Chapter XVIII

Are Remote and Non-Remote Workers Different? Exploring the Impact of Trust, Work Experience and Connectivity on Performance Outcomes

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Information technology (IT) is enabling the creation of virtual organizations and remote work practices. As this practice of employees working remotely from their managers and colleagues grows, so does the importance of making these remote end-users of technology effective members of organizations. This study tested a number of relationships that were suggested in the literature as being relevant in a remote work environment. Interpersonal trust of the employees in their managers was found to be strongly associated with higher self-perceptions of performance, higher job satisfaction and lower job stress. There was weak support for the impact of physical connectivity (i.e., the availability of IT) on job satisfaction, supporting the enabling role of IT. These findings were similar for both remote employees (i.e., those that worked in a different building than their managers) and non-remote employees. However, more frequent communications between the
manager and employee was associated with higher levels of interpersonal trust only with the remote workers. Cognition-based trust was also found to be more important than affect-based trust in a remote work environment, suggesting that managers of remote employees should focus on activities that demonstrate competence, responsibility and professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

Working remotely is becoming more common with advances in information technology (IT). Information technology is enabling distributed work, both for IS professionals and other professionals. Many, if not all, remote workers will be end users of information technology. Making these end users effective in a remote environment holds many challenges for organizations. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the challenges and issues.

In recent years, there has been some research on telecommuting to understand one type of remote work practice, that of working remotely from home (Belanger & Collins, 1998; DeSanctis, 1984; Duxbury & Haines, 1991; Duxbury, Higgins, & Irving, 1987; Igbaria & Guimaraes, 1999; Johnson, 2001; McCloskey & Igbaria, 1998; Neufeld, 1997; Olson, 1988; Switzer, 1997). A key issue in telecommuting and virtual organizational structures is the management of employees who are located remotely from their manager (Beyers, 1995; Kepczyk, 1999; Pearlson & Saunders, 2001; Pinsonneault & Boisvert, 2001; Rooney, 2000; Tapscott & Caston, 1993). Managers’ roles are changing as traditional, hierarchical methods are no longer appropriate (Bogdanski & Setliff, 2000; Cascio, 2000; Grenier & Metes, 1995; Jenner, 1994; Lucas & Baroudi, 1994; Pearlson & Saunders, 2001; Raines & Leathers, 2001; Snell, 1994). The fear of lost managerial control is reported to be a significant factor preventing widespread adoption of telecommuting (DeSanctis, 1984; Duxbury et al., 1987; Duxbury & Haines, 1991; Goodrich, 1990; Pearlson & Saunders, 2001; Phelps, 1985; Risman & Tomaskovic-Devey, 1989; Roderick & Jelley, 1991).

The objective of this research was to study remote work and remote management and to explore differences among remote workers and non-remote workers. This information can potentially assist organizations and managers in making their remote workers more effective. For this study, remote workers were defined as employees who work in a physically separate location from their managers. The employee’s location could vary considerably from working at another company office or in their home, to working at a customer’s location or out of their car. Employees working at home are by definition telecommuting; however, telecommuting is just one work arrange-
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