Guidance for Managers: Managing Your Team Remotely

Managing Your Team Remotely
A quick guide

CONTEXT

This guide builds on the University's Coronavirus Homework Protocol which we should all familiarise ourselves with. A guide for individuals will also be available shortly, with a particular focus on wellbeing.

For many managers **remote working will be a new challenge**, trying to make sure our teams stay engaged and connected. Similarly, for employees this might be the first time they are working completely autonomously.

There are many things we can do to make this transition as **supportive** and **smooth** as possible, including adopting some useful working practices to combat feelings of **isolation and stress** that working at home may create. This may take time – we will all need to learn along the way and share what is working well. We will need to be patient and flexible with one another - we don't have to settle on the perfect routine or have all the answers immediately.

In this period of transition, our initial focus should be on supporting wellbeing while maintaining morale and motivation. This helps ensure business critical tasks can continue and builds a culture of trust and communication within our teams. In time, we may also wish to focus on ensuring output and performance.

This guide is therefore a living document which will be added to and amended as we collectively learn and experiment over the next few weeks.

For the latest institutional updates, policy and a set of FAQs about the University's coronavirus response please visit the coronavirus webpages.

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Top Tips for Managing Remote Teams

01 **Agree ways of working** Make sure every team member is clear about how you will work together remotely, how you keep each other updated, and how frequently.

02 **Show the big picture but prepare to flex** Remind your team about the big picture and how their work fits into it. Review short-term goals regularly and adjust as needed. If some members can't carry out all their usual work, consider other skills they can lend to others to meet team goals.

03 **Set expectations and trust your team** Be clear about mutual expectations and trust your team to get on without micromanaging. Focus on results rather than activity.

04 **Make sure team members have the support and equipment they need** This includes any coaching they might need to use online systems or work remotely. Keep your calendar visible and maintain a virtual open door.

05 **Have a regular virtual huddle** This is essential for keeping connected as a team, to check in on each other's wellbeing and keep workflow on track. It needn't be long, but regularity is key.

06 **Keep the rhythm of regular 1-2-1 and team meetings** This maintains a sense of structure and continuity for all.

07 **Share information and encourage your team to do the same** Without physical 'water-cooler conversations', opportunities to pick up information in passing are more limited. Share appropriate updates or learnings from other meetings and projects and invite your team to do the same.

08 **Tailor your feedback and communications** People can be more sensitive if they're feeling isolated or anxious, so take this into account when talking or writing. Communicate regularly, not just when things go wrong, whether it is information, praise or criticism.

09 **Listen closely and read between the lines** Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling. Home in on what's not being said and ask questions to clarify.

10 **Help foster relationships and wellbeing** Make time for social conversations. This increases rapport and eases communication between people who may not meet often. It also reduces feelings of isolation.

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Specific Areas to Consider and Links to Available Resources

⫸ A RANGE OF SITUATIONS

Each of your team member's situation will be different, and fluid, as we all find ways to balance work, looking after our own health and **caring** responsibilities. **Many people with caring responsibilities are currently grappling with the pull in multiple directions**.

You can play a key role in reassuring team members that such feelings are normal and discussing any particular difficulties individuals face. Setting out your expectations as a manager may help to lift some of the weight of the responsibilities they are feeling.

The Coronavirus Homeworking Protocol states that *"If you are working from home, you may have unplanned caring responsibilities for dependants during this period (e.g. due to school, nursery or nursing home closures). In these circumstances, it is anticipated that staff and line managers will need to exercise a certain level of flexibility in order to accommodate this unusual situation."*

- Some schools will be setting structured work, but this will vary considerably between schools and age groups. You may wish to share this Resources page with team members with children at home, which offers links to a variety of educational resources.
- Yammer Group – Remote working (children, mental health and general chat)
- Supporting Parents and Carers @Cambridge (SPACE) resources.
- My Family Care - Access to emergency childcare, and to a network of adult and eldercare across the country, as well as family and caring related Coronavirus webinars and resources.

top*tip* **Creative Solutions /** *"Be flexible and compassionate; keep an open communication dialogue going so you can adapt to this rapidly changing situation together… Consider creative solutions where possible, such as supporting your people to divide tasks up into manageable chunks according to priority and the level of concentration required and working at different times of the day, for example."* From The Flexible Working People

> "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them *feel*."

Maya Angelou

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⟶ HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) many of us will be deeply anxious about our health, both physical and mental, and that of our loved ones. Homeworking over a sustained period can also lead to feelings of isolation.

See the complementary 'Guidance for Individuals' which has a particular focus on wellbeing and sources of support. Please share this document with all members of your team.

- Encourage your team members to assess their home workstation, using the DSE screen equipment self-assessment checklist.
- You may also find it useful to read the University's guidance on computer health.
- Talk to your team members about their home-working arrangements, to ensure they are healthy and safe.
- More advice is available from the HSE and in the University's practical considerations for home working.
- For those who have team members who have reasonable adjustments in place under the Equality Act, talk to them at the earliest opportunity, and then regularly, to make sure that these adjustments can be continued if possible. Where they cannot be, discuss alternative adjustments. See the Business Disability Forum's helpful guide for further information.

It is important you look out for your **own wellbeing** too and set your own boundaries. It might be helpful to clarify with your team when you are happy to be contacted, and when you are not.

"The main thing I would ask you to do is to look after yourself, your loved ones and colleagues and always err on the side of caution" Eilis Ferran, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Institutional and International Relations.

⟶ SOCIALISATION AND MORALE

Encourage remote socialising, such as:

- Sharing pictures of what is happening locally, or inspirational posts (you know what will go down well with your team!) to build connection.
- Virtual coffee breaks

Be sure to continue acknowledging birthdays, professional and personal milestones and achievements, wherever possible.

top*tip* **Banish Guilt /**
You may wish to agree with your teams that you are going to banish guilt when working remotely.
"It has been shown that people who work at home report feeling guilty if they step away from their screen for a toilet break or grab a snack; a hangover from presenteeism culture which never happens when they're working in offices. We can't emphasise enough the role that a healthy sense of mutual trust can play in the success of remote working arrangements" From The Flexible Working People

top*tip* Share successes over video calls – to maintain morale and a sense of progress.

COMMUNICATION

Consider having both a 'formal' and 'informal' communication plan and use appropriate tools for each. For example, in addition to holding formal one-to-ones and team meetings, consider creating an online space to replicate the more spontaneous office chat and questions.

- Microsoft Teams video calls are good for formal catch-ups, while the Chat function in Teams is great for more informal conversations. You could also create a group on Yammer.
- The *ourcambridge* team are, for example, having weekly wellbeing catch-ups (no work!) separate from formal team meetings.
- See this useful quick guide to 'Choosing the Right Digitial Communication Tool'
- It may be helpful for all team members to open their diary to their team, so that colleagues can see when they are available.

You should take the lead in communicating key messages to your teams as below:

- You are not expected to be available all the time and there is no expectation that you will respond to messages outside your planned working hours.
- There are a number of sources of support available within the University so make sure your team members know where to access these.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Many departments are using Microsoft Teams to communicate within their team. It allows for audio and video calls/meetings, resource sharing and a chat function.

- Quick Guide to Working Remotely
- Quick Guide to Accessing Microsoft 365
- Quick Guide to Microsoft Teams interface
- Quick Guide to Microsoft Teams Video Calling

For instructions on how to download Microsoft Teams this guidance page is very useful. **Note: To access Teams in a browser you need to use either Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge - other browsers such as Firefox do not work.**

Once you have familiarised yourself with Microsoft Teams, our colleagues in UIS have created a Teams Hub where you can get lots of detailed guidance.

You can also visit the Remote Working Support group on Yammer, a new self-help space in which anyone can ask questions and share their tips with the University's remote working community. Trying to help each other by resolving common issues in this forum will free up valuable time for both the UIS Service Desk and local IT support desks to deal with the most urgent requests for help.

⫸ LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

You may have team members who are required to take on tasks that differ from their normal day-to-day work (because of covering for an unwell colleague, protecting business critical functions and/or the fact that their normal tasks cannot be done remotely).

Where this work requires new skills, knowledge or the use of different systems and technology, please support your team in accessing the appropriate training, wherever possible.

Some places to start include:

- University's Personal and Professional Development – including online learning modules and PPD On-Demand.
- UIS IT Services Training – including online courses
- LinkedIn Learning – (this will shortly be available for all University staff and students – watch this space!)
- You may also wish to match team members up with a **mentor** who has experience in the particular area or skill the mentee needs to acquire. Please see the University pages on mentoring for guidance and tips.

top_tip_ **Take Forward Learning /** Learning is a great way to keep your team **motivated** and provide a **clear focus** in a somewhat uncertain time – make the most of it!

⫸ OUTPUT AND PRODUCTIVITY

Does working remotely impact productivity? Understandably, you may have concerns about this. However, studies show that for many people, working remotely leads to an increase in productivity. As a manager, the following advice may be helpful:

- Set clear **expectations**. Be clear about deadlines, especially for critical tasks.
- Focus on **output** rather than activity as a measure of commitment and engagement, i.e. consider whether desired outcomes are being achieved, rather than a high levels of online activity or quick responses to messages. This also helps to build trust.
- **Talk openly** to your team – leading by example – about any issues they are having with productivity or motivation while working remotely. A culture of openness and trust will enable to you to help find constructive solutions, such as assigning different tasks. **Role model the behaviour you want others to follow**.

top_tip_ **Sharing Productivity Challenges /** Encourage an open discussion about motivation, time management and productivity during team meetings, i.e. **ask everyone to share one challenge and one tip for managing themselves**, to create a good practice resource bank your whole team can draw on.

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The Three C's of Remote Leadership

01   **Clarity** of expectations, goals, objectives and ways of working.

02   **Communication** formal and informal, using appropriate tools.

03   **Connection** to maintain morale, team relationships, a sense of purpose and to minimise feelings of isolation.

From Jason Wingard '[Leading Remote Workers: the Coronavirus Impact on Effective Management](#)'

Appropriate Behaviour in a Virtual Work Environment

A virtual work environment, with its lack of non-verbal cues, can create a barrier to understanding how your behaviour as a manager affects your colleagues. It can also encourage some individuals to be less inhibited about how they express themselves, while others may feel isolated and forgotten. In this period of transition, there are bound to be moments when managing a team remotely is frustrating or challenging. At these times, both our own behaviour and that of our remote working colleagues teams can fall short of what is expected in a physical office.

- Everyone should have the right to disconnect and be able to create a boundary between their work and home time. Inappropriate behaviour in a remote team setting can reach even further into colleagues' personal lives than in the physical workplace.

- Signs that a member of your team is experiencing such behaviour may include being increasingly withdrawn in online group meetings, less involved in work items or looking visibly upset during online calls.

- Acting on these concerns promptly is important to ensure any underlying issues are addressed quickly.

- The [Dignity @ Work Policy](#) and related procedures may be helpful here or you may wish to contact your [HR School Team](#).

As a manager, you should also ensure your own behaviour remains appropriate. In particular, it should not be expected that team members will be available at all hours. It should also be recognised that some team members will take longer than others to adapt to these different working arrangements.
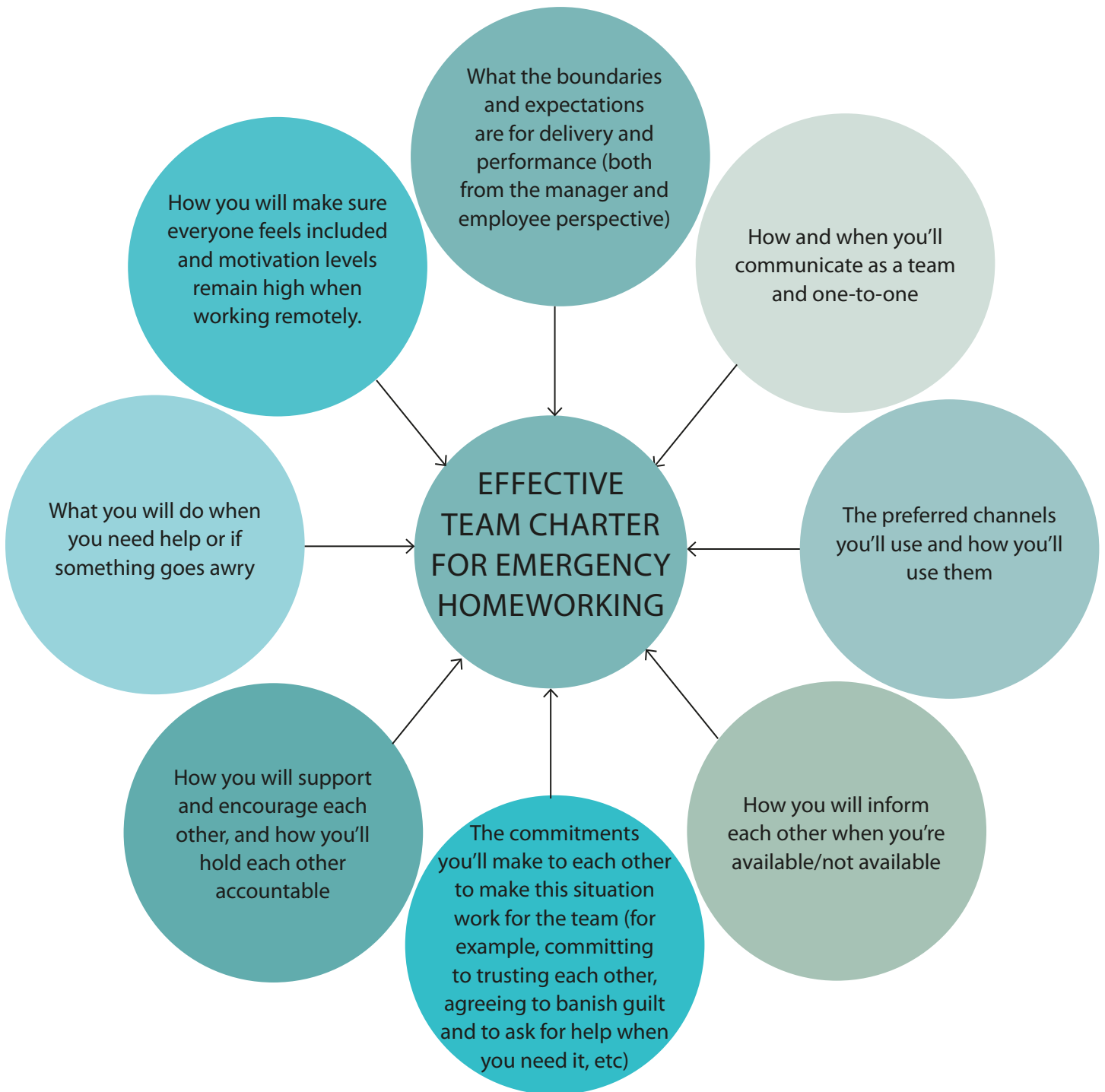
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Creating a Team Charter

ADVICE FROM THE [FLEXIBLE WORKING PEOPLE GUIDE](#)

"If you do nothing else, our advice is to spend some time with your teams creating a team charter so you can confidently navigate this unusual period together. A flexible working team charter is a document every team member contributes to, helps to shape and commits to. It can encompass every previous point in this section of the guide."

An effective team charter for emergency homeworking should cover the following:

What the boundaries and expectations are for delivery and performance (both from the manager and employee perspective)

How you will make sure everyone feels included and motivation levels remain high when working remotely.

How and when you'll communicate as a team and one-to-one

What you will do when you need help or if something goes awry

EFFECTIVE TEAM CHARTER FOR EMERGENCY HOMEWORKING

The preferred channels you'll use and how you'll use them

How you will support and encourage each other, and how you'll hold each other accountable

The commitments you'll make to each other to make this situation work for the team (for example, committing to trusting each other, agreeing to banish guilt and to ask for help when you need it, etc)

How you will inform each other when you're available/not available

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Further Resources and Interesting Articles

- Dr Thomas Roulet, Judge Business School, University of Cambridge
  'Opinion: Coronavirus - Five Ways to be a better manager when working from home'.

- Dr Olivia Remes 'Opinion: Five Ways to beat anxiety and take back control of your life during COVID-19 – according to Science'

- An excellent collation of articles, tips and resources from Manchester Metropolitan University on Working and Managing Remotely (some of these are Manchester Met specific, others more general)

- **University of Bristol** presentation on Managing Remote Workers

- **Harvard Business Review** 'A Guide to Managing your newly remote workers'

- **LinkedIn** article – 'Tips for managing a remote workforce during coronavirus'

- **FutureLearn** online course – Collaborative Working in a Remote Team

- **Harvard Business Review** – How to Manage Remote Direct Reports

- **Forbes** – Top 15 Tips to effectively manage remote employees

FEEDBACK OR SUGGESTIONS?

This guide is a first iteration and will be added to and amended as we settle into this period of remote working. If you have any suggestions or feedback on this guide, please email the **ourcambridge** team on ourcambridge@admin.cam.ac.uk

Find this guide useful? Please do let us know, so we can ensure we are producing valuable information and making a positive impact.

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