



TWING PROJECT

Finland: Case Study Report

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Case Study 1: An international ICT company

1. Contextual and company information

The company is one of the leading global providers of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). It provides solution on: Cloud Software and Services, Enterprise Wireless Solutions, Global Communications Platform, Networks, Technologies and New Businesses, amongst others.

The ICT company has 606 permanent and 14 temporary employees. In addition to this, a varying number of consultants, some also in research and product development, but mostly in outsourced services (cleaning, property maintenance, canteen). The sector is still male dominated, only 14.9% are women. The company has also become more international during the last ten years, with employees from 50 different nationalities, i.e. 27% of its employees have a foreign background. The majority of the personnel have at least a higher university degree, especially in research and product development (R&D). The level of the educational background of the personnel has remained the same during the years and several of them work in expert position. (Interview with the Chief People Officer, of the company, 26.01.2024). The majority of the personnel work with tasks requiring independent work and high level of self-management.

The company in question strives to ensure that their employees can show their skills by focusing on its strategy, such as career development, competitive rewards, diversity and inclusion, leadership, and well-being. The company has also taken measures to promote and improve the well-being and safety of their personnel by implementing a cultural and transformation program. It focuses on five areas: cooperation and collaboration, empathy and humanness, executing speedily, fact-based and courageous decisions and fostering a speak-up environment (Annual report of X 2023, XX). However, the company is aware of a global competition for the best talent and therefore aims for a continuous improvement corporate culture in addition to providing competitive remuneration.

2. Drivers and motivations for the adoption of telework and its regulation through social dialogue

The ICT company in question has used telework as part of their working time practices already before the time of COVID-19 pandemia. Before the pandemia longer telework time-periods were decided

together with the team supervisor. Currently, the company strives to apply a "2+3" day model, but in practice it is up to each team to decide individually a flexible model. Telework is not part of the formal collective agreement, but telework recommendations are included as an attached in it. In practice, teleworking practices are planned at the local level. The company has a teleworking contract, although it is seldom use, i.e. a telework contract is signed mainly for those workers who work predominately remotely.

The current hybrid model has been met positively by the personnel because working remotely has increased the work-life balance and provided improved opportunities to schedule tasks and to focus on these in a quiet environment without interruptions. Of course, this does not apply to all, e.g. time and space management can be more challenging for teleworkers with small children. For supervisors and team members one of the challenges caused by teleworking is the negative impact on the exchange of tacit knowledge between coworkers. The latter is particularly of importance for newly hired employees who are not yet accustomed to the organizational culture of the company.

According to the Chief People Officer and the shop steward some teams work mainly or only in company premises, e.g. several teams from research development department have found face-to-face work to be an efficient and inspiring way to work. Supervisors find it also more challenging to do internal risk evaluation. The current challenge is how to get the personnel back to the office because the majority of them are satisfied with remote work. The Chief People Officer emphasized the problem is that employees do not always take into consideration their own well-being and can work overtime because the work-life border becomes easily blurred, particularly for employees in senior or expert positions. It is difficult for the supervisor to set boundaries on their working-time due to existing possibilities for flexibility. However, the current ICT company has several employees and consultants working aboard making it impossible to have regular office meetings. The Chief People Officer pointed out:

[W]e have a lot of teams with people from all over the world, so they've never been in a situation where all those colleagues are right next to them, so for them teleworking is business as usual.

The regulation of telework by guidelines is done by the transnational consortium in the company and these are followed by respective countries' national statutes. According to the Chief People Officer and the Shop steward there is no need to invite unions for the planning of teleworking time arrangements because only minor changes have been done to the original teleworking time arrangements, and flexible weekly based time arrangements are done at company level.

3. Social dialogue and decent telework

Telework has not been included as part of the formal collective agreement. However, since the beginning of 2023, the company has had telework guidelines in use. According to the welfare manager, these focus on the following topics: the instruction applies to all employees at the company, including both managers and employees; the customary place of work is at the company's office and this will remain as the customary place of work; the employee has the right to return to the office premises; telework is based on employee's own wish; teleworking from abroad is not allowed, unless there are separate short term arrangements made between the employee and employer, the employee is allowed to work 60 % of his time remotely but in case (s)he intends to work more, a contract between the team manager and employee should be made; the employee has to inform the manager in case (s)he works far from the office and cannot participate in a face-to-face meeting with a sort notice; it is up to the company to decide if the employee has to return to the office premises and end teleworking. The teleworker is also in charge of providing their own secure internet connection and safe working conditions.

4. The process of negotiation

In Finland, a local agreement can be done between the employer and the employee when they prefer to do it. It "stands for the right given in collective labor agreement to agree certain matters locally" between the employer and the employee representative or shop steward (Työelämään.fi). The latter term is used if employee representative has been chosen by employees who are also members of a union. Topics such as teleworking arrangements, wages and holidays can be decided. For local agreements decisions there is no need to invite representatives working in unions. Also, in the company in question a decision about teleworking arrangements has been decided locally between the employer and the shop steward. The company in question also follows the decisions given by the transnational consortium.

The consortium has recommended to increase the office working time percentage from 50% to 60%, but after a discussion with the Human Resource department, the company (in Finland) agreed not to change the current recommendation. In other words, it is still 50% office time and 50% remote work.

In practice, the time division can be 60% at office premises and 40% remotely depending of the nature of tasks. The employee can make a teleworking contract with the line manager, but this is optional. The latter is done mainly in cases where the employee will chiefly work remotely and rarely, or not at all face-to-face. The shop steward highlighted that it is possible to move workers back to office work if there are signs of weakening of the productivity, but so far both the employer and employee side have been satisfied with the current system. The shop steward also acknowledged the importance of having a written teleworking contract in these previously mentioned special cases because it protects both the employer and employee from misinterpretation of their rights and duties.

So far there have been no specific negotiations about telework practices between unions representatives and the employer. The company applies a flexibility approach with the aim of suiting both the employer and the employee giving the employee an option for teleworking. According to the Chief People Officer:

We have pretty good working practices and maybe the starting point for everything is that we try to find this kind of “win win” – WE are a very flexible employer. -- As long as you take care of your work and the necessary meetings and the supervisor is aware, we can quite flexibly build it so that if someone wants to be off Friday for half a day and do it on Saturday. Then, of course, it is not overtime, but then it is normal working hours.

The previously mentioned teleworking guidelines are done by the consortium in cooperation with the Human Resource department. The decision-making model illustrates well the so-called company level arrangement where sector level decision-making is more challenging to be realised because of the internationality of the company. Current challenge is with the incorporation of (newly hired) employees who chiefly work remotely and do not work in the premises of the head office or in any of its subsidiaries.

The current hybrid model of the company in question represents well the *employee-oriented flexibility* approach used in the ICT sector, i.e. the current hybrid model leans strongly on remote work, i.e. teleworking has become an efficient and flexible way to work among both the employers and employees. Nevertheless, according to the Chief People Officer, there are some teams (mainly at research side) who prefer face-to-face meetings because it makes it easier to brain-storm, plan and develop.

5. The process of implementation

The updating of teleworking guidelines did not involve the trade unions, because the changes involved were minor, and were discussed between the Human Resource department, shop steward and occupational safety and health representative of the company. The team supervisor decides together with her/his team the division of office and teleworking days. This decision is based on the previously mentioned guidelines done by the consortium and is further instructed by the Human Resource department.

According to the shop steward, the annual occupational safety and health survey among the employees showed that the level of satisfaction was higher among those employees who have been working several years in the company, whereas newly hired and in particularly younger employees have found hybrid working time arrangements more challenging. Similarly, the Chief People Officer stressed that in exit interviews, employees complained of a lack of interaction with colleagues in office premises. In the future, more attention should be given to creation and maintenance of social cohesion. Still, too strict implementation of telework and office days should be avoided because these can complicate the realisation of tasks.

6. Impact of the measure on decent working conditions

The human resource strategy of the company is guided by the company's "code of business ethics" and "people group policy", these highlight that all workforce related activities comprising of employees' employment and career development as well as compensation and benefits will be done in line with equal opportunities for all and non-discrimination. By taking into consideration the previously mentioned human resource strategy, teleworking guidelines, and hybrid working time arrangements it can be stated that these go in line with each other and are guided from top-down in this international ICT-company. However, the current hybrid model also reflects how the employees' interests are taken into consideration.

7 Conclusions

Among ICT experts it is common to independently organise their working time. Of these, the majority prefer to combine office with remote work, such as 60% in office locations and 40% remotely. Creative work is done more in office premises where it is easier to exchange ideas and knowledge. Neither the shop steward nor HR department are interested in regulating teleworking time arrangements, because this could impede the work productivity. However, the company has teleworking contracts, which are used particularly in those cases where the employee works mainly remotely. It is also important for both the employee and employer to have a signed contract where clear rules are written, such as the employer has the right to end the employee's telework arrangement.

According to the Chief People Officer and the shop steward, employees who are leaving have explained in their exit interview how satisfied they have been with the tasks and in particular with the working environment. Nevertheless, recently, particularly young employees who decide to leave the company have mentioned lack of cohesion, and lack of face-to-face contacts with other employees as one reason for leaving. In other words, in the future it is important to maintain and increase opportunities for the personnel to meet face-to-face regularly. This is of course more challenging for those who work entirely remotely because of their remote location.

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Case Study 2: Bank "X"

1. Contextual and company information

The bank in question is one of the main national banks in Finland. At the end of 2023, the total number of personnel of the bank in question was 847 (in 2022: 776). The majority of the employment relationships are full-time and permanent. Nevertheless, part-time employment is popular particularly among students, who work in customer services and the back office. The average age of personnel is between 24-44 years. The majority of the employees (61%) and supervisors (53%) are women.

In the Bank X attention is given, not only on the monitoring of daily activities by team members, but also on their individual development and possible skills needs. The supervisor analyses on competence priorities both in annual performance appraisals and in monthly discussions together with the employee in question. They discuss and evaluate possible improvements to be made and agree also about development actions. The supervisors also receive regular training in skills management and evaluation, amongst other things. In addition, the bank has taken into use a so-called "competence development method" and internal mentoring program. Personnels competence is also developed during diverse kinds of training events. (Annual Report of Bank X 2023).

According to the shop steward, the hybrid working time model has become common in the financial sector. Since spring 2022, the current hybrid model has been in use since the spring 2022 in the bank in question. In practice, the bank consortium made a decision of a 2+3 model permitting the employees to work remotely three days a week. However, the employees can always work entirely from the office if they prefer it. The Bank X aims to provide its employees an opportunity to work three days per week remotely, whereas the two office days in turn can strengthen the social cohesion between the colleagues and improve an exchange of information and ideas. More detailed guidelines are decided by the team supervisor together with the team members on local banks. The work itself is the same as done in the office, whereas topics requiring high-level of data protection and security, such as signing of loans are done in the bank premises. In addition, face-to-face meetings are especially important when it comes to inclusion of new employees to the bank, or as the HR director states:

Our customer service has a systematic induction program. When a new person starts, the first weeks at the office are done to give them a good orientation. Many supervisors have said that it is much easier to do the orientation at the office. The induction plan indicates who it is good to meet and what

issues need to be discussed. The walkthrough then takes place both face-to-face and through contacts. Most of the time, one of our support people is at the office on site.

2. Drivers and motivations for the adoption of telework and its regulation through social dialogue

The bank has implemented a model for teleworking contracts, and guidelines for telework, already before the COVID-19 pandemic era. In practice, these were applied mostly to ICT experts who worked mainly, or for over half their working time, remotely. In the beginning of 2024, the guidelines were updated together with representatives from the human resources department, shop steward and the occupational safety and health representative.

The employee's work obligation is the same as for the work carried out in the employer's premises and both the employer and employee follow the current national legislation, such as: *Working Time Act* (872/2019) and the *Act on Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement and Cooperation on Occupational Safety and Health at Workplaces* (44/2006), *Occupational Health Care Act* (1383/2001). Neither the employer nor employee representatives have found it necessary to include union staff in the negotiation of teleworking time arrangements. Since the autumn 2023, the consortium has given updated hybrid working time instructions with an emphasis of two days at the office and three remotely. Hybrid work is based on mutual consent between the employer and employee.

According to the shop steward and the HR representative, the core reason for continuing telework in form of hybrid work has to do with time saved from commuting between home and office. This has made the work more efficient and improved employees' motivation and their work and life balance. Team members also organize face-to-face meetings in the bank premises particularly if they need to brainstorm. The shop steward pointed out that it is fairly easy to organize face-to-face meetings on regular bases, because the majority of the employees live in the metropolitan area.

The teleworking contract model and guidelines are based on a company level decision guided by the bank consortium and the national legislation, i.e. the decision-power of employer and employee representatives and other social partners, such as union representatives have been minimal. However,

the previously mentioned representatives (working in the bank) do play a role in the follow-up of legislation and company directives, as well as in the guidance of OSH-initiatives, such as ergonomics. Unions in turn can organize seminars and training for their members on current telework topics, such as: the transition of tacit knowledge and skills transfer; and the inclusion of young and new employees in the organization (Representative for YTN, interview 3).

3. Social dialogue and decent telework

According to the HR representative and the shop steward from the Bank X, no major changes has been made to the teleworking guidelines. More attention has been given to the compliance and data protection. The current teleworking time agreement is done at company level by the consortium (3+2 hybrid model), and follows the national legislation. The collective agreement does not have any formal part included in it about telework, but an attachment about a model for teleworking time arrangement.

4. The process of negotiation

The original model for a remote work contract and guidelines where mainly done with a focus on ICT experts. Attention was given to topics, such as: work duties carried out remotely (where remote tasks are outlined), remote work location (agreed with the supervisor) and employee's obligations concerning the work when working remotely and to the terms of employment. In the latter part the employer and employee agree on more detailed instructions, such as tasks carried out remotely, reporting and working time and data security as well as to the non-disclosure obligation related to work. The terms of employment in the contract model adheres also to the existing national legislation, collective agreement, and company rules concerning telework.

In comparison to the original teleworking arrangements, the updated instructions stress somewhat more on the data protection and compliance. The current model is also aimed for employees working in the customer service and back office, i.e. hybrid work has become part of the organisational culture.

There was no need to contact external partners, such as union staff for updates. Instead, members of the so-called cooperation forum took part in the updating of instructions. The group consisted of a shop steward, an OSH-representative, a HR representative and of two commercial representatives (the leader for client services and the leader for the ICT-unit). The cooperative forum discussed mainly about how to take better into consideration compliance and the data protection of clients. The bank representative stressed:

Topics dealt with issues, such as compliance and above all ensuring that the employee's home has a secure environment, but also that signed documents are not allowed to be taken home. Of course, we cannot go to employee's home and check that the working environment is safe for dealing with clients' data, so, it is the employee's responsibility [to take into consideration the safe working environment].

The bank has not had any bigger issues requiring the involvement of the social partners, but occasionally the employers contact PALTA (the employer union for Service Sectors of Finland) to ask for advice with unclear topics or further recommendations. The correspondence has been smooth with the union. These topics have not dealt with telework.

5. The process of implementation

There were no contested issues about telework agreement, but there have been some disagreements about the use of the leisure time insurance aimed for teleworkers. According to the HR-representative:

We have had one case where we have need to contact the insurance company about an accident, which took place while the person was working remotely. She had taken part in a so-called remote walk meeting, i.e. she had a walk remotely while she took part in an online meeting (with her mobile phone?). During the walk she fell and stumbled. As far as I remember, the insurance didn't cover it because it was a walking meeting. This case was one of those that was then discussed. We also encouraged people to attend walking meetings. Then came this response from the insurance company that if the walking meeting has been agreed in advance with the supervisor, then it will be covered by the insurance. On the other hand, if a person goes there [to a walking meeting] on their own, then the insurance does not cover a possible accident. And in practice, no one agrees with the supervisor that "I'm going to take part in a walking meeting"! In other words, it [the decision] was perhaps a bit

far from practice. But we haven't had that many leisure accidents anyway, and they are mainly related to business trips. Now that commuting has decreased, then these accidents will also [most likely] decrease.

6. Impact of the measure on decent working conditions

The current flexible working time approach in form of hybrid working time model has gained popularity in the Bank X, because it permits the employees to work three days remotely. The right to Telework has also become an important benefit when companies hire new employees.

The current model gives attention to the equal treatment of the employees by providing flexible working time opportunities for all its employees as long as their tasks can be done remotely. Before COVID-19 pandemic era, the teleworking time model was applied mainly to ICT workers, whereas after the pandemic time to all workers, comprising also workers from the customer service and back-office. The working time is still based on so-called flexibility system admitting the employees to start and end their working time within a flexible time-frame. The employees report their working hours on weekly bases and these are followed by their supervisors.

The employer highlights teleworking topics such as: employees' safety, work efficiency and data protection; it has also taken out a so-called leisure time accident insurance for its employees. In the future, more attention could be given to skills training of supervisors and employees about topics, such as self-management, competence and training skills.

The current working time model in Bank X reflects both the needs of employees and decision power at the consortium level, i.e. it can be described as a combination of *employer-oriented flexibility approach* and *institutional approach*, e.g. a "recommendation" of 3+2 days and teleworking instructions based on the strategy of the company. The latter in turn follows the national legislation. Nevertheless, this case study differs somewhat from the information received from other banks collected for the national fieldwork report. In these banks an institutional approach was more dominant, i.e. the voice of the employees was not as much heard as in Bank X. (see TWING fieldwork reports).

7 Conclusions

Hybrid working time arrangement has become part of the organizational culture in the bank in question. Preliminary use of teleworking arrangements took place already before the COVID-19 pandemic era among ICT-workers, but after the pandemic it has been common also in customer service and back office. The bank follows teleworking time recommendations given by the consortium, the national legislation and other company instructions, such as hybrid working time guidelines done between the supervisor and employee. These have not required the involvement of employer or employee union representatives; i.e. teleworking time arrangements are done at company level.

Hybrid working time solution has increased the working motivation and work efficiency, amongst others. Both the employer and employee representatives have been satisfied with the so-called “3+2” working time model because it gives the flexibility for the team supervisors and employees to arrange their teleworking time flexibly. Two weekly office days are considered as important because these increase the social cohesion between employees and improves the exchange of information according to the bank consortium. The consortium members base their hybrid working time recommendation on studies about teleworking time arrangements and on responses received from the employee representatives. In practice, the current hybrid model is based on a mutual trust between the employer and employee. So far, there are no signs of declining work efficiency, on the contrary, there are signs of improved well-being and motivation of workers. The latter in turn has increased the working efficiency. The current model could also be transferred to other sectors because of its flexible character.

Still, it remains to be seen if the so-called 3+2 model is the most optimal. Changes in working life has to be taken into consideration when possible modifications to the model are done. In addition, there are signs of weaker intrinsic motivation among younger workers, as well as among some senior employees, i.e. weaker time management. The latter should not be seen as a direct consequence of telework, even though it can be connected to it. The Chief People Officer pointed out how also external topics can influence on the self-leadership of employees, e.g. expectations mediated by the social media on [young] employees, and their current life situation. Another obstacle caused by the telework is the blurred line between work and private life. According to the shop steward, it has become common to expect employees to take part in meetings and other tasks even if they would be sick: *[Nowadays] it has become common to expect employees to take part in online meetings even if*

they are on sick leave. The shop steward has reminded employees of their right to remain offline when sick.

The results from the current case study go in hand with previous studies on telework and well-being, i.e. telework can be profitable for persons with strong self-leadership skills, whereas the opposite for those who do not have these skills, as well as work-home balance can be challenging for some employees and can in worse scenario increase psychological burden (Koponen et al. 2021). In the future, the hybrid working-time practices could be improved by Bank X investment in formal and informal training of work-related learning, e.g. abilities, skills and acquisition of knowledge (Mühlenbrock et al. 2023.). Attention should also be given to clear role and task description, otherwise there is a risk of role ambiguity caused lack of communication, amongst others (Sardeshmukh et al. 2012). Social partners, such as unions may play an important role in the promotion of the well-being and rights of hybrid or teleworkers, *inter alia*. Incentives of improved regulation of sick leave, working time reporting and courses of soft skills (such as self-leadership and time managements) can also be important.

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Case Study 3: A Chemicals company in polyolefin solutions

1. Contextual and company information

Company X is an international provider of advanced polyolefin solutions. The shop steward represents the Finnish employees who work as experts in the company. The number of employees working in Finland is approximately 1000 consisting of the senior level management, experts and production and laboratory employees. In the laboratory the majority of the employees consists of women, whereas the production side is male dominated. At the senior level of management, the gender division is equal. (Interview with the Shop steward, 13.02.2024).

Since 2021, the company has implemented a telework contract for its workers. Telework has been possible mainly among senior level managers and employees in expert position, such as the divisional engineers. According to the shop steward¹ the company has a flexible approach based on a recommendation of two office days and three telework days, but the number the latter can be less in case the work tasks require it. The transfer to telework can be easily arranged, but a telework contract has to be signed between the employer and employee. Those who have worked remotely have been satisfied with the telework practices. The benefits have been saved time from commuting between home and work, but disadvantages have been the risk for social exclusion and weakened communication between colleagues.

2. Drivers and motivations for the adoption of telework and its regulation through social dialogue

The Collective agreements has been signed between the contract negotiators for Chemicals at Union PRO and the Chemical Industry Federation of Finland. The specific scope of the agreement is underlined by the following:

¹ The Chief People Officer declined our interview invitation, therefore the information is based on an interview with the Shop steward and on the Annual Report from 2022 of the company.

[It] is job-specific, which is why the nature of the employment relationship, the person's level of education, the statistical title given, the method of payment of wages and the form of remuneration are of decisive importance for the application of the agreement.

Collective Agreement for Chemicals

The current agreement includes also a specific section about telework. In addition, the company has country specific teleworking agreements for its teleworkers, a general telework agreement has not been possible to outline because of contextual differences in the national working time acts.

Those who have worked remotely have been satisfied with the telework practices. According to the Shop steward benefits have been saved time from commuting between home and work, but disadvantages have been the risk for social exclusion and weakened communication between colleagues.

3. Social dialogue and decent telework

There has been very little discussion about teleworking in the company, partly because it is only possible with personnel in senior positions who are not working in the laboratory. However, a guideline for a telework contract is included as an attachment in the collective agreement aimed for oil, natural gas and petrochemicals (3.2.2023- 31.12.2024). The guidelines state the following, amongst others:

- The usual rules, such as company instructions and national legislation of working life are applied to telework.
- The tasks and goals of work for a teleworker are the same as in the work done at the workplace. An employee who works remotely has the same protection under the Employment Contracts Act, collective agreement and social insurance as in a regular workplace while working.
- Workers' compensation insurance is also valid while teleworking, but its more precise application to work outside the workplace is determined in accordance with Chapter 5 of the Occupational Accidents and Occupational Diseases Act.

- Regarding occupational health and safety, it should be noted that the employer usually does not have the opportunity to influence the work environment outside the workplace, but the employer's general duty of care according to the Occupational Safety and Health Act extends for all work.
- When ordering tele- or hybrid work, the equal treatment of employees must also be taken into account, unless otherwise dictated by the work duties.
- More detailed hybrid or teleworking time arrangements can be based on the company's teleworking instructions, special teleworking contracts or a case-by-case agreement between the supervisor and the employee.

4. The process of negotiation

According to the shop steward, the negotiation process about telework contract proceeded in a smooth dialogue between the employer (HR and the contract negotiator from the Chemical Industry federation of Finland) and employee representatives (the contract negotiator from the Union PRO, shop stewards and the Occupational Safety and Health representatives). Topics were discussed in a positive dialogue between the social partners, and the key to successful negotiation has been the development of mutual trust. This in turn requires a regular communication, face-to-face meetings, and a comprehension to give time to each partner to ponder and reflect over a best solution for respective problems. Nevertheless, the contract negotiator could not point out any specific telework topics requiring lengthier negotiations.

5. The process of implementation

Since 2021, the company in question has had telework included as part of their collective agreement, in other words, a telework contract should be signed by anyone who aims to telework with the precondition that the work tasks are adjustable for teleworking. Currently, it is mainly senior level

managers and divisional engineers who can telework and to some extent employees in expert position. In practice, the telework contract refers to a “3+2” flexible approach consisting of three remote and two office days.

6. Impact of the measure on decent working conditions

Since the COVID-19 pandemic era, a hybrid working time model has become to stay as part of the company’s organisational culture even though managers and experts prefer to be on-sight where they can better collaborate and manage the employees. The guidelines and contract is based on the transnational company’s strategy and the national legislation of the respective national subsidiary companies. The teleworking time model represents an *employee-oriented flexibility approach* and *integrative bargaining approach*. E.g. negotiation process between social partners is done in a positive atmosphere, in form of regular meetings and exchange of information.

7 Conclusions

The current flexible telework approach has been unanimously accepted by the workers at X company in Finland. Still, the Shop steward pointed out few topics relating with the usability and efficiency of telework:

In the negotiations, efforts have been made to find solutions to various issues through a good dialogue, which has been built by giving the [social] partners enough time to think about the issue and by showing trust and listening to everyone. The most important thing is to emphasize the transparency between the participants. The more often we meet without the mediation of a screen, the better understanding we get of the other person and the topics [s]he tries to convey.

The quotation above refers not only to the role of face-to-face interaction, but also to the maintenance and creation of improved communication and trust between colleagues. In other words, even if teleworking has improved the efficiency of work, it is important to maintain regular office days as

well. Still, there are problems with working hours particularly among employees in expert position. It is difficult for the line managers to follow the working time of these employees who often report their work directly to the head office in X [a European country]. In some cases, there has been clear signs of burn out. Therefore, the Human Resource department, shop steward and OSH representative have decided to control the working hours on an annual level, i.e. to check-up possible excessive hours done by the employees at least once a year. The aim is to improve the well-being of their employees in the long run.

The shop steward emphasized the importance to clarify for newly hired young employees the telework arrangements, i.e. the possibility for teleworking and the understanding of mutual flexibility between the employer and employee. The employee should always have the right to come back to the office, but also follow the telework instructions of their team leader and managers. In case the company does not provide clear rules and an opportunity for teleworking there is a risk that young employees look for a job from a competing company.

References

Annual Report of Company X

Interview with shop steward, (13.02.2024)

Case Study 4: Kela - Social Insurance Institution of Finland

1. Contextual and company information

Kela - Social Insurance Institution of Finland was founded on December 1937. During the first decades the core objective of Kela was to pay out national pensions. Kela's organization and operations have become diverse, i.e. among its core services is to provide social protection in form of a variety of benefits (History, Kela homepage). At the end of 2022, Kela employed 8,586 people, of whom 7702 were permanent employees and 884 fixed-term employees. The share of the above increased by 69 people from the previous year and was about 10% of the total number of personnel. The share of part-time employees grew from 2021 (933) to 1060 persons until the end of 2022. The average age of the personnel was 44.5 years. (Kela toimintakertomus ja tilinpäätös 2022).

Kela strives to promote a good employee experience by developing its organizational culture e.g. self- and community-steering, family-friendliness and multi-location work. The results of a personnel survey from 2022 indicated positive results about the organizational and management culture: The majority of employees feel that they can influence their work (71%); the team members were satisfied with the management of their supervisor; 88% of Kela employees feel that their supervisor takes care of matters related to the employment relationship accurately and in a fair manner. Family-friendliness is one of Kela's significant strengths as an employer, and 92% of Kela employees feel that they can reconcile work and private life; 84% of Kela employees are satisfied with their work. According to the Annual Report of Kela -2022, the functionality of the work community is rated 8.3 (on a scale of 4–10). (Kela toimintakertomus ja tilinpäätös 2022).

According to the Chief People Officer, the majority of the tasks at Kela require a high-level of self-management, i.e. the employees are expected to complete their daily tasks by themselves, but there is also a risk for misinterpretation of instructions. Therefore, it is crucial to write these as clearly as possible. Furthermore, tasks requiring self-management do not suit everyone.

2. Drivers and motivations for the adoption of telework and its regulation through social dialogue

Teleworking time arrangement became part of Kela's organizational culture already in the year of 2016, when Kela participated in a telework study conducted by the Family Federation of Finland. After the study, telework practices continued. According to the Chief People Officer, in the beginning, telework was made on daily bases, few days a week, but during the COVID-19 pandemia, Kela switched to a flexible approach with a freedom to work entirely remotely, i.e. one monthly office day. Still, several kinds of services are done from local offices, such as customer work. The latter can also be done remotely by phone or Zoom/Teams, in cases where the client is familiar with the services of the organization. In ICT, telework has been carried out already since 2009 because the majority of ICT tasks can be managed remotely, such as data protection and safety topics. The Chief People Officer highlighted that not everyone wants or can work remotely, e.g. because of family reasons.

Since 2020, teleworking time arrangement has been included as part of the collective agreement. and teleworking time practices have remained as part of the organizational culture, mainly because the personnel of Kela have found teleworking as an efficient use of working. It saves time from commuting and improves the work and life balance. Since the beginning of 2023, Kela has taken in use a hybrid model, i.e. the personnel are expected to work at least one day at the office. Previous mentioned guideline is not included in the collective agreement, although it includes instructions for teleworking. In the current collective agreement teleworking instructions are included as an attachment and as "notes to be included" in the next collective agreement.

The current case study represents a public national institution where the teleworking time arrangements are done by the steering group of Kela together with Kela Union for Professional and Managerial Staff. In other words, the teleworking guidelines come from national level, although practical time adjustment are done in respective local offices of Kela between the line-manager and employee. Also in this case, existing national legislation is considered as sufficient.

3. Social dialogue and decent telework

Already before the COVID-19, it has been possible for employees to work remotely if they had agreed this with their employer. The current collective agreement² is signed between Kela and the Kela Union. It includes an attachment of guidelines for teleworking. These have been included since February 2020. The guidelines state the following:

Teleworking is voluntary. There must be an agreement between the employer and the salaried employee on remote work. The teleworking arrangement works flexibly, when both white-collar employees and employers have similar perception of the place, time, other conditions and principles of teleworking. (free translation from Finnish)

Kela has taken a voluntary insurance for all employees in June 2020, but it does not cover work done abroad, i.e. telework done from abroad is prohibited mainly because of social security and date protection reasons. Telework arrangements are agreed between the line manager and employee and a telework contract is written if the employee works remotely for more than a month. There is no period of notice for the above.

The collective agreement covers permanent and fixed-term full-time employees of Kela, but excludes executive level employees, annual leave substitutes and trainees. The terms and conditions of employment of part-time salaried employees have been agreed separately.

In the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kela Union conducted a survey on remote work for its members. Core topics raised by the respondents consisted of topics, such as: compensation of overtime and the length of a working day, and the use of time in general. During the interview in the beginning of 2024, the organization had ongoing discussions about the best hybrid time practices. Other topics focused on health and well-being such as mental burnout and reconciliation with family. The Kela Union has instructed the employees to contact their supervisors and to discuss previously mentioned topics with them. The shop steward mentioned that she cannot recall any cases about burnout nor (occupational) accidents. In case there would have been any these would have been handled on a case-by-case basis. Another issue raised by the respondents was about incorporation best practices of newly hired employees. The Kela Union has guided their members to stay in contact with their supervisor if there are any problems with the current (telework) hybrid arrangements.

² <https://www.kelantoimihenkilot.fi/files/785/KelaTES2022.pdf>

The employers were also concerned about how to maintain clients' data securely. Nevertheless, they had confidence on their managerial staff's knowledge and skills to keep clients' data safely. The staff stewards highlighted:

We have been monitoring our work [at Kela] already before and after the coronavirus. In other words, we can see if the tasks are done in time, but [employees'] work is also related to trust, i.e. we trust that the employees perform the work assigned in time.

Kela has also a statutory insurance comprising compensation for accidents that occur in the immediate working environment, e.g. at the desk, but also on the way to work. The latter also includes taking children to playschool/school, as it counts as part of the commute. The shop steward stress that there is no straightforward interpretation of how accidents are dealt with, but each case will be handled individually.

The organization is constantly investing in the training of managers and employees, nowadays there is more online training available. In the future, even more should be invested in the training of line-managers, for example, on how they could take into account the signs of employees' exhaustion. More attention should be given to self-leadership skills of the employees.

The human resource department can also intervene in the work of employees, in case there are signs of burnout among them. By applying a so-called "early intervention model", it is possible to help employees who experience exhaustion. With the help of the model, the human resource staff go through the employee's job description in more detail, i.e. the goals, competence, motivation of the employee. In addition, to mental well-being, topics such as ergonomics and time resources are discussed and tested. According to the Chief people officer, it would be important to apply the above model also to those who have challenges with time management. Additionally, it would be good to make an evaluation of the well-being of employees in expert position to get a deeper insight of resources.

4. The process of negotiation

The shop steward underlined how the collective agreement is based on a continuous negotiation between the employer (Kela) and employee parties (Kela Union) about the development of work time practices: *So, we discuss about diverse issues constantly and think about how to develop them. Then, what works now may not work a year from now, i.e. we strive for continuous discussion between the employer and white-collar parties.* In addition to the telework recommendation, Kela also uses the so-called working time bank. This is enabled by the Finnish Working Hours Act. It comprises provisions on the statutory working time bank with the possibility for companies to use their own similar solution instead of the statutory program.

The Shop steward has not taken part in any CBA negotiations focusing either directly or indirectly on telework issues. As said earlier, Kela has several years' experience with telework. The current dialogue between the social partners can be described as an *employee-oriented flexibility approach* and *integrative bargaining approach*. E.g. negotiation process between social partners is done in a positive atmosphere, in form of regular meetings and exchange of information.

5. The process of implementation

The Chief people officer stressed that the inclusion of telework as part of their collective agreement went smoothly partly because of the organization had a positive experience with teleworking already before the time of COVID-19. The collective agreement negotiations, in general, have proceeded in a positive manner. This can partly be explained by a frequent and regular cooperation and exchange of information between the social partners, consisting of the human resource representatives, Kela Union representatives and shop stewards. The Shop steward, in turn, highlighted the importance of clear guidelines, i.e. that there shouldn't be left any room for misinterpretations. Additionally, the needs and wishes of employees are mediated by the Shop steward to the other social partners. Employees have asked additional information about the right to work abroad and the use of the flexible time systems in connection to teleworking.

6. Impact of the measure on decent working conditions

Both employers and employees found hybrid or teleworking practices particularly useful for time efficiency. In other words, the inclusion of telework as part of the formal collective agreement has proceeded smoothly, instructions for general teleworking time arrangements are attached in the current CA. Today, Kela is applying an extremely flexible approach consisting only of one office day in month. However, not all tasks are suitable for telework, for example, employees working with client services work mainly from the office premises.

7. Conclusion

According to the shop steward, the current legislation is sufficient for framing telework. The updated Working Hours Act brought only a small change into the organization, i.e. stamping working time. In practice, this can be done physically using a clock card or from the employee's computer. But otherwise, changes in the law have not affected the activities of the organization. She did not find it reasonable to include any strict guidelines about telework as part of the formal collective agreement. Statutory regulations could also hinder efficient and flexible working time practices. Instead, the management level, including team supervisors, could better develop best practices about occupational health and well-being by including their employees in their planning meetings.

Since the end of COVID-19 restrictions, the working atmosphere has improved. The shop steward explained this by employees' improved digital skills, but also by their new way to manage time, e.g. to make a lunch appointment during an online meeting. She stressed, that the foremost reason for an improved sense of community has to do with the ending of COVID-19 restrictions.

Efforts have been made to intervene in the monitoring of teleworkers' work where necessary. Recently, there has been some unclear use of working time among employees, and in some cases, workers have been dismissed. In future, the intention is to check annually how much surplus or deficit accumulates and intervene if necessary.

Attention should also be given to the well-being of workers. The Kela uses a so-called early intervention model, to help employees with possible mental health problem, and low self-

management skills. In addition, Kela offers a virtual gymnastics program for its personnel, where they can find gymnastics programs of about two minutes in length. Occupational health care has given feedback that the mobility of employees has decreased and there is a risk of social exclusion. Therefore, it would be important for the employees to organize regular lunch meetings outside of their home or office premises. The occupational health services provide also a so-called wellness chat. It targets topics, such as empowerment and self-leadership. This has been popular among employees.

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