Home Office – How to make it work

As a lot of our employees worldwide are sent into Home Office right now because of the outbreak of COVID and the efforts to flatten the curve of new infections, we wanted to share some tips for this challenging time. Those will touch both the technical set-up part as well as some working and communication information.

A similar idea of positivity against fear popped up within our team in the Netherlands. Very spontaneously our colleagues started sharing positive pictures of themselves and their home office set-up. This is a great reminder that despite being physically distant we are still all together, not isolated and therefore 'never walk alone'.

Technical set-up

Of course, to work from home a certain technical set-up is needed. Important things to keep in mind as well as some tips about the set-up include:

- A stable and fast internet connection. This is a given, but only if you can connect to the Company's network and servers to access the resources needed for your job, you can effectively do your work and support your team.
  - If you experience issues with Skype and Teams including log-in issues, dropouts, general quality issues regarding bandwidth etc.:
    - Use your local bandwidth exclusively for working. Turn off all other devices that use up bandwidths within your home.
    - If your home internet connection is not enough, use Hotspot Function on Smartphone to get mobile internet access, if available.
    - Use the Dial-In function to Skype or Teams if problem with your internet speed occur.
    - Do not use video and/or share your desktop if you have problems with internet speed.
    - Log out from VPN if not needed. Skype, Outlook, OneDrive are able to work without VPN.
    - Reach out to your local IT for help of something is not working. But please be patient – the IT team cannot solve everything immediately.
- VPN connections to reach the Company's applications, data and files. This works via Cisco AnyConnect App together with the Multi Factor Authentification from Microsoft.
- A headset or at least headphones with an integrated microphone. This is of course needed to hold meetings and stay in contact with colleagues regarding current projects and important updates. If you have none available, working with the integrated microphone and speakers of your laptop is fine as well.
- In case of video chats, please use either the integrated camera of your laptop or a USB-Camera, if you have one available to you.
- A desk big enough to sit comfortably with your laptop, a notebook and some additional supplies you might need.
- Optionally, you can connect a monitor with your laptop with the right cable. If questions occur here, please reach out to your local IT to find the right cable/connection.
- If you need software for your home office, please check the 'Software Center' for easy downloadable and already approved applications. This only works if your VPN is enabled.

- o If the software you require is not listed, please reach out to your local IT or if available the IT self-service portal.
- Only use your PC for work related things. NO Netflix or wild surfing through the web. These things could lead to security breaches and possibly grave problems on your device.
- Before working at home – please check if VPN, MFA is installed and working. Please reach out to your local IT.
- IT support is done remotely only – this needs very good collaboration between you and the IT support employee.

Get into the right mind-set

Working from home seems simple at first, but there are many little challenges ahead that need to be faced by everyone. These might seem like trivial things but trust us – they do make a huge difference.

- Even though you are working from home, it is important to still dress appropriately and professionally. Sure, putting on joggers might seem tempting but because we associate them with relaxing and leaning back, they might take away from your concentration and productivity.
- Stick to regular and normal working hours despite being at home. Of course, getting up later may be possible due to the lack of commuting to the workplace but please stay focused and do not constantly take breaks, which will make it harder to finish tasks on time and will effectively make you work longer but not better.
- Make sure to set up a true working space on an actual table or desk! It might be tempting to sit on the couch with your laptop, but your productivity and work quality will be reduced significantly. It is not always easy to separate your work and private life. Therefore, a defined space to work will help both your productivity while working and your relaxation and stress relief in your private life.
- Make sure to get rid of any distracting things in your home. If you live with other people, close the door to your working space to make sure you can focus on the tasks ahead. Minimize your digital distractions – put your private smartphone away or on do-not-disturb during work hours and only check them once every few hours. Make sure that if you have a work phone it is within reach and ready for any work-related calls.

Work effectively and stay connected

What sounds basic is an essential part of managing home office successfully. The bigger and more spread out the teams and/or colleagues are, the more important it is to find the right way to communicate.

- Communicate more than you usually would. In the office you can just drop by the workspace of your colleague and catch up on projects, deadlines and other important company-related information. At home people might feel cut off quickly and a feeling of loneliness might arise. Therefore, using communication tools like MS Teams and especially its group chat function is important to make sure everybody feels updated and knows about the latest updates regarding important projects. In this uncertain time, it's also important for team leaders to set aside some time in the week for a check-in call with either the whole team or single employees to make sure everybody is feeling good and knows how things are progressing.
- Clarify expectations for the work from home. What are projects that need to be finished on a normal schedule, what hours need to be kept, what response times are expected, etc. This way everybody on the team will feel better about being disconnected from the others because the goals are still clearly defined.

- Pro-actively seek feedback from your manager. Make sure to talk frequently to make sure the tasks you are performing are up to the usual standards and delivered on time.
- Plan for social online time. Since a lot of people are alone at home, team spirit can be lifted by using platforms such as MS Teams for a team lunchbreak or an everyday coffee catch-up in the morning.
- Transparency is key to focusing employees. Please be open with your teams about what you are doing and which projects you are focused on. In the office there is a sense of companionship in working towards certain company goals but with everybody sitting alone at home in front of a laptop, this feeling of belonging disappears. It's important to check in and out of work with little chat messages like 'Back from break' or 'Gone till tomorrow' to make sure people know when you are reachable. This helps reduce miscommunication and distrust among colleagues.
- Schedule some breaks during the day. Get up occasionally to get a glass of water or a healthy snack to disconnect from work for a few minutes. Powering through the day without any breaks will help neither your productivity nor your mood.

Work smart in projects
As many projects require the collaboration of different employees and/or departments, being smart about the processes while in home office saves time and trouble.

- Set up short, regular catch up calls during the week to make sure everything is on track for the project. This way everybody knows what to do and how the progress is going.
- Share documents that are being worked on by many people via MS Teams so there is no version control issue or any errors because people are confused about which is the right/final one.