

It's About Time



Making the Remote Office Work—It's Not Just About Technology

The number of remote workers—those who do some or all of their work away from a company's office—is increasing rapidly. Companies offer remote working arrangements for many reasons: to reduce unnecessary travel, contain real estate costs, eliminate energy-sapping commutes, or address work and family schedule conflicts. In the past, employers' response to this dramatic shift in work patterns has been to focus on technology. Conventional wisdom held that with the right technology we can work effectively from anywhere. WFD's research on remote work makes it apparent that an effective remote work strategy demands more than technology.

"WFD has tracked workplace flexibility for over 10 years. Access to technology is often viewed as the key barrier to working in an increasingly dispersed work environment," notes Karen Noble, a senior consultant with WFD. "However, our research shows that workplace attitudes and management practices—such as measuring employee performance by long on-site hours (face time)—are greater obstacles to remote work and contribute to another key barrier, workload."

WFD research has shown that the factors critical to seamless and effective remote work are:

- Clear policies and implementation guidelines that address all the variations of remote work
- A culture that rewards performance, not just visibility

- Practices that maximize mutual connectivity between workers, team, and the organization

Policies for all types of remote work

Whether your employees work from home one day a month or are on the road five days a week, clearly defined policies and guidelines are essential to success. The first step is to recognize the various types of remote work, each of which has distinct requirements in terms of work space, work practices, connectivity, accessibility, and communication.

- Telecommuters or teleworkers perform some of their work responsibilities at sites other than their primary office location, usually their home or a satellite office. They generally maintain a dedicated workspace at the primary office.
- Remote workers are a subset of the dispersed workforce who perform all of their work responsibilities from a location other than the primary office and do not have dedicated workspace there.
- Mobile workers are on the move most of the time, performing their work at different office sites, customer locations, and from home. They may use shared workspace at various office locations.

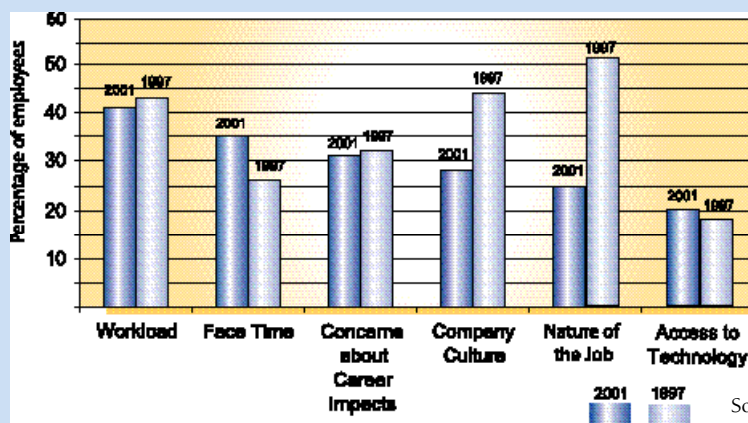
WFD's expertise in creating more effective workplaces has helped hundreds of global companies become more profitable by increasing employee commitment and retention.

A key part of WFD's offering is flexibility consulting and remote work strategy and implementation.

Want to Learn More?

To learn more about remote work strategy and implementation, and view our Expert Q&A, visit our website at www.wfd.com and follow the It's About Time link.

Workload and Face Time are Primary Barriers to Remote Work



A few years ago company culture and nature of job inhibited remote work. Today employees say workload and face time are the primary barriers.

Source: WFD, Cross-Industry Study

To be effective, remote work guidelines should address the needs of all employees working in a dispersed team. "Many remote workers have established satisfactory one-on-one arrangements with their supervisor, but the impact of the arrangement on co-workers is often overlooked. It can be a disaster when the rest of the team is left in the dark," says Diane Burrus, senior consultant at WFD. "Team members need to know how to reach each other and understand the protocol for contact and access. Otherwise, business needs may not be met, and remote workers may be left out of important decision making."

Changing a 'face time' culture

Flexible work arrangements are very popular among employees, but they require companies to adjust their management culture.

"Managers in a face time culture assess employee contribution and performance by walking around to see people working rather than by results delivered," explains Amy Richman, WFD senior consultant. "In addition, workers in the office are more often selected for special projects, included in meetings, and consulted on other issues. Remote workers are left out of the loop, which can decrease productivity and employee satisfaction." The key to an effective remote work strategy is to create measurable goals that can be evaluated on an ongoing basis regardless of where one is working.

Creating a performance-based culture also requires more focus on workload planning. In WFD's recent surveys, employees say that one of the biggest barriers to remote work is an out-of-control workload. Last minute requests, lack of planning, constant emergencies, and too much work are all reasons employees cite for not being able to perform their work remotely. When planning a remote work strategy, a more intentional style of management is required of employees and their supervisors.

Keeping remote workers connected

Maintaining the social connection between workers and their organization is a crucial, and often overlooked, component of any remote work strategy. Electronic communication tools enable us to communicate efficiently in a dispersed work environment and have reduced the need for face-to-face contact in many cases. The result can be the loss of the real human connections that often happen as part of informal communication, information sharing, and team celebrations. Researchers exploring organizational identification among remote workers have found that without the proper work-based social support, virtual work can increase employees' isolation.¹ If remote work arrangements do not provide ways for employees to feel connected to one another and to the organization, commitment to the organization is weakened.

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Attempts to change attitudes, behavior, and ultimately the culture will fail without strong commitment from senior management. Remote work has to be viewed as a creative business solution in a changing work environment. IBM is one company that has embraced remote work, not as an accommodation, but as a better way of doing business. "Our team of six is located in five states, in three time zones, and serves customers all over the world. We don't have the time or budget to get bogged down with old paradigms about how the work gets done," says Andre'a D. Jackson, Manager of IBM's Global Workforce Flexibility Project Office. "We take advantage of IBM's tools, technology and support system, which enable us to communicate with each other and work effectively anywhere, anytime. These tools, as well as a focus on results and intentionally keeping each other informed on all activities, have allowed us to use remote work very effectively to achieve our business results."

¹Wiesenfeld, B., Raghuram, S., & Garud, R. 2001. Organizational Identification Among Virtual Workers: The Role of Need for Affiliation and Perceived Work-Based Social Support. *Journal of Management*. 27 (2), 213-230.

Meet The Experts



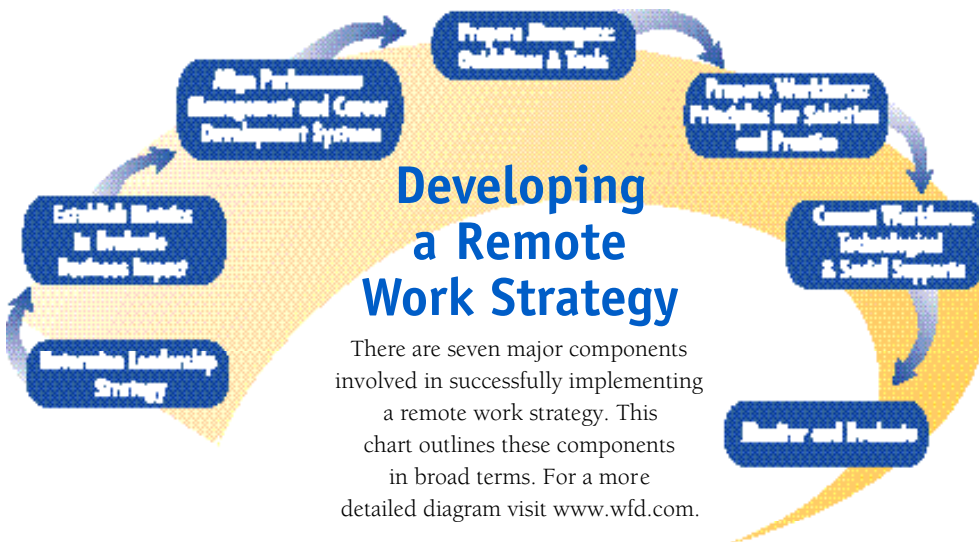
Diane Burrus

Diane Burrus has over 20 years of experience developing management practices that enhance employee commitment, performance, and retention. She has consulted with global companies to address issues of work-life support, workload, flexibility and remote work. Ms. Burrus has developed customized management training programs, videos, multi-media and e-based tools for clients such as Corning, Deloitte & Touche, Dow Chemical, IBM, Merck, Prudential Insurance, and Xerox.



Karen Noble

Karen Noble has 25 years of experience as a consultant in human behavior and organizational change. Over the past 15 years she has worked on five continents to develop change strategies focused in the areas of workplace flexibility, work redesign, work-life strategy and Diversity for clients such as: Abbott Laboratories, DuPont, GE Capital, JP Morgan, Hewlett-Packard, Sears, Roebuck and Company, and Texas Instruments.



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