

Remote Work - a Small Guide to a Major Factor of Change

Remote work has been a talking point for decades, the technology has been available in the Kaustinen region for a long time, and in 2020 at the latest everyone is doing it. Or are they? What exactly is remote work? The following is a brief introduction to this new way of working and the aspects of it that are on everyone's lips at the moment.

What is Remote Work?

[Statistics Finland](#) defines remote working, or telework as follows:

Telework refers to gainful employment that takes place outside the actual workplace - for example, when traveling at home, in a summer house or on a train - as agreed with the employer. Teleworking usually involves the use of information technology. Teleworking is work that, due to the nature of the work, could also be done in the workplace. For example, a telephone installer job or a courier job is not considered remote work. Work arrangements that are independent of time and place are essential for teleworking. Partial telework is also counted as telework.

[The National Institute of Occupational Health](#), on the other hand, lists parallel concepts for telework:

The organization of modern work and the related flexibility of place can be viewed in terms of teleworking, flexible work, mobile work, multi-place work, decentralized work, virtual work and e-work.

For an employee, teleworking means changing the way they do things, and increasing self-management. These are not always easy obstacles to climb, but if neglected, the individual's ability to cope with their workload might be in danger, as stated in [the 2007 Telework Guide for Employers](#) published by the Ministry of Labor.

The employee may find that they save a pleasing amount of time on the commute, not to mention the number of tonnes of CO₂ not emitted per year - for example, 42 remote working days a year for a teleworker would mean [37,475 tonnes less CO₂](#) emissions. On the other hand, the positive side of business trips also comes to the fore: their operation during the transition from working time to leisure. Thus, the absence of commuting to and from work can mean a reduction in mental recovery and processing time for the employee.

At the heart of all cooperation is trust, and teleworking has been repeatedly mentioned as an expression of trust on the part of the employer. Thus, for an

employee, doing telework is often something that adds value to the work. It can also be an opportunity to influence the making and structure of one's own work, which is very important for coping at work. On the other hand, remote working means being removed from the support of the work community and rebuilding work ergonomics, and defining the boundaries of private and working life more precisely.

For the employer, in everyday life, remote working often means remote teams, and changed ways of communicating with employees. In remote teams, leadership habits are subject to mandatory change if work has only been measured in hours of attendance. If traditional views of management aren't altered with teleworking, workplace collaboration may suffer and productivity may fade. From the employer's point of view, teleworking also means the desertification or liberation of physical spaces for other uses, depending on the point of view.

Changes are also happening in employers' recruitment strategies: opportunities to recruit employees change when place-basedness is not such a big factor or a factor at all. Numerous studies report on the benefits of remote working and, for example, Forbes magazine [lists the benefits for the employer](#) of better productivity and commitment of employees to work.

The image of everyday life changes in villages, cities and society as a whole with teleworking. People who work remotely no longer commute at certain times of the day to workplaces in crowded vehicles and queues on the roads. They are not available in offices at the usual times, do not pick up breakfasts, lunches and snacks from the same places, and the differences between peak and quiet times, for example in gyms and swimming pools, may level off. On the other hand, teleworking may just bring completely new faces on the streets of towns and villages as guests and new inhabitants.

Where is remote working done?

For a long time, remote work was talked about as work done either at home wearing pajama pants or in a shorts outfit at a beach resort. In both scenarios there was strong implication that teleworking was a kind of cover-up for a half-time vacation, or at least for slipping from work and the seriousness it required.

Years ago already, continuous teleworking, usually exotic places, became a popular global phenomenon. It was known as digital nomadism. There are services online where you can [compare the pros and cons](#) of different parts of the world from the point of view of a remote worker working in varying places around the globe.

For an employee, arranging a workstation at home is perhaps the most common measure required of a teleworker. In the beginning, the living identity and home living in the same place causes both fun and annoyance, but soon *remote* dissolves into *work*, and the content of the work takes the attention to the content of the work.

For the employee, working remotely means increasing both responsibility and freedom in work. The removal of the need for being location specific is at the heart of the definition of telework, which means that employees can plan their time better at work and in their free time, but at the same time the requirement to manage their

own work increases without the physical community and structures.

From the employer's point of view, teleworking desolates physical offices, but on the other hand, face-to-face encounters become more relevant for both work tasks and management. The divisive attitude towards teleworking disappears when it is found that teleworking fits some well and some badly, depending on the task, the team and their members: it is not a one-way concession to the employee or a new headache for the employer. Descriptions of typical symptoms may not be valid anymore, and detecting problems with teleworking may require different means than before. On the other hand, teleworking can reveal and even fix problems that would not otherwise have been noticed at all. For example, [Humanly Sustainable Teleworking?](#) published jointly by CoHumans Oy and the University of Helsinki, states that those who do not necessarily very vocal in real-life meetings have an easier time getting their voices heard in remote meetings.

The physical framework of telework is inevitably a matter to be decided in telework. The Telework Guide for Employers published by the Ministry of Labor states that according to the telework framework agreement, the main rule is that the employer acquires the equipment and tools needed for telework and is responsible for their installation, maintenance and technical support. The employee and the employer can also agree on a case-by-case basis that the employee will use his or her own work equipment, which is certainly quite common, at least in the case of a rapid transition to telework.

Remote working offices, which can be found in a wide variety of ways both in Finland and around the world, bring more community to telework and provide new opportunities for networking. In large cities, both in Finland and abroad, such office space is even a profitable business. In the Kaustinen region, we may still have to wait for such a time, although the number and use of free remote workstations has increased, for example due to the contribution of the P-IRIS Central Ostrobothnia project.

The concepts that combine teleworking and vacation are today seen as opportunities to reach customer target groups that were previously unreachable only at certain times of the year. With the COVID-19 epidemic, for example, summer cottages are enjoyed longer when their owners and users are not necessarily forced to return to the city.

In Finland, the increased teleworking with the corona has increased the interest in moving away from city centers to work. In the world's major cities, on the other hand, it has been seen as the best way to encourage people to stay in small neighborhoods, and major infrastructure changes have been made in a short time for example, [in major cities such as Milan](#).

When does remote working take place?

There has been a lot of talk about teleworking since the 1990s, so it can be said for sure that there has been a shortage of it at many levels. Already in the 1990s, a comprehensive fiber optic network was to enable teleworking in the Kaustinen

region. It did do that, but only in a technological sense.

In fact, the detachment of work from the physical workplace has taken longer and the real need for it was not created by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. In the technological history of communication, this is not a new finding. Brian Winston depicts in his book *Media Technology and Society, A History From the Telegraph to the Internet*, how the introduction of a functional technological solution has been adopted one invention after another - from the telegraph to the Internet - only after a sufficiently serious social or societal need has arisen.

For the employee, monitoring and managing working hours in telework is more their own responsibility. Opportunity to plan your time better, and make more meaningful use of both work and leisure. On the other hand, the need to be reachable, which has already been emphasized in the past, may become more and more important in many jobs with teleworking. The Silicon Valley of California, known worldwide as a center of innovation, has also taken a pole position on teleworking in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic: Many well-known technology companies have offered their employees [unlimited teleworking in the future](#), according to Wired Magazine.

The employer may find that new measures are needed to monitor work in telework, if previously mainly working hours have been calculated and there have been no indicators for the content of the work and measuring the results. To put it simply, from the employer's point of view, the value of teleworking increases when the result of the work no longer increases by increasing the employee's hours of attendance at a particular physical location. Today, it is difficult to come up with an area in which place-specificity could not be removed from any aspect, at the latest through digitalisation, robotisation and automation.

The living environment of people working remotely has adapted to new ways of working in countless ways even before Covid 19, but the changes came into everyone's daily lives in spring 2020. The end result is in everyone's fresh memory today and the changes will be reflected in autumn 2020, for example in [housing companies and house factories](#).

Who is a remote worker?

Who can and who cannot telecommute? Who is allowed and who isn't? These issues have been resolved in Finland and around the world in the past in as many ways as there are different work cultures in different parts of the world. With the pandemic, the questions have become more in the direction of who is forced to work remotely and, on the other hand, how many professionals are there who would work wherever, given the opportunity.

From the employee's point of view, the prevailing attitude has in the past been that remote work has been a concession of the employer to the employee. However, not everyone has dreamed of teleworking and it is not suitable for all tasks. In the UK, for example, the longest travel times in Europe have been measured, but the options offered to reduce commuting still do not appear to be an attractive option as [reported by the BBC](#).

However, job images are changing at a dizzying pace in every industry, so one way or another, employees everywhere will face a change in place-specificity in their own work soon. A forward-thinking employee can also see the disappearance of place-basedness as a new opportunity to expand the job search territory.

According to [Maaseudun Tulevaisuus](#), there has been an increase in the number of teleworkers this year, especially non-senior employees, who have previously been the main group in telework.

Employers have been wrestling with teleworking, among other things, on how to enable teleworking in a way that does not create inequalities between employees and, on the other hand, to make the most of it where possible. Among others, the [Humanly Sustainable Working Life?](#) report states that supervisors often struggle specifically with issues of fairness in managing remote workers. In the past, many employers have even ended up banning telework unequivocally from everyone to avoid injustice, but by the end of the Covid-19 era, this thinking has inevitably passed away.

The undeniable advantage for employers is that telecommuting opens up completely new paths to recruitment. New ways of organizing work provide new opportunities to solve productivity problems and search for workers with a wider range of wounds.

Many jobs do not allow remote working by nature. During the coronavirus epidemic, this issue inevitably arose, as doing site-specific work often also involved an increased risk of infection and inevitably led to the experience that the lack of a teleworking opportunity was unfair.

Why do we work remotely?

Why is telecommuting finally done? It has been noted that teleworking is not an absolute value after all, but a means of removing obstacles to meaningful work and leisure. The feature of teleworking seems to be that it reveals both latent problems and resources.

By experimenting with remote working and its various forms, the teleworker often learns a lot about himself or herself, both as a person and as a member of the work community. Ways to work together for smooth teleworking are sought by each employee in their own way, so whether the experience is ultimately positive or not, learning and transformation certainly requires teleworking. Transformation, in turn, can mean the opportunity to choose an environment for work and living on completely different grounds than before - instead of a plethora of services, a small municipality may start to feel attractive, where neighbors still say hello and you can start jogging in the woods within minutes from walking out of your front door.

In the life cycle of companies, public bodies, organizations and other organizations, teleworking is just one of many tools introduced, one solution to the problems that have arisen. Alongside this, electronic tools, automation and digital environments for meeting people are evolving rapidly in many areas.

Employers, both in the case of teleworking and in other policy changes, find that trust in employees really pays back. At first, it can feel funny to trust that employees will continue to work without supervision. Eventually, one work community after another finds that the greatest danger to working together was not that the irresistible attraction of housework competes with concentrated work. An article on telework published by [Maaseudun Tulevaisuus](#) provides a strange, cautionary example of such bias today:

Melin says in Tampere on public-sector example of an example where at the beginning of the 2000s seriously discussed the expansion of telecommuting. "However, the city government decided not to do so. It was thought that senior officials would do telecommuting as agreed, but women [sic] could not be trusted. According to the decision makers, they could have used the time to do handicrafts or gardening."

More broadly, it can be safely argued that the relevance of the content of a work increases when, in a broader sense, place-basedness leaves where it is not necessary in working life. The elimination of place-basedness offers greater opportunities to choose places of residence, living environments and everyday structures. At the center of life can be a person instead of work and measurable benefit. The environment we build can be designed so that work and leisure are not far apart. In a broader perspective, teleworking is part of the digitalisation that extends to every work image and part of the solution that human thinking, artificial intelligence and robotisation can work together to ensure the well-being of both people and the environment.

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