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Telework, Ageing, and the Socially Inclusive Workplace

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Introduction

- Telework as accommodation option for ageing workers in need of workplace flexibility
- Effectiveness limited without practices/policies for distributive work environments
- Risk of social exclusion for teleworkers

Background

- “Factory model” of work at odds with reality of modern information workplace
- Information and communications technologies (ICT) expanding boundaries of telecommuting
- Need for robust assessment tools and implementation of best practices

Telework: Opportunity?

- **Opportunities:**

- Employers report retention savings, improved productivity, and heightened worker satisfaction
- Enable ageing workers to have more flexibility and expand reach
- Serve as accommodation for workers ageing into disability

...Or Barrier?

- **Barriers:**
 - Current Internet practices fail to fulfill this potential
 - “Digital divide” extending to workers who are ageing and who have disabilities
 - “Overhead” of learning and managing new technology and practices

Telework for Ageing Workers: Conceptual Model

- **Workplace accommodation** to increase participation
- **Strategic choice for employers** with personnel, human resource, market, and cost considerations
- **Social inclusion** through Web-facilitated social networks
- **Distributed work** with more opportunities for participation

Conceptual Issues

- Businesses are complex: threats and opportunities to inclusive, diverse workplaces
- Social relations with co-workers, supervisors and others in the distributed work environment essential to effective performance
- Improving ageing teleworker's social and human capital

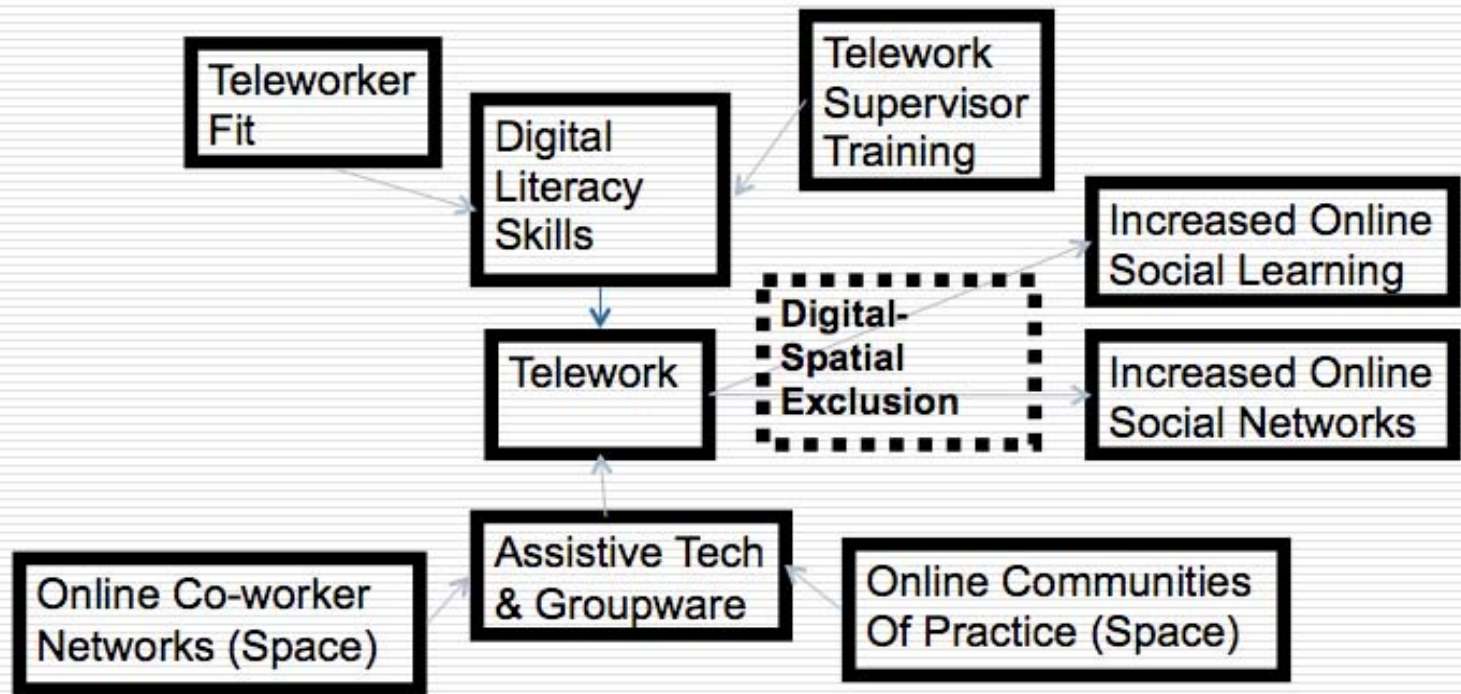
Policy/Practice Tools

- Practice guidelines need to be derived from an evidence base of effective telework accommodations
- Adoption of decision-support tools to match workers to characteristics of the distributive work environment
- Policies that incentivize social learning and social networks, both at the organizational and individual level

Policy/Practice Tools (continued)

- Social Networks
- Professional Learning Spaces
 - Communities of practice (CoP)
 - Online communities of practice serve as virtual learning spaces
 - Online co-worker networks provide social capital (reciprocal trust) for the online CoP
- Assistive Technology

Policy/Practice Model: Inclusive Telework for Ageing Workers



Approach

- Implicit life-long learning perspective: Relevant across populations online
- Importance of studying telework vs. offline outcomes
- Expanded notions of social work involvement: Technical assistance, CoP facilitators, digital literacy training, assessment and evaluation

Conclusions

- Increasingly complex social and economic context of business impacts modern inclusive, diverse workplaces
- Mutual benefits for employers and ageing workers in need of flexibility, accommodations
- Research to lead to applied best practices

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