

Why Working From Home Works

By Dan Pontefract

In a landmark 2007 paper published in the Journal of Applied Psychology called “The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown About Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences”, authors Ravi Gajendran and David Harrison of the Department of Management and Organization at Pennsylvania State University dispelled the notion that working from home was bad for business or bad for employee morale.

It’s a paper I’m certain the internet company Yahoo! failed to read when they announced all 12,000+ employees had to begin working from Yahoo! offices 100 percent of the time back in June 2013.

What Did Gajendran and Harrison Prove?

Through the review and analysis of 46 individual studies that featured 12,883 employees, these researchers determined working from home demonstrated seven positive outcomes:

- Employees had greater control over their environment proving causality to increased results and productivity
- Due to less face-to-face interaction between the manager and the employee, the quality of their interactions actually increased
- The balance of life and work – allowing for the flexibility of life’s curveballs and family matters – extended their wishes to do a good job
- With an increase in autonomy came an increase in job retention and satisfaction
- Stress was reduced due to a decrease in commuting, money on lunches and business attire
- Commitment to the company increased – what we might call a likelihood to stay – due to the work from home option
- Distractions decreased and performance increased whilst managers shifted their adjudication on results versus face-time

My Personal Story

Since 2002 I have led people across multiple time zones and countries. Since 2008 I have been a mobile worker. This geographic flexibility sees me working from home roughly 50 percent of the time.

The other 50 percent sees me in meeting rooms, hoteling stations, hotels, airplanes, lounges and coffee shops. Through my travels I am constantly plugged in, constantly in touch with everyone and anyone.

When I think back to the research of Gajendran and Harrison, I often smile. Why? Because for me personally, they are absolutely right. If I was shackled to a desk or an office 100 percent of the time, there is not a chance I'd be as motivated, engaged or productive as I am in my life today. I might not even use the collaborative technologies available to me as much as I do today.

If I didn't have the flexibility to work from home I don't believe I'd be the leader, employee or performer I am today.

I personally believe – and can attest to – the seven positive outcomes outlined by the research above ring true for me, the team I'm a part of as well as the organization I'm employed by. There are many ingredients to creating an engaged team and/or workforce, but one that is crucial is offering a flexible work environment coupled by collaborative technologies.

Collaborative tools like virtual worlds, instant messaging, webcams, telepresence, micro-blogging, blogging, video/photo sharing in addition to good ole email helps reinforce connections to continue and productivity to swell. If you believe a 'work from home' program can be successful without at least some of the aforementioned tools, you are as misguided as believing COVID-19 isn't going to affect your business.

It is in stark contrast to not only the decision made by Yahoo! several years ago but by countless organizations who continue to believe a 100 percent work-from-the-office strategy is better for morale, productivity, and innovation. This is not going to be the case in the wake of COVID-19.

In Summary

In these trying times, make it your mission to help employees shift to a flexible working environment, and use it as an opportunity to build out your set of collaborative technologies.

It's often in the shadows of a crisis where opportunity lurks. Now is your opportunity.

Dan Pontefract is the founder and CEO of The Pontefract Group, a firm that improves the state of leadership and organizational culture.

He is the best-selling author of three books: *OPEN TO THINK*, *THE PURPOSE EFFECT* and *FLAT ARMY*. A renowned speaker, Dan has presented at four different TED events and also writes for *Forbes* and *Harvard Business Review*. Dan is an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria, Gustavson School of Business and has garnered more than 20 industry awards over his career.



His third book, *OPEN TO THINK* won the 2019 getAbstract International Book of the Year winner and the 2019 Axiom Business Book Award in the Leadership category. He is set to release his 4th book on September 29 titled, *LEAD. CARE. WIN. How to Become a Leader Who Matters*.

Previously as Chief Envisioner and Chief Learning Officer at TELUS—a Canadian telecommunications company with revenues of over \$14 billion and 50,000 global employees—he launched the Transformation Office, the TELUS MBA, and the TELUS Leadership Philosophy, all award winning initiatives that dramatically helped to increase the company's employee engagement to record levels of nearly 90%. Throughout his tenure he was a mobile worker and helped the organization rollout its award-winning Flexible Work Styles model. Prior to TELUS he held senior roles at SAP, Business Objects and BCIT.

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