

Tip sheet

Keeping your team productive and engaged during COVID-19

As a manager, keeping your team productive and engaged during COVID-19 is a common dilemma. However, it can be relatively easily achieved by adapting some of the things you do as a manager to make sure the team are clear on their shared outcomes, outputs and milestones for their work, and putting in place regular check ins to ensure everyone is connected and communicating effectively.

There are three key foundation stones to have in place:

1. Ensure everyone is clear on their work, and what their work will achieve (i.e. their outcomes)
2. Ensure you have agreed ways to communicate with each other, including how, how often, and what to do if you can't get it working, or can't participate
3. Be clear on your role as a leader, and how you will keep your team cohesive, and on task.

Clearly define your team's business outcomes, and review progress regularly

As a team, you may already have an overall plan for your team's workload (i.e., a business plan) that clearly articulates:

- the goals your team is working towards,
- the outputs that will contribute to those goals,
- which team member is responsible for contributing for each output, and
- how you'll measure progress/success.

Then work with each of your direct reports (and theirs in turn) to ensure everyone understands those outputs and their contribution to it – what they'll do, why, to what standard and when.

This forms the basis of your team meeting discussions, so the entire team knows what everyone else is doing and why, and there is a clear sense of shared purpose. Check the 'Managing for outcomes during COVID-19' tip sheet on how to determine and articulate your team's business outcomes if they've not already been

defined. If they've changed over this period, ensure the changes have been discussed as a group with concerns or ambiguities explored and clarified, and confirm how progress and success will be measured.

Over the COVID-19 period, you'll rely on this plan more than usual to ensure everyone is on track, so keep it updated, and ensure everyone is clear on it.

Having most meetings online means people can miss information or actions they're meant to take (for example, tech glitches or poor accessibility), so ensure action items to progress your plans are documented and the responsible person tagged. Check the 'Using technology well during COVID-19' tip sheet to pick up ideas for using technology for visibility around project check-ins.

Dial up and down your meetings, depending on need

Agree with your team how often you will meet – either to discuss progress, or to check-in on each other. Dial this up and down according to the teammate and their level of experience/confidence with working autonomously.

Some of your team members will be able to independently organise their work but others might need you to help them identify which tasks to focus on in any day or week. This should become clear over time but if you are unsure, ask what their preference is. Similarly, encourage team members to reflect on how they work best and what they need to bring their best to work.

Another good discipline is to ensure meetings end at the 25 minute or 50 minute mark, so everyone has time to refresh before the next one. It may have felt like meetings were back to back before COVID-19, but the travel and transition between meetings provided breaks. While we are working from home it's important to create time for wellbeing or comfort breaks (grabbing a quick snack, a toilet break, a physical stretch).



Agree how often you'll check-in on each other's wellbeing

You also need a way to stay connected and cohesive as a team. It's important to take a regular temperature check for team cohesion and for feelings of isolation working from home, so you can approach the work differently when needed. The only safe assumption is that everyone's needs are unique and will likely change, often as situations change (e.g. children returning to school may mean an adjustment in work hours from early morning and evening, to a bulk completed in the middle of the day, and more opportunities to connect).



Many managers have set up regular check-ins using Teams or Skype, and many employees (and leaders) have told us that these semi-regular check-ins make them feel more connected and included than they ever did in the office, where it was left more to chance. They're keen to maintain this cohesion as we gradually return to workplaces, so discuss as a team how any inclusion wins can be maintained, if that's your experience. If it isn't, explore with your team what you can adjust or improve, as this is crucial to engagement now and as you return to the workplace.

Alternately, you could add social time to a regular team meeting at the beginning or end, however make it optional, so no one feels compelled to share or participate if they're more introverted. Or maybe a virtual coffee, a trivia 'lunch hour' or a quiz on matching the person to the favourite song, for example.

For new starters, establish a buddy system so everyone has someone else to look out for them and are committed to maintaining more regular contact. This might be a good option more generally too – ask your team.

As a leader, regularly reassure your team that you recognise that everyone is doing the best they can despite the circumstances. You may not have all the answers, but by showing you are willing to work with them, can help alleviate anxiety.

Technology as an enabler of productivity and engagement

Many of us have had a crash course in collaboration technology over the past few months and found it incredibly useful as a way to improve our productivity, responsiveness and engagement.

In the office, we may have stayed desk-bound and sent an email, but now use Skype or Teams to call someone and achieve a faster outcome to our query or request. Build on this further by:

- exploring how online collaboration tools such as MS Teams or Slack could be used to work together in real time, either as peer review or co-authors. It's a nice way to change up working in isolation.
- use technology such as MS Teams to encourage everyday chat amongst team members. Encourage 'bursts' of chat and then quiet times for concentration.
- however, try to ensure you're not spending too much time 'online' as a team, as back-to-back online meetings can be exhausting. Have some 1:1 catch-ups by phone occasionally, or consider if [some of your meetings](#) could be a note instead.

Role model good practices

The rapid shift to working flexibly since COVID-19 has been handled remarkably well in our sector. Recognise teams/team members who have been innovative and embraced new practices. As we transition out of COVID-19 and into new ways of working, call out the new knowledge learned, or skills gained to encourage your team about how well they've adapted.

Above all, be a manager who proactively role models your emotional intelligence about your own needs, by visibly demonstrating your own commitment to achieving goals but also looking after yourself. Discuss how you've been arranging your work differently, to include more exercise (or whatever your goals are), and delegating where it is responsible to do so, to give your team stretch opportunities. Communicate realistic expectations around work/life balance and demonstrate it yourself. Advocate for what works for you, and role model that so others can do likewise, without negatively affecting other teammates or overall workloads. Working from home can blur boundaries between work and life easily with so much technology at our fingertips, so it is important to discuss your own discipline around boundary setting (and your mistakes!) to encourage your team to do likewise.

At an individual level, employees want to know that they are important to you and that you care about their individual circumstances, their concerns and their well-being. Check out the [wellbeing resources](#) the PSC has put together specifically for the COVID-19 response, for more details on how to attend to your team members' wellbeing over this time .

This tip sheet will be enough to get you started, but if you feel you need more help or to go deeper, post your query on our LinkedIn group, talk to your manager or a trusted peer, or consult with your HR representative to explore any courses your agency may have access to.

Works for me.

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FLEXIBLE WORKING

