**Managing a team remotely**

# Purpose

Relationships can be challenging for teams working from home due to limited face-to-face communication, and unclear goals and performance standards. This document provides guidelines for managers to fulfil the following five responsibilities toward their direct reports:

# Set the stage for a successful remote work relationship - focus on clearly outlining individual and team goals and understanding employee needs and preferences.

# Motivate team members and influence behaviour - continuously ensure positive team/individual morale and discuss and demonstrate the Department’s values and behaviours and ensure they are helping to build and maintain a respectful workplace.

# Ensure effective communication - provide e-mailing and videoconferencing etiquettes and develop a balance between formal and informal communications.

# Provide project or program management support - review ongoing projects and programs continuously and provide advice and support.

# Manage team performance - obtain feedback from relevant stakeholders to assess direct report’s performance and provide developmental support to improve performance.

# Guidance for managing remote teams

**Set the stage for a successful remote work relationship**

Eliminate ambiguity and emphasise clear roles and responsibilities. Employees who are working remotely must have a clear understanding of organisational expectations for each day, week, month and even year. With increased distance between you and your team, there are fewer opportunities for interactions. Your remote employees need to know what to do, when to do it, how to do it and how much of it needs to be done.

**Establish clear goals and expectations**

Clarify roles and responsibilities and determine concrete goals for all team members. Given that there are limited opportunities for interaction, clearly communicate expectations and goals at the outset. This helps remote employees understand where to focus their efforts and be self-reliant.

You should set clear expectations for:

* work hours
* availability
* communication
* timely meetings
* key projects and deadlines
* scheduled meetings
* responding to email

Set protocols about ongoing contact frequency and communication preferences. Encourage two-way communication through e-mail, telephone and video conference and establish the practice of regular conference calls.

**Consider work styles and employee needs when setting the ground rules**

Partner with direct reports to discuss work styles, abilities, and preferences, and use these to set ground rules for remote working relationships. Managers should build rapport with everyone in the team, understand their concerns and expectations, and empathise with them.

**Meet in-person at regular intervals**

Ensure you make yourself accessible to your team and arrange for one on ones. Give them the time to contact you on Webex, Skype or any other app and turn your availability on. Give them one day in a week for one-on-one to discuss their issues and you can give them your instructions. A regular cadence for these contacts will let people know they are an integral part of day-to-day operations.

## Motivate team members and influence behaviour

## Monitor team morale

## Make efforts to maintain personal contact with every member of the team and promote honesty and openness. Demonstrate empathy to build rapport with the direct reports and allocate time for discussing their problems.

## Demonstrate DET’s Values and expected team behaviours

## Display desired behaviours in remote working relationships/interactions, as highlighted below:

## Follow through on commitments and keep promises

## Demonstrate respect by valuing employees’ time and appreciate their ideas and contribution

## Be flexible

## Use work processes and protocols as guidelines, without being restrictive.

## Ensure effective communication

**Use a mix of structured and informal communication methods**

Blend structured communication approaches, such as weekly “check-ins” through phone or videoconference, with informal, real-time communication methods, such as instant messaging and e-mail. Structured communications ensure reserved time to discuss ongoing needs of direct reports, such as performance evaluation or leave, while informal, real-time communication methods can address immediate needs.

**Establish meeting schedule protocols**

Establish shared responsibility for open communication and use the following tactics to ensure successful team meetings:

* share contact information and time availability of all team members
* send acceptance notifications for scheduled meetings to the organiser within 24 hours
* send meeting agenda and supplementary information along with the notification
* send notification for a meeting at least four days in advance

**Establish and model virtual meeting etiquette**

Provide team members with the following tactics to establish videoconferencing etiquette:

* adjust tone and pace of speaking to compensate for transmission delays
* limit background noise to minimise interruptions
* maintain appropriate distance from Web cameras to avoid blurry or large images
* set an agenda prior to the meeting
* set aside a few minutes for setting up videoconference and phone equipment

If remote employees face difficulty communicating due to language or technology issues, they should be allowed to send in their comments immediately after the meeting through e-mail.

**Handle conflict through verbal communication**

Be direct and communicate verbally when resolving any issues or conflicts. In the absence of physical cues, managers should ask a lot of questions to better understand the reasons for the conflict.

## Provide project and/or program support

**Establish project/program guidelines**

Set clear guidelines for team members regarding timeframe and quality of work and encourage them to show commitment to work. Set deadlines for daily and/or weekly updates from remote workers.

**Schedule recurring meetings for project/program and process review**

Conduct regular meetings with team members to review progress and examine existing processes to identify gaps and possible solutions. In addition, arrange frequent face-to-face team meetings to encourage individuals to share experiences, best practices, and knowledge.

**Utilise project planning tools to communicate daily workload**

Provide direct reports with project planning tools to ensure visibility on project milestones, required action steps, and deliverables. This will ensure effective allocation of work among team members based on their capacity.

## Manage team performance

**Share organisational knowledge that may impact performance and engagement**

Act as a conduit of organisational culture and knowledge, and share information such as the following to improve direct reports’ performance:

* established processes for completion of work
* examples of exceptional work from other locations
* organisational changes (including formal and informal reporting structures, new leadership priorities)
* organisational policies on employee relations, such as conflicts and codes of conduct

Similarly, remote managers should ensure that good work and best practices from employees are captured and shared across the organisation.

**Evaluate performance through multiple sources of feedback**

Solicit information about quality of work from internal stakeholders, team members, and when relevant, external customers. In addition, evaluate remote employees’ performance in real time by engaging them in brainstorming, problem solving, and joint action planning.

**Define and track goal achievement through the PDP process**

In a remote working relationship, there are comparatively lesser opportunities for a manager to check if work is being completed and goals are being achieved. As such, establish clearly defined goals in the PDP on eduPay and mutually agree metrics to measure employee performance.

Consider informal and formal options for providing timely, specific and sincere recognition for individual and team contribution and performance.

**Operational policies and governance**

Despite changes to working environments, business continuity is a key objective. To achieve this continuity, managers need to consider a range of operational processes, including governance. Formal governance procedures and delegation powers remain the same. In situations where an entire workforce may be working remotely, the person of delegate authorisation (e.g. An Executive Director) must either digitally sign off documentation or approve decisions from their individual email. Executive Assistants, Executive Coordinators or any other Department staff cannot approve on behalf of a delegate.