TELEWORK AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE: SOME DIMENSIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyse how telework is implemented in different organisations as a way of promoting better work-life balance for workers. Through interviews with Spanish female teleworkers, we have found that in those organisations that give more organisational support and autonomy to workers, telework is an effective measure. By contrast, in those organisations that have not integrated telework into their organisational culture, where being present in the company's workplace is still all-important, conflicts and imbalance can arise in the lives of teleworkers. For this reason, we conclude that the willingness of organisations to improve the work-life balance of their staff does not depend so much on the implementation of a set of measures (including, for instance, telework), but more on changing to a genuine organisational culture that tries to implement such measures in the least discriminatory way and firmly believes that, in order to allow staff to give of their best, all aspects of their lives need to be balanced.

INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement in the literature on work-life balance strategies that the lack of balance between work, family, and personal life is one of the main

problems that individuals in Western societies face on a day-to-day basis, in particular those individuals who have family responsibilities (Carrasquer, 2005; Dex & Bond, 2005; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Gregory & Milner, 2009; Halrynjo, 2009; Maume, Sebastian, & Bardo, 2010; Tobío, 2005; Tremblay, 2004; Watts, 2009). The massive incorporation of women into the workplace, the increase in the number of single-parent families, and the increase in dependency as a result of an ageing population are some of the factors that explain why the question of work-life balance has become a key agenda item in a number of European Union states.

The changes listed above, which have taken place over recent decades, have not been accompanied by changes in other areas, for example, in public policies toward developing adequate and accessible quality services for the members of the dependent population, whether they are children, people who are unwell, or the elderly (Torns, 2005). Moreover, the fact that, today, the majority of women work outside the home has not led men to be significantly more involved in carrying out domestic or family-related tasks (Tobío, 2005; Williams, 2000). Neither have companies shown themselves to be particularly sensitive with regard to their employees' need to be able to satisfactorily balance their professional responsibilities with their family, social, and personal commitments (Rapoport et al., 2002; Thistle, 2006).

Nevertheless, examples are starting to emerge of companies that have seen the need to introduce changes within their organisations, in order to allow for the implementation of measures that promote the balance of work, family, and personal life. Not only do they seek to improve working conditions, but they also seek to ensure the survival of the company itself by improving its ability to attract and retain talent, its productivity, and, in short, its competitiveness.

Many of these measures are related to flexibility in organising time, such as the following: shorter working days; flexibility in start and finish times; the lengthening of maternity leave; the right to add holiday entitlements to maternity leave, plus breastfeeding breaks and paternity leave; telework; and so on.

With specific reference to telework, one of the guidelines included by the European Parliament (2004: 5) was to emphasize the importance of "distance working, where possible" so that workers can "meet their professional, family and educational responsibilities, with a balance being struck between their own interests and those of the employer."

Therefore, in this article we set out to analyse the extent to which telework represents an adequate and effective measure to balance the family, work, and personal lives of workers. First, our study provides the opportunity to expand knowledge about how women produce meanings, opinions, and feelings about telework. Second, it shows how this production allows us to widen the research lens beyond individual teleworkers to the organisational level. And third, it indicates how organisational culture is a crucial factor in explaining the relationship between telework and work-life balance.

We will focus on the analysis of interviews with Spanish female teleworkers in order to learn how telework affects their work-life balance. We have found it specially interesting to analyse the daily lives of women with dependents, because, as we will show later, such women are more likely to adopt telework and they admit to having more difficulties in balancing their work, family, and personal life than men.

In this regard, in the first and second sections, we present a comprehensive literature review of studies that have looked at the conditions needed for the effective introduction of measures to achieve work-life balance in companies and at how telework affects family life. This literature review enables us to establish an organisational typology, taking into consideration three organisational factors that set down the conditions needed for telework to be an effective work-life balance measure.

In the third section, we give the details of our research methodology. Two reasons explain why our sample included only women. The first reason is that a great deal of literature shows that work-life balance is gendered (Emslie & Hunt, 2009) and gender differences remain embedded in the ways in which respondents negotiate their home and work lives (Coltrane, 2010; Gerson, 2004; Gregory & Milner, 2009). Women continue to take on the dual role of worker and the person principally responsible for domestic and family duties (Gálvez, 2009; Parella, 2005; Tobío, 2005; Torns, 2005; Williams, 2000). Therefore, we believe that women are, first, the ones who experience problems in achieving an adequate work-life balance. The second reason is that it is women with dependent children who mainly take up telework and other flexible arrangements (Gregory & Milner, 2009). This statement is based on a large number of studies showing that women consider taking care of children their main motivation in the choice of teleworking (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). Notwithstanding this, work and home present a problematic relationship when women must, at the same time, cope with the responsibilities of childcare, household maintenance, and paid work activities (Christensen, 1987; Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1993; Gurstein, 2001). In this vein, several authors argue that working at home means more stress for many people, especially women, for two reasons. First, they have to work around the time schedules of family members; second, they suffer a lack of spatial separation between work tasks and household chores, and thus they are constantly accessible both to family members and to colleagues at work. Besides, these analysts insist that telework does not per se involve a change in gender roles and the home remains a sex-segregated environment (Gurstein, 2001; Wikström, Lindén, & Michelson, 1998). Thus, our main interest has been to analyse how teleworking women live and to explain this complex situation. Our sample has been chosen strategically, paying attention to variables such as the kind of organisation involved, the weekly time spent teleworking, the family situation of teleworkers, and their position in the organisation. By examining these variables, we have obtained data on variability in the position of the worker in the organisation, the type of organisation, and variability in the type of teleworking.

In the fourth section we detail our main findings. We have found that it is with the provision of more support and autonomy to workers in their organisations that telework becomes an effective measure. By contrast, in those organisations that have not integrated telework into their organisational culture, where being present is still all-important, conflicts and imbalance can arise in the lives of teleworkers. So, we conclude that the willingness of organisations to improve the work-life balance of their staff does not depend so much on the implementation of a set of measures (including, for instance, telework) but rather on changing to an organisational culture that genuinely tries to implement such measures in the least discriminatory way and firmly believes that, in order to allow staff to give of their best, all aspects of their lives need to be balanced.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES

Several authors, of whom Steven Fleetwood (2007) is a good example, have argued that the discourse about work-life balance does not reflect real practice. Thus, it is not unusual that organisational structures and cultures undermine formal work-life balance policies (Gambles, Lewis, & Rapoport, 2006). In line with this, Houston (2005) has proposed that measures that do not tackle organisational cultures sometimes reinforce gender segregation in the workplace, since the take-up of work-life balance measures is strongly gendered. Thus, as we have mentioned, women with dependent children are the most affected by this situation as they adopt measures such as telework or reduced working-hour arrangements (Gregory & Milner, 2009). And it seems that a number of barriers appear to limit men's adoption of such measures. The most frequently cited are (a) the organisation of the workplace; (b) perceptions about entitlement; (c) the business environment; and (d) the domestic organisation of labour in employees' homes (Bittman, Hoffmann, & Thompson, 2004; Bygren & Duvander, 2006; Crompton & Lyonette, 2007; Duncan, 2007; Singley & Hynes, 2005). In this connection, Gregory & Milner (2006) have found that "organisational career cultures" prevent men from overtly choosing work-life balance over their careers. The consequence of this is clear: men become users of a sort of informal flexibility.

Therefore, the culture of an organisation can act as a means of reinforcing the traditional separation of gender roles, producing a clear division between the working experiences of men and women (Lewis, 2001; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999; Thompson & Prottas, 2005). In short, such organisational practices reflect both gendered societal norms about the "ideal carer" and capitalism's norm of the "ideal worker." In the ideal worker norm, as many authors show, presence and commitment are the most relevant factors (Bailyn, 1993; Cooper, 2000; Gambles et al., 2006; Rapoport et al., 2002; Watts, 2009). This leads to a discriminatory situation for the majority of women, since they have a dual role: in

the home and in paid labour (Bailyn, 1993; Gálvez, 2009; Maume et al., 2010; Torns, 2005).

To overcome this difficulty, Friedman and Johnson (1996) point out organisations need, at least, to look at their organisational cultures—the norms that define commitment, success, and appropriate behaviour. These authors also emphasize that the support of senior management is an essential factor. They believe that there is a need for organisations to set up a "work-family culture," defined as a set of shared assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding the extent to which an organisation supports and values the integration of employees' work and family lives.

The authors believe there are three dimensions to a culture that are relevant to the achievement or non-achievement of a work-life balance:

First, organisational demands with regard to the hours spent at work or the expectation that workers prioritise work over family;

Second, the fact that workers may perceive negative consequences for their professional careers due to the use of work-life balance measures or the time they dedicate to family responsibilities; and

Third, management support and sensitivity toward their employees' family responsibilities.

Therefore, employees are more inclined to use their company's work-life balance measures when the organisational culture of the company supports such measures. The organisational culture is positively related to emotional commitment and negatively associated with work-family conflicts, or the intention to leave the organisation.

A study in this area by Thompson and Prottas (2005) describes three organisational factors that encourage workers to use work-life balance measures and to do so effectively and with positive effects on their lives. We will use this study later in our analysis, but we state here the three factors referred to:

First, formal and informal organisational support. A key factor is the support of colleagues and superiors in the use of measures designed to achieve a work-life balance, together with the perception that employees can use such measures without fear of negative consequences for their work and professional careers;

Second, autonomy in the workplace. Workers with more power to decide how to carry out their work feel more satisfied with their family, their work, and their lives in general. They are less inclined to change jobs, and they show less stress and lower perception of conflict between work and family;

Third, using control as a mediator. The feeling of control perceived by workers mediates the relationship between informal organisational support, autonomy in the workplace, and intention to leave work.

IMPLICATIONS OF TELEWORK IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The concept of telework emerged in the United States in the mid 1970s during the oil crisis of that period, when it was stated that "if one in seven urban workers did not need to travel to work, the United States would not need to import oil" (Nilles, 1976: 4). During that time, telework rapidly became seen as a solution to a large variety of individual, organisational, and social problems. Not only did it mean a reduction in city traffic but it also meant the creation of new employment opportunities for people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups; a reduction in employment costs; an increase in productivity; and even improvements in teleworkers' quality of life through an increase in their job satisfaction and a reduction in their stress (Angell, 2000; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Handy, 1990; Kowalski & Swanson, 2005; McLuhan & Powers, 1989; Nilles, 1976; Toffler, 1980). Since then, definitions of teleworking have proliferated. At present, the complexity of the concept and the wide variety of phenomena that it embraces (types of contracts, status in the organisation, location of the work, type of tasks, etc.) are such that it has become almost impossible to define. However, there is a consensus that teleworking is decentralized, depends on the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), and is different from the traditional work carried out in the home (Baruch, 2001; Sullivan, 2003).

Reviewing the literature, it is possible to find a great deal of controversy about the effects of telework in daily life. For example, although most organisations include telework within their measures to facilitate workers' work-life balance, the guidelines, at the time of the implementation of telework, are more often governed by criteria of cost savings than by criteria of promoting work-life balance. Through teleworking, companies can reduce their investment in facilities, equipment, electricity, water, and so forth (Daniels, Lamond, & Standen, 2001). In addition, teleworking can lead to an increase in worker productivity and a reduction in absenteeism (Baruch, 2001), but also to a deterioration in the contractual conditions of workers and their legal cover, turning permanent jobs into self-employment (Moon & Stanworth, 1997; Sennet, 1998).

As well as the aforementioned contradictions, there are studies affirming that telework reduces work and family conflict (Duxbury, 1996; Phizacklea & Wolkowitz, 1995) and others arguing the contrary (Daniels et al., 2001). In this regard, Bailey and Kurland (2002) have found that work-related factors, not family concerns, were most predictive of individuals' choice to work remotely. On the contrary, other studies have shown that for women, taking care of children is their main motivation (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). In fact, with this kind of work organisation, women may not have to make a choice between home and career. However, when working at home, separating these two spheres—work and home—very often becomes problematic, as women must cope with the responsibilities of childcare, household maintenance, and paid work activities (Christensen, 1987; Duxbury et al., 1993; Gurstein, 2001). In fact, studies reveal

that working at home implies more stress for many people, especially women, because they find they have to work around the time schedules of family members, and because of the lack of spatial separation they are constantly accessible to these family members. Moreover, telework per se does not change gender roles, and the home remains a sex-segregated environment (Gurstein, 2001; Wikström et al., 1998). Therefore, contrary to the idealised vision of homework allowing for a greater balance between work and family life, telework can reinforce women's role in the home (Gothoskar, 2000; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). This does not mean that telework cannot be a family-friendly strategy; but it does mean that telework "is not necessarily gender-equitable in its operation and effects" (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001: 142).

In this context, our main aim has been to analyse telework as a strategy for work-life balance, while widening the research lens beyond individual teleworkers to the organisational level. Our hypothesis is that it is not telework but the organisational culture that determines in what way telework can be implemented, and therefore whether telework can really contribute to a better balance between work and family or, as some studies say especially for women, it can create conflict because of the lack of separation between the two spheres.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in our research has essentially been qualitative. Its theoretical and technical bases make it a highly useful instrument with which to understand and evaluate the psychosocial and cultural processes involved in the practice of telework and the conflicts it may give rise to with regard to balancing the different areas of the lives of women teleworkers. Although this kind of focus requires intensive processing of the data compiled from fieldwork and does not allow for the widespread application of the results, it makes it possible to go deeper in a way that is comprehensive and interpretative, adding to the analytical and explanatory potential of the data. This is because the main objective of using qualitative methods is the analysis and interpretation of the significance that individuals attach to their day-to-day actions and practices, to those of other people, and to their surroundings (Denzin, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miller, 2005; Wodack & Meyer, 2009).

Participants

Our qualitative study is based on individual interviews with a sample of 24 women and on 10 focus groups with a sample of 48 women. The total sample included 72 women teleworkers with family responsibilities: 8 were senior-level personnel, 22 were intermediate-level personnel, 7 were university lecturers, 25 were technicians, 6 were administrative secretaries, and 4 were translators. A total of 20% of the women in the study were full-time teleworkers, with the remaining

80% carrying out telework for between one afternoon and three days during a week. The sample was organised with one main aim: to reflect the Spanish labour situation. The distribution of the 72 teleworkers regarding the kind of organisation was: 22.2% private companies; 20.8% state-owned companies; 36.1% private universities; 4.2% state universities; and 16.7% were self-employed working in several companies at the same time. Altogether, 20 organizations participated (this figure doesn't include the aforementioned self-employed). In all, 60% of these organizations were big companies (over 500 employees), 20% were medium-sized companies (between 50 and 500 employees), and the final 20% were small companies (fewer than 50 employees).

Procedures

Being a female teleworker with dependents were our criteria for eligibility for the study. We have looked for variability in the kind of organisation, the professional category, the weekly time spent teleworking, and family situation. To generate a heterogeneous set of individuals who met these criteria, a snowball sampling method was used (Patton, 2002). In order to initiate the snowball, we contacted individuals in companies and public bodies that we knew had telework programs, and distributed e-mails to colleagues about our search for teleworkers. Prospective participants were screened by phone to check whether they met the study's eligibility criteria. All of the interviews were digitally recorded. The individual interviews ranged in length from 45 to 60 minutes, and the focus group sessions lasted from 2 hours to 2 hours and 30 minutes. The interviews were carried out in Alicante, Barcelona, Bilbao, and Madrid (Spain). The focus group sessions were conducted in special closed spaces in the premises of the companies of the participants, and the individual interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees or in several cases in their offices at work.

Measures

The study used an interview guide to prompt discourses and narratives about telework and work-life balance. The individual interview guide included the following topics: daily life, resources and problems needing to be balanced, the main dimensions of telework in participants' companies, motivation for teleworking, pros and cons of teleworking, telework and daily life relation, impact of teleworking in personal and family life, telework and time-space organization, telework as a tool to balance work and family life, and opinions about gender differences. The focus group guide included the following questions: is telework effective in balancing work and family and personal life? Is telework a way to relocate women at home? What is the relation between telework and time and space organization? What are the pros and cons of teleworking in companies, that is, is telework a help or a hindrance in one's professional career? What is the participant's opinion about gender differences in teleworking? These types of

guides allow topics and issues to be delimited in advance and allow interviewers the flexibility to decide the sequence of questions (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

The individual interviews and focus group sessions were taped and transcribed verbatim. These verbatim transcriptions were analysed with the aim of achieving a thematic analysis of content. This analysis had three phases: pre-analysis, codification, and categorization. In the first stage our aim was (a) familiarization with the data as a whole; (b) organization of information for analysis; and (c) identification of relevant content according to the objectives of the research. In the second stage, we divided up the interviews according to our findings in the first stage. We established a context unit for every relevant piece of content in order to properly understand and interpret it. Then we catalogued the analysis units according to these criteria: meaning, frequency of appearance, and evaluation by the interviewee. In the final stage, we organised and classified the analysis units into categories. Our qualitative content analysis was supported by the ATLAS.ti program. This programme assisted the researchers in organizing, managing, and coding our qualitative data in an efficient manner.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

As we have mentioned, our research aim is to analyse the relationship between telework and work-life balance, focusing on organisational factors. Our hypothesis is that organisational culture is the key to understanding why telework may contribute or not contribute to the achievement of a good quality of work-life balance. The way for us to access organizational culture has been through the discourse of our interviewees, specifically, through the discourse about how their organizations have implemented telework, the rules for telework, the way they define telework, how they coordinate telework time and attendance time, and how this articulation affects employees and their possibilities of achieving an adequate work-life balance. Talking about the role of telework in their working day has articulated two different kinds of discourses. These discourses reflect the way in which telework impacts on the meaning of work and the organization of family life.

We have labelled the first type of discourse "Balanced Discourse." It is characterized by the presence of a group of organizational factors and elements that produce in the teleworkers a harmonious and balanced sensation when it comes to the articulation of their diverse life realms. The second one is labelled "Non-Balanced Discourse." It is characterized by the presence of a group of organizational elements that in combination cause discomfort, uneasiness, and conflicts in the teleworker when it comes to work-life balance. To explain the elements and factors that in combination create the two discourses, we have used

the three organizational factors of Thompson and Prottas (2005) mentioned above: organisational support, autonomy in the workplace, and perceived control. Below, we explain the different characteristics of each type of discourse using the factors referred to above.

Type 1: Balanced Discourse

Balanced Discourse is exemplified by those teleworkers who explain that their organizations have clearly defined telework programmes, with stated operational and regulatory criteria for their staff. They state that it is usual to supply staff with the technological infrastructure they need to carry out telework. In addition, the support of superiors and colleagues when workers opt to telework is very strong. In these kinds of organisations, it is common for teleworkers to be given high levels of autonomy when carrying out their work. Consequently, the teleworkers interviewed say they feel they have a high degree of control over their lives. A more detailed breakdown of this type of organisation is included later.

(a) Formal and informal organisational support. The women teleworkers who have developed a Balanced Discourse have highlighted a high degree of formal and informal organisational support. We have identified three key factors that back up such an assertion.

First, the organisation has telework programmes that are open to the majority of employees. The companies of this type that we have analysed have several flexibility programmes that promote balance between the work, family, and personal lives of their workers. These programmes include measures such as flexitime, personal days off work, shorter working days or telework, to list just a few examples.

Second, the organisation provides the technological infrastructure to enable staff to telework from home (a computer, a broadband connection, etc.):

> We all have, er . . . well, . . . because it's a great company from a technological point of view, we're in a very privileged position in the sense that . . . me, I don't mind whether I work here or at the airport, on the terrace outside my house or in my house; I mean, you have a computer that gives you access to all the . . . all the applications, besides e-mail and all the tools, you have all the company's applications. I mean, I can prepare a proposal for a client whilst on the beach, can't I? Then, because, of course . . . you only need a computer, you can get online, with a card or a wireless connection, everything's very close to you, and . . . as we have all the technology of the company available to us . . . well, OK, I can have a conversation, speak to someone, er . . . via computer. I mean, you can have a conversation with someone using your computer. . . . I can, er . . . look for a document, I can ask for prices, you know? I mean, I can do everything, whether I'm at home or travelling; I mean, it makes no difference to me.

> Almost all of us at [company name] have . . . a broadband connection at home that we can use for work. And we have mobile phones that are set up

> to . . . access our email at any time of the day. So, if you don't want to go into the office one day, because you haven't got any meetings, you haven't . . . ah . . . mmm . . . and you can do your work directly from home; you can do that without any problem. But I mean all of us do that!

As we can see from these examples, technological support from the organisation is crucial if staff members are to telework in a comfortable and free-flowing way.

Finally, superiors support employees who opt to telework. This support can be expressed in many ways, although the main one is respect for the personal or family situation of each worker, since the objective is to agree on working hours that are compatible with the member of staff's personal environment:

> On the one hand, there is respect; that is, for us the situation is, in other words, I think it's very important, on the one hand, that management respects the needs of each . . . individual. In other words, amongst ourselves we have a rule not to call any meetings . . . meetings with my team at seven in the evening. I try not to if it's not absolutely necessary, a critical situation, whatever.

The support of your line manager is key in knowing that if you're not physically present at the company workplace you won't be penalised:

> I don't have the feeling that the company overlooks me. . . . Well, I don't know if it's the company . . . or . . . my project leader, of course. I guess that it's your direct boss, that is, they do your assessment, and . . . and, well, I don't. I don't have any . . . sensation at all that I'm overlooked, or anything, not at all.

In fact, in these companies, the evaluation and assessment of the work done by individuals is based on the setting of objectives and the evaluation of the results achieved, which favours the practical application of flexibility policies, including telework:

> I think it's very important to think about telework as being based on results. I mean, they give you certain responsibilities. When you do them, when you resolve them, is the least important thing.

(b) **Autonomy in the workplace.** Autonomy in the workplace is the second organisational factor pointed out by Thompson & Prottas (2005) that characterizes Balanced Discourse. The manner and time in which teleworkers carry out their work is usually decided by teleworkers themselves. Workers can work at a time that best suits them and freely organise the relationship between the kind of tasks to be carried out and the location in which they carry them out. In other words, this allows workers to organise the time and space of their paid work according to their convenience. Therefore, organisations that genuinely support telework as a means of balancing the work, family, and personal lives of their workers do not just allow work to be done in a location different from the office; they also allow work to be done at a time that best suits individuals, in such a way as to enable them to balance the different areas of their lives.

It is true that in most jobs the rhythm of work is not constant and there are periods that require more dedication than others. Equally, neither are the demands of family life constant. In the case of families with children living at home, school holiday periods and times when a child is unwell are times when teleworkers prefer to dedicate less time to their paid work and make up for it at another time or else work at night:

> The advantage you have is that you can adapt yourself . . . adapt your personal life to your professional life. In my own case, I don't mind saying that I haven't worked [company name]'s working hours, which are from eight until two, but I've worked from four until eight. Or that I haven't worked at all because I didn't have to do anything. The fact is that they don't pay us by the hour, for being physically present at work.

Such autonomy is highly valued by the teleworkers interviewed because, besides enabling them to combine the different areas of their daily lives with much greater levels of contentment, it also demonstrates the trust that the organisation places in them.

As we have said, and as the following quotation shows, many of the informants spoke of how it is possible to autonomously manage the relationship between the type of task and the location in which it is carried out. For example, many of those interviewed state that they prefer to perform certain jobs at home because it is easier to concentrate, with no interruptions from colleagues or coffee breaks, and so forth:

> If I need to do work on coding, because development work is needed for such and such a day, I work from home that week because I work much faster, I can concentrate better, and . . . and it's better for us because I work more quickly.

(c) Perceived control. This is the third element we have considered in defining Balanced Discourse with regard to telework. The control that teleworkers perceive themselves to have, not just of their working lives but also of their lives outside work, is high. Since it is possible for them to organise their time in the way that best suits them, coordination of the different spheres of their daily lives does not lead to conflict:

> It seems as if, early on, women rushed into the work market. But suddenly we've found that it's not satisfying us completely and . . . that you want to . . . that you want to combine both things and that, what's more, you can.

Many of the women interviewed spoke of telework as a means of self-managing their time, allowing them to organise the different areas of their daily lives. Such opportunities for managing and organising are described as a fluid and harmonious set of options that offer them a great deal of professional and personal autonomy. For this reason, they state that they have a great feeling of control over

their work, the time they spend with their families, their availability for each sphere: in short, more control over their lives:

> Er . . . but I think there's a very important issue here that we do a lot to promote and that's the education of the people themselves. I mean, if you don't educate yourself and you don't have control, professional maturity is very important. . . . [If not, your job] can drag you along day after day to the point that you're always available, 24 hours a day. That's very important. The fact of having all these options means you can set priorities, set aside time for yourself and know when you're [available] and when you're not.

To sum up, the women interviewees have developed a discourse that emphasizes the following characteristics: first, a high degree of formal and informal organisational support; second, a high level of autonomy in the workplace; and finally, a high degree of perceived control over the interviewees' work and their lives. The convergence of these three features is what we call Balanced Discourse. This discourse is a reflection of organisational cultures that are concerned about work-life balance and how to implement the right policies to achieve it.

Having a balanced culture (one that achieves balance) is related to two kinds of factors. The first refers to concern for implementing clear and specific policies of work-life balance, with the intention of assessing the performance and the efficiency of workers above all, without rewarding mere presence in the workplace, and with concern for symmetrical and egalitarian treatment of men and women. The second refers to the fact that all these characteristics are positively perceived by the workers, assessed as important elements of the workplace, and identified as defining elements of the workplace when the women teleworkers produce a discourse about it. The effect that this balanced culture has upon women teleworkers is very important.

As we have observed, women who telework in organisations with balanced cultures enjoy a harmonious relationship between the different dimensions of their lives (personal, family, professional, etc.) and feel good in their organisations, with many of them manifesting high degrees of commitment to the organisation. Besides, they do not have the impression that their professional careers may be adversely affected because they telework. This is particularly important, since in non-balanced cultures, this last factor is the source of considerable pressure and discontentment for teleworkers. As we will see next, nothing of what we have explained above as occurring in Balanced Discourse occurs in what we call Non-Balanced Discourse.

Type 2: Non-Balanced Discourse

Non-Balanced Discourse is described by women teleworkers who claim that in their organization telework is a real option; however, such an option does not contribute to a genuinely harmonious balance among the different areas of teleworkers' lives. This lack of harmonious implementation is a consequence of

the way in which teleworking is introduced, revealing an organisational culture that is unprepared for this labour modality. Non-Balanced Discourse can be characterised as follows.

   (a) Organisational support. Women teleworkers who have developed a Non-Balanced Discourse explain that their organizations have work flexibility programmes that include the option of teleworking. Nevertheless, this does not imply that all professional levels can participate in the telework programme; nor does it mean (even in cases where they can) that all workers telework.

   These teleworkers confess that, in their organizations, telework is not freely available to all workers and the conditions under which teleworking can be carried out are not clearly set out. The opposite is true—telework is applied as a privilege that is given on a discretional basis to certain workers and under exceptional circumstances:

> You negotiate it with your boss, and on the basis of mutual trust whereby your boss knows that you're going to do, mmm . . . the work he expects you to do, he says: "OK, you can work from home for a few days if you like, provided it doesn't interfere with . . . well, with your work." They're never, er, neither enthusiastic nor really explicit when they say yes, but they don't say no. It's something you do, that is. The problem . . . that's the bit, let's say, that you kind of negotiate.

Thus, although telework may be one of the company's policies, its application is often discretionary, being granted by managers with a desire to agree to staff teleworking. Furthermore, those managers who do grant requests do not convey to staff that the practice is at the heart of the company's organisational culture, being instead something that is exceptional, a privilege that they feel somewhat "obliged" to agree to under certain circumstances. Underlying this discretionary practice is a degree of mistrust toward telework; against a background of prejudice that regards telework as an option chosen by workers who wish to get out of doing their usual work, superiors assume that if workers are not physically present at the office then they are not working:

> I think the lack of trust on the part of managers is an added element of stress . . . or the perceived lack of trust on the part of managers when you say you want to telework. I mean, even though on a . . . human resources level and the fact that the company's rules state you can do a number of hours of telework, I think that culturally, however, we have not moved forward with the perception that if you're teleworking, you're teleworking and not skiving. I think that the kind of culture that says, if it's telework, then you're not working, is still very entrenched, or at least in the area that I'm most closely associated with. So, I think that a key, basic factor is the trust of your manager. I mean, I think there are two important issues: one, setting objectives, which I think is something that is very important, and that if that leads to setting professional objectives, later, self-managing time is . . . like more . . . or should

> be more free. I mean, if you agree that over the next four months, you'll have finished this and that specific task, and that you actually do them, how long you take and when during the week you do them shouldn't make any difference, should it? So, I think that the question of setting objectives is basic and that the question of trust on the part of managers is a key element. Because . . . I guess we've found ourselves there, like you were saying. You're teleworking but it looks like you're skiving! So, as far as I'm concerned, these factors are very important.

However, this mistrust does not come only from superiors; it also comes from coworkers who do not telework:

> People from this country . . . you know, the question of culture is also very important. People from other countries don't even think about it: "Ah, OK. You're working from home—great." Even when you talk to people using Messenger, you see that the majority are at home one day or another. But in this country, people who don't [have that option] are jealous, which is healthy, because they don't . . . they know it's not [my decision], but they say: "Ah! Right! Working from home, yeah, yeah!" Like they're saying, you're . . . you're not doing anything. They know you are, but it's the . . . the mentality and the first thing that people who are from here say. I know they don't really think it, but they say it anyway, don't they? And you say: "The thing is that . . . here, that's what everyone thinks, they all do." Even if they say it as a joke, the truth is that the idea is still: "Ah, if you're at home, you're not working." And they'd like to be able to combine things as well.

Therefore, in such organisations there remains a strong culture of being physically present. The evaluation of the work carried out by staff depends on the number of hours they physically spend at work, not on the quality of their work, nor on the extent to which the organisation's goals are met. In fact, such organisations do not usually have systems that really offer rewards for achieving objectives.

Moreover, managers in organisations like these do not exercise leadership in spreading the practice of telework. In many cases, these managers tend not to telework and often have longer working days than other workers. Thus, they convey to workers that if they want to thrive in the company they will need to spend long hours working and spend them in the office. So, compensation and professional promotion in organisations like these are strongly associated with being physically present, which is, by definition, an obstacle to the introduction of telework:

> Of course. For example, in my department, they wouldn't consider me for lots of things and if you're there in person, then, well, people can always bear you in mind. . . . You have to combine things. Yes. You can't only be at home. It's impossible. It's not beneficial.

Moreover, the organisation does not provide the technical means that facilitate the use of telework. Support is limited to financial assistance to enable workers to buy

computers and pay for an Internet connection. Workers themselves are the ones responsible for ensuring they have the necessary technological infrastructure in place to be able to work from home.

(b) Autonomy in the workplace. In such cases, teleworkers perceive that they have very little autonomy in organising their time while they telework. In fact, some teleworkers go as far as to say that the only difference between teleworking and working in the office is the physical location:

> Telework means simply that you're doing your work in a different place but the amount of time you spend is the same, meaning that it doesn't let you make it compatible with other kinds of activity.

The culture of being physically present encourages workers to "always be there," even if they're teleworking, if they do not want to lose out on professional opportunities:

> What surprised me was that I was sending emails at 10 or 11 at night and everyone would reply! This . . . is . . . might seem funny, but, on the other hand, it's . . . if you don't reply, well, no one says anything, it's OK, but if you want to be . . . in the group of people who . . . who do more, then you need to be replying to those emails. Do you see what I mean? . . . So . . . well, what I was saying the other day to another . . . mother who works . . . we were in the middle of a fun conversation here using chat . . . and I said to her: "Come on! You're a bit of a mug; you're working at 11 at night." And she said: "You're more of a mug; I've seen you loads of days working." We have a . . . kind of chat system that shows when you're online.

Moreover, the feeling that the worker is enjoying a privilege and the climate of mistrust in which telework is carried out promote a feeling of guilt on the part of the teleworker, making her work an even longer day:

> At the beginning . . . perhaps it was more in your mind that . . . personally I was a bit defensive, and I even felt the need to work more than I was working here, so they could see that I was really working at home. Later, as time goes by, you relax and you do . . . your work.

This is despite the fact that most of the women interviewed argue that telework allows them to be more productive, doing a number of tasks more efficiently:

> Yes, because it's a bit like the calculation I do, even though I've worked it out it's also that when I work 6 hours at home, I get a lot more done than I do in 9 or 10 hours here. Because at home you're relaxed, nobody calls you; I mean, you concentrate on a specific task and you plan to finish it in two or three hours. And of course, here it's continuous. I mean, they call you, they call your colleague, or else someone comes in, or someone says something to you.

Many teleworkers say that, in their organisations, there is still a perception that there are certain tasks that must be done in the office or, at least face to face,

particularly when it is a question of working as a member of a team. Another point is that in some cases, the teleworker's timetable and days of remote work are not taken into account when meetings are scheduled or at other times when the worker's presence is required:

> Telework . . . well, when I did it, it didn't really work out, although it was partly my fault for not knowing how to organise myself. Er . . . mainly with regard to meetings. . . . We spend a lot of time at the . . . in meetings. And . . . not so much for the time you're in the meeting but because . . . for a half-hour meeting, which they set for a day I'd planned to telework . . . I have to travel 100 kilometres, which means I don't telework; I stay here and do a full day's work here.

(c) Perceived control. As a consequence of the two characteristics mentioned above, teleworkers who have developed a Non-Balanced Discourse perceive they have less control over their work and personal lives because, in reality, they telework in a climate of mistrust and are not able to organise their time in a way that best suits them. The effort to achieve coordination between the different spheres of their daily lives ends up causing conflict and stress. Therefore, the Non-Balanced Discourse is characterized mostly by a constant: a strong emphasis on being present in the workplace.

Therefore, not being physically at work can result in workers being penalised. In this connection, some of the women interviewed speak of a clear case of gender inequality. When women are the ones who generally opt to telework, or who leave the office earlier than men to attend to family commitments, it is harder for them to be seen as candidates for promotion. This means that many women have the feeling that promotion or career advancement is not open to them because they have opted to telework and because they are not seen by their superiors and colleagues as being physically present in the workplace:

> Well, the first thing I'd like to say is that I telework but it isn't . . . part of my contract or anything. I mean, it's a perk that I can . . . that I can . . . well, that I can make work because . . . I have a manager who . . . thinks it's a good idea. And basically because he's a virtual manager and isn't Spanish. The company offers you . . . certain advantages, but the people I know who work here, people from this country with bosses from here as well, don't do telework, or if they do it's something that is very sporadic. Because it's not understood. If you're at home, people think you're not working. . . . They need to see you at work and you have to be the last to leave, as with any company here.

And it is difficult for women to get out of the mode of always "being there," of being constantly accessible and connected, given the context in which telework is carried out:

> About work, because you always have the mobile [phone] with you, you have the computer . . . I mean, before mobiles, people would call you but it was for things . . . that were really important. If not, they were used to calling your landline and leaving a message on the answering machine or with the secretary or whoever. Now, people . . . I'm the first to say . . . that we've got used to the mobile as being our portable landline. So, of course, no one's ever said to me to switch off my mobile when I leave work . . . or not to switch if off. It's, as I was saying, an individual decision as to whether you leave your mobile on or you turn it off. As I have my work mobile which is also my personal number . . . the advantage is that I only need to have one, as it serves both purposes. The disadvantage is that you can be called one day at two in the morning if the server's down in a critical area and they need your help. Then, of course, people aren't to know that you're on holiday. They might call you on 3rd August: listen, look, it's . . . because he's already had his holidays . . . then at that point you say . . . well, it's difficult to break away. You've got the ability, you have the final say, and you can say: look, I'm turning off the mobile because I'm going away for two weeks and I want to switch off from everything. And you can do it, but it depends on your character. Some people aren't relaxed about doing that, and you say: "What if something's happened or what if I don't find out about something and something's happened."

At times, Non-Balanced Discourse shows that this organisational dynamic goes further than the work environment and that the employee´s partner, family, friends, or society in general do not associate home with work and, therefore, do not respect the time for paid work at home, or they have the perception that teleworkers do a lot less work than others. In fact, this question is one that women think seriously about before deciding to telework, with many of them even deciding not to telework full time for fear of this kind of mistrust or lack of understanding of what telework involves.

In conclusion, coordinating different spheres of life is not easy, and many women do not value telework as a strategy for achieving work-life balance but, rather, as a means of enabling them to carry out specific tasks in an environment where they can get away from the interruptions they experience in their workplace. Or else, those who restructure their working day by means of telework state that they pay a high price; although they may have more time for their family and domestic life, they need to make up the time by working at night or at the weekend, which means they have practically no time for themselves since they are always accessible to their organisation or to their family:

> I think that in principle, yes, we pay a heavy price, definitely. But, I mean, in the abstract, yes, I would agree. But, to reconcile work, family, and family life implies . . . I don't know, working from 11 at night until 3 in the morning, because you're online, and of course, you combine things, yes, yes. Thanks to telework you can combine everything, but . . . that, that . . . I think that . . . I, at

> least, feel that we pay a price. I also had leave of up to a year after my baby was born. I would then come in during the mornings and telework in the afternoon. . . . Then, of course, afternoon telework turns into going to pick up the children. Fantastic! You enjoy them, great, but when they go to sleep, then you start your working day. Then, of course, it was triple because it's true that you can be a mother and it's fantastic, but, well, you're a, a . . . professional mother, Mrs. so-and-so, well . . . .

Nevertheless, the overall evaluation of telework by these workers is positive. Very few say they would be prepared to give up the flexibility it offers them:

> Yes, yes, yes. I try to maintain a timetable, with the advantage of flexibility for my son, if for example, I need to go to the doctor on a Wednesday morning. So I'll maybe work on Sunday evening. . . . Because right now, if they were to give me a rigid working timetable, I'm not sure how it would go. The thing is that I've also got used to having the flexibility. Flexibility—I always say the same: until you have it, you don't appreciate it. If they take it off you . . . I wouldn't take it because I feel like it, not because I say . . . but at some time I need to do a Tuesday morning, if it suits me. There aren't people, nobody's there, I can do a Saturday morning. But of course . . . when you get used to it, with the routine, with the advantages it has, it would be hard to give it up. I'd find it really difficult to give it up.

The characteristics of Non-Balanced Discourse are (a) weak and precarious formal and informal organizational support; (b) limited autonomy in the workplace; and (c) very little perceived control by teleworkers over their lives. The extremely weak or low level of these three elements as evaluated by some of our women interviewees shows that in their cases the organisational culture related to telework and work-life balance can be considered a non-balanced culture. In organizations with this kind of culture we observe two elements. First, there is a clear lack of policies to implement telework. And second, apart from the number of hours of attendance at work, there are no specific policies to assess performance in the job. So, although telework is a real option for female workers, it does not work as an effective means to promote work-life balance.

DISCUSSION

As we have mentioned in the previous section, Balanced Discourse is directly connected with organisations with a balanced culture, and Non-Balanced Discourse is connected with organisations with a non-balanced culture. Nevertheless, organisational culture is not the only element that differentiates the kinds of organisations from each other. We have identified three types of elements. The first one is related to organisational size and sector. Balanced Discourse has been produced by those teleworkers who work in big companies, and Non-Balanced

Discourse is more typical of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As for the business sector, it seems that Balanced Discourse has a tendency to appear in the ICT sector. The second type of element is related to the organisation of work: Balanced Discourse emerges in those organisations that show a great concern for work process improvements and for what is called the "reengineering" of work. The third type of element is related to corporate social responsibility: organisations with Balanced Discourse tend to attach a great deal of importance to the factors that shape corporate social responsibility, and these become key aspects in the definition of their identity as organisations.

In our discussion, however, we will focus specifically on the relationship between culture and discourse. According to our research, the impact that tele-working can have on the daily life of workers depends to a very large extent on the organisational culture: on the support that teleworkers have from the organisation; on the autonomy granted to them to organise their tasks, time, and work space; and on organisational demands.

Thus, if we take into account the support provided by the organisation, those companies we have referred to as having a balanced culture allow all staff, irrespective of their seniority, to telework. On the other hand, in organisations with an on-balanced culture, telework is discretionary and depends on the willingness of superiors to allow it; or, although it is part of the company's organisational structure, telework is not seen as a measure open to all workers, and neither is it generally promoted and supported by staff at management level within the organisation.

Moreover, in organisations with a balanced culture, not being physically present is not penalised. In fact, a member of staff who is a full-time teleworker or is on extended leave can be put forward as a candidate for promotion. The opposite is true of organisations without a balanced culture, where being present in the office is one of the factors taken into consideration when evaluating worker performance and involvement in the organisation.

With respect to autonomy in organising work, organisations with balanced cultures are more flexible in terms of hours worked and the place where work is carried out. Planning is based on objectives, and workers are not evaluated on the number of hours they spend in the office but on their results. Organisations without a balanced culture, by contrast, are characterised by the placing of a great deal of value on being present in the workplace and staying late. Therefore, flexibility in terms of the hours worked or the location in which work is carried out is permitted only for work reasons (for example, when a worker has to coordinate with others who are in other countries, or when she/he needs to travel) or under exceptional circumstances and for specific reasons (when a member of the family is unwell, during school holidays, etc.). Moreover, although in organisations like these workers are allowed to work outside the office, they are required to meet the number of working hours stipulated in their contracts, leading companies to demand the same availability in terms of time, irrespective of whether the worker is at home or at the office.

With regard to organisational demands, we have seen that organisations with a balanced culture set their objectives in a more realistic manner, that is, that the task can be done in a reasonable period of time that does not involve an excessive number of hours to be spent on it by the worker. In most cases, tasks in organisations without a balanced culture, however (even those that also carry out objective-based planning), require additional hours to complete—time that is taken from family or personal time. However, in organisations with a balanced culture, workers' personal and family time is respected. Efforts are made not to organise meetings during after-school hours, whilst companies without a balanced culture expect workers to be available 24 hours a day, including, in some cases, at night, at weekends, and during holidays.

There is a long way to go to guarantee labour rights for teleworkers, whether in relation to labour health guarantees, or in relation to the availability of technology, or in terms of the rights related to workers' contractual relationships, for example. In addition, as our research shows, it is essential that organisations that raise the possibility of teleworking continue to guarantee equal rights for teleworkers to nondiscrimination, in terms of the maintenance of the same chance of promotion as other workers, of time dedication, and so forth. Guarantees remain valid only in the context of organisations with an organisational culture that we call balanced.

In fact, according to our analysis, the willingness of organisations to improve the work-life balance of their staff does not depend so much on the application of a set of measures (including, for instance, telework). It is rather a matter of an organisational culture that genuinely tries to implement such measures in the least discriminatory way possible (in terms of gender, professional level, family situation, etc.) and firmly believes that, in order for staff to be able to give of their best, all the other aspects of their lives also need to be taken into account and a balance between them needs to be achieved.

Needless to say, telework entails flexibility for workers, turning this work model into a balancing strategy that is especially valued. Nevertheless, behind the apparent homogeneity and overlap among teleworking arrangements we find a vast range of different experiences. When analysing the interviews, we have been able to identify different forms of explaining, discussing, and living the experience of telework in relation to employees' work, family, and personal lives. Such differences have been influenced, to a large degree, by the extent to which telework is integrated into organisations' work and cultural dynamics. We have seen that organisations that have not integrated telework into their organisational culture, where being present is still all-important, create conflict and imbalance in the lives of workers who choose to telework. This does not happen in organisations where telework is completely integrated into the organisational culture, as a means of working that is just as legitimate as being present in the workplace.

We conclude this article with three general suggestions for future research based on our results. The first has to do with an obvious point: it would be very

interesting to replicate these results with a larger group of teleworkers, including not only women but also men in order to analyse gender differences. The second refers to the need to compare our results with results in other countries, with the aim of identifying social, cultural, and organisational divergences. The third is to introduce quantitative methods to enrich our qualitative findings. We think that a multi-method approach, which includes both qualitative and quantitative elements, will give us, first, a view of general tendencies with regard to the valuations and uses of telework and, second, distributions and frequencies related to opinions and expectations in different situations.

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