

Strike a balance with flexible working arrangements

As the holiday season kicks into high gear, work-life balance is on many of our minds. How can I meet all of my work commitments this month when no one will be in the office, and still strategically use very little vacation time to stretch the holiday break from four days to 14? Am I right? I think most all of us want to stay engaged with our professional lives while maintaining the freedom to prioritize our personal lives. And many employers have come up with ways to help us achieve that balance.

Teleworking is not a brand new concept, but is certainly gaining steam as employers and employees alike try to find ways to meet a variety of wants and needs. There are benefits to both sides when it comes to offering flexible working arrangements such as teleworking. For businesses attempting to meet sustainability targets by reducing employee

commuting and associated impacts to energy and environment, the benefits of this option can really add up.



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For example, in a five-day work week, I drive a minimum of 50 miles per day or 250 miles total just directly to and from work. I also use lighting and several pieces of computer equipment in my office for about nine hours per day or 45 total hours. Multiply this by the more than 4,000 people employed by my organization and you have a lot of fuel and energy use, not to mention resultant emissions. Not every business is as

large, but every little bit adds up and relative savings may still be significant.

From the employee's perspective, the option to work from the comfort of home or other chosen work space can represent a reduction in drive time, total transportation costs and, for some, the time spent getting "ready"

for work. It can also mean the opportunity to eat healthier meals than a busy, grab-and-go schedule often leads to, take care of personal tasks during breaks, or complete work remotely on what would otherwise be a sick day. For some, the change of scenery and comfort of home also often spark additional creativity.

It's important to remember that teleworking is not appropriate for all kinds of work, or for every employee or company. For instance, much of what I do relates to written communications, so a lot of my work can technically be done from anywhere. But a scientist must be in a laboratory to conduct experiments, and a lawyer must meet with clients and perhaps appear in court. Also, not everyone remains productive without the added structure an office environment provides.

Both employer and employee must decide who is and is not a suitable candidate for teleworking. And certainly before offering this option, businesses

must weigh the potential advantages, disadvantages, and practical matters like policies and processes related to office equipment and information technology support.

Teleworking is just one form of flexibility that businesses are starting to offer in an attempt to improve the health, happiness, and productivity of their employees while perhaps also helping reduce their operational costs and carbon footprint. It should never come at the expense of maintaining face-to-face relationships with colleagues and customers, so an all-or-nothing strategy may not be most effective, but providing the flexibility of teleworking on some sort of part-time basis may provide a little extra balance to help some employees thrive. Could it be right for your business?

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