

***PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVEMENT OF INTEGRAL
TELEWORK MANAGEMENT***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although currently there are 11 institutions with the pilot plan for e-Work¹ in the Costa Rican Public Sector, it is deemed necessary to develop joint actions to consolidate Telework as a common practice within organizations and the general population.

There is a series of limitations that justify this plan: resistance from middle management to have e-Workers, lack of communication programs, and lack of training for application of e-Work procedures, lack of team structure, connectivity and software that allow e-Work.

Improvement actions proposed for application are the following: Development of a training program and change in middle management in the Public Sector. Creation of an e-Work network where e-Work is possible. Creation of a Videoconference network for e-Work support. Design of a software solution “package” that makes accessing basic e-Work services easier.

KEY WORDS

Strategy

Productivity

e-Centers

Videoconference

¹ **E-work**, also known as **Telework** (and in the USA as **Telecommuting**) is work performed from a distance, typically over a network such as the Internet, as opposed to work performed directly on site.

Proposal for improvement of integral e-Work management

1-INTRODUCTION

This document contains a proposal for the elaboration of an action plan that integrates efforts in e-Work, Videoconferences and e-Centers in Costa Rica.

It is based in the experiences gained from the e-Work programs applied since 2007, as well as expert criteria, economic tendencies, employment level and new technology that allow an increasing application of e-Work and video-connections.

Presentation of issues start with the framework concerning e-Work focus and reach, as well as the need to present a series of variables that relate to: legislation, paperwork simplification, access to technology, training and cultural change, among others. It also takes into account related Executive Decrees, the criteria presented by the e-Work Committees and the opinion of International Experts. It finalizes with the proposal, expected products, the roles played by those involved and an action plan for applying the system.

2- REASON FOR DEVELOPING AN INTEGRAL E-WORK PLAN

It is clear that e-Work offers a series of benefits for employees, companies and society in general. This has been demonstrated with the programs developed by the Costa Rican Electricity Institute and other entities, as well by the references obtained from other countries confirming it.

Although since Decree Number 3407 of July, 2008 some important breakthroughs have been achieved, the truth is that the accumulated experience and current economic climate show the need to strongly promote a series of variables that allow obtaining a qualitative and quantitative increase nationwide.

The aforementioned is based in the need to articulate a series of efforts so this work style may contribute with significant productivity increases, social inclusion, profitability and quality of life.

Within the factors that are considered important, the following stand out:

2.1- Focus: In many cases, it is understood that e-Work is done from home, when in reality it can also be done as a movable task, such as inspectors, sales agents, technicians, field professionals and executives, among others. It can equally be performed at telecenters.

It is also important to point out that Videoconferences, whether they are performed in conference rooms, through computers or cellular phones, they constitute a means for e-Work. For that reason, they are an integral part of this proposal.

2.2- Scope: e-Work is directly related with:

2.2.1- Legislation: Most current legislation was designed considering work as something immovable and generally done within an office.

2.2.2- Paperwork: Most paperwork was designed years ago under the criteria of immovable work within an office.

2.2.3- Facilities: Office and cubicle designs follow old criteria that contribute very little to mobility, agility and customer service.

2.2.4- Performance: In many offices and jobs, productivity is not normally measured, something that is essential to e-Work.

2.2.5- Culture: Office equipment has been conceived in response to office work and usual paperwork, without consideration to the new scheme set forth by e-Work.

2.2.6- Leadership: Traditional leadership is based on the premise of physical presence of the employee and not their productivity, regardless of where they are working.

2.2.7- Videoconferences: It is customary to move employees to meetings, when they could very well be performed using Videoconferences in a computer, conference room or using 3G cellular phones.

2.2.8- Telecenters: They offer a viable option that enables execution of activities and reduce costs, for workers as well as companies. Their implementation requires considering the “Intelligent Community Centers”.

2.2.9- Technology: e-Workers, those at home as well as those that are mobile, require a set of solutions and access to make their jobs easier.

2.2.10- Connectivity: It is necessary in any e-Work style and must fit the bandwidth needs for each particular case, especially for videoconferences and mobile work.

2.2.11- Social inclusion: In times of high unemployment rates, with a young new work force and communities in social risk, it is necessary to offer more employment options.

2.3- Regulatory framework

The approach for this proposal is based on a different legislation, internal and external, related with efficacy in management and improvement of services. Particularly work related laws and other legislation related to social inclusion and environmental corporate responsibility.

2.4- Criteria for e-Work Committees

e-Work Committees have expressed their points of view on a series of actions to promote e-Work, with the following aspects standing out:

- 1- Develop a cultural change program geared towards e-Work and aimed at leaders and headquarters.
- 2- Apply a Training Program to develop e-Work programs in the different institutions.
- 3- Facilitate access to software and equipment to those people that don't have access to them.
- 4- Offer more employment opportunities to e-Workers.

2.5- Challenges for the current approach:

- 1- Few institutions have e-Work programs.
- 2- Organizational culture does not favor the incorporation of e-Work.
- 3- Absence of training programs in e-Work matters.
- 4- Many employees don't have connectivity, equipment or software.
- 5- Videoconferences are not been put to the best use, even though the infrastructure is available.
- 6- Many people migrate to the center of the city searching for work in the absence of having work options within their communities.
- 7- Talented and knowledgeable people are not used to the best of their abilities due to lack of access to information in their communities and, consequently, they miss the opportunity to perform e-Work.
- 8- Communities with high risk of isolation have limited work and training options.

3- PROPOSED VISION FOR E-WORK FOCUS

In its most developed state, e-Work is visualized as a means to increase productivity within organizations, as well as quality of life in employees, improving customer service, social and environmental responsibility.

The aforementioned vision is systematic, given that it incorporates factors of different origin to reach the same goal. Jointly, these factors are contained in four major hubs, which are the starting point of a set of actions.

3.1- Technology Hub: Concerns access to databases, availability of e-Centers and Videoconferences, the use of integrated software geared towards e-Work and equipment availability.

3.2- Training Hub: This is the training necessary for e-Working, training for the committees, and creation of study programs. It also involved management of cultural change within the organizations.

3.3- Management Hub: Includes adjustments to legislation, simplification of paperwork to expedite e-Work, as well as proposals for the redesign of facilities required for virtual work.

3.4- Strategy Hub: Under this hub, planning, support, cooperation and program control are integrated and coordinated.

4-GENERAL GOAL

Establishing e-Work and Videoconferences as a customary practice within institutions and companies in Costa Rica.

5- SPECIFIC GOALS

Telework Argentina 2010

- 1- Consolidation of e-Work in the public and private sectors.
- 2- Creation of e-Centers for the promotion and stimulation of e-Work.
- 3- Use of videoconferences as an e-Work tool.
- 4- Development of training programs for the promotion of e-Work.
- 5- Establishment of a certification program for e-Working.
- 6- Creation of an entity that coordinates, plans and advices on all aspects related to e-Work.
- 7- Support the redesign of paperwork and process that expedite virtual work.
- 8- Contribute to the development of a culture that favors the application of e-Working.
- 9- Propose changes required within legislation to promote e-Work.
- 10- Support fulfillment of international agreements and contracts related to Society of Knowledge and Digital Government matters.

6- EXPECTED RESULTS:

- 1- Have in 2010 no less than 20 institutions implementing e-Work.
- 2- Have access to a videoconference network nationwide by 2010.
- 3- Have two operational e-Centers in 2010.
- 4- Have approved study programs in 2011, incorporated into the study plans of higher education centers.
- 5- Have trained no less than 1,000 public employees by 2011 in the application of e-Work systems.
- 6- Have access to an e-Work Certification system by 2012.
- 7- Have a complete evaluation of all the public sector to identify positions that can be handled through e-Work by 2012.
- 8- Have in 2011, courses and virtual programs that are required by e-Workers and the general population.
- 9- Consolidate Costa Rica as a reference point for the use of information technology, before 2013, in e-Work, Virtual Training and Videoconference matters.
- 10- Create four alliances with national and international organisms for the development of e-Work programs, videoconferences and virtual training.

7- ORGANIZATION:

To achieve the aforementioned vision, goals and products, each of the hubs stated in point number 3 has to be developed in coordination and simultaneously. Also, there is a need for specialized units with the ability to perform said actions in the short and medium term.

The units that are involved in each hub are the following:

- 5.1- Technology :** ICE- Digital Government and alliances with other entities.
- 5.2- Training:** Universidad Estatal a Distancia and alliances with other entities.
- 5.3- Management:** e-Work Committee and Video-connections.
- 5.4- Strategy:** Digital Government Intersectional Committee.

8- ROLES OF THE INVOLVED UNITS:

For the proposal to develop as planned, it is necessary that each unit involved has a clear understanding of what is expected of them in each part of the process. For that reason, a guide will clearly define each action and product expected from each entity participating in the process.

9- GENERAL STRATEGY

To promote e-Work and videoconferencing as work styles that favor social inclusion and environmental responsibility.

Start e-Centers' operations, where citizens can perform e-Work, have videoconferences and be trained in a virtual way in aspects that makes their access to the work force easier.

Design a software offer that integrates all the applications required for the different e-Work positions.

Design the theme content that shall be incorporated in the higher education programs in order to promote e-Work.

Develop a culture change management program.

10- SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

- 1- Define the work team for management of the program.
- 2- Select a specific sector for a trial plan for the application of "e-Work software".
- 3- Select a location within the Great Metropolitan Area, to develop the e-Work trial plan, in order to evaluate viability before implementing other centers.
- 4- Make e-Work training programs available to the community.
- 5- Perform a positioning strategy for the program within target communities.
- 6- Integrate a series of related projects (see annex 1)

11- IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

11.1- Approvals

The Technical Secretariat of the Digital Government approves the proposal.

11.2- Action plan design

The Central e-Work Committee creates the action plan for the 2010-2013 term.

11.3- Design of National Videoconference Network

Design of the Network's topology.

Design of the equipment's technical characteristics.

Create policies, regulations and procedures.

Elaborate support tools for the regulations and procedures

11.4- Design of the National e-Center Network

Feasibility study and location of e-Centers.

Design of facilities.

Design of the equipment's technical characteristics.
Creation of policies, regulations and procedures.
Elaboration of support tools for the regulations and procedures.

11.5- Application of communication campaigns

Design a campaign for each target community.
Meetings with authorities and general population.

11.6- e-Centers and Videoconference start up

Start operations in two e-Centers.
Use videoconference rooms in provincial capitals.
Apply videoconference PC software for the Ministers and Executive Presidents.

12- CONCLUSIONS

The efforts performed have allowed important concrete advances in e-Work issues nationwide. Nonetheless, it is necessary to have an integral approach with a combination of factors related among them, to be able to reach a higher development level in this field.

Integration of actions concerning Mobile e-Work, videoconferences and e-Centers are the central part of this approach. Jointly, the need to offer software that integrates access to a series of services for e-Workers arises, as well as the need for more connectivity.

In order to reach the previously stated goal, it is necessary to standardize and integrate a series of actions that guarantee more accelerated and uniform growth in all entities and companies.

13- RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13.1- Application of an e-Work approach can be developed as mobile, with the clients, in the field, from e-Centers, through videoconferences and from the home.
- 13.2- Development of the National Videoconference Network and the National e-Work Network, as means to promote e-Work.
- 13.3- Application of a training program for managers, Human Resource directors and general public that promote e-Work consolidation.
- 13.4- Obtain the support from the Digital Government Intersectional Committee to concrete alliances and cooperation treaties that contribute to the promotion of e-Work, videoconferences and the e-Centers.

**ANNEX N°1
RELATED PROJECTS**

Telework start up is directly related to other initiatives that, in parallel or as complements, have to be developed to promote modernization actions that support the use of TIC's.

1- Videoconferences

Video-communication, understood as the possibility of visually communicating images, whether through cellular phones, laptops, desktops or videoconference rooms, constitute a very useful tool in e-Work systems and it has high impact in the reduction of commuting, road traffic and fuel use.

2- Virtual training

People that participate in the e-Work system, whether from home or in telecenters, must have the possibility of receiving virtual training in the different aspects needed in order to perform their activities. Even though in class training can be necessary in some cases, virtual training eliminates the need of commuting, reduces road traffic and fuel use.

3- On line paperwork

There is a series of administrative paperwork that are time consuming, use paper and require commuting, but they are of little added value to the process. In this aspect, e-Workers should have access to a portal where, through the use of a "Digital Signature" equivalent, they can present paperwork related to vacations, permits, certificates and inquiries to their personal file, among others. This eliminates the need to commute for those reasons, reducing road traffic and fuel use.

4- Process redesign

e-Work has a multiplying effect in other fields of the organization; for example, in process optimization, since input/product flow analysis for those positions can lead to identifying new activities that are suitable for e-Work and improve those that aren't within the new organizational work context.

5- Organizational culture

It has been shown that resistance to change happens when e-Work is introduced to organizations. This is simply explained by three fundamental factors: first, because the person is absent from the office, second, because management are used to controlling physical presence more than results and third, because coworkers that remain in the office consider that there is uneven treatment.

REFERENCES

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- E-Work Technical Committees
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