

WP3 - Smart working and the organisation of labour: smart working and internal labour markets in **Romania**

Case Study 1 - Figshare Product



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Introduction

Figshare¹ (Singh, 2011), a London-based start-up backed by Digital Science², a division of publishers Macmillan³, describes its new 'Figshare for Institutions' as 'simple and cost-effective software' that can be used by institutions to securely host and make publicly available all academic research outputs (Hane, 2013). Figshare founder Mark Hahnel⁴ tells Chemistry World⁵ that the institutional data management system allows users to maintain full control of their research, including when and what they want to make public (Fenner, 2013). Public research outputs are grouped together at institutional and departmental levels, allowing easy filtering based on file type, tags and impact. Previously, institutions using figshare did not have the departmental and metric filtering capabilities, he says, adding: '*Instead of just public or private research, they can create private working spaces which can be made available to specified colleagues or collaborators. These spaces allow all parties to upload files or notes and comment on each of the uploads.*' While individual users can publish their research outputs on Figshare for free and receive 1GB of private storage space, Hahnel says institutions will be charged an annual licence fee (Hahnel, 2013). In return, institutions are allocated huge amounts of private storage space, unlimited public space and an easy to use data management system. Figshare, launched in 2012, made 200,000 files publicly available during its first year of operation and now has about 1 million research objects available (Stafford, 2013).

Hahnel first developed the platform as a personal custom solution for the organization and publication of diverse research products generated in support of his PhD in stem cell biology⁶ (Hooijmans and Ritskes-Hoitinga, 2013). In January 2013, Figshare announced a partnership with PLOS⁷ to integrate Figshare data hosting, access, and visualization with their associated PLOS articles (Kishor, 2013). In September 2013, the service launched a hosted institutional repository service. In December 2013, they announced integration with ImpactStory⁸ to support the collection of altmetrics. Figshare also hosts the Reproducibility Collection as a founding member of The Reproducibility Initiative⁹, which acts as an independent and blinded validator for replication of submitted data. Figshare releases 'The State of Open Data' each year to assess the changing academic landscape around open research (Hyndman, 2017).

With three offices, one in Iasi, Romania, one in London, UK and one in Boston, USA, the IT company has 35 employees, mostly in Romania¹⁰. During the pandemic, working outside the office was implemented very easily, in the context where most companies in Iasi and in Romania had to work from home.

In the interview organized through a Zoom session, 6 employees of the Figshare company participated, one of which is from the management team.

¹ <https://figshare.com/>

² <https://www.digital-science.com/>

³ <https://macmillan.com/>

⁴ https://figshare.com/authors/Mark_Hahnel/96371

⁵ <https://www.chemistryworld.com/>

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Figshare>

⁷ <https://plos.org/>

⁸ <https://profiles.impactstory.org/>

⁹ <https://validation.scienceexchange.com/#/reproducibility-initiative>

¹⁰ <https://knowledge.figshare.com/about>

Management of out-of-office work

The Figshare company had been offering employees the possibility to work from home for about 1 year before the start of the pandemic. Out-of-office work was regulated according to the laws in place (Labor Code¹¹, CHAPTER 9 - Work at home¹², articles 108¹³ (Legal definition and special characters), 109¹⁴ (Home work contract) and 110¹⁵ (Equality of treatment)). Everyone can choose how to work (on-site or online). 4 of the 6 employees who participated in the interview had already used the opportunity to work from home before the pandemic.

On an out-of-office day at Figshare, the work is organised as follows: *'The working day starts with a daily meeting where the status of the previous day, the plan for the current day, the issues, and the tasks (a methodology based on Scrum¹⁶ (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2020)). The work consists in analysing the technical specifications, realising requirements, writing code, and creating test cases. Everybody keeps in touch with his colleagues on call, during the day. When they finish working they have to give a status on slack¹⁷.*

Regarding the **benefits** of out-of-office work, the participants in the interview enumerate the following main advantages:

- **saving time spent in traffic;**
- the **flexibility to work from almost every place in the world** (~10% of employees put it into practice by leaving Iasi and starting to work from different places);
- the fact that they could **concentrate better on daily activities** (which leads to increased productivity and a decrease in downtime);
- the advantages of a **fresh lunch**.

Regarding the **main challenges, bottlenecks, and difficulties** related to out-of-office work they enumerate:

- there is **no clear distinction and boundaries between life and work;**
- the **lack of socializing;**
- **building trust and relationships are harder**, especially with new employees;
- **limited feedback** in the team;
- the **informal knowledge transfer is lacking**. The conversations that happen during coffee breaks tend to be just as productive as those for which meetings are scheduled. These informal conversations do not happen when working from home.

¹¹ Labor Code: <https://www.codulmuncii.ro/homepage.html>

¹² Work at home: https://www.codulmuncii.ro/titulul_2/capitolul_9_1.html

¹³ Legal definition and special characters: https://www.codulmuncii.ro/titulul_2/capitolul_9/art_108_1.html

¹⁴ Home work contract: https://www.codulmuncii.ro/titulul_2/capitolul_9/art_109_1.html

¹⁵ Equality of treatment: https://www.codulmuncii.ro/titulul_2/capitolul_9/art_110_1.html

¹⁶ *'Scrum is an agile development methodology used in the development of Software based on an iterative and incremental processes.'* <https://www.digite.com/agile/scrum-methodology/>

¹⁷ Slack: <https://slack.com/> *'used for chat, send audio and video clips, or for talk things out live'*

Impact of COVID-19 on managing out-of-office work

On 16 of March 2020 was the first day when all employees from Figshare signed the teleworking papers (as annex to their contract, according to the law), although they had this benefit before the pandemic. The management team encouraged all employers to take from the company office whatever they needed for good working conditions (chairs, monitors, keyboards, etc.). Before the pandemic, working from home could be done for short periods of time, but after the pandemic, the possibility to work for longer periods of time was introduced with the agreement of the management team.

Regarding the problems encountered during the pandemic, they mention the space aspect: *that work will take over at least part of a room – creating a quiet environment may not be easy for those with children or living in a small apartment. Also, at the end of working hours, the work equipment (unless it's just a laptop) will still occupy some space or will have to be moved every time.* The managers have the challenge to keep “the eye” above the remote colleagues' work and to try not to go into deep micro-management.

Working conditions in out-of-office work

Although for the IT sector, there are no big differences when working remotely or from the office, the interview participants wanted to point out a few aspects. The **differences** identified between working outside the office and other forms of work were the following:

- **more online meetings** are needed when you work outside the office;
- outside the office, **working from almost anywhere is allowed** (provided there is internet access);
- it offers by far the **most flexibility in terms of personal life** and requires the **least time to get ready** (no commute, no strict dress code);

The operational part of the company cannot really work 100% remotely due to specific law regulation which requires physical presence in the office for signing different papers for example or for maintenance activities. These activities must be carried out physically because physical resources need to be replaced or reinstalled. We also mention the scheduled delivery of new equipment needed for servers or workstations assigned to new clients.

In Table 1 below, we have analyzed working outside the office in the Figshare company with reference to several aspects of working conditions. Although in general, the participants in the interview considered that work outside the office is not influenced by these aspects, there were several observations that we caught in this table.

Aspect	How does out-of-office	Remarks
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	work affect the aspect?	
Earnings	the salaries remain the same	employers save time and money necessary to commute to the office or for lunches (office lunch is more expensive than lunch prepared at home)
Working time and flexibility of working hours	the same as in the office	the time lost in traffic is gained and everyone appreciated this positively
Work-life balance	the same for five of them and worst for one of them	- five of them reported that they gain more time to spend with their family and they appreciated this positively - one said that he preferred the version with physical work because it is much simpler for him to separate life outside the office in this way
Stability and job security	the same as in the office	no one indicated that working from home would be an issue
Social protection	the same as in the office	they didn't see any difference
Employment status/form of contract	the same as in the office	their work remains the same that in the office
Engagement and motivation to work	the same as in the office, with ups and downs	maybe, slightly more motivating being at the office thanks to being surrounded by people working towards the same goals
Productivity at work	seems to be the same and depends on the tasks	- working from home is a bit more productive with own tasks; and office work is more productive on tasks that require input from others - overall, it decreased at the beginning of the pandemic period but increased after the first 2 months of the pandemic
Stress, the intensity at work	seems to be the same and depends by person	- it's a matter of personal reaction to outside stimuli
Occupational health and safety	the same as in the office	they didn't see any risk to health & safety, or rather, the risks that appear in one part are the same in the other part
Integration at the workplace	the same as in the office	although it's easier to connect with colleagues while working from the office than from home
Right to disconnect	seems to be the same and depends on person	for some it is easier to disconnect from the office (going home), and for others from home (disconnect from devices)
Aspect	How does out-of-office work affect the aspect?	Remarks

Costs of out-of-office work	seems to be the same	there are additional maintenance expenses (electricity for devices and air conditioning), but they earn money from not traveling and with a cheaper lunch
Commuting and work-related travels	decrease very much	some of them live farther away from the office and for them this was a big factor
Access to trade unions , collective bargaining	the same as in the office	no changes from this point of view
Access to information, consultation, and participation rights	seems to be the same	- although, information transfer is easier when working from the office thanks to the opportunities to have informal conversations - in the same time, the company offered the possibility and accessibility to information via online tools

Table 1: How have several aspects of working outside the office been affected?

Impact of COVID-19 on working conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic has not impacted the out-of-office work in Figshare company in terms of working conditions. They implemented out-of-office from one year ago, and they moved from 1-2 days per month maximum before the pandemic to mandatory working from home during the pandemic. They have the possibility to take home all the work equipment and they worked at home like in the office. Thus for the employers, remote work didn't have a negative impact on working conditions, in the context in which they already experienced the out-of-office aspects and feelings.

The **main challenges for out-of-office work during the pandemic** in terms of working conditions identified during the interview were the following:

- **hard to focus** and to stay focused in the same manner as they were doing this while they are in a meeting room in the office;
- **socialisation** with colleagues **was more difficult**;
- there is **less time dedicated to team building** and doing fun things together (remote work is more goal and task-oriented);
- In the beginning, **communication with colleagues was more difficult**. For example, when somebody was at the office, he could go directly to a colleague to discuss a certain problem. But, with working from home, there were long waiting times. But, with time, these problems were fixed;
- **keeping the “eyes” open against productivity**.

Measures needed to be implemented in order to ensure decent working conditions in Figshare company for the employees working out-of-office were the following:

- to have their **own “office” space at home**:
 - **money** allocated **for hardware and software tools** to use in order to be able to do their work;

- **money** could be allocated **for electricity and internet** services;
- the **company representative should be more flexible:**
 - **when asking for the strict presence** of the employees, online, every minute and every second;
 - when are **power/internet service outages** – if this happened in the office, the company would take the hit. When working from home, employees are expected to recoup those hours.

They didn't see differences across various workers' groups or offices from Figshare company.

Skills in out-of-office work

The interview participants identify the following **necessary skills for efficient out-of-office work:**

- **a sense of responsibility/ownership of/pride in one's work;**
- **self discipline;**
- **seriousness;**
- **professionalism;**
- **maturity;**
- **focus;**
- **a good organization and management of time;**
- **good communication** (concise, to the point).

All participants in the interview agreed that the out-of-office work allows them for **future professional development** – in Figshare company or in other IT companies. Their future professional development will fully depend on the technology required to learn or different soft skills to achieve. In this context, their current job in the Figshare company allows them to develop professionally. Of course, it depends a lot on everyone, but working from home has the advantage that they save time that then they can use in personal development. The training and workshops are rarely necessarily organised in person, they are done in a hybrid format lately. As far as soft skills go, they may move to the level that is necessary for an out-of-office environment. They noticed that their ability to make small-talk has suffered, but they had grown in areas like making presentations, and preparing & delivering concise messages verbally as well as in writing. Overall, they think that the form of work is not a negative factor in professional development. In parallel, the entire management focused to continue to allow (via different ways) the possibility of professional development for everyone.

Regarding **developing their professional career in out-of-office work**, they agree that in their case is possible, because they work in the IT domain, but not all of them want to take it into consideration in the next period of time. **Persons that take it into consideration**, agree with the advantages that allow them to save time and to stay more with family (here are persons with experience and with families). **Persons that do not take it into consideration**, consider that socialisation, and face-to-face communication with people is very important and offers the main skills to make a career path successful (there are people at the beginning of their career). Also, they value the physical separation of work and home quite highly, which is not possible in their current living arrangement. If they had a separate room in their home that they could dedicate to an office, they would consider an out-of-office work opportunity to be equal to an in-office one. Regarding the necessary skills to do their job from the out-of-office, they consider that they need the same skills as for an in-office work opportunity.

They didn't see any major obstacle in developing their skills hindering the progress of their career when working from the out-of-office. They agree that informal conversations at the office are quite valuable, and that is lost when working from home. Also, a part of them agrees that prefer to attend a conference or a presentation face-to-face instead of attending an online one. Solutions to these shortcomings, can be (1) either arrange for recurring meetings that don't have a specific agenda (to allow people to brainstorm/talk about anything), or (2) formally organise "tech talks" where subject matter experts from within the company present their work/information that could be useful to their peers.

In order to develop their skills to develop in their career, participants in the interview talk about the following possible kinds of support:

- **tech talks** – voluntary presentations from people within the company;
- **external training courses** (either university / third party training providers) that teach skills relevant to their current roles & their potential next roles within the company;
- **workshops** where it is possible to learn theory and practise the skills at the same time;
- **discussions with management** to reveal other solutions (books, online courses, etc.).

Role of social partners in ensuring workers rights and decent working conditions in out-of-office work

The employees of the Figshare company are not organised in a union and hence the lack of union actions. The work from home was enforced by the law due to pandemic so there was no discussion or point to negotiate with the company management (DECREE no. 195 of March 16, 2020 regarding the establishment of the state of emergency on the territory of Romania¹⁸). The Figshare company provided all the work equipment and the technical support that allows employers to do out-of-office work. The right to information and consultation was respected and the employers felt informed and safe in any type of work. They have not heard about any issues in regard to workers' rights within out-of-office work.

In the end, a part of them says that they prefer working in an office. They consider requiring physical presence in-office every working day a deal-breaker for any potential employer. This wasn't the case before the COVID-19 pandemic – the standards for employee flexibility have changed drastically.

Conclusions

In this study, we saw how some of the employees of the Figshare IT firm see work out-of-office. Regarding working out-of-office, the participants in the interview saw both advantages and disadvantages. For example, from the point of view of **earnings** when working from home, an advantage would be that they earn the money needed to travel from home to the office and to buy lunch, and a disadvantage would be that maintenance expenses would be higher. From the point of view of **productivity**, an advantage would be obtained in working from home in the case of individual tasks (where you can concentrate better), and an advantage would be obtained from the office in the case of collective tasks (when you can interact more

¹⁸ DECREE no. 195 of March 16, 2020: <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/223831>

simply and effectively with colleagues in the team). Also, **experienced people** prefer to work from home and in this way they spend more time with their family, while **less experienced people** prefer working from the office, where they can more easily receive guidance from other colleagues.

In the Figshare company, but in general in the IT field, employees used many of the software tools required for remote work before the pandemic, and the transition to remote work during the pandemic was simple and natural. If before the pandemic remote work was only accidental and allowed for short periods of time, after the pandemic the regulations have changed and now it is something natural and it is allowed to work remotely for longer periods of time.

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