

How can banking practitioners make the most of ‘work from home’ arrangements?

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Tips for working remotely in Hong Kong

In response to the recent coronavirus pandemic, Hong Kong took an early lead among global financial centres in implementing remote working arrangements. Two of the largest industries in Hong Kong – the government and the financial services industry – were some of the fastest to react and ask their staff to work from home.

While working from home (WFH) has become an inevitable means for many banking and financial practitioners to continue doing their jobs during the pandemic, staying productive at home is often easier said than done. ***Here are some tips to help you make the most of WFH, especially if you’re doing so for the first time:***

1. **Keep a set schedule**

Create a set schedule for staying connected and checking in with co-workers or line managers, either through a video chat or a conference call. This helps set expectations, provides stability and avoids potential feelings of loneliness and isolation. Many people experiencing emergency work-from-home arrangements, often for the first time, are not used to the anxiety that they are likely to feel. Some people rely on others to provide structure to their day, so being isolated can be very stressful. Having a set schedule can help.

2. **Create a designated work space**

Wherever possible, try to set up a designated work space away from other members of your household who might be trying to work from home too. This is especially difficult in HK as flats are very small, with dense living conditions and non-existent sound insulation. There is also plenty of construction noise, both outdoors and indoors, and children are at home all the time following school closures. At a minimum, learn how to mute a call or video conference quickly, in order to avoid sharing too much of the joys of family life. It’s also worth exploring your conference software to see if it allows you to type comments instead of always needing to have the microphone on, or even to add a blur or virtual background for your next video conference. If possible, try to set yourself up in a small room that allows you to close the door, and use headphones if possible, to reduce distractions.



3. **Set expectations**

If you're managing a remote team, understand that some employees may struggle to stay productive if they are unaccustomed to WFH, and set your expectations accordingly. As entire teams transition overnight from office to remote work, there will be mistakes and growing pains. Efficiency may decrease as people get used to communicating remotely, coping with technology and planning their own days without the structure that being in the office can provide. Staff who previously complained about having no work-life balance may find this is truer still when working from home. Managers should therefore seek to be as flexible as possible and to communicate frequently to support employees with the transition.

4. **Stay informed and connected**

Alternative: Use technology to help you stay connected to colleagues. A range of video conferencing and messaging apps is now available that let you communicate and hold virtual meetings with your team. If you have to choose between video conferencing and audio-only services, try to use video as much as possible. Video calls can help you and colleagues to feel more engaged, while also providing visual cues that you might miss on a phone call. If you're worried that out of sight might mean out of mind, a video call can also help to reinforce the fact that you are still available and working.

5. **Take the opportunity to upskill**

In industries such as finance, there are many professional qualifications that require you to maintain a minimum number of mandatory annual training hours. We understand that due to the postponement of training courses, some banks and their employees may start to encounter difficulties in fulfilling their annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements. You should take this unexpected opportunity to complete your required mandatory training ahead of schedule for 2020. That way, when COVID-19 subsides, you can then concentrate on revenue generation.

To support this, the HKIB launched **FLEX Learning** for a range of training programmes in mid-February. This virtual training arrangement provides banking practitioners with a flexible learning experience in an appropriate format. Practitioners can continue their scheduled training from a convenient location and in an interactive, informative and effective way, replicating much of the experience of a physical classroom.

Explore our FLEX Learning programmes

<http://www.hkib.org/page/185>

Feedback from our FLEX Learning participants

Banking practitioners who have already participated in our FLEX Learning programmes have highlighted the following features as ones they found particularly useful:

- *Strong interaction between the trainer and participants*
- *A more convenient, easier and safer approach to training*
- *Participants receive a quick and live response to questions*

We stand ready to work with you

The HKIB has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation and working with the relevant regulatory bodies and financial institutions during this challenging period. We stand ready to work with you in upholding the professionalism and competence of our practitioners.

Capacity building is critical in forming a strong and resilient banking system that can weather escalating headwinds and, more importantly, bounce back effectively from crisis. This pandemic brings unplanned yet highly valuable time for banking professionals to focus on developing their knowledge and skills.

For any enquiries, please contact the HKIB at (852) 2153 7800 or cs@hkib.org.