

# **Flexibility and Wellbeing for Office Performance on the Romanian Market**

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## **Abstract**

In the contemporary organisations the human resources and the facilities that have are two majors driven forces for performance. In my own PhD research, conducted between 2007 and 2012, I was demonstrated that there are strong relations between the facilities and business performance. In 2018 I started a new research, more focused on the impact of new ways of working on the organisational performance and the relation between them and wellbeing. The main part of the current project is a case study from the Romanian branch of an Austrian Insurance Company where we investigate the possibility to reduce the office space for 340 people keeping the same activities and number of employees but introducing new ways of working. Another research part called “Office Flexibility” has the purpose to evaluate the level of performance and wellbeing of people from Romanian companies that already have introduced new ways of working as flex / home office and coworking plus the general awareness for this topic. Office Flexibility research is based on an electronic questionnaire that was applied to a number of 94 office workers. Both elements of the research show that Romanian office workers know well concepts of the New Ways of Working and they consider that are suitable solutions to improve the level of personal wellbeing and the level of organizational performance.

**Keywords:** workplace, flex office, wellbeing, office performance

## **1. About Office Performance and Facilities**

Office facilities spaces include material resources and services that employees need to carry on their activity. This category includes office furniture, office equipment, electrical infrastructure, IT&C, Systems, security, HVAC systems, lightning systems, etc.

A definition of Facility Management I developed in my own PhD research “The Influence of Facilities on the Office Performance” conducted between 2007 and 2012, in order to highlight the relations between facilities and performance. My definition is:

“Facility Management is the integration of design and maintaining activities of buildings, workspaces and workplaces as well as other support services in order to achieve a maximum ratio between organizational and individual performance on the one side and the costs of initial investment and operating costs on the other side”.

Examples of support services are: communications systems, security systems, maintenance services, catering services, cleaning services. All these services need to be developed, improved, maintained and updated throughout the entire life of the building.

The main model of my PhD research “The Influence of Facilities on the Office Performance” is developed from the basic model “balanced scorecard” [BSC]. The BSC model offers a general overview about the global performance of any business or organisation and it is focused on managing the implementation of the strategy and operational activities with a mix of financial and non-financial data items organised in four main directions: financial, customer, internal business processes plus learning and growth of people.

According with Norton and Kaplan the BSC elements are available for any kind of business or organisations from anywhere but in the contemporary society a business or organisation that starts to have a certain level of complexity and number of people in order to run need to have a frame where we can consider two polar elements: Information Technology and Communication [IT&C] infrastructure – hardware and software, on the one hand, and the space facilities - building, workspaces, workplaces (fit out, furniture, ambient), on the other hand. This main model developed and called “The Influence of Facilities on the Office Performance” [IFOP] in the PhD research work as an electric motor. The BSC elements are the moving part – rotor and the IT&C and space facilities elements is the basic magnet field pole – stator, Fig 1.



Fig. 1: “The Influence of Facilities on the Office Performance” [IFOP] model

The topics of IFOP model development are the space facilities (fit out, furniture, ambient) where three important categories are to be considered: buildings, workspaces and workplaces.

- A. For the **building** analyse we have to consider the following elements: building classification, lighting and electro faculties, security facilities, location, HVAC.
- B. The **workspace** elements considered in the IFOP model are: number of employees per square meter; types of office spaces, furniture and interior design quality, price per square meter of space, initial and recurrent costs of facilities.
- C. The **workplace** elements are: type of workplaces (personal, rotated work places – flex office, mobile and non-territorial workplaces, but can be also a classification between operative, executive and managerial workplaces), chairs quality, desk quality, storage facilities.

## 2. Flexibility and Wellbeing for Office Performance research methodology

In the current research “Flexibility and Wellbeing for Office Performance on the Romanian Market” [FWOP] I have the purpose to evaluate the impact of flex and home office on the organisational performance and the relation between flex / home office / coworking and wellbeing in the companies on the Romanian market. The main part of the current project is a case study from the Romanian branch of an Austrian Insurance Company [RBAIC] where we investigate the possibility to reduce the office space for 340 people with approx. 20%, keeping the same activities and number of employees but introducing new ways of working as flex and home office. The frame time for this study was between March and July 2018. Another research

part called “Office Flexibility” has the purpose to evaluate the level of performance and wellbeing of people from Romanian companies that already have introduced new ways of working as flex / home office and coworking plus the general awareness for this topic. This part is based on an electronic questionnaire that is applied to the GreenForest clients and partners on one side and in the network of ROFMA (Romanian Facility Management Association) members on the other side. The data was collected between 26 June 2018 and 7 July 2018.

## 2.1. Methodology of *RBAIC* case study

Parallel with the evaluation of the space efficiency I analysed, with the beneficiary, the opportunity to introduce new ways of working as flex and home office in order to improve the quality of life for employee and them personnel wellbeing on the one hand and to improve the global performance of the company on the other hand.

The case study had the following steps:

- A. Methodology preparation and beneficiary primary dates evaluation
- B. Beneficiary project team communication and the methodology finalisation
- C. Interviews with a number of 35 employee from different departments
- D. Data processing and report writing

The case study was based on space, process and people analysis. For the process analysis I applied the Porter’s Value Chain Model, Fig. 2. The process analyse was an important input also for the space planning.



Fig. 2: Porter’s Value Chain Model

The people analysis was based on individual interviews and interviews with 2, 3 or 4 people at the same time. People got an invitation by e-mail where the name of project “Flexibility and wellbeing for the *RBAIC* community”, the purpose “to evaluate the opportunity of introducing new ways of working as flex office and partial home office” and the interview main topics mentioned. I used a guided interview developed from the „Hygiene factors and motivators“ model, author Lister, Kate; Harnish Tom (2016) “Work on the move 2: Well-being in the workplace” IFMA Foundation and published also in the ISS 2020 Vision - Future of Work, Workforce and Workplace - Capstone White Book, Fig. 3.

Records made during of interviews had the following topics:

- A general overview to understand what wellbeing at work means to them
- Evaluation of RBAIC’s people perception of workplace ergonomics, temperature, lighting, noise, privacy, healthy, safety, food facilities and life / work balance
- Process evaluation as input, transformations and output
- Communication methods as direct meetings, phone conversations, call and video conferences
- Key Performance indicators [KPI] relevance and adequacy for “work from home”
- People learning and growth perspective, collaboration and level of self accomplishment
- Feedback for partial “work from home” and flexible / non-territorial workplaces potential implementation

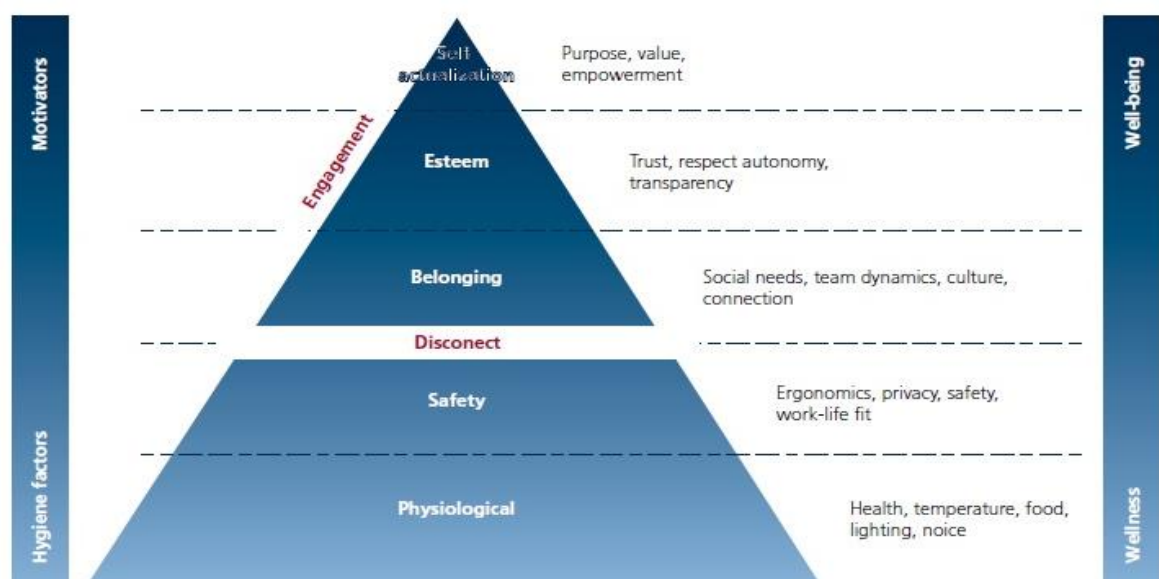


Fig. 3: Hygiene factors and motivators. Source: “Work on the move 2: Well-being in the workplace” (2016) and „ISS 2020 Vision - Future of Work, Workforce and Workplace - Capstone White Book“ (2017)

## **2.2. Methodology of “Office Flexibility” research**

The electronic questionnaire was applied to 94 persons from a relevant target group consisting of employees from multinationals companies that have or not implemented “new ways of working” [NWW] but also different kind of owners or employees of SME’s or people that are using coworking spaces. The questioner had a few closed questions about the NWW experience but also opinions about the NWW personal suitability or organisational suitability and also an open question about personal NWW meaning. Four types of NWW where addressed in this research as following: partial home office [PHO], total home office [THO], flex office [FO] and coworking [CW]. PHO I define the jobs that are make a part of time from the employer’s office space and a part of time from home. THO meaning to do almost all job from home. FO means in this research means nonpersonal or non-territorial work stations, or hot desks – shared desks concept combined with collaborative, informal office spaces or focus room areas. CW means working in a rented workplace as a freelancer or a small business and sharing more office facilities with the rest of people that have rented workplaces in the same conditions.

## **3. RBAIC case study**

The final objectives established with the client for the RBAIC project was:

- Space transformations for RBAIC office community enhancement
- Improving the office facilities due to of creation of special spaces for collaborative tasks and focused tasks
- Improving the internal mobility and spontaneous communication trough introducing flexible / non-territorial work places
- A better life / work balance through “partial work from home” concept implementation
- To improve the space efficiency due to of space reduction with 1 level from total of 6 levels in the RBAIC head office

The case study has 3 major components: interviews, internal process overview and space planning recommendations.

### **3.1. Audit interviews**

#### **3.1.1. Workplace wellbeing perception**

The introduction open question in the topic of interview was about the general perception of wellbeing at the office. I asked what is the first thought about workplace wellbeing trying to ignore the current project. I grouped the answers in 6 important items: flexible and home office;

quiet, focus and concentration; collaborative and psychosocial environment; space and ergonomics topics; tasks orientation issues; other organizational programs.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Answer content</b>	<b>No. of answers</b>
1	Work from home - partial	4
2	Work-life balance	3
3	Flexible work schedule and home office for a better focus	2
4	Difficult to implement home office for my own activity	2
5	Freedom of choice regarding of place for work	1
6	Reduction of traffic time	1
7	Wellbeing and space ok at RBAIC, open for new ways of work	1
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>14</b>

Tab. 1: Flexible and home office answers associated with workplace wellbeing

From the beginning the RBAIC's people was very interested, open and in general very positive about flex & home office.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Answer content</b>	<b>No. of answers</b>
1	Focus and concentration environment without other perturbations	5
2	Quiet area	3
3	Missing of crowding	2
4	Missing of noise	2
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>12</b>

Tab. 2: Quiet, focus and concentration answers associated with workplace wellbeing

In general the quiet, focus and concentration answers were connected with flex and partial home office. The partial home office was considered a solution for focus and concentration issues.

No.	Answer content	No. of answers
1	Positive work environment with accent on psychosocial factors	5
2	Team work	3
3	Collaborative and positive environment	3
4	Motivated team	1
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>12</b>

Tab. 4: Space and ergonomics topics answers associated with workplace wellbeing

No.	Answer content	No. of answers
1	Comfort	2
2	Relaxing and gaming area	2
3	Green area	1
4	My private space, total against of flex and home work	1
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>6</b>

Workplace ergonomics as chair and table was appreciate as suitable but it was revealed that more of 50% of the RBAIC's employees doesn't use the chairs facilities for dynamic seating.

Tab. 5: Tasks orientation issues answers associated with workplace wellbeing

No.	Answer content	No. of answers
1	Happiness of work in all tasks	1
2	Quality of services from internal and external suppliers, how quick and good they do the tasks	1
3	Reduction of routine	1
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>3</b>

Tab. 6: Other organizational programs answers associated with workplace wellbeing

No.	Answer content	No. of answers
1	Healthy programs	1
2	Office massage	1
<b>Total no. of answers</b>		<b>2</b>

Tab. 7: Collaborative and psychosocial environment answers associated with workplace wellbeing

### 3.1.2. Workplace wellbeing of RBAIC's people evaluation

When I asked details about the particular wellbeing RBAIC's factors the highest numbers of complains was about work-life balance with accent on time for come and leave from work and lack of focus – a concentration condition that has consequence also in work-life balance. Many employees mentioned that they have to work from home in the private time in order to do tasks where they need concentration. Other important mentions was that there is not enough private space, food facilities, air conditioning, heating and cooling, poor intimacy, security tasks with inadequate open space workplace.



### **3.1.3. People learning and growth**

Trainings for personal development plus sport and artistic programs cover the needs of those interviewed. Regarding of professional and specialized training people from few departments expressed that they need more specialized courses. The only one area where I discover that are problems of career planning and employee retention is Purchasing and Support Services, including the people from the reception.

### **3.1.4. Collaboration and level of self accomplishment**

The most important complain regarding of collaboration provided by almost all interviewed people was the number and time consuming of formal meeting the current situation of space is not enough formal meetings rooms. It is a good level of cohesion and integration of the new people inside of teams / departments but there is poor relation with other people from organization. All interviewed people apparently are self-accomplished with there jobs. Nine of them affirm that certainly even if they will have all material need covered for live they would do the same job as volunteer for free.

### **3.1.5. Feedback for partial home office and flexible workplaces**

The general feedback for partial home office and flexible workplaces was positive and actually there is a high expectation feedback sentences as “finally we have a discussion in RBAIC about this topic”. Many of the interviewed people worked in the past from home, or they have family members with home office or friends and they have a good opinion for partial home office but negative for total home office.

A large majority of the interviewed people, 24 people - 68%, considered as a positive factor for their jobs and teams to introduce work from home two days per week and 4 people – 11%, one day per week. In the same time they were open to the idea to have flexible, non-territorial workplaces.

Three interviewed people mentioned that they have to keep the closed office and not shared for security reasons, or they should to keep a departmental area even if it is open. Some fears available desks shortage, or be distracted home by their own children under the age of 5.

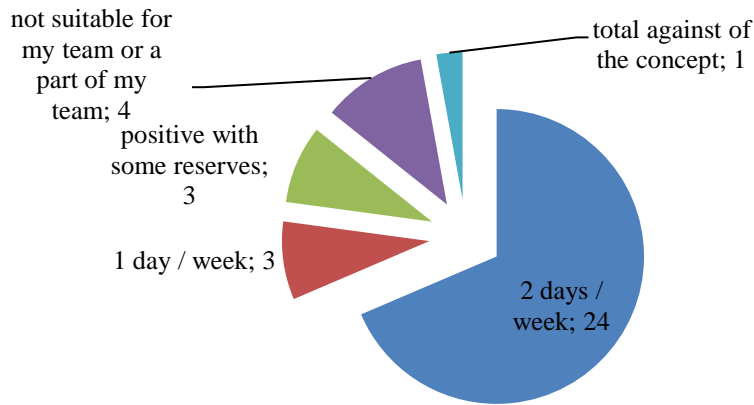


Fig. 4: Feedback for partial home office and flexible workplaces

The partial home office and flexible workplaces was considered not suitable by the interviewed people for 4 compartments that represent less of 20% from the total number of workplaces.

One single person from those interviewed people was total against of the home & flex office because for him, in particular, it is very important to have a private space with printed documents even if are not necessary to be print as working procedures. Also for him it is very important to have the possibility to communicate spontaneous with every one of his collaborators in any moment. He also mentioned that this is only the first step to cut finally RBAIC a half from the office space.

### 3.2. RBAIC's process overview

For the general analyze of RBAIC's process I applied Porter's Value Chain Model to the RBAIC organizational structure in order to build a general view and flow for RBAIC main process. The result was a custom RBAIC process map based in interviews where a large time was allocated to analyze the job descriptions and process managed by the interviewed people.

### 3.3. Space planning considerations

Main proposal is to create of a new type of space "office community plaza" at the grand floor. Here should be the most active space from the RBAIC organization with the following functions:

- to be the most important nodal point of direct communication from RBAIC, where the employees has opportunity to interact spontaneously between them and with RBAIC partners
- to be a type of space that accelerate the creativity, innovations and new ideas and in the same time has a RBAIC community enhancement
- to be a space that can accommodate the people that has days of home office but they prefer to be in the organization or they have tasks that require them physic presence at the RBAIC head office
- to be a space where more flexible and relaxed meetings can be done in order to reduce the frequency of the formal meetings from the present.



Fig. 5: GreenForest's proposal for RBAIC's office community area

In order to solve the concentration and focus complains I recommend creating a few areas with library rules. This means that in this closed spaces people don't talk between them or by phone.

In the space planning recommendations I used as main indicator "desk allocation rate" that is the ratio between the number of desks and the number of employees. In the regular open space I propose groups of 6 desks plus a supplementary one perpendicular on the traffic flow that has not an ergonomic position but can be used as reserve desk. For this reason I didn't calculate them as basic desks.

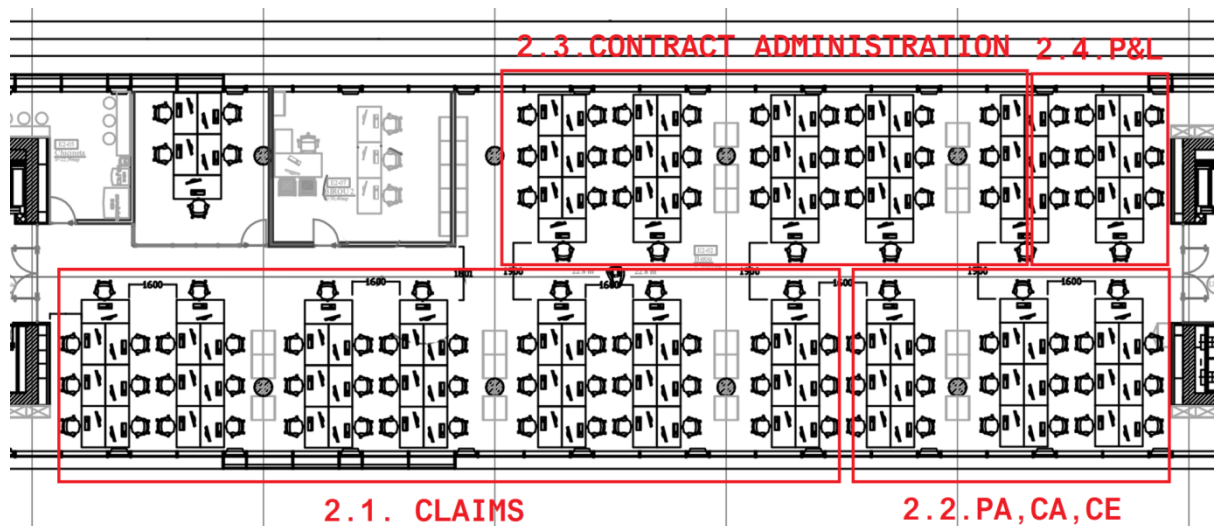


Fig. 6: RBAIC space planing proposal

### 3.4. Recommendations made for RBAIC

In the RBAIC Romania head office it is a high positive expectation regarding of partial home office & flex office implementations. In the same time it is a high potential of improvement for the collaborative facilities plus focus and concentration facilities with high impact on creativity, innovation, productivity and general people wellbeing.

The space efficiency objective is a sensitive and critical point for employees but in the same time if it is managed well can be transformed in a good organizational changing opportunity. This was the idea from the start and if it will be continued in the spirit of the project recommendations can have a high impact in order to improve the people global performance and their wellbeing.

The main recommendations are:

- To introduce partial home office 1 day / week in the majority of directions and departments from RBAIC with desk allocation rate by 80%. Even if the majority of department's managers consider that home office can be 2 days / week it is better to have a longer transition time with 1 day / week.
- To make sense in terms of space efficiency the partial home office should be combined with flex office, respectively non-territorial and non-personal workplaces. In general this is a critical point in terms of organizational changes but interviewed people were very open and they understood well the concept.

- To create “The Office Community Plaza” at ground floor as nodal point of direct communication from RBAIC, where the employees have opportunity to interact spontaneously between them and with RBAIC partners. Other functions are to accommodate people that have days of home office but they should to be in the organization and to be a space where can be done more flexible and relaxed meetings. Here it is an area that should to accelerate creativity, innovations and new ideas and in the same time to make a RBAIC community enhancement.
- To make a few areas with library rules in order to solve the concentration and focus complains. This means that in this space people don’t talk between them or by phone.

#### 4. Office Flexibility research part

##### 4.1. Profile of respondents

From the age point of view the higher number of respondents had the age between 25 and 35 years old (– 42%) follow by the age group between 35-50 years old (– 37%).

Regarding the structure of the respondents we consider 2 important jobs category, operative and executive. Executive are considered any persons that have the responsibility and authority to make decisions on how to achieve the organization's goals, not necessary correlate with team coordination. The number of respondents was quite well balanced, operative 46% respondents and executive 48%. From the team coordination activities point of view 30% of respondents coordinate teams with more than 3 people. From an entrepreneurial point of view 9% of respondents are owners of a business with more than 3 employees and 16% of respondents are self-employed or owner of a business with a maximum of 3 employees.

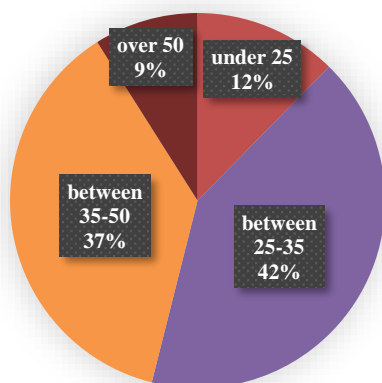


Fig. 7: Age structure of the Flexibility Research respondents

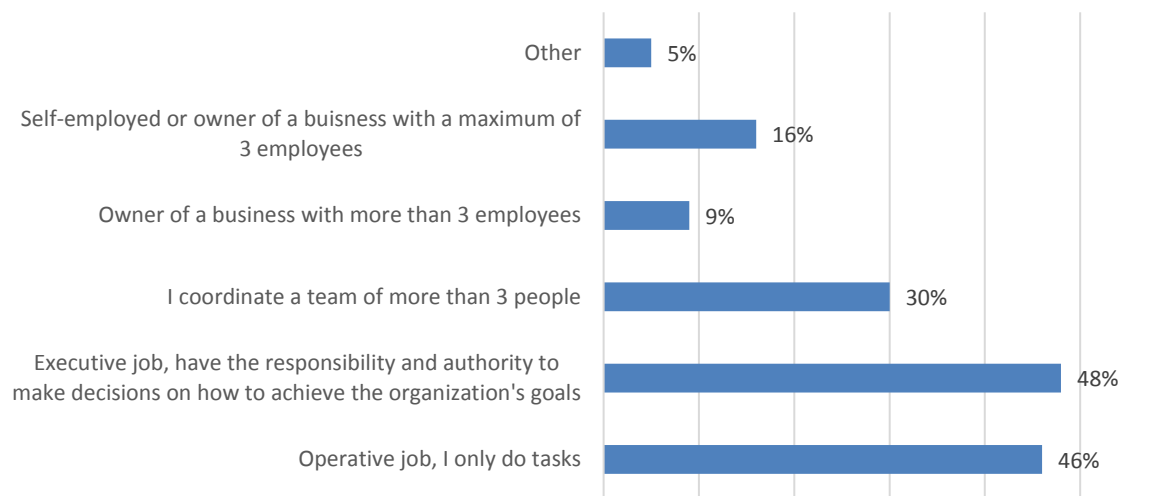


Fig. 8: Activities structure of the Office Flexibility Research respondents

## 4.2. NWW experiences

First topic of the research was about NWW experience. First observation it is that majority of the respondents know the concepts from this research. PHO and FO are frequently used by respondents or other family members, 41% from respondents work now with PHO, 23% with FO and 22% with CO. This means that those opinions are very relevant about the suitability of NWW.

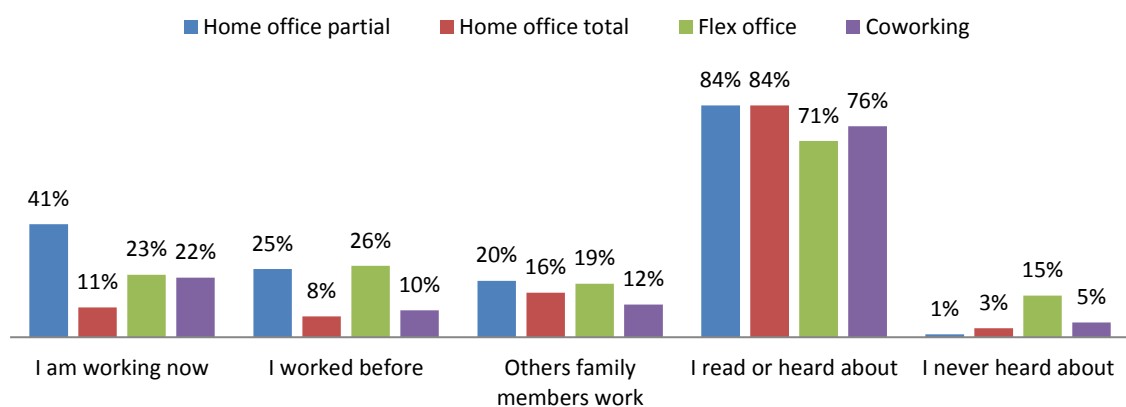


Fig. 9: NWW respondents experiences from the Office Flexibility Research

### 4.3. Suitability of NWW for respondents from the personal perspective

The level of acceptance for NWW it is very high at least in the respondents group. Only THO show a quite high percentage of answers that consider it as not suitable – 45%.

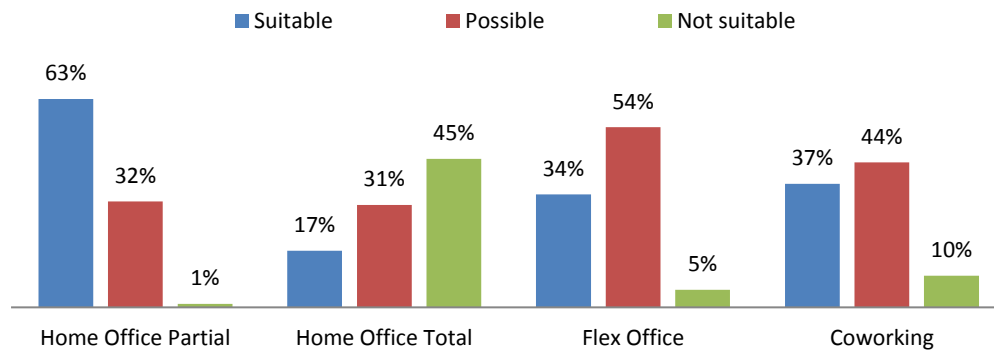


Fig.10: Suitability of NWW for Office Flexibility research respondents from the personal perspective

### 4.4. Suitability of NWW for the employer organization from the respondents perspective

The opinions about suitability from the employers' perspective are quite close, but a little bit lower as percentage, there may be some reservations about the suitability of NWW for all employees.

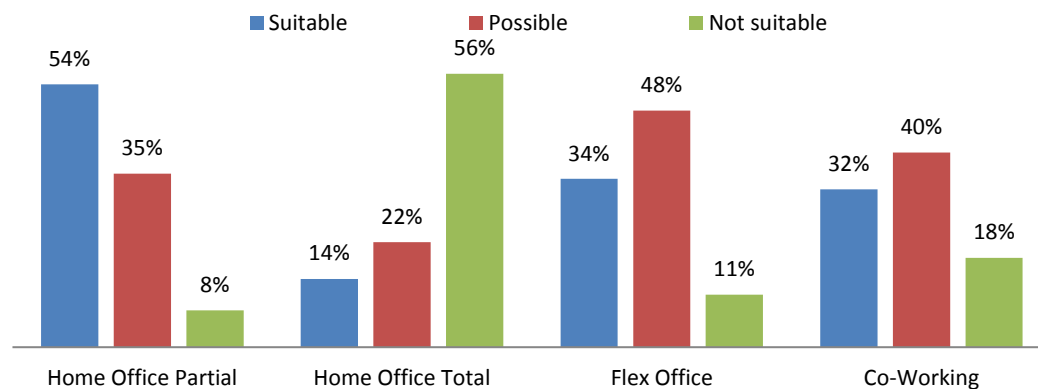


Fig.11: Suitability of NWW for the employer organization from the respondent's perspective

### 4.5. NWW personal meaning

In this topic the only open question was used. POH way of work has the most of the answers, 82 from 94. Most of them had a correct definition for the PHO, but in some answers there were also personal opinions about the advantages of this way of work, such as: flexibility to do task in the suitable personal time and flexibility to manage easier other personal activities; better focus and confidentiality; better efficiency following of the home comfort; time reduction with moving between home and firm office, cost reduction, benefits from home work and team work in the company; more family time and better work – life balance; an opportunity to take out

from the daily routine; possibility to manage better the personal trips and work tasks. An only one negative remark was that POH mean an opportunity to don't work nothing or almost nothing for the employer.

THO had 77 answers, most of them definitions for this concept, but also advantages, as mentioned at PHO, that were valid here, too. The difference was that here there were also many notices regarding the main well known weaknesses of this work way, such as: social isolation; captive in the house; team missing connection; poor connection with the culture and company values. Here were two mentions regarding of TOH as an opportunity to don't work nothing or almost nothing for the employer.

FO had 73 answers, again most of them were correct definitions, but also personal remarks of the advantages mentioned to the home office work, plus specific advantages, such as: better facilities for a specific task, different environments that encourage creativity and have a positive wellbeing contribution. There were mentioned also some specific FO weaknesses, such as: the risk of not finding a workplace when you need it and the lack of privacy and space personalization.

CW had 71 answers, most of them correct definitions, plus personal remarks about some strengths of this method, such as: share more knowledge and resources; better social and professional relations; an opportunity to meet new people; an opportunity to be part of a community; an opportunity to be connected in a social, professional and knowledge network; changing ideas with others; group energizing; a changing opportunity, but also some weaknesses, in general the same ideas as for FO, plus the renting cost issue.

## **5. Conclusion**

In Romania there is a good level of knowledge and positive expectations regarding the "New ways of working". Even though the weaknesses of these new ways of working are well known by the people that are working this ways or only heard or read about them, they consider them suitable solutions to improve the level of personal wellbeing and, at the same time, the level of organizational performance.

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