

STAFF INFOSHEET

Novel Coronavirus

Staying connected: communicate well with your team

One of the most important factors in a team's successful transition to dispersed working arrangements is keeping up the levels of communication. When teams no longer have the ability for watercooler conversations or to 'pop in' and discuss issues as they arise in real time, additional thought and effort is required to ensure continued effective communication. This guide has been produced to support teams stay connected and manage communications where they have transitioned to members of their team working from home or across multiple work sites.

Create the culture

Give employees the confidence that communication channels are open and they are able to continue to consult and collaborate with colleagues as well as being able to voice concerns and know their questions will be answered. Continue communicating what is happening at a team, divisional and agency level and align common objectives to build cohesiveness and reinforce team spirit.

Develop a communication strategy

All team members should share the same expectations for communication; agree the appropriate number of weekly formal 'report-ins' and set guidelines about daily needs. Detail the best way and time for team members to be reached and be mindful of any team members working on flexible hours or work patterns. Remembering that people have different ways of working, agree how urgent queries should be elevated versus the process for raising general queries; whilst some people prefer a 'shopping list of questions' approach, others may operate by raising thoughts and issues as they occur. Establishing rules of engagement will be important; the clearer the expectations the more successful a team will be at communicating.

Establish etiquette

Establish ground rules for team meetings and one-on-one check-ins; these rules may include turning off phones during team meetings and not checking emails or multitasking to ensure that everyone is focused. Teams may also want to agree protocols regarding matters such as response times to emails and messages that come in 'out of hours', again noting that individual team members' standard hours may be more varied than usual.

Engage regularly

Frequency of contact should increase to ensure greater clarity, less misunderstandings and better teamwork. An important feature for communication for dispersed teams is certainty and predictability. Managers may wish to engage with the team at an individual level on a daily basis; establishing 'top and tail' (beginning and end of a work day) check ins can assist in communicating priorities and expectations as well as give employees the ability to raise questions or problem solve non-urgent matters that may have arisen during the day. A weekly 'storm' meeting to continue team awareness of the work and priorities of colleagues will also support cross team communication and collaboration on shared objectives.

Communicate clearly

In the search for efficiency don't confuse brief communications and clear communications particularly if the platform being used doesn't allow others to read body language and cues; take the time you need to communicate with clarity.

Use multiple channels

Provide a variety of communication technology options rather than relying on email or telephone alone; virtual meetings can be as effective as face to face meetings if you have set the rules and social norms up front.

There are platforms that allow for quick collaboration and may be more effective for simpler, less formal conversations as well as time sensitive communication however you should speak to your manager or seek advice from your ICT Department as to the preferred solution within your agency.

Access to video conferencing where available can be hugely beneficial; seeing each other can increase the feeling of connection as well as it being a chance to see what everyone is doing.

Support the social

Before jumping into the formal agenda, spend the first few minutes of a team meeting checking in with each other, similar to the corridor conversations that some members of the team may no longer have access to. Build in social interactions; have virtual coffee breaks or lunches and continue to celebrate team achievements or personal milestones.