

Need to design hybrid work model that works for everyone: The case of an employee moved to a different city during COVID work-from-home arrangements and now can't easily visit the office

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Background about the organization:

Public Services Telecommunications Division (PSTD) under the Government of Ontario, is executing an ambitious project to upgrade the Ontario's Public Safety Radio Network. With 250 employees working in different functions such as PMO, Civil, Deployment & Operations, typically 7.25 hours per day, 5 days per week, with office located at downtown Toronto.

During COVID, Branch had implemented temporary work-from-home arrangements for all employees and now with situation easing up, Organization recently implemented a hybrid work model spending three days per week in the office and two working remotely.

The Civil Team is composed of the Sr. Project Manager (Civil), three Construction Supervisors and five technicians with day-to-day activities of managing site progress, quality control visits and site inspections.

Description of the incident:

Mike P is one of the technicians in civil team. He is a 50-year-old man, living alone, renting an apartment in Toronto near work location, and his only daughter lives in a town way up north in Orillia. During COVID work-from-home arrangement he decided to move to Orillia with her daughter and grandson with main reason being to create a family support system which is crucial for mental, physical & social health at this age.

After implementation of new hybrid work model, Mike's commute to office had become a significant challenge for him as he would have to wake up as early as 4 AM to drive to Barrie Go Station to catch 4:30AM train to union station. So, in total he spends more than 3 hours just to reach office and similarly in the evening on his commute back to home. These long hours of commuting to workplace proved to be a high stressful experience for him and he is showing signs of stress and fatigue along with symptoms of insomnia. Also, long sitting hours in train are causing him joint stiffness and some back pain.

On the other hand, Mike's supervisor, Stephane, acknowledges his challenges regards to commute and notices fluctuations in Mike's performance due to this challenge. Stephane likes him as a person, and he wants to help him being an integral part of his team. However, Stephane's limitation would be that this hybrid work policy is now implemented throughout the organization for all employees without any exception and he is responsible to get it implemented on all his team as well.

Stephane already had some discussions with Mike to address this challenge, but he does not know how he could help. Even if he can get an approval for more relaxed schedule for Mike by creating an exception due to his condition, this could be perceived as a special treatment among other team members, possibly followed by similar request from other team members as well.

Discussion questions

1. Do you justify Mike's relocation to other city without consent of employer, considering his circumstances? Why? Why not?
2. Do you agree longer commutes to office can result in fatigue? If yes, then how many hours of daily commute can be considered as leading to fatigue?
3. If you were Stephane (Mike's Supervisor), how could you approach this case? Do you have a different solution?
4. What might be Mike's options if organization is unable to accommodate his request to reduce number of days he needs to work from office? What could be done without leaving this job?
5. Most employers started implementation of 3+2 Hybrid work model. Do you agree that this is the most balanced approach? If not, then what other work model you suggest?
6. Employers are justifying the need to bring employees back to office for team collaborations as required critically for a successful team. Do you agree that added value of bringing all team to office is worth all time and resources required to make it happen? If not, then please suggest the alternate ways to achieve required team collaboration?