

# Managing e-working

**Managing people from a distance, part or all of the time, requires managers to perform normal management functions in a new and innovate way**

Managing people from a distance, part or all of the time, requires managers to perform normal management functions in a new and innovative way. It also encourages a shift in managing by supervision to managing by support. As a result the manager develops and improves his or her leadership skills by facilitating rather than directing the work of others. Managers may need additional skills, support and training to make the transition successful.

## **An e-Working Agreement**

The key to successful remote management is a written agreement that is drawn-up between the e-worker and their manager – with input, as appropriate, from the staff representatives or trade unions – prior to commencing e-working. This agreement should include:

### ■ *A behavioural contract*

This can address almost any aspect of working together at a distance. It seeks to compensate for the loss of face to face contact that office based colleagues have, through which they learn what are accepted norms of behaviour, and how and when to interact with others.

This type of contract is designed to raise and get agreement on issues that otherwise may not surface until they become a problem. It also ensures that everyone's expectations of working practices and behaviour are aligned. Issues that should be considered are: collaboration; information sharing; work planning; team membership; management processes; meetings; socialising; communication; workload; resolving conflict.

### ■ *Clear objectives and targets that support management by outputs*

The implementation of e-working can introduce a more systematic and objective form of management. Defined objectives and performance measures will provide a basis for e-workers to plan their own time and also to judge the success or otherwise of remote working.

This should also include a system for monitoring performance formally and informally through structured feedback, both positive and negative. As remote workers do not receive the usual behavioural signals on their performance an increase in formal communication on performance on a more regular basis is required.



**Defined objective and performance measures will provide a basis for e-workers to plan their own time and also to judge the success or otherwise of remote working**

■ *How, who and when communication can be made*

This should set out the rules about how communication will take place between the manager, the e-worker and the other members of the team. It should include when and how phone, fax, email and voicemail are to be used, as well as what type of message is appropriate to each medium.

The communication tools are there to be used by managers for information, guidance and motivation, and not for supervision. If a manager uses the communication tools as substitutes for walking past the e-worker's home desk to check they are working, then the e-working will encounter problems.

In addition it is essential that the e-worker is kept well informed so that the informal information acquired when in the organisation's office, together with the social interaction, is not lost to the e-worker. This will reinforce the team identity and create a smooth transition from home office to work office.

**Maintaining motivation and commitment**

Managers may find it more difficult to continually motivate and encourage their remote worker, as their work goals are not reinforced routinely as they would be in the work office. A way to address this issue is to give the e-worker more control in their work planning where possible. Managers should also regularly inform their e-worker on where their contribution fits into the wider organisational goals and effort.

Recognition of any special effort, work completed ahead of schedule or a job well done needs to be given to the e-worker as well as to the office based team. Where appropriate, a group forum such as a virtual notice board or conference call can be used to praise team and individual achievement.

The findings of this project have revealed that e-workers morale, motivation and commitment have been improved as a result of the provision of e-working by their employer and the acknowledgement of their non-work needs. The introduction of e-working has also led to the retention of skilled staff that would have left the organisation if this flexible working arrangement had not been available.

### Managing Co-Workers or 'e-Teams'

The e-working Agreement should seek to address issues that may arise between e-workers and their colleagues following the introduction of e-working. However, it is not always possible to predict changes that may occur within the organisational structure or within the 'e-team' that may affect the way individuals work together.

It is for this reason that ground rules should be identified and implemented prior to commencing e-working to ensure that responsibilities and expectations of the group are met. One of the key findings of this project was the need to ensure that co-workers were included in all aspects of the planning and implementation of e-working. As a result a specific training programme was developed to address the challenges co-workers experienced following the implementation of e-working in their team.

#### Tips for managing e-teams

- *Hold regular team meetings and ensure communications are effective*
- *Be as open as possible and put trust in others and be prepared to take risks*
- *Pay particular attention to the training and development needs of e-workers*
- *Ensure e-workers take full responsibility for maintaining contact with all team members*
- *Become the e-worker's main formal link with the organisation to represent their interests in the organisation*
- *Set clear objectives that have clear outcomes and keep careful records if there are any concerns about the e-worker's ability to manage flexible working effectively*
- *It's okay to say no to flexible working sometimes. For example, if there are performance issues or a genuine negative impact on operational needs*

#### Customer Service

Managers and e-workers need to ensure that customer service is not adversely affected by the introduction of e-working. One of the key factors to a seamless customer service is the communication channels being used. It should not be necessary for the customer to make any changes to the way in which they would normally interact with the e-worker.

To confirm that there has been no negative impact it is recommended a customer survey should be conducted in the months following the introduction of e-working.

“*Though one concern would still remain, I think, and that is the question of person's career progression. If that's a choice that an individual has to make, then that's a choice an individual has to make, but I think the concern would be that the employer will start making that assumption and choice for people.*

*We also perhaps have to look at the job and say, "yes, so what if this job has been done in a particular way for 19, 20, 25 years, perhaps it can be done differently".*

*And that's what we have to look at. How can we facilitate what we want with what the individual wants, and if we can marry the two, then we marry the two. ”*

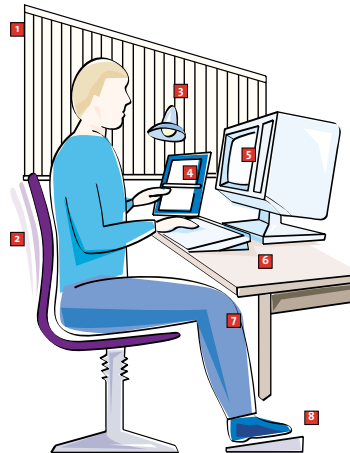
**Billy Hannigan**  
Assistant General Secretary,  
PSEU

### Code of Practice on e-Working

Before e-working is implemented in an organisation a Code of Practice on e-Working should be developed for the organisation. This Code of Practice will establish the scope and boundaries of e-working and will assist both the e-worker and their manager/team members to work successfully together.

The Code of Practice used for this project was based on the Code of Practice on e-working in Ireland, which forms part of the Agreement under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and was endorsed by Government, IBEC and ICTU in May 2000.

- 1 Windows should be fitted with adjustable coverings to avoid reflection and glare
- 2 Chair should have fully adjustable set and backrest. Angle to be in range of 70° to 90°
- 3 Local illumination should be provided where required
- 4 Document holders should be arranged to minimise frequent head and eye movements
- 5 700mm max viewing range to screen
- 6 keyboard should be detachable so as to avoid strain of hands and arms
- 7 Knee and thigh clearance essential
- 8 Footrest should be provide if required by individual operator



For further information go to [www.familyfriendly.ie/ease-to-eworking](http://www.familyfriendly.ie/ease-to-eworking)



“ I feel the main advantage of e-working is the reduction in travel time for the employee and that as far as I'm concerned is a win-win situation for the employee and the manager.

The employee involved with me is somebody who has to take two buses into work. Now that is hassle, and that's a lot of time to get into work which could be spent at home, you know, even if it means having a lie on, being more relaxed starting work.

**And from my point of view the employee is much, much more motivated.**

It's not just the work output; it's that added bonus of the employee feeling that there is a bit of loyalty paid back. That we're getting the same quality of work out of you at home as you produce at work – and possibly more ”

**Bill Bhandal**

Project Manager, eircom