

## **The new work processes. Psychoenvironmental management of the enterprise. Telework**

### ***Los nuevos procesos de trabajo. Gestión psicoambiental de la empresa. Teletrabajo***

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## **Introduction**

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Telework is in our times a revolutionary concept. Everybody is talking about the advantages and disadvantages of working on the rules of distance work. But, what is Telework? Since every source has its take on this question, the field seems unclear and demands for a clarifying work.

## **Method**

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One of the problems during the research was finding people that telework. Based on a qualitative method, on the Social Construction of Reality (Burr, 1997; Quivy and Van Campenhoudt, 1997) as a theoretical frame, and on Discourse Analysis, we set out to explore the concept and its characteristics. Through observation as a technique, environmental and organisational conditions at home are revealed (Vallès, 1997; Alonso, 1998). The methodology was applied to three discursive supplies, that of the teleworkers, the people interested in teleworking sharing distribution list on this subject, and the discourse made by the press.

This three perspectives are used as a triangular validation. The methodology is based also in a research model made for this occasion. We called it "Dynamic Generative Model". This model enables comparisons between the three perspectives of analysis through eight dimensions: Concept and general aspects; work activity, spatial aspects; telework at home and family; temporal aspects; communication with central office; legal aspects and work relationship; and psycho-social aspects.

The data for analysis was taken from 52 articles in current press and 7 interviews to persons considered experts with some kind of influence on the concept construction; 108 electronic mail messages from a distribution list on telework that gives the consumers vision; and 14 interviews to people who considered themselves as teleworkers. This group is formed by teachers, consultants, team co-ordinators on storyboards, translators, journalists and telework co-ordinators. We also made 12 observations in situ at the teleworker's working space.

## Results

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The results of the research bring a new view on the definition of telework in our context, providing information to control the psycho-environment-social aspects of working at home; it also reveals valuable information for contracting aspects, and opens the way for a new methodology on discourse analysis. We show the environmental aspects. Through the observation method, we concluded that: there is a lack of a proper space, a lot of domestic sounds or street sounds, lack of isolation when it is wanted, lack of organisation system of the physical information and other items related to the task, interference of other members of familiar unity, interference of the social context of proximity, no space dedicated to work (It is frequently shared with other persons), lack of symbolic space related to work and a lot of symbolic spaces related to intimacy or familiar roles.

The observations also provides a lot of items related to ergonomics. In general in all the cases we found a lack of interests in ergonomics when not ignorance about the risk that draw from the equipment.

Finally, we observed no consideration of risk at home (Where is the risk at home?). No one consider the eyes risk, the postural risks, the wrist risk, the continuous work risk or the danger of kitchen when the teleworker makes his/her coffee.

## Discussion

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The teleworker needs a community, structure and meaning, as Toffler (1980) asserts for people in the third wave era. That means we can consider the virtual community and the sense of engagement (Rheingold, 1994; Sennet, 2000) as contributive to these needs. Self-organisation of time provides a structure, while the social support by familiar and proximity context, together with economic, psychological and social compensation as vitamin theory, are all factors that give meaning to Telework (Warr, 1987).

This would also lead to consider the Individual, Organisational and Social environment in work context (Sundstrom, 1987; Net, 1991), to provide community, structure and meaning as well; the need of social interaction (Nelson, 1990) and project (Castells, 1998a), the design of place and time for interaction and the definition of group project; the need of a symbolic space (Pol and Valera, 1994; Pol, 1996b) and the need of environmental meaning (Pol, Valera and Vidal, 1999; Castells, 1997), provides meaning and emotional attachment to the place and work; the overcome of role conflict (Altman, 1975) at home; the overcharge of roles or the incompatibility of behaviour (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985) at home; differentiation between public and private space (Gutek, Repetti and Silver, 1998) at home in the sense of considering work as a public activity and the other activities at home as a private; the consideration of privacy (Altman, 1975; Pol, 1996b), personal space (Hall, 1966), concept of territoriality (Altman and Chemers, 1980; Valera and Vidal, 1998) or space appropriation (Pol, 1996b), that provides the discussions between the psychosocial environment needed to work at home and the interaction with others members of the facilities and other activities; ergonomics (Prieto, Zornoza and Peiró, 1997) to provide adequate working conditions; the need of socialisation at work (Peiró and Prieto, 1996)

and Psychological contract (Schein, 1988) that implies the design of contracts with enterprise or others teleworkers as we said before.

We must also consider the new deal on couple responsibilities or family roles assumed since the family crisis (Castells, 1997) and social webs provided by traditional methods or new technologies (Castells, 1998a).

Speaking about environmental items, we can see that the results and the general theory do not match. On one hand, telework is supposed to diminish the environmental impact of commuting. On the other hand, however, the teleworker needs to move in order to buy consumable items or even for searching social contacts. At the same time, the theory explains the advantages of telework in order to reduce the emissions and the consumption of energy of the enterprises. Yet, the use of home facilities implies an increase of energy consumption. Also the reutilization of computer components or detachable cartridges or even paper waste is easier in the enterprise than at home. Equally for sharing spaces and equipment. So is Telework friendly with the environment? We have serious doubts after the research. And to solve this question a new research should clarify the environmental pros and contras of telework. For that purpose, we would need a amount of data larger than what is now available in our general sources.

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