Chapter XIV

Working at Home: Negotiating Space and Place

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Abstract

This chapter explores the work-family interface by investigating home as a potential work space that must still accommodate the social and leisure needs of household members. By examining spatial patterns of household Internet location, this chapter investigates the prevalence of paid work in Canadian homes, illustrates how household spaces are reorganized to accommodate the computer/Internet, and examines how the location of Internet access is situated within sociocultural contexts of the household and how this might affect potential work-from-home scenarios. Data collected from a triangulation of methods—surveys, interviews and in-home observation—also illustrate the relevance of household Internet location from an organizational perspective. The relationship between individuals and business organizations is interactive and integrative, and the home workplace is complex and blurred with other daily social realities, which influence effective work-at-home strategies and potentially shapes productivity and efficiency.
Introduction

The nature of work is changing in today’s information society, especially with the prevalence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the home. In many instances paid work is relocating to the home, which offers people more flexibility, yet often less clear boundaries between work and household (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). There has been considerable literature concerning how paid work at home—or telework—is detailed, outlining numerous positive and negative features of working from home, and the impact of paid work at home on the household and organizations (Armstrong, 1997; Dimitrova, 2003; Frissen, 1992; Gurststein, 2001; Haddon & Brynin, 2005; Hardill & Green, 2003; Salaff, 2002; Stanworth, 1997). Despite conflicting analyses and debates about the impact of telework on individuals and organizations, little attention has been paid to the spatial semantics of organizing the location of household ICTs to compliment (or hinder) not only leisure and social use, but also work related tasks and work-at-home scenarios. If indeed businesses and organizations wish to encourage their employees to work at home, then it is important to think about how individuals spatially organize household ICTs and what impact this has not only on work performance and productivity, but also household members.

Most recent statistics in Canada indicate that Canadian Internet use is highest from home, with 62% of households using the Internet at least once a day, on average, from home (Statistics Canada, 2002). Canadian statistics (Statistics Canada, 2001a) also reveal that from 1996-2001, more people chose to work from home then ever before (1,175,760 billion, or 8% of the working population), and that most people who work at home live in urban areas. Having the Internet in the home has changed the way people think about work, how they do their work, and ultimately where they do their work.

This chapter explores the work-family interface by investigating the construction of the home as a potential work space that must still accommodate the social and leisure needs of household members. By examining spatial patterns of household Internet location, this chapter will:

- investigate the prevalence of paid work in Canadian homes,
- provide an overview of household Internet locations,
- illustrate how household spaces are reorganized to accommodate the computer/Internet, and
- examine how the location of Internet access is situated within sociocultural contexts of the household and how this might affect potential work-from-home scenarios.
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