



IJSRIS
journal
ISSN: 2820-7157

★ INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ★

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND
INNOVATIVE STUDIES**

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RECEIVED
17 August 2026



ACCEPTED
09 September 2026



PUBLISHED
1 October 2026



October 2026



Volume 5



Number 5



Pages from:
742 to 748

Remote working and employee productivity from an educational perspective: The educational context and the educational contract

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PREFIX :
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ABSTRACT

Remote working alters the material, relational and organisational conditions of professional activity. This article examines its potential effects on productivity through the lens of the teaching situation and the teaching contract. It adopts a

documentary and conceptual approach based on the bibliographic corpus used to study remote working, management and the regulation of professional relationships. The analysis focuses on available resources, the clarification of expectations, autonomy, social interactions and training in digital tools. It proposes a framework linking the conditions of remote working to coordination mechanisms and

dimensions of performance. The results consist of synthesised proposals and indicators to be put into practice; they do not correspond to a field survey or to calculated productivity gains. The discussion shows that flexibility can support work when resources and expectations are consistent, whilst isolation, technical difficulties and blurred boundaries can undermine it. The transposition of the didactic contract to the professional workplace must be confined to situations involving learning and support. The study concludes that an explicit coordination framework, combined with material support and training opportunities, is beneficial. Empirical validation remains necessary to assess the proposed relationships.

Keywords: Telework; productivity; didactic situation; didactic contract; remote management; autonomy; training; coordination.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and rationale

The COVID-19 health crisis has accelerated the uptake of teleworking in many organisations. The transition to remote working was sometimes organised in a rush, with varying levels of preparation. This development has highlighted the need for equipment, communication and coordination to ensure business continuity (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020).

Remote working is not merely a matter of moving the workplace to the home. It combines geographical distance with the use of technologies that enable tasks to be carried out and coordinated. The analyses by Lemesle and Marot (1994) and Largier (2001) encourage us to examine the diversity of arrangements covered by this term. The consequences depend, in particular, on the place of work, the degree of autonomy, the tasks involved and the organisation of communication.

1.2. Problem statement and research question

An organisation may make digital tools available without clarifying the expected outcomes or providing the necessary support for learning. Conversely, explicit expectations may remain difficult to meet when connectivity, workspace or support are lacking. The central question is therefore as follows: how do the conditions of the learning situation and the clarification of expectations contribute to understanding the effects of remote working on employee productivity?

Three complementary questions structure the analysis: what resources make remote working possible? How are roles, responsibilities and communication arrangements defined?

What indicators would enable performance to be assessed without equating online presence or longer working hours with improved productivity?

1.3. Objective and central proposition

The objective is to construct a framework for analysis linking remote working, learning conditions and the regulation of productivity expectations. The central proposition is that the effects of remote working depend on the interplay between resources, coordination and support. This proposition guides the conceptual study; it is not presented as a hypothesis already confirmed by original data.

The didactic contract is employed to understand expectations relating to learning, training and support for employees. Its use in a professional context requires a distinction to be made between these expectations and the employment contract, legal obligations and general management mechanisms. This distinction prevents any relationship between a manager and an employee from being equated with a teaching relationship.

2. Methodology

2.1. Nature of the approach

This article adopts a targeted narrative review and a conceptual analysis. The corpus focuses on telework, remote management, digital skills, the boundaries between personal and professional life, and social regulation. Qualitative research references provide a basis for organising a contextualised interpretation of the phenomena and preparing for a possible future investigation (Aubin-Auger, 2008; Kakai, 2008).

The approach does not constitute a systematic review: it is not based on an exhaustive search of bibliographic databases, a selection count or a standardised assessment of the quality of the studies. It does not include interviews, field observations or performance measurements carried out specifically for this article. The results are therefore an interpretative synthesis and a proposed framework.



Figure 1: Methodology.

2.2. Corpus and document analysis

The bibliographic corpus is retained. The studies are organised around five themes: the definition and forms of telework; physical and digital resources; management and coordination practices; autonomy and time boundaries; and learning and the clarification of expectations. This organisation allows arguments to be compared without assuming that all the texts relate to the same populations or use the same methods.

Examples of companies and percentages cited without a precisely identifiable primary reference are not used as evidence of performance. Documentary references with incomplete records retain their status as references within the corpus. No new sources are added to artificially reconstruct a missing justification.



Figure 2: Corpus and documentary processing.

2.3. Conceptual artefact and units of analysis

The artefact under examination is an organisational and didactic analytical framework. It links remote working conditions to mechanisms of coordination, learning and task completion. It is not a software programme or an experimental device. The units of analysis considered are the employee, the team and the task, as their performance may evolve differently.

The analysis distinguishes between input conditions, such as equipment and expectations; intermediate mechanisms, such as autonomy, communication and training; and expected outcomes, such as quality, task completion and adherence to deadlines. The proposed indicators are detailed in the Results section.



Figure 3: Organisational and pedagogical analysis framework.

3. Analyses

3.1. Definition and forms of telework

Home-based telework involves carrying out work activities from the home environment. Mobile telework refers to activities carried out from multiple locations using digital tools. Working in a telecentre provides access to a shared space and equipment located away from the organisation's headquarters. These arrangements present distinct challenges in terms of access to resources, concentration and coordination (Desbarats, 2013; Fernandez et al., 2014).

Variation in location alone is not sufficient to characterise the organisation. It is also necessary to examine the frequency of remote working, the possibilities for returning to the office and the interdependencies between activities. The diversity of arrangements described in the literature makes it essential to

clarify the context before any comparison of performance (Feldman and Gainey, 1997; Largier, 2001).

3.2. Resources and working environment

A remote working arrangement requires a suitable workstation, a reliable internet connection, accessible applications and technical support. These resources determine the ability to carry out the task and learn the necessary procedures. Access to tools must be accompanied by instructions and support: the mere availability of an application does not guarantee that it will be adopted (Fernandez et al., 2014; Etoundi Eloundou, 2020).

The home environment may offer conditions conducive to concentration, but it can also introduce interruptions, competing responsibilities and space constraints. The analysis must take into account differences between employees. The boundaries between work and personal life are therefore a central aspect of organising remote working (Dumas and Ruiller, 2014).



Figure 4: Working environment and resources.

3.3. Autonomy and clarification of expectations

Autonomy allows employees to organise certain aspects of their work, but it must remain compatible with the team's interdependencies. Deliverables, priorities, deadlines and availability windows must be clear. When expectations remain implicit, staff may spend time interpreting requests or demonstrating their availability rather than producing the expected result (Brunelle, 2010).

The framework of social regulation enables these expectations to be interpreted as rules established and adjusted through collective action. Formalisation should not be solely top-down: discussions on the feasibility of tasks and the difficulties encountered enable the rules of coordination to be revised (Reynaud, 2004). Contractual and regulatory

arrangements, however, depend on the specific context; no universal legal framework for telework is assumed (Scaillerez and Tremblay, 2016).

3.4. Learning situation and support

In its pedagogical sense, the learning context refers to a set of conditions organised around a body of knowledge to be learnt. In telework, this perspective applies to training on digital tools, the learning of procedures and support for new practices. It leads to an examination of the resources, the activities offered, the interactions and the feedback provided to the learner.

Collaborative technologies support both task-related exchanges and social relationships. Their use must be analysed in terms of the teams' needs and habits, rather than solely on the basis of the number of tools installed (Cai et al., 2021). Appropriate support includes demonstrations, opportunities to try things out and feedback on any difficulties encountered (Etoundi Eloundou, 2020).

3.5. Learning contract and responsibilities

The learning contract concerns the expectations – often implicit – between a teacher and learners. In distance learning, it specifies, in particular, the work expected of the learner, the support available, the arrangements for participation and the assessment criteria. Employees must be able to understand what they are expected to learn and how to seek support.

The application of this concept to professional relationships remains limited. Expectations regarding deliverables and availability fall mainly within a framework of coordination; they take on an educational dimension when they relate to learning. The proposed framework therefore distinguishes between two complementary levels: the organisation of work and the organisation of training. Ensuring consistency between them means that performance is not demanded before the means to develop the necessary competence have been provided.

3.6. Social interactions and support

Informal exchanges and the ability to obtain help quickly may be less accessible when working remotely. The organisation must schedule opportunities for coordination, whilst ensuring that an excessive number of meetings does not disrupt concentration. Perceived support is a key factor in understanding the relationship between employees and their organisation (Allen et al., 2003).

Support must also take into account the motivations for teleworking and differences between contexts. The same working arrangement may be desired by some employees and experienced as a constraint by others. Exploratory research into motivations and the initial lessons learnt from remote working suggests that this diversity should be taken into account rather than assuming a uniform response (Berberat et al., 2021; Ngassam, 2020).

4. Discussion

4.1. Scope of the proposed framework

The summary presented in the Results section links the quality of resources, the clarification of expectations and support to observable dimensions of performance. It helps to explain why remote working can facilitate certain tasks whilst undermining others. This interpretation aligns with the view that potential productivity gains depend on organisational conditions and supporting policies (OECD, 2020).

The contribution of the didactic perspective lies in the focus on the necessary learning processes. A lack of proficiency with tools can be mistakenly interpreted as a lack of commitment. By distinguishing between skills to be acquired and professional outcomes to be achieved, the organisation can adapt its expectations and provide support. Proposals P1 to P4, detailed in the results, represent relationships to be tested, not measured effects.

4.2. Productivity and quality of life

An increase in the number of hours worked or messages sent does not prove an increase in productivity. The comparison must focus on comparable tasks and take their quality into account. An apparent improvement in output may also be accompanied by fatigue, rework or a deterioration in cooperation. Issues relating to quality of life and work-life boundaries must therefore be examined alongside work outcomes (Savary, 2006; Dumas and Ruiller, 2014).

A hybrid approach may be considered when tasks require both individual concentration and face-to-face cooperation. Its suitability cannot, however, be deduced from general principles: it depends on the activities, the physical resources available and the team's needs. Recommendations must remain flexible and be subject to monitoring (Brunelle, 2010; OECD, 2020).

4.3. Limitations of the didactic transposition

The professional workplace is not to be confused with a teaching situation. A manager may coordinate an activity

without being tasked with imparting knowledge. The concept of a didactic contract is therefore relevant to training and support schemes, but it does not replace an analysis of hierarchical relationships, contractual responsibilities or workplace rules.

Distinguishing between pedagogical expectations and performance expectations also prevents difficulties from being attributed solely to the employee's motivation. A poorly defined task, an unavailable tool or a contradictory procedure may hinder the completion of the work. The proposed framework encourages an investigation into these factors before drawing conclusions about individual performance.

4.4. Limitations of the evidence and future validation

The corpus comprises texts from different periods and contexts. The results of the review do not allow for an estimate of the average effect of teleworking, nor do they establish causality. Several records are incomplete; the key reference to the teaching contract mentioned in the original text does not have a complete bibliographic record in the corpus. The retained references will therefore need to be checked before any scientific submission.

Future validation could involve interviews, observations of working practices and indicators of task completion. It should specify the occupations, the frequency of teleworking, the equipment used, the comparison periods and the characteristics of the tasks. A qualitative analysis would help to understand implicit expectations and the difficulties in adapting to teleworking (Aubin-Auger, 2008; Kakai, 2008).

5. Results

5.1. Conceptual synthesis

The main finding is a framework comprising four dimensions: physical and digital conditions; clarification of expectations; learning support; and coordination and interpersonal support. These dimensions act as enabling conditions for work performance. Productivity, quality and well-being are distinguished so as not to reduce performance to a single indicator.

The proposed model can be summarised as follows: teleworking conditions → coordination and learning → task completion → performance assessment. Feedback from employees and the difficulties observed inform a review of resources and expectations. This model constitutes an analytical output and not a proven causal mechanism.

5.2. Recommendations arising from the analysis

P1. Usable resources and accessible technical support can facilitate the completion of tasks remotely. P2. Clear and discussed expectations can reduce uncertainties in coordination. P3. Appropriate training can support the adoption of tools and procedures. P4. Maintaining interactions and time boundaries can contribute to a more sustainable organisation. These proposals are neither ranked by importance nor statistically validated.

5.3. Indicators to be operationalised

The following table sets out the dimensions to be documented in a subsequent investigation. This is a measurement plan; no observed values are available in this study.

Dimension	Proposed indicators	Data required
Resources	Availability of tools and technical disruptions	Service logs and employee feedback
Expectations	Clarity of deliverables and criteria	Guidelines and feedback sessions
Learning	Proficiency with tools and training needs	Assessed activities and observations
Coordination	Response times and difficulties in cooperation	History of communications and interviews
Performance	Tasks completed, quality and adherence to deadlines	Comparable production records
Working conditions	Interruptions, isolation and disconnection	Interviews or documented questionnaires

5.4. Possible calculations and absence of quantified results

For sufficiently comparable tasks, a measure of productivity can be defined as the volume of compliant work carried out divided by the time taken. The on-time completion rate may correspond to the number of tasks completed within the scheduled timeframe divided by the number of tasks that reached their deadline, multiplied by 100. The denominators and compliance criteria must be clearly defined.

These definitions are proposed for future data collection. No calculations can be carried out here due to a lack of headcount figures, timeframes and original metrics. Percentages reported without an identifiable primary source in the original text are not considered to be findings of this research. The article therefore provides conceptual outputs and an analysis plan, without claiming any measured gains.

6. Conclusion

The analysis examines productivity in teleworking from the perspectives of resources, the clarification of expectations, support and working relationships. It proposes a link between professional organisation and learning, limiting the use of the didactic contract to situations where a skill or piece of knowledge is actually to be acquired.

The conceptual findings detailed in the ‘Results’ section highlight the dimensions to be taken into account and the indicators to be developed. They do not allow us to conclude that remote working is generally superior, nor do they provide a quantified effect. Flexibility must be accompanied by practical resources, comprehensible rules and appropriate support for employees.

An empirical study is needed to test these proposals against actual practice. It should distinguish between tasks, contexts and forms of remote working, and then assess the completion of the work, its quality and the conditions under which it is carried out. This approach would enable the proposed framework to be evaluated and context-specific recommendations to be formulated.

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