



Comparing outcomes between remote and teleworking federal employees

What is the GSA priority?

One of the General Services Administration's (GSA) strategic objectives is to offer sustainable workspace options and services that maximize flexibility for the federal workforce.¹ Remote work is a workplace flexibility that allows federal employees to balance professional and personal goals and responsibilities and determine their own beneficial work environments.² It is a GSA priority to understand whether or not remote work affects employee job-related outcomes, and ultimately organizational health and performance.

What did we evaluate?

We partnered with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and GSA's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) to evaluate whether there are differences in employee job-related outcomes for remote workers (employees with no regular required in-person work) in comparison to teleworkers (employees with some required in-person work and who are also allowed to

telework). Note that for simplicity, a small number of employees who hold positions with no formal telework eligibility are included in the telework group but make up less than 1% of its total membership.

The evaluation used existing administrative data to better understand organizational health and performance by observing several employee job-related outcomes (annual performance ratings, rates of work hours reported, rates of sick leave or family leave reported, and separation from the federal government or transfer).

How did the evaluation work?

Using a pair-matched design and data, we compared outcomes using regression with pairwise fixed effects for over 3,400 GSA remote workers with outcomes for teleworkers. We analyzed GSA employee roster, timecard, and notice of action data from July 2022-July 2023.

To ensure the comparison groups were as similar as possible across a number of relevant dimensions, with the exception of the amount of in-person work required, we identified pairs of employees from the remote work group and the telework group that matched along the following dimensions: Staff and service office (SSO), GS grade, total pay, years of tenure, age, education, sex, and race. We dropped a group of GSA employees that did not match closely on the dimensions listed above. The final sample of employees included in the analysis represents 30% of the GSA

¹ U.S. General Services Administration. *GSA Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022 - 2026*. https://www.gsa.gov/system/files/GSA_Strategic_Plan_FY_2022_-_2026_FINAL_508.pdf

² United States Office of Personnel Management. Employee Services. November 2021. *2021 Guide to Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government: Leveraging Telework and Remote Work in the Federal Government to Better Meet Our Human Capital Needs and Improve Mission Delivery*. <https://www.opm.gov/telework/documents-for-telework/2021-guide-to-telework-and-remote-work.pdf>

workforce and is not representative of the GSA workforce.

What did we learn?

We found that job-related outcomes were the same for remote workers and teleworkers, with no statistically significant differences in employee outcomes. Performance ratings among remote workers and teleworkers were almost identical (remote workers were rated 0.01 point less than teleworkers on a 5 point scale).³ Remote workers took the same number of sick days, days of family leave, and worked the same number of hours as teleworkers.⁴ Remote workers transferred to other parts of the federal government at the same rate as teleworkers and were 0.5 percentage points more likely to transfer within GSA.⁵ None of the differences were statistically significant.

We find a 1.2 percentage point decrease in the proportion of remote workers exiting the federal workforce compared with teleworkers. This estimate falls short of the adjusted threshold for statistical significance.⁶

³ Performance ratings among remote workers were 0.01 point less than teleworkers (on a 5 point scale; $\beta = -0.0109$, $p = 0.526$, CI [-0.0447, 0.0228])

⁴ Remote workers took the same number of sick days ($\beta = -2.56e-05$, $p = 0.982$, CI [-2.29e-03, 2.24e-03]), days of family leave ($\beta = -1.51e-04$, $p = 0.894$, CI [-2.38e-03, 2.07e-03]), and worked the same number of hours as teleworkers ($\beta = 3.25e-05$, $p = 0.990$, CI [-5.44e-03, 5.50e-03])

⁵ Remote workers transferred to other parts of the federal government at the same rate as teleworkers and were 0.5 percentage points more likely to transfer within GSA ($\beta = 5.80e-03$, $p = 0.105$, CI [-0.00122, 0.0128])

⁶ The Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons leaves us with a threshold of 0.006. We find a 1.2 percentage point decrease in the proportion of remote workers exiting the federal workforce compared with in-person workers ($\beta = -0.0121$, $p = 0.0247$, CI [-0.0227, -0.00154])

We conducted a robustness check on the matching of employees from the remote work group and the telework group by removing outlier differences between pairs, and statistical significance of differences in employee outcomes did not change.

What do we recommend?

We find no evidence that remote work negatively or positively affects organizational performance in terms of the employee job-related outcomes measured in this evaluation. These findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the available data did not allow us to adjust for all likely confounders, and therefore cannot reliably identify causal effects.

We recommend other agencies conduct more robust analyses to build further evidence on the effect of remote work and telework on employee outcomes. In particular, we recommend further work to understand if remote work may be associated with increased retention in the federal workforce. Such efforts will inform operational and policy decisions of the broader federal community, with potential to impact over two million federal employees⁷ and make progress towards the President's Management Agenda goal of retaining dedicated employees.⁸

⁷ The Office of Management and Budget. April 13, 2023. *M-23-15: Measuring, Monitoring, and Improving Organizational Health and Organizational Performance in the Context of Evolving Agency Work Environments*. Washington, D.C. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/M-23-15.pdf>

⁸ "President's Management Agenda Workforce Priority Strategy 2" Performance.gov, accessed April 2024. <https://www.performance.gov/pma/workforce/strategy/2/>