



Remote Working Approaches That Worked (And Some That Didn't)

Charles Humble





In 2009 “40% of some 386,000 employees in 173 countries have no office at all.”

Source:

http://www-01.ibm.com/industries/government/ieg/pdf/working_outside_the_box.pdf



The 105-year-old technology giant is quietly dismantling its popular decades-old remote work program to bring employees back into offices, a move it says will improve collaboration and accelerate the pace of work.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ibm-a-pioneer-of-remote-work-calls-workers-back-to-the-office-1495108802>

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IBM, a Pioneer of Remote Work, Calls Workers Back to the Office

Big Blue says move will improve collaboration and accelerate the pace of work



The shift is particularly surprising since IBM has been among the business world's staunchest boosters of remote work, both for itself and its customers. PHOTO: REUTERS

By *John Simons*

May 18, 2017 8:00 a.m. ET

478 COMMENTS



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YAHOO!

701 FIRST AVENUE





Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home. We need to be one Yahoo!, and that starts with physically being together.

<http://allthingsd.com/20130222/physically-together-heres-the-internal-yahoo-no-work-from-home-memo-which-extends-beyond-remote-workers/>

The screenshot shows the top portion of a web article. At the top is the 'All Things D' logo. Below it is a navigation bar with links for News, Reviews, Mobile, Media, Social, Enterprise, Commerce, Voices, and Conferer. A 'Trending' section features the headline 'You Say Goodbye and We Say Hello' with a 'Follow @karaswisher' button. The author's name, 'Kara Swisher', is displayed with a small profile picture and links for 'ethics statement', 'bio', 'e-mail', 'RSS', and another 'Follow @karaswisher' button. The main article title is '“Physically Together”’: Here’s the Internal Yahoo No-Work-From-Home Memo for Remote Workers and Maybe More'. Below the title is a date and time stamp: 'FEBRUARY 22, 2013 AT 10:18 PM PT', followed by social sharing icons for Tweet, Share, G+, LinkedIn, and Print. The article text begins with 'Courtesy of a plethora of very irked Yahoo employees, here is the internal memo sent to the company about a new rule rolled out today by CEO Marissa Mayer, which requires that Yahoo employees who work remotely relocate to company facilities. “Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home,” reads the memo to



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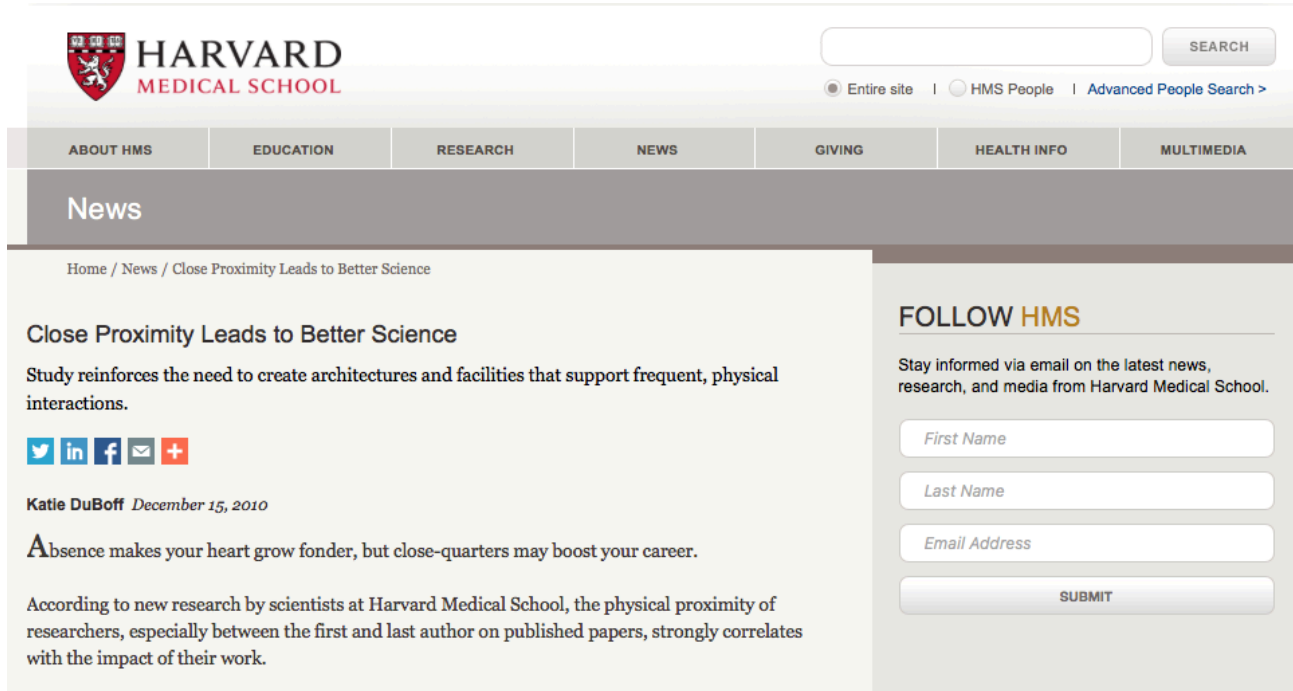
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Why this talk



The screenshot shows the Harvard Medical School website. At the top left is the Harvard Medical School logo. To the right is a search bar with a 'SEARCH' button. Below the search bar are navigation links: 'Entire site', 'HMS People', and 'Advanced People Search >'. A horizontal menu contains links for 'ABOUT HMS', 'EDUCATION', 'RESEARCH', 'NEWS', 'GIVING', 'HEALTH INFO', and 'MULTIMEDIA'. Below this is a 'News' section header. The main content area shows a breadcrumb trail 'Home / News / Close Proximity Leads to Better Science' and the article title 'Close Proximity Leads to Better Science'. The article text states: 'Study reinforces the need to create architectures and facilities that support frequent, physical interactions.' Below the text are social media icons for Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Email, and a plus sign. The author is 'Katie DuBoff' with the date 'December 15, 2010'. The article begins with 'Absence makes your heart grow fonder, but close-quarters may boost your career.' and continues with 'According to new research by scientists at Harvard Medical School, the physical proximity of researchers, especially between the first and last author on published papers, strongly correlates with the impact of their work.' On the right side of the page is a 'FOLLOW HMS' section with a sub-header 'Stay informed via email on the latest news, research, and media from Harvard Medical School.' Below this are three input fields labeled 'First Name', 'Last Name', and 'Email Address', followed by a 'SUBMIT' button.

HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

SEARCH

● Entire site | ○ HMS People | [Advanced People Search >](#)

ABOUT HMS | EDUCATION | RESEARCH | NEWS | GIVING | HEALTH INFO | MULTIMEDIA

News

Home / News / Close Proximity Leads to Better Science

Close Proximity Leads to Better Science

Study reinforces the need to create architectures and facilities that support frequent, physical interactions.

[Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Facebook](#) [Email](#) [+](#)

Katie DuBoff December 15, 2010

Absence makes your heart grow fonder, but close-quarters may boost your career.

According to new research by scientists at Harvard Medical School, the physical proximity of researchers, especially between the first and last author on published papers, strongly correlates with the impact of their work.

FOLLOW HMS

Stay informed via email on the latest news, research, and media from Harvard Medical School.

First Name

Last Name

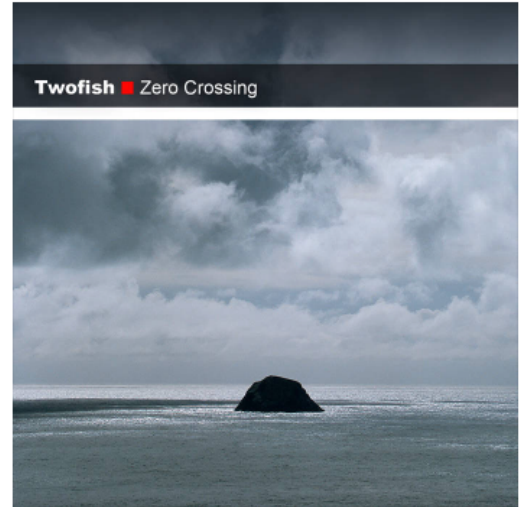
Email Address

SUBMIT

<https://hms.harvard.edu/news/close-proximity-leads-better-science>

@charleshumble

- Have done most things in IT from desktop support to CTO
- First managed a team in 1997
- Became editor-in-chief of InfoQ in 2014
- Also play in a band





Why this talk

- Remote only company with a unique culture
- InfoQ operates world-wide with an audience of around 1.5 million
- 7 QCons around the world





Remote working upsides

- If you are an introvert, or on the autism spectrum, not having to always interact with people face to face can be liberating
- Working remotely means that you can flex your work around your life more



Remote working upsides

- No commute
- Amazing peace and quiet meaning you can really concentrate and do proper deep work
- A work environment that you can tailor to your own personal needs



But ...

- Being able to flex your work time around your life also means you need to be very, very disciplined about actually doing work

Mitigations

- Some sort of time management system

Getting Things Done
the art of stress-free
productivity

from the New York Times bestselling author

David Allen



OmniFocus sidebar navigation:

- Inbox
- Projects
- Tags
- Forecast
- Flagged
- Review

Calendar view (Today: 5, Future: 0)

Forecast

43 Inbox Items, 4 actions

Today — Tue 19 Mar
5 items • 5 due soon

Transit	charles@c4media.com	11:00 - 14:30
Editorial Standup	charles@c4media.com	14:45 - 15:00
★ Extended Mgmt Standup	charles@c4media.com	15:15 - 15:30
Reminder: Company Meeting 2019 - Book your flight & Fill in the form		17:00
Write up idea for popular in primary topic - popular across InfoQ		17:00
Speakers-for-artiles-QCon-London		17:00
Morning Paper		17:00
Stats for editors		17:00
Dates for mum		17:00
Ring-Pizza-Express		17:00
Reply-to-Stewart		17:00
Music	charles@c4media.com	18:00 - Tomorrow

Tomorrow — Wed 20 Mar
no items

Stay at Park Plaza London Riverbank	charles@c4media.com	All Day
Music	charles@c4media.com	Tuesday - 01:00
Editorial budget call-Monthly	charles@c4media.com	14:00 - 14:45
InfoQ Growth Initiative	charles@c4media.com	16:00 - 17:00

Thu 21 Mar
no items

Stay at Park Plaza London Riverbank	charles@c4media.com	All Day
Aginext.io	Charles Work	All Day
Editorial Weekly Call	charles@c4media.com	09:00 - 10:30
Aginext.io London 2019	charles@c4media.com	09:15 - Friday
Ticket: Aginext.io London 2019	Charles Work	09:15 - Friday
Roxana and Charles - one on one	charles@c4media.com	10:30 - 11:15
Ana - one on one	charles@c4media.com	11:30 - 12:00
Ana Charles One on One	charles@c4media.com	12:00 - 12:30
InfoQ Product (re-design, P&S, etc.)	charles@c4media.com	12:45 - 13:35
Editorial Standup	charles@c4media.com	14:45 - 15:00
★ Extended Mgmt Standup	charles@c4media.com	15:15 - 15:30
★ Weekly Management Meeting	charles@c4media.com	17:00 - 19:00
QCon.ai Committee Meeting	charles@c4media.com	19:00 - 20:00

Fri 22 Mar
no items

Stay at Park Plaza London Riverbank	charles@c4media.com	All Day
Aginext.io	Charles Work	All Day
Aginext.io London 2019	charles@c4media.com	Thursday - 18:15
Ticket: Aginext.io London 2019	Charles Work	Thursday - 18:15

Stats for editors

Inbox Item
Status: Active

Project: [Dropdown]

Tags
[+]

Dates
Estimated Duration: [Input]
Defer Until: [Dropdown]
Due: 19/03/2019, 17:00
Completed: [Input]
Added: 14/03/2019, 10:29
Changed: 18/03/2019, 21:07

Repeat
Repeat Every: [Dropdown] Weeks

Notifications
Due: Today, 17:00
Add Notification [Dropdown]

Note
Add a note [Text Area]

Pomodoro

- Helpful when you need to blast through something (like email):
 - Choose a task
 - Set a timer for 25 minutes
 - Work on the task until the Pomodoro rings
 - Take a short break
 - Every 4 pomodoros, take a longer break



Separate Office

Video: 1982: Pebble Mill
at One: Roald Dahl

[https://www.facebook.com/
bbcfour/videos/474640292909006/](https://www.facebook.com/bbcfour/videos/474640292909006/)





I'm allowed to sit at my desk, I'm allowed to stare out at the world, I'm allowed to do anything I like, as long as it isn't anything.

What I love about that is I'm giving myself permission to write or not write, but writing is actually more interesting than doing nothing after a while.

Neil Gaiman

<https://tim.blog/2019/03/28/neil-gaiman/>

MARCH 28, 2019 BY TIM FERRISS

Neil Gaiman — The Interview I've Waited 20 Years to Do (#366)

46 COMMENTS

TOPICS: THE TIM FERRISS SHOW

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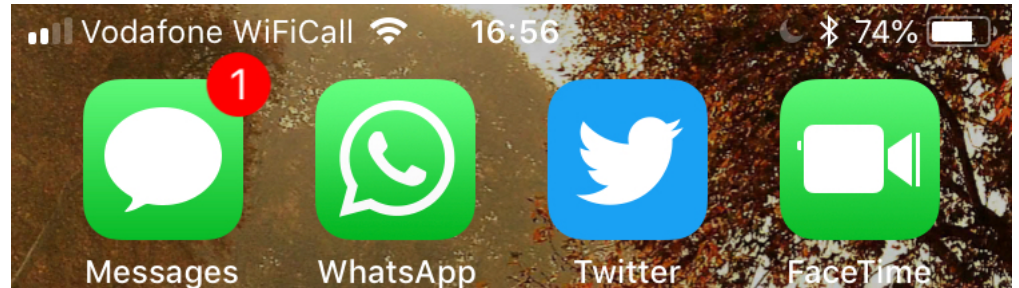
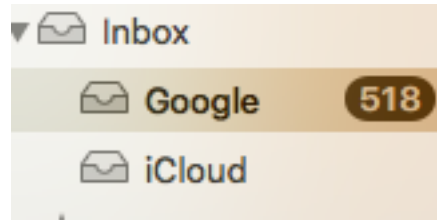
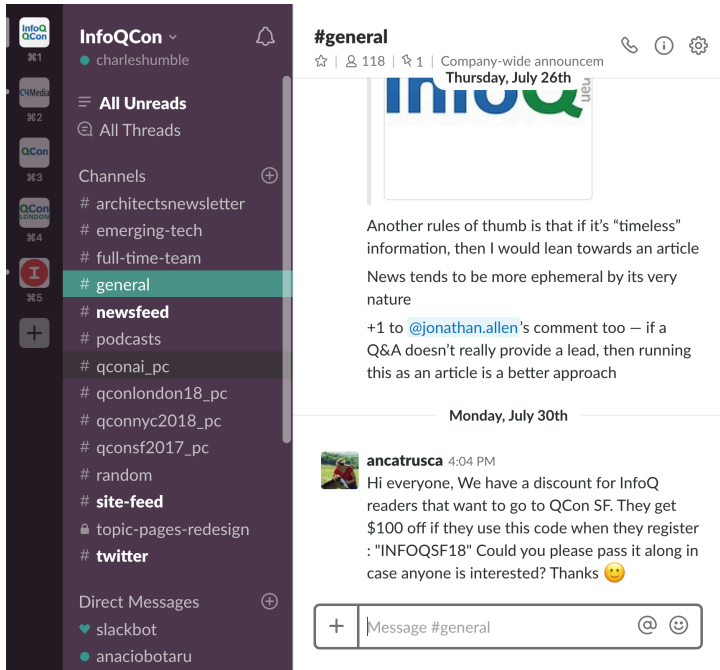
"The biggest problem we run into is going, 'This is who I am, this is what I'm like, this is how I function' while failing to notice that you don't do that anymore."

— Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman ([@neilhimsself](#)) is the bestselling author and creator of books, graphic novels, short stories, film and television for all ages, including [Neverwhere](#), [Coraline](#), [The Graveyard Book](#), [The Ocean at the End of the Lane](#), [The View from the Cheap Seats](#) and the [Sandman series of graphic novels](#). His fiction has received Newbery and Carnegie Medals, and Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, Bram Stoker, and Will Eisner Awards, among many other awards and honors.

- 
- Amazing peace and quiet when you can really concentrate and do proper deep work

- Amazing peace and quiet when you can really concentrate and do proper deep work
- Hmm....



Hmmm...



Mitigations

- You probably need a company-wide communication policy
- “Do not disturb” is your friend

A screenshot of a Slack notification card. At the top, there are two toggle switches: "NIGHT SHIFT" which is turned OFF, and "DO NOT DISTURB" which is turned ON. Below the toggles, the weather forecast for Friday, 23rd February is shown, indicating a high of 4° and a low of -4°. A calendar event is also mentioned: "The first thing on your calendar today is '15Five and weekly review', and it started over an hour ago."

A screenshot of a Slack user profile menu for a user named Charles Humble. The menu includes options such as "Set a status", "Profile & account", "Preferences", "Set yourself to away" (highlighted in blue), and "Help & feedback". Below the menu, the workspace name "c4media" and its Slack URL "c4media.slack.com" are displayed, along with options to "Customize Slack", "Analytics", and "Sign out of c4media". At the bottom, there is a link to "Sign in to another workspace ...".



Deep Work

- Bill Gates famously conducted “think weeks” twice a year

Deep Work

- Bill Gates famously conducted “think weeks” twice a year
- It was during a 1995 Think week that Gates wrote his famous “Internet Tidal Wave” memo that turned Microsoft’s attention to Netscape.

To Executive Staff and direct reports
From Bill Gates
Date May 26, 1995

The Internet Tidal Wave

Our vision for the last 20 years can be summarized in a succinct way. We saw that exponential improvements in computer capabilities would make great software quite valuable. Our response was to build an organization to deliver the best software products. In the next 20 years the improvement in computer power will be outpaced by the exponential improvements in communications networks. The combination of these elements will have a fundamental impact on work, learning and play. Great software products will be crucial to delivering the benefits of these advances. Both the variety and volume of software will increase.

Most users of communications have not yet seen the price of communications come down significantly. Cable and phone networks are still depreciating networks built with old technology. Universal service monopolies, and other government's involvement around the world have kept communications costs high. Private networks and the Internet which are built using state of the art equipment have been the primary beneficiaries of improved communication technology. The PC is just now starting to create additional demand that will drive a new wave of investment. A combination of expanded access to the Internet, ISDN, new broadband networks justified by video based applications and interconnections between each of these will bring low cost communication to most businesses and homes within the next decade.

The Internet is at the forefront of all of this and developments on the Internet over the next several years will set the course of our industry for a long time to come. Perhaps you have already seen memos from me or others here about the importance of the Internet. I have gone through several stages of increasing my view of its importance. Now I assign the Internet the highest level of importance. In this memo I want to make clear that our focus on the Internet is crucial to every part of our business. The Internet is the most important single development to come along since the IBM PC was introduced in 1981. It is even more important than the arrival of graphical user interface (GUI). The PC analogy is apt for many reasons. The PC wasn't perfect. Aspects of the PC were arbitrary or even poor. However a phenomena grew up around the IBM PC that made it a key element of everything that would happen for the next 15 years. Companies that tried to fight the PC standard often had good reasons for doing so but they failed because the phenomena overcame any weaknesses that resisters identified.

The Internet Today

The Internet's unique position arises from a number of elements. The TCP/IP protocols that define its transport level support distributed computing and scale incredibly well. The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) has defined an evolutionary path that will avoid it running into future problems even as virtually everyone on the planet connects up. The HTTP protocols that define HTML Web browsing are extremely simple and have allowed servers to handle incredible traffic reasonably well. All of the predictions about hypertext - made decades ago by pioneers like Ted Nelson - are coming true on the Web. Although other protocols on the Internet will continue to be used (FTP, Gopher, IRC, Telnet, SMTP, NNTP), HTML with extensions will be the standard that defines how information will be presented. Various extensions to HTML, including content enhancements like tables, and functionality enhancements like secure transactions, will be widely adopted in the near future. There will also be enhanced 3D presentations providing for virtual reality type shopping and socialization.

M 1028049
CONFIDENTIAL

Microsoft Confidential

MS98 0112876
CONFIDENTIAL

If you are interested in exploring this topic more I recommend reading Deep Work by Carl Newport





But ...

- No commute means less time for reading/listening to podcasts/whatever it is you do on your commute
- Less exercise: you won't be walking to the bus/train/office

Mitigations

- Schedule time for yourself to, for example, go for a walk/run every day
- Get a fitness tracker





A big win for remote work

- A work environment that you can tailor to your own personal needs
- I have worked in some truly terrible offices





Sign me up

- Look into how much it might cost
 - Is your computer up to the task? Do you have a decent monitor? Keyboard?
 - Do you have/can you get high speed internet?
 - How much is a good office chair?



Mental Health

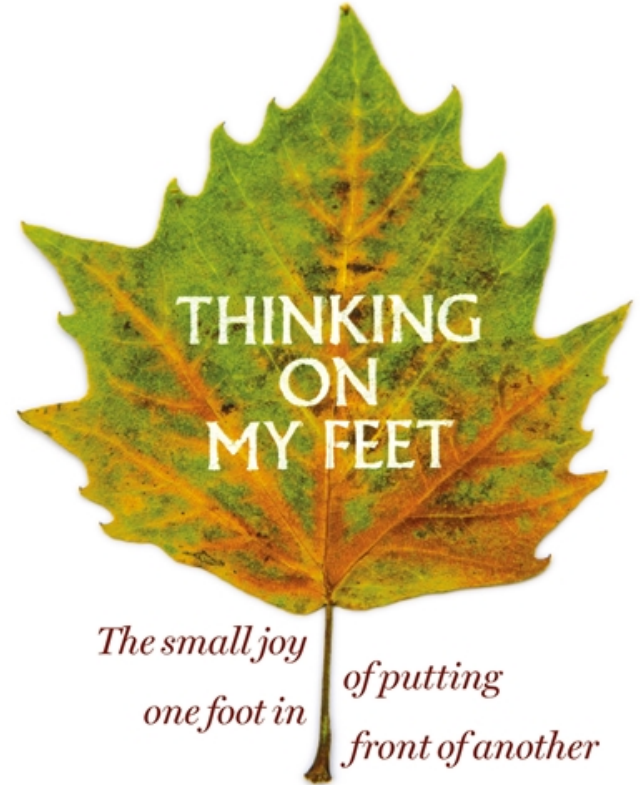
- Burnout is a real, serious issue.
- Loneliness can be a real problem.
- Make your social life (and your family) a real priority.
- Also pets can help.



Mental Health

- There is a growing body of evidence that getting out in nature really helps.
- There are a lot of aspects of C4 Media's organizational design which specifically help with this

Kate Humble





Make remote work work

Upsides for a remote company:

- Your overheads are low
- If you get your hiring right your employees are happier and more productive
- You can hire the best people because location is largely irrelevant



A remote team may be less productive than that same team if it were co-located, but may still be more productive than the best co-located team you can form.

Martin Fowler

<https://www.martinfowler.com/articles/remote-or-co-located.html>

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the article 'Remote versus Co-located Work' on the website martinFowler.com. The page has a dark blue header with the site name, a search bar, and navigation links for 'Refactoring', 'Agile', 'Architecture', 'About', 'ThoughtWorks', and social media icons. The article title is in a large, bold font. Below the title is a paragraph of text, followed by the date '19 October 2015'. A profile picture of Martin Fowler is shown next to his name. A 'CONTENTS' section lists several sub-topics with blue links. Below this is a list of tags: AGILE, PRODUCTIVITY, TEAM ENVIRONMENT, TEAM ORGANIZATION, and COLLABORATION. The main body of the article begins with a paragraph discussing the consequences of the information age.

martinFowler.com

[Refactoring](#) [Agile](#) [Architecture](#) [About](#) [ThoughtWorks](#)

Remote versus Co-located Work

There isn't a simple dichotomy of remote versus co-located work, instead there are several patterns of distribution for teams each of which has different trade-offs and effective techniques suitable for them. While it's impossible to determine conclusive evidence, my sense is that most groups are more productive working in a co-located manner. But you can build a more productive team by using a distributed working model, because it gives you access to a wider talent pool.

19 October 2015

Martin Fowler

CONTENTS

- [The Many Shades of Remoteness](#)
- [Most people are more productive when co-located](#)
- [Remote teams are often more productive](#)
- [Pay attention to communication patterns](#)
- [Remoteness and Agile](#)
- [Conclusions](#)

[AGILE](#)

[PRODUCTIVITY](#)

[TEAM ENVIRONMENT](#)

[TEAM ORGANIZATION](#)

[COLLABORATION](#)

One of the most profound consequences of the information age is the ability to do so many things while ignoring location. I no longer need to visit most shops, libraries, or travel agents. (I'm looking forward to the day I don't have to visit a dentist.) Most of the world has seen this, but it's particularly obvious to software developers, who are generally at the front of the digital transformation.

Yet when it comes to developing software, many developers do not take advantage of the communication possibilities of connected computers. Yahoo got a lot of press



Hiring

Location isn't entirely irrelevant

- Some countries have very complex tax regimes you need to understand
- Not all locations have decent internet (even in the UK!)
- Timezones can be a problem at scale



Hiring

Interviewing remotely is particularly hard:

- Have a probation period of, say, 3 months
- For key hires fly them somewhere and meet in person
- Have a really robust onboarding process



Trust

These are C4 Media's core values:

- Transparency
- Integrity
- Continuous Improvement
- Service
- Accountability



Transparency can create a shared sense of purpose

We have a one page business plan and a set of dashboards in Google that are open to everyone in the company



Communication: meetings

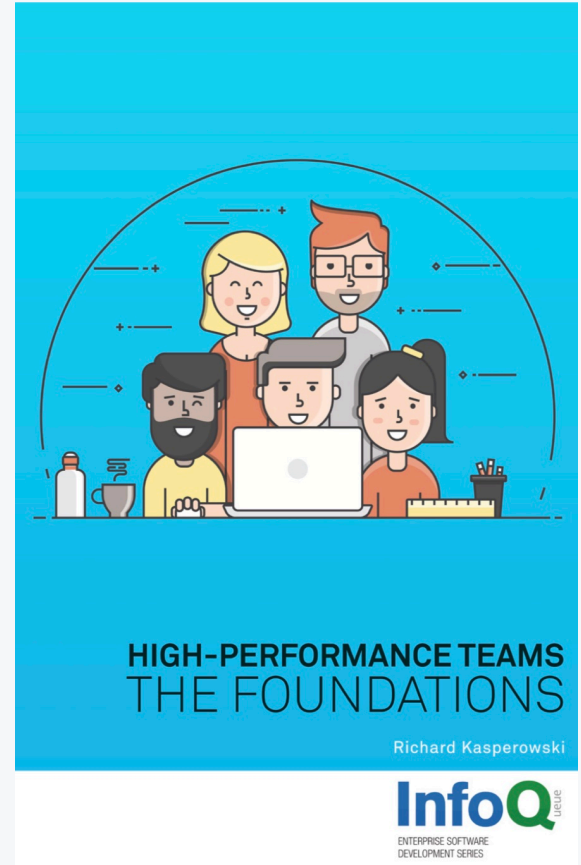
At C4 we've found the following meetings useful:

- Standups / daily huddle
- 1-2 weekly departmental calls
- Tertile planning
- Annual all hands

Meeting rituals

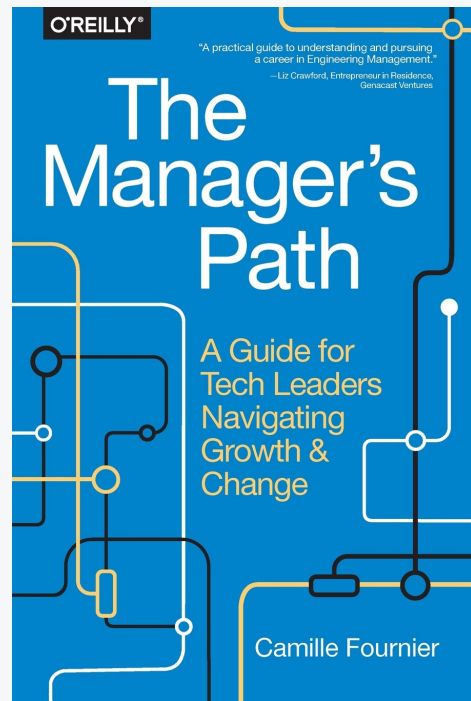
- Check in
- Meetings should be conducted on video if at all possible
- The core protocols are helpful here

<https://www.infoq.com/minibooks/high-performance-teams>



One on one meetings

- One on one meetings are sacrosanct
- A one on one is not a status meeting
- Try to keep notes in a shared document






Tools

- Slack for IM – I also use this for daily journaling
- Zoom for video conferencing
- Workplace for “water cooler” like chat
- Google Docs for remote collaboration
- 15Five for weekly private retrospectives


Current 15Five

[View my history](#)



Charles Humble
Editor in Chief

Due Saturday, January 19



Dio Synodinos
Reviewer

[Print](#)

[Who else can view my 15Five?](#)

Questions

Happiness score - On a scale of 0 to 10, how happy were you at work this week?
What are the one or two primary reasons for your rating?
Metric answers are visible by account admin(s) in addition to your reviewer and followers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

What wins did you have this week (big or small)?

Add a new answer

What challenges did you face this week? Any stuck points?

Add a new answer

What have you learned this week? (optional)

Add a new answer



Scaling Up

Remote work requires a strong written culture, particularly with teams spread across time zones.

This becomes more important as the company grows.



Wrapping up

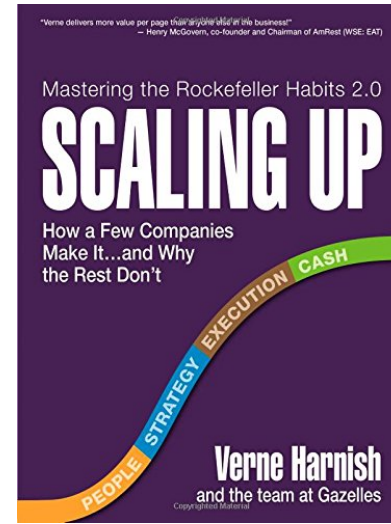
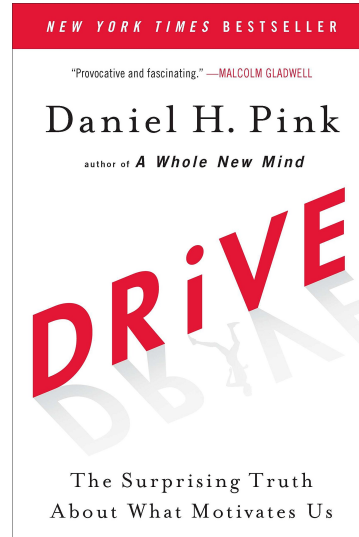
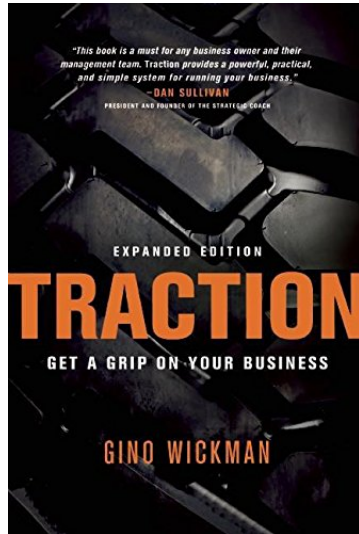
- For both employee and employer remote work requires intentional design to work well
- Separate home from work - through physical separation, for example
- Prioritise mental health - social life, exercise, taking breaks



Wrapping up

- Both the company, and its managers, need to exhibit transparency and be prepared to be vulnerable

Books that influenced us





Thanks for listening

Twitter: [@charleshumble](https://twitter.com/charleshumble)

Email: charles@infoq.com

Writing: <https://www.infoq.com/profile/Charles-Humble>

Music: <http://www.twofish-music.com/>