

CONNECTIONS

Supporting all people to engage in activities they find meaningful

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An illustration of a winding asphalt road with a yellow center line through a rural landscape. In the distance, a red classic car drives away. In the foreground, a person wearing a blue shirt, black shorts, and a green helmet is riding a green bicycle towards the viewer. The landscape features rolling green hills, large brown rocks, and several trees with green foliage. The sky is a light blue gradient.

Regional, Rural & Remote

Bunbury Garden Labyrinth: A Place for Hope, Harmony and Community

Bringing Student-led Services to Rural Queensland

Learning from Disaster: Teaching and Learning through the North Coast Bushfires

Occupational
Therapy AUSTRALIA



OT WEEK 2020 CELEBRATIONS AND PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS

Tips for Managing a Remote Workforce

Anna Pannuzzo, Director at WorkPlacePLUS

Over the past several years, a growing trend in the disability and aged care system has been the number of people wishing to receive care in their own homes. This has created a greater demand for allied health home visits and other home care options.

2020 took working remotely to a new level, with people across all industries working from home wherever possible to slow the spread of COVID-19. Telehealth has surged in Australia as the safest option for providing health care where practical.

Managing a remote workforce presents a range of leadership challenges and considerations.

Monitoring Staff Performance

With practitioners and staff working remotely, it can be more difficult for supervisors to ensure the work is performed to the agreed standard. Supervisors need to be able to track and measure staff performance, both during the probation period and throughout employment, including:

- Agreeing on performance goals, expectations and KPIs
- Giving and receiving feedback with staff
- Giving and receiving feedback with clients
- Measuring outcomes and feedback

Management Tips

- Review your organisational policies, processes and expectations for performance management, ongoing supervision, communications, and working from home

- Set up regular one-on-one check-ins via phone or video conferencing (daily or weekly depending on your requirements, their level of experience, and the working arrangements)
- Take notes, follow up on agreed goals/actions, and review how the process is working
- Ask staff how they are going and listen to their issues
- When measuring client feedback, take the client's mood and personality into consideration

Top Tip: Get to know your staff over video conferencing, particularly their communication nuances. Video conferencing has enabled business to continue through COVID-19. However, this mode of communication can be fraught with issues, both technologically and regarding communication patterns. Supervisors and staff will need to be clearer and more explicit in communicating expectations and feedback.

Addressing Workplace Conflict

Serious complaints and grievances, such as bullying, harassment or discrimination, should take urgent priority for a supervisor. In the current climate with more staff working from home, these serious workplace issues can and still do occur.

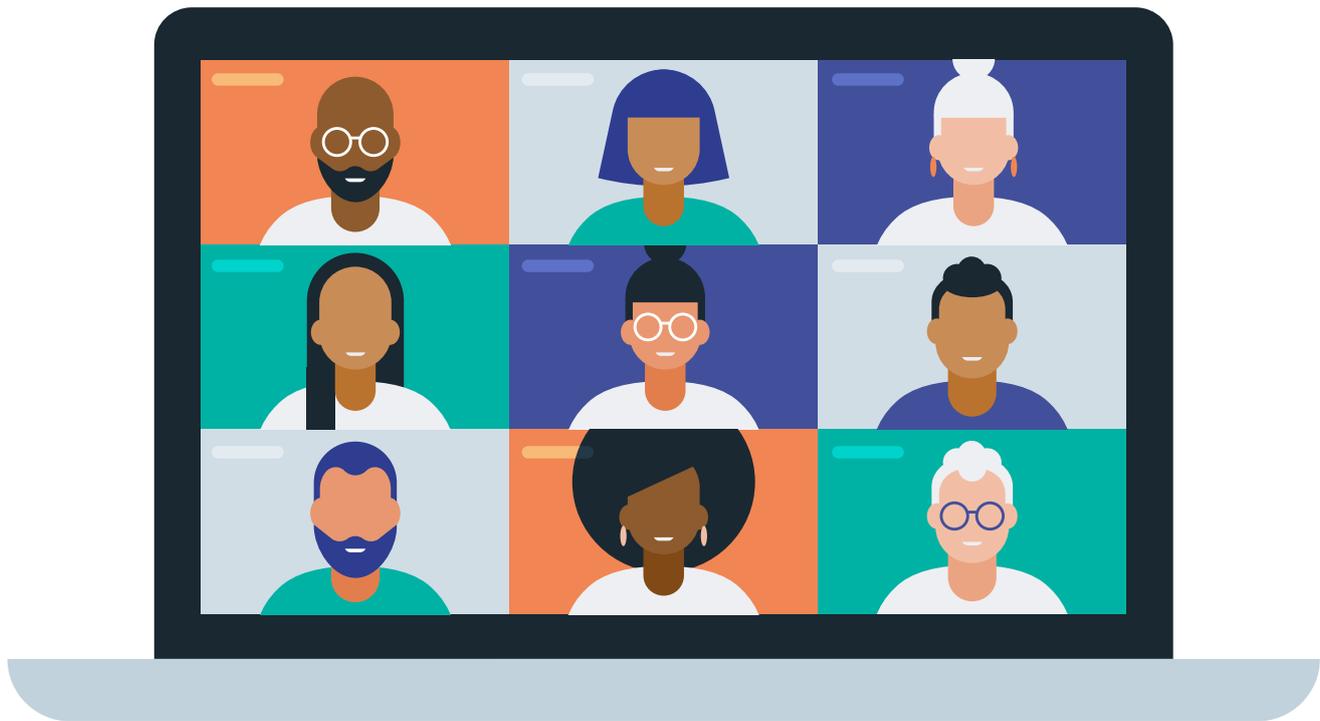
Additional challenges when investigating workplace conflict remotely include:

- Mitigating technical issues with videoconferencing, electronic signatures, and transferring files
- Ensuring the interviewee is in a private setting without unauthorised people or recording devices
- Obtaining and maintaining detailed records
- Gathering and safeguarding physical evidence and confidential documentation
- Assessing and monitoring the remote workplace culture

Management Tips

- Review your code of conduct and your organisational policies and processes for complaints and grievances, bullying and harassment, and equal employment opportunity
- Respond and deal with issues in a timely, fair and systematic manner
- The rules of procedural fairness and evidence apply when addressing workplace issues—in some cases, engaging an independent workplace investigator is the best option

Top Tip: Facilitating conflict resolution or conducting a workplace investigation remotely may take additional time and planning. Plan ahead to ensure that documentation has been securely transferred, you are using a secure meeting platform, and all parties have a working microphone, camera and internet connection.



Protecting Employee Mental Health

Employers have a duty to protect the health and safety of their employees, so it is important to note that remote and isolated work is recognised by SafeWork Australia as a mental health hazard in the workplace. People working remotely may not have easy access to resources, communication or support.

The risk to mental health is made worse when:

- No policies and procedures are in place for working alone, remotely or in isolation
- Employees lack the appropriate equipment or technology for communication (important for safety and social connection)
- The workplace doesn't offer flexibility
- The workplace doesn't offer an employee assistance program or wellness support program
- There is a community crisis such as a bushfire or pandemic, which may cause grief, fear, fatigue, heavier workloads, financial distress, and/or extra pressures at home

Management Tips

- Review your organisational policies and processes for work health and safety, and mental health
- Ensure you are providing flexible and healthy workloads, allowing for rest and recovery
- Keep staff informed on significant workplace changes or issues, including what this means for them and their jobs
- Regularly check on each employee's wellbeing through good communication—be accessible and demonstrate that it's OK to talk about mental health
- Look out for behavioural changes and learn how to respond to an employee who is struggling
- Provide support resources, such as an Employee Assistance Program

Top Tip: If staff are working remotely due to a crisis such as COVID-19, they may feel increased isolation and uncertainty. Supervisors will need to be more empathetic and flexible regarding what staff are dealing with at home, and more available for regular check-ins to help keep staff on track and ensure they are coping.

The two common threads throughout these management tips are the importance of knowing the organisational policies and processes, and the importance of regular, transparent, one-on-one communication between supervisors and staff.

Even when, ideally, a remote employee demonstrates autonomy and confidence in their own abilities, a supervisor should remain consistent in following the organisational protocols and connecting regularly with each person on their team.

About the Author

Anna Pannuzzo is the Director of WorkPlacePLUS, OTA's preferred HR provider. OTA members can receive professional support for addressing complex HR issues such as restructuring, bullying and harassment claims, industrial audits, employment agreements, and more.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more at www.workplaceplus.com.au or by calling (03) 9492 0958.