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Study Finds 'Telework' Popular With Employees, Managers

By Derek Sheppard (Contact)
Wednesday, September 2, 2009

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BREMERTON —

A 15-month **telework pilot project** that took root in Kitsap County has wrapped up, and a **draft report** is headed to the Legislature.

Ed Stern quickly identified a key finding of the Kitsap Telework Pilot Project, a state-funded \$150,000 project of the Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council and state Department of Transportation.

"The home office is the office of the future," said Stern, a teleworking proponent, policy adviser for the study and Poulsbo city councilman. "The good news is that it's already built."

The study sought to **develop a framework** so companies and employees could implement telework, also known as telecommuting. It involved surveys and reports from more than 85 employees and managers.

Advocates believe that having certain employees work from home a day or two a week can improve productivity and morale, reduce carbon emissions and save tax dollars by decreasing the frequency of upgrades and construction of expensive transportation infrastructures.

The tool kit and the report to the Legislature is at

teleworktoolkit.com.

Teleworking isn't an all-or-nothing proposition, and most employees surveyed preferred working remotely one or two days a week.

Of the employees who worked from home, 78 percent were "very satisfied" and 21 percent "mostly satisfied".

For every satisfied employee, there is a potentially skeptical boss. But 70 percent of the managers involved in the study initially thought the plan was a good idea, and nearly all of them still thought it was a good idea after the study was over.

The report qualifies the findings by noting that pilot participants were volunteers, and may have been predisposed to view the effort positively.

A few stumbling blocks did arise, according to the report. Initially the project hoped to attract a wide swath of employees from large and small businesses and public agencies. After the economy soured, most of the participation came from public agencies, though it did **attract a big name** in Microsoft.

At the outset, one of the ideas was to establish telework centers, envisioned as small office spaces in urban areas where people could travel a shorter distance to work. But renting space would be

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expensive and workers weren't that interested, according to the report.

Now that the research is complete, what does it take to make sure the effort doesn't enter the dustbin of government studies?

The report outlines ways in which government regulations and policies can encourage telework, or how private groups can advocate for the practice.

Stern said the study will prove valuable every time it pops up in a Web search. Businesses and organizations everywhere will have a chance to learn from it.

"The beauty of the Internet is that it's bottom up, not top down," he said.

He's confident in the future of telework, either through voluntary adoption or necessity because of pandemic or disasters.

He also works from home.

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