

Teleworking - A study from employees' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In the current working environment, the new normal, and the fast-changed technology, teleworking has become more and more popular in many organizations because of its benefits. However, there is a lack of teleworking literature, especially from employees' perspectives. Most of the studies found in teleworking literature were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, studies in teleworking were based only on data collected from supervisors, leaders, and managers. The present study aims to fill these gaps in the literature by collecting data from 24 employees (teleworkers) through in-depth interviews to explore their perspectives on teleworking. The respondents are teleworkers or used to be teleworkers in firms. The research findings have identified 06 advantages and 06 disadvantages, and teleworkers' explanations of how they impact their performance. Among these advantages and disadvantages from employees' perspectives, some are never found in previous studies. Based on the research findings, some managerial implications are proposed to enhance teleworking in the current dynamic working environment.

1. Introduction

Teleworking (also called *working from home*), an obvious world of work, refers to the context in which employees perform work remotely from home. In the context of teleworking, employees are not located in one central office but rather work at any location (Korkeakunnas et al., 2023). From history, the industrial revolution gathered employees to offices and factories to work. The transaction between employee and employer is normally understood as the time employees spend at firms. Then, the information revolution has provided a huge change by unbinding employees from a fixed workplace. Teleworking is using electronic media as a means for people to work. Digital technologies provide solutions to re-arrange work and employees in remote locations (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

During Covid-19, especially in social distancing time, teleworking became the solution for many types of businesses. In addition, nowadays, with the rapid development of technology, teleworking has become popular in corporations. In 2023, Reeracoen - a Japanese consulting firm conducted a survey with the participation of over 800 firms about their working modes. The result showed that 77% of participating firms have changed to hybrid working mode (Reeracoen, 2023). The reason for this change is because the hybrid working mode is to respond to employees' expectations, and to increase employee performance. The survey also identified some benefits identified by employers, including reducing costs for firms, travel expenses for

employees, and some other opportunity costs. According to Saigon Times Online, employee performance is still an issue that has not been managed well (Ngan Diep, 2023). In this report, it is highlighted that, in teleworking, employee performance is very different between employees. Therefore, developing policies and working procedures to manage teleworking should be more invested. To do so, a study of teleworking in the current business context (after Covid-19) is significant.

Academically, scholars have discussed a lot and had different findings on the effects of teleworking on employee and organizational performance. In their study, Bloom et al. (2015) found that home-working not only led to a 13% performance increase but an improved work satisfaction. This result is echoing with those found in the studies of Kowalski and Ślebarska (2022), Baruch (2000). In contrast, Kurkland and Bailey (1999), Baruch (2000), found some negative impacts of telework on employee performance and productivity. Korkeakunnas et al. (2023) argued that not all work can be performed effectively in the mode of teleworking. This gap is to support a study to explore the advantages and disadvantages from teleworkers' perspectives, which can be factors that influence their performance.

The literature on teleworking has had a significant development in the last four years 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023. Most of the publications were conducted in the context of Covid-19. In recent years, the globe faced the Covid-19 pandemic and teleworking was the only option. That is the reason for having many studies in teleworking published at this time. However, in the 'new' normal, when Covid-19 is not classified as a concern anymore, there is not much literature on teleworking published. In particular, most of the studies published in 2023 and early 2024 have two main characteristics: (a) the research contexts in studies were still in Covid-19 time (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Chambel et al., 2023), and (b) participants were supervisors, leaders, managers (Korkeakunnas et al., 2023; Kowalski & Ślebarska, 2022). Therefore, a study conducted in the new normal context (after Covid-19) with the participants as teleworkers is necessary to provide more understanding of teleworking.

To enrich the literature of teleworking, especially after Covid-19 time - the 'new' normal, when many firms employ hybrid working mode, there is a necessity to conduct more research in teleworking. The appropriate teleworkers for the present study are limited in back-office employees and managerial staff, who are working in some limited industries, such as Education, IT, etc.

The present study aims to (1) explore the advantages and challenges of teleworking from employees' perspectives, and (2) propose managerial implications for firms to enhance the effectiveness of teleworking. The research findings will provide more insights into teleworking in the current business environment.

2. Literature review

2.1. A brief of teleworking and research on teleworking

Telecommunication was first invented by Nilles in 1975 to describe a telecommuting network allowing employees to work in offices close to their homes (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Kurkland & Bailey, 1999). In his paper, Nilles (1975) highlighted that it is important for firms to prepare employees to be ready for the new work mode. There are some publications defining what telework is. However, there is a lack of a universally accepted telework definition (Athanasidou & Theriou, 2021). In common, telework can be understood as "*a transition from in-person supervision to remote managing, from face-to-face communication to telecommunication-*

mediated communication, from on-site working to off-site or multiple sites working, and the case of groups, from side-by side collaboration to virtual teamwork” (Kurkland & Bailey, 1999, p. 53).

According to Kurkland and Bailey (1999), there are four types of telework, consisting of home-based telecommuting, satellite offices, neighborhood work centers, and mobile working. *Home-based telecommuting* is the type of working, in which employees are scheduled or arranged to work at home in their employment, and the connection to the office includes telephone, email, computer/laptops linking to office servers, and fax machines. *Satellite offices* are a kind of work in which employees work neither at home nor at headquarters office, but in a location convenient to the employees and/or customers. Satellite offices are equipped by the firm with furniture and equipment. *Neighborhood work center* is similar to a satellite office, but it belongs to site owners, and several companies have separate offices in a leased office building. Lastly, *mobile working* is a type of work, in which employees are frequently on the road, using communication technology to work, and communicating with the office when necessary. Employees in this type of work need to be on the move to get their jobs done.

In the publication of Baruch (2000), three characteristics of teleworking are identified, including: location of the workplace being partially or fully independent from the location of the employer, contractor, clients, etc.; use of information technology; organizational form and communication link to the organization.

The most updated review publication was published in 2021. In this systematic review, Athanasiadou and Theriou (2021) divided reviewed studies on telework into two categories: telework challenges and outcomes. They found that from 2010 - 2019, there were not many studies on telework because of the slow increase in telework. An interesting issue is that most of the studies were published in journals in technology to imply a strong relationship between telework and technology. In terms of telework outcomes, there are some keys, including inclusion in the workforce of certain groups, job satisfaction, work-life balance, career impacts, productivity, performance, interpersonal interaction, and social isolation. Challenges of telework consist of the autonomy versus control paradox, and the relationship between teleworkers and non-teleworkers. Last but not least, in this study, the authors found that more than half of the reviewed studies adopted a quantitative approach to address research objectives.

The literature on teleworking can be found in many disciplines, such as transportation, urban planning, information science, organizational behaviors, ethics, law, and sociology (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Most research contexts are in advanced economies, such as the US, UK, Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, Germany, Italy, etc. (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). It can be seen that there is a lack of studies on telework in the context of developing countries like Vietnam. This is also a research direction suggested by Athanasiadou and Theriou (2021).

2.2. Contingency theory and teleworking

The fast development of teleworking in recent years is the result of an uncertain, dynamic, and flexible environment. To adapt to such an environment, firms have to balance between changes in technology, market, etc., and their strategies and management systems, including the workforce. To serve this purpose, contingency theory of labour process change is the base to explain and re-organize the work process (Fredericks, 2005; Tomaskovic-Devey & Risman, 1993) and to decentralize organization (Nilles, 1975).

Contingency theory offers the idea for managers to choose organizational structures and control systems, which depend on characteristics of the current business environment (Jones & George, 2022). From that, the theory allows managers to contingently lead, empower and motivate their employees. In teleworking, under the pressure of technology development and the dynamic business environment with many new job formats, flexibility is really needed. Therefore, managers do not simply define goals for employees, but they react to the power of employees and the organizational constraints as well (Tomaskovic-Devey & Risman, 1993). In addition, relative power and status of the class of jobs are considerations to achieving organizational goals contingently.

In short, teleworking is a typical aspect of organizational operation, which has to rely on technology development, organizational constraints, relative power, and the status of classes of jobs (Tomaskovic-Devey & Risman, 1993). Contingency theory is really helpful to address and enhance telecommuting at firms.

2.3. Advantages and challenges of teleworking

In the very first publication in teleworking, Nilles (1975) discussed some impacts of telecommunications, but not classified clearly the benefits or challenges. The key impact which is discussed is organizational decentralization. He also discussed transportation and communication systems, labor force, land use and urban growth patterns as consequences of telecommunication.

Later, the first paper identifying the advantages and challenges of teleworking was studied by Kurkland and Bailey (1999). In their paper, Bailey and Kurland (2002), Kurkland and Bailey (1999) classified the advantages and challenges of all four types of teleworking (home-based, satellite, neighborhood work center, and mobile work) by three levels: Organizational, Individual, and Social level. At the *Organizational level*, the common advantage of all four teleworkings is greater productivity; meanwhile, challenges include performance monitoring, performance measurement, managerial control, and virtual culture. In *Individual level*, the common challenges consist of professional isolation, reduced office influence, and access to resources; meanwhile, less time communication and the absence of office politics are two challenges appearing in 03 over 04 types of teleworking. Lastly, at the *Social level*, mobile work is identified with no advantage, and the other 03 had less traffic congestion, less pollution, and greater community involvement as advantages. There is no challenge identified in satellite offices and neighborhood work centers, and telework culture is the common challenge of the other two types.

Bailey and Kurland (2002) conducted a review of telework research, and had a summary of ‘what happens when people telework?.’ The positive outcomes at the top lists include improved productivity, organizational loyalty and belonging, job satisfaction, and employee retention and attraction. However, neither negative outcomes nor challenges were summarised in the review.

Later, in their literature review section, Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that it is unknown whether teleworking is good or bad for employees, because findings of previous studies were contradictory. Their research findings confirmed the positive impacts of teleworking on perceptions of autonomy, lower work-family conflict, employee-supervisor relationship, increased job satisfaction, lower turnover intent, etc.

In 2020, another review paper was conducted to review all published papers on teleworking till November 2018 by de Macêdo et al. (2020). The key advantages of teleworking, such as the self-image of responsible, committed, independent, and autonomous professionals/individuals, work-family balance, etc., are summarised. Criticisms of teleworking include the excess of working hours, the isolation of the workers, the impacts on their social life, and the invasion of family space.

Lastly, the last review paper, which was published in 2021, was carried out by Athanasiadou and Theriou (2021) by collecting papers on teleworking from the Scopus database between 2000 and 2020. The study is to review (i) the extent and coverage of articles on telework, (ii) methods used and unit of analysis in these articles, and (iii) the main research themes in these articles. The main research themes are divided into 02 categories: challenges and outcomes. The outcomes include the inclusion of employed groups, job satisfaction, work-life balance, career impacts, productivity and firm performance, interpersonal interaction, and social isolation. Telework challenges consist of autonomy vs. control, and teleworkers and non-teleworkers relationships.

In short, the literature on telework shows some important issues. First, previous studies were not conducted in any specific sectors (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021; Bayazitova et al., 2023; Korkeakunnas et al., 2023) or manufacturing sectors (Fontaneda et al., 2023; Kowalski & Ślebarska, 2022). Second, there are no consistent summaries of the advantages or challenges of teleworking in previous studies. Even though many studies have provided a positive impact of teleworking, scholars are still discussing whether teleworking is really effective, for employees and employers. In addition, there is a lack of studies in teleworking in the context of post-Covid-19, and more empirical evidences from developing countries are needed.

3. Methodology

The present study aims to explore employees' perspectives to identify the advantages and challenges of teleworking and then the effects of teleworking on their performance. To address the research objectives, a qualitative approach is employed with in-depth interviews as the method to collect data (Creswell, 2007). A comfortable context to conduct in-depth interviews is important for interviewees to share their opinions. This approach is selected to fill the gaps identified in the literature that cannot be addressed by quantitative-based research.

The sampling method employed in the present study is snowballing and purposive to select appropriate interviewees who are (1) full-time employees of firms and (2) teleworking or used to telework. Based on the result of the literature review, semi-structured interview questions are proposed to collect the data. Interviewed questions are to explore experiences in teleworking, advantages and challenges of teleworking and how teleworking affects employee performance. Related to sample size, in qualitative study, the sample size is not determined at the beginning of the study, but at the end of the research. When the data from interviews can provide insights into understanding teleworking and when no more new insights can be obtained, the interview can be completed (Taylor et al., 2016). In the present study, no new insights of teleworking can be explored, when the number of informants reached 24.

Finally, thematic analysis is employed to analyse data sets and address the research questions. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), the framework to analyse textual data includes six steps: Familiarising with data, Generating initial

codes, Searching for themes, Reviewing themes, Defining and naming themes, and Reporting. By focusing on meaning across a data set, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. According to Gibson and Andrew (2009), thematic analysis serves three main aims, including examining commonality, examining differences and examining relationships. With these aims of thematic analysis and the research objectives of the present study (to explore the advantages and disadvantages of teleworking), thematic analysis fits the research purposes properly.

4. Data analysis

In total, there are 24 interviewees approached and interviewed for the study, including 11 men and 13 women. The demographic information of the interviewees is summarised in Table 1. Moreover, all respondents are living in Ho Chi Minh City, and have internet connections at home, while 75% confirmed that they had a separate space at home for work, and their homes were silent and appropriate for working. Although 25% do not have a private place to work, they also have a table, chair, and laptop to support completing tasks at home. This indicates that the employees were ready to work from home.

Table 1

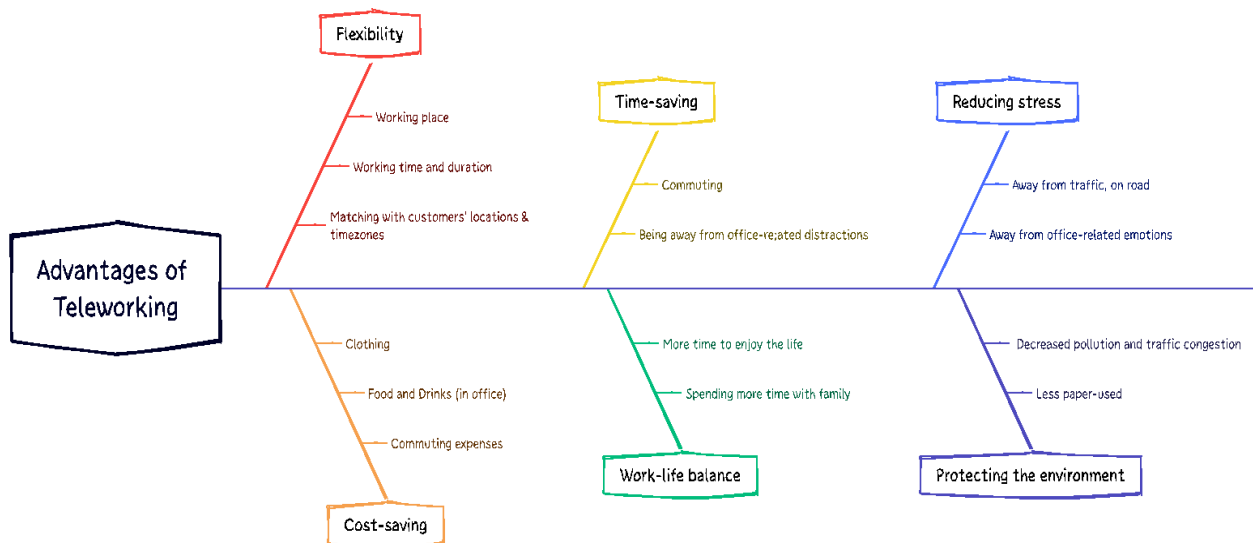
Demographic Information of Interviewees

	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			Working industry		
Male	11	46%	Engineering & Manufacturing	6	25%
Female	13	54%	HR	6	25%
Age			IT	6	25%
18 - 29	19	79%	Education	3	13%
30 - 49	4	17%	F&B	1	4%
50 - 64	1	4%	Marketing	2	8%
Relationship status			Job title		
Single	20	83%	Employee	7	30%
Married	4	17%	Executive	13	54%
Education			Senior/Manager	4	17%
Bachelor	18	75%			
Postgrad.	6	25%			

Source. The research's data analysis

4.1. Advantages of teleworking and effects on employee performance

From employees' perceptions, teleworking has many advantages, including Flexibility, Time saving, Cost saving, Work-life balance, Reduced stress, and Environmental protection. All advantages are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Teleworking Advantages*

Source. The research findings

Flexibility

From the interviews, 23 out of 24 respondents agreed that they prefer teleworking as it is the freedom to determine the time and place of work. Working from home allows workers to be more flexible in scheduling appointments and running errands. Interviewees 7 and 9 preferred working at home due to the freedom and better flexibility. They state that: “*Just as when working from home, I can work whenever I want as long and I can get my work done. I myself can measure my comfort level at work.*” (Interviewee 7), and “*It is easier to manage both work and personal aspects of your life; you have the flexibility.*” (Interview 9).

When employees are no longer tied to offices, they may be better positioned and more willing to work flexible hours, such as earlier or later in the day or even at weekends. Teleworking does not need to always follow the office hours. Many teleworkers do their tasks in their own homes so they work according to their own timings that fit with their working styles. For example, “*When you wake up in the morning, you can even directly open the laptop and pay in installments*” (Interviewee 22), or “*Working from home mode is more flexible in completing work.*” (Interviewee 8).

Another detail of Flexibility is that teleworkers can arrange a suitable schedule for trading with customers in different locations instead of staying late at the office. Interviewee 2 explains: “*This could assist in meeting specific company needs, such as trading with customers in different time zones.*” (Interview 2).

The flexibility in workplace, time and duration, and matching with customers’ locations and time zones make teleworkers more productive and their performance is much better. Teleworkers believe that control of time, work space, etc., are the keys. Being flexible in what to wear, where the workspace is, how to decorate the corner, and having autonomy in tasks are the factors improving teleworkers’ performance. Moreover, self-setting up the workplace (such as temperature, convenient corners, etc.) helps teleworkers minimize distractions and increase their performance. This is shared by Interviewee 16, “*The flexibility of teleworking enhances performance very much. Being able to control my schedule can help me arrange tasks more productive*” (Interviewee 16). Or Interviewee 11, “*My performance is directly improved thanks*

to the flexibility from teleworking such as controlling my time or modifying my work space to make me feel the most satisfied to do tasks” (Interview 11).

Cost-saving

Teleworking offers employees one important advantage - Cost-saving. The costs are mentioned consisting of commuting, parking, maintenance, food, and clothing. Not only saving these expenses, teleworkers also receive financial support from companies, such as electricity, internet, and communication. 21 per 24 interviewees mentioned that they can save commuting, parking, and even maintenance expenses. For example, *“I can save money on commuting, and also receive additional benefits for electronics, water, and also Internet connection from my company.” (Interviewee 9); or “I do not have a motorbike, so I usually go by Grab bike. It cost me about 30 - 40,000 VND to go to work every day. With teleworking, I can save that money.” (Interviewee 20).*

Working in an office makes people have to spend a lot on food, and drinks because of the in-office mood. These expenses are expensive in Ho Chi Minh City. Interviewee 5 noted that *“Half of my monthly salary was paid for food when eating with colleagues outside.” (Interviewee 5).* Participant 23 added: *“When being in the office, my colleagues used to ask me to order milk tea with them. It is enjoyable. But in teleworking, I order it less frequently because there’s no one to share the joy with. I guess I save some money there.” (Interviewee 23).*

In particular, clothing expenses are mentioned by some respondents. Some interviewees explained that they want to impress their co-workers with new, trendy, and fashionable clothing. Therefore, they have to spend money on clothes, and by teleworking, they can save on this expense. This is shared by interviewee 2 *“Teleworking eliminates the need for the employee to dress up for work ... The savings of not having to purchase new clothes for work.” (Interviewee 2).*

Time-saving

Besides saving expenses, teleworkers can also save their time in commuting, especially in rush hour. Time-saving is shared by 21 per 24 interviewees. The activity frequently mentioned in Time-saving is commuting. Participant 2 answered, when asked about the advantages of telework: *“I can avoid the travel time, traffic jams, and others to save time” (Interviewee 2),* or explained to another participant: *“Yes, because I’m able to save a lot of time in commuting. I feel comfortable logging in at work even at night.” (Interviewee 4).* In the viewpoints of participant 15, saving time is very useful, since more time can be spent for family, sleeping, doing exercise, and preparing breakfast, *“It can allow me to focus on priorities outside of work, such as getting more sleep in the morning, spending more time with family, exercising, or eating a healthy breakfast”.* (Interviewee 15).

Another aspect of time-saving is that telework brings opportunities for employees to focus on tasks without office-related distractions, less time on meetings as well as waste time on meaningless tasks at work. Interviewee 4, who has the job title Senior Human Resources Manager, commented that *“I do not have to spend time in long meetings. It is possible for me to do some helpful other work. Moreover, I have more time to focus on work” (Interviewee 4).*

Interviewees believe that with the time not being spent on commuting, they can do a lot and get a better performance. Similarly, teleworking keeps them away from in-office distractions and brings them more peace of mind to make more accurate and faster decisions, and it will bring positive energy to employees to increase their performance. This is explained by respondent 7 as follows: *“I feel that my work results are better every day because I can save time and feel very*

comfortable with my surroundings since I am home” (Interviewee 7).

Work-life balance

Work-life balance is important for all employees, not only married but also single ones. Married people have a family to take care of, they always want to spend more time with their families. Teleworking has a positive Respondent 19 explained his Work-life balance by linking back to his response to the discussion about Flexibility: *“Becoming a virtual worker gives me a chance to work side by side with my wife as well as with my kids who are studying online courses.” (Interviewee 19).* He believes that, in teleworking, spending more time with his family can reduce work-life conflict, and this will lead to boosting job satisfaction, and increasing productivity.

To single teleworkers, teleworking gives them more time to enjoy their lives since they can create a comfortable, secure, and conducive working atmosphere. For example, respondent 12 pointed out that *“I can work on the back porch of the house while enjoying coffee or honey tea in the morning instead of preparing clothes, food or facing traffic jams head to the office.” (Interview 12),* or respondent 10, who is working in the Marketing department, added: *“I can work in the living room accompanied by instrumental music to help me increase concentration.” (Interview 10).*

Interviewees believe that teleworking is giving them more time for their loved ones, and it, obviously, gives them a greater control over time, and leads to reduced work-life conflict, increase their performance. These are the results of reciprocating from organizations.

Reducing stress

This advantage (accompanied by improving productivity) is mentioned by 04 respondents. The main reason leading to stress is being stuck in traffic jams, and spending much time on the road. For example, one respondent stated, *“I think that (teleworking) can reduce lots of stress. No one wants to be in traffic jams before work; it could make their whole day bad.” (Interviewee 7).*

In the office context, employees are distracted from tasks and colleagues, and noise makes them difficult to focus. This rushing impacts less productivity and less motivation, which can cause negative emotions (like stress or anxiety). Teleworking and having a flexible schedule can allow workers to find a comfortable time and place that enhances their productivity and reduces work-related stress. Respondent 2 responded *“I feel pressure when working at the office. I have a thought that everybody is watching me. That’s why working from home makes me feel more comfortable and reduces the pressure. I love my private place at home” (Interviewee 2).*

Having less stress makes teleworkers feel better (physical and mental health), and good health is always good for performance.

Environmental protection

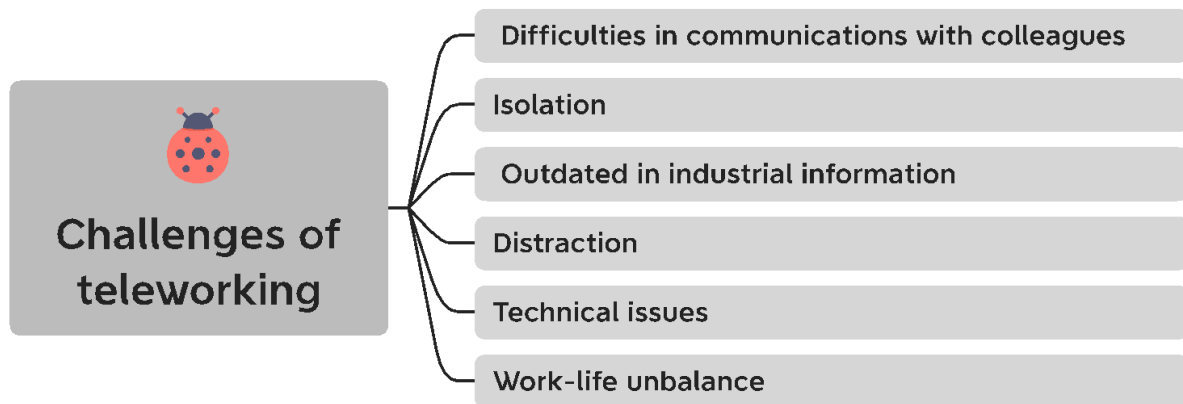
There is only 01 interviewee being concerned about the impacts on the environment of teleworking. As explained by Respondent 4 *“As you see, pollution and traffic congestion in the pandemic decreased markedly around the world. Moreover, it helps reduce carbon emissions and has a positive effect on climate change when we stay almost at home to work.” (Research Interviewee 4).* It can be seen that the issue of protecting the environment is the consequence of commuting. In addition, environmental protection is also the result of reducing paper use in in-office mode.

4.2. Challenges of teleworking and its effects on employee performance

Even though many advantages are listed and favored, challenges are always there, in teleworking. Challenges described by respondents in the present study include: Communication difficulties with colleagues, isolation, distraction, technical issues (computer and internet connection), and disproportionate work-life balance. All challenges are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Challenges of Teleworking



Source. The research findings

Difficulties in communications with colleagues

The issue of *Difficulties in communication with colleagues* is mentioned by more than half of the interviewees. According to the interviews, working is not only about task completion but about a very high level of social interaction in very different situations. To some people, teleworking makes them face more difficulties in communicating. Communicating via technology cannot support the understanding between members. This is shared by one young employee “*At offices, bonding activities bring employees together. That helps introverted people like me to explore relationships at work. But home-based via technology makes things harder*” (Interviewee 1).

The other aspect is difficulties for newbies in onboarding time. Newbies need time to learn about the organizational culture and integrate into the team/department/company. Hence, for newbies, teleworking might not be appropriate. As shared by one engineer, who has just joined one technology firm, “*As a new employee and starting to telework, it caused many difficulties such as difficulties in making friends online or joining with teammates. I faced many problems initially but was so scared to talk with mentors because I did not make sure they were available to ask or not*” (Interviewee 3). Lacking face-to-face communication makes it difficult to access people for help, support, and cooperation. Teleworking can lead to the feeling of social and professional isolation and disconnectedness.

As a consequence, having difficulties in communications leads to adverse effects on employee performance since they cannot have in-time cooperations and support. Without a person-to-person interaction, teamwork is also weak, and it may lead to difficulties for teleworkers in receiving critical information. Moreover, teleworking for a long time may cause feelings of isolation and disconnectedness and affect performance negatively.

Isolation

The biggest challenge, according to 11 per 24 interviews, teleworkers have to accept is that isolation. Interviewees explained that they have a sense of feeling out of touch with others in the company, and they do not have the advantages of teamwork. Participant 14, a research executive, has experienced struggles in social isolation, *“Although various software tools, email, video conferencing are available to conduct regular meetings. I still feel I lack instant access to the water cooler conversations in a physical office environment”* (Interviewee 14). To add more explanation, participant 7 specified that: *“One of the factors that make me love the company is coming to the office every day, meeting colleagues. I am a person with a huge need to communicate, so in teleworking, I felt joy was lost.”* (Interviewee 7).

Being in remote positions, teleworkers have to face isolation, peer-to-peer relationship, mentoring, etc. This type of work reduces social networking which can have negative impacts on their performance.

Outdated industrial information

The previous two challenges (difficulties in communication with colleagues and isolation) of teleworking lead to another challenge - Outdated industrial information. Teleworking reduces social networking. Hence, it makes employees not being noticeable fast about the new developments/changes in their industry. Many interviewees stated that, in teleworking, they face the risk of missing out on knowledge that could help them with their professional obligations and development. One of them mentioned that *“I also would feel left out from activities and meetings that could enhance my career.”* (Interviewee 21). From what is shared by interviewees, when working at offices, besides official meetings/communication, there are also informal conversations that update them with the most updated information related to their jobs/industries. Participant 6 commented that *“I do not have informal interaction with others and face-to-face contact with others.”* (Interviewee 6).

It can be seen that teleworking takes the chance of being updated away from teleworkers. Informal talks are invaluable and provide employees wonderful opportunities to be updated. Teleworking reduces the chances of social networking (as mentioned in Isolation), and it makes them less noticeable in their industry. As mentioned earlier, information can be updated anytime through informal communications at the office, and many interviewees pointed out that lack of updated information will affect their performance negatively.

Distraction

Even though *Flexibility* is recognised as the most frequently-mentioned advantage, it can lead to a lot of *distractions*, such as household tasks, online shopping, social media platforms, and video games. Working at home gives teleworkers more autonomy, but it also requires them to be more self-disciplined. As shared by one young employee *“It is easy to get distracted by social media, games, and personal stuff”* (Interviewee 3). To be more specific about personal stuff, some explanations from other respondents are: *“For example, parents asking us to help, it does not take too long, but it is difficult for me to get back into the working mood.”* (Interviewee 2), or *“I am too easily distracted by household tasks. I find it difficult to get into the mindset of ‘working’ at home without distractions”* (Interviewee 8).

Even though all teleworkers in the present study have their own table and chairs to telework or even a place to work at home, noise is a big concern. Noise can be from neighbors or from people in the house. These noises can make teleworkers lose their concentration: *“I am often distracted by noise from the surrounding neighbors”* (Interviewee 9). Moreover, participant 2 also specified that *“... the noise caused by surrounding neighbors also annoys me, especially when I*

am meeting” (Interviewee 2).

Obviously, when being distracted, teleworkers cannot concentrate on their jobs, and their performance is negatively impacted. This is confirmed by Respondent 13: *“The same thing can be solved immediately in the office, because there is no other thing involved. At home, when I was about to prepare for the task, neighbors came. At this time, I will certainly put the work at hand to deal with some home affairs, and the work efficiency is definitely not as high as in the office”* (Interviewee 13).

Technical issues

Even though technology, especially in communication, has been developed very fast, a lot of unexpected issues always exist. These issues include internet connection, internet instability, difficulties in sending work data/information between employees/servers, required software, and/or knowledge/skills to use the software. Some shares from interviewees are: *“I am struggling with Internet connection at work from home. I feel bad and depressed when I lose important information in the meeting because of this. I never face that situation at the office before”* (Interviewee 2).

or, *“My wifi and internet are good, but there are some software ... difficult to fully understand and use, I need to ask my colleagues a lot to be able to use it”* (Interviewee 20),

or *“I’m quite good at technology in general, but there are still issues that I could not handle by myself; because of that, if my laptop went down, it would be a big problem because it may delete all my data and prevent me from working”* (Interviewee 22).

Working in the office offers employees support from the IT department, which they never have while teleworking. Moreover, in some jobs, it is required to have appropriate working equipment. For example, respondent 1 shared, *“Due to the nature of my work, I often depend a lot on the machines at the factory, especially complex tasks that are often delayed due to not having enough machines, as well as the focus and support from the partner”* (Interviewee 1).

Work-life unbalance

Work-life balance is mentioned as an advantage of teleworking; however, work-life unbalance is a challenge that teleworkers have to face. If it becomes stressful to balance work and household tasks with the family members’ expectations, it can decrease their concentration and performance. The most frequent aspect mentioned in work-life unbalance is longer working hours. For example, Respondent 13 stated, *“One of the disadvantages of working at home is that it is hard to keep up with the routine. Sometimes, I work overtime (overwork) too late, until 3 - 4 AM, and therefore wake up later than usual. I want to build a healthy lifestyle, but it is tough to do so”* (Interviewee 13),

or *“It is tough for me to balance work and personal life while working from home. I often focus on work and forget to eat. Working at the office, I think everyone reminds each other to break, eat, or end working hours. I often get caught up in work at home without caring about the time”* (Interviewee 5).

Overworking makes teleworkers exhausted, not spending time for their own lives or their family members. *“However, in teleworking, I think it may negatively affect work-life balance because you are bringing work home ... Working too much and not spending time on myself or my loved ones is not good”* (Interviewee 16).

5. Discussion

The research findings show that, from employees' perceptions, there are 06 advantages, including *Flexibility, Cost-saving, Time-saving, Work-life balance, Reducing stress, and Protecting the environment*; and 06 challenges, consisting of: *Difficulties in communication with colleagues, Isolation, Outdated in industrial information, Distraction, Technical issues, and Work-life unbalance*. The advantages of teleworking are that it keeps employees away from distraction, makes feel motivated (in working, having more time with their family), and leads to higher productivity and better employee performance. Challenges of teleworking, obviously, drive adverse influences on employee performance because of feelings of isolation, working too much, lacking updated information, etc. Among the identified advantages and challenges, some are only found in the present study, from employee' perspectives, including: 04 advantages: *Flexibility, Time-saving, Cost-saving, Reducing stress*; and 03 challenges: *Outdated in industrial information, Technical issues, and Work-life unbalance*.

The participants of the present study are living in Ho Chi Minh City, the most crowded city in Vietnam. The living expenses and traffic jams in such a city have increased day by day. These factors can help to understand the advantages mentioned by respondents, such as *cost-saving, time-saving, and reducing stress*, which have never been found in previous studies. In particular, issues related to commuting (commuting expenses, commuting time, traffic) mentioned in these 03 advantages of teleworking could be the consequence of the city development and the pressure that respondents are facing daily.

Another new advantage of teleworking, from employees' viewpoints, is *Flexibility*. According to To Talent—an organization providing the European job market with knowledgeable, in-depth articles and organizing events, young employees do like agile and open working spaces and hot-desking, where they do not have a fixed desk, and they love work flexibility (Egba, 2023). In the present study, most participants are between the ages 18 - 29. This fact can explain why flexibility in the workplace, working time, and duration are mentioned in the interviews. Moreover, in the context of globalisation, businesses are not only limited within the country, and employment is not only closed to the head office. Hence, teleworking is perceived as the working mode to match customers' locations and time zones.

In the challenges of teleworking, *Outdated industrial information* is only found in the present study and is never found in previous studies. This challenge is raised because of a fast-changed working environment. In the current technology time, office conversations (official and unofficial) are really important to employees to share/be shared, to update/be updated. This finding is aligned with the suggestion by Lambert and Enz (2017) about information sharing between across department, which can brings the value to firm.

Different from *Limited access to resources* in previous studies, interviewees in the present study have faced to *Technical issues* when teleworking, because of many unexpected problems. In the modern working environments, many new software, technologies, technological solutions are used; and in this situation, employees will need a lot of support from technical department(s). The more advanced and developed technology, the more knowledge/skills required and the more support needed.

The challenge of *Work-life unbalance*, which is found in the present study, is a surprise likewise. As presented previously, Work-life balance is perceived as one advantage of teleworking. However, some teleworkers, they are so focused on working, or to some teleworkers, the flow of telework does not allow them to stop working; and this leads to time for family and unbalance of work-personal/family life. As also stated in the study by Fontaneda et al. (2023), the need to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life and to have an

adequate ergonomic environment is really significant.

6. Concluding remarks and managerial

The purpose of the present study employing in-depth interviews as the method to collect data is to explore the advantages and challenges of teleworking and their effects, from employee' viewpoints, after Covid-19 pandemic. The present study is to contribute to the literature on teleworking in the new working context, which is after the pandemic, with rapid development of technology and new requirements from the labour market. The research findings have depicted an overview of teleworking from employees' perspectives. There are 06 advantages and 06 disadvantages identified from interviews with 24 respondents who are working in different sectors. Among these advantages and disadvantages, some are never found in the previous studies, including *Flexibility*, *Cost-saving*, *Time-saving*, *Reducing stress* as new advantages, *Outdated industrial information*, *Technical issues*, and *Work-life unbalance* as new disadvantages. From the viewpoints of interviewees, all found advantages and disadvantages have impacts on their performance and productivity.

The present study has theoretical and practical contributions from the research findings. Theoretically, the present study affirms that contingency theory can serve as the base for the context of teleworking, in which the extent and employees' power will affect the adoption and reorganization of the new working mode situation (Tomaskovic-Devey & Risman, 1993). Moreover, the present study has contributed to the literature of Teleworking with 04 new advantages (*Flexibility*, *Time-saving*, *Cost-saving*, *Reducing stress*) and 03 challenges (*Outdated in industrial information*, *Technical issues*, and *Work-life unbalance*).

Practically, from the research findings and from the current working context, to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of teleworking, some managerial implications should be noted.

Firstly, to prevent *Technical issues*, digital transformation and organizational support are really needed. There is a need to standardize operational processes with the investment in e-office, softwares, tools, devices/equipment, etc. To telework successfully, organizations need to design systems supportively to provide instruction and help in time for teleworkers. Moreover, the system and support channels must be explained clearly to teleworkers.

Secondly, *Outdated industrial information*, *Isolation*, and *Difficulties in communication with colleagues* can be addressed if there is a strong and supportive digital organizational culture, which is understood as organizational culture, including values, norms, and attitudes, in the digital context. The use of digital tools for communication needs to be more present and supportive not only for teleworkers but also for the whole organization to communicate, share, and cooperate. Digital platforms, where teleworkers and non-teleworkers can chat, share; should be developed and used for informal communication as well. On these platforms, employees can even ask for any support from the ones they like/trust. They play the role of an actual working environment, where employees can remind each other about tasks, time for lunch, deadlines, etc.

Thirdly, *Flexibility* is one new advantage with 02 per 03 sub-issues relating to individual working behaviours. As discussed in the Discussion, young employees prefer open working spaces, not being limited in a strict working hour; and they are counting a larger portion of the workforce, nowadays. Hence, a flexible and dynamic HR policy is really crucial to respond to environmental dynamism (Fredericks, 2005). In addition, designing a flexible and open working space for non-teleworkers is also an important issue to consider.

7. Limitations and further research

Even though the present study has identified the advantages and disadvantages of teleworking, from employees' perspectives, to depict the situation of teleworking; there are still some limitations. Firstly, the respondents in the present study are from many sectors. Each sector has a different working context, and, therefore, teleworkers working in each sector will have different advantages, and face different advantages. Further studies should be focused on each sector, differently, to identify its picture.

Secondly, the present study collected data from employees' perspectives. To have a more comprehensive picture of teleworking, besides focusing on one sector, further studies should collect data from both leaders/managers and employees in the same study.

Lastly, one limitation of qualitative study is that the number of participants is small to generalize the research findings and to analyse the differences (of advantages and disadvantages) between demographic aspects (such as gender, age, industry, types of work, etc.). Further research should employ this research's findings and employ a quantitative approach to verify with the large number of participants and more deeply analyse differences in demographic factors.

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