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The Future of Remote Work, According to Startups After Covid-19 in Tunisia

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1. Abstract

Teleworking is now one of those practices that are increasingly present in Startups. Allowing staff to work from home is often linked to many advantages in terms of the well-being and productivity of employees. However, it sometimes imposes other more questions about the difficulties of putting it into practice and its implementation within the startup's organization. Recently, the health crisis due to covid-19 has forced most startups in Tunisia to work in this way full-time. This research will discuss the status of teleworking after the pandemic, according to the Tunisian startups.

Keywords: Remote Work, Startups, Covid-19, Tunisia.

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2. Introduction

Certainly, remote work is part of our daily life. For many employees all over the world, this is already almost like an old habit. But forced into confinement for nearly two years by the Covid-19 epidemic, today, millions of people worldwide rely on working at home to pursue a professional activity if it allows it. As proof, about 40% of employees that are currently working in the European Union began to telework full-time because of the pandemic (Eurofound, 2020). With this health crisis, the advent of digitalization in working life has accelerated without precedent. This dynamic also has all the attributes to be sustainable.

In Tunisia, the culture of "home office" is still in its infancy, but it begins to arrive. During the confinement, the state has set the example. Many public sector employees have started to telework. Thus, a law has been put in place allowing the electronic exchange of data between public institutions. It's a revolution in the administration when I think about the heaviness of the bureaucracy in a country such as Tunisia. In fact, communication, human resources, education, finance, media, accounting, or even medicine... Many sectors had to make their employees telecommute to ensure the continuity of their activity during the containment period. According to the INS data, telecommuting concerned one out of ten employees who were able to continue working during the total containment (INS "Institut National de la Statistique," 2020).

In this era of the Coronavirus pandemic, work modes continue to be shaken up. With telecommuting becoming the rule, new needs emerge, and the appropriation of new digital uses is not easy at all. I will try in this research to decipher the ecosystem of Tunisian startups that are at the heart of these new ways of remote working. Now, the time seems ripe for introspection to learn the lessons of this unprecedented crisis on the organization of work and the compulsory use of telework in a certain number of cases, especially for startups. A forward-thinking effort

must also be carried out to prepare for the future, to create a new evolving organizational framework because a return to the situation that prevailed before the pandemic seems illusory.

In Tunisia, the recent economic, political, sociological and digital changes that were taken by the government to face the pandemic, have strongly impacted the traditional way of working used by companies and especially startups, and completely transformed into an interesting innovative method which is remote working. This evolution makes the teleworking according to Tunisian startups an interesting case study.

In this Work Project, I first study the contextual insights on both startups and remote working in Tunisia, the evolution of the Teleworking culture and the Tunisian startups' market. I then present the methodology used to prepare this work project, the diagnostic, and the analysis of the results observed during the pandemic. After, I develop some valuable recommendations to the startups on how to effectively implement the remote work concept within their organization and develop it to face a possible pandemic that may occur in the future.

3. Contextual Insights on Startups and Teleworking in Tunisia

In this part, I will try to explain the status of both teleworking and startups within the operational system of the Tunisian economy on the legal and practical levels.

3.1. Startups in Tunisia

During the past few years, Tunisia tried first to make the startup concept legal and then, the government began to invest more in this sector in order to encourage the new startups because they believed on them as a key factor to overcome the difficult economic situation that appeared after the 2011 revolution.

3.1.1. Startup Act

The Startup Act is a legal framework designed to facilitate the launch and the development of startups in order to make Tunisia a leading country in the field of startups at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, MENA region and Africa.

The startup label is a label of merit granted to any Tunisian company that respects the labeling criteria. In fact, and according to the Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and the Digital Economy, the company applying for the label must verify the following five criteria:

1. The age being less than 8 years since its legal constitution.
2. The size with less than 100 employees and less than 15 million dinars of annual turnover or the balance sheet total.
3. Independence by having a capital owned more than two-thirds by physical people, regulated investment organizations or foreign Startups.
4. Innovation by having a model providing an interesting solution and differentiated to a given problem.
5. Scalability by targeting a large and homogeneous market with adapted solutions and teams capable of implementing the project properly (Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and the Digital Economy, 2018).

3.1.2. The Advantages Granted to Startups

The Startup label offers a series of advantages and incentives relating to entrepreneurs, startups and investors.

Firstly, there are four benefits that are granted to entrepreneurs “young people, professionals, researchers, young graduates...” to dare to launch their startups:

1. The Startup grant: It is an allowance given to the co-founder and shareholder of a startup in launch for the expenses of life for a year. Its amount is indexed to previous compensation for 12 months for an employee and takes the form of a fixed indemnity for the self-employed. The monthly net amount of purse is a maximum of 5000 dinars and a minimum of 1000 dinars.
2. Patents: The state support for registration procedures and costs of startups' patents at national and international level.

3. Leave for the creation of a startup: It is a leave of one-year renewable once time granted to the co-founder of a startup to devote himself full-time to launch and develop his startup. In this case, the employer, in a public or a private sector, cannot oppose the departure of the beneficiary of the leave “except in the case of a private employer who is employing less than 10 employees”. The beneficiary of this leave can terminate it at any time and return to his or her original employment upon notice.

4. Liquidation: The amicable liquidation of startups is promoted by the Startup Act through the combination of measures such as the Startups Guarantee Fund, the exemption corporate income tax and state payment of salary costs (Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and the Digital Economy, 2018).

Secondly, there are three benefits that are granted to the startups themselves:

1. The simplification of procedures through the startups’ portal designed as an interaction point in order to apply for the startup label and benefit from associated advantages.
2. The reduction of the charges through the assumption of responsibility by the state of the social contributions, employee and employer benefits and exemption from corporate tax.
3. Exchange facilities by raising the ceiling of the Technological Card to 100,000 dinars for startups and giving them the right to open a special account in currencies freely supplied by capital contributions, quasi-capital, in business figures and dividends in foreign currencies (Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and the Digital Economy, 2018).

Finally, we can find some benefits that are granted to investors:

1. Tax relief: Amounts invested by natural or legal persons in regulated investment organizations dedicated to Startups are fully deductible from the tax base.
2. The exemption from capital gains tax: Profits from the sale of securities relating to participations in startups are exempt from tax on the value.

3. Contributions in kind: In the case of contributions in kind, the shareholders of a Startup are empowered to choose the contribution auditor in order to assess said contribution.

4. Financial instruments: Startups are legally authorized to issue bonds convertible into shares, regardless of the option periods for the conversion (Tunisian Ministry of Communication Technologies and the Digital Economy, 2018).

3.2. Teleworking in Tunisia

There is no regulatory framework that currently exists in Tunisia regarding teleworking. However, there is no text that prohibits it. Therefore, it is quite possible to put it in work in compliance with the regulations in force. Indeed, this mode of professional practice tends to develop all over the world and will probably follow the same path in Tunisia. In order to implement teleworking in Tunisia, it will be necessary to rely on the legislation existing and provide for each company a framework that is adapted to its needs and its own resources. This framework will take the form of a global charter proposed by the company to its employees: it is a contract between the employer and the employee who will describe the different aspects of the exercising of the tasks and responsibilities that need to be performed from distance. Moreover, it should be noted that the definition of employment contract under the Tunisian law does not mention the performance of its obligations by the employee at the employer's premises; which means that teleworking does not go against the text and that it is perfectly conceivable as a mode of execution of the employment contract. Another important thing that should be highlighted; this provision specifies that the teleworker has the same rights as the employee who performs his work on the premises of the company.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Economic Impact of Covid 19 in Tunisia

The model of economic and social development put in place in the 1970s, and with adjustments in favor of further opening and liberalization of markets in the 1990s, gave its first

signs of running out of steam in 2008 with the global economic crisis. The tensions social policies began to gain momentum, particularly in the mining area, and intensified in December 2010, contributing to the fall of the regime in place in January 2011. This followed the entry of Tunisia in a phase of political transition, accompanied by an economic transition whose development has mainly been seized by post-revolution social, political and security instability. This resulted in weak economic growth, around 1.8% on annual average over the period 2011-2019, and at 1% in 2019 (Central Bank of Tunisia, 2019).

Public finances were weakened, and the budget deficit worsened, after 2011, due to an increase in public expenditure, particularly recurrent expenditure, which is faster than those of own resources. This is explained by a Keynesian demand-side stimulus policy initiated in 2011 to counter the effects of the revolution, a policy that resulted in an increased payroll and consumer spending “food and energy products” which becomes heavier. The budget deficit, at 1% of GDP in 2010, peaked at 6.9% in 2013, but has since succeeded, to be reduced to around 4% of GDP under the double effect of a policy to control the evolution of wage bill and detente on international hydrocarbon prices. The weakening of finances public debt has been accompanied at the same time by an increase in the outstanding public debt (Central Bank of Tunisia, 2019).

The fiscal stimulus policy by increasing the wage bill has partly contributed to the rising inflation whose rate was around 3% in 2010. The rate of inflation has indeed increased since 2011, sometimes exceeding 7%, due to the economic situation of several factors, among others, with the depreciation of the dinar “imported inflation,” the increase in the wage bill and the lack of control distribution channels. Over the last two years, Tunisia has recorded a relative mastery of the inflation rate due to a restrictive monetary policy acting by raising the interest rate director and a tightening of bank refinancing (Central Bank of Tunisia, 2019).

And of course, over the past 9 years, the current account deficit has also widened as a result, with low economic performance and faster evolution of imports relative to exports. The current account deficit fell from less than 5% of GDP in 2010 to almost 9% of GDP in 2019, after having exceeded for some years, 10% of GDP (Trading Economics, 2020). This deficit resulted in a depreciation of the dinar and/or a decrease in the foreign currency reserves. In 2019, the unemployment rate was around 15% of the working population after reaching 18% in 2011 due to the cyclical consequences of the revolution in terms of technological unemployment. However, over the past nine years, unemployment has not only not been able to be absorbed and reduced significantly, but it has remained very uneven from region to region. For some people in Northwest or Center-East governorates, this rate exceeds 24%. In fact, it overcomes the 30% in some southern governorates. In terms of poverty, Tunisia has made significant progress. The rate of monetary poverty in Tunisia has indeed fallen from 23% in 2005 to 15% in 2015, and the poverty rate extreme, calculated according to the threshold established by the World Bank of \$ 1.90 per day, increased by more than 7% in 2005 to less than 2% in 2015 (The World Bank, 2020).

4.2. Tunisian Start-up Ecosystem

Even though the Tunisian startup ecosystem is still in its infancy, it is teeming with innovation and success. Its lack of international visibility is not a reflection of its dynamism: the Tunisian ecosystem identifies more than 575 Startups active during the last ten years, 32% of which were created during the last three years. Proof that the efforts of the entire ecosystem - entrepreneurs, investors, state, schools, accelerators, incubators, and nurseries are producing concrete results. Out of the 673 Startups, there is only 960 entrepreneurs, founders of startups and this proves that the association between the founders of startups has not become too familiar, as it is noticed in international ecosystems where it is generally a team of founders, partners, complementary in their tasks (CEO, CFO, CTO, CMO, ...). Moreover, this point

represents one of the main weak points of this ecosystem which must mature quickly to minimize the risk between partners (Hinrichsen, 2020). On the other hand, like all startup ecosystems, these young innovative companies are generally technological, and the female entrepreneur has unfortunately not found her place well: only 16% of Tunisian startup founders are females. As in all Startup ecosystems, the capital attracts the largest share of innovative companies. In Tunisia, startups located in the greater metropolitan area of Tunis represent more than 57% of Tunisian Startups, followed by Startups from Sousse, Sfax then Nabeul. However, startups founded by Tunisians abroad represent 8% of the total.

We are faced with the overwhelming success of Big deal.tn and the selling on Facebook, a great wave of websites selling online has appeared on the market with some successes and many failures. In addition, entrepreneurship in the craft sector is one of the peculiarities of the ecosystem of Tunisian startups. In fact, there are several startups that innovate in local products such as baskets, jewelry, traditional clothes, or Fouta which is a traditional Tunisian towel. These startups in the field of Arts, Culture, and Leisure sector represent 17% of Tunisian startups. They are logically followed by the technological sector (IT and telecom), which represents 11% of startups. Then, we find, almost equally of 8%, the industries of health tech, transport, and business services sectors.

4.3. Telework in Tunisia before and after the COVID-19

For almost a year and a half, we have been experimenting with an unexpected revolution in our working methods that has never been experienced to date. The Covid-19 pandemic has imposed difficult choices on governments: how to save lives by confining the population without causing irremediable economic deterioration? The pandemic marks a turning point in the acceleration of digital transformation and new technologies by precipitating workers, when their position allows it, to telework.

4.3.1. Telework in Tunisia before the COVID-19

Strangely, teleworking is not on the rise in Tunisia, and few companies offer their employees the possibility of working remotely. In fact, until the summer of 2020, Tunisia does not have a legal framework dedicated to remote work. That said, the Labor Code is not an obstacle for companies wishing to set up this working method. However, Companies can, on the other hand, require the presence of the employee at the workplace in the contract according to the requirements and the needs of each company. So, until June 2020, to be legally regulated, teleworking had to be voluntary and implemented as part of the employment contract or an amendment thereto. In Tunisia, and although the figures on teleworking are not available but, A study was published by the INS in 2020 revealed that only 1.4% of employees were able to work remotely before the pandemic (INS, 2020).

During the Pre-COVID-19 Era., regular teleworking was still a minority practice even among executives. But the more significant the proportion of executives in the company, the more the practice of teleworking develops. Conversely, in establishments in which workers and employees are in the majority, the proportion of employees working from home is lower, including among managers. As a matter of fact, employees with regular teleworking are relatively more stable and integrated into employment. Actually, the different families' situations affect the use of telework. Moreover, Employees in couples with young children are more concerned with intensive teleworking especially women, because they tele-work almost as much as men.

4.3.2. Telework in Tunisia after the COVID-19

If everyone agrees on the fact that the health crisis of the Coronavirus has given a boost to digitization, a division persists whether between countries or between regions of the same country. Teleworking, for example, is the perfect example that can illustrate digital inequalities. During the general confinement, which was decreed between the months of March and June

2020, several Tunisian companies in addition to the civil service, have resorted to teleworking to continue their activities while respecting the travel restriction measures taken by the government, within the absence of a regulatory framework governing the teleworking. A second wave which was more ferocious than the first one, obliged the teleworking to be back again. To slow the acceleration of the epidemic, the government Recommended the remote working once again, which seemed to be regaining ground. However, teleworking cannot be improvised because it requires IT equipment, good connectivity, and above all, new organizational methods within the company. Another downside with remote work is the fact that not all the activities are tele-workable.

According to a study conducted by the Tunisian national public service broadcaster (Al-Watania TV1), in the first quarter of 2020, only 30% of private companies teleworked during the first wave of the epidemic. The rest were faced with the inability to comply with this change. The study also noted that many are the reasons for this inability to keep up with change. The report evoked the link between the causes of the Tunisian companies' inability to react urgently to the rapid spread of Covid-19 and the nature of their activities. Several employees, agents and executives of Tunisian companies, did not have the means and tools in terms of logistics and knowledge needed to manage the change in the way of working. Moreover, the study revealed that the possibilities of teleworking in a country depend on several major determining factors, such as the economic and professional structure, high-speed internet access, and the rate of personal computer ownership. So, according to this research, the possibilities of teleworking are correlated with the level of economic development of a country. Therefore, countries where employment is concentrated in sectors, such as information and communications technologies "ICT", professional services, finance, insurance, and public administration can direct a more significant proportion of the workforce towards

teleworking, unlike countries heavily dependent on agriculture as a secondary sector, construction and tourism.

Faced with this pressing challenge of digitization and the switch to digital, many Tunisian companies have taken the plunge and started the process of adapting to this new situation imposed by work in the era of Covid-19. According to the results by published by the INS to assess the socioeconomic impact of the epidemic on the private sector during the first wave, 12.5% of companies have increased their online presence mainly to facilitate teleworking and perform administrative tasks. More than 25% of companies that have a Business Continuity Plan “BCP” have integrated teleworking into their plan (INS, 2020).

Another recent survey carried out, in the middle of the second wave, by INS with the objective of measuring the impact of the Covid crisis on employment and entrepreneurship, confirms that this trend displayed by a growing number of companies to adapt to remote work. Furthermore, the study found that 16% of companies improved their organization's IT infrastructure, and that 60% of these companies invested the most in purchasing IT equipment, while 30% of them spent the most money for the acquisition of IT solutions for the management of teleworking. Companies in the ICT sectors, health services and the food industry were the most to invest in the acquisition of these solutions, with respective rates of 38%, 36% and 30% (INS, 2020).

4.4. Problem and Research Question

Many people across the world strongly believe that there is a very little chance that life will resume its ordinary course once this crisis is over. This observation naturally includes the world of work that's why there are excellent chances that this event will be the source of new standards which we will see their popularity increase during the first half of 2022. Teleworking is one of those aspects which, although not new, have been developed significantly within startups where it was not expected before. In addition, remote working will probably become a

commonplace for the startups' sector in all over the world and especially Tunisia which is the subject of this work. This unplanned transition could create some positive side effects. For example, some employees say that, during this crisis, the bonds have been strengthened because through working from home, coworkers showed their colleagues or sometimes even their clients, a face of themselves that they weren't used to showing off in the office. So, this transparency can have a positive impact on the whole working atmosphere.

The implementation of teleworking in an unforeseen way and in these conditions may be a real upheaval for working staff but going through this upheaval together can have positive long-term impacts on the collaboration of the different actors. Startups located in Tunisia are therefore used to finding their workforce in the same area. For positions that do require qualification, this is generally not a problem as this ecosystem is in large part populated by qualified workers. However, it is not the same for less skilled workers such as manual staff. Therefore, these startups must broaden their field of action in order to attract enough players with the necessary qualifications. As a result, controlled teleworking could help to brave this spatial constraint. It can make it possible to expand this growing market to find the necessary talents. Moreover, this will, in a way, make the offer more attractive and improve the image of the startups in the eyes of potential talents (Marius Thériault, Paul Villeneuve, Marie-Hélène Vandersmissen and François Des Rosiers, 2005).

In this thesis, I will start by describing the actual situation of the remote work in Tunisia according to startups during Covid-19 and my vision to its future after the pandemic. Then I will discuss the challenges that startups are facing concerning teleworking and how the pandemic pushed them to adopt new technologies and techniques to face these lockdown's issues. My hypothesis for this thesis is that Tunisian startups will slowly be adopted to address teleworking challenges after the Covid era. To validate my hypothesis, I have deployed a qualitative method instead of developing a scientific model based on quantified data.

5. Data and Methodology

To be able to confirm or refute what was previously explained, practical, qualitative research will be conducted in the next part that involves primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The first part had for aim to respond to the problem through focusing on the analysis of the literature review and on the setting up of teleworking within startups in Tunisia during covid, and other sources such as news and magazines articles about the startups' market in Tunisia. The second part aims to collect information from individuals working or leading Tunisian startups, and from the observations and diagnosis of psychologists that were in contact with patients which have been teleworking during the pandemic. And this will be done through open-ended semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations of social media platforms.

5.1. Research Methodology

The approach used in this work is the qualitative research method. This method requires to be in contact directly with the field to be able to collect various testimonies in connection with the problematic posed. It can allow, among other things, to identify new themes unexpected, but relevant, that was not have been initially discussed in the theoretical part and therefore I will have fewer limitations than a quantitative model could. Furthermore, it offers me a more open analysis that lends itself rather well to the study of managerial practices related to human resources.

To support this study, I tried to conduct a series of open-ended semi-structured interviews with people from a variety of startups from different fields and sectors such as Transport and Logistics “Hezni Maak”, Health and Biotech “Med.tn”, Entertainment “Artify”, Beauty and Wellness “Tap4Glam” and Ecommerce and Marketplace “Ecom Solution”, and many others. Actually, the fact that I studied with many founders or co-founders or even employees that are working within these startups helped me much in my research and offered me the chance to dig deeper to receive the data I need to reach. In term of numbers, I was

unfortunately successful only to conclude in total nine interviews (two with founders of successful startups which are “Hezni Maak” and “Ecom Solution”, six others with employees from different startups and from different positions, and one last interview with a psychologist that was in contact with patients that had problems due to teleworking during lockdowns) because Tunisia was recently struggling against Covid-19 and the government announced a general lockdown that approximately lasted the whole summer. Unluckily, this made the communication with these startups even harder than before because many of them either took the decision to postpone their activities or to work in a very slow mode. So, I was unable to take interviews with 25 startups as I planned in the first place. This situation obstructed the flow of my researches twice and that’s why I postponed the delivery of my research from June to September. Most of these interviews were conducted online via Messenger, Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms. However, each of these interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes.

Data Type	Methods	Quantity
Primary	Open-ended semi- structured in-depth interviews + Figures mainly collected from Ecom Solution and from Dr. Tobich + My personal notes on interviews	9 interviews
	My observations of the startups’ situation in Tunisia and the implementation of teleworking as an effective solution during Covid-19	More than 150 observations of blogs, websites and Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter Startups’ accounts
Secondary	Data related to the teleworking and the Startups’ market in Tunisia	±20 reports, articles, research papers...
	Data related to the pandemic situation in Tunisia	±15 articles and interviews
	Data related to teleworkers’ behaviors during Covid-19	±10 reports, articles, books, research papers...

The aim of the method of the semi-structured interview was first to be able to discuss by topic the different hypotheses posed by the different points of theory studied in the first part of this work while leaving a maximum of freedom to the interviewee in his answers. The guide of each interview was straightforward including a customary greeting, a brief introduction to the topic and then, several both general and specific questions related to the topic discussed. Concerning the employees interviewed, some were directly explaining the teleworking strategy taken by the startup to continue working during the pandemic and the employed tools to

accomplish their objectives. Others were concerned about their experience with working from home in a general way. Finally, the interviews ended with a section with some forward-looking questions on the potential implementation of remote work in the future. Then a different interview guide based on the same logic was directly intended for the Psychotherapist. In this case, the questions were based on the psychological part of the teleworking and their effects on the workers. Finally, many of the interviewed startups had just set up an investigation into the teleworking in view of its implementation in the context of Covid-19. The purpose of these surveys was to identify how they may further implement the teleworking in their everyday routine after Covid-19. The responses to this survey, completed by many workers, were also used to carry out the practical study so that the analysis of this specific case is as complete as possible. As for the research itself, the Nova SBE library and Google Scholar were the cornerstones of my research that facilitated the access to multiple research papers.

5.2. The example of Ecom Solution

First, I want to thank my dear friend Baha to give me the opportunity to meet his brother Mr. Mohamed Louay Snoussi and the founder of Ecom Solution who was really helpful and patient with me. In fact, he offered me many interesting and valuable data and shared with me both his startup's personal experience during the pandemic and his visions towards the future of teleworking, according to startups in the Tunisian market after Covid-19. Therefore, I wanted to take Ecom solution's successful experience as an example to study.

Diving deeper into the practical example of Ecom Solution to understand better the methodology based on which remote working was set up during the Covid-19 pandemic. Ecom Solution is a French company based in Tunisia which is part of the large Web ECOM Family, and which specializes in virtual assistance, digital marketing, and various activities such as e-commerce and web development. The company offers solutions such as virtual clients assistance, digital marketing (branding, web presence, digital marketing strategies etc..),

graphic design, e-commerce (logistics, business development) etc. In fact, the solutions that are provided to their clients are mainly intended for the e-commerce sector and social networks. Furthermore, Ecom Solution offers chiefly digital based services: this one factor played as an essential role of facilitator with the adjustments introduced due to the pandemic as most Ecom Solution's employees do all their work via phone and laptops. Thus, the decision of a remote work regime hasn't significantly impacted the performance or tasks rate of accomplishment but improved it since according to a survey conducted internally, 83% of the employees were satisfied with the remote working and felt more comfortable accomplishing their tasks. Moreover, the 2-year-old startup showed a great deal of responsibility during that period facing a challenging and risky decision took by the management board. It is also important to highlight that the demographic composition of Ecom Solution's employees shows that 60% are males, 40% females, 47% are aged between [25;39], 33% are between [40;55] and 20% are between [56;65]. This is partially explanatory for the high rate of employees supporting the remote work policy since according to other international surveys, young employees prefer more to telework than the older employees. These results pushed even further the thought process of Ecom Solution management board as they are now thinking of extending the remote work period and even adopt a "hybrid" work policy as many companies were already doing since before the pandemic where employees might get to choose a specific number of week's days to work from home and the rest to join the office as a way of integration for each other's. As a result, this move is less costly for the company, less pressure on the employees, and can even increase the productivity.

5.3. The Psychological Impact of Teleworking in Tunisia During Covid-19

My interview realized with the young doctor Amira Tobich, working for the previous three years with employees from both private and public sectors who are suffering of all types of stress and anxiety related to the work, revealed many facts that helped me to evaluate my

hypothesis. There is a strong relationship between the psychological aspect of the worker with the startup's decision of continuing the telework after the pandemic or not. Furthermore, if the employee is facing troubles to adapt with the remote working, it will be hard for the company to mainly focus on this working method in the future. While observing the cases of her patients that were working at startups during the first and the second lockdowns that happened in 2020, Dr. Tobich highlighted five observed urgent cases that appeared at the period of the teleworking and highly affected the stability of the employee.

Here are the five prominent cases of situations that I'm analyzing. First, Employees who have children that need to take care of them and who are also complying with the isolation at home 36% are under 12 years old, 26% are between [13 and 17], and there is 64 % of employees who are still single or don't have children. Previously, while those employees who are parents were in face-to-face work, the children were in day care centers, with nannies or at schools. In fact, the children had their needs met in these places with competent professionals. Today, parents need to learn how to adjust and reconcile all these dependents' needs with their work while also being at home working in a full time. Therefore, this created an insecurity sensation and a fear of not being able to do both things together: doing what is necessary for the child and fulfilling the daily tasks related to their jobs.

Secondly, there are many adults that are dependents of employees who live in the same house with them like old parents, or relatives with physical disability or psychological disability. In this case, we have a majority with a percentage of almost 75%. This number is divided to two parts: one for those who still live with their parents 70% and the other 5% is related to those who have relatives depending on them for other reasons. To develop the analysis and the management of these data, Startups need to consider a flexibility for their employees who will need to deduct a part of their working from home to new the challenges like teleworking while need to look after their parents for example. The adaptation time for all these

needs more time and that's why teleworking startups need to implement new solutions like opening virtual rooms for orientation that will be a necessity to help their staff regaining their normal job stability. However, the cases observed of working women report that they are dealing better and performing more than men within an exact area of expertise and under the same circumstances.

Thirdly, the mandatory isolations imposed of the Tunisian government during the lockdowns affected the careers of female employees. In fact, 23% of teleworking woman had some serious difficulties because they had to combine taking care of their children that were also obliged to stay at home and their domestic daily tasks with remote work. The great concern is related to the reports of married women complaining the telework, and this is due in the foreground to the society's culture that put more pressure on woman to both take care of her life's domestic obligations and her kids. Here, we are facing a dilemma. Before, when women were working in the workplace did not have to worry about these issues because the life flow was going as usual until the appearance of the Coronavirus. Another issue was observed, most of couple suffers a decompensation in the relationship because they were tired and exhausted from the new routine that was suddenly imposed on their lifestyle and this harmed a lot their regular routines. Moreover, women's employment rate is statistically much more affected than men because many women were obliged to prioritize her personal life on her professional one. Toward these issues, the psychological briefing is highly demanded from startups to avoid reaching a depressive level that can destabilize the workflow's flourish.

Fourthly, male employees also face difficulties with the integration into the new reality of sharing obligations with their wives and combining work with their children, household chores and teleworking in the isolation's period. In addition, 90% of this group generally does not have skills in domestic management and childcare, and to overcome this issue it's highly recommended that startups use the most powerful tool among all which is the motivation and

encouragement for their employees to quickly adapt with these “new” domestic and familial challenges. Furthermore, this group is who showed the highest level of stress during lockdown period. To conclude, all these details interfere in the couple's marital life, generates anxiety in the familial atmosphere and significantly affects labor performance. And to face this issue, startups need to implement a well-studied visual and auditory guidance and to encourage them to attend virtual conferences with a group of workers who had to deal with the same anxiety and the same experiences.

Finally, I noticed an increase in the reports of incidences related domestic violence with more than 28% only at the period of the second lockdown which was the longest one. This significant increase of reports included everybody such as fathers, mothers, children, and others in the family “LGBT community, the elderly and even disabled individuals”, and this is due to the more time spent at home. Unfortunately, not all the aggressed cases informed about their incidences. However, we can constate that there is a painful silence shown by the look, half-words and sometimes even by the marks of aggression on the victim’s body. Moreover, there is a silence by aggressors due to the fear of losing work or a great shame from their assault. To overcome this dangerous act, I suggest that startups need to enforce the legal-based development in victim assistance that could be a part of a general training. There could be more solutions to face these acts that were dramatically increasing during the past two decades and especially at the lockdown’s period, such as strategies to use “code words” when the victim is afraid of reporting the aggression, to raise awareness and the legal assistance within the working system of the startup, and to organize campaigns on how to combat violence and how to act.

6. Results and Discussion

Starting with the analysis of the data collected in the previous part, I can instantly understand how valuable the conducted interviews are because at a certain extent they are very efficient to foresee how will be the future of remote working, according to startups after Covid-

19 in Tunisia. To analyze and discuss the results, I will divide the upcoming section to 4 main points which they are the advantages of teleworking, its disadvantages, the challenges, and my recommendations.

6.1. The Advantages of Telework, According to Startups During the Pandemic

Teleworking brings multiple benefits to both the employees and the startups. In a general context, teleworkers usually are known to be less stressed because they are entitled to a more suitable environment from the professional one. And especially when there is no need to rush to reach the office, because simply everything is done at home. In fact, this lack of travel leads the employee to be more efficient and productive from one part and reduce the spread of the infection. What is more, the fact of being in home makes it possible to manage the daily domestic and familial task better. Thanks to its flexibility, people devote more time to their families and their passions. However, this is a double-edged sword because in one hand, this allows the teleworkers to have a quiet and stress-free lifestyle and in the other hand, this could put more pressure on them to deal with both the professional and personal life at the same time especially if they have kids quarantined at home.

In addition, remote work inspires a natural feeling of freedom. If the job is done, everything is going like clockwork. The teleworker can allow himself to sit comfortably in front of his computer and to make his own way for a good day of work. And concretely, the employee demonstrated before the pandemic that he can be autonomous and productive at the same time especially, when he is not distracted by his colleagues. This spaced environment leads to an excellent professional performance and arouses a natural feeling of emancipation, without any overload of activity.

Teleworking symbolizes a significant saving of money in the eyes of companies especially startups. That's why, teleworkers are not the only ones to benefit from the advantages of this relocation. According to startups, allowing employees to work from home saves them

money because it will be no need to pay for renting a workspace, maintenance costs and transportation costs. And as productivity increases, absenteeism rates are reduced completely. Furthermore, the exchanges between colleagues will be richer and the causes of distractions such as personal phone calls and chatting will be erased from the picture. In short, teleworking is a corporate culture to favor, if startups need to prosper after Covid-19.

6.2. The Disadvantages of Telework, According to Startups During the Pandemic

On the other hand, teleworking is not always positive because the employee working from home could encounter some drawbacks if he/she does not find a balance. The most significant disadvantage of telecommuting could be either the lack of interaction, isolation, lack of confidence and loss of interest, or as it is the case in Tunisia, working from home could be so stressful and challenging in presence of other familial distraction and domestic responsibilities. This can easily invade the daily lives of teleworkers. Even if it is not really the case, working from home could make the possibility of gaining a promotion seems to be complicated.

When teleworking for a startup, but there is not a real discipline that organizes the workflow, that's can easily affect the employee's productivity. At the very beginning, the employee shows exceptional attention to his work. It provides for a strict schedule with a well-organized start, end, and break time. Once accustomed to this cog, the teleworker eventually gets bored and no longer respects his own schedule. This unfortunately affects not only its productivity, but also wastes time and money for the startup.

The other disadvantage of this relocation is the inability to supervise the teleworker. All communications are generally made via phone and internet. The startup could find itself in a delicate situation, where it is hard to properly follow up on their employees and the productivity of their work. Moreover, it is quasi-impossible to verify if the employee is really working or if he has problems completing his duties. Furthermore, Team spirit and communication are scarce,

and they are the motor of any young startups that aspires to lead its market. As a conclusion, when working from home, it is almost impossible to keep an eye on everything at the same time.

6.3. The Challenges of Telework, According to Startups During the Pandemic

According to my observations for the Tunisian Startups' Ecosystem, the way of managing companies in Tunisia is still mainly directive. The widespread type of management is still vertical, but it tends to evolve little by little towards horizontal management, transversal. Moreover, some startups have realized the importance of investing in change management processes to achieve their objectives. These startups have worked on team cohesion, the spirit of belonging and therefore the empowerment of employees. So, the implementation of emergency teleworking will therefore remain for them a question of structural means such as computers, internet coverage, telephone, Cloud, and remote access, communication channels or even suitable time slots. However, for the other startups that have not yet taken the path of transformation, teleworking will require more complex management. In this case, managers are called upon to succeed in empowering employees. They must set up a support for change in order to gain acceptance for this new mode of operation within the startup and as a consequence, encourage employees to adhere to it. I should also highlight that the employees can also have concerns about teleworking which is mainly explained by the analysis of Dr. Tobich in the previous section. To face this resistance, it is essential to highlight the advantages of teleworking by explaining that this type of organization allows teleworkers, for example, to work with more flexibility in terms of time, and in some cases with more balance between private and professional life.

6.4. My Recommendations to Startups

One of the areas on which startups must act is internal communication via forums, internal community platforms or even groups on social networks. Teleworkers must have access

to communication tools that will allow them to stay in touch with the company and take action on the day-to-day management of tasks. Here are some recommendations for both startups and employees to successfully implement telecommuting after the pandemic. Firstly, it's essential to clearly define together the modalities of teleworking by indicating the frequency and deadlines of telephone meetings and videoconferences to gain time. Secondly, the startups need to choose the right communication tools or platforms to ensure secure messaging tools, document sharing, videoconferencing, etc. and at the same time, the managers need to focus on a planned training for the staff in order to easily adapt to these new updates. Thirdly, the leading teams working within startups need to set specific and realistic goals that strike a balance between discipline and confidence and at the same time can be in line with the remote working that's why in this case the controller manager becomes a remote manager-coach. Finally, it's necessary that Tunisian startups design a regulatory framework to manage time and schedules, workspaces, professional posture and to refine the system according to the results over time. Startups need to think of a hybrid type of working as a first move until they completely master the remote working.

7. Conclusion

After concluding the thesis, I can say that teleworking is going to have a permanent stamp on global workplaces including Tunisian startups because the weak economy of Tunisia is in a real need for them to empower the economic growth especially if we realize that the Tourism sector that Tunisian government always counted on was hugely affected by the crisis. So, Tunisia needs to find effective alternatives such as Startups and teleworking to overcome such worldwide pandemic in the future. Startups can cut down on various overhead costs such as rent and other bills by implementing a full or partial work-from-home policy. On the other hand, it is important to develop well-being and psychologic consulting programs within companies to assess the mental health of employees and to follow-up on telework policies as it

could be damaging to certain individuals. These implementations will certainly require prior studies and testing phases to be fully implemented, but with the current nature of the global situation, the implementation of such policies seem to be inevitable. This leads me to several questions that should be answered:

- Are the Tunisian public and private companies ready and able to be transferred online?
- Is the Tunisian technological infrastructure able to accommodate to the large pressure that comes with the implementation of telework?
- Can we ensure the constant follow-up of the psychological and mental health of the employees?

8. Limitations

The primary limitations faced in writing this thesis were the lack of data related to Tunisian Startups and it was hard to reach the Statistics related to them. The Global pandemic situation also made it challenging to conduct startups visits especially at the lockdowns' periods. Although, I have been able to have multiple interviews with different employees from different positions, I think that a higher number of samples would have more accurate and conclusive results. In addition, gathering data after analyzing nine interviews conducted with three different languages "Arabic, French and English" was really challenging.

Writing a thesis, while I was obliged to have a full time work due to the financial crisis caused by Covid-19, and especially about a topic that is entirely new to me, put on me more pressure to both succeed my career and obtain my master's degree.

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