NAVIGATING THE NEW WORLD OF REMOTE WORK

Best practices and strategies for overcoming common obstacles to remote success

Case studies from 16 organizations making remote-work work
Remote Work is the Future of Work
Learn how to create a successful office culture without an office

Benefits of Remote Work
Reduce commuting, increase access, and retain top talent

Best Practices
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Make Remote-Work Work for You
Increase productivity by remaining flexible

Quiz: Are You Remote Ready?
See if your company is set up for remote success
Remote Work is the Future of Work

Strategists have been predicting a transition to remote work since the 1970s - long before the widespread availability of internet access and email made it feasible.¹ Yet by 2017,

12% only 12% of American workers “telecommuted” at least one full day each month.²

So much has changed so quickly. Thanks to COVID-19, many companies and employees have been forced to adjust to remote work overnight. According to one estimate,

40% of previously employed Americans are now working from home.³

Even after social distancing orders are lifted, many workers have expressed concern about the health risks of returning to congested offices. If schools and childcare providers remain closed or with limited schedules, working parents may also be forced to stay home. The result is that the work-from-home future may finally be here.

At Artemis Connection, we have operated remotely since our inception. We have nurtured a strong culture built on a set of shared values, including a focus on solving our client’s hardest problems, without needing to share office space.
At Artemis, we have created a structure that enables our employees to produce quality work wherever they are. Our consultants connect with each other and with our clients over phone, video-conferencing software, messaging platforms, and other tools. Our experience with remote work enables us to understand the challenges and benefits of operating virtually.

Before COVID-19 first appeared, we had already started a project to catalogue what we have learned, combined with focus groups of remote workers, interviews with experts in the field, and an array of secondary research.

Given the sudden changes brought about by the pandemic, we believe it is more important than ever for companies and employees to understand how working from home differs from working in an office, how to navigate the likely pitfalls that result, and how to succeed in this new environment.

Our report captures the results from focus groups we conducted with 16 companies across 7 industries, including tech, non-profit, education, and financial services.

We also drew on our own best practices, interviewed experts, and synthesized existing research to supplement our findings.

We’re excited to help more companies help their employees to thrive.

Artemis Connection
connect@artemisconnection.com
We intentionally created Artemis as a work-from-anywhere company because we found a large pool of under-employed and highly-qualified people outside urban centers.

Any major transition is likely to create challenges. But after companies address those issues, they can be more productive if they remain remote or provide employees with the option to continue working remotely. Among the many benefits of remote work, several are worth highlighting:

- **Keep working, decrease costs.** Remote work saves money by reducing overhead costs like real estate and costly travel budgets. One interviewer’s research showing that “companies save an average of $11,000 per part-time telecommuter”. Some companies can save on labor if employees work from lower-cost locales with adjusted salaries.4,5

- **Access top talent, wherever they live.** Working from home promotes individual autonomy over working hours, and allows employees to be in the places that best suit their needs. That means companies can break down geographical barriers to accessing top talent.

- **Increase employee productivity.** Employee productivity can increase, as long as companies are attentive to creating the right structure and processes. We discuss best practices to increase productivity in the next section.

- **Reduce the time, stress, cost, and climate impact of commuting.** “Commuting” down the hallway to a home office enables employees to spend less time in transit and less money on transportation. It also reduces the number of cars on the road and ultimately carbon emissions.

89% of remote workers who switched to remote work due to COVID-19 reported being more or equally satisfied with their work & productivity6
How to Increase Productivity

Many companies express concern that operating remotely will lead to decreased productivity (and profitability), but research has found the opposite to be true. As long as employers structure the remote workplace effectively, productivity can increase. There are a number of practices employers should adopt to make the transition successful:

- **Be willing to re-envision the traditional work environment.** In our focus groups, the firms with the most flexible work schedules were the most successful at maintaining output from in-person to remote work. For example, companies that acknowledged employees may need to accomplish tasks outside of normal business hours were more productive than those that maintained the standard 9-5.

>“Employees have a higher level of commitment to their organization and to their work in situations where they have an opportunity to choose flexible work hours, to work from home, to decide on their own when their work hours will be day by day during their work week.”


Reenvisioning the traditional work environment also means **updating metrics of success.** Managers who measure accountability in output-based metrics, as opposed to the number of hours worked, produce better outcomes than those who maintain traditional strategies.
● **Be patient.** Transitioning to remote work takes time and training. Companies should remember that these changes may not happen overnight. It is important to teach best practices to new hires during the onboarding process, then reinforce these practices on an ongoing basis, including during regular performance check-ins.

● **Provide needed tech support.** Many employees, especially those who do not have experience with technology or do not have access to reliable internet, will have trouble transitioning to a home office. Good employers proactively recognize this and provide support.

42 M Americans do not have broadband internet access at home.9

● **Help employees solve the 4 main problems of working from home: children, space, privacy, and choice.**3 Remote work presents challenges that don’t exist in the office, including dealing with family, finding a quiet space and time to work, and deciding how to focus at any moment on competing demands for attention. Employers who recognize these challenges and work with their employees to find solutions foster more loyalty and productivity.
Management Considerations

Employees are not the only ones struggling to adjust to remote work; managers too need to transition to managing effectively in a new environment. Our research has identified a number of ways to address common challenges:

- **Encourage flexible work schedules.** In a traditional office, employees tend to work on a set schedule, which can lead to longer, less efficient hours. With remote work, we’ve found that employees are more productive and efficient when presented with specific goals and tasks and allowed to work on their own time.

- **Focus on new metrics of success for employee progress.** Some of the companies participating in our research created new metrics, including tasks completed and overall capacity. These new benchmarks yielded increases in productivity, which surprised the managers.

- **Cultivate trust.** Whether employees like it or not, many managers take comfort in being able to watch over teams as they work on assigned tasks during the workday. We have found that extending flexibility and empathy to remote employees increases efficiency and encourages employees to feel a communal stake in company success.
One focus group reported that "ultra-clear transparent policies surrounding people with kids and other people at home, [and] meeting people where they are" resulted in "more confidence in what leadership is doing." The company was able to increase their output compared to in-person operations pre-COVID.

- **Appreciate that employees are human beings.** For many employees, spending time with colleagues at work is a perk. It’s a chance to be with peers and (ideally) focus attention and energy on the job. Without proper support, working remotely can feel **lonely and isolating.** It’s easy to burn out, especially with increased home/family responsibilities. **Meetings in particular can be a source of stress.** Here are some guidelines to help:

  1. Identify critical meetings where interruptions will cause particular challenges and encourage employees to identify ways to avoid disruptions in advance.
  2. For all other meetings, ensure that employees with family members at home don't feel the need to apologize if one appears during a video call.
  3. For internal meetings, cultivate comfort through relaxed tone and casual dress.

- **Pay attention to burn out.** If employees stop caring about their work, they are more likely to leave:

  “Has workplace burnout caused you to look for another job?”

  **37% of 7,434 respondents replied Yes**

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**source:** artemis connection
How to Innovate Virtually

Fostering innovation, including in formal Research & Development, may seem like a daunting task for a remote team. In-person collaboration is often seen as essential to innovative development. Teams can continue to create new ideas remotely, as long as they are attentive to the following best practices:

- **Remote models allow for greater access and opportunity for training.**

  “Online training is usually completed when it is needed for a project, and not for general knowledge.”

  - Manager in the tech industry

Fostering innovation requires creativity, collaboration, and competency. While research and development may look different in the remote workplace, holding **virtual training sessions** and **investing in knowledge-sharing tools** can help employees develop new ideas and new skills.

- **Structure environments and use tech tools to foster creativity.** Enabling colleagues to connect for casual conversations can be especially challenging in remote work environments because employees aren’t able to casually stop by a coworker’s desk for a question or bump into each other in the hallway. Using technology to **connect colleagues outside of formal, structured meetings** can help to encourage creativity and collaboration.
Set aside times for virtual “whiteboarding” sessions, using video-conferencing tools to facilitate interaction. Similarly, holding open sessions where colleagues can co-work on screen simultaneously can be helpful in promoting conversations.

“The environment matters... having a little coffee break at the office, talking to people, and coming back will put you back into focus. Monotony draws out the mental exhaustion.”

- Manager in the automotive industry

Understand your industry and culture. The difficulties in fostering creativity vary by company. In our focus groups,

80% versus 40%

of technology-focused groups 

of non-technology focused groups

were able to work creatively from home.

“Being thoughtful is harder because we have to reimagine all our programming that had been largely face to face. We can’t just repackage things. Prior planning for work we had been doing doesn’t apply.”

- Manager at an education non-profit
Logistical Solutions

Without the physical separation of work/office and rest/home, many employees’ lives are becoming muddled so they feel constantly “on.” Some tips to maintain a healthy work/life balance include:

- **Establish and reinforce boundaries.** Managers should offer support and training to help employees create **boundaries between work and home life.** In a recent survey, nearly 70% of respondents said that “working from home during the pandemic caused them to experience workplace burnout.”

Empowering employees to set boundaries (and respecting those boundaries) will give employees a **better sense of control,** in addition to minimizing interruptions and distractions, which in turn can positively impact work performance.

- One company found that much of their employees’ burnout stemmed from not having designated space to work. Respondents reported more success by **physically separating** from work technology during non-work hours.

- **Schedule on- and off-times to send emails or otherwise be available.** Managers and employees should both be responsible for **designating times when they are or are not working.** One example is scheduling good morning/evening messages to the team, creating organic space for questions.

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3+ more work hours logged per day

290M increase in daily Zoom users since December 2019

54% of employees in our focus groups reported feeling burnout
- **Avoid scheduling Friday afternoon meetings.** Maintaining clear distinctions between weekdays and weekends is critical to avoiding burnout. One way to help your employees draw that distinction is by creating a buffer at the end of each week.

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- **Consider employees’ physical needs.** Numerous companies highlighted the importance of ergonomic equipment:

  - Research by the International Ergonomics Association has found that ideal working spaces are located in quiet places away from the flow of activity in the home.
  - Ideal equipment include computers, full size monitors, detachable keyboards, surge protectors, and docking stations.

  **Many employees we talked to did not have access to computers, desks, or other office tools, which limited their productivity.**

  When possible, companies should allow employees to **borrow equipment** for in-home use. This can include ergonomic equipment such as chairs and standing desks or technical equipment such as monitors, microphones, adaptors, and other hardware.

  If budgets permit, providing **stipends** to employees to purchase tech tools or upgrade internet access can also be a major help.
Increasing Employee Morale

It is more important than ever for managers to be supportive of their employees. One key finding from our focus groups was that a **sense of community** leads to higher work ethic, more success, and, in turn, more revenue. Managers can show employees they are valued by:

- **Allowing employees to have “hybrid schedules” even if they return to the office.** Employees can split their time, with some days in the office and other days working remotely. For this to be successful, managers should promote consistency and check in frequently with employees to ensure that no one feels left behind.

- **Encouraging employees to create routines, even when it might feel unnecessary.** Our teams have found success by scheduling structured time for checking in, meeting, and collaborating. It helps to create **weekly updates, regularly update goal-setting documents, and hold consistent check-ins** with teams about performance and personal needs. These routines also require employees to signal when they are “on and off” the clock.

- **Promoting employee collaboration.** We have found that employee collaboration increases when teams have time to brainstorm and connect without a structured meeting agenda. **Allowing time for organic community and team building in a virtual environment can help foster collaboration in the long-run.**

- **Celebrating milestones** (birthdays, work anniversaries, etc.) with remote parties or mailed care packages.

Source: Data taken from Nicholas Bloom’s survey of the current state of working from home.¹⁴
Make Remote-Work Work for You

Many companies have understandably experienced “growing pains” following the unexpected and immediate transition to remote work this spring. From productivity difficulties to managerial behavioral changes, there are many challenges to be aware of when transitioning to or operating in a remote work environment. But there are also many benefits to remote work, and using the best practices we have identified should empower companies to increase productivity, cut costs, and foster more employee engagement going forward.

We conclude with two critical priorities for all organizations:

1. Employers who show understanding and empathy toward employees, and work with them to find a more flexible arrangement for their home-offices, will have more productive and happier workers.

2. Employees tend to work longer hours and experience higher rates of burnout in a remote setting, so employers who establish end-of-day routines and remote social events can not only boost morale, but also boost retention.

These findings have been consistent across the participants in our focus groups and interviews, and are backed by academic research.\(^ {15,16}\)

As a “remote-native” organization, we believe it is critical to contribute to research and new understandings for remote work success. What we have learned has enabled us to create a remote work environment that is better for our employees and encourages higher-quality problem-solving and entrepreneurial thinking, ultimately benefiting our clients as well.

If you are interested in learning more about what we do, please visit our website, www.artemisconnection.com or email us at: connect@artemisconnection.com.
Are you remote ready?

Rank your organization on a scale of 1-10 for each of the following questions

☐ How capable are your managers of overseeing employees outside of the office setting?
☐ Are your metrics for success focused on outputs, not hours worked?
☐ Has your company invested in tools that foster creativity and collaboration?
☐ Do you have the capacity to provide technical support?
☐ Do caregivers and non-caregivers feel supported in balancing their work and life commitments?
☐ How comfortable are you with offering flexible work schedules?
☐ Can your employees set appropriate boundaries that will be respected?
☐ Have you set new norms for meetings so, for example, employees don’t fear having family members appear in internal video calls?
☐ Are you open to experimenting with rethinking expectations about on and off times and normalizing taking time off?
☐ Have you considered how to foster morale by supporting and celebrating workers outside of the office?

If you scored...

<50: You might not be remote ready yet. We hope these best practices have been helpful, and we would love to discuss how they can work for your organization.

50-80: You’re on your way. Moving to remote work can be challenging, and you may need help implementing new policies and processes.

90-100: We’d love to learn you’re making remote-work work for you and share strategies.

Regardless of your score, we would love to hear how your company is adapting to remote work and discuss how our strategists can help your teams.

Find us at connect@artemisconnection.com or LinkedIn.
At Artemis, our vision is to inspire positive impact so everyone can reach their full potential. We bring this vision to each engagement and to everything we do.

To Learn More
contact us at
connect@artemisconnection.com

Prepared by:
Jade Fisher
Christy Johnson
Amaya Lessard
Logan Pashby
Kiana Rahni
Sonia Steinway
Citations


