

Green Status Threatens an Emerging Telework Regime?

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Abstract: The evolution of work regimes has been a central topic of discussion in organizational studies, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Telework, once considered an alternative work model, has become a strategic organizational practice, reshaping business dynamics and leadership approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency in Portugal accelerated the adoption of telework, transforming it into an emerging work regime. In subsequent years, many organizations recognized its positive impact, integrating telework into their long-term operational strategies. Advancements in digital technologies have demystified telework, enabling employees to perform tasks remotely without compromising organizational efficiency. However, a paradigm shift is underway, with companies reconsidering telework policies, favoring hybrid or fully in-person models. Some researchers argue that this transition reflects organizational control mechanisms, potentially influencing voluntary turnover and employee autonomy. This study aims to examine the correlation between leadership competencies and organizational needs, assessing how telework influences business dynamics and innovation. Using a mixed-methods approach, we conducted research within a Portuguese-Angolan business group, employing critical incident techniques to analyze telework's viability and future implementation. The findings provide valuable insights into leadership adaptation, organizational restructuring, and the sustainability of telework as a long-term strategy

Keywords: Teleworking, Leadership adaptation, Organizational innovation, Digital transformation, Workplace flexibility

1. Introduction

The evolution of work regimes has been a major topic of debate within organizations and academia, especially in the post-pandemic context. The government-mandated telework policy during the state of emergency in Portugal triggered mixed reactions among companies. Many organizations approached this shift with reluctance, lacking full awareness of the necessary adaptations for maintaining operational continuity. However, the forced implementation of this work model proved to be a significant milestone in organizational transformation and the way work is perceived.

With technological advancements and the increasing digitization of processes, teleworking has moved beyond being a temporary alternative to becoming a structured and viable practice across various businesses. This new reality required deep adjustments in supervisory methodologies, communication strategies, activity coordination, productivity standards, employee well-being, and corporate culture. Additionally, issues such as workplace flexibility, trust in teams, and the redefinition of professional values and habits have become central to organizational discourse.

The analysis of telework's impact on organizational contexts raises fundamental questions about leadership and internal dynamics. The success of this model largely depends on leaders' ability to adapt strategies to the new reality, ensuring balance between employee needs and corporate objectives. Thus, this study aims to explore the correlation between leadership competencies and organizational needs, investigating how they influence business dynamics within the telework framework.

To achieve these objectives, a case study was developed within a company operating in Portugal and Angola, employing a mixed research paradigm and the critical incident technique for data collection. The findings of this study will allow for a deep reflection on the viability and sustainability of teleworking, analyzing whether the recent trend toward a return to in-person or hybrid work models represents a setback or an adaptive evolution in organizational management.

2. Literature Review

Olson (1983) describes teleworking as the computerization of the office, thus introducing the concept of remote work, carried out beyond traditional time and space constraints, supported by technological advancements. Over the decades, teleworking has evolved from a niche practice to a mainstream organizational strategy, particularly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The adoption of a teleworking regime requires organizations to restructure methodologies, communication channels, and coordination mechanisms. This transformation often necessitates a flattening of hierarchical structures, fostering autonomous work teams with delegated authority, thereby enhancing information flow and decision-making efficiency (Nunes, 2021). Additionally, telework demands a shift in leadership approaches, emphasizing digital communication skills, emotional intelligence, and adaptability (Bravo-Duarte et al., 2025).

Leadership plays a crucial role in the success of teleworking environments. Pontes (2008) highlights that leaders act as change agents, motivating teams to achieve organizational goals, which directly impacts company performance. In remote settings, leadership must transition from traditional oversight to a results-oriented approach, where employee accountability and trust become central pillars (Bonome, 2008). Recent studies reinforce this perspective, identifying transformational leadership, participative leadership, and supervisor support as key factors in maintaining employee engagement and well-being in telework settings (Boccoli et al., 2024).

Furthermore, e-leadership competencies have emerged as essential for managing remote teams effectively. These competencies include digital communication proficiency, goal management, and work-life facilitation, all of which contribute to reducing virtual distance and fostering a positive telework experience (Alkhayyal & Bajaba, 2023). Leaders who exhibit high emotional intelligence and adaptability can better support employees, ensuring productivity and job satisfaction in remote work environments.

The paradigm shifts in telework leadership underscores the need for continuous adaptation and innovation. Organizations must invest in leadership development programs that enhance digital skills, trust-building strategies, and effective remote collaboration techniques to sustain long-term telework success.

3. Methodology

The research follows the premise that teleworking significantly impacts employment relationships, shaping how participants perceive themselves as actors and promoters of organizational innovation. Given the increasing relevance of this topic, we designed a case study to explore participants' perceptions of teleworking, its influence on business dynamics, and managerial behaviors in this evolving reality. The central research question guiding this study is: "How does the use of teleworking influence organizational dynamics and leadership capabilities, with a view to innovation?"

To address this question, we adopted a mixed-methods approach, which allows for a comprehensive understanding of processes and phenomena implicit in telework research. This methodological choice aligns with previous studies (Pacheco et al., 2024; Simões et al., 2012), which highlight the advantages of case studies in capturing the complexities of telework, particularly in pandemic and post-pandemic contexts.

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

The study was conducted within a Portuguese-Angolan business group operating in the food retail sector, employing over 1,000 professionals. Data collection was structured across three distinct phases, each targeting different participant groups at different moments:

Phase 1: Focused on identifying technical limitations, communication challenges, and adaptation strategies in teleworking. A closed-ended online survey was administered to employees of Angolan nationality to assess their experiences.

Phase 2: Examined functional changes resulting from telework implementation. A mixed online survey (closed and open-ended questions) was distributed to Portuguese employees to capture their perspectives on organizational shifts.

Phase 3: Investigated past, present, and future perceptions of teleworking from a leadership standpoint. A semi-structured interview was conducted with senior management to analyze leadership strategies and organizational needs.

3.2 Data Analysis Approach

To ensure robust analytical insights, we employed a three-tiered data analysis strategy:

Descriptive Statistics – Used to quantify survey responses and identify trends.

Content Analysis – Applied to open-ended survey responses and interview transcripts to extract thematic patterns.

Comparative Analysis – Cross-referenced findings from different participant groups to establish correlations between telework, leadership, and organizational innovation.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of digital leadership competencies in telework environments, including adaptive communication, trust-building, and technological proficiency (Stoian et al., 2022; Yorulmaz et al., 2023). Additionally, bibliometric analyses suggest that telework governance remains an underexplored area, requiring further research into its long-term strategic implications (Kurland, 2002).

By integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of telework's impact on organizational dynamics, offering insights that contribute to future leadership strategies and innovation frameworks.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

The study was conducted within a Luso-Angolan business group, where daily cross-border information exchanges are integral to operations. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study was presented—without obligation—to all employees holding managerial positions in Angola, whose communications with Portugal were frequent, as well as to Portuguese employees and senior management. This approach resulted in a sample of 110 employees, providing a diverse perspective on teleworking dynamics.

4.1 Teleworking in Dialog between Portugal and Angola

The first phase of the study focused on Angolan managers who regularly interact with Portuguese employees. Their initial reaction to the study revealed surprise at the formalization of teleworking in Portugal, as they had not perceived significant operational changes within the organization.

Despite being familiar with the concept of teleworking, most Angolan managers were unaware of its formal adoption within the company, as process execution remained unchanged, and there was no perceived negative impact on workflow efficiency. This suggests that teleworking, in this context, did not introduce significant operational disruptions, reinforcing findings from previous studies that highlight the adaptability of telework models in cross-border business environments.

4.2 Integration or Disaggregation Changes

The second phase of the study examined Portuguese employees, both those working in Portugal and those stationed in Angola. Their responses indicated that teleworking had a minimal impact on their ability to perform work tasks. The primary challenge cited was communication difficulties due to physical separation from colleagues, yet they also noted greater availability for addressing issues outside of standard office hours.

Interestingly, employees reported higher productivity levels, attributing this to the ability to minimize workplace distractions and focus on tasks without frequent interruptions. This aligns with research suggesting that teleworking enhances concentration and efficiency, particularly when employees have autonomy over their work schedules. Overall, Portuguese employees viewed teleworking as more beneficial than detrimental, reinforcing its positive impact on work performance.

4.3 Perception of Change in the Context of Teleworking

The third phase involved senior managers, who were asked to reflect on teleworking's impact on organizational dynamics, innovation, and productivity. Their responses revealed a mixed perspective:

Productivity Gains: CEOs acknowledged that employees produced more in less time, validating teleworking efficiency.

Challenges in Implementation: Some employees misinterpreted teleworking as a form of extended leave, highlighting the need for clear organizational policies to maintain accountability.

Future Outlook: While CEOs now recognize teleworking as a valid work model, they still favor physical presence, viewing telework as an experiment rather than a long-term strategy.

This perspective reflects traditional leadership models, where physical oversight remains a key factor in managerial decision-making. Despite teleworking's proven benefits, leadership preferences for direct supervision may hinder its widespread adoption.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of teleworking, particularly in organizations that traditionally rely on physical presence for supervision and control. While teleworking has demonstrated clear advantages, including increased productivity, enhanced flexibility, and improved work-life balance, its adoption remains limited in Portugal due to deep-rooted managerial practices that prioritize direct oversight.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for telework experimentation, forcing organizations to reassess their operational models. However, despite the positive outcomes, many companies still perceive teleworking as a temporary or alternative arrangement, rather than a long-term strategic shift. This reluctance stems from classical leadership structures, where decision-making is centralized, and physical control over employees is deemed essential.

Our research highlights that leadership adaptation is critical for teleworking to be fully integrated into organizational frameworks. The transition from traditional hierarchical leadership to liberal leadership models, which emphasize autonomy, trust, and results-driven performance, is key to overcoming resistance. Additionally, the implementation of agile methodologies, such as daily check-ins and structured review processes, can help bridge communication gaps and maintain accountability in remote work environments.

The study also reinforces the importance of innovation in shaping future work models. Organizations that embrace teleworking as a strategic tool rather than a temporary necessity can enhance their competitive edge, foster employee satisfaction, and drive long-term organizational success. However, this requires a fundamental shift in leadership mindsets, moving away from control-based supervision toward trust-based collaboration.

Ultimately, the research confirms that teleworking has the potential to redefine organizational dynamics and leadership capabilities, paving the way for more adaptive, innovative, and resilient workplaces. As businesses continue to navigate post-pandemic realities, those that embrace telework strategically will be better positioned to thrive in an increasingly digital and globalized economy.

This study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of teleworking, offering a foundation for future research on leadership evolution, digital work environments, and organizational innovation. The findings suggest that teleworking is not merely an experiment but a viable, sustainable work model—if organizations are willing to adapt and evolve.

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