

Book Review

Remote Work Revolution: Succeeding from Anywhere

Neeley, T. (2021). *Remote work revolution: Succeeding from anywhere*. Harper Business. ISBN: 978-0063068308 (Hardback), \$9.74, 240 pages.

A consistent takeaway from research conducted on effective learning and working environments is that communication is key. In remote work and learning environments, communication comes from many different platforms, can be asynchronous and synchronous, and requires specific techniques, trust, and technology to be effective. Every salient point from the *Remote work revolution: Succeeding from anywhere* (Neeley, 2021), comes down to one central concept: communication. Technology and engineering educators will find the foundational concepts of this book pivotal to help guide remote education, especially in laboratory settings; potentially increasing the reach of their programs.

Organization and Motivation

Neeley (2021) writes in an academic manner and provides realistic case studies that can be generalized to different organizations. It is aimed at reaching remote learners and workers within all industries. It can be especially beneficial for technology and engineering education programs where students are wanting more classes offered remotely (Ndahi, 2006) or when they must take courses remotely (Mentzer & Mohandas, 2022). Neeley published this book shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly expanded the research success of remote organizations and institutions. However, the author suggested she began writing this book prior to the onset of the pandemic, due to continuous growth of remote work and education. Although remote work and education have existed for decades, the rapid changes were unfamiliar to many organizations. Prior to the pandemic, organizations were able to utilize remote work to save organizations a significant amount of money (Cascio & Motealegre, 2016) and to increase enrollment at higher education institutions (Ndahi, 2006).

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The aim of the work includes engaging directly with workforce employees, teachers, and leaders to help them bond and grow together, as well as action guides, or case studies, for each task to achieve this aim. Although case studies help explain Neeley's vision, the cases selected might not all be generalizable to technology and engineering education environments. She discussed the need for team launches and how sharing goals, making a plan, understanding roles and resources, communicating, and collaborating effectively make a significant impact on launch session alignments.

Readers of this book might expect to understand techniques to implement within a remote work and learning environment to minimize distractions, enhance work performance, utilize technology and, of course, succeed from anywhere. However, there was limited evidence of techniques that can be used to achieve organizational and institutional goals of successfully implementing remote work and learning. Instead, this book serves as a great introduction to a deeper-rooted problem in remote learning and working environments, although readers may come away with unanswered implementation questions. For example, the author states "Employees and leaders need to become more strategic and mindful in deploying digital tools, and part of that process is learning to understand communication media in terms of its characteristics — lean versus rich, synchronous versus asynchronous — and apply that to what we know about relationships between the people with whom we work" (p. 83). Yet she stops short in giving a plan for how one might put effective communication into motion for remote settings.

Following the last chapter is an action plan that was developed to help work through problems that may emerge within an organization or an institution. The action plan is a great tool that organizations and institutions can use to identify shared goals, build trust, be productive with remote learning and working, use digital tools in remote settings, identify differences, lead virtually, and prepare for global crises, such as COVID-19. Neeley states that individuals can work on it after each chapter, or at the end of the text. However, including information about the action plan somewhere within the introduction would be beneficial in allowing individuals to plan in advance for its use while reading the book.

Key Points of Agreement

Neeley explained the justification for remote settings, and how it enhances individuals' performance and lowers organizations' spending. Micromanaging workers or students and ensuring their every move is associated with being concentrated at work is not beneficial; rather, it gives workers and students a sense of anxiety and reduces the likelihood they will stay with an organization. Woldeab and Brothen (2019) discussed students having higher test anxiety in proctored settings, which resulted in students' lower performance.

Neeley's ideas of common practices that can generate and maintain collaboration in remote work and learning environments included encouraging

individuals to review key points before meeting, using shared documents to brainstorm ideas, allowing allotted time for individuals to share their ideas in meetings, having smaller focused virtual meetings, using digital tools such as whiteboards and screen sharing, and of course, communication.

She had interesting insights on helping leaders engage their employees in remote learning and working environments by creating time for informal interactions, identifying the unique attributes of individuals, and forcing difficult conversations that may lead to conflict. She states that leaders and teachers should schedule facilitated breaks during the workday or class time, such as virtual coffee breaks or even happy hour. She also recommends that leaders encourage peer-to-peer interactions where colleagues can check in and spark conversations.

Key Points of Disparity

The author briefly explains in a few sentences that all employees need to have access to available resources; however, she does not properly address the digital divide within remote work and learning settings. The digital divide is a pivotal aspect of remote working and contributes significantly to the well-being of employees (Ihm et al., 2024), which is why it is crucial to address employee accessibility to the internet and information and communication technologies.

The author discussed communication barriers among international collaborations and time differences, though did not discuss the issue of globalization and training for remote employees or students. Also lacking was a discussion of how remote communication can help enhance international collaborations and make shared goals more defined and attainable (Swanson, 2022). Neeley suggests that setting boundaries and developing a launch session to establish goals is the most effective way to minimize global collaboration within organizations along with understanding psychological distance, communication, and teaching. She emphasizes a case study of a global organization making English the mandatory language within the organization and indicates that individuals need to understand how to actively listen and communicate with one another (Neeley, 2021). She explains how an individual can make active efforts to better understand cultural differences within a global organization. Still, not explicitly stated is how an organization can ensure cultural differences are highlighted to their employees and learners. Mutual teaching was highlighted as a significant strategy for global organizations, with an emphasis on ensuring employees know how to teach and learn remotely taking into account the cultural differences. In other words, employees and students seem responsible for cultural differences and psychological distance rather than the organization or institution itself.

Neeley has an excellent overview of different types of trust among employees and clients within a remote setting. She gives a few examples of how employees can build trust with their peers and clients, such as engaging on

work-based social media platforms. This approach might prove beneficial for technology educators wanting to try new platforms to engage their students with new innovative technology. Although she gives brief examples of how an individual can get others to trust them, she does not delve into how organizations can ensure their remote employees build trust and collaborate with others.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, this book is a significant starting point for understanding how to ensure employees, teachers, mentors, and students can thrive in a remote learning and working environment. However, readers may find they have unanswered questions on how to properly implement an action plan in developing a successful global remote organization and institution. Given this book was authored for individual self-development rather than for organizations and institutions, it has good potential for guiding technology and engineering educators wanting to work and teach remotely.

Rodriguez, T. (2024). Book Review: *Remote work revolution: Succeeding from anywhere*, 36(1), 112-115. <https://doi.org/10.21061/jte.v36i1.a.7>

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