Tips for managing hybrid teams when some staff are working from home

UNIVERSITY of OTAGO
Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo
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ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The following table outlines some of the practices to consider when managing successful teams that include staff working from home. It needs to be read in conjunction with the Working from Home Policy, Procedures and Guidelines. Some further resources are included at the end.

The term "working from home" means an agreed arrangement to work fully or partially from home or at another location outside of the University of Otago. The term "hybrid" refers to a team/group of staff where some people are working remotely with other staff working in a shared physical workplace.

This may bring up new challenges such as maintaining team cohesion, collaboration, ensuring team wellbeing and ensuring that staff have the resources they require.

The **Working From Home Guidelines** include useful questions to support your discussion with individuals and these further tips are designed to support your discussions with both the individuals and the team, building team cohesion and shared goals.

AREAS TO CONSIDER, AS A MANAGER, WHEN STAFF ARE WORKING FROM HOME IN A HYBRID TEAM	
Purpose and priorities of the team	• Regularly talk with individuals and the whole team about the **shared values, purpose and priorities** of the team in order to keep each staff member connected with the work of the whole team (e.g. "what we are focusing on in the next month is…" "X will be coming up next month, so we need to gather relevant information". Include this information about priorities on as well as including on shared digital boards/communication channels. • Where appropriate use SMART goals or objectives and timelines to enable staff to focus on priorities and to understand how their work fits into the overall work of the team. • Regularly update staff on progress with work activities and make visible the contributions of different members with particular thought about staff working at home whose physical presence is not visible to other staff.
Induction and set up for working from home	• Talk with staff members, and organise, equipment needed and any professional development required to use the necessary technology. • Make sure that staff members undertake a H&S assessment of their work area and Occupational Health (ohn@otago.ac.nz) are available for support and advice as required.

	• Talk through the implications of the home becoming the workplace and how the Health and Safety requirements might apply including reporting incidents, • Review with the staff member cybersecurity and privacy requirements for their work in a home setting and discuss the security of information.
Communication channels	Consider establishing communication across and within the team that establishes clear practices. • Regular meetings with the team and individuals scheduled in advance (e.g. weekly) • Keep people connected to information about wider University activities affecting the team, because people working at home may miss out on some of this information • Establish clear communication channels for use for specified work activities to avoid collaboration overload – where staff spend time having to learn and use multiple channels. • Establish clear expectations about team information storage areas to ensure it is available to all staff rather than held on the desktop of an individual staff member • Equitable communication means ensuring everyone gets the same information. If a manager works alongside other staff, then information may be shared in passing and staff working from home may miss out.
Team norms	• Establish team norms and expectations (a "team charter") around working as a hybrid team. This could include initially meeting with the team to discuss their thoughts on working practices and agreeing a final plan which is then regularly reviewed and shared with new team members when they are appointed. Areas to consider include: - taking into account different work patterns (e.g. some staff have early or later work hours) that may affect the timing of meetings - establish expectations that some communication can be asynchronous whereby an immediate response is not expected by someone who sends an email at 7am when they start work early - how the team want to structure their days including times when the team are all engaged in "deep work" and agree not to phone/text contact each other in order to focus on their work - what are the ways that the team wants to connect together socially as part of replacing the "water-cooler conversations"

	- using shared calendars to communicate when team members are available for contact or focusing on specific tasks - identifying which digital tools (e.g. email, zoom chat, Whatsapp, text, phone, Slack and Trello etc) will be used by the team for what purpose - work-life balance and the importance of breaks and boundaries in the working day – compared with staff on the main campus, staff working at home may feel more able to take breaks during the day or may feel that they need to work longer hours in order to demonstrate their value. • Establish shared expectations about all staff taking breaks during the day and whether they are able to have some flexibility in their working day to attend events such as a school activity with their children. Plan to undertake periodic pulse checks with the team on how the "team charter" is working out and make changes as needed.
Relationships with the individual team members	• Establish regular one on ones with all your team members. Make sure that there are opportunities to see staff working from home on screen and to ask "how they are going" as well as "what they are doing". • Make time for informal check-ins with staff – this could include being available 15 minutes before each team meeting or 15 minutes afterwards if they would like to talk to you. • Ask people how they prefer to connect with you (e.g. by phone, online meetings etc) and tailor individual meetings to suit as far as possible.
Strong team culture	• Build a shared mindset by talking about "we" and intentionally commenting on the contributions that each team member makes to the work/outcomes of the team • Listen for and address any indications of an "Us" and "Them" culture including and concerns that individuals/groups receive different opportunities or consideration. • As part of developing understanding of each other's environments, ask everyone to do a "video tour" of their work area to show the other team members. • Create development opportunities such as cross skilling or buddying in order for team members to develop connections with each other.

	• Ensure there are opportunities for social connections such as virtual shared lunches or a 10 minute drop-in chat before the team meeting starts. • Create small moments of connection. Working from home can mean that it is easier to miss out on the moments that spark innovation. For example, send out small nudges either task based "Why not reach out to another team member today and say hi" or that reinforce team norms "Its ok to ask for help in our team" or that encourage people to explore new information (e.g. sharing relevant links, resources)
Performance	• Ensure everyone know the outcomes, priorities and deadlines, so that everyone knows what is important to focus on • Provide regular feedback about both the work that a staff member is doing and how they are doing it as a member of the team. Where deadlines are missed, or a staff member is not engaging collaboratively with other staff then have the conversation with them to find out what is causing this and how it can be addressed. • Ensure career opportunities and opportunities to be involved in new initiatives/ projects are allocated fairly and not affected by proximity bias which may disadvantage staff working at home with a manager on campus alongside other staff. • Coach staff who are working from home to identify any skills or resources that they need to do their work effectively – this is often visible when working alongside staff, it can be invisible with remote staff.
Meetings	• To be equitable, consider taking all meetings online with a hybrid team; this avoids inequities where some staff are on screen individually and other staff can have side-conversations as part of being on screen in a group in the same room. • Make sure that everyone has the necessary technology and skills to engage effectively in meetings. • Consider the timing, duration and quality of meetings as part of the communication channels and strategy for the team. • Include celebrations and highlights as part of meetings. • Consider whether to have short regular huddles where people can update the team on what they are working on currently or to meet socially.
Technology	• Use technology wisely and intentionally. • Regularly review whether the technology used is fit for purpose for the work of the team members.

	• Ensure shared understanding about the purposes of communication channels and information storage within the team.

References and more information

Working From Home Policy

Working From Home Procedures

Working from Home Guidelines

Adam Grant - The Science of Remote Work https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJMEwBp3wdc

Harvard Business Review (Volume 99): Doing Hybrid Right

Hays - Checklist for managing your remote team. https://www.hays.com.au/blog/insights/a-quick-checklist-to-help-you-manage-your-remote-team-more-easily

Linkedin Learning resources: https://www.linkedin.com/learning/making-hybrid-teams-work/hybrid-teams-can-be-high-performing-teams?autoplay=true&u=74831122

Suzi McAlpine https://suzimcalpine.com/8-tips-for-leading-a-team-remotely/