

Distributed Work Playbooks



Background. These playbooks were created based on external and internal research at Google and are meant to help guide employees through distributed work experiences.

Employees have unique experiences with distributed work, so we tailored our recommendations based on roles one might have on a distributed team. Here's a high-level overview of the roles and the following slides have tailored recommendations:

Role

Description

Distributed Employees

Do you often collaborate with teammates across locations? Looking for ways to improve your own distributed work experience, from building strong social connections to working around common logistical challenges? Look at [slide# 3](#) for tips.

Buddies of Distributed Employees

We could all use a buddy from time to time, especially if a large portion of a team is together in one location and others are not. It can be really helpful for distributed workers to have someone looking out for them. Check out [slide# 4](#) to be a better buddy for your distributed teammates.

Managers

Managers are uniquely positioned to set the tone and best practices when it comes to how their team approaches working across locations. Check out [slide# 5](#) to help your distributed team connect easier.

Leaders

It's important for leaders to not only communicate their investment in distributed work, but also follow through and demonstrate their support. Small things like defining and communicating a travel policy can help add clarity to the way Googlers work with one another across locations. Look at [slide# 6](#) to learn more!

Working together when we're not *together*: An employee's guide to distributed work

Research shows that distributed work can be as effective as working in the same office, but it isn't always as easy or enjoyable. Why? **Employees struggle to create 3 types of high-quality connections.** But simple behaviors can help. This playbook is designed uniquely for you.

Connection Challenges

		
GETTING CONNECTED	BEING CONNECTED	FEELING CONNECTED
Arranging logistics, like rooms and timezones	Ensuring technology supports the work you're doing	Getting to know one another, building trust

What can you do to improve distributed work?

1

Be Present

Some engagement signals are lost when working together virtually (e.g., with video conferencing), particularly when we mute the microphone or focus intently on our laptops.

- Unmute your microphone and validate contributions from others. A head nod, “mmhmm”, or “yeah, good idea” will do it!
- Keep laptops closed and phones face down, unless you're the note-taker.
- Ensure you're clearly visible on the video screen by zooming in, making eye contact, and expressing your reactions noticeably.

3

Re-Tool Your Meetings

Make sure the technology you're using for meetings helps you reach optimal levels of productivity.

- Add agendas and relevant docs to your calendar invites.
- Taking meetings from your desk? Ensure that you have a functioning camera or headset.

2

Get Talking

A little rapport goes a long way. Create opportunities to get to know your distributed teammates just like you would if they sat in the next cube over.

- Start your meetings with an open-ended, personal question. Try “what did you do this weekend?” (You'll get more than asking “how was your weekend”!)
- Consider creating a group chat that is always “on” for work-related questions or fun, social messages.

4

Strategize Your Space

When meeting rooms are in short supply, get creative! You don't have to let physical space get in the way of effective distributed work.

- Talk to teammates about norms for your space. Can you take meetings from your desk? If so, when?
- Dial in to meetings on your phone and find a quiet space to talk. Or look for informal spaces you don't have to book like cafeterias, coffee shops, or outdoor spaces.



“It's [essential to have] deliberate, strong communications about what goals and decisions are made in what forum.”

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What can you do to improve distributed work?

1

Reach Out

It can be hard for teammates in other locations to be heard, as they often have to overcome barriers to jump in share. You can help create the space for them to speak up.

- Ask for input from the most isolated meeting participant any time the meeting breaks into a discussion.
- If you see someone trying to enter the conversation, stop and invite their comments.
- Say hi! Check in on a distributed teammate with an encouraging instant message, a project-relevant news article, or a funny photo - just because!

3

Get Talking

A little rapport goes a long way. Create opportunities to get to know your distributed teammates just like you would if they sat in the next desk over.

- Start meetings with an open-ended, personal question. Try "what did you do this weekend?"
- Try a group chat that is always "on" for work-related questions or fun, social messages.
- Share a virtual meal over video conferencing. But keep time zones in mind - your lunch may be someone's breakfast or afternoon tea.

2

Traverse Time Zones

Scheduling a meeting that works for everyone is hard enough. It's easy to forget what matters to your teammates, especially time zones and personal working hours.

- Add other time zones to your calendar.
- If you host a recurring meeting, try a rotating schedule to ease the time zone burden.

4

Appreciate Differences

Cultural differences influence how people like to be visible or receive recognition; the way people act; and interpret the actions of others - but we're not always aware of how culture influences behavior, experiences, or workstyle.

- Reflect: Some behaviors required for distributed work aren't comfortable counter cultural identities, norms, or personalities.
- Teach a teammate something new about your culture (e.g., words in a new language, holidays/cultural traditions).



"I need to put a lot more effort in for that [video conferencing] to come through as a human interaction."

Working together when we're not *together*: A manager's guide to distributed work

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What can you do to improve distributed work?

1

Set Team Norms

Norms set clear expectations for how your team works together. But they're often assumed rather than explicitly stated, leaving opportunities for confusion.

- Set clear guidelines and budgets for when team members can travel - it's one of the best ways to support distributed work!
- Encourage team members to create communication and decision making norms (e.g., answering emails/pings off-hours, information-sharing across time zones).
- Set norms for when team members should and shouldn't join meetings off-hours.

3

Get Talking

A little rapport goes a long way. Create opportunities to get to know your distributed teammates just like you would if they sat in the next cube over.

- Start meetings with an open-ended, personal question. Try "what did you do this weekend?"
- Try a group chat that is always "on" for work-related questions or fun, social messages.
- Share a virtual meal over GVC. But keep time zones in mind - your lunch may be someone's breakfast or afternoon tea.

2

Traverse Time Zones

Scheduling a meeting that works for everyone is hard enough. It's easy to forget what matters to your teammates, especially time zones and personal working hours.

- Revisit your team meeting schedule. If the same people are joining off-hours, try a rotating schedule to accommodate everyone. Acknowledge those who are joining off hours, and reconsider "friendly" meeting times (e.g., 8am in Singapore is still 5am in Hyderabad).

4

Appreciate Differences

Cultural differences influence how people like to be visible or receive recognition; the way people act; and interpret the actions of others - but we're not always aware of how culture influences behavior, experiences, or workstyle.

- Reflect: Some behaviors required for distributed work aren't comfortable counter cultural identities, norms, or personalities.
- Use 1:1s to discuss how distributed Googlers can be heard, supported, and included.



"[Distributed work] is more difficult and requires more effort and moderation...once you've done your homework it'll be a much more enjoyable experience"

Working together when we're not together: A leader's guide to distributed work

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What can you do to improve distributed work?

1 Set Team Vision and Norms

A shared vision and norms help set expectations for how your team works together. But they're often assumed rather than explicitly stated, leaving opportunities for confusion.

- Set clear guidelines and budgets for when team members can travel - it's one of the best ways to support distributed work.
- Encourage your directs to discuss, establish, and document team norms about communication, decision making, and how work gets done across locations.
- Make sure your team has a shared vision, which helps team members across locations align to a broader goal.

2 Traverse Time Zones

Scheduling a meeting that works for everyone is hard enough. It's easy to forget what matters to your teammates, especially time zones and personal working hours.

- Revisit your team meeting schedule. If the same people are joining off-hours, try a rotating schedule to accommodate everyone. Acknowledge those who are joining off hours, and reconsider "friendly" meeting times (e.g., 8am in Singapore is still 5am in Hyderabad).

3 Reach Out

Create a shared sense of belongingness and make sure everyone feels respected and included.

- Make an extra effort to connect with distributed team members on a personal level. Pick up the phone or send an instant message to ask about their day, weekend plans, etc.
- Speaking of travel norms, try to bring your full team together in one location as often as makes sense. Or if you're hosting team building events in separate locations, make an effort to be there in person.

4 Appreciate Differences

Cultural differences influence how people like to be visible or receive recognition; the way people act; and interpret the actions of others - but we're not always aware of how culture influences behavior, experiences, or workstyle.

- Reflect: Some behaviors required for distributed work aren't comfortable counter cultural identities, norms, or personalities.
- Use 1:1s to discuss how distributed Googlers can be heard, supported, and included.



"We don't talk about [distributed work]...[we should be] bringing it to the forefront that this is the reality that exists"