

International Journal of Law Research, Education and Social Sciences

Open Access Journal – Copyright © 2025 – ISSN 3048-7501
Editor-in-Chief – Prof. (Dr.) Vageshwari Deswal; Publisher – Sakshi Batham



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium provided the original work is properly cited.

Managing From a Distance: Remote Work, Internships, and The Future of Team Leadership

Tanishq Chaudhary^a Samridhi Singh^b

^aJIMS Engineering Management and Technical Campus, Greater Noida, India ^bKCC Institute of Legal and Higher Education, Greater Noida, India

Received 11 July 2025; Accepted 09 August 2025; Published 12 August 2025

The sudden shift to remote work was not just a choice; it was actually survival. The thing that began as a temporary fix soon became a long-term structure for which nobody was fully prepared. Laptops were replaced with offices, but leadership styles were not changed, as many managers kept trying to supervise and act as if nothing had changed, which ultimately created a disconnect and confusion. Employees were not just logging in from home; they also were managing stress, family duties, and isolation during the global crisis, and thus, this changed the meaning of productivity. Remote work did not weaken work ethic; rather, it exposed poor leadership,¹ and the teams with a lack of trust or autonomy struggled, while others grew stronger without micromanagement. Without the luxury of hallway chats, every word had to be intentional, clear, respectful, and timely, and this overall took communication to a new urgency. The 9-to-5 model began to lose its grip. Flexibility replaced fixed hours, and so it brought a new need for self-discipline and clear expectations from both sides. This shift was not just about digital transformation; it was about human transformation. It was about how people view work, value their time, and interact with each other that changed at a core level.

¹ Nicholas Bloom et al., 'Does Working from Home Work? Evidence from a Chinese Experiment' (2015) 130(1) Quarterly Journal of Economics 165 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju032>> accessed 04 July 2025

Keywords: *remote work, digital transformation, leadership styles, workplace flexibility, employee well-being.*

INTRODUCTION

The global shift to remote work began not with a strategy but with urgency, and so companies had no transition plan but only a survival instinct. For business students and law interns, the idea of learning by being present collapsed, replaced by a screen and a muted mic icon. Senior managers, trained in boardroom decision-making, were suddenly navigating through Slack messages and virtual check-ins, whereas in law firms, the absence of courtroom hearings has pushed, and now even veteran advocates are being joined by digital unfamiliarity,² reshaping litigation as a remote-friendly operation. Human Resource departments have evolved from administrative centres to emotional stabilisers, dealing with burnout, disengagement, and silence on the other end of the call. BBA interns had an expectation of office badges and coffee-machine wisdom, but now find themselves chasing clarity on WhatsApp groups and Teams calls. The idea of “corporate presence” has transformed and is now judged less by dress code and more by digital punctuality, response time, and clear communication. Law associates who are in compliance and corporate advisory have to handle sensitive client work without a secure office infrastructure, which is making digital ethics a growing concern. Business students lost the real-time exposure to workplace energy, and instead of this, they observed organisational culture through email etiquette and Slack sarcasm. Internship evaluation in both fields began to rely on visibility and initiative; those who followed up, spoke up, and showed up virtually were being remembered. Decision-making moved faster in digital setups, but they are often done at the cost of inclusion, and so quieter voices in legal and corporate meetings are at risk of being side-lined on mute. CEOs and managing partners found themselves leading teams from home, navigating performance, culture, and burnout through screens, and not face-to-face. For many business and law students, this shift became a lesson in self-leadership, by figuring things out alone and fast and learning not by being shown. The future of work no longer asks where the person works, but how the person adapts, and for law and business, adaptability is now the first real qualification.

² Deepika Kinhal, ‘Virtual Courts in India: A Strategy Paper’ (Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, 01 May 2020) <<https://vidhilegalpolicy.in/research/virtual-courts-in-india-a-strategy-paper/>> accessed 04 July 2025

REMOTE WORK REWIRED: RETHINKING STRUCTURE, STRATEGY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Remote work did not just shift desks; it rewired how teams think, report, respond, and rely on each other across departments, industries, and job roles. Team structures that once revolved around physical desks had to be rebuilt for upgrades with screen fatigue, group chats, and calendar invites. Interns entered the workforce without ever walking into a real office and just floated names in the CC bar, overall quietly proving themselves by sending one email at a time. Business students were taught about organisational structure in classrooms, and so in real life, they watched that structure dissolve and reassemble overnight. Law interns are no longer mentored over chai, and so juniors had to figure out tone, urgency, and formatting on their own by reading between the lines in briefs. Accountability was not about clocking in; it was about the intern who showed up when it mattered, who took ownership without being told, and who did not disappear when things got hard. Performance reviews were not about the hours one stayed for the task, but they were about what the person got done.

Firm cultures that were once reinforced by dress codes and decorum now have to survive through people behaving over email, responding to deadlines, and showing up in silence. The students who survived remote internships were not the toppers but the ones who learned to ask the right questions, follow up, and build relationships online. Corporate teams stopped obsessing over time and started focusing on trust. If any person delivered results without being micromanaged, that was enough. Remote work exposed the things that were rarely discussed: that most organisations were never designed to function without physical control, and the ones that survived evolved into systems that ran on clarity, ownership, and trust.

MANAGERIAL DYNAMICS IN A REMOTE SETUP

Managers quickly learned that staring at online statuses did not count as supervision; the real hardship now means clarity and not control. Business field interns and fresh hires were not managed remotely; many of them were not introduced properly, yet they are expected to contribute like they are already in the loop. Micromanaging became exhausting for the managers

and demotivating for those who could not find balance³, who lost trust faster than they realised. Managers had to stop judging productivity by activity because people are not busy; they are just burnt out, with no one to vent to. Junior lawyers had to learn fast, as asking too many questions online made the interns seem inefficient, and asking none of them made them invisible.

Performance reviews have started depending more on perception than on progress, so whoever stays active online and visible in meetings receives the credit. Managers in corporate setups had become part-time therapists, as they checked in on moods, not just metrics, and thus became an unexpected KPI. In law and business firms, the remote setup exposed weak leadership. With this, those who could not guide without micromanaging ended up losing good, talented interns. Managers could not rely on the body language of the interns to spot disengagement, and so they had to read between the lines of emails and miss deadlines. One-sided communication killed creativity; remote setups demand managers who can listen more than they speak. But some managers are humanised in nature, and they admit that they do not have all the answers and allow younger team members to step up. The ones who made remote work feel real were those who trusted early, delegated smart, and gave feedback that did not feel like it was robotic. The best leaders in both corporate and law firms were not the ones with the highest titles; they were the ones who showed up consistently, communicated clearly, and made space for others to grow.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AROUND REMOTE WORK

The shift to remote work caught the legal framework off guard; there were no clear rules, but the entire workplace was already working online. India's labour laws, which were rooted in physical establishments and fixed hours, were suddenly expected to apply⁴ to professionals who are working from three different cities and one borrowed Wi-Fi connection. India's labour laws were drafted in an era for factories and offices. They had no playbook for Zoom meetings, co-working cafes, and employees working from hill stations. Employers started using activity trackers and webcam alerts to monitor employees, but no one asked if this was legal.

³ Rebecca Knight, 'How to Manage Remote Direct Reports' (*Harvard Business Review*, 10 February 2015) <<https://hbr.org/2015/02/how-to-manage-remote-direct-reports>> accessed 04 July 2025

⁴ The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 No 37/2020

Remote disputes began surfacing silently; employees were terminated over email, tasks were reassigned without explanation, and legal remedies were not always accessible. Businesses struggled with accountability, and if someone is being overworked, could they claim legal protection? Some interns worked beyond working hours, across weekends, and with no legal redress because their contracts did not even acknowledge “working hours” anymore. HR policies have tried to evolve with recent times, and even some companies added “remote conduct” clauses, but these, without any clarity, often sound more like guidelines than enforceable rules. In many small businesses, remote interns are technically “unofficial,” and they do full-time work with no salary, with no leave, and with no legal safety net. Court hearings went online, but access was not equal; law interns from small towns with weak networks found themselves excluded from real-time learning. Both business and legal terms began building policies reactively, not from the textbooks, but from daily problems no one had anticipated before 2020. Termination and probation extensions were communicated by email, with no HR meeting, no notice issued, and no clear legal explanation. In the end, remote work revealed a truth that no one could ignore: that the future of work had arrived, but the legal system was still stuck in the past.

COMMUNICATION & COLLABORATION IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Communication became a skill, not a habit,⁵ as teams had to learn how to write, speak, and even pause differently when the screen was their only meeting room. Law interns often spend hours trying to decode one-line briefs sent by email, with no tone, no follow-up call, and no one to tap on their shoulder. Business interns joined Slack or the Teams groups with 40 people, with all of them strangers and never met, and were expected to “blend in” by the end of the week. Miscommunication became the silent productivity killer, as one misunderstood line could delay a case review or ruin a client pitch. Some interns worked for weeks without hearing their manager’s voice as feedback, instruction, or even appreciation. Fresh interns from the business field were added to group chats but never introduced in meetings, and this created silent hierarchies where the interns did not know whom to approach. Many BBA interns working remotely never got to present their ideas; their camera-off meetings gave visibility to those who were already in the group. Team members hesitate to interrupt in online meetings, as they fear they would sound rude or unprepared, and so let key points go clarified. The corporate

⁵ R Konnikova, ‘Why Remote Work Is So Hard—And How It Can Be Fixed’ (*The New Yorker*, 26 May 2020) <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/annals-of-inquiry/can-remote-work-be-fixed>> accessed 04 July 2025

presentation lacked organic interaction, as earlier one could read the room, and now it was just talking into digital silence with no reactions. Law interns missed court visits and live client meetings, which are essential for legal communication that no Zoom simulation could replace. HR teams in business-led companies tried virtual icebreakers, but they felt more like assignments than actual bonding activities. Actual brainstorming got reduced to Google Docs comments, which kills the energy that comes from arguing over a clause, marketing idea, or negotiation live with a senior. Corporate juniors had to become overly cautious, as their one poorly phrased message could be misunderstood. Interns from both fields and backgrounds found that if they were not assertive on calls, they would be simply forgotten, and no one would ask twice about the forgotten. Communication became a test of writing, as interns had to learn how to sound confident and polite and not too formal, and all this through email alone. And the ironic part is that neither law nor business schools taught students how to navigate this kind of remote communication; the interns had to figure it out the hard way for the job.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION & MOTIVATION REMOTELY

In a remote setup, work was not always visible; interns in both corporate law and business terms often felt unsure if their efforts were even being noticed. Law interns submitted legal research and drafting work through email, but many never heard back, and they also do not know whether they did well. Business interns, especially in marketing and strategy roles, faced performance reviews based on outcomes, but without any guidance on how success was defined. In the absence of face-to-face check-ins, interns started feeling lost, not knowing whether to take initiative or just wait quietly for instructions. Recognition mattered more than ever; simple feedback of a good job would make interns feel seen, especially those working long hours from home. In some law firms, partners did not have time for mentorship, so interns were evaluated only on how quickly they responded to emails and finished tasks, and not on how much they learned. Business teams started using small wins to motivate remote interns, like acknowledging the best pitch deck or the fastest client response of the week. Without office energy or peer presence, staying motivated was tough, and so this made interns question their progress because no one was there to reassure them. Managers who took 10 minutes weekly to check in personally made a bigger impact than an automated feedback form, as human conversation still mattered. Law interns, who regularly followed up, asking for feedback or mini-review sessions, were better

able to improve, but did not feel confident enough to do so. A few interns were judged unfairly for staying silent in meetings, even though they were working hard behind the scenes and did not feel confident enough to speak up on video calls. Interns in remote roles started learning to “self-motivate” by setting their routines and following a calendar as required. In the end, performance was not just about delivery; rather, it was about visibility, clarity, and kindness. Interns worked better when they felt their work mattered.

CHALLENGES OF REMOTE TEAM MANAGEMENT

Managers in the law firm struggled to track interns’ performance remotely, especially when juniors were not sure when and how to ask for help. Business teams often forget to introduce interns properly in virtual meetings, leading to silent observers who never get the real responsibilities. In offices, anyone can tap someone and ask a doubt. Remotely, interns had to decide whether their question was worth bothering someone over a message. Law interns missed physical court visits, case discussions, and client exposure, things that are essential, which virtual internships could not fully replicate. Managers often assumed that no complaints meant everything was fine, but interns did not always feel comfortable raising issues via email. Business interns working across departments faced confusion about whom to report to when project teams overlapped and responsibilities were not clear. Team bonding was almost non-existent for many, with no office lunches and casual chats, interns often felt like outsiders in their teams. For many interns, home was not the ideal workplace, and not only this, but noise, slow internet, shared devices, and a lack of privacy added layers of difficulties to working from home. In remote setups, managers could not observe signs of burnout,⁶ and they missed the tired expressions, skipped meals, and late-night work culture. Constant video calls left many drained without the in-person energy, and so meetings felt more like tasks than collaboration. Some interns overworked out of fear, thinking that being visible online was the only way to prove they were serious. Overall, managing a remote team was not just about tools; it was about empathy, trust, being available, and giving good feedback.

⁶ WHO, ‘Burn-out an “Occupational Phenomenon”: International Classification of Diseases’ (*WHO*, 28 May 2019) <<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>> accessed 04 July 2025

CONCLUSION

The shift to remote work changed more than locations, as it changed how teams function, how leaders lead, and how interns find their footing in unfamiliar systems. For law interns, the absence of physical courtrooms and chambers exposes gaps in hands-on legal learning that digital tools cannot bridge. Business interns discovered that performance was not just about task completion, and it was about showing initiative when no one was watching. Managers in both fields had to replace observation with intentional communication, such as feedback, clarity, and check-ins. Motivation could not be handed out in team meetings anymore; it had to be created through small recognition, flexible support, and personal care. Remote onboarding proved that without human connections, even the most structured process could feel impersonal and isolating. Team culture was tested, and those organisations that took time to include, support, and listen to their interns were able to build lasting engagement. Interns across fields learned a lesson that they will carry forever: that no matter where they work from, clarity, communication, and curiosity will always matter more than location. In the end, remote work did not just change workplaces; it challenged everyone to become better professionals, more patient collaborators, and more human leaders.