

# WORKING FROM HOME

## FINDING THE BALANCE FOR EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE

NINE LIVES CONSULTING 

Career Navigator



**It's been our observation of people completing Outplacement and accepting new roles that work from home is now a permanent feature of the workplace.**

Recent anecdotal and survey evidence also confirms that employees are committed to retaining the new flexibility of working from home where possible (and where relevant), meaning they will not accept new roles that do not accommodate their needs, and will move from an existing role if it refuses to meet their needs.

***Employers - ignore this at your peril.***

The balance between how much time in the office and how much time working from home remains under debate as it is different for every employee and employer. There is no universal formula. This time balance is essentially pivotal on task types and communications. Put simply, it appears to be about what tasks are best done where.

## Working from home: typical tasks

- Compiling reports
- Preparing documents
- Telephone communications (client support etc)
- Conducting analysis

## Working in the office: typical tasks

- Group meetings
- Strategic discussions
- Tactical discussions
- Social interaction
- Embedding common culture
- Exposure to other functions to broaden skills.
- Building network and effectiveness
- Training and development

*BUT* the considerations are a little more complex than this.

Each party must reach clarity on a range of issues

### **The employee needs to consider:**

- Their role: the various core and non-core tasks required over a 1-year period.
- Their style and personality, dictates their preferred work style, tasks and work environment.
- Career stage dictates degree of autonomy, authority, aspirations and gap analysis for future roles.
- Tasks done best in each location, as in the above diagram.
- Times of day when they do particular tasks best, midnight or mid-day, what is best for the employee.
- Performance measures; preferably based on output, timeliness and quality, rather than hours on duty.
- Career considerations, what is the next step, who do I need to meet and what do I need to know.
- Personal housing arrangements, shared facilities, study or kitchen bench, children or a pesky cat.
- Personal family life (which alters with time), family commitments and responsibilities.
- Commuting times, especially if they live in regional areas.
- Appropriate office furniture and security in the home.

All these are shifting requirements, making for a dynamic framework for WFH decisions

### **The institution/employer factors include...**

- Its goals and outputs. Clarity on how and who is responsible.
- Ways of doing its tasks, relevant and up-to-date policies and procedures.
- Performance measures based on output and quality, not hours worked.
- Supervisor and manager roles and performance measures adapted to the remote workforce structure.
- Supervisors developing a good understanding of each of their subordinate's style and capabilities.
- Embedding a common purpose and commitment in a disparate team.
- Building teams to compete with competitors and rapidly respond to changes in the marketplace.
- Embed improvements and changes to improve efficiency, effectiveness and quality of product/service.
- Skills upgrades with training.
- Maintaining the security of its information and processes. (There may be others in the dwelling).

## This represents a static framework

In our experience, most institutions prefer a static framework to avoid surprises and variance meaning that tension between the two frameworks can lead to mishaps and resentment.

**It is a tension that can be temporarily accommodated but never permanently fixed in an Employment contract and this is the new issue; the work environment can no longer be solely dictated by the organisation's needs. This really needs to be a continuing dialogue, with more control being handed to each employee.**

The only way to achieve a balance, which is different for everyone, is to listen to each employee. They know what the right balance of working from home and time on the business premises is for them to deliver on their commitments.

Managers should know what the goals and performance criteria are and staff need to know how they are being assessed and that the assessment is related to their output. Between the two parties, a consensus can be reached but it needs managers to ensure they have suitable people in each role, be clear about goals, be reasonable about deadlines and trust their team to deliver.

This style of management will be a challenge to a proportion of existing managers who will resist this approach, especially if they feel it threatens their role and status, diminishes their power and threatens their relevance. This style of manager is no longer relevant and will be an impediment to an organisation's ability to prosper.

The new paradigm includes:

- Requiring staff to be present, not just based on the institution's needs but on schedules that consider the individual's needs.
- Requiring staff to be in the office only for work that requires face-to-face interaction.
- Allowing staff to arrive and leave in off-peak times, they will make up the time at home after hours.
- Meetings with 24 hours' notice and clear agendas.
- Performance measurement based on output, timeliness and quality.

To successfully accommodate the work from home requirements, the leaders of every organisation need to review and assess every level and function of their organisation for its suitability and capability to operate effectively under the new circumstances. The revision of performance measures is a vital component of making this work.

Resistance will result in a second rate workforce as the competent staff move to more accommodating organisations.

*The information provided in this article is of a general nature only and not intended to be advice*