

Chapter 6.4

Employees' Attitudes Toward Telecommuting: An Empirical Investigation in the Egyptian Governorate of Dakahlia

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of companies today in a wide variety of industries are experiencing the benefits of allowing employees to work from their homes. Telecommuting has become a recognized and accepted work alternative for millions of Americans and has grown exponentially during the past 20 years. The main purpose of this article is to explore the attitude of Egyptian information workers toward the concept of telecommuting and to examine the relationships between such attitude and workers' expectations of their productivity and job satisfaction if they participated in a telecommuting program. Original data were collected by using a self-administered questionnaire. A national sample of 228 Egyptian information workers in Dakahlia governorate in Egypt completed the questionnaires with usable data. The results revealed that more respondents are in favor of telecommuting than those who are not in favor of the concept and that the increase in the attitude score toward telecommuting tends to be paired with higher expectations about telecommuting productivity and satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

This article presents the results of an investigation on the attitudes toward telecommuting among information workers in Dakahlia governorate in Egypt. Interest in telecommuting has increased markedly in recent years. Advocates of telecommuting state that it would improve employee satisfaction, reduce employee stress, increase productivity, improve customer service, and reduce real estate costs. That led many organizations and individuals to adopt it. However, telecommuting is not common in Egypt. Egypt is an African country with a population of 68 million, 10 million telephone lines, and a teledensity of 10% (Ledwaba, 2002). Egypt has established a strong base for its future through a project that has seen 5 million Internet users (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2005). A global e-government survey conducted by Brown University in the U.S. rates Egypt as being at the higher end of e-government readiness (49th out of 196 countries) with an implementation strategy comparable to many developed countries (Ledwaba, 2002).

The creation of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) in 1999 reiterated the Egyptian government's firm commitment to encourage technological development (International Telecommunication Union, 2005). Dakahlia is considered one of the ancient Governorates in Egypt. The Dakahlia Governorate reports a population of 4,839,359; it is the third largest governorate in Egypt. Agricultural areas cover approximately 10% of the cultivated area of the country. There is also a large industrial base in Dakahlia, including fertilizer industries, hydrogenation of oils and soap, chemicals, spinning and weaving, garments, wood, rice milling, crushers, cotton mills, milk, and so forth (Mansoura International Trade Point, 2005). Mansoura, which reports a population of 900,000, is the capital of the Dakahlia governorate. An actual trip on Mansoura's streets often tells a story of traffic havoc and rush-hour gridlock that more often than not has no set hours. Traffic planners could consider telecommuting as they try to devise new ways to improve the situation.

BACKGROUND

Telecommuting could be defined as the partial or total substitution of telecommunication technologies, possibly with the aid of computers, for the commute to work (Nilles, 1994). By telecommuting, employees are able to work at home (or at an alternative worksite) but stay in touch with their offices via computer network, voice mail, and electronic messages. By telecommuting, work is structured around networks instead of buildings and clocks. Improved technologies mean that there is nothing that can be done in the office that can't be done at home.

Driving Forces

It was during the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s that the term *telecommuting* was coined by Jack Nilles

in response to the realization that the world's fossil fuels were hardly inexhaustible and that energy conservation was now a necessary forethought (Reymers, 1996). The following pressures acted to increase the acceptance of telecommuting:

Traffic Congestion

For many workers, the daily commute is the most disagreeable part of their days. In recent years, for example, the large telecommunications company Pacific Bell gradually has become increasingly interested in the concept of telecommuting. The possibilities of telecommuting was first called to Pacific Bell's attention during the Los Angeles Olympics, when it was adopted as a temporary measure to avoid the horrendous automotive gridlock that was expected when Games visitors were added to the city's already clogged freeways. Shortly thereafter, Pacific Bell implemented a pilot project to examine telecommuting, using 100 volunteer managers. On hearing about the project, 400 other managers developed informal arrangements with their bosses to begin telecommuting (Hequet, 1994). In 1996, one-fifth of Pacific Bell's 10,000 managerial-level employees telecommuted at least one day a week, said Linda Bonnicksen, a company corporate communications manager. Pacific Bell provides its employees who work at home with everything but the computer. It also pays the phone bill and, in some cases, installs ISDN transmission, a broad bandwidth line that can transmit data up to 10 times faster than the fastest available consumer modem operating on a standard phone line (Bailey & Foley, 1990).

Vast Changes in Information Technology

Telecommunications advances permit the convenient transmission of information anywhere in the world almost instantaneously. Hence, people whose work deals primarily with information may be able to work wherever they can keep in touch. In

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