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Panel 7 Paradoxes in Alternative Work Arrangements

Keri Pearlson
University of Texas, Austin

Dan Accrocco
NCR Corporation

Jim McGee
Diamond Technology Partners, Inc.

Carol Saunders
Florida Atlantic University

PANEL 7

PARADOXES IN ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Panel Chair: **Keri Pearlson**, University of Texas, Austin

Panelists: **Dan Accrocco**, NCR Corporation
Jim McGee, Diamond Technology Partners, Inc.
Carol Saunders, Florida Atlantic University

This panel will present and debate various paradoxes surrounding the implementation of Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA). AWA includes such topics as telecommuting, remote work, telecenters, and other conceptions of the virtual office. This is an especially relevant topic to the ICIS theme, Networking and Electronic Communities, because the nature of alternative work arrangements requires organizations to rethink the fundamental ways individuals in their communities work, both alone and in groups. The AWA perspective assumes that technologies will not eliminate jobs, but will facilitate the transformation of traditional work arrangements by allowing flexibility in "when" and "where" work is done. The impact on the nature of work, workers, work groups, businesses and home life are all relevant to a debate about AWA.

This panel will examine the reasons why AWA is not more prevalent in today's workplace. While the concept of telecommuting has been around for over twenty years, the actual implementations of AWA have been slow to occur (Davenport and Pearlson 1996). We believe that the slowness of the adoption of AWA is due, in part, to the difficulty in resolving issues we describe as paradoxes (Davenport and Pearlson 1996; Rognes et al. 1996).

We will examine the following paradoxes from three perspectives during our session:

3. Flexibility versus structure
2. More time for individual work versus more time required for meetings
3. More control versus less control
4. Individual versus teamwork
5. Focus on the telecommuter versus focus on those left behind
6. Temporary versus permanency of a virtual office

The panel will present these paradoxes and discuss them from three different perspectives.

- Keri Pearlson, an academic who has studied this and related topics for eight years, will briefly introduce the panelists and the paradoxes listed above.

- Dan Accrocco, a manager with NCR corporation, which successfully introduced telecommuting to their midwest workforce, will provide the perspective of a traditional organization which migrated to a virtual organization.

- James McGee, a partner with a consulting firm that has always used virtual office concepts, will provide the perspective of the "greenfields" approach of an organization that was initially designed with the latest technologies and work concepts.

- Carol Saunders, an academic with an interest in and experience with AWAs and a participant in Telecommute '96 where much of the current research in this area was presented and discussed, will frame the discussion with theory and previous research.

The objectives of this session are:

1. link current issues in AWA with reference literatures;

2. highlight key issues in the implementation of AWA and possible alternatives for handling them;

3. involve the audience in the discussion of these issues and tradeoffs; and

4. identify future research opportunities in this area.

Each panelist will present their perspective on the paradoxes, then the audience will be encouraged to discuss these and other tradeoffs found in AWA with the panelists.

REFERENCES

Davenport, T., and Pearlson, K. "Two Cheers for the Virtual Office." Working Paper, University of Texas at Austin, March 1996.

Rognes, J.; Rogberg, M.; Forslund, K.; and Virtanenl, M. T. "Paradoxes and Some Unexpected Consequences in Telecommuting." *Proceedings of the Telecommute '96 Conference.* (Website: http://www.cba.uga.edu/tc96/proceedings.html), April, 1996.