



2024 Best Practices Submission

Presentation Title:

Working from Home: Best Practices and Managing Risk

Presenters:

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Presentation Description:

Many institutions have struggled with the proper balance of remote work and office work. The University of South Carolina's Finance Department has found success with a hybrid model where they have created a team environment where all team members come together once each week. Join this session where we will share about their journey to find success through communication and share about best practices with working from home. Then, we'll look at some common risks that can occur in a remote working environment.

Statement of the Problem:

USC Controller's Office workload has increased tremendously with very limited resources being added post COVID-19 coupled with the great resignation, it became clear that we would need to provide a solution of flexibility for our staff in order to maintain existing staff and to prevent turnover. It was vital that the Controller's Office work to build in flexibility through remote work to prevent staff from leaving for more flexibility and higher wages but it was also important to demonstrate through key metrics that there would be little to no diminished productivity and performance.

Identify the Solution:

Since the implementation of our ERP system in 2015 and 2019, the efficiencies gained through technology has been significant and allowed the Controller's Office to go 100% remote during the COVID-19 pandemic shut down. A combination of remote work and maturation of the Controller's Office has significantly improved our efficiency and it was clear that the Controller's Office could handle remote work. With the development of key metrics to monitor productivity and performance, flexible scheduling by each department and regular schedules including one mandatory day for all staff to be in the office, there would be little to no impact on the University community.

Implementation Timeline:

Over the course of 90 days in the fall of 2021, the following steps were taken to move to a hybrid remote environment for the Controllars Office.

- 1.Utilized tools provided by USC's human resources, the Controller's Office performed an assessment of all positions within the department for suitability to telecommute. The assessment evaluated recommended factors and determined that 65 of 84 positions (77%) are eligible for telecommuting immediately and the remaining positions would be eligible within a year and with some technical adjustments.
- 2.Completed a "stay" survey for the staff determine what drivers would keep them employed with the Controller's Office. Had 100% participation in the survey.
- 3.Enhanced key metrics by each area within the Controller's Office to monitor productivity and performance.
- 4.Determine costs savings by developing hoteling space allowing the University to repurpose space.
- 5.Develop schedules that are specific to each area of the Controller's Office in order to meet the business needs of the University but also University employees and students.
- 6.Determine what technology enhancements would be needed by staff to maximize productivity and performance in a remote environment.

Benefits & Retrospect:

The Controller's Office realized immediate costs savings to our department for relinquishing space but the biggest benefit was in staff turnover. Due to competition in the market and within the university for qualified accountants, we believe the flexibility to telecommute, where it makes sense, provided significant improvements in the morale of our team and the quality of life for the staff. This has led to less turnover and less loss of institutional knowledge and, ultimately, led to even greater efficiency with continuity. Remote work has helped the Controller's Office to mitigate increased costs of salaries and fringe and training should we have to replace all positions due to market competition - higher salaries and flexibility with remote work. Since implementation of hybrid remote work, very low turnover in all areas. Each area of the Controller's Office has workcenters within our ERP system. These centers measure 60% of the work daily work. These centers show outstanding work by person, # of transactions performed daily/weekly/monthly depending on the type of transaction by person, outstanding reporting, outstanding invoices, # of transactions pending not assigned to name a few. Our Directors and Senior Managers use this as a tool to ensure that work is at our above normal levels on a daily/weekly and monthly basis. The other 40% of the work is project based and those are measured through developed project plans with timeline and guidelines.The Controller's Office has been able to move to hybrid remote work without any diminished productivity and performance on all teams.