

TELEWORK: WHAT IMPACT ON THE ALGERIAN EMPLOYEE?

Riad Benghebrid,  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7152-2300>

Senior Researcher, Centre for Research in Applied Economics for Development, Algeria

Mohammed Sahnouni,  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7937-7730>

Lecturer 'A', University of Algiers 3 Ibrahim Sultan Cheibout, Algeria

Corresponding author: Riad Benghebrid, riad.cread@gmail.com

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Abstract: *In a knowledge-based global economy, where technological progress has become the crucial link for achieving economic development, many Algerian institutions inevitably faced of the developing of their managing methods of work based on the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). The telework is one of the growing patterns in this context it has been widely used in recent years as a new conception of work and jobs, especially during the pandemic that afflicted many countries, including Algeria. However, adopting this method of organizing work raises many problems related to its effects, especially on the individual level, namely on the employee's quality of life, which is what the current study tries to answer. In order to do so, the writings and the basics related to telework were reviewed and discussed in the first part.*

While the second part was devoted to presenting the methodological framework used at field level. Based on a quantitative approach that included 142 employees from various sectors of activity, the results of the research included in the third part revealed that telework gives employees flexibility and independence in organizing their work schedule. It also contributes to reducing expenses related to the budget for transportation, meals, and childcare.

In addition, telework enables employees to reorganize their social time (work time, family time) and thus, better match work and private activities, as well as reduce exhaustion resulting from various movements. It constitutes an opportunity to rest and reorganize, which in turn helps to raise productivity, according to most of the employees questioned. However, this does not negate the fact that this working method produces some undesirable effects, which are often perceived as negative consequences, as the results revealed the telework may be a source of social isolation and extension of working hours. Furthermore, the flexibility that telework gives to employees in organizing and managing working hours may lead to irregular schedules, which would blur the boundaries between family and professional lifestyle.

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Introduction

Telework, one of the growing organisational forms in the context of integrating information and communication technology into the business of enterprises which allow the completion of professional missions from "anywhere at any time" (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). In the public sector it is considered as one of the alternative work options to ensure the continuity of the public utility in performing tasks related to public services, however in the private sector, telework represents a switch from traditional work arrangements that embodies the actual change taking place in the methods of organizing work, as it is assumed that work takes place outside the production units of the enterprise (Sekkil, 2021) and this may be full time or part time; depend on demand or circumstances, like what happened during the Covid-19, which was detected for the first time in Wuhan, China, in late 2019- and has forced many countries of the world, including Algeria, to take a series of preventive measures in order to contain and overcome this unexpected situation, Foremost is the imposition of total or/and partial containment in march 2020 through executive decree n° 20-69 (Official Journal, 2020), completed three days later by decree N° 20-70 (Official Journal, 2020) which led to suspension of permanence in the workplace and open the field for alternative management styles on top of which is telework.

This mode of work organisation wich represents a new era of practice in the Algerian workplace, and supposed to be based on trust and flexibility needs special attention to circumvent health crises (Benghebrid et al., 2022). In addition, the results that can be achieved by using it on a large scale which is often related to three levels. First, the environmental level, the telework reduces traffic and pollution (Mello, 2007). Also, fewer of cars on the road may decrease traffic accidents (Alves Cachapela, 2016). As for the second level, it is related to the employer; the telework contributes in raising productivity and concentration (Kazekami, 2020) by reducing commuting time and increasing the devoted time to institutional activities. While the third level is related to the employee, where the telework gives more freedom, more independence, and a better quality of life for employees, it also increases the amount of work flexibility while controlling its hours, which allows reconciliation between professional life and family life (Baard & Thomas, 2010) and reducing stress level, which in turn can lead to an increase in job satisfaction. Telework can also give to employees financial gains by reducing the total daily expenses related to the transportation budget, food, child care and other expenses. All these results achieve by telework and others, reflect the importance of this organizational form of work.

However, the evaluation of telework in the Algerian context in particular remains complex, given that it is a new mode of management in Algerian institutions popular during the Covid-19 pandemic, and talking about it hardly goes beyond this scope (Laib, 2020; Rabia, 2020; Kahal, 2022). Moreover, the absence of a legal framework regulating telework directed several studies to discuss this issue from its legislative side (Bakkar and Boucheria, 2020; Benregdal, 2020; Kamli, 2021; Sekille, 2021). This matter push us to question about the potential effects of this work method, focusing only on the individual aspect and within the local context, in other words, the current study seeks to evaluate the effects of telework from the point of view of the Algerian employee. To do this, we will try to answer the following question: *What are the impacts of telework from the Algerian employee point of view?*

In order to answer this question, the present research called upon the literature review and discussing the basics related to telework in the first part. Through this approach, a set of questions reflecting the potential effects of telework from the point of view of the Algerian employee will be formed in the second part. After that, we will present our research methodology which mobilised quantitative data collection tools befor we expose the analysis of our empirical results with a discussion and general conclusion.

Literature Review

The rise of ITC use and the spread of Internet connections has facilitated today's office work, enabling it to be virtually done from anywhere at any time (Bailey and Kurland, 2002; Messenger and Gschwind, 2016), one of the consequences of this evolution is the development of a diversity of work practices like telework. This new form of work arrangement has definitely changed the perception of work in the organization and the individual's relationship (Saoudi & Fellag , 2020). A case study conducted at PwC Luxembourg concluded that telework

indeed affects team cohesion through key factors like permanent telework, independence, and team size (Liégeois, 2021). This means that telework can be a solution, provided that the risks it causes on the psychological and social level are not neglected.

In another study conducted in a big multinational company in Belgium, the pros and cons of telework, also known as "mobile work". Telework represented a resource of flexibility, personal and professional growth, reducing interruptions with colleagues, time savings, improving work hour organization, and opportunities for better time management, this flexibility that teleworkers had in choosing when and where to work had created much stronger links between travel behavior and organizational behaviour (Caros et al., 2023).

However, telework has a mixed perception regarding work-life balance, as some view it as an intrusion into personal or family life, while others see it as a means to achieve work-life balance. The study found that technical ability to do telework and gender are strongly associated while age is not (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012). In the same context, the results of the study which was carried out in the Public Administration of the Brazilian Federal Data Processing Service (SERPRO) and the Federal Revenue Service, showed that telework has contributed in improving quality of life, work-family balance, increased productivity and flexibility, better assessment of workload, reduced costs and travel time, as well as reduced exposure to risks of violence. As for the disadvantages, the study identified many elements such as lack of adaptation, lack of communication with the company, psychological problems, lack of infrastructure and remote control of the worker (Filardi et al., 2020). An enabling environment (for example, suitable physical premises or high-performance IT equipment) at all levels is a necessity to telework, in addition organizational support that includes the formalization and oversight of the practice of teleworking would enhance the success of its implementation (Dussault et al., 2018).

At the local level, according to the results of the field study conducted at Field Core General Electric Algeria, the telework forced them to work extra hours without calculating compensation, and this exhausted them, in addition to the difficulty of reconciling the work entrusted to them with family life. Despite this workers want to continue working remotely because it is part of the company's policy and to preserve the positives that have been achieved as well. Depending on two mediating variables (independence and flexibility), an experimental study conducted with Algerian university professors examined telework and its impact on job satisfaction. That study found that telework was seen as a collective, flexible, and effective approach which has allowed independent and transparent decision-making, resulting in time savings and improve productivity (Merabet & Bensmain, 2021). Thus, telework changes thinking about the use of time and it promotes a more modern concept for the working relationship, which in turn requires the development of legal standards in order to protect the company's interests and employees alike (Scaillerez & Tremblay, 2016).

Methodology

As already mentioned, the current study seeks to evaluate the effects of telework from the point of view of the Algerian employee. To understand more this endeavor, we opted for an essentially quantitative approach, with diversity of the sample in terms of (age, professional experience, sector of activity, etc.). Based on previous telework studies, a questionnaire was designed around two headings, the first section related to the profile of the respondents, while the second section was devoted to the main axes related to the impacts. Then, a pre-survey was carried out with several salaries that led to changes in the order and wording of some items before proceeding to the distribution, which was done directly (personal distribution) and online, where the questionnaire was uploaded to the Google Drive website, using the Google Form model and a direct link was created and distributed based on *Snowball Sampling*. The latter consists of distributing the survey questionnaire to individuals with the desired characteristics and then asking them to distribute it to other individuals with similar profiles. Thus, this technique targets, on the one hand, a homogeneous population of teleworkers, on the other hand, diversity in terms of sector, location, gender, and age. All of this was done over a period of three months, specifically from september to december 2021.

According to the results of the table below [see Table 1], there were a total of 142 respondents, 52.1% males and 47.8% females. The majority of them (66.9%) are people with an average age ranging between 30-39 years, and work experience not exceeding 9 years for more than half of the respondents (54.9%).

Table 1. Statistical summary of survey respondents

Gender	%	Age	%	Marital status	%	Number of children	%
Male	52.1	≤ 29	10.5	Single	51.4	No children	28.1
Female	47.8	30-39	66.9	Married	41.5	1	24.6
		40-49	16.9	Separated	4.2	2	34.5
		≥ 50	5.6	Widowed	2.8	≥ 3	12.6
Total	100		100		100		100
Years of service	%	Activity sector					%
≤ 4	21.1	Information and communication activities					26.0
5- 9	33.8	Scientific and technical activities					14.7
10 -14	26.0	Public administration					11.9
≥ 15	19.0	Other services activities					11.2
		Financial and insurance activities					10.5
		Manufacturing industry					9.8
		Educational services					6.3
		Health and social work activities					4.9
		Others					4.2
		Total	100				

Source: Authors elaboration based on SPSS outputs.

In terms of marital status, the results suggest that 41.5% of the employees interviewed were single, while more than half (51.4%) were married, i.e. 73 out of 142 employees in the total sample. In addition, 71.7% reported having at least one child across all age groups. The results also showed that 54.9% of the respondents had work experience of up to 9 years, while 45.0% had ten years or more. The experience accumulated over years of work affects the degree to which an individual learns and is willing to use new technologies and adopt new forms of work. In this sense, some sectors of activity are inherently evolutionary and require constant adaptation and learning. As for the sector of activity, according to the Algerian Nomenclature of Activities (NAA) drawn up by the National Statistics Office (ONS), 26.0% of respondents are active in the information and communication sector, 14.7% in the scientific and technical activities and 11.9% public administration, while 9.8% to 11.2% are engaged in manufacturing industry, financial and other services activities.

Results

In the context of the positive effects of telework, the findings indicate that flexibility and independence are identified as the primary effects, with a support rate of 70.4%. Although it is difficult to define this concept precisely, it commonly refers to an individual's ability to make decision and organize his work by himself, as he see fit (Dumas and Ruiller, 2014; Olivier, 2017) and without the need to refer to the direct supervisor [see Figure 1].

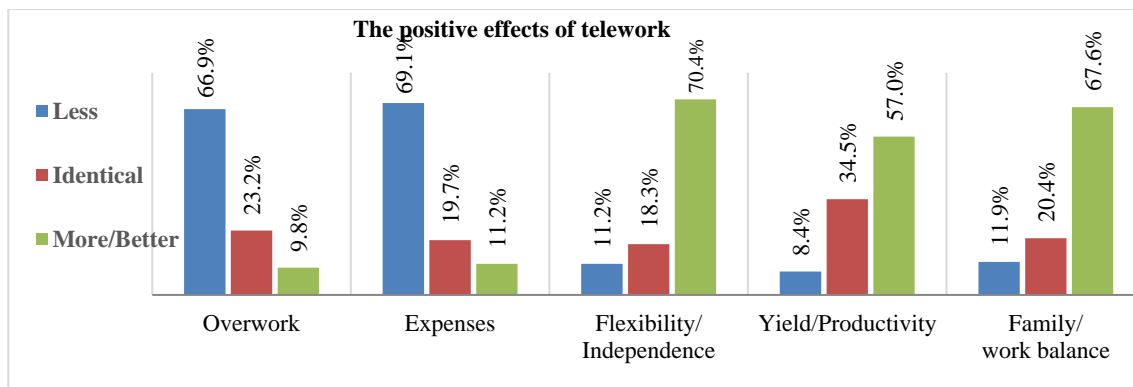


Figure 1. The positive effects of telework

Source: Authors elaboration based on SPSS outputs.

Also, 69.1% of the employees surveyed stated that working remotely can reduce the amount of expenses (savings on expenses) in three aspects. The first aspect, teleworkers save expenses related to the transportation budget (gasoline, vehicle maintenance, etc.), the second includes meals (restaurants/cafes), while the third aspect of savings relates to child care for example costs related to guard, especially in the current context, where a large number of spouses work full time, a better distribution of time between work and family becomes an urgent need (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012; Tremblay, 2016) this is what telework achieves according to 67.6% of the respondents. The greater flexibility that telework provides to the employee in working timings, enables him to reorganize his social time (work time, family time, etc.), and thus, better reconcile his job with his life activities (Bolino and Feldman, 2000; Golden, 2001 Parslow et al., 2004).

Telework also contributes to reducing fatigue resulting from traffic jam, limited transportation systems, working time, and the spent budget, as 66.9% of respondents reported that telework give them an opportunity to rest and relax, enabling them to allocate more time to family, sports, and recreational activities. In addition to this, the freedom to work and the independence granted to remote workers in the research and problem-solving process significantly increase their decision-making capabilities, and raise their initiative and spirit, and thus better assumption of responsibilities.

With regard to the return/productivity variable, more than half of the respondents acknowledge that they are more productive in telework compared to the office, with 57% of them expressing that telework allows them to deal with occupational stress caused by frequent interruptions from the usual workplace (Vayre, 2019) and thus more focus and better return. According to Westfall (2004), telework has four possible effects on institutional productivity, namely: workload, work intensity, work efficiency and work organization (Tanguay and Lachapelle, 2018).

Despite these positive effects provided by telework, this does not prevent the production of this work style for some undesirable effects, which are often viewed on the basis of negative consequences [see Figure 2].

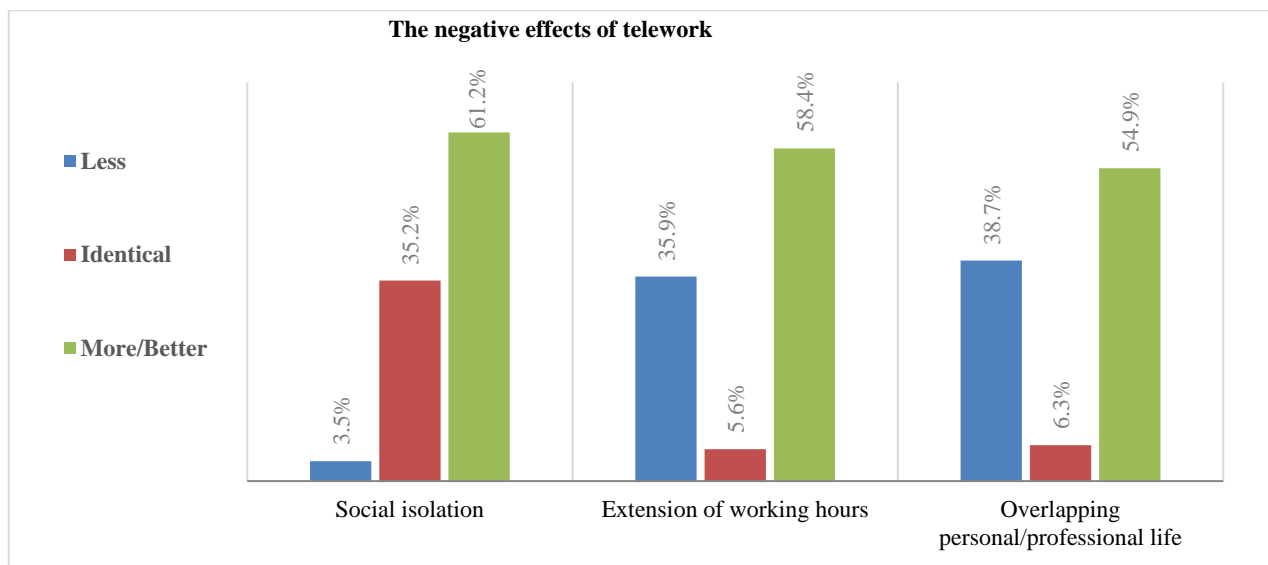


Figure 2. The negative effects of telework

Source: Authors elaboration based on SPSS outputs.

According to 61.2% of the respondents, telework may be a source of a low sense of belonging because of the low level of simulation and possible interactions among colleagues (Bailey and Kurkland, 2020) and thus social isolation (Hislop et al., 2015; Eom, 2016; Villarinho and Paschoal, 2016). An individual's feeling of group's needs and that his presence has meaning and purpose is vital to ensuring a comfortable work environment and may serve as a place for socialization (Fray and Picoueau, 2010). Also, 58.4% of the employees surveyed stated that telework can extend working hours by allowing the way for additional hours (Robert, 2020), as the flexibility it

gives them in organizing and managing working times may lead to irregularity in the schedules allocated for that, what might blur the existing borders between family and professional lifestyle according to 54.9% of teleworkers (Teo et al., 1998; Tremblay et al., 2006). Complementing the results presented in the previous paragraphs, the summary of the effects of telework according to Algerians' employee were listed, as highlighted in table below.

Table 2. Summary of the effects of telework according to Algerians' employee

The positive effects of telework (Benefits)	The negative effects of telework (Risks)
Flexibility and independence (+)	Social isolation (+)
Expenses (-)	Extension of working hours (+)
Family/Work balance (+)	Overlapping personal/professional life (+)
Overwork (-)	
Yield/productivity (+)	

Source: Authors elaboration based on SPSS outputs.

According to the results of our study [see Table 3], flexibility constituted the first gain behind the adoption of telework, as the freedom granted to the employee in managing and executing the work agreed upon within the scope of telework modifies the concept of traditional dependency and provides the opportunity to transform into self-employment (Pontier, 2014), however, the latter varies according to the tasks performed, the job and the power of appreciation of the telework (Sewell and Taskin, 2015). Some studies believe that flexible working hours can sometimes lead to increased control and speed of work, which may create the impression that the employee works more after switching to telework (Metzger and Cléach, 2004; Tanguay and Lachapelle, 2018) and for free. Moreover, eligibility of telework requires theoretically the equipments, starting from the designated places to the wide and protected communication network (Zoumane et al., 2004), which is not available to all Algerian employees, in addition, the widespread use of information and communication technologies carries many electronic risks such as electronic fraud, data loss, theft, technological error, etc., which may involve legal risks in terms of civil liability (Chartier, 2016). Expenses savings are also seen as one of the main advantages of telework, especially by individuals who have family obligations (Tanguay and Lachapelle, 2018). The employee's performance of tasks from his home or in a place close to it, without the need for transportation, achieves positive results in reducing expenses and traffic jam (Potter, 2003) and also contributes to reducing administrative burdens on institutions and business owners (Flayyih and Qusmar, 2018), however, staying at home may mean, on the other hand, an increase in household energy costs, such as electricity and gas. In addition, if the teleworker has more time to spend with his family, he is likely to do other activities with the latter outside the home, and this include some exceptional costs for fuel, meals, etc. (Savary, 2006). The study also confirmed that telework can meet the needs of employees by giving them flexibility in adjusting their work schedule and restructuring their daily routine in a way that enhances freedom of action and integration into the rhythm of private social life (Dimitrova, 2018), with the potential for a risk for the teleworker to allow his work to invade his family life, thus sacrificing his private life for the sake of working life especially, among women due to maternal responsibilities (Maruyama and Tietze, 2012) and negatively interacting between telework and family roles (Senussi, 2020). Thus, teleworking can be a solution, provided that the risks it entails on the psychological and social level between isolation and dependence are not neglected, without overlooking the technical difficulties related to informations and communications technology, as well as the difficulties related to the lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework that manages labor relations.

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages, frequencies

Variables	N	% of Cases
Flexibility and independence	100	70.4
Expenses	98	69.1
Family/Work balance	96	67.6
Overwork	95	66.9
Yield/productivity	81	57.0
Social isolation	87	61.2
Extension of working hours	83	58.4
Overlapping personal/professional life	78	54.9

Source: Authors elaboration based on SPSS outputs.

Conclusions

Our research focused on the effects of telework from the point of view of Algerian employees. We tried to understand by means of an empirical study whether telework generated consequences and effects on employees other than those stated in the literature. In general, our results show that implementing teleworking involves five positive effects namely: flexibility and independence, savings on expenses, reducing fatigue, better distribution of time between work/family and more productivity.

However, this does not negate the secretion of this practical style to some potential negative effects that impact sense of belonging, extension of working hours and blur the existing borders between family and professional lifestyle. Therefore, organizations must initiate a “*major transformation to prevent these potentially deleterious effects and this involves the development of a genuine company teleworking policy, the creation of spaces for dialogue about the conditions regarding the deployment of teleworking, the development of infrastructure and formal support systems for teleworkers, an evolution of managerial practices, and the redefining of the processes used for evaluating*”. For this, we need qualitative insights includes employers in the assessment of telework, this is what this study lacks. Therefore, future research should be at least qualitative in order to help us understand this new practice of work from a different perspective.

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