An empirical study on effectiveness of telecommuting

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Abstract

Working from home as an option in contrast to customary courses of action by which representatives play out their activity capacities has encountered gigantic development as of late. While such practice is established in the reason that working from home is advantageous to both the laborers and the companies alike, in an astonishing number of examples it has neglected to convey its underlying guarantees. In light of a union of earlier research and distributed industry best practices, this article distinguishes and talks about various basic achievement factors that an organization must think about when actualizing a working from home program and anticipating a sensible possibility of progress.

Keywords: Telecommuting, Telecommuting Program Implementation, Remote Worker Management, Telecommuting Rules and Policies

1. Introduction

Working from home has altered the manner in which numerous individuals work. As opposed to investing energy in rush hour gridlock, getting down to business and originating from work, representatives can telecommute, utilizing broadband association with interface PCs and telephones to organization information systems. Since the 1990s, working from home as a business practice has become fundamentally because of the expanding weight on organizations to slice costs and to build representative efficiency. Organizations are currently tested to start progressively adaptable reasoning for the new "corporate office." what's more, the extension of broadband Internet administrations to worker's homes and the union of voice, information and video over a typical IP structure have made working from home a suitable choice – and once in a while a prerequisite – for medium to huge estimated organizations in the present commercial center. Individuals can work productively as though they were in the workplace.

The advantages of working from home, both genuine and saw, are well-archived: expanded representative efficiency, expanded quality contact with clients, better work-life balance for representatives, decreases in corporate land costs, and decreases in rush hour gridlock clog and air contamination. What's more, the capacity to work from home is additionally viewed as an appreciation for occupation applicants. Meanwhile, organizations actualizing working from home projects may likewise confront critical difficulties. Most regularly referred to issues include: challenges in overseeing and overseeing telecommuters, sentiments of seclusion with respect to the representatives, coordinated effort wasteful aspects because of an absence of closeness among specialists, and expanded security dangers.

This article is proposed for those associations that have either a current working from home program or are intending to dispatch such a program. In light of a union of earlier research and distributed industry best practices, the paper talks about various basic achievement factors that an association must think about when conveying a working from home program. Organizations that arrangement and execute cautiously around these elements regularly receive the rewards of a smoother working from home program usage, while those that neglect to consider these issues enough are bound to be disillusioned.

2. Success Factors

Sending an effective working from home program requires significantly more than just giving a rapid Internet association and a PC. A generous measure of arranging must happen to suit explicit arrangements and strategies, innovation determination, preparing, specialized help, cost and spending the executives, and client fulfillment. Organizations must start via cautiously arranging and reporting the key periods of the execution

What follows is a list of primary concerns or factors that must be handled appropriately. The rest of the article presents a detailed discussion of these factors.
☐ Eligibility – Selection criteria and requirements for participation
☐ Technological infrastructure support
☐ Telecommuting worker training and help desk support
☐ Remote worker management and performance evaluations
☐ Telecommuting rules and policies
☐ Telecommuter agreement & contract

3. Eligibility

Working from home isn't for everybody. It involves working in an area that is physically confined from associates. It ought not be accepted that a worker with a background marked by astounding execution in the workplace would most likely imitate his/her outcomes at home. Individual and business related variables exist that may influence the presentation of a remote worker.

3.1 Personal Factors

As a rule, remote workers ought to have certain character attributes for them to be compelling when working from home. Notwithstanding immediate supervision, there are numerous instruments that can help survey the character characteristics of the workers. It is suggested that directors use character tests that evaluate these various attributes. A considerable lot of these tests are promptly accessible on the web. A decent possibility for working from home ought to be proficient, trustworthy, creative, and confident. S/he is a cooperative person, imparts well, and should have a sensible measure of learning of the advancements utilized for working from home.

Polished skill: A great applicant ought to have shown that past assignments have been finished with demonstrable skill. Demonstrable skill is characteristic of the applicant being full grown, dependable, and systematic. As a business, this ought to be one of the criteria to choose whether a representative can be trusted with work while outside of the workplace.

Creativity: Working at home additionally necessitates that the worker be ingenious while playing out his/her activity capacities. A decent competitor ought to have the option to deal with any difficulties that surface. Chief or managers may not generally be accessible all an opportunity to respond to questions, and the remote worker will be relied upon to determine these difficulties freely. Genius could be assessed by how the working from home hopeful has taken care of task related issues previously. The capacity to discover practical answers for earlier difficulties exhibits critical thinking aptitudes required while working alone.
Correspondence: Since the remote worker will be confined from his/her chief and associates all the time, it is additionally critical to remain in contact every now and again. This incorporates not exclusively having the option to answer email and return telephone calls rapidly, yet in addition being proactive by posing inquiries and generally making it realized that the remote worker is included and focused on the work. In circumstances where the remote worker is doled out to an

undertaking group, discussing viably with colleagues winds up vital when teaming up in the relegated venture.

Other Personality traits that should also be considered include:

  ☐ Strong job skills and high level of job knowledge
  ☐ Has volunteered for telecommuting
  ☐ Demonstrates high productivity
  ☐ Is well organized and has good time management skills
  ☐ Is achievement-oriented and has high standards in job performance
  ☐ Requires minimal supervision and is capable of assessing own performance
  ☐ Desires to master new skills and continue learning

By and large, great working from home applicant search for fascinating work, expanded obligation, and self-improvement. They esteem acknowledgment for accomplishment. Working from home requests a specific dimension of autonomy of the remote worker. A worker who is exceedingly experienced in his or her field and has had a time of modification in the association is bound to adjust effectively to the autonomous idea of working from home. Broadness of professional training empowers the remote worker to deal with business related issues freely as opposed to depending on the chief to give direction or goals. An essential target of the underlying screening process, in this manner, must be the distinguishing pieces of proof of those representatives who are as of now working effectively in their given occupation by showing such characteristics as freedom, association and concentrated exertion that are helpful for working from home.

3.2 Work-Related Factors

Notwithstanding a worker's close to home qualities, it is essential to think about the idea of his/her activity duties. On a case-by-case premise, directors should take a gander at the set of working responsibilities of the representative. The director ought to evaluate whether the worker's obligations are appropriate to be performed autonomously, and at an off-site area. For instance, work works that include for the most part circuitous client administrations are progressively appropriate for working from home, while occupations that require uncommon devices or gear are definitely not.

Numerous organizations currently possess private and potentially prized formula information. The presence of such information may possibly render working from home illogical because of clear security concerns. While innovative arrangements, for example, virtual private systems (VPNs), firewalls, and Secure Socket Layer (SSL) can relieve a portion of the dangers, organizations should, and a significant number of them do, have explicit approaches on remote access to corporate frameworks and databases. Full-time remote workers, for instance, ought to by and large be given the remote access rights gave that sufficient security methodology are carefully pursued. Low maintenance remote workers, then again, may be emitted site work assignments that don't expect access to corporate databases. At long last, workers who handle ordered information may be viewed as ineligible for working from home altogehter.

4. Technological Infrastructure Support

A comprehensive telecommuting program strategy includes a technical architecture that is well planned and evaluated within the context of a company's existing local area network (LAN) and wide area network (WAN) environment. The goal is to create an optimal support environment that:

- Leverages the existing network infrastructure to create a seamless "extension of the LAN" to telecommuters
- Minimizes security risks
- Establishes a framework for adding additional services such as voice over IP (VoIP) and video
- Maximizes supportability via use of industry standards

4.1 Network Infrastructure

One of the principal contemplations is to choose the sort of remote access innovation. The decisions extend from moderate, bulky dial-up to costly, committed private circuits. For most working from home projects be that as it may, the best decision is the utilization of virtual private system (VPN) advancements over an economical, broadband open Internet access administration. Contingent upon whether the remote worker is stationary or moving, such administrations can be advanced endorser lines (DSL), link modems, open Wi-Fi hotspots, 3G/4G cell systems.

Then again, for amazingly delicate information, a system supplier that can offer a "private" IP condition might be considered. Normally these suppliers have interconnected their spine circuits secretly with "last mile" broadband suppliers and can keep the working from home traffic off the open Internet and on their private connections. This is commonly more costly than utilizing VPNs and the open Internet for transport.
Regardless of whether the public Internet or a private transport is used for connectivity, for telecommuters there are two main VPN technology models to choose from: Secure Socket Layer (SSL), and IP-Security (IPSec)

In either model, the telecommuter's data transmission traffic is "encrypted and tunneled" to a corporate security device (VPN gateway) where it is validated and "decrypted" through the corporate firewall into the corporate network.

In an SSL model, an encrypted data exchange called a session is established between a Web browser application, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, or Safari, and a Web server application. Therefore SSL-based VPNs typically only provide security to Web-enabled applications such as email or Web portals. Applications that require client software, such as ERP or CRM systems, are therefore relegated to IPSec VPNs. In recent years, however, some vendors have released client-based versions of their SSL VPN offering, in which users launch an "application window" to run non-web-enabled applications.

In an IPSec model, a secure, encrypted data path is established between the user's computer and the host server, typically a VPN gateway. For IPSec VPNs, the next decision is to determine how the VPN sessions will originate. Specifically, the decision must be made between software-based VPN technology and a hardware-based VPN appliance. In the software-based model, only the traffic coming to and from the telecommuter's PC is encrypted in VPN tunnels, while in the hardware-based model all traffic going through the appliance is encrypted. An important factor in determining the best model is understanding and accommodating other Internet traffic from inside the telecommuter's residence. If the telecommuter has other PCs that access the Internet from   the broadband connection or lives with another telecommuter working for a different company, then the best course is to utilize a software-based VPN installed on the telecommuter's business PC. While hardware VPN appliances can be configured to only tunnel traffic originating from specific PCs on the telecommuter's home network and user authentication is required to access corporate resources, many companies feel more comfortable establishing the VPN session directly from the telecommuter's PC.

4.2 Hardware Management

In addition to the desktop or laptop computers, there must be Customer Premise Equipment (CPE) to terminate the DSL, cable, or other broadband connections. In some cases, this is simply a modem that connects the broadband service to the telecommuter's PC, while in other cases it could be a combination of equipment including a router, switch, wireless access point, firewall, or VPN appliance. As is the case with most large scale technology deployments, standardization is critical to maintaining adequate support levels. Because the disparate broadband Internet service providers are likely to have their own CPE standards that may or may not match those of others, driving standardization becomes a difficult challenge. From a support perspective, managing all the different CPE devices and understanding their configuration utilities to set up filters, firewalls, access lists and provide upgrades can be a major undertaking. Moreover, if VPN appliances, wireless access points, or switches/routers to connect multiple PCs are deployed, the telecommuter can quickly amass a stack of equipment complete with patch cords, power supplies, etc. that could result in an unsafe, unreliable, or overheated environment.

4.3 Value-added Applications

When deploying a telecommuting program it is important to plan ahead and attempt to "future-proof" the investment. Standards-based technologies and an open framework should be selected to support additional IP services and tools as they become relevant. An inexpensive dial-up backup strategy might be considered for those rare times when the broadband connection is unavailable. This could be an automated "dial failover" that initiates a dial VPN session from the CPE if the primary link goes down, or it could be a simple process of training users to use their manual dial-up VPN capabilities if the broadband service becomes unavailable.

To improve communications with other telecommuters and employees in traditional offices, the use of online collaboration tools, web-based "presentation rooms," and desktop video conferencing should be considered. IP Telephony can be an extremely effective means of eliminating long distance phone calls between the telecommuter and headquarters. High-speed broadband connections and secure VPNs make the use of Web- cameras and online meetings a viable option. Telecommuters are going to request these value-added applications, so CIOs must think ahead and communicate a technology roadmap. By articulating the plans for improved and expanded services, telecommuters will be less inclined to "do it themselves" and thus an increase in demand for support. Moreover, a well articulated plan will make for more satisfied telecommuters and create volunteers to help develop and champion innovations.

Managers should also be familiar with the current technology available to telecommuters. Telecommuters should be given the right tools so that they can better perform their work. Telecommuters that work independently from other employees should have access to the systems and applications that allow them to complete their tasks. Telecommuters who work in teams should have sufficient communication tools to facilitate collaboration among team members as well as to communicate with their supervisors. Based on the technology available, managers should decide whether the infrastructure is fitted to accommodate the job requirements of the telecommuter.

5. Training

The success of a telecommuting program can to a large extent hinge on the adequacy of training. The issue of training is two-fold. First, users (telecommuting workers) must be trained to use the

technologies necessary to perform their job functions from home or a remote location. Second, IT personnel must be trained to provide the users with the technical support (help desk) services whenever and wherever needed.

It is important that all employees participating in a telecommuting program have a basic level of knowledge in the operation of computer and network applications. It is advisable that each participant be given a proficiency examination before starting the program. The result of the exam can then be used to screen those users who need additional training. It is also important that all telecommuters attend a security awareness training program, perhaps once a year. Such programs will allow employees to receive continuous education on the latest security threats and the corresponding countermeasures relevant to the telecommuting setting.

With few exceptions, the job of help desk representatives is one of the most challenging in today's technology driven work environment. Those who seek expert help by phone or email are often perplexed, stressed out, or downright angry. They want answers, results, solutions — and they want them now.

Therefore, help desk personnel must be provided with training for effective listening, questioning, and problem- solving, as well as how to write clear, accurate email responses and follow-up reports that will answer users' requests and satisfy their managers' expectations. They should also be given "life-preserving" techniques to help reduce stress and maintain enthusiasm and productivity while dealing with even the most difficult clients.

The Help Desk personnel should be trained on at least the following issues.

- □ Identify the users, positions and location professionally for security reasons.
- □ Identify the types of requests they most frequently receive while operating the help desk.
- □ Understand users' individual communication styles for the purpose of making adjustments to best handle their problems.
- □ Cite responses they should provide and those they should avoid when trying to resolve users' issues.
- □ Comprehend the importance of keeping emotions in check when dealing with difficult people.
- □ Practice stress-reduction techniques to minimize the possibility of anxiety, anger, and job burnout.
- □ Recognize the components of clearly written email solutions for users, knowledge-base entries for coworkers, and incident reports for their supervisors.

6. Telecommuter Management and Performance Evaluation

Managing on-site employees can be difficult, but it is even more challenging to manage employees at a remote location. Telecommuting raises numerous management issues as it creates an environment in which very little or no supervision exists. Companies should assess their existing management policy so that any weaknesses can be addressed before telecommuting is implemented.

Managers of telecommuting must sharpen their basic skills, including performance measurement by results, effective interpersonal communications, mastery of electronic tools, and leadership and team building. A successful management approach to telecommuting requires a blend of soft skills, performance-tracking software, and the use of technology as a telecommuting enabler and a medium for communication. The following are general rules a manager should follow when managing telecommuters.

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Supervisors of working from home must home their fundamental aptitudes, including execution estimation by results, powerful relational correspondences, dominance of electronic devices, and initiative and group building. An effective administration way to deal with working from home requires a mix of delicate abilities, execution following programming, and the utilization of innovation as a working from home empowering influence and a mechanism for correspondence. Coming up next are general principles a chief ought to pursue when overseeing remote workers.
a.   Distinguish undertakings appropriate for remote work: Managers will in general choose which occupation positions could possibly be reasonable for working from home. Rather, administrators should concentrate on which errands can be performed in a working from home condition. An attention on the idea of errands as opposed to the title of an occupation position makes it simpler to recognize the correct possibility for working from home, and whether these representatives will most likely work from home on a full-or low maintenance premise.

b.   Build up the guidelines: The main way working from home connections will be effective is if all members utilize the equivalent rulebook. Uniform working from home strategies and Procedures ought to be created and made accessible to remote workers and administrators, who would then be able to be required to agreeably associate and dodge mistaken assumptions.

c.   Practice effective meeting management: Meetings are a necessary part of any organizational process.
This becomes more important for employees who collaborate on the same projects while telecommuting. Managers should schedule in-person meetings often enough to warrant the cohesiveness of the team. It is recommended that meetings be held on a weekly basis, but this may vary depending on the team cohesiveness, and the nature of the work being performed.

d.   Provide effective support: A telecommuter with broken or unreliable equipment is the equivalent of not working at all. A manager's duty is to ensure that the telecommuters are provided with adequate equipment, contingency options, documentation for troubleshooting, and around-the-clock help desk support.

e.   Manage all direct reports by results: Effective management for telecommuters shall be based on work achieved. By managing the work output, managers will be able to keep performance at acceptable levels regardless of the amount of supervision. Using the work output as measurement for performance also makes keeping track of telecommuters more effective.

f.   Communicate: Communication is an important role that all managers must perform well. Consistently utilizing communications technologies and periodically holding face-to-face meetings can overcome most of the issues a company would face otherwise.

g.   Use appropriate performance metrics: An effective telecommuters' manager should break employee work into objectives, projects, tasks, and action items. Assigning, tracking, evaluating, and rewarding work output using these specifics dramatically improves a manager's knowledge of work activities, consistency in establishing expectations, and ability to objectively determine whether those expectations are being met. Managers can use the current project management software to measure the performance of telecommuters. Project

management software provides tools for reporting the progress made in a project by every team member, as well as time-recording tools for each individual.

h. Coach Telecommuters: Managers need to deal with employees' problems by coaching them. Telecommuters, just like in-office employees, need guidance while performing their jobs. It is important for a manager to detect any issues through behavioral changes. By being proactive, managers will be able to avoid having larger issues in the future.

i.   Facilitate group collaboration: The use of collaborative software systems or group support   systems (GSS) and shared workspace software allows telecommuter teams to collaborate on project management, customer relations management, report writing, product development, problem solving, and decision making activities. There are GSS programs that facilitate all these activities.

7. Rules and Policies for Telecommuting

Before an employee starts the program, s/he must be made aware of all the rules and policies specifically designed for the telecommuting environment. These rules and policies are typically divided into three categories: employees, equipment and security. The employees' aspect of the rules refers to the requirements for the physical space employees should have in place when telecommuting. These rules will allow employees to have the proper environment when it comes to working from home in order for them to complete their tasks safely and successfully. The equipment aspect of the rules refers to the requirements for taking care of the equipment used while telecommuting, such as computers, printers, and other networking equipment
This will help keep the equipment safe and in working order. The Security aspect refers to the requirements that the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data must be maintained at all times whiles the employees are telecommuting.

A Rules and Policies for Telecommuting document will state the definition of telecommuting and it will also define all criteria for eligibility and approval, as discussed in the Eligibility section above. The document will also include the following specific rules and policies:

☐   Telecommuting is voluntary. If employees wish to stop telecommuting, they are allowed to stop at any time by notifying their managers.
☐   The company may change the terms or conditions by which the employee is allowed to telecommute, or even terminate the permission to telecommute at any time if the company believes his/her performance or conduct does not meet expectations of managers.
☐   Telecommuting hours should be agreed upon between the telecommuter and his/her manager in advance. The required number of hours will not change unless it is approved; any overtime would have to be approved by manager.
☐ Travel time and sick days will be treated the same ways as for non-telecommuting employees.
☐   Employees are responsible for adhering to proper safety practices at all times, which include maintaining a safe work environment, using appropriate security measures, and protecting all company's assets including data and equipment.
☐   Employees should have a separate space at home that will be used for work purposes. The ideal place should be a separate room in the house to avoid any distractions (i.e. chores, people) and it should be safe and secure.
☐ Equipment provided by the company to its employees should only be used for work related purposes.
☐   Sensitive data should not be stored on local media at any time. This includes any internal or external hard drives, or any other external storage media, such as a USB flash drive or a CD-ROM.

☐   The telecommuter should adhere to the company's confidentiality policy when handling printed documents. All work created while telecommuting is the company's property.

☐   All office supplies for telecommuting will be provided by the company.

☐   While telecommuting, the employee is covered by the same Worker's Compensation Insurance currently in place at the company for non-telecommuting employees. The employee should immediately inform the manager in the case of an injury or accident at the telecommuting site.

☐   The company will not be responsible for expenses related to operating costs (i.e. utilities, home insurance and maintenance) when employee is telecommuting.

☐   The company will not be liable for any property damages to the employee, whether real or personal, when the employee is using his/her property for telecommuting.

In addition to the rules and policies mentioned above, it is important that employees sign a Telecommuting Agreement before they start a telecommuting program. The agreement will ensure that they have read and understood the rules and policies. Shown in the appendix of this paper is a sample template of such an agreement.

8. Conclusion

The center prerequisites of an effective working from home program execution continue as before, paying little respect to the sort of industry or the idea of business. Cautious screening of hopefuls, sufficient and solid mechanical help, clear correspondence and preparing, admirably characterized standards and methods, and fitting administration theory and practice are principal to accomplishing the mission. With the correct arranging and thought of the issues delineated above, organizations can expect a much smoother procedure of working from home program execution with maintainable long haul returns.

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