

Rediscovering Telework as a tool which improves the work-life balance. The case of Poste Italiane

Patrizio Di Nicola and Simona Rosati
Sapienza University of Rome
Department of Sociology and Communication

Porto, 5-7 November 2008

The scenario: telework in Italy

The **second half of ninety** represented a “gold age”
for telework in Italy:

- in the Italian Parliament many different parties proposed laws to help the adoption of telework both in the private and public sector;
- in 1997 the Government introduced the possibility, for government employees, of using telework widely;
- in the period 1993-1998, in the private sectors, many agreements were signed, both national and at firm level.

The scenario: telework in Italy

At the **turn of the millennium** the idea of telework dissolved in the public interest. It has depended on:

- the widespread diffusion of ICTs into all kind of workplaces allows the firm to use widely a “stock of implicit telework”.
- the fear that the formal introduction of telework would made more complex the organisation;
- the lost of interest in the public sectors: Government concentrated ICT innovation in e-Gov

The scenario: telework in Italy

After the 2005, the situation changed again.

- the introduction of the EU Framework Agreement on telework and the diffusion of attention to CSR have created the condition for a new idea on the use of telework as a tool for increasing the work life balance of employees.

The new regulatory framework

- In Italy, on the 9th June 2004 an Interconfederal National Collective Agreement on telework was signed.
- It implements the European Framework Agreement on telework signed in July 2002.
- The agreement highlights that telework is a tool to modernize the work organisation and that it may increase work-life balance by giving the workers concerned greater autonomy.

Corporate Social Responsibility and new strategies of human resources management

- CSR means that the performance of a company depends on a variety of intangible assets, like knowledge value, innovation ability, the confidence of the various categories of stakeholders, reputation and, last but not least, the ability to contribute to the wellness of the community.
- In this context, telework can be an innovation that both companies and workers consider a win-win.

Telework and work-life balance

- Italian Statistic Office discovered that in 1999 only 15 Italians out of 100 declared themselves very satisfied with their free time while 38 % Italians were dissatisfied. In 2003 the percentage of unsatisfied was substantially identical: 37%.
- Telework could be an answer to the company need to adopt ethical behaviours, a response to the pressure that society places on the productive systems so that the issues of economic and company development do not diverge from the interests of the people.
- After the worldwide financial crisis the request for ethic in business increased

The case of Poste Italiane

- Poste Italiane is the first postal service company in Italy (with over 150 thousand employees and an annual turnover of 17.055 million Euros in 2006).
- In Poste Italiane official documents telework is defined as a innovative way to work finalised to satisfy the organisational flexibility and productivity demands of the company conjugating them with the family and social life of the workers.
- The first sector where telework was firstly experimented was the Contact Center (CC), where ten call centre employees have been chosen for the experimentation.

The sociological survey: the aims

- The aims of the survey are:
 - to monitor the progress of the project and to provide useful results for its continuation and the extension of telework to other company sectors.
 - to investigate telework implications at organisational, relational and socio-psychological levels for the managers and the workers involved, focusing on the advantages for the work-life balance.

The sociological survey: the methodology

- Data collection was carried out using different but complementary research tools:
 - A basic questionnaire to collect the professional, social and personal profiles of the teleworkers;
 - in depth interviews to investigate professional and personal opinions about telework.
- The interviews were video-recorded. The aim was of improving the survey contents focusing on the emotional and expressive dimensions of the protagonists of the research.

The main results: teleworkers' opinion

- The decision to volunteer for telework has been a "choice", a "decision" well evaluated and taken consciously.
- The motivations regard mainly the need to solve logistic problems related to daily home-work commuting.
- The expectations are mainly related to solve social problems, like having more time to follow the family and manage the home.
- After this, they feel telework will have a positive impact on the level of concentration and on the tranquillity of the working environment.
- The majority of the teleworkers do not see potential problems with telework and only some of them indicate the possible sense of isolation connected to being alone at home during work.

The results: the managers' point of view

- For the managers this experimentation represents a of main signal of the will of Poste Italiane to begin an important process of change and innovation.
- It is known that telework can have a positive impact at social, organisational and individual levels:
 - it could have a positive impact on the environment, contributing to the reduction of traffic and consequently of pollution.
 - it can answer in a functional way to various organisational necessities: from cost reduction, to the lessening of absenteeism, to the improvement of work productivity standards.
 - for the workers the main advantage is certainly the possibility to balance better company and private live demands.

The video-clip of the survey

Conclusions

- Italian companies are showing a new interest for telework.
- Telework has become a management tool that HR management is considering able to create a balance between business strategies, organisational structures and the cultural, technological, environmental and social specificities of the context.
- The project of Poste Italiane represents a concrete example of these trends. The company looks at telework as an extensive tool of HR management and not just as a practice to introduce in a restricted way in order to satisfy specific necessities of sectors and/or persons with specific and marginal problems.
- If Poste Italiane will extend telework to a higher number of employees, it will be able to connect its HR management culture and policies to the principle of organisational wellness, obtaining important results in terms of efficiency, efficacy and productivity.

Thanks for the attention

Further information:

patrizio.dinicola@uniroma1.it

simona.rosati@uniroma1.it

www.dinicola.it
