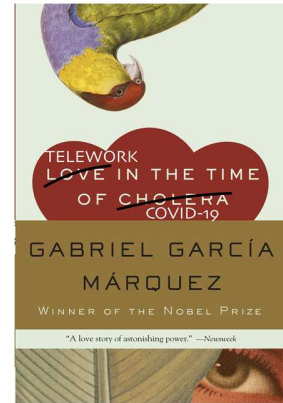ISGlobal

Telework in the time of Covid-19

Alicia Abellan, Paula de Prado, and Maribel Casas

How to manage your work during the current crisis

First of all, we should assume and accept our life is experiencing drastic changes. We cannot detach ourselves from the extraordinary situation we are living in and thus should not expect to keep our top-speed productivity. It takes some time to accept the changes and adapt to them, allow yourself some time for it.

We recommend reading this chronicle on how to adapt to situations of crisis by Aisha Ahmad, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Toronto: "**Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure**":

https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-You-Should-Ignore-All-That/248366

Be patient and gentle with yourself! Be aware that the current situation is extraordinary (totally new and unexpected) for everyone and each of us needs its personal time to adapt to it. It is okay if one day you are 100% productive and the next you are not at all.

General tips for individual managing of telework

- **Create a working environment.** If you have an office-like room at home, perfect! However, most of us might not have such space or are sharing with other people. In that case, agree what will be that working zone and the times for that. Use that place only to work. For example, if you use the dining table to work, sit in a different place from the one you sit when you eat.
- **Use a calendar** to create an overview of the deadlines. First, a mid to long term calendar, then use it to set your weekly calendar.
- **Set your short-term goals that will lead you to achieve your long-term goals.** Make sure that you do not try to overachieve, since this can lead you to stress and frustration, and thus, lower your productivity. Trello (https://trello.com/) is a good tool to establish and visualise them.

A good technique to set realistic goals is the SMARTE technique:

Specific: break the general task into small tasks. Specify them to make it the easiest possible for you to know what you need to do to complete that task: what you exactly need to do, where to find what you need, etc.

Measurable: some tasks are easier than others to identify they are done. Write down how will you know they are done.

Achievable: make sure the goal is realistic and not too ambitious. That it is realistic. It is important to consider the situation and the current exceptional conditions. Remember that the goal of setting goals is to be able to achieve them!

Relevant: make sure that the goal is in line with your other goals and that is relevant for your progress.

Time-bound: set the task in a timeframe. Sometimes big tasks might make you feel they are never-ending, and thus leading you to tiredness or frustration. It can help to set a timeframe for that task so you know when it will be over and might motivate you.

Evaluable: make you own evaluation of what works and what doesn't for you and change what doesn't.

- **Feel connected to your team.** Share your thoughts, your struggles and your progress. Stay connected with your work colleagues and share your concerns and fears with them not just regarding work, also your daily tips for teleworking. You could discover new ways of working and manage the situation.
- **Struggle to focus?** The current conditions and the environment at home might not be the best to focus as much as they might be in the office. Finding and accountability partner might help you stay on track. Sharing your goals and work plans with a colleague might help you achieve them. A technique to improve your focus is Pomodoro. It consists on setting work intervals separated by short breaks. Links to example tools:
https://tomato-timer.com/
https://apps.apple.com/es/app/be-focused-focus-timer/id973130201
- **Take breaks! And make sure they are "good breaks".** Keep in mind that your brain needs this time to keep working efficiently. A good break should not be considered as a reward. The aim of a good break is to provide your brain the necessary energy to keep going. If you follow the pomodoro technique, examples for the small 5-minute-break are: stretching, breathing fresh air, making coffee. Checking social media (twitter, instagram, whatsapp…) is not a good break, since it is usually full of stimuli that our brain will not be able to process and won't let it relax.

- **Create a morning routine to gradually activate your brain.** Maybe meditation or yoga to begin with, a good breakfast followed by an activity that you enjoy and distracts you (reading, painting, doing sudokus ...) for a short period of time (15 minutes) before sitting down and starting the day.
- It could be a good moment for **learning new ways and tools for managing self-demand and frustration** as during these days these feelings may appear more easily. Try to see it as a new personal challenge and as something positive for your following academic, professional and personal life!
- **Keep the work-life balance.** While working from home, it is easy to uneven the work-life balance. Each person will live this time in a different environment. Some will be supportive to keep the balance, some will not. It is a good idea to make some a-priori decisions of how you will keep the work-life balance within your environment. It is necessary to establish when are you working and when are you taking time off as far as possible. It is as important to establish your working time as it is to establish your time-off. Make sure you mentally get away of your work when you are off.

SPECIFIC TIPS FOR EACH SITUATION

Living with little kids: we recommend watching the video that Oriana Ramírez did for ISGlobalians on how to do the quarantine with children: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1htUD9g8lAIV4WmDLCC2MLnjPkE7EtIBu/view and this one on BBC (made by a Catalan family): https://www.bbc.com/reel/video/p0885wz7/the-reality-of-confinement-with-a-four-year-old

Living with adolescents: consider everyone's needs and make a joint agreement on the way you will together deal with the situation in a way that everyone is comfortable. For adolescents, it is a very stressful and complex situation to deal with, since they might have stronger social needs. Listen to their needs, respect them and maybe be more flexible with the limits than usual. They should also feel part of the home-duties, this means involving them into the household tasks. Put mutual respect into the front line.

Living alone: keep social contact almost every day with your family or friends. It is important to explain your worries and how you feel these days. Make a good plan of activities and do not feel guilty if you do not follow them. Try to think in a short-term basis and give you some gifts such as a good dinner.

Living with flatmates: make a joint agreement on the times and areas designated to work. Schedule working hours and free time hours during the week as well as the rooms each activity will take place. Try to share how you feel openly and any concerns that you might have regarding the way you are managing the situation with your flatmates, they are your "confinement team"! Be mutually supportive!

Living with a person who is in need of care: keep some time each day to take care of yourself. Caring for a person, especially if he/she is ill, is not only time consuming but also emotionally demanding. It is difficult to disconnect from this stressful situation during confinement, so make sure that you keep some time away from work and your caring obligations to do something by yourself.

Healthy remote work culture
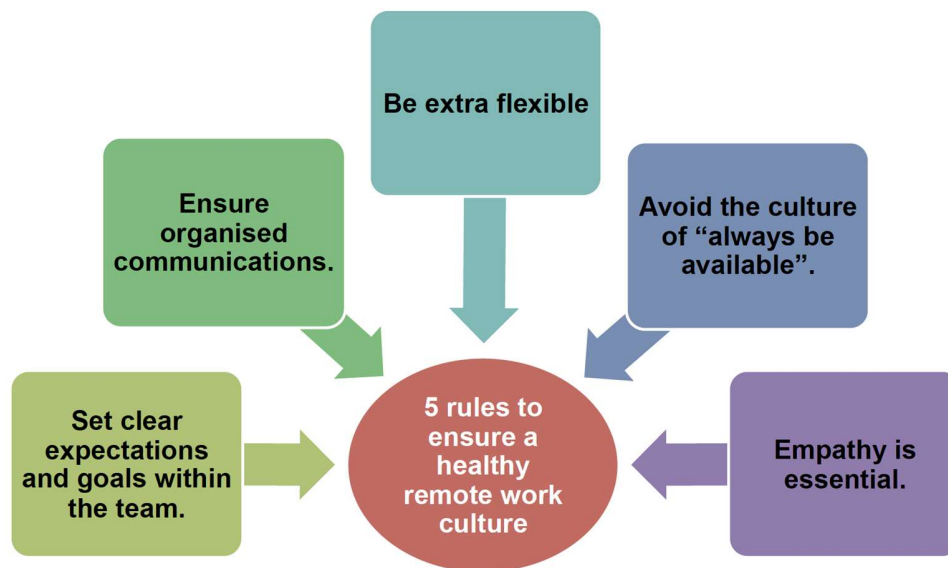
- **Set clear expectations and goals within the team**: so that everyone is aware of the needs, objectives, and deadlines to be met. It is a time in which we need to trust each other and be realistic with what we can and cannot accomplish.
- **Ensure organised communications:** agree on what is an adequate frequency of virtual meetings and which will be the channel used for communication. Make structured meetings determining each time a chairperson and a person to collect and write the final decisions. Since a face-to-face communication is not possible while teleworking, the tools a team will use are of special relevance as they become the basis of the team communication. Some tools for improving remote communication can be found in the following section of "Materials of Interest".
- **Be extra flexible:** During this exceptional time, we might change our windows of time to get work done. The context that each of us is facing at home differs, and it could result in different working hours between workers. We should be flexible, accepting more asynchronous work and being aware that things do not have to happen instantly.
- **Avoid the culture of "always available":** teleworking is not synonymous of being available for 24 hours, the feeling of always having to be connected could cause unnecessary pressure. A healthy

way of managing it might be the transparent communication of your working hours to your colleagues and of the reality that you might be facing at home, which is currently also the workplace.

- **Empathy is essential:** non-verbal communication, which plays a significant role in any conversation, might be difficult to perceive in a videoconference, a call or an email. It is important to be assertive to ensure your message is perceived as you meant it and that you speak to your colleagues with a positive attitude. Additionally, build an environment in which everyone feels comfortable to share their context and feelings, in case they need to express themselves.

Materials of interest

ISGlobal teleworking resources: just remind you that to have access to internals resources and services (Intranet, PurchasesWeb, SBO, FileSystem, Computing servers) you have to use remote connections tool (VPN).

- Free tools for connecting between co-workers (https://www.owllabs.com/blog/video-conferencing-tools):
  - **Google Hangouts**: https://hangouts.google.com/. It allows videoconferences up to 15 participants.
  - **Meet:** https://meet.google.com/?pli=1&authuser=0. It allows videoconferences up to 15 participants.
  - **GoToMeeting** (G2M): have a look at the guide prepared by ISGlobal SRI on "How to organize a videoconference with G2M": "Basic instruction for video conferencing Web App management (with GotoMeeting)". It allows videoconferences up to 100 participants, screen sharing and scheduled meetings, among other features.
  - **ZOOM**: Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing. It allows videoconferences up to 100 participants, screen sharing and scheduled meetings, among other features. Please, be aware that important security and privacy issues have recently been detected with this tool, which could compromise the confidentiality and security of your collaborative work. If you still decide to continue using Zoom, you have to update it to the latest available version and check that your computer's antivirus and antimalware are also fully up-to-date.
  - **JITSI**: Jitsi.org - develop and deploy full-featured video conferencing. It allows videoconferences up to 200 participants.
  - **SKYPE**: Skype | Herramienta de comunicación para chats y llamadas gratis. It allows videoconferences up to 50 participants, screen sharing and video call recording, among other features.
  - **FREE CONFERENCE**: Free Conference Calling Services | FreeConference.com. Ideal for smaller teams or meetings as it allows videoconference up to 5 participants, screen sharing and document sharing, among other features.

- **SLACK**: [El motor de tu trabajo](). It is a collaborative tool, that can help your team to work more easily. It helps your team to work online in an efficient way, creating different channels to communicate with your work colleagues and share files. You can create organized conversations that can be private or open, make slack calls (with voice and/or video) or consult the history to find previous files, channels or relevant messages.
    - **TRELLO**: https://trello.com/. It is a collaborative platform to organise teams and keep track of the progress.
- Webinar from University of Southern Denmark about teleworking: https://mitsdu.dk/en/vejledning/vejledning/studieogtrivsel
- The Guardian article: "Start a daily routine – and make the weekends different': the isolation experts' guide to lockdown living": https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/apr/01/start-a-daily-routine-and-make-the-weekends-different-the-isolation-experts-guide-to-lockdown-living-coronavirus
- A video from a nuclear submarine captain: https://www.bbc.com/reel/playlist/world-in-lockdown?vpid=p0884k8x

And finally, music is always a good way to disconnect or to focus during your work, enjoy them!

[STAY HOMAS, Josep Montero - The Bright Side (Confination Song IX)]()

[STAY HOMAS, Judit Neddermann - Gotta Be Patient (Confination Song VI)]()