

STILE – WP 5 ad hoc module on EWork Minutes from the user group meeting

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Participants:

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Duration: (from 3 to 5.30pm)

1. Introduction

The first meeting of the members of the user group was aimed at:

- presenting the objectives of the project;
- examining and discussing the list of proposed indicators;
- pinpointing a sample strategy for the pilot project.

First of all the general project was presented, with particular attention on WP5 and its objectives; successively, the list of the indicators was presented, updated by the aspects raised in the discussion with the partners (on 25th March).

As is inevitable in any meeting on the definition of indicators useful for individuating telework, the starting point of the discussion was the various definitions of this modality of work.

To pinpoint the quota of teleworkers, two main strategies are generally pursued: on the one hand, an exact definition of telework can be supplied and the respondents are then asked whether they consider themselves to be teleworkers, or indicators can be pinpointed whose combination can supply a typology of the various forms of telework.

Despite the fact that the project group share a definition of telework (any occupation conducted totally or partially outside the traditional place of work that uses telecommunication connections systematically, part or full time on a daily or weekly basis), it was decided to follow the second type of strategy that presents the following advantages:

- freedom for users to use more or less rigid definitions of telework to quantify the phenomenon;
- possibility to construct a typology of the various forms of telework;
- exemption from the risk of social desirability (people that declare being a teleworker to please the interviewer, while ignoring the actual meaning of the term).

The members of the user group appreciated this choice, considering the possibility of classifying the various types of telework as extremely interesting.

2. Indicators and typology of telework

The members of the user group also agree on the main dimensions of indicators: the place in which the work is conducted, the telematic technologies and intensity or systematic nature of the telework.

Another dimension signalled as relevant is the teleworker's level of integration with the organisation of the contractor company. In fact this variable becomes relevant to distinguish telework managed inside an organisation as opposed to one conducted autonomously by freelancers (journalists, translators, researchers, etc.) and could give rise to the following model:

Tab. 1 – systematic nature of remote work in relation to integration in an organisation

Systematic nature of telework	Integration in organisation	
	High	Low
High	1. stabile telework	3. Free-lance telework
Low	2. occasional telework	4. autonomous work that occasionally used telematic technologies

Probably type 4 doesn't necessarily represent a case of telework. Furthermore, this distinction can be traced back to differences between e-work and telework: in fact, whereas e-work (work in a network) is a modality of work that uses the potentialities of telematics to move communication flows, telework represents a subspecies as it foresees the physical movement of the worker.

Of the indicators already foreseen, those that can supply indications on the level of integration of the worker are as follows:

- The property of the IT equipment with which remote work is conducted
- The amount of time spent communicating with colleagues in an average telework day
- The typology of subjects with whom remote communication is conducted
- The type of work supervision, control and co-ordination
- The juridical status of the worker.

3. Sample strategies

Before going on to discuss each indicator, the sample modalities to adopt for the pilot project was looked into.

Given the numerical limitations of the inquiry (200 interviews per country) the participants of the user group agreed to construct a non representative sample from the statistical viewpoint, aimed at individuating teleworkers (or potential ones) that can be useful to test the indicators and to outline a map of the various forms of telework.

The snowball sample technique is considered useful if accompanied by an attempt to ensure the variability of the sample and sources.

The strategy suggested consists in the construction of a logical grid that lists all the possible types of teleworkers and sources to retrieve them, ensuring that at least 3-4 cases are contacted for each type. Given that the criterion of statistical representativity is disregarded, the criterion of heterogeneity is fundamental for the framing of a sample.

Tab. 2 – example of a logical grid for the construction of a snowball sample (to be completed)

Sector	Dependent workers	Autonomous or para-subordinate workers
Telecommunications	Telecomitalia (directory enquiries), Tim ...	
Finance, social security and insurance	Monte Paschi di Siena, INPS, Inail, Dimensione ...	
Software development		
Construction of web sites		
Technical maintenance	IBM	
Advisory activity	Enpacl	
Journalism		

Translations		Logos
Research	University researchers, research centres	Freelance researchers
Editorial		

Furthermore, it was suggested to assess the possibility to insert questions on the three main dimensions of telework (place, time and technology) in general surveys of the Eurobarometro (or Doxa) type to evaluate the efficacy of the questions in larger samples so as to supply a quantitative estimate of the phenomenon.

4. The list of indicators

The discussion then went on to look at the proposal of the indicators. The initial observation of the participants at the meeting was that the proposed indicators seem too specific and analytical to be inserted in broad-based inquiries on the labour force. Therefore, the main advice was to privilege objective types of indicators that can contribute to the definition of various forms of telework, disregarding more subjective indicators that would be more significant in the case of a comparison between teleworkers and non teleworkers e.g. the perception of work quality or one's own level of autonomy or the repetitiveness of the task). If it is considered necessary to insert these aspects in the pilot project questionnaire, the use of indicators already used in Eurostat inquiries or in inquiries conducted by the Dublin Foundation was suggested. Furthermore, regarding structural data (education, profession, activity sector, company size, etc.) the group recommend using the same questions present in FdL questionnaires so as to ensure the maximum comparability of results.

On the more qualitative aspects of telework, the possibility of conducting collective interviews to teleworkers (focus group) was suggested as it would allow some crucial aspects linked to the carrying out of this type of work to be analysed.

On some detailed matters, it emerged from the discussion that there is the necessity to distinguish between indicators targeted at all teleworkers and indicators targeted at only dependent workers, this is the reason why the following codes (TW-DEP and TW-SELFEMP) have been placed in the column on 'kind of people'. The proposals for change regarded the following indicators:

- **2.4 – intensity of use of telematic connection:** it would be better to specify the percentage of working time spent in the connection mode;
- **2.5 –functions of the connection:** the question must be placed following the definition of the type of work conducted at a distance, and in any case the classification proposed is considered unbalanced: it would be better to specify: for which activities is the telematic connection necessary? To effectively conduct my work; to carry out control functions; to deliver the results of my work; to deal with customer relations; to communicate with colleagues, superiors, partners or clients; other)
- **4.2 control:** it is considered necessary to assess whether there is some kind of control and who oversees the control of the worker's performance;
- **7.1 training:** it is useful to distinguish between training organised and paid for by the company and one conducted by the workers' own initiative;
- **8.2 electronic notice board:** on the continuity of company information, it would be a good idea to insert an item on union information;

- **8.3 – variations in productivity:** add the reply 'I have always worked in this way' for those workers that have always teleworked;
- **8.4 – use of extra time due to lack of movement/journeys:** insert the possibility to increase work time.

Furthermore, the following indicators have been eliminated as they are considered to be of little significance.

- Repetitiveness of the task
- Quota of colleagues involved in telework experiences
- Means used to communicate with colleagues
- Knowing other teleworkers
- Opinion of the effect of telework on personal life
- Quality of work
- Intention to change job

The table of indicators has also been modified and simplified as illustrated in the document attached.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the main recommendations which emerged following the discussion with the user group are as follows:

1. A principal element of WP5 is the contribution provided by the description of the various types of telework.
2. The level of integration within an organisation is a fundamental dimension to classify the forms of telework.
3. The indicators to be tested must be as objective as possible and less oriented at the description of qualitative 'nuances' that could lead to comparability problems.
4. In all cases where it is possible, indicators should be used that have already been inserted in existent statistical inquiries (structural data, flexibility, quality of work) so as to increase the level of comparability of the results.
5. For qualitative analyses, it may be useful to conduct collective interviews (focus groups) in each country with a group of teleworkers.
6. For the sample strategy it would be preferable to construct a sample of only teleworkers. The sample strategy, not being able to follow criteria of statistical representation, must privilege the criterion of heterogeneity of sources and types of teleworkers.