

# Distributed Work

## Control, On-going Learning, Trust and Collaboration

I encourage free flow of emails.

By the way let me approve the email before you send it to the boss, okay?

Yikes!

It is odd that sometimes we contradict ourselves. We can't really promote free flow of emails if we want to also censor or approve emails that workers send out.

This contradiction is only one of the challenges that leaders and managers must resolve before their organizations can fully benefit from distributed work.

We define distributed work as those activities that are independent of time and space. Regardless of time zones and distances, leaders, managers and workers can work and communicate aided by information technologies.

But there are transitions that an organization has to go through in order to fully take advantage of distributed work. And these involve the issues of:

Control  
Skills and Knowledge, and  
Trust and Collaboration.

### Self-Control

In traditional work, especially those in hierarchical organizations, the boss is in control. He or she physically monitors the worker and the work that is being done.



In distributed work, however, leaders and managers encourage workers to develop self-control. Workers set their own pace and decide on how work is to be done. Workers actually lead themselves.

It is therefore critical that leaders, managers and workers agree on the results and the methods by which they accomplish the results. Provided that workers are clear on the goals, they can pretty much lead and direct their

own work.

How would leaders and managers know that a worker is achieving the desired results? By requiring on-going feedback on projects and plans. This is done effectively through online tools for project management and reporting. Or, even a mere email exchange will do the job.

### Skills and Knowledge

Distributed work also works well when workers are highly skilled and are knowledgeable about their work. There is nothing more frustrating than having the freedom to dictate one's own work but not having the right skills.

Many companies are now realizing that in order to support the workers who work remotely, they have to add the infrastructure to allow on-going learning and sharing of knowledge.

### Knowledge Management

Oftentimes this effort is referred to as Knowledge

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Management – which means that valuable and critical information on customers, products, financials, processes and others are made available to everyone via intranets, web sites and virtual private networks.

### Free Flow of Information

Another area where leaders and managers are experiencing the challenges of transition from traditional work to distributed work is communication. Leaders and managers should move from the traditional practice of top-down, one-way or two-way communications to simultaneous and free flow of electronic communications.

The remote worker should be able to send an email to anyone, even the President of the company - unimpeded or unhindered. The free flow of information is vital in increasing the speed of decision making and getting everyone involved.

However, this free exchange is a difficult practice to adopt specially for those managers who would rather control the flow of information – a practice that is common in traditional organizations.

### Trust and Collaboration

What has to take place before the free flow of information truly becomes an acceptable practice? Leaders and managers must first create the

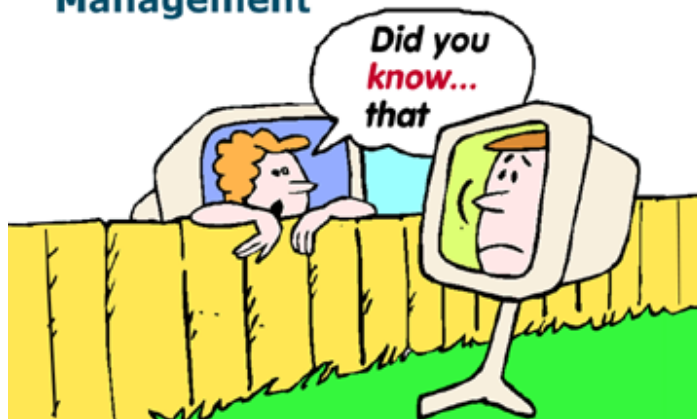
to cut across departmental barriers, collaboration among leaders, managers and workers is possible.

One of the biggest benefit of distributed work is the opportunity for managers and workers to collaborate – a way of getting everyone involved in projects and decision making at a faster speed and less hindered by traditional barriers of time and space.

### Summary

In summary, distributed work is here to stay and it will realize its full potential when leaders and managers encourage workers to develop self-control rather than being

### Knowledge Management



culture of trust and collaboration.

Trust that the bearer of the message is a contributor and that the contributor is a member of the organization who desires to make a valuable contribution.

So whether the contributor carries "bad news or good news", leaders and managers should not attempt to censor or "control the flow of information".

And finally, because of the free flow of information and the ability of the information

controlled;

when on-going learning and knowledge sharing is part of the day-to-day work;

and when free flow of information is unhindered and trust and collaboration is a norm of behavior.

Ask yourself these questions:

What in your organization stops the free flow of email exchanges among leaders, managers and workers?

How can it be remedied?