

Telecommuting has mostly positive consequences for employees and employers

November 20 2007

Telecommuting is a win-win for employees and employers, resulting in higher morale and job satisfaction and lower employee stress and turnover. These were among the conclusions of psychologists who examined 20 years of research on flexible work arrangements.

The findings, based on a meta-analysis of 46 studies of telecommuting involving 12,833 employees, are reported in the current issue of the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association (APA).

“Our results show that telecommuting has an overall beneficial effect because the arrangement provides employees with more control over how they do their work,” said lead author Ravi S. Gajendran.

“Autonomy is a major factor in worker satisfaction and this rings true in our analysis. We found that telecommuters reported more job satisfaction, less motivation to leave the company, less stress, improved work-family balance, and higher performance ratings by supervisors.”

An estimated 45 million Americans telecommuted in 2006, up from 41 million in 2003, according to the magazine *WorldatWork*. The researchers defined telecommuting as “an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organization.”

Gajendran and his fellow researcher David A. Harrison, PhD from Pennsylvania State University, found that telecommuting has more positive than negative effects on employees and employers. “A work-at-home option gives telecommuters more freedom in their work arrangement and removes workers from direct, face-to-face supervision,” Gajendran said. In addition, the employees in their study reported that telecommuting was beneficial for managing the often conflicting demands of work and family.

Contrary to popular belief that face time at the office is essential for good work relationships, said Gajendran, telecommuters’ relationship with their managers and coworkers did not suffer from telecommuting with one exception. Employees who worked away from their offices for three or more days a week reported worsening of their relationships with coworkers. However, managers who oversaw telecommuters reported that the telecommuters’ performance was not negatively affected by working from home. And those who telecommuted reported that they did not believe their careers were likely to suffer from telecommuting.

The typical telecommuter examined in the analysis was a manager or a professional from the information technology or sales and marketing department of a firm. The average age of a telecommuter was 39; men and women were equally represented.

Women telecommuters may derive even greater benefits from telecommuting. The authors found that study samples with greater proportions of women found they received higher performance ratings from their supervisors and that their career prospects improved, rather than worsened.

“Telecommuting has a clear upside: small but favorable effects on perceived autonomy, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intent and stress,” the authors wrote. “Contrary to

expectations in both academic and practitioner literatures, telecommuting has no straightforward, damaging effects on the quality of workplace relationships or perceived career prospects.”

Source: American Psychological Association

Citation: Telecommuting has mostly positive consequences for employees and employers (2007, November 20) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-11-telecommuting-positive-consequences-employees-employers.html>

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