Chapter 18

Telework:
Exploring the Link Between Disability, Work/Family Balance, and Flexibility

Allyson Heisey
Columbia Southern University, USA

ABSTRACT

Anywhere working has been a subject of interest to researchers for decades. With the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have a renewed interest in this phenomenon. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between disability, work/family balance, and flexibility by examining the impact anywhere working has on disabled online instructors. This research identified "flexibility" as the main theme that was important to the disabled teleworker and was identified as the most positive outcome of anywhere working. By taking advantage of flexibility and benefits of telework, all participants indicated that they were better able to balance work and family obligations. This chapter concludes with a discussion on possible research opportunities to further study how anywhere working affects people with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The goals of this chapter are to examine the anywhere working (telework) experiences of online instructors with disabilities as well as explore the relationship between disability, work/family balance, and flexibility. Anywhere working and disability is an important area to examine because the potential of working anywhere for those with disabilities has not been realized. A better understanding of the issues relating to disability and the issues around anywhere working will provide insights that can inform government and organizational policies.

Researchers have characterized telework or teleworking as being synonymous with telecommuting, remote work, distance work, anywhere work, home working, work at home, flexiwork, or flexiplace (Dobson, 2015; Haider, 2015; Meshur & Ulusoy, 2013; Ashoush, Elsayed, & Younis, 2015). In the United States, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management defined teleworking as "a work flexibility arrangement

under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work" (USOPM, 2014, p. 4).

The literature argues that the benefits of anywhere working include flexibility, reduced real estate and overhead costs, continuity of operations, increased employee productivity and engagement, stronger employee commitments to the organization, and increased employee satisfaction (Canavan & Schneider, 2015; Friedman & Westring, 2015; Dobson, 2015; Ketter, 2015). On the other hand, the limitations and challenges of anywhere include problems maintaining productivity and visibility with management, feelings of isolation, fear of not being accepted as a valued employee, uncertainty of pay increases, and negative organizational culture towards anywhere working (Ashoush, Elsayed, & Younis, 2015; Dockery & Bawa 2014; Dahlstrom, 2013; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Manglesdorf, 2016).

The research to date has examined the benefits and limitations of anywhere working in the context of the non-disabled. Therefore, it is important to understand if the same benefits and limitations are relevant for those with a disability or if there are other considerations. There has been some limited gray literature from practitioners and government. For example, the viability of using anywhere working as an accommodation by organizations (Cosgrove, Fink, Dillion & Wedding, 2015), changes in judiciary approaches to the American's with Disabilities Act, also known as ADA (Johnson, 2015), opportunities of anywhere working for the disabled (Johnson, 2014), and attitudes of disabled workers towards anywhere working (Meshur & Ulusoy, 2013). However, there is limited academic research examining anywhere working and disability.

This chapter explores the relationship between flexibility and work/family balance from the perspectives of online instructors with disabilities engaged in providing educational instruction and working from anywhere. The next section provides a background and discussion about telework followed by a review of the advantages and disadvantages of anywhere working. The following section examines work/family border theory, the ADA, using telework as an accommodation, and online teaching. The methodology used in this study is explained before the findings are presented using a conceptual framework that identifies common themes and patterns from the survey data. The chapter concludes with a discussion and guidelines for consideration by management and organizations in future anywhere working arrangements in the context of workers with disabilities.

BACKGROUND

The term "telework" was coined by Nilles (1975) more than 40 years ago, during a study of urban sprawl and organizational decentralization in the state of California. At that time, the term "telework" and "telecommuting" were used interchangeably and to describe the enabling of employees to "work in offices close to (but generally not *in*) their homes, rather than commute long distances to a central office" (Nilles, 1975, p. 1143). Later, in the literature, "telework" or "teleworking" was characterized as being synonymous with telecommuting, anywhere working, remote working, distance working, home working, work at home, flexiwork, or flexiplace (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990; GSA, 2011; Kaplan, Weiss, Moon, & Baker, 2006; Mello, 2007; Tremblay, Paquet, & Najem, 2006; Younis, 2015).

The 1970s in the United States was characterized by economic hardship and commuting difficulties caused by the oil embargo and subsequent gasoline shortages. As a result, workers and organizations adopted communications technology as an alternative to automotive commuting (Niles, Carlson, Gray,

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