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Remote Project Management Guide

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Introduction

Remote working has always been an important part of executing projects and programmes. This has increased in importance given that many organisations have their workforces working from home (WFH) due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

This guide has been created from a recent blog series focusing on many of the considerations to make remote working effective.

Pm Majik

CHAPTER 1

Overview

Guide to remote project management.

Remote project management: Guide to working from home

Remote working is quickly becoming the new normal. Roughly 70% of people work away from their office at least once a week across the globe. Knowing this, it's important to be able to manage a project with remote workers effectively.

There are plenty of reasons to choose to have a remote, or location independent team, working on your project. However, concerns do arise too surrounding issues like trust, productivity, being able to offer leadership, and data security.

In this article, we're going to look at the positives and concerns about remote working, as well as key issues you'll need to contend with when managing a remote team on a project.

The good and the bad

Running a remote project presents some unique benefits that can feed in to a successful project on many counts. These include:

- An increase in employee satisfaction
- A reduction in fixed costs
- Decreased carbon footprint of your project
- More access to industry leading talent

However, there are challenges to face, with some negative elements including:

- The need to invest in new systems and training for them
- A decrease in employee visibility which can breed trust issues
- Lack of a team structure and ethos

Key considerations for remote teams

Although it's a generally accepted principle that remote working will provide great benefits, it's important to plan appropriately. Your management and leadership will be different and there are fresh considerations.

Hardware requirements

You need to assess the technology your team needs to successfully work from home. Items such as:

- The right laptop
- Webcams
- Ergonomic mouse
- Digital sketchpads where needed
- Webcams, headphones, and microphones
- A suitable desk space

Need to be built into budgets and provided.

For more details please see Remote Project Management Hardware Requirements.

Health and safety

It's still the employer's responsibility to ensure your workers have a space conducive to their health and safety. Even if this isn't a legal requirement where you're based, it's certainly a moral one.

This covers a range of issues from ensuring your colleagues have an appropriate chair to making sure they're logging out to take breaks regularly.

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Health & Safety.

Security

Both online and real-world security should be a concern for remote workers. You'll need to have processes in place with your IT team to ensure standard updates are completed. Having the right anti-virus and anti-hacking measures in place is a legal requirement, too.

Further, if you're providing kit to your team, such as laptops or mobile phones, you need to make sure your insurance offers adequate coverage.

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Security Considerations.

Communication

Myriad communication software is available, some better than others. A communication plan is vital so that everyone knows which system is used for what purpose. You can take advantage of some of the following systems:

- Skype
- Zoom
- WhatsApp
- Slack
- Microsoft Teams
- Signal

And plenty more, depending on your needs.

For more information see Remote Project Management: Communication Considerations.

File management and transfer

There are a few different ways to manage your data. For a well-developed organisation you can have your remote team access a remote intranet and your bespoke systems.

Other options that enable large file transfers, storage, and downloads include:

- Google Drive
- OneDrive
- Dropbox
- IDrive
- MediaFire

For more information see Remote Project Management: File Management and Transfer.

Workflow management

Remote work should be about outcomes rather than hours logged. However, there are times that you need to see your team logged on and there is software that can help with that.

Having a log of assigned and completed tasks is also important, with systems such as Asana, Zapier, and Trello. Understanding the benefits of different tools is essential to ensure you get the right one for your project.

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Managing Workflows.

Scheduling

Freedom to choose your working hours is great, but you need to request the time of your project's team or a particular colleague from time to time. There are calendar apps that will let you book time with people and let them request your time, like:

- 10to8
- Google Calendar
- Calendly
- Teamweek

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Scheduling.

Employee engagement

Working away from a bricks and mortar office is very different to going into the office. Little perks like Friday coffee and cake or the annual Christmas party aren't really possible. You can still reward your team with things like organising local food delivery or gifting a streaming service subscription.

Ensuring your team are able to develop by harnessing a Learning Experience Platform will also engage a team. You need to also offer regular contact with their leader, whether it be for structured feedback and appraisal or a quick chat over lunch through Skype.

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Engagement.

Business continuity planning

Different considerations need to be made when you've got a remote team to work with. Ensuring security and integrity of your kit and data is one element of this.

You also need to be documenting your processes, having regular virtual meetings and making them available for later, and understanding your vulnerabilities.

For more details please see Remote Project Management: Business Continuity Planning (BCP).

Conclusion

Plenty of skills cross over from project management in an office to a fully or partially remote team. You'll need to get to grips with some new software and consider some different factors in your processes and decision-making. The payoff will be worth it with a happier and more productive team feeding into managing a successful remote working project.

CHAPTER 2

Hardware Requirements

Remote Project Management: Hardware Requirements

When embarking on a remote working project, hardware requirements should be tackled early on. They might take some time to get in place and will require research and configuration by your IT department.

It's not as simple as handing over a computer and sending your team member off to their kitchen, garden, or favourite café. Other hardware and accessories need to be provided, once you've figured out the minimum specifications needed.

There's plenty to consider, so here we're going to look at:

- Who's responsible for hardware for remote workers
- Which pieces of kit should be provided
- How to maintain hardware remotely

In order to give you a solid grounding in the hardware requirements for remote workers.

Who pays for the hardware – the kit?

One of the eternal dilemmas when managing a remote project is; who provides the hardware? This is going to vary depending on your contracts and tax implications in your locality. The business or the employee may get certain benefits from buying the kit that's need to work from home.

Depending on the type of work, there could be some very specialised and expensive kit that needs to be bought. A film editor, for example, will need a very powerful computer. A social media manager, on the other hand, will probably cope will with a mid-range laptop. Whether you should be asking either role to provide their own kit will depend on your agreement at interview.

A solution offered by many remote employers is providing an allowance for hardware that's topped up by the user. As long as you provide enough budget to get your minimum requirements, it's then up to the team member if they want to upgrade for personal use.

Specifications of hardware

Every role is different. What is an absolute essential for a administration job is barely a passing thought to an engineer. Here we'll explore the items you need to think about providing or otherwise budgeting for.

Computers

Should you reasonably expect a remote worker to have their own computer? It's not set in stone; your worker may be very comfortable with their own device or they may have a 10-year-old whirring chunk of computer.

What's important is the device being used has a processor and RAM that's up to any task you can reasonably ask for. Having fingerprint security could be a worthwhile investment to ensure data integrity and mitigate risks. A portable laptop will mean the tech can be moved between the office and home easily, too.

Communications

You still need to be able to stay in touch with your team, and the closest to a face-to-to meeting in a video conference call. This needs certain bits of kit, such as:

- A reasonably functioning webcam
- A good set of headphones – noise cancelling would be very useful
- A microphone, which can easily be part of a headphone set
- A light ring if you need to ensure your team looks presentable to external clients

A webcam might be standard in most laptops but don't take it for granted. If you team already has these items be sure to run a test on them to ensure they meet the standards that you need.

Accessibility

You're still responsible for providing a safe and comfortable working environment as an employer on a project. This stretches to providing tools like:

- An ergonomic mouse that plugs into a laptop
- A comfortable keyboard – laptop keyboards can get uncomfortable after prolonged use
- An additional screen if your team will be using multiple applications
- Digital sketchpads, tablets, and imaging equipment may be needed depending on the role

And ensuring that there is comfortable chair and desk at the right height is also important. A comfortable team member is a productive team member.

Maintaining your kit

Where your team is primarily located will be a big decider in how you deal with equipment maintenance. When you colleagues are able to come into the office, a laptop can be handed over to your IT team easily for updates and upgrades.

A fully location independent team that could stretch from Lisbon to Bali and everywhere in between will need a different solution. Providing an annual stipend to cover costs and consumables for hardware maintenance would be prudent.

Conclusion

Hardware requirements when managing a remote project go further than buying everyone a laptop. You need to make sure you understand what's expected from each role, understand the specifications of everything they will need, and decide on a plan for who will buy the kit and be responsible for maintenance.

Having the right hardware in place will prevent costly delays trying to source the right tech in the future and make the whole project run smoothly. You'll also be ensuring the team feels valued and cared for when you provide gear that makes their working environment more pleasant.

CHAPTER 3

Health & Safety

Remote Project Management: Health and Safety

Having a remote team working on your project, whether fully or partially, presents its own challenges. A key consideration when managing a project remotely is health and safety.

Although you're not going to be directly providing the work premises for your team, an employer is still responsible for health and safety. In countries like the UK, this is a legal requirement. Even if your jurisdiction doesn't have a legal requirement to monitor the health and safety of your remote workers, it's still a moral consideration.

Here, we'll explore:

- The underlying principles of health and safety for remote workers
- How to make an assessment of a workstation for a remote worker
- Ways to monitor the measures you're taking

Enabling you to be confident you're being a responsible manager for your team.

Health and safety for remote workers

UK-based employers are still responsible for normal health and safety measures, even if their staff work from home. If the period of remote work is only short-term there is no increased risk. For longer term or permanent working from home arrangements, proper assessments need to be carried out.

Most at-home working is computer based. This means the primary consideration for health and safety is going to be the use of display screen equipment (DSE).

There are other considerations, such as if your team are taking the correct breaks and only working the allowed hours and shift patterns as laid out under the Working Time Directive. Check your local requirements if you're not UK-based.

One of the biggest concerns noted by remote workers is feeling like they're missing out when not in the office. This can have an impact on mental health. It's important to check in on your team to assess their stress levels and that they're managing their workload.

Providing a safe environment

When it comes to health and safety, having an appropriate workspace is one of the biggest concerns for a manager. If your team is geographically spread out, you probably aren't able to carry out a desk assessment directly.

You can ask your team member to do this for themselves and raise any issues with you. If they choose to use a co-working space, café, etc then they'll need to make a brief assessment each time.

Things that need to be considered include:

- Keyboard – it needs to be detached from the screen unless portability is necessary – so a USB keyboard for a laptop in a home office would work – it needs to tilt, and be comfortable for the user
- Mouse or trackball – it has to be suitable for the user and able to be placed in a comfortable position that doesn't strain wrists
- Displays – the screen needs to be readable, without jitters or glare, have adjustable brightness and contrast, and be adjustable for tilt and angle
- Furniture – there needs to be enough space for everything your colleague needs, a chair that offers the right support, glare-free surfaces, and the ability to get the right posture
- Environment – airflow, lighting, noise, and temperature all need to be comfortable for your team member

Electrical testing

If you're providing the hardware for your remote team then it's your responsibility to have it tested for electrical safety. Again, this is a legal requirement within the UK so you should check your local labour laws. Even if it's not the law, it's good practice to show your team you care about their safety.

Monitoring remote workers

One of the key principles of remote work is that you trust your team to complete their tasks. Although having workflow managers in place to check the work is being done is helpful, having a timer or key-stroke logger for your team to use can be counterproductive; without trust they will last motivation.

At the same time, you need to ensure everyone is taking the right breaks and coping with their work. Work with your team to decide an appropriate monitoring system so you know they're not risking burnout.

Regular communication is key. Checking on your colleagues' mental health is important, as is having employee assistance systems, such as helplines, in place. You can also use the regular contact to monitor things their workspace and that their hardware and software is meeting their needs, too.

Conclusion

Having your team working from home doesn’t absolve you from health and safety obligations. When managing a remote project, health and safety must be looked at differently but still considered. You can ask your team to complete their own desk assessment, but your company will need to meet costs of reasonable adjustments. Any electrical kit you supply still needs to go through regular testing, too. As with many elements of managing a remote team, health and safety can easily be adapted with some creative thinking.

CHAPTER 4

Security Considerations

Remote Project Management: Security Considerations

Protecting your project against known risks is one of the keys to its success. One of the elements that is different when managing a project remotely is security.

Security considerations can take two forms, namely data security and the security of your hardware. Both have novel challenges when dealing with a project that is being ran remotely.

Here, we'll explore:

- The actions you need to take to ensure data security
- Systems that you can use to mitigate risk
- How to protect your equipment and hardware

Giving you an overview of the security aspects that you need to assess for your location independent team.

Keeping your data secure

A lot of the threats to your data are the same whether your team are working in the office or at home. You need to ensure that you mitigate risks such as:

- Hacks to your system
- Data breaches
- Ransomware infecting computers
- Data wipes due to hardware failure

Along with your IT team, there are some simple steps that you can take to prevent these as best you can.

In a closed system with defined and well-managed endpoints controlling your data streams can be easy. You need to be more sophisticated with a remote team, taking steps like:

- Managing your team's operating systems, ideally having everyone on Windows 10, with automatic updates enabled, and Windows Defender turned on – this should be more than sufficient security
- Enable cloud-based monitoring so your IT team can access everyone's desktop where necessary and monitor activity for anything suspicious
- Have all your software licenses checked to make sure they cover remote working and add new accounts where needed, this will ensure all updates can be received
- Ensure your servers have the right protection when allowing external access to their data flows

You should also make sure that your Acceptable Use Policy is appropriate for your remote workers. When a device is being used at home there's risk that a child might want to use it or it will be used to access Internet of Things (IoT) devices. Whether your security consultant thinks this is an acceptable risk will need to be determined.

Systems to ensure security

As well as making sure your existing software is robust and suitable for your project's team to work from home, there are new things that you can introduce to add more layers of security to prevent hacks or data leaks.

- You can investigate adding a 2FA system that will make sure secure actions are double authenticated
- The team can access a Virtual Private Network (VPN) as an extra layer of defence against hackers
- Install suitable firewalls and geo-blocking features that can cope with multiple locations logging in

You can also engage the services of a data security specialist to be sure you've covered all bases. Particularly if your team will be working with sensitive data, you want to be sure you're not exposing your client and customer information unnecessarily.

Physical security

The stories of government issued laptops being left on trains or in cafes haunts people in charge of data security. You can have the most robust software in the world, but you can't program against carelessness or the theft of a computer.

One simple way to mitigate risk when a device could get lost or stolen is to have all the data stored on a cloud system so the computer is basically a brick with login details. Sometimes this isn't always possible, and there is also inherent value in the devices, too.

When setting up a remote team you need to make sure you have adequate insurance. If you've already got a policy in place, be sure to update them on any new hardware you've bought into the company.

It's important to understand the terms on which devices used away from your office are covered. Ask your insurer:

- What security does your employee need to have at home in case of a claim of theft?
- Is unattended hardware covered, e.g. if a computer is stolen from a parked car?
- Will they cover the device if it's taken overseas and under what conditions?

And be sure that these details are clearly communicated to the people who you provide computers, graphic pads, tablets etc., too.

Conclusion

Looking after the software, data, and hardware on a remote project is different to an office-based project. Security when managing a remote team still needs to be as robust and well communicated to everyone.

Prepare your software to be protected against potential hacks or malicious software and make sure everyone who has a piece of kit provided by the project is insured and knows their responsibilities.

CHAPTER 5

Communication Considerations

Remote Project Management: Communication Considerations

Making sure that you team know exactly what needs doing is vital in any project. The need for communication when managing a project remotely is even more important; it's not as easy to know if someone has really understood you.

There are two key elements to a communication strategy when managing a project remotely: a robust communication plan and the right tools to implement it. We'll cover both issues here, discussing:

- The principles of a communication strategy
- How to split your communications effectively
- Some tried and tested communication tools

Giving you a path to follow when looking after a project and working from home.

Make a communication plan

When your team works remotely, you lose one of the big elements of communication – body language. It's also not quite so easy to have a quick chat, since remote working tends to have a strong focus on productivity.

You need to build a strategy that allows for your team to collaborate. There also needs to be a mutual understanding of how your team can raise any issues and how tasks will be allocated.

Some key elements of a communication plan for a remote team include:

- A range of communication tools with defined purposes
- Laying out expectations for response times
- Guidance on how to communicate urgency
- A requirement for personal user manuals – having your team layout how they work best

Where and when to communicate

You don't want your team to be constantly bombarded with chat notifications. On the flip side, you also want to be everyone confident speaking up when they have questions or something valuable to add.

Silo your communications so that important or urgent issues don't get missed. You also need to give your team a social outlet since they can't have a chat around the coffee machine.

You need to have a communication platform for:

- Planning and allocating tasks and deadlines
- Sharing and collaborating on documents
- Work email for clients and internal comms
- Video calls and conferences
- A virtual noticeboard
- Work related conversation
- Informal chat

And be sure that everyone has accounts, every piece of kit has the right license, and the whole team knows how to use the functions you need.

Although there are platforms that'll accommodate a range of these functions, it can help to keep some things separate. For example, using a completely different chat app for informal communication to your noticeboard should stop chat diverging off topic.

Getting the job done

There are hundreds, if not thousands of tools out there to facilitate communication for a remotely managed project. Each one will have its own limitations and stand-out features that you or your IT team should investigate before rolling it out.

You need to factor in things like how much it will cost, how scalable the technology is, and how user-friendly it is for your team. The level of security and encryption is also important since secure information is likely to be sent. Also, if you choose a communication tool that's too obscure, you might put off clients who don't want to deviate from what they know.

Some tools that are common for project management include:

- Trello, Jia, and Friday for setting out your tasks and timelines and allocating work across your team
- WhatsApp, Signal, and Slack for noticeboard and conversational style communications
- Office 365 and Google Drive for collaborating on documents and keeping everything in one place
- Zoom and Skype for video calls with a range of functions such as screen sharing and host control

All of which have their plus point along with feature that aren't quite perfect. Research is vital to know what is going to work for your team.

Conclusion

It’s vital that you are able to keep in touch with your team. You can’t ask about someone’s weekend as you share a ride in the lift when your team works remote. This type of chat can be emulated, as can other types of office communication. Laying out a plan for communication when managing a project remotely is going to be a big driver of success. Ensuring that you have the right tools for your project to communicate effectively, as we’ve suggested here will be the building blocks to your success.

CHAPTER 6

File Transfer & Management

Remote Project Management: File Transfer and Management

Without a filing cabinet or desk draw to turn to, it can be tough to keep track of documents. This is one of the many challenges that come along with managing a remote team: file management and transfer.

It's not as simple as getting a software subscription and away you go transferring your work. There are things to consider, like:

- How to prepare and run your file sharing system
- What features you want to have in your new filing tool
- Which file transfer and management tools are best

So that your project can run smoothly, avoiding some of the standard pitfalls. No one needs the nightmare of working on a now-defunct file because they didn't get the update buried in an email.

Setting up a file sharing system

It's not good enough to just have files flying over email constantly. This is how a team loses track of a document and hundred of comments start to drown out the work.

Having a cloud-based file transfer system will make things flow smoothly, and not place too much of a burden on the storage capacity of the laptops of you team. When starting a new project, you need to get your filing system ready to go.

Some key principles include:

- Be structured and keep any personal files you store on the same platform siloed from work, and ensure your team knows to do the same
- Be organised with a good file naming system so that no one will be scratching their head where to find a document
- Be prepared; set up your sharing settings so that the right people have access to view, comment, or directly edit anything you're storing

And be sure that your team all understand how the system works. Your logic for naming files needs to be clear for anyone who will be adding into the storage space.

What you want out of your new system

Not every file sharing system is the same. There are ones that just allow you to upload and download documents between users, there are others where you edit your documents directly on the cloud system.

A key consideration is how many collaborators a system can allow. Being scalable might be important to your project, whether now or in the long-run. You don't want to get caught short in the future by reaching a user cap.

The amount of storage you need will depend on your project. If you're producing lots of graphics, drawings, databases, etc then ensuring the system you go for can handle lots of data and allow you to expand your needs is really important.

Another feature that might not occur to you straight away is advanced search options. Having a tool that allows you to search not only file names, but their contents, can cut out lots of time hunting for the right document.

File management systems to consider

Google Drive

It's very likely to be familiar to all, or at least most of your team already, which is useful. Being able to create documents in the system is convenient for real-time collaboration.

Google Drive will work across most operating systems, and with a business subscription you and your team get 24/7 technical support.

One Drive

As with Google Drive, in OneDrive you get to create and edit documents directly in the cloud system. A big advantage is the familiar interface – it looks and feels just like Microsoft Office apps.

It comes with document recovery for those accidental deletions and 24/7 technical support, too.

Dropbox

One of the most famous file sharing systems, its reputation is built on its reliability. Your team can set it to auto-sync saving and uploads and it has lots of third-party app integration options.

The security layers of Dropbox, with extra encryption for businesses, is a standout feature.

IDrive

It may not be as well known as rivals, but it's super easy to use and has huge storage capabilities. It'll work across most operating systems and hardware and has solid encryption as well.

Packages for unlimited users and terabytes of storage at reasonable prices make IDrive an interesting proposition.

MediaFire

There are some very good price options for MediaFire with some hefty storage limits for the cost. It doesn't work across so many platforms and lacks a lot of integrations, but worth noting if you're looking for huge storage capacities.

Conclusion

Making sure everyone working on your remote project has access to the files and data they need is a very different process to working in a bricks and mortar office. For this task, the cloud is your friend. File transfer and management on a remote team will need new software tools and a different style of planning, but it's all eminently achievable.

CHAPTER 7

Managing Workflows

Remote Project Management: Managing Workflows

Making sure that everything gets done is what managing a project is all about. To effectively manage a remote team, workflow management can take on a new dimension.

Of course, you can still use your usual tools to know where you're up to and whether you're on track to completion. There are, however, tools available that will allow you to share your work in a clear and presentable way so everyone can access what they need.

This article will discuss:

- The challenges of managing your project's workflow on a remote project
- How some standard workflow management tools can adapt to online management
- Some of the new software available to manage your workflow online

To give you the overview you need to have your team thrive in its remote environment.

Managing workflow in a remote world

In your office you can have a map of your project for everyone to visualise the progress and have everything stored locally on your intranet. Having your team around you allows to do a quick check-in on a piece of work. Grabbing your team for a quick huddle to update on where everyone's up to takes a few minutes.

When you can't do what feels so natural as a project manager, you need to adapt. At the point where you're breaking down your project into tasks to assign, you'll need to think about things a little differently.

It may mean that a piece of work that would normally be done in a meeting moves over to be a document the team collaborates on over a day. The weekly coffee morning meetup will have to move to a conference call using your chosen communication software.

All of this needs to be built into your standard processes for managing your project – your old templates might need some reworking!

Adapting your standard practices

When it comes to managing your workflow, two of the most important tools you'll already be using are Gantt charts and RASCI matrices. You'd normally have this information stored on your office computer and accessible to those who need it.

You can still easily migrate these tools online, keeping them in an online file management system for example. There are also online versions of these formats that can have controlled sharing permissions, we'll cover some in a moment.

Your project plan can also go online as a standalone file. You can allow colleagues to update it or have access to it depending on your needs and your style of management.

How your team comes together will also need to be adapted. Meetings will turn to video conferences, a quick chat might take place on a chat app, and a brainstorming session transfer into a Google Doc. The way the tasks in your workflow get completed will be different, but they will still happen.

Software for workflow management

It's nice to stick with what you know best, and having your standard pieces of project management kit are definitely handy to fall back on. Using software to manage your team doesn't have to be a replacement for your tried and tested methods, but they can make things more intuitive and accessible to everyone.

Trello

Trello is a user-friendly project management app that isn't about to replace all of your high-level tools. It lets you assign tasks and deadlines and integrates well into other tools you might use like Google Drive or Dropbox. There's even a Gantt chart you can fill in.

Think of Trello as a complement to your current systems. Your team will be able to access the information that you need and you're not going to spend a long time getting to grips with it.

Asana

Customisation is the watchword for Asana. It's very much focussed on the workflow element of your project and doesn't have a load of bells and whistles you have covered elsewhere.

It'll take a little time to get set up but then your team will know exactly where they're up to. As a tool to keep on top of deadlines and activity, it works well.

Zapier

Zapier focusses on automating processes in your workflow. It's useful if you've got repetitive tasks or work that's heavily rule-driven.

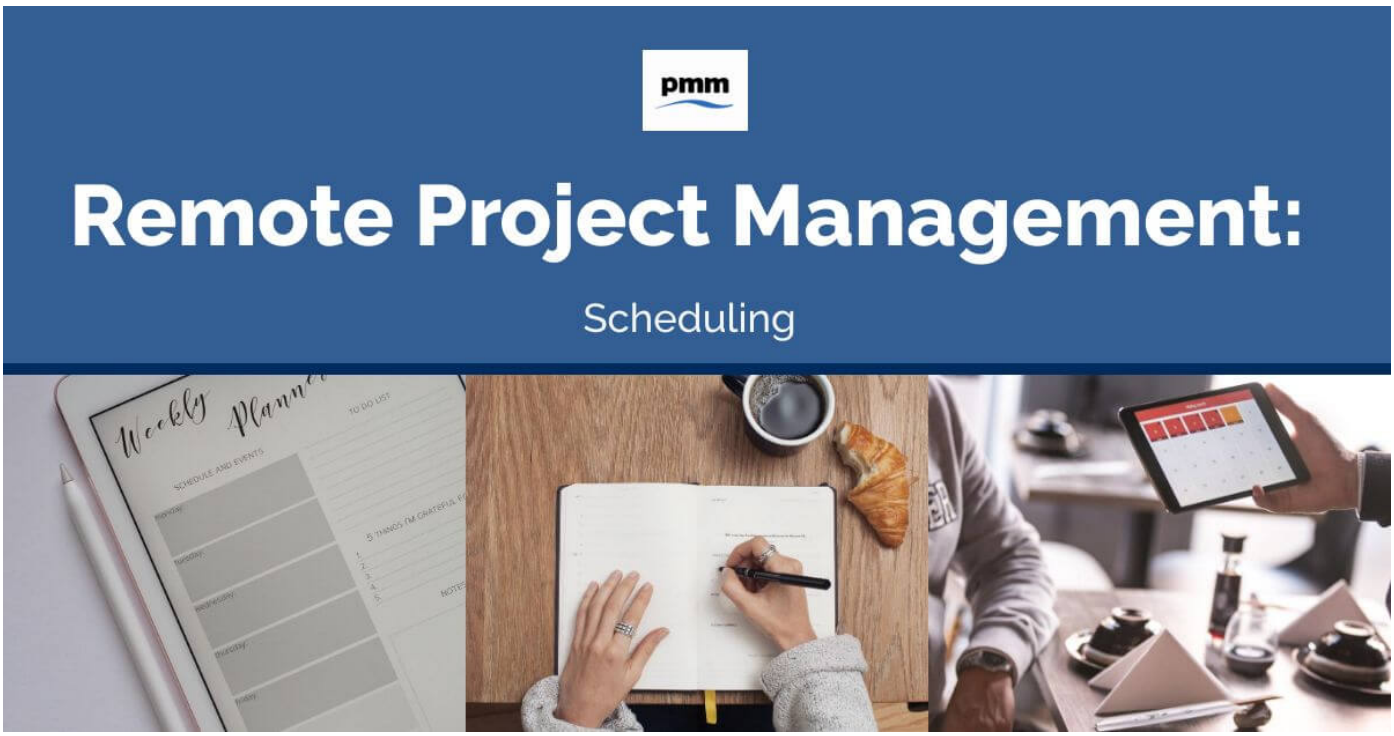
It integrates well with plenty of other apps so should fit with just about every other software tool you have. Its downfall is the pricing plan, with it getting more expensive the more your project begins to rely on it.

Conclusion

You're not going to throw out your workflow management tools to manage a remote project. You might need to find ways to make them more accessible or store them differently and change the inputs to suit remote working. There's software to help with the task too, but you can rest assured that your role as a project manager isn't going to be taken over by them any time soon.

CHAPTER 8

Scheduling



Remote Project Management: Scheduling

It's possible to emulate a lot of elements of the office when managing a remote project team; scheduling a lot of your activities will take a little more thought though. With everyone onsite, calling a quick huddle for an update or running an ad hoc collaboration session is simple.

Forward planning is much more important, even for little tasks, when your team are location independent. It can be easy to miss the vibrancy of an impromptu team gathering or a brainstorming session. These don't become impossible; you just need to work a little differently.

In this article, we'll cover:

- The things you need to take into account when scheduling
- Some techniques to help you get your scheduling right
- Software that you can use to make your schedule run smoothly

To ensure that you'll have the right people on the right Zoom call, at the right time.

Things to consider

Working 9-5 in a bricks and mortar offices has certain advantages. Being able to grab the person you want to have a 10-minute catch up with is pretty simple. You know, at least roughly, where everyone is and get an idea of their routines.

When you've not got eyes on people, all you really know is the work they produce, not how and when they do it. This isn't a problem; as long as you do the work it doesn't really matter when you wake up. Except when it does.

It's perfectly fine to still need to have live conversations with your team. It just needs to be planned better because your team will be working differently. When you need the time of one, some, or all of your team you need to think about:

- Time zones: your team could be based internationally but there'll be a sweet spot in the day that works for everyone – you just need to find it
- Work patterns: remote working is all about flexibility. Your team might choose to work overnight when creativity flows, they might finish up in time or the school run; understanding this will help book time in
- Notice requirements: some your team can jump into a meeting with ten minutes notice, others might need a week to rejig childcare arrangements. Make sure you know how soon you can make changes

Make it happen

It can start to sound complicated – knowing who can be where and when. You might feel like you're working around your team a little too much. There are things that you can do to make things easier to plan.

- Have set times that everyone needs to be present and available for meetings and collaboration sessions
- Lock-in a long-term schedule, so everyone knows when their one-to-one session is, what time weekly coffee and catch-up is, and when the team meeting is
- Ask for a personal brief from everyone outlining their general working patterns and how quick they can make adjustments. Store it in your shared systems so everyone knows how to get their colleagues' time
- Set a holiday policy; some people might do everything over three days and take a long weekend regularly; make sure everyone knows how to notify about full days away

Software to help

Google Calendar

If you've already chosen to use Google Drive for your document storage and Google Hangouts for some of your communications, Calendar will integrate smoothly. You can book in regular slots and have your team share their schedules with everyone. It's easy to use and does the job well.

Microsoft Outlook Calendar

When your storage, email, and document ecosystem use the Microsoft suite, then Outlook Calendar is a natural option. It will integrate appoints from email so it's easy to tell everyone when you need them with one message. Calendars are shareable so everyone can keep up with who's where. A natural choice if you're using Office and OneDrive already.

Calendly

Established remote workers might have their schedules on different systems; Calendly will allow your team to integrate everything. It's a simple interface that has a lot of power behind it. If your hardware plan includes a bring your own device policy, you can be sure that this app will work across anything your team has.

Conclusion

Remote work is so popular because of the flexibility in location and schedule that it can bring. It can feel like a massive headache to make schedules when you manage a remote team but it doesn't have to be.

As long as you have a plan in place and harness the power of software, you can still manage schedules quickly and effectively.

CHAPTER 9

Engagement

Remote Project Management: Engagement

Managing a project remotely brings about a host of new challenges; keeping a team engaged will take a little bit of adaptation. You'll find a lot of the principles are the same, you'll just need to find new ways to communicate to engage your team on a remote project.

Here, we'll look at:

- Why engaging a remote worker looks different
- The process that you'll need to adapt
- Some real-world examples of how you can engage your remote team

Making sure that you're ready to bring your team into the business and make their work as rewarding and fulfilling as any onsite job.

Motivating a remote team

One of the biggest concerns of remote workers is the fear of missing out, or FOMO. People who aren't always visible in the office feel like they can be forgotten about when it comes to rewards and promotions.

As a leader, you need to make sure that every person on your team understands that they add value. There'll be some people who just want to see the difference they make to the bottom line, whilst others will want to feel appreciated on a more human level. It's up to you to know what style works for your team and offer it.

Key things to do differently

The basics of what works to engage a team don't change, although you're probably a few points ahead already by offering the flexibility of remote working. As with many elements of managing a remote team, it's all about finding new, tech-driven ways to do the same things.

Onboarding

The process to bringing in a new team member is crucial to engaging them long-term. It's no good sending over a welcome manual in PDF format and a tired corporate video from last decade.

You still need to offer:

- Face to face meetings
- Content presented in an interesting way
- Quizzes and tests to check understanding
- Time for the new colleague to make personal connections
- Lots of interactivity with material and people

So the new recruit can learn about the project and their role in it.

Contact

With no coffee machine chats or few minutes in the lift together, finding out someone's favourite TV show or how many dogs they have isn't so easy. As a remote manager it can feel like every minute needs to be spent on producing an outcome.

Building relationships is vital, and it's ok to schedule time for informal, or semi-formal conversations. Ensuring that you have plenty of time for your team to have one-to-one or small group contact with you and each other will make everyone feel valued and part of the team.

Career path

An office setting makes the internal hierarchy visible and it's easy for employees to see what the person on the next rung up does each day. It's not so easy in a remote team and this can cause a disconnect in everyone's career path.

The options for career progression still need to be laid out and provided as options. Having a mentoring scheme to connect everyone with people higher and lower than them on the ladder will ensure job role familiarity.

You need to make sure everyone knows how they can build up their contribution to the project. Providing your team with KPIs that show how their work produces positive outcomes will give them something to aim for.

Make work rewarding

When you can't bring in the coffee on a Monday morning or go for a working lunch, you need to be creative in how to reward your team. Making them feel valued is going to make them want to produce value for you.

We've put together some ideas that you can use to make your team valued for a job well done:

- Add credit to ecommerce accounts such as Deliveroo or Amazon
- Send gift baskets of products they like from local suppliers
- Provide a streaming service subscription
- Where possible, arrange an offline meeting for fun activities
- Have goodies delivered and hold an informal, online gathering outside of work hours
- Offer online training course subscriptions

By using this type of reward you'll be ridding the idea of FOMO from your team because they'll feel truly valued and considered.

Conclusion

Engaging your team in a remote project isn't all that different to an in-office team, on a conceptual level at least. What's important is finding way to adapt all of the methods you've learned already. Remote workers in general are more motivated and engaged, so you're starting from a good position. Be sure to maintain that positivity with and effective introduction to the company, regular contact, and clear vision of how they can grow within the project and beyond.

CHAPTER 10

Business Continuity Planning

Remote Project Management: Business Continuity Planning (BCP)

Whilst working remotely is part of many business continuity plans, when you're managing a fully remote project there are different considerations. A remote project's business continuity plan will look different in many ways.

It's vital to have a plan for business continuity to ensure the integrity and resilience of the work that you're doing. As you plan your remote project, resilience needs to be baked in at an earlier stage.

In this article, we'll cover:

- The overarching technical and security concerns
- How to start to build your business continuity plan
- Making sure you're able to maintain your project integrity long-term

To ensure that your project has planned for the worst and can still achieve its end goal.

How remote working makes continuity different

Having full control over your data setup is one of the things that can make a business reluctant to go fully remote. A remote team will have an array of different hardware that all needs to be compatible with your systems and be able to log in to your remote servers.

Rather than a wired connection in office, remote working introduces a potential security issue with the potential for public internet connection being used or home router issues.

Because your data is going to be handled differently and accessed through a range of terminals, you need to build this into your plans and policies. Some important considerations to include will be:

- Ensuring all users maintain a data connection with servers, even when not actively in use whilst working
- Turning on auto-sync functions for cloud storage when necessary
- Checking through your data and appropriate use policies to make sure they are relevant for remote workers

Creating and adapting your business continuity plan

The general structure of your business continuity plan will remain the same – you're creating a plan to ensure your project can continue, no matter what may happen. You need to plan for issues as diverse as:

- Cyberattacks
- Energy use restrictions
- Natural disasters
- Fire and flood

All of which will need to be managed differently with a geographically distributed team.

First, you'll need to identify the critical people, hardware, and software that's needed to keep the project running. As well as whichever project specific software you use, any scheduling or communication software will need to be taken into account too.

Once you know what and who's needed to keep the project running, you need to convene a crisis team. These people will be in charge of managing elements of the plan.

Without a physical presence being possible, a key factor in the team will be how to get in touch with each other. Having a chat group solely for continuity purposes is a good idea.

Making your business continuity plan future-proof

A remote team will have more potential vulnerabilities so you should be working through your continuity plan more regularly. Once you've got the plan in place, it needs to be tested. This can be done with a virtual run through, with different team members offering feedback, or live testing if it's possible.

The locations, contact details, and hardware of your team is going to be more fluid. This needs to be accounted for with proper policy and process to capture new phone numbers or laptop serial numbers for example.

Storing your plans needs to be considered too. Printed manuals might once have been a useful contingency in the event of server failure, but in a remote team having your processes stored on a thumb drive or an alternate cloud storage system would be a modern equivalent.

Conclusion

Your business continuity planning for a remote project will be different mainly in how often it changes. The team you work with are likely to use new devices frequently, move about more, and there will be different connections to your server to contend with.

As well as the technical aspects, having people located in different parts of the country or world means different challenges to understand. Be prepared from the outset and have robust processes in place to mitigate problems and maintain resilience will ensure your project works well no matter the challenge.

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