Managing Projects, Project Teams and Maintaining Productivity while Working from Home

We have all seen the fluid and increasing impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic is having to us personally, in our offices, in our communities and with our clients. As stated by our firm leadership, our first concern is with our employee’s health, wellbeing, and state of mind as this pandemic develops. At the same time, we have obligations to our clients and projects that we should do our best to maintain through these difficult times.

In situations where individual staff or entire project teams opt to work from home in response to this pandemic, what steps should we take to minimize the impact to our work and client obligations.

**Project Team and Staff**

**Step 1 – Inform Leadership**

If choosing to work from home, inform your project manager, regional sector leader and/or region leader so that they are aware of your situation, and to ensure that important communications can reach you.

**Step 2 – Coordinate Technology Requirements**

Check that you have the proper hardware and software in place to work remotely. The information provided can help guide you through this.

**Step 3 – Plan your work with your Project Manager or Supervisor**

Establish a plan with your PM for your assigned work, check in points and confirm task deadlines.

**Project Managers**

It is your responsibility to coordinate the work of staff members and project teams to enable them to work effectively and ensure project success, if working remotely. This starts with planning and frequent communication. The following steps are a guideline to help you through this process. The specific needs of each project, project teams and staff will vary but the fundamentals outlined below will serve you in most circumstances to maintain productivity for your projects.

**Step 1 – BIM Coordination**

- Pay attention to notices posted on SQ1 by the BIM team and ensure that your project teams are paying attention as well.
- Check with your local BIM coordinator or manager regarding requirements for working remotely, i.e. is your project in BIM 360 or not. If not, ensure that your team understands what is required to effectively access their model from its current location.
- Follow the recommendations of your BIM team member to maintain the health and functionality of your project models and ensure your teams are aware of these recommendations. This becomes more critical as staff move to remote work platforms. The following points from the BIM team are just a few of the guidelines for maintaining model health:
Whenever opening any model it’s good practice to sync to central right away.

When opening models, select the down arrow next to Open and click Specify. Close any worksets that have “Link” in the name. After the model has opened - open the worksets dialogue box and open the “Link” worksets one at a time. Be sure to click OK after each one.

Under no circumstances should a model be kept open overnight. A model must be closed when moving from one location to another (i.e. from your home to work). A model would need to be closed and reopened when changing connectivity state (from docked to wifi for example).

If you don’t plan to be active in a model, please sync and close out.

When closing the model at the end of the day – click on Relinquish All Elements.

Step 2 – Plan the Work

• Meet with your project teams and plan the tasks and deadlines for the coming weeks in alignment with project schedules and deadlines.
• Take advantage of Microsoft Teams and One Note to set up communication streams for projects and task lists for team members so that the entire team can follow the progress of the work and share information. Please ensure, however, that project correspondence, ongoing work and project information are properly filed in established project file systems. Teams should be used to facilitate team communication and collaboration only.
• Identify obstacles that may slow or stop progress and develop a plan to mitigate these obstacles where possible. For example: if working with outside consultants, check with them on their plans during this pandemic and confirm that they have plans in place to meet project deadlines; check with regulatory agencies to see what impacts this may have on projects in review or projects planned for submittal in the coming weeks; if work involves multiple offices, coordinate with staff in other offices to ensure plans are aligned to keep the work progressing.

Step 3 – Communication

• Frequent communication with your project teams is critical to the success of teams working remotely on projects. This cannot be overemphasized. Set up a regular schedule for video conferencing with project teams, at a minimum once daily, or more often as needed to keep teams informed on project issues, enable collaboration between team members, answer questions and hear concerns and ensure the team understands their tasks and has the information they need to proceed.
• Daily video conference team meetings should be structured to keep the calls short and to the point. These calls should be for the intent of:
  o Checking progress on the work
  o Ensuring staff understands their task assignments and deadlines
  o Determining what obstacles are prohibiting progress so that you can resolve them
  o Share project information to keep the team informed, motivated and empowered while working remotely and in isolation.
• Where design issues or coordination issues need to be addressed, schedule separate video conferences for these and only invite those necessary to the topic. Then share decisions with the larger group at the next team touchpoint meeting.
Step 4 – Site / Client Meetings and Travel

- As stated earlier, communication is critical. We have a contractual obligation to our clients, but they are likely confronted with the same concerns that we have about minimizing social contact whenever possible. Reach out to clients early to discuss alternative options for addressing upcoming scheduled meetings. Determine what alternatives may work for each situation with your clients and develop plans that will serve the project and address safety concerns.

- Be creative with your clients in finding ways to continue progress through video conferencing, document sharing and other remote means for sharing progress and receiving input from clients and enable work to continue. Determine with your clients what video conferencing platforms are available with your clients and ensure that we are set up to communicate in these platforms, i.e. Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc. It is too easy otherwise for work to stall but we are creative problem-solvers, that is why we were hired. Let’s use our skills to develop creative means to stay connected with our clients remotely and keep work progressing.

- As stated in the firm guidance in SQ1, travel is limited to essential travel only. Before traveling to any meeting or project site, confer with your Sector Leader and/or Region Leader to confirm the necessity of attending in-person or whether an alternative can be proposed in the situation.

- If in-person meetings are still required, such as site construction meetings, determine what safety protocols can be put in place with staff to minimize contact at these meetings. Discuss this with others who will be in attendance prior to the meeting and establish an agreed plan to minimize risks.

- Ensure that any staff being asked to attend a necessary in-person meeting are comfortable with the steps put into place to minimize the risk of exposure. If any team member is uncomfortable attending a requested meeting, we will respect our staffs concerns and develop an alternative plan to serve the meeting requirement.

Following these guidelines will greatly enhance a project teams’ ability to stay productive and meet deadlines. If situations develop that are slowing progress, i.e. client is delayed in providing necessary feedback to a project, team members are unable to work, there are challenges with working in digital models remotely, etc. please let your PM or Principal know immediately. The sooner we are aware of issues, the quicker we can step in to provide support and help to hopefully get the work back on track or intervene with clients.