

Remote Working Advice for Employers

*This article from Irish Tech News is by **Shauna Moran**, a specialist in advising companies on remote working. www.operateremote.com*

4 Considerations for Businesses Implementing Remote Working

1. Managing Remote Teams

Remote working requires clear structures and processes tailored and catered to each department. It's the responsibility of the leadership team to work with employees to define and implement structures around virtual management, technologies and methodological skills.

The leadership team must strike a balance between their roles and responsibilities, effective leadership styles, and emotional intelligence according to the situation, individual and desired outcome. I'd recommend business to start by analysing how they have effectively managed teams in office-based environments, and explore ways to effectively translate that into a remote environment.

A great tip I suggest is to set the correct expectations amongst teams and departments. For example, what do you expect from each member of your team on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Leadership teams should clearly define and communicate the added responsibilities for each employee in a distributed team.

I recommend that leadership explore the ways in which they can inspire, create visions, foster enthusiasm and take care of team energy levels on the remote team as well as the most effective ways to manage by principle instead of policy, helping team members focus on important issues and deliver expected results.

2. Communication & Virtual Collaboration

When it comes to team communication you need to challenge any assumptions you have about what information is 'nice to know' versus 'need to know'.

Before deciding if you need to communicate certain information with your team, put yourself in the position of your team – what is their level of understanding about the project, the team, or the organisation and does this information affect them?

Communication is fundamental to remote working success. Failing to communicate and engage effectively can hinder projects, reduce employee engagement and lead to miscommunication. There are numerous communication and collaboration tools specifically designed for remote teams. The trick is finding the right technology for the right purpose, and ensuring communication guidelines are clearly articulated and understood by each team member.

Email, for example, is often useful for communicating facts, but not for delivering some of the meaning associated with those facts, in which case a video call might be more appropriate. Ensuring that individual 'time-zones' are taken into consideration as a critical success factor in successful collaboration and exploring the best methods and processes which allow teams to communicate synchronously (real-time) & asynchronously (delayed-time).

I'd recommend businesses start by looking at what, when and how information needs to be shared both on a team and individual level. Recording & sharing important video meetings for team members based outside of the standard time-zones and having a place where all relevant project updates can be seen by all are all effective ways in building effective workflows.

3. Employee Engagement & Culture

Businesses must implement employee engagement and culture strategies specifically tailored to individuals who don't come into an office every day. businesses need systems in place that help them review how they manage and increase engagement for both existing and new employee. They shouldn't rule-out opportunities for remote teams to meet in person frequently and should consider the benefits of in-person interactions and team-building activities.

Social time or 'water-cooler' moments that would naturally happen in an office environment can be easily tailored to suit remote teams, but it requires a proactive approach and a team that is willing to engage in a new way of building more purposeful working relationships. Some of the most culture rich teams I've worked with have setup social time on a Friday afternoon on video calls, which replaces the traditional 'after-work get together'.

I recommend businesses look at the important ways in which they build culture in an office and translate that as best they can in a remote team. It's about redefining our new social norms and adapting the ways in which we build relationships and trust.

4. Technology

Technology is at the core of effective remote operations, as this provides the main way of communicating with the team. There are many aspects to technology when considering remote working, such as a virtual private network (VPN) and mobile device management, as well as the security and connectivity for each worker.

Technology is also responsible for enhancing a teams ability to complete the project. This makes it increasingly important for businesses to provide a high-quality and highly functioning technology stack designed to meet the needs of the team.

Remote specific technology has improved considerably in recent years; video conferencing technology has evolved support virtual meetings, which means there's a much more unobstructed view of the recipients face, chest and arms, and is often a preferred alternative to in-person or face-to-face meetings. In terms of selecting the right technology, I recommend that businesses focus on the requirements of each department and select and

trial a handful of technologies as opposed to adding too many options, which leads to misunderstandings and too much noise.

Regardless of what tools are used, businesses should consider how they control the use of technology, take care of necessary tools and infrastructure needed to perform daily operations and focus on sharing data and enabling fluent communication.

There's no doubt that remote working presents significant growth opportunities for individuals, businesses and the economy. However, in order to have the greatest chance at success, it's crucial that right processes and structure are implemented to reduce key challenges associated with distributed teams and get the best ROI from a virtual workforce.

The most successful remote businesses I've worked with have invested time and resources into developing a remote strategy that's unique to their values, teams and growth strategy and understand that in doing so, they are investing in their most valuable stakeholders, their employees.