The Innovation Services team has been nearly fully remote for five years, so we’ve learned a few things about what works, what doesn’t and what might help make good policy and practice in future. You can find some of them here: We’d like to share these tips with colleagues who may, by necessity, be learning the lessons of remote work on their own. Here’s some of our thoughts:

**Clear Goals. Clear deliverables**

If you work remotely, you need to know exactly what you’re doing and to be fired-up to push on. Be clear. Team members from diverse backgrounds can sometimes interpret goals differently.

“Clear goals energize, align and boost engagement,” says Tanya Accone, Senior Advisor on Innovation at Scale, who leads our team. Crystal clear deliverables give clarity, build confidence and form the basis of accountability, wherever people work.”

Through U-Report, UPSHIFT, the Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge and other initiatives, we’ve proven to ourselves that a remote, global team can deliver, including in emergencies, working like a 24-hour relay team.

**Pick the best and invest**

Talent is the lifeblood of UNICEF and hiring from anywhere means tapping the widest pool of candidates.
“It’s about flexibility, trust and helping people make the best of themselves,” says Tanya Accone. “As a manager, you can’t be looking over people’s shoulders all day in the office - and you probably shouldn’t be doing that anyway. Wherever people work, you need talent you can trust.”

With more people required or requesting to work remotely in future, savings could be made through reducing office rental fees and exploring more cost-effective locations. These savings could then be invested in enhanced tools to boost remote co-creation.

**Redesign interaction**

“Despite COVID, what we have here is a huge opportunity re-think how we work together for the future,” says Kat Crisp, who focuses on our innovation portfolios and field engagement work. “For remote work, teams must take time to focus on building personal connections, fostering well-being and creating space to talk about new ideas.”

Occasional real-life meet ups are precious for remote teams and finding virtual ways to create random ‘water-cooler’ conversations is a challenge.

Throughout the pandemic, the Office of Innovation has worked hard to boost well-being and remote rapport through virtual group tours, online sketching, cooking and social sessions. This all helps strengthen team spirit, solidarity and building strong working relationships across units.

“Our team runs short, weekly Zoom fun sessions, with different people leading each time,” says Kat Crisp. “So far, we’ve had Kahoot quizzes, team songs, stories and U-Report driven scavenger hunts.”

The Innovation Services team is also exploring new tools for remote co-design and collaboration. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) offer exciting opportunities in future, blurring the lines between real and shared virtual workspaces.

**9 to 5 is so 1940**

We’ve heard a lot about flexibility lately. We love it.

Working across 11 time zones, our team meets demands at all hours. For some, it means late-night calls, but flexibility helps us get the best from both the early birds, the night owls and everyone in between.

“Working around people’s personal schedules, giving them the space to work where they want, when they want – provided the job gets done – has worked well for us for years,” Kat Crisp says. “From time zones from New York to Vietnam, with a remote, part-time team of just four, we built the Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge from scratch.”

**Looking ahead**

Many of us are remote working now, but just how well?

It will be fascinating to gauge the perceptions of staff and management around productivity, collaboration and just how much they want to go back to their offices once the pandemic subsides.

Also, remote work probably isn’t for everyone.

New, younger staff, hungry to learn and soak up the full UNICEF experience, may need and want to spend far more time in the office. In our team, the average preference falls on a couple of days in the office each week and the rest elsewhere. Some of us thrive on the freedom of it, some need more structure.

Yet our team well knows - from years of experience - that if done well, remote work definitely works.