Shifting Gears for Employers:

Creating an E-Work Policy

There is no doubt that e-work is gaining in popularity. As an employer, ensure you're prepared to support e-work in a way that keeps you competitive and your employees satisfied.

This guide outlines the steps to creating an e-work strategy for your workplace.

To successfully establish an e-work strategy at your workplace, you will need a business case, a policy, and an implementation plan.

The Business Case

In order to introduce a permanent E-work Policy it is necessary to secure senior management buy-in and approval. To do this, it is best to create a business case that details why having an e-work option is good for your workplace.

Your business case should outline the benefits and costs of a permanent e-work option and include such considerations as savings from reduced real estate and parking requirements, reductions in office and resource use, and benefits to productivity and staff satisfaction. Compare these to business as usual.

What's in a Name?

While working from home rose to popularity during the pandemic, the concept has been around for a long time and goes by many names, including:

- E-work
- Telecommuting/Telework
- Remote working
- Work From Home (WFH)
- Work from Anywhere (WFA)
- Flexible workplace

The level of detail you put into your business case will depend on the size and nature of your organization, and the degree to which decision-makers have already considered this operational model.

Ultimately, your business case should promote the adoption of a formal e-work program and policy; together they will outline important e-work operational and human resources considerations.

E-Work Policy Development & Implementation

1. **IDENTIFY A LEAD OR A TEAM** – Once the business case has been approved, it's time to develop a policy. Identify a team or lead to do this. Try to have representation from a diversity of departments; include a senior manager.
2. **GATHER INTERNAL RESEARCH** – Gather related internal policies that could be impacted by an e-work option. Examine your workplace culture and the collective experience you've had during the pandemic. Investigate challenges experienced by staff and seek out their input and suggestions.

   Consider how productivity and success are measured in your workplace and compare it to the e-work model. For example, if being at the office signifies a "good employee," you will have to shift this perception to one that values quality of work and effort over attendance. Employees will be reluctant to embrace e-work if they think they could be perceived as being poor workers.

Employer Benefits

- Attracting & retaining top talent
- Managing risk via a strategy that provides continuity of operations & quick disaster recovery
- Reducing real estate & travel costs
- Reducing office space & parking needs
- Improving employee productivity
- Reducing employee sick time
- Promoting a commitment to climate action through the reduction of employee travel
- Improving employee loyalty

3. **LOOK TO EXTERNAL EXAMPLES** - Gather examples of policies and plans from other workplaces (see box). Review books like *Workshift: Future-Proof Your Organization for the 21st Century* by Jason Morwick, Robyn Bews, et al., and *Remote: Office Not Required* by David Heinemeier Hansson. Interview workplaces with well-established programs for lessons and best practices.

4. **WORK THROUGH INTEGRATION POINTS** - As you build the draft of an E-work Policy, examine how it could sync with existing programs (ex. workplace wellness, occupational health & safety, and employee training) and HR policies. Identify the elements that you would like to evolve into a distinct E-work policy and where complementary policy (ex. Work-Related Travel) needs to be adjusted.

Policy Examples

Don't reinvent the wheel. There are many organizations that have formal e-work policies. You can learn from them. Start with these examples:

- Government of Canada
- Province of British Columbia
- University of California Berkeley
- Shopify

5. **WORK OUT THE DETAILS** - Hammer out policy including which positions and tasks are eligible for e-work. Being upfront, fair, and equitable about why some roles are exempt and others are not is critical to developing the trust required for implementing a successful program. Your experience with the pandemic will have already provided you insight on what could work.

6. **IDENTIFY YOUR NEEDS & SUPPORTS** - Determine how computer needs, office space, parking, facilities, supplies, etc. will be considered in your plan. Is there anything you need to better support e-work? Like many activities, the devil is in the details. If you are implementing an occasional shared workspace for example, you'll need to include storage areas for employee belongings. There should be no 'squatting'; personal items should be removed upon leaving a workstation. You'll need to know how to manage this and how spaces will be cleaned between users.

In order to feel like a team and avoid collaboration delays, remote worker schedules should overlap a minimum of 4 hours a day.

- Remote: Office Not Required

7. COMPLETION & IMPLEMENTATION - As a final step in the completion of your E-work Policy and plan development, identify performance and satisfaction indicators to track. Ensure you include both quantitative data and qualitative feedback from staff. Incorporate a regularly-occurring review timeline. You will use this information to report on your E-work Policy to senior management, recommending adjustments when required.

Finalize your implementation plan. Identify how program supports will be set up, how and when managers and employees will transition to the new e-work option, and how your new policy will be communicated. Once your policy and implementation plan are complete, present it to senior staff for approval.

Survey your employees on their workstyle and space preferences to see if on-demand space could work for your workplace. You may find that you can reduce your office-space-to-employee ratio through hotelling or hot-desking.

Hotelling: reservation-based seating assignments

Hot-desking: reservation-free seating assignments (first come, first-served)

8. COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE - Once your E-work Policy is approved by workplace decision-makers, it's time to share it with staff. Communicating well and often – before, during and after implementation – is critical to success. Consider starting a workplace newsletter or a shared "digital water cooler app" within which you can post employee e-work testimonials, questions, and ideas; this will ensure the development of your new e-work workplace culture.

"To instill a sense of company cohesion and to share forward motion, everyone needs to feel that they're in the loop. At 37signals, we've institutionalized this through a weekly discussion thread with the subject 'What have you been working on?"

- Remote: Office Not Required

E-working is super green. For example, the well-known LEED certification program for commercial buildings has a 'Sustaining Site' category and points are available for 'alternative commuting transportation' and includes telecommuting as a minimum.

For more resources to support active and sustainable transportation activities at your workplace, visit **www.greenup.ca/shiftinggears**

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