Chapter 5
Telework as a Driver of the Third Sector and its Networks

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role of telework as a driving force behind third sector activities and in the creation of networks and links between organizations in that sector. Telework as a tool has generated considerable change in the traditional organization of work. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to respond more quickly to customer requirements and to users and beneficiaries of third sector and social economy organizations. Online connections and services provided by telework have also led to a greater density of contacts between organizations in the third sector, which promotes the transmission of information and collaborative practices in providing services to the public.

INTRODUCTION

Telework has evolved in recent decades into a new way of organizing work.[1]The novelty of this is that services are provided online from various locations outside the physical environment of an organization via new communication technologies. Telework is associated with internal flexibility (Martínez-Sánchez, Pérez, De Luis, Vela, 2006) and has given rise to organizational innovations including the creation of connected networks – networks that have taken on an important role in ensuring the response capacity of all types of organizations. Telework promotes two dimensions of horizontal structures: on the one hand, it reduces the number of intermediate hierarchical levels within an organization by making communications between the central operational nucleus and work designers and planners more direct; on the other hand, it reduces hierarchies

between organizations by creating collaborative networks of which they all form a part, and by making increased and improved use of the capabilities and potentials of the organizations themselves.

In organizations which have adopted network systems, telecommuting can, in principle, be considered a new type of organizational logic that further accelerates the return on the resources employed – one that makes different use of space and time variables than in traditional organizations. However, some authors question whether telecommuting, or more generally, telematic and computerized procedures used as tools, constitutes a real break from traditional work organization structures, as suggested by Baethge and Oberbeck (1995) in their article on office work. Networked telework – at least in its most widespread form in asymmetric networks – does not threaten to replace the constituent elements of the old logic of work organization described by Martín Artiles (1999), i.e. process automation, the dominance of the logic of time economy, the primacy of quantity over quality, product uniformity, and the standardization of operations.

In this chapter we will generally address some of the applications of telework in the areas of social economy and third sector institutions and organizations. Our second section, following this introduction, examines telework as a quantitative dimension in terms of its dissemination throughout the European Union and other leading countries. We will also take a broad look at the general lack of regulation with regard to telework in most countries, and the exception presented by recent Spanish labor reform, which for the first time includes weak regulation of the practice of working at home, which in this case, may be considered to be telework for all practical purposes. Section 3 examines new organizational forms which are generated and generalized by telework and which are collectively called 'network organizations' in this paper. While there are many different types of organizations, this paper presents those associated with telework common to all organizational forms

that incorporate telework. Section 4 describes how organizations operate via telework. Here we aim to emphasize the general characteristics that result from incorporating telework in different third sector and social economy institutions and organizations. The fifth section presents an overview of how telework affects the organization of the entities that use it. Finally, the last section explains some of the central ideas that have been developed in the paper and proposes some ideas for further research to examine the relationship between telework and the third sector.

THE PREVALENCE AND REGULATION OF TELEWORK

In 2003 SIBIS[2] created a definition of telework which included four modalities: telework from home, mobile telework, freelance telework in SOHOs (small office/home office), and telework done in shared facilities outside of organizations and the home. A worker would fall under the category of teleworking at home when he or she spends at least one day a week working from home. An organization makes use of mobile teleworking when employees spend more than ten hours a week outside the home and office. SOHO telework is done by freelancers who work from their home offices.

From a legal perspective, to date telework has not been addressed by any specific legislation in European Union countries, although recent labor reforms in Spain for the first time include provisions regulating work done at home, which today is associated primarily with telework. An effective framework for generating regulation does not seem to be found in collective bargaining agreements either, although the European Framework Agreement on Telework, signed by many unions and employers, suggested making telework an issue for collective bargaining. More pragmatically, companies that have chosen to use telework are negotiating its terms through individual agree-

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