Ongoing Telework[1]

Contents

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[1] From the preface of "Introducere in Telelucru" RBA Media, Bucaresti, 2010

INTRODUCTION

I am starting writing this preface at the half of July 2010, while waiting for two official news: on one hand that Facebook has reached over half a billion registered users, and on the other that Google has decided to launch Google Me: its new proposal in the field of social networks.

I have started to deal with Teleworking training the moment when the electronic post in one of the most prestigious Italian organisations was managed as follows: there was just one mail address for each Department, which could be accessed from a single computer in a locked room. The key was kept by the secretary of the manager of the department, who used to print the received emails every morning (it was mandatory to mention in the Object, the actual recipient of the e-mail) and distributed them by the internal mail cart.

Less than fifteen years have gone by.

Today, the subject of Telework training is just as modern: moreover, its modernity is even more obvious.

But what are today, the most modern aspects in the evolution of this phenomenon?

We will start with Telework in itself. First of all, it is necessary that we establish what the field of the phenomena that are defined by this term, is.

TELEWORK EVOLUTION

In the 90s, in Europe, we have witnessed a progressive expansion of the application field of this term: from the strict meaning of Telework at an dependent address, which was achieved by replacing the classical work of an employees at the office, to the broader meaning of the work carried out from a distance, even at variable intervals, by using IT technologies. It was for a good reason, that at that time, the General Management of IT and Media Companies of the European Union started using the term eWork: in order to underline how much the Telework concept has changed.

From the ten million eWorkers in Europe in 2000, many of them were teleworkers: home workers, employees and nomadic professionals, or managers who, at some point, duet o the choices they made, were working from different locations, other than their offices, and stayed in contact with the help of technologies.

The aspect change of this phenomenon lead to a population chance, as shown from the statistics published by Empirica and made by the Commission, which comprised important figures, and not the low ranked individuals from the work field.

In 2002, the European Framework Agreement on Telework is signed, narrowing the definition of Telework to that circumstances that were considered as needing protection: regarding professionalism and security in work dynamics.

The definition of Telework is thus narrowed to: *"Telework is 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 employers premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis",* leaving categories such as commercial or technical assistance staff outside, since due to specific needs, their work was carried out outside the company's office: the so called „on-site teleworkers", that is the individuals who work from one company's office for another company.

The narrowing down is obvious: it's enough to think that in 2002 there were 4,5 million teleworkers estimated based on the definition of the agreement in 2002, as compared to ten million European eWorkers in 2000.

The Agreement is widely used, even if in some contexts (outside the application area of this agreement: as mentioned between the syndicate representative and the representatives of the employers, especially in the private sector) broader definitions are kept: for example, in the Public Administration in Italy, the people who work from an office are also included in the Telework category (at least from the form point of view) if that office differs from the **office** they belong to.

Aside from the protection requirements and the importance of European Agreements, is this more restrictive definition the right one to comprise the current trends of the phenomenon, or is Telework in its strict sense, better understood in the broader frame of work from a distance, through the use of IT technologies?

I remain convinced by this second hypothesis, believing that it is more correct to talk about Teleworks, rather than Telework, and call „Classical Telework" the one set by the Agreement in 2002.

Of course, the impact on everyday life, on the specific tutelary requirements, on the pecuniary subject of finding a balance between professional and family life, are more obvious in the specific population of teleworkers employed at home; but the novelties, even that regarding the impact on the professional life are more and more present. We can give an example: in the IT sector, as means of service provision, the so called laboratories.

Some people go to an office in a certain town and work for clients that are located in other towns.

Do they still go to the office and nothing is changed?

Really nothing: this work modality presents them with both a strong advantage and disadvantage.

They are less subjected to transfer pressure, they are more subjected to the competition from workers from other locations: in other towns, countries, or on other continents.

India has opened important locations in this field, and it is not the only one: if we participate to a convention in an European town, it is normal to hear people from international companies, say that the development labs, rather than the Back Office of their companies have been centralized in Hong Kong or Vietnam.

An here, we go back to the key subject: training.

Training in the broadest sense: referring not only to time (long life learning) but also to the level of knowledge:

- To the updating of skills and knowledge

- To the sharing of distinctive behaviours

- To the orientation towards organisational values

The training which, through the nature of the recipients themselves, can only be in the form of e-Learning, and I would add, e-Learning with a careful assistance (....)
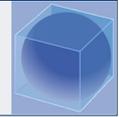
CHANGES OF E-LEARNING

Big changes have been made and are still being made in e-Learning.

Though still new, the e-Learning world has gone through fundamental changes. Up to five-six years ago, the cost of solutions was nearing that of project implementation for companies needed in order to train a large number of people: typical case, in banks, training for new counter procedures.

Thus, it was hard to start a self-financed process for the deployment of solutions aiming, for example at teleworkers' training.

Today, platforms are available which allow the reduction of the solution realisation cost: increasing, in a way which has not yet been fully explores the application areas.

> Interesting *by-products*, such as the facilitation of linguistic localisations, as well as a wide series of indexes and indicators for the process and results of the training, are also available.

In the field of e-Learning, the recent years have shown a high vivaciousness of the Open Source community, which has produced a large number of training tools and at the same time a steady evolution of technologies. Today, some of the best Open Source platforms in the e-Learning field, rival the most famous commercial platforms.

Regarding accessibility and compatibility; these platforms automatically implement a series of high level functions, and navigation support, which can be personalized in the smallest details: the style can usually be completely changed, thus almost fully personalising the aspect of the platform.

Regarding activity supervision, they offer a large variety of already predefined reports, ready to use: for each user category and associated activities in the management of training within a certain organisation.

A large percentage of these reports often have different research criteria, which in fact increase their functionalities.

The main report instruments available for platforms (and integrated with the General Reporting function of the project) are usually:

- User progress report: underlines the progress of the user for all courses he or she has been registered. Offers an indication of the progress throughout the training process.

- Progress report within the course: underlines the progress percentages and the period of time needed for a single course.
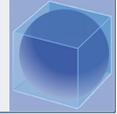
- Detailed report regarding the benefit: indicated the benefit detail for a single course, underlining the time assigned for each didactical unit the course includes.

- Testing report: shows the results of the evaluation tests

- Statistical report: for a single course, shows the average time allotted by the user for each didactical unit.

- Satisfaction Questionnaire report: shows the rests of the satisfaction questionnaires filled in by the users.

Moreover, it is usually possible to create personalized reports in terms of data aggregation and graphic layout, depending on specific requirements: in order to better supervise individual performances and the performance of the whole organisation.

The existence of some Open Source platforms, allows the creation of real Learning Content Management Systems, which include the creation function of the courses and the construction function of the contents: thus becoming a solid and valuable support for the distribution of knowledge.

In order to understand the spread of the Open Source Platforms which adhere to e-Learning standards, we'll take Moodle as an example.

Wikipedia, at address http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moodle, tells us that Moodle:

- Has over 32,000,000 users or developers registered on the official site.

- Has about 47,000 registered sites, here we should note that registration is not mandatory

- Is present in 209 countries

- Is translated in 75 languages

- Can be accessed through any browser

- Is available on the biggest operating systems
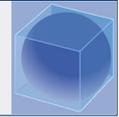
E-LEARNING AND THE TRAINING OF TELEWORK WORKERS

Why did I expend the discussion on e-Learning platforms? Why is training the crossing point for a distribution of telework forms that should not reduce the effective protection (and not only normative) of the workers, developing their ability to produce added value through their activities.

In fact, we are debunking a still existent paradigm: the teleworker is not far.

The teleworker, be it an employee, consultant, manager, professional or investor, no matter if he or she works from a lab or during a trip, or from home, is not far away.

The teleworker is at his work place.

The company or the client is perhaps far from him.

The problem is to prevent this distance from leading to a loss of added value, be it real or perceived both on the side the worker and on that of the beneficiary of this work.

And this brings us to training (....): e-Learning (closely assisted) and Community, a subject that deserves an ulterior specific examination.

It brings us back, because the training is very well evidenced from the very beginning, as it in underlined among other, in the excerpt from the 2002[2] Agreement and it has reoccurred in different experiences[3]:

For a deeper approach of the theme I refer you to the text in the book: before drawing the conclusion of this preface, I would like to make a short summary of the major points of Telework, which is, in our time, still under transformation.

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[2] *"Teleworkers have the same access to training and career development opportunities as comparable workers at the employer's premises and are subject to the same appraisal policies as these other workers.*

Teleworkers receive appropriate training targeted at the technical equipment at their disposal and at the characteristics of this form of work organisation. The teleworker's supervisor and his/her direct colleagues may also need training for this form of work and its management."

[3] The documentation is quite vast. Among the different experiences, depending on the volume of the available documentation, I would like to mention the experience in the Toscan region: in Italian you can find it under http://ius.regione.toscana.it/organizzazione/telelavoro/htm/progetto/index.htm. In English, on the Internet, you can find an excerpt from the article "Telework – assessment of trials": under http://www.studioberti.it/attachments/029_ework2.pdf
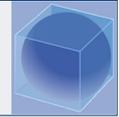
THE CURRENT STAGE OF CLASSICAL TELEWORK

The most updated publication on teleworks seems to be „*Telework in the European Union*" published in March 2010 by the *"European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions"*. It is a publication which deals with this subject while making a clear reference to the 2002[4] Agreement, thus focussing on classical Telework, and offering among others:

- statistics, updated for 2005 on the widespread;

- synthesis of the choices of public powers in various countries, regarding Telework.

I have already talked about training, making a reference to the 2002 Agreement.

There is one aspect that I found relevant regarding the exigency of training: the teleworkers, even the classical ones, are, on the date the statistics are published, the weak or the strong points of the labour marker?

We start with the ip, we take the data from the quoted publication and present them as histograms, in order to make things as clear as possible:
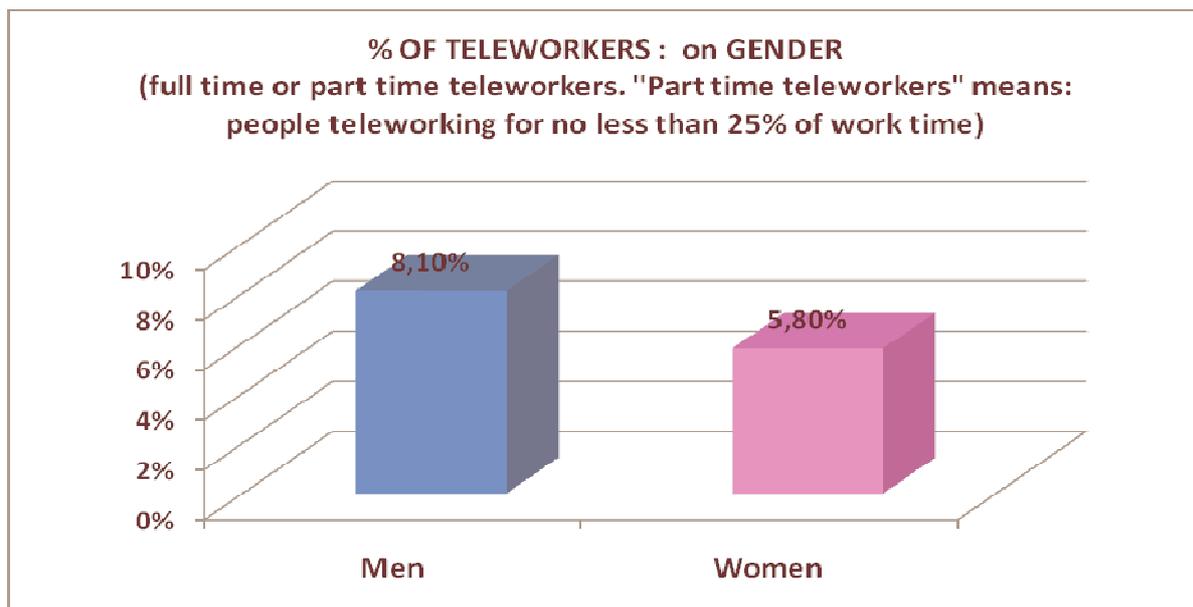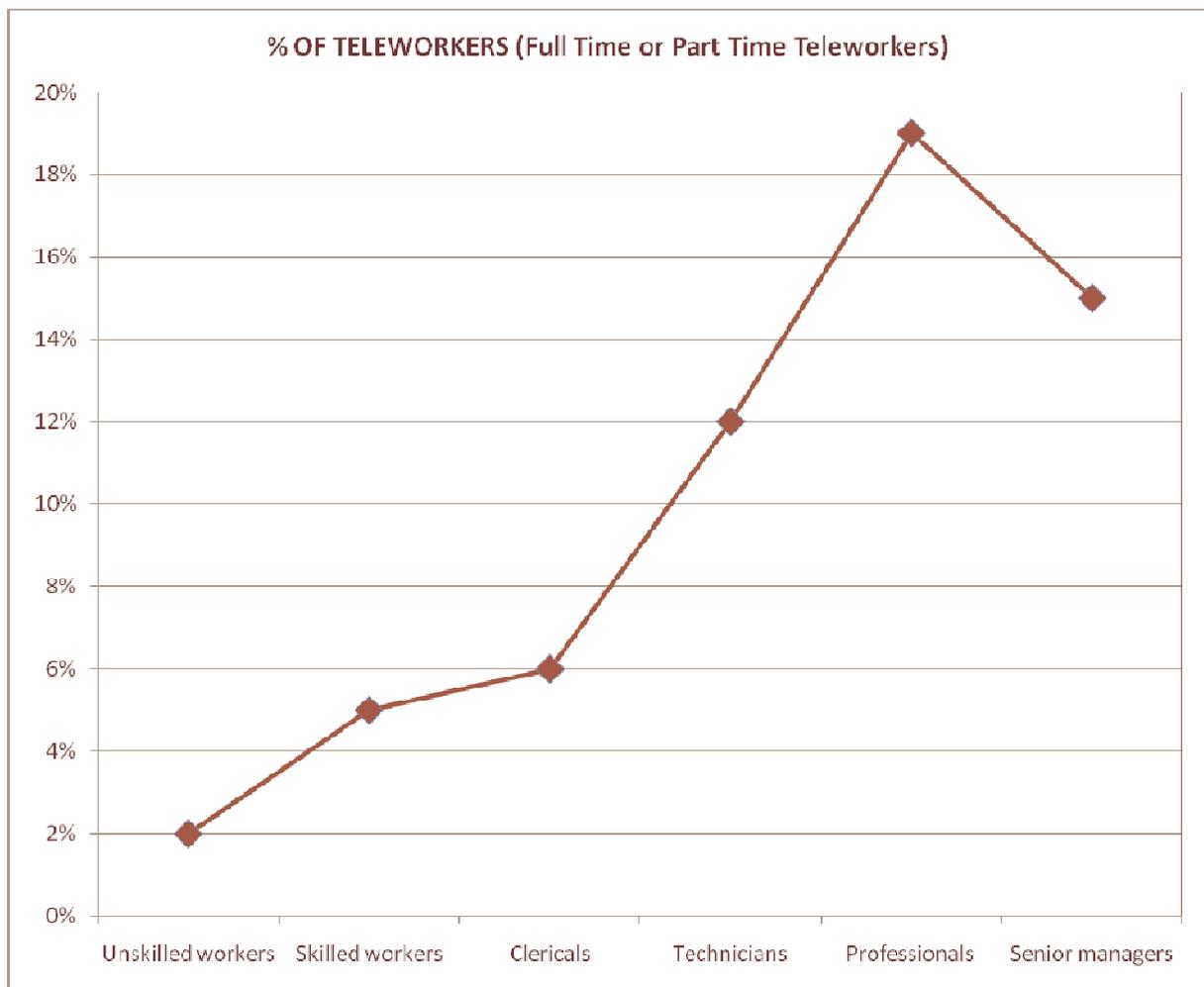

Let us go to professional levels.

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[4] As correctly mentioned in the beginning of this document: *"This report examines the phenomenon of telework in the EU – particularly in the context of the European Framework Agreement on Telework, which was signed by the peak social partners in July 2002"* , it is confirmed later in the same document *"The European Framework Agreement covers employed workers only. While the percentage of people doing telework among those who are self-employed is relatively high in most Member States, this report follows the general, and more limited, definition of the agreement – thus, addressing the issue of employed teleworkers only."*
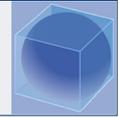
Even more significant is the chart that can be drawn with the data from a series of professional categories, ordering them in an ascending manner:

The percentage of teleworkers, even part-time (at least 1/4 of the time): on specialisation level

% OF TELEWORKERS (Full Time or Part Time Teleworkers)

The connection between the professional level and the percentage of teleworkers is obvious: there is just one saturation on the level Senior Manager, which can be attributed to the weight of the relational interpersonal component in this type of activity.

But let us return to the report between the choices of public powers and telework distribution. I have brought these two data classes together, in an objective non-homogenous way, in terms of measurement criteria, in the table below. The result seems an interesting one, even if we consider the matching if classical data with completely non-homogenous measurement criteria:
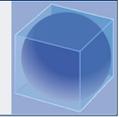
	Soft law mechanism		Collective agreement		National legislation	
	Guidance	Voluntary agreement	Collective agreement	Legislation extension of collective agreement	Social partner consultation	Legislation without social partner consultation
15%	LV, NL	FI	DK	BE	CZ	
10%	SE UK		AT EL, ES, DE	PL FR	SK	SI
5%	IE		LU IT		HU	PT

Can you see a positive link between the regulation level and the distribution degree?

I for one cannot: on contrary, with the creditable exception of the Czech Republic on one hand and the situation in Ireland on the other, I can actually read the contrary.

And anyway, 15.2% of teleworkers in Czech Republic, be they part-time in 2005 (9% full time) is really many?

Here's what we can read on the govloop.com blog (Social Network for Government) posted on 29th June by John Sanger:

> "The President has said he wants 50% of the federal workforce to telework, which if done strategically, could mean a significant reduction in federal space requirements. Less commutes, less heating, cooling and lighting will advance the Green values of today while saving a lot of money and potentially expanding and improving services to the public. It will also create jobs as the remaining spaces are redesigned to reflect the new work arrangements"

> We've been saying the second part in Europe for a long time as well. I don't remember the first one that of asking 50% of state / federal workforce to telework as being one of the suggestions of any elected politician.

The truth is: there have always been two visions of telework.

- One centred on classical Telework, which among others things has always regarded the training of teleworkers as a specific theme.

- One, presented for example in the project Telework and Local Development of the Napoli Town Hall, adopted by Leonardo TES project as well, which has always considered telework as a more advanced form of work flexibility, which focuses on a broader framework of training the workforce: developing a culture of a good, distinct flexibility and guaranteeing an ongoing training, thus strengthening social connections. It is inevitable that those working in telework be able to find under the condition of a smaller perceived report to the work context it refers to: it is inevitable that this risk be assumed, thus increasing the sense of belonging to a more complex professional community, or at least, a more transversal one.

No matter which vision, we must stress the role of the good practices in telework: from the more ample organisation of the work to the more specific forms of communication with the co-workers, clients/suppliers, partners or employer.

To avoid digression we will take into consideration the theme of the two extremes: in general, from above, specific and from below.

Regarding the general procedures, it is recommended that we refer to the quoted report "Telework in the European Union".

The first confirmed point if the voluntarism of Telework, which presumes that Telework cannot be seen neither as a right, nor as a duty, but it must be introduced as a reciprocal agreement.

> The European framework regarding telework insures that both the employee and the employer can at any time cease the telework without prejudicing the work relationships or the work conditions.
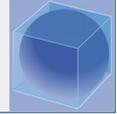
All member states seem to insure the voluntary character of telework with certain specifications. For example, in the Italian public sector, it is stipulated that both the institution and the individual can voluntary activate telework, while the workers with other abilities than those who need to stay at home to care for relatives, towards that who live far away from their place of employment. Lately there have been talks about a series of very specific situations such as those involving health problems, among which the cases of cancer patients.

The second confirmed point of **treatment equality** of the teleworker and other workers.

This concept is materialized in different ways in the different member states: in some cases there are specific fields mentioned, or in general, rules are applied for all workers.

In Holland, for example, this is achieved through a general protection against any form of discrimination.

The third point underlined is access **to information.**

The European framework foresees on one hand that the Teleworker has the same rights regarding training and career development as the other workers he/she can be compared to; on the other hand it also foresees that specific training requirements may apply for teleworkers regarding their work and the risk of isolation.

Some countries insure certain specific training services for teleworkers: and in this field we have the largest space and highest exigency in this field, which is even more efficient since you can benefit from it in the simplest manner, through the Internet, even more so, when it is properly assisted.

The forth point, which seems to be a more delicate one, as it resulted from the experiments in the 90s, ist that connected to the **work and working time management.**

The European framework on one side sets the general application of regulation regarding telework time, and on the other side it underlines that '*the teleworker manages the organisation of his/her working time'.*

This sets important advantages for teleworkers, towards other workers, in some countries (Czech Republic, the first in this category in 2005) partially compensated by the prohibition to recognise additional working hours for people in Telework.

The fifth point, more recently confirmed is **work safety.**

The framework agreement foresees that the employer is responsible for the „health and work safety" for telework positions.

This cannot be easily solved in all details of all national legislation, which in some countries set different safety rules which are actually not compatible for both working places and homes.

These are some details that can easily be overcome, since the problem of accident prevention remains, but in some cases I have participated to long discussions in which the safety issue seemed to stall (and not just in relation to regulation costs, which in fact are minimal), the spreading of Telework: as if it had already been proved that it is more dangerous to stay at home and work, than be in traffic, either by car or by motorbike, driving to the place of employment.

The sixth confirmed point if that of **intimacy** and **data protection.**

Teleworker confidentiality is an important issue when the teleworker works from home. The agreement stipulates that the employer respects the teleworker's intimacy and this is why, for example he cannot enter the working space in the employee's home without proper notification and the teleworker's approval. Any form of supervision system can only be introduced after an approval from the syndicate, as required by the Council Directive 90/270 from May 1990.

Regarding data protection, it is the employer's duty to take opportune measures and inform the teleworker about all regulations in the field: in practice this poses no problem for electronic documents, while it can pose problems for documents on paper.

Regarding the interferences between the teleworker's right to intimacy and the employer's right to check the services provided to him, there are national solutions which differ in details, but have a common priority line to protect the employee's home and validity of service verification, as long as these are not used for another purpose than that mentioned.

These general confirmed themes: as operative solutions, due to their connection with the specifics of the context or the country, I consider that the validity of the solutions spplied in the quoted experience of the Tuscan region, are confirmed; in this environment, when we talk about classical telework, that is that telework as classical employee and typically at home; which of particular interest for the European Framework Agreement from 2002.

Then there is the aspect of specific indications.

From this point of view, I really like the American site GoovLoop (www.govloop.com), which presents[5] the first 5 top positions for the teleworker:

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[5] Address http://www.govloop.com/profiles/blogs/top-5-tips-on-teleworking
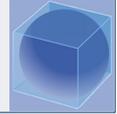
1. *Provide updates – nobody knows what you are up to so you need to provide updates to the boss. Whether asked or not, sending a weekly update on what you are working on and have done is great.*

2. *Answer the phone – If someone calls while you are teleworking and you don't pick up, they get upset and think you are lazy . …*

3. *Use all formats – Some people are phone people, some email…and some face-to-face. ….*

4. *Don't let people know….that you are on the patio, that it is a beautiful day, that the dog just had a great walk, that you went kayaking at lunch…*

5. *Make the best use of your time in the office –You should periodically go into the office. Think of this time as face-to-face time, build relationships, and more. …. .[6]*

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[6] You can find fast and practical information, at: http://ezinearticles.com/?Fourteen-Tips-For-Telecommuting&id=3714875
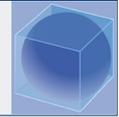
The future of telework: beyond the fear of change

When telework does not spread the way it should, this happens because of the belief that it is always better to work in a company where you can socialize and have direct relationships with the co-workers and employers. This fact is quite relevant for classical telework, but it is also valid for the teleworks that fall into the e-Work category.

The explanatory answer (you are made to develop your own social networks in your work, as if you weren't involved in telework) is always weak and does not allow the dismissal of the deep fears so well expressed in Altan's speech, an extraordinary Italian satirical author[7], published 15 years ago:

"Telework is very comfortable.

You're working from home,

And no one can tell when you're being fired"[8]

But is your fear generally justified?

Is there really a balance between the spread of Telework and the spread of precariousness?

I don't think so.

Let us look over these two recent pieces of information coming from the same country:

- Corriere della Sera, one of the major Italian newspapers, wrote on 18th January 2009: "Telework, Italy ranks last", comparing the data from 2007, 3.2% from Italy, related to other important European countries: *„it is sufficient to think that in Finland, Holland and Switzerland, more than one out of four employees works in telework (27,6%), in Great Britain, Germany and Denmark about one person out of five (17,8%), while in the Mediterranean countries (France, Spain and Italy) the average rate in 2007 was of 4,5%"*

- On the other hand, after a year and a half (21st July 2007) , Repubblica, another important Italian newspaper, stated that only 6% of the faculty graduates is hired with an employment contract for an undetermined period of time, writing *„ The end of permanent employment. Only 6% of new graduates"*

The same day this second article appeared, I looked for employment offers and requests on two Social Networking sites: the absolutely largest (Facebook) and the widest spread, at

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[7] http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Tullio_Altan

[8] Era una vignetta, ma la sostanza non e' mi sembra diversa dall'aneddoto che Priscilla A. Arling riporta nella prefazione di *"The impact of Telework on Performance: A Social Network Approach"* , che racconta: *"... Cynthia also encountered psychological and social stressors; (....) and missing the camaraderie of other co-located employees, she eventually left the company."* E che prosegue con: *"Unfortunately Cynthia's teleworking experience is not unusual... "*
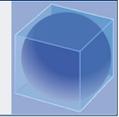
least in Italy, in case of Social Network Professional, with a high number of users that recently exceeded one million people, (LinkedIn)[9].

Look at the table below: the numbers are absolute from all points of view, as searches within the pages of a single website. But the most interesting thing is that on Linkedin, the number of "offer" pages exceeds the number of "request" pages, reaching a value I find really extraordinary: over two hundred and fifty thousand[10].

Site	Search key	Number of pages (Google search, 21 Luglio 2010)
Facebook.com	Work search OR searches	182.000
Facebook.com	Work offer OR offers	77.000
LinkedIn.com	Work search OR searches	213.000
LinkedIn.com	Work offer OR offers	269.000

So, with all due respect for the saving of socialising networks of teleworkers, regarding their usual work context, is there where the change takes place?

I think not: seeing telework as a slightly different work method makes us forget that traditional work is already „slightly different".

Normality is found in the network.

It already represents it for the relational life, for training, for work[11], starting from head hunting[12].

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[9] In order to get an image about the importance of social networks, we would like to present this data: in July 2010, searching „Social Network" in Google we found 56.900.000 results: in comparison, searching in "Republic of Italy", we found 4.180.000. In order to exceed "Social Network" as page number, the „Social Network" search must look for „ European Union" which archived 94.000.000 results.

[10] As you know: x pages including work and offer don't means x pages of work offer, But this is a general rule.
Moreover, I don't mean to say that all the offers you may find on the Internet are serious and interesting. By why doesn't his happen outside the networks?

[11] A confirmation comes from the quoted report "Telework in the European Union", which, on page 4 writes: *"the Austrian correspondent notes that since telework has become **such a natural part of the***
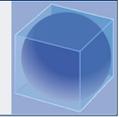
Today's news is the level of the concrete possibilities to develop professional communities and their relationship with teleworking[13]: not only regarding the simple continuation of managing what has already been managed, but also regarding the change of the paradigm.

I am talking here about the real possibility to obtain actual results, on a large scale: since in methodological terms, the issue has been known for a long time [14], and there have been interesting developments, not only in theory (such as P. Arling's study)[15] as well as in practice, such as the ETAF portal ETF[16]

The field is vast, and at the same time largely unexploited, and I think it is difficult to begin an operational stage in order to *„obtain sustainable social-economic results on an unique market of the fast and super-fast Internet and on inter-operational applications, guaranteeing everybody's broad – band access by 2013 and the access with a superior Internet speed (30 Mbp ore more) by 2020, insuring at the same time, that at least 50% of European families will subscribe to Internet connections over 100 MbP"[17]*

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work routine, research interest in the topic has declined and the national statistic office in Austria subsequently cancelled data collection on these issues in 2003"

[12] Remaining in Italy, I quote this phrase from the Career News (www.careernews.it) *"If you think you can manage just by reading the offers published in newspapers, displaying only that information from employment centers, sending your CV by post or e-mail, entering your profile in the „Work with us" section of companies' sites, you are making a huge mistake.* **An efficient, successful search for a place of employment** *is also possible (and will be more and more popular) on the* **new channels.** *Let us try and get to know some of them.*

 Social network, blog e-community …."

[13] Even if at present the association of the two terms does not have the spread it deserved : searching *telework OR telework "social network"* will only yield (!) 19.100 results.

[14] One of the most quoted articles in this field (At least on Google 1024 quotes were found) is from 1996: this is *"Computer networks as social network : Collaborative Work, Telework, and Virtual Community"* by Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia ed Haythornthwaite

[15] http://misrc.umn.edu/jobmarket/PriscillaArling/Arling_Impact_of_Telework.pdf

[16] http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf?Open

[17] The quoted phrase is taken from the document "E U R O P A 2 0 2 0 – a strategy for intelligent, sustainable and ample increase" of the European Commission

CONCLUSIONS

During the last month, I've had the change to ask two different people the following question: „The companies that talk to us about the importance of their business being presented on Social Network allow their employees to access these networks?" in both cases I have received answers I find embarrassing.

In fact, at present, there is a clear tendency to differentiate the report: between the „generalist" Social Network (Facebook type) and the so-called "Professional Social Network" or PSN (LinkedIn type): but in fact this seems to be the remake of film, that of the electronic mail 15 years ago, I mentioned as an example at the beginning.

Fifteen years may seem an eternity in this field: on the other hand, the great technological innovations in the field of IT and communication (the great innovations: not that which happen every day, but that which gives them a common sense) prove their authority at individual intervals of 10 to 15 years (the computer in the 60s, the DB/DC in the 70s, the Personal Computer in the middle 80s, e-Business in the second half of the 90s).

We are at the beginning of a wide expansion of the transformations brought on by the Social Network, which will take some time to leave the Social Network Professional and the representative nucleus of the specific professional communities: such as the Community build around TES (www.leonardotes.org) and developed by T&T (http://www.ctanm.pub.ro/t%26t/index_it.php)which represents a sure interest for those who want to be up to date with the Telework dynamics in all its elements.

We are, in fact, right on the wave of the European eWork logic:

- The 90s revolution seems to have happened yesterday

- How will it develop tomorrow in the context of 2020 Europe

- How it was standardized for our time within the Lisbon strategy *"The idea of eWork is closely linked to the development of the knowledge society in Europe. The Lisbon Strategy highlighted the importance of creating "more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". Not just "more jobs", but also "better jobs" a good working environment, a better reconciliation of work and personal life, health and safety at work, employee involvement, and diversity in working life. The knowledge society opens new perspectives for the quality of work: creating the conditions for change in existing jobs, generating new working methods and new ways of organising work, and allowing greater flexibility in the workplace."*

(....)

Stefano Berti