

The Good, The Bad, And The Unknown About Telecommuting

The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown About Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences

Ravi S. Gajendran and David A. Harrison

Pennsylvania State University

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What are the positive and negative consequences of telecommuting? How do these consequences come about? When are these consequences more or less potent? The authors answer these questions through construction of a theoretical framework and meta-analysis of 46 studies in natural settings involving 12,883 employees.

Telecommuting had small but mainly beneficial effects on proximal outcomes, such as perceived autonomy and (lower) work–family conflict. Importantly, telecommuting had no generally detrimental effects on the quality of workplace relationships. Telecommuting also had beneficial effects on more distal outcomes, such as job satisfaction, performance, turnover intent, and role stress. These beneficial consequences appeared to be at least partially mediated by perceived autonomy. Also, high-intensity telecommuting (more than 2.5 days a week) accentuated telecommuting’s beneficial effects on work–family conflict but harmed relationships with coworkers. Results provide building blocks for a more complete theoretical and practical treatment of telecommuting.

Telecommuting has a clear upside: small but favorable effects on perceived autonomy, work–family conflict, job satisfaction, performance, turnover intent, and stress. Contrary to expectations in both academic and practitioner literatures, telecommuting also has no straightforward, damaging effects on the quality of workplace relationships or perceived career prospects. However, there is a downside of higher intensity telecommuting in that it does seem to send coworker (but not supervisor) relationships in a harmful direction. Some of the complexities of these consequences have yet to be explored, but the evidence and theory reviewed here suggest that they can be managed effectively through informed human resources policies.