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Workplace Reality
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“Working from home is today’s modern shorthand”

Companies must be at the forefront of generational changes if they are to attract the best talent and, of course, remain globally competitive. Recent research indicates that working from home can increase productivity and decrease stress - also companies may retain more employees by offering a work from home programme.

It is imperative that organisations understand the dynamics of their workforce by listening to the individual preferences of employees; this is exceptionally important as the younger generation will increasingly challenge the traditional way of working as they are used to significant independence and flexibility.

Employers must send out a positive signal to the nation’s most valuable resource - ‘young workers’

Graduates, in particular, want a sense of freedom in that they want to choose what projects they work on, as well as, how, when and where they will perform their work. Graduates want more control over their day-to-day work life and it is much easier for companies to attract and retain talent if they give employees options - as this will help them to excel at their jobs.



“Working from home is today’s modern shorthand”

‘Working from home is becoming increasingly common practice’

Today, every industry is more about getting things done, accommodating clients and completing projects - irrespective of where an employee works; also because of rising traffic congestion and the spread of laptops, as well as cell-phone connectivity, it is quickly becoming the ‘norm’ to work from home.

It is only the employee who has difficulty managing his workload at the office who may find it very awkward to work with distractions at home. However, research indicates that employees who work from home take fewer breaks and work more efficiently.

By a company offering their employees the option to work from home they are demonstrating trust to employees and it is the freedom and flexibility to allow them to choose where to work, which makes them more productive.

Advantages of working from home:

- Two thirds of employees prefer to work from home
- Reduces absences - as employees will work from home even if sick
- Flexibility - can vary schedule, employees can run errands and keep appointments
- Removes certain time pressures and reduces stress
- Employees can produce more than their office based counterparts
- Workplace distractions costs companies money
- Employees save money by not commuting
- Employees are judged on what they produce and not their appearance
- Employers can reduce the need for office space - huge savings
- If an employee is absent a company is not paying for an empty desk
- Employees become more independent and self- directed
- Dominant personalities cannot rule the office
- Avoids discrimination and workplace bullying
- Allows baby boomers to work longer - gives increased flexibility
- In the event of a disaster employees can still work
- Employees can wear more comfortable clothes

“Working from home is today’s modern shorthand”

Home-based workers now span a wide spectrum of jobs

Companies who offer their employees the flexibility of working from home, will win at the end of the day, as their employees will be more productive and consequently more engaged. Also with the pace of technology it is possible to participate in company matters within minutes.

A quieter environment means employees can produce more - flexible working is not just about working from home it is about working from wherever an employee needs to be - employees who are not tied to their desk can be more productive. Employees who save time commuting are happy to spend more time being effective.

Employees who work from home are sick less often, remain in their job longer and report being happier.

‘Home is where the work is’

An increasing number of small companies are now employing more people to work from home, indeed colleagues may be thousands of miles away from each other, but this means a company can keep and attract a wide talent pool.

Home workers made up 13.9% of all those in work in the UK during the first quarter of 2015. The percentage of those in employment who work from home has gone up from 11.1% in 1998 to 13.9% in January to March 2015.

Of the 4.2m people working from home in 2015, 35.2% were professionals or associate professionals, 23.5% were working within skilled trades and 14.8% were working as managers or senior officials.

Challenges Facing Homeworkers

Managers acknowledge the fact that managing homeworkers is far more difficult than managing office workers. Homeworking is an agreement between employee and employer which allows a worker to carry out their usual job related tasks at home rather than in the company's workplace.

Four issues dominate the argument for workers being allowed to work from home and include:

- effective management of employees
- performance management
- communication
- training

An employee working from home must understand, completely, their daily job role in order to effectively perform outside of a company's workplace. Communication is the essential link between what motivates an individual to work objectively at home and understanding exactly organisational targets.





Employee Engagement

Although work environment plays an important role in work engagement, engagement is also about personality traits - which means that no matter what the situation some employees will always be more engaged than others.

The relevance of employee engagement is to:

- increase levels of employee satisfaction
- encourage employees to perform to the best of their ability
- increase productivity through engagement
- enhance employee attraction
- nurture a culture of innovation

Engaged employees are valued by their employers as high performers, because they are more likely to go that extra mile, are more creative and are more likely to stay in an organisation longer than a disengaged employee.

Research indicates that among job categories, managers, executives and office/administrative workers had the highest levels of engagement in 2014 at 38.4%.

Employee Engagement

Among the generations, traditionalists are the most engaged group, at 42.2%, possibly because the few who work do so by choice and enjoy their jobs. Millennials are the least engaged group, at 28.9%. Although the economy is improving, workers in this generation may not be getting the jobs they had hoped for coming out of university/college.

'A lack of communication and knowledge sharing amongst employees working from home are barriers to employee engagement.'

The whole purpose of employee engagement is for the employee to feel valued and involved - this must be monitored when employees are working continuously at home. Thus employees must sustain their involvement in company affairs such as being involved in decision-making matters and having the freedom to voice their ideas, it is crucial that employees do not become too isolated.

Employers need to be in touch with the minds of the younger generation to get 100% from them - because this is how they will become completely engaged - younger people will 'own' their work and do whatever it takes to get results. Younger people will want a sense of belonging and will not be encouraged by financial incentive alone.

Employee's working from home must engage to:

- connect
- contribute
- convey

People working from home should be aware of what each member of their team is doing and what they are contributing - this is to establish mutual trust in the absence of working in a company environment (lack of trust makes the homemaker vulnerable).

Also employees working from home (as part of a team) must hold their colleagues accountable for their performance. There should also be clear communication as to regards to how meetings and conferences will be conducted.

Employees are choosing to work at home because they work harder, get more done and they become better at their job but they must remain engaged with their organisation.

Motivation of Home Based Employees

Motivated employees are one of the key factors that provide competitive advantage for businesses. Therefore, companies that allow their employees to work from home should hold regular meetings and invite suggestions and ideas from their workers to keep them motivated and engaged. Firms should not let 'out of sight - out of mind' apply to employees working from home - homeworkers must be kept informed about important business decisions.

Motivating employees will keep them happy but it is very hard to keep an unhappy employee motivated. Homeworkers must sustain a combination of incentives and motivation to maintain a healthy positive work environment in order to remain productive. The importance of employee motivation cannot be overstated as it influences a company's overall performance and business targets.



Adapting to Change - WFH

'Adaptation is crucial as a multi-generational workforce will become the norm'

For working at home to be really productive companies must implement the right tools and strategies, this is crucial for the older worker because as a job changes, the individual job fit is also likely to change, often with the result that the employee is required to adapt. There is, of course, a significant difference between an employee working from home and in a more traditional environment - companies need to teach their older staff how to cope with adapting to that change.

Organisations must outline specific rules and policies so that employees are fully aware of what is expected of them. A quiet working environment is important, clients and colleagues do not want to listen to the sound of a television, radio or a dog barking! It is imperative that firms hold regular staff meetings to invite suggestions and ideas regarding company matters.

As the landscape of our workforce is changing and people are living longer companies must accommodate the older worker in helping them to adapt to change so that older people's skills do not go to waste. Firms need to focus on:

- Retain - the older worker by offering flexibility
- Retrain - ongoing training irrespective of age



Maintaining self-discipline and self-esteem whilst working at home

Self esteem is contagious and is extremely important whether or not an employee works from home. A good sense of self-esteem has an impact on how an employee operates in 'their specific workplace'. Self-esteem affects everything an employee will do - it is the person who has good self-esteem that is the "glass half full person rather than the glass half empty".

'Self-esteem is a mental muscle it must be exercised'

Employees who have good self-esteem will be the individual who observes things that are done correctly, will be constructive in their criticism, flexible when others make mistakes but will stick up for themselves when they need to.

The pace of work and productivity in today's workforce is progressing at rapid speed - but it is crucial for employers to take the time to praise their employees otherwise employees will feel that they are never doing enough - will doubt themselves and added pressure in the workplace increases aggressiveness as well as rudeness.

Maintaining self-esteem is a lifelong psychological process - and a good workplace environment is essential, as a bad workplace makes a person vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

Self-Discipline

Self discipline is the most important trait for the homemaker, as being disciplined allows an employee to stay on course in reaching their business targets with minimum supervision. The one common theme that comes up in every company when talking about successful employees is 'discipline' - it is the fundamental element of successful achievement.

Self-discipline is about cultivating a mindset to get things done and being in control, which is essential for an employee working from home.

A man with short, graying hair and black-rimmed glasses is looking down at a document. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt. The background is a blurred office setting. The image is framed by a white and blue geometric shape.

Conclusion

Companies have offered employees the opportunity to work from home as a result of a growing demand and this has been possible because of the advances in technology.

A recent study of homeworkers in the UK indicated that 75% of them declared themselves to be more productive and efficient when working from home than working in the office. However, in order to work productively at home employees must continuously invest in their talent, skills, character and creativity - self discipline is a must.

Employees who work at home are more likely to work in excess of their contracted hours and would opt to work from home over a pay rise. Creating a flexible working environment that helps employees grow and develop is an ongoing process.

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