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Where Home is the Office

The New Form of Flexible Work

Janet W. Salaff

Abstract

Internet and local computer-based technologies challenge the relation between work and home life. Drawing on advances in technology, many hi-tech firms promote remote forms of work. Teleworkers give up their company office some or all of the time, and work from home. By separating the place of employment from the place where the work is actually carried out, teleworking restructures the relationship between public and private spheres. This paper looks at how, in the mid- to late 1990s, a teleworking sales force organized their work processes after transferring their office to their homes. I describe how employees and their families contribute to the company as they develop ways to manage their home work space and time with the family.

In studying this "boundary work," I look at telework as a form of exchange. I ask whether telework is "post-Fordist," transferring to employees craftsmanlike control over their product, lightening managerial oversight, and providing more family time? If telework enhances worker autonomy and reduces stress, this should be visible in the greater time and place flexibility that employees enjoy. Or is teleworking "neo-Fordist," where the company uses new coordination mechanisms, which maintain control and increase exploitation? I find that teleworkers do hidden work, putting effort into balancing job and family spheres. At the same time, I locate mechanisms through which telework extracts more from employees, their families, and home. I explore how, through telework, capital penetrates the home in new ways, as teleworkers openly contribute money and time to production at home. Through telework, firms relinquish tight hierarchical control while increasing labor extraction.

Introduction

Internet and local computer-based technologies not only change work and home life, but also challenge the relation between them. Drawing on advances in technology, many hi-tech firms promote remote forms of work. Teleworkers give up their company office some or all of the time, and work from home. By separating the place of employment from the place where the work is actually carried out, teleworking restructures the relationship between public and private spheres. Organizations expect to profit from the deep-seated restructuring and decentralization that telework entails. While firms may start teleworking with their budget in mind, however, employees adopt telework to balance their work and family commitments. Indeed, since promoters of telework use different symbols for different groups, goals often come into conflict (Sturesson, 1997). The integration of family and work spheres raises deeper issues than moving data from the center to the periphery, and propels us to understand how employees experience working at home for the firm.

My discussion looks at how, in the mid- to late 1990s, the sales force for the small business market, a subset of a telecommunications firm's teleworking employees, transfer their office to their homes. Using qualitative methods, I join those that take the employees' standpoint (Gurstein, 2001; Mirchandani, 1997; Nippert-Eng, 1996). In the pages that follow, I first examine issues raised in the literature, and define telework. Next, I briefly review the background of the firm and the characteristics of our respondents, then turn to the views of those that I studied who engage in this new form of labor. I describe how employees and their families contribute to the company as they develop ways to manage their home, work, space, and time with the family.

Background: literature, terms, and numbers

Literature

Teleworking entered the North American business parlance in the late 1950s to address problems of daily travel (Mokhtarian, 1997). While urban decentralization and commuting have continued to motivate North American firms to adopt flexible forms of work, in the 1980s larger structural changes contributed to telework. These include the drop in telecommunications costs, greater importance of information processing work in all industrial sectors, the increase in intangible forms of commodities, and creation of large numbers of service sector jobs (Agres, Edberg, and Igbaria, 1998; Ellison, 1999; Mitter and Efendioglu, 1997). These changes have brought about a strategy of "flexible specialization" in the production process to meet diversified markets and reduce production costs, of which telework is a form (Harvey, 1989, 1993; Piore and Sabel, 1984). Manufacturing, telecommunications and other backbone services could decentralize many operations, relying on communications media to link knowledge exchange (Castells, 1989).

Project and contract work is also associated with telework. Firms are less likely to use their employees' time continuously in one locale (Perin, 1996). Teleworking firms can also contract professionals who, as scarce employees, can bargain to work at a distance. Disabled professionals that can telework need not be excluded from their fields. As firms aim to contract labor more flexibly, innovative technology coupled with telework reduces the need for moving employees to a central location. Consultants predict that each full-time teleworker can save firms thousands of dollars per year (Pratt, 1999).

It is the promise of greater control over work conditions that most appeals to professional, technical, and managerial employees like those we study. Employees, increasingly educated, and familiar with computing, try to achieve more control over their product, and this expectation further contributes to the work at home movement.[1] More

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1   According to a 2001 European survey of teleworkers and non-teleworkers on stress levels in the workplace, 41 percent of workers rate travel as the most annoying aspect of their office job, followed by office politics (37 percent) and constant interruptions (33 percent). One quarter of office workers spend between one and

professional women remain in the labor force throughout their careers, and balance multiple roles. Both parents also wish to share more with their children, but face mounting time pressures as the pace of work accelerates.[2] Home tasks also take time. The physical merging of work and family spheres promises to ease the "time bind." Telework also responds to employees' dissatisfaction with office culture (MORI, 2001). To this, has been added anxiety over working in high rise offices, and away from family and friends.

Urban Canada, and in particular the metropolis of Toronto where our study was conducted, embodies many of these factors that make telework an option. At the time of the study, the large metropolitan area had four million people, who traveled frequently to work. Women's employment in Ontario is higher than in Canada overall, and the majority of married women work, including those with children. The populace is increasingly well educated, and wives want to use their education: 80 percent of Canadian women with university level education surveyed in 1995 felt that "being able to take a paying job is important to happiness." Further, most believe that both the man and the woman should contribute to household income. At the same time, 19 percent of all full-time workers surveyed in 1992, and even more of the full-time women workers, were "time stressed." Although 30 percent of the employed women resolved this with flexible work schedules, nevertheless 18 percent of these still felt highly stressed. Many also believe "most women really want a home and family over a job" and an "employed mother can have as close a relationship with her children as an unemployed mother" (Statistics Canada, 2000: 71–2, 154). These overlapping and contradictory attitudes create role strain. Able to use computers, having them in their homes, people start to move home to work.[3]

two hours travelling each day, and 15 percent are late to work between one and three times a week due to travel delays. Not surprisingly, over half of office workers want to work from home because of the freedom it gives them, 42 percent to cut down on commuting time (MORI, 2001).

2   There is some debate over whether work hours have increased in the 1990s (Parcel, 1999). Nevertheless, most people feel they are overworked.

3   There were over 1,437,000 daily inter-regional person trips in 1991 between the downtown and four adjacent parts of the greater Toronto area, a factor convincing firms like ours to reduce travel to the office. Women's employment in Ontario was high (58 percent, 1988), and 66 percent of all husband–wife families (1986) were dual earner families. In 1986, 14 percent of wives in dual-earner families had

There are, however, many problems in implementing telework (Bailey and Kurland, 1999). There are economic barriers to accessing the Internet (Castells, 2001; Mckie and Thompson, 2000: 194; NTIA, 1998; OECD, 2001). Yet since access is broadening, clearly other factors limit telework. Among these are challenges to "deference" and "demeanor," and the difficulties of managing the supervisor/employee relationship remotely. Working parents that try to adopt a firm's "family friendly work policies" are invisible to the office (Hochschild, 1997; Perin, 1991). As teleworkers, they need continuously to do "career identity work," demonstrating their progress to their supervisor, and commitment to the group (Tippin, 1994; Whittle, 2001).

The social organization of work also slows adoption of telework (Olson, 1988). Work processes entail more than capital and routine labor. Before embarking on telework, management may not have thought through the cultural arrangements that work processes involve (Featherstone, 1993). Many employees need collegial support that is hard to get at a distance, which work restructuring may disrupt (Greve, Salaff, Wellman, and Dimitrova, 2002; Krebs, 1996). Management styles may not suit decentralized work (Gainey, Kelley, and Hill, 1999; Hochschild, 1997). As well, when people turn to telework holding high expectations which are not met, many do not continue (Armstrong, 1997; Gurstein, 2001).

The intrusion of companies into family time and space did not start with telework. The family has long done unpaid back-up work for industrial labor, most visible in home-based manufacturing. Workers that do simple manufacturing "putting out work" at home absorb many production costs (Mirchandani, 1998). Large corporations also depend on the unpaid emotional and back-up labor of the wife in supporting the husband's job (Luxton, 1980; Smith, 1973). Hochschild (1997) described the extension of capital into family terrain through overtime and shift work.

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university degrees versus 6 percent of wives in traditional families; for husbands: 18 percent in dual-earner families had a university degree, versus 14 percent in traditional families. 57 percent of mothers with children under 6 yrs old were employed (1991). In 1999, 49 percent of Toronto households used the Internet, 35 percent from home. Those with university education, like our sample, (52 percent) were more likely to use computers from home (Dickinson and Jellison, 2000: 10, 13; Mckie and Thompson, 1990: 100, 162, 163, 316; Mckie and Thompson, (1994: 79, 145).

Moving the workspace into the home draws the family even more deeply into the service of the firm. Teleworkers do hidden work, putting effort into balancing work and family spheres. This "boundary work" has become a focus of telework research. Many explore how families handle the ambiguity of laboring in family space. They find that professionals that telework do considerable emotion and cognitive work to handle these dual spheres (Ellison, 1999; Goldman, 2000; Mirchandani, 1997; Nippert-Eng; 1996, 1998; Silver, 1993; Sullivan, 2000).

This chapter takes the "boundary work" teleworkers do one step further. Given the competing goals of telework, I ask whether telework is "post-Fordist," transferring to employees craftsmanlike control over their product, lightening managerial oversight, and providing more family time? Or is teleworking "neo-Fordist," where the company uses new coordination mechanisms, which maintain control and increase exploitation (Prechel, 1994; Sullivan and Lewis, 2001)? To answer these questions, I look at telework as a form of exchange. If telework enhances worker autonomy and reduces stress, this should be visible in the greater time and place flexibility that employees enjoy. At the same time, I locate mechanisms through which telework extracts more from employees, home, and their families. I explore how through telework, capital penetrates the home in new ways, as teleworkers openly contribute money and time to production at home.

Telework's complexity lies in its range of effects. Through telework, firms relinquish tight hierarchical control while increasing labor extraction. In describing how telework as a new form of work reshapes the relation between work and family, I organize the material around the factors of production. (1) Starting with property, capital and space, I discuss the costs to employees when they move their office in their home. (2) Moving on to labor, time, and the family, I describe how employees give more to the company as they develop ways to manage their home work space and time with the family. (3) I then turn to ways teleworkers legitimate giving more to the company.

Terms and numbers

Many forms of telework evolved as firms have adapted telework to their needs. Some classify forms of telework by spatial location. Work carried out away from the employer's premises includes individual home based teleworking and multi-location mobile working, as well as collective forms of teleworking in non-domestic premises controlled

by the employer (Huws, 1996). Others define telework by the amount of time people spend away from the office.[4] Lumping these together gives rise to estimates of 10 million European teleworkers in 2000 (IDC, 2001). The proportions vary widely by nations, ranging from, in 1999, media-strong Finland (15 percent) and Sweden (16 percent), to the US (9 percent) and Canada (7 percent), to Spain (4 percent).[5] In Europe, large firms and companies that have installed remote technology are more likely to sponsor telework. Companies that depend on computer based technologies in their own work and as products they engineer and sell most readily shift the location of work and the employees. Over 45 percent of European mobile workers and teleworkers are employed by "large and very large" companies, mostly in the business services, finance and health sectors (Pusceddu and van de Roer, 2001). In addition, firms with multiple sites, and those that use email are more likely to telework (Kordey, 2000).

To understand more fully how the entry of work into family space restructures both work and home, I study only those teleworkers that have given up their office to work full time from home. The current chapter describes the home–work life of mobile workers in the small business sales force who retained their full-time employment contract. They mainly worked from home, and also could book a cubicle, much like booking a hotel room, at company quarters ("hoteling"). These cubicles are not "theirs," however, and employees carry in their own lap top computers and documentation to work every day.

The teleworkers

The history of telework in "Telecom"

The telecommunications provider I study, which I call "Telecom," is a key industry player, with an established history. Telecom had been

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4   The European Economic Community distinguishes "mobile workers," that spend at least 20 percent of their working hours outside of both their home and office, from "telecommuters" who spend at least one day a week working from home.

5   Extrapolating to 2001, and for all work sectors, the Canadian Telework Association estimates the number of Canadian teleworkers at 1.5 million, a number that includes telework, overtime, or the self-employed. Telecom, the firm I study here, now has approximately five thousand teleworkers, one of the largest Canadian programs. http://www.ivc.ca/part12.html#statcan.

known as a good employer and was a popular job choice for Canadians. Stressing loyalty, company culture, and image, Telecom kept employees on for a lifetime. But in the 1990s, when the telecommunications market was deregulated, the company faced a crisis, and reduced its head count through layoffs and early retirement. Teleworking was a strategy to cut costs further and improve productivity.

In the mid-1990s, the company initiated an experimental pilot project for volunteers to telework, drawing on employees from several departments. The company wanted to see how telework could be practiced, and how they might sell teleworking as a product. In a short period of time, the firm applied this initiative to the business sales force in the belief that sales workers, who traveled daily to clients, needed no fixed office. At the same time, the company increased sales targets. This speed-up that accompanied telework somewhat compromised its meaning. Some felt that telework was part of the effort to boost output at their expense.

Technical changes paved the way. The firm was integrating scattered sales databases to mutual readability and remote accessibility. Sophisticated networks allowed faster data transmission. A mechanization task force upgraded the sales force's PCs. However, at the time, few used advanced technologies. Nor were these supporting technologies fully operative, creating bottlenecks in sales work (Dimitrov and Dimitrova, 1995; Dimitrova and Salaff, 1998).

As a sizeable and old organization, Telecom's employees were diverse. In the small business market, engineering-oriented sales people were keen on trying out all the latest computer based applications from home. The people-oriented sales workers were less enraptured by new technologies. Newcomers that had transferred from other firms and were familiar with ruthless sales approaches, wanted to work "quicker and smarter." In contrast, tenured employees felt that company restructuring hampered their performance. These different orientations were played out in sales people's views towards the tradeoffs in telework.

Our sample

I learned about these teleworkers from on-site observation, focus groups, time budget studies, and in-depth interviews of 94 full-time company employees between 1993 and 1997; 48 are sales workers in the small business market. Twenty-eight salesworkers gave up their office entirely to work at home, the rest had not begun, were trying

hoteling, or other alternatives. We located these in a number of ways: some participated in the company's teleworking "trial," others replied to a company survey.[6] Supervisors and colleagues introduced still others. Learning in advance that several offices would shut down, we collected information on some sales workers "before" and "after" this event. Our interview detailed their daily work and family activities in several one to three and a half-hour sessions. Wherever possible, we conducted an interview in the teleworker's home office to understand their work set-up in a family context, speaking with supervisors and spouses as well. We taped interviews, transcribed them verbatim, and analyzed the texts qualitatively for themes.

Most of the sales teleworkers in our sample are mature workers. Their ages ranged from 28 to 46; the modal age is 40. Half are fairly new teleworkers, but almost all have worked at home long enough to settle into their remote location. I have background information for 42 and learned that 19 came to the firm fresh from school, then rose through the ranks to their sales position; 23 transferred from other companies, nearly all from sales. Nearly half the sales workers in our study are women, equally divided between teleworkers and office workers.[7] Twenty-three have young children, which helped us understand how teleworkers combine family chores with work life.

Boundary Issues: Home Space and Work

Information and communications technologies dissolve traditional boundaries in time and space. Telework, which draws on these technologies, is particularly likely to reshape the meaning of work. Essential concepts of workplace, home, and everyday life are deconstructed and reformulated most visibly in the merging of home space and work (Gunnarsson, 1997: 57). But as many have noted, the boundary work is fraught with ambiguity. It is not the technology that creates this con-

6   To learn more about the representativeness of our sample, we analyzed survey responses from the firm's middle-level employees. The survey showed that more split their work between their home and the central office. Of the 846 employees that gave their teleworking status in the company survey, 32 percent teleworked fewer than three days a week, while 13 percent worked nearly full time from home.

7   In 1986, 46 percent of the sales workers in Canada were female (Mckie and Thompson, 1990: 54).

fusion, nor will the company's teleworking procedures easily solve it. In many ways, placing corporate work in the home is ill-defined, creating considerable uncertainty and the need for teleworkers to do boundary work.

This uncertainty begins with the costs of working at home. Traditionally, an employer foots all direct production costs. However, teleworkers and their families absorb home office expenses, from rent forgone, to extra maintenance costs, consumer durables and services, and production equipment. Putting out funds on behalf of the company is the ambiguous first step in merging the family and work spheres.

Choice

Given that teleworkers dedicate sizeable amounts of money and energy to this project, we need to ask: was telework required? Many telework studies, including those done by one of Telecom's departments, advocated employee participation in the decision, or what is known as an "RSVP." However, Telecom wished to close entire office floors and consolidate buildings. To do so, it needed complete participation by the sales force. Nevertheless, Telecom did not portray the move home in this manner to its sales force. They were not always clear whether teleworking was compulsory or optional, giving rise to some confusion. Although exemptions were possible, many sales workers surmised that they had to give up their company office. Others bargained or resisted.

Taking the perspective of the company, a radio services salesman, and former real estate salesman, explained why they all had to telework:

> [T]he Company is liquidating their assets. They want to sell their real estate. Real estate is expensive and it costs them money to keep the Scarboro office functioning as it's functioning right now. So they're getting rid of their offices and they're putting us in our home offices. It's part of the three year plan to make them more competitive. (radio services salesman 1)

Others thought they had a choice. One implied that if reducing driving was a goal, Telecom might instead have rearranged sales areas to match the salesperson's home location. Yet in this uncertain atmosphere she complied, seeing the willingness to telework as a test of loyalty.

> I mean I have a choice. If I don't like it I can go back to the office, okay? (*Q*. Do they give you a choice?) Well, they'd like to think they did. But I mean it wouldn't be to my benefit to do that. [B]ecause then I start two hours of commuting a day, okay? And I don't want to do that. It's the opposite way to my customers, the majority of them. See [the office is] in Markham. I live in Oshawa. My customers are in Durham Region. I want to be close to my customers. So I think they could have done a little bit more that way. (equipment saleswoman 1)

Another sales representative with a small apartment objected.

> So the company's saving money big time on the real estate because they've reduced their costs and everything. That's great but what about us that have . . . inconvenience from the standpoint from space to accommodate this? . . . Well I think the company should clearly spell out in terms of whether it's something that, you know what I mean, it's kind of like a mandate, that this is what they want or if they're giving you a choice, because it was not clear. It was not clear. It was implied but I think a lot of people thought well, I have to do it. But how can they, you know, if you're living in an apartment and I know this has happened with people who are living in a one bedroom apartment, that isn't exactly fair to them. So what are you saying that if they don't get a bigger apartment or if they don't cut into their living space you're going to what, get rid of them? Demote them? So it was kind of almost like a threat in a sense. (network saleswoman 1)

Others defined the choice as theirs:

> We were given a choice. You know I had an extra bedroom so it was fine for me. (equipment salesman1)

Space

Citing business security, Telecom requires teleworkers to have a separate space to work in, usually an office with a door, but does not pay for that space. Many of the 28 teleworking sales people already had a work space at home. Others had to renovate. Those with one bedroom apartments had to put office machinery in the dining room. Many saw the task of turning living space into multiple uses as burdensome.

A saleswoman converted half the family room to office space, from which her family was excluded.

> I have a living room – family room, so I've taken over half of the living room. There's a divider. We don't come in here. There's a chesterfield and chair, and the idea is that if . . . somebody needs to come in to the house to meet me or something then that furniture is there. The living room we weren't really using so that's why I took it over. (equipment saleswoman 2)

Yet another turned an unfinished basement into an office.

> This office was done professionally. I acted as a sub-contractor if you will. I hired all the various trades, electrician, plumber for the bathroom over there, the drywaller, the carpenter . . . I knew I was going to work out of the office, out of the home. I knew [Telecom] was going to go in that direction. So about a year ago my wife and I decided to get this done, so I've been like this now for about a year. It wasn't always in this state. It wasn't as functional. (radio services salesman 1)

He justified the cost and his unpaid labor as upgrading his property. Nearly all paid for added features, light, electricity, and heat to accommodate the new use of their home space.

Several acclimated much more, and moved in order to telework. A salesman sold his suburban home with sizeable landscape, and moved to a smaller place, anticipating that since he would have to work harder as a teleworker, he would have no time to garden. Another pushed forward her marriage and moved to a house to coincide with the closing of her office.

Yet another vacated a rented apartment and bought a new house. Although she had previously complained to her supervisors about the inconvenience of working from her own apartment, her rather costly adjustment to the teleworking deflected her own opposition.

> (*Q.* How do you like teleworking?) [A] lot better than I did right at the time (I began) because I had all my equipment in my bedroom, and I was having to move into my living room to use my table. So it was not convenient. All the plugs were in different spots. It was just I was in a very small place. (network saleswoman 1)

In addition to their dedicated office space, these teleworkers use different parts of their houses more or less freely for work. They integrate their new time and space schedules with the home use even wider than the office. In good weather, they work on sales proposals in the garden or on their decks.

Employees received used company office furniture and equipment, but this was rarely adequate to the home that had not been built as an office. A young salesman moved plugs, transforming his condominium solarium into an office for the fax, printer, and other substantial machinery. Many objected to the office-grade furniture, and paid for their own.

> It's not fair. I think personally what they should have done when they put us into a teleworking environment, they should have, let's say, said, "okay, I'll allow you up to $2000," . . . like "show me receipts up to and I'll cover . . . ," like I said, $1000 or $2000, whatever that figure be . . . That would have been positive on the company's behalf. But they've done absolutely nothing. (equipment saleswoman 1)

Although the employees are donating part of the house to the firm, they do not get tax benefit. In this firm, sales people earn salaries, and under tax law, since they are not self-employed, they cannot get tax breaks for a home office. At the same time, their home no longer has "use value" alone, but is an integral part of the work process. This increases the ambiguity of the contribution of the family to the company.

Some were unwilling to make the changes to the home. "My home is private. I don't want my business at home" (data salesman 1). Instead, they used the general purpose hoteling facility the company gave the sales unit when they closed office floors. To this they had to carry their own equipment daily.

Spatial boundaries: maintaining a work front from home

Once past the home office door, teleworking draws Telecom's sales employees' families into the work process in other ways. Small business market sales people must represent the company to their customers. To maintain a professional image, sales workers have to monitor their families. Families become complicit to maintaining the work process and the company image.

Spatial segregation

Rules about spatial segregation emerge which restrict the teleworkers' ability to integrate their family with their work lives. Family members can no longer fully use the house as they had before. Identifying per-

sonal sounds, such as dogs barking, children playing or crying, grand-father clock chimes, create confusing "noise" for the customer during remote conversations.

Teleworkers train their children to notice new spatial distinctions. Their children learn the difference between a parent that is at home for the family or for work. Clues like a shut door tell children to remain outside. They know not to pick up the business line when it rings, and not to interrupt their parents on the phone. Teleworkers then have to manage the children and others that also use their home.

To handle these constraints on use of home space, many act as if they were in the downtown company office. Still company employees, Telecom expects those with young children to continue their former child care arrangements. None provide day care themselves at home. Some hire nannies. Some have at-home spouses. The rest remove their youngsters from the home during working hours. As before, they have contingency plans for overtime work, out-of-town meetings, ill children, and school days. Neighbors and nearby kin are back-ups, who help them cope with overlaps in the demands of the company and their children's needs.

Many could not segregate their family lives from the work lives when children and workers were under one roof. One salesman with small children at home discussed his problems with merging the two realms. His wife cares for his children at home, and he feels the home environment is distracting as well (like the light bulb that might need to be replaced).

> Well my wife and my two kids are in the house so even though I'm isolated . . . you hear the kids screaming or somebody falls down and starts to cry you know that type of thing. So there are those distractions and they are probably equal to those you would have at work . . . There, you know, there's always somebody popping their head up and saying "hey do you want to go for a coffee?" or "how was your weekend?" Or whatever the case. So in my case [too] because my house is "full" of people.

His resolution is to remove himself from his home office by hoteling. Since he has no fixed locale anymore, he is able to choose among a range of work places to visit, and feels he is not spending company time driving to an office.

> As long as I have a phone and my laptop then I can pretty well work anywhere . . . But usually it's combined. I mean I'm going to have to

make that journey anyway. You know I'm going to go to a customer visit so I'm driving downtown so it's not like I'm going out of my way. I'm not driving downtown just to go to work. (network salesman 2)

An equipment saleswoman maintains strict boundaries between family and work life. During the school year, she requires her 12-year-old son to follow new behavioral and space rules at home. After school,

> my son walks in the door, he sees that I'm on the phone, he comes over, he waves to me, and he goes and does his homework or watches TV in a totally different area of the house . . . He acknowledges that he's home which is great, and then he continues on his way.

But when he is on vacation, she sends him to his grandparents so that he does not have to follow these work imposed rules all day long,

> This March break I sent him away to my mother's. That way I didn't have to worry about him being noisy when I was on the phone and stuff like that. So I'm very cognizant of not having that happening cause this is, after all, a workplace from 8 to 5. (equipment saleswoman 3)

A salesman felt guilty at having to enforce this redefinition.

> It may be cruel, but to get them out of your way until you're finished doing your work, you just send them outside with a snack to tide them over until dinner time, and they play with their friends (radio services salesman 1).

Boundary Issues: Labor and Home Time

Telling time

A poorly defined element of the telework contract, and perhaps its crucial feature, is labor time. The home-based sales worker is obligated to put in the same amount of clock time at work as before, a minimum 37.5 hour week. (This includes time channeled into several Scheduled Days Off ("SDOs") a year that they can take off without penalty.) It is assumed teleworkers will continue to work these hours, but how they do so is not specified. This is part of their new flexible time.

In a classic essay, E. P. Thompson (1967) distinguishes craftsman's from factory workers' time. The craftsman may put in long hours to complete a product, but then delay beginning another. Assembly line "factory time" instilled workers' conformity to fixed production schedules. Teleworking assumes that Fordism has done its job and that workers have an internal clock. Teleworking holds out the humanist premise that, like artisans, employees can gain control over their work time and schedule it in a flexible manner.

Nevertheless, the comparison with craftsmen is only half right. Sales workers do not work for themselves. They are both company and customer driven. First, they often work with others. They must respond when others need their input. Much work is face to face. Managers sometimes set joint client visits, or the sales team may visit a client together. This greatly limits their ability to decide on their own when to work.

Next, office workers are socialized to work company time, without having a supervisor in front of them. The "timing" of office time has themes. Employees can "stay late," "leave early," "work overtime." They also rely on certain props to trigger changes from one timeframe to the other. Some of these props were other people who arrived and left at set times. Other props were commuting trains and ride shares, knowing the "good times" to avoid commuter traffic jams, and quitting work to meet family obligations. In addition to adhering to an internal clock, and external rhythms, there are external sounds. Office workers may not listen to factory bells, but they are trained to jump when the phone rings, and calls stop at the end of the day. They hear elevator bells, and when these stop, it signifies the workday is over.

The initial transformation from an "at home" to an "at work" mentality creates problems when people first start teleworking, which Nippert-Eng (1996) refers to as the "transition ritual" to work. Since their home office is not specialized for work, they have to find new ways to define their time schedule. Hence, they frequently ask themselves: "When does work start?" A sales woman told us for the first few weeks as a teleworker, she dressed, walked out the door, and traversed the block, then re-entered her home in work mode.

Many mimic office hours to handle the ambiguity of sharing family and time with office time. One woman deals with family issues at lunch time or after work in the same manner as if she were in the office. Others do family work during office time, and then will make up by

doing office work during family time. This usually ends with increasing company time.

The crucial problem for teleworkers is when to stop (Goldman, 2000). This is as much an issue of their high quotas as of cues and frames. Mandated customer visits, and a sizeable quota of quarterly sales all push them to work hard. Completing one sale does not give them time off from the next. How much they have accomplished and when is a sale final is also ambiguous. Network sales people promote an ongoing service. Their database software cannot always distinguish whether the deal has been struck or is just being discussed. Further, a customer can terminate at any time. Hence managers, who must ensure that their group meets quotas, constantly worry that the teleworker is not putting time into winning a sale. Since managers cannot directly watch or control the worker's output, they develop their own methods to ascertain whether their employees are working (Tippin, 1994). Some hound the teleworkers to remind them of work undone.

While they may feel empowered by working "on their own time," work from home puts teleworkers at the mercy of the project. Disassociating themselves from work is the greatest problem. Teleworkers easily expand their work time to the point of self, and often family, exploitation. No one now compels the employees to start to work, neither will anyone stop them from working.

Nearly all are conscious that they labor longer hours. Many do so willingly. Some believe they owe the company this time, in exchange for reduced commutes to the office. They are grateful for the flexibility of being able to do family and personal affairs during the day. They speak of "splitting" the time they save from not having to commute with the company. By this they mean they divide the time they would have spent on commuting, and devote part of it to their family and then lengthen their working day without "charging" the company. An equipment saleswoman recounted she had deliberately to break her day to get some rest. Although she took breaks for only a few minutes, she returned the gift by giving hours to the company

> So it's becoming more aware of, how do I word this? You've got to become aware that maybe you need to walk away from it for five minutes and things like that. The only issue with teleworking is that you work far harder. You don't walk away from it at like 5:00 at night and go home. It's far easier to come back to it after the kids have gone to bed or whatever is appropriate cause it's all here. So I work far more hours now than I ever did before . . . They probably get eight, ten hours out of me more [a week]. (equipment saleswoman 4)

Many devised ways to solve the problem of overwork. Before tele-working, a network saleswoman anticipated not having enough space to telework. She initially put her office in her bedroom. When she found that she could not separate herself from her work mentally because she was always looking at it, she finished her basement and moved her office there. Recreating the office environment at her own expense was a costly physical way to resolve the temporal boundary issue.

Another reported that she answered the phone at all hours. She worked more hours simply because there was work to be done, and the office phone was in the house and more convenient to get to than if it was located some distance away in the company office.

> Because it's here. So now, like you know before, I may not have left the house until 7:30, quarter to 8 in the morning, [that's when] I'm starting work. [But now] I'm in here at like 7:00 in the morning if not earlier. Okay? If it was 5:00 before, I'd put my phone on call forward and walk out. Now it's like I'm talking as if I was in the office. A customer appointment is a different scenario. But now it's like I may be cooking dinner and I hear the phone ring. Instead of putting it on call forward. And I'll come and I'll answer the phone, and it may be you know, it's 5:30 at night and next thing you know it's 6:30 . . . Well at the beginning it was because the phone was here. I thought I had to answer it all the time. So it was my, that was the wrong thinking on my part, but that's the way I was. And it's because there's work to be done and it's very easy because it's sitting here to do it. Where before [in the office] it wasn't quite so convenient. (equipment saleswoman 5)

One equipment vendor gives equipment sales people prizes and honors if they sell more. These become badges of success. To get these, sales people may double the 37.5 required hours, and telework helps them do so. These folk pass their new-found time and place savings from telework to the work flow. An equipment saleswoman logged so many hours in the office that her husband, fearing for her safety in a darkened high rise office at night, encouraged her to telework. He built a narrow space in the laundry room for her computer equipment and files. She then could work such long hours that she collapsed on the rare family vacation.

Her colleague with a newborn had the same problem of how to protect important family time and keep up with the job simultane-ously. She hired two people – a nanny to care for her child in the day and a housekeeper to clean – and relied on her supportive husband.

Every night, the couple spends three hours with the infant and then the saleswoman returns to her office every evening after her infant goes to sleep. She reported:

> I had to work very hard to get my husband to buy into [telework]. I convinced him, but it was a struggle. Now it is not a struggle. He knows that it's best for [the baby] and me and because you know it's very important, our family life. (equipment saleswoman 6)

For this teleworker, working at home eased in longer hours, while still making it possible for her to maintain family time.

Others' spouses were disappointed in their expectation that they would give them, not the company, more time. A saleswoman's family thought that a working mom at home meant that she would have more time to cook nice dinners, that dinner would be ready at 5:30 and that she would have more time to spend with them.

> [My husband] thought that [teleworking] would mean more time for us when the kids weren't around, and I would take lunches [with him] and I could have more time together. But that didn't work out either. (equipment saleswoman 7)

Time pressures kept her on the road or at her desk, and away from a relaxing lunchtime with her spouse. Her reaction was to deny the family-friendly nature of telework: She sat them down and talked to them,

> I explained what was expected of me. My husband realizes that it's a changing environment out there in the job world, and everybody's trying to keep their job so you do whatever is required to keep your job, and he supports me in that respect.

Family time

Children have schedules of their own. Outside organizations structure many activities. The parent has to handle school, library, club, sports, and medical schedules. Then there is the children's own personal rhythm, their needs, their cares, that they turn to the at-home parent to meet (Hardwick and Salaff, 1998). The most crucial time is just after school when the children return home at 3:30. Another important time is the 5 to 7 dinner time slot. Many try to meet their family's schedules, while not losing any work time. Some use "office time" to be with their children and repay the company in "family

time." They may stop the project that they are working on at dinner time.

Trading time often extends their unpaid work for the firm. Grateful for this time they can spend with their children, they may return to work after. Unlike an office worker, who leaves the office for home for good at night, teleworkers can pick up where they left off. They thus face a dilemma. Even though they may have worked their daily allotment, they haven't finished their job. They know they can pick up the work. They thus easily work after dinner, whether feeling refreshed from their family break or guilty at having stopped "early."

A radio waves salesman reported, he made sure he repaid the company for this "right" to participate in family time during "working hours."

> If I'm home [when they return from school], I open the door for them and I sit with them for a little bit. I don't hide that. If I'm at a customer appointment they go to the neighbor's or they go to my mom's house. Again it's all part of working smartly. If I do stop work at 3:30, I don't think I'm cheating the company 'cause there's a lot of times where, for example, [I go out of the way for the company.] Monday night . . . the foreman [had to get these plans] in order to do the job right. I put them through the company mail. They had to go to Barrie. The job was due on Tuesday and the foreman didn't have the plans yet. So I got in my car at 7:30 at night and I delivered them to Newmarket on my own. Now I'm going to submit my mileage because it was my car on my time for company purposes, but still I went out of my way during my family time to go to Barrie. So it's give and take. (radio services salesman 1)

Telework has raised the ante. Now that the norm is working more hours from home, they fear their careers will suffer if they cannot increase their workload at home. A new mother lamented,

> When I go home at night I don't have the same opportunities as everybody else to be able to continue doing my job at home because I have a new job when I get home, taking care of the family and everything else. (network saleswoman 7)

She accepted the need to incorporate her family into her work, even as she bewailed her inability to do so (Mirchandani, 1999).

Family labor time for the company

It is not only that the family must stay out of their way while they work and they must juggle two schedules in the same locale. Family

members often treat the home as work place themselves, taking on company roles.

There is continual upkeep, not just for family use. The home office is also a company show case.

> The . . . thing that bothers me is once when I was at home, I quickly realized how much dust, and perhaps 'cause you don't see it during the day and on week ends you're busy, and my house isn't dirty, please don't misinterpret. But you realize [when you are working at home] that that wall's got a couple of marks on it because now you're seeing it in day light. So I ended up wall papering and painting a few rooms, 'cause I all of a sudden realized I wasn't happy with them 'cause I was here all the time. So I guess that was an impact of teleworking . . . [My husband and I did] it together. (equipment saleswoman 2)

New issues like business security permeate the home. One new family-wide obligation is enforcing company privacy:

> (*Q*. Do you have a lot of stuff to shred?) No, I burn it. My husband burns it. I have two fire places . . . I have a fire every week. And even in the summer . . . 'cause it has all my pricing in it you see. Yes, he cooperates, he's great. I'm very lucky. (equipment saleswoman 8)

No longer able to get a company technician to fix their computers, they involve knowledgeable family members. Another equipment saleswoman reported

> Actually my husband was quite helpful. If I got stuck on the computer or something like that . . . he knew (it) better than I did, so he was able to help me. (equipment saleswoman 7)

Productivity and managing work

Is telework more productive? Many teleworkers feel they produce more work at home. However, remote workers' feeling of more output are not easily documented.[8] Most teleworkers point to time savings.

8   It is difficult to study the productivity of remote workers, apart those that can be closely monitored (Dubrin, 1991). However, one comparative study of IBM marketing and service teleworkers and office workers found that the teleworkers believe they are more productive, but multivariate analyses do not confirm any difference in output (Hill, Miller, Weiner, and Colihan, 1998).

They usually refer to adding more hours to the work week. They also quickly note that being teleworkers means being better organized. They are forced to account for their time and motions; nothing can be taken for granted. They have to do this management work themselves, however, another part of their unpaid work.

> Well you know when you're working in the office you're surrounded by your files, all of your pamphlets, etc. On a way out to a customer you just grab whatever you need and away you go. Whereas now I have to think about what I need to make it through the entire day 'cause once I leave the home I'm not usually going to come back until later that evening so I have to have all the documentation. Whatever I can have electronically I do. So it's probably made me a little bit more productive. (consultant 1)

Others find specific areas where they feel empowered and thus more productive. As a salesperson insists, teleworking removes her from office politics, and thus makes her more productive.

> Actually I believe [telework is] better than being in the office because the relationship is totally different with a customer than it is with people in the office. Because sometimes the office can be quite political . . . And sometimes you find the office, especially with a lot of companies today, the morale can be low. And you can be easily brought into that. So I've always been the type of person that has avoided the lunch room and the break, and I always made sure who I sat with were up-beat people not people who were always complaining. So you know, that can be a down factor as well, being in the office so it depends. (equipment saleswoman 5)

Another equipment saleswoman complained that she gave more to the company, but was not paid for it:

> So I think you know I've helped the company out. They've been getting far more time out of us, okay? So I'm far more productive and I've just proven that in a normal week. (equipment saleswoman 1)

Communication with colleagues

A central issue for most was how to communicate with each other. They worried that they would not find out about issues colleagues are dealing with. They are concerned that now that their peers are dis-

persed, they cannot get support when they face a difficult problem, cannot rely on the help of a co-worker who may have had a similar situation in the past. They stressed the importance of learning from one another – a process which is not a formalized dimension of the sales process. While working in the office they go for coffee and hang around the water cooler or fax machine, socializing or talking about "non-work" topics. They attend meetings to discuss problems, celebrate awards, retirements, birthdays, join sales rallies.

Now, from their quiet home office, they look back at these informal water cooler chats as "non-productive." Mirchandani (1996) learned that teleworkers consider going to the office as "non-work," especially when their files and materials are at home. They may not see the ways some of these activities contribute to the job. Yet they do notice that teleworking breaks many of the informal social networks that people have built around the work process (Greve et al., 2002). Informal interaction is not institutionalized and they now take extra time to see these peers, to complete the work process.

> Normally if I'm going to meet with my peers I would meet with them after a customer meeting or something like that, and then I would go to lunch or something to share information that way.

Legitimating telework

Telecom's contract specifies teleworkers' rights and obligations on both sides. Past this, teleworkers incur unspecified costs in boundary work. Teleworkers have to manage their image of themselves as working at home instead of the office. They make actual capital expenditures, and put time into managing their office in the home. To "account for" and make sense of these expenses they think in terms of a balance sheet.

They start by an actual account of costs and savings, by which they become aware of some of the hidden costs of work. They posit a balance sheet: the company reduces its overhead through passing on costs of work to them and their families and, in exchange, teleworkers recover other expenses. Apart from driving time, there are other real costs, such as dress codes, parking, lunches, paying for premium time services. They note that working at home reduces some of these common, but usually unacknowledged, costs of work.

Tools of the trade

Getting new technology is a perk of telework. The new computers they were given and the integrated data bases are signs that telework will work. However, it took a year before the technology was in place, and throughout our study, the integrative data bases were ineffective. Nevertheless, the projected plans were enough to legitimate those with an engineering orientation.

Many are eager to uphold the company culture. Since teleworking is mandated, they define the project as ensuring a more competitive product, and job security for themselves. More, many are committed to being in the "modern" world of computer-based telecommunications. They see telework as pushing the company in that direction.

The most enthusiastic fully enjoy the "toys" they are given and are proud of the new equipment. They define themselves as well organized, modern sales people, who get ahead by using all the tools they can get their hands on. They look forward to the "paperless office" and hope to achieve it at home, fully embracing computer-based technologies. Teleworking is just another technique that gives them more of the computerized environment they enjoy. The embracing of technique is a cultural construction, frequently termed a masculine mystique. However, many saleswomen also hold the engineering perspective, proud of being in the forefront of change (Massey, 1996: 114).

A 32-year-old network salesman rattled off what he could do as a teleworker at home. Nevertheless, he and others downplayed the fact that the technology was not fully upgraded. He is taking his accounts and putting them into the data base, winnowing out one piece of paper after another:

> The [computerized data bases]: They need fine tuning, but are very good. You do it daily, [put] all information there. The senior [level] can go into it and get what they need to. Great, get rid of paper files, what you're viewing is there anytime you want. I inherited a bunch of files and looked at them and said 'this stuff is going into the garbage!' . . . [Other equipment]: I have just one business phone line, records 100 phone calls that come in, whether they leave a message or not. Name display, call waiting, call answer. It's a Meridian phone 9417. I can make phone calls from there. With [the spreadsheet] as my base, I can make cold calls, I can fax through the NSL, but if my fax is on no one can call in, but the Micro link solves that problem. So I pretty well can live with what I had if I had to. Res. line and business line. (network salesman 1)

A 40-year-old wireless radio-phone salesman looked forward to being equipped for the job with pride. At the time, however, he had only cast-off company equipment.

> (*Q*. So you've got a fax machine, two computers, printer what else?) I will be getting laser printers. That printer's very good though. I'll be getting CD ROM on our computers. I'll be getting some kind of a photocopier . . . I have two lines. I have my personal line plus I have a Telecom phone line. And in the near future, I'll be getting Micro link. It's a data line. It processes information much quicker. It's a faster line and they will provide that to us and with that Micro link I will be able to tap into the server at the office. And this will all be taking place, I would imagine, this year some time. (radio services salesman 1)

A saleswoman excused the inability to work at speed at home due to the slow implementation of technology, because the company made amends.

> At the beginning . . . I couldn't get on to the main frame and things like that . . . It wasn't until I got the new Pentium lap top that I could get on to the main frame. And that was a real inconvenience cause any time I wanted to get something off the main frame, I had to go into Toronto. So they created a real issue that way. However, they realized that and they got it corrected . . . They knew they had to with us teleworking. (equipment saleswoman 9)

Given the importance of technology, teleworkers do not stress that the company should "stay out" of their homes. Rather, so long as they are teleworking "at home," the company should truly enter the home. The company should make their equipment work better.

> I think one of my problems with this . . . is that it would have been nice to have, perhaps, a consultant come in for half a day or something cause I've got all this equipment and just to help us in terms of integrating everything together. Because I've heard there's some incompatibilities with some of the lap tops with the ISDN and also when I get Windows and NT I heard that it's not compatible with the Brother unit so these kind of issues I'm fearing because it would have been nice to have somebody come in and say, okay this is how this works and it works with this and so forth. And also to go through the ergonomics of the room as well.

Far from complaining that the company is now in her home, she is frustrated that the company is not doing enough in the house.

So when I plug in my computer I plug in my modem 28-8 to my fax machine, so I'm getting only 28-8 speed. Micro link allows for you to get 2×64 so 128. I'm not getting that because they gave us these boxes they don't even sell any more. An NT1 and a terminal adapter from Nortel that just allows us to have these two B channels they're called. So (a) I'm not getting the speed I should be getting; (b) if I'm on Lotus Notes or whatever and I'm hooked up to my LAN I can't receive a fax because it's busy and I can't send a fax. So I have to disconnect my LAN and then go and use my fax machine which is ridiculous. And also I have access to the Internet. The Internet is an extremely competitive tool. It is fantastic to get information to your own customers about your own company and so forth, and I know that I don't utilize it to its capacity because it is so damn slow at 28-8 it's ridiculous. So I have no incentive to go in there unless I have a project to work on. Pulling out that one paragraph per customer of mine that I did on my territory plan took me two hours to cut and paste it because the Internet is so slow. So I've been talking about this and trying to, and I talked about it in our territory plan meeting and said like just like can I buy the box cause you can buy a box for $500 that'll bond the two channels together and give you that speed. And I got good news saying that they're actually looking at buying these other modems that will be able to do a little bit more.

The formal administrative support was inadequate.

I think there should be a teleworker hot line too. [To deal with] technicalities, like equipment not working and so forth. I've got like six different help desk numbers for different applications. I call one and it's like no I'm supposed to call the other, and it's just, I really don't feel confident that everything that I have here is hooked up properly (network saleswoman 4).

They felt slighted that their manager did not pay attention to their new need to bridge office equipment with equipment that was not meant for the office.

I think that if I were a manager, whether they have time to do this is probably unrealistic, but I would have liked to have gone to each of my co-workers' houses. They were actually supposed to do this. And see how they're set up. Find out what, if there are any concerns, whether it's how things are connecting or what have you, you know? And then maybe taken that information back and say you know I need some consulting on this. Like I need some help with this. I remember last year we were given a grid, a floor grid, and we had to put down our addresses and so forth and a manager was supposed to sign it. They

> were supposed to come to our house and we were supposed to do a floor plan of our office. And that never was done. It wasn't even pushed. (network saleswoman 8)

For those that want to take full advantage of the teleworking arrangement, the available technology is not still enough. They want even more advanced technology to bring back the important "water cooler conversation":

> I would love to see something to bring back that team environment, the water cooler, that's the one thing they haven't replaced with the whole teleworking thing, it's the concept of the water cooler where you talk about your weekend, what happened at your last appointment and all those kind of things; . . . I think they should do it through an Internet site, which is set up for video conferencing . . . It's funny 'cause after our breakfast meetings, you know, you'll find that everyone kind of wants to hang around a little bit you know in the office and just chat about stuff. People are anxious to talk about stuff. (solutions specialist 1)

Sales workers do not want to avoid peer interaction. They want to manage it. Some felt better about teleworking as soon as people got used to communicating remotely. They even wanted their clients to be enmeshed in the newest techniques. At the time, the company did not push Internet communications with customers, yet some sales people pushed their managers to urge their best customers to connect to them through the Internet. They saw this as a means to commit the customers further. Free Internet service was to become a company bonus offered to the committed small business customer.

Others define the "essence" of sales as people work, not paper work. They express the view that they are "people" people. They felt that "whether you're working with support people or with peers, you have a better idea of what each person is doing if you have face-to-face contact." With the remote communications characteristic of home work, "you're just another phone call, another voice mail as opposed to up live and in person." Since they need face-to-face interaction to influence people and to establish strong working relationships to get things done, several think politically. These sales workers use the flexibility of teleworking arrangement to maximize face-to-face interaction with peers. Some spend less time working at home and more in hoteling facilities. There they figure out who they can work near and when. They try to maximize their contact with their supervisors.

Summary

As a humanist ideal embedded in the human relations office, giving up the central office and working at home for the company has caught on among the media and scholars. It was hoped that teleworkers could use their time and space in "new ways" and gain ownership of their time and space, a post-Fordist goal. However, the company held a neo-Fordist perspective, whose agenda was to to increase profits by decentralizing. In the process of meshing these two goals, the sales workers took on more of the costs of their employment, without concrete reimbursement. They assumed more of the burden of property and labor, spending more time at work and incorporating family labor into the work process.

In many ways employees have adopted the company perspective. They take the role of the company in this restructuring, and try to fit their family life to the new company demands and definitions of work. They adopt the slogan, "work smarter and faster." Few see costs as all one way, however. Most see telework as an exchange. The engineering-oriented employees and the more aggressive new hires extol telework as a sign that their company is now moving to the forefront of new technologies. They hope in this way that Telecom will best the competition. Those that competed to win perks also appreciated the ability to work harder. The people-oriented employees, and those who were more tenured feel that the telework does not benefit clients, and is not worth the costs.

Understanding that teleworking entails more issues than saving travel time, sociologists have begun to explore its deeper social structural impacts. The social implications of telework go beyond change of workplace. Looking at the factors of production, I noted how telework further deepens capital penetration in a sacrosanct area, the home as a private space. Through telework, this "last frontier" becomes a factor of production. Teleworking firms openly enter this hitherto unexplored domain to accumulate capital.

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