Flexible, Remote and Online Working guide
Part 1: Team management and pastoral care plan

In the midst of Covid-19 (C19), many of us are working from home for the first time or working from home in new ways. Organisations are having to (very quickly) put new plans and protocols in place to ensure business continuity, take care of our teams, clients and communities, or make sure that our shows can go on.

This is not business as usual. This is a new normal – albeit, we hope, a temporary one. We all need new skills and systems to make it a success.

Lots of resources are starting to appear about the 'what': the technologies that make remote and online working possible. But the 'how' is just as important: the logistics and protocols of managing our work and teams remotely in ways that are healthy, productive, effective and enjoyable.

Part 1: Team management and pastoral care plan

We're busy. We're worried. We're out of our routines. A lot is changing – in our work, our homes and in the wider world – and it's changing really fast. We're all more reactive than pro-active right now. We have to be.

But those of us who employ or look after teams, groups or communities have a duty of care to help them navigate that change – now more than ever. Making time to co-design and develop a team management and pastoral care plan can make everyone's lives a little easier (including our own).

Co-design

The best remote working solutions are usually developed by managers and team members working together to create plans and protocols that are specific to their teams.

Given the whiplash pace of current change, many organisations don't have time for a full co-design process right now. But finding ways to get your team involved from the outset can help get their buy-in later. This can be as simple as asking team members about their needs and communication preferences (over the phone, via email or through an online survey), or hosting online training sessions that double as team consultations.

Logistics

In addition to the question of 'what platform should we use?' some things you might want to think about include:

- **Policies and procedures:** What existing policies and procedures do you already have in place that may need to be considered, adapted or repurposed for your new situation? This may include working from home policies, occupational health and safety policies, procedures for accessing emails or work servers remotely, or your team's code of conduct.

- **Remote work devices:** Computers, smartphones, webcams, headphones, microphones and more. What devices will team members need and who will provide them? If team members are expected to use their own equipment, what will you have to do to check that it's suitable and secure? If team members will take their office computers home with them, what systems or insurances will you have to put in place to ensure that equipment is safe? Will you need to rent or buy additional devices?

- **Internet access:** Do all of your team members have reliable and fast internet access at home? If so, are they expected to pay for their data use, or will the company compensate them for any additional costs? If not, will you need to invest in mobile data devices? This will be particularly important for team members in regional and remote areas.

- **Digital inequality and access:** Don't assume that everyone has access to a computer, smartphone or internet connection at home. Some people may be sharing their devices with other members of their households. Some may have previously used shared equipment in libraries or internet cafes that are no longer available to them. Some might not be able to afford to increase their data plan. Just because we find ourselves in an environment where you think you team members should be grateful to still have a job doesn't mean that their personal circumstances automatically make it possible for them to do that job at home. It's important to create a safe, non-judgmental space for people to share their situations (and to respond accordingly).

- **Other remote work equipment:** Do team members need desks, chairs or other special equipment? Does anyone have particular access or communication needs that you need to consider? Could you equip your teams with 'On the Air' signs to help make sure they're not disturbed while in meetings online?

- **Remote workspace expectations and requirements:** The days of quiet, distraction-free home working spaces are over for many of us. Self-isolation and shelter-in-place regulations mean that more people are spending more time in their homes for more (and not always complimentary) purposes, including co-working, home-schooling and caring responsibilities. We need to adjust our expectations and requirements accordingly. What are the minimum standards that you need team members to consider – their health, their safety and the safety of your equipment, or the confidentiality of their work? What are the additional recommendations you can suggest over and above those – good ventilation, good lighting, or comfortable furniture?

Team time

Ask all of your managers to make a schedule of which days their team members will be working. This is particularly important if your organisation is changing from full-time to part-time delivery.

In addition to moving your regular catchups and workload meetings online, think about:

- Virtual coffees scheduled at the start of several days each week (allowing for all team members to participate in at least one per week, depending on their working days); and/or

- Virtual lunches scheduled at lunchtime several days each week (as above); and/or

- Virtual drinks at the end of several days each week (as above).

- Virtual birthday cake once a month to celebrate that month's birthdays (with bonus points for organising dietary-appropriate cake to be delivered to those people); and/or

- Tools to enable virtual hallway conversations (like Slack or the chat function of Microsoft Teams), the informal updates, ideas and celebrations that keep us connected, informed and enjoying our work.

If your team members are split between home and office working environments, ask office-based attendees to dial in from their individual work spaces too. As well as supporting good social distancing, this helps reduce feelings of us-versus-them, and will hopefully mean the work-from-homers (who may be craving social conduct or adult conversation) are less likely to feel left out.

One-on-one time

Managers of remote teams have an enhanced responsibility to keep in touch with the people in their care – both within their teams (as above), and individually.

One-on-one time fosters trust, makes team members feel supported, provides them with a safe space to share concerns or issues they may not be comfortable sharing in a group, and helps them be as productive as possible.

Ask your managers to schedule regular one-on-ones with each of their direct reports – and *never* cancel them. You can postpone them if necessary, but cancelling one-on-ones (especially if you do it regularly) is a key way to build resentment, and reduce productivity as a result.

In addition to checking in with team members about their workload and targets, ask them about:

- What their new routine is looking like (and how it's working for them).

- Whether the remote working tools and software platforms are working (and, if not, what issues they're experiencing).

- Whether their devices, internet access, workspace and equipment are working (and, if not, what they might need).

- Whether they're feeling included as part of the team.

- How they're feeling about the situation with C19 in general.

- What you could be doing to better support them.

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About the writer

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