

DON'T BE IN THE DARK THIS WINTER, COMMUTE SMART – GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

The challenge

Commuting for long periods of time has become a part of the UK's working culture. British workers spend the most time travelling in Europe, as much as 47 working days per year (Samsung research 2004). In the case of London and the South East commuters travel on average 8 hours per week or an extra working day!

Not only is the amount of time commuting impacting both on the quality of life and productivity. The 9 to 5 culture with its peak travel times generates congestion on the rail, underground and road networks. According to the RAC Foundation, road congestion alone costs the UK economy some £20 billion per year.

Smarter Working for Smarter Commuting

One solution is to reduce the amount of time commuting through smarter working practices such as allowing flexible working hours, including staggered working, and home working.

The benefits of smarter working for smarter commuting have been measured by a number of companies. This includes British Telecom which on the introduction of smarter working practices reported productivity gains worth £10 million per year and recruitment and sickness absence savings of £7 million, while the RAC had productivity increases of 8% for flexible hours.

Against this background, Work Wise UK has set up a practical guide for employers with tips on how to implement smarter working practices for smarter commuting.

Flexible Working Hours

Introducing flexible working hours for employees is an effective route to smarter commuting, allowing journeys either to be made outside peak periods or reducing the number of journeys all together. There are several ways this can be achieved which are simple to implement.

- Flexitime - Flexibility can be introduced on how the employee works his or her weekly or annual hours.
- Flexihours - By allowing employees to leave early or later in the day, enables staggered commuting outside peak periods.
- Condensed Working - The number of commuting journeys can be reduced through the practice of condensed hours, where the employee works the required weekly hours in just four days, taking the fifth day off. Alternatively, staff could take a half hour lunch break each day and then be allowed to leave at 3.00pm on Friday, before the evening peak journey home.

Home Working

Technological advances, particularly broadband have allowed the option of home working for many employees. However, some employers are understandably reluctant to implement it fearing a reduction in productivity. This can be tackled by focusing on employee output and results rather than an attendance and time.

Allowing staff to work from home, for example on a Friday, will result in a small reduction in the number of people travelling, significantly impacting on congestion and overcrowding.

Planning

Careful planning and agreement beforehand will ensure success of a smart working for smart commuting scheme. One of the key areas to consider is consultation to make sure any scheme is valued and workable. It is also a good idea to have a trial period or pilot group first.

To introduce a scheme among the things to consider are:

- An employee survey – find out what employees would appreciate and value.
- Manage expectations – Only offer flexible working practices and or home working where it is practical to operate – for example where production requirements may not allow such practices.
- Talk to managers – find out what jobs are open to flexible working practices, for example some support staff such as IT and reception staff may be limited in their degree of flexibility.
- Smart working practices may involve a change in organisational culture. To help in the promotion of such a policy as a good example let senior managers work flexibly.
- Health and safety implications need to be examined such as longer office opening hours and people working alone.
- Impact on clients and suppliers – many managers are worried about the thought of employees not being there at core times in case a client rings. However, this can be covered for and the benefits of smart working in terms of retention of valuable staff and other gains will enable a better service to clients.
- Timing meetings to include everyone who needs to be there.
- For home working, decide what level of staff, how much work may be done at home and the technological requirements – are the necessary files and data accessible and have security implications been considered?
- Some method needs to be decided on to measure the success – is productivity up or staff turnover down etc?
- On making a decision regarding smart working make sure it is fed back to employees. Additionally, when the scheme is up and running have an open door policy to discuss and resolve any possible problems that may arise.

Overall, success is achieved by working with staff on smart working. In many areas of perceived challenges in implementing it, the staff themselves if consulted will often come up with a solution, particularly if the benefits are highlighted.

For further information:

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