

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY FOR WORK AFTER HOURS AMID COVID-19: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SECTOR IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract *In Lithuania the implementation of telework in public sector is not very prominent. However, amid COVID-19 and national lockdown situation new measures had to be taken and in some public sector entities telework was introduced for the first time. With implementation of this new work mode, digital connectivity for work after hours became a prominent practice. To evaluate how this work model shift influenced employees (why they work and what outcomes such work generates), a qualitative research method, interviews, was applied in case of 2 public sector entities in Lithuania where telework was not considered to be a normal practice. Even though being a pilot study, the results of this research revealed that after the introduction of telework and given the access to digital technologies for work related matters, employees tend to experience increased work engagement, have more flexibility to manage their work time and undesirable outcomes of such work model are not as negative and severe as can be predicted. This case study introduces the topic not explored in depth heretofore and suggests ingenious conclusions on the matter. Results of this study support and contradict previous literature and propose additional insights. One of the most important practical implications refers to the findings that introduction of telework for the first time in public sector has more benefits than undesired outcomes with only insignificant undesirable outcomes.*

Keywords: *digital connectivity; telework; public sector; constant connectivity; work engagement.*

Introduction

The use of digital technologies for work related tasks remotely has been applied in many businesses, however, not to the extent and intensity that was reached amid COVID-19 pandemic. After the introduction of various restrict governmental policies and measures, lockdowns and shut-downs of businesses, digital connectivity (DC) for remote work unquestionably spiked (Chadee, Ren and Tang, 2021). COVID-19 pandemic disrupted various labor markets and imposed organizations to transform existing patterns of operation around the globe. This surge of connectivity via digital means brought new challenges, especially for those to embrace it for the first time. Rapidly understood as a new norm of work, this work method was equally understood as a threat to general well-being of employees (Derks, Van Mierlo and Schmitz, 2014; Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005; Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Sonnentag, 2012).

Nonetheless the implementation of remote work/telework over the past decades was monitored to gradually increase even before the crisis (Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017), the public sector appears to be behind on implementing telework opportunities (Ruth and Chaudhry, 2008). However, COVID-19 situation forced many economic sectors to

see telework/work from home (WFH) as the new normal and bureaucratic organizations became no exception. This case study address-es public sector in Lithuania.

The **aim** of this research is to reveal the reasons and understand the outcomes of DC for work after hours in public sector in Lithuania amid COVID-19 pandemic and telework. This case study intends to fill some gaps in previous studies and aims at contributing to academic literature several ways. First of all, to overview and advocate a topic of growing importance in contemporary human resources management by analyzing issues not elaborated and covered adequately in academic literature, as public sector lacks academical insights and is neglected in comparison to private sector, when public bodies (such as government departments) should be leaders and set an example in DC encouragement, provide necessary and favorable policies (Yin, Zhang and Dong, 2020). Secondly, this research aims to explore beforehand unanalyzed experiences. Thirdly, it is intended to encourage future in-depth studies to be developed to analyze overall situation of DC for work after hours in public sector worldwide.

The remaining sections of the paper are structured as follows: the theoretical part gives an overview of the literature on DC and telework. Further, the applied research **method** is described. The empirical results come further. Finally, the discussion and conclusions are provided.

Theoretical background

Digital connectivity for work after hours and telework during COVID-19

DC for work or digital work connectivity is mainly understood as the use of digital technologies for work related matters while away from employers' premises (Rivera, 2020). In addition to emails and various DMS (Document Management System) in this study DC for work is also understood as communication through instant messaging and social media channels (Bordi, Okkonen, Mäkinen and Heikkilä-Tammi, 2018). Amid COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdowns many businesses had to shift their operation behavior and were forced to transfer to digital environment. During this novel situation, DC became the new norm of work behavior and even though it was firstly considered as a "magic bullet" to save businesses from col-lapse, it also introduced new challenges to cope and work behaviors to be addressed (Chadee, Ren and Tang, 2021). In line with new demands, employees had to embrace multiple digital technologies and were forced to find new methods to integrate this change and increased communication (Okkonen, Heimonen, Savolainen and Turunen, 2018) into their lives and combine work and home domains efficiently (Mark, Iqbal, Czerwinski and Johns, 2014) whilst teleworking.

The term of telework was first defined back in 1975 (Niles, 1975), however there is no universally acknowledged definition of it up to current days. Telework is mainly understood as work done or services provided remotely by using information and communication technologies (IT means) (Eurofound, 2020). It is an alternative to traditional work arrangement that covers a variety of practices and forms, and decouples the activity of work from material work place, specific work schedule, grounded 'office' rules, conducts and routines (Tietze, 2002). Telework is seen as a challenge to traditional management models organization theories (Taskin and Edwards, 2007). That is to say, telework mainly implies work done outside employer's site via help of IT means and DC.

Notwithstanding the broad definition and perception of telework, it has to be out-lined, that even though the term of telework might be related with work from home (WFH), it does not necessarily imply such environment (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). In this

paper the term telework is chosen as a substitute to WFH and as a subcategory of remote work concept due to the fact that amid COVID-19 pandemic people were forced to work remotely not necessarily only from home. The term of telework is chosen also because it specifically describes that while teleworking, people use personal digital devices (e. g. mobile phones, PC, laptops) and is this term is restricted to employees, excluding depending contractors, etc. (Sostero, Milasi, Hurley, Fernández-Macias and Bisello, 2020; Eurofound, 2015). Thus, telework is here considered as major factor to enable and encourage DC for work after hours.

As of official statistics, only 5.2% of European Union workers, together with only 2.5% of Lithuanians, in 2018 were usually working from home (Eurostats, 2020), when in 2020 this percentage rose to nearly 40% (Eurofound, 2020) with public administration sector the third most popular one to be convenient for telework practice. Due to this considerable increase, for those to start telework for the first time, it became rather difficult to separate work and personal life domains. As telework is considered to be directly linked to increased work behavior (ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012, Demerouti, Derks, ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2014), the lines get blurred and workers are more likely to start ad-mixing work-nonwork boundaries, i. e. stay DC. As reported, 24% of teleworkers were more likely to work on their free time (Eurofound, 2020). This abrupt of normal working modality (when working in employer's premises) came with its potential benefits and undesirable outcomes.

Whilst embracing telework and constantly surrounded by a range of digital technologies one of most worrying problems is, of course, constant connectivity (Dery, Kolb and McCormick, 2014; Mazmanian, 2012). Despite various managerial practices and governmental attempts to limit such connectivity (Sayah, 2013), when provided with technological gadgets and forced to merge life and work environments into one, employees encounter various problems. In order to understand and evaluate reasons for increasing DC for work and after hours, all constituents have to be considered simultaneously, i. e. technology as a facilitator, management strategies and characteristics of work itself (Aljabr, Chamakiotis, Petrakaki and Newell, 2021). In mind with existent research-es, four major categories of reasons for DC after work can be outlined.

Reasons for Digital Connectivity for Work after Hours

An individual's reasons for work after hours are by no means likely to vary. However, there are some most prominent ones that are in help to determine whether a person is in the habit of staying DC to work or not (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000). The identification of these main reasons can help to better understand the workforce within a company and efficiently manage the personnel.

Based on boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000), notably important key variable is individual's type and ability to integrate. As of this theory, the relationship of work and home do-mains is influenced by how a person perceives these different roles, i. e. one that con-siders work domain to be an important part of self-concept, is more likely to stay connected to work and blur the boundaries between the family and work domains (Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate, 2000). Within this theory, employees who are more attached with work-related matters tend to be DC for work after hours. Coupled with boundary theory, Boswell and Olson-Buchanan revealed a positive correlation between communication technology use after hours and ambition followed by job involvement, concluding affective commitment not as significantly related (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

Another group of reasons to stay DC after business hours is tightly connected with organization's policy and norms (Belkin, Becker and Conroy, 2020). The availability for

employees to access work related communication channels and technologies after hours can manifest into different outcomes, e. g. one that is ambitious and eager to reach career progression is more likely to be engaged into after-hours connectivity and can experience severe burnout, while those who are aware of this constant connectivity policy but do not spend actual time working after hours, do feel stressed about diminished boundaries between work and life domains (Belkin, Becker and Conroy, 2020). Fenner and Renn found that perceived usefulness of technology and positive psychological climate for work after hours using technological devices are positively connected to employees' willingness to perform job related tasks after hours (Fenner and Renn, 2009). Organizational expectations and policies are thus positively related to DC after hours and it is crucial for companies to set specific rules governing the use of technologies after business hours.

The third group of reasons to stay DC and perform work related tasks after hours is based on direct managerial practices (Sinha and Laghate, 2021; Duxbury, Higgins, Smart, and Stevenson, 2014). When employees are equipped with technological devices and can be reachable 24/7, employers or immediate superiors demand employees to be approachable when needed, following their, as role-model, example, i. e. are pressured to conform to constant availability and response time, bound to engage to meet expectations (Sinha and Laghate, 2021; Duxbury, Higgins, Smart, and Stevenson, 2014).

The outcomes of digital connectivity

As more contemporary workplaces are characterized by their level of digitization, especially amid COVID-19 pandemic, and employees are forced or encouraged to perform work outside employer's site via help of IT means, increased connectedness seems rather inevitable. This, first and foremost, is understood as negatively related to one's ability to psychologically detach from work. Numerous studies have been conducted and demonstrated direct correlation between the ability to disengage psychologically from work related matters and overall employees' well-being (Derks, Van Mierlo and Schmitz, 2014; Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005, Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Sonnentag, 2012). The impact of connectedness on employees' well-being most generally include intensified employees' attention, availability, obligation to immediate response, psychological disengagement (Büchler, ter Hoeven, and van Zoonen, 2020). All these constituents result in psychosomatic health problems, emotional exhaustion, stress and general performance (Büchler, ter Hoeven, and van Zoonen, 2020). Employees who are able to temporarily disengage from work are to recover and come back with improved engagement, higher-level of psychological well-being and are ready to meet new demands (Büchler, ter Hoeven, and van Zoonen, 2020). This is understood as productivity vehicle, while given the feel of constant connectivity and inability to detach from work matters may cause counterproductive effects such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, collapsed boundaries between work and home domains, etc.

Methodology

Context of the study

Due to increased percentage of telework implementation, and public sector being rather a convenient sector (Eurofound, 2020), the context of this study is public sector in Lithuania. While telework and constant DC for work is more present in private sector, management practices and principles in public sector in Lithuania are seen as more traditional and standard.

On the other hand, new strategies are being adopted. The modernization and remodeling of human resources system and public sector management in Lithuania seems to be rather slow and limited as new principles in practice are adapted only in a limited manner and, from the perspective of human resources, seem to be understood as declaratory (Chliviskas and Luckutė, 2016). However, amid COVID-19 crisis, when almost all organizations were forced to reorganize their nature of operation in order to meet and manage new challenges, the approach towards human resources in public sector in Lithuania was seen to transform. Despite the complexity of processes of decision-making and delivery of public services and limited technical facilities, this crisis left the sector without any other choice. As a result, human resources in public sector are now said to be understood from the mechanical point of view (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013). Considering public sector in Lithuania to be operating in rather traditional work model, it becomes an interesting context for this study because in analyzed public bodies telework to such extent was introduced for the first time.

Data collection and sample

Together with theoretical approach, this research is based on qualitative insights from semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 8 employees from 2 public sector entities. These entities are municipal actors that are in charge of public administration. For this case study public sector entities were chosen provided that employees of those entities worked at employer's premises and not at home theretofore COVID-19 pan-demic and were forced to change their working behavior amid the pandemic. Inter-viewed employees had 8 to 5 work schedules 5/7 and had limited or no access to digital technologies for connectedness after hours. The majority of employees in researched companies had to telework, however, only 8 people out of 40 questioned in both public entities admitted to stay digitally connected for work after hours. It can be concluded that the majority of employees in public sector in Lithuania tend not to be engaged to work after hours.

This research invokes thematic analysis approach (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013). Dossiers of participants are listed in Table 1 below. This case study should be understood as a first step for more in-depth study compiling of bigger number of interviewees. The majority of interviewees are long-term employees and of elder age, only 1 male and 7 females.

Table 1. Dossiers of participants

ID	Age	Education	Position	Seniority
1	65	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	7 years
2	37	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	11 years
3	56	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	16 years
4	54	Diploma of Higher Education	Head of Unit	11 years
5	36	Diploma of Higher Education	Head of Unit	2 years
6	54	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	12 years
7	28	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	4 years
8	42	Diploma of Higher Education	Specialist	6 years

Interviews were carried out in a one-week period in March, 2022, audio records were made with the consent of the interviewees. Interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, questions for interviewees were given in five blocks of questions regarding: main details about work after hours' schedules, reasons, evaluation and consequences, measures to stop or limit digital connectivity for work after hours. Average duration of an interview was 23 minutes. The main

interview questions are listed in Table 2 below. Most relevant answers to interview questions are outlined in Appendix A.

Table 2. The main interview questions

Topic	Main questions
The change of work routine	How often do you work/stay digitally connected for work after hours and when? How this routine changed amid COVID-19? Please explain why.
Reasons to stay DC for work after hours	Why do you stay DC for work after hours? Please indicate main reasons. To what extent your DC for work after hours dependent on organization's policy and norms, your direct superior, colleagues, career ambitions, personal traits, family?
Undesirable outcomes	Do you consider DC for work after hours a positive or negative work behavior? Do you suffer any negative effects of such connectivity: physical, psychological? Have you experienced any unpleasant episodes within a family because of DC for work?
Potential benefits	Can you name any positive effects of DC for work after hours?
Measures to stop or limit DC for work after hours	What measures do you take to stay disconnected from work? Is it possible to completely digitally disconnected from work while constantly surrounded by technologies?

Results

In this study the experiences of DC for work after hours from the interviewees are organized into the following main dimensions. Firstly, the change of DC (moments of connectivity) is evaluated. Secondly, reasons for DC after work are outlined. Then, accordingly to the experiences of interviewees the undesirable outcomes and potential benefits are considered. Lastly, overall situation and measures to stop or limit DC for work after hours are discussed.

The change of digital connectivity for work after hours (moment of connectivity)

To measure the extent to which interviewees were digitally connected and/or worked after hours using technologies, respondents were asked to estimate how often (indicating cases per week) and for how long they were working after hours before the pandemic, amid the outbreak and national lockdown. 2/3 of interviewees answered that they were never DC for work after hours and this behavior changed as their employers were forced to provide technological gadgets for them to be able to telework during COVID-19 outbreak in the country. On average, interviewees tended to work after hours 0 to 1 time per week before being able to telework and 3-4 times midst the lockdown. Almost all interviewees accentuated that constant access to technological gadgets is strongly related to the extent of time people spend DC to work after hours, e. g.:

The cases of staying digitally connected for work after hours definitely increased as before the pandemic, I have always left my phone at work, however during lockdown and even now I bring my phone home and feel responsibility to answer it even if a client calls after work hours. (ID1)

With regard to breaches of normal working routines while being digitally connected to work during the lockdown, interviewees answered that they were mainly interrupted during

lunch or having dinner (ID1, ID2, ID4, ID7). Many respondents noted that there were cases when they were working during the late or even night time (ID2, ID3, ID4, ID5, ID6, ID7, ID8).

Reasons for digital connectivity after work

To analyze reasons for DC for work after hours and in line with theoretical researches, the following two sections are outlined: the blur between home and work domains, as most relevant and other irrelevant factors such as organization's policy and norms and direct managerial practices.

The blur between home and work domains

Personal traits and self-concept. In compliance with boundary theory, the results of carried out interviews confirm direct relation between individual's self-concept and likeliness to stay DC for work after hours, i. e. those interviewees who tended to practice work after hours (if provided with technological gadgets) even before the lockdown, simultaneously with those, who only started this behavior amid COVID-19 and lockdown, recognized that this tendency is particularly relevant to their disposition to consider work domain important and interesting in their personal life (all IDs):

It is absolutely relevant to my personality as I love my job and to spend some extra time after work hours to make some calls or write some short report is no problem for me. I just can't "close the doors at 5 o'clock" and leave everything if I am needed. (ID2)

It's just my personality. If by any chance, not even on purpose, I check my e-mail and see a work-related message, I tend to answer and by doing to I feel as if I am needed and being useful. (ID3)

In addition, phrases used by the interviewees admitting individual's self-concept included: "I feel obliged to", "you just have to do it", "this is your responsibility", etc. An interesting observation is that the majority of interviewees concluded that they feel affectively committed to their jobs, i. e. their engagement to the company and the level of loyalty is one of the reasons to stay DC after hours (ID1-ID6):

The majority of my colleagues try to do their best and cooperate by not wasting others' time, thus, if one does not have the ability to complete the task during working hours, it has to be done after, so the next day all team could deliver good results and feel happy about it. (ID6)

The merge of home and office space. The results of this research revealed that the boundaries between the family and work domains became comprehensively blurred when people started to work from home during the lockdown/telework. Asked to evaluate their time spent working/staying digitally connected for work after hours interviewees admitted that they were constantly crossing these boundaries due to the fact that they had to perform two (or more) roles simultaneously and the inexperience and inability to segment work and home boundaries resulted in necessity to perform work tasks after hours (ID2, ID5, ID7). This blur of boundaries was more observed from those who are of younger age and have children. By the same token, but from different perspective an important observation is that not only the blur between roles, but the merge of home and office spaces rather results in tendency to stay digitally connected to work after hours:

While in lockdown, teleworking, I considered my work to be the most important and interesting. As I had nothing else to do, not being able to go out I used to stay digitally connected even up until 10-11 pm. (ID3)

Before telework, I never used to check my work email or perform any work-related tasks after work hours, but during the lockdown I tended to do this often as my room became my office and you were able to work any time you felt like it. (ID7)

Irrelevant factors

Organization's policy and norms. Public sector entities analyzed in this research were not promoting or implementing telework previously and this performance model was a new practice. Thus, employees of these companies were not familiar with expectations and policies towards specific rules governing the use of technologies after business hours. As the majority of interviewees indicated (ID1-ID5, ID7-ID8), constant access to work related communication channels and technologies was severely connected to their tendency to stay DC after work hours:

Being given a laptop for telework and a permission to use it for personal matters was a complete game-change for me. As I spend a lot of time by the computer, having one for all affairs was really problematic; these two digital worlds often collided into one. (ID7)

Respondents concluded that no (or loose) rules regulating the access to technological devices from work for personal use after work hours is more negative than a positive norm. Interviewees were happy about having the ability to use technologies for their personal uses, however it often resulted in staying DC for work after business hours and even leading to experience burnout episodes (ID3, ID4, ID5, ID6, ID7, ID8). All confirmed that there is no encouragement or positive attitude towards work after hours using technological devices from their organizations and willingness to behave in such manner is more related to their personal traits.

Direct managerial practice. To understand whether managers took the opportunity to reach to their technologically/digitally equipped and almost 24/7 reachable employees, all interviewees expressed that there was no direct demand to be approachable when needed. However, some respondents indicated that even before the pandemic and telework they sometimes had to perform work-related tasks because of their bond with immediate superiors or colleagues, e. g. answer some questions or address specific issue via mobile phone (calls, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.) during the weekend, while on holiday (ID2, ID3, ID4, ID5, ID7, ID8). Apart from these exceptional cases, interviewees explained that this shall not be understood as managerial demand or standard practices.

I am constantly digitally connected to my superior because we connect on Facecebook messenger and many times we communicate though this channel. One time I was on vacation and she needed me and called via messenger and I had to address this immediate issue. (ID7)

Undesirable outcomes

Rather surprisingly, there is a difference in opinions about constant connectivity to work and overall well-being. While none of the interviewees experienced any strongly negative

psychological effects and said that DC for work after hours did not negatively impact their productivity, thoughts on this work model justified. 50% of respondents (ID1, ID2, ID5, ID7) do think that the ability to be DC to work after business hours is more positive than negative and another 50% conclude the contrary (ID3, ID4, ID6, ID8).

In view of any negative physical outcomes, some interviewees (ID1, ID2, ID3, ID7, ID8) mentioned occasional fatigue, back pain (in case of telework and not being able to have ergonomic seating conditions), minor vision problems. However, these undesirable outcomes were not considered as severe:

I have no ergonomic environment in my house, thus I had to work while at the pool, at the kitchen counter, on the sofa, whatever, I had some back-pains, etc. But it was not that bad (ID2)

Potential benefits

The majority of respondents expressed that they consider DC for work having more potential benefits than negative outcomes and those, who justify work after hours argue that the flexibility of telework outweighs the undesirable, i. e. in comparison to not having the ability to telework before the lockdown interviewees say that if one is able to somehow find the overall balance, the ability to manage your time more flexible is of great benefit. Respondents who expressed negative attitude towards digital connectivity for work after hours believe that there should be clear boundaries between personal and working hours, an employee should be granted the workload proportional to normal business hours and even not to be accessible 24/7. However, even with such stance, interviewees admitted that they still stay digitally connected for work after hours contrary to their beliefs.

In terms of any problems related to personal-work life balance during telework, the majority of respondents felt no severe discomfort explaining that they were able to perform both, home and work roles simultaneously or being able to segregate them when needed (ID3, ID4, ID5, ID6, ID7, ID8):

I felt and feel no discomfort while teleworking or staying digitally connected after hours, because I am able to segregate family and work time, in fact, I felt much more relaxed being able to have this flexibility of telework and managing my time according to current needs. (ID8)

At the same time, some interviewees admitted that their achieved personal-work life balance and connectivity for work after hours was directly dependent on norms in their families: those whose relatives and/or significant others were also working after hours, experienced less or none issues or unpleasant episodes (ID1, ID4, ID6, ID7, ID8) in comparison to those, who were the only ones to stay digitally connected/accessible (ID2, ID5).

Measures to stop or limit digital connectivity for work after hours

In the light of increased number of cases to stay DC to work after hours, interviewees admit, that it is the matter of one's personal routine. However, whilst tele-work, work-personal life behavioral patterns changed and it is now more complicated, while being able to digitally connect, to change such behavior, especially if one feels passionate about his work (ID2, ID4, ID5, ID7, ID8). Basic measures to limit digital connectivity are suggested: simply disconnect

from any work-related technologies (ID1, ID3, ID8), try to perform as much work as possible during normal business hours (ID5, ID7, ID8) or to simply utilize lunch and other breaks if one feels comfortable to do so (ID5).

On the overall, respondents expressed their concerns about the blur of boundaries between home and work domains amid the processes of digitalization. To reveal general opinions, the majority of interviewees (ID1, ID3, ID4, ID6, ID8) reasoned that it is not difficult to limit or stop DC for work after hours with the supposition that the person must be able to draw firm lines between home and work life. They suggested that this strongly depends on the ability to segregate and straighten out top priorities in life and perform correspondingly. Per contra, ID2, ID5 and ID7 declared that it is almost impossible to stay disconnected from work while having constant digital access when one is passionate and care about his work:

If your employee does not set out rules on accessing digital gadgets provided for work, it is very difficult to stay offline. For example, I have the ability to use employer's provided laptop for personal issues and for me it is impossible to not pay any attention and efforts when I receive an email after work hours whilst using it, I am just interested about what is going on.
(ID7)

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research was integrated. Adding to previous works and findings, results of this research suggest additional insights about how the access to digital technologies modify work behavior of public sector employees who previously had not experienced any telework. This research, although being a pilot study, reveals gripping points to be studied in depth.

First of all, it can be concluded that the introduction of telework is tight-knit with increased work behavior (Demerouti, Derks, ten Brummelhuis, and Bakker, 2014; ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012). As admitted by interviewees of this research, telework has modified their approach to work. All respondents were experiencing telework for the first time during the lockdown and as a result, their normal working modality was abruptly. Not only they were struggling with unfamiliar work conditions, their work routine has changed and they tend to be more engaged to work matters even after the return to offices whilst now having constant access to digital technologies. Thus, in an overview of Lithuanian public sector, this research supports previous academic literature and verifies that telework increases DC after work hours and endorse official Eurofound (Eurofound, 2020) statistics. In addition, it has to be pointed that this engagement increase has long-term consequences over employees and profoundly changes normal work practices on public sector.

The results of this study add up to academical insights and support theories, that DC for work after hours directly depends on employee's self-conception. As affirmed by all interviewees, the availability for employees to access work related technologies and DC for work after hours is dependent on one's self-conception. To support Ash-forth et al., (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000) those, who tend to consider work domain to be an important part or their life, are more likely to stay DC for work after hours. All interviewed employees stated that their willingness to be accessible 24/7 and to perform work tasks is only reluctant to their personal character. A point to be kept in mind is that all respondents, declared that it is their personal matter to stay DC for work after hours. Partially contrary to Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007), interviewees in this research do not represent any direct correlation between communication technology use after hours and career ambitions. None of the respondents claimed that working after hours is connected with their career goals

or the need to portray themselves as exemplary employees, etc. However, it can be concluded that employees, who are able to manage their work and life balance but tend to feel passion about their work and find it interesting, are more likely to stay digitally connected after work hours.

As of organizations level, positive psychological climate for DC for work after hours is not very dependent on the amount of time employee spends being digitally connected for work matters after hours. Research results contradicts existing academic works (Fenner and Renn, 2009) as interviewees state that one is likely to stay DC for work after hours due to personal character rather than because of organization's norms and attitude to-wards it. On the other hand, some respondents do agree that when employer is positive about work after hours and does not have any restricted policy on the matter, this can correlate with increased work engagement.

Unanticipatedly to previous works and traditional beliefs, exploitation by direct superiors was rejected. All interviewees claimed that they do not experience any exploitation by their immediate superiors whilst having constant access to digital technologies for work. However, it has to be outlined that during interviews, distrust on honesty about the matter was experienced. Given the nature of Lithuanian public sector, employees, especially the elder ones, are not willing to express their honest opinion about their superiors. Thus, this conclusion should be considered questionable. Nevertheless, being accessible 24/7 via digital technologies do sometimes result in work engagement after hours or off hours. Due to this convenience employees, as shown by this research, do actually feel discomfort about being approachable when needed and to uphold theoretical approaches (Demerouti, Derks, ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2014; Sonnentag and Bayer, 2005; Boswell and Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Sonnentag, 2012), have difficulties to disengage from work psychologically.

To generalize an overview of undesirable outcomes and potential benefits of DC for work after hours it has to be concluded that in case of this research employees in public sector did witness more positive than negative sides of telework. Benefits to be mentioned and observed the most were the flexibility of telework and ability for employees to manage their own work time, i. e. interviewees stated that when one is able to find the balance between home and work domains, telework can be in great advantage on the grounds that when one is able to manage his time, it can lead to increased producibility in comparison to when employee is forced to be at employer's premises 8 to 5.

Undesirable outcomes in this case study were not as present as presupposed, the majority of interviewees did not overcome any serious problems related to personal-work life balance during telework, however, it has to be pointed out that during lockdown those, who had bigger families and young children, no ergonomic work environment, did struggle more compared to employees of elder age/no young children/enough home space to find comfortable working environment. In terms of family norms, the majority of interviewees stated that it became a normal practice in their families to DC for work after hours. On the overall, the results of this study partially contradict previous academical works (De Vries, Tummers, and Bekkers) and employees in public sector, at least in Lithuania, does not experience any severe negative effects from telework, and whilst being DC for work, their organizational commitment actually increases and not vice versa. In correspondence with the results of this study, it can be concluded that the introduction of DC and telework in public sector is considered to be a productivity paradox (Ruth and Chaudhry, 2008) and can be associated with increased work engagement due to the flexibility of such work model.

Practical implications. This research has some managerial implications for practitioners. Seeing the value of DC, public sector entities are encouraged to develop a “culture of telework” having in mind that more and more employees are willing to combine working from home and work in the office. Entities are supposed to help employees to keep the lines between work and home domains by not expecting employee to be available 24/7. Finally, public sector entities need to develop employees while encouraging them to change their attitude and not to feel obliged to work after working hours.

Limitations

This research has some shortcomings that might be addressed in future research. The first concern is related to pilot study. For further studies, more interviews in public sector entities need to be conducted. The second concern deals with Lithuanian context. Taking different nature of public sector in EU into consideration, further research should focus also on other EU countries. The third concern refers to the situation, more specifically to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research might analyse the relationship DC in stable situation.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix A

Topic	Question	Most relevant illustrative quotes
The change of work routine	How often do you work/stay digitally connected for work after hours and when?	<p>(ID1) My work phone is always on and I always answer it. My laptop is usually off.</p> <p>(ID2) Before COVID-19, very rarely. Now I always stay digitally connected via phone or laptop, even on weekends.</p> <p>(ID4) At least 2 or 3 evenings per week via phone and laptop.</p> <p>(ID7) Always. My phone is always on and I answer it anytime. I use work laptop for my personal matters, thus I tend to check work e-mail (and answer queries) from time to time on my free time during evenings, weekends, even while on holiday.</p>
	How this routine changed amid COVID-19? Please explain why	<p>(ID1) The cases of staying digitally connected for work after hours definitely increased as before the pandemic, I have always left my phone at work, however during lockdown and even now I bring my phone home and feel responsibility to answer it even if a client calls after work hours.</p> <p>(ID2) Telework for me resulted in increased digital connectivity for work after hours, because when I work from employer's premises I work more efficiently and complete most tasks within working hours. Whilst telework, I had to simultaneously take care of my kids, was distracted and had to complete work queries after business hours.</p> <p>(ID3) After I was given a laptop for telework, I used to stay connected and work after hours very often: during lunch break, evening, weekends, etc. Before telework this was not the case because I was busy doing something else, and during lockdown we had to stay inside, so I had nothing else to do but work.</p>
Reasons to stay DC for work after hours	<p>Why do you stay digitally connected for work after hours? Please indicate main reasons.</p> <p>To what extent your digitally connected for work after hours dependent on organization's policy and norms,</p>	<p>(ID1) I just feel obliged to answer the phone, definitely not out of curiosity.</p> <p>(ID2) It is absolutely relevant to my personality as I love my job and to spend some extra time after work hours to make some calls or write some short report is no problem for me. I just can't "close the doors at 5 o'clock" and leave everything if I am needed.</p> <p>(ID3) It's just my personality. If by any chance, not even on purpose, I check my e-mail and see a work-related message, I tend to answer and by doing to I feel as if I am needed and being useful.</p> <p>(ID3) While in lockdown, teleworking, I considered my work to be the most important and interesting. As I had nothing else to do, not</p>

	<p>your direct superior, colleagues, career ambitions, personal traits, family?</p>	<p>being able to go out I used to stay digitally connected even up until 10-11 pm.</p> <p>(ID4) First of all, my workload is just too big. However, as a head of department I am responsible for the overall performance, thus I, myself, finish any unfinished tasks of my employees, even though I am not required to do so.</p> <p>(ID5) During lockdown and telework I had to not only perform work but also take care of my kids.</p> <p>(ID6) I stay digitally connected and work after hours only sometimes and this is an operation which interrupts my colleagues' performance, thus I do it after hours in order not to disturb them.</p> <p>(ID7) Before telework, I never used to check my work email or perform any work-related tasks after work hours, but during the lockdown I tended to do this often as my room became my office and you were able to work any time you felt like it.</p> <p>(ID7) Being given a laptop for telework and a permission to use it for personal matters was a complete game-change for me. As I spend a lot of time by the computer, having one for all affairs was really problematic; these two digital worlds often collided into one.</p> <p>(ID8) I was provided with laptop for telework and was able to manage working hours myself, so I was very happy with this ability to perform work whenever most convenient, even after normal business hours.</p>
<p>Undesirable outcomes</p>	<p>Do you consider digital connectivity for work after hours a positive or negative work behavior? Do you suffer any negative effects of such connectivity: physical, psychological? Have you experienced any unpleasant episodes within a family because of digital connectivity for work?</p>	<p>(ID1) I do not think that it is some kind of malady whilst teleworking. When you work after hours after you come back home from the office, then yes, but whilst telework, no.</p> <p>(ID2) I guess it depends on your personality. I love my job and see no problem to stay digitally connected for work after hours.</p> <p>(ID3) I think that it is bad behavior. One has to be able to separate work and home.</p> <p>(ID4) It depends on circumstances. If your office environment and atmosphere allow you to complete your task within business hours, then no. If not, you have no other choice but to complete your work at home.</p> <p>(ID5) I think that digital connectivity for work after hours is good whilst telework. I very much value the flexibility of managing my own work schedule because of my family and it is ideal for me to have the ability to connect to work related matter from home to finish my tasks. It is especially convenient when you have a sick child and are not forced to take sick-leave but can just work from home on your convenient time.</p> <p>(ID6) I think that it is a bad behavior. Digital connectivity (and work done at that time) for work after work hours should be considered as paid overtime.</p> <p>(ID7) I think it is more positive than negative. I prefer the benefits of staying digitally connected for work after hours because I can compensate the time that I spend on my personal matters during business hours and finish my tasks on time. This give me the ability to not show the loss of performance and I can manage my schedules to my convenience.</p>

		<p>(ID8) I think that it is not very good. An employee is supposed to have the ability to finish work within business hours. However, if I have to run some personal errands during business hours, it is very convenient for me to have the ability to digitally connect after work hours and complete my work. The most important this is just to find balance.</p>
<p>Potential benefits</p>	<p>Can you name any positive effects of digital connectivity for work after hours?</p>	<p>(ID1) Well, for example, some very interesting clients call you after hours and that conversation can cheer you up, you remember their stories, even laugh sometimes with them.</p> <p>(ID2) The biggest advantages is being able to use work-related digital technologies for personal matters.</p> <p>(ID3) COVID-19 and telework forced me to learn a lot of new techniques and this helped me to improve my skills. Of course, the ability to use the equipment for personal matters is the biggest advantage.</p> <p>(ID4) I can do my work peacefully, while surrounded by most comfortable environment.</p> <p>(ID5) Definitely the flexibility to manage your time and finish everything on time.</p> <p>(ID8) I felt and feel no discomfort while teleworking or staying digitally connected after hours, because I am able to segregate family and work time, in fact, I felt much more relaxed being able to have this flexibility of telework and managing my time according to current needs.</p>
<p>Measures to stop or limit DC for work after hours</p>	<p>What measures do you take to stay disconnected from work? Is it possible to completely digitally disconnected from work while constantly surrounded by technologies?</p>	<p>(ID1) I do not take any measures because I do not mind it. But if you want to stay disconnected from work after hours it depends on your personal attitude.</p> <p>(ID3) I just shut down mu laptop, but then turn it on again, that not very good. However, I believe that it is possible to stay disconnected when you have other activities to engage in, like hobbies, learning something new, etc.</p> <p>(ID5) I just try to do all the work during business hours. However, when you feel happy and interest in your job you tend to stay engaged and I think this is not a bad thing.</p> <p>(ID8) I just not let myself to overwork while staying digitally connected for work after hours. Just do not turn on your phone or laptop and that is it.</p>