

# Transition to Telework

Learning leaders have a key role to play in creating a flexible workplace • BY ERV LESSEL



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Advancing technology, changing workforce demographics, increasing competition for talent and escalating costs are driving a widespread, cross-industry shift to telework and workplace flexibility. When implemented strategically, telework and other workplace flexibility solutions can drive organizational performance and help realize cost savings and operational efficiencies — all critical success factors to address new economic and demographic realities. Learning leaders need to understand what workplace flexibility is and what their roles are in supporting a potential transition within their organizations.

An effective workplace flexibility strategy includes changing the way we think about the workforce — policy and performance management; the workplace — how we optimize our office space; and the work itself — how we collaborate and innovate. When properly implemented as a business strategy rather than a perk or employee benefit, workplace flexibility can yield strategic results.

These benefits have been recognized by President Barack Obama as critically important to our nation's economy and further codified through new legislation requiring all federal agencies to begin implementing formal telework policies. Addressing the White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility in March 2010, Obama stated: “[Workplace flexibility] is an issue that affects the well-being of our families and the success of our businesses. It affects the strength of our economy — whether we'll create the workplaces and jobs of the future we need to compete in today's global economy.”

All organizations must deal with increasing hiring needs, business continuity challenges, increasing performance and efficiency goals, and rapidly changing workforce demographics. Implementing a broad workplace flexibility program can help to address all of these challenges. Organizations that have effectively implemented workplace flexibility have realized significant progress in their ability to:

- Recruit and retain top talent.
- Ensure continuity of business operations.
- Increase organizational performance and individual productivity.
- Identify and capture cost efficiencies.
- Improve career-life fit for an increasingly diverse workforce.

Effective flexible workplace solutions require organizations to develop cross-functional implementation plans that take a broad approach to scaling workplace flexibility. Only through integrated project teams can organizations effectively reduce wasteful redundancies and realize efficiencies.

Given that a shift to workplace flexibility affects multiple layers across the organization — from strategy to people, process and technology — any transition plan must be accompanied by a broad, well-coordinated change management program, which emphasizes training and employee support resources.

CLOs can lead the charge in overcoming organizational challenges by establishing a culture of trust and accountability, overcoming manager resistance and ensuring employee compliance and understanding of new technology support and security infrastructure requirements.

When implementing flexible workplace solutions, CLOs must communicate the purpose and expected results of the program, conduct and assess training, and lead the culture change necessary to operate under this new model. CLOs experienced with distributed learning can share processes and lessons learned as core business processes migrate to a distributed model. CLOs will need to train managers to supervise and measure the performance of virtual teams and prepare employees to be successful in this new work environment.

A transition to workplace flexibility requires a significant organizational investment to facilitate strategic success. For those who are interested but unsure it's worth the investment, let me close by sharing what we've achieved at Deloitte. The successful implementation of workplace flexibility achieved a first-year cost savings of \$30 million in capital expenditure and increased employee satisfaction. Effective use of technology, reduced office space requirements and the implementation of applicable personnel policies have had a positive and lasting impact.

What's really great is these solutions are scalable, can be segmented by workforce, and are adaptive. As organizational leaders, we play critical roles in helping our organizations succeed in an ever-evolving competitive landscape. A transition to workplace flexibility can enable this success. I've seen it succeed and hope others will soon realize similar benefits. **CLO**