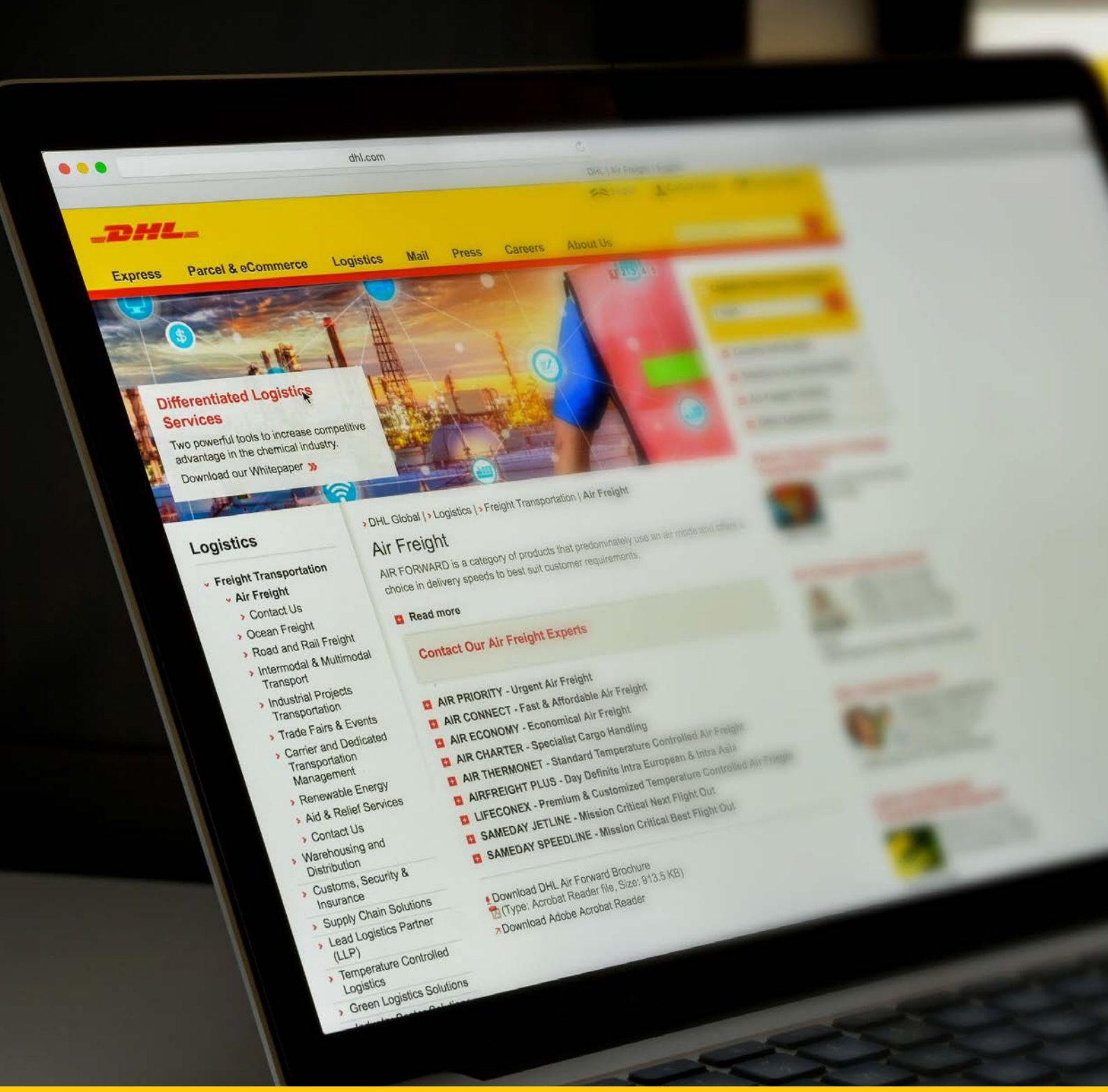


EMBRACING THE FUTURE OF WORK

INSIGHTS INTO DHL'S WORK-FROM-HOME MODEL

Companies are exploring innovative strategies to enhance productivity and foster a flexible work environment in today's dynamic business landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for change, pushing organisations to adapt their work models. DHL, a global leader in logistics and express delivery services, successfully implemented its '*Future of Work*' policy, which encompasses a work-from-home model. This, in turn, has revolutionised its business operations. This case study examines how DHL reshaped its work policies to prioritise employee well-being, work-life balance, and increased productivity.

SHAPING DHL'S FUTURE OF WORK

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated DHL's adoption of remote work, initially driven by the need to ensure staff health and safety. DHL's teams worldwide quickly adapted to working from home, providing valuable insights into the benefits and challenges of remote work.

"During COVID, we needed to ensure we facilitated the setup of a proper workstation at home for our employees, including internet connectivity and providing an allowance for employees given their use of utilities. That was our biggest investment," explained Sarvesh Devan, DHL Express Country Manager for Fiji and Pacific Islands.

"In some areas, there were challenges, to be honest, especially for those living in more remote areas due to internet connectivity and power issues. So, we had to manage those challenges. Consistent monitoring was crucial for tracking performance, and it worked well."

DHL also conducted extensive research and employee feedback, including from Fiji employees, which informed the development of the '*Future of Work*' policy, officially introduced in January 2022. According to Devan, getting support from employees was essential.

> *Most of our employees love the work-from-home model, especially working parents. Some had children at home while they were working, and sometimes there was nobody to look after their children So, we had buy-in from those employees.*

Sarvesh Devan,
DHL Express Country Manager for Fiji and Pacific Islands.

"Many roles here are not fixed from 8am to 5pm. Instead, employees must ensure job allocations are completed within a timeframe, and this applies to several roles. This type of work allows flexibility in the team and freedom to work from home."

HOW THE MODEL WORKS

Under the '*Future of Work*' policy, DHL employees can voluntarily work from home apart from a few specialist roles that require access to office facilities and equipment. The arrangement is made mutually between each employee and the direct supervisor and manager.

Employees receive laptops, screens, and internet modems for their home workstations. While the company initially covered internet connectivity during COVID-19, catering to the different data needs of all staff through one internet provider became challenging, given varying connection quality in different locations. Therefore, under the '*Future of Work*' policy, employees who opt to work from home choose an internet provider that works well in their area, and DHL provides the required modems to suit their needs. As the work-from-home initiative rolled out, Team Leaders in the DHL Fiji office also visited staff homes to ensure they had everything they needed and to ensure Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) compliance.

Under the '*Future of Work*' policy, employees can work from home four days a week and spend one day in the office, striking a balance between remote work flexibility and team culture. Management can also demonstrate flexibility by accommodating individual circumstances, such as extending remote work periods for staff dealing with family emergencies abroad. In such cases, employees can spend more time in the office at a later date.

Devan acknowledges that consistent performance-based assessments and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are vital to monitor productivity, ensuring employees meet performance requirements while working remotely. Productivity reports are either automatically generated or manually submitted by staff daily for management records. If an employee's performance declines while working from home, for any reason, management works with the employee to address the issue and provide necessary support to improve performance. Sometimes, an employee is asked to temporarily return to working from the office until their performance improves. The '*Future of Work*' policy is contingent on employees consistently meeting KPIs.

IMPACT OF 'FUTURE OF WORK' ON BUSINESS

Kavish Prasad, DHL Express Fiji Business Services Manager, has been with the company for almost 11 years. He manages 125 staff responsible for outsourced operations to Australia and New Zealand. Currently, 65 per cent of the Business Services Division actively utilises the '*Future of Work*' policy.

"The idea is if we can work for Australia and New Zealand from Fiji, why can't we work from home? It's as simple as that. We don't have to meet with customers face-to-face, so that's an added advantage," said Prasad.

Prasad believes that the work-from-home model is the company's future. It was tried and tested during the pandemic and has already demonstrated positive impacts on work culture and productivity. According to Prasad, most employees have consistently exceed performance targets, showcasing the model's effectiveness.

"In our Business Services Department, we have productivity targets of 95 per cent, 100 per cent, and 105 per cent. When people work from home, we find a majority would reach over 105 per cent," Prasad explains.

"So, if you measure it on a monthly basis, let's say the target would be to deliver 100 per cent, and a particular staff member working from home would deliver 107 per cent to 108 per cent."

"Even for our call centre employees, who I think would find it most difficult to work from home because not everyone has a suitable set up at home for call centres. We did a trial for six months, and at no point did our grade of service go below 90 per cent, which is the expected result. Our grade of service was 96 per cent. That was the highest we ever had in terms of grade of service. So based on those kinds of figures, this is proof of concept that staff working from home can be more productive. "

A study[1] conducted by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in 2019 found that on average over 12 workdays are being lost per employee citing absenteeism, distraction, low productivity, and stress as common factors affecting working parents due to childcare responsibilities. Prasad notes that the '*Future of Work*' policy through the work-from-home model has led to less absenteeism at the company.

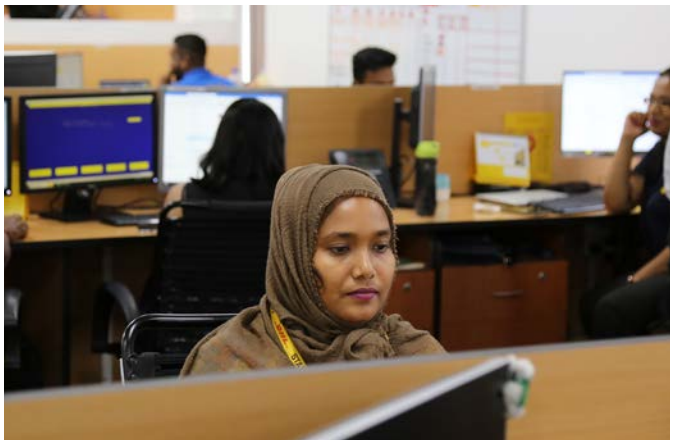
> *It's a win-win situation. We've had situations where employees needed to be away for a few months to support a family member's medical emergency overseas and didn't have to take extended leave. All they need is the equipment and the internet to work, and that's it. As far as the employee is performing, that's all that's required.*

Kavish Prasad,
DHL Express Fiji Business Services Manager.

[1] International Finance Corporation (2019) Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare in Fiji - Fiji-TACKLING+CHILDCARE.pdf (ifc.org)

EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES

Zureen Shazia Feroz, a DHL Financial Administrator for the Australian market, highlights the improved work-life balance the policy offers. Feroz resides in Navua (approximately a half-hour drive outside Suva) with her husband and two children. She finds that working from home allows for regular breaks, managing household chores, and meeting deadlines.



I love working from home because I can take regular breaks to refresh my mind, and especially for us working mothers, we need our house to be tidy and up to date, so I can do this. When I'm at work, this has to be done on the weekends.

Zureen Shazia Feroz,
DHL Financial Administrator for the Australian market.

"Also, sometimes we have deadlines to meet, and it's almost 5.00 pm, and you need to go home; that is when I find working from home really helpful. I don't have to rush because I live all the way in Navua, and instead of staying back, I can use the time it would normally take to travel home to work on my laptop."

The flexibility of remote work enables employees to adapt their schedules to personal circumstances, leading to increased satisfaction and productivity. According to Feroz, support from family members at home is also important.

"It can be a little harder to work from home during the school holidays, but for me, it's all about time management. We just need to prepare their meals beforehand, and when I have my lunch, I just need to ensure my children's lunches are prepared too. I just need to make sure they eat on time. There are no issues."

Jyotika Lal, a Commercial Support Agent at DHL, agrees that the benefits far outweigh the challenges of working from home.

Lal, who has worked for DHL for the past 16 years, first adapted to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

OHS is the biggest consideration to make when working from home. I have to set up a nice workstation for myself. My workstation is my dining table because it's the centre of my house, so I can monitor everything while working. I have to also cheer myself up when working from home because when we are in the office, we communicate with many people. I have also created an environment to socialise with my kids while working. So, that was one of my adjustments to my home office set up," she said.

When DHL introduced the work-from-home model under its '*Future of Work*' policy in 2022, Lal took the opportunity to continue working from home.

"I used to get up at 4.00 am to make my boys breakfast and lunch, and we left home at 5.45 am to get to the office on time. If I left at 6.00 am, I would reach work at around 8.15 am because the Nausori-Suva corridor is always full of traffic. So, for my family, working from home saves a lot of travelling time and money spent on fuel," said Lal. "I also now have time to go for a walk after I send my daily reports at 5.00 pm, so I'm taking care of my health and well-being too.

I am very grateful to DHL and my management. If you have this chance, why lose it? My advice is just to show your can-do attitude, be loyal to your company and manage your time well.

Jyotika Lal,
DHL Commercial Support Agent.

A WIN-WIN FOR EMPLOYEES AND THE COMPANY

The '*Future of Work*' policy provides advantages for both employees and DHL. Employees save commuting time, which can be invested in work, thereby increasing productivity. Additionally, reduced absenteeism is observed as employees can balance work and personal responsibilities more effectively. Independent surveys were conducted in 2021 and 2022 to determine whether businesses are great places to work and to gauge the model's effectiveness.

"'*A Great Place to Work*' is an independent body out of the UK that conducts this annual survey, and in 2021, DHL participated in the survey for the first time, with every employee taking part. As a result, we got recognised as a great place to work with 90 per cent positive ratings, and again in 2022, there was an increase to 97 per cent. So, 97 per cent of our employees are saying DHL Fiji is a great place to work," Devan shared.

The model's success showcases DHL's commitment to innovation and employee well-being, positioning the company as a frontrunner in the changing work landscape. DHL's '*Future of Work*' policy implementation exemplifies its commitment to adaptability, employee well-being, and productivity. By leveraging remote work opportunities, the company has transformed its work policies to align with the changing business landscape, optimising performance, flexibility, and employee satisfaction.