

Telework New Zealand

Teleworking Employers' Survey: summary of results

The first phase in Wellington Regional Council's Traffic Demand Management research and strategy development project has now been completed. This first phase comprised a survey of Wellington Employers.

In mid April a questionnaire, accompanied by a letter and an information sheet was posted to the 235 employers of more than 50 people in the Wellington area. Responses were to be faxed to either the Wellington Regional Council or Bevis England by May 12.

Eighty-seven responses were received, representing a response rate of 37%. This is considerably higher than the norm for mail surveys, suggesting a reasonably high level of interest in the subject. However, only 79 of these responses were incorporated in the subsequent analysis – some were too late for inclusion and others were incomplete. The purpose of the questionnaire was to assess the level of knowledge about, and interest in, teleworking in Wellington.

There is a reasonably high level of knowledge about the benefits of telework although some common misunderstandings persist – particularly the feeling that additional technology was a necessary prerequisite. On the question of interest in teleworking, however, the results are clear; over three-quarters of respondents had positive interest in telework implementation and over half expressed an interest in further information about it.

Two questions specifically addressed this. In response to the question "DO you have any interest in seeing telework develop in this organisation in the future?" 77.2% provided an affirmative response. When respondents were asked "Would you like to find out more about teleworking?" 57% responded in the affirmative.

The full results of the Survey are available from either Wellington Regional Council or Bevis England.

A variety of other conclusions can be drawn from the responses received:

- a) Almost half the organisations approached have had some experience with telework, albeit on an 'ad hoc or occasional basis'. A high 94.7% of these have an interest in seeing telework develop further. Of those who have not already had experience of telework a lower 61% would like to see it develop further although an additional 12.2% do not have sufficient information. This supports the great deal of anecdotal evidence that suggests the use of telework will continue to grow once started within organisations. With the provision of further information this growth should accelerate.
- b) Most teleworkers are drawn from senior and professional levels in the organisation at present, reflecting the tendency for telework to start as 'executive homework'. It is normal to expect telework to spread through an organisation, once a formal programme, addressing performance management and 'trust' issues, is in place.
- c) Major employee motivations behind telework include personal circumstances, the nature of the work, convenience, and the absence of interruptions. This

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reflects the norm seen elsewhere although formal programmes reduce the role played by the 'nature of the work' as they can open up many additional jobs to the telework approach.

- d) Employers reported benefits in productivity, staff retention, morale, lower overheads, and flexibility with other benefits receiving a lower number of mentions. This again reflects the international norm although lower overheads tend to become more important benefits in mature programmes.
- e) Eighteen respondents had employees who had teleworked in the past but who no longer teleworked. The major reasons given were changed personal circumstances (11 responses) and changed work requirements (7). This demonstrates the need for telework to be voluntary and responsive to both personal circumstances and company requirements.
- f) Once the apparent dependence on technology is overcome, the major keys to further growth in the use of telework appear to be assistance with implementation, telecentres for staff, changes in management mind set, and creating staff demand for telework.
- g) Fifty-five respondents provided both the number of employees and a subjective estimate of how many commuted longer than 30 minutes. Of the 14,980 employees involved, 4475 (29.9%) were reported to have commutes of longer than 30 minutes. This percentage varies across the sample from 1.9% to 61.2%, underlining the subjective nature of this conclusion.
- h) Traffic, transportation or parking were highlighted by over 82.6% of respondents as a major challenge facing Wellington. Moreover, these three categories accounted for 69 (39.4%) of the 175 responses to this question.

It would appear that telework will be an effective alternative to transportation. There have been few problems with it, the benefits attributed to telework in overseas cases are being seen locally (although with formal programmes in place, these benefits are likely to be greater), and, where there has been experience of telework, it has been a positive experience.

Assuming that telework is enabled for one day a week for employees with longer commutes within the respondent organisations, the potential reduction in peak hour trips could be as high as 6%. If telework grew to two-and-a-half days a week, the saving would be 14.9%, a significant potential trip reduction.

This research would indicate that the primary focus of future action in this field should be to encourage those who have expressed an interest in implementing telework to implement sound programmes sooner rather than later. There is also a clear need for further information about telework to be made available.

The predicted benefits are being experienced by many companies in the Wellington region and the impact of these benefits will increase as companies gain a greater understanding of how telework could help them, adopt formal programmes, and make these programmes available to more staff. It is also notable that respondents expressed interest in implementation assistance and telecentre projects.