

TELEWORKING: HOW TO MAKE IT WORK BETTER

Nowadays the concept of teleworking is rapidly evolving all over the world mainly due to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic that has made teleworking a fundamental element of business. Globally, among employees, 2.9% were working exclusively or mainly from their home before the COVID-19 pandemic (Florence Bonnet, 2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of workers teleworking has risen vastly. At the peak of COVID restrictions 69% of Belarusian companies switched to remote work. Although, the proportion of people working from home has declined after the lockdowns, it still remains well above pre-pandemic levels. Telecommuting influences the preferences of workers in the new and globalized economy. The purpose of our work is to explain the meaning of teleworking, determine its benefits and ways how organizations can avoid obstacles connected with virtual work.

Teleworking can be defined as a flexible work arrangement in which employees periodically, regularly, or exclusively perform their work from home or another remote location that is equipped with the appropriate technology to transfer work to the central organization. Also such terms as telecommuting, working-from-home, off-site working, or virtual working can be used to describe this mode of work. In Belarus, after the COVID-19 pandemic virtual working for all employees has been preserved in every tenth organization. Half of the companies practice remote work for part of the staff [2].

As any phenomenon teleworking has its advantages and disadvantages.

- No need to commute to work. This results in increased productivity through extra work hours made possible by time saved from not commuting. Instead of wasting time on tiring journeys and getting stressed, employees can start working immediately without long preparations and public transport or gasoline expenses. In turn, the company reduces its costs for office expenses. Moreover, there is a benefit for the whole society: the cut in the use of transport for commuting to work helps to reduce pollution.

- Increased work schedule flexibility. Teleworking helps employees flex their hours, such as spending time with their children or performing chores. Telecommuting provides the opportunity to tailor the work environment to how and when they do their work most effectively. Employees can choose where they want to work and set workspace according to their needs, which directly influences concentration during the working day.

- Increased feeling of freedom. Employees feel independent and valued because they see that the employer trusts them. Although they are spatially and psychologically removed from direct, face-to-face supervision, according to the studies, teleworking doesn't deteriorate it, but strengthens employees' feeling of responsibility [3].

- Time-based conflicts are among the disadvantages. Working-from-home can also make psychological disengagement from work more difficult. The ICT technologies may encourage to continue working at home even after normal work hours. This may be

especially true for those who find it difficult to separate activities between home and work. On the other hand, lack of self-discipline can lead to reduction of working hours.

- Lack of face-to-face interactions and informal networks can diminish relationships with coworkers and managers and increase feelings of isolation. As a result, employees feel less connected to their team. Moreover, without collaborative or group learning, professionals can become stagnant in their job growth and learning process.

Despite all the benefits, when employees telework regularly, or exclusively, they may start to experience the disadvantages more heavily, and productivity and job satisfaction decrease. Therefore, managers are faced with the challenge of reducing the impact of negative factors and enhancing the positive effect. There are three ways of improvement and together they create effective strategy of teleworking for companies.

The first and foremost is hybrid working. Hybrid working is a form of teleworking when employees work a mix of days at home and at work each week. It's becoming more popular nowadays since hybrid is highly valued by employees on average, reducing attrition by 33% and increasing job-satisfaction measures. Also, it helps to overcome the lack of face-to-face interactions as employees still have some days to meet in the office and maintain interpersonal communication. According to the study, conducted by Bitrix on August 2-9, 2022 (employees of 237 Belarusian companies took part in the survey), 64% of respondents prefer a combined work schedule and two thirds of respondents consider hybrid working more effective than completely remote [2].

Secondly, employers can make available and encourage a wide variety of communication channels to teleworkers. Offering a full platform of communication channels would help unify communication across an organization, helping all employees feel more connected to the organization. Belarusian companies are quite advanced in this matter - nine out of ten companies have online collaboration tools [2]. Implementing video communication solutions more widely allows for the closest experience of face-to-face communication.

Finally, it is important for employers to understand the personality composition of their employees. The studies say that extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism are positively correlated with virtual working and enhance employees' performance and job satisfaction. For example, agreeable, rather than disagreeable, individuals may be more receptive to telecommuting and might also perceive it as more flexible. Agreeable people also try to please those around them, which may help them balance work and home demands. Neurotic individuals have more favorable attitudes toward teleworking and perceive it as shelter from interpersonal anxieties that might be experienced in the traditional office environment [4].

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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflicts that are allowed to fester and grow will ultimately diminish productivity and damage staff morale. Moreover, employers seek employees with the skills to manage and diffuse conflict.

Conflict management, also known as conflict resolution, involves having a workplace that precludes conflict and a management team that successfully handles and resolves workplace issues. Poor communication or interpersonal tension can easily cause simple disagreements to flare up into resentment or worse.

Managers themselves cannot stand aside from the problem of conflicts for the performance of the team much depends on its solution. Managers should handle conflicts in such a way as to minimize negative consequences in the future.

So, the aim of this paper is to identify the causes of conflicts. Moreover, the survey among the students of the Belarusian State Economic University on the question: “How to deal with conflict situations at work or study?” has been conducted. From the survey, we wanted to find out how students react to the occurrence of conflicts, whether it causes them discomfort, how it affects their performance, what methods and rules they are accompanied by when resolving conflict situations.

The results of the survey show that 95.2% of students face conflict situations not only at work and school, but also in everyday life, conflicts most often cause discomfort to about 89% of students, and about 73% of respondents believe that the occurrence of conflict situations strongly affects their performance. In a survey on ways to deal with conflicts, 42.4% of students do not know the answer, as they believe that it is necessary to act and react to the conflict in the way “feels inside”. And the remaining 57.6% of respondents claim that they are guided by certain rules that help to respond adequately to the conflict that has arisen.

Nowadays there exists a number of strategies to resolve conflict situations. They are as follows: forcing, accommodating, avoiding, compromising, collaborating.

One cannot but mention a special algorithm for negotiations. It includes:

1. definition of the subject of the conflict;
2. identification of solutions;