Supervising Remote Teams

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Outline

• Community Wellbeing Team
• Myths about remote work
• Common challenges
• Key strategies to effectively supervise remote teams
• Remote team culture
• Fostering social connection
• Further Reading
Community Wellbeing Team

- The Community Wellbeing (CW) Team was set up to support our community through COVID-19.
- The CW team can give on-the-ground support to staff, students and visitors in response to current and emerging COVID-19 situations.
- The CW team will also be delivering proactive wellbeing initiatives for staff and students.
- This may include guidance on how to look after your wellbeing, online modules (such as this) to build the capacity and resilience of our community, opportunities for social connection and more.
Myths to Bust

Myth #1: “Remote workers are slackers”

Myth #2: “It is up to the remote worker to constantly prove they are working”

Myth #3: “Remote Work Means Company Culture Suffers”

Myth #4: “Remote workers are available all times of day”
Common Challenges

• Understandings factors that can make remote work especially demanding is an important aspect of effectively supervising remote teams.

• Challenges inherent in remote work include:
  1. Lack of face to face supervision
  2. Lack of access to information
  3. Social isolation
  4. Distractions at home
  5. Stereotypes, assumptions and unconscious bias
  6. Challenges to a manager’s identity
Essential Strategies

- **Spell out goals and roles:**
  - Teams that suddenly change work patterns — particularly moving from co-located to distributed — need to rethink how to accomplish their tasks and ensure that everyone understands his or her role.

- **Establish structured daily check-ins:**
  - Many successful remote managers establish a daily call with their remote employees. This could take the form of a series of one-on-one calls, if your employees work more independently from each other, or a team call, if their work is highly collaborative.

- **Humanise communication:**
  - Email alone is insufficient. Remote workers benefit from having a “richer” technology, such as video conferencing, that gives participants many of the visual cues that they would have if they were face-to-face and allow team members to read one another’s emotions and help to boost morale.
Essential Strategies

• **Establish “rules” of engagement:**
  – Remote work becomes more efficient and satisfying when managers set expectations for the frequency, means, and ideal timing of communication for their teams. Consider when and why do we use chats? Why do we write emails? At what point do we pick up the phone?

• **Provide opportunities for remote social interaction:**
  – One of the most essential steps a manager can take is to structure ways for employees to interact socially (that is, have informal conversations about non-work topics) while working remotely.

• **Keep everyone in mind:**
  – Make a list of the current core and extended team members with their photos and keep it in front of you while you’re working each day to help you make more conscious decisions about allocating responsibilities and information.
Essential Strategies

• **Offer encouragement and support:**
  
  – Especially in the context of an abrupt shift to remote work, it is important for managers to acknowledge stress, listen to employees’ anxieties and concerns, and empathize with their struggles.

• **Normalise new work environments:**
  
  – Working from home creates new distractions and the potential for misunderstandings. The more the members of your team know about each other’s environment, the better they will be able to make sense of one another’s behaviour.
Remote Team Cultures

• The key to building great remote relationships is **intention**.
• You need to try harder to find common interests, have meaningful meetings, and truly understand each person’s perspective.
• Creating a strong remote team culture depends on two things:
  1. A clear set of “rules to live by” that have buy-in across the team.
  2. A healthy system of meetings, events, and habits that keep people communicating.
• The 'Essential Strategies' discussed provide guidance for how to establish a clear set of rules.
• The next slide provides ideas as to how you increase social connection in your teams beyond meetings.

Image sourced from [https://info.trello.com/embrace-remote-work-ultimate-guide](https://info.trello.com/embrace-remote-work-ultimate-guide)
Social Connection

- **Town Halls** - open forums for questions, discussions, and (short) team presentations occurring at least once a month.

- **Virtual morning teas**, coffee walks, pizza parties or birthday celebrations.

- “**Oh Hey There…**” - a 15-minute weekly random grouping of team members who connect on a video chat to, well, just chat. Post-session, a screen capture of the members and highlights are shared with team.

- Leave **time at the beginning of team meetings** just for non-work items.

- Create a “**Fun” or “Random**” channel in teams for people to share work-appropriate pictures, GIFs, what they had for lunch etc.

- Other ideas? Let us know at [hrd.development@anu.edu.au](mailto:hrd.development@anu.edu.au).
Running Great Virtual Meetings

- Virtual meetings can be a challenge, though they don’t have to be. Consider the following tips to help you and your teams have great virtual meetings.

1. **Stick to meeting basics** - Set clear objectives, send pre-read material, take minutes, set ground rules etc.

2. **Use video where possible and make sure faces are visible** – this provides an opportunity for social connection and provides visual cues to help people self-regulate (e.g. notice if they are speaking too long etc.)

3. **Brevity is key** – keep presentation lengths to a minimum and enforce time limits. Help your team by giving them notice you are going to call on them so they can prepare their thoughts. Help yourself before starting a meeting by writing down key things you’d like to convey.

4. **Look down the camera** – Avoid looking at yourself on your screen when in meetings. To improve the quality of connection with your team, look straight down the camera. This takes discipline and practice, so it can help to first imagine you were in a real space and looking people in the eyes.
Running Great Virtual Meetings

5. **Assign a facilitator/chair** – this may be you, or another person on the team. The role is to guide conversation, call on people (see below) and, ultimately, to keep the meeting on track and on topic.

6. **Making decisions** – think about how you'll make decisions as a group and avoid the awkward race of everyone trying to say 'yes' or 'no' in the meeting. Consider using polls (see below) for voting, establish a rule of 'silence means agreement', or go around one by one. What works for your team will depend on size and culture – so play around and see what works.

7. **Call on people** – avoid a free for all and specifically ask people for their POV on a topic. Where possible, give people advance notice (a minute or two – or before meeting). This also helps to ensure people are contributing equally, and that more than the loudest voice is being heard.

8. **Capture real-time feedback** – For larger groups, make use of interactive polling or Q&A tools in Zoom or Teams. Don’t worry if you aren’t used to them - test the tools beforehand and trust that your and your team’s skills will build over time.
Further Reading

• ANU

• Remote Working Guides
  – https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers
  – https://hbr.org/2014/01/to-raise-productivity-let-more-employees-work-from-home/ar/1
  – https://doist.com/blog/remote-working-parents-survival-guide/

• Virtual Meetings
  – https://hbr.org/2020/03/what-it-takes-to-run-a-great-virtual-meeting
  – https://slackhq.com/ultimate-guide-remote-meetings
If you have more time...

- Carol Dweck 'Mindset'
- Marcus Buckingham 'First, break all the rules'
- Brené Brown 'Dare to Lead'; 'Daring Greatly'
- Australian HR Institute – Remote Leadership
- This Working Life podcast, ABC Radio National
Thanks

If you have feedback on the module, questions, or suggestions for wellbeing initiatives please email hrd.development@anu.edu.au