TELECOMMUTING**


Although this book expands considerably beyond the subject of telecommuting it includes computer home-work as just one of the possible options in the changing work environment. Applegath includes many anecdotes and ideas about alternative work situations which may stimulate more creative thinking on the subject. He includes many examples of how people have learned to structure their home-work time and avoid the common pitfalls of isolation and distraction.


This book addresses the practical issues of how to implement a telecommuting program and ways to better understand and deal with the psychological issues unique to home-work.


This socialist analysis of home-labor focuses on the potential exploitation of electronic home-workers. The article traces the history of industrial home-work and compares it with modern telecommuting. Berch finds more similarities than differences and concludes that telecommuting is subject to the same historical abuses of low wages and poor working conditions. Although positive arguments have been made for electronic home-work, the bottom line, according to Berch, has always been corporate cost cutting and not quality of work life.


The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, which represents about 300,000 clerical workers, takes a cautious view of computer home-work. Among the pitfalls cited are the potential abuses of a piece-rate system of wages, problems in fair performance appraisal, difficulties in monitoring working conditions and compliance with labor laws, and the threat to union solidarity posed by isolated, difficult to organize workers. Unlike some other unions, AFSCME recognizes the appeal of home-work to some employees and offers guidelines to help workers make informed choices about this option. Labor unions, while fundamentally opposed to telecommuting, are consistent in acknowledging the opportunities home-work offers to disabled workers. For further clarification of union views on telecommuting see resolutions by AFL-CIO (Proceedings and executive council reports of the AFL-CIO, 1984. p. 189).

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**Items from this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.

De Sanctis provides a concrete outline of how to implement a telecommuting program. She bases these guidelines on interviews with eight companies involved in electronic home-work and addresses personnel management problems, legal and regulatory considerations, employee selection, evaluation and supervision, as well as clearly detailing the kinds of jobs and technologies most appropriate to work-at-home arrangements.


Jacobs profiles a successful "telenaut" who she believes may be typical of the growing numbers of professional office workers doing computer homework. While companies have proceeded cautiously with the idea, the prospects for improving productivity through telecommuting are looking more attractive. Jacobs cites studies putting the potential increases in computer homework productivity in the neighborhood of 60%. Other benefits suggested include: retention of skilled workers, larger pools of job candidates, job scheduling flexibility, more available office space, energy savings, and increased likelihood of employing the disabled, a goal which for many companies inspired the idea of telecommuting to begin with.


This volume is based on papers contributed at a national executive forum where a wide range of issues surrounding electronic homework—labor, legal, psychological, organizational, and social—were discussed by knowledgeable participants. Papers are arranged in three sections focusing on case studies, issues and problems, and outlook for the future. Part one presents experiences with and differing reactions to telecommuting programs by American Express Company, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of South Carolina, Mountain Bell, Control Data Corporation, F. International, and the U.S. Army. Legalities (labor standards and protective laws, labor relations and collective bargaining, benefits and insurance, safety and health, zoning, etc.) as well as the effects of work location on motivation, and the potential for exploitation of workers by employers are discussed in Part Two. Part Three offers recent technology forecasts, speculates on the impact of new office technology on female clerical workers, and discusses the role computer homework may play in the worklives of professionals.


In its chapter on telecommuting, Control Data Corporation cites estimates of as many as 10 million computer homeworkers by 1990. The adjustments that this change in the work environment will require of telecommuters and their managers are discussed from a business viewpoint.

Nilles, Jack. "Telework may soon make daily long-distance commutes obsolete while enhancing worker productivity and satisfaction." Technology Review (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Alumni Association, Cambridge, MA 02139), April, 1982, pp. 56-62. (Reprints available through University Microfilms International)

Telecommuting is often thought of as a means to reduce the expenses and aggravations of the typical office commute by substituting phone lines for bus lines, subways, and traffic jams. Nilles, a well known researcher in this
field, is quick to point out the energy and time savings possible with electronic home-work. He also looks at many other aspects of the shift from office to home, such as the possible impact of telecommuting on unionization of clerical workers and how the changing roles of office workers sometimes collide with conventional notions of corporate status. In taking a broad view of the implications of telework, Niles provides a framework for long term planning. He even sees some potential for providing job training and entry level employment to the jobless in depressed areas without requiring physical migration of the work force.


Olson examines in detail some existing home-work arrangements. Her study covers the experiences of firms which have either instituted formal pilot programs or which tolerate informal, individually negotiated, work-at-home arrangements. The companies surveyed with formal pilots gave a variety of reasons for exploring at-home work including cost savings, computer utilization, increased productivity, social responsibility, testing market potential for new computer products, and better personnel recruitment. The companies offering informal programs stated their primary reason for allowing work-at-home as attracting and retaining highly qualified employees who will only work for the firm if they can work at home. While nearly all of the firms reported positive experiences with employee performance, some difficulties with communication, equipment, and remote supervision occurred. For those companies with short term pilot programs, half continued with employee telecommuting when these experiments ended. Olson summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of working at home for employees, their reasons for working at home, their attitudes toward their arrangements, and comparisons between workers with informal versus formal arrangements. A related working paper by Olson and Roberta Tasley from the same series is *Telecommunications and the Changing Definition of the Workplace*.


Olson and Primps base their analysis of telecommuting on exploratory interviews conducted over a three year period with computer home-workers and their managers. They tentatively conclude that work-at-home arrangements are "not likely to become widespread in the near future" because of the problems remote work causes for managers and also because telecommuters themselves often have difficulty juggling home and child care responsibilities with their work.


Information on the desirability of telecommuting, its nature, and its cost benefits as perceived by telecommuters and their employers is included in this revision of the author's dissertation. Ramswower uses a research model to guide a field experiment of employees from five organizations who telecommute from their homes. In his remarks on practical applications, he reports that many negative organizational and behavioral effects can be diminished if the employee is strongly motivated to work at home and his employer is willing to suitably tailor the job. Part-time telecommuters, particularly skilled professionals with appropriate workstations in their homes and little personal desire for office interaction, did not experience the negative effects reported by full-time telecommuters. This particular study did not show in-
creases in productivity through increased performance among full-time telecommuters. While Ramsoyer does not envision full-time telecommuting becoming a widespread phenomenon at this time, he does see part-time telecommuting gaining acceptance as appropriate office technology develops.

Rubins, David. "Telecommuting: will the plug be pulled?" Reason (Reason Foundation, 1018 Garden St., Santa Barbara, CA 93101), October, 1984, pp. 24-32 $2.00.

Rubins begins his article with a survey of the kinds of computer home work being done across the nation. He then shifts to a discussion of the substantial controversy regarding home-work. His exposition of current labor regulation covers trends in labor union and right-to-work lobbying. He discusses how local zoning laws affect this new generation of home-workers and what kinds of regulation the labor department may undertake to prevent wide spread exploitation of computer home laborers. Rubins, a proponent of home labor, stresses the advantages of telecommuting for the disabled and includes a description of an unusual electronic home-work project run by Best Western using inmates of the Arizona Center for Women as remote reservations agents.


The telecommuting concept is only one of several interactions Salomon cites as an example of substituting telecommunications for travel. However, he believes that rather than reducing travel, telecommunications will, instead, modify travel patterns and reasons for travelling. He suggests that because people have a strong built-in desire for mobility and see need for variation of scene and experience, other complex issues must be considered before assuming that telecommuting will be widely embraced simply because the right technology is available. For instance, the stress of working in a "closed environment" and the potential for conflict among members of telecommuter households may present problems for remote workers.


The shift from office to home has a major impact on the quality of work life for telecommuters. Shamir and Salomon look beyond business and economic considerations to focus on the changes home-workers may encounter. They find that the traditional office serves many functions beyond simply providing a place to work. Among the issues discussed is the importance of social interaction for employee satisfaction. The authors conclude that the void created when workers leave their offices to work at home will not be easy to fill.

TC Report: the monthly newsletter of trends & developments in location-independent work. (Electronic Services Unlimited, 143 West 24th St., New York, NY 10011), Monthly. $145.00 per year.

This newsletter, which is itself produced by a pool of telecommuters, offers current coverage of "location-independent work." Besides providing brief news items, it includes annotated bibliographies of the latest books and articles on telecommuting. Electronic Services Unlimited (ESU) also offers a number of research reports and memoranda for sale, including its benchmark study, Telecommuting: the state of the art and market trends. Lists of ESU publications and prices are available on request. One special study, conducted by ESU for a consortium of major corporations, including AT&T, Citibank, Digital Equipment, J.C. Penney, Union Mutual Life, Xerox and others, is discussed by ESU executive director Marcia Kelley in Personnel Administrator (February 1984, pp. 48-52).