

## Flexible Forms of Work in Romania during Pandemic COVID-19

Alina Madalina Belu  
Ionela Staneci (Drinceanu)  
Aurel Dinca

*University of Craiova, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Romania*

[alina.bbelu@gmail.com](mailto:alina.bbelu@gmail.com)

[eladrinceanu@yahoo.com](mailto:eladrinceanu@yahoo.com)

[aureldinca@yahoo.com](mailto:aureldinca@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*Today, due to the flexibility of work, the workplace is no longer just a place with four walls and a desk, and barriers such as time and space have been overcome by implementing flexible ways of working offered to employees. In Romania, changes in the labor market are obvious. If 10-15 years ago the standard/traditional employment model was the basic element of labor relations, and flexibility seemed an exotic and distant concept, nowadays labor flexibility has become a reality that no one can deny. Moreover, flexibility in labor relations has become a necessity. The employer is required to find and retain those employees who professionally meet the requirements of the job. The currency of exchange is that employees have their own requirements and needs to which the employer must adapt. The main objective of the research study is to determine how managers implement the main forms of flexible work.*

**Key words:** telework, jobshare, flexitime, project work

**J.E.L. classification:** M54

### 1. Introduction

In the context of today's economy, when professionals can choose from a wide range of offers available on the labor market, employers must reinvent themselves and learn to offer employees other benefits than financial ones. Most of the time, the flexibility of the organization in which he works can determine the employee to remain faithful to it for a long time and, most importantly, to be motivated to give his best at work and to be productive. Extremely tight deadlines, a very high workload, a management that shows skepticism or working with rigorous clients are things that can demotivate employees to the point where they will want to reorient to other professional opportunities. If certain things cannot be changed or negotiated, as they would jeopardize the smooth running of the organization, there are others for which the employer could be more flexible, the aim being to increase the retention of existing talents and attract new ones by promoting these benefits.

Most organizations seek to strike a balance between their productivity needs, short delivery times, customer satisfaction, increasing market share, innovation and needs, employee interests (lifelong learning, professional development, work-life balance). Thus, the concept of flexibility of work performed is well rated by managers and employees alike. There are so-called internal flexibility policies, which consist of work processes at organizational and functional level, involving a degree of secondment of staff. Adoption by companies and the implementation of flexibility programs, minimizing job losses and competitiveness are key factors in maintaining them in the market. The term flexibility has values such as the ability to react and adapt to change. In the current political discourse of the European Union, this concept is viewed in a timely and essential manner, since workers and organizations of all kinds must adapt to the variables of today's society, characterized as the digital age, speed century, information society, in which the IT

industry has gradually penetrated all areas of activity.

Organizational or functional flexibility refers to work processes, work and job organization and secondment of staff. For example, production based on teamwork includes the acquisition of multiple skills and the rotation of tasks. There is also extensive teamwork, which includes own teams and partnerships, which will generate cognitive consolidation, evolutionary learning, innovation and product development.

The flexibility of the work schedule may consist of a continuous shift schedule or schedule on certain days of the week, certain times in a day or in a year; this could mean working from home, while traveling, part-time and full-time work. This type of flexibility can be developed along the professional path, through various leave programs and continuous training, related to the job in question.

Flexibility policies can take many forms, depending on the options available to each organization. Internal flexibility contributes to improving the performance of companies, in terms of adaptation, productivity and innovation. At the same time, it offers benefits to employees in terms of time management, health status and availability to perform duties. Economically, such forms of alternative labor involve a cost-benefit interaction that benefits the management, staff, company dynamics and, implicitly, the labor market.

Internal flexibility must be implemented in a participatory and balanced way. It has the role of balancing short-term demand and supply, based on productivity and minimizing costs, with long-term demand for innovation and strategy. Another function of internal flexibility is to meet the goals of all parties and to find viable solutions for them.

## 2. Literature review

Freedom to choose the work schedule, to choose where to work or non-traditional forms of employment (such as part-time employment, with an unequal or individualized / flexible schedule) are preferred to substantial salary benefits. In such a context, the employer has the mission, not always easy, to find those tools / ways / facilities that will make him attractive for future employees. On the other hand, the facilities offered to employees, in order to increase their attractiveness, must be compatible with the business needs of the employer, but also in accordance with the legal provisions (Mariappanadar, 2019). Thus, the flexible approach to the employment relationship should not only follow current trends or just try to increase employee satisfaction.

In practice, employers should consider several aspects that justify the implementation of flexible approaches, such as (Greene, 2020):

- flexibility must be introduced for a reason, namely the employer to identify those business problems that he is trying to solve;
- establishing through internal policies the forms and limits of flexibility, as well as defining the minimum requirements that are not negotiable and that the employer must implement so that, in the end, the benefits of flexibility are reciprocal;
- establishing the functions that will be the decision-makers for the implementation of the forms of flexibility - these functions should be those that closely manage the activity of the employees and that can decide, in reality, if a certain form of flexibility is compatible or not with that activity;
- it is important for employees to be informed about all aspects and implications of a flexible formula they want to access;
- last but not least, it is necessary to document the implementation of the form of flexibility applicable for each employee; in the absence of documentation or poor documentation of how the employee and the employer must cooperate and the rules applicable during the implementation of that form of flexibility may generate real problems in their relationship.

A variety of work flexibility is also called on call. This type of arrangement is often used both in the field of IT, but also in the field of service provision (electricity, gas, communications) in order to solve problems / breakdowns that may occur at any time (both during the day and at night) and which requires urgent employee intervention (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2020).

Another approach to work flexibility is employee mobility, which can be an attractive factor for them in making the decision to join a company. Flexibility through mobility offers employees the opportunity to transition to work internally, within the same employer, applying for positions they consider more attractive and more compatible with the training acquired, but also externally, by seconding to other countries and even the transition permanent job abroad (Gilbert, 2020).

Therefore, employers have at hand various tools to make them more attractive to future employees or even to existing employees who want a job stability, the choice of one or another of the work flexibility formulas being the exclusive attribute of the employer, which you have to accommodate these formulas to your own business needs.

Flexicurity is an approach that seeks to combine labor market flexibility for the benefit of employers and job security for the benefit of employees, flexibility combined with employment security and reduced labor market segmentation (Sims and Bias, 2019).

Employment flexibility refers to the speed with which the labor market can adapt to changes in the economy. Enterprises are trying to adapt to the increasingly harsh conditions on the market, and labor market flexibility strategies also help workers, giving them the opportunity to adapt. The flexibility of the labor market brings advantages to both employers and employees. Among the tools related to flexibility are: *on-the-job training, fixed-term contracts, part-time flexibility contracts, working hours* (Slater, 2019). Over time, major changes have taken place in the way work is perceived, as well as in the relationship between organizations and employees; There were times when employees expected to stay at their jobs for a long time and enjoyed an acceptable level of job security, but competition, technological change, led to a rethinking of the relationship between employees and organizations, as well as us strategies focused on the ability to react effectively to market conditions, conditions that are constantly changing. It is currently necessary for the workforce to be able to produce immediate results, and employees can be evaluated according to performance criteria, these aspects having an impact on maintaining the job for a long time. There are currently training and development programs to improve employees' skills, thus enabling them to become more able to move from permanent employment to a flexible job (Mathis and Jackson, 2015).

The alternative work modalities most often used in knowledge and innovation-based organizations are *telework, part-time, jobshare, flexitime, project work and intermittent work* (Gilbert, 2020). All this meets the collective and particular needs of human resources and human capital, talent management in any open-minded corporation.

### 3. Research methodology

The purpose of the article is to determine the way in which managers, from several organizations in Romania, perceive and apply the main forms of flexible work. Using in this sense the method of SWOT analysis, through which we highlighted qualitative aspects such as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each concept of flexible work.

The alternative ways of working most often used in organizations based on knowledge and innovation are *telework, jobshare, flexible and project work*.

**1)Teleworking** is a spatial tool for organizing work and is the most well-known possibility of working remotely, even if not very widespread. This represents the work activity carried out remotely at the employer's premises, due to the use of information and telematics technologies, in a different and distant place from the one where the person directly benefiting from the work is located.

**2)Job-share work** consists in the distribution of work tasks and is a form of flexiwork through which two or more part-time employees share their work and the benefits of a normal job, full time. The salary and the holiday allowance are shared.

**3)The flexible work schedule** includes a variable work schedule. It is the most widespread, easy to manage and accessible flexible form of work. The flexible work schedule offers alternatives to arrival times, departure, lunch breaks, generally there is a time in the middle of the day, when all employees are present. Also, a variant of this working method is the flexiplace, which allows the employee to carry out part of the activities outside the office, according to pre-established rules.

**4)Project work** is an employment contract through which the worker participates in the realization of one or more specific projects, as established by the employer, without a relationship of subordination independently, regardless of the time required and depending on the result. The collaborator carries out his activities in his own way, but coordinated by the company organizing the project.

Based on the purpose of the scientific research, the following objectives have been drafted:

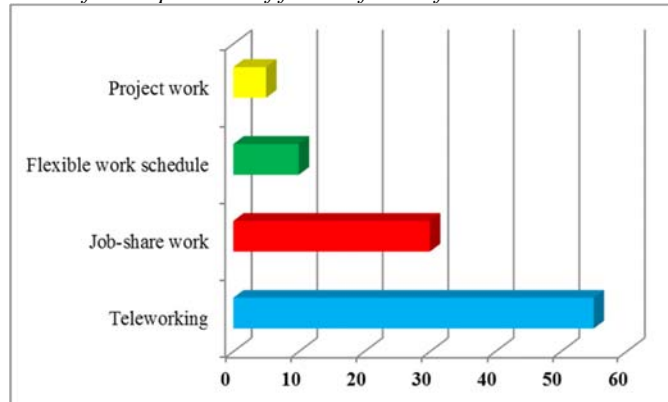
1. Identifying the main forms of flexible work;
2. Analysis of flexible forms of work;
3. Identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of each concept of flexible work.

Data collection was carried out between November 2020 and February 2021, using the questionnaire.

#### 4. Findings

Below are presented the results obtained after the development of the exploratory qualitative stage, respectively the analysis of the data collected with the help of the questionnaire. Figure 1 shows the informational basis of the study, respectively the share of importance that managers give to each form of flexible work.

Figure no. 1. The share of the importance of flexible forms of work.



Source: the author's own concept

The results obtained indicate that the manager takes into account the first *Teleworking*, and, in the last instance, *Project work*.

Using the SWOT analysis method, we highlighted qualitative aspects such as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the teleworking concept (Table 1).

Table no. 1. SWOT analysis of the teleworking concept

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ flexibility in the organization, innovation;</li> <li>✓ increased confidence in job satisfaction;</li> <li>✓ increase productivity, reduce costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ lack of application methodology;</li> <li>✓ limited control of employees;</li> <li>✓ communication barriers between members.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ creating a new organizational culture;</li> <li>✓ competitive advantages by reducing costs;</li> <li>✓ market expansion, application of environmental protection policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ occupational risks;</li> <li>✓ absence of normative regulation;</li> <li>✓ difficulties in adapting workers;</li> <li>✓ risks in information security.</li> </ul>

Source: the author's own concept

Teleworking can be defined according to two variables: temporal and spatial. By analyzing the time variable, teleworking can be full-time or part-time, with a fixed schedule or with a flexible schedule. It is a form of home-working, and may not involve the obligation to weigh in favor of the possibility of free management of one's own work schedule.

From the SWOT analysis we can observe the main characteristics of the job-share concept (Table 2).

Table no.2. SWOT analysis of the job-share concept

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ greater flexibility of the work schedule than part-time;</li> <li>✓ the possibility of allocating personal life time;</li> <li>✓ efficient coverage of the company's work needs;</li> <li>✓ attracting capable individuals who would not decide to work full-time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ the salary scale refers to the number of hours worked per week and less to efforts;</li> <li>✓ difficulties of integration in the culture of the organization;</li> <li>✓ the organization and functioning regulation of the company does not correspond to the new organizational structure;</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ investing in human capital and increasing the degree of labor flexibility;</li> <li>✓ engaging employees in individual and group projects, at organizational and external level;</li> <li>✓ facilitating communication through multimedia means (computers, laptops, landline / mobile phones, faxes).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ the company profile does not meet the variable requirements of the market;</li> <li>✓ the quality of the work is overlooked in favor of quantity;</li> <li>✓ unqualified staff that causes the decrease of the economic-financial indicators of the company (cash flow, turnover, profit, market positioning).</li> </ul>

Source: the author's own concept

Not every job done by job sharing is considered job-share. If one of the parties works less than 17.5 hours per week, it can no longer be considered part-time, but becomes a temporary job.

Following the SWOT analysis, the main qualitative aspects of flexible work are highlighted in Table 3.

Table no. 3. SWOT analysis of flexible work

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ harmonization of family life with work;</li> <li>✓ uninterrupted time for creativity and analysis;</li> <li>✓ reduction of travel costs and parking spaces;</li> <li>✓ reduction of stress, delays and absenteeism for personal reasons;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ fatigue felt on days with more hours of work</li> <li>✓ inadequate strategy in case of interdependent positions</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ increasing competitiveness by reducing fixed costs;</li> <li>✓ attracting motivated and qualified employees;</li> <li>✓ facilitating the recruitment of the best staff;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ transferable human capital</li> <li>✓ economic crisis that brings unemployment, layoffs, austerity measures.</li> </ul>

Source: the author's own concept

This work practice should not be confused with working from home in various reports and presentations, with the completion of professional training or with teleworking, which takes place mainly outside the premises.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the project work concept are identified in Table 4.

Table no. 4. SWOT analysis of project work

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ it is not necessary to hire staff for the execution of some works, this requiring additional costs;</li> <li>✓ the client can terminate the contract if the work performed by the collaborator does not fall within the terms provided in the contract;</li> <li>✓ the collaborator has the right to sickness allowance or maternity leave;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ management is not flexible and participatory towards employees with little seniority;</li> <li>✓ the proposals of the employees are not taken into account, and the vacancies are covered in a large proportion from external sources;</li> <li>✓ age limits and restrictions on experience are introduced in press releases;</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ establishing a favorable work climate and attracting talents;</li> <li>✓ desire to promote, increase skills and a high degree of adaptation to crisis situations;</li> <li>✓ increasing the quality of work performed and producing specialists;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ people with inappropriate behavior can be hired;</li> <li>✓ involves a large volume of work, being necessary to constantly update the grids;</li> </ul>

Source: the author's own concept

The role of the employee in the work on the project is of collaborator, and that of the employer is of client. The project is easily identifiable and completed by a result, while the program is an activity completed by obtaining a result. In the case of this flexible form of work, the work performed must be completed within a specified period of time.

## 5. Conclusions

A national economy is all the more advanced the better its labor resources are used. Somewhat paradoxically, in Romania, this very resource was neglected. The immediate consequences were the migration of a relatively important part of the competent workforce or young graduates with remarkable potential and a widening of the gap in labor productivity, compared to the level achieved in Western European countries, but also to other countries in transition.

The existing alternatives to the traditional work of 8 hours a day meet the needs of employees, offering them the possibility of a more efficient time management dedicated to personal life, a greater satisfaction of the work performed and, implicitly, better productivity. These alternatives are divided into telework, part-time, jobshare, flexitime, project work and intermittent work. Each of them includes advantages and disadvantages alike. The individual and the collective labor contract in the case of these forms of activity are differentiated and address issues regarding the salary scale, the included bonuses, bonuses, the right to rest, medical, maternity / paternity leave. A major shortcoming of these forms of labor flexibility in Romania is that of deficient legislation, in the sense that there are no well-defined rules on occupational safety and medicine and, therefore, these concepts of work are rarely available to most SMEs, as well as large state and private companies. Exceptions are usually multinational organizations, which already have well-established employee satisfaction policies.

It is preferable for Romanian organizations to enter into strategic partnerships with major players in the world market, so that they can implement their own human resources policies, inspired by their organizational culture and adapting the strategies taken over to the trends of the Romanian labor market. Learning organizations are open to such opportunities for work and mobility of human resources. They add value economically and socially, and also achieve success in the services provided, as well as in interpersonal relationships.

If in the short and medium term the productive direct investments represent the engine of the economic recovery and of the increase of the labor productivity, the approach from the long term perspective supposes the consideration of other fields as well. In Romania, in order to start the relaunch of economic growth and to ensure its long-term viability, it is essential to break the vicious circle, which, in a schematic representation, could consist of the following phases: low level of labor productivity - low income in the productive sector (of employees and capitalists) -

low volume of savings, accumulation and amounts collected through the budget - small investments and insufficient expenditures for health, education and training and improvement of the workforce - failure to provide funds to replace used fixed funds (physical or moral ), capacity building and the introduction of technical progress, on the one hand, and the depreciation of indicators on health status, level of education and professional competence, on the other hand - maintaining the average level of labor productivity at low values.

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