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Exploiting the hybrid work model in different organizational contexts: an analysis of Chinese and European firms' behavior and a proposal for the future

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SUMMARY

前言

2020 年的冠状病毒疫情对每个人的生活产生了深远的影响，为世界"新常态"时代奠定了基础。劳动领域也不能免受变化的影响：遏制病毒传播的措施迫使世界各地的公司从办公室工作转向远程工作。结果是，即使在疫情封锁措施除了少数例外不再实施的当今，是否应该保持远距离工作的问题仍有待回答。此次的远程工作巨大试行的好处是，目前有了在不同环境下进行的分析在线工作数据和后果的更广泛案例研究。本文的目的在于收集影响不同行业和国家的工人远程工作经验的大量变量，以提供能够助于决定如何以及何时以最有效的方式实施弹性工作制的指导方针。

第一章对弹性工作制的概念进行理论概述，其目的是对弹性工作制给出详尽并远不止于静态概念的定义，把弹性工作制视为一系列活动和选择，根据其所处的文化背景而变化。在此定义过程中，笔者还分析意大利语和汉语对弹性工作制定义的相似性和差异性，以便比较两国弹性工作制及其在两种不同背景中呈现的特殊，来从两种不同弹性工作制方法中吸取教训。第一章还介绍弹性工作制的历史，以便更好地理其各个方面。随后，本文重点构成弹性工作制的基本要素，区分其有形和非有形成分。根据所收集研究的结果，本文还对弹性工作制在人力资源管理实践中的应用进行分析。此外，第一章的第二部分收集欧盟成员国政府在疫情封锁期间时发布的相关工作方法和政策。本文还包括中国在处理同样情况时作出的决策总结，目的是了解中国政府——和其他国家政府不同——如何能够实施如此严格的政策，并暴露中国文化中使得中国政府能够采取这样的政策的具体文化特征。分析这一点及其重要，因为行为上的差异助于了解在转向远程工作时人力资源管理政策会受到类似变量的影响。这一部分中的分析使本文在保持着一种全球思维的情况下分析不同的行为，以避免仅考虑西方环境中的现象。

第二章不重点法规，重点实践，内容更加具体。该部分的分析旨在考虑本文中案例研究或统计对象的公司产业变量。该分析的必要前提是，不可能为组织的人力资源管理需求提供统一的解决方案。每家公司都按照不同类型的思维方式去管理其运营，而且思维被转化为各种可能的实际运营方面选择。为了作出追求利润和

效率的运营选择，必须关注公司属于的产业种类，因为这一点与其战略密切相关。众所周知，只有当公司的战略与每个部门的每个运营决策相一致时，才能实现良好的绩效和成功。由于相关信息过于广泛，区分不同产业采取的政策有助于简化对各种公司选择的分析，给本文提供精确的分析框架。此外，研究表明，属于同一行业的成员有着共同的世界观，及其交互导致属于同一行业的组织共享同样的观点，采取同样或被调整的政策。这对制定有效的战略有很大的影响，使它们在特定领域变得更加普遍，因为它们被证明是有价值的。这不可避免地导致策略之间的家族相似性。再一次，2019 年冠状病毒疫情对组织内活动管理选择的影响不容忽视；事实上，这一点对这种类型的研究来说是一种创新。疫情这一事件作为许多活动的转折点，从微观角度来看，也作为许多人生活的转折点，因此，有必要特别关注其在运营和战略决策中引起的巨大转变。本文提供并分析中国背景下的企业行为示例，为在决定实施或不实施弹性工作制时要考虑的不少因素其中多增加一个变量。众所周知，公司所处的文化背景对政策的执行方式及其对员工的影响具有重要影响。因此，仔细观察中国公司如何应对紧急情况所需的远程工作，有助于更深入地了解什么方法有效，什么方法没有效，以及哪些方法能够被西方公司调整并采用。

然而，拥有一份由欧洲和中国公司所选择程序的清单，对于让某家公司成为一个更好、更高效的工作环境没有太大用处，而有必要开展一种以更易于分析的微主题和结构化框架为基础的研究。本文希望为企业在决定是否采用远程工作时提供一个明确的指导方针。可能性是多方面的，所涉及的变量是不同的，变量的影响也极其大。第三章试图对"公司是否应该继续提供远程工作机会？"这个问题给出最终答案。为了得出结论，本文提供一份收集到的远程工作的总体利弊清单。以更结构化的方式列出本文在分析许多案例中发现的优缺点，可以作为最终分析中提出的弹性工作制的基础。最后一章继续给出一些关于如何——在它有用的情况下——实现弹性工作制的更实际指示。首先，本文确定适合远程工作的活动内容，因为在不考虑相关任务性质的情况下盲目应用远程工作是不可取的。然后，本文就如何分配任务以及简化流程的有用程度提出意见。此外，第三章还包括就制定有效的绩效考核制度的建议，这在实施弹性工作制时尤其需要，因为对远程办公人员和办公人员的评价应该是同等的。另一个需要探讨的问题是如何安排员

工的工作轮班，因为在组织内具有更高程度的复杂性时管理员和主管无法了解公司全部情况的可能性较高。第三章的关键内容是对所有收集数据的总结，并对影响弹性工作制模型创建的变量的确定。从数据收集中得出的结论是，工人的固有个人特征，以及其个人家庭和居住状况，对远程工作的结果的影响很大。员工所处的文化是另一个需要时刻考虑的因素。从组织的角度来看，重要的是正在实施的战略，以及它属于的产业。最后，通过数据收集，本文清楚地介绍在实施弹性工作制时应始终遵循的最佳实践，并提供对其的完整而清晰总结。

INTRODUCTION

After the spread of COVID-19 disease, severe restrictions were imposed on day-to-day activities of the population. Many Countries had to enter lockdown and, needless to say, this had a huge impact on how work-related activities were carried on, forcing organizations to adapt to hybrid forms of work, making part or all of the employees work remotely. This was the start of an unprecedented mass experiment in the field of human resources management: as challenging as it was for many people, it still allowed scholars to collect a lot of new data in the field of remote work, which was not particularly researched before. This study sets its root in the opportunity that comes after all of this new collected material, of reanalyzing the new data in order to elaborate some newly updated guidelines on how correctly apply the hybrid work model, how to exploit it in the best way possible and how to decide whether or not it is the case to implement it.

To give more details: in the first chapter, a theoretical overview on the concept of hybrid work is proposed, with the aim of giving to an exhaustive and well detailed definition of how we can interpret the experience of hybrid work, not merely seen as a static concept, but conceived as a variable spectrum of activities and choices which can show many variations depending also on the cultural context it is embedded in. The second part of the first chapter collects different approaches and policies issued by the respective Governments of Countries belonging to the EU when trying to work during lockdown. This paper also takes into account what China's decision were, when having to handle the same situation. For the sake of this study, this comparison is made to analyze different sets of behavior while keeping a global mindset, in order not to stay stuck on what is familiar in the Western context.

The second chapter the focus shifts from a legislative point of view to a more practical and specific one. The analysis intends to take into account the variable of the sector of interest of the firms that are objects of the case studies or statistics here reported. One of the obvious premises underneath this study is that it is not possible to offer a univocal solution to the human resources management requirements of a given organization. Each company manages its operation following different types of logics, which translate into a wide range of possible choices in terms of operations. For some profit-generating and efficiency-seeking operative choices to be made, it is fundamental to also focus on the economic sector of interest of the firm, since it is strongly intertwined with the strategy at stake. To add another variable to the complexity of factors to keep in mind when deciding to implement or not a hybrid work model, examples of firm behavior belonging to the Chinese context are also provided and analyzed. It is well known that the culture

in which a company is immersed has a major weight on the way policies are chosen to be implemented and the effects they have on the personnel. Therefore, taking a closer look on how Chinese companies have handled the shift to remote work required by the emergency gives some more insight on what have worked for them, what did not and what could be potentially adapted by Western companies

Having a list of procedures chosen by European and Chinese firms, however, would not have too much use as a tool for making a given company a better and more efficient working environment, if not broken down in more manageable micro-topics and put inside of a structured scheme. What this study wants to obtain is a clear guideline to follow when an enterprise is in the situation of deciding whether or not adopt remote work. The possibilities are numerous, the variables at stake are different and very impacting. The third chapter tries to give a final answer to the question "should remote work be an option to keep offering?". For reaching such conclusion, a list of the collected overall pro and cons of working remotely is provided. Listing the pros and cons that the research has found in the analysis of many cases, in a more structured fashion, can be the bases of the hybrid work model that is be proposed in the final analysis.

The last chapter goes on giving some more practical indication on how implementing the hybrid work model, whereas it makes senso to implement it. First of all, this study identifies the content of the activities suitable for working remotely, since it is not advisable to blindly apply remote work, without considering the nature of the tasks at stake. Then, a proposal is provided in regard to the matter of how tasks should be distributed and to what degree it is useful to simplify the processes. Other suggestions are made as long as it concerns the issue of developing a valid performance appraisal system, which is particularly needed when the hybrid work model is implemented, as the evaluation of those working online and those present in office should be equivalent.

Another issue that is explored is how to plan employees' work shifts, since having a higher degree of complexity within the organization might lead managers and supervisors not to see the full picture anymore. The key paragraph of the third chapter is the one in which all the data gathered are summed up and the impacting variables on the definition of a hybrid work model are identified. What emerged from data collecting is that the intrinsic personal characteristics of the worker, along with his personal family and home situation is very impacting on the whether the outcome of working remotely will be positive or negative. The culture employees are immersed in is another factor that should always kept in mind. From an organization point of view, what matters is also the strategy that is being implemented, along with the sector in which it operates. Lastly, the

data collection made possible to have a clear picture of what are the best practices that should always followed when implementing a hybrid work model: a straight to the point sum up of the matter is therefore provided.

CHAPTER 1 **Theoretical overview on the concept of hybrid work and its role during COVID-19 crisis**

The aim of this chapter is to give an exhaustive and well detailed definition of how we can interpret the experience of hybrid work, not merely seen as a static concept, but conceived as a variable spectrum of activities and choices which can show many variations depending also on the cultural context it is embedded in. The analysis focuses on the chronological evolution and meaning of the term, to understand it deeply and to get to the core aspects of its nature. Since the COVID-19 pandemic gave work from home a connotation of urgency and necessity, this latest evolution will also be taken into account, by also lingering on the differences between China and Europe in regulating the norms related to phenomenon.

1.1 How to define hybrid work

The hybrid work model refers to the combination of working part-time in the office and working part-time from home, an approach which became popular during the COVID-19 pandemic and was previously hypothesized to be the perfect way to experience telework, in 2017[1]. If we consider the common meaning of hybrid work that can be found in encyclopedias, it can simply be summarized in: "the practice of alternating between different working environments, such as from home and in an office[2]", but it can be noticed how this interpretation appears to be limited, as it does not really specify the intrinsic characteristics of remote work, making it seem like a mere transfer of a set of tasks from a place to another, without acknowledging every other implication that this choice carries along.

Threfore, when it comes to this flexible model of working, the focus should inevitably be on the most peculiar aspect which characterizes it, that is the variable of working in a different place from the usual office. A great variety of terms is used for referring to the phenomenon, such as "telework", "remote work", "work from home", "smart working", "home-based work", which basically refers to the same choice in the field of managing the working environment of the employees.

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[1] INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO), *Teleworking arrangements during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond*, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo-how-the-ilo-works/multilateral-system/g20/reports/WCMS_791858/lang--en/index.htm, 20-03-2022

[2] https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/hybrid-working, 02-02-2022

Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, gives a deeper meaning to the process, stating that:

"*Telework is a work arrangement in which work is performed outside a default place of work, normally the employer's premises, by means of information and communication technologies (ICT). The characteristic features of telework are the use of computers and telecommunications to change the usual location of work, the frequency with which the worker is working outside the employer's premises and the number of places where workers work remotely (mobility)[3]*".

It can be noticed that another element is now standing out: the need for technological resources for performing the tasks. Not only, Eurofound puts the stress on two variables that constitutes remote work: the frequency of its occurrence and the options for mobility. This is surely another step towards giving a complete definition, but it is still not enough: as strictly pragmatic as it is, it does not stress enough the need for flexibility and the degree of investments required in terms of collaboration and autonomy from the employees[4].

A further interpretation was offered by McEwan in terms of qualitative description:

"*Smart working practices are agile, dynamic and emergent. They are the outcomes of designing organizational systems that facilitate customer-focused, value-creating relationships that are good for business and good for people[5]*".

It is possible to see a connection between the strategic role of this type of choice and the impact it has on the business itself and on the people involved. This is perhaps the key concept when it comes to elaborating a plan which includes the option of working from home: by definition, the set of tasks required by a job are carried out by the human resources at stake. The human capital is subject to a series of decisive factors affecting its performance and well-being: an employee cannot be unbundled not only from its personal orientation and characteristics but will also be subject to the so called "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede), which is the culture. So, it is easy to see how defining hybrid work in a univocal way is challenging enough when it comes to a given, restricted context, and how it becomes even more complex when a clash of different norms and values occurs.

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[3] EUROFOUND, *Teleworking*, 2022, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/teleworking, 23-02-2022

[4] LAKE, A., *Smart flexibility: Moving smart and flexible working from theory to practice*, Burlington: Routledge, 2013

[5] McEwan, A., *Smart working: Creating the next wave*, London: Routledge, 2013

Not only that, but it is also debatable that culture belonging to a nation has so much power on influencing human resources practices: what really matters, is the actual organizational culture of a firm, split off from its geographic context, but rather aligned to the strategy at stake. So, it is noticeable how the variables having an impact of the working choices of a company keep growing and this helps understand how remote work is not a series of decision to be put into practice without too much of an analysis.

Up to now, the definitions here explored were very close to a Eurocentric mindset and perception of the experience of work; since the aim of this study is not stay stuck on practices which are already formalized and implemented, but rather give some new perspectives on how remote work can be applied, it is useful to also concentrate on making a comparison between the phenomenon and the hues it assumes in two different contexts, in order to learn from different approaches.

1.1.1 Cross-cultural definitions: a comparison between China and Italy

Since China played a major role in handling the need for readapting the working conditions to new standards during the COVID-19 spread, the focus will now be put on the Chinese interpretation of what hybrid work constitutes.

In China, the term most widely diffused to indicate hybrid work is 弹性工作制 tánxìng gōngzuò zhì, which can be literally translated into "flexible work system". By looking at the definition that can be found on Baidu[6], the most used search engine in China, it can be noticed that the given explanation of the term insists on the fact that what is crucial for hybrid work to be qualified as such, is the premise of completing the prescribed work tasks or fixed working hours, even if the surrounding environment is different from the norm. It also specifies that employees are free to independently choose the specific time arrangement for work, instead of opting for a unified and fixed commute time.

A recent study on working from home in China after the effects of the pandemic lists two methods of applying the flexible working system: time-based and place-based[7], which confirms the validity of the most common definition. When talking about time-based flexible working system the core concept is that an employee works for a fixed number of hours, but then has the right to autonomously control the remaining time. On this basis,

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[6] "弹性工作制是指在完成规定的工作任务或固定的工作时间长度的前提下，员工可以灵活地、自主地选择工作的具体时间安排，以代替统一、固定的上下班时间的制度" (https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%BC%B9%E6%80%A7%E5%B7%A5%E4%BD%9C%E5%88%B6/9723467, 23-02-2022)
[7] PAN Yuting 潘寓婷, 弹性工作制：疫情影响下的居家办公思考, 2021

a task-centered flexible working hour system has also been developed in China: basically, the company only stipulates the longest time required for completing the tasks, trying to give the employees the motivation that will lead them to develop higher levels of efficiency. In addition, there is also a further option: a compressed working system based on self-selected working days per week, which involve flexible overtime in exchange for future vacation credits. Using technology media platforms, space-based flexible working forms such as working from home and telecommuting have also been incorporated into the concept of flexible working: it allows employees to choose their own office locations in addition to the locations specified by the company. Especially in the case of the outbreak of the epidemic, this space-based flexible working system has well solved the inconvenience caused by space obstacles making flexible working system a hot topic again in China.

The Chinese interpretation of the phenomenon is very interesting because it raises an important theme related to the topic of hybrid work: the role played by the necessity to reach the specific targets of the organization, even if the working conditions differed from the ones someone would have in an office. Moreover, this view can easily lead the reader to put into relation this target-oriented approach to the variable of time flexibility (other than the choice of a different working place). Does this mean that the working day is to be considered finished once that all the targets are reached? Should this also be an intrinsic characteristic of remote work? And if so, why should not be possible to extend the concept to work in office? What happens if the targets are not timely reached? Is it smart to keep, at least partially, the working hours fixed and the same for everyone? These are all questions that arises naturally when the nature of work is examined and will be further investigated in the following chapters.

As regard to Italy, hybrid work is usually identified by the term "smart working" or "lavoro agile", which is described as a method of executing the obligations deriving from a job contract, characterized by the absence of constraints in terms of time or space and based on planning the activities by phases, cycles and objectives.[8] The Italian webpage of the Ministry of Labour also claims that this method helps the employees in reconciling working hours with personal life while enhancing his productivity. The definition of smart working[9], emphasizes organizational flexibility, the voluntary nature of the parties who

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[8] MINISTERO DEL LAVORO E DELLE POLITICHE SOCIALI, *Smart working*, 2022, https://www.lavoro.gov.it/strumenti-e-servizi/smart-working/Pagine/default.aspx, 25-02-2022
[9] contained in Law no. 81/2017,

sign the individual agreement and the use of tools that allow you to work remotely (such as: laptops, tablets and smartphones).

So, the Italian definition of the term also stresses on another fundamental topic when it comes to managing remote work: the work-life balance issue. New questions arise easily: it is true, and should we take for granted the fact that remote work has a positive impact on the lives of the employees? What could the negative effects be? Has it good effects on the psychological situation of the workers? And if the working place becomes your own home, do not the people constituting your family run the risk of being affected by it? Is it actually motivating? It is also stated that it is a voluntary choice by both parties stipulating the contract: an aspect not put in evidence when a analyzing the Chinese interpretation. This could be another key concept in the field of the study, which can have a huge impact on the dimension of the motivation and distribution of power inside an organization. Once again, these topics will be more deeply explored later this paper.

1.1.2 Brief history of hybrid work

Some notions about the history of hybrid work can also be useful having a deeper understanding of the elements that constituted it throughout the years.

The first actual appearance of hybrid work in a narrow sense can be traced back to 1973, when Jack Nilles, who worked for NASA communication system and is now known as Father of remote work[10], coined the terms "telecommuting" and "teleworking"[11]. This happened before the spread of personal computers, when telephone lines were used as network bridges between offices. Then, after pcs became popular, he gave a new definition to both terms:

" *Teleworking: Any form of substitution of information technologies (such as telecommunications and/or computers) for normal work-related travel; moving the work to the workers instead of moving the workers to work.*"

"*Telecommuting: Periodic work out of the principal office, one or more days per week, either at home, a client's site, or in a telework center; the partial or total substitution of information technologies for the commute to work. The emphasis here is on reduction or elimination of the daily commute to and from the workplace. Telecommuting is a form of teleworking.[12]*"

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[10] KELA, C., *The history of Remote Workers*, 2019, https://codersera.com/blog/the-history-of-remote-workers/, 25-02-2022

[11] JALA INTERNATIONAL, *Jack Nilles*, 2018, https://www.jala.com/jnmbio.php, 25-02-2022

[12] UY, M., *Differences Between Telecommuting and Telework*, 2021, https://www.lifewire.com/difference-between-telecommuting-and-telework-2378090, 25-02-2022

Today the expressions are used interchangeably and remain linked to the concept of working off-site by using technologic tools for performing the required tasks of the job. Jack Nilles had a great role in diffusion this method of work, as he developed telecommuting projects for more than 100 companies and governmental organizations all over Europe, US and South America.

1979 was also an important year for the development of remote work, since not only some efforts were made in promoting hybrid work as a way of reducing pollution deriving from the combustion of gasoline (The Washington Post), but it is the year during which IBM allowed five employees to work from home, as a way to test the effective value of this option. The result was deemed so successful that by 1983 toughly 2,000 IBM employees were working remotely. With the born of internet, the shift to remote work was made smoother and communicating became easier. Another turning point was reached during the middle of 1980s, when it was made possible for call-center employees to work from home. People were showing satisfaction and contempt towards the new option offered by firms, so much that in 1987 1.5 million of employees were working from home, just considering US. This enthusiastic feedback is probably strictly linked to the fact that cutting the time expenditure for reaching the office must have been groundbreaking and also a way to save money. Then, in 1991, Wi-Fi was invented, a revolution that furtherly helped in the development and spread of hybrid work.

In 1995 the nature of work kept being put into question: "work is something you do, not something you travel to" and "work is what we do, not where we are" [13] were both mottos that reflected the way in which hybrid work influenced the perception of the nature of work itself. In 2000 another crucial point was reached: the Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Act legitimized remote workers and made corporate telework policies mandatory, while, in 2010, the Telework Enhancement Act allowed the government greater flexibility when it came to managing remote workforces through telework. 2016 saw a huge increase in the usage of team collaboration and project management tools: for instance, the software "Slack" went from 0 to 4 million of active users daily. By the year 2018, most companies offer the option of working from home, while in the US the number of fully remoted firms was already 170, showing a major growth since 2014 (when there were only 26 active companies with this specific). On a global level, 70% of the population worked remotely at least once a week and 53% half a week, which meant more than half of the population working as a remote employee in the world. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, in 2019 the trend of remote work was

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[13] WOODY, L., *The Underground Guide to Telecommuting*, 1995

already taking off: the video collaboration software "Zoom" reached 50.800 customers with more than 10 employees, a number 5 times bigger the one in 2017.

It can be said that remote work started trending 10 years before COVID-19 outbreak, mostly as an occasional work pattern; then, after the pandemic exploded in 2020, the "mass teleworking experiment"[14] had to take place and the percentage of employees experiencing work from home grow up to 40% of the total circa, in Eu[15], as in the US[16]. It is safe to assume that in the future the percentage of teleworkers will stay a lot higher than the data of the pre-pandemic period: this matter will be more deeply analyzed in chapter 3.

1.1.3 What hybrid work is composed of: tangible and non-tangible elements

Now that a general overview of how hybrid work can be interpreted, based on the geographic context and on the meaning that it developed throughout the years, has been presented, it is possible to draw a conclusion and try to list the tangible and non-tangible elements that constitutes the choice of flexible work.

When it comes to its tangible elements, they are evident enough and can be easily listed as follows: in the first place, technological tools and adequate software are by definition the fundamental assets for carrying on remote activities. This variable brings along another choice that has to be made by the company: the tools at stake, such as laptops, can be provided by the employer or it can be requested from the worker as prerequisite for being hired for the position, usually depending on the business type, industry, and number of employees. As regards to software, instead, especially after the pandemic crisis, millions of employees became accustomed to using digital tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams on a daily basis. This was also the beginning of a trend which has never been so relevant before: the "digital dexterity" required from the human resources, so the need for them to keep the pace with the rapidly evolving technology[17]. This is not something to be overlooked, as it can have a negative impact in terms of enhancing the

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[14] INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, *Teleworking arrangements during COVID-19 crisis and beyond*, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/multilateral-system/g20/reports/WCMS_791858/lang--en/index.htm, 03-03-2022
[15] EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were, where we head to,* 2020, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-06/jrc120945_policy_brief_-_covid_and_telework_final.pdf, 03-03-2022
[16] GAD, L., *Remote Work: The Biggest Legacy Of Covid-19*, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/gadlevanon/2020/11/23/remote-work-the-biggest-legacy-of-covid-19/?sh=35cbcedc7f59, 03-03-2022
[17] MCCLUSKEY, M., *Beyond Email: How Technology Trends Help Newly Remote Work*, 2021 https://hrwatchdog.calchamber.com/2021/07/how-technology-trends-help-newly-remote-work/, 04-03-2022

distress level of the working people.Secondly, it has been shown how the core flexibility that characterizes work from home is intertwined with the variables of physical spaces involved and the structure of the time schedule. The key elements should also comprehend what work is concretely made of: tasks and objectives, which can be managed and distributed in ways that differ from the usual seen in office, based on the strategy of a given firm. The contract obligations and the legal ground a company stands on are also to be considered: is the option of working remotely mandatory or any employee can have a say in the decision? That is a structural aspect linked to many concrete implications. For instance, from a human resources (HR) perspective, being fully remote, so choosing to make it the norm for everyone, will put the company in a position of having access to a larger talent pool; not only that, but a stronger prominence is also given to the business itself when it comes to attracting talents, narrowing the relevance that the location would have on their choice[18]. Lastly, the field of interest of the firm has a role in how work must be handled: it can be considered another visibly impacting element. In chapter 2 a series of relative case studies will be explored.

Speaking of non-tangible elements, they can be more subtle and harder to be individuated, but a first input is already given by both the Italian and Chinese definitions of hybrid work, which insist on the fact that it is a good and useful tool for motivating the employees. So, the motivation of the people involved and how to handle it is for sure one of the keys more abstract, yet not less relevant, aspects of remote work. Then, what it is important to manage in the correct way is the level of autonomy given to a single employee and how he or she will have to interact with the others: how is it possible to keep the levels of collaboration high and what must be done in order not to lose the benefits deriving from teamwork dynamics? Just to give an example, a Chinese study demonstrated that when the interactions between the members of a company keep not showing signs of variation, people may start to experience boredom and boredom has a negative impact on the level of cooperation showed[19]. A way to handle this type of negative effect can be change the teamwork pattern, so that a senso of novelty can be triggered, making employees more prone to faster and more productive interactions again.

It has previously seen how remote work is claimed to have a strong connection with the

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[18] ASHIRA, P., *Office Not Required—Why Remote Work Is Here To Stay*, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashiraprossack1/2021/04/25/office-not-required--why-remote-work-is-here-to-stay/?sh=1d75b8ea6ab4, 04-03-22
[19] WANG Minda, LI Jianbiao, 汪敏达, 李建标, 喜新厌旧与团队合作行为：有重启公共物品实验的证据, 2019

personal life of the employees: this is another complex aspect involved in the implementation of work from home, the work-life balance. The term was coined in 1986 and can be defined as: "A state of equilibrium in which the demands of both a person's job and personal life are equal[20]". Research show that when a manager helps his employees achieve work-life balance, they become more conscientious in their work, and their trust, loyalty and commitment to the company appears to be doubled[21]. It is still important to remember that in the case of hybrid work, the lines that separate work and personal life become blurred, with the frequent effect of causing overworking and with the subsequent extension of working hours and poorer work–life balance. Work-family conflict is also very likeable to be experienced by those who have to deal with highly mobile teleworking or have little past history of working remotely[22]. A solution can be found in a more regular communication between managers and employees, not only concentrating on work matters, but also creating a boundary that allows speaking of psychological issues that can arise[23].

Ultimately, what can never be forgotten is the fact that whenever these trends and choices are analyzed, they are always merged with another non-tangible factor which influences work to a strong degree: the culture at stake, either as conceived as organizational culture or as country culture. It affects every HR process, but it is particularly relevant when communication comes into play.

1.1.4 General relation between the hybrid work model and human resources management practices

Now that the general elements constituting remote work have been identified, it is useful to see how they are intertwined with the most relevant human resources management practices at stake.

Once again, the analysis can start giving a deeper meaning to what was already explored in the previous subchapter: it has been shown how the intrinsic nature of remote work affects deeply the work-life balance of the employees, and how communication plays a key role. For the communication processes to be efficient, research shows that

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[20] LOCKWOOD, N., *Work-life balance*, 2003, http://old.adapt.it/adapt-indice-a-z/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/lockwood_work_life_balance_2003.pdf, 09-03-2022

[21] DUAN Xinran, 段新冉 中国企业实现员工工作 – 生活平衡的策略研究, 2011

[22] SANDOVAL, J., IDROVO, S., DUQUE, E., *Remote Work, Work Stress, and Work–Life during Pandemic Times: A Latin America Situation*, 2021, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8297005/, 09-03-2022

[23] GRANT, C., WALLACE, L., SPURGEON, P., *An exploration of the psychological factors affecting remote e-worker's job effectiveness*, well-being and work-life balance, 2013, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ER-08-2012-0059/full/html, 09-03-2022

investments in terms of managerial training must be made, in order to develop not only the formal share of information but also the more informal communication skills. This is particularly important not only for supporting the employees in their working activities, but also for the company itself: misunderstandings and misinterpretation of what are the tasks and objectives can lead to dissatisfaction and frustration, leading to a lack in productivity. Training goes both ways: it cannot be limited to the upper management but should involve every employee. Some approaches that can be considered will focus on the concept of time and distraction management (given the fact that not everyone has it easy when it comes to concentrating outside of a more formal context), the communication etiquette (especially in the senso of setting a window of time during which is acceptable to send messages) and explanation on how to access available systems and troubleshoot basic IT problems[24]. Once these training efforts have been made, it is always fundamental to keep track of the results: after the goals are set, the HR managers should measure the rate of success and get feedback from the subjects of the learning process.

Speaking of evaluation of the performance, the performance appraisal system is also crucial and requires to be clearly set, along with its indicators. In this regard, the New York Times provided a guide for reviewing employees performance in the Work-From-Home Era[25]. It underlines the importance of doing the evaluation before the meeting is set up, so that an exchange of analysis between various managers can be arranged and more precise questions can be prepared before the talk. Since the information might be lacking in some elements, not being able to be in office every day, it could be useful to ask for a 360-degree type of evaluation and feedback, coming from other members of the team or even customers. In the same optic it would be fair not to merely focus on tasks to be carried out, but give prominence to quality such as flexibility, initiative, and teamwork skills. As a general rule, being empathetic and acknowledging how the mood of a manager can have an impact on all the team can make the exchanges between employees more positive.

When it comes to the recruiting process, it is already been stated that remote work allows to get access to a larger pool of talent, but it is not the only advantage: there are extensive examples of successful virtual hires, proving that making efforts in terms of employer

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[24] MCGOVERN, M., *How to train remote employees to work more effectively*, 2020, https://www.hrmorning.com/articles/train-remote-employees/, 16-03-2022
[25] WEED, J., *How to Manage Performance Evaluations in the Work-From-Home Era*, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/21/business/work-performance-evaluations-covid.html, 26-03.2022

branding and showing great ability in leading the interviews even if from remote will make the organization select great talents and making the right decision about them[26].

An interesting new debate has arisen since the wider spread of work from home and it involves the way and extent to which HR managers should monitor the productivity of the employees: after the pandemic, companies started using specific software for having strict control on the activities performed by the worker from home.[27] These software can not only track the amount of words that are typed by a single individual, but also snap pictures using the camera of the laptop. It is debatable that this practice could be considered fair, as it may cross a line that indicates the invasion of privacy of the individual. The performance of the workers is also impacted by the way career planning is handled: what need more attention in the context of hybrid work are the risks of craving a career growth. For instance, the struggle with social isolation and lack of actual contact with the colleagues because of overwork is proved to be major incident while working from home[28].

As regards to the policies related to compensation and benefits, the variable of being remote adds complexity to the matter: generally speaking, it could be decided to link the rewarding system with the location the headquarter is settled, but it also happens that a centralized headquarter is not available, so the options could be adjusted to the cost of living of a given country or to adapt to market rates. Lately there have been interesting cases of companies, such as Google itself, who threatened to cut employees' pay up to 25%, if they choose to keep working from home permanently[29]. This is actually a dangerous move for a company to make, as it will easily lead employees to quit their job, causing a strong financial loss: according to some estimations the cost of replacing someone is equal to their pay for a 12 month period[30]. Moreover, it is morally questionable to make the workers free to choose the most comfortable option for them

[26] WINDLEY, D., *How To Succeed With Remote Recruiting*, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2020/09/04/how-to-succeed-with-remote-recruiting/?sh=3d22b10636e0, 16-03-2022

[27] SATARIANO, A., How My Boss Monitors Me While I Work From Home, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/technology/employee-monitoring-work-from-home-virus.html, 16-03-2022

[28] BROWER, T., *Why Too Much Work From Home Could Be Bad For Your Career*, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/04/11/why-too-much-work-from-home-could-be-bad-for-your-career/?sh=1111b263f701, 16-03-2022

[29] BERO, T., *Employees are accepting pay cuts to keep working from home. They shouldn't*, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/sep/27/employee-pay-cuts-work-from-home, 17-03-2022

[30] LIU, J., *Pay cuts for remote workers are an 'empty threat,' HR experts say—here's why*, 2021, https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/27/pay-cuts-for-remote-workers-are-an-empty-threat-hr-experts-say.html, 17-03-2022

yet make them suffer a monetary loss for it.

Lastly, some brief mentions to some of the best practices for supporting the well-being of the employees. Providing encouragement and emotional support is a relevant part of being a manager: research on emotional intelligence has shown that people are prone to imitating their managers when confronted with a situation of crisis[31]. Therefore effective leaders should provide affirmation of their confidence in their teams, especially when the stress level of the colleagues has reached higher points. What also matters is to provide opportunities for remote social interaction, leaving some time for dwelling on informal topics right before virtual meetings or virtual office parties. As corny as it sounds, it is proved to promote a sense of belonging to the group and reduce the chances of feeling isolated[32]. The meetings and virtual call must be clearly structured and regular, in the same way the ideal timing and frequency of communication must be clarified as soon as possible; the option of arranging team calls rather than one-on-one is strictly advised if the type of job is highly collaborative.

1.2 The role of remote work during COVID-19 pandemic

The urgency to adapt to new solutions in order to keep the active businesses running and, of course, avoid the collapse of society during COVID-19 pandemic, was a major driver for the development of remote work systems and its legal regulation. Multiple were the approaches and policies issued by Countries belonging to the EU, but they were never as strict as the ones carried out in China. Understanding how it was possible for the Chinese Government – and not for other ones- to enact so rigid measures is a key point for getting an accurate analysis on how some of the dynamics which characterized the response to the emergency, also reflect on the choices in the field of human resources management.

1.2.2 Work from home regulations in Europe

Since the spread of COVID-19 disease it is frequent to speak about working from home as the new normal. In 2020 Eurofound found out that up to 40% of the people working in the EU started experiencing remote work as a fixed solution. as a consequence of the pandemic[33]. It is important to notice that before these challenging times, only 15% of the

[31] LARSON, B., VROMAN, S., MAKARIUS, E., *A Guide to Managing Your (Newly) Remote Workers,* 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/03/a-guide-to-managing-your-newly-remote-workers, 17-03-2022

[32] ibidem

[33] EUROFOUND, *Living, working and COVID-19,* 2020, https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-covid-19, 20-03-

EU employees had ever worked in a place different from the usual office, then, after the shift to work from home, which was supposed to be a temporary, short-term solution, it kept being the choice of many workplaces for a whole year and in some cases, it will remain the preference for the future. According to Microsoft's 2021 report, in fact, the flexible remote work option is the one preferred by 73% of the workers taking part to the survey and 66% of businesses even expressed the possibility of focusing on rearranging physical spaces in order to favor the development of a fixed hybrid work model[34].

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, telework had never been subject to thorough studies in the senso of collecting comparable international data. In this regard, in May 2020, the ILO published guidance on "Defining and measuring remote work, telework, work at home, and home-based work", which was a first step towards the harmonization of teleworking activities[35]. Before the pandemic, what was also lacking was the set of regulations regarding remote work, since the matter has always been subject to specific aspects circumscribed into a given industry or type of job. After the lockdown forced most employers to transfer their activities online, more social actors and policymakers started showing interest in regulating this new way of handling working activities.

Referring to the European situation before the outbreak of covid-19, a distinction can be made between countries belonging to EU in which there are statutory definitions of remote work and those in which there are not. The first group comprehend Belgium, Czechia, Spain, France, Greece, Hungary, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia. In most of these countries the definitions chosen are very close to the wording which has been used by the EU Framework Agreement on Telework (2002). What can be noticed is that usually these national definitions do not concentrate on telework as a labor contract, but rather on the perception of telework as a working arrangement: this is proved by the fact that only in Portugal is possible to have specific fixed term telework contracts, while in most countries, like Italy, a general written agreement is enough from a legal point of view[36].

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[34] MALKANI, D., 2021, *Going Hybrid: The Future Of Work Is Here,* https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/06/04/going-hybrid-the-future-of-work-is-here/?sh=69c794212cb9, 20-03-2022

[35] INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO), *Teleworking arrangements during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond*, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/multilateral-system/g20/reports/WCMS_791858/lang--en/index.htm, 20-03-2022

[36] DE MIGUEL, P., CAPRILE,M., ARASANZ, J., *Regulating telework in a post-COVID-19 Europe*, 2021, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f087dd16-d55e-11eb-895a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en, 22-03-2022

Generally, in Europe the working conditions of remote workers should not differ from the ones experienced by regular workers, since working from home does not constitute a special employment status. There are some exceptions, such as the case of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Lithuania, and Slovakia, which decided to give complete freedom when regulating the time schedules, meaning that a single worker is given complete autonomy when organizing his or her working time. Depending on the country, this is a choice which may not comprehend a compensation in the case of overtime work. When talking about the principle of equality, some countries have also issued explicit non-discrimination clauses, stating that the remuneration of those working remotely cannot be a slimmer than the one received by workers in the employer's premises performing similar or equal tasks. Sometimes the principle of equality extends to the point of guaranteeing by law the same access for any type of employee to the same promotion and training possibilities.

The right to disconnect is a new form of safeguard in the interest of teleworkers, which concerns Belgium, France, Italy and Spain, as they are the countries that made an effort in legislating this aspect of work from home. In France it was possible to be protected by this right starting from 2016, while Italy made the same move on 22 May 2017, with Law 81, which states that the right to disconnect should be handled by individual agreements between the two counterparts of subordinate worker and employer and it applies only when it comes to smart working[37]. Countries like France and Belgium, instead, extend the right to all companies with more than 50 employees.

Another central topic concerning the regulation of the peculiar aspects of hybrid or remote work is the matter balance between the privacy rights of the employees and the employers' need for surveillance methods. It was mentioned before that new software allows now to monitor the productivity trends of the workers, in a way so deep that could be perceived as intrusive. In fact, many countries put a limit to the digital surveillance phenomenon: Italy itself has forbidden the direct monitoring through the installation of apps in devices. It is worth to be noted that in most countries the digital surveillance is allowed but only in relation to given contexts; Germany in particular has a strong policy of recurring to surveillance equipment only when there are reasons for suspecting a

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[37] In order to be more specific on the issue, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work states that: "in Italy, the flexible determination of space-time factors distinguishes 'smart work' from telework. Smart work is defined as a more flexible arrangement where work takes place partly at the company's premises and partly outside, with no constraints in terms of place of work or working time beyond the limits of maximum hours established in legislation or collective bargaining."

worker to be actor of criminal activities.

When analyzing the components of remote work, it has been showed how the company must make a choice between providing the employees the equipment necessary for carrying out the required tasks and preselecting them based on the ownership of needed tools. There are, in fact, countries in which the topic in not addressed by the law and there is freedom of choice in this sense; several members of the EU put on the employer the duty to provide the right equipment, or at least to cover the expenses suffered by the worker in order to acquire the requested tools (this is for instance the case of Greece and Lithuania).

As regards to OSH (Occupational Safety and Health) of workers, it can be challenging for an employer to guarantee the protection of them when telework is at stake. A list of countries (which also includes France, Greece, Belgium and the Netherlands) found a solution in providing safety and health experts for inspecting employees' workplaces, in order to ensure the compliance with OSH (a measure forbidden in other countries like Italy, Spain, Germany and Portugal). Then another complication can be found in the fact that it is hard to handle work accidents in the case of remote work. Generally speaking, according to each country legal framework, an employee must be able to prove that a given accident happened during the window of time that was set for working from home, and on the designated workplace. Then, the authorities in charge have the duty to check if the activity involved in the cause of the incident was private or related to work. Of course, this will not be the case of companies located in countries which forbid inspections at home (Italy, Spain, Germany, Croatia), where risk assessment is carried out collecting information from the workers themselves.

In Italy, the matter of safeguarding the health of the employees was taken to another level and a series of options for avoiding the risk of suffering from "technostress" were enacted. The workers are required to respect the rules stipulated in relation to the time limits of working activities: this means that every employee must abide by rest periods and breaks defined by law and collective agreements. The equipment used for carrying out job tasks must remain switched off during this selected window of time. Since the risk for isolation represents a serious matter and a concrete risk for people working from home, Portugal decided to promote regular contact between the people working from home. Luxembourg, instead, issued a law declaring that employers must guarantee that all the measures needed for preventing teleworkers to experience isolation from the worker operating in the office are put into practice.

As regards to the matter of work-life balance, one of the measures for protecting the

employees has already been shown and consists in applying the right to disconnect. The interesting thing to notice is that some other countries see work from home as a right of the worker and do not acknowledge the negative consequences associated with the phenomenon (which is the case of Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Romania).

Up to now, the regulations analyzed here have been the ones referring to countries with statutory definitions of telework. This means that Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Latvia and Sweden were not taken into account. This does not mean that in these countries telework was completely overlooked, but it was rather addressed by the framework of national OSH regulation. For instance, Nordic countries they have a work environment legislation that is related to regular workers and to remote workers as well, even if some more guidelines to follow are stated for the cases of work from home.

What can be said about the link between remote work and the spread of covid disease is that the European Governments tried to contain the circulation of the virus with a series of temporary preventive measures linked to hybrid work: sometimes it was just a recommendation, other times telework was imposed. In cases such as the ones of Belgium and France, the provision of *force majeure* allowed the Governments to enforce telework without complications. It is similar to what happened in countries where states of emergency were declared (so Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy in relation to the public sector, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia). In a more practical sense, it means that in the countries listed above the voluntary principle of telework lost its validity and employers had to transition to hybrid work applied by default, whenever the job of interest showed the characteristics required for it to be carried out online. Italy represents a peculiar case, because outside of the public field, the decision to opt for the solution of remote work still lied with the employer or employees, which can request it.

Belgium is another particular case that deserve a special mention, because in this context a cross-sectorial collective bargaining agreement was issued: the document focus the attention to the management of telework arrangements in the private sector, that do not fall under categories already defined by law before the pandemic. It particularly dwells on the matter of degree of flexibility at stake, along with the theme of providing right and clear information to the worker, even in the sense of timely communicate what are the privacy rights and what monitoring method will be used; it also addresses the issue regarding the setting of working time schedule limits and choices about the costs of the equipment. Lastly, it involves guidelines about the well-being of the employees and measures on how to avoid risks of isolation.

In other countries, such as Ireland and Netherlands, guidance on working remotely specifically during covid-19 times were provided by the Health and Safety Authority. The example of Latvia is even more interesting, because audiovisual material was provided for addressing the themes of how to arrange a home office and how to exercise at home.

In the final analysis, it can be said that the prolonged experiment of telework was a major driver for changing the legislation regulating work at home, other than encouraging the debate around keeping exploiting these new dynamics after the end of the pandemic. To be more specific, according to the 2021 Work Trend Index issued from Microsoft[38], 73% of the workers wants flexible and remote work to stay: even in Italy, on March 16th 2021, the Chamber's Public and Private Labor Commission approved a legislative proposal consisting of 12 articles that update the 2017 law about hybrid work. In the text, the definition of agile work is given, and it is specified that the employee who works remotely is completely equated with the one who works in presence. The categories that can have priority access to this way of working are defined and tax concessions are established for companies that invest in tools useful for employees to work remotely.

1.2.3 A peculiar approach: how China managed the experience of working during the pandemic

It is well known that China's response to Covid-19 outbreak was very strict: the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, in fact, issued the most rigid measures to prevent the spread of the virus asking the Chinese population to make multiple sacrifices in order to get out of the state of emergency. A report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) in February 2020[39] states that China's bold approach to contain the spread of the disease was successful and efficiently changed the course of the epidemic's escalation. The main characteristic of China's reaction to the outbreak was the rapidity with which the related measures were put into practice since the early stages in Wuhan and the surrounding areas of Hubei.

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[38] WISEMAN, B., *The Next Great Disruption Is Hybrid Work—Are We Ready?*, 2021, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work, 25-03-2022
[39] WHO, *Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*, 2020, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/who-china-joint-mission-on-covid-19-final-report.pdf, 25-03-2022

China's action can be divided into three stages. The first one focused on blocking the spread of the disease from Wuhan, so what China tried to do was to control the source of infection, blocking the possible channels of transmission. Other than carrying out surveillance activities, a series of protocols were formulated for diagnosing the virus and for the management of close contacts. The second stage concentrated on reducing the intensity of the epidemic: depending on the province, strict rules were established in the management exportations and importations. A lot of efforts were made to make sure that every case was cured, and all close contacts were put under isolation. It is also to be underlined that Spring Festival holiday was extended, the traffic situation was put under tight control and mass gathering activities were cancelled. Lastly, the third stage tried to find a balance between prevention and control, linking it to the economic and social development and implementing scientific evidence-based policies. The most important aspect during this stage is the development of new technologies for tracing contacts, which involved the use of big data and artificial intelligence. Speaking of the role of technology during the pandemic, China distinguished itself from other countries by making the population use software on their smartphones in order to determine whether or not people should be allowed into subways and public spaces. What is important to remark is that this type of system, called Alipay Health Code, also shares information with the local authorities; it assigns a color code (green, yellow, or red) to each person, indicating their health status. At this point, work was resumed in phases while providing welfare services in a targeted way and restoring social norms. It is crucial to concentrate on how it was possible for China to achieve the result of slowing down the virus so drastically, since it was not achievable to do the same in other Countries. Here are shown in the form of graphics the data gathered from the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University[40] for understanding the development of new covid cases and deaths in different countries.
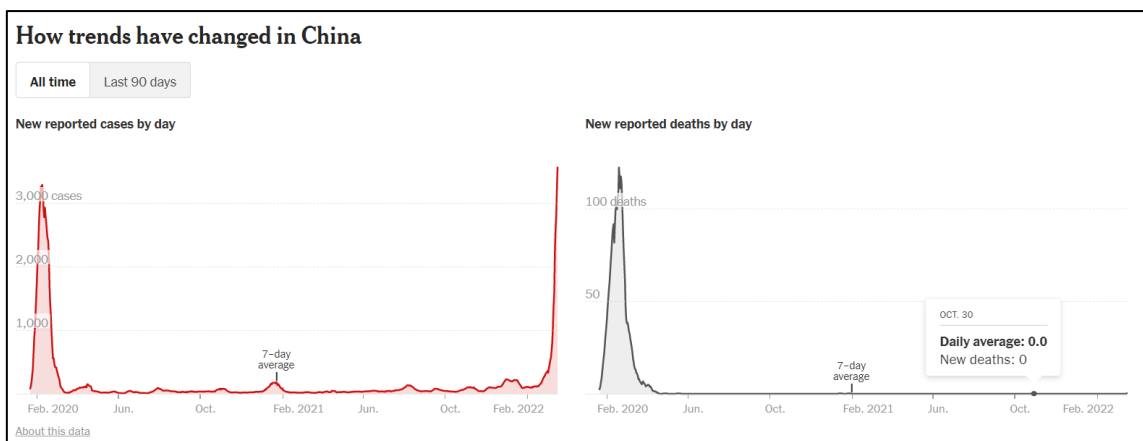
[40] *Coronavirus World Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak*, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/world/covid-cases.html, 26-03-2022
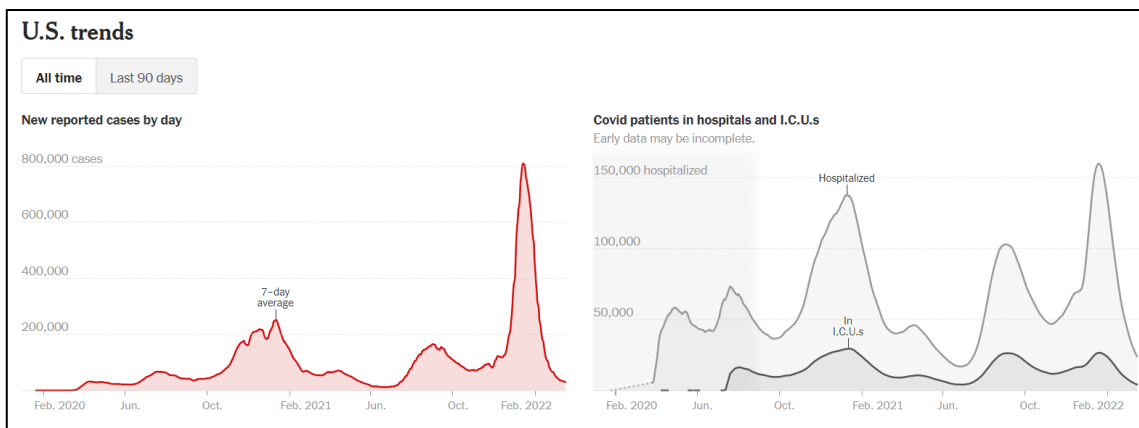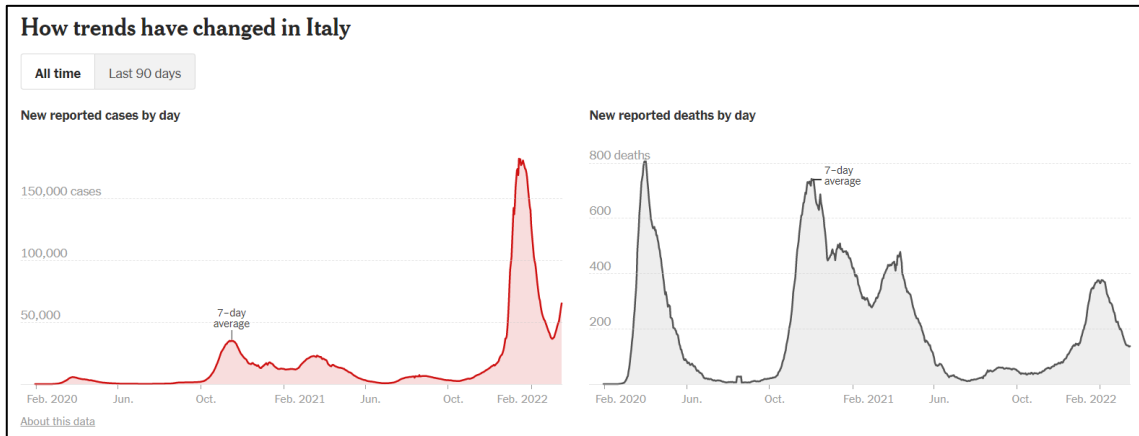
figure 1, 2, 3 exhibiting the development of new covid cases and deaths in China, US and Italy.

Looking at the three examples taken in consideration it is very noticeable that China followed its own path when it comes to controlling the spread of the disease. Since the first outbreak at the beginning of 2020, a major drop in the transmission rate of the disease was already obtained starting from the first half of February. Within a month, covid cases went from an average of more than three thousand daily to around twenty per day in the middle of March. The same cannot be said for example for the case of Italy or US, where the recovery was not sudden and linear, but rather characterized by moments of peak and a subsequential decrease in cases. However, we cannot overlook that China, along with other countries, still registered a prompt and strong increase in new reported cases during February 2022, two years after the beginning of the pandemic. This was not an expected outcome, having China always shown the ability to keep the infection rate under control in a relatively steady fashion. It appears instead, that on March 13th[41], China reported nearly 3400 daily COVID-19 cases, double the number from the previous day, with what can be considered the gravest outbreak in two years. This

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[41] FRANCE, A., *China battles worst Covid outbreak for two years as cases double in 24 hours*, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/13/china-battles-worst-covid-outbreak-for-two-years-as-cases-double-in-24-hours, 26-03-2022

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unpleasant outcome seems to be the result of the highly transmissibility of Omicron variant and a rise in asymptomatic cases, which compromitted the otherwise very successful zero-covid policy. As a consequence, schools were closed in Shanghai and several north-eastern cities were put under lockdown. The explanation for what happened seems to be that in some restricted areas the emergency response is not solid enough, along with the fact that the strict approach that China decided on starting from the very first months of the pandemic, is causing fatigue in abiding by it and hurting the economy. It is important to underline that China's case load is still very little compared to global standards, yet this drastic increase is putting into question whether or not the tough containment approach is still working under the new circumstances.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the strategy China chose to control the spread of the disease has been, for the most part, very successful. For the purpose of this paper, what matters is to understand how is that China could apply such a strict control mechanism, while in EU or US the same was not seen. Lawrence Gostin, a global health law scholar at Georgetown University, gives interesting cues on the causes for this distinction underlining that China is a peculiar country, with a political system that can gain public compliance with extreme measures[42]. He also adds that such an aggressive social control, which results in a surveillance system intrusive to say the least, could never be acceptable in other Countries. It has already been mentioned how smartphones were used to identify and isolate people who might be spreading the illness, but the phenomenon does not stop with the decrease in cases: the Government's monitoring apps seems to be there to stay[43]. Li Sihui, a researcher at Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, has expressed perplexity as regards to collecting citizens' data with the excuse of controlling the state of the epidemic. This trend has extended to the point that in Hangzhou, officials are trying to shift from the health code system to a more detailed and invasive ranking system based on a "personal health index"[44], which bases the score of every single individual based on different, very personal variables such as the amount of sleep the person usually gets, the level of activeness during the day and drinking and smoking habits. If this choice has received some critics on Weibo, one of the major Chinese social networks, it is also true that other

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[42] KUPFERSCHMIDT, K., COHEN, J., *China's aggressive measures have slowed the coronavirus. They may not work in other countries*, 2020, https://www.science.org/content/article/china-s-aggressive-measures-have-slowed-coronavirus-they-may-not-work-other-countries, 26-03-2022
[43] ZHONG, R., *China's Virus Apps May Outlast the Outbreak, Stirring Privacy Fears*, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/technology/china-coronavirus-surveillance.html, 26-03-2022
[44] 集众力 汇众智 市卫健委全力深化杭州健康码常态化应用，2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/pKIM2f_FuEakp6LVctoS2g, 26-03-2022

cities tried to promote ways to make the citizens accept this kind of apps, even when it comes to fields outside of the medical one, for instance in order to get coupons in the hope of boosting the economy.

An interesting cue on the weight of the cultural factor in handling the epidemic emergency can be seen by making a simple comparison with the use of tracking apps in a country belonging to the EU, which is Italy. During 2020, the Italian Government has issued an app called "Immuni" which had the same intent of the Chinese one: limiting the spread of the disease by contact tracing. What is different is that the download of the app has always been not mandatory, relying on the civic sense and freedom of choice of each individual. What also stands out, if one would visit the Italian Government webpage concerning the app[45], is the stress on the privacy issue. It is stated multiple times that the tracing system is completely anonymous, and that the app does not keep track of any piece of information that may allow anyone to discover the identity of the users. This was clearly a way of reassuring the Italian population, which can easily appear skeptical and suspicious towards the choices of the Government, having Italian people a history of distrust of people in power. Forcing a system not welcomed by the population would have led to a much more tense atmosphere, which was already shaken by protests and riots against the mandatory restrictions in many Italian cities during 2020 and 2021. It emerges here how China's choices in terms of regulating the emergency were possible in a Country where the authority of the people in power is rarely put into question (especially when the censorship has a huge role when it comes to prevent the rise of opponents to the Government), where the collectivism principle is stronger than the needs of the singular individual and where also the concept of privacy has a different historical and cultural weight, if compared to Western Countries. In this regard, some research shows that even if the interest of Chinese people towards the issue of privacy rights has risen because of the globalization, their conception of the theme is still not comparable to Western standards and tendencies[46]. From a more pragmatic point of view, instead, it is also important to underline that China is capable of carrying out labor-intensive, large-scale projects quickly, in a way that is not possible to see anywhere else.

All of these aspects beforementioned must be put into relation with the work from home dynamics seen during COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics from a well-known online office platform show that on February 3rd 2020, during the epidemic, tens of millions of enterprises and nearly 200 million people across China started working remotely from

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[45] *App Immuni*, 2020, https://www.governo.it/it/approfondimento/immuni/15336, 27, 03, 2022
[46] LU, Y., *Privacy and data privacy issues in contemporary China*, 2005 https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10676-005-0456-y.pdf, 27-03-2022

home[47]. In the early days of the epidemic, documents jointly issued by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and other departments also encouraged enterprises to arrange employees to work from home through flexible working methods such as telephone and Internet to complete work tasks. The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology also issued a document promoting the use cloud computing, focusing on remote office, home office, video conferencing, online training, e-commerce etc.

Research tried to find the right point where all the companies shifted to a remote work setting: since it is quite hard to find reliable data, the researches chose to use the download rate of the app DingTalk, which is the dominant mobile office platform in China[48]. In particular, it is an app developed by Alibaba group and provided to all Chinese firms free of charge for business communication and work collaboration; it has the highest rank of active users. How it can be seen in the figure here attached, DingTalk scored very low in January and the explanation simply lies in the fact that before the pandemic, people used to work almost exclusively in offices, therefore there was no need to download such a software. To give some more indications, another study estimated that in 2018 only 0.6 percent of the workforce (4.9 million Chinese employees) had remote working experiences and most Chinese workers in their sample worked away
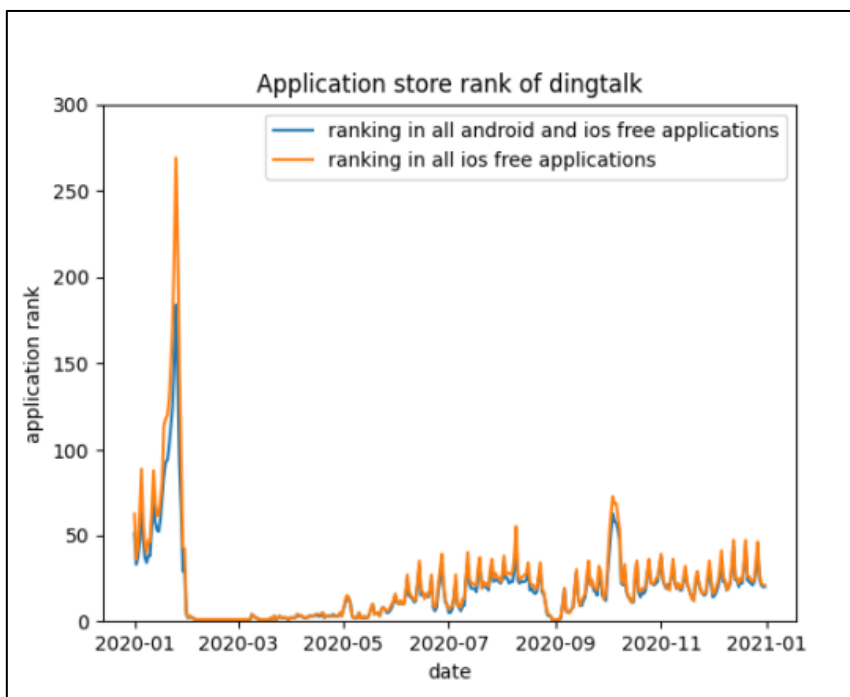
figure 4 exhibiting the application store rank of dingtalk throughout 2020 and 2021

[47] XIE Zengyi 谢 增 毅 ， 远 程 工 作 的 立 法 理 念 与 制 度 建 构 ， 2021, http://www.procedurallaw.cn/info/1022/2995.htm, 27-03-2022

[48] WU, Y., MUNASINGHE, T., MANIKONDA, L., SENEVIRATNE, O., *Data-driven Analysis of Remote Work in China during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, 2022, https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/79676, 27-03-2022

from the office for the first time during the COVID-19 situation[49]. As the pandemic peaked, the download of DingTalk app followed the same trend.

Not only this shift affected deeply the lives of the population, but it constituted a singular challenge even from a legal point of view. In fact, China implemented the flexible working system relatively late, in 1995, when it was clearly stipulated by the "Labor Law of the People's Republic of China", but only with the meaning of time flexibility. In fact, according to Chinese laws and policies, the working hours system for workers mainly includes two forms: one is the standard working hour system, a standard working hour system of 8 hours a day and 40 hours a week, while the second is a working hour system implemented for specific groups of workers [50]. The latter refers to the system implemented for workers whose working hours cannot be measured in accordance with standard working hours or who need mobile work due to production characteristics, special needs of work or scope of responsibilities. The comprehensive calculation of working hours refers to a system them hours in cycles of weeks, months, quarters, and years in industries that require continuous operation due to the nature of work or are limited by seasons and natural conditions. The flexible working system in a more extensive sense has not been specified in the official rules and regulations: it can be said that it is only a way for individual firms to manage human resources inside their private boundaries[51], while remote work legislation remains blank. This has actually resulted in an issue bigger than it might seems, since there have been many cases where the employee thought that he was working from home, and the employer considered him to be absent[52].

During the pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the China Enterprise Confederation/China Entrepreneurs Association, and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce jointly issued the "Support for Stable Labor Relations During the Prevention and Control of the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Epidemic". It states that "companies under the right conditions can arrange for employees to work from home through flexible working methods such as telephone and Internet" and it puts the stress on "encouraging flexible

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[49] WANG, B., LIU, Y., QIAN, J., PARKER, S., *Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID‑19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective,* 2020, Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective - PMC (nih.gov), 27-03-2022

[50] PAN Yuting 潘寓婷, 弹性工作制：疫情影响下的居家办公思考, 2021

[51] WANG Wei, SHI Yan, 完善突发公共卫生危机中 弹性工作制的思考, 2020

[52] XIE Zengyi 谢增毅，远程工作的立法理念与制度建构， 2021, http://www.procedurallaw.cn/info/1022/2995.htm, 27-03-2022

work arrangements." During the epidemic prevention and control period, not only enterprises, but also public departments such as Chinese Government and public institutions have implemented a flexible working system, other than many community workers and volunteers.The problem lies in the fact that these regulations and measures are only a general framework and basic principles for how the Chinese Government should respond to public crises. During the period of flexible work involved in public health crises, issues such as employee leave, labor safety, and employee rights protection lack legal constraints. Once a dispute arises, it is difficult for the rights and interests of employees to be protected, an issue which affects the stability of labor relations and the maintenance of social order. For example, on February 5th 2020, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, together with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and other departments, issued the "Opinions on Stabilizing Labor Relations and Supporting Enterprises Resuming Work and Production During the Prevention and Control of the Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia", which stipulates that during the epidemic prevention and control period, enterprises must fully understand the situation of employees being quarantined or undertaking emergency measures issued by the Chinese Government. The "Notice of the Office of the Leading Group for Migrant Workers of the State Council on Further Ensuring the Return of Migrant Workers After the Spring Festival" also clearly stipulates that migrant workers from rural areas cannot provide the normal labor service temporarily due to isolation, observation, treatment or because of economic measures issued by the Chinese Government, the enterprise shall not terminate the labor contract or go back to the condition of labor dispatch workers.

It must also be added that in labor disputes, the conflicts caused by the calculation and payment of wages are the most likely to occur. Some companies pay wages based on the actual number of working days on the job, while others do not calculate the number of days for delayed resumption of work, but pay wages based on the normal number of days; since the flexible working system is not clearly defined in the law the policies vary from place to place. During the challenging time of the pandemic, the Chinese Government issued a series of policies to financially protect workers, imposing that the employers would continue paying the usual wage for people affected by the coronavirus or who had been in close contact with coronavirus patients, even in the case of employer suspending production[53].

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[53] DING, W., *COVID-19 and Labour Law: China*, 2020, https://illej.unibo.it/article/download/10786/11105/37579, 28-03-2022

CHAPTER 2 **From theory to practice: analysis of recent case studies of work from home experiments in different organizational contexts**

While chapter 1 lingers on the theoretical aspect of hybrid work and the relative regulations that have been implemented in the European Union and China, now the focus will shift to a more practical and specific point of view. The analysis intends to take into account the variable of sector of interest of the firms that are objects of the case studies or statistics here reported. Once again, case studies belonging to the Chinese context will be part of the research, since they offer a wider perspective on how human resources management policies can be managed when it comes to working from home or in a flexible environment. The weight of the variable linked to the cultural framework in which a given company is immersed in must be considered, in order to provide a comprehensive guideline on how to behave when handling hybrid work.

2.1 Examples coming from different fields of interest

One of the obvious premises underneath this study is that it is not possible to offer a univocal solution to the human resources management requirements of a given organization. Each company manages its operation following different types of logics, which translate into a wide range of possible choices in terms of operations. In the previous chapter it has been shown what the hybrid work model is composed by and how it relates to every single HR process, generating a need for key decisions to be taken from the upper management. For some profit-generating and efficiency-seeking operative choices to be made, it is fundamental to also focus on the economic sector of interest of the firm, since it is strongly intertwined with the strategy at stake. It is well-known that a good performance and success are only achievable when the strategy of the company is aligned with each operative decision, belonging to each department. Making a distinction between the policies adopted on the bases of different sectors makes sense when it is needed to simplify and cluster a variety of combinations of choices that would otherwise be too rich, if analyzed while not following some type of structure. The logic here is that it can be said, as research shows[54], that the members belonging to the same industry share a common world view and tend to interact in a way that ideas and policies end up being shared or adapted to each individual organization belonging to the same economic sector. This has a great impact on the development of effective strategies so that they become more common in a given field, as they are

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[54] HUFF, A., Industry Influences on Strategy Reformulation, 1982, https://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/5640/1/Industry%20influences%20on%20strategy%20reformulation.pdf, 12-04-2022

proved to be worthy. This inevitably leads to a family resemblance among strategies. Once again, the impact of COVID-19 crisis on choices in managing the activities within an organizational context cannot be overlooked; in fact, it represents an element of novelty for a study of this type. This event constituted a turning point for many activities and, from a micro-perspective, for many people's lives, so particular attention will be given to the great shift it caused in operative and strategic decisions.

2.1.1 Primary sector

First of all, it is important to start introducing the concept of teleworkability, which is the degree to which an occupation can technically be performed remotely[55]. This idea is particularly useful when it comes to give an analysis on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the adoption of telework from firms. Related to this concept there is the issue of what type of tasks simply cannot shift to a remote work setting. This has to do with jobs in which the physical handling tasks cannot be substituted in any way with other technological solutions. Some examples of this case can be seen in jobs like the one of nurses, manufacturing production line workers and farmers. According to the index of teleworkability elaborated by Sostero (2020), which is used to assess what are the jobs and how many of them are possible to make teleworkable in Europe, as regards to the primary sector (along with the manufacturing and construction sectors), only 10-20% of total European workers in the field could work from home. This natural consequence of the nature itself of primary sector belonging jobs makes it difficult to gather data on how an hybrid work model would work in this type of environment. COVID-19 crisis challenged this sector mostly in terms of defending the health of workers operating, for instance, in the agri-food sector.

 The agriculture sector has faced a limited number of restrictions due to the fact that it was deemed as an essential sector by governmental choices. For instance, in Italy, agricultural workers were included in the list of vulnerable workers and received a one-time payment of EUR 600. There has also been tax exemption for the ones forces to be present in the workplace. As some research shows, it is still important to notice that after the pandemic there is a greater need for modernizing the traditional methods of farming and that farmers themselves have started relying on social media in handling their

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[55] EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, *The impact of teleworking and digital work on workers and society*, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662904/IPOL_STU(2021)662904_EN.pdf, 14-04-2022

farming processes[56].

As regards to fisheries, the impact of COVID-19 in Europe seems more related to market dynamics than other factors, so it was not possible to find a common pattern valid for every Country. Even in this case, the European Parliament suggests as long-term policy to strengthen databases and market intelligence tools, while other suggestions have nothing to do with how the technology aspect can come into play in supporting the sector, due to its core nature[57].

2.1.2 Secondary sector

As stated before, the construction sector is part of those whose teleworkability is at the lowest score, as it is strictly connected to the presence of workers on the specific site of operation. When it comes to data, the construction sector accounted for around 7.7% of global employment, before the pandemic[58]. The crisis, however, have had a negative impact on it in most market, also creating some challenges to the labor force. Even in this case the solutions implemented by most countries did not include work from home, but instead focused on issuing policies to support the weakened enterprises financially, through the suspension or subsidization of taxes, fees and social security contributions. So, it is safe to say that Governments tried to establish some sort of damage control system to protect the employees. For instance, in France and Germany there is a general effort in terms of preventing unemployment, including in the construction sector, offering short-time work and partial unemployment benefits. Besides, it is still worth noticing that the sector has not stayed the same after the pandemic. For example, technological shifts have increased, especially as long as it concerns environmentally friendly ones.

Once again, when it comes to the field of manufacturing, the teleworkability rate is still very low. The pandemic has had a disruptive impact on textiles, clothing, leather and footwear industries. In many cases, factories and retails had to close, causing the employees to lose their job and being suspended[59]. Just to give an example, the Italian

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[56] KALOGIANNIDIS, S., *ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR DURING GLOBAL PANDEMIC*, 2020, (PDF) ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR DURING GLOBAL PANDEMIC | Stavros Kalogiannidis - Academia.edu, 16-04-2022

[57] EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, *Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on EU fisheries and aquaculture, 2021*, https://op.europa.eu/it/publication-detail/-/publication/07e5b4e2-1116-11ec-9151-01aa75ed71a1, 16-04-2022

[58] ILO, *Impact of COVID-19 on the construction sector*, 2021, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767303.pdf,, 17-04-2022

[59] ILO, *COVID-19 and the textiles, clothing, leather and footwear industries*, 2020, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---

manufacturing sector has seen an average drop of 15% from both the supply and demand sides, with the only exception of the pharmaceutical industry[60]. Even when talking about the food and beverage manufacturing sector, the fact that the field is vital for the thriving of the global population did not spare the global and local supply chain impacting the production of food from suffering some negative impacts[61]. COVID-19 outbreak still acted as a key event to trigger the need for a more modern approach to the management of food manufacturing industry. It has been demonstrated how investments in digital technologies can improve the ability of this type of food chains companies to be resilient and more performative in the optimization of outputs[62]. This means making an effort in terms of working with the technologic tools which are consequential to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as big data, could computing, robotics, automation etc., so that remote and autonomous working ca be facilitated. Put aside the tasks intrinsically physical and strictly connected to the presence on a specific worksite, the company Accenture[63] still strongly recommends developing a network of digital workspace for handling the other fundamental activities such as human resources, marketing, sales, legal, business, IT and the institution of key communication representatives with to scope of overseeing the different activities. Other tips related to the development of agile workforce and workspace and linked to the preservation of food safety include a more precise determination of what are the spaces belonging to evert employees: not only the social distancing must be provided, but some efforts must be made in the sense of reviewing how these spaces are defined, also taking into account the number of workforces at stake. Strictly linked to this concept there is another topic which was already covered when talking about the definition of what hybrid work means: the worktime management. There must be found a key, a plan of action that can efficiently integrate the work shifts of those working on site, along with worktime limitations of those who belong to the functional departments working from home. This is particularly important in the sectors in which the core functions cannot be carried on online because

sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741344.pdf, 17-04-2022

[60] LANZA, A., TRENTI, S., *The Italian manufacturing sector and the Covid-19 impact*, 2020, https://bancaria.it/en/livello-2/archive-2/last-summary/july-2020/the-italian-manufacturing-sector-and-the-covid-19-impact/, 18-04-2022

[61] TELUKDARIE, A., MUNSAMY, M., MOHALALA, P., *Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector*, 2020, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/22/9331, 18-04-2022

[62] ALDACO, R., *Food waste management during the COVID-19 outbreak: a holistic climate, economic and nutritional approach*, 2020, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720340468?via%3Dihub, 18-04-2022

[63] TELUKDARIE, A., MUNSAMY, M., MOHALALA, P., Analysis of the Impact of COVID-19 on the Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector, 2020, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/22/9331, 18-04-2022

it prevents the whole activity from collapsing and, needless to say, it is the only way to keep working during times of crises. So, the need for integration is a concept to be highly aware of when planning the tasks and activities of some specific sector, in which a fully remote solution cannot be applied. In the final analysis, the literature suggests that the staff workforce that can work offsite should be encouraged in doing so and even contracted to make it a permanent measure. It can also be considered the option of developing a pool of labor that can be chosen to operate on the basis of a series of business constrains: in this case the employees must be able to work with their skills in a interchangeable fashion, depending also on their health status, demand and other variables.

Lastly, when considering the secondary sector, it must be mentioned the industry of power, utilities, and renewables. The main effect of COVID-19 crises is that it meant a huge shift of focus, on the behalf of companies, on keeping their assets online while still providing safe supplies of electricity and gas to the clients. Data shows that on the renewables side, there has been some negative effects coming from the disruption in the supply chain over the months[64]. According to a McKinsey study[65], the resilience rate of the utilities companies which had already developed digital management tools before the crisis, have been much higher than the others. An interesting suggestion is linked to the use of remote supervision in helping the employees minimizing risks and at the same time simplifying the operational processes. Enabling the workers to work digitally, along with remote troubleshooting, could help the companies operating in the utilities field to reduce crew sizes, a choice which carries as a consequence improvement in terms of safety and efficiency. During the pandemic, in fact, there was a great shift to a flatter work model, characterized by the collaboration on remote across different business functions and geographic locations, which was registered to be even more productive than the old-fashioned on-site meeting. It is also true that this way, executives had the power to discover multiskilled workers, whose not obvious qualities would have otherwise stayed hidden in a stable, on-site work environment. McKinsey study also shows how utility executives have a growing interest towards the option of hybrid work model, in the sense of working remotely themselves and involving the workforce in the planning process: the possibility to access to a much wider pool of talents creates an

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[64] REQUEJO, F., *Understanding the sector impact of COVID-19*, 2020, https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/COVID-19/gx-understand-sector-impact-power-utilities-renew.pdf, 20-04-2022

[65] BOOTH, A., *Power and people: How utilities can adapt to the next normal*, 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/electric-power-and-natural-gas/our-insights/power-and-people-how-utilities-can-adapt-to-the-next-normal, 20-04-2022

advantage in terms of diversity and resiliency, setting the ground for building the right set of skills which lead towards a significant competitive advantage.

What it is also interesting to underline is that, according to a study carried out by Accenture[66], hybrid workers operating in the field of utilities shares a more optimistic and thriving mindset towards the future of work, as opposite to the more disgruntled approach shown by those working on-site. A company operating in the utility sector can choose from a range of work models, which go from fully on-site to fully remote; in doing so, it is important to consider a serious of factors, similar to the ones already explored when analyzing other fields, so the overall workplace safety, the degree of digital collaboration, the operational continuity and organizational culture: in any case, balance is critical.

2.1.3 Tertiary and quaternary sector

Looking at the data provided by Eurostat[67], it is noticeable that the COVID-19 caused crisis has started showing effect during the spring of 2020 and had a severe and prompt impact on retail trade, as there has been a drop by 11.2% in the total retail trade volume in April 2020. Unlike the categories belonging to the first and second sector, the retail field distinguished itself for the sudden rise in sales volumes, already obtained in May and June 2020, when the sales levels even managed to surpass the ones registered before the pandemic, in the non-food industry. As long as it concerns EU, in January 2022 the sales volumes were 4.1% higher than the month right before the start of the crises, February 2020. By making a comparison with December 2021, instead, this volume has increased by 0.6%.
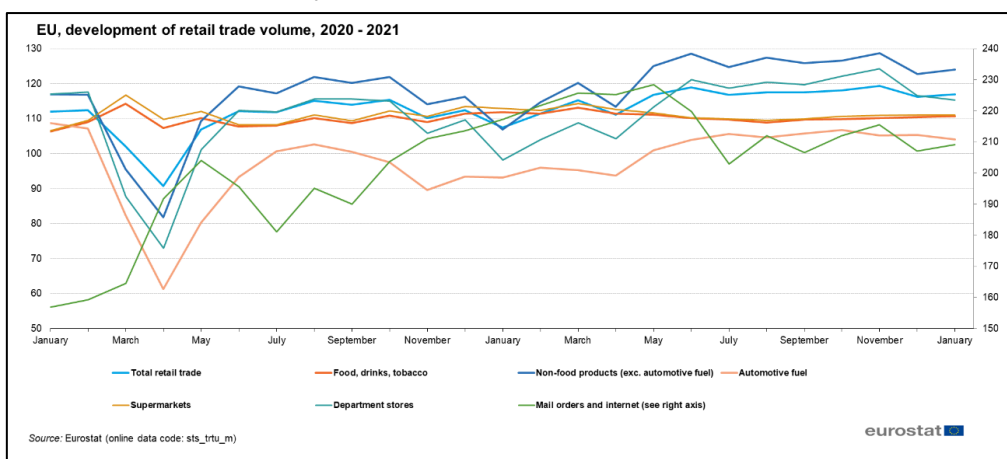
figure 5 exhibiting the EU development of retail trade volume throughout 2020 and 2021

[66] AGUILAR, L., *Productivity anywhere is the new nature of work*, 2021, https://www.accenture.com/us-en/blogs/accenture-utilities-blog/productivity-anywhere-future-utilities-work, 21-04-2022

[67] EUROSTAT, *Impact of Covid-19 crisis on retail trade*, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Impact_of_Covid-19_crisis_on_retail_trade, 21-04-2022

It is true that the sector of retail saw an advantage in the rise of the e-commerce, which has provided access to goods even when the restrictions imposed for safety reasons made it harder, if even possible, to shop in physical stores. The European E-commerce Report [68] published in 2021, states that in 2020, the total European e-commerce increased by 10% when compared to data of year 2019. Therefore, seen the potential of the demand produced by online consumers, the companies that were not already focused on prioritizing e-commerce had to rush to do so. According to data from IBM, the pandemic has in fact affected the world of e-commerce by accelerating the shift to online platform by five years circa[69].

A recent case study tried to investigate the long-term effects of a collective crisis (in the specific case the analysis considers the trigger event of COVID-19 outbreak) on the retail and service sector[70]. The research included the point of views of retail and service stakeholders operating in New Zealand, Australia, UK, Europe and US. People interviewed all agreed in stating that a permanent shift in the working habits inside the company would be fundamental from a perspective of long-term developments. Especially when asked about remote working, the results shows that the participants saw a connection between this change in handling the processes and short-term benefits, such as a perception of more efficiency expressed by the staff, on a level that was not anticipated before. Not only that, from this specific data collection it resulted that working remotely, in a way, brought people together. The people interviewed reported that the use of technology, such as the use of video conferencing software, has helped in enhancing cohesiveness and a deeper sense of belonging to the teams geographically apart. What can be discussed here is the fact that this new generated sense of belonging is noticeable as a short-term consequence, but what about it on the long run? In fact, there have been some perplexity around the lack of physical interaction caused by remote work. This lack leads to a social information processing shortage, meaning that

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[68] ECOMMERCE EUROPE, *E-commerce still growing: accelerated digitalization of businesses and consumers*, 2021, https://ecommerce-europe.eu/press-item/e-commerce-still-growing-accelerated-digitalisation-of-businesses-and-consumers/, 21-04-2022

[69] NEALON, K., *How Covid-19 Changed Retail — Probably Forever*, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/07/22/how-covid-19-changed-retail---probably-forever/?sh=4f14246b145c, 21-04-2022

[70] FERRARO, C., *In this together: the long-term effect of a collective crisis on the retail and service sector*, 2022, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JSM-04-2021-0144/full/pdf?casa_token=lK3GmL1AQ0kAAAAA:s96Shb40EmuelJJUmxNkbBVQ8k-mraM5MPahgZsw3gJIW9Ms-rLHpyv7ZeQVHxCY1SkECt09rojsysRjRGm0AEYiBAVJP2zTYl8EeEaYZQB1amLx8A, 21-4-2022

co-workers do not manage to have an influence over job attitudes by giving cues[71]. Besides, even the variable of how big an organization is will have consequences on the long-term effectiveness of remote work: if the network at stake is too wide, it is not possible to generate the same sense of human interaction and belonging by making video calls with every employee on a regular basis. In a long-term perspective, it is also hard to figure how the mental health of the workers could be impacted by this new normal: the lack of physical socialization could turn out to be damaging.

The retail sector has shown to see as a core function the strategic relevant information exchange, which has a lot to do with the digitalization process accelerated by COVID-19 crisis. The communication is known for being a key part of the strategy formulation process, so it is important to understand how to exploit the option of remote exchange of information as a way of making the processes faster and at the same time shared among the company in its entirety, comprehensive of the decision-making teams.

From a human resources management perspective, another key factor comes into play when remote work in the sector of retail is considered: not only there is a need for communication processes to be efficient from a business point of view, but in a more people-oriented sense, people experiencing remote work during the pandemic have found out that creating a sense of community is a crucial part of the future of the organizations. This attended result requires some efforts in terms of reorganizing the staffing operations: the firms analyzed during the research decided to prioritize the management of casual staff, because it appeared to be the most impacted category by the pandemic restrictive measures, since stores had reduced their working hours. For some of the firms, this led to a high percentage of employees being stood down, due to the decrease in customers spendings. Following another type of approach, instead, there have been firms that decided to focus on the long-term, acknowledging that people are the key to successfully carrying out operations and retaining them inside the organization, even throughout times of crises: by abiding to this mindset and strong perception of the worth of human resources, people have been stimulated, even more than in the past, to conceive themselves as a part of a community, which translated in a general more optimistic and positive behavior. This is interesting, because while remote work and the digitalization of processes have shown to create the issue of a wider distance between members of a group, it demonstrates that this difficulty can be overcame by making some efforts in enhancing the sense of community of people, even if from remote and during challenging times. Research shows that for the future of retail and service marketplace

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[71] SALANCIK, G., *A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design*, 1978

it will be crucial to insist on this aspect and focus on the adaptive responses to employees' experience. Retail managers should be required to concentrate on creating a better environment in the sense of making the flow of ideas easier and faster, in a way that employees can feel heard and actively contribute to team improvement.

Another interesting experiment as regards to the matter of hybrid work in the retail industry comes from Canada, where the retail giant Best Buy decided to move its offices, embracing a digital-first type of approach to the workplace[72]. Their choice is a very peculiar one, because while normally companies, while proclaiming themselves open to a flexible management of the personnel schedule, they still let the employees experience several days per week to spend working on-site, in a mandatory fashion, Best Buy Canada does even more than that, as they never require their workforce to show up on-site but let them free to choose for themselves. The downside of seeing the company cohesiveness crumble, as the lack of physical interaction between co-workers is proved to be damaging, is overcame by making employees experience in real life team building activities, which are not negotiable and must be carried out in person. The results are very positive and shows that 96% of the people interviewed had the perception of being able to work even in a more efficient way than usual, and half of the totality of them said that they actually prefer coming to the office only when specifically required.

There have also been tests coming from the colossal Apple, which claimed to be issuing an employee pilot program called "Retail Flex", allowing store associates to work from home for some shifts[73]. Since, during the pandemic, retailers had to close their physical stores and move to the e-commerce, the retail workers themselves had to adapt to the shift and start performing online customer services or keep participating to sales sessions but in livestream. This meant for volunteer participants to respond to the teams' needs by working some of their shift at the store, while alternating some other at home. Speaking about the salary, it remained the same for everyone. So here it is possible to analyze another solution if compared to the Best Buy Canada one, it seems that two approaches come tied with a shift in focus: in the first case the scheduling decisions were focused on the individual employee's needs, while in the case of the Apple retail department, the prominence is given to the teams' requirements. Other than this, it is

[72] TONEGUZZI, M., *Best Buy Relocating Canadian Corporate Headquarters to Adopt Hybrid Work-From-Home Model: Interview*, 2022, https://retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2022/04/best-buy-relocating-canadian-corporate-headquarters-to-adopt-hybrid-work-from-home-model-interview/, 23-04-2022
[73] GURMAN, M., *Apple to Test Hybrid Work From Store and Home for Retail Staff*, 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-01/apple-to-test-hybrid-work-from-store-and-home-for-retail-staff, 23-04-2022

interesting to notice how companies started investing in cross-training activities in order to dispose of multi-skilled personnel, while working in different sets (both online and in-store). If this trend continues to work on a voluntary basis, it might have some positive effects in the retail industry, affected by a shortage of workers, especially in the US[74].

The tertiary sector is composed of a variety of industries which are very different from each other, therefore now the focus can move to another complex environment which still has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis: the banking sector and financial service sector. From an economic slowdown point of view, it can be said that in EU the contraction has been uneven across companies, while it was noticed that a fall in production and income has been worse in a consistent way worse than the average for some of the firms, along with some layers of the population. In order to give some insights on how the pandemic has changed working in the industry, it is fair to point out that from a global perspective, as some McKinsey research shows[75], consumers needs were already steadily evolving towards an online oriented approach, even before the pandemic, so the firms operating in the files were already experiencing some massive changes. When the outbreak was at its first stadium, banks' human resources leaders were already successfully making some changes in the work practices within the firms, adapting to the new conditions. Banks were very fast in providing digital-first model for sales and service, implementing online advice activities and reshaping the distribution of personnel on a physical level. Here again it comes into play the dynamic of team: the workforce belonging to group have been moved to the ones which were experiencing a shortage in workers. Not differently to what so far has been noticed to be a rule for the retail sector, even in the bank industry times of change required HR managers to implement more creative talent management solutions, once again linked to the skills management of personnel at stake. Several HR offices had to worry about the future of their workforces, so they had to work on the reskilling, upskilling, and redeployment of their employees. So consistent efforts were made in the training processes required to evolving people's ability and tasks. The shift from hierarchical structure to agile ones characterized the sector, making the singular employee gain more autonomy, along with a dissolution of the more formal and rigid relationships in favor to a more relaxed environment. Even in this case it is noticeable that teams were given more empowerment

[74] LOEB, W., *Another Crisis In Retail: Labor Shortage Will Get Worse*, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/walterloeb/2021/07/07/another-crisis-in-retail-labor-shortage-will-get-worse/?sh=fa3f29c6a864, 24-04-2022

[75] REICH, A., *How banks can build their future workforce—today*, 2021, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/how-banks-can-build-their-future-workforce-today, 24-04-2022

opportunities, as opposite to the phenomenon of a singular leader making relevant decisions.

Remote work does not only come along with positive effects for the employees involved. Financial Times has published an interesting article about what how remote working might cause burnout, in relation to the finance sector[76]. In fact, even though there have been some initial losses caused by the pandemic, the banking and consultancy services were still very requested by the global population. A survey conducted by the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development considered a sample of 1.000 employers: results shows that 47% of them mentioned the issue of discomfort in mental wellbeing when working remotely. According to some other data provided by Stanford University, the main issue for American workers was that even if they saved 35% of time that they would have normally spent commuting, they still spent even more time working on projects for longer lengths of time than before. HR managers tried to find a solution in offering wellness programs such as free access to meditation apps or yoga classes, but the experts say that these practices cannot make up for the stress deriving from too tight deadline and the excess in blurring the boundaries between personal life and work. Coinbase, a platform which handle the flow of cryptocurrency tried to implement a policy of damage control which even this time requires key efforts in terms of training the employees. By shifting their operations to a remote work model, they also focused on educating the employees on recognizing signs of burnout, so that they could more actively set rigid boundaries, even if this means avoiding working at all costs, as a way for fueling periods of boredom at home.

All of these factors being considered, Wall Street banks still managed to gain record profit and revenue during the pandemic, even though the employees were working from home[77]. Wall Street found itself in a difficult position, because in this case the workers themselves were asking to extend the possibility of working remotely even when COVID-19 crisis would have come to an end. This company in particular is known for having showed an organizational culture in which change is not always welcomed and that values face to face time. The Goldman Sachs chief executive pushed himself to the point of defining work from home and "aberration", besides asking his employees to come back to the offices, deeming it a fundamental point for keep carrying on his company apprenticeship culture. It seems fair that at the end of the day, during January 2022,

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[76] CUNDY, A., *Remote working fuels burnout in finance sector*, 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/1eb12dd8-ba23-40aa-8765-90dd5674c37d, 25-04-2022

[77] NGUYEN., L., *Wall Street Grudgingly Allows Remote Work as Bankers Dig In*, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/24/business/wall-street-remote-work-banks.html, 25-04-2022

despite the contrary feeling expressed by the CEO, the company still had to maintain the option of remote work, even if stating that the long-term plan will not undertake modifications.

The insurance and financial sectors offer an interesting perspective when it comes to hybrid work, because they show the highest potential for working remotely[78]. This thesis is demonstrated when we group the different tasks required by jobs belonging to different sectors, in a way that they are graded on the basis of what can be carried out online without seeing a loss in productivity: these are types of industry characterized by a high share of workers that at least obtained a college degree, if not even and higher level of specialization. As it was easily predictable, the activities with the highest potential for work from home are strictly linked to the interaction with computers and a need for updating knowledge: to make some examples it is easy to think about the activity of attending online seminar or having to create electronic data backup. It is understandable to state that if a job would be productively performed online has more to do with the tasks it is composed by and not by its job title itself. In the case of finance, for instance, it can be seen an overlap between the relevance and percentage of activities that can be successfully performed online and the tasks which constitute the core aspect of the job. If a job requires the employee to spend most of the time performing this type of activities, it is reasonable to say that it will be easier to shift to online operations if compared to fields in which the work performed in person brings much more benefits and has more operative value than the other tasks that could still be carried out online.

Along with travel, insurance results to be the sector that saw the lowest growth during COVID-19 crisis in Europe[79]. This is not an easily foreseeable outcome, knowing that the insurance filed is judged to be one of the industries with highest potential in shifting to remote work. McKinsey made research on the case and found out that out of more than 2000 firms, three-quarters of the time spent on tasks belonging to the field of finance and insurance can be spent pursuing the same results working online, without losing productivity in respect to working in person[80]. It seems like these findings were actually

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[78]LUND, S., *What's next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries*, 2020, http://thebusinessleadership.academy/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MGI-Whats-next-for-remote-work-v3.pdf, 12-05-2022

[79] FERNANDEZ, S., *Europe's digital migration during COVID-19: Getting past the broad trends and averages,* 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/mckinsey%20digital/our%20insights/europes%20digital%20migration%20during%20covid%2019/europes-digital-migration-during-covid-19.pdf, 25-04-2022

[80] WELCHMAN, T., GORAN, J., *Why insurers should embrace remote work*, 2021, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/insurance-blog/why-insurers-should-embrace-remote-work, 26-04-2022

influenced by the fact that a large share of this particular industry operates in advanced economies; what it is interesting is that this sector, contrary to what could be commonly led to believe, has to still to undergo some great digital transformation, especially as long as it concerns the talent acquisition processes and pipelines. So once again it is possible to have an insight on how human resources management processes can be key to success even in fields of operation in which they might be mistaken for something more marginal. The reason, as already mentioned in the first chapter, lies in the fact that when making the recruiting processes an online activity, the firm is freer to take resources independently from where the headquarter is located, so the talent pool from which pick the human resources at stake is indeed larger and ideally unlimited from a geographic point of view. So, the recommendation the experts have put out is to always look for the most qualified candidate, not limiting themselves to a restrain to a specific local area, and also to try and increase the number of employees who work online. These outcomes were made possible to explore right after the COVID-19 outbreak, during which insurers have demonstrated being able to provide the same services as before, but on an online setting, productively working in teams as before and efficiently handling the advice and routine claims management activities from home. The consequences of these findings are also linkable to the training part of human resources policies implementation, because it is needless to say that a shift to online working setting cannot be separated from a need for improvement in the technological skills in the sector, even considered that it is estimated that the demand for higher digital capabilities will increase 55% by 2030. The solution of hybrid work of course does not come without limitations: the biggest challenge perceived, in this case related to the insurance sector, is the difficulty in creating a cohesive culture within the enterprise, especially when the human resource selected operates from another Country; in this case the weight of being distant might play a negative role in the equation.

Other factors to keep in mind are always related to local-specific characteristics of the Country in which the headquarter is located. In Italy, the insurance sector was impacted by the pandemic either in terms of results (it has to be noted that people travelled significatively less, so the demand for insurances dropped), and also in terms of working organization. Research shows that in Italy the shift to remote work was seen as a more complicated step if compared to other Countries, because Italian firms were not ready to see their workers keep carrying out the activities from home, not having considered the option of hybrid work up until the crisis[81]. Another reason for this difficulty is traceable

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[81] CHRISTMAN, G., *Communication Strategies to Enhance Productivity for Virtual Advertising Account Executives*, 2022

back to the fact that the face-to-face contact is considered a crucial part in the information exchange process with the client. As a practical implementation of COVID-19 related change of policies, Italian firms did not refrain from still physically showing up to work in order to assist clients: the difference was that the organization of the work followed a rotational structure, making 50% of the regular employees keep operating on site, so it can be said that remote work was not fully implemented, it happened only partially. Another aspect that cannot be overlooked is the fact that in Italy a lot of workers in the sector of insurance are not direct employees but work as independent consultant, meaning that they have a lot more freedom and flexibility in relation to setting choices and time management preferences. The situation changes a bit when another context is considered: the same researchers focused also on the Switzerland in the same industry. The main difference is already noticeable when the premises to lockdown are considered; in fact, 24% of the employees with managerial responsibility had already experienced working from home once in a while, so there was familiarity with technological assets necessary to shift to a fully remote mode and no particular adaptation was required to workers for implementing this policy. The results show that most of the managers taking part to the interview sis not encountered issue in supervising their teams from a distance, and only 13% of them stated that there have been some problems. More than 50% of the managers also stated that they have been noticing higher levels of individual productivity in their subordinates; as long as it concerns the negative sides, 15% encountered communication issues and 20% thought that their ongoing projects were negatively impacted by the shift. Either way, the overall judgement of the people participating to the study was positive and they seemed to be wanting to keep some sort of flexibility in terms of time and place inside the organization. To summarize, it is correct to state that Switzerland insurance companies would be ready to implement a hybrid work model which is comprehend one or two days per week of work from home in order to properly meet employees' needs and well as clients' and overall business needs. Along with that, a policy stating clearly how the whole process would be handled is considered essential to prevent misunderstandings from occur.

When we move to the other end of the spectrum, we find those activities which make a job impossible if unbundled from its on-site context, or which suffer from a consistent loss in productivity. This is the case of what was already analyzed when referring to the primary and secondary sector, so when are required tasks which include controlling machines or equipment, handling objects, assisting and caring for others, measuring products or surroundings. Even when it is considered the sales field, the marketing online activities and campaign can be easily programmed off-site, but there is a huge

component of the operative tasks that would get lost in the process: for example, direct marketing activities are impossible to perform online, such as the physical distribution of samples.

Even when considering a unitary sector, there are some important differences in the way some jobs could work online better as compared to other. Among healthcare occupations, a surgeon would obviously be unable to operate, while x-ray technicians would be refrained from working online because of the intrinsic nature of their job, of having to handle specific machinery. Overall, the effective remote work potential found in the health professional sector is only 11%. It is still possible to see some effectiveness when the job at stake includes communications activities towards the patient that can be carried out without the premise of being present in person. It is also true that the COVID-19 outbreak not only meant some huge changes in the way hospital were operating, but even triggered the conversion of some of the on-site care activities to telemedicine, which seems to be a novelty here to stay even after the crisis[82]. Telehealth can easily include communication technology in its processes, but here arise some subject-specific issues, in particular related to the matter of privacy, reimbursement and other factors. What once again can be worth noticing is the core issue of the coordination of teams: this research has already shown how is one of the crucial variables to manage in finance, retail and many more industries, and telemedicine appears to make no exception. In fact, telemedicine can be defined as a coordinated team effort that involves secretaries and administrative staff, besides urologists, nurses and specialized personnel. What cannot miss is also the coordination with other laboratories and IT technicians, so there is a concrete need for integration between the different operative units of the system. This means that even the aspect of communication process has to be carefully managed, because it is crucial for it to be continuous and fast. In telemedicine, it is not only important so shift to online applications such as Zoom, Hangouts and Skype, but there is also a need for more complex databases for patient follow-up tasks, which have to be available and result updated for every member of the team. When working from home, healthcare workers must still follow rigid patient agendas, therefore their behavior has necessarily show an high level of self-discipline and ability to organize, treating the client in the same way he or she is expected to be treated in a face to face setting. The aspect of continuous training is very relevant for the sector: virtual platforms can come into play as a sharing knowledge key point, as even specific medicine-related platforms have been created in order to organize webinars, meetings and virtual congresses, in a way which

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[82] RODRIGUEZ, M., *Telemedicine and Smart Working: Recommendations of the European Association of Urology*, 2020, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32654801/, 28-04-2022

is respectful of the privacy regulations issued by EU (examples of them are LogMeIn, GoToWebinar and GoToTraining). From the result obtained thank to the help of The Academic Life in Emergency Medicine organization, which is specialized in high-level remote work, working from home can offer some great improvements even in the field of academic medicine [83]. The most productive habits in producing benefits can be summarized in five activities, which are: improving project collaboration, creating virtual meetings, fostering digital mentorship, forming virtual communities of practice and advancing online learning. From a psychological point of view, instead, the same group of researchers found out that it is true that dismantling the traditional, rigidly structured hierarchical teams, in favor of a more flexible and informal environment can foster the sense of safety perceived by the individuals, which directly translates into more positive effects in the work context, since it is easier for each employee to express honest feedbacks. When considering the possible downsides of this new way of working, it emerges that it can be challenging for leaders to keep under control a successful team culture in a less stable environment; other than that, it has been undelighted how online work can look different for each team, because every team is unique and respondent to complex dynamics that involve the entire organization at stake, first of all the organizational culture. The online newspaper Forbes offered some insight on how the shift to remote work can successfully be implemented in the sector of healthcare: the first rule being identify which are the activities that can be carried out online[84]. It reported the case of the firm AltaMed, a company which made a shift to hybrid work by making more than 1.000 employees move to remote work, with them being medical managers, HR, IT, compliance, and call center operators. Linked to the importance of having clear communication practices established, there should be a habit of spelling out what are the expectations and the changes in terms of responsibilities when the shift happens, because there might be long time employees which could not get the meaning of working online, misunderstanding the right behavior request and the appropriate etiquette. Then there is another specifically field tied issue, which was already anticipated before: the right management of privacy policies and security. Employees must keep in mind that even is the online context comes along with less tight hierarchical structure, there are still confidential personal data at stake: it is necessary to address proactively the HIPAA privacy threats. A VPN could also come handy as operative tool for gaining more security

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[83]HE, S., *Remote e-Work and Distance Learning for Academic Medicine: Best Practices and Opportunities for the Future*, 2020, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7301927/, 28-04-2022

[84] KUPIETZKY, J., *Embracing Remote Work In Healthcare Organizations,* 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/02/07/embracing-remote-work-in-healthcare-organizations/?sh=67db4dee7938, 28-04-2022

coverage, but even without the help of technology the processes linked to the transfer of confidential information must be reformulated in a way that works in the online context. The sector of healthcare is another one in which it is easy to experience overworking: on the long run, remote work might cause employees to feel the need of being ever present, especially when considering that a lot of companies tend to use more informal channels of communication such as WhatsApp for the work-related information exchange, a tool definitely more personal and pervasive than e-mails[85]. Despite this bad practice, it is still possible to use hybrid work as a way of reducing the pressure experienced by medical staff. The benefits that come along with this choice comprehend the cost effectiveness aspect, since even not having to pay for the parking fees let the workers feel more relieved, together with the relaxation that comes from not working - for those whose tasks must be performed on site- in a physical space which is not overcrowded.

The COVID-19 outbreak was also responsible for the great shift to full-time remote work even in the field of information technology. It has to be noted that this was not the first time that work from home was exploited for carrying out work activities in the sector: many companies had already experienced hybrid forms of work, so the change of setting was not a big, impactful novelty. Nevertheless, it still meant that in-person communication was almost completely erased. It would be easy to imagine that the most natural change in terms of behavior would be to rely on synchronous communication for the transmission of information, such as videocalls and online meeting. Apparently, this was not the case for many IT American firms: as research shows, it was found that while working from home employees would rather choose to communicate using more asynchronous tools, like emails[86]. Therefore, employees spent less time in meetings, focused more on the pre-existing, stronger ties and showing a pattern of communication that was less stable than before. The study analyzed a sample containing all US Microsoft workers, except for those who were employed in senior roles or members of group whose data were particularly sensitive; by 1 April 2020, all non-essential workers belonging to the company were working from home full-time. Results have shown that work from home made the network of employees inside the enterprise more fragmented and made every fragment more solid as a group, so the pre-existing ties among people were strengthened, at the expense of the less strong ones. This is important to be noted, because it reveals that even if it is noticeable an improvement in terms of productivity

[85] ARIS, C., *A remote future for healthcare*, 2021, https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/future-remote-or-hybrid-working-healthcare/122531/, 28-04-2022
[86] YANG, L., *The effects of remote work on collaboration among information workers*, 2022, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-021-01196-4, 28-04-2022

inside one cluster of people inside of the company, the ties connecting a part of the human resources at stake to another go through some issue with the shift to remote work. Therefore, before making a choice this impactful, it might be useful, as an organization, to have clear in mind what are the essential ties the company needs for carrying out the activities in a productive way even when the whole setting becomes something different from the usual, physically close one. Are there any of them that can be sacrificed for the sake of hybrid work? Is it a key point to be considered when creating a hybrid work model fitting to the needs of the company?

The results do not stop here, since there are some more findings coming from the Microsoft experiment. It has already been discussed how the shift to remote work has a significant impact on the work life balance and how the lines defining working time window and personal life tend to become more blurred, which can translate into more working hours than usual. It can be argued that an increase in working hours might be the symptom of the less productiveness and efficiency displayed by the workers, or it might just mean that the boundaries became so blurred that people started working in the spare time out of boredom, for substituting the time spared not commuting or for some other reasons, such as being interrupted during work so often that they had to extend the time limit to get tasks accomplished. What is sure is that data shows that, while work related synchronous collaboration tools suffered a decrease in popularity as way to communicate between employees, there has been a significant increase in terms of use of asynchronous communication technology, like instant messages. Therefore, the shift to remote work carried along a shift in the communication pattern which is linked to a change in working time limits. These effects appeared to be heavier for managers and engineers, which experienced a greater increase in instant messages, emails sent and unscheduled online meetings hours. The reason for it stems from the fact that the job of managers has a stronger connection to communication tasks than others, given the fact that they have a role of support to the coordination of different areas. As regards to engineers, the increase in asynchronous communication tools usage is due to the fact that software development teams seem to rely heavily on informal communication, which might have taken place face to face before implementing remote work for everyone.

As regards to team performance, another post-pandemic research analyzed the difference in team cohesion and performance in the field of information technology, when working locally versus working remotely[87]. Once again, the role of instant massages, so

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[87]GRAHN, K., MARTINS, A., *Local and remote team cohesion effect on performance in the software industry*, 2021, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1572012/FULLTEXT01.pdf, 28-04-2022

asynchronous communication tool, impacted the results, showing that with the replacement of natural in person dialogue and the usage of chat as more prominent communication channel, the cohesion appeared to be strongly correlated with performance with teams working remotely, not locally. From a micro perspective, it is usual to perceive software engineers as introverted and generally not reliant on other people persons, therefore remote work might be an advantage for those who were more hesitant to communicate with others in real life, feeling freer to talk when using online tools. To summarize, it seems like there were not huge changes in the efficiency score of employees during the pandemic, since engineers did not experience a change in setting that was so relevant: the only noticeable thing was that both cohesion and efficiency had slightly higher variance during the pandemic. It can be concluded that cohesion is especially relevant when the teams at stake work remotely. Either way, it is still important to undelight that people still had to show flexibility in terms of the window of time in which they operated, having to work more some days to balance the days during which they had to work less; managers should make sure to check in the individual workers and make sure that leadership is positively executed in order to empower people psychologically, by trusting them to autonomously perform important work tasks.

It has already been pointed out that some of the activities belonging to the communication sector are not transferable to an online setting, due to their intrinsic nature (e.g., direct marketing activities), but there is still room for teleworkability when some other dimensions of the same job field are considered. Actually, McKinsey went to the point of considering the marketing and communication industry one of those which could possibly consider a shift to a fully virtual model of work, along with IT and software development firms[88]. Therefore, it is legit to think of this specific sector of the economy as a particularly good one for at least implementing hybrid work. To make an example, the famous social media company Reddit has switched to a permanent hybrid model already in October 2020 and its employees are free to work wherever they want, even in-office, if they prefer so[89]. This is also a field which was not new to the challenge of operating online: the consumers' habits have evolved through the years, and, especially after the pandemic, they got more and more comfortable with making their purchase choices entirely online. Advertisers and marketers did not waste the opportunity to try

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[88] ALEXANDER, A., *Reimagining the postpandemic workforce*, 2020, https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/reimagining-the-postpandemic-workforce, 28-04-2022

[89] SMITH, M., *Twitter, Reddit and 8 other companies offering permanent remote or hybrid work—and hiring right now*, 2022, https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/13/10-companies-that-switched-to-permanent-hybrid-or-remote-work-and-hiring-right-now.html, 28-04-2022

and shift more of their business operations online. For instance, e-mail marketing regained a big role in the strategic decisions belonging to some of the companies, being a key point in the growth of digital marketplace and also in the customer retention initiatives[90]. In the marketing industry, more than in other ones, what matters is the correct grasp of what is relevant at the present day that can be exploited for carrying out successful work-related campaigns. So, it is fundamental to understand how companies can still obtain positive outcomes from the implementation of their strategies while working from a distance, following a hybrid work model, and conciliating their internal and external approach. There is a trend for marketing agencies to let their staff manage campaigns, schedule posts and create content directly from home, supported by blossoming teams[91]. This is done with the help of specific digital tools: first of all, once again video conference platforms have to be mentioned, because they are the basis for running strategic meetings and presentations, fundamental for preserving the correct flow of information. In the second place, project management tools play here an essential role, since they are used to guarantee an alignment amongst the whole company, to make sure that the same goals are shared and clear for everyone. Other than these ones, there are still some useful tools that are usually used for the delegation of tasks and to promulgate the company culture. In the field of marketing and advertising professionals, being stuck at a desk for hours might result as less productive than being able to multitask and get some a part of the work done while taking part to an online meeting at the same time.

The pandemic induced work from home experiment has taught a valuable lesson for communication workers: the long-time meetings people were used to or even the taken for granted assumption that being in the same room as the others was a fundamental part of the communication exchange process, were not actually that much important for the delivery of the key points to share. In fact, marketing activities often requires creative solutions, which are graphically represented with the use of specific software and then shared on screen or with the help of collaborative documents; in this case it is easy to understand how the remote sharing of information comes handier than having to explain everything verbally in person. The same logic is applied when considering the communication process between the brands themselves and their customers, not only

[90] WOZNIAK, T., *Working From Home's Impact On Marketing Strategy And Messaging*, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2020/05/27/working-from-homes-impact-on-marketing-strategy-and-messaging/?sh=29178cfaa897, 28-04-2022
[91] NICKS, S., *What Has The Marketing Industry Learnt From Remote Working*, 2021, https://www.markletic.com/blog/what-has-the-marketing-industry-learnt-from-remote-working/, 28-04-2022

amongst employees' teams. Speaking of which, it is needless to say that communication skills are crucial when working for marketing agencies: the aim of employees is to deliver difficult concepts in a way which is simple and east to recall for the audience. This is an asset that must be exploited efficiently with the shift to remote work. What cannot be overlooked is also the economic aspect of the shift: different companies have based the decision to keep their worker working from a distance even after the pandemic also on this factor; to give an example of another social media company at stake, Mark Zuckerberg stated that he expects half of Facebook's employees to work remotely in the next 10 year, while Twitter itself gave the permission to his staff to stay at home permanently, since there is no particular need to keep operating on site[92].

Having to perform creative activities from home not only has positive aspects linked to the ease with which online sharing of information occur: the downside lies in the fact that the mental effort and concentration needed for the problem-solving skills required and for reasoning out of the box, can difficulty be achieved with all the distractions some people might find at home. To prevent issue from occur, some precautions should be taken into account: the first thing to do is to physically designate a specific area of the house dedicated to working activities, which in the best scenario should be separated from other areas from a shut door to keep the distractions away. Other than that, it is estimated for marketers to useful to schedule "deep work" sessions[93]. This means to make efforts in terms of working without interruptions of any kind, not only putting the mobile phone into "do not disturb" mode, avoiding e-mails, notifications, and calls, but also literally scheduling this type of sessions on the calendar. The aim is to let even co-workers and clients know that those time windows are reserved and cannot be used for other purposes. This operation should help the employees in sparking a bit of anxiety, since they know their job requires a high degree of team cooperation: letting other people know why and when alone time is needed helps every person involved show empathy and respect each other boundaries.

The tertiary sector also comprehends another industry that was not mentioned up to now: the real estate sector. In Europe, the housing market was experiencing a florid period before the starting of the outbreak. The peculiar nature of the COVID-19 crisis triggered a series of responses that had not been seen when crisis of the other nature occurred: this time a change in the monetary and fiscal policies carried along some consequences.

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[92] THOMPSON, D., *The Workforce Is About to Change Dramatically*, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/just-small-shift-remote-work-could-change-everything/614980/, 28-04-2022

The strong decline in mobility caused by the restrictive measure and social distancing had a negative impact on the house investments in Europe, registering a decrease of 3.1% in respect to 2019[94]. The real estate sector does not belong to one of those industries with a high rate of teleworkability; instead, according to McKinsey the rate of effective potential of time spent performing work remotely without suffering from productivity loss is about 32-44%[95]. Therefore, the real estate sector workers do not really qualify for the most advantaged ones when the shift to remote work occurred. Research analyzed the case of a real estate company operating in Poland after the consequential shift due the pandemic and interviewed the workers on how their working activities were affected. The result shows that during the two months taken into analysis the overall situation of the respondents have worsened in a significant way; especially as it concerns revenue, 59% of professional work decreased and it is also worth noticing that 85% of respondents put the blame of this decrease also in the problem of the lack of face to face meetings with clients, which normally plays a big role in persuading people to sign a contract. So, the most affected group of workers belonging to the field of real estate were real estate agents, property valuators and representatives of real estate developers who provide services to the residential market. Remote work mostly concerned those professionals who do not have a direct contact with potential clients, but rather are managers, analysts and those concerned with the training processes. Two thirds of the interviewed personnel also pointed out that the time spent working online was longer than the usual working shift, especially in the case of people concerned with the back-office activities, not in direct contact with the clients. Other than that, some critics were received in the matter of effectiveness perceived, since 44% of the respondents experienced a decrease in that sense. Nevertheless, the interviews made known that there was a general sense of skepticism in the way processes were handled because of the pandemic related restrictions, nor shifting all the working activities to an online setting could be perceived as a viable option. In fact, it is undeniable that the sector might exploit the positive aspects coming from remote work only to some extent. If anything, something that might really affect the way the real estate industry work, after the pandemic, are the remote shifts occurring in other companies: after the great migration to the online setting, it is estimated that the size of the typical office might come down by 30-50%. On the contrary, for residential space, people might start asking for

[94] BATTISTINI, N., *The euro area housing market during the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2021, https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/articles/2021/html/ecb.ebart202107_03~36493e7b67.en.html, 29-04-2022
[95] MANYIKA, J., *What's next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries2020*, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/whats-next-for-remote-work-an-analysis-of-2000-tasks-800-jobs-and-nine-countries, 12-05-2022

properties which include home offices or a space for co-working setup. Real estate firms should look carefully at these trends and adapt to the consumers' behavior shift in order to provide innovative, sellable solutions[96].

Going back to the analysis of what the pandemic repercussions were on the various sectors of the economy in Europe, it must be said that the hospitality sector was deeply affected by the outbreak. In particular, the Hotel-Restaurant-Cafè (HORECA) sub-sector suffered the pandemic's consequences the most, because most hotels, bars and restaurants were forced to stay closed during the first two waves of the outbreak. Besides, in 2020 31% of the revenues in culture and creative industries were lost because of the COVID-19 situation; sub-sectors of tourism and such as performing arts and music event had also to suffer from a major drop in revenue[97]. Eurostat also shows that travel agencies and tour operators had to experience great losses in every Member State of the European Union: the drop in overall turnover was 71% in 2020.

So, there is no doubt that the coronavirus has led companies to change the way they operate, in order to survive the crisis. Taking into account again the concept of teleworkabilty, even in the hospitality sector there are some tasks that cannot be translated to an online setting, once again the once who are strictly related to direct interaction with people or machinery (in this case the activities of front desk and housekeeping can be considered). The situation is quite similar to the real estate sector one, the peculiarity of the field does not allow a complete shift to remote work, but there are still some opportunities that may be grasped to make the business grow, as an indirect consequence of other jobs becoming remote. For instance, the concept of "workation", so, working remotely from a touristic locality, have become a popular one in these years[98]. Therefore, people have started combining work and vacations more and more, taking extended period of times in more pleasant locations to balance the work related fatigue: they basically become a new customer target for the hospitality industry. A recent poll taken in the US has shown that almost 70% of people interviewed took a workcation and more than 90% of them were planning on taking in 2022[99]. Hotel chains

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[96] SHARAN, *Impact of remote work on the real estate industry*, 2022, https://www.wishup.co/blog/impact-of-remote-work-on-the-real-estate-industry/, 29-04-2022
[97] EUROPEAN PALIAMENT*, Relaunching transport and tourism in the EU after COVID-19*, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/690884/IPOL_STU(2021)690884_EN.pdf, 29-04-2022
[98] CAGNAZZO, S., *Workation, così gli smart worker italiani lavorano da remoto in vacanza*, 2022, https://www.repubblica.it/economia/rapporti/osserva-italia/trend/2022/03/15/news/workation_lavorare_da_remoto_in_vacanza-341454364/, 29-04-2022
[99] LAMBA, M., MOHAN, D.*, Remote Work Creating Opportunities for the Hospitality Industry*, 2022, https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4109861.html, 29-04-2022

should evolve in this sense and offer special packages for remote workers, on the basis of the length of their stay. Another input is given by the option of offering co-working spaces: the hotel companies have started offering hotel rooms converted into private offices or even reserved floors and area of the structure.

It is not possible to forget that COVID-19 crisis constituted a challenge not only for private companies, but also from the point of view of Governments and not only from a legal perspective (which was already discussed in the first chapter of the paper). The OECD, the European Commission, and 12 EU Member states (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain) have worked on a joint project to make the resilience of the public sector in EU Member States stronger, by using the Common Assessment Framework model (CAF)[100]. From the results obtained through the questionnaire, the priority of respondent organizations have seen a shift: while digitalization has remained a fundamental goal to achieve, workforce management and remote working have emerged as key point to get to as soon as possible. Different criteria were found to make sure that the challenges presented by the crisis could be overcame: leadership, strategy and planning, people, partnership and resources and finally, processes. In relation to leadership, the main issue across European public administrations was actually being able to provide safety and right working conditions to the employees; not less importantly it was also key to keep the staff motivated and less resistant to the new way of working. Basically, the leadership aspect had to be cured in order to keep the employees' moral up and help them in being more flexible. As regards to strategy and planning, most part of the people interviewed stated that they have felt unprepared and lacked the fundamental tools for overcoming the crisis. The most difficult part was to organize the workforce management and choosing new strategies and plans, since the uncertainty factor was so impacting. The people criterion refers to the issue encountered by worker themselves when having to shift to remote work, because many of them physically lacked the technological tools to cope with the job requirements. It was most definitely the most affected category inside the firm, yet it is noticeable the one that the showed ability to adapt to the new practices the most. The confirm of this mental shift is to be found in the fact that people adapted so well that now many organizations have decided to keep a hybrid work model for managing employees' work shifts. As for the partnerships and resources criterion, during the pandemic the ability to reach out to strategic partners was limited, so many

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[100] EIPA, *Building a resilient public sector with CAF: Lessons learned from the Covid-19 crisis*, 2022, https://www.eipa.eu/blog/building-a-resilient-public-sector-with-caf-lessons-learned-from-the-covid-19-crisis/, 29-04-2022

organizations felt stuck in the impossibility to create new ties or bonding with other external stakeholders; only one-thirds of the interviewed said that they had no trouble at all in creating new link. Lastly, many internal processes were affected by the crisis, especially when it comes to those in need of digitalization (for instance, human resources management department, IT and communication); the processes had to be turned to digital in order to guarantee the correct flow of information.

Having pointed out that individuals were the most affect operative engine of the working organization, it is useful to linger on the effect that the shift to remote work has caused them, especially from a psychological point of view. There is a recent study made in the Italian Public Administration, which analyzed the answers of a total of 1550 respondents[101]. The results were consistent with what was already found through research made in the private sector: the respondents were mostly satisfied with the effect remote work had on the work-life balance, even if women generally suffered more a bad balance between personal and professional life. The most important finding is the fact that the Italian Public Administration structure results to be in contrast with the characteristics which are proper of remote work, so a higher level of flexibility and autonomy. Usually, the public administration field is not seen as a one characterized by fast processes and prone to quick change: it is actually a sector which normally does not show flexibility and has a specific issue of over-bureaucracy that has the outcome of producing negative job demand. Since remote work is proven to produce more balance between personal life and work and also give more autonomy to people working from home (causing positive effects on the wellbeing of employees), a great shift to online work in the public administration field could help the sector become more attractive to talents.

Another Austrian study was based on 40 interviews with employees from two different public sector organizations and analyzed the effect remote work had on organizational and digital culture[102]. First of all, the employees noticed that remote work had an influence on team cohesion and collaboration: it seems like digital teams were considered as showing more positive characteristics such as productivity, innovation, flexibility and a better way to organize. To be more specific, different workers noticed

[101]LOMBARDO, L., *The Impacts of Remote working on employees' psychological wellbeing: an Empirical Study of the Italian Public Administration*, 2021 , https://www.politesi.polimi.it/bitstream/10589/183474/3/TesiLombardo_Finale.pdf, 29-04-2022
[102]EDELMANN, N*., Remote Work in Public Sector Organizations: Employees' Experiences in a Pandemic Context,* 2021, https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3463677.3463725?casa_token=vXXs8J-8AHQAAAAA:yw9eD7ws6yy5FuLLRzYlRHEh53Lu4dy2eTTYhXS-c7oJ6vWsAacy5WaMIYQAKyAEafmf5uE4NRQ, 30-04-2022

that working in digital teams allowed them to be faster, with a decrease in the excess of e-mails flow. On the other hand, people also did not miss out on the fact that co-workers are more prone to pay less attention when others are speaking during online meetings; it was also undeniable that in person contact with colleagues was a part that people missed while working remotely. From a management point of view, things did not seem to be easier with the online shift, and even quite exhausting when the hybrid, mixed model was applied. Conflicts were more likely to arise, since people present on the physical work site had the perception that they had a burden of work bigger than the others. People working from home, instead, had often the feeling of being overloaded, mostly because of a loss of information during the communication processes, which lead to a situation of more fragmented teams. Even considering the undeniable downsides characterizing remote work, the research found that in both the public organizations analyzed, people still expressed the wish for its continuation. Of course, in order to obtain the most from the experience, it is important to learn from the shortcomings encountered during the crisis: it is crucial to have a stronger structure, better communication, more transparency and faster decision-making processes. Managers should be key persons even in the public organizations, stating clearly rules, common deadlines and obligations, while at the same time make sure the teams themselves keep the same level of transparency.

Lastly, there is still one sector which is useful to put into relation to the variable of hybrid work: the education sector. Teachers and people working in the education field were not excluded from having to perform their job tasks online, as the Governments were trying to find ways to contain the spread of the coronavirus. Educators were deeply affected from the shift to remote work, to the point that research have found that teachers experience burnout almost twice as other government employees[103]. The web is full of testimonies coming from teachers that, during lockdown, had to suffer from very extended working shifts, sometimes being even forced to record instructional videos for people learning from a distance, replicating the in-person lessons. An extensive number of interviews demonstrated that educators have faced huge challenges in trying to keep up with the requirements of online working, feeling intense exhaustion[104]. Most importantly, a survey conducted by the US National Education Association registered that 55% of veteran teachers with more than 30 years of experience were starting to

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[103] PERNA, M., *Why Education Is About To Reach A Crisis Of Epic Proportions*, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2022/01/04/why-education-is-about-to-reach-a-crisis-of-epic-proportions/?sh=6679443178c7, 30-04-2022

[104] SINGER, N., *Teaching in the Pandemic: 'This Is Not Sustainable'*, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/30/us/teachers-remote-learning-burnout.html, 30-04-2022

consider resigning, a warning sign not to underestimate, especially during what it has been defined the Great Resignation Era. As regards to the matter of motivation and productivity of employees in education, a Dutch study analyzed the situation of 623 of them, focusing on the relations between a series of factors such as perceived competence, autonomy, motivation, and productivity during the Spring of 2020[105]. The results gathered have shown that being forced to work from remote has had some negative consequences for the people involved in the interviews: as a first signal of worsened working conditions, even though employees admit to have experienced slight increases in competence, autonomy and confidence that they could handle the challenges emerging from the situation, they still suffered from an evident decrease in perceived relatedness, intrinsic motivation e productivity. Not only that, the perception of being part of a team is lessen, while employees admit to enjoy their work less. The explanation is to be found in the fact that in normal conditions, the direct contact with the students is a key part of the job. The education, in fact, comes not only from a series of notions being verbally communicated, but also from the social interaction between students and educators.

A similar study was conducted in Latvia, focusing on the motivation aspect of employees of educational institutions working from home during COVID-19 crisis[106]. It has to be premised that motivation to work can be defined as a personal desire to be part of a structured employment in exchange for a set of outcomes, which normally are remuneration, career development etc. Younger people are normally attracted and motivated by the possibility to see career growth and money, while aging it is usual to lean towards social and security motives. It is important to also notice that the pandemic had a negative impact on people's personal security and has enhanced the stress and anxiety levels. This was particularly impacting on the wellbeing of personnel, because, as results show, the most important motivation tool is social guarantee, other than stable, secure work. According to respondents, the main challenge during remote work was the lack of communication and socialization. This is not a new theme, this paper has already explored how the sense of loneliness induced by working online and diminished communication possibilities affect people working almost in any sector. It is fair to say that being people social animals, independently from the type of job they choose, the

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[105] RIETVELD, J., *Motivation and Productivity of Employees in Higher Education during the First Lockdown*, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357224605_Motivation_and_Productivity_of_Employees_in_Higher_Education_during_the_First_Lockdown, 30-04-2022
[106] ROZENTALE, S., *Motivation and Challenges of Teleworking Employees of Educational Institutions in Latvia During COVID-19*, https://sciendo.com/it/article/10.2478/jtes-2021-0020, 30-04-2022

intrinsic nature of them suffers some sort of impact, when the socialization possibilities diminish. The trouble encountered in the communication processes are a direct consequence of this lacking. The second biggest impact factor is the unregulated work regime, meaning that educators have experienced, more than it happened in other sectors, less time to be dedicated to family and children, hobbies and entertainment; they also often had to personally purchase the equipment need to carry out their responsibilities. This aspect is linked to the matter of how to handle remote working from an human resources management point of view, when it comes to deciding whether or not make the organization in charge of the equipment people will use during remote work. It is not unusual to see companies list, among all the benefits offered, a personal computer offered by the firm and other required tools. In case of the education sector is much less likeably to see such opportunity: In fact, data gathered has shown that the employer often did not provide a pc, a desk and a computer chair when needed. While only 16% of remote employees belonging to other sectors stated that they had felt stress and anxiety, in the education sector the percentage goes up to 28%. Drawing a conclusion, the overall experience of educator was negative even in this case, and there is a lot that employers can learn from past mistakes. For instance, they should be more present in offering moral support and physical one to the educators, by proving the needed tools for working remotely in the most efficient way. Secondly, the normal physical interaction with co-workers and students, which is indeed a motivating factor for employees and a way of starting creative discussions, could be recreated making specific events or meeting, but also keeping in mind that research shows that in order for online meeting to be productive and not harmful on the personal wellbeing, they should have a length or circa an hour or less[107], so that the weight on work-life balance is limited.

Nevertheless, McKinsey[108] survey has included remote education among those working sectors which will definitely decrease after the end of the pandemic: this seems to be the case of consumer behavior going back to where it was before the huge change linked to the pandemic occurred. It is likely to imagine a future education industry in which software are more productively and efficiently exploited, given what teachers had to learn when they had to move online, in a way which is positive for developing the skills of the

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[107] KERSHAW, M., LUPIEN, S., SCHEID, J., Impact of Web-Based Meeting Platform Usage on Overall Well-Being among Higher Education Employees, 2021, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34708822/, 03-05-2022
[108] LUND, S., *What's next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries*, 2020, http://thebusinessleadership.academy/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MGI-Whats-next-for-remote-work-v3.pdf, 12-05-2022

students. Yet, the core activities that design the educator job, even though they can still be performed online, are too much subject to the effects of losing interaction in real life, therefore shifting to a full online setting in most cases is not advisable.

2.2 Examples belonging to the Chinese context

Now that a wide variety of cases of shift to remote work after the COVID-19 crisis (most of which belonging to the European background) has been explored, it is time to add another variable to the complexity of factors to keep in mind when deciding to implement or not a hybrid work model. It is well known that the culture in which a company is immersed has a major weight on the way policies are chosen to be implemented and the effects they have on the personnel. Therefore, taking a closer look on how Chinese companies have handled the shift to remote work required by the emergency can give some more insight on what have worked for them, what did not and what could be potentially adapted by Western companies, in a global mindset fashion.

From a people-oriented perspective, there is an extensive literature underlining the fact that employees' expectations, behavior, and performance may be different as we move to one culture to another[109]. These differences are reflected in how companies are structured and managed. To make a practical example, Chinese firms tend to reflect the cultural weight of the informal ties that link people, the so called guanxi, in way that they can help getting a career advancement; Chinese enterprises are also more paternalistic, collectivistic, and highly value a higher degree of power distance. Other than that, there is still an important weight that the Confucian set of values plays in the whole organizational culture: for instance, these values are linked to the concept of obedience, the respect of authority and loyalty.

It is important, for the sake of this research, to linger on the peculiarity of the Chinese approach to management. Chinese companies had to overcome 30 turbulent years of management, being forced to operate in a constantly changing environment. The environment in which a firm operates also affect it in the way it "learns" to operate: being China not a stable market, companies have developed in a way that their management system is tendentially loosely structured, in which nee information are processed quickly

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[109] LOK, P., CRAWFORD, J., *The effect of organizational culture and leadership style on job satisfaction and organizational commitment: A cross-national compariso*n, 2004, https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/02621710410529785/full/pdf?casa_token =iI5OWZb3TBoAAAAA:e-86RXa98cLgxz1csrtme-QFD6R3mxpFAkh4UlqbEtS-Kkb2oMT45pTFFkBSFnBnuPUlbDvJst9l9D4ikBZG6VjPs8tVBsk_z04t-B3UV6M68cjSeA , 03-05-2022

and managers are able to act in an independent fashion[110]. The trend that years of research in the field have found is that the way people are managed is also very different in China; by linking again the concept of guanxi to the value of interpersonal relationships, Chinese leaders tend to act as if the member of their organization are also members of their family, even in the sense of having higher standards in what is demanded from them. As long as it concerns the organizational structure, Chinese managers and leaders usually have a preference for keeping things simple, relying more than often on the singular autonomy of a business unit. Generally speaking, Western companies tend to rely more on a structure which guarantees multiple reporting lines, in order to avoid more risks; China, on the other end, seems to be more focused on pursuing growth at any cost and on pushing hard in order to get to rapid expansion, even if this means to improvise or create disruption[111]. The work ethic has also changed a lot throughout the years and a specific study has found that there has been a decline in this sense[112]. In 2018 it was registered that people are now not so much interested in showing loyalty towards the firm, if that does not translate into an equivalent exchange of making money for their own benefits rather than doing it just for the sake of showing devotion. This phenomenon was called by some researcher as "emphasis on material values" or "egoistic materialism", indicating that now even Chinese people value their individual needs and interests more than rigidly abide by ancient Confucian values, and worship of money have played a significant role in this.

This has some interesting implications when these findings are put in relations to the overall shift to remote work and the strong link it has with the consequences on workers' work life balance. Although different studies have analyzed the impact of remote working on work-family relationships based on different theories and perspectives, the essence is that the boundaries between work and life are blurred, and the infiltration between work and family affairs always occur when working from home. A recent Chinese paper has focused on studying the impact of telecommuting on employees' work-family relationship in terms of boundaries. Everyone has different perceptions of how much these boundaries can stretch, which results in different results of work-to-home contaminations[113]. Employees' cognition and regulation of their own behaviors, thoughts,

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[110] HOUT, T., MICHEAL, D., *A Chinese Approach to Management*, 2014, https://hbr.org/2014/09/a-chinese-approach-to-management, 03-05-2022
[111] ibidem
[112] CAO, Z., HILL, R., *Work Ethic in China Changes over Time from 2004 to 2018*, 2019, https://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/journal/paperinfo?journalid=372&doi=10.11648/j.ijvetr. 20190501.12, 03-05-2022
[113] LI Yahui 李亚慧, 远程办公与自我认知对员工工作家庭关系的影响研究, 2022

emotions, and cognitions affect their own behaviors. Therefore, it has to be noted that the impact of telecommuting on work-family relationships is not only related to a matter of boundaries, but it is also related to employees' self-cognition: in social cognitive theory it mainly refers to the individual's cognition and regulation of self-aspects such as behavior, thought, emotion, cognition and personality characteristics. This is interesting because, from a human resources management point of view, it is also useful to keep in mind that, from a smaller perspective, the human resources are, indeed, human and the individual characteristics of each worker cannot be overlooked when deciding how to apply remote work. The same logic should also be followed when there is a group of people that are proved to share similar characteristics (e.g. a specific trend in this sense was seen when analyzing the behavior or IT workers during the shift to a fully remote setting). Other than this important insight, the paper has left the readers with an analysis of 406 Chinese employees' answers in relation to the experience of working from home, coming to the main conclusions that telecommuting affects work-family relationship as follows: the contamination of personal boundaries plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between telecommuting and employees' work-family relationship, while self-cognition negatively impacts work life balance. In response to these findings, companies and employees should take reasonable measures to improve the impact of telecommuting on work-family relationships. The human resources department of the enterprise should regularly hold remote office online communication and sharing meetings to establish a timely and effective communication mechanism to relieve employees' negative emotions and pressure. The second is that firm managers should clearly define problems and allocate resources reasonably, thereby reducing the ambiguity and uncertainty of management work, also reducing the possibility of employees' work infiltrating their families, timely understanding of employees' work status and finding problems in order to solve them in time. The third is that employees should set appropriate "boundaries" at home, physical boundaries and psychological boundaries, to reduce the probability of mutual interference between work and family, thereby increasing productivity and reducing conflicts.

The question of "what it's like to work from home" has also sparked discussions on the Chinese social networks: an institution collected 2,402 Weibo posts on the topic of "Working from home" through the "Weibo" platform, and found that people's feelings about working from home mainly included experiencing a lot of additional difficulties, more overall tiredness, being busy, sometimes free, bored, sleepy, and anxious; among them, most keywords convey negative feelings or emotions. Similarly, on Zhihu, China's largest Internet question-and-answer platform, the question "Why do I feel that working

from home is more tiring than going to a company" was widely discussed, with more than 400 netizens responding to related questions. This goes against what Chinese scholars had tried to demonstrate in the past; in fact, they mainly regarded "working from home" as a "good thing", which is also in contrast with the findings of most Western studies. Numerous Chinese studies have shown that compared with the traditional office model, remote workers experience no commuting pressure and have more work autonomy, so they can have higher work-life quality and job satisfaction. The negative feedback from Chinese workers on the home office model that can be found online make it blatant that it is necessary to shift focus on the impact of home office from the mainstream "positive" to "negative", in order to understand and evaluate this new office model more comprehensively. Even in this case the boundary theory can be useful in analyzed the effect of working from home on Chinese employees: this theory asserts that there are three main types of boundaries between different domains, which are th physical ones, temporal ones, and psychological ones. In the traditional model, generally speaking, the physical boundary of the work field is the door of the office, the time boundary is the time point specified by the commute system, and the psychological boundary is the transition point from the work mood or state required by a certain organization. After working from home, all three types of boundaries in the field of work have changed, resulting in changes in the relationship between work and other fields. This means that, based on boundary theory, changes in boundary relationships can be used to explain the newly added negative feelings of people working from home. Under the home office mode, the fields with interaction with the work field are mainly the home field and the leisure field. In the traditional office work mode, the physical, temporal and psychological boundaries of the work-family field are relatively clear, and the two are in a high degree of separation, which ensures that workers can properly deal with each other without interfering with each other tasks in the current field. As the workplace shifts from the office to the home, the problem arises.

First of all, the fusion of work and home domains on the physical boundary carries some crucial consequences. Independent and quiet office space, suitable room temperature, comfortable office desks and chairs, necessary electronic equipment, high-speed network connection, etc. are all objective requirements to ensure the work efficiency of employees, but, from a practical point of view, many home office workers do not have a suitable office environment. According to an online office survey, 40.9% of homeworkers work on sofas and 26.2% work on beds[114]. Such a working environment inevitably affects

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[114] ibidem

the work efficiency and mental state of homeworkers in a negative way. This is actually an interesting matter, because research has shown that in terms of function, the small and medium-sized residential units, which are the most popular type of accommodation in China, basically meet the needs of residential functions, but generally lack office and study space, with the consequence that during the stay-at-home period of the epidemic, people's demand for office space has become increasingly prominent[115]. The existing home office mode can be summarized into two categories: independent office and hybrid office mode. The independent office mode indicates the office space as in independent space, and it does not interfere with the living space in use. Thene there is the mixed office solution, which refers to the combination of office space and indoor main functional space. Some practical suggestions for Chinese people to handle an independent office space were to use furniture as an important means to create an office space. As the main body of the space, in addition to the functions of storage and decoration, furniture also plays an important role in the separation of space and the creation of functional space. In these times, with the spread of the need for designing spaces in a variable way and the concept of sustainability, the demand for flexibility and variability, functionality and practicality of furniture has become more and more unified. Other than that, the research suggests different ways for creating an office space even when the worker is not provided with a dedicated room, which are: 1) adding a countertop, which can be arranged in various functional spaces as needed, and has the advantages of strong operability, convenience and speed; 2) placing equipment with high integration, strong space saving, flexible movement and assembly them without affecting the original use space, such as open and close office cabinets which, when not in use, remain closed and neither affects the use of the apartment space, but also provides users with a relatively independent office environment; 3) creating an adaptable residential plan, which increase the adaptability of residential space. Overall, it can be stated that the more flexible the structure of the residential space, the better it can meet people's needs. Therefore, employees might keep in mind these practical solutions when they feel like their physical boundaries have been compromised while working.

But the issue with the physical boundaries does not stop to the matter of home spaces not being available, but it extends to the point that when the workplace moves to the home, it also means that the advantage of traditional centralized office also disappears. The most frequently mentioned is the inefficiency of communication due to the inability to communicate with colleagues face-to-face. After all, in face-to-face communication, in

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[115] JIN Qiuye 金秋野, 中小户型住宅居家办公空间改造策略研究, 2022

addition to obtaining sound information, people can also capture other information such as the other party's look, posture and movement, which all ensure the efficiency of communication in most of the cases. On the other hand, although modern communication and network technology has seen a great improvement in the last years, the environment in which everyone lives is still different: any individual might for instance drop calls and hinder the continuity of collective communication. Another proved issue is the fact that the fusion of physical boundaries brings more domestic matters to the home office worker, which transforms the temporal boundary relationship in the work-home sphere into "home-invading work." There are two main types of these newly added family affairs. One is the labor that was originally solved by the company, such as cooking, cleaning of the workspace, with the shift to a remote location, it must be undertaken by individuals; this part of the family labor costs people a certain amount of time and energy, because for instance worker have no time at all to rest, spending even the breaks in labor activities such as cleaning the dishes. Second, as it was pointed out in many cases, there are the various household chores that are required to be undertaken because of being in the family space, such as cleaning the room, picking up couriers, feeding pets, taking care of children. It can be firmly stated that when the physical boundaries of the work-family field are merged, due to the absence of the work field boundary maintainers, the influence of the family boundary maintainers increases rapidly, and the family shows a state of strong boundaries and begins to influence the work field. The frequent invasion of time boundaries has a negative impact on the work efficiency and status of home workers. Thirdly, the increase in the frequency of family interaction requires homeworkers to frequently cross the boundary between work and family, which makes the psychological boundary between work and family blurred, making the boundary between the two fields falls into a state of fusion. Work and family often require people to be in completely different emotional states, but people are not able to frequently switch between work and home states. They do not have the possibility to choose to meet the emotional state requirements from one domain or another, but they are forced to bear double psychological pressure at the same time. Also, the emotional state of roles (especially the role of parents) may be more demanding in the family domain than in work. A famous study by Hochschild[116] pointed out that in modern society, work has become "family", family has become "job", and tired parents are always eager to escape endless family disputes and endless housework, running to the office in order and harmony. In general, it can be concluded that, with regard to the boundary relationship between the work-family field, with the change of office locations, the physical and

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[116] LI Yahui 李亚慧, 远程办公与自我认知对员工工作家庭关系的影响研究,2022

psychological boundaries of the work-family field begin to merge, and the family begins to "invade" the time boundary of the work field. The imbalance of this boundary relationship is an important reason for the negative feelings of home workers.

Speaking of boundaries, the work-leisure boundary is another key point for understanding work-from-home fatigue. Study shows that the physical, temporal, and psychological boundaries between the work field and the leisure field of home workers are also in a state of imbalance[117]. First of all, the physical boundary relationship in the work-leisure field is mainly manifested as fused. Although there is no clear physical boundary in people's leisure area, in general, the family space is one of the main places for people's leisure. When the workplace moves to the home, the shift translates to a merging of the boundaries between work and leisure. One of the negative effects brought about by this integrated relationship is that the leisure environment and atmosphere in the family make it easy for workers to be in a loose state. Secondly, the time boundary relationship in the work-leisure field is mainly manifested in the invasion of work on leisure. There are two forms of this intrusion relationship: active intrusion and passive intrusion: active intrusion refers to the fact that home office workers actively reduce leisure time and increase working time to complete the established work tasks. It was found that despite the change of office location, the workload of many workers has not decreased, and they still need to submit work results on time. When work with a strong time boundary is invaded by the family, the work domain can only maintain its domain scope by actively invading the leisure domain with a more blurred time boundary. Therefore, home workers have to take the initiative to reduce leisure time and extend working hours in order to complete the prescribed work tasks. Passive intrusion, instead, refers to the fact that home workers are forced to give up leisure to deal with temporary work tasks. The Chinese study before mentioned has shown that when home office workers are not present, their leaders and colleagues often hold a "compensatory mentality": they believe that because subordinates or colleagues enjoy the benefits of home office, then they can make demands on their work regardless of the time window. In other words, the lack of control over physical boundaries is compensated for by strengthening control over temporal boundaries. It was found that leaders or colleagues who work in the office will more frequently use various communication tools to contact their subordinates or colleagues working from home, even in the middle of the night. Remote workers also show the intrusion of work into leisure in the psychological boundary relationship between work and leisure. As mentioned earlier, the frequent entry

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[117]LI Zhong, YANG Shuchao, 李 中 杨书超, 居家办公为何很累：基于边界理论的解释,2020

of work into the leisure domain from a time boundary perspective, makes home office workers always in a long-term "standby" state. Therefore, even if employees are not actively working, they are still psychologically unable to enter a leisure mood and state, and it is difficult to truly relax.

When the individual dimension is valued, the interference between personal life and work life is not the only matter at stake. The personal soft skills of the employees might also suffer some changes in the way they are applied. In Beijing, another research focused on the experience of 823 female attorneys, whose creative self-efficacy was subject of analysis during the pandemic[118]. The key thought underneath this study is that the creativity is a core skill for practicing the job of attorney: attorney need creativity in order to handle litigations, preparing plans and court debates. When they were asked to move to a remote location still carrying out the same activities than before, their innovative responses had to be triggered to keep up. The results of the questionnaire have shown that sometimes crises like the one of this pandemic can actually have positive effects on people's ability to be creative and innovative, if some conditions are respected. In this case, an important value is kept into account, which is a specific one linked to the Chinese context: employees' value of Zhongyong, which refers to "moderation, rectitude, objectivity, sincerity, honesty, truthfulness, propriety, equilibrium, and lack of prejudice"[119]. This study has offered evidence of the fact that Zhongyong can actually affect the way business activities are carried out: to be specific, this means that the variable of Zhongyong has a negative impact on people's creativity level, when the uncertainty factor is brought by COVID-19 crisis. So, having in mind that low levels of Zhongyong is positive for Chinese personnel creativity, some practical implications which are very context specific can be found in having managers design training programs to teach workers not to over-compensate on their innovation tendency during a period of uncertainty.

Speaking of innovation behavior, another Chinese case study explored the phenomenon of it during remote work, analyzing the answers of 254 employees[120]. The research stems from the fact that in the era of digital economy, with the development of mobile Internet, big data, information and communication technologies, etc., a series of profound

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[118]TANG, C., MA, H., NAUMANN, S., XING, Z., *Perceived Work Uncertainty and Creativity During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Roles of Zhongyong and Creative Self-Efficacy*, 2020, Frontiers | Perceived Work Uncertainty and Creativity During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Roles of Zhongyong and Creative Self-Efficacy | Psychology (frontiersin.org), 09-05-2022
[119] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zhongyong, 09-05-2022
[120] WANG Hui, XIAO Yuting 王辉 肖宇婷, "彼之砒霜，我之蜜糖"：远程工作对员工创新行为的"双刃剑", 2022

changes have taken place in business models, organizational types, and corporate governance methods, which require the industry to adopt more flexible and free working methods. In the Chinese context, social platforms such as QQ, WeChat, Dingding and Feishu have emerged one after another, providing strong support for real-time communication between employees; office software such as Zoom, and Trello have emerged. Therefore, with the help of modern information and communication technology, a way to enable employees to work remotely in an alternative location away from the traditional central office. Also, Chinese studies have shown that remote work can bring certain negative effects. For example, remote work makes employees, leaders, and colleagues spatially isolated from each other, which increases employees' loneliness, and thus has a negative impact on individual work performance. Moreover, as the degree of remote work increases, employees experience more emotional exhaustion, leading to reduced work enthusiasm and work engagement. Other than that, compared with traditional work methods, online communication of remote work can easily lead to information asymmetry and higher coordination costs, and remote workers need to make more efforts to obtain innovation support from the organization. This has for sure an impact on the search for innovation conducted by employees, which is made more difficult; so it is safe to say that the factors pushing for innovation are weakened. The research results show that in a Chinese context, role ambiguity and work autonomy play a negative and positive mediating role in the relationship between remote work and employees' innovative behavior, respectively. On the one hand, remote work expands the spatial isolation between employees and organizations and leaders. As a result, the delivery of work information is delayed or incomplete, and employees feel that their roles are blurred, as it was already seen many times also in the Western context. It takes a lot of time and energy to deal with this pressure, limiting the ability to carry out innovative activities. On the other hand, the spatial isolation brought about by remote work enhances employees' discretion in work, enabling them to have more innovation resources and wider innovation space. Furthermore, the positive mediating effect of job autonomy was greater than the negative mediating effect of role ambiguity. It can be seen that with the continuous improvement of remote work support technology, the positive effect of remote work might become more prominent. In the second place, it can be noticed that when leaders actively respond to online messages from subordinates, communicate needed information, give relevant opinions and feedback to remote workers in a timely manner, it not only helps employees understand work tasks, saves employees' time and energy, and reduces role ambiguity, but it can also enhance employees' perceived organizational support, thereby enhancing their perception of work

autonomy. The higher the level of superior responsiveness, the smaller the indirect effect of remote work on employees' innovative behavior through role ambiguity, and the greater the indirect effect of work autonomy on employees' innovative behavior. With this change, the negative impact of teleworking on employees' innovative behavior is weakened, while the positive impact is strengthened. So, once again, it has been explored how communication is key for obtaining a more performing business and less stressed employees.

Based on self-determination theory and the autonomy-control paradox, another paper has established a mechanism model of the impact of changes in remote work intensity on task performance and emotional exhaustion. The research used a questionnaire survey method to test the theoretical model with the survey data of 627 remote workers in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Shanghai[121]. In fact, after the COVID-19 crisis, remote work in China has risen rapidly, and the negative effects have also become prominent. According to a survey report covering 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities (including 4,850 valid samples), 83.1% of remote workers encountered problems such as lower work efficiency, remote system failure, worse work quality, and longer working hours during the epidemic. Respondents said that "remote office blurs the boundaries, makes work less psychologically expected, and turns 996 and 965 into 007". Therefore, how to reduce the negative effects of remote work and maximize its advantages has become the focus of organizational management research and practice. The research has concluded that: remote work intensity has an inverted U-shaped relationship with task performance, and a U-shaped relationship with emotional exhaustion; remote work intensity has an inverted U-shaped relationship with autonomy, and a positive linear relationship with job reinforcement; autonomy mediated the relationship between telework intensity and task performance, and job reinforcement mediated the relationship between telework intensity and task performance and emotional exhaustion; age, telework norms, and telework support in the model have a significant effect. Remote work intensity has a critical point of effect on autonomy, task performance and emotional exhaustion. Controlling the effect of remote work "increasing first and then depressing" is the key point for the organization and management of remote work. What has been found is that with the prevalence of remote work, uninterrupted connectivity is the main cause of reduced employee autonomy and increased workload, which in turn stems from the trust crisis brought about by remote invisibility. To crack the paradoxical effect of

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[121]HU Weiwei, JIN Yanghua, WANG Xiaoqian, XIAO Di,胡玮玮, 金杨华, 王晓倩肖, 迪自主 – 控制视角下远程工作的悖论效应研究,2021

remote work, first of all, it is necessary to establish a reasonable remote work system inside and outside the organization, such as formulating remote communication norms and daily interaction standard procedures, clarifying the connection rules (time, method and content, etc.), advocating planned communication, improving predictability and sense of control in employees working remotely. Secondly, even in this case, it is necessary to communicate regularly between collaborating colleagues and superiors and subordinates, and feedback work results, so that team members who work together can understand each other in time work dynamics and progress, alleviating trust anxiety from invisibility. At the same time, in the process of promoting and implementing remote work, managers should take the lead in establishing new concepts, building a new management model and a more adaptive organizational structure, and creating an environment that supports virtual work.

In terms of human resource management logics, going from the past on-site management mode to online management mode, change the expectations and type of control of when, where and how employees should complete their work. Managers should emphasize the close cooperation between remote employees and non-remote employees, and gradually form online trust culture, also using combined evaluation methods. The characteristics of remote work focus on work result orientation, build an independent performance evaluation mechanism and promotion evaluation mechanism, and form a management system and management measures that match remote work. In addition, managers should provide tool support and emotional support as much as possible to help employees solve various technical and management problems arising from remoteness, as well as emotional problems under work isolation.

As regards to sector-specific findings, some other conclusions have been drawn in the context of Chinese firms; according to a case study carried out on 107 Baidu's developers, productivity can improve when working from home and there are some specific conditions that are met[122]. If fact, it has been noticed that employees' productivity can raise the first time they work from home, because the novelty of the new setting and the excitement deriving from it translates into more energy dedicated to work. Another reason for having more success in terms of productivity may be linked to the fact that, by being less direct contact with co-workers the occasions of distraction are limited. Another factor in this case is connected to the operational choice made by the firm to make employees write daily reports instead of the weekly ones they were used to write;

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[122] BAO, L., *How does working from home affect developer productivity? — A case study of Baidu during the COVID-19 pandemic,* 2022, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11432-020-3278-4.pdf, 10-05-2022

it can be hypothesized that keeping this sort of daily journal may help developers keep track of their daily work and push them to compensate the day after if the goals were not met. The increase in productivity is also a double-edged result of having more flexible working hours, which, from a point of view, has the effect of blurring the lines between work and private life even more, but, on the other hand let workers have access to moments of the day where they can be productive the most, such as very early in the morning or very late in the day. Some other subjects of the study did not perceive this increase in productivity and were actually discontent with the solution of having to work from home: if they had, for instance, children to take care of, or more complex familiar situations, they have suffered from a smaller window of time for being productive on job. What else can come into place it once again connected with the individual characteristic of the singular employee: it has to be noted again that the propension to being able to focus autonomously, even in a setting different for the designed one, is not of anyone. Some people might just experience some difficulties in trying to focus when other co-workers are not around, or even simply because they have too many distractions in their room, a place in which they mostly feel relaxed. In conclusion, what this study demonstrated more clearly is the fact that, at least in the Chinese IT sector, the results in terms of productivity were not the same for everyone and depended, other than the type pf projects people were working on (the results have shown that C++ projects were less impacted by the shift to remote work, while Java projects scored negatively in every case), on the personal characteristics of the singular individual.

Another interesting case study analyzing China's firms remote work policies has focused on the public sector; to be more specific, on the employees working for Shanghai Municipal Health Committee, that implemented a hybrid work model policy[123]. It was registered that in terms of jobs, employees who work in administrative and office work are more willing to work from home than employees who work in laboratories, having to focus on management, copywriting, communication, and coordination tasks. Of all the commuting modes considered, employees who commute by themselves apperas more willing to work from home than employees who take public transportation, cycling and walking to work. This may be related to the serious traffic congestion during morning and evening rush hours and the shortage of parking spaces in residential areas, since the place of residence is far away from the work unit, and the commuting cost is relatively high. From the perspective of family structure, compared with employees of nuclear

[123]YANG Yinhgua, LOU Jiao, LIU Tianyi, WANG Jian, WANG Hualiang, 杨颖华,娄娇,刘天一,王健,王华梁 上海市卫生事业单位员工在岗与居家协同办公调研分析, 2020

families (or small families), employees of four generations living in the same house are less willing to work from home. Different family structures have different time and responsibility requirements for family members and may lead to different degrees of family interference with work conflicts; the different degrees of such conflicts may be one of the reasons for the different willingness to work from home. Employees with four generations in the same family structure may have greater conflicts between family responsibilities (such as taking care of elders, children or surrogate spouses) and job responsibilities in terms of time and energy requirements, or because family affairs interfere more with home work. Compared with families without the elderly and no children, employees of nuclear families with 1-2 children are more willing to work from home because they can flexibly manage their office hours while taking care of their children, balance family and work effectively. It was also considered that at home office configuration that meets employees' needs is a prerequisite for ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of their home office. In this case it was shown that most employees' home office equipment and office network can meet normal office needs, and only a few employees use mobile phones as office or network equipment, which affects the normal development of work to a certain extent. People who do not have access to a personal space for working away from distractions have stated that they do not wish to keep working remotely, since the lack of an independent office space or interference during work may interrupt employees' work focus, gradually generating irritability. Overall, compared with on-the-job work, the average effective working hours, average work efficiency, and average daily actual workload of working from home differs in a way that in this case there is a higher degree of failure to complete the work as expected. Of course, this difference in the effect of working from home may be caused by many reasons. As shown in the research results, there are obvious differences in the effect of working from home depending on the position of the employee, which largely depends on the restrictiveness of the work content to the workplace. In addition to it, employees' individual self-control, subjective adaptability, managers' management assessment methods, as well as the family structure and the configuration of home office conditions that affect the willingness to work from home. Practical solutions to the matter include the role of managers, who should make overall arrangements according to the type of job the employees are engaged in and their personal preferences, so as to ensure that the overall work is carried out normally, while at the same time respecting the choices of the workers, allowing them to enjoy better work life balance, and obtain more satisfaction and happiness. Another action to take into account is to formulate rules and regulations for working from home and improve performance appraisal methods. Managers should

clarify the relevant regulations on working from home, formulate phased and long-term work plans, build a remote working platform and management system, maintain online communication at any time, and hold regular video conferences to strengthen online supervision of home-working staff. It is also advisable to emphasize the results-oriented performance appraisal indicators, focusing more on the progress and quality of work completion. To strengthen employees' self-discipline awareness and ability is also a key strategic point of implementing a hybrid work model.

At this point, for the sake of this study, it might be useful to borrow some notions from the psychology field. In 2021, the "International Association of Applied Psychology" has published an article on how effective remote work can be achieved, from a work design perspective, based on the analysis of working from home during the pandemic Chinese employees' answers in a series of interviews[124]. To be more specific, 39 full-time employees (15 of them working from Beijing) were asked to participate to semi-structured interviews using video calls. The people who decided to answer the question belonged to many different industries (e.g., education, IT, media, finance, etc.) and had very different occupations (e.g., managers, teachers, designers, etc.). Most of them had never worked away from the office and was experiencing remote work for the first time. The results have shown that most of them, as it was seen in many other cases, were struggling with home-to-work interference and work-to-home interference. The effectiveness of their working activities was often disturbed by many interruptions occurred because of family members: China was not an exception to the overall choice of many Countries to shut down schools, therefore employees' who were also parents had to face bigger challenges while trying to focus at home. What they reported is a tremendous increase in fatigue, having to be present online all day. Another struggle reported was linked to the fact that online communication lacked the degree of efficiency the one experienced in person normally has: people felt that online communication was causing low productivity. Procrastination is another factor influencing negatively the experience of working from home: for people who were already struggling with procrastination in office, it became even worse. It was registered that even if the workers were sparing no efforts in trying to be as productive as always, they often delayed working on core tasks, wasting time on social media or taking longer breaks. Something else which should not be overlooked is the feeling of loneliness many workers had experienced; while it is true that online communication made people able to exchange

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[124] WANG, B*., Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective*, 2020, https://iaap-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/apps.12290, 10-05-2022

information, it seemed like conversations became more focused than usual on tasks and work activities, making people feel like their need for belonging and relatedness were not satisfied at all.

As It was already stated earlier in this paper, Chinese people have a different approach to privacy than what it is likeably to see in Western Countries (it must be reminded that in many of the Countries belonging to the EU it is even forbidden to be filmed when working at home): this translated into strict control measures when they had to deal with COVID-19 effects, having dedicated mobile apps investigating people's lifestyles and movements. It is possible to see a reflection of this accepting behavior even in the context of work: research shows that Chinese people experienced a higher degree of monitoring from their supervisors when they shifted to remote work[125]. The way this choice was implemented was through daily reports, clocking in/out via applications such as DingTalk and having to work with a camera on. The workers participating to the study did not find these practices overwhelming and rather found it a useful way to avoid procrastination, feeling more devoted to work. Going back to the issue of personal traits having an impact on remote work performance, participants who reported themselves as being less disciplined have more issues when trying to be productive and had higher failure rate. Those on the other end of the spectrum, describing themselves as more rigid in terms of self-regulation, reported that they were even more timely than before. What is interesting is that less disciplined people found it even more useful than the others being closely monitored while working.

Basically, signs have be shown that workload and monitoring have different effects on people. The study concludes that:

" *Employees with higher workload and those who are under more intensive monitoring will experience less procrastination during the period of working from home and, therefore, will have higher levels of performance; but these employees will experience more work-to-home interference and, therefore, will have lower levels of well-being.*[126]"

As a general rule, it is still stated that people less capable of being self-disciplined encounter more difficulties, having been proved that they specifically need some external input to be motivated. There are also some cues on the fact that less rigid people might fall into the trap of being so distracted when working online that they even get to the point of failing to engage in informal communication activities with the co-workers; therefore, they will likely experience a stronger sense of loneliness. The same study has also

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[125] ibidem
[126] ibidem

argued that the well-being of people with higher levels of job autonomy will be higher than other employees because they experience less interruption when working remotely. These conclusions have underlined the importance of the type of job at stake and the personal characteristics of the individuals, independently from the industry in which they operate, when decide whether to implement a hybrid work model.

As it was seen earlier in this paper, in many cases the major issues deriving from working remotely were connected to poor communication, which was affected by the shift to a full online context, missing the physical cues and the spontaneity of informal interactions. It might not be the only variable impacting teamwork dynamic, tough. Another Chinese research carried out during 2021 have taken into analysis another aspect, which is the willingness of employees to voluntarily share knowledge with their colleagues[127]. The results were based on the collected data of 315 questionnaires answered by people working for two different Internet companies in Beijing. What the study found is that there is a significant negative correlation between employees' remote working intensity and knowledge sharing willingness, meaning that telecommuting intensity negatively affects employees' willingness to share more hidden knowledge, even if it does not significantly affect employees' explicit knowledge sharing. In fact, employees can easily and quickly share and transfer explicit knowledge even in remote office scenarios, so the difficulty of explicit knowledge sharing has not been significantly increased. At the same time, in the remote office scenario, in order to ensure that tasks are completed, employees need to actively share some information that can be communicated face-to-face orally in offline scenarios through remote office software (such as DingTalk, Feishu, WeChat, etc.). For example, work-related documents, reports to overcome the ambiguity of information caused by remote communication.

In China, remote working has become a reality for many organizations at present, but it appears that many of them still use the traditional office model to manage their employees, therefore, the rules, systems, and corresponding human resource management policies and practices need to be updated. Compared with traditional offices, organizational flexibility and organizational efficiency are improved in remote office scenarios, but at the same time, when employees work in dispersed locations, various uncertainties and ambiguities increase, coupled with the lack of a common communication environment: the willingness to share knowledge is be challenged by many factors, and managers are also faced with the problem of how to motivate

[127] PENG Zhen, CHEN Tianzi 朋 震, 陈天子, 远程办公强度对企业员工知识共享意愿的影响机制探, 2022

employees to share knowledge. Therefore, organizations should improve various human resource policies in the remote office scenario as soon as possible. Organizations should also attach importance to e-leadership training, and managers should improve their e-leadership level. According to the conclusions of this study[128], if the direct leaders of telecommuting employees have a higher level of e-leadership, the negative impact of telecommuting on their job reshaping will be attenuated, which will ultimately benefit knowledge sharing. With the continuous development of information technology, managers should pay attention to the organic combination of information technology and their own leadership, strengthen the learning and use of information technology, and give full play to the advantages of information technology in their management process, such as increasing communication efficiency, impacting positively the psychological distance of employees.

For the sake of the research is key to also take into account the satisfaction degree of Chinese remote workers, by taking a look at some recent journal publications[129]. An article reported that for some of the employees, who can handle managing family and work depending on the current needs in both domains, remote work is considered an ideal work arrangement, because working remotely from home saves the time cost of commuting. This part of the time saved can be used to arrange some work or family affairs, which greatly improves the efficiency. Also, they see a pro in having the possibility to manage urgencies right at home, avoiding the embarrassment of having to share some private information in the office. Nevertheless, results of the study suggest that the effects of remote work on employees' job satisfaction should not be generalized, and the effects of remote work on job satisfaction are not the same for employees with different work-family boundary preferences. For remote workers with a separation of boundaries view, remote work affects the boundary between work and home, negatively affecting their job satisfaction; for remote workers with a view of boundaries integration, remote work makes them enjoy the autonomy to flexibly handle work and family affairs, and increases the matching between people and organizations, thereby improving job satisfaction.

Speaking of employees' preferences, some other key data comes from another Chinese article on the matter of the future of remote work, which was published during 2021[130]. It reported that coronavirus has made people generally start working from home and has

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[128] ibidem
[129] WANG Yiyang 王翼阳, 远程办公中的员工激励问题分析, 2021
[130]TIM Minahan, 新的工作方式为灵活的未来做好准备，2021

also changed long-standing misconceptions about remote work. Executives and managers once suspected that employees could not "really work" after leaving the office, but now they realize that working from home can make employees work efficiently, work life well, and even have a positive impact on psychological, cost and environmental factors. A study conducted by Citrix and OnePoll found that 70% of the 10,000 employees surveyed in six countries felt that working remotely was the same or more productive, while 83% of employees surveyed felt that it is easier for them to work outside the office. The office has always been a place for collaboration and innovation. Outside the meeting room, employees chat casually in hallways, cafeterias and gyms. However, rules aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus changed all that. Employees must be screened before entering the office and must wear personal protective equipment and maintain a certain social distance after entering the office. For the foreseeable future, safety guidelines will limit the number of people that can be accommodated in offices, and even knowledge workers will switch to shift work. Many employees find the rules too cumbersome and don't want to worry about it. In fact, 64% of the 2,000 global employees surveyed were surveyed by another Citrix and On ePoll survey said they felt uncomfortable after returning to the office for a month or more. A further 3% of employees surveyed said they would never want to go back to full-time work again. What is also important to notice is that in the past, many people would choose to move to a big city to find a job and live there if they wanted a good job. But as work goes virtual, the impact of workplace on career success and opportunity has is not as important as it used to be. In another Citrix survey of 2,000 global knowledge workers, a quarter of respondents said they have given up or plan to live in a big city for several reasons. One is that their jobs are now 100 percent remote and will be permanent (37 percent). The second is that they now only need to go to the office once a week (25%). The third is that the COVID-19 pandemic has proven that they can get their jobs done anywhere (22%).

Some other considerations were made on the matter of remote work, with Chinese journalists concluding that telecommuting is necessarily good or bad[131]. In their opinion, regardless of the office model, there are pros and cons. Even some organizations that have invited employees to fully return to the office will require employees to continue working remotely at least part of the time. Continuing to develop these two capabilities can help companies adjust human resource systems such as performance management and payroll to suit the specific circumstances of employees working in different environments. But more important, it also allows organizations to use this to experiment,

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[131]WANG Xin 王馨, 居家办公行得通, 2022

find the most suitable work model, and better prepare for the future, not just saving each employee's office space cost, as well as employee performance considerations.

Lastly, it is interesting to focus on what are Chinese suggestions to work remotely in the healthiest and more productive way possible, now shifting the focus from a company perspective to employees' one. A Chinese article published during 2021[132] has issued some tips on how to make a good first impression in a remote work environment, which are: adding a display that allows the worker to use more programs at the same time, analyze and compare materials, and save the trouble of looking down in front of the laptop all day; when making video calls, they suggest that the employee should try to use earphones or headsets instead of relying on the built-in speakers of your computer; in order to ensure the comfort of working from home for a long time, consider purchasing an ergonomic desk chair, or an adjustable standing desk. Despite this being a useful advice, it once again connects to the issue of weight of remote work costs, which are not covered by the company but are to be undertaken by the individual. They also suggest that ideally, when it is time for making a video call, the background behind should be the clean and orderly. But again, as it was mentioned before, residential allocations often do not provide a separate space for working remotely, therefore people who have to improvise a workspace, might already feel shame or uneasiness in having a messy background. In some cases, the article also suggests buying a green screen, which again is not covered by work expenses. When, instead, it comes to maximizing the benefits of telecommuting some good practices, according to Chinese scholars, include: clarifying remote collaboration time, to set expectations for new colleagues regarding working and non-working hours. Everyone's day-to-day schedule is different, so it's critical to clearly communicate each own schedule to leaders and colleagues. For example, stating clearly that daily working hours are 9:00 am to 6:00 pm, or 12:00 noon to 12:00 pm, with one hour of lunch time. The worker needs to determine his own schedule and keep his team members informed, not trying to juggle housework activities at the same time: this allows you to be productive, focused, and worry-free both inside and outside of work. Another good practice is work tasks transparent during remote work, trying to use appropriate collaboration software. As a way to improve focus during the workday, employees are suggested to avoid the easy distractions, taking a few minutes a day to clean the work area, keep it tidy, and schedule regular times to wash the dishes or vacuum the floors; it is considered also useful set a time to complete these chores, and also to set time periods to focus on completing a task, such as compiling data or writing a report.

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[132] ZHAN Sun 战隼, 高效远程办公指南, 2022

CHAPTER 3 **What we have learnt and what we can improve: a new model for managing hybrid work**

In the second chapter of this paper, many case studies about the implementation of hybrid forms of work were analyzed: this was made with the specific intent to collect as much data as possible about the different types of policies enacted, underlining the challenges encountered and the good outcomes that came out of this huge social experiment. Having a list of procedures chosen by European and Chinese firms, however, would not have too much use as a tool for making a given company a better and more efficient working environment, if not broken down in more manageable micro-topics and put inside of a structured scheme. What this study wants to obtain is a clear guideline to follow when an enterprise is in the situation of deciding whether or not adopt remote work. The possibilities are numerous, and, as it was already noticeable from the data shown earlier, the variables at stake are different and very impacting. This chapter tries to give a final answer to the question "should remote work be an option to keep offering?".

3.1 Looking at the future of remote work

This part of the chapter is useful to give some more considerations on the issue of having to decide to keep the option of working remotely. Listing the pros and cons that the research has found in the analysis of many cases, in a more structured fashion, can be the bases of the hybrid work model that will be proposed in the final analysis.

3.1.1 Is remote work here to stay?

According to the famous newspaper "Forbes", remote work is not only here to stay, but will also increase during 2023[133]. On the basis of their estimations, which are inserted in the US context, it was reported that 25% of all professional jobs will definitely keep being carried on remotely. A detail that cannot be overlooked is the fact that remote opportunities went from being 4% of all high paying jobs, to 9% at the end of 2020, and now the percentage is over 15%. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that remote jobs not only have increased through the years but have also developed a greater talent acquisition power. In Europe the situation does not look very different, since, as an article issued on the official website of the European Commission was already reporting at the end of 2020, teleworking will not vanish even now that the coronavirus crisis has been

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[133] ROBINSON, B., *Remote Work Is Here To Stay And Will Increase Into 2023*, Experts Say, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2022/02/01/remote-work-is-here-to-stay-and-will-increase-into-2023-experts-say/?sh=31a40d8f20a6, 12-05-2022

handled and people went back to living with not so many restrictions[134]. The article correctly underlines that teleworking is very appealing to companies, since there is no doubt that it comes with a lot of cost savings. As it was already mentioned earlier, there are companies which have already officially decided that they will not go back to in office work, such as Google, Reddit and other social media enterprises. However, this does not necessarily mean that the conclusion should be a simple "yes, remote work will stay". By exploring the wide range of industries which had to experience work from home, it has been noticed how, while some of the companies actually decided that working remotely was even a better option than being in person in office (this was often the case of IT, social media, software development, e-commerce firms), there are still some sectors that struggled a lot and will definitively go back to being present in person. The education sector was perhaps the one in which this struggle was experienced the most. McKinsey's research about what behaviors will stick after the crisis, also support this thesis of a non-unique answer to the question about the future of remote work, indicating that in some cases remote work is just not sustainable on the long run, as it has a very strong negative impact on the personal lives of workers[135]. Needless to say, the concept of teleworkability comes again in handy, since it allows to make a clear distinction between tasks that can be carried out online: it was seen how for most part of the primary and secondary sectors, the core tasks typical of the job simply cannot be performed online, due to the intrinsic nature of such jobs, which comprehend physical interactions between people or machines. The best guess that can be made for the future of remote work is that it will stick whereas there is an actual advantage in terms of productivity return. When possible, the shift to remote work will be full and irreversible, while it can be easily imagined that a major part of the companies will choose to implement a hybrid form of work (regard to this matter, it is interesting to see the evolution of healthcare sector, which has managed to implement different online solutions, as it was seen in Chapter 2). This way, they can get the best of both worlds and learn from past experience, even if this means to deal with a much more complex internal environment.

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[134] CEURSTEMONT, S*., Teleworking is here to stay – here's what it means for the future of* work, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/teleworking-here-stay-heres-what-it-means-future-work#:~:text=Social%20Sciences-,Teleworking%20is%20here%20to%20stay%20%E2%80%93%20here's%20what%20it,for%20the%20future%20of%20work&text=Coronavirus%20response%20measures%20have%20accelerated,pandemic%20levels%2C%20according%20to%20experts., 12-05-2022

[135] LUND, S., *What's next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries*, 2020, http://thebusinessleadership.academy/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MGI-Whats-next-for-remote-work-v3.pdf, 12-05-2022

3.1.2 The overall pros of remote work

There is a reason if many companies have decided to move to online working and to never look back: the benefits this policy carries along are very noticeable, not only from a company's perspective, but, in many cases, also from the employees' point of view. To have a clearer overview of the general situation, a list of the pros which have been registered during these years of experimentations, can be a useful tool to look at before making this operative decision.

➢ Cost saving. As it was already stated, one of the main drivers for companies to move to online work is due to the cut in costs they experience from sparing utility bills, real estate costs, office furniture etc. What makes this aspect so great is the fact that even employees enjoy from a reduction in expenses, if they were used to pay for commuting ways of transport, gas oil, parking, lunch and many more factors.

➢ Time saving. Working remotely allows employees to have more control on their time schedule, and it also saves time normally wasted commuting.

➢ Flexibility. In terms of time management and location. It must be remembered that thanks to remote work it was possible to achieve the concept of "workation".

➢ Better work-life balance. If the risk of seeing the boundaries between work and personal life become more and more blurred is not considered, there are high chances that an overall self-disciplined and well-organized employee will manage his time in the most efficient way possible, achieving more time to spend with the family or for leisure.

➢ Higher loyalty degree. Whereas employees see work from home as a benefit, they will be more likely to stay in the same company, lowering the turnover rate. This is particularly important now that we entered the "Great Resignation Era".

➢ Higher competitive advantage. If a company is capable of attracting more candidates through the benefit of remote work, the competitive advantage will inevitably become higher.

➢ Access to a wider pool of talents. When the geographic boundaries are not a variable that matter anymore, a company can pick its talents from anywhere.

➢ Increase in productivity. Even if it is not a rule, some companies have documented seeing better performances during the work from home period; employees themselves felt more motivated, more focused, and productive in many cases.

➢ Lower absenteeism rate. When an employee is more motivated to work it will be less likeable to skip workdays, and it is demonstrated that remote work can

increase some employees' motivation. Another factor is the ease to not having to deal with traffic and potential unforeseen events on the way to work: a stable connection is all that is needed.

➢ Digitalization of work. Shifting to remote work also means an effort in terms of learning some new digital skills and digital tools. This is great for the personal development of the individual, but also from a company assets' point of view. The digitalization of work can also make processes faster and easier.

3.1.3 The overall flaws of remote work

As it was seen in the previous pages of this study, remote work is a solution far from being perfect, as it carries along a series of negative sides, which should not be overlooked.

➢ More complex internal management. Implementing remote work, especially in a hybrid form, requires a higher degree of integration effort. This is due to the fact that the communication processes have to be carefully planned; a clear picture of every employee's situation, work shifts and duties must be designed and followed.

➢ More complex recruiting processes. When the talent options become wider, the selection and recruiting processes can be dispersive and quite harder to follow.

➢ Communication issues. The main issue that was reported in most cases here analyzed is linked to difficulties in the information exchange between remote workers. The informal cues that come along with the normal in person information exchange get lost in the process

➢ Cross of personal boundaries. One of the biggest limits of remote work is that it risks to cause excessive blurred boundaries between personal life and work life.

➢ Bigger self-management weight. It has been registered that working from home requires employees to make a bigger effort in handling multiple activities: the one linked to work life and the one belonging to the family field. In trying to avoid negative impacts in both fields, a huge effort is required from the individual, which, because of the housework to manage, is not allowed the usual break times that he would get in office. The burnout is easier to be achieved in trying to stay on the top of all tasks.

➢ Higher procrastination level. Less-disciplined employees will likeably fall in the procrastination trap. When work piles up, it is easy to be forced to sacrifice some free time to actually do the work. The consequence is that the worker runs out of time to dedicate to himself.

- ➢ Higher distress level. The employees experience higher pressure to keep up with work tasks and digital skills updated required. If the work and personal life boundaries become too blurry, managers and supervisors might feel free to contact the employees even when the work shift would be over, causing some more stress.

- ➢ Physical distance. The physical distance does not only impact the personal lives of employees, but makes it harder, even for the company, to spread a cohesive organizational culture. This was, it is easy for employees located in a Country different from the headquarter's one to feel isolated and not to have a solid grasp of the company's culture.

- ➢ Overall sense of loneliness. Whereas employees tend to perceive work as a social activity, the shift to working separated from the co-workers can enhance a sense of solitude.

- ➢ More expenses on the employees' side. Generally speaking, the employer will not pay for the equipment needed by the worker to perform properly. It is very likely that employees will have to pay for their own Wi-Fi connection, pc, ergonomic chair, and everything else that might be useful for working.

3.2 How to implement the hybrid work model

This part of the chapter is to give some pragmatic indications on how the hybrid work model can be implemented, starting from the definition of those activities which are suitable for a shift to remote work to the definition of which are the most impacting variables on the success of the implementation of the policy, so that a valid model to follow when managing hybrid work can be provided along with those that are the applicable best practices.

3.2.1 The content of the activities suitable for working remotely

The concept of teleworkability has been used in multiple parts of this paper, as it is particularly useful whereas it is needed to make some clear evaluations of whether or not employees should be asked to work remotely. The jobs which were deemed as nom-teleworkable were all characterized a high number of tasks which are strictly physical and cannot be performed online. They usually show low degree of social interaction required for performing the job in the correct way, even tough there are some important exceptions, such as nurses, childcare workers and jobs linked to direct marketing activities, like street and market salesperson. When the core activities of a job incorporate a high amount of manual labor, it is simply not possible to shift it to the online

dimension. For instance, this is the case for many jobs which belong to the primary and secondary sector, such as manufacturing, transporting, and mining. Occupations characterized by low teleworkability and which do not need social interaction to perform include machine operators, control technicians and elementary workers. As regard to jobs which are high in social interactions and have high levels of teleworkability, the occupations included are managers, doctors, financial advisors and teachers. On the other end of the spectrum, job which do not require a lot of interaction and are easily performed from home are the ones in the IT and communication field.

What is interesting is that while the theory suggests that all of these jobs should be performed online without any sort of issues, what the data collecting has shown is that there is not necessarily a direct link to teleworkability and great outcomes in terms of productivity and job satisfaction. The case of remote teachers is perhaps the most iconic one: on the paper online learning seems like a very feasible solution, but when the data on teachers' poor satisfaction levels and their overall low well-being are considered, it is easy to understand why this is not an occupation that will keep being carried out from home, as a general rule. Therefore, while with the concept of teleworkability some logical cues are given on what is practically possible to carry out online, other factors need to be considered, because "possible" does not always equal "feasible".

3.2.2 How to distribute the tasks and how much to simplify the processes

Shifting to a hybrid work model will add a conspicuous number of unstable variables to an organizational environment which in most cases in already complex enough per se. As general best practice in the human resources management, it can be stated that whereas the degree of complexity within an organization grows, more efforts have to be undertaken in order to keep things simple. The more the differentiation between jobs carried out within a given firm, the more integration efforts are required to keep a cohesive internal structure, along with a strong organizational culture. When the variable of remote work is introduced, the main focus should be to have a clear picture of which are the role of people working remotely, who are the one who will stay in office, how many days of the week people will work from home, and, most importantly, what are the internal rules on the matter. One of the core challenges of implementing hybrid work is in fact to understand the logic behind the choices in terms of policy implementation. Job tasks can be deconstructed to the point of becoming a list of actions to be perpetrated online or in office on the bases of their nature, but the most important thing is not to push it to the point to which remote work becomes a policy implemented rigidly, almost blindly, without considering other impacting factors. If the shift to remote work translates into the

solidification of the same practice being implemented again and again throughout the weeks and months, it is easy to see how, on the long run, this will cause new problems or loss in efficiency, because there are some factors which was ignored from the start of the implementation. The key that can be found is to identify what is feasible, not only from a tasks' core nature point of view, but to keep an eye the other dynamics that are happening as the times goes by. What is advisable is to create a model for implementing hybrid work which is not too deconstructed and simple, but comprehend different sets of variables (that, for the sake of this study, will be explored in the following paragraphs). An important matter that should never overlooked is to keep track of the feedback coming from employees and supervisors, so that what is not working can be timely fixed, without forgetting to also keep track of the policies that works. It is well known that what works today might not be working tomorrow, therefore it is important to erase, adjust or make more efficient those aspects of the implementation that lose value as the time goes by. Other important decisions managers should take are how many times the employees should be allowed to work remotely, what degree of freedom they are given and what are the tasks that cannot be performed from a distance but are mandatory to execute on site.

3.2.3 How to structure a valid performance appraisal system

One of the most challenging difficulties a human resources manager might experience when part of the employees has moved to remote work, is to develop a fair performance appraisal system. Therefore, while employees that will not take part to the remote work offer, will keep being evaluate on the bases of beforehand established parameters, some adjustment have to be made for remote employees, as they operate in a different context and have to deal with some peculiar aspects which are typical of work from home solution. Since at least part of their time will be spent in a setting different from the office, the communication process has to be even more structured and explicit, in order for them not to miss on key parts of their jobs. First of all, it is important to explicitly state how the evaluation will be managed, by stating clearly what are the goals that the company expects the employee to reach. This is an overall good practice, but it becomes even more important when there is an active risk that information might be not correctly received, and also when the company operated with people that may be working from another Country, who risks experiencing an excessive feeling of distance and isolation from the teams and managers. When a flexible working option is issued, the performance indicators also need to change: along with the shift from in person to remote work, it is needed to make a shift in terms of focus, which should move from the time window during

which the tasks are performed to the results achieved. What needs to be redesigned is not only the working mode itself, but also the approach managers have towards remote workers: with the implementation of the hybrid work model more than in any other case it is fundamental to evaluate what is done more than the time spent doing it.

As long as it concerns the matter of key performance indicators (KPI) useful for evaluating the actual productivity rate carried out from home, some other elements have to be taken into account, which might be different from the ones used in a fully in office work mode. Since it was registered that the main issue of working remotely is linked to communication impediments, it would be useful to introduce a KPI which is focused on evaluating the ability to efficiently exchange relevant information with the teammates and co-workers, so that managers can have a more solid control over an aspect that becomes harder to handle. Another key aspect is to test the learning skills of the employee, making sure that he is able to follow the instructions given and quickly learn when needed. Whereas the organizational culture and the culture belonging to the Country in which the firm operates, stricter measure for monitoring the employee can be used, such as tracking the worker's activity on his computer, to check if the pages he has visited are work related and how much time is actually spent working.

3.2.4 How to plan employees' work shifts

The before mentioned need for a higher degree of integration is also reflected in the efforts that have to be made in order to keep a clear overview of remote workers' and in office workers' schedules. Even in this case the key for getting positive outcomes out of the choice of going remote is to make the communication processes well structured and planned, which will definitely support the coordination effort required by the flexibility of the environment. From an operative point of view, this will translate into the needs for managers to always keep in mind who are the people who work from home and who is allowed to work remotely. For those who can shift to an online mode, clear instructions should be given about the days they should still go to the office and, if there is one, a window of time during which the supervisor expects the worker to log in. The level of freedom the employee enjoys should be clarifies beforehand. It is advisable to make use of software which allow the collaborative mode, so that every worker can see what the shifts of colleagues are, and, in case they are allowed such freedom, to indicate the window of time during which they will be available to work.

3.2.5 Impacting variables

The aim of collecting so many new cases of work from home experiments, belonging to

different sectors and cultural context was to identify, in the final analysis, some common factors that could always be valid considering when shifting to a hybrid solution. The findings collected have made it possible to come to the conclusion that there are four impacting variables that influence the outcome of going remote. They can be summed up as follows:

1. Individual characteristics and personal situation of the employee. This is something that gets easily overlooked by the employers, but actually has the potential for being the most impacting one. In fact, it was possible to observe in many cases how there was an undeniable direct connection between the personal predisposition of the employee and the increase or decrease in terms of productivity. Not only that, even the communication processes could benefit or get worse with the shift to remote work, depending on the characteristics of the individual. For instance, one of the reported case studies in the IT sector have demonstrated how making the communication processes virtual has helped making the information exchange better, since there was a noticeable part of the employees who had always displayed a more introverted nature, that felt freer and more motivated to communicate with the shift to the virtual instant messaging system. As a general rule, it can be stated that people who are more self-disciplined will benefit the most from the option of working remotely, because their chances of procrastinating and piling up works are low. On the other hand, when the feedback comes from a person which struggles with time management and is more easily distracted, the pressure deriving from working more autonomously affects his productivity rate negatively on the long run, as this type of employees is more likely to experience burnout.

Another matter that cannot be ignored is the household situation of the employee. It was demonstrated that people with complex environment at home, such as people who had children or other relatives to take care of, show lower degree in job satisfaction when they are forced to work from home. It is evident that not being able to have a separate room for working or being frequently interrupted during the remote shift, will cause a loss in focus, and consequently, less motivation, higher distress levels and, in the final analysis, less productive outcomes.

2. Type of industry. By confronting a wide number of cases of firms operating in different sectors, it appeared evident that there are some industries that more easily take advantage from having some of the work carried out online, such as the ones in the IT and communication sectors. This does not mean that these

should be the only ones to implement a hybrid work model, but it is rather an indication that should be considered when deciding which of the job can be moved online and which it is better to keep doing in person.

3. Strategy adapted by the company. The type of industry of the firm has a direct correlation with the strategy which is adopted by the firm. As it was before mentioned, there is a family resemblance between strategies, meaning that the members belonging to the same industry share a common world view and tend to interact in a way that ideas and policies end up being shared or adapted to each individual organization belonging to the same economic sector. This has a great impact on the development of effective strategies so that they become more common in a given industry. The weight of the strategy implemented by the firm on the remote work dynamics is great: whereas the company at stake relies on a strongly collaborative mode, the shift to remote work could cause harm if not followed by accurate policies which can compensate for the lack of physical interaction.

4. Cultural context. The cultural context has a strong impact on the consequences of working remotely. As it was already clarified in the first chapter, the cultural context is not only the one of the location in which the headquarter in located, but also the organizational culture at stake. An example concerning the latter interpretation of cultural context comes from the banking sector: it was registered how in many US banks there was a resistance to letting employees maintain the benefit of working from home, as being present in the office is seen a fundamental point for keep carrying the company's apprenticeship culture. As regard to the matter of location-specific cultural impact, different Chinese cases have been explored. The most important cue that derives from the analysis is that the HR processes are impacted by cultural factors: to make a practical example, a more invasive monitoring system (even through the use of webcams) is widely not only accepted in China, but also appreciated by the workers who struggle with time management and procrastination. It was seen how, on the contrary, the practice of filming the personnel, especially when they are located at home, is frown upon in most EU Countries, to the point that it is even deemed as illegal in some of them.

3.2.6 Proposal of a model

By putting together the information gathered through this research, it is now possible to provide a theoretical model that can be followed by HR managers when having to deal with the implementation of a hybrid work model.

1. First step: consider the type of industry. This should be the first step in order to define from the start whether or not it makes senso to go remote. Are competitors moving online? Is it estimated that competitive advantage will be achieved? Considering the financial position of the firm, is it feasible? Most importantly, will going remote add unjustified complexity or will simplify processes in the long run?

2. Second step: consider the strategy. It is well-know that processes work when they are aligned to the strategy and the whole organizational culture is coherent. Studies have proved that when the interactions between employees shift to the virtual environment, in most cases it is possible to see that the weakest ties between workers become even looser. This means that when the strategy requires highly collaborative teams, it is possible that when the in-person interaction gets lost, the productivity will decrease. On the contrary, if what matters the most are the pure hard skills of the workers, shifting online will become easier and less expensive in terms of integration efforts.

3. Third step: map the communication nodes. The exchange of information might become harder when going remote, because of the lack of physical interaction and informal insights that gets lost in the process. Therefore, it is crucial to have a clear idea of which are the most important nodes, points of communication exchange, that need to be kept under control and reinforced.

4. Fourth step: check on employees' opinion. Remote work should be lived by the employee as a benefit issued by the company and not as an additional fount of stress. An ideal hybrid work model would not force employees who, for a number of reasons already explored, feel discomfort working from home to still do it because everyone else does. When employees work remotely against their will, the productivity levels decrease.

5. Fifth step: define how to distribute tasks. Once that decisions on the matter of who, and with what role, will work remotely, are made, it is necessary to distribute the tasks between in office hours and remote hours. The employees need to know timely which tasks are to be performed online and which do not. It makes sense to establish that all the activities linked to the reinforcement of the

organizational culture, to the creation of stronger ties within teams, to social interaction with clients, to bonding moments should be executed in person.

6. Fifth step: define the KPIs. The KPIs used in the performance appraisal system should be clearly defined and explicitly communicated to remote workers, especially if they differ from the ones applied to fully in person employees.

7. Sixth step: define a schedule. The degree of flexibility in the work shifts should always be agreed with the employees, even considering the relation this factor holds to the KPIs.

8. Seventh: keep monitoring. An excess in the simplification of the processes can become harmful on the long run, because it will not cover issues deriving from variables which have changed over time. Asking for feedback regularly, along with monitoring the relevant KPIs is the key for avoiding falling into the competence trap, that is, blindly applying policies which have worked in the past, without considering possible changes in the overall scenario.

CONCLUSION

The reason this paper was written is to be found in the desire to exploit the possibility of collecting new data on the matter of hybrid work, deriving from the huge shift to remote work caused by the COVID-19 crisis, in order to analyze the variables that constitute and affect the implementation of such a plan.

The methodology consisted in starting off with the analysis of the theoretical concepts underneath the hybrid work model, then moving to the exploration of practical case studies: the research provides insight from both a legislative point of view and a more pragmatic one, lingering on the solutions adopted by firms belonging to the EU and China.

After collecting enough theoretical and pragmatic data, the focus of this paper goes back to the theory, while trying to provide some useful guidelines to follow when deciding whether or not to implement remote work, and how to do it. The more complex the environment gets, the more efforts should be made for keeping processes simple. The final model proposal here provided will hopefully help HR managers to have a clearer idea of what steps should be followed when going remote: it is a pragmatic example of simplifying processes in order to keep the control of an environment that becomes more complex. The model is composed by several variables, which are the result of the sum up of the findings listed in the first two chapters. By applying these variables to different environments, each firm can obtain its own personalized model to follow.

In conclusion, the hybrid work model is here to stay, as it has proved to be a positive tool, whereas it is wisely applied. It will not stay as a rule in every industry or for every firm strategy, but it still is a valid solution, which can, under the right circumstances, increase the talent attraction power of a company, and even its return in terms of productivity. Companies will not go back to the starting point; after this huge experiment was carried out nothing can ever be the same.

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