



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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The Basics of a Teleworking Policy

Everyone should know the basics of teleworking. (Remember when it was called telecommuting?) But how many organizations are utilizing it? What factors are holding you back?

The Benefits

There are a number of tangible and intangible benefits associated with a telework policy. First of all, it is perceived as a quality of life benefit. People are generally happier if they have the option to work at home one or more days per week. It keeps them out of traffic, keeps office distractions to a minimum, and allows people to focus on their work for a large block of time. This can lead to a situation where people are more productive. Because the percentage of companies offering teleworking is still small, it can be used to increase retention among your current staff and lead to easier recruiting of new staff. Let's face it, in today's competitive job environment, a teleworking policy is perceived as one sign of an enlightened workplace.

The Problems

There are real and perceived barriers to teleworking as well. For instance, there may be incremental hardware and software costs to get everyone connected. There is also a concern that less personal interaction will lead to problems associated with teamwork and camaraderie. However, the biggest barrier is usually a management mindset. Managers are concerned that since they cannot see teleworkers, it is hard to know what they are doing and whether they are being as productive as they would be in the office.

Your company can implement teleworking by asking the following multi-part question: Can a person effectively do his or her job from home, given that the right logistics are available and there is proper management focus? Let us assume that you have the ability to provide the right hardware and software to make the logistics work. In the IT development world, for instance, programmers need to basically sit at their desks for hours, or days, focusing on coding and testing. This work can be done from home, maybe more effectively than in the office. Systems analysts need to be in the office to meet with their business clients, but much of their analysis can be done from home. Project Managers probably need to spend most of their time in the office. Application support personnel can do much of their work from home if they have access to all the applications and tools they need. Development managers probably need to work mostly in the office.

Start with a Pilot Project

Don't make a full commitment up front. Sponsor a pilot project to see whether and how a teleworking program would work in your organization. Most of the information you need to get started, such as overall process, benefits, costs, hardware/software, management focus, training, etc., are available from a multitude of sites on the web. Start with a



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teleworking option of one day per week. Evaluate whether or not it is successful and then see what it would take to implement the policy on a larger scale in your organization.



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Sample Teleworking Policy

The following information provides an overview and framework for a generic teleworking policy. This can be modified as appropriate based on individual company circumstances.

Business Case

We are implementing a telework option into our work environment for the following reasons:

- **Quality of life:** We believe that allowing the flexibility for teleworking will result in people feeling better about themselves and their work.
- **Increased retention:** Many companies do not offer a teleworking policy. We feel that offering this option in our department will be a positive point of differentiation for our company, and will be a reason that people will want to stay with us longer.
- **Easier recruiting:** A teleworking option is an attractive benefit for potential new hires, and demonstrates an overall flexibility concerning how employees do their jobs. This should be a positive incentive to help find new employees for our department.

Overall, we feel that this program will have a positive impact on our company through higher morale, longer retention, and shorter recruiting cycles. There are some employees who feel that they will be more productive while they are working at home. (There are studies that show higher productivity from teleworking for certain types of work.) In the worst case, our expectations are that people will get at least as much work done while teleworking as they would if they were physically in the office.

Costs

We anticipate very little incremental costs for the program. None have been identified so far. In general, employees will be responsible for any incremental phone or equipment costs. All employees must have proper equipment and software, but these are available already and do not represent any incremental costs. *(In some companies, this may represent additional costs. Identify the up-front and ongoing costs and include them in this section.)*

Hardware / Software

(There are a number of hardware and software options available for the technology needed for teleworking. Your company will need to determine whether everything is going to be standardized or whether you will deal with each teleworking request differently based on what its specific needs are. Some people will have dial-up access. Some will have cable-modem or DSL access. Some will have the proper hardware and software on their personal home machines. Your company may decide that teleworkers need to have a standard set of company-supported hardware and software, probably on older equipment that would be obsolete for the typical desktop environment.



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The first decision you need to make is whether you will support a standard teleworking hardware and software environment, or whether you will evaluate each person's need separately, depending on what they have and what they need. The rest of your hardware / software policy should be driven by that first decision.)

General Framework / Policies

- This initiative will begin as a pilot test. We will need to gather some experience to see whether this is a viable alternative to being in the office. We will evaluate the program periodically to ensure that it is still working as it should.
- The work that takes place at home will be roughly equivalent to what takes place in the office. For instance, if a person normally takes support calls at work, they need to be able to take the calls at home.
- The starting and ending time worked from home should be roughly equivalent to what is worked in the office. For instance, if a person works 9:00 – 6:00 in the office, they should keep those same hours when working from home. Leaving the home for lunch is acceptable, just as leaving the office for lunch is.
- People working at home should have their phone calls forwarded so that a call to their desk at work will ring through at home.
- People who are teleworking will need a phone line to connect to the office. It is assumed that teleworkers have a second phone line at home, or that they will be using their primary line (which would otherwise not be in use since the person would normally be in the office.). If a teleworker decides that he or she would like to install a second phone line, he or she will be responsible for the cost
- Teleworkers who are using their primary phone line to connect to the office must be especially diligent when checking emails so that people can get in touch with them quickly when needed.
- Teleworkers should have the material they need at home to do their job. This will cut down on the disruption to other co-workers that might be caused by asking for material to be emailed or read over the phone.
- The preference is for telework days to be on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. This is so that the telework day does not begin to appear as part of a three-day weekend.
- Scheduling of telework days will be determined after reviewing the primary/backup support list and any other flextime requests. This review will ensure that we have adequate onsite coverage for our applications every day. There also needs to be one day per week when everyone is in the office.
- The teleworker should block his or her calendar on the days he or she works from home to keep appointments from being requested.



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Accountability

The teleworker and the manager will document the expectations for work that will be done on the telework day. The next day, the teleworker should validate to the manager what work was completed, along with an explanation of any variance. This can be during an in-person discussion or an email update, at the discretion of the manager.

What You Need to Remember

- Employees love a teleworking option, even if it is one day per week. This should translate into higher morale, increased retention, and decreased time to find new employees.
- Teleworking must make business sense. If people can be just as productive as in the office, plus you get the intangible benefits expressed above, it should make sense. If certain jobs can be done more effectively at home, you have a powerful business case.
- The biggest obstacle you will face is not from the teleworkers, but from the managers. Managers need to feel comfortable knowing that deadlines are met, not from knowing a person is in their desk all day. Prepare your managers and the teleworkers for the new paradigm.
- The technical and cultural challenges can be overcome with the right management focus. After all, thousands of companies are doing it today.