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DISTANT MANAGEMENT: HOW TO MANAGE A TEAM IN A DISTANT WORK ENVIRONMENT EFFECTIVELY

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has engulfed the whole world with consequences, has forced many managers to switch to a remote work format. At this time, it is impossible to imagine a manager who does not have remote management skills. One of the key skills is the ability to develop and implement a communication and interaction plan with the team, wherever the employees are. For the effective work of a distributed team, appropriate technologies and, importantly, the ability to use them are required. In addition, for effective team management in the conditions of remote work, it is necessary to apply some tactics in the organization of employees' activities. In this article, we will consider the actual problems of remote management and methods of its improvement.

Keywords: distant management, distant work, distant management of employees, tactics of improving remote management, modern technologies.

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ДИСТАНЦИОННЫЙ МЕНЕДЖМЕНТ: КАК ЭФФЕКТИВНО УПРАВЛЯТЬ КОМАНДОЙ В УСЛОВИЯХ УДАЛЁННОЙ РАБОТЫ

Охватившая последствиями весь мир пандемия COVID-19 заставила многих руководителей перейти на дистанционный формат работы. В данное время невозможно представить себе руководителя, не обладающего навыками дистанционного менеджмента. Одним из ключевых навыков становится умение выработать и реализовать план коммуникаций и взаимодействия с командой, где бы ни находились сотрудники.

Для эффективной работы распределённой команды обязательно нужны соответствующие технологии и, что немаловажно, умение пользоваться ими. Также для эффективного управления командой в условиях дистанционной работы необходимо применять некоторые тактики в организации деятельности сотрудников. В данной статье рассмотрим актуальные проблемы дистанционного менеджмента и методы его совершенствования.

Ключевые слова: дистанционный менеджмент, удалённая работа, удалённое управление сотрудниками, тактики совершенствования дистанционного менеджмента, современные технологии.

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In modern times distant work is becoming popular in many industries of companies. More recently, remote work seemed to us something frivolous, unusual and unreal, since everyone went to the office together according to the installation mode and work schedule and sat out their legitimate 8-hour working day there. There came a time when working online became a forced schedule. A pandemic has begun in the world, because of which restrictive measures and quarantine regime have been introduced for all citizens. Then many companies had to get out of this situation by switching to a distant mode of operation so that the company would not stop its activities due to restrictive measures. After this practice, many companies appreciated the possibilities and prospects of remote work and began to conduct their activities distantly, even after the quarantine regime was lifted.

In 2021, remote work is used by many employees and companies around the world. Thanks to new modern technologies that are continuously developing and improving day by day, we have access to the necessary solutions for organizing work in a virtual environment: communication with the team, monitoring the activities of employees, task planning, the ability to work together in real time.

In my article, I consider the advantages of distant work, the opportunity to collaborate with performers from other cities, countries and even continents, alternatives and advantages of working outside the office.

Distant work opens a new era that will leave behind the vague concept of "outsourcing" as a way to increase work efficiency and reduce costs, replacing it with a new modern ideal: distant work, which allows you to work more productively and efficiently, as well as get the most satisfaction from your activities. "A world without an office" is not the future, it is the present. And we have a lot of opportunities to live that way" [1].

The concept of "distant management" means the organization of a team at a distance, where the goal of the manager is to create such conditions in which each employee of the team is focused on a single common task, but at the same time will complement each other.

Distance management differs from innovative management in that the first is a form of implementation from the second. Innovation management is the process of developing a new concept, technology in management, aimed at obtaining maximum profit with minimal costs.

The idea of remote work has been mentioned since 1972. Jack Niles put forward the theory that it is not necessary to keep employees in the office at all, since modern means of communication allow you to maintain contact between employees at a distance. This theory has been tested by many experiments, the results of which interested the American National Science Foundation. The American authorities suggested that the development of the idea of distant work would help solve the problems of urban transport. Also, the new labor organization could provide employment to the population of remote rural areas.

In Russia, the first "freelancers" or, as they were called earlier, "teleworkers" began to appear even with the birth of Internet technologies. Specialists such as programmers, designers, web developers were the first to start working remotely.

Currently, the number of remote workers has increased. According to the Ministry of Labor of the Russian Federation, from 2019 to 2020, the number of distant workers increased 124 times [2]. Figure 1 shows the trend of the transition of Russian workers to a remote employment format.

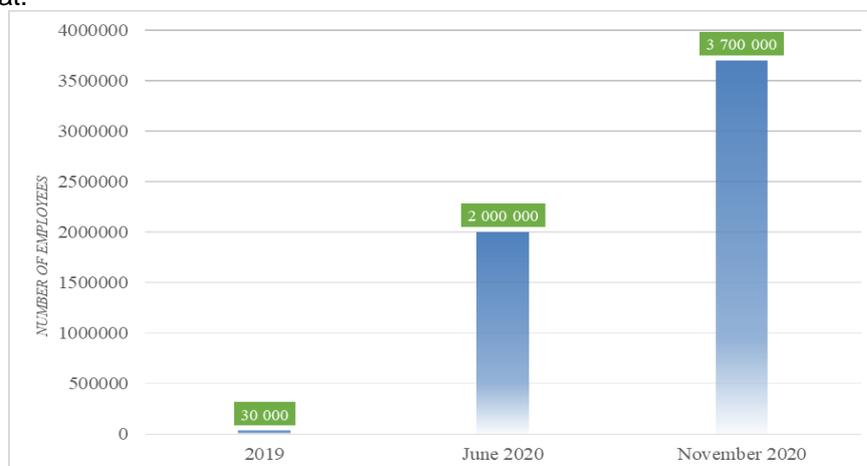


Figure 1 – The trend of switching to remote work since 2019

It is worth noting that more and more specialties are adapting to the format of distant work. Figure 2 shows the professional areas that have the largest remote employees.

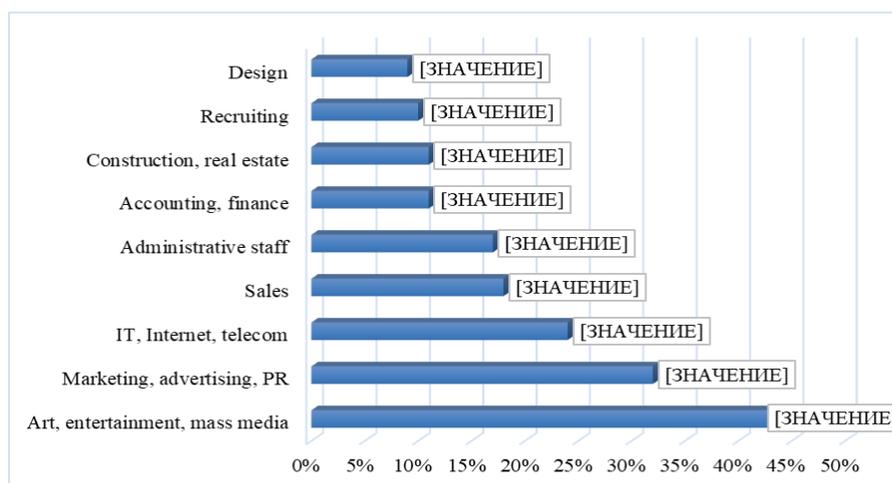


Figure 2 – Professional areas with the most number of remote employees

HeadHunter recruitment service interviewed more than 3,500 applicants in order to assess the advantages and disadvantages of distant work. Figure 3 shows the main advantages of remote work, according to HeadHunter respondents.

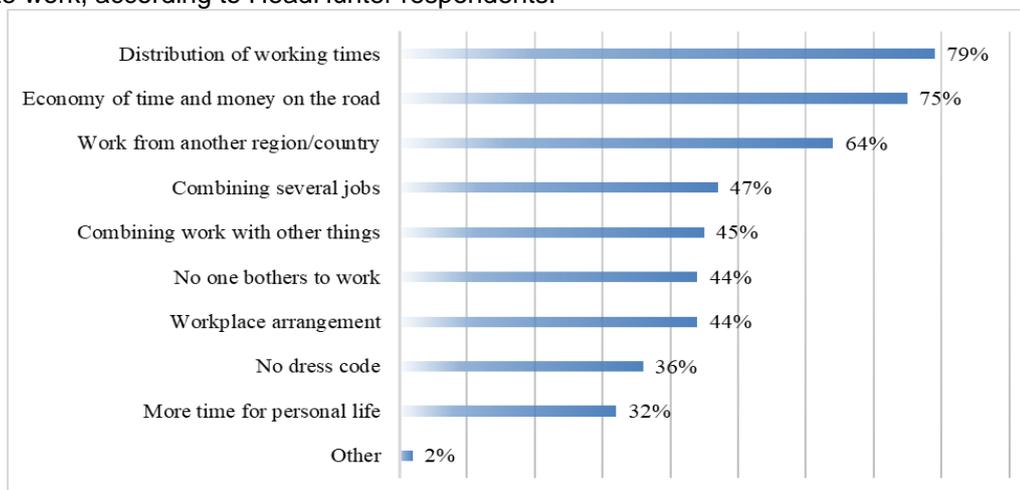


Figure 3 – Advantages of remote work according to respondents

Figure 4 shows the disadvantages of distant work according to the HeadHunter respondents.

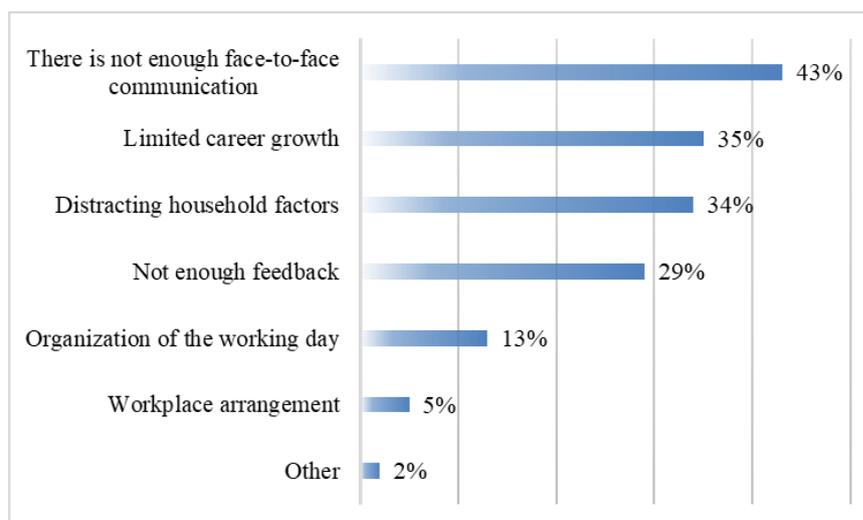


Figure 4 – Disadvantages of remote work according to respondents

According to the results of the interviewed applicants, it is clear that the advantages of distant work are much greater and they are also more significant.

Also, surveys were conducted on the part of novice distant managers, some simply shared their experience and summarized their remote activities. Consider some of the negative aspects of distant work, according to company executives.

1. Lack of personal communication with employees.

Managers claim that the lack of personal contact with a subordinate during distant employment makes it difficult to establish trust and control over the activities of employees.

2. Lack of time to focus on team management [3].

Managers working in several areas (project activities or routine work) have little time to effectively manage their team.

3. Unclear fulfillment of the requirements of the manager.

Often distant employees perform their tasks poorly. One of the reasons for this problem is the indistinct communication of tasks to employees.

In Table 1, we will consider in more detail the difficulties of managing a team distantly and the tactics of their solutions.

Table 1 – Problems of distant management and tactics of their solutions

Problems of distant management	Tactics of their solutions
Lack of control over subordinates	Maintaining a task tracker together with the company. Tool: "ToDo-list" is a task tracker in which all employees enter all their business - from working with e-mail to allocating time to prepare a development strategy. The expected result: Employees rationally allocate their time, and the head in an autonomous mode unobtrusively monitors the work of subordinates.
Distrust of subordinates on the part of the head	Increase the level of reliability and loyalty among employees. The Formula of Trust = Reliability + Loyalty Tools: 4 Steps to Increase the Reliability of Your Team: Step 1: Skill Check. Step 2: Be as open as possible in your expectations and requests when communicating with your team. Step 3: Give an example of how reliable you are for your remote team. Step 4: Count on others to do their job. 5 steps to increase loyalty among employees: Step 1: "Go personal" (share personal stories, be delicately interested in the personal life and hobbies of employees). Step 2: Encouraging social interaction among employees. Step 3: Interact with the team regularly. Step 4: Meetings offline in a relaxed atmosphere. at least once a week/month. Step 5: Be Positive and Optimistic.
Confidentiality in the work of other employees	Inform all employees of the project, organize employee interactions with each other to avoid misunderstandings in the work.
Uncertainty in time	Always set start and end dates (deadlines) this or that job. Make it clear to the team that time is not infinite and the faster they finish one task, the closer the company will come to success.
The habit of taking full responsibility for yourself	Delegate authority and distribute responsibility. It is important when delegating tasks not to forget to write them down. Rules for effective delegation in remote work: Rule 1. Enter a message about the task in real time when holding a conference in Zoom, Skype, WebEx, GoToMeeting, etc., distribute and record tasks so that all employees are present in real time. Rule 2: Always print oral assignments. Don't rely on verbal task requests – even minor ones. You can enter tasks in a shared online space, in a meeting minutes document, in a spreadsheet, or even by email. This will help to avoid misunderstandings among subordinates.
Difficulties in setting tasks	To set a clear task, you need to follow only 2 rules: Step 1: Always know what you want and what result you want to get. Step 2: Be straightforward in setting tasks. Get down to business as quickly as possible and say exactly what you want using the right words, leaving nothing open to interpretation or speculation.

An important indicator of the effectiveness of distant work is the commitment, involvement of an employee to a particular task.

For really important tasks – those that need to be completed first – there is a methodical step-by-step process that ensures maximum commitment of the employee who is assigned this task. This process should be used sparingly, because abuse of it can lead to the opposite consequences, and team members may become immune to it. Let's consider 6 steps to achieve employee commitment to a particular job.

Step 1: Ask to repeat the task

After you assign an action to someone, ask them to say the task or repeat it to you. The fact that they say these words significantly increases their sense of understanding and commitment to the task. For example, at the end of a meeting or conversation, say something like, "Just to make sure, I'd like to confirm what everyone will be working on next."

Step 2: Define a time frame

If you have already set a deadline for completing the task, ask this person to repeat or confirm yourself (for example, "You said you would do it on Friday, right?"). If you haven't set a deadline for the task, ask how long it will take them to complete the task (again, you should always have a deadline). For example, after receiving confirmation about the task, say something like "Great, so when can you do it?" or "Have any idea how long it will take you?".

Step 3: Develop a Commitment

The next step is to develop a sense of duty in order to let the person know that thanks to his help you will change your original plans. The idea is to let the person know that renegeing on their obligations will lead to some kind of hindrance for you. This creates an even greater incentive for them to complete the task, because the stakes are now higher. Here is an example of what you can say: "OK, then I will reschedule other scheduled meetings to meet with you and discuss the project."

Step 4: Emphasize the importance

The next step is to develop a sense of conscience in order to let the person understand that now you depend on him to complete the task. You want to emphasize the importance of the task, as well as the negative consequences that may arise if it is not completed. Here is an example of what you can say: "I have to warn you that if this is not done by Tuesday, I will get a public reprimand, so this is really important!".

Step 5: Confirm the action

The next step is to close the request, confirming that the action will be performed.

End the meeting or conversation using a firm and concise verbal confirmation phrase. Here's an example of what you can say when you end the conversation: "So, I'll definitely get a copy of this document on Friday, right?". Part of this step is also to write down the task and email it with a summary after the meeting.

Step 6: Show Appreciation

About a day after you make the request (and some time before the deadline, the task is approaching), follow the person by expressing appreciation. Let the person know how much you appreciate his efforts to complete the task and that he is one of those people who do this work. This not only reminds them of the task, but also appeals to their own sense of inner commitment. For example, "I really appreciate your help in this task-you are one of the few people I can count on." [4].

To organize distant work, it is necessary to use software tools. There are many software products that are firmly entrenched in the practice of remote work. In Table 2, let's look at some popular tools used in the field of remote work.

Table 2 – Software products for distant work organization

Software Task	Software products
<p>Planning. Strategic planning allows you to determine the overall plan of the company's actions, as well as to break it into smaller projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Focus To-do (application) – "tomato" timer and project manager, tasks. ✓ Notion is a modular solution for organizing the workspace and managing tasks, projects and employees. ✓ MindManager – transforms strategic plans, ideas and business information into visual maps that help the team work more efficiently. ✓ Asana, Trello, Base Camp – project planning programs designed for personal and shared use.
<p>Control. Accounting of working hours is a key point of cooperation at a distance, allowing the manager to make sure that everything is going according to plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Time Doctor – accounting of working hours, makes it possible to remotely monitor employees. ✓ Focus To-do – accounting of time spent on a particular task, project.
<p>Work on the project. When working together on a project, it is important to organize and monitor the activities of all employees of the company.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Planfix – joint task and project management, work with comments, interface configuration, report creation, work with contacts, documents and analysts, access control, integration connection, configurations. ✓ Google Docs is a text, table processor and presentation creation service, as well as an online cloud file storage service with file sharing functions. Allows employees to work together in real time. ✓ Dropbox is a file hosting company of Dropbox Inc., which includes personal cloud storage, file synchronization and a client program. ✓ Bitrix24 – service allows you to manage your business in a "single window" mode. Includes: CRM, project and task manager, corporate messenger, etc. [5].

To organize high-quality and effective distant work, appropriate technologies and software, as well as the ability to use them, are necessary.

Despite the fact that many companies are transitioning or have already switched to distant work, responsibility, delegation, development, motivation and employee engagement are

still relevant issues. Do not forget that in addition to work, an employee has a personal life, and, not always from switching to a distant employment format, he devotes enough time to it. Therefore, in order to avoid negative feedback from remote work, it is necessary to distribute the schedule and workload of employees depending on their strength and capabilities, devote time to each employee to check a particular job, build relationships on trust, but unobtrusively maintain control over the performance of work, organize team interaction not only during the workflow, but also involve them in joint recreation (organization of team building).

The organization of high-quality distant management and the ability to effectively manage the team will lead the business to the desired successful result.

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