

# Tip sheet

## Managing for outcomes with a remote, flexible workforce

We often hear about managing for outcomes, but what does it mean? In theory, it means adapting your personal approach to team leadership to be goals-driven, not task driven. In practice, you put in place a way of working with your team that clearly defines your shared goals as 'outcomes', turns these outcomes into outputs delivered by individuals, agree how you will meaningfully measure progress against them, and then regularly check how that progress is going. Critically, you leave day-to-day decisions about tasks and where, when, and how the tasks are achieved up to the employee to decide. When you measure performance, you're therefore looking at progress towards the aspect of an outcome that the employee 'owns', rather than their time spent on things, or just on the outputs they produced.

This approach makes it much easier to manage your team when they're working remotely during COVID-19. It's also a sustainable approach if your team will return to your office in a hybrid home/office way, because then everyone has the right information to monitor and adjust the progress of their work, as well as be responsive to the needs of your end customer/client - whoever they might be. It's also a crucial discipline for managers to use as we move towards a discipline of outcomes-based budgeting and funding.

**Outcomes-based management during COVID-19 (and beyond) requires three key inputs: knowing your business outcomes, your team outcomes, and for each employee, their individual outcomes.**

### First, define your business outcomes via your business plan

If you don't already have a business or work plan for your team, you will need to start there – or ensure it is up to date, as you'll rely on it more than ever over this period. It needs to contain this information at a minimum:

- Which component of organisational strategy this work is aligned to;
- The outcomes your team is driving (the effect/change your team's work is expected to achieve) – using SMARTT criteria;
- Outputs you will produce to achieve this effect (the projects, tasks or deliverables);
- Timeframes;
- Resources needed (human, technological and financial);
- How progress and success will be measured – including any hard metrics or KPIs your team has.

While your business outcomes will be defined in consultation with your leadership, it's best to discuss and agree what they mean with your team as they're settled. The kinds of questions to ask at this point are:

- What do we need to achieve and why?
- Are there broader strategies that drive or influence our work?
- What problem are we aiming to solve?
- What is the best way to achieve this and have we got the required capability and capacity?
- How will we engage and reflect relevant diverse stakeholder voices?
- What are the best indicators of success?
- How can we ensure flexibility and agility in delivery?
- What are our strengths to leverage and challenges to address?

**Once your business plan is set, you then have to agree your team outcomes.**

**These are the ways of working that make your team effective: collaboration, communication, connection and cohesion that make coming to work (even from home) so rewarding.**

## Next, work with your team to decide your team outcomes

Set some time aside in a team meeting to agree the way of working that makes your team 'hum'. Ask everyone to describe what working in an effective, high-performing team looks like, and describe it in terms of outcome statements that can be measured, similar to your business outcomes.

Good team outcomes typically include measures for:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Connection
- Cohesion

These four areas are particularly important to protect productivity – if the team is not working in a unified way, work will quickly take off in different directions and become counter-productive, and people become frustrated and distracted. Or they may feel isolated and disconnected, and need to work together (online or in person at a safe distance where a location is suitable).

Use the time to have an open discussion about trust as a two-way process:

- Managers trusting staff to do their jobs, and to be open to feedback.
- Staff trusting managers to provide competent direction and guidance, and constructive feedback on performance.

Then have regular discussions about work habits and work demands.

**If you would like to learn more about ensuring good communication and collaboration, read our '[Managing a Dispersed Team](#)' guide.**



# Talk with your direct reports to develop individual outcomes

Next (or in parallel), meet with each of your direct reports to confirm their individual performance objectives, ensuring that each of their outcomes and outputs are aligned with your team's business objectives, and contained in their individual performance plan as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

These can typically include:

- Work/project objectives and milestones: are they specific, measurable and attainable.
- Activities/tasks to be performed within these
- Expected results/outcomes, and how these will be measured.

It's also worth having a discussion with them about their individual wellbeing goals for the next year, and take the opportunity to review any flexible working arrangements or adjustments they have in place to ensure they will support the KPIs they have to achieve, or if they may need adjusting (or the employee's circumstances have changed and they seek to adjust them).

Some employees also have individual wellbeing plans they may want to pursue, based on preventative physical or mental health measures. It's important to be aware of these (within privacy constraints, and based on what the employee is willing to share), as an imbalance in this area (e.g. a lack of work/life balance and overly long hours) can form a key operational risk to not just that

individual's wellbeing and performance, but also the team's ability to achieve its goals. Knowing what each employee's individual goals are forms a useful basis for 1:1 check ins in addition to discussing individual and team outcomes

In a remote environment, some employees may need extra guidance or check-ins, especially if they're new in a role - so dial it up and down by simply asking "what works for you?".

If you are a manager of managers, ensure your direct reports are also working towards ensuring individual work outcomes are clear and understood, and individual wellbeing outcomes are surfaced where relevant. Work with your direct reports to summarise these thematically (again, noting privacy considerations).

A summary for a team of individual outcomes often includes these factors:

- Skills development/career opportunities
- Work-life balance
- Efficient use of time

Many employees have also reported during this time how much they have valued the additional autonomy they've had in how they structure their work day outside the office. Keep this in mind, as autonomy can become an important factor in individual wellbeing.

## Pull all the information together, and you have a team triple-bottom line to measure against

Next, summarise all of the information into a simple table that your team can use. This simple triple-bottom line approach provides an excellent reference point for future team meeting discussions on how the team is going as a whole, or what might need re-calibrating or adjusting. It is a way to keep everyone focused, productive and engaged, and keep your energies on managing what your team is going to do, rather than how they do it or during what hours.

We've provided a blank template in the **Appendix**. Keep your team's version in a shared team space online (e.g. a team channel in MS Teams).

# Finally, implement and monitor at the team and individual level

Once your team's work program is developed and understood, and your outcomes defined, it is time to implement and monitor.

At the team level, use your team workplan and outcomes list as the basis for regular team discussions (perhaps monthly), using the time to reflect on how you are all tracking against it, with any measurement indicators available.

At the individual employee level, at a minimum, revise their performance plan twice yearly to ensure it captures all the outcomes and outputs they're working towards, and can recognise success or challenges in any of these.

For their individual outputs, such as projects, they will likely have project plans that map out milestones, deliverables and risks (depending how your agency handles this). Progress against these is then the focus of your 1:1 catch ups, as well as periodically seeking their opinion on how the team outcomes are going (this is particularly important if they are uncomfortable speaking up at the team meeting because they're introverted, or are new and do not yet feel confident). Use coaching techniques (see *Coaching tipsheet*), which is an especially effective tool to maintaining connection and cohesion, plus social interaction, with a remote team member, to guide them through their problem-solving and build their skills, rather than focusing on prescribing how they will complete a given task. They are then given the autonomy to decide how they go about something, while having the supports in place to seek your help or guidance for areas of uncertainty, or when they need your input to push something along.

By measuring progress against these, you are managing for outcomes. The difference is that there is much less emphasis on how the employee arrives at the goals they've been set (the hours worked, where they may do it if location is less important) – the focus of the conversation instead is on the progress made or challenges experienced.

## Providing feedback

Your team has set out to deliver a program of work and it is now time to measure how well you did, not only in terms of actual product created or service needs met, but how effective, timely and relevant your work has been. This will help you learn from what happened and be able to plan accurately for the future. Ask these questions as a team:

- What impact have we had and what improvements can we make?
- Are there any unintended consequences to consider?
- What could be done differently in future?

COVID-19 is a good opportunity to introduce new ways of working, which includes new ways of managing your team, particularly when the team is working in different locations. Use this time to move to an outcomes-based focus, and it will set your team up well for a return to a hybrid office/elsewhere model (whether that's home, or a hub/shared office space, or co-located in another agency if that improves collaboration).

And if you would like to test your own skills as the manager of a flexible team, use our [Flexible Working Skills for Managers assessment](#), with its accompanying development guide for any areas you'd like to build more confidence in.

# When progress is not what you expected

During COVID-19 and even its aftermath, your team, or individual employees, may experience new (e.g. technology, or competing care commitments) challenges they were not prepared for, or struggle with motivation. Be prepared to work together to solve them and share solutions from which others can learn.

If regularly monitoring reveals that your team is not meeting its business, team or individual outcomes, set aside a time with the relevant people as soon as you can. Use this meeting to explore what the challenge is:

- Is it inadequate technology, is it an issue with a stakeholder that needs to be addressed, is it a budgetary shortfall, is it personal circumstances/health, or is it capability?
- Do they have enough time to do this task – do their days or hours need adjusting, more coverage in the role, or do they need to drop back their work to manage other commitments?
- Does there need to be a shift in the where, when or how the work is being done to improve productivity?
- Or was the goal badly defined in the first place (or no longer relevant) and needs adjusting?

Regular and meaningful conversations about how your team members are going when it comes to staying productive provide an opportunity to learn about the challenges and successes of any flexibility they may be using as well. This can include conversations about changing circumstances with individual needs, potential technology barriers and impacts on the team of working remotely. It may also mean that you need to adjust your expectations of team members, who have shifted to working remotely in a short timeframe, and who may be experiencing elevated levels of anxiety or associated challenges.

If, however, individual performance becomes an issue and you need to have a constructive conversation to address the lack of productivity, check out the PSC tip sheet about 'handling conflict'.

Any of the above scenarios may mean that the way you manage the workload across the team might change temporarily, to adapt to your team's availability during this time. Creating more opportunities than you ordinarily would for your team to discuss the work of the team and what individuals are working on can create collaboration amongst the team, so that the work is shared and you can keep moving towards the team goals. Or use the role design guidance developed by the PSC to adapt team roles in the short-term.

**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.

Works for NSW.

**FLEXIBLE WORKING**

# Appendix

## Outcomes to maintain or enhance (sample only)

Business Outcomes:	Measured by:
<b>Deliver X to enhance Y capability in Z client sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Measure for change in Z client sector's Y capability</li><li>Trend in achievement of outcomes overall</li></ul>
<b>Ensure we are responsive to A clients over B period</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Responsiveness measure</li></ul>
<b>Engage with stakeholders to drive impact of K implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trends in measure for implementation for K/stakeholder qualitative feedback</li></ul>
Team Outcomes:	Measured by:
<b>Positive team culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Pulse survey runs 4 times/year to test perceptions</li></ul>
<b>Cooperation to achieve outcomes and flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trends in qualitative feedback from team meetings</li></ul>
<b>Sense of belonging</b>	
Individual Outcomes:	Measured by:
<b>Skills development / career opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Capability plans in place with measurable objectives for experience, exposure and education</li></ul>
<b>Work-life balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1:1 discussions/performance discussions</li></ul>
<b>Efficient use of time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Qualitative feedback in team meetings regarding projects</li></ul>