

Remote and Mixed Model Working

Practical Resource for Organisations - Part 1

‘The Future Of Work – Flexible, Remote and Mixed’?

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FOREWORD

Sarah Jackson, Chair of PiPA, authority on flexible working, women at work, gender pay-gap.

PiPA research over the past five years first revealed and has then consistently underlined the additional barriers that result in too many parents and carers giving up the industry and taking their talents, skills and diversity of lived experience elsewhere.

The pandemic has hit this industry arguably harder than almost any other. So many individuals have had to leave, longstanding companies and venues have closed or fear closure. And yet, as we re-open, there is hope that a stronger, more inclusive industry may result. The experience that so many people have had of working from home, often in roles and with responsibilities that had appeared to be suitable for onsite working only; and of managing teams remotely who would normally be together in the same place – there is so much learning that can be taken forward so that we do not go back to how things were before, but create something different. Something better. Something more inclusive that better reflects and speaks for the great diversity of life across the UK.

Building on the remote working experiments of the past 16 months rather than simply pressing “re-play” may feel challenging, but by applying the practical common sense and creativity that are the hallmarks of the performing arts, and with an acceptance that for every organisation the answer will be uniquely their own, this truly is a golden opportunity for real, long-lasting and positive change.

INTRODUCTION

The last eighteen months have been incredibly challenging for the theatre workforce. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic many people have lost their jobs, many have been prevented from working, and many have been working from home. As the theatre industry reopens, organisations are looking at developing constructive approaches to returning to the workplace for those workers who are able to do so. This is an important juncture for organisations to consider the benefits of remote working – and the practical steps needed to take to integrate new approaches - before simply returning to pre-pandemic working patterns.

As a sector we have an opportunity to embed the specific learning from working remotely throughout the pandemic, combined with the accumulated knowledge, case studies and research-led strategies from PiPA's work in this area over the last five years, and establish an updated model for working that will allow the sector to remain a competitive and flexible employer.

In May 2021 PiPA conducted research with theatre sector workers that identified a huge appetite for flexibility in the way we work in theatre, including remote working. This survey was conducted while many in the sector had been working from home for at least twelve months, and the findings reflect both the positive benefits, and practical challenges, both for managers and for the general workforce.

The survey findings reflect the thinking around flexible working that business leaders, chief medical officers, and directors of health and wellbeing have been advocating for a decade:

“The way to attract the best people, and keep them, is to offer them a working environment in which they can thrive and be their best. And flexible working has the proven potential to do just that, paving the way to greater inclusion, diversity, and helping to reduce, at last, the gender pay gap.”

- **Paul Hamer, CEO, Sir Robert McAlpine**

Wider workforce research, such as the McKinsey ‘What executives are saying about hybrid working’¹ report, have predicted that a mixed model of working (also referred to as hybrid or blended working) will become far more common in the workplace than pre-pandemic:

“The majority of executives expect that (for all roles that aren’t essential to perform on-site) employees will be on-site between 21 and 80 percent of the time, or one to four days per week.”

Because of its work in this area over the last five years, PiPA has a wealth of knowledge and experience to draw on, alongside some case studies of arts organisations who have first-hand experience of developing remote working policies and putting them into practice. PiPA have worked with organisations including Royal Shakespeare Company, LW Theatres and Royal Opera House, all of whom have found that by working with their staff in developing and implementing new approaches to working, both staff and the business have benefited in many ways:

“We found the PiPA Charter Programme incredibly useful - it’s clear how much consideration, thought and care has gone into it. Simply the act of working through the programme helped us remind ourselves what we already do that’s great, and challenge ourselves on what more we can do in future – as well as sparking new ideas and creative approaches we hadn’t considered before. The reports were tailored to our organisation, and full of practical suggestions, information and links to other resources. Finally, the support and guidance from the team at PiPA, and Matt in particular, has been invaluable both in helping us think about our own internal approach, and connecting us with other organisations and best practice.”

- **Kate Sirdifield, HR Manager- Royal Shakespeare Company**

¹ [What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work | McKinsey](#)

The business case for a mixed model of working is stronger than ever, and business leaders are acknowledging the benefits of more flexible approaches in motivating their workforce and creating more productivity, as outlined in the KPMG Intelligent Working Statement:

“It’s all about focusing on outcomes and trusting our people to do the right thing for themselves and our firm. We’re happy to consider any working arrangement that allows you the work-life balance you want, providing you can fulfil your commitments”.

The focus of this report is what new approaches to working could that mean for a sector that faces unique challenges in terms of working patterns and hours, a sector which is 75% freelance, and struggling to rebound from the crippling impact of COVID-19.

PiPA Remote Working Research Analysis & Tools

As in many other sectors, overall, the research conducted by PiPA in May 2021 during COVID-19 identified significant appetite and opportunity among managers and within the workforce for embedding a more robust and flexible infrastructure into daily working practice.

318 people responded to the survey, providing attitudes from a broad representation of roles across the sector. 50% of respondents included traditionally office-based roles including administration and PR, and of these 24% were from senior management. 66% of respondents currently manage staff or freelancers, and of these 40% have managed someone during lockdown, while 24% have managed someone before lockdown (of these, 20% have also managed someone during lockdown).

44% of respondents included, but were not limited to, backstage workers, performers, creatives (lighting designers, directors, producers, casting directors). 96% of respondents have experienced fully or partly working remotely or from home.

The survey reveals the benefits of flexible and remote working as expressed by the respondents:

- 64% reported a better work-life balance
- 60% reported an ability to better manage caring responsibilities/family life
- 52% achieved more than when working on-site
- Positive effects were reported on stress (33%), mental (39%) and physical well-being (46%)

There is also understandable trepidation, due to the challenging experiences of remote working during the pandemic, and the desire to get back to the security of what we know. Although 89% of managers surveyed felt that their teams have been as productive, if not more productive, whilst working from home, nearly half (45%) found it harder to manage their teams remotely as when managing on-site teams. This document addresses these commonly arising concerns below.

As well as the benefits reported from various forms of remote working, the research also identified some key challenges experienced including feeling disconnected from colleagues; lack of boundaries between work and domestic life and working over contracted hours. With research-led strategies and training to overcome these

challenges, there is an opportunity as a sector, to make a mixed model of working sustainable for as many people and employers as possible.

High-level vision and planning for mixed working has the potential to redress the imbalances and pressures experienced during the pandemic. This has the potential to result in long term productivity and wellbeing gains for the performing arts industry. Additionally, those facing other barriers to work including parents, carers and disabled people will benefit from a more flexible structure.

As we look to reopening there are many factors to consider and no one-size-fits all approach in a post-Covid landscape. There is conflict between wanting things to 'get back to normal' and 'doing things differently.' To assist leaders and managers as they explore new approaches to working, based on tried and tested strategies as part of the PiPA Charter Programme, PiPA have designed a suite of practical tools to support managers to assess the potential opportunities and challenges for organisations identified through the research.

This document includes this guidance:

- **Making the business case for remote working** – a summary of the benefits and challenges of developing new policies
- **Types of remote working** – definitions and explanations
- **Common concerns** – addressing frequently arising questions

Additional practical tools complement this document and include:

- **Remote Working Sample Policy**
- **Making Off-Site Working Work includes the tools-**
 - **PiPA Role Analysis tool**
 - **Remote Working Checklist**

These resources are intended to facilitate impartial and practical support in identifying the potential for mixed models of working within organisations.

MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR REMOTE WORKING

This section outlines definitions and key benefits and challenges of remote working. Useful in making a case to Senior Management Teams or Boards.

What is Remote Working (definition)

Remote Working, often known as *Working from Home*, may cover working from any other premises, enabling employees as well as freelancers to carry out the activities within their role, away from the organisation's building or traditional office environment (i.e. off-site, rather than on-site).

The remote worker should have access to the necessary equipment, tools and resources to execute their work away from the employer's office or building.

Freelancers often provide their own equipment and space but, on some occasions have access to on-site facilities. If activities using facilities you would usually provide are to take place off-site this will require consideration in line with remote working provision.

What are the main benefits?

Evidenced by the PiPA/SOLT/UK Theatre May 2021 research, the benefits of remote and mixed working for individuals and employers in the performing arts sector include:

- **Better work-life balance:**
Two thirds of respondents say they benefitted from a better work-life balance whilst working from home which is likely to lead to increased job satisfaction and positively impact workforce retention and performance.

"Flexibility creates happier and more productive people and teams"

- **Engagement:**
Nine out of 10 managers reported the same, if not increased productivity for their teams working remotely during the pandemic.

Almost nine out of 10 workers said they were as productive if not more productive working from home.

"I have found that my work from home days are more productive for admin duties and for running team meetings, attending meeting etc. Because I try to plan all of these into my work from home days, what I am finding is the days that I am on-site, I am more free to be less 'desk bound' and to actually participate in my work, our shows, with my on-site team more, I am more mobile, more present for them."

- **Retention:**

9 out of 10 workers feel that offering some form of remote working would make a job more attractive which impacts the rate of staff turnover.

“There are definitely benefits in terms of being able to recruit roles from a wider pool of candidates if location is not an issue.”

- **Financial incentive:**

Nine out of 10 of respondents stated a key benefit of remote working was reduced costs (such as travel, and other expenses connected with working on site) which is also likely to reduce staff turnover in lower paid roles.

- **Profitability:**

Remote Working can reduce overheads for both the individual and organisation; utility costs for the organisation’s building can decrease, as can commuting costs and other associated ongoings (such as childcare) for remote workers.

“Pre-Pandemic I wouldn’t have thought my role would work well from home, but I’ve been pleasantly surprised how much can be done. It’s a mix of on-site and home working, but it’s definitely advantageous to do whatever aspects can be done from home.”

What are the main challenges?

The main challenges that arise when implementing remote working fall within four categories:

- **Management** – Six out of ten survey respondents reported they are managing people in their current role, over half (55%) report finding it easier or the same to manage remote workers as managing on-site teams. Nonetheless that means 45% of managers are finding it harder to manage their teams remotely. One fifth of managers said they would benefit from more support and training in order to be able to effectively manage people working remotely.

“Managing people remotely, particularly people I’ve never met or spent time with in person, does have its challenges and I think these will become more apparent in the long-term. I would appreciate some training on how to best manage people remotely.”

- **Communication** – This is key to the successful implementation of remote working; from workers being informed that this can be requested, to the communication of the organisation’s Remote Working policies and guidelines. An additional challenge is to formalise ad hoc or informal methods of communication within teams or between managers and staff, that have been developed on-site, or relied on face-to-face interaction. It is crucial to ensure systems and processes remain effective when one or more of the team are no longer full-time on-site so that standards and delivery are unaffected. This will also address some of the challenges reported in our survey such as experiencing a lack of boundaries between work and domestic life (62%) and frequently working over contracted hours when remote working (44%).

- **Team Dynamics** – A high proportion of respondents said that they experienced feeling disconnected from colleagues or the team (69%) and feeling isolated (40%) when remote working.

Whilst the feeling of isolation might have been enhanced due to lockdown, the challenge is to ensure and enable team connectedness when some may be offsite. Equally important is to think through how to maintain organisational culture, including induction and support of new staff.

- **Resources** - Remote working equipment, such as devices, software and broadband need to be fit for purpose; many respondents commented on inadequate resourcing during the pandemic. Adequate equipment and resources will support the uptake of remote working and its effective implementation. If it is an organisation's decision or a requirement of the role, it will be the organisation's responsibility to ensure this equipment is made available. The *PiPA Resource Checklist* in part 2 of this resource 'Making Off-Site Working Work' is a useful tool to identify equipment required to make working off-site a success.

TYPES OF REMOTE WORKING

Below is an outline of the different types of remote working along with their specific opportunities and challenges. This will be useful for managers and employees to build a shared understanding and insight of Remote Working in order to have productive conversations about it.

Type	Description	Opportunities	Challenges
Full-time Remote Working (Favoured by one out of 10 survey respondents)	<p>Working away from an organisation's building or from the traditional office environment for all aspects of the job. This can include working from home, in co-working spaces, or at different sites.</p> <p>This type of working may be suitable for most desk-based jobs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling uninterrupted focus time for Remote Worker, especially for tasks that require concentration and less team contribution. • Reduces issues around limited space or shared spaces within organisations. • Opportunity to engage with workers based at different locations. • Opportunity to expand the diversity of talent within the workforce as recruitment is not impacted by location/commuting distance or access to a building etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain roles and duties within the performing arts will need to be undertaken on site or in conjunction with other people. Analysing the role and its activity to understand the impact on the individual, their team and the organisation will determine if remote working or a mixed working model is suitable. (See PiPA Role Flexibility Assessment Tool in <i>Making Off-Site Working Work</i>) • Ensuring equal communication and engagement between remote and on-site workers.
Mixed Working (Sometimes referred to as Hybrid Working or Blended Working) (Favoured by seven out of 10 survey respondents)	<p>This is a mixed model of working partly on-site (in the organisation's building or office) and partly remote. To implement effectively, it requires compartmentalising the different tasks and responsibilities within a role to understand what aspects can be conducted remotely and what aspects are best for the individual and the organisation to take place on-site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a mixed approach means an organisation's working practices are prepared and agile to respond to sudden changes experienced by their workforce (self-isolation requirements, childcare, travel restrictions etc). • A mixed working model can present opportunities for remote and flexible working for aspects of roles which have previously been considered as inflexible (e.g. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing effective communication across the team, departments, and throughout the organisation. • Ensuring there is no disparity of experience between those working on-site and those working remotely. • Ensuring that the scheduling of working remotely and on-site is beneficial for the individual, the team and the wider organisation. • Working from home may become temporarily challenging due to unforeseeable circumstances

	<p>A mixed approach is suitable for a variety of roles, where agreed upon aspects can be carried out off-site (e.g. project planning, budgeting, emailing, making and sewing, etc). This form of remote working will suit most roles and organisations within the performing arts.</p>	<p>backstage/ technical, creative).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mixed approach will contribute to embedding the flexibility that will support transitional periods for the workforce (e.g. returning from maternity leave, or long-term sickness etc.). 	<p>(such as failure of broadband services), and therefore, providing space or hot desks may still need to be on offer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote Working may not be a viable option for some due to personal circumstance (insufficient space, caring responsibilities). This is important to consider if the request is coming from the organisation.
<p>Ad hoc Remote Access</p>	<p>The tools used to effectively implement Remote Working can also be applied to improve access. It can include offering remote interviews, accepting self-tapes and using online platforms as standard for meetings, workshops or events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This offer can increase access to work and other engagement opportunities, improve recruitment processes, attendance management, and support access needs and wellbeing. • Meetings, workshops, training and events can be accessed at different times due to the ability to record remote activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive and clear communication should come from the organisation to raise awareness that remote access is an option. • Support may need to be given for people to be able to use certain digital platforms and software. • Ensuring remote experiences are sufficient and comparable to live attendance.

COMMON CONCERNS

This section outlines previously identified barriers or misconceptions which can prevent remote working. This will be beneficial for managers to familiarise themselves with in advance of implementing a mixed, or fully remote, model of working.

“Flexible working I could control, one request at a time. Blended working will just be a free for all.”

- A mixed model of working establishes a principle that staff members have increased control and choice about where they work – on your premises, from home, or from some other location away from your site.
- This kind of choice and autonomy has been shown to increase employee engagement and thus performance.
- It’s a positive change to introduce. But you also need to have control as a manager.
- It will be important for you to invest thought into establishing the boundaries, within which your staff are able to choose where to work remotely, and when, so that they know what is possible and acceptable.
- You may find it most practical to involve your team in this, so that everyone shares in the design, understands, and takes responsibility for the team’s mixed working practice.

“Everyone will want to work remotely. Nobody will come in to work.”

People like coming to work, because work fills a social need as well as being how to earn a living. Many people found full-time working from home during the pandemic an isolating experience. Many people will be glad to get back to your premises, which are designed for them to carry out the job you pay them to do.

“Everyone will choose to work from home on a Friday.”

Well, they may do! This is why it will be important for you to have defined the parameters for remote working. For example, that a certain number of people are required on your premises on a particular day, for a particular reason. With those requirements clearly set out, it will be up to the team members to agree how they will ensure that the right number of staff are on site at any time. (One organisation dealt with the Friday ‘problem’ by splitting the staff into two teams, the Friday Crew and the Monday Crew. Everyone works on site Tuesdays to Thursdays; all team meetings and other activities requiring collaboration are scheduled for those days. This model may not suit your business, but it is an example of innovative problem solving that meets everyone’s needs.

“There are some roles in my team that have to be done on the premises.”

This may well be true, and it is your right as the manager to say so. But take the time to think about whether elements of a job could be done remotely (for example, in Wardrobe, the Bible can be worked on at home, even though other elements of the role may need to be done on site). And don't be afraid to consult the role-holder concerned. They are likely to be practical and realistic about where they need to be and when. The more you can delegate around the design of your team's mixed model of working, the more it is likely to fit the exact demands of your business as well as the needs and preferences of your team members.

“I shan't be able to change someone's arrangement in future if I need them to work on the premises.”

Make use of trial periods for individual arrangements; consider designating the first three or even six months as a pilot, and build in team reviews and evaluations about how it's going. Keep communication open and encourage constructive discussion. Make it everybody's responsibility to make mixed working a success for the team. But also establish from the start what your expectations or requirements are: for example, that the whole team will always be on the premises for the monthly team meeting; or that the organisation commits to giving sufficient notice when requiring someone to be physically present on a day they have been accustomed to working remotely.

“I have a big team. I simply don't have time to be considering and authorising lots of remote working requests.”

A mixed model of working is an overarching principle, supported by your team protocols, that effectively normalise informal flexible working. It is different from a team member making a formal request under the legislation for a contractual change to when or where they work. By introducing a mixed model of working, you are passing responsibility to your team members to make their own decisions about where they can do their best work. After the initial time investment to take stock and to set out agreed parameters, the demands on your time should be less. Step back and let your team manage their own work locations.

“Theatre work/ The Performing Arts is not suitable for any kind of remote working”

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that there is now capacity within a multitude of roles for remote working. It is important that this learning is embedded into the long-term strategy of an organisation. Even before COVID-19 there were many examples of remote working from within the performing arts; Stage Managers sending rehearsal reports from home, Production Managers answering emails whilst in transit, costume alternations being carried out away from the venue etc. Carrying out an analysis on which roles and tasks can still be completed remotely will support the embedding of a mixed approach.