
Work at Home as Challenge: Mission (Im)possible?

Darbs no mājām kā izaicinājums: vai (ne)iespējamā misija?

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The article presents the situation and perspectives of remote working in today's labour market. The embeddedness of a remote work phenomenon is analysed by assessing compatibility of generations participating in the market, revealing generational characteristics and influence of new technologies. The author presents the concept definitions of remote work and legal foundations of this type of work. The title provokes a scientific discussion about the balance of work and personal life, work and career, and gives the scientific perspective on pros and cons of remote work based on multiple research data. The article ends with a discussion which reveals the facets of remote work (mission possible) in the context of Covid-19 pandemic.

Key words: remote work, legal foundations of remote work, compatibility of generations in labour market.

Introduction

A global employee survey conducted in 2018 (surveyed 3,000 employees) found that people who work remotely just once a month are 24 percent happier than those who always work in the workplace. As many as 52% of those surveyed say they work remotely at least once a week. Interestingly, the main reason for such work is the ability of employees to concentrate and work more productively. In a study conducted a year earlier, employees identified an opportunity to improve work-life balance. Another similar study by FlexJob shows that 65% of employees think they would be more productive if they worked from home rather than in the office. More than half of the world's employers offer the opportunity to work remotely, according to a global telework survey by technology company OWL Labs. Some companies are determined not only to allow employees to work remotely, but also to choose when and how much they want to work. A results-oriented environment is said to help employers not only reduce employee turnover and attract talent, but also enjoy greater productivity (Jankaitytė, 2018).

Working from home is considered to be one of the most common forms of work among young people and those planning their time. However, there are already studies that claim that older people are also successfully using their work experience remotely. In addition, working from home can be both a permanent and an additional job, which opens up all possibilities for financial freedom and independence from the employer when creating your business space or working on projects (see Darbas namuose: papildomas darbas į finansinę laisvę – išsamus gidas, 2020).

According to the International Data Corporation (IDC), the number of U.S. mobile workers is expected to increase from 96.2 to 105.4 million between 2015 and 2020. IDC also predicts that by the end of the forecast period, mobile workers will account for nearly three-quarters (72.3 percent) of the total U.S. workforce (Microsoft 365 Team, 2019).

There are opinions that teleworking also has negative trends. Over time, teamwork weakens, company goals “move away,” and employees sometimes find it difficult to separate working / non-working time, i.e., some work remotely, longer. All is well if the company focuses only on the employee’s performance and does not capture the actual number of employee hours worked, but if the company wants to record hours worked as well, it can be difficult to do so. In principle, this trend of teleworking may increase another trend - the popularity of the form of project work, where employees are hired for a specific project rather than full-time work (Karavaitienė, 2020).

These are just a few thoughts from research published online. What situation motivates researchers to analyze the phenomenon of work at home and understand the perspective of its spread. What influences the development of telework strategies: technology, the problem of the labor market in a demographic context, intergenerational compatibility in the labor market, the global economy?

This article is based on a report presented at the European Commission’s organization *European Centre for Workers’ Questions* (EZA) organized conference at Latvian Christian Academy in May 2019 “Fairness: Development of New forms of work, self-employment and social protection in EU countries. Future of Work: Changes in Labour Relations”. Today – in 2020 – the situation is different. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, new studies have already emerged to assess the significance of telework. Many of us have “naturally” become teleworkers.

However, the purpose of this article is to answer the question raised in the title, and it is necessary to start from methodological approaches to this phenomenon. First of all, we will find out the concept and concept of the phenomenon of telework, the legal aspects and the strategies that can be developed today for this form of work.

Terminology and ensuring the basic functions of remote work in Law (Lithuanian Labour Code)

On 16 July 2002, the European social partners ETUC (and the liaison committee Eurocadres-CEC), UNICE, UEAPME and CEEP signed a framework agreement on telework. This agreement was innovative in many regards, and opened up new perspectives for the European social dialogue as practiced for the previous twenty years (Employers’ Resource Center, 2006).

Despite the significance of telework, there is no single definition in the scientific literature to describe it. The lack of a common definition poses a number of difficulties in the assessment of nature of the phenomenon and the comparison of research results across countries.

There is no single concept of telework (remote work) in Lithuania. To define work done remotely from the organization's office the concepts of remote work, e-work, flexible work and work at home are used which have similar meaning.

According to the empirical research data (2015), the largest part of the Lithuanian population spends the whole day at the workplace, which is not at home (office, company, client house, etc.) According to the survey data 85.5% of all respondents work in this way, and this number haven't changed significantly if compared with 2013 and 2014. According to surveys, there was little change. Another group of employees combine remote work and work in a particular workplace (which is not at home). As data of 2015 show, 12.5% of the respondents combine teleworking and workplace work, yet the majority of them (9.3% of respondents) spend most of the working day at work outside of home. There are very few in Lithuania who do all the work at home or in any other convenient location. Research data shows that only 2% of respondents worked that way in 2015 (Nakrošienė & Butkevičienė, 2016, 367-368).

The official definition of "telework" is given in Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (Julsrud, 1996). Teleworking refers to the flexibility of the workplace, whereby the employee performs the activities permitted by the employer from the approved workplace, except for the place where the employee otherwise worked (Aronen, 2017). For remote work, employees typically use mobile telecommunication technologies, such as laptops or tablet PC's with Wi-Fi and smartphones to work from cafes, others can use a desktop computer and a landline phone at home. Remote work specifically refers to the work done in an area that reduces travel time. These locations can be at home or in another workplace that is facilitated by broadband, computer or telephone lines, or other electronic means used to communicate. The authors A. Nakrošienė & E. Butkevičienė (2016, 365) introduced wide scale which shows the content of work in distance (remote work): *telework*, *teleworking* (Martino, 1979; Giuliano, 1981; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Wilson & Greenhill, 2005; Madsen, 2011); *home-based work*, *working from home*, *home-based telework*, *homeworking* (Ramsower, 1985; Shin *et al.*, 2000; Ammons & Markham, 2004; Redman *et al.*, 2009); *remote work*, *telecommuting* (Nilles, 1997; Siha & Monroe, 2006); *virtual office*; *virtual work* (Martino, 1979; Giuliano, 1981); *e-work* (Gareis, Hüsing & Mentrup, 2004); *flexiplace*; *flexible work* (O'Brien & Hayden, 2008). It confirms the slogan which was designed in 1995: "Work is something you do, not something you are traveling to".

Remote Work in Article 115 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania is defined as follows: "The employee will perform a work function or a part of the work function agreed in the contract in places other than the place of work which are acceptable to the employee" (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, 2010). Earlier version of Labour Code of Lithuania valid before 2017 July 1 provided that in cases where the employee is working outside the workplace, the employee and the employer should form a separate type of contract, (teleworking contract). The telework (remote work) contract was enshrined in the previous Labour code as one of the types of employment contract. Meanwhile, remote work contract is removed as a separate type of employment contract in the new Labour Code of Lithuania (article 52). Now remote work is regulated as a way of performing a job function, but not as a separate type of employment contract. This new regulation of remote work means that when any type of employment contract (fixed-term, open-ended, project-based, multi-employer, etc.) is concluded, it is possible for the employee and the employer to carry out the work contract remotely. Definition of

remote work (*see* Labor Code of the Republic of Lithuania, article 52). Telework is a form of work organization or way of performing work where the employee regularly performs all or part of the work functions assigned to him on a regular basis at a distance agreed with the employer, that is, at a place other than the workplace, also using information technology (teleworking).

Some organizations are telecommuting to improve employee's quality of life because remote work usually reduces travel time and time, hindered by traffic in traffic jams. Likewise, teleworking can make it easier for employees to reconcile their responsibilities with family such as caring for children or elderly parents. Some organizations work remotely for environmental reasons, because remote work can reduce traffic jams and air pollution, as well as reduce the number of cars on the roads (Borisevičiūtė, 2012).

Types of remote work

The type of telework depends on where the contract provides for the place of work and working hours. It can be singled out: the work is performed in the place provided by the employee mobile working place, flexible work, job at home, another place of work, remote work – full-time, remote work – part-time work, flexible work schedule (Norkūnienė & Romerytė-Šereikienė, 2018, 84).

This makes it possible to emphasize 4 aspects of remote work: a workplace that can be located anywhere out of centralized organizational workplace; use of ICT (information and communication technologies) as technical assistance for remote work; time allocation, specifying the work time instead of the one at traditional workplace; a variety of employer-employee relationships, ranging from an employment contract to a traditional job as full staff. (Julsrud, 1996).

If we want to understand perspectives of remote work, we have to evaluate advantages and disadvantages of remote work.

Advantages and disadvantages of remote work

The authors A. Nakrošienė & E. Butkevičienė (2016, 367), having analyzed the theoretical and practical insights offered by many scientists, presented the advantages and disadvantages of the nature of telework for employees, which can be used to model future telework development strategies.

Advantages: freedom of time Planning (Harpaz, 2002); increased autonomy and efficiency of an employee (Hill *et al.*, 2003); reduced travel costs and time savings (Morgan, 2004); possibility to combine work and personal life (Ammons & Markham, 2004); greater job satisfaction, reduced work-related stress (Salaff, 2002); ability to reduce communication with colleagues (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000); possibility to organize uninterrupted work; access to qualified staff from other regions; ability to retain experienced staff (Vaičiulis, 2013).

Disadvantages (challenges): longer working hours (Madsen, 2011); limited career opportunities (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000); lower visibility, contacts (Khaifa & Davidson, 2000); no separation between work and personal life zones (Redman *et al.*, 2009); limited opportunities of professional development (Salaff, 2002); unsatisfied communication needs (Wilson & Greenhill, 2005); control and maintenance difficulties; problems of safety at work; data protection and confidentiality (Vaičiulis, 2013).

In comparative context we have to understand intercultural definition of remote work, because of no single definition of this phenomenon. Advances in information technology, especially the rapid development of the Internet since 1990, the ability to use the same electronic documents at home and in offices has reduced the need for the employee to be physically present in the organization. There are favourable conditions for remote work that is carried out in an environment away from the organization's office, usually at home (Nilles, 1997; Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

Around 20-30 million employees worldwide work remotely at least one day a week, while 44 million people – at least once a year (Telework Research Network, 2010; *see also* McKinsey Global Institute, 2016). In the context of the global labour market, these numbers are not significant, but they indicate a new form of work that is influenced by the development of information communication technologies and the international context of remote work as well.

The author of this article has looked at Lithuanian internet platform and found 8 (eight) most popular works that you can do while traveling or from home in Lithuania or in any world country social network maintenance, programming, design, blogging, translation services, customer service, teaching English, editing/montage of video films.

Mostly young people with good IT skills and proficiency in foreign languages are able to perform these tasks.

Is it possible to have balance in labour market between generations? Is it enough space to all ages in the space of remote work?

The changing nature of work and a dialogue among generations

Someone once said that the only real thing in life is death and taxes.

We can now add two more real things and they are an aging workforce and increasingly multigenerational workforce. The aging and multigenerational workforce became an important issue for individuals, organizations and societies (Hedge & Borman, 2013).

Why will age diversity in society increase?

First, there is an increase in the legally mandated retirement age or its total abandonment

Second, organizations are recruiting and hiring both older and younger to address worker shortages.

Third, many countries have reduced years of required educational schooling before one can enter the workforce, so there is now an increase of younger workers seeking employment.

Conventionally, workforce and societal aging is often thought as “bad news”. People tend to assume that young people are more productive, energetic and flexible... the older are slower, feebler and more dependent. Age diversity can potentially have positive as well as negative effects. Stereotypes about older workers influence others' behavior towards them. Ageism may be the most tolerated form of discrimination.

The nature of employment and work has changed over the past 50 years as well (Burke & Ng, 2006). Workers have a much healthier environment, new technologies which made work more creative and interesting. But work intensification and competition

levels have also increased for some reasons. Scientists mentioned 4 main issues: decision making, an adjustment process, a career development stage, and human resource management. Each generation (veterans, baby boomers and X, Y, Z) has different values, beliefs, expectations, learning styles and preferences.

The current generation entering the workforce is referred to mostly as Generation Y or as the Millennials (Ng & Gossett, 2013, 338). The used terms and specific age groups range between different countries, but they have similar characteristics. According to PwC’s report (Millennials at work: Reshaping the workforce, 2011, 3), already by 2020 the millennials will form 50% of the global workforce. By 2025, 75% of the global workforce will be comprised of millennials (Twaronite, 2015).

Y generation – born between 1980 and 2002; 1982-2000; 1980 and 1993 (optimistic, confident interested in value of civic responsibilities, lack experience, low level of interpersonal skills, need supervision.

This generation of workers has been characterized as lacking in cultural, political, and spiritual centeredness (Faye, 2001). M. Aronen (2017) presents Y (millennials) generation characteristics which based on insights of Beekman (2011), Cahill & Sedrak (2012) and of Hobart & Sendek (2014). According to M. Aronen (2017), the used terms and specific age groups range between different countries, but they have similar characteristics.

Table 1

Y (millennials) generation characteristics

| I am... | I can provide... | I demand... |
|--|--|--|
| - self confident | - collaboration skills | - active lifestyle |
| - hard working | - technological skills | - work-life balance = personal needs and interests |
| - open minded towards different backgrounds | - understanding of global marketplace and connections abroad | - feedback |
| - ambitious and eager to tackle new challenges | - knowledge of marketing and customer service | - meaningful work = making an impact |
| - multitasker | - effective skills in research | |
| -optimistic and explorer | - problem solving skills | |

[Source: M. Aronen (2017, 15)]

Research in Finland

The author of the article became interested in the results of the bachelor’s thesis conducted by a young researcher M. Aronen from JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland). One of the focus groups in her study was constituted by her peers, Generation Y. The young researcher wanted to especially examine the views of the upcoming majority of the working generation with the hope of understanding present students’ views on remote working. She had the following questions in mind. What are their beliefs towards remote working, as they do not have experience of it? To what direction do millennials hope that the future of work will go in terms of the working environment? Among the university students of this generation, what are the underlying reasons to be or not to be interested in the way of work?

M. Aronen’s (2017, 8) research introduces the definition of a knowledge worker as an employee whose work involves the creation, development, and dissemination of information. In the research, the author seeks to deepen the understanding of the links between remote work and the content of work of a knowledge worker and to assess how her peers understand the content of remote work in this context.

It has been identified that remote working is mostly suitable for knowledge workers in managerial or supervisory tasks (Pyöriä, 2003, 171; Ojala, 2014, 8). This is also supported by Noonan & Glass (2012, 40), since from their study results can be seen that college-educated employees and persons in managerial and professional positions are much more likely to work remotely than the population as a whole. Therefore, being a core concept in this study, a knowledge worker is defined below based on the understanding of Karr-Wisniewski & Lu (2010, 1-2).

The author of the article presented M. Aronen’s research (bachelor’s thesis) in her report at EZA international seminar “Work at home as challenge: mission (im)possible?” The issue provoked the debate whether generation Y really wants to construct its professional career in the remote (telework) space? Do employers, as representatives of the X and previous generations, really see the prospects of remote work differently?

M. Aronen (2017) in her empirical research presents SWOT analysis of two focus groups. The aim of the SWOT analysis was to find out how employers and future knowledge workers (millennials) evaluate the situation and prospects of remote work (see Table 2 and Table 3).

While it could be assumed that the millennials are so accustomed to technology that they would also like to work remotely, the conclusions are not that simple.

Based on this research the millennial characteristics of collaboration and need for feedback are very powering, therefore influencing them to prefer typical office environment at least over full-time remote working. M. Aronen (2017, 40) results of SWOT are analyzed only based on the millennial employee perspective, and even though the author understands that, as an example, a strength for the employee could be seen as a weakness by the employer, and vice versa. However, these contradictions are not analyzed in M. Aronen’s research. Presenting her ideas for the future, the author writes: “More research could also be done of the main ideological differences between the employees and employers regarding remote work. In addition, further research of remote work management practices, and how they could be adjusted so that the both expectations – of the employee’s and employer’s – can be met, would enhance the effectiveness of this way of work” (Aronen, 2017, 47).

Table 2

Remote working SWOT from the millennial employee perspective

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|--|---|
| Flexibility Reduced costs Working environment | Isolation Lack face-to-face communication |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| Lower stress lever Better work-life balance Increased productivity | Mental illness Physical health, ergonomics Working overtime |

[According to M. Aronen (2017, 18)]

Table 3

Remote working SWOT from the millennial perspective

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|--|
| Flexibility Reduced costs Self-determined working environment- fewer distraction | Lack face-to face interaction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and ideation • Communication • Networking • Sense of belonging |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| Enhanced self-management skills Better work-life balance | Lack of self-discipline, motivation Distraction in remote working environment Suitability for remote working Badly implemented remote work management |

[According to M. Aronen (2017, 40)]

Instead of conclusion

The report “Work at Home as Challenge: Mission (Im)possible?” has been presented at EZA International Seminar “Future of Work: Changes in Labor Relations” in May, 2019. The title of the report was provocative, and empirical study “Remote Working and Its Management. Attitudes and Perceptions of Future Workforce” fulfilled by young Finish researcher Miia Aronen in 2017 has brought up vibrant debates.

The report has been remade to an article and continues to provoke discussions. It calls for an evaluation of the remote work’s situation and perspectives. Especially in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, when we all became workforce of the remote work, and the former discussions gain new meaning and evaluation. The well-known Lithuanian sociologist R. Grigas states that social reality in the context of sociological self-perception requires to assess several aspects: first, the existing gap between reality and reality itself; second, latency – events occur here and now; third, differences in interests of the participants (Grigas, 2001, 15-16). Based on this sociological approach, we can state that we will be able to evaluate lessons of the currently performed remote work only after some time.

It is already being discussed how remote work will change management of work organization, people relationships and even attitudes towards moral and spiritual values. Will there be a room in the labor market for older people? Will Y and Z generations “close” themselves in “virtual space”? Some of the questions will be possible to answer relying on R. Grigas sociological self-awareness approaches. Author’s report “Work at Home as Challenge: Mission (Im)possible?” has been completed with the sentence: to be continued...

Let it be continued...

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Darbs no mājām kā izaicinājums: vai (ne)iespējamā misija?

Kopsavilkums

Raksts aplūko attālinātā darba situāciju un perspektīvas mūsdienu darba tirgū. Attālinātā darba fenomens ir analizēts, izvērtējot paaudžu savienojamību, kas piedalās darba tirgū, atklājot dažādu paaudžu īpašības un jauno tehnoloģiju ietekmi. Autore aplūko attālinātā darba konceptdefinīcijas un tā juridisko pamatu. Raksta nosaukums izaicina uz diskusiju par darba un personīgās dzīves, darba un karjeras līdzsvaru, un sniedz zinātnisku skatījumu uz attālinātā darba priekšrocībām un trūkumiem, balstoties uz pētniecības datiem. Raksts noslēdzas ar diskusiju, kas atklāj attālinātā darba (kā iespējamās misijas) dažādas šķautnes Covid-19 pandēmijas kontekstā.

Atslēgas vārdi: attālinātais darbs, attālinātā darba juridiskais pamats, paaudžu savienojamība darba tirgū.



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