



European Civil Service Federation
Fédération de la Fonction Publique Européenne

PRESERVE TEAM SPIRIT AND FIGHT AGAINST “TEAM-OUT”



Better late than never, our Administration has taken on some of the material aspects of teleworking to better adapt the rules to the particular conditions imposed by the lockdown.

The first step is the reimbursement of the cost of a computer screen and an ergonomic chair. Other complementary measures are in preparation for 2021.

The material aspect must indeed be addressed, but this is not enough.

The intensive teleworking that has been going on since the beginning of the pandemic has brought on more insidious effects which can seriously affect our psyche. The emotional impact of the sudden rupture of face-to-face social ties has remained relatively underestimated by the Administration. This new type of illness, whose first symptoms are manifested by a confused feeling of isolation leading to withdrawal, has a name: "**TEAM-OUT**".

Online meetings and other means have made it possible to maintain, over a certain period of time, and in a formal way, the contacts which have been weakened by physical distancing. And even if our Administration has finally acknowledged this in view of the distressing increase in the number of colleagues in psychological difficulty and in Burn-Out, it has not fully understood the degree of individual isolation of the staff.

Admittedly, the very recent launch of the "[Boost your wellbeing](#)" initiative is a timid attempt to provide some response, but its programme is essentially an invitation to self-help. It is not sufficiently part of a proactive approach that would involve all colleagues, including managers at all levels, to boost morale and reach out to the most vulnerable.

The FEDERATION also deplores the fact that this initiative was put forward by the Administration with so little prior consultation. No Trade Union organisation was invited to take part in its development, nor the Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work. A choice all the more regrettable as it concerns the well-being and health of the staff and should therefore be part of the social dialogue.

In itself, however, the reasoning behind telework for its early supporters has always been the desire for a better balance between work and family life.

But if telework has brought a certain emotional benefit to family members because of their permanent presence under the family roof, the daily practice of telework has also revealed a risk: that the home gets so overwhelmed by professional demands that the boundary between family life and work becomes very blurred.

On a daily basis, we are no longer really at the office or really at home. A pervasive hyper-connectivity where our working hours are getting longer and affect our "free" time: and also makes us fear, in the long run, the evolution towards an increasingly virtual form of our workspace that will no longer have any real physical link with us.

There are still avenues to be explored on how to take action and prevent the risks of "team-out" in the long term. The Administration must continue to work on this, but must involve all staff representatives.

We are all concerned, and middle management in particular may also be affected by a situation for which it could not be adequately prepared. They may feel torn between looking after the wellbeing of their team, some of whom are showing signs of stress, and their senior management who would like everything to function as before. They also need support.

Many managers are trying to adapt their management style to meet the challenges of managing team members, some of whom have been overwhelmed by teleworking, so that they can motivate their teams in the long term. Suggestions should be given on how to manage their staff while avoiding any risk of treating them like children or being intrusive, which would certainly not go down well at all.

The challenges for management are considerable:

How can we continue to ensure the continuity of the European public service whilst also showing the necessary kindness and empathy to team members who might be "Out for the count" because of "Team-Out"?

How can we guard against any intrusion into the private and personal lives of staff and avoid confusion between the role of a manager and that of a therapist, which they certainly are not in any way?

The answers to these and so many other questions should be developed in a permanent and trusting dialogue between the Administration and the Organizations representing the Staff.

The FEDERATION is ready and willing to bring all its support.

The FEDERATION would also be very grateful to receive your own ideas on how to cope with or fight against "Team-Out."

The FEDERATION

Your reliable source of information

You'll never walk alone