

TELEWORK VS ABSENTEEISM

Telework vs absenteeism

In 2017, several measures in favour of telework crept into the reform of the Labour Code. In the hubbub that accompanied the ordonnances (statutory instruments), these novelties went almost completely unnoticed. Nevertheless, they were making access to telework much easier, predominantly by increasing employee rights. Even though telework has a positive impact on issues such as quality of working life (QWL) or absenteeism, it is rarely presented as a solution. Wrongly so.

Telework on the increase

According to a survey carried out by Ifop in 2018 and published in February 2019, 29% of employees have tried teleworking, on average 6 days per month. The trend is increasing, because in 2017, 25% claimed they used remote working. These figures take into account regular telework formalised by an employment contract as well as informal and irregular telework. Before the Labour Law statutory instruments, this latter form of teleworking, which is largely the most usual form, involved 16 to 20% of employees. The new rules were therefore drawn up so as to provide employers with legal security. Now, telework can be set up simply by a collective agreement, by an internal charter or even merely by an agreement between the employee and the employer, for instance during an email exchange.

Improving working conditions

Any employee may request the possibility to work remotely. A refusal on the part of the employer must be justified in writing. On the other hand, barring exceptions, telework cannot be imposed on the employee. Since the 2017 reform, teleworking is clearly a facility granted to employees so to better manage their schedule. According to the Ifop study, more than three-quarters of employees who have chosen teleworking, say they enjoy a better work-life balance, feel less tired, healthier and, even feel more independent and efficient in their work.

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A way to reduce absenteeism?

A recent study by BVA for Workplace Options confirms the benefits of telework, in its most flexible form. Employees who make occasional use of telework have an absenteeism rate of 1.2%, three times less than the average of employees, which stands at 3.9%. Telework could even be a remedy to prevent the risk of inability to adapt to a return to work after a long period of sick leave. It is for this purpose that the Berard-Oustric-Seiller report proposed to establish telework as an alternative to sick leave for therapeutic reasons but solely on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, other studies somewhat moderate this optimism, by underlining the difficulty encountered by employees in separating work time and rest time, and the lack of significant added value in terms of well-being or health. Of course, remote working is not in itself a miracle solution. Even so, it is an additional tool offered to employees to better manage their time, and to the employer to experiment with new management methods. And like all tools, its effectiveness depends above all on how it is used.

Damien Vieillard-Baron

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