

Working from home – Evidence review

In a study of 6,451 employees Chomiak (Chomiak, 1999) found that as employees spent more time teleworking they also spent more time working overall. She concluded that “For the teleworkers in the present study, the flexibility and control provided by this work-style arrangement may have facilitated longer working hours.”

Fairweather (Fairweather, 1999) argued that technological methods “can allow managers to monitor the actions of teleworkers as closely as they could monitor on site workers, and in more detail than the same managers could traditionally. Such technological methods of surveillance or monitoring have been associated with low employee morale. For an employer to ensure health and safety may require inspections of the teleworkplace. When the teleworkplace is in the home there may be an invasion of privacy associated with such inspections, that could be perceived and resented as surveillance.”

Lim (Lim & Teo, 2000) found that married people were more favourably disposed to teleworking while people with high levels of job insecurity were less keen on it. Organisational commitment was found to be negatively associated with attitude towards teleworking as a work option.

A survey of BT workers found that most of those who did telework thought it gave them a better life. However, a small minority found that it had a negative effect on their quality of life, mainly because of increased working hours. The main motivation for teleworking was to get more work done – 83% of respondents said that this was very important (Anonymous, 2003)

Harris (Harris, 2003) found it was important for managers to develop an “understanding of the complex interface between the domains of work and home life.”

Sánchez (Sánchez, Manuela Pérez, Pilar de Luis, & Vela Jiménez, 2007) found that firms’ performance was positively related to the use of teleworking, flexitime, contingent work and spatial decentralisation. Teleworking firms used more flexitime, had more employees involved in job design and planning, were more intensively managed by results and used more variable compensation.

Nicholas (Nicholas, 2008) found that educational level had a significant association with interest in teleworking. “Partial support was found for the effect of autonomy and work/life balance toward the preference to telework.” Men were more interested in teleworking than women.

Golden (Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008) found that professional isolation made job performance worse but reduced people’s willingness to change jobs. Professional isolation’s effect was increased by the amount of time spent teleworking but reduced by face-to-face interactions and access to communication-enhancing technology.

Scholefield (Scholefield & Peel, 2009) found that while managers overwhelmingly reported positive attitudes towards the concept of teleworking they had significant concerns which affected how much they actually used it.

Rose (Rose, 2010) outlined five effective ways of managing teleworkers: evaluating the job itself; evaluating the employee; determining if the teleworker will have the appropriate equipment at the alternative worksite; creating guidelines for optimal teleworking; setting performance expectations.

Hayman (Hayman, 2010) compared people working flexi-time to those working from home. He found that flexi-time could reduce the effect of role overload and job-induced stress. However, telecommuting did not always enhance role overload and work/life balance. People working flexitime had significantly higher levels of work/life balance than those teleworking.

Morganson (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010) found that main office and home-based workers had similar high levels of work-life balance support and job satisfaction but that people who worked in the main office had higher levels of inclusion.

Taskin (Taskin & Bridoux, 2010) argued that teleworking had a negative effect on the cognitive (shared mental schemes, language and narrative, identification with goals and values) and relational components of organisational socialization.

Pyöriä (Pyöriä, 2011) argued that telework had failed to become established because most people liked being in growth centres with more jobs and amenities and also because there was no “established framework and ‘culture,’ of teleworking.”

Arora (Arora, 2012) found that a higher frequency of telework was associated with high isolation, which, in turn, negatively affected work engagement. However, when frequency of telework was high, perceptions of isolation were lower if the ‘feedback environment,’ was favourable. Social-networking tools and feedback environment were negatively associated with work isolation and positively associated with work engagement.

Martin (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012) reviewed the research on teleworking and found that there was a small but positive relationship between telework and organisational outcomes. Telework increased productivity, secured retention, strengthened organisational commitment and improved performance.

Caillier (Caillier, 2012) found that teleworkers in a federal government agency did not consistently have higher levels of work motivation than non-teleworkers. Caillier (Caillier, 2013) also found that teleworkers and non-teleworkers reported similar intentions to quit although workers were more likely to want to quit if they were denied the chance to work from home.

In 2012 it was reported (Anonymous, 2012) that the share of regular full-time employees who usually worked at home for part of the week had increased from 1.1% in 2000 to 2.1% in 2010. Those more likely to work from home included those in IT, writers and editors and those in jobs which involved spending time at clients' locations.

Grant (Grant, Wallace, & Spurgeon, 2013) found that differentiating factors between e-workers included access to technology, ability to work flexibly and individual competencies. Adverse effects were found on well-being, due to over working and a lack of time for recuperation. Trust and management style were found to be key influences on teleworkers effectiveness.

Mekonnen (Mekonnen, 2014) found a significant difference in productivity, with teleworkers more productive than office-based workers.

Duxbury (Duxbury & Halinski, 2014) found that the number of hours in telework each week helped people keep on top of their work but did not affect how much strain their domestic life put them under.

Greer (Greer & Payne, 2014) found that strategies for coping with teleworking included: using advanced technology; communicating with one's family; task planning and striving for extra productivity.

Van Yperen (Van Yperen, Rietzschel, & Kiki, 2014) found that the perceived effectiveness of both time-independent working and location-independent working was positively-related to people's need for autonomy at work and negatively-related to their need for relatedness and structure at work.

Workers at the telecommunications company TELUS who were 'mobile,' enjoyed a better balance between their work and home life and were less likely to quit their jobs (Cottrill, 2014)

Kane (Kane, 2015) examined the links between teleworking and organisational citizenship behaviours. Kane found that telework frequency was positively related to professional isolation which was, in turn, negatively related to both organisational and work-group identification. The more frequently people teleworked the fewer OCBs they tended to perform.

Anderson (Anderson, Kaplan, & Vega, 2015) found that employees experienced more job-related positive affective well-being and less negative affective well-being on days when they were teleworking.

Bentley (Bentley et al., 2016) found that organisational social support and teleworker support were associated with increased job satisfaction and reduced psychological strain among teleworkers. Social isolation mediated the relationship between organisational social support and job satisfaction and psychological strain.

Cavadini (Cavadini, 2016) carried out a qualitative study of teleworkers. The teleworkers perceived an improved work-life balance from teleworking but teleworking also affected role boundaries with the flexibility of teleworking schedules affecting family life and work life both positively and negatively. Teleworkers often felt a lack of connection with co-workers but teleworking did have a positive effect on health-promoting behaviour. "Overall teleworking was reported by the participants to be both professionally and personally satisfying" - this was especially true among mothers of school children. However, the participants also reported working during personal/family time or taking care of personal/family tasks during work time pushing the boundaries of each role they held and of work-life balance.

Shepherd-Banigan (Shepherd-Banigan, Bell, Basu, Booth-LaForce, & Harris, 2016) found that for women who had young children (between 6 months and two) working from home led to a statistically-significant decrease in depression scores over time.

Basile (Basile & Beauregard, 2016) found that teleworkers used physical, temporal, behavioural and communicative strategies to recreate boundaries similar to those found in office environments. "Although teleworkers can generally develop strategies that align boundaries to their preferences for segmentation or integration, employees with greater job autonomy and control are better able to do so."

Louie (Louie, 2018) interviewed 12 teleworking leaders. Six themes emerged from the interviews: communication; employee relations; individual leadership experience; employee or work issues; monitoring; and trust. Also important were the development of efficient practices for communicating with employees and the "intentional use of remote work for the important leadership activity of strategic thinking."

In 2018 it was reported that over half of workers (53%) felt they would be more productive if they could work outside the office (Anonymous, 2018)

Guinn (Guinn, 2018) studied women teleworkers in a healthcare setting. Most had chosen to become full-time teleworkers and said that the experience was primarily positive. Most self-identified as introverts, while four felt they exhibited extroverted behaviour with team members and supervisors. Career mobility was a worry. Participants who maintained an equal work-home balance did so by creating rituals to indicate when they were working and when they were available to their housemates and family.

Giovanis (Giovanis, 2018b) found that there was a significant and positive relationship between flexible employment arrangements and workplace performance. Giovanis (Giovanis, 2018a) later found that women were more likely to say that household chores were shared when their partner worked from home. Women were happier when their partner was a teleworker.

Jostell (Jostell & Hemlin, 2018) found that the extent of teleworking after hours was unrelated to work-family conflict. However, having more permeable boundaries and allowing work to interrupt non-work behaviour was related to higher levels of conflict.

Research from the London Business School and the University of California (Avis, 2018) found that working remotely could affect one's chances of promotion, pay rises and result in lower performance evaluations compared to office-based peers. "Employers should ensure flexible workers regularly receive communications around benefits and support systems such as employee-assistance programmes [as] they will not benefit from in-office posters and leaflets."

van der Lippe (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2018) found that an ideal worker culture amplified the increase in work-family conflict due to working from home, this affected men and women equally but the more colleagues who were working from home the less conflict women experienced.

Dockery (Dockery & Bawa, 2018) found some evidence to suggest that working from home contributes to better relationships and a fairer division of housework for couples with children. "Limited evidence of negative externalities is observed, notably where male employees work substantial hours from home." However, "overall the findings contribute to the weight of evidence that working from home is conducive to families achieving a better work-life balance."

Nakroien (Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė, & Goštautaitė, 2019) found that reduced communication with co-workers, supervisors' trust and support (or lack thereof), and the suitability of the working place at home were the most important factors affecting different telework outcomes. Higher self-reported productivity was related to reduced time in communicating with co-workers, a suitable working place at home and the possibility of taking care of family members when teleworking.

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