# How Effective Is Telecommuting? Assessing the Status of Our Scientific Findings

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The term _telecommuting_ was first coined in the early 1970s, and since that time the number of people taking advantage of the ability to work remotely has grown dramatically. By 1997, more than 100,000 U.S. federal employees were telecommuting, and by 2014, more than 3.3 million U.S. workers reported their home as their primary place of work. This number is only expected to grow as a result of the increasingly global nature of our economic and employment systems.

Although the public has a generally positive view of telecommuting, it is less clear what science has to say about its benefits and drawbacks. Studies examining telecommuting have been conducted across a wide range of disciplines, often using different – and non-comparable – definitions of what telecommuting actually is.

In this issue of _Psychological Science in the Public Interest_ ([Volume 16, Number 2](#)), researchers Tammy D. Allen (University of South Florida), Timothy D. Golden (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), and Kristen M. Shockley (Baruch College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York) provide a balanced and comprehensive view of what we know about telecommuting's benefits and drawbacks – and for whom it works best.

## Commentary on How Effective Is Telecommuting? Assessing the Status of Our Scientific Findings

By *Kenneth Matos and Ellen Galinsky*

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In a review of the research, the authors find that telecommuting is associated with many benefits for employees, such as increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance and lower work stress and exhaustion. However, those who work primarily out of the office may face isolation from, and reduced levels of knowledge sharing with, colleagues. Working from home may also blur family-work boundaries and lead to increased amounts of work during "non-work" hours.

One key aspect uncovered through this review is that the impact of telecommuting on employees depends on many different factors, such as the amount of time spent telecommuting, the personal characteristics of the worker, and the structure of the organization.

Telecommuting seems to confer the most benefits when practiced to a moderate degree. Workers who have more autonomy and more control regarding when they telework and when they complete their tasks seem to benefit more from telecommuting arrangements than those who don't. Telecommuting may, therefore, be a poor choice for those who have trouble setting their own schedule or motivating themselves to work. Face-to-face contact may also be more vital in certain types of workplaces where in-person contact is beneficial for innovation and creativity.

Telecommuting can be good for employees, especially if organizations work to ensure the success of such programs. Training managers need to be clear on the circumstances under which telecommuting is appropriate and the ways in which telecommuting employees' job performance will be evaluated. Telecommuters should be provided with appropriate technology so that they can effectively complete their work from outside the office while staying in close connection with in-office colleagues. Finally, candidates for telework should be chosen carefully, as not all employees will have the self-regulatory skills to work in a non-office environment.

In a commentary accompanying this report, Kenneth Matos and Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute note that with the rise in global markets, employers are no longer asking whether they will allow telecommuting but want to know how to do it right. They praise the report for highlighting the nuances involved in understanding who will benefit the most from telecommuting arrangements. In doing so, Allen and colleagues have provided a blueprint for employers and workers who wish to build successful telecommuting programs.

About the Authors (PDF, HTML)