



CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD HAS SHIFTED (shifting our world)

There's every chance you've got this book in your hands because of a question. Potentially, it's a question along the lines of, 'How do we shift to work from anywhere?' or 'What does work from anywhere really mean?' It's possible that you're contemplating, 'Can it really work?' It is also possible that it's no longer a question of 'if' your team can work remotely. This might already be a reality of your workforce and you're mulling over the big questions, such as 'How do we make it truly work?' and 'How can I trust my team to work autonomously?'

Work From Anywhere

These are all important questions. And they're the kinds of questions that some of the largest organisations globally (and the teams within them) are asking. For possibly the first time en masse in our economic history, questions about how we work, where we work, and what work actually means are being considered by all workplaces, regardless of size and industry. From the local coffee shop on the corner, to our financial institutions, to the likes of multinational tech behemoth companies, all businesses have been affected. Leaders across the globe are contemplating these same questions – and many have made long-term commitments around work from anywhere (WFA) for their workforce.

The world has seismically shifted. Where it was previously considered 'suboptimal' to work away from an office, we are now seeing well-known companies globally committed to a WFA approach into the future.

Organisations such as Stripe, Shopify, Facebook and Twitter across 2020 all declared significant policy changes, with a swing towards permanent or at least significant adoption of flexibility for their people to allow them to truly work from anywhere.

Jack Dorsey, CEO of Twitter and Square, announced in May 2020 a permanent remote work policy that allows individual employees to make the choice about where they work and how.

Shopify CEO, Tobi Lütke, also announced in May 2020 they would embrace a remote workforce, claiming they were now 'digital by default'. Lütke argued that for Shopify, their offices would become the place to support new hires to transition to remote working environments. For an organisation such as Shopify, with customers who mostly work from home, having employees working from home also will create a stronger empathy of customers' experiences.

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The lead taken by these types of organisations has seen many others follow suit, with major parts of our populations now working from either home, co-working spaces or locations other than an office.

In fact, Nick Bloom from Stanford University outlined that in June 2020, 42 per cent of the US labour force was working from home full-time, with only 26 per cent working at their business premises. The remaining were, at the time, out of work, a testament to the severe impact of the recession that flowed from COVID-19 and lockdown measures. With almost twice as many people working from home, Bloom argues the US is now a 'working-from-home economy'.

One of the most significant changes we came across in our research occurred in possibly the least-known giant company on the planet, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). TCS is a large IT service company with a global reach. They have campuses across China, Hungary, America and India. This company had invested heavily into bricks and mortar – creating places for people to gather, collaborate, ideate and deliver work. However, in 2020 they made the decision that 75 per cent of their 500 000-strong global workforce would work remotely within three years. This is a firm commitment to invest in the future of work in a different way, making the change not as a temporary response to a crisis, but as a chosen commitment to a long-term strategy in the way of work.

In a focus story on their website, TCS argue that, collectively, forward-thinking organisations are 'on the verge of a new work order that will render obsolete age-old concepts such as location dependency; defined and fixed working hours; high-touch governance; and presenteeism as a prerequisite to optimal productivity'.

Is this just a rebadge?

Technology is a catalyst for change. It always has been. Since the first person who not only crafted a round object but also had the curiosity to see what would happen if they attached this object to something else to help move it, we have known that technology changes the way we gather, transport, connect and trade.

The advent of the internet, combined with the evolution of work devices that packed in solid speed and grunt alongside the ability to be used in a mobile fashion, meant that the way we work had been transformed. No longer are people tied to a location that houses a computer server (or industrial-blend coffee sachets).

Remote work, flexible work practices, and the ability to work-on-the-go are not new approaches. They have been a large part of the way we work for decades, allowing individuals with a range of requirements to access work in a way that works for them. But this does beg the question: is 'work from anywhere' just a rebadge of old practices and principles? Or did the rush to remote work expose just how far short of the WFA mark we were?

Policies and practices were grossly underprepared

The global pandemic of COVID-19 provided two gifts (if they can be called that). The first gift was the global experience of how quickly change can happen when the purpose is big enough. For the past 10 years or so at Pragmatic Thinking, we've worked with organisations to drive change and craft impactful cultural shifts in organisations. We've worked on everything from shifting the safety culture, to shifting the leadership culture, and to driving a united culture across organisations that have grown rapidly through acquisition. One of the common pushbacks we get in this work stems from the belief that change takes time, particularly cultural change. We heard

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all too often that people are resistant to change; in fact, they simply don't like change. COVID-19 and the changes to workplaces that followed, however, showed us just how quickly change can occur, and how swiftly people can adapt when they need to.

The second gift that COVID-19 provided to workplaces is the realisation that existing flexible work policies and practices were grossly underprepared to accommodate the requirements of a permanent shift of teams to both perform and connect virtually; and yet, people still found a way.

The policies in place and tools available to 'work-on-the-go' were all embedded in the belief that we'd reconvene back at 'work' (traditionally an office space) at some point and recalibrate, or get back to the 'real' work at some point in the near future. Working flexibility was a holding pattern of sorts — sure, some work got done, but it was never going to be as good as the work you could get done in the office.

Yet lengthy, enforced remote work clashed with this belief — and the productivity data in many industries suggested otherwise. In spite of shortcomings, many teams took big leaps forward in the early days of March and April of 2020 that might otherwise have taken years or even decades.

Making the shift to a WFA approach requires new tools and new processes. Transferring what works in an office to a distributed methodology and hoping that it'll still work is a recipe for disappointment.

Perspectives that needed to adapt

Working from anywhere used to be a concept that workers would have to try to convince their managers was a good idea. Truth be told, we had team members here at Pragmatic Thinking have these conversations with us over the years, and we pushed back. As staunch believers and advocates of organisational culture,

we came from the perspective that decisions needed to be made based on 'culture over comfort' (believing that the request to work from home was about personal comfort over the collective team culture). Taken as an individual request, we could see the benefits of working from home, but we lived in fear that then everyone would want the same request. What damage might that do to the culture we'd worked so hard to build?

After the rush to remote working for our team, our perspective has now changed dramatically and irrevocably. And the study and exploration of how to adapt to this shift as a team is the essence of this book. If you feel resistance to this shift, or those around you are providing resistance, we get it. Change is possible, but it requires a change in perspective and a change in belief first.

Making the shift to working from anywhere within your team and organisation starts with having a belief structure about what work can be, and how it can be performed; in other words, it starts with a philosophy that matches the methodology.

Shifting beliefs about work

Among all the shifts occurring in workplaces, the greatest shift required in making the transition to working from anywhere a success is the shift in our thinking.

We all carry beliefs about work, and about how work should 'work'. Some of these are conscious and overt (such as getting paid for the role) and some are unconscious (that work colleagues should always ask if you'd like a coffee when they're heading out for one).

When it comes to embracing a WFA approach with your team or business, unpacking some of the beliefs you have about work is useful.

What beliefs do you have centred on having an office? What ties do you have around needing to physically see people working?

The following are the three key beliefs that will underpin your first step into exploring a WFA approach.

WFA is possible

If you're looking for all the reasons WFA won't work, you'll likely find them. Before stepping into this change with your people, you need to truly ask yourself whether you believe it's possible.

Sure, it's going to take work, and you'll learn many things along the way and turn corners only to realise that approach doesn't work. All of these are okay as long as you have the underlying belief that it is possible to WFA as a team.

We can do this

While you can have the belief that WFA is possible, you may have reservations about your team's overall ability and the people who will come along for the ride.

The second key belief you'll need to embrace is that you can do this as a collective. Believing you will find a way with the people and the resources you have is critical to your long-term success.

It's worth it

Finally, leaders who believe not only that it's possible but also that it's worth it are the leaders who'll find a way in the world of WFA.

Through the rest of this book, we unpack the journey that sits ahead, including the trials to be faced, the new strengths to be honed, and the battles to step into. Embracing this style of leading

and working is not for the faint-hearted. Start with a belief that it's worth it — or the answer to the question of 'what would make it worth it?' — and you've got a foundation for success.

What we discovered throughout the journey of Pragmatic Thinking shifting to being a distributed team is the following:

- People are ready (or not) at different stages.
- People are ready (or not) for different reasons.
- Change starts with core beliefs and a united philosophy.

Principle-based decisions

Regardless of whether you're a multibillion-dollar company or a small business, you need to know the basics well. With these basics in mind, you can make principle-based decisions. If we had one piece of advice for leaders of any kind setting out on a WFA transition, it would be that in times of uncertainty, come back to a principle-based framework for your decisions.

Why does having a principle-based framework make a difference?

When in a place of needing to make bold, tough decisions, our brains search for lenses through which to make these decisions. Without consciously coming back to the core principles of the given situation, our thinking can easily move to other internal frameworks, gravitating towards bias based on personal values. The things that we would like to have happen start to cloud and distort what we pay attention to, and the things we ignore.

Coming back to core principles, particularly business principles, provides an important framework for crafting what a WFA

initiative looks like for your team and organisation. These start with ensuring the actions and direction are legal, ethical, and mindful of cash flow within the business. You can then build from this foundation. This seems blindingly obvious, and yet time and time again we see businesses fail because they perform illegal behaviour, make poor ethical decisions or are no longer a 'going concern'. That last one is accounting speak for running out of money and not being able to pay their bills.

Other core principles such as conflict of interest, corporate citizenship and confidentiality, among others, are what good business decision-making is built on, and yet far too little percentage of executive teams or boards apply this level of rigour (principle-based decisions) to their practice.

Having principles that you, other leaders and your team can return to in order to make key decisions doesn't mean you won't face the tough calls; calls that affect the important people in your organisation, and decisions that hurt. Having the principles in place means that people can understand why these decisions are made, and understand how these decisions move beyond personal values. Sometimes the hardest things to do in life are the right things.

Once core principles are clear, having a WFA philosophy is the next building block.

Building your WFA Philosophy

A widely held belief, which could be challenged for validity, is that you need to have a plan to achieve success. Let's face it: most small businesses fail within the first five years. Very few survive a decade, and an infinitely smaller number survive a decade and achieve revenue of over a million dollars.

Small business supporters often implore people to fill out a business plan as a starting point. Our fundamental belief is that this is actually not the correct place to start. In fact, if you were to ask most successful entrepreneurs, 'What was your plan going into business?', they'll usually say, 'I didn't have one.' What they did have was an understanding around the purpose of what they were trying to do and a strongly held belief in their ability to find a way.

Now, in the pursuit of wanting to set up something radical and different, let's face it, the new world of not being a co-located team is right up there. It is a radical change, and it requires some radical thinking. So rather than putting your efforts into a plan to build a hybrid or distributed team, sink your effort into creating a philosophy.

Start by asking the big questions:

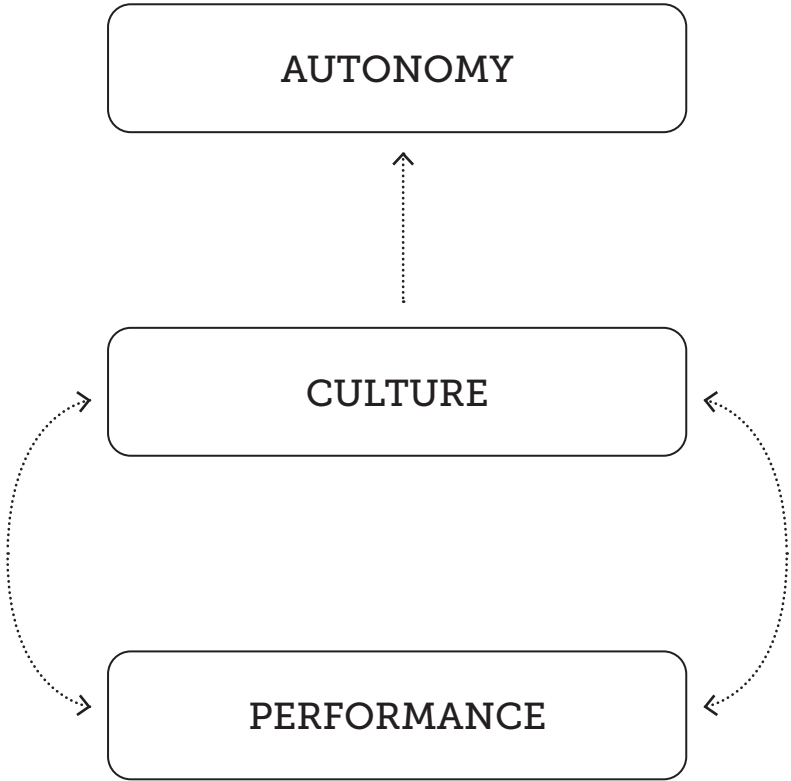
What is our approach to working together?

What is our approach towards finding success?

We asked ourselves the very same questions at Pragmatic Thinking in the early days of our WFA journey, rather than just set up a plan or follow blindly what other people have done in the past. (BTW, don't blindly follow what we're about to share either, but use it as a thought generator or a concept generator).

For a long time, organisations have said, 'It's culture first' and, while we're card-carrying members of the culture club (not the 1980s band, although we're also big fans of Boy George and the crew), the truth is that hybrid teams, without the data that comes with non-verbals in conversations, can create some real risks to the longer term success of the business, unless they first focus heavily on performance. Performance can then strengthen culture and allow for autonomy.

This approach to a WFA philosophy is illustrated in the following model.



The work from anywhere philosophy

Let's examine each of these three areas in more detail.

It starts with performance

If we look at WFA from an anthropological point of view, we can see the one thing that underpins all cultures on the planet is performance. In times of deep uncertainty, cultures need to focus on performance more than anything. If this were 20 000 years ago, we might've been focusing on surviving the winter or crossing a salt lake or successfully bringing down prey on a hunt to feed the tribe. And the tougher times got, the bigger the need to deliver on performance; without it, we'd allow the culture to die.

That was way back then. However, in our modern times, when faced with challenge and struggle, the best thing to focus on is still performance. And while the benchmark of performance is particularly important for survival, the truth is that performance is critical during the good times as well as the tough times.

This is only ever really put to the test when underperformance is significant. You can have what would be perceived as an awesome culture, but your business (and its culture) can be one step away from falling over if there's not a care of, and measurement against, performance. We could provide a litany of examples of really cool and funky cultures, where people loved their job, only to have the company go broke and cease to exist because of underperformance.

What is the best measure of performance? This question is one that leaders and organisations need to come back to. No single measure works for all. Understanding the drivers and deliverables around performance that you and your people are chasing is the starting point. Performance may be revenue-driven, or based on market share or customer acquisition. Or you may be chasing awareness-raising or increased usage. The actual metric is secondary to understanding the metrics that

matter; the drivers of performance for your business and having them as the foundation and core focus to return to.

When times get tough and uncertain, having a culture that knows how to get back to performance as its bedrock will be able to withstand a barrage of challenges. Consider this as an adaptation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: where the base of the pyramid in Maslow's hierarchy is shelter, safety and other biological needs, in a workplace context it is business performance; making sure that the business isn't going broke, and that it's hitting the necessary markers in order to continue to exist. For this reason, the philosophy of working from anywhere starts with a focus on performance.

Which strengthens culture

Performance provides a platform for culture within teams. Our great friend, corporate anthropologist and best-selling author Michael Henderson, says that culture is (wo)mankind's greatest invention. Human beings are quite an unremarkable animal until we bond together – and that's when we become capable of transforming the world. When home-base is taken care of and the bottom of the ladder is performing, we can flourish through culture.

Exploring and defining the culture that is required to make the move and be successful in WFA is a critical starting point. This is not about believing in a good culture or a bad culture; rather, this about working out what culture you need to have to align it with the direction you and your team are taking. Aligning culture to the methodology of work, discussing in depth the culture you want to become, and taking opportunities to assess whether yours is a thriving or dying culture are all important aspects for any leader to entertain and explore.

Culture is a core and key part of the philosophy of working from anywhere. In fact, the desire to maintain an intimate and

personable culture is why many organisations are hesitant or downright resistant to moving to a WFA model.

Shifting your team to WFA requires a different conversation about culture. It's a conversation about what you and your team value, and why you value it. What do you care about, and how can you care about that same thing in a different way? If your values were traditionally demonstrated through posters on the walls or hallways of a physical office, the removal of those walls and hallways doesn't necessarily mean you no longer care for or value the same things. What's needed is an adaptation of how we connect and express these things in a distributed manner.

As Tobi Lütke tweeted:

A common misconception about company culture is that if you have a good one, you have to hold on to it. I believe this to be wrong. If you want to have a great culture, the trick is to evolve it forward with your environment ...

With clarity around performance, and a drive towards a dynamic and evolving culture, successful organisations are those that believe work can be an extraordinary experience for the individual.



Which allows autonomy

In *Drive*, best-selling author Dan Pink unpacks the three components required for motivation at work. Two of the elements that Dan outlines are connected to the challenge of the work

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and the reason for the work: mastery and purpose. The desire to improve, to grow, and to get better at the work they do is strong in individuals. Positions that provide an opportunity to master skills and a role are motivating. Coupling this potential with a strong purpose (*why* this work matters) results in a sense that tasks aren't just getting done for the sake of ticking things off. Rather, a stronger pull and impact is created because of the effort.

The third element that Dan outlines relates to autonomy – that is, the ability to have a choice about *how* the work will be done. The expression of self within the role is key. Within workplaces, this means shifting away from a process-style of management and encouraging and supporting an output-style of direction. As a leader, you provide your team with the desired result and allow them to choose how to get there.

The trap is that autonomy can be misinterpreted as individuals in your team being able to do whatever they want, whenever they want. When it comes to being successful in a team environment, and being valuable, autonomy is about you and your team doing the things (the tasks, the job and so on), the best way that you can do them in keeping with performance standards and cultural expectations. It's about being clear on tasks or outcomes and then having the ability to plan your work to achieve this and beyond while respecting the wider team and its objectives.

Think of a musician, for example; autonomy as a musician isn't just being booked for a concert and then being able to goof off and do whatever you want. It's actually about setting your schedule around being ready to produce the best possible performance for that concert along with your band and the expectations of the audience – and ensuring you're booked for the next one.

The power of giving your team autonomy can really come into play with a WFA approach. It provides the ultimate choice for individuals around how they can deliver their work, belong to a group, and grow as people through the process.

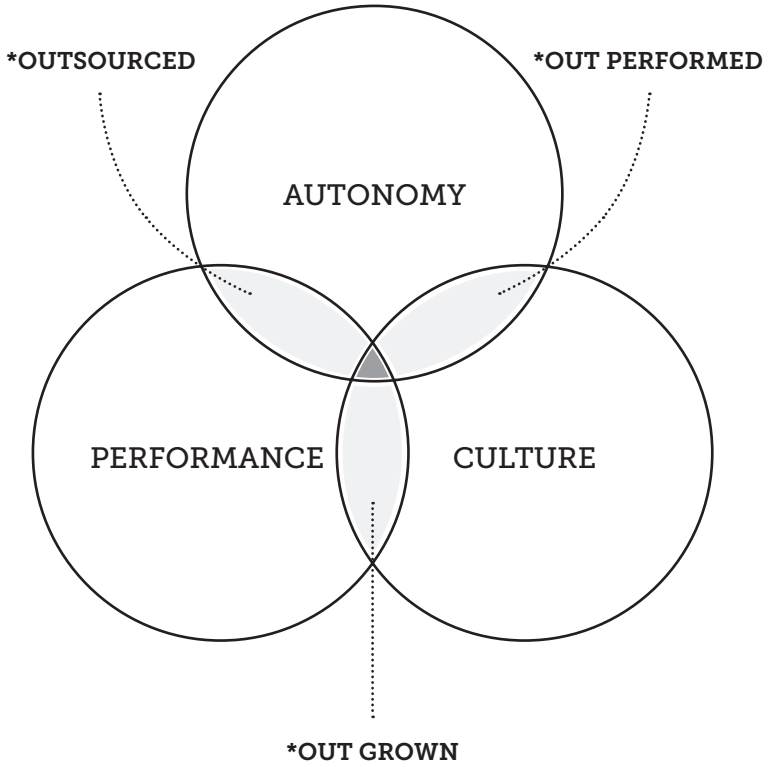
Put simply, having teams permanently working from anywhere provides the ultimate choice at work. While an office environment allows some opportunity for autonomy, it is limited. WFA offers autonomy in a way that an office setting could never provide. Individuals in your team have the ability to influence their work environment like never before – introducing stand-up desks, time on the treadmill, or a yoga mat in the office for hourly stretches. They can take the opportunity to bust out emails from the home office in the morning, shift to a local café for creative writing around lunchtime, before walking around a local park while talking with colleagues on the phone. Not to mention no more having to deal with work colleagues leaving lunches as science experiments in the fridge for months on end.

The expression of autonomy is dialled up in a WFA approach. Everything can truly come to life when the groundwork of clarity around performance is expressed (you're clear on what is of value) and this is connected to a culture that aligns (through the continual expression of values), allowing autonomy and personal growth to be developed (becoming valuable in the role).

Performance, culture and autonomy are equally important.

This WFA philosophy, with its tenets of performance, culture and autonomy, provides the framework for strong, important conversations inside your team and organisation. You can have conversations around what matters to you and your team, the key things you'll be measuring, how your people can belong and behave, and where the opportunities are for individualistic expression, growth and mastery in the role.

These three pillars of performance, culture and autonomy provide a philosophy and framework that lays the foundation for a successful move to WFA. To prove how a lack of focus on any one area is problematic, we're going to revert to the time-honoured consultancy go-to model: the Venn diagram. Don't be too shocked, okay!



**Potential to be...*

How performance, culture and autonomy interconnect

If, for example, you were to remove the focus on performance, and have a core focus on culture and autonomy, you become trapped in mediocrity. It may feel nice and supportive of people; it may feel heart-warming and connected. But it's a trap nonetheless, and it's here where you can have *cheerleaders* rather than team players.

These cheerleaders are the people with the pom-poms celebrating on the sideline, but without any actual influence on the success of the game. They can't make a move that will progress things forward, and they don't learn and adapt their skills to master the role and grow for success. What happens in this scenario over the long term is that personal values and preferences are likely to start to compete with the culture. Your team starts out as friends and ends up clashing, because nothing unites them to measure their success.

Eventually, with this focus on having *cheerleaders* in your team, your organisation will be *outperformed*.

Alternatively, if you were to remove culture and have a sole focus on performance and autonomy, you are left with a group of *doers*. This may sound appealing, because at least here things are being delivered. The focus is on output and output is achieved.

With *doers*, however, you're in danger of ending up with *contractors* rather than a team.

Understanding how work fits into the ecosystem as a whole falls, and genius happens in solo pursuits rather than being cultivated through a sense of belonging to something beyond self.

Eventually, in organisations and teams with *contractors*, these team members will be *outsourced*.

Finally, if we were to remove autonomy and focus only on performance and culture, the environment starts to resemble that

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of many office-based, co-located teams. People are connected to the culture, 'the way we do things around here' and the tactics, and work is measured and achieved. However, there's a niggling sense of losing self and a potential for frustration with the limited (if any) opportunity for autonomy. Tighter controls, regulations and processes are the core outcomes with this approach. It's here that you have *conformists*, rather than *adaptors*.

Discretionary effort, problem-solving, learning and application all suffer when you drop a focus on autonomy. This can affect not only your motivation and that of individuals in your team, but also the kind of creative output and innovative thinking that more and more organisations need for survival.

Eventually, over time, conformists within organisations will be outgrown.

Only through focusing equally on all three pillars of performance, culture and autonomy will your team and organisation avoid being outperformed, outsourced and outgrown in a world that has shifted so dramatically. The WFA philosophy allows this equal focus on all three pillars – and adopting this philosophy could well be deemed (in Joseph Campbell's terms) your call to adventure.

If you're still not sure if you want to answer the call, the next chapter provides even further food for thought and action.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Flexible working has been around for many years, but the rapid global movement towards working remotely brought on by COVID-19 quickly made clear how underprepared and outdated flexible working policies had become.
- Before setting out on a journey towards working from anywhere, considering your beliefs about work is worthwhile. The three beliefs you'll need to hold onto throughout your journey are that working from anywhere is possible, you and your team can do it (as a collective), and it is worth it.
- Along the journey, as a leader you will need to come back to making principle-based decisions, in good times and bad. Sometimes the hardest decisions are the right decisions.
- In order to be successful over the long term, a WFA philosophy needs to be established, and this philosophy is built on focusing in equal measure on the three key areas of performance, culture and autonomy.
- For more on Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom's research into the working-from-home economy, go to news.stanford.edu and search 'Nicholas Bloom'.
- To discover Tata Consultancy Services' new approach to working using Secure Borderless Workspaces, go to www.tcs.com and search 'virtual workplaces'.
- And to read some more tweets from Tobi Lütke and going 'all-in' on WFA, search online for the article 'Shopify is going all-in on remote work', written by Evan Niu and published on The Motley Fool website (www.fool.com).

Your coaching check-in

Whether you're teetering on the edge, preparing to dive head-first into a long-term shift to working from anywhere, or have been working this way for a while, we hope it's clear where your focus needs to now go. Take some time to consider the beliefs you and your team hold about work, and the WFA approach. Lean on solid business principles when making decisions, in both the good times and the bad.

Before moving on to the next chapter, take a step back to consider the following:

- Which areas of focus are driving your organisation and your team at this moment? Do your people know and rally to achieve performance outcomes?
- Does clarity exist around your team culture, along with a constant commitment to strengthening this culture?
- Do your teams have ample opportunity to embrace autonomy and, in doing so, come up with innovative solutions?
- Are there any new tools or processes you'll need to introduce to make WFA 'work' for your teams?

Remember—a balanced focus on all of these areas will be your challenge as you set out on your journey towards WFA mastery.

OUR TEAM ANSWERS THE CALL OF THE QUEST ...

It's one of the oldest adages around: any great journey starts with a single step. But, sheesh! What about the second, thirteenth and 115th steps? During those early steps, you can experience everything from having a skip-in-your-step and smelling the clear mountain air, to the earliest signs that the ultra-expensive hiking shoes you bought online are a size too small.

As the Pragmatic Thinking team – or PT Crew – embarked on a new adventure, travelling from a co-located team to a fully distributed team in a matter of weeks, we experienced all the feels. We were fearful of an uncertain future for the business; we were worried about loved ones and family and the challenges they were also facing; and we were concerned about the sheer ground that would need to be made up (we lost 90 per cent of future revenue in a matter of days). However, in spite of all this, we were also intrigued about what might be possible if we embraced this new landscape.

Accepting the call to adventure, and the new trail that implies, always brings a sense of curiosity and wonder. You see things you've never seen before, and that brings an energy and focus

that is hard to find among the mundane and predictable. This was certainly reflected in our team's approach in the earliest days of moving into distributed work. Sure, we were worried and deeply concerned about the state of the market and how (and if) we'd survive, but we also exhibited classic energetic responses to a challenge. The newness of the work, the way of work and how we'd build a new approach brought energy. This energy needed to be harnessed and, while it wasn't outwardly spoken, inherently we knew the key to our future success was how we'd sustain energy over time; we were embarking on a marathon, not a sprint.

To maintain and sustain this energetic approach to a new environment, we had to respect that new energy can be fragile; as easily as it appears, it can also disappear. Therefore, in response to this call to adventure, we invested our time and effort in the critical work; the work of reconnecting to purpose and getting clear on what matters, even among huge uncertainty.

Our purpose at PT had never been more relevant and needed. Our purpose is:

To make work an extraordinary experience and role-model cultural magnificence.

In reconnecting to this, we could see the *why* in our work and our existence. Most, if not all of our client work experiences had become as messed up as a nine-year-old's room. All the pieces that had sat orderly in their cupboards had been strewn everywhere in the blink of an eye. It was incumbent upon us to help our clients find where things belonged again; however, for us to do this, we needed to ensure we'd sorted our own space first.

We wanted our team to explore the new world of work. We sat in the beautiful question of 'What would a high-performing hybrid team look, sound and feel like?' We engaged in practices — such as listening to the same podcasts — so we could come back together to share reflections and lessons. We started to form expectations and measures around what success would look like and, crucially, what it wouldn't look like.

We'd started with energy along the trail, knowing what the end goal was, but without an intricate knowledge of what each turn of track might bring ...

