

The Key to Making e-working a Success

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e-working: Know What You Mean Before You Start

There are many descriptions of what e-working is and there is a vast amount of material available, both on the web and from other sources, on every aspect of e-working. Terms used include: telecommute, telework, e-work, e-work centre, virtual office, remote worker and mobile worker.

Descriptions of e-working include workers who:

- *work from home for one or more full days per week and in the company office at least one day a week;*
- *work from home full time and occasionally go into the company office;*
- *work in an e-work centre full time and occasionally go into the company office;*
- *work occasionally from home, such as one or two days month;*
- *work in multiple locations such as customer sites, company offices, their homes, planes, trains, hotels;*
- *work at customer sites and occasionally go to the company office for meetings etc.*

If e-working is being considered in an organisation for the first time, it is important to be clear at the outset as to what the e-worker, their colleagues and manager understand by the term 'e-working'.

Critical Success Factors

- *Identify suitable workers and jobs*
- *Ensure that the management issues and effective communications are addressed*
- *Identify the most appropriate technical solution and equipment for the particular job*
- *Have a formal e-working agreement*

Training should be provided which is tailored to address the different challenges for workers, managers and the e-team. Particular attention should be given to ensuring effective communication between the parties

The e-working Agreement

The formal e-working agreement should address all the key areas to ensure that both the worker and the manager are clear about the arrangements for e-working. The formal agreement will also be useful when reviewing the success or challenges arising from the e-working arrangement.

The e-working agreement should include details of hours and place of work, communication structures, reporting procedures, home office arrangements, length of agreement and arrangements for termination of agreement.

It should also detail guidelines for the use of equipment provided by the employer, security and confidentiality arrangements, monitoring and review process and any other terms and conditions which are particular to the e-working arrangement. The agreement should also record any changes to the way in which performance is managed and monitored as a result of e-working.

Other Success Factors

- *Get the right mix in the e-working project team: most successful e-working arrangements include representatives from the Human Resources department, IT department, employee representatives or trade union, together with a 'champion' from Senior Management*
- *Provide training tailored to address the different challenges for e-workers, managers and the e-team. Particular attention should be given to ensuring effective communication between the parties*
- *Ensure supports for dealing with technical and other problems are available and easy to access. It may be necessary to consider a higher priority for IT support to remote workers as they have fewer alternatives when systems fail*
- *Ensure the home office or e-centre is suitable for the job, especially in relation to the physical and technical security of the e-worker, equipment and confidential information that may be on the premises*
- *Ensure that arrangements are agreed that allow the employer access to the home office to conduct a Health and Safety risk assessment*
- *Clarify who supplies what for the home office, who owns the equipment and arrangements for returning equipment in the event that the e-worker ceases e-working*

- Clarify insurance provisions for the home office
- Adapt the company Safety Statement to include the home office
- Review your electronic communications policy to ensure it covers e-workers

Assess the Value to the Organisation of e-working

The experience of e-working is usually positive for both employers and employees. However 'buy in' at all levels in the organisation is more likely if an assessment of the value to the organisation as a whole is undertaken.

The initial cost of setting up e-workers can seem considerable but these costs are outweighed by savings and benefits. The most significant savings arise from retaining skilled employees and from reducing the need for expensive office space.

Costs and Savings

Costs may include initial set up costs, on-going costs, extra software licences, additional training, extra costs for technical support, security issues, additional allowances and support, loss of incidental contributions.

Savings may include office and car spaces, savings cost of replacing skilled workers (including reduced productivity of new staff) and reduced absenteeism rates.

Benefits to the e-worker and the Organisation

- Better work/life balance
- Increased job satisfaction
- Reduced stress levels
- Increase in motivation
- Improved time management
- Retains skilled workers
- More attractive employer leading to increased pool of potential workers
- Expected improvements in communications
- Clearer objectives for e-worker, manager and e-team
- Greater responsibility taken by e-worker
- Improved productivity
- Reduced absenteeism

“ Well, certainly I'm not available on a daily basis, in person. But I am always available by telephone. When I started e-working I clearly documented where I would be available and where, distributed that to everybody on my team and support staff so that they would understand how to reach me.

I'm always quick at returning phone calls, returning emails and then, of course I come into the office one day a week and I think that is very, very important.

Frequent and regular contact with the office in person is important and should be maintained by an e-worker”

Melanie Cambell

Investigator, Office of the Information Commissioner

Benefits to Society

- Access to more work opportunities for people with disabilities and for people living in remote areas
- Fewer commuters leading to less congestion and less pollution
- Encourages greater diversity in the workforce
- Opportunity for e-workers to use extra time for the benefit of their community

Impact on Clients and Customers

- Greater diversity of workers offers better customer service
- Greater continuity of relationship with customers as a result of reduced loss of skilled workers
- Greater flexibility in hours available to work offers better customer service

Finally... be Realistic

Management and staff need to acknowledge that this is a different way of working, with new challenges and opportunities. There will be teething problems, so pilot the arrangements, monitor and review the outcome and adjust the formal e-working agreement accordingly.

The technology works – so let's get going!



“The e-working solution was ideal for me as it enabled me to combine flexible working with e working to achieve the advantages of being at home yet allowing me to work longer hours. I would have possibly looked for a job nearer to my home if e-working were not available.

In my particular circumstances, e-working has improved communications with my co-workers ”

Bennery Rickard
Regional Librarian, EHSS