

# 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.

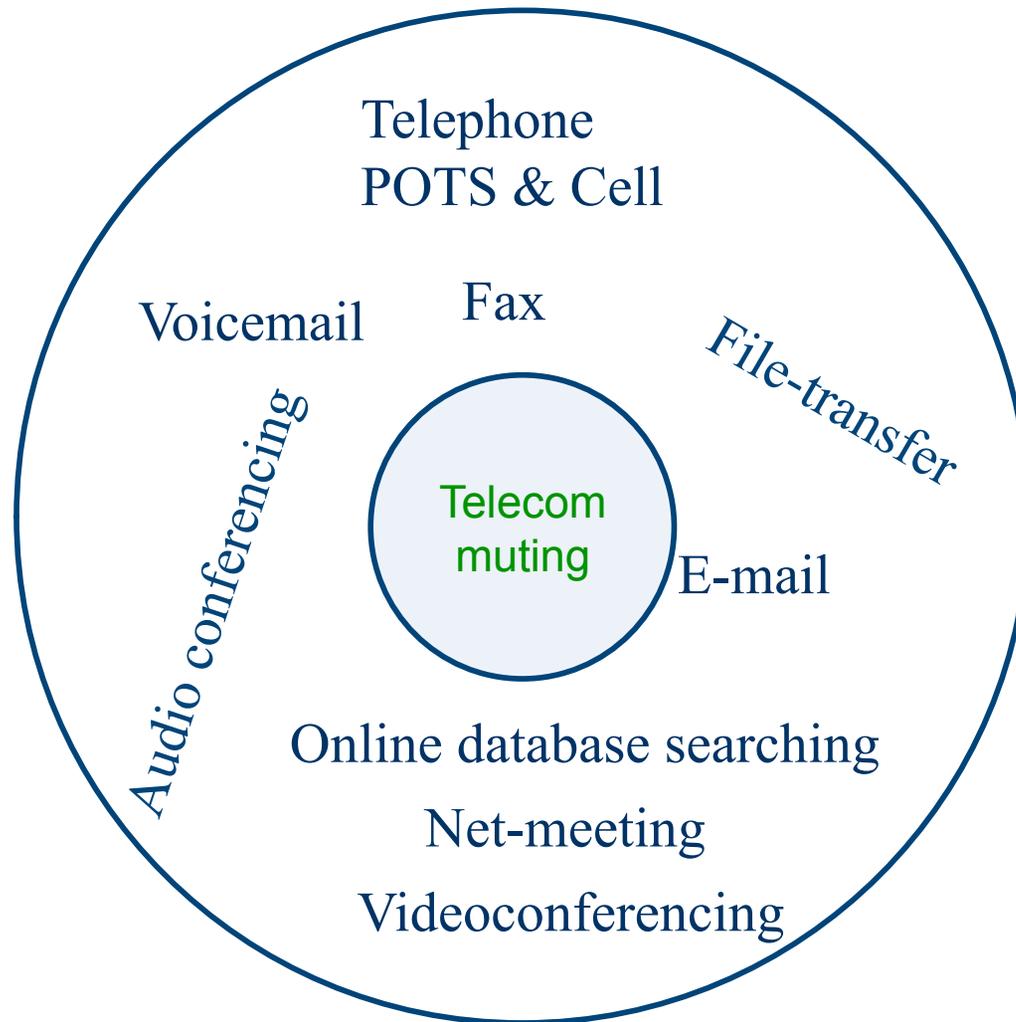


# Definition

- “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.”



# Telework v Telecommuting

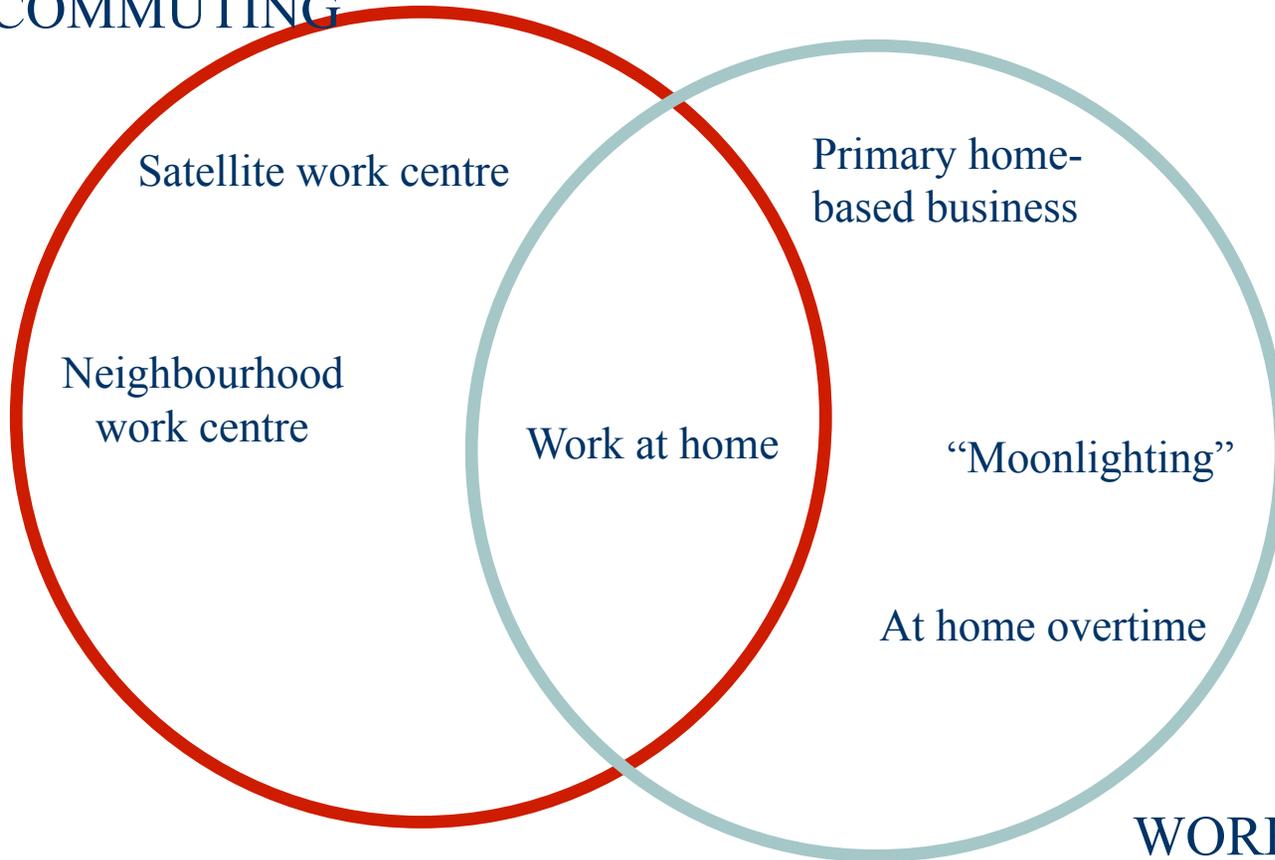


Source: Martin, Pamela (1992) *Telecommuting: The Rid of the Future* Legislative Reference Bureau, State of Hawaii



# Telecommuting v Working at Home

TELECOMMUTING



WORK AT HOME

Source: Adapted from Martin, Pamela (1992) *Telecommuting: The Rid of the Future* Legislative Reference Bureau, State of Hawaii



# 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

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



# 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

<http://news.myjoyonline.com/photos/news/Scale%20Imbalance.jpg>



# 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.

	Gov/Regulators	ICT Providers	Tech Users (e.g Banks, UWI)	Trade Unions
Tech Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low tech,</li> <li>• Low pc per capita</li> <li>• Low “institutional access” to mobile technology</li> <li>• Low to very low access to <b>broadband</b> internet technology at work.</li> <li>• Low security, highly restrictive remote access</li> <li>• Small corps of high tech knowledge workers</li> <li>• Low tech awareness on the labour/HRM side.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High tech,</li> <li>• Low pc per capita</li> <li>• High “institutional access” to mobile technology</li> <li>• High access to <b>broadband</b> internet technology at work.</li> <li>• High security, generalised remote access.</li> <li>• Large corps of high tech knowledge workers</li> <li>• Medium to high tech awareness on labour/HRM side</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High tech</li> <li>• High pc per capita,</li> <li>• Selective “institutional access”</li> <li>• Selective access to <b>broadband</b> internet technology at work</li> <li>• High security, selective remote access.</li> <li>• Relatively <b>large</b> corps of hi tech knowledge workers</li> <li>• Medium to high tech awareness on labour/HRM side</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low tech,</li> <li>• Low pc per capita</li> <li>• Low “institutional access” to mobile technology</li> <li>• Low to very low access to broadband internet technology at work.</li> <li>• Low security, <b>highly restrictive</b> remote access</li> <li>• Little or no hi tech knowledge workers</li> <li>• Little or no tech awareness</li> </ul>
Dominant Culture	<b>Technophobia</b> and low change orientation	• “ <b>Technophilia</b> ” (gadget culture) – early adapters, strong change orientation.	• “ <b>Tech-neutral</b> ” being driven to change by tech elite	<b>Low tech</b> , low change orientation
Telework Norms	• selective/restrictive, little or none	• Comparatively high use of telework (more institutionalised, but characterised by low HRM intervention)	• Selective, non-institutionalised/ ad hoc telework, little or no HRM intervention.	• Little or none.
HRM/ER Norms	• Pluralist, union acceptance	• Unitarist, union exclusion	• Unitarist, union exclusion	• Pluralist



# 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

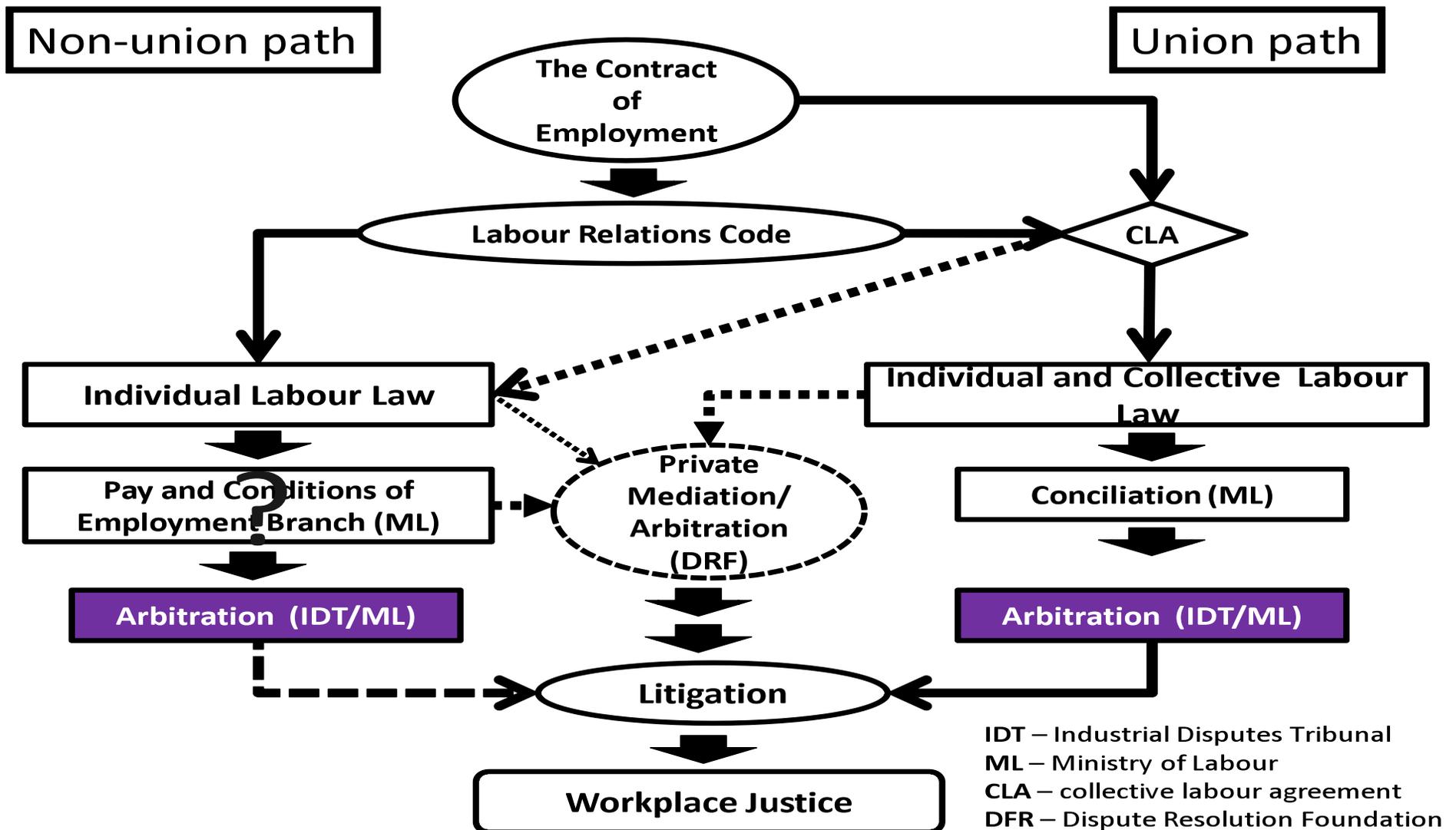


# Policy Framework

- Law is complemented by a bifurcated institutional framework for the resolution of disputes.



# Dispute Resolution Mechanism





# 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.