

Erosh briefing ...

April 2020



Supporting home workers

***Disclaimer:** the advice in this document is for guidance only and is not from a technical expert, specialist professional or lawyer. Erosh cannot be held responsible for the consequences of any action taken based on the information provided. Please check with your own technical expert, specialist professional or legal adviser before acting.*

Contents

1. Change management.....	3
2. Continuity	4
3. Communication	4
4. Equipment/tools.....	5
5. Performance management.....	5
6. Policies and procedures.....	5
7. Team meetings	5
8. Team building and motivation.....	6
9. Training and development	6
10. Working arrangements particularly relevant to the Coronavirus situation.....	7
11. Where to find further information.....	7
12. Your views and experience.....	7
13. 'Tea & Training' session.....	7



erosh is a membership organisation for professionals in the sheltered & retirement housing sector. We provide news, commentary and good practice to help you respond to current and future challenges and opportunities; to enhance individual and organisational performance; to help you comply with national standards; and ultimately to improve the quality of housing and support services for older people.

For information about erosh and to join please click [here](#).

Introduction

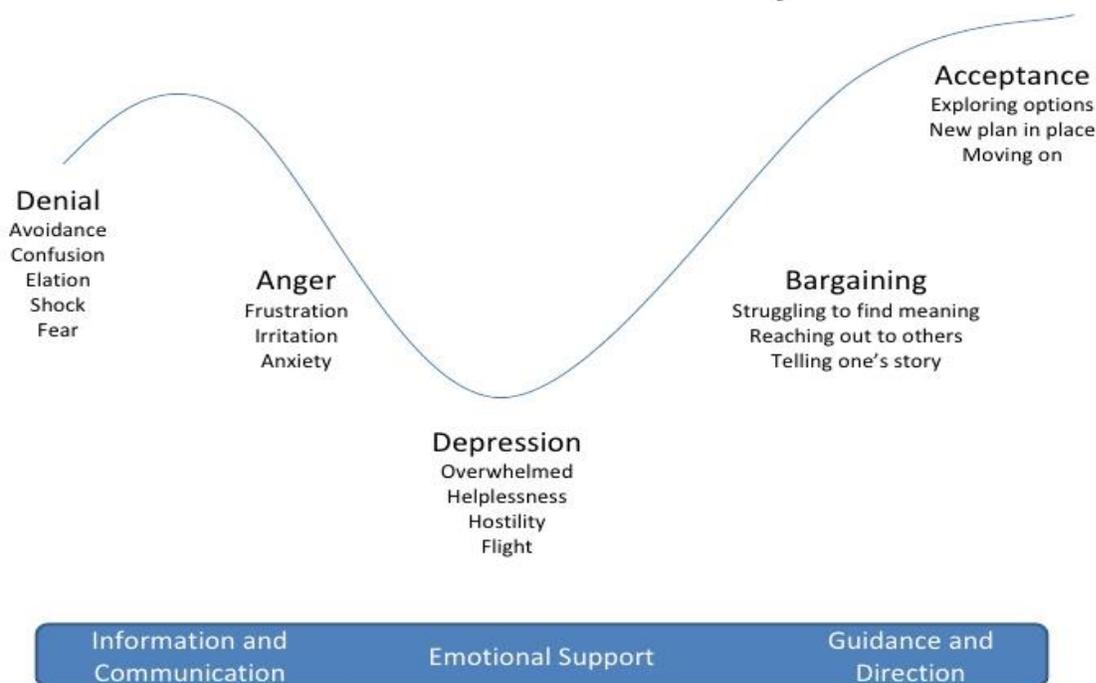
Measures adopted by our members to continue to provide a safe and effective service to older people and to protect staff include encouraging people to work more from home where this is possible. Managing homeworkers presents its own challenges. Sheltered and retirement housing service managers are accustomed to managing dispersed staff but not necessarily staff who work wholly or partly from home. Those who are being asked to work from home may never have done so before and find it unfamiliar.

Here we set out some top tips (in alphabetical order) for managing and supporting home workers.

1. Change management

The Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle or Change Curve is a model consisting of the various levels or stages of emotions experienced by a someone who is approaching the end of their life or who has lost someone close to them.

Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle



This model is useful in identifying how staff feel when experiencing significant change, and how best to support them. The particular circumstances around the Coronavirus outbreak have resulted in very sudden and unplanned change so staff may feel the early stages of the change curve more strongly and employers may need to ensure that there is sufficient information and communication as well as emotional support.

Staff may:

- Feel threatened by the change and frightened by or anxious about the uncertainty
- Be worried about job security even if this is unfounded
- Feel change has been enforced upon them and they disagree with the change

- Not be equipped emotionally and physically to work from home
- Be concerned about losing their 'usual' level of communication
- Feel conflicted personally – pleased about own personal safety but a feeling of abandoning residents
- Struggle with boundaries between home and work

Although, as the current changes have not been planned so the usual advice about involving staff in proposed changes does not apply, there are still measures employers can take to support staff through the changes:

- Involve staff in discussions about how things are working
- Encourage ideas, problem sharing, and collaborative solutions e.g. through a dedicated part of an intranet.
- Encourage staff to express their fears and concerns
- Keep communicating about further changes and developments
- Keep checking people's workloads and stress levels, with offers of support e.g. counselling or assistance programmes, or, especially for small organisations, someone to talk to other than their line manager.

2. Continuity

Where there is a change from office based to home working, and particularly where, as it is now, the change is sudden and unplanned, it is important to minimise disruption and maintain as much continuity as possible.



- Consider how 'normal' processes can be replicated in a home working situation e.g. if a one to one meeting is planned, a team meeting, or even an annual appraisal, it should be possible to go ahead using alternative methods e.g. video/telephone conferencing/meeting facilities or even just a telephone call. May not be ideal but in such exceptional circumstances, continuity helps to reduce anxiety and reassure staff.

3. Communication



Some staff may never have worked from home before and, with the anxiety about themselves and their families, may feel particularly anxious and uncertain about their jobs and how home working will work for them.

- Ensure clear lines of support with named people for staff to talk to about any concerns; and that staff know how and when they can contact them.
 - Establish clear protocols e.g. should emails be sent first requesting to speak on the phone rather than calling without prior arrangement etc.
 - Provide guidance on expectations e.g. boundaries between home and work.
 - Keep communicating constantly as the situation changes; and communicate even to say that there is nothing new to communicate!
- Make sure staff are on the circulation list for all relevant information so they are kept in the loop.
 - Regularly communicate how much the organisation value people's contributions especially where they may be taking on additional or different tasks or responsibilities through this exceptional period.
 - Communicate changes to other services which may impact on residents e.g. changes to repairs services.

- Communicate consistently to everyone in the team – the same things at the same time.
- Think carefully about communication methods; distinguishing for example between what is appropriate to communicate through email and where a telephone conversation might be more appropriate.

4. Equipment/tools

- Does everyone people have the right equipment to work from home on a temporary basis?
- What additional equipment might you need to provide?
- Do you have video/telephone conference facilities or do you need to acquire on-line meeting facilities?
- Do you have sufficient IT support for those who need it; and clear guidance how to access it?

5. Performance management

One challenge for managers of home or flexible workers is how best to manage performance. Focus needs to be on clear outputs and outcomes rather than on how things are done. Expectations also need to be very clear; those of us who work from home ‘normally’ may be confident and comfortable about what is expected of us but this may not necessarily be the case with those who have not worked from home previously.



- Keep an eye on fairness in relation to distribution of work and responsibilities, ensuring that demands are acceptable.
- Be clear and communicate how performance will be monitored, including how this may differ from current arrangements and the expectations of staff e.g. to what extent are staff expected to be available?
- Clearly establish how existing targets and performance indicators apply. Are there any for example which are particularly affected by the change in working arrangements, and how will this be accommodated?

6. Policies and procedures

Ensure procedures and policies are clear (including how they apply to home workers) and communicated to staff e.g. absence, sickness reporting, sick pay etc. CIPD has [useful information](#) about how organisation’s should respond in relation to Coronavirus.

Review health and safety arrangements for home workers; and consider if particular adjustments are needed for any staff with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Keep up to date with [government guidance](#) on Coronavirus related sick pay.

Develop contingency plans in the event of homeworking staff being unable to work.

7. Team meetings

In a period of significant and rapid change, especially where this is not planned, team meetings are essential to ensure that staff do not feel isolated especially in the early stages of the change to home working. These may however take a different form (and be virtual as we have seen). For example:

- **Daily briefings** to ensure that staff are aware of any changes that impact on their role.
- **Weekly team meetings** to keep workflow on track and provide the opportunity for home workers to raise concerns and discuss problems; and for managers to check motivation, workloads, and stress levels.
- **Monthly team meetings** to not lose sight of the 'normal' approach to managing team performance.

Even if, because of the current circumstances, these meetings take place virtually, they should still be formal in the sense of being properly organised, well structured, and chaired to convey their importance.

Good practice example: virtual team meetings

One erosh member is keeping morale in the team by holding weekly conference calls through Skype.

8. Team building and motivation

An efficient process of team building can take 6/10 times longer for a dispersed workforce than for an office based team. There are many theories about teams and team development, far too many to go into here but it is important to note that, however well developed your team is, a major change especially when unexpected, can take a team back to Tuckman's 'Forming' stage i.e. where a new team comes together. There will therefore be a need to revisit how the team will work together, as well as reinforcing meeting and reporting arrangements etc.

Source: The Coaching Tools (2020)

Tuckman's Team & Group Development Model



Strategies include:

- Agreeing new ways of working, communication and reporting protocols
- Agreeing how performance will be monitored and poor performance addressed
- Considering how existing quality standards and deadlines will apply
- Considering whether any new or additional resources are needed to support the team
- How problems or issues will be identified, communicated, and addressed

Those of you who have come across [Belbin's team roles theory](#) will also know that individuals have different personality characteristics which impact on their team role. Some individuals for example might welcome the opportunity to have some quiet focused time away from the office but others, perhaps most given the nature of sheltered and retirement housing work, may struggle more with being isolated from residents and colleagues.

Motivation will be important too at a time when exceptional external circumstances may be causing stress, anxiety and uncertainty.

9. Training and development

- Training courses, conferences, and events will of course be on hold but there are other useful opportunities home working staff could tap into e.g. online courses and seminars, webinars etc.

- People can also stay connected through organisations like erosh. Through our website www.erosh.co.uk we keep staff connected with policy and good practice, as well as with other colleagues in the sector.
- Face to face networking may not be possible but it doesn't mean that homeworking staff can't network with other members. For example, they can post a question or ask what other members are doing about Coronavirus on the erosh [Members' Forum](#); and/or see what others in their area are doing by contacting the local [network chair](#) who can put them in touch with nearby members.

10. Working arrangements particularly relevant to the Coronavirus situation

- Make sure all staff contact details are up to date, including emergency contact details.
- Make sure all staff are aware of what to do to protect themselves at home against the Coronavirus and what to do if they experience the symptoms and need to self-isolate.
- Communicate any changes to staff working arrangements to residents, reassuring them of service continuity.
- Ensure staff are aware of Coronavirus symptoms and what to do if they identify them amongst residents.
- Providing guidance for staff similar to guidance provided to residents (see the erosh new guide on *Supporting Older People and Staff through Coronavirus*).
- Requesting up to date medical history from residents (and staff) so those at high risk can be targeted.
- Cancelling non-essential external meetings and travel.
- Making sure resident and staff handbooks and directories are up to date with any new information relating to the Coronavirus situation.

11. Where to find further information

Click on the following links.

- Age UK – [Coronavirus information](#)
- BBC - [Coronavirus pandemic](#)
- CIPD – [Responding to the Coronavirus](#) – guidance for employers including a [useful questionnaire](#) to prepare for home or flexible working, as well a variety of [support materials](#), and a useful [factsheet](#).
- NHS - [information about Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
- Public Health England - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - what you need to know](#)
- 111 Online - [Coronavirus guidance](#)

12. Your views and experience

As always, we are keen to collect your views and experiences. If you have anything to share with other erosh members, please email Rebecca Mollart, ceo@erosh.co.uk or call 07803 176957.

13. 'Tea & Training' session

Now, why not have a look at our 'Tea & Training' Session on this topic which you can find on our website www.erosh.co.uk. These are very short (about 20 minutes maximum) on-line training sessions which you can easily digest whilst you take a break and have a cup of tea (or any refreshment of course)!