Telework in Texas

Introduction

Telework is becoming an increasingly important topic to managers and executives in state government. A growing number of organizations have realized the benefits of allowing their employees to work from alternative worksites, including improving employee attitudes, increasing emergency preparedness, and meeting cost reduction goals. While research has shown an increase in teleworking in both private and public sectors, federal and state governments are also looking more to remote work locations as a standard practice. According to the latest national statistics, teleworking in state government agencies has increased by 122% since 2005.

In April 2014, DIR conducted a survey to assess the current state of telework among state agencies and institutions of higher education[1] in Texas. DIR asked both Human Resources and IT leaders to share their experience with teleworking in their agencies. Based on those responses, 84% of agencies in Texas have or are planning a telework policy and approximately 23% of state workers are teleworking, both regularly and intermittently.

Telework Defined

Telework is a work arrangement that allows an employee to work during any part of regularly paid hours at an approved alternative worksite (e.g., home, telework center). This definition includes remote work, or a work arrangement in which the employee resides and works at a location beyond the local commuting area of the employing organization's worksite.

This definition is different than mobile work, which is characterized by routine and regular travel to conduct work in customer or other worksites. Examples include site audits, site inspections, investigations, property management, and work performed while commuting, traveling between worksites or on temporary duty.

Key Findings:

- Lack of executive and high-level support is cited as the most common reason for an agency not to have a telework policy.
- Agencies and institutions of higher education both agreed that allowing employees to telework enhances work/life balance and job satisfaction by a notable amount.
- On average, one out of five employees currently telework; of those who do, most employees typically telework one day or less per week.
- Agencies with a telework policy realize the benefits of employee satisfaction and productivity and reduced organization costs.

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[1] Henceforth referred to as agencies.

- State agencies with successful telework program indicated that setting clear and measurable goals and identifying and express expectations led to success.

About the Telework Survey

DIR received 78 complete responses to the 15-question telework survey (survey attached). The survey included three sections that asked agency representatives about the status of their agency's telework policy and current telework practices as well as their overall perspective on telework.

- 64 entities were represented and included answers from:
  - 53 state agencies
  - 11 institutions of higher education
  - 13 Information Resource Managers
  - 51 Human Resource, Administration, Business Managers

Telework Policies

Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 illustrate the status of teleworking in Texas state agencies and institutions of higher education based on responses to the telework survey.

- 56% of respondents say their entity has a telework policy.
- 40% of those agencies with a formal and documented policy have had policies in place longer than 5 years.
- 16% of entities do not allow telework.
- Most large and medium sized agencies have a formal policy.
- Small agencies are split between not allowing telework and having an informal policy.
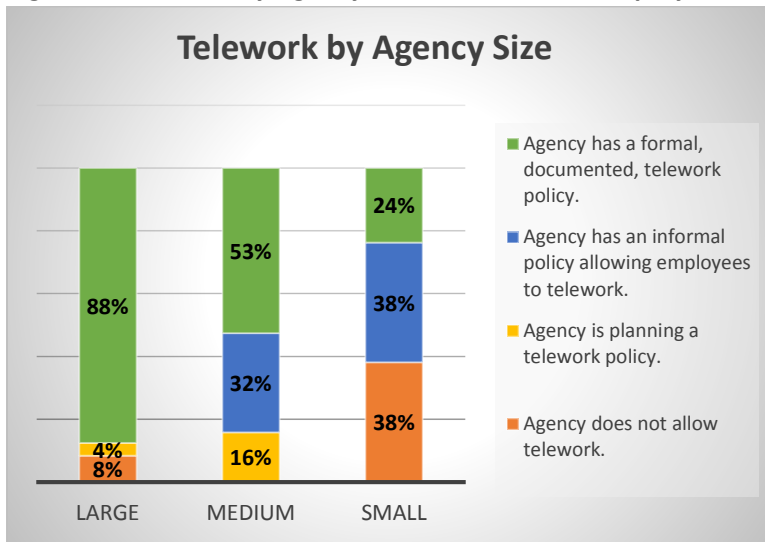
Figure 1: Total Agency Telework Policies
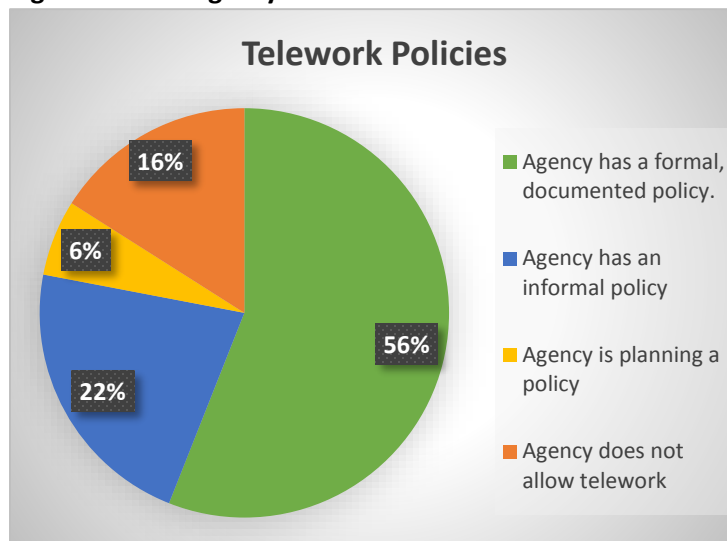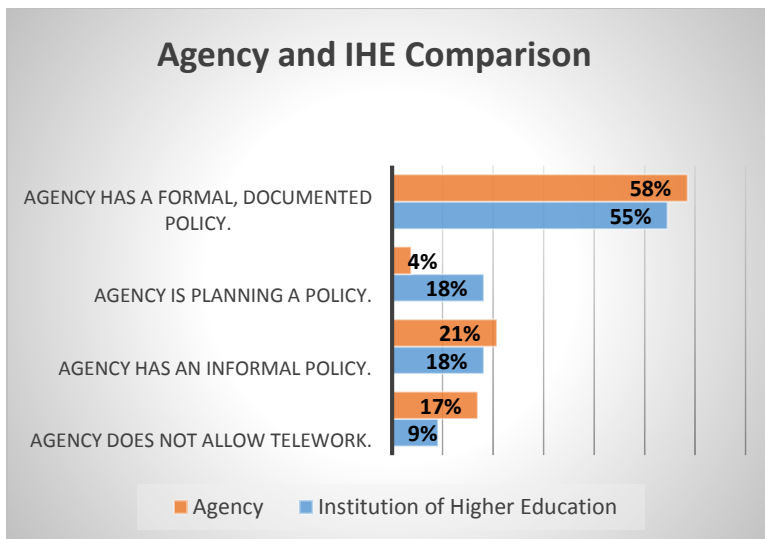

Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey

Figure 2. Telework by Agency Size and Full-Time Employees

Telework by Agency Size

Legend:
- ■ Agency has a formal, documented, telework policy.
- ■ Agency has an informal policy allowing employees to telework.
- ■ Agency is planning a telework policy.
- ■ Agency does not allow telework.

	LARGE	MEDIUM	SMALL
Formal policy (green)	88%	53%	24%
Informal policy (blue)		32%	38%
Planning (yellow)	4%	16%	
Does not allow (orange)	8%		38%

Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey.
Large= More than 500 FTEs, Medium=100-500 FTEs, Small= Less than 100 FTEs

Figure 3. Telework in Agencies and Institutions of Higher Education

Agency and IHE Comparison

	Agency	Institution of Higher Education
AGENCY HAS A FORMAL, DOCUMENTED POLICY.	58%	55%
AGENCY IS PLANNING A POLICY.	4%	18%
AGENCY HAS AN INFORMAL POLICY.	21%	18%
AGENCY DOES NOT ALLOW TELEWORK.	17%	9%

- ■ Agency
- ■ Institution of Higher Education
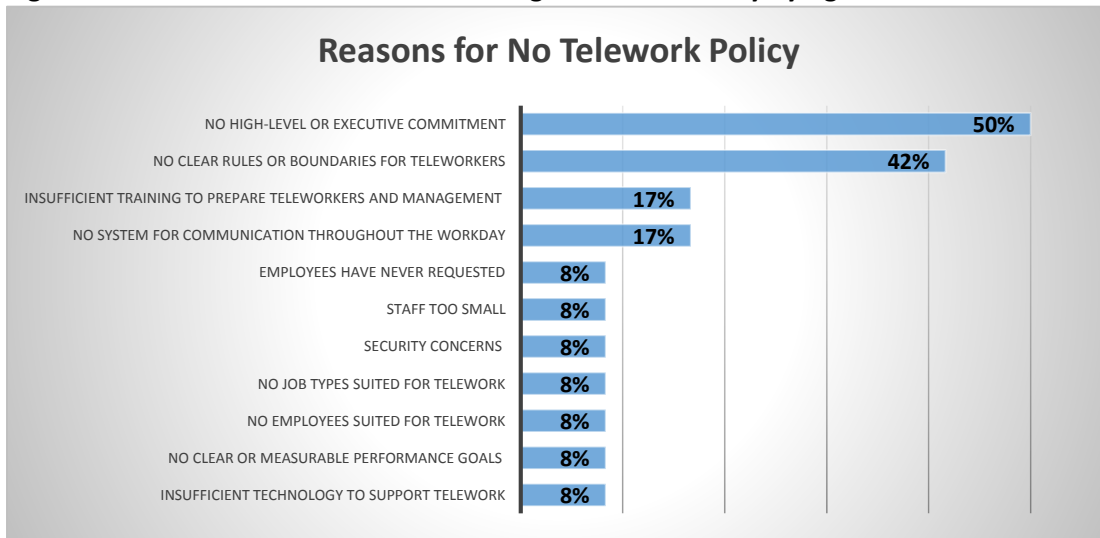
Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey

Teleworking policies vary depending on the business needs and employees of each agency. Based on the survey results, most agencies with telework policies typically include the following elements:

- Eligibility criteria (e.g., minimum employment period, minimum performance level, attendance level)
- Security and equipment standards, if not already contained in a separate security policy
- Safety guidelines
- Telework agreement, including such items as location, equipment, tasks performed, schedule, contact information, safety checklist, emergency procedures
- Teleworker training
- Supervisor training
- Availability and communications requirements
- Technical support processes
- Employee telework performance assessment
- Measurable telework program goals
- Designated telework coordinator or team

Agencies without telework policies checked a list of reasons for not having such a policy. Figure 4 illustrates the most cited reasons for agencies not to have a telework policy.

Figure 4: Most Cited Reasons for Not Having a Telework Policy by Agencies without a Policy
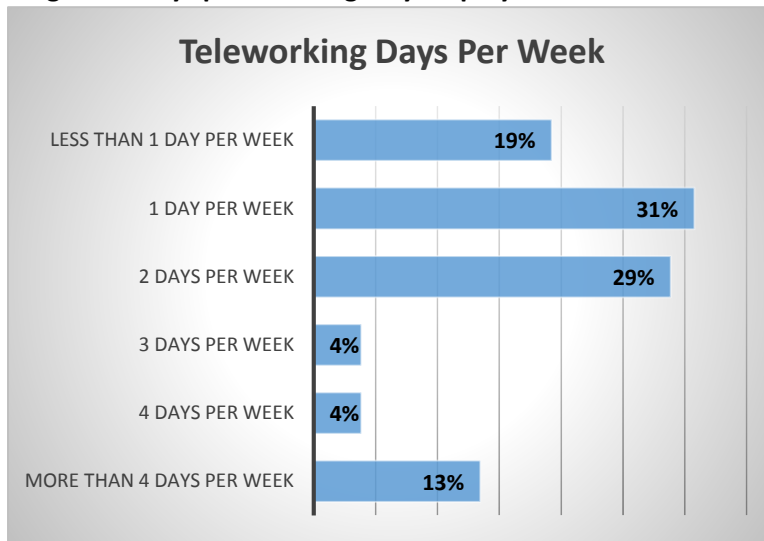

Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey

Telework Practices

Based on responses from the survey, most employees do not telework more than two days per week, and the majority of employees telework one day per week or less. Respondents stated that less than 11% of employees telework more than four days per week. Figure 5 illustrates approximately how many days per week state employees are teleworking.

Figure 5. Days per Week Agency Employees Telework

Teleworking Days Per Week

LESS THAN 1 DAY PER WEEK	19%
1 DAY PER WEEK	31%
2 DAYS PER WEEK	29%
3 DAYS PER WEEK	4%
4 DAYS PER WEEK	4%
MORE THAN 4 DAYS PER WEEK	13%

Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey

For a telework arrangement to be successful, employees need the technology and services or connectivity required to perform daily work duties. Each employee should have the equipment necessary to stay in communication with their team and managers.
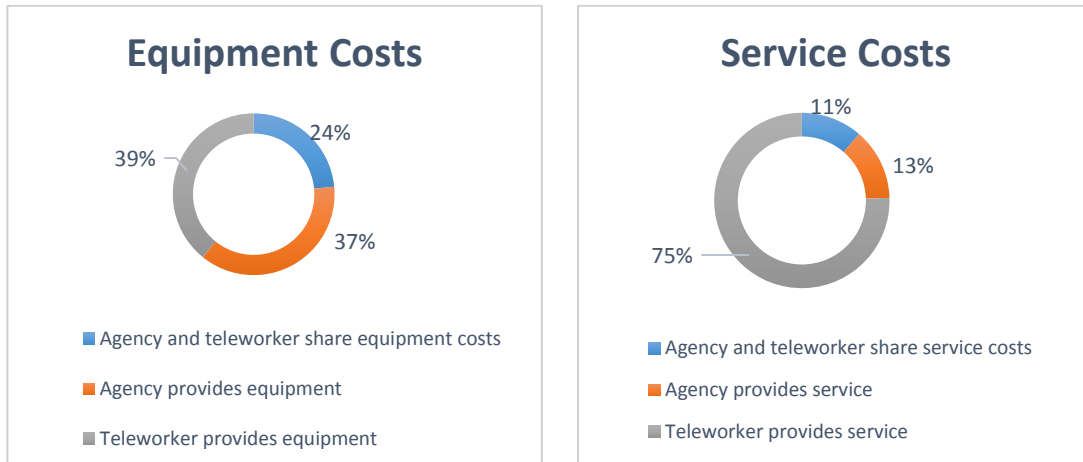
According to the survey, most agencies with a teleworking policy require employees to have an internet connection and a computer at home. Agencies determine in their telework policy how these costs will be shared by the employee and the organization. While equipment can be provided by the agency, most organizations rely on the teleworker to provide connectivity at the alternate work site. Agencies may also incorporate a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy to address technology equipment required for teleworking.   The following list includes examples of technology that agencies require their employees to have to be able to telework, in order from most to least required:

1. Internet connection
2. Computer
3. Virtual Private Network or a secure network connection
4. Mobile telephone/smart phone
5. Landline telephone
6. Collaboration software, such as SharePoint, Outlook, Lync
7. Terminal services (Remote Desktop Services)
8. Voice over Internet Phone/Softphone

Figure 6 shows how agencies are currently dividing costs for the equipment, such as laptops or desktops, and telephone or Internet services employees need to telework.

Figure 6. Equipment and Service Costs for Teleworking

Equipment Costs

- 24%
- 37%
- 39%

■ Agency and teleworker share equipment costs
■ Agency provides equipment
■ Teleworker provides equipment

Service Costs

- 11%
- 13%
- 75%

■ Agency and teleworker share service costs
■ Agency provides service
■ Teleworker provides service

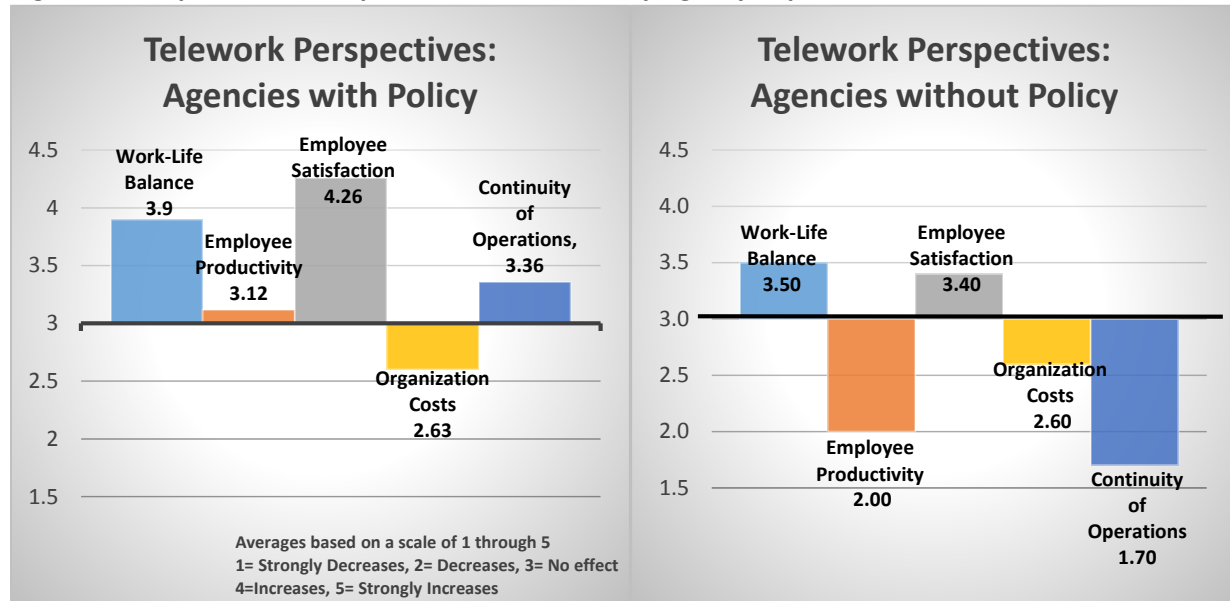*Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey*

Telework Perspectives

Perspectives regarding telework vary among agencies with and without telework policies, particularly on the effect of telework on employee productivity. The DIR survey asked agency representatives how they perceive the effect of teleworking on a scale from 1 through 5, in which 1 represented "Strongly Decreases," 3 represented "No Effect," and 5 represented "Strongly Increases" on:

- employee work/life balance
- employee productivity
- employee satisfaction
- organizational costs
- continuity of operations

The responses show differences in perspective between those agencies that do not have a telework policy and those that have either informal or formal policies. While all agree that teleworking increases employee work-life balance and satisfaction, those with a telework policy indicate that teleworking also increases employee productivity and the agency's continuity of operations. Figure 7 below shows the differences in teleworking perspectives.

Figure 7. Comparison of Perspectives on Telework by Agency Representatives with and without Policy

Source: 2014 DIR Telework Survey

Teleworking can shift an organization's work culture but clear policies and procedures help employees and managers meet the goals of the organization. In a teleworking arrangement, an employee's work is judged based on productivity, quality, and timeliness, rather than the amount of time present at work. The following practices have been shown to increase employer/employee satisfaction with a telework program:

- Set clear and measurable goals for employees and agree on metrics to evaluate performance.
- Set clear expectations and establish clear procedures to ensure the arrangement succeeds.
- Communication is essential; employees, managers, and teams must agree to terms of communication, including when employees will be available and by which method.

See all questions and answers of The 2014 DIR Telework Survey.