Telework: Not Business as Usual
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Telework means distant work (Tele from the Greek means distant)

The word ‘telecommuting’ was first coined by Jack Nilles (1975) to describe work that was undertaken away from a central office.

The benefits of telework are for the most part anecdotal rather than evidence based.

Technology has not been found to be an obstacle for organisations implementing telework.

It is doubtful that Senior Managers are aware of who teleworks, who has access to telework or how telework is implemented in their organisation.

Not all job are teleworkable, not everyone is suited to telework (and not everyone wants to telework)
The Acceleration of Telework: Drivers

- Legislative Environment *(Fair Work Amendment Bill 2013)*

  *The right to request a flexible work arrangement will be extended to a broader range of employees (including carers, over 55’s, the disabled, victims of domestic violence and immediate family/household members providing care or support to such victims)*

- Technology
  - NBN
  - Collaboration tools
  - Cloud
  - BYOD

- Other
  - Real estate costs (activity based working/office space)
  - Work/life balance
  - Long commutes
  - Co-working spaces
  - Mobility
Status of Telework: Definition is still problematic

• The definitions of telework usually refer to a **formal** arrangement with an employer
• Flexibility – working from home or other places away from the office is often undertaken as an **informal** arrangement which is not always captured in statistics
Three Components: technology, human resource management and service quality (customer service)
Anywhere Working: Framework

Technology: Socio-technical framework
- technology infrastructure
- technological support
- media richness
- choice of tools
- employee technology (tablets, smartphones)
- ‘polluted time’ employee wellbeing

Human Resource Management: SHRM, job characteristics
- autonomy
- access to skilled employees
- balance between electronic and face to face communication
- tacit knowledge
- productivity/work intensification

Service Quality: SERVQUAL
- customer perceptions of quality
- technology choice
- appropriateness of technology
- organisational culture

Telework
Enhanced service quality
Business as usual
Competitive advantage

Anywhere Working Panel for the Women, Management and Work Conference
19 July 2013
Technology

- Technology infrastructure (fast, ubiquitous broadband)
- Technological support
- Media richness – (face to face is the richest, lowest is email)
- Choice of tools - BYOD
- ‘polluted time’
Human Resource Management

- Job design - autonomy
- ‘presenteeism’
- Access to skilled employees
- Balance between face to face and electronic communication
- Tacit knowledge
- Productivity/work intensification
- Innovation and creativity
Service Quality: Customer Service

- Customer perceptions of quality
- Technology choice
- Appropriateness of technology
- Organisational culture
Some thoughts....
“You get a lot out of a one hour [face to face] meeting, just throw ideas around sometimes. If you are on the phone, it might be misinterpreted, it might cut you out, you might not hear...maybe there should be a room that was just dedicated to the conference [call] where you had the right acoustics and all that sort of stuff, which we don’t have because you lose so much of it.”

Office-based Supervisor
“...and the Blackberry is the worst invention...because as soon as I see my little red light flashing on my phone I’m like oh might be something important I should read that oh I’ll just quick reply...they’ve [the customer] emailed me this, they need an answer, I’ll just provide it, it’s right there, don’t be lazy. I think I see it as laziness...if I was asking the question I’d be stoked if someone had that answer to me in my inbox by the next morning...I just want everyone to be happy...”

Full time teleworker (1)
“...mentally, I feel like because I’ve been given these resources there’s no reason why I can’t be accessible every minute of the day and because I don’t have an office line or landline then if someone rings my mobile there’s no excuse for why I don’t answer it unless I’m in a meeting...”

Full time teleworker (1)
“...there have been multiple occasions where I’ve been told by a client about something going on in Sydney and I hate it...and whenever that happens I’m straight on the phone. Like this is so embarrassing. Tell me these things...”
“I think one of the challenges is to have too many decision makers out of the office at the same time...because sometimes you need to bring them all together and say ‘we need to decide on...’and you might actually need to be in person to talk about it for a while before you can make a decision”

Office-based Supervisor
“I can seclude myself in this country property away from anyone who can knock on the door and abuse me on what I’m doing. I can organise these meetings at a particular time and come and not when they just find out about something and they get in the taxi, come here [head office]...”

Full time teleworker (2)
“you just tend to rush, you tend to miss a lot of the detail...you just get these replies that sometimes completely disappoint...you think you’re solving the issue, all you’ve done is delayed it because there’s going to be another three or four emails because it wasn’t clear in the first place.”

Office worker (1)
“...it’s almost like a psychological thing that you just come in, you’ve got your routine, and yes you come in at certain times, you do exactly the kind of same things...you’re in a routine and I guess it’s you know it’s a good thing...”

Office worker (2)
“I like the fact that I have my desk and I know where everything is and I know where I can put everything. I like organisation and at home you’re just working from a bench...I like the discipline and the structure.”

Office worker (3)
“...we have morning tea, that’s on a Tuesday and she [teleworker 1] never attends any...because she’s not there she misses out on all of that as well...then she comes in the next day and asks what has happened or what did I miss out on; stuff like that and I thought well go into the office and you will be part of it.”

Supervisor (1)
“It is not the same as being there, no, it is not...to me it is, you’ve chosen to work from home today, I am not there to give you a word for word report on what was discussed. I will take you through the major things, you can’t get people’s reactions if you’re talking to me, you’ve got to come to those sorts of functions yourself, but don’t then come back and say you’re missing out on all of this when it’s your decision to work from home.”

Supervisor (1)
“Some people make judgements about a small period of time where they’re interacting with someone over the phone...as opposed to seeing them in the corridor or down the street, or having a chat with them or rubbing shoulders...”

Senior Manager
“...that’s just coffee, so you may hear something from someone else which might be related to something else and you sort of join the dots...well okay I can sort of piece this together and I kind of know where everyone’s going because I get little snippets from everywhere in little conversations that happen in a formal and informal context and I can sort of piece the whole thing together...that would be very hard to do if all you had were a series of telecons [teleconferencing] on very structured issues...”

Senior Manager
“...a few people will say sly remarks like ‘oh you know, you’ve slept in’ or ‘have an afternoon nap’ or you’re doing all these sorts of things and I kind of think ‘that’s a bit wrong because you know I am doing the work...that’s why I would never ask for three days[to work from home]...it’s just the sly ‘oh are you still in your jamies or ‘you going out shopping’. Why would I go out shopping in the middle of the day? Why would I stay in my PJs? I do the child care run, hello! I feel I need to defend myself.”

Teleworker (2)
“...if somebody’s working from home, I’d be less inclined to ask them something because I would just you know, I’d think ‘well it’s not urgent, I’ll just wait til they’re back in the office’ or sometimes you think ‘Oh I don’t really want to annoy them’...”

Office Worker (2)
Challenges ....

• There are components of both formal and informal telework arrangements – both need to be managed
• The ‘visibility’ of workers issue needs to be resolved (trust, agreed work outputs, communication) – how to measure productivity (individual/team/organisation)?
• Work intensification versus low productivity workers...management and leadership
• Job design – need autonomy
• Tacit knowledge – how do we impart and capture?
• Innovation and creativity opportunities
• What are the implications for customers?
Is this what managers are afraid of?
Should they be?
This is where we want to extend the conversation about telework!
Anywhere working...