Remote work: equipping business students for the working reality.

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Abstract

We are living in an economy where talent acquisition and retention have become one of the major challenges facing organizations. The good news is that a new workforce has emerged to fill those gaps and is not only location independent, but skilled, passionate, and willing to work without bricks and mortar offices. Business schools are responsible for graduating students who are ready to enter careers in a variety of industries, ready and willing to join the ranks of those location independent workers. However, are they ready for such a context? Do the skills and competencies required for success in this context match the skills and competencies business schools are building into their students? The results of this research project provide insights into the required competencies for success, as well as the support and feedback required by the remote worker, all from the perspective of remote workers.

KEY WORDS: remote, remote workers, competencies, support, feedback, business education, coworking, virtual teams.

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Background

The term 'remote workers' refers to **individuals and teams who are not required to show up at a physical location on a regular basis**. This working construct is also referred to as Smart working, choosing the best place (home, coworking space, office, local, or global) to get the work done (Tierney, 2018). Along with providing a solution to the talent crisis, which, according to Korn Ferry, is predominately based on simple demography." (May 2018), businesses benefit on several levels. Those benefits include higher employee output, control over costs, diversified workforce, expanded recruiting pool, interruption prevention, employee retention, and a stronger culture (Farrer, 2018). Of course, these benefits hinge on the success of the hiring process, making sure that the workers hired actually have the competencies necessary to be successful in these roles, and then on the continuing support of these same workers. A survey conducted by Flexjobs reported that individual workers desire remote work because it provides great personal benefits: work-life balance, flexibility, meaningful work, autonomy, freedom, and independence (Reynolds, 2017).

This research[2] focused on remote workers and distributed teams. These virtual or remote working individuals and teams may split their time between collocated spaces and off-site, while others may work virtually 100% of the time location independent. It is important to note that remote workers use technology extensively to support their communication and collaboration.

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"Technology, when used properly, can facilitate trust-building, effective communication, and overall coordination of teams; however, the reverse is also true in that ineffective use of technology can impair team functionality.[...]any technology usage in virtual teams should be aligned to optimize team trust, communication, and coordination." (Ferrell & Kline, 2018)

Different names are associated with these types of work arrangements, i.e. virtual, distributed, telecommuting, nomads, freelancers; however, no matter the labels, the opportunities and challenges are the same.

According to a Global Coworking Survey (Deskmag, 2018) there were 18,900 coworking spaces[3] globally servicing 1.69 million remote workers. This is especially interesting when considering results reflected in this same report revealed that 66% of respondents cited their home office as their primary work environment, with only seven percent working primarily from a coworking space. This begs the question: do we really know the extent of the number of remote workers globally?

In their paper on virtual competence, Wang and Haggerty (para. 4), "…theorize that individual virtual competence (IVC) is a new and distinct capability that individuals require in order to perform effectively in their organizations".

Much research exists pertaining to the necessity of hiring based on identified competencies, "…abilities or attributes, described in terms of behaviour, key to effective and/or highly effective performance within a particular job" (University of Nottingham, 2018). Skills are about *what* is done while competencies look at *how* a task is done. Competencies link to performance management in both face-to-face and remote settings; however, as confirmed by Al-Husaam (2005), most examinations of appraisal systems focus on organizations built on collocated settings, not on those virtual or distributed. Key information provided by researchers even go so far as to identify competencies on which to base those appraisals (Wang & Haggerty, 2011). However, the gap becomes evident when considering performance evaluation, based on relevant competencies, from the perspective of remote work. Certain complexities exist around remote teams that may not be evident in collocated teams; the simple fact that remote teams depend largely on technology vs. face to face for communication can change the nature of how employers conduct performance evaluations. Observation, a valuable tool for evaluation is not possible when the employee is located across the globe, nor is a 360 evaluation practical when interactions between employee, manager, client, or co-workers are less frequent that their collocated counterparts.

In a publication regarding the evaluation of virtual teams, (Albertson, 2009, p. 28) the author states that:

> *Little is published about the evaluation of employees in virtual teams. While this paper has discussed the traits of virtual teams as well as the qualities of performance appraisal types currently in existence, and has made inferences about which methods are best suited for virtual management relationships, no studies have been done to assess the effectiveness or accuracy of any particular technique when used with members of a virtual team.*

Armed with this knowledge, the focus of the research was established. Students graduating today with business degrees will be working in careers yet to be created. How do educators prepare them for what lies ahead? This research was a collaborative effort between academia and industry focused on technology related roles. The research question was ***"What competencies are necessary for success as a remote worker, and what feedback and support are required for continued growth and success?"*** Two Research Objectives flowed from this question: 1. ***To identify the necessary competencies for successful in a virtual, technology environment.*** 2. ***To articulate what is important to technology sector remote workers regarding feedback and support.***

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[3] Coworking spaces are places where independent professionals working together in a shared space of creative collaboration and community.

Literature Review

Significant learning emerged from the review and informed the approach to research. One report stated that " K.S.A.O.s (Knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes) are particularly relevant in virtual teams—meaning that such KSAOs are more relevant for individual team members' and the team's success in virtual than in traditional teamwork" (Drumm, Kanthak, Hartmann, & Hertel, para. 4). Wang and Haggerty suggest that individual virtual competence (IVC) is vital, and stands in contrast to those necessary in a collocated setting. Specifically noted were competencies that relate to technology, motivation, and self-efficacy (para. 7). The value of competencies along with research regarding the empowerment of virtual teams on their effectiveness is evident. Experienced empowerment resulted in a team's sense of purpose, autonomy, and impact; ultimately, this empowerment reflects in higher levels of performance (Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, & Gibson, 2004). The same authors stated "…that team empowerment may be more important to the performance of virtual teams than it is to the performance of collocated teams because of the unique nature of virtual team tasks" (Kirkman et al., 2004, para. 9). While performance criteria for virtual teams include "…leadership, trust, communication, team cooperation, reliability, motivation, comfort, and social interaction" (Dube & Marnewick, 2016, para. conclusion), it takes high levels of relevant, individual competencies to create such success in a team.

The literary review provided great insight from collocated organizations, managers, and researchers. However, what was evident from the literature was the missing voice of the remote worker. Ensuring the hearing of silent voice informed the methodology of the research.

Methods

The researchers applied a mixed method design approach (Venkatesh et al, 2016). Learnings extrapolated from current academic research informed Research Objective 1, while a quantitative and qualitative approach informed Research Objective 2. Findings from literary reviews informed the open-ended questions posed at meetups[4], with additional insights reflected in survey questions (Figure i). Following amalgamation of all data received, the researchers were able to identify emerging trends and discern how those trends lined up with, or contradict those identified through the literary review.

Meetups and coworking channels facilitated the invitation distribution to remote workers, specifically those in the technology industry, to participate in the interviews. These conversations were conducted in coworking spaces in British Columbia, Canada; Helsinki, Finland; Amsterdam, Eindhoven, The Hague, Netherlands; Berlin, Germany; London, England, and Paris, France. Further individual and group virtual meetings were conducted along with face-to-face interviews in North America and Europe.

What is your role as a remote worker?
Why did you choose this context of working?
What competencies contribute to your success as a remote worker?
What is your primary work environment?
What do you enjoy most about remote work?
What challenges do you face as a remote worker?
How and when do you like to receive feedback?
How do you want your supervisor/manager to support you?

Figure i Questions asked during interviews.

Data confirming, and adding to the literary review, informed the questions individuals responded to via anonymous surveys (Figure ii). Individuals working remotely and organizations directly connected with remote workers received a link to the survey for distribution to the appropriate candidates. Social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, #Slack where utilized for further distribution of the survey. Survey

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questions included a series of closed-ended, Likert scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions in order to determine demographics followed by opinions related to respondents experience as remote workers.

Country considered home base
Age group
Role in technology
Work arrangement
Primary and secondary work environments
Opinion regarding the importance of feedback from supervisors and peers
Desired format and frequency of feedback
Understanding of 'autonomy', 'accountability', 'support' in a work context
Importance of specified competencies
Suggestions for competencies not included

Figure ii Areas addressed on survey.

The research gathered input from 250 individuals; 109 participated in the survey while 149 provided feedback in either face to face or virtual platforms. A Snowball Methodology (Kudovskiy, 2018) informed the distribution of surveys. The following results reflect the combined responses from all 250 participants.

Results ~ Demographics

The following information provides an overview of the demographic responses.

Countries represented in research
Respondents cited Canada (34%) and the U.S. (33%) as their home base, with 26% naming various countries in Europe as home. The other designation reflects respondents (7%) who identify home base as specifically being Mexico, Russia, Romania, Bolivia, New Zealand, and Poland. Do note that while these locations, Canada, U.S., Europe, and other are cited as 'home base', the remote workers are not necessarily working from these location 100% of the time; for many, travel to other locations is a regular part of their experience. One specific remote worker would name Canada as a home base but has worked from Ireland, Portugal, England, France, and Spain over the past four years.

Age
While the bulk of respondents reported to be 36-40 years of age, those 25-35 and 41-45 age group are not far behind in numbers (Figure iii). Findings from the research revealed that 49 % of freelancers are over 50 yrs. An independent study reports 32% of baby boomers plan to migrate to working as freelancers over the next few years (Freshbooks, 2018)
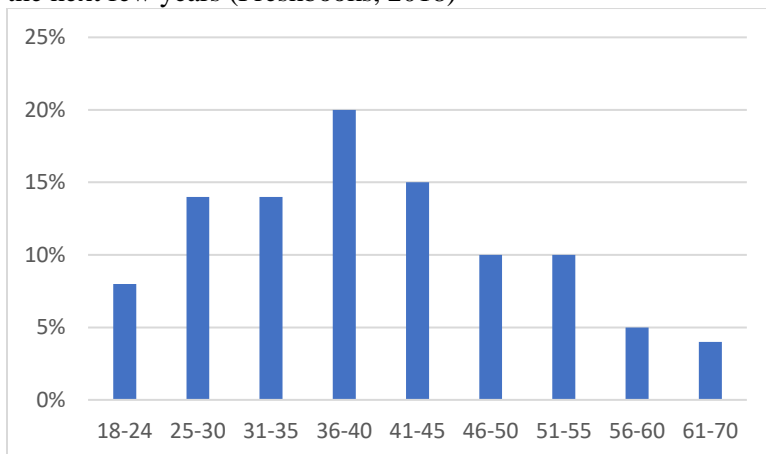

Figure iii Age demographics

Work Arrangement
Remote work is not a one-size-fits-all arrangement. To determine the extent to which people worked location independent vs. collocated respondents reported the following (figure iv).

	% of respondents
Work fulltime remotely for an organization. Freedom to work from wherever I choose.	38%
Work fulltime for an organization. Work from a shared or dedicated workspace.	22%
Self-employed. Work from a dedicated or shared workspace.	19%
Self-employed. No dedicated workspace.	13%
Work fulltime remotely for an organization. I frequently travel to various locations for the organization.	8%

Figure iv Work arrangement

Looking at the specific locations where people work from demonstrated the variety of choices remote workers make (Figure v).

	Primary	Secondary
Home office	67	15
Office not located in your home	11	18
Home living area (kitchen table…)	8	16
Coworking space	8	7
Café or coffee shop	4	12
No primary or secondary, changes constantly	1	15
Outdoors (beach, forest, mountains…)	0	6
Other (hotel lobbies, library, conferences…)	1	11

Figure v Work locations: primary and secondary

The initial intent of this research was to focus on the technology industry. However, it became apparent that the technology industry was not an entity unto itself…every company in every industry is powered by technology and innovation. In fact, 13% of respondents stated they were not in the technology industry, yet still considered themselves to be remote workers connected to technology within their industry. The following breakdown reflects the specifics of those roles (Figure vi). A large percentage (49%) chose 'other' to identify their roles. The 'other' category represented technology roles within operations, Human Resources, technology coaching, leadership, project managing, service design, communications, and C.T.O.s.
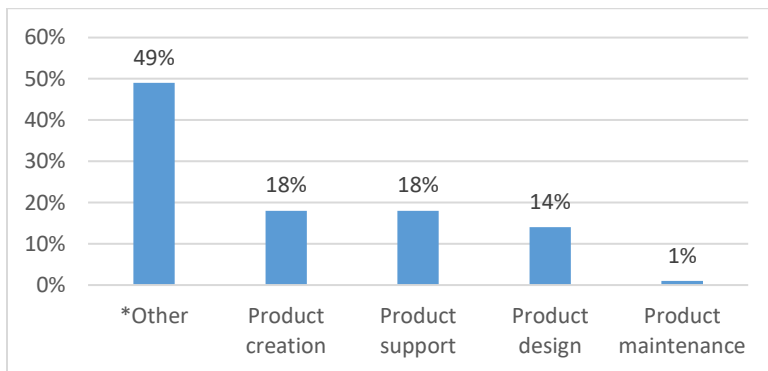

Figure vi Breakdown of technology roles performed by respondents.

The focus of this research were the competencies necessary for success as a remote worker. The following competency sub-headings represent, in descending order, the level of importance given to each from the perspective of the remote worker. Based on responses to a Likert Scale, the number listed beside each represents the percentage of respondents that reported the competency as being critical to success. In the interviews, respondents noted competencies that both led to their success and those they knew needed to be developed in order to grow in their future success.

Communication (100%)
In every conversation over the course of the research and the additional comments added to the survey responses, respondents stated that excellent communication skills are vital and non-negotiable for success as a remote worker…particularly written communication. They went on to explain that communication is vital because of the importance of accuracy and eliminating ambiguity in shared messaging. The remote workers explained how miscommunication is common due to such things as language differences, idioms, or lack of non-verbal ques. Research results revealed that excellence in communication also encompassed channels use. One interviewee provided the following example. The language of 'texting' is not adequate when the work context calls for reading emotional cues, or providing a 'paper' trail (documentation) outlining decisions, agreements, complaints, discussions, proposals, conflict resolutions, or reports. Another respondent reported that depending on the current location of a remote worker, he or she might not be able to rely on technology that supports visual, virtual meetings. In addition to the ability to articulate verbally, many virtual meetings call for a written follow up summary to be provided to all involved to ensure agreement of what discussion content, and action steps determined.

Other respondents spoke to the fact that excellent communication takes time, something that many claim is limited. They reported that it also takes patience, reflection, reviewing, reworking, rephrasing, and great intentionality to communicate clearly. Another aspect of communication discussed was having the ability to determine the appropriate communication channels and technology to use in order to communicate effectively. One respondent stated, "Because nonverbal communication is limited in virtual conversations, we have to work extra hard to articulate and confirm messages."

Self-directed/motivated (74%)
Second on the list of importance was the ability to self-direct and self-motivate. This entailed taking responsibility for personal decisions and effectively organizing activities based on intrinsic motivation without pressure from others. Without being self-directed, remote workers stated they might not have what it takes to organize multiple contracts in order to achieve the deliverables identified.

Trustworthy (72%)
Being trustworthy was stated as critical by 72% of the respondents. Respondents reported that if someone is not a trustworthy person, it might be a struggle to make progress in his or her career. Discussions reflected on the thought that some people *need* the accountability of others to continue making progress. The weather, the surf, depression, excitement are some of the distractions that can cause misplaced priorities when an individual has already committed to an important deliverable. By consistently following through with what has been committed, an individual is demonstrating trustworthiness. For people who view commitment as restrictive, it does not mean they are not a trustworthy person, but it does mean that it will be difficult to demonstrate it through actions.

Discipline (58%)
Discipline is showing a controlled form of behavior or way of working. In the study, 58% of respondents agreed that discipline is the long commitment in the same direction, doing something because it is the right thing to do, not because it felt like it.

Taking initiative/curious (55%)
This refers to an act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation; eager to know or learn something. The phrase 'the buck stops here' rang true with many research participants. When working remotely the individual may not have ready access to a manager or co-worker to solve a problem, or provide a resource. In all likelihood, no one will be standing over a remote worker telling them next steps, or even first steps in initiating and working through a project; no micro manager to focus on the details. Being curious speaks to a desire for continued growth, never settling for status quo, seeking new and improved processes, new solutions, learning new things, and never letting oneself stagnate. This desire for continued learning was a common sentiment among participants.

Adaptable/flexible (54%)
Research participants shared the sentiment that being ready and able to change in order to adjust to new conditions is what adaptability is all about. They shared that while an individual may be an amazing web developer, writer, project manager, without the ability to adapt he or she may not have what it takes to recalibrate or adjust when faced with continuing changes to due dates and deliverables. These changes can come from different directions: the client, a supervisor, a team member, unforeseen circumstances, or even as the result of self-action. No matter the source, the respondents cited successful remote workers need to develop the ability to 'go with the flow' without compromising the integrity of the project or assignment.

High Self-efficacy (52%)
Self-efficacy speaks to having a high belief in one's own capabilities to produce quality outcomes. A healthy self-efficacy regarding a person's ability to produce a product or service that is of the highest quality provides a profile of an individual who has what it takes to be successful in a smart working context. Discussions clarified the distinction between self-efficacy and over confident or egotistical. Respondents recognized that an individual with high self-efficacy understands their strengths and is willing to seek help when needed without feelings of inadequacy.

Results ~ motivational factors

There were four additional areas explored during the course of the research: support, autonomy, accountability, and feedback. Each has an influence on the intrinsic motivation of the remote workers, and on the work environment.

Support
The most frequently commented on question was, 'what does being supported mean to you?' (Figure ix). In conversations, many reported their manager or supervisor had little idea what they actually did; many had to take the lead in communicating and reporting to their supervisor. One survey respondent stated, "This is the biggest challenge I find in remote work. Being supported means being able to find what you need, get feedback, and, when needed, have team members and leadership back your ideas and support you to clients/customers."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs[5] draws attention to the five levels of needs required for an individual to reach self-actualization (Stewart, Nodoushani, & Stumpf, 2018). As exemplified by a case study coming out of South America (Cangemi, 2009), the research revealed many remote workers chose this work context because it supports their desire to create, and to be autonomous, operating at the higher levels of Maslow's Hierarchy. They expect to meet the foundational levels of basic needs, belonging, and recognition through the support and collaboration of peers and supervisors. Herzberg, in his Motivation-Hygiene Theory, builds on Maslow's Hierarchy. He states that unless people's basic needs (hygiene) i.e. salary, secondary working conditions, the relationship with colleagues, physical work place, and the

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[5] A respected motivational theory of needs depicted visually as a triangle. The foundational need of the triangle is physiological, being built upon with safety, social, esteem, self-actualization.

relationship between supervisor and employee are met, the motivators i.e. performance, recognition, job status, responsibility, and opportunities for growth will not create satisfaction (Kuijk, 2018).

Kathleen Hogan created a hierarchy of needs based on those outlined by Maslow (Hogan, 2018). Hogan listed these as being: pay, perks, people, pride, leading to purpose. In other words, support starts with meeting the basic needs of the remote worker, removing any barriers that would prevent them from being fully autonomous, mastering their job, and ultimately finding purpose in what they do (Pink, 2009). Many of the responses identified below apply to what any employee would require from their supervisor; however, the need for such support is greater when working remotely.

Access to both people, technology support and communication tools, when needed
Having a supervisor or manager remove barriers and roadblocks.
Fostering strong collaboration with team and supervisors.
Respect and recognition for ideas, input, opinions; being heard.
On-going feedback and encouragement.
Emotional and psychological support.
Access to learning and development.
Clear vision and expectations.

Figure ix What support means to a remote worker.

Hearing about the challenges remote workers face in this working context is an effective way to consider how to support remote workers. Participants described various struggles in the course of successfully performing their roles, some of which were even greater if part of the team were actually collocated. Struggles such as cultural differences, loneliness, working with different time zone, feelings of isolation, poor communication, and inadequate technology to support this. One of the respondents had this to say about her struggle with loneliness. "Loneliness can lead to depression. The remote work culture and even coworking spaces don't foster conversations where people can ask for help for possible mental health issues."

Autonomy
Remote workers cited autonomy, or 'self-rule' (Sneddon, 2013, p. 3) as a reason for working remotely, thus it was included as a question in the survey. Yet, how do remote workers define autonomy? Based on the research, three words: freedom, independence, and flexibility sum up what autonomy means to them. That can be disconcerting for a manager who has a high need for control. However, when the individuals hired provide evidence of the above competencies, a manager would be more at ease with moving from a command and control style to that of a supportive and participatory approach to leading his or her employees. After closer examination, it became clear that having autonomy is not just a drive for freedom, independence, and flexibility, but also a key component of work design theory.

> "Of all the identified motivational task-related work design features, autonomy or "the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the individual" has been found to strongly affect both subjective and objective employee performance (e.g., creativity) and attitudinal outcomes such as commitment and job satisfaction. For knowledge workers, in particular, autonomy has been found to be an important, essential aspect of their performance" (Theurer, Tumasjan & Welpe, 2018, p.3).

In other words, if organizations design work arrangements in such a way as to increase job satisfaction and decrease alienation and repetitive work, the result should be increased productivity and greater sense of personal achievement, thereby creating autonomy.

Accountability
Without exception, our respondents agreed that accountability at work is vital. If one is to enjoy the privileges afforded by freedom, independence, and flexibility, there must be accountability. While many

anecdotal responses were provided, one that reflects the sentiments of all would be "Doing what I say I will do; delivering on commitments. Making work visible and available to the rest of the team, and holding the rest of the team to their commitments as well." The one word used by most in their responses was 'responsibility'; being responsible for: meeting deadlines, fulfilling commitments, owning consequences, actions and decisions, achieving deliverables, success and failure. The definition provided by businessdictionary.com, "The obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner", suggest that accountability flows in many directions: inward, vertically, horizontally; indeed to anyone and everyone the remote worker interacts with in regards to getting the job done. In their allegory on accountability, the authors share advice to a struggling manager; very reminiscent of the thoughts expressed by remote workers.

"Choosing freedom would mean that every staff member at every level would be fully accountable for his or her ideas, actions, behaviors, and performance, without anyone looking over his or her shoulder. No more alibis, passing the buck, or playing the blame game, and no second-guessing on performance reviews. To me, it meant that I would no longer accept the 'helpless victim' role from my staff."   (Lebow & Spitzer, 2002, p. 27)

Feedback

When asked about feedback, 72% of respondents stated that individual feedback from a supervisor was either critical, or at least very important. A further 69% agreed that feedback from peers was also critical to their success (Figure vii). The channel identified for receiving feedback is important in attaining and maintaining high levels of success. According to 73% respondents, the most effective delivery channel from a supervisor is face-to-face, in person when possible, but if not then through video calls. Approximately 25% of those also stated that receiving a written summary following the conversation was important. When receiving feedback from peers, 56% reported that video and face-to-face conversations were preferred, 32% were content with email or instant messaging communication.
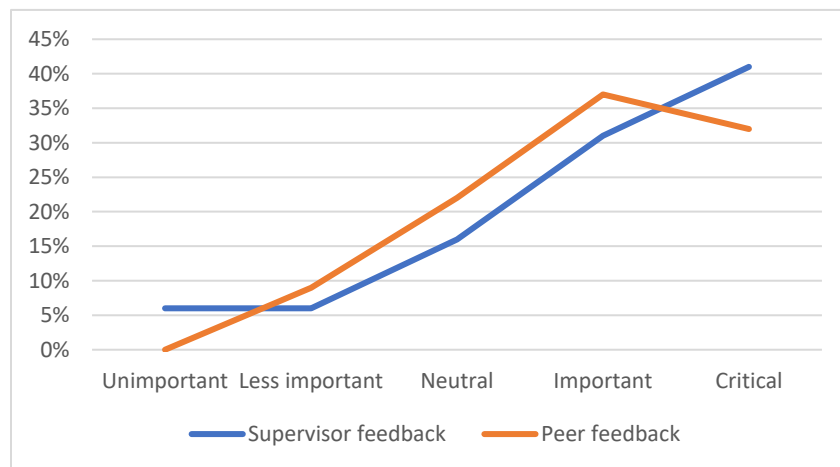

Figure vii Importance of Feedback

The reported frequency of receiving feedback was also worth noting (Figure viii). Some current opinions state that annual performance reviews are no longer relevant (CFO Innovation Asia, 2015). However, Cappelli and Tavis do not substantiate that position; rather, they encourage organizations to tailor their assessment processes to the needs of the workforce (Capelli and Tavis, 2018). Our findings affirmed this: 78% reported wanting feedback whenever needed, with the remainder desiring it several times a week, or throughout the day. Additional comments overwhelmingly stated that a scheduled, formal review session should also happen on a regular basis, be it quarterly, semi –annually, or annually, connecting on-going feedback with performance reviews. With agile approaches to work being adapted throughout organizations, these reviews lined up with project completions. Regarding multidirectional feedback:

"Peer feedback is essential to course corrections and employee development in an agile environment, because team members know better than anyone else what each person is contributing. It is rarely a formal process, and comments are generally directed to the employee, not the supervisor. That keeps input constructive and prevents the undermining of colleagues that sometimes occurs in hypercompetitive workplaces."

The authors goes on to report, "In agile organizations, 'upward' feedback from employees to team leaders and supervisors is highly valued too" (Cappelli et al, 2018, p. 50).
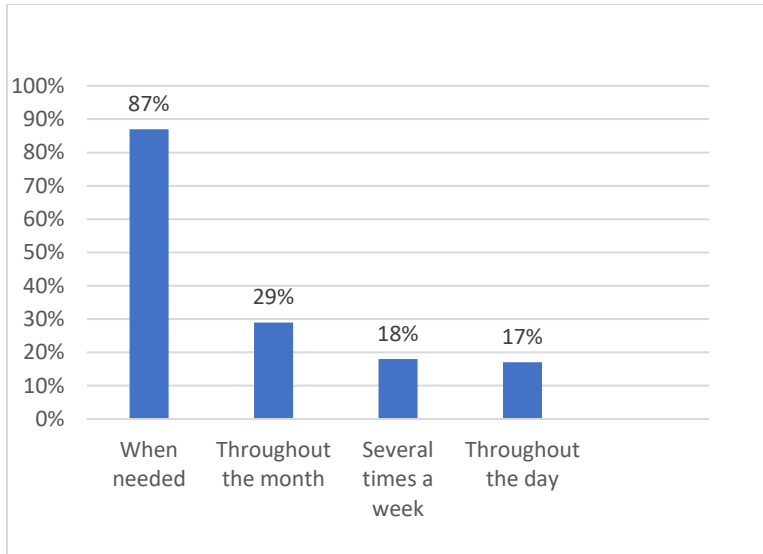

Figure viii Frequency of Feedback

Additional Theme

Throughout the conversations and survey feedback, empathy emerged as an additional theme and so warranted note in the research results. Empathy is the glue that binds all the competencies together. Empathy is the evidence of emotional intelligence and is highly regarded as a key attribute of informal leaders that emerges from self-managed groups and ultimately helps steer projects along (Quisenberry, 2018). "Empathy…is a skill that allows us to understand and share the same feelings that others feel. Through empathy, we are able to put ourselves in other people's shoes and connect with how they might be feeling about their problem, circumstance, or situation" (Soloman, 2015). When seeking to understanding clients, empathy helps the remote worker gain a great appreciation for their needs and desired outcomes. Client meetings are often conducted virtually calling for a heightened sense of empathy; being diligent in asking appropriate questions and listening to not just what is being said, but also the sentiment behind those words contributes to the success of a remote worker.

Discussion

From the findings, it is clear that remote workers form a resourceful workforce. Not content with identifying issues, they are quick to offer solutions and suggestions around growing and improving this context of work.

The results of the study lead to implications regarding how to support workers. Three areas are evident: communication, culture, and technology.

Communication, as noted in the competencies, is vital. Suggestions around this started with actually determining hours for common communication; respecting time zones, choosing certain hours during the day when team members were able to meet together to work through plans, issues, and develop workflow. Being aware that when people receive a text or email, they feel compelled to open it and reply. Respecting time zones in communication means being aware of when others should be off work, even

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sleeping. If the team consists of both remote and collocated members, be sure not to forget those not physically present; do not ignore them. If a manager is not taking the lead in regular reporting, the remote worker should take the initiative to send a weekly report on what they are doing. Learn how to be concise in these reports hitting the most important issues. Finally, remote workers have learned the importance of over communicating. Never assume that people can accurately fill in missing information gaps. Having a clear vision and objectives and laying out role expectations, then clearly communicating them, is important. This clarity helps the remote worker's manager to not micro manage…everyone is clear on the deliverables.

Culture is important in all work contexts, but more difficult to create and maintain in virtual settings. The respondents stressed the importance for coworking spaces to have regular gatherings to encourage the people to come out of their offices and interact with others in the space. Remote workers work hard, so it is valuable for organizations to create a culture that supports taking sick time even though the individual is not working in a collocated space. The addition of a new team member influences culture. Their advice? When new members join a team, leaders need to take time to clarify the existing norms and values, before the unintentional creation of a new norm. Another insight that the respondents want acknowledged, is that remote workers can often accomplish more work in a shorter amount of time because they do not have the same interruptions. It is demotivating when they feel pressure or guilt and keep working just to put the hours in for the sake of avoiding misperception.

The third area was technology. Remote workers need to have the necessary technology to be most effective and efficient. While hiring remote workers can save an organization money on office space, our respondents were adamant that technology is not an area to look at for cost savings. For the remote worker, advance planning in the event of technology interruptions is wise. It is advisable to line up other tasks to work on while waiting for the issue to be resolved.

The findings from this research have implications that go well beyond remote workers. Implications for business education and the careers business students will enter are worth noting.

Implications for education

The responsibility of business schools is to preparing students for the work environment in which they will engage in the years ahead. While it may not be certain what business graduates will do, it is evident that the way they will conduct business will involve working remotely to varying degrees. Some will work locally, but research suggests the majority will be involved in a more expansive global workforce. Graduates may not only be remote workers, but managers and leaders of a remote workforce with influence in communities facing ongoing growth and sustainability issues. Armed with the knowledge of what competencies our students need for success in this working economy, along with the environments they will contribute to, educators can pose certain questions that will lead them to effective and innovative strategies and practices. The intended result would be entrepreneurial leaders prepared for the ever changing and somewhat ambiguous career journeys to come. Discussions around the following topics can guide decision makers as they create and mold the most appropriate context for developing such leaders (Figure x).

How might educators…
equip students to take responsibility for their work and actions; "how they do it, when they do it, and where they do it" (Pink, 2009, p. 84). Are they becoming more self-directed?
facilitate learning focused on giving and receiving, effective, constructive feedback to their peers and instructors?
deliver learning in innovative spaces?
help students experience the life of a remote worker?
prepare our students for the global impact of work, developing relevant competencies throughout their educational journey?
design curriculum in such a way as to prepare for the competencies needed for success in this context?

Figure x Discovery questions for educators.

Implications for business

This research was a collaborative effort between academia and business; each has much to teach and learn from the other. As business changes, and demands for talent acquisition and retention increase, the need for graduates to move seamlessly into career roles is great. These partnerships also provide the opportunity for academia to support business as it navigates an uncertain future. As this research has revealed, the success of remote workers not only depends on their having the necessary competencies, but also on the ability of the organization to provide the support systems that remove barriers to success. These questions may help guide business decision maker's strategic conversations to that end (Figure xi).

How might leaders and managers…
ensure that individuals placed in remote or flexible positions have the competencies for success?
provide the necessary support needed by remote workers?
facilitate collaboration among team members?
provide timely feedback using appropriate channels?
provide training specific to communication technology?
ensure that remote workers have access to the best technology enabling them to achieve deliverables in a timely manner?
communicate a clear vision and expectations?
be cognizant of challenges faced by remote workers and be willing to remove barriers caused by those challenges?
utilize more productivity focused tool for distributed teams?

Figure xi Discovery questions for business.

Conclusion

All signs point to the reality that remote work will play a role in the future of work. It is clear there are specific competencies that contribute to success in this working context, and research shows there are many qualified individuals possessing those competencies. Respondents also presented practical suggestions regarding how they want, and need, to receive support and feedback. It is also evident that organizations benefit from remote workers through talent acquisition, diversity, retention, and engagement.

This does not mean that every organization should transition to a fully distributed design, nor does it mean that all graduates will only work in remote contexts. However, educators are in a unique position on many levels. Educators have direct access to the workers of the future, and these students deserve to learn what they need to be successful and thrive in an ever-changing world. In addition, organizations are looking to educational institutes to produce graduates with the skills and competencies required to help them achieve their goals. As this research focused on the context for business students working remotely, opportunity exists for educators to reframe education in a way that reflects industry, now and in the future. The findings of this research also have implication for Human Resource professionals as they create recruitment and selection processes in an economy of talent acquisition challenges. Further application of the findings can inform economic development as it relates to the impact of a growing remote workforce and the value of attracting remote workers as valuable contributors to a local economy.

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