

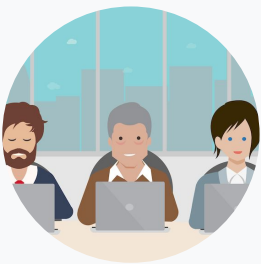
# Distributed Work @Google Playbooks



## Working together when we're not *together*: An employee's guide to distributed work

► **Background:** These playbooks were created based on external and internal research at Google and are meant to help guide you through your distributed work experiences.

Google's research shows that distributed work can be as effective as working in the same office, but it isn't always as easy or enjoyable. Here are three things employees can invest in to optimize the experience of working distributedly.



**The Place:** Focus on physical space, time zones, and technology



**The People:** Focus on relationships



**The Practices:** Focus on communication structures and norms

► **Next Steps:** Simple behaviors can help. Read on to learn best practices for working virtually related to the place, the people, and the practices. And check out tips specifically for managers and leaders.



# The Place

*An effective virtual collaboration experience starts with set-up, logistics, and the right tools.*

## Re-Tool Your Meetings:

Make sure the technology you're using for meetings helps you reach optimal levels of productivity.

- Add agendas and relevant docs to your calendar invites.
- Taking meetings from your desk? Ensure that you have a functioning camera or headset.

## Strategize Your Space:

When meeting rooms are in short supply, get creative! You don't have to let physical space get in the way of effective distributed work.

- Talk to teammates about norms for your space. Can you take meetings from your desk? If so, when?
- Dial in to meetings on your phone and find a quiet space to talk. Or look for informal spaces you don't have to book like cafeterias, coffee shops or outdoor spaces.

## Share the Time Zone Burden:

Scheduling a meeting that works for everyone is hard enough. It's easy to forget what matters to your teammates, especially time zones and personal working hours.

- Enable the world clock on your calendar and add other time zones to appear alongside yours when sending meeting invites.
- If you host a recurring meeting, try a rotating schedule to ease the time zone burden. Acknowledge those who are joining off hours, and reconsider "friendly" meeting times.

## Create a Virtual-Friendly Home Workspace:

If time zones will require occasional WFH calls with your team, set up a virtual-friendly workspace optimizing lighting, technology, and backdrop (recognizing that creation of such a space may set a norm for others on your team).



# The People

*Building and maintaining relationships is important for collaboration across distance.*

## Get Talking:

A little rapport goes a long way. Create opportunities to get to know your distributed teammates just like you would if they sat in the next cube over.

- Start your meetings with an open-ended, personal question. Try “what did you do this weekend?” (You’ll get more than asking “how was your weekend”).
- Consider creating a group chat that is always “on” for work-related questions or fun, social messages.
- Share a virtual meal over video conferencing. But keep time zones in mind - your lunch may be someone’s breakfast or afternoon tea.
- Say hi! Check in on a distributed teammate with an encouraging message, a project-relevant news article, or a funny photo - just because! Pick up the phone or send an email to a colleague and ask about their day, weekend plans, etc.
- Share quick daily updates via email (even better if photos are included).
- Take teammates on a virtual tour of your office space over video conferencing.

## Appreciate Differences:

Cultural differences influence how people like to be visible or receive recognition, the way people act, and how people interpret the actions of others - but we’re not always aware of how culture influences behavior, experiences, or workstyle.

- Reflect: Some behaviors required for distributed work aren’t comfortable for various cultural identities, norms, or personalities.
- Teach a teammate something new about your culture (e.g., words in a new language, holidays/cultural traditions).
- Use meetings to discuss how distributed colleagues can be heard, supported, and included.

## Be Present:

Some engagement signals are lost when working together virtually, particularly when we mute the microphone or focus intently on our laptops. Be sure to:

- Unmute your microphone and validate contributions from others. A head nod, “mmhmm”, or “yeah, good idea” will do it!
- Keep laptops closed and phones face down, unless you’re the note-taker.
- Ensure you’re clearly visible on the the video screen by zooming in, making eye contact, and expressing your reactions noticeably.

## Prioritize Team Meetings:

These are often some of the only interactions you’ll have with your team when working apart so schedule them, prioritize them even if it there isn’t anything urgent, and be socially present. If the agenda is light on a given day, use the time to get to know the other person better.

## Recognize Your Teammates:

When working remotely, it isn’t as easy to say a quick “thanks” or “good job” to a teammate. Be sure to send a message to a colleague congratulating or thanking them, share kudos in team meetings, and utilize your company’s recognition program. And check out [Google’s research on gratitude here](#).



# The Practices

*Having a plan for communication, structures, and norms is critical for virtual teams.*

## Reach Out:

It can be hard for teammates in other locations to be heard, as they often have to overcome barriers to jump in and share. You can help create the space for them to speak up.

- Ask for input from the most isolated meeting participant any time the meeting breaks into a discussion.
- If you see someone trying to enter the conversation, stop and invite their comments.

## Set Team Norms:

Norms set clear expectations for how you work together with your team. But they're often assumed rather than explicitly stated, leaving opportunities for confusion.

- Discuss, establish and document communication and decision making norms with your colleagues (e.g., answering emails/pings off-hours, how often will you stay in touch, information-sharing across time zones).
- Be sure to communicate frequently and openly. When remote team colleagues can count on being able to quickly receive the information that they need to, this improves the trust among team members and can aid in the efficient transfer of key, task-relevant knowledge.

## Match the Comms Channel to the Need:

Video is best for more sensitive or detailed discussions, while a quick message is great for check-ins or clarifying simple matters. Don't default to a message when a richer format is warranted; don't force a formal video meeting when an email is enough.

## Make the Most of Meetings:

Fewer opportunities to connect necessitate good meeting hygiene. Set meeting agendas in advance, kick off meetings by recapping where things left off previously, and be mindful of timing to avoid ending a meeting without getting through key agenda items.

## Don't Wait for a Formal Meeting if you Don't Need to:

Physical distance and time zones can lead some people to avoid communicating as much as they need to. If something comes up that you'd normally ask an in-person colleague about right away, don't let physical distance stop you; message or call your colleague to keep progress moving. When remote team members can count on being able to quickly receive information they need, trust improves more quickly.

## Prioritize Your Well-being:

Focus on your well-being while working from home by setting up a comfortable office space to physically separate your work and home life; setting limits on your workday so that you don't accidentally work more hours than normal; achieving your stand goal by getting up at least every hour. Mindfulness is another useful tool to increase well-being and focus, while relieving stress.

# Additional Tips for Managers/Leaders

## ▶ The Place

### Ensure Sufficient Private Meeting Spaces for you and Your Team:

Virtual work requires more private meeting spaces than in-person work. Ensure your team's space matches the amount and type of virtual work you'll need to do. Configure more private rooms if needed.

### Leverage Internal Technology to Promote Smoother Remote Collaboration:

Work with your organization to install the latest and greatest collaboration technology across your team's space to avoid echoes, interruptions, or freezes, and facilitate all types of work. Consider installing a private video conferencing unit in your office to convert the space to a virtual meeting room anytime.

## ▶ The People

### Create a Shared Identity Among the Team:

This will build "perceived proximity" and camaraderie even when physical proximity is missing. Start by setting a strong vision and rally the team around it.

### Connect in Person Early and as Often as Needed:

Getting to know people in person via an office visit sets the tone for successful virtual collaborations later. If you haven't worked closely with folks before, meet in person as soon as possible and try to bring your full team together in one location as often as makes sense. Or if you're hosting team building events in separate locations, make an effort to be there in person. During site visits:

- Aim for plenty of informal time (e.g., work side-by-side instead of a formal off-site).
- Learn about others' goals, preferences, and styles to facilitate working relationships when apart.

## ▶ The Practices

### Set Team Norms:

- Clarify task expectations and ownership with your team. From the start, make sure you have clarity on which pieces of work each person/team owns and your expectations of them. Let your team know when they have authority to keep progress moving when you're unreachable, and when you prefer they loop you in first.
- Ensure your team has a shared vision to help teammates across locations align to a broader goal.
- Create norms for when team members should and shouldn't join meetings off-hours.
- Share task-oriented information early as it can help to acclimate the team to the overarching goals of the project and set a clear direction for the individual team members to work towards.
- Ensure that your team's well-being is supported no matter where they work.
- Set clear guidelines and budgets for when team members can travel - it's one of the best ways to support distributed work!

### Create Interdependent Tasks:

These are tasks that are organized to require the team to work together to accomplish them. A shared task structure facilitates team member interaction and helps to create superordinate goals that the team can identify with and focus on achieving together.