

COVID-19 guide to:

Remote working and wellbeing.

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Purpose of this White Paper

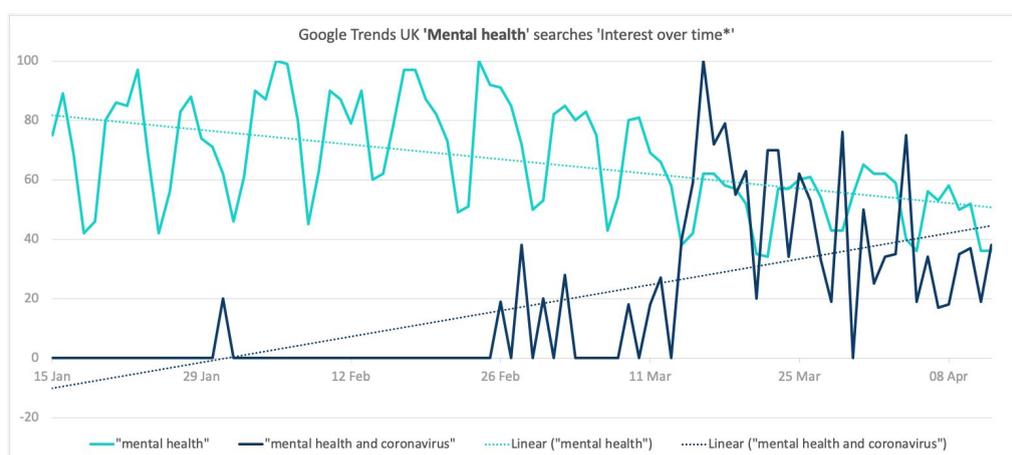
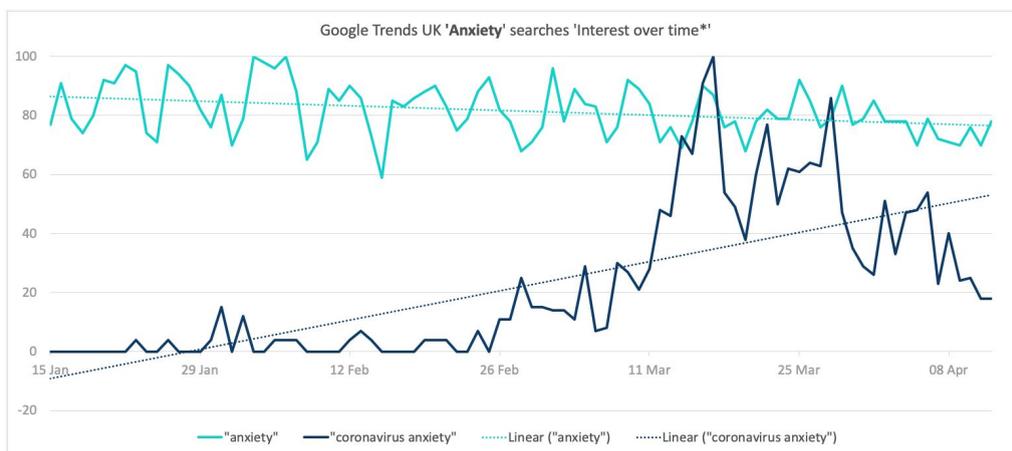
This White Paper is designed to support senior leaders responding to COVID-19. It explores the current issues faced by organisations adapting to remote working and team management. The report also outlines high level strategies, new ways of working and operating that will enable teams to stay engaged, connected and productive during the pandemic and beyond.



1 Introduction

Many of us who lead and support teams and colleagues are acutely aware that mental and physical wellbeing are key issues. This is now being further exacerbated by the stress and uncertainty of the recent COVID-19 outbreak. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 6 people in England reported experiencing a common mental health problem such as anxiety and depression in any given week¹. This is increasing as people struggle juggling work commitments, childcare, buying basic groceries, helping relatives and feeling socially isolated.

Over the last 90 days, Google Trends search results show a distinct shift in search terms from 'mental health' and 'anxiety' to these terms interlinked with 'coronavirus' as shown below². *



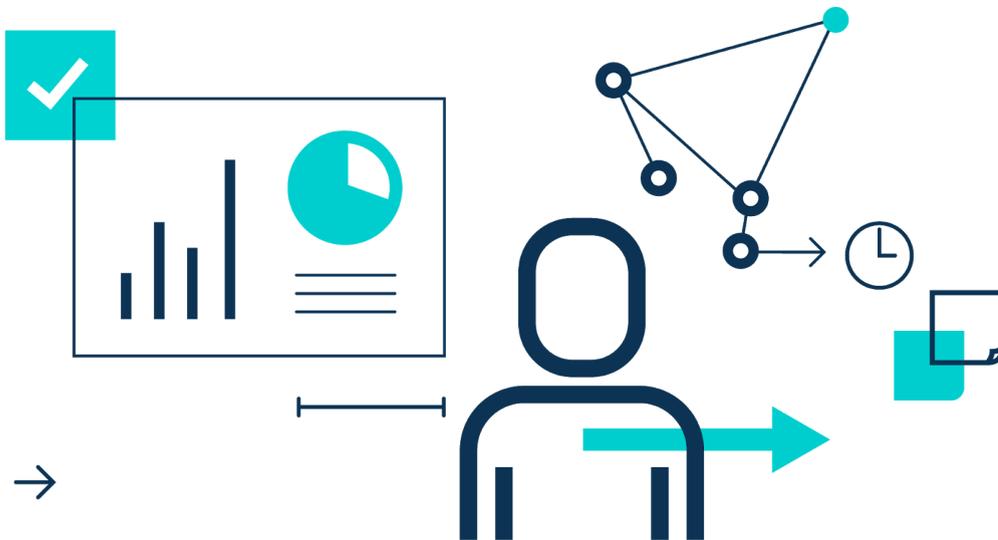
Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. A value of 50 means that the term is half as popular. A score of 0 means that there was not enough data for this term.

“COVID-19 has thrust us into physical isolation and distancing. Organisations need to ensure that new working practices are designed to prevent it being social isolation too.”

Addressing these challenges is going to require rapid changes in current work practices, which must flow from top levels of management all the way through to teams and individuals to truly make a difference. This is not just about technology - leaders need to think and lead differently.

There are many tools that can support simply working remotely, but there is a large gap between being able to work remotely and effectively collaborating and working out loud with your teams, with everyone still feeling connected and supported.

This gap is driven by behaviours and ways of working and cannot be closed by technology alone.



2 Working Out Loud

Current in-office work practices do not directly translate into remote working practices. Keeping everyone across email chains and in the loop with one-on-one phone conversations or meetings is not easily manageable and sustainable in the longer term. Nor are days of back-to-back video conference calls, they frustrate and drain people, causing patience to wear thin. The ways of working within companies need to evolve.

The concept of Working Out Loud

Working out loud is key to the successful achievement of outcomes, ensuring teams are fully aligned at all times and facilitating knowledge transfer by default. This is a concept we employ across Rainmaker on every project.



Be Inspired

Teams should work-out-loud because it inspires and engages everyone across businesses. Working as one team, with real time collaboration, creates momentum to deliver value add outcomes irrespective of team location.



Share Knowledge

When teams work out loud they are able to share knowledge with others in real time. This provides a more innovative and collaborative atmosphere for people no matter where they are working, and produces more robust outcomes from multiple perspectives.



Truly Transparent

When teams communicate openly using collaborative tools and ways of working they are able to share progress and updates in a more accessible format. This allows teams to be more agile and innovative.



Be Brave

It's all about openly narrating people's work as they do it, so others can contribute or learn. Failure is the mother of success, so people need to learn collectively as a team, fail faster and break new ground.

Tools and approaches need to be put in place that not only support flexibility in **location**, but also in **availability** or time of day. Creating effective ways of sharing thoughts, ideas, approaches and information that are light touch and easily **accessible to everyone at any time** is critical.

Providing the ability to work around the challenges mentioned above, as well as trying to reduce peaks in load on VPNs and internet bandwidth are also important considerations.

If you've never really worked this way before, it can all seem a little daunting. But it doesn't need to be.

3 It's all about culture

You'll need the ability to have ongoing conversations and make sure everyone can access and share information while working collaboratively in real time, or at any time of day. That's where working out loud, strong guiding principles and solid core values - in addition to just having the tools - can really help. A great example of some guiding principles is shown below - work together with your team to come up with principles that work for and support you.

Example

Guiding Principles



User centred

We will concentrate on user needs, always providing a simple, integrated experience



Accessible and inclusive

We will focus on accessibility and inclusivity to ensure adoption across all users



Experiment

We will lead users to quick adoption through our own experimentation, adoption and use with other users



Work out loud

We will break down silos and work in collaborative teams across the business.



Co-identify risks and mitigations

The business should be informed and decide on the risks they are taking and the consequences of any mitigations



Work is about outcomes

We will lead the way in demonstrating that work is about outcomes, not time or location



Iterate, then iterate again

We will adopt an agile and iterative roll out approach, based on outputs not inputs.



Design with data

We will value usage data and make decisions to improve user experience and ways of working based on it.

We have to accept the world has changed and will likely remain this way beyond COVID-19.

To be successful in this new work world, our approach must shift to be about outcomes and not time and place. This is work redefined.

You and your colleagues are going to have to rapidly adapt to:

- A remote workforce actively working from home and creating a virtual organisation. Current location based working styles will not work effectively with a virtual workforce.
- People working around kids, relatives, family members who are at home and/or unwell. A happy family and home life is key to a happy remote worker.
- Working hours that no longer represent a 9-5 pattern. Management and workers must immediately adapt to the concept of flexi hours.
- Distraction. This will be a real everyday problem to overcome and people will need to be empowered to manage their own time to cope with this new factor.

This is going to require you to have empathy, consideration and understanding you may never have had to give much thought to in the workplace before. Other critical considerations and watch points in this new world include:

- The mental health of your colleagues/workforce - already under unprecedented external pressure, this is likely to become more fragile the more isolated people become.
- Business continuity - your business as usual has just been radically interrupted. How fit for purpose are your current arrangements?
- Tooling and working practices - unless they support effective collaboration, you risk becoming ever more unproductive and ineffective.

But there is good news! If work becomes about outcomes and staying connected, people and teams can effectively transform ways of working to operate effectively in this new world.



4 Rainmaker's best practice tips

Here are our top tips for staying socially connected and aligned when working remotely:

Daily stand ups: A great way to set up the day, check in, discuss blockers and priorities.

Video and screen sharing (eg: Google Hangouts): Useful tool for stand ups, meetings, quick (or long) catch ups and reviewing work real time; Aim for 'cameras on' to preserve the face-to-face contact (but also be understanding if people need a video break)!

Transparency: Creating an ongoing dialogue in well planned and implemented Slack or Teams channels means you can see what your colleagues are doing no matter where you are or what time you're working.

Co-creation: Real time content collaboration in shared documents means sharing everything, even an early idea. Be brave.

Make it fun: Carry on conversations as if you were sitting in the middle of your teammates. Keep a sense of humour (while being respectful!).

Maintain trust: Trust is one of the most important factors of successful remote working. Give it more focus and energy than you normally might.

Happy families: Enable your colleagues to work around the needs of their families. Kids are at home now, some people may have illnesses to deal with. Be flexible.

Exercise: Encourage your peers and teams to get up from the keyboard. Walk the dog, play with the kids. Take part in virtual social exercise programmes, there are tons.

Making this achievable

There are plenty of tools available to support successful remote ways of working, but how you implement is important and the technology must be simple to adopt. Even in the midst of this crisis, encourage people to create new and inspiring ways to maintain productivity, share ideas that work and actively seek out ways to change approaches to match the changing situation we find ourselves in. Experiment, iterate and adapt.

Remote wellbeing

Finally, once you've created the online environment and remote ways of working out loud to support your success in the new working world, it's incredibly important to overlay wellbeing elements as well. These will be the glue that binds you all together and allows everyone to have the mental and physical wellness to continue to successfully work together, apart.

In keeping with the evolution in ways of working due to COVID-19, organisations can support wellbeing through organising remote activities like **virtual team bike rides, yoga, meditation or pilates classes, happy hours and coffee breaks**. These activities will all create live banter, social interaction and a feeling of camaraderie which will have a fundamentally positive effect on both physical and mental health. It will also bring the added advantage of strengthening and tapping into the hive mind of your organisation, which in itself will further promote wellbeing over the challenging coming months.

The time to start this new way of working is now - we cannot afford to delay and add further stress, confusion and uncertainty to our working lives. If you need help knowing where to start, please [get in touch](#).

Rainmaker is in the perfect position to support your working evolution. Ever since Rainmaker started, we took the approach that work is about outcomes, not time or location. We've always worked out loud and have not been tied to any location. In fact, after 10 years and with over 100 Rainmakers, we still don't have an office!

Be safe and well, and look after each other.

If you would like more information on mental health support and resources, please refer to these leading sources -

[World Health Organization COVI and mental health considerations](#)

[Public Health England Every Mind Matters](#)

mind.org.uk

[Mental Health Foundation](#)

¹ McManus S, Bebbington P, Jenkins R, Brugha T. (eds.) (2016). *Mental health and wellbeing in England: Adult psychiatric morbidity survey 2014*. Leeds: NHS digital. mind.org.uk

² Source: <https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=GB>

