

New Ways of Working in the Time of COVID-19 from the Perspective of Young People

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the traditional working models. The paper presents a study which first objective was to investigate and compare the working relationships between two periods: before and during COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of young people. Secondly, the research presents an overview of the existing working models with a focus to the new and smart ways of working. The study is based on mixed methods: literature review and quantitative research. 364 young people living in Tirana, Albania have completed a survey in January-March 2021 timeframe. The data gathered from this questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS software. The results suggest that in comparison with 2019 young people had greater flexibility in 2020 to work from home or both forms (remotely and in office). Furthermore, 38.57% of them have the opportunity to choose whether in future to work from office, home or in combination. 26.17% have responded that it depends on the manager decision and 35.26% are not sure about it. Similarly, more in depth data will be provided in relation to their development opportunities and demographic variables.

Keywords: new ways of working, working conditions, young people, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Labour markets are under pressure from the combined effects of several megatrends (OECD, 2019). The developments in work design, labour relations, physical workspaces and ICT are brought up together under the broad concept of ‘New Ways of Working’ (NWW), also known as ‘The New World of Work’¹.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the traditional working models. It had an impact on both workforce and workplace. Within a limited and short time of period the companies have shifted their way of working. The new challenges, brought also new opportunities for new business models and management philosophies. Young people are disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis, with multiple shocks including disruption to education and training, employment and income losses, and greater difficulties in finding a job (ILO Monitor, 2020)². The shape that the workforce of the future takes will be the result of complex, changing and competing forces³.

2. Literature Review

The pandemic crisis has an impact on workers, work and organization in both long and short term. The future of global labour market has been affected also from technology. The technological innovations can affect employment in two main ways: a) by directly displacing workers from tasks they were previously performing (displacement effect) b) by increasing the demand for labour in industries or jobs that arise or develop due to technological progress (productivity effect)⁴. All these changes led to the creation and increase of new ways of working.

¹ De Leede, J., & Kraijenbrink, J. (2014). The mediating role of trust and social cohesion in the effects of new ways of working: a Dutch case study. *Human resource management, social innovation and technology*, 14, 3-20.

² Monitor, ILO (2020). COVID-19 and the world of work. *Updated estimates and analysis*.

³ Brown, J., Gosling, T., Sethi, B., Sheppard, B., Stubbings, C., Sviokla, J., & Zarubina, D. (2017). Workforce of the future: The competing forces shaping 2030. *London: PWC*.

⁴ Petropoulos, G. (2018). The impact of artificial intelligence on employment. *Praise for Work in the Digital Age*, 119.

NWW are practices in which employees are able to work independent of time, place and organization, supported by a flexible work environment which is facilitated by information technologies.” NWW is divided into four components, namely (1) Teleworking, (2) Flexible Workplaces at Work, (3) Flexible Working Hours, and (4) IT (De Leede, 2017)⁵. These factors contribute to the fact that employees get more and more control over the way of performing work. New Ways of Working (NWW) consist of changes that take place at four aspects: 1) the physical workspace, 2) (ICT) technology, 3) organization & management and 4) work culture. The physical workspaces refers to NWW measures that increasing the flexibility where and when to work by introducing flexible work hours, telework and creating flexible workplaces at the office that better suits the work task. Introducing ICT technologies implies that employees are supported with technologies that allows them to be connected and able to collaboration always and everywhere. The third NWW aspect: ‘organization and management’ is important since managing employees might become a big challenge when it is not longer visible were, when and what employees are working on. It is therefore important that managers have trust in there employees, focus more on output instead of presence at the office, and provide them with more autonomy by stimulating own initiative. Changes in work culture implies that an open culture, with focus on information sharing and collaboration in networks is created.⁶ According to a study led by Knoll in 2011, five major trends in the new ways of working consist on: a) the continuing distribution of organizations; b) the availability of enabling technologies and social collaboration tools; c) the coming shortage of knowledge workers; d) the demand for more work flexibility; e) pressure for more sustainable organizations and workstyles⁷.

Going forward to more recent studies, the such as the one of According to World Economic Forum, five imperatives for resetting the future of work agenda consist on:

⁵ De Leede, J. (2017). *New ways of working practices: antecedents and outcomes* (Rev. ed.). Bringley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

⁶ Blok, M. M., Groenesteijn, L., Schelvis, R., & Vink, P. (2012). New ways of working: does flexibility in time and location of work change work behavior and affect business outcomes?. *Work*, 41(Supplement 1), 2605-2610.

⁷ Ouye, J. A. (2011). Five trends that are dramatically changing work and the workplace. *Knoll Workplace Research*, 1-14.

transform organization design and work design; cultivate health and wellbeing; align new technology and skills; build human-centric leadership culture; embrace stakeholder capitalism. Furthermore, the document is referring to company boards and senior leaders for potential considerations on well-being, purpose and new ways of working to come together to create a “new deal” for what being a worker in the organization means, and to reshape work, workplaces and workforces for ongoing success in the future⁸.

Method

This paper is based on literature review and quantitative research. In January- March 2021 timeframe 534 young people completed the survey that aimed to provide as much as possible data about young people employment situation in Tirana, Albania. In this population a sub sample of 364 young people that were currently employed provided very important and statistical significant data about their way of working. Additionally they responded to other relevant questions that targeted their understanding of new ways of working same as their working practices before 2019 and during the pandemic crisis. The data gathered from this questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS 19 software.

Results and Discussion

Below are presented the first data about the way young people were engaged to work in two different periods: before 2019 and in 2020. The option of working from home is based in the definition of ILO in the Home Work Convention (No. 177) and Recommendation (No. 184)1996, as “work carried out by a person ... (i) in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer; (ii) for remuneration; (iii) which

⁸ World Economic Forum. (2020). Resetting the Future of Work Agenda: Disruption and Renewal in a Post-COVID World. World Economic Forum in Collaboration with Mercer.

results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used” (Convention No. 177, Art. 1)⁹.

The data shows that COVID-19 and socio-economic variable, in specific, the family income have a significance (0.032) whereas the p level is smaller than $\alpha = 5\% = 0.05$.

Statistically it was proved that there are differences about the way young people performed before 2019 and 2020, which coincides with the COVID-19 global pandemic. Thus, working from home and both home and office were higher in percentages in 2020 than in 2019. On the other hand, working from office decrease from 69 % (2019) to 43% (2020). This is also the highest difference (26%) between both periods. The difference between both ways from 2019 to 2020 has been increased with 22% going from 26% to 48%, respectively.

Furthermore, 38.57% of them have the opportunity to choose whether in future to work from office, home or in combination. 26.17% have responded that it depends on the manager decision and 35.26% are not sure about it.

To the question if the young people participated in other training and development opportunities during COVID-19 period apart from ‘safety and healthy’ sessions, the highest percentage of 49% include those that did not take any and they believe it was not needed. 29% responded that they were not trained but would have liked to partake and only 23% of young people did undergone through other training session for them to upskill their knowledge and expertise.

Following this question, the Albanian young people were asked about the topic they consider very important to be trained. The highest level of 45% was chosen for, ‘customer service in a new and creative way’ training. Other sessions such as IT tools (30%) managing team virtually (28%) were also identified as needed from them.

⁹ Berg, J., Humblet, M., & Soares, S. (2021). Working from home: from invisibility to decent work.

3. Conclusion

New ways of working, including teleworking, other forms of flexible working (e.g., flexi-time arrangements), staggered hours, alternating teams, rotating schedules, etc.¹⁰. The results suggest that in comparison with 2019 young people had greater flexibility in 2020 to work from home or both forms (remotely and in office). Moving from a traditional method of workplace presence to a hybrid model would be the future of work, especially for this generation. The transition into a more agile structure would provide to young people greater flexibility. It is an evolution process, which in Albania started mainly due to COVID-19 pandemic situation. However, it presents a unique opportunity for being creative, innovative and more agile with new business and management philosophies. Comparing the working relationships between two periods: before and during COVID-19 pandemic indicated that new working practices are crucial from the perspective of young people.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization. (2020). Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond: A Practical Guide.

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