

We have been keeping it 'in the pipeline' for a few months, this article with testimonials on teleworking, to find a good time to publish it.

And the time seems to have come! Thanks to the contributors for their testimonials and for having had the patience to wait!

The Union has indeed launched a new video on Flexible Working Arrangements, which you can find here: [video](#)

Furthermore, the Union and the Administration are currently considering how to improve the implementation of the policy, which has now been active for 18 months. So this is indeed a topic on the agenda!

\*\*\*\*\*

We are a couple with a child, and we both work. I live an hour from the office, which can be even longer on days when there is heavy traffic in Geneva (often on Tuesdays and Thursdays). In addition, my spouse has meetings in Paris, where the company she works for is based, twice a month. Our parents and siblings are even further away...

On days when I work from home, I can use the time that would normally be spent travelling to do family tasks such as taking our son to school or looking after the house to support my wife who - she also works from home but much more than me - still takes on too much of this aspect of our daily life. What's more, I don't have to face the stress of the road and the fear of arriving late... When my wife is away, I can also easily pick up the little one from school and keep track of homework, external activities, school meetings, all while preparing the evening meal. In short, for me, teleworking is an opportunity for a more balanced family and professional life in the distribution of roles between men and women, as well as the assurance for the civil servant of being more available to his children.

The other side of the coin would undoubtedly be the interference between work and private life. Thus, thanks to (or because of) teleworking, it is easier to be contacted outside office hours for meetings involving, for example, participants from a different time zone, in Asia or America. Moreover, it is not as easy to close the door of the spare room where my teleworking station is located as it is to close the door of the office, an hour's drive from home!

In short, I think that teleworking provides solutions to the daily constraints of a family far from their loved ones and where both parents are working, and that it can also make our professional activity more persistent, including in private moments, the moments that were once sacred to couple or family life. Conversely, it is more difficult to keep up with what is going on in the department, especially undocumented or unwritten information, if you are not there regularly. Also, I believe that teleworking is most beneficial when it is limited to a few days a week, alternating with days spent in the office, an opportunity to discuss the life of the department with colleagues, the progress of their own assignments and projects, or to share some more personal news.

(married man with child based at headquarters)

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Why I like teleworking.**

It is very difficult to think about positive outcomes of any pandemic. But if I was asked this question regarding the last global pandemic we all went through I would say telework. I must say that I am generally positively impressed by how the ILO managed the whole thing in terms of preserving the individual right to choose whether to get vaccinated as well as to preserve colleagues' health by minimising physical presence in the office by allowing teleworking. Not only. The ILO managed to make a step ahead and tried to keep the pace of our times adopting a teleworking policy last summer which has significantly advanced our working conditions, work life balance and put us on an equal footing with other UN agencies as well as some private sector enterprises. Although there is always room for improvement, I welcomed the policy and look with curiosity to its future developments.

A few reasons why I appreciate teleworking inside and outside the duty station? Because I can concentrate better at home and work on those tasks which require silence, focus and long reflection; because I can have confidential meetings which I cannot have in the shared office space together with other 4-5 colleagues. In the morning, I can prepare my coffee and start a washing machine cycle while responding to some early emails well before 9 AM. Over the lunch break, I can prepare myself a healthy meal at home considering that we do not have a canteen in our field office, or I can exercise and therefore improve my physical health other than mental one. I can receive my grocery shopping delivered (there is no grocery shopping close to my place so this is the only arrangement possible) and can pay electricity and gas bills 'on the spot', which is how this kind of payment is done in the country where I live (otherwise language and logistic barriers would make this task very hard).

Honestly, if I had to switch back to full in-presence work week at the office, my body would not be happy and I would probably feel more tired by the end of the week. I love sitting and working from my sofa from time of time, turning on and off the heat and the A/C according to my needs (not to 10 people different body temperature), being able to move in comfortable clothes when no meetings are planned, and taking advantage of bigger and private space which I would not have at the office. Sometimes I do not feel well and the only alternative to TW would be asking for a sick leave. However, in this latter case, I would not be able to get the work done and many items would be put on hold until the next or following days. Teleworking allows me instead to deliver without spreading any annoying virus around and stress my body too much when I am not feeling at my best. Normally I have a fixed TW schedule, but unexpected episodes of illness happen sometimes.

Having said so, I think that alternating TW days with days in the office is important. Not only because human beings are social animals, but also because I need to feel that I am part of a team, of an office and of a wider Organisation and because I value so much the sense of collective belonging. Also, I believe that on a more practical note, some kind of problems can be easily discussed and addressed in person, and I do appreciate sitting around the same table with the entire team, including the excols, and openly discuss what is working and what is not and to find a solution. This reinforces working relationships and mutual trust.

Furthermore, I like teleworking because I can make the best use of my weekend and still be able to connect on time the first day of my working week. And there is nothing wrong or shameful about this - we all have (or should have) a life outside our professional life and quality time off is essential to ensure the balance. Last but definitely not least, I appreciate the telework outside the duty station arrangement so much because my current relationship would probably not have survived without that possibility. 30 days in a year are not a lot, and I know many couples which live in different countries because of the nature of our job (and for precarity reasons sometimes) and the only way to see each other, in addition to the annual leave, is teleworking outside the duty station. Moreover, this arrangement allows for a better coordination of personal and professional life: for instance, someone can shorten the absence period from work while travelling abroad by combining annual leave with TW outside the duty station, thus meeting work deadline and without giving up to travel plans. It also allows colleagues who live far away from their country of origin to spend time with their family while keeping annual leave for quality time off with respective partners.

I can think of more valuable reasons to promote teleworking, but I want to prioritise one last consideration: managers need to open their eyes and see that preventing teleworking is not an effective way to ensure productivity and gain respect, on the contrary it decreases the morale and increases a sense of disaffection to the team and to the workplace in general. The only way to make this more equal is to change the policy and make teleworking a right instead of a mere entitlement. It should not be left to the choice of each manager but rather a right that the Organisation promotes for the wellbeing of its employees and a choice for each employee to exercise it or not. In this sense, I consider myself lucky because my manager understands the importance and the value of TW inside and outside duty station and allows me to take advantage of it because this does not have a negative impact on my performance and dedication, quite the opposite. And while it is important to have monitoring mechanisms in place to avoid abuses, it is also important to increase awareness on the importance of indicating with preciseness the address from where the work is performed, especially in the unfortunate event of a work-related accident outside the workplace. Colleagues should be reminded that the insurance can only cover the location indicated in the request submitted online, which represents a very important OSH aspect to be fully aware of.

(Woman colleague without children, based in the field)

\*\*\*\*\*

Teleworking has been greatly beneficial for me. I spend less time commuting and I can work more effectively as I have fewer distractions. More importantly, the days when I telework are the only days in which I can be more present for my children when they get home from school. We have 'goûter' together and then we sit side by side; while I work, they do homework. As a full-time working mom, these afternoons in which work and family share the same space are precious. My kids are young and I am well-aware that these moments are fleeting. Working shouldn't always mean missing out on most of our kids' days, especially when we have all the means at our disposal to better balance productive and domestic work. Everyone's circumstances are different as are personal preferences in terms of how to organise work and life. Telework is about understanding those differences and enabling everyone to find the best way to contribute to our joint mission.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's true that teleworking has allowed us to benefit from a clear time saving by avoiding travelling to the office. It allows us to be more efficient because we are less disrupted by

coming and going in our office, having coffee with colleagues, etc. Overall, it improves the work-life balance. But we have let the wolf into the sheepfold. When the office is also home, the line between work and personal life becomes very fine. The risk is always finding something to do or finish. This hyper-connection is difficult to live with. Before, we just had to leave the office to stop working. Now, we need a lot of discipline to respect this boundary.

For teleworking, the advantages can become disadvantages.

(Married man with children based at headquarters)

As a father with full-time childcare responsibilities, teleworking would have really helped me to be a little more present and to organise my daily life differently, more peacefully. Commuting times are getting longer and longer (45 minutes for me each way), so it would have been very helpful to save this time for several reasons, both family and professional. Now that my child is an adult, I can only imagine how much time I could have saved to see him grow up a little more, not to mention the effort I would have saved in organising my week. I think that a happy parent is a parent who can combine advantages such as working in an environment like ours, enjoying a little more time with their family and being able to organise their day while remaining productive (or even more productive) and less worried.

Can you imagine, in the case of a single-parent family, that another person is actively involved in your child's development, that they are there every day when they leave and return from school, that they bring them their snack every day, that they spend time having fun with them in the park, that they wipe away their tears when they fall over while playing, that she helps him with his homework and all this in your place? If you can imagine it, then you can be sure that many others have experienced it and are still experiencing it. I hope for the best for parents in this situation because it is now possible with teleworking to be a little more present in these precious moments.

A simple example based solely on 30 minutes per journey: 2 days of teleworking per week would result in a family time saving of approximately 2 hours per week, 8 hours per month, 96 hours per year and 960 hours over 10 years, i.e. 40 days in total. Does that not seem like a lot? For single parents, it would have been/is a lot. After school, if you haven't finished your homework, do it at the same time as the children. It may also motivate them: 'I'm doing what daddy does!' Just save some of your emails to write for these moments of togetherness and responsibility.

There is also another important issue with teleworking, the planet! Not taking the car 2 to 3 times a week, combined with the number of people who can take advantage of teleworking, would make it possible to actively fight against pollution and over-consumption in an attempt to limit the enormous impact we have on our beautiful blue planet.

In the age of new technologies, with the computer tools at our disposal, performance monitoring (for us and in private), the positive impact on our planet, the importance of our children's education and the motivation that teleworking provides, in the end, it would almost be time to '**impose it**'! (*Single-parent family based at headquarters*)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### Advantages:

- Saves commuting time and energy = less fatiguing, especially for older or pregnant colleagues or those with health conditions
- Cuts down CO2 emissions
- Allows to better reconcile family /private life with work
- Colleagues who work less well in teams or do not get along with other colleagues can contribute working from home, although telework should not become a replacement for effective conflict mediation.

#### Disadvantages:

- Reduced possibility for social contact, e.g. spontaneous encounters with colleagues across the house. Social contact stimulates creativity and work is most of the time a social activity which cannot be replaced effectively by remote forms of work.
- Participation in informal discussions, decision making and networking becomes more difficult. Colleagues, and especially women, who stay at home to better combine care and office work will reduce their visibility, influence and maybe career options.
- Colleagues might experience a feeling of isolation or disconnect, especially in teams which are not managed well or when these colleagues are not working in a team. This can have negative effects on mental health.

- With more people teleworking, hot desking could be established. Having an office and teleworking 50% or more is not cost effective for the Administration, which might rent out office space.

- 

I personally think the combination of telework and office work is the best and should be institutionalised. (*Female based at headquarters*)

(\*) : *Professional male/female married, with and without children, single-parent family male/female, General Services married with and without children, headquarters and field.*