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The Pros and Cons of Telecommuting in the Lebanese Sector in the midst of the Corona Virus

By

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ABSTRACT

Telecommuting – which is different from working from home - is a term that defines the act of working from a remote location that replaces telecommuting to the workplace. (Golden et al., 2015) With the ongoing events of developmental advancements, change in the working environment, and most prominently of the outbreak of the Corona Virus, telework has become a familiar and inevitable reality around the whole world. (Mokhtarian, 2004) This study aims to study the reality of telework in Lebanon during the Corona Virus, look deeply within the attitudes of workers and employers, and empirical evidence and results to provide a detailed report of the cons and pros of telework in the Lebanese sector in the middle of the health and economy turmoil going on in Lebanon. This study employed the data from literature review, qualitative analysis, and online interviews with 30 employees, 10 of which were selected from a home automation company in Lebanon called "Somfy" from different departments and specialties to reflect wide and rich perspectives. The rest of the data was gathered from 20 other employees who worked at different companies and organizations who had diverse backgrounds, positions, cultures, and managerial levels in an effort to gather varied responses that can generate credible findings and valid conclusions. The interviews were based on real testimonies and comparisons of managers and

employees who shifted from regular working at the offices to working remotely. This investigation provides an overview of the reality of the telework in Lebanon along with its merits, drawbacks, challenges, and opportunities. It also provides general speculations of the future of telework in Lebanon, along with future recommendations of the optimal ways to effective management of teleworking systems.

Keywords: Telecommuting, Digitalization, Pros & Cons, Covid-19, Teleworking systems, Work from home arrangements

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 General Background

The term "telecommuting" originated in 1972 and was offered as an innovative and effective alternative to traveling to and from work. Although this phenomenon didn't prosper then, it gained its popularity in the 1990s (*Telework Legislation* 2019) As time progressed, more and more companies started to give opportunities to people to work remotely, but the main catalyst that accelerated this trend is the recent Corona Virus and its lockdown measurements that forced the whole planet to continue work processes from safe and remote distances. This occurrence slowly became normalized within the working structures and cultures of organizations, and scholars speculate that the number of telecommuters will inevitably continue to grow unabated, specially that it proved effective and cost efficient. According to a recent article published in the June 2020 *Monthly Labor Review*, only 7 % of the US population used to work from home prior to Corona, this number rose to 44%. (Dey, 2020) The history of telecommuting is extensive and the current world trends and technological advancements have helped in fueling this tendency. In such a hyper connected compressed global village, wireless devices and software meetings made it easier and possible to run international businesses, interact with others and get work done without the need to be physically present. (Mokhtarian, 2004) Telecommuting has been known to cause controversy between supporting and opposing parties, for this practice proposes apparent change in how companies have historically conducted businesses and held employees under tight or controlled supervision and reporting. This work etiquette revolution has noticeable effects on

various social and economic issues, such as work-family balance, productivity, work structure, greenhouse emissions, and expenses (Allied Telecom, 2018)

Despite of the increasing popularity, telecommuting is not the same as remote work, but it falls under it since remote work has many dimensions and subtypes. Telecommuting can be defined as "the use of telecommunications technology partially or completely replace the commute to and from work" (Haddon & Lewis, 1999). Over the years, telecommuting has suffered from a bad reputation. It always raised questions and was regarded as a grey area that many companies avoided. In the past, telecommuting was considered unfavorable by the companies that believe in physical existence of employees as essential to fulfill all business goals; employers need to be able to feel, evaluate and manage the energy levels and outputs. (Guimaraes & P Dallow, 1999). The Virus came to challenge this prevailing notion and showed many companies that businesses can operate remotely and maintain a normal and productive courses of action.

In Lebanon, Telecommuting has gained wide acceptance recently with the break out of Corona Virus. At first, the Lebanese companies were forced to operate remotely with the lockdown measurements, but surprisingly, many Lebanese companies are contemplating and evaluating the possibility of turning a lot of their work to be distantly managed even after the Virus is long gone. According to the US Bureau of Statistics, the prior attitude was that companies need the physical presence of employees to maintain an atmosphere of control, discipline and efficiency, but Corona Virus has taught companies that a lot of the work and tasks that were assumed to be only achieved by being present in the workplace can be achieved with efficiency in a remote work culture. (Dey, 2020) The Corona Virus struck the planet's economy and cost governments, companies and families a lot of expenses and opportunities as people tried to adjust to the

uncomfortable battle with the Virus. In Lebanon, the Virus' occurrence paralleled with an economic collapse that broke the world's record in fastest receding economy in modern times. So besides the time and effort Lebanese companies and employees had to put to adjust to telecommuting amidst the virus, firms and even citizens had to simultaneously go through one of the most severe economic crisis to emerge internationally "top three, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century" (Devi, 2020) which further complicated the experience, creating even more impediments in the face of this transition.

The compulsory experience of adjusting to remote work has left companies with the fact that in today's reality, telecommuting can't be avoided. Crisis management invites companies to adjust to whatever they are dealing with and try to make the best of it, and telecommuting isn't just a temporary uncomplimentary resolution that companies will switch off when things go back to normal. Telecommuting is proven to have several benefits that may not be found in traditional office settings. According to Pinsonneault & Boisvert, telecommuting positively affects the productivity of employees, lowers absenteeism and increases flexibility (Pinsonneault et al., 2001)

A lot of studies have been conducted to show the beneficial and adverse effect of telecommuting and how the world is ushered into a new era of working remotely. By the same token, while Lebanon is embracing this concept more progressively, the Lebanese economy and its current structure propose different advantages and barriers to working from home.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Literature revolving around this topic has provided a detailed timeframe about the progress of telecommuting through different eras in history. Noticeably, telecommuting has gained wide

acceptance, and it is predicted to have its figure prints on major organizations' working structure and facets. Telecommuting's positive effects were shed on the overall job satisfaction, motivation, and productivity of home – working employees. (Kratz, 2019) At the same time, in other settings, the productivity and effective communication were influenced negatively by this concrete work separation. (Harpaz, 2002) However, despite the argued pros and cons, the current reality of the external circumstances including the pandemic has accelerated the spread and the embrace of this arrangement globally, and it has also been adopted inevitably in the Lebanese market.

Such a shift in the working structure of organizations has exposed the working environment to new challenges, drawbacks, and provided it with novel opportunities and pay offs.

This research aims to provide a detailed study about the reality of telecommuting and its advantages and disadvantages in Lebanon. It attempts to answer the question: What are the pros and cons of telecommuting in Lebanon during the Covid19 pandemic?

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to help managers and employees learn more about different facets of telecommuting and how to effectively integrate it into organizations. Remote working has been forced into the business world in response to the ongoing pandemic, and the fact that it is not clear whether remote working might be the new norm or not, signifies the importance of telecommuting, and denotes the significance of learning how the Lebanese system can adapt this aspect along with its corresponding strategies for the sake of its own economic development. In short, this study is aimed at guiding the Lebanese work culture to successfully incorporate telecommuting in its current structures. By studying telecommuting's general advantages and

disadvantages and in particular understanding them in the Lebanese context in its unique sociocultural and economic setting, investors and local managers can better tailor policies that render overall employee satisfaction and organizational sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency, and ultimately growth.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is deemed significant because it contributes to the following:

- Clear understanding of the teleworking concept alongside with its different types and definitions.
- Understanding both the pros and cons of telecommuting
- Understanding the different perceptions behind remote work
- Understanding the driving forces behind telecommuting
- Learning about the barriers impeding effective telecommuting implementation
- Learning about the differences of teleworking between developed and developing countries
- Understanding the critical success factors to a successful remote work system
- Understanding telecommuting in the context of Lebanon, where little literature is found given its sudden surge as a forced measurement

1.5 Need for the study

The need for this study stems from two important factors. The first is that telecommuting in general will always change in functionality due to the fast pace of technological advancement as well as anthropological changes resulting from globalization, sociopolitical events, etc. There

will always need to be constant research parallel to the social changes we are witnessing, so that the study is accurate within the timeframe we live in. A lot of focus in the literature about telecommuting, was made during the virus' rise rather than after to understand the full repercussions on the world economically – In its most recent research, McKinney Company suggests that "more than 20% of the workforce could work remotely three to five days a week as effectively as they could if working from an office. If remote work took hold at that level, 3 to 4 times as many people working from home than before the pandemic and would have a profound impact on urban economies, transportation, and consumer spending, among other things" (Benzell & Bana, 2020) The research conducted by the latter authors makes assumption based on patterns and previous research as well as assessing the flexibility and functionality of work types within remote work platforms, however, no study to empirically collect the actual results of Covid-19 on the global economic work force and how it ultimately alternated it, as well as laborers' take and full experience on it.

The second factor is that only one study has been made to assess telecommuting in Lebanon (by scholar Mohammad Rayan Salame, titled Exploring the Effects of Forced Telework in Lebanon during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Establishing a Framework to Enhance Teleworker Job Satisfaction and Work Motivation. However, it examines it solely with respect to Maslow's Pyramid of Needs as a theoretical framework – This study broadens the theoretical framework and studies the advantages and disadvantages as a whole (Salame, 1997). Many studies were made in the West concerning this issue, covering many aspects from organizational growth to achievement to employee motivation and market type, however, we can no longer assume that what is right for the west is true for developing countries. This is especially true according to Ollo-Lopez, Goni-Legaz & Erro Garces who found that Western corporations and job

atmosphere have different cultural attributes that may facilitate work from home, such as high individualism, low power distance, and high femininity in contrast to developing countries that proved to require collectivism and higher masculinity (Endresen, 2021).

Furthermore, telecommuting in Lebanon, like other developing countries, was not a popular platform and the economy was working mainly in traditional forms. Lebanon focuses on the service sector and the agricultural sector as well as the banking sector… only recently did banks start evolving their services through online platforms, but these platforms still did not completely allow the absolute shift where employees can work remotely, it simply expanded the market to allow easier access – the study initially examines the Lebanese workforce's experience in telecommuting during covid-19, but really it is a study that also examines telecommuting in Lebanon in general, since it is a new phenomenon to this developing country and no particular study has been made to assess it. Hence, this study wishes to investigate the reality of telework in Lebanon, and to provide a reflection about its advantages and disadvantages in an attempt to better understand this global trend, and to utilize it in the presence of obstacles and barriers in the Lebanese structure.

1.6 Operational Definitions

Telecommuting: "the use of telecommunications technology to partially or completely replace the commute to and from work"

Employees' Attitudes: "a psychological state of mind that can be positive or negative"

Work from home: "is a working arrangement in which a worker fulfils the essential responsibilities of his/her job while remaining at home, using information and communications technology"

Digitalization "a socio-technical, evolving process that takes place at the individual, organizational, societal, and global levels and across all sectors"

Organizational structure "is a system that outlines how certain activities are directed in order to achieve the goals of an *organization"*

1.7 Methods

As a part of a systematic data collection process, the methods used to evaluate telecommuting in the Lebanese sector is based mainly on the conducted interviews and surveys of 30 different employees and executives. The first group of people was approached through Somfy company- an international company- who gave permission to interview 15 of its employees about their experiences of working remotely during the pandemic lockdown through online interviews, however 10 have agreed to be interviewed. The interviewed employees at Somfy were chosen from different departments and specialties to reflect wide and rich perspectives. The rest of the data was gathered from 20 other employees who worked at different companies and organizations who had diverse backgrounds, positions, cultures, and managerial levels in an effort to gather varied responses that can generate credible findings and valid conclusions. These answers of the participants were gathered from the interviews mainly, and back up questionnaires were done to reinforce the findings. The answers included the opinions of level managers to evaluate the effect of working remotely on job productivity and employee motivation. The questions encompassed empirical evidence and personal experiences relating to the positive and negative effects of telecommuting. The questions also focused on how well employees were able to achieve their desired goals in remote working environments, and how they were able to surpass the challenges that accompany this type of work.

1.8 Research Problem

This thesis wishes to explain the following research problems:

RQ1: what are the different pros and cons of the remote work in Lebanon?

RQ2: what are the different barriers and success factors behind the effective implementation of telework system?

1.9 Theoretical background

This research has taken into account the studies of several theories that have to do with employee expectations, motivations, organizational behavior, and industrial psychology, in order to shed light on the different facets of this topic. According to Cropanzano & Mitchell The social presence theory stresses the importance of physical presence in building strong relationships, creating mutual understanding, and strengthening communication between employees. The social exchange theory focuses on the productivity quality of employees who like the setting they are in or consider it as beneficial to them personally. (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) So, aside the fact that comfortable employees are in general more innovative, productive, and loyal to their companies, the fact that they feel they enjoy a certain benefit that suits them would make them indirectly work harder to prove that it is effective and in a way, thank the company for that "privilege". (Cole et al., 2002) This is the case if employees prefer telecommuting and were given that option.

Constructivist theory views people as constant learners, who construct their knowledge rather than passively take information in all the time. As they experience the world and indirectly or directly reflect upon them, they eventually build their own insights and incorporate or internalize

new information into their older ones. Constructivism could give us insight on the rise or fall of telecommuting within companies and whether the negative perception still prevails after companies in Lebanon were forced to adopt it as well as see if employee's opinions about it changed from perhaps actually liking it as an idea but realizing certain barriers to it and prefer work settings better. (Kamerade & Burchell, 2004)

Motivation theories serve companies, management, and HR with tools and knowing how to produce policies as well as plan certain cultures to motivate their employees. Studies have concluded that motivated employees result in better organizational performance and goal achievement. (Osabiya, 2015) Telecommuting may in itself be a motivation catalyst or on the contrary, a demotivating one depending on factors like employee needing human interaction at work or not liking micromanagement or factors like poor connection or general logistics for telecommuting to happen smoothly. (Allen & Eby, 2015)

Finally, the last school of thought regarding telecommuting stress the importance of logistics and resources and explain that what makes the experience of telecommuting smooth for staff and efficient in realizing organizational goals has more to do with the company's technical infrastructure and readiness for the cyber world. (Kunkel, 2020)

Chapter two

Literature Review

2.1 Historical background of telecommuting

The idea of teleworking has progressed slowly in the business world historically and apparently a lot of people in the yesteryear thought that the idea was worth a while and contemplated about its possible underpinning and benefits. The term telecommuting originally appeared in 1972 by Jack Nilles as he was working remotely on a complex Nasa communication project from his own home. He used the phrase "telecommuting" for his remote work and since then this phrase saw light. (Bailey & Kurland, 2002)

Soon after, in 1979, the term "flexplace' was coined by an author called Frank Schiff who wrote an article for Washington Post under the name "Working from Home Can Save Gasoline" This post is regularly attributed with starting to promote the possibility of telecommuting and lead to the main conference about the subject, which occurred in 1980. (Bailey & Kurland, 2002)

In 1992, the Interagency Telecommuting Pilot Project was conceived. The Project's whole design was to advocate the utilization of outer telecasters for government offices in Washington D.C. After two years, in 1994, September twentieth was named "Employee Telecommuting Day", and the idea started to acquire steam. (Noonan & Glass, 2012)

In 1995, ESPN employed the services of an innovative company called "progressive Networks" to stream a broadcast during a baseball game to a large number of followers. Although this initiative may have appeared to be irrelevant, it established the framework for the HTTP-based

streaming uprising that would help make working from home conceivable over the course of the following years. (*The History of Telecommuting,* 2018)

Following that, in 1996, "The National Telecommuting Initiative" was created with the undertaking of expanding the prevalence of telecommuting activities, explicitly inside the Government. Proving the authors Butler et al., this initiative presented a solid and noticeable impact in the future of teleworking. In 2004, an allocation bill that encouraged the work from home arrangements explicitly in Federal organizations was put forward. In 2008, Microsoft dispatched Smooth Streaming innovation and streaming technology started to gain attention and over the nation. The trend later on followed a progressive route through which this technology was employed in everything ranging from streaming media to facilitating online gatherings and coordinating work zone for telecommuters. (Butler et al., 2007)

During the year 2009, working from home had been effectively merged in the working culture. As per the United States Office of Personnel Management, during this specific year in excess of 100,000 government representatives were reported to working distantly. In the following year, the Telework Enhancement Act was passed on by the government in an effort to secure and make the experience of working from home for Federal employees safer and more effective. (Lautsch et al., 2009)

The year 2012, seemed to introduce telecommuting as a broadly acknowledged and pursued work plan in different fields, however Yahoo didn't share the same enthusiasm and the CEO Marissa Mayer that the organization wouldn't be allowing working from home as part of its environment or arrangements. Several specialists have anticipated that this move is going to have adverse effects on this inclination overall, however, reality proved otherwise, and nowadays the

most reputable companies are accepting teleworking arrangements as initial part in their working environment. (Davison & Khaliah, 2000)

2.2 Telecommuting Definitions and Types

Telecommuting is often defined as the usage of telecommunications technology to partly or fully substitute the travel to and from work. (Mokhtarian, 2004) Working from home is spreading noticeably, reflecting wide acceptance in the US and elsewhere as being a manifested reality of the globalization path, a business response to internal business issues, and as a transportation demand management (TDM) technique. The expression "working from home" signifies various things to various individuals, coming about in confusion and misconception. A few group reject the concept due to a restricted view they have of telecommuting (e.g., everyday home work), without assessing each extraordinary structure of telecommuting on its own benefits. Working from home doesn't encompass all different types of telecommuting, but it is considered to be one kind of distant work. According to Hamilton, the definition of the term "far off work" can be defined as "work done by a person while at a different area in comparison to the other person who is directly overseeing or paying for it" Further definitions have been extended had to describe telecommuting as: "Working at home or at satellite work stations using electronic or other means to communicate with the usual place of work" (Carol, 1987)

Grouping remote work into home based and non- home based is the convenient thing to do. (Raiborn & Butler, 2009)

According to Raiborn & Butler, home based sorts incorporate the following:

Owning a home based business that is operated solely from home, and can be referred as a "primary based-home business.

"Moonlighting from home" is defined as operating a secondary owned business from home in addition to having another regular job.

"Salaried employees working from home extra hours" which is the reality of working overtime by bringing extra work after a full day at the office.

salaried worker working at home in lieu of in-office work: one of the "traditional" types of working from home.

With reference to Moktarian, Non-home based include the following:

Working from a location that is closer to home that the original workplace. Field work, managing a branch office, working while traveling, and long distance telecommuting which is working and living in one Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. (Mokhtarian, 2004)

2.3 The Negative Perception of Telecommuting

In 2019, The Bank of New York Mellon Corp. was one of the organizations that stood out because of its decision and announcement that it is going to decrease telecommuting opportunities. Similar to the bank announcement, companies like Yahoo, IBM, and Best Buy have announced that they are going to require those telecommuting to return to traditional work sites. These companies attributed their shift from teleworking to reasons like employees and managers aren't well-trained to work remotely, fear of fallen morale and lack of engagement. (Blackwell et al., 2002)

According to the article "The Hard Truth about Telecommuting" Companies invest heavily in new technologies that they believe will have considerable benefits on the company's overall performance, however earlier investing in telework was known to cause controversy as telework

was seen as an undesirable work trend by many middle and upper managers. (Noonan & Glass, 2012) The bad reputation that seems to have prevailed over the telework aspect is stemmed due to many concerns and considerations. Employers imagine teleworking in the context of losing productivity in an environment that has breached security, unsupervised and unmotivated employees. In this setting, employers think about performance management which is essential to telework. In lieu of tangible yield and deliverables, a study called "Advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting for the individual, organization and society" addressing the different scenarios related to flexible work arrangements reported that "managers feel they have lost their control when they are unable to see and monitor employees working" (Harpaz, 2002)

It is clear that telework is stigmatized with negative stereotypes that are associated with the high profile failures and uncertainty. There is proof that when working at home continuously, you get much more performance work done, according to Judith Olson. "It's the collaborative aspect that suffers" (Wilkie, 2019). There is something many refer to as 'the attribution error' in psychology that plays a role in reinforcing these stigmas. If somebody nearby is inaccessible or out of the workplace, his or her college or subordinate will quality it to uncontrollable circumstances, that something probably came up. On the off chance that somebody distant is inaccessible, a college will immediately attribute it to the person's character, that they are slacking off, staying away from you or are being uncooperative. Along these lines, managers, who are likely in the workplace, attribute malicious intentions to those who seems uneasily accessible. (Pyöriä, 2011)

Another psychological perception revolving around telecommuting—which Judith Olson calls "social facilitation"— holds that individuals will in general work better when encircled by other people who are also working tediously. (Wilkie, 2019).

2.4 Telecommuting Driving Forces

It has been clear that telecommuting has been present since a long time at varying rates in different countries. Some workplaces have included it as a part of its working arrangements offering alongside office work as an incentive for employees to be able to have a partially flexible and comfortable work schedule. (Westfall, 2004) Despite the fact that telecommuting stirs paradoxical controversies, several factors have been found to ignite this trend and make it more widely acceptable. If there is something that can have wide consensus is that the world of business is changing and in a world that is changing rapidly it is important to understand these driving forces and proactively plan to utilize and adapt fast to these changes.

Globalization seems to be one factor that has facilitated not only the spread of telework but the ability to make work manageable and doable from afar. (Huws et al., 2000) Globalization has connected separate parts of the worlds, and not only made communication between them easier, but also made communication a must for courses of businesses. Multinational Corporations, MNC's are examples that incorporate remote work in their structure early on with the possibility of traveling from time to time and have succeeded in collaborating thousands of employees from different parts of the world. (Haddon & Lewis, 1994) Moreover, Tamarat & Smith have found out that many foreign companies employ workers living abroad in different locations, and are accustomed to managing and having whole teams operate and run business mostly from afar. Freelancing, outsourcing and taking over remote projects have always been the case for several major companies and employees to work remotely and get deliverables done. (Tamrat & Smith, 2015)

At the same time, the organizational trends, structures, and culture have been entirely reformed by technological advancements made managing business processes highly streamlined and integrated technological advancements have completely reformed the organizations by making their business processes highly integrated, and more streamlined. (Tung & Turban, 1996) the article "The future of telecommuting" stated that Online collaboration platforms and web-based applications have eliminated geographical, informational, and physical boundaries and have empowered employees to communicate with other partners in various areas. One innovation specifically — Artificial intelligence (AI) — will assume a major part in the support of advanced working environments, working behind the scenes to produce a more proficient, upheld and satisfied labor force. (Handy & Mokhtarian, 2002) Innovation and technology in the working environment plays a facilitating role in making working processes smooth and on target. Cloud based facilities management software like Quick MS helps business pioneers stay coordinated and up to date and is positively related to business profitability. (Morgan, 2017)

According to Morgan, new technology has facilitated telework with teleconferencing and co-working space. Internet-based service models and instant remote access were enabled by mobile and cloud computing. This has brought about the spread of independent- interconnected working environments linked together by elements of portability and virtual conferencing (Morgan, 2017)

The corona Virus is one of the forces that didn't facilitate the implementation of telework in particular, but it forced companies and employees to adapt it in response to the emerging health crisis that signified the importance of social distancing and abstaining from going to work and populated areas (Zeidner, 2020) According to a study done at the US National Library of Medicine, preceding COVID-19, just seven percent of organizations were reported to offer telecommuting choices to most of their workers. (Wilkins & Wilkins, 2020) However, because

of the pandemic, Global Workplace Analytics is presently assessing that this number has increased, and a percentage of 35% of America's labor force will be telecommuting in 2021 for most of the week days, and this number will keep on rising. (Chang et al., 2021)

Corona Virus has prompted the world to bring about a quick response and transformation in the working environment. Telecommuting has gone from a possible alternative or aspect to part of the status quo, and companies have moved from digitization the communication among firms and clients, to digitalization the connection among employees and their employers. (Armour et al., 2020)

Organizations find themselves today because of the Corona at an intersection: those that exploit post-Coronavirus openings will end up in a decent situation to preserve their position and draw in individuals when the circumstance settles. Paradoxically, those that fail to respond to the change accordingly will be abandoned, subjecting themselves and their workers to several financial turmoil and hardships. (Wilkins & Wilkins, 2020) Also, the Corona displayed the fact in a rapid changing work with several impeding realities playing against the odds of humanity, telecommuting might be an inevitable reality that all companies will accept and adopt in cases of emergencies. (Sischka & Steffgen, 2021)

2.5 Advantages of Telecommuting

Telecommuting has been found to bring about tangible and desired outcomes to business in general, even though the perceived benefits between managers and employees might vary due to the different experiences and expectations, but both have admitted and noticed benefits associated with the implementation of work from home arrangements. (Silva et al., 2019) Telecommuting is considered to be environmentally friendly, for it has been positively related to

the decrease of fuel and electricity consumption as employees stop commuting to work and use

their home supplies. (Madden, 2020) Also telework is cost efficient, the author Asgari has stated

that studies conducted in 2013 showed that firms are able to save 11,000 $ annually per

employee, and this saved money can be invested in other sectors as product research and content

development: companies that offer work from home arrangements are found to have better

results when compared to those who don't. Flexible work arrangements are considered a trend

that makes the company more sought by talented employees and portrays the company as more

advanced (Asgari, 2016). Companies who allow telecommuting have better access to talent

acquisition. Cross-line work permit organizations to take advantage of a more prominent number

of ability and variety of ability that can help them address several issues in the organization.

For employees, a flexible working schedule is found to increase satisfaction, decrease work

turnover, and lower number of sick leaves. A lot of research found evidence that telecommuters

are perceived to have better morals, increased productivity and overall motivation. (Guyot &

Sawhill, 2020) Other studies have backed the idea that the flexibility of telecommuting offer

employees with different life commitments the privileges of work-life balance and time

management. The flexible schedule can be an added value to the employees that in turn will be

more loyal. Saving up time is a definite advantage that most employees notice. It is reported that

work commuters spend an average of 105 minutes commuting back and forth to work and

sometimes up to 130 minutes in peak hours. Employees are reported to be more satisfied as they

skip the agonizing and tedious process of commuting to work. (Guimaraes & P, 1999)

According to Chan et al., It is true that less monitoring and supervision are conducted when

workers are remote, but this fact is reflected by increased autonomy and increased sense of

responsibility by telecommuting as he or she becomes more in control and independent. (Chan et

al., 2020) Moreover, the decreased supervision over employees' daily activities is found to create a reciprocal trusting relationship between employers who had no choice but to depend on employees, and employees who felt more responsible and willing to provide good results to their superiors. It has been stated according to Regoli that a decentralized working structure that challenges the prevailing authoritative hierarchal structure is reported to increase benefits that result from a more positive working culture, more sense of security, motivation and participative management. (Regoli, 2017)

According to Pew Center Research that studied teleworking facts and perceptions, 70 to 80% of the American workforce expressed their preference of having a hybrid teleworking schedule. (Parker et al., 2021) Telework is found to be positively related to employee happiness, for 53 % of workers reported that they are willing to work more than 40 hours a week compared to regular office work. 24% of American companies believed that telecommuters are more productive than non-telecommuters. 58 % of Americans believed that telecommuters are more productive than non-telecommuters. (Parker et al., 2021)

In a study shared by Dey, it reflected perceptions about telecommunications and traditional work settings, telecommuters reported 25% lower stress levels as they were allowed to work from home, 80% noted that telecommuting contributed positively to their life-work balance. 78% of reported sick leaves weren't because of actual illness but because of other home or stress related issues. Working from home can help employees to manage their times better. Companies allowing remote work have reported 25 % reduction in employees' turnover rates. (Dey, 2020)

Telecommuting is found to increase productivity. American express telecommuters have been found to handle more calls and produce 43% more business deal as compared to their subordinate office based workers. (Abrams, 2019) Teleworking customer service employees

handled 13.5 % more calls compared to their non-telecommuting workers. Alpine access

associated the 30 % boost in its sales and the 90% reduction in customers' complaints with the

increased number of workers operating from home. (Wilkins & Wilkins, 2020) A recent study

showed that telecommuting helps employees to spend more time working on an average of five

to seven hours per week, home workers are more prompt to work when they are on vacations or

even sick, and 84% of teleworkers preferred working from home. (Parker et al., 2021)

2.6 Disadvantages of Telecommuting

On the other side, telecommuting has been found to cause several drawbacks to the firms,

employees, and the overall working culture. A loose sense of authority and weak supervision can

produce an adverse effect of slacking and unmotivated employees. Employees ability to control

how employees manage their work is diminished. It cannot be guaranteed that paying per hour to

contractors or freelancers is really representative of what they have accomplished, as there is no

proof that they are paid for work related activities. (Tavares, 2017) Possible incidents were

reported by companies, where employees repeatedly abused the remote work systems. One

example can be Yahoo that has been impacted by decreased productivity, slacking off, and

missing important requirements and deadlines. (Pyöriä, 2011) Further to that, slacking isn't the

only concern of employers, sometimes employees need the supervision as a form of guide and

track keeper that informs employees of possible mistakes and preferred courses of action.

Without this upper guide, employees might be stuck because of unclear information or confused

roadmap. They are also more likely to commit mistakes that are not solved right on the spot.

(Madden, 2020)

Lost productivity and investing effort in wrong methods or places can occur especially when employees aren't accustomed to teleworking or haven't had adequate training on how to work effectively from home. (Regoli, 2017) Other than that, the decreased personal and face to face communication can be a roadblock to creating a positive and close work culture. Symptoms of social isolation have been reported with employees that visit their company once or twice a month. Cooperative team work can be also challenging to achieve, as more misunderstanding and ambiguity occur in distant communication. (Buomprisco et al., 2021) This reality is also impeded if the internet connection is facing weak or is facing some cut offs, since this home-online connection is the only source of linkage between employees and their firms, a slight troubleshoot in the internet connection can cause demotivation and inefficiency and decreased productivity. (Buomprisco et al., 2021)

There are certain cases where some aspects of work can't be completed remotely. certain roles and work structures require for the physical presence of employees. (Arias Oliva et al., 2012) Not all issues can be trouble shut remotely. Furthermore, securing data and protecting confidential information from hacking and preachment can be more challenging especially that all information and crucial meetings have to be done from behind the screens. (Harpaz, 2002)

According to Allen & Eby's study, 19 % of remote workers have expressed that teleworking increased their loneliness and they felt that this type triggered social isolation and the lack of communication and collaboration between coworkers. (Allen & Eby, 2015) According to telecommuters, brainstorming is one of the most challenging task impeded by teleworking in meetings. (Armour et al., 2020) Moreover, 53 % of the American population believed that home working induces the possibility of family conflicts due to decreased separation and privacy between work and personal life. (Abrams, 2019)

2.7 Telework in Developed and Developing Countries

The number of teleworkers in 2020 has increased by 140 % since the year 2005. The reality of telework in the world is different. According to, 44% of the companies around the globe don't allow any type of remote working. (Sischka & Steffgen, 2021) On the other hand, in 2018, 4.3 million American people were reported to be working remotely half their working time; and 1 in every 5 people telecommute around the world, specially in Latin American and the Middle East. (*The Future of Jobs and Skills in the Middle East and North Africa: Preparing the Region for the Fourth Industrial Revolution,* 2017)

In the case of the recent rise of Covid, the capacity to telecommute is a significant factor to consider in the functioning lives of individuals who were influenced by the pandemic and the related lockdown measures acquainted to control its spread. (Armour et al., 2020)

In non-industrial nations like Brazil, individuals with lower average income are more unlikely to have the perks of working from home. The difficulty of offering flexible working schedules influences the weakest populace and is driving many low-qualified employees to proceed with commuting to work during the pandemic. (Sischka & Steffgen, 2021)

The execution of lockdown measures has been the most forceful in the effort of controlling people's gatherings and hindering the spread of the Virus (Signorelli et al, 2020). For safety considerations, several governments have urged their citizens to telecommute.

A new strategy brief by the International Labor Organization (ILO) showed that the pandemic, have pushed 59 nations to execute distant working systems for non-essential publicly working staff (ILO, 2020). This reality has raised questions about the type of employees who is eligible to operate from their home and their corresponding (Saltiel, 2020).

In the United States, half of the working populace were telecommuting in April 2020 (Brynjolfsson et al, 2020). In the UK, this extent was less – about 47% - (Cameron, 2020). In Japan, where the public authority didn't force a far reaching lockdown, the reality was around 10% of telecommuters (Okubo, 2020).

Results from near examinations applying pre-Covid-19 measurements demonstrate that non-industrial nations have a low predominance of occupations that are viable with telecommuting in correlation with the high level nations (Dingel and Neiman, 2020).

Utilizing information from the Skills Toward Employability and Productivity (STEP) overview for ten agricultural nations (Armenia, Bolivia, China, Colombia, Georgia, Ghana, Kenya, Laos, Macedonia and Vietnam), late exploration infers that solitary 13% of laborers in these nations could telecommute (Saltiel, 2020).

In light of family studies for 23 Latin American and Caribbean nations, the portion of people who can telecommute fluctuates from 7% in Guatemala to 16% in the Bahamas (Delaporte and Pena, 2020)

In examination, in Germany this offer is 56%, and in the United States, the offer is 37% (Alipour et al, 2020; Dingel and Neiman, 2020)

Finally, it may be safe to conclude, that applying telecommuting systems in developing countries can face greater challenges for both the employees and businesses. (Delaporte and Pena, 2020)

 These countries have witnessed less effective application of telecommuting programs, and have reported lower evaluations and turnouts from employees and businesses. Not only that, but also, the fruits of telecommuting can be less seen in countries that are suffering on many levels and that have technological and IT infrastructure challenges. (Delaporte and Pena, 2020)

2.8 Theoretical Framework

Since empirical evidence has given weight to both advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting, statistics alone cannot determine a universally right path to take when it comes to the latter. Various theories can be used to perceive telecommuting, and they can be categorized by psychosocial and logistical paradigms.

Psychosocial theories include those that discuss telecommuting from the human capital perspective in terms of their psyche, expectations, emotions, motivation, general experience, and hence productivity while competing their tasks and collectively partaking in achieving their company's goals. (Osabiya, 2015) Complementary to these theories, logistical ones focus more on the resources available that can in turn make telecommuting a sustainable and successful experience or on the contrary, create frustration, confusion, and inevitable demotivation or simply technical inefficacy thereby acting as barriers to effective telecommuting. (Rasmussen, 2008)

The Social Presence theory stresses the importance of physical and concrete communication between colleagues among a spatial congruence, thus siding with the negative view of telecommuting, since it affects business staff's communication. This theory focuses on "the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication." (Gunawardena,1995). Accordingly, it highlights that the ability to interact with others is directly proportional to understanding, cultivating intimate relationships among peers, and audience satisfaction. On the other hand, the Social Exchange theory claims that social behavior stems from a simple formula that calculates a reciprocal/exchange process, where people evaluate their actions based on a risk-benefit scale; so people who perceive telecommuting as personally

beneficial, will feel compelled to perform better as they telework just as the study conducted by Kelliher and Anderson in 2010 showed. (Kelliher & Deirdre, 2009)

Another theory is the constructive theory which basically explains that people's perceptions of certain things can be changed upon varying experiences and enough time. Cognitive behavior specialists state that people are generally reluctant to any type of change, especially when it comes to certain perceptions and opinions previously formed strongly, in which they face a psychological phenomenon called cognitive dissonance (Strebel, 2014) However, when people are forced to this change, adaptation, time, and facing this unknown may result in radically shifting their opinions about a certain experience or idea, constructing a new image for it in their minds. (Kerka, 1996) In short, organizations that were against telecommuting and communicating virtually will reflect upon their experience just as employees will, and accordingly may change their behaviors regarding its importance or efficacy and ultimately see a rise in telecommuting in countries that previously didn't adopt it, irrespective of forced measures. And when this happens, the high numbers create a trend and consequently a norm to follow. (Fay & Kline, 1970)

Finally, among the psychosocial theories, one cannot omit the classical motivation theories that discuss personal and group dynamics within a work setting. Although these theories did not emerge primarily to analyze telecommuting, they can help in determining how the latter could affect organizational productivity. (Fujii, 2020)

Motivation theorists believe that companies can create a right attitude among employees through effective motivation and climate setting that in turn create a willing cooperation and commitment from employees to evolve their own selves and their organization through optimized productivity. (Harrison, 2007) A basic example is that if the culture of an organization is

innovative and innovation is a pillar to organizational success, management must focus on providing an atmosphere of free-thinking, a safe space for creativity, and must incorporate in the organizational system a fast rebound for various plans in cases of "failures", because there ought to be many. Risk-taking and innovation are two faces of one coin, so management must mold a specific attitude towards mistakes, in that they should be viewed as learning opportunities instead of horrid failures, which in turn motivate employees to be innovative. (Ruth & Chaudhry, 2008) How does that relate to telecommuting? Well, it is employees that are telecommuting and so in ways, telecommuting may be rising their motivations or actually declining it. (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) people who prefer collegial spirit or are mostly motivated by a positive work environment, need to be working in the office as they can feel extremely lonely. But then again, if their actual work office or culture was not already providing this, then staying at home would not really affect their productivity. According to the article "Managing Telecommuting Employees in Today's Work Environment" published by the University of Southern California, people who prefer decentralized cultures or dislike micromanagement, can feel motivated working from home, but also, if companies increase cyber communication strategies, micromanagement would still be prevailing regardless of remote working. (2019) Same goes for those who need fixed structures and are more comfortable with close up guidelines – if proper communication strategies are placed to truly mirror the original organizational culture, then the physical gaps get to an extent, smaller (Barrett, 2015)

What makes this gap in telecommunication smaller? The technical logistics and resources available.

Let us generally discuss the prevalent motivational theories and then use them in the research's analysis.

The first motivation theory is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains that people are motivated to be productive in a steady chronological order. This order basis itself on priority of survival. (Miller, 2016) Humans cannot achieve their superior skills nor give the world the best of what they can offer unless their lower and most primal needs are met. These needs are: physiological, safety sense of belonging, self-image/esteem, and self-actualization/achievement. This theory contributes to the active awareness of HR to grant the employee a reasonable 'compensation in proportion to the contribution made by him', and this compensation must be sensible to the external environment providing the employee the ability to live independently and with dignity so that he/she may elevate individually and professionally. (Parikh & Surana, 2005)

Dual-Factor Theory – Fredrick Herzberg's two factor theory classifies two variables for motivation in the workplace. Hygiene factors are placed pillars in the organization because without them, there is "dissatisfaction". (Syptak et al., 1999) Motivators are added value for an organization because they inspire positive satisfaction. This contributes an awareness for HR to make sure that the environment, income, and type of management are positive hygiene factors in the workplace, and to properly establish mechanisms that add extra motivation for the employees like recognition, professional development (better sense of achievement), and even allocation of right skills to the right job which makes the nature of the job more amusing. (Fujii, 2020)

Need for Achievement - David McClelland proposes a more differentiated motivation classification where he considers that people's needs are molded from their own worldviews and past experiences throughout their lives (Gorski, 2004). We have people who are high achievers and are "type-A" in striving to be the best at what they do, we have people who are more inclined towards affiliations and yearn for good relationships, and we have those who are

motivated with power and need to direct others. Here, HR should create personal profiles of each staff member and through surveys, interviews, and past experience deduce what kind of motivation works best for each employee. (Aban et al., 2019) High achievers should be given difficult tasks with clear goals and constant feedback. Sense of belonging seekers should be placed with right teams and have a stable concrete good relationship with peers from their department and HR should foster in them the feeling of family-loyalty towards the organization. As for those who work well in power must be given incentives of promotions in management positions. (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007)

Expectancy Theory – Victor Vroom believes that employees' productivity is proportional to how much they view that their work relates to their personal goals. Using a Utilitarian approach, there are three variables to weigh: Expectancy, Instrumentality, and Valence. (Day, 2011) The approach to a certain task and hence mold of a behavior would lie in the following questions: Can I do this? (Training Question), Will it work? (Education Quest), and Is It Worth it? HR here should make sure that the resources for achievement is available by choosing the right candidates for the right jobs, giving them enough time for a deadline, being clear about its instructions (so strong and credible communication strategy is essential) and support to get it done. (Fujii, 2020) HR should make sure that there is a good rapport between employees and their employers/ institution's system; there must be trust in transparency of the system as well as the idea of genuine merit-based promotions and rewards (Parikh & Surana, 2005)

2.9 Barriers to Effective Telecommuting

Here, we discuss the theory that focuses less on raw physical interaction and more on actual digital infrastructure that in turn breaks or makes the telecommuting experience, for as we mentioned previously in the motivation theories, aside management, communication, and proper

training, it is mainly the technical advancements that make physical distances and communication issues less significant. (Asaari & Karia, 2001) After all, it is those technological advancements that even made work from home conceivable via email, cloud-based systems, teleconferencing, digital palm-top, tailored internal programs, etc. According to Perez in her article that addresses the several barriers of telework, there is an array of logistical facets to discuss here:

Slow or unreliable network connections can severely affect workflow and productivity. (Perez, 2002)

Proving Baruch, the type of IT or technological support infrastructure since the efficiency and velocity of software and technological assets are significant to telecommuting efficiency. Choosing an accurate remote access technology among moderate, cumbersome dial up, and expensive meticulous private circuits fitting to the type of organization is crucial with respect to exerting the right type of pressure in its own systems. (Baruch, 2002)

What could be more optimally efficient? A virtual private technology or a regular public service line? Companies would also take into consideration privacy concerns when it comes to sensitive data requiring private IP environments that are immune to viruses or hacks. Furthermore, the budgeting towards equipment and tools play a crucial role in providing a smooth workflow, where having possession of advanced resources can support complicated company systems.

Finally, the training of employees that are expected to telework is a must. They should have proper skills and adequate technical competences in order to utilize the new skills needed to perform their functions. (Vasic, 2020) Maybe students of the next generation can automatically take basic courses on how to act and react towards telework issues, manage security regulations,

and generally learn what is expected of them in that field; however, today's employees should be properly oriented by the company itself to provide them with comfort and confidence while entering this new telecommuting era. (Not to mention, the IT personnel should also be trained to respond to technical issues remotely). (Buomprisco et al., 2021)

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Sampling

We asked an international company in Lebanon, Somfy, to allow us to interview 10 of their employees from different departments and positions and hence took IRB's approval for that, but approached staff of the other 3 organizations through internal connections as independent individuals, asking the people we know and their colleagues to be interviewed – we also asked 12 random people, and 5 were receptive.

So, the data collected was from 30 individuals, 10 as a group from a company, and the rest individually. Initially, we were supposed to ask all 4 companies' permission to get their employees to be interviewed on their behalf, however with the breakout of corona, all these companies had closed premises and it was nearly impossible to reach their administrations, so we contacted peers from university, neighbors, and personal contacts to take the interviews and ask their colleagues to do so as well in order to adapt to the situation.

4 companies were chosen on the basis of needing 2 international and 2 local companies in order to compare their logistics for telecommuting, as well as purposely choosing 1 centralized management and 1 decentralized management in each to also see if organizational management and perhaps even culture had anything to do with the results.

Somfy is an international corporation with a decentralized management. 10 employees took the interview: 1 sales manager, 1 sales associate, 1 accountant, 3 engineers, 2 HR personnel, 1 account manager, 1 social media coordinator.

The rest of the interviewees' positions and job titles included:

1 communication specialist, 1 education coordinator, 2 social workers, 1 procurement manager.

1 talent acquisition specialist, 2 accountants, 1 chairperson,1 marketing manager.

3 drivers, 1 social media specialist, 1 office manager.

1 teacher, 1 medical representative, 1 local library owner, 1 pharmacist, and 1 field coordinator in an NGO.

This purposing sampling allows the research to first, compare/contrast experiences of Lebanese employees in both local and international companies, hence overseeing different budgets, different cultures, different systems, and different sizes that perhaps can trace a common pattern in a certain variable if possible. Moreover, we selected 10 individuals from the same local company of different departments and hierarchies in order to observe if there is a general consensus in terms of experiencing the same issues in one company or perhaps even one department or subjective experience overweigh perception of telecommuting making the depending variable less to do with the company itself and more with personal preferences. It is also important to see if the experiences differ based on the position of the employee and hence broadening this comparison among the 4 companies. So, sampling should help in first understanding if there is a pattern among local verses international companies when it comes to telecommuting readiness, second it should aid in finding a pattern of perception based on job positions. The companies chosen were also chosen based on having different cultures, varying

between decentralized and centralized modes of leadership and flexible conduct in order to see if culture had anything to do with employee's perception of telecommuting. The individuals in the research were also chosen to have different hierarchal positions, genders, and ages as well as be in different and same departments in order to also decipher any pattern in those variables if existing.

The number of 30 interviews in this research meets the general recommendation by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who state that interviews in qualitative research should be between 12 to 15 to reach data saturation.

Below is the list of questions that were used in the interviews conducted with the candidates. These questions are probing questions and might have been extended and customized by necessity. There were two set of questions asked, one set was customized for HR Managers, supervisors and those at management positions, and the second set was for employees to reflect the different perspectives and attitudes.

Employers' Questions

How are companies adapting to implementing WFH arrangements?

What are some of the barriers of implementing telecommuting here in Lebanon?

What are some of the perceived benefits of implementing working from home arrangements?

What negative side does telecommuting has brought up to your company?

What are employers' responsibilities when implementing working from home arrangements in response to COVID-19?

What are workers' responsibilities when working from home?

How do you measure workers' productivity when working from home?

Will you be willing to include telecommuting as a part of your work culture, even after the Corona is gone?

Employees' questions

What are the biggest challenges you faced while trying to work remotely and what considerations should be made to address and manage them?

Have you noticed any added value to your company or perceived benefit to you from working remotely?

How does the situation in Lebanon as well as the pandemic shape the whole experience of telecommuting?

Do you consider yourself more productive and efficient as you telecommute?

What characteristics are found in the working office ambience that are extremely different from working remotely?

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected via an online questionnaire that the individuals took on SurveyMonkey as well as a 20 minute videocall interview through Zoom application. We also reviewed the companies' websites in order to obtain crucial background information regarding their organizational structure, policies, missions, in order to deduct their overall culture which is needed for the later stages of analysis. The main agent for our qualitative data collection and analysis were the interviews, the questionnaire was only for reinforcement.

The questions included those that help define the individual's organization, position, age,

caretaking responsibility as well as their view of commuting to work, whether or not they

enjoyed telecommuting better than their traditional office setting, whether they enjoyed work

environment prior to covid-19, the advantages and disadvantages of their telecommuting

experience, whether given the choice would choose telecommuting after covid-19, and what they

would enhance or change if telecommuting became inevitable in their companies. The questions

are available in the appendix. Interviewees were assured that their answers would not be public

and served only the study, they were also guaranteed that they are free to stop the interview at

any time they felt uncomfortable and can also refuse to answer a certain question. Most questions

were direct, and the few open-ended ones only helped in explaining the holistic perception and

aided in creating a bigger picture to the answers, especially when grouped, compared, and

patterns were derived.

The interview included broadening the questions related to the merits and challenges of their

telecommuting experience as well as their suggestions and general comments to enhance the

experience for both the employees and the company. Since the positions of the individuals are

needed as variables, anonymity was not available, however, information given was not

considered sensitive, except for the one question that asked if they enjoyed their work

environment prior to covid19, in which they could freely choose not to answer. This can be

considered as one of the challenges and limitations of that particular survey. The interviews were

supposed to be held in person, but due to the strong pandemic regulations the plan was

alternated. However, as Mann and Stewart (2000) deduced, the zoom application interviews

allowed for functional flexibility, where interviewer and interviewee were in different locations,

and a main advantage was it really being a short and easy remote phone call that burdened no

one's hectic day. O'connor and Madge (2001) as well as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) would agree that such interviews are cost and time effective, convenient, and need no equipment other than a phone and internet. Another direct advantage was that interviewers were extremely comfortable given that the setting was their own home, so their answers were quite direct and genuine, proving (Alexander,1996) who suggested that telephone interviewees tend to be more open than in face to face communication as well as (Sixsmith,1998) who added that they are prone to discuss sensitive issues more casually. It is also important to note that within the interview process, questions may have been extended or broadened or tailored based on the interviewees in order to create a flexible atmosphere, allow the individuals to speak comfortably, and further understand their points via elaboration.

The data collected from the qualitative research was analyzed through an inductive approach where the findings presented were based on the analysis of the participants' responses.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected via 20 minute online interviews through Zoom application video calls and were backed by surveys (the main agent for our qualitative data collection and analysis were the interviews, the questionnaire was only for reinforcement). We also reviewed the companies' websites in order to obtain crucial background information regarding their organizational structure, policies, missions, in order to deduct their overall culture which is needed for the later stages of analysis. The theoretical frameworks briefly mentioned above were used as guiding vectors in the thematic content analysis – To ensure the strength of data collected for validity and reliability of results and to reduce the risk of false interpretations as well as broaden our view of telecommuting in Lebanon amidst Covid-19, the study safeguards the use of data triangulation where a variety of data sources were collected including people and space, even understanding

organizations' cultures through their websites, as well as theory triangulation, where multiple frameworks were adopted to examine the findings.

The questions included those that help define the individual's organization, position, age, caretaking responsibility as well as their view of commuting to work, whether or not they enjoyed telecommuting better than their traditional office setting, whether they enjoyed work environment prior to covid-19, the advantages and disadvantages of their telecommuting experience, whether given the choice would choose telecommuting after covid-19, and what they would enhance or change if telecommuting became inevitable in their companies. The questions are available in the appendix. Interviewees were assured that their answers would not be public and served only the study, they were also guaranteed that they are free to stop the interview at any time they felt uncomfortable and can also refuse to answer a certain question. Most questions were direct, and the few open-ended ones only helped in explaining the holistic perception and aided in creating a bigger picture to the answers, especially when grouped, compared, and patterns were derived.

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The data collected from the qualitative research was analyzed through an inductive approach where the findings presented were based on the analysis of the participants' responses.

Chapter Four

Proposed Data Analysis

In this final chapter, the responses of the interviews will be revealed, assessed, analyzed, and translated into answering our main research question, which is: "What are the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting amidst Covid-19 in Lebanon?", and the derived conclusions will also help in answering the research's second question which is "What are the barriers and success factors in implementing telecommuting in Lebanon?" – The interviews' survey may also lead to new findings depending on patterns highlighted in the data collection, and the discussion afterwards will help in opening a new horizon of thought: whether Lebanese companies should opt for telecommuting after the pandemic finishes and on what bases. This chapter will be divided accordingly: Research data raw findings, research data analysis: answering the research questions and discussing telecommuting in Lebanon after Covid-19, and finally research limitations.

4.1- Research Data Findings

As mentioned in the sampling section of the study's methodology, the sampling was purposed in order to, besides attain direct answers for the research questions, find certain patterns if existing among various variables discussed. In this section, the findings were categorized by the variables that were chosen, highlighting certain patterns that will be explained and broadened in the analysis section later. So the following passage only releases the raw findings without the discussions revealed in the interviews and the themes derived accordingly or their fit within the previous literature.

15/30 interviewees were between 18-30 years old - 80% of the young generation preferred telecommuting as they are used to the cyber world and were raised on it. Many of those young people consider that they concentrate better as they know how to schedule their time accordingly without a formal setting or protocol and divide their settings to what helps them concentrate better, including spending some hours in a café or at a friend's house or routinely at home (depending on character preferences) but freedom was prevalent as an answer.

15/30 interviewees were above 30 years old - 60% of the older generation preferred telecommuting. The 60% who preferred telecommuting do so as the majority of them agreed on better family time and expressed that back in their days, that wasn't an option so their life/work balance was always compromised, making them want to take advantage of this now. The other 40% stated that it didn't matter because when they are working at home, they still focus on their jobs over anything else.

13/30 people did not enjoy their work environment or being at work - All people who did not enjoy their work environment preferred telecommuting.

17/30 people enjoy their work environment - 3 of them preferred telecommuting over staying home, 4 preferred their work settings, and 10 said that if they had a choice, they'd want a mix of both (like having important conferences, weekly updates, team projects, and client meetings in the office, as well the free option to work in the office anytime even after formal shifts).

International companies were better equipped for telecommuting in terms of resources, computer systems, and most importantly, experience. Employees of international companies had a better overall experience logistically than those in local companies, who had a negative telecommuting experience and preferred to be in their work settings for efficiency. Of the 15 who worked in

local companies, 11 preferred to stay in their work settings if their companies didn't enhance technical systems and communication strategies.

Local companies were more familiar and understanding when it comes to external factors like common electricity cuts and very poor internet connection. While on the other hand, employees of international companies were uncomfortable and felt less adequate than peers who lived abroad; they felt less professional and were insecure, especially when explaining the situation to their superiors if they were foreign and not Lebanese.

7/30 interviewees had managerial positions. 86% of those managers preferred traditional work settings because it made them feel more in control of certain situations, especially during crisis management or in unexpected conditions or when there is a new project or new employees or new customers to deal with.

The rest of the interviewees with lower positions had fluctuated answers depending on their job types, work environment, telecommuting technical efficiency, and caregiving responsibilities.

Work that entailed a typical 9am to 5pm desk job or telephone based jobs or jobs that require singular effort without many inter and intra team interaction was preferred to be done at home. (like accountants, procurement, data entry, graphic design, etc.) – 9/30 interviewees had such jobs, and 6 of them preferred telecommuting irrespective of the work environment.

Communication/clarity changes before and after telecommuting:

21/30 interviewees stated that understanding their tasks didn't change during telecommuting. If their managers had clear instructions and were easy to reach for questions during work settings, they were still easy to reach and approachable to ask for further information remotely.

Top 3 answers to why telecommuting is preferred among all interviewees:

1. Commuting to work is a hassle

2. Caretaking responsibilities

3. Type of job that makes no difference if working from work or home

Top 3 answers to why telecommuting is not preferred among all interviewees:

1. Inadequate logistics like slow connection and no proper digital platform

2. Social isolation

3. Easier/efficient access to team members when projects need department collaborations

4.2- Research Data Analysis

Based on the findings, we will elaborate on what the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting in Lebanon are, and accordingly derive the success factors and barriers for implementing telecommuting in Lebanon with respect to the theories discussed in the literature review.

Several advantages and disadvantages of Telecommuting during Covid-19 in Lebanon have been noticed: To tackle the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting during Covid-19 in Lebanon, we will first organize the findings based on key themes highlighted within the interviews as most important and prevalent and discuss them with respect to the literature and theories, and then a more simplified bullet point approach to categorize general advantages and disadvantages.

It is also important to mention the reality &Comfort of Telecommuting in Lebanon during Covid-19.

After coding interview responses about how they felt during their experience telecommuting in Lebanon, sub-themes emerged including distress and instability, frustration due to logistical incompetence, country's continuous electricity cuts and lack of proper telecommunication quality, managerial skepticism and abandonment, and on the side, the general low and fearful mood related to covid-19, August 4th blast, and economic depression. Most participants explained that they couldn't conduct their jobs properly at home due to slow internet and electricity cuts, which frustrated them and slowed their pace – Many interviewees spoke of instances were important meetings were being held and they could only hear half of what was being said and had to code out the rest of the words…. others explained of instances where they were giving presentations and suddenly were cut off. 25 of 30 participants expressed that telecommuting made them feel they were lagging on their duties. Participants in international organizations felt very intimidated and afraid that they would be perceived as unprofessional, one participant said: "I was really embarrassed that many electricity cuts and asking for repetitions during meetings made me seem unqualified for the new position I attained, I didn't know if my Danish boss could understand how normal electricity cuts and slow internet is in Lebanon". On the other hand, participants in local companies stated their frustration when it came to the readiness to take on telecommuting, where their companies had absolutely no professional platforms or programs: "Many were not trained on using Cloud, we were using WhatsApp calls frequently, it was very messy and chaotic, we even would sneak to actually see each other in the office sometimes because it wasn't working remotely." Moreover, older participants were most anxious about this forced and new method of working, even the ones with

extensive experience in their field – a teacher said that "I cannot perform my duty. I am demotivated when I feel I cannot connect with my students and they are extremely confused and tired with having their face stuck to the screen the whole day. This is not healthy for kids, especially those who aren't used to this method of learning and more so, when this method of learning isn't being used properly and with caution to their mental health." He also said that the lack of experience from his behalf made him use police measurements to ensure attendance and that is not usually his style." Whereas younger participants were inclined to find easier coping mechanisms and adapted faster to the barriers they experienced in telecommuting. Furthermore, through follow-up questions, comfort as a feeling in general was definitely not a word being used when describing this period, given the dreadful situations they had to live through as citizens from death rates resulting of Covid-19, aftermath of Beirut exploding, and day to day worries about economic survival and random cut offs. There was a consensus that it was the worst periods of their lives; on the other hand, comfort as a word did emerge when discussing the relief that they didn't have to commute to work – many also joked about video calls in their pajamas. Participants who were in managerial positions were not comfortable because they felt they lacked control, even if their companies were actually decentralized in culture and hierarchy. They had to deal with more abrupt rising problems, they also felt the workload was higher, one even mentioned that: "I would eventually fix the work of a subordinate myself rather than call and coach her together to fix it because it took less time and effort, as I did not have the energy to spend 3 hours in a slow connection to teach her something that would otherwise take 15 minutes." Another manager said that she couldn't trust her employees were making use of their time at home, she could imagine them watching TV all day. Actually, the employees felt the same kind of discontent with their own managers throughout this experience. A prevalent

concern was how they truly felt their managers' skepticism and lack of trust, which mirrored in their own performance as they felt unworthy and like children being supervised, so their tasks were being done merely to finish and send it to their superiors rather than with joy and passion and perfectionism; one participant said that she felt like a school girl. Another reason for frustration towards different management was the notion that they felt their work and effort were not being recognized and that there wasn't praise or consistent follow-ups or even any fair mechanism to even evaluate their efforts adequately. All ages and job types did have a similar way of expressing this specific concern "I knew my work wasn't going to get credit" or "individual work tends to get drowned and no one knows who did what any more as long as the job is done".

Social isolation was already at its peak during covid-19, where family members or friends couldn't even come over and people couldn't meet up anywhere, the whole country was in lockdown – but to even be prisoned at home for work was draining to many people and social isolation was a significant factor to why many did not enjoy telecommuting. Many people explained that they actually liked the idea of telecommuting before it happened, but afterwards, they could not wait to go back to their work settings for they learned that a change of social ambiance or even spatial setting is important to their mental health. Although when asked whether this was solely due to telecommuting or the general lockdown, most people admit that it may very much be the latter case.

Accountants and social media experts and basically participants with jobs that already entailed just sitting on the desk alone didn't mind this social isolation as their job previously had the same setting, it was actually more comfortable for them at home. One participant said: "frankly, I actually worked more because I am an introvert and from the comfort of my home I could put

music, eat, have a quick shower, and was in my natural element to focus only on work." Another rising point stressed by some employees was that they didn't care about physical presence as long as the communication was clear in terms of what is expected of them, how, and when, and that through video calls and good management, it was irrespective of actually being there. However, many interviewees explained that even if they could functionally do their jobs at home, they missed their work environment because it was actually fun… one participant said that she loved going to work on Wednesday because they had a breakfast tradition where colleagues had a buffet and spoke and laughed and on Fridays the manager was obliged to get dessert. Another participant said: "Coming in to work was therapeutic to me because team projects were always so energizing, productive, and smooth. My work peers are like family and we mesh so well together, even when there is a little healthy competition, we always help each other get things done." – Another side of loving the traditional work setting was among participants who needed to be in a room where other people are tediously working, for "it is contagious to me" as one participant described it and "gives me the discipline I need to continue working" as another mentioned. Aside the work environment that some people missed, many jobs that entailed brainstorming or teams had the similar complaint that having colleagues right in the corner office made work easier and not just more fun. "Sometimes you just need to quickly walk by the second office and ask for the signature or show the papers at hand without having to scan or even create on the spot solutions face to face while the coffee is in your hands" said one participant. Others that have to deal with clients explained that many of their persuasive abilities lie in their body language, eye contact, and impromptu improvisation skills that really just need human contact and having to go through the hassle of phone calls and message recorders was

disruptive. Many participants agreed that mixing telecommuting with working in the office would be an ideal way to work after Covid-19.

Although there wasn't a 100% full consensus about having an elevated work-life balance, there definitely was a majority accord that agreed they acquired better habits and had more time to themselves. Many, especially male participants, said that they previously couldn't even be with their children because when they came home it was their bedtime, so now they actually spend more time with them. Mothers on the other hand felt more tired because they were expected to take care of children and also work at the same time, with one shyly saying that: "It felt like just because I was home, my husband didn't understand that I was home working*" and another saying: "At least when I went to work, I sort of had my own identity, the part of me that is not a mother and I could put my children in the nursery or with their grandparents, but now I had now excuse to do so." Furthermore, one participant said that she developed the bad habit of not knowing when to stop working, specially that the living room is where she worked and also ate and watched TV, etc., so there was no separation." Finally, some participants explained that being home working didn't give them more time for their families because they were still busy working– However, the rest of the participants mentioned how they devoted more time with their loved ones or created breaks that included having lunch together or quick walks or telling each other of the funny incidents that happen throughout the day or just bumping into each other. Here, we run across another factor that came up with further questioning about the work life balance, and that is freedom or autonomy.

Apparently, it is not the mere concept of telecommuting that automatically gives people a good work balance, but rather the freedom you get while telecommuting and how well you organize time, duty, activity, and prioritize accordingly. Many participants expressed their gratitude for

having given more autonomy and no longer being micromanaged, so they could really finish a report well done based on their own speed or categorize their own time to finish their tasks and have more free time during certain days to actually go out or paint or cook or just immerse in their hobbies or have a coffee with a friend. One architect said: "sometimes I have very busy days where I work longer than the official shift requires me to base on the task at hand and my ability to finish it, and sometimes I have leisure days where the task is easy for me and I could run errands instead of cramping them all for the weekends". Another participant mentioned that he was glad his work was to be judged according to the deliverables at the end, the result, instead of getting comments throughout the process hampering his own process of how he knows the image will turn out to be. Many were positive about their improved work schedules because they were comfortable enough to design it themselves.

In conclusion, there was a general harmony within the majority of participants' answers that the sudden conversion to telecommuting was not very smooth or comfortable, they did not feel stable, there was a relative feeling of social or more accurately, professional isolation, management did not deal well with remote guidance, and there was a better work-life balance due to increased freedom.

- No commuting to and from work, which saves time and also reduces traffic volume on the roads

- Flexible Worktime (autonomy in dividing the work according to personal preference and ability)

- Work/life balance (it is important to note here that the mere act of telecommuting isn't what generates this balance, but rather adequate time management in using the freedom telecommuting provides)

- Avoiding the high cost of fuel and rising cost of office rental space due to the ongoing steep economic crisis Lebanon is facing

- Telecommuting may aid the rise of local Lebanese startups and products due to cutting office cuts all together which is pivotal during this crisis, as many investors pulled away and most products used in Lebanon are exported, which became unreasonably expensive to the average citizen

- Provides stable and safe work conditions amidst political unpredictability with ongoing protests and road blocks that will continue to occur

The disadvantages have been noticed to be related with psychosis of the employees, their motivation, expectations, and organizational culture.

- Social isolation

- Feeling disconnected and disengaged from the company

- Lacking the motivation that results from the working ambiance and collegial team spirit

- Blurry professional boundaries in terms of time and privacy

- Local companies' management behavior seemed suspicious of employees

- Lack of regular feedback from managers

- Confusion from dealing with IT problems

- Managers feel less in control

- Local company lack proper technical tools for smooth digital interaction

- External circumstances like electricity cuts and slow connection in Lebanon

- Family conflicts and a common misconception that working from home means being available

- The fact that the telecommuting process happened as a sudden measurement in the face of Covid-19, so many companies were not prepared. And because this happened during Covid-19 and national lockdowns, mental health spiraled downwards because everything else was closed including leisure, where even family and friends couldn't visit each other, resulting in a negative overall experience.

Moving to the unique barriers and success factors present for Implementing Telecommuting in Lebanon. Based on the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting during Covid-19 in Lebanon, the barriers and success factors derived for implementing telecommunications are heavily centered around:

Leadership, Communication Strategy, Employee Empowerment, Quality of Digital Infrastructure, Formal Policies, and Organizational Culture – which are all interconnected and have direct relationships with one another.

In our findings, we deduce that the type of leadership is more important than the physical presence of employees when it comes to understanding the task, motivation, and ensuring quality performance: this is evident when asked about communication change before or after telecommuting (with 70% answering that they experienced no change and the independent variable was their manager's style) as well as the repetitive highlighting of managers' skeptical attitude and lack of feedback when it came to disadvantages of telecommuting.

On that note, the social presence theory was challenged, because it highlights the physical ability to interact with others with understanding tasks better.

Concurrently, this parallels with the pattern of answers that showed managers preferred traditional work settings over telecommuting because they feel less in control. So, a main barrier to implementing telecommuting in an organization is a negative managerial view of it and an

imbedded perception that employees must always be supervised. However, the success factor is determined by two key issues:

A) How to communicate directives and establish clear goals and reasonable time frames

B) Having a result-based performance evaluation rather than on presence and time.

Transformational Leadership is significant in this case, so that managers can shift between supportive and delegating approach depending on employees' involvement and technical aptitude, with the intention of empowering the employee in order to give him/her more autonomy in later stages, making telecommuting easier on both.

Here, motivation is increased according to Maslow's hierarchy with respect to self-achievement, Herzberg's motivation theory on recognition, McClelland's dual factor theory via clear goals, structure, and constant feedback, Vroom's expectancy theory via addressing the three questions for employee achievement: Can I do it? (through proper training), Will it work? (through reasonable deadline and proper resources), and Is it worth it (effort validation and feeling the process was in fact smooth and effortless), similarly bringing us to the Social Exchange theory as well (effort VS personal gain).

Training on telecommuting is also important to be taken by managers and not just employees, for when the former have knowledge of its advantages on the organization and prior familiarity on how to properly achieve its optimal benefits, they will have a more positive attitude towards it as noted by Holt (1994) and Igbaria and Guimaraes (1999). The studies proved the Constructivist theory because trained managers and adoption of telework organizations were positively related. Finally, a success factor for telecommuting could be if management put effort into transferring positive organization culture in a way that does not only appear in work settings, but within telecommuting as well. There can be cyber clubs and activities like yoga online classes or

cooking/clubs, or create monthly events that can keep employees having a certain sense of belonging towards the organization and feeling they belong, diminishing the sense of isolation from working home, and again motivating those with strong need for affiliations and collegial relationships.

The second critical factor for success in teleworking is communication, and although this was discussed above under leadership, it is essential enough to have its own segment. First, when managers and employees are interacting from remote distances, communication does become complicated as the social presence theory denotes (but not impossible). The study conducted on this issue that listed communication as a challenge was by Huws et al. and it was done in 1990 – since then, technological advancement paved way for much easier and effective modes of telecommunication, including video conferences and internal programs. So when leaders and employees discuss the outline of specific duties, goals, resources, and time needed to accomplish the results, managers can devise an easy method or platform (tailored program) for monitoring performance, receiving questions, and giving feedback – creating a systematic process. Such new communication skills are necessary to prevent teleworkers from feeling confused or isolated as they have mentioned in the disadvantages.

A strong discrepancy between local and international organizations in our study was how the latter were better equipped for telecommuting. By better equipped, we mean experienced and trained on telecommuting, but most importantly, having a prioritized budget for digital infrastructure, resources, tailored internal programs, credible systems, strong security, predictable processes, and IT support teams available remotely. The technical logistic theorists that base a significant weight on having a quality digital realm were right to believe that the lack of it is a barrier and its adequate presence a strong success factor to implementing

telecommuting; for a basic disadvantage and immediate demotivating factor according to the interviewees is not having such tools, because it slows down their efforts, focus, and time, and it ends up creating constant stress and frustration over silly and preventable instances.

Another disadvantage from local companies was not having a formal telecommunication system, allowing employees and their managers to access private phone numbers and using phone applications like WhatsApp, causing a decrease in professionalism and a feeling of privacy infringement, blurring work boundaries.

Finally, for telecommuting to work efficiently, organizations need to provide support by supplying proper funds for the teleworker to have appropriate tools including office equipment if they didn't have them as well as ample training for the IT programs being used.

Slow internet connection in Lebanon and electricity cuts are dangerous barriers that do not have direct amends and cannot be controlled by the organization's management or technical advancement, however, the organization's understanding and support towards such instances can mitigate those barriers. Perhaps, planning around them (in terms of time and deadlines) or providing employees with better private internet costs if it helps.

Proper formal policies create a sense of safety and credibility within the working environment and so they should be updated to tailor telecommuting-based worries and related instances. Reimbursement of internet/telephone costs and transportation costs if employees are meeting with clients or performing sales or research or field work or any project that needs car commuting. Policies should also aid in establishing boundaries concerning work time and job description. Manochehri and Pinkerton (2003) note that "telecommuting policies need to address issues as privacy, health and safety, security measures, reimbursable expenses and use of

equipment". These policies are definite success factors for implementing telecommuting because it encourages staff to trust this new working condition.

The question remains should companies opt for telecommuting in Lebanon?

According to the findings of the study and backed literature, companies in Lebanon should definitely invest in creating digital platforms that can safely carry the burdens of the company's tasks and internal communication process. Irrespective of whether or not the company seeks to fully rely on telecommuting, this procedure should happen under the aspects of risk management, probable future competition (as historical sequence shows that telecommuting is on the rise), elevating flexibility in the work culture when needed (which as mentioned previously attracts better talents and creates higher motivation), and finally can be a Lebanese company's new tool for providing longer paternity and maternity leaves, which not also serves as a competitive edge, but also directly aids in better work/life balance (something that the new generation actively searches for in any job) as well as promotes healthy community values that fall under millennial corporate social responsibility.

Paving way for a hybrid telecommuting company may allow the organization to optimally gain telecommuting's benefits without compromising the important traditional work setting's advantages as well. Perhaps management could adequately study which jobs and tasks require mandatory office presence, what meetings need to be held in assembly or at the office, assessing what can be delegated and when, and tailoring the telecommuting experience to the organization and the employees' abilities. This can also serve as a trial experience where management can learn in case an actual emergency happens and measurements force full lockdown.

Whether to fully transform or build a company to have a telecommuting work structure or not, will depend on company goals, company type, the goods/services it provides, company culture,

company budget, and company human capital. It easier to telecommute when employees have high capacity and high involvement so delegation is easy… it is easier to telecommute when the type of job requires no constant and continuous team cooperation… it is easier to telecommute when there is adequate budget for proper quality digital infrastructure and all its subsequent resources from training to IT group to security measures. Finally, in Lebanon it is very important to assess age demographics and internet literacy because many from the working force and even market audience are from the older generation in a developing world that still encompass rural modes of work, small traditional local family businesses, and simply not having or needing to have access to the internet; these people will find it very hard and demotivating to be trained on telecommuting.

4.3 Study Limitations

The fact that telecommuting happened at a time where Lebanon witnessed its capital exploding and the whole economy spiraled downwards: (the Lebanese pound value diminished and fresh dollars were scarce making exported products, *which constitute most products since Lebanon relies heavily on exports,* extremely expensive compared to the average citizen's income that remained the same). Many companies had to downsize, salaries were cut, and people's reserves in banks perished; certainly, this also added to the negative experience of working from home due to a pandemic, as simply, people were not in their natural individual or social elements. So, the perception of telecommuting may have been hindered by the negative overall experience. Isolation may have been exaggerated because friends and family could not visit each other or leisure activities were unavailable, etc.

The interviewees may have been afraid of answering certain questions truthfully due to fear of

their companies, even if they were assured their answers will only be used to serve the study and

hence remain anonymous.

The number of interviewees is definitely inadequate to truly decipher patterns on a national scale

and come up with certain theories that may empirically help in policy making or decision making

for companies' futures.

The companies chosen were not horizontally similar with respect to having the same goal or

selling the same products/services or having the same size, etc. Although this serves the study in

understanding certain variable patterns, the outcome cannot be fully accurate if there aren't

similar companies compared with each other at the same time to see if they yield the same

results.

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