

Chapter 5.20

The Benefits of Home–Based Working’s Flexibility

Diana Benito Osorio
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos–Madrid, Spain

INTRODUCTION

The history of home working in Western economies can only be understood by means of changes in the systems of production in Europe and North America and through changes in the general sphere of women’s responsibilities, which typically include family work as well as paid work (Johnson, 2003). Both new situations produce the most important change: the change in work venue.

The development in industrial production has been an uneven and changing pattern, beginning with artisanal guilds of the middle ages and continuing through to industrial production in the 19th

and 20th centuries (Boris, 1996). Mistakenly, the process of industrialization has often been characterized as a unidirectional shift of production from home to factory (Johnson, 2003), but the reality has been very different. The earliest forms of industrialization first appeared within the home setting (Albrecht, 1982). One of the initial impetuses for the use of home-based working arrangements among such employees was provided by the oil crisis of the 1970s which, in conjunction with advances in computer technology, led to a surge of interest in “telecommuting” among white collar workers (Niles, Carlson, Gray, & Hanneman, 1976). However, it was not until the development of personal computers and networked systems in the 1980s that home-based working arrangements

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experienced significant growth, growth that has been particularly pronounced among executives, managers, scientists, and engineers in large corporations (Bureau of National Affairs, 1991). This home-based working's revival, on the early 1980s, was linked to the shift in the structure of employment and production in post-industrial economies of North America and Western Europe (Lipsig-Mummé, 1983). Years later, in the 1990s, this subject was treated again but with a new vision. While adoption of telework was slow during the 1980's, the subsequent decade's information revolution resulted in considerable growth in new work forms (Moss, Whitfield, Johnson, & Andrey, 2006; Robertson, 2005). The "renaissance" was interpreted as a symptom of economic restructuring that put increased pressure on domestic industries from off-shore producers (Leach, 1998).

The 1990s and now, in the 21st century, have seen a significant increase in work that is conducted entirely online (Gurstein, 2002). Since 1990s business conditions have changed, workers have become more mobile and the guilds of the future may also come from new organizations (Malone, 2004). It is well-known that work is changing becoming increasingly "person based" rather than "place based" (Couclelis, 1998). For these reasons, the way in which the working arrangements in firms adapt in response to these changes is of crucial importance for conciliation between labor and family life (Evans, 2001).

In this article I study how technology and flexible location working, in concrete, home-based working, can be combined to achieve the conciliation between labor and family life. Certainly, the new telecommunications technology supports such workplace flexibility (Johnson, 2003).

BACKGROUND

We have seen in the previous section that home working has an extensive history related to patterns of change in industrial production, settlement,

gender roles, and family life (it has generally performed by married women who are usually mothers of young children). Home-based working includes a variety of types of work, done in various occupations, and by workers of various social classes what produces very important differences and similarities among the working conditions of various categories of homeworkers (Johnson, 2003). In the early 1980s, Lipsig-Mummé (1983) used a broad definition of home-based working to include service, white-collar and professional, as well as industrial homeworkers. Home-based work is typified as work performed with help of information and communication technologies where employees are connected to corporate networks while working from their homes¹ (Gurstein, 2002). Phizacklea and Wolkowitz (1995) conducted an extensive review of research on the impact of gender, race, and class on home-based work. In this research, the findings showed that women (who used the ICT's) were more likely than men to consider the ability to look after children as an important advantage of working at home. Nowadays, home-based workers represent a relatively small but growing proportion of the workforce (Johnson, 2003), in the case of the North America, an estimated one-quarter of the working population does some or all of its paid labor from home or close to home. This implies that the number of people who combine work and family responsibilities has increased over the past two decades, especially as more women are participating in the labor force.

The societal, demographic, economic, and cultural changes that characterize developed societies, as well as the growing rates of woman incorporation to paid work, have situated the conciliation between labor and family life on the top of the human resources management (HRM) research. Specifically, the demographic variable is an essential factor in analyzing problems and developing appropriate policy responses—and a key factor behind social and economic cohesion.² Demography is assuming increasing significance

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