Summary

Telework is the substitution of communication technology for work-related travel. A teleworker typically commutes a few days a week into a central office and works at a ‘virtual’ workplace (usually his or her home) for the remainder of the week. In this book, we argue in favour of increasing present levels of telework or, as we like to put it, growing the virtual workplace. The case for growing the virtual workplace is compelling: we provide an analysis of the integrative value proposition for telework and also develop the EOS integrative framework as a tool to understand and promote the practice.

When we use the concept of value proposition, we mean a concise and specific description of the benefits (value) of a particular course of action to a target audience or stakeholder. For example, a value proposition might describe to a customer why one company’s services are superior to those of its competitors and should therefore be selected by the customer. In this particular case, there are three target audiences: employees, organizations and society at large. We talk about an integrative value proposition to make the point that, on the telework issue, the interests of the three stakeholders above are aligned. We therefore believe it would be a mistake to suggest a separate value proposition for each stakeholder.

Accordingly, we choose to formulate the single, unified, integrative value proposition as follows: employees, organizations and society alike should grow the virtual workplace, as the multiple, tangible benefits of telework for each of these three stakeholders greatly outweigh its costs.

The book unpacks, analyses and defends this integrative value proposition. We conclude that, if telework is implemented effectively and where appropriate, then for each stakeholder the benefits of telework will greatly outweigh the costs. A few examples will suffice here to clarify our thesis that the interests of the three stakeholders are aligned.

Employees, especially highly skilled ones, usually value flexibility and autonomy when performing their jobs. However, they also care about their organizations’ costs and productivity, if for no other reason than to increase the likelihood of their continued employment. Furthermore, employees are often concerned about societal-level challenges such as the impact of business on air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as they are also citizens affected by such impacts.

Organizations (meaning manager-owners or senior management repre-
senting the employer) know that employee recruitment and retention are key to their own survival and performance, and they realize that providing telework options can contribute to these organizational objectives. However, they often also genuinely care about employee job flexibility and satisfaction per se. Furthermore, they realize that the organization’s environmental and social responsibility objectives can be served by telework. In this case, therefore, organizational objectives overlap to a large extent with societal objectives.

Societal decision-makers (such as politicians and public administrators) face challenges in the realms of competitiveness, community health and ecological footprint per capita. Often these decision-makers realize that performance at the national, regional or municipal level ultimately results from micro-level parameters, including organizational costs and productivity, as well as employee job flexibility and satisfaction, all of which can be served by increased telework adoption.

Thus, each of the three stakeholders not only derives net benefits from the practice of telework but also cares about the perspectives of – and outcomes for – the other two.

In order to understand how stakeholders derive these benefits and can contribute to growing the virtual workplace as efficiently as possible, we borrow from classic strategic management frameworks and categorize the telework process into four broad constructs: telework adoption (strategy formulation), implementation (strategy implementation), tracking (measurement/feedback) and impacts (performance). Using those four constructs and the three stakeholders – employees (E), organizations (O) and societal decision-makers (S for society) – we develop the EOS integrative framework to examine not only the interaction among employees, organizations and society, but also the interaction among telework impacts, tracking, implementation and adoption.

As an example of the first interaction, the organization’s adoption of – and support for – telework may have a profound effect on the employee’s decision to telework. This book discusses how actions of each of the three stakeholders affect the actions of the others. As an example of the second interaction, proper telework tracking will provide feedback that will influence the details of future telework implementation. The book discusses how actions in each of the four construct areas affect actions in the others.

Thus, the integrative value proposition and the EOS integrative framework are integrative in complementary ways. The integrative value proposition is integrative in the sense that the stakeholders’ goals are aligned. The EOS integrative framework, on the other hand, is integrative in the sense that what one stakeholder does will affect what another stakeholder does,
and also in the sense that actions in one construct area (such as tracking) will affect actions in other construct areas. With integration so central to the book, we clearly take a holistic approach to the phenomenon of telework.

However, we also pragmatically acknowledge the need to examine the phenomenon’s constituent parts. Because each of the four constructs can be examined from each of the three stakeholder perspectives, we present a $3 \times 4$ matrix into which telework research can be organized. After an initial, introductory chapter, the book therefore contains 12 more chapters, one for each construct/stakeholder combination. As a consequence of this organization, readers can, if they wish, read only the chapters they consider most directly relevant to them. For example, managers could choose to read only the chapters about the organization’s perspective (Chapters 3, 6, 9 and 12), while those interested in the employee’s perspective may want to focus their attention on Chapters 2, 5, 8 and 11. Finally, those interested in the societal perspective will find Chapters 4, 7, 10 and 13 of particular interest. It should be noted that Chapter 7 is rather technical and geared primarily to transport economists and analysts.

We place more emphasis than other authors on telework tracking because, beyond identifying and quantifying telework impacts, tracking also provides feedback to influence future telework implementation programs. Importantly, it can change the mindset of decision-makers about the value proposition of telework.

The book contains numerous practical tips – specific to each stakeholder – on how best to implement telework. For example, for the employee, there are self-assessment, home office design and best-practice telework guidelines. For the organization, there are guidelines for telework job and employee selection, telework program design, and the management of virtual teams. For the societal decision-maker, there is a frank assessment of the real effectiveness of the six major proposed telework-enabling policies: providing moral support, disseminating information, leading by example, creating an enabling infrastructure, instituting tax and regulatory policies, and creating incentives and disincentives.

This book is written for managers, employees, policymakers and academic experts on telecommuting and the virtual workplace. Technical sections are identified as such and can be safely skipped without affecting the reader’s understanding of the book as a whole.
To Our Parents and Families,
Whose Unconditional Love Transcends all Distance

It is an inconvenient truth that many people in advanced economies currently spend most of their professional lives in unfortunate office towers and inefficiently consume time, energy, and public infrastructure during their lengthy commutes to and from work.
Their lives could be so different . . .