Skills and Systems for Remote Working Webinar, Thursday 30 April at 2:30pm BST

**SPEAKERS**

**Dr Nasser Siabi**
Founder and CEO of assistive technology providers Microlink

**Dr Nancy Doyle**
Occupational psychologist, CEO of neurodiversity consultancy Genius Within, and postdoctoral research fellow at Birkbeck

**Carl Ward**
Head of assistive technology training and workplace accessibility assessor at Microlink
COMPANY BACKGROUND

▪ Established in 1992 working within the higher education and workplace sectors
▪ Helped over 300,000 disabled people to succeed
▪ Operating in the UK, USA, South Africa and Middle East
Wellbeing & Isolation; you cannot pour from an empty cup

Cognitive impact of all this remote contact!

There’s usually ‘double peak’ of anxiety, one at the start, one when we transition back so be prepared

Some of your staff need safeguarding, not wellbeing – this requires trained professional support
Help your staff manage home working with reassurances and advice on separation techniques. If you can’t do it with space, you can do it with clear time boundaries.
EMOTIONAL & COGNITIVE DEMANDS OF REMOTE WORKING & PHONE/VIDEO COMMS

Allow flexibility – for example turning off cameras for those who find it overwhelming, different screen view options for those who need to see faces.

ENERGISING TECHNIQUES & PACING

- This is a marathon not a sprint.
- Recommend the Pomodoro technique
- Movement creates energy for those who are well
- Pace those back to back meetings
- Acknowledging impact of sleep
INCREASED RISK OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS
due to lack of contact and heightened anxiety.
Practice “pre-forgiveness” – talk about this in advance so that it’s less disconcerting when it happens

DISTRACTIBILITY & HYPER-FOCUS
adapting working styles to realise the productivity benefits of remote working

- You may need to work with individuals around when they can actually focus.
- General distractions can be managed by masking; headphones, music.
- The news is very distracting. Set timers for when you are allowed to check.
- Have a ‘dump pad’ for intrusive thoughts about things that must be done that day.

Have a ‘strategy session’ with your teams – people work very differently, so by sharing a wide range of ideas you are more likely to find one that works
I M P A C T  &  S K I L L S

A balanced view
If it is all food and alcohol we are going to be very unhealthy after this! However, some acceptance that all bets are off and that we need to allow ourselves things to cope with the pressure is required!

Non-work jobs
What are the jobs that you always think you should do – like organising photos into memory books or searching for new music that you like, writing, learning an instrument, painting – give yourself time to do this within your working week as a treat.

Self Care
Self-care for those juggling busy families with working from home might be permission to watch TV with the kids and just “be” for an hour.

SELF-CARE & TREATS

Looking after yourself: making time for R&R; exercise, nutrition and hydration; managing risks around alcohol, social media, news etc; being realistic about what can be achieved; knowing when to ask for help.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT & CHECK-IN BUDDIES
Groups of 2 or 3 people that can check in on each other or reach out for support
PSYCHOLOGY; COGNITIVE IMPACT & SOLUTIONS

For all Employees – more extreme reactions possible for employees with health or disability issues.

- Increase in anxiety around all comms affects thinking
- Differences in ability to plan, prioritise and consider time boundaries
- Differences in sensory perception and social perception – nuances lost
- Differences in sensory and social perception also affect cognitive strain, so meetings are more tiring.

Acknowledge anxiety. Have ‘settling’ moments planned in regularly – conversation and email

Time boundaries may need to be explicit and flexible. Some will need more help in this – find your natural organisers and put them to work

Acknowledge and talk about nuances being lost – prepare everyone to forgive each other for misunderstandings

Meetings need to take less time and have both and visual/auditory options. Enable closed captioning. Send agendas and refer to them frequently. Mics, headphones, cameras, bandwidth
Designating an area at home to work is the first step to successfully setting up a workspace.

- A work environment prepares you mentally for work
- Plan for long-term comfort not ten minute usage
- Consider the health & safety aspect of your space
- Correct seating = Better posture
- Conduct your own DSE and organise your desk
- Take frequent breaks, 20 min work sessions
- Move or walk around
COMMON HOMEWORKER POSTURE PROBLEMS

Many Homeworkers we encounter often display a number of very similar postural issues that will affect their well-being and productivity:

- The Slouch! Leaning forward over their laptop, often in a chair that gives them no back support and is at a height that is too low or high for their desk.
- The Recline! The arms are outstretched putting pressure on the neck and shoulders, back and hips.
- The Horizontal! Many think this is a relaxed way of working but it is particularly damaging to the neck and upper back.
GOOD HOMEWORKER POSTURE

Encouraging Homeworkers to follow a few simple rules will positively affect their well-being and aids their concentration and productivity.

- Work at a desk or table with adequate knee/foot clearance so that you can sit/stand close to your laptop.
- Use a separate keyboard and mouse with your laptop.
- Position the keyboard and mouse directly in front of you within easy reach.
- Position your laptop so that the top of the screen is level with your eye height. If you don’t have a laptop riser, use a box file or some books to raise your laptop. Or plug in a separate monitor if you have one.
- If sitting, use an adjustable chair. Use a rolled-up hand towel for extra lower back support, if needed. If your chair is too low, sit on a cushion to raise your seat height.
“Equipping yourself / employees with the right tools significantly lowers injury risk, increases productivity and fosters wellbeing.”

**WHAT IS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT ERGONOMICS AND EQUIPMENT**

- Provide yourself a **safe and productive working environment**
- **Source the right tools** for the job
- **Home Worker Kit** – AT Tools, Ergonomics and Screen Solutions
The technology has improved considerably in the last 5 to 10 years.

Highly developed products such as Dragon are accurate and productive.

Now operating systems such as Windows 10 and MacOS come with reliable basic voice recognition.
Products such as ClaroRead & TextHelp Read & Write give text to speech tools along with many other tools for literacy and language.

Microsoft's Immersive Reader gives cross platform reading tools including text to speech and dictionary functions.
An engaging way of working for many, but....... Traditionally not transferable to a workplace situation.

Modern software such as **MindView**, **MindManager** and **AYOA** allows a flexible and relevant workplace application. Free solutions such as **X-Mind** are available too.
ORCAM MyReader

AI device for the blind and visually impaired, that can read the morning paper, a favourite book, text messages, emails, and more.

Super Reading

SuperReading provides tools and techniques for increasing reading speed while retaining accurate recall and comprehension by 300-500% even for those with dyslexia.
FocusBand

Pioneering wearable technology that analyses brain activity and allows the user to independently manage different mental states through an app. A team leader can easily see a person’s daily stress levels and intervene in real time for those who are vulnerable, offering support and help to decrease mental anxiety and build colleague relationships.
FLEXIBILITY, CONSTRAINTS & RESPONSIBILITY

- Develop core structures
- Measure the teams output rather than an under a microscope management style to build trust and facts based on real time data
- Manage shared project work remotely
- Designate a Team leader to co-ordinate efforts
- Teams that come together under stress perform much better becoming robust, strong and enduring

Assistive Technologies are productivity tools; speech to text, text to speech, that enable people to dictate in text form or listen to documents as you would an audio book. Integration with IT platforms means that companies, such as Microsoft, Apple and Google have delivered a set of tools that help everyone.
Organisations no longer need to suffer in silence and nor do their employees. Ergonomic solutions such as chairs, sit stand desks and desktop peripherals can change a person’s workplace experience. Paired with Assistive Technology these solutions redefine the future of work for everyone.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

- Flexibility will be key. Change will bring opportunities for inclusion but also new risks.
- Increasingly obvious how assistive technology is useful to people across the workforce. The goal is to give every member of staff the support and equipment they need to realise their potential. Hopes for cultural and attitudinal shifts among managers and staff.
- How the world of work may change post-corona: more distributed, greater autonomy. Huge value of skills learned now in future world.
THANK YOU

Presented by
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Mr Carl Ward, Head of Training and on-site staff, Microlink