

Memo

To: Regional Administrator, Agency XYZ
From: Megan Stefani, Director Human Resources Division
Date: 12/11/2008
Re: Telework Policy

INTRODUCTION

Agency XYZ is currently in the process of considering implementation of a telework policy for its employees. This is a beneficial, forward thinking step and one that will prove to be an important move for the agency. Presently, telework policies are cropping up throughout both the private and public sectors. In fact, according to Telework Exchange, 82% of the federal workforce spends time outside of the office (Plumb, 2008). The fact that so many federal employees have jobs that take them out of the office shows that it is important for them to have the tools to stay connected and continue to be productive. The employees of Agency XYZ are no exception. It is true that implementing a telework policy does involve substantial work up front and a commitment of funds on the part of upper management, however in the long term it will reduce costs and increase productivity of the workforce. In fact, research has shown that, when teleworking is permitted, productivity increases 20-30% (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 2003). Teleworking policies are said to have all of the following benefits to an organization: enhanced organizational flexibility, curtailed business overhead costs, improved worker productivity, effective worker recruitment and retention, and reduced commuting time for workers (Shin et al, 86).

DEFINING THE ISSUE

The federal workforce has entered a new world. The old hierarchical form of management is not as effective as it once was due to the diversification of the workforce (Ricucci and Naff,2008). The homogeneous management styles of the past are not always the best fit in the new heterogeneous work environment most employees find themselves in. In addition to the increasing numbers of women and people of color in the workforce is the addition of a new generation of employees-Generation Y (aka the “Millennials”). They have different work styles and priorities than the generations before. To get, and keep, the best and brightest of this new-and increasingly technologically savvy- generation, XYZ must adapt its management style to allow for the flexible work schedules they desire (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 2003).

Of course implementation of a telework policy will require clearly defined rules and eligibility requirements, which will be discussed later, but there is great opportunity here for XYZ to increase productivity, and employee, as well as customer satisfaction. In addition, more and more employees are concerned with an equal work/life balance. Providing this to employees, when practicable, will go a long way to improve employee satisfaction due to the fact that a large amount of trust is involved when granting an employee the ability to telework (Manocherhri, 2003).

BACKGROUND

Technological Advances and Globalization

As mentioned previously, the face of the workforce has been, and continues to be, in a state of transition. According to the Rand Corporation’s study entitled “the 21st Century at Work,” employees are becoming increasingly more technologically proficient. In addition, the increased

globalization of the world market “will be even more expansive than before, affecting industries and segments of the workforce relatively insulated from trade related competition in the past” (RAND Corporation, 2004). This means that more and more employees are finding themselves in work situations that are not conducive to sitting in an office. XYZ needs to embrace the changing work environment by backing a well developed telework policy.

Changes in the Composition of the Workforce

More and more women with small children are joining the workforce. This brings a new and useful dynamic to the team setting within the office, however, it also brings up work/life balance issues that were not as prevalent in past generations. Focusing more on these issues will likely increase the participation of women in the workforce. In addition, the technological advances introduced by such a telework policy will also aid employees with disabilities for whom a trip into the office is sometimes impossible (RAND Corporation, 2004). Inclusion of all members of society leads to a more diverse and representative bureaucracy- and telework can help with this.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS:

In order to implement a successful telework policy, there are some legal issues that must be considered and addressed. All workplaces in the United States are required to follow the guidelines of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The purpose of these regulations is to keep employees safe while in the workplace. What happens when their homes become the workplace? Additionally, teleworkers may worry that their promotional opportunities will be limited by the fact that they are working out of the office. In order to avoid lawsuits, promotion criteria must be clearly defined and used.

OSHA

This is a substantial hurdle to overcome when putting together a telework process. What conditions will be required if the teleworker's workplace is their home? OSHA has made a statement to this effect: "In November of 1999, OSHA responded to an inquiry regarding at-home working conditions. It stated that employers would be held responsible for complying with the Occupational Safety and Health Act and with safety and health standards for telecommuting employees. Although this statement was quickly rescinded due to numerous complaints from employers and lawmakers, it opened some serious considerations" (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 15). These considerations include employee safety while working from home. In addition, if the employee is injured while at home, it is difficult to determine if the injury occurred while the employee was actually performing job duties. These issues will need to be addressed in order to adequately prepare for a workforce who will be using their homes as their office.

Advancement Opportunities

Another legal concern is advancement opportunities for teleworkers. They may feel that they are out of the loop and therefore will not be considered for promotions due to stigma associated with working out of the office. In order to avoid lawsuits, XYZ has to have well defined performance measures and criteria for both their traditional employees and teleworkers.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Management and Employee Buy-in

One of the most important things XYZ will need in order to ensure effective implementation of a telework policy is buy-in from management and employees. Specifically, it will be important for supervisors who directly manage potential teleworkers to feel comfortable with the arrangement.

Unfortunately, “many managers do not understand telecommuting and therefore lack the ability to manage it. To fully benefit from the advantages of telecommuting, management must learn how to manage the challenges it poses” (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 9). If man

Strong Technological Support

In order for a telework policy to be successful, it must be supported by a strong technological base. The agency must be willing to spend money to develop and maintain such technology in order to obtain the most productivity and satisfaction of its employees. In addition, in their article, Manochehri and Pinkerton note that “to have effective communication and timely response, the organization needs to ensure that the teleworker has appropriate access to email, fast communication links (e.g. cable connection to internet), and hardware that is sophisticated enough to deal with company software and programs” (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 14). This initial investment for technology upgrades is expensive, however it is vital to a successful implementation. In fact, not providing the necessary technology will slow productivity and make the telework program unsuccessful.

SUCCESS OF THE TELEWORK POLICY FOR XYZ

A telework policy will be successful for XYZ because its mission revolves around customer service and its employees’ ability to efficiently and quickly respond to their needs. Empirical data has shown that employees respond well to the opportunity for a flexible schedule. They enjoy the reduced commute time, fewer distractions, greater flexibility to work at peak times, better technology, more comfortable work environment, and the ease of working during nonscheduled time (Hill et al, 677). This sentiment will likely ring true for XYZ employees due to

the fact that most are commuting in from all across the bay area. Success will also depend on buy-in from employees and managers, as mentioned previously. The most likely opposition will come from traditional employees and managers who feel that a telework policy would be counterproductive. In addition, men typically support a more traditional work environment. Studies show that “women preferred interactions through email and a teleworking environment whereas the men in the groups did not find it as appealing. The men were more accustomed to dealing with people in person, while the women felt they were more interactive and had more of a voice in the teleworking environment” (Manochehri and Pinkerton, 15).

Potential Gains and Pitfalls

Should XYZ decide to implement a sustainable telework policy, the Social Exchange Theory states that the organization will likely experience an increase in employee loyalty. The Social Exchange Theory purports that employees have attitudes and behaviors commiserate with the degree of employer commitment to them. Basically, “when an employer acts in a manner that is beneficial to employees...the generalized norm of reciprocity creates feelings of obligation whereby the employees feel they are obliged to be committed to their employer” (Roehling et al, 2001 22(2)). This has the potential to decrease turn over in the organization, a costly human resources issue.

The largest foreseeable pitfall to this telework initiative is to not adequately develop the necessary technological requirements. Without the necessary tools, employees working away from the office will not be able to work productively. Another potential pitfall is the opposing view point that telework could possibly disrupt the work life balance by blurring the line between work and home (Hill et al, 1998).

CONCLUSION

Implementing a comprehensive telework policy will increase productivity and employee satisfaction. In order for it to do these things, however, a detailed criterion for selection and requirements must be developed and used equally throughout the organization. It should be extended to all employees who are eligible, even newer employees (less than three years-but they should have at least one year). Another important consideration is that as the nation's largest employer, the federal government is looked to by the private sector to be a "model employer." Along that vein "the federal government (and provincial and municipal counterparts) should set a positive example in the area of work-life balance. Being seen as a model employer will give governments the moral high ground to expect, and request, changes in this area from other employers" (Duxbury and Higgins, 7). It will be important for upper management to balance the upfront costs with the projected benefits to be realized from telework. For example, the U.S. General Services Administration is already implementing a telework program. They have a goal of 50% of employees teleworking by 2010 (generally only one day a week). They have also developed guidelines for how an employee should request the opportunity to telecommute. For ease of reference, I have attached a sample of their telework flyer to this memo.

Works Cited

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U.S. General Services Administration. R9 PBS Telework Microsite:

http://r9insite.gsa.gov/pbs/pbs_ara/telework (Internal website. Please do not reprint attachment without approval from GSA)