

FOR EMPLOYERS – Implementing Teleworking Arrangements

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Other terms commonly used:

- Mobile Work, Telecommuting, Remote Work

THE FIRST STEPS

Prior to starting Teleworking, companies might wish to look at existing HR policies that currently exist. More importantly, decide your reasons for wanting (or agreeing) to offer Telework Arrangements in your organization.

Identify specific goals that you hope to achieve by offering Telework Arrangements.

Examples would be:

- Reduce overhead costs & increase office space
- Retain valuable talent
- Improve employee morale and increase productivity
- To gain reputation as an “Employer of Choice”

Thereafter, it is important to decide the scope of the programme:

- Will it be implemented throughout the organization? Or will telework be geared towards certain departments only?
- Will there be a pilot programme? Will it start with only one department?

Set a timeline of approximately 6 months to 1 year for pilot projects. This allows you to evaluate if the policy worked, or if it needed areas of improvement.

BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION

((A) Defining the Job Roles (and tasks within each Job Scope) appropriate for Telework

Work suitability is actually dependent on JOB CONTENT/ FUNCTION (what needs to be done), rather than Job Title, Job Title or Work schedule.

To determine if the Job Role can be converted to telework, take a closer look at the tasks:

Tasks Suitable for Telework	Tasks Not suitable for Telework
<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Requires thinking and writing* Telephone-intensive tasks* Computer-oriented tasks, <p>Typical Examples of such Tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">*Analysis, Auditing reports, Computer programming, Conducting business by phone, Data entry, Design work, Editing, Evaluations, Field visits, Maintaining databases, Planning, Preparing budgets, Preparing contracts, Project management, Reading, Record keeping, Research, Thinking, Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Requires employee’s physical presence to attend to clients e.g. face to face customer service* Requires extensive face-to- face contact with their supervisor or other team mates• Requires access to material that cannot be located outside the office compounds• Work involving security-sensitive materials.

(B) Teleworker's Eligibility Criteria

Have a generic guideline to help determine which employees can opt for telework.

However, it is important to also factor in individual personalities and job scope for case-by-case basis approval.

Some useful criteria to consider include:

- How long has the employee been working for the organization?
- What Job Function does he/ she carry out?
- What are the employee's work style and personality characteristics? Looking specifically at:
 - * Organisational, time-management and planning skills
 - * Ability to work independently
 - * Ability to prioritise and meet deadlines
 - * High Degree of autonomy, with a strong self-motivational drive
 - * Ability to thrive in an environment that has little social interaction during traditional work hours
- What was the employee's past track record (based on his/ her performance evaluation)?
- What is the employee's working relationship with his/ her supervisor and his/ her team mates?
- What is the employee's reason for wanting a Telework Arrangement? (e.g. Caring for their child, Caring for their sick parent etc)

(C) Home System: equipment & security

In general, the guideline to determine if the employee's home system is suitable for telework should include the following:

- Telephones (Land Line)
- Cell phones
- Voice mail
- Desktop computers
- Laptop computers
- Software
- Broadband Internet access
- Scanner/Printer

Provide a checklist for the employee, allowing him/ her to be aware what equipment will be provided etc.

Involve your IT department in the setting up of security systems required to maintain sensitivity of corporate information

(D) Management's Involvement

Management needs to know what impact the implementation of Teleworking will have on the rest of the company. Be clear in defining the goals of the Teleworking programme to Management.

Flexible Work Arrangement schemes that work best are those that have management support.

(E) Defining the Policy (including HR policies etc)

If the plan is to implement Teleworking across the organization, have a clear policy prepared as a guideline for all future processes. This policy will serve to navigate

supervisors, employees and the HR department through implementation of telework arrangements.

Like all policies, the Telework Policy should be revised as the programme evolves. Recommendations from employees and feedback from supervisors can be incorporated to fine-tune the guide.

In the policy, include some guidelines on important issues such Annual leave allocation, Allowances granted and other employee benefits or compensation issues that may be changed with the implementation of the new scheme.

IMPLEMENTATION

After the preparation work is done, the processes required to get the Teleworking Arrangement going can be broken down into the following steps:

(a) Internal Marketing of the Programme

When starting off the programme, there may be employees/ supervisors who are unsure of taking up the arrangements. It is therefore important for the Telework committee (if it is set up) to do their part to encourage participation. Some possible methods include:

- Introduce the programme and the processes to the supervisors (or managers)
- Send out companywide emails, introducing the programme
- Highlight the programme in internal memos, company newsletters and other internal PR
- Introduce the programme during the Orientation Programme of new hires

It is important that educating employees about what Telework is, what it is not, how it works and how they can benefit from such a work arrangement is essential.

(b) Who Starts it?

Most organizations are likely to start off with a pioneer group or department. Start with a department which has a higher chance of easier implementation by virtue of:

- the job nature of the various team members
- the team makeup (Personality traits of the various team members)
- employees who have spent more time with the firm and very familiar with existing processes

(c) On-going Training

In order to ensure that the programme is successful, it is not enough to just implement it and let it run its natural course. Flexible Work Arrangements are very new in Singapore and there is still room for potential conflicts and hiccups that might occur at the beginning. It is therefore necessary to make ongoing training an integral process.

- Supervisors

Constantly ask for their feedback and zoom in on areas that are challenging, such as co-ordination of team members who are based in office and based at home.

- Employee

Employees might also need some hand-holding at the initial stages, to help them ease the transition and minimize disruption to business processes

Both employee and supervisor also can meet with the HR team on a regular basis to discuss the progress, highlight challenges, discuss triumphs and to take an objective view of how teleworking has changed the working environment, team dynamics and customer satisfaction level. These meetings allow the programme to be constantly fine-tuned to better match the overall corporate goals.

Some suggestions on how both Supervisors and Employees can ensure that Teleworking is ongoing smoothly:

SUPERVISOR

- Be realistic in your evaluation of the employee's performance: Give as much praise and as much critical feedback as possible
- Be objective in your assessment. If necessary, include inputs from fellow team-mates, coworkers, clients and subordinates who are in contact with the employee
- Factor in the Teleworker's schedule when arranging for team meetings etc
- Integrate a performance appraisal process into the telework agreement
- Be readily contactable to your teleworking employee, via phone, email and other forms of pre-agreed communication
- Have a win-win mindset and be honest with your employee

EMPLOYEE

- Be conscious of the arrangement and try to make sure that you are able to convey your commitment to your role despite the change
- Strive to maintain good working relationships with co-workers/ supervisors (which may include the occasional department lunch gathering etc)
- Respect the work schedule arrangements and keep to them, especially when other team members are affected e.g. Team meetings
- Keep an open and honest communication style with your supervisor. Let him know if something is not working
- Be patient: Know that any new new policy or work arrangement takes time to adjust to.

POST-IMPLEMENTATION

(A) Monitoring Process

Before implementation, the ongoing evaluation process should be decided upon. As the programme takes flight, constantly check-in with the employee, supervisor and the other team members. Ideally, there should be some templates prepared for the following:

*** Teleworker's Performance Evaluation Form**

(This should include monitoring and assessment of:

- > Communication Style and Habits (e.g. were they easy to get hold of via emails? Via weekly meetings? Etc)
- > Responsibility Level (Responsiveness to deadlines, Ability to maintain performance standards, Cooperation with the rest of the team)
- > Level of Independence (Able to work with minimum supervision, Able to still supervise existing team from home etc)

* Supervisor's Performance Evaluation Form

> Supervisor's Evaluation of Arrangement (e.g. provides objective evaluation, Able to identify setbacks and offer solutions etc)

> Supervisor's Ability to manage the entire team (ensuring that teleworkers can still integrate with the rest of the team)

* Team-mates Suggestions and Feedback Form

- Some basic questions for colleagues to express their opinions about the work arrangement

* Programme Evaluation Form

- This serves to ONLY focus on the success level of the programme, and should be completed by various stakeholders.

Depending on the individual situation, having client's responses to the change might also be useful if the job function has much client-facing time

(B) Possible Challenges & Solutions

There are potential problems with implementing Telework, however, there are always solutions that can be considered.

Supervisors may express difficulty in the actual supervising duty, since the team will consist of a mixture of employees who are physically present in the office and those who are not.

Solution: Have pre-implementation discussions. Both supervisor and employee (as well as team members) need to be clear about what is expected of them. Do not try to adopt a 'wait-and-see' method. The minute problems surface, bring them up for discussion and keep an open mind to allow for improvement suggestions from both parties.

For roles that have interaction time with external clients, there might be some negative reactions from the customer. Depending on the nature of the business and the job role, a flexible worker may be perceived by customers as being less pro-active.

Solution: Before implementing telework, carefully assess if the role is suitable for telework. If it can be implemented, supervisors should give some thought to the 'end-user experience'. From the customer's point of view, there should always be someone (within the team) present to handle queries and to ensure that customer service is still a top priority of the firm.

There might be fear (real or unreal) that employees will abuse the system and not really be as committed to their role, when working from home.

Solution: There is no fixed arrangement for every employee. Depending on the personality of the individual, the job might have to be altered slightly. In situations when employee has proven himself/ herself to be reliable and able to perform well with little or no supervision, there is a higher chance that telework will work out for this employee.

Other team members are unhappy with the arrangement and feel that they are not fairly treated.

Solution: It is therefore important to clearly define which roles are approved for teleworking and which are not. It might also help to modify the performance appraisal

system. For example, a co-worker has to take on extra duties because a team member takes up teleworking. For this co-worker, his performance appraisal should include the element of his new duties as well his ability to work on a team. Reward accordingly.

There might be other possible problems that surface as the Telework arrangement is implemented. However, some simple steps to help deal with them would be:

- 1) Be prepared with guidelines on how teleworking will occur
- 2) Have clear communication channels between all parties throughout the entire process,
- 3) Ensure a transparent and effective appraisal system is implemented
- 4) Constantly and consistently allow for feedback, comments, criticisms and suggestions from all parties that are directly and indirectly involved