

# Telecommuters with flextime stay balanced up to 19 hours longer

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Not surprising: Telecommuters balance work and family life better than office workers.

Surprising: They can maintain that balance even while sometimes squeezing in a couple extra days' worth of [work](#) each week.

Researchers from Brigham Young University analyzed data from 24,436 IBM employees in 75 countries, identifying the point at which 25 percent of employees reported that work interfered with personal and family life.

For office workers on a regular schedule, the breaking point was 38 hours per week. Given a flexible schedule and the option to telecommute, employees were able to clock 57 hours per week before experiencing such conflict.

Not all of those 57 hours are telecommuting hours, notes lead study author E. Jeffrey Hill, a professor in BYU's School of Family Life. The typical high-flexibility work arrangement includes a mix of office time and firing up the laptop from home, the venue depending on the task at hand.

"Telecommuting is really only beneficial for reducing work-life conflict when it is accompanied by flextime," Hill said.

Before he joined BYU's faculty, Hill was a pioneering telecommuter at

IBM starting in 1990, working for the company's Armonk, New York headquarters while living in Arizona and then Utah. A few years later, the organization made a big telecommuting push and saved millions on the cost of office space.

"Managers were initially skeptical about the wisdom of working at home and said things like 'If we can't see them, how can we know they are working?'" Hill said.

Nowadays more than 80 percent of IBM managers agree that productivity increases in a flexible environment.

In the current economy, the scenario is being repeated with other businesses feeling the pinch.

"A down economy may actually give impetus to flexibility because most options save money or are cost-neutral," Hill said. "Flexible work options are associated with higher [job satisfaction](#), boosting morale when it may be suffering in a down economy."

The study, titled "Finding an Extra Day or Two," will appear in the June issue of the *Journal of Family Psychology*. Study coauthors include BYU School of [Family Life](#) professors Jenet J. Erickson and Erin K. Holmes, and Maria Ferris, a retired IBM researcher.

Previous research by this group found that family dinnertime isn't just good for kids - it recharges working parents. Slate dubbed their findings the "Mac-and-Cheese Effect" for the extra benefit the family dinner hour gives to working mothers of young children.

In the new study, telecommuting's benefits were apparent among both genders.

"Men are as likely as women to use flexible work arrangements," Hill said.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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