything you need to be done from your new hire. A good way to do this is to:

- Put together and share a task calendar. Consider using a tool like Asana to ensure each employee is assigned a specific task and their projects are finished on time.

- Inform them of your short-term and long-term goals.

- Schedule weekly meetings to discuss your ongoing projects and to resolve potential problems.

Bonus: Invite them on-site

If your budget allows, enabling your team to meet in person is a great idea. If you have an office, consider inviting your remote employees on-site to work with the rest of the team. This will help strengthen the bonds in the team and increase the sense of belonging. If your team is fully distributed, annual retreats where the entire team can meet in person will have the same effect.

How to Build Culture

Managing remote teams, it can be hard to know if someone feels included or motivated to give their best. Engaging your remote team requires you to be super insightful, creative, and innovative. In other words, what managers need to do is create a fun and collaborative environment despite the distance between everyone.

Team-building games

There are tons of skeptics out there who don't believe that when you have the right technology, motivation, and people, fun doesn't have borders. Luckily, we at Adeva have all of that and more!

Our advice to you is to get out of that comfort zone and encourage the team to bond over these 5 amazing games:

- **The Desk Photo Contest:** ask your remote employees to snap a photo of their desk and share it with the team. You can use a tool like Slack.

- **A Walk in My City:** ask your employees to show the main tourist sights and secret spots in their city and share it with the team on Slack.

- **Movie Night:** stream a movie via a virtual conference call with a screen-sharing option like Zoom and let the whole team join you.

- **Get Fit Challenge:** set an exercise goal that employees can track using their phones. The employee who performs the best wins a prize! It can be a simple step challenge or a burning calories challenge. One fantastic app to use is Stridekick.

- **Virtual Scavenger Hunt:** create an outdoor scavenger hunt with the help of a platform like GooseChase. The team needs to follow the instructions to receive the allotted points. Sometimes they'll be submitting a photo or video, while other times they'll be solving a puzzle or riddle.

Virtual happy hours

Another method of infusing fun to your remote team is virtual happy hours. They're similar to a regular happy hour at a bar. The team gathers around, orders a few drinks, and de-stresses over engaging talks and music. There are many apps designed to function as a "happy hour" space for remote teams. We personally love using Zoom.

Have your team members join a video chat to unwind, with no discussions of work topics allowed. Chat about life, hobbies, and fun trips you're planning. You can even share photos of interesting places you've visited and why plan a trip to that destination. The key part in this game is to get to know each other outside of day-to-day tasks.

In-person team retreats

There's no more amazing way of connecting your remote team than by organizing an in-person company retreat. Not only that the team will have the chance to form meaningful connections, but you'll also get to have loads of fun.

Here's everything you should know to have a blast:

- Pick a destination that wouldn't eat up your budget.

- Make sure the destination is in close proximity to all team members.

- Choose a peaceful place that supports collaborative work. It can be remote, but close to major sightseeing locations.

- Book an apartment or house that has a great internet connection.

- Organize your time. Plan movie nights, homemade dinners, or team-building games.

- Have brainstorming sessions. They might result in an idea being spun or a project being born.

- Plan some time for regular work.

- Make it a tradition.

How to Maintain Trust in Remote Teams

Without trust, all types of relationships fall apart. You can't expect your employees to perform well and remain engaged without building trust and transparency. Just like flour creates the structural network of a good cake, trust is the core concept of building online communities.

If you're looking for ways of building trust on your distributed team, start with:

Giving your employees information about the company

Employees want to know details about your company. They want to understand your business strategy so they know how to support it.

Maintaining ongoing communication

Get in touch with your employees often to encourage purposeful communication. Make sure you're always responding to their inquiries and are available to lend a helping hand. When there are things to discuss and clarify, employees should be confident to reach out to you for help.

Encouraging personal connections

There's a myriad of ways how you can strengthen personal connections on the team. It can be something simple like creating a water cooler chat on Slack where you will bond over common interests. Another idea is to celebrate birthdays, company milestones, and community recognition. Let your employees know that they have a community of amazing people they can always rely on.

Moreover, don't forget to engage your employees on a daily basis, or at least a few times per week. Strive to communicate face-to-face via an app like Zoom as it's a more personal type of communication that can bring the whole team closer. At the start of each meeting, give them five minutes of chit-chatting and casual talk. This can help them get to know each other better.

Giving feedback

Don't keep your employees in the dark. They want to hear about their business performance. Not hearing your feedback leaves them doubting their skills. If you criticize their work, make sure you offer constructive criticism. Instead of focusing on the negative, let them know what and how they can improve on.

Taking responsibility for your actions

In addition to discussing employees' mistakes, leaders should also admit their own mistakes. By openly discussing your mistakes, you'll create a culture of trust where everyone will feel comfortable to share their mistakes and setbacks. If you want your team to trust you, you should leave your ego aside and show that you too are vulnerable to errors.

Telling the truth

By being open and honest with your employees, they'll be open and honest in return. A major part of building trust is having the integrity to tell them the truth. Even if it's bad news, your team deserves to know how the business is performing. Your honesty will inspire them to perform at their best.

Respecting your team

In order for your team to remain engaged and motivated at work, it's crucial that you treat everyone with respect. Respect their ideas, their opinions, and their time. If you set a meeting at 10 a.m, make sure you stick to the time. If an employee comes to you with an idea, don't be criticizing. Discuss the pros and cons to encourage them to keep on sharing their opinions in the future.

How to Build Secure Policies

Do you know what used to distinguish an ancient village from a city? The most important thing that made the difference was fortifications. When a wall was fortified, that meant that the settlement was worth defending. The majority of settlements were surrounded by structures like high walls and towers that would keep an enemy out.

Do you also know what distinguishes a secure remote team from an insecure? It's the security practices you have in place!

Working with remote teams can be challenging. You trust a person who lives on the other side of the planet to write you a high-quality code. You entrust them with your software, passwords, and other sensitive data. You've never shaken their hand or seen their faces. Even worse, some research shows that, on average, there's a hacker attack every 39 seconds on the net.

How do you avoid security breaches in a world where your employees are working from four sides of the globe?

Here are a few tips and tricks for how to incorporate data security into your company culture and scare away malicious hackers.

Turn on Your Firewall

One way of preventing security breaches on your team is by turning on your firewall. You can implement a firewall in your hardware, software, or a combination of both. Firewalls are effective at stopping malware from spreading to your network.

If a hacker happens to infiltrate your system, this security measure will act as a solid defense. Make sure your firewall is always turned on.

Encrypt Your Disk

People often lose their devices or have them stolen. It might have happened to you, or you have heard it had happened to someone you know. When you're leading a team, you have tons of sensitive data stored on your devices. From social security numbers to bank information, protecting your files is critical.

One way of doing so is by encrypting them. Encrypted files are unusable until they're decrypted with certain software and password.

Enable Encrypted Backups

You hold the key to keeping your files safe and secure. It's through enabling encrypted backups. It's one of the most reliable tools you can use to protect your business and your team. When encrypting a file, you're translating the file's data into a secret language. The key is an impenetrable password of your design. Don't forget to educate your team about doing the same.

Use SSH Keys

With the evolution of the Internet, the creativity of cybercriminals also evolved. With that in mind, you must take significant security measures to keep your sensitive data secure. Another widespread practice are SSH keys. SSH keys are similar to passwords. However, while passwords can be cracked, SSH keys are almost impossible to decipher.

Outline Strong Password Management Policies

Did you know that 25% of employees use the same password for every enterprise system they access regularly? Even worse, these passwords are usually a combination of:

- people's names

- names of places

- birthdays

This is where password managers come as a long-waited help. Password managers are used for storing your passwords and helping you generate secure codes that are difficult to hack. Most of them come with browser extensions that automatically fill your passwords for you.

Use VPN Connection

Remote teams have employees working from all corners of the world. They might be using their home network, or work from coworking places through unsafe public networks. Either way, you want to ensure that no one is eavesdropping on your connection. That's why a VPN connection is essential.

With the help of a VPN service, your remote employees will be able to establish a secure connection with a remote computer network from any location in the world. Any remote employee will manage to use the internet as if they were present at the VPN's location.

Have Two-Factor Authentication on Emails and Tools

Adding an additional layer of security is widely practiced among distributed teams. A two-factor authentication supplements the username and password model with a code that only you know. To ensure "bulletproof" security on your team, educate your team about using two-factor authentication. They should use passwords that are a combination of numbers, lower and upper case letters, and symbols.

Take Advantage of Cloud Applications

Cloud apps are amazing for boosting your team's productivity and communication. But they're also great for keeping your data safe and secure.

Many cloud service providers offer safe virtual storage and working space for businesses. You can rest assured that they'll keep your data safely stored and impenetrable.

How to Manage Time Zones

One of the positive sides of hiring remotely is being able to search for talent beyond your zip code. Borders no longer restrict your hiring search parameters. But what do you do when time zones slow down the communication between team members, reducing their ability to collaborate on projects? How do you bring Tom who lives in New York and Maria who lives in the Philippines together on a video call?

Being a remote team, we have our Toms and Marias. To make sure there's not a disconnection between team members, this is what you should do:

1. Get on board with asynchronous communication.

2. Have project management in place.

3. Have an overlap for daily standups.

4. Be aware of other people's time zones.

5. Put down any scheduled meetings.

Get on board with asynchronous communication

If a problem were to appear for one of your remote employees, a good solution is for them to leave a message on Slack. Another option is to sync up their time with who they need to talk to for a couple of hours one day.

Have project management in place

Store all your projects at one central place so that every team member can see what they need to work on or if there's a task they will need to collaborate on with another teammate. A tool like Jira can allow employees to log in their projects, let others see their progress, and tag teammates in case they need their help.

Have an overlap for daily standups

Holding daily standups can help keep everyone in the loop of a project's progress. If you have a larger team, it might be easier to have each of your departments to schedule a separate meeting.

Be aware of other people's time zones

To make it easier to sync up and organize your daily standups, make sure you know your teammates' time zones. You can use an app like *Timezone.io* that lets you see which cities your team members are currently with the local time in those cities in chronological order. A great tool that will help you plan meetings across time zones is *TimeandDate.com's World Clock Meeting Planner*. You just pick the cities where team members live and the date for your meeting and it will give you the best times for a meeting.

Put down any scheduled meetings

Use Google calendar to have a predefined schedule for all your meetings, scheduled leaves, and important events. That way everyone will plan their time upfront and be aware of everyone's availability.

It's a great practice to ask your team members to set their working hours in their calendars. This way, whenever someone schedules a meeting, they will be notified if the person they invite is done for the day. This practice will help everyone become more considerate of other people's time.

Benefits and Challenges of Remote Work

Benefits of Remote Work

"Want to grab a cup of coffee?" This is a line we at Adeva rarely hear as the entire team works remotely. We're an exclusive developers network, we partner with some of the most innovative companies to scale their engineering teams. For us, "let's grab a cup of coffee" translates into "let's meet on Zoom."

Many companies like Adeva had an "aha" moment and realized that remote work is the future of work. They have slowly strayed away from the mindset that in-office employees are more productive and engaged. In fact, studies even confirm the opposite.

Those companies that have adapted to the mindset that remote work is the way to go, were inspired by the following 5 major benefits of remote work.

The top 5 benefits of remote work include:

- Less Time to Hire
- Reduced Turnover
- Productivity Boost
- Lowered Costs
- Access to a Global Pool of Talent

Let's break them apart, one by one.

Distributed companies need 33% less time to hire than traditional ones

According to the State of Remote Work 2019 by OwlLabs, fully distributed companies take 33% less time to make a new hire. Remote companies take roughly 4.5 weeks to hire a new employee, while other companies take nearly 7.

Several factors might be at play. First of all, remote work expands the talent pool by 100%. Instead of hiring locally, remote companies have the entire world to source exceptional talent from. If one country has a limited amount of Ruby developers for example, then traditional companies hiring Ruby developers will have a hard time finding the talent they need. Talent shortage will never be an issue for a distributed company.

Moreover, employer brand also has a significant impact on companies' ability to hire faster. Offering flexible work options means that your company cares for the work/life balance of its employees. And the majority of employees care for work/life balance. Nearly 80% of U.S. employees said they would refuse a job that didn't offer flexible work options. Meaning, employers that provide flexible work options have higher chances to grow their talent pool and hire faster.

Remote teams reduce turnover by 25%

The same study by OwlLabs has found that remote companies have a 25% lower employee turnover than companies that don't allow remote work.

In other words, flexible work options are a retention tool. Although competitive pay and good benefits influence an employee's decision to stay at a company, flexibility at work is equally important.

Today, many employees are struggling with burnout. Feeling overwhelmed at work, they often look for more rewarding opportunities elsewhere.

Companies that offer remote work options have healthier and happier employees. Their workers enjoy a work/life balance and stick with the company for a longer time.

Remote workers see a boost in productivity

A 2-year Stanford study by Nicholas Bloom revealed that remote workers weren't lying on their couches in Save Our Planet t-shirts, eating tacos and watching Jimmy Fallon while playing games with guests.

His study of in-office and remote workers showed a productivity boost among those who worked remotely. His findings revealed that remote employees work a true full-shift versus being late to the office or leaving the office early several times over the week. What's more, they found working from home to be less distracting.

Flexibility has been shown to reduce workplace stress, improve mental well-being and support productivity. Overall, remote workers tend to be more productive because:

- They don't waste time commuting to work.

- They can create their own schedules.

- They can work when they feel the most productive.

- They don't get distracted by their coworkers or office noise.

- They can take breaks when they feel tired.

Remote work keeps costs to a minimum

Whatever is the size of your company, reducing costs is always on the agenda. Luckily, remote work can lead to reduced costs, whether you're a multimillion-dollar company or a small business.

Aetna reported that it saved a whopping $78 million when it shed 2.7 million square feet of office space. The Global Workplace Analytics showed that if a typical business allowed their employees to work remotely for at least half of the time, they could save on average $11,000 per year.

Apart from real estate costs, companies can avoid other costs, including office supplies, equipment, coffee, and furniture.

Reduced costs might be directly related to distributed companies' faster time to hire and lower turnover. Moreover, remote workers' increased productivity is another factor that can save a company thousands of dollars per year.

Distributed teams get access to global talent pools

When you decide to transition to remote work, the entire world becomes your hiring pool. You won't be constrained to a single zip code. If the skills you're looking for are in short supply in your home country, there's nothing preventing you to hire international workers. Thanks to technology, your team can be scattered on all seven continents and still communicate perfectly.

Apart from opening your company to applicants from all around the world, you'll attract even more talent by offering flexibility. Multiple studies have found that the majority of Millennials would be more willing to approve a company if it offered remote work.

Remote work can also boost retention rates so you can keep more of your top talent for longer.

> *Being able to work remotely gave me the freedom to experience my job the way I want to. I can take my job around the world, in the comfort of my home or in a coworking space. Having that choice makes you less pressured, and it builds your self-discipline. The remote life showed me that a job well done can be done well from anywhere.*

- Marija Shakleva, Web developer

Challenges of Remote Work

People seem to have plenty of negative opinions about distributed work and remote employees. We constantly hear objections like: "Remote employees are lazy and never get the job done."

"Distributed work only sounds nice in theory. In practice, it's a lack of communication, issues with time zones, and disengaged employees."

In reality, as we've come to find, remote work does come with its set of challenges but nothing that's unsolvable.

Many companies have been slower to warm up to the remote work concept, requiring their team to commute to an office daily. They have been discouraged by several remote work challenges that need proper addressing.

These are the top 4 challenges of remote work:

- Establishing Collaboration

- Making Remote Employees Feel Included

- Managing a Team Scattered Across the World

- Organizing Team-Building Activities

Let's analyze them one by one.

Establishing a culture of collaboration in a distributed team

Establishing proper communication is an everyday issue of remote teams. The distance gets in between and the normal pace of conversations can get distorted. One developer is in London, another in New York, and the third one in Abuja. To ensure smooth collaboration, choose your collaboration tools wisely and stick to them.

If you're working on a complex project, with a lot of dependencies between tasks and team members, consider using Jira for project management. It provides you with an initial setup depending on the methodology you choose and it comes with Scrum and Kanban boards out of the box.

If your project is simpler and your team is smaller, Trello is your best choice. Unlike Jira, this project management tool comes with a clean slate where you can create your own planning board by adding columns of your choice. You can create it by following an existing methodology or do your own hybrid.

Making remote employees feel included

Have you ever heard of the term "social pain?" We have it and it's a major issue for remote employees. Neuroscientists believe that this type of pain is caused by rejection or feeling excluded from social activities. Meaning, your remote employees might feel excluded from a team and suffer from depression.

The State of Work study by Buffer found that 19% of remote employees struggle with loneliness. Human interaction is vital for the mental well-being of an employee and your company should think of ways to encourage it. If not, expect your remote workers' engagement and productivity rates to start dropping.

Managing a team scattered across the world

Remote teams, just like any other team, need proper management. Everything is simpler when your team is office-based. You gather in a conference room and work out the details of the project. But with distributed teams, there's a difference in time-zones, in culture, and in communication. To resolve your PM issues, you need a system in place for checking in on the status of the ongoing project and keeping the entire team in sync.

Consider using a project management tool like Jira if you're leading a complex project. If you're managing a simpler project, Trello can be a great option. Both tools come with a planning board where you can keep track of the project's progress.

For daily standups, you can use tools like Zoom and Google Meet. They're great for scheduling calls with the team, doing a screen share, and recording your sessions.

When it comes to iteration planning meetings, video conference tools such as Zoom and Google Meet also come in handy. The leader of the meeting can open the project planning board and present it to the rest of the team through a screen share.

After completing a story, it's common practice to schedule an online meeting using a video conference tool. You can demonstrate the functionality with the whole team and the product owner

Defining the acceptance criteria is a step every development team doesn't want to miss. You can schedule a separate meeting for this or you can discuss it during the iteration planning meeting. Once it's decided, add it to the ticket in your planning board.

A tool like Jenkins is great for managing the whole release cycle. The tool can help you automatically deploy to your testing environments and execute unit tests to make sure things will run smoothly.

Finally, structuring team knowledge is vital. For this, it's a good idea to use tools like Google Drive, GitHub wikis or Confluence pages for documenting your processes.

Team-building activities in a distributed team

Team-building activities are so popular and loved by companies worldwide because they bring teams together and encourage trust. But how do you build trust when your co-worker lives across the ocean?

Nearly 65% of remote workers report that they have never had a single team-building session! You can't let this happen to your company. The first thing that comes to mind is flying everyone in for an in-person gathering. Yet, if you're tight on the budget that doesn't mean there's nothing you can do. Look for online team-building activities that will bring the team closer together on a personal note.

Here are our personal favorites: Agile Games for Distributed Teams.

Remote Work Today

How Many People Work Remotely?

According to the State of Remote Work 2019 by OwlLabs, 62% of survey respondents work remotely. It's important to note that they work remotely at different frequencies. 54% of respondents work remotely at least once per month, 48% work remotely at least once per week, and 30% work remotely full-time.

Moreover, that same study found that 42% of remote workers plan to work remotely more often than they do at the moment in the next 5 years. More than 50% of on-site workers want to start working remotely.

Areas that have the greatest remote work participation are IT and operations (18%), customer support (14%), and sales (13%).

> *I love working remotely because it allows me to work from anywhere and it gives me the flexibility to organize my day based on my personal preferences. It will be very hard for me to go back to the 9 to 5 office lifestyle now.*
>
> - Davor Minchorov, Developer

How Many Companies Are Remote?

According to the Global State of Remote Work Report, 56% of companies allow remote work. Out of that 56%, 16% are fully remote, and 40% are hybrid, offering both remote and in-office options.

When a company is remote, it means that it has no headquarters or office space available. Every single employee works from their homes, workspaces, or from wherever they prefer. Hybrid companies have office space. Their employees can choose between working at home, working at the office, or to alternate between the two.

The Toolkit

Throughout the guide, we have mentioned a variety of different remote work management tools. Some of them we like to use on a daily basis for staying in touch, while others have come in handy for managing projects. Whether it's for holding standout meetings or sharing a few laughs, here's an outline of our most commonly used tools.

The best team communication tool: Slack

What's so amazing about Slack is that it simulates the water cooler. It's one of our most-loved apps that we use to discuss everything from small talk and tech jokes to travel tips. Team members can join channels they think are relevant and avoid those which may be too distracting for their productivity. You can have multiple channels for different intents, such as #random, #projectstatus, #brainstorming, #business-ops, etc.

The best project management tool: Asana

Thanks to a tool like Asana, you'll always know the status of different work projects happening across your team. It's great for tracking tasks, defining workflows, and managing your work. You can create projects, set deadlines, assign tasks, track progress, and tag people. Instead of wasting time on status meetings and sending emails, you can get work done more rapidly and easily with a single tool.

The best video conference tool: Zoom

When it's time for our daily standup, we rely on Zoom. It's a video conferencing tool with real-time messaging and content. You can use the app on any device and have as many participants as you wish on a call. It's most widely used for team meetings, webinars, training, and online events. It integrates with hundreds of other tools, such as Slack, HubSpot, Gmail, and Trello.

The best tool for managing complex projects: Jira

Jira is a recommended tool if you're leading a complex project that includes a lot of dependencies between tasks. It's an issue-tracking tool that's used by teams to track, organize, and prioritize bugs, new features, and improvements for certain software releases. The best part of the tool is the Scrum and Kanban boards. You can use the boards to customize your tickets and add workflows when moving the ticket from one phase to another. The best part? You have access to reports with actionable insights into how your team is performing sprint over sprint.

The best tool for managing simpler projects: Trello

Trello is a great tool if you're managing simpler projects and smaller teams. Similar to Jira, you can create your planning boards and move the tickets through different stages until they're completed. Trello has practically limitless possibilities so you can adjust it to whatever project you have.

The best tool for online signing: HelloSign

HelloSign is a tool that lets you create and sign documents online easily and in a couple of minutes. It integrates nicely with Google Docs, Dropbox, Zapier, and other useful apps. For example, if you store your documents in cloud services like Google Drive or Dropbox, you can import them in to be signed. There's also a Chrome extension that you can install to sign documents in Gmail.

The best app for storing files and documents: Google Drive

Google Drive is a safe place for storage and collaboration on your documents and files. Its main purpose is to expand your ability to store files beyond the limits of your hard drive. You'll receive 15GB of free cloud storage without having to spend a dime. The tool lets you store any type of files, including photos, videos, .pdfs, and Microsoft Office files. You can choose the people you want to share your files with, and enable them to suggest changes and make edits easily.

The best software development tool: GitHub

GitHub is a top-notch tool for hosting and reviewing code, as well as for managing projects and building software. It's the highest-rated platform for developers which makes it the perfect tool to use with your remote team.

Importance of distributed teams for Green Environment

If you're a person who cares and respects our planet, you might be looking for different ways to make an impact. Surely, you can always plant a tree in your backyard, reduce your plastic use, or avoid driving your car. But did you know that remote work may do more for the planet than we expected?

Here's how working remotely can improve the air around us and aid in building a better world of tomorrow.

You're not producing any office waste

Did you know that the average office worker wastes 10,000 sheets of paper per year?

Or that office workers, on average, use 500 disposable coffee cups every year?

Considering the majority of your days are not spent in the office, you're actually not producing any waste. What's more, as all communication between team members is digital, there's no need to print any documents, handouts, or work contracts.

You're saving 30 million gallons of gasoline each year

According to research, Americans use an average of 392 million gallons of gasoline daily. Considering there are roughly 25 million people who work remotely, this means telecommuters are saving approximately 30 million gallons each working day.

You're decreasing CO2 emissions

The Global Workforce Analytics found that working remotely for at least half of a week could lower carbon emissions by up to 54 million metric tons each year. Estimations say that remote work has the same impact on the environment as planting 2 billion trees per year.

You're stimulating the development of small towns

Remote work is not location-dependent, which stimulates the development of small towns and reduces the crowd in large cities. This means greener cities and higher quality of life.

Do you think that taking action against climate change and protecting the environment is vital for our survival? Maybe now it's a great time to give your employees more flexibility and the opportunity to work remotely at least once a week.

3 Best Books About Remote Work

Remote work offers a myriad of benefits. But it also comes with a set of challenges. From managing time zones to building trust, there are plenty of things to learn and improve upon. If you want to read more tips and tricks about managing remote teams in addition to our in-depth guide, there are many good books on the topic. Here are our top 3 that can be an amazing resource for optimizing your remote working setup.

Remote

Office Not Required by Jason Fried & David H. Hansson

Why read it?

The book is written by the founders of Basecamp, Jason Fried and David H.Hannson. It contains profound advice from the two co-founders who've succeeded in the remote working arena. The book explores the concept of remote work from beginning to end. It dives into topics such as online collaboration, hiring and keeping the best talent, and managing your remote workers. The book is a great pick for both employers and employees who want to know how they can work together, remotely, from any desk and at any time.

Distributed Teams

The Art and Practice of Working Together While Physically Apart by John O'Duinn

Why read it?

This easy-to-read book contains valuable tips and tricks on a range of topics. It investigates concepts such as diversity, employee retention, communication, a culture of trust, and more. The author shares his hard-learned lessons drawn from 26+ years of working in remote companies. There's also advice from company founders, software developers, recruiters, data scientists, and economists.

Work Together Anywhere

A Handbook on Working Remotely — Successfully — for Individuals, Teams, and Managers by Lisette Sutherland & Kirsten Janene-Nelson

Why read it?

In this book, Lisette Sutherland, an expert on virtual-team strategies, teaches you everything you need to know to be successful in the distributed work arena. She shares valuable advice that she accumulated from professional experience, in-depth research, and interviews with managers/workers around the world. It looks into topics such as running effective meetings, facilitating positive communication practices, and crafting team agreements. Additionally, the book is abundant with actionable tips for cultivating agility, collaboration, and camaraderie.

Scaling engineering teams.

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