

HISTORY of TELEWORK (1972-1998)

A focused telework program implementer may ask, “Why do I need to know the history of telework when I am only interested in implementing a telework program in the here and now?” That is a good question, and the answer is that one of the important initial activities for telework implementers is dispelling misinformation and inspiring confidence in the initiative. One of the primary pieces of misinformation is that telework is a new and untested program. It behooves the implementer, therefore, to be able to point out the historical grounding of telework as well as the strength and diversity of its roots.

The following is a brief historical chronology of telework that should serve most purposes:

(NOTE: The following is only a sampling and there are bound to be significant events that are not included. We welcome suggestions for additional significant events.)

1972: After teleworking from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. in the early 1960’s while working as a consulting rocket scientist to the U.S. Air Force Space Program, Jack Nilles became a University of Southern California researcher focusing on the telecommunications-transportation tradeoff. This was the path that Jack Nilles would follow to become known as “The Father of Telecommuting.”

1973: Jack Nilles directed the first telework demonstration project. The project (conducted with 30 employees in a private sector organization) was partially funded by the National Science Foundation. It was here that Nilles coined both the words “telecommuting” and “teleworking.” He went on to become one of the earliest implementers of telework programs, write several books on the subject, and provide telework consultation on a worldwide basis.

1979: Frank Schiff, Vice President and Chief Economist of the Committee for Economic Development, coined the term ‘flexiplace’ and published one of the first major media telework articles in the Washington Post (“Working At Home Can Save Gasoline”).

1980: One of the first known telecenters was established in Marne-la-Valle, France. The second in Nykvarn, Sweden (1982), and the third in Benglen, Switzerland (1985). The telecottage concept is said to have originated in Scandinavia in 1985. There are now many of them worldwide.

1980’s: Spurred by the work of Jack Nilles, Gil Gordon, and others, a variety of private sector and public sector organizations began implementing pilot tests of telecommuting programs. For example, in 1981, JC Penney started its first group of home-based call center agents to take catalog orders, thus marking the first use of telecommuting for inbound call centers.

1980’s: Spurred by the work of Frank Schiff, a scattering of Federal agencies (GSA, NIH, EPA, Air Force, Army, Labor, Railroad Retirement Board, NASA, IRS) implemented small scale experiments and/or studies on telework.

1982: Gil Gordon (Gil Gordon Associates) hosted the first national conference on telecommuting in the U.S.

1984: Gil Gordon (Gil Gordon Associates) established the first nationally recognized newsletter on telework issues.

1985: Southern California Association of Governments transportation planner Patricia Mokhtarian established the predecessor organization to the International Telework Association and Council (ITAC), first as the Telecommuting Subcommittee of the Telecommunications Task Force of the Los Angeles Central City Association, and then, in 1988, renamed the Telecommuting Advisory Council (TAC). 1987: Based on research, planning, and design work by David Fleming, California state government official, and Jack Nilles, the State of California launched the first comprehensive public-sector telecommuting pilot program.

1989: The President's Council on Management Improvement commissioned the first 'government-wide' telework pilot project for Federal agencies.

1990's: Led by a small but growing number of congressional leaders, such as Rep. Frank Wolf (Virginia) and Rep. Steny Hoyer (Maryland), the U.S. Congress became a committed and nonpartisan ally of telework.

1992: The European Community Telework Forum was organized with Jack Nilles as the keynote speaker at its first conference in Den Helder, the Netherlands.

1992: The California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) and the US Federal Highway Administration funded the Neighborhood Telecenters Project (conducted by Pat Mokhtarian at the University of California, Davis) which opened 15 telecenters in California, and monitored/evaluated others across the state. By 1997, nearly 40 demonstration telecenters had been opened in California alone. Due to the difficulties associated with sustaining telecenters, many of these telecenters are now closed.

1992: Marsha Fuller, a consultant from Hagerstown, Maryland, engineered the foundation for the initial Federal government directed telecenters. Based on this work, the US Congress, led by Reps. Wolf and Hoyer funded the Interagency Telecommuting Pilot Project, directed by Warren Master of the US General Services Administration (GSA). This project, which continues with congressional support, was established to pilot the use of telecenters in Federal agencies and is located in the Washington, DC greater metropolitan area.

1993: The US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) officially endorsed use of telework by Federal agencies.

1993: The US Department of Transportation, led by project manager Ed Weiner, published the first major Federal report on transportation implications of telework (the 'red' book).

Mid 1990's: Based on progress with the Interagency Pilot Project, GSA established emergency Federal telecenters in response to the Northridge earthquake in California, the Oklahoma city bombing and the Atlanta Olympics. Despite being built with continuation in mind, the emergency California and Oklahoma centers succumbed to the same problems that closed the previously mentioned CALTRANS centers.

1994: AT&T held the first corporate nationwide Employee Telecommuting Day to spread the word to employees about utilizing and benefiting from telework

1995: Based on its success with its Employee Telecommuting Day led by Susan Sears, AT&T Telework Director, AT&T helped to establish a national public awareness and education program called Telecommute America (now known as Telework America). The US Environmental Protection Agency, the US General Services Administration, US Department of Transportation, US Department of Commerce and the Association for Commuter Transportation joined AT&T to become the initial founding sponsors of this nationwide program.

Mid 1990's: Private sector corporations begin reporting substantial savings in facility operating costs through use of telework.

1996: The President's Management Council implemented the National Telecommuting Initiative (now called National Telework Initiative -NTI) led by the US Department of Transportation (DOT) and US General Services Administration (GSA). The mission of the NTI was to boost use of telework by all American employers (public and private sectors) with special emphasis on Federal agencies.

1997: ITAC announced that more than 11 million people reported working as telecommuters in 1997, compared to eight million in 1995, according to survey findings from the 1997 American Internet User Survey, commissioned by FIND/SVP, a New York-based market research and advisory company. The survey found increased company and employee awareness of the benefits of telecommuting, a robust U.S. economy and increased and more efficient use of technology—particularly the Internet—to be the main reasons for the growth.

1997: DOT hosted the first International Workshop on Planning Regional Telework programs (Irvine, California)

1998: Key trends include a growing interest abroad in telework, with the largest push in Western Europe; employers are reporting an improved ability to recruit and retain talented workers using telework in an increasingly competitive labor market; DOT and GSA continue to lead the Federal Government's telework efforts; and the International Telework Association & Council/Telework America continue to lead the nation's overall telework educational and implementation efforts.

Telework America Online Curriculum
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Workshop 1: GETTING EDUCATED

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