Teneo

The Global CEO Advisory Firm

Teneo Insights
The Productivity Dilemma
Due to COVID-19

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Summary

As global efforts to stymie the spread of the virus escalate, school closures, mass gathering cancellations and social distancing have stoked anxiety levels and have forced a new normal that is only just taking shape for individuals, businesses and governments alike

In just the last 2 weeks, companies all over the world have had to make sudden and swift decisions to move to mandatory work-from-home procedures, upending employees and employee family routines in an effort to help mitigate the spread and contact with the virus

Some companies were relatively prepared, employing workforces largely attuned to remote work or capable of making the transition quickly due to the nature of the job

For other companies, working from home is counter-culture and may challenge productivity over the next weeks and months as the trajectory of the virus continues

Although a work-from-home construct is not new, the anxiety associated with the pandemic may alter the ability for employees to maintain the desired level of employee focus and productivity

Now presents a significant leadership opportunity for global corporations as they begin to navigate an unprecedented remote workforce paradigm that may endure for weeks and months to come
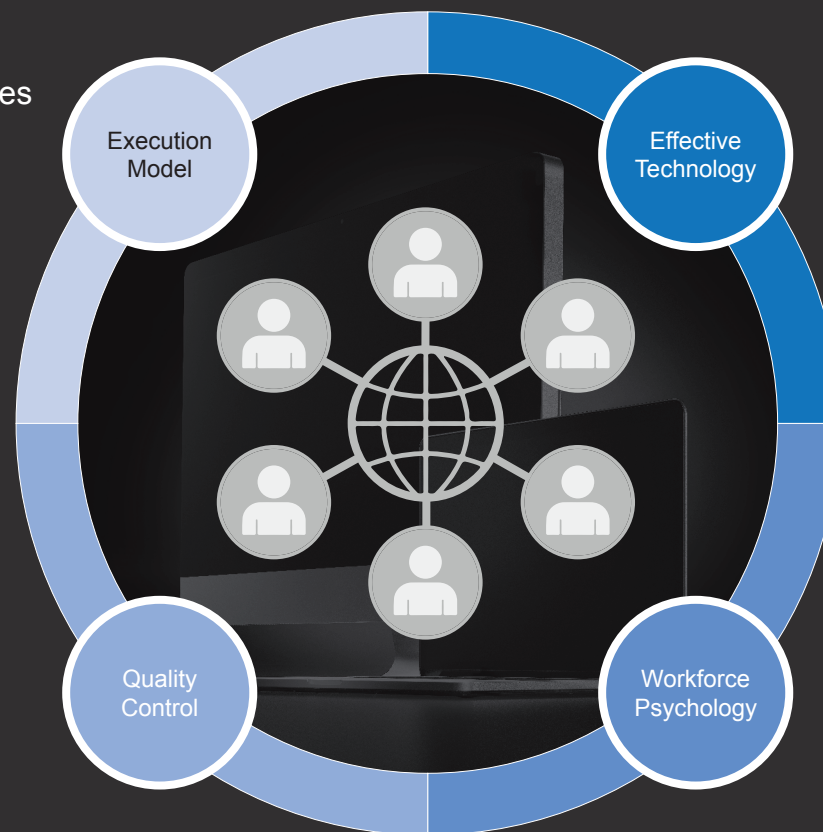
The Work-From-Home Construct

Companies have increasingly, where appropriate, offered employees the option to 'work-from-home' (WFH). Organizations thus evaluate the right execution model, technology requirements, quality considerations and WFH psychology associated with their specific business operations to maintain a happy workforce, yet achieve the same if not greater productivity.

Execution Model

- Management structure & guidelines
- Benefits, policies & procedures
- Tracking & reporting
- Communication

Effective Technology

- Tools and equipment
- System availability & integrity
- Physical & cybersecurity
- Help-desk & employee support

Quality Control

- Consistency
- Innovation & thought leadership
- Brand & reputation
- IP Protection

Workforce Psychology

- Leadership & culture
- Motivation & opportunity
- Empathy & flexibility
- Mental & physical health

WFH Best Practices To Date

In the last decade, organizations have learned how to evolve and adapt to changing workforce requirements, processes and available technology to support a successful WFH environment.

Execution Model

- Centralized HQ office + 1) occasional WFH; 2) work from anywhere; 3) fully remote
- Clear working policies, definition of roles and agreed expectations on deliverables and outcomes
- Stipend or reimbursement for home office equipment
- Regular employee + team check-ins
- Regular employee + manager check-ins
- Regularly scheduled team 'virtual social' events
- Good time management between work, personal needs

Effective Technology

- Dedicated home 'workspace' with necessary monitors, mouse, printers, etc if feasible
- Secure communication, collaboration and documentation tools
- Encryption, 2-factor authentication, password management policies & procedures
- Robust company property security policies for mobile devices and laptops
- Regular inventory of assets and asset owner

Quality Control

- Frequent team collaboration via phone, video conference
- Peer reviews of documentation and deliverables using web-based collaboration tools
- Periodic web-based presentations of team / client or customer deliverables
- Periodic team brainstorming sessions to share and develop ideas
- Incentives for creativity, innovation and high quality output

Workforce Psychology

- Top-down leadership support and encouragement for the WFH model
- Support for employee self-care, 'mental health breaks' or personal time for physical activity
- Empathy, understanding and accommodation for occasional unusual work / shift hours
- New and creative policies, team and promotion structures to support a work from home culture

The COVID-19 Impact

The virus outbreak and its sudden imposition on company workforces may significantly disrupt the traditional goals and benefits of a WFH operating model for both employers and employees.

WFH BEFORE COVID-19

✓ Studies show WFH experience enables more freedom, helps work-life-balance, has shown to reduce stress, improve health and reduce costs (to employer and employee)

✓ Employees can create an 'at home' workspace to focus on work-related tasks – typically separated from other rooms / aspects of the home

✓ Distractions minimized with dependents likely in school, and/or support available from outside resources for extraordinary care like visiting nurses

✓ Supplies for work or home needs are conveniently delivered and often according to a scheduled routine

✓ Experts say that WFH can improve productivity by as much as 13%

WFH NOW

✓ The COVID-19 pandemic and its uncertain future has significantly increased stress levels and anxiety no matter the industry or workforce

✓ Some may not be prepared with the right tools and home infrastructure to effectively work from home or be isolated for a prolonged period of time

✓ School closures, reduced services and social distancing means dependents in the home during work hours will put additional strain on employees

✓ Uncertainty related to ongoing access to essentials for the home will exacerbate stress and anxiety

✓ The COVID-19 impact to productivity is untested and unclear: businesses will need to navigate it for their individual organizations

What To Prepare For

Not everyone is able to compartmentalize the stress of the job and the personal stress related to the outbreak; some employees may **struggle to cope** with the environment and may become specifically **more emotional or sensitive**

Employees have a **range of personal circumstances** to which employers will need to be sensitive: e.g. children or parents to care for at home (or both); minimal or no access to caregivers; exposure or suspected exposure to the virus

Outside of friends and family, **connectivity to the job and the company is critical for employees**; surveys indicate employees trust information from their employers more than other sources, and **want daily updates from managers**

Employees are stressed and anxious – expect to hear more requests for down time or time for 'self-care'; employers will, to some degree, need to honor these requests at face value

Alternatively, some **employees may fear retribution** if they speak up and ask for help or time off, leading to potential burnout or depression

Other **employees may abuse the WFH construct** leading to productivity fall-off; thus it will be important to identify individuals who may need specific or more focused oversight and regular check-ins

Depending on how employers handle communications, e**xpect disgruntled employees to take to social media** to vent or commiserate with others

The isolation aspect of a WFH environment can also **reduce the strong sense of team bonds** gained through team outings or a meet-up after work; **junior staff** not typically brought into leadership circles, mission-critical meetings or celebrations **may suffer more or feel left out**

Increased and sudden use of more electronic communications rather than in-person meetings and conversations may also increase the **potential for misconstrued messages**, resulting in unnecessary hurt feelings and sensitivities

All of the above may result in **mistakes, decreased productivity, confrontation and/or backlash** against the company <u>if not planned for and handled appropriately</u>

The Opportunity

This new WFH paradigm shift means corporations will need to completely rethink workforce engagement in an environment where in-person meetings and live, physical proximity to employees is no longer possible

Employees are looking for support, stability and information from their employers that is relative to them, their roles and their personal situations, having been inundated with 'fake news', and rumors over social media

CEOs and leadership teams have a significant opportunity to design and deliver a new employee engagment and communcations strategy to meet the needs of this new way of operating

Recommendations for Today's WFH Dynamic (1/2)

De-Stress the Transition to WFH

Where feasible, employers can provide (reimburse) items to help replicate the office desk space (e.g. monitors, keyboard, mouse)

Establish or augment an IT support team with additional resources who can provide technical support in the initial weeks during this transition to a WFH environment; particularly for those not accustomed to a WFH situation

Reinforce cybersecurity policies and procedures, and encourage employees to proactively reach out with any questions or concerns

Quickly organize text / chat groups and email distributions enabling quicker outreach to teams for emergency and / or non-emergency communication

Prioritize Communications

Overcommunicate from top-down leadership on steps the company is taking, including continued commitment to the mission and vision of the company - in the state of uncertainty at the moment, employees will be concerned about their future employment and silence will fuel insecurity

Centralize communications within the company to ensure consistency in messaging to all levels of the workforce – and be prepared to modify or amend communications and policies in an environment with continually evolving information

Set daily calls with teams and direct reports to check-in and reinforce the 'team' dynamic, no matter the working arrangement; encourage team 'events' like virtual lunches or end-of-day social time to keep cohesion

Demonstrate empathy and understanding as employees unexpectedly transition to a WFH model – they may have extenuating circumstances that require additional support or ramp-up time to full productivity

Recommendations for Today's WFH Dynamic (2/2)

Prepare to Modify Operations & Expectations

Many employees may not be prepared for WFH and need relevant training to be productive. Research has shown that formal WFH training helps employees feel more productive and engaged (70%) vs those who weren't trained (53%)*

Because of likely extenuating circumstances for employees, particularly those with families, consider allowing teams to work in "shifts" to give employees time during the day to manage personal issues

Especially in a prolonged environment, encourage managers to set time for team socializing, acknowledgements and celebrations (birthdays, finished deliverable, etc)

Strict client deadlines or project milestones are challenging under normal circumstances – it may not be feasible to expect employees to operate at the same level as they did before the pandemic; managers may have to make some concessions about how hard they push and expected results

Allow employees to have their morning coffee, lunch or evening workout without interruption – just because they are at home doesn't mean they have to stay fixed to their screen – let employees pursue a normal lifestyle integrated into their new work routine

Consider paying for employee subscriptions to mobile apps, which help with anxiety and meditation or provide access to online therapists – and message in a way that demonstrates that the company fully encourages and supports use of the services

If something isn't working, listen to your employees and be prepared to change course – there is no playbook for this and everyone is learning real-time what works for each unique organization

https://remote.co/how-train-employees-to-work-remotely/