

 **WORKPLACELESS**

REMOTE WORK TRAINING REPORT

A deep dive study on learning and development in remote teams reveals remote-specific training drives positive results for individual and company performance.

PUBLISHED MAY 2020



WHY ARE WE DIGGING INTO LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT IN REMOTE TEAMS?

There's no denying that the state of remote work has gone through a dramatic upheaval and acceleration as a result of the business response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Industry benchmarking groups are publishing reports that analyze the current state of remote work, including the Gartner survey which states that **74%** of CFOs intend to shift some employees to remote work permanently, and companies are grappling with their own plans to move forward, such as instituting permanent work from home policies.

In response to these rapid changes affecting remote work, we saw a need to assess:

- what the new remote work landscape looks like
- what Learning & Development (L&D) professionals are doing to recognize and overcome challenges within their own teams
- what role remote-specific training plays in the future of remote business performance and profitability

To help answer these questions and provide a detailed picture of what's happening at the intersection of remote work and L&D, we surveyed 764 people across 35 countries. To add greater depth to the results, we interviewed 30 L&D, People Operations, and Human Resources leaders from companies representing a wide range of sizes and industries.



SURVEYED

764 people from
35 countries



INTERVIEWED

30 leaders

This study aims to provide useful data and advice to help companies take action by preparing their workforce and business to succeed with the rapid changes to remote work.

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THE STATE OF REMOTE WORK

An assessment of how individuals and teams describe their remote working situations and how that has been and will be impacted by responses to COVID-19.



NOT ALL REMOTE TEAMS HAVE THE SAME SETUP

Our survey respondents represented a mix of professionals working remotely with a quarter of respondents typically working remotely full-time:

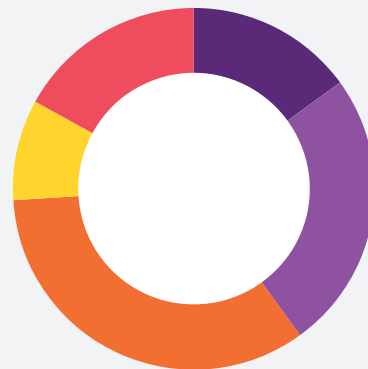
How often do you typically work remotely?



- 25% 100% of my work is remote
- 16% 75-99% of my work is remote
- 23% 50-74% of my working time is remote
- 14% 25-49% of my working time is remote
- 15% 1-24% of my working time is remote
- 7% 0% of my working time is remote

Respondents also represented a mix of company remote work setups, from "Fully remote" to "Solo remote." We saw the highest representation with hybrid remote teams at **34%**:

What is your company's typical remote setup?



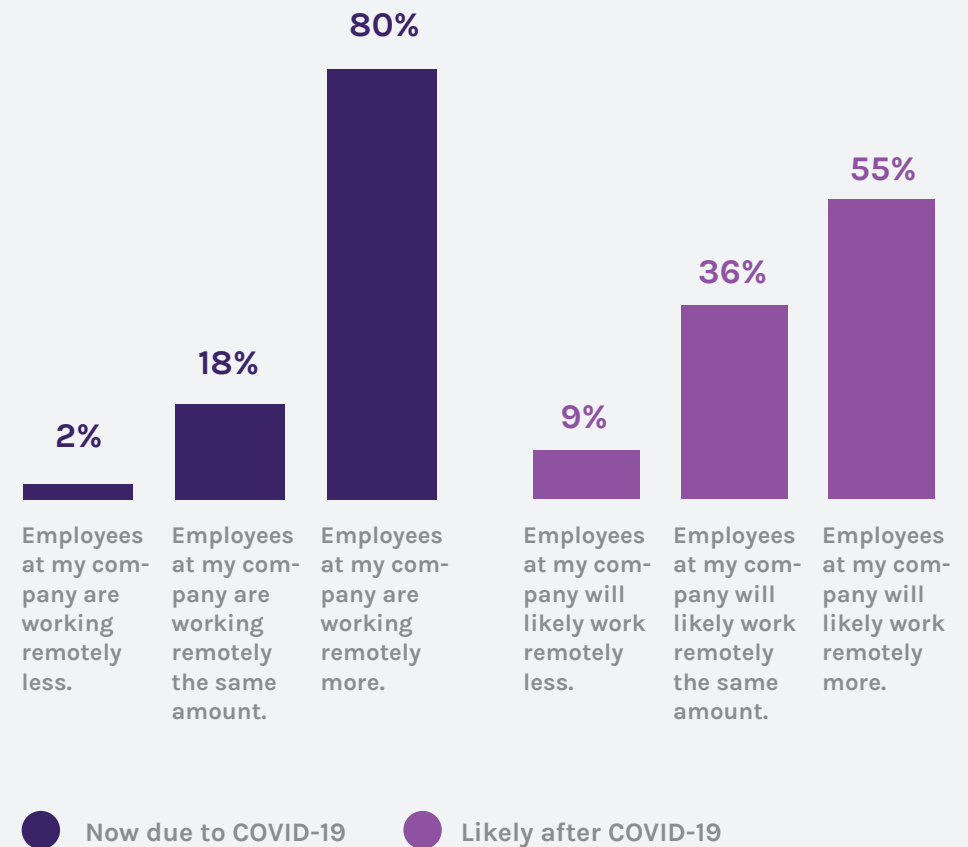
- 14% Fully remote - Everyone at my company works remotely.
- 25% Flexible remote - The teams mostly work out of a central office, but we can work remotely a few days per week/month or as needed.
- 34% Hybrid remote - Part of the team is full-time remote and part of the team works out of central office locations.
- 9% Solo remote - I'm the only remote team member.
- 17% No remote - None of us regularly work remotely.

CURRENT REMOTE WORK HAS YET TO REACH A “NEW NORMAL”

80% of respondents reported that employees in their company were working remotely more as a result of COVID-19. After the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, **55%** of respondents believe that employees at their company will likely work remotely more while **36%** said they will work remotely the same amount as before the pandemic.

In slight contrast, **97%** of L&D interviewees envision more remote work in the future. This means we are currently in a state of flux and haven't yet reached a stable situation or reliable outlook for exactly what remote work will look like in the future.

Has COVID-19 changed remote work at your company?



L&D IN REMOTE TEAMS

A look into how L&D is structured within distributed teams and how L&D professionals have adapted to support an often newly remote workforce.



SUDDEN REMOTE WORK SHIFTS REQUIRE SUDDEN L&D SHIFTS

Interviews with L&D practitioners in remote teams uncovered more intricate L&D setups, ranging from completely decentralized to centralized, or a mix of both.

In smaller companies (<100 people), individual professional development is supported by providing stipends and empowering individuals to take ownership of their own growth.

According to survey respondents, where L&D decisions reside depends upon the size of the company:

As companies grow, they begin allocating dedicated resources to the L&D function with the goal of mapping individual growth to strategic business outcomes.

COMPANY SIZE:

Under
100
employees

Between
100-5,000
employees

Greater than
5,000
employees

DECISION MAKERS:

Executive
(C-Suite)
level

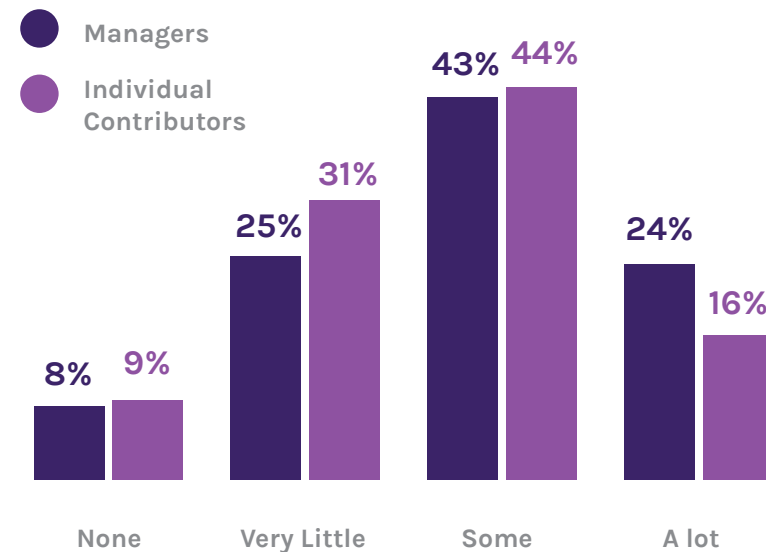
HR / People
Operations
departments

Dedicated
L&D
departments

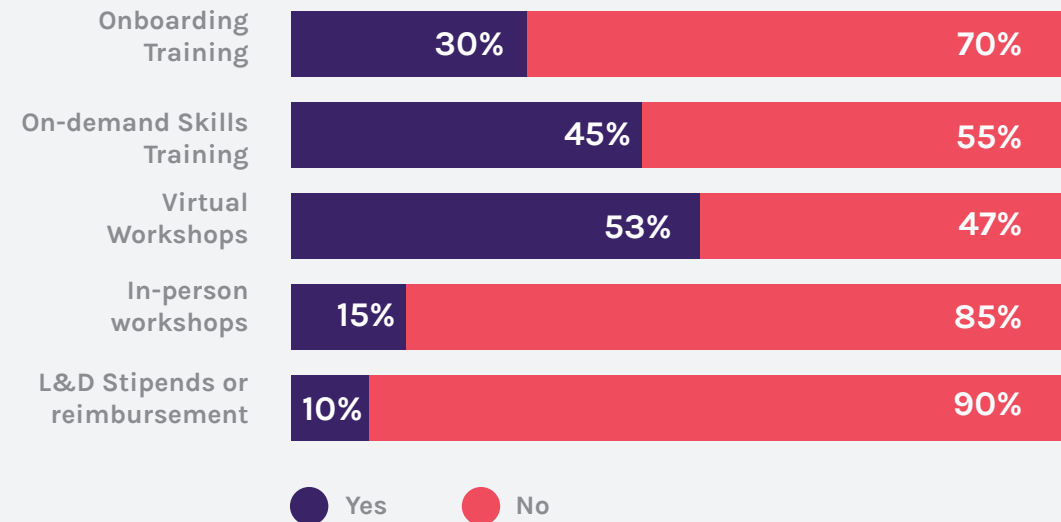
REMOTE-SPECIFIC TRAINING VARIES ACROSS TEAMS

68% of managers surveyed reported receiving "Some" or "A lot" of remote-specific training. This rate was slightly lower for individual contributors at only **60%**. **77%** of interviewees responded that their organizations provided employees with resources or training specific to remote work.

What level of training do professionals receive about how to work in a virtual environment?



Does your company offer any of the following types of training specific to remote or virtual skills?



There was a wide range of remote-specific training provided. The most common types are "Virtual workshops" followed by "On-demand skills training." In contrast, only **30%** of respondents receive remote-specific onboarding training and only **10%** of professionals receive any stipend or reimbursement for remote-specific L&D.

46% of professionals spend 1 to 4 hours per month of their own time learning about remote work or refreshing their remote work skills. This implies that a number of employees feel the need for additional remote work training beyond the formal opportunities offered by their employers.



NEWLY REMOTE TEAM DEMANDED A SHIFT IN L&D RESOURCES

Interviewees from companies that were not fully remote before COVID-19 noted that because of the sudden and drastic shift in business needs, their time was diverted away from regular responsibilities to source or develop resources for remote training. Larger companies with designated L&D departments were able to leverage internal resources, especially if those departments are closely aligned with the business.

In addition to creating or sourcing brand new content on remote-specific skills, L&D departments also had to shift their own practices and processes to a completely virtual environment. For instance, sessions that used to be primarily face-to-face, supplemented by webinars, had to be converted to webinars and virtual classroom-based training. For those organizations that foresee more remote work in the future, the area that will need to evolve the most is learning delivery: the need to scale learning across distance, especially in large companies, will require a shift to modalities that are not as reliant on instructor-led training (ILT).



Pre COVID-19 Impacts

Shifts Due to COVID-19

Moreover, as companies adapt their workforce strategies to align with business and market needs, the workforce will increasingly feature freelancers or those participating in the gig economy. L&D needs to evolve to accommodate and support these team members, which has historically been challenging due to employment regulations.

With the majority of L&D practitioners foreseeing more remote work in the future, this experience with sudden or unexpected remote work is informing future decisions for learning interventions. Interviewees shared experiences of having to learn about remote work themselves while simultaneously trying to create learning programs to support their newly remote teams. Furthermore, interviewees cited plans to develop customized training programs, identifying external training providers, and growing learning teams and their capabilities to deliver training across distance.

ARE PROFESSIONALS PREPARED?

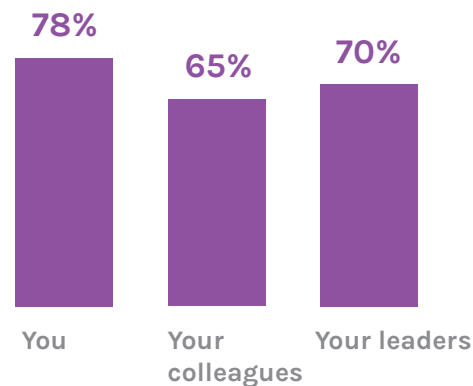
An analysis of how individual contributors and leaders are prepared for remote work, the types of challenges they face, and the resources they utilize to adapt.



NAVIGATING WORK FROM HOME DURING COVID-19 IS NOT THE SAME AS SUSTAINABLE REMOTE PREPAREDNESS

Individuals feel they are above average when it comes to being prepared to succeed in a virtual environment. They also believe they are more prepared than leaders and even more prepared than their colleagues.

How prepared do you feel you, your colleagues, your leaders are prepared to succeed in a distributed environment?



% Reporting Above Average Preparedness (Top 2 Box (reported a 4 or a 5 on a scale of "Not at all prepared" to "Extremely Prepared"))

It's important to distinguish between preparedness to suddenly work from home as a crisis response and preparedness to work remotely for a sustainable future. In our survey, we saw that respondents were working remotely more due to COVID-19. As a consequence, **55%** of respondents spent more time learning about remote work. Our L&D interviewees also emphasized an immediate shift of resources to adapt to the rapidly evolving work environment, recognizing the immediate support need for employees and managers.



I think it would be a huge miss if you didn't overemphasize the fact that what we're dealing with now is very different. And so using that as the primary example and driver for the conversation is incredibly important for our teams. We need to build the muscle around the things that are challenging and help them navigate the change."



JASON WEEMAN

Head of Corporate Learning and Development, Upwork



REMOTE PREPAREDNESS IS TIED TO THE LEVEL OF REMOTE-SPECIFIC TRAINING RECEIVED

Preparedness to perform on a remote team is directly correlated to the amount of training received for both Individual Contributors and Leaders.



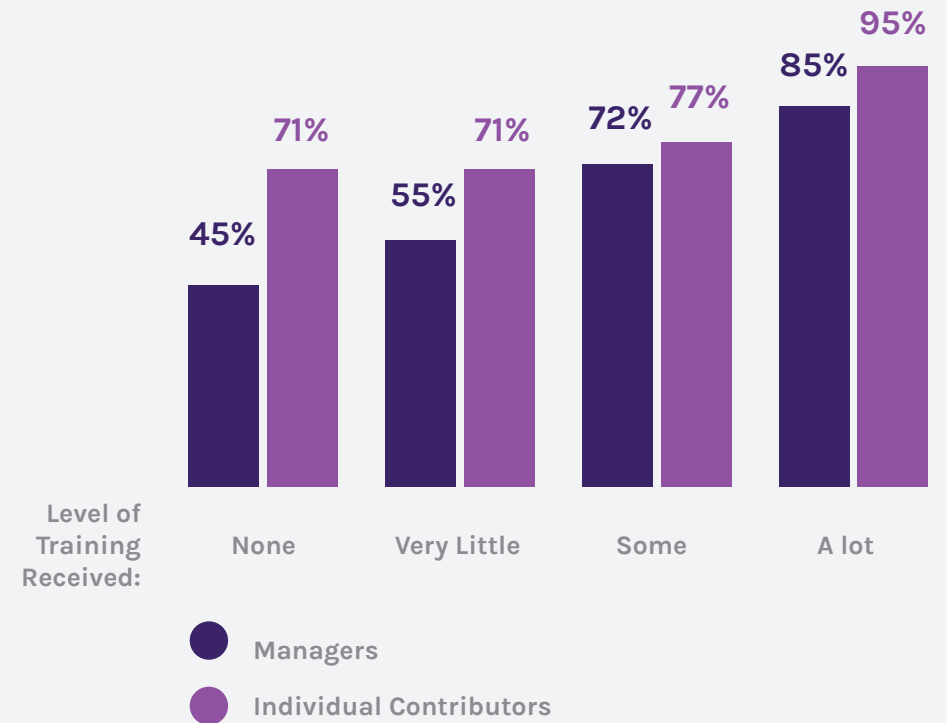
We're only going to continue to expand, and people are only going to continue to engage with people more remotely [...] And for us [...] it's just making sure that our younger leaders or newer leaders are prepared for that."



MANDI CHRISTENSEN
*Director of Learning and Development,
Customer Service, Chewy*

The greater the level of remote-specific training, the greater the sense of remote preparedness.

Based on level of training, do you feel prepared for remote work?



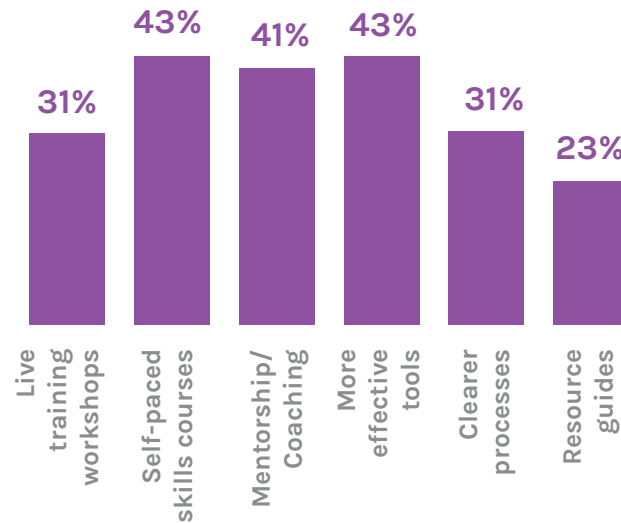
% who reported a 4 or a 5 on a scale of "Not at all prepared" to "Extremely Prepared"



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR REMOTE PROFESSIONALS IS NEEDED

Furthermore, **95%** of respondents believe additional support would better prepare them to work well in a distributed environment. "Self-paced skills courses," "More effective tools," and "Mentorship/ Coaching" rise to the top of the list of most beneficial solutions. Resource guides, while abundant, fell to the bottom of that list.

Which of the following would better prepare you to work well in a distributed environment?



The good news is that **97%** of interviewed L&D decision makers plan to act on these results and make additional remote-specific training and resources available.

Similarly **40%** of interviewees indicated that better tools would improve the effectiveness of remote work at their organization. As one learning and development leader observed, **"We have enough basic tools that we just aren't leveraging, and it's more awareness and desire to use them. So we're at the very beginning of the change management curve, if you think about it that way. I think it's really the mindset [...] everybody thinks collaboration has to be face to face, in real-time. That's the hurdle."**

Additionally, **73%** of interviewees indicated that providing training and resources specifically for remote management is a priority. A deficiency in remote management capabilities affects individual leaders' engagement and performance; it also affects the people those leaders are supporting.

“DISTRACTIONS” AND “OVERWORKING” RISE TO THE TOP OF REMOTE WORK CHALLENGES



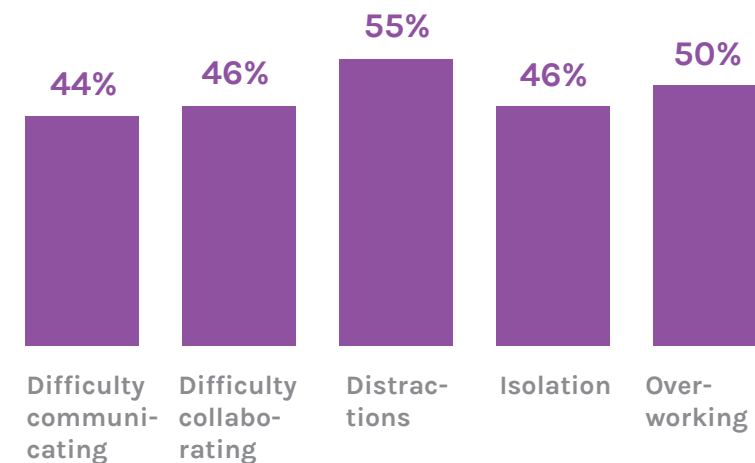
Communication in the workplace can be a challenge, but even more so when you are working remotely. You aren't able to see and read the body language and expressions of your teammates throughout the day. As such, our team doubles down on staying connected with each other by using video and sprinkling a bunch of fun and casual topics into the mix along with regular work conversations."



JULIA DOMINGUEZ
Operations Manager, Yoko Co

In comparison to The Remote Work Report from FYI in 2019, where "Communication" was far and away the biggest challenge, responses to our survey reflected that the greatest challenges affecting the average workday are "Distractions," with **55%** of respondents reporting this affects their average remote workday "somewhat" or "greatly," and "Overworking" at **50%**, which likely reflects the sudden remote work shift due to COVID-19.

Do these challenges affect your average remote workday?



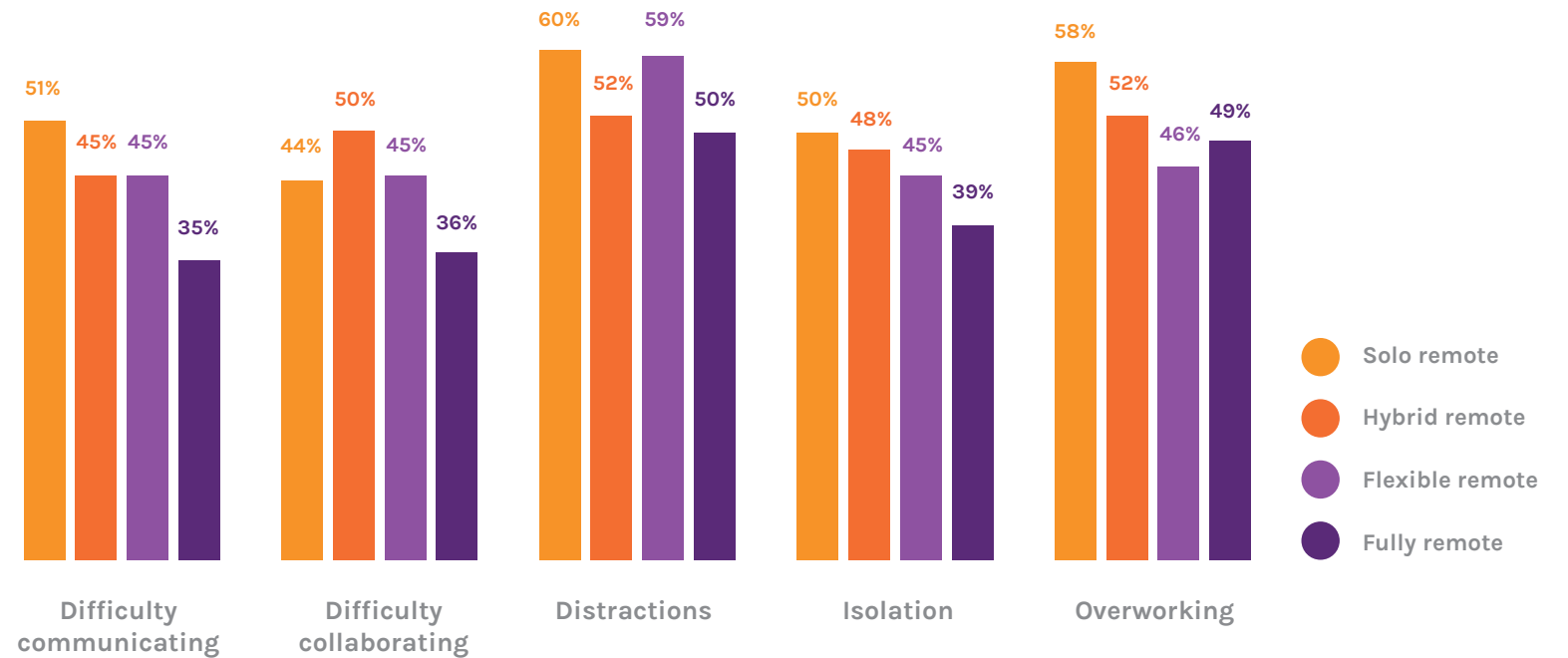
% responded "Somewhat" or "Greatly"



A DEEPER LOOK AT REMOTE SETUP REVEALS DIFFERENT CHALLENGE RANKINGS

As companies are publicly announcing that the future of their organizational structures will likely be an increase in hybrid teams, we took a look at the challenges specific to a hybrid environment. Respondents from hybrid teams experienced "Difficulty communicating" and "Difficulty collaborating" at a higher rate. And respondents who were "Solo remote" experienced "Overworking", "Isolation", and "Distractions" to a greater extent.

Based on remote team setup, which of these challenges affect your average remote workday?



% responded "Somewhat" or "Greatly"



REMOTE WORK CHALLENGES DEPEND ON PERSPECTIVE

In contrast to survey respondents, **only 17%** of interview respondents indicated that overworking or setting boundaries were challenges within their organizations. This contrast indicates a disconnect between individual contributors and L&D leaders and HR decision makers.

Interviews with decision makers revealed that the challenges faced by remote individual contributors, managers, and the organization at large are interconnected and interdependent. While these highlighted challenges may be present in co-located companies, they are uniquely manifested and amplified in distributed teams. As such, any intervention that aims to address these challenges needs a strategic, holistic, and comprehensive approach that considers the remote work experience.



A constant challenge is just visibility into what is happening in different parts of the company."



COURTNEY SEITER
Director of People, Buffer

"People miss bonding with other people and having that connection. We're starting to create more opportunities for people to come together and restore their energy."



LAÏLA VON ALVENSLEBEN
Head of Culture and Collaboration, MURAL

"The biggest pain point is that you don't pick up the kind of historical knowledge or institutional knowledge as organically."



HILARY CLARKE
Mattermost



THE CHALLENGES TEAMS FACE ARE INTERCONNECTED

The challenges that came to light in the interviews indicated that if a workplace does not have the remote-specific tools, processes, and rituals that foster organic, fluid communication and authentic, spontaneous connections, it leads to decreased collaboration and productivity and a lack of engagement, visibility, and access to information.

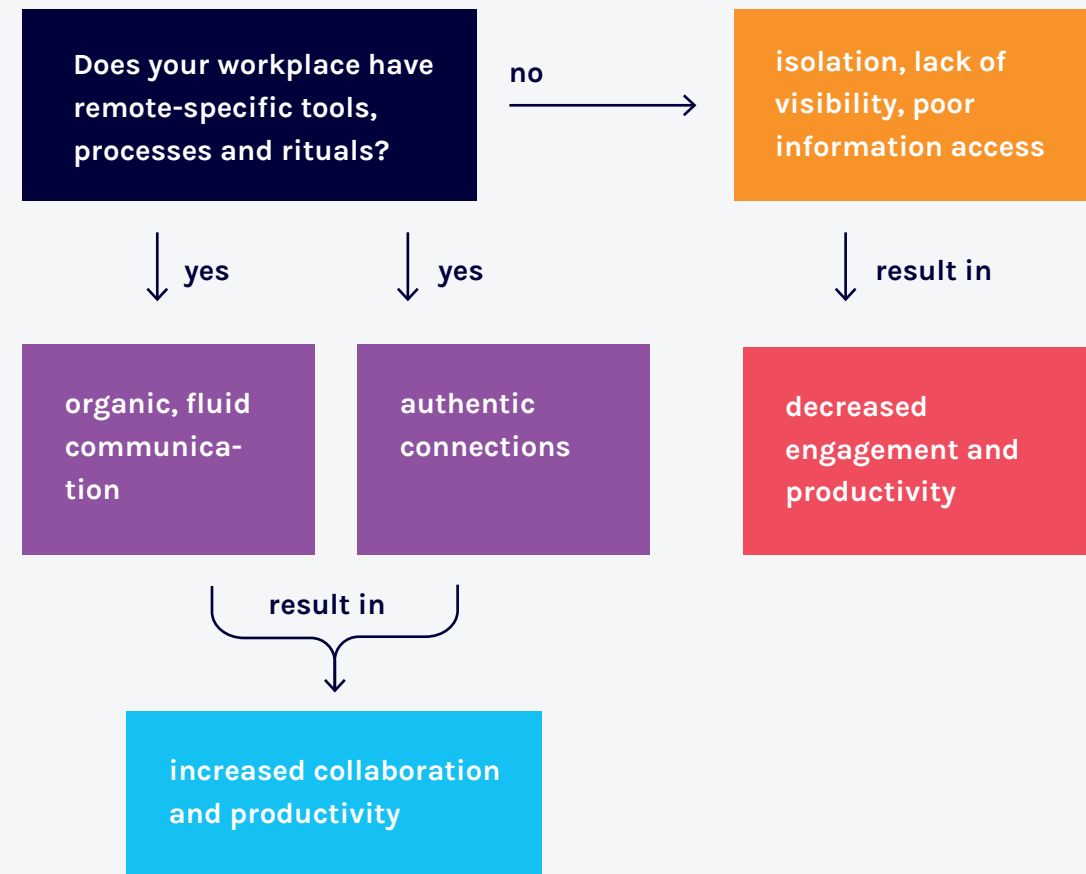


Isolation—that feeling of disconnectedness—can lead to lower productivity."

BECKY KARSH

Head of People Development, US/CAN, Uber

Example flow of interconnected challenges



ARE COMPANIES SUCCEEDING?

A collective take on where companies are and are not succeeding in remote work and the impact that has on business outcomes.

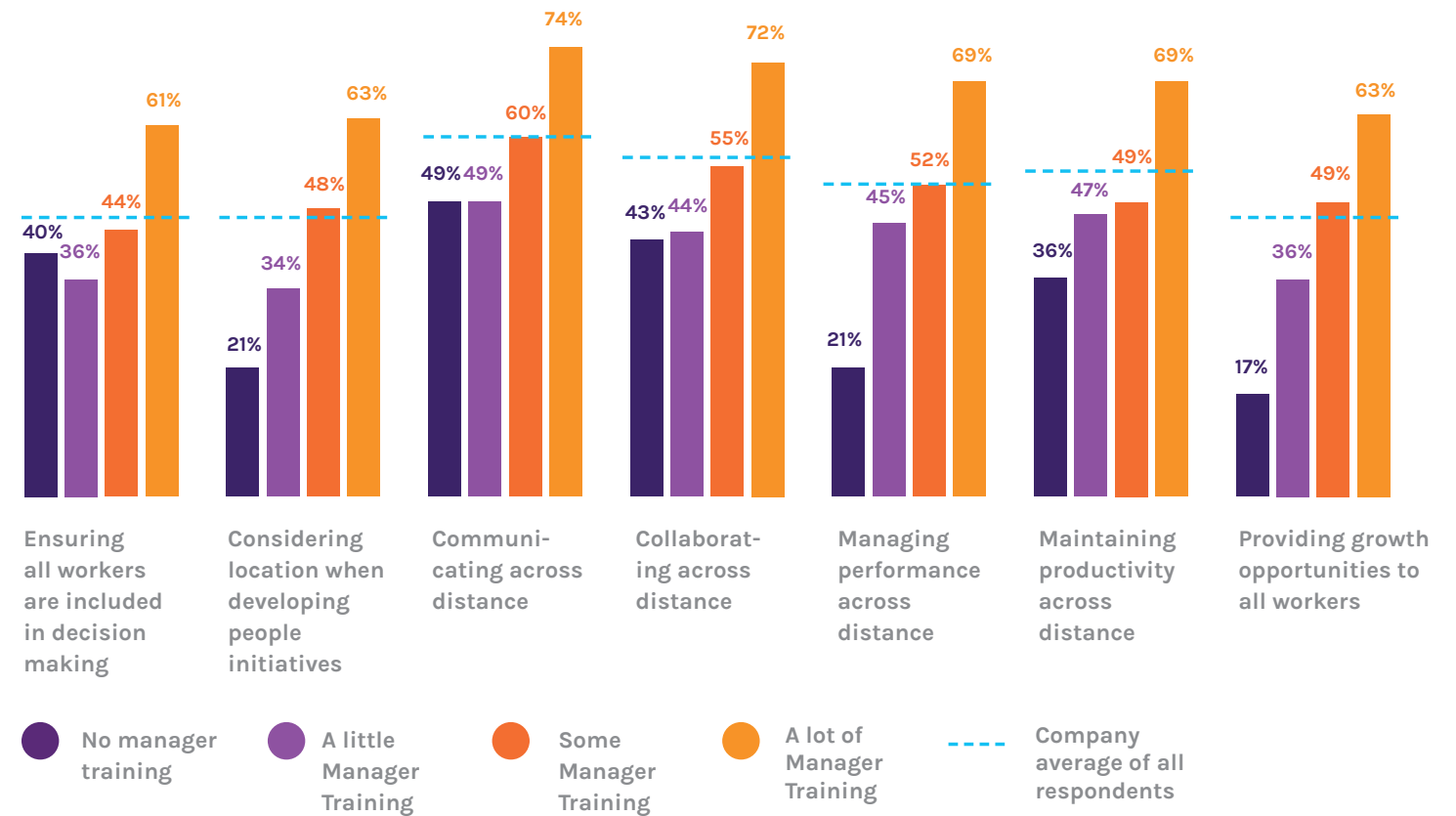


COMPANIES REACH ONLY MODERATE SUCCESS LEVELS IN REMOTE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE METRICS

Survey respondents ranked how well they felt their organizations are performing in a variety of business success metrics. Overall, organizations are only moderately successful at managing some of the common topics of concern for remote teams. Companies especially fell short across all three people-related metrics of "Ensuring all workers are included in decision making" "Considering location when developing people initiatives" and "Providing growth opportunities to all workers."

Across all of these success metrics, the more companies supported their team managers with remote-specific training the more positive results they experienced in terms of overall company performance.

Based on level of manager training, is your company successful at:



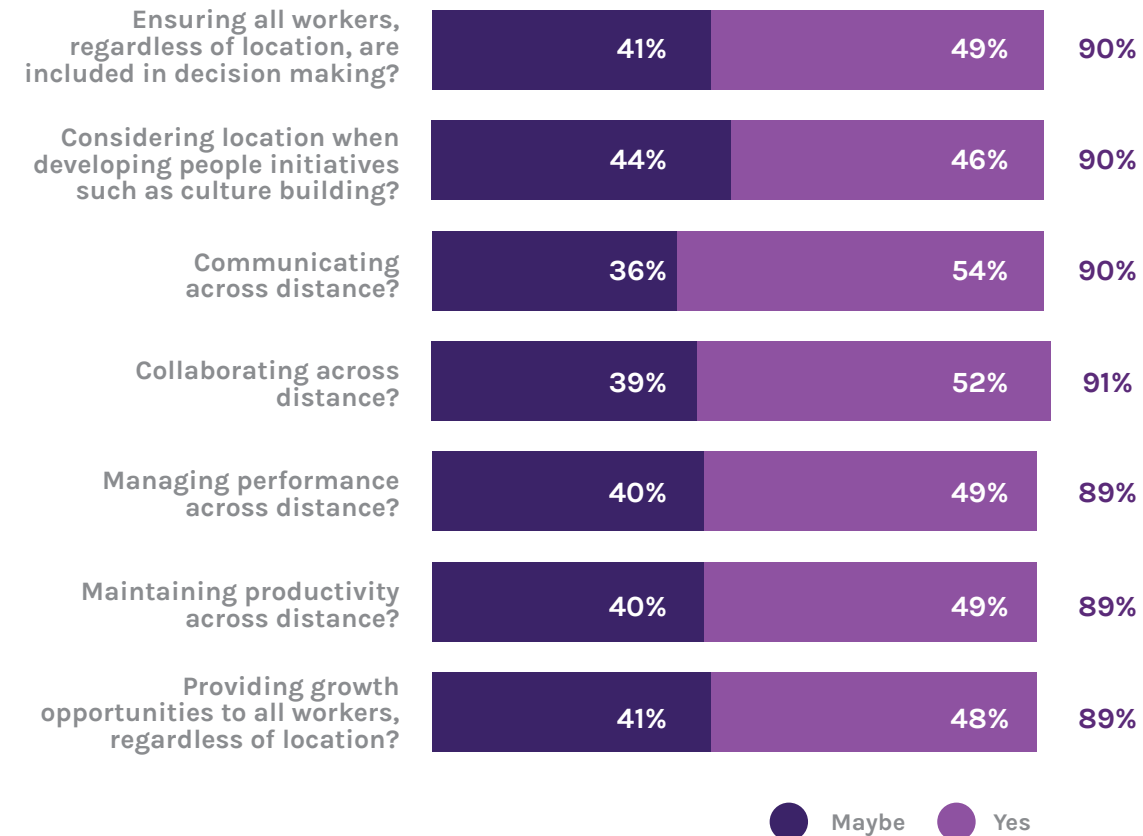
% who felt their companies were "Successful" or "Very Successful" across each performance metric.



MORE REMOTE-SPECIFIC TRAINING LEADS TO ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Survey respondents across the board believe more training would lead to organizational improvements across all metrics.

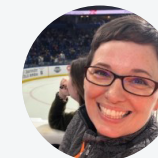
Do you think additional training would help your organization improve in:



Interviewees representing smaller, fully-remote companies identified focuses that reflect their organizations' size and age: expanding the business' capacity to support career growth, and shifting from self-directed learning to strategic mapping. For example, a People Operations Generalist at Doist, shares, **"One of the things that we're really focusing on this year, and into the three to five year timeframe, is building this concept of learning agility."**



Attracting people who are curious and self-motivated is the first step. In order to keep them, we have to provide more for them to learn."



ANGELA SMITH
Head of People and Experience, Thesis

REMOTE WORK PREPAREDNESS AFFECTS BUSINESS OUTCOMES

As with any training or L&D initiative, we want to ensure that program results tie to business outcomes. Our survey pressure tested how preparedness (or unpreparedness) for remote work directly ties to five areas of business outcomes. The majority of respondents felt that their "unpreparedness to work well remotely" negatively affected business outcomes across all measured metrics, from Employee Satisfaction to Company Profit.

Moreover, across all metrics, Senior and Executive Level Leadership respondents believe unpreparedness to work well remotely negatively affects business outcomes to a greater extent than all respondents.



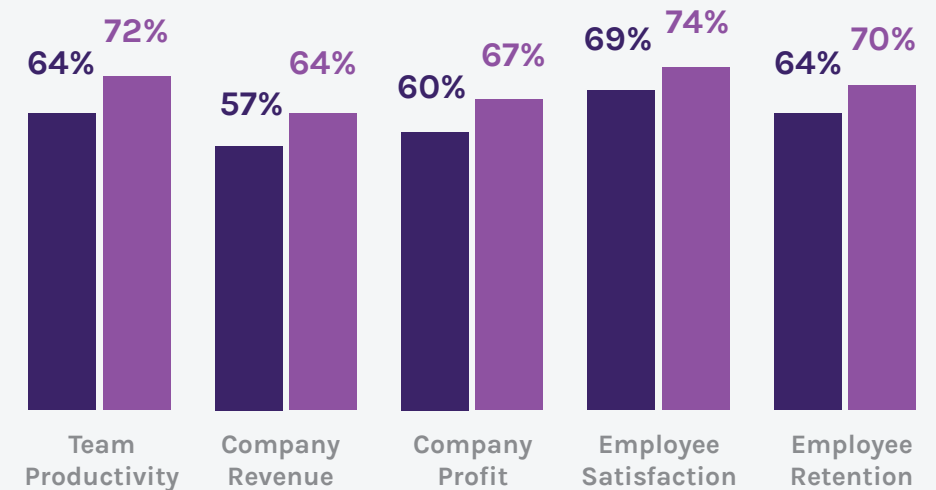
Our department had already been providing remote work training for months prior to COVID, so we were much better prepared."



KEVIN SHUMAN

National Manager, Sales Training and Development, Toyota Financial Services

Does unpreparedness to work well remotely negatively affect the following business outcomes?



% who responded "somewhat or to a great extent"

- All Respondents
- Senior Leadership Respondents

For remote work to have a true positive impact on business outcomes, organizations need to take a strategic approach.



ADVICE TO TAKE ACTION

Where can company executives and L&D decision makers go from here to optimize the performance of their remote teams?



ADVICE FOR BUILDING YOUR REMOTE-SPECIFIC TRAINING, LEARNING, AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Our survey data and interview results highlight that training is a critical factor in the success of remote individuals and remote teams. This remote-specific training may look different depending on the team structure and the L&D setup.

01

REQUIRE A FOCUS ON REMOTE-SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT TRAINING. The data demonstrates a clear and positive impact on team performance and business outcomes when you properly prepare your remote leaders.



02



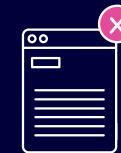
LEVERAGE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY FOR ALL REMOTE PROFESSIONALS. With currently only 30% of respondents receiving remote onboarding training, this would be a great place to start.

03

TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ADDRESSING TEAM-WIDE ISSUES FROM A DISTINCTLY REMOTE LENS. To be fully prepared for remote success, L&D programs need to provide a holistic approach to addressing the interdependencies of challenges as they are uniquely manifested in remote teams.



04



RESOURCE GUIDES ARE NOT SUFFICIENT. While additional information is helpful as supplemental learning, it will not ensure your remote teams are properly prepared to succeed in remote work.

05

PARTNER WITH REMOTE WORK TRAINING EXPERTS. Alleviate the strain on L&D professionals by leveraging the expertise of experienced remote work training providers and consultants in building curricula.



In conclusion, each of these L&D elements don't live independently; remote L&D will not be successful in a vacuum or when implemented without executive support. To integrate a successful and sustainable remote policy, first build your remote strategy, then **invest in training to support and realize your engagement, productivity, and profitability goals.**



If things are planned and done strategically and in an organized, non-chaotic fashion, it can be much more smooth and less stressful on an organization and the human psyche."



ANNE BIBB, VICE PRESIDENT

Global Work at Home, Continuum Global Solutions

ABOUT WORKPLACELESS

We help companies experiencing the pain points of remote work transitions by implementing scalable and personalized training programs that increase team productivity and employee engagement.



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