The telework adoption process in a Dutch and French subsidiary of the same ICT-multinational: *how national culture and management principles affect the success of telework programs*

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative case-study into the telework adoption processes in a French and Dutch subsidiary of the same ICT-multinational. Drawing on internal policy documents and semi-structured interview data collected from 10 line managers, the study examines the subsidiaries' telework policies, the line managers' evaluations of the telework practices and policies in their firms, and their views on conditions for dissemination of telework practices in their subsidiaries. In comparison with the Dutch culture, the French culture was assumed to be less conducive to the diminished level of face-to-face interaction typical of telework. In contrast to expectations, however, the presence of a formal telework policy in the French subsidiary suggested upper management to support telework. The absence of a formal telework program in the Dutch subsidiary was attributed to Dutch upper management's disapproval of telework due to telework abuse in the past. At the lower management levels, however, culturally defined attitudes dominated. Although formally successful, the French line managers were reluctant towards telework. In spite of the lack of support of upper management, the Dutch line managers, approved to telework as an underground activity. The study concludes that telework management is essential for any telework program to reach its full potential and to expand the availability of telework to larger groups of workers.

 Keywords: telecommuting, telework arrangements, telework acceptance, management attitudes, management principles.

1. Introduction

Due to the numerous academic and non-academic writings on teleworking and reviews on these (Kurland & Bailey, 1999; Baruch, 2001; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), public awareness of 'teleworking' as an innovative work mode and its reported advantages and disadvantages for society, organizations and employees has increased. In the telework literature, a distinction is made between 'mobile telework,' 'self-employed telework,' and 'home-based telework' (or 'telecommuting'). Mobile workers perform their work away from the regular work place, sometimes using online connections during business trips or in the field. Self-employed teleworkers operate from their own home offices. The home-based telework category comprises of employees which are working at home for all or part of their contractual working hours, ranging from full-time telehomeworkers to marginal or occasional telehomeworkers. Of course, the three telework categories overlap in part (Gareis, 2002). In the present study, we mainly focus on the latter and most common type of teleworking, i.e., home-based teleworking, which we define, in line with Gajendran *et al.*, 2007, as 'an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks at home (or in a satellite office) that are normally done in a primary or central work place, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside or outside the organization.' In the remainder of this paper, home-based telework will be referred to as telework.

Telework advocates have emphasized the potential benefits of teleworking as this type of distributed working can contribute to organizations' strategic goals, such as improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency on a long-term basis. Yet, despite the rising percentage of teleworkers among the working population, the demand for teleworking among employees still exceeds the access that is given to them by their employers (Gareis, 2002; Peters *et al.*, 2004). In search of explanations for the adoption and diffusion of teleworking in organizations, previous studies have emphasized the importance of 'fit' between organizations' characteristics and various telework attributes. In order to explain telework adoption in organizations, organizational fit factors, such as technology use (Pérez-Pérez *et al.*, 2005); occupation, task and employee characteristics (Huws *et al.*, 2001; Peters & van der Lippe, 2007; Olson, 1983), structural factors, such as formalization, centralization and specialization (Ruppel & Harrington, 1995), the competitive environment of organizations (Sia *et al.*, 2004) and the organization's corporate culture (Daniels *et al.*, 2001) are mentioned. In addition to these, national culture is presented as an important factor in the adoption of telework (Standen, 2000; Tregaskis, 2000; Peters & den Dulk, 2003). In fact, national culture is considered one of the factors that explain why European countries largely differ among each other as it comes to employer and employee interest in telework and actual telework adoption (*ibid.*; Gareis, 2002). Especially the different penetration rates between Northern and Southern European countries are striking (*ibid.*; Vendramin & Valenduc, 2000).

The role of national culture in the processes used by organizations to integrate telework arrangements into their daily routines has not often been researched. The present study wishes to contribute to the existing anthology of telework research literature by looking into the telework adoption process at company level which has not much been studied before. Moreover, studies into the influence of national culture on telework adoption are scarce (Baruch, 2001), but give valuable insights into the way telework is used in various national contexts, and how it can be used as an effective corporate strategy of multinationals in a globalizing economy. In order to fill

this gap, we conducted a comparative case-study on the 'telework adoption process' in two subsidiaries of the same ICT-multinational in two countries: France and the Netherlands. These are two countries which score differently on Hofstede's dimensions of national culture (Hofstede, 1991) and with regard to the uptake of teleworking (Gareis, 2002). The Netherlands is one of the leading countries in Europe in which 20.6% of the employed population work at home for a portion of their working hours (Gareis, 2002). With 4.4% of the working population working from home, France as a representative of Southern European countries is in the lower rankings. In the present study, telework adoption refers to both telework attitudes, i.e., positive or negative evaluations of telework attributes, and to telework management which refers to how telework has been implemented. The study aims to provide an empirical answer to the following research question: *How has the process of telework adoption developed in a French and Dutch subsidiary of the same ICT-multinational?* The research seeks to answer the following sub questions:

- What telework policies are adopted by the French and Dutch subsidiaries?
- How has the telework adoption process developed in the French subsidiary?
- How has the telework adoption process developed in the Dutch subsidiary?
- What do managers in the two subsidiaries expect with regard to the spread of telework in their firms?

In the next section, the theoretical framework is presented. Next, the research methodology is outlined. This is followed by the presentation of the empirical results. In the final section, the results are summarized and discussed.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The telework adoption process

The introduction and diffusion of an innovation in a firm can be described and analyzed by looking into the various states of the adoption process. Jenkins and Chapman (1998) distinguish four states. The four states are: 'the separated state,' 'the linked state,' 'the activated state' and 'the adopted state.' Building on Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory (1995) and the decision episode model of Newell *et al.* (1993), they identify mechanisms underlying transitions from one state to the next. Internal organizational factors affecting the adoption of an innovation may be the presence of people within the organization having knowledge about the innovation and who advocate the use of the innovation in the firm. However, internal pressures may also come from employees demanding the innovation. External organizational factors may be the presence of visible adopters who facilitate the awareness of the innovation (cf. Peters & Heusinkveld, forthcoming). The perception of the adoption advantage is important if the adopted state is to be robust. This adoption model has strong parallels with the model of planned behaviour as developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) focusing on attitudes, which in turn affect adoption intention and adoption behaviour. In case actors' belief-based attitudes are in favour of the innovation, adoption is much more likely. In the present study, we apply 'the adoption process model' to the adoption of telework by managers. In the first state, management or managers are simply not aware of telework as an innovative work mode. This lack of awareness, of course, affects telework adoption (cf. Illegems, 2001). In the second state, managers are aware of its existence, but are not using telework in their firms or departments, may be because a lack of motives or drives to adopt telework. That is, there may be no problem to which telework is considered a

solution to. In the third state, managers weigh costs and benefits on the basis of their perceptions of telework, and shape their telework attitudes. Only when the adoption advantage suffices, telework is being adopted. In line with the definition of telework adoption presented in the Introduction, the 'adopted state' can be characterized by two variables. On the one hand, managers declare in some form that they believe that telework is an appropriate and attractive work mode to be used in their organization or department. Commitment to telework may be reflected in upper management having implemented a formal telework policy. At the lower management levels, telework is adopted when managers hold positive attitudes towards telework which also leads to actual adoption behavior, for instance, granting an individual worker's telework request. The latter may demonstrate true acceptance of telework as an institutionalized work mode in their departments. Hence, at the shop floor level, acceptance refers to the use of telework. Of course, we should be aware that telework can be used in a formal or informal way and that organizations' formal telework programs may differ with regard to their scope, objectives and goals, policies and procedures, telework technology infrastructures, training programs, and assessment procedures (cf. Nilles, 1998). To maintain success and competitive advantage in the longer run, the telework program should be subject to a company-wide process of focused and continuous incremental innovation, which is also referred to as 'continual adjustment' or 'continuous improvement' (cf. Newell *et al.*, 1993; cf. Chapman & Sloan, 1999). At the individual level, managers may have various interpretations and value-based evaluations of the benefits and costs of the telework policy and practices in their organizations (cf. Milliken *et al.*, 1998), depending on their own backgrounds, objectives and individual preferences (cf. Duxbury & Haines, 1991; Jackson & van der Wielen, 1998; Kaufman, 1999; Bardoel, 2003). Also across organizational levels, managers' attitudes may vary (Suomi & Pekkola, 1999; Boiral, 2003), just like subcultures within one country, within one organization, and even within one business unit can vary (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). These variations should also be taken into account when studying the telework adoption process.

2.2 Cross-cultural variations in managers' attitudes

Studies examining reasons why adoption and diffusion of telework have been slow found interest among (line) managers to be low (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Generally speaking, managers may not be convinced of the appropriateness of telework in their firms, and, therefore, hold reluctant attitudes (Huws *et al.*, 1990). Those who have considered the adoption of telework may use management problems as the main argument against its implementation (Nilles, 1998). Peters and Den Dulk (2003) argue that managerial reluctance towards telework may be reinforced by two related factors (Peters & den Dulk, 2003). On the one hand, telework often results in a loss of concurrent control and not all managers are willing to deal with the associated uncertainty (Baruch, 2001). On the other hand, allowing employees to telework requires managers to delegate power and to give subordinates more job autonomy which some managers are also not willing to do (*ibid.*). Since these two factors correspond with two of Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of national culture, namely, 'uncertainty avoidance' and 'power distance,' managers' willingness to adopt telework is likely to depend on the national context in which they operate. National culture, which can be seen as a product of socialization (Hofstede, 1991), even has a bigger impact on how people think and act than their organizational or professional cultures (Trompenaars, 1993). Therefore, managerial reluctance towards telework can be expected to be reinforced by cultural factors (cf. Peters & den Dulk, 2003;

Raghuram *et al*., 2001), which may influence whether and how telework is being adopted in various contexts. Based on Hofstede's theory (1991), the Dutch culture is expected to be more conducive to the diminished level of face-to-face interaction typical of telework than the French culture.

3. Research Method

3.1 A comparative case study

In this paper, we used a comparative case-study research design to explore the role of national culture in the telework adoption processes in two subsidiaries of the same multinational. The case study design allowed an intensive and detailed examination of the telework adoption process in its natural context, such that the interactions between relevant factors remain intact (cf. Yin, 1994). We used a so called 'most different' case-study design, comparing two cases of the same phenomenon in different contexts (George & Bennet, 2004). We selected subsidiaries of the same multinational in the Netherlands and France which neutralizes for the role of sector and company. Since we expected that basic beliefs and values, and hence, telework attitudes of management and managers are influenced by national cultures, the main focus in the present study was on cross-national differences and similarities in the telework adoption processes in the two cases which we related to variations in national cultures (Hofstede, 2001).

3.2 Interviewees

The two case-studies were based on ten semi-structured interviews with line managers within the French and Dutch subsidiaries, combined with content analysis of internal policy documents. We chose to select line managers, since these are in the position to grant employees' telework requests (Peters & den Dulk, 2003). Moreover, by having a pivotal role between higher management and employees, we expect them to have some influence on the use and management of telework arrangements in their departments. We obtained entrance to the organizations through a formal letter to contact persons of the French and Dutch establishments. The chair of the works council of the Dutch establishment helped us to find five Dutch interviewees. The HR-manager in the French department recruited two interviewees for the study. In addition to these, we used three semi-structured interviews with French managers on telework and technology which were conducted in the context of another study in 2006. The seven interviews we conducted ourselves took place in the period November 2006 - May 2007. The face-to-face interviews were carried out in the interviewees' mother tongue, which was French or Dutch, respectively. The interviews were taped and transcribed. To facilitate discussion about the data amongst the researchers, the French transcripts were translated into Dutch.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The semi-structured interview data collected from line managers were structured around a topic list including themes which particularly helped us to analyze the state of telework adoption and the telework adoption process by inquiring after: the drives for and content of the establishment's formal telework policy; the formal and informal telework practices in the line manager's department; the line manager's attitudes towards telework; the line manager's evaluations of telework; and the line manager's future expectations with regard to a successful spread of telework practices in the

subsidiary. Although semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method to get insight in opinions, attitudes and intentions of interviewees, they are less suitable for identifying real behavior. To increase the validity of our empirical analysis, we also studied internal telework policy documents. These provided additional information on the formal telework policy, the organization's telework goals, telework selection criteria, and the content and the procedures of the telework arrangement. The internal telework documents were provided by our contact persons in both subsidiaries. With regard to the Dutch establishment, we examined the Directive on Telework of August 2002 and the regulation on telework of August 2006. With regard to the French establishment, we examined a 2005-policy document. We used the software program Kwalitan to support coding and interpreting the interviews and documents (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To increase the inter-subjectivity of our interpretations, all data were coded and analyzed by all three authors. In the following section, the analyses of the internal policy documents and the interview data are presented. The sub questions introduced in the Introduction and the analytical concepts presented in the theoretical section will guide our analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Telework programs in the French and Dutch establishments

In 2003, the French establishment implemented a formal telework pilot, initially allowing a selection of 50 employees to work from home on a voluntary basis. According to the pilot's formal policy documentation, only managers ('*les cadres*'), mainly working in the field of engineering, marketing or administration, are given access to formal teleworking for two days per week at the most. Formal teleworkers are to sign a telework contract. In order to prevent them from becoming socially isolated, they are allowed to telework no more than two days. Teleworkers are equipped with a laptop providing them long-distance access to documents and information, based on a Virtual Private Network (VPN), RAS and WiFi. Recently, some of them are also equipped with a BlackBerry, depending on the tasks and their position in the organization. Before managers can formally request access to formal telework they have to fill out an 'auto diagnostic' questionnaire to test whether the tasks they perform and their personal characteristics are 'teleworkable,' in their own view, and in the view of the company. According to the policy documents, the basic principle of telework in the French establishment is 'trust' between a manager and a subordinate. This trust, in turn, is grounded in performance management and regular face-to-face meetings.

In contrast to the French case, the Dutch establishment had no formal telework policy at the time the field work was conducted (2006/2007). The interviews with line managers revealed that higher management was even strongly against telework, although informal practices seemed to be turned 'a blind eye to.' The policy documents, however, show that the Dutch establishment used to have a formal telework policy which was introduced in 2000, but was reversed in 2002. The formal policy was targeted both at managers and subordinates who held positions which allow a lot of job autonomy. According to the former telework policy, teleworkers had to sign a formal telework contract for a year period in which the agreements and mutual responsibilities of the contract partners were written down. It included agreements on compensation with regard to travel and telephone expenses, technological and home-office facilities, and rules regarding the presence of staff in

the department and accessibility of employees. Like in the French case, line managers were in the position to grant individual workers' telework requests or not, the maximum number of teleworking days being two. Both the manager and the employee could decide to end the telework contract, although no exact criteria for discontinuation were presented.

Our findings with regard to the presence of a formal telework policy in the French and Dutch subsidiaries are in contrast with our expectations. In order to understand this unexpected outcome, the next subsections focus on the drives for the adoption of the formal telework policies in the two cases. In order to get more insight into the telework adoption processes, we will also look into the line managers' telework attitudes and their telework management. Finally, the interviewees' views on conditions for a successful diffusion of teleworking in their subsidiaries draw our attention to the design of the telework programs.

4.2 Telework adoption in the French case

4.2.1. Drives for a formal telework program

The introduction of the French telework pilot was grounded in the firm's marketing strategy and was focused on the visibility of the company as a global market leader in ADSL, one of the technologies underlying the global spread of telework. In agreement with social partners, higher management wanted to materialize the credo of *"practice what you preach,"* the French teleworkers themselves becoming ambassadors of the ICT products of the firm. Meanwhile, international cooperation with firms in Europe, Asia and the US made telework in the establishment a necessity, as employees' work activities were increasingly hindered by variations in geographical time zones of business partners. Telework offered an answer to the problems associated with the firm's global market activities. *"It [telework] is not an advantage, but rather a result of professional needs,"* one of the French interviewees proclaims. In 2005, due to a large scale re-location program expanding commuting times of 2,000 employees, the HR-department stimulated a further adoption of telework in the French subsidiary. In order to compensate for the extra commuting time and to increase organizational commitment, the firm decided to offer the formal telework arrangement to approximately 600 additional employees. This more socially grounded argument in favor of telework was also supported by the need of the organization to be in line with societal developments.

According to the French interviewees, however, general awareness of telework as an alternative work mode in France is low, and telework is not widely adopted. Although the geographical spread of team work may have kindled more and more interest in telework among French workers, telework is still not an issue. Despite this, however, the employees in the French subsidiary are used to work from home informally, but this is definitely not considered a substitute for regular office work. Informal telework rather serves as a mode to work overtime.

4.2.2 French line managers' telework attitudes and telework management

In contrast to our expectations, some of the French line managers articulate positive aspects of telework. They especially emphasize the rise in productivity, flexibility and cost reduction associated with telework. Moreover, they view telework as an instrument to improve their firm's image. *"People start to talk about telework as an important factor in their job decision process,"* one of the interviewees says. However, other French managers express negative expectations, particularly with

respect to coordination and control issues. One manager articulates: *"When a person has been working at home during the week and only comes to the office sporadically, it becomes problematic to judge the contribution of this employee."* Hence, this French line manager views presence in the working place as a necessary condition for controlling performance. Another disadvantage mentioned by the interviewees is that teleworkers may lack contact with colleagues:

> *"In our company, especially in France, networks of people are extremely important in order to know what is going on, to be informed about vacancies, all these ways to gather information, that is all very informal and that happens in canteens when people sit together and have their coffees, people working from home loose this type of contact."*

It is interesting to see that this interviewee states that the emphasis on internal networks is typical for the French culture. He also underlines that the need to be physically present in the workplace is typical for the company. Implicitly, he is aware that this might be different in other firms. According to another interviewee, telework hinders the creation of team spirit: *"How can that be done when everyone is teleworking, when nobody meets."* Hence, the French managers present employees' physical presence in the central office as important, both for individual employees and for the team. The managers' emphasis on control appears to be related to them being anxious for the spread of confidential information. From a technological perspective, the managers are afraid that telework can cause data security problems: *"People are not alert, they use their equipment for personal and work related matters and sometimes, they forget that there are data on the mobile telephone, or the laptop that should not be distributed."* The interviews show that, although some of the French managers put forward telework advantages, disadvantages are much more stressed which reveals their reluctant attitudes towards telework in their departments.

The interviewees also tell that a considerable part of telework in the French subsidiary is still performed informally. Since every employee in the French establishment is equipped with a laptop, and has remote access, the interviewees have no clue how often distance working is put into practice, especially as most telework is performed unnoticed on top of employees' normal working hours.

> *"For example, I am able to log on to the system outside the office; I am able to work at home. This takes place in the evening or on Saturdays. This is not organized work, but something you do on top of it. But not in a formal way, no. It exists, but outside regular working hours."*

The dominance of informal telework in the French case may be attributed to the way telework requests are dealt with. The interviews reveal that, in order to be eligible for the formal telework arrangement, telework candidates have to convince their managers that there is a serious need to work from home, for instance when commuting times are extremely long, or when work needs to be performed at a-typical hours due to international cooperation with colleagues abroad. Only when the manager is convinced of the need to telework on a structural basis, potential teleworkers can start up the formal telework procedure which was referred to earlier. The French interviewees emphasize that it is much easier to arrange for informal telework.

4.3 Telework adoption in the Dutch case

4.3.1 Drives for a formal telework program in the Dutch case
The Dutch formal telework policy was introduced in 2000 as a response to strong company growth. At that time, the internet hype and the tight labor market pressured the Dutch subsidiary to allow employees teleworking. *"It [telework] was not to be avoided as it was demanded by the market."* The most important explanation for the formalization of the telework practice, however, was the strong company growth, and, as a consequence, office space scarcity. One of the interviewees reveals that, at that time, mobile workers in the Dutch subsidiary having business contacts outside the organization were even forced to work at home for one day per week or more. Some of them were even hardly present in the main office. In 2002, after the economic downturn in the Dutch economy, the Dutch formal telework arrangement was discontinued. Due to the establishment's underperformance personnel was cut down dramatically and all employees could be accommodated in the office again. The new situation took away the most important incentive for telework. One of the Dutch line managers articulates:

> *"At present, things are going okay. There is no pain, no real need. Nowadays, office space is available. There is even plenty of room. So people are very much welcome to work in the central office."*

Note that in this quote telework is associated with 'pain' rather than 'gain.' However, an even more important rationale for the discontinuity of the formal telework policy than the 'office-space argument' appears to be the loss of social cohesion in the firm and the abuse of the telework policy by some teleworkers:

> *"[It has been discontinued] because some people abused the telework arrangement. And they [higher management] have chosen the easiest way, i.e., removing the arrangement all together rather than pointing that out to the people concerned or taking disciplinary measures against the ones who made abuse of it. One of the examples [of the abuse] is that an employee had to go to a customer, but could not go since he combined telework with child care. He said: I can not go since there is no one to look after the children. This is just one of the examples that caused the telework policy to be discontinued."*

According to this interviewee, at the time the formal telework policy was operational, many teleworkers used to have only little contact with the company and it even happened that employees refused to come to the office when this was demanded by the manager, often because of private affairs. Obviously, telework ran out of control and its unintended side-effects had severe impacts on the business. After the discontinuation of the formal policy, it took this line manager about a year time to re-discipline his subordinates and to improve employees' morale and organizational commitment.

4.3.2 Dutch line managers' telework attitudes and telework management
The anecdotes presented above clearly relate to some of the arguments against telework which are raised by the Dutch line managers, such as the loss of commitment and social cohesion at work: *"Someone who is always teleworking, at home, will loose the connection with the company."* Other arguments against telework that are mentioned in the Dutch case are accessibility problems. Also with regard to team work managers consider telework a hindrance: *"It is important that employees remain*

part of the company, of the culture, experience the team spirit." Also the loss of information is mentioned as one of the negative side effects of telework. The Dutch interviewees express that it may get harder to exchange work experiences and to communicate informally.

Notwithstanding the negative attitude of upper management and the articulated potential dangers of dispersed working, it is striking that the Dutch line managers hold very positive attitudes towards telework. If fact, all line managers are convinced that telework leads to a rise in productivity. *"The advantage is that you are able to be very productive."* An additional positive evaluation of telework concerns the better quality of employees' work and private lives. The interviewees also mention cost reductions, time benefits and environmental gains. Moreover, the Dutch line managers consider teleworking employees to be more creative than their non-teleworking peers.

At present, the only remains of the previous formal telework policy are the internet connections, allowing all employees in the Dutch subsidiary to have remote access to the organizational network. However, as a consequence of the supportive attitudes of line managers, informal telework is flourishing, and is a more than common part of workers' daily work practices. Strikingly, despite the severe consequences of the improper organization of the formal telework program, the Dutch line managers clearly express that they strongly dislike a "rigid" formal telework policy and that they do not want to be "bothered" by complicated allowance procedures. In their views, a strict telework policy is "not going to work" in their company, especially since the type of work activities do not allow fixed telework days. Instead, line managers rather give their subordinates *ad hoc* permission to telework. A telephone call or an e-mail of the employee to inform the line manager suffices to arrange for this. It is clear that most of the managers are pretty relaxed and trust that their employees perform their tasks correctly.

> *"The atmosphere in the Dutch establishment is quite self-supporting. A boss who is telling you on Monday what you should have performed on Friday is out of the question."*

However, given the history of the Dutch formal telework program, one of the line managers says that he is alert, and that an employee's access to telework will be denied as soon as he notices that the telework arrangement is being abused in the subordinate's personal interest. In this regard, it is interesting to hear his evaluation of the current situation:

> *"As long as they [employees] do not say anything and management does not know, they will not turn against it [informal telework]. But there is no formal policy which I do not like."*

In fact, in 2006, the establishment's works council proposed to re-establish a formal telework framework in order to open up equal opportunities for all employees. The main argument for this is that a formal telework policy reduces employees' dependency on the "goodwill" of their line managers, and also prevents telework practices to run out of managers' control.

Like in the French establishment, telework helps both Dutch managers and subordinates to meet deadlines, which often runs parallel with working overtime. In contrast to the French establishment, however, telework is strongly supported by line managers, and the Dutch employees are used to full home working days, particularly when they indicate that they prefer to work from home as they do not want to be

disturbed by their colleagues. Much in line with the argument against a formal telework request procedure, however, some interviewees indicate that the 'harried' type of work does not allow strict home-based telework days as employees need to be on call all the time.

4.4 Conditions for successful spread of telework in the two establishments

The interviews concluded by inquiring after the conditions under which the interviewees would expect telework to spread successfully in their establishments. In answer to this, French line managers emphasize the resistance towards telework among line managers which hinders the uptake of structural telework. In line with this, they stress the need for new management styles. New management and communication skills would especially help to manage international virtual teams which also demands intercultural sensitivity from managers. According to the French interviewees, this is currently lacking. In the view of the French interviewees, the organization should better support managers to adjust to the new developments. In this context, almost all French line managers underline the need for education and training programs which should be offered by the local HR-department. This education should also be focused on how to use the new telework technologies.

> *"Now that telework has become more common in the organization, all managers will get access. Hence, in my view, internal communication is needed at the level of management and the HR-department. Thus, education is needed. I really think this is an issue that should be dealt with by the HR-department at the local level."*

One of the restricting conditions for a successful spread of telework in the French subsidiary is the organizational culture which is being described as rather hierarchical, emphasizing the need for employees to be physically present in the central office. Moreover, the relationship between managers and subordinates is described by the interviewees as "paternalistic." In the French line managers' views, managers are not really willing to change this. Paradoxically, interviewees characterize the organization as "high technology," but managers and employees are considered "afraid of technology."

Also in the Dutch case, the line managers mention a more adequate ICT-environment, including ICT-infrastructure and ICT-support, to be an essential condition for a successful spread of telework in their organization. Also the support of higher management is frequently mentioned to hinder the spread of telework. The current attitude of higher management is said to be unsupportive, focused on control, and characterized by distrust. According to the line managers, higher management considers telework a cost rather than a benefit. In the opinion of the line managers, the higher management's vision and management style should change in order to stimulate telework practices within the organization. This should be accompanied by a shift towards output management. The majority of the Dutch line managers state that management should develop a clear telework policy in which goals, rights and obligations should be communicated. This policy, however, should not be used in a dogmatic way. Strikingly, according to the Dutch line managers, the current culture and organizational structure at the shop floor level already fit the preferred context for a further growth of telework. Employees are much empowered and employees are target oriented. Currently, *the presence of workers is no measure for productivity.*

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this comparative case study, we looked into the telework adoption process in two subsidiaries of the same ICT-multinational. The premise of the present study was that managers' telework attitudes, intentions and behaviors are influenced by national culture (Hofstede, 1991) which may hinder or support the adoption and spread of telework in organizations. As telework runs parallel with more autonomy for employees and a loss of managerial control (Gajendran *et al.*, 2007), Dutch culture was assumed to be more conducive than French culture to the telework practice (Peters & den Dulk, 2003). The results of the study, however, presented a mixed picture. They are briefly summarized and discussed below.

In the French case, telework was supported by a formal telework policy, but its scope was limited: only a selection of mid-level and senior managers and, increasingly, professionals were given access to the formal telework program. Looking into the primary drives for the formal telework policy, the French telework program can mainly be seen as a symbolic statement (Lewis, 1999). The telework policy was used to show to the organizational field that the company was using the new technologies. The practice itself, however, was not really supported by adequate telework management. Especially due to the strict request procedure for formal telework and French line managers' paternalistic attitudes, telework remained an unnoticeable practice and was definitely not viewed as a new way of working replacing regular office work. Although French line managers' mentality had started to shift, telework was still confined by the rigidities of French culture and was preliminary used as a way to enable international cooperation.

The Dutch telework program was more broadly applied at first, primarily due to labor market pressures and a lack of office space. After some business downturns and a significant reduction of personnel, the formal policy was discontinued. Particularly the loss of social cohesion and the lack of organizational commitment caused upper management to hold negative attitudes towards telework. However, informal telework practices persisted which was strongly supported by the Dutch line managers' positive attitudes and flexible management styles. Strikingly, despite the firm's telework history, the line managers were clearly willing to trust their subordinates, which is much in line with Dutch national culture.

Remarkably, in neither case there seemed to be a formal, holistic plan and set of policies for program development, including the necessary technological and training components. Such plan would have signaled support of upper management which the line managers considered an essential condition for a further growth of telework practices (cf. Jenkins & Chapman, 1998). In line with this, line managers in the Dutch case called for a clear definition of the business objectives and goals of teleworking in the Dutch subsidiary (cf. Nilles, 1998). A formal telework framework may prevent telework from running out of control again, at the same time stimulating equal telework opportunities across or within worker categories. A reduction of managerial discretion might be arrived at by developing clear participant selection criteria (*ibid.*). It is clear from the Dutch case that a culture of 'laissez faire' should be prevented, and that success criteria should be formulated. Moreover, policies and procedures that will govern the telework program should be developed and periodically evaluated, including duties and obligations of all participants. Although the formal documents informed us on the initial drives for telework in the two establishments and the rules with regard to its implementation, the interviews showed that the subsidiaries lacked to formulate such success criteria, and to evaluate the

developments of the programs periodically. Especially in the Dutch case, such evaluations might have allowed the organization to identify problems in time. In the French case, such assessments may reveal the cultural bottlenecks at the shop floor level and may lead to adequate adjustments in work rules, procedures, and training. Especially training received little attention in both cases. The need for it was particularly expressed in the French case. Training would help French line managers to develop the new management styles and communication skills necessary to manage virtual, and often international, project teams. Moreover, in neither case, the ICT-infrastructure and ICT-support were geared at structural teleworking. In order to create conditions for successful telework, however, line managers and employees should be offered an adequate ICT-infrastructure, including security provisions, and tools and skills to use telework in a successful way.

Although our study showed the telework adoption processes to vary across the two national contexts, some general observations can be made. First, the in-depth analysis of the telework adoption process in the Dutch subsidiary showed that the telework process was not unilinear and, second, both in the French and Dutch subsidiary, the development of telework adoption differed across the upper and lower management levels. Obviously, the telework adoption process can stagnate or can even be reversed at the one level, but can flourish at the other, and vice versa. Particularly at the shop floor level, culturally defined attitudes dominated. In the Dutch case, informal and *ad hoc* teleworking was supported by the line managers, especially when it directly contributed to the employees' job performances. In a similar vein, the French case showed that the presence of a formal telework policy in the organization does not garantuee indivual line managers to hold favorable telework attitudes. Such discrepancies underline that practices are often decoupled from organizations' policies (cf. Boiral, 2003). Third, this study illustrated how management principles affect the telework adoption process. Taking into account the necessary steps in the telework implementation process (Chapman & Sloan, 1999; Nilles, 1998), is likely to increase the long-term success and effectiveness of multinationals' corporate telework programs in a globalizing economy and will expand the availability of telework to a larger group of workers.

As globalization and technological developments will lead to a growing demand for telework practices in all kinds of cultural settings, the present study shows that telework management becomes increasingly important. By presenting how two telework programs were implemented in two subsidiaries of the same ICT-multinational operating under the same institutional pressures, but in different cultural contexts, we feel that our study contributes to the academic telework literature in which there is ample documentation for insisting on completion of management preliminaries for any successful telework program. Although national culture definitely plays a role with regard to how telework is adopted, both at upper and lower managerial levels, this study shows the importance of telework management, regardless of its cultural context. It also shows that telework regulations as written down in policy documents do not suffice when practices are not periodically evaluated. The results of our study also imply that the design, implementation and evaluation of the telework program should be a concern for stakeholders at all organizational levels, including upper management, HR-management, ICT-management, individual line managers, co-workers and employees. In view of the outcomes of the study, organizations should be viewed as 'learning communities,' experiences in the past obviously influencing attitudes, intentions and future behaviors. Moreover, the responses of the line managers in both cases illustrated that

they should be involved in the change process, just like other stakeholders, as their participation is essential for a successful telework implementation (Limburg, 2002).

In conclusion, the implementation of successful telework pilots and programs which reach their full potential may not only stimulate rollout plans in the internal organization. The use of telework policies may also lead to more positive evaluations of telework among managers in the same organizational field (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). Especially CEOs may be vulnerable to these mimetic pressures (Peters & Heusinkveld, forthcoming) and may be stimulated to take on the champion role in their own organizations. Future research may focus on the telework attitudes held by upper management and their motives for the implementation of telework programs.

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