

Telecommuting - Making it Work for You and Your Office

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Outline

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- **Summary of Factors in Employees' Telecommuting Opportunities, Preferences, and Practices.**
- **University of Waterloo
Telecommuting Main Literature Review Points**
- **Perceptions of Family-Friendly Policies: University Versus Corporate Employees.**

Highlights!

Flexible Work Arrangements

- A study by Simmons College in April 2006 shows that that balancing work and private life is possible. more than 90 percent of women had flexible work arrangements of some kind during their careers. This is an indication
- From the 400 women surveyed, 60 percent had children, and 18 percent had stopped work temporarily. It is clear that flexibility is becoming more feasible and may be part of a long-term career success.

Flexible Work Arrangements

(cont.)

- Women are rejecting the outdated “work is primary” career model of the 1950s, and are acting as career self-agents, using flexible work arrangements (FWAs) as dominant tools in defining their terms of employment.
- Women decisions to work part-time, decrease work load, or temporarily not work at all are seen as deficient, invalid, and wrong by many current organizations.

Survey Findings

- The general belief that women have the financial option to “opt-out” is refuted by survey findings. Only 18 percent of the women “opted-out” by voluntarily taking time off.
- Many women don’t have the option to “opt out”. In this survey, 86 percent of women reported providing more than half of their household incomes, with over a third responsible for paying the bills.

Survey Findings (cont.)

- In fact, almost half of the women surveyed reported using FWAs that allowed them to continue working full-time.
- **Benefit for Employees:**
 - Study findings were that the use of FWAs had no statistically significant impact on income. Analysis found that women who used FWAs saw no difference in salary compared to those who did not.
- **Benefits for Employers:**
 - The women in this survey reported that organizations that offer FWAs would be rewarded with employee's increased loyalty and willingness to “go the extra mile”.

Redefining Commitment

- Up to 1992, research has always focused on men for examples of normal behavior; women's careers were viewed as anomalies.
- Commitment has always been viewed as doing "whatever it takes" to get the job done. The idea of "commitment" is a critical element for being valued and promoted within an organization.
- As long as FWA use is seen as confining availability, instead of defining it by one's own terms, then a person's commitment to the organization will always be viewed negatively.

Redefining Commitment (cont.)

- There needs to be a redefinition of commitment and the “ideal” employee for flexible work arrangements to be properly accepted by society.

Shapiro, Ingols, & Blake-Beard. (2007)

Optioning In versus “Opting Out”: Women Using Flexible Work Arrangements for Career Success.

CGO Insights, No. 25

Jackson, Maggie.

“Flex for Success” Opting to Balance Life and Work is no Longer a Career-ender, a Study Says.

The Boston Globe. Retrieved February 15, 2007

http://bostonworks.boston.com/news/articles/2007/01/28/flex_for_success/

**Summary of Factors in
Employees' Telecommuting
Opportunities, Preferences,
and Practices.**

Introduction

- Even though telecommuting is viewed as a system to increase productivity and enhance organizational flexibility, organizations are still reluctant to adopt the practice.
- There are four characteristic groups that play a role in the adoption of telecommuting by the employer and the employee. They are:
 - **the organization,**
 - **the job,**
 - **the individual, and**
 - **the household.**

The Organization

- The *organizational characteristic* involves the employer's decision to offer telecommuting. Among the many concerns employers have with telecommuting is the data security problems, and problems with productivity and work quality.
- One study showed that organizations benefit from telecommuting because they claim savings in terms of office space. A case study, of a marketing company in the US, introduced telecommuting for its salespeople to reduce paper waste and increase voice communication.
- Since the first step to the adoption of telecommuting is for the employer to offer it, the development of telecommuting is strongly related to changes in organization structure.

The Job

- The *job characteristic* has to do with job suitability. Jobs that require a physical presence are less suited for telecommuting than jobs that do not. This leaves several job types in between that are left to the discretion of the employers and employees to decide. The result is several job types that could involve telecommuting, but do not.
- The job characteristics that make telecommuting more desirable and beneficial for the employee are frequent computer use, good career opportunities, attending internet courses, high level of education, high IT level skills, supervisory position, and long working hours.

The Individual

- It has been found that the preference to telecommute is higher for men and individuals who are young, disabled, have long commuting times, and have positive attitudes regarding the benefits of telecommuting.
- The employee and the employer's reasons for practicing telecommuting are not always the same. For telecommuting to work within a company the employer and the employee need to come to a mutual understanding of what that will entail.

The Household

- An employee may find telecommuting very attractive because of the time saved from commuting to and from work. That extra time can be spent with the family, especially when there are young children in the household.

Peters, Tijdens, & Wetzels. (2001)

Factors in Employees' Telecommuting Opportunities, Preferences and Practices.

“Disturbed Balances & New Options in Work and Care.”

Research Paper No. 008.

University of Waterloo
Telecommuting Main Literature
Review Points

DEFINITION OF “TELECOMMUTING”

- Jack Nilles coined the term “telecommuting” in 1974 while stuck in traffic in Los Angeles.
- In the United States, “telecommuting” has since been defined as: “an alternative work arrangement, whereby organizational members spend some or all of their work day at a location other than the traditional, centrally located workplace, often relying on computer and telecommunications technology to do so”.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

- Potential to lower operating costs at the office, and to gain increased production from more satisfied employees.
- Employees who work from home may demonstrate an improved productivity since they will not have to deal with office related distractions.
- Productivity gain may also be realized by avoiding the production loss associated with employees arriving late, and from employees “decompressing” after long commutes.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

(cont.)

- Reduce employee turnover. Flexible work hours provides employees with choices to accommodate their individual schedules. Employees who are satisfied with their work arrangements may be more inclined to remain in the company.
- Recruitment; by eliminating or reducing commute times, employers may tap into the large labor pool located away from the city centers.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

- Telecommuters can take advantage of a decreased cost of living.
- Elimination of a commute may also allow telecommuters to spend more time on family-related matters, leisure activities, and other similar pursuits.
- The flexibility that telecommuting allows may facilitate employees working through maternity and medical-related incidents; satisfaction with work arrangements may, in turn, decrease the level of staff turnover.

SHORTFALLS OF TELECOMMUTING

- Higher level risk perceived by employees, because the employee has less of a chance to improve his or her reputation through behavior.
- Managers favor managing the way they have always done, as opposed to learning a new management style that they may not be able to rely on.
- Inability to directly supervise workers and to help them learn how to work more efficiently.

SHORTFALLS (Cont.)

- Workers may have problems working during work time because they are distracted by family, television, or other distractions in their homes (Katz, 1987).
- Since there is less face-to-face contact with managers, clients and co-workers, the teleworker faces personal and social isolation, as well as professional isolation, and sometimes they can be missed in promotions or other job or social opportunities.

Deluce, Early, Lee, & Longston.

Toward Telecommuting? A Feasibility Study for the University of Waterloo.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. April, 2001.

Retrieved February 15, 2007.

<www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infowast/watgreen/projects/library/telecommuting_001.pdf >

Perceptions of Family-Friendly
Policies: University Versus
Corporate Employees

Summary of Main Points

- The primary objective of this study is to examine the differences between university and corporate employees and their subjective perceptions of work-family policies. The study looks into differences in:
 - industry,**
 - gender, and**
 - dependant care responsibilities.**
- Rigid expectations and timelines for tenure track faculty build the pressure to succeed quickly. The intense effort on their part to meet tenure requirements often hinders work life/family life balance.

Industry Differences

- Companies that offer work-family benefits are usually large, family-related businesses, unionized firms, companies facing competition, and companies with a high proportion of female and/or young employees.
- Within the academic field, factors that contribute to the implementation of work-family policies include a large budget, a large student body, a large number of employees that create a demand for good policies, doctoral programs that allow for teaching assistants, human resource managers who know the family demographics of employees, and a commitment to strategic planning and change management.

Gender Differences

- Policies were meant to be gender neutral, even though the increase of women in the labor force was the primary reason for initiation of family-friendly policies.
- Men do not use the policies as often as women do. Men both perceive their use as hurting their careers and actually experience denigration or drop in career progress from using policies such as family leave.
- Women still tend to remain the primary caretakers and have greater household responsibilities even when both spouses work.

Dependent Care

Responsibility Differences

- It has been argued that employees without dependants are less supportive of family-friendly policies. Popular press accounts report that some single, childless employees resent the “preference” given to those with children.
- Respondents without dependant children care responsibilities reported being expected to work longer hours regardless of impact on personal life more than did dependant care respondents.

Anderson, Morgan, & Wilson. (2002)

*Perceptions of Family-Friendly Policies: University
Versus Corporate Employees.*

Journal of Family and Economic Issues, Vol. 23(1),
Spring 2002.

Human Sciences Press, Inc.