

Embracing remote working

The ultimate guide to thrive in the remote work era.



The IT industry has seen a major shift from closed office spaces to completely remote setup with teams distributed all over the globe in last few months. Businesses changed overnight and so did the market expectations. Struck by this sudden shift in norms, industry is now paving its way to attain maximum benefit by leveraging the positives that came along with this shift and looking at ways to minimize the impact of the challenges posed by it.

In this eBook, we aim at exploring the current trends and future of remote working, taking a deep dive into the issues and benefits that it brings along and looking at certain measures that can help teams and organizations align themselves well with this change.



Remote working trends

Remote working is on rise and is here to stay. It will be the future of IT industry in the years ahead.



- A Gartner, Inc. survey of 317 CFOs and Finance leaders revealed that 74% will move at least 5% of their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions post-COVID 19. A recent poll done by Gartner showed that 48% of employees will likely work remotely at least part of the time after COVID-19 versus 30% before the pandemic.
- Based on an ongoing study by the IBM Institute for Business Value (IBV)—which has surveyed more than 54,000 respondents in the United States between April and July 2020, prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, only 10 percent of individuals indicated they were working from home. By July 2020, that percentage had quadrupled to nearly 45 percent.

Of those currently working remotely, 80 percent indicate they would like to continue to work away from the office at least occasionally, while 58 percent would like this to be their primary way of working.

Looking at the trends, we believe..



All that is needed to fit-in this 'new normal' is to streamline the ways of working with:

New guidelines

Defining organization-level standards and guidelines for remote working.

Team intimacy

Building a collaborative 'CARING' environment that enables remote workers.

Innovative approach

Designing specialized programs that helps remote workers in imbibing company's culture.

The 'right' tools

Empowering remote workers with standard toolset.

Inspect and adapt

Revisiting and publishing organization policies time and again to make it most suitable as per the changing market needs.



Do you know that there are organizations that have been working 100% remotely since ages?



For some companies working remotely has always been a norm.



GitLab

Remote is not a challenge to overcome. It's a clear business advantage.



With a distributed team, we can hire the smartest people no matter where they live and keep them if they decide to relocate.



No offices, no useless meetings, no mandatory hours. You're recognized for what you do, not your time in a chair.

AUTOMATTIC

We care about the work you produce, not the hours you put in.

“



Over a third of the world's population is under mandatory or recommended self-isolation. Social distancing is the new normal. It is becoming critical to increase emotional proximity between team members to battle the effects of Social Distancing and 'Work From Home' (WFH) isolation.



Vaibhav Gadodia

Managing Director and CTO, Nagarro talks about increasing team intimacy during COVID.

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While some face a few challenges..



Remote working if not managed well can pose serious challenges for individuals as well as teams impacting the overall productivity.

Are you facing any of these remote working challenges?

As an individual	As a team
Availability of a work setup best-suited for an effective remote working	Inconsistent communication among team members & missed project updates, lack of visibility & predictability
IT infrastructure, technology and security concerns	Lack of remote working norms resulting in people working in silos and multiple working standards
Overcoming distractions and difficulty, striking a perfect balance between personal and professional life	Multiple meetings for the matters which were resolved in minutes in a co-located setup
Staying motivated and delivering productively	Ignorance of tools that can enhance coordination, communication and simplify remote working



Effective remote working

We solve the complex challenges of working in a remote set-up by addressing key aspects in four focus areas: People, Processes, Tools, and Governance.

Effective remote working: The four-quadrant approach



We believe these to be the basic building blocks for effective remote working and should be leveraged for building a highly efficient and productive workplace.

Build a healthy work culture and retain team intimacy along with continuous learning and a work-life balance.

Identify, evaluate and choose the right communication tools, whiteboarding tools and toolset for running agile events successfully.

People & Relationships

Processes & Practices

Tools

Governance

Determine a team remote working agreement, streamline communication and revisit agile practices in a remote set-up.

Define the organization's remote working guidelines for managing virtual teams effectively.



People and Relationships



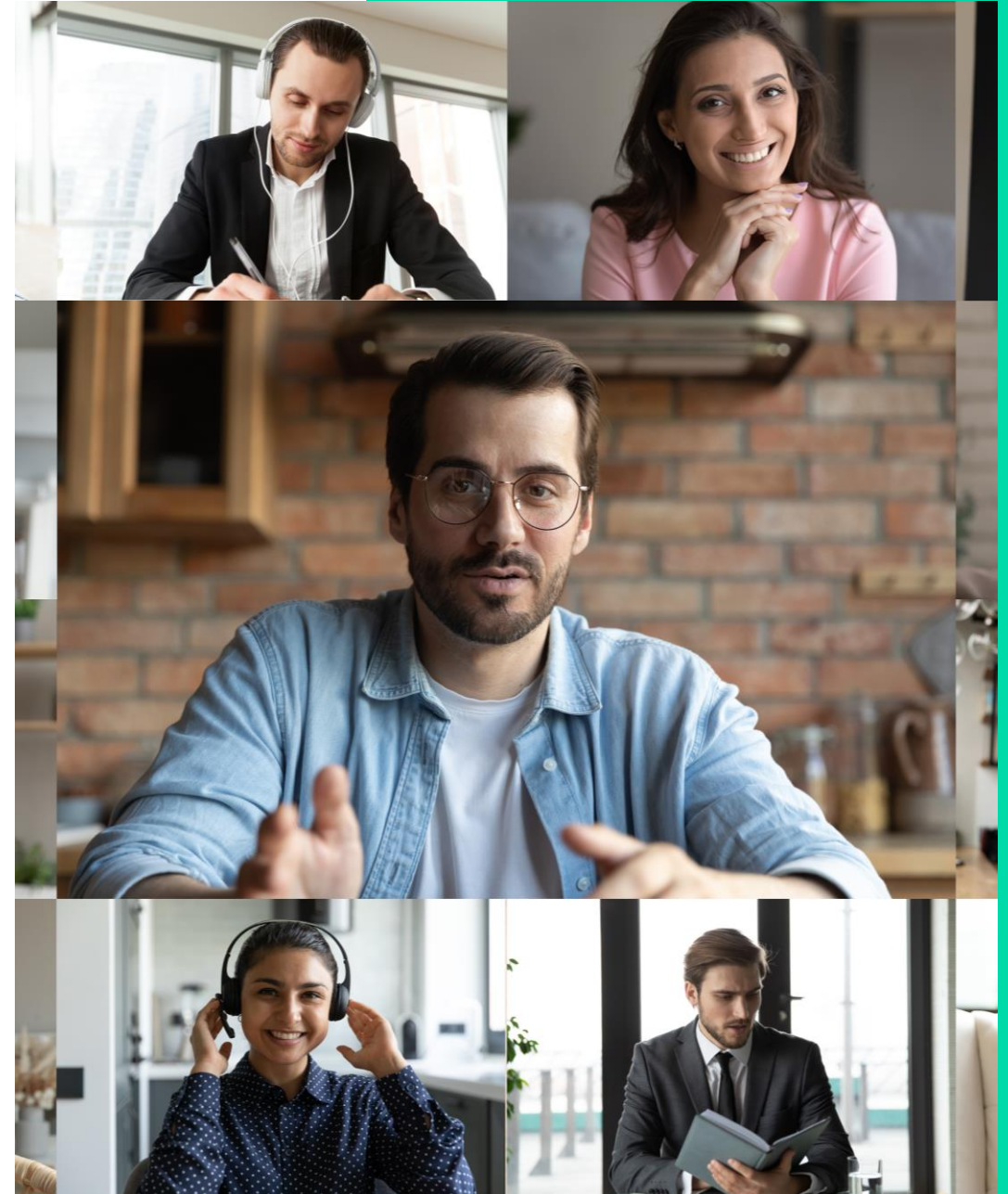
Team culture & intimacy

Fostering intimacy in distributed teams is entirely possible when you consider means to build social cohesion, experience connection, and stave off loneliness by:

- Creating a friendly & virtual safe space encouraged by informal interactions
- Being 'CARING'. Treat your colleagues with empathy and take measures to keep them motivated
- Building trust among colleagues and empowering them to take decisions

A few good examples:

- Encourage people to share their thoughts, jokes, anxieties, day-to-day experiences, grievances, etc. without the fear of being judged
- Set up casual meetings like opt-in sessions and virtual coffee sessions
- Make small gestures like thank you notes, appreciations, acknowledging individuals for his/her significant contributions during team meetings
- Celebrate birthdays and team successes in new ways





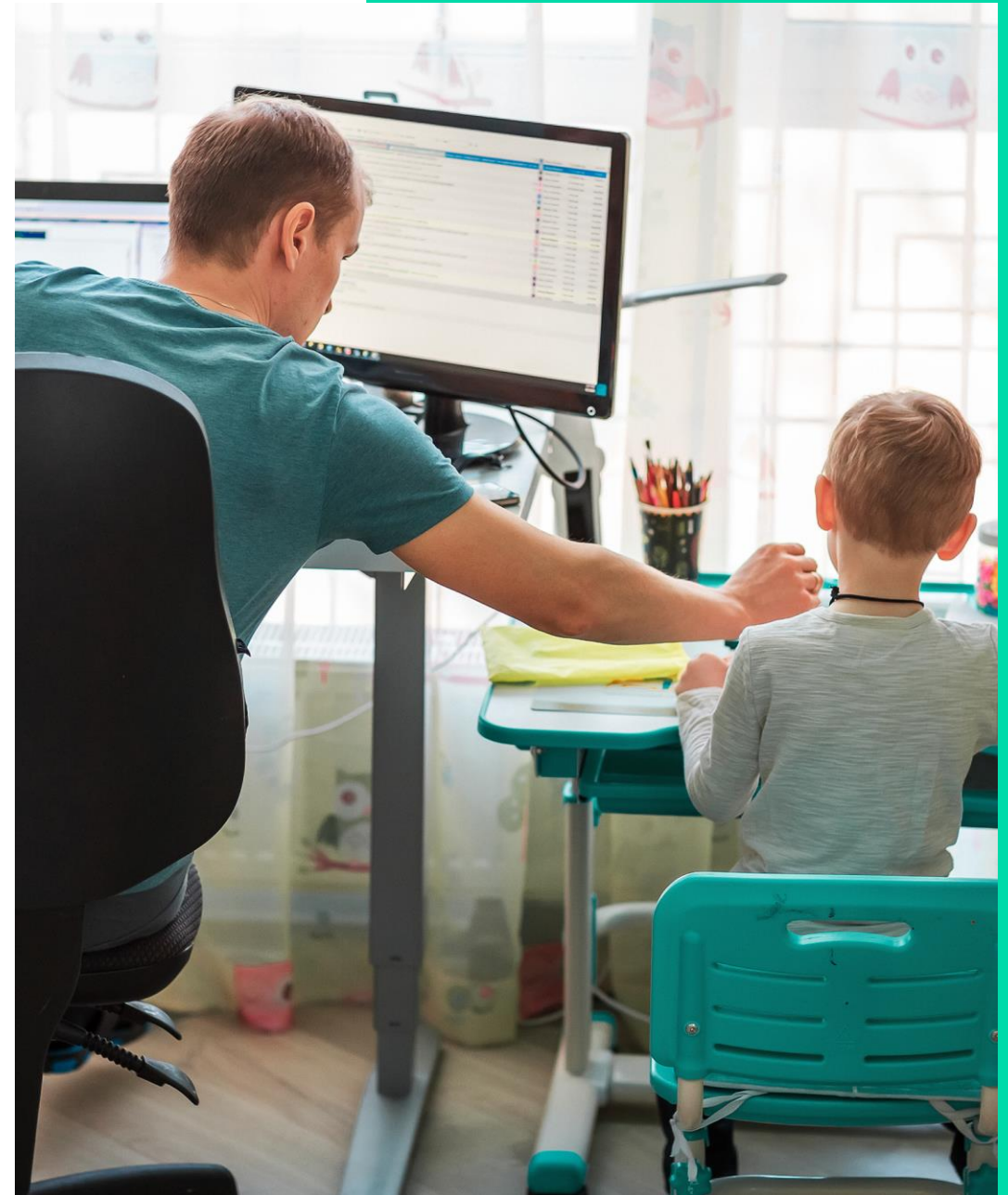
Balance work and home

Striking a work-life balance while working remotely is possible with:

- Dedicated workspace suitable for efficient remote working
- Defined working hours and a daily schedule
- Prioritizing and timeboxing work items
- Inclusion of well-deserved timely breaks

A few good examples:

- Build a dedicated work area with minimal distractions and a healthy sitting posture
- Prepare daily check-list or work-items list of to-do tasks. Reprioritize to accommodate ad-hocs. Stay agile, stay productive and remain focused.
- Take short 5-10 minutes break every couple of hours to improve concentration and maintain good health
- Pursue a hobby that will keep you refreshed





Continuous learning

Coping with the changing business trends and diverse market demands requires cross-skilling and reskilling employees. With remote working, virtual learning spaces have gained importance and one can leverage these to stay updated.

Maintain the culture of continuous learning by:

- Identifying the possible learning dimensions that will benefit your team and the organization and setting aside daily hours for learning new skills.
- Defining goals of your learning program and chalk out definitive milestones that are achievable along with your daily work schedule.
- Sharing knowledge and experience with the team after every milestone





Processes & Practices



Team remote working agreement

A clear and well-defined set of guidelines that bring in transparency in the processes and help in keeping all the team members informed about the team policies and the expected behavior.

Must-haves checklist for remote working agreement:

- Detail out team's working hours most suited to the project/customer needs. Need breaks ? Include it in your team's schedule
- List down tools required as per the project needs and those privy to the team and include details of a unified means of communication
- Identify a single source of truth and hash out its usage. E.g., using a common repository to store all project artefacts available to all
- Plan and detail out necessary team events in advance e.g., meetings, discussions, etc. with a defined agenda, schedule and list of stakeholders
- Agree on and include 'focus hours' / 'no meeting days' that provides uninterrupted development time to the team and helps in enhancing productivity. ([Implemented by Pinterest](#))





Communication

Streamline both synchronous (when all participants are available) and asynchronous (when communication happens based on one's availability through messages instead of live conversation) communication. Here are some quick tips for the same:

- Choose a unified platform for all types of communication
- Be objective and fact-driven while communicating every minor detail
- Use visual modes to be more effective
- Maintain a single source of truth

A few good examples:

- Using same, reliable and secure set of tools for communication, for instance Microsoft Teams.
- Relying on @mentions or #hashtags to help team members in picking up the points specifically mentioned for them and clearly figure out topic of discussion
- Publishing and storing all meeting notes in Teams Notes or Wiki pages making it accessible to all team members at any time.





Revisit agile practices

Teams should refrain from establishing or continuing with the same ways of working as they used to in a co-located environment and reorganize to focus on the objective of various agile events.

1. Sprint Planning: Quick tips

- Forecast the sprint goal for an upcoming sprint
- Start adding the backlog items required for attaining the sprint goal even before planning meeting. This can be done during backlog refinement meetings
- Split long planning meeting into multiple meetings if required to focus on specific set of requirements based on priority.

Sprint Planning: Best tools

- MS Teams, Slack, Cisco WebEx, for seamless video conferencing
- MS Whiteboard, Mural etc. for brainstorming or whiteboarding
- Planningpoker.com, ScrumPoker, etc. for estimation exercises
- Capacity Planning on either project management tool or MS Excel





Revisit agile practices

2. Daily Stand-ups: Quick tips

- Extend standups by 5-10 mins as required and combine it with the social call to improve team intimacy
- Encourage video calls for better team connect
- Use these meetings also for sharing significant daily achievements and praising team members

Daily Stand-ups: Best tools

- MS Teams, Slack , Cisco Webex, etc. for video conferencing
- Suitable project management tool like Jira, Azure Devops etc. that provide a Scrum/Kanban board for tracking progress of work items/issues and reports for inferring whether the team is progressing in the right direction and will be able to meet the sprint goal





Revisit agile practices

3. Sprint review: Quick tips

- If possible, pre-record the functionality achieved during the sprint
- Share the achieved functionality with relevant stakeholders for an early feedback
- Utilize the remaining time to prioritize and forecast the set of features planned to be developed in upcoming sprints

Sprint review: Best tools

- MS Teams, Slack , Cisco Webex, etc. for smooth video conferencing experience
- Confluence/relevant tool for sharing of artefacts and maintaining meeting notes
- Suitable project management tool like Jira , Azure DevOps that provide Scrum/Kanban board for tracking status of work items and allow capturing action items resulting from feedback





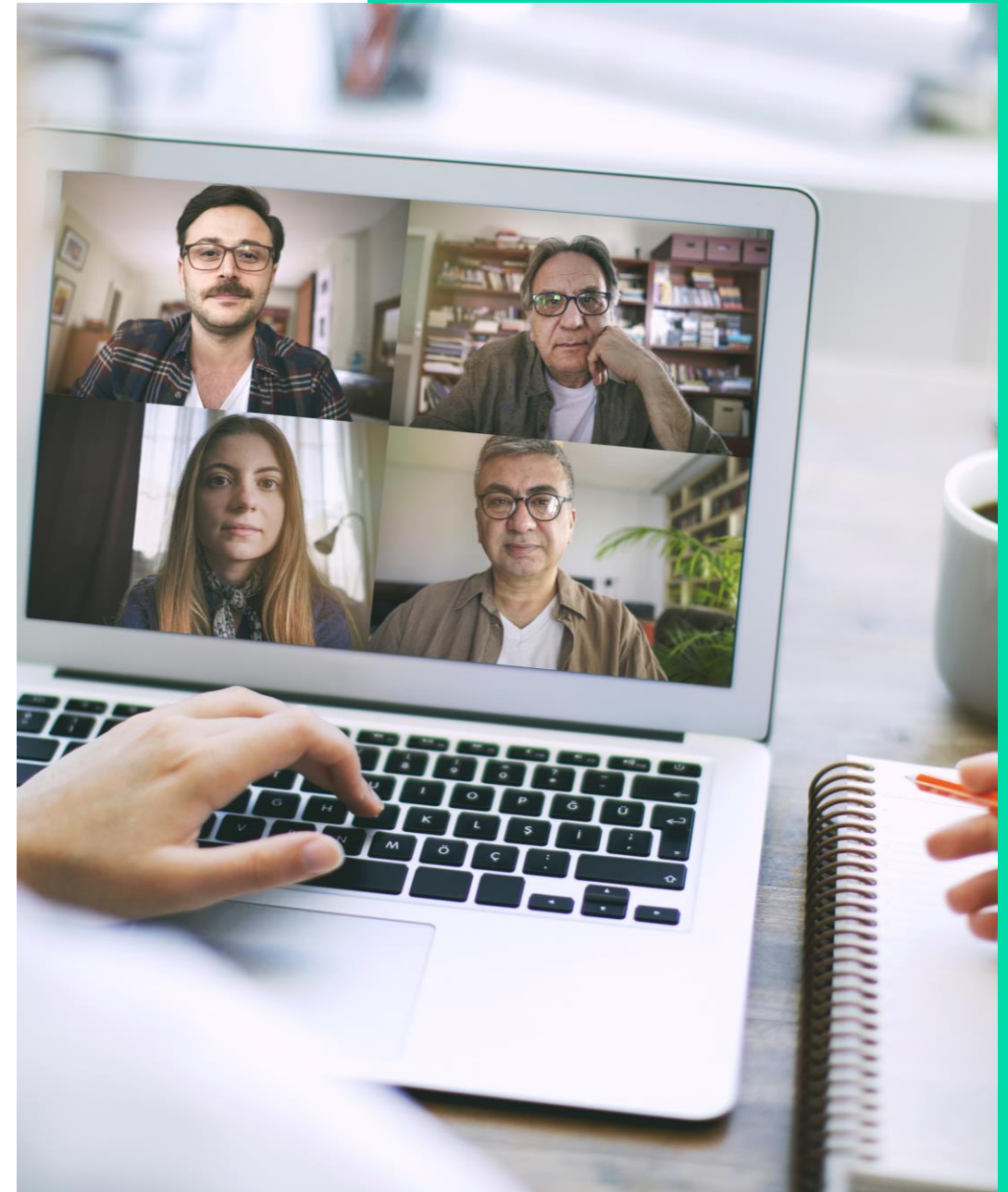
Revisit agile practices

4. Sprint retrospective: Quick tips

- Select appropriate tool for running remote retrospectives and set-up the board in advance
- Encourage team members to share their experiences and improvement areas
- Retrospect on the processes as well as the tools being used for remote collaboration
- Look at ways to improve the team connect and refining your ways of working remotely

Sprint retrospective: Best tools

- For a seamless video conferencing experience use MS Teams, Slack, Cisco Webex, etc.
- For digital retrospective boards use Reetro.io, Ideaboardz, Easyretro, Confluence etc. whichever best suits your team needs



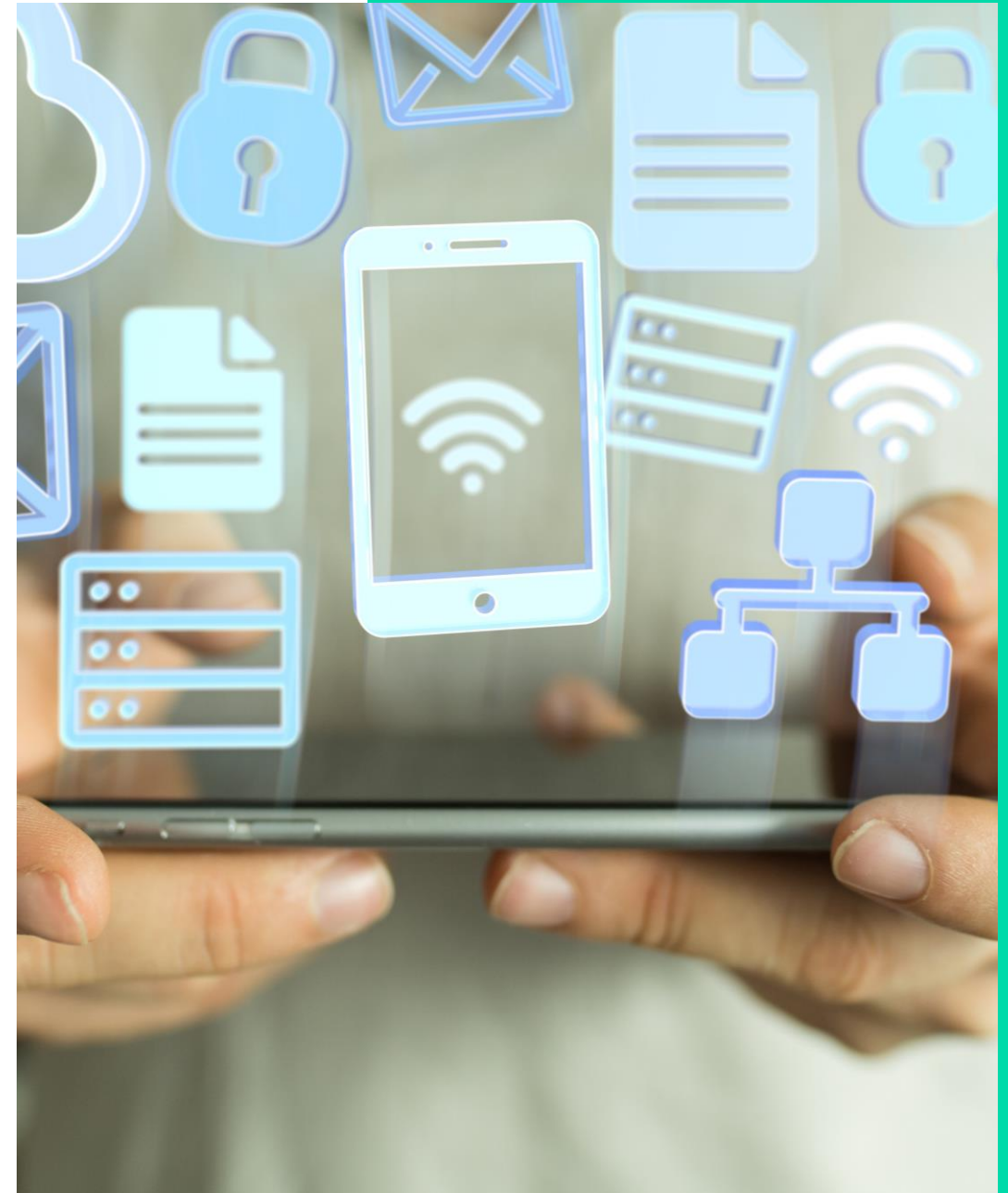


Tools



- Communication modes (via messages and video calls)
- Quality of video calls and video conferencing limits like number of users supported on same audio or video group calls
- File sharing and cloud storage limit
- Integration with Outlook, Office 365 and other relevant apps, as needed
- Support for Digital Whiteboards
- Platform support
- Security constraints

A hand holding a smartphone with various digital security icons overlaid on the screen, including padlocks, Wi-Fi signals, and server racks.





Whiteboarding tools

Digital whiteboarding is a necessity now to brainstorm ideas, plan forward, draw mock-ups, and explain information to colleagues. Choose an app that provides seamless whiteboarding experience and includes:

- Good Canvas size and zoom-out options to brainstorm ideas without space constraints
- Real-time and asynchronous Collaboration for co-editing, reviewing, and commenting on the boards with built-in chat window for users to exchange messages while collaborating
- Share documents and files such as images, links and other files for easy reference
- Presenting options to take control over the view of the virtual whiteboard and guide through one aspect of the content at a time
- Security for restricted access management and to assure security aspects as per business needs
- Multi-platform support to use the tool in different platforms and devices

Some of the most widely used whiteboarding apps include – MS Whiteboard, Miro, Mural, Google Jamboard, Conceptboard, AWW(Web) and Invision Freehand





Tools to run Agile events remotely

1. Sprint Planning:

MS Teams, Slack, Cisco WebEx, for video conferencing. MS Whiteboard, Mural etc. for brainstorming or whiteboarding. Planningpoker.com, ScrumPoker, etc. for estimation exercises. Capacity Planning on either project management tool or MS Excel

2 . Daily Stand-ups:

Suitable project management tool like Jira, Azure DevOps etc. that provide a Scrum/Kanban board for tracking progress of work items/issues along with reports for inferring whether the team is progressing in the right direction

3 . Sprint Review:

Confluence/relevant tool for sharing of artefacts and maintaining meeting notes. Suitable project management tool like Jira, Azure DevOps that provide Scrum/Kanban board for tracking status of work items and allow capturing action items resulting from feedback

4 . Sprint Retrospective:

For a seamless video conferencing experience use MS Teams, Slack, Cisco Webex, etc. For digital retrospective boards use Reetro.io, Ideaboardz, Easyretro, Confluence etc.



A person in a dark suit is seated at a desk, working on a laptop. The laptop screen displays a network diagram with a central icon of a classical building with columns and a dome, surrounded by various icons in hexagonal frames: an envelope, a pencil, a television, a washing machine, a flask, an open book, a computer monitor, a stethoscope, a house, and a document. The word "GOVERNANCE" is faintly visible below the central building icon. In the foreground, the person's hands are visible; one hand is pointing at the laptop keyboard, and the other is holding a white paper with a blue bar chart. To the left of the laptop, there is a white cup of coffee on a saucer. The background is blurred, showing a modern office environment.

Governance



Demarcate remote working guidelines

Maintain a transparent remote work policy that establishes standard and uniform ways of working. Publish handbooks with remote work policy and guidelines that covers the following key-aspects necessary for effective remote working:

- Organization-wide remote working guidelines. For example, GitLab, the world's largest all-remote company, has an [All-Remote working guide](#) that has some great tips and tricks for working in a remote set-up.
- Code of conduct
- Recommended standard toolset for remote collaboration and communication
- Attendance and Availability Standards
- Security Considerations
- Leadership structure and details of SPOCs
- Dos and Don'ts
- How-to section with a compiled set of frequently asked questions





Governing virtual teams

Servant leaders can effectively manage virtual teams by:

- Building rapport by connecting with every team member individually
- Encouraging transparency, autonomy and nurture an environment of trust and respect
- Engaging every team member and take measures for improving the level of participation
- Defining clear goals, prioritizing work items, and setting clear expectations.

A few good examples:

- Organize one-on-one meetings more often as compared to a co-located setup to understand challenges, offer support and guidance
- Set OKRs and detail out clear objectives for everyone and specify timelines.
- Make use of facilitation techniques such as liberating structures that make it possible to engage every team member and help in improving the level of participation



6 essentials of effective remote working

Conclusion



Experiment and build the work setup most suitable for optimum efficiency



Set clear remote working guidelines for team



Prioritize work items and set clear responsibilities



Choose the right set of tools for work planning, tracking, and reporting



Choose the right set of tools for efficient collaboration with team/customers

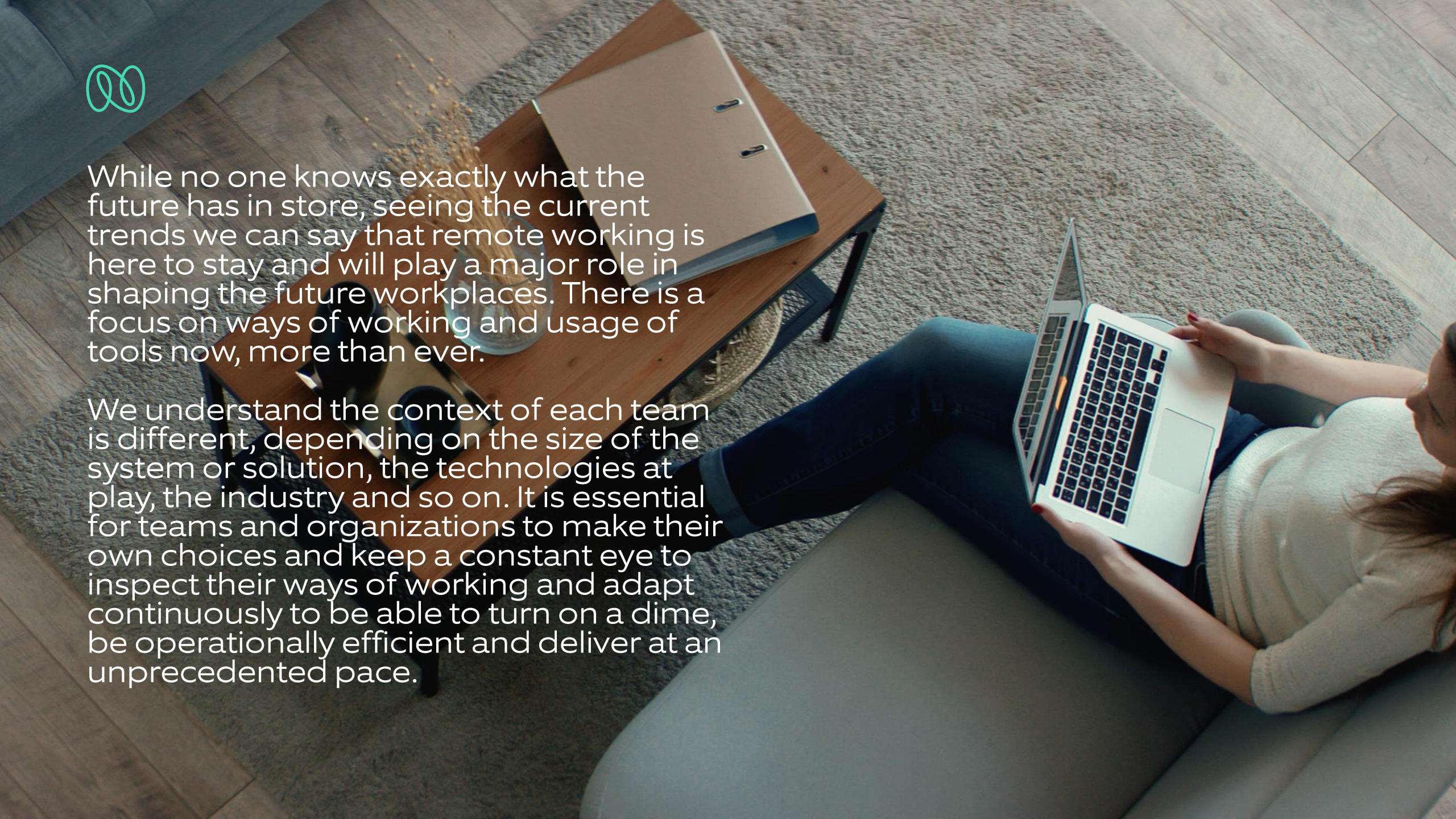


Build team intimacy to battle the effects of social distancing



While no one knows exactly what the future has in store, seeing the current trends we can say that remote working is here to stay and will play a major role in shaping the future workplaces. There is a focus on ways of working and usage of tools now, more than ever.

We understand the context of each team is different, depending on the size of the system or solution, the technologies at play, the industry and so on. It is essential for teams and organizations to make their own choices and keep a constant eye to inspect their ways of working and adapt continuously to be able to turn on a dime, be operationally efficient and deliver at an unprecedented pace.





About the author

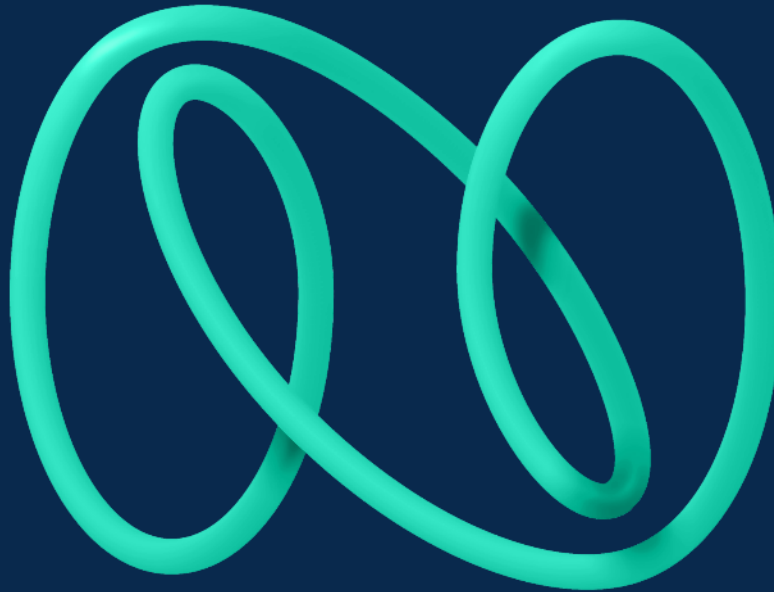
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An integral member of Agile, COE at Nagarro with extensive experience in agile trainings, consulting, adoption, and transformation.

Certifications: SaFe 5.0, PSM, Atlassian Certified (ACP 600 & ACP 300)

**Imagine
what we can
do together**



We are excited for our next conversation.

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