

# Telecommuting found to have little impact on corporate careers

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Working from home is known to be good for a strong work-life balance, advantageous for employee productivity, and is even touted as being beneficial for the environment. However, telecommuting has also carried

a stigma—despite a lack of data to back it up—that employees who work remotely have difficulties rising in their career.

New research from the Lally School of Management at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute finds that the reality is more positive than previously feared. In a study recently published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Timothy D. Golden, a professor and area head of enterprise management and organization in Lally, found that rather than suffering career consequences, telecommuters and non-telecommuters receive an equal number of promotions.

"Although telecommuting has experienced rapid growth, some workers are reluctant to try telecommuting for fear that it will hurt their career," Golden said. "This research helps answer that critical question: Does it hurt your career if you telecommute? My study shows that it depends heavily on the employee's work context."

Golden found that a key determinant in the success of telecommuters receiving promotions was the prevalence of telecommuting in their workplace. Telecommuters were promoted more when they worked in offices where working from home was widely accepted, yet in offices where few people telecommuted, those employees received fewer promotions.

While telecommuters may rise in the ranks at the same rate as their office-bound counterparts, Golden observed that employees working from home don't earn the same bump in pay. However, if telecommuters signaled a "devotion" to the workplace by working additional hours outside of normal working hours, his analysis indicated that they benefited in terms of both promotions and salary growth.

Golden also determined that it was not simply the fact that an employee telecommuted that mattered. The amount of telecommuting per week is

also a key component of an employee's advancement. Moreover, he found that face time matters. Even when an [employee](#) telecommuted a large percentage of their work week, telecommuters who had more in-person contact with supervisors received higher pay increases.

Golden used a sample of more than 400 employees matched with corporate data on [promotion](#) and salary growth.

"In this study, I wanted to use objective data—actual promotions and salary increases—rather than simply rely on survey responses, as had been done in previous research," Golden said. "In this way, we can begin to uncover the true impact of telecommuting on fundamental [career](#) outcomes, such as promotions and salary growth over time."

Golden is an expert in the field of telework and telecommuting, studying this field for more than 20 years.

"Previous research has tended to treat all telecommuters as one homogeneous group, and my research suggests that telecommuting is not a one-size-fits-all work arrangement," Golden said. "Telecommuting arrangements are often unique, and differences in these arrangements must be understood and taken into account when determining how best to be successful. This study suggests contextual factors are especially important to consider when determining telecommuting's effect on promotions and [salary](#) growth."

**More information:** Timothy D. Golden et al, Is there a price telecommuters pay? Examining the relationship between telecommuting and objective career success, *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103348](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103348)

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