



REMOTE COLLABORATION OF CROSS FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

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CHALLENGES WORKING REMOTELY

For most of us the concept of 'working from home' used to mean a day or two away to take care of a sick family member, work on a special project, wait for a tradie or perhaps attend a medical appointment. However, over the past few months the Covid-19 pandemic has redefined how many of us now work, exercise, and socialise. Working and collaborating remotely, together with the challenges that this presents has now become the new normal for everyone.

Although we've seen a gradual push for a long time for more remote working arrangements, distance learning and offshoring non-core functions, given the rapid changes over the past few months, managers from across the board are grappling with the challenges of maintaining an effective, productive and motivated team with so many of us now working from home.

This discussion looks at some of the issues and challenges managers, team leads, and project managers may be experiencing during this Covid-19 pandemic and a few ideas as to how we might mitigate these challenges.

"SOME CHALLENGES REQUIRE MORE CAREFUL
CONSIDERATION"

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Most tangibly, the team working remotely will need the basics, such as:

- System access, physical equipment, internet connectivity & printer
- Support – capable to talk someone through issues remotely
- Security – essential standards to protect corporate data
- Setup - a comfortable, quiet and safe setup

These challenges are generally less tangible, less predictable, and more varied in the way they impact an individual's circumstances therefore require closer consideration .

- **Communication** – How much is too much, or not enough?
- **Tracking work output**, progress, deliverables and team productivity
- **Dealing with isolation** – especially for the young and/or single
- **Motivation vs procrastination**
- **Prioritisation** of work vs other
- **Routine** - both across the team and for the individual
- **Scheduling**– work, calls, family, exercise
- **Distractions** – kids, pets, chores, renovations, internet etc
- **Wellbeing** – both physical & mental health & wellbeing
- **Networking** and socialisation

PROJECT WORK IMPACTS

Ideally we need to have some degree of face-to-face interaction involved in order to extract the best outcome. After all, the written word can only communicate so much, and a good deal of human interaction communicated through tone, posture, body language, and in some cases even volume. All of which can be very difficult to glean from a team Zoom call!

However not all phases of an engagement or project are as reliant on the face-to-face and therefore not as heavily impacted. Take a system build for example – once the design is completed and signed off, developers should generally be capable of completing. This is unlike the Design phase where a more collaborative and vigorous discussion usually produces a better result..

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

Just like the Covid virus, there is no silver bullet. Organisational culture, expectations and each individual themselves differ greatly in how they might approach and respond to the current circumstances. Listed below are a few of the actions and considerations that our team at FourPL have experienced working remotely within our team and with our customers and partners.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL

- Look at 'outcome' rather than 'hours'.
- Use the Pomodoro technique – 25 mins on, 5 off approach...do this 4 times and then take a proper 30 mins off away
- Reward yourself – set a goal, achieve it and reward yourself - but stay away from the pantry!
- Set a routine – Set an alarm, exercise, breakfast, and even 'commute' as such to your workspace, lunch etc
- Set your boundaries – both physically by way of a separate workspace, and from a time perspective
- Save on the commute – acknowledge and feel good about the saving in time and cost.
- Stay engaged with friends and work colleagues – communicate and share. Keeping in mind some will need it more than others.



**" FOCUS ON OUTCOMES
RATHER THAN RESULTS"**

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

AS A TEAM

- Agree on a communication platform/channel– Zoom, MS Teams, WebEx, jabber, Dropbox, SharePoint etc,
- Ensure everyone has access, good screens, good video and good sound.
- Encourage participants to turn on their video – this will allow more people to be actively involved.
- Keep the meetings short, sharp and focused...but not always about work. Mix it up occasionally
- Don't over-communicate. Find the balance of what works for your circumstance and your team.
- Prioritisation – with the thin line between work and home life blurring whilst working from home, its more important than ever to set clear instructions and priorities with your team.
- The roundtable – towards the end of a meeting/call, work your way around the group and check in on everyone. Ensure everyone has had their say and that they haven't spent the entire session on mute.
- Ensure one-one calls are also used to pick up on some of that less formal conversation. Not everything needs to be a group session.
- Disconnect! - help your remote team to disconnect by having specific daily working hours.

**"WORKING
REMOTELY ALSO
AFFECTS THE
NATURE OF WORK
AT EACH PHASE
OF A PROJECT"**

Working remotely not only impacts how individuals and teams collaborate, but also affects the nature of the work at a particular phase of a project or engagement.

To break down a fairly typical system implementation we would expect to see the following phases/activities:

- Detailed design workshops and requirements gathering
- System build and configuration phases
- Testing – Unit testing, Integration testing and User Acceptance Testing (UAT)
- Training, communications, documentation
- System cutover and deployment
- Hypercare and operational support

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES

IMPACT ACROSS PHASES OF A PROJECT

In our experience, those phases of a project that are likely most impacted by teams working remotely are tabled below:

Phase	Remote Challenges	How to Manage
Detailed Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Want robust, open and honest discussions.• Test the norm and flush out true business requirements.• Not everyone gets a voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plenty of comms – clear, concise, visual• Document everything, circulate and validate• Allow plenty of time - more than normal• Record the conversation• Use tools like Mural (whiteboard)• Use collaboration tools, Sharepoint & MS Teams• Establish a clear RACI• Resource planning - allocate enough time sometimes more time
UAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often used as a training exercise for key users/ superusers.• Difficult if not clearly scripted and directed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Centralised management• Careful planning, resource allocation• Daily team checkins – discuss the defects, challenges and resolutions• Remote access, security• Collaboration tools
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May not be impacted – depending on the format.• Online learning is common.• Train-the-trainer typically needs more hands-on approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small group online sessions• Use of video and visuals• Validate and confirm the understanding• Run iterative user surveys to ensure we are meeting the learning objectives?
Hypercare	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First few days - Ideally need people 'walking the floor'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formal introductions, external hypercare team, who will help me when we go live, how do I raise an issue, how do I resolve the issue and how to make sure my internal stakeholders are happy• Establish accessible sme's, especially for the first days• Daily check-in's• Encourage Q&A, discussion not just resolutions
Stakeholder Validation, Endorsement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Silence is NOT approval• Execs are often very visual• 2-way engagement may be tricky• Less tangible requirements needing interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video and visuals• Re-state, and replay, again• Short, sharp, concise, clear• Raise issues and mitigations• Increase Steering Committee involvement• Playback key decisions with project and extended teams

A TEST FOR THE TIMES

Although managing teams remotely can create a number of initial challenges for organisations, the reality is that these are issues that have usually always existed in some form and are often only exacerbated by a remote work setting.

Because of this, remote collaboration with your team can in many ways represent an opportunity to ensure organisations are running smoothly, efficiently and collaboratively with effective communication, security and coordination protocols and platforms in place.

Once we're all out the other side of having to work remotely, and we all settle into our 'new normal' however that may look...will an organisation actually be better off, perhaps more resilient, more engaged with their teams, their customers, more productive and more efficient?

Sometimes a different voice helps initiate the change or simply assure your team. At FourPL we have deep experience working with our customers on complex projects, and can help you with your projects or help conduct a health check to understand where to look for incremental improvements during working remotely.



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