

The new 'Normal' – innovating from home

Working from home has traditionally been an exceptions approach with a strong preference by company's to have meetings and events in person. Now, however, as the impact of COVID-19 is felt across the world, home working is becoming a necessity as businesses attempt to keep staff 'signed in' and well whilst keeping business momentum going and revenues protected. We learn more from white.space, experts in corporate innovation.

This week's news has shown that we could be at the beginning of a work-from-home revolution where the latest technology will enable and grow a company's capabilities and a hybrid model of digital collaboration and productivity is increasingly integrated as BAU.

As Corporate Innovators, you are no doubt also evolving how you work effectively whilst continuing to deliver on your ongoing technology innovation projects in collaboration with your teams as well as 3rd parties.

Against this backdrop, we have been engaging with the Whitespace Corporate Innovation Community to capture the free services, tools and advice being offered to help you and your colleagues maintain business continuity:

Microsoft is offering a free 6-month Office 365 Trial (including Microsoft teams).

IBM is offering a free 90-day trial of its fast data transfer software IBM Aspera as well as an extended trial of its video streaming solution IBM Watson Media.

Google announced that it would be rolling out free access to “advanced” features for Hangouts Meet to all G Suite and G Suite for Education customers globally.

Cisco is offering a 90-day free version of its Webex service, allowing up to 100 meeting participants and toll-free dial-in features.

AWS is providing customers in the most affected regions with technical support and AWS credits that help cover costs while enabling organisations to quickly scale their tools and infrastructure to keep businesses running, and speed COVID-19 research projects.

Zoom is providing free educational resources/training to support their customers and free subscriptions to those based in China.

For Whitespace, facilitating and empowering remote working is not something new. When heading up product development or tech projects, we have long utilised remote collaboration while innovating rapidly and with impact. Our Innovation Lab team are happy to share their expertise with you and provide that assistance during these times of change. Please feel free to contact us to find out how we can help.

Additionally, as we appear to be entering what could be a lasting period of remote working at scale, fortunately, there is much that Corporates can do to minimise the impact of this temporary paradigm shift on their innovation drives.

Here we share our tips on how to you can support and continue Innovation within your organisation:

Pick and limit your communication channels

First off, focus colleagues on using a limited range of communication tools that are adopted universally within your organisation. This is an opportunity to streamline communication, maintain efficiency and endeavour to keep focus and progress on a given project. The last thing you want is employees using an improvised hybrid of text, email, WhatsApp, Telegram and social media.

Options like Monday, Asana and [Qwil Messenger](#) variously allow for assigning of tasks, updating of progress and control by team leaders. Which is right for your project, department or company will depend on numerous factors.

Embrace version management

One of the greatest challenges of working from home at scale will be in ensuring that staff collaborating on a single project are all working on the latest version of a document, plan, initiative or file. Your current collaborative technology project, for example, might quite reasonably be spread across multiple files, assets and spreadsheets. As such, consider the software solutions available that best suit your business. Sector or market-specific offerings are available that guarantee only the correct versions of any projects are updated. Or you can simply use singular virtual drives in the cloud, rather than have everybody work on locally stored files separate from one another.

Manage like a creative studio

Large scale distributed working is much more commonplace in industries like TV, film, music and video games. It's not uncommon to see relatively sizable teams spread across dozens of countries collaborate on a single piece of art. There are flat or flexible management structures and open organisational cultures that encourage everyone to put in ideas don't only allow for the flexibility that mass remote working may demand; they equally help with motivation, momentum and keeping potentially lonely staff feeling valued and engaged.

Do what you already do

Innovation staff may already have the most experience of collaborative working within a given Corporation. As such, those in our discipline may be better versed than most to adapt to remote working. Collaborating beyond the walls of a department or Corporation is what we all do. Your time spent developing ideas with startups, working in accelerators and contributing to the shared Corporate Innovation knowledge-base through entities like our Corporate Innovation club means you already know how to work from your own home. Trust your innovator's instincts.

Test your corporate VPNs

VPNs, or 'virtual private networks', allow companies to protect information shared internally, encrypt data and hold malevolent technological attacks at bay. But they may be poised to go under considerable strain as increasing numbers lean on them to work from home; because normally only a particular group of employees may be using a Corporate VPN. As such, request that your staff log-in remotely before everyone moves to work from home, so you can be sure that staff can connect and the VPN can handle the load.

Stagger the shift to remote work

Only if safe with regard to COVID-19 and advice from local authorities, consider staggering moving staff and projects to a remote model. Even if only over two or three days, it may reduce the severity of impact on the general progress of a technology project.

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