



REMOTE WORK

How to develop
future-ready skills
for success

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Introduction

Between the global nature of today's economy and the richness with which people can now connect over long distances due to technology, a more permanent and necessary shift has occurred in the workplace to embrace remote work. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this looks set to escalate over the coming months and perhaps years.

Over the past few decades, there has been much research focused on identifying individual and organizational differences that predict success in remote work. Employees find remote work satisfying for various reasons (Gajendran & Harrison, 2006), including control over scheduling, flexibility, and the ability to better balance work-life demands that create stress and a perceived increase in productivity (Vega, Anderson, & Kaplan, 2015). Currently, the most common reason people cite is to have uninterrupted time to concentrate on work, followed closely by the desire to save time commuting (Zeng, 2019).

Given its appeal to employees, remote work is increasingly attractive to organizations (Allen, Golden & Shockley, 2015; Narayan & Plasient, 2017). However, some early adopters (e.g., IBM, Yahoo) have reconsidered its merits, citing impediments to communication and innovation (Calvo, 2013). This raises important questions about how to best manage remote work arrangements to ensure they benefit both the employee and employer. Without proper efforts to close the gaps introduced by distance, the anticipated benefits of remote work may not be realized, due to disruptions to the coordination of work between

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dispersed teams, supervisors and their subordinates, and other colleagues (Allen et al., 2015; Calvo 2013). Individuals who are most effective remotely have developed competence in key areas that help them remain productive and content despite the physical distance.

While benefits to employees and organizations alike are established, the fact is, outcomes are mixed as to who benefits and under what conditions (Golden, 2009; Golden & Viega, 2005). Evidence suggests those who work remotely more than 50% of the time may not realize the expected benefits without adapting to being remote. The quality of co-worker relationships can suffer, and perceived social support may decline without intermittent opportunities to close the gaps created by distance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2006).

Many cite work-life balance as a reason to engage in remote work, but an inability to disengage from work may increase work-family conflict for some (Eddleston & Mulki, 2017; Golden & Raghuram, 2009). Another often cited benefit is increased job satisfaction (Vega et al., 2015), due to greater autonomy. That said, people with lower emotional stability can experience strain from having to make more decisions independently when they are remote (Perry, Rubino, & Hunter, 2018). Taking all of this into account, now more than ever, employers need to consider the individual differences in remote workers' personalities and identify how to best support and develop them to realize their potential as remote workers.



Remote work is
the future of work.



Alexis Ohanian, Reddit

What is remote work?

Simply defined, remote work describes an arrangement in which employees leverage technology to communicate and coordinate their efforts when working from different locations, including different time zones, or even countries, either full- or part-time (Nilles, 1975).

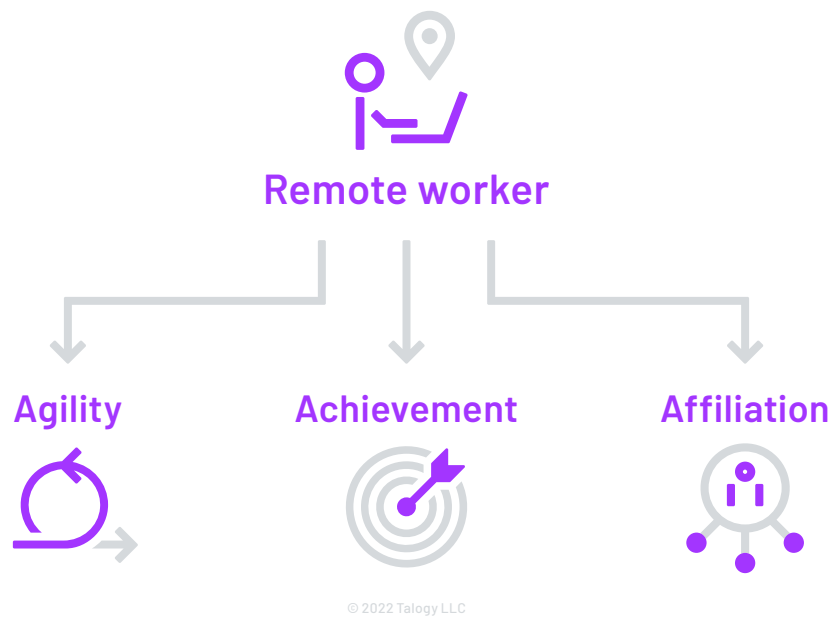
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, at least 25 million workers globally fit this definition (Global Workforce Analytics, 2015; 2017), 18% of which are full-time (Zeng, 2019). The notion of remote work is not new for organizations, with approximately 56% of worldwide companies allowing it. However, it is known by various names, with geographical preferences as to which are used: telework, e-work, distributed work, flex-work, and telecommuting are all common.

In the aftermath of the outbreak of COVID-19, a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reported that over 75% of employers have employees working from home (SHRM, 2020). Over 7 in 10 of those employers are struggling to adapt to remote work. The issues seem to be particularly difficult in the professional services, healthcare and manufacturing industries.

Additionally, a survey by IBM suggests that there will be a strong shift toward more remote work after the pandemic subsides; nearly 40% of respondents felt strongly that their employer should provide opt-in remote work options, more than 75% indicated that they would like to continue to work remotely, at least occasionally, and 54% reported that they would like to primarily work remotely (IBM Study, 2020). The growing trend toward remote work has been hastened by the pandemic and feels like remote work is here to stay.

Leveraging technology to
coordinate efforts while working
from a different location^a

^a Nilles (1975)



The Talogy remote worker model

In order to help our clients and partners as they support remote work for their employees, and to help individuals realize their potential as remote workers, Talogy has reviewed the science of remote working and compiled a competency framework (referred to as a model). This model describes characteristics that are key in helping one develop into an effective and happy remote worker. It is our view that all individuals can learn, grow and adapt. By understanding the remote worker model competencies and how their current skills are aligned, employees can identify areas of developmental opportunity and ways of utilizing their strengths to maximize their remote work potential.

Competencies required for successful remote working fall into three broad areas: **Agility**, **Achievement**, and **Affiliation**. Used in combination, these competencies describe the skills and behaviors needed to successfully navigate remote work. Talogy's Remote Worker assessment measures three key competency areas that contribute to effectiveness in remote work and provides development tips to help employees leverage their strengths and close development gaps.

What skills lead to success in remote work?



Talogy has identified three core competency areas which are important for remote workers



Agility

How people respond to change and handle challenges independently



Achievement

How people adapt their work practices to drive action and ensure accountability



Affiliation

How people deal with the absence of having other people in the same physical space to support them

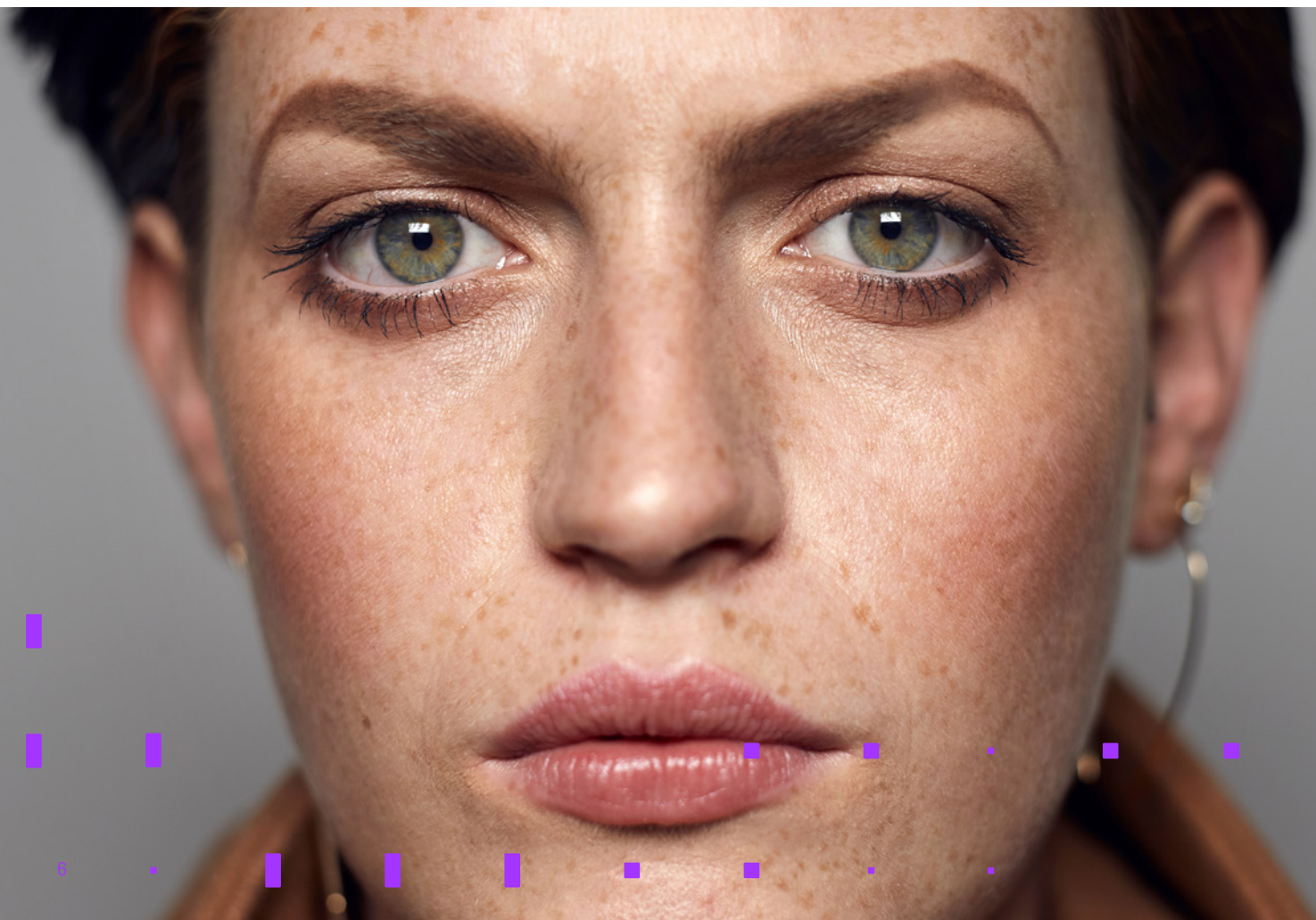
Agility

When working remotely, individuals do not get as much immediate feedback on their work and may spend more time than warranted dwelling on mistakes and setbacks. They may have fewer opportunities to quickly discuss an issue or concern, gain perspective from a trusted co-worker, and reframe situations in a more positive light. Those who are naturally resilient can more easily bounce back from setbacks, regardless of their work environment, and solve problems autonomously. Resilient workers naturally draw on their own resources to overcome setbacks, which allows them to maintain focus and productivity in a remote work environment.

Being resourceful is an asset for remote workers where autonomy is an inherent part of the work environment. To this end, it is particularly important to have strong information gathering and analytical skills to help determine what needs to be done, combined with creativity to brainstorm solutions. Resourcefulness is highly valued in any workplace setting, but it becomes more crucial in a remote setting where fewer immediate resources are available and there is less access to colleagues. In the absence of these typical assets,

workers who are less resourceful may struggle to complete basic tasks or fully understand the issues they are facing, which can lead to inappropriate or ineffective choices. Employees who are high in resourcefulness are more likely to enthusiastically tackle obstacles, identify root causes of issues, and identify innovative solutions.

An individual's learning agility, or capacity to quickly pick up new skills and responsibilities, can often make the difference between a high remote performer and one who is simply getting their job done. Continuous learning entails the ability and willingness to learn from new experiences and to leverage those lessons to perform effectively in different ongoing contexts. When working away from a traditional office setting, the benefits of having a learning-focused work style are heightened because there are many tools that can potentially increase one's effectiveness. Those high in learning agility will be more likely to utilize new tools and experiences, and to identify ways of leveraging effectively in a remote environment without relying on others to teach or explain them.



Achievement

Remote work environments can frequently provide workers with the exact job characteristic that many of them crave – autonomy. To thrive with the freedom afforded by being remote, initiative is required. This is the inclination to actively influence events rather than passively accepting them. Research has shown that having the freedom to plan and complete work autonomously increases trust and leads to higher motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, some people do not respond as positively to the lack of structure, barriers to support, and minimal supervision that comes with a remote work environment. They may need the extra boost of motivation that comes with a structured workplace. Additionally, getting things done virtually can feel more difficult, as it often requires a few extra steps to carry out basic tasks. For individuals who are high in initiative and more naturally action-oriented, their internal motivation often overcomes the lack of structure in the work environment and they tend to find ways to get results, remote or not.

In addition to initiative, remote workers must take ownership over how their work is done because there is no one physically present to outline priorities for them or keep them focused. Some individuals do not work as effectively when they must set their own work pace, determine their own priorities, and work autonomously toward their goals. They tend to work on those things they find more interesting or easier first, rather than those that are most important. Some people may lose motivation without having colleagues present to keep them on track or hold them accountable. These individuals benefit from the more direct oversight and informal check-ins associated with a standard office setting. When those individuals are working remotely, their work style can be detrimental. Individuals who are high in ownership are internally driven to complete their work when and as expected. They can motivate themselves to produce high-quality work in a timely manner whether they are working remotely or in an

office setting. Understanding individuals' level of ownership and work styles is important to their eventual success as a remote worker.

Decisiveness is another important asset for remote workers, enabling them to be able to make sound decisions quickly and independently. Deciding which projects to tackle, in what order to do them, and how much time to spend on each task are all basic decisions remote workers make multiple times a day. People who prefer to gather opinions and ideas before making decisions, as well as those who naturally struggle to make up their mind might feel discouraged when they are remote. Not being able to be physically close to others may make it more impractical to involve them in decisions, at times. For individuals low in decisiveness, they may delay actions waiting on feedback or hoping an issue will resolve itself. Individuals who are higher in decisiveness are less likely to notice a disruption as a result of working remotely as they already tend to quickly make sound and independent decisions but may have to work harder to vet decisions which require buy-in from partners and stakeholders.

As noted with decisiveness, remote workers must effectively manage time and resources by regularly evaluating their progress against goals and reprioritizing often. Strong prioritization skills enable remote workers to combine work and personal lives effectively. While working from home provides great opportunities for balancing the two, it also creates challenges for those who are not particularly good at managing their time or organizing their work. Individuals who do not monitor task progress and clearly schedule their workday can find themselves bouncing between work and personal tasks without being particularly effective at either. Individuals who make a more focused effort to control their work schedule by regularly evaluating and reprioritizing their work are more productive and effective in remote work settings.

Affiliation

Remote work requires people to be more proactive about building relationships when they are working away from colleagues. This means taking steps to build rapport quickly with others, gaining their trust, and cultivating long-term relationships. Remote work requires people to reach out more frequently to establish priorities and exchange relevant information. Building trust and ongoing partnerships means maintaining regular contact with people and making more time to connect with them on a personal level. With most communication occurring through technological means, making and maintaining a network of connections is more challenging and effortful. Effective remote workers allot adequate time to both relationships and tasks.

Flexibility is among one of the main drivers of success and satisfaction for remote workers because it allows people to balance work-life demands. However, adjusting to a different work environment may also require flexibility in how work is typically performed, given the differences in equipment and the absence of having other people nearby in the same physical space when working remotely. Flexibility enables remote workers to modify their attitudes, behaviors, and plans in response to changing circumstances. Those who are particularly prone to multi-tasking and who prefer to seek others' feedback may find themselves starting a lot of things but leaving them incomplete. Some people use remote working as dedicated time to complete tasks requiring uninterrupted focus, during which they may signal they are unavailable to others, and in turn, create delays for those who are dependent on them. People are more likely to be successful if they can juggle multiple competing demands, shift directions quickly, and proactively maintain a support network with colleagues when they are remote. A critical differentiator is being flexible to others' needs when working remotely, which can mean adjusting boundaries and preferences with regard to interruptions and work styles.



Conclusion

In summary, effective remote workers need to possess a mix of **Agility**, **Achievement**, and **Affiliation**. While these characteristics are important for most jobs regardless of environment, they become especially important in our world of remote work, which often presents specific challenges around social interaction, communication, and work style. Learning how to build and maintain relationships, effectively use communication channels, and adjust one's work style to be successful outside of a traditional office environment is possible. The first step in doing so requires gaining personal insight and understanding where one may need to grow and develop. With this information, a coaching discussion with a trusted colleague or manager who can help identify ways of improving, provide feedback and follow up, would further focus the individual on realizing their potential as a remote worker.

It's critical to support your employees to succeed in the new remote work environment, and completing a robust and valid personality assessment is a good place to start. This provides specific actionable insight into the three success factors for remote work as well as guidance for development. Talogy can help you with this need by providing a well-established personality instrument and personalized insight report, specifically built around the remote worker competency model.

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