

Telework case study transcript

Ian Birks, CEO, Australian Services Roundtable

My name is Ian Birks, I am Chief Executive of the Australian Services Roundtable or ASR and ASR is an Industry Body focused on getting the best for the Professional Services Sector in Australia. We are here today to talk about one of the interesting dynamics that is happening globally within the Professional Services space and one of the drivers of improved productivity, and that is the whole shift towards smarter more flexible ways of working through telework.

Telework is a driver for increased productivity in the Professional Services Sector across the World. We are seeing the shift in digital technologies and the enablement of key aspects of work on the move that are really helping businesses to work differently and improve the way that they work. There is great opportunity to drive more take up and adoption of telework throughout the Professional Services Industry. We see it as a way to really improve Australia's relative positioning both within our own country domestically and globally within export markets by making smarter use of Teleworking techniques.

Many organisations that have adopted telework are very positive about the impact it has had on their business and we are going to be talking today to a couple of organisations that have taken advantage of telework, two different types of Professional Services Firms to get a profile about what they have done within a Teleworking environment.

Tony Moodie, Founding Principal, Moodie and Associates:

We're a civil infrastructure design and management firm, we design, we document, we tender and we manage the construction of civil infrastructure. That's roads, drainage, water and sewerage.

Digital technology makes what we do possible. There's no question about that! I think what has happened now is there is almost a culture of home based professionals and sub-professionals who are working on the same lines as we are operating.

All these people are sufficiently experience and resourced to operate without direct supervision, that's what makes it work for us.

The productivity improvement gives us a competitive edge in that we don't have big city rents to pay and we don't have a management and administrative rump which adds to costs so we are very cost effective and very competitive and that appeals to a significant segment of our market.

I think that the work, life benefits are significant. I estimate in my own case, that I probably save, just looking at the time that it takes my wife to commute to and from work, I save up to 7 to 8 hours a week which means I can do more productive work during the day or I can spend that extra time marketing and promoting the business or other interests.

From a productivity perspective our subcontractors are locked into lump sum fixed price sub contracts and they are generally, invariably good at what they do. They are experienced operators who know exactly what they are doing and the supervision that we give them is limited.

Both our clients and the authorities that have to review and approve our work, Local Government and Federal Government agencies in some instances and our land developer clients are all coming around to accepting drawings in digital format. There is no need to provide hard copies any more. That is a big win for us. It makes life a lot easier. We are moving towards the paperless office in terms of storage of design documentation.

Paul Meissner, Director, Five Ways Group:

So what Five Ways Group does, my business, we are 100% based in the cloud, we are a Professional Service Accounting firm with clients all over the World. We have no fixed address. We get up in the

morning and where ever the mood takes us, we can work from anywhere.

Teleworking or working remotely is a massive part of our business. It allows us to engage with the clients. And it allows us to be really available to our clients not just when we are sitting at a fixed location. You never have to say to a client, when I get back to my desk I will answer that question because you are always available.

The main benefit of teleworking for my business is reduced costs. We don't need a flash office with a flash board room... although they are nice.. and we can reduce costs on infrastructure we don't need our own servers and we don't need all that hardware. We are flexible to work where we want.

Some of the challenges we face with teleworking are, certain staff at different times of the day enjoy the company of others they enjoy bouncing ideas off each other, you get a lot out of round table discussions, when you are teleworking you are often working on your own and you loose a little bit of that. So we try to find fixed times during the week, we try to make sure that we are catching up once or twice or three times a week as much as we can, we do teleworking for the rest of the time but it is important to really come together, always being available for clients but also always being available for staff.

The clients view of teleworking is very interesting. The clients now days, I really find they are just after accessibility to their accountant, or to their professional services provider.

It has been really interesting that clients of mine really don't mind where I am or what I am doing before I am able to help them or after I am able to help them. Or they really care about is that they are getting the value, that they are getting the answer. I can be overseas or on the golf course at a café or I can be sitting next them in the office, it is really about the real time being able to assist a client.

Not any industry with any set of systems can necessarily jump into telework and have it work right out of the box. What underpins our ability to work remotely is the use of cloud solutions, cloud software. It's the access to data, its access to what you need to do your job while you are not sitting at your desk. While there is not the pile of papers.

You can't take a very paper based work environment and automatically send (staff) home with a couple of shopping bags full of files. It is teleworking but you won't get the outcomes you want. Having some online working spaces, being able to do a lot of your job online, will really promote and give you the benefit from teleworking.

Ian Birks, CEO, Australian Services Roundtable:

It is important to recognize that the services sector in Australia is actually 75% of the economy by contribution. We are talking about a very large part of the Australian workforce. Almost 80% of the Australian workforce. That workforce needs to be as productive and capable as possible to compete both domestically and internationally.

ASR believes that use of smart work techniques like teleworking put the Australian professional services firm at the forefront of international competitiveness.