Remote working best practices: The do's and don'ts

In the contemporary professional landscape, the concept of remote work has transitioned from a temporary solution to a permanent fixture for numerous organisations globally. Gone are the days of cubicles and watercooler gossip; the modern professional navigates a digital frontier, unbound by physical location. The rise of remote work, fueled by technological advancements and a global pandemic, has transformed not just how we work, but who we are as workers.

While liberating in its flexibility, remote work presents unique challenges. This evolution necessitates a recalibration of our work habits to ensure productivity, efficiency, and well-being in a non-traditional work environment. Mastering the art of self-management, fostering collaboration across distances, and maintaining boundaries in a blurred work-life environment are some of the hurdles remote workers must surmount. To thrive in this new paradigm, a strategic approach is vital.

Strategic workspace design and ergonomics

A paramount consideration for remote workers is the creation of a designated workspace that not only fosters concentration but also adheres to ergonomic principles. An optimal workspace is characterised by a clutter-free environment, natural lighting, and a setup that minimises physical strain.

Your environment shapes your experience. Dedicate a specific area in your home as your workspace, away from distractions like the television or kitchen. Natural light and greenery can elevate mood and focus, while noise-cancelling headphones can shield you from unwanted sounds.

Invest in ergonomic furniture, such as

boundaries can blur the lines between professional and personal life, leading to either overworking or underperforming. Implementing a structured schedule, akin to a conventional workday, is crucial.

This includes designated start and end times, scheduled breaks, and the use of time management techniques to enhance focus and efficiency.

So, establish a consistent schedule, mirroring traditional office hours if that suits you, but allowing for flexibility. Utilise time management tools like calendars and planners, and chunk similar tasks together for improved focus.

Experiment with the Pomodoro Technique, working in focused 25-minute intervals with short breaks, to combat burnout and maintain productivity. Schedule virtual coffee breaks with

emphasis on clear, concise, and empathetic communication to mitigate misunderstandings and promote a sense of belonging among remote team members.

Schedule regular team meetings, both formal and informal, to foster connection and exchange ideas. Encourage open communication and celebrate individual and collective achievements.

Leverage shared documents and project management tools for transparent task tracking and progress updates. Utilise online collaboration tools like whiteboards and breakout rooms to replicate the brainstorming and problem-solving aspects of in-person work.

Prioritising mental health and work-life balance

Remote work grants flexibility, but also

culture. To counteract this, it is essential to cultivate a sense of community and engagement among remote workers. This can be achieved through virtual team-building activities, informal social gatherings, and recognition programs that celebrate achievements and milestones. Fostering a strong sense of community not only enhances morale but also reinforces organisational identity and loyalty among remote teams.

Continuous learning and professional development

The remote work landscape is constantly evolving. The dynamic nature of remote work, coupled with the rapid pace of technological advancements, necessitates a commitment to continuous learning and professional development. This includes staying abreast of new tools and methodologies, enhancing soft skills such as digital communication and self-management, and seeking opportunities for growth and advancement within the remote work framework.

Stay ahead of the curve by dedicating time to continuous learning. Explore online courses, attend webinars, and read industry publications to stay updated on the latest trends and technologies. Network with other remote professionals through online communities and forums to share experiences and best practices. Embrace opportunities for growth and development to remain competitive and relevant in the dynamic world of remote work.

Embracing flexibility and adaptability

The essence of remote work lies in its flexibility, offering an unprecedented opportunity to tailor work practices to individual preferences and life circumstances. However, this flexibility also demands a high degree of adaptability, as remote workers must navigate varying demands, time zones, and disruptions. Cultivating an adaptive mindset, characterised by resilience, openness to change, and problem-solving capabilities, is essential for thriving in a remote work environment.

Security and data protection

With the decentralisation of the workplace, ensuring the security of data and information becomes paramount. This encompasses adopting robust cybersecurity measures, including secure Wi-Fi networks, VPNs, and multi-factor authentication, as well as adhering to best practices for data privacy and protection. Organisations and individuals alike must remain vigilant against cyber threats and prioritise the integrity and confidentiality of professional information.

The remote revolution is here to stay

By adopting these best practices, you can navigate the challenges, unlock the potential, and thrive in this exciting new era of work. Remember, remote work is not just about location; it's about embracing a mindset of self-management, collaboration, and continuous learning. It is through the strategic integration of disciplined time management, effective use of technology, prioritisation of mental health, and cultivation of a collaborative and flexible culture that the full potential of remote work can be realised.

As we continue to adapt to this evolving work model, it is the principles of intentionality, connectivity, and resilience that will guide us toward a productive, fulfilling, and sustainable future in the realm of remote work. With dedication and the right tools, you can transform your couch into a launchpad for success, conquering the remote frontier and forging a fulfilling

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PHOTO: **AMIT RANJAN/UNSPLASH.**

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chairs with lumbar support and adjustable desks that can significantly reduce the risk of musculoskeletal disorders, thereby enhancing productivity and ensuring long-term health.

Remember, this is your professional domain, so personalise it with objects that inspire and motivate you.

Disciplined time management and structured schedules

Remote work thrives on self-discipline. The absence of traditional office

colleagues to maintain social connection and combat isolation.

Leveraging technology for enhanced connectivity

Clear and consistent communication is the lifeblood of any team, especially in a remote setting. And when it comes to remote work, technology is the linchpin that connects dispersed teams. Utilisation of collaboration tools and platforms, such as Slack, Zoom, and Trello, facilitates seamless communication and project management.

However, it is not merely about adopting technology but also about leveraging it effectively. This entails establishing clear protocols for communication, ensuring regular updates, and fostering an environment where digital tools augment, rather than impede, productivity.

Overcommunicate, even if it feels redundant. Utilise a variety of communication tools like video conferencing, project management platforms, and instant messaging, choosing the right medium for the specific message and recipient.

Be mindful of time zones and respond promptly to messages to avoid frustration and delays. Actively listen, ask clarifying questions, and document key decisions to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Fostering a culture of collaboration

Remote work demands a proactive approach to communication and collaboration. This involves regular check-ins, transparent sharing of progress, and the cultivation of an inclusive virtual culture that encourages open dialogue and collective problem-solving.

The absence of face-to-face interactions necessitates a heightened

requires self-awareness. The isolation and monotony inherent in remote work can have profound implications on mental health. It is imperative for remote workers to prioritise self-care, including regular exercise, hobbies, and social interactions outside of work.

Establish clear boundaries between your work and personal life. Set work hours and stick to them, resisting the temptation to check emails late at night or on weekends. Take breaks throughout the day, step away from your desk, and engage in activities that rejuvenate you. Communicate your boundaries to colleagues and respect theirs. Remember, a healthy work-life balance fuels long-term productivity and prevents burnout.

Combat isolation by scheduling virtual social time with colleagues and friends. Get regular exercise, even if it's just a brisk walk outdoors. Prioritise sleep and a healthy diet to maintain energy and focus. Utilise mindfulness techniques like meditation to manage stress and anxiety. Don't hesitate to seek professional help if needed; prioritising your mental well-being is essential for overall performance and happiness.

Employers, too, can support work-life balance for employees by promoting flexible work hours, encouraging time off, and providing access to mental health resources. Achieving a healthy work-life balance is paramount to sustaining motivation, creativity, and overall well-being in a remote work setting.

Cultivating a sense of community and engagement

One of the challenges of remote work is the potential for feelings of isolation and disconnection from the organisational

Six intl. startups working towards fashion recycling solutions

AFP, *Paris*

The fashion industry's significant issue of excessive waste is prompting governments worldwide, especially the EU, to set ambitious recycling goals. However, the challenge lies in the complexity of recycling textiles, and there is a lack of mature technical solutions to address this issue effectively.

NGOs warn the real problem is over-production, and that tech innovations may just provide cover for brands to continue pumping out billions of new clothes. But the pressure to start recycling at a massive scale is happening now. "Brands need to get to high levels of recycling at super-speed, and if they don't, the EU will be giving them massive fines," said circular economy consultant Paul Foulkes-Arellano. AFP spoke to multiple experts to see which ideas could make a difference. Many will fail, but here is a snapshot of current contenders that illustrate the different challenges in textile recycling.

MycoWorks: Mushroom leather

MycoWorks grows mycelium (fungus roots) that comes out like luxury leather, with early clients including Hermes and General

Motors (for car interiors). "The only input is sawdust and energy costs are extremely low because it's a fungus, not a plant, so there's no need for light, and very little water," said CEO Matt Scullin.

While the makers of most new biomaterials are struggling to reach industrial scale, MycoWorks claims to have cracked the problem, billing itself as "the first and only biomaterials company to open a full-scale factory" in the US state of South Carolina, with the first 1,000-sheet harvest coming off the line in January.

Circ: Unblending clothes

Most clothes are a blend of materials, making them hard to recycle. US-based Circ has invented a chemical solution to separate the most common blend, polycotton, into its constituent parts. It uses a hydrothermal process to liquefy the polyester and separate it from the cotton. Both can then be turned into new fibres. Retail giant Zara used them for a clothing line released in April.

SuperCircle: Collecting and sorting

The world lacks the infrastructure to collect and sort large amounts of old clothes, which must be kept clean and separate from other waste. SuperCircle brings together delivery

ILLUSTRATION CREDIT: **ZARIF FAIAZ**

firms, warehouses and tracking systems to streamline and cheapen the process. They hope to change public attitudes with in-store drop-off bins, free shipping labels and other encouragements.

"We need ease, convenience and incentives for consumers so that when they are done with an item, the first thing

they think is end-of-life recycling," said co-founder Stuart Ahlum. They now handle all recycling logistics for multiple companies and sectors, including Uniqlo North America.

Saentis Textiles: in-house recycling

Saentis Textiles already helped solve one key challenge with a patented machine that

can recycle cotton with minimal damage to the fibres, so it can make quality new textiles. Its recycled cotton is used by brands including IKEA, Patagonia and Tommy Hilfiger. Now it is selling its machine to textile companies so they can install one directly in their factories, allowing them to chuck in cut-offs and scraps for recycling on the spot.

Unspun: 3D weaving machine

Unspun claims to have invented the world's first 3D weaving machine, capable of creating a custom-sized pair of jeans directly from yarns in under 10 minutes. Currently building its first micro-factory in Oakland, California to prove the concept, the machine could remove the need for brands to keep large stockpiles of inventory, cutting down on waste and transport.

Cetia: Preparing old clothes

Clothes must be prepared before they can be recycled, and this is the speciality of France-based Cetia. Some of its machines are simple, like one that yanks the soles off shoes. Others are more complex. One uses AI to recognise hard points such as buttons and zippers, and then a laser to slice them off without damaging the item.