

Before you read

Do you think technological developments always make life easier?

Reading

Read the article from the *Financial Times* and answer the questions.

Freedom or slavery?

Arian Cane

Early morning in California, and Elizabeth Safran, a public relations consultant, is dealing with a huge number of e-mails. Everybody in the small company works from home and relies on e-mail and instant messaging to stay in touch. Elizabeth worries about her work-life balance and thinks that technology 'makes us more productive, but everybody is working all the time - weekends, evenings. It's too much.'

Five o'clock Friday afternoon in the UK, Paul Renucci, managing director of a systems integration company, switches off his computer. He now works at home

and is off to pick up his children. In the past, it would take him two hours to get home from the office.

Ms Safran and Mr Renucci represent different sides of a modern problem: the capabilities of the latest communications technologies, such as e-mail, text, instant messaging and videoconferencing, make it difficult to draw the line between work and leisure and raise important questions about the nature of 'flexible working' - where employees can work where and when they choose.

There are three issues here. First, does the rise of portable, networked devices such as the BlackBerry and Palm Treo really

damage an individual's work and life? Second, what is the effect of these devices on traditional workplace relationships? And third, how do individuals manage them?

A Microsoft survey found that where flexibility had increased, so had productivity and employee morale, together with lowered stress levels and staff turnover.

However, individuals can suffer technology-related stress as work moves into their free time and from the complexity of the gadgets they must use, such as mobile phones where manufacturers try to persuade customers to upgrade more frequently.

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1 True or false?

- The staff in Elizabeth Safran's company all work in the head office.
- Elizabeth is happy with the way she works.
- It takes Paul Renucci a long time to get to work.
- It is sometimes hard to separate work and free time.
- Technology means that people can work wherever they want.
- A Microsoft survey reported that everyone benefits from flexible working.
- Technology can be stressful for individuals.

2 Use the a word or expression from the article to complete these sentences.

- If a company depends on someone, it r _____ on that person.
- When you ask someone to stay in t _____, it means you want to see or speak to them again.
- The c _____ of a machine is what kind of things it is able to do.
- F _____ w _____ describes when you can work where and when you want.
- If you can carry a piece of equipment, it is described as p _____.
- A d _____ is a small machine which helps you do something.
- Everyone needs to do more work - the company wants to improve p _____.
- The way staff feel about the company and their work is described as staff m _____.

Over to you

Do you think that the use of modern technology can cause stress? Why (not)?