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Martin Kesselman

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Current CITE-ings from the popular and trade computing press: telework and telecommuting

Martin Kesselman

Readily available technologies now allow librarians to perform most of their work offsite. Some traditional building-based services, such as reference, have been taken over by virtual reference, and now even instruction offers options on par with or even better than classroom-based questions such as a webinar that can be viewed and reviewed at any time or by having librarians embedded into various courseware packages. Librarians no longer need be limited to a single library; groups of subject librarians can work together in the cloud to provide services to multiple universities. How about a remote university that is having trouble recruiting for a librarian in-house that is willing to move close by? Why not hire a remote librarian that lives elsewhere and may come on campus a few times during the year. Corporations are already there and have been there for quite some time already. Is now the time for libraries to seriously consider the possibilities? Below are some articles from the non-library literature that may provide some ideas and review advantages and disadvantages for both the library and employee.

Acuff, J. and Leach, P. (2015), "What common practice will horrify our kids someday?", *Time*, Vol. 186 No. 11, p. 73.

Twenty years from now instead of saying, I've got to go to work, we will say, I am going to work. It will be laughable to think that work can only take place in an office.

Bharadwaj, S. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 93 No. 4, pp. 105-109, p. 5.

The author provides a case study for employee morale telecommuting from a remote office including comparisons of productivity with those working in the office. Telecommuting does not necessarily increase employee satisfaction and productivity. There are also challenges for human resources and information technology (IT). Transparency is key to demonstrate that discrimination does not exist between those that work offsite with those that work from the office.

Eddy, N. "Telecommuting seen as more productive than office work," *eWeek*, available at: www.eweek.com/small-business/telecommuting-seen-as-more-productive-than-office-work.html

Mobile and cloud technologies are ubiquitous. A survey by FlexJobs of more than 2,600 Americans found that their choice of location for important projects requiring higher productivity was their home and not their office.

Grevstad, E. (2016), "All signs point to telecommuting", *PC Magazine*, January, pp. 35-37.

Grevstad points out that from an informal discussion with an HP executive, workers spend approximately 40 per cent of their time at meetings and conference calls (sound familiar?). According to the company FlexJobs, an online service for freelancers, 76 per cent felt that to be able to do important work, they needed to avoid the office. They cited fewer distractions and a stress-free environment, especially not having to commute. In all, 97 per cent said it would improve the quality of their lives. IT companies are working hard to develop bring your own device strategies due to the various tools that telecommuters use

such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and operating systems.

Grevstad, Eric. (2015), "Telecommuting: the antidote to rush hour", *PC Magazine*, November, pp. 36-39.

Grevstad focuses on the technologies useful for telecommuting that may require support by IT professionals. Grestad also provides a link to the return on investment and employee telework savings calculators at GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.co. The return on investment calculation looks at 4,000 sources, 600 calculations and 100 variables.

Kennedy, S. (2015), "Tragedy of the common [. . .] grounds", *Information Today*, Vol. 32 No. 7, p. 8.

How often do you go into a Starbucks and see most people at tables doing work and often monopolizing the space, leaving little room for other customers.

Kokalitcheva, K. (2015), "The bloodstream of the enterprise", *Fortune*, Vol. 172 No. 6, pp. 105-105.

The author reviews corporate trends of companies hiring and maintaining a remote workforce. Highlighted are the benefits of using cloud computing and being able to recruit the best employees regardless of their location. Has your library had to repost a position two-three times, maybe a teleworking librarian might fill your vacancy? There may be challenges in keeping employees on the same page, but with some effort, this can be possible in an evolving new kind of workplace.

Maney, K. (2015), "The tinder trap", *Newsweek Global*, Vol. 164 No. 14, pp. 42-43.

Unlike articles that discuss opposite trends, Maney notes that millennials in the USA are actually moving to cities for work and opting to go to office instead of because they can share ideas at the workplace. Maney feels that technology has failed to increase telecommuting. With technology available today, you can do much of your work on your smartphone and what Citrix Chief Executive, Mark Templeton, defined as the "software-defined workplace". The Internet also provides numerous opportunities for continuous learning. But still the greater need is what Maney calls the innovation economy in which people coming together at the workplace create idea factories.

Newman, K. (2016), "Home, sweet office", *Psychology Today*, January/February, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 16-17.

Newman provides suggestions on how to be more productive in telecommuting and resisting distraction through boundaries. Neman is also an advocate of creating a space that focuses on nature – plants, materials made of wood and even taking the time to walk outside. The focus is on processing power and no letting "one's stuff" take over and trying to find a quite space to do work from.

Preimesberger, C. (2002), "10 tech essentials for efficient telecommuting", *eWeek*, available at: www.eweek.com/mobile/slideshows/10-tech-essentials-for-efficient-telecommuting.html

Tools discussed include those for teleconferences and sharing such as Dropbox and Pick (with a calendar feature); Web-based video conferencing tools such as Skype, WebEx and Teamroom; Asana communication platform, sharing information such as Google Docs and Google Hangout; Communifire which is an Intranet communication platform; Slack messaging platform that allows for sharing of all types of documents; Draft is a mobile app to share and revise notes; WeWork for conferences and virtual workspaces; and Box and Dropbox for sharing photos and images.

Smulski, J. (2015)"A successful telecommuting strategy", *Strategy Magazine*, available at: http://strategymagazine.com/successful-telecommuting-strategy.

A report published by the Telework Research Network shows that telecommuting has gained in popularity by 80 per cent since 2005. This article reviews questions one should ask in determining if telecommuting is right for you such as being an ideal candidate, being well equipped with technology and having good organization skills, a designated office space, being a great communicator and don't rely just on email; voice is critical, be responsive in terms of questions, provide opportunities for some face to face meetings but these can be virtual using tools such as Skype, CollabShot and GoToMeetings, schedule regular meetings online to create team collaborations and communications.

Spreitzer, G., Bacevice, P. and Garrett, L. (2015), "What your firm can learn from coworking spaces", *Harvard Business Review*, September, Vol. 93 No. 9, p. 28-30.

Shared office spaces for when telecommuters work occasionally from the office show workers with a high level of satisfaction from results of their interviews and surveys with a score of 6 out of 7. There were three major benefits, meaningful work, autonomy and a sense of community. Some companies have established a Coworking Manifesto.

Wagner, D. (2015), "Telecommuting: 3 myths busted, 3 benefits revealed", *InformationWeek*, 1 October, available at: www.informationweek.com/it-life/telecommuting-3-myths-busted-3-benefits-revealed/d/d-id/1322386

The myths are that that telecommuting helps with work/live balance (the literature says otherwise), helps with employee retention (actually telecommuting does not seem to be a criteria for changing jobs) and damages relationships with managers and opportunities for promotion (probably not as telecommuters tend to be high performers but it does create isolation with other workers). However, if these factors were really taken seriously, important benefits can come from telecommuting, such as lower work stress, shorter commutes, increased flexibility of work schedules and higher performance, even though many teleworkers were under the illusion that their work performance suffered, but, in fact, higher job performance was seen. Areas that did suffer significantly were those of innovations that require information exchange with others so companies need to be certain to minimize worker isolation. In general, part-time telecommuting works best.

Webb, A. "Virtual assistants are about to get promoted", Vol. 37 No. 3, p. 74.

The article focuses on the use of mobile virtual assistant technology. Topics geolocation functions of mobile apps, tracking spreadsheets and the use of Google. Now one of many virtual assistants owned by major companies available in the marketplace.

White, S. (2015), "Room for improvement", *BusinessWest*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 38-38, 1/2p.

Working offsite can be offset by the costs of travel and providing office space, getting dressed up for work or finding day care for workers with children. However, this article also reviews issues such as distractions by television and family, and less communication with others at the workplace.

Martin Kesselman (*martyk@rulmail.rutgers.edu*) is based at Rutgers University, Piscataway, New Jersey, USA.