how to effectively manage

## a remote workforce.

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human forward.

introduction.

Remote working has become an increasingly common concept in the 21st century. This trend accelerated rapidly in 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic made it unsafe for large numbers of people to gather in indoor environments. Governments in many countries advised that anyone who was able to work from home should do so, leaving countless employers facing the unexpected challenge of managing a remote workforce.

Research suggests this is likely to be a lasting trend, with a PwC study concluding that remote collaboration is 'here to stay'. A Gartner poll found that 90% of HR leaders were planning to allow employees to work remotely at least some of the time, even after COVID-19 vaccines are widely available.

This leaves many businesses facing what, for many, will be a new challenge: engaging, supporting and getting the best out of a remote workforce.

In this short guide, we'll highlight some of the most effective measures you can introduce to achieve this goal.
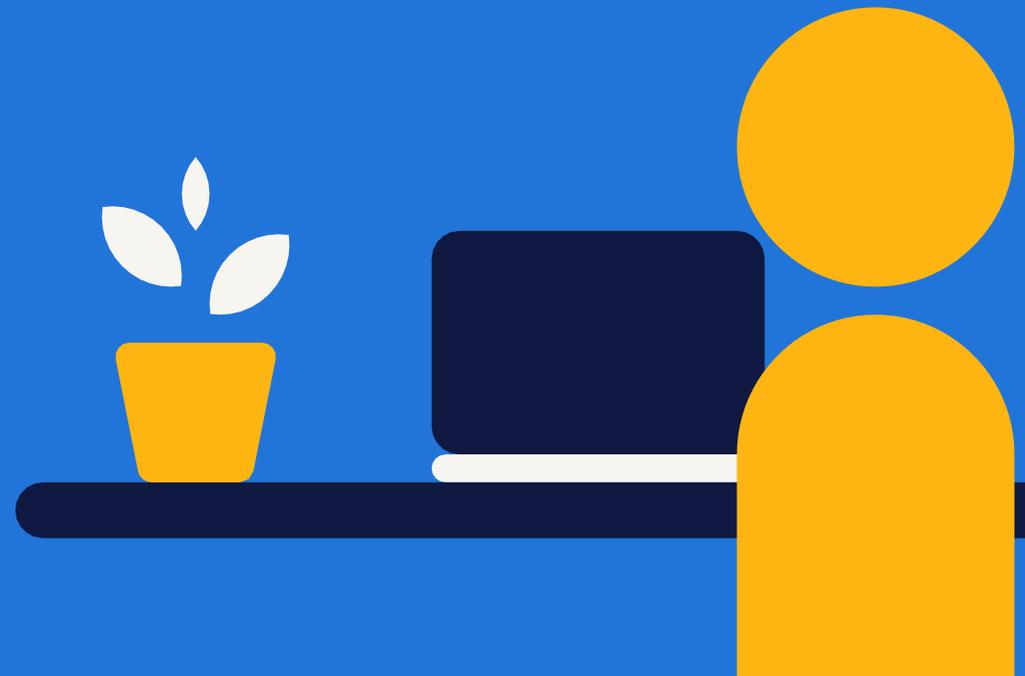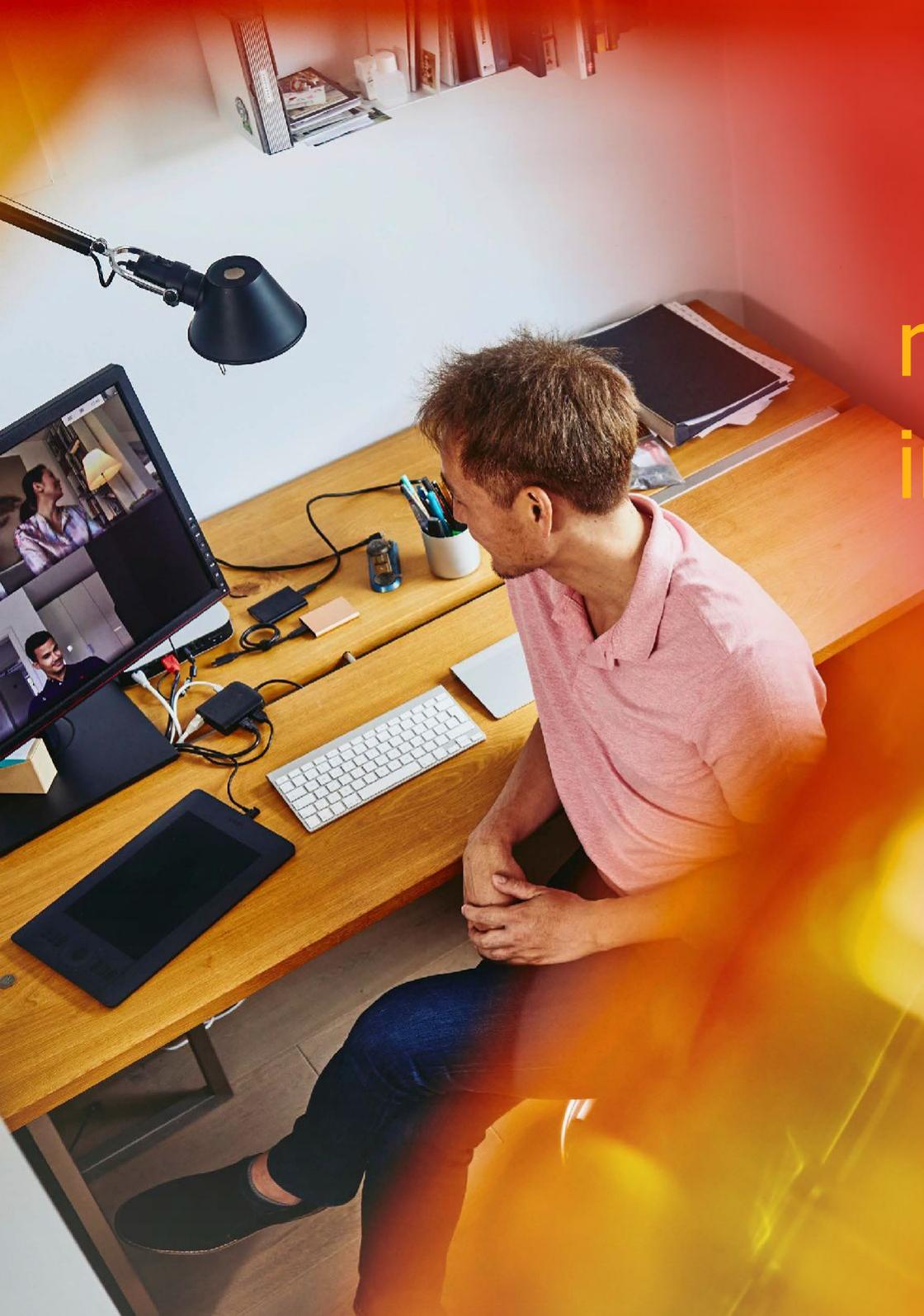
maintain face-to-face interaction.

Face-to-face contact and conversation occur naturally in traditional workplaces, but a special effort is required to ensure this continues when people are working remotely. Embrace video conferencing technologies and make sure that colleagues get enough opportunities to see their co-workers' faces and have actual conversations, and not just through email or instant messaging apps.

Speaking face-to-face offers many benefits for remote workers and for the business. Human interaction is important for people who might be feeling isolated or lonely, while direct sharing of information and advice on best practices can provide a boost to productivity.

focus on results

rather than activity.

For managers who are used to being in the workplace with their staff and now find themselves overseeing remote teams, the first instinct might be to constantly check on people's activity to make sure work is getting done.

However, this can have negative effects, such as people feeling like they're being micromanaged and aren't trusted to get on with their work. It's important to give employees clear responsibilities, set expectations and track progress, but you should also be willing to allow a certain level of freedom and autonomy.

Certified business leadership coach Angela Civitella recommends inviting workers to come up with their own schedule that outlines how they will complete particular tasks in a set timeframe.

be extra vigilant
to signs of unhappiness.

When you spend a lot of time in a physical workplace with your team, you'll naturally pick up on signs of how people are feeling, which makes it easier to do your job when it comes to supporting employees' health and well-being.

This is less obvious when people are working remotely and don't have as many opportunities to speak openly with their colleagues and managers.

It's hence important to be on the lookout for signs that people are struggling with the transition to remote working or don't feel happy in their jobs. These indicators could be subtle, such as individuals gradually becoming more withdrawn or making fewer contributions to team meetings or online chats.

Monitoring sentiment in the remote workforce could be a key responsibility for the HR department in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, with research suggesting the crisis could have long-term consequences for mental health.

There are various people analytics tools you can use to gather data on employee engagement and well-being, such as Peakon and Qualtrics.

provide access to
the right tech and tools.

Effective remote working relies on technology, so you need to make sure every member of your staff has the tools and technical support they need to do their jobs effectively from a remote location.

This might involve supplying company-issued laptops or phones installed with all the software and applications each user will need. As well as making it easier for people to work, this could help to increase security and ensure that sensitive business data is protected.

If the transition to remote working will involve employees spending a lot more time on video calls, you might want to provide microphone headsets and high-quality webcams to maximise quality and reduce tech-induced stress.

Furthermore, it's vital to make sure all staff have been given the proper access to any online applications or cloud tools they need, as well as training on how to use these technologies.

Failing to do this will impact productivity by limiting people's ability to get on with their jobs, but it could also increase levels of stress and anxiety associated with remote working.

emphasise
your brand values.

Managing a remote workforce is likely to create a number of challenges, but it can also provide opportunities. One example of how your business could benefit from this shift is by reinforcing your employer brand, particularly in terms of showing faith in your employees, empowering people to work autonomously and allowing a better work-life balance.

As noted by Gartner, many employers' efforts to enhance their brand values in recent years have focused on caring for their workforce and helping people improve their lives outside work.

"Even before this crisis, employers were increasingly treating employees as key stakeholders. During this crisis, you can show employees that you plan to look out for them for the long haul."

Brian Kropp, VP and Chief of HR research at Gartner

offer more recognition.

Gartner research has also shown that employees' desire for recognition for their contribution to the business increases by about 30% during periods of disruption and uncertainty.

One of the most important things managers can do to support staff who are making the transition to remote working is to actively acknowledge the effort people are putting in and the benefits they're generating for the business.

Recognition can come in various forms. A simple gesture like singling someone out for praise in a team meeting, or referring specifically to an employee action that led to a positive client outcome, can show that hard work is not going unnoticed.

Efforts like these can help you build a happier, more engaged and more productive remote workforce. This is likely to be a vital step in setting up your business for lasting success in the years to come.

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If you're looking for effective, lasting solutions to your biggest HR challenges, Randstad has the experience and expertise to help. Contact us today.