

The Impacts of Telework as Strategic Human Resources Management Resolution in the Private Sectors of Cameroon

Dr. Eyong Ako ^{a,*}

^a University of Bamenda

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ABSTRACT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, telework has become something we need to do rather than just an option to consider. While we may be forced into doing this by current circumstances, this might be a good time to evaluate your thinking about telework as well as your process for doing this. The purpose of this paper is to establish whether telework practices can be considered as strategic human resource management resolution. The findings of this research would contribute to existing literature on teleworking in developing countries because it helps in understanding the role played by ICTs in human resource management. The results of a number of studies reviewed in this paper show the outcomes and the benefits of implementing telework practices on human resources management and not only for employees themselves, but also for their organisations. Despite the fact that telework practices has significance setbacks such as Technology Risks Non-existent or insufficient technology to support teleworker job duties and expectations, Management resistance, Lack of face-to-face communication, Lack of teleworker visibility to management., but at the end of the article the author proposes several recommendations in order to improve the understanding, choice, implementation, and effectiveness of telework practices. This pave way for the reader to have an in-depth knowledge about the necessity of teleworking and there by gives opportunities to bring out further research on this topic.

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*Corresponding Author:

akorolly87@yahoo.com (237-674634554)

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1. General Introduction

The relevance of information technology continues to expand in recent times. As a result, more workers have been able to work from remote locations that is, separate from the sites of their organisation through the use of ICT tools and computer networks.

Looking at Scott P. [2011, p.8] Telework is defined as any work conducted away from the primary workplace, part-time or full-time, which is facilitated or aided in some way by information and telecommunications technology.

According to the European Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 article 2 defines Telework as a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/ relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.

Development of Telework Over Time

The use of telework is clearly growing in almost all of the countries surveyed. This form of work is relatively new in most developing countries.

As telework is a relatively new form of work and is not common in developing countries, reliable national statistics about the use of this form of work organisation are still rare. However, this article was able to draw on the findings of the EWCS carried out by Euro found that investigates various issues of employment, including the development of telework.

Presently, due to COVID-19 pandemic, telework has become something we need to do rather than just an option to consider. According to [Chuck M. 2020] While we may be forced into doing this by current circumstances, this might be a good time to evaluate your thinking about telework as well as your process for doing this.

Yet prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers teleworkers across the world was relatively low, and where it was most prominent, it was linked with cottage industries or industrial homework.

However, Between January and March 2020, as Covid-19 infections swept the globe, many countries instructed employers to close up operations and also encouraged them to introduce full-time, mandatory telework for their workforces to the extent practicable given their functions, in order to limit the spread of the virus.

Information and communication technology (ICT) offers us a ‘modern tool’ to fight the pandemic.

Telework is the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer’s premises.

Specifically, the current study focuses on The impacts of telework as Strategic Human Resources Management Resolution in the Private Sectors of Cameroon

The findings of this research would contribute to existing literature on teleworking developing countries because it helps in understanding the role played by ICTs in human resource management.

2. Review of Literature

The two theoretical perspectives are drawn from socio-technical system theory and adaptive structural theory to support the theoretical framework for this study and will be discussed in turn.

Employee Productivity and McGregor’s Theory of X & Y

McGregor’s Theory of X and Y states that motivation is directly linked to employee productivity.

As a leader or a manager who is tasked to supervise the work of others and get maximum output from them, you must have experienced many a times that people don’t always do what you want them to do. They will - if you are lucky, and then only few times - miss deadlines, procrastinate, wait for your instructions or blame others for their inability to complete the work. And on the other hand, you have individual performers who are self-motivated, controlled and disciplined.

As all of us would agree, every individual has his/her own style of working and has a different work psychology. There are different things which motivate people. They come from diverse backgrounds and therefore, there are different set of factors which influence them and their productivity. Thousands of articles and theories have been written for managers to help them get the best from each of their workers.

Douglas McGregor, a famous MIT professor and Social Psychologist, formulated two theories of motivation — Theory X and Theory Y, where he suggests that these two (contrasting)

theories directly link to the workers one might encounter at the workplace, and how managers can deal with them.

Theory X assumes that workers inherently dislike work. They avoid responsibility and therefore they always need to be told to do certain tasks. They need to be controlled and supervised at every step. This theory also assumes that since the workers are not motivated to work, they need to be enticed or at times, threatened to produce results. These beliefs lead to close supervision, tighter control and ‘tough’ management styles.

On the other hand, Theory Y assumes that workers are self-motivated, creative, proactive, willing to solve problems, and take responsibility. This style of management is fairly decentralized. The leaders involve workers in decision making, encourage them to make suggestions, provide them opportunities to take up more responsibilities, and, accept their creative inputs and innovative ideas.

Theory X works very well for large scale mass production operations and for the work involving unskilled workers; whereas, theory Y is well-suited for knowledge workers, where knowledge sharing and continuous improvement is encouraged.

In both cases, managers need to have visibility into the work being done by workers. In case of application of Theory X, the managers need to put together a structured environment, so as to get the work done from the workers. The managers need to keep a close track on the workers’ activity. In case of Theory Y, the managers need to show the right direction to the workers and they will automatically perform well. Obviously, the managers’ outlook impacts the productivity and performance of the workers. Their intervention shapes the working style of the workers.

In addition to these two theories, one more influencer is at play at the workplace - which is self- image. Self-performance drives self-image. Therefore, apart from what people perceive of us, individuals must also keep on doing periodic self-introspection to assess that “whether we are responsible for other’s perceptions of ourselves?”

What if there is a Fit-bit at work which offers complete transparency about the working habits of individuals with concrete data and figures — to both, the managers as well as individuals? Imagine if the manager gets to know detailed information about his team members — such as how much time they are spending on core activities, non-core activities, meetings, social

networking sites etc.? Armed with such data, the manager can define a set of activities or processes which can positively impact the team's productivity.

From an individual perspective – if there is some tool which can provide a mirror image of daily activities for each employee – then the workers can self-analyze their work patterns and bring in improvements so that they are less stressed, more productive and strike a perfect work-life harmony.

Human Relations Management Theory Basics

The human relations theory of management began development in the early 1920s. Today, it is integral to every business, and understanding the involved skills and theories is key to employee success.

In the 1920s, Elton Mayo, an Australian-born psychologist and organizational theorist, began his research on the behaviour of people in groups and how it affects individuals in the workplace, known as the Hawthorne studies.

At the time, Taylorism, or the application of science in the workplace to improve productivity, viewed individuals as machines that could work in unethical or unrealistic environments. Mayo, in contrast, popularized the idea of the "social person," meaning organizations should treat people as individuals – not machines – with individual needs.

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Appraisal of Literature

There is significant link between employee's productivity and teleworking in an organisation. Typically, it is fair to assume that if productivity is high, teleworking is having a positive impact on workers.

Employee's productivity based on teleworking is considered to be a critical and effective tool not only to attract and retain talented workers but to keep them motivated.

from the above literature, the strengths of the workers in this study indicated that working from his or her home sometimes becomes stressful, achieve higher job satisfaction from adopting telecommuting practices, save on the cost and time of commuting to and from the place of work. Also, telecommuting provided less pressure on workers, flexible hours for work, better social life, an improvement in the ability to clearly think and analyse issues because of the reduction in interruptions, and an improvement in time management.

The weakness found in the literature are the potential factors that can slow down work of workers like internet connexion, electricity blackout, earth quakes just to sight a few.

3- Determining the appropriate use of telework

-The nature of the job

The steps for implementing telework should commence with deciding what nature of work can realistically be performed from your workers' homes. There may be some tasks that can only be done face to face, or by using the specialized equipment and technology that is in your worksites. These days, however, many things can be done remotely. These include answering phones, developing contracts, filing reports and sending information to customers and clients.

- work place duties

Take a good look at all workplace duties, and decide which ones can be done from home *with no drop off in quality or efficiency*.

-Interconnection of work

Another thing to consider when deciding whether to do this: the interconnected nature of work. In the office, employees have access to each other instantly. How do we accomplish that remotely? The staff chat with each other in real time no matter where they are located. Twenty years ago, this was not common in the workforce.

Today, it makes the connectivity issue moot. Services are provided to our clients with the same efficiency whether the staff is in the office or remote. Advances in technology may make telework a very real option for many of your employees.

4-Telework: Working Conditions

Ascertaining better working conditions for teleworkers poses certain challenges. Traditional management methods applied in the employers' workplace are not suitable for telework, which can pose challenges for both employers and workers. How these challenges are addressed can have a significant impact on working conditions, notably including working hours, rest periods, and the health and well-being of teleworkers.

Most researchers had assumed that one of the positive side of telework is that it provides working time flexibility for workers, which can benefit the enterprise in terms of productivity and the worker in terms of work-life balance (Eurofound, 2020).

A research was carried out by the ILO, in collaboration with the European Foundation, in different countries around the world to examine the working conditions of teleworkers, including their working hours.

Base on the studies, it was seen that in most countries, telework did provide workers with flexibility as to when working hours were performed. Telework also guarantees certain autonomy, so that teleworkers can organize working time based on their needs and preferences (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). Recent research also indicates that working time flexibility) are more frequently available to teleworkers than other workers (Eurofound, 2017). These elements can play an important role in the positive use of telework by workers and employers.

However, if precaution is not taking, telework can result in long working hours. Researches reviewed that most teleworkers in the study reported longer working hours than office-based workers, often going beyond the normal working hour limits established in their employment contracts.

Looking at the data extracted from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey, shows that the share of workers working long hours (defined as more than 48 hours per week) was higher for workers who teleworked than for other workers (Eurofound, 2016). While the advantage of information and communications technology (ICT) is the ability to work from anywhere, the disadvantage is that if telework is not managed properly, the limits between working hours and personal life can become "blurred" (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). ICTs allow workers to be more

reachable, irrespective of location, including during what might be viewed as “non-core” working hours. It is important to note that while longer working hours for teleworkers can be problematic, these concerns can be exacerbated if teleworkers are not able to get adequate rest. A body of research has developed over the years identifying how working on computers for prolonged periods can lead to certain stresses and strains on workers (Hagberg, et. Al. 2007, Paksachol, 2012, Ashraf, 2007). Among the reported injuries associated with prolonged use of computers are eye strain, musculoskeletal problems, and other problems associated with being sedentary for extended periods of time (e.g., obesity, heart issues, etc.) (Padma, et.al. 2015).

5- Impact of teleworking as a strategic human resources management resolutions

Impact of telecommuting on individual workers

The teleworkers in the organisation receive the direct effect in the implementation of telecommuting practices. These impacts are positive and sometimes negative to the teleworkers.

One positive impact of telecommuting on individual workers is that they do not commute back and forth to work and hence are able to cut down on transportation cost (Hunton, 2005). In line with cutting down on cost, the teleworkers are therefore able to have an improved balance between their work and life at home. An improved job satisfaction leads to highly motivated workers when telecommuting is adopted.

This nature of work, provide certain benefits to the individual workers, which include better social life, improved time management, flexible working hours, less pressure on workers, and homebound workers' ability to also work (Crandall & Gao, 2005; Nosek, Mandviwalla, & Kock, 1998).

Even though there are numerous advantages in the adoption of telecommuting by individual workers, there are also some disadvantages. These disadvantages have compelled some workers to stay away from telecommuting (Topi, 2004). For instance, in Portugal, surveys on workers have shown that the workers feared that their supervisors were going to become more separated from them when telecommuting is introduced (Nunes, 2005).

In addition, the workers' resistance to telecommuting was as a result of the fear of being isolated in the telecommuting environment. Nunes (2005) asserts that workers mostly prefer to develop

a reputation and status for themselves in the company of their colleagues when they are physically together. Unfortunately, visibility is minimised in telecommuting environments. The workers are therefore forced to visit the workplace regularly owing to the fear of being perceived not to be committed or forgotten by colleagues (Elsbach & Bechky, 2007; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006).

More personal conflicts can also be experienced when workers work from their homes. Khalifa and Davison (2008) assert that family members, colleague workers, and others are directly affected by telecommuting even though they are not the adopters of the innovation. According to Hunton (2005), the traditional workers experience less conflicts among their families and friends when compared to those workers who telecommute. The less time that the workers spend with their families and friends accounts for this problem. Again, the rate of interruptions in work is seen to be higher, lasting for an average of 2 hours for workers who exclusively work from their homes. In summarising the negative impact of telecommuting, Navarrete and Pick (2003) outlined the feeling of isolation through being away from the office, inability to separate work issues from family issues, thus leading to work–family conflict, and the inability of management to effectively monitor and evaluate the workers to be some of the impediments to the adoption of telecommuting by workers.

- Increased employee productivity.
- Increased employee satisfaction.

Impact of telecommuting on the Organisation

It is clear that, organisations that negotiate innovative work practices which also benefit staff are forward looking, competitive and profitable.

The provision of quality services requires quality jobs and quality management processes. telework programmes are an important element in achieving these.

There are certain impacts for relating telework to organisations: these can be seen below;

Cost reduction

Generally, teleworking helps companies save money, depending on the number of teleworkers, commuting frequency, the number of trips and time spent on commuting, expected increase of

number of workers, estimated average discount rate and cost distribution, and employers and workers (Shafizadeh et al.; 2007). Reducing costs for employers and workers through e-working can save money (Schilling, 1999; Ye, 2012).

Continuity of Operations (COOP)

Organizations with significant telework capabilities can maintain operations during major weather events, pandemics, terrorist attacks, or other disruptive events.

Improved Employee Retention

Employers with telework programs tend to have lower employee turnover than those without such programs. One Denver-based company reported going from 60 percent to 0 percent turnover by initiating a telework program, which now has 20 full time and 4 parttime teleworkers among a staff of 44 (Silva, 2007). Similar results have been reported by a number of other organizations.

Increased Personal Flexibility

If managed properly, teleworkers can have a great deal of flexibility in scheduling work, personal appointments, and family responsibilities during the day. As long as teleworkers are evaluated on work performed, rather than time expended, this personal flexibility can be very satisfying, contribute to job satisfaction, and increase retention.

Expanded Talent Pool

Teleworking can alleviate the need for transportation altogether, allowing companies to hire these workers. (Virginia.gov, 2010) In addition to the local benefits, it's possible to hire specialist help from anywhere in the world, thereby avoiding relocation expense and inconvenience for workers and their families, and allowing organisations to hire the best talent available.

Increase Demand for Goods and Services

Increased demand for communications, networking, and equipment required for telework.

On-Site Energy Savings

Organisations may cut energy costs along with the need for office space and real estate. The utility costs associated with teleworkers are typically borne by the teleworker, rather than the employer.

- Improved employee recruitment and retention.
- A reduction in overall absenteeism.
- A reduced need for office space and parking space.
- An opportunity to recruit skilled workers from outside the area

6-Hurdles to the effectiveness implementation of telework on human resources management in Cameroon

This section of this article is principally aimed at analyzing the continuous hurdles encountered in the implementation of telework practices in an organisation. Aspects of workplace cultures that hinder or inhibit the achievement of telework include:

-Set up of functions

One major challenge involves the set-up of functions of support within the firm. These supports should be capable of offering the needed assistance to the various personnel and other workgroups scattered in the locality. The operations of the support group will even have to be extended beyond the regular working hours to offer the needed support to the workers in the different time zones.

-Support equipment for telework

Another hurdle is the cost to offer the equipment and other supplies for the workers who telecommute (Bose & Luo, 2011). In this case, telecommuting creates some form of challenge to the firms who do not have the needed funds and resources to assist the staff who wish to telecommute. In addition, investments in information and communications technology and network infrastructure are supposed to be made to enable for telecommuting to be performed. Again, policies are supposed to be developed to protect the firm's resources (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

-Training and development

To add, the development of comprehensive training workshops to provide the workers the requisite skills to adopt and practice telecommuting. Managers and supervisors for instance will have to be trained on ways to manage the workers effectively from their remote locations when telecommuting. This is because the supervisors will not be able to monitor the workers throughout the day, and hence, they will need to find ways of effectively monitoring the performance of the workers (Khoury, 2009). Dimitrova (2003) also asserts that as a result of

the varied approaches in the implementation of telecommuting, it becomes difficult to find a single best way of supervision. It is therefore suggested for organisations to first analyse their approach carefully before implementation.

-Data security

The organisation is also confronted with the issue of data security during telecommuting. The security of data has been a topical issue for organisations in recent times. According to Crandall and Gao (2005), “security issues raise questions as to how much and what type of work should transpire in the home environment.” Issues relating to data breaches have brought negative attentions to firms and have even made national headlines in recent times. These breaches have led to the firms involved to lose revenue in the form of image repair cost, legal cost, and also customer notification cost. A major cause of these breaches is guests' access to the organisation's sensitive information in the homes of telecommuting workers.

Technology Risks Nonexistent or insufficient technology to support teleworker job duties and expectations

Organizational Risks

Management resistance, Lack of face-to-face communication, Lack of teleworker visibility to management.

7- Recommendations

-Organisations should add telework technologies in organisation budgets, but allow workers to use their own equipment when practical.

Previous studies have found that there is a minimal expenditure gap in the technology required to support teleworkers at the basic level, and the technology required to support most current workers on-site, especially for knowledge workers. Organisations must now budget for the additional items necessary for telework. Based on experience to date, many organisations have moved to purchasing laptops (with docking stations) that can be taken home, rather than office desktop machines, and providing an adequate software suite for all workers (not just teleworkers).

-Organisation should embrace a more proactive and “inclusive” management style. Just because someone is not physically present in the office does not mean that they should be

excluded from meetings, conferences, and communication with the rest of the team. It is to everyone's benefit to include teleworkers in routine collaborative office activities.

Video teleconferencing is also effective as a substitute for face to-face visits. It might also be helpful for teleworkers to submit plans for the coming week, and reports on the previous week, every Monday, regardless of job responsibilities.

Organisations should develop effective measures of performance. This could be in terms of work output, work quality, or some other relevant metric.

- Managers must base individual evaluations on performance, not on presence.

Knowing that a worker is in a particular place at a particular time is not useful as a measure of performance, unless they are attending a meeting. Recommendations for Implementing Managers will need to know what the worker is doing, and must be able to measure their performance in a meaningful way.

-Organisations should place increased attention on “managing for results,” and managers will have to manage proactively. With positions that are eligible for telework, location is largely irrelevant. Organisations will need to manage by measuring results, rather than by “butts in seats.” Even teleworkers will not be at their desk for the entire eight to ten hours of their workday, and shouldn't necessarily be expected to be. Most teleworkers will be every bit as accessible as those in the office. This may be a difficult concept for some managers, but if an employee can answer help desk calls from a remote location, and provide good customer service, wherein lies the problem? It's all in the measurement of results.

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