



Institution
of Occupational
Safety and Health

Maintaining good leadership practice: remote working during the Covid-19 crisis

We are advised that the only way to combat the spread of the virus is to stop the spread and rate of infection within our communities.

“Stay at home” is the message; lock-down, self-isolation, quarantine, social distancing, not gathering in groups, and households as opposed to families, have all become familiar phrases.

Government has instructed the closure of “non-essential” business and services, as well as businesses that promote social gatherings (bars, restaurants, theatres, gyms, and so on) – plus the cancellation of hundreds of events, conferences and meetings.

Organisations and workplaces have been told that their workers must work from home, wherever possible.

Challenges now facing leaders and managers, as we move through the effective management of the Covid-19 crisis, are:

- maintaining the effectiveness of a now-remote team for an unspecified length of time,
- adapting and responding to any changes of organisational direction or priorities, and
- ensuring an effective transition back into the workplace.

Managers must consider their duty of care with respect to the health and wellbeing of...



Five principles of good leadership practice



Many leaders and managers will have built ways of working, personal styles and tools to meet these principles in a stable workplace environment.

The situation we are all now facing means that, for many, those skills are either redundant or need modifying to remain effective during this period of changing circumstances.

Potential solutions



Your team

Face-to-face interactions and daily communication create feelings of trust and cohesion within a team.

When your team is remote, you don't have that same advantage. This can lead to diminished relationship levels and potential conflict between you and your team and even between the team members themselves.

Remote managers must be comfortable in trusting their workers and giving them a lot of freedom. Even in the most cohesive and functioning team there is simply going to be less oversight of remote workers. If you're prone to micro-managing, you might never feel comfortable with the inherent freedom remote workers have to complete projects at their own pace and according to their own working styles or family circumstances.

Daily contact, on either a one-to-one or group basis, enquiring and keeping up to date with the personal or family situations is essential. Although this may be an obvious thing to do for most, bear in mind that situations

may change quickly. Workers need the reassurance that you hold their welfare as a personal priority.

Emphasise the importance of your company culture and your willingness to be there for your workers. Despite being away from the workplace, it's important for employees to feel valued, heard and trusted.

Fully utilise any technological and software resources that are available, such as: conference calling, virtual meetings, SharePoint or Teams for document sharing, work planning and so on.

Make sure that work, projects or activities are clear, prioritised and time-bound. Make your expectations unambiguous.

By understanding your own priorities, you can cascade workload in a structured way, avoid duplication of effort and make sure you get optimum performance from your team.

Keep your team up to date with the same type of information you would

have used in the office or workplace. This will help to prevent a feeling of "I'm in the dark" to develop among your team members.

Conflicts occur in any team, but in a remote team where face-to-face communication happens less frequently, noticing them is more difficult. As a remote team manager, you need to see those conflicts when they arise and have a plan to combat them.

A problem that's unique to virtual teams is that there are no co-workers to have a real-time conversation with. The real fighting may be happening in private messages or emails that the rest of the team is not copied into.

It's important to seek out any signs of conflict actively, such as changes of tonality in any messages or emails. This does not, however, mean that you should micromanage and watch everything your team does and says. Ask questions at the right times and occasionally check in with individual team members.



Your organisation

Business priorities and activities may have changed during this period.

Managers must ensure, as far as possible, that they keep informed of any changes to the purpose and expectations placed on their teams by the organisation.

In some cases, it may be necessary for the whole team to be repurposed and/or seconded to other, more critical, business activities.

The end-goal is to ensure the resilience of the organisation and continuity of business, through and after this period of uncertainty.

Regular contact with your senior leadership team will be invaluable. Ask questions. Ensure that you can pre-empt the questions that your team may have about any changes made or the information you subsequently share with them.



Yourself

You must lead by your own example to others.

Your dialogue with both your team and your leader must be transparent and trustworthy.

For the successful continuity of communication, business activity

and team cohesiveness and efficacy, you should consider your own health and wellbeing as critical. How you approach your self-care will be mirrored by your team. Any instruction or way of working you have issued to your team must strictly be adhered to by you yourself.

Follow government guidance, take any additional steps adopted by your organisation and stay safe.

For more information visit www.iosh.com/covid-19/maintaining-good-leadership-principles