

## Top tips for homeworking.

Remote working over the last months has changed from a unique feature of forward-thinking offices and a 'nice to have' for some workers, into a necessity for business continuity and a clear recommendation from public health bodies.

For some companies this is already firmly embedded in the culture. But for many it will be a bit of a shock to the system. While digital communications are readily available they have been adopted in many companies in either a half-hearted or a laissez-faire way. If your business hasn't been developing its digital communications, the coronavirus outbreak will have made this a near-term necessity.

*Here are some key recommendations:*

### Structure communication

Remote working does not mean people are sent home to fend for themselves. The most effective programmes have clearly structured communication channels and schedules. For example, team meetings might be scheduled weekly or fortnightly. Generally one-to-ones with managers may be monthly or quarterly. But with those who are new to remote work, more regular check-ins and conversations may be helpful.

Think of remote working as a stretch assignment. Someone is deployed in their role into a new environment, but has the same or similar roles, responsibilities and objectives. Explore what communication, equipment, tools and support people need to succeed at their job in this new environment. Delineate specific channels for specific purposes. Make sure people know how to contact everyone they would normally need to talk with during the day.

It's also a good time to talk honestly about people's preferred communication methods. Who is happy to just pick up the phone, and who takes a little more time to consider specific questions and lay them out in an email?

### Ensure good performance management

Most people work more effectively when they have clear deliverables, guidelines and timeframes. This can be more challenging for managers when people are working remotely, but effective performance management will make all the difference. For many employees a five or 10-minute check in call at the beginning and/or end of the day will be very useful. Managers should make sure they are tracking these objectives and checking in on progress.

## Keep information timely, consistent and honest

When there is important information or new policies that need to be communicated with all staff, make sure it is shared in a direct and timely way. Avoid trickling out information, or teasing employees with an expected announcement. For example, one very large company this week announced to all employees at 9am that they would be making 'a major announcement at the end of the day'. Leaking incomplete information or making an announcement about a forthcoming announcement is not particularly helpful. Don't do it. It causes unnecessary speculation, confusion and worry, particularly at such times of heightened anxiety and where people are away from the office.

## Ensure everyone has equal access to information

People don't like feeling 'out of the loop' and even when it is possible to work remotely, some people miss the conversation, the insight or just the chat that is part of an office environment. Make sure communication channels are set up so that people are still included and have access to the same information and communication networks. Make sure announcements are shared equally with people who are not in the office.

## Reach out to people from other organisations

Many people in HR have a diverse network of connections from previous jobs, networking events, personal connections or social networking sites. It's unusual for companies that are normally competing within the same sector to directly share best practices, but now is a good time to suspend or re-examine how we think about that competition. For example, some HR departments have been forming Slack channels or using other group discussion platforms to share experience, advice and best practice between companies. This is especially helpful for smaller businesses where one person or a small group of people are effectively their own 'department'.

Although it's a challenging time for people managers, every other company is facing the same challenges, barriers and stressors. So it can be a relief to know we're all in the same boat and everyone (for the moment) is trying to solve the same problems.