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Perspectives of young professionals teleworking in France

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the phenomenon of telework as experienced by young professionals who telework in France in 2018-2019, at the time of the thesis: what form the practice is taking, what the teleworkers think of telework, what they identify as its strengths and weaknesses, and what its future prospects are like in their eyes.

The report first reviews the previous research in the area, defining telework and assessing the status of its growth and penetration in global and French work practices, drawing a profile of French teleworkers, then listing the necessary technologies needed for telework and the known advantages and issues of telework and its future prospects as already documented.

Afterwards, thanks to qualitative interviews with French teleworkers, the report will offer innovative insights on telework in French organizations, while the rest of the results show consistency with the previous research:

- Telework is still mostly understood as home-based, although it seems sufficiently known that teleworkers are rarely surprised when they start teleworking for the first time;
- Organizations prefer offering telework by a tacit agreement rather than contractually
- Teleworkers appreciate getting a break from the socialization of the office, the benefits for the environment of telework and the managerial changes it leads to as managers need to evaluate the employee performance instead of their simple presence;
- Indeed, there still seems to be a cultural bias against telework in France at management level, although it is becoming the fact of a minority;
- The technological requirements to telework may seem daunting to some;
- Telework currently cannot replace efficiently the social relations of the office for interdependent work;
- Telework is becoming more and more important to the French workers despite becoming a common occurrence in France only recently, and organizations will need to adapt in the future to attract and retain those professionals;
- Continued growth is widely expected for the near future, and many hope telework will be an answer to many societal challenges, such as climate change and the desertification of the countryside.

The thesis eventually opens to possible subsequent research, validating its findings in a quantitative and representative way, and questioning employers on their own views on these findings.

Keywords
Telework, remote work, distant work, telecommuting, French organizations, France

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1 Introduction

The word telework first appears in 1972 in the Washington Post in an article signed by Jack Schiff, as the concept is being developed by Jack Nilles, a former engineer in telecommunications at NASA, as a combination of the Greek word “tele”, which means “far off, afar, at or to a distance”, commonly used in different languages to represent the concept of distance as in “television” or “telephone”, and the English word “work”. It thus describes work done from a distance. It is also known as distant work, remote work or telecommuting, which I thus use as a synonym in this thesis. What it really means nowadays is somewhat vague and a complicated subject that will be covered in the theoretical background.

Telework has been adopted and promoted in parts of the world since the 1970s. In the era of information technology, its development has gained traction in the 21st century. While some countries have been a very fertile ground for it, like Finland where 28% of the workforce teleworked in 2013 or Sweden where 32% of Swedish workers teleworked in 2012, France has long been one of the trailing countries in the OECD to adopt telework. In 2004, only 7% of workers reportedly teleworked, and only a fraction of that in a permanent capacity. In 2012, the figure had almost doubled to 12%, but that was still a poor proportion compared to the rest of the OECD. (Eurofound and the International Labour Office 2017, 17.)

And yet, French workers have always been very keen to telework. But employers have traditionally been reluctant to allow them to, because of different cultural and structural obstacles.

In spite of it, telework has experienced a fast growth in France in recent years, to the point where nearly 30% of the workforce now teleworks at least partially (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 1). It still falls short of the 40% to 50% of teleworkers in the workforce that it was thought ten years ago that telework could and would amount to now.

Telework brings a revolution to the way organizations manager their employees and maintain the social links between the organization members in modern times and seems to keep ever growing. Young graduates are overwhelmingly interested in teleworking, and the young workforce is the future core of the workforce. It is thus a critical topic to investigate to investigate how they perceive telework after their own experiences, to identify the obstacles that remain to its successful adoption by French organizations and evaluate the importance telework will have in France in the future.

When I left France, in 2012, telework was still very uncommon and French management was very reluctant to adopt the practice, as the statistics I mentioned above showed, and my personal experience following my studies in management confirmed at a personal level. I worked for a year in an organization that was 2 hours away from my home. It took me 4 hours a day of commuting time (sometimes even more), which my organization was well aware of, but they never considered allowing me to telework and were strict on my presence and punctuality. I suppose this is the best example I can give personally of the management culture I felt was at odds with the concept of telework. France has long suffered, and it was a topic tackled during my Master's studies in management in a business school as well, of placing too much value in presence at work: you are expected to work a lot more than you are contractually supposed to in order to show you are motivated and a good worker, and you are only thought to be working if you are in the office. That was the feeling I felt was widespread at the time I was working in France anyway.

This led to the reason why I chose this thesis topic: I was curious to see if it still is the case in 2019, if the supposed cultural reluctance of French management to implement telework had been lifted and what obstacles remained for the French society to fully undertake this massive change to work habits in the 21st century. In short, the thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

- With telework becoming common at work, how have the French teleworkers reacted to this relatively new practice for them?
- Does any obstacle remain in French organizations to the adoption of telework?
- Is the French society finally ready for telework?

These are the questions driving this research, where I will look to determine the challenges and prospects of telework in France in this new reality where telework is disrupting organizational and managerial habits, to uncover new insights and compare with the previous researches on the topic.

The thesis will first review the existing knowledge on telework in France: how to define telework and why that is not as obvious as it would seem at first, how telework is performing in the rest of the world and then in France in particular, what the profile of French teleworkers is like, what the needs in information technology are to support telework, what the benefits and issues of telework currently documented are, and finally what the expected future of the phenomenon is in France. The next step will be to discuss the methodology

of the research, before publishing my results, analysing their meaning and listing the potential biases in the study and drawing the conclusions on the research as well as sketch out the possible future researches on the topic.

This thesis solely focuses on teleworkers' feedback because they are more easily accessible and it would take too long to interview as well a suitable number of decision-makers to hear enough variety of opinions from a management point of view, but it is obvious that a complementary research done by interviewing decision-makers would contribute a lot to the topic too.

What is investigated in this research is the young professionals who already have a few years of experience to share, while still young enough to represent the workforce of the future. Therefore, the age range of the teleworkers in the scope of the study is between 25 and 35 years old. More experienced teleworkers could have also brought different, interesting insights, as it is granted different generations may have different perspectives on the phenomenon, but my research prefers to focus on the younger generation as it represents the workforce of the next thirty to forty years and thus I feel they will impact more the future of telework in France and be impacted by it.

Moreover, workers who have never teleworked are also not in the scope of the research, because only factual information based on professional experience is used for the research. Preconceptions of employees and employers who have never experienced telework would make for an interesting research, but they are not in the scope of this study.

Finally, France has territory all over the world with very different economic and social realities, hence the thesis focuses on metropolitan France to remain coherent.

2 Theoretical framework

The definition of telework must first be drawn to characterize the concept for the rest of the thesis, because, indeed, there are many coexisting, competing definitions of telework and none has truly achieved unanimity in academia.
Next, the importance of telework will be analysed, first in the world and then more specifically in France to assess how widespread the phenomenon has become in work habits.
The technologies necessary for teleworking nowadays will also be briefly reviewed, before listing the issues already documented with the telework practice and development.
Likewise, the known advantages of telework and what drives the practice will be discussed after existing research.
Last of all, the analyses on the expected trend of telework in the future will be reviewed.

2.1 Defining telework

Despite being an almost-half-a-century-old well-known and well-studied concept, there is no common agreement on the definition of telework in academia. Some tried to provide a definition for telework by classifying it in different categories with different practices of telework: Fritz, Higa & Narasimhan in 1995, Manley & Tolbert in 1997 or Mokhtarian in 1991 (Aguilera, Lethiais, Rallet & Proulhac 2016, 2). Synonyms for the word “telework” include “home-based work”, “telecommuting”, “virtual work” or “mobile work”. Some may see some differences in concept in those words, but they are usually only preferences based on national or corporate culture around the same concept of telework.
Originally, telework was not even though as necessarily requiring technology (Olson in 1988), but modern business practices have changed and shifted that definition: telework and technology are nowadays intricately linked (Ellison 2004, pp. 17-18).

The European Union provided their definition of telework in 2002 in the article 2 of the European Framework Agreement on Telework: telework is “a form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer’s premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis” (Welz & Wolf 2010, 3).

Telework is often restrictively thought of as home-based telework, but that is only one of the categories of telework. Two other main categories of telework exist. The first one is nomadic workers, such as traveling salesmen or experts seconded to a customer organization. Telework is the only way their work can be done, as their work requires being

away from the organization's office. The second one is working overtime from home before or after business hours, such as checking the professional mailbox, and thus does not replace the usual work routine. (Aguilera & al. 2016, 2.)

2.2 Status of telework around the world

The differences in defining telework, in particular whether it is considered in a restrictive, home-based sense, or in a wider sense encompassing all forms of telework, make it a challenge to compare studies on telework. Nonetheless, it is clear that telework is a global phenomenon in modern business.

Reportedly 95% of the Fortune 1000 companies implement some form of telework for their employees on a formal agreement basis (Hoefling 2001, xviii). But while the telework practice has seemingly penetrated the routine of big companies, it is nowhere near that developed in the rest of society, where the phenomenon and its growth remain limited. Thus, Welz & Wolf (2010, 5) estimate that only 7% of all EU workers telework on a regular basis (at least 25% of their work time), and only 1.7% of EU workers have telework as a norm in their job. This is a small increase compared to the 5.3% of teleworkers in the European Union in 2000, over the course of 5 years, showing that the practice keeps growing. Of course, the spread of telework is also not uniform in the European Union: some countries have adopted the practice in their work a lot more than others: 15.2% of workers in Czech Republic for instance telework on a regular basis and 9% almost all the time. The most recent statistics on EU teleworkers (Eurofound and the International Labour Office 2017, pp. 14-16) show that they make up about 17% of the working population: about 3% are regular home-based teleworkers, the most restrictive sense of telework, about 5% telework only occasionally and the about 10% that remain classify as nomadic workers. It shows that telework is growing, although only a minority of teleworkers do it as a choice and not because it is necessary to perform their jobs. The same report outlines great differences outside the European Union as well: telework is very common in the United States, with 37% of workers who had at least some telework in 2015, against 30% in 2000s and only 9% in 1995. Even with telework considered in a narrow sense, the share is still of 20% of teleworkers in the US. In India, 19% of non-agricultural workers telework regularly, 16% of workers in Japan but only 1.6% of Argentinian workers.

The conclusion is that telework is a common phenomenon in industrialized countries, overall still limited but with very different levels of penetration in countries. Its trend remains growing slowly, however.

2.3 Status of telework in France

France was quite late in adopting the practice: only 2% of workers teleworked, partially or full-time, in 2000, making it at the time one of the most telework-sceptical countries in the European Union.

There were three main reasons that were believed to be behind that long-time reluctance of French businesses to adopt telework: first, France was late in adopting the relevant equipment of information and communication technologies and deploying a good supporting internet network in the whole country. Second, the French management culture conflicted with telework: indeed, French managers often preferred checking the employee's presence at work over setting goals and checking the employee's actual performance. Finally, top management was also very risk-averse about it. (Maestlé 2012)

The trend since then has been rapidly rising however: almost tripling in 5 years (5.7% in 2005, including 1.6% of full-time teleworkers), to an impressive 25% in 2015, although still under 5% are full-time home-based teleworkers (Welz & Wolf 2010, pp 4-6; Eurofound and the International Labour Office 2017, pp. 13-15), underlining that the vast majority of teleworkers telework only partially. The latest figures, from a survey at the end of 2018, continue that rising trend: almost 30% of employees of business organizations now telework (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 1). It is still a way short of the 40% to 50% that the strategic analysis centre of the French government estimated back in 2009 that it could be ten years later, now in 2019 (Centre d'analyse stratégique 2009).

Most of that growth is reported to be due to the rise of contractual agreements on telework, formalizing the practice in the organizations (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 1). Such figures place France among the most telework-friendly countries in the European Union nowadays. Most of the large companies allow telework but are still experimenting with it and do not tend to formalize the arrangement: thus, the practice is not that widespread. LBMG estimated the French teleworkers amount to 17% of the workforce in 2012, but once again underlines that formalized telework is rare and the custom is rather to have informal arrangements as experiments that are not binding (Maestlé 2012). According to an OpinionWay survey they quote, 76% of employees in Paris – where commutes can be a long and challenging experience - wish to telework. The figure rises to a staggering 98% when it comes to fresh graduates, according to a Deloitte survey.

Telework is a mostly home-based practice in France, but the French government has been developing and promoting co-working spaces around the country, in particular in the

main big cities, to allow for teleworking outside the home: working away from the office, but also from the distractions from home, all the while providing the teleworker with a usual working environment (Teletravailler.fr 2018a).
Telework benefits from an excellent image from employees and a high satisfaction rate among teleworkers, but managers are still reluctant to fully integrate the practice and make it a norm in their companies.

2.4 Profile of French teleworkers

The recent Malakoff Médéric Humanis survey (2019, 2) described the French teleworker: 51% of them are executives, 49% work in large organizations of more than 1000 employees, 45% work in the sector of services and consulting sector. 34% live in the very dense Parisian region, 57% have dependent children and 26% are helping someone ill or dependent. 45% of teleworkers are between 35 and 49 years old. They telework in practice 7 days a month and believe the ideal number to be 6.7 days a month. 77% of them are happy with telework.
Teleworkers like teleworking because it saves them time on their commute (54%) and offers more flexibility on their work hours (36%). 90% feel more autonomous and responsible, and almost as many believe there are more productive and better engaged in the organization. They find a better harmony is achieved between work life and private life (85%), that telework makes them less tired (85%), saves them some money (84%) and offers an opportunity to practice sport regularly (64%).
The French teleworkers prefer working from home (92%), then in away offices arranged by their employer (35%) or in shared areas such as co-working spaces or coffee shops (21%). Only 45% of teleworkers report having a dedicated teleworking space.

2.5 Review of the technologies used to telework

Working away from the organization facilities comes with technological challenges nowadays, as the remote employee still needs to be in the organization's virtual workspace. Such requirements can be classified in three different categories: the requirements on the physical workspace, the requirements to connect the remote employee to the organization's digital workspace and finally the requirements of collaboration tools to maximize the productivity of telework. (Logicalis 2013, 4.)

The physical workspace of the teleworker is mostly the same as a regular office workspace, except that it is away from the office premises. Therefore, it needs to be setup and supported remotely as well, as the onboarding will not be done within the office premises.

It is thus necessary that a technical specialist either visits the teleworking space to install the setup for the teleworker, or that the installation is done in the office premises and then transported, which means that all the working needs of the teleworker would have to be transportable. Nowadays, most of the time all the needs of a worker to telework can be handled by a laptop, so inherently transportable. The teleworker also needs to be trained to use specific teleworking tools in order to ease the onboarding and maximize peak productivity as early as possible (Logicalis 2013, 28). Likewise, support of the teleworking physical workspace has special needs and maintenance should be ready to face them.

The connectivity needs of the telework space to be integrated into the digital workspace of the organization start with a connexion with an appropriate broadband to access the Internet. Consequently, the teleworker needs access to the organization's own network, and that access needs to be secured against external threats on the confidentiality of the network and the teleworker's work. The teleworker then needs access to the same applications as an office workspace would have, and they need to be fully integrated to the organization's workspace: for example, complete access to the organization's databases. This can be achieved for example using desktop virtualization and cloud services. (Logicalis 2013, pp. 9-10.)

As for collaboration tools, the core need is to empower the communication with the teleworker to simulate the presence with the other employees in the organization's office. Indeed, a teleworker is physically unable to communicate with the other employees or to show their availability. To achieve that, phone capabilities are traditionally essential to the teleworking space to allow vocal conversations. In recent times, technology has also made it possible to simulate meetings thanks to video conferencing software that provides not only an audio feed like the telephone, but a video feed too, as well as some additional features such as a shared screen, PowerPoint window or polls for the participants to the video-conference. A presence tool shared by all employees is also beneficial to show their availability to be contacted, simulating how an employee would see a colleague off on a break, on the phone or in an important meeting for example and would understand it is not a good time to contact this colleague (Logicalis 2013, pp. 15-27). Managers might also want some indicators to show the activity of the teleworker as they can control the work done in their office, but that is a delicate topic in legal matters: the best solution is instead to use smart performance indicators to evaluate the teleworker's work. Non-vocal communication means also need to be implemented: for example a professional mailbox and an instant messaging software, so that the teleworker may remain in the loop in the organization, collaborate with co-workers in matters and contexts where a written exchange is more appropriate than a vocal one, and to exchange messages with customers if that is

relevant to the teleworker's job. Finally, the productivity of the teleworker can be increased by maintaining a shared database of information on whatever the teleworkers may need in their work and would usually just ask a colleague about in the office, and giving an easy access to it to the teleworker.

2.6 Known advantages of telework

A recent survey found that two thirds of French workers are interested in teleworking, for at least part of their working time (Harris Interactive 2018). The main reason cited by the participants for their attraction to telework was a better harmony between work and their private life, as about 6 French workers in 10 believe that is the main feature of telework. Another study mentions that 85% of teleworkers perceive this better harmony between professional life and private life as a main benefit of telework (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2). Most reports underline the increased productivity of the teleworker (Bailey & Kurland 2002), 79% of organization leaders recently believed that (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2) but that might be correlated with the increase in working time that 64% of French teleworkers report (Teletravailler.fr 2018a). One of the reasons is that teleworkers, because they do not need to commute, are less often late and miss fewer working days. The self-reported gains in productivity by companies that allow telework span from +15% to +48% - in any case a significant improvement (Hoefling 2001, xviii). The absence of the teleworker in the office also means that the organization needs less space in their office and can therefore save money by paying a smaller rent for a smaller office. That is real but marginal however: only 0.4% of savings in rent are reported (Matthews & Williams 2005).The community benefits from telework too: the city transportation system and the environment are helped by the conversion of commuters into teleworkers, as it reduces traffic and, logically, traffic congestion (teletravailler.fr 2018b). A study from Vias Institute shows that telework reduces the number of accidents and injuries as there are fewer cars on the roads (Godart 2017). Finally, telework is also a competitive advantage for companies to recruit new employees and retain their current ones: a survey from Conference Board highlights that 25% of employees would change their jobs if the only change or extra benefit compared to their current position was that they were allowed to telework (Hoefling 2001, xviii-xix). Half the organization leaders also believe that telework helps improve social dialogue within the organization and diminishes the absenteeism at work (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2). Organization leaders also find telework improves the quality of life of their employees at work (92%), gives more autonomy and responsibilities to the employees (91%), engages the employees more (79%), lowers their fatigue (78%), improves the employer image (69%) and challenges the organization to renew its managerial practices (64%). (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, pp. 2-3.)

Last of all, almost half of employees and decision-makers alike agree that telework is an answer to social challenges such as the employability of fragile people, and over a third also believe it is more respectful of the environment (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 3). The benefits of telework are said to be felt the most by teleworkers when the practice is marginal, between 1 and 2 days a month (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2). The survey also reports that teleworkers have a better grasp than ever of the benefits and issues of teleworking.

2.7 Known limitations of telework

Despite the advantages of telework that have been listed and its attractivity to French workers, telework is still considered extraordinary and full-time telework remains uncommon, as seen previously. That is because telework also has drawbacks and limitations that have been well documented: for example, the trust or distrust between the teleworker and the manager (representing the organization) is listed as the most important factor in the successful implementation of telework (Harris Interactive 2018). The work environment is the next critical factor: it needs to be suitable for work, so quiet and not distracting. Many French teleworkers (56%) also identify clearly the risk that work invades their personal life, and that real breaks from work become hard (Harris Interactive 2018). That figure is consistent with the Malakoff Médéric Humanis survey (2019, 2) that found that 60% of teleworkers acknowledged possible difficulties in separating private life and professional life. Many teleworkers also underline the loneliness of teleworking and the feeling of being excluded, not belonging to the organization like office workers, because they are not physically present. The Malakoff Médéric Humanis survey (2019, 2) quotes 54% of teleworkers mentioning such risks, with 39% of employees even afraid that telework might hamper their career in the organization (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 3). The distance is also a problem for the manager that cannot physically control the employee and the work done (Felstead, Jewson & Walters 2003) and 56% of organization leaders acknowledge that managing telework is challenging (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 3): trust becomes essential in the teleworker/manager relationship, and appropriate performance measures help reassure the manager. Managers self-report some solutions such as rethinking the collective relationship, how delegating and controlling tasks is done, controlling the workload and the rules regarding the working time (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 3). They also underline that telework is a disruptive practice and requires specific formation and awareness actions, which only 31% of managers say they got for themselves when they implemented telework in their organization. Managers overall also support telework (83%) but 18% of them struggle to implement it (Malakoff Médéric Humanis

2019, 3). Finally, some managers worry that telework makes them lose some of their responsibilities (44%) and might jeopardize the hierarchy relationship (34%).
Organization top executives worry about the teleworkers too: 54% say they struggle to evaluate the hygiene and safety of the teleworking space used by the teleworkers, and 31% believe that without a dedicated teleworking space the physical health of the teleworkers may deteriorate (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2).
An interesting piece of information in the Malakoff Médéric Humanis survey (2019, 2) is the reasons provided by the decision-makers why they do not implement telework: 45% say it is because of security concerns regarding the computer tools for the work. 31% mention management resistance to the practice, and 28% find it is too
Finally, cultural values also have an impact on whether management supports and allows telework or not (Peters & Batenburg 2015). Some cultures are naturally more reluctant than others to adopt the practice. The prejudice of French decision-makers against telework is significant: 80% of companies that have not implemented telework believe that it has no positive effect on productivity. Companies that are practicing telework, on the other hand, are only 43% to think so (Aguilera & al. 2016, 8). This figure seems to lower even more since in late 2018 only 21% of those organization leaders believed that telework did not improve productivity (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2). Furthermore, 44% of the companies that have not implemented telework believe that telework is a serious or very serious competitive disadvantage because it would decrease the productivity of the worker that would telework. The figure is once again lower (26%) among companies that practice telework (Aguilera & al. 2016, 8).

2.8 Expected development of telework

As mentioned previously, the French workforce is very interested in teleworking. Despite that, its growth has been slow. Previous researchers believed that the barriers to the practice of telework were too strong and the phenomenon too old now to think that telework would suddenly become widespread, unless an exogenous shock occurred to boost it unexpectedly (Aguilera & al. 2016, pp. 9-10). It could for example be a strong government campaign for the development of telework and decisions to transfer the societal cost of commuting to the organizations it serves: if the employers had the financial responsibility of the commuting infrastructures, they would be a lot more eager to develop telework.
The reported number of ‘teleworkable’ jobs is high: 58% of all jobs in the Rhône-Alpes region for instance (Teletravailler.fr 2018b), so the theoretical cap of telework is very far still. However, only 15.9% of French companies declare interest in expanding the practice in their organization, while 76.8% do not want to expand the practice and 3.9% even want to reduce their practice of telework (Aguilera & al. 2016, 7). More recently, 44% of decision-

makers have reported that they will increase the number of teleworkers in their organization or extend the allowed frequency of telework thanks to the increased legal flexibility in the implementation of telework (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 1).

3 Empirical part

3.1 Methodology of the research

The methodology of the research is a particularly important part as it defines the reliability of the research and its potential biases. This is why I was as rigorous as I could be in designing and managing the interviews, to keep my results as trustworthy as possible.

I decided to use interviews as the means to collect data for my research. Quantitative surveys have already been done multiple times before and it would have been unrealistic for me to try to make a survey as good as the others, because of the number of answers needed to collect. The quantitative knowledge is already available and satisfactory, also done very recently: at least one survey a year by different institutions, with a big, representative sample of the population (a thousand participants or more). But surveys already assume they know the main options the teleworkers will answer and limit them to that array of options, which has the extra bias of suggesting those options to the teleworkers as they can read them.

Qualitative interviews, on the other hand, are a lot less common on telework and could give a lot more freedom to the interviewees to express their views on telework in their full complexity and originality, and could thus bring some new insight on telework as seen and lived by teleworkers.

As I live in Finland and my research subjects are in France, I could not meet them to interview them face-to-face. Instead, I opted for a voice-chat-based interview to provide the best support environment for a qualitative interview, allowing the interviewees full freedom and spontaneity in their answers and allowing me to keep the conversation alive and reactive.

I, as the interviewer, prepared a common list of open questions to try and cover all aspects of telework during the interview, while remaining as open and neutral or non-directional as possible, to avoid influencing the spontaneous answers given by the interviewees and thus introducing an unwelcome bias into the research results. As a result, the answers were completely spontaneous: that means they might have not thought of something, but it guaranteed the absence of the suggestion bias. Furthermore, these questions were only to serve as guidelines, and reacting to the interviewee’s answers by asking more accurate, personalized and unprepared questions was paramount to get as much in-

depth in their view of telework as possible, and the teleworkers were always open asked if they wanted to add anything that was not covered before at the end of the interview. Thus, the interview type was semi-structured.

The general guidelines of the interview (the structure I followed during the interviews) can be found schematized in Appendix 1. To recap, the planned questions covered the following topics:

- The definition of telework in the teleworker's mind
- The description of the teleworker's job
- How telework is working in practice for the teleworker
- The teleworker's past experiences of telework
- How telework was initiated in the teleworker's career
- The teleworker's overall evaluation of telework
- What the teleworker has liked about telework
- What the teleworker has disliked about telework
- If the implementation of telework surprised the teleworker in any way
- The attitude of the teleworker's organization regarding telework
- The history of telework at the teleworker's organization
- If the teleworker would like to telework more or less in the future
- The importance of telework for the teleworker's future career choices
- The prospects of telework in the French society according to the teleworker

The definition of telework was the first question asked, in order to ensure a common understanding of the concept for the rest of the interview. It was also interesting to assess what was their own preconceived definition of telework, because the definition of telework can vary, as I have mentioned in the theoretical background.

The interviews were initially conducted in English, as it is the language of this research, with the first two participants as their command of the English language was fluent enough. However, in order to try and lift a possible obstacle to the research and remain accessible to everyone, the subsequent interviews were conducted in French, the mother tongue of the interviewees and mine.

The interviews were held over a voice chat software, using either WhatsApp, Mumble or TeamSpeak. They were recorded in most cases, after the interviewee allowed it, so that I could listen to them again, which allowed me to focus then entirely on the interview while not risking to not remember the details of what they had said. One challenge was that, in

most cases, the software picked convenience by the interviewees (WhatsApp) out of convenience did not offer a recording feature: I then had to try and record the conversation by putting the interviewee on speaker on my phone while pressing the phone on a microphone, recording it on Windows. Such recordings were then somewhat unreliable and of poor quality, although they still proved enough for their intended purpose.

In one instance, the interviewee was traveling by train, which caused her connexion to the Internet to be so bad that I had to allow exceptionally an alternative way of conducting the interview. Indeed, we could barely voice half a sentence before the connexion was lost, and we had already postponed the interview a couple of times to accommodate her schedule and availability, so postponing again was mutually deemed not the best solution. As a result, I wrote her my questions one after the other, and she answered by recording her answer vocally and sending it to me. This way, the interviewee would still have the freedom and spontaneity of oral speech, and I would still have the flexibility in my questions to adapt to her previous answers and react.

The interviews took on average about 40 minutes to discuss the topic through and through, albeit in one case the interviewee was so laconic and direct in his answers that it took barely 15 minutes. The longest interview took a little over 55 minutes.

The volunteers for interviews were found in different ways: the first two were personal friends I asked directly. Then I found two more by making a general call to the public on social media such as Reddit and Twitter, and the final three were friends and acquaintances who volunteered after I published a post on Facebook asking for teleworkers to interview.

In all cases, the participants were told in advance of the topic of the interview (telework) and the expected duration (about 35 minutes). The condition was also made clear that it needed to be an oral conversation, but they were given the freedom to choose the mean to achieve that.

The research was spread over a few months, as it began during a preparatory course to thesis-making, “Research Process”, which I then built upon. The first two interviews of this thesis were made for that preliminary research.

3.2 Results

Eight interviews were held for the research. Two of the people interviewed were women, six were men. All of them belonged to the same age category: between 28 and 32 years old, young professionals with a few years of experience, as it is the target of the research.

The first interviewee is a 29-year-old male from the south of France working as an IT support specialist for other employees at his workplace, both for hardware and software. Most of his work is done remotely on the other employees' workstations but still from his workplace. He teleworks only exceptionally.

The second interviewee is a 28-year-old male from Toulouse working as a journalist reporting on local news to his national newspaper. He has an office in the outskirts of the city but frequently teleworks, usually one or two hours every working day, approximately six to eight hours a week. The editing of his article has to be done at his office because of the infrastructure needs the editing requires, while he does not consider on-field reporting to be telework. Writing his articles, however, he tends to do at home, teleworking. He also had a previous journalist job more telework-intensive, about two thirds of his time, when he was working away in the United States of America for a French public online media.

The third interviewee is a 29-year-old female working as a regular freelance web developer for several customer organizations as her main occupation. She usually works in the Paris area but is otherwise based in the north of France, about an hour away of commute. She teleworks a lot, about 70% of her working time. She teleworks mostly from home, but in rare occasions she uses some co-working spaces if she needs to visit a client and does not have a good internet connexion to work there. She started teleworking a year and a half ago.

The fourth interviewee is a 29-year-old male from Paris who works as an independent programmer. Although legally independent, he works for a French governmental organization, where it takes him 90 minutes a day to commute. He teleworks about a day a week, using his smartphone as a mobile workstation that he just plugs to a ready-to-work setup of a screen, keyboard and mouse, whether at home or at the office. He also teleworks during his commute in the metro, managing his emails and professional Slack on his phone. He is considering teleworking from a co-working space to provide him with a better work environment than his home.

The fifth interviewee is a 30-year-old male from Nantes. He is a software developer who currently teleworks a little – one day from time to time when he wants – and he has teleworkers more in two previous positions. In the first of those positions, he was originally working in a different city but decided to move to another, distant city, and his employer spontaneously offered to keep his job as telework, coming to the office for about a week per month. In the second position, he likewise was teleworking for a different company based in the same distant city, which he also visited a few days per month. He however believes telework to be the main reason behind his departure from this second position because of the isolation he faced in his job.

The sixth interviewee is a 30-year-old female from Montpellier. She works in a mutual fund, training and forwarding relevant information to elected delegates to enable them to work efficiently in their function. She teleworks one or two days a week, she is not allowed any more than that, and she also travels between one and four days a week, depending on the time of the year (and consequently her duties). Her direct manager is located in a different city.

The seventh interviewee is a 32-year-old male who lives in Paris. He currently has four part-time jobs where he teleworks almost 100% of his time. In the first, he does B2B business development in France for a Swedish company. In the second, he creates videos for an online tabloid. In the third, he is a handyman for a small service company. Finally, in his fourth job, he is an entrepreneur providing counsel in financial investment and saving. He also has teleworked in previous jobs, for example as a travel reporter and as a journalist.

The eighth and last interviewee is a 31-year-old consultant in project management and change management living in Paris. He can telework whenever he feels like if his work does not require his presence at a client organization, although he elects to do so only when he feels that special circumstances justify it, like an illness, an administrative personal task to perform or a flight departure or return close to his work hours for example. He has also teleworked in a previous organization in the months before his exit.

The results are given by topic and summarized by interviewee. Indeed, as a qualitative research, it does not make sense to provide aggregate results, by essence quantitative, for a small sample that cannot pretend to be representative. By presenting my results summarized by topic and by interviewee in tables, it allows each narrative to be followed from topic to topic and to remain coherent while providing the greatest readability to the results. It is nonetheless a translation and a summary of what each interviewee said, because

there was over 5 hours of continuous dialogue in total in the interviews and it was necessary for clarity to summarize the ideas expressed by the interviewees. The summary of what they said or did not say as a group is closely intertwined with commenting and analysing it, so it is rather included in the next part, the analysis.

3.2.1 What the teleworkers think telework is

Teleworker 1	Working away from the office, particularly from home.
Teleworker 2	Working from anywhere, including but not restricted to home. Implies the work could be done from the office but the teleworker chooses to do it away from the office.
Teleworker 3	Working from home or a co-working space instead of the office (if it is a choice).
Teleworker 4	Working away from the office, particularly from home.
Teleworker 5	Working away from the office (home, co-working space, etc).
Teleworker 6	Doing your routine work from home.
Teleworker 7	Working from whichever place the teleworker chooses that has an internet connexion. No physical presence required anywhere.
Teleworker 8	Working from home or in transportation using information technology to be available.

3.2.2 How the teleworkers started teleworking

Teleworker 1	When the organization website is down, during a general strike or when the organization facilities are closed for security reasons, telework is then approved to provide remote support.
Teleworker 2	It was obvious and implied by his job as his office is located 45 minutes away from the city centre where he does his reporting, while his home is merely 5 minutes away. He is legally a freelance journalist and he is paid by the pages he writes, so productivity is very important to him: telework thus proved necessary.
Teleworker 3	She chose her career path specifically to be able to telework, from home or anywhere, so that she would be able to also dedicate some of her time to other professional projects and hobbies. She started to work normally at her organization and then asked to telework when she had settled and realized her work did not really need her presence in the office.
Teleworker 4	Telework was not in the job description when he applied, but he quickly found out, after he joined his organization, that he was given a large autonomy in his work and that he could telework. He did so by tacit agreement.

Teleworker 5	In his first experience of telework, he wanted to move to a different city and his then employer offered he continues to work for them as telework. In his second experience, a former colleague contacted him to join his team, but as he was located far, he was offered to telework.
Teleworker 6	She was already part of the organization in a different position. Her future gaffer was located in another city, but she was offered to just stay where she is and to work remotely with her boss. A year later, telework was implemented in the organization and she was part of the test population as she already had a rather nomadic work.
Teleworker 7	In most of his jobs, telework was an integral part of his work from the very beginning, even if it was not usually specified in the job ads and was not then a criterion in his job search. In one case, he was temporarily hired for an event by a foreign company and they then realized he was a good salesman. They offered him to keep working for them part-time as telework, since they do not have any office in France. In another case, his work was based in an office and he started to live at his office, sleeping there with the consent of his employer. He then solicitated the permission to work remotely and obtained it from his employer.
Teleworker 8	It was mentioned as a policy of the organization when he joined, so he felt free to telework when he had a good reason to. In his previous organization, he had a long project in a distant city. He was ill and exhausted, and it was then suggested to him he could telework for a few weeks to recover. Afterwards, it was no secret he was planning to resign shortly, so he felt freer to telework despite the poor consideration the organization had for teleworkers.

3.2.3 How satisfied the teleworkers have been about telework

Teleworker 1	Neutral: just another way of working. Good if it fits your needs and motivation.
Teleworker 2	Happy with telework, but it mostly is a professional obligation. He prefers working at the office, but it is too convenient to avoid the commute and telework from home.
Teleworker 3	Very happy, she finds that telework is an extraordinary advantage both for her professional life and her overall quality of life. She acknowledges it requires self-discipline, but it is very enjoyable if you have it.
Teleworker 4	He really likes to telework, and he wholeheartedly endorses it.
Teleworker 5	He has a mixed opinion of telework, although he believes it is more due to the management approach of telework in his experience. He resigned from his second telework experience in part because of telework: he felt isolated because he was working alone on a project.
Teleworker 6	She is delighted with telework and fully enjoys its perks.
Teleworker 7	He is happy with his experience of telework, he would grade it 7 out of 10, noting it could be improved.
Teleworker 8	Telework is a good thing, it brings about a change in archaic management methods traditionally based on presence. It also grants more autonomy and balance between professional life and private life.

3.2.4 What the teleworkers like about telework

Teleworker 1	The work is evaluated on performance and not on presence, and if you are very productive and reach your targets quickly, you get more free time.
Teleworker 2	Good professionally: it allows proximity to the field he reports about. Also convenient to avoid commuting: the working day is finished already at home. It also is necessary for productivity to remain competitive in the journalism business.
Teleworker 3	Telework offers a huge flexibility, which helps professionally when, because of some constraint, she is unable to commute or is ill, as she can just work more easily from home and her employers know that. She is also able to adapt her schedule to her liking and to her natural rhythm, she can work in the morning (when she feels the most productive), afternoon or in the evening, whenever she feels like. She also likes having her own private environment to work in, she finds it comfortable. Finally, it saves her a lot of commuting time in Paris, where she feels the transportation system is not good enough to commute. Overall, it adds a lot to her quality of life and gives her more time to spend on her hobbies or personal projects.
Teleworker 4	Telework saves him 90 minutes a day as he does not have to commute. The flexibility it offers also means he can get some personal tasks done during business hours, whether administrative or domestic chores. Overall, that is a sensible gain of efficiency in his life.

Teleworker 5	He likes having more autonomy and flexibility in his work, being able to decide when he works, avoiding the commute and the typical noisiness and interruptions of a normal open-space office. He has felt more productive.
Teleworker 6	It saves her 80 minutes a day of commute and she finds her environment calmer when she teleworks. She appreciates being away from her colleagues sometimes. She also enjoys a lot the flexibility in her schedule it offers, she can freely decide when to work (even outside normal business hours) and when to take breaks.
Teleworker 7	He likes being able to choose where he works: for example, on a beach, and dressed however he wants. He feels energized from having a variety of places to work at. He enjoys having more autonomy and less supervision, and not needing to attend endless meetings he is not interested in. He only needs to dedicate his time to the tasks he needs to do and is happy to skip the social breaks and the different social troubles of the office, because he does not like having to socialize professionally with colleagues.
Teleworker 8	Needless commuting is no longer necessary, it saves time and saves the environment as well. A more nomadic work also means less papers and bureaucracy, a leaner work place. Home can also be a more comfortable and better work environment, helping to focus. It is also helpful for private matters that can be dealt with more flexibility, like for parents with a sick child.

3.2.5 What the teleworkers dislike about telework

Teleworker 1	You get easily distracted at home and it is hard to focus on your work. He feels a drop in productivity somehow because he lacks the required self-discipline.
Teleworker 2	You cannot ask as easily a colleague's opinion on your article. Asking for help is then too formalized and done through technology instead of a direct social interaction. It requires IT-savviness, which not every worker has.
Teleworker 3	Telework requires a lot of self-discipline and organization skills: procrastination quickly leads to being overwhelmed with work. She also finds it less efficient to communicate with colleagues and discuss details of their work, in particular when drawings are necessary, but as she usually does it all by herself she does not suffer too much of it, and when she works with someone like that she then commutes to be physically present for such a conversation.
Teleworker 4	His home is not ideally suited to telework: it is small and he does not have a room dedicated to his work, so the work environment when he teleworks could be better. He finds it is difficult to really disconnect from his work after his day is over. Finally, he is afraid of missing out on new opportunities, contacts and things to learn from the office place if he teleworks too much. He believes a co-working space would be a good answer to all of those challenges.

Teleworker 5	He has only one major complaint about telework: how isolated it has made him feel in the organization.
Teleworker 6	She reports having technical issues sometimes with her work tools, but her IT department keeps improving its support of telework. She also dislikes not seeing her colleagues at least once a week, so she prefers not to telework when she has weeks heavy with traveling.
Teleworker 7	He does not like the loneliness of telework, and the remote work environment sometimes makes it hard to get to work: he needs a lot of self-discipline to make it work. His ideal work conditions vary (being isolated or having his colleagues around, a studious workplace or a more exotic one) so it is difficult for him to find the perfect balance at all times. He has tried but not liked co-working spaces where he feels the atmosphere is too 'business school'-like. He would prefer being able to choose who he shares the co-working space with, for example working with a couple of friends in a room on their own, separate tasks.
Teleworker 8	Some people are suspicious when they do not see you at work: you are not here, so you are not working. Telework is not adapted to some jobs that require presence. The link between teleworkers and the organization is also challenged if they telework too much.

3.2.6 How telework compared with their expectations

Teleworker 1	He was not surprised, it confirmed to him that telework required good self-discipline.
Teleworker 2	He expected more feedback on his production done by teleworking. He has a large autonomy and his production does not seem to be really evaluated.
Teleworker 3	She was not surprised by her first experience of telework, she always had the notion it requires good self-discipline.
Teleworker 4	He cannot objectively say; he feels it has been too long to remember accurately what his expectations had been.
Teleworker 5	He was not surprised, telework proved to be what he had expected.
Teleworker 6	She doubted her ability to be efficient while teleworking, as she thought she might not have the self-discipline required to work remotely. This is why she had asked to be able to stop teleworking and resume working normally in the office if it did not work out, but she found herself surprisingly more productive when she teleworks.
Teleworker 7	He was surprised how closely monitored he was when he teleworked for the first time. He had to go through an online platform that took random screenshots of his computer to check if he really was working, and his phone calls were recorded. After this first experience, he was not monitored this closely anymore.
Teleworker 8	He was not really surprised, although he expected to be monitored more when he teleworks.

3.2.7 Telework at the teleworkers' organizations

Teleworker 1	Organization is reluctant to truly implement telework: he is expected to be physically present to greet other employees walking in needing help, and in case there is an unforeseen spike in activity. Yet usually 75-80% of his tasks could be done completely remotely, and the IT support group he belongs to has 40 employees.
Teleworker 2	Telework is not a new thing in journalism, he draws the comparison with journalists phoning in their articles in the early 20th century. Telework is considered normal and obvious, and every journalist at his organization teleworks. There used to be a real office for all the journalists, but it got downsized to a single desk, mostly for the editing tasks, because telework became naturally prominent.
Teleworker 3	She believes telework started around 2014 in her main organization and that they are very satisfied with the increase in productivity and in the employee satisfaction it led to.
Teleworker 4	His organization has allowed telework ever since it was founded a few years ago, because it proved to be beneficial in productivity. He believes that his governmental organization approaches telework loosely on the legal side, but on the other hand he works on open-source projects with no business secret, so the security of his remote workspace is not an issue.
Teleworker 5	Telework was already implemented in his first organization when he joined. The second one was smaller, and he was the first teleworker recruited. In both cases, he believes the organizations adopted telework to attract or retain employees with a very in-demand skillset.

Teleworker 6	Her organization recently hired a specialist in wellbeing at work who, she believes, initiated the implementation of telework in the organization for both productivity gains and employee happiness and retention. The organization is testing telework with a test population that she is a part of.
Teleworker 7	One of his organizations is based in Sweden and does not have an office in France, so it is the only way they can get him to work on business development for them, and they have allowed telework ever since their creation. They are flexible with him but remain in close contact with him. Another (larger) organization, a tabloid, hired him as a freelancer, and it saves them office space to allow those freelancers to telework, which they started to implement last September for their web-only content. They behave quite distantly, he says he does twice the work they ask in half the time they allotted him, and he feels very disconnected from his employer. For another of his jobs he is his own boss, as an entrepreneur. In the last organization, they are a young start-up still using their own funds, so they use the co-working space of a start-up incubator and have always allowed telework. He has a large autonomy and feels very trusted.
Teleworker 8	When he joined his previous organization, in 2015, teleworkers were perceived to be lazy or doing the bare minimum required of them. Presence was required by the management and expected for career evolution. His current organization is more telework-friendly, and he is trusted to know when he can telework. Telework is an ancient practice in the consulting field, at least 10 years old.

3.2.8 The ideal amount of telework for the teleworkers

Teleworker 1	He would like to be trusted to adjust his telework ratio depending on the needs. Somewhere between 35 and 50 hours a month would seem suitable to him to maximize his productivity.
Teleworker 2	Ideally, he would prefer to telework less and restore the news-room (office) to its full size. But due to the location of the office and the nature of his tasks, he will keep needing to telework.
Teleworker 3	She feels that her current ratio of 70% of telework and 30% pre-sential work is the ideal balance for her. She is not worried about the link with the rest of the organization or about being over-looked in the organization.
Teleworker 4	He would like to telework more in the future. He is considering moving away from Paris to get a better quality of life in another place, while keeping his current job. He would thus telework four days a week. However, he states that the ideal proportion of tel-ework would rather be half a week.

Teleworker 5	It all depends on the work conditions of telework and the opportunities offered to him, so he cannot say.
Teleworker 6	Her schedule varies a lot depending on the organization activities. She teleworks one or two days a week and thinks it is ideal to her, but she also has a lot of traveling (between one and four days a week) which she does not count as telework because her organization does not classify it as such. That leaves her between about two or three days a week in the office, with a minimum of one.
Teleworker 7	He already does 100% of his work as telework but would like to telework even more in weekly hours to increase his income.
Teleworker 8	One day a week, with the possibility of up to two days a week seems like the ideal amount of telework to him.

3.2.9 How important telework is to the teleworkers in their future career

Teleworker 1	He would like to have the choice for health and comfort, but it is overall not important.
Teleworker 2	It is not important at all to him. An office with a good location would be just as fine.
Teleworker 3	It is a criterion in her decision. She favours smaller organizations because the relationship is more personal and trusting, and they give her more autonomy in her work, including telework. She has already turned down some offers from larger organizations in part because they did not offer her to telework.
Teleworker 4	Telework is very important to him in regard to his future job searches.
Teleworker 5	Telework has no importance to him in his career choices.
Teleworker 6	Telework is a clear pro in her future decisions about her career and will be a factor she takes into account.
Teleworker 7	Telework is not a decisive criterion in his career choices, the work must be fun and lucrative, preferably in a field he likes. However, he does value being able to telework and will take it into account as a pro in his career.
Teleworker 8	He considers telework an indispensable condition to accepting a position, because it is a marker of modern management practices to him.

3.2.10 What the teleworkers think will be the future of telework in the French society

Teleworker 1	Smaller companies will be eager to implement telework widely, but larger companies will require a physical presence for political reasons, for his line of work at least. He believes telework will be easier to allow for work on a final product. In services, however, there is no final product to show, so the service must be shown by the physical presence of the employees.
Teleworker 2	Telework will keep growing, especially for people who work independently with their creativity, until it reaches a plateau. Technology will not prove as efficient a substitute for human interactions as it is commonly believed. In particular, for jobs where social interactions and feedback are essential, he believes telework will only lead to a decrease in productivity. He believes that the trace left by text-based interactions is an obstacle to telework as people will not want to ask others for help.
Teleworker 3	Telework has a bright future. She thinks in particular of parents who would have it easier to manage both their professional life and their family life by teleworking.
Teleworker 4	Telework will become a lot more common in the French society. Many of his friends have office jobs that are telework-compatible, and he believes they will eventually be performed by teleworking. He thinks the government will push the practice in France, as an eco-friendly measure that will fluidify traffic.

Teleworker 5	Telework will keep growing for in-demand positions, particularly in the IT field, but that it will probably not grow much in other fields. He otherwise has little idea how it will turn out.
Teleworker 6	Telework has a clear future in organizations as it increases productivity and the wellbeing at work of the employees. Organizations could also save office space: open-spaces could become more frequent for teleworkers when they come and work at the office instead of having their own nominal room empty when they telework. She thinks there still remain some obstacles preventing that all organizations implement telework, but large companies should expand telework to all their support functions and only keep a few essential presential points.
Teleworker 7	Telework is growing more and more and will become more normal than a traditional office job. He hopes it will lead to an urban exodus and repopulate the countryside. He thinks it would be a very good thing, although it could make employees' life more precarious and make it harder to negotiate a fair compensation for their work.
Teleworker 8	Telework cannot be the only way of working in the future: organizations are still a place to go to in order to meet people, and to keep a social link within the organization. This is why he thinks telework should not be done for more than 2-3 days a week. That being said, telework is a good answer to managerial and environmental challenges.

3.3 Analytical part

3.3.1 Biases of the research

The research must be clear on what biases may affect the results, and there are a few in this one.

First of all, it is a qualitative research. The size of the sample is small (8 teleworkers) and by far insufficient to compare to large surveys done earlier and get any quantitative insight on the topic. That was never the goal of the research, as it would have been delusional to try to achieve a good quantitative original research on par with the previous surveys (like the ones done by Malakoff Médéric Humanis.or Aguilera & al.). The research instead focuses on qualitative insight, to understand the teleworkers' point of view on telework and find oddities.

Another bias is the composition of the sample: the gender parity is not respected, men have been interviewed six times and women only twice, so that does not provide a lot of variety of points of view from women. All of the interviewees were in the same age category, between 28 and 32 years old, which fits the focus of the thesis and leaves older teleworkers out of scope. It would be however interesting to investigate what older teleworkers think of telework as it should be a big change to their work habits that were reinforced for many years, and they are usually said to be less tech-savvy than younger employees, so their own experience of telework may differ greatly from the younger teleworkers that were interviewed for this research.

Finally, the interview conditions have changed a little from one to the other, whether it is the language used (English or French), the software used for voice chat (TeamSpeak, Mumble or WhatsApp), the odd complementary question or answer out of direct voice chat (either voice recording or written chat), or my own questions and attitude as I adapt and react to the conversation. The personal relationship between the interviewer (I) and the interviewee also was different, between friendship and total stranger. All of that may have influenced somehow the consistency of the results in the research, although I believe very marginally so. Likewise, the quality of the recordings and my ability to record the conversation also varied a little, and I also had to translate the answers given in French to English in this thesis, but I do not think that any of that significantly impacted my transcription of the results.

3.3.2 Analysis

The definition of telework:

No one provided a perfect definition of telework based on the theoretical background. Some neglected to mention co-working spaces (along with any other place the teleworker may be free to telework from), which raises the question of their awareness of their existence. One even restricted telework to home-based. Almost every interviewee mentioned spontaneously home when defining telework, often to underline that it is the most common way to telework. It seems to show that telework remains primarily thought as home-based in France. It may be the reason why the cultural bias exists: it can easily be misconceived that if you are at home, it is your free time and you are not working, especially as your manager cannot monitor your presence in front of your workstation.

Only one mentioned telework can be done when traveling, while another even dismisses this aspect of telework because her organization does not consider this to be telework. That is an aspect of telework that is apparently still not well known.

Only one interviewee also mentioned telework is performed using information technology, while another just mentioned the requirement of an internet connexion. The most reasonable explanation is that the others probably thought it is implied and did not think of mentioning it.

Only one interviewee thought to specify that telework only counted as such if the work could be done in the office but was chosen to be done remotely. No one mentioned the legal contract about the work (even if it is not mentioned on the contract that it can be performed by teleworking). Again, the most plausible explanation is that it was considered implied by the interviewees. Nobody thought spontaneously of other categories of teleworkers such as nomadic workers and overtime workers. One interviewee who belonged to the nomadic worker category did not even see her nomadic work as teleworking. Those two categories thus seem to remain relatively excluded from the concept of telework in the minds, while more traditional forms of telework, and especially home-based telework, remain at the core of the definition.

Co-working spaces are rising and it is too early to judge their success, but considering how easily they were overlooked by the teleworkers I interviewed in this preliminary question, it seems they should be promoted more to make both employees and employers know that it is a remote workspace solution for them.

How telework started for the teleworkers:

In many cases, the employee was working normally in an office and the employer offered telework as an option to answer a problem: the employee being ill or close to burnout, the employee moving to a different city, the ideal employee for a promotion living in a different city or a short-term hire proving beneficial to a foreign company with no office in France. It is thus a direction action by employers to attract or retain good employees. In other cases, the employee solicitated the permission to telework from the employer when they realized their presence was not actually necessary for their work, and it was granted. Sometimes it was made clear from the first day at the office that telework was a free policy of the organization or implied by the job and there was no permission to acquire: even if telework was not in the job description or in the legal contract, telework was possible by tacit agreement. It seems consistent overall with the previous research that highlighted that formalized agreements on telework are uncommon in France and that employers prefer unbinding agreements (Maestlé 2012), while the practice becomes more normal in organizations, however.

Overall teleworker satisfaction:

Nobody expressed a really negative opinion on telework. Most interviewees were happy with their experiences of telework, some were even very enthusiastic about it. One considered it neutrally, as just another way of working that can be a better option if it fits the employee needs and motivation. Another interviewee expressed mixed feelings about it, saying that while his overall experience had rather been negative and made him even quit one job, he believes the project management was more to blame than the practice of telework as it increased his isolation by assigning him to a solo project, disconnected from the rest of the organization members. This variety of opinions is however a good thing to get different insights in the research, and the overall positive opinion on telework is once again consistent with the previous research (Malakoff Médéric Humanis 2019, 2).

Pros of telework:

Many perks of telework have been mentioned by the interviewees. The time it saves them of commute has been the most obviously discussed, which they can use to their liking, like for example spending more time on a hobby or working on a personal project. The flexibility of work hours, which can help to take care of a child or to do some administrative or domestic chores more easily and efficiently, and their autonomy in their self-organization has been widely appreciated as well. Many have felt they are more productive when they telework too, and several teleworkers found that their remote workspace, usually home, is a better, calmer work environment that helps them to be more productive, or they at least enjoy it better. Several teleworkers interestingly expressed their appreciation of getting a

break from the socialization at the office. A couple of teleworkers also discussed the welcomed change in management, as they are no longer evaluated on their presence but on their performance. One interviewee said he feels energized from getting to work in many different settings. It was also mentioned that a more nomadic work style could mean leaner offices with less paperwork in organizations, and that telework contributes to saving the environment by reducing traffic and thus paper use. Many of these perks have been overlooked or considered minor in previous research. Overall, many concluded that telework improved their quality of life. However, no one mentioned the financial or health benefits telework might have, unlike previous research brought up, so it did not seem important criteria to the interviewees.

Cons and obstacles of telework:

A lot of cons and obstacles have also been reported by the interviewees, often contradicting directly what others listed as a pro. For example, one teleworker found he was less productive when he teleworked because he lacked the self-discipline to resist being distracted at home, which nearly all of the interviewees agreed was necessary to make telework a success. Some interviewees somehow missed the social interaction from the office, where it is easier to ask for an informal hand or to discuss details of your work together, or even to get some opportunities to network and learn new things. I personally expect future technologies, maybe even virtual reality, to meet that challenge. Someone also underlined that knowledge of IT tools is required to telework and that not all the workforce has it, in particular the older employees. It is a valid point, although the workforce necessarily becomes more and more adept with technologies as time passes and they have been around for longer, and the young professionals in the scope of this study belong to the first generation that grew up in a digital world, so it is reasonable to think that they should have less trouble than older generations in the future to adapt to new telework technologies. Somewhat similarly, one teleworker spoke of technical issues with her work tools as telework was only recently implemented in her organization and was not lean yet. That underlines that the implementation of telework takes time and might not be fully efficient at first. Other interviewees noted their home environment was ill-suited to work and lacked the proper atmosphere to focus on their work, and one person reported a difficulty to really disconnect from work after the workday. Both have been a common complaint in previous researches. Likewise, the isolation two teleworkers shared feeling and others also mentioned as a risk is already a well-documented risk. One person thought that, indeed, the link between the teleworkers and the organization can be challenged if they are too often away from the premises, something once again already present in previous research. The co-working spaces seem to be rather divisive in my small pool of teleworkers, but most admit they will give it a chance (or another one) in the future. Finally, someone

finds the organizational culture in some organizations is still biased against telework and that it is too often believed teleworkers do not really work. That validates my own experience and starting theory: the bias still exists, but it has been so rarely brought up overall in the interviews that I think it is disappearing, now that telework has been well documented and organizations know the right conditions to make it beneficial to them and to their employees.

Initial expectations of telework:

Most people assured they were not surprised in any way when they started to telework by the reality of telework, and that telework was exactly what they had been expecting. Several teleworkers underlined they were fully expecting telework to require good self-discipline to work well, whether they had it or not in the end. Some others spoke of the monitoring of their work in contradicting ways: two teleworkers had expected more monitoring or feedback on their work, while another spoke on the contrary of a serious monitoring, taking random screenshots of his computer and recording his calls, which surprised him. So, it should be a sign that telework is perceived pretty accurately in France by teleworkers.

Organizations and telework:

There are big differences reported by the interviewees on how telework is managed and perceived in their organizations, past and present. Most organizations have a positive attitude – which is logical considering I am interviewing teleworkers –, allowing telework by tacit agreement and granting a large autonomy to the teleworkers. The teleworkers believe the organizations' motives are to improve the attractivity of the organization, the employee happiness and retention, to increase productivity and to save office space and rent as well. However, it can be noted that most of those organizations were either founded in recent years, or have only started to implement telework recently, so they do not have old processes regarding telework and are certainly the typical organizations that drove telework to grow tremendously in France between 2012 and 2019 as the theoretical background showed. Some other organizations, on the other hand, were described as having a negative attitude towards telework. A large organization that required the constant physical presence of their entire support team allegedly for political reasons, and another large organization where, in 2015 at least, teleworkers were perceived to be lazy and bad employee with no career perspectives working this way. That tends to show that the much-discussed cultural bias against telework in French organizations still exist, even if it seems to become the attitude of only a minority of organizations. Organizations that have not implemented telework are not in the scope of this research, but it could be supposed that they have not implemented telework maybe because they share this bias. The takeaway

from that is that the French government still has work to do to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of telework for the organizations, well-documented and proven, and that organizations may benefit from specific coaching and change management in telework implementation as telework has its pitfalls and needs the right management and structure to succeed.

The ideal amount of telework:

I did not require a number from the interviewees and when they gave one, it was not necessarily on the same scale, so the comparisons are a little harder to make. There seems to be two main categories: those who think it best to telework a lot (between 70% and 100% of their time), and those who would like for telework to remain a smaller part of their week, one or two days a week. The latter are a bit more numerous and are in agreement with the previous research estimating that the ideal number of days of telework in a month is 6.7 for French teleworkers. Those who want to telework a lot dismiss the worry of feeling disconnected from the rest of the organization, while those who want to telework a little underline wanting to ensure they keep the link with the rest of the organization alive.

Telework in their future career:

Two teleworkers answered that telework had no importance at all in their eyes when it comes to make career choices, other criteria clearly overshadowing it. Three teleworkers consider telework as a bonus, something that adds value to a potential job offer, but would not say it is important. Two answered that it is an important criterion to them, one of them even said she had turned down some job offers primarily because telework was not offered as an option. One person even said that telework is an indispensable condition to him accepting a job offer, even though he does not telework that much, because he considers it is a sign of modern management practices to him and the absence of telework at the organization would raise a red flag in his eyes. There is a diversity of opinions on the importance that telework has for their career, but it is striking how important telework has become already for some people in their career choices, considering the practice has only boomed in France in recent years. I believe telework is going to be a competitive advantage for organizations in the near future and that will force organizations to implement telework or improve their telework practice, to attract and retain the best employees.

The future of telework in the French society:

Nobody can know for certain what the future has in store for telework in France, but it can be interesting to hear how the teleworkers envision this future that impacts them. Every interviewee agreed that telework is going to keep growing in France. But they disagree on where the growth will end.

Most believe there is still a lot of growth incoming: the French government is expected to promote telework because it is eco-friendly and helps solve the modern issue of traffic jams in big cities. Parents should telework more in the future to combine their professional life and their family life more efficiently. One person expects telework to become more normal than traditional office jobs, which could help repopulate the countryside thanks to the flexibility in location. Another believes that telework will help modernize management. All of it seems logical. Someone else think that telework will contribute to making open-spaces more common than nominal offices, which surprised me because open-spaces seemed to be the norm already to me, but the interviewee replied she had never seen an organization working in open-spaces so it was her belief.

Then come the limitations: two of the interviewees disagree on the future of telework in large organizations. The first thinks they will require physical presence for political reasons, visibility, and telework will not grow there, and likewise, that it will be easier for people who work on a tangible product to telework because they will have something to show for their work, rather than people who work in services who have nothing to show but their presence. The other one thinks on the contrary that they should easily expand telework to all their support functions and only keep a few essential points. They are somehow compatible: such large organizations could implement telework widely to their support functions but might not because of political reasons. Others think that the growth will soon plateau, because it cannot replace effectively the social interactions of the office, that only people who work independently would benefit from it while those who work more interdependently would suffer in their productivity. It is probably right until technology provides an answer to that need, like for example virtual reality. The IT field is perceived to be the main fertile field for telework, which I agree with because it is obviously a tech-friendly industry with a lot of in-demand employees. Last of all, telework could change a lot the relationship between employee and employers, and the risk is that it makes it harder for the employees to negotiate a fair compensation for their work as they are no longer based in a specific location with known living costs. That makes sense, although unions might play a role, and might also push people away from cities to the countryside where life is cheaper, as someone argued above.

4 Conclusion

In spite of a small, non-representative sample, many insights can be taken from the research thanks to its qualitative approach and the variety of opinions expressed by the interviewees. Indeed, the results actually match a lot of the existing research, while adding some new spontaneous ideas.

Telework seems to still be thought of as primarily home-based in France where the co-working spaces are a nascent concept and should be promoted more for teleworkers and their employers to know that they are a valid option. Nomadic workers, although officially counted as a form of teleworkers, do not seem to be yet seen as such.

Organizations seem to have a clear preference for arranging telework by tacit agreement rather than formalizing it in the employment contract. It could be interesting to investigate why they are reluctant to formalize telework when they are now adopting it more and more for productivity gains, employee retention and attracting top talent in their organization.

Teleworkers, as reported in previous research, like teleworking for a number of reasons. Among the new or little-discussed-before insights uncovered by this research, they like getting a break from the socialization of the office – which they tend to still want, just not all the time -, support telework for its positive impact on the environment and appreciate the change it brings to their organization, forcing it to have leaner offices where management stops evaluating the employees on their presence but now rather on their performance.

On the other hand, telework requires a lot of self-discipline and there is a real risk of feeling isolated from the organization, something the participants to this research massively agreed with previous findings. What is not commonly found in previous research on the matter is that they might miss the social interactions of the office, where it is easier to get help informally and to find new opportunities for personal growth, and not only because of the risk of isolation. The bias against teleworkers in some organizations is still reported present and could also have to do with political reasons at the executive level, where employees are wished to be seen.

Nothing really surprised the teleworkers when they started to telework except maybe the monitoring, either by its excess or by its lightness.

While many agree with the ideal average of teleworked days in a month found in previous studies (6.7), some are more enthusiastic about telework and would like to telework full-time or almost.

Most teleworkers in this study report that they see telework positively in a job offer, and several consider it an important factor in their future career choices, maybe even indispensable. Considering how recently telework has become relatively common in France, it is striking that young employees value it this much and it will likely influence the policy of organizations on telework in the future.

Finally, the opinions diverge on the future of telework in the French society and the scope it will ultimately reach, except that in the near future it will keep growing. Many have high hopes however that it will change work positively and help tackle some societal challenges such as climate change.

The thesis objectives of finding new insights on the situation of telework in France, and particularly the obstacles that remain and its prospects for the future, were met through a qualitative approach, and I have the answers to my original research questions:

- The French teleworkers seem mostly enthusiastically about telework and the details of the lessons learned about their routine has already been discussed above in this conclusion;
- There are still some obstacles to the growth of telework: a cultural bias against telework remains, the current technologies struggle to emulate the social interactions of the office, co-working spaces are still relatively confidential, some jobs and industries demand more presence, etc;
- The young French professionals are ready for partial telework to become the norm and report no real issue in their first steps teleworking, but most of them are more reluctant about full-time telework. The question remains for older teleworkers and management, as they were not in the scope of this research.

I am now aware how successful and mutually beneficial telework can be for both the teleworker and the employer. I have learned of the pitfalls and the necessary conditions to make telework a success. I know after my research that telework is not well-suited to everyone. I have learned that telework has surprisingly boomed in France following my departure and that most of the organizations that have offered telework since seem to have a healthy and positive opinion on telework, even if formalizing telework is still uncommon. So contrary to what I thought before my thesis, I now know it a viable career option to telework with French organizations. This knowledge may help me to find a job with a French

organization while remaining mostly based Finland. Moreover, much of what is discussed is not exclusive to the French society but are common characteristics of telework: it is also useful for me to know what to expect about telework if I work with any organization in the future that allows it, particularly in Finland for example where the practice is very common.

It would be possible to build on this research by making a quantitative analysis on the new findings to validate them against in a representative sample of the French population, and by questioning older teleworkers and employers on their own point of view on the matters discussed and the insights brought up by the teleworkers. Finally, a specific research on the preconceptions and expectations of workers who have never teleworked and of employers who refuse to implement telework would also be likely to uncover new information on the field.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. General guidelines for the interviews