



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Telecommuting: the good, the bad, and the skeptics

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A recent Gallup report found that people who work remotely are more engaged, enthusiastic, and committed to their work—but only if they work outside the office 20 percent of the time or less. The common thread between most telecommuting studies reviewed suggests that allowing workers to spend some, but not all, of their time outside of the office could be beneficial for everyone. However, despite numerous studies and the empirical evidence showing productivity gains, many employers remain skeptical about the level of performance they can count on from employees outside the direct view of supervisors. How can you be sure if telecommuting is right for your organization?

Benefits of telework

Companies interested in telework are sure to find many advantages. Some benefits include:

- **Improved morale and company loyalty.** Having a more flexible schedule equals improved job satisfaction and morale. Teleworking requires managers to be more precise in their expectations and communications, with written objectives that focus on work performance.
- **Decreased absenteeism.** Most studies claim that teleworkers take fewer sick days and consistently report themselves as less stressed because they telework. In addition, employees with a cold or flu may want to work at least part of the day from home to avoid spreading the virus to coworkers.
- **Increased productivity.** Studies suggest people actually work more hours at home, in part because they aren't commuting or running errands at lunch. Some of the productivity increase also comes from being away from office distractions. While face-to-face camaraderie may help employees build relationships, there isn't much that can be accomplished in an office that can't be accomplished from a distance, using technology.
- **Expanded human capital pool.** Telecommuting lets you choose from a much larger talent pool, finding the best candidates regardless of physical location. Your company can also save on some significant relocation costs.
- **Reduced traffic congestion.** Not having to endure heavy commute travel during peak periods

could lead to lower levels of stress for telecommuters and reduce overall metropolitan traffic congestion.

Criticisms/pitfalls of telework

With the positives of telework come the drawbacks. Before you start sending employees home to work, be aware of the following pitfalls:

- **Collaboration and communication can diminish.** Some studies suggest employees are inhibited by not physically being together. When employees work from home more than 50 percent of the time, they are more likely to feel disconnected and disengaged. Also, it reduces the creativity that comes from random workplace interactions.
- **Job requirements pose limitations.** If a job requires special tools that are only at the office or if an employee manages many workers who are physically in the office, these positions should not telework.
- **Technology security may be inadequate.** The level of security required for teleworking depends on the level of technology, size of the organization, sensitivity of the information handled, and other factors. If your organization handles extremely sensitive data, telework may not be an option based on available technology.

Bottom line

If implemented and managed carefully, telecommuting could offer benefits for the right people within certain industries. There are many things to consider when determining if telecommuting will work for your organization. Ensure the positions you're considering lend themselves to telework and don't require daily face-to-face or physical interaction. Identify whether your organization has the necessary technology available to implement and sustain a successful telework program. Analyze the company culture and work ethic of your employees to identify whether your business model can be successful in a telework setting.

Lastly, outline a detailed telework plan and implement it part-time to determine whether it's a fit for your organization.

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