

No More Virtual Communities — Strong Linkages of Flexible Working Women On The Net into the Practice of Everyday Life

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Abstract

In my paper I address the strong linkages of flexible working women on the net into the practice of everyday life in Taiwan, the process and how they try to overcome the problems and toughness of living and working together and the way they involve themselves into communities in realistic lives, not only on the net.

First, this paper hopes to reveal the background of digital working and its relevance with female white clerical workers. Second, the history, mission statement and main work of the Women Awakening Foundation (WAF) and the Small Office & Home Office Association (SOHO Association), because both of them are playing important roles for flexible working women to tie up strong linkages around Taiwan, and to introduce the new project of six star communities in Taiwan, which is held by the Taiwan government. Third, the way they try to break through their difficulties in private lives and working situations into involving public communities to make better living and working surroundings.

Keywords

Labour and gender studies, telework, digital working, the balance of work and life, engaging communities

Digital working

With the rapid developments of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) around the world, nowadays many ICT related and qualified female white clerical workers tend to take their priority to choose another much more flexible styles of working and living as digital workers in order to have more flexibility to be at home and so to have a good chance to be a perfect wife or a good mother. Those digital workers, who are skilled and have ICT equipment at home, take their home as the working place. Instead of working all day long in the office, they prefer to work at home and have more flexible working ways, including working hours, places, schedules, promotions and so on (Casimir 1998, Casimir 1999, Engstroem and Johanson 1998). However, over time, digital working is not just as a new specification of occupation (Kerr 1995), but a new

way of life to pursue the occupation and to balance the problem between working and living (Applebaum 1992), the public and private sphere in this new coming century.

The major contemporary concerns and issues as informed by the experiences of female digital workers (Chen 2001; Fukutome and Yoshizugawa 1999; Kantani 1999; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz 1995) have highlighted a significant tendency of gender relations in the employment situation. These issues reveal that even though the company welfares and employment legislation for digital workers are not completely established yet, many qualified female digital workers take this kind of job as the first choice in order to balance their works and lives. On the contrary, this is often the last choice for many qualified male digital workers.

Past research and theories about digital workers are rare and most of them have tended to focus on the development of information and communication technology, the profits and interests of business and companies, and the efficient management and effective autonomy. Very few studies have been done with a focus on gender issues, especially the situation of women in this context (Chen 2001; Steward 1999; Phizacklea and Wolkowitz 1995; Thompson and Ackroyd 1995; Yoshizawa 1999).

In summary, the critical roles of women as digital workers have often been neglected or underemphasised as the secondary domain of the labour market in the past decade in the research literature. There has also been a lack of research examining whether women and men as digital workers are willing or forced to choose or adapt to this kind of working and living styles, and the vital roles they play between the labour market and families within the broader contexts of globalisation and social change. Instead of discussing the realities of the labour market under the gender discrimination, social inequalities and global capitalism, I hope to contribute to reveal another aspects of how female digital workers devote to balance their working and living in everyday life by involving themselves into communities and tying up strong linkages with other women in communities.

The Women Awakening Foundation (WAF) and Small Office & Home Office Association (SOHO Association) are playing important roles for flexible working women to tie up strong linkages around Taiwan. The followings are the history, mission statement and main work of these two organisations.

Women Awakening Foundation (WAF)

<<http://www.awakening.org.tw/>>

Location: 4F, No. 264, Lung-chiang Rd., Taipei, 104, Taiwan.

History:

The Women Awakening Foundation was established in 1987. Since 1982, a group of women who supported gender equity founded the *Awakening Magazine* to arouse women's self-awareness and to strive for women's rights. With much difficulty, the group published the magazine and organised various events like anti-sexual harassment activities and the advocacy of Equal Employment Law. After a few years, *Awakening Magazine* has gained a positive reputation and respect from the Taiwanese community. In hopes of mobilising more women, the founders established the Awakening Foundation in October 1987.

Mission statement:

1. To raise public awareness of women's issues, to fight for women's rights, and to improve the social conditions of all women.
2. To raise feminist consciousness.
3. To mobilise women, to eliminate sexism, and to promote gender equity.
4. To carry on the women's movement and to end all forms of discrimination and oppression.

Main work:

1. Each year, we set a theme, which corresponds to current women's issues.
2. Hold seminars, public hearings, and speeches to address women's issues and relevant topics.
3. Provide direct aide, counselling and information for individual women and other organisations.
4. Hold lectures and seminars on women's issues for various communities, organisations and schools.
5. Publish the monthly *Awakening* newsletter.
6. Pushed for the Family Law reform and drafted the Equal Employment Bill.

Small Office & Home Office Association (SOHO Association)

<<http://www.soho.com.tw/>>

Location: 15F-9, No. 6., Hsin-Yi Rd. Section 4, Taipei, 106, Taiwan.

Date of foundation: Small Office Home Office Association was established on 17 September 1999.

Mission statement:

1. To create a better environment for workers of Small Office & Home Office, in order to rise up [to] its competition and its contribution for the whole situation of economy and labour market.

2. To offer and to improve the occupational education for workers of Small Office & Home Office, in order to rise up [to] its competition and quality of business.
3. To improve inner/inter national negotiations, cooperations and social activities between the members as workers of Small Office & Home Office.
4. To promote and to carry on researching on related policies and legislations for the both sides of employee and employer of Small Office & Home Office, to indemnify workers of Small Office & Home Office from the harm of work, to ensure their occupations and to improve their working surroundings.

Main Work:

1. Hold seminars and speeches around the cities in Taiwan, which correspond to this kind of new working and living way and the employee and employer of Small Office & Home Office.
2. Provide direct aide, counselling and information of relevant aspects for the employee and employer of Small Office & Home Office, especially for women, who want to run their own businesses.
3. Hold workshops, conferences and colloquiums on relevant issues for various people. For example, the temporal or long-term unemployed, beginners of this kind of new working and living forms, the employee and employer of Small Office & Home Office, and special topics for young women or elderly people.
4. Keep on doing the research on the employee and employer of Small Office & Home Office in different cities and in various types of business in Taiwan.
5. Pushed for the human resources of women and the labour policies for the workers of Small Office & Home Office.

Many qualified female workers choose to work at home or at small offices nearby as digital workers, rather than at distant offices or companies, in order to save or have more flexible time for their working and living. They think that is the best way to balance their works and lives, and besides, they have heavy responsibilities of family to take good care of their family members, including babies, young children and elderly and sick relatives.

At first, the flexible-working women just wanted to try to exchange their working experiences and create a learning circle among them on the Internet. Then they also tried to share their working emotions and feelings of lives as a virtual community. Moreover, those flexible-working women also share their responsibilities for loads of work and occupation with others in the virtual community, and the loads of housework, with other unemployed or flexible-working women in the real community. In this way, they have already made a strong linkage with one another and constituted a cooperating circle through the net into their everyday lives. They have made the

surroundings of working and living better and friendlier for the flexible-working women in the virtual and real communities.

Project of Six Star Communities

<<http://www.gov.tw/>>

According to the successful experiences of many communities around Taiwan, especially the above cases about flexible-working women through the virtual communities into the real communities. In March 2005, the government in Taiwan is eager to extend a new project of six star communities. This new project addresses the aspects of public security, medical health, industry, ecology, landscape, culture and so on in the communities around Taiwan. It hopes to build up a strong linkage between the communities and nation and to foster the involvement from local citizens.

Conclusion

The flexible-working women are not only sharing their working emotions and living feelings on the net, but also walking through the virtual internet communities into the real communities and the practice of everyday life. Moreover, they create a better environment for families in Taiwan; for example, sharing their loading of work and housework, raising and educating little or young children, or nursing elderly or ill relatives and so on. Most importantly of all, they have already tied up a strong linkage and built up a cooperating circle between those flexible-working women on the Internet and in the real communities. In this way, they can work further to increase the public awareness of women's issues, to fight for women's rights, and to improve the social conditions of all women.

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Biography

Chen, Ming-Chen is a doctorate student in sociology of Labour and Gender Studies at Humboldt Universitaet zu Berlin. She graduated MA from the Institute of Sociology, National Tsing-Hua University, Hsin-Chu City, Taiwan in June 2001. The topics of her current studies are labour and gender studies, information society, virtual communities, and East and South Asia studies. She speaks Taiwanese, Chinese, English and German.