

The new art of business

A Report by

**RADA
BUSINESS**

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art



Introduction

Our world of work will never be quite the same following COVID-19, with the pandemic accelerating a shift to remote working. To adapt to these changes we will all need to learn new skills.

Chief amongst those is communication – maintaining the ability to connect, persuade and lead while not being in the same physical space.

Our enforced lockdown lifestyle has shown what is possible with remote working and convinced many doubters that being anchored to an office is not an inevitability.

We have enjoyed the flexibility working from home affords us. If managed well it could allow the possibility for more time for family, personal relationships and self-care.

However, if this shift is to work effectively, our communication skills now need to play catch up. The future must see a beginning of the new art of communication.

Leadership, employee engagement, building and maintaining professional relationships will increasingly be done remotely.

Learning how to do this effectively will be critical to our future success and effectiveness of our organisations.

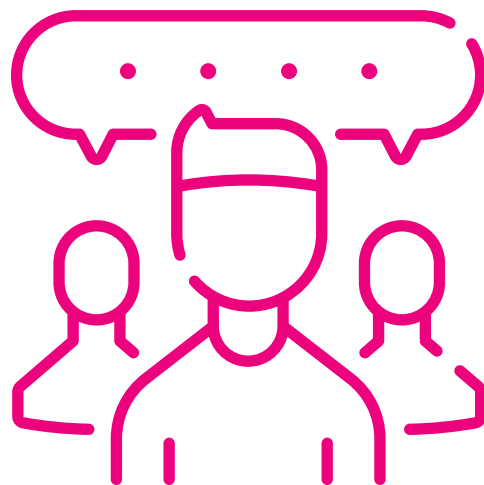
For many, we recognise our weakness in remote communication and struggle to maintain effective connections from afar.

However, by being conscious of some basic rules, tips and techniques, we can enjoy the best of our new working lives.

In this report, we reveal how our working lives changed and the extent to which these new behaviours will remain permanent even as the world reopens.

We also show how communication has suffered as many of us struggle to learn how best to adapt and use the new tools at our disposal.

Finally, we show what can be achieved by getting communication right and the role it plays in helping our organisations and people to thrive.



Source: the data used in this report has been obtained using [Global Web Index](#).

Executive summary

The shift to homeworking

In the second quarter of 2020 (March to May), 68% of UK adults (that were able to do so) were working from home, 41% on a full-time basis.

91% of the UK's highest earners were working from home.

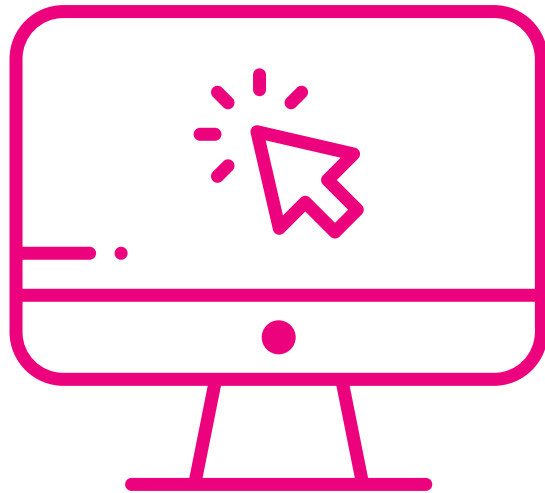
Some sectors, including Marketing/PR, Software Developers, Management Consultants, Banking and Property are seeing a move to permanent homeworking of at least 2.3 times the national average.

One in five homeworkers used online collaboration tools (Trello, Slack etc.) to maintain links with their colleagues.

Online business-networking (through services such as LinkedIn) also saw usage rise, with up to 26% of homeworkers making use of these tools during lockdown.

The major reported benefits of homeworking were saving time (58%), saving money (54%), more flexibility (50%) and more time with family (42%).

One in five homeworkers used online collaboration tools (Trello, Slack etc.) to maintain links with their colleagues.



91%

91% of the UK's highest earners were working from home during the second quarter of 2020 (March to May)

Making a permanent change

45% of workers say that they are either extremely or very interested in making the shift to homeworking permanent.

This is particularly true for younger workers. 61% of 16 to 24 year olds and 51% of 25 to 34 year olds.

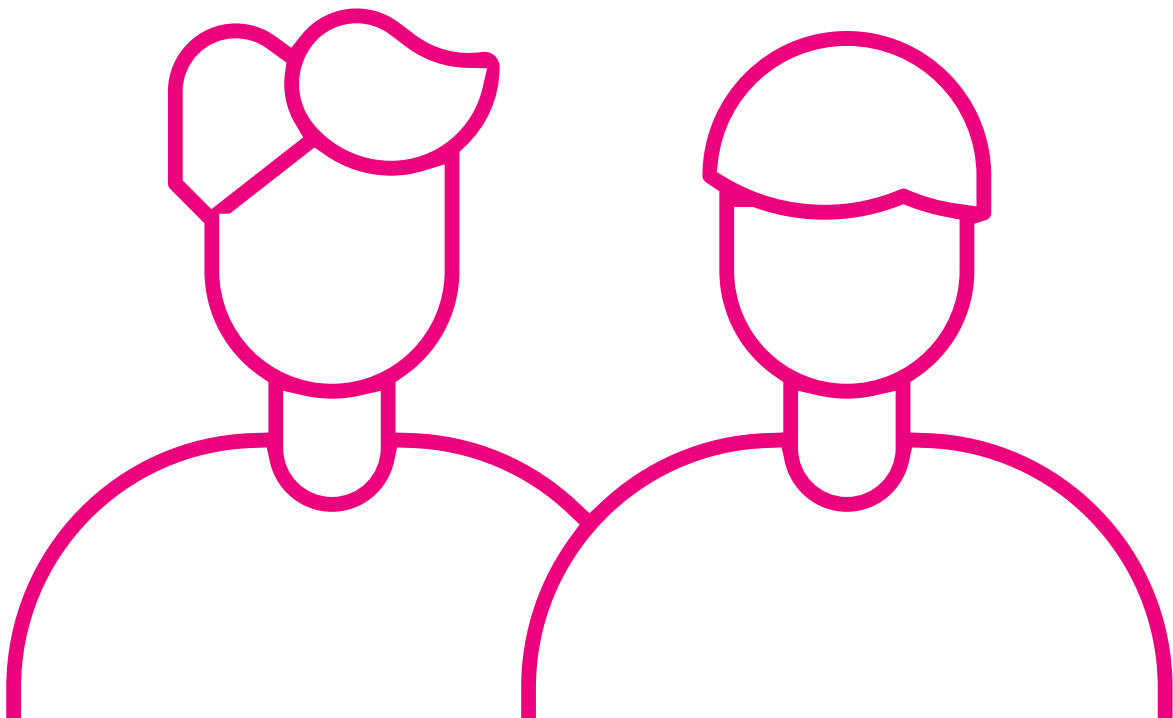
80% say that they want the option to work from home, even if it's only an occasional arrangement.

Those most interested in a fully homeworking role are those aged between 35 to 44 (18%).

While 18 to 24 year olds want some degree of homeworking, they are least likely to want this to lead to an end to all office-based working (just 9%).

Environmental motivations for increased homeworking also appear to be at play. 45% of UK adults say that the pandemic has increased their desire to reduce their personal impact on the environment.

Those most interested in a fully homeworking role are those aged between 35 to 44 (18%).



The challenges for employees

The most common challenges of homeworking are feeling isolated (48%), feeling less productive (35%), technical communication issues (33%) and communication with co-workers (31%).

Employers now face an expectation to allow flexible working. The ability to work from home is increasingly seen as something employers should make possible for their employees (regardless of lockdown), with 37% of all workers saying it should be an important priority.

Communication of company strategy is a common challenge. Only 33% of employees say that they get a minimum of one annual company strategy update, with 12% saying that they never get such information from their employer.

There is often a communication gap between leadership and staff. 44% of executives rated such communication as excellent, compared to just 20% of lower-level employees.

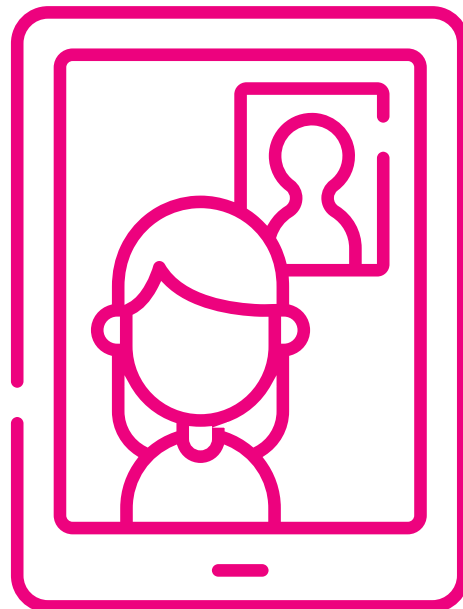
30% of executives report video or audio problems are common when using video for work communications.

24% of people at management-level expressed a concern that their tone is not coming across through video – for example, they may appear impolite or terse when that is not their intention.

Similarly, many report being distracted by their own image appearing on the screen (22%) or self-conscious when using video (19%), all detracting from the quality of the interaction.

Employers now face an expectation to allow flexible working.

30%



30% of executives report video or audio problems are common when using video for work communications

The opportunities for employees

On the whole it seems employers have risen to the challenges presented by lockdown, with 48% of employees saying they approve of how the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak has been handled (with only 13% saying they disapprove).

Companies that successfully implement remote communication strategies are 50% more likely to see their organisation as well-equipped to meet future challenges and adapt to new ways of working.

The pandemic has rapidly sped-up adoption of video communication by Gen X and Boomer generations.

During the pandemic, video contact with leaders has increased across all age groups, but for Boomers the rate has almost doubled – from 12% to 23% (compared to a marginal increase for younger generations).

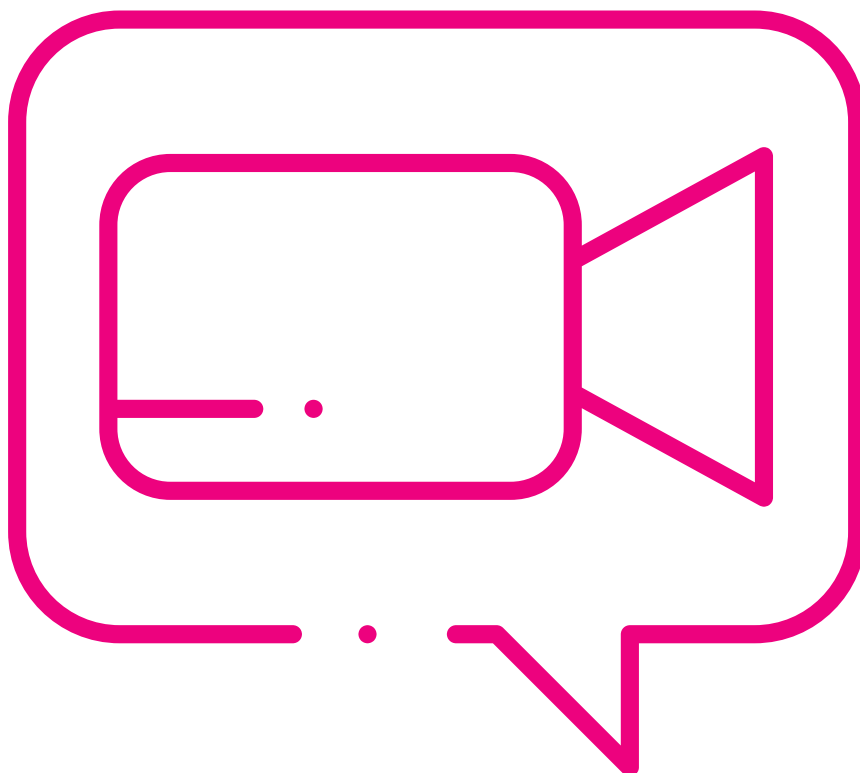
Those organisations where video was adopted, workers are 67% more likely to feel confident about the quality of employer engagement, and 55% more likely to feel they have a successful and collaborative environment.

Also, 59% more likely to believe their companies will remain profitable in the future and 40% more likely to feel confident about their future job security.

40% of HR professionals reported that live video training has supplanted in-person sessions for new recruits.

However, this was not the case for all, with over a third reported that training stopped completely during Covid.

The pandemic has rapidly sped-up adoption of video communication by Gen X and Boomer generations.



How our working world has changed

The shift to homeworking

In the midst of lockdown, home became a workplace for many of us. In the second quarter of 2020 (March to May), 68% of UK adults (that were able to do so) were working from home, 41% on a full-time basis.

This change was even more significant for specific groups. For example, people in director or senior management positions in particular relocated their workplace to their homes – 91% of the UK's highest earners were working from home.

Similarly, some sectors also saw a greater shift to home working, with Marketing/PR, Software Developers, Management Consultants, Banking and Property seeing a move to permanent homeworking of at least 2.3 times the national average.

To compensate for the lack of face-to-face contact, technology began to fill the gap in helping to support communication and collaboration.

As well as the obvious rise in video conferencing, these changes also correlated to an increased use of online tools to promote collaborative working (such as Quickbooks, Trello or Slack), with as many as one in five homeworkers making use of such services to maintain links with their colleagues.

Similarly, online business-networking (through services such as LinkedIn) also saw usage rise, with up to 26% of homeworkers making use of these tools during lockdown.

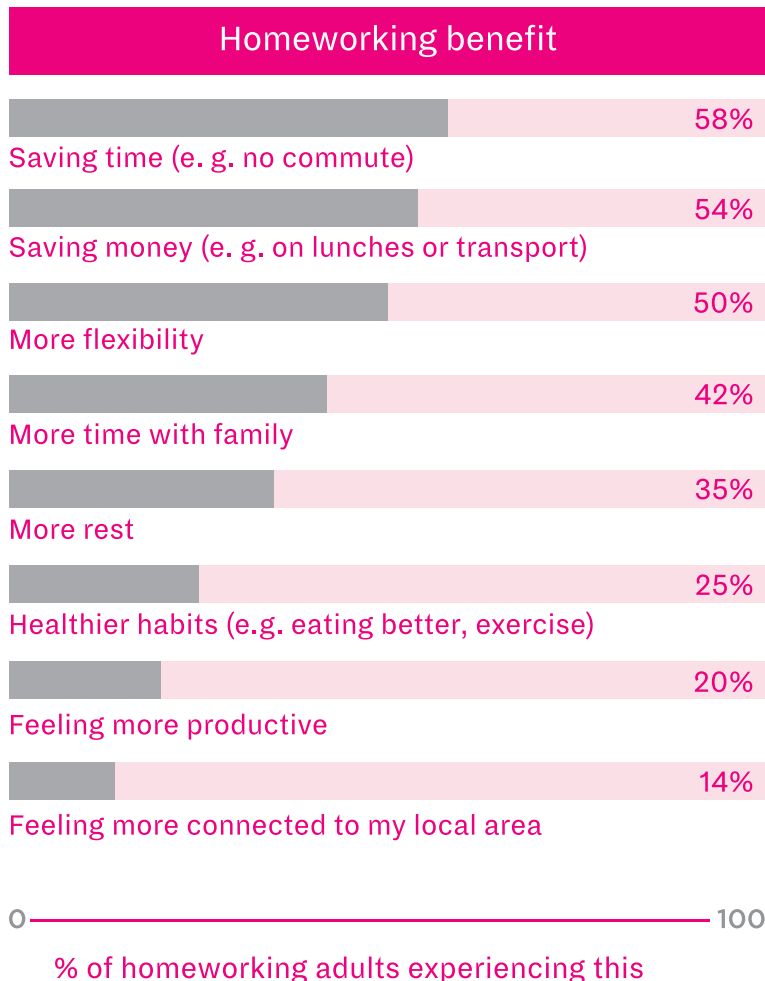
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A permanent change?

All evidence suggests that (for those that can) the legacy of COVID-19 will be a permanent shift in our working patterns.

There are many reasons for us to prefer a degree of homeworking. A number of benefits have come to the fore during the pandemic.



A generation of workers has realised they can be time-rich, reduce their financial outgoings, make time for personal wellbeing and be better connected with friends and family. Why would we switch back?

Post-pandemic, 45% of workers say that they are either extremely or very interested in making the shift to homeworking permanent. This is particularly true for younger workers - 61% of 16 to 24 year olds and 51% of 25 to 34 year olds.

Even for those that don't want a permanent shift, 80% say that they want the option to work from home, even if it's only an occasional arrangement.

Only 20% of workers are reluctant to say goodbye to a permanent office-based role.

Those most interested in a fully homeworking role are those aged between 25 to 44 (18%).

Interestingly, while 18 to 24 year olds want some degree of homeworking, they are least likely to want this to lead to an end to all office-based working (just 9%).

Presumably recognising the need for a degree of face-to-face interaction and learning with colleagues.

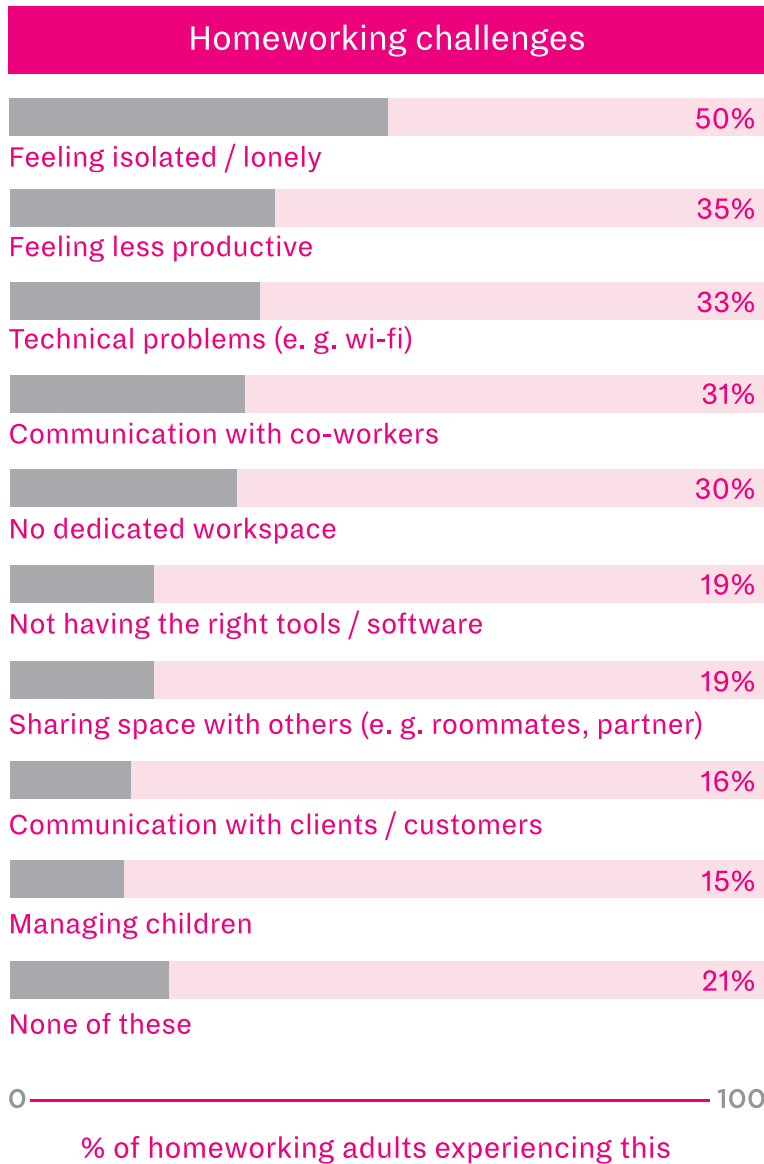
Environmental motivations for increased homeworking also appear to be at play.

45% of UK adults say that the pandemic has increased their desire to reduce their personal impact on the environment.

Avoiding unnecessary journeys to and from work, is a step many of us can take to reduce our weekly carbon footprint.

The challenges of this new way of working

While clearly an attractive option, working from home is not without its challenges, particularly when it comes to effective communication.



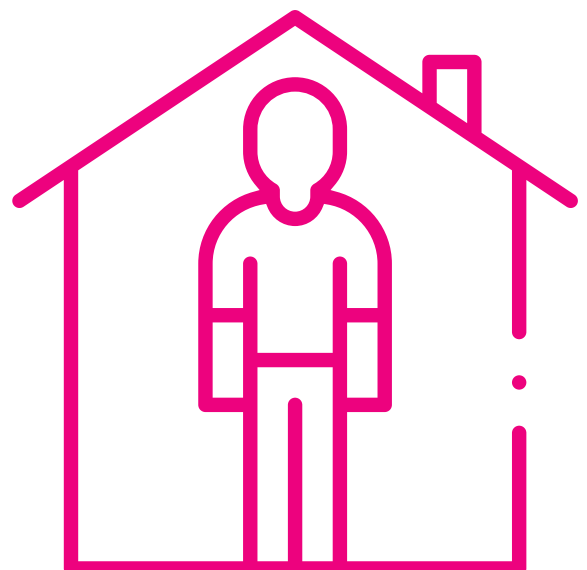
The troubles reported by homeworkers highlight many of the new skills we need to learn, in order to adapt to an increasingly remote way of working.

Front and centre is the quality of internal communication. How can we make sure that co-workers feel connected and still part of the group despite not being physically present?

Also, how can leaders make their presence felt, helping to reinforce a desirable company culture and set of shared values?

How do we also meet the challenges of client communication – ensuring clients feel connected and that they are not a lesser priority.

Finally, what physical and practical steps need to be taken to overcome poor connection or interruptions from other members of the household?



Employer response to these challenges

On the whole it seems employers have risen to the challenges presented by lockdown, with 48% of employees saying they approve of how the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak has been handled (with only 13% saying they disapprove).

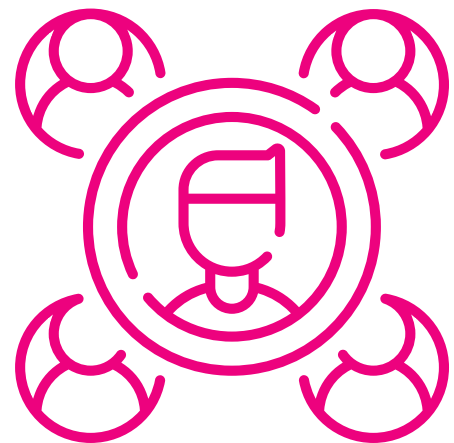
However, moving forward the ability to solve the challenges associated with homeworking will be a crucial factor in meeting the expectations of workers.

What's at stake for employers?

This change to working patterns creates a number of risk factors for those companies that don't adapt successfully. Firstly, employers now face an expectation to allow flexible working.

The ability to work from home is increasingly seen as something employers should make possible for their employees (regardless of lockdown), with 37% of all workers saying it should be an important priority. Therefore, not offering this option would be a serious limitation on staff recruitment and retention.

However, if not executed correctly, there is a danger that increased remote working will contribute to the most common communication fears report by business leaders.



Areas of weakness

Communication of company strategy is a common area of weakness.

Only 33% of employees say they get a minimum of one annual company strategy update, with 12% saying that they never get such information from their employer.

It is also the case that many organisations struggle to effectively cascade information to all levels.

Pre-Covid there was already evidence of a communication gap between leadership and staff. 44% of executives rated such communication as excellent, compared to just 20% of lower-level employees.

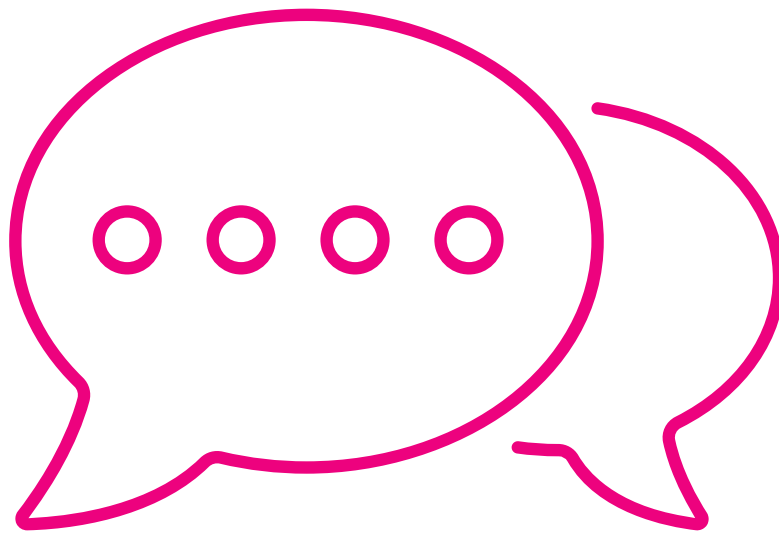
The extra restrictions of Covid and remote working are likely to further widen this gap.

An increased reliance on video communication could also prove problematic.

As well as the associated technical difficulties that can occur (30% of executives report video or audio problems are common), there is also a concern about how video affects the quality of communication.

24% of people at management-level expressed a concern that their tone is not coming across through video – for example, they may appear impolite or terse when that is not their intention.

Similarly, many report being distracted by their own image appearing on the screen (22%) or self-conscious when using video (19%), all detracting from the quality of the interaction.



33%

Only 33% of employees say they get a minimum of one annual company strategy update

The opportunities and solutions

Despite these concerns, for those companies that do embrace the ‘new art’ of business communication, there are considerable opportunities.

There is evidence that companies have managed to overcome the communication challenges of remote working through video.

For those successfully channelling its benefits, the rewards are significant.

Employees in such companies are 50% more likely to see their organisation as well-equipped to meet future challenges and adapt to new ways of working – meeting their personal desires for greater flexibility and remote working.

Older workers in particular are embracing these new forms of communication when executed effectively.

Whereas in pre-Covid times, video communication between companies and employees was concentrated on younger workers (Millennials and Gen Z), the pandemic as rapidly sped-up adoption by Gen X and Boomer generations.

During the pandemic, video contact with leaders has increased across all age groups, but for Boomers the rate has almost doubled (compared to a marginal increase for younger generations).

Homeworking video contact	Millennials / Gen Z	Gen X	Boomers
Receiving video comms from leadership weekly pre-COVID-19	31%	18%	12%
Receiving video comms from leadership weekly post-COVID-19	37%	28%	23%

With this increasingly universal adoption, video can start being used as an effective leadership communication tool with all groups and across a wider range of organisations.

Covid has also shown the impact of video communication during a crisis.

For example, those organisations where video was adopted, workers are 67% more likely to feel confident about the quality of employer engagement, and 55% more likely to feel they have a successful collaborative environment.

The wider reaching impact of effective communications can also be seen.

Workers are 59% more likely to believe their companies will remain profitable in the future and 40% more likely to feel confident about their future job security.

Finally, video during a period of remote working has also radically changed the onboarding process of new workers, with 40% of HR professionals reporting live video training has supplanted in-person sessions for new recruits.

For those not switching training delivery to virtual sessions the risks are obvious.

With over a third reporting that training stopped completely during Covid, those preparing now for a more remote working life are going to seize an important, early advantage.

Tutor insight: Kate Walker Miles

How to communicate effectively while working remotely

Many organisations are yet to find absolute clarity on what their new normal will look like.

And many individuals report a sense of social anxiety about returning to more face-to-face interactions.

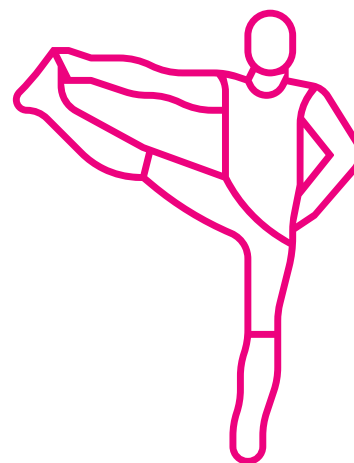
But one thing is clear, video communication is here to stay. Confidence in our ability to communicate clearly and connect with others this way is vital for our future performance. but many of the behavioural cues that we use to read each other when face-to-face are diminished on digital platforms.

Fortunately, there are skills and techniques that business professionals can use to master the art of communicating.

► 1. Stretch to release tension

Take a moment to prepare yourself before the meeting begins, so that you feel calm and relaxed enough to get your voice in. Stand up. Get your energy moving and loosen up your body by bouncing on the spot. Then release some physical tension by stretching. A simple way to do this is to stretch your arms above your head, reach for the sky, and then bring them back down to your sides, like you're drawing an arc with each hand.

Next, roll your shoulders back and then forwards a few times each. Gently tilt your head from side to side, then forward and back - and finally, give your limbs a good shake out. Finally use your hands to grab the muscles on top of each shoulder blade and squeeze out the tension.



► 2. Try a vocal warm-up

To be impactful on video calls it is helpful to speak with more volume and energy than when communicating in person.

Old-school tongue twisters are a great way to warm up your voice, lips and tongue before jumping on a conference call.

Treat yourself to some wide-mouthed yawning, it will help to release tension in your face, jaw muscles and tongue and give you a richer and more expressive voice.

Humming will help prepare your voice to travel more effectively when you speak and moving up and down through your pitch range as you hum is a very effective technique for preparing to keep an audience engaged.

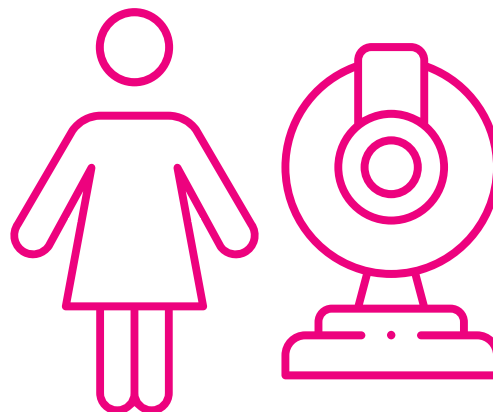


▶ 3. Check your stance

Posture plays a big role in how we come across to others. If sitting at a desk or table, be sure to sit upright on your sit bones, with uncrossed legs.

Plant your feet firmly on the floor. Lengthen your spine and neck towards the ceiling and sit tall.

Sitting in this way will help you to feel more grounded, but also enables you to show openness and a readiness to engage with others. To keep yourself energised you could try standing for some of your video calls but do try to stand still and avoid locking your knees to prevent rigidity.

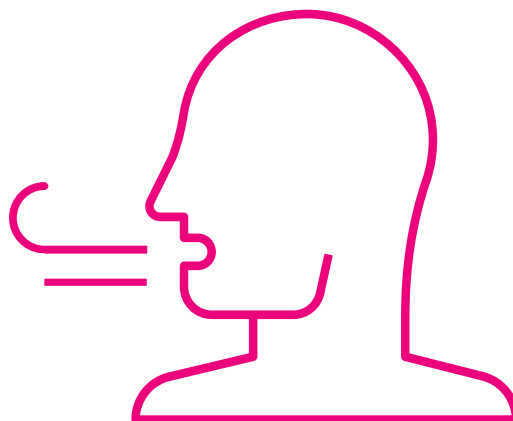


▶ 4. Breathe

Take a moment to focus on your breath before speaking; breathe out and then in, slowly and deeply.

Try to make each outbreath longer than the inbreaths. Taking a breath in this way will help to calm any pre-call nerves and steady your voice.

Allowing your belly to move freely with your breath will help to give your voice more power and a richer sound. Remember to build pauses into your speech when you need something to land with people – it allows a moment for listeners to take in what you're saying while you prepare your next thought.



▶ 5. It's all about connection!

Video conferencing is likely to remain a crucial tool for maintaining strong relationships with your team and clients.

It's much easier to switch off both physically and emotionally from others when you're not in the same office space. So, it is important to appear mentally present with others if you want to maintain trust. When you're on a call, avoid fidgeting and focus your attention in one place.

Look directly into the webcam and not at your own appearance when you're speaking. Hiding your self-view, as several platforms allow, can really help you to relax and take your attention away from yourself and back to your audience.

Then you are better able to maintain connection with them in the same way that you would if you were in a room together.



About RADA Business

RADA Business helps people at work become brilliant communicators.

We build on the work of one of the world's most respected drama schools to deliver world-class training programmes and coaching for organisations and individuals.

Everything we do is grounded in an understanding of business - and the varied needs of people within organisations.

Whether you're leading a company, managing teams or taking the first steps in your career, we can help you deliver your very best performance.

Since 2001 we've worked with some of the world's best-known employers in more than 30 countries, including law firms, retailers, media companies, universities and governments.

We're convinced that organisations work most effectively when everyone has a voice - and we're committed to giving people the skills to get themselves heard.

All our profits support the activities of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, helping to develop the next generation of actors and technicians.

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss what we can do for you or your organisation by contacting ask@radabusiness.com or +44 (0)20 7908 4810.