

Smart working and the organisation of labour: smart working and internal labour markets in France

Telework as an element of a global well-being policy in a dynamic company

The case of ROOLE

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Summary table of the case study

Name of the company	ROOLE
Sectors	Insurance and Manufacturing of automotive equipment
Main contents of the case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of telework in the company : a hybrid work organisation - Management of telework : changes and issues - Working conditions in telework - Skills evolution in telework - Role of social partners (Works council) in respect to telework
Main conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roole is a company that has been able to seize and organise telework as an opportunity to contribute to both the economic and social performance of the company. The history and culture of the company is the main driver of this positive situation - Telework is a permanent part of a hybrid form of work organisation and is part of an overall company policy to promote employee well-being at work - Telework now seems to be fully integrated into the organisation and is largely based on management by trust. It is combined with various initiatives to maintain cohesion within the company, notably by ensuring the attractiveness of the office.

Introduction

This short case study¹ aims at analysing the impacts of telework on working conditions and work organisation in a specific company. It therefore aims to complement a first general approach, at national level, produced in the framework of the first work package of the IR SMART project. In line with the objectives of work package 3 of the project, it aims more specifically to provide complementary empirical elements targeted on the impacts of telework on working conditions and work organisation. More specifically, it targets one of the possible forms of remote working that is particularly relevant in the French context, namely telework, a form of organisation that has particularly developed under the impetus of the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to contribute to the understanding of the diverse realities of the concrete implementation of telework in various environments, this analysis focuses on a medium-sized private company undergoing strong economic growth.

The company now known as Roole was founded in 1982 under the name Identicar. Initially, the company invented and marketed an innovative solution for protection against car theft: the engraving of car windows. This solution was later supplemented by the creation of new technological tools to further improve the identification of vehicles and their spare parts². On this basis, the company subsequently diversified its activities and, in 1997, set up a supplementary car insurance policy to cover the costs incurred in the event of a car accident, in addition to the main insurance policy. This solution therefore provides better protection for drivers in the event of accidents, vandalism, punctures, breakdowns and, of course, theft. Subsequently, the company further developed its strategy to become a car club, offering services not only to its customers (club members) but also to all drivers. This leads to the development of a wide range of services and innovations, including some free of charge, accessible to all motorists³. This also leads to promote actions aiming at developing solidarity mobility, and thus the possibility of access to mobility for people without vehicles. An important tool set up to accomplish this mission is the Roole Foundation, established in 2017, which allows the company to financially support various solidarity initiatives related to people's mobility. In 2022, the company changed its name to Roole.

In 2022, the company had more than one million customers (premium members). It has always been a family business, which is now run by two brothers, the children of the company's founder. They are the company's shareholders. The company is no longer an SME, as it has almost 300 employees (270 in 2022) and is described as being subject to rapid growth and therefore to an increase in its workforce.

¹ We would like to thank the company for allowing us to conduct this study. The study was limited in scope in respect to the timing of our project and was based mainly on six interviews carried out in February 2023: one interview with the HR and customer service director; one interview with the secretary of the company's social and economic committee (who is also the company's social impact officer), four individual interviews with employees (a manager in the customer relations department, an employee in the back office in the customer relations department, an employee who is a project manager in a cross-functional department, an employee in charge of the employee experience in the company's HR function). We would like to thank all of them for their time and their warm welcome.

² A vehicle geolocation beacon called Wetrak GPS, microdots to mark the vehicle and its spare parts (Wetrack DNA)

³ A specific digital information and advice medium, a geolocation application "Roole Map"

Its products and services are mainly marketed through car dealerships. The company therefore has an extensive network of car dealer partners throughout France (1900 in 2022).

Roole has several establishments on French territory: a head office in Boulogne Billancourt near Paris⁴, an establishment in Beauvais dedicated to customer relations (call centre) and an establishment in charge of logistics also located in Boulogne. The company integrates a diversity of professions and functions in relation to its activities. Given the importance that the company attaches to the quality of its customer relations, the customer service department is a central component of the company's workforce and is therefore responsible for handling a large number of calls (315,000 in 2021). The company also employs around thirty sales people, who are usually on the road at car dealerships and are therefore more nomadic workers than teleworkers. Finally, it employs a dozen people in charge of logistics operations. In addition, there is an IT department⁵ and a set of support functions (finance, HR, etc.). The HR function is structured within the company under the leadership of an HR and customer relations director. It includes three operational HR managers covering the different areas of the company.

It is important to note that the employee experience is central to the company. The company has adopted the managerial concept of "symmetry of attention", which means that the relationship between the employer and the employees conditions the quality of the relationship with the customers. An interesting indicator of this orientation is the company's voluntary commitment to external labelling of its actions in the field of well-being at work. This has resulted in several awards over time. In 2021, Roole was ranked first in the "HappyIndex@AtWork" ranking⁶. This philosophy also reflects in a wide variety of benefits offered to the company's employees: generous annual financial participation in the company's results, benefits linked to the status of parent, free access to sports facilities. As a mirror image of these actions, it is interesting to note that the job tenure of the employees interviewed for the study is relatively high in all cases (from 4 years to more than 10 years) and that they all report a good climate within their company. In addition, the company currently has 65 managers, responsible for more or less numerous teams, mainly recruited internally. This suggests that the company offers real opportunities for professional development to its employees.

In this context, our interviews clearly show the company sees telework as an element of employee well-being

Process of implementing out-of-office work

Telework does not appear in Roole with the COVID pandemic. It was already in place, but on a different scale and in a different way than it would be during the health crisis. Before the crisis, the company experimented with teleworking, including in the customer relations department, but in a limited and unregulated way. At that time, not all employees were equipped with a laptop⁷, which did not facilitate the generalisation of this practice, and there were no internal company rules governing the use of telework. The practice therefore remained limited in scope and was more a matter of experimentation than of generalisation. This said, our interviews reveal two important elements that will facilitate the development of telework during and after the pandemic:

⁴ A move of the headquarters to new premises occurred at the end of 2021

⁵ In all likelihood very important in a company that has resolutely opted for digitalization

⁶ The HappyIndex®AtWork label has been in existence since 2015 and aims to highlight companies where employees are happy to work. A ranking is made each year according to scores that are given exclusively by employees, who evaluate their company in a completely anonymous way

⁷ This was only the case for managers at that time

- Telework is considered from the outset by the top management as a form of work organisation that can contribute to the well-being of employees. In this respect, the current secretary of the works council told us: *"Before the pandemic, the interest in telework was really linked to the well-being of employees and not to other issues, especially real estate. Telework is a way of considering the problems of employees who live far away, of dealing with the problem of limiting the constraints posed by commuting in highly congested urban areas, of better articulating personal and professional life"*. In response, the company's HRD stressed that *"telework should not be used to save space, even if the premises are full on Tuesdays and Thursdays, because these are also days when people do not voluntarily telework (as is the case on Fridays and Mondays most often)"*. Telework is thus seen as a step forward and not primarily as an obligation imposed by the experience of the pandemic and the lockdowns.

- In addition, before the crisis, the company undertook a major project to make the organisation more *'transparent'*. The aim was to encourage collaboration between employees in accordance with a corporate culture intended to be fully participatory. This resulted in significant technical changes: adoption of a collaborative communication application, electronic document management tools, sharing of professional agendas, etc. These developments to support a decompartmentalised company are all assets that can also support the development of telework.

In this context, when the health crisis broke out⁸, the company already appears to be in a position to use telework under good technical conditions. Only one crucial point is missing: the insufficient computer equipment of all employees. However, the company very quickly orders and distributes to almost all employees the computers needed for telework: *"We organised ourselves so that everyone had a computer, we sent emails and sms to everyone to enable them to come and pick up or receive the computers - we therefore carried out a great deal of organisational work in a very short time"*. This point is clearly confirmed by all our interviews. It can be explained by the very good financial situation of the company.

At the end of the first lockdown (June 2020), the company took up the subject of telework with the will to give it a framework and to perpetuate it beyond the exceptional situations where it is necessary. This approach led to the implementation, in the absence of trade union organisations within the company, of a charter drawn up by the employer and organising telework. This charter sets the maximum number of days per week that can be spent in telework on a voluntary basis at two. All employees of the company can telework except those whose functions do not allow it (employees in charge of logistics operations) or are not suitable for it (sales representatives who are by definition nomadic employees). The system in place in the company therefore leads to a hybrid work organisation combining office work and telework.

Management of out-of-office work

The COVID-19 pandemic logically leads to a profound change in the managers' activities. This is of course particularly the case during lockdowns periods, which lead to a completely remote management. This raises many questions for managers: how to lead a team without a physical presence? how to create team cohesion with employees who are not there? How to observe the work of employees? However, according to the interviews conducted, the main difficulty encountered by managers during this period is that of the well-being of remote employees: how to ensure that employees are well? how to spot the weak signals of ill-being at a distance? According to the

⁸ With a first lockdown decided in March 2020

company's management, managers were able to be very agile during the pandemic. For example, they were able to assess on a case-by-case basis whether certain employees really could not work from home in good conditions. If this was the case, employees who were unable to work during the lockdown could be placed on short-time working. A different difficulty, mentioned by a customer service manager, was that, during this period, it was difficult to maintain links between the managers themselves, making sharing and collaboration between them more complex.

At the end of the first lockdown, when the face-to-face work can resume, the management intends to gather feedback from the managers on their experience: *"we went round the managers to sound out their experience and their needs"*. Co-development workshops, aimed in particular at enabling managers to talk to each other (and thus to break their potential isolation), are set up. As a result, the company's telework charter is built in collaboration with the managers. As already mentioned, this charter establishes a form of hybrid work organisation. By limiting telework to two days per week in principle, it aims to maintain cohesion within the company. The latter is seen as essential, even consubstantial with the history and culture of the company based on the importance given to the employee experience. It is therefore a question of allowing employees to develop links between themselves (professional and informal) but also of encouraging relations between the various departments of the company and thus avoiding silos within the organisation. The interviews show that the crisis period has allowed managers to adapt to telework and thus to integrate it into their daily lives. So that telework seems to be accepted and well integrated by the vast majority of managers. In addition, the company's application for remote communication is used extensively to provide regular updates to teams (collectively and individually) or to address requests to employees in a way that is seen as sufficiently easy and flexible. In addition, our interviews underline the need to build and maintain a management by trust, including in a telework situation: *"the postulate of the company is trust, to bet on the autonomy of employees"*⁹. This is a point that is generally known to be fundamental in a telework context. Telework means that the manager can no longer visually monitor the presence, hours or performance of his team. This is a challenge to managers who have no choice but to trust their employees, unless they opt for ways of monitoring their employees' activity which are potentially very damaging to their health¹⁰. At Roole, the customer service manager we met¹¹ expresses this dilemma and the change of posture to be adopted by the manager. How to fulfil his role without excessively affecting the autonomy of the teleworking employee? *"The teleworking employees let me see what they want. So I don't know, if an employee puts a client on hold on the phone, if it's to deal with the file or to do something other than work. So you have to trust them, and trust is something you have to cultivate"*. A facilitating element for the establishment of this bond of trust between the manager and his or her team may be the existence of management by objectives. This is the case in some departments at Roole, particularly in the customer service department. In the latter, customer advisers have to meet daily quantitative targets which are statistically monitored by managers. This monitoring not only limits the risk of 'laziness or abuse' on the part of employees¹², but also enables the manager to detect any problems encountered by an employee at a distance: *'I monitor the production statistics on a daily basis and communicate them to the team. This also allows me to see what is going wrong and to initiate direct contact with the employee if necessary. The employees are managed by objectives, so there is no need for constant pressure. I see myself as a manager-coach, a guarantor of the framework and a resource to enable employees to achieve their goals.'*¹³.

⁹ Interview with the secretary of the works council and manager of a small team in the company

¹⁰ Digital presenteeism or electronic activity monitoring

¹¹ In charge of a team of over 10 client advisors

¹² Doing nothing at all while teleworking is immediately visible in the activity statistics..

¹³ Interview manager customer relations department

An important element in the establishment of trust-based management identified in our interviews is the flexibility given to managers to manage their teams' telework days. As we have said, the basic rule set out in the company's telework charter is that two days a week should be spent teleworking. However, is a manager free to respond flexibly to particular requests from employees? In other words, can a manager authorise, autonomously and without formality, an employee to deviate from this rule and to benefit from more teleworking days? The company's answer to this question is clearly positive: *"We have set a rule which is the company's rule, but the company must be able to adapt to specific situations. This is the role of the managers whom we make responsible in this respect. They must be able to get out of the rule, not hide behind the rule. It is up to them to take the lead, to decide"*¹⁴. In this respect, several of our interviews underline that the development of telework has highlighted differences in the postures of managers within the company. Some, in small numbers, are less flexible than others and rely more on compliance with rules than on employee autonomy. This may have led to difficulties: differences in treatment of employees depending on the personality of their manager and therefore inequity between employees regarding the possibility of sufficiently flexible use of telework depending on the team they belong to. However, these situations are presented to us as marginal. They have involved few managers. When this was the case, it was the HR managers who were called upon to play the role of mediator, to be pedagogical with the reluctant managers in order to solve the problems. This type of intervention is not necessarily obvious in practice¹⁵, but it is valued by the company, which is keen to guarantee flexibility as an element of employee well-being. One of the employees we met¹⁶ expressed this link between employee well-being and managerial flexibility in telework, based on her own professional experience: *"The two-day rule is good in that it avoids the difficulties associated with full telework. But what is important is the flexibility with my manager, the fact that I can do more or less telework according to need, without formalism or rigidity"*.

A third important aspect of the management of hybrid work at Roole is the way in which managers lead teams, in order to ensure cohesion within the team and more generally within the company. In this respect, the adoption of a hybrid work organisation facilitates the possibility for managers to schedule face-to-face group time. In this context, managers have the opportunity to set up to two fixed attendance days, common to all members of their team. This is the case of the customer service manager we met, who set Tuesday as the day when everyone would be present. In practice, in the light of the interviews, it seems that these common days are often Tuesday and/or Thursday, with employees often opting to telework on Wednesday, Monday or Friday. These times of collective presence also provide the opportunity to schedule activities that are seen as conducive to strengthening internal cohesion. However, the top management would like to continue to provide Roole's managers with more tools for leading their teams: setting up exchange rituals, giving meaning to people's presence in the office, etc. The aim is to better establish a hybrid organisation that serves the performance and well-being of the teams.

To date, it seems that hybrid work management is well established and smooth within Roole, which clearly satisfies the employees we met, including the managers. However, there is still a need to be vigilant in detecting the weak signals of employee discomfort, with a view to preventing psychosocial risks. Even if hybrid work limits the risks for the manager of not seeing the possible suffering of an employee, the risk of not knowing how to detect weak signals¹⁷ remains in the eyes of the top

¹⁴ Interview with the Director of Human Resources and Customer Relations

¹⁵ It can lead to a manager getting into trouble, to disinvestment in his task

¹⁶ Project manager "transformation projects" at Roole

¹⁷ Potentially revealing situations of risk, burn-out, for employees

management. The company therefore feels that there is a particular need for vigilance, which has justified information and awareness-raising actions for managers on these issues.

Working conditions in telework

One should make a distinction between two periods:

- The pandemic period during the lockdowns periods
- The pandemic period outside of the lockdowns and the post-pandemic period

The lockdowns

At the beginning of the pandemic, the situation within the company was mixed. Some of the employees were placed on short-time working and therefore exempted from work. Another part of the employees continued to work from home, and especially during the lockdowns, in full telework¹⁸. In this context, the interviews show the difficulties that employees may have encountered. These difficulties vary, of course, depending on the particular situation of the employees¹⁹. The most difficult situation reported to us does not concern teleworkers but the nomadic workers who are the company's sales representatives. The latter are victims of car dealership closures, which lead them to remain on short-time working longer than other employees of the company. Then, having returned to work, they are still victims of restaurant closures for a time²⁰. One can thus imagine the difficulty of their working conditions, which will be compensated by benefits offered by the company²¹.

As regards employees who teleworked during the lockdowns, the difficulties reported during our interviews are related to:

- The need to get used to working from home in a very brutal way: managing the presence of one's children when one has them, taking one's bearings in one's professional activity in a configuration that transforms the home into a workplace....
- An intensification of work linked, at least for some employee profiles, to the multiplication of remote meetings during the same day, which can generate exhaustion
- A loss of human links linked to working exclusively at a distance.

In this context, it appears that the company's management quickly grasped the risks to which employees could be exposed and took a number of initiatives to limit them:

- *To maintain the employees' link with the company*: setting up an internal radio station to broadcast news²²; remote and live interventions by the management for the employees
- *To monitor and analyse the social climate within the company*: implementation of a digital tool enabling employees to be surveyed monthly on their working conditions.
- *To assist employees in the event of difficulties*: before the pandemic broke out, the company had already opened up the possibility for employees to have recourse to two external coaches²³ if necessary. The aim is to enable employees to benefit from effective assistance if they are faced with professional or personal difficulties. This system is therefore independent of the health crisis context, but it has been widely used by employees during the pandemic, according to management. It is likely to have offered accessible support to employees facing psychological difficulties.

Current situation

The first thing to note is that the sustainability of telework in a hybrid work organisation does not reveal any difficulties or negative impacts on employees' pay, job stability, employment status or social protection. On all these dimensions, the inclusion of regular telework within the company does not change anything for people.

Other aspects of working conditions deserve further development in the light of our interviews. They reveal an ambivalence, which is often underlined in relation to telework situations.

- **Work-Life balance**

From this point of view, all the employees interviewed favour telework. It is seen as a real advantage for better articulating personal and professional life by allowing more flexibility²⁴. In fact, our various interviews underline that employees have asked on several occasions to have three and not only two days of telework per week. This is an indication that telework probably satisfies employees, especially as it is strictly voluntary²⁵.

- **Working time and flexibility of working hours**

Our interviews first confirm what a large body of literature already indicates. Telework at home leads to the elimination of travel time and the shortening of break times. It can therefore lead to longer working days. This said, everything seems to depend on the profile of each individual and our interviews do not allow us to detect any real problem in this respect for the employees interviewed. Beyond that, some employees seem to find in the alternation between telework and office work a form of compensation for longer working days in telework: *"in telework, I don't waste time travelling; I have fewer breaks than in the office. It is a problem if I only telework, but the hybrid organisation allows me to find a balance, to compensate, and I have found my balance"*²⁶. However, the top management says that they are aware of the risk that long working hours can represent: *"It really depends on the employees. Telework can be risky for the "big" teleworkers who spend 8 hours behind their screens, eat fast at lunchtime and work late. We try to be vigilant about this, we communicate on this subject because in these situations there is a real risk for mental health. During the pandemic, we also organised remote events to get people out of their work"*.

As regards flexibility of working hours, this seems to be a reality for the employees interviewed and is valued: *"I can manage my hours freely: I can finish at 4 pm for my children if I don't have a meeting scheduled and make up for it the next day"*²⁷. For the manager in charge of a team of customer advisers interviewed, the observation is similar: *"some will work longer days by teleworking, using the time saved on transport or taking fewer breaks - but this is not necessarily the case, especially for those who have their children at home on Wednesdays. In this case, I feel that people don't necessarily work all the time, but it's not a problem if they stick to their goals. So people can be autonomous and responsible »*.

In the end, one can assume the autonomy that the company's teleworking employees seem to enjoy allows them to find a balance on their own that satisfies them.

¹⁸ Without the possibility of working outside the home

¹⁹ Family situation, housing configuration, occupation.

²⁰ Driving them to eat in their cars

²¹ Reduced targets during the pandemic, festive events organised by the company for them...

²² About the company and its projects

²³ Including a psychologist

²⁴ Taking care of children, doing housework, etc.... while working

²⁵ Employees who do not feel comfortable with teleworking can therefore decide to work in the office more than three days a week

²⁶ Interview project manager "transformation projects"

²⁷ Employee in the back office of the company's customer service department

- **Right to disconnect**

Within the company, the right to disconnect does not seem to be formally understood²⁸. On the other hand, the work practices in place suggest that the issues to which this right must respond are not ignored. Thus, all the employees interviewed explain that they may connect to their professional tasks outside working hours via various tools. But all of them also explain that they do so voluntarily and that they would never be asked, for example, *"to answer an email in the middle of the night"*. Furthermore, the main lever of the right to disconnect within the company seems to be the exemplary behaviour of top managers: not to send emails to ask a question after 7pm; not to schedule meetings after 6pm; not to send emails during the weekend. *"Managers turn off their emails and mobiles during the holidays. The culture of the company is very much focused on well-being and work/life balance, so it's kind of naturally regulated"*²⁹.

It therefore seems that the right to disconnect is a reality in the company, based mainly on the company culture driven by its top managers.

- **Engagement and motivation to work : maintaining links within the company**

Company's management sees this dimension as fundamental as the managers interviewed pointed this out. The interviews identify several recent changes that may affect the commitment of the company's employees and that are not directly related to the health crisis: change of the company's name in 2022, relocation of the company's headquarters at the end of 2021, changes in the company's management. It may therefore be difficult for the company management to determine any loss of commitment or motivation directly related to telework. This said, telework as practised during the lockdowns periods has generated, in the eyes of the actors interviewed, a loss of link between the employees of the company rather than a loss of commitment. According to the management, the number of employees declaring themselves satisfied with their jobs remains very high in the company's monthly barometer, so employees are committed. The perceived risk of teleworking, however, is that it can lead to employees being locked into silos: *"With teleworking, you concentrate on your work tasks and the close links with your team. On the other hand, it is more difficult to maintain a link with the other departments of the company"*. From this perspective, teleworking that would lead to spending more time at home than in the office is seen as a potential threat to the feeling of belonging to the company and ultimately to motivation. As one customer service manager told us, *"it is important to know your colleagues well, but it is also important to know the different departments in the company well, to eat together in the canteen, etc."*. The choice of a hybrid form of work organisation is, in the company, an initial response to this challenge. However, beyond that, the company says it is very careful to encourage synergies between teams to avoid silos. The latter are seen as counterproductive for the organisation's performance: *"The commitment is there but we quickly fall into our silos (our tasks and our colleagues in close proximity, our team) - this is a strong point of attention for us because it leads to a drop in motivation in a company where links used to be very strong and lively"*³⁰. From this point of view, the company attaches particular importance to the attractiveness of the office. The aim is to provide a positive experience for employees and to encourage cohesion between them. All of our interviews enthusiastically emphasised the quality of the improvements made during the move to new premises, which were made possible by the company's good financial health. These include "a

²⁸ In France, the law recognises a right to disconnect for employees in order to regulate the use of digital communication tools with a view to ensuring employees' rest and holiday time. However, no legal sanction is provided for, so the law seems to be mainly an incentive.

²⁹ Interview HR and Customer Service Director

³⁰ Interview Employee Experience Manager

restaurant worthy of a Parisian bistro", a sports hall accessible free of charge, etc. In addition, discussions are underway to improve the quality of the office workspaces, particularly the "concentration" areas.

- **Productivity at work**

From this point of view, people interviewed, including the company top management, did not identify any difficulties. Telework apparently does not affect employee productivity. In fact, the employees interviewed value the positive impact of telework. Telework allows them to concentrate better, to avoid interruptions, etc. To this extent, the positive impact of telework is underlined, as in several studies, if it is organised under good conditions.

- **Stress, intensity at work**

Apart from the elements relating to working time and the measures taken to prevent risks to mental health already mentioned above³¹, the intensification of work in telework is not a concern as such. On the other hand, **workload is clearly an issue that is globally taken into account by the company**, whether teleworking or not. Workload is thus a subject systematically reported in the monthly barometer set up by the company. Since 2018, it has also been included in all individual interviews with employees, organised every six months, either online or in person. The workload is also planned and monitored through a specific system.

In addition, another phenomenon identified during the interviews can be linked to the intensity at work: **infobesity**. The company uses many digital professional and communication tools. Moreover, remote work involves more recourse to the written word and the formalisation of documents. These phenomena can lead to over-solicitation of employees, difficulties in accessing the right document at the right time and therefore contribute to forms of work intensification. To respond to these risks, the company set up a centralised digital knowledge-sharing tool and recruited a knowledge manager at the beginning of 2022 to organise the implementation of this tool.

Finally, during the health crisis (and therefore in full telework), a particular difficulty was associated with the multiplication of video conference meetings on the same day. Managerial rules were quickly established and are still in force: no meetings scheduled before 10am and during lunch breaks, no meetings on Fridays!

- **Integration at the workplace**

It is worth mentioning here two distinct aspects:

- Firstly, new workers, especially young workers on work experience schemes, do not have immediate access to telework. This option is only available to them after a few weeks of presence in the company. This period allows these workers to follow a training course aimed at enabling their proper integration into the company. During this period, and as a result, their tutor/referent may himself be required to be (more) present at the office. Otherwise, integration difficulties may arise, a risk mentioned in some of our interviews.

- Secondly, it is the issue of the visibility of the teleworking employee³² that is mentioned in some of our interviews as a possible problem. Indeed, when teleworking, the employee can no longer participate in meetings or informal moments (coffee, etc.) that presence in the office allows. The risk

³¹ including the possibility of using external coaches

³² With regard to colleagues in other teams or departments, but also with regard to the company's management

is that the employee's work loses visibility within the company and is somewhat forgotten, which may have consequences for his or her career path within the organisation. In this context, hybrid work is by nature a lever limiting this difficulty. Furthermore, some of our interviews emphasise the need for managers to make their employees' work visible or to encourage them to do so: *"I advise my team members to publish their activity reports on microsoft teams to make themselves visible but also to break down the silos, to make our activities visible to others than our direct colleagues"*³³

- **Costs of out-of-office work**

With regard to the costs generated by telework, two measures taken by the company are important:

- Firstly, all employees benefited from an allowance of 200 euros in 2020 to equip themselves in a freely. With this sum, employees were able to acquire the equipment they felt they needed to telework in good conditions (a desk, a work chair, etc.). In addition, all of them benefit from the provision of equipment directly necessary for their activity: laptops, but also a second screen on request, headsets (including wireless ones for customer service employees), etc.

- Secondly, the employees receive a fixed monthly allowance of 20 euros. This corresponds to a contribution from the company to the additional expenses incurred by working from home (internet connection, electricity consumption, etc.)

- **Commuting and work-related travels**

Several of our interviews highlight this aspect as an advantage of teleworking. The company's headquarters are located in a highly urbanised area with a lot of road traffic. Teleworking therefore allows the employees exposed to these inconveniences to avoid them to some extent and therefore also to save time. This time saving also benefits employees using public transport.

- **Access to information, consultation and participation rights**

Our interviews did not reveal any difficulties in this respect. The company has employee representatives in a works council. The works council communicates regularly with employees. A discussion channel is dedicated to the Committee in the company's communication application and therefore allows exchanges between employees and their representatives. The Committee also has its own space on the company's document-sharing software where the minutes of the Committee's meetings with management are accessible. These minutes are also shared with all employees at the end of each meeting via the internal communication application and the company's internal newsletter refers to these documents. Employees can also use a form to send their questions/ concerns to the works council, the works council then submits to management. The use of these different digital tools therefore seems to guarantee a link between the works council and the employees without teleworking having a negative influence on this.

Skills in telework

New skills in telework ?

³³ Interview Social impact manager

Our interviews first of all underline the need for behavioural skills to enable effective telework: being autonomous and responsive, being responsible in the performance of one's duties³⁴.

Telework also requires skills in the use of digital tools. In the case of Roole, this included acquiring sufficient mastery of collaborative remote communication tools. This was done without any particular difficulties, as the company had begun to digitalise its work processes before the health crisis. However, small-scale training sessions, particularly on the use of the company's communication application, were carried out, including its functionalities other than video conferencing (allowing, in particular, the use of emails to be limited). The company has also progressively digitised a number of internal processes (administrative, HR), so there seems to be little difference for the employee, who uses different tools and software whether he/she is teleworking or not.

A distinct and important point directly related to telework is the ability to work asynchronously. Telework limits the number of face-to-face group meetings. It is also associated in the company with a desire to limit the number and duration of remote meetings for reasons related to working conditions. This situation gives rise to the need to formalise documents more in writing, and to know where and how to share them in order to enable remote collaboration. This skill seems to us to be clearly specific to remote work. It seems to have been acquired overall by the company's employees: *"we are doing it better and better"*. On the other hand, it may prove problematic for certain employees who, regardless of their professional qualities, may have more difficulty writing and formalising information³⁵. This problem is clearly identified by the company's HR and customer service director: *"Telework requires formalisation, which can create gaps and problems. For example, an employee who makes mistakes will hesitate to give information. I have in mind the example of a super manager who is not at ease with writing. So it's a question of supporting employees in difficulty, but it's really not easy to act on it"*.

Access to training

Our interviews do not reveal any difficulty in access to training by employees that are related to the development of telework. There are online training opportunities but the most important training courses provided by the company are face-to-face. This is particularly valued by the employees interviewed, and therefore teleworking is not an argument for the massive and systematic deployment of online training at Roole. On the other hand, the ability of teleworking employees to have more time to inform themselves independently is mentioned in several of our interviews³⁶

Telework and career paths within and outside the company

Would telework be a key criterion for employees if they were considering leaving the company to find a new job? The answer to this question obviously varies from employee to employee, but overall, all consider the possibility of teleworking as an important element that could guide, along with others, their possible career development. The benefits associated with telework can be seen here.

Within the company, the potential impact of telework on the career path of employees seems to be mainly due to the risk of invisibility of the employee increased by telework and already mentioned above.

³⁴ An example is given by our manager in the customer service department: "an advisor should not wake up ten minutes before going to work in order to have quality calls with customers".

³⁵ Fear of spelling mistakes, reluctance to use the written word, difficulties in making powerpoints, etc.

³⁶ Monitor literature, access online conferences or webinars, etc.

Role of social partners in ensuring workers' rights and decent working conditions in telework

Roole appears to us as a company which, despite its economic growth, is and remains a family business. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the employees we met value the feeling of belonging to the company and the need for the company to form a united and supportive group. In our view, this is consistent with the fact that the well-being of employees, the employee experience, is highly valued and maintained through a multiplicity of initiatives led by the company's management. Telework, associated with a desired hybrid work organisation, thus easily takes its place in this ensemble and is therefore above all a company policy. The company has a works council, a social and economic committee, which aims to represent the employees and to dialogue with the employer in full compliance with French legislation. On the other hand, the trade unions are not established in the company, so that the works council is the only body for social dialogue. Has the latter had or does it have a driving role in work organisation and telework? Or does it rather contribute to a company policy? It is the second hypothesis which seems to us to be verified here. In general, the social and economic committee is not distant from the employee community. It is above all part of a relationship of collaboration with the management and is therefore not *"very demanding"*. It also coexists with a working group called "the Collective", which brings together 25 volunteer employees who have 11 hours a month to devise and propose projects to improve the well-being of employees. In this landscape, the CSE (works council) can be seen as an additional mean of contributing to company policies and of contributing or promoting new ideas where appropriate. This being the case, the CSE was informed and consulted on the company's draft telework charter. To this extent, it was able to support the proposal of three days of telework per week instead of two, thus relaying the request of several employees. Even if this proposal was finally refused by the management, a dialogue was able to take place and to date the solution adopted is supported by the secretary of the Committee, who is also attached to the life of the company's collective. Overall, therefore, the committee contributes to policies initiated and designed by the company's management. Nevertheless, it is known to the employees and is in regular contact with them. The members of the works council are thus committed to collecting the demands and questions of the employees and to raising them with the management. Having access to the results of the company's regular social barometer, the works council is also able to identify the needs or problems encountered by employees. In the case of telework, it has been able to bring to the attention of management the reluctance of some managers to telework and thus to identify inequities in treatment between employees in this respect. More generally, the works council seems to be welcome to submit new ideas to the management. The good economic health of the company and its culture therefore favour a quiet social climate in which the employee representatives are useful players in the implementation of company policies. This situation seems to satisfy all stakeholders. Could this change if the company's situation was to change in the future? It is not possible to say. What is certain is that the secretary of the body takes her role seriously: *"I received 22% of the votes in the elections (2022) and this vote obliges me, people trust me, so it obliges me and I have to be careful: to have a good relationship with the management but also to be able to represent people who do not agree with the management"*.

Conclusions

Roole is a growing company, but its culture remains that of a family business that values the experience of its employees alongside its focus on customer satisfaction. This justifies a policy and numerous

initiatives aimed at improving the quality of the "employee experience" and therefore the well-being of employees. Teleworking within Roole is a component of this company policy. Telework is not simply a result of the pandemic, but is seen before the pandemic as an important dimension of the employee experience. This being the case, the pandemic has led to a spread of telework, supported by the company, which is far from the previous situation. It has also led to the organisation of telework on a permanent basis, which is reflected in the establishment of a company charter on telework. This charter was co-constructed with the employees and discussed with the works council, and establishes a hybrid work organisation system, combining two days a week of telework (for the well-being of the employees) and three days in the office, in order to preserve the collective spirit dear to the company. To date, this form of organisation seems to be well established and satisfactory in the eyes of both management and employees. Moreover, it is not a form of organisation that we could describe as fixed or bureaucratic. There is a flexibility left to the discretion of each manager as to the number of days that can be teleworked according to the individual situations encountered. This point is important in the eyes of all the people we met for the purposes of this study and shows that management by trust is a reality quite widely in place in the company. While telework seems to be well integrated into the organisation, some of the risks it may pose to employees' working conditions are well identified and give rise to initiatives: prevention of mental health risks, planning and monitoring of workload, maintaining links between employees, etc. Challenges remain, however, even in the context of hybrid work: managers' ability to detect weak signs of employee ill-being, difficulties generated for some employees by the 'asynchronous' work favoured by teleworking.

More than the formal social dialogue embodied in the works council in place, it is the dialogue with employees that is sought and implemented in a favourable economic context and in a positive social climate.

Finally, to date and within the limits of our investigations, the example of Roole seems to us to be that of a company which has been able to seize and organise telework as an opportunity to contribute to both the economic and social performance of the company. The history and culture of the company seems to us to be the main driver of this positive situation.



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