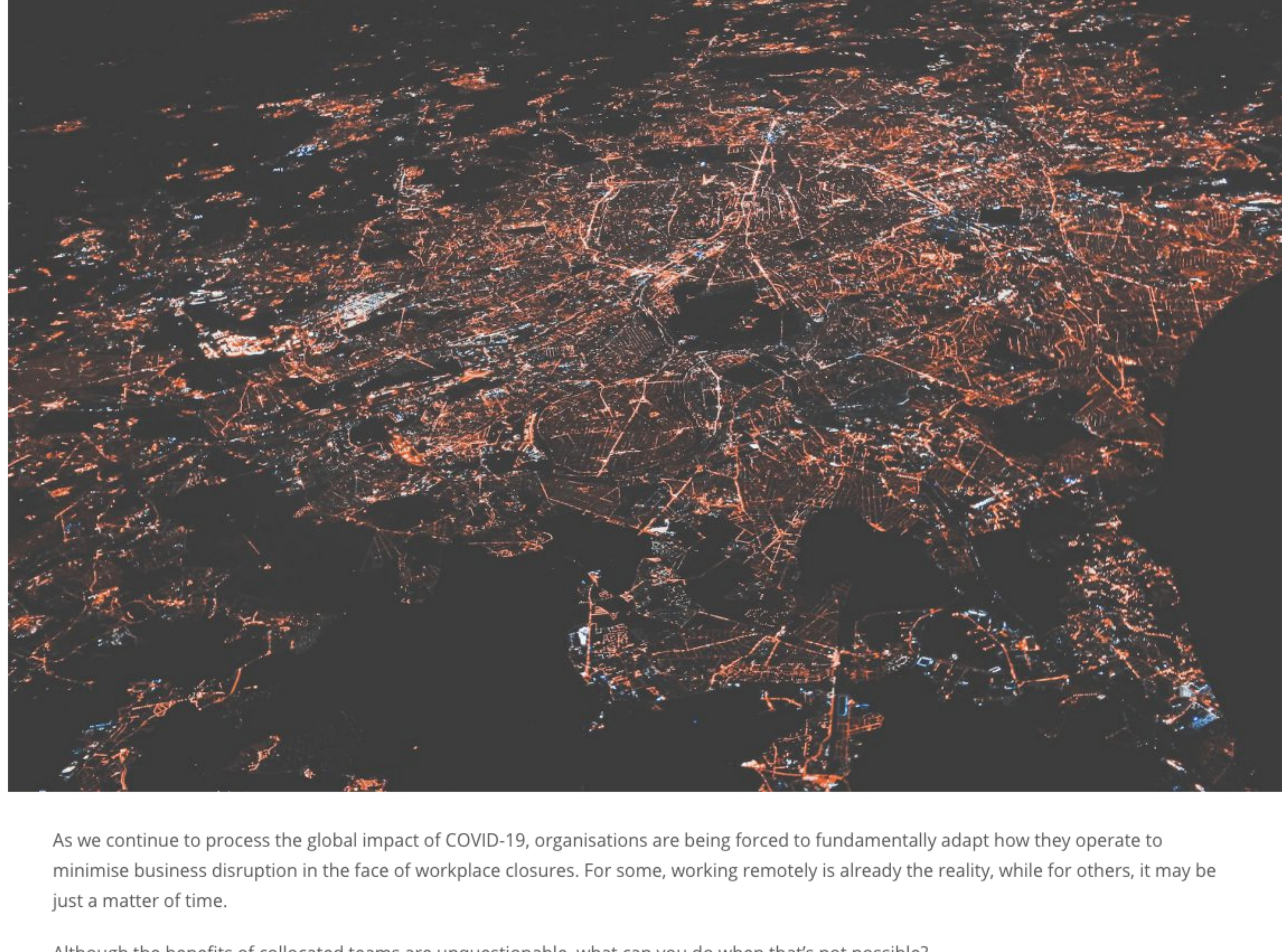


The hierarchy of remote working needs

ELABOR8 / MARCH 23, 2020



As we continue to process the global impact of COVID-19, organisations are being forced to fundamentally adapt how they operate to minimise business disruption in the face of workplace closures. For some, working remotely is already the reality, while for others, it may be just a matter of time.

Although the benefits of collocated teams are unquestionable, what can you do when that's not possible?

We have been working with our clients to rapidly shift their operations to remote methods, without losing effectiveness. In this article, we'll share the real-world learnings we have uncovered from over 63 Australian business teams across higher education, health care, finance, insurance, and non-profit sectors.

Find out what is required to enable your teams to work from home effectively, the challenges you may face, and how to overcome them.

The hierarchy of effectiveness in remote working

Based on our experience of what organisations require to set up remote teams and develop their distributed capabilities, we have developed a hierarchy of needs, similar to that of Maslow's. It covers everything from the short-term basics that you'll need to get started, right through to longer term considerations like how to nurture a strong organisational culture when face-to-face interaction isn't possible.

Level One: Infrastructure and connectivity

At the most basic level, effective remote systems and methods of communication are critical.

Hardware

Over 62% of teams we worked with had company-issued laptops with cameras, speakers and microphone for all members. Those without were still able to remote access from their home computers, but not all had webcams.

First, we'd recommend you conduct an IT audit to determine which employees have access to a:

- Laptop or home computer (including installed software)
- Phone
- Web camera
- Headphones
- Microphone

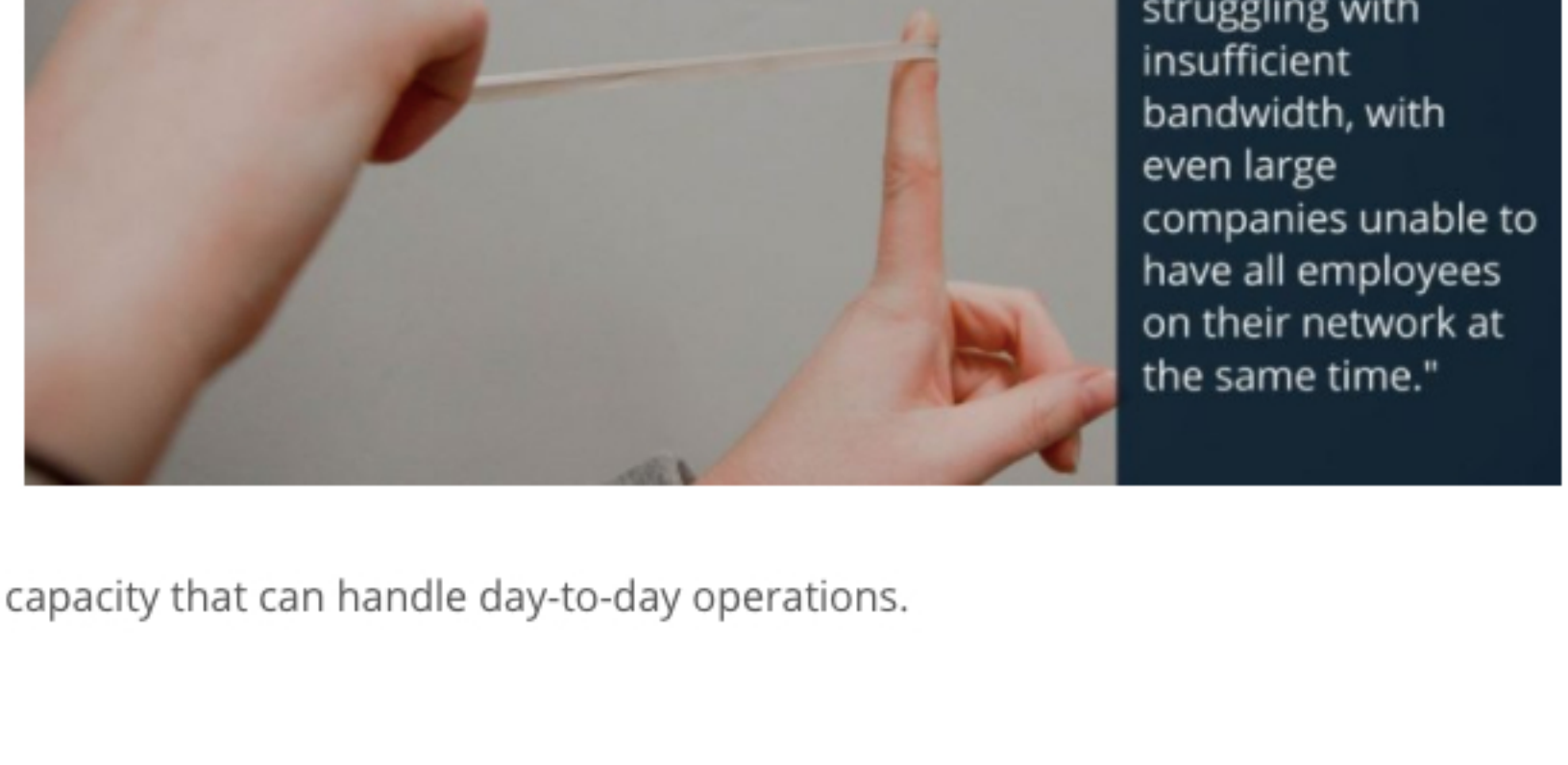
Remote system availability

You will need to provide remote access to internal systems and files, with cybersecurity features like a VPN. Of those we've worked with, 58% already had critical systems access available remotely, and extending this has been our focus.

Robust connectivity has proved to be an unexpected major challenge for many of our clients — we have found that as many as 80% are struggling with insufficient bandwidth, with even large companies unable to have all employees on their network at the same time.

In the short-term, these contingency measures will help alleviate the strain:

- Arrange shift access to the network.
- Prioritise access for business-critical teams.
- Limit access to non-essential websites like YouTube.
- Encourage employees to work offline where possible, for example, editing documents offline then uploading the edited version.
- Use mobile versions of tools, such as apps for MS Teams, Zoom, Outlook, and Workplace.
- Encourage teams to work staggered hours. You may need to seek industrial relations expertise here.

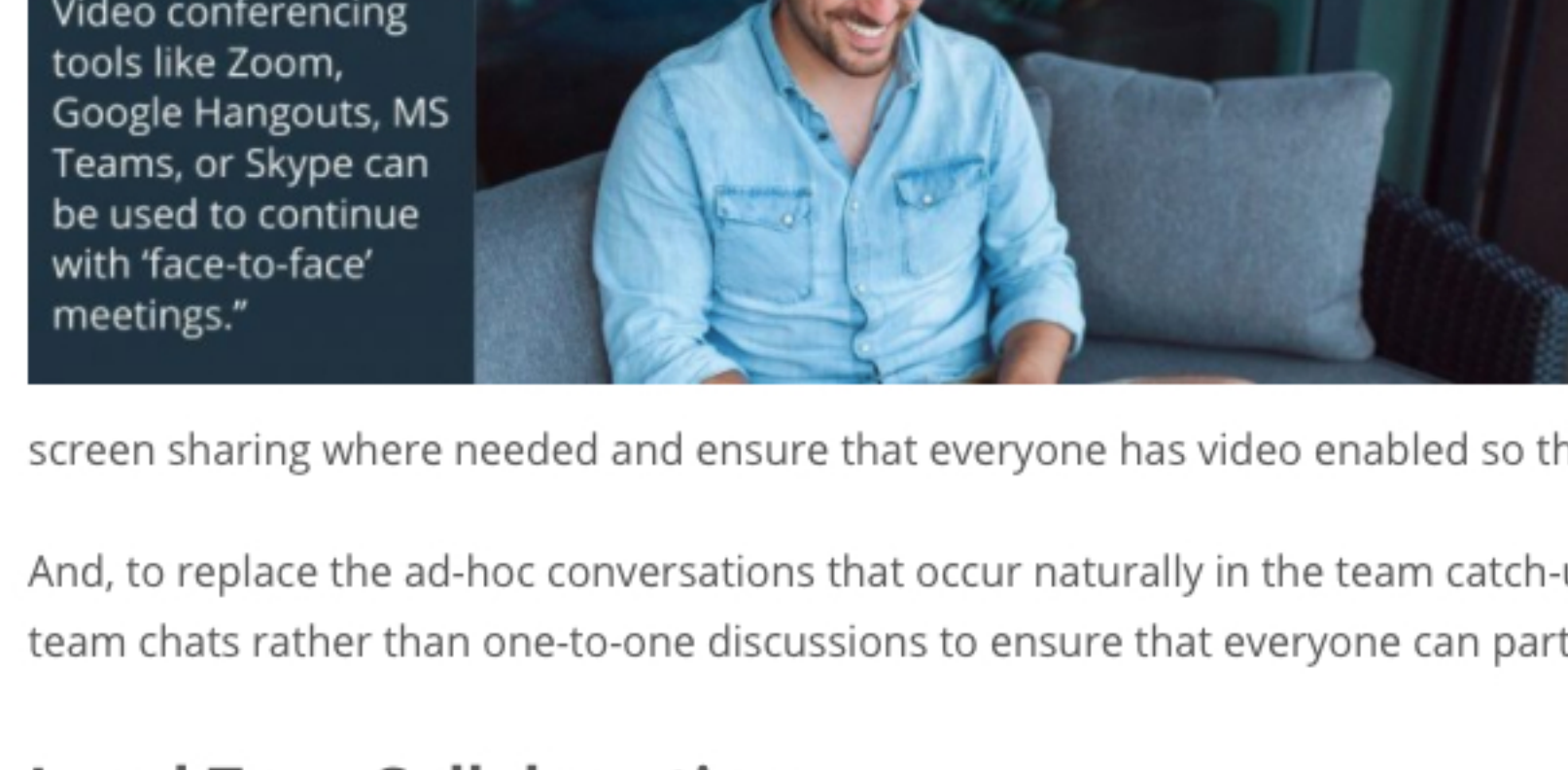


In the longer term, you may need to explore ways to reach a capacity that can handle day-to-day operations.

Virtual meeting and collaboration tools

Effective communication is absolutely vital in any distributed working situation, but even more so for deeply connected teams which depend on a fluid flow of information. We found over 69% of our clients were equipped with virtual meeting tooling and were familiar and comfortable with running meetings virtually. However, at least 25% required some instruction for running effective remote meetings.

With the right tools and some adjustments, it is possible to continue with all your regular team meetings remotely. Video conferencing tools like Zoom, Google Hangouts, MS Teams, or Skype can be used to continue with 'face-to-face' meetings. However, attendance and engagement represent the biggest challenges to deriving the same outcomes from virtual meetings — which is why amplifying your preparation is so important.



When you run your group meetings, be sure to carefully schedule around people's remote working hours, test technology before people dial in, and monitor individual airtime so everyone feels seen and heard.

More importantly, work with your teams to select the technology, ensure you stress test for concurrent users, bandwidth limitations, and application integration. Do not forget to take into account your organisation's security requirements, both technically and information-wise. Use screen sharing where needed and ensure that everyone has video enabled so that facial expressions and body language can be seen.

And, to replace the ad-hoc conversations that occur naturally in the team catch-ups, set up team chat spaces in a tool like Slack. Encourage team chats rather than one-to-one discussions to ensure that everyone can participate in the conversation.

Level Two: Collaboration

Once you have the basics in place, you can focus on improving how your teams work together. Setting clear goals and expectations is important to give the team clarity and stability, especially when their work situations have suddenly changed.

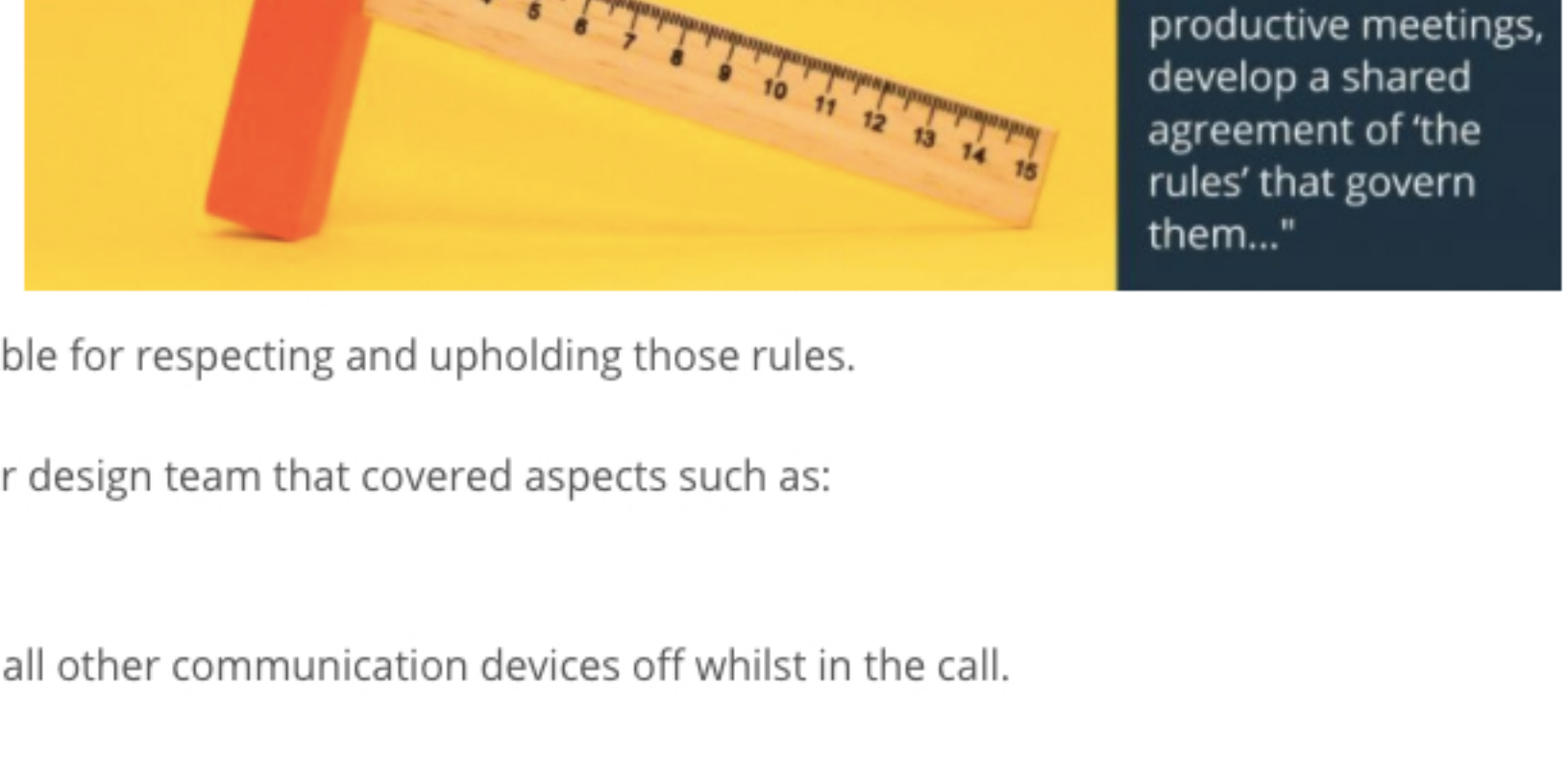
The majority of teams in our survey were equipped to work remotely but required assistance in digitising their work in progress. Others discovered the need to make their teams more familiar with the process of having conversations and activities through online channels and video meeting tools.

Of those we talked to, more than 35% of teams were not practiced in conducting their team meetings remotely. To enable productive meetings, develop a shared agreement of 'the rules' that govern them and hold each other accountable for respecting and upholding those rules.

We helped one of our clients to create an agreement for their design team that covered aspects such as:

- Assigning a facilitator or moderator to each meeting.
- Being present in the moment, not just present: turning all other communication devices off whilst in the call.
- Muting microphones whilst others are talking.
- Allow time for people to un-mute and interact when questions are asked.
- Being conscious of talking over other people when someone new is trying to speak.

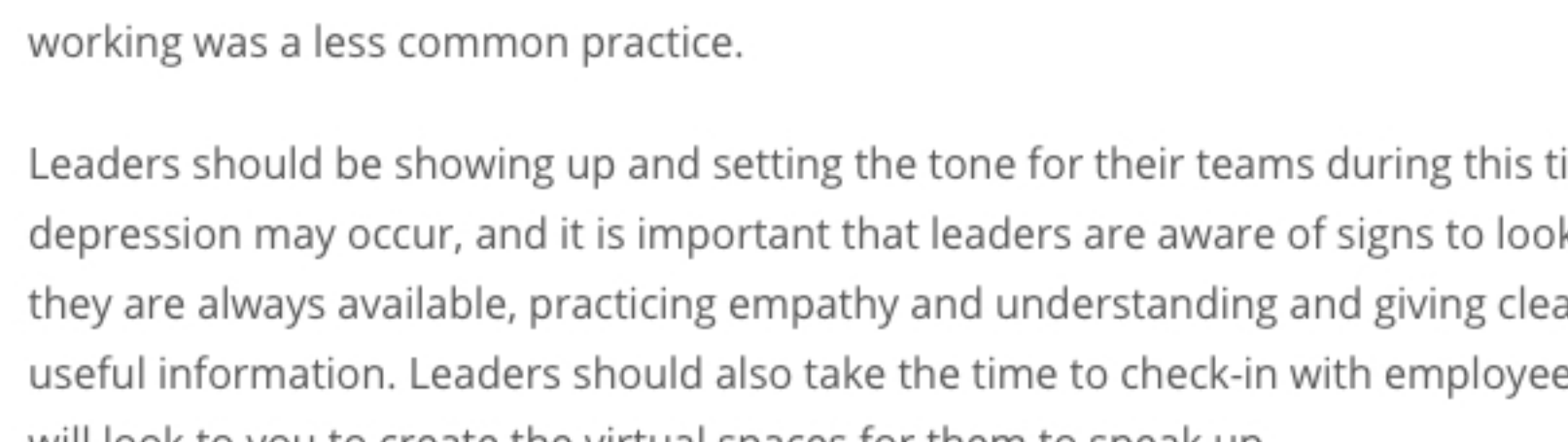
One client commented that they found this to be a great initiative to help them be emotionally supportive of others while facing the uncertainty and vulnerability in upcoming days.



Level Three: Effectiveness and Wellbeing

When everyone in the team is remote, the dynamic will naturally change. With the loss of face-to-face interaction and daily 'water cooler' conversations, it is essential to consciously cultivate personal connections within the team and dedicate time to talking about things other than work as well as allowing your team to find a remote routine that is best for their wellbeing.

Encourage your employees to maintain a healthy lifestyle, with clear work boundaries while staying connected to their colleagues remotely. It is important to build into your teams' routine a time to come together.



This may need some active focus – we found 12% of the teams in our survey did not have any online interaction aside from work-related tasks. Take the lead from our clients who have made a point of trying to keep a fun element in meetings, with one even awarding a prize for the worst shirt of the day.

Also bear in mind that humans are intrinsically social animals and working remotely can impact people in different ways, particularly for those for whom remote working was a less common practice.

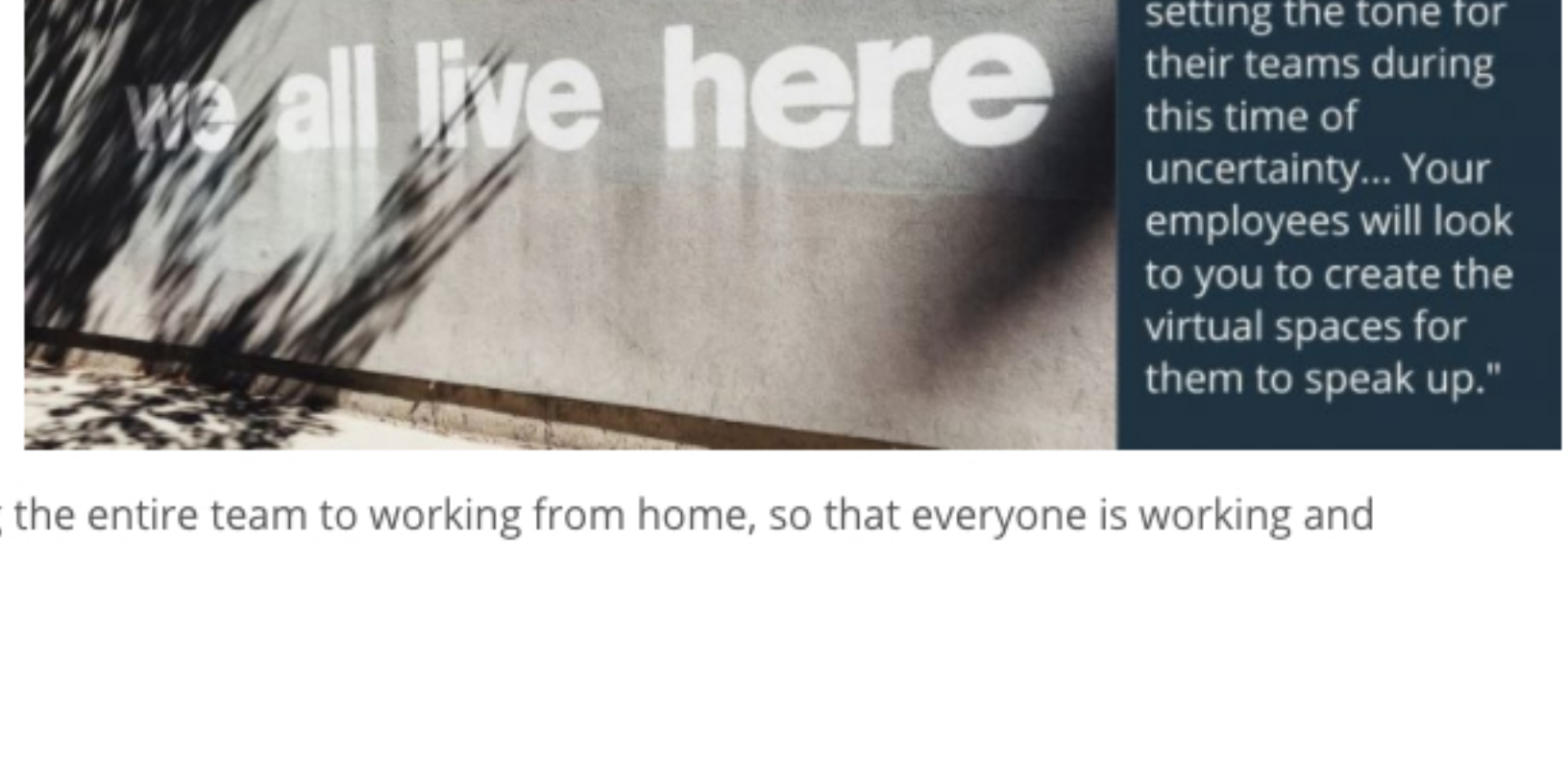
Leaders should be showing up and setting the tone for their teams during this time of uncertainty. Feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression may occur, and it is important that leaders are aware of signs to look out for within their team. This also means making it clear that they are always available, practicing empathy and understanding and giving clear communications to ensure that the team is up to date with useful information. Leaders should also take the time to check-in with employees in one-on-ones about how they're feeling. Your employees will look to you to create the virtual spaces for them to speak up.

Level Four: Learning and personal growth

Success in high performing teams is dependent on team members effectively sharing new information and learning; it is critical both in developing the team's collective knowledge and their capabilities. The practice of consistent knowledge sharing further promotes collaboration and trust within the team. The knowledge within the room is greater than the knowledge of any one individual – even if it is a virtual room.

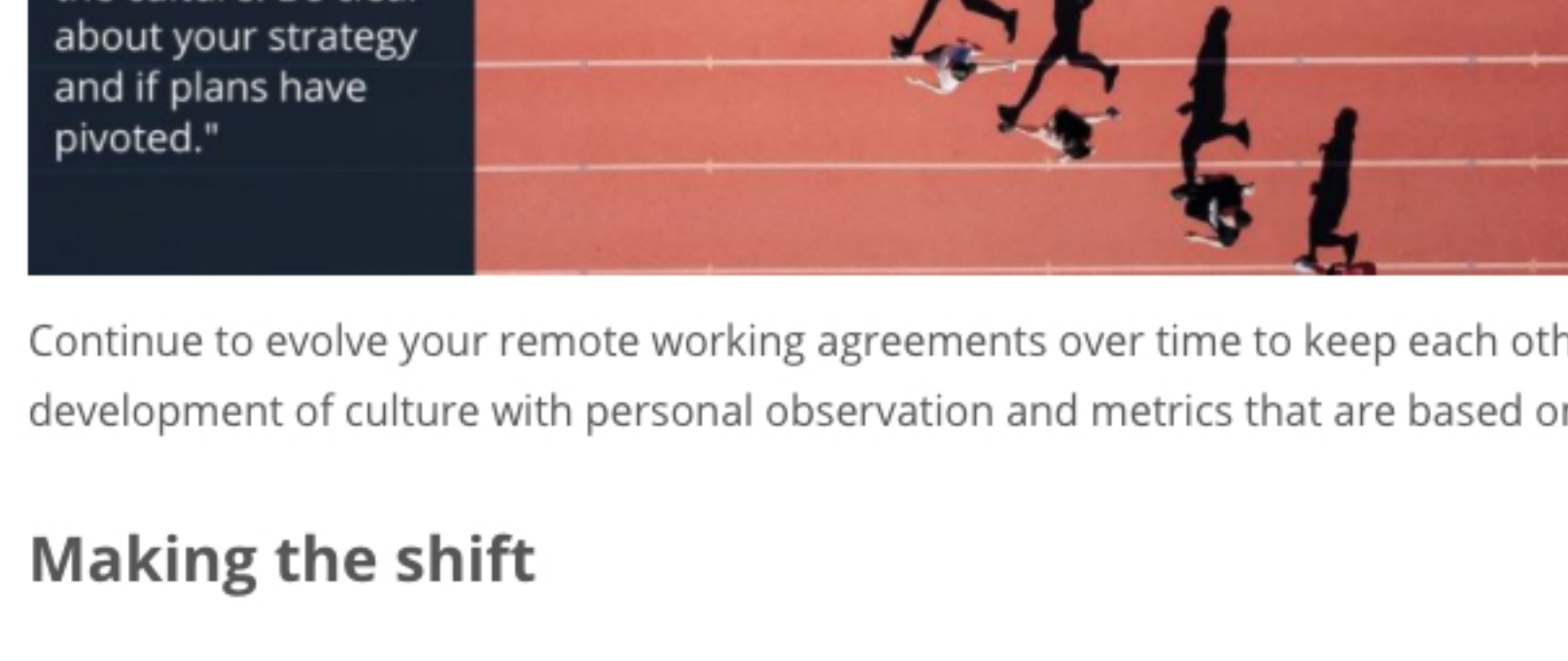
Whilst knowledge sharing in remote teams is challenging, it can be facilitated by encouraging team members to actively seek and share new information, such as research and articles, that will help themselves and the team.

Devise mechanisms for knowledge sharing within your teams, like using your collaboration tools to dedicate time and space to sharing learnings. These can take the form of daily lunch and learns, playback sessions or messaging channels on specific topics. If your team is split between remote working and employees in the office, consider rolling the entire team to working from home, so that everyone is working and communicating the same way.



Level Five: Culture and social needs

The final piece in the jigsaw for making remote working successful over the long term is developing a strong culture that is as effective away from the office, as it is when the whole team is collocated. Maintaining your culture during times of change does not need to be an additional initiative, but rather the way you carry out initiatives with your people in mind. Although it is more difficult to cultivate culture remotely, it is by no means impossible.

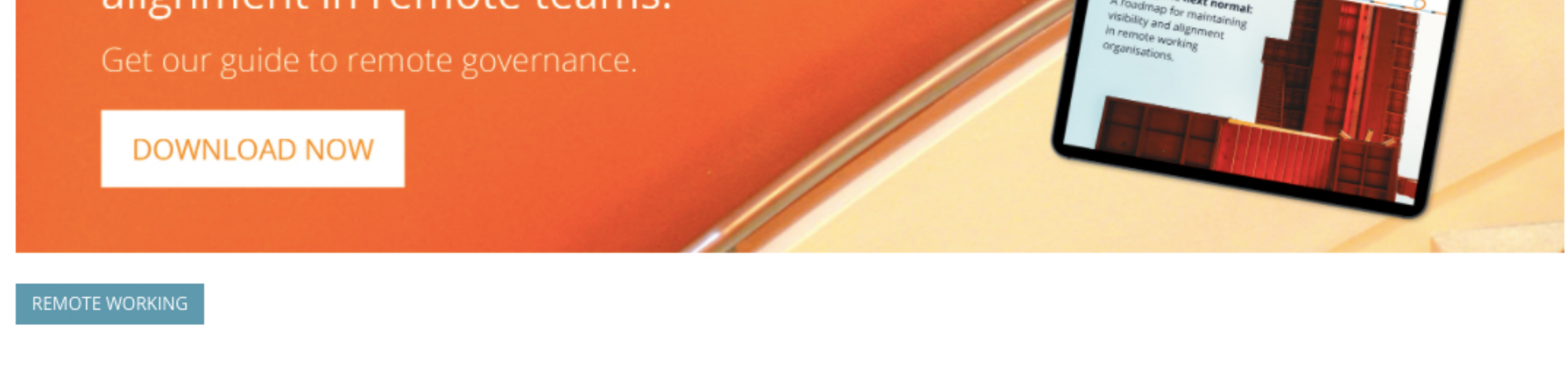


Start by coming back to your core company values. Find ways to empower your people, regardless of location, to take action to maintain the culture. Be clear about your strategy and if plans have pivoted, this should be communicated with your teams and reinforced at every opportunity so that everyone feels confident they're working towards common goals.

Then take some time to determine and refine the culture that you want to foster in your distributed teams. Continue to evolve your remote working agreements over time to keep each other accountable, connected and aligned. Monitor the development of culture with personal observation and metrics that are based on feedback from employees.

Making the shift

With uncertain times ahead, it is important to be prepared. If your organisation hasn't yet gone fully remote, start testing now before the situation becomes critical. Take a day where everyone works from home then come back and discuss what went well and what didn't. It's better to do this while you have the time to make changes than deal with the consequences of having remote working forced upon you in an underprepared state.



REMOTE WORKING

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We are Elabor8. Our purpose is to find the best way to enable change from the inside. Empowering people, teams and organisations with new skills, a changed mindset and a strong platform for growth.

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2 COMMENTS

- Antony**
MARCH 30, 2020 AT 3:09 PM

Thanks so much for this Ryan and Team. Please share as much and as often as you can. We are experimenting with creating priorities across all our teams, as we are discovering that with virtual meetings, our people are working really and being focused, but also being very outcome oriented, which is creating waves across other teams that need to be involved, and these are not always coordinated, nor possible. I know that you folks are experts in this!
- Alex**
APRIL 23, 2020 AT 4:58 PM

An excellent piece.

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