

Sample chapter

Step 1: Check Your Job: See If Telecommuting Is Right for Your Job

Introduction

Telecommuting. Telework. Remote work. Flexible officing. Flexiplace.

Whatever you call it, millions of people are doing it right now. Some work at home, some on the road, some at satellite offices, and some at telework centers. Telework is not just for private sector employees. There were over 74,000 participants in federal government telework programs in 2001, and several state governments are major supporters of telecommuting and have telework programs for their employees.

A [survey](#) conducted by International Telework Association and Council (ITAC) found that teleworkers report that being able to telecommute makes them more productive, more satisfied with their jobs, and more loyal to their employers. Telecommuters still spend some time in the office. Telecommuters typically averaged at least one day per week away from their main office.

Why do people telecommute? Each teleworker may have different reasons: to avoid the time wasted in long commutes, to get more flexibility for dealing with family concerns, to have a more comfortable place to work productively. The ITAC survey found that 33 percent of the surveyed workers would choose telecommuting over a salary raise and 43 percent would quit their current job to take one with telecommuting.

What do their employers get out of it? Quite a lot. Telecommuters are generally very productive. A [Gallup survey](#) reported 22 to 46 percent higher productivity for teleworkers than for others. [American Express](#) reports that its telecommuting customer service workers are 26 percent more productive than those that are full time in the office. In addition, teleworkers have less absenteeism and take 33 percent fewer sick days than others. Employers can also cut their space and parking costs by allowing employees to work at home part of the time—[AT&T](#) estimates that it has saved \$550 million since 1991 in this way. Total [savings](#) for employers have been estimated as high as \$12,000 per telecommuting employee.

Telecommuting can have great benefits for the teleworker and the organization. Getting those benefits depends on reasonable expectations, good planning, and clear communication between employer and employee. This course shows you how to get started with a positive telecommuting experience.

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Reasonable Expectations

Teleworkers have found that having workplace flexibility helps them reduce stress, be more productive, and balance home and family responsibilities with less strain. Employers of teleworkers have found that giving employees this flexibility has helped to reduce absenteeism, improve morale, and save on office space and parking costs. Municipalities where telecommuting is common have found telework is useful for reducing traffic congestion and pollution.

Does this mean telework is a panacea? Of course not. Telework will not eliminate stress from an employee's life or relieve employers of the cost of providing workers with a place to work. However, with good planning, forethought, and training, telework has proved to have the benefits discussed above.

Jumping into telecommuting unprepared, however, can cause a reduction in productivity and a lot of unnecessary frustration, stress, and turmoil for both the teleworker and the employer. The tools in this course will help you to anticipate issues related to your situation and develop a plan for addressing them before they become problems that derail your telework experience.

Your Assignment, Should You Choose to Accept It

Once you know more about the benefits of telework and have developed a plan to maximize benefits and minimize pitfalls, you will be in a position to talk with your supervisor about your own telecommuting schedule.

In this course you will develop a telecommuting plan. The elements of the plan are:

- Task analysis—determining which parts of your job are suitable for remote work.
- Personal analysis—deciding how suitable your work style and preferences are for telecommuting.
- Remote office analysis—developing a plan to meet your needs for space, equipment, and resources.
- Talking points for a presentation—describing to your supervisor the benefits of telecommuting for your organization, your work group, and you.
- Telecommuting agreement—documenting the terms of your telecommuting experience (you will write a draft that may be amended when you meet with your supervisor).

In the Web Resources at the end of each lesson you will find links to help you with each part of this assignment. At the end of the current lesson, you will find links to sources with statistics and discussions about the benefits and costs of telework. Also at the end of this lesson are links to help you with the job analysis that you begin on the next screen.

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What Work is Suitable for Telework?

Successful telecommuters need to find a good balance between work to do remotely (at home, on the road, or in a telework center) and work to do at the main office. All kinds of people telecommute: computer programmers, engineers, writers, researchers, managers, secretaries, clerks, customer service representatives, nurses—high level, mid-level, front line. The job title and the organizational level don't matter so much as the particular work that needs to be done.

To determine whether a job is suitable for telecommuting, you need to look closely at the individual tasks that make up the job.

Here are some examples of tasks: keying items into a database, scheduling a meeting using email or calendar software, chairing a meeting, writing a report, reading a report, washing the coffeemaker, answering and routing incoming telephone calls, greeting office visitors, faxing, photocopying, filing.



Some tasks must be done at the main office. Some can be done at home (or other remote location). Others might be done at home if the right tools can be made available.

Begin by making a list of all the tasks that you perform on a regular basis. Remember to include any important informal tasks that may not appear on your job description, but are important to doing a good job.

Once you have created your task list, print out a copy of the Task Analysis Worksheet on the next screen for each task.

The worksheet will help you with a task-by-task analysis of your job. Start by listing all the tasks you perform on a regular basis. Then review each task individually in the light of the statements on the worksheet.

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Task Analysis Worksheets

Task:	True	False
This task requires minimal unscheduled face-to-face contact with colleagues.		
This task produces results that are easily measured or quantified.		
This task produces results that have predictable outputs or deadlines.		
This task uses software, data, or tools that can be made available at a remote location.		
This task minimizes use of files, equipment, or supplies that are difficult to move to a remote location.		
This task can be accomplished with the use of fax, telephone, or email contact		
This task allows flexibility in the time or place where it is completed.		

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Analyze Your Results

Now analyze your results. Each task marked with all "True" answers is a strong candidate for remote work. A task with only one "False" might be a candidate and could perhaps be done at home with ingenuity and a change in your work process. However, don't force the issue too much. You want to leave some work to do at the office.

Now go back through the tasks that appear suitable for telework. Note down the equipment, software, data, or other tools you will need to do the job most efficiently at your remote location.

Now you have a picture of how much of your job is suitable for telework.

Review your worksheets again after looking at the sites in [Web Resources](#) at the end of this lesson. Reading about the policies of some major employers and experiences of other telecommuters and may give you additional insights on how you can work remotely in an effective manner.

Make a list of the tasks that are good for telework and decide how much of your time they take during the typical week. You can use that information to help you decide how many days per week you want to work at home and how many days you want to work at the office.

But remember: a task may be suitable for telework, but this does not mean that you **must** do it at home. Your balance of home time versus office time will depend not only on the nature of the tasks, but also on the culture of your organization, your own comfort level in working away from the main office, and the agreement that you work out with your supervisor.

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Web Resources

General Introduction to Telework

["About Telework"](#) is an article on the site of the **Canadian Telework Association** that has compiled many of the (sometimes conflicting) statistics on telework in the US, Canada, and Europe. There is also a good section on the ["Advantages and Disadvantages of Telework"](#) for the employee, employer, and society at large.

The Federal Government's [Interagency Telecommuting Site](#) has many links to information about telecommuting in the public and private sector. If you are a federal employee, you can find how to contact the telecommuting coordinator for your agency.

About.com has two good introductory articles: ["Telecommuting: What Does It Mean?"](#) and ["Why Telecommute?"](#)

Task Analysis

The Federal Government has a very short, commonsense statement on the suitability of job tasks for telecommuting. You can see it at the [Office of Personnel Management](#) site.

About.com has a useful table, ["Job Functions Suited to Telecommuting"](#)

European Telework Online also has a description of the tasks best suited for remote work in ["What are the basic requirements for teleworking at/from home"](#).

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