

**U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness**

Report of a Special Study

TELEWORK WORKS:

A Compendium of Success Stories

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its inception in 1990 as a Federal pilot project, telework, also known as telecommuting and flexiplace, has become an important tool in the array of work/life programs. Its original goals were to save energy, improve air quality, reduce congestion and stress on our roads and bridges, and enhance the quality of family-friendly and other initiatives for Federal workers. The experience with having employees work in locations other than the office, namely, in their homes or a telecenter, has been successful in many agencies, encompassing a wide variety of jobs and work situations.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) undertook this study in recognition of its leadership role to encourage agencies to expand their telework programs. It is intended to showcase examples of telework success stories from a variety of jobs and work situations. Instances of episodic telework were deliberately not included. Rather, the compendium includes examples of employees who have formal agreements to work at least one day per week away from the traditional office.

Because the intention of the study was to provide anecdotal examples of successful telework experiences, we are not drawing conclusions or making generalizations from the data. However, three elements emerged from the interviews that appear to be the key to a successful telework experience:

Managers with a willingness to experiment. Most of the managers in our study mentioned that they had approached the experience with some reservation. Their concerns focused on the employee's availability for face-to-face interaction, the potential resentment by the rest of the staff, and anticipated communication problems. They had been willing to take a chance to see whether their reservations would materialize, and to a person, they reported that their concerns had been unfounded.

Motivated, self-starting employees. Virtually all of the employees told us that they had initiated the first discussion with their supervisor about the possibility of teleworking. They had thought about it, worked out the details of their specific situation, and then approached their supervisor with a specific proposal.

Clearly defined expectations. The expectations of the managers and employees must be clearly defined at the outset. All parties must agree on reporting requirements, expected outcomes and the nature and frequency of communication.

This willingness of supervisors to step away from the long-standing model of the workplace as the central point where employees assemble to get their work done is crucial to a successful telework experience. Equally critical are a motivated, self-starting employee who can work independently and a clear set of agreed upon performance expectations.

II. BACKGROUND

Technology is changing our world and our workplace. It has provided the means to access almost any kind of information and has enabled instantaneous communication in ways that are still evolving and expanding. The advent of smaller-faster-better computers, the Internet, and email have made it possible for employees to seamlessly work away from the traditional office setting. Environmental concerns about pollution, fuel costs, and crowded roads have also contributed to the need to find creative approaches to accomplishing work outside of the traditional office setting.

Telework, also called flexiplace or telecommuting, is not only a natural outgrowth of today's high tech environment and the need to conserve time and resources; it is also a reflection of the changing values of today's workers. These new workers expect to change jobs and even occupations frequently during their working lives. They look less for stability and more for flexibility. Because of their desire for options, they are often motivated to seek employment in a workplace that allows them to vary both their hours and place of work. They also have environmental concerns about conserving energy and reducing traffic congestion—concerns that are shared by many other workers.

The first step to respond to these technological, environmental, and personal value changes was taken ten years ago, when the Federal sector began its exploration of the impact of working from home or a telecenter by establishing the Federal Flexible Workplace Pilot Project. "Flexiplace" was designed to experiment with and evaluate the impact of alternative workplaces on quality of life issues. The pilot was sponsored by the President's Council on Management and Improvement and was co-directed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the General Services Administration (GSA). As an outgrowth of the pilot, in FY 1993 GSA received funding for the first telecommuting centers. They were established as satellite work locations that would serve as surrogate offices for workers who had excessively long commutes. There are now telecenters in California, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia.

In 1994, a Presidential memorandum directed agencies to establish a program to support flexible family-friendly work arrangements, including telecommuting and satellite work locations. OPM and GSA were asked to work with agencies to expand flexible work arrangements, revise regulations that are barriers to such work, and develop any necessary legislative proposals.

In addition to formal arrangements, usually involving at least one day per week away from the office, many agencies also use informal telework arrangements, often referred to as "episodic" telework. In these cases, employees work from home temporarily when they have

an illness or injury that prevents their coming into the office, or when they have an assignment that can better be completed away from the office and its distractions. So, telework can be for as little as a few hours to complete a specific project, or for as much as five days a week in those cases where someone works full-time from home or a telecenter.

There are many reasons that telework makes sense. The upward trend in dual wage earners and single parent families provides an increased pressure to balance work and family life. Today's workers expect a work experience that is flexible, both in hours and location, and is less stressful. Conserving energy by reducing the length and frequency of commuting has economic and social benefits such as lessening the damage to our roads and infrastructure, and minimizing the effects of traffic-related stress on our well being.

Given the benefits of telework, we undertook this study to find successful teleworkers and their supervisors so that we could showcase their experiences. Our intent is that this compendium of real life success stories will provide models of what is being done successfully. We believe that if supervisors and managers can see these positive examples in organizations and positions that are similar to their work situation, they will establish telework opportunities in their offices as well.

III. METHODOLOGY

To collect our information, we contacted the Interagency Advisory Group (now the Human Resources Management Council) and the Interagency Telework Coordinators to locate successful telework examples. We did not attempt to capture instances of episodic telework. Rather, we asked for examples of teleworkers who had a regular schedule of at least one day per week out of the office.

Our information is anecdotal and is intended to provide examples of offices and positions where employees are successfully teleworking. Because we wanted to be as specific in our cases as possible, we interviewed both the supervisor and the employee(s) to present both perspectives. We also tried to place the organization in context by describing the type of work done in each particular organization. We did not attempt in any way to draw a representative sample, although we did attempt to provide examples of small and large offices in both field and headquarters settings.

IV. FINDINGS

COMMON THEMES

While we could not draw conclusions or make generalizations because of the anecdotal nature of our data gathering, certain themes emerged. These themes were consistent regardless of whether the employee worked outside of the office for one day or five, or whether they worked from home or in a telecenter.

Productivity

Both managers and employees mentioned productivity. Most employees believed that their productivity had increased as a result of their teleworking. They attributed that increase most often to having uninterrupted time to read and think, and many of them planned their work accordingly. Some of the supervisors also reported productivity improvement, while the majority reported no loss in productivity.

Reduced Stress

Almost every employee said that they felt more relaxed and less tense as a result of their not having to commute one or two days a week. Most said that having a break from rush-hour traffic had made a significant impact on reducing their tension levels. Many supervisors also mentioned that teleworking employees seemed less "wired" and often improved their relationships within the office because of their more relaxed attitude.

Saved Time

The employees all appreciated the commuting time that they saved. Avoiding the commute gave them extra time to be with their families, run errands, or go to doctor's appointments, and made a significant difference in their quality of life.

Technology

Most of the employees reported that their electronic access to email and information was the same from home or the telecenter as it was from the office. Some had to purchase their own equipment or use excess computers, others had to pay for phone lines, but all felt that whatever they invested was worth the trade-off. One of the managers said that she believed that anything the agency spent on computer equipment was worth the productivity and well-being gains for the teleworkers, and she had supplied identical equipment to them.

Interpersonal Relationships

Both employees and supervisors told us that they had to work harder to maintain relationships. Some employees had to cajole co-workers into calling them at home, because the co-workers' tendency was to hold work until they got back into the office. Some supervisors reported that they had to be especially aware of including teleworkers by phone when they had meetings in the office. Some employees said it required more effort to keep in communication with co-workers, so they made it a point to catch up when they were in the office. All reported some difficulty, but nothing that could not be solved by paying attention to it.

KEY TO SUCCESS

We found that overall there were three critical elements that had to be in place to ensure a successful telework experience:

- **Managers with a willingness to experiment.** Most of the managers mentioned that they had approached the experience with some reservation. Their concerns focused on the employee's availability for face-to-face interaction, the potential resentment by the rest of the staff, and anticipated communication problems. They had been willing to take a chance to see whether their reservations would materialize, and to a person, they reported that their concerns had been unfounded.
- **Motivated, self-starting employees.** Virtually all of the employees told us that they had initiated the first discussion with their supervisor about the possibility of teleworking. They had thought about it, worked out the details of their specific situation, and then approached their supervisor with a specific proposal.
- **Clearly defined expectations at the outset.** All parties agreed on reporting requirements, expected outcomes, and frequency and nature of communication. Having expectations in place and understood from the beginning was critical to the success of the telework experience.

This willingness of supervisors to step away from the long-standing model of the workplace as the central point where employees assemble to get their work done is crucial to a successful telework experience. Equally critical are a motivated, self-starting employee who can work independently and a clear set of agreed upon performance expectations.

V. SUCCESS STORIES

The success stories are listed by job title. We are very grateful for the cooperation extended to us by both the teleworking employees and their supervisors. Their comments were thoughtful and their enthusiasm for the program was infectious.

Further Information

Both GSA and OPM have extensive information on their websites about telework. Visit the sites at:

www.opm.gov/wrkfam/telecomm/telecomm.htm and www.gsa.gov/pbs/owi/telecomm.htm

For information on a specific agency's telework program, consult the listing of all agency telework coordinators and their phone numbers, which can be found at:

<http://www.policyworks.gov/org/main/mp/library/policydocs/mworkplce.htm>

TELEWORK POSITION: Budget Analyst, GS-13

DURATION: Four hours on Fridays, for 2 years

ORGANIZATION:

General Services Administration (GSA)
A Regional Office
Public Buildings Service

THE WORK SITUATION:

With a workforce of primarily budget analysts, the employee's division is divided into three sections. Her section, where the teleworking employees are assigned, is responsible for overseeing space rental agreements for government properties within a multi-state area.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

There are two employees in the section who regularly telework, one for one day a week, and the other for four hours a week. The supervisor supports GSA's telework program because he believes that it benefits both the agency and the employee. He told us that an open dialogue between the supervisor and the teleworking employee is key to the success of the program, and that it is critical that supervisors have trust in the employees who participate in the program.

He reported that the productivity of his teleworking employees is greater during some phases in the budget cycle because being away from distractions in the office results in a higher volume of more accurate work. He also told us that his experience has been positive because both he and his employees approach telework with some degree of flexibility. When there are variations in the flow or volume of work, both employees are willing to adjust their schedules accordingly.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

Working from home for a half day each Friday has been most beneficial for the employee. She works nine-hour days in the office from Monday through Thursday and then teleworks for four hours on Friday morning. She told us that not having a two hour commute to the office, and not having to contend with rush-hour traffic on Fridays has been a major stress reducer for her.

GSA has provided her with a laptop computer, email access, Internet access, a printer, and a phone card, so that she can work as comfortably and completely from home as if she were in the office. On the rare chance that she will be unable to log onto the GSA system, she

always makes sure that she has reading material, spreadsheets to review, or documents to research. She checks her voice mail frequently, and is available by phone if her supervisor or co-workers are trying to reach her.

Working at home has made her more aware of the variety and types of assignments she has to do, in that she plans her Friday work for those assignments that can be readily accomplished at home. For example, she makes sure that any large printing jobs will be done on Thursday, so that she may take them home with her on Friday.

She said that because being at home is less stressful, she often finds herself accomplishing six hours of work in the four-hour timespan. At home, there are fewer interruptions, distractions, or telephone calls to contend with. And, because her work involves certifying funds, having time to concentrate without interruption in a quiet environment is a plus. She describes the situation as “win-win.” The agency benefits from her increased productivity, and she benefits from being less stressed and by gaining extra time and money by avoiding her commute for one day out of the week.

TELEWORK POSITION: Information Technology Specialist, GS-13/14

DURATION: One day per week for 3 years

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

THE WORK SITUATION:

NASS conducts hundreds of surveys and prepares reports covering virtually every facet of U.S. agriculture. Its mission is to objectively provide accurate, current statistical information to farmers and others so that they may make informed agricultural decisions. This particular organization works with the many NASS offices to maintain the technological infrastructure, establish policy and training programs, and troubleshoot problems that the help desk cannot resolve.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The supervisor told us that his biggest problem is in attracting and retaining a knowledgeable staff. The work they do is at the cutting edge of computer technology, and the competition from the private sector is fierce. He said that he jumped at the chance to permit employees to telework, because he believes that it is a tool for retaining his excellent staff at a time when salaries are not competitive. He currently has a staff of nine specialists, with five vacancies to fill.

He permits his staff to telework one day a week, either from home or a telecenter. Tuesdays are set aside for all employees to be in the office, but any other day is acceptable to him. Because of the nature of their work, his employees already have the latest computer equipment in their homes, so their only direct cost is to install and pay for an additional phone line.

He sees no downside to telework. There have been no problems within the staff or with the customers. Service is the same whether the specialist works from the office or from another location. Most importantly, his staff is happier. Some of them live 40 to 50 miles from the office, and avoiding that commute is a significant improvement in their workweek.

THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE:

We interviewed an employee who teleworks from home and another who works at a telecenter. Both employees told us that telework has many advantages. Because there is no walk-in traffic at a telecenter or home, they have concentrated time to work on problems

without being distracted. More work gets done because there are fewer temptations to get sidetracked. They are accustomed to being accessible at all times, since in the office they carry cell phones. They believe that they are even more accessible at home since they cannot go to another work site.

Both reported that they are more productive on their telework day, because they plan those days to do documentation or technical reading. They said it took some getting used to, and required a conscious communication effort to make sure that the whole team was kept up-to-date on projects. They indicated that there is still some resistance by other managers in the agency, who imply that working from home is not working.

In comparing the telecenter to a home office, the employee who works at the center said it was worth the ten-minute drive so he could have access to a fax machine and copier. He noted that he worked better in the more formal office atmosphere.

Despite the few drawbacks, the employees reported that telework was a positive experience. They said that it was an important factor in their job satisfaction, and credited the openness and support of their manager for its success.

TELEWORK POSITION: Contract Specialist, GS-12

DURATION: Two days per week for 1½ years

ORGANIZATION:

General Services Administration (GSA)
A Regional Office
Federal Supply Service

THE WORK SITUATION:

The contract specialists who work in the division spend the majority of their time negotiating contracts with furniture manufacturers for the Federal Supply Schedule. Each journey-level specialist works independently with the offerors to negotiate the best possible price for the government, and then follows the contract over its lifespan (generally five years). The specialists also work on reimbursable projects for a variety of agencies. These projects involve managing parts of or entire systems furniture installations from the design stage through purchasing and installation.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

When the employee initially requested permission to work two days a week from a telecenter near her home, the supervisor reported that she was uncomfortable with the request. The employee was a high performer, who could be counted on to skillfully handle special projects. She also had information technology skills that she used to help others in the office. However, the supervisor decided that her initial reaction was unfair to the employee, who wanted to avoid her time-consuming, 65-mile commute to the office. Because the supervisor believed that the potential benefits to the employee (reducing stress, allowing for more time with her family, reducing traffic in her community) outweighed her initial misgivings, she approved a formal agreement to permit the employee to work on Tuesdays and Thursdays from a telecenter located ten minutes away from her home.

The supervisor reported that her misgivings were unfounded. There were short-lived start-up problems to enable the employee to seamlessly access email and the office databases, but once that was accomplished, the change has gone smoothly. Always accessible, the employee uses voice mail at both locations to let callers know exactly how to reach her. Because she is on a flexible work schedule, she emails her supervisor upon her arrival at the telecenter to let her know her schedule for the day. When there are meetings scheduled on the telework days, the employee either conferences in by phone, or adjusts her schedule so that she can be there in person.

In addition to the personal benefits to the employee, the supervisor reported organizational benefits as well. The employee is less stressed on the days that she is in the office because she has had a day off from her commute. She is more upbeat, and her attitude positively influences others in the office. The two days at the telecenter allow the employee more uninterrupted time to think about projects, and the supervisor reported making assignments to take advantage of that extra concentration time.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

In order to avoid her 65-mile commute, the employee requested permission to work from a telecenter close to her home. She specifically asked for Tuesdays and Thursdays because some of the staff members in her office work on compressed schedules with Monday or Friday off, so her being available both Monday and Friday helped to cover the office for those days.

Because she negotiates contracts, the employee was assigned to a confidential workstation in the GSA Telecenter, which she shares with an employee who telecommutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. She has a full "virtual" office, with electronic access comparable to her being in her normal office. At the telecenter she works in a secure building, has her own phone number, phone card, and generic voice mail, and works with fewer distractions and less noise.

The employee reported that the reduction in commuting time has enabled her to do more with her family, particularly her young child, and has resulted in lowering her stress level. She now works more efficiently and effectively both at the telecenter and in the office. Because the telecenter provides a work atmosphere that is less hectic and prone to interruption than her regular office, she deliberately schedules work that requires uninterrupted concentration for her telework days. Thus, she is able to accomplish more in the same amount of time.

TELEWORK POSITION: Hearing Representative, GS-13

DURATION: Four days per week for 4 years

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
Employee's Compensation Appeals Board

THE WORK SITUATION:

The 27 hearing representatives in the office are responsible for issuing compensation decisions that are covered by the Federal Employee Compensation Act. They are assigned cases (rotated geographically) and must work within time limits. They review the claimants' case files, meet with claimants and their attorneys, and approve or deny a claim within 85 days of the hearing. In addition to the hearing representatives, there are also claims and other staff who provide administrative support for the office. All but six of the hearing representatives work from home.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

Telework in the office began as a pilot program in 1996 and was made permanent in 1999. The result is that nearly 80 percent of the hearing representatives are now teleworking. The job is particularly conducive to telework since it requires extensive travel and employees must be independent self-starters who can effectively and efficiently manage their time. Since interaction with peers is usually limited to discussing cases and exchanging information, most of the job is done with the employee working alone.

DOL provided each employee with a complete workstation including a laptop computer, email capability, and a phone card. Some teleworkers use a dictaphone to dictate case decisions that are sent to a private contractor for typing. Via their computers, employees also have access to some procedural manuals and databases. Since case files are sensitive and frequently extensive, a courier service is used to deliver files and other claims information to teleworkers' homes.

The supervisor indicated that all employees are required to report to the office for one day per week to review incoming mail, attend meetings, submit reports, or pick up files or support material for upcoming cases. Because the use of workstations is infrequent, workers share desks, and space savings have been realized. Visiting the office provides an opportunity for teleworkers to share new information, clarify any legal issues and review documents. The agency offers a flexible band that reaches from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.; the employees use this benefit to adjust their work schedules and manage their time more efficiently.

THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE:

Saving commuting time was the primary benefit mentioned by three teleworking employees. Each spends at least two hours a day traveling into the office. With telework, that time is now available for research, reading case files, dictating, and writing decisions. Eliminating the commute also noticeably reduced stress levels according to the hearing officers.

The employees told us that the noise level, interruptions and “small talk” in the office was distracting, especially since many of the employees in the office share desk space. The privacy of their homes helps them to concentrate more clearly on the case documentation.

The one disadvantage the hearing representatives mentioned was that some of the comprehensive resource materials that they use are only available in the office. But the flexibility to accomplish their work assignments, the time saved by not commuting, and the decreased levels of stress were cited as factors that far outweigh that drawback.

TELEWORK POSITION: Mathematical Statistician, GS-13

DURATION: Two days per week for 3 years

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

THE WORK SITUATION:

The eight mathematical statisticians in the division work as a team to select samples for surveys conducted by NASS. These surveys measure agricultural production and inventories of livestock and crops.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

In 1997 a pilot test of telework was initiated, primarily because of strenuous support from a former administrator. During the pilot, extensive surveys were conducted, with the opportunity for comments and suggestions from employees. To ensure that everyone was heard, the organization set up meetings for non-teleworkers to air their concerns, and encouraged a buddy system between pairs of teleworkers in the same unit.

At the time, the agency did not provide financial support for teleworkers, and participating employees were required to install a second phone line in their home office at their own expense. (A recent change in policy now permits the organization to pay for call forwarding to the second telephone line, but the employee still pays for the line itself.) If retired computers were available teleworkers could use them, but only for agency work.

Currently the Department requires a written contract between the supervisor and the teleworker. There are three types: long term (specific days per week of indefinite duration); short term (specified days for duration of a project); and medical (for pregnancies or people recovering from illness or surgery, with the appropriate medical documentation.) The contract assures that supervisors have control over who teleworks, on what, and when.

The supervisor reported that one of the major organizational advantages of telework is that it is a tool to retain good workers, since several of his employees had told him that they would have taken a field job if they could not telework. Many employees wanted to avoid commuting so that they would have more time to spend with their families. He told us that these workers, highly productive to begin with, became even more productive as teleworkers.

THE EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE:

Two teleworkers each had long commutes that were frequently extended by frustrating major traffic jams. For them, the major benefit of teleworking is the time they save by avoiding a commute two days a week.

All of the employees decided that Thursdays would be a day on which none of them could telework, so that face-to-face meetings could be conducted and informal communication could take place. The telework days are spread out across the other four workdays so that some statisticians are always in the office. The others are readily accessible by telephone and all have access to the LAN from their home offices.

The employees told us that they are far more productive as teleworkers because they have the opportunity to focus on their computer work without the repeated interruptions that occur in the office. They consider telework a critical flexibility in their working environment, and said they would not consider working in an office that did not permit it.

TELEWORK POSITION: Medical Librarian, GS-13

DURATION: One day per week for 2 years

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Public Health Service
National Institutes of Health

THE WORK SITUATION:

The unit consists of five systems people, one of whom coordinates the work of the other four. The group is responsible for maintaining a national library home site and for building a new website for disseminating consumer health information.

The unit's employees coordinate the work of ten contractors and work closely with the library computer center. This coordination is necessary to avoid both technical problems within the internal system, and the presence of conflicting, unsubstantiated, or erroneous medical information on the homesite. The systems staff also conducts quality assurance studies to determine how well their customers are using their databases, and they conduct training for both professionals and the general public.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The supervisor told us that at first she didn't think that the positions in her office were appropriate for telework, because the work was not readily quantifiable. She said that in other parts of the organization, jobs like indexers and cataloguers operate independently and lend themselves to telework, and they were the first jobs included in telework when it became available.

When one of her employees convinced her that the employee needed a day a week without interruptions to deal with coordination and planning problems, the supervisor put aside her objections, and permitted the employee to telework. As a result, about half of the staff now work at home for one day a week.

They work cooperatively to coordinate their telework days so that they will all be available for face-to-face meetings. The supervisor told us that the productivity gains are obvious to her, but at some level she "still misses having the staff around." The supervisor observed that effective teleworking relies on strong and seamless connections to the local area network and other support networks. She noted that her organization has begun allocating specific amounts of money and staff time to establish and maintain those connections.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

Because she knew that indexers in her agency were already teleworking, the employee approached her supervisor with a request to telework one day a week so that she could have structured time without interruptions to think and plan. As a result of her successful experience, about half of the staff now work at home one day a week.

She told us that the freedom from interruption is extremely valuable, because it permits her to have the continuity necessary for creative thinking that is required for planning, writing, and data analyses. Saving an hour and a half in commuting time was another major benefit she cited. She has also found that it is actually easier to conduct a meeting among teleworkers by using the speakerphone than by trying to physically assemble those same people.

She emphasized that a critical element to effective teleworking is having the proper assistance to set up an employee's home computer and troubleshoot any problems. Initially she did not have that support, and lost time getting her computer up and functioning. Since her organization now provides that support, working from home has no drawback.

She added that she and her teleworking colleagues make sure that they remain visible to the rest of the staff. One way they do that is by participating in telecons, so that they may keep others informed about what each is doing.

TELEWORK POSITION: Office Automation Assistant, GS-7

DURATION: One day per week for 2 years

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)
State Statistical Office (SSO)

THE WORK SITUATION:

NASS conducts hundreds of surveys and prepares reports covering virtually every facet of U.S. agriculture. Its mission is to objectively provide accurate, current statistical information to farmers and others so that they may make informed agricultural decisions. The employee works in one of 45 SSOs that provide information for these reports and also publish data about many of the same topics for audiences within their state. Two teleworking employees provide support to the publications issued by the office.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

Although the office is relatively small, two of its 15 employees telework one day per week. The agency gave both excess computers and modems to use at home so they could communicate with the office, and each put in a second telephone line at their own expense. The supervisor told us that the organization has benefited significantly from the program, since both employees are more productive when they telework because it gives them the opportunity to work uninterrupted.

The only drawback is that vacations must be scheduled more carefully to insure that the office is fully covered. But both employees are flexible and will switch days to accommodate the situation. Interestingly, it has been difficult to convince other staff members that they should feel free to call the teleworkers when they are working at home. The tendency is to think of the teleworkers as being home and out of reach, when they are totally accessible by phone.

Both employees are self-starters, and work independently in the office as well as from their homes. The supervisor is convinced that telework is not for everyone, but that it works well when the job is conducive to working from home, and the employees function well on their own.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

We interviewed one of the teleworking employees. The employee's only route to work requires her to cross a bridge that frequently becomes congested. When that happens, her 45-minute commute doubles. Her main objective in suggesting teleworking one day a week was to avoid that uncertain commute.

She sees many personal benefits. She accomplishes more because she has no interruptions, and can focus on the task at hand. Her commuting time has been cut by two hours, and on her telework day, she avoids paying for gas, tolls, and parking fees. She is more relaxed and less stressed by having a change of pace in the middle of the week. Her use of sick leave is reduced because she can schedule doctor's appointments around her lunch hour.

Although her computer equipment is faster in the office, she is able to access email and the local area network easily from home, so she is never out of touch with the office. For consistency, she works the same hours as she would if she were in the office, and with her electronic access, she easily can run the office mail system from her home. She said the only thing she would like better than working one day a week from home is working two days a week from home.

TELEWORK POSITION: Human Resources Specialist, GS-12

DURATION: One day per week for 6 years

ORGANIZATION:

General Services Administration (GSA)
A Regional Human Resources Office

THE WORK SITUATION:

The Region encompasses several states. It has a large workforce and an operating budget of more than one billion dollars. The Human Resources Office provides the full range of personnel services to the organization. By adopting a multi-functional approach to organizing its work, each of the office's specialists is trained in two functional areas, and can rotate or be reassigned within the office as workload dictates. It is a matrix organization that distributes work assignments by customer. The teleworking employee is a position classifier.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The supervisor told us that not only does she support the concept of telework, but that GSA as an organization has been a strong advocate for telework since the program began in 1993. Having a proactive, supportive atmosphere for the program has been a plus for both the employees and managers who participate in it.

The supervisor is completely satisfied that the teleworking employee is as productive as if she were working in the traditional office atmosphere. She attributes the success to the worker, who was always a high performer and therefore an ideal candidate for participating in the program. She said that the employee is self-motivated, an independent worker, and is responsible for the type of work that is conducive to working from home. As pleased as she is with the current situation, she does feel that some employees would not do well away from the office, and would not offer the opportunity to telework to every employee.

The supervisor said that for this employee, telework is particularly important, and is a factor in retaining her with GSA. She mentioned that many of her other employees work from home occasionally, and she is currently working out details with another staff member who wants to participate in the program on a regular basis.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

The employee works on a part-time, four-day per week schedule, primarily as a position classifier. She is responsible for researching position classification standards and writing and classifying position descriptions. Her job was recently expanded to include organizational

development type work. Because the new work is more customer-focused, she has recently been adjusting her telework day to accommodate the needs of her customers.

She began teleworking when GSA initiated the program in 1993. She requested permission to participate because she believed that her classification work was conducive to teleworking, she wanted to avoid her stressful one-hour commute, and she hoped that the commuting time she saved would give her more time to spend with her new baby. In her request, she specified the work she would perform at home, how it would be measured, and offered a tentative weekly schedule. As a result, she began working at home each Wednesday, the third day of her four-day part-time schedule. GSA provided her with a phone line, modem, phone card, and laptop computer. She teleconferences into the office when there are meetings on her telework day.

She told us that eliminating her commute for one day of her weekly schedule has enabled her to spend more time with her family, reduced her stress level, and resulted in her being more productive both at home and at the office. Although there are times when she does feel isolated and “out of the loop” with her co-workers, and she sometimes experiences problems reaching other employees by phone, she told us that the advantages of telework far outweigh the disadvantages.

She said that it “does take work to make it work,” but it is worth the effort. She is very happy with the telework program and would not want to revert to her traditional work schedule. Telework is a flexibility that has been a great benefit to her, and she would not want to work in an organization that did not offer it as an option.

TELEWORK POSITION: Human Resources Specialist, GS-13

DURATION: Five days per week for 3 years

ORGANIZATION:

Office of Personnel Management (OPM)
Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness

THE WORK SITUATION:

The employee works in one of several field divisions that evaluate the operation of personnel management programs in Federal agencies and conduct nationwide studies of human resources policies and programs. Although the work involves ad hoc teams of evaluators that conduct on-site reviews at the various agency field or headquarters locations, they conduct much of the planning and follow-up work by phone or email. The division has a staff of 20, mostly in one office location. However, the telecommuting employee's duty station is in a different city.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

Because his predecessor approved the arrangement, the supervisor was not involved in the decision to permit the employee to telework full-time from his home. However, the current supervisor is very pleased with the arrangement. Not only does it save the cost of leasing office space in the employee's high-cost duty station, but having an employee at a remote duty station avoids the travel costs associated with sending an employee to that area to conduct on-site work.

That the employee works from his home is transparent to the division staff. He is always available, responsive, and particularly sensitive to keeping others informed when he will be away from his home office. The supervisor reported no downside to the arrangement, attributing its success to the employee, his senior status as an evaluator, and his excellent work habits. The supervisor said that such an arrangement would be problematic with someone who was not at the full journey-level, without the experience, discipline, and independence that the current employee brings to the job.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

Three years ago, the employee was one of two evaluators who worked in the Federal building at his duty location. When his office partner retired, the employee requested permission to work full-time from his home. He cited the substantial cost saving to be realized in rent avoidance. His request was quickly approved, and he established an office in his home.

OPM provided him with a phone line, a phone card for emergencies, a computer, a printer, a fax machine, a desk top copier, and office furniture, which was essentially the same equipment that he had in his former office. His move to a home office was seamless; he was still able to call in for weekly staff meetings, his dial-up access to the local area network in the main office was the same, and he had the same equipment. As before, he got computer support through a headquarters help desk or from a staff member in the division.

What had substantially changed was that he was no longer spending 3½ to 4 hours each day commuting to the office where he had worked. While he reported that the greatest benefit to him has been the lack of personal wear and tear caused by his previous commute, he also cited other positive aspects to his teleworking. He believes that he is more productive because he is not worn out by the time he gets to the office. He saves money since he no longer needs many dress clothes, nor does he have to pay commuting costs or buy lunch out. He takes less sick leave for doctor's appointments and never needs a snow day for building closures.

As before, he conducts most of his work by phone, and travels about five to seven weeks out of the year. The only downside he reported is that he has no face-to-face human interaction during the day. He believes that it is important to maintain a personal level of discipline every day. To that end, he works a traditional day, varying his starting time between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., and using email or the phone to keep his co-workers and bosses informed if he will be away for appointments.

TELEWORK POSITION: Safety and Health Compliance Officer, GS-12

DURATION: Three days per week for 6 years

ORGANIZATION:

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
An Area Office

THE WORK SITUATION:

The safety and health compliance officers in this OSHA Area office are primarily responsible for inspecting agencies to ensure that they are in compliance with current OSHA safety and health rules and regulations. They conduct unannounced visits to construction or industry work sites within their jurisdiction, which covers more than 30 counties, to identify existing and potential safety hazards. Some of the officers are responsible for safety inspections while others focus on the hazards associated with chemicals, fumes, and carcinogens. Recently, there has been a proactive approach to train agencies on ways to prevent safety mishaps and hazards in the workplace.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The supervisor, who has experience with more than one teleworker, told us that a successful teleworker must be self-motivated, independent, and able to work with a minimum of supervision. The current teleworker fits those criteria, and he believes that she is more productive in her three days of teleworking than she would be if she were in the office with its distractions and interruptions. She varies her telework days based on her assignments for the week.

To stay apprised of her workload, he asks her to call him each morning to inform him of the status of her work. She also must come to the office at least one day per week to check her email and attend bi-weekly staff meetings. He feels that her being in the office each week enables her to “stay in the loop” and remain up-to-date on current projects. He has provided her with a pager so she can be reached at a remote location, and indicated that the area office is in the process of acquiring additional laptop computers for those employees who are teleworking.

The supervisor reported that all of his teleworking employees seemed to be in a better frame of mind and less stressed when they come into the office. He believes that telework has been a positive and worthwhile experience for the employees, and that the office has benefited because of their increased productivity.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

The employee began participating in the telework program approximately six years ago because she wanted to eliminate her 25-mile commute into the city. At peak hours it is a stressful and difficult experience. She also works better in a quiet atmosphere, and the office is totally open, with no walls or cubicles for visual privacy or noise reduction. She believed at the time that working from home would provide her with privacy and allow her to concentrate on the report writing and the reading required by her job.

Because the construction sites that she visits are frequently closer to her home than the office, it is more efficient for her to go directly from home to these sites. She does, however, usually go to the office two days per week to read her email messages, submit written reports, attend staff meetings, and meet with co-workers. She contacts her supervisor on a daily basis, and has a pager so that she can be reached at construction sites.

Rather than maintaining a rigid schedule, she adjusts her time in the office around site visits and meetings. As a union representative, she also makes herself available to employees as needed.

She told us that because she can work from home she has been able to maximize her time by reducing time spent on the road. Because her home environment is less hectic and more private than the office, there are fewer distractions and interruptions, and she is better able to concentrate. She believes that the telework program has enabled her to be more effective, efficient, and productive, and happier in general because she is in control of her life.

TELEWORK POSITION: Safety Specialist, GS-12

DURATION: Four days per week for 7 years

ORGANIZATION:

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
An Area Office

THE WORK SITUATION:

The safety specialists in the OSHA Area Office are primarily responsible for inspecting agencies to ensure that they are in compliance with current OSHA safety and health rules and regulations. The specialists conduct unannounced visits to construction or industry work sites within their jurisdiction, which covers 31 counties. They identify existing and potential safety hazards primarily at construction work sites. Some of the specialists are responsible for safety inspections while others focus on the hazards associated with chemicals, fumes and carcinogens.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The supervisor is very pleased with how well the current teleworking situation has progressed. He characterizes the employee currently participating in the program as self-motivated and independent, and reported that she actually had been doing some work at home before the program officially began at OSHA. Because the bulk of her work is outside of the office, her job was a "natural" for teleworking.

He expects a daily status report from the employee and requires her to come into the office one day out of the week. She schedules her day in the office so that she can attend staff meetings, and the rest of the time she can be reached via her pager. He said he is as well informed, if not better informed, about her caseload because she makes a point of communicating with him.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

The employee told us that she began working from home occasionally, even before a telework program was officially established. She said that her supervisor recognized that she was able to be more productive at home, and the workload statistics supported that contention.

She was responsible for funding her home office. She purchased a personal computer, printer, and fax machine for her home, and she had an additional telephone line installed. Because it is not yet possible for her to access the OSHA system, she cannot read her email

or transfer documents electronically from her home office. However, the majority of her work involves preparing and printing her inspection reports, and that she can easily do at home. She maintains daily contact with her supervisor to keep him informed of her progress. At least one day per week she reports to the office for meetings, to turn in completed work assignments, check her email, and “pull” additional assignments.

The nature of her work (on-site inspections) is well suited to teleworking. She schedules assignments that are close to one another so that she can visit as many sites as possible, remaining at the work site until the project/inspection is completed. When she returns to her home office, she can prepare her findings and reports in a quiet environment without having her concentration broken.

She likes working at home without the frequent interruptions from her co-workers. They call her at home only with serious questions, so she is better able to concentrate on her work without having to start and stop.

Another benefit of telework is her ability to avoid the heavy traffic between home and the office during peak travel hours. She reported that her stress level has been lessened as a result. Because teleworking allows her to adjust her schedule around her family and home while she still continues to fulfill her job responsibilities, she believes that she is a happier, relaxed person and that has made her a more productive employee.

TELEWORK POSITION: Statistician, GS-12

DURATION: One day per week for 1 year

ORGANIZATION:

U.S. Department of Agriculture
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)
State Statistical Office (SSO)

THE WORK SITUATION:

NASS conducts hundreds of surveys and prepares reports covering virtually every facet of U.S. agriculture. Its publications cover a wide range of subjects, including traditional and specialty crops, production and supplies of food and fiber, and prices paid and received by farmers. The employee works in one of 45 SSOs that provide information for these reports and also publish data about many of the same topics for audiences within their state. The SSO creates as many as 300 publications a year.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

The employee's primary responsibility is to maintain a statewide list of farm operators. Because this list is the basis for many of the office's statistical surveys, it must be constantly updated from multiple sources. The work is computer-based and requires an independent worker who is knowledgeable and self-motivated.

The employee requested telecommuting for one day per week to avoid her one-hour commute. She chose Thursday as her telework day. The office provided her with a computer and a modem, and the local area network coordinator set up the equipment with access to the office network. The employee uses a toll-free number to communicate with headquarters, and has a calling card for the rest of her calls. Since she deals primarily with reporters or farmers, when she gets a call on Thursday, the office emails her with the phone message and she returns the call in just the same manner as if she were in her normal work location. Internally, the staff uses her home phone number to reach her.

Because the employee's work touches all employees in the office, the supervisor was initially concerned that her being out of the office every Thursday would cause resentment on the part of the rest of the employees. He reported that his concern did not materialize, and that there have been no problems with the rest of the staff.

He is pleased because she can focus on the task at hand without distraction and accomplishes more, and her increased comfort level is evident when she is in the office. Further, his concern that he would have to consider changing her assignments to accommodate her being

out of the office has not materialized. He said he was very pleased with how things have worked out, and believes that almost any job in his office could be done from home one day a week if the person in the job had the knowledge to function on their own and was a self-starter.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

The employee told us that she requested her telework arrangement because in bad weather her commute is about 1½ hours each way, and she wanted the convenience of avoiding it for one day a week. She said that when she works from home she usually starts her work day a half hour earlier, since she drops her toddler off at day care at the same time each day on the way to the office. Because she can start working earlier, she gets to spend that extra time with her child at the end of the day.

She said that the hardest problem she had was getting her co-workers to call her at home. Because they viewed her being at home as being on leave, they did not want to bother her. Often they would wait until she was in the office on Friday to speak with her.

She uses an extra room in her home as her office, and believes that she is twice as productive there than in the agency office with its distractions. She told us that she practices better time management and plans and prioritizes her Thursday work. She has a written agreement with her boss and was given a videotape to watch and a booklet outlining the parameters of the program. Both items were developed in headquarters.

She said that she has watched the statistician work evolve over the years and remarked that ten years ago there was only one computer that was shared by everyone in the office. Now everyone has the fastest and best available equipment, and work that used to be done face-to-face is now being done with the computer. It is because of these technological advances that it is possible for her to telework successfully.

TELEWORK POSITION: Voucher Examiner, GS-7

DURATION: Five days per week for 7 years

ORGANIZATION:

General Services Administration (GSA)
A Regional Office
Federal Supply Service
Fleet Management Centers

THE WORK SITUATION:

The Region encompasses several states. It has a large workforce and an operating budget of more than one billion dollars. A part of the Federal Supply Service for the region, the fleet management centers are responsible for leasing, maintaining, and repairing vehicles for agencies that have fleets in the area the region covers.

THE SUPERVISOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

In the early 1990's, the office moved to a new location. That move caused a serious problem for the employee, who has a walking disability. Although she can walk very short distances with the aid of a walker, the available parking at the new location was not close enough to allow her to access the new office. She was faced with not being able to continue in her job.

Because she was an independent, productive, and conscientious employee, the supervisor believed her to be a perfect candidate for telework and readily established an agreement with her that permitted her to work from home on a full-time basis. Her work is accomplished by phone or in writing, and she is the only employee who processes accident claims for the fleets in the office. She resolves claims by serving as a liaison between insurance companies, private citizens, and the car leasing agencies when a GSA fleet vehicle is involved in an automobile accident. The position lends itself well to teleworking.

From the supervisor's perspective, there has been no downside to the arrangement. It is seamless to the customers. The employee was able to keep working productively, and the supervisor has a knowledgeable, dependable employee who gets the work done effectively and efficiently.

THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE:

When she first started teleworking, the employee was living in a very small house with no real room for an office. However, her parents lived nearby and had a very large house, so it was in their home that she first established her office. She said that in the beginning, getting

up, dressed, and physically going to her parents' house to work helped her to establish office-type work habits and to maintain her discipline during the transition.

GSA provided two phone lines, file cabinets, a fax machine, a desktop copier, and a computer. Her work originally was sent from the fleet centers to the regional office, where it was batched periodically and then mailed to her. To allow for a more even flow of the claims, the Centers now send work directly to her as the accidents occur. Unless the files are time-sensitive they are sent through regular mail. She has had email access since 1996 which has helped to keep her in the loop with her co-workers and the remote financial center that processes the checks.

In 1997, for personal reasons, the employee moved to another state. Other than a different address on her letterhead, nothing has changed. She continues to work from her home office, covering the same territory, and processing about 400 accident claims per year.

She told us that she loves working from home. She can set her own pace, and when she has trouble reaching someone during the day, she has the flexibility to make calls or fax materials in the evening. She said she never has to take a snow day, never has to fight traffic, and that her use of sick leave is diminished because of her ability to schedule her work hours. She normally works from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. so that she is available to her contact points in the various Fleet Management Offices.

She did tell us that when she first moved to another state, her mail carrier asked her if she worked for the CIA, since she was getting so much mail from a variety of Federal offices and insurance companies. Other than that misunderstanding, her home office has gone unnoticed.