



Not all those who wander are lost

Lessons from five years of learning and working remotely

*Not all those who
wander are lost*

The dreaded agenda slide

- Remote working basics
- Stories
 - ...about study
 - ...about work
 - ...about teaching
 - ...about research
 - ...contribute your experiences :)
- Best practices

Some statistics

$$n = 1$$

What is remote work anyway?

- Living as digital nomad?



What is remote work anyway?

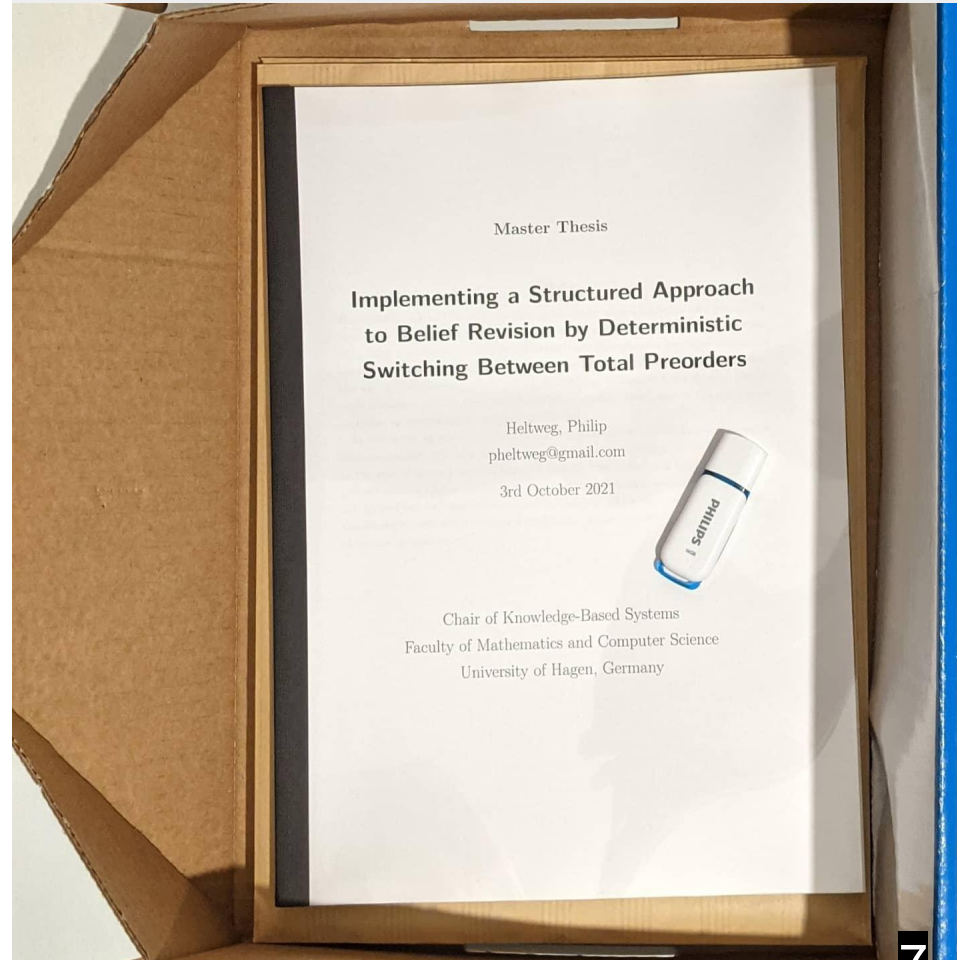
- Sitting at home in sweatpants?



Working from Starbucks

- Working from Starbucks can be nice
 - ... sometimes
- Set up a good working environment at home
 - <https://mynoise.net>

Study



Experience

- Largely remote final semesters of B.Sc. in Information Systems
 - University of Münster
- M.Sc. in Practical Computer Science
 - remotely from FernUniversität Hagen
- (Worked as HiWi at my advisor's chair)

Opportunity: Organize yourself

- Earning degrees remotely is possible
- Flexibility in schedule
- Fits different types of learners
 - And does not mean students are not interested in the material

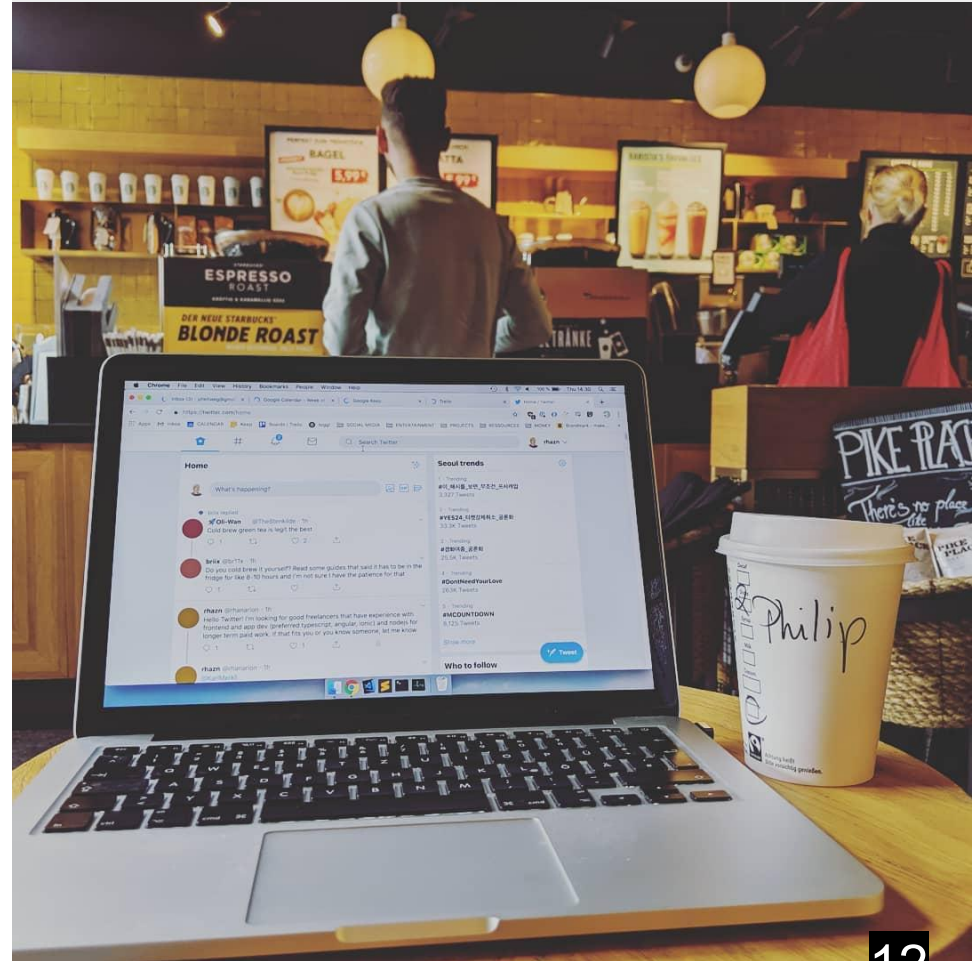
Challenge: Technology

- Make sure you have backup internet
- Have a microphone, good camera, participate
- Remove distractions

Challenge: Isolation

- Remote studies can be incredibly isolating
- Search for
 - Student communities (Discord, WhatsApp)
 - Learning partners / groups for homework
- Consider working / volunteering at the university

Work



Experience

- Software development @ ESL FACEIT GROUP for ~7 years
 - Initially hybrid (on-site + some remote only)
 - Increasingly international (especially US, Poland)
 - Finally, home office with some days in the office
- Freelancing @ isselthal industries UG
 - Just me, 100% remote
- Scientific Staff @ Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (during COVID)

Opportunity: Slow work

- Embrace asynchronous work
- Write, don't talk
 - Replace whiteboards with documents
- Prototype, don't talk

Challenge: Starting projects

- Being remote makes team cohesion and product vision hard
- Work in cycles
 - in-person kickoffs + regular, in-person roadmap meetings
 - remote implementation work

Challenge: Hybrid Teams

- The 'water cooler effect' is real
- Dread hybrid meetings

Challenge: Time Zones

- Consider time zones when hiring or joining a company
- Only hire in "one direction"
- Have core work hours for meetings

Teach



Experience

- (Very) short at FernUniversität Hagen
- Two years at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg
 - Agile Methods and Open Source (~8×6 student teams of FAU and TU Berlin; project-based SCRUM)
 - Methods of Advanced Data Engineering (~150 students; lectures and individual data engineering projects)
 - Master- and Bachelortheses as advisor

Opportunity: Good scaling

- More work up front, but can be reused
- In Hagen
 - Much less direct teaching, more managing content
 - But: In-person exams are a challenge for everyone

Challenge: Lectures

- "Stage presence" is hard
 - Embrace alternative forms of presentation like live demos
 - Tip: Buy a standing desk and use it for any presentation!
- Eye contact with superpowers by looking into the camera, not at the screen

Challenge: Interaction

- Teaching to a room of anonymous Zoom pictures is not fun
- A surprising number of students are not on computers, sit in libraries or have no microphone or camera
 - Do not switch presenters with students ever
- Personal pet peeve: Announce and stick to a way to get questions in (that is not "just speak up")
 - A second person to monitor chat is very helpful
- Project work and exercises seem to work, interactive discussion no

Research



Wissenschaft kombiniert.

Experience

- ~ 2 years as doctoral student at FAU, partially during COVID
- Collaborative open data engineering / design of a domain-specific language for data pipelines
- Empirical software engineering

Opportunity: Local connections

- Use being remote as a strength - find local connections for your research
 - People love talking about their work
- Keep your local network alive by overcommunicating your work
- Try academic- or grant networking, e.g.,
 - European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance (EELISA)
 - mFund

Opportunity: Conferences and communities

- Push to be included in international events and communities
 - Software Campus
 - Dagstuhl Forschungsmethoden Training
- Generally important but especially if you are remote

Challenge: Isolation

- Remote research can be even more isolating than normal work
 - Largely own projects, less teamwork
 - Long stretches of independent work
- Take care of people that are starting out (also yourself)
- Learn from software engineering
 - Do dailies with other researchers
 - Set up peer debriefing sessions
- If in doubt: Overcommunicate

Best Practices



Put on shoes

- Set up a good workspace
- Wear professional clothes
- ... also literally put on shoes

Travel, don't commute

- Spend time saved from commuting on regular travel
 - to kick-offs and planning meetings
 - to conferences and seminars
- Consider all projects as: "mostly remote with in-person kickoff"
- When starting anything: Look for an opportunity to meet in person ASAP

Plan together, work alone

- Alternate
 - in-person, synchronous goal setting and planning
 - remote, asynchronous work
- Be deliberate about these modes
 - Bring flip charts and messy sticky notes to in-person meetings
 - Adapt processes to asynchronous work otherwise, e.g., with RFCs

Have more useless meetings

- Have to replace random encounters with scheduled downtime
- Schedule a daily call with your team
 - Whatever "your team" means to you
 - Ideally, use the daily format from SCRUM
- Set up regular peer debriefing meetings
- Invite people for remote coffee

Remote work, local peers

- Isolation is real
- Build a local network, adjacent to your work
 - Journal clubs, Game Dev Meetings, Start up pitches...
- Not ideal but possible: Do this remote as well

Take Away



A talk in a single slide

1. Put on shoes
2. Travel, don't commute
3. Plan together, work alone
4. Have more useless meetings
5. Remote work, local peers



<https://heltweg.org>

