

Teleworking in Governmental Organizations, Infrastructures, Advantages and Disadvantages of Teleworking in Iran

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Abstract: Information and communication technology has had considerable effects on lifestyle such as work performance method. One of these effects is performance of some activities without geographical limitations and far from workplace (teleworking). In this work method, teleworking person performs task with help of network facilities in a place other than his workplace and using computer and transfers his work result to the desired place using information and communication technology. This work method has many advantages and disadvantages which can affect its execution and continuation in organizations.

Goal of this paper is to study infrastructures, advantages and disadvantages of teleworking in governmental organizations. For this purpose, analytical – descriptive method has been used. The obtained results indicate that teleworking have many advantages for teleworking people and organizations despite disadvantages and problems which this work method has such as the absence of teleworking skills, shortage of necessary experience among the personnel, resistance against change of organizational culture, the absence of supportive policies and attention of government to teleworking, the absence of suitable laws, no attention to information technology progress in the country and development of infrastructures, lack of proper security for exchange of work information and documents, the presence of conservative attitude and formal attitude toward work, shortage of information technology skills and concern with some social probable problems.

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1. Introduction

Work in future means what is regarded as value. The durable presence in competitive space and market requires provision of products and personal services to customers and acceptance of changes in workplace and society. It should be accepted that permanent employment is no longer meaningful in today's competitive environment and institutions and organizations should employ knowledge-based, efficient and effective labor force based on their needs by analyzing their surrounding business environment, extracting related needs and skills. On this basis, perhaps, some concepts such a fulltime work or single job of the people have no application as in the past and new types of work are created (Fathian and Jahani, 2011).

In addition, Information and communication technology have affected work and jobs by affecting different aspects of society. One of these effects is combination of the mentioned classifications based on time and place of work activities using information and communication technology infrastructures. In other words, the phenomenon which is called teleworking is a kind of network nature for work with which work is transferred from head offices to outside such as

home, car, airplane etc, even organizations and other countries without considering time and place limitations. Information and knowledge beyond organizational borders flow among specialists and experts through information and communication technology infrastructures. Personnel have perfect freedom and the maximum power to select their workplace. A person can select his office in his main workplace, home, car or hotel and perform work and exchange information without time and place limitations. Teleworking is an alternative method for fulfilling today's organizational needs. Teleworking was introduced as a work method for the future in late 70s and early 80s AD. Teleworking has been considerably promoted in industrial countries and the countries as pioneers of information and communication technology; however, it has not been widely applied in all countries in the world.

2. Problem Statement

Work as one of the most important social phenomena includes different dimensions and change in work method requires change in all of these dimensions. To realize teleworking, different researchers have studied different dimensions and aspects and most of them almost have studied necessity of change in personal, organizational and

technological attitudes and investigated their related factors and paid less attention to other aspects such as effect of cultural, social and economic factors. Issues relating to work and external relations of activities as well as internal relations of the people who form workgroups all are in sociological domain, however, work nature is very complex and varied and different technical, economic and social aspects are interrelated and interdependent (Tavasoli, 1996).

Teleworking is one of the modern methods for performing work which has different advantages in personal, organizational and social level and caused its advance and development in the global level. On the other hand, teleworking has some problems and disadvantages like any other work method which can include all three groups of teleworking people, executive organizations and society. Sometimes, these problems and disadvantages resulting from teleworking are so effective that they can stop this work method and prevent it from being executed (Tahavori, 2012).

2-1. Teleworking History

In 1950s, literature and writings of technology changes led to a new idea thereby combination of telecommunication with computational technology causes performance of work in a place other than traditional workplace (Ghanbari and Bakht Joo, 2011).

Since Jack M. Niels, father of teleworking presented idea of shortest circuit from home to workplace to save money and energy of transferring personnel to their workplace; many changes have been made in this work method. He believes that teleworking is replacement of work related travels with information technologies such as computer (Wicks, 2002).

Information and communication technology advances and reduction of costs of this technology

and advantages of this work method caused its development and growth in the world particularly America and European countries. Finland has the first rank among the member states of this union in teleworking. The number of companies which use teleworking force has been doubled between 2002 and 2007 (Ghanbari and Baskht Joo). But after 4 decades of design and execution of teleworking plan, this phenomenon is new in Iran which was born 2 years ago. This teleworking bylaw is being executed in some ministries and governmental organization (Tahavori, 2012).

Based on legal documentation of teleworking, a kind of teleworking has been referred in articles 36, 37 and 38 of civil service law and it has been emphasized that the employee is obliged to perform work for 44 hours per week and he can perform some of the work out of department. This behavior is legal and civil service law has permitted the employee to do some work out of department whether this environment is home or any other space. Goal of teleworking bylaw is to increase productivity. In other words, the goal of what has been designed has been to increase productivity, work flexibility and reduce transportation of the employees (Abedi, 2001).

3. advantages and disadvantages of teleworking

Review of literature on teleworking shows that this work method provides advantages for the included groups and can lead to some disadvantages and problems for these groups. These advantages and disadvantages have been classified in three personal, organizational and social groups leading to advantages and problems caused by teleworking for the people and organizations as well as society. Some of the most important advantages and disadvantages of teleworking have been mentioned in Table (1).

Table (1): advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, Source: Tahavori, 2012

	Advantages	Disadvantages and problems
1	Reducing transportation cost and time	Personal isolation
2	Balance between work and life	Reducing social communication and interactions
3	Reducing stress and mental pressures resulting from work	Concern with job progress and promotion
4	Less disorder in family life and improving life quality	Reducing job communication
5	Working hour flexibility	The absence of suitable facilities and technical infrastructures at place
6	Increasing job satisfaction	No separation between house and workplace
7	Independence and reducing dependence at work	Excessive fatigue due to working hard
8	Increasing job security	Shortage of suitable space at home for teleworking
9	Reducing probability of disease and using sick leave	Loss of competition sense
10	Improving increase of productivity	No trust and acceptance by the non- teleworking colleagues

4. Teleworking Jobs

It is not possible to perform any activity or task in teleworking system. The activities which can be performed by the person are suitable for teleworking. Teamwork which requires physical attendance of the people is not included in this plan. The jobs which are result-based, are not time-based and have no client and don't require continual attendance of the personnel at workplace are suitable for teleworking. In addition, some characteristics of the activities which are suitable for teleworking include:

- 1) Study and research jobs
- 2) Computer and IT jobs such as programming, web pages design, graphic design, animation, typing, translation, authorship, sale and marketing, consultation, accounting, edition, production of multimedia content etc.
- 3) Design and computation in engineering sciences
- 4) Distance education and teaching (through video conference, internet)

The jobs which are included in the fields such as clerical affairs, banking, management, supervision, support etc.

The jobs which are not suitable for teleworking:

- 1) The practical and executive jobs such as firefighting, police, laboratory work, dentistry, medical emergency
- 2) The affairs which require face to face communication with manager, customer or addressee
- 3) When continual and close supervision on work is necessary
- 4) When emergency events is likely to occur or cost of the event is high such as responsibility of atomic power plant, responsibility of machinery in mass production line
- 5) The activities in which continual and direct continuation of many employees is necessary
- 6) The affairs which are confidential and should be permanently controlled

Characteristics of teleworking people are summarized as follows;

- 1) Fully able, self sufficient and problem informed people can do teleworking.
- 2) The people who don't need responsibility frequently
- 3) The people who don't need frequent inquiry
- 4) The people who seldom refer to their department
- 5) The people who need less direct supervision

- 6) The independent people who don't need continual supervision
- 7) The people who don't need continual social interaction
- 8) The people who had excellent performance in workplace
- 9) Motivated and punctual people
- 10) The people who have bilateral communication based on trust with their managers
- 11) They completely understand their job requirements

The components of teleworking which should be studied, designed, developed and evaluated include five components: personnel, organizations and employers of government, information and communication infrastructure and social infrastructure. Each of the components is briefly studied.

Teleworking causes reduction of stresses and mental pressure caused by work by reducing transportation of personnel and improving their life quality and as a result, efficiency will increase. Although teleworking people work more than others, they perform their tasks better than ever due to time flexibility in work (James, 2004).

Through teleworking, people can save time at 1 to 3 PM during their working days. The time which was wasted in traffic and passenger car or public transportation and is saved through teleworking can be spent for taking care of children, the old and handling housework. One of the other advantages of teleworking for the workers is reduction of employment costs. Teleworking people spend less money for travel, dressing and eating (eating at home is less expensive than eating in restaurant) (Vega, 2003) but there are barriers which have made teleworking difficult in different countries and projects from the viewpoint of employees and researchers have mentioned different barriers which are as follows:

- 1) Reducing job security
- 2) Increasing some internal costs of house
- 3) Increasing some additional travels
- 4) Increasing working hours
- 5) Feeling of being forgotten and lost
- 6) Shortage of job skills and suitable working knowledge among the graduates
- 7) The absence of teleworking skills among managers
- 8) The absence of teamwork ability (Hotopp, 2002)

In discussion of the governmental organizations and employers, one of the important advantages of teleworking is increase of efficiency. Less transportation increases hours of attendance at home

leading to balance between work and housework which naturally will cause reduction of mental stress and finally increase of efficiency. Government also can cause to develop teleworking by enacting supportive laws and policies and developing information and communication technology in the country. Other advantages of teleworking include value added, solving problem of the employee's absence, reducing energy consumption and resources, improving employment system and maintaining personnel, reducing work space and overhead expenses but the available barriers are thought by the organization and government to include:

Mismanagement

- 1) Weak knowledge management
- 2) Need for additional equipment for performing teleworking operations
- 3) Reducing transfer of knowledge and experience from skilled and experienced employees to the new employees
- 4) Reducing mutual understanding of employees
- 5) Insufficient support of employees
- 6) Low investment rate in information technology
- 7) The presence of restrictive laws and regulations in development of information technology
- 8) The absence of supportive policies of teleworking implementation
- 9) Failure to notify the organizations for developing advanced electronic equipment and inability of teleworking people to have access to governmental services and information

Since employees should be permanently connected to the organization through data transmission tools, it is better to develop its infrastructure to remove communication barriers and problems. High expenses of telecommunication and instability, unreliability of distant lines and power supply and unbalanced distribution of services and influence of mass media are among the barriers of this type. Finally teleworking is one of the social phenomena and change of work performance method has different effects on community. Social phenomena are also effective on this change. The presence of conservative attitude toward creation and general change of work methods and social isolation and necessity of the teleworking people's preparation for confronting with it and unawareness with concept of teleworking and its types are of the barriers affecting implantation of teleworking in this field (Fathian and Jahani, 2011).

5. Conclusion

Rapid changes which started since 1960 led to changes in area of the organizations and directed them toward intelligent strategies such as realization of working processes based on telecommunication technology and without reliance on workplace which can be named teleworking. Application of this young phenomenon is a solution for optimal application of human capitals using communication and information technologies.

Teleworking is a phenomenon which is used in most advanced industrial countries as a solution for acquiring value added. It also has many advantages in different dimensions. But it has not been realized in our country. Recognition of the available barriers and problems and detection of solutions in this field can help us realize teleworking in the country. Increase of information literacy and growing use of serious electronic technologies will lead to increase of life quality. Considering emphasis of government on execution of teleworking plan and increase of the number of teleworking forces in governmental organizations, the organizations can utilize this action as an opportunity and change its goals and activities with reengineering and take step for realizing their goals. To achieve goals and benefits resulting from teleworking, they should provide necessary equipment and conditions.

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