

PRACTICAL GUIDE

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# Remote management: 3 key principles on how to rise to the challenge





# Introduction

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It took just a few months to transform remote management from something anecdotal to an everyday reality for millions of employees.

Many managers who are used to face-to-face management feel lost when it comes to a remote approach. But remember: **remote management is still management!**

Whether face-to-face or remote, employees' basic needs, including a **need for meaning** and **recognition**, remain the same. The real difference stems from the fact that geographical distance exacerbates these needs. Managers must therefore respond with what could be called **augmented management**. In practice, this involves being more thorough in terms of **managerial rituals**, being more attentive to employees' needs and giving employees more of an **energy boost** when talking with them. In short, good remote managers understand that their **teams** should be their priority, now more **than ever!**



**Ludovic Girodon**  
*Advisor & Management Expert*

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Remote management: from  
“it’s not really for us!”  
to “how does it work?!”

How many of us were interested in **remote management** just a few months ago? It was seen as a little-known and restrictive practice, adopted solely by companies with geographically disparate or poorly organised teams and fledgling companies who wanted to test out the concept of working from home.

**The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly shaken things up:**

- The term “remote management”, which was rarely used, has now become a buzzword;
- Once a theoretical constraint, it has become a **widely shared reality**;
- Once a vague concept, it has become **an indispensable skill** for any manager in the post-Covid working world.

With most EU employees reporting that **their experience of remote working has been positive** during the pandemic and over three-quarters saying that they want to continue working from home at least occasionally, even without Covid-19 restrictions<sup>1</sup>, **remote working is here to stay**. With that comes remote management: this is now a reality which we will have to live with in the long term.

Yes, but... Few companies have had the time to include the subject of remote management in their managers' basic training.

This has been a sudden and radical change and **the support offered to managers** must rapidly be adapted to ensure that they can continue working without becoming overwhelmed.

Whether these managers are responsible for isolated individuals or teams, whether these employees are working entirely from home or in hybrid mode (spending some days in the office and other days at home), **this guide provides the keys to understanding how best to help them to rise to the challenge of remote management**.

1. Eurofound survey, 2020

## | What do we mean by “remote”?

The term “remote management” can be applied to three different ways in which people work remotely.



### **The most obvious: physically remote**

A, B and C work from home. B and D are in different countries. D works in the office.



### **The most technical: operationally remote**

A and C have good technical resources, including high-performance communication tools. C has to look after his/her children and cannot work traditional office hours. D is part of three different teams, while B only reports to one person.



### **The most human: emotionally and culturally remote**

B, C and D speak English, but A doesn't. A is happy to be on his/her own, but C isn't. B lacks self-confidence. A, B and D are long-standing colleagues while C has just joined the team.

It's a well-known fact that **distance** sometimes creates a strange sense of **distortion**: information is altered, an instruction is lost along the way, an informative email is read as a reproach, a meeting held at the last minute is seen as a way of keeping someone out of the loop.

To deal with these three kinds of remote working (physical, operational and emotional), **the following simple but essential management principles should be applied.**





In practice, what advice should these managers be given?

# Building trust

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Now that the familiar (and, for some, reassuring) setting of the office and the human interaction it entails are no longer an option, employees may feel as if they are being left to their own devices to a varying degree, depending on the individual and their circumstances. This feeling may induce **anxiety** and **lead to employees becoming demotivated**.

This is where managers play a major role: in their ability to prove that their **team members can count on them**, no matter what the distance. **It's all a question of trust**. In a context which is primarily virtual, managers now personify the stability of the working environment.

Remote working makes it impossible for managers to physically see their direct reports and this can cause issues of mistrust. Indeed, a survey<sup>2</sup> which was carried out among global workers in April and May of this year found that 34% of remote workers felt that their managers **“expressed a lack of confidence in their work skills.”**

**To ensure successful remote management, building trust is at the very top of the list, even coming before professional performance.**

2. Centre for Transformative Work Design survey of 617 global workers between 21 April and 5 May 2020.

## Emphasise listening skills and empathy

Even if this means repeating themselves and **using practical tools**, such as regular one-to-one sessions with each employee. Managers should **create a communication channel which is dedicated** to problems related to remote working (feelings of stress, disconnect and/or isolation) and **emphasise its availability**.

Although some people may initially see this as requiring considerable effort, it will **quickly become automatic, ensuring a smoother working process**.

## Demystify working hours/highlight results

- So-and-so probably works less because he/she is looking after his/her children.
- Do people working remotely put in as many hours as we do in the office?

This kind of suspicion must immediately be addressed because it can have a harmful and demoralising effect on a team. In this situation, it is vital to be clear that although remote working may involve staggered working

hours for some people, everyone is working towards specific objectives. **It should also be added that working from home is not always easy!** Just because a team member has not logged on at 10.30 in the morning, that does not mean that he or she is twiddling his or her thumbs. In return, managers must **learn to trust their team members.**

## | Ensure that managers are understood

Although there is a risk of sounding like a broken record, managers who focus on being understood will improve their team's **efficiency** and **cohesion**. The objectives, deadlines, processes and people involved should be clearly stated. Managers should check **that their instructions are clear and encourage feedback.**

## Understand how to reconsider and reflect

Managers themselves are now faced with the challenges of remote working! Although managers should demonstrate real commitment, they must also be able to **tell their team members** if they are unable to meet a particular objective or to attend a scheduled meeting. Managers have the right to show that they are **human** as they adapt to these new working conditions – and they will benefit from this. Why? Simply because we tend to trust people more when **we feel that we can identify with them**.

**Remote management therefore involves the establishment of a system of organisation which is:**



# Establishing rules and rituals

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Given that the working environment has expanded considerably and has become more flexible, managers must:

- **communicate clearly** about the basic rules of this new way of working;
- **establish rituals** to ensure that employees feel a sense of belonging, both to their team and their company, and to prevent the risk of disengagement.

**There is a reason why rituals are the hallmark of every human society!**



## **Try this :**

Involve employees in the drafting of these rules and rituals by organising a **collective consultation**, for example. This process will help them to feel more actively involved in this new working environment and they will be able to feel a connection with it, even virtually. In this way, team members can create a charter which is a truly shared effort.

At the very least, managers who are dealing with remote working must provide clear rules in two major areas:

## Communication channels

### Which tool for which type of communication?

The type of communication should **be identified by its nature, its urgency and the level of collaboration** it entails. Emails, phone calls, texts, shared documents, instant messaging, WeTransfer, Zoom, Slack, Google Meet, etc.

**Once again, establishing simple rules provides** a framework and also prevents employees from being swamped with messages and feeling overwhelmed or, conversely, feeling isolated. It also prevents the use of too many digital tools, something which may deter some employees and which can be counter-productive. **The key: setting up a simple system which everyone understands.**

## Meetings

Here too, **clear rules will make management easier:** do team members always have to connect with their cameras? And what about microphones? Can a meeting be recorded so that employees who are unable to attend can catch up later?



**Did you know that an efficient meeting should never last more than 52 minutes<sup>3</sup>?**

*This is particularly true with remote working, because there are plenty of reasons for giving up and switching off: technical issues, turning off the video and/or the sound to focus on another activity at the same time, children being present and so on.*

To ensure that information is not lost, a person could be chosen **to produce minutes** for each meeting which are then shared on a common platform, for example.

3. Wisembly & Ifop study, 2018

This is where **rituals** come into play: they're a key part of the well-known phenomenon of team-building and are now more important than ever. A few ideas:



**Every week**, schedule a video meeting for all team members, whether they're working from home or in the office.



**Every month**, draw two team members' names at random: they will work together on a given subject (whether work-related or not) to strengthen their relationship, to encourage collaboration and to prevent any sense of isolation (whether openly recognised or not).



**Twice a week**, have a mid-morning cup of coffee together - via video, of course! And/or have the team organise a regular games tournament. These are designed to be informal occasions during which relaxation is prioritised over work.



Managers and their teams will have to be creative and must understand how to overcome the phygital barrier.

## | Focus on the right to privacy

Remote working literally provides a **window into the personal lives** of each and every one of us, mostly by means of images shared by video but also by means of the constant sharing (whether voluntary or not) of private information: “My children are here”, “I’m going to ask my husband to turn off the radio” and so on.

While this sudden confrontation with employees’ personal lives can help to create feelings of solidarity and friendship, care must be taken to ensure that everyone’s right to privacy is respected. **Some employees who work remotely don’t have a separate office and individual circumstances** (living situation, financial status, mental well-being) **can vary enormously**.

These circumstances also influence how we work and react to professional stimuli. This is something to keep in mind when it comes to managing someone who works from home. **The flexibility of remote management** also comes in to play here.

# Paying attention to phygital

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This strange term is actually a contraction of the words “**physical**” and “**digital**”. It is commonly used in marketing to refer to customer solutions which combine real-life experiences (in a physical shop) and online elements (by means of an immersive virtual experience).

An international survey<sup>4</sup> which was published in October 2020 revealed that the vast majority of workers now **want to work in hybrid mode**, with the ideal being 3 days working in the office and 2 days working remotely. Only 15% of them plan to work 100% remotely and 1 in 3 employees considers investment in more efficient video communication tools to be an absolute priority (77% of them use these tools at least once a week).



4. Barco ClickShare survey, 2020

Clearly, managers will need learn **how to work seamlessly with hybrid teams**, whereby some team members work in the office and other team members work remotely from home. The situation is increasingly complicated!

**It is easy for difficulties and resentment to emerge:**

**Team members** who work from home **can feel left behind**, left out of the latest topics of conversation and hampered by an inability to access necessary information.

**Team members** who work in the office **can feel aggrieved**, with the impression that they are forced to work longer hours and to endure more hard-line management.

Here are a few ideas to share with managers to help them to avoid these pitfalls and to foster a **sense of belonging** and **collective intelligence**:

- **Set objectives** without distinguishing between team members' different working arrangements;
- **Choose a single**, common interface for sharing and publishing documents so that everyone has identical and simultaneous access to the necessary resources;
- **Organise compulsory video meetings** for the entire team so that team members who work remotely do not feel left out;
- **Apply phygital principles** : create a tool or an event which helps remote workers to immerse themselves in office life;
- **Encourage collaboration** between hybrid team members.

As ever, it's all about collective rituals!

## And what about managerial well-being?

**A good remote manager must be comfortable with the responsibilities** the role entails. This can be overwhelming for some managers who do not feel sufficiently well equipped or well prepared.

Managers must pay attention to any distress signals sent by their employees, while simultaneously being alert to any warning signs of their own. As mentioned above, **managers are remote workers like any other** – they simply manage other people as well!

It's already been said: the widespread adoption of remote working is a major change which **requires strong adaptability, flexibility and listening skills**. More than ever, managers are seen as central figures and leaders.

Indeed, their ability to demonstrate their calm handling of the situation will help employees to adapt. This is a weighty new responsibility which can be unnerving.

It is therefore up to you as HR managers, training managers or line managers to identify yourselves as **trusted points of contact**.

Make sure that your company's managers understand that **you are there to discuss** any issues, misunderstandings or anxiety caused by the challenges of remote management.

Why not boost their confidence in their own managerial talents through a targeted and personalised and remote-friendly coaching programme using videoconference?

# About MoovOne

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MoovOne offers a pioneering professional digital coaching solution, designed to unleash human potential. With our digital and human approach, we offer each participant an effective and personalised coaching experience, anywhere, anytime. We support business transformation on an individual, collective and organisational level by building customised coaching programs.

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**Varied coaching formats**, tailored to all challenges

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