

TELECOMMUTING: CURRENT STATUS, FUTURE DIRECTION

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ABSTRACT

Telecommuting is a method of work which substitutes telecommunications and technology for the daily journey to, and home from work. Instead of travelling to a central workplace telecommuters work from home or a specially established centre close to their home. The incidence of telecommuting is increasing throughout the world. An extensive search for information on the telecommuting phenomenon reveals that most developed countries in the world have some level of participation in telecommuting. The United States of America certainly leads the way in terms of the numbers of participation and especially the information available.

Information on the Australian situation has been difficult to find. It would appear that not many organizations have formal plans or policies regarding telecommuting. Much of the information available for the Australian situation is concerned with the Rural Telecentres programme that whilst not strictly developed for the purposes of telecommuting does provide facilities which can be used by organizations and telecommuters.

Based on the reports available telecommuting is a popular choice for many workers. Telecommuters report benefits associated with lifestyle choices and increased work productivity due to lowered stress levels and choices about working hours. Telecommuting has also associated problems for telecommuters varying from being able to set aside a suitably equipped environment at home to concerns about isolation and missed career opportunities.

For organizations the benefits also are many including increased productivity, cost savings and worker satisfaction. The problems facing organizations need careful planning to overcome. Organizations have to deal with managerial issues, potential problems associated with insurance and legal exposure, and security concerns. Organizations need to establish formal policy regarding telecommuting in order to address these concerns.

Telecommuting has the potential to impact on travel and transport habits and infrastructures. It has the potential to impact positively on the environment by reducing vehicle emissions. Telecommuting, by making work location independent has the potential to affect suburban and rural communities.

Issues associated with telecommuting need to be further researched in order to have the information to plan and manage this phenomenon effectively. There is difficulty obtaining information on the Australian experience, even though Australia would be ideally suited due to its geographical isolation to take advantage of the possible benefits.

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