Telecommuting Strategies

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Proposal:

Background
Supply Management Services
The Supply Management department acts as an integral component of UBC through goods and services procurement, freight, customs and surplus equipment management. By reducing costs and running as efficiently as possible, this service has been able to provide the absolute best value for the staff and students on campus.

Three of the department's main strategies demand constant innovation. These being:
Best Value- Maintain passion to acquire lowest overall cost of ownership
Best in Class- Employ leading edge technology and procurement strategy
Risk Reduction- Manage University supply risks to avoid costly expenditures

With seven distinct departments,
Key Issues:
- Inefficient use of space and crowding problem
- Rising costs of travel, time and resources
- Demographic trends leading to requirement of childcare and eldercare

The overarching issue that Supply Management Services is encountering is an ineffective workplace design. This design is inhibiting the effectiveness of the organization's strategies and, most importantly, to maintain its ability for cost leadership.

As the working demographic is starting to become sandwiched between taking care of a longer lifespan retiree as well as their children.

Purpose: Allowing the Supply Management department to look at alternative, feasible and cost effective solutions; more specifically, telecommuting, to conduct their jobs. By doing so, we can create reusable space to enhance the workplace further.

Research Methodology:
Research into the organization through interviews, job descriptions and collective agreement language will facilitate understanding around the areas of work that can be telecommuted.
I would like to do quantitative and qualitative research by cross comparing with organizations and perhaps other educational institutions that have started this new facet of completing work. By looking at the costs involved in capital start-up, potential savings and employee satisfaction, we will be able to tell what is feasible and whether or not telecommuting is possible.

At the very least, I would like to find some alternative solutions for the Supply Management Services to conduct work. I will be researching various companies who currently allow for shorter work weeks and the productivity and employee relation results.

Major Issues Employees Currently Face:
Research has shown that work-life conflict leads to several forms of personal problems such as marital trouble, depression and stress-induced sickness.

As the demographic of the country is changing, larger portions of citizens are falling into a sandwich generation. That is, not only are there demands to look after children, but the same family will need to look after their elderly. According to the Conference Board of Canada, 1999, one in four Canadians now care for an elderly family member (an increase of 6% ten years earlier). Work and life components, despite even the best efforts, are closely linked and will one will always be invariably affecting the other.

How Does This Affect You?
According to the Future of Work 2003 study, employees of 2012 will be looking to companies that have flexible work policies that are compatible with employee lifestyle needs. The inability to offer work-life balance in an organization has transpired into high priced consequences. Well supported through various surveys, costs include:

- increased turnover
- increased absenteeism
- reduced job satisfaction
- reduced productivity
- increased managerial stress
- increased health costs
- increased disability costs

In contrast, an organization that does provide flexible employment policies shows improved bottom-line profits through:

- Recruitment and attraction of candidates: employees desire employment policies that match their lifestyle needs
- Decreased absenteeism and lateness
- Increased productivity
- Employee satisfaction gains
- Higher participation in training and education
- Increased employee retention

Alternatives:

Alternative Work Schedules

In this situation, all employees work a full workday, however their start and end times vary. Some employees who prefer to start earlier in the morning will be able to choose a schedule that requires them to begin the workday at 0700 and leave at 1500, and those that prefer to start later could start at 0930 and leave at 1730.

Positives:
Employees are able to choose the time that they are able to be the most productive to come into the workplace. They are also able to choose the best schedule to fit their

life needs. Having alternative work schedules also improves coverage and access for clients as some employees will be in earlier and those that start later leave later.

Negatives:
The depth of coverage will be lower, as fewer people are able to take requests when schedules do not overlap. Additionally, scheduling meetings between staff can be more difficult as employees have different work hours.

Compressed Workweek

Employees in this setting will work the full amount of hours in a normal workweek, however, will compress these hours into a shorter week. This means that the workday will start earlier and end later on days those employees come into the office and in return, will receive Fridays off. Alternatively, the Employer may agree to provide different days off for different employees.

Positives:
Employees are able to take care of personal appointments during their days off, rather than on lunch hours or breaks. Employees can save on parking, commuting, lunches, and childcare costs. Employers have the ability to extend hours of service due to the scheduling of staff.

Negatives:
Productivity on longer days may be lower than during shorter shift durations as motivation can decline as the work day extends. For employees, public transportation options and childcare may not be as available for extended work days. It may also be challenging to schedule vacation and sick days. Additionally, employers need to be mindful of provincial employment standards about work hours and establishing overtime.

Telecommuting

Employees will work regular hours, however, work will be completed from home. This option relies heavily on communications technology.

Positives:
Employees are able to adjust their work schedule in order to meet personal needs and save time and money from parking, travel and meals. Organizations that encourage telecommuting find higher productivity levels due to fewer distractions and interruptions in the home environment, Furthermore, employers are able to save space and reduce operating overhead. Organizations are also able to expand their recruitment pool, to individuals who do not desire a commute to work.

Negatives:
Need to ensure that both the work and employees are well suited to telecommuting. Additionally, there will be several significant home requirements (ie. insurance,

zoning) before an employee can begin telecommuting. Telecommuting can also deter a team environment or sense of belonging.

Job Sharing

Job sharing is a form of employment whereby two or more employees share one position and work part-time hours. They also share benefits, salary and responsibilities of one position. This form of flexibility can see two employees split the position 50/50 or 45/55, and one employee can come in two days in a week and the other can work the other three.

Positives:
The employer can acquire a larger base of employees. This option can also increase the amount of creativity and skill, as they are combining two minds essentially. Furthermore, this option acts like having two part-time employees, however, they would share one desk and space at the workplace.

Negatives:
It can be difficult to mesh two personalities and task delivery. Clientele may not like dealing with two different people. The employer will still need to supervise two employees rather than just one person. Some benefits offered by an organization may be very problematic to split between two people.

The best choice to tackle the three key issues will be the option of telecommuting. It reduces need for physical capital, helps employees achieve work-life balance and create a reputation of an "Employer of choice".

TELECOMMUTING

Employer Challenges

With any flexible employment policy, there can be apprehension from upper management. Telecommuting creates a large change in the organization and without effective communication and support from upper management, it cannot be successful. With telecommuting, there is a loss of control and supervision over the employees that are selected to telework. Additionally, there is an issue around security and protection of confidential documentation and company intellectual data. Using a telework agreement can cause a significant disruption in the culture of the organization. More specifically, it can be difficult for employers to instill the values of the organization and maintain culture when the employees are telecommuting.

Employee Challenges

The most significant challenge an employee will face is working within an isolated work environment through telecommuting. Some employees are well-suited to working completely independently without the team atmosphere; others find it much more challenging. Another deterrence to telecommuting for employees is the perception of difficulties in promotion. This consideration will need to be communicated through

management and effectively handled through the performance appraisals and organization planning completed by managers. Finally, another major factor is that telework requires the employee to deal with insurance and potential increases in insurance premiums.

Occupational Health and Services Act Considerations
The OH&S Act will still apply to all employees that work from home. The following obligations as an Employer still remain:
Paying premiums
Reporting payroll
Providing a safe workplace
Reporting injuries
Investigating incidents to a reasonable limit

Employers are required to ensure that employees' home offices are safe and ergonomic, just like the work office; however, workplace injuries are generally quite minimal. In fact, the risk of harm at a home office is substantially lower than going to an office outside of the home.

In dealing with OH&S Act, employers should use the following considerations:

A. Telecommuting Policy: Make sure to address home-inspections and which responsibilities are employer-owned and which are employee-owned.

B. Training: Provide training and training materials on how to build and preserve a safe home office. See Appendix A

C. Prevention: In order to prevent at-home incidents, employers need to take precautions as they would if the employee worked on site. Part of prevention would be at-home inspections. There is an option of a passive inspection or an active inspection. A passive inspection would be providing employees with a list of different pictures to be taken of the home office. These pictures would be brought in and the employer would look for any hazards. The active inspection would be where the Employer goes into the home office and examines the area. With active inspections, 24 hour notice must be provided before entering. It can ONLY deal with the home office area, the inspector should carry a list of all the items that need to be checked and the inspection should feel like a consultant visit, rather than anything personally invasive. This active inspection should be completed with union representation and the employee present.

TELECOMMUTING POLICY

Definition

Telecommuting – or telework – is defined as the use of a work at home arrangement or remote-access arrangement by means of computer and telecommunications infrastructure. This option is a privilege, which will be provided to high-performing employees that meet certain criteria and whose work responsibilities are appropriate for telecommuting. Each employee proposition will be treated individually under the guidelines specified below. If certain positions are specifically required to be completed through telecommuting, employees will be notified at the time of hire.

Eligibility
Generally, this policy will apply to employees with good performance. Telecommuting arrangement must be a feasible option for the work responsibilities in question. The arrangement must be mutually beneficial to the parties involved. The agreement will continue until either productivity is not maintained from the employer's perspective or the employee would like to discontinue the arrangement. The home of a telecommuting candidate is prepared and adequate for telework.

Initiation of the telecommuting agreement can be made by the Employer or the employee. Participating in this employment policy will be considered voluntary, unless the position requires telecommuting, in which case the employee should be informed at the time of his/her hire. Consent for telework will be made by the Employer after investigation of performance and eligibility.

Duration
This telecommuting option is a voluntary agreement. It can be terminated at the request of the employee at any time. If the position is required to be telecommuted, the employee must have been notified at the time of hire that this is part of the employment contract. All steps should be taken by the Employer to move the employee back to the office site should the employee elect that alternative.

The Employer should also have the option to terminate a telework agreement if the employee is not able to maintain work expectations.

Equipment and Property
Equipment such as desks and computers may be provided by the department. As a consideration, although initial set up costs may be slightly greater, by providing the equipment the Employer can ensure ergonomic standards and prevent future health claims. Furthermore, it signals a supportive attitude for employment flexibility. Any and all equipment provided by the department should be considered loaned and must be returned at the time the telework agreement ends. Employees would be liable for any damages beyond normal wear and tear. This information should be reflected in the employment contract with the employee who starts a telework agreement.

Additional Guidelines for Telecommuting
In establishing and approving a telework agreement, the Employer and employee should mutually agree in advance the days and hours of work. Employees should be expected to maintain the normal workload and report any absences for sick time. Additionally, the

Employer and employee should establish guidelines regarding meeting attendance, educational workshops and training updating. The last consideration is the Homeowner's Insurance. The employee should be responsible in ensuring their Homeowner's insurance is sufficient in protecting the home worksite and their liabilities. The Employer is able to request a certain amount of insurance before the employee is able to meet the criteria and be approved for telework.

Steps to Implementing a Telecommuting Plan

1. **Prepare a telecommuting proposal**
2. **Obtain support from the top management and union**
3. **Establish a telecommuting implementation committee with telecommuting trial employees and management**
4. **Develop company telecommuting policy (See Appendix B)**
5. **Develop telecommuting agreement and employment contract**
6. **Approach union**
7. **Prepare and present telecommuting orientation sessions**
8. **Approve and set up telecommuting plan with union and organization**
9. **Monitor effects and productivity from telecommuting plan**
10. **Make any necessary adjustments**
11. **Review effects of telecommuting based on measurables yearly**

MEASURABLES

The following are suggestions for how to measure the effectiveness and success of a telecommuting policy. These measures should be compared on a yearly basis.

Retention

Presently, Supply Management UBC has been suffering from high turnover rates, which substantially increases human capital costs. These costs spread to training and recruitment. Retention rates are a realistic and objective standard to measure success. Moreover, reaping the benefits of higher retention rates can boost your productivity as an organization.

Attendance Rates

Attendance would be another measurable to compare for effectiveness of telework. Absenteeism and lateness are incredibly disruptive in the workplace, creates tension among employees and costs the organization substantial amounts of money. By being able to reduce the amount of absent days or late days because of commuting or childcare, an organization is able to improve efficiency.

Employee and Customer Satisfaction

The telework effects should be partially based on employee and client satisfaction. Both parties are crucial to any organization and will be able to provide insight into significant

problems or benefits. By creating checks with these two groups, the telcommuting project can continue to improve and evolve with time to ensure that it moulds to fit new needs.

Carbon Footprint
An incredible side benefit from this program is the real savings on the environment. By using the current emissions from commuting and operations to compare with future emissions levels, we can also have an idea of the social benefit for the environment.

Recruitment
Although recruitment can be affected by a myriad of factors, this measure should also be considered for reviewing the success of telecommuting. Being an employer of choice creates a competitive advantage and opens the applicant pool for the organization. Recruitment would be a long run measurable to see if telecommuting and work-life balance meets the needs of current employees.

Appendix A

Training Tips for Providing Safe Home Workplace

- The office needs to be away from any main pathways in the house or near any temptations. Benefits of telecommuting are negated if there are distractions within the home office
- Separated, restricted access work area: the area in which the employee works should be a secluded, work-dedicated room. Employees should not have to take time out of the workday in order to set up or take down their work area (i.e. on the dinner table)
- Office equipment needs to be ergonomic. This can be either the employee's responsibility or the employer's responsibility. By providing ergonomic equipment for the employee, it acts as long-term accident prevention and reduces future claims
- Desks are well equipped and have room for storage. Storage compartments limits clutter and mess which can be hazardous, especially during a hectic day
- Proximity to electrical sources. This will limit the amount of cords and wires that can cause tripping and falling. Also consider using proper extension cords that run around the room, not across the floor to increase safety
- Demonstrate to employees the early signs of incorrect desk set-up: headaches, muscular strain, stiff neck, numbness in arms or legs
- Watch the placement of rugs or other slippery surfaces in the work area
- Be careful of extension cord and outlet stuffing. Don't plug the computer and printer into the same outlet as the fax, refrigerator, and air conditioner. Overloading an electrical outlet is an easily overlooked hazard.
- Lighting – an important small concept. Watch the type of bulbs is not overly harsh on eyes. Additionally, overhead lighting in a spare room of the house can cause shadows over the computer and desk when the employee is working Additionally, position desk so that computer screen does not catch the sun's glare

Appendix B

Policy and Procedures Checklist for Telecommuting

When an organization is creating a company policy on telecommuting, the following considerations should be made:

Definition – Ensure there is a thorough and clear definition of telecommuting

Eligibility/Criteria – State which employees are eligible to participate in the program
Voluntary participation
There must be complete support by upper management
How candidates need to apply for telecommuting option
Not a general benefit for all employees; performance maintenance and location requirements

Employee's Responsibility
Supplying adequate work space
Fulfilling employment contract terms

Safety
Description of WCB liability
Description of any potential at-home site visits
Employees' responsibilities for providing a safe work environment at the home site

Equipment and Supplies
State which party is responsible for what equipment
Certify that all software and technology obtained for the purpose of telecommuting is legally acquired and properly licensed
Specify the use of supplies at the home office
Details of the return of supplies and equipment should the telecommuting agreement end

Security
Connection to existing security policies for electronic access
Connection to existing security policies for corporate information use and storage
Back up and virus protection at home site office

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