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**Control dynamics in the context of remote work
arrangements**

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Introduction

Because of the pandemic, companies and individuals experienced on a large-scale remote work, a phenomenon that had been in existence for years but not yet widespread due to reluctance on the part of some managers and employees. This global experiment has given people and companies a chance to learn more about this approach marked by flexibility and autonomy, thus being able to appreciate and enjoy the benefits it brings on a work and personal level. Today remote, full but especially hybrid work, would seem to be transformed from a transient, emergent phenomenon into a new reality. Full remote and hybrid modes in fact respond to what are the new needs of a workforce that in recent years has reevaluated its priorities, increasingly seeking temporal and spatial flexibility, a better balance between work and life, and finally physical and mental well-being.

In the face of these changes and demands, enterprises cannot be indifferent. It is, therefore, necessary to understand how to make this approach work also from the point of view of the enterprise, which for its proper functioning needs among many things a good level of organizational control, that is, alignment between employees' behavior and business objectives. Indeed, the distance that characterizes contexts in which there is a remote work component has consequences in terms of control, which is associated by many with direct supervision and monitoring of the employee that obviously due to physical absence cannot be implemented as in the office.

Thus, the purpose of this thesis is precisely to investigate the dynamics of control that are created in a context where managers and employees are distant in order to understand if and how it is possible to ensure an alignment of intent on the part of employees and the company. To do this, the elaboration was developed in two parts: a theoretical one (chapters 1-2) and an empirical one chapter (3-4). Through the first two chapters, in fact, an attempt is made to give more context to the qualitative research that follows in the second part, so the reader is provided with definitions and explanations of what are the main themes, namely remote work and organizational control.

The first chapter explains what is meant in this study by remote work, a general term chosen to indicate all those cases in which for a variable time manager and employee are distant; then follows a description of the origins and evolution of this way of working as well

as the benefits and challenges it brings to employees, companies, and society. The chapter ends with an analysis of the spread of remote work before, during, and after the pandemic.

The second chapter explores the concept of organizational control, highlighting its importance and the different approaches that have been taken over time. Next, attention is focused on what are the types, control mechanisms that a company can put in place (result, action, cultural and personnel control) and the advantages and disadvantages of using each. In light of this, it is illustrated how the best way to ensure a good level of control, is not the single use of these mechanisms but the use of a mix, possibly, of all of them so as to mitigate the limits and flaws of each and enjoy the advantages, thus maximizing the likelihood of directing people's behaviors toward those desired by the company.

Once these basic concepts are clarified, in the second part of this chapter the two phenomena are observed jointly so we consider organizational control in the context of remote work arrangements. The views and findings that researchers have come up with so far on the topic of organizational control and especially the types of control in remote work contexts have thus been collected and illustrated. We thus had an opportunity to contextualize our research and explain what needs it addresses. In fact, despite the interest that the topic is generating, there is still room for further analysis, especially with regard to organizational control in remote work in a normal, non-emergency context such as that of the pandemic.

Indeed, the qualitative research presented in chapters 3 and 4 aims to understand whether and how control can be practically exercised effectively for the company and in a sustainable way for the employee in work settings that adopt remote work in part or in full. This was made possible by the direct testimony of employees and managers of companies that even before the pandemic adopted this approach and that over the years were able to test, correct and fine-tune initiatives, actions, and strategies that would achieve good employee-company alignment, ensuring the smooth functioning of the company and, at the same time, a person-centered business climate.

One of the foci of this research in fact was to explore the possible solutions tried out by the companies involved so as to be able to give practical insights, and examples that can be reproduced and replicated by companies wishing to adopt this approach. Based on this, I chose to carry out qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews of employees and managers of the companies selected as the sample. The methodology used to conduct the

research and carry out the analysis was elaborated in Chapter 3 in the methodological note, while Chapter 4 presented the results obtained.

Chapter 1

Remote work

1.1 What is remote work?

In the academic literature and in our daily life, there is no commonly international accepted definition for a job performed outside the central office, out of the employer's premises, without the necessity to commute from and to the firm. Actually, there are many terms used to indicate this phenomenon: telework, telecommuting, home working, agile work, flexible work, virtual work, distributed work, in Italy smart working. All these new ways of working are commonly denoted by the following elements (Madsen 2011 ^[1]):

- a variable percentage of work hours performed in a place outside the office (home, café, park, hotels, etc.)
- a shift from "in-person supervision" to remote management
- a transition from face-to-face communication to digital communication
- a shift from side-to-side collaboration with colleagues to a virtual one

However, even if they are used interchangeably, these terms have distinct elements, and they are used in different situations. The aim of this paper is not to deepen this terminology issue, but we can do some distinctions to clarify the perspective adopted for our analysis.

So, starting from the word telecommuting, according to Allen et al (2015) ^[2] it is "a work practice that involves members of an organization substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace—typically principally from home—using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks". This can be a good reference definition but according to ILO 2020 ^[3], telecommuting is a stricter concept because it is limited to employees excluding self-employed workers. Telecommuting and telework are words used very often as synonyms (Madsen 2011, Allen 2015): telecommuting is used in the USA, instead telework is used in Europe. Telework or telecommuting can be also done at home but not necessarily, because the employee can decide to perform his/ her job also in other places such as cafes, satellite offices, and outdoor places. Other terms that are used as synonyms, but they differ somehow are for instance flexible work arrangements which is a broader concept because it can entail not only flexibility in terms of space but for example wider flexible work programs such as compressed work weeks or flexible schedules (Allen 2015). Then another fact to be considered

is that there are also geographical differences in the terminology used: “agile work or smart working” in Italy, specific Italian definition that represents a method of work execution denoted by the lack of workplace and time constraints; “new ways of working” in Belgium; “Arbeiten 4.0 (work 4.0) or mobile working” in Germany and “remote working” as a synonym of telework in Ireland.

The existence of all these terms overlapped for some aspects, very different for some others makes difficult to compare studies on this theme because each one uses a different term/ definition based on which data are collected and considerations made. However, in this paper this fact doesn't represent a significant obstacle because we are interested in the aspects shared by all the previously listed work modes: for a certain amount of time employees are distant from their managers and this has implications for managerial control due to the lack of supervision.

Therefore, because the focus of this paper regards organizational and control aspects and not normative or contractual ones, we have chosen to adopt a more general concept which is remote work. It will be used to indicate all the types of work in which the employee and the manager are distant for a variable amount of time, so for us, this term includes telework, smart working, agile work, distributed work that are used specifically when it is requested. We can define remote work as “organizational work performed outside of the normal organizational confines of space and time” (Olson 1983^[4]), as “work that is fully or partly carried out in an alternative worksite other than the default place of work” (ILO 2020), it can be performed not necessarily from home, by both dependent and independent workers. So remote work is a general term that implies spatial and temporal flexibility for the employee who performs his/her job away from the employer's premises.

Furthermore, it is important to make another clarification in order to understand why we talk about remote work also to refer to telework, a term that is used for example in European reports and documents: the reason is that part of this work is focused on the firms' organizational control in Italy (chapter 4) where smart working and telelavoro (telework¹) are distinct concepts in juridical terms (Osservatori Digital Innovation Politecnico di Milano ^[5]) and they are also considered very different approaches by firms and people who see in smart

¹ Telelavoro is a juridical concept older than smart working. It is regulated for the employment contracts for public sector by the DPR 8 March 1999 n° 70 and for private sector by the interconfederal agreement 20 January 2004. Instead smart working was regulated only in the 2017 by the law n°81/2017, “Legge sul lavoro agile” (https://blog.osservatori.net/it_it/telelavoro-smart-working-definizione-differenze).

working the modern and updated version of telework which is deemed to be old and not so smart and sustainable. In fact telework in Italy is the situation in which the person performs his/her job outside the central office in a specific and predetermined place with a dedicated workstation, instead smart working is intended as a new managerial philosophy that revises concepts of work time and space giving the employee the possibility to choose, based on her/his personal and task needs: work hours, tools and places that can be outside the office or inside the office in specific areas dedicated to particular tasks.

Therefore, because we are interested in both to the extent in which they entail some workdays performed outside the firm, we use the term remote work, which could be more neutral, to indicate both.

1.2 Origins and evolution of working remotely

Remote work is not a recent phenomenon, it dates to the 1970s. The oil crisis, determining high prices and decreasing availability of oil, together with the increasing pollution of air and unsustainable city traffic prompted to find a new work solution for reducing commuting. In 1973 Jack Nilles, a physicist of the Lawrence University of California, considered the father of remote work, coined in his book “The telecommunications and transportation trade-offs” the term “telework” and “telecommuting”: workers could avoid commuting to the central office thanks to the use of telecommunications and computers. This new approach to work was the result of an experiment² conducted by Nilles in collaboration with the University in 1972; he started a pilot test lasting 9 months in partnership with a national insurance company as the study’s subject.

In that historic moment, the technology available included telephones and telefax machines and, in very few cases, personal computers, so the focus of the study was on the development and effectiveness of satellite offices intended as decentralized workplaces nearer to the workers’ homes, in telecommunication with the centralized office. The experiment was a success, bringing significant results such as increased productivity and a reduction of health and infrastructure costs. Since that moment, working remotely became a real work alternative and started to be considered by firms.

Since the 1970s, the concept of working remotely has undergone an evolution, triggered by the advancement in technology. According to the study of Jon Messenger and Lutz

² <https://www.lawrence.edu/articles/lu-alum-jack-nilles-father-telecommuting>

Gschwind (2016) ^[6], the progressive transformation of telework can be distinguished into three stages, also called generations. The first generation regards the period from the 1970s to 1980s, this stage is characterized by the use of computers and telephones, i.e. stationary Old ICTs, at employees' home or close to it as we have seen in the case of Nilles' satellite offices. Then, in the 1990s technologies made another step forward through the spread of the World Wide Web created by Tim Berners-Lee and the creation of laptops and mobile phones. Thanks to these so-called mobile Old ICTs and the internet, telework becomes mobile giving the opportunity to employees and managers to perform their job also in third places such as cafes, parks, cars, etc (second generation, according to Messenger and Gschwind). This detachment from space was even more favored by the advent of the so-called New ICTs such as smartphones and tablet computers which give the employee the possibility to work "here, there, anywhere and anytime" (Kurland and Bailey, 1999) giving life to what Messenger and Gschwind call "virtual offices".

Furthermore, these new technologies, the enhancement of the internet and the efficiency of email and online messages allow the employee to communicate in an instant and effective way with everybody inside and outside the organization. Another important innovation linked to the development of this new way of working is on-cloud technology that allows all employees regardless of their location to access to needed information simply through a pc or a mobile device, ensuring them to be updated and able to take decisions and perform their tasks without leaving anyone behind.

Today people could send video, audio and instant messages and also collaborate with colleagues in real-time through the sharing of the screen or working on the same document through online drives. Digital tools have significantly reduced the gap between face-to-face communication and virtual one, therefore remote work is not simply possible but it might be efficient and in step with traditional work.

1.3 Literature Review of Benefits and challenges of remote work

As we said, remote working is an increasing phenomenon, accelerated by the pandemic of Covid 19, more and more appreciated and adopted all around the world. In this paragraph, we want to understand more deeply the benefits and challenges that this way of working entails for organizations, employees and even the environment. This will be the start of our work, here in fact we only present the incredible potential of RW and the challenges that must

face in order to make it sustainable for the employee and efficient and effective for the company. How this can be done will be elaborated on and deeply analyzed in the fourth chapter.

1.3.1 For employees

Considering employees' perspectives and the choice of remote working, the first reason that may come to mind is the commute travel reduction which results in double savings, in terms of time and costs. In fact, thanks to the absence/ reduction of daily commuting, workers have more leisure or family time, the amount of time saved is from 40 to 90 minutes a day (estimates vary by study) and they have also fewer costs to bear due to the reduction of fuel used and a low maintenance expense. In addition to these, remote workers may experience many other expenditure decreases: they can spend less on office clothing, food and even insurance (ILO 2016 ^[7]), they save the costs for parking and other transport, they can buy or rent houses in more affordable markets (Beno 2021 ^[8]). According to a press release of Codacons³, in Italy, thanks to smart working a person could save from 2845 euros to 5115 euros and 74 minutes every day, depending on whether the employee travels by car or public transport and based on the distance traveled from home to the workplace.

Despite the previously mentioned savings, in order to have a complete overview of the economic advantages, we need to mention the existence also of some costs that are shifted from the company to the employee: for instance, energy, connectivity, and heating costs.

Even if less time in commuting is an important advantage that can easily be detected, this is not the main inducement to choose remote work (Bailey and Kurland 2002 ^[9]). There is much evidence both from scientific articles and practitioners' reports and papers which demonstrates that there are other factors that push workers to adopt this work approach and they are not linked to the economic-financial dimension. Some of them are increased flexibility, better work-life balance, higher autonomy, and consequent improvement in job satisfaction.

³ Codacons press release, <https://codacons.it/bollette-codacons-prezzi-record-di-energia-e-benzina-incentivano-smartworking-lavoratore-risparmia-fino-a-5-100-euro-allanno-per-aziende-costi-si-abbattono-del-30/>, 14 february 2022

In their global report about future work trends, Reisinger and Fetterer report ⁴ that for 59% of knowledge workers flexibility is more important than salary and other benefits. Also at the Italian level, the INAPP report confirms as main benefits flexibility, consequent autonomy, and improvement of work-life balance: 66,5% of interviewed workers agree with the fact that remote work makes them able to organize more autonomously their work and 68,9 % say that remote work helps them to manage family commitments.

Flexibility is often mentioned also by scholars as a benefit (Desanctis 1984 ^[10]; Kurland and Bailey 1999 ^[11], 2002;). When we talk about work flexibility in remote work arrangements examined, we consider both the spatial dimension, so the workspace that cannot be necessarily home but elsewhere, and the temporal dimension so flexible schedule and flexible work hours. In a few words for employees, it means having the possibility to choose based on their needs how to work; they can decide where or when to work in order to perform their job at the best. Thanks to this work mode, people can organize their tasks and their time, so they perceived themselves as owner and controller of their work.

This leads to a higher autonomy, a direct consequence of greater flexibility. A higher autonomy provokes an enhanced sense of responsibility, higher perceived trust, and meaningfulness of work (Sokolic 2022 ^[12]). All these aspects can cause an increase in the level of job satisfaction as another positive output of this work type (Wheatley 2012 ^[13]).

Other advantages that can result from time and space flexibility are: an enhanced balance between work demands and at home responsibilities and a better employee's ability to manage work-life interactions, especially for women (Troup and Rose 2012 ^[14]) and also an improvement in personal well being given by the freedom to choose how to manage work obligations (Sokolic 2022). About the improvement of work-life balance, there are some discordant opinions among scholars, based on the opinion of workers. For some people, especially during the pandemic, remote work was a great source of stress because there wasn't the possibility to fix some boundaries between work and life, generating conflicts.

Even if this is a potential problem of virtual work, it is appropriate to distinguish between the remote work, experienced during an emergency characterized by the unexpected, instability of all types also psychological and coerciveness as the pandemic was, and the remote work, as a result of a conscious individual and organizational choice, performed in normal life. So remote work might deteriorate in some cases work-life balance due to the

⁴ Jabra Hybrid Ways of working 2021 Global report

blurred boundaries between life and work which can result in fatigue, stress, and bad morale (Grant, Wallace, and Spurgeon, 2013 ^[15]). This may happen especially if the employee is not prepared for this, for instance, he/ she has not a proper space dedicated to work. According to the study of Xiao et al ^[16] (2021), people who continue to work from home need a designated workstation, access to childcare, and a routine.

As we said, remote work can be harmful if it is not chosen but imposed, in-fact not everybody can take the same advantages from it because of several variables such as family situation, the intensity of social life, personal predisposition, etc. However, there are some cases in which remote work has allowed fragile people, disabled people, women with little children, or people who in general have to take care of somebody else to work and have a more serene personal life.

The improvement in well-being is given also by the fact that the commuting time drastically decreases and so employees have much more time to devote to family, to friends, to personal development, so to a richer personal life. On the other hand, more time is not always translated into more family or leisure time but into longer work hours that can increase the level of employee stress. The possibility to work anytime, anywhere has impacts on the duration of working hours and on the organization of working time (Euro found-ILO 2017 ^[17]). In the Euro found report, based on many national reports, it is stated that people who work remotely are more likely to have longer working hours than office workers. The reason for this fact is that there is no real end to the working day, employees do not leave the office to go home and they have complete access to their work at anytime, anywhere so they may be tempted to check and answer emails, finish an uncompleted task, help a colleague, or respond to a customer's request. The easy access to work leads to what is called Autonomy Paradox (Mazmanian et al 2013 ^[18]): if, on one hand, professionals have flexibility and control over their job and their interactions with others, this work mode also leads managers and clients to think that the person is always available and so this results in a higher engagement of the professional and a difficulty in disconnecting from work.

For the same reasons also the organization of working time is impacted because people can choose when to work so the working day schedule changes: many workers especially managers and knowledge workers prefer to work in the evening, or they may decide to work in weekends. This is part of the idea of flexibility intended as the possibility to work when and

where you are more productive and comfortable, but the risk is that these become not substitute hours but additional ones.

In terms of task performance, employees have fewer distractions and interruptions, they are free to set their workplace and choose the conditions on which they are more productive, for example, light, temperature, furniture and music. However, the work of a remote employee could be hindered by the absence of appropriate work equipment including also instability or inconsistency of internet access (Vafin 2021 ^[19]). According to the Microsoft's global report 2021, one year later the start of remote working 42% of employees lack office supplies and 10% do not have an internet connection good enough to appropriately perform their job.

In general, remote work is a very good solution for deep concentration and focus on one's job but, at the same time, if it is not properly designed by the organization, it can also lead to a sense of isolation and the absence of social interactions with colleagues, having consequences on the quality of life and of the work of a person. This is one of the greatest challenges of remote work to be overcome in order to make it sustainable and purposeful for the employee and effective for the organization. In fact, a sense of isolation can hinder the ability to learn the corporate culture and may also reduce the involvement and the contribution of the employee to the firm (Kurland and Bailey 1999), since the person does not feel part of the organization.

Distance from the workplace could translate not only into social isolation but also professional isolation; according to Sokolic the reduction of interaction in the workplace can result in missed opportunities to build connections and social networks. Because of social and professional isolation, career and professional development in the organization could be more difficult and the employee could also have problems in understanding developments within the company. A potential drawback of a work context where people are not sharing the same space all the time is reduced visibility (Bailey and Kurland 2000, 2002). Many workers fear that in a remote context their effort could be not visible to the eyes of managers and colleagues and so not properly noticed and appreciated. Furthermore, working remotely can hamper access to the informal information sharing that happens in a normal office (Euro found, 2017).

Another benefit of remote work often mentioned by academics and practitioners is increased productivity. According to Vafin 2021, working remotely reduces tardiness and sick leave increasing productivity. For Choudhury, Foroughi and Larson ^[20] working from anywhere

increases productivity not only due to the previously mentioned elements but also the possibility to choose where to live. Furthermore, the OECD report ^[21] (2021) shows a positive correlation between productivity and the desire to work at home.

In general, we can say that the improvement of individual performance is the sum of many elements previously described (freedom to organize, flexibility, autonomy, job satisfaction, control of time, absence of interruptions and distractions) but there are two main explanations often emerged in academic and practitioner literature for this increase of productivity in remote work arrangements (Eurofound, Beauregard 2015 ^[22]). The first one is the extended work time. The additional time obtained by no commuting together with flexible hours and light boundaries between work and life can lead the remote employee to work more, for example, to finish a task or answer an email etc. So, in this way, remote workers seem to have higher productivity with respect to office employees, but this happens due to the increase in the actual amount of work performed (Beauregard and Basile 2015). The second explanation given for greater productivity is the absence of interruptions and distractions which translates into high quality of work.

Even if many authors and firms declare an increase in productivity, many others sustain that this is not always true, and it doesn't work for everyone. In addition to being very difficult to measure and quantify, especially in the case of knowledge work, productivity depends on many variables, some of which employers and sometimes employees themselves have no or little power to modify. For instance, individual performance in a remote work context can be influenced: by the nature of work, according to the study of Dutcher (2012) ^[23] virtual work has positive impacts on productivity in the case of creative tasks and negative ones for dull tasks; by demographic group, industry, level of education, distance from work (Morikawa 2022) ^[24]; even family personal situation (Madsen 2011) and culture. Productivity can also be deteriorated by a lower level of employee engagement, considered one of the determinant elements of work productivity (Patro 2013 ^[25]). In fact, if the employee feels isolated, alienated, and uninspired he/ she will put less effort into his/her job having very low productivity, this aspect is even more important in the case of remote work where the possibility to feel disengaged is very high, if there is no active and continuous intervention of the firm. Furthermore, the productivity of a remote worker is strictly connected to her/ his digital skills; one of the main reasons for the discomfort of employees who worked remotely for the very first time is the lack of appropriate digital skills in addition to the communication

difficulty that we can say maybe partially derived by the insufficient knowledge of virtual tools. The consequence of this leads to a lower sense of productivity and satisfaction for those workers, with respect to those who had previously experienced remote work.

So, in the end, we can say that there are some cases in which remote work could be more productive than office work and productivity depends on many variables such as personality, family situation, educational level, etc. Therefore, it is important that firms offer their employees alternatives with respect to traditional work to put them in the best conditions possible to perform well but, on the other hand, remote work is not suitable for everyone so it must be the result of a conscious choice of the individual and not something imposed to him/ her. This reasoning is valid also for many other advantages we have seen, so remote work has very great potential, but it has to be well understood by employees with respect to their needs and implemented in a sustainable way by firms that have to intervene actively in employee engagement, organizational commitment and digital training to amplify benefits and minimize disadvantages.

1.3.2 For companies

Some of the positive aspects previously considered for employees result in positive outcomes also for companies. For instance, improved satisfaction and increased morale mean lower turnover and absenteeism, greater productivity and wellbeing translate into high-quality work (Kurland and Bailey 1999). In addition to them, many other factors impact positively the profitability and success of a firm, adopting remote work. The first one is talent attraction. On the company side, allowing people to work anywhere means that it can hire employees all over the world, attracting highly skilled professionals without geographical boundaries but only based on its needs in terms of talent and specific skills. In general, talent attraction is fundamental to achieve organizational goals and direction because excellent human resources are at the basis of the success of a firm; in this period characterized by an alarming talent shortage is even more important. According to the Manpower Group report⁵, over the last sixteen years, the global talent shortage has worsened every year and in 2022 three in four employers have difficulties in finding the talent they need. In this situation, remote work can be a concrete solution to widen the talent pool available for the company,

⁵ <https://go.manpowergroup.com/talent-shortage>

representing at the same time a competitive advantage in the war of talent between companies.

In fact, remote working is perceived as a benefit by employees, so it is a perfect tool to attract people, but it allows also to improve staff retention (Euro found and ILO report 2017). Thanks to the pandemic, workers had the opportunity to re-evaluate their careers and their life determining a relevant shift in their priorities. According to a Randstad survey⁶, people start to give higher importance to work-life balance, personal life, and wellbeing, having a fulfilling job and more control over it. Most respondents said that their personal life is more important than their work life, happiness is a priority and job flexibility is a fundamental prerequisite they are unwilling to sacrifice. All age groups agree on the importance of having flexible hours (80% of Millennials, 79% of those between 55 and 67), whereas spatial flexibility is a subject dear, especially to the youngest generation (three quarters in the case of Millennials, only 60% of older generations).

Failing to meet these expectations means a failure for the success and growth of the company, the unfulfillment of these needs is one of the main causes of the so-called “Great resignation”, term coined by Anthony Klotz⁷. Great resignation is a phenomenon that started in the USA in 2020-2021 and achieves its maximum in September 2021 when 4,4 million American workers resigned (Tessema et al 2022 ^[26]). Voluntary resignation also regards the European labor market and to some extent Italy, in particular, northern regions such as Lombardia and Veneto involving the age range between 26-35 based on the data of Aidp⁸, Associazione italiana direzione personale. People who worked at home during the pandemic started to appreciate the advantages of remote working and get accustomed to it, so, when asked to return to their workplace, they are reluctant, and they are willing to resign and search for jobs in hybrid/ remote firms. One way to retain people in a so fragile situation is attempting to accommodate workers’ desires offering them flexibility.

An additional advantage for companies in adopting remote work is cost reduction and consequent improvements in margins (Vafin 2021). For instance, if the company decides to go fully remote, the office costs (rent, utilities, cleaning service and furniture) will be reset but

⁶ Randstad Work monitor 2022, <https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/global-hr-research/randstad-workmonitor/>

⁷ Klotz, A. (2021). Anthony Klotz on defining the great resignation. The Verse

⁸ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/great-resignation-perche-e-fenomeno-crescita-e-come-rallentarla-AEU3sflB>

also in the case the firm opts for a hybrid solution, office costs will be significantly reduced because offices designed for a hybrid team are usually smaller and more functional. Other saved costs regard business travel: instead of business trips, the company could make use of teleconferences and virtual meeting. Furthermore, it must be considered the cost reduction regarding staff: because firms have different workloads during the year, remote work gives the possibility to hire freelance and contract workers based on their needs, without facing the expense of hiring a new full-time employee.

Additionally, remote work gives the company the great opportunity to preserve business continuity also in case of an emergency, as we see during the Covid 19 pandemic but also earthquakes, floods etc. Companies that have early adopted this work mode have fewer problems in facing the covid 19 crisis and continuing efficiently and effectively their business with respect to those firms that experienced for the very first time this new way of working.

An impact often mentioned is an increase in organizational commitment (Madsen 2011), intended as the individual attachment to the company. In general, authors have found a positive correlation between remote work and organizational commitment (Choo et al 2016^[27]) but there are also some researchers who support the fact that remote work could impact negatively it due to a lack of interactions with the workplace and colleagues, to a low engagement and sense of identification (Wang et al. 2020^[28]). Even if there are ambiguous results in academic research, we can say that remote work is commonly perceived by workers as a great benefit because it allows them to manage their work and their personal-family life. Based on this statement, we can also affirm that in the case of RW we have high level of continuative commitment, intended as “an employee's desire to remain with the organization due to perceived benefits, lack of attractive alternatives, or high switching cost” (Meyer and Allen, 1991^[29]). But it is not enough to create a strong organizational commitment, in fact, according to Meyer and Allen is also important the employee connection, identification and involvement with the firm (affective commitment); so, in the context of remote work, continuative commitment is strong but at the same time affective commitment if not properly encouraged by the company through the maintenance of a high level of employee engagement could be weak.

Despite significant benefits, companies that decide to adopt remote work must face some challenges. The main issue for companies is employee's control issue which represents one of the main barriers to the implementation of remote work, even today (Kurland and Bailey

1999, Kurland and Egan, 1999; Felstead et al. 2003 ^[30], Sokolic 2022). Managers are reluctant to implement remote work because they fear an irremediable loss of control and consequent performance deterioration. Work time and quality of work could not be monitored and controlled through the traditional office-based mechanisms due to the physical distance between manager and worker and the issue is even harder in the case of knowledge jobs where outputs are more difficult to measure. Control in remote work is more complex and it requires managers to develop a relationship with employees characterized by a much higher level of trust and a deep change in the mindset and skills required. This issue is the focus of our paper and so for it will be examined and analyzed more deeply in the following chapters.

Companies may also face some inefficiencies related to internal communication and consequently employee' motivation and engagement. According to Sokolic, communication can be problematic in different ways: there could be less or lack of communication with respect to a traditional situation due to the lack of physical presence, but it could also happen that managers because of the control loss fear tend to over-communicate. In this way, frequent messages and numerous meetings become totally counterproductive because they increase employee's stress levels, and interrupt the individual workflow decreasing productivity. So, a very important challenge that must be faced is certainly the elaboration of a good and balanced communication strategy that requires intentionality, tools and managers' skills and predisposition.

Other aspects linked to communication that could be difficult when workers are distant are the creation of team synergy and cohesion, informal learning, employee engagement and organizational commitment. It could also be more difficult but not impossible to develop a strong organizational culture and transmit it, especially to new employees. About new entries, remote work may be uncomfortable for younger workers because they lack experience and autonomy, and they need more supervision and support in order to learn and grow. Finally, a very practical aspect that must be considered by companies is cybersecurity so the protection of sensitive data that could be more fragile and complex outside the office.

Most of these drawbacks must be seen as challenges: they are objectively difficult because in a context where people are remote from colleagues and managers, they are not solved naturally, but they are not impossible, they simply require more intentionality and active actions and interventions from managers and individuals themselves. For this reason, we will examine them more deeply in the next chapters and we will try to find some solutions,

strategies to adopt in order to overcome these problems thanks to the testimony of some Italian firms who have successfully implemented remote work arrangements.

1.3.3 for the environment and society

Remote work, as all the human activities, has effects on the environment. Working remotely is often seen as a good solution to decrease greenhouse gas emissions thanks to the reduction of commuting and travel but, as the latest working paper of Euro found ^[31] states, assessing the environmental benefit of remote work is a very complex task because a wide variety of variables must be considered. In fact, some potential rebound effects may occur and even out weight energy savings from reduced commuting. Some of these are increased non-working travel and mostly increase of house energy consumption which in turn depends on many factors i.e., heating and cooling technology installed, home energy efficiency, and climatic and region-specific conditions.

So even if there are ambiguous results about the ability of remote work to mitigate greenhouse gas emission, we can more easily affirm that remote work can reduce acoustic pollution and traffic congestion, foster the use of public transport due to a higher concealability between flexible work hours and, for instance, bus hours. It also gives the possibility to employees to relocate outside the city, repopulating in this way countryside and areas where the population with time was drop off. As we have already seen, remote work could be also a solution to foster social inclusion giving the possibility to work to those categories that for many years have difficulties in access to the labor market such as disabled people, women with children and in general individuals who take care of somebody else. Finally remote work could also have a positive impact on cross border cooperation between companies and institutions, increasing social and economic cohesion.

Table 1, Summary of remote work benefits and challenges

	advantages	challenges
Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Less time commuting • cost savings (gas, dress, car maintenance) • Autonomy • Higher job satisfaction • Higher productivity • Less distractions • Better work life balance • Improved morale • Work opportunity for elderly, disabled, parents with little children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and professional isolation • Potential lack of visibility • Longer working hours • Blurred borders between work and personal life
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced overhead costs • Reduced turnover or loss of good employees • Widen talent pool available to the organization • Increased productivity due to lower stress levels and flexible hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision and performance evaluation could be difficult • Isolation may result in a less engaged and motivated worker • Management could be resistant • Clients and community may be skeptical • Effective communication • Connection with colleagues could struggle • Creating a culture company is difficult but not impossible • Cybersecurity • RW could be uncomfortable for new employees
Environment and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced traffic congestion • Less carbon emissions due to less commuting • Increased use of public transportation • Regeneration of rural areas • Social inclusion • Improve cross border cooperation, social and economic cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is difficult to assess the positive impact of remote work on the environment • Carbon emissions due to increased house consumptions + non work travel could out weight saving from commuting

Source: personal elaboration based on the literature reviewed

1.4 Remote work in EU and Italy

In this paragraph, we will try to give a broader vision of the spread and diffusion of remote work considering as a reference point the outbreak of the pandemic. We will see where and by who telework was adopted and then we will see the changes caused by Covid 19 pandemic. Our discussion will involve Europe in general with a specific focus on Italy's situation.

1.4.1 Before pandemic

The pandemic has been an incredible accelerator of remote work diffusion, representing an occasion for a massive global experiment of this new work approach, however, forms of remote work were put in place also before 2020. In previous years, working remotely existed as an alternative to traditional office work but it was not a popular and widespread practice, it was adopted only by some occupational categories in some countries with specific characteristics and cultural predispositions. According to some studies (Milasi et al. 2021 ^[32], Sostero 2020 ^[33]), the typical teleworker before 2020 was:

- A self-worker; in 2019, 36% of the self-employed was sometimes or usually working from home in the EU-27 versus only 11% of employees.
- A worker in Knowledge-intensive services, i.e., professional and ICT services as shown in figure n°1
- High-skilled worker
- A person with a third-level degree
- top level i.e., managers and seniors so with a high level of autonomy

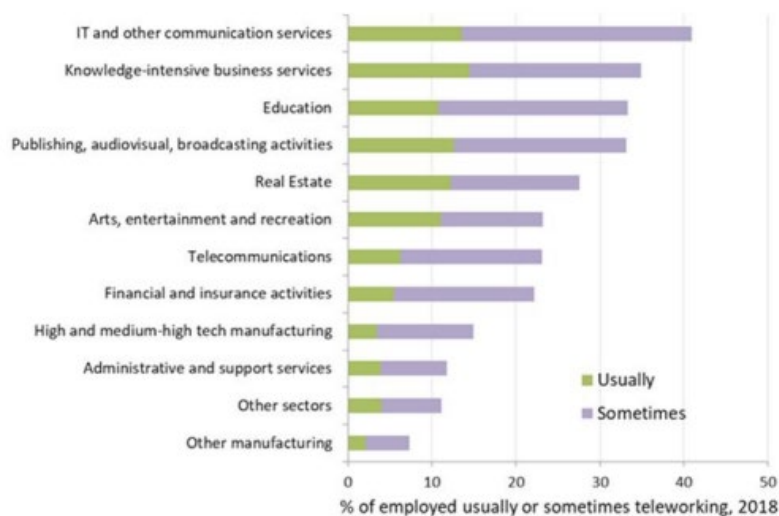


Figure 1: Prevalence of telework by sector, EU-27, 2018, Source: Sostero's (2022) calculations from ad-hoc extractions of EU-Labour Force Survey data provided by Eurostat

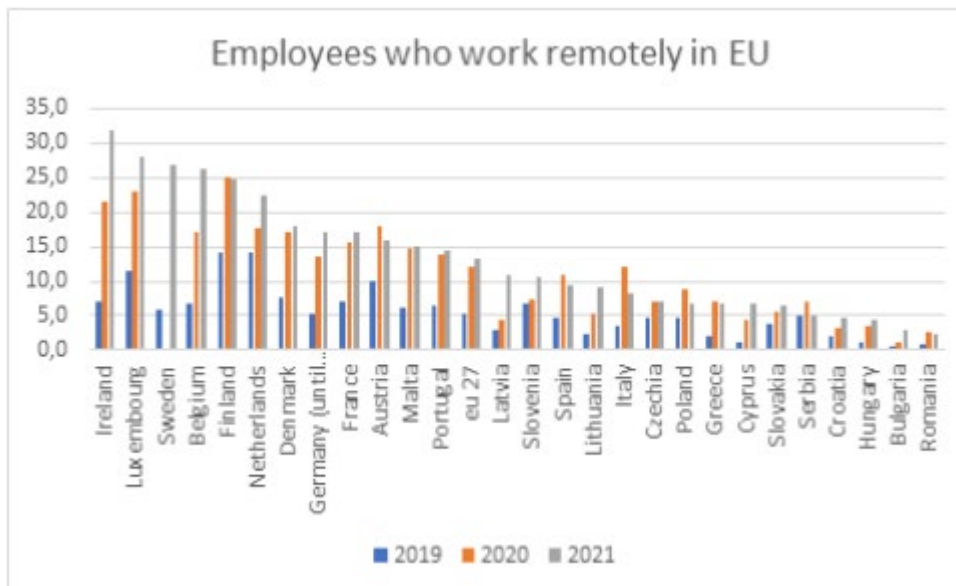


Figure 2: Employees who work remotely in EU in 2019,2020, 2021.

Source: Eurostat, LFS, variable code: ifsa_ehomp

Figure 2 shows that the countries where remote work was more spread in 2019 were Finland, Netherlands, and Luxembourg, whereas in fifteen of the twenty-seven European state members performed telework is below 5%.

According to some studies (Sostero 2020, Boeri et al 2020 ^[34], Cetrulo et al 2020 ^[35]), there is a potential percentage of jobs that can be performed remotely. From the estimates of Sostero, in EU the share of employment teleworkable is around 37%, whereas according to Boeri's study it is around 31% and for Cetrullo about 30%. In both cases, there is a huge gap between the potential of teleworkable employment and the actual one. For instance, in Italy in 2019 only 3,6% of employed people usually work remotely against a potential of teleworkable employment of 37%.

For Sostero et al teleworkability is "the technical possibility of providing labor input remotely into a given economic process". It is technically possible in the sense that the actual implementation of that specific job depends on some variables such as the organization of work and the available technologies, so theoretically the job can be done but in practice there are some elements that can hinder its feasibility and efficiency. So according to the authors, the most suitable jobs for remote working are those that entail information processes tasks because information digitally encoded can be transmitted instantly around the world without quality losses. Also, jobs that provide social interactions, as long as they do not require physical contact, could be performed remotely thanks to the availability of digital communication tools (video conference, chat, phone, etc.). But the more social interactions it involves, the harder

it is to do remote work without significant losses. Finally, obviously jobs that require physical tasks are not teleworkable for now.

There are several reasons why remote work is differently spread across Europe. For instance, in Northern Europe, a larger share of employment is represented by knowledge and ICT services, sectors that historically and technically are more predisposed to this work mode. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks, the level of ICT infrastructures, available technologies, workers' level of digital skills, ICT training are all relevant factors that can enable or hinder remote work (Milasi et al 2021). However, according to the writer's opinion, the main critical factor of a successful remote work adoption is the organizational and management culture in the specific country or even in the specific company. Whereas technologies can be enhanced, and digital skills can be learned, management practices are something very eradicated in the culture of a country and in single companies, so it is the field that requests more work in order to change deeply the mindset especially of managers and make them aware of the importance of flexibility in order to retain, attract employees making them more productive, satisfied and responsible of their work. Those countries that have voluntarily adopted flexible work arrangements even before the outbreak of the pandemic are in fact characterized by great importance of flexibility, autonomy, and freedom as their own values. Instead in other countries such as Italy there has been for several years a higher distrust of remote work due to, as ISTAT ^[36] defines in its research about the labor market in 2020, as a "market characterized by a strongly hierarchical structure with a work organization based on routine formalization and control, not oriented to the results achievement and to the employee involvement in the organizational choices and decisional processes".

1.4.2 During the pandemic

The pandemic has forced many countries such as Italy to overcome their distrust and made their employees work at home. All European countries have experienced an increase in remote work due to the spread of Covid 19, especially in the occupational category of employees. In Italy in 2020 it was achieved the highest percentage of remote working for employees, 12,5%, with a peak in the second trimester (18,6%, ISTAT), a very relevant result that, however, is still far from its potential. Inevitably, countries that previously adopted and implemented this work mode had fewer difficulties in performing jobs remotely, whereas

countries such as Italy suddenly had to revolutionize their work organization and managerial practices facing many challenges and difficulties derived from the lack of structural shifts.

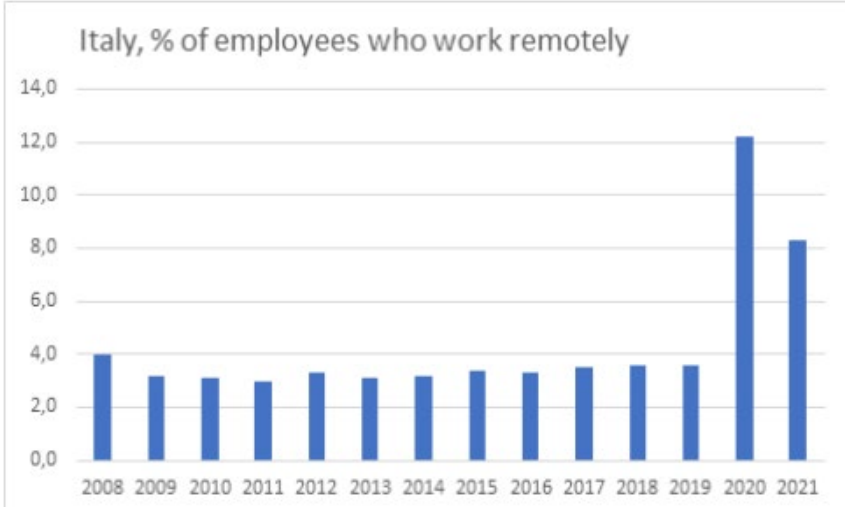


Figure 3: Employees who work remotely in Italy
Source: Eurostat, LFS, variable code: ifsa_ehomp

With respect to the pre-pandemic situation, starting from 2020 the profile of remote workers slightly changes. For instance, in the Euro found Survey Covid 19 ⁹ we see that the percentage of women who work remotely (41%) is higher than the men percentage (37%), whereas in the pre-pandemic the situation was the opposite (men 21%, women 18%). In the same survey, another change revealed is the increase of remote work in the youngest target. Finally, according to Sostero, the pandemic gave access to remote work also to employees, to low and mid-level clerical and administrative workers and not only managers and seniors as previously happened.

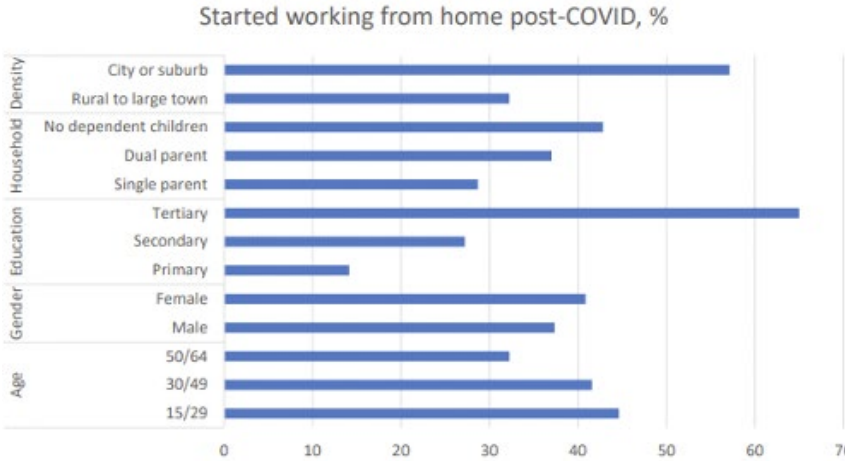


Figure 4, work and personal characteristics people started working from home post- covid, % Source: EF COVID survey

⁹ Eurofound's e-survey, Living, Working and Covid data <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/covid-19>

1.4.3 After the pandemic

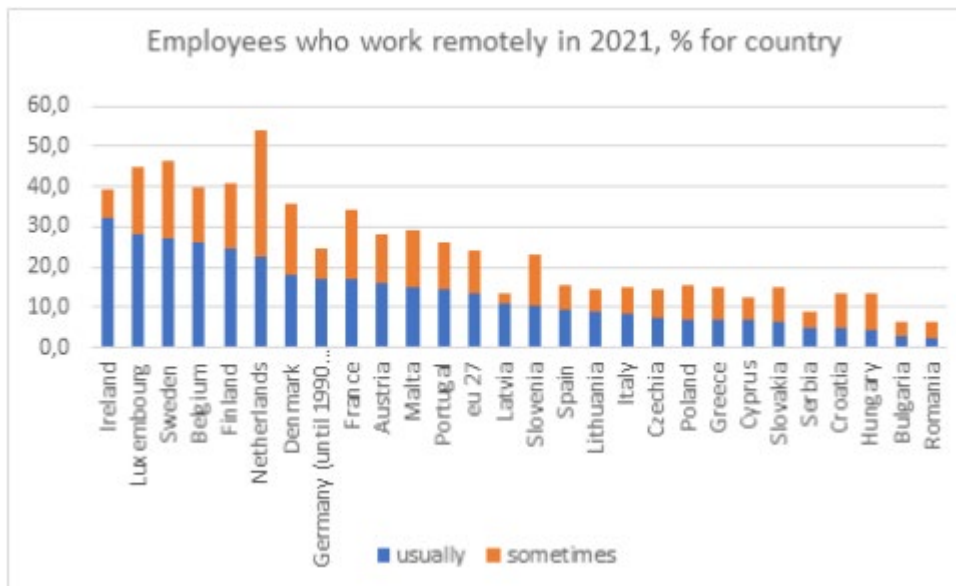


Figure 5, Employees who work remotely in 2021, % for country
Source: Eurostat, LFS, variable code: ifsa_ehomp

Despite the improvement of the epidemiological situation and so the possibility to return to the office, many employees still want flexibility and the possibility to work remotely for at least a part of the week. In the survey of the Conference Board 2020^[37] organizations predict as the most significant change after the pandemic the adoption of ways of working including more remote/ virtual work, expecting an increase in employees working at home at least 3 times a week. Observing the Eurostat data, in 2021 the number of employees who work usually/ sometimes remotely has increased in twenty-three of twenty-seven Member states, with some significant gains in Belgium (+ 6,2), Ireland (+ 7,3 pp), Latvia (7,5pp) and Netherlands (+ 13,7 pp). So, it seems that the choice of working remotely is not an exceptional event of 2020, but it might be a new trend, the beginning of a new approach to work.

Obviously when we consider the year 2021, we have to bear in mind that: first of all, in that period the pandemic was already spread all around the world with short periodic national lock-downs and restrictions, so the return to normality was not entirely possible and secondly, one single year, at most characterized by a certain level of instability, cannot be considered statistically decisive to express a judgment on the longevity of the phenomenon. However, if these data are combined with the numerous workers' surveys made by companies and institutions, we can have a deeper and broader vision of the work future. Through these

surveys (Microsoft annual report, KPMG global survey, PWC survey 2022, Mckinsey¹⁰), we can see how the preferences and expectations of workers are changed in these two years giving more and more importance to well-being, work-life balance and flexibility, especially in the case of Gen Z and Millennials who have a new “worth it” equation as 2022 Work trend Index annual report of Microsoft affirms. Based on this, we can say that in the next future in the labour market the lesson and the experience of remote work will not be forgotten because companies and workers had the possibility to try it, to discover and appreciate its potential which can be even higher in a normal situation, in a balanced hybrid context. For instance, In Italy AIDP research¹¹ states that almost 58% of new employees and employees ask for flexible work as a pre-condition to accept or continue the work. For this reason, managers and leaders could not ignore this stronger and stronger desire, otherwise, the risk is being left behind and losing precious talents. In its survey KPMG has found that 52% of surveyed organizations are considering implementing a remote working policy and 37% have already adopted one, confirming the idea that remote work is not a temporary strategy anymore but a long-term one.

According to the Italian Research Institute, Osservatori Digital Innovation Politecnico di Milano, due to the vaccines campaign, smart workers in Italy are decreased from 5,37 million in the first trimester of 2021 to 4,07 million in the third trimester. This could be interpreted as a signal of the decline of remote work because of the return to normal but it is not the case; thanks to the benefits experienced by workers and firms, hybrid work is going to last or be implemented in 89% of big companies, in 62% of PA and in 35% of PMI based on the research of Osservatori Digital Innovation.

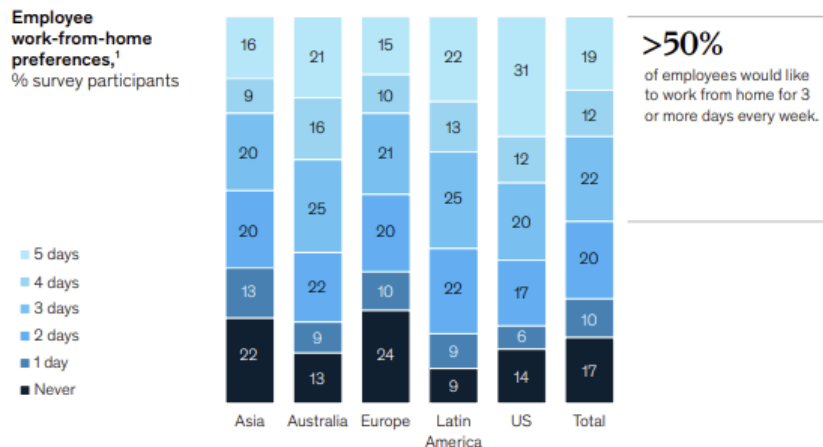
¹⁰ 2022 Work Trend Index: Microsoft Annual Report: The survey was conducted by an independent research firm Edelman Data x Intelligence, among 31,102 full-time employed or self-employed workers across 31 markets between January 7, 2022 and February 16, 2022.

Global Workforce, Hopes and Fears, Survey 2022: in March 2022, PwC surveyed 52,195 workers across 44 countries and territories

Mckinsey, Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, Meredith Langstaff, Dan Ravid What employees says about the future of remote work 2021

¹¹ <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-lavoro-il-covid-90percento-aziende-non-ha-dubbi-smart-working-modalita-definitiva-AEIPy1OB>

The majority of employees would like to work from home at least three days per week in the future.



¹Question: How often would you prefer to work from home in the future?
 Source: Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

Figure 6: Employees work preferences for the future

Source: What employees are saying about the future of remote work, KPMG, Reimagine Work: Employee Survey (Dec 2020–Jan 2021, n = 5,043 full-time employees who work in corporate or government settings)

Today the number of people working remotely is lower than the one registered during the lockdown, however, it is significantly higher than the number registered in the pre-pandemic time so we can assume that working remotely is not a temporary phenomenon, but it could be effectively an alternative of traditional work, it is not an emergency strategy any more but it is a structural strategy that can help in creating a more resilient, inclusive and smart economy.

However, to reap the full benefits of remote work, the contribution of all the involved subjects is needed: governments have to develop policies able to guarantee workers' rights and to make remote work sustainable; individuals have to improve digital and soft skills; finally, organizations must deeply change their management mindset and leadership and have to support employees, training them to acquire new skills, providing appropriate technologies and spaces.

Chapter 2

Organizational control

2.1 What organizational control is

Control is considered a key activity of the management process. Even if there are several definitions of control, there is a common consensus among researchers that control is essential in the life of an organization. According to Fayol¹², it is one of the four fundamental functions which are organizing, planning, controlling and coordinating. These functions together allow the organization to work in an effective and efficient way. For Merchant and Van der Stede 2017^[2], control is the back end of the management process which is composed of objective setting, strategy formulation, and finally control as the execution phase. So, the underlying idea is that a firm could have the best strategy possible but, if it is badly executed, the company will not achieve the desired goals. Since the strategy phase and execution one are distinct and they involve different actors, the organization needs some mechanisms to ensure that established strategies are carried out in a coherent and coordinated way and this is the scope of control (Jaeger and Baliga 1985^[3]). Over time, authors have recognized a great importance and a growing need for organizational control, however, in the years the approaches to it have varied following organizations' changes and development, and other external factors.

In literature, control is defined and interpreted based on two different perspectives that emphasize some particular aspects: the cybernetic perspective and the behavioral one. The starting point of these two approaches is the definition of organizational control as a process of aligning the actions of employees with the interests of the organization (Snell 1992^[4]) or also as a process that directs, motivates, and encourages employee behaviors in alignment with the company's goals, aspirations and expected results (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017, Ouchi 1977^[5], 1979^[6], Eisenhardt 1985^[7], the difference consists in how this can be done and which aspects must be considered.

According to the traditional control approach, the way to coordinate and solve control problems is simply limiting actions of employees through rigid work division and

¹² Fayol, H. 1949. General and industrial management. 1949 quoted by Laura b. Cardinal, Sim B Sitkin, Chris P. Long in "A configurational theory of control", chapter of the book " Organizational control" 2010

standardization (Depickere 1999 ^[8]). In his book Daft ^[9] explains how this traditional control conception was the output of the management theories raised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Scientific Management pioneered by Taylor, whose main aim was to improve efficiency and labor productivity and Bureaucratic approach developed from Administrative Principles (Fayol) which is characterized by impersonality and rationality, defined authority and responsibility, rigid procedures and rules. The cybernetic approach to control entails a closed-cycle process, defined by Green and Welsh ^[10] as a feedback loop: the manager sets the objectives and a performance standard, then he/she measures the outputs that are perfectly measurable, compares actual results with the desired/ standard one and in the case of a deviation between the standard and actual result, he/ she takes corrective actions. As some authors recognize (Carenys 2010 ^[11], Daft 2001), the problem with this control approach is that it is very mechanic and it implies having a predictive model and a performance standard but, whereas this is optimal for companies where tasks are mechanic and repetitive, it is not the best solution for other firms that are characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and dynamism.

As Daft says in his book, from the 1980s this traditional view of management which was the primary approach until the 1970s, started to falter inexorably due to increased competition, globalization, technological progress. Organizations developed new corporate cultures based on flexibility, flatter structures, quality, customer satisfaction, innovation, and also employee engagement. There was a shift in considering the organization from a technical system to a social one. So over time, human relations and behavioral approaches started to be fundamental factors to take into consideration in order to make the company work. According to this, also organizational control was enriched by elements such as social, cultural, and psychological ones (Carenys 2010).

Therefore, based on this behavioral perspective that is also our position, control is considered as a broader concept that includes “everything that helps ensure that the people in the organization are acting so as to implement properly the agreed strategy” (Merchant 1988 ^[12]) including for instance employee recruiting, socialization practices, norms and use of code of conducts. Based on this, this new control approach embeds both direct controls i.e., actions and results controls and indirect controls such as cultural controls and personnel controls. In fact, as Carneys says in explaining the position of human relationship schools, behavior is shaped by human relations so it is influenced by individual objectives, relationship

with one's work, motivation, and participation. Consequently, if a manager wants to influence employees' behaviors in order to make them achieve the company's objectives, he/she needs to take into consideration human relations and employee psychology. Furthermore, in agreement with this perspective, individuals have not only financial needs but demands of different nature, so for instance boosting their motivation is not sufficient to give them a bonus. They need to be empowered, appraised and appreciated, to participate and feel committed to the organization, they need sociality and a sense of group belonging, they want to work for values in which they believe and they search for personal satisfaction in the company. So also, these needs must be taken into consideration to intrinsically motivate them in order to achieve the organization's objectives.

The people who control and direct employees' behaviors could be managers but not necessarily; for instance, control can be exercised by employees on their colleagues (peers' control), or control could be self-control where it is the employee himself to monitor and direct his own behavior. In our research, we focus on the control role of managers, so on managerial control intended as activities done by managers to influence employees' actions and decisions so that they result consistent with organizational goals (Flamholtz et al., 1985^[13]).

2.2 Loss of control and control problems

In any case, the reason why an organization needs control is that there is a natural divergence between the organization's interests and individual ones so the risk is that employees do not operate for the good of the company but according to their own interest. The job of managers is to intervene and try to make them converge in order to avoid a loss of control. According to Merchant and Van der Stede (2017), the main reasons that can imply a loss of control so nonalignment between employees' behavior and the company's goals are the following control problems: lack of direction, motivational problems, and personal limitations.

2.2.1 Lack of direction

Whether control means keeping people on track, this presumes that all individuals in the organization have to know the road. There might be some cases in which the problem is not the fact that the employees do not want to meet expectations but they cannot do so because they do not know what the company expects from them, or cases in which it is not that they

do not want to follow direction but they simply do not know where the company is going and, hence without indications, they easily get lost. So even if the strategy, the vision and the mission are wonderfully designed by top management, whether they are not shared with the lower levels and, even more important, if they are not translated into the words of each team and person, they are destined to fail. So, the organization needs to put in place some actions and initiatives in order to help each person to understand more deeply how he/she can personally contribute with his/her work to the achievement of the final goals.

2.2.2 Motivational problems

A further problem for the organization's goals achievement can be a lack of motivation. There are two types of motivation:

- extrinsic motivation, to engage in an activity as an instrumental means to an end (Frey and Osterloch 2002^[14])
- intrinsic motivation, employees operate for their own sake because they find their work enjoyable and challenging or because they share the values of the company for which they work.

So, there might be a situation in which the person knows what he/ she is expected to do and how his/ her contribution is collocated in the company plan but the individual does not have the motivation to do it, to operate in the interest of the company. So here it is necessary a managers' intervention to realign people. For many years, the idea was that managers could only influence extrinsic motivation through formal managerial control mechanisms such as reward and incentive systems, so the employee is motivated to achieve the goal by the fact that he/ she will receive an economical bonus. However, it is not completely true, managers could also foster intrinsic motivation through more informal and indirect mechanisms such as empowering employees, increasing their organizational identification and commitment, supporting their growth and encouraging their natural predispositions.

2.2.3 Personal limitations and lack of resources

Finally, an organization could have employees that have received perfect instructions about what they have to do and why they have to do it in terms of the company's expectations and desired direction, at the same time maybe those employees are also very motivated to achieve the expected results and to contribute to the success of the company but they have not the

personal resources to do it, they are unable to perform well because of some person-specific limitations. Some of these could be a lack of aptitude, attitude, training, or knowledge.

Another problem that personally we could add to this list of control problems detected by Merchant and Van der Stede is the lack of the appropriate resources which, according to us, is an element not included in the others because it is a limitation that does not depend on the individual but by the fact that he/she is not put in the right conditions to perform well, because they do not receive the appropriate instruments or information or support in terms of other human resources to perform at their best the job.

2. 3 Organizational control types

Organizational control has been classified in many different ways. The first distinction we can make is based on formality: there can be formal control mechanisms and informal ones.

Formal control includes “officially sanctioned and usually codified institutional mechanisms such as written rules and procedural directives- visible, objective forms of control”, whereas informal control regards “unwritten, unofficial values, norms, shared values and beliefs that guide employee actions and behaviors-less objective forms of control” (Cardinal et al 2004^[15]). Organizational control can be also divided into direct and indirect control (Hutzschenreuter 2009^[16], Errichiello and Pianese 2016^[17]): direct control means that the manager can directly supervise and monitor employees’ behavior, indirect controls are implemented where there isn’t this possibility and so the manager needs to rely on levers that can influence behaviors in the desired way, for instance through organizational culture.

Another fundamental classification of control types is based on the object of control, so according to researchers (Ouchi 1979, Eisenhardt 1985, Snell 1992) we can control results achieved (output control), actions performed (behavior control), resources used (input control) and norms and values shared (clan control). These control types were relabeled by Merchant respectively as results, actions, personnel and cultural controls. The latter two usually are included together in the definition of clan control (Ouchi) or people mechanisms (Eisenhardt); we chose Merchant's framework precisely because he clearly and more specifically distinguishes these two types of control, which are complementary but affect employees’ behavior differently.

Adopting this control framework, in the next parts we will deepen every single type of control trying to figure out what it consists of, when it is desirable and when it is not and what

kind of problems it may solve. In describing these types of control, we enrich the Merchant framework with other authors' opinions and findings about these control mechanisms which are often called with different terms but they refer to similar concepts.

2.3.1 Results (Output) control

Result control includes defining the dimensions of desired results, setting performance standards, measuring alignment between actual and desired results and providing respective rewards for success in goal attainment (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017). Result control means that managers assign and define some goals for employees who are then monitored and evaluated on the basis of the achievement of the goals. The only way in which employee's behavior is directed by the organization is by giving him a clear and well-defined goal, letting him or her free to obtain the expected result as the individual wants. Results control can be implemented during the process or after the completion of it (Hutzschenreuter 2009), therefore in the first case it allows to control intermediate results and it allows redirecting attention and effort *in itinere* due to intermediate feedback, in the second one is an ex-post form of control and the object of control is the final result.

Setting clear pre-set objectives and basing evaluation on them can be a good way to guide the employee towards expected results avoiding the risk that he/ she can lose the sight of the company's desired direction. Results control also can have positive implications on extrinsic motivation in the case in which a reward and incentive system is linked to the achievement of goals, but also on intrinsic motivation. Monitoring and evaluating the final output means giving autonomy and freedom in choosing how to achieve the pre-set goal, in this way the employee feels empowered and trustworthy, he/she sees his expertise recognized and respected so he/ she is motivated to put effort into the job. This reasoning is not valid for everyone, it depends on the type of worker employed in the company: if employees are not hard achievers or autonomous people or they are risk-adverse, this approach can be detrimental especially in the case of very challenging targets. Some people by nature prefer to be more specifically told what to do and they prefer to not have high degrees of responsibility, in this case, results control has bad impacts on their motivation, does not offer them enough guidance, and may accentuate personal limitations.

Beyond these specific worker factors, according to Ouchi (1979), feasibility of results control as a mechanism to ensure organizational and individual alignment depends on two conditions:

- the ability to measure the desired output effectively and precisely
- the knowledge of the transformation process or task programmability.

Ouchi in fact thinks that in order to perform control, you need something to monitor, and for him when we interact with people, the only two things that we can monitor are their behaviors and results. When behaviors cannot be observed, when it is not possible to set rules that ensure success because the managers know little about the process itself or because the work by nature has very low task programmability (knowledge work), a suitable solution could be results control. However, results control needs measurability as fundamental condition: managers must be able to precisely measure the desired outcomes.

A limitation of this mechanism, identified by Merchant and Van der Stede, is the arise of congruence and alignment problems derived from the fact that sometimes managers can have imperfect knowledge of the desirable outputs. Therefore, it could happen that the outputs monitored are measurable with precision but they are not the right indicators for measuring a good performance in that specific case or for that specific role, or that they are the right aspects to consider and focused on but they receive wrong weights. In both cases there is an incongruity with the company's goals, employees take the wrong actions because managers have induced them to focus on areas that are not relevant to the achievement of the organizational goals. Another limitation recognized by Hutzschenreuter (2009) regards the fact that results control mechanisms simply tell the manager that there is a deviation between what was expected and what was achieved but, without other actions and initiatives put in place, they do not give us information why the goal was not obtained, whether due a personal failure or external factors on which the person does not have control.

2.3.2 Actions (Behavior) control

According to Hutzschenreuter, actions control can be classified in process control, when the action is performed by a machine, behavior control, when it is done by a human individual.

With actions controls managers ensure that the process is appropriate and in line with what the organization wants to pursue. Thanks to direct supervision and rules and norms creation, managers can observe, verify and direct employees' behaviors towards the desired ones, those that are considered beneficial to the company (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017,

Errichiello and Pianese 2016, Ouchi 1979, Eisenhardt 1985, Snell 1992). Actions controls include the usage of standard procedures, guidelines, rules and behavioral norms that employees must respect to be considered aligned.

For Ouchi (1977,1979) the condition to perform this type of control is perfect knowledge of the process, for Eisenhardt task programmability. They refer to the fact that managers have to know the linkage between actions taken and results achieved. If they do not fully know the process, they cannot also understand what are the desirable actions to be taken in order to achieve that specific result, so they are not able to translate organization's intentions into operative actions (Ouchi & Maguire 1975 ^[18]). However, according to Eisenhardt (1985), another aspect that helps actions control implementation is behavior observability. So, even if there is no perfect process transformation knowledge, there could be room for actions control when managers can observe employees or make their actions observable through the use of information systems or other monitoring devices.

As all, also actions control has both advantages and disadvantages. According to Merchant and van der Stede, actions control has first of all the benefit to be the most direct form of control; thanks to direct supervision, managers have interactions with employees and so they can more easily see how much effort they put in the assigned task and they can appreciate and observe individuals' skills. Secondly, action controls tend to create documentation that represents an accumulation of knowledge, a collection of best solutions for specific problems/issues. Due to this documentation, knowledge can be transferred to new employees and, even if someone leaves the company, remains within it. Furthermore, having established procedures and guide lines may help to reduce uncertainty in the business (Hutzschenreuter 2009). In fact, whether there is an obstacle, the presence of a specific procedure may be a starting point for the employee to tackle it and solve the problem quickly whether no further complications arise. Finally, another advantage underlined by Merchant and Van der Stede is the power of actions control in terms of coordination.

However, this type of control entails also some relevant disadvantages. The first one is limited feasibility (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017): the use of standards, rigid procedures etc. as the predominant type of control can be successful in cases where tasks are denoted by a high level of programmability and by mechanic and repetitive actions, but it cannot be implemented as primary and predominant control in case of knowledge work or in general in uncertain and dynamic business environment because if not used with caution and balance,

it hinders creativity, flexibility and innovation. As opposed to the case of result control, action control limits in a relevant way the employees' ability to decide how to perform the job and how to achieve the set target reducing motivation and proactivity. Finally, from an economic point of view, actions control is more costly than result control or other types of control because it entails investments in information systems and other surveillance devices to make behaviors observable (Eisenhardt 1985) and the cost of personal surveillance (Eisenhardt 1985, Snell 1992).

2.3.3 Cultural control

A group culture is defined by Schein ^[19] as "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. ". Also, other authors define organizational culture as "the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help members of an organization understand why things happen and thus teach them the behavioral norms in the organization "(Deshpande and Webster 1989^[20]).

So organizational culture is able to influence individuals' behaviors representing a sort of guide for employees (Jaworski 1993 ^[21]) because it gives hints on how they have to behave and on what they have to focus their attention on. Beliefs and values shared by the employees in the organization become the assumptions based on which they approach things, detect problems, and find solutions.

Therefore, we can say that organizational culture has a great control potential, the objects of cultural control are organizational environment and normative culture. Cultural control aims at designing and communicating to employees shared values, beliefs, traditions, rituals and ways of behaving so as to indirectly and, we can add, subconsciously influence their behavior, creating organizational behavioral norms (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017). It is an indirect control form because the organization's intent is transmitted by the top to employees without formal procedures (Jaeger and Baliga 1985^[22]) and we define its influence subconscious because cultural controls are generally thought to be a relatively unobtrusive form of control with respect to actions or results control (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017). In fact, in the majority of cases, employees do not feel controlled in this sense, they do not think that ways of doing things in their firm can be a control mechanism but simply the identity

and characteristics of that company. Some useful managerial techniques in terms of cultural control are codes of conduct, group-based rewards, role models/ intra-organizational transfers, tone at the top/ top-management communication (Hutzschenreuter, Merchant and Van der Stede 2017) and physical and social arrangements (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017).

Both in Merchant and in Ouchi, who call this indirect form of control “clan control”, at the basis of cultural control there is the idea of mutual control: because they belong to a group with a shared culture, individuals naturally tend to monitor the behavior of others, observing and highlighting possible deviations, and at the same time to influence others’ way of behaving. Due to the low monitoring ability of cultural control, the essential elements to make this mechanism effective in keeping people on company’s track are a high level of organizational commitment and identification (Ouchi 1979), and congruence as more as possible between individual and company norms and values (Jaeger and Baliga 1985). According to Merchant the effectiveness of cultural controls depends also on individuals, groups and communities in which ties between members can be more or less strong, the strongest the tie, the most effective this type of control will be.

But, in general, cultural control is suitable for almost every setting and company because it implies little costs with respect to direct form of controls, it is unobtrusive so employees are more willing to accept it and it might produce fewer harmful side effects. Cultural control is significantly useful in solving the problem of lack of direction and motivational issues.

Deal and Kennedy ^[23]in fact consider culture as a very effective instrument to guide behaviors for two different reasons: the first one because “a strong culture is a system of informal rules that spells out how people are to behave the most time”, in few words it makes simpler to choose how to behave in a certain situation because the employee exactly knows what the company expects from him or her, so he/she doesn’t waste time, facilitating decision making and increasing productivity; secondly, Deal and Kennedy say that when a person chooses a company is choosing a way of living, so they believe that a strong corporate identity makes people feel good about what they do. This boosts their motivation because they are not working for just any firm but a company with great values and beliefs, its own way of thinking and doing things, therefore they feel part of something special. High commitment and identification make possible to create an emotional bond between employees which produces good impacts on motivation and consequently on retention and productivity of the

person. In fact, employees who share the company culture and feel part of it are less prone to leave the organization, they are also more motivated to perform well their job and achieve results because they truly believe in the values and mission of the organization.

However, as Ocasio and Wohlgezogen (2010)^[24] observe, cultural control provides general and broad direction, so there might be cases in which it fails in directing the actor's attention to the real intent of the organization, to the achievement of the desired results. The authors note as this characteristic of cultural control can be considered at the same time a weakness but also a strength. This indirect form of control is in fact fundamental when neither action control or results control is feasible or recommendable (Ouchi 1979). The classical example made by Ouchi is the case of researchers' job: it is not possible to establish *a priori* the desired result, the specific steps and tasks to achieve it, and how precisely measure it and evaluate it. So, in the cases characterized by uncertainty and significant difficulties in measuring output and defining tasks, the more effective way to give a common and coherent direction to employees is to implement cultural control that allows communicating desired behaviors, stressing values.

However, as all types of control, also cultural control presents some pain points. For instance, in the case of companies where the culture is too strong, there might be a problem of adaptability, in the sense that realities, where values and behavioral norms are strongly eradicated, might have difficulties in adapting to changes, creating a divergence between new needs and priorities and the behavioral norms followed by employees. Furthermore, strong cultures could determine rigidity and cultural stagnation (Ocasio and Wohlgezogen) because employees could avoid acting differently and adopt an innovative and maybe better approach because they fear being excluded and considered deviant from established way of thinking and doing things in the organization. In addition to this, also direction of attention may be impacted negatively because whether culture works as a filter, it means that some aspects are considered important according to organization values, others are not but the risk is that those that are considered irrelevant might be fundamental for achieving in an innovative way the organization intent.

2.3.4 Personnel (Input) control

Personnel control, also known as input control, is an indirect form of control that focuses on recruiting and training employees (Snell 1992, Hutzschenreuter 2009, Cardinal 2004). Managers can perform control by choosing the right people, so those individuals that fit the

organization in terms of values, skills and capabilities, called by Snell “the antecedents of performance”. In this way, they indirectly ensure that employees’ behaviors are aligned with the organization’s goals, increasing the probability that the job will be well performed. Through these mechanisms, managers influence the types of people who will work in the company: the more the type is affine to the company, the more probable will be that he/ she will act in the company best interest.

In addition to selection, there are other useful personnel control mechanisms that reinforce alignment: job design, provision of necessary resources and mostly training (Merchant and Van der Stede). Through job design, managers can clarify the company’s expectations, making employees clearly understand what the firm wants from them, decreasing the possibility of a lack of direction. To meet those expectations, in addition to personal skills, it is fundamental that managers identify all the resources needed by employees to perform at their best in the assigned task and to achieve the desired results.

In the case of training, according to Merchant and Van der Stede, it provides updated information about what actions and results are desired by the organization and also how tasks are expected to be performed. Training in this sense allows constant communication about organization’s expectations, guaranteeing consistency and congruence between employees’ behaviors and company goals in the time (Hutzschenreuter 2009). In fact, even if new company goals and new aspiration emerge, personnel is always on the same track of the company because, through training, we communicate the new expectations and direct people toward desired behaviors, helping them update and improve their skills and competencies. In addition to this, training has also an impact on motivation because whether employees acquire knowledge, they also have higher self-esteem as professionals, they know more about their job and so they are more motivated to do it well.

One of the main advantages of personnel control is that it is a preventive mechanism (Chris P. Long ^[25], Snell 1992): it is a form of control that is applied before employees perform the task, so this allows in many cases to prevent some problems that can be hardly solved ex-post. However, as Snell recognizes, this aspect has also a drawback “it only manages potential”. Through selection in particular, managers can create a team and an environment that potentially is almost perfectly in line with company’s values and needs but in the practice this cannot happen for several additional reasons and control problems may arise.

Another advantage of personnel control is that it facilitates cultural control, as Hutzschenreuter affirms, it is a sort of foundation of cultural control because it ensures that new hires already share values, norms, and behaviors at the basis of the organizational culture, so for those people will be easier to internalize them even more and their behavior will be easier influenced by cultural control mechanisms.

Personnel control is the most suitable solution when task programmability and output measurability are low and so neither result control nor actions control can be performed. However, it plays a fundamental support role for also these two forms of control, in addition to the cultural control as we have just seen. So, choosing the right people is in any company or sector a good starting point for ensuring organizational alignment. It can be costly in terms of time because it requires well-designed recruiting processes, training schedules and development programs but this investment is repaid by the reduction of direct supervision needs and an increasing managers' space for other activities.

Table 2, Types of control

	Result control	Action control	Personnel control	Cultural control
definitions	It includes setting desired targets, monitoring them and rewarding or punishing employees based on the success or failure in achievement of goals	Through direct supervision, rules and procedures, managers observe. Verify and direct employees' behaviors toward the desired ones	Select the right people for the right jobs. It consists in recruiting and hiring people that better fit the firm's needs in terms of skills but also attitudes and values	Indirect influence of employee's behaviors that are directed toward desired ones through values, beliefs and rituals
Prerequisites	Knowing what results are desirable Output measurability	task programmability knowledge of the transformation process behaviors observability	individual motivation	Strong culture emotional tie between employees high employee's commitment
Problems solved	lack of direction motivational problems	personal limitations lack of direction	personal limitations motivational problems	Motivational problems Lack of direction
Advantages	Positive effects on extrinsic motivation (rewards and incentives) Positive impact intrinsic motivation (autonomy and empowerment)	Most direct form of control Accumulation of knowledge Coordination power	Preventive instrument Feasible for all companies Reduces need for direct supervision Enables cultural control	Unobtrusive form of control Not costly Fosters employee's retention
Disadvantages	feeling lost without precise procedures and rules feeling pressured and demotivated when difficult targets are set possible arise of goal congruence problems	limited feasibility, works well in repetitive and standardized job little space for autonomous decisions possible negative impacts on motivation employees are less proactive and innovative	it manages only potential it can be costly in terms of time and resources	may fails in directing employee's attention to the real intent of the organization risk of stagnation and scarce innovation in case of too strong culture
Managerial techniques	incentive systems budgeting non-financial rewards management by objectives	standard procedures action preview action constraints action accountability	recruiting training job design	code of conducts rituals socialization moments mission statement social and physical arrangements tone at the top

Personal elaboration based on literature review

2.4 How to achieve a good level of control?

According to Merchant and Van der Stede, it is not possible to achieve perfect control but what companies can aspire to is achieving good control. In order to do it, managers need to choose the right instruments. Conforming to the traditional view based on the Ouchi framework, you choose the control type based on the task content, so for instance, if outputs are measurable and actions cannot be monitored, you choose results control. However, there is another theoretical view that is becoming more and more shared by authors for which formal and informal controls are not substitutes but they are complementary to each other (Kreutzer et al 2016 ^[26], Chris P. Long et al 2002^[27], Cardinal 2004). In their study Kreutzer et al. find that formal and informal controls reinforce each other and together they have a positive influence on performance. The authors recognize three main categories of benefits derived from the use of multiple control types: they foster dialogue between the team and the management, they foster cooperation and, above all, one mitigates the limitations and flaws of the other.

Regarding management control effectiveness, there is a common consensus about the need for balanced and mixed use of different forms of control (Anthony 1952 ^[28], Jaworski 1993, Merchant 2003, Cardinal 2004, Hutzschenreuter). Anthony was the first researcher to support the relevance of combining multiple forms, both direct and indirect, formal and informal controls (Jaworski 1993). Very often managers are tempted to overuse and prioritize direct controls such as actions and results mechanisms because behavior and output are easier to be observed and measured with respect to the objects of cultural and personnel control. Using a control combination allows maximization of the possibility to align individual behaviors and the company's goals, targeting all those aspects that can effectively influence behaviors.

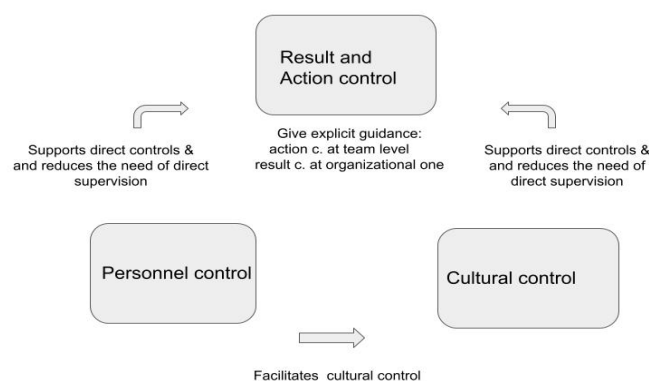


Figure 7, interactions between different control types personal elaboration

In the previous paragraphs, we have seen some virtuous connections between the different types of control, now we consider all of them together (figure n°6) in order to understand more deeply the considerable benefits that the use of multiple control forms implies. According to some authors (Hutzschenreuter 2009, Kreutzer et al 2016, Chris P. Long 2002), indirect controls support direct forms of control and vice versa.

Starting from personnel control, selection and training are mechanisms that do not have relevant side effects so they can be easily used for control by the majority of firms. Personnel control intensifies the effectiveness of direct forms of control because, for instance, thanks to training, employees can better understand how to perform their job and how to act in order to achieve the desired result. On the other hand, personnel control, as we saw, enables effective cultural control because through selection it allows choosing those people that by nature fit particularly well the company's values and beliefs so they will easily and quickly internalize the organizational culture and also their behaviors will be more easily influenced by it.

Cultural control in turn facilitates and lightens managers' job because using indirect mechanisms of control gives the opportunity to reduce direct supervision, allowing the manager to dedicate his/ her time to more strategic activities and also to mitigate rigidity and standardization.

On the other hand, formal controls are useful to give explicit guidance to employees, giving them procedures and rules to follow, reducing uncertainty and facilitating decision-making, and clear goals that help to figure out what is truly important and needs attention. Also, within the category of formal controls, actions control and behavior control allow obtaining alignment at two different levels: actions control works very well at the local/ team level but poorly on the organizational level, instead, results control is very effective at the organizational level but not at team one (Ouchi and Maguire 1975).

Therefore, formal and informal controls can coexist and, indeed, they must exist to ensure effective management control. Jaworski (1993) introduced the concept of primary controls and secondary controls based on which the firsts are acknowledged to be the dominant ones, the second are present but do not have a significant influence on behaviors. From this he theorized the existence of four different control systems:

- bureaucratic system, where actions and results control are predominant and cultural and personnel control are secondary;

- clan system, where a high level of informal controls is accompanied by a low level of formal controls;
- low control system, where all four types are used as secondary;
- high control system, where we assist to a high level of formal control integrated and supported by a high level of informal controls.

The latter is considered the most effective and beneficial for a company (Jaworski 1993, Cravens 2004 ^[28], Hutzschenreuter 2009), according to Cravens in fact “high levels of informal (professional and cultural) control are expected to reinforce high levels of formal control.”

However, the choice of how to mix and concretely implement each type of control can vary and it depends on company characteristics and external situations. This implies that the control system of a company can change over time; according to Merchant, adaptability to change is one of the factors of control success in ensuring organizational goal achievement. The consideration of control as a dynamic concept can be recognized also in the definition of control balance, given by Cardinal et al. (2004), which represents another fundamental aspect of control effectiveness: “control balance is a state where an organization exhibits a harmonious use of multiple forms of control, The harmony of any configuration of control elements relies on specific situational requirements”. So, balance does not mean static but it entails adapting control to the situation and to the specific company. As Merchant and Van der Stede say, organizations can emphasize the use of one or more control mechanisms at a given point of their lives and then change it because maybe they are growing and in need of more formalization or because their goals and needs are changed or because the environment in which they operate is changed.

Therefore, another important aspect to consider when a control system is designed is that there is no optimal control for all situations because each company is different, each manager has his/ her own style and each sector has its specific needs. In addition to this, another variable to consider and not forget is that management effectiveness relies on how employees will behave in response (Merchant and Van der Stede 2017). Organizational control works through the influence of people’s behaviors so when a company has to choose which type of control to use and which managerial actions to take, it has always to bear in mind the way in which employees think and behave, the way they are, what they value or not in order to implement the actions and initiatives that have the higher chance to influence them.

2.5 Organizational control in remote work arrangements

As we have already seen in the first chapter, remote work arrangements- both full remote and hybrid ones- are characterized for a variable amount of time by the physical distance between managers and employees. Distance results in significant consequences in terms of control because direct supervision, which has been considered for a long time an essential element for control, is lost (Allen et al 2015 ^[29], Sewell & Taskin, 2015^[30]). Losing the possibility to see and physically control what people are doing generates in managers the fear of an inevitable loss of control, becoming one of the reasons why, even today, some managers are reluctant to adopt the remote approach. Remote work represents an opportunity to put in doubt the idea that control can be implemented only by direct monitoring of actions and results.

Considering the importance of control for the company's functioning, some authors have explored and studied how it is possible to exercise control in companies where the employee is out of the premises and his/ her job cannot be closely monitored. Whereas in the late 80s and 90s research about remote work/ telework was focused on advantages and disadvantages, because the phenomenon had just been born, starting from early 2000, since when remarkable technological progress has made and has given easier access to remote work, researchers shifted their attention on the consequences of this new approach on several aspects included organizational control. However, whereas the literature regarding remote work, in general, has become more and more abundant, the focus on organizational control in remote work had not the same resonance in the past.

But, due to the adoption of remote work forced by the pandemic, today remote work is known and has been tested by almost everyone; many employees and companies have appreciated it and so adopted it. For this reason, also researchers' interest in remote work and its implications on businesses increases, slowly shifting from a traditional view based on formal, coercive and singular use of control types to a more holistic control approach that better fits the new organizational relations and needs in modern organizations. In the following paragraphs, we make a synthetic literature overview regarding organizational control in the case of remote work, observing how control can be implemented and which types of control are used and/or are more suitable for this specific work environment according to researchers.

2.6 Control types used in remote work arrangements

As Kurland and Cooper state in their study (2002)^[31], managers who have to deal with remote workers can rely on all the control types that we have seen so far: results control, actions control, cultural and personnel control that in Kurland and Cooper research are relabeled respectively as output, behavior and clan control which includes both personnel and cultural ones.

2.6.1 Actions control in remote arrangements: How to correctly implement it

In front of the fear of losing control in a remote environment, the natural temptation for managers is to tighten it and rely basically on actions control. For a long time, the assumption of McGregor's Theory X that employees dislike work and will avoid it where possible (Hafermalz 2021^[32]) has persisted in the literature. So based on this view, the lack of supervision and proximity work as facilitators of counterproductive work behaviors and duties avoidance (O'Neill et al. 2014^[33]). In line with these assumptions, tight behavior control seems to be the right solution. Therefore, new technologies were developed and/or adapted for this scope, becoming a very effective instrument to monitor remote employees' activities because they "allow managers to monitor the actions of teleworkers as closely as they could monitor on-site workers, and in more details than the same managers could traditionally" (Fairweather 1999^[34]).

However, closed technological monitoring is not the appropriate solution for modern organizations because it is not ethically acceptable to employees who perceive it as an invasion of privacy and consequently it is detrimental because, if implemented, it results in low morale (Fairweather 1999), stress, and pressure (Delfino et al 2021^[35]) for employees, so lower productivity and worse work quality for the firm.

This is what happened during the pandemic as Delfino et al testify. In this study, it was found that during the COVID-19 crisis managers implemented an excessive and constant control of behaviors facilitated by the use of new online platforms that allow monitoring closely employees' activities. So, actions control substituted those types of control that are based on face-to-face contact, i.e., informal controls that were not possible anymore. Therefore, it was observed an increase in video calls, extra calls that were considered by employees not productive, a waste of time and, above all, perceived, especially by juniors, as a way to check if the person is working. So, results control was substituted by frequent checks

of activities: as some employees testified, their supervisors do not check simply the output but also the intermediate phases. This management attitude was perceived by workers as mistrust and this intrusive and constant monitoring of activities has led employees to feel more pressured, stressed and demotivated.

As we have already said, certain negative aspects suffered by employees have been exacerbated by the uncertainty and constraints imposed by the pandemic which was an exceptional and unpredictable global event. So, the reference for remote work to be considered by companies and employees has not to be the one we experienced during the pandemic but the one of firms who have already adopted, developed and operated it for years. However, this experience is a good example of bad control in remote work arrangements; also in this case, pandemic has allowed us to experiment and understand what works and what does not. In any case according to Wilson (1999)^[36], closed actions monitoring is not sufficient to align effectively employees' behaviors and the organization's objectives in modern organizations (Wilson 1999).

Harrington (1999)^[37] proposed as a solution to overcome this fear of control loss "a change in management style to accommodate new methods of employee communication and interaction" based on commitment, trust and engagement. In her study Downes 2022^[38] observes that in remote companies, actions control still plays an important role but because behaviors cannot be directly observed, managers shift their attention to communication behaviors and so they observe indirectly them through updates in communication and work-tracking software. However, the approach to actions controls and the use of technologies is different with respect to the traditional one, it is implemented according to the view proposed by Harrington. The aim is not to control people but to coordinate the work through task assignments and deadlines, give guidelines to the employees and as an additional function to monitor the mental and emotional state of individuals as Downes observes. Another important aspect of action control implemented in a remote work context is that it is not the main control mechanism used but it is only one of the control tools that remote work firms use in order to address specific needs and problems.

2.6.2 Result control

According to the control body of knowledge when behaviors cannot be observed directly (Ouchi 1977, 1979, Eisenhardt 1985, Snell 1992), managers should emphasize result controls. In the previous paragraph, we have specified how closed control of actions is possible thanks to technologies but not recommended. For this reason, according to several authors the Ouchi “rule” can work also in the case of remote work arrangements: Olson (1982) found that “ most remote supervision of professional employees is actually based on results, the quality and timeliness of completed work, rather than observation”; for Felstead (2003)^[39] output monitoring is a suitable way to ensure alignment in the case of home-located employees; for Allen (2015) information about teleworker performance is a way to overcome the managerial concern about the loss of control, because of lack of actions monitoring; finally for Illegems and Verbeke (2004)^[40] it is fundamental to set clear performance objectives and measures for employees, In this way, even if not physically present in the office, employees know perfectly what is expected from them so the probability they lose the desired direction is minimized because they are precisely told on what they have to focus.

In spite of that, according to some studies, in remote work arrangements emphasis on results is not automatically higher with respect to a traditional context. Groen et al 2018 ^[41] find that, among employees who work far from the office, the more they work remotely, the greater the emphasis on output control is. However, they also discovered that employees who work outside the office experienced less result control emphasis than those that are not allowed to do it. Authors give possible explanations for these results: in the first case, there is a positive correlation because employees give for granted that, because they are less present in the office, emphasis on result control is naturally higher; to explain the second finding, the authors cited Kossek et al (2016) ^[42] for whom remote workers experience less managerial control because they perceive to have more autonomy and control on their own job.

As stated in another recent study (Downes et al. 2022), result control is implemented by managers but the use of metrics which in the main cases are not hard measures is complex and it does not represent the main way to ensure organizational alignment. So, as the authors say, remote work ideology is based on the fact that you do not control the person, you monitor her/ his work so there is a natural shift from micromanagement to the management of work results, however jobs that are more teleworkable (as we saw in chapter 1) are services and knowledge work for which it is difficult to establish precise, definable measures, sometimes it

is even difficult to establish the desired outputs because they are jobs characterized by creativity, complex tasks and a long period to realize them. So, result control as also action control is useful to give guidance to employees but in these situations, they are not so precise and effective as in the case of more standardized work so they require to be supported by also indirect forms of control.

2.6.3 Cultural and personnel control

In conformity with the Output-Behaviors framework (Ouchi 1977, 79, Eisenhardt 1985), if outputs cannot be precisely measured and actions are not programmable or observable, a possible solution to influence employees' behaviors in the company's desired direction is to use clan control, including both recruiting and training (personnel control in Merchant and Van der Stede) and socialization and culture (cultural control in Merchant and Van der Stede).

As several authors recognize (Felstead 2003, Kunda 1992^[43], Wilson 1999, Depickere 1999, Grugulis et al. 2000^[44]) team based social activities and corporate culture are effective managerial tools to ensure organizational control when other more direct forms of control are not appropriate or possible. This is absolutely true also in the case of remote work arrangements: we have seen that a balanced use of actions and results control is helpful for the organization to coordinate work and direct people toward the company's desired direction, however, they cannot use singularly and, even if these two are used together, in order to overcome some of their implementation limits in a remote work context, they absolutely need to be reinforced by more indirect forms of control that can influence effectively remote workers behaviors.

According to Depickere (1999), organizations who want to adopt remote work modes have to make a choice: they can implement very intrusive control mechanisms that ensure compliance with operating requirements, aware that this will have negative impacts on employees as we previously saw, or they can build commitment so that tight control is not needed anymore. Also, for Wilson (1999), the best solution to ensure alignment of objectives is to increase the real employee's commitment to the organization. The mechanisms described by Depickere and Wilson through which managers can concretely increase commitment fall within what we called cultural and personnel controls: in addition to compensation and benefit, Depickere lists as organizational commitment enablers the process of recruiting and selection, formal mentoring systems, training, an offer of challenging jobs

and activities to keep up informal communication; instead, Wilson focuses his attention on cultural mechanisms to foster commitment, such as the promotion of beliefs system and mission statement, creation of a work environment based on trust and empowerment. Therefore, we can say that in terms of control the logic is that the more the employee identifies with the company, he/ she is committed to it, he/she believes in its values and mission, he/she feels to be considered trustworthy, the more he/ she will act in the interest of the company and put effort in his/her work even if she is not in the office and she is not monitored by the manager.

We know that control is a process used to detect and avoid misbehavior, promoting a culture based on trust and empowerment seems not good mechanisms to overcome this problem especially in the case of remote work but as some authors underlined (Wilson 1999, Katzenback and Smith 1993^[45]), at this point, the importance of teams comes into play thanks to mutual accountability and collective scrutiny of the work. In remote companies in fact building teams allows creating a sort of horizontal surveillance among individuals of a single team that is informal but more direct and supports managerial control. Felstead considers teams “vehicles to promote collective values, beliefs and identity”, furthermore he observes that in the case of companies that encourage active participation in the work team, collective honor, group status and respect for colleagues represent powerful sources of control.

An additional interesting point about cultural control in remote or hybrid firms, noted by Kurland 2002, is that, unlike result and action controls, cultural control mechanisms are designed specifically for remote workers. Felstead (2003) noted, for instance, in the case of remote workers managerial attempts to mix business with sociability, to move away from task-oriented talk and to share team gossip, and to informal chatting. This happens because cultural and personnel control ensure organizational alignment, tackling problems that are specific to remote environments such as professional and personal isolation, lack of informal training, intraorganizational networking, and remote mentoring which represent the real challenges of remote work (Kurland and Cooper 2002).

2.7 Space for our research

So even if the theme of remote organizational control has become popular and authors have already started a rich debate, research is at the beginning and there is a wide room for

further insights and in-depth analysis of multiple aspects concerning the relationship between remote work and control, control and monitoring, manager and employee.

Therefore, in reading the various literature articles, I noted a lack of collective knowledge regarding concrete managerial control initiatives and actions that can be implemented by companies and so I decided to try to give my contribution to this. In fact, there are some empirical researches about this issue but they refer to emergency remote work. According to the author's opinion control mechanisms implemented during the pandemic are not good indicators and reference practices because they entail dynamics that do not characterize remote work in normal conditions but they are influenced by the uncertainty and unexpectedness of the Covid 19 crisis. Furthermore, remote work was a constriction dictated by the epidemic situation so many firms do not have time to adapt it and develop the right mindset to approach it and provide the right tools to effectively work.

For these reasons I decided to investigate how firms that have adopted the remote work approach before the spread of Covid 19 have concretely implemented organizational control so which forms of control they use and above all which practical managerial actions and initiatives they have used. Thanks to the interviews made and the analysis done in the next chapters, this qualitative research aspires to give practical insights and sort of best practices that can be taken into consideration and replicated by firms that want to change their mindset and embrace this different way of working.

Chapter 3

Methodological note

This study was designed to examine the control dynamics in the context of full remote and hybrid companies, trying to understand the challenges in terms of control but above all the solutions, so actions and interventions made by managers to ensure an alignment between employee behaviors and company goals. Because of the explorative nature of this study, a qualitative research design was deemed the most appropriate. In particular, a multiple case study approach was adopted, in order to explore and compare control practices in remote work in different, yet comparable, settings.

3.1 Making contact with the companies

In order to do it, I approached by emails organizations that have adopted remote working policies, both full remote and hybrid to ask for interviews. The research of the eligible companies for the study started on the web, searching for articles about cases of excellence in the field of remote work in Italy: the number of the companies found in the web and then contacted was limited and initially the sampling was composed by only three responding companies that gave their availability for the interviewees. Then the sampling was extended to three further companies via a snowball technique: in fact, founders and employees previously interviewed gave me suggestions about other interesting cases compatible with my selection criteria. So due to their recommendation and their greater knowledge of the phenomenon and of the actors involved, I could identify new success cases.

3.2 Criteria of companies' selection

The criteria of selection were the following:

- the adoption of remote work, full or hybrid. As we said in chapter 2, paragraph 1, we are interested in the dynamics in terms of control that arise in the moment in which the manager is far away from the employee. We are not interested in the fact that the entire team is working remotely the entire time because, even if there is one single employee who works out of the employer's premises, the traditional control based on direct supervision and physical presence is not applicable.

- Italian SME. As a result of the pandemic, remote work has become widespread but the correct approach to it is still unclear and has not been internalized. In fact, companies still struggle to accept it and overcome some cultural legacies related to hierarchy and traditional control and for them it is unclear what strategies need to be implemented in order to make remote work arrangements effective and efficient. In addition, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises were chosen since SMEs are the core of the Italian economic and business fabric.
- Services companies working in the digital world. The reason for this choice derives from the fact that, as we saw in chapter 1, not all sectors and occupations are teleworkable and the most suitable for remote working are service firms characterized by knowledge work, in particular those that are involved in the IT/ digital world.
- Adoption of remote work before the pandemic. Thanks to this we can observe cases in which the choice to adopt remote work is intentional and not constricted. The successful achievements of those firms are the result of a long evolution and constant experimentation of the proper practices to make remote work efficient for the firm, and sustainable for the employee. So, they were recognized as good practices and examples for those firms that want to approach this work modality.

3.3 Participants

Companies were approached by email to ask about their willingness to be involved and to agree on which members could be interviewed. Participants voluntarily agreed so the number and the professional role of interviewed people for each organization are variable. Interviewed people were top managers, middle managers, senior employees and also some junior employees. In total people interviewed are sixteen, in some cases the person gave the opportunity to be interviewed for a second time, so the total interviews number is twenty. Finally, the overall number of interviews hours is about 24 hours: 7 h for Bitbull + 3,50 h (Digital PR) + 3,52 h (Evermind) + 5, 30 h (Quindo) + 55 min (Reverse) + 3 h (Seedble).

Table 3, quantitative data about interviews made

	Bitbull	Digital PR	Evermind	Quindo	Reverse	Seedble	tot
N interviewees	4	4	2	4	1	1	16
N interviews	5	4	3	5	1	2	20
Hours of interviews	7 h	3,50h	4h	5,30h	55 min	3,15 h	24,20h

Considering the qualitative nature of this study - an explorative research on the dynamics of control in remote working context- in order to better understand the findings that will be explored later, it is important to give some personal, organizational and strategic information of the involved firms and to briefly tell their stories thanks to the direct information given during the interviews and indirect information gathered through firms blogs, websites and documents (for example firm playbook).

3.3.1 Bitbull Srl

Bitbull is one of the first full remote companies in Italy, it was founded in 2014. It is an IT services firm specialized in e-commerce projects.

The two founders who met on LinkedIn were from different cities, Cuneo and Milan so they decide to found a remote company in order to untangle work from geographical boundaries. In fact the reasons for this farsighted decision were mainly two: one is personal, when the company was founded the two partners had just started a family, they had little children so they did not want to sacrifice family time and remote work offers them the possibility to balance work and personal life; the other reason instead was linked to talent search and attraction because having no office meant to have no geographical boundaries so they can find the best talents everywhere without up-heaving employees lives.

Bitbull works on projects so the starting point from a methodological point of view is the principles of the Manifesto for Agile Development and the Scrum methodology which have been adapted to the firm's needs. Collaboration spirit is fundamental in the firm, in fact they work in teams on projects. A team of 5-6 people (developers) is dedicated to each project and it is coordinated by the Project manager who ensures project and organizational alignment and the team leader who instead guarantees technical IT alignment.

The overall team is composed of approximately 20 people and it is distributed mainly throughout the Italian territory. The organization is divided into four levels: executive board

made of the three firm partners; project management board, made of executive board and project managers; team leadership board, composed of team leaders and finally operational figures.

Born eight years ago, Bitbull is constantly evolving and experimenting with new ways and instruments to make remote work efficient and sustainable for their employees. The virtual office of Bitbull is represented by Slack, they use Basecamp to communicate with teams and clients, Jira to manage projects, Confluence for knowledge management and finally Google workspace in general for firm communication and coordination.

3.3.2 Digital pr pro, re-branding in 2022 with the name Disclosers, brand of Your Story srl

Digital PR Pro is a brand of Your Story SLR created in 2019. It is a PR and media relations agency based in Milan. In addition to classic PR services, the firm offers also training online and offline about PR and PR consultancy to other firms that already have internal communication teams.

The company has a team of 10 people, all of them are employees because the founders of the agency decided to not have external collaborations or collaborations with freelancers. The organization is structured on 2 levels: managerial figures and PR specialists who follow clients in the projects for the operational and strategic part.

Digital PR has experienced 2 different stages in terms of work approaches. Initially from January 2019 to February 2020, the founders decided to adopt a hybrid approach according to which on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday employees go to the office, whereas on the other two days they can work remotely. After the remote work forced by the pandemic, the founders decided to not fix established days but to give employees the freedom to choose when to work remotely. The company has provided employees with a 200-square-meter office that is considered not a simple place to work but as the agency's home. People can use it as and when they want without any obligations.

The reason for this maximum freedom of choice given to employees is the founder's interest in the well-being of the individual: if people can choose when and how to work according to their needs, they will be happier, more fulfilled, and consequently more productive and devoted to the company. The main values in Digital pr are responsibility, transparency, passion and commitment, and finally proactivity. To organize and coordinate work even when they are not in the office, the tools used are Base camp for project

management, a virtual meeting platform to communicate also during the day and a WhatsApp group for more informal communications.

3.3.3 Evermind srl Benefit society

Evermind was born in 2011 as a full remote company. It is involved in software development, creation of digital strategies and brand identity paths for other firms. Its activities include also advising companies on implementing and designing remote work arrangements.

Becoming a benefit society¹³ in 2021, Evermind has expanded its corporate purpose, adding activities and initiatives that are not only concerned with the purely economic aspect but rather sustainability and well-being of people. All choices and decisions in the company are made considering people's needs and aspirations, respect for the environment and enhancement of the local area. Among the goals quoted in the charter are :

- A commitment to creating *"a positive work environment, aimed at the enhancement and well-being of people, in order to develop the potential of each person and constantly grow pride and satisfaction in working with the company."*

- An ethical dimension of work by *" developing a culture based on collaboration, sharing, transparency, accountability, trust, inclusion, respect and care for others"*

- The promotion of smart working *for employees, associates, partners with children and all those who should express the need and the continuous research aimed at improving the current standard of work life integration: flexibility of working hours, the possibility of working remotely, access to company premises for family members of employees, associates and partners to share moments of the day and, in some cases, also of company life.*

Born as a full remote company, in recent years they are witnessing a transition to hybrid; in fact, a space has been made available in Reggio Calabria. The reason for this choice concerns the company's goal of enhancing the territory. It is a meeting place where it is possible to work or simply be together, open to employees but also to those who are not part of Evermind and

¹³Benefit society: it is a model imported by the USA (Benefit corporations) and introduced in Italy in 2016.

According to Information site on Benefit Societies maintained by B Lab and AssoBenefit, benefit societies are “ companies that, in addition to the purpose of dividing its profits, pursue one or more purposes of common benefit and operate in a responsible, sustainable and transparent manner towards people, communities, territories and the environment, cultural and social goods and activities, entities and associations and other stakeholders”

<https://www.societabenefit.net/#:~:text=Le%20Societ%C3%A0%20Benefit%20sono%20aziende,beni%20ed%20attivit%C3%A0%20culturali%20e>

work in smart working. The team composed of about 24 people is distributed across all the Italian territory from North to South. Work organization is defined by founders as liquid, horizontal and not pyramidal.

3.3.4 Reverse Spa

Reverse was born in 2017, it offers headhunting services and HR consultancy to other firms. The company today is composed of less than 90 employees and it operates in Italy, Germany and France with branches in Milan, Bologna, Paris and Berlin. Beyond that thanks to the company digital approach, Reverse receives many mandates of research and selection of personnel worldwide. There are two founders who have given a very personal imprint to the company: Alessandro Raguseo, an expert in business organization and the HR world, and Emanuele Bacchi, a software engineer who is passionate about technology so Reverse's formula is to unite these two worlds in a synergy that allows humans to use technology in the best way possible and at the same time bring this technology not only internally but also externally to benefit candidates and clients from this degree of innovation.

Reverse was born as a flexible organization since 2017, adopting a hybrid approach to work according to which employees have the freedom to work wherever they want and agree with their team working hours, without the necessity to ask for permission.

3.3.5 Seedble Srl

Seedble SRL is a consulting company, founded in 2014, specialized in the design and implementation of innovation projects related to the themes of open innovation, digital transformation and new ways of working. The company is part of the Symphonie Prime group, made up of companies located in Italy, Spain, Germany and Switzerland that offer technological innovation, guidance and support services to companies in digital transformation processes.

The company's mission is to design and create future-proof organizations that can innovate, evolve, and adapt to socio-economic scenarios. In the beginning, the ambition of the organization was to create a network constituted of different professionals and to become a startup accelerator. Today innovation in Seedble is declined in three different ways:

- strategic innovation, it helps startups to grow and support companies in the development of co-innovation projects in collaboration with start-ups.

- process innovation, it guides the digital transformation of organizational processes through data-driven strategies and techniques in addition to the creation of appropriate platforms.

- organizational innovation, it supports organizations in designing and implementing new ways of working and innovative managerial approaches based on people's needs.

Seedble office, Phluid, is located in Rome, it is a co-working space open to all Seedblers who want to join the office but also external people in order to encourage contamination. The organization is flat and it is structured by talents not roles so relations are mostly between peers, work is organized by different projects where people are involved on the base of their skills. Born as a startup, today Seedble is witnessing an expansion phase, reaching a group of about 27 people involved who compose 4 different teams: administration, advisory, IT and marketing.

Since the company was a small startup, the cofounders have decided to adopt a hybrid approach after studying it in depth: Seedble approach starts from the premise that only the individual knows what are the conditions and situations in which he/ she can perform at his/her best. Therefore, in the organization the choice of working remotely is left to the individual and the team. Employees can decide when and how much to work remotely, always in agreement with their team because both individual well-being and collaboration spirit have to be considered. Over the years the company has made several experiments and it has implemented different solutions to make this hybrid approach efficient, building a strong knowledge base to share with other firms.

3.3.6 Quindo Srl

Quindo is the first SEO and e-commerce creation agency that works remotely in Italy. It was founded in 2014 by Laura Venturini. Disappointed with the lack of flexibility in her previous work environment, she decided to found her own company that would allow more flexibility for employees and, most importantly, allow her to get the best professionals on the market and deliver the best quality of work possible. Because talents are not concentrated in the same area and people perform better when they can choose how to work, having all people in the same office was not a need anymore and so the only solution was to create a full remote company.

Quindo is made of 12 employees, SEO consultants, digital strategists, developers and copywriters dislocated across Italy. The organization is quite flat: there are some managerial

figures such as the entrepreneur, the CFO and the team leader but also employees who are in charge of operational work have a high degree of responsibility, in fact each person is responsible for about 10 projects and she has a certain number of vertical resources In Quindo available to help her carry out the project. The team leader instead has the job to coordinate the work and assign tasks, based on the workload. The coordination and monitoring of remote work are supported and eased by the use of a Project management tool called Monday, asynchronous communication happens via slack, and synchronous communication via virtual conference tools.

Table 4, data and features of involved companies

	Bitbull	Digital Pr	Evermind	Reverse	Seedble	Quindo
Foundation year	2014	2019	2011	2017	2014	2014
Head office	Milan	Milan	Rome	Milan	Rome	Lucca
sector	Software development	Public relations & communication services	It services and it consulting	Selection and research of personnel	Business consulting	Advertising services (SEO)
Revenues *	2.272.725 (2020)	1.000.000 (2021)	130.433 (2020)	3.128.296	441.162	358.863
Dimension **	11-50 employees	11-50 employees	11-50 employees	50-200 employees	11-50 employees	11-50 employees
Work approach	Full remote	Hybrid approach	Full remote	Hybrid approach	Hybrid approach	Full remote

* Data from [https:// www.ufficiocamerale.it](https://www.ufficiocamerale.it) except Digital pr revenues that are a founder's statement

* We consider all the people that contribute to the business, including those that are not employee but collaborate as professionals with VAT and external collaborators in general.

3.4 Materials

In accordance with qualitative research and its aim to explore the studied phenomenon, we used:

1. Semi structured interviews
2. Organizations' documents: for instance, culture book, statutes

Interviews were performed remotely by telephone or through videoconference platforms, they were conducted from December 2021 to March 2022. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, they usually lasted between 50 to 100 minutes, yielding more than 100 pages. During the interviews, there were asked questions that could guide and address discussion in the desired direction but at the same time it was given also a wide space to interviewees to tell their experience and share their opinions.

Since my goal was to explore without preconceptions or assumptions the phenomenon, I tried during the interviews to direct and address the discourse towards the aspects that interested to me through guiding questions. At the same time, I also gave space to the interviewees to tell their experience, their thoughts and opinions about the phenomenon studied. I did not cage the speech too much but I let concepts and aspects emerge spontaneously, especially in the first interviews. Then as the interviews went on and certain concepts began to recur with greater force and repetition, the guiding questions also became more specific so as to delve more deeply into these recurrent themes.

Interviews are the main source for this study but also other types of sources had been consulted to gather information and insights: for instance, culture books (Seedble and Bitbull) and Evermind's Manifesto and statute.

3.5 Data analysis

Interviews transcripts were carefully read several times. During the reading annotations and observations were made. A thematic analysis was performed so the transcripts were initially subjected to an open coding phase in order to identify text parts that can be significant for the research. This phase has generated a large dataset of in-vivo codes. Adopting the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al. 2013^[1], Gioia 2020^[2]), this large number of codes has been restricted eliminating redundancy and grouping similar concepts obtaining first-order codes which maintain the informant-centric vision. Later I made a further abstraction articulating second-

order codes bringing out the research perspective of the concepts that emerge from interviews. Finally, I aggregated second-order codes in order to have clear macro categories. First and second-order codes together with aggregates form our data structure that is represented in the table 5.

Afterward, linkages and connections were made between the components of our data structure and they were represented in figure 7 through which I have tried to give a graphical representation of my findings and a potential answer to the research question: “which are the control dynamics in a remote work context and how to effectively align employees’ behaviors and organization desired direction in this complex and dynamic environment? “

The findings discussed in the following chapter are the reflection of the collected data; to clarify and illustrate the findings I have included firms’ quotations. Findings are organized by paragraphs that represent our aggregates. Therefore, we have four paragraphs that represent the four types of control recognized by Merchant: personnel control, cultural control, result control and action control. Then we have some paragraphs dedicated to what we have called managerial levers which can foster organizational control in an indirect way. Each paragraph (aggregate) is divided in subparagraphs that represent second order codes, previously identified. In these sub paragraphs I explain more in details the specific issue supporting our findings through the direct testimony of the organizations in the form of detailed employees and managers quotes.

In considering the single theme, I made also comparisons and considerations on how the same aspect is declined and developed in different companies.

At the end of some paragraphs, I have added a box called firm insight. In this box it is described a practice, an initiative or a strategy implemented by one of the companies involved that is personally considered by the researcher particularly interesting and effective in terms of organizational control. The aim of these sections is to give practical and concrete starting points for other firms that want to successfully implement remote work arrangements, guaranteeing alignment despite the distance.

In the part of the discussion, after having deeply observed each theme, I integrated all of them and highlight links and connections in order to give an overview of how control is performed in a remote work context and how it adapts to a totally new and innovative way to consider work, relationship and leadership.

Table 5, data structure

1 st order codes	2 nd order codes	Aggregates
<p>Like-mindedness To make remote work efficient and successful, you need to select those people that share the same values, attitude to work</p> <p>Skill specificity Specific personal skills and conditions are required to be a good remote worker (ie intrinsic motivation)</p> <p>Soft skills In the selection, soft skills required for a successful remote working are more important than competence</p> <p>Trial periods trial periods are fundamental</p> <p>Team engagement Team engagement in the selection process</p> <p>Preference for senior profiles preference to hire seniors due to high level of autonomy</p> <p>Selection process complex and articulated selection processes, always including a practical exercise to test work approach affinity</p>	<p>Selection by affinity</p>	<p>Personnel control</p>
<p>Use of output control more importance given to outputs than inputs ie worked hours nobody controls what you are doing now but what matters is only the objectives achievement</p> <p>Employee's empowerment they have the freedom to choose how to achieve goals</p> <p>Rewards In some cases, rewards are linked to performance</p>	<p>Output control approach</p>	<p>Result control</p>
<p>Participation in target setting Setting objectives with the employee allows to align perfectly company expectations and employee's ability</p> <p>Use of Project management tool employees who can always know who has to do what by when and for managers who can easily monitor work progress and</p> <p>SMART objects If a goal is desired by the company but considered not achievable by the employee the manager needs to reflect why and how to make it achievable</p>	<p>Target oriented work to make the employee not feel lost on daily work but at the same time to respect their autonomy</p>	

<p>Challenge but achievable Goals have to be challenging but achievable, in order to understand if they are, you need to confront with the direct interested person</p> <p>Understanding goals Every team and individual participate and discuss how they can help to achieve the company goal it is not a goal imposed from the top but it is a shared goal, comprehensible to the individual who can then understand and have understood what piece it represents in the corporate design</p> <p>OKR engagement power his system makes people more engaged in achieving the business goal, they are evaluated and rewarded based on the achievement of these types of goals You have to make that the person care about the goal</p>	<p>OKR methodology as a way to solve lack of direction</p>	
<p>Promotion of culture Playbook, blog, on boarding, social network are tools for the firm to talk about itself, transmit its mission, vision and its identity even at distance</p>	<p>Increased storytelling due to lack of presence and visibility with the aim to transmit the company identity</p>	<p>Cultural control</p>
<p>Physical arrangements Creation of a virtual office, accompanied by a physical office for hybrid companies that is completely re-designed and it has the function of Company Home or social place for employees Activity based office, co-working space</p> <p>Building organization identity Need to create a strong culture to make the employee aware who he/she is working for</p> <p>Tone at the top Importance of a strong entrepreneur vision</p>	<p>Physical arrangements and social arrangements to reinforce and established a strong company identity and foster sense of community</p>	
<p>Intentionality In a remote context Many aspects that are spontaneous and more natural in presence need to be structured especially when the firm grows Required intentionality both by managers and employees</p> <p>Sociality as manager's responsibility Active interventions of managers to create opportunity for sociability to strength the team and create a serene work environment</p> <p>Creation of social opportunity Virtual coffee team building activities in presence or remotely dedicated channels on digital platforms used</p>	<p>Creation of multiple channels of sociability to foster team synergy and to tackle personal and professional isolation</p>	

<p>annual meeting</p> <p>Social relations between employees are welcomed</p> <p>Social network, instruments of knowledge sharing, virtual spaces for sharing things</p>		
<p>Purposeful and guiding meetings</p> <p>Meetings are important because they allow you to guide the work of people, identify problems and realign behaviors. They have to be used carefully because if not well designed they can be a waste of time reducing productivity or even detrimental, increasing pressure on employees</p> <p>Documentation</p> <p>Procedures are useful to give guidelines to employee when they feel lost, especially at the beginning</p> <p>Remote companies have a lot of documentation</p> <p>Creation of brain company</p>	<p>Online meetings</p>	<p>Action control</p>
	<p>Procedures, documentation</p>	
<p>Trust in a person's professionalism</p> <p>Trust in Assume the task performed is correct</p> <p>You are dealing with adults, you don't need to do babysitting</p> <p>You as manager start from the premise that your employees are trustworthy, they care about their job, they put effort in it so you know that they work at home as in the office</p> <p>Pay the trust</p> <p>you trust me so much, i feel obliged to put all the possible effort in my job</p>	<p>Trust as a way to overcome the fear of loss control as a motivational factor</p>	<p>Managerial levers</p>
<p>Feedback as verification and alignment tool</p> <p>you need to confront with your team to bring out promptly problems because otherwise the not tell becomes a monster retrospective sessions. One to one meeting as way to give structured feedback</p> <p>Feedback to incentive person growth</p> <p>positive and negative feedback are needed to help people to feel engaged, to know if they have taken the right direction, to improve and grow</p> <p>positive feedback to motivate and encourage people</p> <p>Feedback helps the person to grow and improve and to the manager to understand how to support the person in this</p>	<p>Feedback culture as an alternative form of control- Mechanism that goes to fill lack of direct supervision due to distance</p>	
<p>Company climate control</p> <p>Managers need to measure the temperature of the firm in order to understand the level of employees' well-being and satisfaction</p>	<p>Management Leadership: manager as a coach</p>	

<p>Double nature task oriented but also well-being and relationship oriented Manager functions are not linked anymore exclusively to performance monitoring</p> <p>Managers as support Managers have to put people in the best conditions to perform their jobs through empathy, active listening, dialogue and transparency</p> <p>Manager as a coach Managers need to motivate people to grow and to stimulate them to be curious and proactive helping people to balance life and work</p> <p>Happiness surveys One to ones and happiness surveys as a way to bring out problems, needs, aspirations at individual level and then solved together</p>	<p>Indirect mechanism to enhance organizational commitment and foster talent retention</p>	
<p>Balanced communication You have to communicate not too much otherwise you put pressure on employees not too little, otherwise they can feel lost and abandoned</p> <p>Updates about company's life You need to engage and update them to make them aware about what is happening in the company</p> <p>Knowledge of right tools You have to learn the ability to use the right tool in the right moment to communicate that particular message</p> <p>Avoid information fragmentation</p>	<p>Balanced, organized and multi tool communication</p>	

Chapter 4

Findings

In this chapter, we are going to show and analyze the results that emerged from the interviews. Our aim is to understand and illustrate control dynamics in remote work contexts. So, we tried to understand which kind of control mechanisms have been implemented in the involved companies. In order to study the phenomenon, we take as a reference the control framework described by Kenneth Merchant in the book " Management Control Systems: Performance Measurement, Evaluation and Incentives ". Therefore, we try to discover which kind of control (personnel, cultural, result and/ or action control) organizations have implemented to solve the main control problems, analyzed in the previous chapter: lack of direction, lack of motivation, and finally personal limitations.

4. 1 Personnel control

4.1.1 The importance to select the right people: selection by affinity

The first control strategy to implement to be a successful company is choosing the right people, people who share the same values of the firm and have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform the job at their best. Selection is a very concrete tool to ensure ex- ante the alignment between employee's behaviors and company expectations, incrementing the possibility to achieve the desired results. This general statement is even more true and crucial in the context of remote working. First of all, remote work is not suitable for everyone and if you want to make it efficient and effective, you need to choose those people that have characteristics that can maximize its potential and minimize its weaknesses. The interviewed firms have recognized some aspects that can hinder a good performance:

- the absence of adequate conditions to work quietly

" If you don't have a work-ready space in your home, it's not sustainable to work remotely. You need a compatible setting, a quiet place, a good connection, technology" Bitbull

- the scarce experience, for instance in the case of those who are at the first job, they need constant support and guidance to learn and grow, the reason for which many firms prefer to work only with senior profiles

" One of the biggest difficulties we've had as a remote company is hiring people on their first experience, even if a person is potentially a genius but you leave him in front of their PC without the possibility of being flanked, of being able to even quickly ask their desk mate something, maybe that person doesn't ask because they don't want to bother, they are left alone, they feel isolated and lost " Bitbull

- an incompatible attitude to remote work due to the necessity to be controlled and guided

" I did interviews with candidates who confessed that they didn't want to come to work with us because in a remote setting they were afraid of not being controlled and they were afraid of not being able to work. There are people who need to have an office, to have a routine, take the car, get their miles and go to the office and totally disconnect, otherwise it's not work for them." Bitbull

- the preference for office sociability over the remote/hybrid flexibility

So, in a context where supervision and direct control are not feasible due to the distance, managers have to base the work relation on trust and consequently they need to carefully choose people. For this reason, in all interviewed firms even if small, the recruiting process is very articulated, it is never a simple single job interview but it is a sort of a level path where each step is fundamental to understand and know more deeply multiple aspects of the potential candidate.

Many of the firms interviewed said that recruiting process was the process which over the years has requested more effort and needs to be changed properly in order to test, first of all, affinity. Often work relationships with very skilled workers were closed due to a lack of soft skills or a scarce affinity with the team or an incompatible attitude with respect to the firm approach. So, firms have elaborated recruiting processes that allow them to know the candidates not only as professionals but also as people.

Many interviewees underline the fact that for the success of a remote/ hybrid firm soft skills, attitude and human aspects are more important than hard skills and competencies.

" During selection, I think it is essential to observe whether the candidate has certain soft skills for example politeness. Those are things that I can't teach you, while doing SEO, programming languages I can teach you, we can teach you whatever we know but if you are gruff, not punctual, always hostile, not good at communicating your emotions, I can't do anything about. Personality matters much more than pure competence; competence can be learned" Quindo

" In the past years, we introduced very competent professionals but with whom we had great difficulties. Skills are acquired, we can teach them to you but, if you do not intend to change your

approach, your attitude, it becomes challenging because we cannot intervene on these things "
(Evermind)

First of all, there must be an affinity between the candidate and the company vision and values so as to create a team that is homogeneous, not in the sense that all people are equal but intended as a situation in which there are common touch points, some fundamental values that can be a link between people and facilitate dialogue, collaboration and team spirit.

"People inside the team have to be good at communicating but it is not enough, they need also to speak the same language "Quindo

For this reason, all the organizations involve the team in the recruiting process to varying degrees, from simply meeting the candidate online and through a presentation video (Evermind) to having the opportunity to express opinions about him or her (Bitbull) and asking for opinions (Quindo). In addition to this kind of affinity, it is important to verify whether there is affinity also with the remote working approach.

"It is important to say that there are values that at the core, foundational values of remote work. When it comes to remote work, trust, transparency, and accountability are central, then there are values that differentiate each individual company, which do not have to be the same for all organizations but they can be integrated with remote culture." Evermind

All companies have shown that during selection they are looking for the same personal characteristics and soft skills which are compatible and tailored to the remote work approach based on trust, transparency and responsibility. The first quality of a remote worker is autonomy and a high sense of responsibility. For this reason, as previously seen, first experience employees are often penalized, they need training and constant support so this might be difficult and costly in terms of time for the company. Considering the importance of goal-oriented work in a remote context, the person must be autonomous because nobody, not even the project manager, will tell him/her how to achieve the result and what he or she has to do.

" There is a control of the work through the management but you are the one who makes work progress, there is not someone who comes to you every day and asks you have done it, how much you have done. This is your task for this week, you decide how to do it, whether to involve colleagues, whether to ask for help, you know that at the end of the week or next week you still have to achieve the goal, how you will do it is up to you " Bitbull

The person must be able to organize his/ her work and time to obtain the desired result. Other aspects mentioned as required skills are proactivity, entrepreneurship spirit, intrinsic motivation, and passion for the job performed.

“You need to be passionate about your work because in a context where I don't constantly control what you're doing and I don't tell you what to do, to make it works you don't need external stimuli to get your work done” Bitbull

“There are inherent issues with respect to remote work that need to be considered. One of them is entrepreneurship i.e., the ability to run your business as if the business were your own, an ability that has to be the product of people's engagement. That ability to think, act and be proactive in what there is to do comes from feeling that you are contributing to the good of the company, you believe in the values of the company. So, once you've been assigned the task and given rules, you have to be able to go above and beyond and give something more.” Seedble

“The first thing to get motivated people is to choose motivated people” Reverse

Beyond this, remote workers need also well-developed social skills. The physical distance must be bridged through excellent communication, empathy, active listening, and intentionality. You have to know how to communicate and when and which instrument is most suitable to deliver that specific message and receive feedback. You don't meet people in the hallway, you have to intentionally search them so you have to know when it is essential to ask for help to obtain a good result.

Affinity and soft skills are identified by firms not only through job interviews but also through the assignment of a project work (Quindo, Evermind, Bitbull, Seedble) based on the role and professional profile. This is a way to have a concrete and practical taste of how the candidate approaches work and how his personality is. So, after the first section in which the company meets the candidate and they know each other, telling each their own story, values and expectations, in the recruiting process of all the organizations there is a practical part where the recruiters could see with their eyes the quality and skills of the person.

“I ask you to set up a document without giving you many directions, for me, this is a way to understand your level of autonomy, problem- solving and management of your own work. Furthermore, if you send the document in time, I can also understand if you are a punctual person and you are able to manage deadlines” (Quindo)

“You show up as a graphic designer, we go to set timelines, and you fail them. The world doesn't fall down, but it's a wake-up call because if you're in stress and you don't meet timelines, that's problematic

for us in an environment that requires essentially very good free self-management skills, work organization counterbalanced by responsibility and communication skills.” Evermind

*“We don't need this assignment so much to say- well you made a perfect project that works, etc.- but I need it to see the choices the person has made, I need it to understand the level of passion, attention to detail, if they take something pre-packaged and then make two-three changes, that's not our approach, we want you to make choices, put your personality, use technologies maybe even different from ours but that you know in depth. We try to understand through this project who you are
“Bitbull*

All the organizations adopting the solution of project work, after the delivery of the final product, provide a moment in which they see the project with the candidate and, in addition to giving feedback, they also try to understand why the person made certain choices asking for explanations. So, also in this case, companies demonstrate to not want to judge the person but deeply understand whether there is an affinity between the candidate's mindset to the organization/ team approach.

As we have seen, the appropriate and accurate design of the recruiting process is a very effective way to tackle losses of control and to ensure alignment in a remote company. The selection in fact as a control tool is able to fix all three typical control problems. Through the selection, we can ensure that employee is less likely to lose sight of direction because they share the vision and values, they are committed to what the organization wants to pursue. On the other hand, it solves also problems of lack of motivation because selected people are very passionate about their job so they are motivated to perform it well regardless of external stimuli.

Obviously, employee engagement must be cultivated and nourished but it is just a good starting level. Furthermore, future workers are selected because they believe in this particular work approach and they fit in it so they are more likely to make it work. Selecting the right people of course is also a good way to overcome personal limitations and so it reduces drastically the need of training and continuously supporting people.

Box Firm insight: Play Evermind

Recruiting process in Evermind is structured as an explorative journey divided into different levels. The aim of this sort of game is to “evaluate each other”, it is a way for the firm and the candidate to know each other as a person and as a professional. It is a way for the firm to know the candidate and for the potential new employee to understand whether the company and its values fit with him/ her.

The recruiting game is composed of 7 levels:

1. Video to explain why you want to work for Evermind
2. Meeting to know better
3. Personalities tests and questionnaires
4. Practical project
5. Meeting with the founders
6. Meeting to know and to be known by the team

As we said before, a good start to have a very motivated employee is to select people that by nature are motivated and enthusiastic. So, the first level of the selection works as a sort of first obstacle that can be overcome only by people who are really motivated to work in the firm and put the effort into explaining why. The first levels aim to know better the personality and characteristics of the person, his attitude and values and his/ her ability to communicate in order to understand if there is alignment with the company ones. Only then there is a moment in which the candidate is tested for her/ his professional competencies, the company assigns him a challenge based on his role, a mini project that is later commented on and analyzed with Evermind.

As founders of Evermind say “CVs are auto referential, with a little project we can see how you work, what you are capable of but also we can test whether you have those soft skills that are fundamental when you work remotely”

4.2 Result control

All organizations agree on the fact that a good way to overcome the risk of a loss of control caused by physical distance is to consider and monitor results and outputs instead of inputs. This organizations' choice is coherent with the control theory according to which when it is not possible to direct supervise actions, the best solution is to adopt an output-oriented approach to control.

"One of the main reasons why people don't want to activate smart working totally is that of control- who knows then if they work at home so much? - if you base a job on results, performance, trust, etc. this is brought down." Digital pr

"In remote work, the thing that really changes is the mindset because you have to be focused on goals and not on how many hours a person works. "Quindo

In the end, what matters is the achievement of objectives that are predetermined together and the quality of the final result. Managers never check how much time their employees put in place to deliver a certain output, they are not requested to clock in. There are some cases in which time is tracked but not for controlling people and verifying if they are actually working but for clients and invoicing modalities. Another aspect for which time tracking can be useful also in terms of goal-oriented approach is deviation analysis, considering what was estimated and what was done in terms of time, so it is a way for example to understand if there were problems during the project or if it is worth to invest time in some services or it is better to discharge them. So, it is a way to ensure alignment with the organization's goals but without basing the individual's evaluation on the time spent.

"When you have to submit invoices to a client at the end of the month or you have to stay within certain costs, tracking is fundamental but it is also essential for monitoring goals and project progress." Bitbull

"We use a time counter that is used not to control resources but for a dual purpose: to have reporting to share with the client who pays us based on time spent, to allow professionals to assess how they use their working time by comparing with what are the estimates made for each activity at the beginning of the project. This comparison also allows us to understand how well or poorly we are doing on the various projects, whether or not we have marginalized and whether or not it makes sense to pursue certain services because indeed some services are strategic but in the long run, they do not bring you an economic benefit "Evermind

“We work by objectives, we are able to estimate that a project, a task takes tot hours, you do it, if it takes less time, bravo. I don't need to know that you worked exactly all those hours, what matters is the quality of the result.” Bitbull

Result control implies relevant employee empowerment that is a recurrent characteristic of the work approach in remote/hybrid firms. The employee is left free to obtain the established result as he deems appropriate. He/ she is free to choose which strategies implement, who involves and which instrument use to deliver the best result possible. In this way it has the perception of having control over its own work, having the possibility to choose not only when but also how to perform the job. This is an effective way to motivate people that feel not like simple executors of work but like direct protagonists, enhancing also their sense of identification with the firm and their entrepreneurialism.

“It is essential to have a goal, the moment you know you have a goal and you care about achieving it for you as a worker and then to bring the result to the company, whether you work from home, in the office or by the sea with a good connection, it doesn't matter.” Digital pr

4.2.1 Target-oriented approach for projects

All the involved firms are companies that work with projects. This is an important reminder to understand also the target-oriented work adopted by them. In terms of goals, we need to distinguish between the project targets and the company targets. At the project level tasks, objectives and work are very well tracked and monitored in order to give direction to all the people involved in the specific project. So, business goals linked to the project are translated into operative goals not only by the manager but also through the participation of the team. Managers set a series of short- and medium-term targets that are in turn unpacked in micro-objectives and specific tasks. The completion of these goals gives the manager a first insight of the productivity of the employee. In this direction, it is essential to have a project management tool.

“In relation to working by objectives, an essential component of the flexibility of smart working, and therefore remote working, is the use of a project management tool, so a tool that allows you to keep track as you go of the tasks and objectives that you want to achieve” Seedble

All the involved organizations have this type of tool, each organization uses the PM tool that is more suitable for its needs but in general they have some common features. PM tools are virtual whiteboards in which each person is assigned tasks and goals. These tasks can be

detailed and commented on. They are accompanied by progress status and defined timelines. In some cases, the collaborative aspect is also brought out by highlighting the link in terms of deadlines between one's task and that of others.

“The risk of working remotely without a well-thought organization and proper strategy is that you have the perception that you do your work and it ends there, instead 9.9 times out of 10 your work impacts another person's work” Evermind

These virtual whiteboards are therefore very useful both for the employees and managers. In fact, on one hand, employees are guided in their work and they can see how their work and that of others is progressing, thus having a clear, transparent, and collaborative overview of what is happening; on the other hand, thanks to statistics automatically generated by the system itself, this tool helps the manager to monitor individual's productivity, and thus to assess their performance at least in terms of the quantitative aspect (meeting deadlines, absence of delays) and to intervene if necessary. Furthermore, the Pm tool drastically reduces meeting and contact moments, so limiting the negative impact of too much abundant communication on operativity.

“They are also useful to avoid the multiplication of moments of contact that is usually created when people are not present. Because you can't see you tend a little bit to multiply the moments when we feel, I'm writing you in chat, do you remember this thing? Have you done it? Think about all this information for all the activities that we have to do would be unthinkable or rather it would be unthinkable, actually, it is one of the main problems that companies have when they work remotely, it is the fact that you multiply meetings and emails. “(Seedble)

The absence of strict supervision and the use of a PM tool allow the manager to devote more time to strategy activities; in terms of organizational control, they permit the manager to listen and dialogue with teams and people to understand what they need to achieve the desired result, what they need to be more motivated and successful in what they do, whether they bear a too heavy workload, whether they need support to obtain the result through training or colleague help.

Micro and short objectives and tasks are constructed in a linear way (also in terms of writing) they are SMART, i.e., simple, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Each person perfectly knows what the company expects from him/ her to do this week, this month, by when, he or she has a clear view of the project and its development. The PM tool allows employees to see clearly the link between each one's contribution, delays and problems are

easily detected because the system itself reports them through notifications, etc. So, employees even if at distance never get lost, communication with others is effective, they are always on track and they know clearly what is their contribution to the project and how they can bring value to it.

“If we define goals together, I am clear in my expectations, I expect this and you tell me look I get this far not beyond, I know how far my expectations can go, you have told me where you can go, we give each other a timeline to achieve those goals we have defined, the famous SMART goals. They have to be simple, measurable, reliable, logical and defined in a time frame. If we think this way, we cannot make mistakes and most importantly I will not disappoint your expectations and you will disappoint mine (shared and clear expectations)” Quindo

Generally, rewards are linked to the achievement of some specific results. For example, in Quindo employees could receive rewards in different cases such as when they made an up-selling or a client renovation or they bring in a new client, or they carry out projects that are considered particularly complex.

4.2.2 OKR methodology as a way to go in the same direction

This overall approach to project work based on result achievement and output control is a useful way to monitor, coordinate, communicate and guide employees in their work but it is not sufficient to have a balanced and healthy organizational alignment. In fact, this kind of target chasing could be detrimental because the risk is to focus exclusively on the project and above all on very short-term goals. This implies short sight and negligence of strategic goals. So, if on one hand the project is well communicated to the employee who perfectly knows how his/ her work is located, on the other, if managers do not put in place initiatives to foster internal business communication and to share strategy and company goals, a significant problem of lack of direction could arise, having negative consequences on the performance but also on motivation.

Of course, in very small companies composed of 15 people maximum as Quindo or Digital pr, this problem is not significantly relevant because the strategy is more immediate to be transmitted, it is easier to see how you contribute to the success of the firm and it is also for the manager easier to recognize it. Instead in the case of remote realities that are even just a little bigger or in expansion, this problem needs to be solved because, even if the number of people is still modest, the distance in terms of communication between teams and people

increases more than proportionally. So, starting from the point that project management tools are fundamental, as the firm grows, there must be also found a solution to reduce the increasing distance to connect teams with each other, teams with the top board and individual objectives with organizational objectives.

One of the solutions to this problem of lack of direction implemented by some of the interviewed organizations is the OKR methodology. OKR method is a goal-setting and tracking framework created by the CEO at Intel, Andy Grove, who updated the already existing Management by objectives method. Then OKRs were made famous by John Doerr, Google advisor (Doerr 2018^[1]). Since that time OKR methodology has spread and today many big companies use it such as the previous mentioned Google, Intel but also Netflix, Airbnb, LinkedIn, and more.

In our organization list, three of six companies (Seedble, Evermind, Reverse) have adopted the method for at least 6 months (Seedble for three years, Evermind for six months, Reverse for one year), a company (Bitbull) is evaluating at the moment whether adopt it or not (they made a workshop that involves top management and middle management), two companies, the smallest ones, do not have it.

This goal-setting framework requires top management to define areas of interventions that are considered important for the strategy of the organization and to set organizational goals. These macro-objectives are then translated into team objectives and individual ones by teams and employees themselves.

The particularity of this model in fact is that it is not a top-down process but it is a method that by definition requires in the goal-setting process the direct participation of people, goals are shared and everybody is called to think about how to achieve them based on his skills, responsibilities, and competencies. This method perfectly fits the needs of a full remote/hybrid company because it increases and reinforces employee engagement and empowerment, aspects that we have repeatedly seen are very critical and need attention in these kinds of work contexts.

“It is not a goal imposed from the top but it is a shared goal, comprehensible to the individual who can then understand and have understood what piece it represents in the corporate design” Evermind

The aim in fact is to make employees aware not only of the desired direction of the company but also how they can understand more deeply the scope of their work and how

they can contribute as individual and as a component of a team to the achievement of established goals and desired results.

“We defined our company goal. Then all the company functions started working on the actions that can help work on that company goal. There are no actions outside of that context, because that is the goal. The OKR allowed us to double revenues. “Reverse

“Working by objectives allows everyone to know how their work fits in the achievement of that macro business objective. This is not to be taken for granted, because with regard to macro goals such as may be positioning goals rather than turnover goals sometimes it is difficult to understand how the individual's contribution actually meshes. This system makes people more engaged in achieving the business goal, they are evaluated and rewarded based on the achievement of these types of goals. It is very important, especially in the case of hybrid work, to keep everyone engaged in the same way, the latter are the ones that you struggle the most to keep engaged within the corporate life” Seedble

OKRs are a useful tool to establish what matters for the company, set the strategy, communicate this desired direction to the overall organization and translate organizational goals into team goals and individual goals together with people involved in order to achieve expectations. Employees have a clear view of what priorities are in the following period at individual, team, and organizational levels. They are also an excellent instrument for tracking because at the end of the period, not only managers but employees themselves could give an evaluation of whether objectives were achieved and how well it was done.

The particularity of this methodology is that it includes not only the definition of objectives but also key results. Key results are measurable results that help us to understand what we have to do to achieve those specific objectives in terms of numbers without saying specifically how to obtain those numbers, keeping autonomy intact. OKR are useful in guiding the person to focus only on shared and recognized priorities, this has a double consequence: on one hand, employees can focus their time and their actions on these aspects without wasting resources on things that are not considered relevant for the objective's achievement, on the other having clear goals allow them to feel less confused, stressed and overwhelmed by work, especially in remote contexts.

So, in this method, all goals- organizational, team and individual ones- need to be linked to something that can be measured. Interventions areas and objectives can be quantitative but also qualitative, for instance in Evermind one of the strategic areas to be monitored is the employee's well-being; this qualitative aspect is then translated into concrete and measurable

actions that whether implemented and done may result in a real achievement or progress in terms of well-being.

“We have created an excel file where areas of focus are defined, there is a macro area dedicated to the company where there are key results defined not only from the point of view of turnover e.g. increase in turnover by x% compared to the previous year, but above all maintaining an average positive value of the stakeholder satisfaction survey (the questionnaire that we provide to clients after the delivery of the project) and the other area is about corporate well-being which is the one related to the happiness questionnaire and it includes both qualitative and quantitative results.” Evermind

In the interviewed companies that have implemented OKR, two out of three companies (Seedble and Evermind) speak of setting challenging but at the same time achievable objectives. Achievable means that they can be potentially achieved at 100%, while the third firm (Reverse) states that the objectives must be very challenging, almost impossible, so even only 70/80 % achievement of the goal is considered an excellent result.

“For us a goal has to be absolutely attainable but it has to be challenging. However, it should not be something utopian because it might disincentivize people, there has to be a challenging goal in the sense that you can't think of doing what you have already done, you discuss together for that in the team as well, but it has to be attainable.” Seedble

“The goal we set for ourselves must be unattainable or difficult to attain; in fact, it is set as a goal toward which we must strive to give our best. In fact, the literature says that if you reach 80 percent of the goal, you can consider yourself very satisfied; if you always reach it, it means it is not a challenging goal. The way we are motivated for us the impossible does not exist, but this giving ourselves such a challenging goal has allowed us to carry out concrete actions.” Reverse

The approach to target setting depends on motivation dynamics: for Seedble and Evermind, goals need to be clear and achievable, otherwise, the risk is to demotivate people who since the beginning know that it will be very hard to achieve it and so they may put less effort in what they do. The opposite is for Reverse in which people to be motivated need to be ambitious, face hard challenges and aspire to difficult results. This reasoning about the level of OKR difficulty is connected to the reward systems, whether there is one. Based on the percentage of goal achievement, a reward is given to the individual and/or the team. In Evermind incentives are only group rewards, because projects are made by teams and goals are set and achieved by teams, it is considered fair and coherent to give group rewards: the

team receives a budget that can be used as they want, so they can decide to divide it between team components or use it for a common project or even for charity if they want.

The only true limit of this methodology recognized by the firms is that it requires study and knowledge because whether it is not well understood or applied for the wrong reasons it can be detrimental and bring the opposite effect inducing employees to focus on irrelevant or misleading actions and goals.

For the success of OKR method implementation, the fundamental factors are efficient internal communication, transparency from the company and continuous feedback. So the company must be very good to communicate to the distributed team what is expected and what is important, so people know clearly what they need to focus on, it must be transparent so it has to be available to share information because employees need to have all the elements to understand how they can contribute in bringing value to the firm, and finally it is essential to periodically revise OKR and progress in order to decide together how to adjust and modify actions to pursue the right direction.

Box Firm insight: OKR, Objectives and key result in Seedble

Seedble is among the companies interviewed the one that has adopted the OKR system for the longest time. The pilot was launched 3 years ago, the starting period was an experimental phase where people did not receive formal training but the firm preferred to adopt a learning by doing approach so it wanted employees to try it in the first person and fail in order to deeply understand the method.

OKRs in Seedble are challenging but achievable, if you put effort, you can achieve 100% of the goal. This is a choice of the firm derived from the fact that setting goals that are too hard can be detrimental to motivation: if the employee knows that a priori the goal is almost impossible to achieve, he/ she never put effort to realize it. Challenging for Seedble means doing something more than what you have done previously.

In the first years devoted as we said to experiment this system, some mistakes were made:

“In the early years, goals were attainable but less challenging because we ask people to get their hands dirty, so to experiment and, if there was something wrong you would fix it in the course without big problems because it was a pilot phase. It happened that some of the key results were not really key and instead it was missing something that allowed you to achieve that goal and it also happened that the missing aspect was so important that it was still brought forward in the company anyway, because without that you couldn't say that you had achieved that goal.”

Objectives and key result regard employee performance but also dimensions that are not directly connected to it, for instance an individual objective could be “Improve project management skill”, in order to measure this improvement and effectively say that the employee has achieved it a key result can be “to do at least one training course on PM”.

OKRs in Seedble are approached in a flexible and dynamic way.

“OKR must reflect what is the primary interest of the company, from there to cascade to the various teams, so if the firm interest changes, there is obviously a need to make adjustments”

This means that if something changes in the strategy and interests of the company, team and individual objectives need to be revised and adapted. Obviously, this is a time and energy-consuming activity so drastic changes cannot be performed normally but only in exceptional cases, for instance for Seedble during this year a disruptive event was the launch of Metaverse that was unexpected but a strategically important horizon for an innovation-based company.

In the firm OKRs are defined at the beginning of the year: each team meets and discusses how they can contribute to the realization of organizational goals, setting specific objectives and key results for the team, the same is done by employees as single individuals:

“Setting goals and percentages are devolved to individuals in the form of a proposal, especially in the case of new entrants who have never done it before. On the other hand, those who have been working with this methodology for a few years already are able independently to organize their key results and then there is a sharing phase so that we all know. “

Because goals are challenging but achievable, in Seedble there is also a linkage between goals achievement and rewards. Rewards depend on the percentage the employee has achieved for each one of his/her objectives in relation to the maximum reward that is written in the contract.

“For instance, we have an OKR achieved at 100%, one at 20%, and so on, the person then gets rewarded based on the percentage achievement of those goals. If you achieve 100% of all your goals you will receive the maximum award which is what each person simply has stated in their employment contract. “

The employee has also the possibility to give different weights to different objectives.

“There might be some key results that are heavier than others, so one maybe worth 50, one 150, the total doesn't change but the allocation of weights varies, this allocation comes by mutual agreement, however let's say freedom is given to the person obviously within an established range”

So OKRs are a useful way to have a clear road map in mind as an organization, team and individual. For this very reason is important especially in remote work where it is easier to lose it, it is important to have a periodic check to see if everybody is going in the right direction and if the needs at the top are changed. In Seedble the checkpoint is every six months, it is a fundamental moment because if there is a deviation the organizations and employees have the possibility to understand what the problem is, maybe the objective was too challenging, or it was anachronistic, or maybe it is a problem of lack of resources and promptly solved it.

4.3 Cultural control

4.3.1 Induction to organizational culture through onboarding and playbook

We have seen that culture is a powerful mechanism to influence employee's behavior, even more in cases in which direct control and supervision are not feasible. For this reason, it could be a good way to ensure alignment in a remote context. However, the first aspect to consider in the case of remote work arrangements, especially in full remote firms, is that you cannot directly see and live company culture due to the distance. It is not like in a normal office where you can see how other colleagues behave, which norms and habits are in that specific company and what you can do or not. According to the companies, this is something to be considered but it is not perceived as an obstacle to the construction of a strong culture; it simply requests more time, intentionality, and structure ever since you are still a small reality.

With time and a deep knowledge of colleagues and the environment, you can understand the company but particularly at the beginning, it might be very difficult. The company needs to have strong storytelling skills because if things cannot be seen, they must be told, so the firm has to tell new employees its story, its values, its aspirations for the future, how it behaves, and why it does. An instrument used by some of the involved companies to immerse in the company culture is the creation of written documents that provide general statements about the organizational values and organizational functioning (Culture book for Seedble, Playbook for Bitbull, Manifesto for Evermind).

"Imagine that today is your first day at work, you are in your room and nothing changes from yesterday, you are still in your room the difference is that today you have 20 colleagues and tasks to do. This seems obvious but it is not, you have to be helped with this new routine. you have to start learning about a whole set of practices, tools, habits, getting into a corporate culture that until yesterday in that room were not there" Bitbull

These documents represent a sort of user guide for the beginning when you need to discover how the company works but also for the rest of the team in those moments in which they feel lost and they need to realign and "not to lose sight of the reasons why he joined and the greater ambition of which he is a part" (Seedble Culture book). Furthermore, they are designed to help employees understand what behaviors are expected: they are principle-based so they do not impose rules but give guidelines.

Indeed, values are even more important in the case of remote firms: in a context where employees are given high responsibility and autonomy, values become guidelines that allow the person to take a decision autonomously and consciously.

“It's about the famous drunkard's wall, a metaphor to say: when I have to make a decision, I feel a little disoriented, lost, unsure, where do I lean? I have to make a decision for my company, whether I'm on the board and therefore it's a strategic company on what to invest in the next year or whether I'm a developer and I have to make a decision about a piece of code, I'm alone, I don't have a colleague who can help me at that moment, values guide me” Bitbull

As previously said, in remote firms, there are two different levels of values: core values of remote work that unite all the involved companies i.e., autonomy, responsibility, transparency, and trust and then values that are specific to the firm. These two levels are integrable with each other and they need to be constantly communicated and concretely implemented.

Remote companies need to create a strong identity and culture distinguishing them from others, to foster a sense of belonging and commitment. The employee needs to have a clear mind about who is working for even if he/she is not present in the office:

“You should not reduce everything to the use of tools because then the employee does not distinguish between one company and another. If it is only a matter of tools, working for you or another is the same. If, on the other hand, the character and culture of the company come through the tools used and the people, I feel inside that company.” Bitbull

For instance, in these documents companies explicitly tell their approach to work, and explain how they work and why. In a time where there is no more a unique way to work, it is important to describe and narrate your approach to work so the individual will understand why things are done in a certain way, so he/ she will have a clear vision of things and he/ she will be more motivated in doing his/her job.

In this sense, another useful instrument is the onboarding process. We can define onboarding as a process in which the company gives the new hires all the necessary resources and training to become effective members and contributors to the organization. Necessary resources include knowledge of organizational practices and procedures, instruments and methodologies used, policies and rules, the company culture and the working environment in general. With respect to the playbook which is a principle-based document, onboarding is more concrete and specific. During the onboarding, the employee learns all the procedures,

instruments used in the company to perform his job but he/ she also receives an explanation of why a tool is used and how that specific company uses it. All companies involved always try to explain in the playbook and in particular in the onboarding their choices, this is another way to establish a strong identity and ensure more alignment thanks to this transparency that distinguished these firms. In fact, if employees have all the information including the reasons for choices made by the company even for smaller and operational decisions, it is easier for them to understand it and align their behavior to what the company has decided to undertake.

In our companies, onboarding process is present and it is implemented in different ways: in Quindo and Digital pr it is a more informal moment in which most of the time the founders introduce the new hire to the company functioning, then they assign the new employee to a senior to have a more specific training based on the role. They are small so as we said in other contexts, their dimension allows a higher level of spontaneity and informality and a strong bond with the entrepreneur who is the company's glue. As the number of employees increases, time decreases so there is the need for a more structured initiative to allow the new hire to acclimate to the company and become operative as fast as possible. In Seedble for instance they have created a series of onboarding videos, in which each Seedbler explains an aspect of the work in Seedble:

"We tell a little bit about the various features and projects done so that people know the tools and procedures we use to facilitate remote work management" Seedble

This is an effective way to start to know the team and to have an overview of what Seedble is and does, accompanied by written files that allow us to explore more in-depth the considered issue. Another important benefit of this solution is the fact that onboarding videos are a sort of on-demand training, so every time a new hire is introduced into the company, he/she simply accesses the onboarding folder in the drive. This is an incredible advantage for the company which saves time because they had to do the videos once and for all and for the new hire that receives the same training as others and for seniors who can always check things.

Another solution for this process was found by Bitbull in which onboarding happens through emails. They have created an automatic system that sends daily emails to the new hire for almost a month, starting from the day before the first day of work. In these emails Bitbull simply explains in more detail with respect to the playbook but also more informally how the company works. This is a way to help the new employee to enter a new complex reality that you cannot see concretely because there is no office but it is there, and also to help

him/her in progressively understand a very different work approach, making the process easier and funnier in compliance with the culture and spirit in Bitbull.

“The day before the first day of work we tell you what's going to happen, we have our virtual office, we start making some jokes. Since you're in by now, we allow ourselves to show you in these emails what we're really like. We then explain what our virtual office is, slack which is the company chat with its main channels, how you apply for vacation and leave, how the task planning tool works, at the end of the first week a summary of how the first week went. We explain to you the company password manager, how the various communication channels work so depending on whether you have an urgency or not, use this one rather than that one, the importance of documenting what we do.” Bitbull

In the end, we can say that onboarding process is doubly helpful: it is an effective way to help the person to understand the culture of the company and progressively align to it and it also solves the problem of lack of resources because it puts the new hire in the conditions to work in the new context.

So, the company must tell who it is intentionally and systematically, it must update about what is going on and engage the employees in the travel in order to pursue together the desired direction.

4.3.2 Build a strong identity to foster a sense of belonging and commitment through social and physical arrangements

Both in the playbook and onboarding, the firms set their tone. For instance, in Bitbull there is a high sense of irony and play, they play with the name of the company to indicate their initiatives, ie Meetbull or Chatbul. As one of the Bitbull partners says " we are all a bit nerdy, we are the meme generation, we like to make quotes". In some firms, not only in the written documents but also during the interviews, workers are not called simply employees but are referred to as Seedblers, Reversers, strengthening the sense of belonging and identification with the firm.

All the organizations involved are united by informal, open, and inclusive cultures based on trust and empowerment. Both in cases of virtual or physical offices they are not considered simply offices, in the interviews sometimes they are called Company's home or meeting place, they are touch points with others where you can share something interesting, ask for help, chat with the others.

"For me technically, our home is Slack and it is the virtual place where the daily exchange between professionals happens " Evermind

In the case of hybrid companies, physical offices are redesigned in order to be comfortable places whose purpose is not exclusively working because you don't need an office to work but they become meeting places that you voluntarily frequent when you want to confront others, seeing people's faces, contaminating yourself and sharing your work day. In Seedble spaces were re-designed to meet these needs and the result is the creation of Phluid:

"Phluid is a sui generis office, it was designed as a co-working space open to the outside world, so a space that could be experienced by Seedblers but also external professionals to foster even more the concept of contamination and knowledge of new realities that we espouse. The office is conceived as a meeting place, a fundamental point of contact because people are not always in the office." Seedble

In addition to being a coworking space, the office is designed according to the activity-based idea, so different rooms are created to answer to specific working needs and not to divide one company's function from another one.

4.3.3 Creating social moments to create strong groups

In addition to traditional control problems, there is another aspect that must be considered by managers in order to have aligned and motivated employees: lack of presence resulting in a lack of sociability and the risk of individualism, and social and professional isolation. As we said, being distant may cause isolation, lack of commitment and belonging to the team and the company. This situation can be highly detrimental to the achievement of company's goal. Relations and dialogue are possible also in remote contexts but they request a lot of intentionality both by managers and employees. Sharing moments that are easier and spontaneous in presence needs to be structured and it is the responsibility of managers to create them and cultivate team spirit to make the group united and motivated.

"It is the entrepreneur/manager's job to create moments of sharing where there is room for everyone: for example, in Quindo on Monday mornings we all meet and everyone talks about themselves, what they have done etc.; we have created the book club moment so Quindo buys 6 books each a year and on Friday afternoons we meet to talk about the books we have read, what we liked, what we didn't turn this moment into a way to get to know each other, to compare."

Even if they are more difficult, social moments are considered very important by these firms according to their approach focused on people's well-being.

“If you can establish friendship dynamics even within a group doing smart work, this then also helps the work itself. Relationships need to be fostered and not cut. If people build bonds of friendship even within the agency this fosters the creation of a calm and well-prepared environment, a collaborative approach, and consequently a better quality of work.” Digital pr

Therefore, in order to foster team spirit, sociability and informal sharing and contamination, interviewed firms have put in place some initiatives to fill the presence gap: on one hand the use of existing and/or new communication tools to virtually reproduce social moments; on the other, the organization of team building activities and company meetings.

All the interviewed organizations have virtual informal channels (mainly Slack) where people can share everything they want, from interesting articles or books to funny things. These channels represent a substitute for chit-chat that happens for instance in front of the coffee machine in a traditional setting. In addition to this where communication is written, some organizations have created also virtual coffee and virtual meetings where people can directly talk to each other about non-work-related issues but to know each other. One of the main problems in remote context in fact is that communication both formal and informal between people who daily work together is well developed, whereas communication and knowledge of other colleagues are very poor. Random virtual coffees can be a good solution to solve this problem and create a more cohesive and collaborative company group. Some organizations also use these tools to celebrate organizational but also personal successes and achievements, to make people feel part of the company and a close team. There are team building activities that can be virtual (for instance Quindo book club) but also in presence.

Periodic meetings and team activities in presence are considered very important by all organizations because according to these firms, whereas distance does not impact negatively work productivity and operations, in the long run it has consequences on the social sphere. Sometimes people need to stay together and confront each other in order to be more focused and motivated to collaborate and achieve together fixed targets. In Bitbull for instance before the pandemic they organized 3-4 physical meetings, one of these for Christmas where also families of employees were involved; in Quindo in addition to annual meetings lasting also 2-3 days, employees participate together in social events around Italy i.e., art exhibition. Very

interesting is the case of Digital pr where part of the profit is used to organize a company holiday:

“This year we all went on a cruise together, from Mon to Fri we worked, then on Saturday and Sunday we celebrated. This allows you to bond so much with the people you work with, so you gain so much of what sometimes remote work doesn't allow you to have. These are activities that despite the investment required should never be lacking as it allows the worker to feel not only an employee but also part of a group. I don't want to say family because that's too much but a very cohesive group beyond the professional goal but that also cares about people. So team building activities, vacations together, social events in general are important because they allow on the one hand the employee to bond therefore to get to know each other and then also the employer to get to know the people whom he entrusts his job and the future of his company. “

Another particular way to encourage relations, contamination and sharing is the use of an enterprise social network. Seedble is implementing a platform Lumapps in which there is the possibility to create communities: employees have their profiles, they can comment, like, interact with each other's, share contents that can be work-related such as articles, books, interesting projects and startups but also non work related. Lumapps is a very useful tool for ensuring employees engagement in several ways: one is encouraging sociability and contamination through the community section but there are other purposes that it satisfies; for instance, the need for constant updating of everybody about what is happening in the company (new clients, new projects, success obtained etc). This aspect will be deepened in one of the following paragraphs.

When we talk about meetings, it is better to distinguish between moments devoted to sociality and to reinforce the team and moments aimed to transmit and communicate strategy and the organization's direction. In the smallest and less structured firm as Quindo this moment can be overlapped during the annual meeting but as the firm grows, it is important to make a distinction in order to not organize confused and useless meetings where informal and formal dimensions are considered together. This happens for instance in Bitbull, where initially the Meetbull, the monthly meeting, was a moment with a double purpose: for the organization to share the strategy and for employees to talk altogether, then they optimize and improve the meeting by focusing on strategy communication, creating for sociability an informal initiative, the Chatbull, a virtual coffee.

“At the beginning, the Meetbull was lighter, now it is becoming more and more organizational and we have instead put lightness thanks to another initiative: a tool that every two weeks organizes a chat between 3 random people who have to have a coffee together thus having the opportunity to get to know each other without necessarily talking about work. This made it possible to transform the monthly meeting into something more organized and directional”

Box firm insights: How do companies foster sociability?				
	Tool used	Purpose	Initiatives	Purpose
Bitbull	Slack informal channels Chat bull, virtual coffee involving 3 colleagues randomly chosen by an automatic system Heart bit	To share funny aspects of daily life and work to daily greeting and general info to help people, who do not normally work together, get to know each other To share interesting things with the others ex. organizational but also personal success and achievements	Annual meetings ex Christmas together with colleagues and families	Share moments together and know each other as people
Digital pr Pro	Virtual meeting platform	To stay constantly in contact	Company holidays	To know each other as professionals but also as people
Evermind	Slack channels Creation of local hubs on slack	To foster participation to local events for those employees who live in the same area	Festival dell'ospitalità, one of the main annual projects of the firm	Occasion to meet colleagues, share opinions and thought, meet new professionals expanding your work network
Seedble	Different thematic communities on Lumapps	To encourage contamination, curiosity and sharing of opinions and initiatives	Team building activities Ex volunteering together, cooking class	
Quindo	Monday meeting Slack channel and WhatsApp group	To share a pleasant moment together For informal sharing	Book club Attendance to social events across Italy such as art exhibition Annual meetings lasting 2-3 days Team building activities such as Aperitivo guidato	

4.4 Action control

We have seen that in a remote working context it is important to trust employees, respect their autonomy and empower them. We have also seen that the PM tool and task settings are very good solutions to give direction. However, this does not mean that they have not to receive some guidelines in their work and be informed about what the organization expects from them. Also in a remote context, managers need to ensure that an employee performs actions that are beneficial to the organization, limiting those that can be detrimental. In this sense action controls performed are: online meetings and the creation of procedures and detailed documentation.

4.4.1 Online meetings

Online meetings are used by the involved companies to help their employees to carry out their job, check progress and detect raised problems. Usually, these meetings are weekly, for instance in Quindo every Monday morning a call is made in which all employees including the founder participate to discuss what was done the previous week and what they have to do in the coming one. In Bitbull there are individual team meetings organized according to the Scrum methodology which provides call planning at the beginning of a sprint¹⁴ so every 1-2 weeks and daily scrums which consist of a 15-minute moment in the morning where you give 2 minutes to each person and answer 3 questions: what did I do yesterday, what am I going to do today, am I in trouble. If there are problems other specific meetings are then planned to solve them. These daily meetings are not always done because as it emerged also in the interviews of the other companies, if it is possible, it is better to avoid too frequent and useless meetings.

Good coordination and monitoring of work do not entail excessive communication: meetings should be meaningful, concise, clear, well designed, with a clear message, useful for making decisions, otherwise they risk being detrimental in terms of employee productivity. If they are too long and frequent, at the end of the week they risk subtracting precious time from other activities and being counterproductive in terms of work quality because especially in knowledge work where creativity is an essential element, a constant interruption can impact negatively work-flow. So, alignment and updating meetings need to be used with

¹⁴Sprint is a time unit used to mark the project process. Usually, a sprint lasts from 2 weeks to one month

moderation and caution. A further reason is also not to put too much pressure on employees who could feel too much controlled, putting in danger that trust-based relationship that we said to be essential in a remote work context.

4.4.2 Shared and detailed documentation and procedures

In remote and hybrid firms' procedures are not considered a way to cage professionals' actions but they are guidelines useful to not lose the point and have a reference also when other people are not available for some reasons.

"Procedures may be necessary but simply as a method of work. For example, in our case when there is the onboarding of a client you have to do certain actions, when you produce a release there are these actions to be done afterward but also to meet contractual terms with clients, there are procedures established for critical situations so if there are 10 critical situations what do we do to dissolve them, so let's say procedures are to make people feel safe, especially those who have just arrived so that they understand how to move" Digital pr

In a remote work context, being able to report and document things is fundamental not because the manager wants to see what you have done in order to express a judgment on you but because keeping things traced and sharing them with others has several benefits in a situation where you are distant. First of all, documenting things in a written form makes information available for everyone at every time. It is a way to share the company knowledge with all the people who need it, making them autonomous in their decision and sharing responsibilities.

A very interesting point was the one of Bitbull where people's ambition is to become useless, in the sense that thanks to the creation of a kind of company brain on Confluence, a knowledge management tool where all projects, meetings, decisions taken, specific procedures to solve particular problems are documented. Knowledge is shared, so there isn't a single person who is the unique keeper of specific information and this has two consequences that only apparently are conflicting: people could take autonomous decisions because everyone has the instrument to choose and act, people have less responsibility because the company works also without them and so, for example, an employee can go on holiday without the worrying that something bad could happen and nobody except him/ her could solve it.

"Transferring the brain to a system like that allows you to be free from being absent, because if one needs information one can easily find it. I go to the knowledge management tool, I see how you did it, your steps, then clear maybe I do it slower, double check but in the meantime, I don't feel lost and I don't give a problem to the client. " Bitbull

4.5 Managerial levers

In addition to the described types of control, during the interviews are emerged some factors that can be considered indirect mechanisms that could help ensure organizational control in full remote and hybrid context: trust, coaching-oriented management style, feedback systems and final strong internal communication.

4.5.1 Trust

In all the interviews it emerged how the best way to overcome the perceived problem of losing control is trust. When there is distance between the manager and the employee the only way to make things work is to create a strong trust-based relationship. As we said in the paragraph about selection, the first thing to do in order to ensure organizational control is to select the right people, those individuals that are more suitable for that specific context. In the case of remote work, we said that they need to be responsible, autonomous, proactive, with good soft skills, especially in terms of communication and values affinity. Selecting this kind of workers is a preventive action that minimizes the risk of a dangerous loss of control. Once the manager has selected these people and gives them goals to be achieved and resources to do it, he or she has to trust them and so they left employees free to choose how to work and how to achieve goals. In an interview with one of the employees of Quindo who was herself an entrepreneur but with a more traditional approach, it emerged a relevant difference with respect to the perspective of Quindo founder:

"I am a more conservative entrepreneur, she starts at 100% trust and then goes down based on how you behave, for me it's the opposite you start at 0% and then you earn it."

So, for managers the starting assumption is that people are completely trustworthy, trust means you have positive expectations toward the behavior of your employees because you have selected them knowing they have the appropriate skills- hard and soft and they share your values.

So, considering this perspective, managers do not feel the need to constantly control their employees, performing micromanagement or saying what they have to do for achieving the goal, they believe in the competence and integrity of the professional and they only intervene if something happens that might undermine this complete trust but they never start prejudiced.

"We don't have control dynamics, we don't have timecards to punch, there is the tendency to give trust which obviously has to be repaid. 99% of the cases it happens, it happens really rarely that this trust is not repaid but it happens in all companies and then at that point you intervene but usually if you go and create a nice working environment there are no problems from that point of view either" Digital pr

Trust is perceived and valued by employees, it is considered a sort of benefit, a privilege that must be repaid with quality work.

"I see a great deal of trust on the management side that we are given every day, on the employee side I see an interest in the work, a really unfeigned caring that probably if this trust were lacking would result in less work, if not controlled" Digital pr

In this sense, considering, the trust-control relation, trust play a substitution role because it is perceived as an alternative to control.

"I think there is a shift going on from a command-and-control type of leadership that controls the activity and does what is called micro management, not just saying the goal is that but also putting your mouth on how you have to achieve it, to a trust and empowerment leadership, so there is trust and the ability of the manager to actually delegate with respect to how a goal is achieved. The important thing of course is to set the goal well and empowerment because you have to actually empower the person to manage themselves." Seedble

Trust can ensure the alignment of employees' behaviors because they do not want to miss the privilege to be considered trustworthy and so they are less likely to inappropriate behaviors such as personal gains, lying and individualism.

However, this conception of trust as an alternative to control is not shared by everyone: all the interviewed employees of Quindo affirm the importance of creating a balance between trust and control. They are not substitutes; they are complementary aspects that allow working efficiently.

" The first thing a remote manager must have is a strong inclination to trust others, because if you don't trust the people you choose by this method, you won't sleep at night. However, control exercised with kindness but with determination is necessary even in a staff where people have a high sense of responsibility. " Quindo

The company in fact has faced an evolution in this sense: initially, even if there was great trust by the founder towards the employees, the lack of control or rather coordination of work had negative impacts on the productivity and the workers' behaviors; then a new figure was inserted, a team leader with the responsibility to supervise and monitor workflow. This choice should not be seen as contradictory or as a step backward with respect to the change in mentality we have previously discussed, in fact the trust-based approach adopted by the founder remained intact and it was simply balanced by a figure who was able to optimize and coordinate people's efforts by directing them toward common goals. The team leader of Quindo said:

"Autonomy and individual empowerment of employees are important, but at the same time, there must be a coordinating figure. It's not about control, I don't look at what they write in the documents because I know they do them well, I don't check how it's going with the client because we're sure it's working, obviously that implies trust. I make sure that the flow of work does not find obstacles and, if there are, I intervene to solve them, I make sure that everyone is in a position to carry out their goals e.g., in assigning tasks I assess the workloads of individuals in order not to overload them, causing stress and impacting the quality of work"

4.5.2 Supportive and inspiring management style: manager as a coach and employees sentiment control

Leadership style can be considered a very powerful lever for control, it could foster alignment between individual and organizational goals; managers' actions and attitude can in fact influence indirectly how employees behave. Different leadership styles lead to different ways of communicating vision and mission, strategy and also control. In the case of remote work context, the predominant leadership style is the transformational one. According to Bass et al 1998 transformational leaders uplift the motivation and morale of employees, help them to become more innovative and creative, pay attention to their needs and try to support personal development, they are coaches and this is exactly the management approach that emerged in all the interviews. Managers are not bosses who need to control and supervise

everything that happens in the company but people leaders who have the job to lead/inspire people, making them grow, bringing out their potential, understanding their needs.

"For us, the role of a manager is getting closer and closer to that of a coach, he or she has to have the ability to bring out the best in people, bring out the problems and also the things that are going well so as to bring them to the attention of the company, things that are working to focus on. Today we often talk about people leader instead of manager: you don't manage people, you are leading and inspiring the people who are in your team, you have a role of guiding, inspiring, and coordinating.
"Seedble

This new shift starts from the premise that happy and satisfied people work better and bring true value to the firm so managers need to care about them, their well-being their personal and professional development

"It is important that the relationship between employer and employee is not only job assignment and job performance but that the employer is interested in your employee's well-being, from which then also comes a better job because an employee who is happy with his job and enjoys his rights works better." Digital pr

This is true in a traditional context but it is even more important in full remote/ hybrid cases where the individual well-being must be safeguarded and a high level of employee engagement and motivation need to be maintained.

In these organizations characterized by quite flat structure, the manager is not above others but available to others, her/ his job is not to keep knowledge for him/herself and give orders but to share knowledge, be able to delegate, teach and help others to express their talent.

"This idea is very difficult to convey to managers who have a hard time trusting and delegating because they remain anchored in the idea that: this thing as I do it, nobody does it, so I do it myself, I do it faster because otherwise I have to explain it and then they don't do it as I say etc. You have to detach yourself from this view and understand that you have to help your team bring out its best."
Seedble

Only through employee empowerment, engagement, and talent enhancement, the manager can ensure a healthy alignment with organization expectations and goals. For the companies involved, the greatest challenge in terms of organizational control is helping employees to achieve their potential, to express their talents, and motivating them; having the security that everybody is doing his job during working hours is not the real problem.

Two of the involved companies introduced more specific coaching programs: in Reverse an ad hoc program “Manager as a coach” was introduced for team leaders to train them, in Evermind in the last year an external coach was inserted to conduct a pilot program involving a small group but destined to be extended to the rest of the company.

"We started in January-February with a pilot group of four people. We would like to extend this path to everyone with two goals: to try to pull the potential of each person and to make people learn to share any kind of thinking, especially problems because if a problem is addressed right away you can easily find the solution. We want to train him not to become a good professional but to train him to the realization of personal happiness that then reflexively becomes an added value for the company."
Evermind

According to this, managers need to develop new skills to overcome scarce motivation and personal limitations in a remote context.

In interviews, the most frequently mentioned characteristic that a manager must have is empathy: managers need to know when and how to communicate with different people. This is very difficult in a situation where you cannot see because you do not have the person constantly in front of you, so you need to be particularly careful and observe your employees.

"I really miss the so-called coffee machine, it's a missed opportunity so you have to try to develop spidery senses and have empathy at the highest level to try to understand that something I'm telling you, that I'm asking you to do could create a problem, a difficulty for you. Many times, in Bitbull we ask: ok can you, do it? Do you need some help? Do you want us to get in touch? I prefer to devote time, I'm very careful to make sure that the organizational calls are very well focused on the goal and that they don't go over the time constraints in the face of being able to then take 30 minutes to understand how a person is doing in the context because it makes a lot of difference in making sure that they stay, that they are efficient, in the quality of their work and others." Bitbull

Empathy means also understanding the person you have in front of you so the approach adopted by the manager needs also to adapt his/her approach to the person. In general, the more accepted approach to adopt is to not be too much intrusive and not interrupt too much the work-flow of the person who was selected for his/her expertise, autonomy, and sense of responsibility; however, the manager needs also to have the sensibility to understand when a person for some reasons needs more guidance, support, and contact.

" There are different situations, each person has their characteristics, periods and experiences. So, it's true that the less we impact on their daily life the better, however if you know that a person is in a

moment that is not productive and you understand that they need to be spurred on or trivially even picked up you have to intervene to prevent the situation from escalating. It's hard to perceive these things remotely, compared to when I was in the office it's much harder to understand what the person is doing during the day so you have to make an extra effort." Bitbull

Control doesn't regard what employees do but how they feel, because "in a remote context, the unsaid if neglected can become a monster" (Evermind). This new type of control that we called employee sentiment control provides that the manager observes employees in order to detect and solve malcontent:

"Often a part of our work as project managers should be primarily oriented toward achieving project goals in a full remote context is also partly oriented toward well-being and perceiving risk indicators in terms of some component's discomfort, PMs are among the first in the field who can notice this."

For this reason, another required skill for remote managers is active listening. As we previously said in the paragraph about result control, thanks to PM tools but also all the other digital tools available, the manager has a clear vision of the work; he knows who is doing what, whether he/she has already finished, whether something happens and stops the right workflow, so monitoring is clear and quite objective, the real difficulty and consequently the true skill of the manager is to understand why things happen so for instance, why people have problems in achieving a specific objective, why they are not able to meet the deadlines. After this kind of analysis, he needs to identify solutions in order to support employees in their work and achieve the expected result together.

"The moment you tell me that it is not achievable, the question I should ask myself is: am I giving all the appropriate tools to achieve that goal? What are the tools that I need to provide to achieve the goal as I expect it to be achieved? If I provide those things, can you, do it? Do you need more people or/and more resources? What do you need? The problem then is active listening." Quindo

Active listening is important not only to understand if something is going wrong in the company but also to motivate people to understand what they would like to do in the company, whether they want to face more challenging projects for instance.

"We have attention in evaluating personal growths, trying to have an organic situation, giving people the opportunity to work in contexts that are challenging for them, interesting, in case moving them from one team to another to help them achieve their desires, use certain technologies, certain working methodologies. You try to reallocate people to the best context, where they feel they can do their best."

Another important aspect to foster motivation could be asking what employees desire to learn both to perform better in their job or simply to keep them curious, to give provide new stimuli.

"In Quindo there is so much inclination to offer training, growth, participation in events, however, you have to stimulate them and try to talk to them and understand what they want to do. People by character have a desire to do certain things rather than others, and remotely you have to reach these people. " Quindo

In Seedble a periodical survey is made to find out topics that employees desire to learn. Then the organization asks the person more skilled within the company to take a course about the selected subject and teach it to all the others. This is a system used also in Quindo, employees teach other employees things that are considered interesting, if there is no sufficient knowledge about the topic, an external professional is called to take the course.

A very useful instrument to establish a relationship between manager and employee that is based on active listening and coaching is the establishment of one-to-one meetings: one to one meeting is a moment in which the manager talks directly with the single employee to know how he/ she feels, which goals and ambitions he/she has, which problems and criticalities he/ she face and then together find solutions.

"The relationship with the employee has to be continuous because you should not assume that a person who came to Bitbull 5 years ago is the same as today, maybe a person wants a family and therefore needs to reduce the burden of responsibility, if you don't talk to them, you will never find out and that one maybe resigns, you have to seek continuous confrontation and one to ones have proven to be a useful tool in this regard." Bitbull

An additional interesting tool in this sense are happiness surveys, they are implemented in Evermind and Reverse. They can be a useful tool for managers in order to know how employees feel in the company and so how to intervene to avoid that someone can lose him/herself and does not look in the same direction:

"The reason and the goal for this survey is to continuously listen to the needs and moods of professionals so that we can understand whether we need to intervene in the short or long term with new activities or changes at the organizational level to move them more toward the direction of the common journey" Evermind

In Evermind employees have to fill in a happiness survey every six months. The questionnaire is composed of two different parts: in the first part, the aim is to find out the

level of personal happiness of employees, in the second part of the questionnaire instead questions are about the well-being in the company, that is, how the person feels in the company so for instance whether the person is stressed or feels connected. This survey is the base from which the company starts to implement new initiatives and strategies to increase the well-being and job satisfaction of people and to find indicators that can quantify these states of well-being.

“Knowing that you have employers who care about your livelihood, your approval, your right to disconnect certainly gives you extra drive, and spurs you on to do better because you tell yourself gosh, I have to do my job and I have to do it well because I get so much in return, it's fair that I earn this. ”
Digital pr

If employees feel listened to and their needs and aspirations are taken into account, this will create adherence to the company: they will repay the trust and attention given to them with quality work and active participation, they will feel part of the organization, they will share organizational goals, considering the company as their own. If managers care about employees, employees will care about the future of the firm and they will actively contribute to its success. So, in the end, we can say that this kind of management style could be very effective for organizational control purposes.

Box Firm insight: One-to-ones in Quindo

In Quindo quarterly one-to-one meetings have been established. It was considered a good timeline by the company; in fact, it allows one to monitor the situation and have an updated vision of company wellbeing but without making too much pressure on employees and without interrupting too much their operativity.

The motivation of these moments was that especially in remote contexts if you do not ask, things do not emerge so you need to take time and talk about personal goals, company temperature and shared sentiment. The team leader tells us an anecdote about the efficiency of these meetings and the drastic improvement they had on motivation and productivity not only of the specific employee but of the entire firm:

"There was a girl who was on the sidelines, who participated very little, who when I got to the first one-on-one said she didn't like working that way. We listened to her, we changed the methodology of project management: previously the approach to the client was handled differently, that is, there was one person who did the account (the figure who talked to the client) and the other people did the operations. Now everyone does the account on his or her project, so I do the project, I follow it from start to finish including the relationship with the client, and this is crucial because I have the pulse on the project, I talk to the client, and in fact the client renewal rate has increased fivefold. That girl has begun to appreciate this new methodology, to participate more during the one-on-one meetings, and now she is one of the company's most valuable resources."

In that case, the one-to-one helps the firm understand that a good way to boost motivation was employee empowerment, giving more responsibility makes them protagonists of their work, increasing interest and care about the project and the relationship with the client.

They have experimented with different approaches to these meetings also in terms of who conducts the one-to-one. With practice, they understand that the meetings need to be done at different levels: both with the founder and the team leader in order to bring out different aspects.

"I realized that if they do the one-to-one with me, they say certain things, with the founder they say other things. The boss is the boss, I'm a colleague so it's easier to voice complaints to resolve them, so meetings need to be done at different levels and more frequently with the team leader." Quindo

One-to-ones are moments to understand what is happening but also to motivate and encourage individual development by fixing together some individual goals. Some questions

that the Quindo founder is used to asking are for instance: what is important for you? Which goal do you want to achieve at the end of the year? Two years from now, what role would you like to play? What would you like to do? Economically what would you like to achieve? Would you like to change what you do? Handle more articulate clients, change industries etc.? This kind of analysis must be also followed by concrete actions to help the employee to improve herself. It is very important for instance to ask what employees want to learn because they need it to perform better their job or because they simply are curious and interested.

For instance, the founder told us the case of an employee who was very shy and wanted to improve her public speaking ability. The founder creates an ad hoc path for her, first, she asked her to do lectures side by side with her, then helped her prepare speeches and so on.

4.5.3 Feedback as a control mechanism

Remote companies have a very strong feedback culture. Feedback is somewhat considered as an alternative mechanism of control that ensures that everybody is always on the established track and if there are deviations, thanks to the immediate feedback the person is brought back:

" We have a strong culture of feedback and therefore error: you can make mistakes because feedback comes in and then so there is a chance to improve after correcting yourself. This thing is very powerful on the control part, due to the fact of having implemented feedback systems between boss and worker we don't lose pieces and thanks to technology we can monitor your activity and straighten up" Reverse

Feedback could be negative but also positive: negative ones are important to grow and improve, positive ones are fundamental to recognize the individual merits and boost motivation.

"If something is done well, you have to acknowledge it and, even if it is done poorly, you have to say it so that you can help figure out how to improve in the future. If you don't, you create discontent dynamics on both the manager's and the employee's side." Seedble

Usually, in the firms involved, positive feedback is given in front of everybody, this is an effective way to motivate the person because he/she receives a non-material but official reward/ recognition in front of colleagues but also the other employees who can see what is considered good and worth of appraisal for the company so they can emulate it, they have a

model to follow. Instead, negative feedback is usually given in private in order to not make the person feel humiliated or punished but to transmit the sense of constructive critique that can make the person grow and do better.

Giving feedback needs training, to be effective the person needs to understand how it has to be formulated in order to motivate and not demotivate.

" It is a type of approach that is not taken for granted, because maybe there are those who come from previous experiences where feedback approach was adopted and therefore are used to it, but there are also those who are at their first work experience or who come from contexts that are foreign to the culture of feedback and therefore clearly have more difficulty precisely because of fear in expressing something that is not going well. It is therefore crucial to learn how to build feedback."

In that regard, in Seedble they made a workshop altogether based on the book "Radical candor" by Kim Scott to learn this aspect and distinguish between a judgment and real feedback. For Seedblers real constructional feedback requires to be radical so things need to be said in a clear and transparent way but they have to transmit a sense of care by the person who expresses the opinion. This sense of care can be concretely transmitted by asking employee for explanations for his/ her actions. Once the manager gives the person the possibility to explain, he/she can have all the elements to express a real formative opinion, without this kind of process the opinion is only a judgment and it can be more detrimental than useful.

As everything in a remote context, also feedback require intentionality and specific attention from managers and employees, they need an active intervention, they may seem like just yet another activity to be done but they are essential to engage and involve remote workers, so it is a moment that must not be neglected.

In our companies, the moment of feedback is always present and it is structured in different ways. In Seedble feedbacks are given between peers because the organization is quite flat, it is a spontaneous but fundamental and highly recommended moment. Individuals and teams establish this discussion moment as soon as the need arises. The choice of not structuring feedback is given for two different reasons: in part, because Seedble is quite small so it is easier to establish a moment and talk with others, in part because feedback to be useful must be given immediately or anyway as soon as possible. In Quindo, Bitbull, Evermind the one-to-ones fulfill this function. Instead in Digital pr specific feedback sessions were created thanks to the collaboration with an external professional, a work psychologist who works as a

mediator between all company people. In these sessions, all people are involved, not only employees but also founders, eliminating in this way hierarchies and giving them the possibility to freely express themselves and to help improve the internal environment and the company together.

The only company that structures a feedback system is Reverse and this is coherent because it has about ninety employees so it needs systematic approach to feedback through specific and planned moments with the managers. Since the onboarding period, there are feedback meetings: in the three months of onboarding four moments for feedback are provided, in this way *“the person is always followed and if we need to direct behavior, we can do it instantly”*.

After this phase, additional feedback moments are planned: every three months there is a structured feedback meeting in which the manager and worker share their evaluation, so the worker shares his/her self-assessment that is compared to the evaluation made by the boss. This is a very effective way to help the individual to understand how he/she is going, whether he/she is meeting company's expectations and whether they are not and what they can do. These feedbacks are archived by a software so they are also a concrete documentation to follow and analyze the individual development

“ All of this is capitalized in the software. These cyclical feedbacks give a step to comparison, to improvement that are unparalleled, so between feedbacks there is an incredible evolution” Reverse

This structured feedback system implemented by Reverse might seem to lose the required promptness for useful feedback but it is not the case because together with established one to ones with managers, there are also other moments that guarantee immediateness, that are derived by the Agile methodology: daily stands up meetings where employees confront each other and express positive and negative feedback about the work in progress; and retrospective, meetings that are taken at the end of a project in order to discuss together how well it went, which were the main challenges, what they have learned for the future etc.

4.5.4 Internal communication for transmitting strategy, updating employees and make them engaged

Efficient and effective communication is the foundation of every managerial function from the planning and organizing to the control phase. The prerequisite of organizational control is in fact that the strategy, the vision, and the pursued direction are well communicated to the

employees, otherwise a dangerous problem of lack of direction can arise. In fact, we intend managerial control as the set of all initiatives, actions and strategies implemented in order to align employee behaviors to the company's expectations and goals, obviously this is possible only if the company communicates those expectations and goals and it does it effectively so that the individual can clearly understand them.

So, communication is fundamental and it is even more important in a remote work context, because due to a lack of presence as we have already seen, you need to be very good at communicating in order to coordinate your team and your employees and give them a clear overview of what the organization is doing and where it would like to go.

In this paragraph, we will talk about three different kinds of communication that are all important to align employees towards the organization's goals and for that on which we need to focus especially in terms of challenges to be faced: operative, strategic and employee-engaging communication.

On operative level communication, the main problems detected by interviewees are:

- the urgency of balanced communication, neither too much because employees may feel pressured, nor too little because they can feel abandoned.
- the Importance of digital tools to replicate all the in-presence dynamics and also the significance of using the right tool for the right scope in the right moment
- the risk of fragmentation; as the company grows, more and more aspects need to be structured, most of the time through the introduction of a new tool. At a certain point, the risk is having too many tools and a very problematic fragmentation of information and great difficulty in finding the necessary information promptly. The solution is not reducing the number of digital tools but creating a unique touch point that allows access to all platforms needed.

On a strategic level, internal communication in a remote context has to overcome even harder challenges: whereas internal communication within the teams is very well developed and efficient, more problems arise for information circulation within the overall company, in fact there isn't a shared physical space where people can casually meet and talk for example about the new important project or client the company has acquired. So the risk is that the individual knows only what happens regarding his/ her job without having a global vision of other projects, strategic company goals, and future perspective. This is very detrimental to organizational control because the individual even if he/she knows what to do, even if he/ she

is very motivated and has all the resources to perform their job, they lack the global vision in which collocate their contribution, they do not know the company environment as a whole. Organizations involved have tried in the years to solve this problem by trying to make people feel more engaged, updating them about what happens in the company, and sharing business strategy. One initiative used for this is the OKR methodology that we have already seen. Another instrument that is often used are monthly/ annual meetings in which top managers tell employees about the company, share strategy and goals, update them about the news. In Bitbull this happens online during the Meet Bull, a monthly meeting that takes place every last Friday and it is open to all the employees, but also in presence during the annual meetings and events organized by the company. Also, in Quindo physical events and meetings are the moment in which not only sociability but also corporate awareness is nourished. Finally in Reverse there is a monthly online call dedicated to corporate strategy to which employees from Italy, Germany and France connect.

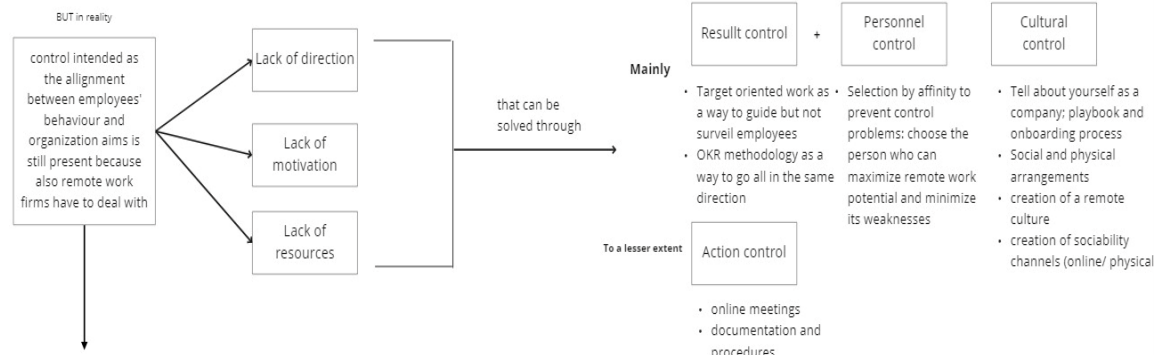
As we have seen, meetings can be useful also for employee engaging and updating communication. With this term personally coined we intend the ability to communicate what is happening in the firm and involve its employees, this is something very relevant in context remote which requires active intervention and intentionality, maybe less important in the traditional office where information spontaneously circulates from mouth to mouth. In this sense, a very interesting initiative that we have already mentioned in the section about culture is the use of the platform Lumapps. This is an instrument that allows the company to enhance operative and engaging communication. In fact, it is not only a place to share things and contaminate each other through the section Community which works as a sort of social network but it is also an instrument for improving operative communication because it avoids informational fragmentation, creating a unique touch point, a sort of intranet, a single access point to all the other tools. In addition to this, it is also useful in terms of employee engagement and updating because it helps the company to tell employees the Life in Seedble and update them about the news, independently regardless of where they are or are working. According to interviewed hybrid companies, in fact it is fundamental to have homogeneous and inclusive internal communication: remote workers and people who are in the office have to be considered and so treated in the same way, so also remote workers must be informed about what happens and engaged in order to perform their job consciously and with motivation.

“We try to keep everybody engaged even remotely, because if you're in the office, the news comes to you right away and it's celebrated, but having people who are always working remotely, we have to keep them updated as well. Because if not, think of a developer, let's take this client, we have to make an online platform to manage something, I come to the office and say how nice, we got this client, I briefly tell the project and then the person who is at home suddenly sees this platform to be done but he doesn't know why, he doesn't know what is the end purpose, who is the client, why we got him, how much profit is he bringing to the company and so also how much am I helping the company to bring this kind of profit.” Seedble

Chapter 5

Discussion

Control is perceived by interviewed firms as incompatible with this new mindset and it is not welcomed as positive concept So



control is not a static concept but a process: **from control and command approach to trust and empowerment one**

it has to be designed coherently with the new mindset

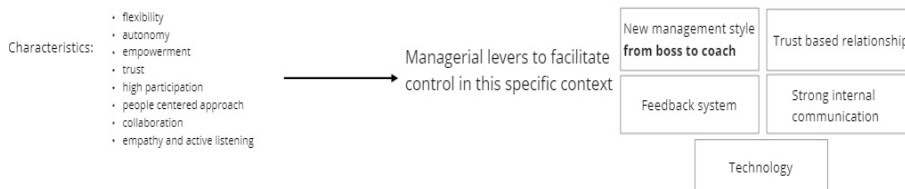


Figure 8, overview of control in remote work contexts, personal elaboration

What emerged is that, even if companies do not welcome the word control automatically associated with very tight and oppressive control, they actually implement traditional forms of control (people control, action control and result control) and some mechanisms that indirectly foster organizational alignment, for instance internal communication or management styles that we have called managerial levers. Both these mechanisms are tailored to the newly emerged work attitude adopted in these companies which is based on trust, empowerment, autonomy, and a people-centered approach. Control is in fact a dynamic concept that has always the same purpose i.e., ensuring alignment between employees' behaviors and company's goals and expectations but it can do in different ways according to the company's values, attitudes and work approach. So, control does not necessarily mean close and oppressive employee monitoring but other kinds of strategies can be implemented to encourage employees to meet company goals; for instance, through an attentive selection of those people that are more suitable to that specific context.

Therefore, also in these companies control exists, it is different from the traditional connotation often given to it and it is needed to solve typical control problems that arise also

in the case of remote companies: lack of direction, lack of motivation and personal limitations. In studying control dynamics in remote work arrangements, we discovered that all four types of control are implemented but with different weights. As very often happens the best way to perform control is to adopt a well-thought and customized mix of control types.

In the case of remote work where direct supervision is not possible and surveillance by technology is not recommended, the best starting point for those companies who want to adopt remote work arrangements is to prevent the possibility of a relevant loss of control through an accurate selection of those workers that by nature and attitude are able to maximize the potential of remote work and minimize its weaknesses (personnel control).

Always due to the impossibility to supervise and control the actions of employees, it is highly recommended a result-driven approach to work and consequently a control based on output instead of inputs. Result control becomes fundamental and fits perfectly in the remote culture because it allows managers to monitor employees' work but also ensures professionals' autonomy and empowerment, giving employee's freedom and responsibility to choose how to achieve the targets.

Action controls are in fact, present but they are used with moderation and prudence because they can undermine trust-based relationships, an essential factor for motivation and balance between control and autonomy in a remote firm. Persistently controlling actions such as through frequent video calls can subject the employee to excessive pressure and constant work interruption that negatively impacts productivity and quality. Instead, another powerful type of control that has been implemented by firms is cultural control.

Cultural control could be very effective in contexts where it is difficult to monitor directly people and their action but firms have to consider that remote work requires a lot of active interventions from the management and intentionality both from managers and colleagues. In remote firms, it is important to create a strong culture that can be constantly and effectively transmitted, a serene work environment and occasions for sociability and knowledge sharing. One of the main needs of remote workers and so one of the main challenges for managers is in fact employee engagement and growth.

Considering this, also, the role of the manager has to change. As we previously said, control exists but it adapts to the needs of the company, in these companies, people are at the center, managers therefore need to ensure that people are comfortable in the work environment and that they are in the right conditions to give their best work performance. They are not bosses

who control and punish but they become coaches who listen to their employees during one-to-one meetings, understand their needs and measure their wellbeing through happiness surveys in order to help them to grow, discover and put their talents into practice. They do not control only the performance anymore but they check and monitor the wellbeing and satisfaction of employees (sentiment control) in order to ensure a perfect alignment between how the employee behaves and what the organization wants.

Other levers of control in compliance with remote work culture are: trust as a motivational factor for employees and an element ensuring a balance between control and autonomy, feedback system that allows to promptly correct together the direction and realign behaviors and finally strong internal communication that can guide and keep on track employees, making them aware of company's goals and aspirations, updating them about what is happening and engaging them in it.

Thus, thanks to the testimony of interviewed firms, we have seen how remote work is a viable solution that can be implemented efficiently and effectively bringing excellent results to the firm, making this nontraditional way of working a real alternative that is fair to offer to those who want it. We have also seen that in remote work contexts organizational control can be guaranteed and implemented but always taking into account what are the characteristics and objectives of this type of work approach that is strongly focused on people's well-being and the attempt of guaranteeing a better work-life balance etc.

Therefore, for those companies who want to adopt remote work arrangements, we recommend implementing control in respect of all these aspects, moving from what is a command-and-control approach strongly opposed by companies and not suitable for remote work as we saw during pandemic to a new one that we can define as trust-empower-and-support approach and that can be extended not only to control but to all the other managerial functions.

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Chapter 3

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Chapter 4

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