Telework

Implications for Employment Relations in the Caribbean

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Outline

• About the research
• Research Questions
• Findings
  — Telework
  — Employment Relations
• TW and the future of employment relations
Purpose of paper

The paper focuses on two questions:

- How has the digital revolution transformed work and workplace relations in the Caribbean?
- What are the implications of these changes for the relevance of contemporary labour policy?
Conclusion

- ICT is expanding in the Caribbean.
- Telework is also expanding (at an undetermined pace) but in an *ad hoc* and unstructured way.
Conclusion

- Telework is driven by the availability of technology and by the preferences of the young technology elites and senior management for the convenience and ‘style’ of working remotely.
- Telework is rarely the main way of working for any worker.
Conclusion

• There is little evidence of formal recognition of this trend at the level of employer, the state or trade union.

• Teleworkers work largely at their own expense combining their teleworking with their normal activities – BB overtime.
Conclusion

- There is little in the norms of HRM or ER to encourage telework.
- Traditional work culture distrusts remote supervision.
- The ER system is inadequate to address the emergent needs of the teleworker.
- This is unlikely to change in the near future.
Definition

Telework (roughly synonymous with telecommuting) refers to work done at a distance from a centralised work-base through the medium of information and communications technologies (ICTs), primarily a computer and internet technology.
Definition

“Telework is a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employers premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.”

June 18, 2010

2002 framework agreement on telework between the EU-level social partners, which defines telework, retrieved http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2008/01/articles/gr0801029i.htm
Telework v Telecommuting

Telecommuting vs Working at Home

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.
RESEARCH DESIGN
Research Design

- Exploratory qualitative research
- Documentary research
- Field work – in-depth interviews and focus groups with respondents most likely to have encountered telework in three most advanced Caribbean islands
- Respondents were “tech elites” and “person primarily responsible for the HRM/ER functions” in:
  - Government regulatory authority (labour and technology),
  - Major telecoms providers,
  - Major technology users
  - Non-governmental organisations
FINDINGS

• On Technology and Work
• The Employment Relations System
On Technology and Work
## Organising Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gov/Regulators</th>
<th>ICT Providers</th>
<th>Tech Users (e.g Banks, UWI)</th>
<th>Trade Unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tech Environment</strong></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium - High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Culture</strong></td>
<td>Tech naiveté</td>
<td>Tech driven</td>
<td>Tech driven</td>
<td>Tech naiveté</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HRM/ER Norms</strong></td>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Unitarist/Union exclusion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telework Norms</strong></td>
<td>selective/restrictive, little or none</td>
<td>Relatively high use of telework</td>
<td>Selective, non-institutionalised / ad hoc telework, little or no HRM intervention.</td>
<td>Little or none.</td>
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Spread of telework

● There is no count of teleworkers and this exploratory study did not allow us to say how many.

● We observed
  — a pattern of teleworking dominated by technology elites and high ranking professionals among the most eligible organisations
  — That ER and HRM professionals were largely naive to technology but as senior staff were part of a general drift toward telework.
Technological awareness

ICT Professionals
• High access to technology
• High exposure
• Embrace technology
• ICT governance policy
• Routine and active engagement in telework

ER Professionals
• Medium to high access to technology
• Low exposure
• “Tech neutral”
• Indifferent to telework
• “Occasional” telework

The Actors - Trade Unions

- Trade unions are the slowest to adapt to the emerging work order:
  - No web sites
  - Low pc per capita
  - Limited access to mobile technology
  - Limited access to broadband
  - Traditional leadership
The Actors - Government

- Government . . .
  - has embraced the technology,
  - is pushing e-governance,
  - has effectively driven the policy agenda for liberalising ICT and
  - has a policy of promoting “universal access” but
  - ICT penetration is selective and shallow and
  - Faces resource constraint.
The Actors - Employers

- We looked at those most likely to embrace telework
- Technology is fully recognised and embraced as a key business imperative.
- Private employing organisations on or near the cutting edge especially in knowledge driven areas such as finance, telecommunications and the higher education sector.
Telework Policy

• 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.
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| Tech Environment | • Low tech,  
• Low pc per capita  
• Low “institutional access” to mobile technology  
• Low to very low access to broadband internet technology at work.  
• Low security, highly restrictive remote access  
• Small corps of high tech knowledge workers  
• Low tech awareness on the labour/HRM side. | • High tech,  
• Low pc per capita  
• High “institutional access” to mobile technology  
• High access to broadband internet technology at work.  
• High security, generalised remote access.  
• Large corps of high tech knowledge workers  
• Medium to high tech awareness on labour/HRM side | • High tech  
• High pc per capita,  
• Selective “institutional access”  
• Selective access to broadband internet technology at work.  
• High security, selective remote access.  
• Relatively large corps of hi tech knowledge workers  
• Medium to high tech awareness on labour/HRM side | • Low tech,  
• Low pc per capita  
• Low “institutional access” to mobile technology  
• Low to very low access to broadband internet technology at work.  
• Low security, highly restrictive remote access  
• Little or no hi tech knowledge workers  
• Little or no tech awareness |

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<th>Dominant Culture</th>
<th>Technophobia and low change orientation</th>
<th>“Technophilia” (gadget culture) – early adapters, strong change orientation.</th>
<th>“Tech-neutral” being driven to change by tech elite</th>
<th>Low tech, low change orientation</th>
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<td>Telework Norms</td>
<td>• selective/restrictive, little or none</td>
<td>• Comparatively high use of telework (more institutionalised, but characterised by low HRM intervention)</td>
<td>• Selective, non-institutionalised/ ad hoc telework, little or no HRM intervention.</td>
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<td>• Pluralist, union acceptance</td>
<td>• Unitarist, union exclusion</td>
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Technology Infrastructure

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

All countries led by Jamaica are following similar programmes of liberalisation of the ICT market (building competition and expanding access)
The Employment Relations System
The roots of the ER system

- Ex-colonial territory, policies informed by British *voluntary tradition* and latterly by North American more *legislatively* driven administrative framework.
Labour Law

Two broad categories of legislation all predicated on the assumption of a contract of employment with a single clearly defined employer

- Individual
  - Protective Legislation

- Collective
  - Auxiliary Legislation
  - Restrictive Legislation
Policy Framework

Law is complemented by a bifurcated institutional framework for the resolution of disputes.
The state of the unions

- Union density & coverage are low – particularly in the private sector
- Old style leadership
- Traditional craft and general union structures
- Fragmented
- Not attracting young people
- Technologically naïve.
The Employers

- Union resistance and exclusion strategies are rife
  - Fixed term contractors
  - HRM Policies
  - Union busting exercises
  - “Incorporating employees”
What unions would like

- If they ever awake to the new development unions will most likely want to map the rights of unionised workers onto the new way of working.
  - T-working should be voluntary rather than compulsory
  - T-workers are employees rather than self-employed or contract workers with all the implications
  - T-workers get same benefits especially health
  - Employers responsible for cost of home working.

Not going to happen. . .

Because . . .

- Neither unions, employers nor government have carefully considered the implications of the new work environment

- Unions do not have the resources nor the power to advance this process

- The state has limited motivation because of the limited political significance of telework.
Not going to happen. . .

Because . . .

- Young workers are not enamoured with trade unions
- Whereas unions may develop the motivation to create a regulatory framework for telework, they lack the collective power to do so.
- Telework itself undermines the collective basis for regulation in support of workers’ rights.