

**FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ATTITUDES
TOWARDS TELECOMMUTING**

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory research attempts to identify factors that are associated with telecommuting among Malaysian executives. There are three aspects covered in this study. Firstly, types of works that are appropriate for telecommuting. Secondly, the relationship between performance appraisal and promotion to telecommuting. Finally, whether family commitment is related to telecommuting. The questionnaire used to collect data for the research is self-developed based on the literature. It consists of two sections. Section A is for respondents to state their demography and commuting data. Section B is on the respondents' attitudes towards family commitment, promotion, organization and other factors related to telecommuting. Three out of five hypotheses tested showed statistically significant results. Respondents agreed that there are official tasks that they could do outside office hours ($r = 0.1200$; $p\text{-value } 0.0000$). Their attitudes towards telecommuting are positively correlated with the work done after office hours ($r = 0.1200$; $p\text{-value } 0.8770$). The study also shows that individuals who are family-oriented tend to favor telecommuting ($r = 0.3260$; $p\text{-value } 0.0000$). In contrast to previous studies (Mahmassani et al. 1993), Malaysian executives do not seem to telecommute for the same reasons. In particular, travelling times and expenses are not statistically significant ($r = 0.0070$; $p\text{-value } 0.7580$). Also, in contrast to previous studies (Bernardino et al. 1993), telecommuting, promotion and performance appraisal also do not show significant correlation ($r = 0.0460$; $p\text{-value } 0.7020$). The respondents think that visibility in the office is important to get promotion and telecommuting would, therefore, hinder them from being visible in the office. It can be concluded that telecommuting is still in its infancy in Malaysia. The government as well as the private sector should collaborate to promote this new working concept for a better working environment.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

According to the speech text by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on 28th February 1991 at the first Malaysian Commerce Council in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia is moving towards a new era of a developed country in realizing the national Vision 2020. Many improvements on infrastructure facilities are to be carried out throughout the country to help achieve the missions and objectives set. One of the objectives is to improve telecommunication facilities to cater the needs for local and international telecommunication.

The Prime Minister is concerned over the matter because telecommunication is a vital part of the country's strength to encourage foreign investors. Apart from the government incentives, good communication facilities are also the attraction for the foreign investors because they do national and international transactions everyday.

He visited California's Silicon Valley area in an attempt to promote partnerships to help develop Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor. The

planned \$40-billion effort calls for the 30-mile times 9-mile area south of the capital, Kuala Lumpur, to be the Asian hub for multimedia research and development. In his speech at Stanford University to major computer companies' CEOs, the Prime Minister laid out plans to wire the area with 2.5 to 10 gigabyte optical fiber networks and build a new airport and two new cities. This shows how serious he is in providing the telecommunication facilities in the country. In his speech over the celebration of the Independence Day, the Prime Minister expressed his concern over the knowledge of Malaysians over information technology. He urged Malaysians to take the opportunities to learn the technology as it is very important as Malaysia is progressing towards the information technology advancement (Lenny, 1996).

With improved communication services in this country, employers could take the advantage to introduce telecommuting to their employees. Telecommuting is a relatively new concept that has been successfully implemented in Western countries. In the United States, employers are encouraged to adopt the concept because it will increase productivity as well as reduce job stress.

Telecommuting is a new concept of freedom. It is about cleanliness. It is about empowerment and it is a new trend. This trend is practiced in many countries around the globe. The effectiveness on productivity and efficiency is visible (Thomas et al., 1986).

As air congestion and air quality problems in metropolitan areas worsen and in need for remedy, people are looking for alternative ways of working in the new era. Telecommuting offers employees conveniences from the hassle of driving through the traffic jam and inhaling toxic fumes to a better conducive working environment. The Clean Air Act Amendment of 1990 (California Act, 1990) for example, suggests that federal governments consider implementing telecommuting programs for their own employees and sometimes for other employees in the public and private sectors.

Interest in telecommuting is growing, despite the fact that very little is known about its potential effectiveness as a transportation control. Part of the effectiveness of telecommuting will depend on impacts on travel. If traveling is relatively easy, telecommuting would not be favorable or chosen. Advanced technology and enlightened attitudes toward work have made it possible for today's employees to be no longer confined to traditional office. They can work from their home, cars or on the decks of their yacht - virtually anywhere where you can plug in a computer and a phone line (Greenberg, 1994).

IBM is one of the first companies to apply its technology to telecommuting. Although IBM's Midwest division is headquartered in Chicago, few of its 4000 employees including salespersons and customer service technicians, show up only once or twice a week using its ThinkPad laptop computers, fax-modems, e-mail, and cellular phones to do their work from remote locations. In addition to