MR4 Operational Distance Transcript

This is video four in the managing remotely new module that is looking at how you can harness the value of remote work, and reduce the cost of virtual distance. In this module. In this video, we're looking at some of the things that you can do to reduce the impact of physical and operational distances.

0:23

Welcome back to the videos on managing remotely.

We left the last video where you're considering the costs that you might be experiencing of working and especially managing remotely. So, now let's look a bit more detail about some of the things that you might be able to do.

For a moment, just, if this picture was to represent what it might be like managing your team when you're all in an office. You're used to seeing each other every day, you're used to seeing your people. You can see when they're doing their work and if they’ve got a problem or not.

And it's very easy for you to wander over to a colleague’s desk and ask them a question if you need to.

1:01

So now that you're working remotely. Does it perhaps feel a bit more like this? It really is difficult to see what's going on, it’s difficult to get a real good sense of the connections between each other and it’s difficult to feel confident, that people are doing the role as perhaps they should be doing.

So first we’re going to be looking at the physical and operational distances and things that you might be able to do to clarify how we work together, how we communicate and really clarify the role, and goal and tasks as we mentioned in some of the costs before.

1:38

So, the thing we need to really keep in mind is that remote workers don’t have this office structure and the organisation, or the infrastructure that we have in workplace. Some organisations have planned for this so they’ve got a planned strategy and they've thought through how do we need to do things differently so that people who are remote feel as included as people who are physically in the room. To be effective you really need to plan: How do we work? How do we send that request for information? How do we communicate? How do we each know specifically how we fit in together as a team and how our roles interact when we're not seeing each other and it's more difficult to just have that connection?

I would invite you if you're doing this alone or perhaps if you are doing it with colleagues, just pause the video for a moment here and just brainstorm, the ideas of things that you are already doing as a manager that could clarify how we work as the team. And, or how you work together with your direct reports, and how are you currently raising role and goal clarity. So, pause the video. Have a conversation with a colleague if you're doing it with someone else, otherwise just brainstorm ideas for yourself, and then come back to it.

2:58

So welcome back if you paused the video. Some of the questions I think are really useful for you to ask yourself, in addition to the things that you're already doing. And consider “How effective are they? Is there anything else I can do?” These are some of the questions that could be very helpful for you to consider. So think about what do you need to do for yourself to raise your clarity about your role, and the goals and tasks of every person within the team, so that everyone has a really clear idea of who's doing what and where and how you interconnect, and sometimes, some teams are very much more so interdependent on each other, and in other team's everybody has their own task and it is very separate. So recognise in your team how much interdependency is there, and then how critical is it that everyone has full clarity on that.

Also, how do you get everyone to have really full clarity and a real focus on the shared objectives, what's the overall purpose and goals for your tasks. And how do you help every member of your team have real clarity about their own purpose and the way that you work together.

Something else to be thinking about as well, is what work are you planning. So, I think we already started on some of this.

yes, so we're getting some real clarity, we want to clarify the expectations of people and get really familiar with … are you working at the same time, in synchrony, like to do what we're all in the office from nine to five? Synchronous working.

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Or are we working asynchronously? When we're working at home do we need to fit in around everybody’s patterns of work? And so, we need to be working at different times. And then how do we plan our communication tools and techniques and the strategies for recognising when we're all in work at the same time and when we’re all in work at different times.

So we need to create effective strategies. It needs to be about not just email for communicating and critically which I haven't really talked about yet but it's right up there at the top, is clarifying expectations. So there’s expectations about whether we're all on call at the same time, whether we're at different times.

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And what are the expectations for how often that we meet, and how, how do we meet? Do we have a lot of communication through online chat and emails, and then have some smaller time when we're all live together? What is it that's going to work well for you?

And so we need to have these effective communication strategies. So choosing the best tools to communicate, and we're going to use different kinds of tools. And there's more information on suggested tools in the handouts as well. Some examples are do you use the telephone>? Recognising the differences between when we need to be working at the same time, working in different times. How do you automate some workflows? What would be useful for you? When we use email and when email is good, and when email is not good, and that will depend on your team and how well you work, what works well for you.

Next, I would like to consider some tips for you specifically around managing remotely. So, first you have to clarify for yourself, what would work for you best in managing people? What gives you the confidence to feel people are On top of their work? And also, how are you giving people confidence in you that you're there to support them when they need it. That's quite an important thing to clarify in your own mind first of all.

So, these are a list of tips that are really useful. Regular one to ones with your team members, and your direct reports. And remember to include things that are personal. So often managers will run a one to one and the entire 121 is focused on operations, on the tasks that are needed, the work that needs to be done. What you really need to remember as a manager is the 121s are the only opportunity where you have directly to show managerial support for your people, and that's about asking them, their aspirations, what is it that they need to do. What is the, how are they emotionally? Particularly when they're working remotely, especially at times like this in COVID-19, when people are particularly stressed because of excessive amounts of change and uncertainty. So this is an important time for you to support them, in mental welfare, mental health perhaps, and ensure their wellbeing. So recognise the emotional impact of things and keep that in mind as you're planning workloads.

There's also the clarifying the roles and the tasks and specific boundaries as we mentioned before.

7:57

And for yourself, recognising when work is being done. So clarify how you know that. One of the ways to do this is to really use a coaching approach for how you are supporting your people.

So again this is more about asking questions when you have a task to do. You can talk about well this is the task we have to do. Tell me your ideas. how would you go about doing this. The advantage of starting this way, is that you are in a way showing respect for their own knowledge and experience, they feel that respect, they feel involved with it and they take on a sense of ownership. Much more so than if you were simply to say “look we’ve got this task, I think you should do X, Y and Zed, and that will get it sorted.” Now That feels quicker for you as a manager, and it feels more confidence building for you because you know exactly how they are going to do it. However, it doesn't engage the other person to the same extent.

And it means that they are, that they have less ownership of it.

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And you have less confidence that really they've taken on board and are… feel able to do this. Whereas if you're asking them how they want to do it, then the advantage is they’re designing work around the way it works for them, because we're all different . We have different ways of working. And the way of achieving some task that is brilliant for you may or may not be brilliant for the other person. When someone doesn't have the expertise to know that, then you can chip in with your own ideas. and then keep them involved in finding out how they would do it, how they will show to you when they’re on track and then you can have the opportunity then to agree, the timeline. So when are they going to report things? How will they recognise they’re on track? When will they recognise they’re not on track? That you might use a traffic light system for that. You know what are the, the warning signals?

9:40

What would we be seeing if it's an Orange, you know, we're not quite on track but it's not really an urgent situation. What would be the red signals? What would we be noticing? And what are, most importantly, what are the green signals? When you see that we are definitely on track?

There's also a real benefit of this in that they feel more supported. They don't feel so micromanaged, and it raises their perception, you’re still there to support them, even though they don't get to see you. So there's a lot of advantages in using this approach.

And the last tip that I like to recommend here is really start using a structured daily check-in. Now when we first started doing these events live, and we were talking about working remotely and one of the people on the Event said their manager had started doing 121s regularly. In fact, everyday every morning. And at first she thought that this was simply far too often. How could we possibly need a check in with our manager every single day? That felt too much. However, after a week or so as she saw all her colleagues in other teams who didn't have this check in, she realised that actually it was a real benefit, and she really really valued the fact that her manager had arranged this daily check in. And it's just a short meeting, no more than half an hour, ideally 20 minutes. If it's just with your… you're on a one to one basis, how about a five minute check in? But with a team you're probably looking at around 20 minutes or so. And it's, it's an opportunity for everybody to highlight something that's gone well for them the day before, what's worked well. What's top of the agenda today for them? And with a … with a reminder of why we're all here. And it gives everyone an opportunity to see that everybody else is playing their part. Everybody else is on top of things. And it's also an opportunity to ask questions. so if something hasn't gone well, you can flag it up and say, this didn't go as I expected, it's a bit of a niggle at the moment. Let's arrange a meeting where we can explore that further and find out why it hasn’t worked and what we can do to change. It's also an opportunity to say you know something's gone particularly well. Let’s arrange our next sort of bigger team meeting. Let's do an analysis of this, let's understand why it worked so well. What we could do extrapolate that. How can we apply that elsewhere? So it's a way of learning from what's working at applying it further.

12:09

It's also an opportunity if you can as manager make it easy for people to ask questions, they can ask something that's on their mind at the moment. and make it easy, you know it's, it's “no question is too stupid” because if we can clarify it now while it's just, a little niggle , then it means it's not building up to become a major problem that will cause issues for performance further down the line.

12:33

So there's a lot of things we could do that around having a daily check in. Your initial reaction might be. “Oh, that feels too much, how can I possibly do that”, but realise that it's worth moving beyond that because it's very valued for so many aspects of overcoming virtual distance when you are working remotely

And it helps people feel more connected which is what we’re going to do on the next session looking at affinity distance.

But before we do that, I invite you to at the end of this video, go through to the worksheet and look at some of the things that maybe you're already doing. And maybe have some ideas that come up for you now on other things you can do to think about how you are managing your people to overcome these virtual distance costs due to the physical distance and your operating structure.

What are the way you can adjust your strategies, your processes so that it works more equitably for people who are working remotely not when you are working in the office.

Look at the worksheet, look at the handout, because that has more details than what we’re including here in the video.

Then come back to the next video when we’ll be looking at the affinity distance.