Work From Home Best Practices
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KEY CHALLENGES – Longer periods of working from home go along with various pain points along three core dimensions

Individual Employees

- **Effectiveness**
  - Loss of routines and typical workstyles
  - Getting distracted/ doing things "aside"
  - No adequate infrastructure/ place

- **Motivation**
  - Uncertainty is a productivity killer
  - No direct/ physical team interactions
  - Feels like "day off at home"

- **Sustainability**
  - "Entgrenzung" leading to not being able to cut off and recharge
  - Working overall longer hours as "always around"
  - Difficulties to cope with family situation

Core Working Team

- **Management & Effectiveness**
  - Less alignment potential yields to more parallel/ wrong direction work
  - More difficult/ effortful ways of communication required
  - Less information sharing across teams
  - Review of tasks and workplanning more difficult remotely

- **One Team Experience**
  - Focus on transactional exchanges, less fun, not "one-team"
  - No joint "offline-activities" for bonding and team building

Project Teams

- **Meeting Effectiveness**
  - Lack of personal interaction/ exchanges before and after meeting
  - Less deep qualitative discussions, esp. if language barrier exists
  - Distraction by doing other things aside
  - Presentation skills limited via phone/ video conference

- **Working Effectiveness**
  - Limited access to project counterparts
  - Ad-hoc alignment requires opening permanent channel ("Standleitung")

- **Bonding/ Relationships**
  - Physical distance to project counterparts

Effectiveness

Loss of routines and typical workstyles

- **Maintain daily routines** as when working regularly – get up at the same time, take a shower, dress-up, get breakfast and than start working at the same time you normally do at the office

- **Dress as going to work** – following your normal patterns and "dressing up" will switch you into working mode instead of "being at home mode"

- If you have **struggle getting into a working** mode in the morning, leave your apartment, **walk around the block** and **than open your laptop** – simulate going to the office

- **Structure your day along key tasks/ objectives** to achieve – keep track of what has to be done during the day (and week and month) and clearly decide when to do/ finalize it

Getting distracted/ doing things "aside"

- **Leave private life outside work room** (e.g., private mobile, etc.) when being in **there fully focus on work** – if you want to check private messages take a break and do it in your private space

- **Reward yourself and give yourself breaks** – breaks are critical to recharge batteries, they can be small (e.g., 5 minutes of checking social media) or longer (e.g., full 45 min lunch break)

- **Do not do household tasks/ chores** while on worktime, even when "only" in a call – when working focus 100% on work, when not working, focus 100% on private things

- **Use timeboxing to clearly separate private** tasks from work – define what's personal time, what is working time; even use blockers within calendar to indicate time for lunch, sports, breakfast, etc.

Effectiveness

No adequate infrastructure/ place

- **Use a dedicated room/ space for work**, possibly as far away from any distractions as possible – do not work from the couch or a crowded area in the house

- **Keep away any distractions** from your work room/ space – leave your private phone outside and if required use headphones to cancel out noise

- **Get the right infrastructure** to be productive – if possible have a desk, chair, a cabinet for documents as well as a mouse, a keyboard, a spider phone, a 2nd screen and a printer at hand

- **Ensure you have the connectivity** you need both on the laptop and your workphone – working from the cellar might be far away from distractions but hinder you being called

- **If you have a partner** also working from home find **clear rules for who can use the workplace at which time** and where calls can be made from without "distracting" each other

- **If you have a partner/ family** clearly align with them that the **workplace means "work"** like in the office – even if its difficult create awareness that coming in/ interrupting at any time is not possible

Sustainability

"Entgrenzung" leading to not being able to cut off and recharge

- **Keep your work within the room** – once you are in your workplace, you work but once you are outside stop working and leave laptop in working room

- **Avoid using your whole apartment for work**, as it will **significantly limit your ability to relax** after work or take breaks, as work is omnipresent

- **Avoid meals in front of the laptop**, try to **eat outside** or take a **clear break for cooking,** otherwise it **won't be a break** and **increase your stress level**

- **Leverage the flexibility** home offices provides, e.g., if you wait for client inputs etc. **take time to go for a run/ do sports** and continue working afterwards

- **Have "transitional time/ space" between private life and work**, e.g., having a short walk, a workout or listening to music after ending work to clearly mark the "cut-off-point"

Working overall longer hours as "always around"

- **Keep working hours** as when working regularly – fully maintain regular working hours (both start AND end time!) throughout the week and block these times free of private/ personal activities

- **Insert calendar blockers for when your day normally starts and ends** – this will help you to keep track of working hours as normal

- **Avoid focusing on work all day long**, **take fixed breaks** where you actually close the laptop e.g., to grab a coffee and **make hard cuts in the evening**

- **Switch off your cellphone during "no work" times** to prevent getting pulled back into work each "beep"

Sustainability

"Difficulties to cope with family situation

- **Leverage time saved** from omission of **commute to work to organize private life** (e.g., laundry, tax returns, grocery shopping) – BUT: **allocate distinct timeslots to avoid** clashes with business duties

- **Your family might not be used to having you home all day** and might assume that **you have more time for them** – clearly **communicate that this is normally not the case** at workload stays constant

- **Identify all critical activities** regarding work, household chores and children, then **find clear rules for who takes when care of children/ household chores** and block these times within the calendar

- **Leverage best practices for splitting up responsibilities** like "4-hour shifts" if 2 adults or "30min-120min rotations" if >2 adults; also leverage "ViCo Playdates" for older kids

- If living in an **apartment building with frequent interactions**, also **use "scale effects"** with others and pool childcare (depending on health regulations and restrictions in light of COVID)

- **Over-communicate and seek full alignment with your partner** – both have work and chores to do, the better you align the more effective it is for all

- **Over-communicate "child-care" times with your teammates** and management team – this will create the freedom for you to focus on your children and also create full awareness on your availabilities

Motivation

Feels like "day off at home"

- **Remind yourself that this is the "new normal"** for some days/ weeks – meaning the work does not change, just the location

- **Keep up a normal work mindset** – it's not a home office Friday/ vacation day but a normal full-time working day for your employer

- **Wake up early and start work early as well** – until typically unproductive afternoon times you will have achieved a lot (and then earned a longer break!)

- **Earn rewards** after finishing something and than **take yourself so time to do something you like** you could normally not do in the office (e.g., cook something nice, do sports etc.)

- **Use productivity software to keep track** and remind you what still has to be done – good examples are Focus Booster, Trello, etc.

- **If you realize you get distracted/ demotivated take a break** – use the flexibility of home office and go for a walk or change locations to another room

→ **See BDPs on "Effectiveness - Loss of routines and typical workstyles"**

Motivation

Uncertainty is a productivity killer

- **Actively ask for information** on status/ planning/ duration of home office rules/ regulation due to COVID – yet also accept that in such fluid situations no definite answer can be given

- **Do not "every minute"/ always check the news**/ push messages – in situations like COVID media pushes out news at high frequency

- **Stay relaxed and focus on work**, as long as you stay home, the **situation outside won't directly affect you** – keep your head clear of bad news

No direct/ physical team interactions

- **Set up informal coffee chats via TelCo or ViCo** with your colleagues and work-mates – if possible do this at the regular times you would go to coffee breaks in the office

- **Align with your colleagues each day what you have achieved** to keep track of what your colleagues are doing and to reassure that your tasks are visible

Core Working Team – Best practices on Management & Effectiveness (1/2)
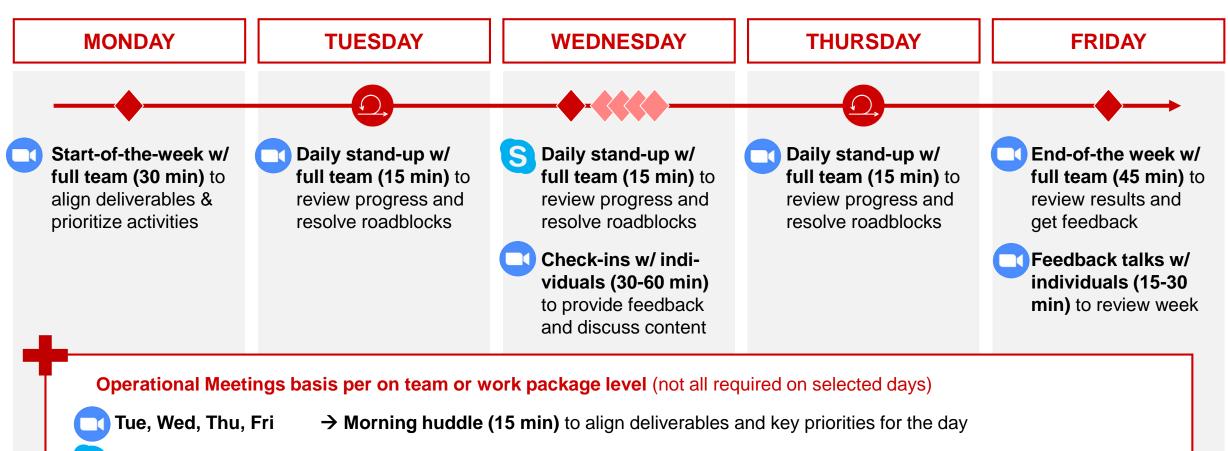
Management & Effectiveness

Reduced alignment options yield to more parallel/ wrong direction work and limits information sharing across teams

- Have **more regular check-ins** with the full working team as well as 1:1 to ensure and **facilitate regular exchange with and in between the team** – these could be with and without management

- **Install clear touchpoints during the day with management team** – example day structure could be 08:30am "Morning Huddle" to align tasks for the day, 11:45am "Check-In" to review progress and 16:00pm "Afternoon Alignment" to review achievements of the day

- Set up a **permanent phone conference**, if you have **high demand for ad-hoc alignments**

- **Enable all team members to listen on management calls** (at least passively) to maintain impression of regular work setting and **avoid de-brief cascades via phone**

More difficult/ effortful ways of communication required

- **Leverage all channels of communication that are available**, incl. WhatsApp, SMS, Facetime, Skype, Telephone, Email, etc. – also ensure to use platforms all your colleagues/ full team can use

- **Use as much video conferences as possible** – this not only prevents "multi-tasking" but also fosters presence and attention

- **Give your team even more access then previously** – alignments are more difficult when not in same place, thus ensure your availability for quick questions via SMS, WhatsApp, Skype, Telephone, etc.

- **Use digital tools for team steering**, e.g. **Trello enabling you to track team progress in real-time** to avoid regular check-in calls with team members

Core Working Team – DEEP DIVE //
Weekly touchpoints

FOCUS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Start-of-the-week w/ full team (30 min) to align deliverables & prioritize activities	**Daily stand-up w/ full team (15 min)** to review progress and resolve roadblocks	**Daily stand-up w/ full team (15 min)** to review progress and resolve roadblocks **Check-ins w/ individuals (30-60 min)** to provide feedback and discuss content	**Daily stand-up w/ full team (15 min)** to review progress and resolve roadblocks	**End-of-the week w/ full team (45 min)** to review results and get feedback **Feedback talks w/ individuals (15-30 min)** to review week

Operational Meetings basis per on team or work package level (not all required on selected days)

Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri   → **Morning huddle (15 min)** to align deliverables and key priorities for the day

Mon-Fri   → **Midday check-in (very short!) (5-10 min)** to quickly review if there are any issues arising

Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu   → **Afternoon alignment (15 min)** to review deliverables so-far and prioritize activities until EOB

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FOCUS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Presence during the meeting

- Do we all have to be on video, or just on the platform? Will we default to "video always" or "announce specific meetings are video-based"? Always announce name before speaking?

- Do we expect everyone to be fully connected by the meeting start time? (vs. still getting audio/video set up)?

Interruptions / speaking

- How will we signal when we have something to say without speaking over one another (e.g., with a virtual or video-conferenced hand wave, a message in the group chat)?

Focus

- How will we hold another accountable for not multi-tasking? "Cold-calls" allowed?

Inclusion

- How will we ensure our full team feels included, respected, and valued in each conversation? (Round-robin check-ins? Group chat input accepted?)

Taking breaks

- What is our standard practice for taking breaks if we plan to collaborate for a long session over video?

Meeting follow-up

- What type of meeting notes will we distribute? Screen captures of real-time "what, who, when?" Follow-up email summarizing notes?

FOCUS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Before the meeting

- Send reminder email to attendees with tech info and virtual meeting norms
- Live rehearsal with team members using the technology
- Ensure proper environment (brightly lit room, no clutter from the frame, laptop lens at eye height)
- Prepare a simple slide to capture next steps ready for screen share
- Open the room early and welcome participants; let them chat with each other

During the meeting

- Structure the opening: (Welcome, objectives, key tech tools)
- Ask questions frequently & pause for response
- Use names to draw attention back in
- Give verbal directions to guide audience attention when sharing content
- Keep vocal energy & eye contact (at the lens)
- Apply engagement tools when appropriate, e.g. poll, annotation, chat, etc.
- End early and summarize next steps (What, Who, When)

After the meeting

- Share relevant screenshots and next steps with participants
- Debrief with team members

FOCUS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

Management & Effectiveness

Review of tasks and workplanning more difficult remotely, motivation also more difficult

- **Be even clearer on expectations** – over-communicate on what should be done, why it should be done and by when it must be done (e.g., do not use "quickly" but specific time)

- Especially have more **strict time expectation management** to maintain team effectiveness, as more "scheduled" check-ins might be required, **clear deadlines become more essential**

- **Be more diligent when planning the work** (e.g., more granular, clearer guidance) and **over-communicate** with the team to ensure everyone is "on the same page" – **here focus more on goals, not on activities**

- Try to **structure work as efficiently as possible** and **adhere to 80/20** to **maintain sustainability;** working from home is already bad, working long hours from home is worse

- **Adjust your way of interacting**, e.g. you won't be able to discuss an Excel-model on screen, **use either video chat** or head back to **send-outs in advance**

- **Potentially switch to "Agile Working" Mode** with Huddles, Sprints, etc. to prevent micro-managing which will decrease motivation

- **Assign "side tasks" from previously deprioritized topics** to create/ ensure less monotonous work and keep up motivation

Core Working Team – Best practices on One Team Experience

One Team Experience

Focus on transactional exchanges, less fun, not "one-team" and no joint "offline-activities" for bonding and team building

- **Maintain team spirit** by having non-work **related check-ins with the team via ViCo** (e.g., virtual coffee breaks, chit-chat, etc.)

- **Make time for small-talk before and after meetings** (e.g., joining a ViCo slightly early) just as you would do in regular meetings

- **Start gamification** like "every morning someone shows the apartment"/ "Funny backgrounds in ViCo"

- **Conduct virtual team events**, e.g., Virtual Friday beers via video conference

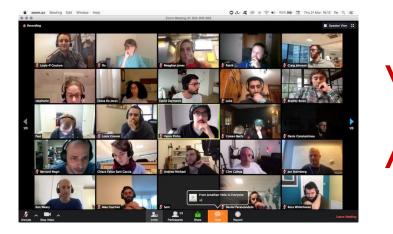- **Open Whattsapp team group** to share information and/or stories, pictures, etc.

Team management difficult

- **Understand that the situation might affect people differently and act accordingly** (e.g., focus on more non-work related video/phone interactions within your team)

- **Communicate clear goals** the team is working towards (e.g., meetings/ deadlines)

- **Continue to offer longer "One on ones"** and feedback meetings – always use ViCo for those

- **Overcommunicate on COVID implications**, status and planning regarding home office setting – uncertainty kills productivity so mitigate it as far as possible

Use ViCo features…

…to conduct virtual team events-

- **15 minutes "Chat Roulette"** within Team – Being paired up randomly and having a coffee chat

- **Cards Gaming online** against each other – Playing cards like on offline world

- **Play quizzes and trivia** via Video Conferencing – Each one can ask a question, others have to answer

- **Play any other games** via Video Conference – For example Bingo works very well

- **"MTV Cribs" Team Edition** – Showing each other the home and workplace

- **Set up a slack channel** to post funny pictures and stories

- **Set up online bucket list** and review who in team has same items on/ already did some of the items

- **Blind drawing in power point** via Screenshare – one person gives task, other has to draw

- **Have dinner together or Friday beers** via Video Conference (Someone has to organize and set up the meeting!)