

From Quarantine to Normality: How Emotions and Productivity Concerns Influence the Intention to Continue Teleworking

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed teleworking from an occasional practice into a widespread necessity, raising questions about its long-term viability. This study examines the determinants of workers' intentions to continue teleworking after a crisis, focusing on the role of positive emotions, productivity concerns, and social concerns. Using data from 1,142 teleworkers surveyed during the 2020 lockdown, the results show that positive emotions significantly increase the intention to telework, while productivity concerns have a modest negative effect. In contrast, social concerns do not exert a significant influence. These results emphasize the importance of promoting positive experiences of telework to ensure its sustained acceptance. This research contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of telework and provides practical insights for organizations seeking to adapt to the evolving work environment.

Keywords: Teleworking, Emotions, Productivity, Social Concerns

JEL Classification codes: J24, M54, O33

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the structure of work and caused a massive transition to teleworking (Kamoshida et al., 2023). During the quarantine period, teleworking became the norm. It offered employees the opportunity to work from home and gave companies the chance to evaluate new working models. After this period, many companies introduced hybrid forms of work, signaling a permanent change in the way we perceive work.

Teleworking is known for its benefits such as flexibility, autonomy, and reduced commute times, but also for the challenges it brings, including the risk of social isolation and difficulties in maintaining a consistent work routine.

The literature suggests that while teleworking can increase job satisfaction, its impact on productivity is controversial (Perelman et al., 2024), with concerns regarding cross-

departmental collaboration and team synergy. The introduction of teleworking has also raised concerns about social support and the loss of a sense of belonging to work teams (O'Neil et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023; Parent-Lamarche & Saade, 2024).

Although numerous studies have examined the effects of teleworking on employee satisfaction, there are few studies that simultaneously examine the influence of emotions, productivity concerns, and social concerns on the intention to continue teleworking. To address these gaps, this study aims to answer the following research questions: How do positive emotions influence employees' intention to continue teleworking? To what extent do productivity concerns influence the decision to continue teleworking? What role do social concerns play in employees' intention to telework in the long term?

In this context, the present study aims to investigate these factors using a quantitative approach. It uses data from employees who have teleworked during the quarantine period. The results of this study can support companies in optimizing teleworking strategies and help to improve employee engagement, performance and retention, thus providing valuable insights into the sustainability of this working model in the future.

The paper is divided into several sections. This section is followed in Section 2 by an analysis of the relevant theoretical framework, including the literature on telework, positive emotions, productivity, and social concerns. Section 3 describes the methodology used, including the sample, data collection method, and analysis procedures. The results of the study are presented in Section 4, followed by a detailed discussion of the theoretical and practical implications in Section 5. Finally, the paper concludes with conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 The role of positive emotions in teleworking

Positive emotions such as satisfaction, enthusiasm and joy play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. According to Fredrickson's (2004) Broaden-and-Build theory, positive emotions expand a person's cognitive and behavioral repertoire, and promote psychological resilience, creativity, and engagement at work. Employees who experience more positive emotions are more adaptable to change, more open to working remotely, and more resilient to work-related stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

In the context of teleworking, studies show that employees who experience positive affect are more likely to perceive remote work as beneficial and show higher work motivation and engagement (Mérida-López et al., 2020; Parent-Lamarche, 2022). In addition, research by Wang et al. (2021) suggests that higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being are associated with greater acceptance of telework, particularly among knowledge workers. These findings are consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation and emotional well-being influence job performance and decision-making.

In addition, teleworkers who feel valued and supported by their organization develop greater commitment and loyalty, which reduces the risk of voluntary turnover (Jamal et al., 2023). Given the increasing importance of hybrid and remote working models, it is important to examine the role of positive emotional experiences in shaping employees' long-term teleworking preferences.

Based on these findings, we formulate the following hypothesis:

- (H1): Positive emotions have a favorable influence on the intention to continue teleworking.

1.2 Productivity concerns and the effectiveness of teleworking

Productivity concerns refer to employees' worries about maintaining or improving their performance while teleworking. Following Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, employees' motivation to continue teleworking decreases if they feel that teleworking has a negative impact on their productivity. The EU-OSHA report (2021) highlights that the feeling of lack of control when teleworking is exacerbated by the intensification of work, social isolation, limited collaboration in virtual teams and the difficulty of separating work and private life, which can lead to stress, and lower employee well-being and productivity.

The effects of teleworking on productivity are highly controversial. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) conducted a meta-analysis which concluded that while teleworking improves job satisfaction and reduces work-family conflict, some employees experience lower productivity due to distractions and lack of direct supervision. Allen et al (2015) also found that teleworkers report difficulties with communication and collaboration, which can affect work efficiency and speed of decision making.

Recent economic trends show a growing concern about telework productivity. Large companies such as Amazon, Google, and Meta have implemented restrictions on telecommuting, arguing that prolonged telecommuting hinders innovation, spontaneous collaboration, and cohesive company culture (Hatchuel, 2024). These measures suggest that companies are emphasizing interaction in the office to encourage creativity and teamwork, although hybrid models remain an option.

However, other studies show that teleworking can increase productivity under the right conditions. Bloom et al. (2015) found that employees who telework in structured environments have higher output and better work performance.

Given these competing perspectives, we propose the following hypothesis:

(H2): Telework productivity concerns have a negative impact on the intention to continue teleworking

1.3 Social concerns and loneliness in teleworking

Social concerns refer to the feeling of isolation, the lack of personal contact, and the challenges of maintaining professional relationships while teleworking (García-Salirrosas et al., 2023). According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, the need for social belonging is fundamental to well-being and motivation. If teleworking undermines social belonging, employee engagement may decrease and they may prefer to work in the office (Buonomo et al., 2024).

Several risks associated with prolonged teleworking are highlighted in the literature, including reduced team cohesion, weaker professional networks and fewer opportunities for mentoring (Golden et al., 2008; O'Neil et al., 2023). Eurofound (2021) reports that employees who work from home for extended periods experience higher levels of stress and loneliness, particularly in entry-level positions or highly collaborative work.

Corporate policy after the pandemic reflects these concerns. Companies such as Amazon and Ubisoft have advocated a return to office work, citing the need to strengthen workplace culture and facilitate informal learning. In France, employees see remote working as a social benefit, leading to tensions between employees' expectations and companies' requirements for office work (Rodier, 2024).

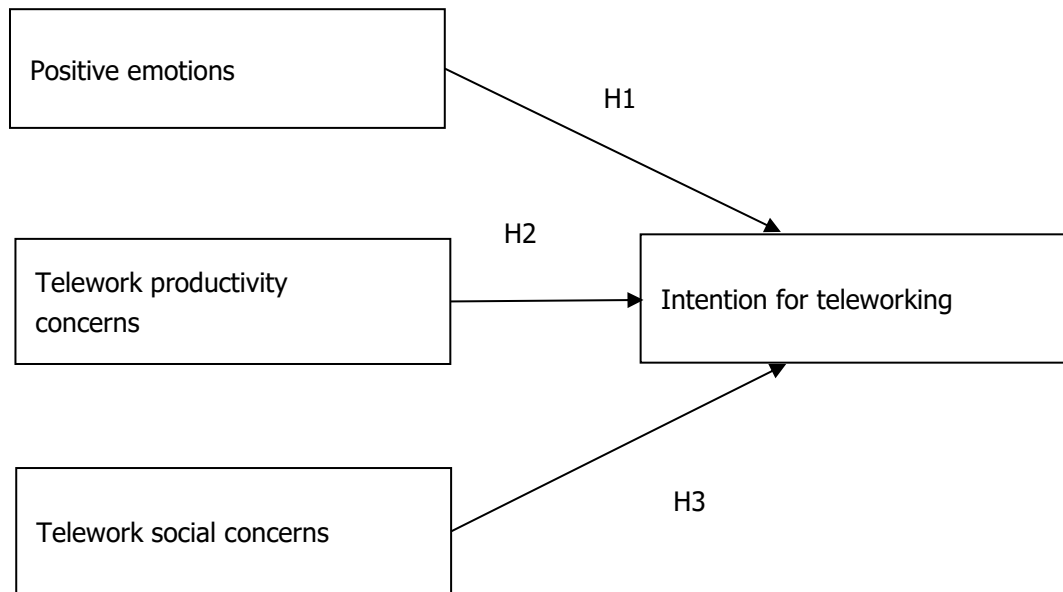
Furthermore, Wang et al. (2021) found that social support from colleagues and supervisors mitigates the negative effects of isolation, suggesting that organizations can mitigate these issues by introducing initiatives to create virtual teams and structured hybrid work models.

Based on these findings, we hypothesize the following:

(H3): Telework social concerns have a negative impact on the intention to continue teleworking.

Based on these hypotheses, we propose the following conceptual model (Figure 1):

Fig. 1 The conceptual model



2 METHODOLOGY

The study is based on data from a sample of 1142 employees who worked remotely during the 2020 quarantine period. The data was collected online between May 13 and June 14, 2020. The demographic composition of the sample includes age groups, gender, education level and employer types (Table 1).

Tab. 1 The sample structure

Variables of the sample		Percent during quarantine
Age	18-25 years	12.7%
	26-35 years	30.1%
	36-45 years	28.3%
	46-55 years	19.4%
	Over 55 years	9.6%
Gender	Male	49.6%
	Female	50.4%
Education	High school	16.5%
	Post-secondary school	10.8%

Variables of the sample		Percent during quarantine
	University	52.4%
	Postgraduate studies	20.3%
Type of employer	Multinational company	30.3%
	Large Romanian company	27.9%
	Small and medium-sized Romanian company	32.3%
	Micro-firm	9.6%
Total		100%

Source: authors' computation

The sample is made up of 50.4.3% women and 49.6% men, with the majority of respondents aged between 26 and 45. The snowball sampling method was used. This is a non-probability sampling method in which the original participants can recommend other people with the desired characteristics of the target population to participate in the study (Nunan et al., 2020).

To test the conceptual model, several latent variables were defined based on the literature (Table 2): telework social concerns, telework productivity concerns, positive emotions, and intention to telework. A latent variable is constructed when the phenomenon under investigation is complex, abstract and unobservable (Hair et al., 2017). To measure the items that define these latent variables, a Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 5 - strongly agree.

Tab. 2 The latent variables

Latent variable	Items	Source
Telework social concerns	Loss of sense of belonging to the organization/work group	Mann & Holdsworth, 2003; Wang et al., 2021; O'Neil et al., 2023; García-Salirrosas et al., 2023; Buonomo et al., 2024
	Lack of support from colleagues	
	Lack of support from management	
Telework productivity concerns	Uncertainty about the future	Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Allen et al., 2015; EU-OSHA, 2021; Ficapal-Cusí et al., 2024
	Potential loss of productivity (e.g. due to lack of synergy, loss of interpersonal cooperation, distraction from work)	
	The feeling that I can't control things	
Positive emotions	I was proud that I could work from home	Bloom et al, 2015; Wang et al., 2021; García-Salirrosas et al., 2023; O'Neil et al., 2023; Perelman et al., 2024; Urien & Erro-Garcés, 2024
	I felt more productive when I worked from home	
	I was grateful that I could work from home	
	I felt better when I was able to work from home	
Intentions for teleworking	I will always enjoy working from home, no matter the situation	Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Allen et al., 2015;

	I intend to improve myself technically to be able to work from home in the future	Bloom et al, 2015; Eurofound, 2021; Nosratzadeh & Edrisi, 2023; Ernst & Young, 2024
	I will recommend the system of working from home to others	
	I intend to work from home even outside of crisis situations	

For data analysis, structural equation modeling was performed using the partial least squares (PLS-SEM) approach with SmartPLS 4 software. The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed to evaluate the measurement model and the structural model was assessed to examine the relationships between the latent variables.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To ensure the robustness of the model, the reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed. The results in Table 3 confirm that all latent variables fulfill the reliability criteria. The values of Cronbach's alpha and of the composite reliability (ρ_a and ρ_c) are above the threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017), indicating a good internal consistency. In addition, the values for the average variance extracted (AVE) are above 0.5 and the factor loadings are higher than 0.7 (Nunan et al., 2020), which confirms the convergent validity.

Tab. 3 Construct reliability and validity

Latent variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability (ρ_a)	Composite reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Intentions for teleworking	0.905	0.910	0.934	0.779
Positive emotions	0.879	0.891	0.916	0.733
Telework productivity concerns	0.815	0.837	0.890	0.730
Telework social concerns	0.820	0.838	0.891	0.732

Source: authors' computation

With regard to discriminant validity, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) matrix (Table 4) shows that all values are above the threshold value of 0.9 (Henseler et al., 2015), meaning that the discriminant validity of the constructs is given.

Tab. 4 The heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) matrix

	Intentions for teleworking	Positive emotions	Telework productivity concerns	Telework social concerns
Intentions for teleworking				
Positive emotions	0.860			
Telework productivity concerns	0.290	0.241		
Telework social concerns	0.248	0.210	0.857	

Source: authors' computation

Another way of assessing discriminant validity is the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For each construct, the square root of the AVE is higher than the correlations with other constructs (Table 5). This criterion is therefore fulfilled.

Tab. 5 Fornell-Larcker criterion

	Intentions for teleworking	Positive emotions	Telework productivity concerns	Telework social concerns
Intentions for teleworking	0.882			
Positive emotions	0.777	0.856		
Telework productivity concerns	-0.256	-0.217	0.854	
Telework social concerns	-0.223	-0.190	0.718	0.855

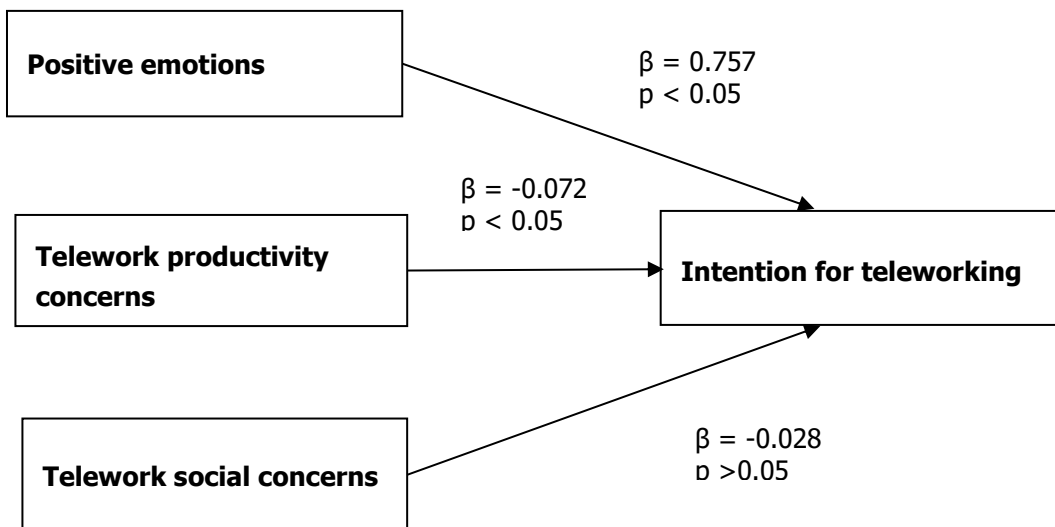
Source: authors' computation

The model is not affected by collinearity, as the variance inflation factor (VIF) does not exceed the threshold value of 5 (Hair et al., 2017).

The structural model was evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure on 5000 subsamples to determine the path coefficients (β), the t-test values and the p-values to assess the strength and significance of the relationships between the variables (Table 6).

Based on these findings, the resulting model is shown in Figure 2.

Fig. 2 The resulted model



The positive emotions manifested by feelings such as joy, pride, gratitude and confidence have a strong favorable influence ($\beta = 0.757$, $t = 51.948$, $p < 0.001$) on the intention to continue teleworking (Table 6). This result supports hypothesis H1 and confirms that positive emotions significantly increase employees' willingness to continue teleworking.

On the other hand, telework productivity concerns, which refer to worries such as lack of control or distraction from work, have a negative but weakly significant effect ($\beta = -0.072$, $t = 2.428$, $p = 0.015$) on the intention for teleworking, supporting hypothesis H2 (Table 6). Although the effect is statistically significant, its relatively low coefficient suggests that

productivity concerns may not be a primary barrier to the adoption of telework, but still play a role in shaping employee attitudes.

Conversely, social concerns about telework do not exert a statistically significant influence on the intention to continue teleworking ($\beta = -0.028$, $t = 0.917$, $p = 0.359$) (Table 6). Thus, hypothesis H3 is not supported, suggesting that the social concerns seen as loss of sense of belonging to the organization or lack of support from colleagues or management may not be a decisive factor in employees' decision making regarding telework.

Tab. 6 Test of the research hypotheses

Relationship	Path coefficient (β)	t test	P value	Result
H1: Positive emotions -> Intentions for teleworking	0.757	51.948	0.000	Supported
H2: Telework productivity concerns -> Intentions for teleworking	-0.072	2.428	0.015	Supported
H3: Telework social concerns -> Intentions for teleworking	-0.028	0.917	0.359	Not supported

Source: authors' computation

The model has strong explanatory power (Hair et al., 2017), as the coefficient of determination $R^2=0.61$ means that 61% of the variance for the exogenous variable intention to telework is explained by the endogenous variables considered in the model.

These results underline the importance of positive emotions for the attitude to continue teleworking. Employees who perceive teleworking as a positive experience and associate it with greater autonomy, flexibility, and a better work-life balance are more likely to continue teleworking. This is consistent with augmentation and construction theory (Fredrickson, 2004), which posits that positive emotions expand the cognitive and behavioral repertoire so that individuals are able to adopt and maintain beneficial practices such as telework.

The negative impact of productivity concerns, albeit modest, suggests that employees are concerned about maintaining efficiency when teleworking. This is consistent with previous research (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) which found that productivity perceptions are critical to teleworking preferences. However, given the small effect size, it can be concluded that well-implemented telework policies and digital collaboration tools can mitigate these concerns.

The non-significant effect of social concerns is an interesting result. While the literature suggests that workplace belonging is critical to job satisfaction (O'Neil et al., 2023), the current results suggest that social disconnectedness does not deter employees from choosing to telework. One possible explanation for this is that employees have become accustomed to virtual means of communication, so the loss of face-to-face interaction is less of an issue. This is in line with studies that indicate that hybrid working models can compensate for social deficits (Parent-Lamarche & Saade, 2024).

From a practical perspective, organizations should harness the role of positive emotions by creating a supportive environment for teleworking. Employers can improve the experience of teleworking by offering ergonomic facilities, flexible working hours and wellbeing initiatives that promote job satisfaction and engagement. In addition, strategies such as virtual team building activities and interactive digital collaboration platforms can further enhance the emotional appeal of teleworking.

When tackling productivity issues, companies should invest in training employees in time management, self-discipline and digital tools to increase productivity when working remotely. In addition, introducing clear performance metrics and promoting a results-oriented work culture can reduce employee uncertainty about their efficiency when working remotely.

From a theoretical perspective, these results contribute to the telework literature by emphasizing the dominant role of emotions over rational concerns (e.g., productivity and social aspects) in shaping telework preferences. The results suggest that the adoption of telework is driven more by affective experiences than logistical or operational concerns, providing a new insight into the motivation to work from home.

CONCLUSION

The study provides evidence that positive emotions are a decisive factor in the intention to continue teleworking. In this regard, employers could support this feeling by recognizing and rewarding the flexibility and autonomy that teleworking brings. It is also important that companies find ways to alleviate productivity issues by introducing technology to support collaboration and providing training to improve virtual communication.

Although this study provides valuable insights, some limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences about the relationship between emotions, concerns, and telework intentions. Future studies should use longitudinal approaches to track how employees' perceptions evolve over time. Second, the sample consists of employees who teleworked during the lockdown in 2020, which may limit the generalizability of the results to the post-pandemic period. Future research could examine other periods and geographic settings to further validate these conclusions.

Finally, the role of hybrid working models deserves further investigation. Given that many companies are now adopting hybrid teleworking models, it would be instructive to examine how employees reconcile office and remote work and whether hybrid models better balance productivity and social concerns.

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