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REMOTE WORKING - A DREAM JOB?

Scan to review worksheet

Expemo code:
19PM-S1L8-AQ8P

1   Warm-up

'Remote working' means working away from a traditional office, eg at home. Work in pairs. Do you agree or disagree with these statements about remote working? Explain why.

1.   Working remotely is more productive than working in the office.

2.   Most people would like to work remotely, if they could.

3.   If I worked from home, I would miss my colleagues.

2   Reading for the main idea

You're going to read about remote working. First skim-read the article quickly to get a general idea of the content and the organisation. Which of these topics is not mentioned in the article?

- Benefits to workers
- Negative effects
- Solutions

- Benefits to employers
- Popularity
- Types of stress

3   Reading for detail

These sentences have been removed from the article. Read the article again and match each sentence with a numbered gap.

a.   And, with no visible body language it is tricky to communicate our true meanings.

b.   Employers need to put the right structures in place, such as scheduled video calls and regular team-building meetups.

c.   One significant issue was the management of virtual working.

d.   Some multinationals have all staff working remotely, with employees situated all over the world.

e.   The benefits are important.

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THE C⚪NVERSATION

How remote working can increase stress

Adapted from theconversation.com, October 11, 2019, by Stephanie Russell

1. Remote working is becoming more popular than ever. A Swiss study found that 70% of professionals work remotely at least one day a week, while 53% work remotely for at least half of the week. _____ (1) New technology makes all this possible. While there are certainly benefits, there are also **pitfalls**. As remote working becomes the new normal for many, it's important that companies adapt and put the right policies in place to ensure their employees feel part of the team and don't **burn out**.

2. Nearly 70% of **millennials** would be more likely to choose an employer who offered remote working. _____ (2) Employees value the flexibility it gives them, particularly if they have childcare commitments. People also appreciate escaping long commutes and avoiding office distractions.

3. But there are also concerns that people's mental health and well-being can take a hit when working remotely. In the UK, businesses lose £100m every year due to workplace stress. Research shows that always being accessible by technology while working remotely leads to the blurring of work and non-work hours, particularly if you work from home. A 2017 United Nations report found that 41% of remote workers reported high stress levels, compared to just 25% of office workers.

4. One of the reasons for this could be the "out of sight, out of mind" **mentality** that's **commonplace** toward remote workers, which leads to a lack of trust, feelings of being an outsider and **a tendency** for people to think their colleagues are talking negatively about them behind their back. One study of 1,100 workers found that the 52% who worked from home were more likely to feel left out and mistreated, as well as unable to deal with conflict between themselves and colleagues.

5. Navigating sensitive territory in a virtual team is an essential skill. Emails can be misinterpreted as being rude or too direct. _____ (3)

6. In a virtual environment managers may focus too much on completing tasks and too little on relationships. With more emphasis on deadlines and routine information, virtual workers can feel treated as a cog in a machine, rather than an essential part of the team. Such a leadership approach can worsen the sense of **isolation** that comes with working remotely and can contribute to virtual workplace stress.

7. University lecturers and students who work virtually report feelings of isolation, loneliness and being unable to "switch off", as well as a lack of social support.

8. _____ (4) Interviewees said a lack of feedback from line managers and senior colleagues gave them no benchmark to judge progress, which led to increased feelings of anxiety and a concern as to whether they were "up to standard".

9. When it comes to work, there are two kinds of stress – the good kind and the bad kind. The Yerkes-Dodson Law (drawn up by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson) points out that stress can be productive up to a point and then it results in reduced productivity. Being unable to report being stressed (or being uncomfortable doing so), is **detrimental** as pressure will eventually **outweigh** an individual's ability to cope over time. In contrast, one recent study found that colleagues who spend just 15 minutes socialising and sharing their feelings of stress had a 20% increase in performance.

10. The right kind of communication is key to overcoming the difficulties of virtual working.

11. _____ (5) Bosses need to lead by example and create a culture where those outside the office feel valued.

12. Equally, virtual workers need to think about what makes them productive, happy and successful in everyday life, and try to **replicate** this in a remote setting – for example, taking a walk at lunch time, going to the gym, ringing a friend or reading a book.

13. If the future of work is heading towards more virtual working, then it is not something we can avoid. Instead we should implement ways of managing the stress associated with it, while enjoying the benefits.

4   Vocabulary I

Match each word from the article with its meaning. Use the context of the article to help you – the words are in bold in the text.

1.	pitfalls	a.	a likeliness to take action or occur the same way many times
2.	burn out	b.	a typical attitude, or way of thinking
3.	millennials	c.	being alone or cut off from social interaction with others
4.	mentality	d.	copy, reproduce
5.	commonplace	e.	frequent and not seen as unusual
6.	tendency	f.	harmful or damaging
7.	isolation	g.	have more significance or a stronger effect than another factor
8.	detrimental	h.	people who were born in the 1980s-2000s
9.	outweigh	i.	problems that are likely to occur in a particular situation
10.	replicate	j.	work too hard and become exhausted

5   Vocabulary II

Match each phrase from the article with the best meaning.

1. … people's mental health and well-being can **take a hit** when working remotely.

   a. become complicated   b. make someone angry   c. suffer

2. … working remotely leads to **the blurring of work and non-work hours**, particularly if you work from home.

   a. asking someone to work overtime   b. a lack of a clear boundary   c. saying something without thinking

3. **Navigating sensitive territory** in a virtual team is an essential skill.

   a. communicating a plan clearly
   b. saying and doing the right thing in a difficult situation
   c. taking your team in the right direction

4. … virtual workers can feel like **a cog in a machine**, rather than an essential part of the team.

   a. the opposite of an individual with feelings
   b. they have an important role
   c. they have to work without stopping

5. … lack of feedback from line managers and senior colleagues gave them no **benchmark to judge progress**, which led to increased feelings of anxiety …

   a. support to do their job
   b. sense of teamwork
   c. way of measuring how well they were doing

6   Reflect and discuss

Look back at the sentences you discussed in the first part of the lesson. Have you changed your mind about whether you agree or disagree with any of the statements? Explain your ideas in pairs.

7   Activate

Imagine you have successfully interviewed for a job with a company that requires you to work remotely at least several days a week. You have some concerns about this arrangement. Write three to five questions to ask your new employer about how they handle remote working, using vocabulary from the exercises in this lesson.

Example: What **pitfalls** have you experienced with remote workers in the past, and how have you addressed these issues?

Roleplay a conversation with a manager from the company. One student – the employee - will ask the questions they wrote, and the other – the employer – will answer the questions. Try to use vocabulary from the lesson in the answers as well.

Then change roles.