

World Health Organization

Guidance for managers: teleworking in the context of COVID-19

31 March 2020

As several WHO Offices are now operating with extensive teleworking arrangements, this document aims at providing guidance and support for managers.

The situation is unprecedented and new for all members of the workforce, even for managers who are experienced in supervising colleagues on occasional teleworking.

So, as a manager, what should you keep in mind, what should you do and not do?

Note that in this document, the word “team” could refer generally speaking to a division, a department, a unit or a team.

1. Be aware of the limitations of our new working environment:

- Remember that working from home at this difficult time may pose challenges, not only to you but to all your team members.
- Keep in mind that, while trying to fulfill their normal tasks, some colleagues have been called to perform additional tasks related to COVID-19.
- Remember that some staff members might experience stress due to concerns related to the health situations of their families by having to provide them with special care, which might include monitoring the health condition and the evolution of symptoms for themselves or family members, liaising with doctors, dealing with the repatriation of family members, and/or helping family members abroad.
- Be aware that such a stressful working environment may prevent you and your team members from being as focused on the work as usual.

2. Set up your own working environment to be as productive as possible

- Do as you would if there was depressurization of the cabin on a flight: first put on your oxygen mask and then assist others 😊.
- Find the best possible place for you to work at home and ensure that your tools are adequate (computer, internet connections, microphones, webcam, additional screens...).
- Explain your work schedule and habits to the persons living with you.
- Establish a work routine and do your best to follow it.

3. Understand the new working environment of your colleagues

- In many if not all cases, the working environment of your colleagues has drastically changed in recent weeks: they may be alone at home or together with other family members; they may have a quiet room to work and concentrate or they may be using shared space; they may have young children who require attention; they may have older children who need assistance with homework; they may be caring for older parents; they or their family members may have health issues.
- While expressing interest and concern for your colleagues, remain sensitive and understand that not everybody may want to share details of their personal life.
- Convey the message that you understand that the situation is not the same for all colleagues and **be patient and flexible regarding work-related expectations.**

4. Understand the revised policies

- Please read and become familiar with the [Administrative Guidelines](#)
- Read regularly the [Teleworking Q&A](#) as they are updated frequently.
- Note that while full-time teleworking should be the norm, some of your colleagues may require to be on partial teleworking and/or on special leave with full pay. Send a message to teleworking@who.int to further discuss the specific situation.

5. Ensure regular communication with the team

- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Make sure you keep an open and regular line of communication with your teams, as a group and individually as necessary.
- Keep in mind that there are different ways of communicating: via emails, video calls, telephone... Use all of them as they are complementary to each other.
- Have group meetings and have one to one conversations.
- Identify for each group, each situation, each person what is the best tool to use (see below) and be ready to change and improve as you learn what works best.
- Be mindful of the tone of your voice and how you write to colleagues.
- Be flexible about timing, particularly as regards starting times for meetings, as current circumstances may have an impact.

6. Maintain a collaborative approach:

- Try to communicate effectively with colleagues; avoid confrontation and accusations and accept differences of opinions.
- Be mindful that, in the present situation, everybody is under tremendous pressure and, as a result, emotions run high. Virtual communications, on the other hand, make it more difficult to fully assess other colleagues' non-verbal language, leading to potential misunderstandings.
- Make sure that in the face of differences of opinion you take the time to reflect upon the different perspectives around an issue, rather than rushing to a decision and acting on impulse.
- When facing a difficulty, make sure you focus on the problem as objectively as you can, rather than focusing on the person who appears as the source of the problem. In addressing different

perspectives on a problem, be mindful of the language used. Polarized language with terms such as right/wrong or true/false is not helpful to find solutions.

- Remember that problems result from different perspectives about an issue, so try to address those perceptions taking into account the information available to each of you.
- In reaching a decision, make sure you explain your choice based on relevant factual information, and describe how that decision relates to the general objectives and values agreed upon by the team.
- If you feel you are experiencing challenges teleworking with one of your colleagues or team members, try first to engage with that person. If the problem persists, get advice from your next level supervisor.
- If you would like to explore options and get advice on how best to address a situation, do not hesitate to reach out to the appropriate support services, including, Human Resources, the Staff Association, SHW, Ethics or the Ombudsman.

7. Learn how to use the best tools and share good practices

- Use the [IT Checklist](#) to select the best tool.
- You may not be an IT expert, so do not hesitate to ask other colleagues to assist you and others. This might be a wonderful opportunity to create new working relations, and to support each other.
- **Learn how to conduct a virtual meeting**
All meetings, being virtual or not should be well managed, but virtual ones are particularly difficult to manage if you are not well prepared.
 - Send invitations in advance and be clear about the tool that will be used.
 - Send the agenda and any background material before the meeting.
 - Plan adequate time for the meeting.
 - Have clear objectives for the meeting and be focused.
 - Avoid lengthy presentations.
 - Invite participants to turn on their videos, so that everybody can feel they are in the same meeting, but don't oblige participants to keep their videos on as they require strong internet connection that is not always available, and some participants may need to keep their video off due to their situation at home.
 - Be flexible about dress code, informal is fine when working from home and meeting colleagues. But should you need to invite an external participant to your meeting, please clarify to your colleagues, if required, that the dress code will be business attire for that meeting.
 - Ask all participants to mute their end if they don't speak to reduce background noise.
 - Call on individuals to speak, by a virtual "tour de table".
 - Wrap up on time and highlight the agreed points of the meeting and the next steps.

8. Be clear about your expectations, have a plan for the team and be ready to adjust it

- COVID19 outbreak came shortly after you had defined the workplans for your team. These workplans may have to be adjusted to the reality of what is now possible for your team to achieve.
- Do not maintain unreasonable expectations. Listen and respond to the feedback provided by your team.
- Don't expose your colleagues to burn-out. Keep in mind that high level performers might not accept the reality of their situation: it is impossible to perform at the same level if you have to prepare 3 meals per day for a family of 5 persons and replace the teachers of your children...
- Offer opportunities for colleagues to step in to help others, as some colleagues might be less busy than others.
- **Find the right balance between work delivery and caring for colleagues.**

9. Lead by example

- We know that in difficult times more than ever, managers have to set the right tone.
- Stay safe and healthy, continue doing physical activities at home and connect to the Fitness Workplace Group: [StayingActive@WHO Workplace Group](mailto:StayingActive@WHO).
- Be organized, be clear, be patient, be kind.

10. Don't hesitate to ask for additional support

- We know that doctors can be sick and will seek support from others. Similarly, managers might be overwhelmed by their tasks and should seek support.
 - For Emergency Contact 24h 7/7: shwemergency@who.int +41 22 791 11 15
 - Covid-19 medical advice covid19-shw-hotline@who.int
 - Staff Counsellor: Ms CASALIS, Nathalie casalishn@who.int +41 22 791 3231
 - Staff Psychologist: Ms MURINO, Eva murinoe@who.int +41 22 791 30 40
 - For any questions related to teleworking: teleworking@who.int
 - For any other work-related concerns, including difficulties with your team members:
Ombudsman: ombudsman@who.int; Mr MARTINEZ-ARAGON, Jose +41 79 290 7200;
Ms ANKRAH-NTAMBWE (+41 79 443 5610).
