



VAO R&R Group:  
Case study for new ways of staff working post Covid-19 lockdown.

During lockdown all our facilities were closed and the staff were on full furlough, but after the first couple of weeks of euphoria at the unexpected holiday they were feeling a sense of isolation. There had been a messenger group set up by the staff in earlier times to arrange cover between themselves and we found ourselves using this platform to keep in touch, as there was no home access to the work emails, and everyone uses their phone these days!

As the facilities reopened I remained working from home, only visiting in person once a week. So the staff started to use the messenger for queries and questions as they cropped up, and I was able to respond quickly, often immediately. We have found the use has just grown.

It is an immediate way of contacting folk, without the pressure of a phone call if there are customers in with the staff. There is a record of the conversations that have happened, unlike the phone, and I have often used a screen shot to capture important conversations for the long term record. Staff can join in outwith their work hours if they wish to... or read up the conversations once they are in work.

It has allowed me to supervise from afar in an immediate way. I can raise nags and reminders, and they can do likewise which is most important to keep the balance within the tea, and not making them wait for answers until my next visit. It has led to a greater development of the individual members of the team who are happy to raise ideas and then follow them through immediately they have a consensus from the whole team, without waiting for my visit for approval. This has had a cascade effect whereby the staff are now confident enough to plan and organise a whole month of workshop activities between themselves.

This quick messaging has not precluded the use of emails for sending files and designs back and forth, but has allowed the comments and queries that these files may give rise to now have an immediate response which is visible to everyone.

This has been most noticeable with the new systems that we have had to bring in with the restrictions. A quick training visit, a 'How To...' file on the email and a flurry of messenger comments and queries and we are up and running with a brand new ticketing process for the workshops - allowing full track and trace capability, removing the need to police the workshop attendees for payments and ensuring that we only have the number of folk turning up that we can safely manage.

This messaging system has worked well with personalising the information that I have been able to gather online. For many years now we have been using an EPOS system which gives me an overview of the activities through the Hub and allows one method of monitoring the workload. Now I have the individual voices to add the flavour to these figures, allowing me to be aware of what is happening on the frontline so when I visit once a week we can continue the discussions that have already commenced on line.

I am delighted with the new system, mainly as it was initiated by the staff. The highlight was a conversation with everyone taking part at 7pm on a Sunday evening. It is testament to the team that they are all happy to join in at any time, although I am not generally part of the discussions that take place around midnight!

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