



9-22-2008

The Effect of Telework

Priscilla Arling
Butler University, parling@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cob_papers

 Part of the [Business Commons](#), and the [Interpersonal and Small Group Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Arling, Priscilla, "The Effect of Telework" (2008). *Scholarship and Professional Work - Business*. 227.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/cob_papers/227

This Letter to the Editor is brought to you for free and open access by the Lacy School of Business at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - Business by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

COMPUTERWORLD

NEWS

The Effect of Telework



By Computerworld staff

FOLLOW

Computerworld | Sep 22, 2008 1:00 AM PT

I was an IT manager for over 15 years and agree that teleworking can have adverse effects on performance [["Telework Up, Productivity Down?"](#) Aug. 20]. Now, as a professor, I have conducted a study on these effects. I looked at 18 teams in nine organizations whose members were in different locations -- across the street or across the world. I found that not being collocated with team members had a negative impact on team social networks, both face-to-face and electronic. But working away from others had a positive impact on performance. And being in the center of the electronic social network had a positive impact on performance, while being in the center of the face-to-face social network had no impact.

So, what does this tell us? First, as many remote workers know, sharing knowledge and communicating electronically is more difficult than doing so face-to-face. More has to be explained, and it can be harder to get someone's attention. But there are rewards for those central in the team's electronic network of communication. They receive more information and can often get others to assist them. There is also a key difference between telework and distributed teamwork. Distributed team members accept that face-to-face contact will be minimal and take steps to facilitate electronic communication. In telework situations, people assume that a teleworker will eventually be in the office and wait for face-to-face contact, delaying completion of work.

Second, the study highlights the benefits of working away from team members. Fewer distractions and more time to work on tasks can improve an employee's performance. But processes and routines are needed that ensure collaboration. This does not require high-speed, sophisticated electronics that try to mimic face-to-face networks. The teams in my study primarily used telephone and e-mail. But the successful members in those teams understood how to use a basic electronic network to meet their goals, and the organization supported them with appropriate processes.

Priscilla Arling

Assistant professor of MIS

College of Business Administration, Butler University

Indianapolis

parling@butler.edu