

## **IMPACT OF TELECOMMUTING ON THE FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE OF TELECOMMUTERS IN PAKISTAN**

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**Abstract.** The present research aims to explore the current usage, possible benefits and impact of telecommuting along with the hindrances in development of this phenomenon in Pakistan. Financial and social impact of telecommuting was also determined on telecommuters. This study utilizes structured interview technique. By using judgmental sampling method, data was collected from specified sample of 54 telecommuters from Lahore. It was interesting to know that people who were involved in telecommuting reported the unfamiliarity with the term. Based on findings, the study concludes that telecommuting is a latest and valuable business tool that provides comfortable working environment along with the financial benefits to the users but due to lack of awareness, it is not being used extensively in the country. Respondents also gave recommendations including training of employees, making them computer literate, develop infrastructure and create awareness about telecommuting to make its future promising.

**Keywords:** Telecommuting, Technology Innovation, Social and Economic Impact, Pakistan

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Durkhiem (1984) in his famous research work “The Division of Labor in the Society” described the transition process of primitive societies to the industrial and economically advanced societies. Durkhiem suggested, “progress of a society generally starts with a simplest level and then develop into a more complex stage”. The author emphasized “the main conversion of the ancient social order into an advanced and industrial society could otherwise bring disorder or crises”. Therefore, modern sociology developed in response to the crisis linked with modernity, for instance, industrialization and procedure of rationalization. But modern day technology is striving actually to make life simpler though technological advancements have revolutionized each and every field of society. This is another prospect of emerging technologies that it has even made possible today to work everywhere and in any environment. Telecommuting is such a technology which has transformed the concept of physical presence of employee at office to what he/she can deliver from home. Telecommunication technologies facilitate an individual to work outside the conventional workplace or office, for example, from remote location, generally from home, or in a mobile situation, etc. Telecommuting is described “telework, electronic homework, the electronic cottage, networking, distance work, location independent work and flexi place” (Huws, Morrison, and Saveri, 1991).

Brown (2010) expressed that “Telecommuting is a significant workplace innovation that allows an increasing portion of the work force to work from home or work at a location remote from the central workplace at least one-day a week”. Since long, the developed economies have employed telecommuting effectively because they are technologically strengthened. Pakistan is so far a less developed and technologically poor country. Internet coverage in Pakistan is limited. Even most of the urban areas of Pakistan are still without internet. There is no doubt that teledensity in Pakistan has improved but still a far away from being sufficient. Exceptions aside, Pakistan has not embraced by information technology (IT) yet consequently nothing can be found physically or in the form of revenue. Pakistani industry of information technology is at its initial stage and what it has been accomplished until now is inadequate. Furthermore, “latest and existing technology is not used properly yet due to the lack of standard and practiced culture of the

business that requires proper planning based on strategic thinking. These are the inimical factors for the long-term and in time investment of resources required for the field of IT to develop and deliver” (Shirazi, 2011).

Earlier research studies (Bélanger, 1999; Pinsonneault & Boisvert, 2001; Potter, 2003) depicted “main reason of the expansion of this notion is found in its professed advantages for both the telecommuters and their employer including job satisfaction, enhanced productivity, increased flexibility, belonging and loyalty to the organization, saving of the office space, better employee’s morale, retention and attraction”. Present study is concerned with exploring the usage of telecommuting in Pakistan where there are many hindrances in its practice particularly limited technological advancements along with the acceptability by the traditional society are among the most common problems. Moreover, the research investigates the impact of telecommuting on the economic and social life of telecommuters along with the future of this profession in Pakistan. Thus, objective of the study are three folds:

- To explore the usage of telecommuting in Pakistan;
- An attempt to comprehend the impact of telecommuting on social and financial aspects of its users’ life;
- To assess the prospects of telecommuting in the country.

## II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Numerous research studies have been carried out in the sector of telecommuting and questioned many issues in developed countries, for instance, United Kingdom and United States from where this concept emerged. Dudman (2001) reported that between 1997 and 1999, three hundred thousand citizens were engaged in telecommuting (work from home) in the UK however in 2000 there were nearly 1.5 million people and several multinational companies embraced with telecommuting including Young, Ernst & IBM etc. Current study has its own significance as it explores the contemporary and potential prospects of telecommuting in the country. It was also imperative to identify the measures which can be useful to raise the usage of telecommuting in Pakistan and can approach the developed nations’ economy levels.

Moreover, it would be supportive for entrepreneurs and market runners in getting benefits through telecommuting, later, are helpful to improve the Pakistan's economy.

Dieringer Research Group (2006) wrapped up in their research study that telecommuting has become popular among several United States employees as they have realized and enjoying the cost benefits which a telecommuting program offers. The study established that "Telecommunication industry in America has made great progress and labor force in telecommuting has been increased to 20 per cent, i.e. increased from 26.1 million in 2005 to 28.7 million in 2006". The study concludes that "the access to wireless and broadband connections has made telecommuting low cost and more productive to work remotely. Thus number of employees is increasing who are using alternative work programs, designed to support them in accepting a balanced lifestyle". The study in 2006 predicted the chances of a boost in telecommuting industry and estimated 100 million workers by 2010.

Mokhtarian and Handy (1993) established that "the awareness of telecommuting is increasing amongst the users including employees or workers, communities, telecommunication industries, transportation planners, and others however the real levels of telecommuting appear to be modifying gradually although a little genuine data on the development is available". In addition, the research demonstrated "the future of telecommuting depends upon the employers if they provide the prospect of telecommuting or on workers if they take full benefits of this prospect, then lastly on the government if it encourages the both policies of employers and worker". The study raised several questions about progress of telecommuting over time, but concluded that predominantly the future of telecommuting seems assuring and promising".

The findings of the research survey conducted in 2011 in US showed that "telecommuters are satisfied with telecommuting that they would rather sacrifice their favorite television programs (54 per cent), nap of an hour (48 per cent), favorite food (40 per cent) or even a part of their wage (40 per cent) than giving up telecommuting" (Lesonky, 2011). 80 per cent telecommuters say, "work from home make them feel healthier and relieved. Thus they can work more professionally and productively leading towards better professional -life stability". Owners who are

running big business prefer telecommuting and maximum 76 per cent of them show loyalty to their work and prefer overtime. The research also exposed “telecommuters are relaxed employees in comparison to the non-telecommuters”. The findings also lead the research to investigate the economic and social levels of contentment of telecommuters with their work in Pakistan.

Gajendran and Harrison (2007) conducted a study by involving twelve thousand eight hundred and eighty-three (12,883) employees and 46 studies meta-analysis confirmed that “telecommuting had no general injurious effects on the quality of workplace relationships”. Further, “telecommuting significantly had little but primarily advantageous impressions on proximal outcomes, such as perceived autonomy and (lower) work-family contravene”. Results of the study also illustrated that “telecommuting had beneficial effects on more lateral results such as functioning, job pleasure, performance, turnover purposes and the role stress”. The beneficial appears partially arbitrates by autonomy. Adding to it, high-intensity telecommuting (more than two days in a week) stressed on telecommuting’s benefit on work-family disparity but upsets relationship with colleagues.

Zelinsky (1994) says “workers get more work done if out of the former office. The increase in productivity is the most significant benefit of telecommuting when a worker turns into a telecommuter, expressed by steelworkers and their managers, in an AT&T-sponsored survey of ‘Fortune’ 1000 managers, 58 per cent pointed out increased in worker productivity”. Further, “The State of California's Telecommuting Pilot Program experienced efficiency growth from 10 per cent to 30 per cent and Blue Cross telecommuters apparently improved their productivity by 50 per cent, Pacific Bell by 57 per cent, J.C. Penney by 25 per cent, and The Travelers by 33 per cent”. AT&T’s group of 6,000 sales workers’ reported a rise in productivity to 45 per cent when they were working from home or from offices of their clients’.

A research conducted by Cooper and Kurland (2002) employed Grounded Theory Method and compared the telecommuting impact on private and public workers’ perception regarding professional isolation. The study interviewed 93 telecommuters and non-telecommuters along with the supervisors in two renowned technology firms and two of the

city governments, who were running dynamic telecommuting programs and concerned to make telecommuting a successful work choice. Furthermore, these associations intend to provide the opening of inquiring challenge that exists in environment even that is encouraging for telecommuting business. Professional isolation of telecommuters was allied with the development activities of employee including instructing; intimate learning; social networking, etc. evidenced the interviewers. "The degree to which the activities are appraised in these organizations and the extent to which telecommuters fail to make use of these opportunities lead towards the magnitude of telecommuters facing professional isolation" (Cooper & Kurland, 2002). It seems that public workers value less to these not-so-formal activities of development as compared to private workers. Therefore, it can be said that telecommuting, probably, obstructs the professional growth of workers in public sector less as compared to employees of private sphere.

A research study by Heibel (2007) confirmed that in US Federal Government is supporting telework plans. After realizing the advantages of telecommuting, "Federal Transportation Appropriations Bill" was approved under which the federal agencies were required to allow all the telecommuters to perform telework. The congress made sure the promotion of telework projects of environmental potentials and energy along with provision of capacity to stay operational particularly during huge emergencies. The Georgia's clean 'Air Tele-work Campaign' is one of the good examples that focused on improvisation of quality of air and decrease of metro cities' traffic burden. Said program presented benefits to a number of the local/home companies, for instance, tax credits, grants, aids and other encouraging material to support them in developing their programs of timework.

The findings of research by Oliver (1994) declares "companies that apply telecommuting and using teleworkers can continue working professionally and efficiently whenever any tragedy related to weather hit the country". It further revealed that "the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, thousands of workers resettled in New York metropolitan areas and Washington DC were telecommuting".

In another research study titled "telework programs and their benefits" conducted by Telework Research Network established that

“business organizations can facilitate their employees by saving more than a million \$ per annum for their company and \$ 6, 800 to the workforce if they permit only hundred of their employees to work partially from home and partly from office”. Telework Research Network studied about 250 case studies and research papers along with supplementary telecommuting documents, based on related researchers and companies’ interviews established “80 percent of the workers wanted to telecommute and 30 per cent would like to take a pay cut in order to telecommute, less than 2 per cent of the employees for the majority of their time, worked from home and at least 40 per cent had jobs that were well-suited with telecommuting”.

After reviewing the above and other related literature, following are the research questions drawn for the scenario of telecommuting in Pakistan.

1. Is telecommuting practiced in Pakistan?
2. Is there any impact of telecommuting on social activities of the telecommuters?
3. Does telecommuting have any effect on the financial condition of its users?
4. Does telecommuting have bright future in the country?

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative research study and used descriptive approach to present the results. Intensive interviews research method was used for data collection. In-depth or intensive interview approach is basically a one-on-one personal interview. Generally speaking, In-depth interview uses small sample and collects detailed and extensive information that why the respondents give particular answers. The research applied structured, telephonic and personal interviews, after preparing checklist and all the respondents were asked same questions. Total 54 telecommuters were sampled for interview from the population through judgmental sampling technique from city of Lahore, Pakistan. The study specifically chooses respondents of the telecommuting field since this concept has introduced in Pakistan. Since present study is the pioneer research and conducted at the initial stages of the telecommuting in

Pakistan so did not stipulate the age limit, qualification and gender of the sample. Therefore, both males and females of varied age groups (25 to 35 years) and qualifications (graduation to post graduation) were included in sample. The major concern of this research study was to investigate the usage of telecommuting and its impact on the life of telecommuters, its acceptance along with hindrances in the progression of this concept by the traditional society of Pakistan, thus variation of age, gender and qualification in the selected sample didn't make any difference. Total male respondents were 44 and females were 10 only.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As judgmental sampling technique was used to draw sample for the study only from Lahore and as a result total 54 respondents were interviewed. The study recorded demography of respondents and focused on age, gender, education, income, marital status etc.

TABLE 1

Demography Characteristics of Respondents (in percentage)

Gender		Age		Qualification		Marital Status		Income (Rs)	
Male	Female	25-30	31-35	Graduate	Post Graduate	Married	Un-Married	25-50000	5000 plus
44	10	30	24	39	15	28	26	32	22
81.5	18.5	55.5	44.5	72	28	52	48	59.3	40.7

Table 1 illustrated that the majority respondents belonged to the age between 25 to 30 years (55.5 percent). Sample included 81.48 per cent of male respondents while 18.52 per cent women. It showed that telecommuting is being accepted by both gender (men and women) in Pakistani society. According to the data it can be said that telecommuting, a professional technique is beneficial and in use of both the gender. Majority respondents were graduate and married. Most of



them were earning 25000 to 50,000 per month and also reported that they are involved in telecommuting for the last eight years.

In a response to question do general public are aware of telecommuting in Pakistan, it was interesting to know that people who were involved in telecommuting they also reported the unfamiliarity with the term. While only four of the respondents said they were aware of the term and the concept. Though the sample is small to be generalized to the whole country and the research is qualitative in nature but it can be said from the responses that telecommuting has been introduced in Pakistan but still not adopted by Pakistani's at a large scale. Exceptions aside, the technique of telecommuting is not selected as a conventional phenomenon which can be beneficial for both public and corporate sector of Pakistan.

Respondents were informed that telecommuting is "use of telecommunication technologies that allow an individual to work outside the traditional office or workplace from a remote location; generally, from home or it can be a mobile situation which they were already doing". Afterward the respondents were asked about the professions which are most conducive for telecommuting, majority respondents answered that information technology (IT) is the most favorable field of telecommuting. Use of telecommuting can make our country technologically rich which in turn will pave a way to new businesses based on telecommuting industry. Some of the respondents replied that writing blog is the encouraging method of introducing telecommuting at international level therefore bloggers are being appointed and heavily paid for writing and managing blogs whereas few of the respondents also mentioned that web designing is also favorable in this regards. Therefore, telecommuting is considered as the most useful method, more or less, for all kinds of programming of sales, consultancies and assistance which is virtual in nature and thus will mainly depend on computer literacy and sound IT infrastructure.

Job satisfaction is an important component for every worker, whether telecommuter or non-telecommuter. While reporting the satisfaction towards job and life, most of the male and all of the female respondents stated that the flexibility in working hours and place was a huge motivation to adopt this modern technology based technique.

Telecommuters were found to be more satisfied with their profession because of flexible nature of the job. They have stress free life, without being bound to organizational routines.

While answering to the personal questions about the impact of telecommuting on the social lives of respondents, responses were dichotomous accounting both negative and positive effects. One of the significant benefits, majority telecommuters mentioned, they are allowed to work from home instead of traditional office settings and fix working hours. They are satisfied and motivated to work due to flexible working hours, comfortable locations with no urgent meetings and calls to attend. Telecommuters enjoy the freedom to balance work and home affairs, for instance, everyday chores, child care, shopping, managing private matters, hobbies, social activities, participating in events, spending time with family and friends, etc. Majority respondents were on the opinion that now they have a better social life. A study conducted by Hunton (2005) also found the similar results. It describes that “in a telecommuting setting, the typical work day, is not a norm now. Instead, tele-workers are free to balance between the work and personal activities. In addition, telecommuters are more motivated to work, as they enjoy job satisfaction”.

They reported no stress of taking leaves from office but one fourth of the respondents expressed the reservations of becoming less social and isolated being all the time with computers and internet. They stated that a company that relies on sturdy team collaboration during completion of a project, telecommuting can be tough job if the team was not supportive. They further said “particularly if the staff communicates online only or through phone, certainly they face hard time in maintaining and building relations with colleagues, which can damage the productivity and job satisfaction”. They also expressed that “relationship generally leads to trust and valuable collaboration; telecommuting can deteriorate the environment”.

On the other hand majority while responding to importance of team relationship said “to maintain the staff connectivity, meetings, retreats or social events required to be planed and efforts should be put for in-person attendance. If manageable, all the staff members required to be present in the office at least for one or two days weekly to retain regular contact”.

Some of the respondents stated that they experience some conflict with family members also when they work from home. However, Hunton (2005) exposed that “telecommuters face higher rates of conflict among family and friends, when compared to traditional workers. The problem could be attributed, perhaps, to the amount of time spent with family and friends”.

Responses for assessing the financial impact of telecommuting on its user brought up some very interesting answers. Majority of the respondents accounted more money in lesser time as an excellent advantage, these responses were expected but seven of the respondents cited saving fuel also because they do not have to travel for their work. Hunton (2005) also have the same conclusion that “one of the advantages of telecommuting is that workers are saving the cost and time of travel they take to back and forth”. In a country like Pakistan where petrol and CNG shortages are routine matter, telecommuting seems to be heavily advantageous. Harpaz (2002) also stated that “one of the telecommuting benefits is that it reduces the quantity of fuel used, since fewer motor vehicles are moving on the road. Some of the other benefits to the society include a reduced pressure on system of transportation, pollution in the environment and added opportunity for handicapped employees”. Money saving, no time limits and gaining work experience for national and international multinational companies are also brought up by half of the interviewee in answer to this question.

Other telecommuting benefits, majority pointed out were “it saves the money of company to build the infrastructure, but the organization requires investing in infrastructure for network, hardware of informational technology and software at the main office and workers’ locations”. However, a research study by Topi (2004) reported a disadvantage of telecommuting “such organizations supposed to develop policies for protection of themselves and their resources”.

During the interview the majority also said that telecommuting is not only beneficial for individuals but can also have positive impact on business and economy of the country thus a bright future can be anticipated. Most of the respondents were of the view that a strong relation between telecommuting and economy of a country may exist and if telecommuting employed as business model it would be very

productive for economy. All of the interviewees listed increase in the employment rate as a significant benefit of telecommuting. They stated that telecommuting offers multitude of opportunities to work. In order to get benefit from these various opportunities people try to be more efficient. Thus, telecommuting is generating efficient manpower. Further revenue generation and business expansion were the benefits mentioned by nearly all of the respondents.

It can easily be stated that telecommuting can be an effective tool for the improvement in financial conditions of individuals who are using along with a positive impact on the economy of a country. It can also be fruitful for the whole organizations if they employ it in their business model. They can earn maximum profit by employing manpower with more experience yet affordable to them. Their businesses can progress and develop which ultimately have very positive implication on the overall economy of the country.

On the basis of data, it can be said that future prospects of telecommuting in Pakistan seem promising. Respondents also gave recommendations to make telecommuting workable and successful in Pakistan. They were of the view that by creating awareness, enhancing computer literacy, establishing sound IT infrastructure and above all through training or capacity building of employees telecommuting can be promoted. Moreover, government needs to take initiative by providing facilities and hiring telecommuters to encourage this field.

## **V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The data of this study reveals that in Pakistan telecommuting is a newly emerged phenomenon and majority Pakistanis is not familiar with the concept. Although telecommuting became a viable option with the advent of email and Internet technology in both big corporations and small businesses but this research study confirmed that the practice is increasing with very slow speed. However, with the introduction of telecommuting based channels/companies, the acceptance level would rise since it offers relieved working from home without any stress of leaving out for work place and managing organizational commitments.

This model of working is not creating any bad impact on social life of the workers rather supportive in improving their financial conditions

and savings. Furthermore, telecommuting establishes that it can also be supportive in economic development of the country because it enhances employment opportunities, with more competent workforce along with the comfortable environment there will be more productivity thus more revenue generation. On the other hand, telecommuting may result in social isolation for some of the telecommuters in absence of companies' responsibilities, working environment of the office and interaction with colleagues; however, for several it seems a blessing because they can spend desirable time with their family members without any work stress. Telecommuting is a good choice for self-directed employees who can perform much of their work without face-to-face interaction on a day-to-day basis. Writers and computer programmers are examples. It is not a good choice for positions in which unscheduled meetings are frequently needed. It is also inappropriate when an employee needs access to equipment and data that can only be found on site. Managers and supervisors may find telecommuting to be a challenge, especially when the team they oversee has not yet coalesced or is experiencing conflict. Although some positions may suit a full-time telecommuting schedule, a company may also offer the option of telecommuting once a week or even once a month.

The study also concludes that the leading impediment for the growth of this phenomenon (telecommuting) in Pakistan is the lack of usage of technology. Therefore, the study suggested to the government to take initiative for promotion of telecommuting and introduce telecommuters in corporate sector. If the availability of required and adequate technology for the support of telecommuting is ensured along with literate and skilled manpower, telecommuting appears to be successful and would contribute towards the economy of the country.

It is also recommended that more research is needed to explore the phenomena of telecommuting in the country. Particularly the long term effects of telecommuting on organizations, individuals, and society required to be investigated in future.

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