The Virtual Workspace: Telework, Disabilities and Public Policy

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Agenda for Discussion

- Rationale for the Research

- Background on Telework, "Workspace," and Accessibility

- European approach to policy

- U.S. approach to policy

- Comparison: do we have complementary, or competing, views?

- Our conclusions / suggestions

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Rationale for the Research

- This research addresses a specific, and generally overlooked, aspect of the "Digital Divide" and discusses the use of Telework (ICTs) as a reasonable workplace accommodation, as well as providing increased access to governmental services relevant to occupational needs.

- We have done this work together as we have noticed a definite policy approach difference in the geographies, and wanted to explore how different and why the differences exist.

Background

- Statistics on telework
- Challenges of teleworking
- Social, Cultural and Policy Considerations

European View

- Council Directive of 27 November 2000
  - Concept of discrimination
  - Reasonable accommodation for disabled persons
- Council Resolution in Feb 2003: knowledge for all
- Overview of the European Action Plan of Nov 2003 – Equal Opportunities for people with disabilities

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U.S. View

- U.S. EEOC recognizes telework as a "reasonable accommodation" under 1990 Americans w/Disabiltities Act
- New Freedom Initiative (NFI 2001) focuses on Telework to help people with disabilities enter the workforce
- Telework promoted by the U.S. Government to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities
- Much legislative/policy efforts, even within disability context, seem focused on reducing costs, rather than increased civil rights of people with disabilities
- Market based approaches (Sec. 508 Rehabilitation Act)

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Comparison

- The institutional approaches differ in that they reflect a an understanding of disability as being a matter of civil rights (U.S.) or more broadly *human rights* (E.U.).

- Alternatively, it can be said that the U.S. focus on the use of markets, and market-based policy instruments to achieve objectives.

- This is in contrast to the EU approach which provides council resolutions, directives and action plans, all designed as policy instruments to promote these concepts, but not provide the same financial incentives by these vehicles as the U.S. does by Sec. 508.

Conclusions

- A variety of policy responses are possible depending on the political and cultural contexts involved.

- As noted above the U.S. and the E.U. have different though complimentary philosophical understandings as to the role and approaches used to promote social objectives.

- In order to help support the case of increased emphasis on e-accessibility and telework, increased national, and international collaborative efforts need to be made to encourage the progress of research in a number of related areas.

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