



FAQs from SMART Working Ask Me Anything session: 3 April 2020

What are the biggest challenges to maintaining an effective and engaged workforce when working from home (WFH)?

- The biggest challenge for organisations is finding a balance between implementing a quick/short term fix for the current crisis where we are forced to WFH (whilst facing increased pressure on profits caused by the economic downturn), and keeping in mind the long term goal of creating a sustainable flexible working culture which will create a competitive organisational advantage, help firms to become more capital efficient and attract the best and most diverse talent
- Please refer to the [SMART Working practical recommendations](#) and the '[Let's get smarter with technology](#)' recommendations on [our website](#) to address some of the challenges that might arise during this difficult period

What have you found to be the most effective interventions that can be offered by an employer to supporting employee engagement, morale and well-being when WFH?

- Ensure firms have a good communication plan to keep employees connected. Everyone is being bombarded with news and information, so it is important to streamline what employers provide to employees to ensure that communications are not coming from different parts of the business
- Ensure managers have good guidance on how to treat employees and what their expectations should be during this WFH period, especially around what to expect from employees in different circumstances, e.g. with young families or carers. Managers should feel confident to allow their team to work flexibly around other commitments (not everyone will be able to work 9-5), so should be encouraged to make a work schedule that fits around individuals in their teams. This should be encouraged and communicated to employees from the leadership team
- Provide employees with top tips for WFH, relating to their technology - how teams can stay best connected etc
- Offer employees some light-hearted relief, such as a pub quiz, weekly photo competition, recipe cupboard hacks etc
- In terms of well-being, ensure employees feel like they can leave their desks and have time away. Perhaps encourage 1-2-1 catchups to be done whilst on your daily walk
- Please refer to the [mental health](#) and [flexible working](#) top tips for more information

How should companies and managers be supporting or adapting to employees needing to juggle working full time with childcare and/or home schooling? Should employers be expecting employees to work their full hours and if they can't, should they cut pay?

- Employers need to set clear parameters stating that they are not expecting everyone to be available all of the time. For example, some companies are not scheduling meetings between 12 and 2 to allow families to have lunch together
- If you have a family, it is important to agree a daily agenda with your partner to allow you to do childcare shifts around your work. You then need to signal times of the day that you are not available to your manager

- It is important to show that our productivity increases if we can work more efficiently in less hours, and still produce the same outcomes – this will be a great advert for the benefits of WFH
- Employers shouldn't be focusing on number of hours worked and micromanaging (and therefore cutting pay if employees can't work full hours), but instead should be focusing on productivity and outcomes

How do you think businesses will be able to support staff further in their remote set up, from a health and mobility point of view, noting in particular, many don't have the space or suitable living arrangements to set up an appropriate work space?

- Even if you only have a small space, it's important to set up a dedicated office area in your home and that you keep this space separate from other aspects of your home life. Make this space feel as much as possible like your desk in your office
- Even if your office space is cramped, it will help improve your focus and productivity, so it is very important in the long term to allow you to work as effectively as you would in the office
- Companies should be supporting you to have the best home set-up as possible, so please don't be afraid to ask for any equipment you might need to improve your office space at home
- Try to spend the time you are saving from cutting out travel to work, to do something to help your health and well-being
- Please refer to the [flexible working](#) top tips for more information

What would you do differently when setting up your remote working workforce if you had to face this, or a similar challenge, again?

- The key here is to be proactive, and not wait for a situation like this to come up again to test us on how prepared we are for flexible working
- In these current times, firms should be learning and assessing what is working and how employees could be better prepared to work remotely, both in terms of resources and infrastructure but also culture
- In 2018, our workstream looked at practical barriers to SMART working, and identified three main barriers:
 - Line management: relating to resistance to change and lack of trust. It is crucial for managers to understand different challenges employees may face and that they are focusing on outcomes, not number of hours worked. Please look out for the top tips for managers, which will be launched soon
 - Organisational culture: relating to your company's attitude towards WFH – is this seen negatively? We need to be thinking about how this experience will change our WFH culture in the long term, in a positive way, to allow for a more inclusive workforce
 - Technology: are companies investing in the technology needed to WFH and ultimately future proofing their business by investing in new ways of working?
- We need to acknowledge that our industry is behind the curve on SMART working, so we are doing a lot of catching up, which is why the pressure on employees shouldn't be as high
- Please look out for the initial findings from the Diversity Project & Timewise research on SMART working, which will be launched in May

What tips would you give to employees for maintaining a good work-life balance whilst WFH?

- There is a key difference between working from home and living at work
- Try and create structure and rhythm in your day, it is known that it takes 66 days for something to become a habit and at the moment we are experimenting on what works best for each individual
- For some, getting ready as if they are going to work and dressing accordingly has proven to be very beneficial
- Having breaks, going out to get fresh air as well as taking exercise breaks are very important to have a balanced mind during times like this
- Some companies have offered 10 additional days of holiday to unwind from work this year

- It is important to recognise when we are feeling stressed given the current circumstances and it is advised to have someone to confide in so that you are not bottling up pressures. Whether it be facetimeing a friend or talking to your partner

How can teams interact more informally?

- Setting up video conferences every other day so there is more to speak about and implementing activities such as virtual exercise, yoga/meditation sessions or drinks after work to catch up on the teams' week
- Virtual lunches and allowing time every week for virtual games
- Creating virtual private rooms for projects which can reduce emails and increase calibration and allow for team chats which you usually participate in during the office hours

What is the general view of professional expectations when you are not just WFH but WFH in the current climate?

- GOV.UK has provided clear guidelines for working from home acknowledging that certain arrangements may prevent you from working standard hours
- Don't be afraid to push back and refer to the government guidelines with your employer in order to come to an agreement on what hours are more suitable for you during the current situation
- The FCA is supporting the work of the DP SMART working workstream, we are collaborating to make sure our Industry is informed on how to arrange flexible working moving forwards

What are the positives of the current crisis and what does this mean for the future of our Industry?

- It has brought to light the need for flexibility – employee's productivity increases in the flexible working set up. For example, in the normal circumstances an investment professional might be WFH only one day per week to create space to generate strong ideas and unique investment insights.
- Flexible working is no longer assessed on a case by case basis nor being pigeonholed for employees with 'special circumstances,' currently all employees are WFH thus flexibility is encouraged across the board.
- Flexible working empowers employees to work efficiently and in a way that suits their needs with a focus on the output rather than time spent in the office. The current situation serves as a giant experiment for implementing flexible working practices.
- The question to consider is: How can we utilise the learnings after the crisis to increase flexibility, employee engagement and productivity longer term?
- Organisations should focus on implementing sustainable flexible working practices, supported by investments in technology and creating inclusive workplaces.
- This 'giant experiment' will help employees to get to know what it takes for them to perform at their best and to have an open dialog with their employer on what set up works best for them in order to be as efficient as possible and able to produce the best quality of output

How do we overcome challenges of living and working in shared accommodations?

- Create a schedule/ booking system for rooms within your households
- Adapt a flexible working schedule (morning/afternoon/evening shifts) for the week across the household and speak to your manager about your circumstances