

Home-workers are hard workers, study finds

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Lucy Battersby

Technology Reporter

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Teleworkers are usually permanent, full-time employees who work more than 42 hours a week. *Photo: Michele Mossop*

Telecommuters are not slackers getting an extra day at home, but are more committed, productive and have higher job satisfaction than people who work full time at the office, according to a year-long study of nearly 2000 employees in Australia and New Zealand.

There is also a high level of trust between managers and telecommuters, with 64 per cent of respondents saying their managers trusted them to work unsupervised away from the office.

"The study found strong evidence of the positive benefits of telework for both individual workers and their organisations," the joint Auckland University and University of Melbourne study found. "Among our sample, telework promoted improved productivity and satisfaction with work, with hybrid teleworkers performing better than those who do little or no telework." The results were issued on Wednesday morning at Melbourne University's institute for a broadband-enabled society.

Teleworking and off-site working was likely to increase, giving businesses an opportunity to reduce their operating costs, one of the report's authors and a lecturer in computing and information systems at Melbourne University, Rachelle Bosua, said.

"Workers – when they feel they have more control over their work environment – can be more productive," Dr Bosua said.

"The [teleworking] trend is definitely going to increase ... There are stages in your week where you need to stand back and get away from the disruptions."

The Cisco-funded Trans-Tasman Telework Survey interviewed human resources managers and 1827 staff at 50 organisations across Australia and New Zealand, most with at least 200 employees.

It found telecommuters were usually permanent, full-time employees who worked more than 42 hours a week and had been with the company for nearly six years. Their arrangements were casual rather than formal and enabled through email access and off-site secure access to their company's intranet.

The average number of hours spent working away from the office was 13 hours and respondents were mostly non-managerial, although middle and senior managers were also represented. Finance and insurance companies and information and telecommunications companies represented about half the organisations involved.

Manager of business implementation at National Australia Bank Veronique Whitaker has been working one day at home every week for about four years. She started working from home because she needed time and space to work without interruptions and the change has improved her productivity and eliminated the need to work on weekends, she said.

"I found I was not getting the time and the space that I needed to do all my thinking work ... I have [now] built the space into my calendar to be able to get everything done," she said.

NAB provided information on home offices and helped staff to get quick and secure online access to work sites, she added. About half her team now used some form of flexible working to help with their work-life balance, Ms Whitaker said.

The study also found workers saved certain tasks for their day at home. Often this was administrative work, writing, planning and project work.

However, people who did work from home also reported that their office conditions were uncomfortable – too hot, cold, damp or draughty – were too noisy or had poor lighting. But during the year there was little difference in the number of injuries reported by teleworkers and non-teleworkers.

The Cisco/IBES survey comes a few weeks after the Australian Communications and Media Authority's own survey found [half of Australia's workforce uses the internet to work away from their office](#) for at least a few hours each week.

Do you find telecommuting more productive? Are you happier when you work from home? [Let us know in the comments.](#)