TELEWORK IN THE TIME OF COVID

Lessons learned from the porpoise survey on digital uses of Breton workers during the containment

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How do we lead our lives since March 17, 2020? The researchers of GIS Marsouin, the main French research center on digital uses, have reflected on this question through the prism of their expertise. Thanks to a major survey, entitled
"CAPUNI crisis" they observed whether digital tools have helped us adapt our existences to the demands of confinement or whether they have, on the contrary, made our confined daily lives more painful.
Supported by the Brittany Region and the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion,
The "CAPUNI crisis" survey specifically questioned 1,500 Bretons as well as 1,000 national.

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has put companies to the test since March 2020. Containment, remote work, ... companies have had to reorganize themselves to face this unprecedented crisis. Containment has allowed for large-scale experimentation of telecommuting in companies and administrations. What is the feedback from employees on this forced telework experience?

According to INSEE, in France, in 2017, only 3% of employees teleworked more than once a week[1] . Since the deconfliction, many companies have maintained telecommuting for some of their employees. Other companies are organizing to set up a regular and chosen telework scheme for voluntary employees. The number of teleworkers is expected to increase significantly in the coming months.

The objective of this note is to make an inventory of the practices and perceptions of telework during the period of confinement, from the point of view of the employees. The results presented are from a Marsouin survey, carried out with a representative sample of the Breton population (over 18 years old), interviewed by telephone during the confinement period (see methodological box in annex).

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[1] "The regular teleworkers are mainly qualified employees: 61% of them are executives. Thus, 11.1% of executives and 3.2% of intermediate professions declare that they telework at least one day a week, while this practice is rare among employees and marginal among workers." Extract from the DARES note "What reality of

telework in 2017?", *Dares Analyses* November 2019 No. 051.

Who are the Breton teleworkers during the containment period?

The Marsouin survey results indicate that 14% of employed individuals were telecommuting just prior to the lockdown. During the lockdown, this share more than doubled, with 32% of individuals teleworking.[2] Most of this was full-time telecommuting (83%). For the remaining 17%, telecommuting was combined with part-time work or childcare.

Confined teleworkers are predominantly women (58%). Managers and senior professionals are over-represented (36% of teleworkers) as are middle managers (44% of teleworkers), while blue collar and white collar workers constitute only 15.5% of teleworkers. The latter occupy jobs that do not lend themselves well to telework. For example, only 3% of blue-collar workers report having teleworked, while 71% of managers have worked at home during the lock-in. These differences between socio-professional categories were already observed before the confinement (Schampheleire and Martinez, 2006).

Only 23% of the confined teleworkers had regular telework experience before the confinement (at least once a week). **For three quarters of the confined teleworkers, this was their first unprepared and abrupt experience.** Finally, it should be noted that 40% of the confined teleworkers had young children (under 14 years old) whose permanent presence at home did not always facilitate the telework of the adults. These figures show that confined telecommuting was not a normal telecommuting experience for many employees, between homeschooling and sharing equipment and connections among family members.

Which telework tools?

30% of confined teleworkers report having very high speed access, the remaining 70% report having very high speed access.
remaining having a broadband connection such as ADSL.

Teleworkers were also asked about the tools used during lockdown. Video conferencing was used extensively during lockdown with the role of maintaining social ties and facilitating teamwork (Boboc A., 2020). **65% of teleworkers participated in video conferencing during lockdown**. However, **for the majority of them, this was a one-time use**, with only 16% reporting that they videoconferenced every day.
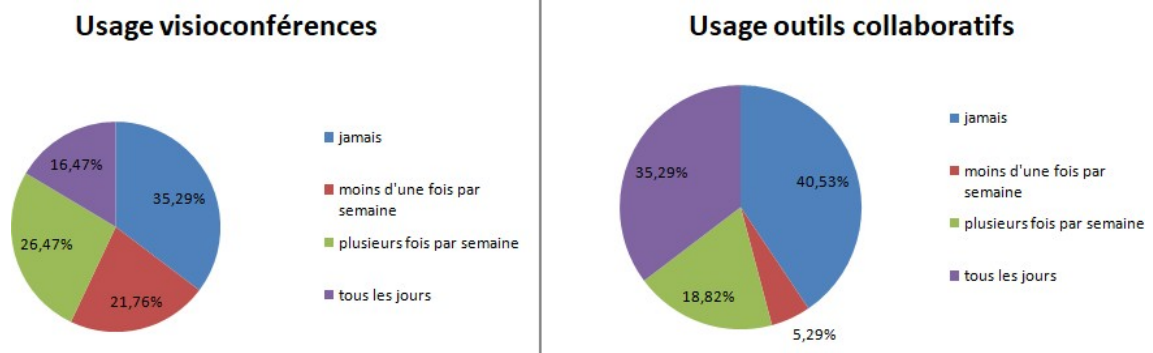
Collaborative work tools (such as google drive, shared calendars, shared backup spaces, etc.) were also used extensively in confinement, most often in addition to video conferencing and internal company networks. 35% of teleworkers said they used them every day.

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[2] It should be noted that with the confinement of the population, many workers have found themselves suddenly in a situation of "non chosen" telework without necessarily having the necessary equipment and space at home. Telework in confinement is therefore not comparable to telework which is practiced in normal times within a legal and negotiated framework between the employer and the employee.

However, this use is quite divisive, as 40.5% of teleworkers have not used this type of tool (either because the company does not have these tools, or because they have not been trained to use them).

Finally, e-mail remains the most important tool for teleworking. 83% of confined teleworkers used it several times a day, and even 44% declared themselves permanently connected to their email. Email plays the role of a "*Swiss Army* knife" (Guesmi S., Raillet A., 2012). Its use increased sharply during the confinement and particularly in the first two weeks (Boboc A., 2020).

Figure 1: Digital uses of confined teleworkers

Usage visioconférences

- jamais: 35,29%
- moins d'une fois par semaine: 21,76%
- plusieurs fois par semaine: 26,47%
- tous les jours: 16,47%

Usage outils collaboratifs

- jamais: 40,53%
- moins d'une fois par semaine: 5,29%
- plusieurs fois par semaine: 18,82%
- tous les jours: 35,29%

Confined teleworkers satisfied?

45% of teleworkers felt less efficient while teleworking compared to working on site. Only 12% said they were more efficient during the lock-in period. This result can be explained by the multiple technical, organizational and economic difficulties encountered by the company (or at least by the team to which the employee is attached), but also by the environment of the teleworker (problem of connection quality and equipment, no dedicated room to telework, children at home, ...). The health crisis may also have been a cause of stress affecting work.
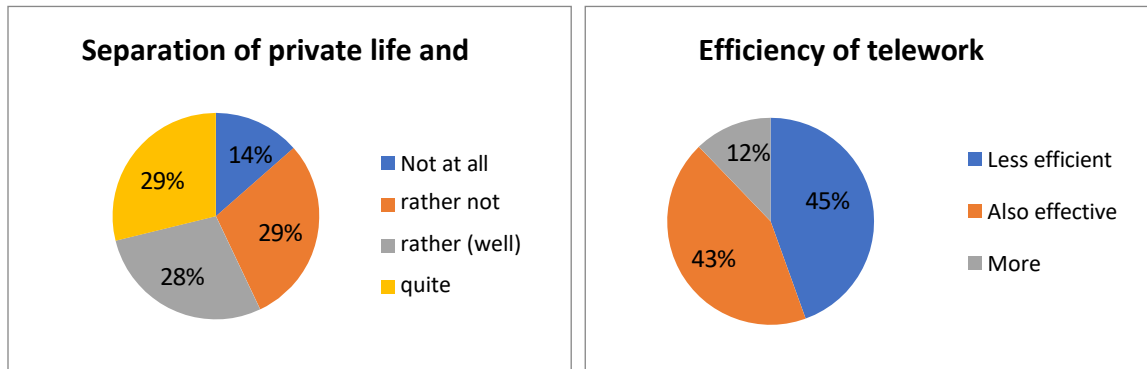
However, this result must be tempered, because in the end 43% of the employees felt as effective in confined telework as they usually do. Perceptions of **effectiveness at work can be different depending on whether the employee is at work or at home** and it is not always easy for an employee to fully appreciate his or her effectiveness while teleworking (Aguilera et alii., 2016). In addition to the risks of burn-out, the confined teleworker may also be subject to a risk of *bore out, i.e. resignation, decrease or disappearance of motivation* (Durieux 2020).

Therefore, it is important to maintain communication with teleworkers in situations where the amount of work may be lower than normal.

The separation of work and private life is not always easy in a telework context, which is moreover confined (and for many not chosen), and can have an impact on the well-being of teleworkers.

43% of the homebound teleworkers said that they had not been able to separate the private/family and work spheres well. **But 57% of the home-based teleworkers said that they were (somewhat or completely) successful in separating the private/family sphere from the work sphere.**

Figure 2: Teleworkers' Perceptions of Working in Confinement

Separation of private life and
- 14% Not at all
- 29% rather not
- 28% rather (well)
- 29% quite

Efficiency of telework
- 45% Less efficient
- 43% Also effective
- 12% More

A confined telecommuting experiment that has been unevenly successful

40% of confined teleworkers want to continue to telework on a regular basis (several times a month). This figure is well above the percentage of teleworkers prior to March 2020. This means that containment has introduced and converted many employees to this form of work.

However, 50% of confined teleworkers say they do not want to continue teleworking. This rejection of telework is more pronounced among women: more than 60% of them do not want to continue the experience. In comparison, only 36% of men are in this situation. It is possible that these differences are due to the unequal involvement during the confinement of men and women in family tasks, especially in the presence of young children[3] .

The answers are also very different according to socio-professional categories. 53% of executives and senior professionals want to continue to telework regularly (several times a month), compared to 33% of non-executives.

Figure 3: Post-Containment Wishes of Contained Teleworkers

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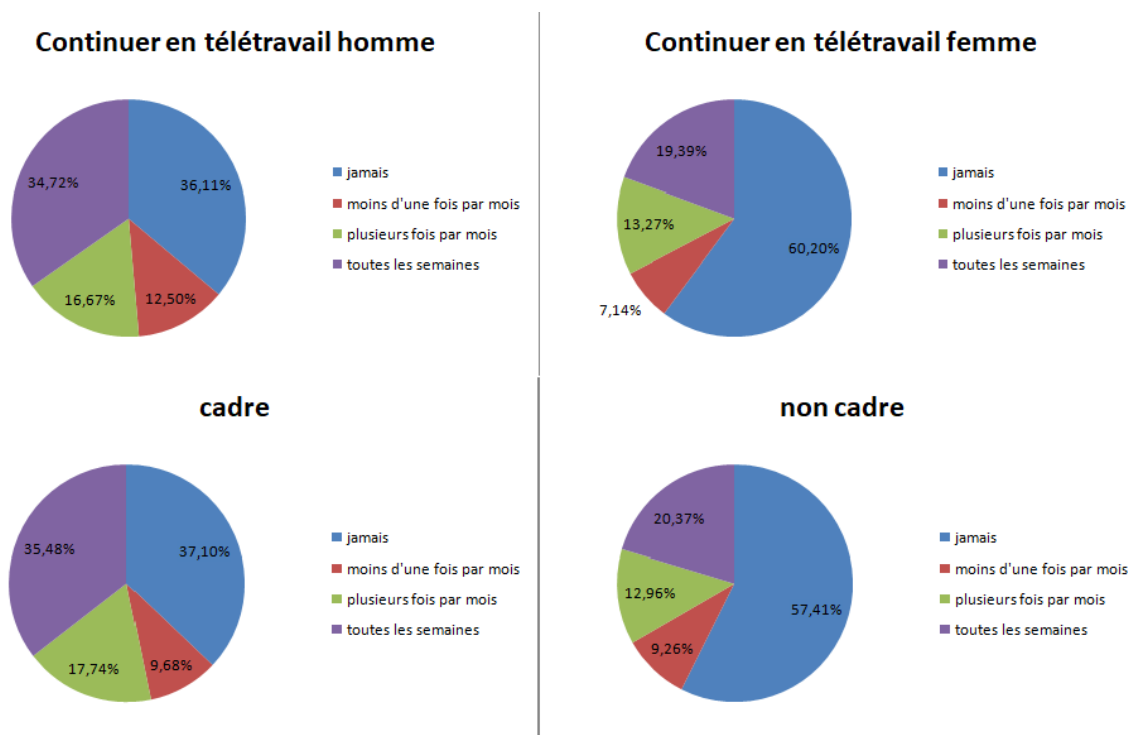
[3] This point is confirmed by the Harris interactive study on the impact of confinement on gender inequalities: https://harris-interactive.fr/opinion_polls/limpact-du-confinement-sur-les-inegalites-women-men/

To go further

To understand what factors explain satisfaction with the confined telecommuting experience and the desire to continue or not to telecommute regularly, we conducted Probit econometric regressions. The variable explained is "I would like to continue to telework several times a month or every week." This variable is binary (YES/NO). The explanatory variables that we have retained for the regression are gender, age, socio-occupational category, place of residence (size of the municipality), presence of young children, quality of the Internet connection and possession of computer equipment.

The summary results are given in the table below, which specifies whether the variable has a significant or non-significant effect (and its sign if significant) on the desire to continue teleworking.

Explanatory factors	Significance
Age	Not significant
Gender	Not significant
Rural town	Positive
Young children	Negative
Number of computers	Positive
4G coverage	Not significant
Quality of the Internet connection/ very high speed access	Not significant
Work efficiency during containment	Positive

Age and gender have no effect on whether or not they want to continue telecommuting. So digital natives are no more or less likely to telework than their elders. Similarly, when we take into account socio-economic characteristics and the teleworking environment, there is no difference between men and women in the desire to continue teleworking. On the other hand, having *young children* has a negative impact on the demand to telework. This result may be explained by the fact that many teleworking parents also had to take care of their children (home schooling), which prevented them from working well. More generally, those who said they had not been effective in their work during the lockdown were less likely to want to continue teleworking.

Location may be a determinant of telecommuting. Employees living in rural areas report more interest in working from home than those living in cities. For the former, telecommuting can reduce transportation costs and free up time.

The final determinants are related to computer equipment and Internet connections. The more computers in the home, the greater the demand for telecommuting. Confined employees who were well equipped (exclusive computer) had a better telecommuting experience than those who were forced to share their computer with other family members. The quality of the computer equipment is therefore crucial in making employees want to telework. In contrast, the quality of Internet access does not seem to have any effect on the demand for teleworking. Whether this quality is measured by the nature of the Internet connection (very high speed versus high speed) or by mobile coverage (4G), it does not significantly influence the desire to work from home. Probably, the current digital uses of teleworkers are not very bandwidth intensive and do not require very high speed networks. But the generalization of telework in companies could change the situation and constitute a real brake to the development of certain professional uses at home if the investments in infrastructures do not follow.

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In order to complete these results, it would be interesting to take into account the sector of activity of the company or its size (SME, large company). Marsouin will launch a survey at the end of 2020 among Breton companies and intends to question them on their telework practice before, during and after the confinement. This survey on the employer's side will bring a complementary vision, essential to understand the brakes and factors favorable to the development of telework. It will allow to know if this experience of confinement and this pandemic context is not for some companies an opportunity to rethink their work organization and to start or accelerate their digital transformation.

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Sidebar on the CAPUNI Crisis Survey

The CAPUNI Crisis survey was conducted on behalf of the Marsouin Scientific Interest Group. Supported by the Region of Brittany and the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion, "CAPUNI Crisis" surveyed by telephone a representative sample of the Breton population (1,500 individuals residing in Brittany, including 500 in isolated rural areas). The representativeness is ensured by the
Quota method based on age, gender, socio-professional category, unit size
urban residence and department.

A national survey was also conducted in parallel with 1,000 individuals according to the same criteria of representativeness.

The survey focused on digital equipment and usage before and during containment, as well as
on homeschooling and telecommuting.

For more information, https://www.marsouin.org/article1214.html.

The Marsouin Scientific Interest Group was created in 2002 on the initiative of the Regional Council of Brittany. It brings together research teams in the humanities and social sciences from the four Breton universities and three grandes écoles, i.e. 18 laboratories, working on digital uses and transformations.