

Workers' and bosses' trust in teleworking is key, says study

March 20 2023



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

In recent years, teleworking—spurred by the implementation of information and communication technologies and the recent pandemic, particularly—has become a feature of many jobs. Many companies have

now made this form of working available to their employees, but it is still far from common practice in today's labor market.

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) researchers have analyzed the different perspectives and perceptions on [teleworking](#), looking at the wide range of factors that affect it, including the psychosocial aspects, productivity or costs. Their work is published in *International Journal of Manpower*.

"We explore and examine different models to identify the factors affecting—positively or negatively—performance of employees teleworking, showing how [trust](#), excessive workloads, [social isolation](#) and work-related fatigue impact their performance," said Pilar Ficapal-Cusí, associate professor at the UOC's Faculty of Economics and Business and one of the study's lead authors.

Research into the topic has shown that teleworking has a positive impact on the individual, group and organizational performance of companies and organizations. More specifically, [comparative studies](#) have shown that teleworkers feel more productive and display lower levels of fatigue.

Nevertheless, other studies also indicate that the very conditions of teleworking may lead to an intensification of work, and consequently, prolonged mental or physical effort impacting staff efficiency and performance levels.

"These results raise a dilemma, since on the one hand, we see favorable conditions and beneficial effects, but on the other, there may be a dysfunctional impact and limitations on optimal staff performance," said Ficapal-Cusí, also member of the UOC's i2TIC research group.

The pros and cons of teleworking

After analyzing data on more than 200 employees at different Spanish companies that have implemented teleworking, the authors saw that if these employees trust in teleworking, they have the perception that it will help them to be more productive. However, if they do not trust this kind of labor relationship, this perception of performance is diminished, which could also lead to social isolation or work-related fatigue problems.

"Fatigue is the factor that has the greatest (negative) effect on teleworking performance, followed by trust, which is positive, and social isolation, which is once again negative," she said.

In this context, the term "trust" means that teleworkers have a perception of support from their superiors, that this form of working does not negatively impact recognition of their contributions or their career progression.

"Trust in teleworking establishes favorable conditions for fostering it and obtaining optimal performance from teleworking employees. Whereas, a lack of trust can lead to and accentuate the negative impact of social and professional isolation, as—given that there is less perception of social support—it may undermine the positive effects of telework," Ficapal-Cusí noted.

It is here that the absence of social connectivity is a significant variable in individual performance. While it is true that a reduction in irrelevant interactions and the availability of more time leads to greater effectiveness, if employees suffer from a feeling of isolation, this can negatively impact their on-the-job performance.

Ficapal-Cusí stated, "Social isolation refers to an individual's feelings of a lack of inclusion or connection at work. Isolated employees have less trust in their skills and knowledge and have few opportunities to interact

with colleagues, as well as a diminished capacity to manage things. That's why the role of managers is essential in facilitating the effective social integration of staff who telework."

There are also other factors, such as overworking and work-related fatigue, which can negatively affect people's mindsets and productivity. Work-related fatigue is extreme tiredness experienced during and at the end of the working day that diminishes employee's physical and mental capabilities. "If someone feels they cannot deal with the demands of the job due to its complexity, time pressures or the great effort required to complete tasks, this gives rise to an overload of work, which is an antecedent to work-related fatigue," Ficapal-Cusí observed.

Indeed, there is plenty of data pointing to how teleworkers who work very intensely, both at home and at work, can experience higher levels of exhaustion.

The implementation of teleworking in Spain

It is estimated that in Spain, one in six people in employment teleworks: between 14% and 17%—according to the latest figures from the Survey on Information and Communication Technology Equipment and Usage in the Home, published by Spain's National Statistics Institute (INE)—although demand for it is far greater. According to Ficapal-Cusí, "Teleworking is seen as a tool for attracting and retaining talent. However, it still needs to overcome a number of hurdles for it to become widespread, as it calls for some effort on the part of public administrations, companies and workers."

According to the authors of the UOC study, trust in telework and in the organization promoting it needs to be the cornerstone of its on-the-ground implementation. This means that companies and other organizations need to focus on creating trust, ensuring visibility and

supporting the career progression of teleworkers, so as to enhance their performance. Ficapal-Cusí said, "Trust is key in adapting to teleworking, and also reduces any feeling of isolation or fatigue."

In this regard, to ensure effective implementation, it is also important to address perceptions of isolation and loneliness on the part of employees through the implementation of certain practices. "Face-to-face interaction, the ongoing exchange of information and leadership training have all been highlighted as good practices for preventing isolation," observed Ficapal-Cusí.

Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that teleworking is currently closely associated with technology-dependent professions, and its implementation in certain kinds of jobs is still far from being a reality. "Its use in other sectors requiring a degree of onsite working is more problematic and will call for new formulas," said Ficapal-Cusí.

"Distance management and an organizational design for a smooth transition to teleworking require bolstering employees' trust in teleworking and in the organization behind it, and establishing mechanisms to minimize feelings of social isolation and fatigue," concluded Ficapal-Cusí.

More information: Pilar Ficapal-Cusí et al, The telework performance dilemma: exploring the role of trust, social isolation and fatigue, *International Journal of Manpower* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/IJM-08-2022-0363](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-08-2022-0363)

Provided by Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Citation: Workers' and bosses' trust in teleworking is key, says study (2023, March 20) retrieved

6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-03-workers-bosses-teleworking-key.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.