

Telework Pilot – Change Management Notes

The Business Hour group was briefed on the OMF-sponsored telework pilot twice in 2017 – in March to hear about the plan and participants, and in July to hear highlights of the evaluation and recommendations. In July, the Technology Executive Steering Committee discussed the pilot evaluation and added some additional comments.

The following are the highlights of the discussions:

Practices that supported telework

Communicating expectations

- Be clear about the management expectations for telework assignments – if an in-person meeting is hard to schedule, are you required to come in on your telework day? Be clear about the circumstances that would require you to change your plans and work at your work station.
- Be clear about how you will fulfill your responsibilities to others as a manager, supervisor, lead worker, trainer or subject matter expert while teleworking.
- If there is additional work needed for you to do your job while teleworking, decide in advance who is responsible for that. For example, if there are some meeting logistics that would allow you to participate remotely, who is responsible for that.
- If there are additional costs for equipment for you to do your job while teleworking, decide in advance who is responsible for that. If you require two monitors, a larger monitor, a mobile phone, or a laptop, decide who is responsible for that cost.
- If your work unit or group has many team meetings, consider limiting the days of the week for regularly scheduled telework. For example, some work groups are limiting ongoing telework for Mondays and Fridays so that Tuesday – Thursday is available for team meetings and team training.

Communicating to the people who work with you, count on you

- Use the “working elsewhere” option to designate your calendar in Outlook. Communicate to others in the work group about what that means and how to contact you.
- Add information to your email message signature or to your automated reply that has information about your availability and schedule.
- For ad hoc telework, send an email in advance to the people you work with the most so they are reminded and can seek you out if something needs to be addressed in person.
- Communicate with others who share a business process that you are available by email or phone. For example, accounts payable processors or timekeepers may be used to finding someone available to approve by looking around in the workspace; sending an email out to see who is available allows the teleworker to perform that role.
- Be logged in and available with Skype for Business. It can be useful to change your location within Skype to say teleworking.

Building familiarity with technology tools among all staff

- One Drive, Office 365, Skype Business and VPN all support remote work assignments. Teleworkers need to be able to use the tools confidently. Other people also need to be familiar with the capabilities of the tools so they know how to interact with the teleworker. For example, if the teleworker is using VPN, you can send a link to a file on your network; if the teleworker is using a mobile phone, then send a PDF attachment.

- Work phone calls can be automatically forwarded to a mobile phone or a personal phone. The teleworker can also be notified via email when they have a phone call to respond to. Building a knowledge base of how to use the tools – both from teleworkers and the people they work with and serve – helps.
- Designating a telework point of contact/advocate/super user within each work group adopting or planning an expansion of telework helped. The ideal candidate for this role is someone proficient in the use of technology tools, knowledgeable about best practices that the teleworker can use to keep up with communications, knowledgeable about management expectations and a good communicator and coach.

Considering fairness among team members

- Some positions have responsibilities that are very well suited to remote work; and some do not. Some work groups considered offering or expanding the opportunity for compressed work schedules to those employees with position responsibilities that are not well suited for remote work. Other work groups communicated to employees that they could pick one option – telework or compressed work schedule – but not both. There is no “one size fits all” approach but team members need to think through what the guidelines should be for their group.
- As a teleworker, you may need to ask a co-worker to respond to requests from your customers or team members that require face-to-face communication on your telework days. You could consider trading off with another teleworker, much the same way as employees on compressed work schedules trade off with a colleague with a different day off. “You take my in-person requests on my telework Friday, and I’ll take yours on your telework Monday,” or something like that, was identified as an option to consider.

Maintaining privacy and security for confidential information

- Teleworkers should know that they need to ensure that they are taking the same steps to maintain privacy and security of confidential information in their remote work station. For example, you can review job applications by logging into the NeoGov website and you do not need to be on a City issued computer. However, you still need to ensure that you are maintaining security of confidential information.

Addressing ergonomic needs

- Teleworkers should know that they need to provide themselves with a remote work station set up that meets their needs. If they need a certain type of chair, monitor, desk or mouse at work, they will need to meet these needs in their remote location.

Areas identified as challenges to work through

Communicating different types of telework

- Some telework days are planned to be regular work days at a different work site, where you are available by email and phone and will handle time sensitive interruptions as you would if you were at your work station. Other telework days are planned for generally uninterrupted time to concentrate on a lengthy task. For example, you could schedule reviewing and evaluating applications or proposals on your telework day and you will limit interruptions. We could use a language around how to describe these types of telework to manage expectations.

Working with people who prefer person-to-person communications

- Teleworkers who say that they increased their productivity because they didn't have to "deal with all the interruptions" need to be cautious about what they are communicating with that assessment. What interactions did they avoid – Personal stories from co-workers? Questions or tasks that had to be handled by someone else at work?
- Be aware of the people you work with or serve who prefer communicating in person, and be intentional about how to accomplish your work with them while teleworking. Have a plan to monitor the casual/drop by requests for information or requests for action from co-workers to be sure that all needed work is being completed.
- Check in on the communication needs of people you are supervising, particularly while your employees are in a probationary status. Check in on the communication needs of people you are training as well. Even when everyone has the same schedule, it is not unusual to hear employees say they don't have enough time with their supervisor, but if the lack of face time is communicated as the cause of a training gap, that is an issue to address.

Considering fairness among team members

- New business practices bring fairness questions – Who is approved to telework and who isn't? Who has equipment purchased by the City and who needs to buy their own? Who used to be allowed to telework and now isn't allowed? Who handles in-person interruptions while someone is working remotely? Again, there is no one right answer for every work group but it is advisable to discuss within your team.

Overcoming technical challenges

- Teleworkers and their team members liked the accessibility when teleworkers forwarded their work phone to their home phone on their telework days. However, if the telework day was Friday, the teleworker could not un-forward the phone until they returned to work on Monday.

Having difficult conversations

- Even experienced teleworkers report that some issues simply work better as part of a face-to-face conversation rather than an email exchange or Skype session. Some Skype sessions have out of sync audio and video which makes the nuances of non-verbal conversation tough to interpret.

Completing current paper-based business processes

- Reviewing draft documents that are part of paper-based business processes and providing directions to an employee about how to complete them were tougher to do remotely. This is expected to be reduced as more processes become electronic.