

# Management and Telework

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses telework as a desirable option for workers and how it can be a valuable tool for employers seeking to attract and retain employees. Telework can be performed as a supplemental or a full-time employment opportunity for local, regional or global work. Telework's many benefits are appealing to technologically competent and confident workers. These workers must be self-starters, able to work with minimal supervision, and, in some cases, rely on technological communications for professional interactions. Managers may be concerned with employee accessibility, productivity and possible loss of management roles (Arnold, 2006). Recently, Marissa Meyer, CEO of Yahoo, banned working from home and received a backlash from workers and professionals. The move was described as a step backward that counters studies of increased productivity, retention and job satisfaction and could demoralize the Yahoo workers (Cohan, 2013; Gaudreau, 2013). An overview of telework's benefits, incentives, organizational examples as well as possible deterrents and management resistance are identified.

## BACKGROUND

Telework is a growing method of employment with a variety of benefits. Telework enables work from anywhere, anytime through information communication technologies (ICT) (Garett & Danziger, 2006). It was used by 85 of Fortune's "2012 Best 100 Companies To Work For" and 84 of the 2013 list (CNN, 2013) with the top ten teleworking companies ranging from 40% – 90% of regular users (see Table 1). This award is voted

for by employees who evaluate some of the best practices, fairness and services of an organization (Rodensky, Rybeck, Johnson, & Rollins, 2010).

Telework is considered one of those best practices that allows employees flexible options for improved work/life balance. For organizations, telework is a savvy strategic management plan (Kowalski & Swanson, 2005). For example, Baptist Health South Florida, with over 13,000 employees – 88% of whom make use of telework, has a 4% full-time voluntary turnover rate (Rodensky et al., 2012). There are other attractions to South Florida's largest private employer and 42<sup>nd</sup> ranked 2012 Best Company to Work for, such as tuition benefits, but 'regular' teleworkers are the majority of workers. Telework brings increased benefits for the employer, the employee and society (Table 2).

## MAIN FOCUS

Much of the literature describes teleworking, sometimes referred to as telecommuting, as employees who use computer technology to work for an employer from home or remote locations on a regular or occasional basis (Baruch, 2003; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Nilles, 1994). There have been variances of teleworking definitions depending on the contracts, locations and tasks (Gálvez, Martínez, & Pérez, 2012). A teleworker is defined by Macmillan dictionary (2013) as "someone who works at home on a computer and communicates with their [sic] office or customers by telephone, fax, or email." The term is not yet listed in Miriam-Webster's dictionary.

The U.S. has a low percentage of teleworkers at 9%, although there is some legislation to encourage and mandate teleworking. Europe is also low at 9%

Table 1. Sample of companies using telework.  
Source: CNNMoney.com/Fortune

Company	% of Regular Telecommuters
Cisco	90%
Baptist Health South Florida	88%
Accenture	81%
Teach For America	81%
Intel	80%
World Wide Technology	70%
PricewaterhouseCoopers	70%
Ultimate Software	50%
Perkins Coie	70%
American Fidelity Assurance Co.	40%

teleworkers, compared to emerging markets: Asia-Pacific, 24%; Latin America, 25%; Africa and the Middle East, 27% each. The highest percentage reported is India with 82% teleworking at least once a week, and 57% are frequent teleworkers, some as outsourced jobs (Reaney, 2012). Some differences of teleworkers certainly relate to job opportunities and cultural norms.

## Challenge to Management

Keeping teleworkers connected is one of the challenges for management. Managers of teleworkers must motivate and inspire out of sight workers and provide authentic information sharing from managers to workers and between work teams. However, an affinity distance problem can result when there are trust issues between team members who have never met one another (Reilly & Lojeski, 2009). Managers too must overcome lack of trust for workers who are miles away (Leonard, 2011). Some face-to-face interventions are recommended, but when that is not always possible, video conference, Skype, Facebook, personal blogs and even Second Life virtual meetings have been used to give some connection between teams and leaders (Klein, 2008). Reiterating the mission/vision/goals can help reduce operational distances amongst teams' interpretations of the organizational practices (Reilly & Lojeski, 2009).

Table 2. Benefits of telework

Organizational	Employee	Societal
Productivity	Savings	Work opportunities
Employment	Flexibility	Flexible, disabled, homebound, distant
Virtual workplace 24-hour cycle	Work/life balance	Ecological – less car pollution
Continuity	Some autonomy	Environmental-less traffic congestion

(Rhodes, 2009; Telecommuter, 2008; Telework, 2009; Ursery, 2003)

## Motivation

If managers deny teleworking requests, it could result in de-motivating the workers. In a study of Department of Health and Human Services workers (98% of whom are eligible for telework), the employees who were denied the opportunity to telework reported lower motivation than the employees who did telework (Caillier, 2012). Interestingly, employees who teleworked frequently, more than two days a week, reported less motivation than employees who teleworked infrequently, up to two days a week. According to Golden (2006), this decline of satisfaction with extensive telework is a result of isolation from co-workers and lack of face-to-face interaction with managers. Studies of some U.S. workers note that the social isolation or relational impoverishment of teleworking has negative effects on job performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008).

There are also positive aspects of being away from the workplace, however, such as avoiding office politics and gossip (Ellison, 2004; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Kurland & Cooper, 2002). The physical distance may ensure that contact, such as phone or e-mail, is kept professional and focused on job related matters - not any drama. Of course, avoiding this personal type of information sharing or wanting to shop talk is an individual preference of an employee. For productive organizational work, the teleworker is most dependent on reli-

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