Enhance the potential of Smart Working

SMARTWO

SmArtWO

smart ONEST   euki.cz   LOITE

Enhance the potential of Smart Working
SmartWo

ERASMUS+ Cooperation Partnership ADULT Education

Small Scale Partnership

2021-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000034986

SMARTWO - Enhance the potential of Smart Working – SMARTWO Booklet

If you have any questions regarding this document or the project from which it is originated, please contact:

SMARTWO

Riccardo Cariani

LOITE S.r.l.

Via Emilia, 52 - I – 40060 Dozza (BO)

Email: rcariani@loite.it

The editing of this document was finished on September 2022

Project website: https://www.smartwo.eu

SMARTWO is an Erasmus+ Small-scale partnerships in adult education. Project Number: 2021-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000034986

This document has been created by the collaboration of the whole SMARTWO partnership: LOITE S.r.l. (IT)-project Coordinator, European Knowledge Institute – EUKI (CZ) and SmartNEST (LV).

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it have caused a profound breakdown of global economic activity, with potentially far-reaching longer-term implications for the way businesses are organised. Faced with the need to reduce the spread of the virus, governments worldwide introduced strict lockdown measures and required social distancing. For many companies, the introduction of teleworking (working from home, remote work, or telecommuting) arrangements was the only way to maintain the business open and avoid furloughing or laying-off staff. Teleworking increased the resilience of the economies to the pandemic as it allowed businesses and workers to rely on what Eberly, Haskel and Mizen (2021) called "potential capital", represented by residential homes and workers' internet connections. The mobilisation of this "potential capital" may have contributed up to 10% of GDP across Japan, the UK, Germany, Spain, France, Italy and the US (Eberly, Haskel and Mizen, 2021)

So, you're working from home? There are now 2 possible paths. One possibility is that you work like so many other individuals who are constricted to home offices. That implies you'll devote a big portion of your day putting things off before you, in fact, get anything accomplished, which is going to lead to work spilling over into your nighttime.

You'll head to bed with work still on your plate, feeling behind and worried, and you'll get up the following day and begin work in your pajamas.

Without somebody looking over your shoulder, it's all too easy to fall under bad habits. You make yourself the morning cup of coffee, you look at your e-mails, you check Facebook, you don't shave. It feels like freedom in the beginning, and it's a terrific sensation not needing to rush out of the door.

So what is the other alternative? The other alternative is that you tackle this opportunity with both hands: that you employ a little bit of discipline and strategy. Most notably: you get the proper attitude that is going to assist you in tackling this special hurdle in the very best manner.

And what does all that indicate? It indicates that you can now complete your day's work in less time since the majority of us squander hours in the workplace on meetings and talking around the water cooler!

It indicates that you have no commute either, implying that you most likely simply gotten 2-3 hours of additional time each and every single day.

You'll operate in a neat and orderly office that is developed particularly to assist you to feel effective at work, and after that, you'll appropriately unwind and relax in the evenings with the folks and things that are near and dear to you.

The very best part is that you can begin using a little bit of "lifestyle design." That indicates doing things as you wish: working the hours that you pick, and even from various places. Why not do additional work throughout the week to ensure that you can have weekends off? (Which additionally indicates you can now go to the hairstylist or to the bank when it's much quieter).

Why not skip working in your home office (if feasible) and rather go and work in a café someplace? Or perhaps while admiring at a stunning nearby landmark? Why not work from your yard, if going outdoors is not a possibility?

All this is feasible when you work from home, whether you are hired by a big company or freelancing. All you have to do is to approach this properly and with the appropriate frame of mind.

And that's exactly what we will be going over in this book. Read this book, and you'll discover that working from home could be the very best thing that might happen to you. You'll be more efficient, you'll make more money, and you'll have more extra time to focus on your self-development, your pastimes, and the important things that truly matter to you.

It's everything about embracing the appropriate frame of mind, finding out how to be productive when there is no one to stack the pressure on, and doing what you can to remain on task.

But is it really that easy? Nope. Whether you are self-employed handling different tasks for different clients remotely or work for a single company, you won't just be productive because you are working from home. It needs lots of discipline, self sacrifice and commitment to ensure that you don't lose focus of what it is you want to achieve. Therefore, you have to be realistic and honest with yourself about your strengths and weaknesses before you can give the idea of working from home a try. The fact that your boss or client isn't always checking up on what you are checking out on your computer means you need to inculcate self discipline; in any case, it is just like any other job you would do! If you are the type that can do things without being followed, working from home can be a good idea for you. If you are the type that is always on social media trying to catch up with whatever is happening when no one else is around you, working from home might not be your thing! Likewise, if you are the type whose mind will wander away the moment your boss steps out of their desk, working from home might not be the best thing you can do with your time at this time. Telecommuters can attest that working from home gives them flexibility; you are able to do what you want to do any time; you are your own boss. You can even work in your PJs and be productive; it is not about how smartly dressed you are at the office, it is about how effective you are at doing what you do. You can even spend more time with your kids, wife, husband or partner; it is even possible to work in a different country and be productive.

People have made businesses out of working from home after working hard to understand how their business model works. Don't be lied to that you can earn thousands of dollars working just one hour from home while you are touring the world! How many people do you know personally have ever done it? If you only see that while surfing the internet, forget about the idea of making thousands of dollars working just one hour. I'm not saying that it cannot happen, you just need to be a lot smarter and hard working to make this happen.

With the ever growing need for employers to make employees feel comfortable with their work and to attain work life balance, so many work at home opportunities have come into being. Actually, the trend is continuing providing more and more opportunities for those who are serious about it. You can be a full time remote worker or a part time remote worker depending on what you are looking for. One of the greatest benefits of working from home is that you can work for several companies simultaneously eliminating the boredom that might come if you do the same thing repeatedly.

You don't work at home because you don't have anything else to do; actually, do you know that over 30 percent of those who work from home have at least a Bachelors degree? Working at home is a conscious decision that you make in the midst of numerous opportunities because you know what you are looking for. It has nothing to do with working fewer hours; it has everything to do with being more productive, keeping your customers happy and offering quality services to everyone you interact with. Of great importance is that you should be tech savvy, reliable in responding to emails, telephone calls, online chat requests and other forms of online communication. You cannot do it without technology since everything has to be done virtually; you could be communicating with a client, your boss or work colleague on different issues that have to be addressed promptly. Trust and reliability are key if you want to succeed in working from home. You have to be available during working hours and after working hours if you want to build trust to everyone who is relying on your work.

In as much as there are so many success stories about working from home, it comes at a price. As said, you have to be disciplined if you are to succeed as a telecommuter. You really don't want to start regretting why you haven't looked for a "real day job" because you are not as productive as you hoped to be. To be honest, a lot can disrupt you such that you may even end up not working some days because you felt that some seemingly less important issues were important at the time. It is often frustrating for the day to end only to realize that you have just done half of what you were expecting to do that day. This could result to feelings of self-hatred and disappointments for failing to achieve your goals, which could in turn make you lag further behind trying to mourn over the fact that you are not as productive. Actually, it could grow into a cycle of sub-par performance and personal blame.

On the other hand, how does it feel when you know you have done everything you were supposed to do by the end of the day; you will probably not even feel bad closing

early because you know that you were productive. The result is that you will be feeling more fulfilled and happier about your decision to work from home. You can then raise your kids and spend time with loved ones without having something bothering you at the back of your mind; you know that feeling, right?

According to the application form indications the realization of this training Toolkit took place through a co-design process with the same beneficiaries. It started from the administration of a questionnaire directly to the staff of the companies identified for the realization of the pilot action to provide an updated picture with respect to the directly lived experience, highlighting the personal difficulties as well as the practical solutions that have been put in place.

The following chapters then resume the major findings in the 3 countries involved with an initial view of the specific peculiarities and then highlighting the features in common.

Cap 2 [The principles of Project Management] shows some useful tools to successfully manage projects: the process of leading a project from start to finish is referred to as project management.

Cap 3 [Time Management] provides some hints and tools to manage the time more successfully: probably one of the most challenging things to master working from home is managing the time effectively.

Cap 4 [Soft Skills for Smart Working] introduces the most relevant skills and abilities to exploit individual potentials complementing hard skills in the workplace: soft skills go hand in hand with hard talents, enabling each business organization to make the most of its technical competence.

Lastly **Cap 5 [Organize Your Home Space for Smart Working]** is showing the easiest and most effective ways of setting up an office at home, as a complement features of the soft skills required on remote working.

Chapter 1: Best & Worst practices during the lockdown

The Italian case

I n Italy in 2020, the health emergency led to 8.8 million employees to work remotely with a share of 40%, while before the pandemic this way of working only concerned 11%. In 2021, on the other hand, remote workers were 7.2 million, equal to 32% of the total employed.

Adoption rate of telework in the three periods in Italy[1]
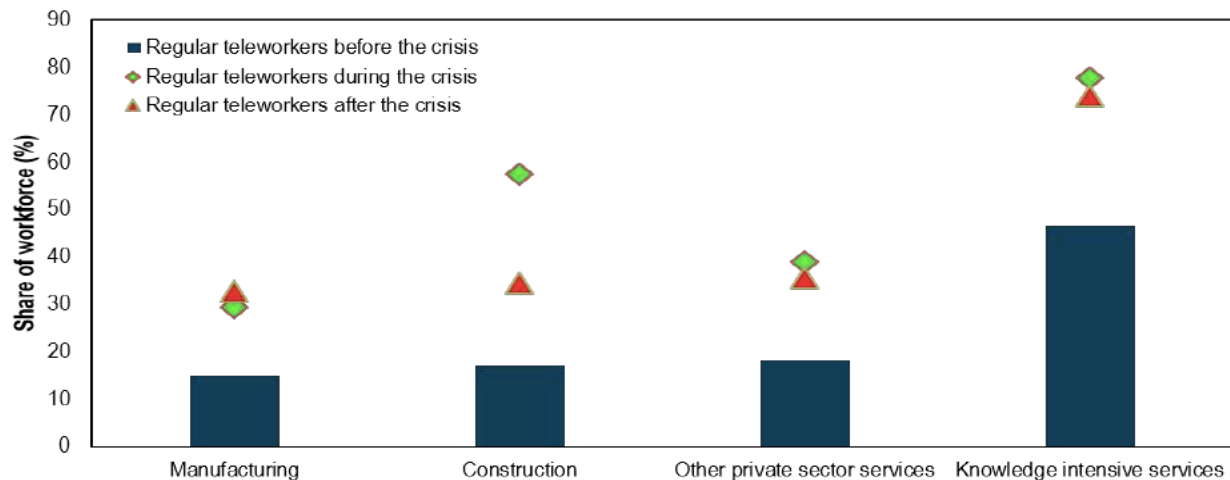
The SmartWo survey in Italy has been conducted on a sample of 20 workers / managers on a different age range with 1/3 belonging to the category of managers and around the 62% of workers /employees, in all the most relevant business sectors.
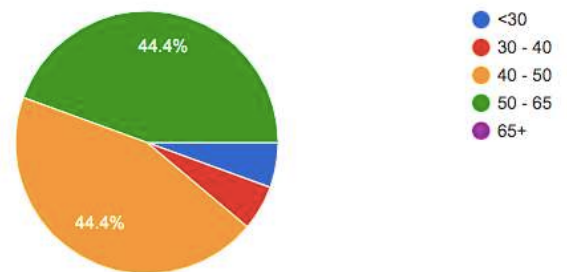
As per the **days in a week worked in remote working** 1/3 of the sample declared a full time engagement especially during the first restrictions.

Nessuno	None
Meno di uno a settimana	Less than one per week
Un giorno a settimana	One per week
2 / 3 giorni a settimana	2 or 3 days per week
4 giorni a settimana	4 days a week
Full time	Full time

---

[1] *The role of telework for productivity during and post-covid-19: results from an OECD survey among managers and workers,* OECD Productivity Working Papers - December 2021 No. 31

Those who declared to have shifted to a full time remote working modality where coming mainly from administration, accounting and commercial areas having thus the possibility to connect to the company' server by remote.
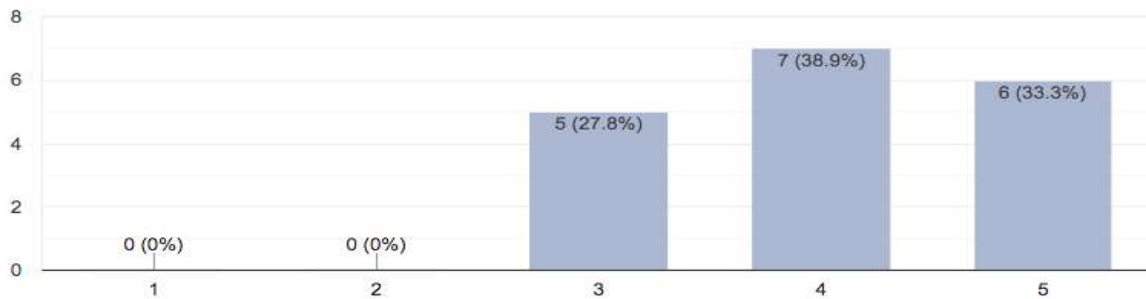
How do you rate the remote working experience in general on a scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 5 (*very positive*)

Almost 2/3 of the sample rated more than positive their remote working experience whereas entering into details these are the average feedbacks on Productivity, Communication & Teamworking with colleagues, Quality of the time spent working, the perception of the Work-life balance, the Family relations and the Personal relations.

In general the sample recorded a positive feedback in all the fields with various motivations:

- The workload remained unchanged, the hours worked too. What varies are the hours, disconnect at the right time and not check emails even after working hours. Having the PC close at hand is simpler. Better relations outside the workplace because, by not wasting time traveling, you have more free time;

- Fewer workplace interruptions that are frequent has led to greater concentration and productivity. Considering the lack of need to move to reach the workplace, the stress of travel and traffic together with the greater presence in the family, have certainly increased the quality of life. The only drawback is the greater availability (time) implicitly required by this solution.

13
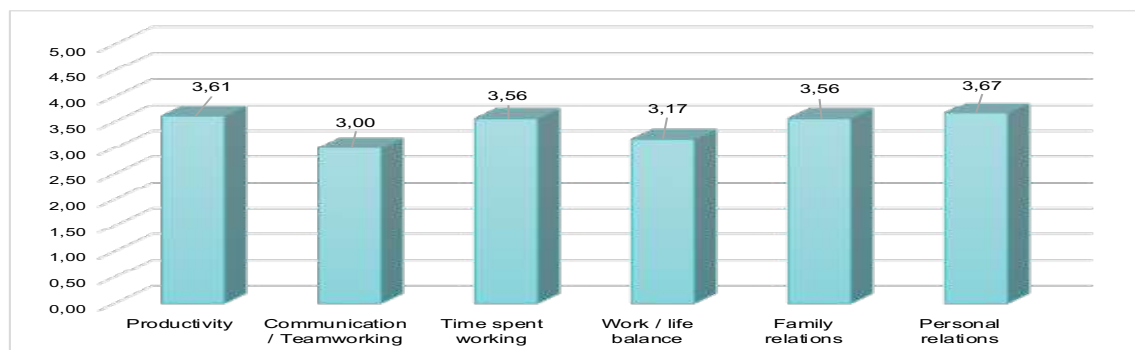
On the other hand negative feedbacks were mainly related to specific business sectors and occupation within the company as well as to personal constraints:

- Productivity is maximum as you work more and without interruptions, your private life suffers it is more difficult to disconnect, working in a team is better in person;
- Industrial plants must be sized and cannot be sold over the phone. The problem was not so much the work from home but the fact that customers could not be visited. The salesman cannot be done from home when in the end sales count;
- The presence at home, the close proximity to adolescent children, with their school and relationship problems, has loaded me with a weight and a responsibility far greater than what I would have experienced in a normal daily routine of school and work in presence

Being asked to list the main obstacles to overcome during the remote working experience more than 1/3 of the sample considered "Communication with colleagues" as the most relevant one, being followed by others as showed in the chart.
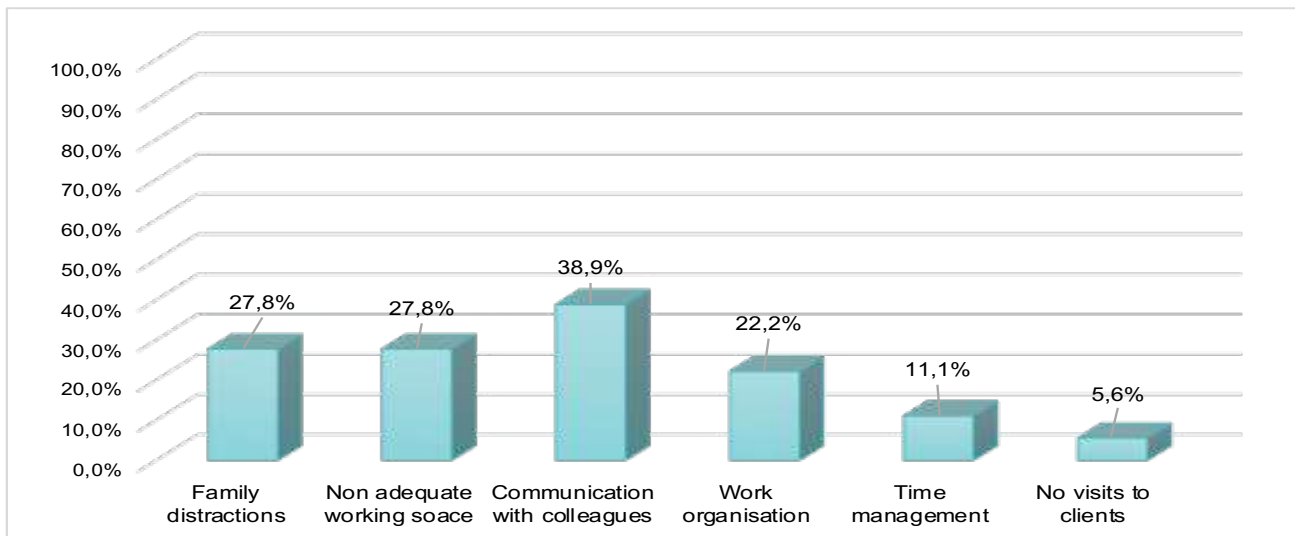
Using the same scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 5 (*very positive*) the sample has also assessed **a)** ability to set limits between working hours and "the rest of the life" and **b)** the level of stress generated by the experience.

14
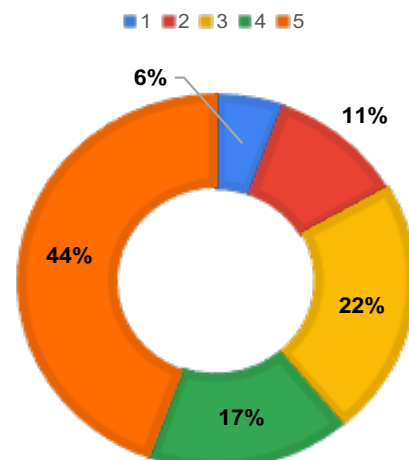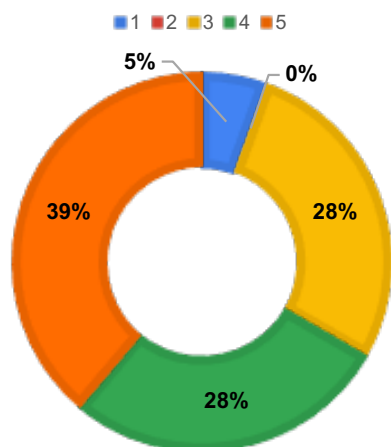
In conclusion almost 2/3 rated more than positive the possibility of continuing the experience also in the future providing various reasons for that:

- The possibility of being more present with the children and with the elderly mother
- Time management and peace of mind
- The freedom to organize time even if you work more on a temporal level
- Less tiredness and greater organization of free time
- Not having schedules and being able to fully manage your commitments
- Flexibility, peace of mind and comfort. Not having to travel in traffic saves time and starts the day stress-free
- Being able to manage time and deadlines according to my daily rhythms with a less rigid schedule
- I got to know myself a little better and I realized that I have to set up a routine that includes a series of steps that allow me to arrive at work start time calm and concentrated
- The ability to listen and empathy in resolving disputes has undoubtedly increased

The Czech case

I n the Czech Republic is the impact of the pandemic monitored by sociology project under the name Life during the pandemic done by PAQ research[2]. Based on this research we can conclude following findings:

o During the first wave of the epidemic in spring 2020, 23% employees worked from home, during the subsequent waves (autumn 2020 and winter 2021) the maximum was around 16%, and in the last waves (autumn 2021 and winter 2022) only 9% worked. According to the results of earlier surveys, around 4-8% of workers used to work from home before the covid-19 pandemic.

o Thus, there is a noticeable decline in the use of telework in the current period. However, due to the structure of the economy, around 30% of the workforce in the Czech Republic can work from home. This is significantly less than abroad, but even this relatively low potential is not sufficiently exploited.

According the data from the Czech statistical office[3] the use of smart working differs between sectors. In overall in the enterprises with 10 or more employees in 2021 worked from home 12% of employees. But in sector such as telecommunications it was up to 69%, in IT 53%, and 25% in research employees working from home.

Employees of enterprises with 10 or more employees in the Czech Republic who worked from home (year 2021)
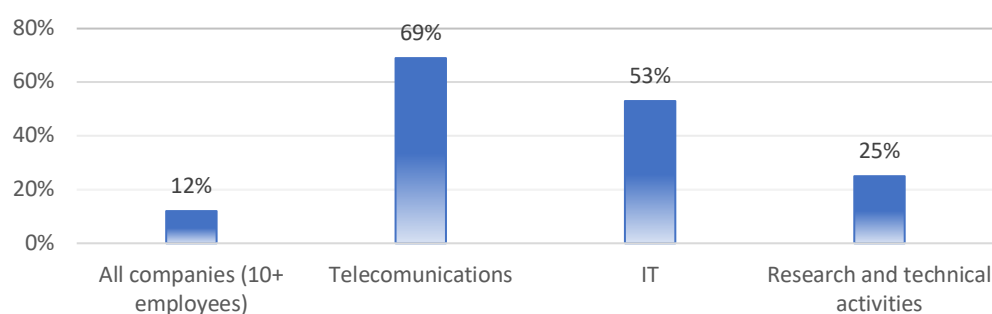
Source: Czech statistical office[4]

---

[2] https://zivotbehempandemie.cz (in the text we are using data and

[3] www.czso.cz/

[4] www.czso.cz/

Based on research done in November 2021 by the Czech Chamber of Commerce about only one third of the respondents declared that working from home suits them very well. On the other side 11% of the workers did not enjoy working from home at all and round half of the workers working from home preferred going to work.

How working from home suited the employees
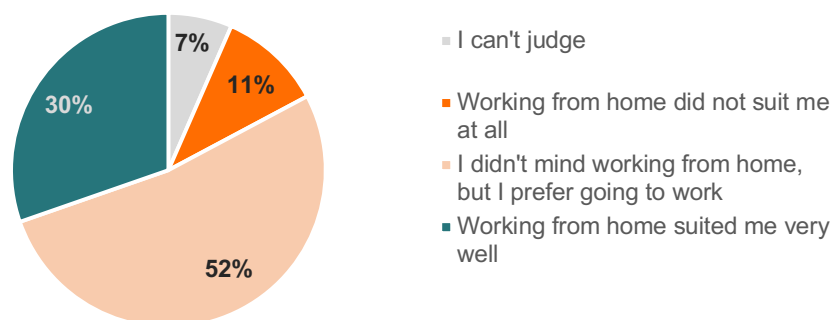
Source: Czech Chamber of Commerce (outcomes from research done in research project Restart)

The main reasons why workers did not prefer working from home was mainly due to loss of social contact with colleagues. For those whom working from home did not suit at all was the largest obstacle lack of adequate working equipment at home (62%) and lack of peace of mind to work at home (62%).

Main obstacles of working from home according the workers
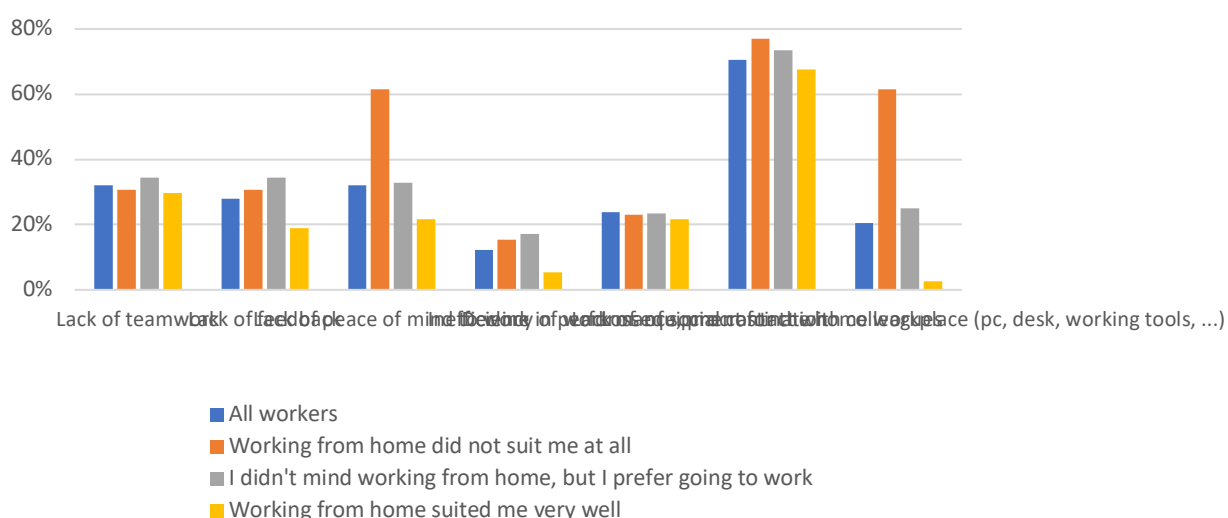
Source: Czech Chamber of Commerce (outcomes from research done in research project Restart)

The SmartWo survey in Czechia has been conducted on a sample of 10 workers / managers on a different age range with 2/3 belonging to the category of managers and 1/3 of workers / employees.

Half of the respondents (5) worked from home almost for full time (4 or 5 days a week) during the pandemic and 2 respondents worked from home less than a day per week. This experience was for them comparable to the situation before the pandemic.

Half of the respondents (5) rated the remote working neutrally and 4 out of 11 respondents rated remote working positively and 1 respondent as significantly negative.

How do you rate the remote working experience in general on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 5 (very positive) (number of respondents)
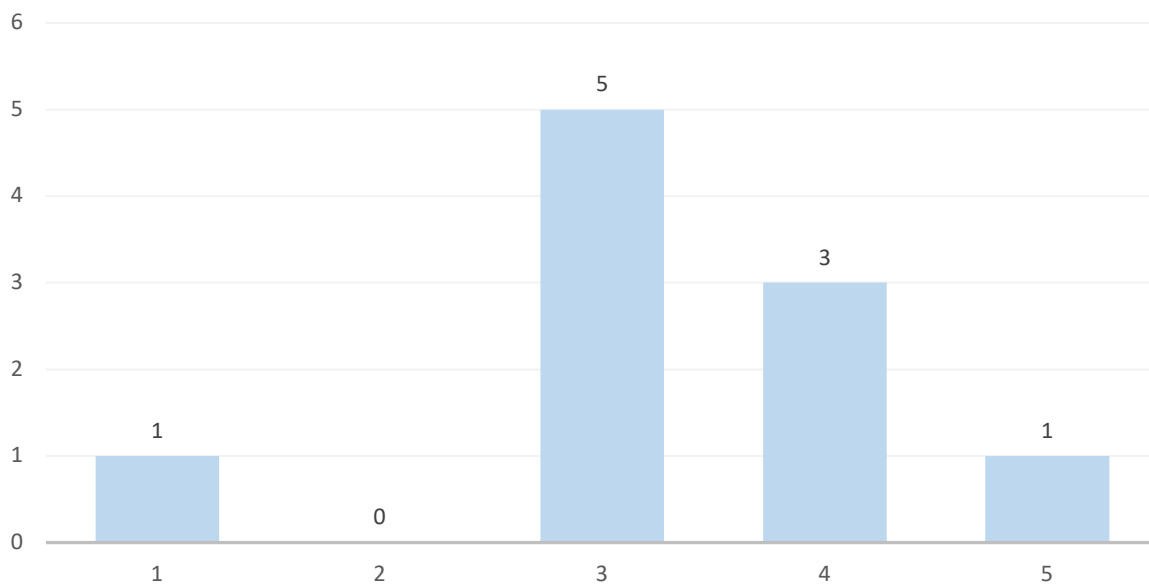
Source: SmartWo findings (total respondents 10)

The biggest positive impact of remote working was in average perceived in **family relationships** (average rate 3,4 out of 5). But 2 out of 10 respondent rated the impact for family relationships negatively. In average rating the remote working had **negative impact on communication and team work with colleagues** which corresponds with findings of the research done by Czech Chamber of Commerce (see above). Almost half of the respondents (4 out of 10) perceived this negative effect of smart working.

How would you rate the impact of the smart working: on your working life (rate on scale 1 = very negative impact / 3 = neutral / 5 = very positive impact) (average rate)
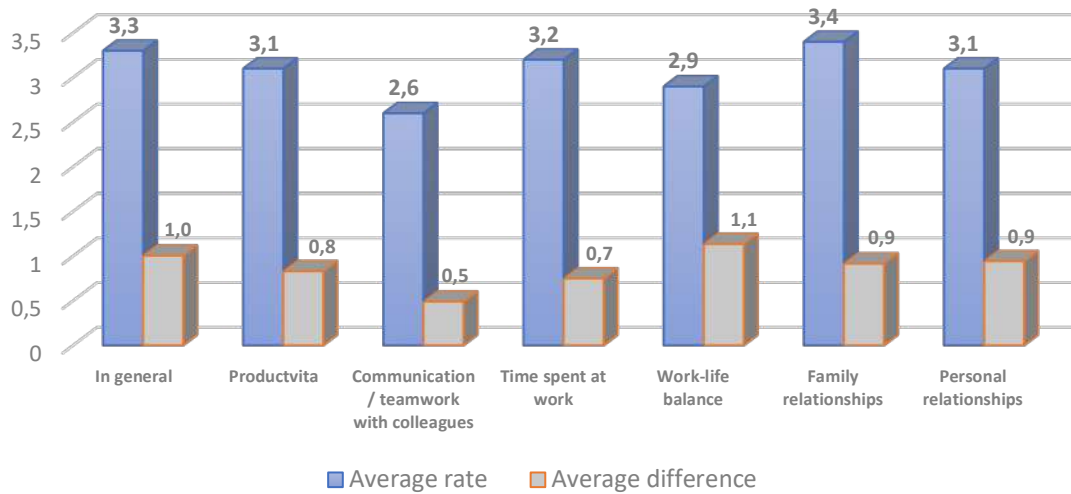
From the distribution of answers between the respondents we can see that employees are perceiving remote working differently. There are workers benefiting from remote working and workers that actually "suffering" the remote working. Most differences are in the impact of remote working on work-life balance, and personal and family relationships.

How would you rate the impact of the smart working: on your working life (rate on scale 1 = very negative impact / 3 = neutral / 5 = very positive impact) (number of respondents per category)

19
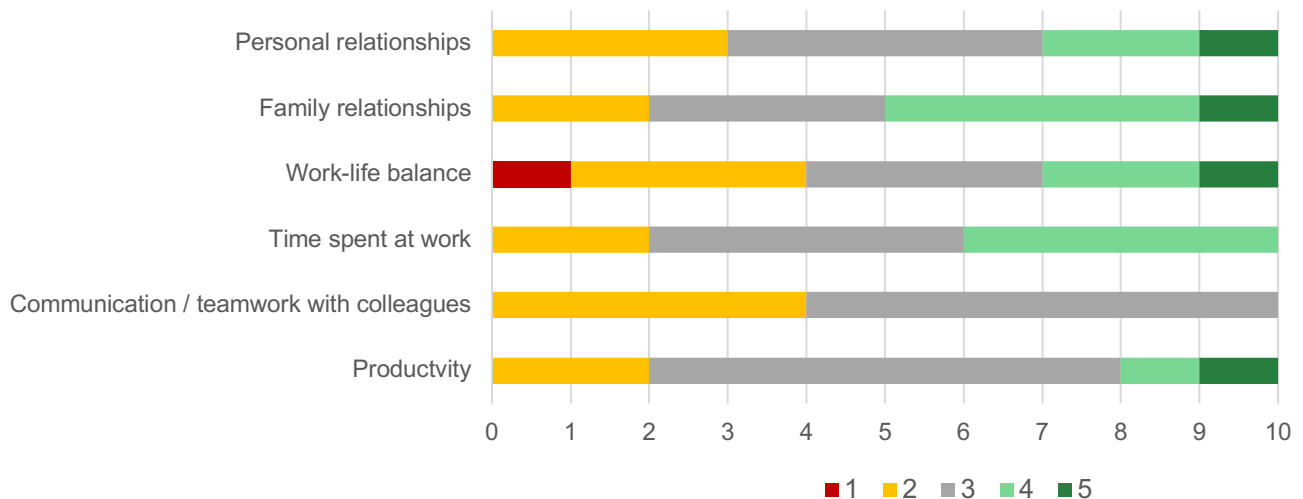
Shared experience by the respondents (general impression):

- *Personally, I don't like it much (the remote working), but my experience with colleagues who have worked remotely is different. One of my remote colleagues works well, communicates and submits work, the other was rather passive and always had to send a statement of work in the evening and admittedly never did much. We don't have any system of control, generally home office is not very well run.*
- *No organization at first, then I found my own system, but I was still at 50% performance*
- *Intensity of remote work similar to office, however team coordination or overall communication is difficult, customer service cannot be fully substituted for remote work. Team performance is also harder to measure.*
- *This had no effect on the performance of the required tasks, they had to be completed on time. Meetings were faster and more efficient, participants were attentive and better prepared*
- *Working remotely was no different from my previous job in the company. All the materials I needed for my work were available electronically. I communicated with colleagues as needed using online tools. In other words, the intensity of the tasks set was the same. The only thing that differed was the style of communication with colleagues. This sometimes brought its own difficulties.*
- *I was able to manage my own work, and I work well from home.*
- *Work efficiency was slightly lower than when I am present in person. However, I had historically worked remotely so I could cope with that.*
- *Our company has decided to protect its employees from workplace infections as much as possible. Therefore, one employee worked in each of our offices for one full week. The next week, another. We have small offices for 2 people. It's suitable for intensive IT work.*

According the communication the respondents stated: "*Face to face is always better and communication is better and work moves forward. Video conferencing and the associated communication doesn't really work for me personally and it's not quite the same.*"

On the other hand ono of the managers pointed out that they actually achieved better results with remote working and is showing us **an example that remote can be effective if properly managed**:" *More effective planning of activities involving more people, better preparation. Consistent planning of all activities and clearly defined output. Higher labour productivity, less inefficient activities. More time for family, except for planned meetings, possibility to spread work and private activities freely*."

For some the **remote working is quite challenging and over time, when no properly managed can have many negative impacts:** "*The moment I work out of close contact in the team, things are solved remotely - by email or by arranging a "call" so productivity drops. Similarly, the* **boundaries between time spent at home on the computer and the things I needed to get done at home were blurring.** *In the early days of telecommuting, I didn't see this change as a problem.* **But over time I started to feel the negative effects - performance pressure was decreasing, team communication was deteriorating, relationships were declining, etc.**"

As another worker stated:" *I'm used to home office work from before* **it's all about discipline and planning**".

Other responded shared his **negative aspects of remote working** and pints out following problems: "*I have a big family and small children. And it's sometimes hard to explain to them that I shouldn't be disturbed because I have a job and I don't want them to think that they are on the "second track", so I don't really prefer this way of working, but if it's necessary, then I can somehow arrange.*"

Half of the respondents stated between the main obstacles to overcome in connection with teleworking the communication with colleagues and almost half (4 out of 10) the adequate working space. One third of the respondents struggled with the organization of work and distraction from children.

Using the same scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 5 (*very positive*) the sample has also assessed **a)** ability to set limits between working hours and "the rest of the life" and **b)** the level of stress generated by the experience.

Ability to set limits between working hours and "the rest of the life" and the level of stress generated by the experience in connection with teleworking. (rate on scale 1 = very negative impact / 3 = neutral / 5 = very positive impact) (number of respondents per category)

level of stress	3	2	3	2
ability to set boundaries	4	2	4	

Legend: ■1 ■2 ■3 ■4 ■5

Scale: 0 — 5 — 10
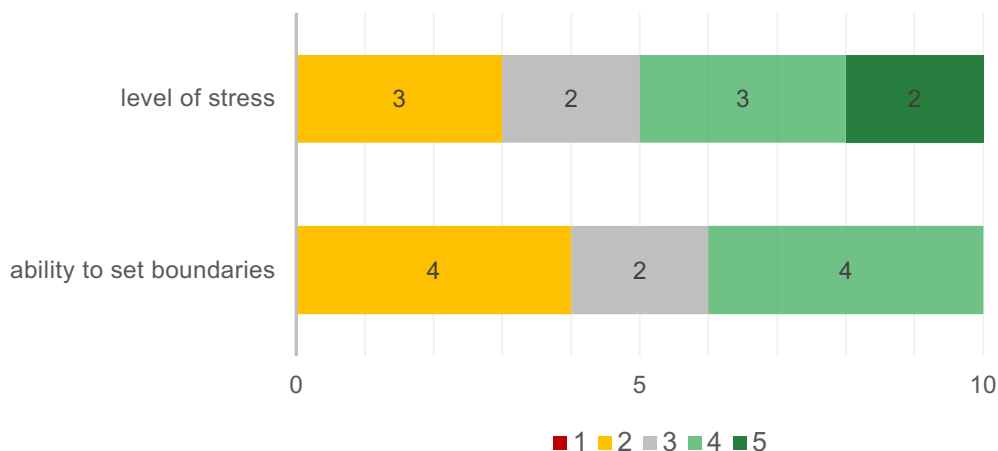
Only half of the respondents would like to continue working remotely in the future. One third of the respondents would not like that at all. The main reasons are:

- *Remote working is not for me. I like social contact.*
- *Telecommuting is only effective for a certain amount of time. Within days of the month, or in severe cases within weeks. But in the long run, I'm overwhelmed by remote communication and my motivation for achieving good work results is waning.*
- *I find telecommuting interesting for certain types of professions or for situations where one cannot actively attend the office, whether for short or long term reasons. I don't seek this method myself, but I find it a useful tool especially for short-term purposes (minor illness or indisposition, awaiting a delivery, helping family, visiting a repairman...).*
- *Maybe better organization of some meetings that would take place remotely whether I was away from home or at work.*

On the other hand those who would prefer to continue work remotely pointed out that:

- *I work when I need to, regardless of the time of day or whether it's the weekend or not.*
- *The time/work ratio is definitely better than being at work, so I appreciate that I organize everything myself.*
- *Time flexibility and less time spent in traffic jams.*
- *I saved 2h of time spent preparing and travelling to and from work, improved my work-life balance.*
- *Saving staff time travelling to and from work, better work-life balance.*

Would you like to continue working remotely in the future? (rate on scale 1 = very negative impact / 3 = neutral / 5 = very positive impact) (number of respondents per category)
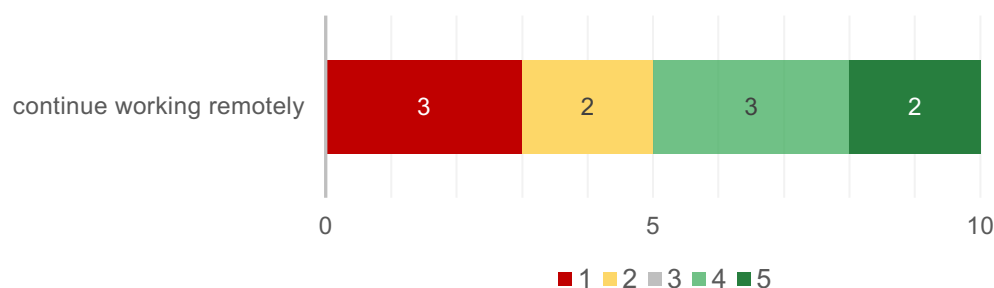
What has worked well for you? **The best practices** shared by the respondents:

- *Technically adapt equipment for a comfortable working environment.*
- *Work with the same commitment as in the office, not changing work habits substantially.*

22

- *It helped me, for example, in my weekly remote working, to set a time from when I would work to when I would work and then follow that and work at that time, then not after that.*
- *Daily schedule of activities, task timeline, discipline, priority setting.*
- *Being able to organize my time.*
- *Plan your day as well as possible, take short breaks after an hour and a half and go for a walk after lunch, have a short nap.*
- *Alternate remote work with face-to-face meetings with colleagues. At least some days of the week. Make maximum use of online meetings instead of messaging. There must be a good division of responsibilities so that everyone knows who is working on what and who is in charge of what.*
- *Beware of multitasking and it is important to measure your time over each task. Wear blue light goggles.*
- *Try to set boundaries that even when I'm at home, I'm simply at work. Older children understand this, younger children less so, but this seems to be a necessary condition for good functioning.*
- *Chill out lounge music.*
- *Online meetings every Monday 9 - 10, where the work for the whole week is clearly assigned, have worked well for us. Anyone who wanted to could book an online meeting with their manager by booking a date in Outlook when they needed to clarify a piece of work. Overall, about 60% of our employees want to continue to use the home office and most often once a week. The greatest interest is on Fridays.*

The Latvian case

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the lives of almost everyone. This has had a huge impact on our working habits. Although remote working has been available in Latvia since the 1990s, the last two years have seen a tremendous effort in the country to make it more broadly available in a variety of businesses. Experts note that, while remote working has been available in Latvia before, it is still a relatively new concept for the majority of employees, as the bulk of people began working remotely suddenly and during a pandemic. As a consequence, remote working is here to stay in Latvia, and workers will continue to use much of what they learnt during the pandemic even when it is no longer dictated by epidemiological requirements. There is even a new term – hybrid work, which means that people work part of the week at their workplace and part – at home.

The fact that remote working only became a significant phenomenon in Latvian statistics data during the epidemic is noteworthy, since it shows that people have previously paid minimal attention to it. As a result, only the first data on remote working in Latvia was collected in the second quarter of 2020. The proportion of remote employees has varied since then, with the waves of the Covid-19 outbreak and the holiday season having a specific influence on the number of remote workers in the education sector, for example.

As previously noted, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Latvia, like many other EU nations, saw a significant move to remote working. Remote workers accounted for about 20% of the total number of employees in Latvia in the second quarter of 2020. However, when the epidemiological situation improved, their share decreased and in the third quarter alone, 8.9% of employees worked remotely. In the fourth quarter, the share of remote workers rose again to 18%. In the months during the Covid-19 pandemic, the percentage of remote employees in the economy averaged 15% of total employment, over half of the possible number of remote workers, and nearly three times greater than in the pre-Covid-19 years. Take a look at the graph provided by Latvia's Official Statistics Portal.

24
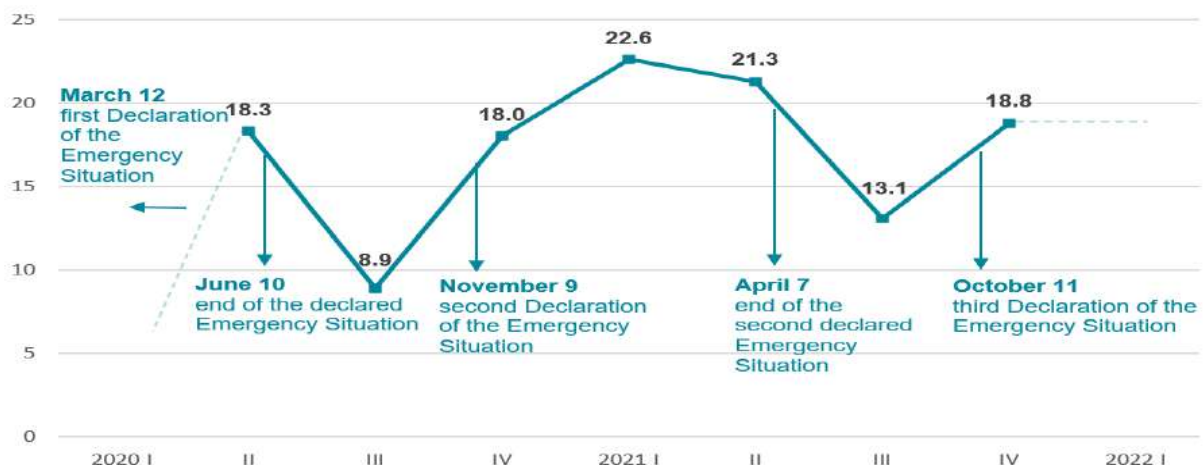
4.1. Share of remotely working employees in the total number of employees by quarter

Source: Stat.gov.lv

It is worth noting, that in the 4th quarter of 2021, 18.8% (143.7 thousand) of employees worked remotely. This is by 4.7 thousand or 0.8% more than a year ago (139.0 thousand or 18.0%) and by 44.3 thousand or 5.7 percentage points more than in the previous quarter (99.4 thousand or 13, 1%). Of those working remotely, 61% were women and 39% men.

After assessing the state of remote working in the Latvian labor market, it was necessary to conduct a survey of employees to determine if they enjoyed their smart working experience and would like to continue working remotely, or whether they did not like the experience owing to a variety of factors. The poll was performed by asking employees from various industries to share their thoughts, even if they did not have the opportunity to work remotely, so that we could understand if they would still be interested in smart working if the chance arose.

The survey included employees and managers up to the age of 65; 80% of the participants were employees and 20% were managers. Beauty, sewing, sales, finances, carpentry, legal, project management, education, and tourism were among the industries represented by the participants. 70% of them had no prior experience with smart working before the pandemic, whereas 15% had previously worked remotely on a regular basis, with the remaining 15% working remotely once a week or less.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, 46 % worked full-time remotely, 23 % did not work remotely, 16 % worked 2 to 3 days remotely, 8% worked once a week, and the rest worked less than 8 hours a week.

To obtain a better comprehension of why 23% of employees were unable to work remotely, the data shows that these employees worked in industries that were not permitted to work due to Covid-19 restrictions. Employees from the beauty and apparel sectors were among those present. Some employees, such as those in legal and banking, were not permitted to work remotely owing to the nature of their jobs.

The participants were asked to characterize the intensity of their remote working experience as well as the organizational aspects of it. The majority of the participants worked full-time from home, meaning that they needed fully organize all their duties from home. Speaking about the intensity, the participants rated it as "good", noting that it had increased and that they needed to establish the discipline to accomplish all of the responsibilities that had been assigned. In terms of organizing, most employees who worked from home used platforms such as ZOOM to arrange all of their necessary meetings with coworkers. Employees who were unable to work from home stated that it was due to

job specifications, Covid-19 restrictions, and for some it was due to technologies and materials needed that cannot be transported home. On a scale of 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (outstanding), 46 % gave their experience a 4; 31 % gave it a 3; 15 % gave it a 5, and 1% gave it a 2. It is interesting to note that even employees who did not work remotely gave their experience on an average a 3. That leads us to believe that they preferred to work from the office throughout the epidemic, but that they would have enjoyed the experience even more if they could work from home at least one day a week.

Afterwards, the participants were asked to report how remote working has altered their everyday work routines. A table has been created to summarize the average data. It should be noted that responses from workers who did not work remotely were not taken into consideration in order to maintain the accuracy of the data.

4.1. Table   The impact of remote work on everyday habits

Factor	Average result On a scale of 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (outstanding)
Productivity	4.09
Communication / Collaboration with colleagues	3
Time devoted to work	4.5
The work-life balance	3.9
Family relationships	4.1
Personal relationships	4

Source: Developed by the authors

As can be seen from the table, productivity, work time, and family relationships received the greatest scores, while communication with coworkers received a modest rating. Participants remarked that productivity rose as all attention was focused on work; for example, they did not spend time chatting with coworkers as they may do at the office. In addition, several participants said as they did not need to drive to office, they were able to use this time to do more work or spend with their families. Employees with children stated that they needed to schedule the most of their work when their children were in kindergarten or school so that they could focus on the work.

Participants also mentioned that it was harder to maintain a balance between personal and professional life because work was taken at home. Collaborating with coworkers was also less efficient than working from the office since if You generally have a question, You can ask immediately, however, when working from home, even if You had the smallest question, You had to call or write to Your coworkers, which took extra time.

Employees who were unable to work from home stated that they would be happier if their managers could find solutions to let them to work from home owing to the Covid-19 hazards, as going to the workplace increased their chances of becoming ill. Employees who work in apparel businesses stated they stayed at home since all of the stores were closed and they could not work at all. They spent this time on self-improvement.

After that, the participants were asked to describe the most challenging obstacles they had to overcome. The three most difficult challenges were communicating with coworkers, organizing duties, and finding a suitable work place. Participants indicated that they needed to adjust to new ways of communicating with their colleagues and organize their tasks. Many of the participants mentioned that the most difficult aspect was finding a suitable work space that not only had the necessary equipment but also had a spot apart from family members.

It is worth noting that on average participants rated the work-life balance on a scale of 1 (extremely bad) to 5 (outstanding) – a 4. It is a solid sign that smart working might help to enhance this balance. The participants reported that they typically worked during standard business hours, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and that they did so while their children were in school. Also in response to this question, participants mentioned that their work-life balance had improved and that they were able to spend more time with family members since they did not have to spend additional time getting to work. Although some claim that it was difficult to build a barrier between personal life and work, particularly at the start, because the job was transferred from the office to home and they had no prior experience with this.

The participants were also asked to rate how stressful the situation was for them. The answers are summarized in the following graph. The responses of workers who did not work from home were not considered.

4.2. Table - The level of stress caused by the situation

Level	% of participants
Very low level of stress	15%
Low level of stress	31%
Moderate	31%

* The remaining 23% are participants who did not work from home

Source: Developed by the authors

The majority of participants stated that they did not experience much stress or that they do not worry about matters over which they have no control.

Participants were asked to offer their opinions on whether they would prefer to continue working from home or, if given the opportunity, whether they would take it. All of the responses from participants were taken into account.

4.2. The opinions of the participants on the continuation of remote work
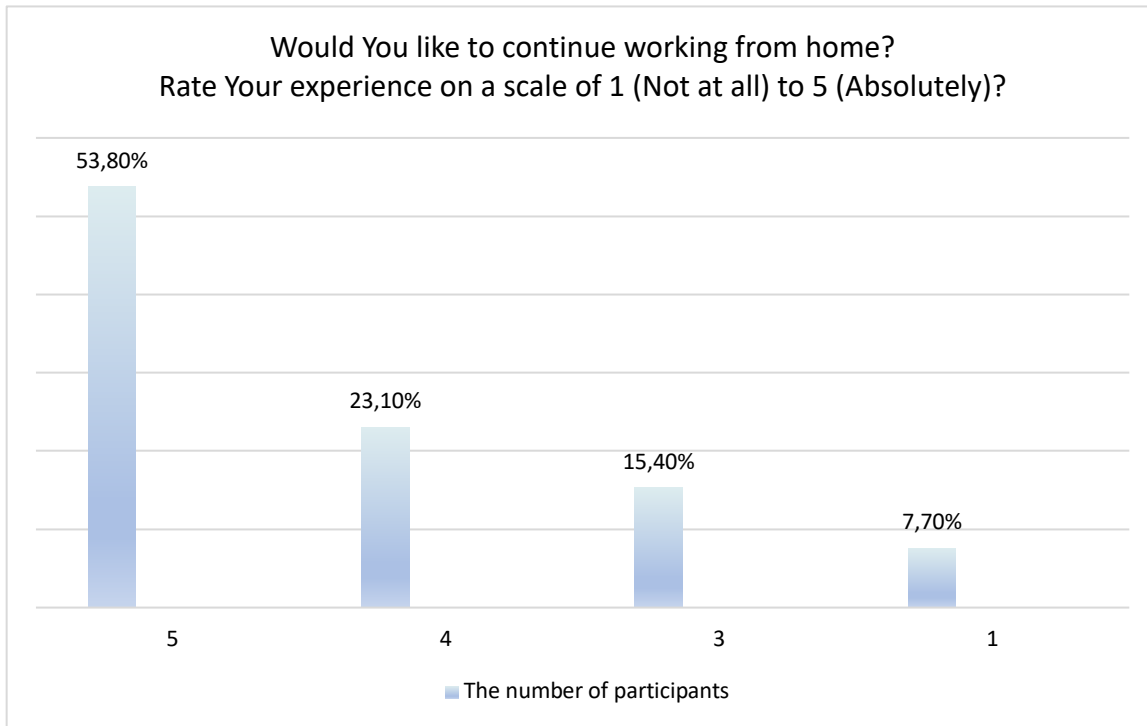
Source: Developed by the authors

The vast majority of participants expressed a desire to continue working from home at least two days each week. Many participants emphasized the significance of coming to the office at least once a week to meet their coworkers, socialize, and maintain the relationship. Participants also agreed that standards on remote working would be required to make the process easier for everyone, not only workers, but also managers.

Participants were asked to express their thoughts on how to better adjust to remote working. The participants stated that:

- The time management and the plan of scheduling tasks are needed;
- To put all distractions, such as a cell phone, aside so that one does not lose concentration on the task in hand;
- It is considerably simpler to adjust to a remote work if You read blog posts and watch videos about other employees' experiences online;

- The significance of the manager's capacity to assist in the adaptation to remote working;

- Before beginning remote work, a meeting with coworkers and management is required to design the remote work process;

- The importance of creating a comfortable working environment at home to facilitate the process, such as putting up furniture that splits the space into two different rooms.

Chapter 2: The principles of Project Management
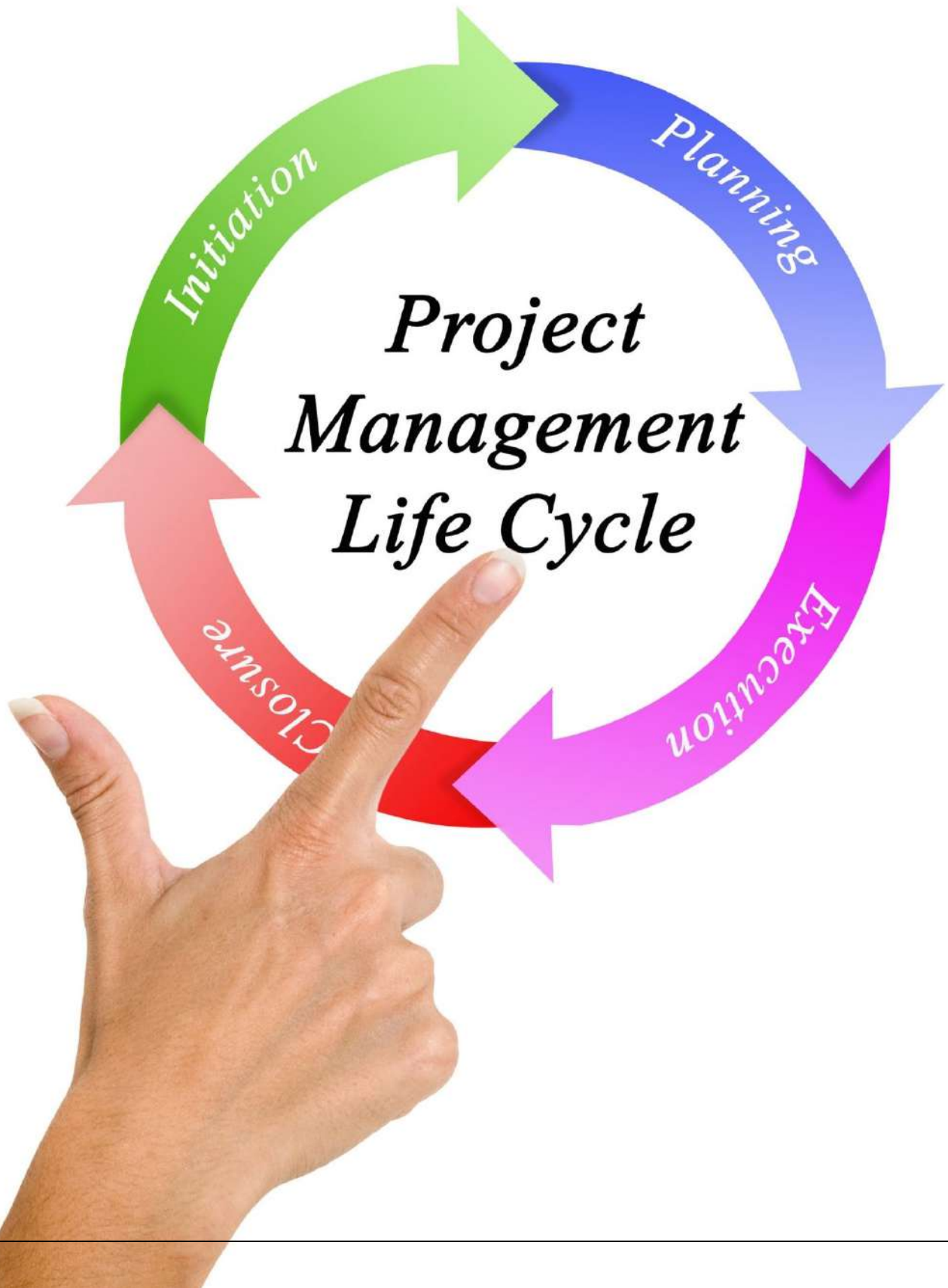
Project definition, essentials, and features

Hey! We are delighted to have You join us. We would like to take this opportunity to welcome You to our Project Management learning module.

Let's get this lesson started with a hands-on practice. What actually is a project? Take a minute to consider some of the many things You have performed in Your life. Perhaps You organized a birthday celebration or a wedding, or perhaps You planned a trip to Japan? Maybe You designed a house plan? Whether You realize it or not, You have been honing a variety of abilities and needed knowledge that can help You to become an outstanding project manager at work or for Your own company, or for any other organization. This learning module will provide You an overview of project management and teach you the principles of it. And, of course, assist You in obtaining employment or progressing in Your career.

Let us show you some useful tools to successfully manage your projects. The process of leading a project from start to finish is referred to as project management. The primary purpose of project management is to finish a project within the time, budget, and quality constraints that have been defined. Since projects are not meant to last forever, they have life cycles.

Source: Developed by the authors

A project management life cycle begins with the initiation of the project and concludes when the project is either completed or terminated in one way or another.

The projects are led by a project manager. Let's define what a project manager is. Project managers are those who are in charge of doing something that has never been done before.

31

They must first forecast the unknown, devise a strategy to deal with the unexpected, carry out the plan with limited resources over which they have little control, then accept full responsibility for the outcomes. Even if You are not a project manager, You may comply with this definition.

Project Management Essentials

- Clarification of requirements
- Goal setting
- Application of knowledge and skills
- Project task management
- Fulfillment of participants' wishes
- Balancing the limiting factors (time-money-quality)

Photo by Smartnest

Source: Developed by the authors

Project phases, key activities, and a life cycle

Project Management Life Cycle

2 Planning
3 Execution
1 Initiation
4 Monitoring & Controlling
5 Closure

Photo by Smartnest

Now that we have characterized project management and project managers, let's have a deeper glance.

Project management is divided into five phases – Initiation, Planning, Execution, Monitoring and Control and Closure or Completion.

Source: Developed by the authors

Project management phases are a series of actions, behaviours, and skill sets that are required to complete a project successfully.

The project initiation phase kicks off a project by defining high-level expectations such as why the project is needed, whether it is feasible, and what is necessary to accomplish it.

Three crucial factors should be determined at this phase:

• The Project's scope (Covers what will and will not be accomplished in the project, as well as the project's goals and an initial list of stakeholders);

• The Project's overview (This encompasses the resources, time, and objectives needed to execute a project and is used to track these requirements through time);

• Resources (It is vital in securing project approval, ensuring funds are available on schedule, and monitoring performance since it helps set spending expectations).

Let's move on to the next phase – planning. During this phase, major milestones, and dates, including the project's final completion date, are established, or, to put it another way, the project plan is set. You can help guarantee that everyone on Your team is working toward the same objective by becoming clear and purposeful about project timelines. This will also avoid You from getting lost on the way when You come across roadblocks. During this process, it's important to outline which project management methodology (Agile, Waterfall or other) the team will follow. However, You will learn more about it later in the module.

Not to forget any important aspect of the project in the initiation and planning phase we recommend you use the Project canvas template for setting up the key project properties. Such as:

• Purpose of the project to set the goal(s) of the project, (why You are doing this).

• Scope of the project to set boundaries to the project.

• Define success criteria for the project.

• What are the expected and needed outcomes reach the project goals?

• Which actions need to be executed to achieve the expected outcomes?

• Define key project milestones of the project activities with their respective dates.

• Appoint team members involved in the project and describe their roles.

• Think of stakeholders who can affect or be affected by the project activities.

• Make sure to know who the users to benefit from the project outputs.

- What are the resources needed for the project (including time, money, equipment, people, software etc.)?

- What are the limitations and constrains for the project?

- Which risks may occur during the project and how to deal with them?

Source: www.projectcanvas.dk

You and Your team can begin executing the project once the initiation and planning phases have been completed. It's all about getting the job done at this point. During the execution phase, You will carry out the details of Your project plan (or project outputs) to deliver Your products to stakeholders who were identified during the initiation phase. But, You might wonder, what exactly are project outputs? Let us explain. A project output is any specific output element that's a result of deliberate work done during the project.

There are three types of outputs:

1.   Internal outputs (These are the part of the product the client usually does not care about like filing taxes and maintaining accounts);

2.   External outputs (These are the outputs to external stakeholders and clients that the project delivers such as revenue-generating features, functionalities, and documentation);

3.   Planning outputs (These includes documents such as the project scope, project plan, project timeline, budgets, and other artifacts).
Source: Developed by the authors
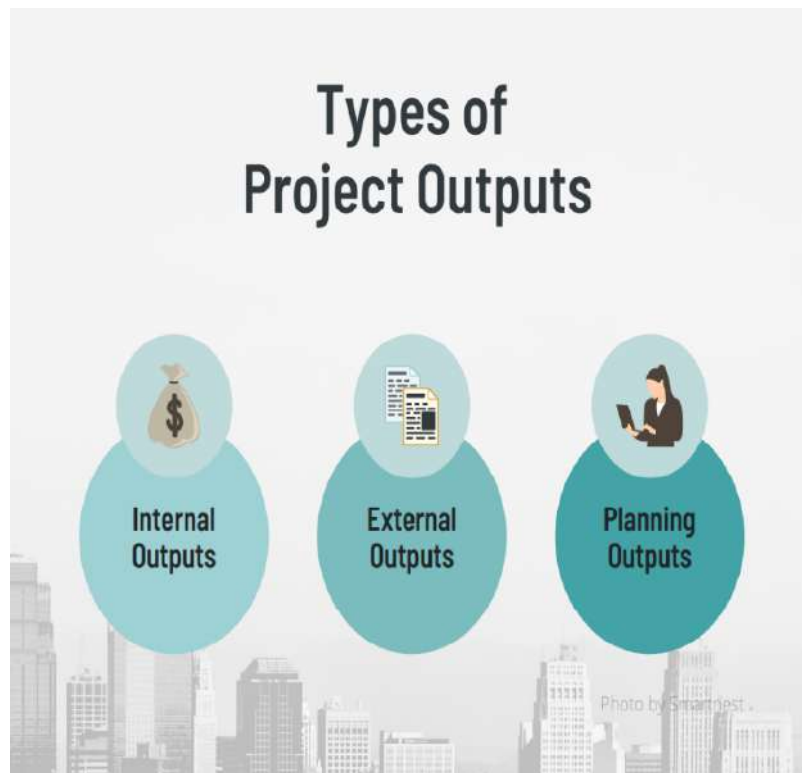
You must remember that throughout this phase, the project team members are coordinated and steered through effective project communication in order to complete the task as specified in the approved project management plan.

To manage Your project activities through all the milestones the Gant chart is a useful tool. Gantt chart is used to break down a project to phases and tasks with start and end date, define milestones, and appoint who's responsible for the task

Source: Developed by the authors

But how can You know whether everything is in line with the goals You established in the beginning? That why the monitoring and controlling processes are needed. These processes, or phases, run simultaneously with the execution phase. Monitoring and controlling processes must be done regularly and should be like consistent project "check-ins". During the project monitoring and controlling phase, the project's time, cost, and performance are compared at each stage, and modifications to the project's activities, resources, and plan are made as needed to keep things on track. Project progress reports and other communications are produced during this phase to ensure that project plans are followed, and that major milestones and deadlines are not missed. Use of proper project tracking tools or frameworks (such as Kanban boards, Gantt charts, and team stand-ups) can be used to ease the process but You will learn about it further.

When You have gone through all the previously mentioned phases, You end up at the final step – closure. This stage, often known as "project delivery", involves wrapping up all activities and delivering the finished product to the client (an internal team or external stakeholder). Since there are still some tasks to be completed, this phase allows for both celebration and reflection. The project results, the conclusion of any formal contracts or agreements, a comprehensive evaluation or audit, and any lessons learned that may be applied to future projects are all determined.

Project management methodology (Framework)

N ow that we have learned about the major aspects, activities, canvas, and other practical information, we can move to the last part of this module – project management methodology or framework. But first and foremost, what is a project management methodology? A project management methodology is a collection of principles, tools, and methods for planning, executing, and managing projects. Project management methodologies assist project managers in leading and managing team members as well as fostering team cooperation.

There are several project management methodologies, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Some are better suited to specific sectors or projects, so You'll need to study about project management approaches to figure out which one is right for You.

Choosing a framework is one of the most important project management decisions You'll make since it determines how You structure Your team and how You plan and monitor Your projects. Basically, framework helps You to manage Your project in the best way possible.

Project management is critical for companies and teams, but to be really effective, You must ensure that Your project management methodology is properly mapped to Your team type, project, company, and goals.

You might be wondering… how to pick the best project management approach? Many variables will influence which project management approach is best for Your project, team, and business. Here's a brief rundown of some of the most important factors to consider:

• Ability to take risks: Is this a large project with significant implications that must be properly handled in order to produce serious results? Is it a smaller-scale project with more leeway to experiment?

• Timeline: How much time do You have to complete the brief? Is it more vital to have a great end product, no matter how long it takes, or is it more necessary to have a speedy turnaround?

• Cost and budget: What kind of budget are You dealing with, on a scale of $ to $$$? Is it possible to adjust it if required, or must it remain within these agreed limits?

• Team size: What is the total number of individuals involved? What is the total number of stakeholders? Is Your team small and self-contained, or is it larger and more decentralized, requiring more stringent delegation?

• Flexibility: Is it possible for the project's scope to vary during the process? So, how about the final product?

• Client/stakeholder collaboration: What level of involvement does the client/stakeholder require or desire in the process? What level of involvement do You require or desire from them?

We have put together a quick review of project management techniques to help You learn the basics and understand how to distinguish between different Project management approaches. We'll go through some of the most common project management methodologies, which are used in a variety of industries including software development, research and development, and product development. Ready? Okay! Let's get started.

Waterfall Methodology
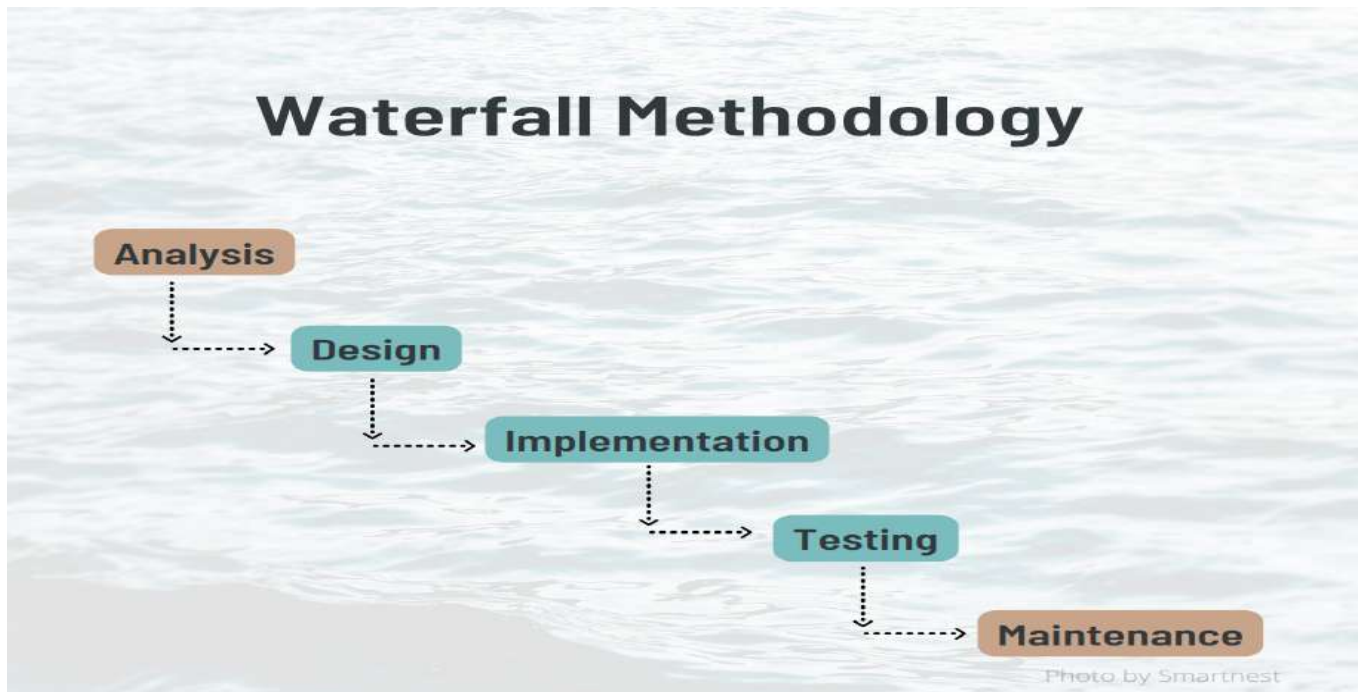
Source: Developed by the authors

Waterfall Methodology is the simplest and most linear of all the project management strategies out there, as well as the most traditional. Before You even get started, You break down and schedule the entire project from start to finish. The waterfall methodology is a procedure in which project phases flow downhill, as the "Waterfall". The waterfall model requires that You only go from one project phase to the next when it has been completed successfully.

When to use it? The Waterfall technique is ideal for highly organized manufacturing and construction projects, as well as when pivoting or changing anything after the fact is too costly. Gantt charts are used in the waterfall approach for planning and scheduling. There's no better option if You are working with physical items with a lot of dependencies or services where Your SLA demands excellence, consistency, and set-in-stone deadlines.

Agile Methodology
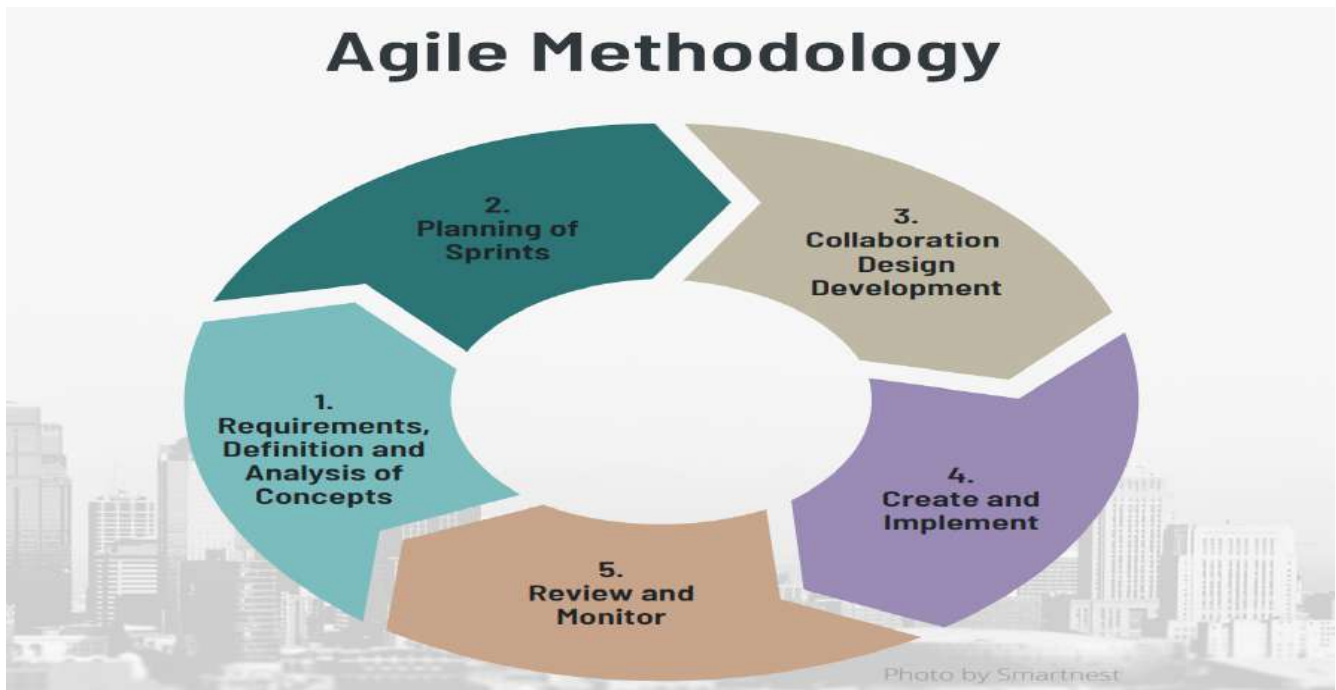
Source: Developed by the authors

In a nutshell, Agile project management is an ever evolving and collaborative mechanism for teams to self-organize. Project planning and task management are flexible, evolutionary in development, seek early delivery, and are always open to change if it leads to process improvement when using the agile approach. Unlike waterfall project management, it is quick and adaptable.

Agile methodology is a popular project management technique for product and software development because it allows project teams to work and cooperate in a very dynamic way. That's because the "Manifesto for Agile Software Development," penned by 17 software professionals, was published in 2001, and it's what we think of as agile now.

When should You use it? The approach has its roots in software development and fits very well with that environment. How can You tell if agile is right for You? It's been used in non-software projects that require a more responsive and fast-paced production schedule, such as marketing; and it's also been used in non-software products that seek to drive forward with innovation and have a level of uncertainty, such as computers, motor vehicles, medical devices, food, clothing, music, and more.

Scrum Methodology

Source: Developed by the authors

Scrum is a project management methodology based on brief "sprints". The scrum approach is a group of people that work together to solve problems. It's best for teams of no more than ten people, and it's frequently tied to two-week cycles with brief daily scrum sessions. A scrum master is in charge of the team. Although there have been attempts to expand Scrum to meet bigger businesses, it operates inside an agile project management framework.

When should You use it? Scrum, like agile, has been mostly employed in software development, but proponents argue that it can be used to any sector or organization, including retail logistics, event planning, or any project that requires some flexibility. It does, however, necessitate rigid scrum roles. It also includes guidelines for team size, roles, planning, meetings, and deliverables, among other things. It's popular among software engineers, but it's also useful for teams that want to deliver working increments of their work throughout a project. It might be used for marketing campaigns, product design, or other creative initiatives, for example.

Critical Path Method
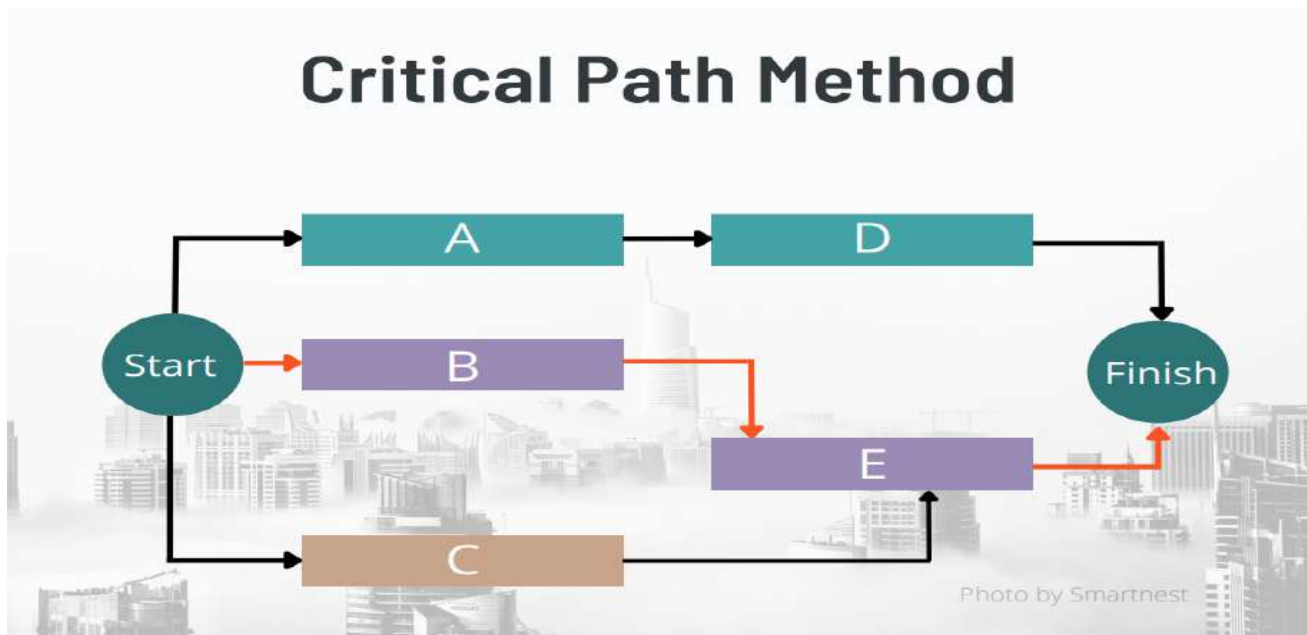
Source: Developed by the authors

The critical path method (CPM) entails creating a model of the project that includes all of the activities listed in a work breakdown structure, the duration of those tasks, whether or not there are any task dependencies, and marking off milestones to indicate larger phases of the project or points at which Your project deliverables are due.

With this information, You may determine the critical path, or the longest series of tasks required to complete the project. You'll need to keep an eye on those jobs because if one of them falls behind, the entire project will suffer.

When should You use it? Smaller or mid-sized projects are better suited to CPM. Without project management software, it might be tough to take all of the data You need to draw and make sense of it as the project grows larger.

Kanban Methodology
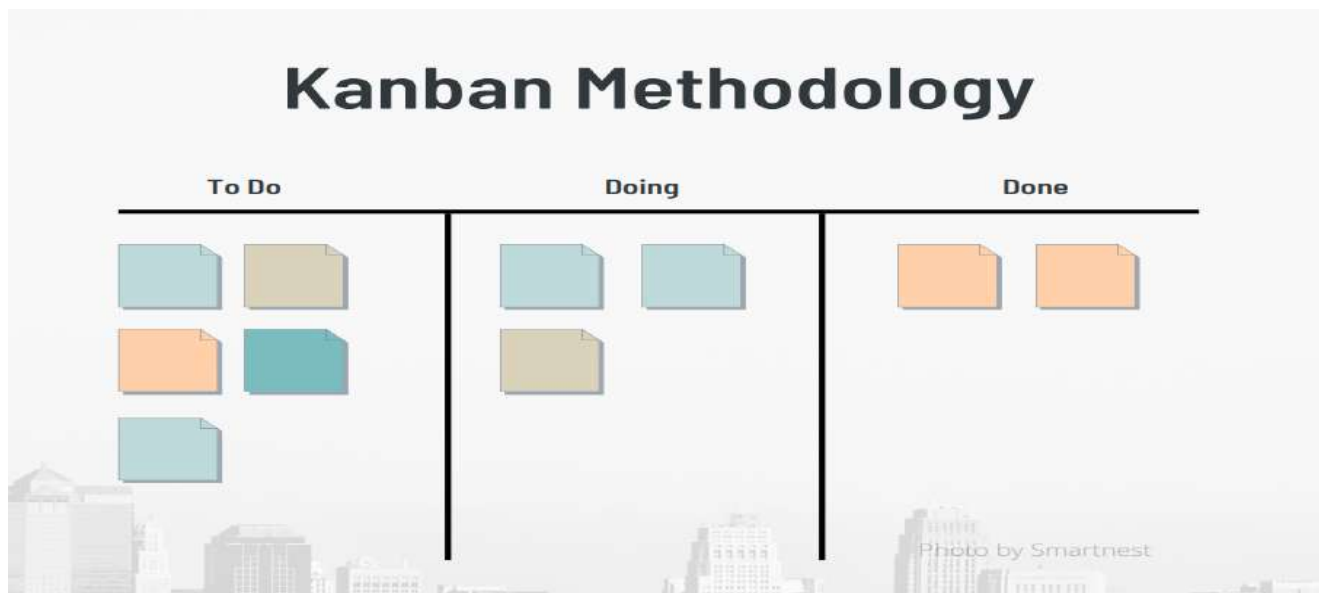
Source: Developed by the authors

K anban project management, unlike the Waterfall framework, focuses on continual improvement. Your team plans how to enhance goods, marketing, or procedures using a Kanban board like the one shown above.

The Kanban technique is a visual project management strategy. In Japanese, the term literally means "billboard". It aids workflow management by displaying tasks on a Kanban board, which makes workflow and progress visible to all team members. The Kanban approach aids in the reduction of inefficiencies and is an excellent project management tool for a variety of applications, including lean manufacturing and agile projects.

Kanban project management has been established since the late 1940s, when Toyota experimented with using demand to regulate the rate of car manufacturing. It was used in Toyota's lean manufacturing methodology, which is known as the Toyota production system. With the advent of visual planning boards in software such as Trello in our day, Kanban tools and methodologies have found new applications. Kanban boards are used by agile teams to storyboard user stories and plan backlogs in software development.

When to use it? The Kanban approach, which was originally intended for manufacturing and software teams, has subsequently grown to include human resources, marketing, organizational strategy, executive procedure, and accounts receivable and payable.

Kanban boards may be used by almost anybody to organize projects by adding cards to represent project phases, task deadlines, individuals, ideas, and more. This concept is notably accessible because to Kanban software. Kanban allows You to visualize Your work in order to reduce work-in-progress (WIP) and move work from "doing" to "done" rapidly. Kanban is ideal for teams with a high volume of requests.

Lean Methodology
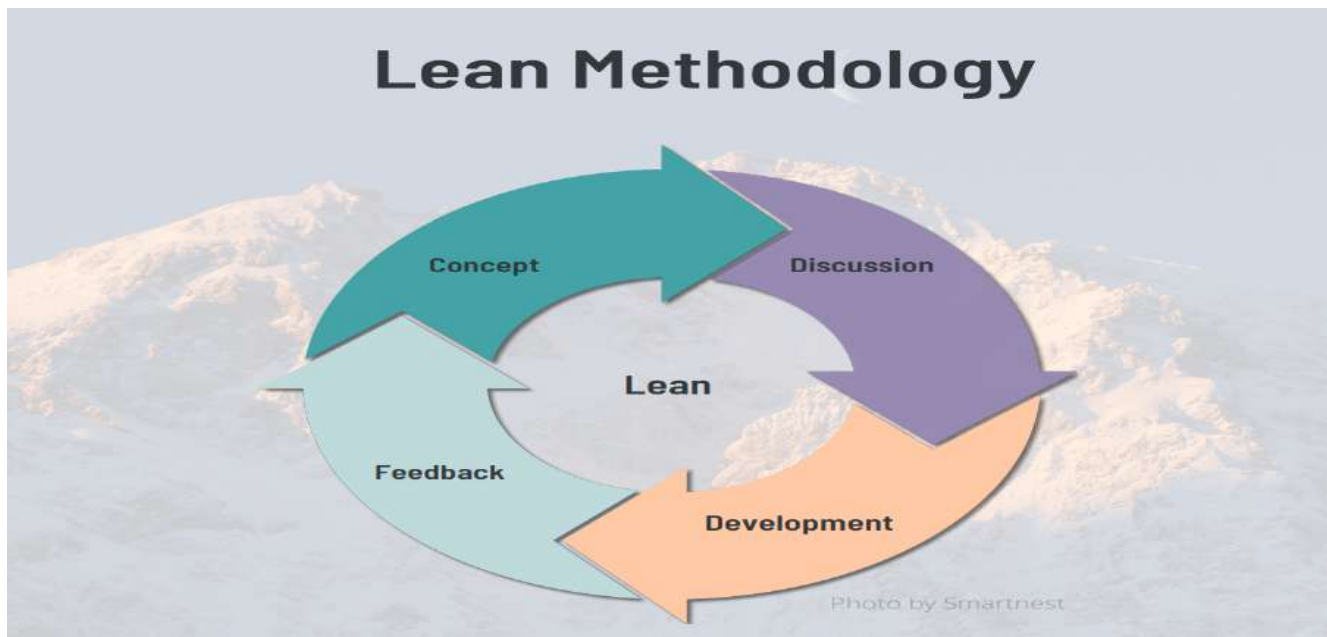
Source: Developed by the authors

Lean project management is exactly what its name implies: a method for reducing waste and increasing value in projects and industrial processes. As a result, lean focuses on removing waste from essential operations in order to constantly improve the value stream. It accomplishes this through maximizing the performance of various technologies, assets, and verticals.

The origins of lean project management may be traced back to Henry Ford's flow manufacturing method for automating the car-building process. Toyota took up on the notion as well, expanding it beyond manufacturing to include continuous product development process improvement.

When should You use it? Toyota was the first to establish lean project management, and it is an excellent production process. It's also known as lean manufacturing, and it's been adopted by the construction and education industries, as well as innumerable startups and software development organizations trying to create products that are focused on the end-user.

Chapter 3: Time Management

Introduction: Basic Principles on Time Management

Probably one of the most challenging things to master when you're working from your own home-based office is managing your time effectively. It's easy to become distracted by the external noise of everyday life that constantly surrounds us. In this chapter, we're going to look at some of the things to consider so that you can maximize every moment spent working, rather than allowing the sands of time to slip through your fingers, never to be retrieved again.

All Time Has an Expiration Date

Time is finite, and you can never get it back again. If you allow yourself to become distracted by even the smallest, insignificant things, when you're meant to be doing something productive, it can take a while to play 'catch-up.' There's nothing to be done

once a deadline has expired and you're late in handing in a proposal, quotation, report, or any number of other things that may be required for a project to move forward.

There's a reason for things having deadlines attached to them, figuring out why this is important and then doing whatever it takes shows those who are depending on you that you take your role within their organization as seriously as they do. It also proves that you can be trusted to work remotely in the first place and that you're not short-changing them when it comes to your time.

Write Down Everything That Needs Doing

This could be done via a 'To-Do List,' or you can add each item to a productivity app like Trello, where you can easily manage your tasks, dragging and dropping things effortlessly from things to do, to being processed, to complete. Some of these apps allow you to include teammates and others who are associated with the same project so that everyone is onboard with exactly what's happening with scheduled tasks. As each task is complete, mark it off your list as 'done.'

There's a psychological reason for physically writing things down. Once you've written it down, it's actually out of your head. Aim to get things down on paper, on your app, or on your whiteboard. It will physically make room for you to concentrate on other things that are maybe just as important.

Focus on Professional Tasks

Avoid being tempted to sneak personal tasks into the mix. Leave these for after-hours or weekends. Along with this comes surfing the internet for anything that's not project or work-related. These saps hours of time that should be spent being productive.

Surfing the web and visiting YouTube or other non-essential sites is counter-productive. Remember that you're being paid to physically work and complete tasks on behalf of your employer, not to make use of their resources for your own personal gain.

Avoid Trying to Multitask

Many of us believe that we can get much more accomplished if we multitask. This is simply not true. In fact, it takes more time for the brain to switch between multiple tasks than it does, focusing all of your efforts and energy on completing one task at a time before moving on to the next. While this may require discipline and forcing yourself to focus a little harder on the task at hand, in the long run, it will prove to be worthwhile in completing

tasks on time. Developing a laser-like focus means doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

Getting tasks completed in a systematic way can help your brain process things more easily and makes the transition of moving from one task to another easier because you're not still considering whether there's anything that's been left hanging or incomplete with previous tasks.

Your brain can only focus on a limited number of things at the same time. This is why you should write things down on paper. It's getting the things out of your head and down on paper to make room for other thought processes to take place.

Take Breaks

Reward yourself or take small breaks regularly to refocus and refresh your mind and body. Working from home is challenging enough, and you need to enforce similar guidelines and rules that you would have if you worked in a corporate office. There you would be entitled to regular tea or coffee breaks, as well as a set lunchtime. Schedule these same breaks into your day where you can get up, stretch your legs, maybe get some fresh air for a few minutes, grab something for lunch and then return to whatever you were doing.

Main Steps Towards a Successful Time Management

Setting Goals

Goals are the targets that you want to achieve. In order to succeed, you should know what you want to achieve. Setting up goals helps you make decisions that are in accordance with your target. Always set challenging but achievable goals, both long and short term, and work towards them.

As much as goal setting is important, prioritization is what helps you move forward. Working in order of importance and realizing what can be left for now helps you work efficiently.

Keeping your end result in mind, decide upon the tasks you need to get done in order of their importance and value.

Setting up goals that you can actually achieve is really important. Because if you continue to have goals that are under realistic or over realistic, then you will not be able to achieve them, which will lead to self-resentment and lack of confidence.

It is always a promising idea to set SMART goals.

Let's have a look at SMART goals.

SMART is an acronym where each letter describes the quality of a goal.

Your goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.

Here is how you can set SMART goals:

Step 1: Specific Goals

List down your goal. Make sure you know your objective. Know your 'why.' See the bigger picture. Visualize what you want to do by achieving this goal. What end result do you have in mind. Be truly clear.

You need to be extremely specific with your goals. Like what importance does your goal or end result have for you? And why is it important? What will be the impact of this goal?

Answer these questions while setting up your goal.

Step 2: Measurable Goals

Set goals that are measurable. By setting measurable goals, you can track your progress easily and make changes, as necessary.

Instead of saying, 'I will increase my sales by the end of the year,' be more tangible with your goal.

Make your goal, 'I will increase my sales by 30% by the end of the year.'

What difference will it make? It will set a defined target that you have to work towards and also that is easy to track. You will maximize your potential to achieve the desired result.

Otherwise, even if you increase your sales by only 2%, you will feel good; although you have the potential and capability to increase sales up to 50%.

So, to tap into your hidden talents, you need to set tangible goals.

Word of caution: Please stay realistic while setting goals. Your goals should be challenging but realistic.

Step 3: Action-Oriented and Attainable Goals

Stay realistic while setting goals. If you want your sales to increase by 100%, then you need to work according to a plan that will help you achieve the parts of this huge goal. To increase sales by 100%, you need to first increase sales by 10%.

Lay out the action plan for achieving the target and remember not to go overboard. Understand the difference between setting challenging goals and unrealistic ones.

Challenging goals allow you to tap into your hidden talents while unrealistic ones exhaust you and are not really action-oriented. You cannot join a firm and be the manager the next day. But you can be the manager over a period of years.

Step 4: Rewarding Goals

Set relevant goals that make you happy and give you satisfaction. Do not fall in the trap of following someone else for setting goals. You can get inspiration from others, but your life is your life. Set goals that are rewarding for you.

Step 5: Time-Bound Goals

Define a time limit for reaching your target, so you stay on track. Having a deadline or end date helps you in tracking your progress and making necessary adjustments along the way. It keeps you focused on your target and minimizes the chances of getting sidetracked.

Let us walk through the steps of setting goals and then working towards achieving them.

Once you have figured out your goal, **write it down**. Writing things makes them more real. When you write your goals, you involve your senses, and it becomes a real feeling in your mind.

Once your goal is written, **make an action plan**. Write all the steps you need to take in order to get to the end result. Think of your goal like going on a long journey. You need to plan out the route and stops. Similarly, plan out your steps and milestones.

Work backward from your target time. So, you can be sure that you can actually complete your actions in the allotted time, or you need to make adjustments.

Take action. Once the plan is laid out, you need to start taking action. Dreams become reality only with action. Start small and build up.

Evaluate things from time to time. Infect it is always a good idea to schedule time for evaluation at regular intervals.

Achieve Your Goal. When you work with focus and manage your time, giving importance to tasks that are in alignment with your goals, you will definitely achieve your target. Enjoy the journey towards your goal and learn things along the way.

Listing and Scheduling Tasks

Prioritize Where Possible

Learn to prioritize important tasks each day by making lists and using tracking tools. These help you become more organized, focused, and identify what needs to be completed on a daily basis in order of importance. It's not only an important tool to plan and schedule your day, but it can also help you tackle each task that needs to be done daily (even those that seem to be unimportant and mundane).

Figuring out what's important may require some guidance from management, mentors, or supervisors initially. If you are working on certain projects as part of a team, take direction from whoever is most senior on the project but whatever you do, make sure that you're not the one that drops the ball!

Tools for Lists

You can use Evernote. It allows you to search through notes and lists and go over old tasks and projects. This app also helps you create a master list that you can present to your boss on a weekly basis, allowing them to see exactly what's going on. Even though it's just bullet points showing upcoming tasks, completed tasks, concerns, and important wins, it helps you remain focused on what needs to be accomplished every single day.

Similar apps available are OneNote and Trello. Before going ahead and settling for an app to keep all your tasks in one place, make sure the app is reliable, has support, and is not likely to be discontinued in the future. This is easy enough to do by performing some research on Google. The last thing that you need to be doing is capturing all of your data,

projects and information on an app that's about to expire: the point of going with an app in the first place is to streamline your productivity, rather than set it back.

To-Do Lists

You may prefer going the good old-fashioned manual route, setting out a physical 'To-Do List' that allows you to write down and capture everything that needs doing. A physical 'To-Do List' can prove to be extremely effective as it's more visual than an app on your phone could be. With a physical list, you can look at the BIG picture of everything that needs to be done during the course of a day. You can then decide what needs to take precedence and what's most important.

Some individuals prefer to go the route of least resistance and choose to get the smaller stuff out of the way, allowing them more time to devote on what is more important after. Whatever way is comfortable for you, do your best to work through each 'To-Do List' daily.

You may even want to capture the most important things that need doing on a flipchart or whiteboard that's close by and easily accessible. As you've managed to complete each task, mark them off or erase them from your whiteboard. You may just find that as you begin doing one thing, it leads to other sub-tasks being broken down further into more manageable bits. In this event, add each of these items to your 'To-Do List' and work through them one by one.

Assess Your Day

Get into the habit of setting aside some quiet time at the end of the day to consider what you've managed to accomplish, what you should've accomplished, and what you still need to accomplish. Items accomplished should be physically crossed off as this provides a psychological way for you to recognize that there's progress being made. It also allows you to re-prioritize items that should be rearranged on your 'To-Do List' as they happen.

Making and sticking to lists creates efficient and effective work habits; it also keeps us motivated towards doing the things we need to do on a daily basis. Some of these tasks may be routine and repetitive, but that's what the work-life is all about—it's getting those smaller things out of the way to make place for what is more impactful and important.

Evening Analysis

For some, it's effective to spend 10 minutes at nighttime, contemplating the day and what has been accomplished, and then writing down the top 5 things that MUST be achieved the following day. The reason for this process is that your subconscious will have time to process each of the tasks while you are sleeping, and by the morning, you will have a clear head and clear direction as to what you need to do to complete the tasks at hand.

Whichever option of List Making you decide to settle for, make sure that it works for you. Some companies have their own activity tracking systems in place, in which case you may need to follow these in-house procedures and protocols.

Prioritization

Prioritizing tasks is a critical skill for the modern workplace. Doing so helps you get more done by making you feel less reactive. However, determining the importance of each task is not easy. Nevertheless, it can help you be more effective and efficient. To help you prioritize your work, consider a few tips to make your tasks more manageable. The first step is to prioritize your tasks.

Whether you're working from home or in a traditional office, prioritization is a key aspect of your work. This can help you to stay organized and productive. For instance, you can write down all the tasks you have to do. You can also make separate lists for personal tasks and workday tasks. In addition, you can use online tools to help you prioritize your tasks. Once you have a list of tasks, you can use it as a reference to make decisions.

Before you start to prioritize your tasks, you should know your strengths and weaknesses. It's best to have a flowchart or to-do list so that you can accomplish all the tasks you've set for the day. Remember to breathe deeply and take a deep breath before starting any task. Besides, you need to know what tasks you are better at and can easily delegate them to other people. You should also know your most productive time and set daily goals so that you can finish the tasks you've delegated.

If you want to feel in control of your time, you should prioritize your work. If you can't be interrupted, you should label it DND. Then, you'll never be disturbed by emails or phone calls. But if you can't, you will be too stressed to finish your tasks. Then, you can allocate your work accordingly. If you can't complete all of the assigned tasks, then label them as DND.

If you're a *Work from Home* worker, it's important to prioritize your tasks. There's no such thing as a perfect schedule. In reality, it's impossible to follow a rigid schedule. The only way to manage your priorities is to think critically and make sure you're not

overworked. This way, you'll be more productive. But, if you don't prioritize your tasks, you'll be more likely to avoid unnecessary interruptions and stress.

The second step is to set a schedule. Before you begin to work, write down all the tasks you need to accomplish. Once you've written down all the tasks, prioritize them in chronological order. You may want to prioritize daily tasks based on urgency or complexity, while a monthly or yearly goal should be based on the priorities of your team. Then, you can plan weekly or monthly activities according to their importance.

Another tip is to prioritize your tasks. For example, you should prioritize your daily activities. This can help you to achieve your long-term and short-term goals. By prioritizing your tasks, you'll be more productive. You'll be able to get the job done better, and you'll have a better focus. When you're working from home, you have the freedom to multitask as you wish, but it's crucial to remember that multitasking is not an option.

When setting priorities, make sure you have an open-door policy. If your team members need to communicate with you, give them access to your work schedule and keep them updated. When you have a closed-door policy, your team can speak with you about problems and suggestions. In addition, having an open-door policy helps you to foster a positive and productive work environment. If you have a team of workers, make sure that the management team is accessible.

It's important to take time off to recharge your brain. A break from your work can be beneficial for your mental health. By taking time to relax, you'll have more energy for the rest of the day. You'll also have more time for other things. The more you work from home, the more productive you'll be. If you're not able to take advantage of your time, you'll be working more hours.

Time Tracking and Planning

While technology is undoubtedly a big distraction these days, it can also be a big help. We've collected some of the best tools and technologies to help you plan your days, keep you focused and on track, banish distractions, and more.

Planning Tools

Having a plan for each day, week, and month is a big part of getting more done and getting things done on time. These are some of the tools out there that can help you to do that.

Outlook Calendar or Google Calendar

Let's start with a simple one that you probably already have on your computer at home and in the office. Microsoft and Google's calendars are a great place to schedule your day.

Both of these options are also available online. So you can access them from anywhere via your Outlook or Google account, and you can set reminders, access it on your phone, and more.

Trello

Trello is a project management tool that doesn't look like a project management tool. In fact, it uses "cards" that are sort of like digital sticky notes that you can move around as needed.

You can create various "boards" for different things, so again, you can manage your work, studies, and personal life in the same place. This is great for simplicity, and you can add and edit cards easily. Trello lets you collaborate with other people too, and because you can drag and drop cards as needed, it's great for people who work best with visual tools.

Trello is a commercial software, but there is a basic free version, so you can get started and try it out without paying a cent.

Asana

Asana is another productivity/project management tool that lets you create various tasks and milestones, set deadlines and reminders, and change the status of items. You can also share projects, tasks, and milestones with members of your team and collaborators if you choose to.

Asana works a little more like a traditional project management tool (but without the complicated Gantt charts project managers use!) It's also a commercial software with a free version, so you can try it out and see if it works for you.

Web and Media Blockers

Social media, news sites, and videos are time thieves. But there are several ways you can block them so they can't interfere with your productivity. Many of these are

available for desktops and phones, and there are options available for most browsers and operating systems.

Freedom

Freedom is one of the best-known web and media blockers.

This software lets you choose what you want to block and for how long. So, for instance, if you still need to access the web for work or a project, you can simply block social media and other sites that suck you in and steal your time. You can choose to block them for up to 8 hours too, so for your whole workday if necessary.

Freedom also has free and paid options, so you can try it out to see if it works for you.

Self-Control

If you're a Mac user, you can download a free application called Self Control that allows you to block specific websites for set periods of time. But beware—it's designed so that once it's installed, you can't disable it—even if you delete the application!

If you use Windows, you can try an open-source equivalent called Self Restraint, which does the same thing.

Cold Turkey

Cold Turkey is another web blocker, but instead of only allowing long chunks of web-less time, this application allows you to schedule mini-breaks during the day when you're allowed to check in and see what's happening.

That's particularly useful if you find that rewards work well for you. If you know you can check your social life support in an hour, you'll be far more inclined to buckle down and get the job done!

They also offer three different services: Blocker, which is just for blocking websites. Writer, which "turns your computer into a typewriter" so there are no distractions. Lastly, Micromanager allows you to limit applications you can access—so no more sneaky games!

There's a free version of Cold Turkey and a pro version with a one-off payment.

Time Trackers

Sometimes, the problem isn't that you're losing time, it's that you have no idea where the time is going.

You sit down at your desk, ready to work, and hours later, you're still there, not much is done, and you don't know why!

Time trackers are a great way to figure out what's eating up your day, so you can work on strategies to limit those things. There are several on the market, and again, many have free versions. These include:

- *Toggl:* It is a cross-platform time tracker that lets you track how you use your time online and off.

- *Clockify:* This is another time tracking option that allows you to track and enter how much time you spend on each task.

- *Timecamp:* This is another free option that you can use to track time on work-related apps. If you know that you're wasting time elsewhere, you have a better idea of what you need to do to stay on track!

Time trackers might seem like an extra step in your already busy day, but just like keeping a food diary or a spending log can help you to identify problems, so can tool like this. Even running and using one for a few weeks can help you figure out what you need to do to stop distracting yourself, and that's a big step in the right direction.

Focus Booster

Focus Booster is a part-time tracker but also offers so much more. It automatically records what you're working on and does timesheets for you. It has a built-in timer so you can break your day into time chunks and get more done. It has a "mini timer" to count down to your next break (great if racing the clock motivates you!)

This application is also cross-platform compatible, so you can use it everywhere.

There is a free trial for this software. Still, even the paid versions are only a couple of dollars a month, so it's very affordable.

To-Do Lists

Writing things down, creating checklists, and then checking things off is hugely beneficial in keeping everyone on task—no matter who you are. Lucky for us, technology

has taken us past Post It Notes on the computer monitor (although, if that works for you, stick on!)

If you are looking for something a little more high-tech, try these.

1–3–5 List

1–3–5 List is an app that makes it easy to pare down your daily to-do list so you can focus and get more done. This is how it works:

- Every day, you choose one big, three medium-sized, and five small tasks to accomplish.

- By forcing you to choose and categorize tasks, the app actually makes it easy to prioritize.

- As you complete your tasks, you can digitally check them off the list.

The application is cross-device compatible, and there's a free Chrome add-on.

Work/Life Balance

It's vital to be able to create a balance between your work and your home life. When you're working from a home-based office, it can be easy to become totally wrapped up in your work to the point where it's all-consuming. This is exactly what you're trying to avoid.

Separate Work and Home

If you go back to the beginning, to identify the actual reason why you wanted to work from home in the first place, you'll discover that nowhere does it actually mention that you wanted to work yourself into a coma!

You need to figure out how to separate your work life from your home life, and then manage to keep the two apart. My reasons for working from home were clear—I was tired of missing out on defining moments in the lives of my children. I wanted to be part of their lives, rather than sacrificing a lot of this valuable time commuting or wasting away in some 2 x 4 cubicle on the 6th floor, getting nowhere slowly!

When you quit for the day, make a point of leaving your work on your desk where it belongs. It's not going anywhere, and it will be waiting for you in the morning. Your family doesn't necessarily want to hear you droning on over dinner about some

monotonous report that you've been working on. If you must talk about your work, keep the conversation lighthearted and to a bare minimum.

Getting the Balance Right

I'll be the first to admit that getting the work/life balance 100% correct takes time and effort. It takes discipline and learning when and where to set boundaries for yourself. Having the work so close by, it's often tempting to quickly go to work on a report that needs some finishing touches or check on emails before turning in for the night. Learning how to physically 'detach' and switch off for the day has probably been one of the biggest challenges I've had to face.

This is a common thread that runs true for most people who work from home—the inability to switch off at the end of a busy day. This can negatively impact family and home life, and interfere with relationships with loved ones.

Getting the balance right means getting all the other basics right:

- Creating a separate workspace that will serve ONLY as an office. Don't work from anywhere else in your home, but from there, no matter how tempted you may be to take your laptop to your bedroom to quickly 'catch up' on something. If you've signed off for the day, close your office door and only return once it's time for you to begin working again.
- Avoid logging into your work computer, iPhone, or laptop the moment you wake up or during the night when you should be resting. Yes, working remotely has the benefit of providing you with 24/7 access; however, be realistic with the demands you're placing on yourself. If you were working from your corporate office, you'd probably head in, put your things down, greet people and make yourself a cup of coffee before even logging on for the day. Set similar boundaries for yourself in your home office. Give yourself time to plan your day and be realistic with your time.

While it's great for your family to have you home-based and around all the time, it can be pretty stressful for them if they see you seldom away from your dedicated workspace and never taking a break. Not to mention the added stress that you're placing on yourself to achieve targets that aren't necessarily realistic.

You can balance some of your personal time by scheduling activities or errands when you would normally take a break. While this may require some juggling, the pay-off in creating time to spend with family and loved ones is priceless. I'd give anything to have been able to experience each of my children's 'firsts' rather than being tied down to an office.

If you have the opportunity to work from home, set a schedule that provides sufficient time for family, along with work. Once you've managed to iron out a workable schedule that's both realistic and doable, stick with it.

Dedicate Family Time to Family

If you can devote yourself fully to your job during working hours, you should aim for the same kind of dedication when it comes to time spent with your family. They are the main reason why you chose to work from home in the first place! Decide what dedicated family time looks like. It may even be worthwhile consulting with your children over the dinner table if they are old enough to communicate what their actual needs are.

While you might believe that being there to support them with school events or the early morning school run is enough, they may have some different ideas. When it comes to these conversations, listen to what they have to say while being fully focused, and see how you can accommodate them.

Often as parents, we have the misconception that it's all about providing our children with materialistic things to make them feel better about themselves (or to prove to ourselves that we can). In reality, it's usually the simple things that they want, like trips down to the beach every Saturday, where you can spend quality time together as a family.

Find out what they want and need from you as a parent, and then go out of your way to make those things happen.

Evening Rituals

When your children are still young, it's worth considering evening rituals that can help them realize the sacrifices that you're prepared to make for them, and that they're important to you. Spend quality time with them before bedtime, establishing evening rituals that they'll not only remember throughout their lives but may also carry across to their own children someday.

Make a point of spending quality time with them. Read to them, or tell them stories of your own childhood. Children are malleable as clay during their formative years, and traditions that are established early on can have a huge impact on their lives. You need to let them know exactly how important they are to you.

This doesn't always need to be for hours on end, but some quality one-on-one time with each of your children before tucking them into bed can build a firm bond between you that will last a lifetime.

As they get too old to be tucked into bed with a story, you may want to continue with this quality one-on-one time, allowing them to confide in you about anything and everything. You will find that if your relationships are solid, your children will be more open with you whenever they have a problem or need advice. Always place your family first, no matter what!

Date Nights

While it's all fine and well to devote precious time each night to your children, don't forget about your spouse. They have probably stuck with you through thick and thin, and it's not always easy having to be around someone 24/7. To keep your marriage or relationship just as strong, set aside some time you can both enjoy alone together.

Whether you decide to commit to one evening every two weeks or one evening a month, carve out quality time the grown-ups can spend together. Make this time about each other and your relationship, not about discussing work or the children. It may be hard to do at first, but the more often you do this, the more you will find that your relationship continues to grow and develop. Think about things to do that aren't always obvious choices, like going out for dinner: catch a movie or go to the theatre, or you may want to make an afternoon of it by attending a wine-tasting event or an art class.

Whatever it is, focus on each other and, once again, try not to discuss work! A caveat here is to also avoid discussing the children. You and your partner may have differences of opinion, and the last thing you need to do is sabotage this time by fighting while you should be bonding.

Tips for a More Successful Time Management

Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is a thief of time. Everyone knows that but how many actually do something about it to ensure that they have minimal instances when they procrastinate? Being aware of the fact that you might procrastinate can help you come up with effective strategies for dealing with what causes you to procrastinate. Do you know that you will probably procrastinate doing an important task because you are already tired? Think about the need to get a break and come back more rejuvenated to do the job.

No one is perfect, you will probably procrastinate once in a while; however, you need to build a spirit of positive procrastination to fight the productivity decreases that might come

61

when you procrastinate. ***You really don't have to be working more hours when you can do more work for fewer hours.***

Here is how you can fight procrastination:

Build in Breaks and Exercise

Having breaks when you can engage in physical or mental exercise can make a big difference in your quest to fight procrastination. When you know you only have one hour to your break, you probably will feel obliged to work harder and beat your deadline. Since you are working with fewer hours within the blocks, you can easily maximize your productivity before you can go for the break. Actually, you won't be feeling the urge to go for an earlier break or postpone the performance of a certain important task when you know you will take that needed break in the next hour. Engaging in physical or mental exercise during the breaks will even rejuvenate you such that you get back to work feeling more energetic to do what is expected of you. I usually read a good book when that break comes because it exercises my mind and gives me the needed break after doing three straight hours of writing.

Take Naps

It is important to get quick naps over lunch hour simply to reenergize and make you look forward to the afternoon tasks. Actually, taking a nap over lunch hour ensures that you don't feel sleepy in the afternoon. Try it—it works.

Get Out of the House

When you work from home, you don't get to catch up with friends and colleagues in the industry to know what is happening quite often. This could make you feel as if you are missing the juicy stuff to grow in your profession. To fight this, you need to stop isolating yourself from the industry. The more you know what is happening, the more motivated you will be in doing what you do. Actually, those meetings with industry players could offer valuable help in enhancing your productivity, given that you get to learn the industry best practices in those meet-ups. It could also prove to be a water cooler for you; doesn't it feel good to take a break after working hard all week or month? You will be feeling a lot more motivated and energized to commit your time, energy, and mind to excel in what you do once you come from these meetings.

You also want to spend some time in nature and just relax. You need to take regular breaks where you can just unwind and relax in nature. These nature walks or activities could prove helpful in enabling you to come up with beautiful ideas about different issues of interest about your work. It is also a good way to re-energize and look forward to a new week; you definitely don't want a situation where you don't even know what day of the week it is because every day is a working day for you.

Technology as a Tool for Countering Procrastination

You are likely to have so many excuses on why you should be chatting with friends on social media or instant messengers. The end result could be you feeling bad about the time you "wasted" doing non-work-related activities, which will in turn force you to work more hours to cover for the lost time. If you don't want this to happen, why not consider using productivity apps to help you remain focused. An app like SelfControl could be a great tool for helping you remain focused since once you block sites for a certain period, you cannot undo it… even if you want to. This is certainly a good way of ensuring that you remain focused and don't procrastinate since the options for spending the time you wanted to just take a break are limited!

How about using commitment devices or making promises to clients when accepting to work for them. For instance, you could promise to do their jobs within a certain time, failure to which you would refund them a certain amount of money for the delay! Would that give you the needed push to go the extra mile to do what it takes to deliver? Actually, to make it tougher for you, it would be better to make a promise that you can really be accountable for. For instance, if you tell your friend to keep your $200 if you don't do something within a certain time, you will be a lot more motivated to do the job because you are sure that money is at stake. You should first give them the $200 to keep, which they refund if you do what you promised. Do you get the point?

Positive Procrastination

Do you know you can use positive procrastination to boost productivity? Imagine doing something less important and less tasking simply because you want to re-energize or rejuvenate. It could be such things like thinking about what the future holds for you as you work from home. Although such things cost you very little energy, they could disrupt your productive hours if you don't think about them often. Therefore, you would better put such "activities" in your schedule to help you remain focused since you will probably spend that time thinking about something important; you could actually think of ways of enhancing efficiencies, such as delegating repetitive activities or ways of approaching customers. This could be the least amount of time you spend doing something that will

probably determine the direction towards which your business will take in the foreseeable future.

Learn to Delegate

When you are neck-deep in workload with an overflowing to-do list, do you offload some of your burden to your team members or stubbornly *(and happily)* cling on to it?

If you are like most managers, then you try your best to keep as much work and authority with yourself as possible. Why?

Because of misguided managerial assumptions:

- **"If I empower my team members, I will lose control. I will appear less strong and less useful. They might even take over me in the future."**

This is a sign of insecurity. Delegating work does not mean you are incompetent or a failure. As a manager and as a leader, you retain the ultimate authority and responsibility, and control.

And relax—nobody is going to take over your job, least of all your subordinates.

- **"I will do all the work by myself because that's how I got promoted to my current role, and that's how I will be promoted to the next level. "**

No, you will not. Definitely not by overstretching yourself with low-level work, which your subordinates should be doing. You will get promoted by focusing on strategic priorities and doing high-impact work that will bring long-term value to the organization.

More importantly, you are not an individual contributor anymore. It's your managerial responsibility to groom a subordinate who can fill up your position when you rise through the ranks.

- **"Nobody can do this work better than me."**

How do you know unless you give your team members the chance to do the work?

It might be an uncomfortable feeling to see your subordinates become experts, but giving them an opportunity to prove themselves and realize their full potential is a sign of leadership.

- **"The deadline is tight. I better do the work myself."**

No, you better not. When there is time pressure, you might find it easier and faster to do the work yourself, but resist the temptation. The time and energy that you spend

coaching another person on how to do the job might seem a lot when you are working under tight deadlines. However, the long-term benefits outweigh the initial one-time investment. The next time you have to delegate a similar type of work, you simply pass on the job. That's it.

The Benefits of Delegation

You must delegate—*assign responsibility and authority to your subordinates to do certain activities*—as often as possible. Because it will help you:

- Reduce your workload and stress levels.
- Develop the managerial competencies of your subordinates, so that they can take bigger and better responsibilities and grow in their career.
- Improve the overall productivity of your organization.

Now that you have understood the value of delegation in reducing your workload, you must understand how to do it effectively.

Richard A. Luecke and Perry McIntosh, in their book "The busy manager's guide to delegation," talk about an easy-to-follow 5-step process.

- Identify the task
- Identify the person
- Delegate the task
- Monitor the progress
- Do the evaluation

Identify the Task

The first step of delegation is to decide the kind of tasks that you want to delegate to your team members. There are essentially two kinds of tasks that can easily be delegated.

- **The tasks that are repetitive and low-value in nature, and don't require your unique skillsets.**

You show your subordinate how to do the job once, and you have to never do the work again. It requires a one-time investment of your time and energy.

However, if the task is repetitive but sensitive in nature, then you must exercise caution. If your boss has chosen you to do the work yourself, you should not sub-delegate the work to your subordinate due to the sensitivity or confidentiality of the task in consideration.

For example, I send a sales report to the brand head at the end of every month. The work does not need any special skill. I just gathered the sales data from the integrated planning department and updated the figures on the presentation template. However, the report is confidential, so I choose to do it myself.

Also, you should never ever delegate work such as performance appraisal, hiring and firing, and work related to interpersonal issues.

- **The tasks that fall under the shared skill set of you and your subordinates.**

Let me explain. As a manager, you are able to do certain types of work using your unique skillsets and capabilities. Your subordinates will not be able to do that kind of work. But there is an area of intersection of skill sets that are common both to you and your subordinates. The tasks that fall within this shared skill set can be easily delegated without much coaching because the subordinates have the necessary skill sets to do the job without your constant supervision.

Then comes the question of whether you should delegate a certain part or the whole task consideration. It's always a better idea to delegate a complete task to a person. Dividing a task into smaller chunks and distributing it among different team members might create confusion and give rise to coordination problems.

Identify the Person

After you identify the task, the next step is to identify the person with the right skillsets who will do a good job. As the manager, you must have a fair understanding of the unique strengths and capabilities of each of your direct reports. So, picking a person shouldn't be that difficult. The following points will help you in selecting the right person.

- Consider any team member who has shown initiative and has previously asked for challenging tasks.
- Consider whether the task can fulfill the competency development needs of a certain person.
- Consider the projects they are already occupied with. You must make sure they have the necessary time available to complete the job in time. If they are already loaded, then they might not be able to do justice to the job even if they say yes to your request.

Delegate the Task

Once you have identified the right person for the job, you can hold a meeting in order to agree on the deadlines and deliverables. For that, you need to ensure that the

person is given decision-making authority, provided with the right resources, and has a clear understanding of the desired end result.

Regarding the end result, you must clearly explain the quality of the work you expect, the target completion date, and the parameters by which you are going to evaluate the finished work. Make sure to follow up the meeting with a written e-mail, so that the key points are not forgotten.

And to the extent possible, you should not put much emphasis on the way the work should be done. Focus on the outcome, not on the methods. Leave it to the subordinate to figure out the right course of action.

Monitor the Progress

In case the assigned task is simple, and it is in the hands of a capable and reliable person, there is not much requirement for monitoring. You know the work will be done.

However, if the person is new or the task is complex in nature or both, you must regularly monitor the progress and address any problems faced by the assignee. Here are a few best practices.

- Thank the person for the progress that has been made.
- Give positive reinforcements so that the assignee is motivated.
- Don't solve every little problem that your team members face. If you do, you defeat the purpose of delegation.
- Don't take the work back on your shoulder even if you see hiccups on the way to completion. Deflect reverse delegation.

Do the Evaluation

The last step of the delegation process is to evaluate the finished work by three parameters: quality, completeness, and timely delivery.

You should recognize the achievement. Try your best to avoid criticism and blame, because there is always a learning curve. Also, discuss possible improvements.

Evaluation gives you an opportunity to gauze and discover the unique strengths and weaknesses of your direct reports and their ability to handle bigger responsibilities in the future. You can use the findings to decide on the promotion, internal development programs, and the future career trajectory of each of your team members.

Delegation is a great managerial asset. Do it effectively, and you will never be haunted by the specter of workload again.

Focus and Concentration

One of the greatest indicators of future success is measured by your ability to focus on tasks until completion. If you ask any millionaire, they will tell you that they have mastered the art of focusing on one thing to completion before moving on to the next task.

That said, we live in a world full of distractions—especially so for those working from home—competing for your attention. Understand that your brain is not equipped to handle massive "shiny objects," trying to capture your focus.

That said, being a master of your brain rather than its slave is no easy task. However, with these simple hacks, you can quickly charge your mind and nurture a laser-like focus;

Start your day with a workout routine

This is the most important thing you can do to your brain and wellbeing. Working out does not necessarily mean hitting the gym for several hours. Just a 20-minute workout routine is enough to spark your mind so that you stay focused throughout the day. Some of the best exercises to start your day include swimming, cycling, yoga, jogging, and cardio.

Don't break the fast too soon

Have you ever heard of intermittent fasting? This is a fairly simple concept in which 8 hours out of your 16 hours a day are for complete fast, and the remainder is half dedicated to consuming all your calories within that timeframe.

Intermittent fasting will not only help you boost your metabolism and lose weight but also help you become more focused on the day's tasks.

Get more fats in your diet

Did you know that the human brain is made up of at least 60% fat? Well, that is pretty much considerable if you think about it. If you want your brain to function well, then you need a lot of good fat. The best way to improve cognitive function is through fats in your diet—nuts, avocados, eggs, among other foods.

Set daily goals

While it is great to have large, game-changing goals, it is important to break them down into bite-size pieces; you can accomplish them daily or weekly. What are your biggest visions? Do you have a roadmap to get you there?

The best and easiest way to achieve your goals and focus on them closely is to break them down into daily goals. When you focus on what needs to be accomplished at the moment, you position yourself better for success. This is known to wire your brain for success and constantly trigger the reward centers in the brain to release dopamine once you accomplish the goals. This way, you focus more on replicating that reward.

Getting enough sleep

Consistent sleep deprivation has been shown to ruin one's focus. Some of the top successful individuals say that part of their success is because they take their sleep seriously and spend at least 8 hours a night.

While working from home may be tempting to let work spill over into late nights, you must master the art of self-discipline and get enough sleep each night. This way, you not only improve your focus but get up well-rested and ready to hit the ground running.

That said, mastering your focus will take a lot of effort. The truth is that we did not evolve to master how to cope with massive distractions the day throws at us. However, when we properly and effectively fuel the brain, we can greatly increase your focus and productivity.

What's it going to be for you? Make the right choice today; your future is counting on you!

Chapter 4: Soft Skills for Smart Working

Introduction: Soft Skills to Be More Effective

Soft skills are personal characteristics that are vital for success and job advancement. They are often tied to how you interact and work with others.

Soft skills make it easier to develop relationships with others, making you more visible for the right reasons and opening up more job options for you.

You'll need soft skills regardless of \what job you have or where you work. For many people, developing soft skills is the most challenging task.

Is There a Soft Skills Gap in Your Organization?

You have a soft skills gap when your staff has a lot of technical talents but none of the soft skills. Soft skills go hand in hand with hard talents, enabling your company to make the most of its technical competence.

- If you're great at attracting clients but not so great at keeping them, you probably have a soft skills gap.
- If you have a lot of staff turnover and have to retrain them all the time, you probably have a soft skills deficit.

There is a soft skills gap when there are many managers but no true leaders.

An interpersonal dynamic in the job cannot be disregarded—listening, expressing ideas, resolving disagreement, and maintaining an open and honest work atmosphere all boil down to learning how to develop and manage interpersonal connections. People may actively participate in team efforts, show appreciation for others, and enlist support for their projects because of these ties.

It's critical that you acknowledge the critical function soft skills play within your team and try to improve them within yourself and throughout the organization.

What are the benefits of soft skills?

Soft skills may assist you, your team, and your company in a variety of ways, including:

- Increased productivity and efficiency.
- Interpersonal and professional partnerships that are stronger.
- More inventive solutions.
- The expansion of the company.

Soft skills are valued by employers because they:

1. Demonstrate initiative, proactivity, and self-assurance.
2. Assist them with comprehending your professional characteristics.
3. Determine if you are a good fit for a team and if your goals align with the organization.
4. Encourage a more positive corporate culture.

How to Run a Videocall: Visual and Verbal Communication to Be More Effective

F or people who work from home, Skype or video call communication is a great way to communicate with colleagues and clients. This service is available for free and allows you to invite your friends and family. The company's headquarters is in Luxembourg and offers subscription and pay-as-you-go options. It's also easy to set up and can be used in a variety of settings, including conferencing. Here are some tips for making the most of your video calls.

You can make video calls with Skype and TrueConf. Both apps have free plans and allow up to three participants. If you want to communicate with a group of people, Skype is the best choice. You can share your screen with up to 15 teammates and get a full channel archive. Both services are efficient and offer a wide range of features. You can also initiate video calls and share your desktop.

Both services offer features that will make your communication experience as smooth as possible. The software is easy to use and allows you to invite people without an app. Meet now lets you create meetings with up to 50 people. If you're trying to manage your Skype credits, you can add other users to the meeting without installing them on their devices. The company also has a feature that allows non-Skype users to join meetings.

Skype and Meet Now are the best options for video calling. Both have great apps for iOS and Android, but they're also free. These programs allow you to share meeting links with others. Microsoft Edge and Google Chrome both offer Meet Now. The Meet Now feature is available for all operating systems, and you can even use it on both Android and iOS. If you are working from home, these tools can help you communicate with your colleagues and clients with ease.

If you have a computer and a cellphone, you can make video calls through them. However, you'll need to have a good video conference headset if you're going to be using your phone for business. In a home office environment, your computer speakers can be adequate, but they can be less than ideal when you're working from a co-working space. Consider a video conference headset. It will make your video call communication seamless and ensure that you're always in the right frame of mind.

You can also use Skype or video call communication to communicate with colleagues or clients. When using these services, make sure to choose the one that's right for you. It can be a great way to communicate with colleagues and clients. In addition to being convenient, you can also use Skype or video call communication to stay connected with your colleagues and clients. The video chat will save you time. And it's also more convenient than ever.

If you need to speak to a customer or a colleague in another country, a video conference can be a great way to communicate. A video conference will allow you to see what the other person is seeing. It's also a great way to communicate with family and friends who live far away. For those who don't have a lot of time, a video call is a great option.

Whether you use video conference or video call, these two applications will make your remote work easier. The Skype client will allow you to see your colleagues' faces, while the video conference will let you hear the voices of people in another location. You can also use both services to communicate with customers. If you need to communicate with clients, Skype is the perfect option. You'll be able to share your screen with others and be a part of the meeting.

The first major disadvantage of video conferencing is the lack of hardware support. For teams with fewer than 10 people, the free version of the software is a great option. Zoom is an all-in-one video conferencing solution that supports Windows, iOS, and Mac. It has a webcam and microphone that allow you to meet with clients from different locations. The downside is that you can't host group meetings with other participants.

How to Work in Team from Home: "Remote Teamwork"

W orking independently, unsupervised from a remote location, requires high levels of trust and integrity. One of the ways to prove that you're doing what you're being tasked to do is through regular, thorough communication. Whether this communication is with the teams that you work with or with your immediate superiors, it tells them that you're available, you're doing whatever it is that you've been tasked to do and that you're a resource that they can rely on.

Integrity is greatly admired in today's workforce. It not only displays a high level of trustworthiness, but it confirms that you're putting your money where your mouth is!

Check in Regularly

Checking in with management and teams that you may be collaborating with on a regular basis is an excellent way to make sure that work is synchronized, and that everyone is on task. Advancements in technology have made it really easy to keep in touch with team members, even when you're working remotely.

Applications like Slack allow you to communicate in real-time with others on your team, and it's easy to see whether you're checking in on your message boards or not. It also provides you with a way to communicate with any single individual to advise them of updates, request information, or simply acknowledge that you're on top of things from your end. I personally use Microsoft Teams, which for me is one of the best possible tools to be using, when you're in my situation, working from the UK for an operation that's USA based.

Be Honest at all Times

Be honest and open in your communications at all times: if you're battling with something or don't believe that you'll be able to meet a particular deadline, communicate this through to the relevant individuals working with you. It's easier to make contingency plans beforehand, rather than trying to close the barn door once the horse has already bolted!

Share tasks that you're working on with your team so that everyone is on the same page and knows who's responsible for what. Don't assume that someone else is completing a task that you know needs to be handled but doesn't appear on the list of things to do.

Don't be afraid to speak up and question roles and responsibilities in order to gain total clarity and transparency.

Commit to Regular FaceTime

Schedule regular one-on-one face time with management. This may require commuting to the office once or twice a month in order to provide regular updates and physical reporting. This can strengthen relationships with other teammates as they see you physically in the workplace from time to time, and it also gives you time to break out of the isolation and monotony that can cause you to fall into a bit of a funk when working completely on your own.

When you're due to have these meetings, make sure that you're prepared with all your facts and information well beforehand so that valuable time isn't wasted scrambling to find documentation of files when you ought to be meeting.

Draw up an agenda for these meetings and then stick to it. Don't go off-book and start discussing things that are irrelevant, respect the time that management is set aside to meet with you. If you need to discuss other things, reschedule another appointment when it's convenient for them.

Use Technology

Make use of applications and tools available to communicate with other employees to keep them posted. Some of these applications that have been specifically designed to assist teams to work in collaboration with one another are Slack and Skype messenger. Being able to communicate with one another in real-time, or setting preferences for when you're not available is easy to do and makes managing teams in remote locations an absolute breeze.

Zoom has replaced a lot of video conferencing that would have been handled before by Skype; whatever your preference, or the preference of the company that you're working for, you can make use of this technology when communicating with others.

The Proper Mindset for Technological Innovation

To be a successful remote worker, your new best friends are going to be your digital tools. Each company will have the tools they use, but below I've listed some of the most popular applications. Get to know these applications, and you'll be one step ahead during the interview process as well as more knowledgeable about digital tools overall.

Software and Hardware

There are some things to consider when preparing for remote work. You want to make sure you're ready with all of the computer necessities which make online work easy. While many companies provide some of these things, it's good to have your own before you even interview to present yourself as the best possible candidate.

Some of the things you'll want to get or prepare are:

- A fast computer
- High-Speed Internet
- Landline
- Mobile phone
- A good web camera

Make sure you have these things, they are set up, and you know how to use all of them before you start working remotely.

Chat Apps

Most companies now rely heavily on chat applications for communications, not only for their remote workers but for their in-office workers as well. Two of the most popular chat applications are Slack and Google Chat.

Slack

You can get started checking out Slack by downloading the application here: https://slack.com/

Slack is extremely easy to use, but if you want to dive deeper into it, you can take a course from Lynda.com or Udemy reasonably inexpensively.

Here's a link to the Lynda course: https://www.lynda.com/Slack-training-tutorials/7513-0.html

Many libraries have free Lynda access, so check with your local library too!

Google Chat

Google Chat is another application that is popular for both business and personal use. Many companies that already use Google for their drive and email will also use chat for both their chat and meeting application.

To try out Google Chat, download the app here:

https://gsuite.google.com/products/chat/

Google has its free tutorials here:

https://gsuite.google.com/learning-center/products/chat/get-started/#!/

This one is quite easy to use and pretty intuitive, even if you've never used a chat program before.

Cloud Drive

If you haven't used one before, you'll want to get familiar with how to use a Cloud Drive. A cloud drive is a web-based server where you can store files, applications, and other media online. Many companies now use one of these to both store files and share them with their workers and clients, and partners. Two of the most prominently used drives are Google Drive and OneDrive.

Google Drive

If your new company uses the Google suite, you'll want to get used to Google Drive. Google Drive allows you to store spreadsheets, photos, and other documents in the cloud and access them anywhere with web access. The best part is that it's straightforward to use, and you use one password for all of your Google applications.

Sign up for Google Drive here: https://www.google.com/drive/

You can learn how to use it in the Google help center here:

https://support.google.com/drive/?hl=en#topic=14940

OneDrive

OneDrive is Microsoft's cloud drive version. The drawback to OneDrive is that it's not free, so I wouldn't recommend getting this one unless you're sure that the company you use will be using it. Your company will most likely pay for it.

You can sign up for it here if you want a personal account:

https://onedrive.live.com/about/en-us/plans/

Microsoft Office has free video tutorials for OneDrive here:

https://support.office.com/en-us/article/OneDrive-video-training-1f608184-b7e6-43ca-8753-2ff679203132

Meeting Apps

When you work from home, your meeting application is going to be one of your most important connection points with your team and others. If your company doesn't have a preferred application for you to use, GoToMeeting and Zoom are two excellent options.

GoToMeeting

GoToMeeting allows you to host an online meeting, use video or audio conferencing, and present by sharing your desktop. There are different plans depending on your needs, but most plans start at $14.99 a month.

They have training and support via their website:

https://www.gotomeeting.com/get-started

Zoom

Zoom is excellent if you're on a budget because you can start using it for free. It also can help you schedule meetings, invite others, use video and audio conferencing and share your desktop to present. Zoom's basic plan is free; the next plan up starts at $14.99.

Zoom has online video tutorials on their support website:

https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-Joining-a-Meeting

Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

Thinking is a mental activity to process information, make connections, decisions, and create new ideas. Thinking can also be thought of as a process of making a to-do list in your mind. Thinking is the first step towards success. There are too many things to do in life, but only 20% of those things will bring success, and because of this, everyone has to think and prioritize accordingly before acting. When taking action, start with those activities that bring success. Every thought has to be written down. This helps with manifestation, thought analysis, and planning.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to follow logic clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe. It is the ability to engage in reflective thinking, understand the logical connections between ideas, and understand the where, how, when, what, and why things are the way they are. It is about asking as many questions as possible until you get all the information you need. Information leads to growth, and growth leads to success, and success leads to wealth.

Critical thinking helps with good decision-making. You must be able to weigh up the pros and cons of solutions to problems. You must look at all the data available and make an informed decision by weighing the pros and cons based on the data given. Big data is popular because of this reason. Managers can make good decisions by using big data.

Make a to-do list

You should be able to determine the what, when, why, where, and how things will happen. This is called scheduling. Failure to do so can lead to disaster, plain and simple. Write every single detail down. Have a to-do list, a task calendar, and a checklist for every milestone. This will help with task manifestation, visualization of the implementation process, and analyzing problems.

Risk Management

You must be able to plan for and manage things going wrong. Things usually go wrong in life; it is a given. This is because, unlike plans, life is time-sensitive and a simple thing as late delivery can cause a huge disaster. You must anticipate what can go wrong and plan for what to do in that case. That's what risk management involves.

How to think critically

- Restructure information.
- Evaluate consequences.
- Ask questions.
- Be observant.
- Read every day.
- Look at historical data.
- Research.
- Look for facts, numbers, or science.
- Be analytical, break down information.

Critical Thinking Process

- Observe
- Investigate
- Analyze
- Interpret
- Evaluate
- Reflect

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Problem-solving is the act of defining a problem, determining the root cause of the problem, and finding a solution. The more problems you solve, the richer and more successful you become.

Problem-solving process

- Describe the problem.
- Break down the problem.
- Find the root cause.
- Research and read until you find a solution.
- Implement the solution.
- Measure the results.

Problem-solving skills

- Active listening.
- Critical and creative thinking.

81

- Research and reading.
- Communication.
- Decision-making.
- Team-work.

Decision-making

Decision-making is the process of gathering information, assessing the consequences, and choosing an option with fewer negative consequences. A good decision-maker chooses actions that give the best outcome for everyone. The research, weigh consequences and make rational decisions while keeping an open mind.

Decision-making process

- Identify alternatives.
- Gather relevant information.
- Weigh the consequences.
- Choose.
- Take action.
- Review your decision.

Creative thinking

Creative thinking is the ability to consider something in a new way, such as having a new approach to a problem or a new result from a data set. It is a process in which your mind generates a new, unusual and productive solution to a problem.

How to develop creative thinking

- Brainstorm ideas.
- Reframe the problem.
- Be open-minded and flexible.
- Use your imagination.

Ways to improve your memory

- Read books.
- Try Fish Oil Supplements (Omega 3).

- Maintain a Healthy Weight.
- Drink Less Alcohol.
- Exercise.
- Give meditation a try.
- Drink coffee.
- Sleep enough.
- Eat Less Added Sugar.

Technical Skills

- Programming/Coding.
- Software proficiency.
- Project management.
- Data analysis.
- Technology.
- Writing.
- Accounting.
- Engineering.
- Medicine.
- Problem-Solving.

Interpersonal Skills

- Teamwork.
- Communication.
- Work Ethic.
- Flexibility and Adaptability.
- Decision-making.
- Time Management.
- Conflict resolution.
- Listening.
- Negotiation.
- Empathy.
- Assertiveness.
- Coaching, teaching, and mentoring.

Managing the Stress: Strategies to Deal with Stress

M anaging stress at home is possible, but it can be difficult. One of the main causes of work-related stress is the lack of boundaries. Working from home can result in working when you should be playing or socializing with your family. If you have a separate workspace, set up a morning and evening routine. It is very important to separate work and personal life. Having a separate space is a great idea.

Taking breaks throughout the day is also essential. If you are able to schedule some time off each day, you'll be able to improve the quality of your work and relieve stress. You can schedule a lunch date with a friend or colleague or go for a walk around the neighborhood. Whatever it is that helps you de-stress, make sure you take time to connect with others. These connections will give you encouragement and validation.

Taking short breaks is another important way to manage stress. A break from work is vital, but it's not always easy. You can take a walk to clear your head or take a short break to read a book or play a video game. Regardless of what you do, you need to get away from the job from time to time. Try creating a ritual to help yourself focus and remain calm. You can also practice mindfulness to keep your mind sharp and focused.

The lack of planning can be a major cause of stress. Not knowing what to do next and where to start can lead to unproductiveness. A list of tasks to complete can be an excellent solution to reduce this. The first step in reducing stress is to write down your to-do list. This will help you prioritize tasks and give yourself time to focus on the tasks that will make you feel calmer. This will help you to avoid being too critical of yourself and to avoid focusing on the negative aspects of your work.

When you are working from home, you need to create a to-do list and keep it organized. This will ensure that you get the most out of your time while working from home. It will also help you to reduce stress by limiting the workload. However, there are some challenges that you may face in this endeavor. If you don't have enough time to devote to the tasks, you'll probably end up feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

As a manager, you should be confident enough to share your worries with your team. Sharing your problems with others will allow you to sort out the reasons for stress and be more productive. It will also allow you to avoid wasting time on the phone. If you can't afford to do this, you can set up a group chat with supportive people. If you have trouble managing your stress, you can turn off your phone and listen to relaxing music or play a relaxing song.

While working from home can be beneficial, there are also challenges. For instance, setting up boundaries can be difficult when you're working from home. The fact that you are not allowed to disconnect from work can lead to anxiety and stress. Being constantly connected to the internet can lead to a feeling of isolation and a lack of sleep. By setting up boundaries and keeping yourself healthy, you can avoid stress and improve your health.

While there are many benefits to working from home, the main challenge is time management. There is no dedicated office. Instead, you can use a separate bedroom. A desk is often a better place for your work. And while a specific workplace is helpful, it's more important to take advantage of it when working from home. Consider your child's needs and wants. They may need a nap or have a different schedule.

A dedicated workspace is essential. If the work is too stressful for you to do the necessary tasks, it can lead to a lower productivity and an increased risk of mental stress. By taking regular breaks, you can make sure you're avoiding overwork. A dedicated workspace will prevent work from spilling into other areas of your home. If possible, try to keep a healthy, balanced lifestyle. You'll feel happier in the long run.

Chapter 5: Organize Your Home Space for Smart Working

Useful and Practical Tips on How to Create Your Own Home Office

Well, the fact that you work in a home doesn't mean you cannot be productive, all you have to do is to set up a proper work environment that will serve as a boost to your work and help you curtail distractions.

This chapter promises to be an exciting one because it will take you through the easiest and most effective ways of setting up an office in your home. Some freelancers assume that all they have to do is set up a table somewhere and get to work, but this isn't ideal.

An enabling work environment goes beyond a table and a chair as it encompasses everything about the environment itself, including the setting. Think about this, if you set up a table and chair in the kid's playroom or nursery, will you be productive with work? Of course! If your desk and chair are set up in the kitchen, can you accomplish great work feats? The answer is no, which means that you need to learn the rudiments of proper office space in your home so you can work in an inspiring environment.

Your home office should be organized and free from distractions; it should be the only place in your home where you can start work and finish on time because it is an enabling environment. When you've got a suitable office space in your home, even if you live with a large family, it will be easier for them to respect your freelance schedule because when you are in the office, it means it's work time.

So, we will get right to the steps you should take as well as the items you will require to make the office as comfortable as possible, let us begin!

Steps on how to set up a home office

1. Choose a suitable room or area

The first step is choosing your workspace or room in your home. Regardless of your choice (room or space), it should be a place that is a bit isolated from the other parts of the house. For example, you wouldn't want to have an office next to the living room where you receive guests.

The area has to be suitable in terms of being isolated, well ventilated, and a good fit for you and your office supplies. If you live in a big house, you may have a spare room to use, but if you live in a smaller home, carve out a space that will serve as your office.

2. Invest in a good chair

You will need a table as well, one that is the right fit for the office/space, but in addition to the table, you will need an adequate chair. Ergonomic chairs are some of the most preferred chairs for freelancers because they sit for long hours, and they have to be comfortable enough to wade off backaches.

If your chair is comfortable, you will enjoy working from your home office, and you will be alert. If you cannot afford a proper ergonomic chair, then start with a very comfortable chair that supports your back as you work. Comfort is vital when setting up your home office, don't use anything you are not pleased with because it can affect your productivity level while working.

3. Get storage equipment

When setting up your office, you also need storage equipment, which will enable you to store documents, files, and other work-related items in the office. The idea here is that you will always get distracted when you save your work files in another storage space in the house.

So when you need to check something, you have to walk out of the office and back every time. You can save time by only having some storage facilities in your office, so everything you need to work is within reach at any time. Shelves, mobile storage cartons, files, etc., are some of the items you will need.

4. Avoid facing the window

When setting up your office, avoid placing your chair and table directly in front of the window, especially if the view is distracting. For example, if the view of the window is a garden, then you can place your table and chair in that direction, but if it is facing the road where people walk and drive by, you will inevitably be distracted.

When you raise your head while working, it is crucial as it can either cause you to work harder or become distracted. If your window offers you a view of your neighbors, kids are returning from school, etc., then you should consider facing a wall or the door.

More so, you can write your goals and put them on large frames on the wall. The words in the structures will inspire you to continue working, and they will make useful decorative items as well.

5. *Get proper lighting*

Regular commercial offices have large windows and are appropriately lit for employees, which is something you must become mindful of when creating your office at home. Ensure that the place is well lit up such that you don't strain your eyes while working. Ideally, your home office should have windows to let the natural light in. But if you are not using a proper room, maybe you are only using a space in your home, get additional views.

Sometimes great sunlight is not enough because your work area has to be illuminated, and you should be able to see clearly. Then there is the issue of working at night, since you are working at home you may want to work in the office at night sometimes. You will need low-impact sound systems that will work with ease at night.

6. *Purchase all necessary items for the office*

After getting proper lighting, also ensure that you purchase all the details you will need for the office. By issues, I am referring to the things you use every time you work and the items you cannot do without while working. Examples of such items range from the significant ones like a computer, mini copier, some cabinets for your printed works, etc.

Then, also purchase the little things like markers, a pen, a whiteboard, sticky notes, files, etc. One of the reasons I am reemphasizing this point, even though you already know, is that sometimes freelancers have these items littered in the home.

So because they have them at home, they do not bother to buy them; they just stand up from working at the office and get them from the store. But if you keep leaving your work to get something from the house, then why did you set up an office in the first place? Your office has to be self-sustaining such that whatever you need to work on should be there.

For the supplies you use a lot, buy them in bulk, so you don't run out of items midway while working. This is the level of preparedness a freelancer exhibits that shows he/she is ready for a future f success.

7. Minimize distractions

Another critical step to setting up a proper office is to minimize distractions. For example, you don't need all sorts of decorations in your office, neither do you need a large TV. The more things you add to the office, the easier it will become for you to get distracted.

When it comes to having a proper home office, sometimes less is more. Only add and purchase essential items you need for work. For example, you need a stapler, printer, etc., and not a video game, a mini aquarium, etc. these other decorative items may seem necessary because you want to personalize the office, but always remember that it is a home office.

Already, you are in an unfruitful environment, so why make it even more complicated by adding these unnecessary items? Also, the decoration on your table should be minimal as any additional item can be a productivity killer. You are in this workspace or room to achieve results and not to be entertained. If you must decorate, be mindful of your choice of decorative pieces because some of them can be distractions. Plants are an excellent choice for decoration, and they can bring a natural vibe into the office.

8. Keep a tidy office

Some freelancers who set up home offices and still complain of a lack of productivity may have untidy offices. When your office is unclean, it goes beyond how it looks, as it can affect how you work. Now you have set up all the necessary equipment, and you are ready to work to ensure that the office is clean at all times.

Don't only tidy up your office when you are expecting a client or guest, do it daily (just like you do with your kitchen). A tidy office will always have a welcoming ambiance such that as soon as you step into it, you are ready to smash goals.

9. Leave work at the office

When you have set up your home office, remember to leave work there. The fact that your office is in your home doesn't mean you should take action in your bedroom or the dining room. Your office is intended to accommodate everything about work, and this will also help you attain discipline in using the office.

If you take your work everywhere with you while moving around the house, you will inevitably get distracted. If you wake up at night and feel the need to complete a project, go to the office and do that. Don't bring your work to the bedroom because you will be too comfortable working in bed and you may fall asleep.

More so, your family wouldn't respect your schedule or office hours if they see that you bring work with you everywhere in the house. Place some value on your work in your home by restricting all freelance activities to the office.

10.   *Have a manageable internet*

Sometimes the internet in your home may be wired to serve everyone, so you may not be able to turn it off entirely because others are using it. What you need to do (if the internet distracts you) is to have a separate internet for your office, one you can manage and turn off whenever you wish.

A productive workspace at home is a valuable asset to your freelance career. Think of your office as the area you go to when you need to achieve great results, and for you to accomplish your goals, you must be very comfortable and enjoy being in the office space. Using the steps in this chapter, you can set up a beautiful home office where you can work without productivity killers.

Basic and Easy Techniques on How to Create a Comfortable Working Environment at Home

Your environment affects you in ways that are very subtle but deep. As a telecommuter, you are fortunate in that you aren't in the cube farm nightmare popularized by so many Dilbert comics. However, you face many other challenges in creating a comfortable and safe workspace that's conducive to productivity.

There is a geographical psychology associated with places in our lives. We act differently in different places. That's why you need to create a comfortable, safe, user-friendly workspace where you can perform at your best.

When it comes to setting up your office away from the office, safety and comfort are key. Here's how to make your workspace safe and comfortable.

Safety first. Your workspace must, first and foremost, be safe. Important safety tips are:

- Check that your desk and chair are conducive to good posture.
- Adjust the resolution on your monitor, or use a larger monitor, to avoid eye strain.
- Take frequent breaks from typing.
- Whenever possible, use your desktop or laptop PC instead of your tablet or smartphone for reading documents.
- Use surge protectors, and make sure that your home's electrical system can handle any equipment you are using.
- Make sure you have the appropriate safeguards in place to protect your company's private information, from using strong passwords to locking your file cabinets.

Get in your comfort zone. Your workspace must be comfortable. Here's how to make your workspace comfortable and productive too:

Make sure the area is open and does not contain a lot of distractions.

Always make sure your workspace is clean, either at the end of the day or at the beginning.

Take a few minutes to clear the area around you, so your workspace has a good "feel" to it.

Keep your workspace clutter-free and trash-free.

If you choose, you may listen to background music, but choose music that isn't too distracting.

92

Good boundaries make good telecommuters

Setting boundaries is important to having a smoothly-running professional and personal life. It's therefore important to set those boundaries and communicate them to others in your home.

Dedicate a room, or an area of your living accommodations (house, apartment, loft, trailer, yurt, geodesic dome, you name it) as your workspace and treat it like that. Try not to eat, sleep, watch TV, play games, or do any non-work-related activities there, at least not when you're working.

The boundaries you set go beyond the physical—they extend to your schedule and availability. Set a work schedule and stick to it. Without the discipline of a schedule, it's too easy to fall into the trap of sleeping extra hours in the morning and trying to make up for it by working late, and then you decide that night that you'll make up the hours later that week... For the insomniac among us, the problem is reversed. Because sleep is of no value to you, you may be tempted to overwork and not set boundaries for when to stop. This will have negative impacts on your health and wellbeing.

Your friends who live in the same area as you may think that you're not at work when you work at home. Be clear with them that you are not to be interrupted at home while you're working any more than you should be if you were at the office. You might need to tell people that you are not available to play with your kids, feed the neighbor's dog, or do chores around the house when you are on the clock.

I spoke to a veteran telecommuting mom about her experience. Her policy is that when she's at work, her family is to, in her words, "pretend that she is not at home." She does not even allow anyone who has the day off (spouse or kids) to be at the house during her work time. Her office is away from the main living area, and she even keeps her pets away from her work area so that they don't distract her. Her family knows that while she's working, she is not available to do anything non-work-related.

By making your workspace safe and comfortable, and by setting clear boundaries with your time and space, you're setting yourself up for successful telecommuting.

Basic Principles on Managing Space and Time Working at Home

How you manage your time has a huge impact on how successfully you work from home. When you work in an office or traditional workplace, you have to be there at a certain time, you are allotted predetermined breaks, and you leave at an arranged time. Your free time is yours to organize, and your hours are easily tracked and noted. But when you work at home, it's up to you to keep track of your hours and ensure you finish projects and meet deadlines. One of the positive aspects of working from home is the freedom to manage your hours around childcare and other commitments, to decide when you work, and to organize your time to give yourself time off when you want it. However, with this flexibility comes increased pressure to make sure that you do not fall into the trap of the many distractions detailed above. So, where should you start?

Getting Organized

When working from home, you will need to organize your own workspace, your working conditions, your hours, and your deadlines. You may, of course, be receiving additional instructions from your client or boss, but the nitty-gritty of getting the work done on time is up to you. It's somehow never quite as simple as deciding you're going to work from 9 am–5 pm when you're at home, so it's essential to find ways to keep track of your work hours and organize a schedule you can stick to.

First of all, you need to devise a method of keeping note of the hours you work. In its simplest form, this could be a document, spreadsheet, or even a piece of paper tacked to a corkboard on which you write down the time you spend working. You may find it easier to break this down into a list of jobs or projects so that you can accurately keep track of how long it takes you to complete each one. Alternatively, there are apps and software which you can download to your phone or computer to allow you to clock in and out whenever you're working. Some have additional features, such as the ability to submit timesheets or log hours according to project completion. This type of technology can be extremely useful to keep note of your working hours automatically, and if you are working for a corporation or agency, you may be able to use a central company program. As with any change in habit, it might take a week or two for you to get used to your new organizational method, but once it becomes part of your routine, you should find it much easier to keep track of your working hours.

Your best friend when working from home is on the list. Writing down priorities, deadlines, and projects is an essential technique to help you to keep on top of your many different responsibilities. You can feel quite isolated when working from home, without colleagues or management on hand to direct you and remind you of a particular task you may have forgotten. Writing lists has been shown to increase productivity, reduce procrastination and give you a real sense of direction. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your workload, try to separate it into smaller jobs that you know you can do immediately. Seeing things written down this way may make you feel more capable of tackling a big project.

It's a good idea to create several lists each week or month, starting with a master list that contains any ongoing or large projects that dominate your workload. From there, create smaller lists containing your weekly and daily tasks, and any jobs that have the highest priority. This helps you to organize your responsibilities into the order in which they should be completed, allows you to pick and choose projects according to their urgency, and reduces the risk of anything getting missed out. Find a method of making lists that best suits you, whether it's in traditional longhand, using a digital document, or online.

Another important aspect of timekeeping and work management is the setting of milestones and goals. Research has shown that we work more efficiently when we reduce large workloads into smaller, easily achievable chunks. For example, rather than approaching a heavy-duty report as one huge document, you'll find it more approachable to divide it into chapters or sections which you can work your way through one by one. Being able to see your progress as you tick each item off your list helps you to feel confident and motivated to continue. Setting goals for yourself is another great motivator. These could be professional or personal, and can be tied in with a reward or achievement, even one as simple as: "Once I've finished this article, I will make myself a coffee..."

Use a combination of whichever traditional and digital organizational tools work for you, but whatever you do, make sure you keep them up-to-date and synced up with each other. If you rely on a digital or online calendar while using your computer, ensure that your paper diary also contains the information you need so that you can keep track of appointments and deadlines when you're away from your desk. Smartphones are the ideal middle ground for a home worker in need of a mobile device that can be synced with your home computer and any other online organizational resources.

Some people work best when they have a schedule to follow. When you're working from home, you no longer have the structure of 9–5 days, and you may find yourself dividing your working hours equally across the week or trying to squeeze them into fewer days to give you more free time. Whatever you decide to do, it will help you to keep on top of your workload to put a schedule in place. This means having clear deadlines for each piece of work, a priority list, and an idea of when you plan to work on each particular project. Find out when you work most effectively and follow your natural rhythm—some

people find it easiest to work in the morning or after exercise, whereas others don't hit their stride until the evening and choose to work through the night. Take the time to find a routine that is most productive for you, and use this information to manage your time and workload so that you perform more efficiently.

Separating Work Life and Family Life

Another challenge commonly faced by people working from home is how to successfully separate work time from leisure time, and accommodate the demands of a family. It can be difficult to juggle the different facets of your life when you work at home, which can have a negative effect on your work, your family relationships, and your social life.

Perhaps the problem is a lack of differentiation, with the lines blurring between work and family life until it's hard to separate the two. You may find work difficult because you are not giving it the space and focus it needs, or you may find family life stressful because you are trying to do several conflicting things at once or neglecting your responsibilities to your partner or children. To solve this issue, go back to the organizational tips above and look for ways that will help you to effectively manage your working time as a completely separate entity from your recreation time. Yes, you're at home, but your work must take priority during the time in which you have scheduled to do it. Sometimes it can be hard for family and friends to truly comprehend the stresses of managing your time while you work at home. To avoid arguments and misunderstandings, it can be useful to provide your family with a copy of your schedule so that everyone is aware of when you can and cannot be disturbed.

Another way to make a clear division between your work and leisure time is by planning your social activities and events ahead of time or by setting aside regular time slots for family and friends. This way, everyone is able to look at the calendar or diary and easily see what to expect from each day. Disorganization is one of the main sources of stress for a freelancer or employee working from home, especially if you are already feeling the pressure of running your own business. It's important for your family to comprehend that you will need support and understanding while working from home, but with effective time management, you should be able to strike a good balance.

One additional pitfall of the home-worker is the temptation to work *too* much. Sometimes the hours can slip away from you, and before you know it, the sun's gone down, and you've forgotten to return to normal life. Because your work is always available to you at home, you may find that you are tempted to squeeze in 'just a few more hours,' here and there, to the detriment of your family life, and even your health. In this situation, it's imperative to revisit your work schedule and ensure you clock off when your daily hours are done. At the very least, keep note of any 'overtime' you do so that you can account

96

for additional hours—seeing your work hours written down in this way may be the impetus you need to cut back a little bit. Though motivation can often be a problem for those working from home, sometimes knowing when to stop can be an issue just as serious. Overworking can be extremely bad for your health and personal relationships, and can turn working from home from a convenient and flexible arrangement into a stressful and tiring pursuit.

Conclusion

Thanks for taking the time to read this book.

Indeed, working from home is quickly shooting up and for a very good reason—flexibility, health benefits, and monetary savings. From all the information we have discussed here, you are better placed to cash in on-demand and find legit work that fits your needs. Realize that there is no limit to how much you can earn while working from home—only if you have the right attitude.

One thing you must bear in mind is that staying organized, networking, improving your focus, never stopping to learn, and so many more tricks will help you enjoy your newfound freedom and flexibility of working from home.

However, you must understand that there are challenges to working from home too. Therefore, you must position yourself to counter these challenges by staying focused and doing the best you can whenever you can. You must identify ways to work positively and boost your productivity. Take time to identify all the sources of your distraction and address them. Start by setting up a comfortable workspace that is suitable for the kind of work you do.

When you hit the office, ensure that your day is organized clearly to include a to-do list and breaks in between tasks. Additionally, ensure that your lines of communication are open between you and your clients or boss and let them know when you don't want to be distracted.

While working at home is rewarding, bear in mind that too much can also be detrimental, just like doing too little. Therefore, set boundaries, take regular breaks, and shut the door on your work at the end of the day to spend time with your family—playing and laughing!

Trust me; there is so much joy in working from home.

Nothing beats a job you work on your terms!

So, what are you still waiting for? Make the most of your work-from-home job.

Enhance the potential of Smart Working
SmartWo

Booklet implemented by:

This project has been financed by the Program Erasmus+ KA2 2021

Small Scale Partnership KA210-ADU - 2021-1-IT02-KA210-ADU-000034986