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The organizational context of teleworking implementation

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Abstract

The large-scale implementation of teleworking has not yet occurred in the industrialized world. This fact is in contrast to earlier predictions that viewed teleworking as the main organizational form of the electronic age that would largely eliminate work-related commuting. The slow adoption of the teleworking practice calls for a careful analysis of all elements that may influence the implementation of teleworking. The present article reports the empirical findings of a survey conducted among firms in Brussels, the Belgian and EU capital. The article's main objective is to identify the drivers and constraints relevant to the implementation of teleworking in the Brussels business environment. Furthermore, some insights are provided into the perceived social and economic advantages and disadvantages of teleworking implementation. Finally, the potential effectiveness of various policy tools to promote teleworking is assessed. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Teleworking implementation; Organizational context; Empirical study

1. Introduction

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, teleworking was perceived as the work arrangement of the future. Commentators then predicted the large-scale implementation of teleworking at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s [1–5]. The teleworking “boom,” however, has not yet taken place. This is surprising, as recent developments in information and communication technology (ICT) have reduced the coordination and control costs

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associated with the geographic decentralization of the work force's location, especially in large, service organizations. The centralization of staff in a single office is no longer necessarily the most efficient way to organize economic activity [6].

In the next section, a simple conceptual framework is developed that includes several variables related to the implementation of teleworking. The in-depth analysis of the parameters included in this model should allow explanation of the present low penetration levels of teleworking. The second section describes in more detail the model's organizational component relevant to the implementation of teleworking. The analysis builds upon the empirical findings of a survey conducted among a large number of human resources managers of large firms in Brussels. In the third section, some insights are provided into the economic and social advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, as perceived by both firms already implementing teleworking and companies that have not yet contemplated implementing teleworking. Finally, in the fourth section, the potential of three policy tools that could be helpful to promote the teleworking practice, is evaluated.

2. The conceptual framework

Although the choice to adopt telework may be an individual's decision, it is often made in a complex environment that influences this individual's decision. Fig. 1 gives an overview of all the elements that may influence the two-tiered, individual's decision process to telework. The two-tiered individual's decision process consists of, first, the long-term decision whether or not to telework, and second, the decision on the frequency with which to telework. In some cases, the adoption of teleworking and the determination of the frequency do not constitute distinct decisions; namely when the latter decision is

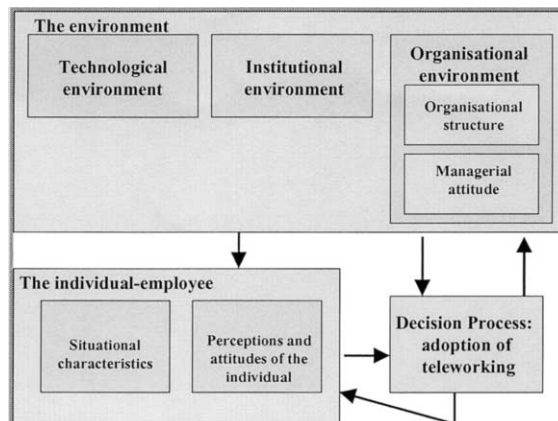


Fig. 1. Basic conceptual framework for modeling the implementation process of teleworking. Source: Bernardino et al., 1992 [12].

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