Remote Team Management

**Thrown into the Deep End-
A Guide to Building and Managing
your new Remote Team**

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Introduction

Thrown into the Deep End

A Guide to Building & Managing your new Remote Team

Let's admit it, business leaders, managers, or entrepreneurs are not really fond of surprises. Imagine being caught off-guard in a situation, where you just say to yourself 'I didn't see this coming.' Dreary, isn't it? The recent **global COVID-19 pandemic** threw us into one such deep end of remote working. Most of us weren't prepared for this sudden transition. Managing a remote team is a lot different than supervising one in co-located offices.

Julie Wilson, the founder of the Institute for future Learning and instructor at Harvard University couldn't explain it better- "Managing a virtual team requires managers to double down on the fundamentals of good management, including establishing clear goals, running great meetings, communicating clearly, and leveraging team members' individual and collective strengths."

This eBook will serve as an ultimate guide for these managers and help them sail successfully through these testing waters. Starting from the basic concept of **remote team management,** to the right tool and courses for effective remote working, the eBook has covered all the nitty-gritties in great detail.

Let's begin by understanding the fundamentals:

Chapter 1

What is remote team management?

Remote Team Management is as simple as the name sounds, the task of managing virtual teams. Up until today, the concept was few and far wide, but as working situations are evolving and with the ongoing mandated lockdown, it is a concept that becomes more and more common.

Now that managers and employees are experiencing the benefits **remote work** has to offer, there's no harm in accepting that **remote work is the 'new normal'.**

Traditionally, remote working is associated with terms such as "Offshore teams" or "Outsourcing". The reality is that working from home (as many of us are doing now) is also a form of remote working.

These scenarios all require management and leadership, as with any traditional job, and this concept refers to "Remote Team Management". It is crucial to be able to create effective management techniques in these situations as virtual working, even though looks all rosy, brings with itself a unique set of challenges.

Leaders are experiencing these challenges more so ever than before with the sudden shift in work culture. But, before we start listing them, let's understand the **emergence of remote team management,**

02 The Difference between Remote Team Management and Distributed Team Management

Even though I've been using the two interchangeably, there are key differences between the two terms.

First, in **leading remote teams,** not everyone has to be distributed away from each other necessarily. A remote team makeup can often just have 2 or 3 people that are working remotely while the majority of the team may be working from the main office. So the term 'remote' doesn't necessarily need to apply to everyone and can only be for a portion of the team.

Distributed teams, on the other hand, is when everyone is separately located away from each other. So for example, you could have one team member in Sydney, with another in London and a third in Paris – but they're all still working towards the same common goal. A manager needs to monitor distributed team management carefully but at the same time, be flexible. They should be able to take elements like cultural or time zone differences into consideration.

Now that we have covered the basics, it's time to **unleash the tips and tricks** that will help you manage these teams more efficiently than ever.

Let's begin,

# Chapter 2

Proven practices for managing your remote team

Those who have just entered the realm of remote work know that managing a virtual team is not a piece of cake. **Communication,** which is effortless in co-located offices, is one of the **biggest challenges in a virtual set-up.** This is just one instance, we will know more when we delve further.

Managers don multiple hats in a virtual set-up. However, you can't be everywhere at once. One can therefore say that remote working is the perfect set up to let your ability to delegate, lead and communicate shine! If you are green to the concept of remote team management, these tips will definitely come in handy,

The **first step is to start by keeping your goals in sight at all times.** Cap the amount of work you take on in a particular week (or month, if you're more of a strategic than tactical planner), identify their priorities and mark them according to how critical and time-intensive they are.

For example, if a task is urgent and time-consuming, it should be given the highest priority for everyone concerned. This way, they too can push busywork down the queue so that it doesn't take up most of the bandwidth during business hours.

You can **leverage these tips to manage a remote team seamlessly,** enhance their productivity, and lead them to succeed. These practices are:
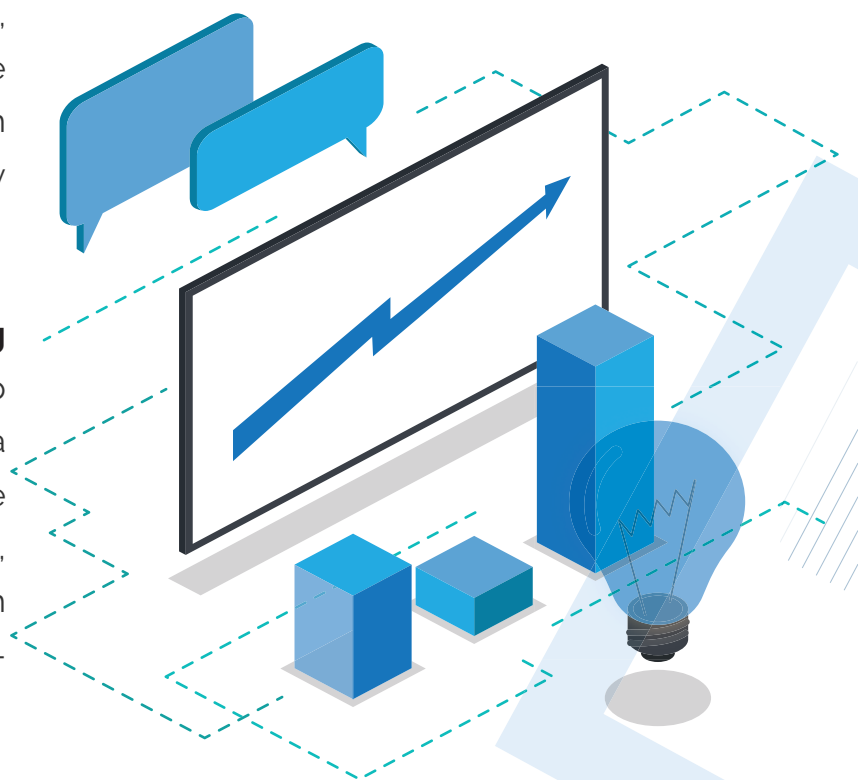
01 Standardize weigh-ins

Given the different time zones and work shifts of employees, managers should set aside a fixed hour for daily meetings. Only then can your staff clear their schedules to be in on the conference call. You can even set it up as a recurring event to automate the alerts.

02 Organize communication modes

Since communication is a mix of asynchronous and synchronous, you'll need to prioritize the channel, frequency and mode through which talks happen, be it one-on-one or group discussions. Fix the agenda and action items prior to the calls so everyone is on the same page. This keeps the conversation on course and prevents it from becoming a source of work interruption and personal productivity.

03 Leverage the right tools

The onus lies on you as a remote team manager to keep your teams effective and cohesive in your physical absence. The kind of tools you use is a template for the engagement that follows. Apart from email and file sharing, it makes sense to invest in a Slack or any of its alternatives so that you and your teams are all in one workspace.

04 Take employee well-being seriously

Prolonged periods of working without social contact can adversely impact an employee's mental well-being. *In fact, about 20% of full-time remote workers report struggling with both loneliness and collaboration.*

Organize virtual lunch or coffee meets, or even some team-building activities to establish a safe space for your members to open up. These teasers let them flex their creative muscle while keeping teammates connected to each other.

05 Clarify expectations

Vague goals have no place in remote work. As a manager, you should set expectations around **SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely) goals.** Your teams are then clear on what they have to do. Besides, it keeps business hours all about work and lets your workers unplug afterwards.

06 Focus on outcomes, not in-seat Hours

Many managers worry that the absence of face-to-face supervision is detrimental to employee productivity. This arises from the logic that what can't be seen cannot be managed.

But research shows that this fear is unfounded, with 76% of founders reporting sustained or increased productivity levels.

This indicates it's high time we focused on the outcomes rather than effort hours. After all, your employees are accountable for the work and not for how long they spend on their seat.

07 Enable and Equip

For work to progress, the working conditions have to be favourable for every member of your team. If only one half of your team is mobilized and ready to hit the ground running while the other half is experiencing technical downtime, remote teams get even further siloed. Run inventory on the hardware and software requirements so that your team has everything it needs.

Besides these useful tips, the **3 P's of the remote team** make the recipe for a successful and empowered virtual workforce. Let's find out here.
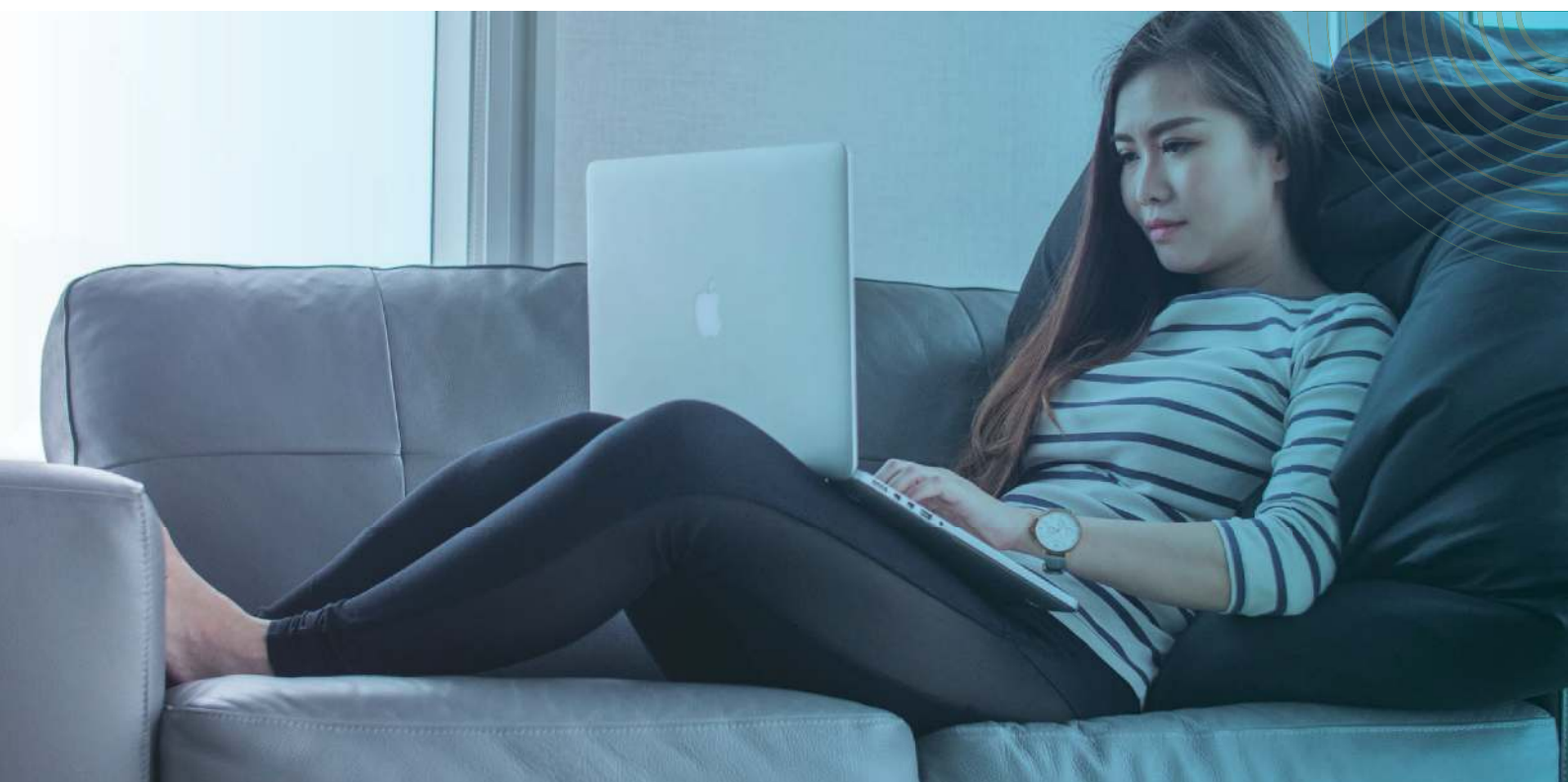
Chapter 3

The 3 P's of remote team managerial success

People, processes and platforms- All three are interwoven.

A remote work setup is destined to succeed with an understanding of **team dynamics.** Only when you have the right blend of doers, with channelized workflows, and sufficient integrations to enable easy file-sharing, conversation, and collaboration, can the team work in harmony and produce results.

01 Team

First things first, your remote team must comprise people who are **trustworthy doers.** Where there's trust, there is a guarantee that your team will fulfil their commitments and deliver.

It cultivates a culture of gratitude that recognizes and appreciates exceptional workers.

02 Size up requirements

If every line of work requires full-time staff, you run into more losses from the permanent overhead tacked onto your payroll for one-off projects. Therefore, it is essential to **assess the workload and nature of work** so that niche or one-time services are passed onto contingent workers.

Besides eliminating inefficiencies, it taps into a diverse body of skills and expertise that can be hashed out online, while freeing up your permanent staff for high-visibility work.

03 Create a process plan

Think of it as a solution to the question "how you work" rather than the details behind the structure. **Cluster your teams by competence level and experience** so that they can collaborate for a particular task while having full autonomy over the roadmap for individual elements within that task. This reduces the amount of back and forth.
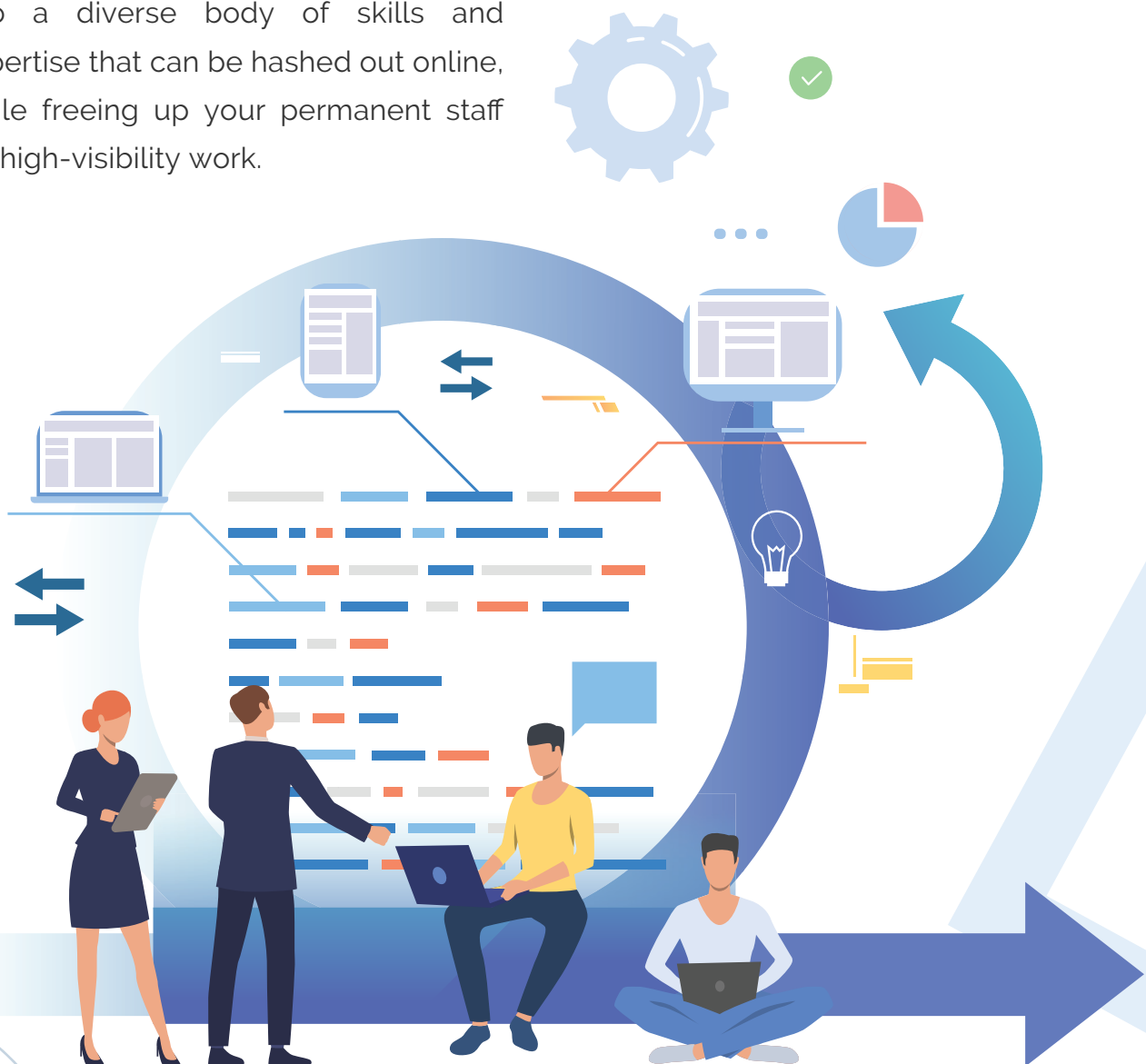
Chapter 4

Remote communication etiquette

" **Effective and seamless communication is the bread and butter of remote work set-up.**

Communication etiquette plays a vital role in virtual meetings, be it a daily stand-upor a one-on-one with your employees. How you convey your message, what tools you use, and how you avoid the common mishaps set the tone of the entire conversation.

You can follow these **etiquette** for a professional and clear communication:

01 Daily Team Stand-Up

The most common and frequent meeting is often given the least thought. **Daily stand-ups are generally short, to-the-point, and targeted,** and do not require any other formalities. And rightly so! It's all about efficiency here and to ensure everyone's heading the right direction with their work.

While conducting them remotely, it's essential to be aware of a few key things:

I. Conduct them at the same time each morning

II. Make sure your video is on: to humanize the meetings and to ensure your interactions are crisp and clear.

III. Team stand-ups not one-on-ones: A group discussion gives you a chance to boost team morale, enhance collaboration and team connectivity.

02 Team Onboarding

Onboarding a new recruit at your brick and mortar office is easier than onboarding one virtually. This is a tricker one, especially when you are an amateur to the world of remote work. But this cannot go wrong as it decides your firm's reputation in the eyes of the new joinee.

So, onboarding is all about structure and hand-holding. Your **communication etiquette should reinforce warmth and clarity** as much as possible.

Here are a few points:

I. Video communication: Managers must communicate with the new employees via video conferences to make them feel they belong to the team.

II. Structure the training and keep them in the loop: A structured training schedule can be emailed to the new recruit to keep them updated and ready.

III. Pairing them with a mentor: Make sure to have a hand-holding buddy with them for the first few weeks to help them understand the firm's work culture and habits.

What Tools and Communication Channels Should you use?

When you are setting up a virtual work office, it's imperative that you wisely select your **communication toolkit.** Even though there are numerous channels, it doesn't mean more is always better.

It's crucial to only have a handful of communication channels that work for you and your team and that too each channel should be used for different scenarios.

Here's the breakdown:

Rely more on asynchronous channels-

Asynchronous communicationis a communication exchange that doesn't happen in real-time- so they constitute emails and voice messages. And let's be honest, a lot of meetings and phone conversations can often be simply resolved by an exchange of a few emails.

Adopting asynchronous communication ensures there's no miscommunication, all the points that need attention are documented eliminating the need to be on call every time.

Use Skype and Zoom for only Checkpoints.

Reserve **Skype** and **Zoom** conversations for two things.

I. Create a checkpoint for Meeting Agendas to see how a project is moving along and moving in the right direction.

II. To clarify any issues that aren't possible through asynchronous methods.

Anything past these two reasons is overkill and generally eats into the productive time of both the manager and the team.

Rule of three- Less is More

Three is often the magic number, and that's definitely the case with your communication channels. Often selecting multiple channels to make up for the lack of physical interaction can lead to overkill. But, in this case, one must note that less is always more. Also, you might end up wasting time tracking your previous important conversations.

Don't worry! We all face it. So, we learnt how setting boundaries for different types of conversions can help. Here's how:

Slack
For **file sharing,** project chats, and informal conversation.

Skype
For **clarifying conversations** that aren't being resolved through Slack. Occasionally for one to one stand-ups too.

Zoom
For **group sessions.** This includes practicing for internal presentations, weekly stand-ups, and check-ins and team collaboration sessions.

Now email communication etiquette is still followed but primarily for client interaction, but internally we only use the magic three!

Communication Mishaps and How to Avoid them

It all looks exciting when you begin remote working. But, the reality hits hard when you face miscommunication issues with your team.

It can really be blown out of proportion when communicating remotely, which means it's imperative to minimize such mishaps – especially if it's during the middle of an important meeting.

These are some mishaps that perhaps, only few haven't faced:

" Sorry,
I was on Mute "

How could I not add this one? Speaking while on mute is an innocent mistake I make on the daily basis. While generally harmless, it can get a little annoying when you're half-way through emphatically explaining something, do you realize that no one can hear you.

I make it a **rule of thumb not to be on mute** for as many meetings as I can, especially during daily stand-ups. It ensures I'm in a quiet place, and it means I'm giving my 100% attention to the conversation and not doing something on the side (i.e., checking emails).

" Crap,
I wasn't on Mute! "

You definitely don't want the opposite scenario. The less common yet fatal scene is speaking while thinking you're on mute- generally saying something risky or questionable that could get you in hot water.

Once again, I have been the culprit of this more often than I'm proud of. My solution to this? The same as the one above, don't be mute in the first place. It makes sure you are in a **quiet environment** and will force you to have your **full attention** to any of your calls.

Video is your best friend.

Face to face interaction always beats anything else, hands down. There's a reason why anti-remote working crusaders prefer in-person interaction, and it's because of this.

As already mentioned, synchronous communication i.e. face to face interactions should only take place when asynchronous means don't help.

Chapter 5

How to find the right balance when using tech for your team.

If you work in a traditional office, between commutes, water breaks, lunches, and formal meetings, you get many opportunities throughout your day where you can detach from the digital realm. However, when you have started managing your remote team, chances are that you spend almost all of your workday at the computer.

But why is a digital detox ? It is because you need to balance your intake of software tech with no-screen time. Simply put, it helps you **avoid screen fatigue** and the **negative effects of technology.** Having to focus on a pixelated screen for hours on end creates a layer of mental and emotional exhaustion, eye strain, and muscle fatigue.

So what can you do?

Follow these **six effective strategies** to find the right balance:
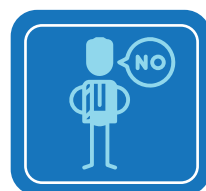
Say NO to 'Zoom Fatigue'

Zoom fatigue is one of the most used phrases post-COVID. Even though you can always video-call your colleague, doesn't mean you should. You should use substitutes like emails, phone calls, or voice messages to minimize excessive screen time.

Adjust screen brightness & other settings

Consider these 3 most important settings to reduce eye-strain and headaches:

- Screen brightness - optimize it according to your workstation

- Color temperature - adjust your screen to emit less blue light and more of red light

- Contrast - you should able to distinguish between what you are reading or typing

Avoid unnecessary meetings

*Show that if you are a part of upper management you end up spending **50% of your time** on meetings, and **35%** if you are a middle manager.*

This means half of your day is spent over meetings and can even lower your productivity. So minimize the unnecessary meetings and keep the important ones crisp and clear.

Take the 'old-school' route

Using notepad instead of word doc, sticky notes instead of to-do list apps, physical whiteboard instead of the digital one and so on can help you take those necessary digital breaks. **Old school practices can never get boring!**

Create a plan and stick to it

Task management can keep you from working beyond business hours. If you have a well-prioritized to-do list in front of you, you will have clarity on what needs to be done.

Chapter 6

Why remote work culture building matters?

On your way from physical workspace to virtual work set-up, maintaining the work culture becomes more important than ever. Why? Because it keeps your **team engagement** alive, keeps every employee on the same page, and **sets behavioral patterns** for different scenarios.

Whether a physical or virtual workspace, building culture starts with a process called "values blueprinting." Leaders are interviewed for their insights on what they think and believe in, making for positive work culture.

These inputs include:

1. **Purpose** served by their company's products and services.
2. **People** who are a source of inspiration to them.
3. **Process** for employee recognition, mediation, and conflict resolution.
4. **Change** management goals.
5. **The direction** of company growth.

These are assessed by a separate value committee that ensures the right people embody the desired remote work culture. It sets a precedent for hiring processes.
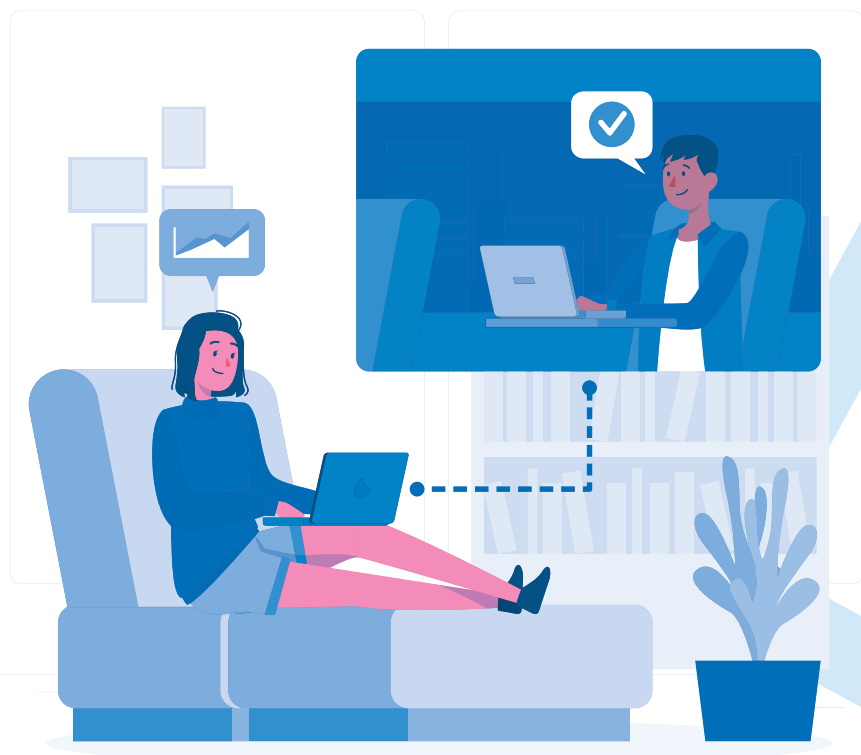
> *Values blueprinting helps recruiters onboard people who are not only competent for the role but also abide by these values.*

The **right remote work culture** recruits and retains top talent, **improves work satisfaction,** and **boosts productivity.** It gives your employees the cues to respond to situations and affirms if the actions they take are correct. This applies regardless of if you've just started or have been working for the company for several years.

The **factors that shape organizational remote work culture** include, but are not limited to:

☞ **Outcomes:** The **results achieved,** which indicate whether or not your employees perform in sync with what leadership expected.

☞ **Attentiveness:** Your **degree of awareness** of ongoing or previous issues and what troubleshooting measures to take up.

☞ **Recognition and benefits administration:** Standardize the **process for awarding incentives** for work performance.

☞ **Equality: Fairness in conduct and appraisal** without discriminating on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, and disabilities.

☞ **Hierarchy:** Hierarchy dictates the **structure, reporting lines, authority, and responsibilities.** It indicates areas you will and won't compromise.

☞ **Balance of power:** Strikes a balance between **risk-aversion** and **change compliance.**

A right mix of tools to achieve each of these will help you **enhance efficiency and performance,** thereby leading to project's success.

Here is the must-have tool inventory to lead your team to succeed:

Chapter 7

10 must use tools to build your remote team

Don't worry, we're not going to include the obvious solutions- looking at you Zoom, MS teams and Slack. But solutions that are unique and have a specific approach to resolving the often specific problems that remote team working causes.

1 Friday: Workflow Management App

The benefits- Easy to adapt templates and **workflows** are imperative to smoothen the often clunky communication rituals for remote teams. We predict such remote team management tools to be increasingly popular especially in distributed team setups.

Pricing: Friday's pro and business editions are priced at $6 and $9 per month per person. The free version lets you try it out with limited workflows, and unlimited users.

2 Cloverpop- Decision Tracking App

What problem do they solve for teams– Cloverpop for Slack which lets remote teams find, track and weigh in on decisions. This means creating polls and announcements to get faster approvals.

Major benefits: Decisions are easy to lose track of, more so when the majority of the workforce is remote. We like how simple it is to get started on. No one can miss any important work update ever thanks to the **visibility boost.**

Pricing: free with Slack.
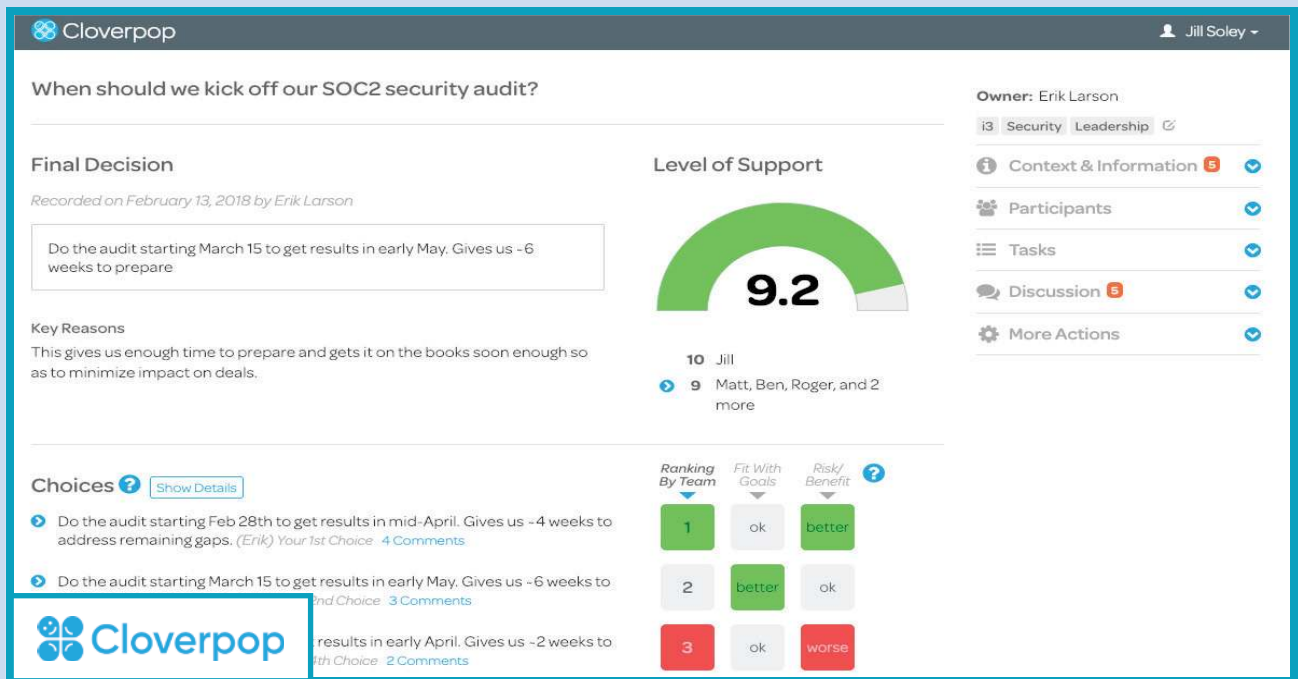
3 Mindful: Team Performance Tracking app

What problem do they solve for teams: Mindful keeps sprint retrospectives in one place, letting remote teams maintain accountability and run different scenarios with pre-built and custom templates.

Major Benefits: We like how easy it is to collect feedback before a meeting session starts. If something doesn't make sense, you can set up a video call and quickly run through your doubts.

Pricing: GBP 2 per user per month for a premium license. Request for the enterprise edition to explore with a greater degree of freedom.
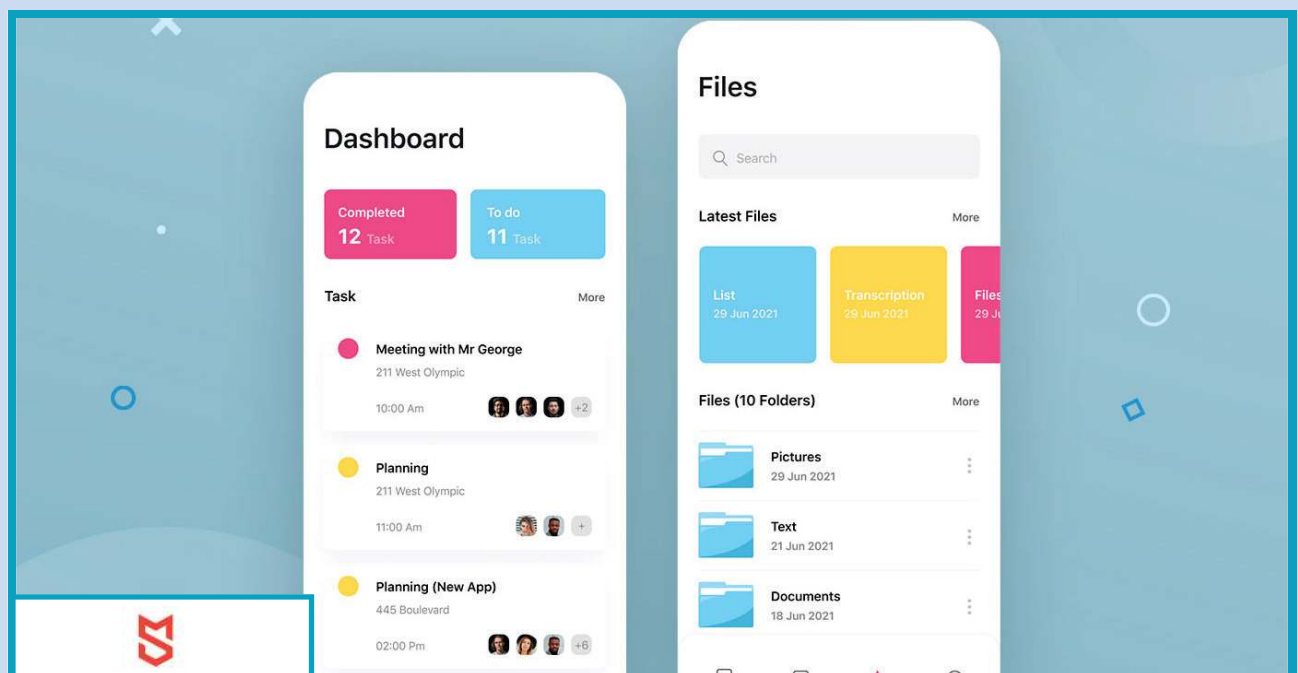
4 Quip: Productivity Management

What problem do they solve for teams: Quip brings transparency into sales planning and account management for service and sales teams working remotely.

Major benefits: We like the **case swarm feature** Bwhich lets remote teams work together on building cases and running scenario analyses. It's a great way to prioritize leads and **enhance sales enablement!**

Pricing: The starter pack costs $10 while the enterprise edition is $25 per user per month. For a more custom quote, you can get in touch with the experts for Quip for Customer 360.

5 Blink : The Employee Engagement App for Frontliners

What problem do they solve for remote teams: Blink is a mobile employee management application that keeps remote workers connected and engaged.

Major benefits: Blink makes remote work seem less remote with its own **BlindFeed, theming and people directory features.** We liked the intranet-based content management feature, simply called 'hub', where remote employees can find documentation such as work policies and guides. The platform is great for keeping the **distractions to a minimum** while enabling you to **maintain your comradery.**

Pricing: The business version is priced at USD 3.4 per user per month. For a more custom quote, you can opt for the Enterprise edition which comes with premium support and more features than the one in the business package.

6 Troop Messenger: Remote Messaging application

What problem do they solve for teams: Troop messenger is an audio and video calling tool that simplifies one-on-one and group meetings for remote teams.

Major Benefits: Besides enabling people to schedule meeting calls, Troop messenger also lets you **enable read receipts to your messages** so that the member you're messaging knows it's important. I liked the **orange member feature** which lets you add members and collaborate with vendors and clients alike.

Pricing: The Premium costs you just USD 1, while the enterprise and self-hosting options are priced at USD 2.5 per user per month. Quite a steal for the features it comes with!

7 Rescuetime: Time Management app

What problem do they solve for teams: Rescuetime is a time management platform for remote teams that lets them stay focused on the priorities while on the clock.

Major benefits: We like how you can pick up even if you were briefly offline with a one-click feature that catches you up.

**Pricing–** $72 after the standard 14-day free trial.
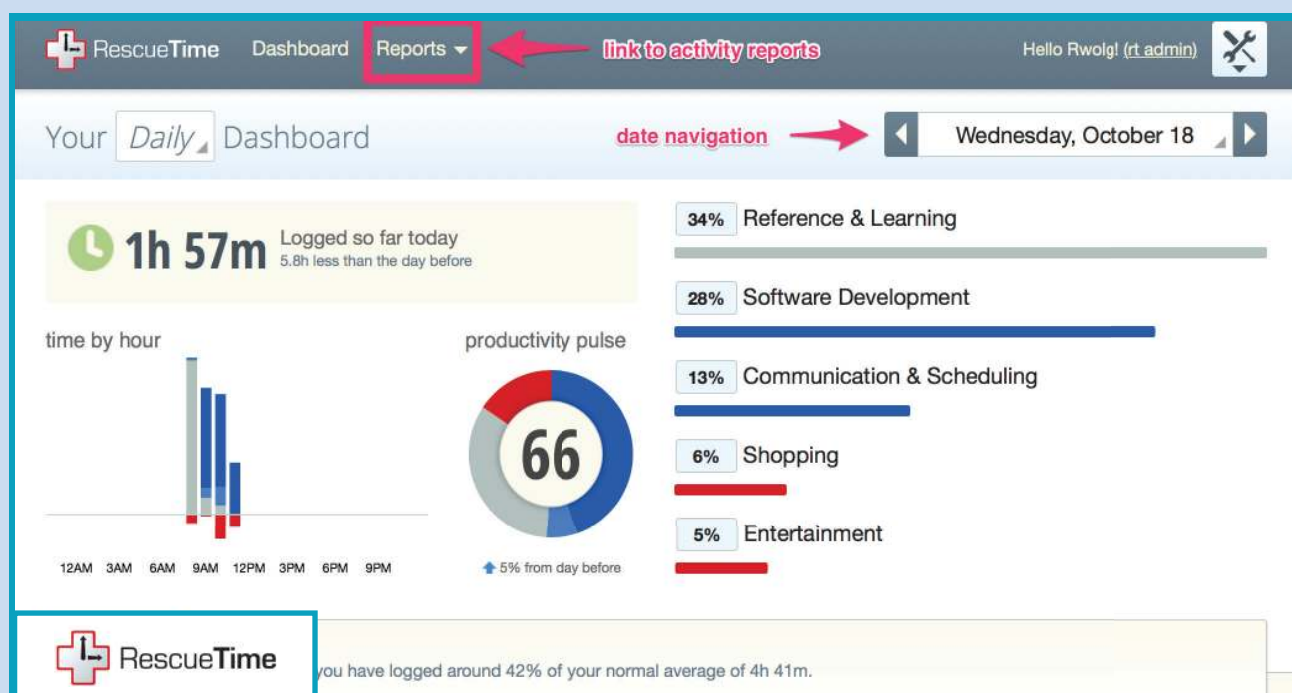
8 Krisp :The Noise Cancelation app

What problem do they solve for teams: Krisp.ai keeps your remote teams focused on work better by canceling out background noise.

Major benefits: It's a fact that background distractors are a source of annoyance for speakers on a call. What I like about Krisp was that you can take meetings anywhere without the worry of background noise drowning out your words.

Pricing: The Pro and Team plans both cost USD 3.333 per user month. The Enterprise plan is applicable to call centers. You can download it for free if you plan to work remotely only occasionally.
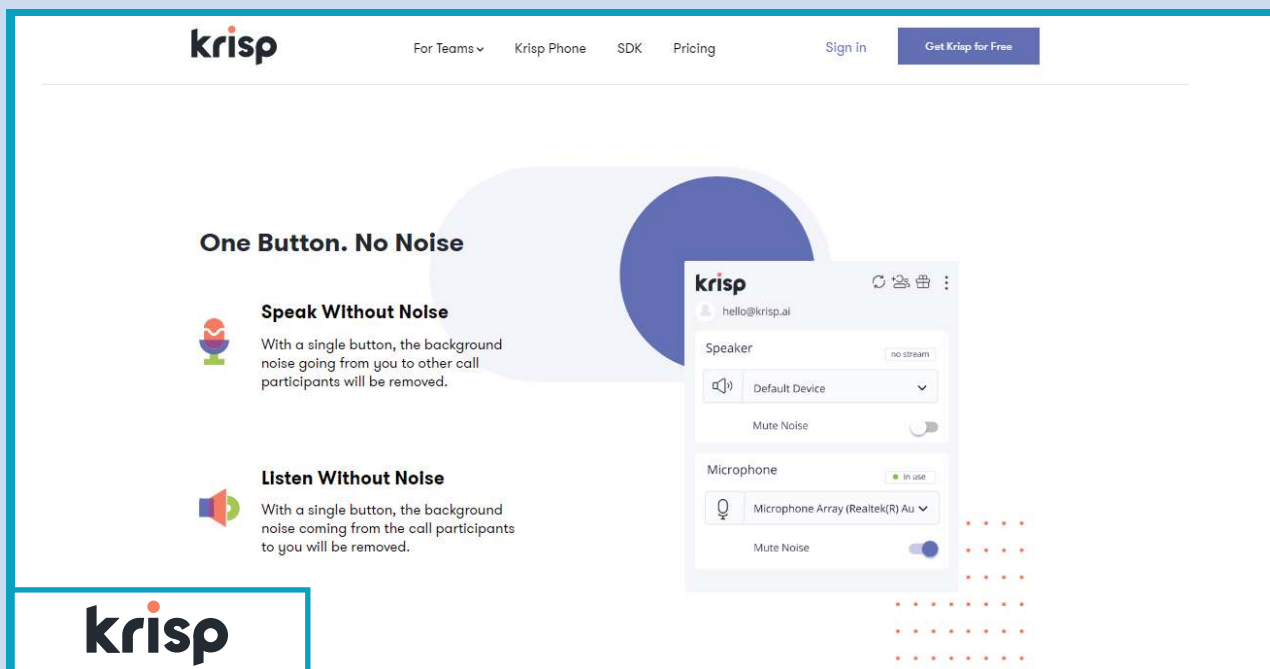
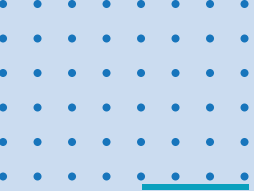## 9 Sprintbase: Design and innovation management app

What problem do they solve for teams: Sprintbase lets remote attendees engage in product innovation online with high-impact workshops.

Major Benefits: We love how Sprintbase has **tackled change management** by involving everyone, from practitioners to thinkers in the design phase.

Pricing: Custom and varies according to organizational needs.

Remote team leaders do not come with a handbook to guide and manage remote teams. It's a gradual learning process, where mistakes teach better management practices and eventually leads to success.

That being said, managers can't always wait to learn from their mistakes. That is where well-curated courses can help them build an empowered remote team. Here is the list of courses to sign-up for:

Conclusion

I am sure we could all relate to these funny memes! Now coming back to where we were, these are the testing times for all the team managers who have begun a their journey as a 'remote team manager'. This eBook aims to help you all to pass these testing times with distinction and lead your remote team to the path of glory.

It's time to buckle-up and practice these tips on a daily basis to avoid any kind of miscommunication, performance or productivity issues, team conflicts or any other roadblocks that will hamper your success. The way you lead today can distinguish you as an influencer and will set an example for those in-lines.

SIWOM

SORRY, I WAS ON MUTE

'Sorry, I was on Mute!' a line we've heard repeated all too many times when participating in our virtual team meetings.

SIWOM is an independent resource
that explores all that it takes to improve your remote working setup to ensure your projects and teams are being managed well - whether you are a part of a large corporation, a start-up or managing freelancers.

Most importantly we
want to put our readers at the heart of that. We want to meet you, write about you and share your points of view.'

AUTHOR BIO

Founder – Aakash Gupta

With over 5 years of experience in remote team management,leading sales, marketing and development teams across India and the UK, Aakash Gupta is the founder of Sorry, I was on Mute, a resource site built for remote team managers. Apart from being a remote team manager, Aakash has been exploring all facets of the digital marketing industry for over 6 years.