

Perceived Benefits and Pitfalls of Telecommuting Practices: Information Technology Professionals' Perspectives

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the perceived benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting from the perspective of Nepalese IT professionals. A network sampling approach was used to collect the data from the top 10 IT companies of Nepal. The questionnaire was distributed to 250 telecommuters and completed by 193 (77.20%). Telecommuters can reap many benefits as a result of telecommuting practices. They can better manage their time and schedules, improve their quality of life, and arrange for the supervision of family members. Telecommuting provides them with the flexibility they require to perform their jobs effectively. By implementing such practices, telecommuters can save money on transportation as well as time and energy spent commuting to work. Because of lower stress levels, increased motivation, professional flexibility, a better working environment, and independence, they can gain access to global talent, reduce tardiness, improve health, and pursue a hobby or a profession. Telecommuters may encounter a variety of pitfalls as a result of telecommuting practices. Because of a lack of face-to-face communication, regular supervision, and constant interaction, they may feel isolated and frustrated. They could be required to work in a detached or separate society. They may struggle to keep their professional and personal lives separate. They must also give up their living space and forego certain job perks. Workplace changes can create difficulties to perform well. To reap the benefits of telecommuting, today's companies must avoid such pitfalls. Companies must create new and innovative systems to make them work and train employees to be comfortable with such practices. They should devise a method for monitoring and tracking the process, and providing needed guidance.

Keywords: Benefits, IT professionals, Pitfalls, Telecommuters, Telecommuting practices, Workplace

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Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic has forced most professionals to work from home (a practice known as *telecommuting*) as much as possible. Working from

home has become more widely available to several professionals around the world. Today's technological advances, which enable internet connections at ever-lower rates, contribute to the popularity of telecommuting practices in industries

(Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015). Mainly, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been critical in sustaining economic activity and allowing a significant portion of the population to earn a living by enabling teleworking from home (OECD, 2021).

Working from home is not a novel concept (Parajuli, 2020). Traditionally, the majority of work was done in the workplace, and this is still the case in Nepal. Because of the advancement of modern communication technologies, particularly information technology (IT), employees now work outside of the workplace. Working from anywhere is possible in this environment. It is becoming more common everywhere (Harpaz, 2002).

Telecommuting is designed to shift work to workers rather than workers to work. The decision to telecommute is essentially a lifestyle change. It is a practice of work-from-home for a company and communicating with it through a personal computer/laptop equipped with modern communication technologies. Such a work mechanism is practiced by many companies and professionals, especially in recent times when many businesses operate entirely from home. Cooper (1996) defines telecommuting as the use of digital communications to establish a connection between the e-work accomplished and the company.

With telecommuting practices, members of a company use information and communication technology to work away from a central workplace, primarily from home, for a portion of their typical working hours (Allen et al., 2015). Hours of work vary from several hours per week to relatively full. Technological developments, the availability of inexpensive and fast computers, fast and reliable communication lines, Internet expansion, and the ability to move files around and work on files from anywhere (Bélanger, 1999) all have created an

environment to use telecommuting in today's companies. Such work practice eliminates geographical and time restrictions, allowing home-based work to return. Telecommuters do not have to travel to and from work every day (Harpaz, 2002). In this highly technological era, it is a popular option for several professionals.

Some jobs require constant human interaction, while others can be done with little to no face-to-face interaction and physical presence. For example, government jobs necessitate constant human interaction. Core jobs in the IT sector, on the other hand, do not require employees to be present at all times in the company. Part or all of their work can be done from the comfort of their own home (Rajbanshi, 2022). Telecommuting has become increasingly popular in Nepal in recent years. The most profound impact of Covid-19 can be seen in how organizations manage their work and workers. Our managers face both challenges and opportunities as the workforce becomes increasingly decoupled from the workplace. Despite concerns about a decline in productivity, people who work from a variety of locations, including their own homes, are asserting to be more efficient than previously believed (<https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2021/09/18/the-workplace-after-covid-19>). As a result, telecommuting has emerged as a viable option for organizational management in the Nepalese context.

Review of Literature

Conceptualization of Telecommuting

Telecommuting is the practice of performing work in locations other than traditional workplaces. This concept is not only popular in developed countries, but it is also widely used in developing countries (Teh et al., 2013). This concept has gained popularity as the nature of work has shifted from a

traditional centralized location to a much more flexible arrangement (Gallardo, 2016). Telecommuting is also known as *remote work*, *telework*, *virtual work*, *distributed work*, *distance work*, *flexible work*, and *flexplace* (Allen et al., 2015). It is a type of work done from home that is frequently aided by telecommunications technologies (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006). It makes use of ICTs (information and communication technologies) to support or substitute workplaces that enable workers to commute (Bélanger et al., 2013). Pearce (2009) reported that telecommuting allows telecommuters to execute their regularly given tasks at residence and/or at some other places geographically close to their homes.

The majority of previous research has focused on telecommuting practices. Telecommuting is a modern form of flexible work (Harpaz, 2002). Bailey, Kurland, and Kurland (2002) stated telecommuting is a process of working away from the traditional workplace while remaining in contact with it using computer-based technologies. It is an e-work (working from somewhere other than one's home). Telecommuters work from home but within the framework of an organizational structure. Depending on the nature of the business, the company, the service, and so on, they can construct their work tasks and working life in a lot of formats (Cooper, 1996). A large number of employees are now telecommuting around the world (Siha & Monroe, 2006). They now have the option of working from home. It is due to recent technological advancements that accessibility has become more affordable everywhere (Allen et al., 2015).

Benefits and Pitfalls of Telecommuting

Telecommuting utilizes information technology capabilities to replace physical presence in a workplace (Stephens & Szajna, 1998). It has both

benefits and pitfalls for telecommuters who work for a company.

Many researchers (e.g., Martinez et al., 2007; Lautsch et al., 2009; Pyöriä, 2011; Bernardino et al., 2012) all agree that telecommuting may help to reduce costs of transportation, food, clothing, and time. It provides flexible work hours. It improves health due to lower stress levels. It also improves the quality of life due to time flexibility. It provides a work location that allows reconciling work with family life. As a result, telecommuting increases the motivation and productivity of telecommuters. Telecommuting also has some advantages, according to Jalagat and Jalagat (2019), such as flexibility, access to global talent, cost savings, a better working environment, and an impact on the environment.

Likewise, many researchers (Hesse & Grantham, 1991; Perin, 1991; Pratt, 1993; Duxbury et al., 1998; Bélanger, 1999; Baruch, 2000; Jurik, 1998; Bussing, 1998; Raghuram et al., 2001; Golden & Veiga, 2005; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Fay & Kline, 2012; Allen et al., 2013; Bélanger et al., 2013; Allen et al., 2015, Golden, 2006; Kossek et al., 2006; Pearce, 2009; Golden & Eddleston, 2018; Shabanpour et al., 2018; de Vries, Tummers & Bekkers, 2019; Parajuli, 2020; Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021; Rajbanshi, 2022) have observed the benefits of telecommuting for individual workers as flexible working hours, personal freedom, enhanced time management, savings in travel time and expenses, and flexibility in arranging supervision of family members and dependents, as well as professional flexibility. Telecommuting also increases productivity, human resource provision, motivation, and satisfaction. It helps to create a positive image of the company. Furthermore, telecommuting has societal benefits. It helps to reduce environmental damage and public transport. It gives solutions for diverse populations. It also helps to preserve physical

infrastructure and energy. Besides that, telecommuting contributes to a significant reduction in absence and lateness rates, as well as direct cost reduction (Parajuli, 2020).

As technology advances, it makes it easier for people to work remotely. However, there are some pitfalls/drawbacks to telecommuting, such as professional and social isolation, potential loss of job-related perks, communication gap with professional co-workers, loss of living space, increase in unnecessary expenses; the difficulty of differentiating professional and personal life, and no opportunities for advancement (Martinez, Pérez, Luis, & Vela, 2007; Lautsch et al., 2009; Pyöriä, 2011; Bernardino et al., 2012; Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). Furthermore, telecommuting leads to a diminished sense of belonging and professional support, and hampered career potential. It requires the need for self-discipline. It may result in personality incompatibility and over-availability syndrome. It necessitates training and new supervision methods, as well as the cost of transitioning to telecommuting. It also necessarily involves changes in work methods and creates a detached society (Allen et al., 2013; Bélanger et al., 2013; Fay & Kline, 2012; Golden & Veiga, 2005; Allen et al., 2015, Golden, 2006; Kossek et al., 2006; Pearce, 2009; Golden & Eddleston, 2018; Shabanpour et al., 2018; de Vries et al., 2019; Green et al., 2020). Telecommuting complicates applications for firms with centralized management.

Research Gap

Telecommuting has long been standard practice in developed-country IT firms (Ansong & Boateng, 2017). The majority of this field's research is

focused on developed countries. Working from anywhere at any time has not been thoroughly researched in developing countries (Chepken, 2012; Rajbanshi, 2022). In developing countries such as Nepal, there is little literature available about research on this issue. In Nepal, this concept is still relatively new. Keeping this in mind, this paper explores the potential benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting practices in the context of Nepalese IT professionals.

Research Objectives

It is believed that telecommuting practices can provide numerous benefits to information technology (IT) professionals. However, there may be some drawbacks to such practices. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are:

- To explore the perceived benefits of telecommuting practices.
- To explore the perceived pitfalls of telecommuting from the perspective of IT professionals of Nepal.

Research Methodology

The study's research design is descriptive in particular. A questionnaire survey was conducted to collect evidence of the benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting practices. This study's target population is IT Professionals (including IT project managers, IT reporting managers, IT trainers and developers, operations officers/IT senior program managers, software business managers, software development managers, and system engineers/hardware) involved in the top 10 IT companies of Nepal.

Table 1
List of top 10 Nepalese IT companies in 2022

S.N.	Name of the Companies
1.	LogPoint Nepal
2.	Deerwalk Inc.
3.	Leapfrog Tech Nepal
4.	Verisk Nepal
5.	Artificial Info Tech Pvt Ltd
6.	Cotiviti Nepal Pvt. Ltd.
7.	SoftNEP Pvt. Ltd.
8.	F1Soft International Pvt. Ltd.
9.	Fusemachines Nepal Pvt. Ltd.
10.	CloudFactory

Source: <https://swagnepal.com/list-of-top-10-it-companies-in-nepal/>

The data was collected using a network sampling approach. The questionnaire was sent to 250 telecommuters (25 from each company). The questionnaire was filled out by 193 (77.20%) of the 250 telecommuters who were contacted.

Among the 193 final respondents, 174 (90.16%) reported having a bachelor's degree in IT, while the remaining 19 (9.84%) reported having a Master's Degree. Furthermore, 109 (56.50 percent) of employees reported being single, while 84 (43.50 percent) reported being married. Employees' parental status was also inquired about in addition to their marital status, and 49 (25.40 percent) reported having children, i.e., 58.30 percent of total married employees.

Regarding positions of the professionals, 43 (22.30%) are software development managers, 35 (18.13%) are IT reporting managers, 26 (13.5%) are software business managers, 21 (10.90%) are IT project managers, 21 (10.90%) are senior program managers, 15 (7.77%) are involved in IT training and development, 17 (8.81%) are system engineers/hardware, and 15 (7.770%) are

operations officers/IT. These professionals' perceptions of telecommuting practices were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating a low level of benefit and 5 indicating the highest level of benefit. Regarding the pitfalls, 1 indicates a low level of drawback, and 5 indicates the highest level of drawback associated with telecommuting practices.

Analysis and Research Findings

This section presents the research's results and findings. As stated in the preceding section, this research aims to explore the benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting from the perspective of Nepalese IT professionals. So, this section is divided into three parts: reliability analysis, perceived benefits, and pitfalls of telecommuting.

Reliability Analysis

Table 2 displays the Cronbach Alpha results for both the benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting practices.

Table 2
Reliability analysis of benefits and pitfalls of telecommuting practices

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Benefits of Telecommuting Practices	15	0.829
Pitfalls of Telecommuting Practices	15	0.737

Cronbach Alpha values of 0.60 and above are considered acceptable (Sekaran, 2006). The Cronbach value Alpha of all variables in this study is greater than 0.6. They are satisfactory for the analysis.

Benefits of Telecommuting Practices

Table 3 depicts the associated factors with the perceived benefits of telecommuting practices in IT companies. It also includes a list of benefits ranked in order of importance in relation to other benefits of telecommuting as perceived by the professionals.

Table 3
Mean and rank of the perceived benefits of telecommuting (n = 193)

S.N.	Factors	Mean	S.D.	Rank
1	Ability to pursue a hobby or vocation	3.27	0.81	15
2	Access to global talent	4.01	0.84	6
3	Autonomy/independence	3.35	0.74	14
4	Better working environment	3.43	0.91	13
5	Flexibility in arranging supervision of family	4.23	0.72	4
6	Flexible work hours	4.75	0.49	1
7	Improved health due to reduced stress levels	4.02	0.54	8
8	Improved quality of life due to time flexibility	4.37	0.68	3
9	Improvement in time management	4.54	0.72	2
10	Increase in motivation	4.01	0.49	9
11	Increased productivity	3.97	0.63	12
12	Positive impact on environment	3.99	0.57	11
13	Professional flexibility	4.01	0.61	10
14	Reduction in absence and tardiness levels	4.05	0.81	7
15	Savings on transportation, food, clothing, and time	4.21	0.69	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

According to the mean values, the top five potential benefits of telecommuting practices are flexible work hours (M = 4.75), improvement in time

management (M = 4.54), improved quality of life due to time flexibility (M = 4.37), flexibility in arranging supervision of family (M = 4.23), and

savings on transportation, food, clothing, and time ($M = 4.21$). Furthermore, IT professionals believe that telecommuting practices provide some benefits, such as access to global talent, reduction in absence and tardiness levels, improved health due to reduced stress levels, increase in motivation, professional flexibility, positive impact on environment, increased productivity, better working environment, and autonomy/independence. Finally, they rank the ability to pursue a hobby or vocation ($M = 3.27$) as

the least beneficial aspect of telecommuting practices.

Perceived Pitfalls of Telecommuting Practices

Table 4 portrays the associated factors with the perceived pitfalls of telecommuting practices in IT companies. It also includes a list of pitfalls ranked in order of importance in relation to other perceived pitfalls of telecommuting by the professionals.

Table 4
Mean and rank of the perceived pitfalls of telecommuting (n = 193)

S.N.	Factors	Mean	S.D.	Rank
1	Application difficulties for firms with centralized management	3.81	0.73	14
2	Changes in work methods	3.69	0.69	15
3	Creation of detached society	4.45	0.39	2
4	Difficulty in separating professional life from private life	4.37	0.84	3
5	Increase in expenses related to home infrastructure	4.31	0.78	4
6	Investment in training	4.19	0.85	7
7	Lack of professional support	4.29	0.72	5
8	Loss of home space	4.23	0.71	6
9	Need for self-discipline	3.89	0.81	13
10	No opportunities for advancement	3.96	0.75	12
11	Over-availability syndrome	4.15	0.67	8
12	Personality unsuitability	4.12	0.73	9
13	Potential harm to a commitment and identification	4.03	0.83	11
14	Potential loss of job benefits (transportation, meals)	4.07	0.82	10
15	Social and professional isolation	4.51	0.77	1

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

According to the mean values, the top five possible pitfalls of telecommuting practices are social and professional isolation ($M = 4.51$), creation of detached society ($M = 4.45$), difficulty in separating professional life from private life ($M = 4.37$), increase in expenses related to home infrastructure ($M = 4.31$), and lack of professional

support ($M = 4.29$).

Furthermore, IT professionals believe that telecommuting practices include some other pitfalls, such as loss of home space, investment in training, over-availability syndrome, personality unsuitability, potential loss of job benefits

(transportation, meals), potential harm to a commitment and identification, no opportunities for advancement, need for self-discipline, and application difficulties for firms with centralized management. Finally, they rank changes in work methods as the least negative aspect of telecommuting practices ($M = 3.69$).

Discussion

As a result of telecommuting practices, telecommuters/employees can reap numerous benefits. They are better able to manage their time and schedules (Venkatraman, 1994). They are also able to improve their quality of life and have opportunities to arrange supervision of family members. Telecommuting gives them the flexibility they need to perform their jobs efficiently, increasing their productivity (de Vries et al., 2019; Parajuli, 2020; Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021; Rajbanshi, 2022). Telecommuting, when done correctly, increases employee efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction (Brown, 2010). Furthermore, telecommuting is advantageous because it saves them time and money while also relieving them of the stress associated with traveling to their workplace due to a variety of geographical, political, social, and economic factors (Piskurich, 1996). Besides that, because family and personal responsibilities can interfere with professional tasks, telecommuters must be highly diligent (Volmer et al., 2012). Because coworkers and other company activities are absent, there are fewer work disruptions, allowing telecommuters to focus on their work and save time. When performing a job that requires concentration, the absence of distractions and interruptions is especially beneficial (Venkatraman, 1994). Telecommuters can also save money on transportation and time and energy spent commuting to work by implementing such practices. Telecommuting practices also offer more benefits, including access to global talent, reduced

absence and tardiness, improved health due to lower stress levels, increased motivation, professional flexibility, positive impact on the environment, increased productivity, a better working environment, and autonomy/independence. Telecommuters may also be able to pursue a hobby or vocation (Jaff & Kadar Hamsa, 2021).

Telecommuters/employees can face numerous pitfalls as a result of telecommuting practices. Telecommuting practices typically involve less communication and interaction among team members. It may result in less teamwork in an organization, which may have an impact on overall productivity (Hager, 2017). Telecommuters may feel isolated and frustrated due to a lack of face-to-face communication, regular supervision, and constant interaction, which may result in job dissatisfaction (Golden & Veiga, 2005). They may be required to work in a detached society or a separate society. They may find it difficult to separate their professional and personal lives (Allen et al., 2015; Shabanpour et al., 2018; de Vries et al., 2019). They may need to invest in home infrastructure for telecommuting (Jones, 2016). Furthermore, telecommuters must also give up their living space and invest in training. They must also give up some job benefits, such as transportation and meals. In some cases, firms with centralized management find it difficult to implement telecommuting practices (Pyöriä, 2011). Finally, changes in work methods can make it difficult for telecommuters to perform well.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic has sparked a surge in telecommuting, which has quickly changed the nature of employment for many people. The ability for workers to work remotely and use platforms like social networking, video conferencing, and web services is a key component of today's

businesses. In such a situation, telecommuting practices have both potential benefits and drawbacks. Today's companies must avoid the pitfalls of telecommuting practices. They can reap numerous benefits by adopting telecommuting practices as one of the few flexible work methods. To make them work, companies must develop new and innovative systems and prepare their employees to be at ease with such practices. They should develop a method to monitor and track the process and provide guidance as needed.

Recommendations

IT companies can put the current study's findings to use in their business operations. Despite the numerous benefits of telecommuting, businesses should not overlook the risks involved with it. Businesses must foster healthy relations with telecommuters in order to reap the greatest benefits from the practices of telecommuting. Today's companies must choose telecommuters based on their expertise and business size. They must also take into account the costs and risks associated with such practices. They must prioritize effective communication in terms of cost, time differences, and cultural differences, as well as intellectual property protection. Companies must prioritize the attitudes, expectations, and needs of telecommuters.

Limitations

- The following are some notable limitations of this paper:
- This research is limited to just ten Nepalese IT companies. The results of this paper hence might not apply to all business units.
- Due to the limited sample size of IT workers, the results of this study may not be transferrable to the entire population of flexible working

arrangements.

- The results may differ if the information were collected from a large population using different sampling methods.

Scope for Future Research

- There is still a lot of potential and scope for future research in the field of telecommuting. Some of the scopes are:
- It is suggested that future research can use a large sample size and companies from various business sectors.
- Future research can consider the relationship between telecommuting practices and the work-related behavior of employees in different business sectors.
- Future research may also examine the costs and financial performance of businesses concerning telecommuting practices.

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