

Final - Work Anywhere White Paper

Introduction

In November of 2007, the State Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Information Technology Council (ITC) Human Resources (HR) Committee chartered the Statewide Work Anywhere Team (SWAT) workgroup and tasked it to develop a white paper on telework/Mobile Workforce for the IT Council. This team examined current practices and trends in mobile workforce activities. The vision of mobile workforce, or Work Anywhere concept, is to assist with many statewide efforts such as recruitment, retention and support for the Green initiatives. The concern is that unless government adopts new strategies it might fail to achieve its goal of recruiting and retaining a new workforce of qualified employees. Government is competing with private industry for a new workforce that is gravitating towards employment in a virtual work environment.

This white paper is the result of the team's research and focuses upon the opportunities, challenges and benefits of telework/Work Anywhere. It also includes observations and recommendations for next steps based on the findings.

Historical perspective

The initial concept of telework/telecommuting was developed in the late 1970s to reduce traffic and a dependence on oil. The State of California implemented the concept in the 1990s. The common understanding of these terms originally focused on the concept of "work at home," transplanting the office environment into an employee home space. It focused on where work was done and how the employee was connected to information and other employees when needed to accomplish the workload. This definition is limited and no longer reflects the full range of possibilities presented in a changing workforce and the evolution in IT. It is also tied to preconceived beliefs that only a limited few can perform work away from the main office free from the direct physical presence of supervision. Telework does not have to be defined by geographic space as an "all days or nothing" mentality, and it is not tied to conventional hours of business. The following is reflective of many of the policy statements developed in the early to mid 1990s: "Telecommuting is an arrangement that allows employees to work in or near their homes for all or part of their work week."¹ This definition allows for a single alternative location and provides some limited flexibility for time worked away from the office. The employee is committed to work 100% either from the main office or from the alternate location. This early understanding of telework assumed that work must be performed in or near the place of residence. More recent definitions of the term, however, express the geographic broadness of where the concept of alternative work arrangements has evolved.

¹ California Highway Patrol Manual, 1997

Telecommuting encompasses working from almost anywhere besides a company's main office – including workers' homes, clients' facilities, employer-owned satellite offices, and even from a hotel room or stationary vehicle in the field.²

Telecommuting/telework has evolved and as such we will differentiate the new understanding with the term Work Anywhere. “[Work Anywhere]” is about flexibility; so many variations exist on the general theme of working outside traditional offices.”³ Employees can work full time or part time from virtually anywhere. Hours can be negotiated as networks are often available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Much of this new freedom is a result of the new technologies that allow business to happen virtually anywhere. This increases the productivity of employees by the customization of the workplace to the needs of the modern workforce.

Lessons Learned – The 1990s Experience in Government and Private Sector

The federal government has taken the lead on the development of Work Anywhere. Using the force of federal legislation, these agencies used a top down approach to implement work anywhere strategies that reflect a variety of needs. The US General Services Administration (GSA) planned and coordinated an extensive network of resources ranging from purchasing mobile computing technologies and the development of neighborhood telecommute centers – all driven by an initiative to reduce traffic in the Washington DC metropolitan area by 20%.⁴ Fewer cars on the road translated into fewer emissions, less cost to operate vehicles and happier employees who avoided the stress of a daily commute. They continue a focus on potential cost savings through reducing the amount of square footage of office space to acquire and maintain.

In private industry many large companies have implemented Work Anywhere strategies. Using virtual office technologies, AT&T found that Work Anywhere had significant benefits for reducing operational costs, increasing employee retention and increasing overall productivity. Their primary strategy is the network-centric IT structure that is not dependent on activities held at a single physical location such as an office building; the network itself enables a virtual community. The success of virtual teams drove management to understand a trend that on any given day 20 to 40% of its workforce might be performing work from alternate sites. They are actively reviewing operational costs associated with office space usage and are rethinking space planning efforts. There are success stories of cost savings achieved through “Work Anywhere” that are realized when office space needs are reduced.

² Carlson, Kathy. “How to Make Telecommuting Work for Your Company,” M. Lee Smith Publishers, 2006: Introduction

³ Carlson, pp 4

⁴ US General Services Administration “Telecommuting Strategic Report, update”

The examples found in government and in private industry demonstrate trends that can help pave the way for the State of California's initiative. Work Anywhere has a positive impact on the quality of life, employee satisfaction, and the environment. This is made possible through top-down directives and a paradigm shift from the exclusive use of a physical office infrastructure to a virtual office infrastructure. These lessons can help California to create a more efficient and effective work anywhere strategy.

Current Practices in State Government

To investigate how Work Anywhere can be effectively incorporated into state business, the SWAT workgroup surveyed several state agencies and examined various departmental policies. This team found that most departments do not have formal Work Anywhere policies; however, many pockets of staff are permitted to telework on an individual basis. Agreements are between employees and their supervisory management and typically have short term written agreements of the expected deliverables and the associated timeframes. Some departments piloted telework and found that despite the pilot success in meeting basic goals, management did not buy into the practice overall resulting in telework not being implemented formally across the organizations. Many program area managers and executives are hesitant to implement Work Anywhere strategies/policies due to concerns regarding monitoring staff productivity and the staff's ability to perform their duties effectively from a remote sight (usually their home) without immediate access to other workers. Additionally, there is concern on monitoring staff that under-perform. The main challenges mentioned by all contacted in the study were the importance of determining the types of duties that are easily measurable and candidate selection requirements for performing tasks that could be part of a Work Anywhere plan. The most often stated concern was how to quickly manage employees that are out of sight. Some of the examples of telecommuting floundered because they lacked executive sponsorship, clear performance measurements or procedures for implementation of the policies. Additionally, some of the managers indicated an interest in receiving additional training for developing skills to better manage employees who work away from the main office.

We identified only a few examples of policies and practices for implementing a Work Anywhere strategy within an IT program, although the use of IT equipment and software has become integral for the success of Work Anywhere projects. Despite this lack within IT shops, many departments' IT teams have identified areas of their workload that could be accomplished remotely. For example, one department identified that 95% of its systems management can be done remotely with the current technology environment, the rest must be hands on. Help desk resources routinely use software to remotely take over operation of a user's machine for diagnosis and is not geographically dependent. Desktop imaging is routinely deployed over networks to distributed desktops. This overall environment makes the IT components of the business of the State of California

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an excellent candidate to pilot policies and develop standards for conducting state business in a Work Anywhere environment.

In the state experience, some departments that piloted telecommuting programs found benefits for the environment, the employee and the department's goals. Telecommuting reduced emissions from commuter vehicles resulting in improvement in the air quality. Employees demonstrated less absenteeism, which speculatively could be the result of less stress and fewer distractions. The increased employer trust in employees produced increased loyalty to the organization, and increased commitment to their work. When Work Anywhere strategies are properly defined and implemented with a measurable workload, productivity and job satisfaction resulted.

The experiences of various departments with telecommuting provide some insight into what is needed to implement a successful Work Anywhere strategy. The SWAT workgroup concludes that Department executives and management teams would benefit from guidelines developed at the top, work tasks must be clearly defined, preferably in writing, and procedures must be in place for quick mobilization. Additionally, the limited use of telework can be directly related to management issues in a few areas: trust, measurability of work output and equipment investment. In light of this experience, the Work Anywhere initiative will continue California's commitment to:

- *Retain good employees:* Individuals who are successful employees will take pride in meaningful work entrusted to them; a Work Anywhere strategy provides independence, and allows flexibility for a work life balance. Some studies cited that 20% of employees reported having turned down new job opportunities because of a desire to remain in a Work Anywhere environment.
- *Recruit stronger candidates:* Candidates would view the state as a preferred employer because of the added flexibility of work environment presented by a Work Anywhere strategy.
- *Lower absenteeism:* Studies have shown that working from home reduces days of absence and allows individuals to return to work faster after injury or illness.
- *Reduce employee stress:* Employees report being more productive in an environment with reduced noise and fewer distractions. They also indicate that having a shorter or no commute can reduce stress levels, making the Work Anywhere employee less stressed and resulting in a better work life balance.
- *Expand the hiring pool:* Candidates with hard-to-find skills find Work Anywhere environments desirable and may come to work for the state if the option is available, rather than choosing career in the private sector. Additionally, providing an alternative work environment has the potential to open employment to qualified disabled individuals who may not have participated in a traditional office environment.

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- *Higher productivity:* Work Anywhere participants enjoy the trust placed in them by management. Participants are committed to producing deliverables and demonstrate that the trust is not misplaced. They demonstrate loyalty and productivity in order to be allowed to continue to have the privilege of telecommuting.
- *Improved employee morale:* With the increased flexibility in Work Anywhere programs, individuals can better balance their life commitments, improving their satisfaction with the work that they accomplish and with the employer.
- *Better emergency response capacity:* The maturity of the IT resources enables the employees to continue work from many locations away from the main office. The Work Anywhere concept can be an important strategy for use in responding to emergent situations and facilitating business resumption activities.
- *Potential lower real estate and over-head expenses:* Work Anywhere strategies allow employees to work from alternate locations including their homes, client offices, or meetings at partner locations. Some studies revealed that at any given time 20 to 40% of the workforce is away from the traditional cubicle doing work at other sites. By reducing the number of centrally located staff, less space will be needed and long term cost benefits may be achieved. Smaller work spaces cost less, require less ongoing operational costs and use less energy.
- *Fewer vehicle emissions - less wear and tear on congested roads:* Implementing Work Anywhere strategies can help the environment by reducing the number of vehicles on the road, which reduces overall emissions while also reducing road congestion.
- *Reduced commutes:* In Work Anywhere arrangements the employee is not obligated to commute, saving personal money spent on gasoline and parking. This savings, in the form of cost avoidance, is like giving a raise to employees without the actual expenditure.

Recommendations

1. *Maximize flexibility of department resources to expand to “Work Anywhere” or respond to emergencies by phasing out desktops in favor of laptops.* “Replace agency desktop computers with fully encrypted laptop computers during normal agency refresh cycles.”⁵ This strategy maintains current business budgetary cycles but recommends that, to allow the greatest participation in Work Anywhere, departments purchase encrypted laptops for all employees who could potentially work anywhere. The potential cost to transition to laptops from desktops could be mitigated by the Strategic Sourcing contracts economics statewide.

⁵ US General Services Administration, “Recommendation for Enhancement and Expansion of Telework” slide 13

2. *Conduct a Work Anywhere pilot, which would be used as a policy development experiment that would focus on issues such as project management, efficiencies, security, confidentiality of data and technical details.* The expectation is that this pilot would help policy makers identify what would be needed to potentially expand a Work Anywhere strategy for the state. It would provide the opportunity for a detailed review of data security requirements and recommend best practices. It would address an ongoing concern that data accessed away from the primary workplace might get into the wrong hands (printed reports left at Starbucks, not logging off hardware or software correctly allowing the next person to access secure data, etc.) The state's obligation for managing confidentiality of personal, sensitive and medical information is at an all time high – the pilot would allow for the development of guidelines for managing risks associated with expanding to a Work Anywhere environment.
3. *Create a prototype state policy that can be used as a how-to guideline for departments to implement a success and individualized Work Anywhere policy.* This would implement a top down approach for Work Anywhere policy by developing and implementing specific procedures, evaluation criteria, and ongoing initiatives for the Work Anywhere program. This will provide more uniformity among departments and will create a common vocabulary and procedures for implementing Work Anywhere into labor union contracts. This will also increase confidence in the procedures by executives and management that have shown concern over implementing previous telework strategies.
4. *Have DGS integrate the Work Anywhere reality into the planning for capital outlay.* This will allow the state to explore space savings and expenditure avoidance opportunities that can be realized through a Work Anywhere program. Traditional concepts of allocating space based on classification needs to be revisited. This discussion will likely need to include discussion with employee union representatives.
5. *Coordinate SWAT workgroup's "Work Anywhere" efforts with the related initiatives to explore how work anywhere benefits can be achieved collaboratively. Some of the current efforts with the potential for realizing collaborative benefits include, but are not limited to:*
 - Broadband
 - IT HR Employee Recruitment and Retention Committee
 - Green Initiatives as led by DGS
 - Enterprise Digital Accessibility Committee (EDAC)
 - Planning Continuity of Operations Programs (COOP) and Continuity of Government (COG) for responding to emergencies

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6. *Provide updated training that integrates understanding of the changing workforce's needs and develops skills necessary to manage employees in a Work Anywhere environment.* This will allow the SWAT workgroup to introduce the Work Anywhere concept into the Manager and Supervisor training modules that are currently under review by the Department of Personnel Administration.

Conclusion

The ongoing evolution within the IT field has allowed maturity in systems and provided tools for conducting work virtually anywhere. The work/life balance is of increased importance to the younger, mobile workforce. The State of California is facing a knowledge drain as many of its employees plan to retire from state service. We need to attract new skilled employees to take their places and are challenged to find ways to retrain excellent employees. We are in competition with the private sector for these scarce and valuable resources. The workforce has changed and if the State of California is to be successful in meeting current and emerging staffing needs, it must understand that the flexibility of a Work Anywhere concept is no longer a luxury – it is an important option for recruitment and retention.

Additionally, IT is uniquely positioned to further the State's "Green initiatives" by contributing solutions for larger issues facing California: traffic congestion, dependence on oil, air pollution, and quality of life to name a few. It is possible to perform work from virtually anywhere. We can do business better. Work Anywhere provides one viable option that we should fully explore.

Working from anywhere and using virtual teams are integral to the success of today's workforce. Regardless of where or how the government work is being performed, organizations must strive to achieve work objectives. Balancing work objectives can be challenging for management; but, it is also rewarding to organizations and staff. Working Anywhere is the new workforce direction and the State Work Anywhere Team recommends that the State of California initiate a statewide standard for expanding the concept into its work environment.

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