



Implementing & Managing a Telework Program

A Complete Guide to Properly Managing Telework Employees

The importance of implementing telework solutions, both from a financial and human resources standpoint, have been widely documented and quantified. However, despite these inherent benefits, many organizations still are hesitant to implement telework, often because there are lingering doubts as to how to manage workers remotely.

Recent studies indicate that teleworking barriers are not technology-related, but rather stem from cultural implications. Typically, managers feel if their employees are out of sight, then work is out of mind. Despite the advances in technology to thwart this myth, managers still prefer to be “hands-on” and closely monitor workers to ensure work is getting done. Additionally, managers fear that if employees are working from home, they will feel more disconnected from the organization, and begin to decline in performance and productivity.

Beyond the cultural aspect, one of the major impediments to adoption of telework is the inability to manage a telework program effectively, and not having the necessary resources to provide a productive environment. Most managers still have doubt as to whether telework will work for their organization.

The following guide will provide managers and supervisors with the necessary information to implement a mutually beneficial telework program. Specifically, this guide is designed to educate managers about implementing a program, including how to:

- Develop a telework program;
- Determine which employees should telework;
- Break down the cultural barriers;
- Select the right tools for telework;
- Ensure security with teleworker’s equipment;
- Launch the program; and
- Evaluate results to determine success.

Laying the Foundation

Identify a Telework Coordinator

If you plan to implement telework with 10 or more employees, it is recommended to identify one employee as the telework coordinator. This person should manage the overall telework program to help improve the quality and effectiveness of your organization's program. The telework coordinator, typically an individual in human resources, is responsible for organizing teleworker schedules, arranging proper equipment for each teleworker, tracking program progress and promoting the benefits of telework among employees.

Establish a Telework Committee

The first action for the telework coordinator is to establish a planning committee composed of representatives from human resources, legal, information technology and management. This group can help establish program goals, objectives, written policies and procedures and develop an implementation plan and schedule with milestones. The telework committee should be responsible for determining the three most important elements of your company's program: policy, training and evaluation.

Create a Telework Policy

Good communication is the essential element of a successful telework program and all employees should know the program's guidelines and expectations. The telework policy should define program parameters, including which positions are best suited for telework. Additionally, the policy should include necessary forms or documentation, including a telework contract/agreement.

Below is an outline of the most important elements for a telework plan:

- General policy statement with program definitions
- Program goals and objectives
- Explanation of the process for program participation

- Review of program benefits
- Identification of positions or aspects of positions appropriate or not appropriate for a telework arrangement
- Review of time, pay and attendance issues
- Sample agreement to be completed by the employee and supervisor
- Checklist of technology and equipment needs

Train Employees and Managers

Since telework typically involves a cultural change within the organization, each employee and manager should receive training on the telework policy, procedures and techniques for managing remote workers. Discuss work schedules, communication methods, required technology, success strategies and proper organization to ensure all employees are fully aware of what is expected of them when working remotely.

Determining Who Should Telework

One of the major challenges for supervisors is determining who is a candidate for telework. This can be a difficult task, as managers may experience employees who want to telework, but are not the best candidate to do so. Managers also may be concerned that if one person is allowed to telework, all employees will want to telework.

Employee Suitability

A good starting point is to review all positions and employees within your organization and determine which have the most potential as teleworkers. The best way to determine who is best suited for a telework situation is to determine certain criteria to be eligible for telework, and then evaluate each employee's working style against these criteria. Those employees who are highly focused, self-sufficient, flexible, have great organization skills and enjoy the solitude of working at home may be the most adaptable to teleworking.

The decision process to grant employees the option to telework could be facilitated by completing a “screening” form that both managers and employees can review and complete together. This process can help the employee understand why he or she may not be a suitable candidate for telework. This form should allow a manager to rate an employee on characteristics that lead to success in telework.

Job Suitability

In addition to determining if an employee possesses the right skills to handle a telework arrangement, managers also need to consider the position or job this person has within the organization. Initially, a particular position may not appear to be compatible with a telework arrangement; however, if the position is broken down into individual tasks, you may be able to identify tasks that could be accomplished in a telework setting.

Telework is feasible for:

- Work that requires thinking and writing, such as data analysis, reviewing grants or cases, and writing regulations, decisions, or reports;
- Telephone-intensive tasks, such as setting up a conference, obtaining information, and contacting customers; and
- Computer-oriented tasks, such as programming, data entry, and word processing.

Positions that are not suitable for teleworking typically require:

- The employee's physical presence on the job at all times;
- Extensive face-to-face contact with their supervisor, other employees, clients, or the public;
- Access to material that cannot be moved from the main office; and
- Security issues that prevent the work from being accomplished at an alternative worksite.

Managers should consider each position thoroughly and determine whether there is potential to create a telework opportunity. As an alternative, the employee may be able to telework one day a week, or half a day for two days a week.

Breaking the Cultural Barriers

A telework program challenges management traditions, as it fundamentally changes how a manager should think about supervising employees. With teleworkers, managers should evaluate an employee's performance by results, not by physical presence. However, this type of management style brings forth issues of employee trust and empowerment – two key elements of a strong working relationship. Telework also creates the challenge of keeping workers, whether they are teleworking or not, to work as a team to achieve one common goal.

Before implementing telework and to help break down any cultural or procedural barriers, managers may need to initiate the following practices to maximize your effectiveness at supervising teleworkers:

- Maintain a sense of control even when people are out of sight
- Develop increased levels of trust and use trust as a purposeful tool
- Use technology for staying in touch with teleworkers
- Rethink and redesign the way certain jobs are performed
- Plan further in advance for meetings and other team activities
- Focus objectives and expectations on short-term, project-based goals
- Adopt location-independent ways of measuring performance and results
- Transition teamwork toward more electronic-based collaboration

For teleworking to be effective, managers must demonstrate trust and support to teleworkers. Most of the time, the people you trust will live up to that trust and respond to it by exceeding your expectations.

While entrusting your employees is vital to an effective telework program, employees who telework must also have trust in you. Some employees fear that not being visible may mean being

passed up for promotions or project opportunities. To avoid this, be sure to include teleworkers in all group activities such as staff meetings and recognition events, and ensure that teleworkers are evaluated and rewarded just as equally as non-teleworking employees.

Non-teleworking employees also have trust issues that supervisors must consider. They must trust that teleworkers will meet their commitments and be as accessible as if they are in the office. They also need to know that their workload won't increase with some staff teleworking, and that tasks usually performed at a specific company location will be assigned equally. This concern can be relieved by ensuring that all employees, whether they're teleworking or not, have access to each other at all times through innovative technology methods.

Below are a few tips to help a manager make the right decisions to ensuring telework is successful within the organization.

- Trust your teleworkers at all times and demonstrate this trust by assigning challenging projects once the employee delivers a strong performance
- Include teleworkers in surveys and evaluations
- Try teleworking yourself when you have the opportunity. It will help increase your personal effectiveness and improve your understanding of the pros and cons of teleworking
- Consider your teleworker's point of view in all situations. Understand the timeframes involved in completing tasks and the resources required to complete them
- Involve teleworkers when setting work goals and objectives
- Delegate assignments fairly among teleworkers and non-teleworkers
- Include teleworkers in day-to-day activities. Be aware of your teleworkers' attitudes and involvement to ensure they don't feel isolated from the main office
- Encourage informal communication within your team to keep teleworkers and co-workers in touch and up-to-date. Consider establishing a "virtual water cooler" via a shared e-mail folder or organizational Intranet
- Communicate on a regular basis with all technology methods, including phone, e-mail, instant messaging and online meetings

- Be flexible and open to increasing the frequency of teleworking if it is working well for the employee
- Keep an open mind about teleworking. Be flexible with the program's policies and procedures in case they need to be adjusted for any reason

Choosing the Right Telework Tools

Before launching a telework program, an organization should determine a teleworker's technology needs in order to be just as sufficient working remotely as he or she would be in the main office. There are several technology options to help implement telework, some of which you are already familiar with and others you may need to research further before making the right decision. The inherent technology needs for a teleworker include the following:

- Computer
- Internet connectivity (high-speed broadband is best)
- E-mail program
- Telephone
- Fax machine
- Collaboration software

In looking at these necessities, few allow for quality interaction between an employer and teleworker, and they do not address the "myths" or concerns that managers have when considering telework. Management's highest concern is the fear of having less control over employees who work from home, and not being able to reach a teleworker when you need them. Both of these concerns, among others, can be addressed with a collaboration software program.

Consider Collaboration

By equipping each teleworker and non-teleworker with high-speed Internet, a Web camera, headset and collaboration software, managers can get in touch with teleworkers at all times—and in return, teleworkers can contact managers, employees, vendors and clients. An effective and

useful tool, a collaboration program should include such features as real-time video, telephone-quality audio and presence detection systems to allow better interaction between the main office and teleworkers. With a collaboration program, the following can be accomplished:

- Teleworkers can better replicate an in-person meeting and easily contribute to the discussion when joining meetings at the main office via the Internet.
- Managers can see and hear teleworking employees during online meetings to avoid a fear of loss in productivity.
- Management and teleworkers can see who is available online for a meeting or quick discussion via instant messaging with the presence detection and status indicators. This will help alleviate the 'out of sight, out of mind' concern with managing a remote workforce, as the manager will quickly be able to determine which of their workers are online, offline, in meetings, away from their computer, or do not wish to be disturbed.

Additionally, a collaboration tool should have more in-depth interactive components of its system to help the teleworker further engage in activities occurring at the main office. Such components include instant messaging, joint editing, whiteboarding, live view, chat and secure file sharing/storing. By harnessing these features, the following can occur:

- Confidential documents are stored in the application's secure file cabinets for sharing, rather than the teleworker's computer
- Teleworkers can instantaneously communicate with the main office
- Multiple employees are able to view, discuss and edit documents simultaneously
- Employees are able to take notes during meetings for all participants to view

Using a combination of communication methods, such as online meetings, e-mail, fax and phone, will provide a comprehensive telework program.

Select a Collaboration Tool

After establishing specific policies, procedures and measurement methods for your telework program, you should next select the right technology.

The most interactive and secure method for communications with teleworkers is a collaboration software program that is designed specifically for your industry and company structure. The following questions can help you select a collaboration tool that best meets your organization's teleworking needs:

1. Does the collaboration solution offer everything a teleworker needs to work effectively from home, such as real-time document editing, audio, video, instant messaging, etc.?
2. Are all the necessary services integrated into one package or would we need to consider other alternatives (and expenses) such as conference calls for the audio?
3. Will the solution maintain total privacy and confidentiality of video, audio and data?
4. Does the system use a high level of encryption methods, such as Advanced Encryption Standard (AES)?
5. How does the provider protect the data and where is it stored?
6. Does the system operate through firewalls? This is critical when it is important to communicate with external audiences.
7. Is security included in the overall price of the solution, or is it an add-on cost?

8. Is education and training about how and when to use the service readily available and/or customized for the teleworker?
9. What type of support will be available to the teleworker? Is the support included, or must you pay for telephone calls to client services?
10. What are the contractual arrangements? Does the provider offer one price for multiple participants, sometimes called “seats”?

As a manager, it is your responsibility to not only find the best solutions for telework, but also find ways to save costs on implementing the program. To minimize technology expenses, look for a collaboration program that allows you to purchase “seats,” which means you can purchase licenses for a group of participants rather than having to pay for each minute you are online using the program for a meeting.

Ensuring Security at Home

Oftentimes, organizations overlook the potential security risks when allowing an employee to work from home. While your office may have security measures in place, your employee’s home may not. The Computer Security Institute, a San Francisco-based association of information security, recently conducted its 10th annual “Computer Crime and Security Survey.” According to the survey, large corporations and government agencies acknowledged more than \$130 million of financial losses due to computer breaches. Therefore, it is imperative to consider technology tools that provide stringent security standards to ensure your company’s information is not compromised from a teleworker’s computer.

Protect E-mail Systems

E-mail can still be an effective, easy and paperless way to communicate, but organizations need to understand the threats to security when relying solely on e-mail for communications. For teleworking purposes, your e-mail system should be fully encrypted to avoid security breaches.

Additionally, it is helpful to have a junk e-mail folder and virus detections to protect your systems against any potential e-mail viruses. Highly confidential information, such as financials, salary data, strategic plans or budgets, should not be transmitted via unprotected e-mail methods. Opt instead for an encrypted method of sharing and storing sensitive information.

Secure Online Meetings

A collaboration software program provides organizations with a cost-effective method for transferring important files over a secure channel. While most products have security as an add-on, others build strong security specifics within the tool to provide better protection. All components of a collaboration tool – including audio, video, data and files – should be protected with the strongest levels of encryption.

Some of the security factors you should look for include:

- Lock-tight password protection
- Comprehensive encryption system using Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) Public key encryption
- Encrypted file storage

Stay in Control

Perhaps the most effective way to protect sensitive files is by having the control in your hands. Any form of communication, and specifically a collaboration tool, should provide you with the control to grant employees access to certain information. A collaboration product should let you designate which of your employees has access and to what files, and it should handle details surrounding need-to-know and right-to-know permissions.

Secure Networks and Applications

Lastly, you should consider ways to secure both the network you are transmitting information with and the application being used to communicate. This is especially important for teleworkers who

use a wireless network, as the security implications with a Wi-Fi network are still being discovered and the vulnerabilities are endless. Acting as two security layers, if your network is breached and you have a secure application, the hacker can only get access to encrypted files, which prevents the hacker from reaching any confidential information.

Launching the Program

Initially, managers will feel somewhat overwhelmed with the changes and challenges in launching a telework program. However, if you approach this in a gradual fashion, giving time to work through new issues, success is highly achievable.

When initiating a telework arrangement, managers need to help employees adapt to this culture change in the beginning stages of implementation. Share information about the program as it is developed, and ensure that employees receive training on the organization's telework policies, procedures and any new technologies that need to be utilized on a daily basis. Once all employees are given an opportunity to review the telework program and decide if they would like to participate or not, then you should move into launching the program.

Maintain Balance

Once a telework program is underway, it is important to emphasize equality between teleworkers and non-teleworkers. Be sure to communicate frequently with employees in the main office and those who are working remotely to maintain a cohesive team.

While managers can maintain communications with conference calls and e-mails, if your organization has a collaboration program, you can also touch base via instant messaging and online meetings. Managers could host regular staff meetings via online, which allows the teleworker to stay involved and included without having to commute to the office. This is especially important if the organization has employees working in another city, state or even overseas, as it would be very costly to transport them to the main office for each staff meeting. Additionally, an online meeting allows the teleworker to not only hear other participants in the

meeting, but also see everyone in the meeting, allowing for more quality interaction with managers and employees.

Set Expectations

Before beginning a telework program, managers should clearly define expectations from an employee's performance before he or she begins working remotely. Focus on results, such as accomplishments, products, or services provided to measure their performance since it will be difficult to observe activities, behaviors or demonstrated competencies. Performance plans also should include standards that are measurable, observable and at least verifiable. Whether an employee works at the main office or at home, they should know what they are supposed to do, and how well they are supposed to do it, in order to ensure successful performance.

Monitor Performance

Monitoring performance includes measuring performance and providing feedback. In a telework situation, measuring the results of employees' efforts rather than their activities can be more efficient and effective. Quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness are four general measures that should be considered at all times for all employees, whether they work from home or in the office.

After establishing performance measures, communicate where an employee stands on performance frequently. Since teleworkers are not in the office to receive quick, informal feedback, make a conscious effort to send an instant message to teleworkers so they know they are doing a good job.

During the first few months of implementing the program, managers may experience a few glitches here and there, but once you find solutions for any minor problems, the organization will soon experience benefits such as decreased sick leave from employees, a reduction in workers' compensation cases and overall improvement in employee morale and productivity.

Evaluate the Program

In order to measure success of the telework program, the telework committee should develop an evaluation plan before implementation. This plan should be based on quantifiable program goals and objectives to measure and compare results.

When evaluating the organization's telework program, it is recommended to first analyze the key issues that affect the organization, such as productivity, operating costs, employee morale, recruitment and retention. While you also can evaluate external issues impacted by telework, such as traffic flow, air pollution, and mass transit use, these factors are usually evaluated through a community effort by a consortium of interested organizations.

There are several measurement strategies managers might want to include in the evaluation plan. For example, compare teleworkers and non-teleworkers on selected measures at one point in time. Also, conduct pre- and post-measurements on the teleworkers alone, analyzing performance before and after they begin working remotely.

To evaluate productivity, develop various levels of performance to measure each employee. Identify quantifiable tasks and determine which can be accomplished in an office setting and which can take place via telework. For example, it may take an employee two weeks to write the office newsletter when working in the office, but only one week in the telework setting because of fewer interruptions.

To measure operating costs, you should measure sick leave taken, workers' compensation costs, office space needs, and/or transit subsidy expenses before and after the telework program begins. In addition to these measures on individual employees, anecdotal data may also be helpful. In evaluating the costs of telework, allow sufficient time for implementation before studying costs. In the initial months of telework, there are typically increased costs for logistical support; however additional noteworthy cost savings are normally realized after a sufficient period of time.

To evaluate morale, recruitment and retention, managers can utilize focus groups, questionnaires and surveys with employees. For example, ask employees to rate their degree of satisfaction with their working conditions, productivity and telework situation.

In addition to looking at overall morale and retention, it is important to measure specific aspects of satisfaction with telework. Similar to measuring costs, it is important to take enough time to evaluate satisfaction with the program, and it may take asking the same questions at several points in time, such as three months, six months, etc. One approach is to develop a small survey asking employees how they believe telework will benefit them before implementation. After six months, ask them to look at the initial survey and identify if they did or did not experience these benefits.

Additional Resources

If you have further questions regarding the implementation of a telework program within your organizations, the following resources can help you.

Telework Consortium

The Telework Consortium discovers, evaluates, and demonstrates the field-ready hardware and software, management processes, infrastructure configurations, measurement techniques, and best practices that are likely to speed the early adoption of cost-effective, easy-to-use designs and technologies for working and collaborating from remote locations.

www.teleworkconsortium.org

Telework Coalition

The Telework Coalition brings together a diverse array of organizations, companies, and individuals with the common interest of promoting awareness and adoption of existing and emerging Telework and Telecommuting applications including telemedicine and distance learning, as well as addressing access to broadband services that may be needed to support these applications. www.telcoa.org

International Telework Association & Council (ITAC)

Founded in 1993, ITAC is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing the growth and success of work independent of location. ITAC includes Fortune 500 firms and federal government agencies as its members. On January 1, 2005, WorldatWork acquired all of the assets of ITAC and ITAC is now identified as ITAC, the Telework Advisory Group for WorldatWork. www.telecommute.org

Federal Government Office of Personnel Management

OPM works with the President, Congress, departments and agencies, and other stakeholders to implement human capital policies that assist Federal agencies in meeting their strategic goals. This is accomplished by recruiting citizens to Federal service, by serving as the main portal for employment information and connecting job applicants with Federal agencies and departments. OPM connects people and their skills and talents to Federal agencies that need specific human resources and provides these agencies with policies and guidance that enable them to capitalize on these skills and talents. For more information on telework initiatives by the OPM, visit www.telework.gov.

VIACK Corporation

VIACK Corporation is the leading authority on secure collaboration and communications over the Internet. Unlike communication services with limited capabilities, the company's VIA3 Assured Collaboration Service provides organizations with an integrated combination of business communication tools including instant messaging, video, audio and information sharing all in one convenient desktop offering. VIA3 was built from the ground up to establish the highest standard of security, enabling companies to conduct meetings and communications over the Internet without risking theft or interception of sensitive information. Employees, colleagues, partners and vendors can now conduct meetings and share live information as if they were in the same office. VIACK's service has been embraced by leading enterprises, high-tech companies, professional service organizations and the US government. The company's products and services are available from VIACK, authorized service providers and government contracting vehicles. www.viack.com