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Teleworking – anywhere, anytime, anyplace

Many of us have seen the ad where the manager of a company joins a teleconference boardroom meeting. She talks business while she sits facing the ocean, having her toenails painted, a soft humming fills the background. As idyllic as this seems, remote working is increasingly an option for workplaces seeking to retain staff who can't or won't attend the office every working day.

The concept of teleworking, telecommuting, e-work or the use of information and computer technologies to conduct regular business has opened up a global market.¹

Initially, the concept referred to people working from home using a computer, now the understanding is the use of IT technology to bypass spatial structures, cities or even continents. The UK Trades Union Congress defined teleworking as "Distance working facilitated by information and communication technologies",² and according to Vittorio Di Martino's research on the subject, these developments mean that work "can be performed at any location where electronic networking is possible".³

The advancements and speed of today's technology, as well as the ability to access shared information via phone, Internet, mobile, satellite and palm pilot are creating a new workplace reality.

This increased flexibility now offers employees a viable, effective and workable option to the traditional, rigid, office-bound structures of previous generations.

These changes impact on the corporate structure, lines of reporting and management styles needed to ensure this fluid system is effective. The emerging information-based contracts

create a "network economy"⁴ based on results not presence, work produced not time spent behind a desk.

Di Martino believes that a "high road" can be reached by negotiation between staff and management and that the best solution will create advantages for all parties. Preconceived shortcomings need to be addressed as "fears of the unknown / as well as loss of direct supervisory control appear to be the major factors of resistance" to adopting this approach to the workplace.

Moreover, implementing safety regulations – including beneficial lighting, eliminating hazards and stress in the work location – can be challenging for managers. Another concern is confidentiality where sensitive information is being accessed at home or in a remote teleconferencing centre. The absence of staff members from the central office may also affect team morale, the ability to interact or brainstorm, or that extra help needed when deadlines loom.

In some cases "teleworking situations may increase isolation, marginalisation and social dispersion / and fragmentation among the workforce".⁵ Inequality of wages may also occur.

However, it seems that there are numerous social and practical advantages to these working arrangements including a committed and productive staff, retention of experienced employees, and a happier more responsive workforce. The UK Equal Opportunities Commission found that "Managers of flexible workers rated 96% of them as outperforming their traditional full-time colleagues".⁶

In addition, office overheads, parking and security are some of the costs

that can be cut. The dollar value of a geographically dispersed or portable workforce seems to outweigh the cost of rehiring and retraining staff.⁷

Psychologically it may also increase the recovery rate of staff confined to home due to illness or on parental leave, allowing them to still feel part of a company and in touch with what is going on. Of course, this depends on the level of continued communication between office staff and remote workers and the sharing of information; emailing minutes of meetings, copying in of emails and letters and just remembering on a daily basis that they are there, albeit in cyberspace.

"More than 70% of organisations interviewed (in Di Martino's paper) were looking for more decentralisation and more than 80% believed in a networking organisation". It is becoming increasingly apparent that in the 21st Century, as Di Martino says, that "people rather than technologies, make the difference" and companies will need to adapt to the changing nature of the traditional static workplace.

In this *Work & Life Bulletin*, we have highlighted three companies with successful remote working arrangements.

¹ See www.telework.co.nz

² UK Trades Union Congress cited in Promoting decent work, the high road to teleworking. Vittorio Di Martino, Geneva, February 2001.

See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/telework/hrdptl.pdf>

³ Promoting decent work, the high road to teleworking. Vittorio Di Martino, Geneva, February 2001.

See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/telework/hrdptl.pdf>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ See www.eoc.org.uk/cseng/policyandcampaigns/productivity_women.pdf

⁷ See www.telework.co.nz/CBA for more specific details.

Remote working offers multiple benefits for Brookers

At Brookers, remote working is synonymous with productivity, commitment and knowledge retention.

The remote worker fires up her computer at 5.30am, puts in a couple of hours work editing a chapter of a legal text and then gets her family ready for school. She works another few hours at her desk before taking a late lunch and then does an hours gardening before collecting the kids from school. After dinner she completes another hours editing and then joins the family to watch TV.

Sound ideal? Maybe for the employee – but what’s it like for the boss?

“There hasn’t been any drop in productivity with our remote working staff,” claims Brookers Human Resources General Manager Terry Hutchins. “We find that our remote working staff have a strong work ethic and high outputs. They meet us more than halfway.”

Brookers is a legal and professional information publisher with a focus on legal, tax, accounting, and human resources material. The company has 154 permanent staff, 112 of whom work from the Wellington head office and 20 from its Auckland office. The bulk of the staff in Wellington and Auckland are editors, editor/writers or proofreaders. There are also large numbers of programme analysts working on their electronic and online products.

Fourteen staff work from home across the country. These staff deal directly with customers and include account managers, technical support staff and customer trainers.

Remote workers are fully set up by the company with a fax machine, a Jetstream broadband connection, a printer, and an additional phone line if required, as well as all the necessary software. They have access to the full company network from home, just as if they were physically in the office.

A \$50 tax-free weekly allowance is paid to assist these remote-working staff with phone and power and general wear and tear to the home office. Brookers also pays for these home office workstations to be assessed by independent OSH experts and pays for modifications required to create a safe office environment.

In addition to the 14 staff who work out in the field, seven desk-bound staff have opted to work from home to suit family or lifestyle situations and choices. They mostly include writers and editors. Some work from home full-time while others combine a mix of office and home. One woman works on a more casual basis of 20-30 hours a week to accommodate her family situation.

A partnership

Remote staff who work out in the field enjoy the flexibility of not having to travel to the office every day. They set their day. They can do their planning and reports in the evenings or early mornings without interruption. If they move house, Brookers assists with costs. “It’s a partnership thing,” says Mr Hutchins. “We make sure they’re not out of pocket.”

Two South Island account managers are flown up for sales conferences and for the mid-year ball. Colleagues, team members and their manager

communicate with them every week. The manager visits them quarterly. North Island remote workers attend company reviews in either Auckland or Wellington every five to six weeks.

Benefits and challenges

For Brookers the benefits of remote workers include the retention of skilled staff, many of whom have valuable institutional knowledge.

“They always meet their deadlines,” says Mr Hutchins. “Their work is of a high quality because they have the time to check it thoroughly, and they’re less distracted by events in the workplace. This enables them to be more productive. They’ve requested to work this way so they tend to do whatever is required to make it work. The turnover rate among our staff working from home is very low – so there’s a big win for both parties.”

The flip-side is that managers find that when the going gets tough and it’s a case of all hands on deck to complete urgent projects, remote workers are not there to lend a helping hand. Mr Hutchins says that if increasing numbers of staff opted to work from home it might mean that fewer staff were available in the office to pitch in when required.

Another challenge is for office managers to remember to consistently maintain communication with their remote workers. Managers sometimes forget to send them information from meetings which they would attend if they were in the office. Mr Hutchins maintains that their communication with remote workers is in the main very good, but, “We could always do better.”



Flexi-time for office staff

Working flexi-time is also an option for office staff. For most staff there are no set times for breaks, there is simply an expectation that the work will be done. At the same time it is not unusual for staff to take more than 30 minutes break at a local café for morning or afternoon tea.

Many staff take the opportunity to start early and finish early, or vice versa. For staff such as those working in the call centre, who can take only short

breaks or a strict one-hour lunch break to ensure that phones are covered, the freedom of other staff to come and go can occasionally be an issue.

Terry Hutchins himself works flexi-time. He starts work most days at 7am, enabling him to leave around 4.30pm to beat the traffic. This year he has negotiated a one-off holiday in lieu of a salary increase to enable him to visit family overseas.

The company offers a range of benefits

to assist with a work-life balance. They include 50% subsidised massages available on one day a week in both offices, free medical insurance, an attractive superannuation scheme, paid parental leave on top of government paid leave, support with further studies, and access to more than 800 online training programmes which they and their families can access out of work time.

Working from a home office suits employees with offshore roles

Many IBM employees have the flexibility of setting the times when they work, which can make work-life balance more achievable when they are working with teams across different time zones.

"The hours associated with an offshore role can be unsociable," says IBM NZ's HR Manager for Offshore Reports, Dorothy Lewsley. "Emails requiring a response can come through in the evenings or early morning, or conference calls can often be scheduled outside traditional New Zealand working hours. Remote workers have the flexibility to

adjust their working hours to get some personal time at another point in the day."

Around 30 of IBM's 800 New Zealand employees work remotely in various locations throughout New Zealand. They have a functional reporting line to IBM managers in Australia or the greater Asia-Pacific region, and to a human resources manager within New Zealand to help with any operational issues. The offshore roles cover a wide range of functions from marketing, technical advice, project management or business consulting, through to human resources or finance.

The company has successfully managed remote workers for many years. More than half its employees with an offshore role work from a home office, while others work from one of the IBM offices, or from a customer site in Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch. For those working from a home office, IBM provides the necessary equipment, including an IBM Thinkpad, printer, fax machine (if required), and access to the IBM network.

"Our employees with offshore roles are empowered to make lifestyle choices. For some that means they can choose to live

in an area where there is no IBM office. The only provision is that the needs of the business are met," says Ms Lewsley.

She says that in some cases employees are more focused if they are working off-site. For some people it is easier to concentrate without the distractions of a busy office environment.

"We have found that employees work more effectively if they are in an environment that suits them and if they have the flexibility to work the hours they need. When working with people in different time zones, they may need to work later in the evening. Working from home provides employees with the flexibility to establish a work-life balance that suits them, while still contributing to the success of the business," she says.

"We know that promoting work-life balance has a positive impact on the company's bottom line. If a person's work-life balance is about right, their morale is good and positive employee

morale leads to better results. For some employees, having the flexibility to work remotely means the difference between staying with the business and having to leave. IBM regards knowledge retention as vital so this is a win-win for us."

Keeping in touch with remote workers

From a people management perspective, the challenge for Ms Lewsley is to ensure that she keeps in touch with her team of remote workers so that they don't become isolated.

"It's important that I build a rapport with each of the team and understand any concerns they may have. Isolation is definitely a factor. They need to know that they have support. When working with off-shore teams on a daily basis, it would be easy for New Zealand-based employees to feel as if they're not part of IBM New Zealand."

To help address some of these issues, Ms Lewsley schedules time with remote employees on a regular basis. She also ensures that they are included in company social events.

"Employees working from home are generally very proactive and not hesitant about raising any issues that concern them. My job is to ensure that they have someone to listen to those concerns and to act on them."

IBM's flexibility programme doesn't end with employees in offshore roles. The organisation also provides a number of flexible work options such as a compressed working week, part-time work and jobsharing. These options are offered to employees based on an assessment against meeting business commitments, but the focus is on ensuring that all employees are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

More information on remote working

www.nzbc.org.nz/energyefficiency/content.asp?id=211

New Zealand Business Council for Sustainable Development outlines environmental and business benefits

www.telecom.co.nz/content/0,3900,201982-201259,00.html

Lists successful remote working programmes on offer in New Zealand

www.cmb.org.uk/resources/familyfriendly/workingf.pdf

Fact sheet on how to be a Family Friendly Employer – UK related

www.flexibility.co.uk/viewers/managers.htm

www.flexibility.co.uk/flexwork/general/emanager.htm

Resources and links for managers of flexible-working staff

www.dol.govt.nz/futureofwork/worklife-flexible.asp

Department of Labour links and information

Hesketh Henry offers remote working option to senior staff

Technology created a valuable link to work for Hesketh Henry Chairman John Avery when he was recovering from illness. Other senior staff can also work remotely at times but the nature of the business means that people work mostly from the office.

A remote access computer link to his company's office provided a lifeline last year for the chairman of this leading Auckland law firm when he was forced to take several months off work after suffering from two bouts of serious illness.

John Avery is Hesketh Henry's Chairman, a former managing partner, and a professional company director.

Thanks to the remote work access facilities set up by his company in his home office, during the time he was off work he was able to stay in touch with what was happening in the partnership and also in the law firm generally, by reading group emails.

The firm operates a full Citrix MetaFrame network, and installs a full-speed Jetstream broadband connection and terminal, as well as a printer if it's required – this enables staff to get full computer access to the office at home, providing access to all work files and email networks.

Mending on the job

"Remote access to the office provided a lifeline for me," says Mr Avery. "I wasn't simply parked to the side for several months. It had the positive effect of making me feel less isolated and less in a vacuum.

"If a staff member was leaving I knew about it and could send them a

message. I felt as if I was still a part of the organisation at a time when things weren't going too well with my health. After over 30 years with the company I have a good institutional knowledge so I could also make myself useful by answering queries.

"When you're sick, remote office access is a godsend. Now that I'm back at the office in a full-time capacity again, remote access helps me to manage my time a lot more efficiently. It enables me to be more productive in the way I work."

Mr Avery says that he would probably be working longer hours if he didn't have the remote working facility. "It has reduced stress for me, and I'm able to keep my practice more under control. The type of work we do requires us to be at the office more than at home. If you're supervising people, then you have to make yourself available."

One senior partner says remote working is an option for most lawyers but it is also necessary to be in the office at times. "The real intellectual grunt comes from verbally bouncing ideas off each other, and you simply can't achieve that as well with emails," he says. "There are issues of confidentiality too. We don't want families of staff members reading what's on screen.

"The remote access system also has big advantages for women returning to work who have young children and for fathers wanting to leave the office at a reasonable time to be with their families. They can make up the work time later in the evening in their home office."

Remote working assists new parents

Another staff member who plans to take advantage of the remote working option is Hesketh Henry Marketing Manager Emma Taylor, who is due to have a baby soon. The company has supplied her with what she refers to as an "end box", a Citrix MetaFrame – a monitor and a keypad, along with a full broadband connection.

"Although I've only been working here for six months, Hesketh Henry have chosen to be very accommodating to my circumstances," she explains. "I have an open-ended arrangement with them. Obviously, I won't be able to work for the first few months after having the baby, but I'll be able to keep in touch with the office, keeping track of emails and doing basic contact stuff.

"I don't expect to be a home worker for ever. In the meantime, I'll be able to access shared files at work in real time. And at the stage when I'm working part-time from home, my work will be measured by agreed outputs rather than by the number of hours I spend at my home desk."

Hesketh Henry has 23 partners, all of whom, along with another 28 senior management and professional staff, are eligible to take advantage of the remote working option. That's roughly 50 staff out of a total of 95 who can work remotely if they wish.

"If senior staff do take up the option, it's generally for family reasons," says General Manager Justin Cox. "We currently have 13 staff who have requested full remote

access from home offices.”

He emphasises that the staff concerned work mostly in the office and only sometimes from home, but that the facility is there if and when they need it. “Just because we supply it doesn’t mean that we expect the facility to be used for

a minimum time each week to justify installing it,” he says. “Given the nature of the senior roles, we don’t monitor usage.”

There are no full-time home workers in the company. “That would be too difficult in our industry,” says Mr Cox. He admits that providing IT

situations at home has involved a significant extra cost to the company but he says it’s worth it if it means they can retain key staff and if some staff members are able to do aspects of their work more effectively off-site.



All sorts of NZ businesses are getting ready to tell us about their work - life balance initiatives.

Introduced a terrific time-out room? Focussing on flexibility? Or maybe you’re making your workplace more family-friendly?

Whether you’re the New Zealand division of a multinational or a family business with a few employees, entering the EEO Trust Work & Life Awards will highlight your commitment to creating a balanced and versatile workplace. Not to mention tagging you as an employer of choice with all the increased productivity and commitment that results.

Aside from the Large and Small to Medium Business Award categories we’ve three others for you to consider.

If your work-life policies are in their early stages then the ‘First Steps’ category is the one for you.

Perhaps you’d like to nominate a chief executive or senior manager for the ‘Walk the Talk’ category.

Finally the ‘Manaki Tangata’ innovation category celebrates unique and creative solutions that redefine our work environments.

To find out how you can make more of a song and dance about your employee initiatives check out our website

www.eeotrust.org.nz

or phone 09 523 3023, email hsamuel@eeotrust.org.nz for more information. Closing date: 26th May 2005.

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 **IBM**

Part-time work options may help solve skills squeeze

Recent research by EEO Trust Research and Information Manager Dr Mervyl McPherson indicates that offering part-time work may enable employers to take better advantage of New Zealanders' changing working patterns.

Her research shows that the years of prime family responsibility and of prime labour force participation intensity currently coincide, and subsequent work-life conflict issues mean workplaces are not able to access the skills and energy of many people. But part-time work may provide a solution.

Dr McPherson's research found that people are now spending longer in the paid workforce but working fewer hours at the start and end of their working lives. Young people spend longer in education but combine that with part-time work, while older people spend longer in retirement and are increasingly spending more of that time in part-time work.

Part-time work expands labour pool

She says this pattern has the potential to be expanded with fewer lifetime years spent in full-time employment and more in part-time employment.

The changing working patterns identified by Dr McPherson are a result of changes in the way New Zealanders live. Dr McPherson says that few couples now live in a traditional breadwinner relationship where the man works and the woman concentrates on childrearing.

Only eight per cent of adults aged from 15-64 years were living like this in 2001.

New Zealand's ageing population means the 45-64 age group is the main growth area of the population and the labour force. Dr McPherson says this is likely to be the main period of full-time work in the future. "During these years people are moving out of intensive childrearing and they may also be delaying their retirement for financial or lifestyle reasons. Surveys show that this is the period when people experience least work-life conflict."

Many parents already work part-time. Dr McPherson found that for women with children part-time work is most common when the youngest child is from five to nine-years-old. Mothers with children under five-years-old are more likely to not be in the labour force and, when their children are older than nine, most mothers are in full-time work.

Most couples with young children would prefer one of them to work full-time and one part-time but one barrier to this is reduced income. "On a lifetime basis, if part-time work during the early childhood years was offset by continuing in the labour force past 60-65 years, this latter income and productivity would offset that lost during the childrearing years."

Dr McPherson believes that increasing part-time work options would increase the total hours people spend in paid work as it would increase employment options for many people, like parents of young children and semi-retired people.

Creating versatile workplaces

Barriers to people working part-time include part-time work not being offered at senior levels or with pay and conditions equivalent to full-time pay and conditions. However, Dr McPherson says that research has found that part-time work can successfully be undertaken by senior managers and professionals and that making part-time work available at senior levels reduces staff turnover.

A versatile workplace can also offer options for transitioning to part-time work and back to full-time work as people's life circumstances change. International research has found that there is less flexibility for women than men to make these transitions. For both men and women, professional and managerial jobs are less likely to be available on a part-time basis than other occupations.

A US study has found that for professional and managerial women, part-time work during the critical child-rearing years is the key to maintaining career momentum. More than half the women in the study said they would not have stayed in their jobs without the part-time option when their children were young.

[Dr Mervyl McPherson's full report is at www.eeotrust.org.nz on the Diversity Information & Research page]

World-wide

Singapore receives US award for family-friendly policies

Singapore recently received an American award for its efforts in promoting work-life balance and family-friendly workplaces in the country. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports has been conferred the Work-Life Innovative Excellence Award by the Alliance for Work-Life Progress (AWLP), an association based in the United States that is committed to the advancement of work-life effectiveness.

The Ministry is the first organisation outside the US to win this award.

The award is the "highest honour" offered by the association to "showcase efforts to create compelling work environments that also support personal life and family issues". Three awards are given out each year to recipients for "achieving outstanding results in integrating employee and business needs".

The Ministry said that the judges, who are work-life experts and practitioners, were impressed with its ability to adapt overseas examples and experiences for local application. They were also impressed with Singapore's approach to encouraging family-friendly workplaces through tripartite collaboration with employers, unions and the Government.

The Ministry was tasked in 2001 to bring about work-life friendly workplaces in Singapore. It did so by promoting awareness, building capability and facilitating funding for work-life consultancy and training.

Visit the Ministry at http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/home_main.asp.

Flexible working benefits

Recent research from the UK Equal Opportunities Commission found that flexible working practices significantly increase staff retention and substantially reduce recruitment costs. Key findings of the study include:

- Managers of flexible workers rated 96% of them as out-performing their traditional full-time colleagues
- Employers which offer flexibility achieve a rate of more than 90% of women returning from maternity leave
- More than one-third of mothers and one in 10 fathers have given up or turned down a job because of their caring responsibilities
- One in five women who returned to the same employer after maternity leave came back to a lower grade or level of job
- 90% of employers with flexible work practices think they are cost effective
- 39% of employers with flexible work practices think their performance outstrips their competitors

- A 5% reduction in staff turnover can result in a profit increase of between 30% and 85%
The report is called *Britain's Competitive Edge: women, unlocking the potential*, available from www.eoc.org.uk

Latest research

Creating Choice: Employment and the cost of care

The Australian Taskforce on Care Costs recently published the results of its research on the financial cost of care and how it impacts on workforce participation. The research found that there is a direct causal relationship between levels of workforce participation and the cost of care for older people, children and disabled people.

"At present, workers with caring responsibilities lack real choice about working at their optimal levels, and choose between employment and caring when the financial cost of care is perceived as too high," the report says.

It says employment levels could be reduced by lowering the financial cost of care as 35% of employees surveyed said they would increase their hours of work if care was more affordable.

Download the report from www.neeopa.org. Scroll down the web page to find the link.

Please read on...

Part-time work is no crime - so why the penalty?

This report published by the Equal Opportunities Commission explores why women working part-time earn 40% less per hour than men working full-time and why this gap has not closed in the past 30 years.

The EOC says that the great majority of part-time workers are women and suggests that between a third and a half of women working part-time are working below their potential. It says many employers are failing to make use of the skills of the part-time workforce despite the productivity gains that can be made from creating quality, part-time jobs.

The benefits include:

- Improved recruitment
- Better retention of skilled staff
- Reduced absenteeism
- Improved staff morale

Go to www.eoc.org.uk/cseng/policyandcampaigns/flexible_working_interim_summary.pdf to download the free report.

Maternal wall shuts out mothers' skills

In their latest newsletter, Australian diversity experts Aequus Partners

describe recent North American research reported in the *Journal of Social Issues*. A special edition of the *Journal* was devoted to working mothers and includes eight new studies on the assumptions associated with motherhood. The authors argue that the gender gap has become an issue of "mother" versus "other".

The research shows that wages of young women without children approach those of men, whilst mothers' wages lag far behind. Mothers earn only 60% of the wages of fathers, and the family wage gap between mothers and other adults has actually widened in recent decades, with single mothers falling furthest behind. Women also tend to be employed in workplaces where the rate of part-time employment is much higher than it is elsewhere, accounting for a large part of the gender wage gap. The authors therefore argue that what was thought to be a glass ceiling problem has turned out to be, in large part, a problem that might more accurately be termed the "maternal wall".

The studies reported in the *Journal* examine the diversity of stereotypes of mothers. The findings and arguments include:

- Lesbian mothers do not experience the same negative assumptions about competence and commitment that heterosexual mothers do.
- When college students evaluate

prospective job candidates they assume candidates who are also parents to be less effective and committed, and within that subgroup hold fathers to more lenient standards than mothers.

- Motherhood is a status characteristic, like race or gender, but it is distinct from gender in its effects.
- There are two prevalent stereotypes of working mothers - the warm but incompetent homemaker, or the cold but competent female professional.

Articles from this issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* can be downloaded for free by searching for Volume 60, Issue 4 of the *Journal* at www.blackwell-synergy.com.

To receive Aequus Partners' newsletter contact Juliet.Bourke@aequus.com.au.

Mommies and Daddies on the Fast Track

A special volume of the ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science entitled "*Mommies and Daddies on the Fast Track*" has been published. It explores family-friendly workplaces, overwork, elite careers and family commitment and more.

You can download the article by going to <http://ann.sagepub.com/> and using the quick search for volume 596.