

## POST PANDEMIC INSIGHTS ON ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF VIRTUAL WORK

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**ABSTRACT.** The virtual work has been implemented in some areas more than others, and particularly in information and communication technology field several years before the pandemic. But, due to the lockdowns while the Covid-19 pandemic, imposed remote work was a new experience for many. This research examines, by the use of a survey, the benefits and the challenges of telework. The respondents confirmed those elements to specific degrees answering to the closed questions and mentioned their perspectives in the open questions. The study focuses on items concerning employees and employer while telecommuting, highlighting their work performance in terms of leading, communicating and accomplishing the tasks. Productivity, work-life balance, well-being, virtual leadership and communication, and the preference for future teleworking are some of the aspects detailed. The findings show correlations between those elements, the preference for continue virtual working is directly linked to work-life balance influenced by remote work productivity, time management efficiency, concentration capacity, and depending on safety and protection measures in the telework system.

**Keywords:** telework, virtual leadership, communication, work-life balance, well-being, WHO-5, working time, flexibility, feedback, Covid-19 pandemic

**JEL Classification:** M10, M54, M15

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## **Introduction and literature review**

Virtual work is based on geographic dispersion of workers independent of company office and dependent on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). The advance of ICT led to different types of work arrangements, having employees performing their tasks away from office (Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2019) and independent of a specific working place that is of teleworker choice (Hill, Ferris, & Mårtinson, 2003).

The term teleworking is specific to European legislation in the field of telework, compared to the notion of telecommuting which is mostly found in the United States of America. The institution of telework in Romanian labor legislation was adopted by Law no. 81/2018 on the regulation of telework activity and is in force just since 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018. This law develops the notions of telework and tele-employee and provides certain rights and obligations for employees in Romania who choose or are forced to work from home (Chistruga-Sînchevici, 2021). Telework is the activity through which the work process is carried out from home by means of ICT, namely laptops, computers, tablets, and smartphones (International Labour Office, 2020). The term was first mentioned by Jack M. Nilles, a NASA engineer, in 1973. At that time there were already some workers at IBM working from home to test the effectiveness of telecommuting. From the perspective of Jack M. Nilles, the term telework addresses a fundamental question, namely: "If a person's work on any given day consists of interacting with a computer, communicating with other people using some form of telecommunications technology, simply reading or thinking, or all of these, what difference does it make where the person is when the work is done?" (Nilles, 1997, p. 7). However, several studies show there is some importance as it comes with benefits and challenges. Telework represents a medium and long-term strategic tool that will contribute to the realization of activities on time, increasing efficiency and productivity (Nilles, 1997).

The measures imposed to prevent the spread of Covid-19 involved social distancing and thus the temporary closure of many institutions and companies. It is certain that starting from 2020, most of the population experience a different way of working, learning, and teaching. Even if before the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic there were already people working remote, today this process is on the rise in most companies and in most fields. The expansion of telecommuting will greatly depend on the tactics and opportunities implemented in each company to support this major change, for both employees and employers. However, in some areas, switching to telework is practically impossible (Phillips, 2020).

Since the Covid-19 virus is still present, many of the employees work remotely daily or opt for a hybrid work system. Several studies of virtual work, practiced mainly in IT companies for some time before pandemic, identified benefits and disadvantages of telework system. Some advantages of the telecommuting for employees are reducing the time spent traveling to the office (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012), and respectively reducing the risk of infection with Covid-19, reducing transport costs, working at oneself rhythm, reducing stress (Antonacopoulou & Georgiadou, 2020), and having more flexibility (Casey & Grzywacz, 2008) in terms of time management (Sostero, Milasi, Hurley, Fernandez-Macias, & Bisello, 2020), and better work-life balance (Hill, Ferris, & Mårtinson, 2003). As for employers some benefits are increased employees' productivity (Nangoy, Mursitama, Setiadi, & Pradipto, 2020), lower company rental costs and the company's ability to recruit and collaborate with qualified personnel from all geographic areas (Niță, 2020).

As any system, telework involves some challenges for both sides. For employees could be challenging moments of energy interaction, losing internet connection, integration of various technological solutions required for support and cyber security (Phillips, 2020). For some the lack of socialization could degenerate in emotional problems (Anderson, Kaplan, & Vega, 2015) and lead to mental well-being issues (Radulescu, et al., 2021). The tendency to work over schedule or in the weekends is a factor increasing unpleasant feelings and reducing self-happiness (Song & Gao, 2019). For employers, the disadvantages would be providing employees with the necessary equipment to carry out telework, providing technical assistance in the event of equipment or telecommunications link malfunctions, adapted communication between company members, less

control over employees (Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021), clarifying some legal issues related to taxation, health insurance, work protection, etc. (Phillips, 2020).

As the way of working changed, it is important for both employees and employers that the management and leadership process is adapted to telecommuting. Knowledge and use of online work platforms (such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.) is required for effective communication between members of organizations. Organizational values and culture, trust and respect must be developed to strengthen employee-employer relationships (Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020). Respecting working hours and deadlines is essential. Timely feedback will prevent various problems and discrepancies in the company. Another important factor to support telecommuting is the support given to employees by the company. Because both mental and physical changes could occur, it is necessary to know and deal with them, like lack of motivation or concentration, mental health issues (Amichai-Hamburger, 2009), blurred work-life balance as studies show employees tend to work more hours remotely (Burke & El-Kot, 2009). Thus, both the employer and the employee are responsible for their prevention. Online meetings should have a purpose and a well-defined schedule. Keeping effective documentation and notes is also essential. Communication between organization members should be encouraged through the use of video cameras and microphones during online meetings. Communication must be concise, accurate and clear, but at the same time adequately convey the message, complex in some cases (Phillips, 2020).

As a result of the development of technology and respectively digitalization and globalization, new opportunities have arisen to create and manage virtual teams of members with different cultural values and norms, and from different time zones (Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2019). Also, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced a large part of the population to work remotely and respectively to move from classic teamwork, carried out in the office, to collaboration within virtual teams. The term virtual team was mentioned as early as the 1960s in the United States of America. The entering to 21<sup>st</sup> century was already rethinking the classical team and hierarchy in an organization, having organization compound of virtual teams and networks (Lipnack & Stamps, 1999). A virtual team involves members being geographically and spatially dispersed

and coordinating their activity through electronic information and communication technology (email, video conferences, telephone, etc.). In order to increase the effectiveness of companies and employees in the remote work system, in parallel with the term virtual team, the concept of virtual leadership appeared and developed. Effective communication among virtual team members (Liu, Ready, Wang, McCarthy, & Kim, 2018) in multinational companies is essential. Also, virtual cooperation between members is one of the most important processes that contribute to the success of virtual teams. They overcome geographical, temporal, and organizational barriers and allow large companies to be part of strategic projects on a global level. Among the advantages of these teams are the diversity of the staff, the flexible organizational structure, and the allocation of resources for innovation (Batırlık, Gencer, & Akkucuk, 2022).

The role of the leader in the coordination of the virtual team is a crucial one. The virtual communication is essential for leaders, and this calls for adoption, acceptance, and willingness to use technology of good quality for achieving the organization's goals. This requires for responsibility, flexibility, continual learning, analytical and technical skills (Liu, Ready, Wang, McCarthy, & Kim, 2018). The specialized literature distinguishes two types of behavior of a leader: the behavior of the task-oriented leader and the second one-oriented towards relationships. In the leadership process, task orientation involves establishing the roles and responsibilities of everyone, both the leader and the team members. Also, the leader is the one who monitors, directs, and contributes to the accomplishment of the team's tasks. The second, behavioral leader type is the relationship-oriented leader, it involves creating good relationships with team members where the emphasis is on the well-being between the two parties. This type of leadership also involves the constant motivation of team members, providing feedback and encouraging members to offer it to the others (Batırlık, Gencer, & Akkucuk, 2022). Another classification of leadership styles focuses on the results of style on virtual teams' effectiveness. The one affecting the relationships is considered the transformational style, while the transactional style is influencing the tasks achievement, and Laissez-Faire style enhancing innovativeness (Gross, 2018). Maintaining a high level of motivation between virtual team members through interactions, discussions and provided feedback is critical for employees and organizations (Penarroja, Orengo, & Zornoza, 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the lives of every employed person. Imposing the telework system during the pandemic was a challenge for both employees and employers. Even the teleworking experience was new for many employees, studies show they prefer to remain working from home post pandemic (Radulescu, et al., 2021). Several studies indicate this preference for the majority of respondents even they started practicing remote working since the Covid-19 pandemic (Sostero, Milasi, Hurley, Fernandez-Macias, & Bisello, 2020). Consequently, this research focuses on the telework system that has meant a new way of working for many employees since 2020. Thus, analyzing the opportunities and challenges of virtual work is essential for those involved and future virtual leadership of organizations.

## **Research methodology and results**

The research was carried out by collecting primary data, using the survey in April 2022. The study included the following stages: development of analysis tools, questionnaires, administration of questionnaires, processing of data obtained from the survey, analysis, and interpretation of data (Şandor, 2013). The survey contains mainly structured questions and a few unstructured (open-ended) questions. There were used identification questions and mainly Likert scale questions (Vagias, 2006).

### ***Descriptive analysis***

The members of an information technology (IT) company were questioned to study the topic of telework from several perspectives. The studied company is present in Romania, Republic of Moldova as well as in the Great Britain, thus the survey was in Romanian and English language. There were 114 employees responded to the survey, of which 81 (71%) practiced telework for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic, 28 (25%) before the Covid-19 pandemic, and 5 (4%) of the employees have never worked remotely. The research carried out had as a target group of respondents those who practiced telework before and those who started working in this way due to the lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the study sample is of 109 teleworking

respondents, from three different countries (64 from Republic of Moldova, 30 from Romania and 15 from the Great Britain), of which more than half (69%) are men, and 37% are women. In terms of age, more than half (59%) of respondents are between 26 and 35 years old. Another 24% of them are between 18 and 25 years old, and 17% - between 36 and 45 years old. Only 1 respondent (1%) is over 45 years old. The majority, approximately 73% of the respondents, do not coordinate a team, and the other 27% are in management positions.

### *Advantages and challenges of virtual work*

- The advantages of teleworking, like the productivity of the employees, the level of motivation, the level of concentration, work-life balance, the flow of documents, but also other advantages of teleworking identified by the company's 109 members while working from home were analyzed.

The first aspect analyzed was the productivity of the employees, more precisely if and to what extent they were more productive during the period in which they worked from home. Thus, most (43%) of the 109 respondents believe that they were often more productive in fulfilling their job duties, and another 27% were always more productive. Comparatively, 21% of employees say they were more productive sometimes, 6% - rarely, and 3% - never.

The shift to telecommuting was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, the presence of safety measures introduced within the company were also studied. In the same vein, 35% of employees believe that they often benefited from increased safety and protection measures, and another 30% - always. On the other hand, 18% of respondents have experienced safety measures and increased protection sometimes, 10% - rarely, and 6% believe that never happened.

The third factor analyzed in the context of the advantages of telecommuting was the increased level of concentration of employees as a result of not being interrupted by their superior/colleagues, compared to working in the office. It was found that 29% of respondents always had a higher level of concentration because they were no longer interrupted by colleagues/superiors, another 28% - often, and 27% -

sometimes. On the other hand, some employees were influenced insignificantly or not at all in this context, respectively 11% consider that they rarely had an increased level of concentration, and another 6% - never.

Digitization of documents is essential in the online system and in telework respectively. Thus, it was found that the majority of employees (37%) are of the opinion that sometimes the flow of documents in the decision-making process has been made more efficient, another 28% believe that this fact happened often, and only 18% believe that document management has always been more efficient. Comparatively, some employees believe that rarely (9%) the flow of documents in the decision-making process has been more effective, and another 7% believe that this has never happened.

In the context of the pandemic situation, the level of motivation among employees was also evaluated. Thus, 32% of them state that they often had an increased level of motivation in terms of safety and protection because the company met their needs, another 27% - always, and 21% - sometimes. On the other hand, 12% rarely had a high level of motivation from the point of view of their safety and protection, and 8% revealed that they never felt this fact.

Also, the motivation level of the employees was studied from the perspective of time management. Accordingly, a large percentage of respondents (41%) believe that they always had an increased level of motivation due to the possibility of managing their time more efficiently, another 32% believe that they often had a high level of motivation. Another 18% state that only sometimes they felt more motivated due to the possibility to manage their time more efficiently, and a smaller percentage, 4% - rarely and never (5%) felt more motivated in this sense.

- The open question concerning benefits of teleworking revealed some insides from company members. The main advantages of telecommuting identified by respondents were saving time to get to the office and saving money on food during the day, which helped reduce costs; a better work-life balance. They mentioned the benefit of having more free time to develop personally in certain areas. Employees also identified benefits of remote work such as: the possibility to relax or sleep during the break (at lunch) and easier access to food; less stress about working hours; the opportunity to spend more time personally and with family; the possibility to supervise what is happening at home, but also to take care of the



children; flexibility in terms of time due to the fact that allocating travel time to work (home-office commute) was no longer necessary.

- In addition to the benefits that have been identified following the process of "migration" to teleworking, remote work has also brought with it numerous challenges.

More than half of the respondents (34% - to a very small extent, 23% - to a small extent) are of the opinion that maintaining a structured work schedule was not a difficulty for them. Comparatively, for 15% of the employees maintaining a structured work schedule was to a large extent a challenge, and for 5% of them to a very large extent. 24% of the respondents consider that only to some extent they encountered difficulties in this regard.

Most employees (59% - to a very small extent, 22% - to a small extent) did not consider the lack of information necessary to perform their work duties a difficulty. On the other hand, 14% of respondents state that to some extent they did not have enough information in this regard. Another 6% are of the opinion that the lack of information necessary to perform their duties was to a large extent a difficulty of the telework system.

The lack of adequate workspace was an impediment for some respondents: 2% - to a very large extent, 7% - to a large extent. Another 20% consider that the lack of workspace was somewhat of a problem. Comparatively, most of the employees did not really encounter difficulties in this chapter (57% - to a very small extent, 20% - to a small extent).

Another aspect studied was the one related to digitization in the context of telework - the electronic signature. In this context, most of the respondents did not identify any problems (65% - to a very small extent, 17% - to a small extent). On the other hand, the need to sign electronically was somewhat of a challenge for 11% of employees, 6% encountered difficulties in this chapter to a large extent, and only 2% - to a very large extent.

The need to fulfill family/social responsibilities at the same time, for example taking care of other people, represented to a great extent an impediment for 4% of the respondents. Another 9% had a great deal of difficulty in this chapter, and 20% - to some extent. On the other hand, many of the respondents did not consider the need to fulfill other

responsibilities in parallel as a significant problem (42% - to a very small extent, 25% - to a small extent).

The majority (72% - to a very small extent, 17% - to a small extent) did not encounter any difficulties in terms of delays in the performance of work tasks. Comparatively, 7% of respondents faced this problem to some extent, and another 3% - to a great extent.

Another aspect analyzed was the part of collaboration with team members. The employees claim that 38% of them had very little difficulties in this chapter, and another 28% - to a small extent. On the other hand, 21% of respondents encountered difficulties collaborating with other team members to some extent. 11% of the employees had to a large extent collaboration problems within the team, and 3% - to a very large extent.

On the emotional level, the most important disadvantage felt by the company's employees was the lack of office meetings. Thus, 16% of the respondents affirm that to a great extent they felt the lack of meetings at the office, another 24% - to a great extent. Also, 24% of employees reveal that they felt this fact only to some extent. Comparatively, 16% of employees were influenced by the lack of office meetings only to a small extent, and 21% even to a very small extent.

The survey included the World Health Organisation's Mental Well-being Index (WHO-5) composed of five questions (Eurofound, 2021). The WHO-5 index is a short questionnaire that refers to well-being in terms of mental health in the last 2 weeks, consisting of 5 statements with 6 response options. They show adequate validity, the scale being used as a screening tool for depression, but also as a measure in clinical trials (Topp, Østergaard, Søndergaard, & Bech, 2015). The well-being of employees was directly or indirectly influenced by the transition to telework. Thus, it was desired to study this aspect among the company's employees. In this context, most of the respondents (33%) felt *happy* and in a good mood less than half of the time, and 30% - part of the time. Only 2% had this condition all the time. Comparatively, 14% of respondents felt happy and in a good mood most of the time, and 9% - more than half of the time. On the other hand, 12% of the company's employees did not feel cheerful and in a good mood at any time. In terms of calmness, 39% of employees felt *calm and relaxed* only part of the time, 10% - more than half of the time, and 2% - all the time. Another 15% of respondents felt this condition more all the time, and 23% - less than half the time. 12%

of them did not feel calm and relaxed at any time while teleworking. On the other hand, only 1% of the respondents felt *active and energetic* all the time, another 18% all the time, and 27% - more than half the time. Comparatively, 13% of the company's employees felt active and energetic less than half of the time, 29% - only part of the time, and 12% did not have this state at any time. More than a quarter (28%) of those surveyed say they *wake up like new and rested* part of the time, 10% - none of the time and 22% - less than half the time. During the telework period, 15% of the company's employees reveal that they wake up like new and rested more than half of the time, 21% of the respondents - most of the time. Comparatively, 5% believe they wake up rested all the time. Only 2% of the company's employees state that their *daily life was full of things of interest* for them most of the time, 17% - all the time, and 13% - more than half the time. On the other hand, 23% of respondents claim that their daily life was full of things that interest them less than half of the time. Most of the respondents (36%) reveal that their daily life was full of things that interest them some of the time. A percentage of 10% of employees consider that their daily life has not been full of things that interest them at any time working.

The score of this WHO-5 index vary from 0 to 100, and the respondent is considered at risk of depression if the score is below 50. The results identified 29% of employees (32 persons) at risk of depression. The mean of WHO-5 score for all respondents was 60.48, being above the average score at European Union level of 45.3 (Romania - 49.3) in March 2021 during the pandemic (Eurofound, 2021).

- In addition to the previously mentioned challenges, the company's members disclosed in the open question responses the following encounters: lack of concentration, sedentary way of life; noisiness, evasion, the incompetence of some people to use the tools intended for remote work, lack of breaks, overtime work, inability to see if colleagues are available or not, lack of face-to-face collaboration (incapacity to see facial expressions and gestures of colleagues during conversations), difficulties in remaining visible in the organization they belong to, the difficulty of generating creative and new ideas (compared to physically organized brainstorming), lack of effective communication and interaction with colleagues, lack of involvement, the reluctance of top management regarding the inferiority of remote work compared to office work, the

impossibility of employees to physically meet their new colleagues; the tendency to work outside working hours. A technical problem was also detected, the instability of the Internet connection. The respondents pointed out, in their responses to the open question concerning the emotional challenges while remote working: loneliness, anxiety and depression, decrease in self-confidence, the disappearance of the distinction between home and office; lack of team spirit, and lack of interest in work.

### *Virtual leadership and communication*

- As the role of the leader in a virtual team is an essential one, the capabilities and skills of the leaders were analyzed from the perspective of the 80 employees that were supervised in their daily activities.

46% of the respondents believe that the leader, of the team they belong to, plans the time of meetings considering the availability and private life of the team members to a very large extent, 28% agree with this statement to a large extent, and 19% - in some extent. Another 8% of respondents believe that the leader of their team is not very good at planning meetings and does not take enough into account the availability of team members.

Most respondents state that the leader has very good communication skills, 50% of them agree with this statement to a very large extent, and 36% - to a large extent. However, 13% of respondents believe that their superior has very good communication skills to some extent, and 1% - to a very low extent.

Another factor analyzed was the leader's ability to effectively delegate tasks to subordinates. Thus, most respondents believe that the leader delegates tasks effectively to a very large extent (44%) and to a large extent (36%). On the other hand, 16% believe that the leader delegates duties effectively to some extent, and the other 3% - to a very small extent.

Since one of the basic managerial duties of a leader is monitoring the performance of tasks by the subordinates, this aspect was also analyzed. Respectively, a large part of the respondents expressed that the leader, of the team they belong to, monitors the performance of tasks effectively to a very large extent (45%) and to a large extent (40%). Comparatively, some believe that this fact is achieved to some extent (11%), to a small extent (1%) and to a very small extent (3%).

Another aspect analyzed among employees was their leader's involvement of team members in online meetings. Thus, 48% of respondents state that their superior actively involves team members in online meetings to a very large extent, 40% - to a large extent, and 5% of employees - to some extent. On the other hand, 6% of employees believe that the team leader actively involves team members in online meetings to a small extent, and 1% of them - to a very small extent.

The telework system also involves certain changes in terms of online communication tools. This change being analyzed, half of the respondents believe that their team leader has technical knowledge about the virtual communication tools they use to a great extent, 33% of them - to a great extent, 13% - to some extent. Comparatively, 5% of employees are of the opinion that their team leader needs to strengthen his technical knowledge of virtual communication in the telework system.

- The adaptation to the virtual work involves usability of new communication methods. Videoconferencing, email, and instant text messages were most often used. Thus, 65% of employees used the dedicated platforms for videoconferencing (Microsoft Teams, Webex, Zoom, Google, etc.) always, another 28% - often, and 4% - sometimes. A very small percentage of employees used videoconferencing platforms rarely (3%) or not at all (1%).

Another communication method used was the instant text or audio messages, using applications such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber or Telegram. 34% of them resorted to written messages always, another 18% - often, and only 7% - sometimes. Comparatively, 36% of them did not use this method of communication, and 15% rarely used it. On the other hand, 68% of the company's employees did not use instant audio messages at all working remotely. Another 18% rarely sent and received voice messages, and 6% - sometimes. Only 6% of respondents used this type of communication often and 3% always.

Another way of communication analyzed was phone conversations with colleagues. During the telework period, over half of the respondents (51%) did not use this type of communication at all. 21% of employees rarely collaborated with colleagues through phone conversations, and another 12% - sometimes. Comparatively, 7% reveal that they often called and were called by their colleagues, and 8% - always.

Also, about a quarter of the respondents (26%) always used email as a form of communication with their colleagues, and 30% - often. 28% sometimes sent messages via email, 14% - rarely, and only 2% - not at all.

The use of anonymous applications within the organization - digital communication tool - was also analyzed. Thus, more than half (57%) of the respondents mentioned that they do not know if anonymous applications, such as Mentimeter, Kahoot or Learningapps, are used in order to identify new opportunities, suggestions, ideas or emerging problems. Another 29% reveal that these applications are not used, and only 14% make use of these digital communication tools.

Stand-up meetings are a common tool in large companies and took place in an online or hybrid form since pandemic in the analyzed company. For the majority of employees (74%) these meetings are organized daily. 11% of respondents reveal that they participate in stand-up meetings only when necessary. Comparatively, 6% of employees are involved in such meetings 2 days a week, 3% - 3 days a week, another 3% - 4 days a week. Also, 3% of respondents state that they participate in stand-ups only once a week.

This analysis continued with the evaluation of feedback as a communication instrument between employees. The assessment and quality of feedback provided to colleagues was analyzed. Thus, half (50%) of them often refer to concrete situations and do not generalize, 21% always do this. 27% of respondents sometimes refer to exact circumstances when giving feedback, and only 3% rarely do so.

A good part of the employees speaks directly and in detail to their colleagues, 42% often and 20% - very often. Another 24% sometimes provide thorough feedback, 10% rarely, and 4% - very rarely.

Most employees (42% - very often and 42% - often) listen to what the colleague says and try to understand their perspective and feelings. Only 15% of them listen to their colleagues sometimes, and 1% - rarely.

More than half (53%) of respondents often give feedback that focuses on what colleagues should improve or change, and 11% - very often. Very few of the respondents say that they do this rarely, and 1% - very rarely.

In the same vein, most employees (49% - often, 38% very often) remain calm and proactive when giving and receiving a feedback message, another 13 - sometimes, and 1% of employees do this rare.

### *Continue teleworking?*

The most of respondents (42%) stated that working from home was very efficient compared to that in the office, and another 39% consider teleworking effective. Comparatively, 14% of the respondents reveal that from a personal point of view, the telecommuting activity was the same as the one in the office. Only 5% of employees consider telecommuting ineffective.

Almost half (44%) of the respondents state they are very satisfied with the work-life balance in the telecommuting system, and another 36% are satisfied. On the other hand, 15% of employees claim that this balance is satisfactory for them, and 6% - they are dissatisfied.

Almost half (44%) of the company's employees consider that teleworking has not influenced the number of hours worked, which remains the same as before. On the other hand, 40% of respondents claim that the number of hours worked from home has increased slightly. In comparison, another 9% say it has increased a lot. 6% of the respondents reveal the fact that the number of hours in telecommuting decreased a little.

At the time of survey almost half (44%) of the respondents state they currently work remotely daily – from home, another 14% - 4 days a week, 15% - 3 days a week, 8% - 2 days a week, and 6% only once a week. Comparatively, 7% of employees currently work remotely only if necessary, and 6% of respondents state they do not work remotely at all now. In order to have a complex perspective of telecommuting, the preferences of the employees regarding the workplace where they would like to work in the future were also analyzed. Thus, 31% of respondents state they would prefer to work remotely daily - from home, 17% - 4 days a week, 21% - 3 days a week, and 12% - 2 days a week. On the other hand, 6% of those analyzed would like to work from home only one day a week, 10% only if necessary, and a percentage of 3% would not like it at all. Almost half (45%) of those analyzed claim that in the future they would like to work remotely - from another location, (except home and office, e.g., a hub, a second home, from a friend, etc.) only if necessary. 39% of employees state that they would not at all prefer to work remotely - from another location. A percentage of 5% of those analyzed reveals that they

would work from another location only once a week, 4% - 4 days a week, 3% - 3 days a week, 4% - 2 days a week. Only 2% of respondents claim they would work from another location daily.

### ***Inferential statistics***

The data analysis was carried out through the PSPP statistical software. From a statistical point of view, the analyzed variables follow a normal univariate distribution, as the values of the Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients were between -2 and 2 (Annex 1) (George & Mallery, 2002). As follows, a number of six hypotheses were tested and confirmed by linear regression.

#### *H1. The lack of office meetings affects the socialization with colleagues.*

The linear regression shows a strong correlation between the two variables (the correlation coefficient  $r=0.72$ ). The variation of lack of socialization with colleagues is explained in a proportion of 52% (the coefficient of determination  $R^2$ ) (Ratner, 2009) by the variation of missing office meetings. The statistically significant result of p-values ( $p < 0.05$ ) gives evidence for the correlation between the variables (Annex 2).

#### *H2. Work productivity is correlated to time management efficiency in the telework system.*

Productivity in the telework system is positively influenced by the way of efficient time management. The direct link of moderate intensity ( $r=0.63$  belongs to the range  $(0.3-0.7]$ ) between telework productivity and time management efficiency is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) and the variation of telework productivity is 40% justified by time management efficiency (Annex 3).

#### *H3. Work productivity is influenced by safety and protection measures in the telework system.*

There is a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) and moderate positive linear relationship ( $r=0.47$ ) between the two variables. The telework productivity variation is 22% explained by variation of safety and protection measures (Annex 4).



*H4. Employees wish to continue remote work due to work-life balance.*

Due to the way of managing the balance between personal and professional life, employees would like to work remotely in the future as well. There is a moderate positive association ( $r=0.52$ ) between the preference for the telework regime in the future and the work-life balance. The correlation is statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ), and the variation of work-life balance explains 27% of the variation of wishing to continue working remotely (Annex 5).

*H5. Work-life balance is influenced by work productivity*

The correlation between the variables is significant ( $p<0.05$ ). There is a moderate positive linear relationship ( $r=0.51$ ) between work-life balance and work productivity in the telework system. There are other factors that influence the work-life balance, work productivity influencing the balance by 26% (Annex 6).

*H6. The level of concentration in the absence of colleagues' interruptions affects the work productivity.*

Data analysis shows a significant correlation ( $p<0.05$ ) between the variables. This relationship is positive and moderate ( $r=0.68$ ), and the variation of concentration in the absence of colleagues' interruptions explains 46% of the variation in the work productivity (Annex 7).

## **Conclusions**

Considering the main aim of this study, benefits and challenges of virtual work were explored and some connections were established.

Employees consider they were more productive telecommuting, had an increased level of concentration, increased level of motivation in terms of safety and protection because the company met their needs, increased level of motivation due to the possibility of managing their time more efficiently.

Maintaining a structured work schedule was a challenge for some. The lack of information necessary to perform their duties was a difficulty for some, while the lack of adequate workspace was a problem just for a few. The need to sign electronically was a challenge for some, but the need to fulfill family/social responsibilities at the same time was not considered as a significant problem. Most of them did not encounter any difficulties in terms of delays in the performance of work tasks. The

respondents encountered difficulties collaborating with other team members were not many. The most important disadvantage felt by the company's employees was the lack of office meetings.

The open questions identified some positive expected or not questioned items, like better work-life balance, having more free time, the possibility to relax or sleep during the break, being nearby the fridge, supervising home in the meantime, saving time and money commuting and less stress, more flexibility and time for personal development. Besides, the trials mentioned by respondents refer to lack of breaks, concentration, technical competences needed for remote work, personal meetings and interactions, team spirit and confidence. They also mentioned loneliness, anxiety, depression, blurred work-life balance and the risk of sedentary life.

The WHO-5 average score is above the risk of depression, but those scoring below should be of interest and taking care of as the studied company has 99% of respondents younger than 45 years. In terms of well-being, the happiness of employees is essential, and considering the risk of depression especially for young persons is something to be highly well-thought-out for long term perspective of an organization.

Overall, the leaders were thought as taking in consideration the members availability when scheduling meetings, having good communication skills, delegating tasks and effectively monitoring task performance, actively involving of others in online meetings, having good technical knowledge about the virtual communication tools. In terms of communication, videoconferencing, email, and instant text messages were mostly used, just sometimes voice messages, and less than half of them used phone conversations.

The study results confirm the work productivity is corelated positively to time management efficiency, to a better concertation in the absence of colleagues' interactions, it depends on safety and protection measures in the telework system. On another side, the work-life balance is positively influenced by work productivity. Furthermore, work-life balance influences positively employees' preference to continue teleworking.

The sample used in this study is a non-probabilistic one, therefore the results should be taken just as indications, disclosures, references for adequate and representative sampling study. This study provided valuable insights for the company's top management and could do that for others in understanding teleworkers and developing their virtual leadership performance.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1. Variables' descriptive statistics

Statistics										
	I11aMtvPrdctv	I11cMtvCnctrNntr	I11fMtvTmpAdmnEfct	I15WkrlFbInc	I9bDezEmtLpsIntBir	I22aPrfRmtDmcl	I9cDezEmtLpsScdClg	I11bMtvMsrSgrPrctc		
N Valid	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.84	3.64	4.02	4.18	2.63	2.84	2.97	3.72		
Std Dev	.98	1.17	1.08	.88	1.32	1.76	1.37	1.19		
Kurtosis	.49	-.55	.83	-.05	-1.21	-.52	-1.20	-.23		
Skewness	-.81	-.52	-1.12	-.86	.19	.72	-.08	-.77		
Minimum	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1		
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	7	5	5		

Source: authors' calculations

### Annex 2. Socialization with colleagues - office meetings lacking

Model Summary (I9cDezEmtLpsScdClg)			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.72	.52	.51	.96

  

ANOVA (I9cDezEmtLpsScdClg)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	104.86	1	104.86	114.43	.000
Residual	98.06	107	.92		
Total	202.92	108			

  

Coefficients (I9cDezEmtLpsScdClg)						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	.52	.25	.00		2.07	.040
I9bDezEmtLpsIntBir	.74	.07	.72		10.70	.000

Source: authors' calculations

### Annex 3. The telework productivity and time management efficiency

Model Summary (I11aMtvPrdctv)			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.63	.40	.39	.77

  

ANOVA (I11aMtvPrdctv)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	41.51	1	41.51	70.69	.000
Residual	62.84	107	.59		
Total	104.35	108			

  

Coefficients (I11aMtvPrdctv)						
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	1.54	.28	.00		5.41	.000
I11fMtvTmpAdmnEfct	.57	.07	.63		8.41	.000

Source: authors' calculations

**Annex 4.** Telework productivity influenced by safety and protection measures.

<b>Model Summary (I11aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.47	.22	.21	.87		

  

<b>ANOVA (I11aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	23.19	1	23.19	30.57	.000
Residual	81.16	107	.76		
Total	104.35	108			

  

<b>Coefficients (I11aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.39	.28	.00	8.64	.000
I11bMtvMsrSgrPrctc	.39	.07	.47	5.53	.000

Source: authors' calculations

**Annex 5.** Future telework wish and work-life balance

<b>Model Summary (I22aPrfRmtDmcl)</b>				
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
.52	.27	.27	1.51	

  

<b>ANOVA (I22aPrfRmtDmcl)</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	91.58	1	91.58	40.03	.000
Residual	244.77	107	2.29		
Total	336.35	108			

  

<b>Coefficients (I22aPrfRmtDmcl)</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	7.20	.70	.00	10.23	.000
I15WkrlfBlnc	-1.04	.16	-.52	-6.33	.000

Source: authors' calculations

**Annex 6. Work-life balance influenced by telework productivity**

<b>Model Summary (I15WkrLfBlnc)</b>					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.51	.26	.26	.76		

  

<b>ANOVA (I15WkrLfBlnc)</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	22.19	1	22.19	38.21	.000
Residual	62.14	107	.58		
Total	84.33	108			

  

<b>Coefficients (I15WkrLfBlnc)</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.41	.30	.00	8.15	.000
I11aMtvPrdctv	.46	.07	.51	6.18	.000

Source: authors' calculations

**Annex 7. The level of concentration in the absence of colleagues' interruptions and the work productivity**

<b>Model Summary (aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
.68	.46	.46	.72		

  

<b>ANOVA (aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.38	1	48.38	92.50	.000
Residual	55.97	107	.52		
Total	104.35	108			

  

<b>Coefficients (aMtvPrdctv)</b>					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.77	.23	.00	7.81	.000
cMtvCnctrNntr	.57	.06	.68	9.62	.000

Source: authors' calculations