

Need to promote 'work from home' idea, says MEF

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KUALA LUMPUR: Industries in Malaysia will benefit from work-from-home programmes, said Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan.

“However, there are some challenges that would need to be overcome in terms of infrastructure, management, trust issues and cultural prejudices,” he said.

Shamsuddin was commenting on the Works Ministry’s pilot work-from-home programme in which a number of employees will be working from home for three months.

He said Malaysia lagged behind many countries in accepting this concept, but noted it is gaining popularity in the private sector.

“One major challenge for both the public and private sectors is Malaysia does not yet offer a supportive environment in legal terms and in cultural acceptance.

“We need to promote the benefits of this concept and overcome prejudices people have about working from home, such as people seeing it as a failure because you do not have an office,” he said.

Shamsuddin said both the private and public sector would gain from a nationwide promotion of the practice so people would understand its benefits.

Also, he said, employment laws would have to be reviewed to create a more supportive environment as there are currently no legal provisions for novel working hours.

Consultant neuroscientist Dr Prem Kumar Chandrasekaran said such a work practice would help alleviate the stress of daily life; however, the personality of the employee would determine how beneficial this is.

Prem, who is attached to Penang

Adventist Hospital, said working from home would reduce some of the workplace stress as well as travel conditions, such as heavy traffic. He said such stress can have a negative effect, especially on those predisposed to depression and anxiety disorders.

“Even in people who are not predisposed, these are real sources of stress that can lead to anger, irritability, anxiety problems, sleep problems and depression,” he said.

Prem said removing this stress may lead to better quality of work and life. This can also have knock-on effects on the employee’s family life and children, helping to foster better parent-child relationships.

“It would leave more time for young children to bond with their parents instead of being sent to playschool,” he said.

Works Minister Datuk Shaziman Abu Mansor had mentioned, when announcing the programme, trust and integrity as the major challenges. He had said these challenges could be addressed by setting targets to assess employee performance.

Shamsuddin said an employer would need to select employees whom they trust to work with minimal supervision.

“Not everyone would be suitable for this,” he said.

“For example, new employees might not understand the product in and out, or might need guidance more often, so working from home would be more suitable for those who have experience.

“In addition, an appropriate work environment at home that is free from distraction would be crucial.”

He said it is a good idea to set targets to assess employee performance but pointed out that the challenge would be in setting targets appropriate for the purpose.