

Chapter I

Telework Effectiveness: Task, Technology and Communication Fit Perspective

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ABSTRACT

We are witnessing rapid growth of inter and intra-organizational telework in many different forms: distributive project teams, telecommuting, mobile work, business to-employee, employee e-business, and virtual corporations. Despite the increasing prevalence of distributive work and its importance in creating business value, our understanding of its success factors is limited. Among many prospective factors, task characteristics, communication quality, and technology support have been mentioned frequently as key components for successfully running telework. Communications quality and technology support seem the direct result of operational design in managing the virtual process; while task characteristics of workers are typically pre-determined, unless they are modified for telework. This paper discusses the implications of chosen variables on telework success from a fit theory perspective. It focuses on examining the implications of two- and

three-way alignments among task characteristics, communications quality, and technology support on in a distributive work setting.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are witnessing rapid growth of teleworking. Telework is a distributed and virtual work arrangement that allows employees to perform their work away from the central office using information and communications technologies (ICTs) (Lindstrom *et. al.*, 1997). Distributive project teams, telecommuting, mobile work, business-to-employee e-business, and virtual corporations are popular forms of telework. It effectively copes with individual (quality of life), organizational (customer orientation and growth in knowledge jobs), and societal (urban) changes. Telework, therefore, emerges an administrative innovation intended to produce various strategic and non-strategic business values, which include cost reduction, improved customer support, productivity increases, and enhanced worker retention and satisfaction.

Despite the increasing prevalence and the importance of the concept, understanding on its effective design is limited. There are many organizational, individual, and technological factors that play a significant role in deciding its effectiveness. Among them task characteristics, communications quality, and technology support emerge key success factors. This chapter re-visits these variables and discusses their implications on telework effectiveness (i.e., quality, quantity, timeliness, and satisfaction) from a fit theory perspective. The roles of two- and three-way alignments—among task characteristics, communications quality, and technology support in the distributive work setting—receive close attention.

A GENERAL MODEL OF TELEWORK EFFECTIVENESS

In this section, a general model of telework effectiveness lays the groundwork. In general, the review of literature on telework and innovation (given that telework is a form of administrative innovation) reveals that the success of telework is largely affected by three main forces: (1) *organizational-level forces*, such as management support, organizational motivation, and other organizational features; (2) *worker characteristics*, such as demographics and task nature; and (3) *design features* of telework.

There may be heterogeneity among organizations in their motivations for introducing telework. From a competing values framework perspective (Cooper and Quinn, 1993; Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983), motivation should attempt to improve an organization's survival, economic performance (profit maximization,

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