Powering Remote Working

Freeing up employees and fostering business agility through the right work management approach and tools.
Summary

Is keeping a workforce coordinated, informed and on-task becoming the biggest challenge businesses face today?

This ebook explores how a cloud-based, collaborative work management application can facilitate communication and collaboration for employees working in different locations. We also discuss how a cloud-based work management platform can help businesses become more agile and enable a more adaptable and collaborative environment that boosts efficiency.

Interviews with project managers confirm that there is a real need for work management software to manage workflow and provide team members with visibility and the tools they need to communicate and improve productivity.
Introduction

One of the hallmarks of successful organizations today is their ability to be business agile, the overall capacity to be flexible in approach and to adjust quickly and easily to changes in circumstance. Crucially, in today’s digitally connected world, being able to successfully integrate employees working from remote locations is vital to achieving effective business agility.

Increasingly, companies are seeking ways to ensure workers can be productive whether hot-desking, visiting project sites, out on client calls, at a branch office, making use of break during a conference, in the midst of a long commute, or working from home. The ever-increasing accessibility of technology has enabled people to embrace a more flexible way of working, which is challenging the traditional in-office, 9-5 working model.

Demand for remote working is on the rise across Europe. Employee demand for a flexible working environment is even more important to millennials. A study by Flexjobs found the vast majority of millennials want to telecommute every day and more than half want to work a flexible or alternative schedule, while half would be happy telecommuting some of the time.

Companies themselves need to be able to adapt to this evolving work ecosystem. What’s more, modern businesses have to recognize that effective support of remote working enables them to enhance their ability to deliver projects, products, and services on time and on budget, thus ensuring improved productivity.

According to the Mobile Multiplier report: “88% of German workers rank flexible working as one of their most important employee benefits — as do 80% of UK employees, 75% of Spanish, and 59% of French.”
Indeed, forward thinking organisations that want to become more business agile need to find ways that enable employees to work more flexibly as it can help drive productivity and engagement, as well as help them to attract and retain talent. The fact is a business tooled up for remote working becomes more attractive than their competitor at a time when many prospective employees prioritize flexible working as a key employment goal.

In order to support remote working that fosters true business agility, organizations need to have the right methods and platforms in place. This then ensures effective workplace collaboration between remote workers in disparate work locations and main offices. Ensuring that businesses maintain productivity and effectively manage resources.
The Clarizen survey

Clarizen surveyed more than 300 executives from a range of companies around the world on work collaboration in their businesses. The findings underlined the critical importance support for remote working has in achieving a level of business agility that boosts collaboration, flexibility and efficiency.

The results bolster the case for organizations to tool up to support more effective home working:

- **70%** of businesses say they have employees, departments and teams spread across several sites or working from home, so they need to find a way they can not only communicate but also work together to meet objectives, coordinate activities and monitor progress.

- **85%** say they need employees across disparate locations to do more than message via a simple chat application.

- **73%** say what they need specifically is collaborative software that increases productivity by tying communication to specific business tasks — helping teams coordinate workflow, track progress, align goals, allocate budget and meet deadlines. Remote working feeds into the need for a collaborative platform that transcends location and teams.

The clear underlying finding is that organizations face more challenges than ever when it comes to fostering remote working and business agility, but company executives do appreciate the need for tools to support staff no matter where they are located.

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The challenges of remote working:

**Lack of communication:** One of the main challenges of remote working is lack of communication, which should not be limited to giving instructions but also providing ongoing updates throughout the project. A report by the UK’s Institute of Leadership & Management found that 88% of remote workers felt that working remotely increased the likelihood of misunderstandings, which in turn delays projects.

**Lack of input:** Input from remote workers is often overlooked, especially for employees who are in a time zone that is several hours ahead or behind as decisions are often made before or after they have had a chance to input via email or in a call. This is detrimental to not only remote workers’ morale but also the business as a whole, as employees working remotely often have invaluable input as they have a distanced perspective.

**Tracking productivity:** Many telecommuters are motivated self-starters – according to ConnectSolutions 77% of workers say remote working boosts productivity. However, some do need to be managed closely and prompted to complete tasks and meet deadlines, while others simply need extra guidance when it comes to understanding what needs to be accomplished and which tasks need to be prioritized. This is difficult for managers to provide if they are unable to track what they are actually doing.

**Limited access to files, documents and resources:** Working remotely can be challenging if businesses do not provide staff with adequate ways to access all the information and documents they need. This can include status reports and related emails. If employees have difficulty putting key working information at their fingertips, it means they waste time emailing on-site colleagues for files, documents and briefings.

**Prioritizing tasks:** Having an easy and accurate way of gauging which tasks need to be done in which order to keep projects or work in general on track, in the absence of a manager nearby to consult – and not become a bottleneck in the process – is critical to effective and efficient collaboration between remote workers and colleagues. Having a means of tracking and sharing priorities in real-time, even as they change, is crucial.

**Sharing and receiving information in a business context:** While email and chat apps are a means of keeping intouch with colleagues and managers when working remotely, information is not communicated in a business context or in real time – with the resulting risk being that projects can get off track, as tasks are not linked, changes are not flagged and progress is not updated.
The critical importance of nurturing effective collaboration

Collaborative work management approach: Sharing information and managing related tasks so that each step in the collaborative process leads toward meeting firm objectives, agreed costs and set deadlines is crucial when it comes to managing and supporting employees across disparate locations.

The result for the business is planning, communication, and alignment of work and objectives that span employees, teams, departments, business units and management groups regardless of working location, for greater overall agility. This requires collaboration on a unique workflow platform that links unstructured conversations with structured work items.

Key benefits of collaborative work management

Better workflow management: Keeping multiple teams in sync is challenging – even more so when they are scattered across numerous locations and time zones. This means projects are harder to manage and are at risk of being delayed if coordination is lacking, which ultimately costs the business money. One of the best ways to ensure smooth workflow is to employ a work management platform that is able to automate emails on tasks, and even reminders on progress teams and individuals are expected to make within a defined time frame.

This takes the hard work out of workflow management by helping individuals, regardless of their location, deliver by collaborating on the right activities – flagging dates, responsibilities, assignments and dependencies (i.e. when one team depends on another to complete a task before beginning the next one).

Communication in business context, maintaining focus on tasks, budgets and deadlines while providing visibility and engagement in these areas: A work management platform that facilitates communication and collaboration to ensure work conversations stay on track so everything stays on task, on budget and on deadline. The prevalence of workplace communications apps, such as Facebook Workplace and Slack, can feed some of the biggest challenges to productive collaboration.

For remote workers, communications apps can be one of the main ways they communicate with colleagues. But too often...
they lead to meaningless chat with no clear focus on work and goals, which can have a detrimental effect on collaborative activities and overload people with unnecessary information and constant interruptions.

Using a work management platform such as Clarizen is preferable. However, a tool that enables effective integration between a platform such as Clarizen and an application such as Slack – allows users to mark tasks complete, review status and utilize other key work management functions – is critical to helping remote workers using a chat app to track work and be more productive.

**Clear prioritization that flags up deadlines, and keeps remote employees focused:** In order for remote workers to flourish in their environment – whether on the move, at a temporary location or at home requires a collaborative tool that helps them prioritise their workload. If remote workers do not have full visibility on a project, it can be difficult for them to assess how they are performing and whether or not the overall goals are being met.

A work management application can make priorities visible and transparent to remote workers. This is particularly important for deadline-driven projects, where having the most up-to-date information on a task is critical for rapid decision-making and timely work execution.

**A means of providing transparency and management oversight:** Project roadmaps are key for any area of business that requires collaboration – from marketing campaigns to day-to-day management. This ensures there is no miscommunication or duplication of work by different individuals or teams or geographic locations, while providing clear visibility of who is doing what and the progress on each task.

Visibility is not just important for managing projects but also to provide senior managers and other stakeholders with executive oversight, so they can monitor progress and see if results and returns are actually materializing.

**A way to store and access vital work materials:** Centralization and storage of all project or program documents, notes, emails, messages and other assets, so they can be retrieved and worked on on-demand 24/7 is absolutely crucial for efficient remote working and collaboration. As is the ability to link unstructured conversations to structured work items – so, for example, emails can be read in context with other project communications.
This capability is critical because even employees who are not regular remote workers will at times need to finish tasks or monitor progress on projects in their off-hours, or in many cases check in with colleagues on different timezones.

Real-world feedback on Clarizen as a collaborative platform

“We are not office based at all. We are based at home and wherever we are needed around the world, so we need a collaborative tool that enables us to get the latest information about a certain project and Clarizen provides us with that... Anyone who is using Clarizen can see what’s going on with the projects. We can pull reports, we can provide in-depth details to our senior managers... For multinational accounts, you can have teams all over the world at different sites. There is no way you are all in one location, so you need a way to collaborate. For our business model it’s the ideal tool...”

— Victoria Seaman, Global VP for Projects & Construction

“We support our customers on the racetrack as well as people who go to customers for review meetings – and they are able to get live project data, resource allocations, etc. One of our guys recently told me he can get a product manual up quicker on his smartphone than getting out his laptop and logging in through the server back at base... Bringing all that data into one place has meant the project visibility has been massively increased. We used to have completely separate systems. Now with Clarizen they are all in one place.”

— Phil Smith, Project Analyst

“Our office formally introduced a ‘work from home’ policy, so now people do work from home for at least a day or two. Because it’s a real-time update in Clarizen, it helps people to collaborate if they are working at different sites... Clarizen will be a key tool in the future. All of us will be tracking our projects, work and timesheets, finance and everything else via Clarizen, so it will be a key tool for communication.”

— Kavita Parmar, IT Project Mgmt/Application Mgmt
Conclusion
Working practices are continually changing as are technologies, which makes business agility absolutely critical. Company leaders can think they know where business practices, cultures and technologies are going, but they have to be ready to adapt to enable effective collaboration.

The leaders of forward-looking enterprises with modern diversified workforces have to look to the cloud to ensure they have the business agility they need and don’t become bogged down by legacy systems. When it comes to workforces functioning across an array of work sites, utilizing mobile technologies so that employees can work wherever they need to is essential. Clarizen is in the cloud and everyone can access it from not just desktop computers but their smartphones, laptops and tablets, regardless of where they are.

“Cloud technologies are clearly transforming the way people work and enabling companies to function in a more agile way. A cloud-based work management approach, supported by the proper platform, dramatically improves business agility. It facilitates a more collaborative environment by providing employees greater visibility of projects – helping them keep progress on track, resourcing efficient and goals aligned — while giving company leaders more effective oversight.”

— Boaz Chalmish, Chief Executive Officer, Clarizen

About Clarizen
Clarizen is a collaborative work management solution designed for people who value their time, and for organizations that value cross-company engagement. Built on a secure, scalable platform, Clarizen brings together project management, configurable workflow automation and in-context collaboration to create a meaningful engagement experience that allows everyone to work the way they work best.

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