

# **Flexwork Workshop Report**

## ***The flexibilization of work, Oeiras (P), 23/5/2001***

### **Introduction**

This report was drafted by Cristina Caramelo. Paulo Peres had been in charged of the handling of the raw statistic data. Rui Cartaxo edited the final report. All 3, plus Fernando Camisão and Isabel Rodrigues, are the core technical team contributing to Flexwork.

The 1<sup>st</sup> workshop in the framework of the EU funded Flexwork project took place in Oeiras, a town located in the outskirts of Lisbon, on May 23. The City Hall offered the Public Library Auditorium and other premises for the seminar.

The workshop was organised solely by APDT taking place at noon and all after noon. The results of an ADAPT programme, Victori@, also run by APDT, were presented in the morning. The whole seminar ran under the title “The flexibilization of work”.

80 people in total attended the Seminar. Only 25 were representing SME’s, business advisors, consultants, etc. 35 people, in total, answered the questionnaire, meaning that some were done on an individual basis, as suggested by the Chairman of the workshop.

### **Aims and Objectives**

The main goal of the conference was to explain to associations and SME’s managers and consultants the concept of flexwork, the benefits to get from it and to identify the possible drawbacks of the project implementation to facilitate the explanation of the quoted project to associations and SME’s managers. The seminar had the participation of Michael Griffith, who briefed the project and Rui Cartaxo who launched and chaired the debate. Participants were asked to deliver their contribute through a questionnaire based in the one drafted by Jeremy Millard and suggested by the Flexwork project team. The major divergence of the one proposed to the audience versus the original is that the

technical questions present a possibility of multi-choice, developed by Cristina Caramelo. The endeavour of this is to raise a major amount of qualitative answers, once that the majority of the people involved do not know what concepts such as Flexwork, IS or ICT exactly mean. This procedure should also be seen in a cultural perspective, as the Portuguese do not have the tradition of filling questionnaires. Once they have to identify themselves, they get worried about consequences and once they have doubts they prefer not to answer. Answers with multi-choices were the way to minimise these restrictions.

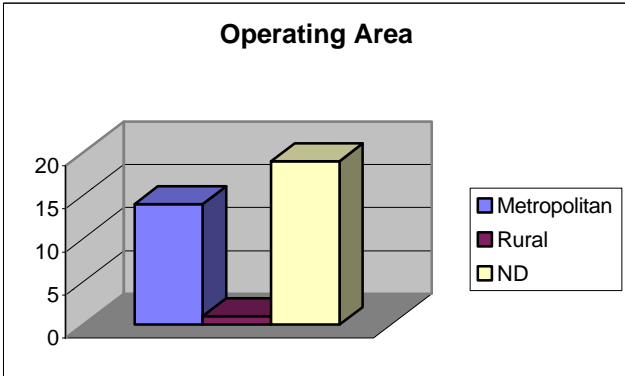
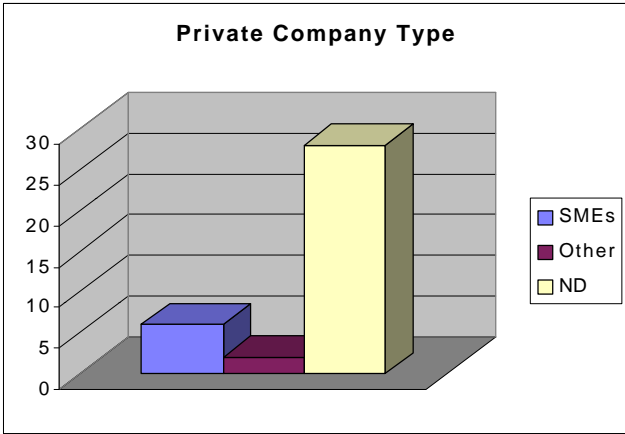
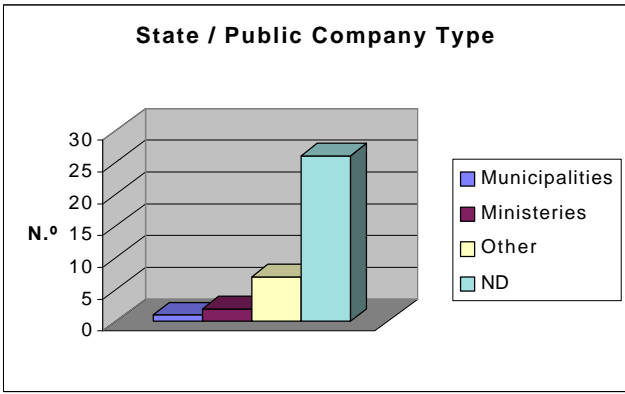
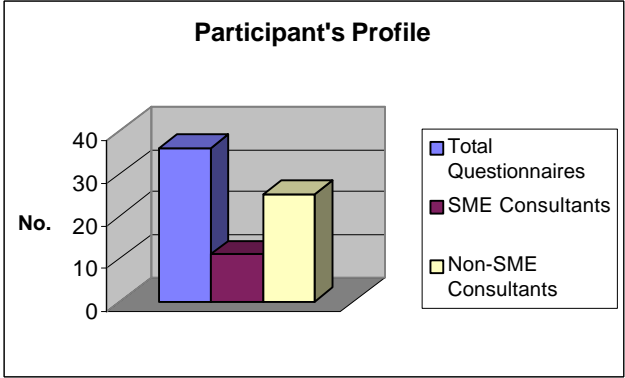
The questionnaire has three parts.

The first one deals with the identification of the individual and his organisation, the second part deals with the characterisation of the organisation. This characterisation ranges from the public or private nature of the organisation, the economic sector where it is included, the type of juridical contract, number of employees, etc. Inside this section, the characterisation of the employees deserves a special attention.

The third part handles the first approach to the Flexwork topic. Here it is required information about the understanding of the Flexwork concept and items included; the advantages and disadvantages of the new methods of work, namely flexwork implementation; implementation drawbacks and possible solutions to their minimisation. Another question very significant for the project is the one that intended to know what sort of benefits can the SME's take as well as the regions and/or communities where they are implanted. The last ones tackle with the structure of the Flexwork Project, in a way to understand how this project can or should support individuals, organisations and communities.

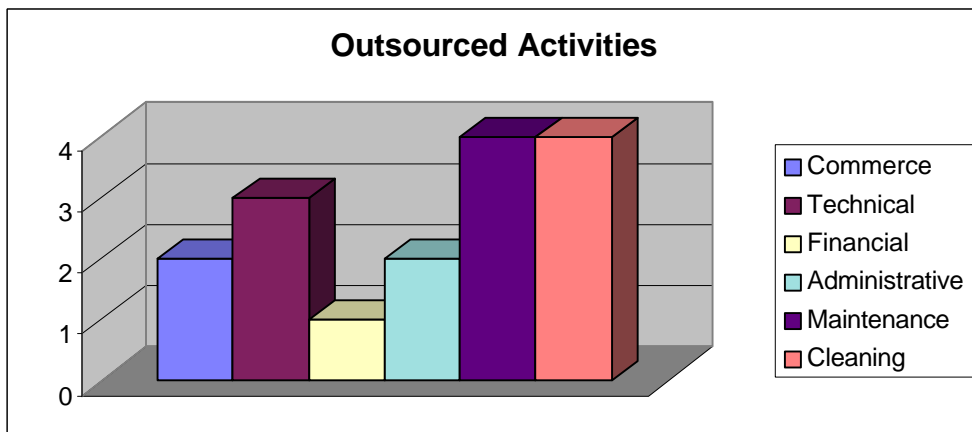
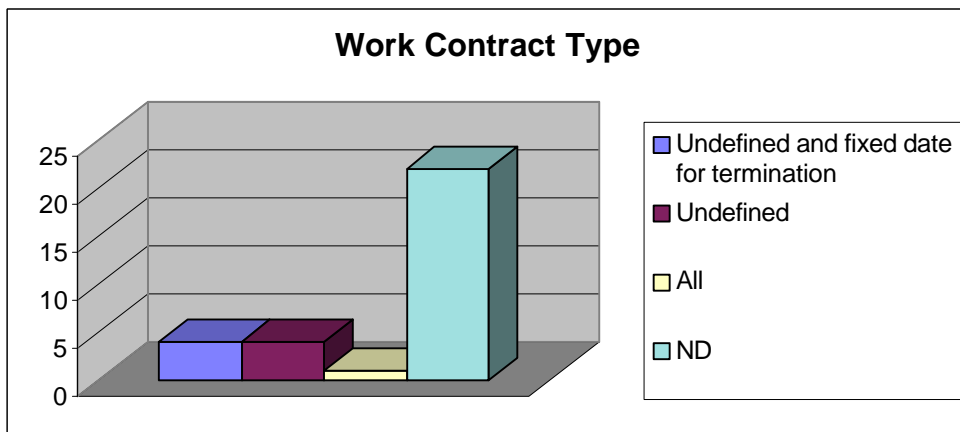
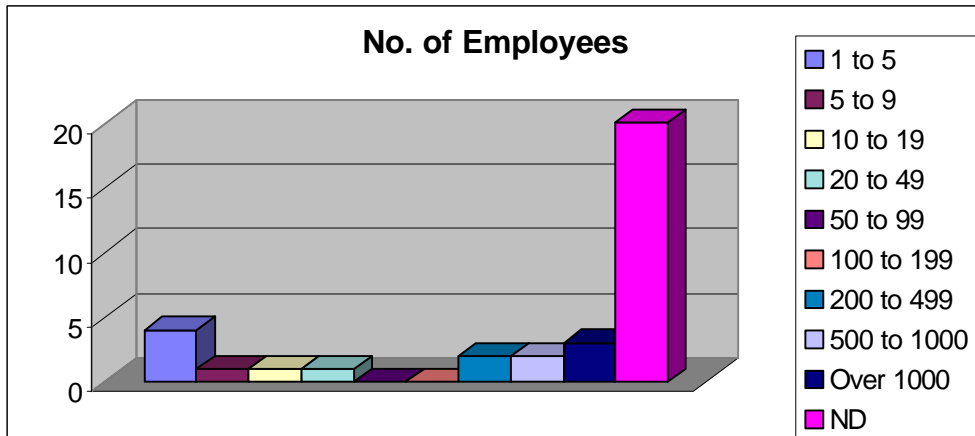
### **Characterisation of the Participants**

The individuals that are not SME's consultants or advisers represent the big majority of the answers. Nevertheless, they are related with SME's. This is due to the fact that is very difficult to bring these individuals for a full day of debate, despite the fact that SME's are among the most interested in the new methods of work. Another important conclusion is that the majority of the presented organisations operate in metropolitan areas.

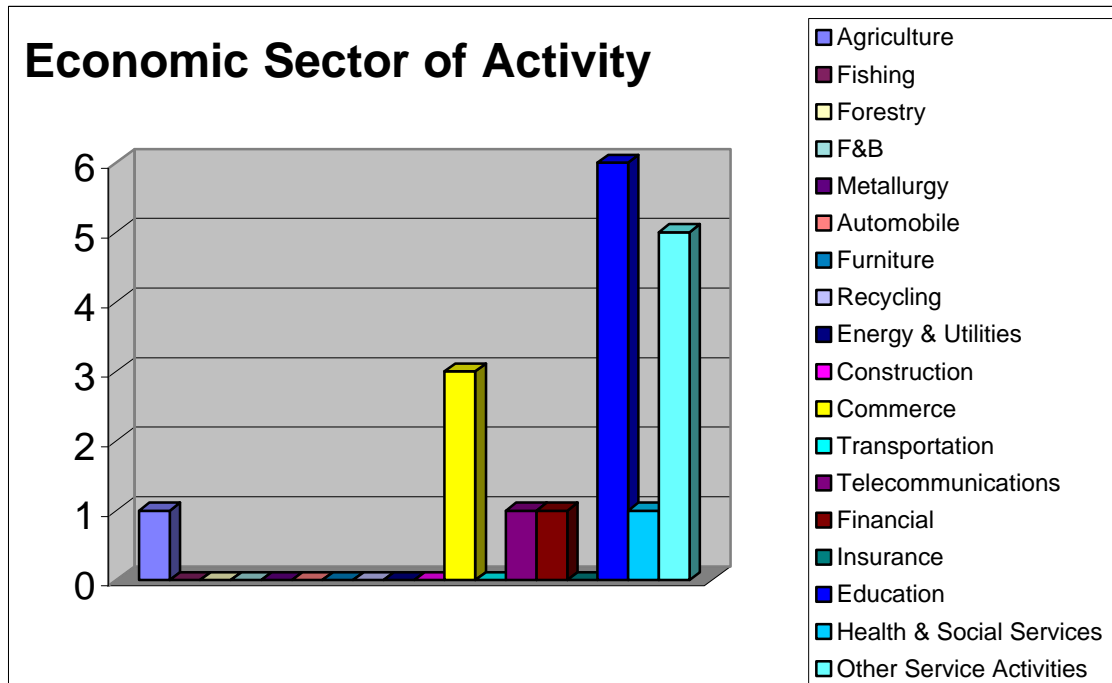


**Characterisation of the Organisations**

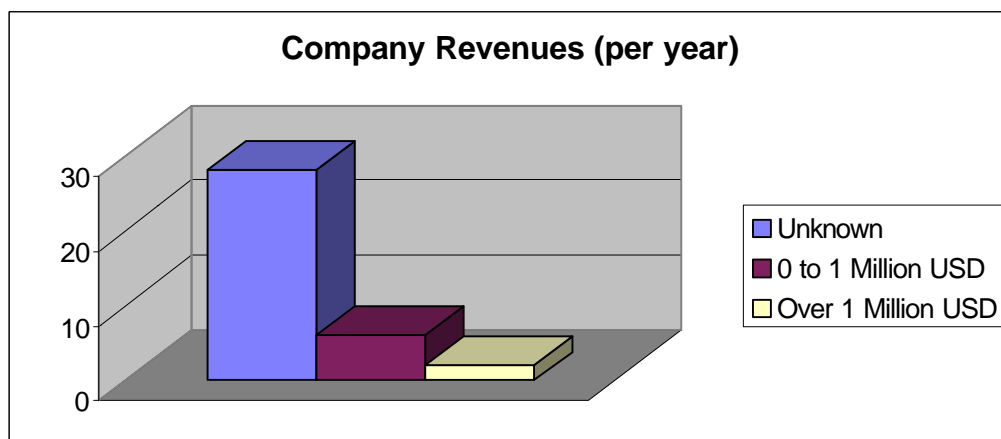
The SME's represented have a small number of employees, which can be clearly seen on the column that represents 1 to 5 employees. The fixed duration work contract and the indefinite duration are contracts more or less equally represented. The activities significantly linked with outsourcing are building maintenance and cleaning services.



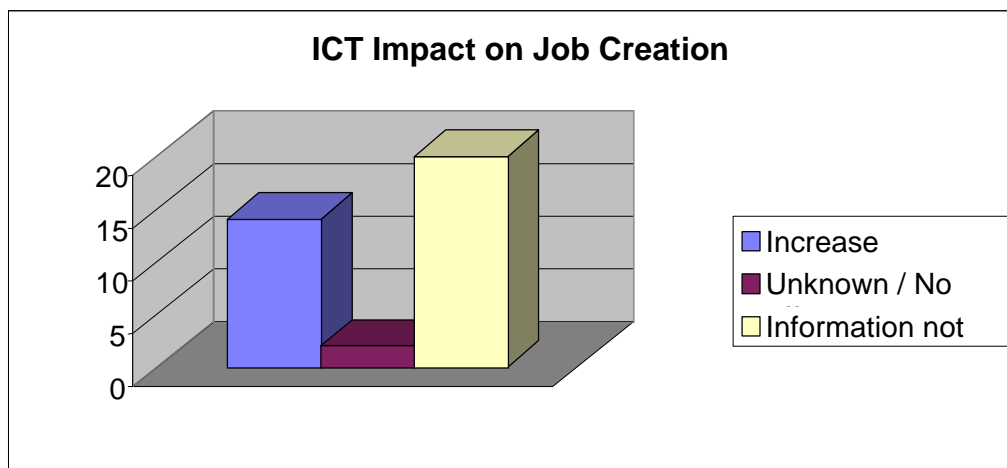
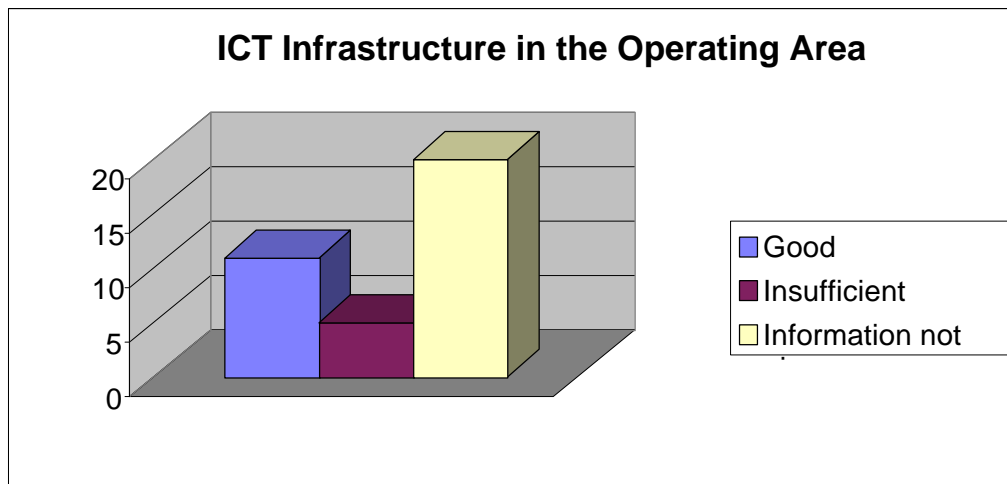
The economic sectors more significant are the trading, teaching and services.



A sensitive issue is always the one concerned with the annual turnover. Portuguese people use to say that the secret is the business soul, so the answer to this questions always raises to many suspicions. The preponderance of the answers goes to around 1 Million euro.



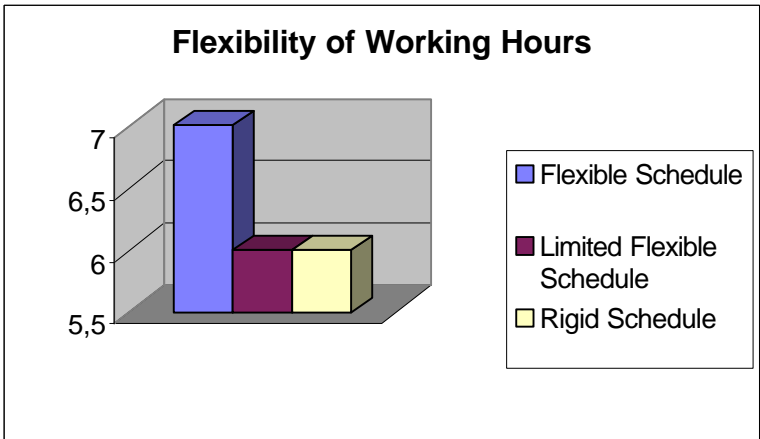
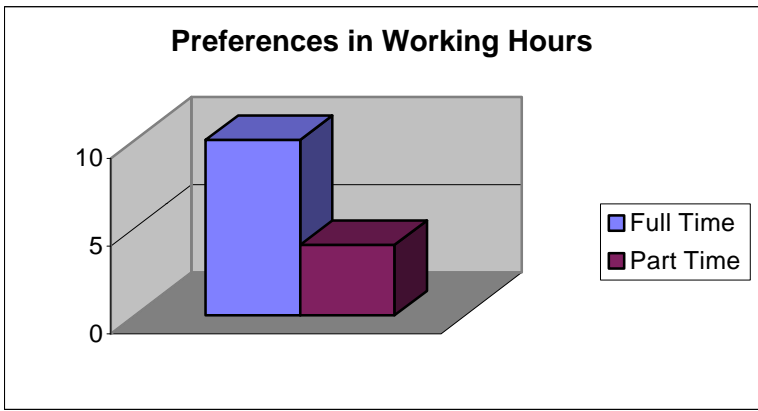
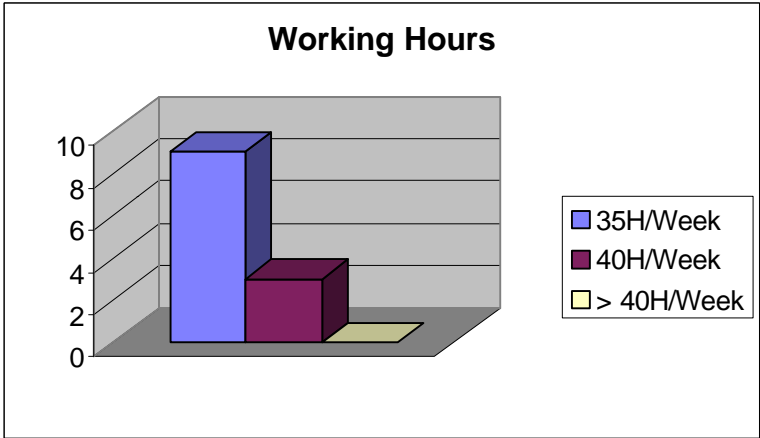
In accordance with ICT structure in the organisation area, there is a preponderance of good structure as considerable answers prove that the ICT implementation contribute to the increase of employment opportunities.

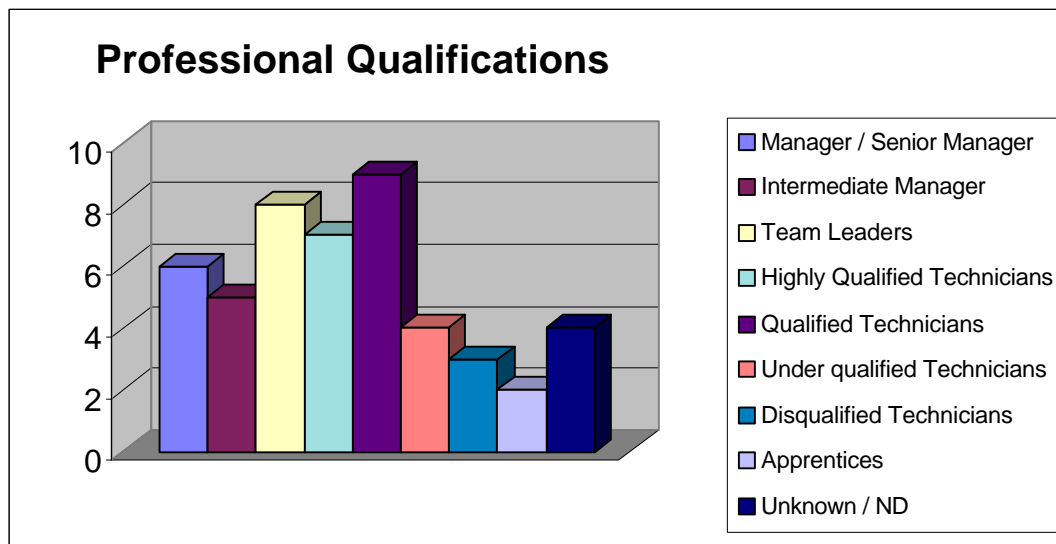


### **Characterisation of the Employees**

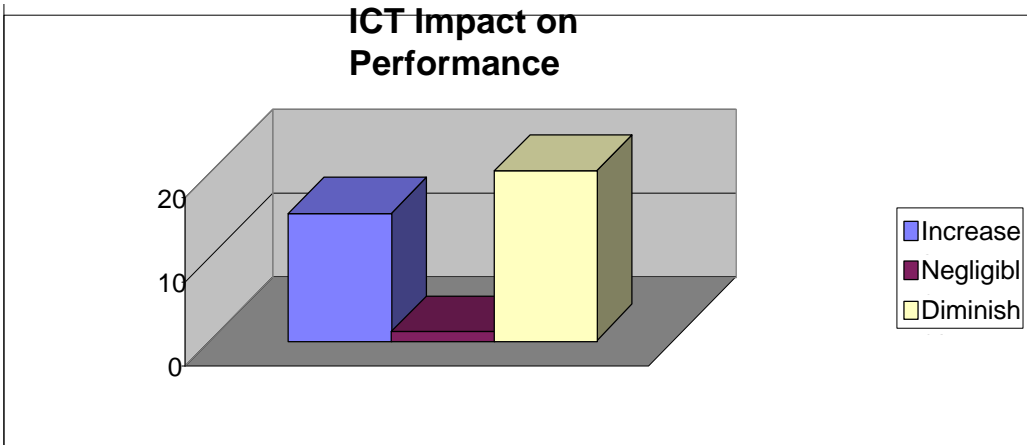
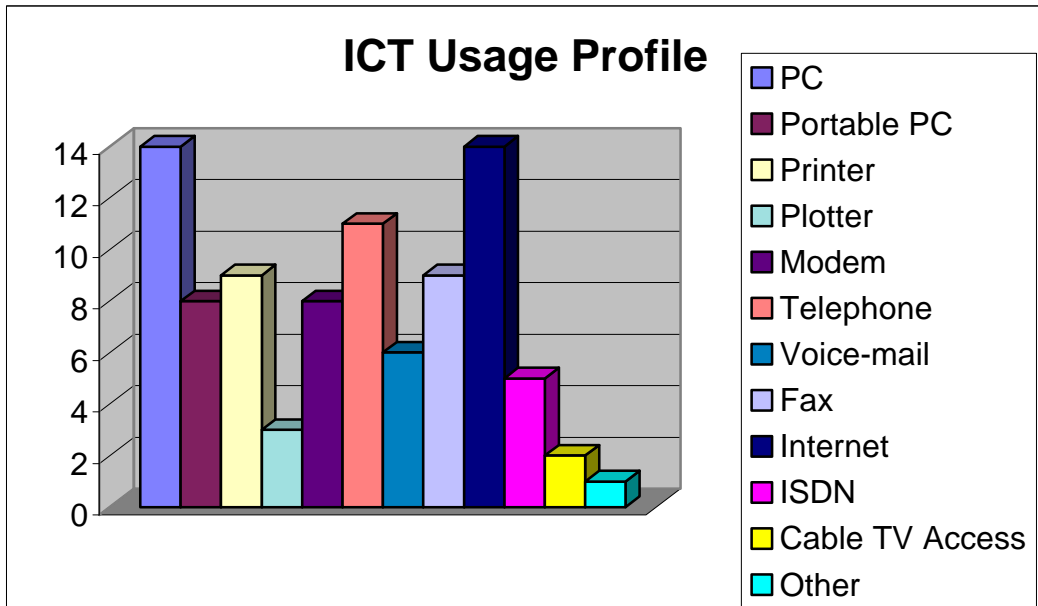
The majority of the individuals support the idea of a work schedule of 35H a week, and the flexibility according to the timetable. It is also true that the majority prefer a full time schedule. This is a very important issue, once that this choice is a consequence of the low salaries income and the precarious forms of part-time opportunities.

Professional qualifications are another state of the sort of organisations that were presented at the conference. In addition, this important detail can be related with the flexibility of the time schedule. The majority of the answers are related with very qualified technicians, team managers and qualified technicians.

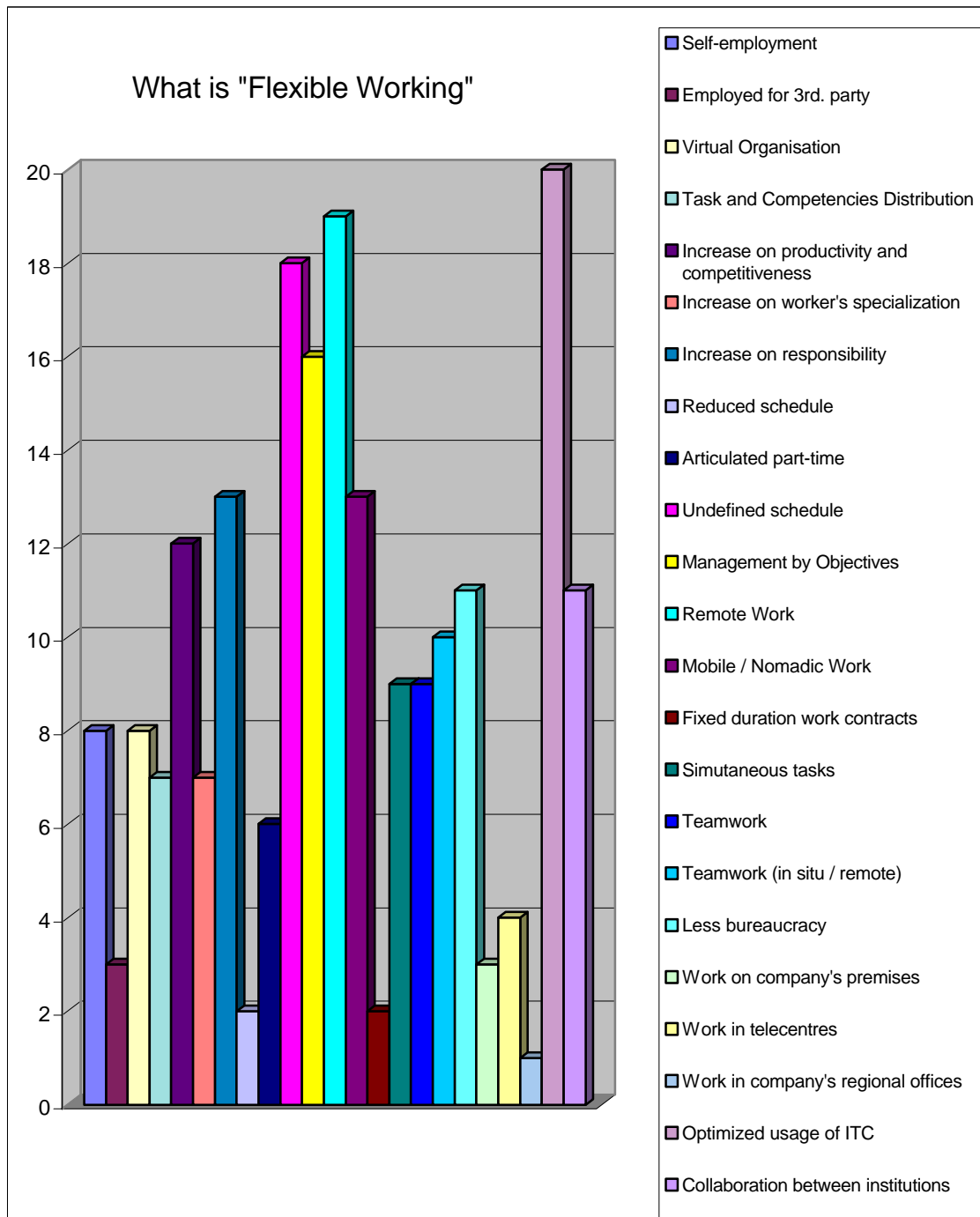




The use of ICT reveals that the most used equipment are PC and Internet, followed by telephone, printer and fax. The dissimilarity between the use of Internet and modems reveal a certain lack of knowledge according to the relationship between these items that can suggest lack of knowledge of the real capacity of the ICT. Curiously, a significant number of answers point to a decrease of professional and quality of life performance when the ICT are used. Devoid of any doubt this reveals the deficient knowledge of the ICT capabilities and how to maximise these in the day-to-day life.



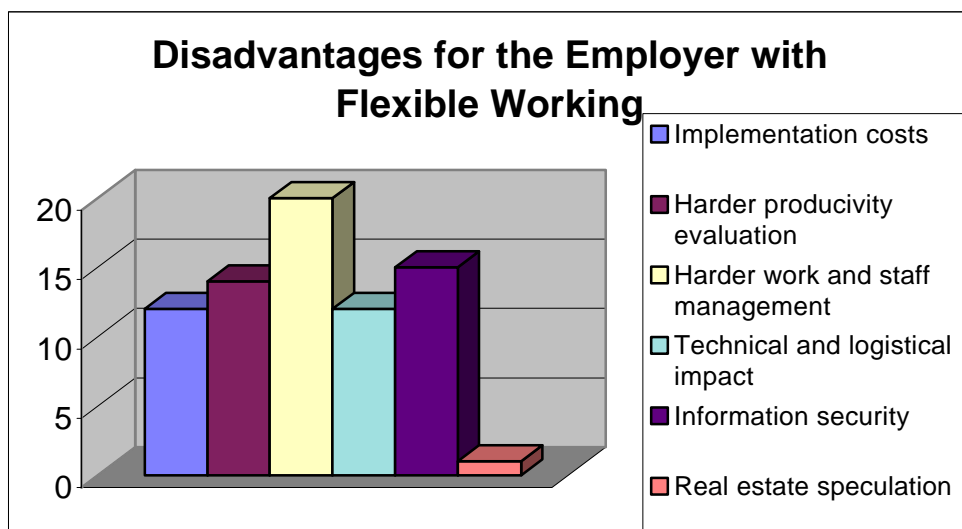
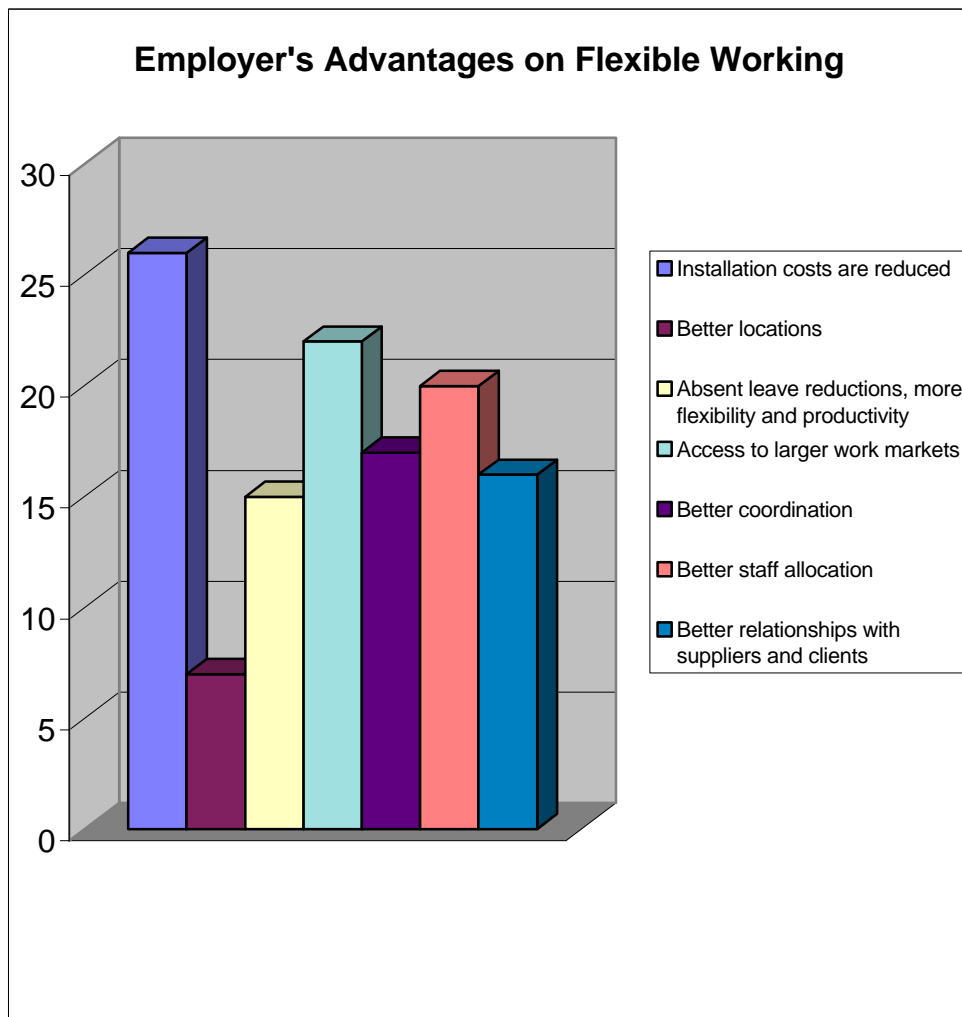
As regards the meaning of flexwork, a significant amount of answers goes to the use and optimisation of the ICT, remote work, freedom of time-table and objectives management.



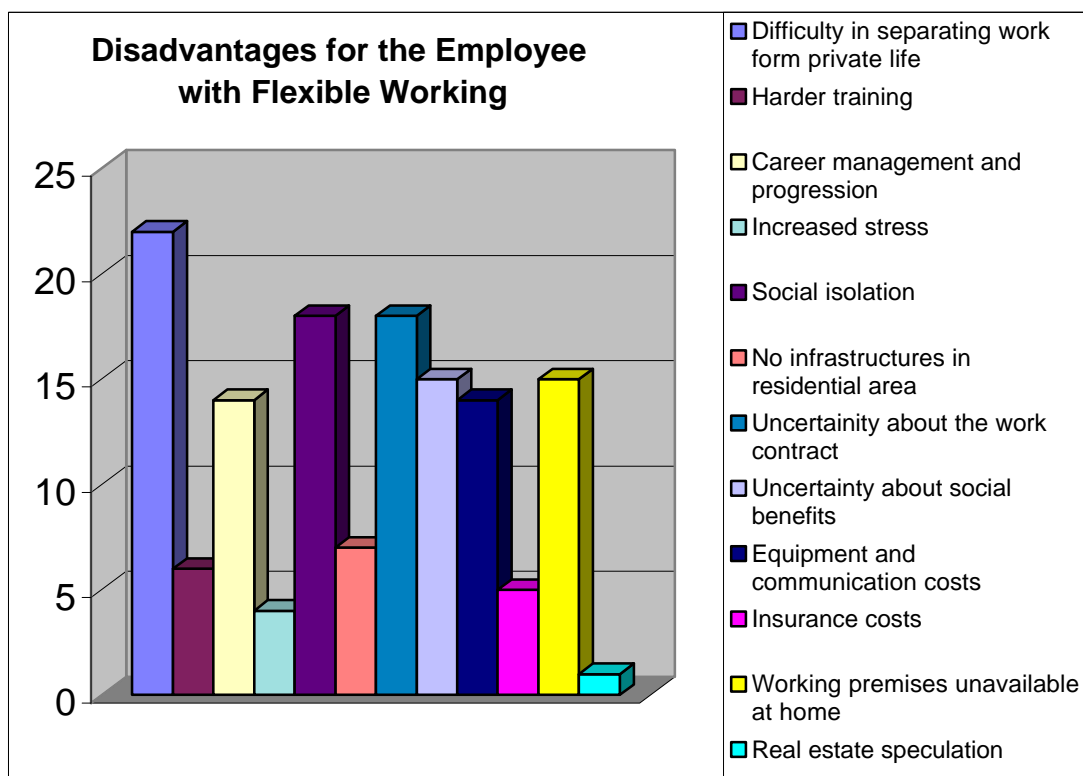
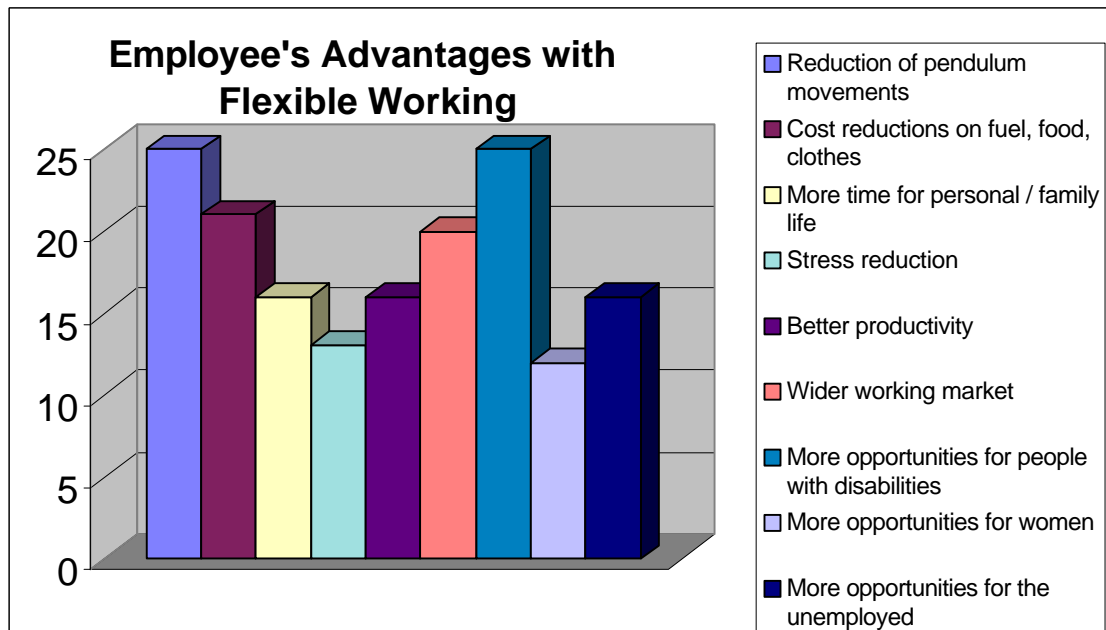
The next step takes in hand the possible advantages as disadvantages for employers and employees.

In relation to employers, is possible to identify as the major advantages of flexwork being: decrease of facilities costs, enlargement of labour market and an improved distribution of tasks and workers. The disadvantages are identified as difficulty of

managing and/or monitoring workers, the difficulty of productivity management and the information security.

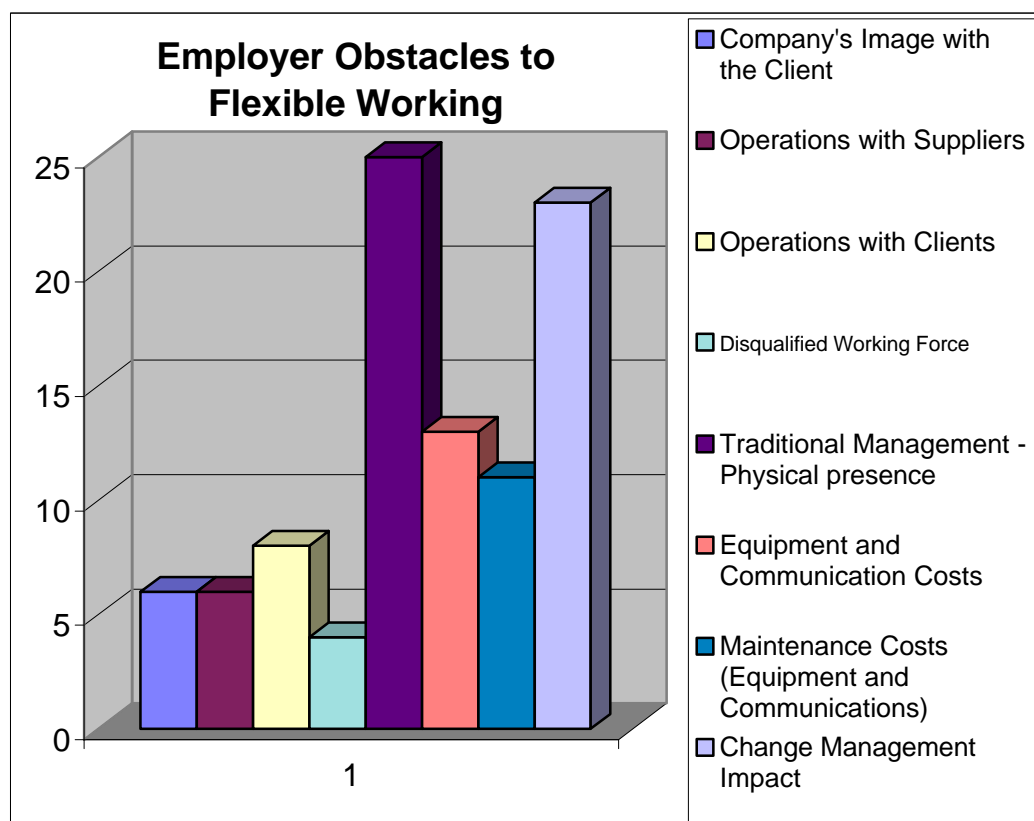


According to the employees, the advantages identified are the reduction of commuting movements, more opportunities to individuals with disabilities and the decrease of costs related with energy, parking, clothes and meals out. The disadvantages are identified as the difficulty of professional and family lives division; social isolation and the deficient ICT network infrastructures in the residential area.

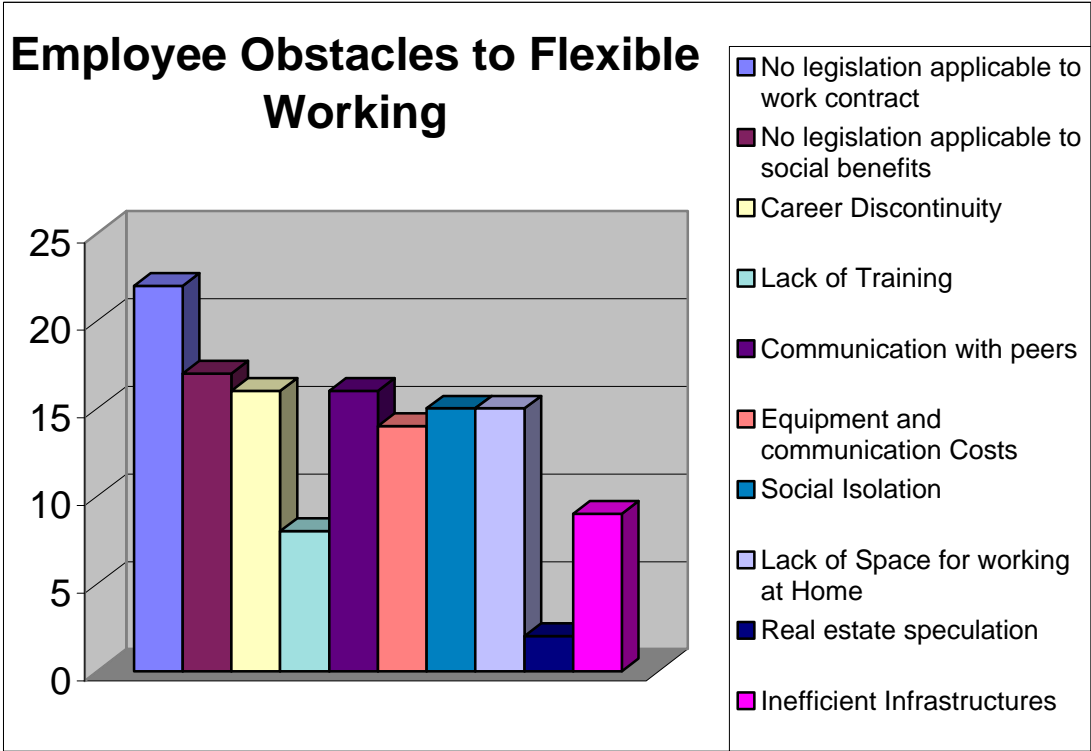


One of the primary results coming from this questionnaire is the identification of the drawbacks of the flexwork implementation. Once identified these parameters will help to conceive action plans to solve or at least minimise them.

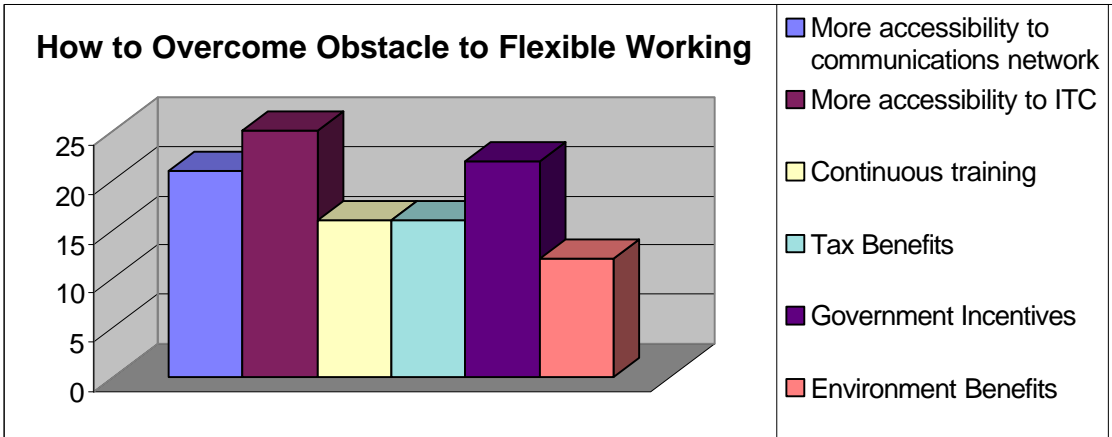
For the employer the main drawbacks identified are the traditional management, which demands physical presence, the anxiety of the change impact, the ICT costs and the deficient ICT network infrastructures.



For the employee the drawbacks identified are the inexistence of any labour legislation relating to the work contract and the social benefits, the anxiety of professional career discontinuity, communication with the colleagues, social isolation and space to work at home.

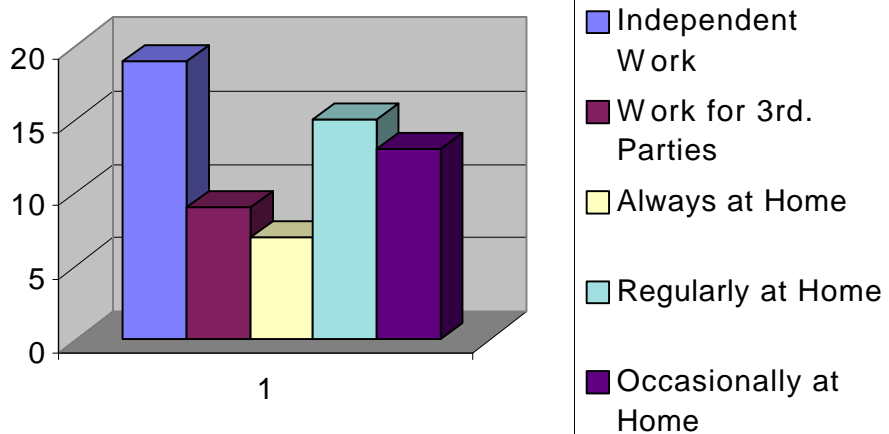


To go beyond these drawbacks the following topics are identified: better accessibility to the Information Technologies, governmental incentives and a better accessibility to the Telecommunication Technologies.

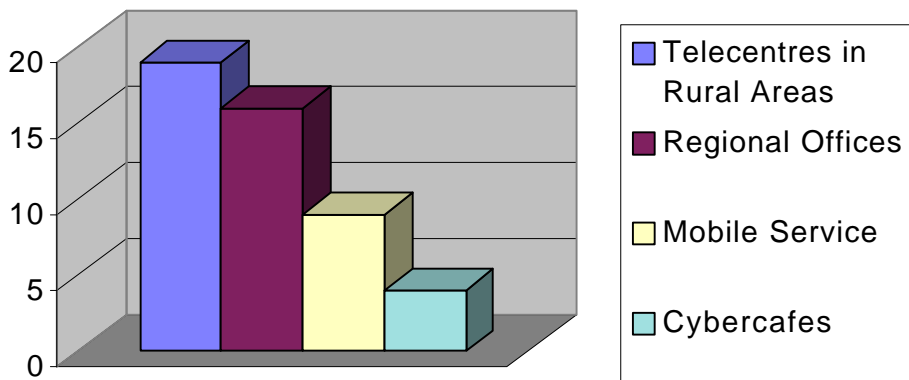


The categories of work identified on the way to the benefits of the SME's and the region where they are localised are independent work, telecentres in rural areas, individuals/SME'S networking, free-lancers, fixed workplace with the flexibility provided by ICT.

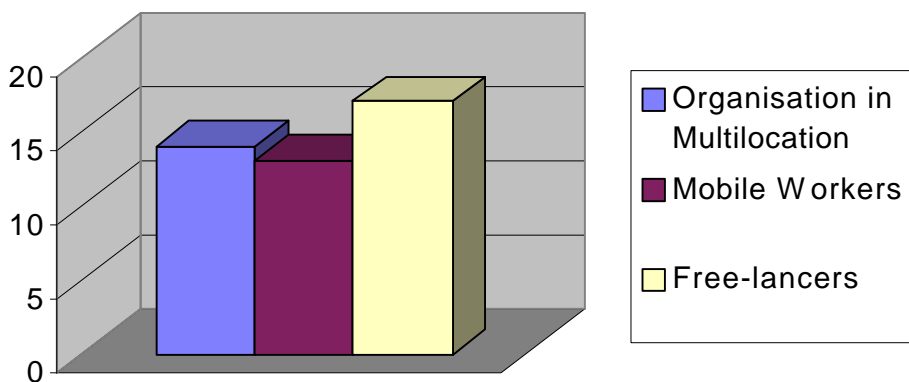
### Work From Home

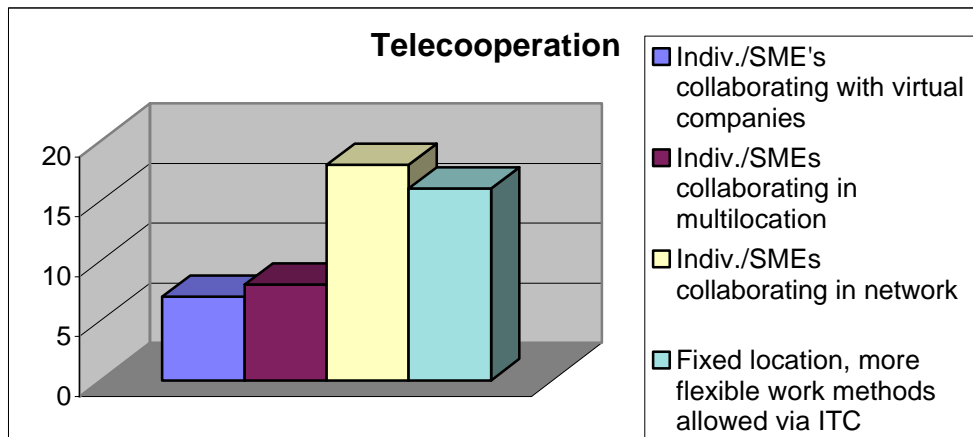


### Work From Telecentres

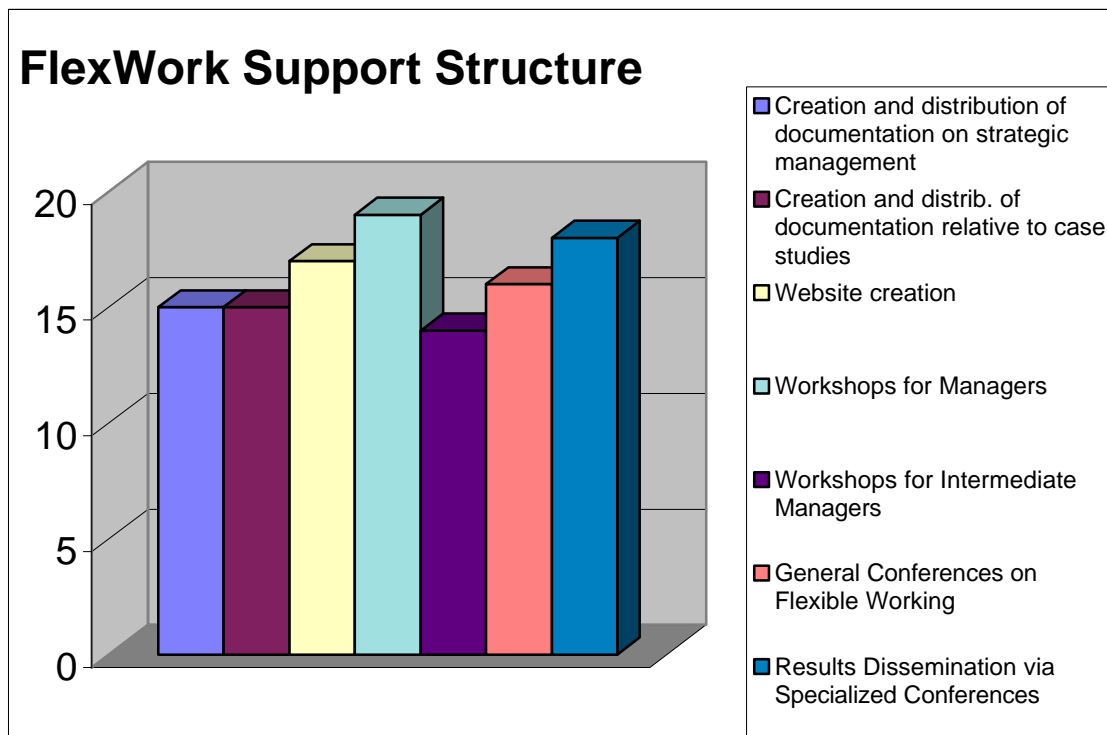


### Mobile Work





The manner that the FlexWork project can support the flexwork implementation is based on the following items: workshops for managers and influent collaborators, conception of a website and Conferences to present results and case studies.



## Conclusions

The very first issue is to ask the attention of Flexwork Project to the culture of each country. Despite the intention of the project to fulfil in every country, region, company, etc, it is important to advise that the features of the cultures and the establishment of the active population expectancies also, can be a success or a drawback point, and can be a very influent element. In addition to this, it is important to mention that the results here

presented are an example more or less representative but they do not intend to be statistically representative of the whole organisational tissue.

Flexwork can be a very interesting solution not only to remote and rural areas but also to metropolitan areas. Despite the fact that the resolution of remote and rural areas can help to diminishing the number of individuals in the metropolitan areas, is also true that the peripheries and its relation with the big city are a very complex problem. Flexwork will allow minimising the functional gap between city centres and peripheries (strongly characterised by the dwelling) and all the questions related with this functional segregation. Rural and remote areas need to be developed, rehabilitated, but urban contemporary areas need a sustainable way of rehabilitation according to the financial, functional, technical and aesthetical realities and expectancies.

Based on the example acquired is possible to conceive a checklist. Alongside with this identification is required a possible reason to this achievement.

The identification of this checklist is the most significant contribute to an important project that is Flexwork.

- ❑ People do not have a clear idea about the organisation structure according to the number of individuals, incomes, aims and expectancies. There is an ambiguity about this, because this questionnaires asks for the identification of the organisation and the individual. This can be very often a drawback according to the will of answering or to the veracity of the answers.
- ❑ The majority of the SME's supported no more than five elements. This can be proved by statistical data of the Portuguese SME's. As a matter of fact, the majority of the SME's do not have more than five elements (see also AMBELIS (1995) Os Números de Lisboa: Câmara Municipal de Lisboa)
- ❑ There is a consensus that ICT are a gear to increment employment opportunities.
- ❑ The flexibility timetable presented in the answers gathered is due to the fact of the characterisation of the organisation and the professional qualifications of the individuals. If bigger organisations were represented, maybe the result would be different due to a stronger hierarchical reality.
- ❑ The preference of full time job is in accordance of a survey made by Freire (Freire et al. (2000) Trabalho e Cidadania. Lisboa. Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, col. Atitudes Sociais dos Portugueses). The reason for that is the low salaries that people get at the end of the month, and the need of continuity to fulfil their more straightforward requirements.

- A deficient knowledge about ICT, can lead to the misunderstanding of them and an ignorance of their entire capacities. This is in accordance of the survey made in 1997 by Cristina Caramelo Gomes (Caramelo-Gomes, C. (2000) A conceptual Model to Implement Telework in Lisbon's Metropolitan Area. Ph. D. thesis, Salford University). People do not have access to a training process, they learn by themselves. This can be seen as a positive attitude once there are no costs for the employer/employee related with that but there are indirectly costs according to the deficient use of the effective tools of the ICT.
- In accordance with the last point but in a contradiction with the item that raises ICT as a gear to increment employment opportunities, the answers show a perception that ICT decreases the professional performance as well as the quality of the family life. Indeed, a certain amount of individuals feel that the possibility to work everywhere at every time, leads to the need of achieving objectives and consequently getting workaholic, putting the personal and the family lives as a moment to next opportunity.
- There is among the individuals presented a good understanding of flexwork objectives. Our explanation is the presentations that preceded the questionnaires fulfilment as well as the translated MG presentation, which was in the files handed at the registration to the participants.
- Once required the opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of flexwork implementation, the results obtained are not very different from the ones showed in the majority of the articles concerned with new methods of work. For the employer the advantages presented concerned the decrease of facilities costs, enlargement of the labour market and the improvement of labour as workers distribution. The disadvantages presented concerned the difficulty to manage workers (see also Sousa, M.J. (1999) *Teletrabalho em Portugal: Difusão e Condicionantes*. Lisboa: FCA – Editora de Informatica, Lda.), productivity and information security. For the employees, the reasons presented as advantages concern the decrease of commuting movements' costs, inclusion of individuals with disabilities and the costs related with energy, parking, clothes and meals out. According to the disadvantages the reasons presented are related with the separation between professional and personal/family lives, social isolation and the deficient ICT network infrastructure in the residential area.

- The drawbacks identified by the employers are traditional management, the anxiety of the flexwork implementation impact in the organisation, ICT equipment costs, and the deficient ICT network infrastructures in the workplace area. For the employee, the drawbacks identified were the inexistence of any work legislation related to the work contract and social benefits. It were also identified the discontinuity of the professional career, social isolation and space to work at home. It seems crucial to pay some attention to these items specially to the one that respects the space at home. Is important to mention that, in Portugal, real estate speculation is one of the most powerful drawbacks of working at home. Satellite communities are mainly related with residential function and this almost mono-functionality is a strong argument to increase the social isolation. It is also important to state that the big majority of the individuals own their houses, and this decreases the will to move; also, because of the price of the space, people buy the house they can buy and not the one they need. A space to work at home is not thus an easy task. (Caramelo-Gomes, C. (2000) A conceptual Model to Implement Telework in Lisbon's Metropolitan Area. Ph. D. thesis, Salford University).
- The ways to go beyond these drawbacks are related to better accessibility to the information and telecommunications technologies and government incentives. In fact, new methods of work are a sustainable way of living. The involvement of the governmental authorities is more important than the individual or the organisational effort are. The equilibrium between rural and metropolitan areas, the quality of life and a better environment are reasons enough to motivate the ICT institutions and the governmental ones.
- The Flexwork Project can benefit SME's and regions trough different types of flexwork. The most identified by the answers concern the independent work, telecentres in rural areas, individual/SME'S networking, free-lancer and fixed workplace with the flexibility allowed by the ICT.
- According to the structure of the Flexwork Project and the way that it supports flexwork implementation, there is a consensus about the need of learning from other experiences and the debate with different parts involved. This is the explanation for the identified ideas of the need of workshops for managers and influent collaborators, the conception of the website, results presentations to Conferences and case studies. In fact this is a new area and all the learning

programs and all the case studies that can be analysed are the strongest arguments to future implementations with a successful result.