

TELEWORK AND ITS MAIN DETERMINANTS. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I. A. STOICOV¹ L. G. ȚÎRU²

Abstract: *Even though home-working and teleworking are very common words used often nowadays, they do not name a new phenomenon. Working from people's homes was a common practice in the pre-industrial era, because many people worked primarily close to their homes in various craft workshops. The actual context of COVID-19 associated with contact restrictions has influenced many companies to allow their employees to work from home to reduce the possibility of infections, so it can be seen as a significant change in this perspective. Analyzing both new and old studies on the subject, it is clear that the phenomenon has evolved and its most significant changes have occurred in the last period, in addition to providing a broad perspective on this type of work. The study focuses on the effects of teleworking on productivity, attitudes toward home-based telework and traditional office work, work-life balance, hybrid work mechanisms, and environmental benefits.*

Key words: *telework, home-working, COVID-19, literature review.*

1. Introduction

It is necessary to understand the larger environment in which telework emerged, its historical context, and how it grew into a modern reality in order to really understand the concepts of telework and telecommuting, which are considered recent and so actual. In order to truly understand the concepts of telework and telecommuting, that are considered recent, it is critical to comprehend the larger environment in which telework arose, its historical setting, and how it evolved into a modern reality. In the quarter-century after Nilles first introduced it, the concept of telecommuting, or alternatively telework, has been applauded as a solution to a variety of organizational and social challenges (Bailey and Kurland, 2002).

Because this is not a new trend, some of history's most significant events will be highlighted. Teleworking has a history of approximately 50 years, and everything started when incipient technology made telecommuting possible through the usage of terminals' telephone lines as a connection. During those difficult times of the oil crisis,

¹ West University of Timișoara, ionela.stoicov@e-uvt.ro, corresponding author

² West University of Timișoara, laurentiu.tiru@e-uvt.ro, corresponding author

the initial main principle and purpose was to support the employees in saving time and money through telecommuting. The American Jack Nilles was the first to use the term "telecomuting" in one of his studies, demonstrating a constructive attitude while emphasizing the positive features of the phenomenon and on business level by saving resources. Frank Schiff believes that in order to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon, he needs to fill in the existing gaps by emphasizing that it has both advantages and disadvantages. As a result, in his post titled "Working from Home Can Save Gasoline," he discusses the potential issues and disadvantages of working remotely. Since the development of technology in the last 40-30 years, there has been a gradual increase in the interest in teleworking. Teleworking has become more common as Internet connections and access have become more widespread (Avgitidou, 2021).

The continuous advancement of technology, and then the introduction of Wi-Fi, opened up new possibilities for remote working. Despite that, most businesses and managers were not prepared to make the switch to teleworking. That is the reason the number of teleworkers remained insignificant (Avgitidou, 2021).

In terms of numbers, 5% of EU workers teleworked on a regular basis in 2000; seven years later, that figure had risen to 7%. Teleworking will not become more widespread in the future, according to Aguilera, unless there is a strong push. However, the number of people who telework on a regular basis is two times smaller than those who telework on occasion, according to the European Commission (1 in 20 vs. 1 in 10) (Welz and Wolf, 2010).

The industrial revolution took people from their homes and centralized them in factories, and offices. Today we may observe an inverted phenomenon, a reverse trend in which people value their skills and abilities by working from their own homes, whether we are talking about external suppliers or collaborators, independent suppliers of goods and services, or employees of companies who work remotely using electronic links (Baruch, 2000, p. 34-35).

Analyzing new and old studies about the subject, it can be seen that the phenomenon has evolved and most of its changes occurred during the last period.

Even though there is some agreement on the relevance of teleworking and its structural elements, previous research has not come to a consistent conclusion on the consequences of teleworking. Scholars have identified a few general key elements that are usually associated with teleworking. Even though there was an agreement on the relevance of teleworking and its structural elements in the previous research, they weren't approached in order to achieve a telework consensus, but scholars have identified a few general key elements that are usually associated with teleworking.

The actual literature review explores and highlights some of the benefits and pitfalls of teleworking, the advantages and disadvantages, it analyzes and describes in what way work from home can be exercised.

In particular, the study examines teleworking and its implications for: the impact on effectiveness; attitude toward home based telework and conventional work at the workplace; quality of working and family life; hybrid work mechanisms; environmental-related benefits; job satisfaction and work-life integration; productivity; the social aspect of work; flexibility and adaptability and work-life balance.

2. What is Teleworking?

Although there are an abundance of studies, "teleworking" still represents a concept that continues to be defined in a variety of ways, some of which are contradictory. Actually, there is no universally agreed definition (McCloskey and Igbaria, 1998).

The frequent element refers to the place where the tasks are fulfilled, therefore the common factor is that work is done from a location other than one's typical office. Referring to the name, "telecommuting," the majority of researchers acknowledge that it does not involve telecommunication.

The European Union's limits on telework are, like those of other research, too generic. More specifically, the *European Framework Agreement on Telework* (2002) defines telework as "a form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract or relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis." (Framework Agreement on Telework, 2002). The above definition shapes various telework execution methods while also allowing for a variety of interpretations of the concept.

"Telework" is currently used in the context of performing professional tasks outside the workplace or office. Most of the time, these tasks are performed from the employee's home, hence the expression "work from home" (Baruch, 2000).

Telework is defined in a variety of ways. Qvortrup (1998) discusses the uncertainty of definitions, as well as the terminology involved (telework, telecommuting, and homework) (Felstead, 1996).

According to the definitions of Korte and Wynne (1996), telework has three main components: location (partially independent/completely independent/totally independent of the location of the employer/client/contractor); use of technology (mainly: personal computers, e-mail, faxes, telephones); the form of organization and the communication connection with the organization: the work is done from various places, ways, channels of communication, and ways of organization.

Even while the importance of teleworking, as well as its structural elements, is expanding, no definite conclusion on the impacts of teleworking can be reached (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Biron & Veldhoven, 2016).

3. Review of Telework Research

In order to review the literature, we took into consideration five representative articles from different periods in order to analyze how the concept of telework has developed and, more importantly, how the variables are connected with it. The most relevant information about each of the five articles is presented as: theoretical ideas, the main aims, expected results, and conclusions.

3.1. *Teleworking: benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers* (2000) by Y. Baruch

This study examines how employees view teleworking and identifies potential advantages and disadvantages. It investigates the effects of teleworking on productivity, work quality, and family life. The new forms of work, especially those approached at organizational level, which carry out their virtual activity, depend on the efficiency of information technology (IT). The technology and thus the IT domain is the main, but not the only factor that has led to the modification of jobs, as well as to ways of organizing for flexibility, efficiency, and responsiveness. As a result, traditional control mechanisms are no longer necessary for efficient human resource management. The latest developments in technology make it possible to work from home or at a distance. In studies on this topic, the impact on people's beliefs toward work, performance, stress, and the relationship between home and workplace is rarely taken into account.

Telework uses technology as its main tool. If in the past, physical effort characterized the work environment, today it is represented by a physical sedentary lifestyle and an increased intellectual effort that makes possible a rapid transfer of information. In 1987, Hakim mentioned that only a small proportion of people who worked from home used computers as high-tech equipment. However, recent studies emphasize the implications of new technologies on telework and its implications of new technologies as a flexible way of working (Mueller, 1992).

Thus, when analyzing the impact of technology on certain processes, the investigator can use multiple strategies, one of them being the strategy of offering an explanation. For example, in order to explain why certain new technological ways of communication fail, the investigator may offer as an explanation the lack of a managerial expertise (Coman, 2018). However, in the context of the working environment and tight deadlines, an environment in which people have to face varied unpredictable challenges and in which people are subject to a continuous flow of requests, the success or failure of each person depends on his/her ability to know how to solve the problems he/she faces (Coman, 2007, p.171).

The study's main objective was to get the teleworkers' perspective on this modern way of working in comparison to the traditional workplace. It was created to investigate both the positive and negative aspects of teleworking that have been indicated in the literature, as well as the actual impact of teleworking. It was done in the form of an interview survey. 62 teleworkers from five different companies were interviewed.

3.2. *A review of telework research: Findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work* (2002) by DE Bailey, NB Kurland

The paper entitled *A review of telework research: Findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work*, which belongs to DE Bailey, NB Kurland focuses on how telework has sparked and influenced research in a variety of fields, including transportation and urban planning, as well as ethics, law, sociology, and organizational studies. This time, the researcher's aim is to look for answers to the following important

questions: „who participates in telework?“, „why do they do it?“, and „what happens when they do it?. The search in order to highlight the specialized literature in the field of telework gave over 80 empirical studies from different areas, such as: research in the field of transport, urban planning and information to organizational behavior, ethics, law and sociology, that are all already published.

It is underlined that in previous times, the availability and preferences of managers were the most predictive factors in determining which employees would work remotely. When it comes to the employees' reasons for teleworking, factors such as reduced commuting and family duties do not appear to be significant. For a long time, the evolution of telework development was inhibited by the need to have control and to supervise and control the entire activity of employees. Despite the fact that many studies support the idea that teleworking increases job satisfaction and productivity, the authors of this study claim that there is little clear evidence in this regard. Relating to this, DE Bailey and NB Kurland suggest that future research should follow three steps in order to provide more information: considering group and organizational impact in order to understand who is affected by teleworking; reconsidering those working on teleworking; and highlighting theoretical construction and connections with existing organizational theories. The authors conclude by offering some recommendations to the researchers working in this field. They advise against mixing assumptions and study techniques because these aspects may be irrelevant to the vast majority of people who telework. Instead, they suggest that researchers start with studies that will help build a solid theory, which they believe is a better approach for researching new work practices.

3.3. *Is telework effective for organizations?* (2012) by BH Martin, R MacDonnell

The purpose of this article is to answer the interrogative title: is telework effective for organizations? As the authors support, telework is a flexible work arrangement that has been shown to benefit both individuals and society. Most organizations have been hesitant to use it due to a lack of proof for management as to whether or not telework is beneficial to the institution, enterprises, and firms.

The main objective of this paper is to bring together multidisciplinary research on the effects of telework on organizational results in order to provide a more complete answer to the mentioned question.

In order to show and demonstrate the facts, a meta-analytical technique was used, starting with an interdisciplinary search for effect sizes in eight databases limited to scholarly journals and dissertations. There were 991 papers in total that were scanned for inclusion criteria. Telework is the independent variable, while productivity, retention, turnover intent, commitment, and performance are the dependent variables.

The authors produced a systematic review and a meta-analysis of 32 correlations from empirical studies to arrive at these conclusions, and they discovered a minor but positive association between telework and organizational outcomes.

Telework is intended to increase productivity, ensure employee retention, promote corporate engagement, and improve overall performance. As a result, it is useful to both organizations and enterprises.

3.4. Overcoming telework challenges: Outcomes of successful telework strategies.

(2014) by TW Greer, SC Payne

The authors of this paper proposed gathering evidence linked to teleworking's current prevalence and continued growth. They believe that potential teleworkers and their managers should be aware of the pressures that may prevent adequate teleworking as well as of viable solutions to the unpredicted concerns. In order to demonstrate this, 86 high-performing teleworkers and their supervisors were surveyed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

As a result of the qualitative data, themes indicating categories of issues and strategies emerged. Using advanced technology tools, relationships with family, task planning, and aiming for better efficiency were among the solutions highlighted. Intentions of turnover, facilitation of work-to-family transition, and vice versa were all correlated to the strategies. The implications for teleworker management are examined, as well as ideas for future research.

3.5. Telework in future workplaces: COVID-19 enforced telework shaping young adults' perception of telework (2021) by V. Mielck

This paper takes the phenomenon on the next level because it acknowledges the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and its influence on the topic. The goal was to provide an overview of how knowledge workers reacted to COVID-19-mandated telework. According to Veronika Mielck, the author of the study, voluntary and involuntary telework represent a topic that has been previously approached by many researchers in their academic publications, but the idea of forced telework was uncommon in scientific literature. The focus of this study is to investigate full-time forced telework in the COVID-19 context.

Furthermore, by enrolling 95 people in two survey rounds, this is a longitudinal study that sheds light on the effects of the forced telework era. Because the author wanted to capture the phenomenon in its evolution, she organized two surveys: the first occurred during the first month of pandemic restrictions, followed by the second after six months.

The perspective is a qualitative one, because she intended to catch the individual changes in perceptions, the feelings and habits of teleworkers, aspects that were analyzed at both general and individual level.

The time of forced telework, according to the author's findings, has transformed the way telework is seen and perceived by employees but not only by them. Overall, telework satisfaction increased during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The mandated telework was attributed to many benefits cited by respondents. It is clear that individuals have perceived not only the benefits, but they've also experienced some difficulties related to the lack of social interaction, lack of intimacy, time management problems, and many others. As a result, the outcomes of this study point to a future interest in the hybrid telework paradigm. Even more, interest in the implementation of a hybrid system as a result of the changes generated by the pandemic was also shown in studies conducted in the field of higher education, such studies revealing that students'

would prefer to use the online environment and the tools it provides, as complementary methods to the traditional educational process (Coman et al., 2020)

To sum up, the article adds to the existing academic discourse about telework by bringing a new perspective from the period of forced telework. There was a thorough theoretical framework exploring the existing works on the issues of telework in order to study the topic.

4. Conclusions

The article includes the general attitudes towards telework, its perceived benefits and the potential future telework aspirations. Despite the diversity of the studies under consideration, they were selected in order to illustrate that, no matter what the perspective or type of case study method is used, the purpose is the same: to analyze and to emphasize the phenomenon of telework. All of the chosen studies are quite important and influential for the field of telework. They have been taken into account considering the release period and the number of citations.

Work is not connected to the idea of an office, a place or a location, but is connected with the idea of an activity that means more than solving tasks, so work is "[...] something we do, not a place where we go to" (Woody, 1995).

References

- Aguilera, A., Lethiais, V., Rallet, A., & Proulhac, L. (2016). Home-based telework in France: Characteristics, barriers and perspectives. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 92, 1-11.
- Avgitidou, S. (2021). *The role of Human Resources during a crisis: the role of teleworking and other information systems* [Master thesis], University of Macedonia
- Bailey, D. E., & Kurland, N. B. (2002). A review of telework research: Findings, new directions, and lessons for the study of modern work. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 23(4), 383-400.
- Baruch, Y. (2000). Teleworking: benefits and pitfalls as perceived by professionals and managers. *New technology, work and employment*, 15(1), 34-49.
- Biron, M., & Van Veldhoven, M. (2016). When control becomes a liability rather than an asset: Comparing home and office days among part-time teleworkers. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(8), 1317-1337.
- Coman, C. (2007). *Tehnici de negociere* [Negotiation techniques]. București: CH Beck.
- Coman, C. (2018). *Analiza imaginii și influența Mass media*. [Image analysis and Mass media influence]. Timișoara: West Publishing.
- Coman, C., Țîru, L. G., Meseșan-Schmitz, L., Stanciu, C., & Bularca, M. C. (2020). Online teaching and learning in higher education during the coronavirus pandemic: students' perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(24), 10367.
- Ellison, N. B. (2004). *Telework and social change: How technology is reshaping the boundaries between home and work*. Westport: Greenwood publishing group.

- Felstead, A. (1996). Homeworking in Britain: the national picture in the mid-1990s. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 27(3), 225-238.
- Gajendran, R. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2007). The good, the bad, and the unknown about telecommuting: meta-analysis of psychological mediators and individual consequences. *Journal of applied psychology*, 92(6), 1524.
- Greer, T. W., & Payne, S. C. (2014). Overcoming telework challenges: Outcomes of successful telework strategies. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 17(2), 87.
- Herman, A. (2009). *The New Workplace of the 21st Century*. Michigan: US Department of Labor.
- Korte, W. B., & Wynne, R. (1996). *Telework: Penetration, potential and practice in Europe*. Amsterdam, Washington: John Wiley & Sons.
- Martin, B. H., & MacDonnell, R. (2012). Is telework effective for organizations? A meta-analysis of empirical research on perceptions of telework and organizational outcomes. *Management Research Review*, 35 (7).
- Mccloskey, D. W., Igbaria, M., & Parasuraman, S. (1998). The work experiences of professional men and women who telecommute: convergence or divergence?. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (JOEUC)*, 10(4), 15-22.
- Mielck, V. (2021). Telework at future workplaces: COVID-19 enforced telework shaping young adults' perception of telework. Retrieved from https://helda.helsinki.fi/dhanken/bitstream/handle/10227/408101/Mielck_Veronika.pdf?sequence=1
- Mokhtarian, P. L. (1991). *Defining Telecommuting*. Institute of Transportation Studies, Research Report UCD-ITS-RR-91-04, California: University of California.
- Mokhtarian, P. L. (1992). *Defining telecommuting*. Institute of Transportation Studies, 273 -281.
- Mueller, F. (1992). Flexible working practices in engine plants: evidence from the European automobile industry. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 23(3), 191-204.
- Nilles, J. M. (1994). *Making telecommuting happen: A guide for telemanagers and telecommuters*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Pratt, J. H. (1984). Home teleworking: A study of its pioneers. *Technological forecasting and social change*, 25(1), 1-14.
- Pyöriä, P. (2003). Knowledge work in distributed environments: issues and illusions. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 18(3), 166-180.
- Qvortrup, L. (1998). FROM TELEWORKING TO. *Teleworking: International Perspectives: from Telecommuting to the Virtual Organisation*, 21 -40.
- Van Meel, J. (2010). The Origins of new ways of working. Office concepts in the 1970s, *Facilities* 29(9-10):357-367
- Welz, C., & Wolf, F. (2010). *Telework in the European Union*. Dublin: Eurofound.