NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
SCHOOL OF LETTERS

MSC PROGRAMME IN COUNSELLING AND CAREER GUIDANCE

LABORATORY OF EXPERIMENTAL PEDAGOGY

CENTERS FOR VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1ˢᵗ INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ATHENS (23-25-1-04)

PROMOTING NEW FORMS OF WORK ORGANIZATION AND OTHER COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMPETITIVENESS AND EMPLOYABILITY

With the Support of the European Committee

ATHENS 2004

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ATHENS 2004

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WORK IS NOT A PLACE: THE VIRTUAL OFFICE – WORKING FROM HOME

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Abstract

This study examines and analyzes the concept of working from home as a modern day alternate work arrangement. Working from home, or telecommuting, truly provides both employers and employees with some mutually beneficial flexibility and an array of other benefits. In addition, working from home addresses in part societal issues related to work-life balance, conservation, and environmental concerns. However, many managers remain ambivalent about introducing teleworking in their establishments and it is highly improbable that every organization and/or employee is suited to work from home. A county's and/or a company's technological infrastructure, along with local social trends may be the two main driving forces of telecommuting. Home working requires also a paradigm shift from focus on working time to a focus on results produced. This article attempts to address the business as well as employee and societal reasons for creating a virtual work place and provides managers with the information tools to seriously consider telecommuting.

Working from Home: An Overview

In the last few years advances in technology in the area of telecommunications, computers and office equipment have allowed widespread working from home possibilities. There are several terms coined to describe working from home: homeworking, flexiplace, teleworking, telecommuting, and electronic cottage.

Employees who work under this arrangement appreciate the convenience provided by working from home. It truly provides both employers and employees with some mutually beneficial flexibility, improves productivity and saves money. In fact, according to the international Telework Association and Council (ITAC) employers reported $1850 in productivity gains and $2100 savings related to absenteeism for each teleworker per year.

According to numerous research findings, a sizable portion of job dissatisfaction derives from lack of freedom and control over hours of work and work schedule and the inability to adjust and match these to the employee's personal needs. With this in mind, perhaps it is not surprising that the most important non monetary aspects of a job, from the employee's perspective, are the freedom to determine work schedule, the arrangement of work hours in balance with non work life obligations, and the total hours of work employers require over a period of time. Employers on the other hand are concerned about the likely impact that alternative work schedules have on the organization's effectiveness.

In the beginning, (early 90's) the concept of Telecommuting was embraced by companies who were able to pay a flat rate per unit of work completed. For example, sales departments would pay employees working from home per unit sold, or

insurance companies would pay a flat rate per insurance claim processed. Nowadays, there is no need for "piece work" to use telecommuting. Virtually all types of jobs can be done from one's home. The old work paradigm from the industrial age that work is the time an employee spends in front of a machine or behind a desk has been progressively abandoned. The management's perspective of supervision "if I can see you working you are working" has also been replaced by results-based appraisals. What counts is what is achieved at the end of the day or week not how many hours one has worked. In today's information age, a different attitude towards a job and a career is developing. It is not just a matter of what is achieved at the end of the day for the employer but also how the employee manages to balance work and life obligations.

Alternative Work Arrangements

Working from home is just one of the many alternative work arrangements. The most common of them may include the following:

Compressed (Reduced) Work Week

The traditional five day 35-40 hour week is compressed into a 4 day work week, a 3 /36 schedule (three shifts of 12 hours each a week) and other innovative work schedules. Research indicates that compressed work week schedules have positive and negative results. One of the most positive effects of a compressed workweek is a reduction in absenteeism. Productivity often improves at the beginning of introducing a compressed work week but it declines later. On the negative side, older employees often find a compressed work week more taxing physically and mentally than younger workers. Yet younger employees find a compressed work week interfering with their social life. The more physically and mentally taxing the job is the more undesirable the compressed week may be.

Job Sharing

This is where two or more individuals working for the same employer share in some form the work normally assigned to one full time employee.

Flexible Hours

Flex hours require employees to be present at the work place during a specified core time, but it also allows them discretion as to when the remaining work hours are going to be completed. There are different types of flex time such as:

- o **Variable Day** whereby an employee can work 12 hours or not at all in a given day as long as the 40 hours of work are completed by the end of the week.

- o **Gliding time** whereby any starting and quitting time is acceptable as long as the 8 hours of workday are completed.

- o **Flexi tour** whereby employees are allowed to starting and finishing at specific times, other than regular, for a specified period such as Christmas season, summer months, a given week or month.

- o **Personal Time off** outside the normal type of leaves may also be considered as an alternative work arrangement to accommodate a better work life balance.

Other Teleworking Concepts

Teleworking basically means being able to work from anywhere. It should not be seen in isolation, but as one of several similar measures addressing the issue of work location.

There are several similar concepts already in place: In the educational field there is Distance Education. Students study not on a particular campus or classroom but where they live. In Business there is e-commerce. Customers buy goods and services online from home without visiting a store. In Health there is tele-health. Patients receive health information and advice from a health professional far away, and in certain instances a diagnosis is provided without the patient leaving home or visiting a doctor's office.

Who are Teleworkers?

Teleworkers are those employees who work away from their organization's office. They may work from home, plane, train, a client's office or elsewhere. Self employed people, or those working on contract, are not considered teleworkers in the pure definition of the term. For example, a freelance writer for a magazine or newspaper working from home is not considered as a teleworker. However, if one adopts a broader definition and includes business owners who run their business from home the numbers swell. This may not be surprising considering that Home Office Businesses represent 89% of all Businesses (Bell & Howell).

Teleworkers can work in any kind of field where the job requires that a lot of time be spent in front of the computer or on the phone. Jobs requiring face to face meetings may not be suitable for telecommuting. Most teleworkers work away from the office one to three days a week and the rest of the week they work in a more traditional setting. Therefore, teleworking should be seen as a part time proposition, not a full time one. Others report that teleworkers work off site about 23 hours a week, they are equally as likely to be male or female and the average teleworker is 40 years old. (Larin Nancy). Furthermore, there is evidence that teleworkers see themselves as trail blazing individuals, leaders not followers.

Some Relative Statistics

US Data

The number of telecommuting employees in the US increased from 4 million in 1990 to 19.6 million in 1999 and the percentage of employers offering telecommuting arrangements climbed from 14% in 1997 to 27% 1n 1998. (Read A.)

Canadian Data

Statistics Canada reported 600 000 teleworkers in 1991, 900 000 (not including public administration workers) in 1998, and in 2001 estimated teleworkers at   1 500 000.

In 1999, The Canadian Telework Association estimated 2 million of home workers, half of which are teleworkers. The Canadian Telework Association estimates that a Canadian worker can recoup on average one hour a day by eliminating the daily commute to work and back home. This totals up an annual commute savings of six full working weeks.

Canadian Federal Government

It employs approximately 5 000 teleworkers. A major evaluation of the program found that most of teleworkers saved over one hour of driving alone to and from work, and teleworking among other things reduces costs of going to work, re-energizes employees, and better balances work and personal lives (www.ivc.ca).

Bank of Canada

Reported (March 1998) that 94% of the 100 telework participants rated telework as a major benefit and 83% found that productivity increased and stress was reduced.

Nortel

About 25% of the 75 000 employees (one quarter full time, and three quarter part time) of Nortel's work force is under "HOMEbase" telework program. Once started only 1% of Nortel's teleworkers want to quit the program. (www.icv.ca)

IBM Canada

About 25% (2 300) of the non manufacturing work force are in a telework program.

Bell Canada

It employs about 5 000 teleworkers.

EKOS Research

Findings indicate that 33% of Canadians would choose telework over a salary raise. 43% would quit their jobs for another one that allows teleworking.

Royal Bank of Canada

Survey in January 2002 discovered that IT including the ability to telework shapes the Canadian family life (InnoVisions Canada, Canadian studies on telework). More than ever people can work at home in a fashion that replicates the office. Here is what the Telecommuters said:

- o It increases job satisfaction 77%
- o It allows more time with the family 72%
- o It permits more convenient child care arrangements 58%
- o It provides a greater choice as to where to live 30%
- o It allows them to get by with only one vehicle 18%

EKOS Research

Reported in 2001 (www.icv.ca):

- o 11% of Canadians work from home (this includes teleworkers, overtime and independent contractors, as well as home based business)
- o 40% of Canadians work part time from home, including 77% of self employed individuals, 52% of professionals
- o 34% of Canadians working at home do so less than 5 hours a week while 31% do so over 20 hours a week
- o 50% of Canadians are interested in working from home while 27% view it as extremely appealing
- o Teleworkers report an improvement in overall quality of life (68%) improvement in standard of living (60%)

Wired Young Canadians

Statistics Canada Report December 2001 reports that young teens are ripe to become tomorrow's teleworkers. They are great users of computers and online software.

Live/Work Balance

Almost every working person faces the challenge of finding the appropriate equilibrium between work and life obligations. More demands in the office on one side of the equation, and child care and aging parents on the other side create an interesting tug of war. Most working men and women are urged by personal and family circumstances to free up and reduce work time to make up time for family relationships and social life.

Costly labour time lost as well as productivity losses have forced employers to consider alternative work arrangements including flex time, personal time off, job sharing, reduced work weeks, and working from home. Employers who ignore the growing social issue of life work balance are likely to cope with greater absenteeism and loss of key employees to other more progressive employers.

Bringing work at home instead of prolonging the hours at the office is not a solution for a better work-life balance. In fact, it may make things worse. Working extra hours at home may make the work-life divide seamless and work may become intrusive to home life. This realization may backfire and home workers may start thinking nostalgically about the complete separate work life of the downtown commute, the office building, the crowds, the cafeteria food, their colleagues, the whole routine. Working from home was never meant to be additional hours of work at home but working at home instead of in the office.

Employees often complain that social life among colleagues outside the office hours is lacking. Very often colleagues do not socialize outside the office environment, do not invite each other to their homes, and in general, do not share their home life. Yet, when one works from home, colleagues call home, are introduced to partners and/or kids who answer the phone and sometimes come over for business. Conventional work arrangements seem to have promoted a respect for each other's employee privacy, but working from home creates exceptions whereby one may be encouraged to hop in and out of each others home to deliver and pick up "work".

Getting to know people one works with builds a community network and alliances which may be more important than the official corporate objective of goal congruence. Also, a spouse or partner today may not be content to being passive with regards to her/his spouse's career. Working from home allows partners to get more involved in each other's careers. Perhaps this is a way of helping employees to better balance work and home life as well as improve their social life.

Workers´ Teleworking Advantages

Workers have a greater control over their working conditions. In fact, workers can design their workstation. They can choose the furnishings of their liking and place them in the room of their choice.

There is a greater flexibility with regards to the time, duration, and pace of working. There is no need to start at a given time or finish in a predetermined span of time, seven or eight hours later. Individual workers can start their day whenever they are ready and finish whenever they feel like. The focus is on the work to be done, and not the time allotted in a day to complete certain tasks.

There are fewer exchanges and interruptions with co-workers, supervisors, clients, suppliers and other working partners. As a result, there is more time available to actually work and home workers may enjoy greater productivity.

There is a closer connection between work and home. Work and home duties inter-mingle and complement one another. There is no need to choose one over the other.

There is a lot of time saved in commuting to and from work. This time saved can be invested in more productive activities, reduce the frustrations of driving, the number of accidents and the possibility of injuries. In addition, it may save hundreds of dollars in travelling costs and reduce the environmental pollution caused by cars.

Home working improves the satisfaction one derives from work and it improves the well being of the individual as it reduces stress. Work becomes an extension of living, so one has a better perspective of what work really is.

Home working allows for a gradual return to work for individuals who are on sick leave, were injured on the job and have other absences from work. It also makes it easier for disabled individuals with reduced mobility "to get to work" because they do not have to leave their home as often.

Working from home may contribute to employment equity as it eases work/family conflicts for working parents. It may allow for a higher attraction and retention of female employees who seem to bear a greater load of family responsibilities.

Teleworking is cheaper than conventional work arrangements or at worse cost is neutral.

Teleworking accommodates those who need frequent medical care as they are able to work around their medical appointments or work from home while they are receiving treatment. For example, a worker requiring cancer treatment or dialysis over an extended period of time may take a medical leave. In this case, co-workers or a replacement would pick up the slack.

Employers´ Teleworking Advantages

Higher worker productivity. The Canadian Telework Association estimates that teleworking increases individual job performance by 20% on average. Less commute time leads to more time available for work (and play) and improves worker productivity.

Lower operating expenses. Fewer facilities, less office space and overhead means lower operating expenses. However, some of these costs may be offset by long distance telephone costs (800 numbers employees use to communicate with the office) and multiple fax machines, and other equipment at each teleworkers home.

Fewer absences from work and lost man hours. "Self-employed" home workers are less prone to miss days of work, and, if they do get sick, they will make it up on their own time.

Reduced personal leaves. Home workers can better manage doctor's appointments, teacher-parent interviews, and household chores resulting in fewer personal leaves

Lower supervision costs. It is easier to manage and supervise employees who work on their own. In fact, there may not be as great a need for supervisors and first level managers for homeworkers.

A Virtual 24 hours around the clock operation. Personnel can be reached at any time through e-mail, fax, or telephone as opposed to the typical 9 to 5 time span. Customers may appreciate these expanded hours of service.

Home workers may develop an improved number of skills and know-how. Home workers cannot rely on the knowledge and direct support of co-workers. This may produce more flexible workers with a greater span of expertise and a less trade unionist approach where a union member of one trade refuses to do the job of another union member.

Working from home may result in better labour management relationships, fewer chances for labour disputes and conflicts. Less management supervision and more worker autonomy and job satisfaction may result into a more peaceful labour – management relationship.

Improved recruitment and retention of specialized mobile employees. Since home working is desirable for most employees and addresses many of the life-work balance issues, it is expected to improve retention and attraction of knowledgeable workers.

Lessens the impact of downsizing and cutbacks. In cases of restructuring, cut backs may not be as visible and the improved skills and know how of homeworkers may allow for easier job redesign and job descriptions.

Fewer space and parking requirements. The Canadian Telework Association estimates such savings at $2000 per employee per year.

Finally, improved employee morale and job satisfaction. All of the aforementioned benefits create a synergy resulting in happier employees, higher morale and job satisfaction.

Societal Teleworking Advantages

Working from home may produce:
- ✓ Fewer cars on the road and less traffic congestion.
- ✓ Less need for additional infrastructure projects of bridges, highways etc.
- ✓ Less overall driving reduces gasoline consumption.
- ✓ Less traffic means less pollution from car emissions.
- ✓ Fewer cars on the road that reduce road wear and tear.
- ✓ Lower traffic accidents and traffic deaths.
- ✓ Less energy consumption. Working from home means that one building is heated or air-conditioned instead of two.
- ✓ Less office garbage.
- ✓ Less population concentration in big cities, better distribution of people between rural and urban communities.
- ✓ An improvement of job opportunities in the rural areas especially in proximity to big cities.
- ✓ More work opportunities for individuals with special needs since working from home improves the employability of special needs individuals.
- ✓ Better identification of workers with their communities and possibly greater involvement in civic affairs. The "I gave at the office" excuse may no longer be used.

✓ Teleworkers are not limited by geography and they may live thousands of miles away in other countries.

✓ It reduces day crime of break and enter theft since the presence of homeworkers averts and/or discourages the commitment of this crime.

✓ It provides options for teleworkers with latch-key kids and elderly parents who may need care at home.

✓ It reduces work related stress and the health costs resulting from it.

Disadvantages of Teleworking

❖ Attitudinal changes about work are needed in order to promote home working as a mainstream type of employment.

❖ Working at home may lead to social isolation. Home life may not provide for a great amount of networking with other colleagues and professionals in the field, social contacts and interactions.

❖ Interruptions from friends and relatives during the working hours of the day may be bothersome and intrusive. Family distractions may undercut the benefits of home working. Working outside the home provides a protection from such interruptions.

❖ Each individual home worker may require a greater use of technology than an average office employee. All modern gadgets that permit easy communication with the outside world (telephone, fax, e-mail, internet connection, computer, modem, and scanner) are needed to a greater extent by a home worker. The cost of such equipment is normally shared among many workers at the office. Duplication is unavoidable as the company office needs similar equipment to the home office for the time the teleworker works on the organization's premises. As a result, start-up costs and information technology support costs may be high. Some duplication may result in inefficient use of resources. Home working applied on a large scale may come at a prohibitive high cost.

❖ Access to couriers' services and therefore communications in residential areas may not be as great in the suburbs where the homeworkers work.

❖ Working from home may reduce public revenues from road tolls often used to discourage driving in central areas and ease down town traffic.

❖ Loss of business for downtown merchants.

❖ Management may have actual and/or perceived loss of control.

❖ Unions may be concerned over total work hours, keeping record of hours worked, overtime pay, lunch breaks, working conditions and the application of various labour laws. They feel that such arrangements weaken the union organization, erode wage standards and may pave the way for worker exploitation.

❖ Flexiplace may be difficult to implement when jobs are interdependent. Especially in service industries, human resources coordination may be hard to achieve.

❖ Potential conflict with office colleagues especially if they are refused the chance to work from home.

❖ Not all employees may be present when coworkers and colleagues require their services and expertise

❖ Fewer promotional opportunities.

- ❖ Teleworkers may put pressure on office workers with requests of the kind "can you find this file for me?" or "can you fax me that letter?"
- ❖ There might be an information security issue when confidential information leaves the organization's premises.
- ❖ Dilution of organizational culture. Independent work may not promote organizational culture.
- ❖ It may be disruptive to the team work culture.
- ❖ Loss of some fringe benefits such as vacation and sick leave may be detrimental to self-employed home workers.
- ❖ Labour law may not adequately cover all situations of home working, as labour laws were designed for traditional methods of employment.
- ❖ Potential for long work hours and work addiction.
- ❖ Couch potato may be replaced by the "fridge syndrome" whereby home workers are driven to the fridge, overeating, and potential obesity/health related problems
- ❖ Many of these telecommuting disadvantages may be mitigated by telecommuters working a few days a week in the office. Having to report to the office at certain times, to meet other colleagues, participate in meetings, ask questions, get new information and in general feel and be a part of the organization may be as important as the autonomy of homeworkers.

Factors Contributing to Teleworking

There are many factors contributing to the phenomenon of teleworking. Some are technologically driven and others are driven by societal trends. Perhaps there is an interaction between these two main drivers. A country with a strong technological infrastructure that is socially developed is a better candidate for adopting a teleworking culture than a third world or even a developing country. At any case, here are the major factors contributing to Teleworking:

Technological advances and access to technology. Technological presence is not enough. It has to be widespread in most aspects of life with a strong business presence.

Advanced telecommunications. A well developed telephone system with full and affordable services is a good starting point for telecommuting.

Cheaper internet availability. An industry of internet providers with fast speed internet connection is a precursor to developing a teleworking culture

Increased personal computer ownership and computer skills. A labour force in which the average worker is computer literate, owns a computer, and is or approaches the definition of knowledge worker sets the foundation for telecommuting.

Increased demand by employees to work from home. Employees must have an identified need to telecommute otherwise telecommuting is a noble but impractical concept.

Social and political pressures to expand alternative work patterns. Societal trends must be such (two income families, bedroom communities away form the city core, traffic congestion and so on) that there is some social and political pressures to rectify the situation.

Increase of suburban population and long distance commuting. Work force dispersion away from the place of work necessitating lengthy commuting is a prerequisite of cultivating a telecommuting culture.

Conditions for Successful Teleworking

The American Management Association reports that in spite of the significant growth in teleworking, few companies are addressing the strategic management issues the new work arrangement creates. In fact only seven percent of US based teleworkers have been formally trained to work outside the traditional office environment (www.amanet.org).

Teleworking can be a recipe for disaster for employees, employers and the organization if certain conditions are not met. To begin with, both employers and employees must be interested in making the program work. Second, the employees must possess certain personality traits and job skills. These may include, at minimum, the following:

- o Able and willing to work independently without supervision
- o Be organized with good work habits and practices
- o Have good time management skills
- o Be responsible, have self discipline
- o Be capable of taking initiatives,
- o Be self motivated and set priorities,
- o Be results oriented
- o Be on the job long enough and/or know the job well

Clearly not every employee possesses these qualifications and therefore, is not suited to work from home.

Third, employers must secure an effective communication system and protocol in place between the organization and working from home employees. Teleworkers must be kept in the loop of what is happening in the office. Toll free 800 numbers and/or fast access internet for e-mail communications are clearly a must. Supportive management is also a must.

Fourth, a performance indicator and benchmark system must be devised to measure the results home workers produce. These benchmarks may include setting objectives, time line by which these objectives are going to be achieved, time and method of communications with the office, provisions for fair work load, and pay equity between home workers and office workers working for the same company.

Is your Organisation Ready for Teleworking?

Teleworking, in spite of its many benefits, is not for every organization. Here are some criteria one can use to determine if an organization has what it takes to be instituting a teleworking plan. The organization may be ready for teleworking if:

- o It increasingly relies on computers.
- o It seeks out recruits and already employs "information workers/knowledge workers"
- o It already employs teleworkers informally. (Your organization may be further ahead than you think. Ask to find out how much work is already done away from the office)
- o Employee productivity and performance needs to be improved
- o The organization experiences a recruitment and/or employee retention problem
- o Travel and relocation costs are high enough that moving the work and not the people makes sense
- o Absenteeism is high. (Teleworking may limit absenteeism due to childcare, and eldercare issues by allowing teleworkers to perform at least some of their normal work at home)
- o Work /life balance complaints are prevalent among employees
- o Office space and/or parking are limited and/or too much is spent on it
- o Employee morale needs some boosting

The Initiative for a Teleworking Arrangement

Teleworking as an alternative work arrangement needs to be initiated by one of the parties involved - either the employee or the employer. In mating rituals one must feel comfortable enough to make an approach without repercussions. Similarly, there must be some evidence from the employer that there is an open mindedness towards suggestions and/or alternate work arrangements for an employee to make the first step.

It is the teleworkers who are often best suited to explain how telecommuting arrangements can help an organization to meet its goals. Every employee seeking telecommuting arrangements should be required to fill out a formal proposal. The question "how you plan to do your work?" needs to be answered by the employees who are the experts of their job. Telecommuting can work only if the focus is on the organizational objectives rather on the employees' convenience. The issue is not "why" the employee wants the telecommuting job but "how" the job is going to be accomplished and how the business objectives are going to be met. Support tools, some training, and management guidance can be only complementary to the main conditions for successful telecommuting. A trial period of telecommuting may be a good idea.
A dialogue to determine the rules and policies of telecommuting is still emerging. Employers need a structure and methodology to deal with the issues of teleworking. They need some guidance to identify the best telecommuting practices and set

benchmarks for others to follow. Standards for operational support, output expectations, occupational health and safety concerns, union concerns, employer liability and training of teleworkers are the first to come to mind. Organizations dedicated to teleworking may be good sources for information to a novice firm that is considering teleworking.

Employers´ Responsibility to Teleworkers

There is an understandable apprehension among employers about their responsibilities to employees who are telecommunicating or work full or part time at home. Some of the big questions are:

- o Are the employer's responsibilities any different from those to employees working on the organization's premises?
- o If they are, what is the difference?
- o Does the employer have the obligation to inspect the home office and evaluate the "work site" for potential hazards?
- o How often should these inspections take place?
- o What right do the employers have to order modifications to the work place of an employee's home?
- o What obligation does the employee have to obey these orders?
- o What recourse does the employer have to deal with an employee's refusal to modify the home office?
- o Should the employer keep a log or record of home office violations to exhibit due diligence in the event of an accident or claim?

Clearly, these questions make one realize the difficulties and/or the differences between the work and home office. The safe overall approach for one to take is that the occupational health and safety rules, whatever they are, apply at any work place including the employee's home. However, home office inspections may not be necessary unless the employer becomes aware of "work related" not "house related" hazards in the home office. Also, a record of work related home office injuries and/or illnesses must be kept for each employee working from home. The employer is responsible for preventing or correcting hazards that relate to home workers work. However, the employer is not responsible for making the homes of employees safe. It is not the employer's responsibility to make sure that first aid kits are available in the home office, emergency exits and/or plans exist, entries are accessible for handicapped people, or the doors and windows meet the office fire codes. However, employers may be responsible for offering general training in health and safety but not necessarily health and safety training for the home office.

The legal definition as to what defines an "employee" and what defines a "contractor" needs to be revisited in order to clarify some potential scenarios of employer responsibility for home workers. The cardinal rule probably is that employers must respect the law, regulations and collective agreements, while employees maintain the quality and quantity of work at the level expected when they work on the firm's premises. Teleworking beyond the obvious computer hardware, software, and peripheral tools such as extra phone lines are in need for such fundamental things as health insurance and pension plans. Employers need not see teleworking as a way of avoiding these traditional employee obligations.

Teleworking Organisations

The increased popularity of working from home is evidenced by the number of organiazations that have sprung up over the last few years. Most of them have a website. Here are some major ones.

- o The International Telework Association and Council (ITAC). This is a non profit organization dedicated to advancing the growth and success of work independent of location. It was founded in 1993.
- o Working from anywhere Organization
- o Independent Home Workers Alliance
- o Canadian Telework Association
- o Inno Visions Canada
- o British Columbia Telework
- o Alberta Government Telecommuting
- o Telework coalition (US based)

Conclusion

Teleworking must be seen as a greatly beneficial alternate work arrangement to all stakeholders involved in human resource management strategies. Employers who dismiss telework out of hand saying this does not apply to my organization should have a second look. As pressures mount on individuals to look for ways to better balance work and life, employers need to begin considering teleworking as an answer to HR issues they face.

Teleworking is not an all or nothing proposition. Part of the work week should be spent at home and part in the office. This helps remedy home isolation, "staying in the loop", and "out of sight out of mind" issues. Governments can recognize the positive potential of telework and consider tax and other incentives for businesses and organizations to introduce telework. Employers should use intelligence and imagination in designing telework strategies and programs. They must ensure that teleworkers receive appropriate training in home office ergonomics to prevent repetitive stress injuries as well as to avoid workaholic practices. Home workers need to guard against poor dietary and/or fitness habits (Fridge Syndrome"), social isolation, and "online obsession".

Work is not a place. In the future, virtual work places where employees operate remotely from each other and from managers will become more common. There are compelling business reasons, employee preferences and societal considerations that support teleworking. The advantages by far offset the costs of setting up and maintaining a teleworking system. An attitudinal paradigm shift from focusing on time spent in front of a machine, or behind a desk to focusing on results produced may lead to teleworking, great improvements in productivity, profits, customer service, and job satisfaction.

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