

How mobile working ruins work-life balance – unless you've got a good manager

December 20 2017, by Stefanie Reissner And Michal Izak, The Conversation



Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

An increasing number of office workers can now work from any location for at least part of their working week. According [to the Work](#)

[Foundation](#), 30% of office workers could work from any location for at least part of their working week in 2016. This figure is expected to rise to 70% in the next few years.

These are mobile workers. They fulfil their job roles irrespective of whether they are at home, in a corporate or client office, or in public spaces. As long as they have their laptop or tablet, smartphone and, ideally, a reliable internet connection they can get the job done. In the words of someone we've interviewed [in our research](#): my computer is my office.

Mobile working – with the flexibility to [work](#) where and when convenient – has well-known benefits. It enables people (particularly women) to combine caring responsibilities with paid work, allows them to maintain contact with a workplace, keep up with the latest developments in their profession and contribute to a pension.

Mobile working enables people to work from home or a nearby corporate location, thereby reducing their commute time across a working week, which enhances well-being [and has environmental benefits](#). It also allows organisations to cut estate costs by providing fewer desks and storage facilities – and even close down entire offices. It's a tempting proposition in times of austerity.

But mobile working also carries significant risks for individuals and organisations. [Research shows](#) that being constantly connected through your smartphone leads to an erosion of boundaries between work and non-work. Plus, mobile workers face increasing external pressures to work more effectively and efficiently throughout a working day or week. For example, people may have to provide a report at the end of the day only when working remotely and may even be rung up by the office to check if they are indeed working.

Under pressure

Our [research](#), carried out in both public and private sector organisations, as well as among individual entrepreneurs, also reveals the internal pressures that mobile workers often feel. They feel compelled to work longer and later hours, and tend to make themselves constantly available via their tablet or smart phone. Frequently, they do not take adequate breaks and, in some cases, skip them altogether. As a result, many of them are constantly surrounded by work in all its shapes and sizes.

Some of our interviewees reported a variety of behaviours that could harm their health and well-being. For example, they reduce their daytime breaks to extremely short periods – sometimes as brief as ten minute comfort breaks – as they are highly alert to the sound of incoming emails and feel compelled to respond instantly.

Others routinely check their work email, not only during the day but also as the very last thing they do at night and the very first thing they do in the morning. They are becoming, in the words of one participant, slaves to email. Some do not even associate checking and responding to their work-related emails as belonging to the realm of work; it is normal for them to do so in the evenings and on weekends.

In fact, we have spoken to those who customarily interweave leisure with work by remaining available and responsive to work related demands during relaxation, such as while watching an evening show on TV.

Others say they do not mind logging on to remote access servers in the middle of the night (we're talking 3am), over weekends, or while on holiday – because they feel pressured to be constantly, albeit remotely, at work.

Even acknowledging the demands of the modern, increasingly globalised and digitised economy, this behaviour indicates that mobile workers not

only struggle to contain work within the boundaries of normal working hours or the working week. But they also find it hard to switch off work completely during what is traditionally regarded as non-work time.

Calling all managers

Meanwhile, managerial responses to a healthier balance between work and non-work are often half-hearted. After all, longer and harder work that comes from mobile working typically increases team productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. One manager we spoke to reported advising his team not to send email late in the evening or on weekends, while also emphasising that it was their responsibility to control their overall working pattern.

By and large, organisations that strive to profit from the advantages offered by mobile working, without cushioning its psychological and social effects, are trying to have their cake and eat it.

The way that mobile working is introduced and communicated between managers and their teams influences how much internal pressure people subject themselves to. This is often under-appreciated. Yet the accumulated tensions on a personal level may, ultimately, affect not only people's private lives, but also their work relationships and productivity in the long run.

Mobile working certainly has its benefits. But companies must ensure they think through how they introduce it and design well-balanced policies that take into account both the risks and advantages to ensure a win-win strategy for both the organisation and its employees.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How mobile working ruins work-life balance – unless you've got a good manager (2017, December 20) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-12-mobile-work-life-youve-good.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--