

**Business Administration and Business  
Economics****Employees' Post Lockdown Perspectives on  
Communication in Telework****Elisabeta Butoi<sup>1</sup>, Dinuța-Maria Ștefănuț<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** The Covid-19 outbreak forced organisations to shift from face-to-face work to telecommuting in a very short time. The employers and employees had to quickly to perform tasks at least like before lockdown. Therefore, the focus of this study was to examine the main determinants of employees' perceived communication and telework satisfaction. The data was gathered from employees of different companies. The quantitative approach was implemented to analyse the subject. The findings show a constructive influence of the support offered by employers to employees who have to adopt digital communication. The adaptation of mediated communication impacts the teleworkers' tasks performance in terms of collaborative activities implicating colleagues and supervisors. The teleworkers' job performance is positively affecting employees' perception of satisfactory digital communication. The family conflicts during telecommuting are not difficult to manage, thus telework is appropriate and digital communication favourable. The teleworkers work-life balance is predicted by the perceived satisfaction with the mediated communication experience through the communication channels used. The findings also emphasize the respondents' preference for future teleworking. This study findings serve further research and employers' approach of communication with and between teleworkers.

**Keywords:** digital communication; work-life balance; telecommuting satisfaction; Covid-19 pandemic

**JEL Classification:** M10; M12; M15; M54

**1. Introduction and Literature Review**

In the last three years, the way people relate to work has changed substantially for a vast majority. The home has become an office and the distinction between the two has been reduced substantially. Thus, the approach to work is carried out today from other perspectives. Face-to-face communication has turned into mediated

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, PhD, Faculty of Business, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania, Address: Horea 7, Cluj-Napoca 400174, Romania, E-mail: elisabeta.butoi@ubbcluj.ro.

<sup>2</sup> Student, Faculty of Business, Babes-Bolyai University, Romania, Address: Horea 7, Cluj-Napoca 400174, Romania, E-mail: dinuta\_maria@yahoo.com.

communication by a form of technology. The pandemic lockdown was the force towards the speedy implementation of the technological tools available for the compulsory form of work.

The concept of telework appeared around the 1970 and was proposed by the American Nick Nilles, considered the revolutionary of the whole process, who supported the idea that information and communication technology (ICT) has the power to replace office work with telecommuting (Antonacopoulou & Georgiadou, 2020). Initially telework was considered work from home but nowadays it refers to employees who work from atypical places such as hotels, cafes, libraries or even in trains and cars on the way (Mellon, 2007). The International Labor Organization defines telework as work carried out outside the office of the employer's organization with the help of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) carried out with the help of devices such as tablets, laptops, smartphones, and desktop computers (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garces, 2020).

Telework is known as remote work, telecommuting or virtual work (Baker, Moon, & Ward, 2006). Telecommuting began to be increasingly used and developed as a form of work after the year 2000. By 2017 in USA the population that practiced some form of telework increased by 102% (Buomprisco, Ricci, Perri, & De Sio, 2021). In 2017, only 5% of the population of the European Union worked from home (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020). In 2019, official European statistics showed that on average 5.4% of employees in the EU regularly worked from home. The lowest rate was recorded in Romania and Bulgaria of 0.8% and 0.5%. Since the onset of the pandemic, remote work has seen a sudden acceleration, unleashed the true potential of this form of work and marked a revolution in the history of telework (Popovici & Popovici, 2020). With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people who started working from home increased to 37% and after remote work was imposed as a priority work organization, companies began to adapt their organizational structures to this new process, thus also discovering the economic advantages of telework (López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño, 2020).

In the virtual or distance work environment the border between people remains communication in its different, possible, and accepted forms. Communication is treated and perceived as an essential part of human existence. This also plays an important role in the field of work where it is carried out at an interpersonal, intra-organizational and extra-organizational level; thus the better an employee has communication skills and competences, the better he can bring an improved contribution to the company from all points of sight (Munteanu, 2020). The human resources department took part in a real challenge in streamlining communication with employees, especially during the pandemic. The way in which organizations communicate and support employees teleworking has been sought to have a positive impact through messages of encouragement and support on their skills, attitudes, and

behaviours (Zito, et al., 2021). There are several studies supporting different opinions on advantages and disadvantages of telework concerning communication and employees' preference for telecommuting. Following a study conducted in January 2021 designed to determine the degree of employee satisfaction with remote work, it was found that the majority of employees believe that remote work does not create a sense of affiliation with the company, nor does it facilitate communication, but they support that in relation to personal and family life remote work strengthens relationships (Kocot, Maciaszczyk, Kocot, Kwasek, & Depta, 2021). Lack of face-to-face meetings, collaboration and direct communication can lead to a loss of sense of belonging and even hinder the ability to work as a team (Jalagat & Jalagat, 2019). Due to the lack of interaction at work, employees communicate less and less, become anxious and emotionally stressed. When the employee is put with or without his will in the situation of remote work, without consulting or teleworking in a team with other people, not only can his development be slower or even non-existent in terms of his professional career, but there is also the feeling of isolation from the rest of the world that can even affect his personal life (Nemțeanu, Dabija, & Stanca, 2021). With the global health pandemic, the face-to-face work interactions with peers and supervisors was reduced (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, & Bendz, 2020) and so was the direct support and feedback (Van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022). The ingenuity of the management to increase the skills of the workers is also an important aspect because not all people have a native talent for virtual communication skills, some find it difficult to adapt and they need to be helped (Cakula & Pratt, 2021).

During telework the communication is an interesting subject as in between office room and kitchen or around the house there may be no one to say hello. Therefore, the employees need to be more frequently engaged in communication by their leaders, to stay informed on future decisions and uncertainties. Feeling included in communication increases employees' productivity and well-being. Individuals who feel they are not being communicated to are at risk of getting anxious or burned out. Therefore, organizational communication is essential for employees' work-life balance (Viererbl, Denner, & Koch, 2022). One study identified that the majority of employees would prefer to work remote at least three days per week; also, most of them would prefer a more flexible working schedule (Alexander, De Smet, Langstaff, & Ravid, 2021). Digital communication is the binding factor that allows connectivity between people from different locations and supports telework (Hoffman, 2002). The use of online applications makes the communication process easier even for personnel without technical skills. Adapting to the needs of communicators and the advantage of free technologies facilitates the accessibility of communication through ICTs, such as platforms for videoconferences, chats, or collaborative work (Eom, Ashill, & Arbaugh, 2012).

The aim of this study is to present a holistic image of how communication affects teleworkers based on employees' perception who experienced this new phenomenon

during Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the study examines the main determinants of workers' perceived communication experience and satisfaction with the remote work.

## 2. Research Methodology and Results

The research was carried out using quantitative methodology to examine the teleworkers' perspectives on communication. The research was based on the survey method for primary data collection. The tool used in the research investigation was the questionnaire sent online to respondents in May 2022 using the snowball method, very shortly after the end of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

### 2.1. Descriptive Analysis

The respondents represent employees from different organizations who practiced telework during the Covid-19 pandemic. The masculine gender is represented by 43% and feminine gender by 57% of a total of 100 respondents. Their age varies from 18 to above 55, most of them being between 18-45 years old. The majority of the respondents (84%) have at least bachelor's degree. 78.78% of respondents practiced some form of telework for the first time during the pandemic and only 22.22% practiced telework prior to the pandemic (Table 1).

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=100)**

Dimension	Item	Percent
Gender	Masculine	43
	Feminine	57
Age	above 55 years	1
	46-55 years	6
	36-45 years	31
	26-35 years	38
	18-25 years	24
Study level	PhD degree	5
	Master's degree	29
	Bachelor's degree	50
	College degree	7
	High school degree	9
Organisation dimension	>250 employees	63
	51-250 employees	15
	11-50 employees	19
	<10 employees	3
Position in the organisation	Leading	25
	Non-Leading	75

Table 2 includes two perspectives on the practice of telework during a week. The first one tracks the number of days per week employees practice telework and the second perspective revolves around their preferences, how many times they would like, if they could choose, to work remotely. In this case, most respondents perform telework daily (43%), 4 days a week (8%), 3 days a week (5%), 2 days a week (8%), one day a week (2%). 14% of respondents work remotely only if is necessary and 4% were not working remotely anymore after lockdown. If they had the opportunity to choose according to their preferences, the majority (58%) answered that they would work from home office every day, 9% would telework 4 days a week, 5% would telework 3 days a week, 8% would telework 2 days a week, and 2% would telework one day a week. 14% would be willing to telework only when it's necessary, and just 4% would prefer not to telework at all if they could choose.

**Table 2. Teleworking at Present and Preferred**

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>“I’m currently working remotely”</b>	<b>“If I had the opportunity to choose, I would work remotely”</b>
Daily	43%	58%
4 days/week	8%	9%
3 days/week	9%	5%
2 days/week	12%	8%
1 days/week	8%	2%
Only if necessary	12%	14%
Not at all	8%	4%

The respondents were questioned regarding the digital communication channels used during telecommuting, presented in table 3. The most used communication channels are phone calling and video conference, followed by text message, audio message, email, and online editable documents.

**Table 3. Digital Communication Channels Used**

<b>Communication channel</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
Phone conversations	47%	21%	17%	13%	20%
Video conference using dedicated platforms (Microsoft Teams, Webex, Zoom, Google, etc.)	31%	27%	25%	15%	2%
Text messages sent instantly (WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber, Telegram, etc.)	23%	36%	19%	18%	40%
Audio messages sent instantly (WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber, Telegram, etc.)	22%	24%	24%	21%	9%
Email	26%	23%	26%	15%	10%
Google Docs / Drive, etc.	14%	80%	24%	21%	33%

## 2.2. Inferential Statistics

The responses to the measured items were rated on a five-point Likert scale where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. The data was analysed using the free statistical software PSPP. In Table 4 are presented the mean, standard deviation, Kurtosis and Skewness values of all variables. The values of the Kurtosis and Skewness coefficients are between -2 and 2 indicating the analysed variables follow a normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2002).

**Table 4. Variables' Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	N Valid	Mean	Std Dev	Kurtosis	Skewness	Min.	Max.
Employer Technical Support	100	3.25	1.37	-1.09	-0.25	1	5
Colleagues Digital Communication Adaptation	100	3.49	1.18	-0.74	-0.4	1	5
Supervisors Digital Communication Adaptation	100	3.44	1.23	-0.87	-0.33	1	5
Complete Task Coworker Communication	100	3.56	1.27	-0.89	-0.46	1	5
Complete Task Supervisors Communication	100	3.49	1.31	-1.08	-0.35	1	5
Satisfactory Digital Communication	100	3.43	1.39	-1.01	-0.47	1	5
Family Conflict Management	100	3	1.32	-1.03	0	1	5
Family – Telework Opportunity	100	3.55	1.38	-1.09	-0.46	1	5
Work-Life balance	100	4.32	0.95	0.81	-1.26	1	5
Future Telework	100	3.95	1.24	-0.5	-0.87	1	5
Future Office Work	100	2.5	1.49	-1.2	0.5	1	5

Several hypotheses were tested, and the supported ones are explained bellow. The linear regression was applied. The following coefficients are presented: the beta coefficient indicating the positive or negative link between variables, the correlation coefficient representing the intensity of the correlation, the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) indicating the percentage in which the variation in the independent variable explains the variation in the dependent variable, and p-values <0.05 of accepted hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1.** *The assistance offered to teleworkers by supervisors for the use of digital communication supported the process of accommodation to online communication with colleagues.*

The linear regression identified for the two variables a direct link (the beta coefficient being positive) of average intensity given by the correlation coefficient ( $R=0.57<0.7$ ). As a result, the variation in the support offered to employees by supervisors for the use of digital communication explains in proportion of 33% the degree of accommodation to online communication with colleagues ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 2.** *The support offered by supervisors for the use of digital communication supported the process of accommodation to online communication with the superiors.*

There is a direct link (the beta coefficient being positive) of average intensity between variables, given by the correlation coefficient ( $R=0.59<0.7$ ) between the variables. The variation in the support provided by superiors for the use of digital communication explains 35% of the variation in the degree of accommodation to online communication with superiors ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 3.** *The accommodation of teleworkers to online communication with colleagues supported the performance of work tasks.*

The variables' direct positive correlation ( $\beta>0$ ) of strong intensity is given by the correlation coefficient ( $R=0.89>0.7$ ). The variation in the degree of accommodation to online communication with colleagues explains 80% of the variation in the performance of work tasks ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 4.** *The accommodation of teleworkers to online communication with superiors influenced the performance of work tasks.*

There is a direct and positive link (the beta coefficient being positive) of strong intensity between variables given by the correlation coefficient ( $R=0.91>0.7$ ). The variation in the degree of accommodation to online communication explains 82% of the variation in the performance of work tasks from the point of view of employees' communication with supervisors ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 5.** *The facility of performing tasks involving mediated communication with colleagues positively influences the perception of digital communication as favourable.*

This correlation is positive and strong ( $R=0.79>0.7$ ). The variation in the perceiving of digital communication as favourable is explained in proportion of 62% by the variation in the performance of tasks implicating communication with colleagues ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 6.** *The facility of performing tasks related to mediated communication with superiors favourably influences the perception of digital communication as favourable.*

This correlation is positive and strong ( $R=0.79>0.7$ ). The variation in the perceiving of digital communication as favourable is explained in proportion of 63% by the variation in the performance of tasks communicating with superiors ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 7.** *Since it is not difficult to manage a conflict in personal life while working from home, telework is appropriate in communicating with family and relatives.*

The correlation between the two is positive and of medium intensity ( $R=0.69<0.7$ ) and the variation in the perception of telework as opportune for communication with family and friends is explained in a proportion of 48% by the variation in the ease of managing conflicts in personal life ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 8.** *The perception of telework as opportune in communication with family and relatives influences the perception of digital communication as favourable.*

The correlation between the two is positive and of medium intensity ( $R=0.69>0.7$ ) and the variation in the perception of digital communication as favourable is influenced in 47% by the variation in the perception of telework as opportune in communication with family and friends ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 9.** *There is a negative correlation between the perception of digital communication as favourable and employees' preference to return to office work.*

The perception of digital communication as satisfactory influences negatively and with a strong intensity ( $R=0.77>0.7$ ) the employees' preference for returning to office work. The variation in the preference for office work is explained in proportion of 59% by the variation in the perception of satisfactory mediated communication ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 10.** *The perception of digital communication as favourable influences the teleworkers' content work-life balance.*

This correlation is positive and of average intensity ( $R=0.68<0.7$ ). The variation in the teleworkers' content work-life balance is explained in proportion of 47% by the variation in the perception of digital communication as favourable ( $p<0.001$ ).

**Hypothesis 11.** *The teleworkers' content work-life balance influences, from the perspective of communication, their preference of telecommuting choice for the future.*

There is a direct and positive link ( $\beta>0$ ) of strong intensity between variables given by the correlation coefficient ( $R=0.77>0.7$ ). The variation of the teleworkers' preference of telecommuting choice for the future explains 59% of the variation in the teleworkers' content work-life balance ( $p<0.001$ ).



### 3. Discussions

This study identified several hypotheses concerning how the mediated communication influenced the teleworkers' perceptions of remote work and their preferences for the future form of work after the forced period of telework during the pandemic lockdown.

The assistance received by employees from supervisors to adapt the technology implemented for the organizational communication during remote work was crucial. The employers' technical support highly influences the users' satisfaction with the ICTs implemented (Eom, Ashill, & Arbaugh, 2012). The choice of communication channel is subject to personality type, as some prefer visual and audio communication channels while for others the most comfortable communication channel is text messages and emails (Smith, Patmos & Pitts, 2015).

The adaptation of digital communication for collaboration with colleagues and supervisors in accomplishing the work tasks impacts the teleworkers' job performance. Furthermore, the teleworkers' job performance adjusts their perception of satisfactory digital communication. Baker, Moon, and Ward's (2006) study mentioned the direct correlation between mediated communication and productivity. Regarding the fulfillment of work tasks, studies present the quality and timely information being highly appreciated by teleworkers, and not so much the relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Teleworkers experience less stress with meetings and work interactions. Employees seem to prefer more autonomy and flexibility. The face-to-face communication in the office is not mandatory producing positive outcomes. As, it seems that telecommuting reduces redundant communication and meeting's stress more than teleworkers' perceived isolation would. Providing the necessary information on time is much more important for employees (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). Teleworkers are exempt from interruptions, from the negative influence from a behavioral perspective that occurs at the workplace, from certain organizational policies imposed at the workplace. Remote work can eliminate exposure to gossip, informal conversations where colleagues complain about other colleagues. Some studies highlight the need for constant feedback from supervisors and the provision of clear information on the evaluation of activities (Fonner 2015). Communication between teleworkers could lose its spontaneity compared to that between employees in the office, but as a result it has become structured, meetings being scheduled (Hoffman, 2002).

The teleworkers' perception of satisfactory digital communication is also impacted by their perception of digital communication as opportune for their private life. The results of this study mentioned that it is not difficult to manage family conflicts while telecommuting, thus finding remote work appropriated for communicating with family, friends, and relatives. Some studies highlight the rising of work-family conflict, but this is triggered when the work demands exceed teleworkers capacity to

accomplish them (Stankevičiūtė & Savanevičienė, 2019).

One of the results presents the positive perspective of teleworkers on digital communication persuading their content work-life balance. There are studies reporting telework as beneficial, improving employees' work-life balance (Tremblay & Thomsin, 2012; Wang, Liu, Qian & Parker, 2021) or increasing teleworkers' social isolation (Gajendran & David, 2007). Another study identified teleworkers as being more satisfied with their job and work-life balance than office workers outcomes (Fonner & Roloff, 2010). Also, access to technology lessens the negative influence of isolation (Fonner, 2015). Another important element for telecommuters to consider is managing media communication boundaries to maintain a stable work-life balance. The choice of the communication environment also influences the performance of employees, it must be done in such a way as to meet the requirements of the tasks to be performed. Within the international teams, the cultural dimensions that could influence the satisfaction of the employee in terms of communication will also be considered because communication barriers may appear (Ruppel, Gong & Tworoger, 2013).

#### **4. Conclusions**

The data analyzed found that most of the respondents consider that telework is appropriate in professional and personal life and that this would be their choice for the future if they could choose. The ease of performing tasks related to communication with superiors and colleagues favorably influences the preference for the telework system. As from the family communication perspective, managing conflicts at home while telecommuting is not a burden. Technical support is vital for teleworkers' accommodation to digital communication. The adoption of ICTs positively powers the teleworkers' performance and further their favorable perception of digital communication.

Studies reveal that better work-life balance enhances better performance (Smith, Patmos, & Pitts, 2015). The organizations have to mitigate all the issues required by an effective and sustainable remote environment by substantial reorganizational efforts and specific policies to provide equal opportunities to each employee (Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021).

The cultural differences could interfere in optimizing communication satisfaction of employees. An extensive research of communication satisfaction of employees considering personality type and cultural values affecting their preference for the most suited communication channels is a further research perspective. Also, the study carried out in normal remote work conditions after a period of telework experience could reveal important aspects of communication in telecommuting.

Due to the sample size of this study, the results should be taken just as hints, disclosures, orientations for adequate and representative sampling study. This study provided valuable insights for the employers and could advance their approach on teleworking digital communication. Nevertheless, it's a source for framing a model of remote work communication.

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