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The impact of the introduction of telework on Moroccan employees

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ABSTRACT

Since the spread of the COVID-19 health crisis, teleworking has become an alternative way of ensuring and maintaining the sustainability of organisations at national and international level.Developments in technology and information systems, such as Big Data and artificial intelligence, have contributed to a revolution in the traditional work system.In particular, this revolution has made it possible to improve social relations and the performance of organ-isations through the adoption of teleworking.In fact, the aim of our work is to study the effect of the generalisation of telework on the performance of organisations in the Moroccan context.For this purpose, a review of the literature was used to define the concept of telework, to determine the tools used, to analyse hierarchical relations and to evaluate the productivity of teleworkers. With this in perspective, we conducted a questionnaire survey of Moroccan teleworkers, from which we found that the use of telework influences the performance and intrinsic relationships of employees.

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Introduction

The rise of teleworking has led to major changes in the way companies and public authorities operate. In order to accommodate teleworking employees, many organisations have had to implement new technologies and modify their communication strategies.

The adoption of teleworking as a way of working has an impact on the diversity and integration of the workforce, reducing geographical barriers and improving access to employment opportunities for people who might otherwise have been excluded due to their physical location or mobility constraints.

In this way, teleworking has proved to be a valuable tool for entities faced with pandemics such as the COVID-19 epidemic to ensure the continuity of their activities and services during periods of crisis.

The move to teleworking has been driven by a number of factors, including the increasing availability of high-speed internet, advances in communications technology and equipment, and the desire to ensure greater flexibility and a better work-life balance for employees.

In addition, it should be noted that teleworking is leading to changes in the work-life balance of employees and presenting new challenges in terms of productivity, performance evaluation, social interaction in the workplace, employee satisfaction and retention, as well as cost savings for companies.

The objective of this study is to examine the effects of the transition to telework on Moroccan employees. To address this issue, the first part of our paper will focus on the conceptual framework of telework. The second part will focus on the methodology to be followed in carrying out our survey. Finally, we will analyse the responses collected with a view to confirming or rejecting our research hypotheses.

Literature review :

Definition of teleworking :

Telework is a word that first appeared in the 1970s and was defined in the 1990s by the American researcher Jack Nills as "telework".

The definitions of the term "telework" found in academic research agree on the need for the notion of distance and the use of information and communication technologies.

Teleworking can take several forms:

Remote working: an approach to work which applies to all units dispersed away from the company's head office or fixed place of business.

Home working: a form of work carried out in the employee's home, whatever the sector of activity;

Teleworking: away from the workplace, tasks are carried out wholly or partly by the employee(s) using information and telecommunications services.

The consequences of teleworking :

A number of studies have highlighted the consequences of teleworking. These include

The study conducted by Eurostat in 2020 revealed that 37% of workers in the European Union worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of these, 53% said they had difficulty reconciling their professional and personal lives, while 37% said they had problems concentrating.

The study conducted by the International Labour Organisation in 2021 showed that teleworking can have advantages in terms of flexibility and time, but that it can also increase the risk of work overload, stress and social isolation. The study also highlighted that workers who are able to choose between teleworking and face-to-face work tend to be more satisfied with their jobs.

The study conducted by the Institute of Economic and Social Research at the University of Copenhagen in 2020 showed that teleworking can increase workers' working hours and cause them to lose their connection with their organisation and colleagues. The study also revealed that teleworking can have negative effects on the mental health of workers, particularly those who work alone at home.

Based on these studies, we found that teleworking has both positive and negative consequences for workers. These studies show how important it is for organisations to take these factors into account in their teleworking strategy. Organisations can put in place policies and management practices that enable workers to telework effectively while preserving their work-life balance and mental health.

Furthermore, the consequences of teleworking affect both employees and the company.

1-2-1) Employees :

Several studies and articles have been produced on the impact of telework on employees. For (Largier, 2001), teleworking is seen as a new way of life for employees, helping to improve their living conditions through flexible working hours and reduced commuting, pollution and stress in big cities.

Thus, Gajendran and Harrison, 2007 found that the implementation of remote working will enable employees

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to reduce the pressure linked to work deadlines and to complete them as quickly as possible insofar as the tasks to be carried out are restructured (Dimitrova, 2003).

In addition, work by Tremblay, 2003 and Solis, 2017 has shown that employees who have opted for teleworking will try to find a better balance between social and professional life as a result of the flexibility of working hours and the reduction in travel (Taskin, 2010).

According to Tremblay et al 2007, the benefits of teleworking focus on three aspects: increased independence, increased motivation and increased efficiency. The study by Solis, 2017 showed that the increase in work efficiency is strongly correlated with the teleworker's motivation and autonomy. Also, Crandall and Gao, 2005 found that teleworking measures productivity gains through employee autonomy and perceived job satisfaction.

However, teleworking could lead to employees losing opportunities to improve their skills and advance their professional careers because of the physical distance from the team and its management.

In this sense, several research studies have been carried out on the disadvantages of teleworking for employees. All these studies agree that teleworking contributes to the loss of the link between managers and their employees (C. Cooper and N. Kurland (2002)). The study carried out by Wojcak et al. in 2016 demonstrated that employees' distance from the team constitutes a new form of isolation and leads to a loss of belonging to the team and a poor understanding of information. Vayre and Delfosse, 2019 found that teleworking generates psychological risks linked to lifestyle changes.

The work carried out by Metzger and Cleach, 2004; Vayre, 2019 has shown that teleworking leads employees to remain permanently connected to the network with the new IT and technological tools, which leads to a deterioration in family relationships or the quality of work.

1-2-2) The company :

Studies on the relationship between telework and the company have shown that the company plays a key role in increasing productivity through the independence given to the employee in organising his or her work. This increase is linked to the absence of interruptions in work and to the interest of the tasks to be carried out following the use of new technological tools such as e-mail or the mobile telephone (Metzger and Cleach, 2004).

The development of technological tools will enable companies to be more flexible and responsive to market fluctuations and competition (Largier, 2001), thanks to the rapid processing of information and data.

This development has encouraged the organisation of information systems, leading companies to introduce new procedures and techniques such as instant messaging to strengthen the relationship between employees and their line managers (Marrauld, 2012).

Finally, the introduction of telework in organisations has helped to reduce certain phenomena such as staff turnover and absenteeism (Mello, 2007). This reduction can be explained by the organisational support, attitudes and behaviours of managers, management and work colleagues towards their employees (Saint-Onge et al. 2000).

Research methodology rche

In this section, we present the objective of the study, the population and sample selected, the construction of the questionnaire and the method used to collect and analyse the data.

The total population of our study corresponds to 200 employees who respect the concept of teleworking.

The sample is equal to the total population, since the questionnaire was submitted to all employees meeting the definition of telework.

2-1) Designing the questionnaire :

Firstly, we chose the questionnaire method because it allows us to easily obtain a fairly large number of respondents and feedback from employees.

The questionnaire was drawn up in one language only, French.

The study carried out is a descriptive exploratory study using the survey technique as a mode of investigation. Exploratory, in the sense that the objective is to study the concept of the introduction of telework in Moroccan workplaces, to analyse the physical, material and social environment of telework and to evaluate the degree of complexity and productivity of telework. Descriptive, in the sense of describing the constituent elements of telework and determining their consequences on all actors.

After developing our questionnaire on the "googleforms" platform on 15 March 2023, we distributed it by e-mail and via social networks, in particular LinkedIn. Respondents were given access to the questions via a link. The choice of this technique enabled us to have a large number of samples, and to receive and process responses quickly in real time.

The final questionnaire comprises 16 questions divided into 4 main areas. This distribution enabled us to avoid repeating questions and to avoid putting respondents in a situation of ambiguity and boredom, hence the need to guarantee respondents a response time of no more than 4 minutes.

The questions took several forms:

open,

closed,

multiple choice with single or multiple answers.

2-2) Research hypotheses

The main objective of our article is to position our research hypotheses in relation to the literature review by focusing our investigation on the consequences of telework on Moroccan employees.

Through a range of questions, we seek to study the impact that the adoption of telework has had on the attitudes and behaviour of Moroccan employees.

Our research hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Does teleworking help improve working conditions for employees?

H2: Teleworking has a positive impact on employees' social ties.

2-3) Data collection :

Data collection is an essential phase in the gathering and preliminary processing of the responses obtained. Gathering the relevant data will enable us to confirm or reject the hypotheses and respond to our problem.

We therefore chose the non-probability snowball sampling technique. This technique consists of sending the questionnaire to people with the desired criteria and then asking them to pass it on to other people with the same characteristics. This technique enabled us to target only teleworking employees.

As a result, we had a total of 90 respondents. The objective was to obtain a minimum of 45 respondents and a maximum of 120, i.e. 75% of the target set. This can be explained by the fact that the questionnaire was sent out over a very short period (less than 10 days).

With regard to the profile of respondents, we found that men were over-represented. In fact, 61.12% of respondents were men compared with 38.9% of women, i.e. 55 men and 35 women.

We noted a certain heterogeneity in the age of respondents, with 52.23% aged between 31 and 40 (47 respondents), followed by those aged 31-40, who accounted for 30% (27 respondents), and only 17.78% aged over 41 (16 respondents). Finally, we have devoted a section to seniority (professional experience) and socio-professional status to ensure that respondents are qualified to work remotely.

In addition, we found that the majority of respondents were employees with 5 years' professional experience, since they represented 61.12% (i.e. 55 respondents) of the sample, which explains the high representation of managers and executives, i.e. 82% of respondents.

Analysis of results :

After collecting the data and identifying the general profiles of the respondents, this section will attempt to analyse the responses obtained, starting with an analysis of the environmental and material aspects of telework, followed by a study of the degree of complexity and intensity of telework, then an examination of employees' perceptions of social relations, and finally an assessment of productivity and the lessons learned from telework.

3-1) The environmental and material aspects of teleworking.

Before examining the environmental and material context, we first measured the importance of teleworking before and during the COVID-19 health crisis.

We noted that before the health crisis, the majority of respondents (81.12%) were not able to carry out their duties remotely. During the health crisis, however, just under 86% of respondents said that their employers had opted for teleworking as an alternative working method in order to maintain continuity in the production of their products and services.

To sum up, these results clearly show that teleworking was virtually absent from organisations' practices. The spread of the virus has made it necessary to speed up the implementation of teleworking.

However, we found that most of the organisations (68.89% of respondents) had drawn up memos and support guides for their employees, while at the same time authorising them to work at least 2 days a week under the derogation. On the other hand, we noted that the majority of respondents (75.56% of respondents) had not received training to help them make a successful transition from an ordinary (face-to-face) work mode to a telework mode. This could be explained by the fact that most of the respondents are new to teleworking and that they became teleworkers in a hurry, as we said earlier.

With regard to the space dedicated to telework, we observed that the majority of respondents (91.12% of respondents) have their own workspace, but we found

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that these people (82.23% of respondents) share this space with one or more other people.

It should also be noted that 70% of respondents are satisfied with the material resources (IT equipment, office equipment and furniture, etc.) made available to them to carry out their tasks remotely.

3-2) The effect of teleworking on work management, social relations and productivity.

On the basis of the answers collected from the respondents, and concerning the previous aspect related to the telework environment and equipment, we have tried in this part to study the effect of telework on work management, social relations and productivity.

For the first part, which concerns the relationship between teleworking and work management, questions were asked about the duration, workload and work-life balance.

In this context, and according to the answers obtained, it is necessary to underline that the working time according to the telework mode exceeds the legal monthly working time in Morocco (i.e. 81.12% of the respondents). Thus, the respondents confirmed that teleworking contributes on the one hand to an increase in the pace of work and the duration of the tasks to be carried out (72.23% of respondents) and on the other hand to an increase in work interruptions (66.67% of respondents).

For the second part of the evaluation of the effect of telework on social relations, we focused our questions on the relationship of teleworkers with their hierarchical superiors and work colleagues.

3-2-1) Teleworkers' relationship with their line managers

We have observed that there is a strong relationship between teleworkers and their managers. In fact, this relationship is based on trust and recognition of the quality of the work. This is confirmed by the fact that the majority of respondents (84.45%) confirm that the success of telework must be based on trust and mutual recognition of the work done by both parties.

In order to validate the answers obtained on trust and quality of work, we thought of putting a question to measure the degree of autonomy and control of superiors over Moroccan teleworkers. We found, on the one hand, that the privacy of 72.23% of respondents is respected by their superiors, and on the other hand, they also have a great deal of freedom in choosing their break periods.

3-2-2) Teleworkers' relations with their colleagues

The massive use of teleworking has a crucial impact on professional relations. According to respondents, this impact is characterised by the disappearance of team meetings, physical exchanges of information, coffee and lunch breaks, etc.

On the basis of the questions put to respondents, we have tried to analyse their assessments, focusing on five aspects: Cooperation, mutual aid, support, interactivity and conviviality.

First of all, 55% of respondents felt that their relations with colleagues had improved. This result was marked by 62% of respondents who felt that the cooperation aspect had improved with teleworking. On the other hand, the majority of respondents (82%) confirm that the variables of mutual aid, support, interactivity and conviviality in teleworking mode are identical to those in office-based work.

Next, we asked respondents to identify the main factors contributing to a good quality of relations with their colleagues. This question will enable employers who have or wish to opt for teleworking to take them into consideration.

The results of this question showed us that employers are led to implement communication tools between work colleagues (81% of responses obtained), to integrate employees into collective projects (79% of responses obtained) and to implement solutions to maintain regular contact between employees.

3-2-3) Teleworking and productivity

All the research suggests that teleworking can have an impact on worker productivity.

Some workers may be more productive when working remotely, while others may experience constraints that affect their productivity.

Measuring the productivity of teleworkers requires the establishment and evaluation of key performance indicators:

Rate of achievement of short-term objectives ;

Rate of achievement of long-term objectives ;

Time taken to achieve each type of objective (in days / hours worked).

Indeed, it should be noted that 55.56% of respondents confirmed that the move to teleworking contributes positively to increasing employee productivity. On the other hand, 18.90% of respondents considered that teleworking had a negative impact on employee performance.

Finally, we asked respondents to indicate their productivity growth rates. From this question, we found

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that 47.78% of respondents said that switching to teleworking generated a productivity gain of between 50% and 80%. This result confirms the study by Bloom et al (2015) in which they found that teleworking contributes to a 20% increase in employee productivity and satisfaction.

Conclusion

It should be recalled that the objective of this article was to analyse the impact of telework on Moroccan employees based on the literature review. In order to carry out our study, we collected data through a questionnaire while drawing on existing theory.

In fact, we have limited our questions to three variables: tools in place, social relations and performance.

The responses obtained from the people interviewed enabled us to measure, on the basis of the technical means put in place, the degree of impact of the introduction of teleworking on work management, social relations and productivity. We found that teleworking simultaneously influences productivity and the quality of work. On the other hand, we noted that the majority of respondents exceed the legal working hours.

Despite the use of a qualitative study, our research has a number of limitations:

The number of respondents is very small;

The study period was limited to a very short period ;

Some questions were not filled in by respondents, particularly those concerning the health and psychology of teleworkers.

Following on from this article, it would be interesting to extend this study using the Delphi method, by sending the questionnaire to HR experts. The choice of this method would make it possible to highlight convergences and consensuses in the responses obtained from people with experience in the field.

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