

The remote working experiment revealed major gaps in technology training

What went wrong,
and how to fix it?



VisualSP®

VisualSP eBook - September 2020

Executive summary


2020 will be remembered for many things, not least the rapid shift to remote working in millions of organizations. In many ways, this almost overnight change in working styles was an enormous success. Nevertheless, the move also revealed serious difficulties. One of the most significant has been the way support and training for technology was delivered. Countless employees struggled with completing basic workplace tasks or using common apps during the lockdown and beyond.

This eBook aims to explore why remote working support has disappointed in many organizations, and then looks at how this can be addressed as work from home (WFH) becomes the new normal.



Contents

Newly remote workers have struggled	4
The approach to remote tech training has been wrong	5
5 keys to unlock remote worker productivity	6
Know the drawbacks of these keys	9
Supercharge remote employee support	11
Contextual microlearning with VisualSP	11
Fix the remote support problem with VisualSP	13



Newly remote workers have struggled

Imagine that, from one day to the next, you left your career and went to work in an entirely new industry. For example, leaving a job in IT to work as a lumberjack, or quitting a career in HR to work as a surgeon. No one would expect you to have complete mastery of your new tools overnight – be they chainsaws or scalpels.

While remote working under the coronavirus lockdown does not represent such an extreme change as these examples, there are many similarities. Office-based workers were, in a matter of days, expected to use tools they had never touched before, get used to a radically different style of working, and lacked the kind of support and help they would normally receive in the office.

It is therefore no surprise that technology issues were the most common problem facing remote workers in one survey¹, and many IT help desks found themselves overwhelmed² with support requests.

In most organizations, it has been the responsibility of IT departments to resolve these issues for remote staff. However, this approach has reached its limits.

¹ <https://www.zdnet.com/article/over-half-of-employees-frustrated-by-remote-tech-issues-during-covid-19-lockdown/>

² <https://blog.invgate.com/how-to-cope-when-your-it-service-desk-is-overwhelmed>

The approach to remote tech training has been wrong

Make no mistake, IT departments have done an incredible job supporting remote working at a very challenging time. At the beginning of the crisis, some confusion was of course inevitable. However, over time certain problems have emerged:

! IT HELP DESKS HAVE BECOME ‘EVERYTHING’ SUPPORT DESKS

IT help desks are specifically responsible for solving technical issues. However, under WFH they have become an all-purpose support and training department – dealing with countless queries about how to use apps – a UX problem which is not usually their responsibility.

! TRAINING HAS BEEN LACKING

Company training departments have had to adjust to a radically new way of offering support. In-office training is no longer possible, yet companies do not have effective alternatives.

! PROBLEMATIC SELF-HELP HAS INCREASED

Many staff have needed help with “can you show me how to...” questions which need short but immediate answers. If the queue to IT help desks is long, they will either give up, waste hours working out how to do it themselves, or look for unreliable information online.

As remote working becomes the norm in ever more organizations, these problems must be addressed. In the next chapter, we will explore how this can be achieved by using keys to unlock many of the problems that remote workers face.

5 keys to unlock remote worker productivity

Most work processes involve completing a series of steps. However, if one of these steps is not possible because the worker encounters a technology problem, it is as if they have come up against a locked door. Technical support is therefore about providing keys to workers whenever they come up against locked doors.

For example, someone might be trying to share a document in Microsoft OneDrive but cannot work out how to create a link – they have come up against a door. The key would be having the knowledge to create that link.

When working at the office, most staff could be confident that someone around them will be able to help. However, when working from home, it becomes much harder to get that key. Should they call up the IT help desk? Search online? Give up and try a different method?

Fortunately, there are some simple actions you can take to ‘unlock’ many technical problems of this type. The following ‘keys’ will help you unlock some of the most common doors that remote workers come up against.

KEY 1: KNOW WHAT PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING WITH

Perhaps the most important way that an organization can support remote employees with technical problems is to know what they are actually struggling with.

If your organization uses Microsoft 365, you can get a quick view of what is happening using the Adoption Overview report in the Usage Analytics dashboard. This will help you see which apps are being used, and you can drill down to see how each has been used over time.

At the same time, your IT help desk will likely have noticed trends in support requests, and this can also give you an insight into common issues that can be fixed by training.

This is helpful, but it is also important to speak directly with users. Consider sending out a company-wide survey or conducting focus groups with staff to learn about the pain points they are experiencing with business technology.

KEY 2: PROVIDE TRAINING WEBINARS TO ADDRESS THE MOST FREQUENT PROBLEMS

By learning about common technology problems at your organization, your IT and training teams can put together training sessions which address them.

For example, many employees struggle with simple issues such as applying permissions in SharePoint. In many cases, a short webinar

on how to choose appropriate permissions would solve the problem for many.

KEY 3: PROVIDE TARGETED ONE-TO-ONE TRAINING FOR STRUGGLING EMPLOYEES

The ‘Pareto Principle’ – or the 80-20 rule – applies to IT Help Desks³. At many organizations, most support requests will come from a relatively small minority of people. In the times of coronavirus, your help desk team may well have found themselves fielding calls from the same individuals over and over again.

If this is the case, consider drawing up a list of employees who are struggling with technology and provide personalized training to them. This investment in time will likely pay dividends in the long run.

KEY 4: CREATE WALKTHROUGH GUIDES FOR COMMON PROBLEMS

Your research into common problems will have revealed some of the most pressing issues that people face. While webinars will be helpful for training, they are normally a one-time event and not all information will be retained. And this is where written guides or videos can be effective.

Create simple step by step process guides which show how to complete specific tasks. These need only be a couple of paragraphs of text or a one-minute video, but they often provide enough information to show people how to complete a process.

³<https://blog.makingitclear.com/2008/03/11/helpdesk/>

KEY 5: CREATE A SELF-HELP CONTENT HUB

For a more comprehensive approach, you might consider creating a self-help hub which users are directed to before contacting your help desk. This hub can answer FAQ's, contain several videos, written guides and more.

This information can be stored in an LMS, in SharePoint or another centralized location. While it is an up-front investment of time, it can pay off by avoiding hours of unnecessary help desk calls.

Know the drawbacks of these keys

All of these keys will help unlock remote productivity with technology. However, they also have certain limitations:

- ❗ Users must actively seek out solutions to their problems
- ❗ Information learnt in webinars and training can be overwhelming
- ❗ People learn by doing – yet all these keys rely on a passive learning approach that is easy to forget

This is not to say that these solutions are inherently wrong. However, they can be significantly enhanced by learning in the flow of work. Josh Bersin, who first introduced this concept, describes it like this: “you publish and interleave your micro-learning into the flow of work, and then nearly guarantee that people will use it and see value quickly”⁴. At VisualSP, we like to call this Contextual Microlearning.

⁴<https://joshbersin.com/2018/06/a-new-paradigm-for-corporate-training-learning-in-the-flow-of-work/>

In the next chapter, we explore what contextual microlearning is and how it works.

Supercharge remote employee support

Contextual microlearning is a new approach to business technology training which builds on all the 'keys' described in the previous chapter. The way it differs, however, is the time and place that the training is delivered.

With contextual microlearning, employees can access appropriate and relevant guides to any web-based software your company uses, right within the page itself. This applies to both widely used enterprise apps (such as Microsoft Teams, SharePoint Online), but also to your company's own in-house apps (such as a vacation booking tool or a timesheet log).

Let's see how this would work.

Contextual microlearning with VisualSP

VisualSP provides contextual microlearning tools that can support remote workers who are having technology problems. The following example illustrates how it would work:

- Esmerelda works remotely and is trying to set up a chat channel for a project subgroup in Microsoft Teams. It is the first time she

has done this, and she is not confident using the technology. She also wants to set controls on the channel to ensure that information cannot be shared externally.

- In the past, Esmerelda would have called up the Help Desk to show her how – even though a guide has been made available on the company's LMS!
- Fortunately, her company uses VisualSP so she can find an answer to her problem in context. She opens the guide right within her browser and finds a simple walkthrough that shows how to create the channel and set controls. The issue is resolved in minutes and she can carry on with her next task.

This is just one example of how contextual microlearning can help address remote workers' technology challenges. Using VisualSP, Esmerelda's company has:

- ✓ **Avoided an unnecessary help desk call**
- ✓ **Saved frustration for the employee and empowered her**
- ✓ **Made Esmerelda more productive**
- ✓ **Allowed her to learn 'by doing', which means she is more likely to remember next time**

Remote workers require a very different kind of support to what has come before. And this is where contextual microlearning solutions help.

Fix the remote support problem with VisualSP

IT departments have done a fantastic job of keeping their organizations functioning during the coronavirus pandemic. When this new way of working was introduced, it was no surprise that IT help desks became the hub for problem resolution – even if it was just for minor “how do I do this...?” issues.

However, this is not an appropriate use of the skills and resources of IT help desks. At the same time, it leaves remote workers disempowered and frustrated - and cuts productivity.

And this is where contextual microlearning can truly transform the remote worker experience. With useful, actionable and effective guidance made available when they need it, contextual microlearning tools like VisualSP can truly resolve the remote worker support problem.

To learn how VisualSP could be applied in your remote working environment, contact us today.

 <https://www.visualsp.com>

 info@visualsp.com  800-764-8061