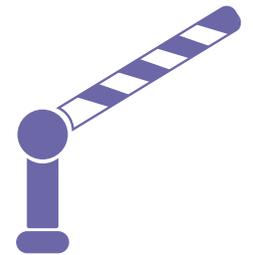


Out of sight, out of mind? Managing distributed workers' occupational safety and health

Facilitators and barriers to occupational
safety and health practitioners'



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The purpose of this document is to provide employers and practitioners with information about the factors that were identified as facilitators and barriers to occupational safety and health (OSH) practitioners behaving in ways that support OSH for distributed workers.

The aim is to help employers establish the best possible context for OSH practitioners to support OSH for distributed workers by putting in place relevant facilitators and overcoming relevant barriers.

As part of this research, we developed a self-reflection framework for OSH practitioners for working with distributed workers. This framework, identified from the research interviews, identified four key abilities, which are set out below.

- Getting the OSH message across to distributed workers: this includes being visible, approachable and available, engaging with workers in the most appropriate ways and being open and flexible about communicating with workers
- Listening to and understanding distributed workers and their role: this includes gaining knowledge and understanding of distributed worker roles and taking a respectful approach to worker input where workers feel safe and confident to report issues
- Empowering and collaborating with distributed workers: this includes empowering workers to take ownership of their work and safety, and establishing and using collaborative working
- Cascading to distributed workers via managers: this includes providing knowledge and support to managers, being in frequent communication and enabling opportunities for managers to communicate about OSH

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OSH practitioner ability	Facilitators (factors that support OSH practitioners to behave in line with this ability)	Barriers (factors that get in the way of OSH practitioners behaving in line with this ability)
Getting the message across to distributed workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intranet to provide constant access to up-to-date information, policies, guidance and training - Technology such as Microsoft Lync Up (videoconferencing) and Skype to enable virtual face-to-face communication - Mobile technology to facilitate constant contact such as iPads and mobile phones - Trackers to enable two-way feedback (such as driving feedback) - Well-thought-through planning and training systems - Communication strategy designed with distributed workers in mind - A combination of online and face-to-face training - Training evaluation to enable practitioners to see if information has been understood - Training conducted in-house - Dashboard system to monitor inspections and learning points - Good organisational culture with solid OSH awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distance – not able to talk face-to-face - Cultural barriers – what we consider as OSH risks may not be the same elsewhere, plus cultural differences in perceptions of intrusiveness, and language barriers - Lack of informal/ad hoc contact and communication - Lack of visibility of OSH - Not knowing how best to communicate with workers (e.g. mode and content of communication) - Over-reliance on emails - High workload meaning information not read - Time differences across shifts and time zones - Jobs not designed to enable contact time or appropriate technology - Inadequate resources such as technology to enable communication - Working in locations where mobile phone/internet signals are unreliable/absent - Organisations seeing face-to-face meetings as an unnecessary cost - Distributed workers, especially home workers, not wanting to be visited (home is their domain) - Not seeing workers until there is a problem - Not knowing what has been understood/what messages have got through - Different resource availability on different work sites - Relying on technology to communicate, leading to misinterpretation of tone - Loss of credibility for OSH practitioners as they are not visible - Centralisation of sites to fewer locations meaning that longer travel is needed to ensure face-to-face meetings

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Listening to and understanding distributed workers and their role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Face-to-face time on site visits - Use of technology (such as trackers and iPads and cameras to share pictures) to get real time information about distributed worker role experience - Strong organisational OSH culture - Confidential helplines and/or reporting lines - Strong, visible and accessible reporting systems - 'Safety first' message from top of organisation - Network of immediate reporting controls - Organisational culture where employees feel valued by the organisation - Supportive management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OSH practitioners focusing so much on risk in others that they forget their own personal safety - Fear of reprisal when reporting incidents - Organisational culture where near misses are not seen as problematic and are therefore not reported - 'Out of sight, out of mind' in terms of engagement with distributed workers - Headcount challenges-ratio of OSH professionals to workers making non-transactional relationships hard - Distance between OSH practitioner and workers (e.g. spread across UK) meaning that face-to-face visits can't be made - Workers and practitioners not understanding different situations and therefore not adequately anticipating risk - Excessive paperwork involved in OSH reporting

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Empowering and collaborating with distributed workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust OSH procedures and training - Robust recruitment process to ensure that the right people are in role - Strong peer group relationships and support - Proactive working with unions - Strong safety culture across the business - Virtual community such as LinkedIn and Facebook for distributed Workers - Operational staff take ownership in developing procedures - Organisation structurally set up to support OSH in distributed workers - Policies, procedures, information and guidance accessible and actively communicated to all - All levels of the organisation involved in programmes of improvement - Safety action groups or consultative forums focused on continuous OSH improvement - Organisational culture of two-way trust - Involving workers in trials and new initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of control and influence over distributed workers - Impact of other stakeholders (such as clients) giving inaccurate briefs or inconsistent priorities to distributed workers - Impact of other workers and traders on site at same time negatively affecting distributed worker OSH decisions - Lack of initial training - Difficult to manage on third party controlled sites - Workers cutting corners when not supervised - Hard to check compliance when dependent on others to carry it out - Prevailing culture of organisation at odds with OS behaviour (such as long-hours culture) - Conflicting priorities (OSH compared to need for production or customer service) - No control over distributed worker time – either not doing a job safely because of lack of time, or doing too many hours because of dedication to get the job done - 'Out of sight, out of mind' in terms of following procedures - Different shift patterns mean workers don't know each other

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Cascading to distributed workers via managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regular senior executive meetings with workers - Senior management commitment to OSH - Having an OSH champion on the Senior Management team - OSH Practitioners being able to go to senior management - Support from all levels of management - Reporting from the Board at OSH meetings and briefings - Managers able to be mobile and therefore access distributed workers - Managers working similar hours or shift patterns to distributed workers - Having competent managers in place with the right training and right support - Directors and managers doing tours with all workers (including night shifts) - Good quality manager-worker relationships - Managers having experience and understanding of distributed worker roles - Workers feeling manager is available for support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not being able to guarantee that managers will pass on the OSH information, particularly if they are also distributed workers and have limited opportunities for direct interaction with workers - Reliance on managers to comply - Senior managers not disseminating or communicating OSH information - No visible support for OSH from senior management - OSH not seen as part of the bigger organisational picture - Managers not understanding their obligations and responsibilities to promoting the OSH culture - Lack of time for managers and workers to engage - Lack of leadership visibility - Perception gap between what senior leaders think workers are doing and what they actually do