



DataArt

Remote Work and Distributed Teams Principles

New York USA

London UK

Munich Germany

Zug Switzerland

Table of Contents



1. [DataArt's Culture of Working Online](#)
2. [WFH Like a Boss: 12 Rules for Daily Efficiency](#)
3. [How to Save Your Business with Distributed Teams](#)
4. [DataArt Busts Top 4 Myths About Managing Distributed Teams](#)
5. [Best Practices for Transitioning to WFH Manager Mode](#)
6. [WFH vs Security](#)
7. [Information Security Hygiene when you WFH](#)

DataArt's Culture of Working Online



DataArt started leveraging remote work and distributed teams options as early as respective technologies and tools became available. This approach is part of our corporate culture since then *.

Decades of experience sharing and accumulation allowed us to crystalize four main pillars of our remote work approach:

Our Discovery and Solution Design consulting services offer mentorship both to ours and Clients' teams on how to make remote collaboration effective



People



Processes



Environment and Tools



Culture

* recently we've shared some thoughts in our corporate blog: <https://blog.dataart.com/how-to-ward-off-coronavirus-and-save-your-business-with-distributed-teams?fbclid=IwAR3EWQrp9uSeM7GUI8BJ0HWN1RHZT8RxE52OKZCbPGFwzbAAGCVEj41cwUU>

High Level Approach for Online Discovery



Awareness

Everyone knows the plan for the Discovery and all changes are shared immediately to ensure there are no surprises



Support

IT support, supervising managers, and senior colleagues (where necessary) help turning DataArt and Client's representatives into a single team



Transparency & Trust

Notes, meeting minutes, and artifacts are available to everyone



Networking

Our teams are connected to DataArt's global professional community, unlocking instant remote consulting capabilities from our experts at any technology, domain, or subject that DataArt covers



Ecosystem

We provide clients with ready-to-use tools and communication channels

Few Remote Work Case Studies



For one large travel client, we initially scoped the first engagement to include three weeks of intensive onsite workshops and a long online stretch thereafter. However, at the last minute, an unexpected and urgent issue prevented the client from meeting onsite. In response, our team immediately restructured the plan to facilitate remote online work instead. We continued working with the client in this mode for months receiving proves of high satisfaction.



While working with a Canadian finance client (loans & credit) we took advantage of online tools to discover all the details of the processes they wanted to enhance with robotic process automation tools. Also we've involved our best experts in this area remotely to help team with certain challenges encountered. Now we have a big ongoing RPA implementation project with this Client.



A top consulting company with people distributed globally needed to run a discovery within short timeframe. In response to this limitation, we adopted online tools to avoid compromising the required scope of the Discovery and still interview all key stakeholders.



For two other financial clients (trading) we designed and developed complex data visualizations without a single in-person communication with clients' representatives. We were able to analyze the client's data and identify their needs remotely. In one case, we constructed the required visual reports; in the other, we designed a full prototype of the new data visualization system.



With our healthcare clients, we do majority of Discovery projects online, due to their or their own clients' high level of geographical branch distribution.

DataArt Coronavirus Update



Summary of DataArt steps in response to COVID-19:

[More details](#)

1. We have activated our Business Continuity Plan as per policy.
An Emergency Response Team coordinates all aspects of operations.
 2. All of DataArt's employees have been asked to work from home, except for essential personnel required to maintain basic infrastructure services.
 3. All travel to client sites and between DataArt locations is stopped until further notice.
 4. We have added capacity to our communication, virtual private network and shared development tools to ensure they can scale with greatly increased work out of office.
 5. Our information security team is organizing security audits to ensure continued preservation of client confidentiality.
 6. We are offering counseling and other assistance to employees as necessary.
- DataArt offers free advice and support to any organization struggling with a sudden shift to remote work.
 - If you need help, reach out via AloneTogether@dataart.com

WFH Like a Boss: 12 Rules for Daily Efficiency

Switching to working from home (WFH) mode is not easy. As well as technical and network security concerns, daily communication requires more effort. Motivation weakens, performance decreases because of constant distraction, work-life balance is affected, and – well, panic ensues. So these 12 tips for a healthy and successful WFH routine will definitely make your life easier.

Rule 1: Set Up a Dedicated Workspace



Separating work and non-work areas is key to a healthy work-life balance. Set up a personal home office that encourages productivity – at the dining table, on a window sill, near a standing desk, or in a bean bag – wherever household distractions are minimal. Make sure you do not limit the personal space of your family members, especially if you plan on video-conferencing throughout the day.

Rule 2: Draw a Line Between Working Hours and Private Life

People who are not used to WFH often complain that, when at home, they start working early, say at 9 a.m., and still find themselves replying to emails as late as 9 p.m. No wonder their productivity decreases exponentially after just a few days! Do not fall into this trap. Plan your activities and workload, and stick to schedule. Remember: when you are done, you are done. Stop checking your mailbox and team chats after working hours.

Rule 3: Be Your Own Manager



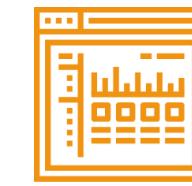
It is advisable to maintain your office-time habits even at home. Get up at the usual time, have breakfast, and get ready for work in the way you usually do. Put everything on your calendar and mind a few simple rules:



Dedicate time for planning complex tasks



Define key stages and milestones – both daily and weekly



Estimate effort and duration, and allocate the corresponding time.

Keep your calendar 80%+ full, so there is reasonable pressure to maintain discipline, with extra room for possible emergencies, yet no temptation to let it all slide.

Rule 4: Have HIIW Sessions

Similar to high intensity interval training (HIIT), high intensity interval working (HIIW) will help you to remain productive. Work in short, intensive intervals (30-40 minutes), then switch to a different task or take a break and eat a snack, breath fresh air, or exercise. There are plenty of guides on short workouts online, like a 10 minute energetic office workout without equipment, short yoga, breathing, or meditation sessions.

Rule 5: Read News Once a Day, From a Single Source

Avoid excessive scrolling through social media and video platforms feeds. This keeps you unfocused. Checking news all the time kills productivity and adds to your stress. Choose a single, reliable news source and check it only once a day, preferably in the morning or after work. You will still keep abreast of events, but also preserve your wellbeing.

Rule 6: Use Your Usual Commute Time to Relax



WFH saves the time you used to spend on commuting. So you can use this time for little pleasures, like watching an episode of a TV show, scrolling through a blog, or adopting new healthy habits, such as a morning workout. You probably used your commute home to switch your “work” persona to your “home”/“loving parent” one. When WFH, learn to do this quicker. Turn off your workstation (or at least notifications), cook something delicious for dinner, or play a board game with your family. It is that time of the day.

Rule 7: Follow Online Communication Etiquette

Your team should agree on a means of communication while WFH. Make sure you have the messenger launched during working hours, turn notifications on, and check the team chat from time to time.

Prepare for the daily team sync-up call in advance: check your Internet connection and headset, inform family members you are not to be disturbed for a while, and do not multitask on the calls. Mute yourself when you are not talking.

Rule 8: Use Video to Compensate for the Lack of Office Social Life



When holding a call from home, video often seems excessive – you have to dress up, comb your hair, clean whatever part of the room is visible in the background, and make sure your cat does not appear in the frame. But, after several weeks of remote work, we are likely to forget how our colleagues look – not good for teamwork and productivity. So turn on video, at least occasionally. And let's face it, sooner or later you need to introduce your cat to your colleagues anyway (and meet their cats as well)!

Rule 9: Follow Corporate Compliance Guidelines

Check with your compliance manager whether there is a set of mandatory or nice-to-have corporate compliance guidelines, and follow them precisely. Data breaches are sometimes perpetrated if guidelines are neglected or not taken seriously, for instance regarding a prohibition on storing confidential information on personal laptops.

Rule 10: Lock Screen Every Time You Step Away



Locking your screen every time you are away from your workstation – whether in the office or at home – is a good habit. The keyboard is shiny and warm, and it is a tempting object for both kids and pets. You do not want to have to explain to your colleagues what gibberish in the team chat is all about.

Rule 11: Enhance Security Measures for Network and Devices

Home networks are less secure than corporate ones, so use extra measures, especially if you work with sensitive corporate data. Turn WPS off. Configure WPA2 with AES as an encryption algorithm for a home Wi-Fi network, and set up a strong password to protect your Wi-Fi connection. Generate strong, completely new passwords for corporate resources. Minimize the use of Bluetooth whenever and wherever possible, especially on old mobile devices. Protect the devices you use for work with anti-malware solutions.

Rule 12: Beware of Phishing and Fraud



Unfortunately, any critical situation spawns fraud. Beware of suspicious emails prompting you to “click this link to learn more about coronavirus protection measures” or similar spammy scams. Business espionage groups are becoming more and more creative these days, targeting entire industries. Be extremely attentive to ensure you do not fall victim to them.

We hope these tips will help you preserve your wellbeing and remain productive while in WFH mode.

How to Save Your Business with Distributed Teams

How to manage remote workforces efficiently?

This section is based on the lessons learned by DataArt, a global software engineering firm with 20 offices in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Our developers are used to working in project teams distributed across different countries and even continents.

Pros and Cons of Distributed Teams



According to FlexJobs and Global Workplace Analytics, over the last 10 years, the number of remote employees grew by [91%](#). Despite this, some managers are still scared of the perceived low productivity of distributed teams.

This fear is groundless. [78%](#) of employees believe that a flexible work arrangement makes them more efficient.

Tetyana Golubyeva, Delivery Manager and Process Consultant at DataArt comments:

"My experience with distributed employees, for many years, shows that this fear is completely irrelevant and more addresses the manager's personal issues with control and trust in the team",

So what are the major advantages and concerns of distributed teams?

Pros



Pandemic resistance

The geographic distribution of teams mitigates the risks connected with local emergencies and pandemics



Speed of staffing

Distributed teams mean looking for candidates worldwide, which gives employers more options to fill the vacancy and, therefore, considerably speeds up the recruitment process



Cost-efficiency

Pay fewer taxes, eliminate rental payments and find people with the same qualifications in locations with more affordable workforces — this is all about distribution



Flexibility

If a team works in different time zones, it decreases the response time for various requests. Distributed teams mean having more working hours during the day, which can be crucial for some products



Portfolio of qualifications

With the option to search for specialists worldwide, it's possible to find experts with any specialization and maturity level, including in very niche domains



Employee friendliness

People get rid of their commutes and save up to two hours a day. Moreover, they feel less stressed

Cons



Managers should understand and admit that communication between distributed teams takes 20 – 25% of people's working time. For a localized team, this number is somewhere near 10%.



Integration skills become more critical – it's naïve to think that people self-organize remotely. You need to spend more time checking whether everything is up-to-date, that all communication channels work properly, and that everyone has the same information.



People's desire to communicate regularly reduces when it comes to remote work – it's just a natural thing. So sometimes you need to push this communication, especially when you need everyone to be up to speed.

Principles of Managing Distributed Teams

The benefits of distributed teams contribute to their popularity.
If you decided to distribute your team, learn the best practices
on how to organize and manage it efficiently, based on
DataArt first-hand experience.

Establish Close Cooperation Between Team Members (and with Clients)



Remote teams do not self-organize and require some integration efforts. This means they need an infrastructure that enables team members to be on the same page.

In one of our latest posts regarding [adjusting Scrum to geographically distributed teams](#), we discussed in detail how to help team members to closely cooperate.

Ms. Golubyeva adds:

"For teams who work remotely for a long time (months and years), it's good practice at least once per half a year or year to bring people together to work in one location for a week or two. It increases team spirit significantly and is completely worth the travel costs."

Set Up Project Management and Tracking Tools



It is highly important to track the working progress. One or multiple tools, like Jira, Microsoft Teams, Asana, Trello, could be used for task management.

Choose the best tool for you based on its pricing, functionality, usability, and integration characteristics.



Encourage Ongoing Communication



Remember that distributed team members talk less, and you need to address this issue by any means available. Otherwise, people may feel lonely, confused about their work, and poorly motivated.

Peter Vaihansky, Senior Vice President at DataArt, recommends:

"Use group chats in ubiquitous products like Skype or Google Hangouts. All team members agree to pay attention to the group chat window throughout their day and respond accordingly – it becomes another team public space, and this approach works well enough for most teams. Sometimes a couple of team members will create a smaller group chat to discuss a particular issue – those are less permanent and will form and dissolve on demand. When voice and chat are not enough, screen sharing comes in handy. Both Skype and Google have that functionality, but there are many other excellent free tools, like join.me or Zoom."

Deal with Different Languages and Cultures



While managing people from different geographies, mind their cultural peculiarities. It is not just about courtesy. Supporting and understanding your team members' needs will contribute to your managerial skills and make your team more loyal.

"While most multinational development teams will probably use English as their working language, accents may differ across the team, which could make understanding each other slightly more challenging. Therefore, it's important to encourage your team members to ask their colleagues to repeat themselves if someone is not coming through clearly on a Scrum call, which some people may be uncomfortable doing for fear of appearing impolite. These and other cultural subtleties can have a direct impact on how well the team works together, and so they deserve separate consideration in an international setting," – adds Mr.Vaihansky.

Address Cybersecurity Concerns



Human negligence endangers security. Multiple offices, collaboration with contractors, and sometimes poor control result in an increased risk of being hacked.

Develop security policies and extend them to both employees and contractors. Control how these rules are being complied with. Limit the number of employees who have access to critical datasets.

Managing Director at DataArt, [Alexei Miller explains](#):

"One misconception is that data breaches are inevitably the result of flaws in IT systems. Another is that external hacking is mostly to blame. In fact, most data breaches are perpetrated by people associated with the company: permanent employees, temporary workers, contractors, or vendors."

The Bottom Line

While public institutions agree to quarantine, let your teams work remotely. It can save your business from enormous losses, and allow working within the standard regime. You will possibly enjoy all the advantages of distributed teams and decide to prolong the experiment forever! Bear in mind that 77% of companies practicing remote working lowered their operational costs, while employees noticed a 90% increase in morale.

DataArt Busts Top 4 Myths About Managing Distributed Teams

A global shift in the corporate world towards distributed working started long before the COVID-19 pandemic. In the software development realm, [distributed teams](#) have become increasingly critical to project success. DataArt has 20+ years of experience working on software projects with distributed teams, and managing them successfully, so we'd like to offer our advice to those companies that are now forced to operate in a distributed mode.

In this section, DataArt experts will bust the major myths frequently voiced by executives who think managing a distributed team is a challenge.

Moreover, we offer advice and support to any organization struggling with a sudden shift to remote work. At no cost, we are happy to share our know-how and offer access to our experts on communication and computing infrastructure, software development processes, team management and other elements of massive-scale distributed team operation.

Myth 1: “I can’t gather a distributed team in a conference room. How can I manage their work and coordinate it?”

Counter-question: how do you coordinate the work of your centralized team? If all team members do not sit on the same floor of the same building, the team is already distributed. Even in a close office space, sometimes no work gets done – and this is not a question of controlling people right at their desks.

Transparency and trust are integral for any team, irrespective of the distance between its members.

As Greg Abbot, Head of Travel & Hospitality Practice at DataArt [puts it](#):

“The foundation of any distributed team is trust. When you start an engagement and work in a distributed team, you’re usually granted trust. We at DataArt always default to almost over-transparency.”

To track the distributed team’s progress and coordinate its efforts, managers can adopt any agile methodology (Scrum, Kanban, Lean SD), and use tools for online reporting (Jira, Trello, Asana, Monday), as well as time-tracking tools (Avaza, Clockify, Freedcamp). Management practices should ensure that each team member, irrespective of location, understands their scope of work and meets deadlines.

Myth busted! Regardless of geographical distance, a team will be effective only if it shares a common goal and full transparency, and is empowered by a proven management framework.

Myth 2: “It’ll take ages for operational decision-making. We can’t afford this.”

Decision-making in any team, distributed or otherwise, condenses to regular and productive communication. Myriads of online communication tools, like Google Meet, Skype, WebEx, Zoom, GoToMeeting (and many more), are suitable for regular or ad hoc group and one-on-one calls. Most offer chat, video-calls and screen-sharing options to make meetings more productive and meaningful. The team simply needs to agree on a unified user-friendly suite of tools and stick to it whenever they need to talk.

Peter Vaihansky, Senior Vice President of Finance Practice at DataArt, [shares](#) a few tips on Scrum team calls:

“It is important not to interpret silence as agreement. Scrums call for active participation in decision-making by all team members, and it is ever more critical to have an experienced facilitator drive Scrum meetings and ensure that everyone gets a chance and is actively encouraged to voice their concerns, ask questions and acknowledge decisions.”

Online project chat, usually accessible on mobile devices, is another important means of communication. It allows teammates – regardless of the physical distance between them – to remain on top of the latest updates and promptly make operational decisions.

Myth busted! Though your local team may sometimes be too large to fit around a table, a distributed team is never too large for an online conference room. Regular team calls and discussions in project chat channels allow for smooth and timely decision-making.

Myth 3: “In distributed teams, some decisions may be made randomly, and incorrectly. We will waste time fixing these.”

Continuous planning and continuous feedback are the core tenets of agile development methodology, and can be adapted for both centralized and distributed teams. The methodology offers a comprehensive framework to track any decision from the point it was made to its implementation, through continuous planning, continuous testing, and continuous integration. For instance, in Scrum, daily stand-ups, sprint planning and grooming, sprint reviews and retrospectives ensure the whole team takes part in decision-making and implementation.

Ekaterina Shalapanova, Delivery Manager at DataArt, [shares her](#) views on Scrum:

“In the late 90s, when Scrum just started to gain momentum, most computers had limited capacity and could accommodate only an email client and ICQ (Jabber, IRC, etc.). This explained why most teams back then worked locally. These days, thanks to modern technologies, Scrum is easily adapted for distributed teams.”

Myth busted! Agile development neutralizes random decisions and optimizes the time spent verifying a wrong hypothesis, which is an essential part of any team collaboration – whether centralized or distributed.



Myth 4: “Integration of all distributed members / teams would take too much time and money.”

Initial integration or onboarding of a new team member - whether on-site or remote - is naturally associated with some complications. To ease the pain and save overheads, managers should develop a templated onboarding plan, with general information about the company, its long-term objectives, projects, and new employee's role-specific information, all divided into digestible chunks. The plan should have clear milestones and a time-table for the newbie to integrate into the new environment as smoothly as possible. An online copy of the plan would prove helpful for any team member who joins a team, regardless of location.

Andrey Ivanov, Vice President of Finance Practice at DataArt states:

“We acknowledge the fact that team member rotation is inevitable, especially over long projects, so effective onboarding is the simplest way to alleviate this pain. At DataArt, we have a comprehensive multi-dimensional framework for integration and onboarding, empowered by Open edX platform. It has proved very effective over the years.”

Myth busted! A reusable onboarding plan, prepared beforehand, saves cost, effort and time spent on integrating new members, no matter whether they join a centralized or a remote team.

The Bottom Line

With many years of experience in developing software solutions with distributed teams, DataArt dispels most myths that state managing these teams is challenging. The most common fears executives have about distributed teams concern productivity: will distant colleagues be able to collaborate with the local team? Will they achieve a mutual goal? But in reality, distributed teams, when equipped with the right management and communication tools, can prove even more effective than centralized ones.

Best Practices for Transitioning to WFH Manager Mode

Team management when working remotely can be tricky, and many managers are suddenly facing this new challenge without preparation. So to help, we have compiled our best advice for managers, condensed from 22 years of experience managing distributed teams, so you can learn how to eliminate distractions and manage your teams more effectively while working from home.

"A remote work environment should encourage performance – not presence" entrepreneur Neil Patel told Zapier, a web app integration platform, for their [2015 book](#) about remote work.

Let's take a look at the best ways you can optimize remote team management in detail.

Tip 1: Over-Communicate



Good communication is absolutely vital to successful remote teamwork, and to those just starting to work from home it's better to overshare initially than risk confusion or opaqueness. You can't be too transparent with your team. In particular, remember to:

- Check in at the start of each work day to make sure everyone is on the same page. This is especially important if you're working across time zones.
- A short weekly call to map out each working week is also helpful for a bigger picture view for the whole team.
- Regularly share your priorities and the progress of projects with your team.
- Be clear in the intent and urgency of any requests. This includes specific (time and day) deadlines.
- Use emojis, images, and gifs in your messages – emotions are harder to convey in writing and a more natural, conversational tone will encourage communication.
- Give more feedback than usual to your colleagues, especially praise, so they know their work is valuable.
- Ensure the entire team is using the same platform for communication (e.g. Slack, Teams or other collaboration software) and encourage everyone to post thoughts, questions and updates on projects throughout their day. You will never be able to perfectly replicate the atmosphere of easy dialogue found in an in-office setting, but you can get close.

Tip 2: Own Your Productivity (1)



Distractions are clearly an issue for everyone when working from home, and many managers fear productivity will nosedive. But there are some simple ways to protect your office hours and avoid losing focus:

Don't let incoming emails derail you. The [Zero Inbox](#) technique will help you streamline your message management; follow these steps to keep your time spent on communication ringfenced:

1. Consolidate your message-handling schedule by scheduling a few time-slots during the day to go through your messages. Try to keep your email client closed by default the rest of the time.
2. If you're concerned about missing urgent incoming mail, take a few minutes to create custom notifications for high priority clients or projects.
3. If a message requires no action on your behalf, archive it immediately.
4. If a message requires a simple reply that you can knock out in a minute or less, respond right then and there, and then archive it immediately.
5. If a message requires some level of thought or response, snooze it to a specific time during your email management window, so you can handle it with appropriate care but not be distracted by it sitting in your inbox. It will reappear and grab your attention when the time is right.

Tip 2: Own Your Productivity (2)



- Consider using a Trello board to organize a simple Kanban-driven flow to manage your to-dos; this will help you to stay focused on what's most important each day.
- Group similar tasks into batches, to be completed together. Switching between different types of work all day hurts productivity, so collate and time your chores appropriately. For instance, small, simple jobs can be saved for the periods when you're low in energy, or in-between meetings when you don't have time to get stuck into bigger projects.
- A similar method is to front-load your day (or your week). This means you focus on the big, intense projects first, and on smaller tasks that don't have deadlines as you go through the day.
- Start finishing instead of "just starting". Breaking down a job into smaller sub-tasks or action steps can help get over the hurdle of never-ending projects.
- Automate anything that can be automated. Or delegated. If you're going to do something two or more times, automate it so you can eliminate busywork and tackle more meaningful work.

**Mikhail Zavileysky,
General Manager at DataArt, has these tips to share on successful WFH practices:**

1. *Put everything on your calendar. Be your own manager. Make sure to set time aside for planning complex tasks, define key stages, milestones, estimate effort and duration, and allocate time. Next, make sure you actually follow the calendar. Keep your calendar 80%+ full - it creates reasonable pressure to be disciplined and prevents excessive relaxation.*
2. *Enjoy it: don't try to emulate the office. Wear comfortable clothes (shorts that are not visible in video calls), exercise instead of commuting. Feel smart: you can now both combine all the benefits and have extra time that you saved on commuting.*
3. *Put EVERYTHING on your calendar, including your lunch and coffee breaks. If you really need all those social things like water cooler conversations, have brief verbal exchanges with colleagues online in, say, group chats. Try to consciously substitute it with small informal chats, agenda-free meetings – "syncs", as we call it in our culture. This really helps to not feel lonely.*

Tip 3: Get Regular Feedback From Your Team & Projects



Communication is a two way street, and a necessary part of remote team building - and successful project completion with a distributed team - is feedback from all team members. Those quick and easy, off-the-cuff office chats now have to be planned. The best way not to forget this is through scheduling:

- Maintain your usual team meetings, especially 1:1s. Consider setting up recurring bi-weekly (or monthly) meetings between you and your supervisor, and between the colleagues you supervise. Take 15-30 minutes to discuss the current workload, comfort level, upcoming tasks, and challenges, and provide feedback to each other.
- Hold regular retros to validate and revise your team's methods of working remotely.
- When gathering employee feedback, it's crucial to remember that the relationship isn't just between the supervisor and employee. Each employee has connections with their fellow co-workers too. Suggest your co-workers provide feedback for each team member in three categories: Start, Stop, and Continue. Each box should focus on behaviors that match the title. Just keep in mind that the feedback should be focused on behaviors and actions, not personalities. The former is something an employee can improve; the latter isn't.

**Alex Makeyenkov,
SVP at Finance Practice at DataArt, says this about WFH:**

"Draw the line between your working hours and private life. The borderline is not so strong but when WFH it is even harder to tell the difference. My wife usually asks me «Honey? Are you already home?». It takes time to switch personas between being a boss and a loving father.

Plan your day – when WFH you cannot just bump into your colleague or catch up near the water cooler, so you should plan all your meetings in advance and be punctual. Use Video conferencing when possible. We get so much more information through the visual channel, and it keeps you alert and alive knowing that other people can see you."

Tip 4: Show Compassion



This might sound vague, but in an office setting people find numerous ways to display their compassion for each other. They show their care by buying lunch for a colleague, or cleaning up after someone. They chat easily, asking after each other and checking in throughout the day. But in an all-remote environment, these habits don't exist. So you must look for other ways to show compassion and care for your team, such as:

- Sending caring emails or chat messages – just like an in-person “Hey, how’s it going?” but online.
- Have flowers or a gift card to be sent to someone who needs or deserves it. Consider sharing photos of the gifts online for all to see.
- When something funny or silly happens in your home office, share it!
- Use video capabilities during meetings. Your colleagues will get to see you, but also your workspace, and any new work companions you may have. Introducing your colleagues to your pets or other family members encourages team building.

Anastasia Rezhepp,

Head of Design at DataArt, follows these rules to protect her WFH productivity:

- "A) Be able to put on a Very Serious Face (scare the kids and relatives away, make sure they immediately leave the room and let you work). Alternatively, there are other 'codes'; that work with the family: Mom wearing headphones = Do Not Touch.*
- B) When WFH, not only should you plan your own life but the lives of everyone you live with as well. Make sure your schedules are synchronized and, at the very least, you won't have to worry that your kids are fooling around too much.*
- C) Set a reminder to exercise. There are a ton of apps packed with 5-10 minute workouts. It's also way more convenient. Just imagine: warming-up without having to go to a coffee machine."*

Tip 5: Reconsider Your Meetings



Start asking yourself if every meeting is actually needed. According to a report by Bain & Company, by eliminating repetitive or unnecessary meetings, you could save dozens of hours monthly. So think about it: can you address the issue without scheduling a meeting? If the answer is yes, then write an email or make a call instead. If the answer is no, then facilitate meetings to be as efficient and productive as possible, by:

- Using the 60 second rule to engage with your audience. You might share shocking or provocative statistics, anecdotes, or analogies to dramatize the issue at hand, quickly. Your goal is to make sure the group understands what needs to be done before starting to tackle the problem.
- Don't allow participants to take an 'observer' role. Create an experience of shared responsibility by planning an interactive, time-limited exercise. (Define a problem that can be solved quickly, then assign people to groups of two or four. Give them a medium with which to communicate with one another. If you're on a virtual meeting platform that allows for breakout groups, use them liberally. Give them a very limited time frame to take on a highly structured and brief task. You can use [1-2-4-All](#) method from the Liberating Structures to help).
- Keep your deck as short as possible. Select the least amount of data you need – don't add a single slide more.
- Use video conferencing tools and turn on the camera. All participants should use headphones with a microphone to ensure they are heard. Provide a clear agenda in the meeting invitation.
- Designate roles: a facilitator (who facilitates and ensures that everyone has the right to speak) and a secretary (who takes notes and shares them at the end of the meeting).

Tip 6: Take Care of Yourself and Your Mental Health



It's no secret that working from home can be stressful, and that every team member will have their own unique set of issues and complications to overcome. It's key to team and project success that every member of the team stays as healthy and happy as possible. Here are some simple tips to do just that:

- Maintain a healthy routine, which matches your normal work routine as much as possible. Set a time to start the work day, and to end it, and don't run over. Create clear boundaries between work and home life.
- Take frequent breaks. Get up, go for a walk, have lunch. Sitting at your desk all day will make you a little stir-crazy.
- Take time to connect on a human level with your colleagues, by having a virtual coffee date or lunch using Teams or Zoom.
- Don't hesitate to express your frustrations, feelings of isolation, or other challenges that you may be having while working remotely.
- Try to create a space dedicated to work – even if it's just a corner where you can store your work materials at the end of the day. Don't work where you relax.
- If you're working on a really distributed team, turn on your phone's 'Do Not Disturb' mode so it won't ding with notifications all night.
- Use the time you needed to commute on yourself. Allow yourself to go through a book or a podcast, read an article, or exercise.
- Use differing schedules to your advantage. Now that you work remotely, you can lie down for a nap or have a quick workout if it gives you an energy boost and increases concentration.

Dmitry Bagrov, Managing Director at DataArt UK, uses these guidelines to ensure the most productivity while working remotely:

"1. Music. Listening to Rammstein or Depeche Mode while working guarantees the best productivity. At least for me.

2. HIIW = High Intensity Interval Working. Work in short yet intense intervals. Be your own manager: make sure to work for 15-30 minutes before you switch and do something else.

3. Let's call it a Five-Minute Mum. Now, this one might only be relatable for parents, but one used to say that during the five minutes while a child is chewing a cookie, a mother can manage to do a whole lot. My advice is: remember the time when you were actually able to do a whole lot in five minutes."

The Bottom Line

Working from home is the reality for many at the moment, and preparing yourself and your team properly can be the difference between success and failure. Take the time initially to educate yourself and your colleagues on best practices, and remember that DataArt is here to help if you need more support!

Working from home entails certain security risks. Under the current circumstances, the risks are even higher. Check our list of the most important security tips to keep in mind when working remotely.

Top Recommendations for Employees



- Always use VPN when you're working. The tricky part here is that most companies have never tested their VPN on such a scale, and VPN connection capacity could present a challenge for large companies. The IT department may want to take measures to increase the capacity of VPN servers.
- Do not mix work with personal business. Avoid using the VPN when you're not working. When you are home, use your personal devices for personal business. If this is not possible, you should disconnect from the VPN to avoid taxing the corporate network.
- Make sure your home Wi-Fi is sufficiently secure (WPA2 + AES encryption, and avoid using default passwords). If you use third-party Wi-Fi, you should ensure it is secure. We recommend installing McAfee Mobile Security: Privacy App for iOS, and Wi-Fi Doctor for Android. Never accept certificates if you are not sure about the network to which you are connecting.
- Keep your Wi-Fi router's firmware up to date.
- Regularly update software and operating systems on all devices.
- Minimize Bluetooth use, especially on older devices.
- Ensure computers and other devices you use for work are encrypted.

Top Recommendations for Employees



- Ensure anti-malware software is up and running on your computer.
- Avoid printing work-related materials at home (especially if you don't have a shredder).
- Don't get phished!
- In case of any incident (even related to your personal device), report it.
- Help your colleagues adhere to best practices.
- Ask your colleagues for help if you're unsure how to do something in a secure way.
- React to InfoSec requests in a timely manner.
- Set your screen to lock after 5-10 min of inactivity.
- Make sure you're family doesn't post pictures or videos relating to your work on social media.

Recommendations for Vendors Working from Home

- Respect your clients' interests and do your best to satisfy obligations regarding security and confidentiality.
- Keep your clients updated on any deviations from standard processes and configurations.
- Report any security issues that could impact client data within 24 hours of an issue being reported.
- Reassess your information security risks.
- Revise your Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery plans.
- Ensure your employees only use authorized devices and software.
- Ensure your communication and reporting mechanisms work as intended.
- Ensure your employees are educated about information security.
- Ensure all devices used in WFH mode have an appropriate logging mechanism up and running.
- Use multi-factor authentication.

Information Security Hygiene when you WFH

During the current pandemic, legions of people have made the switch to 'work from home' mode, which has significantly increased the risk of cyberattacks. DataArt has prepared several recommendations to help you work from home safely.

Computer



Devices that you use for work should be compliant with the information security requirements and policies of your company:

- If possible, use a corporate laptop that is enrolled into corporate management tools (added to a corporate domain and Mobile Device Management tools, like Intune).
- If you have your own laptop that you use for work, do the following:
 - Install antivirus software and update it regularly
 - Create a strong password
 - Enable Full Disk Encryption (FDE), like Bitlocker (Windows) and FileVault (macOS)

Operating System



- Install OS updates and patches, especially security-related ones
- Install any updates for the third-party software you use
- Don't use the admin account; create a user account and make sure it is also password protected. If you need temporary elevation of privileges to perform administrative tasks, use sudo/runas
- Lock the screen on your device when you go to another room if you do not live alone or have guests.

Network and Router



- Use a wired connection instead of Wi-Fi when possible
- Check that you have a backup Internet connection channel (3G/LTE)
- Check the settings of your router and change all default and weak passwords
- Turn the firewall on
- Ensure that the router's administration interface is not accessible from the Internet
- Switch Telnet and other insecure services off
- If possible, segregate your wired and wireless networks into different VLANs
- If you use Wi-Fi make sure:
 - Your router access is password protected
 - You configure WPA2 with AES as an encryption algorithm on Wi-Fi network
- Minimize the use of Bluetooth whenever and wherever possible, especially on older mobile devices.

Secure Operations



- Use the VPN provided by your company to access server files and services
- Use a Remote Desktop connection to your office workstation instead of working on your home computer, if possible
- Use only corporate email for any business-related activity
- Do not store corporate information on your private devices any more than absolutely necessary to complete your work
- Use corporate tools for data storage and sharing, like SharePoint online, OneDrive for Business, GSuite, Box, or other tools provided by your company
- Write down or memorize contact information for your company's InfoSec department and Security Incident reporting facility. Contact them immediately in case of any suspicious activity on your computer, or if you suspect you've suffered from a virus outbreak, phishing/spam or any other attack.

Internet browsing

Be ready to combat SPAM and phishing emails or social media messages. There will be plenty, particularly on the topic of coronavirus:



Do not click on suspicious links



Do not respond to suspicious contacts in Skype and other messengers



Do not open suspicious attachments

The Bottom Line

DataArt offers free advice and support to any organization struggling with a sudden shift to remote work. If you need help, reach out via

AloneTogether@dataart.com