

Teleworking (Sometimes called Telecommuting)

“Tele-” is from the Greek, meaning “at a distance”, so Telework is “working at a distance”.

Teleworking *includes* telecommuting as one of its components. The other components of telework are Telemedicine (remote diagnosis, consulting and treatment), Distance Learning (remote education, training and briefing), and Teletrade (using telecommunications to carry out business transactions – also called e-commerce or electronic commerce and now also m-commerce or mobile commerce).

Teleworking is using telecommunications to change the geography of where we work. Telecommuting uses telecommunications to *avoid the use of transportation to travel* to and from the traditional workplace. So, telecommuting is a much more limited term, applied to avoiding the dangers and time wasting of the daily commute to and from the office. Telecommuting, because a component of the word is “commute”, therefor has the connotation of being an employee benefit or accommodation.

Telework additionally, includes working from anywhere as the opportunity to do so presents itself – your car, an airport lounge, a teleworkcenter or branch or satellite office, a client’s office, a café or a hotel room. This new ubiquity of the workplace is sometimes called “Flexiplace” working.

Also included as telework is avoiding travel associated with having to attend meetings by using audioconferencing (voice only conference calling), videoconferencing and/or collaborative software. The latter enables several people, at distributed work locations, to view and modify the same document synchronously or asynchronously.

The word Telework helps reinforce, because “-work” is part of the term, that telework is a business management strategy and not purely a means of relieving the employee of the personal burden of having to commute. Even though avoiding the commute has many benefits associated with it, managers need to be able to justify what can be a significant investment of management time and capital required to adopt telework strategies. Consequently, managers’ business case proposals and cost-benefit analyses are more readily accepted when the term telework is used rather than telecommute.

Internationally the word Telework is readily modified to become Telearbeit, Teletravail, Teletrabajo etc.

Telework/Telecommuting provides a wide range of **Benefits** to employers, employees, society and the environment. The main benefits are:

- Improved quality of work-life balance for employees: stress reduction because of doing away with strictly structured work patterns, increased control by employee of work environment, opportunity to have more family time, improving overall employee morale, removal of the stresses and dangers associated with having to commute.
- Improved competitiveness, in terms of individual and organizational productivity, and enhanced governmental service level efficiency.
- Improved capability to recruit and retain workers – ability to retain employees whose spouse or family is relocated out of the area; to accommodate a valued employee with a disability, personal or family illness; or on extended leave because of childbirth or adoption.

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- Real estate cost savings by avoiding additional construction costs or increased lease costs; avoiding having to relocate to accommodate employment of more people; or to become a 100% virtual organization.
- Introduction of “stealth” process re-engineering – improved management methodologies & practices will follow the introduction of a successful telework program. Results oriented management, ideally suited to telework, rather than line of sight management – the traditional management style, will become the new organizational culture.
- Absenteeism can be reduced – maternity and medical leave time can be diminished, because working from home does not always require total recovery. Unexcused time taken off to deal with personal and domestic day-to-day events such as family emergencies and household repairs can be minimized when the flexibility of telework options are available so that lost time can be made up.
- Bring employment to underemployed segments of the population such as retirees, the disabled, workers in inner urban areas, geographically remote areas, military spouses, areas from which manufacturing industries and farming have moved away, or where military installations have been closed.
- Reduction of mobile toxic gas emissions, pollution runoff into waterways & the preservation of limited natural resources (oil) and green open space.

There are **Challenges** associated with Telework/Telecommuting. These include:

- ◆ Resistance, usually from middle management, to change to the new ways of working required to control remotely located workers – “Results Oriented Management”, rather than “Line of Sight Management.” Managers need to overcome telework myths such as “Out of sight means out of control!”
- ◆ Adoption of new technologies, too far ahead of worker familiarity & acceptance of them, can result in resistance to change. This is especially prevalent when training is not provided to keep employees’ technology skills current. A program not providing adequate technical support has been identified as one of the main reasons why Telework programs failⁱ.
- ◆ Managers often object to the adoption of telework strategies, because they fear that data security measures, procedures and sanctions for non-compliance can not easily be replicated outside the main office environment.
- ◆ Exposure to charges of inequity in the selection process between employees chosen as teleworkers vs. those passed over to remain non-teleworkers. An inadequate selection process can expose employers to charges of discrimination, favoritism etc.

Further Research Sources:

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ⁱ GartnerGroup study. www.gartner.com.