

INTELLIGENCE

A tripling of energy prices could be the event that pushes people over the edge toward a whole new view of work.

/TREND/

Gas Prices Drive Telecommuting

As fuel costs soar, workers and employers examine alternatives.

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

THE PRICE OF GAS, it seems, has replaced the weather as everyone's favorite small-talk topic. While \$2 per gallon once seemed expensive in the United States, it now seems downright cheap. After Hurricane Katrina, the United States saw costs of \$3.50 or more a gallon. Fuel prices dipped back down slightly as rebuilding began, but at press time, Hurricane Rita was threatening to drive up the cost-per-gallon higher than ever.

But U.S. citizens should count their blessings: In Europe, prices are double or triple what they are in the United States due to government taxes. The *Washington Post* reported on prices at \$6.77 a gallon in Paris in early September.

Imagine...

In an article published in April entitled "In Our Humble Opinion: What Will a World of \$5 Gas Be Like?," Charlie Grantham and Jim Ware, executive pro-

ducers of the Work Design Collaborative, examined workplace implications for the rising fuel costs. But now they say their projection needs to be revised: With \$5 a gallon not seeming far off in the United States, they'd change their hypothetical figure to \$7 a gallon.

So what are the effects of the soaring gas costs for workers and employers? In their April article, Grantham and Ware predicted a rise in what they call "distributed work." They wrote, "When the cost of commuting goes up by a factor of three, we think people will start saying, 'It just ain't worth it.'"

With housing prices also sky-high, many workers have decided to live far away from their jobs in more affordable neighborhoods and commute in. But now people may be reassessing that decision. What's the answer, then?

If, just by telecommuting, people can cut their costs by a couple hundred dollars a month and increase their billable hours, Grantham and Ware think the de-

cision will start to become a no-brainer. They continue, "We think a tripling of energy prices in the United States over the next three to five years could just be the kind of event that flips people over the edge and drives them toward a whole new view of work...."

Grantham and Ware's organization, Work Design Collaborative, just received a grant from the Gaines Family Foundation to create an industry and professional association, the Distributed Work Industry Association, to develop industry standard productivity measurements, provide professional development programs for industry leaders, and seek to influence U.S. federal and state regulations that help or hinder the growth of distributed work.

Jerry Gaines, trustee of the Gaines Family Foundation says, "...Working from home—or close to home in a satellite office—can have a positive impact on families and communities,

such as reductions in traffic and commute times, air pollution, and the use of high-priced gasoline, as well as increased productivity.”

Implications for employers

According to a September article in *USA Today*, about 20 percent of companies are planning to take steps to help workers with higher gas prices. Those steps include organizing carpools, offering public transit discounts, raising mileage reimbursement, and providing telecommuting options.

Grantham and Ware urge employers to start thinking about setting up remote and satellite offices as well as distributed work programs. For example, government and private-sector workers in the Washington, D.C., area can work at telework centers funded by the U.S. government.

to aid gas shortages.

An important result of distributed work, Ware points out, is business continuity in the event of an emergency. The importance of this was demonstrated after Katrina hit.

Telecommuting can also save companies money on office space. An article in *Computerworld* reports that at GE Energy's division in Atlanta, telecommuting has allowed the company to cut the number of its office-based workstations by 50. Each workstation costs about \$15,000 a year in real estate and related costs, adding up to a savings of \$750,000.

GE pays for the costs of home computers and broadband connections. Some of the company's employees telework one or two days a week, while others do so for the whole week.

Charlie Grantham says, “We've seen some companies reduce operating costs

work along with their managers. Jane Franklin, a special projects coordinator overseeing telework and van pooling there says, “There's always been a little hesitation on the part of managers and that's one reason to formalize guidelines.”

FAST FACT/Genesys Conferencing reports a 40 percent increase in the use of its multimedia conferencing services in the last few months. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of users surveyed say reduced driving due to rising gas prices was responsible for their increased use.

Ware says more and more federal agencies are actively encouraging telecommuting lately. An article in the *Washington Post* reports that the U.S. Office of Personnel Management sent out a government-wide memo urging telecommuting after Hurricane Katrina

by more than 30 percent when they fully embrace distributed work and alternative workplace strategies.”

A cultural, not technological, issue

Computerworld reports that more companies are prepared for telecommuting employees because of such recent innovations as more-common broadband connections and web-based collaboration tools. But one IT executive cautions in the article that telework can be a “cultural challenge” more than a technological one.

Skip Snow, an IT executive at a major financial institution, telecommutes long distance. He says, “The problems with telecommuting don't have as much

to do with technology and tools as with whether a worker or manager will work as well with a guy on the phone as compared with the guy in the next office. But with globalization, remote workers are going to be the norm.”

At Georgia Power in Atlanta, *Computerworld* reports, the company's 475 teleworkers (out of 8,800 total employees) must sign a set of guidelines for tele-

Employees Want Alternatives

According to a survey released by ComPsych Corporation, the majority of employees polled would rather telecommute, carpool, or take public transportation than continue to drive their cars with rising gas prices.

Employees were asked, “If gas prices become too high, will that affect your commute to work?” Seventeen percent replied that they would change the way they commute and 44 percent said they would prefer to change, but can't.

SOURCE/CCH Human Resources Management Daily Document Update

Resources

- “Virtual Work,” *Intelligence*, August *T+D*
- www.thefutureofwork.net
- www.workingfromanywhere.org

More

- www.thefutureofwork.net/assets/July_2005_Newsletter.html#opinion
- www.thefutureofwork.net/blog/archives/000334.html
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- www.computerworld.com/careertopics/careers/labor/story/0,10801,104078,00.html
- www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/13/AR2005091301973.html?nav=rss_technology

/REALITY CHECK/

Mature Workers: Myths and Realities

OLDER WORKERS are electing to remain in their jobs longer, both for financial and for personal reasons. According to a study from The Conference Board, slightly more than half of employees aged 55 and older said they were not planning to retire because they found their jobs interesting. Almost three-quarters also cited lack of financial resources as a reason they were continuing to work.

AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) recently released its 2005 list of Best Employers for Workers Over 50.

Along with that list, it distributed the following information on myths and realities about older workers, based on findings from a 2000 study and various other sources.

Myth: Older workers are unwilling to try new things.

Reality: 88 percent of workers aged 45 to 74 said that "the opportunity to learn something new" would be essential to their ideal job. (Source: AARP 2002 study)

Myth: Mature workers aren't as agile or quick.

Reality: Although some mature workers do experience physical limitations, their

accumulated knowledge and experience, as well as their strong interpersonal skills, counterbalance this. For example, a study of hotel reservation agents showed that although workers 50-plus handled phone calls somewhat more slowly than younger agents, they were more productive in booking reser-

vations. (Source: Sloan Management Review)

In addition, a survey found that mature employees waste less time at work than younger ones. (Source: Salary.com)

Myth: Older workers have more health-related problems.

Reality: Health problems and associated health-care costs vary by risk factors, and many are unrelated to age. Those risk factors can have a greater impact on health-care costs than age alone. (Source: The University of Michigan Health Management Research Center)

Myth: Mature workers are unwilling to learn new technology.

Reality: A study by Louisiana State University found that older workers in a state agency were more willing than younger workers to learn new technology. (Source: Chicago Tribune)

Myth: Older workers are less driven because of burnout or proximity to retirement.

Reality: Towers Perrin, a global professional services firm, found that employee motivation increases, rather than declines, with age in many situations. (Source: 2003 Towers Perrin Talent Report)

The Top Advantages of Mature Workers

Based on a U.S. survey of HR managers released by AARP in 2000:

- experience, 55 percent
- reliability, 29 percent
- knowledge, loyalty, and stability, all 23 percent

/GLOBAL 360/

Canada Embraces E-Learning

Eighty percent of professional development in Canada now includes e-learning, says the Canadian Society for Training and Development. Just five years ago online training was rare in that country, says *The Globe and Mail*, which reported the CSTD statistic.

"The balance has shifted out of the classroom and onto the computer, and e-learning is becoming dominant," says Ruth Daniels in the article. Daniels was a judge for CSTD's Awards for Training Excellence, announced in Toronto in September.

MORE/www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20050921/CABRIEFS21-1/TPEducation/

/FROM THE BLOG/

Top Trends Affecting Human Capital Strategies



The Society for Human Resource Management recently asked non-HR executives which business trends will most affect their company's human capital strategies in the next two years. Answers are shown below.

	2005	2006
Rise in health care costs	30 percent	37 percent
Demand for flexible work arrangements	35 percent	31 percent
Economic uncertainty	26 percent	29 percent
Talent retention	21 percent	24 percent
Exporting of U.S. jobs	19 percent	22 percent

More/ on the T+D Blog at http://tdblog.typepad.com/td_blog/2005/09/top_trends_affe.html

Workers, Managers Not Aligned With Strategy

GETTING MANAGERS and workers aligned with the company's business strategy is proving difficult for many businesses.

Only about one in three organizations has been successful in motivating employees to understand, be committed to, and carry out their company's business strategy, according to a recent survey by Right Management Consultants and the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation.

Sixty-three percent of companies indicated that aligning their employees to their business strategy is their number 1 employee communications goal, but just 37 percent report that their efforts have been successful. So says the report *Best Practices in Employee Communication: A Study of Global Challenges and Approaches*.

"Companies with employees who understand and carry out their employer's business strategy tend to have higher worker retention rates and are generally more productive than those with disengaged workforces," says Chris Gay, senior vice president and employee engagement practice manager for Right Management Consultants.

In addition, the typical manager has difficulty leading in ways that contribute to the company's long-term success, say the authors of a new book on strategic leadership. Rich Hughes and Kate Beatty are co-authors of *Becoming a Strategic Leader: Your Role in Your Organization's Enduring Success*, which is based on the pair's eight years of work with executives and leaders in the Developing the Strategic Leader training program at The Center for Creative Leadership.

Beatty says, "Even the best operational managers may not necessarily lead their teams from a perspective that reaches beyond what has to be achieved for day-to-day business results. The missing piece is what we call strategic leadership...[which] focuses on the enduring success of the organization as a whole. Its purpose is to drive the organization so that it will thrive in the long term."

Managers who want to determine whether their leadership is strategic rather than operational can look to these three key indicators of a strategic leadership approach, outlined by Hughes and Beatty:

It's broad in scope. Strategic decisions have an impact beyond the manager's functional area. An effective strategic leader views the organization as interdependent and interconnected.

It's future-focused. The strategic leader operates with a long timetable, integrating short-term results and a long-term focus. Good operational leaders manage daily functions effectively and work with people skillfully to meet short-term goals, but often don't take a long-term view into account when they plan their leadership actions.

/TECHNOLOGY/**Talking Hi-Tech at Work**

By Joseph Grenny

TECHNOLOGY has made communication nearly instantaneous, incredibly convenient, and enormously accessible. But has it really made us better communicators? Are there parameters by which we must carefully monitor our method of communication to ensure that it appropriately matches our message?

The answer is yes—especially when you consider that many of us are already far too savvy at finding ways to avoid face-to-face conversations that involve high emotion or high stakes.

When it comes to resolving broken promises, violated expectations, or bad behavior with someone at work, resorting to hi-tech methods like email, voicemail, or text messages can amplify problems.

Imagine: A subordinate leaves a cryptic excuse on your voicemail after missing a key deadline, or a colleague emails your error-filled report to your boss instead of confronting you directly.

According to a recent survey by VitalSmarts, more than 87 percent of those polled admitted that using hi-tech means to resolve a workplace confrontation is not effective. Moreover, 89 percent say email, text messaging, and voicemail can get in the way of good workplace relationships.

Even though the majority of respondents agree that we shouldn't be so coy in our communication with coworkers, the question remains: When does ease and security trump the need to talk face-to-face?

Face-to-face communication is a must anytime non-verbal signals are important in deciphering the message, the news is particularly bad or sensitive, negative feedback is being delivered, or differing opinions will ensue.

Regardless of the circumstances, you should think twice before pushing the "send" button and consider what you want long term.

Until people learn to ethically, maturely, and directly deal with crucial issues, technology will only amplify rather than alleviate our dysfunctions.

Until people learn to ethically, maturely, and directly deal with crucial issues, technology will only amplify rather than alleviate our dysfunctions. If people stopped and really asked themselves what they wanted, they wouldn't be so quick to dash off a nasty note or leave a voicemail oozing with sarcasm.

When facing the following situations, it's time to get off your duff, walk down the hall, and talk to the other person in the flesh.

Giving delicate feedback. Good: You meet one-on-one to tell someone he has a hygiene problem. Bad: You bring your work team together and say, "Everyone who doesn't have toxic body odor, please step forward. Not so fast, Robert."

Working through a long-standing gripe. Good: You set aside a time and calmly and professionally discuss something that has you concerned. Bad: You email a list entitled "The Top Ten Reasons Everyone Despises You."

Confronting someone who has not delivered on a promise. Good: As soon as you find out that someone has let you down, you factually describe what you expected and what you got. You don't wait and let it fester. Bad: You share your complaint in your Last Will and Testament as an explanation for why you stiffed the guy.

Delivering a controversial message. Good: You're going to reject a person's proposal—one that she has worked on for months. She deserves a complete expla-

nation as well as an opportunity to engage in two-way dialogue. Bad: You leave her a voicemail saying, "Remember that proposal you came up with? Well, we rejected it. By the way, don't forget the boss's birthday lunch this afternoon."

Delivering bad news. Good: When letting someone go, you treat the bad news as bad news. You allow the other person to show their concern and emotions. Bad: You send a singing e-card—"Ta-da ta-da ta-da: You no longer work here."

Joseph Grenny is the co-author of the best-sellers *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations*; a keynote speaker and consultant; and president of VitalSmarts, a corporate training company specializing in organizational performance and leadership training; www.vitalismarts.com.

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Bad Bosses Drain Productivity

Employers are losing hundreds of hours of productivity a month due to the time workers spend complaining about bad bosses. When asked how much time they spent complaining or listening to others complain about a supervisor in an average month, respondents indicated

- 20 or more hours, 31 percent
- 10 hours, 28 percent
- three hours, 29 percent
- 30 minutes, 12 percent

SOURCE/a recent study by *badbossology.com* and *Development Dimensions International*

/HOW TO/

Manage your Manager

CAN'T WAIT FOR THE WEEKEND? Is your boss driving you crazy? These tips from a recent CNN/Money article can help you manage your supervisor to improve your work life.

Ask, what's the problem? Determine exactly what the issue is. If your boss is a micro-manager, prove you're capable by requesting complete control over small tasks and then building from there. If she is a non-manager, guide her by offering choices and being specific with your requests. If he overloads you with work, ask what the priorities are and for options to help you manage the workload.

Have regular meetings. Many of the frustrations employees experience with managers are because of a communication breakdown. Set up regular meetings to tell your boss about your career goals and discuss what you need to get there. In addition, ask her what her goals are and how you can help. You may also want to try to talk your boss's language. For example, if he loves hockey, incorporate hockey analogies into your proposals to get his attention.

Toot your own horn. Make sure your manager knows your accomplishments and the extra

work you put in. In addition, share a few details of your personal life so she sees you as a person and not just as an employee. If your boss isn't listening, toot your horn to others in the chain.

Learn from it. Stop and think whether your attitude is feeding the problem. Ask yourself and your boss what you could do differently. If you start being more flexible, your manager may be as well.

Know when to bail. Sometimes there's just no way to make it work—for example, if you and your boss have completely opposite personalities or work styles, or if you're in a dead-end position. If you're stagnant, not learning, and not finding opportunities for advancement, it may be time to look elsewhere.

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