

Feasibility of telecommuting by improving operations self-management in air export freight forwarding

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<p>This study of feasibility of remote work focus on self-management improvement.</p> <p>The research process and result can be used for academic purpose.</p> <p>Significate digitalization has been transforming business model world-wide. The new wave brings impact in air freight forwarding area as well. Meanwhile technology developing and new systems have been programed to fulfill new needs. Telecommuting, working from home, is no longer just a dream. Potential feasibility exits among operational professionals.</p> <p>While continuing this study, the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak is continuing spreading around the world. People are highly requested to stay at home. Employees are required to work from home if it is not absolutely necessary to go to office. Therefore, the study becomes an urge of how possible telecommuting apply to air export operation as well.</p> <p>In this research, it starts from understanding air export operation, to analyzing operations works in details by list problems, potential risks and possible implementations, furthermore, to figure out what actions can be taken by operations in air export in order to make telecommuting applicable on operational staff. It is expected to provide practical executable implementations to support for employees of operations when telecommuting is expected or needed.</p> <p>DHL Global Forwarding (Finland) Oy, as the biggest forwarding company in Finland, it is valued as representative in this study. It is based on daily operations experiences, observations, and feedback, development suggestions will be proposed.</p> <p>The purpose is to help employees, in this case focusing on air export operations, to understand the importance of self-management under telecommuting circumstances and guide employee to self-manage and self-improve for self-career developing, further benefit organization as well.</p> <p>As results, three proposals are offered solutions for operations. Most important of all is to set positive attitude as precondition. It is encouraged that operations proactively keep self-training to enhance individual professional skills. It is also emphasized to keep communicating with teammates as teamwork is vital for improving efficiency and productivity in work, moreover for harmonious working environment.</p>	
Keywords Telecommuting, self-management, communication	

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1 Introduction

Digitalization has shifted various business industries significantly. More and more companies have been adopting modern tools and transforming business mode to digitalised forms. In air cargo industry, most freight forwarding companies have provided leadership, finance, sales, working tool kit of a laptop with adequate programs, access to database and internet connection. They can carry the mobile devices to work remotely.

However, for operations in freight forwarding who handle paper work on daily bases, they also have expectations and needs to work remotely, or telecommuting specifically, for reasons such as inconvenient transportation to work place, advanced knowledge of usage of working tools, various multitasks shifts. Nowadays, operations still have to go to working place to finish job tasks of printing out document in paper form, wrapping up pouch, printing out label stickers. Although in recent years, paperless e-freight has been implemented increasingly around the world, some professions anyway require on-site manual handling at working places.

While continuing current study, the Covid-19 outbreak is still spreading in most countries in the world (WHO 03 June 2020). Governments request or even force people to stay at home. Employees are asked to work from home as much as possible if it is not absolutely necessary to go to work place. Telecommuting becomes an urge or a must due to the force majeure. Air export operations, as well, try to survive with less staff, but somehow same amount of work load under such exceptional circumstances.

This study will focus on digging deep current situation of air freight operations behaviour and thoughts, searching for solutions if there is feasibility to go higher level of paperless process for telecommuting oriented. Of course, change of such digitalization is challenging, especially affecting people titled operation. The study tries to understand operations real consideration, needs, expectations and find out improvements can be developed if operations can take actions from themselves. By acting proactively, to benefit both individual and company are expected.

1.1 Background

In freight forwarding industry, programs such as “Digital cargo”, “eFreight”, have been pushed world-wide since about fifteen year ago. Air freight forwarders tilted operations used to handle air shipments by sending fax, handing over original shipping document

with ink stamps and blue ink signatures. Communication methods were conventional with low speed (IATA 27 May 2020)

By generally adopting e-tools, such as e-awb, EDI (aka. Electronic Data Interchange), EDM (aka. Electronic Document Management), great part of shipping process has been transformed digitally which means much less paper work in physical form. Shipping information can be generated, executed and transferred via online platform, forwarding programs. Furthermore, nowadays, database has been connected between forwarders, airlines, warehouse, customs, and even customers. Operations daily work become more paperless and spend most of time reading emails (IATA 27 May 2020.)

Since business can be done online, face-to-face conversation is no longer the most popular communication channel. For example, salesmen can make phone call or write an email to make offers to new customers. Better than before, email confirmation is acceptable without extra original stamped and signed document in paper form. Needless to say, speed of information transfer from sender to receiver shorten from weeks, days, hours to seconds. Efficiency has been increased significantly. The best of all, working online does not require people to travel to a specific office. Jobs can be done as long as users have enough equipment such as smart phone or a laptop, with access to internet and information resources (Messenger 2010, 18.)

In Finland, DHL Global Forwarding (Finland) Oy, as one of the leading freight forwarding companies, has the pressure and motivation to cope with new trend in the industry. Air freight forwarding plays important role in the industry. Operations conduct practical jobs on a daily basis. Traditional forwarding operations need to collect paper document. However, new technology, new styled mechanism of organization has gradually changed such daily routine. The change has far more quick and dramatic as many operation start to be anxious and uncertain (DHL 30 May 2019.)

Presenteeism at work used to be headache in an organization, however, it is replaced by working smartly and efficiently without sitting at desk doing nothing. Paper work has changed to digital form. E-signature and e-stamp are more widely accepted same as chopped paper document. People need or prefer to work at remote locations rather than in fixed company office. Work at or from home, hot desking or desk sharing has been more familiar and popular nowadays. It helps improving efficiency and work-life balance for people (Cooper & Lu 2018, 125.)

Unfortunately, it seems certain type of work which does not require presence on-site, such as salesmen, managers, IT support. For operation people who handle practical paperwork every work day, it seems impossible and unworkable. Is it feasible of remote work or telecommuting for operations at all? Or to what level, remote work can also apply to operations. Since Covid-19 outbreak has being getting worse, government has requests people to stay at home and go to office to work unless it is necessary. Telecommuting becomes an urge to conduct remote working in short notice (DHL 31 May 2020.)

As operation, it is important to understand what these change mean and affect individually and in organization-wise. Maintaining conventional work style is not possible anymore. To be active and open-minded welcoming the new change and focus on self-management and further self-development is essential. Moreover, awareness as player in team work and enhance communication is one of the key issues (Morgan 2017, 49.)

1.2 Scope and objective

The main focus of this study is telecommuting, meaning fully or partially working from home, not from standard office. It is more emphasized self-management from subjective self-driven point of view instead of external forces. It is limited in air freight industry and narrowed down to only concentrate on people who operations are titled air export operations or customer service specialist working in air export department in forwarding company. The study is not about technical professional skills. It demonstrates the combination of operation professional knowledge and mind-set of self-awareness, self-expectation in a wider view. The forwarding company size is medium sized or larger sized enterprises with over 200 employees in international freight forwarding industry. (Messenger 2010, 18.)

There are mainly two reasons to carry out this study. Firstly, telecommuting is fast rising trend driven by global cargo digitalization, and paperless oriented for environmental protection. In some business divisions, remote work not only increase efficiency, but also strengthen employees' commitment which company can benefit from both. Multi-skilled and committed employees have expectation to have same opportunity to work from home. It is worth to dive deeper to find out possibility and feasibility, for better performance from people who actually participate the operations duty. Second reason is stay-home policy forced by Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. For operations, they traditionally practice field work with presence in standard office, now they are forced to work from home under unexpected special circumstances of force majeure (DHL 30 May 2019.)

There are outcomes are expected from the study. Firstly, to answer whether it is feasible for operations in air export to work from home. Secondly, to understand telecommuting environment for air export operations and find out development obstacles. Thirdly, to support operations by giving practical executable suggestions and solutions in order to achieve healthy and balanced daily working life with improving in efficiency and productivity under the situation of telecommuting. The solutions will be helpful to enhance professional skills, knowledge on organization network, communication channels and commitment.

For company management and remote leadership concerned, the sub-objective is to know operations needs in deed in order to make correct decision to provide better working tools and enhance company organization function. Effective communications between team members, within each team, between teams, within organization are essential. Building best communication form a well-functioned network which optimize forwarding procedure with higher flexibility.

1.3 Research problems and analyse

This study aims to analyse and answer the following main question and sub-questions:

- How operations of air export in freight forwarding can achieve communicating by improve self-management?
 - Why does operation change to telecommuting?
 - What are benefits of working from home comparing work in office?
 - How to take actions for better work performance under telecommuting?

The key concept is telecommuting. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of telecommuting is defined as below:

“A situation in which someone works for an organization from their home and communicates with the main office and customers, etc. by phone or email.”

(Cambridge Dictionary 31 May 2020)

The concept of telecommuting is relatively new and frequently used in recent years. It is a little different to remote work. Telecommuting refers working from home which people still go to office some days. Remote work refers people working at home who don't have particular office. A qualitative research is used for this study. The study case is telecommuting of operations in DHL Global Forwarding (Finland) Oy handling air cargo outwards from Helsinki-Vantaa airport (Silverman 2010, 137.)

Based on researchers' study question, this study is from operation point of view, proactively considering practical actions can be taken. Unlike sitting in standard office, operations have new enforcement to work remotely. Since this might be new situation to most of people, uncertainties and wonders are raised. Taking digitalization and enforcement into consideration, operations look quite different than a decade ago. On one hand, companies want to put more effort in paperless, cost effective and environment protective, on the other hand, operations have willingness and expectation of possibility of working remotely.

Remote working, mainly from home, can be various places rather than office (Cambridge Dictionary 02 June 2020.) Differ from remote work, telecommuting means working from home. Under telecommuting mode, companies are able to provide operations working tools and willingness of being supportive in order to maintain or encourage outcomes from operations. Then, while operations can practise telecommuting, can operations in air export do better in improving efficiency while working from home instead being present in standard office? What practical effective actions can operations take proactively in order to achieve better outcome?

In order to answer above questions, researcher, also as participant of operations, set starting point of understand air export operations work description, further to analyse status of working and mental state. Operations daily routing is very clear and standard due to nature of the work. Procedure and handing are following standard operation protocol. Operations job task is to take received orders, follow instructions, handle accordingly, keep recording, and ensure traceable. Obviously, not like sales, operations work are with limitation, much less flexibility, and high request in common standard. Therefore, analyse is down to the utmost end of process as detailed as possible to evaluate how the communication by operations are conducted.

2 Air export operation

Air export in forwarding needs operations to coordinate shipment moving from one place to another destination which place is usually in foreign country. Shipping process is highly required well organized team work. Quality of communication of team work decide successfulness of shipping process. About fifteen years ago, with basic configuration in office, operation used fixed line phone, fax, type writer, dot matrix printer, carbonless duplicate paper for communication to process shipments. Operations practise their job with these equipment. Only in less than twenty years, all business industry, including air freight forwarding, may be surprised and excited when global digitalization re-shaped business module. Operations started to ask “please kindly send us an email to.....” instead of calling for a fax copy for confirmation (IATA 03 June 2020)

2.1 Roles of operations in air export forwarding

It might give delusional impression that operations work is not difficult without challenges, as long as procedures is based on request, regulation, and company policy correctly, job is done easily. On the one hand, it is not challenging somehow. Operations usually only wait and receive instructions and take actions accordingly, unlike sales need to reach annual target volume. On the other hand, operations might be doing most comprehensive implementation work in air exporting (IATA 03 June 2020.)

Based on researcher’s own observation, five roles of operations in air export are described as:

- Contact window to customers. Customer always firstly contacts operation who handles his shipment directly, asking whether his shipments are well taken care of arrive at destination in good condition. Operations present company and deliver actual service product to customers.
- Control tower of shipment process. From arranging pick up shipment from shipper, booking best flight schedule, while preparing document before departure, it all depends on operations overall planning and organising.
- Information centre to generate actual shipments. To prepare shipments ready for shipping, operations collect and gather information from different parties, such as packing details from shipper, security check from warehouse terminal, booked flights information from airline, selling price from sales, costs from subcontractors.
- Shipments execution. Operations organize information to issue awb, to make export declaration, and to apply supportive official documents. Operations’ work is to implement shipping instructions and generate actual shipments which start to move from origin to destination.
- Back up on duty call. Usually senior operations is the most reliable know-how and on duty call to response emergency or take immediate action on particular tasks.

2.2 Paper-age for operations

Before digitalization, operations received shipping instruction order from customer by posted letter or fax which in paper form. Every time, operation needed to obtain confirmation of stamp and signature from customer. According to IATA definition, The Air Waybill (AWB) is a critical air cargo document that constitutes the contract of carriage between the “shipper” and the “carrier” (airline) (iata.org). Freight forwarder as agent of carrier (airline) issues AWB. Operations handle issuing AWB which must be printed on carbonless duplicated paper from dot matrix printer. Sometimes, according to regulation or special requests, original document issued by officials needed with original stamp and signature. Not only between customers, airlines, or customs externally, but also internal contacting was with countless paperwork, such as work manual, guidebook, regulations, forms, invoices, etc. Piles of paper on desk was normal in office scene (IATA 03 June 2020.)

For long time, operations have get to use to daily routine of same workflow. Daily work started from transporting to office, checking-in, heading to own cubic, sit in front of own desk, browsing shipment file, arranging document papers, calling customer, faxing document to get confirmation, calling airline, team working with colleagues, typing shipping document, wrapping pouch, printing labels, etc. Mostly, operation work was about paper work and manual handling (Cooper & Lu 2018, 185.)

Take example of operation normal working day (Figure 1). It is created by writer to describe conventional daily routine of operations working in office. Obviously, besides transportation to and from work, all tasks are happening and done on-site at work place. Once operations leave office, without working tools and connections, operation duty has to end. Mostly communication is via face-to-face conversation being in presence in office building while standing near each other, having coffee or lunch together, and meeting in conferences room as so on. (Chen 03 June 2020.)



Figure 1. Air export operations daily routine (Chen 03 June 2020)

2.3 Digitalisation impact operations

When computer, internet started shifting whole world, air freight industry adopted new technologies quickly. Operation got rid of fax machine, type writer, matrix printer, or just use these as back up. More multi-functional integrated printers with connection have replaced mechanical equipment (IATA 03 June 2020.)

After email conversation is accepted as official business confirmation, communication speed is accelerated greatly. There is less phone conversation making open office sounds noisy. Most important of all, it improves operations work more efficient and productive. Business communication is optimized in correctness. Unnecessary confirmations back and force is mitigated greatly (IATA 03 June 2020.)

IT industry's boosting give air industry a strong push. To improve business communication of information in high professional level and automation oriented, different e-tools of programs, platforms and systems designed for air freight industry have been introduced. These e-tools are designed not only for quicker AWB generating but also for data recording, information transferring, financial controlling, filing, analysing, even for decision making and strategic planning (Eben 03 June 2020.)

Of course, operations only need to master operations parts and generally understand the structure of whole virtual mechanism. Even thought, considering each airline, each warehouse, each forwarder partner has own programs, it means operations must have certain knowledge of all programs in order to communicate shipping information with different parties. No matter how advanced the e-tools are, operations are still the fundamental level to contribute basic database (Eben 03 June 2020.)

2.4 Telecommuting

Remote work is one of outcomes from digitalization, is current world-wide trend and is growing rapidly with numerous creative ideas. Some ideas of "new" way are revolutionary which completely change shape or pattern of business in some industries. In a freight forwarding company, different programs and platforms have been introduced. This means information sharing, reporting, even decision making are transferred digitally (Nagy 2009, 58.)

As operations, one of job tasks is to understand use these e-tools to handle shipments by putting correct information to system correctly between related parties of shippers, brokers, airlines, warehouses, customs, consignees, etc. Furthermore, operations are also

responsible to provide post-shipment service. For example, to issue claim if shipment found damaged arrived at destination, to make closure customs document and provide shipper confirmation document (IATA 03 June 2020.)

Computer technology had developed enough to afford some people working from home since 1970s. With booming in global digitalization in the past twenty years, there are many synonyms, such as telework, mobile work, remote work, etc. The common point of the concept is working location is not in central workplace, such as fixed office building, warehouse, shop store (Mezghani & Aloulou 2019, 134.)

Usage of paper is decreasing in huge amount while information transferring digitalized is on the rise. Operations has changed to use computer much more than arranging papers. Paperless helps decreasing limitation in operation process methods and makes operation catch up trend of modern air freight forwarding industry (IATA 03 June 2020.)

No doubt, telecommuting is prior in some aspects. People in professional of salesmen, freelancers, trainers have benefit from telecommuting. For operations whose professional requires less creation and flexibility, but more compliance in accuracy, it is definitely not possible to conduct telecommuting completely at the moment. Since operation know the finest details, by digging in deep in operation process, there must be something workable which can be improved by operations proactively, no matter how small change. Comparing to the definition of telecommuting, operations also can consider feasibility of working from home (IATA 03 June 2020.)

Creation, courage, determination, and capability of implementation should never be underestimated with motivation to continue to develop. With updating knowledge and skills, rich experiences from daily practicing, operation know the best how to combine e-tools and commodities to produce shipments, down to the details of each number or letter. Operations have ability and expectation of join telecommunicating (Morgan 2017, 119.)

2.5 Differences between work in office and telecommuting

In order to figure out in which part of process operation can make effort, it is better to find out differences in really details between working in office and telecommuting. Operations must have access to necessary resources, both tangible and intangible. Tangible resources refer stationaries and equipment. Intangible resources refer access to database, systems support, and employee well-being (Mahlon 03 June 2020.)

From below list, comparing working in standard office and telecommuting in main aspects, it indicates some differences. “Yes” and “No” refer whether the resource is available, whether the action is needed, or whether the resource can be obtained by request (Chen 03 June 2020.)

	Working in office	Telecommuting
Commuting time	Yes	No
	Transportation time between home to office depends on distance from to office, road condition, public transportation, etc.	No need to travel from home to office save time.
Check-in/out	Yes	Yes
	Device tracking working hours, or via web portal, or via mobile application	Self-manage tracking working hours via web portal, or mobile application
Working desk	Yes	Yes
	Standard office desk with enough space, or fixed cubicle, or office room	Flexibly set own working desk, in reading room, at summer cottage.
Stationeries	Yes	Yes
	Pens, ruler, stapler, tape, envelop..... are all available from company storage	Pens, ruler, stapler, tape, envelop..... limited but adequate available
Computer set	Yes	Yes
	Standard desk computer set, fixed power station, 1-2 displays. IT support set connection and installation on site.	Company laptop, or carry desk computer set along. Self-mange to set, or wait for IT support to help.
Internet connection	Yes	Yes
	Company internet connection, auto access to intranet, secured, high speed, stable server	External internet, request VPN to access intranet, connection quality depends on own internet server provider varies
Communication channel	Yes	Yes
	Face-to-face, team meeting, coffee break chat, lunch break, team building.....	Distant, phone call, Skype chat, online conference call, email, build-in application in program.....
Printers	Yes	No
	Multi-function integrated printers, to print awb and labels in paper form	Not applicable
Original document	Yes	No
	AWB full set Standard process, post to official address, stamp at customs, original certificates.....	e-AWB Risk of missing original document, legal violation, company compliance violation.....
Back up / Escalation	Yes	Yes
	Ask and talk with colleagues nearby, face-to-face conversation, immediate response and solution	Send email or via program, phone call, text message, skype.....relatively slow response and feedback, person not available at the moment
Insurance	Yes	Yes
	Standard company policy	Standard company policy

Figure 2. Comparison working in office and from home (Chen 03 June 2020)

According to above comparison (Figure 2), it is obvious that the biggest benefit from telecommuting is time saving of commuting to work place. In fact, this is quite important to operations. In order to arrange shipment to catch booked flights, operations always need to manage many cut-off times meaning to complete task before specific time. Like the first runner in a relay race, operations must finish their part before shipments continues to next stage. It is common that operations have to handle multiple shipments simultaneously. Therefore efficiency is essential because each minute counts (Chen 03 June 2020.)

Comparing resources of working desk, stationaries, desk computer set, internet connections, communication channel, although under telecommuting, operations still can maintain normal work with adequate tools. However, there is some limitation could affect telecommuting working environment and outcome. Most of operations work within organized internally can be managed without being present office. It is more complicated when communications externally. The main issue is original document and label (Chen 03 June 2020.)

Number of airlines joined e-awb process is increasing. It means no more physical awb set needed to accompany with air cargo. However, there are still airlines requesting full AWB set issued by forwarding company. Operations are responsible to provide such document and this cannot be done from home because it needs printer and delivery document to particular place. Further important, there are regulation and legal issue restriction related (IATA 03 June 2020.)

Labels with AWB numbers and other information must be put outside of the packages for counting when shipments arrive at each transit point. Currently, due to the size and label material, label printer cannot be moved flexibly. Moreover, label printer is shared for all operation users, not for one use. Therefore, label printing is not possible for telecommuting. If operations in telecommuting are not able to handle original document and label, then simple solution is to ask in-office team member for help to organize the document for them (DHL 30 May 2019.)



Figure 3. Work flow of operations under telecommuting (Chen, 3 June 2020)

The flow showed changes in model comparing (Figure 3). Operations can only handle most of shipments from home. The rest of work is taken over by team members working in office who have enough knowledge as operations and know how to complete the shipments. Nowadays, it is not possible to have all operations staff work from home. There must be certain amount of operations in office maintaining workflow (Chen 03 June 2020.)

2.6 Advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting

Telecommuting has many advantages concerning operations staff:

- Increased efficiency and productivity if well managed
- Saved commuting time and cost
- Improved balance of working and private life
- Increased commitment and reliability
- Relieved stress to a certain extent
- Mitigated negative presenteeism

Not all operation can manage telecommuting well because they vary in personal skills. Better IT skills, faster typing speed, familiar with available resources can make remote work faster and easily. Well managed telecommuting brings better efficiency (Louis 03 June 2020.)

Saving commuting time bring great convenience. From example, assuming it takes 30 minutes from home to office by private car in the morning, it consumes both time and gasoline. Meanwhile, telecommuters can use the 30 minutes to go through emails and make a plan of to-do list of the day. Needless to say, working from home give more opportunity staying with families, handling holds. Balanced work-life give mental safeness and possibility to make schedule better organized. Allowance to conduct telecommuting show confidence and trust from organization. Increased satisfaction increase operations stronger commitment and motivation to perform better work (Paul & Jos 2002, 294.)

Of course, there are also disadvantages:

- Distant communication takes longer time
- Misunderstanding due to misinformation
- Decreased concentration due to distractions
- Disconnected due to technique error
- Inadequate tools due to limited storage
- Panic situation due to lack of immediate support
- Emotional loneliness due to missing team members

Since working from home means working alone in a private space. Comparing face-to-face, distant communication will be missing information from eye contact, face express, voice tone, hands gesture, etc (Paul & Jos 2002, 295.)

3 The theoretical Framework

Based on researcher's recognition, developing communication is one of the keys in air export operation. It connects each elements of repeating circles of progress. Improve communication is key to improve team work efficiency. Improve individual operations communication skill is key to better team work outcome. Subjective action for individual improvement can be developed from three aspects:

- Hardware – skills of usage tangible devices, capability of utilizing difference programs
- Software – health mental state, proactive mind-set of telecommuting
- Combination and integration of both hardware and software – Organization of all available resources to make progress

3.1 Plan-Do-Check-Adjust cycle (PDCA)

Since operation team handles practical handlings, therefore, smaller cycle of Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) would be suitable for individual. With further study, there is another version of PDSA. It is called "Plan-do-check-adjust" (a.k.a PDCA, Figure 5).

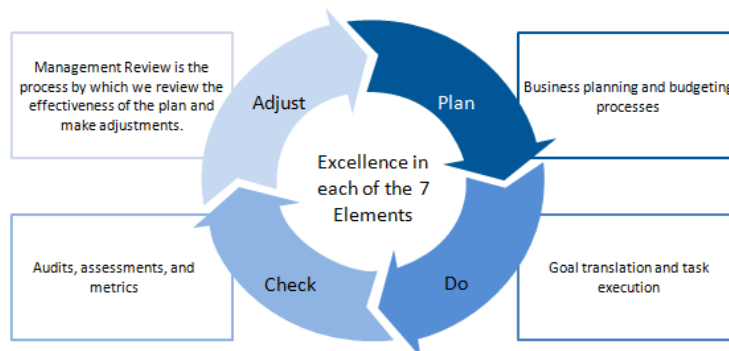


Figure 5. PDCA model (Deming 1993, 132)

PDCA model is considered more suitable to achieve continuous improvement of process in business and organization mechanism. In general, each shipment contains planning shipping route, preparing shipment, checking documents and adjusting if any wrong input. Therefore, operation usually has his own unique tools to make the operations easier and better in efficiency.

Take an example of one tool for multi-shipments tracking. For each operation, it is common to make shipment plan per week. A well designed overview gives a good visual which is helpful in effective practice.

It is designed based on a simple excel table. Some basic information is needed, such as dates, destinations, and special remarks (Figure 6).

3.2 Kotter's eight steps

The study is related in a relatively median or big-sized organization with long history. Telecommuting has affected individual's daily routine, but also impact organization transforming. DGF FI have nearly two hundred employees in global group, the Kotter's model is considered proper model to reflect changing procedure (Figure 8).

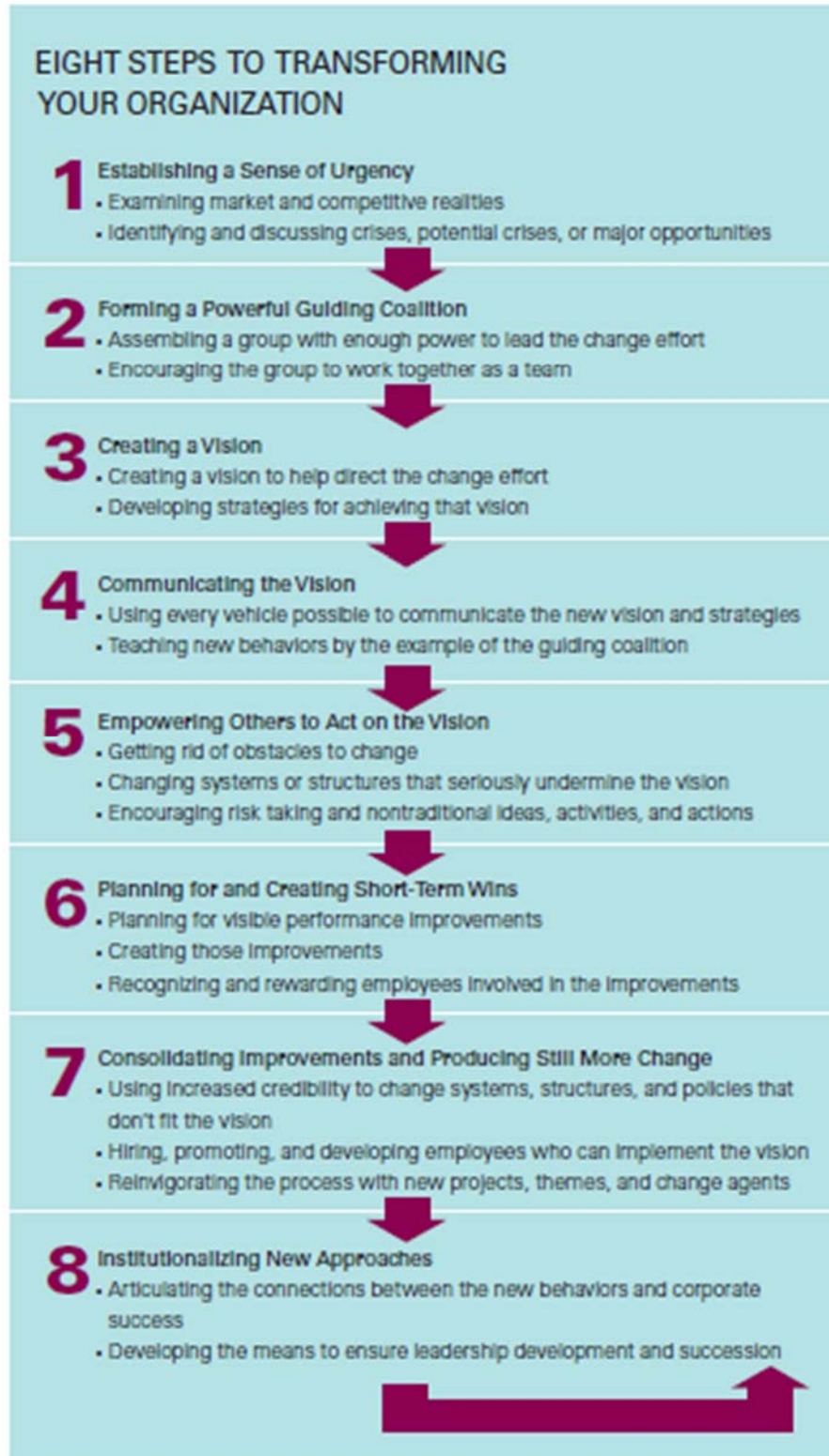


Figure 8. Kotter's eight steps model (Harvard Business Review 1995)

Therefore, Kotter's eight steps apply in transforming organization (Figure 8). Although, Kotter's model might be old and not up-to-date, however, considering our company has history of fifty years, it is still a valuable reference. In this case study, the urgency was from both business plan of developing remote work and increasing operations telecommuting pushed by Covid-19 emergency.

3.3 “And People Stayed Home” guideline

In the year of 1869, a famine poem “And People Stayed Home” by Kathleen O'Meara written in 1869, already gave a guideline how to deal with sort of telecommuting. At that time, there was no digital tools at all. Even under terrible environment and poorer condition, people still managed and find out solutions. Comparing the modern world we have, we surely have inspirations for innovation.

The poem says:

“And people stayed home
And read books and listened
And rested and exercised
And made art and played
And learned new ways of being
And stopped
And listened deeper
Someone meditated
Someone prayed
Someone danced
Someone met their shadow
And people began to think differently
And people healed
And in the absence of people who lived in ignorant ways
Dangerous, meaningless and heartless,
Even the earth began to heal
And when the danger ended
And people found each other
Grieved for the dead people
And they made new choices
And dreamed of new visions
And created new ways of life
And healed the earth completely

Just as they were healed themselves.”

(Offbeat quotes 03 June 2020)

3.4 Hardware and software setting

As mentioned, operations daily work need tool kits involving computers, printers, and using different programs Microsoft offices, integrate platform for logistics. For basic needs, it might be enough for operation to know how to create email, attach document to email, form excel tale sheet, form standard work document (DHL 30 May 2019.)

Of course, better skills in mastering more office programs add more value. Social media channel has extended from privates chat to business conversation. Skills in using social media bring more opportunities in access more information and network. IT help desk is on standby if operations needs technique support. However, once it comes to telecommuting, IT only help from distant place, either by taking remote control which has to interrupt current work, or provide instruction link asking to find solution by own which take longer time and may lead to failure due to lack of IT knowledge (DHL 30 May 2019.)

3.5 Mind-set and stress handling

Change means breaking of comfort zone. It brings uncertainty with more stress and less security. To stay positive attitude when change is happing in self-management is important. Mental health is vital as precondition of telecommuting. Change could be frightening according to the Kubler-Ross change curve (Figure 4). The curve might not suit all people or all situation. However, as human being, mostly people could be in such process without effective and productive leadership (Stumpf 2015, 83.)

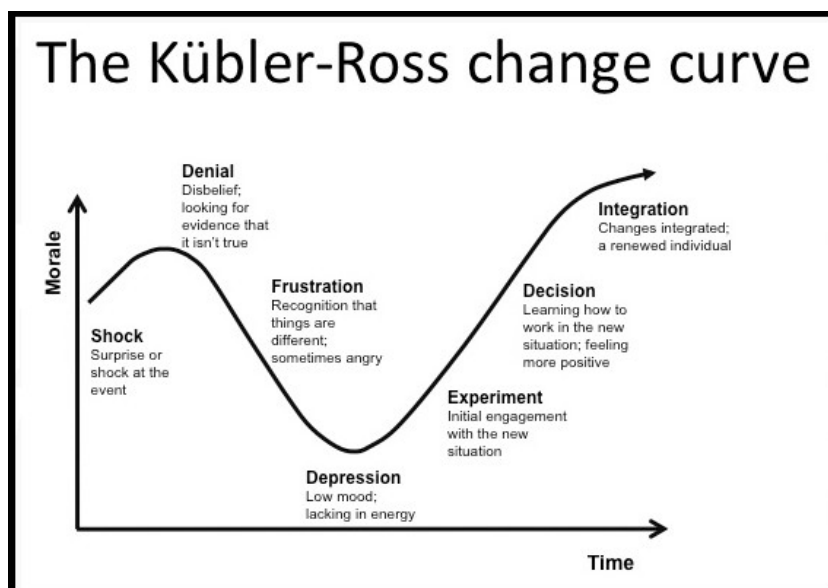


Figure 4. The Kubler-Ross change curve (1969)

Negative attitude could cause trouble in implementation and influence others. Working in office surrounded by familiar colleagues makes people feel safe and connected. Telecommuting means much less contact with supervisors or other team members. This could make people feel disconnected, less secured which might lead to panic if not coped well. Unhealthy mentality causes lower motivation and less commitment to organization (Stumpf 2015, 85.)

However, motivation and commitment are important for both employees and organization. On one hand, employees want to increase self-value in organization for higher self-esteem. On the other hand, organization wants to increase employee's commitment to enhance solidarity. Therefore, there are needs for both sides to improve self-managing capability (Patrick & Constantine 2014, 356)

Researcher comprehends that self-management under telecommuting doesn't mean no control, no rule to follow, no policy to comply. Actually, it requests more self-driven motivation, well knowledge of organization, wider scaled knowledge of others, not only limited in his or her own job description. Improvement is positive changes. Proactively response to new change is highly encouraged. Not everyone has the motivation and ability to encounter challenges and stress from changes. Concerning operations, usually, any improvement may lead to spending more time on learning new things, more workload, more stress and risk of failures which can cause financial consequences. This is one of the reasons that operations prefer to stay in closer team in same space, so they can take care of each other and solve the problems. In this way, stress can be easily mitigated. Own cubic is moved from office building to home is a big change. Working alone doesn't mean working lonely. Individual work is still involves in network. Higher awareness of acting as individual in whole organization as a big picture is required.

3.6 Teamwork is essential

Air freight forwarding business rely on comprehensive, coherent, well-organized teamwork. It the combination outcome of team members' performance. The better individual's performance, the better outcome. Therefore, each team member counts and values. (Patrick & Constantine 2014, 256)

According to researcher's understanding, a complete shipment which is ready to move involves works from different teams. Below listed teamwork are only part of compulsory team within organization.

- Winning business needs sales teamwork
- Domestic delivery needs freight teamwork
- Security check needs warehouse teamwork
- Airline space and rate need space capacity teamwork
- Shipping document execution needs operations teamwork
- Export declaration needs customs teamwork
- Consolidation needs traffic teamwork
- Profit and cost need finance/commercial teamwork

Not only teamwork within organization, but also with external teamwork are also involved in process. After all, only when teams work together, success can be achieved. Air export operation, like a spare part in an assembly line, is part of numerous teamwork. Each one has influence on whole process. Quality of service which is provided by operation can affect shipment process, KPI performance, cooperation with partners, customer satisfaction, company image, and others. Operation should always bear in mind that operation has responsibility as a teamwork player (DHL 03 June 2020)

Researcher observes that operations as a team must work perfectly and cooperate closely. Senior operators have long experiences with customer and operation systems. They have been used to the old system for decades. To use a totally different new system requires each of operations' effort to unlearn and learn new system from beginning. For someone who has worked with old system for long time, stimulated conditioned reflex actions, it is really hard to change mentality.

In DGF FI, passion, excellence and entrepreneurship really come to life when combined with teamwork. Now, as mostly it cannot do face-to-face meetings, DGF FI discovers new ways of team working. For example, leadership established regular calls with sub-teams, teams, even cross departments to share updating information, feedback from the market and customers, and to discuss potential issues before they are escalated. In addition, DGF FI are also working together with the other divisions as a project with the main objective to keep employees safe and healthy (DHL 03 June 2020)

3.7 Communication is vital

Based on researcher's experience, teamwork communication is vital without any doubt. Constant effective and productive communication is vital connecting different parties in remote work. When it comes to operations work, business communication is interaction of

sharing ideas, knowledges, and transferring information. Such communication demands correctness with time requirement. The better communication, the better accuracy.

There are multichannel for operations to communicating: face-to-face discussion, workshop group training, team building practising, emailing, applications built in integrated platform, etc. Multichannel communication help to ensure best outcome and avoid misinformation (Trenholm & Jensen 2013, 23)

When it is changed to telecommuting, there are less options of channels. The most effective method of face-to-face talk is not an option. Communication transfer virtually more than ever. Quality of information sharing is affected with more uncertainties. It can be limited by individual's computer skills, professional knowledges, personality, presentation skills and so on. In result, better individual operation capability contribute better communication outcome ((Trenholm & Jensen 2013, 45)

3.8 Social and balance of work-life

Besides business communication, private communication interaction between employees are encourage more from organization side and more welcomed from employees' side. Like other entrepreneurs, DGF FI has put more effort on this to encourage employees to join LinkedIn DGF group and Yammer community (DHL 03 June 2020.)

To keep work-life balanced is the core of self-management. Telecommuting makes the line between working hours and private time not clear. Mobile devices provide possibility to work much more flexibility. For sales, specialist, or manager, it might be common to check and reply email by mobile phone or laptop. However for operations, it requires to take action with physical paper involved. It might happen during off-duty time. However, if operations go telecommuting, limited flexibility is the obstacle needs for solutions (Morgen 2017, 64.)

4 Conducting study

In this chapter, the research methods is to be used. Suitable research methodology of a case study adopted is to achieve study objectives and to solve the research problem.

4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative tends to study on small number of cases, in-depth and details. By contrast to quantitative, qualitative research intends to find precise particulars matters of how people understand and interact. In targeted organization for this study, there are limited amount of people have been telecommuting. Although, people working from home are still in stage of self-adjusting and learning new way to work. Therefore, it is not scientific to proceed questionnaire if the outcome from questionnaire is predicted unreliable (Silverman 2010, 13.)

The qualitative research is carried out on a study case within organization of DHL Global Forwarding (Finland) Oy (a.k.a. DGF FI). As leading freight forwarding company, DGF FI has been top one freight forwarder in Finland for years, especially in air export section. Study how DGF FI employees take reaction to telecommuting is considered valuable and representative to a certain extent in air export forwarding in Finland (DHL 03 June 2020.)

4.2 Observation and Interviews

Data collections for case study of qualitative research reply on mixed methods and variety of data. Participant observation is one of often pre-eminent methods data collection, in which participant takes a role of in the situation in the case study. Interviews is commonly used in-depth focused and forma survey to obtain information. Data collection of this study was from both. Minority data was from writer as operations participant observation. The first-hand information was empirical resource because writer was included in daily operation and involved in process of arranging telecommuting in this case. Majority information was from interviews. The in-depth conversations about the topic provided different angels of options and surprisingly positive feedback which encourage the study to promising direction (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011, 299.)

In this study, researcher is also participant of operation's situation. Based on researcher's observation, employees in operation team are titled export operation customer service specialist. Operations is the short name. They are handling shipments, customer service as daily bases. General job descriptions are same. Depending on customer group, there are teams and sub-teams. Four people accepted interview invitation. Three are operations

and one is in leadership in air freight. Each one expressed different opinions, ideas and attitudes towards working from home based on their own experiences and observations which was truly valuable for the research. Feedback from four interviewees are summarised how they think of and cope with telecommuting. Four interviewees were labelled D1, D2, D3 and D4 in following expounding.

Researcher asked below questions for interviewees aiming to find out real consideration and potential expectation of each interviewee towards telecommuting. The main questions were:

- Do you want to prefer to work in office or work from home?
- How do you handle working from home?
- How supportive the working tool kit and communication of coordinating with team-mates in office?
- How do you solve problems while telecommuting?

The interview with interviewee D1 was via Skype call while both were working from home. The questions was from upper level as manager, whether considering telecommuting was good for employees and company. From what he saw and heard from employees, what software and hardware were important? Further, what was his wishes, suggestions, and critical thoughts on telecommuting?

The questions for D1 was different to the other interviewees because as leadership level must have wider range of viewing and evaluating the circumstances. From his feedback, it was aimed to find how management handle telecommuting within organization and what target they lead employees is heading for.

D1 gave comments in details thoroughly and comprehensively on telecommuting and related topics from his point of view as a leader. It was obvious, he has also analyzed situation of sudden change for the past month since outbreak of Covid-19 in Finland. As D1 told, even before Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, working from distance was part of company business plan. "The big word" was commitment according to him. The organization wanted to be top runner and modern in freight forwarding industry. Best employees were the most valuable treasure for company.

Due to Covid-19 pandemic, people are asked to work from home as much as possible and follow social distance instructions (WHO 03 June 2020). As D1 stated clearly, the answer was "No" if question was whether it was possible to send all operation customer service to distant work, or work from home at the same time. He explained pros and cons.

- Pros: From what interviewee D1 has been seen so far, distant work has brought huge benefit to company. When employees are given more freedom and trust, they pay

back better work outcome and show better commitment. Employees are loyal to company and not change to competitors. Rarely people use it in a wrong way. In general, it is really glad to see most outcome is positive.

- Cons: interviewee D1 mentioned that at the moment, current tool kit available is not the best. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, about 70% employees are asked to work from home and only about 30% employees work in office according to government's instruction concerning employees' well-being (DHL 03 June 2020). Because physical paperwork for certain counties and labels, some work must be done in office. This is the main physical limitation. There is emergency plan that if assuming up to 80% of operations telecommute, and 20% stay in office. That means it generate more workload to teammates. On hectic days of week, stimulating workload is transferred to people in office. There are risks of extra stress, making mistakes, and even consequences in customer service.

Telecommuting was new topic which was not concerned to operations until about one month ago. There was no specific work mode for telecommuting. However, best wish could be everybody would do their own job remotely completely. Employees were encouraged to be more flexible. From telecommuting, people could save time in buses, to pick up children, to dentist without spending unnecessary time back and force to office. People was able to make better arrangement of time management.

It was emphasized that mind-set is really good point. Positive thinking leads to positive behaviour, further to positive outcome. For example, for operations, it was normal to handle multiple shipments simultaneously. It was important to keep track each shipment progress status, and not miss handling. Many tools are used to trace each shipment and have an overview of all on-going shipments. Responsibility is one of key elements. People with sense of responsibility is more reliable to work in distance.

As leader, D1 also faced challenges of new way of leading. Same to others, this was new learning for him as well. It was about combination of building trust and remote leading. He said he would like to see more Whatsapp group chat of employees, being more actively during Skype call. Of course, it was better than to have Skype video call (IT is working on it). To communicate, it was always better to talk while looking each other's face.

D1 mentioned that even the market volume was dropping in market, but it was convinced that company wanted to continue telecommuting for sure. As D1 talked, one of challenges for leaders, was how to treat people equal who have same job description. Because telecommuting, workload was transferred. During hectic working days, heavy workload could cause mistakes in operation handling, it might affect customer relationships in consequence.

Some practical suggestions were given by Interviewee D1. Employees could make preparation before online training or conference call start, such as audio and video setting, internet connection, and presentation document in advance, to ensure smooth proceeding. If employees needed, company could provide financial support. For example, company was willing to pay for extra displayer for employees who worked from home. Company paid taxi bill when employees needed to move computer set from office to home in short term. In long term, company might only purchase laptops instead of desk computers. Purpose was to trust building and strong commitment as D1 pointed out in the beginning.

Interviewee D2 had taken the interview via Skype audio call. Because of professional skill and knowledge and good connection with teammates, more questions were asked about operation proceeding from researcher, such as how to prepare work from home, what office tool kit needed, how to tackle IT problems, and how to communicate with teammate in office to coordinate shipments. Researcher was aiming to seek practical solutions which can be used to improve handling speed and increase accuracy.

To work from home or in office was both acceptable for him, but he also expressed that he prefers the latter. As the others, D2 also appreciated saving time in travelling to and from office. When he worked from home, he could take care of children, small house-holds. For example, he could read email at car service which maintenance took about one hour. Using mobile phone or laptop, he didn't have to spend time check-in office back and force. Talking about working efficiency, interviewee D2 said it was challenging in the beginning to setting working corer at home and figure out the best way to communicate and cooperate with teammates in office. When obstacles were cleared, process runs routinely, efficiency has been increased greatly.

Interviewee D2 also showed his own design for tracking ongoing shipments process overview which help him to monitor shipment status and avoid any mishandling. The design was based on excel file (Figure 9). Each note contained one shipment's basic information with remarks as below picture (confidential information is redacted). Moving note to correct cell in excel indicated shipment status update. It provided a visual overview of shipments schedule of whole week, helped schedule overall organization and planning.

A	B	C	D	E	F
KESEN	MA	TI	KE	TO	PE
			<div> <div> PVG 105 +2 TO +8 C KE FI AY 12:00 ita ok MRN ok CLS KE 27.5 </div> <div> PVG 105 General cargo KE AY FI 12:00 ok, ok ok, MRN ok CLS KE 27.5 </div> <div> PVG 105 +2 TO +8 C ok </div> </div>	<div> PVG N/OK TI 26.5 prepaid DDP ETA 11:15 / 1 JUN TULLAUKSESSA </div> <div> PVG N/OK ETA 11:15 / 1 JUN GL ok TULLAUKSESSA </div> <div> HKG 105 +2 TO +8 C ETA 07:25/ 29 MAY ok, ok ok </div>	<div> GRU N/OK Odottaa hintaa GL kys.26.5 Ei GL </div> <div> Kyselyssä 19.5 Ei pakattu </div> <div> N/OK xry GL kyselyssä 19.5 ETA Ei GL </div>

Figure 9. Tracking overview in excel (designed by interviewee D2)

There is only one negative aspect interviewee D2 concerns which was lack of social communication with co-workers. He enjoyed being around with teammates and talked with each other. However, when he was working from home, he felt isolated and disconnected. Instead of face-to-face, he could only talk with colleagues by phone or via skype call.

Interviewee D3 expressed his preference of working from home. At the beginning, it was no problem to agree with other teammates how to take turns of telecommuting because the other two teammates preferred to work in office and Interviewee D3 preferred works from home. It was also agreed that while Interviewee D3 is working from home, the other two teammates helped him with paper work in office. Questions for him was same as to D2 because they have similar job description. The purpose was to find out how younger employee of Generation Y took telecommuting comparing Generation X.

From D3 feedback, it had been working in distance perfectly with no mistakes so far. For him, saving commuting time was the biggest benefit. It made him feel calmed and concentrate on work easily. He didn't need to get up early and took about twenty-five minutes driving to office. Since he started telecommuting, he was very much enjoying to start work with a nice cup of coffee in the morning, sitting in front of computer and read through emails. With good skills in digital tools, to work on computer is no problem for him at all. In order to work effectively and correctly, he designed his own way of tracking shipment status after trying idea from co-workers and Microsoft OneNote. Communicating with teammates via phone or via email was totally fine without feeling isolated. After all, Interviewee D3 is totally positive towards telecommuting and willing to continue. However, he had thought about when error in communication happened what back-up plan he had prepared.

Interviewee D4 was the only interviewee totally dislike telecommuting, and only wanted to work in office. The interview was face-to-face. Interview D4 has long history of working in air freight. Although D4 had comprehensive professional knowledge and skills as a senior, there was less willingness to make such big change. Main reason was preference of drawing clear line between work and life. But when teammates who is working from home, Interviewee D4 was very much willing to help to collect physical document and label to complete shipments in office on behalf. The other purpose to stay in office is social communication. This was typical example that people reject telecommuting. Not really because of lack of commitment or working skills, there were other reasons of personality, mentality, health condition, etc.

4.3 Analysing the data

To analyse the data and information collected was mostly about comparing and understanding what potential meaning hiding behind. The result concluded from analysis gave confirmed findings from the research process. The research followed qualitative research framework theory and most of information collected were first-handed or transcript. Therefore reliability and validity are with credibility (Cohen & al. 2011, 539.)

Comparing three operations feedback about telecommuting, mostly they had empirical experiences of telecommuting. They also evaluated if they were able to work from home under each one's condition. Depending on expectation and capability of conducting telecommuting, it showed different attitudes, effectiveness and performance from each. Therefore, interviewees as representatives can be categorized into three groups based on desire of taking telecommuting and capability of practising: high desire and good capability; low desire and adequate capability; moderate desire and good capability with flexibility. The better satisfaction, the better outcome if each one's expectation is meet. However, it is important to keep enough staff in office to maintain standard functioning. As D1 mentioned, for supervisors, to keep employees treated equally is a must.

From interpersonal communication angle, during all interviews, the conversations were non-stop. Interviewees were active and eager to express and discuss about the new way of working. When the conversation went further, they were willing to present and share their own creative ideas and findings while they were trying to work better from home. This illustrate that telecommuting is welcomed in general and even exciting for some people. From their adjustment of ways of communicating with colleagues in office, it illustrates that they have power, knowledge, and motive to improving performance. The innovation of improvement is beneficial to induvial and organization as a whole.

Results from interviews verified analysis outcome. Telecommuting for air export operation is possible and feasible to a certain extent currently and will continue for some time in future because of physical document limitation and level of digitalization. Telecommuting can build mutual trust between employer and employee. It enhances employees' commitment and engagement to organization. It benefits operations self-career development, company continuity, and business sustainability as well. Flexibility of telecommuting supports operations to work more efficiently, effectively and productively. It motivates operation customer service specialists for performance and develop potential business possibility.

4.4 Validity and reliability

Validity is an important key to effective research. Invalid research is worthless. Validity in qualitative research has several principles. In this study, main principles is the researcher is part of researched world; they data are descriptive; and there is a concern for processes rather than simply with outcomes (Cohen & al. 2011, 180.) As participant of study, researcher herself contributed own data and made thick description from interviewees whose situation as operations were known by researcher, but valuable and worth to go for deeper study.

Reliability in qualitative research is contested by suitability. Reliability is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instrument and over groups of respondents. It is should be precise and accurate because it affects the outcome quality (Cohen & al. 2011, 201.) In this study, the observation by researcher has been from different time and different places, same as interviewees. The progress has been continuing and evolving. The positive feedback and outcome give more verification of the reliability.

5 Solutions

In air export operations, people often say “Let’s check case by case”. Everyone can handle telecommuting differently in their own way as long as it suits the best. From this study, three proposals are brought to provide guidance for air export operation about how to mentally initiate and what actions can take to handle telecommuting better.

5.1 Set positive attitude

Positive mind-set is vital. Keep mental health and don’t take too much stress. Think through whole work flow, touch point (simulation customer journey). It helps you to aware what problem might be encountered, so that preparation can be done in advance. With preparation, panic situation can be mitigated.

Be active, be committed, be committed, and be motivated. Consider mindfulness and meditation breaks. Check online employees’ well-being information. Take regular breaks, get some fresh air or go for a short walk for a relaxing peaceful moment for your brain. Put some background sound if needed under precondition which is not disturbing others and affecting working atmosphere. Set “off-duty” rules, although telecommuting somehow makes the line between work and life vague.

5.2 Act proactively from subject

Act and do it! Take action if necessary using existing resources. Take online trainings provided by company to improve professional working skills. Make a study plan and schedule and mark it on calendar in outlook.

Stimulate IT skills. Learn how to use more digital tools. When IT support is not available in emergency, learn to search online for solution and try to fix it by yourself.

Formulate own working instruction of standard operation procedure (SOP), keep updating and save it in public folder. Write down how to handle certain type of shipment step by step. Attach related example, link or formula in same document. This helps memory fresh if going for holiday or sick leave. Furthermore, it supports teammate as your back up.

Keep physical health. It is foundation of keeping energetic working status. Change sit/stand position every thirty minutes. Look away from computer every 20 minutes according to “20-20-20 rule”. Strictly follow Covid-19 golden rules, wash your hands frequently with soap and water and cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing.

5.3 Keep communicating

Stay reachable and available during telecommuting. Keep connected with team members, asking for advice, feedback, and suggestions. Offer help to colleagues if capable. Participate daily update, conference call and participate in conversation. Add photo to profile and make it visible. Make video conference rather than audio meeting.

Share SOP document. Make it available to colleagues supervisors.

Communication between individuals within team, between teams within departments differ in own communication methods. Keep open-minded for differences. Think bigger and take others into consideration when communication across different groups. Participate online meetings. Always make greetings when joining in the beginning and express thankfulness and regards. Conduct conversation with good manner. Use business social media. Take good advantage of LinkedIn to build better business connections, communicate with other related partners.

Speak out and give feedback to supervisor is welcomed and encouraged, not only solving individual problems, but also supporting management for strategic planning. For each team member, it is necessary to train for updated information and new skills for new change, especially the knowledge to the new operation system and how to cooperate with new team leader. To improve individual capability with wider view within the organization is essential.

6 Conclusion

Telecommuting is not something will happen in the future. It is happening right now. With fast adaption of new technologies, remote work is much more popular than before. Some type of work, such as IT, writer, journalist, don't have a certain working office. Such change is inevitable. Due to Covid-19 outbreak, the schedule has been pushed much earlier unexpectedly. Operation process already have been pushing for paperless work. Not only for environmental protection, but also for business and trade in efficiency. Thus, we have get to use to e-stamp, e-signature, or e-identification. Maybe someday in the near future, these procedures will be replace by more advance resolutions. Therefore, there are both inner and outer motivations of change to telecommuting.

Comparing working in office, operations can benefit from telecommuting of saving commuting time, learning professional skills, enabling self-innovation. Besides individual self-development, operations also gain more flexibility and trust from company which provide better working experience in a positive working atmosphere.

In conclusion, for operations, it is not possible to completely work at home. However, it is feasible to work partially from home as telecommuting with coordination with colleagues in the office. Operations have made progress and taken action on innovating starting from small changes by themselves, such as design own digital tools. Following "Plan-Do-Check-Adjust" circle, small project was planned, tried, verified and updated. Repeating PDCA model is easy to adopt for individual work (Deming 1993, 132.) and helping to develop a better way for better performance.

Considering operations as part of whole organization, awareness and understanding of being part of company is important. Communications is connections within organization. Especially when telecommuting has great impacts on organization working pattern. Operations is closely involved in the transformation as Kotter's eight steps model (Harvard Business Review 1995.)

It is not enough for operation to know how to use excel to make a sheet of filling numbers, it is also asked to use excel functions to analyse those numbers and furthermore give summaries and suggestion based it. To be self-aware such urge and take action is requested in self-management. It is easier to start working on individual with more value increasing, not only by learning knowledge, but also mind opening. Operations should think bigger, higher and wider. Well awareness of operations' behaviour can affect and influ-

ence organization-wide. Communications skills are more necessary more than ever. Operations need to master different channels to send and receive information, strengthen on capability of presenting and information delivery to others.

Although from this study, 100% telecommuting is having obstacle to implement in operations for now. Research and discussion about related topic have been raised to management as part of strategy of development.

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