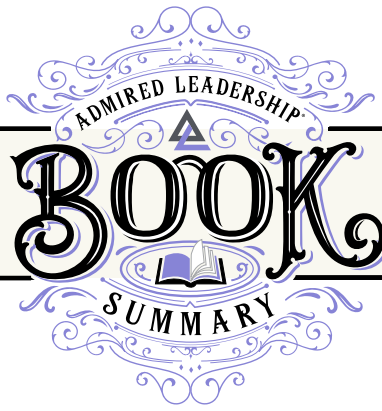




Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours



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Remote Work Revolution

Succeeding From Anywhere

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While the modern notion of remote work has been around for 30 years, the Covid-19 pandemic caused remote work to shift from something relatively rare and unconventional to common practice in almost every industry. And many companies have continued the practice, due to the economic, environmental, and social benefits it brings. But remote work also raises questions about how to navigate tech exhaustion, maintain employee motivation, and facilitate team coordination. Harvard Business School professor Tsedal Neeley's book **Remote Work Revolution** highlights best practices for leaders to navigate the remote working environment.

Key Quote

"Remote Work Revolution provides evidence-based answers [to] pressing concerns as well as practical guidance for how you can, together with team members, internalize and apply the best practices that matter the most" (p. xv). — Tsedal Neeley

KEY POINTS

Four fundamentals of teamwork that each member must agree to.

1. "Shared goals" with "plain and clear" aims,
2. "Shared understanding" about each person's "roles, functions, and constraints,"
3. "Shared understanding of available resources, ranging from budgets to information,"
4. "Shared norms" that serve as a model for effective collaboration (pp. 4-5).

To support productive remote work:

1. “Focus on process not outcomes when assessing productivity,”
2. “Lean into” the flexibility remote work affords (rather than constantly monitoring people),
3. “Provide support for optimal working conditions” by being willing to invest financially in what workers need for good working conditions,
4. “Emphasize team goals and identity” (p. 58).

Select the right digital tools for the project, vary the format to prevent tech fatigue with one tool, choose the tool that best fits the context, and don't overburden people with too much digital media (pp. 83-84).

With culturally diverse teams, challenge your own assumptions about other cultures and ask which digital media members of the team prefer to use. Fluent members should slow their pace and encourage less fluent members to engage. “Listen as much as you speak,” “observe and ask,” “empathize,” and highlight the ways cultural diversity enriches your team's capabilities. Introduce social engagement that is not always work-focused (pp. 84, 129).

Lead virtually by being present on digital media, and discourage subgroups from forming. Emphasize team members' “strengths, not status,” “promote a common purpose,” provide “clear, consistent, and direct communication” and constructive feedback, and promote an environment where it is safe to disagree (p. 149).

Prepare for global crises by staying abreast of global issues – Neely calls this panoramic awareness. Weigh various solutions to a variety of scenarios, and, as soon as you have a plan for a given situation, act! Be ready to change and reorganize “radically” in the face of a crisis.


Key Concepts:

How Can We (Re)Launch to Thrive in Remote Work?


Preparation and discussion about team collaboration are essential to success, especially in remote work. “A launch session (and periodic relaunches or reappraisals), which puts in place a clear group plan to meet the demands at hand, is crucial in remote work” (p. 3).

To launch successfully, Neely lists four essential elements of teamwork: 1) shared goals, 2) shared understanding of team member roles, 3) shared understanding of resources, and 4) shared norms (pp. 5-9).

Collective norms must be established, especially in a remote environment. These define interaction plans for all roles, create a sense of psychological safety, and build connections within a team. Norms can ensure all team members have a place to both speak and listen, and they outline how to stay connected on priorities and identify follow-up protocols (pp. 11-14).



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Launches should estimate an hour and a half total across one or two sessions, at least once per quarter. And an increased frequency, such as every six-to-eight weeks, is recommended for virtual teams or teams in times of uncertainty (pp. 4-5).

Finally, in a launch session, leaders should take the opportunity to reinforce their commitment to a team (p. 15).

How Can I Trust Colleagues I Barely See in Person?

Neely defines trust building as gathering “all kinds of personal and professional details about who (others) are and how they comport themselves,” making “it easy to pass trust back and forth between each other” (pp. 20-21). And she defines several different types of trust.

Passable trust is “a sufficient level of confidence you have in others based on their words and actions.” It is the minimum trust required to work with someone, and it is created via observable behavior (p. 22).

Swift trust is “the high level of trust that must be ‘swiftly’ established by members in a team formed for a specific project or assignment who expect to be working together for a limited period of time” (p. 22). Swift trust is the most prominent form of trust in virtual teams (p. 28).

Cognitive trust is where trust can be confirmed and increased over time, based on experiences and interactions. It is grounded on the belief that others are reliable (p. 24).


Emotional trust is built through positive feelings and emotional bonds, grounded in care and concern for one another (p. 24).

The good news for developing these forms of trust is that knowledge about the people you work with can promote trust. There are two types of knowledge to foster among team members:


Direct knowledge encompasses the “personal characteristics and behavioral norms” of the people you work with. To build direct knowledge with people far away, get to know your teammates. For example, ask questions about teammates’ lives in a meeting instead of jumping right into work topics (p. 30).

Reflected knowledge is developing an understanding of how your work practices are seen by others. This can be developed by paying close attention to how you and other teammates work and by being willing to have your perceptions of others challenged (p. 31). This kind of understanding is especially important cross-culturally. You must challenge your assumptions about people in another country or culture.

Leaders should create a space for interactions to help get to know team members outside of explicitly doing work, to build both types of knowledge (p. 32).



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Self-disclosure is key to building emotional trust. Important elements in self-disclosure in communication include: “depth, breadth, duration, reciprocity, truthfulness,” and “attribution.” (Attribution means communicating that the information is “uniquely intended for the recipient.”)

Additionally, self-disclosure can be either “descriptive vs. evaluative.” In other words, saying “I had dinner vs. I like Habesha food” adds or subtracts a level of personal disclosure (p. 33).


So to build connection and trust, take a moment to share small and appropriate personal details about yourself. Some more examples from the book include saying things like, “I can’t meet at that time because I have to take the car to the mechanic” or mentioning that one colleague “always makes a cappuccino on Fridays at 4 o’clock” (p. 34).

Can My Team Really Be Productive Remotely?


A virtual environment increases worker productivity and creates significant financial benefits for an organization. This positive impact has been proven across multiple industries and countries (pp. 45-47).

Autonomy is one of the greatest benefits of remote work for both the worker and the employer. It creates trust and self-confidence, boosts personal investment in projects, and increases efficiency through scheduling flexibility (p. 51).

Managers may be inclined to install formal or informal monitoring technologies to cope with the fear that remote workers are less productive. But these tactics tend to backfire, as they betray a lack of trust between employers and employees (pp. 39-43).



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Harvard faculty member and team productivity expert J. Richard Hackman established the following criteria for assessing if a team was functioning well:

1. **“delivering results, or achieving expected goals”**
2. **“facilitating individual growth, or a sense of personal development and well-being,”**
3. **“building team cohesion, or ensuring that the team is operating as one unit”** (p. 44).

Remote teams must have good cohesion to be successful, and this depends on both the quantity and quality of interactions among team members. Without cohesion, workers feel professionally isolated (pp. 55- 57).

How Should I Use Digital Tools in Remote Work?

Tech exhaustion is one disadvantage of remote work. To minimize this, work to create transition periods between meetings and balance the amount of video calls utilized (pp. 63-64). Digital tools should be selected intentionally to maximize their effectiveness and prevent overload.

Leaders must navigate certain challenges when implementing digital tools for remote workers:

1. **“Mutual knowledge.”** When people who work together are distant, it is easy for wrong assumptions and misunderstandings to blur and hinder communication (p. 66). The mutual knowledge challenge in the remote work scenario is the idea that “we need extensive common ground to successfully interpret the situational context and appropriately respond to one another” (p. 66).

2. **“Social presence.”** Social presence is how we leverage voice and facial expressions to cue thoughts and feelings. Remote workplaces lack face-to-face interaction, so effort must be made to communicate digitally in ways where people can see each such things as facial expressions and even clothing (pp. 68-69).
3. **“Rich” vs. “lean” media.** Some types of media convey greater amounts of information than others. “Rich” media (video, telephone) are more helpful where less clarity and more ambiguity exist. “Lean” media (e-mails, documents) work where things are very straightforward. A team that does not have strong relationships may benefit more from rich media choices (p. 70).
4. **“Productive redundancy.”** “Social tools that increase and reinforce redundancy are not only useful but often essential for virtual teams” (p. 74). It can be effective to strategically pair two distinct forms of media to ensure messages are received appropriately (pp. 74-77).
5. **“Cultural differences.”** Adding global and cultural differences to remote work scenarios can add insult to injury when it comes to connection and understanding. Consider asking communication partners from different cultures for their media preferences (pp. 78-79).

Social tools, such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, can be beneficial for connection, knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation while requiring minimal investment in any infrastructure. Social tools also create a sense of trust amongst coworkers.

But to be successful, leaders must set an example and have a presence, themselves, on social tools (pp. 79-83).

“Creating urgency and setting priorities is the job of the leader, not the technology” (p. 83).

How Can My Agile Team Operate Remotely?

Agile teams are ideally five-to-nine cross-functional team members with no single leader. They use open and direct communication to make quick progress. Agile teams often have multiple prototyping phases of a project. They are also known for quick and frequent meetings, such as daily fifteen-minute “stand-up” meetings (pp. 87-89). Agile was developed for in-person software organizations, but the approach can be efficient in any industry, including remote environments (pp. 90-92).

Teams with communication norms and existing digital platforms are better primed for making the transition to remote (pp. 99-100). There are five best practices for a team to maintain a successful agile environment while remote:

1. **Individuals should prepare in advance for meetings and then sync up to collaborate.**
2. **Members should “brainstorm in shared documents.”**
3. **Daily stand-up meetings should leverage an organizational method to keep communication streamlined.**
4. **Norms should be established for when to use certain digital communication platforms.**
5. **Leaders should “solicit anonymous feedback” to evaluate team satisfaction (pp. 101-107).**

How Can My Global Team Succeed Across Differences?

Importantly, language can be a huge barrier to collaboration and success for a global team (p. 117). To have an inclusive conversation on a global team, fluent speakers should dial down dominance, less fluent speakers should dial up engagement, and everyone should balance for inclusion (pp. 121-124).

Psychological distance is the “level of emotional or cognitive connection among members.” It is essential to reduce this distance to increase team empathy, respect, and trust (pp. 116-117). The “mutual adaptation model” addresses this and outlines the process of understanding and adaptation for team members of diverse cultures (p. 125).

Mutual learning consists of “absorbing and asking.”

- Absorbing is gathering information on a workplace, team, or situation without jumping to conclusions.
- Asking questions back and forth can allow team members to adapt to new information and may build on what is learned in the absorbing stage (p. 125).

Mutual teaching involves “instructing and facilitating.”

- Instructing is not only formal teaching and coaching but also informal advice and assistance.
- Facilitating is teaching while connecting or explaining links between team members with vastly different backgrounds (pp. 126-128).

What Do I Really Need to Know About Learning Virtually?


Leaders should be actively involved in enhancing virtual learning. According to Frances Frei and Anne Morris, “Leadership is empowering other people as a result of your presence – and making sure that impact continues in your absence. Leaders must create the conditions for people to realize their own capacity and power” (p. 133).

The six most common challenges that leaders face in general and especially in a virtual format include:

1. **The “location challenge.”** Hybrid scenarios complicate group dynamics.
2. **Class divisions and status perceptions.**
3. **“Us vs. Them” dynamics within subgroups.**
4. **Predictability in roles, goals, and expectations** when there are not enough reminders from leadership.
5. **Performance feedback** may be perceived to unfairly favor in-office workers. But, in reality, research shows that non-remote workers are not typically evaluated unfairly.
6. **“The engagement challenge.”** Creating team engagement through unstructured interaction time is necessary (pp. 134-147).

How Do I Prepare My Team for Global Crisis?

In the era we live in now, “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) factors create the conditions for the worldwide ripple effects of this interconnectedness and characterize a world where crisis is expected” (p. 153).



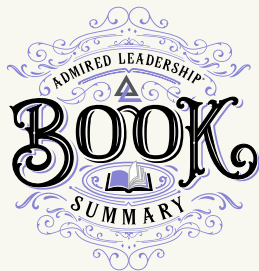
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Panoramic awareness is what Neely calls keeping a wide-lens view of the global situation. “Leaders don’t have the luxury of consuming news solely from one part of the world. Like a landscape lens, you must constantly maintain as wide a view as possible on international events” (p. 156).

Just as your globally diverse team can bring challenges, it can also assist in handling crises nimbly. “A diversity of cognitive approaches, which comes from a talent pool that is broadly representative of nationalities, societies, cultures, religions, racial backgrounds, and so forth, plays a crucial role in determining global teams’ ability to adapt effectively to crises” (p. 168).

Looking ahead to anticipate risks and challenges, leaders should frame a situation by considering not just one possibility but the array of future changes a team may need to make (p. 161).

Neeley, T. **Remote Work Revolution: Succeeding From Anywhere** (2021) New York: HarperCollins Publishers.



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The Latest and Greatest Books for Leaders

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