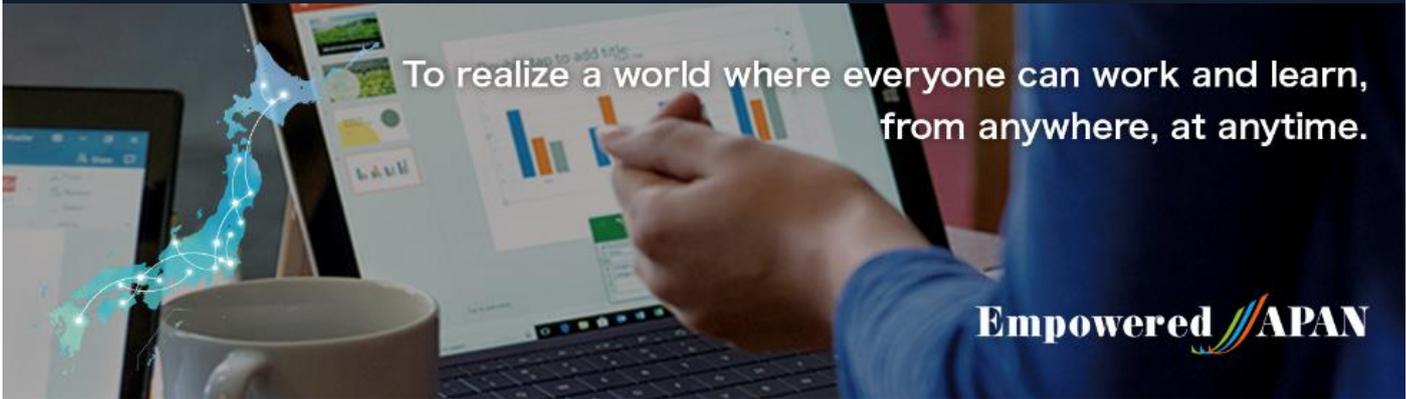


Empowered JAPAN Webinar Report



Empowered JAPAN Executive Steering Committee was established in 2018, "To realize a world where everyone can work and learn, from anywhere, at anytime." To promote the true value of workstyle innovation including telework, the committee has been coordinating symposiums in both Tokyo and regional cities. And in collaboration with various local governments, Microsoft, and partners, the committee has been serving as an advisor to provide telework training for both corporate and individuals. In response to the spread of infection of corona virus (COVID-19) and the government announcement on February 25, 2020, which included the request to citizens to telework, the steering committee made the decision to launch a series of free webinars starting from March 17, 2020, to provide practical information for individuals and organizations across the nation, to telework and/or practice online education.

Category : Learning from case studies

companies

Date : March, 23, 2020

Speaker : Atsushi Oyaizu

Executive Advisor,
Microsoft Japan Co., Ltd.



Entered Microsoft in 1995. After working in the sales and marketing departments, led the BPA (Business Productivity Advisor) Team from 2002, supporting over 100 user projects on improving white-collar productivity and changing work styles. Since 2009, has issued many recommendations on work-style reform from his position as Executive Advisor. In 2014, served as an Executive Deputy Member of "Telework Month," a national movement for the promotion of work-style reforms which was implemented by four ministries (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry; Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism). Has served as a part-time instructor at educational institutions such as Waseda University and the University of Tokyo Graduate School, and has given many lectures.

Strategic Teleworking

~Misunderstandings and Methods for Success

Such as Going Paperless~

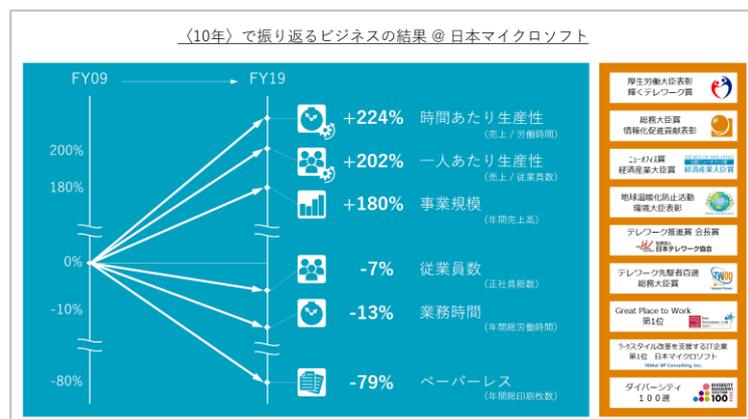
While the annual sales increased by 180%, the total annual working hours of all employees decreased by 600,000 hours (minus 13%), and the total amount of printing on paper decreased by 79%. This is what Microsoft Japan Co. Ltd. has accomplished in the 10 years from 2009 to 2019.

Currently, Microsoft Japan has a workstyle that allows employees to exchange opinions "anytime, anywhere, with anyone" and make decisions. This is the result of "strategically, and sometimes forcefully" (Mr. Oyaizu) promoting telework.

Mr. Oyaizu joined the company in 1995, and has been leading the Business Productive Advisor Team since 2002. He has been engaged in business reform and productivity improvement, and supported over 100 client companies. Mr. Oyaizu said that Microsoft Japan made the accomplishments based on the experience that Microsoft Japan has gained through workstyle reform despite repeated failures.

"People think Microsoft Japan can adopt telework and go paperless because our employees are special. That is not true. Ten years ago, our office was in Shinjuku, Tokyo. If you see photos of the office, you may think it is a logistics warehouse. The office was filled with cabinets, lockers, cardboard, and loads of paper. We were printing on 20 million sheets a year, so we are not special." (Mr. Oyaizu)

The current office in Shinagawa, Tokyo does not have any of these office materials. Employees work in various places, i.e. home, in transit, in addition to the office. The company reformed workstyle to "reduce work instead of paper" (Mr. Oyaizu) which will be explained later.



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"The purpose of the reform that started in 2002 was not to support the weak. It was to improve productivity and efficiency. Frankly, we wanted to work quicker. As a result, it made positive impacts on employees who were caring for children or elderly people, staggered working hours, and environmental load reduction. However, these were not our initial objectives." (Mr. Oyaizu)

According to Mr. Oyaizu, as long as only employees who stay in the office longer are evaluated positively, telework will not be permeative or habituated. No matter how well the philosophy, systems, and ICT are implemented, if telework is only for specific people at special times in limited places, it does not work, and the weak cannot be supported.



Then, what do we need to do for most of the employees to work throughout the day anywhere or somewhere near the client, and collaborate with various people? According to Mr. Oyaizu, the company had three challenges: organize to reduce or eliminate tasks, manage systems with ICT that is convenient and secure, and change behavior instead of awareness.

"Digitalizing sales slips does not reduce the amount of paper we use because there is always someone who prints the slip for verification, describing, and recording. The important thing is to reduce the work itself, outsource it, or leave it to AI. For example, at Microsoft, the process of checking contract exceptions was reduced by half after careful examination. Also, AI predicts orders that may be received for each division." (Mr. Oyaizu)

If procedural tasks, i.e. data input and reporting, are trimmed, the amount of paper usage will be significantly reduced, which helps employees to concentrate on high value-added work. This is the telework that Microsoft Japan is aiming to achieve.

In order to reduce or eliminate business processes and roles, the involvement of top management is essential. Mr. Oyaizu emphasized that structural reform is the key, and top management must act and instruct each division instead of leaving it up to them.

The second challenge the company had for adopting telework was to create a convenient and secure environment. For this purpose, it was necessary to fully mobilize organizational management such as labor and evaluation systems while controlling ICT at a high level. "If there is a risk of information leakage when you work at a café, or if your superior suspects you are skipping work when you work from home, no employees will telework including myself." (Mr. Oyaizu)

What is effective in managing telework is to quantitatively visualize the role, responsibility area, and progress of work. You need to be able to describe your work objectively.

The third challenge was the failures in which Microsoft Japan experienced before reaching the "change behavior instead of awareness" concept, Mr. Oyaizu revealed. The company started with awareness reform.

"The President directly instructed us, the company created posters and manuals, and information sessions were held multiple times. However, it barely changed the behavior of the employees. Awareness is a matter of the individual's mind, and it should not be controlled by the company. On the other hand, the behavior of employees can be changed by the company with a certain level of enforcement. For example, set a telework day or week. When employees try teleworking, they will be aware and expect telework. It will promote innovation and lead to the improvement of efficiency. The key to promptly reform is to actually try, rather than explaining and discussing." (Mr. Oyaizu)

According to him, even Microsoft Japan had a difficult time in promoting telework. There was opposition, complaints and rejection from the employees. However, it changed after the Great East Japan earthquake of 2011. Employees were able to continue teleworking for several weeks while sheltering at home. That experience led to the confidence to work "anytime, anywhere, with anyone."

"You can start teleworking as an emergency measure against COVID-19 for today and tomorrow, and you really should. However, I am certain that this experience will give you confidence and you will realize the true meaning of telework in the future." (Mr. Oyaizu)