

Managers Guidance – How to engage an agile working team

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Version control

This document is subject to regular review due to legislative and policy changes. The latest versions of all our publications can be found on our website. Before contacting us about the content of this document, we recommend that you refer to the most recent version on the website and any relevant guidance.

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Notes / changes
v1.0	23/05/2023	Cabinet	New guide

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Introduction

Denbighshire County Council is committed to ensuring that all employees are engaged in the workplace. Our employees are all working in a different way in which they were used to and it is vital that managers and supervisors ensure that the team are supported. This guide will support managers as to how to engage an agile team.

Definition

Agile working is a form of flexible working where workers spend some of their time working remotely (usually, but not necessarily, from home) and some in the employer's workspace. At the same time, it is important to recognise that agile working may not work well for everyone.

Leading and managing agile teams requires an adaptation of approach, however some aspects of day to day people management (such as keeping people safe in the workplace SFARP*, communication, relationship building and performance management) will become more important than ever before.

SFARP* = So far as reasonably practicable

Managers are encouraged to openly talk to their employees and teams about the way in which agile working is working for the business and them personally. Recognising that some employees will struggle to adopt this way of working due to personal circumstances that will not allow for them to be able to work remotely at home or from another location.

There may also be certain roles or tasks that require staff to be co-located (i.e. working in the same physical location as colleagues), and that working at home or from another location would not suit the service.

It is advised that managers and employees continually review their working arrangements as part of the 1 to 1 discussions. Circumstances and job roles frequently change and evolve, and it is therefore important that the working arrangements works for both parties and that an open dialogue is adopted.

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If any employee requires any additional support when working in an agile manner, the following pages on the council website might be of use:

<https://www.denbighshire.gov.uk/en/jobs-and-employees/my-employment/mental-health-wellbeing/mental-health-and-wellbeing.aspx>

How do you engage and agile working team?

Recruiting and inducting a new team member into an established team that is now working in an agile manner will need to be thought through. More planning and preparation is needed, so that the new employee feels part of the team, even though that team may be working in an agile manner.

It is important that an induction plan is devised with various time slots given so that the employee meets the whole team and feels part of a team. More information can be found in the How to Induct an Agile Employee Guide.

It is essential that managers take the lead in engaging their agile working team and not forgetting the 'One Council' approach. Creating a team that work together to deliver the same Chief Executive's 5 key principles of the council:

- Culture
- Communities
- Performance
- Member/Officer relations
- Staff

In this guide we will look at the main important points we believe that managers and supervisors should consider when trying to engage an agile working team.

The Denbighshire Way – Chief Executive's 5 Key Principles and Values

It is essential to any organisation that employees including managers and supervisors work towards the vision. Denbighshire County Council has set out its vision and priorities and all

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employees should work towards these by ensuring that they also abide by the organisational values. It is therefore essential that the team are aware of the vision, priorities and values, so that they are able to fulfil the overall aim of the Denbighshire Way.

Consider some of the following:

- Teams should be aware of what the council vision and priorities are and how the team contributes to them. Talk about these in team meetings, check understanding and making this a regular feature in team meetings, 1to1's and other such meetings.
- The council values should be adopted by all. Managers should ensure that any new employees joining the council demonstrates the values as well as then ensuring that all team members abide by the values whilst in the employment of Denbighshire.
- Teamwork is essential and it is important that managers have a “we” rather than “I” approach.
- Team and individual expectations are communicated thoroughly and regularly.

Communication

Agile working is based on effective communication and is critical to the success of any organisation. When communication is not well managed, it can result in poor information flow, knowledge gaps, and barriers to effective team working and exclusion of team members who are not in the office. Communication needs to be more intentional, as casual or ad-hoc conversations may not happen the same as they used to when people were in the office and talking casually in the office, kitchen and other areas. Employees need to feel connected.

Consider some of the following:

- Meetings should be held on a regular basis and can take many forms, think about doing a mix of face to face and virtual meetings. Also think about different ways in which team meetings can be done, for example going for a team walk and getting out into the fresh air.

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- Teams should be encouraged and supported to establish their own principles of communication. This may include making use of daily communication via Jabber, email and phone as well as face to face meetings and walks.
- Build in regular social and human connection opportunities to support employee engagement and team building, for example team walks, sport or getting out and helping the Denbighshire community groups by volunteering as a team.
- Sharing what every team member is working on or focussing on. Some members will not be aware of what projects or key work areas that others are working on.

Wellbeing

It can be more difficult to provide adequate support and maintain social links for agile workers. People who are deprived of social contact through work can feel isolated or disconnected, bringing on pressure and stress or aggravating pre-existing mental health problems.

There are practical things we can do to help manage the risk of stress and mental health problems for agile workers:

- Talk openly with them about the possibility of them becoming stressed or mentally unwell
- Involve them in completing stress risk assessments so they can help identify potential problems and solutions
- Keep them updated on what is happening so they feel involved and reassured
- Have regular keep-in-touch meetings or calls so they can share any concerns
- Make home workers aware of occupational support that is available to them
- Take account of the needs of the individual – if someone is an agile worker for medical reasons you may need to meet their needs differently

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Ask & Listen

Regular feedback is critical to keeping you team motivated as it helps with aligning on expectations and objectives. It also demonstrates to the team that managers and supervisors care about their work and their professional development, which will encourage them to take risks and try more innovative approaches, all of which will motivate and engage the team even more. It's easy to forget about feedback in a remote set up. If you're out of sight, feedback can be out of mind.

Consider some of the following:

- Be a coach to your team. Provide regular feedback on how they can constantly become better.
- Ensure 1to1's are completed on a regular basis, and provide quick feedback on their work.
- Ask about their wellbeing, and use the question "How are you?" which is provided in the 1 to 1 form. Be interested in them as a person, ask them about their home or personal aspects, to get that personal connection. Showing that you care goes a long way to motivating your team.
- Ask about their work life balance, those working from home can sometimes work longer hours, making them tired and potentially stressed. Speak regularly about workloads, demands and training needs.
- Encourage employees to take regular breaks and use their annual leave. Make sure people aren't working too long to meet unrealistic deadlines or feel obliged to answer emails outside normal working hours.
- Stress can build up over time and the causes can be work-related or from other issues. Whatever the cause, it's important that any worker gets help as soon as possible, and we should support them to do so.

Employee Recognition

As mentioned employees who work as part of an agile working team need to feel connected and valued. Some employees may not be aware that the work that they do

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alone and within their own four walls has a positive contribution to the wider team and council priorities. Employees don't need to be seen to be productive. Therefore it is essential that managers and supervisors encourage employee recognition to ensure employees feel valued, motivated and connected.

Consider some of the following:

- Simple regular team 'shout outs' across the team so that the whole team are aware of what individuals have been doing and how great they have been working.
- Share comments and feedback that has been received about your team.

Management style and behaviour

Management style and behaviour is key to building a successful agile working team. The team should be clear on where they are headed, the expectations of them. Together with this it is important to have the right management style and behaviour to lead, manage and engage an agile working team.

When managing an agile team managers and supervisors will need to think about the working environment and giving employees the support they need, and trust them to get them job done, which will encourage motivation and morale.

Consider some of the following:

- Adopt a coaching style, encourage participation and employee development, and empower the team to make decisions, but ensuring that you are visible and available.
- Manage by outcomes rather than presence; recognise effort and accomplishment; avoid micromanaging.
- Get to know your own team and their own personal strengths and attributes.
- Listen to each team member and care about them by facilitating openness and trust.
- Lead by example – role model effective agile working behaviours.
- Consider your own behaviours, including tone of voice (face to face and by email), dress code and expectations in meetings etc.

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- Setting boundaries for agile working and what is acceptable and not acceptable e.g. the time in which you send an email, you may want to all agree that there are no expectations that emails will be responded to late or early in the morning. Consider placing sentence “Please be aware that I work flexible hours, so whilst this is a convenient time for me to send this email to you - I do not expect a response from you outside your normal working hours.”
- Consider the health and wellbeing of the team. Asking the team about their health and wellbeing and supporting employees with any challenges that they may have. Therefore, reducing the stigma around mental health.