

Empowered JAPAN Webinar Report

To realize a world where everyone can work and learn, from anywhere, at anytime.



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 : System (labor work, subsidy, internal rules and remote working manuals)

Date : March, 25, 2020

Speaker : Kaori Takeda

Labor and Social Security Attorney (Certified Social Insurance and Labour Consultant Corporation NSR)
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Labor and Social Security Attorney, Regional Informatization Advisor, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Visiting Researcher, Japan Telework Association. Has given more than 300 lectures at government offices and other business seminars, and has handled more than 1,000 projects to support the promotion of telework at companies and organizations throughout Japan. Authored the series "Forefront of Telework (total of 24 articles)" for the Rodo Shimibun newspaper, supervised the production of "Time for Action! Work-Style Reform Through Telework" for Nikkei Mook, co-authored the "Textbook on Introducing and Operating Telework" for Nihon Horei, and wrote a column for the 136th issue of "Change! Japan Telecommunications" published by the Cabinet Office. Has also been featured many times in newspapers, magazines, and TV programs.

Concept of Labor Management and Evaluation

Required for Telework

Telework is a flexible work style that uses information and communication technology (ICT) in order to effectively use time and space. Currently, working from home is strongly required to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Ms. Kaori Takeda, a labor and social security attorney, recommends separately considering labor management and evaluation for the categories of "emergency telework" and "telework after full-scale implementation of telework." Ms. Takeda, an expert counselor at the Japan Telework Association, is a professional who has given over 300 seminars on telework and assisted in the introduction of telework for more than 1,000 projects. She is also a regional informatization advisor to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications and also serves as a committee member of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

Let's begin by discussing emergency telework. According to Ms. Takeda, there are three points of labor management which require particular attention: employment rules, the burden of cost, and evaluation. When leaving working hours the same and only changing the location of work, telework can be immediately implemented even from tomorrow. Furthermore, there is no need to change employment rules. "Some managers may worry if employees are truly focusing on their work or complying with the service regulations in the employment rules," noted Ms. Takeda. "Other managers may worry about the risk of information leakage. However, if you want to specify supplementary rules, you can exchange individual pledges and memorandums with teleworkers."

When changing working hours, companies should think carefully before deciding to implement a flextime system, etc. This is because flextime systems cannot be implemented unless stated in the employment rules. There are no exemptions to the Labor Standards Act, even in emergencies. If you want to allow employees to take "temporary breaks," those breaks must be taken with the scope of the employment rules. One example is using the provisions on "time off for personal reasons" as listed in the employment rules. Once work conditions have settled down, companies should create "Telework Regulations" based on the experience of emergency telework. Then, after listening to the opinions of the employee representatives, the company should notify the Labor Standards Inspection Office and proceed with full-scale introduction by notifying employees.



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When using telework for only part of working hours, the Labor Standards Inspection Chief has the discretion to decide whether or not work accident insurance will be applied in the event of an accident while traveling from one location to another. When considering the difficulty of separating public and private time during travel and the benefits of reducing travel time, Ms. Takeda suggests avoiding such work styles. Instead, she recommends the combination of half-day telework and half-day paid leave. "To my client companies, I recommend a style which combines half-day paid leave and half-day telework," said Ms. Takeda. "Simply by taking a half-day of paid leave once per month, the employee will fulfill the obligation of taking five days of paid leave per year. Furthermore, using telework even for just a half day once per month is effective for supporting BCP in the event of an emergency.

Another concern of implementing telework is the burden of cost placed on employees. If your employee regulations do not require employees to bear costs, then do not allow them to do so. "The company should pay for all the work-related expenses such as necessary communication equipment and postage," said Ms. Takeda. "Doing so will prevent conflict with Article 89 of the Labor Standards Act and eliminate the need to change the employment rules."

In that case, how should companies handle utility bills which are difficult to separate into public and private charges? According to calculations by NSR, an organization to which Ms. Takeda belongs, the daily utility bill is between 60.3 and 218.9 yen. Based on this estimate, companies should issue a telework allowance, or should issue a stipend based on the number of telework hours. There are also some laughable cases in which employees complained of "having to pay for their own coffee and snacks while working from home." Even in such cases, please carefully explain the purpose and significance of working from home, and hold in-depth discussions with labor and management.

In terms of evaluation, there is no need to change the evaluation system just for telework if telework is only performed once or twice per week. First of all, it is important to communicate while utilizing IT and to "visualize work" through daily reports and job analysis. If telework is used frequently, it may be possible to introduce performance-based evaluation; however, what is necessary is to raise the awareness of managers and ensure fair evaluation.

"If telework results in a lower evaluation, or if reporting and management requirements are stricter only when engaging in telework, then no one will use telework," pointed out Ms. Takeda

Although the topic deviates slightly from telework, let's introduce response if an employee is suspected of being infected with COVID-19. If the employee takes leave voluntarily, he or she is considering of being absent due to sickness or taking paid leave. If the employee is ordered to go on leave by the company, the company must pay a leave allowance (at least 60% of the average wage). In this case, it is possible for employees to take paid leave at their own wish; however, they cannot be forced to take paid leave, with the exclusion of systematic use of paid leave or designated seasonal paid leave. If the COVID-19 test shows a positive result unfortunately and the employee takes leave per work restrictions specified by the prefectural governor, generally speaking, this does not constitute "leave take for a reason attributable to the employee," and it is not necessary to pay a leave allowance. If the employee is covered by health insurance, he or she will be issued the injury and illness allowance.

So, what are the important points of labor management in order to fully introduce telework after an emergency response? We will now explain these points based on the "Telework Guidelines" that were formulated in 2018.

According to Ms. Takeda, if a person is employed instead of being self-employed, "all laws related to laborers will apply." We should also comply with information equipment guidelines in the Industrial Safety and Health Act; specifically, standards for information equipment work such as recommending taking a break from work once every 60 minutes. Even during teleworking, the need to properly ascertain working hours remains unchanged. Working hours consist of all "time spent under supervision and instruction of the employer." The user must confirm and record the start and end of work by recording logs on the computer, e-mails, chats, etc.

"Ascertaining the status of working hours, which was mandated by the Industrial Safety and Health Act in 2019, is required to ensure the health of workers, not to calculate wages," explained Ms. Takeda. "Please note that this also applies to employees using the discretionary labor system and to management supervisors."

At Ms. Takeda's employer NSR, images of the entire office are shown on Zoom 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Teleworkers are always connected to this Zoom stream. However, there are rules such as turning on only the speaker and then turning on the microphone just when speaking. This Zoom stream is not used to confirm if employees are at their desks; instead, the aim is to share the atmosphere of the workplace in order to facilitate communication by remote workers. To ensure privacy and security, NSR does not stream images of the employees' desktops or clear images, and does not record images.

At the end of her lecture, Ms. Takeda emphasized that telework is "a system that enables work for people who want to work." In order to make emergency telework a success and then to implement full-scale telework, it is necessary for employees to exercise self-management, and to work with a sense of responsibility and integrity.

1.4.2 評価（見える化、コミュニケーションが）しやすい就業環境

- 24時間365日事務所全体の動画を流して空気感を共有し、遠隔でもコミュニケーションしやすく声をかけやすい状態にしておく。
- オフィス内でも各自が自席からWeb会議（Teams、Zoomなど）やWeb朝礼に参加することで、遠隔参加のテレワーカーのみが特別にならないようにする。
- Web会議の画面共有等を利用し、打合せや指導も行えるようにする。
- Web会議ツールはテレワーカー側は常時スピーカーのみONにし、声かけ時にマイクをONにして話しかける。
- 会議資料は事前にデータ配布して効率的に行う。 <NSRでの業務の見える化>

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（出典）テレワーク推進ツール集
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