

# Leadership Framework tools and resources

## Managing employees remotely



**Remote working relationships can be more difficult and challenging to manage than those where the manager and team members work together in one location.**

**As companies grow, it is common for managers and their direct reports to work in different locations, even in different countries. In 2020 more people are working remotely due to a global pandemic.**

While the principles and practices of the Leadership Framework still apply, some areas need a stronger focus. While factors such as the organisation's structure and role design impact performance, working relationships and performance effectiveness, the focus of this document is on what each manager can do to enable productive work for remote workers.

To enable productive work, managers need to maintain strong manager-team member working relationships. With remote workers, however, as managers and team members are in different locations, some people management practices need additional attention to keep people focused and engaged. These practices are:

- i. Continual context setting

Context setting occurs when manager gives team members a broad understanding of what is happening so they can make informed decisions in their work. It ensures the team, as a whole, is more effective, as each team member understands why a task is important, how a particular task fits with other tasks and provides team members with a clear understanding of the limits and freedom within which to act. It enables the team to collaborate directly and use their own judgment to make decisions about their work. Continual context setting enables team members to fully utilise their capability and the capability of the team to improve the way the work is performed.



Continual context setting is achieved by constantly:

- Providing team members with the big picture as it relates to their work.
- Keeping the team informed about the manager's own goals, issues and problems, and how the successful delivery of the teams and each individual's work supports their manager's objectives.
- Providing information on each team member's goals so they understand each other's assignments and can collaborate directly.

## ii. Creating an inclusive culture

This occurs when team members:

- Are kept informed by their manager of what is happening in the business unit.
- Are provided with opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process. This is a genuine two-way process that does not merely take into account the input of team members, but deliberately involves and engages them as a means to build trust, motivation and to ensure an optimum outcome. This does not mean that it is a democracy, where decisions are reached by a consensus or vote. It means that team members are encouraged to have an input and are heard. The manager, as he/she is accountable for the output of the team, makes the final decision.

Achieving an inclusive culture can be difficult for remote workers. It can, however, be enabled with open lines of communication. You, as the manager, must take accountability for communication but let your direct report know that they have a responsibility as well and that you expect them to approach you with anything that needs to be discussed.

## iii. Providing role clarity

To ensure role clarity, a manager must make sure team members understand their role requirements. While important for all employees, it is more important for remote workers, as they do not have the opportunity to get continual feedback. Role clarity, including clear accountability and authority, builds individual confidence and esteem and generates trust in the system of work. It extends beyond the tasks in the position description. It includes the broader accountabilities of all employees for their work, and how they are expected to work with their manager, their team and others in the organisation, without needing to constantly refer to their manager for assistance.



iv. Providing a safe working environment

It is difficult for managers to understand the working environment of remote team members but, besides any moral or legal obligation to do so, managers cannot build strong manager-team member working relationships or expect productive work in an unsafe work environment. This not only includes providing a safe physical environment, but also an environment free from bullying and harassment. During conversations lookout for signs of distress.

v. Clear task assignment

It is by setting clear tasks with clear boundaries for work that managers create the necessary conditions for productive work and create an environment that maximises creativity, ensuring optimum output and building trust.

To be performed correctly, tasks must be assigned in a way that ensures the team member has a clear understanding of the context, purpose, quality and quantity required. There must also be a clear understanding of what time the task is due and what resources are available for task completion. The acronym for this task assigning method is a CPQQRT. Having a CPQQRT helps establish trust and fairness in assigning work and then assessing work against those agreements.

Remember, remote workers may not have access to all the information available to others, so an increased focus is required in setting the context ie why this work needs to be done and how it fits with the team's business direction.

Furthermore, when performing a task, there are many pathways to choose from, many of which are plausible. Providing the task's context allows a team member to select a pathway that takes into account the current issues and circumstances of their local environment. It is this choosing of a pathway that gets people motivated and energetic about their work.

vi. Assessing and evaluating work

When evaluating team member performance, it must be based on what is achieved and how it is achieved. When you and your direct report work in different locations, it can be difficult to see how they accomplish their work, so consult with those who have worked with your team members in-person and who have observed first-hand how they work. By focusing equally on what and how they have achieved, you can accommodate the different work styles of direct reports in locations with different norms and cultures.



vii. Recognising and rewarding good work

When team members are in different locations from their manager it is easy to forget to recognise their good work. Managers need to make a conscious effort to do this for remote team members. The easiest and quickest reward is a verbal 'thank you' for a job well done.

viii. Addressing the work interests of all employees

To ensure team members remain engaged, managers must constantly address the four key questions that all employees can be expected to have. These are:

- Where are we going?  
(What is our direction? What are our priorities? What do we need to do to be successful?)
- What's my role?  
(What is my part in this?)
- How will my performance be judged?  
(How am I going to be measured?)
- Where am I going?  
(What is my future in the company?) - This last question is answered by the Manager-Once-Removed

Keeping the focus on answering the '4 Questions' engages each individual in their work.

ix. Communication

The time and methods for communication are always difficult and will need to take into account different locations, different time zones, customs and different preferences. There will always be a need to maintain formal 'one on ones', however managers may need to adjust the frequency to the needs of individuals. Some people may need a daily check in, others may only need weekly or fortnightly contact.

Furthermore, the idea that everyone is "on demand" all hours just because they are at home is not correct. They will need natural breaks and time for lunch. Work together to create ground rules about how and when you will communicate with one another.



Some communication ground rules to consider include:

- Methods you will use to communicate - Discuss the methods you will use to communicate, such as telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, social networking sites and video conferencing.
- Timeframe for responding to communications - Determine an appropriate timeframe for responding to avoid “virtual silence”, which can cause confusion and damage remote working relationships.
- Contacting each other outside of regular business hours - Employees in remote working relationships often work in different time zones, so normal work hours may not always overlap. Agree on acceptable hours for communication and decide how you and your employees can reach one another outside of normal working hours in case of emergency.

x. Ensure effective systems of work

Part of a manager’s role is to ensure team members have the tools and resource to not just perform their role but to perform it well, otherwise they may lose their motivation. Make sure team members have the technology they need to be successful. This may just be a mobile phone and laptop or the ability to attend virtual meetings. Some employees will have most of the equipment required, but is it fit for purpose? Do not just assume that people know how to operate with virtual communications - or are comfortable in that environment.

## Things to remember

People perform their best work when they are:

- Clear about the goal.
- Clear about what is expected and the boundaries within which they must work.
- Given some freedom to determine how they are going to achieve their goals.



## Related content

This information has been taken and summarised from information on [The Leadership Framework members site](#) in the sections:

- [Leading yourself – Manage relationships](#)
- [Leading people – Assigning and assessing work](#)
- [Leading people – Build teamwork](#)
- [Leading the organisation – Design and maintain productive systems of work](#)

Information on organisational design impacts on employees can be found in the sections:

- [Leading people – Create effective roles and fill them with good people](#)
- [Leading the organisation – Design the organisation](#)
- [Leading the organisation – Enable systemic trust and fairness](#)

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