

Remote Working - First Aid Kit

A new management challenge is facing us as we find ourselves in a situation where suddenly a large part (and maybe soon all) of our workforce is working remotely.

Managing a virtual team like this requires managers to double down on the fundamentals of good management, including establishing clear goals, running great meetings, communicating clearly, and leveraging team members' individual and collective strengths.

More or less over night not having the team co-located anymore will impose the following new issues on managers as much as on their teams:

- Misunderstanding from poor communication
- Incompatible communication preferences
- Differences in work ethic
- Lack of clarity and direction
- Frequent second-guessing
- Deficient sense of ownership and commitment
- Inability to ask the right questions
- Difficulty with delegation
- Hidden incompetence
- Mismatched skills/needs
- Distrust and suspicion
- Diminished productivity
- Lack of empathy and personal connection

With this guideline we are introducing some quick fix measures you can take to reduce the impact and reduce the likelihood of these issues.

Immediate Fixes:

- Create space for online collaboration

Avoid email as an internal communication & collaboration tool like the devil!

Instead and if not already in place the following digital tools are prudent to be implemented and staff trained on:

- Video conferencing (20x more effective than a phone call) like [Skype](#) or [WebEx](#)
- Screen Sharing for collaborating on the same deliverables
- Individual or group chats for updates and queries
- E.g. [Office365](#) to enable collaborative editing of the same document online
- E.g. [Doodle.com](#) for appointment scheduling
- Shared online storage for collaboration to avoid creating multiple versions of the same document by emailing it (i.e. [Microsoft OneDrive](#))

For most firms [Microsoft Teams](#) or [Slack](#) would be a powerful platform to meet the majority of these requirements.

- **Clarify and Track Commitment**

By using Project Management Tools such as Trello.com (or Asana for more advanced PM skills and needs) to establish team wide Kanban boards that effectively track progress, workload and dependencies.

- **Create a routine**

- Schedule frequent checkpoint meetings on all team levels and also 1-2-1 with all staff. For most coordination purposes and as a rule of thumb it should suffice to schedule a daily Checkpoint Video Conference with each team and a weekly 1-2-1 with all staff.
- Ad Hoc meetings can then be scheduled as and when needed with only the critical participants to brainstorm a particular issue.
- Video calls recreate the routine office feeling remote teams are missing out on.

More tips on how to run meetings and virtual meeting etiquette in particular can be found in the [Kies Consulting - Effective Meetings Handbook](#)

- **Clearly communicate expectations on deliverables.**

- What does good look like?
- What are the tolerances?
- How is progress going to be checked?
- When is it required and what are the assumptions and dependencies for each deliverable?

- **Ensure work hours overlap.**

Being online together and being able to quickly reach somebody on Skype generates the critical team feeling that is now required.

- **Support and empower your team**

The only priority a virtual team manager can afford. If other responsibilities are conflicting from that new purpose a different solution should be sought.

- **Reshape your team members' responsibilities**

Empower the staff that are more comfortable and effective with remote working whilst supporting the ones that struggle by temporarily relieving some of their workload and by coaching them through their adaption process.

Secondary Fixes:

- Define (old and/or new) standards for work systems & processes.
- Establish a meritocratic system to keep members that are able to perform in this environment motivated and to give them more responsibility.

- Establish a culture of communication.
 - For a leader it's crucial to lead by example and give regular updates, hold brief check-ins with their teams and most importantly run effective meetings.
 - Create explicit guidelines on what kind of messages should be sent through which mediums and how the team is expected to interact with each other.
- Build trust by ensuring the team is clear on the Mission Statement and is following and working towards the same 'openly and jointly' agreed upon goals.
- Build further trust by reflecting on the progress the 'hidden away' team members have made whilst nobody watched them. Use project management tools to visualise progress on deliverables to the whole team (up and down the hierarchy).
- Hold staff accountable to their responsibilities by setting clear expectations on their performance, frequent progress check-ins to measure performance and having the 'difficult conversations' when expectations are not being met.
- Establish at least weekly 1-2-1 meetings with all your staff to ensure that casual chat you would have had over a cup of tea is now something that can't be forgotten! This will allow you to strengthen their alignment to your strategy and/or plan and gives them a chance to air more subtle concerns that mustn't be discussed in a team meeting.