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SMART WORKING GROUP – CASE STUDY

Since the outbreak, what ‘new ways of working’ has your organisation adapted? To what extent will the way we work be transformed in a post Covid-19 world?

Our IT and other systems were ready and robust. So although in the fortunate position of being able to work from home, we remain grateful to those, especially in the NHS and other hard-pressed services, who were and still are having to go out to do their vital jobs. At the same time, we recognised that working from home is not without its challenges.

We knew that we needed to consider these challenges from different angles, to enable staff to continue to provide a full service to our clients, while supporting our people, many of whom were naturally worried about the virus and were dealing with the practical implications. As was observed by a number of commentators: *“We are not working from home - we are at home during a crisis trying to work.”*

We thought about what our staff might find supportive, not just in relation to work, but also what might help with all of the implications of the ‘new normal’. From the start, our staff comms aimed to provide practical advice and assistance to staff dealing with the challenges of remote working, caring responsibilities, isolation and mental & physical health, to name a few. We have trained Mental Health First Aiders across our business, and we reminded staff that these colleagues are there as needed. We’ve shared insights from experts we work with. We arranged a webinar during Mental Health Awareness week, inviting a representative from a Mental Health charity that our Charitable Foundation supports, to talk to us about mental health and wellbeing within the workplace.

Our senior management recognised that some staff might have more demands on their time than others for reasons outside their control, with many juggling work and caring. Our staff are conscientious, and we knew that everyone was trying to do their best. Even so, for some the impact was significant. At Artemis, we place great importance on the manager/staff relationship. We encouraged staff to come to an arrangement with their manager that allowed them to strike a sensible balance between work and family life. Our senior people encouraged these arrangements and did not feel the need to intervene at a policy level, taking a principles- rather than a rules-based approach. HR was on hand as required, reinforcing the clear tone.

Examples of the new ideas we’ve introduced to sustain connections, energy and motivation include:

- An all-staff call every Monday morning, led by our Senior Partner with colleagues providing updates – both on the business and on continuity. The calls have been very well-attended, with positive feedback from staff who value the insights.

- Social activities across the business, from weekly ‘coffee mornings’ to a monthly all-staff quiz to regular informal events on a team or regional basis.
- Weekly online exercise classes, open to all and provided by a personal trainer.
- A dedicated area on our intranet hosting guidance aimed at managers and staff, with regular comms as we add new materials. Topics include effective remote working, dealing with isolation, online social events and help with home schooling.

Our staff comms have emphasised the value of personal connections. We have encouraged staff to make time to speak to one another, rather than relying solely on email. Our managers have recognised the importance of calling round their team members for regular catch-ups; and HR are in turn connecting with managers to talk through any concerns or questions that the managers might have.

We reviewed and increased controls under our regulator’s Senior Managers & Certification Regime, asking our senior managers to confirm that controls remain effective, and undertaking risk assessments as appropriate. Our Chief Risk Officer gives regular updates on the firm’s risk management profile via the Monday morning calls. Our Executive Committee’s meetings moved to twice weekly, with meetings at a functional level also increasing in frequency, particularly in the early days and weeks as we moved from crisis management to ‘business as usual’.

We have continued to on-board new hires to the firm effectively. We’ve met and adapted to the challenges of lockdown by doing all of the important activities in a slightly different way.

For clients, we recognised that many would have questions about their investments, and that regular communication would be crucial. During the first two months of lockdown we arranged daily calls for clients with Fund Managers and weekly Fund Managers’ updates online and by email for clients.

What affect has the lockdown had on your organisational culture? To what extent do you think flexible working will support your diversity & inclusion agenda post lockdown?

Through this crisis, our strong, collaborative culture has served the business and our clients well. Across every team we have witnessed our cultural principles (“Clients come first, Collaboration & Integrity and Accountability”) in action – whether through our commitment to being present and doing the right thing for our clients, collaboration across teams to keep the business running effectively, or integrity & accountability in stepping in and stepping up in a time of crisis.

We set ourselves up to work from home and connected effectively in a way few could have predicted. We think we have seen the very best of Artemis' culture in action.

We anticipate increased informal flexibility as the restrictions ease. Whilst we don't expect wholesale changes to our way of working, and we value the collaboration that comes from working together in the same location, the future is likely to be a blend of the best bits of 'before and after Covid-19'. For example, before the outbreak there was a lot of travel between our Edinburgh and London offices and to go and see clients in person. The pandemic has shown us that this is not always necessary. While we will travel again, we'll think about it differently and more consciously – not least from an environmental perspective.

We've engaged with clients online, and for some this may become a feature of future engagement. We've all worked from home and connected through the various collaborative tools. We'll see more of this, as staff manage their commutes and benefit from home working in future - without having to look after or home-school young children!

What are your top 3 biggest lessons learned since the lockdown?

Flexible working is an enabler of business continuity.

The experience we have had, whilst challenging in some ways, has demonstrated that flexibility is an essential component of a successful business. We've always been supportive of flexible working requests. But now more than ever we have come to see the positive benefits that flexibility brings, and the importance of empowering managers to support that in their teams.

Ask questions

Some people have benefitted from remote working whilst others have found it more difficult. One consistent theme has been that human connection is almost universally important. Asking people how they are will often elicit the response "I'm fine." Asking a second time how they *really* are can create a 'safe space' for people to open up and talk honestly about how they are feeling or coping.

To help us get a sense of what staff were thinking and feeling we ran a survey. We were intentional in how some of the questions were phrased. For example: "Do you have any concerns?" let people know that it's ok to share concerns. We had a 90% response rate, which showed us that our staff are keen to be involved, contribute views and shape decisions.

Digital landscape has extended our reach

We're working in an industry that has always thrived when clients are provided with honest, clear and forthright communication. During this time, we have focused on increasing our output of digital communication, and in some cases have replaced physical events with digital equivalents.

At the start of lockdown we may have feared we'd lose touch with a number of clients. But what we've actually found is that clients are just as keen to embrace new technologies

and engage with us in different ways. We have seen increased engagement across various digital platforms, proving that these platforms are not just beneficial for internal use but also externally.

Face-to-face events that would have involved careful pre-planning and extensive resources are now turned around more quickly, meaning we can reach more clients in a much shorter timeframe.