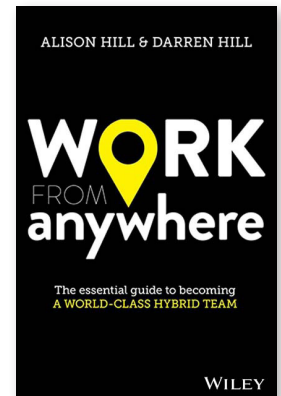# soundview
Executive Book Summaries®

Work From Anywhere

The Essential Guide to Becoming a World-Class Hybrid Team

by **Alison Hill and Darren Hill**

Contents

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

The global pandemic ushered in a new reality of remote work—a trend that's likely here to stay. **Work From Anywhere** delivers practical strategies on developing a high-performing team and business in a remote, distributed environment. Accomplished authors, behavioral experts, and fast-growth business leaders Alison Hill and Darren Hill show you how to create these strategies to bring out the best in your hybrid and remote team members, by focusing on both performance and people.

You'll learn the unique psychology, methodology, and technology that make hybrid teams excel, and how to foster high performance across your team, no matter where they're located.

Working from anywhere is no longer just an HR conversation; it's an executive conversation. Perfect for business leaders working with hybrid teams, **Work from Anywhere** is also ideal for organizational development executives, cultural transition leaders, business leaders, and entrepreneurs who are responsible for ensuring that employees consistently perform at their best, regardless of location.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why working from anywhere (WFA) is not just necessary but desirable.
- The three pillars of performance, culture, and autonomy as the key to mastering WFA.
- Great strategies to change the way your team thinks, connects, and works.

Introduction

Having teams operate in a distributed or work from any-where (WFA) fashion is not new, nor was it solely born from the global pandemic. A few rare companies with valuations now in the billions have been distributed for decades, or at least since the advent of the internet.

Yet, the sheer impact of COVID-19 and the overnight call to remote and distributed work practices reshaped work-place behaviour and standards so significantly that, in time, we may speak historically about the events of 2020 as being as disruptive for workforces as the invention of the printing press and the personal computer.

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."

Put simply, the requirement of organisations to offer and adapt to WFA practices as a regular option is now here forever. Recent research suggests that to be competitive in the talent marketplace, you need to have options available beyond the co-located team.

Chief financial officers around the world have celebrated the shift to WFA more than anyone, because of their con-nection to the numbers that drive the business. The reduced costs are varied, but the two big reductions are reduced commercial rent and reduced travel and accommodation expenses.

The Best Way to Work?

But what if WFA is actually the best way to work? How comfortable has that question left you? What was your first intuitive response?

Embracing a WFA approach for your team could enrich the lives of your people and their work. You can lead and thrive as a team working from anywhere, whether in a distributed form or as a hybrid team. The gifts from this are not just a flexible work environment but also a deeply autonomous one, built on the kind of performance standards and cul-tural togetherness that create the work engagement we've quested for.

When we explore a new model and methodology, the very things we've been craving from work become possible.

The alternative is pretty ordinary; if your belief is that WFA is the poor cousin of the office-bound team, you'll likely create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Your energy will be reflected and radiated throughout your team, and you'll see problems instead of opportunities.

Let's not do that. Let's dare to create something special.

The World Has Shifted (shifting our world)

Making the shift to a WFA approach requires new tools and new processes. Change is possible, but it requires a change in perspective and a change in belief first.

Shifting Beliefs About Work

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

- **WFA is 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**. 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 lead-ers who'll find a way in the world of WFA.

Building Your WFA Philosophy

Let's face it. The new world of not being a co-located team 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?"

For a long time, organisations have said, "It's culture first." 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.

> In times of deep uncertainty,
> cultures need to focus on performance
> more than anything.

The three pillars of performance, culture, and autonomy provide a philosophy and framework that lays the foundation for a successful move to WFA.

In times of deep uncertainty, cultures need to focus on performance more than anything. 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.

Performance provides a platform for culture within teams.

Culture and Autonomy

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?

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.

Autonomy 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 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 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.

The Call to Adventure

Let's unpack some of the early considerations and tools to get started on the pathway to WFA.

New ventures create energy—energy that is harnessed into motivation. Figuring out the new lay of the land can be engaging and intoxicating. Through increased action, we shift into the adrenaline phase of motivation. We see the results of our actions take effect, communication and feedback generally increase over this time as individuals are figuring out what they are doing, and we are open to innovating on the run.

Motivation can start to drop after this initial novelty and adrenaline period—and the higher the peak, the steeper the drop. As novelty and adrenaline drop, motivation starts to wane.

For leaders, it's important to recognise this phase and not see it as a sign that the shift to WFA is not working. Instead, this is the "bedding down" phase, providing an opportunity to redesign how work and connection are achieved.

Have normalising conversations with your people around how they are feeling and coping. Then double down on progress. Ask, "What are the things that we can make gains on today or this week that will move us forward?"

Navigating the Communication Quagmire

Working from anywhere requires different communication tools. Consider four tools you need to navigate this minefield and effectively engage a WFA workforce. The tools create a simple framework that can be applied to any organisation and help to bring structure and clarity to your hybrid and remote communications.

Say hello to your new favourite acronym: SOCS.

Social. Now more than ever, our people need social inter-

action and connection with their teammates to build rapport and strengthen their sense of belonging. Create time to engage not only with your own team but also cross-functionally with other teams. The preference here is to utilise a video conferencing tool (whichever is your software of choice) because it creates an opportunity to see people visually and pick up non-verbal cues.

Operational. The starting blocks for world-class WFA teams is to have a platform that can be easily accessed for operational communication and visual progress. Given the nature of hybrid work, this is most often a digital tool that is agnostic to location for accessibility. Consider how individuals, teams, and cross-functional teams can engage in these platforms, connect, help each other out if needed, and celebrate the wins along the way.

Conversational. Having a designated place where your team can have casual conversations back-and-forth, similar to how they would if they were all in the office together, is important. This includes team-centric conversations, company-wide conversations, one-to-one interactions, and everything from the quick business update, to the water-cooler chats, to recommendations about the latest Netflix series to binge on.

Speed. How do you cut through the noise when something urgent or important needs to be shared? Which platform do you use to get quick attention (knowing you don't want to use this platform all the time because it will be habitualised)? This is where the speed element of this framework swoops in to save the day. For many organisations, the best option for this is a quick text message.

Charting the Course

Any journey is founded in a combination of both embarking on a planned direction and the serendipity of stumbling across the unplanned along the way. When the unplanned happens and the unknown path is trodden, you have a chance to check back in and reorientate the pathway forward. Are you and your team way off base? Or is the new direction where you want to be? How do you reconnect with a sense of progress rather than meandering?

To keep progressing, you need a charted course of direction or a map to come back to. It is this touchstone that becomes a shared reference point for intrepid travellers to gather around, share stories, and plan for the next move.

Five Levels of Distributed Work

Matt Mullenweg, CEO of web-publishing and commerce firm Automattic, has a model, the five levels of remote work, which allows a team and organisation to plot where they sit on the continuum of remote or distributed work.

Level one: Non-deliberate action. At this stage, remote work is seen as a temporary fix or "holding pattern," and very few things have been done to improve or optimise the remote working experience. In this setting, employees may be putting off completing certain tasks out of necessity—essentially, until they're able to get back to the office.

Level two: Recreating the office. At this stage, they've made the commitment to work remotely but are still doing what they can to recreate the office environment and office routine in a remote setting. They'll (over) use tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams to gather as a team virtually, but there is still an expectation (assumed or otherwise) that emails and messages will be responded to as soon as possible.

Level three: Adapting to the medium. At the third level of remote work, you're likely to start seeing more of the benefits come to light. As employees have accepted that remote work is here to stay, they're much more likely to begin upgrading their space to accommodate their new working environment.

At this stage, asynchronous communication also becomes more common. Documentation and written communication will become more important at this stage, so that those who are unable to attend live are able to access critical information on their own timeline.

Level four: Asynchronous communication. Work no longer needs to happen at the same time for everyone. Instead, the work considers not only the tasks to be done but also how to hand over the baton to others who may arrive at the task at a different time. Employees have more control over how they structure their day, and your organisation will begin to focus performance expectations on outcomes and what is produced, rather than how or when work is produced.

Trust is heightened as employees gain more autonomy, and a new level of psychological safety is achieved.

Level five: Nirvana. This level should be considered "the dream" of all remote working organisations. At this stage, your organisation is able to consistently perform better than any co-located team. Everything is running

smoothly, and communication levels are high across the organisation. Everyone in the company has time for wellness and mental health.

Being strategic about where you are and where you are heading is the goal. And regardless of where you're aiming for in terms of your placement on these levels or on the distributed to co-located continuum, the question "Could this be done a different way?" is worth pondering.

Tackling the Toolbox

Work from anywhere is no longer a people policy touted by the rising technology companies or the early adopters; it is a permanent strategy and conversation inside organisations regardless of industry. This is indeed a new frontier, a new adventure, which requires new skills and new tools.

Research has uncovered three areas that individuals and leaders need to shift. As a leader, you need to

- Change the way your team thinks (psychology);
- Change the way your team connects (methodology);
- Change the way your team works (technology).

And you need to do this across two focus areas: performance and people.

For example, let's talk about psychology. If we start with the psychology of performance, the two areas to focus on are managing expectations and setting standards.

Managing expectations. For distributed and hybrid teams to work effectively, a conversation around expectations needs to happen. This includes setting expectations around response times, having a generosity of assumption, and recommitting to regular feedback. Through managing expectations, we provide our teams with the clarity, focus, and framework required to create psychological safety.

Consider the following ground rules: Leave nothing unanswered, tighten the feedback loop, and be a brag (encourage team members to share their successes).

Setting standards. To effectively create behaviour change and see a high adoption rate of the desired behaviours, you'll need to both set the standards and consistently role-model them as a virtual leader. This includes setting boundaries between "work" and "home" and encouraging others in your team to set and uphold their boundaries.

When stepping into the psychology of people, the two areas to focus on are managing people's mindsets and navigating roadblocks.

> With change being your only constant in the current environment, you need to adopt and encourage a growth mindset . . .

Mindset management. The mindset you hold drives the results you and your team are able to achieve. With change being your only constant in the current environment, you need to adopt and encourage a growth mindset within your team and organisation to see long-lasting success.

You can look to leverage many different tools and strategies to help manage mindset. A powerful example is cognitive reframing, which is the act of choosing to look at someone or something differently (the ole classic "Is there another way to look at this?").

Navigating roadblocks. Roadblocks are going to happen. It's inevitable, even more so when you are treading a path that is not well worn. You can divide any roadblock you encounter at work into two categories: external roadblocks or internal roadblocks.

For example, perfectionism. Do you find it a battle to let go of work until you feel it's been polished to the highest possible sheen? If this is you, try using cognitive reframing and shifting your language to coach yourself into realising that sometimes speed is more important than dotting every I and crossing every T.

Confronting the Challenges

Becoming a world-class work from anywhere team brings with it challenges—challenges that you won't have faced before on this new frontier; and when you overcome the initial challenges, others will be waiting around the corner.

Heroes confront the challenges that lie on their path. They

learn from the falls, strengthen their purpose and resolve, and navigate their way to the ultimate battles. It's through confronting the challenges that true mastery is achieved.

The Challenge of Losing Spontaneous Data

For example, how does leading a hybrid or distributed team differ from leading in a traditional office environment? The single biggest difference is the loss of spontaneous data through body language and non-verbal communication.

Research has indicated that approximately 70 percent of communication is picked up not from what we say but from how we say it—from body language.

When you're having distant conversations with your team, because you lack visual symbols and auditory cues, summarising throughout is often very helpful. This means, during distant conversations, webinars, or Skype calls, you summarise with each other what you think the other person's just said, and you do this far more regularly than you would during a face-to-face conversation.

This allows you to capture the value or the key concept that's just been shared and make sure that you're both actually in agreement that that's, in fact, what you're talking about. Invite people to share back what they've just taken from what you've just said, rather than just assuming that what they've taken is what you meant.

The Challenge of Performance Feedback

If performance is the bedrock of success in our WFA philosophy, world-class hybrid teams need to have the skills to be able to provide feedback around performance on a regular basis.

As we move further into a WFA dynamic, many leaders and team members are having to confront the challenge of facilitating an underperformance conversation within a virtual team setting. When approaching an underperformance conversation with a member of your team, keep the following in mind:

Start a conversation as soon as possible. The best place to start is to have the conversation rather than avoid it—the longer you leave it, the more assumptions can run amok and stories can grow.

Make the conversation visual. In order to effectively depersonalise the tough conversation, you need to make the conversation visual. It's useful to share your screen so that your points of discussion are clear, and misunderstandings can be talked through.

Sources of Strength

Let's explore some of the greatest sources of strength that can arise from the commitment to a hybrid, work from anywhere approach.

Rhythms and rituals have always been culturally significant, and in a WFA team they don't become less significant; in fact, you and your team's rhythms and rituals become a critical component in the long-term survival of team culture. They become the sources of strength on which WFA is built.

Working from anywhere is a shift in habits and behaviours. It can be a shift that increases energy and increases connection to work but only if you find the rhythms that work for you and your team.

Individual Rituals for Work

Despite the autonomy that comes with working from anywhere, having structure in your workday is still worthwhile for peak performance. Start with a set of WFA rituals that you can use to prepare for and wind down from your workday.

Different zones for different work. Given that our environment drives our behaviour, it could be worthwhile considering whether on different days, or for different portions of your day, you can work from a different location (such as the local park, a different local café, or even just a different room) in order to achieve an energetic shift.

Still have "work clothes." Wearing the same clothes all day can mean you find it more difficult to not only "switch on" for work but, potentially even worse, wind down from work at the end of the day. So even if your WFA clothes look nothing like your old office attire, separating what you'll wear when at work versus when you're not may be worthwhile.

Team Rituals for Work

When teams are distributed or hybrid, rhythms and rituals take on a new form. They shift from being unconscious (because we've done the in-office ones for a while) to becoming more conscious. They take greater cognitive load and planning although can be just as effective (if not more inclusive) than the office-only rituals.

Win the morning. The way your team starts their day inevitably has a flow-on effect to how energetic everyone feels throughout the rest of the day. Workers at Pragmatic Thinking often share what wins they've had during their daily kickstarter video meetings, with the beauty of this ritual coming to light in the variety of approaches they hear about.

> While collaborating isn't a hard thing to do in theory, it's the habit and structures that surround collaboration that need to change in a WFA context.

Seize the midday. To perform at your best consistently, you've got to make space in your day for recovery rituals. Seize the midday is a daily reminder to get up from the desk and do something to reinvigorate our minds and reset for the afternoon sprint.

You can seize the midday by getting outside in the sunshine—at the beach, at a local park, or even by going out for a rollerskate. This daily exposure to sunlight (even on a cloudy day!) and a bit of aerobic exercise are important for many reasons, including the release of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a powerful neurochemical associated with a boost in mood and a sense of calm.

Slaying the Beasts

When it comes to a WFA or hybrid workforce, there are four big battles that you and your team will need to overcome:

- Collaboration (lack of);
- Stagnation (as opposed to ideation);
- Disconnection;
- Miscommunication.

Let's talk about the first of these.

Collaboration (lack of). Collaboration is the backbone of high performance. Collaboration starts with connection, but how do we achieve this genuinely in a WFA setting? The challenge for hybrid teams is that collaboration can diminish quickly, and this lack is like a famine.

While collaborating isn't a hard thing to do in theory, it's the habit and structures that surround collaboration that need to change in a WFA context. The true barriers to collaboration aren't the lack of walls and whiteboards; they're trust and ego.

Strategies to Slay the Beast

Here are the weapons to overcome those barriers and build true WFA collaboration:

Care about collaboration: Sounds simple, but it's an important first step. Your team's culture is about getting clear on the things that you care about. When you consciously care about collaborating with others, when you truly believe that the best outcomes are achieved through the input of experts and experience, you will find a way to successfully collaborate.

Review the resources and platforms you are using to collaborate: When it comes to collaboration, you risk a particular platform, tool or system becoming overused. One of the benefits of collaboration for WFA teams is that it reduces the pressure of having to think on the go. Instead, collaboration can be considered, allowing people to jump into the desired platforms pre-prepared. Get clear on when you use what platform, and allow space for people to find or use their own.

Create space to share and learn about other people's passions: Do you know the skill sets of your people and what lights them up? What about your team? Do they know that of others? Oh, yes, this is a doozy—but when you and your team get acquainted with the skill sets of others, you can cross-skill and learn from others, too.

Extend trust first: Lack of collaboration comes with a lack of trust and a growth of ego. ("What do they know? I've got this.") One of the ways to grow trust and reap the benefits of collaboration is to extend trust first. It will cost time, effort, and energy. Trust others to be able to comprehend what you are trying to achieve, trust others to provide their support, and trust others to ask if they don't know. When you make this investment of time, it can repay you and your team tenfold.

The Adventures That Await

If you've achieved a victory over any of these beasts, make sure you take the time to recognise the effort and courage required to succeed. A few quick tips for celebrating this with your team: Find a wider audience. Talk to your internal comms department, create a good news story, put in for

an award, or simply write an email to the CEO, cc'ing in your team, highlighting their victory.

Break bread. Whether the "feast" is face to face or virtual, you have the chance to tap into a well-worn ceremony of celebrating victory via a meal shared.

Level Up to the Next Adventures

Now that your dragons have been not only slain but also celebrated with gusto (or perhaps just a little fist pump), it's time to lift your gaze once again to what vistas sit before you in the new world of work. Four areas offer opportunity and exploration for any WFA or hybrid team to level up. These four areas are energetic state, gatherings, continuous productivity, and access for all. Let's discuss the last of these, access for all.

Building a work experience to WFA is one thing; but if you want to play a really big game, build a work experience to WFA for all, including people who would otherwise find access difficult because of pre-existing conditions.

Blind or visually impaired team members. When using visual technology, ask your team to support those who are blind or visually impaired by

- Communicating naturally and using ordinary language—using words such as "see," "sight," and "look" is okay;
- Being aware that gestures and facial expressions, such as nodding, pointing, and waving, may not be seen;
- Using precise words and instructions, such as right, left, forward, back;
- Giving directions from the person's perspective rather than your own—don't point or say "over there."
- Describing diagrams and pictures verbally.

The deaf or hard of hearing. When using visual technology, ask your team to support those who are deaf or hard of hearing by

- Utilising captions;
- Finding out the communication preferences of the individual;
- Ensuring background noise doesn't interfere with the conversation;
- Having someone available for the individual to reach out to at any point for help;
- Keeping the camera at a good angle to give lip-readers a good view of your face;
- Slowing down your talking speed to help improve the accuracy of devices being used.

If stepping into the adventure of becoming a world-class hybrid team is your pathway, be fairly warned: It's not for the faint-hearted. Diving into the beautiful questions around what it actually takes to deliver exceptional work, create a culture worth raving about, and carving out space for individual expression and growth is one heck of an adventure.

But you've got this. Truly you do.