

BY FIONA NEWTON



PRODUCTIVITY IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'



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FIONA NEWTON | TRAINING DIRECTOR, PRODUCTIVE EVENTS & TRAINING

Bachelor of Arts, Media

Certified Microsoft Specialist

Certificate 4 in Workplace Training & Assessment

Author of ebook 'Master your Inbox'



Fiona is the co-founder of Productive Events and Training, the creator of The Fitzroy Market and broadcaster on the award-winning Chicks Talking Footy show. Fiona has used her experience as a small business owner and radio broadcaster to train tens of thousands of people across most industries in Australia in how to be more productive and communicate effectively.

Renowned for being an inspiring speaker and trainer, Fiona shares her personal insights and experience to help others grow. With every presentation and training session, Fiona aims to ensure her audience takes away useful insights, inspiration and tips that will help them succeed in their career or business.

Fiona is particularly passionate about giving people back their life and finding balance and creating more inclusive workplaces and has a knack for simplifying complex information!

Her clients include: Westrac, Lander & Rogers, Maurice Blackburn, Griffith University, Melbourne University, University of Wollongong, Maribyrnong Council, La Trobe Council, UniSuper, Department of Human Services, Queensland University of Technology, RSM Australia and more!

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change” Charles Darwin



We have just gone through the largest interruption to our work lives since the internet and email were invented! In the blink of an eye remote work went from being an interesting experiment to an essential requirement. In many ways, this happened more smoothly than expected. We already had the technology set up with the cloud, internet, online meeting tools and email. There have been challenges too. Home broadband can be slow (although the 5G network being rolled out is good timing), security of information and disruptions at home.

These are challenging times, but to get through it, it's crucial that organisations and their workers embrace the positives and explore fully what can be achieved through remote work.

If we are honest with each other and realistic about what we can achieve in a day around the distractions we face, we can build trust and resilience and strive to remain productive and engaged.

This Whitepaper will explore what our workplaces will look like in the future, how to manage online meetings and online communication and build human connection in a remote team.

THINGS TO CONSIDER



GET THE INFRASTRUCTURE RIGHT

For virtual teams to function well each individual needs to have the technology to support them to do their job. It's more than just having a laptop, it's also about having the right software for video conferencing, access to the files and databases in the organisation and the training on how to use it well. The roll out of the 5G network should mean that internet speed is improved and therefore home technology is up to the challenge.



WILL PRODUCTIVITY GO DOWN?

There is no reason that productivity should go down when a team is working remotely. In fact, they should be able to do more focused work at home than in an open plan office. There are unique challenges right now that may need to be overcome. Several people can be working from home at once, schools can be shut down requiring parents to home school but overall, the evidence suggests that productivity should not go down if the right support and technology is in place.



MAINTAINING THE HUMAN CONNECTION

The incidental conversations that occur in the kitchen or around the office is lost when teams work remotely. Also, complex and emotionally charged conversations can be harder to manage when you are not face to face. You can't just walk into an office or up to someone's desk to follow up. However, we still must have these conversations. Managers can support their team by ensuring remote work policies are easily accessible, regularly checking in on employee morale, or finding ways to help colleagues show solidarity while apart.

How will remote work change our organisations?

CENTRAL OFFICE, REMOTE WORKING OR FLEXIBLE APPROACH?

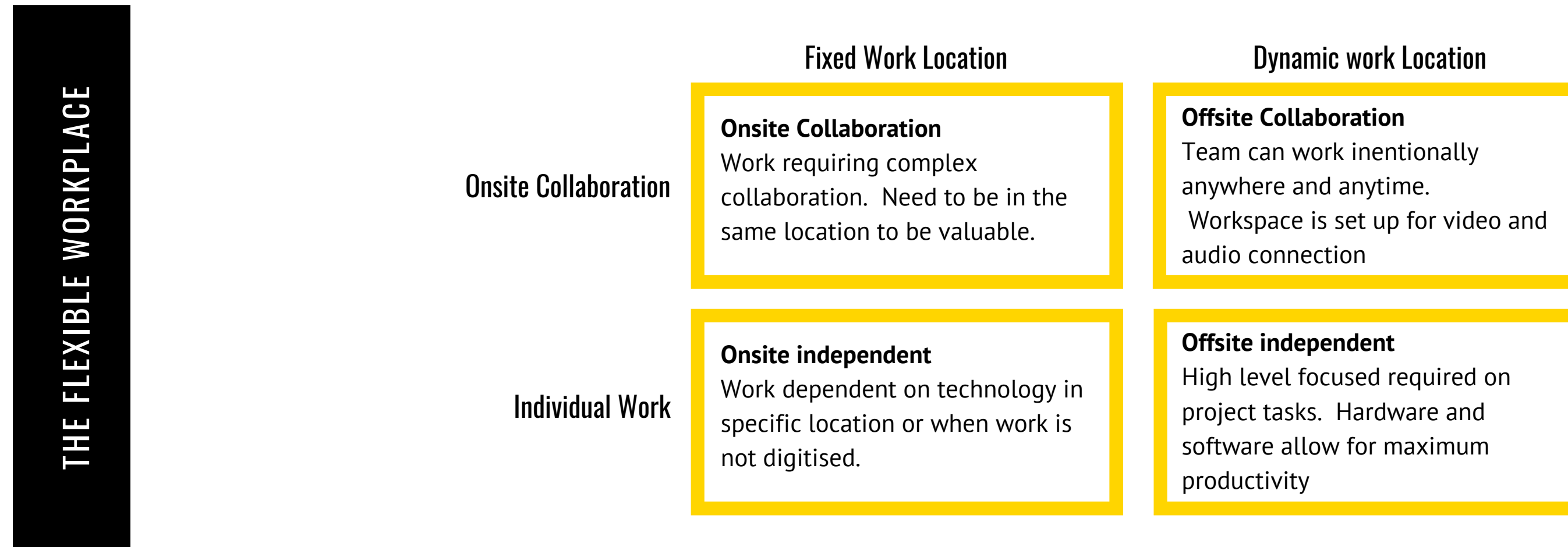
In a recent blog, 'Our New Reality: Predictions after Covid-19', KPMG made some predictions about how work will change going forward. They predict that remote working will increase, the 9-5 workday model will be challenged, and leaders and managers will need to adapt to this change. Remote work at some level is here to stay and it is radically reshaping almost every industry. There are many advantages that will help organisations move forward. Time saved in commuting means better work life balance for your team – **According to Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), workers averaged 3.7 hours' commuting time per week in 2002, but this had increased to 4.5 hours by 2017.** Effective managers will need to develop innovative ways to work in with the circumstances of each employee and find ways to build culture, manage mental health and collaborate and work together in a productive way.

Many organisations are encouraging their workforce to continue working from home even after cities slowly lift their lockdowns and restrictions. Twitter has announced that they're allowing permanent remote work for some of their employees. Shopify has also joined Twitter in granting employees the option to work from home permanently for the rest of the year. Optus have permanently moved their call centre staff to remote working.



- **Remote work will increase**
- **9-5 workday will be challenged**
- **Focus on output not input**
- **Increased work/life balance**

FIXED OR DYNAMIC LOCATION



For many years work has taken place only in the left-hand column of the model – in a fixed work location either for individual work or complex collaborative work. The challenge has been with work that requires high level focus in a busy and interruption prone environment. It has also been that commuting to a physical location is time consuming and tiring. Now is the perfect time to reimagine how we do work. The pandemic has proven that we can do work differently and the technology to do this has been here for at least a decade. Work needs to be seen as a thing you do, not a place you go. Leaders will now need to develop innovative ways to work with the personal circumstances of their team.

Fixed or flexible time

The 9 – 5 workday doesn't work for everyone. Many people I have spoken to are enjoying starting work earlier as they save time commuting in the morning. Others are enjoying flexibility around child care drop offs. Remote working can make this easier.

Managing interruptions and finding flow

It's easier to manage interruptions away from a centralised office and get more focused productive work done, where there is no colleagues dropping in at your desk and general office noise. No colleagues dropping in at your desk!

FIXED OR DYNAMIC LOCATION

According to Basex Research, the average employee spends 28% of their time dealing with unnecessary interruptions followed by “recovery time” to get back on to the same level of focus. The same research found that one hour of uninterrupted work will produce the same results as three hours of interrupted work.

Why Find your Flow?

“Flow” is a state of mind where we feel in total pursuit, execute tasks effortlessly, and achieve the peak of our performance.

When you’re in the state of Flow, you are completely focused on the task at hand, forget about yourself, about others, about the world around you, lose track of time, feel happy and in control and become creative and productive.

Input v Output

Work will now need to be measured by outcomes and work produced rather than input. This will take trust and maturity from everyone.

Manager-driven v self-driven

It takes a higher level of self-motivation to work from home or remotely. Your team will need to be better at managing time than ever before.

Commute v no commute

The average commute time in Australia is 4.5 hours a week (overhalf a workday). The commute from the bedroom to the home office is 2 minutes on average (informal research). That’s time that can be spent with family, hobbies or exercise.

Structure v adaptable

Our workforce is going through a revolution. We will need to adapt quickly but with new technologies, improving home set ups and innovative leadership we can do it.

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THE 5 LEVELS OF REMOTE WORK

There are several models to consider when discussing remote work options.

Office-based

The team operates from a fixed location with fixed hours. This is the most traditional way of working. There are advantages to this type of work – teams can brainstorm and collaborate easily when face to face.

Office-based with option to work from home

Organisations give their staff the option to work from home some days of the week. This may suit parents, people with a physical disability or people needing to focus on important projects away from the office environment. It will require technology for online meetings, cloud software and online chat software.

Remote team based in the same time zone

A fully remote team working in the same time zone allows you to work synchronously and manage tasks without delay, make calls and get instant feedback.

Remote team in different time zones

This model can be useful if your organisation needs to operate on a 24-hour cycle or outside the 9-5 workday structure.

Digital Nomads

Digital nomads are team members that travel while they work. They will be working in different locations and working at different hours depending on where they are. This can work if output is your only focus and you can trust them to produce the results. It can be a challenge if you need them to attend meetings or communicate with you at a specific time.

Note: You can download our '10 Commandments of Email Etiquette' document from our website to help design your own protocols for your team.



THE EMAIL DELUGE

Rescue Time is an app that tracks how you spend time on your digital devices. How much time spent on email, social media and how much time jumping between communication tools.

The staff at Rescue Time looked at the data from 50,000+ of their users and found that the average knowledge worker ‘checks in’ on communication tools such as email and IM (Instant Message) every 6 minutes. Note: Checking in refers to any time a user switches from a productive task to a communication tool.

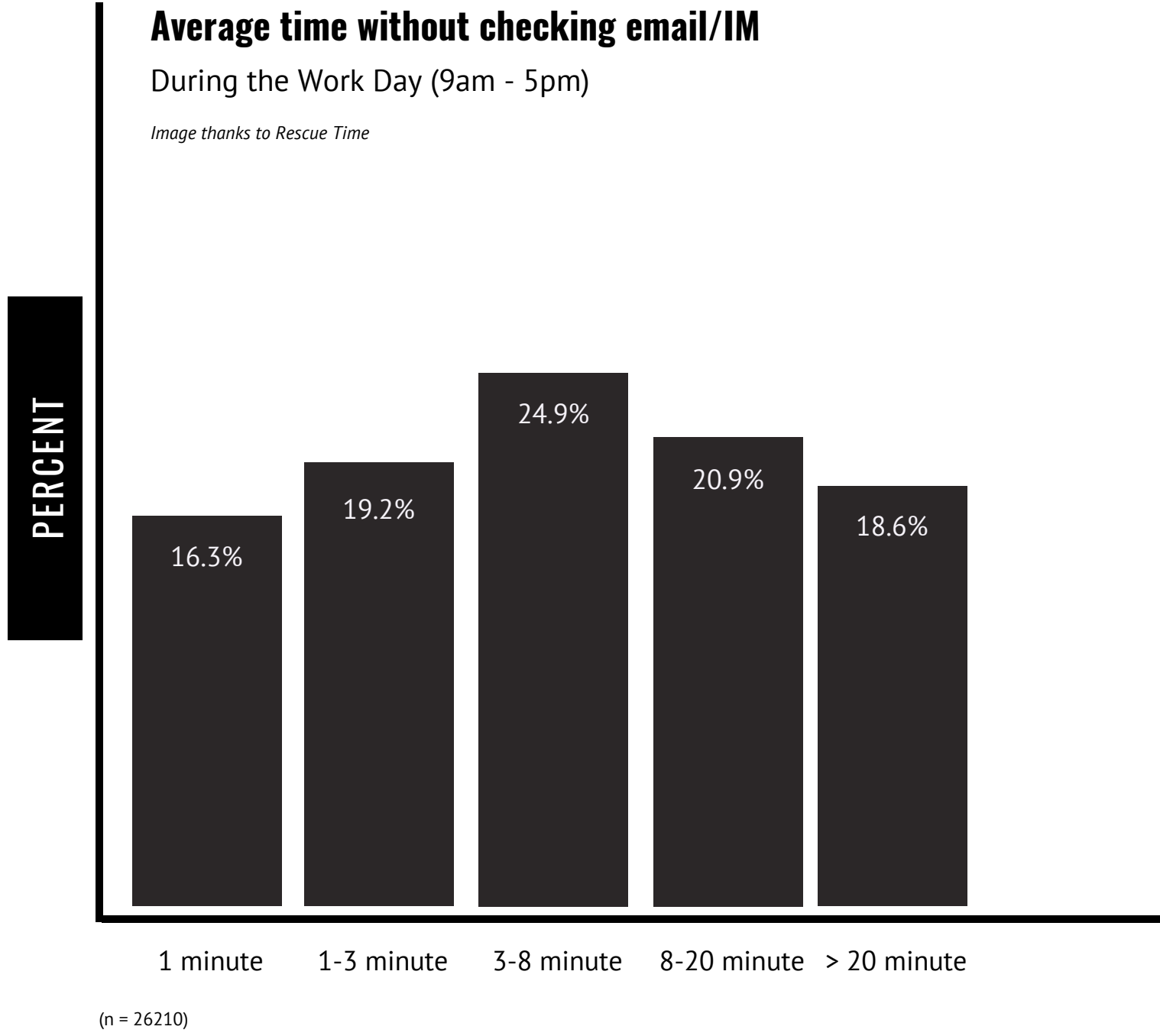
They broke down the data further.

35.5% of users ‘checked in’ on communication every 3 minutes or less and only 18.6% can go a full 20 minutes on average.

40% of knowledge workers never get 30 minutes straight of focused time in their day.

This begs the questions – How are we meant to get any focused/high value work done in the day when we are switching to communication tools every 6 minutes and not getting at least one block of focus for 30 minutes a day? The short answer is that you CAN’T!

Your teams will need to have clearly written email protocols for communication and have a good understanding of how to manage and process email as this traffic only increases with remote work. The other thing to consider is creating virtual office/work spaces in tools like MS Teams, Slack or Google Hangouts to allow for team communication and collaboration outside of an Inbox.





MS Teams is part of the Office 256 suite of apps and is the virtual workplace for your team. So, there is no need to switch between programs when you're holding a meeting. Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents can be immediately shared through Teams. So, collaboration and communication is streamlined.

Pros

- Enriched communication (chats, online meetings, shared files, team task lists, activity feeds).
- Better focus on work
- Increased transparency
- Seamless move to a digital workplace
- New team members can get up to speed quickly

Drowning in your emails becomes a thing of the past. As conversations are now held in a structural way in your Teams, you no longer have all the email-upon-email response, often sent as a Reply All and if there is a quick question that needs to be asked it can be done through Chat

Cons

- Challenging transition from Outlook
- Structure of files can be confusing
- Non-optimal online meeting experience
- Can't differentiate team permissions
- Can't move channels between teams

MANAGING ONLINE MEETINGS

Social distancing is a phrase that we've all had to get used to very quickly! I prefer the term physical distancing because we can still be social (and connected) while being physically distant thanks to technology. Many of us are now working from home full time and therefore meeting via Zoom, Skype, Go To Meetings or similar technology. In our industry, we've been meeting, coaching and training online for a few years now and this is what we've learned.

There's a lot of advantages to meeting online. It's more cost-effective – it saves money because of time saved in travel and commuting. The meetings tend to be shorter because we have to be more succinct in the way we communicate. We can meet more often if required because it's more accessible and location is not an issue as we can meet from anywhere.

However, online meetings have challenges that we need to be aware of so that we can overcome them. You can't simply convert a face to face meeting style or training session in to an online Zoom or Skype session and expect the same results. You are limited with how you can interact with a virtual audience.



Mute your microphone to help keep background noise to a minimum, make sure you mute your microphone when you are not speaking.

Be mindful of background noise when your microphone is not muted, avoid activities that could create additional noise, such as shuffling papers.

Position your camera properly if you choose to use a web camera, be sure it is in a stable position and focused at eye level, if possible. Doing so helps create a more direct sense of engagement with other participants.

Limit distractions you can make it easier to focus on the meeting by turning off notifications, closing or minimizing running apps, and muting your smartphone.

Avoid multi-tasking. You'll retain the discussion better if you refrain from replying to emails or text messages during the meeting and wait to work on that PowerPoint presentation until after the meeting ends.

Prepare materials in advance. If you will be sharing content during the meeting, make sure you have the files and/or links ready to go before the meeting begins.

Use poll questions periodically to engage your audience and keep them focused.

Monitor the chat function for questions as they come in, to see if people are expounding on something you covered, or to see if people are expressing poor understanding

Enable video only for the presenter. You can only see a limited number of participants anyway, depending on your screen size, and enabling video gobbles up network resources. If you plan to lecture without feedback (e.g., for a large seminar), you can also disable participant audio.

Schedule one or more feedback breaks. In a physical classroom, you can see raised hands or observe confused looks. It's important to assess understanding and allow participants to ask questions. An audio free-for-all can be a nightmare, but dedicated Q&A periods work really well.

Address Internet disruptions: At this time, many network providers are seeing massive increases in residential bandwidth use during the day, and many users are being throttled. If participants are experiencing lagging or skipping, suggest that they use their computer to access video, while simultaneously dialing in by phone for the audio (located in bottom right box).



MAINTAINING HUMAN CONNECTION FROM A DISTANCE

Human connection is the heart of who we are as people. The energy and trust we build from social interactions have long been the bedrock of successful team building; connections help us collaborate, creating exceptional outcomes. Eye contact, handshakes, facial expressions and hugs have all been a part of our everyday interactions. The absence of these physical interactions can cause us to feel isolated, lonely and disconnected.

In a remote environment, frequency of contact cannot go down. If you're used to having meetings, continue to do so. In fact, contact should probably go up for the whole team and its members. Newer employees, those working on critical projects, and people who need more contact will require extra one-on-ones. Remember, too, that you can do fun things virtually: happy hour, coffee breaks, lunch together. All these things can help maintain the connections you had at the office. There's ample research showing that virtual teams can be completely equal to co-located ones in terms of trust and collaboration.

- Schedule video calls (via Zoom, Skype or MS Teams) instead of phone calls. This will mean you can make eye contact and read facial expressions not just hear their voice.
- Conduct a virtual coffee break that is just about checking in and building relationships or even better a trivia night or something similar.
- Lead well being check ins with the whole team. It's a good opportunity to discuss lessons learned, mistakes made, discuss ideas for improvement, talk about what you are grateful for as a team or give encouragement.
- Recognise great work. Send an email to the team or group text.
- Social media can be a great tool to utilise to stay connected too. Sharing photos, videos, memes and quotes to keep things light and fun.



Virtual Teams can be equal to co-located teams in terms of trust and collaboration.

CONCLUSION

We are living through a workplace revolution! While there are challenges that will need to be overcome such as technology, online communication and maintaining human connection and mental health, there is also a great opportunity to reimagine what our teams and organisations can look like in order to be more productive. Every team can be productive from any location with video and audio conferencing, a virtual workspace tool like MS Teams, shared file storage and the internet.

There will be times where a central office is best for collaboration, times where remote locations are best and times where working on an individual task in a highly focused way will be best done away from a central location. Let's be flexible enough to work with that dynamic. Be brave enough to cater to each individual on your team and empower them to work and collaborate in the most productive way for them and with respect to the task at hand.

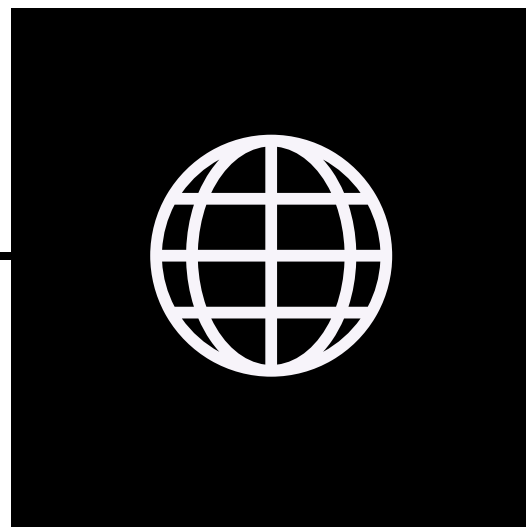
KEY TAKEAWAYS

BUILD THE RIGHT INFRASTRUCTURE

MANAGE YOUR ONLINE TOOLS

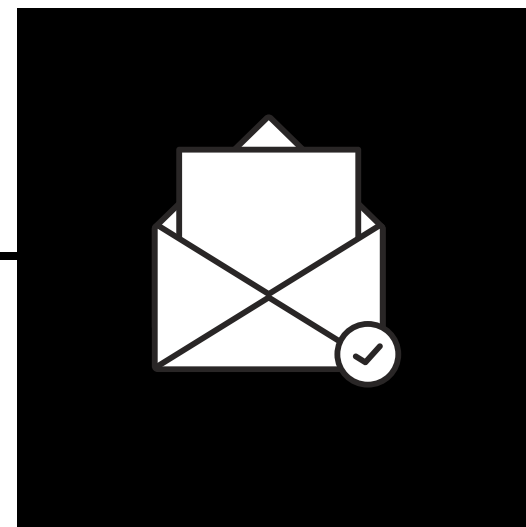
DEVELOP THE RIGHT PROCESSES

MAINTAIN HUMAN CONNECTION



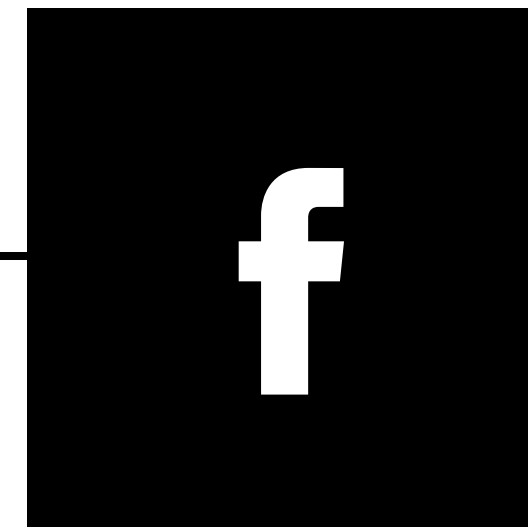
WEBSITE

productivityspecialists.com.au



EMAIL

info@productivityspecialists.com.au



FACEBOOK

[productivityspecialists](https://www.facebook.com/productivityspecialists)



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