

MANAGING REMOTE TEAMS

WORKSHOP GUIDE



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Many organisations have adopted a new policy towards 'working from home' or 'working from anywhere' and have discovered that many employees want more flexible working patterns in the future. They expect to be travelling less and to see a greater focus on virtual and hybrid meetings. However, there are potential downsides to this shift. A weakening of the social bonds between colleagues and a challenge to company cultures means that greater efforts are needed to maintain a robust team culture, with a particular focus on team communication. Managers need to lead by example and be great communicators and listeners themselves.

The aim of this course is to introduce managers to some of the potential pitfalls and give them the tools to make their remote workforce as efficient and effective as possible.

Jess is managing a team that has started to work remotely. However, failing to communicate regularly with her team means that she has become either too distant or prone to micromanaging when things go wrong. She has the potential to be a warm, productive, and involved manager, but her arms-length approach means things are falling through the cracks, and the team is suffering. Will she learn to reach out and build an effective remote team, or will she continue talking to her cats?!

LOOK – watch the video and reflect on the content and message

THINK – activities and questions linking the video to their own experience and workplace

REMEMBER – a summary of the key learning points

Each section relating to the video will last around 15 minutes

PRACTISE – At the end of the series of videos there is a practical exercise which will bring the learnings together. Delegates should be encouraged to record any personal development actions on their Personal Action Plan sheet.

FEATURED VIDEOS

- Barriers to communicating at a distance
- Keeping motivation Up
- Remote Communications

FILM 1 – BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATING AT A DISTANCE

LOOK (play video, 6 minutes)

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Ask the group to discuss the following topics, drawing on their own experiences:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely and issues for someone managing a remote team?
- What things should you avoid doing as a manager of a remote team?
- What more could you do, as a manager, to support remote teams to get better results?
- What sorts of things prevent/facilitate good communication with remote teams?

REMEMBER

- Communicate regularly and agree how regularly with your team
- People are doubly sensitive at a distance. Communicate clearly and empathise with your team's needs and domestic responsibilities.
- Avoid micromanaging timetables and only communicating when something has gone wrong. Develop trust with your team.

FILM 2 – KEEPING MOTIVATION UP

LOOK (play video, 4 minutes)

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Get the group to consider how managers can motivate remote teams:

- Discuss ways of making people feel part of an 'in-group' even if they are working remotely.
- What are some good ways to give feedback to the team/team members, and what shouldn't you do?
- How can you assign team roles to ensure important information isn't missed, and to boost motivation in general?
- How can humour be used sensitively (also considering diversity)? What works and what doesn't?

REMEMBER

- People feel closer – even when at a distance – when they feel part of an 'in-group' with a common purpose, and this makes communication easier.
- Create a sense of community where people aren't afraid to speak up, feel valued as individuals, and can grow.
- Appoint someone to monitor any news that could have slipped through the net and distribute it to the remote team

FILM 3 – REMOTE COMMUNICATIONS

LOOK (play video, 3 minutes)

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Help the group think about the processes of communication in remote teams; how to build in non-work-related bonding sessions, and what channels to use for different purposes.

- Discuss what methods of communication your team currently uses. What works well, and what is frustrating?
- Come up with some good rules for emails.
- Consider why it can be good to have non-work-related discussions and how best to arrange them. Any other activities (games for instance) that can bring the team together?
- Discuss different channels – email, social media (different types), different types of meetings platforms, and decide which channels might be best for different messages.

REMEMBER

- Ensure your team know the processes for communication and why those processes are important.
- Make sure people find time for short, non-work-related calls
- The medium is the message – get the team to agree on means of communication and acceptable tone/style

GROUP EXERCISE

This exercise illustrates the potential frustrations of remote, virtual meetings, and how good management can help resolve them.

1. Arrange participants into groups of no more than 7
2. Have them work in break-out rooms
3. Ask them to come up with an authentic agenda for a virtual meeting (15 minutes)
4. Tell them they must run the meeting live (i.e. face to face in the same room) but try and introduce many of the frustrations that can occur in a virtual meeting (people entering and leaving the meeting, multi-tasking, interruptions, technical hitches etc. Give them 5 minutes to decide on these and assign roles – e.g. the domineering person, the interrupter, the person who doesn't listen/does other things) Let them run the meeting (10 minutes)
5. Each team then discusses what a good manager/chairperson of the meeting could do before, during and after virtual meetings to ensure better results (5 minutes)

Conclude by bringing the break-out groups together again and asking them to summarise their findings for point 5. to the whole group.