



Your guide to remote working for the employer and employee

We're a 38,000-person organization that depends on flexible and remote working every day. We've been relying on our modern workplace to empower our employees wherever they may be working for 20 years now.

Over that time, we've learned a lot about remote working. How to ensure it's adopted successfully and what pitfalls you'll need to sidestep. So, we're bringing our insights and expertise together in this guide, to help at a time when (like us) you're probably relying on remote working more than ever.

We've structured this guide to address the challenges facing employees, business leaders and IT leaders. Read on to learn how you can harness the maximum potential from home working – keeping you and your business productive and engaged.



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For the employee

Your personal well-being

Think about your personal work style – your habits and behaviors. No matter how long you're working remotely for, it's important to retain (and adapt) your structured habits, because maintaining your routine is important for your productivity.

If you're new to working at home, it may also be a new experience for your family members. It's always a good practice to discuss it with them and let them know when you are working.

Working from home can lead to increased screen time and less time away from your desk. So, schedule lots of breaks, stretch and if you can, walk around while you're on calls. And don't let work intrude on your home life, even though you're working from home. When you're offline, try to stay offline.

Your home office environment

Next, you'll need to think about your physical surroundings. Whether you live in a compact apartment or a palatial townhouse, noise and light will impact your work.

Start by finding a quiet corner or workspace, to allow you to concentrate. Background noise presents a challenge when you're joining audio conferences or Teams meetings. So, a certified USB headset with background noise-canceling capability is essential. Avoid consumer headsets and loudspeakers if you can – they'll deliver a poor experience for you and your colleagues.

It sounds obvious, but don't assume a meeting won't require you to join and use video. If you're planning to join a Teams or Skype for Business call, consider your "virtual dress code" and wear something appropriate. Ensure you have light shining towards you, rather than from behind, too – this will help your webcam deliver the best picture quality and improve the experience for your colleagues.

Your Teams or Skype for Business setup

If you're not up to speed with Microsoft Teams or Skype for Business, invest time to learn about the core features and functions you'll need. Familiarize yourself with the basics – the mute button, turning video on and off and how to use background blur.

Try out your setup with test calls, practice switching between microphones, cameras (if you have more than one) and screen sharing across multiple monitors. Consider data protection and security – how are you going to share information on your screen? Sharing individual applications rather than your entire desktop is often the wisest choice.

When you feel comfortable, investigate more advanced features that can augment your remote working experience. Have you used the Whiteboard feature on Teams, for example?

If you're using Teams, you'll have the additional option of using the dedicated app on your mobile device. Download it and get familiar with using it before your first meeting.

[Head here for training resources on how to get the most out of Teams.](#)

Your connectivity

Wi-Fi can be impacted by disruption and bandwidth challenges so, where possible, plug in via your LAN cable. Latency, jitter and dropped packets all affect the video and audio experience. If you can't improve your connection speed, optimize bandwidth by turning off video or consider moving your audio to a cell phone.

Other people in your home may also be streaming entertainment or playing online games, so you may want to plan or schedule your activities.



For the business leader

Your employee experience

One of the main remote working challenges is the impact on employee experience. That's especially the case when interactions that would usually take place in person have to be conducted virtually.

But you can address this by setting expectations around remote working practices even on a short-term or "exceptional circumstance" basis.

This includes defining which tools and platforms to use, how to use them and defining practices that are necessary for your business continuity (taking into account your workplace maturity).

Employees who aren't used to working from home may find the change to their expected ways of working a challenge. Consider creating a support network, for example, assigning a remote working champion per business unit to help colleagues understand how best to work from home within the context of their role.

Your corporate policies

Shifting to a home working environment opens the door to personal devices and applications being used to distribute corporate assets and information. And that increases the risk of confidential data being intercepted.

Ensure you have updated (and enforced) your data security and corporate policies to address the use of personal devices for business purposes. It comes back to being prepared – your employees need guidance and advice ahead of time. Close integration with your IT leaders is crucial here.

Your business investment

Chances are, you'll already have tools at your disposal that can enable effective collaboration, communication and remote working. Most workplaces will have access to Skype for Business or Teams as part of their Office 365 subscription. If you do not have access to Microsoft Teams, [Microsoft is making a 6-month trial available](#). You may also want to take advantage of capabilities such as Teams live events to host online town hall meetings and reach all your employees.

By partnering closely with IT, you can ensure you unlock the full value from your existing platforms, as well as identifying where additional investments could be made to improve the employee experience.

Your communication and collaboration practices

As a leader, it falls on you to act as a role model for the type of remote worker that you want your employees to be. And there are a few steps you can take to ensure you're effectively espousing the virtues of a virtual workplace.

Schedule regular check-ins with your team and ensure everyone can openly and honestly share successes and challenges. Encourage one-on-one coaching and establish a support network or mentoring system for your employees.

Make sure your leadership team recognizes success stories – at both a team and individual level. Send emails and call out contributors in calls.

Set clear priorities and expectations of roles within your teams. Assign clear ownership, deliverables and timelines, but place trust in your employees that once work targets are set, they'll have the flexibility to operate in the way that suits them best.

Your culture

Introduce a democratic and proactive culture as part of your remote working initiatives. Encourage employees to challenge the status quo and suggest ways of doing things differently. Ask your team to come up with ways to enhance communication, conduct regular "team retrospectives" to reflect on what can be improved. Most of all, build a culture that welcomes change.



For the IT leader

Your business continuity responsibility

You're likely to experience a much higher demand for online meetings, conferencing and live events during this time. And as an IT leader, supporting the needs of the business may present a challenge. If you encounter limitations, provide guidance to your organization to help ease some the pressure on your network.

For example, you can move nonessential audio calls to PSTN – which allows you to maintain one-on-one meetings, collaboration, document sharing and access to whiteboarding features. And you could also consider turning off video – this consumes a huge amount of bandwidth.

Your role in empowering the employee experience

Whether you're using Microsoft Teams or Skype for Business, you can implement policies to help improve remote meetings. Look at settings such as anonymous join, meeting lobby, recording options, meeting features (video, screen sharing) and others. You may want to consider advanced features such as meeting transcription or closed captions (if appropriate for your organization) to increase the ease of use and flexibility for participants.

Your infrastructure

If you're using Skype for Business on premise, you can do a quick check over the capacity you have according to the infrastructure you've deployed. To review your edge server capability and bandwidth from your data center, you can use the [Skype for Business Bandwidth Calculator](#) to run these numbers.

From the tool, you'll be able to roughly calculate how many audio sessions can transit your network and the number of sessions and conferences you can support. If you need help, call us or seek guidance from your technology partner.

Your ability to support large user groups

Every collaboration platform will have a limit on how many sessions or attendees it can handle. And this can make engaging large portions of your workforce a challenge. But there are ways around this.

Teams and Skype for Business enable meetings of up to 250 users, where all of these users can fully collaborate. But if you need more capacity, there are steps you can take:

- Enable broadcast meetings through Teams live events or Skype Meeting Broadcast. These are streamed and don't place as much pressure on your network. Only a small number of people will be able to present or share video, but everyone will be able to ask questions. You don't need to have Teams or Skype for Business fully deployed at your organization to be able to use these. And users may be able to join with minimal client setup from a browser. Learn more about Teams live events [here](#).
- Use Skype for Business and Teams in Islands mode – which shares the burden between the platforms as well as across the cloud and your network, resulting in a better experience and greater scalability. Find out more [here](#).

Your reporting capabilities

There are tools and dashboards available to assess how your organization is addressing the remote working challenge. Skype for Business on-premise customers can use the Call Quality Dashboard or the QoE/CDR reports from the server environment. In Office 365 (for Skype for Business online and Teams) the Call Quality Dashboard that's available through the admin center tools allows you to monitor the quality and volume of calls.

Use these tools to assess performance, flag issues and report the findings back to your business leadership.

For the IT leader Cont.

Your security obligations

Teams and Skype for Business employ foundational security, which can protect your organization and address your compliance responsibilities. Consider how you can:

- Harness built-in information protection, including eDiscovery and Data Loss Prevention – even in chats and conversations
- Use multi-factor authentication for enhanced identity protection and secure guest access
- Apply Conditional Access policies for scenarios when a user directly signs into Microsoft Teams
- Ensure appropriate governance is in place for team naming, team classification and team creation
- Prevent external sharing where necessary and ensure guest access is turned off in order to limit the attack surface (unless it's required for external meetings)
- Keep screen and document sharing within the dedicated platform (whether that's Skype for Business or Teams) as much as possible – this gives you the best chance of maintaining security and compliance

We're here to help

For more resources and advice on mastering remote working, explore our [Workplace Experience](#) content. And please get in touch if you'd like help with a specific remote working challenge that you're facing.



About Avanade

Avanade is the leading provider of innovative digital and cloud services, business solutions and design-led experiences on the Microsoft ecosystem. With 38,000 professionals in 25 countries, we are the power behind the Accenture Microsoft Business Group, helping companies to engage customers, empower employees, optimize operations and transform products, leveraging the Microsoft platform. Majority owned by Accenture, Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at www.avanade.com.

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