



The Telecommuting Life: Managing Issues of Work, Home and Technology

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the 21st century approaches, the work environment is transforming, driven in large part by technology. For example, technology is challenging ideas about where and when work needs to take place. Technology allows employees to work from home. However, this new distributed work arrangement brings with it many new challenges for both the employee and employer. In this case, we introduce one company that has decided to experiment with the telecommuting arrangement. Through the eyes of one teleworker, many of the benefits and challenges of telecommuting are explored.

INTRODUCTION

One doesn't have to look very hard at the business world to figure out that something significant seems to be happening with the current workplace. Look at the language we are using to describe our situation (emphases added): "A tidal wave of change is sweeping across the American workplace (Ehrlich, 1994:491); "The last decade, perhaps more than any other time since the advent of mass production, has witnessed a profound redefinition of the way we work (Business Week, 1994:76); and, the very notion of a job itself, is being questioned (Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Van Maanen, & Westney, 1996a). Whether one views the terms in which change is described as dramatic hyperbole or a reasonable representation of what is happening, it does seem that change, dramatic or evolutionary, is indeed taking place. Furthermore, the impetus to change is being felt across a wide variety of organizations, from Fortune 500 companies to government bureaucracies and even to the military.

One innovation in how work is accomplished is telecommuting, and it is increasingly being adopted by organizations. Telecommuting constitutes a fundamental change in where, how, and even when work is accomplished. After this brief introduction to telecommuting, we will present the case of Glenn Smith, an account of one individual's and organization's experience with creating this new work arrangement. We hope that the issues raised will offer insight into the implications of this new work arrangement both to individuals and organizations that might be thinking about the telecommuting option.

Telecommuting or teleworking, as defined by U.S. General Service Administration (1995), "refers to a means of performing work away from the principal office—typically at home or at a nearby telecenter." Telecommuting increases separation from the principal office while simultaneously increasing connection to the home. Telecommuting is not new; it has existed for several decades. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, businesses projected that the physical location of the worker would shift from the central business building to the home. Although there were organizations that pioneered this movement, it was not until the 1990s that telecommuting became a viable, acceptable, and, occasionally, a preferred work option.

A survey conducted by Telecommute America reported 11 million US teleworkers in early 1997, an increase from 4 million in 1990 (Murphy, 1998). Furthermore, conservative estimates for the number of teleworkers in the year 2000 range from 11 to 15 million (Piskurich, 1997) with other estimates indicating growth rates of 18% a year resulting in 20 million U.S. telecommuters by the year 2000 (Nilles, 1997). The GartnerGroup predicts even more involvement of U.S. workers in teleworking situation — by the year 2000, 30 million with more that 137 million involved in some form of teleworking by the year 2003 (Langhoff, 1998). These estimates suggest a growing recognition that telecommuting is a viable work option that organizations must acknowledge. Indeed, as the case will present, the forces driving telecommuting clearly express the interests not only of individuals seeking increased flexibility to reconfigure home and work but also of organizations focusing on economics, environmental regulatory pressures, and technological advancements. With this alignment of organizational and individual interests, the increasing growth in the population of teleworkers is not surprising. Nevertheless, it remains a "new work arrangement," very much in its initial adoption phase.

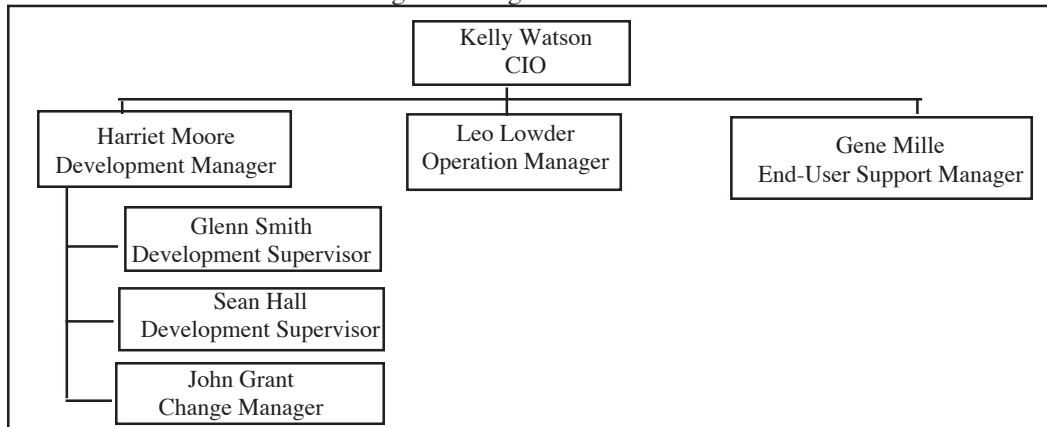
Let's now turn to Glenn's experience to help us better understand what might happen when an individual completes his work at home, electronically connected to but geographically distant from his principal office. This case portrays the real-life experiences and reflections of one teleworker. It is worth noting that this case tells a telecommuting story from one demographic perspective — a manager-level teleworker who belongs to a dual career family with children. Although some issues raised in this case are unique to this particular situation, many of the issues are faced by the mass of teleworkers.

BACKGROUND: AMERICAN BANK CORPORATION

Kelly Watson is the vice-president for information systems (IS) at American Bank Corporation (ABC) in Chicago. ABC is a large financial institution that has typically been characterized by its conservative culture. However, over the past decade mergers and acquisitions in the financial industry have required ABC to quickly change from an ultra-conservative, "change very slowly" mentality towards new and more progressive ways of doing business. Fortunately, the president and CEO, who are both in their mid-60s realized the need for change and have been instrumental in setting the precedence for making change happen. One recent change in the IS division was the hiring of Kelly Watson 3 years ago as Chief Information Officer (CIO).

In this capacity, Kelly is in charge of the migration of systems from the mainframe legacy environment to a new client server environment, and she faces a number of challenges. First, the IS division is under considerable pressure from its customers to get new systems up and running. Second, even though the IS professional resources in her division have grown tremendously (see Figure 1 for Kelly's staffing structure), she has employee retention problems. The market for IS

Figure 1: Organization Chart



professionals is so competitive that Kelly faces the constant problem of having to replace staff who have been lured away by competitors, consulting companies, and vendors.

SETTING THE STAGE: FINDING A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

Kelly's most recent expression of her retention problems is the imminent loss of one of her most senior development supervisors, Glenn. Glenn's wife, Vicki, had received a very attractive job offer in Cincinnati, where Vicki had grown up. Though Glenn really enjoyed his work at ABC and has developed satisfying work relationships with his manager as well as with Kelly, he feels that it wouldn't be fair to Vicki to deny her this opportunity. Given the number of people who have recently been hired away from the IS division and the fact that he receives calls from headhunters all the time, Glenn knows he'd have little problem finding a comparable position.

Kelly, anxious not to lose yet another experienced development professional (especially someone with Glenn's track record with clients) was prompted to try something new. Kelly had recently come across a number of interesting articles that highlighted the benefits of creating a virtual office. Apparently, companies were increasingly allowing knowledge workers to telecommute. In the financial industry, specifically, companies such as Bank of America, Citibank, and HomeFed bank were all offering some form of telework to their IS personnel, and they were reporting benefits in employee productivity and in reduced operating costs. She called Glenn into her office and broached the subject with him, "Would you be interested in working out a telecommuting arrangement with ABC?" Glenn was at first taken aback, but the idea did have some appeal. Organized and hardworking, he felt that he would have little problem working in a less structured format. Additionally, in his role as a development supervisor, most of his work revolved around projects. Glenn believed that during some phases of the project life cycle he would require close contact with the users; however, his current project was a long way from that point. And, right now, at least, his physical presence was not really a necessity. Certainly, he wouldn't miss the two hours he spent commuting through city traffic every day. On the other hand, Glenn was somewhat concerned with the implications of his telecommuting with his staff, and he knew this would have to be addressed. Kelly asked Glenn to think it over, to speak with Vicki about it, and they would talk again soon.

In the meantime, Kelly met with Harriet Moore, her development manager. It was Harriet who had first informed Kelly that they might be losing Glenn and had urged her to "do everything possible" to keep him. So, while Harriet was uncertain as to how telecommuting would work out — she had never worked under an arrangement like this before — she was anxious to give it a try. She did suggest to Kelly that it would be important to discuss this with the other IS managers. Kelly agreed and convened a meeting with her three managers: Harriet from development, Leo Lowder from operations and Gene Mille from end-user support. She also asked a representative from human resources (HR), Bob Loskins, to attend.

Table 1: Benefits of Teleworking

BENEFITS TO ORGANIZATION	BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUAL
* Improve office productivity	* More retained income (reduce personal expense)
* Increase use of new technology	* Increase job satisfaction
* Enhance recruitment and retention of personnel	* Productive and balanced lifestyle
* Increase competitive advantage	* Reduce stress and illness from commuting
* Reduce central office costs	* Integrate work and personal life
* Optimize personnel performance	* Improved family functioning
* Minimize cost and disruption of relocation	* Effective time management
* Improve environmental reputation	* Increase personal safety
* Strengthen Disaster Planning	* Control and design of workplace

Sources: Hodson, 1997; U.S. General Service Administration, 1995; ITD Telecommuting Task Force, 1997

CASE DESCRIPTION: THE DECISION TO TRY TELECOMMUTING

Kelly began the meeting by emphasizing the retention challenges the IS division faced. She informed everyone that they were confronting the imminent loss of yet another experienced professional, this time a development supervisor. She told them that she was giving very serious consideration to allowing the supervisor to telecommute in order to keep him at ABC.

Leo immediately asked Harriet if she knew about this and if she supported the idea. Harriet responded, "Yes, Glenn is really respected by his clients, and I can't afford to lose him right now ... and, who knows, if this works out, it may give us an advantage in attracting and keeping the best people."

"That's right," interrupted Kelly. "I wouldn't be proposing this if I didn't see it as a strong initiative for not only the division but also whole company. The opportunities with distributed work are really considerable," insisted Kelly, passing around a sheet that outlined the benefits of teleworking (see Table 1).

"But, you're only offering it to Glenn, right now?" Gene retorted, looking at Kelly. "Yes," Kelly replied, "We've never tried anything like this before so I want to move slowly on it...I'm sure there will be some bugs we'll have to work out as we go along."

"Right!" Leo jumped in, "How are you going to maintain control over his work quality? What happens when he has to meet a deadline and he's got a sick child at home with him who's lying around on the sofa? For that matter, what is he going to do at home, set up a separate office or is he going to be working from his kitchen table?"

"And," Gene chimed in, "I know that Glenn's really reliable, but what are you going to do when everyone starts wanting to try telecommuting?"

"Hold on!" Kelly interrupted, "These are all really important points and they illustrate what I was just saying, ... we'll have a lot of issues to work out. But, for right now, can we agree in principle that this is something we want to try and that we'll begin offering it to Glenn?" Gene nodded.

"It's definitely something that is in our interest as a division to explore," agreed Leo looking at the list of benefits Kelly had passed around, "Heck, I might try it myself!"

"What do you think, Bob?" asked Kelly, turning to the HR manager, "You've been pretty quiet during all this?"

"Well, I'm all for trying something new, especially if it's going to put a dent in our hiring and retention problems," replied Bob. "But, our discussion here has made it clear that there are going to be a lot of issues we'll have to deal with. We'll need a policy on telecommuting — I'll start looking into what other companies are doing with it."

"Good, then we have agreement," said Kelly, "We'll move on offering it to Glenn as an experiment. In what kind of time frame do we want to revisit this?"

“How about three months?” Bob offered.

Kelly looked around the room; the others all nodded. “O.K.” said Kelly, “Now I only hope that Glenn wants to move ahead with this.”

Glenn Tries Life as a Teleworker

Glenn let Kelly know that he would like to give telecommuting a try. The juggling of their respective professional careers was a recurring topic of conversation in the household. Glenn and Vicki agreed that they should do this if for no other reason than this was a working arrangement that they would definitely have to explore at some point in their careers. So why not now?

Initial Set-Up: The First Couple of Weeks

Setting up their new home in Cincinnati, Vicki was thrilled with the prospect of Glenn working from home. Now he would be home when the kids got off the bus and to help out with all the “taxi” and other family duties that had always been her responsibility to manage. Their lives would change in other ways too. Glenn needed an office. Since the living room was rarely used, this space was designated his office. With his own money, Glenn purchased used office furniture. Its cost was considerable, \$1,500.00, but since it was to go in the living room, Glenn and Vicki had decided that it was worth buying quality pieces. Also, Glenn wanted a good chair, not a spare from the kitchen.

The phone lines were a little more of a challenge. After spending \$120.00 for the initial set-up and an additional \$30.00 a month (for voice mail, call waiting, caller-id, and call forwarding), Glenn was ready to connect to ABC. They already maintained two telephone lines for their house (one for the computer and one for voice), but a month into the project, Glenn’s work conversations were so monopolizing their voice line that Vicki insisted that they get a third line designated for the family. They carried the cost of this additional phone line. After complaining about the costs that he was carrying, ABC did come through and provided Glenn a laptop computer (56k modem), and they provided Glenn a calling card for the voice long distance. ABC already had an “800” number to support the long distance connection for data. Glenn had asked for an ISDN line, but ABC was not set-up to receive ISDN communications. Actually, ABC only currently supports data connections at the speed of 28.8k. And, Leo Lowder in Operations was not ready to make any additional purchases to support teleworking at this time.

The hassles of getting set up continued. Connecting to ABC’s system from his home was more difficult than he originally thought it would be. His first week of telecommuting was pretty unproductive as the kinks were worked out of connecting his computer to ABC’s network. Glenn spent a lot of time trying to get the technical support he needed to get set up. But, the technicians at ABC were swamped with service requests at the home office; and when they did find the time to call Glenn back, they had difficulty understanding and responding to his particular needs. They just hadn’t had any experience with helping someone set up a distributed office. Then, Leo Lowder raised some concerns about security because Glenn was dialing directly into ABC’s network. While Leo was uncomfortable with the current arrangement, he allowed it to continue for the duration of the experiment. Further, the connection problems persisted. Sometimes the local telephone company was to blame; at other times it was ABC’s corporate telecommunication network.

Managing his time productively would be an issue, and this required some structure. Thinking that it would have been helpful to have had some specific guidelines or training courses for structuring his day and for maintaining effective communications links with the corporate office, Glenn, nevertheless, proceeded on his own to make changes he thought would be helpful to his situation (certainly, ABC offered no such programs). Glenn decided to set up a daily agenda of tasks to complete. Because he was a “night owl,” he found himself completing tasks in the late evening hours when the house was quiet and he was not disturbed by the phone. Glenn had always been a hard worker and this continued dedication to work did not change with his new work venue. Glenn also set up daily lists of the people he needed to contact. He would spend a considerable amount of time on the telephone as well as maintaining contact through e-mail.

Back at ABC, the initial reception of Glenn’s telecommuting highlighted just how much of a departure from traditional work practices this new arrangement was. On the phone, Glenn received a lot of friendly ribbing about how it must be great being able to get up when he wants and do what

he wants. Ads running on the TV of teleworkers at home in their pajamas only added to the barrage of stereotypical comments (e.g., “Your golf game must be improving!” or “What’s on ESPN now!”). Some of these comments about the informality of working at home were correct. Glenn did enjoy the relaxed dress code and was often on the golf driving range during lunch; however, these offhanded comments concerned Glenn. The monetary costs associated with establishing himself as a teleworker were clear, but the friendly ribbing made him wonder what other price he might be paying?

The Next Two Months: A New Set of Issues

The project Glenn was working on had up to this point been conducive to letting him work at home. During this time frame, he had returned to ABC twice for 4 days. ABC picked up the costs for travel and lodging. These interim visits to corporate office were going to be necessary at least for the short-term and maybe long-term. In addition, the project would soon be starting implementation and Glenn realized that he would have to be on-site more; although, he wasn’t sure how much more. He could have done with some help to develop a corporate on-site schedule. Needing to be on-site was not all bad. Sometimes, Glenn felt the isolation and wanted to simply go out to lunch with his colleagues. He was also concerned that he was out of the day to day loop. Though, Glenn was fortunate that Harriett, his boss, acted as an advocate for him in his absence.

The clients Glenn supported also raised some issues. Over the last month or so, there had been times when end-users wanted to have Glenn on-site. To maintain his communications with end-users, Glenn audio-conferenced in on meetings, however, no video was being used. And, while audio conferencing provided a connection, Glenn did not always feel as an equal participant. One observation Glenn made was that if all participants were meeting face-to-face in a room with Glenn present on the speakerphone, he did not feel a real part of the exchanges taking place, regardless of how frequently he “spoke up.” By contrast, if everyone “met” on a conference call from their separate offices, the meeting dynamics were more equal and satisfactory.

A more daunting issue for Glenn was learning how to manage from a distance. Glenn’s prior management style had been “by walking around.” He would stop by his staffs’ cubicles to chat and keep abreast of their work. Now, this was impossible to do from his home. Some of Glenn’s employees had no problem adjusting to Glenn’s physical absence; however, one employee was having difficulty completing his work. Glenn knew that a more formal management routine was going to be necessary; so he set-up weekly audio staff meetings. What else could he do to better monitor his employees’ performance? What technology might further facilitate his managerial responsibilities? Glenn was very interested in exploring the available groupware technologies to support virtual teams, but ABC had initiated little use of this type of software (except for e-mail). Furthermore, his ongoing management and project responsibilities kept him so busy (he was hiring additional staff) that he simply didn’t have the time to investigate the technology. Glenn also felt he needed a fax machine, but at this time no money had been budgeted for such purchases. Frustrated at not having all the means of keeping in contact that he needed, Glenn reached into his own pocket to buy a fax machine.

On the home front, many of the benefits Glenn believed he would have by working from home did come to fruition. He did have more flexibility and was able to do things with the family that he simply did not have the opportunity to do under his previous working arrangement. Occasionally, he had been able to meet with the children at lunch; he had cared for the children when they were ill; and he was able to be more active in the neighborhood.

The adjustment to working from home, however, was not without problems. A number of issues arose with his family. Glenn started receiving an increasing number of work related calls in the evening when the family was eating dinner or when they were relaxing together. Time and time again, Glenn would have to leave family activities in order to deal with a work-related problem. Glenn and Vicki decided that he would not answer his work-designated phone after 6:00 p.m. That worked for a while until his manager and clients figured it out. If Glenn didn’t pick up on his work line, they simply dialed the home number. Sometimes, it felt like he was “on call” 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Additionally, late afternoons when the kids came home from school and Vicki returned from work proved difficult. When the kids got off the bus in the afternoon, they were thrilled that Dad was

home and were anxious to talk about their day. Glenn loved being available to hear all the school stories, but, occasionally, the children would rush into his office excitedly shouting, "Dad! Dad! Guess what ..." only to interrupt a telephone call or an urgent task. This disruption was annoying and would lead to conflict as the kids were told to, "Leave the room; Daddy's working!" On rare occasions when Glenn was dealing with a particularly frustrating problem, family members would bear the brunt of his frustration.

Tensions also arose between Glenn and Vicki in the allocation of responsibilities for managing the household. At those times when Glenn had to return to Chicago to interface directly with the home office, Vicki had to single parent, and this put considerable pressure on her. On the other hand, Glenn's apparent availability at home had also lead to some conflict. On one occasion, Vicki arranged to have some landscaping done. That morning was one of those difficult times when Glenn was having problems getting connected just when he was under a time crunch. The door bell rang five times in the space of two hours as truckers wanted to know where they should dump the mulch, the gardener wanted to know if Glenn had any oil for the tractor because it was low, and everybody wanted to get paid. Glenn called Vicki at work furious that she had presumed on his time in this way. At moments such as this, Glenn wondered whether the new work arrangement really was working out satisfactorily.

Back at American Bank Corporation: The Experiment Receives Mixed Reviews

Results Inside the IS Division

As the three months experimental period drew to a close, the reviews on the telecommuting experiment were mixed. It certainly had taken Glenn a little longer to get set up than either he or Harriet anticipated, and the downtime associated with that put pressure on everyone to catch up the project. Still, once the technology-related bugs were worked out, Harriet and Glenn had both been happy with the latter's overall productivity and work quality. Also, Glenn's current clients were beginning to adjust to Glenn's physical absence and realized that quality products were still being delivered. Some clients did believe that Glenn was going to have to be at corporate more for the upcoming implementation and they were asking Harriet for her assurances that he was going to be physically available.

Unfortunately, the experiment also created some tensions. Several other development professionals approached Harriet. And, when they were told that it was only being offered to Glenn as an experiment for the time, they wanted to know why Glenn was being singled out for this special privilege. Harriet also received a few complaints from some of the division's other internal clients who wondered why they couldn't find Glenn despite the fact that they had dropped by on several different occasions to ask him questions. Additionally, the concern around "special privilege" also cropped up in the other IS functions and highlighted some stresses in the division. For example, operations staffers who as a group were prone to feel that they always had to cover for mistakes that the developers made, complained to Leo that it was unfair that it was someone from development who got "to stay home and relax on the sofa."

Predictably, perhaps, new technology issues were also raised. If this was truly the way the company was going to move, then a major commitment of additional resources was going to be required: new hardware, software, and telecommunication equipment was going to be necessary. With this, it was clear that the IS division would have to figure out a way to provide technical support for specific teleworker problems that would be difficult to solve because they would not be able to go to the site. Leo, especially, had serious concerns about whether this level of investment in telecommuting was warranted at this time.

Results in the Rest of ABC

In HR, Bob was also receiving a lot of inquiries from ABC employees, not only in IS but also in the rest of the company who had heard about Glenn's arrangement and who were also interested in telecommuting. Bob knew that the question of whether telecommuting was going to be a company wide option would have to be answered fairly soon. Additionally, if the telecommuting option was

Table 2: Employer's Costs and Benefits per Teleworker

Employer Costs per Teleworker		Employer Benefits per Teleworker	
Computer costs and associated hardware	\$3,200	Cubicle Savings	\$5,000
New phone lines (ISDN more expensive)	\$100 - \$500	Absenteeism Decreased	10%
Home office furniture (desk, chair, lighting, supplies)	\$1,000	Productivity Increases	15%-25%
Selection and Training	\$175	Office space savings	1000 square feet
Moving costs such as materials	\$240	Turnover Decreased	5% of salary (costs for searching/training)
Annual Costs (e.g. phone lines)	\$1,000	Park Expenses Decreased	
		Environmental savings due to less vehicle commuting	
		Increased Competitiveness	

Source: JALA International, Inc., 1998 and Fitzer, 1997

opened up to other employees, then, this would have to be addressed at the company level. His research into what other companies were doing made it clear to Bob that ABC was getting into something much larger than anyone had imagined when they first discussed telework three months ago. For example, exactly how would people be compensated and reviewed? What technology would be supplied by the company? How would worker's compensation work if someone got hurt at home? What new training was going to be necessary and for which groups in the company? Would ABC develop these training courses or would they look for outside consultants who specialized in establishing a telecommuting environment? Bob had gathered some initial statistics that other companies had published regarding their experiences (see Table 2) to share with Kelly. But, he knew he would need to determine not only the tangible but also the intangible costs and benefits associated with telecommuting that ABC would incur if it moved ahead.

The Next Step

It was now three months since the IS division had made the decision to experiment with the telecommuting option. As she prepared for her meeting with her IS managers and Bob Loskins, Kelly Watson wondered what the next step was going to be. Given the reactions to the experiment, should they go ahead and make telecommuting more widely available? If they chose this option, what had to happen to ensure its success? Should they put it on hold and delay the decision? Or, should they abandon it as something that was not feasible in American Bank Corporation?

DISCUSSION: CURRENT CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATING WORK, HOME, AND TECHNOLOGY

The preceding case points to a number of issues that highlight the altered bounding of work and home created by a telecommuting arrangement and the influence of new technology. Obviously, Glenn is no longer physically present at work. Glenn's work arrives at the office electronically but he isn't there, thus creating some dynamics that require active attention. This separation or unbundling of the worker from principal work location raises issues not only with regard to immediate work relationships, namely Glenn's boss, co-workers, and subordinates, but also more peripheral relationships, those organizational employees who are acquainted with Glenn or simply with Glenn's new work arrangement. Additionally, Glenn's physical absence from corporate offices also has more long-term implications for his development opportunities and advancement. At the same time, the creation of a workspace in the home bundles together home and family life with work life. Boundaries that facilitated the creation of a distinct way of living that was non work-obliged are no longer present, and their absence raises concerns for work, family, and leisure. All these issues will require attendance and active maintenance on the part of the teleworker. Finally, the technology that allows telecommuting to be viable surfaces new issues that both the organization and Glenn will have to address.

Getting Work Done From a Distance

All parties immediately feel the physical distance between and the separation of the teleworker from the organization involved. Absence from the office creates a void, and the managers, co-workers, and others left behind who are unfamiliar with telecommuting have no experiences from which they can draw to fill it. Consequently, it is easy for the ambiguity associated with what the teleworker might be doing away from the office to be resolved with images of activities that are non-work associated. Perceptions that Glenn is involved in non-work related activities (e.g., watching TV, or playing golf) are understandable, if inaccurate. Second, Glenn's physical separation from those he supervises requires revisiting how he enacts his role as a manager. The interpersonal, informational, and decisional functions that comprise the traditional managerial role typically include a sizable face-to-face component (Mintzberg, 1973). A new way of enacting these roles will be necessary. Third, the potential for deterioration in all work relationships must be acknowledged and proactively managed. And, there is, indeed, evidence to suggest that telecommuting does have a destabilizing effect on work relationships that is expressed approximately six months into the new arrangement. The good news is that a recovery and mutual adjustment seems to be possible after about a year (Reinsch, Jr. 1997).

These three sets of issues clearly point to the need for a "learning and adjustment" period for those organizational members touched by the new telecommuting work arrangement to discover and establish new ways of working. It is clear that training programs need to be offered for managers and teleworkers that address issues such as communications and time management. Additionally, as the case indicated, Glenn had a strong working relationship with his manager, Harriet, and his ability to continue to provide quality contributions to ABC under the new work arrangement was never in doubt. Nevertheless, the issue of ensuring a teleworker's actual and "visible" productivity is central to this new work arrangement.

As indicated earlier, learning how to supervise others' efforts in a distributed mode can be particularly difficult and would seem to require a careful and explicit consideration of both the supervisors' and their subordinates' preferred work styles. This has been a challenge for Glenn and for his employees. Prior to telecommuting, Glenn ensured the productivity and quality of his department's work through an informal management-by-walking-around style. In order to stay on top of his department's contributions and particularly the efforts of those employees who performed better with closer monitoring, Glenn had to find ways to formalize his supervisory activities.

The above discussions emphasize the importance of developing new ways to ensure the contributions of the teleworker and underscore the importance of paying close attention to the network of relationships in which any of us organizational members are embedded. Teleworkers have to make projecting their virtual presence and developing substitute communication channels to stay connected with their relational network a priority (Bjorner, 1997).

Issues of Development and Advancement

Before concluding our discussion of the impact of separation from the principal work site, it is important to raise the question, what happens to a teleworker's advancement opportunities and career path? Certainly the lack of visibility that we have already discussed may cause some problems if not actively managed. As one AT&T teleworker rather crassly put it, separation from the workplace means a loss of "suck up" opportunities (Hequet, 1996). It is important for the teleworker to take responsibility for charting his development path under this new work arrangement, for example by actively seeking and initiating new challenging work projects. However, because this is uncharted territory for most organizations, we simply do not know the answers to this. Will the teleworker have to return to the home office to maintain upward mobility or must the teleworker trade advancement for location flexibility?

Dealing with Confounded Boundaries between Work and Home

Telecommuting muddies the boundaries between work and home, and the telecommuter can cycle continuously among personal, family and work related tasks. This arrangement provides a

potential flexibility not only in where, but also, to a degree, when the work takes place. While some aspects of the work, most notably contact and coordination with office workers and clients, need to take place during corporate business hours, the independent tasks that make telecommuting a viable option for a given employee can be completed at any time. The 24 hour / 7 day week, thus, potentially becomes the frame within which work can be accomplished.

This continuous time frame brings both positive and negative attributes for the teleworker. On the positive side is the flexibility to complete work during times when the teleworker is most productive. Additionally, this potential flexibility of where and when to work opens up opportunities for the teleworker to improve their relationship with family members by permitting a more active role in family life (Hill, 1995; Olsen, 1987). For example, being available to pick a child up from school or to coach a sports team whose practice would typically begin 45 minutes before the parent could get home from work. Thus telecommuting allows the teleworker to work at some tasks early or late in the day, saving times in between for family.

On the negative side, imposing appropriate time boundaries around work and separating and conserving the quality of home life, including relationships with the family are critical. Indeed, there is a real possibility that unless specific steps are taken to define specific work boundaries, for example, by establishing a daily work agenda, that one's work life may overwhelm the home, temporally (there is precious little time that work does not impinge on) and emotionally (family members falling prey to work related frustrations). As is true with regard to the workplace, a learning and adjustment period are also needed with regard to the home.

Technical Issues: Connecting the Teleworker

The technology makes it possible to work anywhere any time providing the flexibility increasingly prized by so many of us on how, when, and where we get our work done. In order for Glenn to telecommute, the technical environment had to be set-up. This requires a negotiation between the teleworker and the organization to fully understand what equipment is necessary. Having the proper technology is essential for successful telecommuting (Artz, 1996). At a minimum, the teleworker must have a telephone, with many teleworkers also possessing a computer and a modem. The Internet has provided a low cost means to connect the teleworker to the office. E-mail has become a primary tool for communication within organizations thus facilitating an additional means to keep the teleworker connected. One teleworker made the following comment, " You learn to live by e-mail. That was my water cooler" (Murphy, 1998). Other equipment that may be required include printer, fax machine, copier, pager, answering machine, mobile phone, and additional phone lines. Exactly who is responsible for these costs needs to be addressed. Also, the slow access to the organization's LAN (local area network) was a constant source of frustration for Glenn. It is important to recognize that the phone line has become an umbilical cord that provides the connection of the teleworker to the organization. When there are technical problems (and there will be), this can render the teleworker lifeless. Solving technical problems remotely are often more challenging and procedures need to be established to address these issues.

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