

***Making Remote Work, Work* - inside Henley's white paper**

It's out with the old and in with the new normal. Part of which is working from home. But how do businesses successfully make the transition permanent? Is it even possible?



Dr Andrew Brough has set out to answer all these questions for Henley Business School Africa. Commissioned by Henley Africa's head of research Professor Danie Petzer, Dr Brough's white paper entitled *Making Remote Work, Work*, sets out to explore the conundrum of remote work and find answers to the questions that managers and CEOs are asking.

"Working remotely is not new," says Brough. "I've been doing it myself for 25 years, but the real watershed came with the pandemic when people, especially in the financial, IT and professional services who were used to being collocated, were now thrust into lockdown. It was the sheer scope and magnitude that created the problem."

Virtual leadership strategies

His white paper looks at what happened and identifies the best way to lead remote teams and, equally importantly, the best way forward as the pandemic abates but people don't want to go back into traditional office space anymore. The one thing that is clear, says Brough, is that remote work is here to stay.

"One of the questions the white paper sets out to answer was what does it take to develop a culture of virtual leadership? How do you create autonomy among staff?" says Brough.

Some managers have been the traditional autocratic command and control types, others have been missing in action, both with potentially catastrophic effects on their teams. Neither have been able to foster the Results Only Work Environment (ROWE), which is focussed only on output instead of the traditional hours spent in the office.

Equally not all employees have managed to flourish working from home. Many have felt adrift, unacknowledged and lost, others have flourished. The post-pandemic office of the future will probably be a hybrid set up, incorporating both remote and collocated employees, which will not be without its own set of challenges.

Altered management

What Brough has found in his research is that whatever model is chosen, management will have changed forever: “In a results-only environment, you have to deliver. If there are any weaknesses in your management style; lack of autonomy, lack of trust or micromanagement, they will be exposed. And if there is any weakness in your team, where you might have been able to duck and run for cover in a collocated team, now there’s no place to hide.

“It’s not about clock watching anymore, clocking in and out is far less important than what it is you produce”.

The Henley white paper looks both at the stages of remote work evolution and tracks the best methodology to design remote work structures to allow companies to work remotely to an extent where there are no offices at all, while identifying and understanding the very real risks and downsides to working remotely so that managers and business leaders can mitigate these.

The research is the culmination of a journey that began three decades ago for Brough.

“I’ve been working in the leadership space for about 30 years helping leaders in more than 90 countries develop the cultural intelligence to work with high performance teams and over the last 12 years, increasingly with remote teams,” he says.

Insight into challenges

Jon Foster-Pedley, Henley Africa’s dean and director, is excited about the research.

“Andy’s research mirrors our own experiences moving to virtual learning just before the beginning of lockdown and then running campus entirely remotely. It’s a particularly useful document that I have no doubt will be vital for other businesses either in transition from lockdown or trying to develop their own ROWE strategy going forward.”

The lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19 had been the greatest stress tests any business could have imagined, he says, but just as great a test would be the road ahead.

“As the white paper shows the greatest challenge for remote work is to use technology to allow for meaningful interpersonal connections, not to reinforce the fear and stress that have been the fruits of making remote work fail.

“We’ve always prided ourselves on using the tools we develop to teach others and this white paper will be massively helpful for us as we design our own sustainable and equitable way forward in the post-pandemic era for the perfect balance between the interests of faculty, students and staff, while sharing it with our own students to prepare them to go back and build the businesses that will build Africa.”

For a copy of the *Making Remote Work, Work* white paper, contact Professor Danie Petzer at DanieP@Henleysa.ac.za