managing a
dispersed team

in the victorian public sector

State Government
Victoria

state**services**authority

managing a
dispersed team
in the victorian public sector

The Victorian Government has vested the State Services Authority with functions designed to foster the development of an efficient, integrated and responsive public sector which is highly ethical, accountable and professional in the ways it delivers services to the Victorian community.

The key functions of the Authority are to:
- identify opportunities to improve the delivery and integration of government services and report on service delivery outcomes and standards;
- promote high standards of integrity and conduct in the public sector;
- strengthen the professionalism and adaptability of the public sector; and
- promote high standards of governance, accountability and performance for public entities.

The Authority seeks to achieve its charter by working closely and collaboratively with public sector organisations.

contact us

Contents

about this guide

who this guide is for

This guide is for public sector managers whose direct reports work in a different location from them.

when to use this guide

This guide will be useful when you have been given management responsibility for managing staff who are physically distant from you. This can occur as a consequence of:

- you taking on a new management role;

- an organisational decision affecting the workforce (for example, re-locating part of the workforce);

- a change in work practices (for example, a new requirement to conduct work at a remote location); or

- a change to the work arrangements for an individual to a dispersed team (for example, an arrangement for them to work from home on a regular basis).

what's in this guide

This guide highlights the issues you need to think about when managing a dispersed team. It also provides some practical tips on how to apply good people management techniques when your staff are physically distant from you.

what's not in this guide

This guide does not provide advice on employee contracts or industrial relations matters as they relate to a dispersed team. You do need to be aware of employer obligations under enterprise agreements or determinations. However, because Victorian public sector employees are employed by a number of agreements, you need to familiarise yourself with the specific documents and frameworks that apply to your staff.

assumptions

This guide assumes that you are familiar with the basic principles of managing people such as:

- organising work plans and performance targets for staff members;

- providing regular informal feedback to staff members on their performance;

- selecting staff for roles on the basis of selection criteria and personal qualities that are critical for success (for example values, initiative and motivation); and

- managing your own time and priorities.

index of key topics

1. what is a dispersed team?

defining dispersed team

A dispersed team is one in which a manager and their direct reports do not work in the same physical location for a significant period of time. A dispersed team is created when one or more direct reports works on a regular basis for an entire working week:

- in an office that is in a different location but part of the same organisation;

- in an office that is in a different location and part of another organisation;

- in the field (at clients' homes, at project sites, at inspection sites, 'on the road' between sites); and/or

- from home.

Some forms of dispersed work teams result from the intrinsic nature of the role (for example, conducting on-site inspections or visiting regional clients). Other forms of dispersed teams are the consequence of work arrangements in which team members work at different locations to aid work-life balance or to accommodate special needs.

A dispersed team may be an ongoing arrangement or a fixed term arrangement, for example, as part of a specific project.

Common terms used to describe various forms of dispersed work

Digital nomad: Someone who do not has an office, but does their work in a variety of locations (such as cafes or airports) using portable ICT devices.

Distributed work: Another term for a dispersed team or workforce; that is, the team or workforce are not physically located together.

e-work: Work that is undertaken primarily through ICT devices and does not require a worker to come into a physical office. They may work at home (telecommute) or in a variety of locations (digital nomad).

Field work: Work that is undertaken away from an office at the site where specific activities or events take place; similar to mobile work.

Home-based work or working from home: Work that is undertaken at home where the home is used as an office.

Human cloud: A way of describing a group of people who contribute to a specific project or work task, typically by sending in their contributions, but who may never meet in person.

Mobile work: Work that is undertaken in a variety of locations, typically where clients are, or where certain work-related activities or events take place.

Remote work: Similar to field work, but where the location is a long way from a population centre such as a town and infrastructure.

Common terms used to describe various forms of dispersed work

Results Only Work Environment (ROWE): An arrangement where the focus is solely on the outcomes of the work and the work may be undertaken at any place or at any time that suits the team member.

Road warrior: Someone whose job involves considerable amount of time driving, usually from one site to another; akin to field work.

Telecommuting: A situation where a team member stays at home but participates in work and the workplace using ICT (typically, email and phone).

Telework: The work undertaken in a telecommuting arrangement.

Virtual collaboration or teaming: This is a situation where members of a formal or informal team never meet in person but interact through electronic communication or else contribute their work independently to a central coordination point. Also known as a human cloud.

Virtual work: The work undertaken in a virtual collaboration or teaming situation.

where do members of dispersed teams work?

- Client or project sites
- Home
- Hub offices – an office where people from a range of organisation come together to work and share office resources
- Satellite office – regional or overseas offices
- Neighbourhood work centre – similar to a hub office but often with office skills and other training activities occurring on place as part of community support initiatives
- On the road/mobile
- Public places such as cafes
- The offices of other organisations

Costs and benefits

In some cases an organisation may have no choice about having dispersed teams: the nature of the work demands it.

However in other situations the creation of dispersed teams may be a choice that either or both the organisation and its employees can make.

The costs and benefits of dispersed work will vary from organisation to organisation, depending on the role and nature of the work, and organisational culture.[1]

---

1   V Illegems & A. Verbeke, 'Telework: What Does It Mean for Management?', *Long range planning*, Vol. 37, 2004, pp. 319–334.

Potential benefits	Potential costs/risks
Increased opportunity to understand, communicate with, and improve services for local communities.	Increased costs associated with ICT investments.
Attraction or retention of a broader labour market where geographic or mobility requirements may have excluded certain candidates from employment.	Reduced opportunities for social interaction, hence increased risk of employee disengagement and/or organisational knowledge loss.
Reduced absenteeism (in the case of telecommuting and where the cause of absenteeism relate to difficulties attending work at a particular location)[2].	Increased risk to data security.
Increased flexibility and organisational agility.	Potential loss of opportunity for individuals to access, or be noticed for, career or skill development opportunities.
infrastructure savings such as lower lease costs where there is opportunity to consolidate office space[3].	Increased occupational health and safety risks.
Increased productivity.	

To see an example of a tool that helps managers consider costs, see the VicRoads 'Working Remotely Manager's Guidelines and Checklist' which is on the SSA website along with other tools.

---

2 Reducing rates of absenteeism through providing alternative (flexible) work arrangements and telecommuting (found to be the most effective methods of reducing unscheduled absences due to reasons such as family issues, personal needs or stress) CCH 2007, 17th annual *Unscheduled Absence Survey*, http://www.cch.com/press/news/2007/20071010h.asp, viewed 24 October 2012.

3 S Clune & S Hunter, 'Work where I live: Advancing the flexible workplace for the Triple Bottom Line', report prepared for Sustainability Victoria and Department of Treasury and Finance, RMIT University, Melbourne, 2001.

what are the trends?

Dispersed work teams have long existed within the Victorian public sector for a number of functions (for example, service delivery, stewardship or regulatory roles).

However, one type of dispersed work, teleworking, is still relatively uncommon. Australia lags behind the US and European countries where it is more widespread. About six per cent of Australians have been identified as working from home, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. [4] However, this figure is forecast to double by 2020.[5] The uptake of teleworking and similar ICT-dependent working arrangements is expected to increase across Australia with the rollout of the National Broadband Network.[6]

---

4   Access Economics, 'Impacts of Teleworking under the NBN', report prepared for Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2010.
5   B Howarth, 'Doing the Telecommute', *HR monthly*, August, 2012, p. 33.
6   Access Economics, 'Impacts of Teleworking under the NBN', report prepared for Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2010.

2. how to make it work for you as a manager

keywords: *evaluation | evidence | organisational policies*

when a dispersed team can work well

A dispersed team will function best when there is:

- **a culture of support** within an organisation, starting at the top. This support needs to be shown in practical ways; for example, development and communication of policies on dispersed work arrangements, supply of equipment, and adequate funding for ICT support.

- **trust** between the manager and the staff member. The presence of trust encourages increased productivity, organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviours.[7] In dispersed work situations, trust is related to perceptions of good performance and job satisfaction, and reduces reported stress.[8]

- **adaptive management:** Traditional management approaches that depend on physical interaction need to be replaced by a progressive and innovative leadership mentality that can design and implement effective dispersed working arrangements.[9] The capabilities of managers and staff are vital parts of this equation which means that you may need development to address any skill gaps you may have, especially regarding management techniques.

- **the equipment and environment** enables effective working away from you and the rest of the members of the team while allowing regular connection to it.

- **the individual's personal circumstances and work traits** are congruent with the requirements for effective dispersed work (for example, self-management, preference for focus on tasks versus preference for social contact). See appendix A for a managers tool: self-assessment on leadership style. Also see appendix B for a sample assessment tool of staff members.

7   J Richardson, 'Managing flexworkers: holding on and letting go', *Journal of management development*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2010, pp. 137–147.

8   K Kowalski, & J Swanson, 'Critical Success Factors in Developing Teleworking Programs', *Benchmarking: a international journal'*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2005, pp. 236–249.

9   E A Offstein, J M Morwick, & L Koskinen, 'Making Telework Work: Leading People and Leveraging Technology for Competitive Advantage', *Strategic HR review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2010, pp.32–37.

when a dispersed team will run into difficulties

A dispersed team will run into difficulties when one or more of the following occurs:

- individuals working away from their manager feel compelled to work longer hours. This may be because they perceive others think they have a privileged work arrangement or that they will be judged more harshly on their work performance.

- the work requires a high degree of task interdependence with others who are located at a central office (i.e. lots of communication and coordination). Performance and collaboration may be affected, particularly if there are limitations with communication technology (such as restricted bandwidth[10] or poor mobile phone coverage).

- the ICT equipment and services often fail, or do not integrate with databases in the office, or ICT helpdesk support services cannot be accessed from outside the office. This can lead to frustration for the whole team. It can also reduce job satisfaction and productivity for the individuals working at different locations.[11]

- if the relationship between the individual and the manager is problematic (for example, unclear performance objectives and measures, poor quality interactions), the arrangement will not work. It is likely to lead to some significant trust, productivity, engagement and job satisfaction issues.[12]

- if an individual is never visits or spends time in the office where the majority of colleagues are located, there a considerable risk of professional and social isolation.[13] This may have an impact on an individual's career prospects or their mental health.
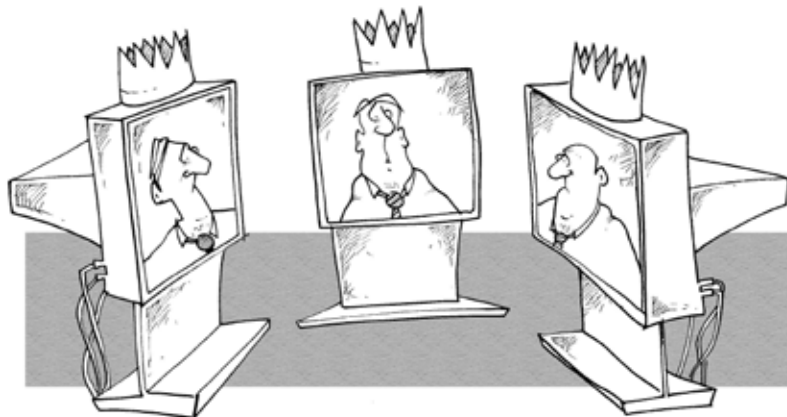
TELEWORKING WAS THE DEATH OF THE OFFICE PARTY

Source : www.CartoonStock.com

---

10   R S Gajendran & D A Harrison, 'The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown about Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences', *Journal of applied psychology*, Vol. 92, No. 6, 2007, pp. 1524–1541.

11   V Illegems & A Verbeke, 'Telework: What Does It Mean for Management?', *Long range planning*, Vol. 37, 2004, pp. 319–334.

12   ibid.

13   ibid.

regular evaluation of arrangements

Periodic review of dispersed working arrangements are strongly recommended for all work teams. At a minimum, you should meet with each staff member every twelve months to review work arrangements and talk about what does and doesn't work well, and make adjustments where needed.

In your assessment, you should include any quantitative data that is available in your organisation to assess arrangements. This may include:

• People Matter Survey data (for example, workplace wellbeing, job satisfaction, engagement and relationship with manager); and

• Workforce metrics (for example, retention rate, unscheduled absence rate, organisational tenure staffing breakdown).

The SSA publication *Making Flexible Work a Success* contains a comprehensive set of tools to help managers and employees plan, implement and review flexible work arrangements. It also describes a process for conducting cyclical reviews of work arrangements. These resources can be of assistance when reviewing arrangements such as teleworking that may be discretionary and have been established by negotiation between you and the employee.

Case study

Request for telecommuting arrangement

Marje leads a team of 14 staff members who work out of a central office agency. She has a mix of full-time and part-time staff. Judy, who handles administration for the team, approached Marje to request an ongoing telecommuting arrangement.

Marje had doubts about Judy's ability to work independently at home given she often sought advice from others in doing her work and sometimes didn't organise her daily priorities very well. And apart from that, she did like a chat with her team mates.

Marje met with Judy to discuss her concerns and gave her the opportunity to respond on how she could address these matters. They finally settled on an arrangement that both were happy with. After a period of coaching on personal organisation and time management, Judy was able to satisfy Marje's concerns about this matter. Then a trial period of a day a week telecommuting was arranged. Judy was able to demonstrate improvements in her productivity and greater self-reliance and ability to solve problems. (Also the distraction levels in the main office appeared to be less on those days too.) Given these unexpected results, Marje was convinced enough to extend the arrangement to a 12-month period.

Case study

An arrangement does not work out

Tony was a long-serving member of his organisation. He had worked successfully in a number of regional and metropolitan roles during his career. He was successful in the last year in gaining appointment to a role that required him to work in a role that featured travel to rural towns to inspect and report on compliance matters.

Tony was happy about the appointment because it was based in the area that he grew up in.

However, over time, Tony's manager, Neville, noticed signs that Tony was not happy. Tony complained more about the organisation, he argued more with team members and criticised any changes being suggested. Some days when Neville phoned, all he reached was Tony's voicemail. Tony never called back. When Neville looked at Tony's outputs, he noticed a remarkable decline in productivity. It was time for a sensitive, face-to-face conversation.

When Tony was presented with the evidence of his declining performance and conduct, he was upset. Eventually it emerged that Tony disliked 'dobbing on old mates' and was, in his view, protecting the community. Tony's confidence was at an all-time low too because his workmates had turned their backs on him. He agreed the best solution was to find him another role in another location, so that he could have a chance to redeem himself. Tony eventually transferred to a metro role where he received the support of new colleagues.

online toolkit For an example of a remote work policy, check the dispersed workforce resources on the SSA website. VicRoads has produced a policy along with guidelines for managers and checklists for working safely.

3. managing a dispersed team

The main challenges of managing a dispersed team arise from the difficulties that physical separation creates for regular, informal communication and for establishing trust and rapport between you and your team (and between members of the team).

This chapter draws upon academic research and insights from people who have worked in dispersed teams. It includes strategies that have been used successfully by public sector managers to overcome the challenges that arise from dispersed work.

which of the following are concerns for you?

	Topic	Go to page…
	What happens to dispersed staff members if they become 'invisible'? Do I need to worry about exclusion or inclusion?	13
	I am not sure that my team's communications are effective. What are reasonable protocols for individual and team communications? How much face-to-face contact do we need?	15
	How do I manage performance and productivity when I can't see my staff member at work? How do I handle misconduct or performance issues?	20
	How do I build trust with dispersed staff members?	24
	Do health and safety issues mean the end of dispersed work? How can I look out for staff members if I don't see them? Some of my dispersed employees appear to be working later/longer hours than are necessary.	28
	Should our dispersed staff members have different ICT systems?	32
	Some of my team have long commutes to work, but don't want to work from home.	33
	What security risks do I need to be aware of?	35
	What skills or qualities are essential for dispersed staff members? What skills do I need to manage dispersed staff members?	39
	What issues do I need to be aware of when planning learning or career development activities for dispersed staff members?	44

encouraging inclusion and visibility

keywords: *visibility | isolation | inclusion*

Isolation and a lack of visibility are issues for employees involved in dispersed work arrangements. These are matters that can affect morale, work relationships and possibly productivity. Therefore, as manager, you should have the conversation with your team about the impact of these issues and what can be done to promote inclusion and visibility.

tackling workplace isolation

The business literature has identified that workplace isolation is a real risk for employees who work in a different location from their manager and work colleagues. Without social and emotional interaction with colleagues, such employees may form a belief they lack support and feel excluded from workplace relationships. There may also be a sense of 'illegitimacy', where they have to work harder to stay on colleague's radars while battling the misperception they are not really working.[14]

One study by an academic, Karen Sobel-Lojeski, has generated a concept called 'virtual distance' to describe the disconnect between team members, whether they are dispersed or working together in one office.[15] The virtual distance comprises three factors:

* physical distance – the geographic separation of team members;

* operational distance – the quality and type of communications (for example, face to face or virtual meetings), other demands on members (for example, working on other projects or programs), distribution of members (for example, numbers of team members co-located or dispersed), and technological capability;

* affinity distance – distribution of members within the organisation hierarchy, communication styles and cultural differences, interdependence and past familiarity.

Sobel-Lojeski has identified teams with a high virtual distance as suffering a 90 per cent drop in effectiveness and over 80 per cent drop in trust, amid other negative effects. Affinity can have a greater effect on productivity and trust than the other two factors. The implication is that managers need to monitor the quality of relationships between team members and encourage activities that promote social inclusion.

One report cited lack of management action as a major factor in employees feeling isolated.[16] To reduce the isolation and promote inclusion in work relationships, managers can:

* check in informally to make employees feel valued;

* promote social interaction among team members;

* encourage staff members pairing and mentoring; and

* facilitate entry for new team members.

---

14   Australian School of Business at UNSW, 'From Freelancers to Telecommuters: Succeeding in the New World of Solitary Work', 5 July 2011, http://knowledge.asb.unsw.edu.au/article.cfm?articleid=1436, viewed 17 February 2012.

15   Quoted in K Ferrazzi, 'Three Symptoms of a Vulnerable Team', *Harvard business review*, 2012, http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2012/09/three_symptoms_of_a_vulnerable_team.html, viewed 21 September 2012.

16   J Mulki, F Bardhi, F Lassk & J Nanavaty-Dahl, 'Set Up Remote Workers to Thrive', *MIT sloan management review*, Fall, Vol. 51, No.1, pp. 63–69.

dealing with lack of visibility

Being 'out of sight, out of mind' is a very real risk in dispersed team arrangements. Casual discussions and sharing experiences are important means of catching up on news or helping with problem solving.[17]

Forgetting that your team is more than just the staff you can see in the office will have serious consequences for productivity (some staff may be over-loaded while others may be under-utilised). It can also have serious consequences for individual staff in terms of their opportunity to develop skills and progress their career. Some practical ways of reminding yourself about your whole team include:

- setting team protocols for contact (for example, daily emails or phone calls, weekly or fortnightly virtual team meetings, six-monthly whole-of-team gatherings in one place, periodic face-to-face meetings with direct reports);

- having photos of all members of your team on the wall visible from your desk;

- communicating with dispersed staff by way of video phone technology, where possible;

- giving staff members in the office the responsibility for sharing information with dispersed staff and advocating their interests and achievements in any spontaneous team conversations;

- making a note of the frequency of your one-on-one contact with staff members who are working at different locations. Make a point of initiating at least one direct contact with each staff member each week (or more frequently if required). This contact could simply be an email to acknowledge work done, to ask for their opinion about something, to remind them they need to take some leave, or to ask them to complete the gifts and hospitality register; and

- signalling your availability and the guidelines for how and when you will respond to formal and informal conversations.[18]

> ## Tip from rural and regional public sector employees
>
> **Invite staff from central office (for example, administration, corporate services, HR) to spend a day working from a rural or regional office. This will give city-based employees an insight into remote working and give dispersed staff members an opportunity to connect with central office staff.**

17   L Harris, 'Home-Based Teleworking and the Employment Relationship: Managerial Challenges and Dilemmas', *Personnel review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2003, pp. 422–437.

18   J Mulki, F Bardhi, F Lassk & J Nanavaty-Dahl, 'Set Up Remote Workers to Thrive', *MIT sloan management review*, Fall, Vol. 51, No.1, 2009, pp. 63–69.

promoting better communications

keywords: team solutions | information sharing | isolation | protocols | etiquette

Communication involves more than attending meetings, exchanging information or using technology. It is also about how people interact (for example, communication style, etiquette). You need to discuss with your staff members what communication protocols should be established. The consequences of poor communication can range from misunderstandings and reduced productivity to damaged work relationships and reduced career prospects. These issues are amplified when staff members are not physically present and miss out on non-verbal signs of problems.

promoting team communications

If not managed well, dispersed staff members can feel they are not being kept 'in the loop'. Managers need to monitor this and find ways to help their team members build connections. This could include the following:

- keep them informed of issues by arranging regular catch-ups or status updates. This is needed to make up for not having those incidental catch-ups that occur in office corridors where colleagues exchange news.

- designate days or dates for a whole-of-team meeting when everybody comes into the central office. If team members work interstate or overseas, this may have to be an annual event – at some stage, a dispersed team will need to meet face-to-face. This will allow them to reconnect with the culture and maintain relationships with the team. Outside of the formal meetings, dispersed staff members should be encouraged to visit others in the office to boost interaction with a wider range of people in the same organisation and build personal networks.

- support team members to establish online channels for interaction such as chat-rooms or enterprise social media such as Yammer. Whatever methods are used, if they are successful, they will enable all team members to be productive and share information, generate ideas, and promote decision making. [19]

- encourage team discussion around what are reasonable times for communication and when people are considered 'out of bounds' or unavailable. Also refer to the section in this guide on health, safety and wellbeing on how managers and teams can keep a look-out for colleagues who work remotely.

19   A D Akkirman & D L Harris, 'Organisational Communication Satisfaction in the Virtual Workplace', *Journal of management development*, Vol. 24, No. 5, 2005, pp. 397–409.

knowledge management and information sharing

Staff members who work alone in community locations can often have different work experiences from their colleagues. The public sector managers interviewed for this guide believe that promoting teamwork among people with disparate experiences and clients is vital to operationalising an organisation's policies and programs.

Bringing individuals together as a team promotes information sharing, builds a program's identity and promotes the feedback loop on the implementation of program goals. Promoting knowledge sharing is important to help such team members build or maintain their connection with the program and organisation, in addition to the local community they serve.

When it is not feasible to bring team members physically together, some public sector organisations rely on enterprise social media (for example, Yammer, VPS Hub, video conferencing) as a vehicle to share information. This enables staff members to progressively accumulate shared knowledge around specific issues and promote an exchange of corporate knowledge.

making the most of 'eyes in the field'

Some managers in large public sector organisations view their dispersed team members as critical links to the community and believe they are important links for building relationships as much as providing a service and delivering on government objectives. These dispersed staff members in turn provide valuable information about stakeholders which helps to inform the organisation's strategic planning.

"

Communication holds the key to how individuals will perceive a decision. In the case of routine decisions, perceptions are likely to be benign or unremarkable. In other cases, the risk of negative perceptions should be managed through good communication.[20]

PSSC Guidelines: Fair and Reasonable Treatment

"

---

20   Public Sector Standards Commissioner, *Fair and reasonable treatment guidelines*, State Services Authority, Melbourne, 2006.

dealing with staff members who stay in the office

One of the greatest risks for office-based staff members is being assigned extra work simply because they are more visible and therefore perceived to be more available. Therefore managers need to be vigilant to ensure the team's workload is distributed fairly.

For team members who stay in the office, there needs to be commitment to ensuring face-to-face meetings do occur when dispersed team members visit. This is vital for building and maintaining relationships between team members.[21] Otherwise, there is a risk of office-based staff members experiencing decreased job satisfaction due to the obstacles to building effective team relationships.

Tips from public sector employees

Employees interviewed for this publication commented that arranging team gatherings for special occasions could sometimes be difficult, but given enough notice, people could be flexible and make arrangements to come in. Their tips include:

- ensure all team members send meeting invitations well in advance (for example, 2 weeks ahead).

- make clear where everyone is – use shared calendars.

- keep everyone in the loop when there's breaking news – email or SMS people who are out of the office.

- take a group photograph and circulate or keep on display for all to see.

creating opportunities for face-to-face contact

A lack of face-to-face interaction is detrimental to relationship building. Emails or phone calls do not provide the non-verbal clues that are the foundation of face-to-face communication. Managers must therefore make a concerted effort to avoid relationships becoming virtual and fleeting,[22] through steps like :

- arranging face-to-face meetings with dispersed staff members every so often to 'touch base'; and

- beginning virtual communications with informal discussions about personal interests to help with relationship building.[23]

21 E Frauenheim, 'Telework May Harm Workers Left at Office, Study Claims', *Workforce*, 1 February 2008, www.workforce.com, viewed 29 August 2012.

22 J Richardson, 'Managing Flexworkers: Holding on and Letting Go', *Journal of management development*, Vol. 29, No.2, 2010, pp. 137–147.

23 J Mulki, F Bardhi, F Lassk & J Nanavaty-Dahl, 'Set Up Remote Workers to Thrive', *MIT sloan management review*, Fall, Vol. 51, No.1, 2009, pp. 63–69.

A comparison of communication methods[24]

Email	Face to face
effective for control, distributing information and requesting specific actions	effective for problem solving and raising awareness of broader environment
	Comment: People who work part of their time away from the office will be able to communicate face to face upon their return. For employees who are full time away from the home office, other media needs to replace face to face communication for problem-solving (for example, video conferencing).

"My manager was in the area and didn't drop by to see me."
Quote from rural VPS employee who was feeling neglected

Managers who have team members in rural and regional offices need to look out for opportunities to meet them face-to-face in their own work environment. A minimum expected frequency would be every six months. Nonetheless, ad-hoc catch-ups are advisable, especially if managers happen to be in the area for other meetings.

---

24   J L McKenney, M H Zack & V S Doherty, 'Complementary Communication Media: A Comparison of Electronic Mail and Face-to-Face Communication in a Programming Team', in Y Baruch, 1992, 'Teleworking; Benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers', *New technology, work and employment*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2000, pp. 34-49.

courtesy and its role in preventing communication breakdowns

Face-to-face conversations enable people to forge connections. People are more likely to be courteous in the presence of other people and will modify their behaviour in response to cues. However, virtual conversations with the absence of visual cues may result in reduced comprehension of messages or lead to a misinterpretation of motives. Over-reliance on email may be risky if the tone of a message inadvertently offends its receiver.[25]

Where there is an absence of personal connection, there is a risk of breakdown in respect and courtesy among colleagues especially if this is accompanied by workplace stressors. Examples of inconsiderate workplace behaviour cited by a US commentator, Ron Ashkenas, include:[26]

• last-minute requests for 'urgent' information without regard for the effort needed to do the work;

• a manager ignoring voicemails and emails that meant resolution of a customer's issue was delayed; and

• a manager who stayed up late at night to participate regularly in teleconferences with colleagues in another part of the world, but received no acknowledgement of this effort.

Continuing experiences with disrespectful treatment by colleagues may lead to a toxic work environment. Ashkenas makes two suggestions to help prevent a breakdown in respect and courtesy:

• convene a meeting with all team members, include virtual members, and discuss what standards for behaviour are expected: What constitutes courteous behaviour? What can be regarded as disrespectful?

• encourage team members to push back or name the bad behaviours they witness. While considering that most employees do not intend to be insensitive or mean to others, the offended parties should be encouraged to describe the impact the behaviour is having on them.

Public sector managers have identified problem-solving skills and resilience as important attributes of dispersed workers (see section on selecting the right people for the arrangement). Therefore, some managers run 'resilience' workshops for their teams to help them learn how to communicate with impact, and build clarity around the intentions of others.

> "
>
> Employees need to be confident to state ideas and opinions openly. Indications that this is not the case (such as requests for input to be confidential or anonymous to assure a response) should be heeded and addressed.[27]
>
> ### PSSC Guidelines: Fair and Reasonable Treatment
>
> "

---

25 D A Whetton & K S Camerson, *Developing management skills*, Sixth Edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2005, p. 549.

26 R Ashkenas, 'Bring Courtesy Back to the Workplace', *Harvard business review*, 2012, http://blogs.hbr.org/ashkenas/2012/09/bring-courtesy-back-to-the-wor.html, viewed 13 September 2012.

27 Public Sector Standards Commissioner, *Fair and reasonable treatment guidelines*, State Services Authority, Melbourne, 2006.

managing performance

keywords: evaluating performance | support | conduct or performance concerns

Managing performance is a key part of every manager's role. In the context of dispersed work, the key activities are no different from those used for office-based employees; for example, set objectives, give informal and formal feedback, give recognition and acknowledgement. Having a dispersed team will test your skills in this area because you cannot fall back on managing simply by presence.[28] As a manager of dispersed staff members you have to develop some other techniques that are not reliant upon proximity.

Dispersed staff members need clarity on how their performance will be assessed. By discussing your expectations of performance upfront, you and your team should be able to agree on what performance will be measured and how it will be communicated. Some staff have agreed action plans and 'to do' lists, which act as an ongoing reminder of priority tasks and help maintain focus and productivity. Such documents provide a convenient way to measure performance and provide an agenda for conversations with the manager and co-workers when they are back in the office.

Aside from performance targets, ensure you have a chat with the staff member upfront about your mutual expectations of *how* work is done. This includes discussion of work times and availability for contact. Work hours should accommodate the staff member's need to take breaks, for work-life balance as well as complying with employment contracts and industrial agreements. This is in addition to any inherent requirements of the job (for example, rosters to meet customer service needs, shift work).

"

Regular assessment of progress toward goals focuses the attention and efforts of an employee or team.[29]

Wayne Cascio, Professor of Management

"

28   E A Offstein, J M Morwick & L Koskinen, 'Making Telework Work: Leading People and Leveraging Technology for Competitive Advantage', *Strategic HR review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2010, pp.32–37.

29   W F Cascio, 'Managing a Virtual Workplace', *Academy of management executive*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 81–90.

support and encourage performance

One of your responsibilities for managing performance is ensuring your staff members have the support and resources to do their jobs well and on time. When you identify obstacles that hinder their performance, your job is to help them remove the obstacles. Particularly significant to dispersed staff members are inadequate equipment or technology, delays in communication of vital information, poorly designed work processes or lack of access to key resources or people.[30] When you check in with your team members each day, ask them how they are going and whether there is anything getting in the way of them doing their jobs.

Tips from public sector managers about managing performance

Public sector managers interviewed for this publication shared the following practices for managing the performance and productivity of dispersed employees:

- use a management style that empowers. Managers who work by 'command and control' principles are likely to be challenged by some loss of power over employees' day to day work because they are unable to see them. Managers whose power is derived from the capacity to influence behaviour and 'being able to get things done' are more comfortable with yielding decision-making control and discretion to their team members.[32]

- trust the employee to deliver on expectations. Some people first need to build up 'trust capital' in the office before they are approved to work out of the office (see also section on fostering trust).

- develop self-awareness of your management style and resist urges to overfocus on your own tasks and 'doing' at the expense of your people. This means making yourself available for your dispersed employees to contact and keeping commitments to return phone calls or emails within an agreed timeframe.

- develop linkages between team members and the organisation as well as the big picture. The section on communications and visibility includes a number of tips for fostering team solutions. By encouraging your team members to make connections within your organisation, you are helping them to identify further resources that will support them in their role.

- welcome feedback, issues and concerns. This may mean prioritising time for discussions with your employees over and above your own set of tasks and deadlines.

---

30   W F Cascio, 'Managing a Virtual Workplace', *Academy of management executive*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 81–90.

31   D A Whetton & K S Camerson, *Developing management skills*, Sixth Edition, Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 2005, p. 255.

guard against unconscious bias when evaluating performance

As a manager you need to be aware of the potential for unconscious bias against dispersed staff members simply because they are not present in your office. There is potential for remote employees to receive lower performance evaluations than their office-based colleagues simply because of the differences in mere physical presence. The researchers in a US-based study, Elsbach and Cable, recommended that managers avoid unfair performance assessments in the following ways:[32]

- avoid trait-based evaluations (for example, enthusiasm, efficiency) because these can be influenced by the physical presence of employees. Also consider that dispersed employees tend to suffer unfair perceptions that they are not as committed or responsible as their office-based colleagues.

- use objective output measures. Focus on links to organisational strategy or objective outputs that can be measured, such as number and type of projects completed, or experts' evaluation of quality.

- be wary if using peer feedback such as 360° for dispersed employees, since colleagues can be just as prone to unconscious bias as managers. It then becomes more important for dispersed employees to talk in-person with colleagues about what they are working on, and make the most of their time to do this when visiting the office.

"

Work is not about where you go but about what you do.

manager, VPS

"

32   K Elsbach & D Cable, 'Why Showing Your Face at Work Matters', *MIT sloan management review*, 19 June 2012, http://sloanreview.mit.edu/the-magazine/2012-summer/53407/why-showing-your-face-at-work-matters/#.UC1MCmVLQpo. twitter%22title=%22sloanreview.mit.edu%22%3, viewed 6 September 2012.

conduct or performance concerns

Many managers admit that underperformance or conduct issues become more difficult when employees are dispersed. The amount of information or evidence available to assess a situation is often greatly reduced. One manager said 'You never have the whole picture'. This is backed up by the R U OK? research which showed a relatively weak response to the question: "I feel I can talk to my manager about issues outside of work that may be impacting on my work performance" where only 55 percent respondents agreed[33]. To counter this, managers need to keep up regular, informal contact with their dispersed employees (for example, via email or telephone call). This helps to keep the lines of communication open as well as build the relationship: both are factors in managing performance and productivity. (For more information, see the sections on encouraging inclusion and visibility, promoting better communications and fostering trust).

In one organisation, an underperforming employee was brought into the central office for a week so that their work could be reviewed. In some situations, managers have sought help from other colleagues in assessing the employee or helping to improve performance. These are usually people who are also working away from the main office. Suggestions included one or more of the following:

*   partner the employee with a high performer who could coach them and help them improve performance;

*   employ peer mentoring; or

*   seek customer evaluation through use of feedback sheets.

As with any conduct or performance matter, you need to have regard for any enterprise agreements or determinations that apply to your organisation, as well as organisational performance management policy. Additionally the SSA publication '*Managing poor behaviour in the workplace*' provides useful guidance on whether disciplinary or other approaches are preferable, and guidance on principles of natural justice.

33   Centre for Corporate Health Pty Ltd, '2012 R U OK? Australian Workplace Relationships Survey', 2012, http://www.ruokday.com/newsroom/r-u-ok-latest/the-2012-r-u-ok-australian-workplace-relationships-survey, viewed 6 September 2012.

fostering trust

keywords: *reciprocal trust | building relationships at a distance | commitment | loyalty*

Managers and their dispersed teams cannot rely solely on technology, processes or performance plans to facilitate the flow of information. Good communication arises from the existence of trust.

The public sector managers interviewed for this guide view trust as essential to the success of dispersed working arrangements. This is supported in the academic literature, with trust described as likely to exist where 'co-workers will fulfil their obligations and behave predictably'.[34]

The culture of your organisation has a significant effect on the success of dispersed work arrangements. Trust is needed by both managers and peers of dispersed workers as well as recognition of results. If your organisation works on the assumption that staff members must be present in the office to succeed, then dispersed work is less likely to be supported. To overcome these hurdles, it appears a critical mass of people is needed to create a culture in which dispersed work will become more acceptable.[35]

In organisations where the inherent requirements of the role require dispersed work (for example, regulatory inspections, emergency or environmental services), this should not be an issue. However, in situations where the arrangement is staff member-initiated (for example, telecommuting), advocates point out that when CEOs and senior executives model the desired behaviour (for example, telework occasionally), it promotes greater acceptance among managers and staff members for the practice.

TRUST = (Communication + Performance + Consistency) x Time

34   W F Cascio, 'Managing a virtual workplace', *Academy of management executive*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 81–90.
35   Y Baruch, 'Teleworking; Benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers', *New technology, work and employment*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2000, pp. 34-49.

the reciprocal nature of trust

Trust is a significant part of the employer–employee relationship and has been viewed in the academic literature as vital to encouraging cooperative behaviour, building communication networks and encouraging employees to share knowledge with others to benefit the organisation. While these are usually considered discretionary behaviours, in a dispersed work arrangement they are often regarded as success factors (in particular, refer to the section on communications and visibility). The extent to which employees engage in these 'discretionary behaviours' is dependent on whether they believe managers are benevolent, supportive, ethical and generally trustworthy.[36]

Trust is eroded if individuals believe there has been a violation of the psychological contract (for example, the employer has failed to deliver on its promises). Periods of organisational change, in particular, can bring about 'triggering events' which lead individuals to review how well the mutual obligations between employee and employer are being met.[37]

One recent study has generated evidence that the use of certain progressive leadership practices builds the psychological contract and leads to greater trust and loyalty.[38] For the dispersed workforce, recommended activities include increased face-to-face communication (preferably in person or alternatively through video conferencing), ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to support productivity, providing job autonomy, recognition and team building. This is a particularly important issue when employees are strongly aligned with their customers. If managers are unable to promote both a functional and emotional attachment with the organisation, employees are more likely to leave.

What is a psychological contract?

This is a term used in management literature. It is a framework for describing the employment relationship and the changing nature of work.

The psychological contract describes the beliefs held by individuals about the obligations owed by employees to their employer and what they can expect in return if they fulfil these obligations.

Transactional contracts are concerned with tangibles such as pay and benefits. These are short-term and have clearly defined outcomes.

Relational contracts are relationship-based and feature intangible outcomes such as trust and loyalty.

---

36   R Sharkie, 'Trust in Leadership Is Vital for Employee Performance', *Management research news*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 2009, pp. 491–498.

37   S Tietze & S Nadin, 'The Psychological Contract and the Transition from Office-Based to Home-Based Work', *Human resource management journal,* Vol. 21, No. 3, 2011, pp. 318–334.

38   C P Lombardo and T J Mierzwa, 'Remote management styles: Effects of relational psychological contracts and leadership style on teleworkers', 2012, Second international conference on engaged management scholarship, Cranfield, UK, 21-24 June 2012.

practical tips for building trust with dispersed employees

Specific suggestions for building and maintaining relationships with dispersed team members have been described in the academic literature[39] as well as by the managers interviewed for this guide. The list in the table below is derived from both sources. When the behaviours are consistently modelled by managers, it provides a message to team members about the organisational culture and the 'way we do things around here'.

Action	Comments
Plan communications	Agree a plan for communication that ensures face-to-face meetings are used (in addition to routine emails and phone calls) to build relationships, reinforce team and program goals, resolve problems and reduce potential for isolation.
Consult with employees	Use participative management approaches to involve employees in decision-making and setting program goals. Encourage employees to contribute ideas and efforts to achieving business targets.
Build relationships between team members	Encourage dispersed employees to network with onsite employees through meetings or other opportunities to encourage greater connection to the organisation and build sense of shared experiences.
Provide a mix of resources that will help employees do their job	Resources include the tangible and the intangible. Dispersed employees need reliable equipment and computer connections. Additionally they need access to people or information that will support them in their efforts to work autonomously. For example, line managers may nominate a peer or office manager in a hub office who can provide moral or practical support to employees working away from the main office. These gestures of support show you understand what the employee needs and contribute to building trust.
Explain strategy and clarify expectations	Communicate the organisation's strategy at team meetings and one-on-one sessions. Explain how the dispersed employee's work fits into the 'big picture' and supports program delivery. Clarify what constitutes good performance.

---

39   C P Lombardo & T J Mierzwa, 'Remote management styles: Effects of relational psychological contracts and leadership style on teleworkers', 2012, Second international conference on engaged management scholarship, Cranfield, UK, 21-24 June 2012.

Action	Comments
Provide regular feedback	Use face-to-face meetings to promote positive behaviours and performance through active listening and constructive feedback. Verify that employee performance and outputs are in line with expectations. Encourage feedback on manager's performance and what support is needed to help employee do better. (Some managers seek 360° feedback.) In between meetings, ensure you provide feedback in a timely manner using appropriate channels (for example, phone, email).
Help team members to keep in touch with organisational changes	Give advance notice of any pending changes to minimise isolation, frustration or disconnect from the main workplace. Provide opportunities to ask questions or make sense of changes.
Build responsibility and autonomy	Encourage employees to take responsibility by giving them autonomy to make daily decisions.
Recognise and care for team members	Foster discretionary effort and loyalty by recognising team and individual efforts and looking out for wellbeing of team members. For example, you may visit individuals on-site or host virtual team gatherings where achievements are celebrated.
Align people with culture	Help employees to develop a broad understanding of the organisation and how they fit (more than just their job responsibilities) to prevent distraction by local agendas. For example, you may share information from your organisation's senior executives at team meetings or seek feedback on business plans during individual catch-ups. Monitor organisation culture surveys or employee engagement surveys for any trends that may need addressing.
Keep any promises made	Follow through on any commitments made to employees. Any absence of communication or follow-up becomes more pronounced when working remotely from a colleague. A lack of management action is cited as a major factor in employees developing a sense of workplace isolation.[40] To overcome this, check in with dispersed staff informally and regularly.

40   J Mulki, F Bardhi, F Lassk, & J Nanavaty-Dahl, 'Set Up Remote Workers to Thrive', *MIT sloan management review*, Fall, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2009, pp. 63–69.

looking after health, safety and wellbeing

keywords: *monitoring OHS | hours of work | keeping in touch*

A manager's responsibility for staff safety and wellbeing involves taking all reasonable steps to ensure that staff are working in an environment that is free from hazards and that cannot cause injury. Enabling employees to work in a variety of locations makes managing this issue more complex. For example, poor workstation design in teleworkers' own homes or inadequate rest breaks puts employees at risk of musculoskeletal injuries. Long distance driving in rural regions presents risks such as fatigue or wildlife crossing roads.

Employee mental health issues are a significant concern for all organisations. Work-related stress is the second most common compensated illness/injury in Australia (following musculoskeletal disorders).[41] Given the physical distance between managers and dispersed employees, and the difficulty of observing interpersonal dynamics, there is a greater risk that mental health and wellbeing issues may go undetected.

Under Victorian health and safety legislation, you are obliged to ensure your team members have 'adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to work in a safe and healthy manner'.[42] You also need to ensure that a risk assessment is completed for your staff members' work locations (including home) to identify any potential hazards. This is particularly important after the legal decision that found Telstra liable to pay compensation for injuries incurred by an employee working from home.[43] Your organisation may already have a risk assessment checklist for working from home arrangements. If not, you may want to check the resources on the SSA website.

Resilience building for employees and teams was seen as an important measure to tackle a growing trend of individual hypersensitivity, particularly in over-personalised reactions to trivial events, especially if there was an issue involving workplace relationships. Research sponsored by RU OK? on workplace relationships suggested that at least 40 percent of the Australian workforce found it difficult to bounce back from disappointments and challenges at work (resilience).[44] Resilience was identified by Victorian public sector managers as one of the key attributes of dispersed employees (refer to page 39).

41 WorkSafe Victoria, 'Stresswise - Preventing Work-Related Stress: A Guide for Employers In The Public Sector', edition no. 2, 2007.

42 WorkSafe Victoria, 'Employer rights and responsibilities', 2012, http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/laws-and-regulations/employer-rights-and-responsibilities, viewed 15 February 2013.

43 Australian School of Business at UNSW, 'Employee Safety: New Rules on the Risks of Working from Home, 12 December 2011, http://knowledge.asb.unsw.edu.au/article.cfm?articleid=1528, viewed 17 February 2012.

44 Centre for Corporate Health Pty Ltd, '2012 R U OK? Australian Workplace Relationships Survey', 2012, http://www.ruokday.com/newsroom/r-u-ok-latest/the-2012-r-u-ok-australian-workplace-relationships-survey, viewed 6 September 2012.

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)

Sections 21 and 22 set out the employer's duties to employees including a safe working environment and monitoring the health of employees. The maximum penalties for breaches of the Act are $1,075,050 for a body corporate and $215,010 for individuals.

Case study

Juliet was a remote employee who had recently started a placement working onsite at another organisation's premises in a distant city on a collaborative project. The project was high profile and becoming politicised, so the performance expectations and pressures rose accordingly. Juliet started experiencing pressure and increasing harassment from one of the managers in the client organisation about her performance. Juliet was relatively new to her own organisation and believed she was at fault so she put up with the bullying for several weeks. She eventually told her manager about the problems with the client. By this stage, she had experienced a high level of stress and had to be withdrawn from the project. The manager, Erica, recognised belatedly that she should have provided Juliet with more support and encouraged her to contact colleagues if her manager was unavailable. Erica's organisation has now instituted a network of peer supports and local management for remote employees. Erica has also introduced a program of resilience training for all her team members.

looking out for each other

There are a number of methods used in the Victorian public sector to look out for the wellbeing of employees:

- when employees work in dispersed teams, colleagues are expected to support each other and look out for each other. It is not considered the sole responsibility of the manager. Resources exist to support employees and managers deal with difficult situations that may arise from isolation such as employee assistance programs and the R U OK? Afield campaign.[45]

- for employees who work out of regional hub offices, for example, in one department there is a location manager who looks after the office. They are also part of a program team with a manager who looks out for their wellbeing as well as performance and delivery on program goals.

- managers in at least one organisation use their contacts in other agencies to keep an eye on their people.

- the employees in one organisation who travel extensively in regional Victoria have a practice of ringing each other when they're on the road or letting others know when they have reached home. This also builds team camaraderie.

- when employees work solo or in small teams in rural areas, they expect to be visited periodically by managers from local or regional hubs. As well as checking on the employees' health, safety and wellbeing, the managers are aware their presence provides support and recognition to individuals, and reduces isolation or loneliness.

- if a manager is travelling or on leave and is therefore out of contact for a period of time, they should nominate another manager or senior colleague to provide support arrangements for team members. Lack of access to managers or others with the necessary delegations can have negative effects on productivity and stress levels. Therefore all team members should be made aware of any alternative arrangements and contact officers who can authorise sign-offs.

---

45 Refer to the R U OK? website for more resources to help with identifying signs of depression or distress in isolated workers: http://www.ruokday.com/resources-for-you/r-u-ok-afield/

24/7 availability?

Focus groups conducted with public sector employees who requested arrangements such as telecommuting revealed there was concern about the perceptions of colleagues and managers who stay in the office, especially where dispersed work was not a common practice. The teleworking employees felt compelled to prove their productivity by working outside normal business hours, including checking emails late at night.

The use of technology to improve flexibility is accompanied by documented risks of work overload and expectations of increased availability.[46] Line managers have an important role in supporting employees to monitor the risks in blurring the boundaries between work and home: they become 'border keepers' who define the boundaries of work.[47] In the same study, a group of teleworkers and managers did not know when it was acceptable to say 'I am not at work' and some teleworkers wanted managers to show more interest in their hours because lack of face time led them to believe managers were unaware of the actual hours they spent working.

Some organisations have used technology to solve the problem. In one high-profile example, Volkswagen stopped its Blackberry servers from sending emails to certain employees 30 minutes after they finished work.[48] Other organisations, particularly in the public sector, have recognised that a total shutdown is not possible and use policies and management to guide and monitor work hours. For example, Vic Roads has issued a '*Working Remotely*' policy which includes the requirement for employees to nominate the hours and days they intend to work remotely. In an organisation such as Department of State Development, Business and Innovation where some employees interact with colleagues around the world in different time zones, a flexible approach to scheduling work hours help keeps the workload in check. As at February 2012, the Department of Primary Industries had a comprehensive organisational strategy to address occupational health and safety risks including accountability for managers in monitoring out of office operations and fatigue.

46   L Duxbury & C Higgins, 'Work-Life Balance in Australia in the New Millennium: Rhetoric Versus Reality', 2008, www.beaton.com.au, downloaded 23 August 2010.

47   L Harris, 'Home-Based Teleworking and the Employment Relationship: Managerial Challenges and Dilemmas', *Personnel review,* Vol. 32, No. 4, 2003, pp. 422–437.

48   BBC News, 'Volkswagen turns off Blackberry email after work hours', 23 December 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-16314901, viewed 30 August 2012.

providing suitable equipment and facilities

keywords: ICT | software | public records | hubs and host locations | work facilities

The supply of reliable equipment and suitable work facilities to dispersed employees is a key factor in ensuring productivity and job satisfaction. Because managers are not on-site to observe employees' reactions, this is an area where it is important to be alert to early signs of frustration related to malfunctioning equipment. Managers have a role in reducing obstacles to employees' high performance as well as supporting them to make progress towards agreed goals.

ICT systems

A major issue for public sector managers interviewed for this guide was the availability of suitable technology to work and communicate effectively. While existing ICT systems are valued for enabling remote work, there are still frustrations that co-exist with using the technology. Some managers expressed frustration at not being able to access consumer technology through their organisation that would enhance communications (for example, Skype and iPhones). Other employees expressed concerns about more fundamental problems such as reliability or speed of internet connections in remote locations.

The provision of equipment and software applications varies across organisations. The minimum functionality expected of ICT to enable productivity and effective collaboration includes:

- voice call and conferencing facilities;
- video;
- email;
- instant messaging;
- online presence (knowing when co-workers are online);
- knowledge sharing via enterprise social tools such as Yammer; and
- access to central organisational files, policies and intranet.

The devices and applications used by employees appear to vary generally across organisations. For example, the devices may be supplied by the organisation or brought from home. The applications may be cloud-based or local. The IT literature has identified a growing trend in the 'consumerisation' of technology in the workplace where employees choose the products and services that will suit their needs outside of the offerings provided by their employer's IT department.[49] A number of public sector employees interviewed expressed enthusiasm for Skype and mobile devices such as iPads. Some believed these were easier and cheaper to use than the video-conferencing facilities provided by their organisation. Where security was an issue, employees would use organisation-supplied equipment. If matters were not critical or sensitive, employees expressed a preference for using consumer applications such as Skype to communicate. Employees found these tools especially valuable for communicating with people located interstate or overseas.

49   M Hamblen, 'Consumerization Trend Driving IT Shops 'Crazy,' Gartner Analyst Says', 2 May 2012,
     http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/9226755/Consumerization_trend_driving_IT_shops_crazy_Gartner_analyst_says,
     viewed 7 September 2012.

To enable a dispersed employee to work productively, expert knowledge of IT systems should not be a prerequisite. Organisations that have a well-established pool of teleworkers argue the case for simple technological solutions. The ICT system should be robust and homogenous. The experience of users should be seamless between the central office and the home or hub office, with no special set-ups or log-ins.

transportation

For employees whose roles involve driving (for example, police officers or rangers), access to vehicles and vehicle accessories that suit the road conditions are vital for productivity as well as safety. Factors to consider include the distances covered, road types (for example, sealed versus unsealed, grades), remoteness of destinations, and access to back-up or support from colleagues.

using a hub or host location

In some situations, for example where members of your team are on the road frequently, or a member is situated by themselves in a particular town, there can be benefits in establishing desk space in the offices of another organisation in the same location. This provides the staff member the opportunity to connect with office resources and office social life, even if it is not part of the same organisation. Often there is a senior employee at the location who will be designated as the location manager and will be responsible for corporate services, including employee safety at the office.

Another model is enabling employees to use alternative office locations within the same organisation. For example, some employees may request the option of working at an outer metropolitan office instead of a CBD office to save on commuting time.

Another alternative is co-working spaces (for example, Hub Melbourne) that are used by individuals from a variety of industries who want to avoid the isolation of working from home or as an alternative to working in coffee shops when travelling. These offer a range of membership plans and rates to reflect different usage patterns (for example, casual drop-ins, permanent desks).

case study

working remotely policy

VicRoads introduced its Working Remotely policy in 2009. The objective was to 'provide guidance in relation to employee-initiated requests to work remotely from another VicRoads location or from their primary residence.'

The policy has attracted most interest from employees who commute long distances to work or have family responsibilities.

For working at a host location (the alternative VicRoads work location), the onus is placed on the employee to identify a work station at their preferred host location and seek approval from the host location manager. In such arrangements, the employee usually works one or two days a week at the host location and the rest of the time at their primary work location.

Other features of the policy include a fixed duration for approved arrangements (i.e. 12 months), manager's checklist for assessing the request, hazard checklist, guidelines for setting up a workstation at a remote location, and an employee self-assessment for hazard identification. Additionally an occupational health and safety representative visits the proposed workstation to assess it against OHS standards before the working remotely arrangement is approved.

For more details, please visit the dispersed workforce page on the SSA website.

boosting security awareness

keywords: *records | privacy | data security | personal security*

Security concerns multiply when work is performed in isolation or outside organisational premises. For dispersed employees, personal security is a primary consideration. In addition, you need to confirm your dispersed team is aware of organisational standards for securing equipment and data, and the need to comply with laws related to privacy and public records.

security of people

Personal security can be an issue for some dispersed employees, particularly those working alone. You need to consider whether the employee's work location offers adequate security for them as well as organisational property.

A number of organisations have established protocols for communication for employees who work solo in isolated locations (for example, forests) or do outreach work. This includes ensuring that these employees know what to do in case of an emergency. Some employees are provided with pagers or phones or have established times for contacting the office to confirm they are OK.

Another factor for consideration includes weighing up the nature of the work and its suitability for working 'one up' (solo) versus the length of time for back-up to arrive in the event of an emergency.

Tips from public sector managers

- Issue pagers to staff who have emergency response roles.

- Set communication protocols for keeping in touch with employees working solo in remote places (for example, employee to ring in at set times if working alone in forest).

- Ensure staff follow established organisational security arrangements and understand any required checks and balances.

- Ensure security-related tasks are included in any work-from-home OHS checklists (see examples in SSA web-based resources).

- If staff are involved in high risk roles, ensure they are based at organisational premises (for example, regional hub, station, courthouse) and are rostered with partners if travelling. Avoid visiting clients' homes if this is not an intrinsic part of the role.

---

data and equipment security

Many security breaches arise from mishandling of material on a laptop or mobile devices because they are stolen, lost or violated. Other breaches occur when employees use unprotected systems for accessing or storing data.

Your organisation should have IT policies that identify security procedures that should be followed by all staff. Ensuring the security of data is a responsibility of all employees. However, there is extra risk when an employee is working in a remote location. One means of reducing risks is to provide employees with security training.[50] Whether your organisation has a dispersed work policy or not, dispersed employees should abide by the same computer use protocols as one would follow in the office. This includes locking the computer and storing confidential material in a locked drawer at the end of the workday.

You may also want to consider installing tracking software on equipment to hasten its recovery in the event of theft, or ensure you have capacity to wipe data remotely.

Tips from public sector managers

- Maintain an equipment log.

- Use organisation-provided equipment and software for conducting business, using same log-ins and passwords whether in the office or not.

- If staff use personal equipment to communicate (for example, via Skype), ensure information exchanged is low risk and low security.

- Avoid storing official documents off-site where possible, otherwise provide equipment to enable safe storage or disposal (for example, mobile filing cabinets, home-based shredder, and lockable filing cabinets at regional hubs).

---

50   Corporate Leadership Council, 'Flexible Work Arrangements', Literature Key Findings, 2006, www.clc.executiveboard.com, viewed 7 September 2012.

records management

All employees need to be aware of the *Public Records Act 1973* and comply with the standards and issued by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) when storing documents.[51] For dispersed employees, the particular records management principles to be aware of include:

• public records must be protected from theft, loss, misuse and inappropriate or unauthorised access or modification, whilst they are being stored, or in transit to and from a storage facility or area; and

• public records must be stored using systems that enable the records to be retrievable. For example, in the event of emergency and recovery situations, the organisation is able to work out what has been lost or the organisation can address business, legal, freedom of information, and other requirements.

Given the reliance by dispersed employees on virtual communications (for example, email, SMS, social media and instant messaging), they need to remember that everything written by a public sector employee as part of their work is a public record. PROV has published a social media issues paper that provides advice on capturing social media interactions as records.[52]

"Of course I'm insecure. I store vital computer information in a cloud!"

Source : www.cartoonstock.com

---

51 Public Record Office Victoria, 'Record Keeping Standard: Storage', 2012, Version 1.0, http://prov.vic.gov.au/government/standards-and-policy/storage, viewed 12 September 2012.

52 ibid.

privacy laws

The *Information Privacy Act 2000* (Vic) sets standards for the collection and handling of personal information by Victorian public sector organisations. These standards are contained in the ten Information Privacy Principles (IPPs). While these IPPs apply to all the work we do, of particular interest (and risk) to a dispersed workforce are:

- data security, particularly for mobile work or work from home; and

- data flows across borders, i.e. personal information must not be transferred outside Victoria unless the recipient of the information is subject to privacy standards in other jurisdictions that are similar to the Victorian privacy legislation. If you have team members working interstate or overseas, you may need to review the type of information being shared across borders and whether the local jurisdictions have similar privacy laws. If in doubt, talk to your organisation's privacy contact officer or Privacy Victoria.

selecting the right people for the arrangement

keywords: selection and recruitment | employee capabilities | management capabilities | talent pools

Given the manager is unable to directly observe dispersed employees on a daily basis, the risks associated with a poor selection for a remote role tend to multiply. These risks can include detriment to health, safety, security, service, productivity or goodwill. Replacement of employees or remedying a poor match can be expensive. Therefore it's important to clarify the unique skills or characteristics needed for success in remote work. The business literature says the following characteristics are important for employees:

- a self-starter, motivated, disciplined and responsible;

- able to meet personal and organisational goals, direction and priorities through effective self-management;

- comfortable building and maintaining relationships with others through email, online chats and phone calls; and

- confident in dealing with technical issues. [53]

What do public sector managers value in team members who work remotely?

1. Resilience
2. Adaptability and flexibility
3. Right fit with other team members (you can always teach skills, but not 'fit')
4. Competence and confidence in the role (high level of knowledge and skills)
5. Emotional intelligence: maturity, high trust, 'no blame' culture
6. Integrity and trustworthiness
7. Understanding of program goals and ability to implement
8. Affinity with or understanding of local community (if place-based service)
9. Ability to solve problems and work around technological issues
10. Organisational skills

source: interviews conducted for this publication

A number of managers have commented that because team members are on their own, they need higher levels of skills and knowledge. Some have also suggested that organisational knowledge is a prerequisite for success (for example, understanding of program priorities, internal networks, sources of information and support, awareness of organisational culture and 'what it takes to get things done'.)

---

53   B Byron & A Grove, 'A virtual success: best practices for working remotely', *Intercom*, November 2011, Vol.58, No. 9, 2011, p.25.

are you recruiting people to work in dispersed roles?

If you are seeking people for dispersed roles, consider including some of the following capabilities in the position description. [54]

Personal qualities:

- **Integrity:** Committed to the public interest, operates in a manner that is consistent with organisation's code of conduct; inspires trust by treating all individuals fairly;

- **Initiative and accountability:** Proactive and self-starting; seizes opportunities and acts upon them; takes responsibility for own actions;

- **Drive and commitment:** Enthusiastic and committed; demonstrates capacity for sustained effort and hard work; sets high standards of performance for self and others;

- **Resilience:** Perseveres to achieve goals, even in the face of obstacles; copes effectively with setbacks and disappointments; remains calm and in control under pressure; accepts constructive criticism in an objective manner, without becoming defensive.

- **Flexibility:** Adaptable, open to new ideas, accepts changed priorities without undue discomfort; recognises the merits of different options and acts accordingly.

- **Self discipline:** Maintains consistent and sensible pattern of behaviour under pressure; recognises and restrains inappropriate emotions during a situation or interaction; recognises own limitations and works with other to ensure plans are achieved.

Knowledge and skills

- **Self management:** Develops and applies personal strategies to manage strong emotions in high pressure situations; actively monitors own preferences and manages behaviours.

- **Written communication:** Identifies key messages and information required for decision making, ensures written communications contain the information necessary to achieve their purpose and meet audience needs.

- **Organisational awareness:** Recognises the formal structure and hierarchy of an organisation and its policies and procedures; appreciates the responsibilities, legal obligations and limits that apply to an organisation; understands the issues and pressures to which the organisation has to respond.

- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills:** Is adept at using communication technology, especially email, social media, e-learning tools, text messaging and the telephone. Candidates should be both skilled in using the technology and be familiar with the etiquette associated with the different forms of communication.

- **Problem solving:** Anticipates potential problems and pre-empts required actions; identified and proposes workable solutions to problems.

- **Change management:** Identifies the need to change; actively supports change by adjusting work practices; remains calm and optimistic, even when things don't go as planned; contributes feedback and suggestions.

---

54   The descriptions of personal qualities, knowledge and skills are from State Services Authority, *The VPS employment capability framework: strengthening the professionalism and adaptability of the Victorian public service,* State Services Authority, Melbourne, 2006.

Experience

While past experience should not be the only basis for employment decisions (personal qualities, knowledge and skill should be the primary criteria), the following are worth looking for:

* has been successful in a role that required working different location from their manager or other colleagues;

* has worked in a team whose members were dispersed;

* been part of an organisation (such as a volunteer body or club) which abided by rules and conduct established elsewhere; or

* has successfully undertaken study in distance education mode.

case study

Victoria Police recruitment for remote policing roles

Victoria Police were faced with the issue of managing the expectations of applicants for rural policing roles. The reality of such roles was very different from the dreams of sea change (or tree change) work and lifestyles held by some job applicants. To counter unrealistic expectations, management are developing an information program and will send a DVD to interested candidates. The program will include information on the unique characteristics of remote policing and featured interviews with serving officers and their families. The interviewees will explain the challenges of such roles and lifestyles and will talk about the qualities a police officer needs to succeed in remote policing. The program hopes to dispel some commonly held myths about the work and reinforce some home truths about remote policing. Candidates will become more aware of the development and experience they need to prepare for roles in remote policing. This program is hoped to result in Victoria Police reducing the risks and costs associated with recruitment and selection processes for dispersed roles.

assessing candidates for dispersed roles

When assessing employees against selection criteria, it is worthwhile tailoring interview questions to address the unique challenges of dispersed work. The SSA has released a number of publications on recruitment and selection. See the full list in the further reading and resources section.

Example of a bad and a good interview question

☒ Can you work by yourself?
asks for a yes/no response

☑ Describe a recent situation when you had to work away from your manager for an extended time. What were the pitfalls and how did you deal with them?
asks for evidence of actual experience

---

do you have the capacity to manage dispersed employees?

Just as some employees are not suited to working in dispersed arrangements, some managers are not suited to managing dispersed employees. With the lack of visual cues and physical proximity, dispersed work arrangements can make managing staff more challenging.

The table below lists key characteristics required for managing dispersed employees[55] and compares these with the characteristics of managers who might be more suited to traditional work arrangements.

Suited to dispersed work arrangement	Suited to traditional workplace only
Open positive attitude that focuses on solutions	Looks for reasons to discontinue dispersed work
Management style that is results-oriented	Needs structure and control when dealing with employees
Effective communication skills, informally and formally, in a variety of environments (for example, in primary office or virtual workplace)	Needs face-to-face communication or physical proximity in order to be effective as a manager
Able to delegate effectively and follow up on accomplishment of tasks	Avoids delegating because staff are not capable, or enjoys the 'hands on' aspects of work

---

55   W F Cascio, 'Managing a Virtual Workplace', *Academy of management executive*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 81–90.

orientation of new managers for existing teams

If you have prior management experience but have recently been assigned to an existing dispersed team, you should set yourself an induction program including a schedule of meetings to ensure you become familiar with your team's responsibilities.

Aside from becoming familiar with budgets, business plans and performance targets, you need to find out about your team members; for example, accountabilities, role descriptions, skills, knowledge, career and development goals. You need to find out about team morale and communication protocols. You need to know about any individual work arrangements that may be established (including any flexible work arrangement agreements). Personal files may include copies of work or flexibility agreements documented by previous managers. Managers who are new to roles can sometimes be keen to implement reforms or changes early on, but it is advisable not to rush in without being well informed and prepared. A copy of a checklist for new managers of established dispersed teams appears in appendix C.

dealing with requests to switch from office-based work to dispersed work arrangements

Some of the managers interviewed in Victorian public sector organisations assess the benefits of dispersed work against operational needs before approving such arrangements. In some cases, managers use trial periods of about three to six months to gather evidence on whether an individual arrangement is viable. When an arrangement is requested, managers tend to assess the merits of the application on a case-by-case basis.

example: teleworking from home

Some managers have expressed concern that approving one application for a work-from-home arrangement will 'open the floodgates' for other team members applying. It is worth keeping in mind that while some employees are keen to work offsite, not everyone wants to work remotely, even if it suits their industry or work styles. For example, one survey of IT employees found more staff preferred to work onsite than work from home.[56] In some organisations that have extensive home-based work, telework was rejected by workers who missed the social life of the office.[57]

After completing a pilot program, one organisation learnt that telework didn't suit everyone. They developed a profiling tool based on work and personal characteristics of the most successful and least successful teleworkers to help identify employees who would be most likely to perform well in a teleworking environment. Another organisation had set up a telework simulation lab (i.e. a separate room in the main building, equipped with workstations) for employees to try out working without face-to-face contact with managers for two weeks. After the trial period, some employees decided such an arrangement did not suit them.[58]

The SSA publication *Making Flexible Work a Success* contains a number of worksheets for managers and employees to assess the suitability of flexible work arrangements generally. It also provides guidance on the employer's legal obligations under the *Fair Work Act 2009*. A sample self-assessment for telework or dispersed work appears in appendix A.

---

56   S Zillman, 'The secret life of IT employees: do you know what they want?', *HC Online*, 2012, www.hcamag.com, viewed 17 August 2012.

57   S Gosper, 'Stay at home if it works for you', *The Australian*, 26 May 2012, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/careers/stay-at-home-if-it-works-for-you/story-fn717l4s-1226364689092, viewed 23 August 2012.

58   W F Cascio, 'Managing a Virtual Workplace', *Academy of management executive*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 81–90.

supporting learning and career development

keywords: *induction and orientation to remote work | continuing professional development*

Traditionally formal learning and development activities have often been undertaken on a face-to-face contact basis. Outside major towns or urban areas, such opportunities can be difficult or costly to arrange. However, learning and career development opportunities should not be reduced for dispersed team members. Managers at a number of organisations that have substantial numbers of employees telecommuting have pointed out that there are ever-increasing opportunities for professional development online, through, for example webinars.

As a manager of a dispersed team, you need to work out along with your staff how they will be able to participate in effective learning and development activities to build the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required for them to succeed in their roles. Many use the formal performance and development review process as the time to review career and professional development goals of staff.

In addition to formal processes, a number of public sector managers use a variety of informal strategies used to ensure their dispersed team members get access to development opportunities, such as coaching during regular one-on-one meetings or harnessing the knowledge of the group at team get-togethers, whether these are in-person or virtual (for example, using tools such as Yammer or web conferencing software).

Dispersed work may have risks for career development activities if managers delegate or assign interesting or challenging work to those that are 'visible' to them. Therefore managers need to ensure that they base any provision of an interesting task on merit and using a sound process, especially if that task may increase someone's promotion prospects or enhance their career development.

training to work in other locations

Staff who work in a different location from you or the majority of the team will need to be, to some extent, self-sufficient. Depending on the specific nature of the work and working arrangements, training in the following can help staff avoid or address particular problems:

- basic technology (hardware and software) maintenance and use;

- influential communication (also see section on communications and visibility);

- resilience and self-awareness;

- networking and managing team and stakeholder relationships, including team protocols and collaborating online or remotely (for example, document sharing and ideas exchanges);

- general workplace health and safety training (including understanding of basic legal obligations, identifying workplace hazards, assessing risks, and implementing controls, ergonomics training to prevent musculoskeletal injuries in desk-based work);

- first aid; and

- defensive driving techniques or fatigue management, if driving is required for work.

Tips from public sector managers

- Arrange regular rotations of staff: this will broaden their experiences as well as address any potential disadvantage.

- Run induction at a central location: this helps to communicate and reinforce the culture of the organisation and provides employees with networking opportunities.

- Employ practice leaders to visit all work sites across regions: this person should have coaching skills.

- If the employee is new to a remote location, arrange for the outgoing job incumbent to do handover if possible. Arrange joint visits to introduce the new employee to key community contacts.

- If the employee has relocated for their role, consider providing information and support to help the family integrate into the new community.

managers' learning and development

If you have recently been allocated dispersed team members, you may want to re-evaluate your capabilities and consider further support or training to help you manage them. See the section, 'do you have the capacity to manage dispersed employees?' on page 42 to identify any capabilities you may want to develop.

Case study

Team development in regional areas

One organisation has been running team building sessions for staff based in rural areas. The sessions are aimed to deal with employee engagement issues including lack of affiliation to the organisation.

The workshop facilitator asked staff to clarify what being part of the organisation meant to them and whether their expectations were being met. The responses led the team to identify what successful teamwork looked like and steps for building a stronger relationship with management. The team members now have a better understanding of their role within and their contribution to the organisation.

4. further reading and resources

online toolkit for managing a dispersed team

Available on the SSA website:

- templates and sample policies (eg VicRoads policy, SSA WFH checklist & policy)
- sample Key Selection Criteria for job descriptions – particularly regarding personal attributes and skills/knowledge required for dispersed work
- quiz/questionnaire – self-assessment – "are you suited to WFH?"

You are invited to share your organisation's relevant policies and tools by publishing them on the SSA's website.

ssa resources

- **Attracting and Retaining Staff: A guide for the public sector in rural and regional Victoria** (2009): this guide identifies a range of strategies that regional organisations can use to attract and retain staff
- **Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit** (2010): This toolkit has been developed to assist public sector organisations in implementing best practice recruitment and selection processes.
- **Making Flexible Work a Success: A Guide for Public Sector Managers and Employees** (2011): This guide provides managers and employees with tools and information to help plan, assess, implement and review flexible work arrangements.
- **Talking Performance** (2010): The Talking Performance printed publication complements the Talking Performance online e-Learning resource.
- **Great Manager, Great Results: Self-assessment and development planning template** (2009): a diagnostic and planning tool to help Victorian public sector managers understand and address their management capability needs.
- **Getting Recruitment Right: Job Analysis and a Well-written Position Description** (2011): This guide is for line managers who are responsible for recruiting, and it complements the Best Practice Recruitment and Selection Toolkit.
- **Developing Conflict Resilient Workplaces** (2010): A guide explaining the steps to managing conflict well and not allowing it to escalate.
- **Mastering the Art of Interviewing and Selection** (2011): A guide for any line manager who has to recruit staff.
- **Public Sector Standards Commissioner Standards: Application of the Public Sector Employment Principles** (2006): These Standards on the application of the Victorian public sector employment principles are binding on public sector bodies and employees.

- **24 Recruitment Myths and Facts** (2010): This information sheet is a compilation of some common Victorian public sector myths and facts surrounding recruitment.

- **21 Secondment Myths and Facts** (2011): This information sheet is a compilation of some common Victorian public sector myths and facts surrounding secondment arrangements.

other resources

Australian Network on Disability
A not-for-profit organisation resourced by its members to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business.
Website address: www.and.org.au

beyond blue
One of the key roles of beyondblue is to produce and refer people to accurate, up to date, easy to read information on depression, anxiety and related disorders. This information includes fact sheets and checklists.
Website address: www.beyondblue.org.au

The Easy Guide to Socialising Online
Provides information on how internet users can protect themselves and their information when using social networking sites and search engines.
Website address: www.dbcde.gov.au/easyguide

Job Access
Federal government website provides advice and support to employers and managers on employing people with a disability.
Website address: www.jobaccess.gov.au

R U OK?
Website contains information to empower employees, managers and executives in remote locations to say 'I'm not ok' when struggling with a problem, big or small. Includes guidance on how to cope with depression, distress and guilt. Also website includes more general information on supporting colleagues in the workplace.
Website address: www.ruokday.com/resources-for-you/r-u-ok-afield

Telework Australia
Online resource centre includes information and templates for individuals and organisations considering telework initiatives.
Website address: www.teleworkaustralia.net.au

appendix A: manager's self-assessment on leadership style

Managing a dispersed team can test your leadership and management skills. Issues that can be resolved easily face-to-face may become challenging due to physical distance. Complete the following questionnaire below to find out if you have the knowledge or skills to deal with dispersed teams.

1.	I try to empower staff to resolve issues or make decisions independently.	☐ Yes	☐ No
2.	I am comfortable with the reduced power associated with managing dispersed staff.	☐ Yes	☐ No
3.	I am skilled at using a variety of channels to communicate with staff formally and informally (for example, face to face, internet, mobile devices).	☐ Yes	☐ No
4.	I trust my staff to achieve results and deliver on agreed performance targets, even if I do not see them daily.	☐ Yes	☐ No
5.	I am able to delegate effectively and can follow up to ensure tasks are completed.	☐ Yes	☐ No
6.	I understand the risks involved in dispersed work arrangements and know what to do to mitigate them.	☐ Yes	☐ No
7.	I encourage dispersed team members to communicate with, and support, each other.	☐ Yes	☐ No
8.	I am confident in initiating 'difficult conversations' if I believe my staff are not coping with their roles or work relationships.	☐ Yes	☐ No
9.	I use a variety of methods to recognise or reward high-performing staff.	☐ Yes	☐ No
10.	I believe my staff members support our goals and promote our program to stakeholders.	☐ Yes	☐ No

11.	My staff give me feedback about my management style.	☐ Yes ☐ No
12.	My dispersed team members have equipment and technology that will enable them to work productively away from the main office.	☐ Yes ☐ No
13.	I set aside regular times to meet face to face with each team member.	☐ Yes ☐ No
14.	I am skilled at adapting my leadership style to suit individual staff and different situations.	☐ Yes ☐ No
15.	I have good self-knowledge and make my intentions clear to staff.	☐ Yes ☐ No
16.	I model the behaviours I expect of team members (for example, keeping agreements, organisational values, looking out for others' wellbeing, collaborating, continuous improvement).	☐ Yes ☐ No
17.	I am able to account to my senior management for the results of team members (including dispersed staff).	☐ Yes ☐ No

How did you score?

A majority of 'yes' answers means that you are more likely to succeed in managing a dispersed workforce.

If you answered 'no' to any of the above, you need to consider whether it is something you should do something about (for example, seek out a coach or relevant skills development). It may mean that having staff in dispersed work arrangements may present some challenges for you at your current level of management skills.

appendix B: assessment of staff member for suitability for working away from manager

If you are considering a dispersed work arrangement for one of your staff members, complete this questionnaire.

1.	They can organise themselves and work effectively without direct supervision.	☐ Yes ☐ No
2.	They can control their work time (they can draw boundaries around working hours.)	☐ Yes ☐ No
3.	They like to try solving problems before calling for help. This includes dealing with equipment or IT problems.	☐ Yes ☐ No
4.	They actively communicate and share information with team-mates and management.	☐ Yes ☐ No
5.	Reduced visibility is not an issue for them because they have the means to stay in contact.	☐ Yes ☐ No
6.	Their work mainly involves thinking, or writing, or dealing with clients off-site.	☐ Yes ☐ No
7.	They can stay focused on work – procrastination is not an issue.	☐ Yes ☐ No
8.	If they have to work from home, family and friends respect their time and support them.	☐ Yes ☐ No
9.	They enjoy a sense of achievement when they meet their work objectives.	☐ Yes ☐ No
10.	They understand what line management expects and can deliver the expected results.	☐ Yes ☐ No
11.	They enjoy working alone and do not mind if not constantly interacting with colleagues.	☐ Yes ☐ No
12.	They are sufficiently aware of organisational culture and protocols.	☐ Yes ☐ No
13.	They will have access to facilities and reliable equipment that enables them to work effectively and safely away from the main office.	☐ Yes ☐ No

How did you score?

A majority of 'yes' answers means that your staff member is more likely to succeed at working away from the main office.

If you answered 'no' to any of the above, you need to consider whether these factors are something the staff member has the ability to change. It may mean that dispersed work arrangements may present some challenges.

appendix C: checklist for first 90 days of managing dispersed team

If you have recently been appointed to manage a dispersed team, you should consider undertaking the following in the first 90 days.

- [ ] Make appointments to meet with each team member at their usual work location.

- [ ] Identify team communication protocols and how effectively team members work together.

- [ ] Establish frequency and location of team meetings.

- [ ] Identify and meet key contacts and stakeholders.

- [ ] Find out network of support staff in area of team members (for example, hub office managers, HR contacts).

- [ ] Review performance plans and accountabilities of all team members (or establish if needed).

- [ ] Learn about team members' work arrangements including standard hours of work and any special flexible work arrangements (for example, different start and finish times, part-time). Get copies of any previous or current flexible work agreements.

- [ ] Find out about the team's culture, morale and job satisfaction levels. (You may need to refer to HR metrics such as turnover or absentee levels.)

- [ ] Find out about staff skills, knowledge and experience, as well as special interests.

- [ ] Find out about staff career aspirations and development needs/wants.

Actions by managers of dispersed employees

Daily:
Check in with each employee informally – phone or email –
to acknowledge them and check on health and wellbeing.

Weekly:
Check in with each employee in structured way:

- [ ] Give recognition for work successes or lessons learnt.
- [ ] Check if any matters need resolution (for example, equipment, resources, information, approvals).
- [ ] Exchange updates on workplace news.
- [ ] Summarise current week's achievements and objectives for following week.

Tips for managers of dispersed employees

encouraging inclusion and visibility

☐ Check in informally to make employees feel valued and visible.

☐ Set team protocols for contact (for example, daily emails or phone calls, team meetings, periodic face-to-face meetings).

promoting better communications

☐ Promote team interactions to encourage bonding and feedback loops.

☐ Encourage information sharing and reports from the field.

☐ Agree on standards for communication etiquette.

managing performance

☐ Support and encourage performance by regular check-in with employees.

☐ Identify any obstacles to good performance (for example, equipment issues, delays in communications or approvals, lack of access to key people or information).

fostering trust

☐ Follow through on any commitments made.

☐ Find ways to involve employees in planning or decision-making.

☐ Provide (and receive) regular feedback.

☐ Encourage employees to take responsibility by giving them autonomy to make daily decisions.

☐ Recognise employee efforts and find ways to show you care.

looking after health, safety and wellbeing

☐ Encourage employees to build peer support networks.

☐ Complete OHS checklists with employees before starting dispersed work arrangement.

☐ Monitor overuse of ICT and excessive work outside rostered business hours.

☐ Periodically visit employees, especially those in remote locations.

☐ Pair up remote dispersed employees with location managers who can look out for their wellbeing and resource needs.

providing suitable equipment and facilities

☐ Ensure ICT systems are reliable enough to support employee productivity.

☐ Consider encouraging employees to use hub offices or co-locate with other government organisations.

boosting security awareness

☐ Maintain equipment log.

☐ Avoid storing official records off-site or else provide lockable equipment to ensure safe storage.

☐ Establish communication protocols for employees who work solo.

selecting the right people for the arrangement

☐ Identify skills or qualities essential for dispersed work (selection criteria).

☐ Check if you have the right skillset for managing dispersed employees.

supporting learning and career development

☐ Work with employees to identify learning or career development activities that can be undertaken via coaching by others, via networking or through informal means.

supportinggovernment
servingvictorians

contact us

DOT7755/13