

The logo for Lrn&Shr, featuring the text "Lrn&Shr" in a stylized font with a yellow ampersand, set against a white rectangular background.

Lrn&Shr

Work From Home

[Learning Module]

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WORK FROM HOME

INTRODUCTION

It is a concept where organisations allow their employees to work from home. It is an opportunity for employees to manage work in flexible hours. Hence, employee can manage work and personal life simultaneously. It is also commonly known as remote working.

There are many advantages of this concept for employee as well as employer like-

- Work from anywhere
- Less stressful environment
- No Travel expenses
- Higher productivity
- No infrastructure cost (office space) for organisation other than technology
- Limit absenteeism
- Increase in healthier environment



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TECHNICAL & OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Work from home requires technology with strategic policies. At first instance, organisation has to establish a secure technology platform which can facilitate official activities/ functions from remote locations. And an employee, has to have a device (laptop / desktop / tablet / Smartphone) with a wi-fi/ broadband internet connectivity. These devices are a life line of the work from home concept.



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TECHNICAL & OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

In addition to technology, employees need to focus on the following tasks to work efficiently at home:

- Identify a designated and well lit place, where you can sit comfortably and work without any disturbance.
- Make a flexible work schedule as per the employer's policy for example working in shifts (day / night as per the country timings).
- Manage time breaks efficiently like tea/coffee breaks, lunch break etc.
- Stay away from visitors during your structured work hours.
- Be accountable for your productivity and establish two way communication with your team or employer for each and every progress.



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EMPLOYEE READINESS

•Most notable point for organisations, is to identify the preparedness of their employees for work from home or remote working. Organisations have to provide training, to their employees and make them aware about the challenges. Training programme should include 3Ws that is –

- work policy,
- work structure and
- wellness of employees.

This module highlights the key components of the work from home environment and challenges.



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ACTION PLAN

Organisations have to clearly document the Work From Home Policy by stating –

- Purpose :
 - Make best use of resources (human / technology) for the sustainable growth of the organisation.
- Objective :
 - Tailored working hours.
 - Reduce travel stress and cost.
 - Increase in productivity.
- Process :
 - Technology support, with the tools that can collaborate teams virtually.
 - Train the employee for work from home.
- Confidentiality :
 - An agreement should be in place to protect sensitive data, proprietary and stakeholders' information.
 - Best practices to protect devices by updated antivirus, device encryption and firewall.

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COMPONENTS FOR EFFICIENT REMOTE WORKING

1



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

2



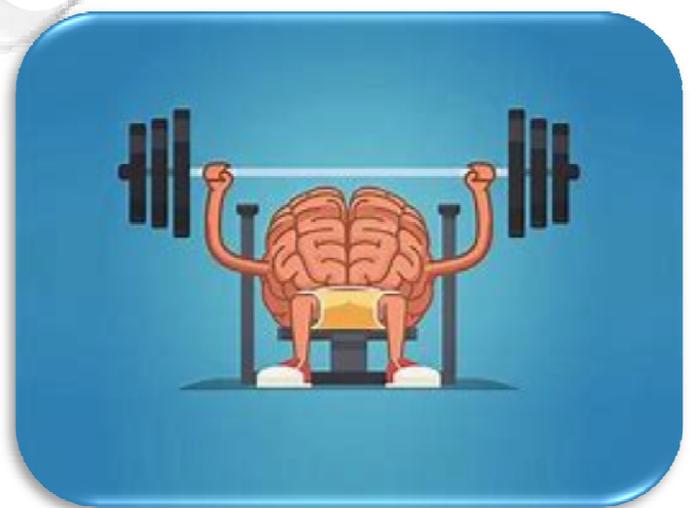
TIME MANAGEMENT

3



TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

4



MENTAL WELLNESS.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication is a two way process, whether it is online or in person. We communicate through two ways- one is verbal and other is non-verbal.

Verbal

- Communication takes place through words, either oral or written.

Non-verbal

- Communication takes place through pictures, facial expression, gesture, graphical illustrations.

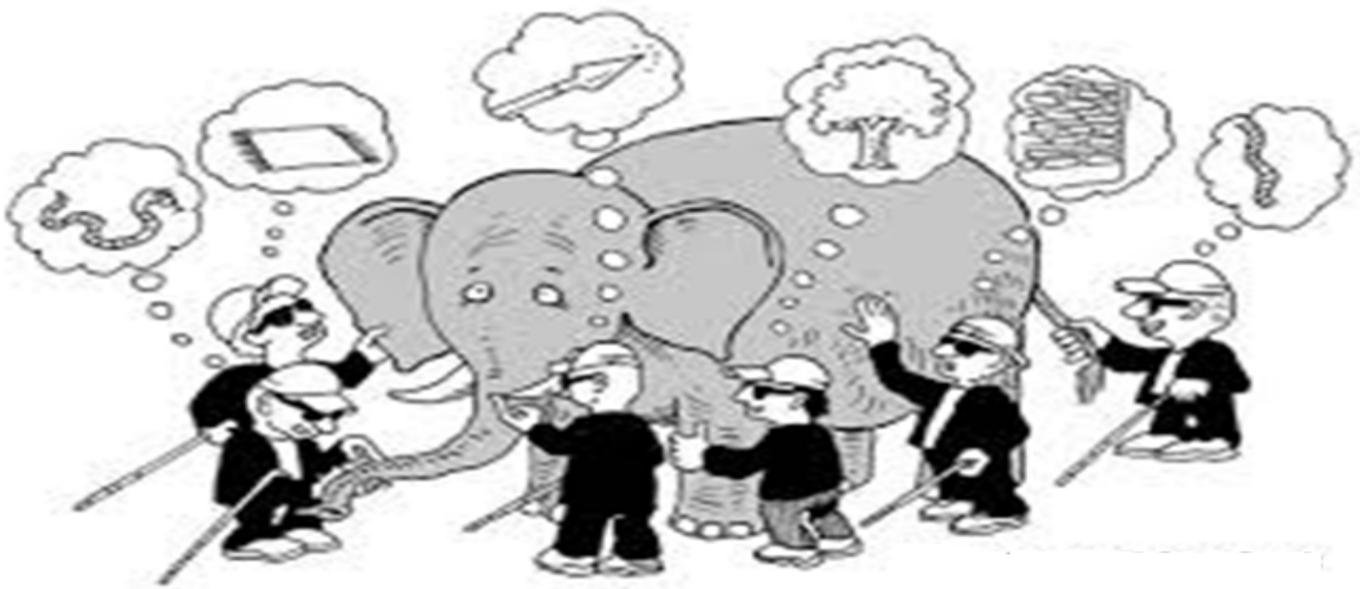
We use both, these forms for effective communication. Effective communication refers to successfully deliver the gist of information / message to the intended person.

When a respondent carries out communication related to an organisation's activities / information, in order to perform business, it is defined as business communication.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication policy, is one of the pillars behind a successful organisation. When an employee communicate from remote locations, it is important to be clear, short and meaningful. One can use both verbal and non-verbal forms of communications. For instance, the story of six blind men and an elephant.



Six blind men were passing through a village. They heard a noise. They asked a villager about the noise. Villager informed them that the sound was being made by an elephant. They requested him to take them near the elephant. When they reach near the elephant, each of them touched the different parts of elephant's body by their palm.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Each one of them narrated their experience as follows –

- First man touched the legs of the elephant and said that elephant is like a pillar.
- Second man touched the trunk and said that elephant is like a tree.
- Third man touched the tail and said that elephant is like a rope.
- Fourth man touched the belly and said that elephant is like a wall.
- Fifth man touched the ear and said that elephant is like a fan.
- Sixth man touched the tusk and said that elephant is like a spear.

All six blind men gave their impression of the animal based on the part they touched.

Did you notice, that their effective communication summarized that elephant is a big and strong animal .

On similar lines, remote working also requires an effective communication by using telephone, email , video conferencing.



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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – TELEPHONE ETIQUETTES

- Speak with mild tone and do not forget to Greet and introduce yourself before starting conversation.
- Explain / discuss point to point , as you may not see the expressions of the person on the other side.
- Stay calm while listening to the other side.
- Do not interrupt the conversation and speak only after one side completes.
- Discussion points should be jotted down before calling a person or while running call.
- It is good to sit in one place and complete the call to avoid distractions.
- Always thank the person at the end of the call.
- If you have two phones , keep the other one on silent mode before starting a call.



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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - EMAIL ETIQUETTES

Email is one of the important tool that has been used by employees and employers while working remotely. An email is not a short message / tweet, which one can simply put up in words or by using emojis. It is a detailed information / report which is communicated to team/ office and customer (s) that remains there for long time. Therefore, it should compose in a clear and informative language that is easily readable and understood by the recipient/s. One has to pay attention on the following points to make email communication effective :

- As a Sender :
 - Start by writing a subject line.
 - Add salutation such as 'Greetings', 'Hello', 'Good Morning/Evening' (as case may be) .
 - After this , write the body of the mail. Use precise and crystal clear language.
 - Once body is completed, format the entire text like highlighting / underline the text which you want to emphasize.
 - After body add signature / email/ contact number etc.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - EMAIL ETIQUETTES

- If you wanted to address certain people. You can add their name before salutation.
- Always format the body of the text in paragraph. Which is easy to read and understand.
- If you want to share detailed information, instead of putting into body, you can attach file (s) separately.
- After completing the body text, you need to read and use spell check to avoid mistakes.
- Once everything is done as per your expectations, add recipients' email address in the box carefully.
- You need to carefully select the direct and indirect recipients.

TO

- Direct recipients, are the primary persons/entities whom you actually want to communicate to.

CC

- Carbon copy – Indirect recipients are those whom you want to inform what you have communicated to primary persons.

BCC

- Blind carbon copy- neither the direct nor indirect recipients can see the bcc recipient. It reserves the privacy of the person receiving the mail.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION - EMAIL ETIQUETTES

- In a nutshell BCC is used to intentionally hide the recipient.
- As a Recipient :
 - Always read the mails carefully and respond as required.
 - Check your mails as per your work and priority.
 - You can also set the automated message like 'In a meeting' / 'Out of office'.
 - Always carefully check whether you need to reply person specific or reply all to a mail.

BEST EMAIL PRACTICES, INCREASE THE PRODUCTIVITY AND TRANSPARENCY.



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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – VIDEO CONFERENCING ETIQUETTES

Video conferencing is one of the most common technology mode of communication , where one can hold virtual meetings face to face. Other than meetings, one can also conduct job interviews, trainings, lectures, workshops, product launch etc.

As per Investopedia - Video conferencing is a technology that allows, users at different locations to hold virtual face-to-face meetings without having to move from your location. This technology is particularly convenient for business users in different cities or even different countries because it saves time, expenses, and hassles associated with business travel.

For productive and successful video conferencing, one needs to follow certain etiquettes. Firstly you need to set up technical support at your end and communicate to all participants for the same.

Video conferencing set up requires: Video conferencing app like – ZOOM, Skype, Google Hangout, other than the Laptop/Desktop with webcam/Smartphone , Microphone and Internet Connectivity.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – VIDEO CONFERENCING ETIQUETTES

For any video conferencing, all participants / teams have to collaborate with each other. Hence you need to check the availability of participants in relation to day and time. Share the agenda of the conference in advance so that the participants will be well prepared. Lets discuss about the participants' etiquettes to be followed during video conferencing :

- Get ready for the conference in formal attire as you attend meeting in office.
- Inform everyone at home that you are on conferencing call. Hence 'Do Not Disturb'.
- Find the place to sit with no clutter.
- Be on time and check the readiness of devices in advance.
- Speak with a clear and mild tone, make eye contact with the camera.
- Introduce your self if you are meeting the participants for the first time. If they are your team members or office colleagues, you can start by just greetings.
- If you are leading the call/ conference , first highlight the points to be discussed and follow it closely.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – VIDEO CONFERENCING ETIQUETTES

- Invite or engage participants one by one and pay attention to their points / discussions.
- Do not interrupt in between, if you want to put forth your view point- either signal by pressing the button (app has the option button) or raise your hand.
- You can mute your microphone when not speaking.
- Always remember to share your window not the entire screen / desktop.
- As a call organizer / participant you need to develop a good relationship and trust with team members and colleagues.
- Wrap up the call by thanking everyone and inform them that minutes of meetings will be shared shortly (Share within one day time).



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TIME MANAGEMENT

It is an action plan to carry out official activities as per the scheduled time period. An appropriate action plan will help to achieve the goals successfully. There is a saying –

“Your future is created by
what you do today ,
not tomorrow.”

Everyone has to manage official and personal activities within available time. Time availability varies from person to person. Therefore, one needs to have a controlled time plan for higher productivity or completing tasks.

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TIME MANAGEMENT

One can improve time management by focusing on skills such as - prioritizing & scheduling, delegation, decision making, problem solving, record keeping etc. Some steps are as follows :

- A list of activities to be completed within a designated time limit.
- Allocate activities to self / team members with time constraints.
- If existing team is not able to complete work on time. Take decision either to include more team members or outsource.
- Regularly, take updates of the progress made and encourage team and self to meet the deadline by setting smart goals.
- Plan, to face challenges in remote working environment such as electricity , internet failure etc.



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TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

Remote / distant work is not possible without technology tools. Actually, technology is the backbone that facilitates remote work environment. Although, organisations have basic technology infrastructure in place, but work from home environment requires organisations to provide specific tools to their employees like communication applications- for email and videoconferencing, project management, customized software and hardware along with operational skills.



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TECHNOLOGY TOOLS

Meanwhile, organisations have to set up technology assistance teams or artificial intelligence (AI) assistance that can help to solve the day to day difficulties that occur during the actual work execution. Organisations have to organize training for the employees to upgrade their skills –

- Technology set up / installation.
- Applications / software to be used.

Also organisations have to prepare self assistance manuals / guidelines. There are many tools which can help to increase the work efficiency in remote working environment such as :

- Google Gsuite, Google sheets, Google drive
- PDF element Pro
- ERP Application,
- Hootsuit
- Project Management Applications – Clickup, Microsoft Project,
- Virtual Meetings Applications – Google hangout, Skype, Zoom
- Digital Signature – Adobe Sign, Hello Sign, E-sign

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MENTAL WELLNESS

A big challenge for an organisation is to balance the Mental Wellbeing of employees.

Mental wellness refers to awareness and balance among certain qualities such as emotional and behavioural maturity, anger control, stress management etc. Companies like Google give more priority to the mental wellness of their employees specifically for 'Work From Home'. Company organizes virtual training programmes for the employees. They train their managers to solve diverse challenges during remote operations.

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MENTAL WELLNESS

According to the World Health Organization, mental wellness is defined as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, to cope with stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

In work from home culture, employees feel loneliness, as only a screen of computer/laptop is their office. Therefore organisations have to pay attention on the mental wellness by developing wellness strategy such as –

- Develop positive communication and trust
- Controlled work allocation and time
- Encourage outcome based approach
- Provide appropriate training and support (if required)
- Allocate resources

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MENTAL WELLNESS

Other than the strategy, they need to conduct some virtual sessions for the mental wellness. Some of the examples are discussed below –

- **Organise some cool down session break** – provide a healthy snack recipe live and give them time to make it. By providing this session break, ultimately it encourages them to move towards healthy food, to boost their productivity and health for the long run.
- **Engage employees in activities ('Live Club') exercise/yoga**– a physical trainer can provide virtual physical training. This session can help employees to be fit, infact family members can also join the same. This way you can engage the whole family .
- **Chit-chat session** – Encourage them to interact with fellow employees or team members.
- **Weekend community interaction** – organize some entertainment/ fun events like singing, acting etc. Also may involve family members too.
- **Out of the wall meetings** – Meet once in a month or two either in office or some where in the open location to break the digital walls.

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MENTAL WELLNESS

Many organisations are focusing on mental wellness of their work from home employees. For example-

Google organizes virtual meditation and mindfulness classes. Also many other groups conduct online sessions for the employees for instance – café teams organise cooking classes, Health teams – fitness sessions etc.



PWC believes in 'Be Well- Work Well'. Company offers 'Habit Bank' that provides simple actions to enhance well being. Also a mental health app that provides practical tips to stay fit and trainings to support their employees.



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MENTAL WELLNESS

Mental and physical wellness is a key for productive work culture either in office or at home. Along with the work, team leaders or managers can include certain physical and fun activities in the day to day work schedule to boost employees morale.

A manager or team leader has to chart out a plan in advance and communicate it to the employees for their readiness. Plan may include some indoor or outdoor activities to break the exhaustive work walls. For example –

- Yoga-fitness activities
- Indoor-outdoor events (tennis as outdoor / hula-hoop indoor)
- Gardening at home
- Singing / dancing break
- Worksheet activities
- Discussion / story sharing / Experience sharing
- Emotional balance activities - self-awareness, social awareness
- Knowledge sharing / Book club

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA)

The following activities will help to develop the skills discussed in this module i.e. Effective communication , Technology tools, Time Management and Mental Wellness.



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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 1

Effective Communication – This activity helps to understand the importance of effective communication, which means that the expected information has been successfully delivered.

- Distribute printout of the given image.
- Make arrangement of two pens of different colour for each participant or ask participant to carry.
- Ask participants to circle/ highlight the sports equipments given in the print within 5 minutes.

Effective Communication Makes A Team Strong

- As all images on the print are of sports equipments. Participants may ask for clarification.
- Therefore facilitator should specify sports equipments in relation to sport – for example : equipments of cricket/ hockey/ basketball etc.

LEARNING -This will help them to understand the importance of clear and crystal communication.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 2

Technology Tools – The main objective of this activity is to use tools/ applications such as – micosoft word, excel, powerpoint, MS- project etc. Facilitator can decide based on the tool that is actually required to carry out day to day office work. (Here it is assumed that participants are well-versed with the basic functions of above tools.)

▪ Ask participants to :

- ✓ design an advertisement to ‘Search of a Friend’. (Apply Word / PowerPoint)
- ✓ make an estimated budget of the above advertisement . (Apply Excel)
- ✓ design work flow network diagram of the above activity . (Apply MS-Project)
- ✓ Also design breakdown structure of the activity.

LEARNING - This activity will help to know the skills of participants in specific applications. As a result, manager/team leaders can decide about the work allocation accordingly.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 3

Time Management – This activity aims to optimize the productivity in day to day work. As you know end of the day, management expects the outcome / progress of the work because they also have to further achieve their goals based on the project, for instance- offering services / products to the associated stakeholder(s)/ client(s).

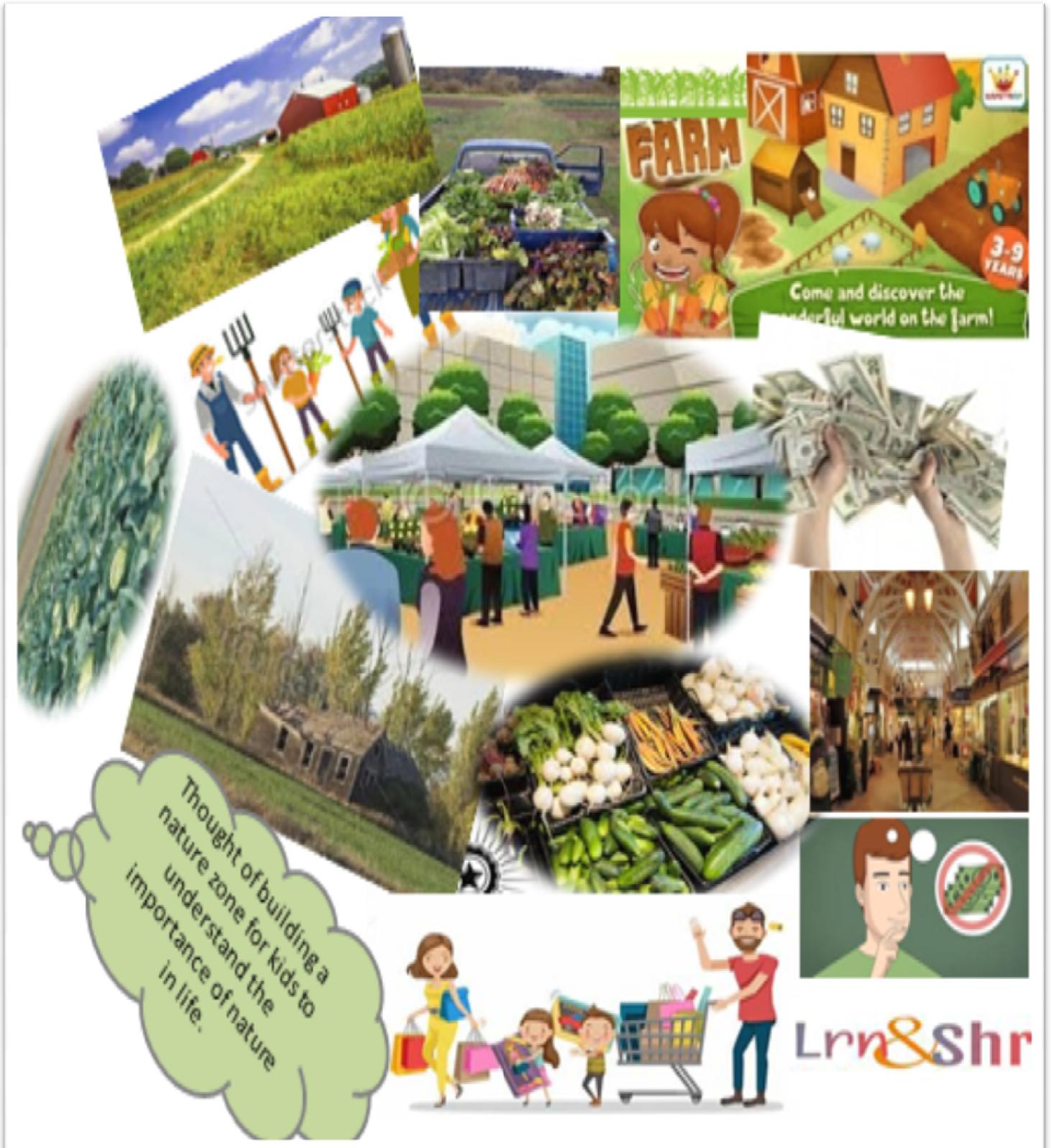
- ✓ Based on the images in (LA)-3, narrate a story.
- ✓ Also they have to give a title to the story.
- ✓ Participants have to finish this story within 15 minutes.
- ✓ Remember the end of the story should be happy and joyful.

LEARNING – Participants will learn :

- ✓ Time limit to complete the task
- ✓ Prioritize task or activity as per the need
- ✓ Remove or trash unwanted task or activity to save time
- ✓ Proper control
- ✓ Sense of ownership

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 3



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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 4

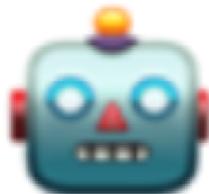
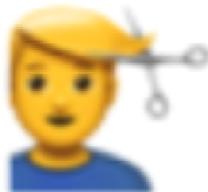
Mental Wellness – The main objective here is to encourage participants for healthy lifestyle and habits. There are many ways to do this, for instance – yoga & meditation, singing and dancing, diary writing, gardening, painting etc. Other than this, puzzles and quizzes also contribute for mental wellness.

- ✓ Some of the graphical images (emojis) are given in (LA)-4 activity. Describe the emotions they signify.
- ✓ Build your own emojis for the following:
 - astronomy
 - email
 - formal attire
 - team spirit
 - fun-time

LEARNING - This activity will help to develop the expressions reading ability and critical thinking.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES (LA) - 4



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CONCLUDING REMARKS

In 1989, Peter Drucker, a management consultant / guru declared that commuting to office work is obsolete. Innovative technology offers platform to employer and employees, to carry out office work from anywhere. Primarily, remote team management is challenging, One needs to develop trust and cordial relationship among team members. Also encourage and appreciate teams after completion of the job or activity.

It is evident that small activities and fun games of 15-30 minutes will help to energise the team. To the best of my mind, such activities should be a part of everyday schedule rather than one day activity.



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