

A Best Practice Guide

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, many non-critical employees are working remotely. It is important that managers prepare for this change, and proactively anticipate challenges to managing virtual teams. This guide explains how managers can take action to create the right conditions for success.

Success Factors

TRUST:

Build and maintain trust. When managers cannot directly observe work, they tend to monitor and follow-up on remote workers more than in-office workers it is imperative that managers set expectations up front and adhere to them consistently.

COMMUNICATION:

Set-up communication protocols and tools. Without a specific communication plan in place, it is far more difficult to coordinate work and maintain productivity in a remote environment. Virtual teams need clarity and standards about when and how information will be shared. Ultimately, the tools you select will depend on the technology that your team members have available in their homes.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Assign work and hold people accountable. Remote team members have far less supervision. It is important to set them up for success by clearly defining actions, specifying who is to complete them and establishing an agreed upon due date. Periodic progress checkpoints should be mutually decided.

Key Tasks

Below are key tasks that can help managers maximize the effectiveness of their virtual teams.

GETTING STARTED

Perform Contact Information & Technology Inventory

- Obtain contact information for all team members and distribute to the full team (i.e., cell phone numbers, email addresses, etc.)
- Have team members provide an inventory of the home office resources they have or need (i.e., phone, personal computer, tablet, Internet connectivity, print/fax/scan capability)
- Provide a contact list for additional technical or functional support when working remote

Identify Platforms & Modes of Communication

- Determine the avenues of communication that are available and decide which ones are applicable.
- Determine how documents will be shared (For example, you could set up VPN to access shared drives remotely, use Google Drive, Microsoft Teams or Slack to collaborate)
- Hold team meetings via teleconference or video conference (For example, RingCentral, Zoom, Skype or other platforms)

Define Response Time

- Determine the appropriate response time for communications from each other and our clients
- If necessary, establish different response times for different audiences (within team, manager, clients, etc.)

Scheduling Meetings

- Determine how often you will meet virtually. Find the right balance to ensure both social connection and work coordination
- Define regular business hours and the expectations for communicating during and after regular business hours

USING TECHNOLOGY

- Maintain privacy of hard end electronic copy files
- Decide upon technology tools to be used and explain access procedures.
- Ensure team members have information and training on how to use relevant software

SCHEDULING CHECK-INS

- Schedule formal and informal check-ins with your team, colleagues and customers (internal and external)
- Schedule time for 1:1 check-ins to discuss work progress and support needs

MANAGING PERFORMANCE

- Monitor team deliverables
- Provide feedback as needed including positive recognition of accomplishments
- Discuss accountability issues (e.g., pattern of missed deliverables, low engagement, etc.) with team members as appropriate
- Compile and provide status reports to management as per your department's communication schedule
- Periodically solicit feedback to see if changes in management and communications are needed

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Employees who are permitted and able to work from home must abide by the following procedures:

- Individuals who work remotely are required to be fully active and engaged in their work for the entire working period. Individuals must be available by phone, email or other appropriate communication methods at all times
- If employee becomes ill during the course of working remotely, they should follow the same time away from work procedure in place by School and/or Department for sick days while working on-site
- Employees are expected to maintain existing standards of performance and productivity should remain consistent with on-site expectations
- Employees who complete time sheets are required to continue to keep record of their time.
- We recommend as much as possible, remote work environments should be quiet and separate from outside activities and distractions

- Employees may use their own equipment or equipment supplied by their School and/or Department. Any equipment provided by School/Dept. must be returned immediately after the remote work arrangement ends. Employees must make every effort to ensure laptops, telephones and any other devices are in satisfactory working order, and that they are responsible to work with their school/department and/or CUIT to address any malfunctions
- The employee has the responsibility for maintaining the security of confidential and restricted files, data and other information. Employees are strongly encouraged to use VPN when accessing confidential and restricted information and/or data to safeguard and prevent security breaches to University systems.
- Managers should schedule regular check-ins with teams and/or individuals to ensure necessary work is being completed. In some situations, daily check-ins may be required