Managing telework: risks, fears and rules

Pasi Pyöriä
Department of Social Research, University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to serve as a reminder that all work arrangements, including the present case of distributed work, have their costs and benefits.

Design/methodology/approach – In addition to a literature review, the paper presents concrete recommendations and guidelines for practicing managers about how to avoid pitfalls in distributed work arrangements and how to manage teleworkers.

Findings – The diffusion of telework has been a slower process than anticipated, among other reasons because the most vital businesses are largely concentrated in the biggest growth centres. Growth centres can offer a diverse range of both jobs and amenities that outweigh the quiet and safety of rural areas. Apart from geographical realities and regional policy issues, another factor that has decisively contributed to the slow diffusion of telework is the absence of an established contractual framework and “culture” of teleworking.

Originality/value – Telework has the best prospects of success if from the outset all the people involved know what to expect and are prepared to deal with any problems and fears associated with the new work culture. It is also important that distributed work arrangements are designed in compliance with national labour legislation. To avoid potential risks, a part-time telework arrangement is advisable for most organizations.

Keywords Information society, Finland, Teleworking, Costs

Paper type General review

Introduction

It is increasingly difficult in the information society to define and demarcate working hours and places of work, to draw precisely the boundaries of national labour markets, and to draw distinctions between commodity and service production. Purely, virtual organizations still remain rare, but many larger businesses employ virtual teams to some degree (Hertel et al., 2005; Hinds and Kiesler, 2002). Available research also suggests that mobile telework and other forms of distributed collaboration are on the increase (Andriessen and Vartiainen, 2006).

Efforts to oppose climate change will probably accelerate this trend towards flexible distributed organizations (WWF, 2009). Therefore, the possible advantages of distributed work arrangements are worth considering, not only because recent developments in ICTs hold promise for enabling more flexible, cost-effective and eco-friendly ways of working, but also for the reason that individual telework has once again surfaced as an important topic in labour market policy.

As is well known, the idea of telework or telecommuting (an American equivalent of teleworking) is far from novel. Since the dawn of history, people have searched for means...
to overcome spatial and temporal barriers (King and Frost, 2002; O’Leary et al., 2002). Recently, ICTs continue the long-since established tradition of communicating over distance, albeit having raised the speed and volume of information flows to a level unimaginable just a mere generation ago. By modern definition, distributed work arrangements encompass many different alternatives to working at the traditional office, including satellite and neighbourhood work centres, flexible work arrangements, generic offices (or hotelling), and telework (Bélanger and Collins, 1998, p. 137).

The interest in working free from the constraints of time and space is not difficult to explain in the world of dystopian prophecies of the future of work. As Ursula Huws (1991, p. 20) wrote already two decades ago, the image that it conjures up is indeed a powerful one:

To the plate-glass and steel city centre skyscraper it counterposes a rural cottage; to the bustling, humming life of crowded office, it counterposes domestic tranquillity; to the daily bodily crush on a rush-hour commuter train, it counterposes a disembodied, abstract, almost ethereal form of communication which leaves the senses intact and unassaulted.

The idea of an empowered teleworker has become a highly charged symbol, in some instances a clear myth, incorporating an overtly optimistic vision of the almost limitless possibilities that ICTs have to offer.

If we take a closer retrospective look at “traditional” individual telework, it is quite clear that this, one of the most vividly discussed forms of distributed work, has failed to live up to its initial promises. In the most “advanced” countries like Finland, for example, official statistics indicate that 8 per cent of the active labour force in 2008 did some form of telework, the definition being paid work done outside the regular workplace under an employment contract (Lehto and Sutela, 2009). In the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics, the corresponding figure for 2005 also was 8 per cent (Ruiz and Walling, 2005). Whilst there are some discrepancies between these studies, the statistics do show that telework has increased, but the reality remains far removed from the early forecasts in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Huws, 1991).

Yet, this is not to say that individual telework, the main focus of this paper, is a futile innovation that has no future. In the following, it is argued that a part-time telework arrangement may boost individual and organizational productivity without jeopardizing crucial relations with peers, or resulting in feelings of social exclusion. Furthermore, it is argued that other forms of distributed work such as virtual co-operation across countries or organizing work across time zones may provide competitive edge for global businesses.

Throughout the analysis, several examples are drawn from the case of Finland. Finland is a technologically highly advanced and networked country, perhaps pointing the way to the future. Indeed, Finland has been rated among the world’s leading information societies – a social and cultural “laboratory” for the design, production and implementation of ICTs (Benner, 2003; Castells and Himanen, 2002). The Finns have always been eager to adopt new technologies and innovations, which may explain the fact that various forms of distributed work arrangements are more common in Finland than in most other European countries (Gareis et al., 2006).

The tone of this article is critical, but it is not intended here either to dispute the benefits of distributed work or to uncritically defend traditional work arrangements. The motive of the analysis is simply to assess the costs and benefits of this evolving form of organizing work (Morgan, 2004; Pyörä, 2003; Taskin and Edwards, 2007).
Moreover, the article emphasizes the importance of labour legislation in designing a formal telework contract, an often neglected aspect in the research literature as well as in practice. Thus, the focus of the paper is on individual telework (done under an employment contract) and the managerial implications of its implementation. Informal telework practices are beyond the current analysis.

Distributed work, globalization and the environment

The concept of telework (or, more precisely, telecommuting) was born during the oil crisis in the early 1970s when American Jack Nilles and colleagues published their calculations on the savings to the national economy that should result from reduced commuting (Nilles et al., 1976). At the time it was still believed that the growing problems of congestion in major cities could be resolved by creating telework centres and by encouraging people to work from home. Unfortunately, this vision soon proved unrealistic. Even with all the talk of climate change and the heightened environmental awareness since the turn of the millennium, faith in the ability of telework to replace traditional work arrangements has still not been restored.

It is quite simply not possible to understand telework in isolation from the wider context of work organizations and society at large. For instance, in order to sell the idea of telework to business companies, it is not enough to use the argument of sustainable development: environmental considerations should be linked up with one or more of the possible benefits of telework (Heinonen et al., 2001; Helminen and Ristimäki, 2007). Although major corporations today claim to take seriously their social responsibility for environmental protection, this is hardly going to be enough to persuade them to make the switch to telework. More realistically, the ideal of sustainable development will need to be coupled with goals that are of immediate importance to the organization, such as well-being at work or improving the flexibility and productivity of work (Butler et al., 2007; Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2007).

Nowadays, telework is understood as one specific type of flexible or distributed work. Besides, the general transformation of work culture towards a greater emphasis on efficiency and productivity, another factor behind the current trend towards distributed work is the closely related process of economic globalization and the consequent demand for more flexible ways of organizing work (Castells, 1996; Jackson, 1999). With the continuing advance of global economic integration and offshoring, i.e. transferring organizational functions to another country, businesses’ decisions on where to locate will largely be determined by considerations of labour costs and customer needs.

However, globalization is not just about a drain of jobs to cheaper labour countries. Collaboration and networking across national boundaries has become at least as important a source of business competitiveness as lowered production costs. Indeed, based on their studies of internationally networked business firms, Matti Vartiainen and colleagues argue that successfully distributed organizations are one important way of meeting the challenge of stiffening global economic competition (Vartiainen et al., 2007; Andriessen and Vartiainen, 2006). Their argument is based on the important observation that it is not only people who move in distributed work, but also the objects on which they work, i.e. products or services.

A good example of how virtual workplaces allow people to work on the same project at the same time in different places, but also consecutively and complementarily across different time zones, is provided by software development (Carmel, 1999). Even if the
programming team are sited in different locations and have few opportunities to meet each other around the same table, they can still pool their resources to develop immaterial products such as software. Indeed, many major Western companies are now subcontracting programming out to India and other countries where competent staff are available at a fraction of the cost compared to advanced economies (Sahay et al., 2003).

For example, the Finnish software company Comptel, who supply invoicing systems and other software solutions for teleoperators, have successfully teamed-up with a subcontractor partner in India (Autere and Korhonen, 2003). Although they are a listed company and therefore under constant pressure to deliver strong quarterly results, Comptel are not planning to outsource all their jobs to cheaper labour markets. Instead, outsourced services are mainly used in projects destined to the Asian marketplace.

The organization of work across time zones may also have benefits for concrete work processes and customer service (Kamel, 2003; Granered, 2004). For example, an increasing number of companies provide helpdesk services around the clock, especially in the ICT industry. Companies such as Microsoft and Oracle have service offices in a number of loci spanning the world. Their presence in different time zones makes possible to provide around the clock support whenever customers need help.

However, the geographical distribution of work is much easier said than done. In particular, communication across cultural boundaries often causes unpredictable difficulties. Indeed, Vartiainen et al. (2007) make the point that the more distributed the organization, the harder it is to coordinate its work. A virtual project cannot be kickstarted from nothing: it is always a good idea to start a project with a face-to-face meeting, to agree in advance on the rules of communication and to create a feedback system that respects and benefits all parties in equal measures, Vartiainen and colleagues stress. Although there are encouraging examples of successfully distributed organizations, it is unlikely that distributed work will ever completely replace traditional work arrangements.

Problems of distributed work
Regionally distributed work involves many similar problems as traditional telework from home. The diffusion of telework has been a slower process than anticipated, among other reasons because the most vital enterprises – such as R&D-oriented manufacturing and knowledge-intensive business services – are largely concentrated in the biggest growth centres (Cooke, 2002). The reason for this is simple enough: growth centres can offer a diverse range of both jobs and amenities that easily outweigh the quiet and safety of rural areas (Florida, 2005).

Knowledge workers or professionals, in particular, have a tendency to concentrate in and around major economic hubs (Cooke, 2002) and to commit “physically” to their organizations (Södergren, 2002). The World Bank (2009) projections indicate that the trend of global economic concentration is set to continue, and we simply have to learn to live with that. Already about half of total world output comes from an area that covers just 5 per cent of the world’s total surface area. A good example is provided by Greater Tokyo: although the metropolitan area covers no more than 4 per cent of Japan’s land area, one in four of the country’s population of 127 million are squeezed into that area.

The importance of agreeing on a framework for telework
Apart from geographical realities and regional policy issues, another factor that has decisively contributed to the slow diffusion of telework is the absence of an established
contractual framework and “culture” of teleworking. For this reason, telework has remained a marginal and to some extent even an elitist phenomenon; the province of managers and professionals enjoying a high level of autonomy (Clear and Dickson, 2005; Pyörä, 2003).

European trade unions have, however, had long-standing discussions on how to create a common set of rules for the development of telework. An important step forward was taken in July 2002 when a framework agreement on telework was signed at EU level; and, consequently, in the following years the agreement took effect in several European countries. The implementation of the framework agreement is entrusted to central union and employer organizations (European Commission, 2006). In countries where trade unions traditionally have a prominent role in labour market regulation, it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of a broadly based commitment and involvement.

Even in the case of minor organizational reforms, such as the introduction of teamwork or new working hours arrangements, success depends crucially on the involvement from the very outset of wage earners’ representatives and on the proper recognition of their interests. For instance, the burden of costs from telework arrangements must not be placed on wage earners. Questions of occupational safety must also be given due attention (Huuhhtanen, 1996; Rantanen and Lehtinen, 2000).

In the case of knowledge work, high ergonomic standards and adherence to working hours legislation are paramount to successful telework arrangements. The growth of knowledge work has thrown up a whole range of new physical problems, such as neck and shoulder pain and the mouse arm syndrome. Overtime as well as time and performance pressures are also the rule rather than the exception in knowledge work (Pyörä et al., 2005). Indeed, in the information society stress and fatigue are more widespread problems today than physical occupational hazards.

In order that these problems can be contained it is essential that telework arrangements are carefully planned. It is crucial that agreements are in place that define the rights and duties of both employees and employers. For instance, telework must not be used as an excuse to get employees to do unpaid overtime. Likewise, teleworkers cannot be expected to be on call 24 hours a day. Ideally, the volume of work should be adjusted from the outset so that overtime will not be necessary, otherwise problems are bound to arise. Working hours legislation does not lend itself easily to working from home or other situations where it is unreasonable to expect that the employer should make arrangements to monitor working hours.

It is not necessarily difficult to set up a successful telework arrangement, but it does require a keen awareness of labour legislation as well as key areas of occupational health and social interaction in the workplace community. Distributed work has the best prospects of success if from the outset all the people involved know what to expect and are prepared to deal with any problems and fears associated with the new work culture.

Most important of all, employees and employers must agree upon the rules of telework in writing, making sure that these are in compliance with national labour legislation (Helle, 2006). A universal principle well worth following is that teleworkers should have the same status and enjoy the same working conditions as other employees in equivalent jobs. In keeping with this principle, teleworkers must always be ascribed to a personnel group based on their position and job tasks: teleworking is a way of arranging work, not a type of employment relationship.
Telework does not suit everyone

The biggest risk and at once the greatest potential benefit of telework derives from the individual employees having the opportunity to decide when and where to work: it might help to dispel the lack of appreciation shown for productivity outside regular working hours. In the best case, telework allows employees to decide their own work rhythm. In the worst case, it may turn into a prison from which there is no escape, even in sleep.

Another point that is often overlooked is that telework does not fit all life situations. Some families have small children who are at home all day, for some people the workplace is like home. Others feel duty-bound to turn up at work each and every day. In some cases, telework may be a family-friendly arrangement, even though it is not an answer to the problems of reconciling work and family, at least in the sense that it would substitute day care (Devine et al., 1997). The first requirement for a successful telework arrangement is effective time use management and an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect between employee and employer. These are key problems that have been raised in the research literature and that still remain unresolved (Nilles, 1998).

However, there is one problem that stands above all others: social relations in the workplace (including customer contacts) are considered more important than the flexibility afforded by telework. People who are physically separated from the workplace community are more than likely to be excluded from social relations, unless there is a conscious effort to organize regular meetings and informal get-togethers. Separation and alienation from the workplace community may also be considered a threat to career advancement. For these reasons, it is important that from the earliest planning stages, special attention is given to creating a systematic feedback system.

Indeed, the key is to tailor telework arrangements to individual needs. Telework must always be the individual's own choice, and there must always be the opportunity to go back. If the only motive for telework is to cut costs or if the employee and management have not agreed on the terms and conditions of the arrangement in advance, it is bound to remain a short-lived experiment.

The problem of traditional management culture

Another point that deserves attention in a discussion of the reasons for the slow diffusion of telework is the role of traditional management culture. Fads and fashions in business management may come and go, but there is one thing that is always constant: the reluctance of managers to relinquish their power. The attitudes of management are the major cause of resistance to change (Nilles, 1998; Suomi and Pekkola, 1999).

In particular, full-time telework and more traditional mobile work require that management focus not so much on controlling how and how long employees work and what they do, but on their performance and output. Performance-based pay schemes are indeed now gaining ground in modern work organizations, but it is still an alien idea that management controls could be scaled down. From the point of view of power distribution in workplace communities, the wide-scale application of telework might perhaps knock the bottom out of the old and familiar system of hierarchic management. Many middle management jobs in particular might consequently be made altogether redundant. At the same time, management would be called upon to show greater trust in employees. This is an equation for which there is no simple solution, and it would be futile to try and offer one here.
Some organizations offer telework as a reward for people in the highest positions and deliberately exclude certain other groups. Telework may also be limited to, say, the three middle days of the week, to keep any feelings of jealousy among other workers at bay. If people were away from work on Mondays and Fridays, that would no doubt be regarded simply as an excuse to arrange extra-long weekends. However, experience has shown that any such feelings usually dissipate when people learn about the positive experiences and efficiency of telework and teleworkers (Lahtinen, 2002).

Telework and teamwork

Another point that warrants comment here is the intense growth of teamworking, which by definition is at variance with the idea of telework. The distribution of teams is the more problematic the more continuous and more intense the contacts required by teamwork (Hislop, 2002; Nandhakumar and Baskerville, 2006). From the individual employee’s point of view, it is easier to exchange ideas and to ask for help with complex problems if one works under the same roof with others. Furthermore, physically close interaction engenders commitment to work and creates a sense of collectivity that extends beyond the actual team organization. It is largely for this reason that purely virtual organizations are rare.

On the other hand, genuine teamwork in which individuals join together for a common goal is likely to foster the sense of trust that is needed in telework. Based on an examination of representative statistical dataset from Finland, Reima Suomi and his team concluded that small and flexible teamwork organizations provide the most fertile soil for the proliferation of telework since the team culture may help to dispel the fears of social isolation that are often associated with telework (Suomi et al., 1998; Sivunen, 2006). On the other hand, it is a familiar comment from many interview studies that teamwork is most effective when all members of the team are within shouting distance (Pyöriä, 2003).

It is easy to see both sides of the argument. The advance towards the information society is placing conflicting demands on individuals, who are expected not only to master new information and communication technologies, but also to develop and improve their skills of social interaction. In other words, contemporary working life requires, at one and the same time, both strong independence and the ability to do teamwork. For this reason, part-time telework may well be the best compromise between the two extremes outlined above, and in all probability it is best suited to the needs of most organizations.

Data security

Security of data is yet another problem that an organization needs to assess before saying yes to telework. In this respect, the most important thing to remember is that data protection is a much wider issue than just a technological one. For those trying to protect data security, the working practices of teleworkers may provide the hardest challenge. Unfortunately, people remain the weakest link in the security of any business.

Access control, encryption and the integrity of digital data flows, as well as efficient firewalls and anti-virus software are crucial today, but as long as discreet documents are filed in paper form or invaluable materials and equipment (such as USB flash drives containing confidential information) are being handled, traditional control systems and precautions should remain in place. Even in the case of digital security, the most
common problems are often surprisingly mundane and essentially human in origin. The careless use of passwords, for example, can compromise any security system. Although research on data security in relation to telework remains scarce, empirical evidence suggests that especially small firms lack expertise and resources to combat security risks (Clear, 2007). In individual cases, this has led management to forbid telework altogether (Pyörä, 2003). As a necessary minimum, an organization should develop and maintain an appropriate data-security policy if it aspires to advance telework.

Discussion and conclusions: what are the benefits of distributed work?
This article has discussed some of the most important problems and possibilities of distributed work in the light of the research literature. Although telework, especially in its most traditional mode, seems to have less potential than some visionaries have predicted, it would certainly be wrong to drop the whole project – distributed work has important benefits both to individuals, organizations and society at large. The benefits of distributed work can be captured in four main points, as described below.

First, telework is environmentally friendly. Although it is naive to believe that telework could resolve all the problems caused by commuting, more flexible and transferable work arrangements would certainly relieve some of the congestion, help to reduce levels of environmental pollution, and possibly improve traffic safety. Systematic investment in commuter safety, let alone the reduction of unnecessary traffic and movement, would pay itself back in lowered insurance costs and in a lowered risk of traffic accidents.

Second, telework could create more flexible work arrangements and at the same time help to lower the costs of running office premises. Even if management compensated in full the costs from building home offices, that would probably be quite a minor investment – especially if it is taken into account that the need for other office facilities would at the same time be reduced. VTT Finland (the biggest multi-technological applied research organization in Northern Europe) has estimated that 20-25 per cent of all workstations in Finland lie idle every day because of commuting, meetings and negotiations, holidays and occasional telework (Nissinen, 2003).

This need not be the case. Whereas office workers in Finland are still used to having their own rooms, companies in continental Europe have increasingly been switching to workstation rotation schemes. VTT calculations show that if 40 per cent of office workers worked from home for roughly half their working hours and if the number of workstations could be reduced by 20 per cent through rotation, then the overall need for office space could be cut by almost 30 per cent and the annual costs by over 20 per cent. In these calculations, the costs of the hardware needed by the teleworker as well as telecommunications and electrical costs are covered by the employer.

These calculations are of course, rather crude and cannot, for instance, take account of possible social and psychological costs arising from telework. At Siemens, one of the leading pioneers of distributed work, half of its 1,400 employees in Finland do telework part time, yet almost all of them still have their own workstation. When Siemens launched its telework experiment in the early 1990s, the main goals were to promote job motivation, to improve customer service and to save office space. However, the company decided to drop its plans to reduce the number of workstations because it wanted to maintain the stability of social relations among its employees. For the same reason,
Siemens took the decision to favour part-time telework: employees at Siemens should work from home no more than three days a week.

Third, it is useful to consider telework as a way of raising the company’s corporate image. Organizations that encourage employees to telework could justifiably say they are taking steps to promote sustainable development. And telework could help to create a positive and modern corporate image in more indirect ways as well. The option of telework could give the company a competitive edge both in recruiting new staff and in motivating current employees. In the public sector, telework could help to polish the rigid and bureaucratic reputation of the local and central government sectors. In contrast to what is commonly thought, bureaucratic environments lend themselves very well to telework (Taskin and Edwards, 2007).

Fourth, several studies have found that the changeover to telework has improved job control and well-being at the individual level and increased the overall efficiency of organizations (Hanhike, 1998; Lai and Burchell, 2008; Luukinen, 1996; Martínez-Sánchez et al., 2007). Especially, in jobs that require creative problem-solving skills it is important to be able to work as flexibly as possible, according to need and inspiration. Telework from home, for example, makes it possible, at least in principle, to establish a rhythm of work that best suits one’s own preferences.

It is unclear, however, whether it is telework itself that impacts organizational productivity or whether some other intervening mechanism is at play. In any event, experiences of telework that is partly done at home are encouraging, even though there are some doubts that this arrangement is best suited to experts in independent jobs (Pyöriä, 2003). Mobile teleworking also has its own benefits. For example, time pressures can be managed by making good use of waiting times and other spare moments (Brodt and Verburg, 2007; Vartiainen et al., 2007).

Telework is best suited to jobs that require peace and concentration and that are best organized according to the individual’s own daily rhythm, far away from the crowds at the office and from unnecessary interruptions. It is also good to remember that telework does not always require telecommunications links. In fact, it might often be a good idea to unplug the laptop: a constant flow of e-mail messages and other communications can be a major distraction in creative work.

In sum, like any other work arrangement, telework has both its benefits and drawbacks. From the individual employee’s point of view, the most obvious benefits are the flexibility and autonomy it affords. An important part of working in an efficient and productive workplace community, then, is the personal experience of performance and achievement, which in turn improves the productivity of the whole work organization.

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**Appendix. Telework contract**

Creating a successful telework arrangement may seem more complicated than it actually is. Ultimately, it is a matter of agreeing on a common set of rules and adhering to those rules. It is important to note that the provisions of national legislation must be followed even when work is done in the employee’s home or some other place of the employee’s choice, and when it is done using the employee’s tools or machines. In the context of Finnish legislation, for example, telework in an employment relationship is one way of organizing work among others rather than a distinct form of employment relationship. If, on the other hand, the teleworker is a self-employed person or equivalent, entrepreneurial legislation is applicable.

As in all ordinary work arrangements that fit the criteria of an employment relationship, it is always advisable to set out the terms of employment in writing. Even though the law says that the contract can be concluded orally, electronically or in writing, a carefully drafted written or electronic contract provides a useful tool with which both the employee and management can see the benefits and drawbacks of the new work arrangement. Since telework at home, in public transport and in so-called electronic cottages differs in many ways from work at a company office, it is useful to define the duties and rights of both parties as unambiguously as possible. The one exception to this recommendation is irregular and infrequent telework, where an oral agreement should ordinarily suffice.

Although there exists no EU directive on telework, there is a common framework agreement among European labour market organizations that is legally binding on the signatories. The main point of the framework agreement is that telework is always voluntary for both the employer and employee. An employee’s refusal to opt for telework is not a reason for terminating
the employment relationship, and the contract must be reversible by both parties. The way in which the contract is reversed should, however, be defined separately on a case-by-case basis. Another important consideration is the comparable worth of employees: teleworkers must enjoy the same rights under the legislation and employment contracts applicable as employees who work at the employer’s premises.

In order that these principles can materialize, the following points should be given special consideration in drafting a telework contract.

Validity of the contract

- date of commencement;
- nature of employment contract: indefinite/fixed term (criteria for fixed term appointments to be specified if necessary);
- trial period and/or period of notice if applicable; and
- if the telework contract terminates or is terminated by one party or by mutual consent, the employee shall have the right to return to his or her previous or equivalent job.

Place and time of work and payment

- **Place.** Definition of telework site (e.g. employee’s home or electronic cottage); in the case of part-time telework it is recommended that terms and conditions are defined regarding arrangements for the use of the employer’s premises (e.g. sharing of a workstation by several teleworkers).
- **Time.** As a general rule, teleworkers shall be responsible for compliance with working hours norms specified in the contract; in part-time telework, it is recommended that rules are laid down on how working hours shall be divided between the telework site and the employer’s premises.
- **Pay.** Criteria for wage determination (e.g. normal monthly salary, overtime pay separately).

Employee’s duties

- teleworker must be present at employer’s premises whenever work demands (e.g. meetings);
- teleworker must be contactable by employer, other employees or customers during specified times;
- teleworker must comply with employer’s safety guidelines; and
- reporting on work (e.g. hourly logbook).

employer’s duties

- compensate the costs incurred to the employee from telework as applicable (e.g. telephone and telecommunications connections);
- provision of necessary training and other instructions (e.g. definition of the rules and restrictions regarding the use of information and communication technology and the consequences of violating these rules);
- occupational safety (e.g. ergonomics);
- ensure that teleworkers and other employee groups are treated comparably in internal workplace communications, personnel training, recreational activities, etc.; and
- respect teleworker’s privacy.
Job tasks and monitoring performance

- content of telework job tasks, timetable and possible interim objectives must be defined on a case by case basis to a degree of accuracy that leaves no room for interpretation; and
- the focus of monitoring in telework must be on outcomes, not on the actual work process or working hours.

About the author
Pasi Pyöriä received his doctorate in the Social Sciences (Sociology) from the University of Tampere, Finland. He has co-authored two books on the Finnish information society. He has published in *The Journal of Knowledge Management*, *The Information Society*, *New Technology, Work and Employment* and *Team Performance Management*. Pasi Pyöriä can be contacted at: pasi.pyoria@uta.fi

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