

Telework, Social Isolation and Job Satisfaction: A Moderated Mediation Model based on Perceived Organizational Performance

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Abstract: - How does telework intensity shape employee job satisfaction, and through what mechanism? This paper puts forward a theoretical framework in which perceived social isolation operates as the central mediator and perceived organizational performance as the moderating condition. Drawing on a systematic review of 102 studies published between 2014 and 2024, we map the main scientific trends surrounding the ambivalent effects of intensive telework, with particular attention to the negative psychosocial consequences tied to isolation. The conceptual model we propose—still to be tested empirically—holds that social isolation reduces job satisfaction, and that this effect weakens when perceived organizational performance is high, through managerial support, reliable digital tools, and organizational clarity. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the framework points toward concrete managerial implications and outlines clear directions for future telework research.

Key-Words: - Telework, Remote work, Social isolation, Job satisfaction, Perceived organizational performance, Perceived organizational support, Moderated mediation model, Systematic literature review, Employee well-being.

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1 Introduction

Telework — the remote performance of professional tasks enabled by digital technologies — has moved from a marginal arrangement to a mainstay of organizational life, a shift accelerated sharply by the COVID-19 pandemic, [1]. Its appeal is well documented: greater flexibility over time and place, lower infrastructure costs, and potential gains in work-related quality of life, [2]. Yet this same arrangement raises real concerns about employees' psychosocial well-being. Social isolation stands out among these concerns, frequently linked to physical distance and to virtual interactions that fail to substitute fully for in-person contact, and recent scientific literature increasingly flags it as a major risk, [3], [4].

When telework becomes intensive, it tends to crowd out the informal, spontaneous exchanges that normally sustain team cohesion, the circulation of tacit knowledge, and a sense of belonging to a professional community, [5]. It also blurs the line between professional and personal life, which can produce role confusion and added psychological strain from being expected to remain digitally available at all times, [6].

Given how contradictory the findings in this literature remain, an important question follows: under what conditions, exactly, does intensive telework shape employee job satisfaction? Which intermediate mechanisms — psychological, social, perceptual — account for these effects, and which organizational factors might soften or amplify them?

This is the question our research sets out to address, through a conceptual moderated-mediation model built on a systematic review of academic work published between 2014 and 2024. Rather than reporting a set of established empirical findings, the model offers a testable theoretical framework: it articulates the mediating role of perceived social isolation and the moderating role of perceived organizational performance. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 details the systematic review methodology; Section 3 synthesizes its results; Section 4 presents the proposed conceptual model; Section 5 discusses theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations; Section 6 concludes.

2 Methodology

To analyze current scientific knowledge on the effects of telework in a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible way, we carried out a systematic literature review, following the international standards set out in the PRISMA guidelines, [7].

2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the studies analyzed, precise criteria were established:

- Publication window: January 2014 to December 2024
- Language: French or English
- Study design: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed empirical research, systematic reviews, and theoretical articles that explicitly address telework
- Quality threshold: publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal
- Thematic fit: an explicit focus on telework and its organizational, psychosocial, or human implications

Editorials, opinion pieces, conference abstracts, and any article falling short of recognized international scientific standards were excluded.

2.2 Data Sources and Documentary Strategy

We searched four databases: Scopus (Elsevier), Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics), PubMed (NIH), and Google Scholar. The primary search terms — «teleworking», «remote work», «telecommuting», «work from home» — were combined, using Boolean operators («AND», «OR»), with secondary terms including «social isolation», «mental health», «organizational performance», «job satisfaction», «productivity», «work-life balance», and «well-being».

2.3 Study Selection Process

Following PRISMA recommendations, the selection process unfolded in three successive stages:

- Identification: 3,250 potentially relevant articles located across the four databases
- Screening: title and abstract review excluded roughly 1,800 off-topic or irrelevant studies
- Full-text examination: two independent researchers closely reviewed the remaining 1,450 articles, after which 1,348 further studies were excluded for methodological weaknesses or insufficient thematic relevance, leaving a final corpus of 102 studies.

2.4 Data Coding and Analysis

Each of the 102 selected studies was coded using a structured analysis grid capturing bibliographic information, the main variables studied, key results and conclusions, identified gaps, and proposed recommendations. Two coders worked independently before reconciling their coding by consensus. Table 1 (Appendix) presents a representative synthesis of the coded articles, summarizing, for each study, the author(s), year, method, main findings, and variables tested.

3 Results of the Systematic Review

3.1 Significant Increase in Publications After 2020

One of the clearest patterns in the corpus is a sharp rise in academic output from 2020 onward, driven largely by the COVID-19 pandemic, which acted as a global accelerator for telework, [1]. Before then, research tended to focus on specific contexts or sectors; the health crisis broadened the field considerably, triggering a wave of empirical studies spanning diverse economic sectors and geographic regions.

3.2 Growing Importance of Mental Health and Social Isolation

Mental health has become a central concern in recent telework scholarship. Roughly 65–70% of the 102 studies reviewed point to a potential negative impact of intensive telework on psychological well-being, mediated chiefly through social isolation, [3], [4], [5]. That isolation is not simply physical or spatial: it also has an emotional facet (a sense of detachment), an informational facet (restricted access to tacit knowledge), and a professional facet (diminished recognition of one's work). This is consistent with earlier meta-analytic evidence showing that psychological mediators, including autonomy, workload, and relationships with colleagues and supervisors, largely explain telecommuting's mixed consequences for job-related outcomes, [8].

3.3 Organizational Performance and Managerial Support: New Central Issues

The review also shows that perceived organizational performance and managerial support have become central themes in telework research. Several studies point to organizational clarity, virtual leadership, and digital tooling as decisive to telework's success

[9], [10], and suggest that stronger managerial support, combined with reliable digital infrastructure and clear communication, can meaningfully soften the negative psychosocial effects of intensive telework.

3.4 Broadening of Sectorial and Theoretical Contexts

Recent studies have also widened their scope to cover many sectors — education, health, public administration, industry — while drawing on an increasingly diverse set of theoretical frameworks, notably dynamic capabilities theory, perceived organizational support theory, and self-determination theory, [11].

3.5 Critical Gaps Identified in the Current Literature

Our in-depth analysis identified several important gaps in the current literature:

- Intersectionality is rarely addressed: few studies look at how gender, age, social class, or ethnicity jointly shape the telework experience
- Longitudinal evidence is scarce: most research relies on short-term, cross-sectional designs
- Digital work-life boundaries remain under-theorized
- Sectoral and cultural differences are seldom explored

4 Proposed Conceptual Model

4.1 Justification and Theoretical Foundations of the Model

The model draws on an integrative theoretical base, combining work-life boundary theory [12], perceived organizational support theory [10], and recent research on social isolation and its psychosocial impacts, [3], [4]. The mixed findings reported across the literature are, in our view, precisely what justifies a more nuanced approach — one that explicitly builds in both a mediating and a moderating mechanism rather than treating telework's effects as a single average relationship.

4.2 Key Variables of the Model

Independent Variable — Telework Intensity: the degree to which an employee's work is carried out remotely. In practice, it is usually operationalized as the average number of remote working days per

week, or the share of total working time spent outside the organization's premises, [9].

Mediating Variable — Perceived Social Isolation: a psychological state that stems not just from physical distance but from emotional, relational, and professional detachment as well. It is treated here as multidimensional, spanning (a) a relational dimension — fewer informal exchanges with colleagues; (b) an informational dimension — reduced access to tacit knowledge; and (c) a recognition dimension — a weaker sense of being professionally acknowledged, [3].

Dependent Variable — Job Satisfaction: a broadly positive psychological state reflecting how employees feel about their professional activity, encompassing perceived autonomy, emotional well-being, and professional recognition, [13].

Moderating Variable — Perceived Organizational Performance: employees' subjective judgment of how effectively and coherently their organization functions. It combines three components: (a) perceived managerial support; (b) the effectiveness of digital tools; and (c) organizational clarity, [10]. This last component echoes earlier work on organizational justice, which identifies the clarity and fairness of managerial decisions as key determinants of employees' perceptions of how well their organization functions, [14].

4.3 Proposed Research Hypotheses

Building on the theoretical relationships outlined above, we put forward four hypotheses, framed as testable propositions for future empirical work:

H1: higher telework intensity would be positively associated with employees' sense of perceived social isolation.

H2: higher perceived social isolation would be negatively associated with employee job satisfaction.

H3 (Mediation): perceived social isolation would mediate the relationship between telework intensity and job satisfaction — telework intensity would lower job satisfaction indirectly, by increasing perceived social isolation.

H4 (Moderation): perceived organizational performance would moderate the relationship between telework intensity and perceived social isolation, such that the negative effect of intensity on isolation weakens as perceived organizational performance rises.

Testing these hypotheses empirically remains the necessary next step, ideally using PROCESS-type methods [15] within longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs.

4.4 Schematic Representation of the Model

The conceptual model can be represented schematically as follows: telework intensity (IV) shapes perceived social isolation (Mediator), which in turn affects job satisfaction (DV). Perceived organizational performance (Moderator) acts on the IV→Mediator link (H4), while the indirect path from intensity through isolation to satisfaction represents the moderated mediation tested under H3.

4.5 Originality and Potential Contributions of the Model

The model sets itself apart from existing work in three ways: it names a precise psychosocial mediator — social isolation — within the telework-satisfaction relationship rather than leaving the mechanism implicit; it introduces an organizational moderator, perceived organizational performance, that has not been specified in quite this way before; and it grounds each variable in a carefully multidimensional definition, laying the groundwork for more rigorous empirical testing down the line.

5 Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, the model advances on existing approaches by offering an integrative framework that makes the psychosocial mechanisms of telework explicit. Bringing together work-life boundary theory, perceived organizational support theory, and research on workplace loneliness yields a more nuanced picture than approaches that link telework intensity directly to satisfaction. What is original about 'perceived organizational performance' as a moderator is that it captures managerial, technological, and communicational dimensions all at once, rather than treating them as separate levers.

It bears repeating, though, that what is presented here is a testable framework, not a set of empirically confirmed conclusions. The relationships proposed remain hypotheses, and rigorous empirical testing is needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

5.2 Practical Implications for Managers and Decision-Makers

If confirmed empirically, these hypotheses would carry real managerial weight. They suggest, in particular, that organizations stand to benefit from:

- Invest in remote managerial support, through regular check-ins and informal spaces for communication

- Equip employees with reliable digital tools that make spontaneous exchange and collaboration easier
- Maintain organizational clarity through clearly defined objectives and transparent communication
- Develop hybrid arrangements that combine the benefits of telework with sustained in-person interaction

These recommendations are contingent on the model's empirical validation and would need tailoring to specific sectors, organizational cultures, and individual employee profiles.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This work has several notable limitations. First, the model is cross-sectional by design and cannot capture how telework's dynamics unfold over time; longitudinal research would be needed to track how isolation and satisfaction evolve. Second, it leaves out intersectional variables — gender, age, family context, sector — whose relevance is nonetheless well documented [16], and future work should incorporate them for a finer-grained picture of telework's differentiated effects. Third, the model's external validity is still an open question: its propositions await testing across different cultural and sectoral settings.

Structural equation modeling, PROCESS-based analyses [15] to test moderated mediation, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs capable of supporting causal inference would all be well suited to validating the model empirically.

6 Conclusion

This paper has proposed a structured theoretical framework for understanding how telework intensity might influence employee job satisfaction. A systematic review of 102 studies published between 2014 and 2024 allowed us to trace several key trends in the literature and to identify meaningful theoretical and empirical gaps.

The conceptual model we propose — still awaiting empirical validation — contributes theoretically by spelling out the mediating role of perceived social isolation and the moderating role of perceived organizational performance in the telework-satisfaction relationship. If its hypotheses hold up, the model would offer practical guidance to managers and decision-makers seeking to improve remote working conditions.

In a professional world lastingly reshaped by the spread of telework, this study offers a solid theoretical framework — pending empirical validation — and charts clear directions for future research as well as for human resources practitioners.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

Both authors contributed equally throughout this research, from formulating the research problem and designing the systematic review protocol to analyzing the retained studies, developing the conceptual model, and drafting and revising the manuscript. Laila Zaouel took the lead on the systematic literature search, data coding, and manuscript drafting, while Fatima Ezzahra Siragi contributed the theoretical framing of the conceptual model, critically revised the manuscript, and supervised the study overall. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Synthesis of representative articles from the systematic review corpus (39 studies)

Author(s)	Ref. No.	Year	Methods	Main Findings	Variables Tested/Supported
Mutiganda et al.	[17]	2022	Systematic review	Telework is associated with higher self-reported performance and lower turnover intention in homogeneous job tasks. Higher-quality research is needed.	Telework practices, individual characteristics, organizational performance, turnover rate
Gopal, Suresh & Padhy	[46]	2023	Literature review	Telework poses challenges such as work boundary conflicts, but these can be mitigated by specific strategies to improve motivation and productivity.	Employee motivation, productivity, work boundary conflicts
Härtel, Hüttemann & Müller	[18]	2023	Quantitative survey	Implementing telework strategies improves work performance, particularly when tailored to individual boundary management preferences.	Telework strategies, work performance, boundary management preferences
Basile & Beauregard	[19]	2016	Qualitative interviews	Effective boundary management by teleworkers is crucial for maintaining work-home separation; greater autonomy facilitates better boundary management.	Boundary management, work autonomy, telework effectiveness
Okello & Gilson	[20]	2015	Systematic review	Trust relationships at work significantly influence motivation and are critical for organizational performance, especially in healthcare settings.	Trust relationships, motivation, organizational performance
Eastgate, Bialocerkowski, Hood & Creed	[21]	2021	Scoping review	Boundary management is crucial for university students managing multiple roles, impacting their well-being, academic performance, and role balance.	Boundary management, well-being, academic performance, role balance
Schall & Chen	[22]	2021	Narrative review	Evidence-based strategies such as role clarity and social interactions are essential for improving safety and well-being of teleworkers during and after COVID-19.	Health and safety, overall well-being, clarity of roles, and social interaction
Even	[23]	2020	Systematic literature review	Face-to-face interactions, inclusive information sharing, and specialized leadership training are essential to prevent social and organizational isolation among teleworkers.	Social isolation, organizational isolation, leadership training
Mele, Belardinelli & Belle	[24]	2023	Systematic review	Telework in public organizations is influenced by individual characteristics, leadership support, and contextual factors such as natural disasters, affecting productivity and work-life balance.	Individual characteristics, leadership support, productivity, work-life balance
Thompson et al.	[47]	2021	Qualitative research	Employee motivations for telework are influenced by commute avoidance and	Telework motivation, job

Author(s)	Ref. No.	Year	Methods	Main Findings	Variables Tested/Supported
				family demand balance, affecting overall job satisfaction and productivity.	satisfaction, productivity
Lee, Lee & Kim	[48]	2023	Fixed-effects regression models	Telework negatively affects interpersonal collaboration, but organizational goal clarity can mitigate these effects.	Interpersonal collaboration, organizational goal clarity
Elbaz, Richards & Savard	[49]	2022	Scoping review	Telework can benefit work-life balance and performance, but inconsistencies exist due to factors such as gender and boundary management strategies.	Work-life balance, psychological health, performance, gender, boundary management
Bjursell, Bergmo-Prvulovic & Hedegaard	[26]	2021	Literature review	Telework influences lifelong learning, potentially increasing social inequalities as it is unequally distributed among workers.	Lifelong learning, social inequalities
Bentley et al.	[5]	2016	Online survey	Organizational support reduces psychological pressure and increases job satisfaction, with social isolation mediating these effects.	Organizational support, psychological pressure, social isolation, job satisfaction
Carvalho et al.	[27]	2021	Moderated mediation modelling	Boundary violations are strongly associated with increased professional burnout and reduced well-being among teleworkers, with gender differences influencing results.	Boundary violations, work-life balance, burnout, flourishing
Guazzini et al.	[28]	2020	Experimental study	Virtual environments can impact collaborative dynamics in telework, with potential for both facilitation and inhibition of collaboration depending on group configuration.	Collaborative dynamics, virtual environments, teamwork
Jöstel & Hemlin	[29]	2015	Regression analysis	Telework outside regular working hours does not significantly increase work-family conflict, but permeable boundaries are associated with higher conflict levels.	Work-family conflict, boundary management, after-hours telework
Carvalho et al.	[30]	2022	Process tools analysis	Family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) positively impact boundary control and life satisfaction, with cultural differences influencing the strength of these effects.	Family-supportive supervisor behaviors, boundary control, life satisfaction
Bhattacharya & Mittal	[31]	2020	Survey and regression analysis	Individual needs significantly influence work-home and home-work conflicts in telework; achievement-oriented individuals encounter more conflicts.	Individual needs, work-home conflict, job satisfaction
Petcu et al.	[32]	2023	Correlation and regression analysis	Effective communication and balanced work intensity are essential for maintaining well-being in telework; increased work intensity negatively impacts well-being.	Communication, work intensity, well-being

Author(s)	Ref. No.	Year	Methods	Main Findings	Variables Tested/Supported
Neculaesei & Tocar	[45]	2023	Structural equation modelling	Employee motivation positively impacts performance, while coordination dependency and perceived stress negatively affect telework performance.	Employee motivation, work performance, coordination dependency
Balcioglu, Artar & Erdil	[41]	2023	Questionnaire and machine learning	Work-family conflict negatively impacts job satisfaction among married female teleworkers, with interpersonal communication satisfaction playing a mediating role.	Work-family conflict, job satisfaction, communication satisfaction
Pulido-Martos, Cortés-Denia & López-Zafra	[42]	2021	Online survey and regression analysis	Telework modalities (face-to-face, hybrid, full telework) moderate the relationship between leadership support and work vigor; hybrid models offer balanced advantages.	Telework modalities, social support, work vigor
Andrei & Militaru	[34]	2022	Survey and statistical analysis	Telework positively influences organizational performance by improving employee effectiveness and job satisfaction, particularly in e-commerce environments.	Organizational performance, employee effectiveness, and job satisfaction
Palumbo et al.	[39]	2021	Serial mediation analysis	Telework negatively affects work-life balance, but this effect is mediated by motivation and job satisfaction, which can improve overall perceptions of balance.	Balance between work and life, motivation at work, job satisfaction
Standen, Daniels & Lamond	[33]	1999	Conceptual framework	The impact of telework on work-family interaction is complex, with both positive and negative effects on psychological well-being depending on boundary management strategies.	Interaction between work and family, psychological well-being, management of boundaries
Prabakaran, Wijayanayake & Jayasinghe	[50]	2023	Systematic review and PLS-SEM	Work control and decision-making strategies are crucial for maintaining work-life balance in telework, particularly in the IT sector.	Balance between work and life, control over work, strategies for decision-making
Raneses et al.	[51]	2022	Quantitative research	Remote work positively impacts employee productivity but has no significant effect on work-life balance in the consulting sector.	Employee productivity, work-life balance, remote working arrangements
Ngamkroeckjoti, Klongthong & Thavorn	[43]	2022	Exploratory study	Motivational factors such as environment, time management, and rewards strongly influence teleworker performance, while work intensity and job security have weaker impacts.	Factors driving motivation, performance of teleworkers, job security
Gálvez, Tirado & Martínez	[15]	2020	Qualitative interviews and focus groups	Female teleworkers directly link work-life balance to social sustainability, suggesting that unresolved balance issues hinder broader social objectives.	Balance between work and life, social sustainability, gender roles

Author(s)	Ref. No.	Year	Methods	Main Findings	Variables Tested/Supported
Campo, Avolio & Carlier	[25]	2021	Structural equation modelling	Telework is not directly correlated with work performance or work-life balance during COVID-19, but family-supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) positively impact both.	Telework, performance at work, work-life balance, supervisor behaviors supportive of family needs
Metselaar, den Dulk & Vermeeren	[40]	2022	Structural equation modelling	The effects of telework on performance are mediated by autonomy and work-life balance satisfaction; home-based work has the most positive impacts.	Telework, performance at work, employee autonomy, balance between work and life
Grincevičienė	[52]	2020	Quantitative survey	Telework intensity positively increases time spent with family and friends, but challenges related to work-personal life balance persist.	Intensity of telework, balance between work and life, time spent with family
Anderson, Kaplan & Vega	[35]	2015	Intra-personal design	Telework improves daily affective well-being, particularly for employees with high social connection and openness to experience.	Affective well-being, telework, connection with others, openness to experience
Hyung-Woo Lee	[53]	2019	Path model analysis	Sustainable HR practices, including work-life balance programs, indirectly improve organizational performance through teamwork and employee satisfaction.	Sustainability-focused HR practices, organizational performance, work-life balance
Dousin, Collins & Balvinder Kaur Kler	[38]	2019	Survey and regression analysis	Work-life balance practices such as flexible schedules and supportive supervision improve job satisfaction and performance among healthcare professionals.	Balance between work and life, job satisfaction, performance at work
Mellner, Aronsson & Kecklund	[37]	2015	Survey and statistical analysis	High boundary control is crucial for work-life balance, particularly for those who segment and need external boundaries in work environments.	Boundary management, work-life balance, boundary control
Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė & Goštautaitė	[36]	2019	Survey and statistical analysis	Adapted work environments, supervisor trust, and reduced peer communication improve satisfaction and productivity in telework.	Telework, productivity, job satisfaction, the work environment
Azarbouyeh & Naini	[54]	2014	Empirical research	Telework positively impacts work quality of life, with no significant impact from personal characteristics such as age or gender.	Telework, work quality of life, personal characteristics

*Note: This table presents a representative selection of articles from the 102 studies analyzed in the systematic review.
Source: Developed by the authors, based on the systematic literature review of 102 studies (2014–2024) conducted for this article.*