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## How to Achieve Sustainable Efficiency with Teleworkers: Leadership Model in Telework

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### Abstract

Globalization, increasing competition, changes in demographic structure of population, and development of information and communication technologies (ICT) are the factors that have posed new challenges for organizations in recent years. The newly fledged conditions have vital impact on production methods and procedures as well as work arrangements in organizations. Currently, organizations cope with various times in which work is executed as well as various places where it is executed. Thanks to ICT an employee can work at the client's place, at home, in a means of transport or in a café. All these situations constitute the work arrangement in which the worker is considered to work 'from distance', i.e. as a teleworker.

The presented approach refers to the flexible work arrangement where an organization's priority lies with its endeavour to become and stay flexible in terms of time and place of performance. Under these conditions the implementation of new ways of work arrangements presents new challenges for leadership. To accomplish this basic function of management when employees are not present at workplace or even are not available during working hours and face-to-face communication is impossible poses many difficulties.

The paper focuses on comparison and identification of the differences between traditional work arrangements and telework, highlights weak points in leadership of teleworkers, and proposes a leadership model for teleworkers' induction.

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### 1. Introduction

Ever growing proportion of telework in work arrangements globally and occurrence of specific problems linked to their implementation by organizations attract the attention of theorists and practitioners ever more.

Recently, telework has experienced its boom primarily due to progress and accessibility of ICT. Various sources present different numbers of workers performing under telework in the world, but they agree upon one fact that their implementation is steadily growing. Differences in numbers stem from the perspective applied by the author who either considers only workers working 'from distance' full time based on their contracts of employment or working so once-a-week to be teleworkers or 'informal' teleworkers who can work from home even if their employment contracts do not denote them as teleworkers. Walinskas claims that currently over 1 billion employees work as teleworkers (Walinskas, 2015).

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As stated above, increase in the numbers of teleworkers is not exclusively the result of the employers' need to adjust to the market requirements, but it occurs also due to the higher availability of ICT products in terms of their prices as well as broader coverage of the ever-faster Internet.

However, along the implementation of telework new problems arose the teleworkers have to cope with. Out of them, most of the authors present teleworkers' social isolation from their teams as being the most serious (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Pratt, 2003; Bajzikova, Sajgalikova, & Wojcak, 2006; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden, Veiga, & Dino, 2008; Pyoria, 2011; Wojcak, 2013; Wojcak & Polakova, 2015). The problem is vented by the American Psychological Association, too, and coincides with the results of our research in the recent ten years presented at conferences and published in a monograph.

Telework as a broad concept usually covers any work performed from 'distance'. As a relatively new form of work arrangement it offers employees freedom in terms of place and time of performance. The new feature of such a work arrangement is workers' freedom to manage their work without the direct supervision of their superior. Monitoring and feedback within this new work arrangement in their traditional meaning are almost excluded. Telework refers not only to work from home, but also work at a client's place or some other site. It is such a work arrangement in which the employee accomplishes the objectives set by the employer using ICT and performing the tasks at other premises as those of his/her employer's. The European Commission defines telework as follows: "Telework is a form of organising and performing work, using technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis" (Eurofund, 2002). The term telework (telecommuting at that time) was coined by Jack Nilles in 1973. Later on it spread fast all over the world, mainly at the beginning of the 21st century.

Generally, telework is categorized by the number of working hours a week performed in the regime and it includes work from home as well. Most frequently it is classified into the following types:

- a) work from home once a week,
- b) work from home several days a week,
- c) full-time telework.

Telework is the work arrangement in which ICT plays a crucial role. However, telework can also be classified by the place of performance as it comes under the category of locational flexibility, such as:

- a) Home office (work from home) is the work arrangement in which the employee performs his/her tasks from home using ICT.
- b) Satellite Centre represents the work arrangement in which employees work in an established centre separated from their employer's premises, such as at a client's place. This arrangement is typical of programmers or database administrators working at their clients' premises.
- c) Street work covers such a work arrangement in which the employee works at a public place, such as a café or a means of transport. This arrangement has come to use just recently, primarily due to the accessibility of the Internet as well as new versions of mobile devices.

Leadership constitutes the core function of management. It can be defined as a process by which one individual influences others toward the attainment of group/organizational goals. Three aspects of the leadership definition should be emphasized. First, leadership is a process of social influence. It cannot exist without a leader and one or more followers. Second, leadership elicits voluntary actions on the part of followers. The voluntary nature of compliance separates leadership from other types of exercised influence based on formal authority. Finally, leadership results in followers' behaviour that is purposeful and goal-directed in some sort of organized setting.

However, leadership should be distinguished from management. Management involves planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling, and the manager is someone who performs these functions. The manager has formal authority by virtue of his/her position or office. Leadership, by contrast, primarily deals with influence. A manager may or may not be an effective leader. A leader's ability to influence others may be based on a variety of factors other than his/her formal authority or position (Reference for Business, 2010). Many, although not all, studies of leadership focus on the nature of leadership in workplace.

An effective leader can create the environment in which subordinates are enthusiastic about fulfilling the organization's objectives. In principle, it is his/her influence on the employees resulting in their voluntary effort to achieve the organization's goals, i.e. they personally desire to fulfil the set goals, they enjoy their achievements what leads to their intrinsic motivation and content with the work itself and its results. Accomplishing this core function of management requires primarily effective communication and employee motivation as it is claimed by a number of authors (Buelens, Sinding, Waldstrom, Kreitner & Kinicki, 2011; Griffin & Moorhead, 2007; Robbins & Judge, 2008;

Covey, 2013). Of course, there will be an important difference in communication and motivation between traditional workers (working in an organization for a set number of working hours) and teleworkers. If the teleworkers are to achieve the objectives efficiently, the 'right form' of leadership must be implemented.

It must be highlighted that telework is not an arrangement typical just of large organizations, it is also widespread in small and medium-sized enterprises. To introduce such a work arrangement may not be an easy task as it may look at first glance. From the perspective of leadership the problem lies primarily in communication.

## 2. Analysis and Discussion

In the paper we focus mostly on the workers working from home, i.e. in their home offices and the problems such an arrangement presents to their leaders.

Above all, teleworkers miss face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication is more convenient because it includes non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions, haptics, gestures, postures, etc.) All means of non-verbal communication make understanding the context of the message easier. If people know each other personally, share joint experiences, it is easier for them to understand each other and the efficiency of communication increases.

Low level of information flow is another disadvantage teleworkers have to cope with. The worker working in home office regime may not have all the information on the organizational activities and therefore he/she may not interpret the information available correctly and fully and, in addition, he/she does not have opportunities enough to verify his/her understanding. There are numerous events permanently going on in organizations, many of them informal, and to understand them and interpret them correctly, the employee must often be part of the events. Informal communication with colleagues at lunch, in a colleague's office, etc., often helps to eliminate misunderstandings. In telework, however, these opportunities are fully excluded.

Another serious problem stems from limited understanding of the organizational culture. Organizational culture is a set of beliefs, values, and norms shared by the group that definitely influences the behaviour of its members. The set is constituted in long run and is based on the collective experience of successful solutions to the problems the group has been coping with, and therefore it is communicated as valid to the group's new members (Sajgalikova & Bajzikova, 2013). As comes from the above mentioned, the organization itself is the culture that develops, changes, and reacts to the changes. The teleworker, who is not part of the developments and does not experience the events together with his/her colleagues, starts losing contact with the organizational reality and gets more and more excluded. It must be taken into account that all the informal discussions, information exchanges, experiences result in the creation of unwritten rules and shared values that influence the workers' behaviour. Within the process, the worker subconsciously internalizes the values and norms because he/she experiences the same successful solutions as his/her colleagues do. To gain understanding and internalizing of the value and norm systems and their changes, the worker must experience the events with the others. This is impossible in the case of telework. If he/she is formally informed on the changes (mostly in writing) he/she hardly internalizes the changes because he/she may misunderstand the cultural message, may not understand the context, and may refuse them when confronting the new requirements with his/her frame of reference based on his/her previous experience with success. These decisive factors (group beliefs, values, and norms) have a crucial impact on the workers' approach toward their organization and its objectives. Without the collective experience wrong interpretations and misunderstandings are highly possible. This would result in decreasing ability to understand the organization and the events taking place in it as well as the reasons and rationale why they evolve as they do. It is directly linked to the understanding that comes with the longer stay with the organization – such an employee knows who can help him/her with a particular problem, who to contact in the case if an unexpected situation occurs. And, as it is usually the case, it is not the colleague occupying the relevant position in the formal structure or the one who is identifiable from the organizational documents. The teleworker may not have the information and therefore he/she does not necessarily perform adequately as he/she would if he/she worked daily on the organization's premises. This can lead to intrinsic dissatisfaction with the job resulting in demotivation, mainly because the feedback on the organization's part is more often negative. Usually the reasons given for the failure include the complaints such as that the necessary information was missing, there were no consultations with the colleagues when they were necessary, nobody answered an important e-mail message when necessary or the employee in question did not know who to contact in the particular situation. These are common conditions namely when organizational structure changes, human resources change in numbers, reengineering is introduced, etc.

The situation is the worst in the case of a teleworker who joins his/her company as a teleworker. He/she does not know his/her colleagues well enough, the person cannot establish relationships with his/her colleagues strong enough to enable him/her to stay adequately flexible to solve all the situations. The worker usually gets the information within

the induction process, however, due to undergoing changes he/she becomes more and more isolated. The isolation is even more intensive if the organization takes over more and more new employees who work in the traditional mode.

Demotivation stems also from the barriers in the teleworker's career path. As the research proves traditional workers enjoy bigger potential for promotion than teleworkers just because of being here and now, being available and seen when the events happen. Table 1 presents some selected differences between traditional work and telework.

Table 1 Selected differences between traditional work and telework

Traditional Work	Telework
The worker is present personally during his/her working hours.	The worker can be contacted exclusively via ICT.
Higher probability to understand communication.	Existing barriers to efficient communication – to understand usually requires more time.
Faster solutions of problems achieved together with colleagues possible – potential of finding and choosing more and better solutions.	Unknown situations evoke the feeling of helplessness if the worker does not know how to solve problems, does not know who to contact and is ignored by his/her busy colleagues.
Possible demotivation because of envying teleworkers that they can work at home.	Possible gradual demotivation due to failure at work in which the teleworker used to be successful.
Experiencing stereotype and routine at work in comparison with teleworkers; the traditional worker cannot freely rearrange his/her working hours.	The teleworker can decide not to work during day and stay longer at night or over weekend to accomplish the tasks – he/she is free to harmonize his/her personal and work-related duties.
Higher possibility of promotion due to the worker's presence at work.	Loss of contact and increasing social isolation leading to ever-lower ambitions.

Analysing communication opportunities under telework circumstances, currently there are several solutions available, such as e-mail, teleconference, videoconference, various chat platforms, such as Hangouts, Whatsapp, Facebook, Skype, and the like. All the channels, however, exclude seemingly small cues accompanying face-to-face communication, such as handshake, tapping on the shoulder or personal appraisal.

Teleworkers are devoid of the face-to-face expression of their colleagues' respect, possibility to help each other if they get in trouble, discuss the tasks over, and the like. Partially, the shortcomings can be overcome in chatting, but the protection of company information must be taken into account in such cases even though it is expected that companies plan to introduce encoded communication applications of their own in the future. The leak of information does not necessarily refer exclusively to the company information, it concerns also personal viewpoints shared among colleagues that would never appear in e-mail messages where individuals safeguard and protect themselves. Thus, teleworkers get isolated because what they can learn from everyday personal encounters in the organization, they cannot learn from daily e-mail correspondence.

Daily exchange of a host of e-mail messages and telephone calls represent another problem. Colleagues working in the traditional mode react negatively when frequently interrupted, while the teleworker just tries to check if he/she understands the task, maybe he/she wants to complete the insufficient or unclear information delivered by e-mail or he/she does not understand because he/she is actually not the addressee of the original message (usually happens with reply-to-all messages). And, maybe, the teleworker just wants to justify his/her position in the team or checks if he/she is still its member.

In communication the overall context must be considered as well. It is evident that virtual social relationships (exclusive internet communication) cannot substitute personal contacts, do not establish closer bonds among people and usually lead to superficiality and indifference that become barriers to efficient subordinates' performance. It results in the lack of immediate problem solving here and now as well as the lack of the workers' personal involvement in the solutions. Currently, organizations try to cope with the situation because any dysfunctional team can impair relationships that can lead to additional unnecessary costs.

Videochat creates the atmosphere differing from personal encounter in all aspects. It often happens that the chatters are pushing forward a final decision at the sake of longer negotiation and search for a better solution. The chat impairs reading non-verbal cues as it is abundantly utilized in face-to-face communication. Videochat evolves the atmosphere

of a videoconference and it is often perceived as formal communication. For instance, it does not allow for idea exchange during breaks as it becomes an added value of traditional conferences. Such exchanges often lead to new ideas or better solutions whose occurrence in videochats is absent.

Why do organizations implement telework then? It is evident that it results in saving financial means; the organization does not have to bear costs of premises, energy, parking lots; it does not have to take care of its employees' comfort, such as air conditioning in offices, food, etc. At the same time it allows more flexible adaptation to the market's conditions, namely in terms of time and place. The teleworker is often available to the client in wider range of time which he/she may adjust flexibly to achieve the objectives.

Usually, the teleworker welcomes the conditions of telework at the beginning, he/she considers the possibilities it offers to be beneficial and advantageous, however, that may not always remain as a functional motivating factor. Later on the circumstances may function negatively primarily due to social isolation resulting in lack of success, staying behind in information inflows as well as decrease in skills and overall satisfaction with the results of one's own work.

The question is how effective leadership in telework should look like. First, the worker who should work in telework mode must be prepared for the position. For better illustration of the specificity of telework, below we present the model of teleworkers' induction as well as the relevant model of leadership in telework.

### *2.1. Model of Teleworkers' Induction*

If teleworkers are to be successful two variables must be analysed: first, the level of a worker's competences and skills; second, the level of social isolation the worker experiences. Their combination forms 4 quadrants representing the levels of the variables (Fig 1).

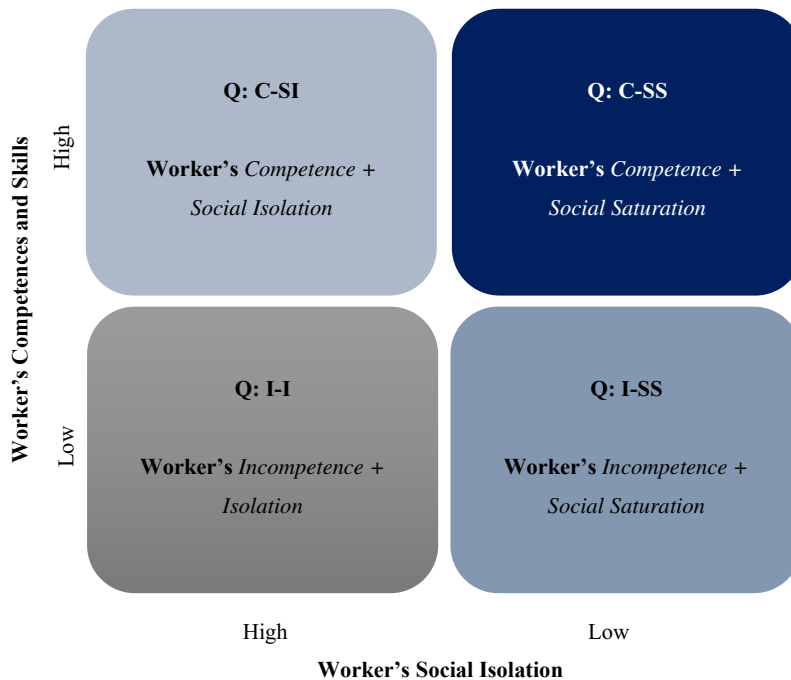


Fig. 1. Model of Teleworkers' Induction

In I-I Quadrant, the worker's level of skills is low and social isolation high. This is typical of a newcomer and may be intensified if a fresh graduate is employed without previous experience from other organizations.

Then the leader's role is to monitor the tasks execution (such workers lack sufficient skills) and, simultaneously, to enable the worker to develop close relationships with his/her colleagues. The leader must concentrate on building relationships among the employees and enhancement of their skills. He/she must support the atmosphere in which communication flows freely and contributes to the awareness of the importance of collegial mutual help. Those who have the skills must realize that the burden will ease if the newcomers are quickly orientated. The leader must monitor the outcomes more closely and, simultaneously, build and develop the appropriate atmosphere at the workplace. He/she must explicitly appraise success and improving of skills. He/she can utilize social events, ideally smaller and informal meetings, where the atmosphere of trust is obvious and skill levels typical of I-I Quadrant workers improve. Of course, training programmes can contribute to the move of such a worker to C-SI Quadrant. There the worker is highly skilled, but socially isolated. The reason is that the courses of this nature do not solve the workers' social isolation from their more-experienced colleagues – those do not attend such courses. In this case, the leader must focus on building relationships as his/her highest priority. When the training of newcomers is accomplished (they should move to C-SI Quadrant), the leader must concentrate on their incorporation into the team. The leader must keep in mind that his/her employees enhance their chance to further develop their skills necessary for their work in the organization (capacities linked to understanding the organization's functioning including its informal rules as mentioned above).

The employees of I-SS Quadrant exercise low level of social isolation, i.e. they feel being part of the team and are accepted by the team, however, they lack necessary skills. It cannot be expected that in the case of recruitment of several new recruits they build the needed relationships in the training they attend even before the training finishes. They can gain the necessary skills, they can establish firm relationships, but not with the colleagues they will cooperate next and who have already worked for the organization some time.

The workers in I-SS Quadrant have already worked in the organization for a long time, they have established the needed social links, but if a change occurs, such as the one in technology or production, software used, and the like, it can lead to lowering or even lack of necessary skills. The leader must arrange for training, frequent monitoring of the

results and informing on deficiencies. He/she must work on the atmosphere enhancing personal motivation toward self-improvement.

In C-SS Quadrant the worker feels low level of social isolation, he/she is perceived as part of the team and is highly skilled. He/she is ready for telework. The leader monitors the results *ad hoc* and maintains the established relationships. The leader does not have to monitor the worker's performance frequently (it is sufficient to do so monthly or quarterly), the worker can work in telework mode independently and is able to solve unexpected situations. His/her results reach high standards and often do not require corrections.

## 2.2. Model of Leadership in Telework

The teleworkers trained for telework have already gained the necessary level of skills and competence and do not suffer from low level of social saturation, i.e. they perceive themselves to be part of the team, belong to C-SS Quadrant. The leader must realize that such workers do not stay in the Quadrant forever. Even if the leader strives to keep *status quo*, the development sooner or later brings new situations. The changes in the organizational structure, technological procedures, reengineering, and the like can be some of the most frequent examples. The leader must be ready for the situations and be able to forecast the changes that will have an impact on teleworkers. The Model of Leadership (Fig. 2) below covers basic organizational changes and their impact on teleworkers.

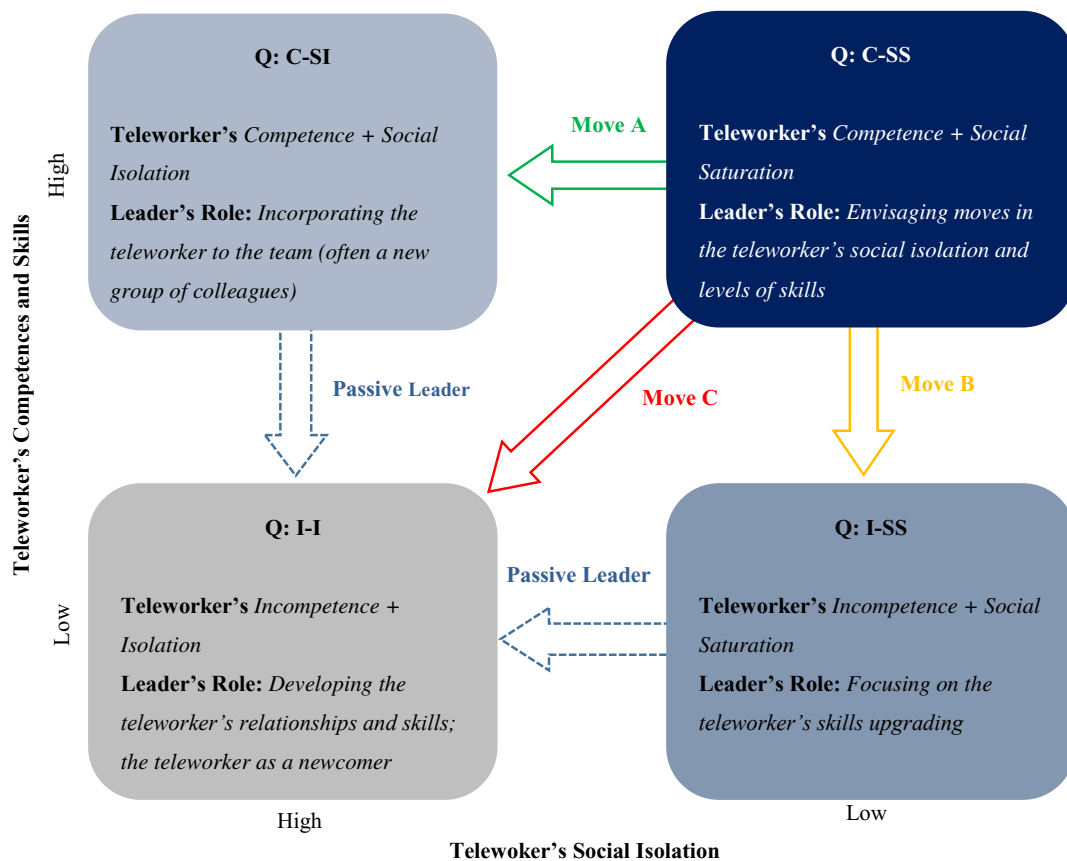


Fig. 2. Model of Leadership in Telework

From the viewpoint of leadership in telework, three moves can occur in the identified quadrants considering two variables: social isolation and level of competence and skills. The moves are as follows:

*Move A:* the teleworker moves from C-SS Quadrant to C-SI Quadrant.

*Move B:* the teleworker moves from C-SS Quadrant to I-SS Quadrant.

*Move C:* the teleworker moves from C-SS Quadrant to I-I Quadrant.



The moves stem from the fact that there are already teleworkers in the organization (C-SS Quadrant), but the situation changes and thus they move within the quadrants of the model.

*Move A* means that the teleworker moves from C-SS Quadrant (with high level of competence and skills, feels being part of the team and the team accepts him/her) to C-SI Quadrant. It means he/she is highly qualified, but feels isolated. Such a situation occurs when organizational structure is changed, teleworker is transferred to another team, or more newcomers are recruited simultaneously to the teleworker's team who start creating a new sub-team with its specific social norms and rules, habits, etc. The leader must eliminate the fledgling social isolation of the teleworker. To reach the objective he/she can implement teambuilding activities, however, they may not suffice. Sometimes, it is more effective to change telework to full-time work in the organization without delay, or to cut the number of days in telework mode a week. The leader must be ready to explain the reasons to the teleworker, so that he/she understands and accepts the temporary change.

If the leader stays passive, i.e. he/she does not eliminate the threat, the teleworker can move to I-I Quadrant with social isolation as well as lowered level of competence and skills. The skills deteriorate due to impaired understanding of the organization's functioning and procedures, activities and plans and inability to discuss the issues within his/her team. This often leads to demotivation linked frequently to insufficient outcomes which brings lowering of skills and increase in social isolation. The risk that the worker quits the organization and starts looking for a new job, because of his/her competence and skills probably in a competitor's organization, increases. Thus the leader must regain the worker's trust so that he/she accepts the temporary change/s.

*Move B* means that the teleworker is moved from C-SS Quadrant to I-SS Quadrant, i.e. the teleworker does not exercise the necessary competence and skills level, but he/she still feels being part of the team and is perceived to belong there by the team as well. Such a situation may occur in the case of technological changes, changes in organizational processes, and the like. The leader must eliminate decrease in the teleworker's competence and skills level and arrange for e.g. training or other forms of further development. In the case that other workers in the organization possess the required skills, the leader can utilize the opportunity and let the team members teach the teleworker. They will be motivated because they perceive the teleworker as part of their group and believe that any improvement in the teleworker's capacity can be beneficial to the team itself. The leader can cut the number of days the worker works in telework mode to enable him/her to spend more time with and in the team complementing and evolving his/her competence and skills. If the teleworker does not feel comfortable under such conditions, his/her attitude can be even considered an advantage. His/her motivation to improve his competence and skills will be much higher because the person himself/herself will try to return to the preceding telework position as soon as possible and will work hard to achieve the target level.

If the leader stays passive, the teleworker can move to I-I Quadrant not only characterized by incompetence, but also by high social isolation. This happens if the co-workers of the team outdo him/her in competences and skills and he/she stops being equally qualified partner. The teleworker turns demotivated then and the scenario presented above can be repeated, i.e. the teleworker probably leaves the organizations and joins a competitor what is obviously a disadvantage for the organization.

*Move C* means the teleworker's shift from C-SS Quadrant to I-I Quadrant, i.e. the teleworker lacks the necessary competence and skills and does not feel being part of the team, moreover, the team considers him/her to be an outsider. This situation can be evoked by reengineering or comprehensive changes in the organization or in its structure combined with technological and process changes, changes in top management combined with enlargement of business activities, etc. The leader must realize that he leads the teleworkers who can be likened to new recruits. The organization undergoes substantial changes, in which the teleworkers concerned do not take part in the way the traditional workers do and experience daily. The leader must terminate the telework mode and start the preparation process for the teleworkers in accordance with the Model in Fig. 1.

In this case a higher number of teleworkers take part in the move, sometimes even all of the leader's subordinates must participate. Under such conditions the leader's position itself may be endangered.

In moves A and B the number of teleworkers concerned is lower and the time when the teleworkers undergo moves varies. E.g. the change can relate to one teleworker who can be transferred to another department and his/her new leader tries to incorporate him/her to the new team. But with extensive changes the need for moves refers to more teleworkers and, in the case of a passive leader, they are not capable to fulfil the set tasks sufficiently and, in addition, they feel isolated from – in their perception – the 'new' organization. Moreover, their leader loses his/her stability as well.



### 3. Conclusion

In the end it must be highlighted that telework is not a fashionable short-term trend. This work arrangement will persist. There are means (ICT) supporting its implementation, workers consider the mode to be an advantage, but, on the other hand, it brings disadvantages not only to the organization but also to its workers. To maintain the adequate teleworkers' performance some situations may require to change their full-time telework status temporarily to a lower number of working days a week, e.g. twice a week, to return back to its full-time fashion. It is estimated that the number of workers in telework as well as the range of telework covering full-time to once a week arrangements will change dynamically in the future.

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