



Teleworking self assessment tool for the Valuation Office Agency

Case Study

The Context

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) with 85 offices spread throughout England, Wales and Scotland employing around 4,300 people. Tackling the rising costs of accommodating staff, while maintaining a local presence had become a key issue for the VOA.

The Challenge

In order to rationalise the structure of regional offices and save on office rental, the VOA wanted to increase the small core of existing home workers by encouraging professional staff already spending time out of the office to switch their main working base to home. It was intended that home working staff could periodically visit an allocated regional office to hold meetings, attend training and interact face to face with colleagues. Paperwork would be handled electronically. The challenge was to design an application process that would maximise successful transition of individual employees into home working. The process had to provide a fair assessment of the suitability of the individual to home work and allow applicants to reflect on potential problems and the adjustments that they would need to make.

The Solution

After consultation with the VOA's project team and a review of existing documentation and home working literature, parameters were set that focussed on the prime aim of encouraging applications. Operating a transparent and fair process would allow both individual and organisation to make an informed decision about the suitability of the applicant to move to home working.

SR&A recommended a three stage selection process:

1. Notify employees of the opportunity to home work, being frank and realistic about VOA objectives and potential advantages and disadvantages to the individual;
2. Produce self assessment guidance tool (not psychometrically developed) to allow interested employees to self-assess and reflect on the potential supporting and hindering factors for them;
3. Interested employees then 'go public' and move to formal application including interview with line manager and objective third party (HR or existing home worker) to explore pros and cons before final decision is made by VOA management.



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A review of current research literature on home working had highlighted potential issues of suitability that encompassed individual, job and home characteristics.

- Individual characteristics reflected work styles and preferences concerning how organised, team focussed, emotionally reactive, action oriented, self-reliant and flexible the individual was and how differences across these styles could help or hinder home working.
- Job characteristics included (amongst others) questions about flexibility, autonomy, frequency and type of communication with various stakeholders.
- Home characteristics included issues such as whether there was a dedicated workspace, childcare arrangements etc.

The resulting guidance tool was loaded onto the VOA's intranet in the form of an on-line self-scoring questionnaire.

In addition, the SR&A proposal recommended training for selected home workers and their managers to help with the transition and on-going working relationship. A draft training plan was produced that the VOA in-house trainers could utilise to formulate their own training sessions with home workers and their managers. Training would focus on perceived advantages and disadvantages for the individual and organisation as well as managing the inevitable impact on people, processes, information, facilities and team dynamics as well as communication, and blurring of work/home time.

The Benefits

Using the on-line guidance tool, VOA employees were able to realistically and privately assess their suitability to home work. This allowed time for reflection on how a change in working base could impact on career and personal circumstances before going public with a formal application to a line manager.

From an organisational perspective, feedback from the VOA project team confirmed that the questionnaire had been fully utilised in their first regional home worker selection process and "the project was very successful". Timely training of home workers and their managers had also occurred to ensure smooth transition. VOA intends to continue to implement their home working strategy region by region.