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## Virtual Teams: Work/Life Challenges - Keeping Remote Employees Engaged

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## Virtual Teams: Work/Life Challenges - Keeping Remote Employees Engaged

### Abstract

Remotely located employees are quickly becoming a norm in the modern workplace in response to evidence that telecommuters save on costs and produce more efficiently. There are many intangible benefits also felt with the increasing prevalence of remote employees. Telecommuters are more satisfied with their work/life balance and report lower rates of job burnout. Though there are also many well-identified setbacks remotely located managers and employees may face. Employers see the most success with telecommuting by first recruiting the people best fit to fill these remote roles. However, the process of developing remote employees is a process that requires constant monitoring. The purpose of this paper is to identify the best practices being used by companies to keep remote employees engaged while simultaneously avoiding burnout.

### Keywords

remote work, engaged employees, engagement, telecommuting, virtual team, work/life balance, isolation, core competencies, recruitment, remote management, communication, assessment, trust, performance management, performance, technology, flexible, mobile workforce, innovation, mobile worker, inclusion, virtual employee, trends in HR, employee benefits, employee isolation, leadership, global virtual teams, workforce, telework, off-site, expatriots, virtual environment, transformational leadership, job satisfaction

### Disciplines

Human Resources Management | Performance Management

### Comments

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## VIRTUAL TEAMS: WORK/LIFE CHALLENGES - KEEPING REMOTE EMPLOYEES ENGAGED

*Kirsten Sundin, American Express Graduate Research Assistant for CAHRS*

Remotely located employees are quickly becoming a norm in the modern workplace in response to evidence that telecommuters save on costs and produce more efficiently. There are many intangible benefits also felt with the increasing prevalence of remote employees. Telecommuters are more satisfied with their work/life balance and report lower rates of job burnout. Though there are also many well-identified setbacks remotely located managers and employees may face. Employers see the most success with telecommuting by first recruiting the people best fit to fill these remote roles. However, the process of developing remote employees is a process that requires constant monitoring. The purpose of this paper is to identify the best practices being used by companies to keep remote employees engaged while simultaneously avoiding burnout.

### **Telecommuting**

As little research focuses solely on the relationship between whole virtual teams and the idea of engagement, this paper will focus on the closely related link between individual virtual team members and their feelings of engagement. Remotely located team members are more and more often a reality of workplace teams both globally and locally as telecommuting becomes a common answer to budgetary problems in a challenging economy and work/life balance issues that have long been a concern of Human Resource managers (Derven, 2007; Madsen, 2003). Estimates of cost savings begin at least at \$2,000 per employee (Hewitt, 2008) and range to IBM's estimation of \$100 million per year as a result of its 42% remotely located workforce (Mulki, Bardhi, Lassk, & Nanavaty-Dahl, 2009). In addition to a savings in the tangible costs associated with working remotely telecommuters do not use a workspace or amenities and create less commute-related pollution and for which companies and tax payers have traditionally incurred a financial burden (Flemming, 1991).

Remote employees generally report a high degree of satisfaction with telecommuting, including greater work/life flexibility. In addition, they report being able to more quickly master new technologies used in daily work (Golden, 2006). In general, remotely located employers report less absenteeism, turnover and effects of job burnout (Flemming, 1991). Estimates suggest that telecommuters can be 20% more productive than traditional employees (Schepp & Schepp, 1995).

In reaction to the vast returns a company and an employee can see, telecommuter work grew over 20% between 2005 and 2006. At least a quarter of the world's workforce (878 Million workers) is estimated to consist of mobile employees (Cisco, 2007). Responding to this rapid growth, companies are assessing whether telecommuting is a good idea for a wide variety of employees.

While the benefits and cost savings of telecommuting can be vast, there are also many well-identified drawbacks, including a deep feeling of isolation and long hours (Schepp & Schepp, 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to identify the best practices being used by companies to keep remote employees engaged while simultaneously avoiding burnout.

## **Managing**

### *Core Competencies*

When implementing telework, emphasis should be placed on recruiting the right people (Snell, 2009). Employees well-suited for telework have a strong balance between technical knowledge and social skills. They are adaptable, well organized, and flexible. Their psychological profile is characterized by low levels of neuroticism, resilience, extroversion, and self-confidence. Further, they are always open to new experiences and opportunities to socialize (Conlin, 2009) and are highly self-motivated (Cisco, 2007).

Despite their prevalence, a Blessing White survey of 898 executives found that 37% of managers found managing global teams very difficult (Newsline, 2006). Telecommuters require a very different style from managers. They require much more time than the traditional employee to produce a similar level of engagement (Cisco, 2007). However, many of the competencies needed by managers in virtual and local settings are very similar. For example, Whitford (2009) found that transformational and visionary leadership produced the same levels of engagement from local and distance employees.

Just as core competencies have been identified for telecommuters, businesses are focusing on the leadership qualities remote managers must possess to be successful. Managers must be organized. Often agendas for meetings and work planning become the basis for daily interaction. One manager at Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals uses a “check-in process” to solicit a statement from his employees and assess daily where they stand in progress towards their goals and how they feel about their current projects (Derven, 2007).

### *Always Connected*

But first and foremost managers must be effective communicators. The communication is different, to be sure, but new norms develop even with those not familiar with the technologies. They must be skilled at relationship building. Short but frequent contacts are required to keep remote employees abreast of daily happenings – effectively replacing the small interactions that would traditionally happen in the hallway or in the lunch room. Replicating these instances of informal learning is a major identified drawback of remote managers (Kerber, 2004). Distance leaders become responsible for communicating the company culture to remote employees (Derven, 2007).

Short, frequent communications with purpose help remote employees to feel connected and included (Janove, 2004). A manager should make a special point to acknowledge the contributions of remote employees. Informal feedback also becomes critical in engagement (Linkow, 2008). They must know that their work is being noticed and is critical to the group effort (Derven, 2007). Managers must make time for personal interaction, especially if it is done virtually, to compensate for the impersonal means of communication (Newsline, 2006). During these points of contact it is

important for managers to always make themselves available for contact from remote employees (Gerke, 2006). Without a strong connection to their manager, employees can feel isolated or develop closer connections with a frequent customers, which can lead them to lose their focus on the company's main goals and strategic objectives.

#### *Assessment*

In a virtual environment trust can be very hard to gain. Managers must keep their commitments to remote employees. Frequent rescheduling or lack of response to questions will very quickly create disengagement and distrust (Gerke, 2006).

Performance management is most effective when management and employees agree on how performance will be assessed and measured (Linkow, 2008). Managing via technology can become demanding, but when a remotely-located employee is clear on their manager's expectations and confident on how they will be assessed, teleworkers will fully enjoy the benefits telecommuting can offer (Cisco, 2007). Managers can facilitate the process by maintaining consistency in their communications and actions towards remote employees.

#### *Trust*

Unfortunately the virtual employment relationship produces less inherent trust than exists between a traditional manager and employee (Merriman, Schmidt, & Dunlap-Hinkler, 2007). Remote employees are most productive when allowed to self-manage. They thrive when trusted to perform their job well (Cisco, 2007). Trust goes hand-in-hand with greater decision-making responsibilities and greater autonomy can help foster creativity in remote employees (Derven, 2007). Though leaders sometimes find this the most difficult part of remote management. Software-enabled monitoring as detailed as real-time long-on/log-off systems exist and are available to managers who worry about security risks and the data that is being transferred outside of a company's intranet. However, enabling this type of control can lead to a temptation to "look over the shoulder" of remote employees. Research suggests that while some means of technical accountability may be good, this type of rigid structure is detrimental to employee motivation and productivity (Newline, 2007; HR Magazine, 2005; "PC remote control", 2007). Managers are challenged to find a balance between people and the task at hand - between the two extremes of micro managing and allowing too much distance (Derven, 2007).

### **Communication**

Communication within the company as a whole, beyond just one's manager, is very important to keeping remote employees engaged.

#### *Feeling Connected*

Mentors can help keep a remote employee from falling into the psychological traps that can accompany working alone. Often employees who report low feelings of engagement experience little team support behind their contributions (Cisco, 2007).

Social networking has become a popular way for employees to feel more engaged with local employees. Internal social networks are used for building a sense of personal community between remote employees but can also offer a convenient tool in the way of professional knowledge information sharing. LinkedIn, Facebook, and even MySpace groups on the internet have also become popular ways for employees to connect with one another. Currently 65% of professionals report that they engage in social networking and 52% of companies report that their motivation in encouraging social networking is specifically to keep local and remote employees engaged. Internal blogs and Podcasting (especially from top leaders) have also become popular as a form of communicating the goals and expectations of upper management (Newsline, 2007, "65% of business professionals").

#### *Means of Communication*

It can be difficult to maintain a strong trust between company and telecommuter without frequent access to reliable communication. Companies must provide adequate connections to the "office" for remote employees to be a productive member of the virtual team (Linkow, 2008). Access to audio conference features, e-mail, and telephone are crucial, and communication over these tools must always be as seamless as possible. Virtual communication is impersonal by nature and can be easily misinterpreted, and there is large room for error in the interpretation of e-mail. The phone remains the most frequently used and effective communication tool for remote employees (Cisco, 2007).

#### *Competencies of the Company*

Managers are best able to interact with remote employees in a decentralized system. This improves the line manager's ability to manage (Snell, 2009) with the leeway to tailor communications and goals to the individual employee. The company culture must foster enough trust to allow employees to make autonomous decisions (Cisco, 2007). Empowered employees with the ability to manage their own careers will exhibit the highest levels of engagement (Snell, 2009).

### **Avoiding Burnout**

While growth in virtual employment suggests that the benefits outweigh the costs, it is important to note one of the most frequent pitfalls of remote work: burnout (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). Burnout from local and remote employees is a serious issue. It can lead to extreme absenteeism, substance abuse, and stress-related health problems (Thomas, 2007).

Telecommuting is sometimes seen as a remedy for traditional employee job burnout. However, remote employees can develop burnout stress from entirely new sources. They report strong feeling of isolation from the company and co-workers. They feel they miss a team connection and their motivation can suffer as a result (Zhang, 2008). This stems from a lack of casual and personal conversations often experienced during breaks in the traditional office work day.

Some remote employees complain that they are promoted more slowly or passed over for advancement opportunities, or at least report that their work is not valued (Schepp & Schepp,

1995). Employees also frequently report difficulty in drawing clear boundaries between their work and personal life. Remote employees are often busy outside of normal 9-5 working hours due to issues with time-zones (Thomas, 2007). Some teleworkers report having a hard time drawing lines between family and work commitments when they are physically in the same place. Managers must focus on helping remote employees to set priorities and frequent breaks (Mulki et al., 2009).

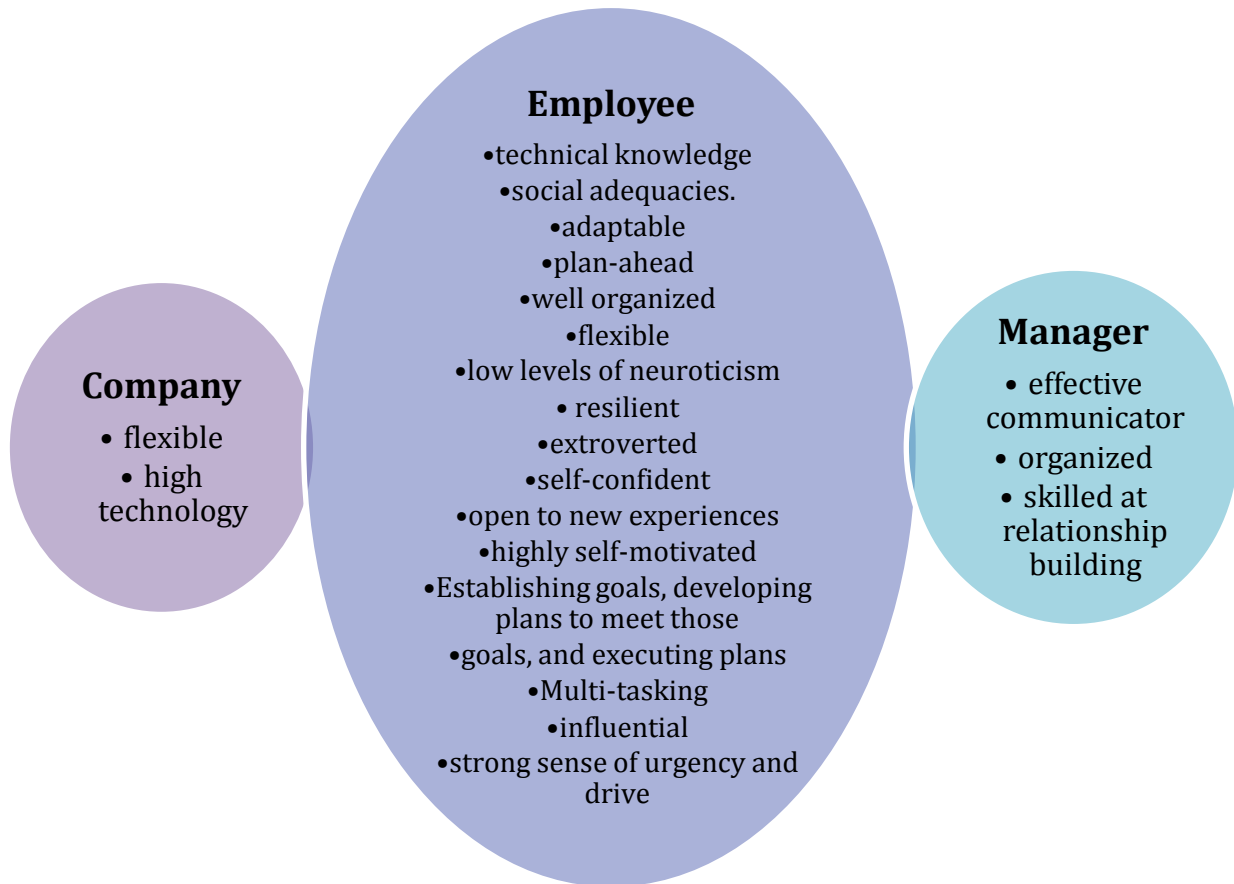
## **Recommendations**

The difficulties remote employees face are serious. There is research supporting both the positive and negative effects telework can have on family/work conflict (Madsen, 2003) (Linkow, 2008). However, some management difficulties may stem from general teamwork, locally or virtually located (Gerke, 2006). Research also supports the idea that with active management many of these difficulties are easily avoided. The opportunities for very positive increases in productivity and job satisfaction can be realized through effective management (Cisco, 2007). Today, the most effective way to accomplish these goals is through constant, consistent communication and virtual networking. When a remote employee is in constant virtual connection with their team, they are more likely to be committed to the team's goals (Kerber, 2004). Remote employees are more committed to their own goals through interactive coaching from managers. Managers are also responsible for creating a virtual environment that replicates the informal professional development the company would provide (Kurland, 2002).

Telecommuting will continue to grow in its many forms. The key to benefitting fully from the advantages of the practice and avoiding burnout is to maintain employee engagement (Kurland, 2002). Personal communication and recognition of accomplished goals are of utmost importance (Whitford & Moss, 2009). With a constant stream of communication and information from a dedicated manager, remote employees can reach their maximum potential.

Table 1:

**Core Competencies**





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## Annotated Bibliography

### **65% of business professional are logging on to social networking sites. (2007). Newsline Article. Retrieved March 10, 2010 from the World at Work organization.**

**Abstract:** The study revealed that employees are quickly gravitating toward leveraging social networks for very traditional business uses. About half (52%) of respondents whose organizations are using social networking sites do so to keep internal staff and remote employees connected, while 47% of total respondents use the networks to connect with potential clients and to showcase their skills. A total of 35% say they use networks to assist them in finding a job. But it's not all about connecting in the conventional sense. Networks are also being leveraged to raise the IQ of organizations. Over half (55%) of those using the networks do so to share best practices with colleagues, and 49% use them to get answers to issues they are currently facing. This is an area that experts think could help social networking really take off inside corporations.

### **Cisco. (2007). Understanding and Managing the Mobile Workforce.**

**Abstract:** Is mobile working the way we will all work in the future? Is it transforming the business world, driving innovation and creating opportunities – or confusing managers, draining organisational resources and wrecking family life? This report examines the challenges faced by mobile workers and the organisations that employ them. It draws on a wide range of sources, including a specially commissioned series of in-depth interviews with mobile workers and their managers from organisations around the world. It reveals several surprising facts about what it takes to be a mobile worker – and how organisations can maximise the value they get from the people they empower with mobility. Today's typical mobile worker is a full-time, male manager. But within two years, one quarter of the world's working population will be mobile workers. This means that organisations will have to manage a rapid transition to a style of working that supports people of all kinds, makes the best of their talents and maintains their identification with the organisation and its goals. Successful mobile workers tend to be resilient extroverts. They are open to new experiences and highly adaptable. And, contrary to the stereotype of the harassed and disoriented road warrior, they are supremely organized and independent-minded. With the right kind of tailored support, their productivity and adaptability make them superlative operators in an era of increasing demands and constant change. But they also need help in maintaining their work-life balance, and keeping their all-important self-confidence. Organisations clearly need to equip their mobile workers with more than just technology: they also need to supply attention, recognition, empathy and a constant sense of inclusion.

**Conlin, M. (2009, July). Is there a virtual worker personality? *BusinessWeek Online*. Retrieved March 10, 2010 from the Business Source Complete database.**

**Abstract:** The article reports on the findings of studies related to the personalities of virtual workers. It states that some employees are simply not suited to digital working by temperament, psychology, or personality. In a study conducted on Cisco Systems Inc.'s mobile workers, it was found that employees who chase socialization also do well in virtual work as they stay connected no matter where they are. The study also said that mobile workers are more organized than their office-bound counterparts.

**Considering More Offsite Work? Manage Virtual Employment. (2008). [Electronic Version] *HR Focus*, 85 (10), 9.**

**Abstract:** The article highlights virtual employment as a means to leverage talent yet enhance employee engagement and productivity. It mentions the audio conference "Virtual Employment: Leveraging Talent & Avoiding Risks of the Off-Site Employee" presented by Geoffrey Dubiski, chief talent scout at Sumner Grace & Associates.

**Derven, M. (2007). The remote connection: Leading others from a distance requires set expectations, trust, and unique methods of evaluation. [Electronic Version] *HR Magazine*, 52(3), 111-115.**

**Abstract:** The article focuses on remote leadership and personnel management. Remote leaders are becoming common in relation to increased globalization, mergers and acquisitions and a desire to save costs on commercial real estate. Leaders who treat remote employees as valuable assets will be rewarded with higher performance and productivity. Tips on addressing the challenges associated with remote leadership are presented.

**Flemming, L. (1991, October). Computer commuting is catching on. [Electronic Version] *USA Today*, 8.**

**Abstract:** In California, state regulations encourage telecommuting to reduce traffic and resulting pollution. Elsewhere, many states are looking to telecommuting to help meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Bell Atlantic is among several major corporations, including IBM, American Express, Pacific Bell, and Kodak, that have turned to telecommuting as a creative alternative to absenteeism, job burnout, and low productivity. Eric Legstrom, Bell Atlantic director of strategic planning, finds his twice-weekly telecommute a good way to break the humdrum effect of working every day.

**Flexible Work Grows as a Work/Life Solution. (2004). [Electronic Version]. *HRFocus*, 17.**

**Abstract:** Flexible work options are about more than "flex time"-they include part-time schedules, job-sharing, and telecommuting, and they are becoming more popular among employees and employers. The HRfocus Flexible Work Options Survey found that interest among workers for flexible options is stable or growing. Much of this depends on how widespread the offerings are or

how many employees use them at a particular organization, as well as management's willingness to provide and support the options. (To see the most current popular flex options among survey respondents, see the sidebar, "What Flexible Work Options Do You Offer?") A structured program seems to be the key ingredient to the success of flexible work options, survey respondents agree. Setting and enforcing parameters ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them.

**From the Leadership: Executive Committee. (2008). Workspan Article. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from the World at Work organization online.**

**Abstract:** The renovation has forced everyone out of their comfort zones and made them (and me) walk the talk about the workplace of the future. Managers once reluctant to have remote employees are discovering that it is possible for team members to be “intellectually present” even when you can’t see them. Co-workers have learned what I call “the rules of remote etiquette.”

**Gerke, S. K. (2006). If I cannot see them, how can I lead them? *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 38(2), 102-105.**

**Abstract:** Purpose — The purpose of this paper is to provide leaders with a clear understanding of some key issues they face when leading remote workers and to provide practical suggestions on *how* to deal with those issues. Design/methodology/approach — The main method of research for this paper is data from participants in workshops over a ten-year period. Participants included all levels of management, as well as non-managers in a variety of large organizations across industries. Industries include high-tech, food, consumer products, energy entertainment and manufacturing. Participants included those with global teams, teams within a country and teams with work-at-home members. Findings — The key finding is that remote leadership requires the same good management and leadership skills that co-located leadership requires. However, in the remote environment, leaders must be more deliberate and planful about building relationships and trust and in communicating. Practical implications — Leaders *can* implement specific techniques, several of which are presented in the paper to increase their effectiveness of leading remote employees and teams. Originality/value — While remote leaders often struggle as they try to work effectively with their employees, they do not often identify that it is specifically the remote factor that is causing much of the challenge. This paper provides practical techniques for anyone trying to get work accomplished with remote employees.

**Golden, T.D. (2006) Avoiding depletion in virtual work: telework and the intervening impact of work exhaustion on commitment and turnover intentions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* .Vol. 69 (1), 176.**

**Abstract:** Despite the tremendous growth of telework and other forms of virtual work, little is known about its impact on organizational commitment and turnover intentions, nor the mechanisms through which telework operates. Drawing upon the conservation of resources model

as the theoretical framework, I posit telework's impact is the result of resource stockpiling and flexibility as teleworkers are able to yield work and personal benefits and protect themselves from resource depletion in the office. Using a sample of 393 professional-level teleworkers in one organization, I therefore investigate the intervening role of work exhaustion in determining commitment and turnover intentions. Results indicate that telework is positively related to commitment and negatively related to turnover intentions, such that a higher degree of teleworking is associated with more commitment to the organization and weakened turnover intentions. Moreover, work exhaustion is found to mediate the relationships between teleworking and both commitment and turnover intentions.

**Hewitt. (2008). Trends in HR and employee benefits: Employers' try to ease workers' commuting pain. Retrieved April 19, 2010 from Hewitt Associates online.**

**Abstract:** According to several recent news articles, a growing number of companies have undertaken a variety of initiatives to ease the commuting burden for employees. This bulletin touches briefly on recent news on this topic.

**Hunsaker, P. L., & Hunsaker, J. S. (2008). Virtual teams: A leader's guide. *Team Performance Management*, 14(1), 86-101.**

**Abstract:** Purpose - The purpose of this article is to provide guidelines to help leaders understand and lead virtual teams. Design/methodology/approach - This paper discusses the importance and implementation of effective leadership for virtual teams. It begins with a review of conventional versus virtual teams, and then describes the two primary leadership functions in virtual teams - performance management and team development. Following the discussion of the development and function of new teams, the article then provides a detailed guide for the leadership of virtual teams over the life of a project. These guidelines follow the four stages of a project timeline: Pre-Project, Project Initiation, Midstream, and Wrap-Up. Practical implications - Following guidelines and understanding the differences between conventional and virtual leadership will enable managers to become effective virtual team leaders. Originality/value - The paper shows how, in the context of increasing globalization and technology, leaders can manage the challenges of leading virtual teams.

**Janove, J. W. (2004). Management by remote control. [Electronic Version] *HR Magazine*, 49 (4), 119-124.**

**Abstract:** Ensuring that your employees consistently meet expectations of performance, attendance and workplace conduct is never easy. However, when separated geographically from your employees by hundreds or even thousands of miles, the degree of management difficulty soars. Beginning with hypothetical experiences of ABC Inc., headquartered in Richmond, Va. (all

taken from actual situations), this article explores what managers can do to meet the challenges of supervising employees in distant

**Kurland, N. B., & Cooper, C. D. (2002). Manager control and employee isolation in telecommuting environments. *Journal of High Technology Management Research*, 13(1), 107-126.**

**Abstract:** This article focuses the effective management of a team where the members are scattered across the globe. A case study of a virtual team found that leaders can take some steps to counter the forces tending to fragment the team and undermine its effectiveness. These include making sure the team is working on issues its members find personally compelling; jointly defining and committing the team to an identity, goals and processes; managing performance with a process that recognizes the team members' routines and daily work; creating a lavish information flow; and binding the process with the leader's unmistakable commitment.

**Kerber, K. W., & Buono, A. F. (2004). Leadership challenges in global virtual teams: Lessons from the field. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 69(4), 4-10.**

**Abstract:** This study examines the challenges related to telecommuting, focusing on how managerial monitoring strategies (behavior, output, clan) link to telecommuters' professional isolation concerns. The study relies on interviews with supervisors, telecommuters, and nontelecommuters. Findings suggest that the primary challenges facing supervisors who manage in telecommuting environments involve clan strategies: fostering synergy, replicating informal learning, creating opportunities for interpersonal networking, and professionally developing out-of-sight employees. These challenges affect telecommuters' professional development opportunities, which in turn heighten their perceived professional isolation.

**Linkow, P. R. (2008). Meeting the challenges of a dispersed workforce: Managing across language, culture, time, and location. Retrieved March 12, 2010 from The Conference Board.**

**Abstract:** The Conference Board established the Research Working Group on Managing Distant Workforce to explore the organizational, managerial, and individual challenges of managing across different languages, cultures, time zones, and locations and to identify effective approaches for addressing those challenges. To do so, managers and employees in five companies—Bechtel, DuPont de Nemours International, Eli Lilly, Target Sourcing Services/AMC, and Sybase—were surveyed. To elaborate on some of the issues raised by the survey and to better understand how top managers are addressing them, a small number of interviews and focus groups were conducted with high performing distance managers and their teams. The findings are grouped under seven headings: The Payoff from Effective Distance Management; The Competencies of Effective Distance Managers; Selecting and Developing Employees for Distance Work; Managing Across Differences in Languages, Cultures, and Time Zones; Managing Relationships and Connections; Evaluating

Distance Employees; Building Distance Teams; and Developing Distance Managers. The final section includes ten action steps based on the findings.

**Madsen, S.R. (2003). Work and family conflict can: Can home based teleworking make a difference? *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 14 (1), p35-58.**

**Abstract:** A key issue in HRD is to identify and determine factors that influence the performance of employees and organizations. Two possible factors are the initiation of teleworking and the reduction of work-family conflict. The purpose of this survey questionnaire study was to investigate the differences in work-family conflict between full-time worksite employees and full-time employees (individuals who worked from home at least two days per week). Two hundred and twenty-one usable surveys were returned from full-time teleworkers and nonteleworkers in seven corporate organizations. The findings indicate that teleworkers had lower levels of various dimensions of work-family conflict. Relationships were also found between work-family conflict and gender, health, number of hours worked, and number of children.

**Merriman, K. K., Schmidt, S. M., & Dunlap-Hinkler, D. (2007). Profiling virtual employees: The impact of managing virtually. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 14(1), 6-15.**

**Abstract:** Leaders in the age of virtual work require an understanding of how this affects their employees' relations with management. From a survey of employees working in a variety of virtual and conventional settings, an empirical profile of employee-manager relationships was completed using a multidimensional measure of virtual status. The profile identified distinct virtual characteristics for two types of virtual employment relationships—free agents and regular core employees who work virtually—and contrasting characteristics for conventional employment relationships. Further analysis of the identified groups suggests that trust in one's manager and perceived managerial support differ across types of employment relationships. Specifically, the findings indicate lower levels of trust and support within virtual as compared to conventional relationships, and lower levels of trust within free-agent versus regular- employee virtual relationships.

**Mulki, J., Bardhi, F., Lassk, F., & Nanavaty-Dahl, J. (2009). Set up remote workers to thrive. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 51(1), 63-69.**

**Abstract:** During the last decade, virtual work -- professionals working remotely from home, from client locations or simply from the road -- has become increasingly prevalent. Some Fortune 500 companies, including Procter & Gamble, IBM, Accenture and AT&T, have already partially or fully eliminated traditional offices. As much as 10% of today's work



force telecommutes from home -- more than triple the level of 2000. This trend will accelerate in the coming decades in response to the ongoing globalization of work, ever-increasing customer demands and the cost and time of commuting. However, remote employees as well as managers are becoming increasingly aware of the challenges associated with virtual work as they relate to internal communication, social interaction and employee satisfaction and commitment. The article focuses on four critical challenges involving remote work that require management attention: (1) finding the right work-life balance, (2) overcoming workplace isolation, (3) compensating for the lack of face-to-face communication and (4) compensating for the lack of visibility.

**New technology allows companies to monitor employees' whereabouts to improve productivity. (2005). *HRMagazine*. 50 (7), 99.**

**Abstract:** The WiFi Watchdog system can be deployed in private sectors as a way to track external and internal wireless users' authorized and unauthorized use of a company's wireless networks. It identifies rogue users by location and time of use. It prevents outside intruders from penetrating a company's wireless network as well as legitimate inside users from unwittingly associating with neighboring wireless networks. In the next couple of years, experts say, more-accurate tracking of wireless users' locations, whether inside a building or outside, will become the norm.

**PC Remote Control Increases Mobile Workforce Productivity. (2007). *Newsline Article*. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from the World at Work organization online.**

**Abstract:** In many cases, allowing employees to work from home has proven productive: It lowers company expenses, and allows employees to more easily achieve a balance between their business and personal lives.

**Richman, A., Noble, K., & Johnson, A. (2001) *When the workplace is many places*.**

**Abstract:** Though it is still common to envision a corporate office building or factory as the place where we "go to work," every day a large proportion of the labor force works "off-site" in another kind of environment— perhaps a room in their home, an airport lounge, or a customer's office. These off-site workers are a major and apparently growing component of the workforce. To determine the prevalence and profile of off-site work, the American Business Collaboration (ABC) funded this study as part of its goal of providing leadership on leading-edge issues for a changing workforce. The primary objective was to obtain information that would enable ABC companies and the corporate community at large to manage off-site workers and a dispersed workforce more effectively. The findings discussed here are based on a nationally representative sample of 2057 adults who are either full-time employees of companies with 500 or more employees, or family members of employees. The study presents a 360° perspective, incorporating the views of off-site and on-site workers, their coworkers, managers, and family members.

**Rosen, P.B.; Ekelman, F.B., & Lubbe, E.J. (2000). Managing Expatriate Employees: Employment Law Issues and Answers. *Journal of Employment Discrimination Law*, 2(2), 110.**

**Abstract:** The article focuses on the management of expatriate employees. Over 100,000 United States companies are engaged in global business ventures valued at more than one trillion dollars. These companies employ almost seven million people outside the United States. As the world becomes more economically politically and culturally linked, the labor-management relationship is more dynamic and the legal issues more complex. American companies operating in the world marketplace must be knowledgeable about these challenges, including the cultural, economic and political challenges that confront employers; effects increased global competition and technology have on the workforce; managing a diverse workforce and avoiding the liability that often results from diversity in the workplace; managing acculturating and negotiating contracts with expatriates; applicability of federal workplace laws to American citizens employed abroad by American companies or "American controlled" companies. The American workforce is embarking upon an uncertain journey into the 21st century due to the rapid globalization of the marketplace.

**Schepp, D & Schepp, B. (1995). The telecommuter's handbook: How to earn a living without going to the office. New York: McGraw-Hill.**

**Abstract:** Telecommuting today; Telecommuting's Advantages: The Upside; Telecommuting's Disadvantages: The Downside; How To Become A Telecommuter; The Best 50 Jobs for Telecommuting; ; 100 Companies With Telecommuters; Resources For Telecommuters.

**Snell, A. (2009). Tackling the challenges of employee engagement. *Strategic HR Review*, 8 (2), 37-38.**

**Abstract:** Engaged employees go beyond the confines of their job description, conscious of how their roles drive the business towards its objectives. The strongest driver in achieving this is a sense of feeling valued and involved. However, achieving high levels of employee engagement is becoming increasingly challenging. Indeed, as organizations globalize and become further dependent on technology and virtual working environments increase, so do the issues associated with engagement. Greater emphasis is put on connecting and engaging with a dispersed workforce. Despite the threat that technology brings, the following are examples of how it can be used by organizations, along with talent management processes, to improve employee engagement: 1. Recruit and onboard the right people. 2. Proactively drive internal mobility. 3. Improve the line manager's ability to manage. 4. Empower employees to manage their own careers.

**Telework trendlines for 2006. (2007). Retrieved March 11, 2010 from [http://www.workingfromanywhere.org/news/Trendlines\\_2006.pdf](http://www.workingfromanywhere.org/news/Trendlines_2006.pdf)**

**Abstract:** The following report includes data from the Telework Module of the “2006 American Interactive Consumer Survey,” a random digit dialed (RDD) telephone survey conducted Oct. 17 through Nov. 5, 2006 by The Dieringer Research Group, Inc. The telecommuting questions in the “2006 American Interactive Consumer Survey” are commissioned by WorldatWork through a special arrangement with The Dieringer Research Group. One thousand and one telephone interviews were conducted with adults 19 years and older in the United States using computer generated random digit telephone lists. The data were weighted to match current population norms for U.S. adults 18 years and older, using four weighting factors: age, gender, educational attainment and U.S. Census region. Data for all U.S. adults in the survey (n=1,001) is considered reliable at the 95 percent confidence interval to within +/- 3.1 percent. The primary goal of the larger “2006 American Interactive Consumer Survey” is to generate representative population projections for selected segments of both online and offline U.S. adults 18 years and older.

**Thomas, D. (2007, March). How to: avoid burnout. *Caterer & Hotelkeeper*, 197 (44), 8.**

**Abstract:** Being constantly overworked and under pressure is likely to lead to a state of emotional exhaustion, or burnout, with deadly effects on your career. However, there are precautions you can take to prevent burnout. What are the danger signs? Typical symptoms include: tiredness, loss of productivity, cynicism, high rates of absenteeism, interpersonal conflict, substance abuse, and deterioration in mental or physical wellbeing. Prolonged and intense levels of stress are usually seen as a precursor to burnout.

**Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., & Lens, W. (2008). Explaining the relationships between job characteristics, burnout and engagement: The role of basic psychological need satisfaction. *Work & Stress*, 22 (3), 277-294.**

**Abstract:** Within the Job Demands-Resources model, the presence of job demands (e.g., work pressure) and the absence of job resources (e.g., social support) relate to burnout through a psychological energetic process, whereas the presence of job resources associates with work engagement through a motivational process. Although various mechanisms have been suggested to understand these processes, empirical evidence for these mechanisms is scarce within the JD-R framework. This study examines the role of basic need satisfaction, as defined within Self-Determination Theory, in the relationships between job demands, job resources, and employees' exhaustion and vigour, the main components of burnout and engagement, respectively. Structural equation modelling in a heterogeneous sample of 745 employees of the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium confirmed that satisfaction of basic psychological needs partially explained the relationships from job demands to exhaustion and from job resources to vigour. It fully accounted for the relationship between job resources and exhaustion. We conclude that the current study adds to the research pointing at need satisfaction as a promising underlying mechanism for employees' thriving at work.

**Virtual Teams are Routine, but Now Managers Need New Skills. (2006). *Newsline Article*. Retrieved March 5, 2010 from the World at Work organization online.**

**Abstract:** What hinders effective management of remote employees, Rice observed, is a lack of daily face-to-face interaction which makes it easy for employees to lose touch. "Team leaders and members alike have to cope with time shifts and extra-long days. Misunderstandings are common and may erode the trust base. Virtual teams need careful nurturing of trusting relationships, as they tend to suffer without informal opportunities to socialize."

**Whitford, T; Moss, S. (2009). Transformational Leadership in Distributed work Groups: The Moderating Role of Follower Regulatory Focus and goal Orientation. *Communication Research*. 36(6), 810-837.**

**Abstract:** This study addressed the question of whether the benefits of transformational leadership extend to virtual environments. Furthermore, whether regulatory focus or goal orientation moderate the extent to which these benefits apply to virtual environments was also explored. A total of 165 employees completed a survey that assessed the leadership style of their supervisors as well their own regulatory focus, goal orientation, work engagement, and job satisfaction. When followers and leaders worked at different locations, visionary leadership was positively related to work attitudes, provided that promotion focus was sufficiently high or prevention focus was sufficiently low. Furthermore, when followers and leaders worked in the same location, personal recognition was positively associated with work engagement, especially if prevention focus or performance goal orientation was high. These findings align with the proposition, derived from construal level theory that leadership advice and support in which only the essence needs to be extracted apply to virtual environments.