

The Norwegian telework experience in creating work and enterprise (Unn Sakshaug) -- 1999

Introduction

The focus on telework has never been stronger in Norway as it is at the moment, both from a political, business and work condition point of view.

A research project on telework, *Project Telework*, was launched spring 1999 by Avenir, Telenor R&D and Semco. *Project Telework* is headed by some of the best telework experts in Norway, and is financed by the Norwegian Research Council. This project builds upon previous research and development projects.

This research project will include hundreds of teleworkers in more than twenty companies and several upcoming regional telecottages, telecentres and small businesses clusters.

The project's main goal is to develop further good conditions for telework in Norway. This is done by looking at new possibilities and the need of different kinds of arrangements or support for individuals, businesses and society.

The focus is also on types of professions and business perhaps not so obviously suited for telework, in order to create work and enterprise. The challenges concerning regional issues such as maintaining the rural populations along the coast and in the many small valleys of Norway is also considered important. As is environmental issues such as pollution and regulations of transport.

There is a special focus on:

- Topics like long time effects of telework, individual aspects and societal development
- Small and medium sized businesses and the Public sector
- Telecottages, telecentres and small business-clusters
- Different means (political, economical etc.) of supporting telework in order to create work and enterprise

This project is built on an earlier project, *The Norwegian Telework Experiment*, 1996-98. (Presented at Telework '97: "Telework for the disabled", and Telework '98: "Results and critical success factors". The previous project combined theory and practice in a successful way. Results from the earlier project were published in the following books and reports (available only in Norwegian):

- *Handbook on Teleworking*, Arbeidsmiljøforlaget, 1998
- *The Telework Experience in Norwegian Companies 1996-98*, The Research Council of Norway, 1998
- *Telework, Technology and Security*, The Research Council of Norway, 1997
- *Telework, Organisation and Leadership*, The Research Council of Norway, 1998
- *Telework, Working Agreements and Labour Law*, The Research Council of Norway, 1997Text here

Further information about *Project Telework* is given at the web-site:



<http://www.avenir.no/fjernarbeid>

The design and goals of this interesting new telework research project are presented in this paper prepared for the Telework '99 conference.

From working in home offices to developing modern society

Some of the crucial questions the newly launched research project on telework will try to answer are:

Can telework be a new means of creating and developing

- work and enterprise?
- both new and old employment?
- both urban societies as well as rural districts?

Norway covers a very large area. The distance from Oslo to the northernmost point is roughly the same as the distance from Oslo to Rome. At the same time, we are a small nation counted in people, less than 5 million, and the population is largely scattered across the country. We also have a very decentralised structure of management.

There is a very high rate of PCs in Norwegian homes, and because of the scattered population, we have a large working stock in need of more flexible ways of working, both as mobile workers, home office workers or working from telecentres. At the same time there is heavy focus on this new way of creating work and enterprise from government and politicians. This year many telecentres and telecottages are being established.

Project Telework has focus on three aspects: individual, business, and society. The earlier research project had a focus mostly on the business, work and employment point of view. The focus is now wider and more related to Norwegian society as a whole.

The Norwegian Government has recently proclaimed an *Active plan for SME's* where they state that the Government will further support the initiative of *Project Telework* and the Industrial Estate Corporation concerning the research on telework and the establishment of telecentres. Responsible for this plan are The Ministry of Trade and Industry and The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

The Government will also discuss today's *Act relating to Worker Protection and Working Environment* as this act does not apply when working in home offices or as mobile workers. Today's regulation excludes the protection of teleworkers. When modifying this law the Government will take care to secure individual privacy rights.

Connection to important public initiatives

Project Telework is also connected to important public initiatives that supports the creation of work and enterprise, especially the establishment of telecentres.

These are the following three:

1. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development: *A pilot programme for selected rural communities with heavy decrease in population*. The aim is to encourage the development of competitive enterprises in outlying districts, both through the restructuring and strengthening of existing companies and through the creation of new jobs.
2. The State Industrial and Regional Development Fund (SND) and the Industrial Estate Corporation (SIVA): *Supporting the creation of clusters of SME's ("næringshager") which includes possibilities for teleworking*. The aim is to help to create added value and enhance employment prospects in outlying districts. The Industrial Estate Corporation has also provided the initiative and driving force in mobilising private and public capital for the formation of regional investment and development companies in order to stimulate new business start-ups, innovation and networking in the districts concerned. Nine telecentres are sponsored by the Industrial Estate Corporation so far (see map)
3. The Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Labour and Government Administration, and the Norwegian Pollution Control: *Green state programme*. The aim is to reduce the wasting of natural resources and the pressure on the environment by the public sectors. 10 public enterprises are part of this programme. Strategic use of information technology and telework plays an important part.

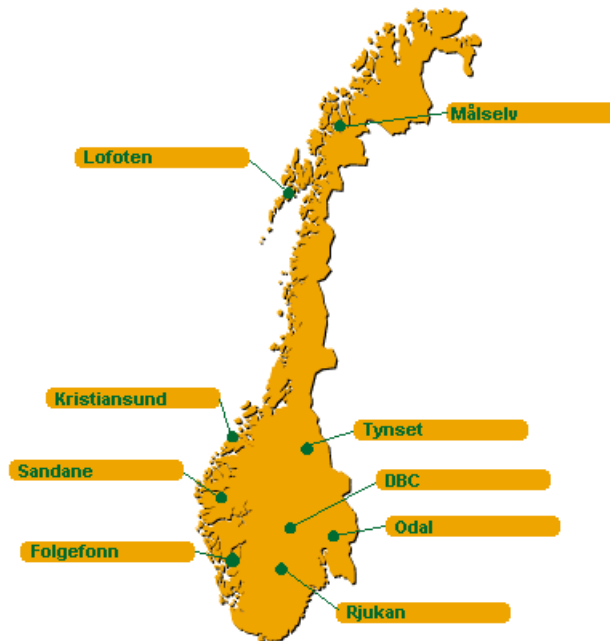
The goals of *Project Telework*

Project Telework will do further research on which tasks are suited for telework within a variety of professions and businesses. This is important in order to state clearly and visibly that there lies a possibility for telework in Norway that is not made most of.

Project Telework's main goal is to develop further good conditions for telework in Norway. This is done by looking at new possibilities and the need of different kinds of arrangements or support for individuals, businesses and society.

The focus is also on types of professions and business perhaps not so obviously suited for telework, in order to create work and enterprise. The challenges concerning regional issues such as maintaining the rural populations along the

coast and in the many small valleys of Norway is also considered important. As is *environmental* issues such as pollution and regulations of transport.



Motivating for telework

It is also important to look at the financial aspect since many SME's in Norway tends to believe that there is too much expenses in starting teleworking, especially on investing in new technology such as PC's, Internet/ Intranet and so on. As often from a cost-benefit perspective, the benefits are not always so clearly seen or easily measured. Motivating for telework is important – and motivation is at its best when we can show good examples or cases from real life experience.

***Project Telework's* main deliveries**

- A updated edition of “Handbook on Teleworking” with special focus on SME's and experiences with long time effects of teleworking
- A collection of articles presenting the results from the various companies connected to the project.
- Reports from the working groups on selected topics, as for instance “developing industry and trade” and “supporting the environment”.
- A Web-site on Telework that presents results and information about the project consecutively, as well as other telework news from all over the world.
- Organiser of a yearly conference on Telework in Norway.
- Participate in discussions and deliver suggestions to Government, public authorities and organisations.

New settings for telework

The ways of teleworking has changed a bit since the time of the research project that *Project Telework* builds upon. In the middle of the 1990s “telework” was almost synonymous with “home office”. The typical teleworker worked either at the regular office or at home.

Nowadays teleworkers are doing it “everywhere”. We are talking about mobile workers, telecentres and virtual companies. This new setting is “moving employment and work” to new locations physically speaking. In Norway the focus on telecentres and clusters of SME's has never been greater as it is today.

Now we are not talking so much about working at home, but more of working other places. *Project Telework* covers this new setting and will do research on the establishment of new places to work as for instance telecentres and SME-clusters the forthcoming two years.

Telework - from big companies to SMEs

The companies that started teleworking in Norway were more or less rather big companies, like for instance Scandinavian insurance and banking companies and multinational oil companies. But the fact is that most companies in Norway are far from big; the vast majority are SMEs and among these the really small companies are in clear majority.

Many of the SMEs in Norway have problems with acquiring adequate competence and qualifications in their nearby surroundings. *Project Telework* will do research on how some SMEs may use telework as a means to acquire necessary skilled employees.

The studies of the establishment of telecentres and clusters of SMEs is another important of *Project Telework*. In Norway we have a lot of commuters, and the idea is that they can work part of the week in telecentres with commuters from other companies. These commuters may also enrich the local environment with their mere presence and skills.

Selected categories of companies connected to *Project Telework*

Companies with long time experience with telework

Some of the companies connected to *Project Telework* are companies who already have introduced telework as an offer to employees, who now have practised telework for some years already.

Project Telework will do research on some of the following:

- What are the consequences and effects from introducing telework – and what are the long time effects from practising it ?
- Which adjustments are being done during practising telework?
- Are means and goals for telework modified as time passes by and experience is being gained?
- Which experiences should be taken into consideration in creating teleworking agreements in other companies – where one wants to not only cover the immediate adjustments in organisation and ways of working?

Companies with especially good experience in making telework policies or telework agreements

Some companies are selected because of their efforts and heavy focus on developing formal agreements and policies for telework. The different trade unions in Norway have been very concerned that telework benefits their members and not only the companies as such. *Project Telework* wants to do research on what are the motives and how do they influence the establishment of telework in different companies.

Project Telework will do research on some of the following:

- Which are the subjects for agreements regulation?
- Which are the subjects for company policies?
- What about the framework and the process itself? What were the driving forces and what were the objections?
- What are the experiences with these agreements or policies? And how are they related to each other?

New categories of businesses and occupational groups

Some companies are being selected because they are representing types of professions and business perhaps not so obviously suited for telework.

Project Telework will do research on some of the following:

- Companies where much information are company confidential or sensitive/ classified information (examples are enterprises in the health sector or Government offices)
- Companies with disabled workers
- SMEs where for instance telework is of strategic use in order to acquire or maintain necessary skilled employees.

Telecentres / telecottages

Some telecentres are connected to the project because they represent new work organisations for flexible work. Since *Project Telework* has a focus on SME's and developing society as well, these centres will be followed with great interest.

Project Telework will do research on some of the following:

- Telecentres where commuters may work part of the week in telecentres with commuters from other companies.
- Telecentres or small business clusters where telework is an integrated part that exists together with virtual organisations and other SME's.
- We will study in what way the mere presence of skilled professionals in telecentres may influence or hopefully enrich the local environment.

Studies and discussions in working groups

Project Telework is supplemented and supported by three working groups to discuss and formulate policies on selected themes. These working groups will consist of experts from academic institutions, research centres, government offices and so forth.

One working group will discuss the *labour market* and working condition with telework. Telework has a potential to reduce geographical and other physical barriers (as moving for instance) in the labour market. What are the potentials – and what impact may telework have in creating work and enterprise?

A second working group will discuss the consequences and possibilities of telework for the *individual* man or woman. What impact may telework have on a teleworkers life as a whole? How do telework influence leisure time and family life? How can telework be used to benefit elder, youth or disabled employees?

A third working group will discuss the impact of telework for developing Norwegian *society*. How can telework be used strategic in order to create work an enterprise? There will be a special focus on SME's. How can telework support the development of rural regions? How can telework support environmental issues like reducing transportation and pollution?

Openess

Project Telework is designed to be an open, exploring and searchingly project. We will build knowledge and experience and contribute to development of good examples of telework.

Case studies in many different companies together with discussions in working group, seminars, web publishing network building, will secure our goals. This is a project where we both do research and at the same time give advice and contribute as expert telework consultants.

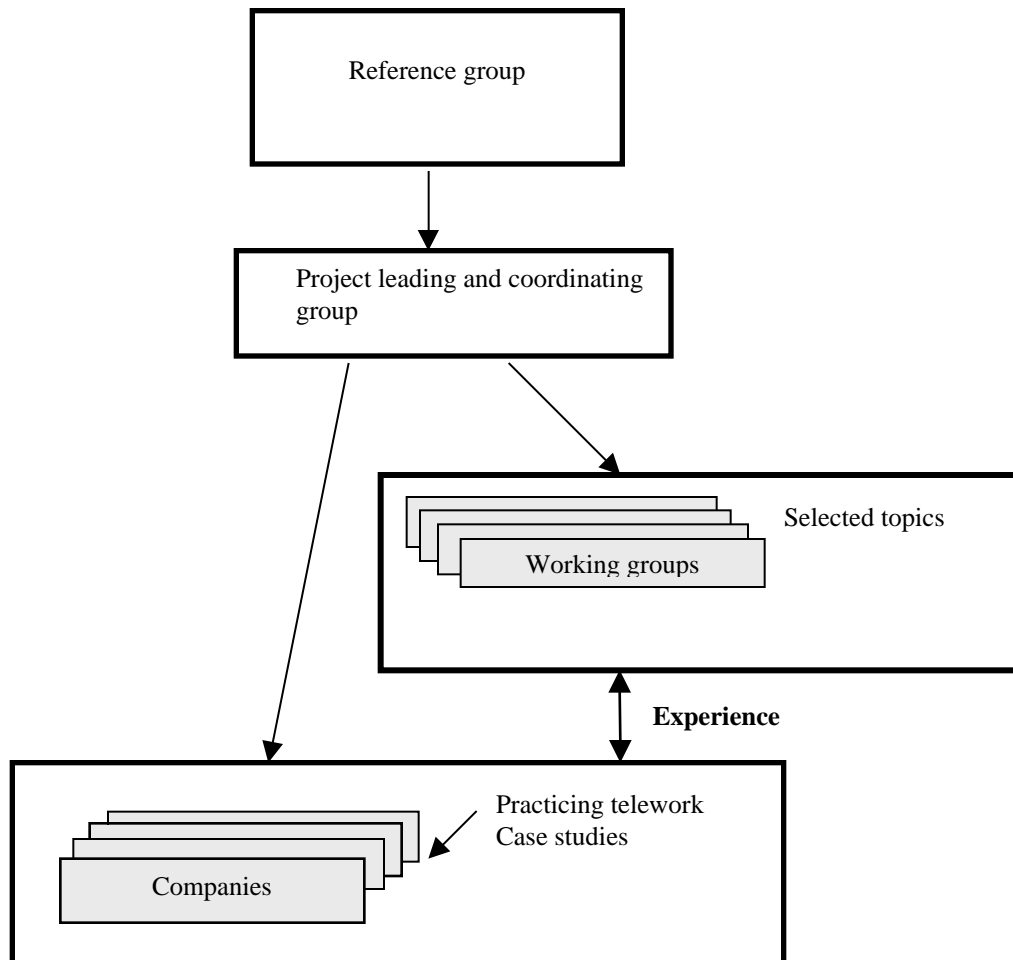
The Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry has said his expectations are very high concerning *Project Telework's* contribution to further knowledge and understanding the importance and possibilities of telework.

The Norwegian Research Council's research program *National Information Networks* (NIN)

Teleworking has become a theme in scenarios and action plans for the development of Norway as an information society. One of the more important action plans is a proposal for *National Information Networks*, NIN, which has been authored by a panel of experts, chaired by the Research Council of Norway. The core concept 'information network' is defined as a technical infrastructure, as well as the organisation and interaction between users and operators of highly diverse categories. The main concern was to develop national information networks to create new opportunities for society, national prosperity, and for the individual.

Partly based on an initiative from the consultant company Avenir ASA, the topic of teleworking was introduced as a theme for the National Information Networks. In the NIN-proposal, the teleworking development programme is one of the approximately ten key areas of application. Other project themes are 'EDI as a tool for electronic trade', 'National road information network', and 'Network for co-operation and marketing in the travel industry' and a number of others.

How Project Telework is organised



Within each area of application, more detailed programmes are formulated by expert groups.

The general format of activity for each of the applications was to establish task groups for co-ordinating activities, while relying on substantial efforts and supplementary financing from industrial and institutional partners.

Project Telework is an important part of the NIN program.

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Author briefing:

Unn Sakshaug is a computer scientist and has worked with different aspects of information technology for more than 13 years. Her main occupation has been on strategic use of information technology and new ways of working. She has been involved in telework related projects for many years.

Together with experts, from Telenor R&D and Avenir she has published several scientific reports related to telework with financial support from The Research Council of Norway.

The latest book published is "Handbook on Teleworking", Arbeidsmiljøforlaget, Oslo, 1998 (in Norwegian)

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