

Article Title: Home based teleworking working and the employment relationship: managerial challenges, tensions and dilemmas

Author: Lynette Harris
Department of Human Resource Management
Nottingham Business School,
The Nottingham Trent University
Burton Street
Nottingham, NG1 4BU.
United Kingdom
e-mail: lynette.harris@ntu.ac.uk

Tel.: 0044 1159486027 or 6165
Fax number: 00 441159486032

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Abstract As home based teleworking grows in the UK, more evidence is needed of how working from home shapes the employment relationship and the implications this may have for those line managers responsible for a home based work force. The reported experiences of a sales team and their line managers at one large international drinks manufacturing company of teleworking during its first year of operation revealed the importance of developing our understanding of the complex interface between the domains of work and home life. The findings suggest individual circumstances require close attention before implementing home based working with line managers recalibrating perceptions of the boundaries between home and work for positive employee relationships to develop within a new paradigm of 'home-work' relations.

The home-based working agenda

Technological advances have led to teleworking from home (also referred to as remote or mobile working) rising on the public policy agenda (Apgar, 1999). It is a form of temporal flexible working likely to attract increasing attention as the work life/balance debate intensifies. In the UK, such initiatives have received encouragement from the present government's stated commitment to family friendly policies (Cully et al., 1998) reflected in recent employment legislation. Whilst home based teleworking is still in its infancy, it is identified as a growing trend (Brocklehurst, 2001) although establishing the extent of its actual practice is hampered by the lack of a universal definition. For the purposes of discussion, the

UK's Labour Force Survey definition (LFS) of teleworkers as 'people who do some paid or unpaid work in their own home and who use both a telephone and computer' will be used in this paper. This specifically includes those who

- mainly work from home in their main job
- work from home in various locations but home is their base (as in the reported study)

LFS statistics identify teleworking growing rapidly in the UK and other EU countries but even more dramatically in the USA (Hotopp, 2002). The number of UK teleworkers in Spring 2001 was reported as 2.2 million (7.4% of the total labour force of whom three-quarters work in the private sector) with an average 13% increase per year since 1997. Whilst the feminisation of the work force would seem to be an explanatory factor in its growth (Felstead et al., 2002:58), currently two thirds of all teleworkers are men.

Teleworking is predicted as a likely direction for organisational development (Pieperl and Baruch, 1997; Chesborough and Teece, 1996). The Institute of Employment Studies estimates the UK uses only 30% of its teleworking potential and that new technologies will further increase the possibilities for home based working (Huws et al., 2001). Despite the present and predicted growth in teleworking, the impact of 'blurring' the temporal and spatial boundaries between home and work on the employment relationship and the challenges it presents for managers with human resource management responsibilities is under researched. This paper sets out to examine this through the experiences of a sales force at one large international drinks manufacturing company, BC Drinks Ltd who became home based teleworkers.

Home based teleworking at BC Drinks

BC Drinks adopted a policy of home based teleworking in 1999 which was implemented the following year for a sales team of 41 staff as a result of the closure of the company's northern regional office in the largest of its geographical areas in the UK. The form of remote working implemented at BC Drinks is best described by Huws (1996) as 'where the employee's home becomes the contractual place of work with occasional meetings at a designated premises' although the nature of the sales team's work involved regular travelling to visit customers. Home working removed not only a shared office base for the team but the administrative support provided by two clerical staff. The sales team was entirely male with the exception of two recent female recruits, only one of whom was married. Three quarters of the team were below 45 years of age with young families and the average length of service with the company was seven years although a third had ten years service or more.

Although studies have reported that teleworking on a part-time basis produces the best outcomes for both parties in the employment relationship (Baruch, 2001), at B.C Drinks partial home working was not offered as an option. The employer led initiative was an 'all or nothing' situation and essentially irreversible once the regional office was removed. Whilst possible problems of isolation, self discipline and motivation were expected by the company's management, the difficulties reported by employees as a result of work being relocated into the domestic domain were not dominated by those anticipated by the employer. Based on the responses of the sales team and their line managers, this paper examines the experience of a group of employees faced with

adjusting to what Daly describes as a 'new set of temporal demands' (1996: 149). It particularly explores

- those problems most frequently identified in moving the office into the home environment,
- the impact this had on the psychological contract employees felt they had with their employer,
- the implications for managers responsible for home based staff.

The methodology

A company survey was conducted six months after teleworking began. An internally designed questionnaire explored seven areas; the physical environment, productivity, balancing home and work life, socialisation, communication, tools and general issues. Anxiety about staff turnover and a largely negative employee response led to another questionnaire, addressing the same areas, six months later to see whether there had been any changes in views of home based working. The second survey revealed no change in the essential concerns of employees other than a hardening of attitudes towards their employer and the management of the move to home based working.

Both questionnaires provided for open responses to most questions, which allowed the same themes to reappear but did not explore in any depth employees' concerns. This may be partly explained by a reluctance on the part of the employer to probe into aspects of family circumstances viewed as a matter of personal privacy (Campbell Clark, 2000) even when these had been initially identified by the employee.

To obtain more qualitative insights, two focus groups with sales staff and two attended by sales staff and their managers were observed. Individual interviews were conducted with a quarter of the teleworkers and their managers with the sample selected to reflect differing lengths of service and, where known, family circumstances. Respondents were encouraged during the focus groups and interviews to describe their experiences from the perspective of their own working context (Burgess, 1982). The ensuing narratives provided a richness of detail, which supplemented the data obtained by the company questionnaires. The reported findings are drawn from the responses to the questionnaires, the focus group meetings and the interviews conducted during and immediately after the first year of the scheme's operation.

Whilst the findings from one case study organisation cannot offer widely applicable conclusions, they illustrate that perceptions about home as a substitute workplace requires closer examination before embarking on full scale home based working. A recognised limitation of this study is that it examines the employee experience of home based teleworking during its initial year of operation when it could be expected most problems of adjustment would occur. Nevertheless, it reveals that for the majority of the sales team the level of trust placed in the employer's concern for their well being had been eroded and would be difficult, if not impossible, to restore. In this way, the study identifies issues all employers would be advised to address in the design and implementation of home based working schemes if they are seeking to retain and enhance commitment to the organisation.

An employer or employee led initiative?

The benefits of home-based working for employers appear self-evident; these are regularly reported as greater productivity, reduced accommodation costs, lower absenteeism and improved customer services (Jackson and van der Wielen, 1998). The most frequently stated organisational reasons for introducing remote working are a more effective use of resources, providing flexible working options for employees, reducing travelling time and optimising the use of technology (IDS, 1996). Of these the advantage most consistently identified is the reduction of costs and overheads (Murray, 1995). BC Drinks's move to home based working was no exception. It was from the outset driven by the pursuit of competitive advantage through cost reduction achieved primarily by the removal of the overheads of expensive office accommodation.

Despite the trend for remote working to appear predominantly 'employer led', it does appear to be less one sided in the benefits it can offer both parties to the employment relationship than most other forms of flexibility. It potentially provides positive outcomes for individuals, whether these are incidental or strategically driven by a concern for arrangements that offer a form of 'mutual flexibility' for employer and employee (Reilly, 2001). As a result, remote working or teleworking has gained an image of a 'liberating form of employment' (Moon and Stanworth, 1997) through working in a home environment free from the stress of daily commuting, with greater autonomy to organise the working day and the opportunity to work undisturbed by office politics and distractions. These are features of a working environment likely to be attractive to many individuals and most reported experiences have centred on teleworking's potential benefits for both employer and employee but a number of

studies have provided a more cautious perspective. At the earliest stages of teleworking's development, Metzger and Von Glinow (1988) identified some of the difficulties that can arise when work is relocated into the home environment which concur with a number of the problems identified in this study; for example, the demands of parenting, social isolation, reduced organisational loyalty and issues of monitoring.

Baruch and Nicholson (1997) argue for attention to be paid in assessing the suitability of teleworking to the fit between the nature of the job, the technology, family circumstances, the organisational culture and individual attitudes and qualities. Their view is that a fit between all these factors is a prerequisite for effective home working. The likelihood of all these factors being satisfied would suggest that reaching a perfect balance between employer and employee inclination will not be a frequent occurrence and employer led initiatives due to cost rationalisation are likely to remain a major influence in the adoption of teleworking.

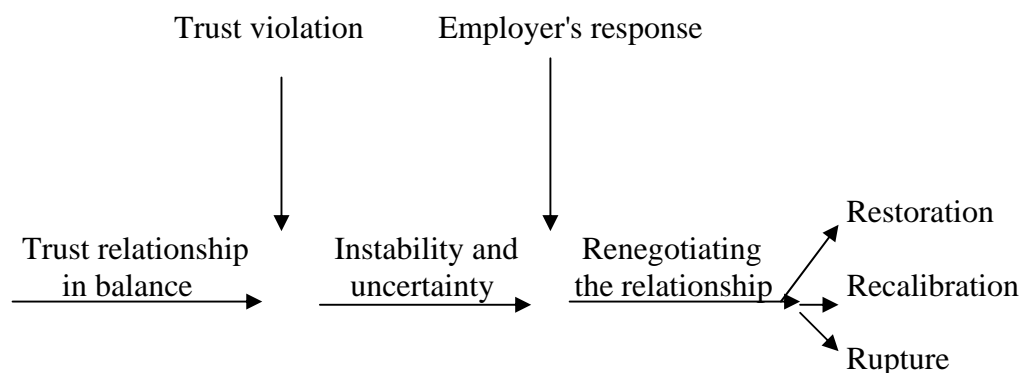
Trust in the employment relationship

The importance of the 'implicit' psychological contract which reflects the understandings between employer and employee about their respective contributions to the employment relationship is well recognised in the academic literature (Fox, 1974; Schein, 1978; Watson, 1987). Widespread organisational change, challenging the perceptions and beliefs employees have about mutual obligations in the employment relationship, has led to increasing interest in the notion of the 'psychological contract' as something as significant as the written employment contract (Herriot et al., 1998; Rousseau, 1996).

Watson (1987:141) observes that the 'implicit contract is never fixed, nor is it ever stable and two particular factors tend to threaten its stability - the push towards increased efficiency on the part of the employer and the tendency towards collective action and challenge on the part of the employee.' As the study revealed, the employer's pursuit of efficiency through cost cutting led to the sales team feeling that it had been at their expense by destabilising important elements of their implicit contract. Their observation was that home based working had resulted in reduced support for them in their daily work eroding the level of trust hitherto placed in their employer's actions. This perceived 'trust violation' resulted in the loss of equilibrium and a subsequent renegotiation and recalibration of the employment relationship as depicted by Figure One. It suggests three main outcomes in such circumstances depending on the quality and acceptability of an employer's response; either a full restoration of trust, a recalibration of the relationship on changed terms or a decision to discontinue the relationship altogether (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). This last outcome was evident at B.C. Drinks in the trebling of labour turnover during the first year of the scheme's operation.

Take in figure 1

Figure One - Destabilising the trust relationship - the employee perspective



(adapted from Lewicki and Bunker, 1996)

The extent to which employees identify a perceived breach in the fulfilment of an employer's obligations is likely to be heavily influenced by their perceptions of managerial behaviours and trustworthiness in handling the change process (Harris and McGrady,1999). The behaviours identified by Whitener et al. (1998) as particular influences on employee's perceptions of managerial trustworthiness are consistency, integrity, the sharing and delegation of control, communications and the demonstration of concern.

The sales team's home based working experience

At BC Drinks Ltd, the two surveys suggested that the sales force found their employer to be deficient not only in the quality and extent of communications but also in the actual demonstration of concern for employees attempting to redefine the temporal and spatial boundaries between work and home life. The situation, described by one individual as *'like it, lump it or leave'*, was one of perceived abandonment by management. The interviews and focus groups revealed that individuals experiencing particular problems physically accommodating a 'home office' felt their managers had a responsibility to make themselves aware of individual circumstances (Kramer and Tyler, 1996) prior to implementation. Despite briefing sessions prior to the implementation of home based working, to the sales team the working last day at the regional office appeared to have arrived without sufficient preparation. One recalled it as being *'rather like the last day at school, we were handed a satchel with an information pack and then packed off home to get on with it'*.

The extent to which the sales team felt deserted by a company many of them had given considerable service to was not really apparent to their managers until the first survey responses six months later. A situation that was then exacerbated by a management ill prepared for and insufficiently responsive to employees' reported problems. The perceived continuing managerial failure to then adequately address their concerns had a further detrimental effect on levels of trust.

In reality, many of the problems identified by the initial questionnaire were particularly difficult for managers to resolve without significant expenditure or were related to family circumstances viewed as 'outside the accepted responsibilities' of an employer. For respondents who described themselves as either '*just forgotten*' or at best '*left to muddle through*' the subsequent lack of any timely and tangible company action was construed as further evidence of a lack of 'employer concern'. Within the year, labour turnover among the sales team had increased from a previous annual average of 6% to nearly 20 %. To the management's consternation, those leaving were frequently the most experienced and high performing staff.

In common with other home based working studies, employees reported working as hard or even harder than before teleworking began but were unconvinced that their productivity had similarly increased when related to the actual hours worked. Although 56% of the sales force said they spent the same amount of time with customers, 30% said they spent less time largely due increased administrative tasks. 76% reported spending more time in the 'home office' than they had in the previous 'work office'. The explanations provided were that 'paperwork' took more time and there were more distractions and interruptions (Felstead and Jewson, 2000).

In terms of overall effectiveness, 36% described this as the same as before but 44 % felt that, to varying degrees, they were generally working more effectively than before. The remaining 20% felt their performance had actually been impaired by home working. The majority of the team (85%) reported working a longer working day although less than half felt this contributed to improved performance. A widely expressed view was that the absence of administrative support had increased workloads but was not properly recognised by the company. Working weekends 'to catch up' was a regular practice for 60 % of the team. Perhaps the most concerning finding was that over a third felt home based working had increased rather than reduced their stress levels.

As anticipated by the company, just over half the sales team reported initial feelings of isolation, problems adjusting to the technology and the disadvantages of reduced social contact with their co-workers and line managers. Although the evidence suggested that such factors presented differing degrees of individual difficulty, the dominant concern was the suitability of 'home as a substitute for the office'. The ability to work without interruption or distraction was highly dependent on the physical attributes of the home and the presence of young family. Personal circumstances influenced the degree of acceptance and adjustment. For example, whilst one single parent was delighted with the greater flexibility, another employee, whose husband also worked from home, found the problems so overwhelming that she left due to a stress related illness. The four issues most frequently identified by respondents are now considered in turn.

The interface between work and home life

For two thirds of respondents a major tension lay in establishing the interface between work time and family time. Campbell Clark (2000) argues that home based working reverses arrangements that have prevailed since the Industrial Revolution for work and home to develop as distinct domains with different rules, thought patterns and behaviours. Members of the sales team experienced varying degrees of difficulty in coping with the blurring of these domains as a direct result of returning the production processes of work back into the home. This was less of an issue for those in the team with family members out at work all day or, in three instances, living alone.

The variables that made certain individuals better able to cope than others with the merging of these two domains are complex and require further and deeper investigation than can be provided by this study. There were contextual factors shared by those that found the integration the most difficult, such as the presence of very young children, a non working partner or spouse or both partners working from home, but less commonality in those that experienced an easier adaptation. A third of respondents work actually saw work as becoming more rather than less intrusive in their personal lives as illustrated by the following comments;

'It works well if you could have time to build into the day to relax away from work. It is becoming a strain that I feel I am always at work - my wife says we can't get away from it. More space would help.'

'I found it much easier before and so did my family. They knew when I was home that my time was for them and that I had switched off, now it is confusing. It is difficult not

to get distracted when I am working at home by other jobs that need doing just to keep things ticking over. My working day has extended from 8 am to 10 p.m.'

The intrusion of work into family activities was reported as a source of conflict with partners in several instances. Only half of respondents had the space at home to be designated solely for office work, 30% worked off the kitchen table which meant clearing away work in progress for meal times. In the absence of a study, a dining room/area was the next most likely place for work creating problems of occupying valuable living space shared by other family members.

These experiences are consistent with Baruch and Nicholson's findings (1997) that teleworkers may well suffer from less work related but more family related stress. For some trying to 'juggle' home and domestic responsibilities led to feelings of acting unprofessionally, as observed by one member of the team new to parenthood

'I wouldn't recommend this way of working to anyone with a baby in the house. It just doesn't feel very professional trying to calm the baby and take a phone call. It sounds selfish but if I wasn't physically here it would be so much easier to concentrate on doing a proper job.'

In contrast, for a few individuals the new way of working offered real benefits but paradoxically these were attributed, as Baruch (2000) similarly identified, to either an absence of family commitments or an opportunity to organise these commitments more easily to reduce work /family conflicts, for example

'As a single parent, most of the problems I had previously in organising the working week have disappeared. I think my self organising skills were fairly well developed before the scheme started and this stood me in good stead.'

'I really enjoy the benefits provided by working from home - this is probably due to my partner working full time and having grown up children. I think if I had done this when they were younger it would have been difficult to work so effectively.'

What is worth noting in these illustrations of contrasting circumstances but a shared positive view of teleworking is that, where difficulties associated with the presence of family were identified, these came from male breadwinners coping with child caring taking place around them rather than the single parent well acquainted with arranging time to accommodate the demands of family and work. Whilst individuals adopted different coping strategies, there was a common view that 'management' should have shown more understanding and support to those struggling to balance the demands of work and family made more immediate by their increased presence in the home.

Regulating the working day

There was an acceptance that the extended work day was the 'quid pro quo' for greater freedom in organising personal time but this could be constrained by family circumstances. For some, the opportunity to work at a preferred time of day for peak performance was just not attainable as one father pointed out,

'With two small children in the house the only current practical solution is to get up early in the morning or work late into the night but I still risk waking them up and its not when I am at my best.'

Four employees had made concerted efforts to make a visible demarcation between work and home through defined times of being available to family or 'at work'. Different coping strategies were illustrated by the variation in attitudes to work related phone calls. 56% allowed customers to contact them 24 hours a day and at weekends but 44% had placed limits on such contact by not giving out home telephone numbers and switching their mobile or business phones off at the weekend and late evening.

70% missed the filter provided by administrators in the office and said the telephone was the major intrusion into family life and a cause of arguments. The new rules of when it was acceptable to say, 'I am not at work' were unclear to both the teleworkers and their managers. The working day now appeared boundaryless whereas it had previously been defined by either being in the office or working away from home.

Rather than expressing anxieties about excessive monitoring, a third of respondents wanted a closer interest in their hours as they felt their 'invisibility' had led managers to be unaware of the actual time they spent on company business. They identified a need to formalise what constituted an acceptable working day and to legitimise non-work times even though that might erode the degree of personal autonomy claimed as one of the benefits of homeworking. A lack of clarity about the legal contract in the new timeless work domain endorses Baruch and Smith's (2002) recommendation for proper consideration of the potential legal implications of not defining the working day for home based staff. Singled out for attention is the difficulty of monitoring hours to comply with working time regulation and the adverse effect working long

hours may have on occupationally related stress, which is more likely go undetected among a distanced work force.

Two way commitment

80% of the sales team felt that their level of commitment to the organisation had diminished yet high commitment theory (Gallie et al., 2001) suggests that greater opportunities to organise home and work time should enhance organisational commitment. The lack of alternatives and a perception that employees had borne both the cost and inconvenience of home working had the reverse effect and deepened as the year progressed. It led one long serving employee to comment

'The company has had all the gain in this situation whereas we have had all the pain. I have calculated that this new way of working has cost me an extra £170 a month when I take into account the extra heating, lighting and other expenditure.'

The potential for the erosion of trust in such workplace transitions (Herriot et al., 1998) was typically illustrated by the following observations

'I had really no objection to working from home, in fact I quite like it but I do object to the financial benefits just going to the company. They couldn't have done it without us and I think they should have helped us far more. It's been one way traffic and you can see which way!'

'It is very difficult to work effectively in a confined space and it has affected my productivity, I also think it places a strain on relationships and several of us are finding this is the case. The company appears to think that all the commitment should come from us but they should have shown more commitment to us.'

In policy terms, the employer's lack of action suggested uncertainty over how to respond. Where difficulties could only be resolved by major expenditure, it conflicted with the initial cost saving rationale for the initiative. By the end of the year it had been agreed that each home based employees should have a £500 allowance for office furniture and other essential equipment but this was perceived to be just 'too little and too late'.

In employee relations terms, the company's slow response heightened employees' perceptions that their employer had neglected a fundamental duty of care implicit in the psychological contract (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Conflicts between work and family time were viewed by the line managers as an area where they would be wiser not to get involved, creating an impression of not caring for the individual left to resolve such tensions alone.

Communications and Isolation

Asked about meetings with their co-workers, only 15% reported now having regular social contact time. Social contact had decreased significantly since the loss of opportunities to meet at the office even though 90% felt socialisation time was actually far more important than ever. 63% reported feeling isolated since they had started working from home but also said they were less likely to fix up social events due to work and family commitments. The lack of 'face to face' interaction was seen as reducing the speed of problem solving and opportunities to find out what was going on. As one of the team observed this could waste valuable time as *'we may be*

reinventing the wheel when in the past five minutes chat at the beginning of the day would have suggested a solution just by sharing our experiences.'

Contact with line managers had reduced to three or four meetings every quarter and the circulated communication brief was held to be not relevant or insufficient to bridge the communications gap. Team meetings when they occurred were described 'as formal' with time constraints because of a full agenda which further reduced opportunities for informal discussion. Several respondents reported feeling '*invisible to the company*' and offered this as an explanation for the tardiness of an employer response to their difficulties. It was suggested that 'out of sight really did mean out of mind' when it came to home based working (Pieperl and Baruch, 1997) which added to the majority's view that the relationship with their employer had been adversely affected.

Discussion - the managerial challenge

The study's findings illustrate the challenges of teleworking for both employers and employees in establishing fresh boundaries between work time, non work time and legitimate availability. They support Baruch's view (2000) that home working is characterised by better conditions and high trust management is only a partial truth. In common with other work place transitions, BC Drinks's move to home-based working placed the organisation's ability to meet the expectations of its employees in changed circumstances under close scrutiny. Past and unspoken sets of expectations dominated attempts to renegotiate and recalibrate the employment relationship within a new paradigm of 'home-work' relations.

The challenge for the managers at BC Drinks Ltd was how to maintain employee commitment at the same time as implementing major changes which appeared to the sales force to have had a disproportionately disruptive effect on their lives. The company's perceived failure to adequately resource the new working arrangements were construed as a breach of a fundamental duty of an employer to provide employees with sufficient support to effectively undertake their work roles (Mishra, 1996). The sales force's sense of being discarded was reinforced by the observed lack of perceived mutuality in a working arrangement where the employees had borne the costs whilst the company had increased its profits.

Attention to ensuring a balance in the benefits for both employer and employee would appear to be an obvious prerequisite for gaining commitment to home based working (Reilly, 2001) rather than relying on the image of teleworking as a universally more liberating and rewarding way of working. Yet at BC Drinks Ltd. little consideration had been given, if any, to the impact of home based working on the nature of the employment relationship or the presence of the four factors Baruch and Nicholson (1997) suggest need to be simultaneously present for effective teleworking. The liberation in this instance was predominantly the employer's release from costly overheads, an outcome not lost on a group of employees reporting longer working hours and varying degrees of disruption to family life. This observed inequity of outcomes encouraged a view that levels of trust had been significantly eroded in a form of temporal flexibility where perceived mutual gain is an important aspects of making it a success (Kurland and Egan, 1999).

The employer's expectation that the greatest challenge for the sales work force would be the self management of their working time proved, in practice, to be less of a factor than accommodating work into their domestic environment. With the majority being men with young dependants their concerns were instead dominated by very different kinds of adjustment such as the demarcation of work and family time, the lack of space (both physical and temporal) to work undisturbed and a resultant extension to the working day (CIPD, 2001). The transition to a 'home based office' not only resulted in a renegotiation of an individual's work/home time frame but also raised as many issue stemming from the actual spatial relocation of work activities. Both dimensions need to be addressed in the search for relevant approaches to the employment relationship with a distanced, less visible work force. The issues raised by employees challenge existing perspectives on the relationships between time, space and actual physical presence (Lash and Urry, 1994: 232) which present particular challenges for managers accustomed to employment relationships with a more visible workforce.

At B.C. Drinks Ltd, these proved to be 'uncharted waters' for a supervisory management unclear about the contours of their responsibilities when work became embedded in the individual employee's home. There was a continuing uncertainty about the socially acceptable boundaries of demonstrating concern for individuals which impeded timely responses and the search for solutions to the identified problems. It was reinforced by a senior management heavily influenced by a traditional notion of the inadvisability of getting involved in employees' personal lives (Kossek at al, 1994) in case this was interpreted as an invasion of privacy. The paradox is that by the very act of relocating work into the home, an employer has

already committed a major intrusion into the individual's domestic life and, it is argued, have a responsibility to give proper support to employees in resolving the resultant issues.

The study revealed a widespread expectation that a 'good employer' would demonstrate such concern and it can come as a shock to employees to learn that employers offering flexible working are not necessarily interested in the wider family's well being which then erodes employee trust (Flynn, 1995). In such circumstances, a recalibration of the employment relationship may arguably lead to a less relational and more transactional relationship with lowered employee expectations and emotional commitment but greater realism about reciprocity and increased individual freedom (Robinson et al, 1994).

Moves to home based teleworking need to be informed from the outset by an awareness and understanding of individual circumstances outside the work domain. In the case study organisation, an audit of the sales team and an initial pilot study would have suggested that the initiative be approached with a consideration of alternative, albeit interim, arrangements for employees whose personal circumstances were likely to be detrimental to effective home working. An ongoing challenge for employers lies in identifying those employees likely to be particularly suited to home working. Whilst this study provides some insights into circumstances unlikely to be conducive to effective home based teleworking, the circumstances and characteristics of employees where it will be more easily accommodated remain elusive and highly individual. As Tietze et al. (2002) observe in a study of teleworkers' coping strategies, each teleworker and their families find their own solutions.

Campbell Clark (2000) suggests the line manager has a particularly vital role to play in negotiating the interface between the domains of work and home. She describes them as 'border keepers' who define the boundaries of work in contrast to 'spouses' who define the boundaries of home. This implies that the sensitivity of supervisors/managers to family circumstances becomes far more critical in home based working situations and that they have specific development needs to prepare them to assist employees in balancing the demands of home and work (Galinsky and Stein, 1990). Employers have the same 'duty of care' to home based employees as other more visible employees (Fidderman, 2002). Whereas these can be reasonably mechanistic when it comes to the reduction and elimination of physical hazards, it becomes far less straightforward when assessing the less visible health and safety risks of increasing hours of work and stressful working conditions for teleworking staff.

Moon and Stanworth (1997:35) argue for a charter for teleworkers to ensure that their terms and conditions of employment are not compromised by working at home and with reduced supervision. Their view is that this is needed because the 'prevailing archetype in the literature of the highly paid consultant' exercising personal freedoms in home based working is not the reality for many as illustrated by the employee experience at B.C Drinks. An emergent message for employers with teleworking staff and, in particular, for HR practitioners is the need to develop and promote HR policies on selection, appraisal, development and reward which can take account of the differing needs and realities of the home-based worker. An European Union agreement on telework was signed in July 2002 presenting something of a new

departure in the development of EU law as it is to be implemented at national level on a voluntary basis. It remains to be seen how this will be taken forward in the UK but organisations employing teleworkers or considering doing so would be well advised to consider its provisions which include working conditions, equal treatment compared to comparable office based workers, data protection, the provision of and maintenance of work equipment, health and safety protection and proper training.

As already acknowledged, evidence from one case study offers only limited insights into the issues to be addressed in moves to home based teleworking, but its findings reinforce the need to develop our understandings of the complex interactions between work and family life (Vannoy and Dubeck, 1998). Taking work into the home environment challenges and changes the responsibilities of employers accustomed to a traditional employment relationship shaped by paying for work time that is distinguishable from non work time and is physically removed from the immediate demands of home.

Footnote

Whilst this study identified a number of the problems faced by a group of employees in adjusting to a compulsory home working policy, two years later many of the sales force involved in the initial project are still home based teleworkers. They continue to report drawbacks but none of them would now wish to return to office based working.

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