

WORK @ HOME



***An Employer's Guide to Implementing
ICT-Enabled Home-Based Work***

The Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy thanks the following for their support in the development of this guide:

American Express

IBM Singapore

SP Services Ltd.

Tripartite Workgroup on ICT-Enabled Home-Based Jobs

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION TO HOME-BASED WORK

1

THE CASE FOR HOME-BASED WORK

2

IMPLEMENTING HOME-BASED WORK

3

**CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTING
HOME-BASED WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

4

**FACILITATING COMMUNICATION
AND COLLABORATION WITH
HOME-BASED EMPLOYEES**

7

**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR
HOME-BASED EMPLOYEES**

9

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE STRATEGY

11

GUIDE FOR THE HOME-BASED EMPLOYEE

13

CASE STUDIES

17

RESOURCES

25

INTRODUCTION TO HOME-BASED WORK

What is Home-Based Work?

Home-based work is an alternative form of work arrangement that involves an employee working primarily from home, rather than in a conventional office setting. Infocomm Technology (ICT) plays an important role by providing the infrastructure and tools that connect home-based workers to their offices and clients. This innovative way of working has been adopted by savvy businesses which recognise the cost savings and improved productivity amongst a myriad of other benefits to be gained.

An Employer's Solution to the Manpower-Crunch

Home-based work can also offer a much-needed solution for businesses facing a manpower-crunch. Organisations can tap into a rich resource pool of economically inactive residents, some of whom may not be able to leave home for office-based work for various reasons, such as family care responsibilities. Home-based work will allow them to pursue a career while meeting their personal commitments. This work arrangement is also an ideal option to retain valuable and experienced employees who are considering leaving the organisation due to similar commitments.

The Role of ICT in Home-Based Work

ICT offers the infrastructure and tools to make home-based work a reality in today's tech-reliant work environment. ICT enables home-based employees to efficiently complete work tasks and also effectively communicate with colleagues and clients. Currently, local residents own at least one computer within the home, and with the progressive roll-out of the Next Generation Nationwide Broadband Network (Next Gen NBN), the majority of Singapore homes will have access to ultra-high speed broadband connection by mid-2012. Against this backdrop, home-based work is fast becoming a viable option in Singapore and offers employers a competitive edge in attracting quality talent.



THE CASE FOR HOME-BASED WORK

For Employers

Home-based work helps to enhance business performance and competitiveness for employers in several ways.

1. Enhance Talent Attraction & Retention

Employers have the advantage of choosing from a wider pool of talent, including skilled and experienced job seekers who require flexible work arrangements for reasons such as family care responsibilities.

It also helps to retain experienced and valued employees within the organisation who are unable to continue with regular office-based work because of changes in personal circumstances.

2. Reduce Cost

Home-based work helps employers to reduce staff turnover-related costs and other fixed costs such as office rental and workstations set-up cost

3. Improve Productivity

Employers have greater flexibility to roster home-based employees according to demands of the business. This helps to optimise manpower and resources deployment resulting in higher productivity for the organisation.

4. Improve Customer Service

Flexibility of work hours in home-based work enhances customer service as business hours can be extended and timely assistance offered.

5. Enhance Business Continuity

Employers with home-based employees are less likely to be affected by incidents that could prevent employees from going to the office to work such as flu pandemic outbreaks.

For Employees

1. Facilitate Participation in the Workplace

Home-based work provides job seekers and employees who are not able to perform regular office-based work the opportunity to join in the workforce and contribute to the organisation and economy in a meaningful way. It also enables them to earn a regular salary to supplement household income.

2. Enhance Work-Life Harmony

There is greater flexibility in work arrangements and hours, enabling employees to achieve a better balance between career and personal life.

IMPLEMENTING HOME-BASED WORK

According to a survey by the Ministry of Manpower¹, there were more than 270,000 economically inactive residents in the prime working age of 25 to 54 in 2010. Women made up the majority (85%) of this group and the main reason cited for exiting the workforce was family responsibilities. With the right support and flexible work arrangement, this large pool of untapped manpower resources can be gainfully employed and fulfill their personal commitments at the same time.

This section is designed to equip employers with the necessary framework for incorporating home-based work within their employment schemes.



¹Report on Labour Force in Singapore 2010

CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTING HOME-BASED WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

1. Get Buy-In from Senior Management

- Get buy-in and support from top management prior to embarking on the initiative.
- Highlight successful cases of home-based work in other organisations, both local and international.
- Make available tips on implementing home-based work to build confidence amongst senior management, that it can be done and dispel any negative preconceptions about home-based work.

2. Assess Suitability of Jobs for a Home-Based Environment

- Home-based work generally requires ICT and/or specific job-related skills and knowledge.
- Evaluate existing jobs to see if they can be performed at home. Some helpful questions to ask:
 - Does the job require direct supervision?
 - Does the job require face-to-face interaction with colleagues/clients?
 - What is the impact on other employees?
 - What is the equipment required and can it be set up at home?
 - Would confidential information be compromised?

3. Pilot Home-Based Jobs

- Start with pilot projects to assess the suitability of the work to be home-based.
- Pilots provide an opportunity to uncover issues and resolve problems within a smaller and more controllable environment before expanding the scale of home-based work for the organisation.

4. Create/Re-Design Existing Organisational Systems

- Review infrastructure, work processes and management systems. Assess the need to refine or even redesign them to integrate home-based work within the organisation.



- Review and/or re-design human resource systems (performance management and appraisal practices) to take into account home-based work. This will ensure that employees who work from home are appraised fairly on measurable deliverables rather than on the amount of time spent in the office.
- Equip managers with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and monitor home-based employees.

5. Establish Policy and Protocol for Home-Based Work

- Written Agreement
 - Formalise job description and terms of employment between organisation and the employee.
 - Clearly state deliverables and performance indicators on which employee performance will be assessed.
- Accountability
 - Set clear line of reporting and formally establish a direct supervisor for each employee working from home.
 - Automate management tools to enable supervisors to remotely monitor the performance and progress of employees.
- Security Issues
 - Ensure appropriate forms of protection such as password, finger-print/voice recognition for access to the corporate network and data.
 - Set clear and proper guidelines on use of official data especially for information that is private and confidential.
 - Make sure home-based employees' home computer/laptop is properly configured, adequate firewall and virus protection installed, to prevent security breaches.
- Communication
 - Schedule regular communication sessions for home-based employees to receive sufficient guidance and mentoring in their work.
 - Include home-based employees in regular internal communications to foster a sense of belonging to the company and ensure they are kept updated on happenings within the organisation.

6. Empower Home-Based Employees

- Digitise key workflow processes to facilitate easy access to corporate resources.
- Provide training to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to work effectively from home. This may include training in the use of basic IT software and creating a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for communications and use of social networking tools.
- Subsidise the cost of equipment such as laptops, broadband service, thin-clients etc.

7. Review Processes and Systems Regularly

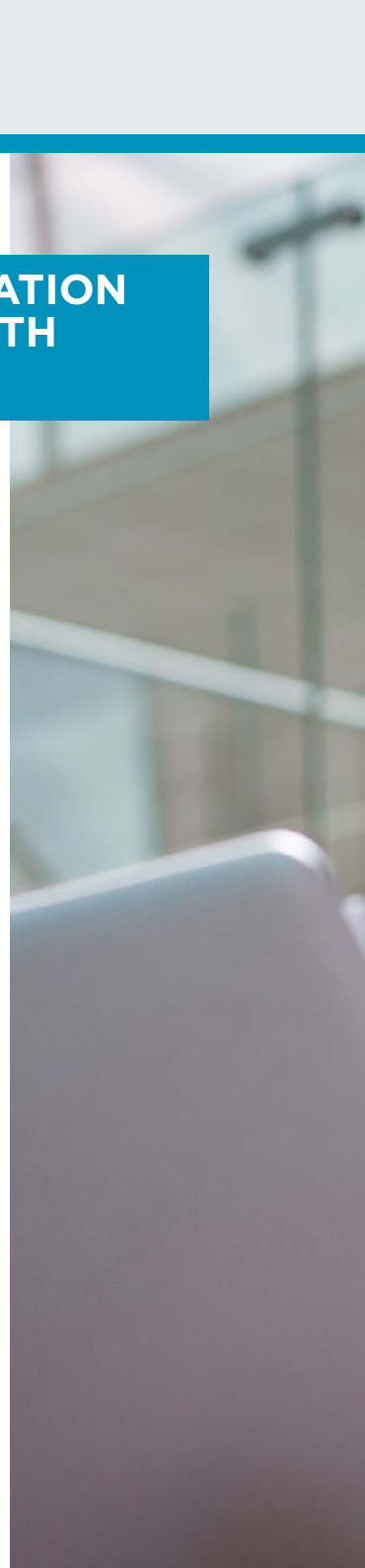
- Evaluate work processes and systems on a regular basis and fine-tune them according to the changing needs of the organisation and employees.
- Get feedback and suggestions from home-based employees as well as their direct supervisors to monitor and evaluate effectiveness of home-based work.



FACILITATING COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITH HOME-BASED EMPLOYEES

Effective communication is vital for a successful home-based working arrangement. These are some methods to connect your employees:

- ✓ Connect employers and employees via high speed broadband and communication tools.
- ✓ Establish mechanisms for maintaining regular contact.
- ✓ Schedule periodic face-to-face meetings to help remote employees stay connected as well as facilitate interaction and team building.
- ✓ Put home-based employees in teams with full-time personnel so as to facilitate better team work amongst them.





PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR HOME-BASED EMPLOYEES

- o Set Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - ✓ Appropriate and realistic KPIs should be set for home-based employees. These should be Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic, and Time-Specific (SMART).
- o Positive Reinforcement
 - ✓ As home-based employees have less face-to-face interaction with their supervisors, it is especially important that supervisors prioritise giving them feedback on tasks and projects.
 - ✓ Motivate by reward rather than through penalty/fear.
- o Establish Clear Expectations
 - ✓ Set clear expectations of the job scope and responsibilities to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication.
 - ✓ Draw up a written agreement stipulating the working conditions (e.g. specific working hours, availability for face-to-face meetings etc) and KPIs to be met and get the supervisor and employee to sign-off on the document.
- o Manage the Time Difference
 - ✓ This applies to those who have offices/operations in other countries or in different time zones.



ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE STRATEGY



Getting Support and Buy-In of Employees

While home-based work is currently available in Singapore, these make up merely a small proportion of all jobs created. Take-up rate by employees is low, perhaps due to a lack of awareness of the availability of home-based work. Employees may also have the notion that taking on home-based work would affect their career prospects.

Employers can take these critical steps to educating employees on the viability of home-based work:

- Communicate success stories to show how the home-based work arrangement has benefited both the organisation and employees.
- Equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to work independently from home.

Developing an Organisational Change Strategy

This is a vital step in ensuring sustainable change and a smooth transition to a new way of working for all involved. A successful strategy should:

- ✓ Build a supportive workplace culture where home-based work becomes an acceptable “ethos” and not frowned upon.
- ✓ Communicate a clear direction and decisive plan of action.
- ✓ Engage all employees prior to implementation - providing feedback channels and addressing all queries and concerns in a transparent manner.
- ✓ Show commitment of senior management and leadership to the new work arrangement.
- ✓ Be flexible to tweak policies and processes over time to meet the changing needs of the market and employees.

Ultimately, implementing home-based work is a joint effort between employer and employees. When everyone shares the same vision and goal for organisational success, then a home-based work arrangement can be effectively integrated into the corporate culture.

GUIDE FOR THE HOME-BASED EMPLOYEE

Some may think that being a home-based employee means you can afford to be unstructured and less organised. The reverse is true. Whereas an office-based employee can rely on the processes and infrastructure provided by the organisation, a home-based employee needs to be disciplined and organised, implement processes and effectively 'self-manage' their work in order to be productive and meet KPIs.

A. Traits of a Successful Home-Based Employee

- Understand the Motivation for Working
 - ✓ Answer the question of “why are you working?” Understanding the reasons and motivation for working is important as it helps the home-based employee to manage and master the roles and responsibilities they are given.
 - ✓ The reasons to work may evolve over time as one moves through different life stages and personal circumstances change. This can be a factor in deciding the type of work and number of hours worked. For instance, a mother with pre-school children will have different reasons for working from home, compared to one with adult children.
- Develop a Plan
 - ✓ Planning allows one to identify and focus on “major” issues and tasks, which are critical for work success.
 - ✓ Be intentional and strategic when working instead of waiting for things to happen.
 - ✓ Have a concrete plan and execute it.
 - ✓ Put the plan on paper and pin it up at the workstation as a constant reminder.

- o Set Objectives
 - ✓ Set SMART goals. S - Specific, M - Measurable, A - Achievable, R - Realistic, T - Time-Specific
 - ✓ Review outcomes against objectives regularly (once a month/quarterly/half-yearly).
- o Be Flexible
 - ✓ Be willing to fine-tune or change methods that do not yield the desired results.
 - ✓ Be flexible without compromising on quality of work and deliverables.

B. Tips on Setting Up Home-Based Workspace

- o Create a Physical Workspace
 - ✓ This helps to mentally separate work from household responsibilities and set the appropriate frame of mind for work. Ensure that the chosen workspace has minimal distractions so that work-related tasks can be efficiently attended to, e.g. taking client phone calls, attending to emails, etc.
 - ✓ The home-office should be equipped with the necessary items to perform work, e.g. work table, chair, stationery, dictionary, calculator, paper, files, folders, etc.
- o Set Boundaries
 - ✓ Decide on the working hours at home and stick to it unless there is an emergency.
 - ✓ Make arrangements for other responsibilities such as child-care or elder-care beforehand.
 - ✓ Establish an understanding with family members on the blocks of time when you will be working and hence are not to be disturbed.
 - ✓ Do not be distracted by unnecessary or unimportant tasks during working hours.

C. Managing Relationships and Communication

- Establish Accountability
 - ✓ Be clear on who the direct line of report is.
 - ✓ Do not be afraid to ask for help when the need arises.
 - ✓ Seek constructive feedback from superior and colleagues within the same team.
- Build Good Working Relationships
 - ✓ Make time and effort to interact with colleagues in the office on a regular basis.
 - ✓ Schedule time for regular face-to-face meetings with supervisor and colleagues.



- Prioritise Communication
 - ✓ Keep updated on news and developments of the organisation via office email, newsletter, website, social media channels, etc.
 - ✓ Identify time slots when you can take calls or reply to emails/ messages.



CASE STUDY #1 - AMERICAN EXPRESS



About the Company

American Express is a global service company, providing customers with access to products, insights and experiences that enrich lives and build business success. It is also the largest card issuer by purchase volume and operates a worldwide network that processes millions of merchant transactions daily.

American Express offers a broad array of payment, expense management and travel solutions for consumers, small businesses, mid-sized companies and large corporations.

American Express has more than 60,000 employees worldwide with operations in more than 130 countries.

Home-based Work

American Express has offered its employees Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) since 2005 in a bid to help employees achieve work-life harmony. The organisation's HR policies extend benefits beyond the statutory requirements to support employees as they juggle work and personal life.

More than 25% of American Express' employees currently utilise some form of FWA. Notably, more than half of the organisation's employees are women, many of whom are married. FWAs have proved to be popular with this demographic and most female employees have taken up these benefits, at various points in their career.

Nature of Work

FWAs range from staggered working hours to remote, off-site work areas. Within the FWAs, additional flexibility may be considered on a case-by-case basis. The organisation offers flexible work styles called 'Blue Workstyles'. These are:

- o Hub - dedicated office workplace.
- o Club - mobile office & shared workspace with company provision for home office setup when working from home more than two days.
- o Home - dedicated home office with company provision for home office setup.
- o Roam - mobile and drop-in hub where employee primarily works at client locations with regular short visits to office.

ICT Support Structures

- Virtual Private Network (VPN)
- Avaya Communicators
- Broadband internet access
- IT software (eg. computer programmes)
- IT hardware (eg. laptops)

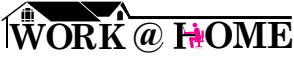
Benefits

A. Employer

- o American Express is viewed as an Employer of Choice, increasing its chances in attracting and retaining high caliber talent.
- o The organisation experiences higher productivity, as employees are happier and more motivated at work.
- o Increase in employee retention and engagement which translates to lower HR costs in the areas of recruitment and training new employees.

B. Employees

- o Increased personal satisfaction as employees are given the opportunity to grow professionally without compromising their personal goals.



- o Feel a strong sense of being valued and well looked after.

“In my role I am in contact with markets across all time zones around the world, which means working on emails and talking to my colleagues or our partners not just during my office hours but theirs as well. While I certainly performed all these duties well going to an assigned desk in the office daily, working from home now is a friendlier arrangement, especially for days when I start early and end very late. Working from home also means I save time when dropping off or picking up my infant daughter at her full-day infant care centre near my home, and I can also reach her faster during the day should the need arise.”

Jessica Goh, Manager, International Communications Team

KEY CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
<p>1. Fewer opportunities to interact socially with colleagues and superiors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Provides tele-conferencing to facilitate communication and interaction especially for employees in remote locations. o Provides opportunities for networking, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Day where employees’ families can visit the workplace. • ‘Healthy Living’ where employees and their family members had a day out at Sentosa. • The ‘Women’s Interest Network’ (WIN) which is an employee voluntary group with an interest in women’s career development and work life balance.
<p>2. Monitoring progress and performance of employees when they are not in the office.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Promote a culture of open communication between leaders and employees. Leaders have regular one-on-one sessions with employees to check on their progress, discuss issues and receive feedback.

CASE STUDY #2 – IBM

About the Company

IBM creates business value for clients and solves business problems through integrated solutions that leverage information technology and deep knowledge of business processes. IBM solutions typically create value by reducing a client's operational costs or by enabling new capabilities that generate revenue.

Today IBM employees from about 37 nationalities work in Singapore, where IBM's ASEAN headquarters is located. The IBM Singapore office also has members from regional and global IBM teams. IBM has over 426,600 employees globally in more than 170 countries, spanning various countries and time-zones.

Home-Based Work

In the late 1990s, IBM introduced innovative flexible work options such as its "Mobility Program" that gives employees the flexibility to decide when and where work gets done. As all IBM employees are telecommuting-enabled, they have access to mobility tools and processes that allow them to work at a location convenient to them at any time, as long as their business goals are met by the required time.

Worldwide, about 60% of IBM employees are on its "Mobility Program" and they are empowered to work from any location such as satellite offices, clients' offices or at home. In IBM Singapore, 5% of the employees work from home.

Nature of Work

With the sophistication of ICT in the business environment, there is a growing realisation that the standard work model has to evolve with the times – one that requires a far more flexible work arrangement than the traditional office, coupled with the need to respond to the changing needs of its employees working in a fast-paced, borderless setting as well as to serve global clients more effectively.

ICT Support Structures

In addition to the usual IT equipment and software, IBM has various ICT-enabled initiatives in place to continually engage employees who are on flexible work arrangements. This includes:

- A Work-Life Integration Community in the social networking space where employees can have online discussions, post questions, blog and create interest groups with other local and global employees.
- Online monthly newsletters.

Benefits

A. Employer

- o Greater employee loyalty that leads to higher retention of talent.
- o Higher morale & motivation resulting in lower absenteeism and better productivity.
- o More savings in office rental and overhead costs, which generates a higher profit margin.
- o Greater customer satisfaction and overall better business results.

B. Employee

- o Better time management as a result of less time spent commuting.
- o Ability to balance the need to meet personal and work commitments.
- o Increased time with the family.
- o More personal time.
- o Greater opportunities for self advancement (through courses/seminars).

“The Mobility Program allowed me to integrate my work and life needs. For example, when my mother was suffering from the after effects of a stroke, I was able to arrange my work schedule in a way that allowed me to care for her adequately and fulfil my work commitments satisfactorily. “
IBM Employee

“The Mobility Program has allowed me to manage my time more effectively. In my previous role in IBM ASEAN, I was able to work with my teams in the region through teleconferences and instant messaging. This allowed me to save time commuting to and from the office during peak hours. When I was working in an Asia Pacific role, I was often required to participate in conference calls late at night or early in the morning with my regional and global colleagues. The flexible work arrangement provided me with the opportunity to spend some quality time with my children when they returned home from school.”
IBM Employee



KEY CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
<p>1. Change in mindset towards flexibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Managers emphasise to subordinates that performance in IBM is not evaluated based on time spent in the office but on business outcomes and living out IBM's core values. ○ Employees ensure that they are contactable and that business goals are met by the required timeline.
<p>2. Have sufficient face-to-face interaction with their colleagues and supervisors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each business unit and department has its own team meetings which can be either face-to-face or virtual. ○ Employees are equipped with the tools and technology to collaborate and 'meet' virtually. ○ There is a comprehensive array of social computing tools to use internally including online communities, blogs, wikis, file sharing and micro-blogging.
<p>3. Maintain a sense of belonging to the company</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ IBM Club was set up to bring employees, retirees and their families together outside of work to participate in a range of activities that are social, cultural, recreational and charitable. ○ Small scale initiatives by HR such as seminars on subjects including Maintaining Positive Relationships, Effective Parenting, Yoga and Stress Management, where employees come together to share and learn.



CASE STUDY #3 - SP SERVICES LTD

About the Company

SP Services Ltd is a member of Singapore Power Group that provides one-stop customer services for electricity, water and piped gas supplies in Singapore. As a Market Support Services Licensee in the New Electricity Market (NEM), SP Services provides meter reading for generation companies, retailers and their customers and meter data management to compile consumption data for settlement of charges between retailers and their customers, as well as facilitates consumer registration and transfers from one retailer to another.

SP Services also provides other utility support services such as billing and payment collection on behalf of PowerGrid and other utility providers including the Public Utilities Board (PUB) for water charges and sanitary appliance fee, City Gas for gas supply charges, and various refuse collection companies for refuse charges.

SP Services employs 660 employees. Currently, there are 20 out of 250 customer service employees who work from home. These are experienced employees with good performance records who requested and qualified for the Work-From-Home (WFH) scheme. These employees are mainly those who are pursuing part-time studies or those with household responsibilities.

Home-Based Work

Offering a home-based work arrangement was a natural next step for SP Services once the company digitised its key processes, an investment that yielded positive Return On Investment (ROI) by itself. In 2009, SP Services included the WFH Scheme under the flexible work arrangements offered to employees.

Nature of Work

Both customer service officers and field employees qualify for the WFH scheme. Employees start work at home without the need to report to the office. Call centre officers can attend to customer calls, access the same IT systems and process transactions for customers' accounts from their homes, very much like how they would if they were in the office. Call centre officers are also offered part-time flexible working hours that fit their personal schedule.

ICT Support Structures

SP Services' highly automated work processes with remote access capability as well as investment in other ICT infrastructure enable the company to adopt home-based work arrangement for its call centre operations with ease. These include:

- Automated processes for job assignments.
- Automated performance monitoring on quality of service.
- Access to office systems for home-based employees.
- Access to laptops, software and mobile broadband connection for home-based employees.

Benefits

A. Employers

- Reduces office rental cost.
- Ensures business continuity.
- Increases employee retention.
- Raises morale and motivation – customer satisfaction increased from 83% to 86% since implementing the WFH scheme in 2009.
- Increases customer satisfaction through extended service hours.

B. Employees

- Reduces travelling time, allowing better management of time.
- Allows for greater work-life harmony and employees do not struggle to choose between work and family life.

“Working from home has helped me in saving transport expenses and also travelling time as I had to travel for one hour to work since I am staying in the West.”

Azlina Bte Ahmad, 8 years in service

“Being a home agent enables me to have more time to study.. But I think most importantly, there is more time for me to interact with my family members.”

Nick Sng, 4 years in service.

KEY CHALLENGES	SOLUTIONS
1. Justify ROI – cost of laptops and telecommunication equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Take a long-term view on ROI
2. Ensure IT security is not compromised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Set up routine and non-sensitive processes to be done from home ○ Introduce additional security features and procedures
3. Maintain communication & accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schedule regular face-to-face interaction with supervisor(s) and colleagues ○ Make use of ICT to maintain contact e.g. web-chats and instant messaging



RESOURCES

Work-Life Funding

www.business.gov.sg/EN/Government/GovernmentAssistance

EnterpriseOne comprehensively lists various government grants, loans and other assistance across industries.

www.familylifeambassador.org.sg

Family Life Ambassador (FLA) Programme by Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) supports the fostering of stronger and more stable families in Singapore through the provision of funded family life education programmes at the workplace for working adults. The FLA Programme offers a wide spectrum of family life topics, such as personal work-life effectiveness, marriage preparation/enrichment and parenting.

www.hpb.gov.sg

Workplace Health and Sports Promotion Grant (WHSP) by Health Promotion Board provides financial support to help organisations start and sustain their workplace health programmes.

www.mom.gov.sg/work-life

Work-Life Works! (WoW!) Fund is a government grant given to businesses to encourage employers to introduce Work-Life measures, including flexible work arrangements at the workplace.

www.ntuc.org.sg/flexiworks

Flexi-Works! by NTUC and WDA offers a grant to support a company's efforts in the recruitment of new workers on part-time or flexible work arrangements.

www.wda.gov.sg

ADVANTAGE! Scheme by Workforce Development Agency (WDA) provides a financial grant to support companies' initiatives in implementing HR systems, changes to working environment and business and operational processes that directly boost the recruitment, retention and re-employment of mature workers.

Other Related Websites

Child Care Link @ www.childcarelink.gov.sg

Employer Alliance @ www.employeralliance.sg

Education, Learning & Employment @ eCitizen www.ele.ecitizen.gov.sg

Family & Community Development @ eCitizen www.fcd.ecitizen.gov.sg

Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore @ <http://www.ida.gov.sg>

Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports @ www.mcys.gov.sg

Ministry of Manpower @ www.mom.gov.sg

Next Gen National Broadband Network @ <http://www.nextgennbn.gov.sg>

Online career portal for working mothers @ <http://www.mumsatwork.net/>

Work Life Balance, Department of Commerce, Govt of Western Australian @ www.worklife.wa.gov.au

Working at Home Policy, NSW Ombudsman @ <http://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au>

Print Resources

Making Work at Home Work, Mary Byers, 2009

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