

Hybrid Working Part 2

Productivity Over Location



Pre-2020, there was still a prevalence in many companies that attendance in the office was linked to productivity, and those companies probably struggled the most with having to swing to a location-less environment. A previously centralised workforce probably worked from lots of emails, lots of meetings, slide decks and spreadsheets to consolidate and talk through information. There was an assumption that this would have continued while workers were remote, albeit less efficiently than being able to chat to colleagues.

Another repercussion of the pandemic is a greater awareness of the spread of infection - having been bombarded with hygiene messages for a year, the concept of people 'soldiering on' and dragging themselves into the office to show their face when they have a cold or flu is at best going to be frowned upon, and most likely become actively discouraged by companies. Being able to choose to work regardless of location maintains equivalent productivity in this scenario.

This is not a new problem by any means, but it affords companies the opportunity to review how they can best help workers operate on a day to day basis irrespective of location or time. One of the best ways to address this is the use of task management solutions.

These have grown in number over the past ten years as people seek to improve how people work and interact on projects and processes - the big players such as [Monday.com](https://www.monday.com), Wrike, Smartsheet and newer entrants such as ClickUp all offer the opportunity to pull staff away from email and spreadsheets to a structured, yet flexible way of defining work and workflow.

These products are designed to be fully-fledged. There are many lighter solutions that deal purely with core task management, such as Trello, Microsoft To-Do/Planner etc. where you can create tasks and allocate them to team members and still provide a decent level of information for managing staff effort and progress, and have a large user base. The larger solutions look to address not only task management but wider reporting and management, essentially trying to pull away from the incumbent systems such as Microsoft Project or the trusty spreadsheet to provide real-time views in familiar forms such as Gantt charts.

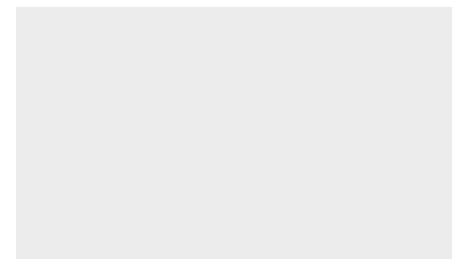
The concept here is closely aligned to the toolsets used for development lifecycles, addressing the lean/agile approach for requirements, development, testing and deployment where all parties live in one tool such as Atlassian Jira or Azure DevOps - in fact, Atlassian who started off with Jira as a bug tracker, have realised the potential of the concept and produced their own task solution called Jira Core, which targets business teams such as Marketing, Finance and Legal. We will cover the development toolsets in more detail in the next few weeks.

The product will be down to personal preference - functionality will differ in terms of the customisation and connectivity to other systems such as Slack or Teams to integrate to existing communication within the business, but the concept is what matters. Unsurprisingly these products are all cloud-based, typically with very good mobile apps, allowing users to work on a variety of devices and from any location.

If hybrid working is to work and work well, the interchange of ideas and inter-related tasks needs to be clear and easy to use - a manager can hold a meeting and add new tasks and subtasks as they go, set required deadlines and dependencies and assign them to users. The users get notifications of new tasks, as well as summaries of what is due. Users can also use the system on the fly to put in further tasks, add comments and attachments for other team members and record time worked if needed, either directly or via third party time management tools. Centralising communication on tasks also helps team members pick up work if a colleague is away or ill, without having to wade through email chains.

From a manager's perspective, the real-time feedback is key - whether office-based or not, tasks and progress are visible without having to ping over update requests or constant calls and can help intervene to remove blockers, leaving team members to get on without having to produce summary updates. The centralised information also allows reporting upwards to be easier, with no manual compilation of progress.

At Dunstan Thomas, we have helped a number of clients get a handle on how to work better in a variety of areas, and task management is one area where we have seen the greatest adoption and impact on how companies work better, from project teams up to executive decision making, with a variety of different tools. These tools, in allowing a central, visible workload has enabled teams to get a greater sense of what is going on and help them feel anchored when sat at home, and ultimately feel more productive.



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