

# Working At TELUS Taught Me So Much About Flexible And Remote Working

*By Dan Pontefract*

We are in the midst of one of the greatest crisis this world has ever seen. SARS-CoV-2 and the resulting disease, COVID-19, is gripping the planet. Leaders and organizations without a flexible work strategy are scrambling to put together emergency measures to keep things together.

This crisis, however, is also creating an opportunity for organizations to shift how they think about and conduct the daily practice of work.

I worked fulltime at TELUS between 2008 and 2018. In 2019 I became a contractor, on call to support several initiatives. It has been a remarkable journey, one that I'm proud to be associated with. One particular component to our relative success is we've developed something called Work Styles™. It's a program more than a technology. At its root, Work Styles is a cultural shift towards empowering team members with the tools, resources and support they need to work when and where they're most effective and productive. To put things into perspective, TELUS is a \$15 billion global company with over 50,000 global employees.

We've realized some fantastic and positive outcomes of the Work Styles program, including how it:

- Increases employee engagement and promotes healthy work-life balance;
- Differentiates employers in attracting and retaining top talent;
- Reduces real estate footprint and environmental impact;
- Produces significant cost savings for the company.

## How TELUS Knows It Works

To confirm the success of the TELUS Work Styles program, we commissioned Western University's Richard Ivey School of Business to conduct a study between February 2013 and February 2014.

The study included focus groups and quantitative research to compare office resident, home, and mobile knowledge workers. More than 2,000 knowledge workers and managers at TELUS participated in the research.

The study found that Work Styles is associated with many positive outcomes and confirmed TELUS' belief that the most engaged and productive team members are empowered to work when and where they are most productive. The study also revealed areas where team members faced challenges in a Work Styles environment, uncovering invaluable insight for leaders.

Empowering employees to work when and where they are most productive offers four big business benefits:

1. **Increased employee engagement:** Mobile and at-home employees reported that their work interfered less with their home lives than their in-office counterparts. We credit improved work-life balance as playing a key role in the company's world-leading employee engagement score which has risen from 53% to 87% over the same time period.
2. **Attracting and retaining top talent:** As an increasing number of millennials enter the workplace, flexible working programs can be a huge differentiator for employers trying to recruit and retain a new generation of workers. We've witnessed the number of resumes received into TELUS double since 2010. The study also found that mobile and at-home workers were less likely to leave their jobs.
3. **Reduced operating costs:** With employees working from home, organizations can reduce their real-estate footprint, leading to significant savings in lease and energy costs. Large companies with offices across the country can also save millions in travel costs each year by investing in tools and technology to collaborate remotely. In 2013 alone, TELUS realized \$14 million in travel savings alone, and reduced its overall real estate leasing costs by \$40 million with a 40% reduction in real estate our overall footprint.
4. **Lower carbon footprint:** When companies downsize their office spaces and cut down on business trips, not only are they saving money, they're reducing carbon emissions by several thousand tonnes. By eliminating commutes, companies can also help take cars off the road. At TELUS, Work Styles helps eliminate more than 19 million kilometers and 1.1 million hours of commuting annually.

*"With Work Styles, TELUS team members maintained their performance, exhibited increased loyalty, and experienced lower stress and less family/job conflict."*

Alison Konrad, Professor of Organizational Behaviour,  
The Richard Ivey School of Business (co-author of the study)

## Other interesting tidbits from the study include

- Mobile and at-home workers reported better work-life balance.
- 98% of mobile workers and 99% of at-home workers reported low to moderate impact of work duties on their home and family life, compared to 71% of resident workers.
- Mobile and at-home workers demonstrated increased loyalty.
- 100% of mobile and at-home workers were considered low-risk of leaving TELUS.

- Mobile and at-home workers were considered equally productive as their resident colleagues.
- Leaders showed no differences in their ratings of productivity or performance of mobile, at-home and resident workers.

TELUS isn't the only organization to realize significant correlation between a flexible work program and bottom line benefits. In a study where call center agents were given the opportunity to work from home for nine months, Stanford University Professor of Economics, Nicholas Bloom, found that those working from home were more than 13% productive, quit 50% less and indicated they were much happier on the job.

## In Summary

COVID-19 has presented an opportunity. As a leader, it's your responsibility to put flexible work into action. Given my experience with TELUS over 12 years, I can wholeheartedly let you know that it is worth the effort.

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**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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

Dan and his wife, Denise, have three children (aka goats) and live in Victoria, Canada. Reach him at [www.pontefractgroup.com](http://www.pontefractgroup.com)