

## **MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS**

A management scholar Joan Magretta wrote that, “*Management is the discipline that makes joint performance possible*”<sup>1</sup>, WFH makes the joint performance harder, but not impossible. Managing remote teams wasn’t a norm (until now) and thus we have limited research and best practices. We should take this as an opportunity to experiment and learn what works and what doesn’t in creating values and managing people. With human adaptability and collective intelligence, we shall overcome the challenges we are facing. Who knows, we might even find ways to excel both in our career and family life.

**1. Beginner’s Mind:** The key to learning and discovery in this new normal is to arm yourself with a beginner’s or an experimental mindset. Having an experimental mindset means exploring new ways to achieve desired results and believe that all failures are temporary. The more you experiment, the more you learn and the more you will achieve.

*“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s mind there are few” ~ Shunryu Suzuki*

**2. Dial-up the Trust level:** The real insight about managing people is that, ultimately, you don’t.<sup>2</sup> Managers provide a context of values and systems within which team members can manage themselves. And **trust** is a soft infrastructure a team runs on. To build trust, we must start with **respect** for individual, we need to value different perspectives and leverage on different but complementary talents. Listening skill and authentic communication come in handy. As a manager, your responsibility is to set an example of being a trustworthy person by delivering what you promise and trusting your team members as you would have them trust you. It’s noteworthy to think trust NOT just as binary thing, either you have it or you don’t, BUT to assess the level of trust your team has and figure out ways to improve it. Without trust and respect, teamwork and collaboration fall apart.

**3. Balance Challenge with Capability:** In assigning task and project to your individual team member, it is important to have the right level of challenge for him/her. Too hard or too easy and it will put him/her in either anxiety zone or boredom zone (see figure 1). According to a research, 1.04: 1 ratio of challenge to capability is optimal to put someone into the zone or flow state. In addition, *having a clear goal, getting timely feedback* and 2-3 hours of uninterrupted time of *deep work* are essential for the flow state. Thus, we need to be mindful of those facts in setting goal, giving feedback and scheduling meetings. Flow state enhances the quality work and job satisfaction.<sup>3</sup>

**4. Create System for Accountability:** In this new territory of WFH, if rules of engagement are not clear, it could be a source of stress and discontent. Word like “WFH burnouts” creeps into our lingo. Thus, we should flash out with our team on what are expected, what are acceptable (and what aren’t) in terms of email & chat responses, taking phone calls and having online meetings. We can call this document, “**Expectations of Engagement**”, consensus and clarity are more important than formality. Research shows that having a **scoreboard** improves motivation, accountability and thus performance of a team. It’s well suited for remote teams. (*more about designing a scoreboard will be discussed in week#5*) Scoreboard can also serve as a central piece for weekly **progress review meeting**, where team members report their progress and setbacks vis-à-vis their commitment, where others offer assistance in clearing the roadblocks. This type of meeting is crucial to build cadence of accountability and teamwork.<sup>4</sup>

**5. Connect and Celebrate:** Being social creatures, we yearn for social interaction. Thus, in WFH setting we can create “watercooler chatroom” for team members to talk about lighthearted topics. We can have pizza or KFC Fried Chicken party or have a virtual TGIF toast (after work hours) to celebrate our accomplishments or simply to decompress.

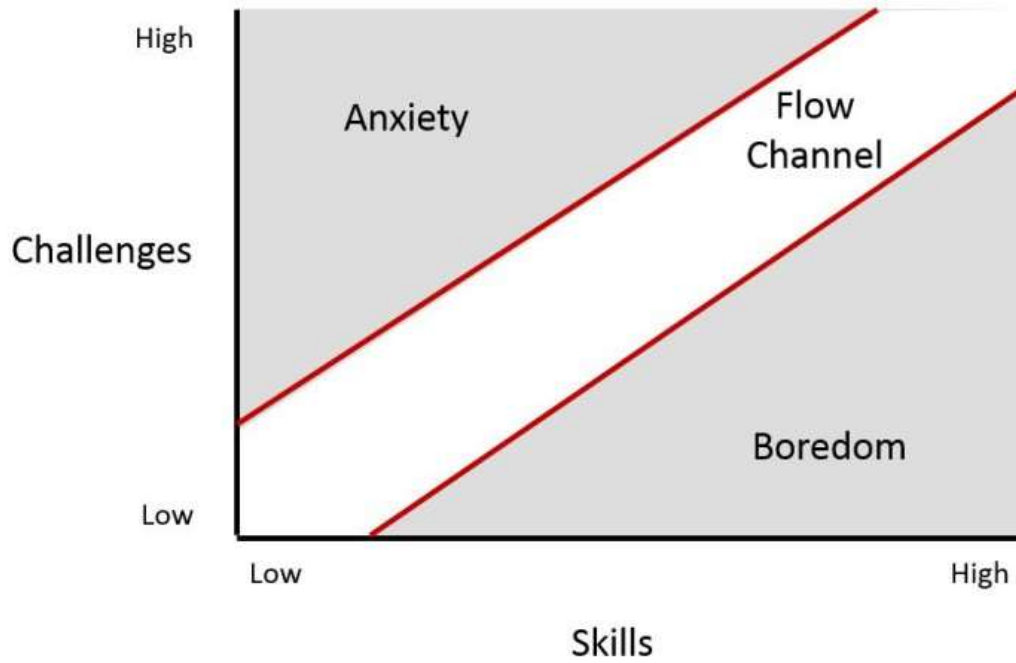
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<sup>1,2</sup> “What Management Is” by Joan Magretta

<sup>3</sup> “Flow” by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, <https://www.stevenkotler.com/rabbit-hole/ea-ullam-copy>

<sup>4</sup> “4 Disciplines of Execution” by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling

Figure-1



Source: <https://www.sidewaysthoughts.com/blog/2013/12/how-do-you-enjoy-yourself-learning-the-8-conditions-of-flow/>