

**telework!va**

**Final Report for**

**CALIBRE**

**By**

**TeleCommunting, Inc.**

***September 2004***



**TeleCommunting, Inc.**

Broadening the workplace definition

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been two years since TeleCommuting, Inc. (TCI) began working with CALIBRE to implement their telecommuting program under the guidelines of the Telework!VA program administrated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). This is the final report detailing the implementation process and program findings.

When CALIBRE applied to be part of the TeleworkVA! Program the goal was to implement a Telework program to provide additional flexibility to employees and help them avoid traffic congestion, accommodate family needs and improve work/life balance. CALIBRE sees Telework as a means of improving retention and recruitment and space utilization.

CALIBRE had developed a comprehensive Telework policy. They have a large technical department and COG's Commuter Connections staff determined that they would probably need limited consulting services. However, they would like the selected consultant to review their policy and ensure that it covers all the major issues. They also needed assistance in establishing criteria for selection, developing and program application, and developing and conducting manager and employee training.

CALIBRE has a successful telecommuting program that corporate management remains committed to supporting. The initial pilot program consisted of 11 telecommuters and has grown to 17 participants. CALIBRE plans on adding 5 more telecommuters this fiscal year.

CALIBRE perceives that the biggest benefits of telecommuting for the company and the employees are:

- Telecommuting is employee friendly.
- Telecommuting is a good recruiting and retention tool.
- Telecommuting enhances productivity by eliminating wasted time on the highways.
- Telecommuting provides cost avoidance of office space overhead.

All telecommuters receive a CALIBRE owned laptop computer that is transported between the main office and the home office. This is a change from the beginning of the program where each telecommuter was given a stand-alone computer for their home office. Data collected from the participants supported the change. This is the only change made to the program since it began.

The only issues arising from telecommuting were the cultural ones. Managers first had to learn how to manage someone they did not see face-to-face all the time. This was largely overcome by the initial training that TCI provided at the beginning of the pilot. CALBRE believes management finally came to the conclusion that the productivity

metrics for an employee are the same whether they are across the hall or working from home.

The flip side of that was also an issue. Again, CALIBRE feels the training provided by TCI really assisted them in the transition to telecommuting. Employee performance has generated the necessary confidence in the program as a valid work alternative. Only one original pilot participant left the program, because in the manager's view, they were not working well in this new work environment.

CALIBRE's senior management believes telecommuting is a great program for the company and the employees. The pilot has provided them with the experience needed to support telecommuting. They remain focused on continuing to make it work. They have a plan in place to expand the number of participants each year.

It has been a pleasure to work with all the members of the CALIBRE Telecommuting Team, the pilot telecommuters and the managers. This consultant wishes them continued success with their telecommuting program.

## CALIBRE PROFILE

CALIBRE is an employee-owned government information technology and management services firm. They provide management analysis & decision support, information technology solutions, and operations support to their customer base worldwide. CALIBRE is a "total solutions house" supporting the organizational responsibilities and mission-critical systems of defense, federal civil, and state & community customers. CALIBRE produces tailored, integrated solutions.

On March 1, 1989, CALIBRE opened its doors for business. They began with 44 employees, three contract vehicles, and \$3.8 million in on-going projects, all by agreement from Management Consulting & Research, Inc. The staff, organized in project teams, adjusted to meet changing demands, completed four projects using 286 PCs with 4 MB RAM and 20 MB hard disks, a few dot matrix printers, no LAN (the "sneaker net" was the approved methodology for printing and file sharing), and WordPerfect 5.1 and LOTUS 1-2-3 software. CALIBRE closed its first year of business at \$4.9 million. Today, CALIBRE has 382 employees and revenues of \$51.0 million.

To provide some additional perspective on the changes that have occurred since 1989, CALIBRE began with a single shareholder. There are now over 292 participants in CALIBRE's ESOP. In 1997, the ESOP attained the majority ownership position (62.7%) and today, owns 81% of the company. Since 1994, share value has increased at a cumulative average growth rate of 28%. In 1989, CALIBRE began with all employees in one office location: Skyline Center in Falls Church, Virginia. Over time they added offices at Hedges Run in Woodbridge, Virginia, Occoquan, Virginia and on-site with customers throughout the Washington Metropolitan area. In 2001, they moved into their new corporate headquarters at Metro Park in Alexandria, Virginia. The new headquarters facility combined the staffs from Skyline, Hedges Run, and Occoquan and is designed to meet their needs well into the future. CALIBRE also has employees on-site with customers at many locations nationwide and overseas.

Their challenge as they enter the 21st century is to maintain and improve the quality and creativity of what they do, accentuate the competitive differences, incorporate new and better ways of taking care of themselves, and perpetuate an intense customer focus.

CALIBRE's interest in telecommuting grew out of a combination of factors. The firm was pressed for space in its old building, traffic congestion was becoming more of a problem, and prospective employees are looking for telecommuting as an employer-provided benefit.

CALIBRE decided to participate in the Telework!VA program in early 2002. They selected TeleCommunting, Inc. (TCI) as their consultant in May 2002.

## **Program Development and Implementation**

TeleCommuting, Inc. (TCI) met with the telecommuting team in May 2002 to assess their requirements for implementing a pilot telecommuting program for their employees. The team consisted of:

Anne Thomas – Human Resources Manager  
William Barkovic – Vice President & Chief Technology Officer  
Charles (Pat) Cororan – Executive Vice President & COO  
Pam Tucker – TeleCommuting, Inc.

CALIBRE had an informal telecommuting policy. TCI would review the policy and make professional suggestions and provide supporting documentation. The team was especially interested in developing eligibility criteria for employees interested in telecommuting. Other services include developing and conducting a program announcement meeting, two rounds of training, focus groups and prepare a final report. They also wanted to take advantage of acquiring equipment under the Telework!VA program.

On June 5, 2002, TCI submitted the Assessment and Budget to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG) for approval. Besides covering the services that would be provided by TCI, the Budget included the leasing of ten desktop computers, ten HP All-in-One printers, and 10 Internet security devices. CALIBRE would supply the telecommuting participants with a Siemens Teleworker Phone package and a Blackberry. The Assessment was approved and TCI received the Notice to Proceed on June 19, 2002.

### **Policy Development**

TCI reviewed the existing telework policy. For the most part, the policy was well written. TCI met with the telecommuting team in late June to discuss changes and recommendations to the Policy. The team elected to incorporate the suggestions and finalized the policy (**Exhibit I**). TCI also developed an application to be used in selecting the pilot participants. At the same time, TCI provided the team with the Eligibility Criteria they had requested and it will be attached to the application.

### **Announcement Strategy**

CALIBRE wanted to formally announce the Telecommuting Program to the entire organization. They requested that TCI develop two presentations. One of the presentations was to be given to the potential telecommuters and the other to the managers.

The purpose of the announcement sessions was to:

- Define telecommuting
- Position telecommuting within CALIBRE

- Explain how the program will work

Both sessions were well attended and each PowerPoint presentation (**Exhibit II**) was approximately 30 minutes in length. Many of the common concerns and myths surrounding telecommuting were addressed.

### **Implementing Telecommuting**

Applications for participation in the pilot telecommuting program were accepted the first week of July. The final selection was finalized the second week of July and the participants were notified of the required training dates at the end of July.

TCI developed two comprehensive training courses for the telecommuters and the managers. Telecommuting not only changes where you work, but it also changes how you work. The home presents a new environment in which to work with a whole new set of issues to address. The telecommuter training covered everything from setting up a home office to developing a communication strategy (**Exhibit III**). TCI trained the 11 pilot telecommuters.

Managers need to manage differently when their employees are working remotely and are not in the office everyday. TCI designed a class to teach managers how they can maintain control and get the desired results from the telecommuters. Many other related topics were discussed with the managers (**Exhibit III**) as well. TCI trained 12 managers.

Both training sessions were evaluated by the participants and were given an overall rating of 'excellent'. CALIBRE found the training to be so beneficial to the telecommuter and their managers that they asked TCI to conduct a second round of training in June 2003.

### **Focus Groups**

After three months of telecommuting, TCI conducted two Focus Groups. Again, one focus group was held for the telecommuters and the other for the managers. TCI believes in separate Focus Groups so management's presence will not influence participant's responses and visa versa.

TCI moderates and records these sessions and transcribes the tapes. In preparing the Focus Group report, TCI will state a finding and back that finding up with actual participant quotes.

The Focus Groups found that the pilot telecommuting program was a success (**Exhibit IV**) by meeting the intended objectives. All participants and managers were satisfied with the program and supported its expansion. This consultant agreed with their consensus.

## Technology

Technology is most often the sole reason for a telecommuting program not being accepted, or not growing to its potential. CALIBRE is one of the few companies that do not have a challenge in this area, which is rare. They did a superb job in setting their telecommuters up for success, rather than failure.

After the first six months of the pilot CALIBRE had sufficient data from the participants for them to adjust the technical support provided the telecommuters. They are now providing all telecommuters with a laptop computer that moves back and forth with them. The laptops are working out much better for everyone.

The only issues they faced were with the Teleworker Phone and the Blackberry. It seems they both want to share the serial port on the computer and that is not possible. When the telecommuters were given the choice of the Teleworker Phone or the Blackberry, they picked the Blackberry. This is no longer a technology issue for the telecommuters.

The telecommuters experienced no other technology problems.

## Summary

The culture at CALIBRE lends itself nicely to telecommuting. Senior management was very supportive of the initiative and demonstrated their commitment throughout the pilot. The program is meeting its business objectives. Their program has expanded to 17 telecommuters with an additional 5 to be added this year.

During the course of CALIBRE's participation in the program, the following benefits were realized based on 113 responses from an on-site survey that was conducted in August 2003:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Average Telework Days Per Week for Program Participants: | 0.42  |
| Average Vehicle Occupancy:                               | 1.15  |
| Vehicle Trips Reduced (over 2 years of the program):     | 8,209 |

It is clear from the survey results that the institution of the Telework!VA program at CALIBRE over the two year timeframe allowed more employees to work from home.

The total budget spent over the course of CALIBRE's participation in the program was \$33,416 of which \$17,500 was spent on consultant costs and \$15,916 on equipment lease reimbursements. Overall, the cost per teleworker for Telework!VA over the 24 month project period at CALIBRE was \$1,965.64. The average cost per each trip reduced for this program was \$4.07.

# Exhibit I: Telecommuting Policy

## 4.20 TELEWORKING

### POLICY

1. Teleworking allows an employee to work at home or in a satellite location for all or part of their regular workday or workweek. CALIBRE considers teleworking to be a viable alternative work arrangement in cases where the individual, type of work, and supervisor are suited to such an arrangement. This arrangement is based upon the needs of the job and CALIBRE, and the employee's past performance.
2. Teleworking is a voluntary work alternative. Either an employee or a supervisor can suggest teleworking as a possible work arrangement. No employee will be required to work from home. It is not an entitlement and in no way changes the terms and conditions of employment with CALIBRE. CALIBRE reserves the right to require teleworkers to work at the office when necessary. CALIBRE also reserves the right to limit the number of teleworkers from certain Directorates or projects, as needed.
3. Teleworking is not a substitute for dependent day care. The same time reporting standards apply when an employee is in the office or when an employee is teleworking. Prospective teleworkers are encouraged to discuss expectations of teleworking with family members prior to entering into a trial period.
4. Each teleworking arrangement is jointly agreed to between the supervisor, project manager and employee. Expectations on the part of both the employee and the supervisor or project manager should be established before any arrangement is implemented. Any teleworking arrangement will be on a trial basis for the first 3 months and may be terminated, at will, at any time by either CALIBRE or the employee.
5. If a teleworker is working from home, he or she must have appropriate, dedicated office space for a home office. Equipment furnished by CALIBRE, such as a personal computer or dedicated phone, is intended for CALIBRE business only and should not be used by other members of the household or any visitors to the home. Any additional home expenses incurred due to working from home (increased utility costs or insurance costs for example) are the responsibility of the employee.
6. Teleworkers who work at home must take all precautions necessary to secure privileged information in the home and prevent unauthorized access to any computer system from the home. Employees will be held accountable for securing information by taking reasonable and prudent measures to safeguard information on a routine basis. For work of a sensitive nature, protective measures such as data encryption, locked file cabinets, disk boxes and regular password maintenance are required.

7. Teleworkers who work from home will not host business related visitors in their home. Visits by co-workers for business reasons must have prior Director level approval. This restriction is intended to protect the employee and limit liability exposure for the employee and the company.
8. Employees participating in the Teleworking program will not be eligible to participate in other commuter benefit programs.

## **PROCEDURE**

1. An employee interested in establishing a teleworking work arrangement should notify his or her supervisor or project manager initially. Individuals requesting formal teleworking arrangements must have been employed with CALIBRE for a minimum of 6 months of continuous, regular employment and must have exhibited above-average performance, in accordance with the Company's performance appraisal process. Once a Director has approved the request, it should be forwarded to the Director, Human Resources. For teleworking arrangements greater than three months, the Chief Operating Officer must approve the arrangement.
2. Once the request is approved, the Director, Human Resources will work with the employee and supervisor or project manager, with input from the Director, Administrative Services and the Chief Technology Officer, to develop a teleworking agreement that will cover items including, but not limited to;
  - Work hours and how the employee will log in and out each day;
  - Work assignments;
  - Contact and communication with supervisor and team members;
  - Availability;
  - Fees, equipment and supplies that will be paid/furnished by the company;
  - Fees, equipment and supplies will be paid/furnished by the employee;
  - Work space setup (consult safety checklist);
  - Safety and security issues; and
  - Mail delivery.

Teleworkers remain obligated to comply with all Company rules, policies, and procedures. Teleworkers will be as accessible as their on-site counterparts during agreed upon regular business hours, regardless of location.
3. If the teleworking arrangement is approved, it will be implemented for a trial period of up to 90 days. At the end of this period, the employee and supervisor will each complete an evaluation of the arrangement and will make

recommendations for continuance, termination, or modifications. Evaluation of teleworker performance beyond the trial period will be consistent with that received by employees working at the office in both content and frequency, but will focus on work output and completion of objectives, rather than time-based performance.

4. Teleworking does not change the basic terms and conditions of employment with CALIBRE. Teleworkers' salary, job responsibilities, benefits and Company-sponsored insurance coverage do not change as a result of teleworking.
5. Employees entering into a teleworking arrangement may be required to forfeit use of a personal office or workstation in CALIBRE's facilities.
6. A teleworking arrangement may be discontinued at any time at the discretion of the Director. However, every effort will be made to provide 14 calendar days notice of such a change to accommodate employee needs.
7. Teleworkers will obtain computer, office, and other required supplies from MIS or the corporate supply room during normal in-office work days. Teleworkers may purchase supplies commercially only when it is not possible to obtain at CALIBRE and upon prior approval of their supervisor as provided for in P&P 6.3, Purchasing of Goods and Services.
8. Teleworkers will submit requests for reimbursement of approved expenses (e.g. Internet Service Provider) on the Monthly Expense Report. CTO approval will be obtained prior to submission to Accounting.

## **EVALUATING AN EMPLOYEE'S ELIGIBILITY FOR TELECOMMUTING**

It is the responsibility of the Supervisor or Project Manager to evaluate each employee requesting a telecommuting arrangement. The evaluation should include their job responsibilities and personal characteristics. The following is designed to assist you in your evaluation.

### **Job Requirements**

Characteristics of suitable telecommuting jobs include:

- A degree of autonomy
- Tasks requiring concentration and/or large blocks of time when the employee works independently of others.
- Need for face-to-face interaction with co-workers is minimal or can easily and reasonably be accommodated by scheduled meetings or routine communications
- The need for specialized material or equipment is minimal and easily and reasonably accommodated.
- Tasks are clearly defined and objectives have identifiable timeframes and checkpoints.
- Duties can be performed without close supervision.
- Working off-site will not adversely impact the ability to accommodate the customers, teams, or manager's business needs.

### **Personal Requirements**

The following characteristics are critical to the success of a teleworker:

- Self-motivated and responsible
- Capable of working independently with minimum supervision
- Familiar and comfortable with job requirements
- Knowledgeable about company procedures
- Successful in current position
- Effective communicator
- Adaptable
- Well organized/time management
- Good work habits and planning skills
- Problem solving ability

## Exhibit II: Announcement Presentation

### TELECOMMUTING AT CALIBRE

Taking care of our people,  
Our community,  
And our business.

#### Agenda

- What is Telecommuting?
- Why are we considering Telecommuting?
- How will the program work?
- How will the program be rolled out?
- What do you do?

#### Telecommuting

Is a **flexible** way of working which covers a wide range of work activities, all of which entail **working remotely** from an employer, or from a traditional place of work, for a **significant proportion of work time**. It may be **full-time or part-time**. The work often involves electronic processing of information, and **always involves using telecommunications** to keep the remote employee and employer in contact with each other. - *Telecommuting Explained*

#### What is Telecommuting?

- Telecommuting is defined as substituting information technology for work-related travel
- CALIBRE considers telecommuting to be a viable alternative work arrangement in cases where the individual, type of work, and supervisor are suited to such an arrangement
- At CALIBRE, the Telecommuting Program allows an employee to work at a remote location for all or part of their regular workday or workweek

## **Telecommuting at CALIBRE**

■ Telecommuting describes four alternative workplace options

1. Customer Site
2. Remote Site
3. Occasional
4. Telecommuting

## **Why a Telecommuting Program?**

■ To provide our people with an enabling work environment

- Reducing commuting time and stress
- Increasing flexibility for work/life issues
- Reducing costs
- Having a more productive work environment

■ To be a good corporate citizen by helping to clean our environment and relieve commuter congestion

■ To adapt and adopt effective, efficient business practices to:

- Improve employee retention
- Improve employee recruitment
- Reduce real estate requirements and costs
- Reduce parking needs
- Increase productivity

## **Telecommuting! A Program**

■ Funding provided by MWCOG and the VDRPT

■ To assist organizations in northern Virginia implement telecommuting programs

■ To provide technology and consulting services

■ Two-year pilot

■ To have an impact on traffic congestion and air quality in northern Virginia

## **How Will The Program Work?**

- A corporate policy and procedures have been developed
- To request telecommuting:
  - Complete the application
  - Includes eligibility criteria
  - Submit to supervisor or project manager
- Directors/Staff Managers will approve their eligibility and forward to Human Resources Manager

## **How Will The Program Work?**

- Three month trial period
- Telecommuting arrangements greater than three months must be approved by the Chief Operating Officer
- CALIBRE will supply equipment
- CALIBRE will reimburse for extra telecommunications and office supplies
- Managers and telecommuters will receive training

## **How Will The Program Work?**

- The manager and telecommuter will complete a Telecommuting Agreement
- Corporate staffs will provide support to:
  - Home office setup/coordination with Telecommuting Center
  - Off-site supplies and equipment
  - Draft agreements
  - Train managers and telecommuters
- Managers and telecommuters will be asked to participate in a focus group to assist in evaluating the program

## **Rolling Out the Program**

- Considered a pilot program at this time
- Talk to your direct supervisor or project manager if interested
- Applications will be accepted within the next week
- 10 participants will be selected
- Not all requests will be approved
- Training will be scheduled
- Pilot program will begin after training and the equipment is distributed

## **What do you do?**

- If interested, read the policy and procedures
- Evaluate job tasks and personal characteristics
- Discuss with household
- Complete application
- If accepted, complete:
  - Telecommuting Agreement with manager
  - Agreement on Supported-Supported Expenses
  - **Home office checklist**

## **What do you do?**

- Attend training
- Brief co-workers
- If not interested or selected, your support of the program and the participants is needed

## **Keep in Mind...**

- Telecommuter might be asked to share an office with another telecommuter (one may be Monday/Wednesday, the other Tuesday/Thursday)
- Telecommuting is not a substitute for dependent day care
- Telecommuting is not an entitlement

## **Keep in Mind...**

- Telecommuting does not change the terms and conditions of employment
- Telecommuting arrangements can be terminated for any reason by either party
- All the forms and materials will be available on CALWEB
- We need your support

## **Questions?**

## **Exhibit III: Training Topics**

### **Telecommuting Training Agenda**

#### **Telecommuter Training**

Topics:

- Discussion of concerns and expectations
- Becoming a telecommuter
- Establishing a home office
- Managing change
- Routines and rituals
- Avoiding the pitfalls
- Communication strategies
- Teams and telecommuting
- Career management
- Time Management
- Data security
- Viruses
- The Telecommuting Agreement
- Challenges and tips
- Insurance and tax issues

#### **Manager Training**

Topics:

- Discussion on concerns and expectations
- Enemies of managing telecommuters
- Telecommuting management elements
- Success characteristics
- Improving for success
- Managing change
- Succeeding as a telecommuting leader
- Responsibilities of a telecommuting manager
- Measuring results and performance
- Career management
- Conducting a home office visit
- Conducting effective meetings
- Delegating
- Team building and telecommuting
- Communication strategies
- Vision, mission and values
- The Telecommuting Agreement

## **Exhibit IV: Focus Groups**

### **Executive Summary**

The CALIBRE pilot telecommuting program began approximately six months ago. The Assessment was conducted in May and it was clear from the outset that CALIBRE was very committed to a telecommuting program. Being a very progressive company, they had already instituted flexible work options for their people, and understand the benefits in doing so.

Identifying the business reasons for the implementation was a simple process. CALIBRE wanted to provide their people with an enabling work environment. This encompasses many issues. Reducing commuting time and stress, increasing flexibility for work/life issues, reducing overall costs and having a more productive work environment were stated as the primary reasons. Being a good corporate citizen is equally important to CALIBRE. Helping to clean the environment and at the same time, relieving commuter congestion was seen as a benefit to both the company and their neighbors. In today's "virtual" workplace, especially in the technology industry, it is vital to companies to access all the tools available to attract and retain quality employees. CALIBRE understands this and has stated this as a viable business reason as well. Once the program grows for a reasonable amount of time, the reduction in real estate requirements, costs and reduced parking needs will be realized. And, of course, perhaps most important of all, since it affects the profitability of a company, is increasing productivity. It is a proven fact that the more satisfied the employees are, the more productive they become.

These are all commendable business reasons for implementing a telecommuting program. After training the managers and telecommuters, and waiting a reasonable amount of time, focus groups were conducted for both groups. Following is the information gathered from those meetings. The focus groups are conducted to determine what, if any, changes need to be made to the program, and to take a reading on how all affected parties have reacted to the program, thus far. It is a definite culture change to any organization, and at times change can be difficult. Even though the training addresses potential pitfalls, suggested changes in communication patterns, etc., oftentimes just to share those experiences is helpful.

The focus groups will show that the pilot telecommuting program at CALIBRE has been a success. As mentioned above, the focus groups will unearth any changes that have been suggested. These recommendations, from the telecommuters, their managers, and this consultant are listed at the end of the report. It appears that almost all the business objectives set forth from the beginning of the program have been met. Of course, it is too early in the program and there are not enough participants to recognize real estate savings just yet. Even though some of CALIBRE's highest performers are among this

group, the decreased interruptions and lessened commute times have had to have an effect on worker productivity. All of the participants are very pleased with the opportunity and hope that the program continues to grow. They recognize the positive impact telecommuting has had on their lives, the company and the environment and have given it their full support.

## **Recommendations**

### **Renewed Commitment**

It is apparent that all levels of management support the telecommuting program at CALIBRE. However, in order to solidify the commitment to telecommuting, and ensure its growth, it is recommended that the executives at CALIBRE renew their commitment to the telecommuting program and communicate that to their organization. Re-announcing the program and sharing the results of the pilot can accomplish this.

### **Training**

In most cases, the participants in the training program found the training they received prior to beginning telecommuting helpful. They and this consultant recommend that CALIBRE provide training to all managers and employees entering the program in the future.

### **Core Office Day**

As more and more people are granted the opportunity of the flexible work options CALIBRE offers, having the ability to get everyone together becomes an increasing challenge to management. When appropriate, it is suggested that CALIBRE assign a core day when everyone is expected in the main office. It can be on a weekly basis, bi-weekly basis, or fixed dates of the month. It should be noted that many telecommuting programs are successful without mandatory core days.

### **Telecommuter's User's Group**

Whether it is in the newsletter, a bulletin board, via email, or a "brown bag session" once a month for telecommuters, the sharing of information and experiences in this unique environment is very helpful and aids in the continued success of any program.

### **Technology**

The IT Department is aware of the fact that having the same platform and computer for their employees, whether in the office or working remotely is ideal. This was mentioned in the focus groups, both by the managers and the telecommuters. It would also be helpful for the telecommuters to be notified when the network is down or expected to be down so that they know the problem is not on their end. Even though CALIBRE is a technology company, the

employees would find it helpful to have some hands on training prior to telecommuting. This would save time and frustration once they being to work remotely.

### **Increased Flexibility**

Interestingly enough, the objectives for the program are stated as allowing an employee to work at a remote location for all or part of their regular workday or workweek, the managers say they are flexible, the telecommuters say they have flexibility, and yet, they ask for more. Some ask for more days, yet most state that they would not want to be out of the office for five days straight. This is common in the beginning of any program. The guidelines become a bit more relaxed as the idea becomes a true part of the culture of the organization, and the guidelines are set forth for each unique employee and set of work tasks.

## **Manager Focus Group**

After three months of telecommuting at CALIBRE the managers were asked to participate in a focus group so that the committee could evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot telecommuting program, and institute changes as required. The employees telecommute anywhere from two to three days per week.

As with any new program, the beginning phases are an obvious adjustment period for all affected parties. However, a judgment can be made after a certain trial period, what direction the program will take. The findings from this focus group were positive and support CALIBRE's goals for implementation. Again, the business reasons for implementation are to provide the people with an enabling work environment, be a good corporate citizen and to adopt effective, efficient business practices.

## **Telecommuter Arrangements**

As mentioned above, the employees are currently telecommuting two to three days per week. All of the managers believe that the number of days could be expanded. Most agreed that coming in once a week should be a requirement.

We strongly recommend that there be a formal telecommuting agreement in place between each manager and employee, and there is. This agreement is specific as to the number of days the employee will be working remotely, the tasks to be performed and a communication strategy. The managers felt that they should and do expect the same accountability whether the employee was in or out of the office. The employees have deliverables and all of them have been met. One manager has watched their employee grow and become "much more responsive". Another one was in "constant communication", thereby dispelling the myth that the employee will be left out of the loop should they not be in the office everyday. The communication strategy put in place by each manager tended to differ, one particular manager has their employee email them when they are not in. Email has become a major communication tool and the employees can be "judged by the responsiveness of their emails and their product".

CALIBRE is such a progressive company and this is shown in the flexibility they are displaying in the telecommuting arrangements. The employees seem to have good rapport with their managers and they can shift their schedules according to the tasks they are asked to do. All managers would support expansion of the program, with some reservations in regards to career advancement. This will be discussed in the next section involving the impact on the employees' professional life.

## Impact on Employee's Professional Life

There was a lot of discussion regarding the impact that telecommuting may have on the employee. A sampling of the comments were as follows:

“Upper management believes the opportunity to get recognized is lost while telecommuting.”

“They are missing out from the solution team.”

“They are missing out on the interaction with others in the company that will hold him back from moving into positions of leadership.”

“One or two days are the same, if looking for advancing their careers they shouldn't be telecommuting.”

“We will end up with two classes of workers. “

The management concerns that were voiced are a result of the awareness that a culture change is taking place. This was discussed in the training class. That is why it is stressed to both the employees and the managers that communications is the glue that holds the virtual environment together. Over time, the managers will adjust to the fact that the quality and quantity of the work output, coupled with growing skills in decision-making, problem solving and sharing ideas are what makes a good candidate for career advancement. They must ensure, however, on their side, that they give the employee the opportunity to do so. It can be dangerous on the manager's side as well to “fall into the thought that the telecommuter is not interested in the company simply because they have chosen to telecommute at the moment.” It was stressed that all employees need to understand that if they desire advancement within the company this most likely will lead to the elimination of telecommuting. The managers stated that they had discussed this with their employees. Not all felt this way as shown in the excellent suggestions and obvious grasp of managing the remote environment shown below:

“The employee does now know how they can grow. We have to introduce/move them into situations where they grow their skills.”

“The change in location is invisible to me. My telecommuter has become more aggressive picking up on problems before I am aware of them. I am impressed.”

“Management needs to help them out that they can do more, we can continually offer them more opportunity. We will then find out if they are interested in growing.”

This shows the importance of good communication between the employee and the manager. These discussions need to take place on a consistent basis. The employee also needs to understand that there is a potential pitfall in “out of sight, out of mind”. They too, need to volunteer to accept more responsibility that can lead to further career advancement, if interested, and relinquish the privilege of telecommuting.

There was an issue raised in the area of mentoring. Some managers were concerned that the telecommuter could possibly miss out on the opportunity to display their managerial skills by helping others. Employees can still assist others via email and the telephone and perhaps schedule more frequent meetings with a new employee. Again, if it is viewed as necessary to be physically in the office everyday to mentor a new employee, this is something that should be discussed with the telecommuter and they will have to make that decision.

This topic spurred an entirely different discussion, the “Baby Boomers” versus the “Generation X’ers”. There are ample studies and polls that have been done in this area and the bottom line usually is, “If compensated well enough, I’m happy”. Obviously, this is the “Generation X’ers” point of view. The important point to be noted here is that the world is forever evolving and we need to be flexible enough to change with it.

It was overwhelmingly agreed upon that all telecommuters have shown an increase in morale. The “further the commute, the happier they are.” An increase in communication skills and an increase in job satisfaction were also noted. The quality of workers involved in the pilot was high to begin with, so the productivity and improvement of skills remained approximately the same. However, as more employees are given the opportunity to telecommute, there most likely will be an increase in productivity and skills as a result. The more satisfied the employee is, the higher their productivity.

### **Impact on Management and the Organization**

The impact on management has been minimal. They all agreed that it has not caused any additional work for them. The changes that were mentioned were things that one would expect to change. For example, they are relying more on technology than ever before, obviously the telephone and email. Telecommuting has instituted better planning from both their perspective and the telecommuters’. This is viewed as positive. They also have more planned meetings, versus ad hoc meetings; this is also viewed as “a good thing”. They know that the employees “do not mind being called in on their telecommuting day for a meeting if they can miss “that rush hour traffic!” It should also be mentioned that they have seen no impact on the coworkers. If anything, they are “watching and waiting to see what happens.”

It was wonderful to hear that there is “a tremendous amount of support” for telecommuting from upper management. Some are “still uncomfortable with no vision, but this will change as time goes on.” All levels of management see that telecommuting “makes good sense.”

The impact on the organization has been positive. Besides the points already mentioned, one manager has already experienced retention as a benefit. Their employee moved a great distance from the office and would probably have left the company if they had not been given the opportunity to telecommute.

Asked if they would telecommute, most stated that they would if they could. At least two managers felt they could immediately.

Asked if training had helped them, they all agreed that the training was very basic, but that it was a good reminder of things that they should have been doing all along. Interestingly enough, the issues discussed in the area of career advancement were covered at length in the training.

## **Technology**

The managers felt that there were some definite challenges in the area of technology. These were discussed in the telecommuter's focus group as well. The IT Department is aware of the issues and is currently underway in resolving them. Technology is the main reason for a telecommuting program not growing. CALIBRE is an exception. The "challenges" that the pilot group has encountered are minor. Issues have to be expected in any new program. We all need to remember that technology never works 100% of the time. When they began to discuss the innovative ways that the telecommuter solved their technology glitches, there was an obvious requirement for the sharing of information shown between managers. This was discussed in the telecommuters' technology section as well. A user's group may be helpful to the telecommuters. They felt that their employees were as productive, but frustrated at times. The "different platforms were bothersome" and suggested that this situation needs to be addressed. The consensus in the group was, however, that the overall technology is good. As one manager stated, "my telecommuter experiences the same problems at home as here. Only once was the problem unique to the telecommuting".

## **Advice and Suggested Changes**

The advice that the managers would pass along to future telecommuting managers was to have "formal counseling sessions face to face, more than once a year. This is essential to maintain a connection". They also should realize, (even the current staff), that "management needs to understand that they need to offer jobs even though they telecommute."

We discussed the impact that telecommuting may have on CALBRE in the future. They felt that the program needs to be well managed and thought out to determine the impact economically. All realize that the program needs to be

expanded to see what telecommuting can really do for a company like reduce real estate, etc.

All managers agreed that there were “no show stoppers”, and that they supported the program and believed it should be expanded. As one manager stated, “if changed, they may leave, it would be like canceling Christmas!”

## **Telecommuter Focus Group**

After three months of telecommuting at CALIBRE, a focus group was held for the telecommuters who participated in the pilot program. Eleven participants took part in the focus group. The majority of personnel telecommute two days per week, with a few exceptions. One employee telecommutes three days per week and one works a compressed workweek and combines it with telecommuting.

The findings were very positive and prove that telecommuting has been well received and is having a positive impact on the employees. The findings support CALIBRE's goals for implementing a telecommuting program.

## **Telecommuting Arrangements**

The consultant was pleased to learn that all employees have a formal telecommuting agreement in place. We highly recommend this document, especially in the pilot phase of a program, so that there is a clear understanding of how the telecommuter and their manager will communicate, what tasks will be accomplished, etc. The telecommuters felt that this document facilitated better planning and better communications with their PM's and their coworkers. One telecommuter even stated that, "I talk more to my team members than before with conference calls." It was stated that one employee, "gets answers faster, due to phone calls and emails, versus face to face communication. They have to pay attention to me."

It should be noted that there was one employee who is having a challenge with coworkers keeping their "commitments." They felt that being in the office, a coworker can physically tell you if they cannot make a meeting, versus attempting to setting up a telephone meeting and the coworker who is in the office does not feel it necessary to keep that commitment with the remote worker.

The flexibility displayed in the telecommuter arrangements mirrors the company culture. This is very positive, both for the telecommuters and the way the company is viewed. It shows trust for the employees, and faith that the telecommuters are working while "at home" and being productive.

## **Impact on Professional Life**

The impact on the employee's professional life overall was found to have been positive. Most have not changed the way they work, meaning they are still performing exactly the same type and style of work, however, they have stated a few differences.

They have found that to be successful at telecommuting, they need to plan ahead. Not only in regards to what tasks they will be performing while telecommuting, but also to communicate this to their PM's and coworkers. It was

stated that in the beginning, coworkers believed that they were not working when telecommuting. Slowly they have disproved this notion. Better communication, improved productivity, and, in some cases, “better availability” have shown that they are indeed working while telecommuting.

More than one employee felt that they had increased their skills by using available tools, versus asking a coworker for assistance. This is a common positive result of telecommuting. Employees are forced to learn additional skills when they all of a sudden find themselves alone. This, of course, is a benefit to both the telecommuter in their career, as well as to the company.

As far as having an impact on their managers’ style, the telecommuters saw no changes. They did, however, note an impact on new employees. They felt that the time for mentoring new employees was reduced due to telecommuting.

The response was overwhelmingly positive when the subject of productivity was mentioned. Due to fewer interruptions, they felt they were able to be more productive. One advantage of telecommuting is that people can work when they feel most creative. For example, one telecommuter will “work at night by checking my email before bed”, so that they are “much more prepared” for the next day. In addition, cutting out the time it takes to commute, allows more time in the day to actually work.

There was a slight concern voiced by a few telecommuters about not “being seen”. But, they felt that if they continued to communicate effectively with their managers, the quantity and quality of their work would speak for itself. They are also showing trust in their managers to speak highly of them, even when they are not physically in the office.

Training helped all the telecommuters, especially in the area of communication between themselves and their managers. They felt that the training gave “credibility to the program and to management”. Having already been schooled on the common distractions and how to avoid them, they recognized them early on and knew how to resolve them quickly.

## **Impact on Personal Life**

Employee satisfaction and high morale have a direct impact on employee productivity. The employees in the CALIBRE telecommuting pilot program are very pleased with the program at this point. They feel the positive impact on their professional, as well as, their personal life. This, of course, directly affects CALIBRE’s bottom line. Happier employees are more productive employees. They are thrilled with the additional hours they are saving in commuting. This has caused them to be “more efficient in their professional, and in their personal life”. They appreciate having “more free time”, as do their families. On a humorous note, one telecommuter exclaimed, “my animal is happy!”

## **Impact on the Organization**

This section of the report should be treated as invaluable to upper management. It is one of those rare occasions that they will be privy to their employee's innermost thoughts, both as individuals and as a group. The discussion begins with discovering what, if anything, the organization has gained by allowing them to telecommute.

Increased morale, decreased stress and increased productivity were mentioned again and again. These not only affect the employees, their families, but the organization as well. They felt that this offering helps CALIBRE to be viewed as an innovative company, and one that people would like to work for. Overall, the impact to the organization is a very positive one. As mentioned previously, happier employees are more productive employees. Employees are more likely to remain with a company that has a telecommuting program than one that does not.

## **Technology**

Technology is most often the sole reason for a telecommuting program not being accepted, or not growing to its potential. CALIBRE is one of the few companies that do not have a challenge in this area, which is rare. They have done a superb job in setting their telecommuters up for success, rather than failure. What a pleasure to see! There is a learning curve involved as to be expected with any new program. That is the reason that a pilot is recommended.

There were a few suggestions made to enhance the program from a technology standpoint. One suggestion that was mentioned is to have some hands on training provided for the equipment before the employee begins to telecommute. Another suggestion was to call the telecommuters when the network was down. This way they would know it is not a problem on their end, and when to expect the network to be available. It would also be helpful "go to one computer". "It is difficult to balance between two." "To be open and buy laptops and docking stations would allow the program to grow quicker."

The issues that were mentioned that need improvement were already acknowledged by the IT Department and on their way to being resolved. It was very interesting to watch the interaction between the telecommuters at times as they shared their ideas and discovery of new ways to do things. We suggest perhaps instituting a "telecommuters' corner" in the newsletter at CALIBRE. This could be a way of sharing experiences and ideas for the telecommuters.

It was wonderful to hear that the PM's and Directors learned more to be able to "save thousands of dollars by being able to utilize existing equipment by

understanding how to use it better.” If this type of information could be shared on a regular basis, it would be of benefit to CALIBRE.

### **Advice to the Company**

The telecommuters hope very much that the program is expanded. They would like to see possibly increasing the number of days by one to two, although all agreed that they would not like to telecommute five days per week. As the program grows, they suggested implementing a “core day”, as many organizations do, whereby all telecommuters must report to the main office. This would allow for weekly team meetings. A change in the company culture would have to occur from an ad hoc way of communicating to a more formalized method that all adhered to.

They hoped that the guidelines regarding when and how they want to telecommute become more flexible and that they could select when telecommuting best fits their work schedules according to the tasks they need to perform.

### **Additional Issues**

The discussion progressed to the future and how telecommuting might change both the culture of the company and the very company itself. The employees could understand how telecommuting could result in saving administrative costs, real estate, and other overhead costs. The concern was raised about “losing their office”. Five out of the eleven participants did not want to lose their office. They would be “resistant” to hoteling. However, when asked if they would share a desk, all responded “yes.” They “don’t want to find a desk”; they “want to know where they are going”. This is a common concern. When finally faced with this issue, the employee is happy to share a workspace rather than give up telecommuting.