

Strobel GmbH & Co.KG: Telework in the Construction Industry: SME Case 18

Overview

Strobel GmbH & Co. KG is involved in the construction industry and specialises in road and underground engineering. The company in Pfullendorf, Baden-Württemberg, employs approx. 400 employees.

Management considered telework for the first time in 1995. Personnel manager of Strobel, Mr Blum, explains that an order quota of 120% is required in order to make 100% use of the company's capacity. This constellation resulted in account arrears. Therefore, this called into question how to reduce these arrears especially as this would increase the solvency of the company. At the same time it was desired that the additional worker could be deployed when required and without major investments in structural alterations and workplace provision. All these criteria could only be met by using a tele-workplace. Management therefore decided on an external teleworker. At first, cooperation took place without direct data exchange by exchange of floppy disks. In addition, fixed dates for personal meetings were arranged.

Practice

In the beginning there was still some concern regarding the chosen solution, if it was right for the company. The reason for these inhibitions was concern about trade secrets as the employee was also working for another company. However, it was possible to gradually reduce these misgivings. On account of the successful cooperation the company was prepared to provide further tele-workplaces at a later stage.

Due to their experience with the first teleworker the company was able to increase its capacities successfully without having to provide a permanent position. A permanent position means a very significant burden to a middle-sized company that may be difficult to carry at times. It was an advantage that the teleworker already had substantial expert knowledge and therefore it was not necessary to introduce him to new areas of work. This led to additional time and cost savings.

Today Strobel employs 8 teleworkers, both full time and on a freelance basis. The teleworkers have the performance target to fulfil 60% of the time quota per month. They can freely manage their time. Teleworking civil engineers have to take on-site measurements once per week which they use for their work at home. Further activities carried out at the home workplace include, for example, statistics and invoicing.

Experience

As a result of telework Strobel GmbH & Co. KG enjoyed faster and more customer orientated job handling and also more flexible work and time management for the employees. Full-time employees can work in the evenings, which means that jobs on

a deadline can be handled faster and without overtime. Freelance teleworkers can be deployed by demand which, *inter alia*, allows for release possibilities during the winter months and therefore cost savings. In addition, there are further financial advantages: the agreed remuneration remains constant and the company has no additional add-on costs.

The Strobel telework concept is based on a high level of trust towards the working method of the teleworkers and their handling of trade secrets. The workers, on the one hand, take on a lot of responsibility towards the company, and, on the other hand, they also have the opportunity to actively design their work environment themselves, which creates an enormous motivational potential.