Homework and telework: a guide to best practice in human resource management

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HOMEWORK
AND TELEWORK

A Guide to
Best Practice in
Human Resource Management

Dr. Peter Standen
Maryam Omari

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
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The opinions expressed here are those of the author and not Edith Cowan University. The information is presented as a guide only, and organisations are advised to obtain advice on legal and industrial matters that is more specific, up to date and relevant to their own context.

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INTRODUCTION

In Australia today there is widespread interest in homeworking and teleworking as flexible work options with significant advantages to both employers and employees. In the research behind this guide we surveyed 500 Australian organisations, finding employer interest in these advantages, along with uncertainty about how to implement homeworking, and some worries about potential drawbacks. Significantly, those organisations that had implemented homeworking reported positive outcomes. In an interview study, homeworkers themselves reported improved work performance, and were appreciative of the flexibility. This guide shows how to implement homework and telework to achieve such outcomes while avoiding the problems that concern managers.

The guide is based on both Australian research and the international literature. There is now plenty of evidence from both sources that, with appropriate selection of workers and sound management practices, substantial improvements in productivity, morale, absenteeism, and commitment are possible. For example, formal trials in the Australian Public Service, Telstra, and the NSW Road Traffic Authority have all found increases in these areas. The human resource managers we surveyed commonly reported improvements in these areas, and none reported negative outcomes. A reduction in office overheads related to space and energy can also be found, although this is not normally the main reason for implementing homework.

The homeworkers we interviewed reported greater job satisfaction, productivity and quality of work. Homework also brought better access to employment, and lifestyle advantages due to eliminating commuting or working nonstandard hours. For many, improved life satisfaction resulted from a better balance of work and nonwork time, often where family care demands formerly created conflict.

Overall, the literature shows very few negative experiences with properly devised homeworking programs. These should not be confused with poorly planned arrangements where inappropriate work or workers are chosen, where management and coworker support does not exist, and where safety and security concerns have not been thought through. We also differentiate well-planned homework programs from 'outworking' practices in industries where wages and conditions inferior to those of office or factory workers have concerned governments and unions.

Amongst the high profile Australian organisations reported to have implemented homework are BP, Shell, Hewlett Packard, AMP, ICI, Qantas, Wormald, Nissan, Mercantile Mutual, Westpac and many state and
Commonwealth government agencies\(^2\). Our research indicates that around 30% of large Australian organisations have formal or informal arrangements, although many currently have only a small number of homeworkers.

Thus homework is attractive to both employers and employees who seek more productive and flexible work options. The research suggests homeworking has considerable unused potential to bring benefits to both parties.

**Homework vs telework: the role of new technology**

Reporting in the news media gives the impression that the widespread use of home and mobile computing, modems, Internet access and other telecommunications advances has created revolutionary growth in the practices usually called ‘teleworking’ or ‘telecommuting’\(^2\). This picture is not entirely accurate, and we use the term ‘homeworking’ here for several reasons.

Firstly, in Australia most off-site work occurs at home, and the greatest immediate potential for its growth is at home. In the future telecentres and satellite offices may provide work facilities in local communities, as has occurred in some areas of the US and Europe\(^5\). Another form of telework is the ‘nomadic’ arrangement where, for example, travelling sales and service staff use PCs to communicate with the office. However, both telecentres and nomadic teleworkers are relatively rare, and homework is likely to remain the major off-site arrangement for the near future.

Secondly, at the moment the emphasis on a telecommunications-lead revolution is misleading. Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that there has been little growth in homeworking between 1992 and 1995\(^6\), and our survey shows that telecoms-enabled off-site work is still very much a minor part of the work done at home by employees.

More importantly, there are many opportunities for homework which do not rely on high-tech telecoms. Employees in many fields have been working in remote locations for years, using phone, fax, or physical transportation of documents. Undoubtedly, modems and the newer digital links will see a wider range of jobs and employees moved home in the future. However our research suggests that for most Australian organisations the obstacles to greater use of homework are the human and legislative factors covered in this guide, not accessing new technology. Opportunities for both low-tech and high-tech homework will remain unused if technology alone is seen as the solution.

Thus, we focus here on ‘homework’ in the belief that the greatest scope for increased off-site work is currently for work done at home which does not require very advanced computer links. ‘Telework’, which strictly means just work at a distance, and
'telecommuting', the transmission of work to off-site personal computers, both have high-tech connotations which exclude types of homework that could benefit many organisations and employees. We note that use of the more inclusive term does not make this guide any less relevant to high-tech forms of homework.

Some misconceptions about homeworking

In researching homework we found that senior and middle managers' views are often based on misconceptions. For businesses to achieve the benefits of homeworking the following ideas must be reconsidered.

• Homeworking is a new and radical change to work organisation

Home has long been a worksite in many occupations and industries, including the clothing and jewellery trades, accounting, secretarial and business services, small and family business, computer programming, journalism, art and design, building and related trades, real estate, agriculture, and education. While some of these workers are self-employed, many others are contractors or permanent employees working for people outside the home.

Further, it is estimated that up to 50% of office workers take work home at some time, particularly professional or managerial staff working long hours. An Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey found that in 1992 almost 10% of employed people worked at home on a typical day, spending an average of 73 minutes in such work. Other ABS surveys show that a quarter of the workforce work at home regularly, and over 360 000 work more at home than elsewhere. Thus, a substantial portion of the nation's work is done at home, and probably has been for many years. This work is largely unseen by workers in CBD offices, many of whom have never considered home as a suitable place for work.

Most of these homeworkers have found solutions to issues such as mixing work and family, security and privacy of documents, trust of employees, insurance, safety and so on. While undoubtedly many of these solutions are ad-hoc and would need to be turned into formal policy before acceptance by large organisations, working at home is already a viable option for hundreds of thousands of people.

• Homeworking is telecommuting

Earlier we noted that our research shows the major impediments to both high-tech telecommuting and low tech homeworking are lack of knowledge and willingness to challenge traditional management practices. We reiterate here that while new technology may provide new opportunities, most organisations haven't used existing opportunities for low-tech homework. Technology alone will not create significant growth in work done at home.
Homeworkers are isolated from office networks and social contacts

Most homeworkers work at home only 2 or 3 days per week, attending the office the rest of the time. Such arrangements allow the best of both worlds - greater productivity and flexibility of work without losing touch with important office networks.

There are also cases of successful full-time homework, including experiments conducted by large firms such as Pacific Bell in the US and ICL in the UK, and governments such as Washington State. In these, networking and socialising needs are met with infrequent office visits, greater reliance on telecommunications, and out-of-office socialising. In some pioneering projects, teleworkers form ‘virtual’ teams and manage projects with no face-to-face contact during the entire life of the project. Such teams may be spread across the country, or even the globe. If this trend accelerates in the next century, as predicted by some writers, new ways of satisfying networking and social needs will undoubtedly develop with them.

Homeworkers are less trustworthy as they are out of sight

Research on homeworker productivity, although in its early stages, is almost unanimous in finding improved productivity amongst both clerical and professional/managerial staff. Although there is always potential for individuals to do the wrong thing, there are many reasons why most homeworkers perform as well as, or better than, office workers:

- They are identified as trustworthy and experienced staff.
- They value the option of working at home and seek to retain it.
- They find office distractions, such as excessive socialising,
unnecessary phone calls and too many personal requests, reduce their productivity and job satisfaction.

• Working independently gives them a greater sense of commitment to the job and more satisfaction with outcomes.

• A better balance of work and family life means more engagement with work.

• Travel time can now be spent in extra work, or nonwork activity.

• They may be able to work at their most productive time of day.

It is also worth noting that many office workers are not constantly in the presence of a supervisor, and in any case merely being seen to be working does not guarantee quality or quantity of work. Modern management practices stress empowering employees to achieve objectives rather than constantly monitoring and controlling them.

• Unions are against homeworking

Although true in the past, particularly overseas, this is changing as management and unions find mutually beneficial ways to implement homework. The Australian Public Service Home Based Work Award, discussed in Appendix A, is a case in point.

• Homeworking is better suited to clerical employees

Research shows this is not true. There are many professional and managerial functions that can be done at home, often producing greater productivity or quality of work. For many years professionals and managers have been taking ‘paperwork’ home under informal arrangements. With the growth of ‘information work’ in such occupations, there is much to be gained by openly encouraging homework on a more formal basis for these groups.

• Homeworking is better suited to professional or managerial employees

This view may reveal a lack of trust of clerical and other staff who have traditionally had less independence than professionals and managers, or a belief that they need to be ‘on call’. Both views may limit organisational effectiveness. There are many clerical and non professional workers who successfully work from home: what counts most is the ability to manage by results. There are also many such jobs where the need to be immediately available does not exist for the whole week, or where people can be on call via phone, fax or email - indeed these will often produce a quicker response without the distractions of the office environment.

• Homeworking is a long term arrangement
Research shows that many employees will have a phase in their career cycle where homework is attractive, perhaps due to family or study priorities. Equally, many will want to return to the office when that phase is over. A need to "wind down" prior to retirement is another reason. Conversely, there may be periods where the socialisation and career development opportunities of the office are paramount, particularly in the early years of a career. Homeworking is often a short-term option.

**Principles of best practice in homework management**

Given the variety of motivations that bring organisations and employees to consider homework, it is not possible to recommend a specific 'best practice' model. Rather, organisations should develop a model which suits their context - the size of the enterprise, the industry, client needs, and so on. This guide is just that: not a recipe but an outline of the issues to work through in arriving at your own program. However, there are a few underlying principles which should guide decisions on these issues.

*Mutual cooperation* is the first. Homework is unlikely to succeed unless the arrangements suit both parties. Our research shows that organisations most likely to benefit from homework place a higher value on human resources than others. A first step in creating a cooperative climate is to involve homeworkers in setting up the program and monitoring its success.

*Flexibility* is the second principle. For many homeworkers this is a key attraction. It is unlikely that rigidly implementing office rules about work schedules and dress codes will bring out their best. Where possible, employees should be given discretion to self-manage. In our experience, appropriately selected homeworkers will not abuse such trust, and actually perform much better than if overmanaged.

Finally, remember to *manage by results*. A homework program has underlying business objectives. The performance of individuals and teams is what counts, not where they sit or what they wear.
SETTING UP A HOMEWORK PROGRAM

Identifying the goals of the scheme

Organisations adopt homework for a variety of reasons. Our research, along with a considerable amount of other local and international research, demonstrates the following advantages.

- Increased productivity, by 10-20% and sometimes more. Several of our homeworkers report 40-60% increases, primarily due to the reduction in distractions. Many also found greater creativity and quality in work done at home.

- Decreased absenteeism. Our interviewees often stated that, compared to office workers, they were more likely to work at home when not feeling well or needing to care for ill family members.

- Improved job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. Virtually all of our interviewees commented on this, and the reasons for it are diverse. For some, the ability to produce more and better work at home was rewarding. For others, reduced tension between work and other areas of life, particularly family care, increased their overall life satisfaction and consequently job satisfaction. Some found more comfortable working conditions or times enhanced satisfaction.

- Improved retention of valued workers who would otherwise leave through illness, disability, a need to remain close to schools or childcare, or difficulties with commuting. The loss of highly skilled employees and the attendant replacement costs were major reasons for using homeworking, according to the HR managers in our survey. Homework also allows recruitment of people who prefer to work non-standard hours or live in remote locations.

- Reduced office costs. Space can form up to 30% of an organisation's budget, and related lighting, maintenance, security, parking and catering services all add to infrastructure costs.

- Greater flexibility in work arrangements. Traditional career expectations are changing along with the age and gender composition of the workforce, and new business practices are emerging. Homework is one of the many flexible work options that fit the new expectations.

For a formal homework scheme to succeed, the business goals must be clearly identified and the scheme planned around them. Such goals must also be acceptable to employees - those not happy to work at home are not likely to
give adequate performance, and office cost savings could be quickly overtaken by decreased output.

**Considering the costs**

It is clear that, in addition to its benefits, homeworking has potential drawbacks. First in many managers’ minds is the potential for greater costs in setting up and maintaining a program. These include both direct costs such as equipment and communication facilities, and the indirect costs of new office procedures and systems such as those for ensuring compliance with health and safety, security and insurance requirements. There are also “social” costs where new management and communications practices must be developed:

- Line managers and supervisors have to be comfortable with managing by results rather than by physical presence.

- Isolation from social activity and informal networks that foster learning about organisational goals, practices, and values has to be overcome.

- Access to career advancement and staff development may be diminished where staff are less visible.

Do the advantages outweigh the costs? While this is a decision that must be made on individual cases, we make four general points. First, we have found many organisations, large and small, that report an affirmative answer, including those conducting the systematic evaluations described earlier. Beyond the direct benefits listed above, homeworking can be seen as an investment in improved management and work practices that will have a general impact on a receptive organisation, fostering skills such as self-management along with greater focus on business objectives.

Second, the *direct financial costs* of starting up and maintaining a program are not necessarily large, as discussed in the section on “Technology and Equipment Issues”.

Third, the *indirect costs* of new organisational systems and procedures are not unique to homeworking but accompany any of the “flexible” practices that depart from the traditional employment pattern. A UK study of flexible work patterns found that while new communication and coordination systems created teething problems in many cases, these disappeared over time.

Fourth, good planning can minimise *some* of the direct operational costs and the indirect managerial costs, and *most* of the social costs. We turn now to this process.

**Planning to eliminate problems**

A systematic planning and monitoring process is essential to an effective homeworking program. Such a process might
start with a *planning committee* or implementation team. This group should include or consult with a range of stakeholders including human resource managers, line managers or supervisors of homeworkers, IS and communications people, union representatives, trainers, facilities managers, legal advisers and others. Including existing or potential homeworkers is also good practice.

Homework is a significant change to most organisations' internal culture and it is essential to obtain the support of top management and other high level 'change champions', although they need not be directly involved in the implementation of homework. Communicating a vision of how homeworking meets business goals, and reducing uncertainty about its negatives, are two useful roles for such champions.

Such motivational and educational activities should be part of the *internal marketing* of any significant change in business operations. Target that marketing as you would external marketing: for example, often the group most resistant to change are middle managers who may need specific promotional activities or training. Such marketing may continue beyond the start-up phase with regular reminders about the existence, value and operation of the off-site workforce.

Starting with a small scale *pilot* or temporary homework scheme is good practice. A review of the scheme can then be used to determine its future. As homeworking is a big change to work patterns, the scheme may need *ongoing review* and perhaps modification after a suitable settling-in period. A model for organisational change based on cycles of action and evaluation will often work better than attempting to get it completely right the first time.

**Policies and contracts**

Increasingly the basic principles of managing homework and other nontraditional work arrangements are being put into formal policies, particularly in larger organisations. The broad principles behind one policy, that of the Australian Public Service (APS), are covered found in Appendix A. Such policies focus on the responsibilities of the employee and conditions under which the agreement exists. Some also cover strategies for management and communication. Underlying many policies is the notion of homework as a contract between employee and employer, with expectations on both sides. In the APS and other schemes, individual contracts are created for, and signed by, each employee.

**Matching homework with corporate cultures and management styles**

Agreements and contracts, though, are only one side of management. Support, optimism, and understanding amongst both homeworkers' colleagues and management are also important. In some organisations, corporate cultures are very much against
homeworking and it could only be contemplated on a small scale, perhaps as part of a package of flexible work options focused on more conventional alternatives.

At the other extreme are organisations where existing support and understanding mean only a little extra education or training is needed. These would aim to make all parties aware of the advantages and limitations of homework, and its different psychological character.

Many organisations fall in between these extremes, where flexible work practices are already supported but some changes in management methods and communication patterns will be needed for homework to succeed. For example, supervisors and line managers may need additional training to manage homeworkers by becoming 'coaches' rather than 'watchdogs'.

Understanding the difference between organisations ready for widespread homeworking, and those which are not, is aided by a model of corporate culture such as Robert Quinn's Competing Values model. In this model organisations have differing degrees of each of the four cardinal attributes shown in Figure 1. Our research found that organisations most supportive of homeworking had a high Human Relations emphasis, and low Internal Process focus. Put simply, they value human hearts and minds above office procedure: participative decision making and creativity are more important than stability and control.

Although one culture may be more disposed to it, and another less so, homeworking is found in all types of organisations. Quinn’s model suggests organisations will adopt homeworking for different reasons and in different ways. This will depend on whether it is seen as a way to increase the value of human capital, expand and adapt to the external environment, or maximise output and efficiency.

Organisations should consider the match between organisational values and the goals of their program. While changing such values is a long term process not likely to be undertaken solely to promote homeworking, suitable presentation of program goals and perhaps some education on the value of human capital may greatly help realise the potential of homework.
**Figure 1. Quinn’s Competing Values Framework.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Internal Focus</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>External Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Relations Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Internal Process Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Open Systems Model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rational Goal Model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> human commitment</td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> consolidation &amp; continuity</td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> expansion &amp; adaptation</td>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> maximisation of output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values:</strong> human resources, training, cohesion, morale</td>
<td><strong>Values:</strong> information management, communication, stability, control</td>
<td><strong>Values:</strong> adaptability, readiness, growth, resource acquisition, external support</td>
<td><strong>Values:</strong> productivity, efficiency, planning, goal setting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SELECTING HOMEWORKERS

Selecting the right people is critical to the success of homeworking. While managers often ask about the types of jobs which can be done off-site, it is the person who is of most importance and decisions should be made on individual cases. The home environment, and the roles of supervisors and colleagues also need to be considered in the selection process.

Choosing suitable employees

This is an area in which future research, including our own, is likely to develop more specific instruments and models. Current research shows a number of broad attributes generally found in successful homeworkers:

- They will be highly motivated, results oriented, self-disciplined, and capable of independent work. Many will also need good interpersonal skills to support communication with other staff.

- To be certain that employees have these characteristics, plus sufficient familiarity with management requirements, a minimum period of experience in the organisation before homework is suggested, typically between 6 months and 2 years.

- Homeworkers should also be volunteers - causing employees to work at home against their will is unlikely to be beneficial to either party. It is usual that the agreement can be terminated by either employer or worker.

- Other key ingredients are the ability to self-manage competing work and family demands, and to retain a sense of professionalism when away from the office. Homeworkers should also be sure they can satisfy social needs when outside the office.

- Experts are unanimous in stating that homework should not be mixed with caring for young children or other dependants with heavy demands. Some formal guidelines require childcare or dependent care arrangements to be specified in writing. In some cases another carer in the house can be suitable, as long as the home/work boundary can be maintained.

- Other personal factors which mitigate against good homeworking include alcohol, drug, food and family problems, and some authorities recommend screening out employees with known problems in these areas.

- The attitude of other household members, and having a suitable home environment, are important criteria covered in the next section.
These issues can be raised in selection interviews or questionnaires for homework candidates. For example, the Australian Public Service guidelines described in Appendix A require supervisors and homeworkers to jointly work through a checklist.

Another role for the selection interview is to be sure that potential homeworkers have realistic expectations, particularly in terms of personal and organisational outcomes, home and office support, and managing the work-home interface.

**Choosing suitable jobs**

Jobs suited to homeworking are, generally speaking, those which can be assessed by results and do not require face-to-face contact either frequently or ‘on demand’. The list of jobs or tasks with off-site potential is very large, and includes many involving report writing, accounting and auditing, legal work, sales and marketing, clerical work, information systems work, research, design and creative work, and some engineering work. It is usual that only part of any job is done at home, and one researcher has found that over half the employees in a typical white collar organisation had jobs which were candidates for partial homework.

Other factors which mitigate against homework include a need for extensive collaboration, high security, and special or expensive equipment. Analysing jobs according to such characteristics, rather than selecting occupation titles such as “clerical” or “accounting”, will ensure the most appropriate choices.

**Supervisors and coworkers**

It is also vital that supervisors and line managers support the concept of homework. They need the right personality to supervise remotely, and should have strong communication and interpersonal skills. Primary competencies for supervisors of homeworkers include setting and assessing goals, maintaining team spirit and organisational values, and including remote workers in the social life of the organisation. Supervisors may benefit from training to maximise these competencies.

In cases where a homeworker is a crucial part of a team, it will also be important that coworkers are happy with the arrangement and have suitable communication skills and equipment to allow phone, fax or email to replace face to face communication. Both coworkers and supervisors, then, should be considered in selecting homeworkers.

**Training and orientation**

Looking beyond the selection process, we have found that training often assumes an important role in aligning homeworkers’ skills and knowledge with business requirements. Many will benefit from improved skills in areas like time management, project management, self management, negotiation, and computer
literacy. Such training is not just an extra cost imposed by homeworking: these are skills which will improve the performance of most employees regardless of where they work.

Large organisations often have orientation sessions covering company expectations and practical issues in areas like communication with colleagues, security, health and safety, working hours, equipment issues, responsibilities and rights, and relevant organisational processes.
MANAGING HOMEWORKERS

Managing by objectives

The key to managing homeworkers is to concentrate on achievement of objectives, rather than the work process. Create clear targets for productivity and quality of output, for example by using performance indicators such as sales figures, report deadlines, client complaints, or measures of quality.

While management by objectives has been used for office workers for some time, modifications might be needed for off-site work where communication is less regular. People might need more feedback, particularly of a positive and rewarding nature. In the absence of the subtle social cues that managers use in the office, communication needs to be clear, consistent and regular. Equally, homeworkers should feel free to discuss problems before they become serious.

A settling-in period of one or more months is experienced by most homeworkers and should be recognised in the management process. During this time people will be learning to cope with new roles and skills.

It is usual that homeworkers are required to meet the same performance standards as office workers. If not, it should be clear to all involved and the compensation issues addressed. Similarly, homeworkers should not be subjected to greater monitoring than office workers as this is likely to increase stress and may create hostility.

Our research has found that most homeworkers are highly self-motivated, achievement-oriented individuals who are rewarded by doing a good job. Many find the office frustrating because interruptions and unwanted socialising get in the way. Give such people the flexibility and support to achieve realistic goals, and encouragement when they do, and a win-win outcome is likely.

Communication

Nearly all homework requires some contact with coworkers or clients, and this may need to be facilitated by managers.

One suggestion is to appoint as a key contact an office worker with whom the homeworker normally discusses work. This person takes on the role of maintaining links between the office team and the remote member, and perhaps also provides emergency help by opening mail or reading faxes.

Administrative support staff are critical elements of the communication link sometimes overlooked in planning. They should understand the needs and role of the homeworker. Support staff can also help by making schedules and home contact details readily available in the office, for both coworkers and clients.

The points in this section may suggest that managing homeworkers requires new skills, systems and attitudes. However
many of these are equally useful for improving performance in the office. It is telling that telework managers have commented that the experience has made them better managers all round. Focusing on results and supporting employees to achieve them are, after all, fundamentals of modern management practice.

**Work hours**

The decision on work hours for homeworkers probably depends most on the need to contact, or be contacted by, coworkers or clients. Some organisations require homeworkers to work standard office hours, but without a strong business need such rigidity can undermine the flexibility that is a great attraction to many homeworkers. Our interviewees frequently reported greater productivity and job satisfaction through being able to match working hours with times of best performance and least distraction.

Many organisations are willing to let employees choose which hours are worked, or to manage solely by results. It may be necessary, however, to check occupational health and safety provisions covering working times: for some people, working non-standard hours may have health consequences. The tendency for some homeworkers in unregulated environments to overwork is discussed below in the section on stress.

Shift workers, such as computer or telephone operators, are also able to successfully work from home given appropriate telecommunications and home environments, and this may be especially attractive for shifts outside office hours. The increasing globalisation of business and ‘colonisation’ of time are likely to drive future growth in nonstandard worktime arrangements, and off-site work will be one means for employers to retain competitiveness.

**Unions and homeworking**

Unions have often resisted homeworking as a result of its association with exploitation. For example, in many countries industries such as the clothing and jewellery trades have long used a large but virtually invisible home-based workforce that has often received poor pay and substandard work conditions. Newer examples of ‘electronic sweatshops’ have also brought problems such as excessive hours of work, loss of benefits, piece work rates, isolation from unions and government support agencies, and poor work environments.

Some unions are now seeing suitably controlled homework schemes as a benefit to their members. For example, the APS HBW award was the outcome of two years of negotiation with the Commonwealth Public Sector Union, which initiated the award. Consulting unions in the planning stage of a homework program is good practice.
Technology and equipment issues

It is common for employers to provide the equipment required for work at home, although practices vary. A computer is frequently needed, and other possibilities include a second phone line, printer, furniture, filing cabinet and office consumables. It is likely a home office would cost less than $10,000 to set up fully, an upper figure found in the Australian Public Service trials. This would cover office furniture, a computer with printer and modem, site visits for OH&S and security inspections, and IT installation. At the lower end of the scale, some employees in this scheme required total costs of less than $2,000. A recent report of a trial in a large bank found an average cost of $2,800 for furniture, computing and communications needs. Other organisations have introduced homework with no additional costs, by allowing employees to take home existing equipment.

Insurance cover for company equipment used at home is typically included in standard employer policies, although this should be checked.

Equipment costs should, of course, be assessed against the extra productivity and labour flexibility, and the reduction in office space and energy costs. For example, it has been estimated that absenteeism costs $400 per day per staff member.

Telework is a form of homework with the additional need for a high speed telecommunications link. A modem costing $200-300 can be used on the home telephone line to provide a wide range of functions including fax, email, Internet access and remote log-in. The performance of such links is now only marginally slower than in-office networks in many applications. In some cases, a second phone line may be helpful where frequent use of the domestic line is required, although newer modems can handle voice and data simultaneously. More data-intensive or speed-critical applications may be able to make use of digital ISDN lines and other services. We do not detail the specific technologies here as most organisations have IS/IT professionals to provide advice.

An important point often made by homework and telework managers is that technology should be appropriate to the individual and the job. While there can be good reasons for supplying standard in-office equipment to homeworkers, in some cases these may be wasteful and low technology options can be considered. For example, some workers may be able to do that part of the job requiring a computer in the office. Others can at least trial homeworking with relatively simple equipment, including existing home equipment where appropriate, progressing to sophisticated computers, telephones, faxes or dial-up lines later. On the other hand, requiring work to be done at home on equipment which does not properly support it is both stressful to the employee and wasteful to the employer.
There are many examples of successful homeworkers whose jobs rely heavily on telephone calls, including sales staff and telephone operators. Most large telephone systems can divert calls, so that clients and colleagues do not need to be given a home number, a situation frequently desirable to homeworkers and their managers. An additional requirement for people making heavy use of a home phone is control of the aural environment: barking dogs, music, and lawnmowers are a little unusual in offices.

Equipment may also bring a need for clear access to the support and maintenance services that office workers take for granted. Training programs for homeworkers can address basic support and maintenance issues, and may aim to foster greater self-reliance than is needed in the office. Such independence can in itself produce cost savings for the support department.

**Security**

Security was one area where our research found perceived problems were inhibiting experimentation with homework. To put these concerns into perspective:

- Careful selection of homeworkers is important, and it is unlikely workers in high security areas would be considered.

- Basic principles of risk management can go a long way towards keeping security risks to an acceptable level in the home as in the office. These include selecting trusted employees; maintaining basic physical security standards by locking filing cabinets or doors; using computer passwords; and establishing which documents require higher levels of security.

- In some ways offices may present greater security problems where they provide unsupervised access to new employees, after hours workers, or non-employees. They are also usually unoccupied for large parts of the week. For such reasons, one of our interviewees, an accountant, considered clients' data more secure at home than in her suburban office.

Other initiatives to reduce security problems include training for homeworkers; provision of virus checkers; having a clear policy on what can be transported to, stored at, and disposed of in the home; and company provision of locks, smoke detectors and similar equipment. Access to equipment and documents by other people in the house may need to be explicitly proscribed. As with health and safety issues, a protocol for site visits may be needed where security concerns are great, with clear guidelines about prior notice. Employers should also check that their fidelity insurance policy obligations are met in home offices.
THE HOME OFFICE: PHYSICAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

The remaining sections of this guide cover issues faced most directly by homeworkers themselves, although many will also be of concern to managers. We look firstly at the physical site of the home office, and its legal status. The next section focuses on the psychological, social and health issues.

Physical requirements

The physical requirements of an effective home office include appropriate space, comfortable and ergonomically correct furniture, separation from other household activities, an area in which to take a break from work, and access to a phone. It must also allow workers to feel personally safe if alone at home.

Some organisations, such as the APS, require inspections of the home office site before entering homework agreements, while others clarify the requirements in an interview. Restrictions on the use of office or personal equipment at home should also be stated. For example, are others in the house allowed to use an office computer?

The costs of electricity, heating and lighting are another area which should be discussed. It is common, although by no means universal, that employees meet such costs, and either way there may be taxation consequences for the employee. The APS review of their Home Based Work Award noted that decisions about home office costs should involve balancing these with the financial savings to the employee from working at home, for example through reduced transport, clothing, and food costs.

Tax and insurance implications

The home office raises a number of tax issues that homeworkers may want to know about. For example, Fringe Benefits Tax may be applicable if office equipment is used privately, and tax deductions may apply if private equipment is used for work. In some states other taxes such as Land Tax also apply to land which is not solely residential. The Capital Gains Tax exemption for a place of residence may be reduced or eliminated where that residence is used to produce assessable income.

Tax deductions for teleworkers may go beyond those for office employees, for example covering electricity, heating and lighting. However, an accountant should be consulted about record keeping requirements.

Finally, while business insurance policies usually cover office equipment used at home, employees should check whether any personal equipment used for work is covered by household insurance, which is frequently not the case. It may also be wise to check whether the home insurance policy has special provisions relating to paid work.14.
HEALTH AND HAPPINESS IN HOMEWORK

Creating boundaries between work and home

Beyond its physical setup, a home office is a ‘psychological space’ in the minds of the homeworker, other household members, and the members of the wider community. The mental images of homework held by all parties are no less important than the physical setup of the office.

For example, a homeworker should consider discussing with other household members the need to treat part of the house differently, and particularly to avoid interruptions. The impact on the other occupants during work hours also needs thought and discussion: if they feel their territory or activities are being curtailed, the arrangement will not work.

People in the community, including friends, neighbours and school staff, sometimes assume that work done at home is more interruptable than office work, and strategies for answering the door and phone might be valuable. One of our interviewees described at length an ongoing battle to change the local school’s assumption that, as she transported children to and from school, she was available for voluntary work and phone calls in between. It is to be hoped that community perceptions of homework improve as it becomes more widespread.

The image of homework in the employee’s mind is also important. One American company has required staff to dress as they normally would for work, leave the house by the front door and enter the work location by a separate door, to reinforce the mental distinction between work and home life.

Many homeworkers and managers would find this excessive. The key element here is that homeworkers adopt the professional attitudes found in the office, which will involve different strategies for different people. Our interviewees have expressed a wide range of attitudes to formal dress, for example. While a few preferred standard office wear, most found they did a markedly better job in casual wear. Indeed for some the personalisation of working conditions appeared to be a major factor in maximising job satisfaction, productivity and creativity at home. This personalisation applied to the physical environment and working hours, as well as clothes.

A final boundary issue is whether the home office can be used for meetings with clients or colleagues. This is often discouraged for reasons of professionalism or security.

As with other issues, careful selection of staff and management by results are more important than rules designed to rigidly separate work and home life. Training programs and orientation sessions have a role as well, and the guidebooks listed
below are useful sources of advice for homeworkers.

Reducing isolation

Although our research did not find isolation to be a problem, this is obviously possible where workers are removed from social and informational networks, and has been documented in overseas studies. Psychologists have long known that the social rewards from work can be at least as attractive as the financial rewards. It is our experience, though, that people choosing to work at home usually have less need for socialising, or at least get such needs met outside work hours.

Whether or not this is so for any individual, it is also well known that some socialising is important for the smooth running of an organisation. Socialising aids spread of knowledge about organisational values, policies and procedures, much of which is never written down.

It is important, therefore, that homeworkers have opportunities for regular contact with colleagues and management. Many homework schemes (eg. the APS Award) stipulate a maximum of three days at home per week. Others require attendance at fortnightly or monthly office meetings, or regular individual supervision sessions.

It is interesting that some organisations have found value in providing remote workers with office desks, even though they remain unused for part of the week. The symbolism of the desk to both remote and in-office workers helps maintain team identity, and it may consequently more than pay for itself.

Provision for regular contact between homeworker and colleagues is often important. Some organisations stipulate homeworkers must be near a phone for a set part of the standard working day, while others are happy to provide voicemail or answering machines.

New technology now makes such communication much more versatile than in the past. Conference calls are being used to conduct meetings by phone, and affordable videoconferencing over phone lines is not far away. Email via a modem is a relatively inexpensive option with particular value where telephone calls are difficult because staff are mobile or work nonstandard hours. While none of these technologies fully replace a face-to-face meeting, there is a growing number of successful work teams whose members are distributed around the country or globe and have never met face to face.

Another part of reducing isolation is to make an extra effort to include homeworkers in social events. It is important they remain on mailing lists and receive all notices and invitations sent to internal staff. Even if they cannot attend events, the symbolism will help reduce any feelings of isolation.

Homeworkers can also be encouraged to socialise amongst themselves, either remotely or in the office. For example, three
homeworkers who live in an outer metro area may like to meet regularly for lunch or form a mutual phone support group. In-office focus groups have also been successfully used by organisations such as the NSW Road Traffic Authority to help manage the impact on coworkers and family members, and to facilitate communication in areas such as technology support.

**Career development for homeworkers**

International experience highlights the need to ensure homeworkers have the same access to career advancement as in-office staff. It is often the case that employees out of sight are also ‘out of mind’ in promotion decisions, and managers should clarify the issues with both homeworkers and in-office staff. Homeworkers should be encouraged to discuss their achievements regularly, and should be aware of the need to maintain visibility.

Opportunities for training and development should also be available equally to homeworkers and office staff.

For their part, managers should be committed to considering the potential of the total workforce, including homeworkers. Generally, equal treatment will avoid discrimination under Equal Employment Opportunity legislation. Industrial relations awards may have further specific requirements to avoid discrimination against homeworkers.

**Psychological stress and overwork**

Although employees often choose homework as a less stressful way to work, it can have the opposite effect if not properly managed. Key principles already mentioned include making sure homeworkers:

- Feel physically secure and have safe working conditions.
- Maintain social networks.
- Are able to set appropriate physical, social and psychological boundaries at home.
- Work to clear and realistic goals with appropriate performance indicators.
- Have performance standards, rewards and conditions similar to office workers, unless both parties agree otherwise.
- Have supervision that provides clear feedback but also gives the flexibility that makes homework attractive.
- Feel supported by management and colleagues.
- Have equal career advancement opportunities.

These issues can be managed by regular discussions between homeworkers and managers, or perhaps colleagues or counsellors. Careful selection of homeworkers, and training or education programs which openly
address the differences between home and office work, will also help.

For some people, working at home leads to overwork, causing stress, or in extreme cases burnout. Overwork was mentioned as a potential danger by some of our interviewees, and it seemed to be a source of tension for at least two. The latter found the increased accessibility of work, coupled with high motivation levels, meant that, ironically, they saw less of their family when working from home than when commuting.

Overwork may also result from an expectation that homeworkers need to prove themselves, or to repay the privilege of working at home. Other causes of overwork at home are employer demands and low wages or piecework rates. Whatever the cause, it is in the organisation’s interest to avoid the low morale and poor quality of work that follows overwork.

On the positive side, homework is likely to reduce stress where the work and domestic issues are properly managed, and where workers’ social needs are met.

Health & safety, worker’s compensation

Our research found that the problem of ensuring health and safety in the home was widely perceived as a barrier to homework. Here we discuss only the broad principles as the specific legal requirements differ from state to state.

In general, employers’ duty of care under OH&S legislation and the common law of negligence applies to work at home, requiring equivalent working conditions to the office, at least where “reasonably practicable” according to the relevant clause. Duty of care also generally applies to employees, who have an obligation not to create risk to themselves and to cooperate with the employer in reducing risk in homework.

As an example of one large employer’s response, the APS HBW Award (described in more detail in Appendix A) has a detailed list of general considerations that apply at home worksites. These involve keeping established OH&S standards in areas like lighting, air quality, ergonomic issues, safe access and exit, appropriate training, and ongoing monitoring. It is important to note that these principles apply equally to in-office staff: the major difference is in establishing and monitoring them at home. Home workplace assessments may be required under the Award before homework is permitted and at regular intervals thereafter. Some organisations require external audits every two years.
Another example of a well thought out OH&S policy is that of Digital Equipment Corporation in the UK\(^{16}\), well known for their innovative teleworking experiments. This policy emphasises the joint nature of responsibility. While the employer “must take all reasonable and practical steps to ensure health, safety and welfare ... a large part of the responsibility for ensuring health and safety in employees’ homes must fairly lie with employees themselves.” The policy lays out the responsibilities of the employee in some detail, including procedures for reporting accidents and hazards. An initial inspection is required, and a checklist must be signed by both parties each year.

General strategies for reducing liability in the OH&S area include having a designated work area at home; providing training in areas such as safety, occupational overuse syndrome (OOS) or stress reduction; careful selection of homeworkers; having agreed maintenance schedules for equipment; on-site inspections; and a risk management plan that includes OOS and ergonomic hazards.

Worker’s compensation

Worker’s compensation coverage, although governed by a variety of state and Commonwealth statutes, usually extends to employees wherever they work, and it is in the interest of employers to identify and manage risks at home. It may also be necessary to identify risks beyond the home office. For example, compensation legislation will usually cover claims for travel from home to other sites. Home workers may also be covered for claims relating to rest periods at home taken in areas other than the designated office site. A grey area for a claiming employee may exist where evidence that he/she was actually at work is difficult to obtain - a contract covering times and places of work is one way to clarify this. A contract could also usefully cover equipment, maintenance and site inspection arrangements.

It may also be relevant to check the employer’s duty under OH&S legislation and common law towards visitors to a home work site, or to potential accidents involving other family members. In general, the employer is only liable for third parties where the employer could have been expected to be in control.\(^{17}\)

Return to work programs

Work at home might seem an ideal option for workers rehabilitating from illness. However, the APS guidelines state that in general a return-to-work program is not appropriate for homework due to the costs and monitoring difficulties. There may, however, be some circumstances where these problems can be solved.

Health improvements at home

While there is potential for OH&S to be compromised at home if not properly managed, there are also potential gains in health and safety. It has been suggested that in jurisdictions
where travel to work is subject to compensation such claims form a large part of compensation cases, and there may actually be fewer claims from homeworkers. It has also been suggested that the increased autonomy associated with homework could reduce OOS injuries, at least if equipment is of high ergonomic standard.\textsuperscript{17}

Additionally, where homeworkers are less stressed and better able to balance work and nonwork demands, better health is likely. Interviewees in our research frequently reported taking less sick leave. The better working conditions and lack of travel also encouraged some to work in circumstances of mild incapacity where they would not have otherwise.

\textit{Conclusion - OH&S at home}

As each organisation’s circumstances differ, and legislative requirements are complex and subject to interpretation of terms such as “reasonably practicable”, it is recommended that OH&S experts be consulted in setting up a homework scheme. Three general conclusions in this area are: duty of care applies to the home office as much as any other; an approach based on consultation and cooperation between employer and employees is likely to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks; and finally, that many organisations have found cost-effective solutions to establishing health and safety at home.
CONCLUSION

There is widespread research evidence, from both Australia and overseas, that homework offers employees and employers considerable advantages. Our own research shows that Australian managers are not taking advantage of these benefits, largely through lack of knowledge of how to implement a homework program. This guide has attempted to distil the principles of best practice in homeworking from research and the literature.

Although the managers we surveyed raised many questions, it is important to stress that the principles differentiating good and bad work practices at home are not as different from those applying in the office as often thought. Common themes in both this guide and standard HR practice involve analysing business needs, trusting and supporting employees, ensuring communication, selection of appropriate employees, choice of appropriate technology and use of goal oriented management methods. In addition, homeworking raises some new management issues in areas like health and safety, career progression, and maintaining communication and social networks.

Our research shows that many organisations allow homework informally - most managers know people who work at home at least occasionally. Moving homework more visibly into the corporate culture means confronting firstly the attitudinal and knowledge barriers to management acceptance, and secondly implementation issues in areas such as security and safety. Many companies have done this, as shown in the case studies from Australia, the US and Europe in the sources listed below. Such cases consistently show that homework has the potential to provide better business outcomes and more satisfied and committed employees.

Feedback

In the interests of improving the community’s understanding of best practice in homework, we welcome feedback on this document. If you are setting up a homework scheme, or have been involved in one, we would be very interested to hear of your experiences - our contact address is inside the front cover.
FOOTNOTES


3 Reports mentioning these organisations include the citations below for Adie & Carmody, Ward, and the DIR; and McCarthy, A. (1993) More employees are working from home. The Age, May 24, p13.

4 Other terms with related meanings include off-site work, distance work, virtual work, distributed work, home-based work, and outwork. Few writers define such terms, and consistent meanings have yet to emerge.

5 Information on telecentres and satellite offices can be found in our Web page - see next section.

6 McClennan, W. (1996) Persons employed at home, Australia. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics. The exact meaning of these figures is not as clear as sometimes suggested, due to definitions and statistical procedures used by the ABS. For example, the figures typically mix together employees and some types of self-employed workers.


8 Both McClennan and Madden (above) have some information on reasons for working at home.


14 While no definitive discussion of legal, tax and insurance issues for homeworkers exists, the principles are discussed in Scott, B. A. (1994) Legal, taxation and insurance issues. Paper presented at the Telework '94 - Managing the Change Conference held by the Asia Pacific Telework Association, Sydney.


FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES


As part of a wider look at family-friendly work practices, gives brief descriptions of homework practices in large firms including Minenco, Wormald, BP, Qantas, ICI, Nissan, and Mercantile Mutual.


A comprehensive annotated bibliography of 170 books, reports, journal articles, and conference papers.


Useful practical guide.

Dept of Industrial Relations (1994) Homebased Work in the Australian Public Service Information Kit. Communication Services and Marketing Unit, Department of Industrial Relations, GPO Box 9879 Canberra ACT 2601.

Contains details of the innovative APS Award, including checklists on security, health and safety, includes an evaluation of the first two years of the APS award, and the important details of the Award.


A widely cited book. Gil Gordon is one of the best known researchers and consultants in the telework area.


Jack Nilles is a widely cited researcher who coined the term ‘telecommuting’ over 20 years ago.


Short article on managing teleworkers.


Covers the OH&S issues.

practitioner's reference to understanding and designing work options. Sydney: Telstra.

Comprehensive and up-to-date reference on telecommuting.


A brief guide to teleworking in Australia, written for telecommuters.


A brief account of the introduction of homeworking and its benefits in one of Australia's largest organisations.

Organisations

Asia Pacific Telework Association (APTA), PO Box N542 Grosvenor Place, Sydney, NSW 2000, ph 241 2933.

A group dedicated to the promotion of teleworking.

Commonwealth Public Service Union National Office, Home Based Work Industrial Officer, 11th Floor, 390 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, VIC, 3000 (ph 03 9206 2399).

The CPSU was a partner to the innovative APS Home Based Work Award.

Work Contact Officer (ph 06 257 5262).

APS department involved in setting up the HBW Award.

Web Pages

The information on the World Wide Web of direct assistance to management of homeworkers or teleworkers is currently limited. Most of the sites below are starting points for those interested in the general growth of telework. Some links of particular relevance to managers are found on our page.

Gil Gordon
A pioneer of the telecommuting community and author of many guides to telework. Good introduction to telecommuting practice with links to many other sites.
http://www.gilgordon.com

Telecommuting Advisory Council (TAC)
A US nonprofit organisation promoting telecommuting.
http://www.telecommute.org

European Community Teleworking / Telematics Forum
Details the many EC initiatives in telework research and development, and has resources for teleworkers and managers.
http://www.agora.stm.it/ectf/ectf home.html
Telecommute America
An alliance of private and public sector organisations dedicated to promoting telecommuting.
http://www.att.com/Telecommute_America

Smart Valley Telecommuting Guide
A very good introduction to the practicalities of setting up a telework program and managing teleworkers, and has a good section written for teleworkers on managing the work and home issues.
http://smartone.svi.org/PROJECTS/TCOMMUTE/TCGUIDE

Edith Cowan University
Homework & Telework Project
Has up-to-date links to the addresses here, and many more. Includes links most relevant to managers, and summaries of our homework surveys and other research projects.
http://www.bs.ac.cowan.edu.au/telework.html

Asia Pacific Teleworkers Association
A WWW site is planned. Currently contactable by email to apta@dialix.com.au.
APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY: THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE HOME BASED WORK AWARD (1994)

This award was approved by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) in February 1994 as a result of negotiations between the Public Sector Union and the Department of Industrial Relations. While set in the context of the APS, it results from a thorough consideration of issues germane to homework in any large organisation. Key features are:

- HBW is not an entitlement or a right, and can only be entered into by voluntary agreement between company and employee.
- Applications are determined on a case-by-case basis.
- HBW is not a substitute for dependent care.
- Generally at least forty percent of normal office hours are to be spent in the office.
- Whether HBW is appropriate depends on the nature of the work. The Award excludes employees whose work requires a high degree of supervision, close scrutiny or direct face to face contact; those whose jobs do not lend themselves to objective performance monitoring; and those with continuous full-time training or supervisory roles.
- Conditions of employment will be the same whether employees work at home or in the office.
- Home based employees will have the same opportunities for career development and training as office based employees.
- Specific guidelines for access arrangements, security and occupational health and safety were developed. The Award provides for access to a home worksite on consent of the employee for purposes such as equipment maintenance, OH&S or security checks. In non-urgent situations, 24 hours notice is required.

A review of the operation of the Award, conducted in 1996 after two years of operation obtained feedback via a survey of approximately half the APS agencies. Among these agencies, 85 applications for HBW had been approved. Responses from both agencies and home based workers indicated a "broad enthusiasm" for continuation of the Award without change.

The following evaluation of the outcomes of HBW was made:

"Reflecting the positive experience with HBW to date from Australian and overseas studies, most agencies which had introduced HBW considered that they had positive benefits for their
organisation. For example, a HBW arrangement in one agency reported a productivity increase of 70% over a three month period ... Benefits identified by agencies through adopting such innovative work practices included improvements in employee morale, reduced absenteeism, attracting and retaining employees saving on recruitment, improved job satisfaction and retention of skilled employees.” p15

Other benefits included the ability to move workers to full time status, to assist injured workers to return to work, and improvements in organisational culture. Such benefits were widespread, and it was found that

“there are significant advantages with HBW arrangements from an employer's perspective in terms of improved output and morale.” (p17)

The review concluded that despite concerns in a small number of agencies about resource costs and maintaining communication,

“it is clear that the greater flexibilities offered by HBW are a positive addition to the conditions enjoyed by APS agencies and their employees. It is expected that as the APS continues to work through the current ‘information age’ that HBW will have a continuing and growing role to play, not only in the APS but throughout the economy.” p34

Further details of the Award and the review can be found in the resource document listed above. The document includes a comprehensive checklist of requirements for approval of HBW under the Award, particularly detailed in the areas of security and OH&S.
APPENDIX B

A HOMEWORK CHECKLIST

The following checklist is based on one used in an Australian Public Service agency and thus reflects its particular HRM and industrial relations environment. Nonetheless it forms a useful skeleton that other organisations can adapt. There are three parts: an overall agreement between employer and employee, and two specific schedules relating to OH&S and security.

Letter of agreement

- Days & hours of duty at home-based site
- Days & hours of duty at office-based site
- Period of HBW
- Period of notice for altering or terminating the agreement (by either party)
- Work to be performed
- Method of measuring work performance
- Office equipment provided at home
- Employee’s equipment used in work
- Maintenance schedule
- OH&S (separate schedule)
- Security (separate schedule)
- Maintaining contact and disseminating information
- Office work space
- Dependant care arrangements

Occupational Health & Safety

- Initial site visit
- Ongoing site visits
- Training

- Task breaks
- Job aids
- Workplace layout
- Electrical safety
- Noise
- Thermal environment
- Lighting
- Access/Egress
- Other OH&S issues

Security

- Initial site check
- Ongoing site visits
- Access to third parties
- Storage of information - lockable containers etc.
- Transmission of information - phone, fax, modem, travel
- Disposal of information
- Physical protection - locks, smoke detectors etc.
- Specific IT issues - passwords, backup etc.
- Other issues related to security of assets, equipment, information, confidentiality and copyright
APPENDIX C

A LIST OF EMPLOYEE AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Employee Considerations

• Why do you want to work off-site?
• What elements of your job can be performed off-site?
• How will you and your manager measure your performance?
• How and when will you do the work?
• Where will you do the work?
• What tools and equipment do you need to do the work?
• How will the company recover the costs of equipment?
• Do both your manager and colleagues agree with the concept of off-site work?
• Do you have appropriate dependant care in place whilst you are working?
• Does your household understand and support the arrangement?
• How will your colleagues and work flow be affected?
• Do you have a proven track record with the company?
• Do you have a good working relationship with your manager and colleagues?
• Do you have excellent negotiation and communication skills?
• Do you have a good social network outside the office?
• Are you willing to take responsibility for getting the job done?
• Can you cope with having to return to your usual place of work if required at any time by your manager?

Management Considerations

• Which elements of the job can be done off-site?
• How will you and the employee measure performance?
• Is there a business reason for the arrangement?
• Are the technology, equipment, furnishings and space suitable at the off-site location?
• Is the arrangement economically viable?
• Can you cover all due diligence issues: EHS, security, insurance, award/agreement provisions?
• Does the employee have appropriate work attitudes and personal attributes?
• Does the employee have suitable dependent care arrangements?
• What methods will you and the employee use to communicate?
• How will you ensure that the employee still feels part of the team?
• How frequently will the employee attend the office and where will they work whilst there?
• What training does the employee require?
• What training or advisory support do you need to assist with the process?
• What effect will equipment breakdown have on the productivity of the off-site employee and on the work flow?

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