Hints and tips for anyone working remotely

Organisational Development
April 2020
Introduction

- The current situation is unprecedented and many across the College are now working under very different conditions than is their norm.
- Few of us would choose to work in such extreme isolation, separated from other team members and colleagues.
- This slide deck has some tips and techniques to help you cope, whatever your work.
What’s here?

• The Challenges
• Issues associated with remote working
• Attributes and skills to make remote working a success
• Running or attending remote meetings
• Further resources
The Challenges
Key Barriers

• Things that cause the most issues when trying to work remotely with others
  – Distance
  – Culture (for cross cultural teams)
  – Time Zones
  – Technology
How far is remote? What is the likelihood of spontaneous and social communication happening?

‘Out of sight’ needn’t mean ‘out of mind’. It’s important to maintain your social connections, if only online. You will however need to make an effort to stay in touch (beyond the needs of work). A surprise phone call or scheduled coffee break can help sustain friendships and lift spirits.
Culture

• National cultures
  – individual or group
  – seniority or experience
  – work and life
  – meaning of success
  – language

• Organisational cultures

• Functional cultures

Most teams now working remotely will be already established and used to working together. In a remote setting however cultural differences perhaps in terms of communication preferences and style may be heightened. Be sensitive to and make allowances for these.
Most RH teams will be working within the same/GMT time zone but some may have colleagues who are currently located in another country or on another continent.

Take this into account when scheduling your calls or meetings.

Don’t always expect those in India or the US to be online early or late in (their) day.

Technology

• It has only just been rolled out and many who are using it for the first time may need time and patience as they learn

  ▪ For technical help see the webpages:
    ➢ Being Prepared To Work Remotely
    ➢ Collaborating with colleagues
    ➢ Teams Channel

MS Teams is the collaborative tool Royal Holloway is using
Issues associated with remote working
Despite some of the positives of working remotely such as the shorter commute to the office, it can increase workload and the possibility of burnout. There is a temptation to simply keep working as technology enables us to connect at all hours and the usual distractions are not there to ease the pressure and provide variety.

- Schedule breaks and ensure you take them
- Prioritise what is important vs urgent
- Be open about your progress & what you are working on
- Be sure you understand what is expected of you and manage the expectations of others on what you can deliver
When your home is now also your work environment keeping the two as separate spaces, physically and mentally, can be challenging

The divide between them may blur with the temptation to keep checking or responding to emails after work hours

Structure your working day as much as possible and take regular and scheduled breaks

At the end of the (virtual) working day – GO HOME
Communicating by email when working remotely

An increase in email usage can be typical when working remotely as it is relied on more than the usual forms of communication such as telephone and face to face conversations.

Misunderstandings can also occur & escalate particularly when there is a ‘time lag’ between receipt and response e.g. when working across time zones or in fast moving / changing conditions.

To prevent it becoming overwhelming and adding to stress levels, manage your email traffic and correspondence carefully by:

- Using it mainly to pass information or files rather than ask questions or chat.
- Checking all the information needed is included to both receive and deliver a valuable response.
- Thinking about the tone (formality /reader orientation / directness / presuppositions). Is it appropriate for the audience & the message?
Working alone remotely

For those more used to working alongside others on a regular basis (and that is most of us) remote working and isolation may bring extra challenges

- The physical proximity of team members provides camaraderie and mutual support which isn’t as accessible when working in a remote team.

- The speed and ease of doing work can decrease; it may take longer to receive a response to questions or gain agreement on decisions; the potential for miscommunication or misunderstanding is higher and frustrations greater.

- When our usual network of expertise is not as close it may force us to become more self-reliant; learning new tools and working in new ways in record time.
Working with others remotely

- Hold regular team meetings
- Start each meeting with a ‘temperature check’ e.g. on a scale of 1-10 how do you feel today?
- Be clear about what are the team goals and tasks; they may need to change or be re-prioritised
- Be flexible and open to doing things differently if only in the short term
- Clarify any interdependencies of work and how it may impact what you are doing
- Constructively address any disagreement or misunderstandings
The new normal

• If you are caring for children now at home full time and/or vulnerable people you will also be adjusting to a new home as well as work environment

• Try and find a new routine that works for your household rather than following the old one exactly

• Increase your focus on your own as well as other’s health and well-being
Those with caring responsibilities

The College recognises that these are exceptional circumstances people are working under so you may want to talk to your line manager about e.g. ...

- Changing your pattern of working hours during the day to accommodate the needs of children and other dependents at different times
- Balancing shorter hours worked on some days with longer hour on others when, for example, others may be able to share caring responsibilities
- Working different days e.g. alternate days with others sharing caring responsibilities
- Requesting leave at short notice
- Reducing the percentage of time worked for a temporary period

For more information see Guidance on working from home with children
Attributes & skills to make remote working a success
Team resilience

Resilience is variously defined as “bouncing back from adversity”; “the skill and the capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change”

How well the team will survive and even thrive when under pressure or during adversity will be impacted by:
- relations in the team
- the degree of existing cohesion
- openness and flexibility
- experience of individual members

Increase and maintain resilience in the team by:
- Speaking about your shared experience of the situation
- Remembering the values that bind you
- Utilising the strengths of individual members
- Being tolerant and flexible
- Focusing on what you can control
- Using humour and creativity to lighten the load!
Skills and qualities needed in a virtual world

• Important qualities when working remotely with others: S.O.A.R.

  • Sincerity
  • Openness
  • Acceptance
  • Reliability

“Trust needs touch” said Charles Handy, but it is not impossible to build and/or maintain it when working remotely. When social/close connection is not possible, increase your focus on and demonstration of these qualities even if you have previously worked together in the physical world.
There is a wealth of resource and material on the internet to help with development. See ‘Further Resources’ at the end of this presentation for suggestions.

Continue to conduct as many normal activities and practices online as possible.

Celebrate success and what is working well.
Managing in stressful times

Bolster morale and build a sense of community through acts of kindness, however small. Encourage people to share their stories of how they have helped or been helped by those around them.
Running or attending remote meetings
What’s best?

- **Simple exchange of info, yes/no answers**
  - Teams instant chat
  - Phone call

- **Detailed exchange of opinion/information**
  - Email

- **Discussion**
  - Virtual meeting
  - Face to face meeting

- **Plan and work together**
  - Network Drives
  - Use the share screen facility on MS Teams
Planning and running your virtual meeting

• Create an agenda and share it on screen
• Agree a social contract with the team on how you want to work online
• Share screen to show any papers or documents you are discussing
• Use features that enable you to exchange work and comment on same document simultaneously
• Summarise key actions & make a record of who is to do what at the end
Managing who is speaking

- Make a list of all participants
- Make enough columns to cover the key points on the agenda, plus a few extra
- Treat each agenda item as a ‘round’ of contributions
- As you invite each person to speak on each agenda item – keep a note of the ORDER in which they speak (by numbering as you go along)
- If some speaks twice on a subject, add an extra tick
- In this you can see that:
  - Cate spoke last in the first two discussions – it would be good practice to invite her to speak sooner in the next round
  - Farah possibly dominated Item 1 - which may be appropriate, or you may want to manage Farah’s contribution in the next round
- Make the last column Agreed Actions, and ensure each person speaks to confirm what, if any, actions they will be taking.

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Agenda items are:

Information to share – one or two people give info, and all others are invited by the call manager to ask questions or share reflections/feedback.

Issues to explore – person who ‘owns’ the issue to seek input from others. Owner outlines issue and context, others invited to reflect, contribute or ask questions. Owner continues to seek further contribution from rest of group as needed.

Decisions to make – one or two people invited to outline the recommended decision and all relevant info. Others are invited to ask questions, share reflections, share feedback. One person sums up feedback and suggests the outcome of the decision. Others invited to agree/disagree. If no agreement, call manager to invite contributions for practical next steps where appropriate.
Remote meeting etiquette

Remember that if you ask people to mute their microphones (where there is a lot of background noise) – you will miss those non-verbal hmmms and ahhs that tell you a lot of what is going on behind the camera – not as perfect as in real life, but it works well.

Spend the first five minutes or so on small talk – it helps people get familiar with the concept of virtual communication before you start your content.

Make sure cameras are switched on (though be aware of what surroundings are on view).
The four classic challenges

- Eye contact
- Body language
- Disagreement
- Silence
The four classic challenges

- Camera on
- Look at camera
- Use people’s names
- Eye contact
- Body language
- Disagreement
- Silence
The four classic challenges

Eye contact

Body language

Disagreement

Silence

Leave mics on

Use chat features + emojis

Frequently check in
The four classic challenges

- **Eye contact**
  - Don’t ignore
  - Ask for other perspectives
  - Take offline if it distracts too much

- **Disagreement**

- **Body language**

- **Silence**
The four classic challenges

- Eye contact
- Body language
- Disagreement
- Silence

- Everyone speaks at start of meeting
- Ask open questions
- Leave pauses
- Invite comments by name
When it all goes wrong

- If you are hosting and the meeting is high profile, prepare a co-host who can take over.
- Log off and back on again.
- Dial in by phone (if you have this facility).
- Re-schedule if needed.
Courses & Materials

• **Remote Working: setting yourself and your teams up for success** (various short free courses on the Linkedin website – you will need a Linkedin profile)

• **How to manage conference calls and online meetings**
Mandatory Online Training for staff

Now might be a good time to catch up on the RH mandatory online courses

• Fire safety
• General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
• Cyber Security
• Equality and diversity
• Freedom of Information
• Anti-fraud
We hope this guide has been of some help but if you would like further information or advice please contact the OD team at: Orgdev@rhul.ac.uk