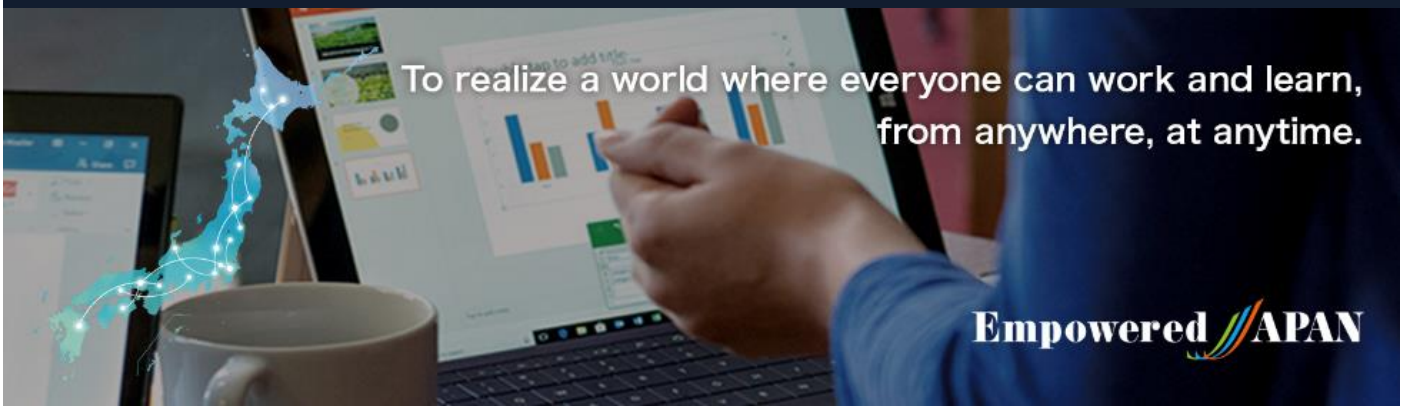
Empowered JAPAN Webinar Report



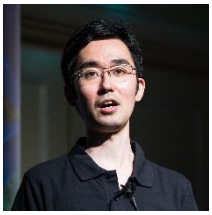
Empowered JAPAN Executive Steering Committee was established in 2018, “To realize a world where everyone can work and learn, from anywhere, at anytime.” To promote the true value of workstyle innovation including telework, the committee has been coordinating symposiums in both Tokyo and regional cities. 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： System (labor work, subsidy, internal rules and remote working manuals)

Date： March, 31, 2020

Speaker： Ryota Motojima

Product Manager,
Commercial Product Division,
Lenovo Japan Corporation



Involved in product planning for ThinkPad and other corporate computers. Also responsible for promoting work-style reforms throughout the entire Lenovo NEC Holdings B.V.
In addition to authoring written works such as Let's Get Started! A Telework Start Guide, is engaged in other activities aimed at promoting the spread of telework in Japan based on in-house knowledge.

Let's Get Started! Telework: Based on Four-and-a-Half Years of Learning at the Lenovo Group

The Lenovo Group has been using telework since 2015. Currently, Lenovo is actively promoting the use of the telework system which has been reviewed and introduced through repeated trial-and-error. When using the three perspectives of "systems," "environment," and "culture" to reflect on various efforts during the last four and a half years, Lenovo clearly identified themes for establishing the system. There is much to be learned from the company's response to COVID-19, as well as examples of mistakes and learning in regards to telework.

"At the Lenovo Group, our premise is that simply preparing a system is not enough to ensure functionality," explains Motojima. Based on that premise, the Group divides the steps until utilization of telework is review, introduction (trial), promotion, and establishment. "Currently, our company sees ourselves as being in the step of promoting usage the use of telework," says Motojima. The reason why Lenovo takes this viewpoint is because their ultimate goal is to establish a sustainable telework system.

Telework systems are rapidly spreading in many corporations and organizations. "However, it is a waste if telework is not established as culture," says Motojima. The reason for this is because there are goals which can be achieved by using the method of telework.

In the case of Lenovo, telework has increased employee creativity through diverse work styles, improved the competitiveness of companies, and contributed to society by reducing congestion during peak commuting times. Furthermore, as a corporate mission to support digital transformation through the power of technology, Lenovo seeks to return the knowledge gained to society in order to further spread telework. Additionally, promoting usage with such a purpose also leads to the acquisition and performance of outstanding human resources.

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In principle, when examining Lenovo's teleworking efforts from the perspective of a system, the targeted individuals are employees and contract employees, and there is no restriction on the number of incomes. Moreover, as operation rules, the company uses simple methods such as keeping Microsoft Teams active while using telework in order to ensure that contact is possible. At the core of this kind of system operation is the concept of ABW (Activity Based Working), which consists of having employees select their own environment in order to maximize productivity.

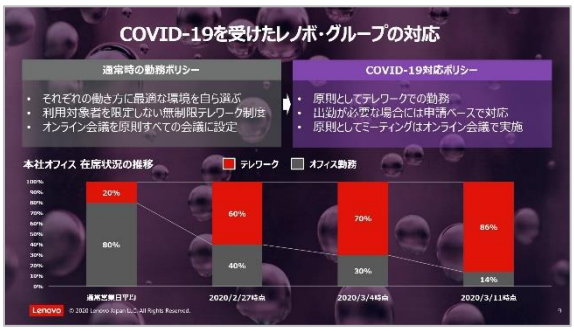
In terms of environment, the goal is to use the power of technology to improve productivity regardless of location. Currently, the telework environment is supported through initiatives such as issuing notebook computers, replacing landlines with softphones, and using Teams for business chat in order to maintain a high level of communication. Also, as an example of failure, inexpensive headsets were uncomfortable and had poor sound quality. This resulted in problems such as not being able to hear voices during meetings.

"Although there is no such thing as 100% security, information must be absolutely protected," explains Motojima. Based on this recognition, it is important to thoroughly implement basic measures such as encrypting devices, setting startup passwords, and installing the latest version of anti-virus software.

Finally, from the perspective of "culture," a top-down approach is the most important aspect in transforming consciousness for making telework a part of daily work. At the same time as implementation by management and holding of telework days, responding to each problem that is identified from a bottom-up perspective will make it possible to change overall consciousness and establish telework as part of corporate culture.

On the other hand, according to an internal survey (before responding to COVID-19), about 60% of all respondents indicated that they use telework at least once a week, and more than 90% of them say that productivity is improved or remains at the same level. This is proof that productivity can be maintained without going to the office. Conversely, although there were only a few negative comments, some respondents had opinions such as "I can work faster in the office because I can ask questions to the employee working next to me," "I have no place to work at home," and "I don't want my family to hear how I handle complaints on the telephone." Such negative comments must be carefully identified through periodic surveys and then addressed. There are also other problems such as the risk of telework leading to long working hours, and the inability to switch between work and private time. These problems cannot be ignored as telework becomes generally established.

Presently, Lenovo is asking employees not to come to the office due to COVID-19. In principle, all employees are using telework and special permission must be received to come to the office. First of all, the company started by recommending telework to the extent that it does not interfere with duties, and then moved to requiring telework as a general rule. In normal times, 20% of employees had used telework. As of February 27, this number had increased to 60%, and then to 70% as of March 4 and approximately 90% as of March 11. This smooth response was partly due to the fact that the Lenovo originally had a mechanism to establish a telework system. "Even so, we recognized that suddenly shifting all employees to telework would interfere with work duties, so we designed a step-by-step plan," says Motojima. This is an important point when introducing a telework system in the future. Also, in the case of manufacturing, development, etc., there is some work which can only be performed by coming to the office or factory. Such duties must be separated from duties which can be performed using telework. This is an important point that must be addressed by many departments.



Motojima's report is a valuable case example for expanding telework systems in the future. Lenovo's use of telework was not immediately perfect. It required a period of trial and error. "Today, technology is evolving and social conditions are changing," observes Motojima. "By incorporating know-how, it is now possible to shorten the time required for establishing telework." This is an excellent time to start efforts for realizing sustainable telework.