

ICT and the Emergence of Telework in the Caribbean

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INTRODUCTION



Purpose of this study

- To evaluate:
 - The extent of penetration of teleworking within the Caribbean and to explain the main factors that inhibit/promote its adoption in the region.
 - The extent of understanding teleworking among key stakeholders (employers, employees, and government).
 - Whether and to what extent Caribbean employers, governments and employees perceive teleworking as a viable alternative work practice and a mechanism for enhancing competitiveness.
 - Provide recommendations to Caribbean policy makers on how to create an environment in which telework can better contribute to regional competitiveness.



METHODOLOGY

- Documentary research
- Field work – in-depth interviews and focus groups with:
 - Government experts,
 - Technology elites,
 - Major telecoms providers,
 - Major technology users and
 - Non-governmental organisations.



OUTLINE

- In the next few minutes we will present an overview of the findings of the study and we will provide tentative answers to the following questions:
 - What drives telework in the Caribbean?
 - What factors are inhibiting the growth of telework in the Caribbean?
 - What policies flow from our findings?
 - What is the scope for further research?



OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS



Overview of Findings

- Telework is not on the agenda of major stakeholders (employers government and trade unions).
- Very little is known about it, and no legislation is contemplated to accommodate the changes that it might bring to the employment relationship.
- We found no employer with a formal policy on teleworking. But there are a few examples of workers who work remotely on a continuous basis – mostly from the offices of various clients.
- There are numerous examples of occasional teleworkers – who telework from home, these are either tech elites or high level knowledge workers.



Overview

- It is not possible to accurately assess the penetration of telework with the methodologies employed by this study. However it seems fair to characterize the penetration of telework as wide, but not deep.
- Telework has been practiced in the Caribbean from as far back as the early 1990s, as soon as internet technologies became available.
- It has been pioneered by tech-savvy individuals (primarily tech elites) located primarily in universities and technology provider firms
- Other sectors (government and the not-for-profit sector, including trade unions) have been very slow to catch up.



WHO DOES TELEWORK

An Illustrative
Model



Government/Regulators

- Tech environment
 - Low tech, low mobility, low internet access
 - Low to very low broadband access
 - Low security, highly restrictive remote access
 - High concentration of tech elites on “Technology side”, small corps of tech elites on the labour/HRM sides.
- Dominant culture – technophobia and resistance to change.
- Telework norms
 - selective/restrictive, little or none



Telecoms/ICT Providers

- Tech environment
 - Hi tech, high mobility, high access to broadband internet
 - High concentration of tech elites
 - High security, extended remote access.
- Dominant culture is “Technophilia” (gadget culture) – early adapters, strong change orientation.
- Telework norms
 - Comparatively high use of telework (more institutionalised, but characterised by low HRM intervention)



Major technology users

- Tech environment
 - Selective high tech
 - High pc per capita, selective mobility, selective internet (broadband) access, selective remote access.
 - A small exclusive corps of tech elites
- Dominant culture – tech-neutral being driven to change by tech elite
- Telework norms
 - Selective, non-institutionalised/ ad hoc telework, little or no HRM intervention.



Non-governmental organisations.

- Tech environment
 - Low tech (very low pc per capita)
 - Low mobility, Low internet (broadband) access
 - Low security, no remote access
 - No discernible tech elites
- Dominant culture – tech-naiveté
- Telework norms
 - Low to non-existent



Technology elite

- Unique feature – spread across all sectors of economy
- Environment
 - Uniformly high tech
 - Large numbers of personal computers per capita, high mobility, high internet (broadband) access, high security, high level of remote access.
- Dominant culture – “technophilia” /technocentric driving change
- Telework norms
 - Universal, non-institutionalised/ ad hoc telework, little or no HRM intervention.



DRIVERS OF TELEWORK



Technology Infrastructure

- Fairly sophisticated ICT technology exists in large commercial entities, in large government agencies and in universities.
- The majority of knowledge workers have access to computers, less access in government agencies and in NGOs.



ICT Policy

- All three countries are following similar programmes of liberalisation of the ICT market (building competition) – Jamaica seems to be the most advanced, followed by Barbados and T&T.
- There are a number of regional agencies connected to ICT policy, but there is little coordination and together they do not appear to have the power to craft a comprehensive ICT policy for the region.



CONSTRAINTS ON TELEWORK



Constraints on penetration

- Technology Policy
 - Still insufficient access to computers, broadband internet and mobile technology. Broadband internet access is not common in workplaces and less common at home.



Constraints on penetration

- Human Resource
 - Inadequate training and exposure to ICT
 - Culture
 - Resistance to change - “Legacy generation” of technophobic policy-makers who are in charge.
 - Norms of supervision
 - Employer concerns about security



POLICY IMPLICATIONS



Policy Recommendations

- Co-ordination between ministries responsible for technology and those responsible for labour policy (Ministry responsible for transport also needs to be linked to this initiative as does the ministries/agencies responsible for education and training in the field of ICT.)
- The need to coordinate ICT policy initiatives within one single centralised entity in contrast to the fragmentation that is evident currently.



Policy Recommendations

- The need to co-ordinate ICT policy across the region. It would seem fair to say that if the region were to develop a more integrated policy on ICTs, this would enhance the prospect of reduced telecommunications costs and universal access to the internet in respective countries. This in turn would make the prospect of transborder telework more feasible. The challenge is to identify one or more regional institutions that are capable of carrying out this role. Among the institutions that have been mooted are, the University of the West Indies, the Caribbean Development Bank and CARICOM.



Policy Recommendations

- Pay more attention to gender issues in the crafting of ICT policies in the respective countries and in the region
- Pay special attention to the possible impact of ICT on persons with disabilities.
- Develop national and regional policies on **telework**
- Amend or introduce labour legislation to take into account the rights of teleworkers.



Further Research

- Telework research is virgin territory
- There is need for quantitative data on how many teleworkers there are.
- We need to know who are the teleworkers and we need in-depth studies of the impact of teleworking on their lives
- More needs to be known about what motivates the adoption of telework.

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