Structural telework: guidelines for good practice

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A misleading definition

Telework is traditionally defined as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) — such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers — for the purpose of working outside the employer's premises.\(^1\)

Telework is a method of organising and performing work

Switching to telework requires a reorganisation of the conduct of work

\(^1\) ILO 2021
The pandemic stress test

- Inadequate equipment: 37%
- Lack of support from manager: 52%
- Decreased work productivity: 35%
- Working during free time: 33%
- Worried about work when not working: 58%
- Emotionally drained by work: 60%
- Too tired after work for household chores: 68%
- Not enough time spent with family: 53%

EUROFOUND 2020
The pandemic stress test

A fair share of these issues can be attributed to the **extraordinary nature** of the crisis.

**Employers had little time** to implement anything beyond the immediate need to provide home working technology.

But with greater adoption of structural telework across the globe, the risk is that a model of remote working which has **proved dysfunctional** becomes entrenched and widespread.

We have therefore reached a **pivotal period**, and the lack of frame must be rectified if telework is to become a pervasive feature of our working lives.
A holistic approach

- **Work organisation**: Distribution and coordination of tasks and authority
- **Work relations**: Social interactions, integration, cohesion, work atmosphere, etc.
- **Work content**: Nature of the tasks and the skills needed to perform them remotely
- **Health & safety**: Risk assessment, preventive measures, general guidelines, etc.

Research provides guidance, not off-the-shelf solutions
Work organisation

- **Clarifying roles and responsibilities for everyone involved**
  - Tasks to be performed remotely, persons to report to, persons to seek help from, etc.

- **Allowing flexibility in organizing working time and space**
  - Scheduling working time around personal responsibilities, flexible location of work, etc.

- **Setting guidelines regarding communication methods**
  - Expected response times, preferred communication methods, shared calendars and documents, R2D, etc.

- **Finding the right balance between autonomy and control**
  - Limiting the use of digital surveillance technologies, greater leeway in structuring one's work, etc.
Work relations

Ensuring proper dissemination of corporate information
- Election of representatives, introduction of new tools, modification of the telework policy, etc.

Promoting informal exchanges between workers
- Virtual coffee corner, established office traditions, team building, etc.

Promoting a culture of trust and openness
- Wellbeing check-ins, case-by-case arrangements for work-life balance, etc.

Fostering social and instrumental support
- Maintaining a virtual presence, scheduling regular 1-1 meetings, availability and supportiveness, etc.
Specifying clear and achievable objectives for each position

Adequate workload, consensus on the content and amount of work to be performed, etc.

Adapt and rebalance workload if necessary

Revising expectations, re-deploying under-stretched workers to over-stretched teams, etc.

Preventing dispersal of efforts and duplication of work

Clearly defined processes & workflows, shared vision of team members' roles and responsibilities, etc.

Training managers on how to manage workers remotely

Online tools, management style, privacy requirements, etc.
Health and safety

Assessing and monitoring the risks related to telework

Proactive safety culture, meaningful health and safety communication channels, early warning systems, etc.

Guaranteeing the same level of protection for all workers

Teleworking brings risks of its own but also risks that are similar to those in the workplace.

Ensuring workers are provided with adequate equipment

Ergonomics furniture, second screen, office furniture, reimbursement of expenses, etc.

Raising employee’s awareness on the risks

Blurred boundaries, musculoskeletal disorders, professional isolation, burnout, etc.
The impact of teleworking

**Work-life balance**
- Reconciliation of work and family life
- Blurred boundaries

**Productivity**
- Better use of high productivity moments
- Long hours and overwork

**Job satisfaction**
- Rewarding and fulfilling
- Draining and isolating

**Quality of life**
- Higher morale
- Stress and sleep deprivation

**Empowerment**
- More autonomy and flexibility
- Lack of support and isolation

**Commitment**
- Mutual trust and loyalty
- Resentment and injustice

**A double-edged sword**

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- Stress and sleep deprivation
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Thank you
For your attention