



Tech is Helping Us Work From Home – But Are We Managing Our Teams?

Gary David Smith



Gary David Smith
Co-founder
Prism

Biography

Gary David Smith is Co-founder of Prism (www.prism.uk.com). Since its formation in 2001, the Prism team – led by Gary David Smith and Richard Alexander – have worked hard to build an enviable reputation as one of the UK's premier outsourced Managed Service IT Providers.

Specializing in the small to medium-sized business market, Prism prides itself on being able to support a broad range of businesses, users, technologies and locations with flexibility and professionalism.

Innovation has always been part of the fabric of the business as early adopters and implementers of technology within the business community through to an award winning CSR strategy.

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Paper type Opinion

Abstract

The rise of the coronavirus (COVID-19), is continuing to cause headaches for businesses and brands all over the world. Even large companies are sending employees home in line with global advice surrounding social distancing and spreading the virus. At this moment in time, remote working is fast becoming the new norm, but how sustainable is it going to be long-term asks the author of this article.

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 on businesses means that many companies have needed to hit the ground running very quickly to adopt new technology and grapple with new software and work processes. For managers, owners and employees alike, there is certainly a learning curve.

For the most part, however, it appears that business is continuing as usual, albeit from afar. However, there are concerns rising as to how effective management and supervision can actually be from a distance. There is technology in place to ensure that workers stick to timetables, briefs and schedules. But, ensuring productivity and self-motivation are different challenges entirely.

Thanks to the incredible technology we have available right now, working from home has never been easier. Software such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom are



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allowing people to connect with one another, to collaborate on projects and to ensure that they are all on the same page. With social distancing in full effect, it's never been more important to keep in touch.

However, many professionals are concerned about how seamless long-distance management can be, especially in the long-term. Short of setting up a video link to persistently monitor employees, there is a sharp learning curve for management from afar. Managing one or two employees may be as simple as requesting timesheets and document deliveries to schedule. That, naturally, is simple to control. However, whether or not employees stay focused on what they are supposed to be doing is another matter entirely.



Setting smaller, bite-size agendas and to-dos with shorter review periods can help settle those not use to the working pattern. Then this can be increased and extended as the approach becomes normalized.

Setting a routine

People who are completely new to working from home are now having to discover a whole new world of self-discipline. Self-starters and sole traders should have little difficulty adapting – for them it's business as usual for them, to an extent. But for those who are used to continual monitoring and checks, it's a whole new scenario. How do they meter themselves and ensure that they don't get distracted? If managers are already having to process employees who are less than productive in what they do, there are likely to be major issues arising.



Equally, when is enough, enough? Some people need to be encouraged to remove themselves from their work and take some time to rest, rehabilitate, re-assess and re-engage. As experienced IT professionals at Prism we have years of experience in using the latest technology to collaborate and to work from afar. However, effective team management from afar cannot be left purely to technology.

The technology teams and managers are using to process work and to adhere to deadlines is all well and good. However, there must still be that human focus. Managers and supervisors are faced with the monumental task of having to completely rethink the way they motivate and manage their teams. I feel, and many are likely to agree with me, that face-to-face time is crucial, at least once per week.



It is tempting to throw all our working processes into technology and faceless communications for ease and efficiency. However, for motivation and productivity, managers need to retain that human contact. Good managers, and great managers, will check in on their teams through video link and through voice calls wherever possible. Therefore, I believe it's important for managers to adopt a more sensitive, human approach during this time.

Naturally, COVID-19 is changing lives in very difficult and challenging ways. Adapting to working from home may not be as easy as it seems. Effective team management during the pandemic must not lose the human touch. Without this crucial link, employees and teams are going to feel alone and adrift. Just as much as you should strive to manage your team with humanity in everyday work, supervisors should be reaching out to field and remote staff regularly, if only to check on wellbeing.

There are all kinds of issues facing managers and their teams right now. With COVID-19 showing few signs of slowing down, it's important we learn to adapt for the long-term, even if this transpires to be a short-term scenario. We must support each other in any way we can.