

Telecommuting positively impacts job performance, study finds

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Telecommuting contributes to improved job performance for employees in complex jobs, allowing them to benefit from fewer interruptions common in an office setting, research from FIU Business finds.

Overall, telecommuting has little negative impact on performance, even in [jobs](#) that require frequent interaction and communication with others.

"We find that for most job characteristics we examine in our study, telecommuting doesn't significantly hurt job performance," said Ravi Gajendran, assistant professor in the Department of Global Leadership and Management, who conducted the research. "For some job features, performance is better with more extensive telecommuting and in others, the impact is neutral."

The findings, published in the February 2019 issue of the *Journal of Business and Psychology*, examined job complexity and problem solving as well as interdependence and [social support](#) to determine the telecommuting–job performance relationship.

"People often think of telecommuting in terms of its implications for work–family balance. But focusing on its flexibility benefits alone does not provide a complete picture of telecommuting's potential upsides for employees and organizations," Gajendran said. "You can think of telecommuting as a way for enhancing [employee](#) performance in jobs with certain features."

The study tested data from a random sample of 273 telecommuters and their supervisors at an organization with a voluntary telecommuting program. Among the jobs held by these employees – marketing (13 percent), programming (24 percent), accounting (10 percent), engineering (23 percent), finance (6 percent), and sales (15 percent). On average, respondents telecommuted roughly two days per week.

One surprising result: [telecommuting](#) improved [job performance](#) when social support from co-workers or managers is low, suggesting perhaps that distance buffers employees from the downsides of unsupportive relationships at work.

"If you don't have a supportive environment, maybe you're better off being away from it," said Gajendran. "That may help with [performance](#)."

Telecommuting has been on the rise since 2005, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the U.S. Census. The BLS' 2017 American Time Use Survey indicated that 23 percent of U.S. employees did some or all of their work at home.

Gajendran and co-author Timothy Golden, professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Lally School of Management, agree more is needed.

"We haven't done a good job of understanding how electronic communication can substitute face-to-face interaction—the thought is that when you're away from the office something suffers," said Gajendran. "Also, there may be a generation of people just as comfortable, if not more, working via electronic technology as face-to-face."

More information: Timothy D. Golden et al. Unpacking the Role of a Telecommuter's Job in Their Performance: Examining Job Complexity, Problem Solving, Interdependence, and Social Support, *Journal of Business and Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10869-018-9530-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9530-4)

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