

Remote Work and Human Resources Challenges From the Covid-19 Pandemic Scenario: The Cases of Italy and Portugal

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Abstract: This study presents the preliminary results of a European project (EURECA) being carried out in Italy and Portugal. One of its aims is to understand the role of remote work arising from the recent pandemic. The question that drove this research was: *What is the role of remote work resulting from the emergent changes of the 2019 pandemic scenario in Portuguese and Italian organisations?*. Case studies were used as the methodological approach, and the qualitative and inductive work directed the research, guided by the assumptions of practice-based theory. Thus, interviews were conducted with human resource managers and/or directors of companies/public institutions. So far, the sample comprises 16 organisations. The results show that before the crisis, which lasted about two years, most organisations did not engage in remote work. Afterwards, human resources practices had to adapt to this new reality, and hybrid work (a combination of remote and face-to-face work) is currently present in most of the organisations studied. New challenges are also appearing in this area, including new information systems, career management, and training and performance evaluation, among others. Hence, this new model of work design also brings new challenges to organisations and management. The implications pressing issue are several: practical (for management and organisations); theoretical (new inputs on HR practices, remote working and change management); and methodological (reinforcing the importance of case studies and practice-based theory in a comparative analysis of the Portuguese and Italian contexts). Avenues for further research are also proposed.

Keywords: Remote work, Human resources challenges, Case study, Covid-19 pandemic, Portugal, Italy, EURECA project

1. Introduction and Background

The recent Covid-19 pandemic increased the prevalence of remote work (RW) to an unprecedented global scale, as a new operating dynamic emerged to face the unpredictability of the lockdown. RW has been successfully implemented by organisations and governments around the world. From March 2020, more than 3.5 billion individuals were confined to their homes, leading several million to RW (Bouziri et al., 2020).

On the 4th May, 2023, The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) officially declared the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, which started on the 11th March, 2020. After only two years of the global lockdown, the resultant practices and challenges of HRM, as well as the working designs and the role of RW, are still not well known. Although there is abundant theory and approaches on the subject matter, studies with practical evidence are scarce and there is still a gap in the knowledge on this subject area. Hence, further studies are needed to demonstrate practical evidence of these emerging issues. As some authors claim (Hamouche, 2021), future research should be directed toward longitudinal analysis to identify the new challenges and opportunities, and further knowledge of the impacts of Covid-19 must be developed and more rapidly disseminated (Vahdat, 2022). The current paper intends to contribute to these gaps and claims.

So, when Covid-19 came to town, human resources practices suffered a shock and had to adapt to the new challenges faced by organizations and their staff. The era of Covid-19 put RW in the spotlight, and research work on the associated problems has been growing. As Jacks (2021, p. 93) notes, 'the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the face of global IT forever and "remote work" is now simply "work". This has quickly become a cultural norm around the world...'

As this is still a recent phenomenon, there remains a deep knowledge gap. The general concern of this paper is to understand the reality for two countries regarding the challenges of RW as a result of this global event. Accordingly, a starting question to guide this research was posed: *What is the role of remote work resulting from the emergent changes from the 2019 pandemic scenario in Portuguese and Italian organisations?*

From the multiple definitions of this work design, there is a central idea: organisations give their workforce the possibility to carry out work at a distance, remotely and outside their conventional physical spaces, using communication equipment and technologies (Piteira, 2020). However, as the current situation is changing rapidly, so the concept must be updated. Recently, several authors have argued that the Covid-19 pandemic has initiated an important RW transformation, which has started a new debate about its effects on the labour market, the workplace, and on organisational practices, as well as a debate about the potential strategies to address these challenges (Tursunbayeva, Di Lauro and Antonelli, 2022). Arunprasad et al. (2022) underline the literature on RW and pinpoint the factors for managing a remote workforce. The authors made a bibliometric analysis on the research published in Scopus journals, followed by a critical literature analysis. They presented a framework that organisations can use to manage remote workforces, focusing on employee engagement, collaboration and organisational agility. These findings highlight technology orientation, leadership, human resources management practices, external processes and organisational culture as having critical implications for managing the remote workforce.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to contribute knowledge for a better understanding of this new working model, one based on practical observation, using the case method as a research strategy. The present work is part of a European research project (EURECA), currently being conducted by a team of researchers from Italy, Portugal and Spain. This qualitative study comprises data from Italy and Portugal.

2. Design Research, Method and Procedures

According to the previous research question and the selected literature, a set of work propositions were posed in order to guide the data collection and analysis:

P1. The definition and application of RW has changed with the organisational experiences from the pandemic scenario (2020-2022).

Recently, some studies have been produced that discuss RW as an adopted work design caused by the global Covid-19 lockdown (Ozimek, 2020; Piteira, 2020; Wang, Liu, Qian and Parker, 2021; Wontorczyk and Rożnowski, 2022). However, a better comprehension of this is still required.

P2. The organisational experiences during the pandemic scenario (2020-2022) highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of RW.

There is a considerable body of literature on RW design, the relevance of which has been underlined by the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically its advantages and disadvantages (Ferreira, Pereira, Bianchi and Silva, 2021; Piteira, 2020).

P3. As a result of the organisational experiences during the pandemic scenario (2020-2022), use of RW is the predominant trend.

Some literature has been produced on this assumption, and the pandemic scenario has reinforced the challenges of HRM in crises, especially through the focus on RW (Alalmaie, Nanda and Alayan, 2023; Contreras, 2020; Sapó and Spinks, 2002; Vyas, 2022).

P4. The organisational experiences during the pandemic scenario (2020-2022) and the corresponding mandatory RW have posed a new set of challenges to HRM and organisations.

HRM is an attractive area for investigations, particularly given the challenges posed by RW design. Currently, with the identified knowledge gap from the post-pandemic scenario already noted, these challenges are the concern of many different actors, and it has been discussed and listed by some studies (Adekoya, Adisa and Aiyenitaju, 2022; Arunprasad et al., 2022; Sharma, 2022; Tursunbayeva et al., 2022).

Method and procedures

The current work intends to generate knowledge based on practice. With a more complex workplace after the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the present work seeks to check if past explanations and theories still explain the new reality. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was used due to the nature of the data, and an inductive approach was taken due to the role of theory and to the researchers' decisions regarding the work process, as suggested by classical authors in the literature (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This is especially the case with contemporary management; it is increasingly understood to be complex, dynamic, distributed, mobile and transient, and to be so in unprecedented ways. Accordingly, inductive research was conducted starting from empirical observation with minor pre-existing theory. The case-study

method was used in accordance with the recommendations of Yin (1994), using semi-structured interviews as the evidence source in the data-collection (2022/2023 ongoing). The research process followed four phases: (1) definition of the objectives and the empirical field for the purposes of undertaking the quantitative study in the EURECA project and gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the organizational perspective; (2) selection of the empirical field in order to have, in each country (Portugal and Italy), an organization for each category of size, activity sector and nature of the capital/mission; (3) conducting interviews with directors/HR managers; (4) data analysis and interpretation of results, and generation of case studies in order to establish comparisons.

The interviews had a pre-existing script informed by the research goals of the EURECA project, with flexibility to introduce new questions. The interviews were conducted online in the interviewee’s native language, were recorded, and lasted about 60 minutes each. The collected data were analysed by country, highlighting the key points of each section, and then compared to find similarities and differences. Qualitative analysis was then carried out on the data following Bardin's (1997) guidelines regarding coding procedures, ensuring quality and fulfilling the criteria for content analysis (completeness, representativeness, homogeneity, pertinence and exclusivity). Consequently, to display and compare the data, co-categorical matrices were generated.

The empirical scenario comprised 16 organisations (7 Italian and 9 Portuguese, see table 1), selected based on criteria previously defined by the EURECA project team (size; product/service; mission and country).

Table 1: Empirical Field

Company description	Italy	Portugal
Size	Big: 3; SME: 4	Big: 6; SME: 3
Product	Manufacturing: 1; Service: 6	Manufacturing: 1; Service: 8
Mission	Private (n=4); Public (n=3).	Private (n=6); Public (n=3).

3. Findings: The RW by the Cases of Italia and Portugal

Data and findings were structured by the following questions: *How is RW currently understood from the organisational management perspective?; Which are its advantages/disadvantages?; and, What kind of new challenges are there for HRM?.*

How is RW currently understood from an organisational management perspective?

This study attempted to determine whether RW was a new mode of work that resulted from the crisis generated by the pandemic or whether it was already a common practice in the group of organisations studied. Thus, how RW was used in recent years was investigated, comparing the trends before, during and after the isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic (see table 2).

Table 2: Remote Work Trends in Portuguese and Italian Organisations

Companies	Before 2020 lockdown	Lockdown (2020-2022)	After lockdown (2022 onwards)
Italian Case			
Insiel	Yes, occasional use of telework	Yes	Yes, full remote and hybrid
Regesta	Yes but to a really small extent, aimed at supporting personal needs	Yes	Hybrid work only
Agenzia Entrate FVG	Just rare cases of telework	Yes	Hybrid work, mainly for individual needs

Companies	Before 2020 lockdown	Lockdown (2020-2022)	After lockdown (2022 onwards)
Provincia Autonoma Trento	Yes, occasional use of telework and smart-working	Yes	Hybrid work, consistent with organizational needs
Job Agency	Yes, occasionally, supporting personal needs	Yes	Considerable access to hybrid work
Benetton	Extensive use of remote work from 2017 (both telework and smart-working)	Only in the functions that could be performed remotely	Wide access to hybrid work
Blackship	Born in full remote in 2013	Yes	Totally full remote
Portuguese Case			
AERLIS	No	Yes	Hybrid
AICEP	No	Yes	Hybrid
Auchan Group	Occasionally	Only in the functions that could be performed remotely	Hybrid
El Corte Inglés	No	Only in the functions that...	Hybrid
GELPEIXE	No	Only in the functions that...	Occasionally
Integrity	No	Yes	Hybrid
Yellow Group	Occasionally	Yes	Hybrid
IPDJ	Occasionally	Yes	Hybrid
ISCAL	No	Yes	Presential tendency, RW by exception

The case of Italy shows that before the pandemic, all the organisations had experimented with a form of RW, albeit with different intensity. In most of the cases, it was a mode allowed only to employees in particular conditions (i.e., family requirements, health, distance) and only to a small number of people. Several organisations tested a mode of office-delocalisation to reduce transit from home to a central site. Only one company operated fully remotely, and this did not change during the pandemic or after. The whole Italian sample experienced RW during the pandemic, as all organisations were in lockdown. Before the lockdown, all companies, except the fully-remote one, applied a telework model, and only two of them (one private and one public) navigated a smart-working model before the pandemic. While the need to equip all employees in RW with a laptop and phone represented the most difficult obstacle for public organisations, for private ones the worst problem was managing people. Moreover, those organisations where RW had been applied consistently before the pandemic had less difficulty in managing RW.

In the Portuguese case, just one organisation was technology-based, where RW is more likely. The majority (six organisations) did not apply RW before the lockdown, but three interviewees mentioned it as an occasional practice in necessary situations. All organisations adopted RW, apart from those in manufacturing and retail (which were not in lockdown), and with the exception of functions that could not be performed remotely. Post lockdown (2022 onwards), the tendency has been to adopt a hybrid model. The majority of organisations tend to adopt a system whereby, in necessary situations and in functions where RW is possible, employees have a choice. This is not entirely in remote mode, so as not to lose the connection to the organisation, but rather

with some days present and others spent out of the office. RW was generally adopted by these organisations after the lockdown (2020-2022), which had previously operated almost exclusively on a face-to-face basis. Hence, this hybrid scheme (some days at home and others in the organisation) is the prevailing one for those functions that can be carried out remotely.

Once the use of RW had been characterised, we aimed to find out *How is RW currently understood from an organisational management perspective?*

In the Italian sample, only one company worked fully remotely from the beginning, with the management model being smart-working-oriented in its essence. All employees (25) worked from home and met with customers and colleagues only virtually. For the other organisations, a hybrid model was applied where in employees work some days in the physical office and some days remotely, though with no employee working fully remotely. Each organisation had its own plan in managing how many days were worked remotely vs in-office. Several organisations set a minimum number of days required in the office (5 to 9 days per month), others set a maximum number of days required in remote (2 or 3 per week), and only one set a maximum number of days per month (8). In most organisations, especially those in public administration, a fixed number of hours to be available online was defined when people were in remote (2 or 3 to 6 hours), as well as a mandatory disconnection period, in line with Italian law. Generally, the calendar had to be shared with the team leader. The most common approach was to allow people to stay in remote (negotiated between employees and managers), and in only one case was it seen as a new way to manage people, suggesting that RW is seen more as a benefit more for the employee than for the company.

According to the Portuguese data, the concept of RW is linked to autonomy, flexibility, self-management and the use of communication technologies. Hence, the hybrid model is also defined as the possibility of choosing to work some days in the office and others outside it. Following this definition, the mixed model between RW and face-to-face is the trend.

Considering this evidence, P1 was accepted, meaning, "The definition and application of RW has changed with the organisational experiences during the pandemic scenario (2020-2022)". Similarly, P3 can also be confirmed, meaning that, "As a result of the organisational experiences during the pandemic scenario (2020-2022), use of RW is the predominant trend."

Which are the main (dis)advantages of RW for organisations?

Notwithstanding the fact that RW has been widely adopted by organisations and it is not possible to go back to a traditional format (face-to-face mode only), the advantages and disadvantages of this mode of work were also questioned.

Italy

More flexibility and a better work-life balance were the two factors mentioned by all the organisations. Remote working permits a large flexibility to choose the timing, the place and the way to manage the job, and also to perceive the need of the other colleagues, i.e., managing a timetable of when to meet and when to work autonomously. Remote work is appreciated mainly for guaranteeing the opportunity to spend more time at home, to manage home tasks and to gain a better work-life balance. It also fulfils the expectations of younger generations for whom work-life balance is a fundamental condition in accepting a new job position. For some organisations, the value of RW also lies in reducing costs, both for employees (travel) and for the company (logistics, electricity...).

The common risks perceived by the organisations were the social isolation of employees and its consequent stress, the difficulty of sharing ideas and values, scarce communication, and the risk of losing organisational commitment and engagement. HR directors were aware that a cultural change is needed to make RW an effective way to manage people in organisations, though the majority of them felt unprepared in this regard.

Italian companies saw RW as a point-of-no-return, and saw the future as being a hybrid formula where employees stay partially remote and partially in-office. Even if RW is seen as a benefit for the individual employee when it is a choice and not a duty, the criticisms are evident and currently without solutions. It is evident that a new culture is needed characterised by less organisational control and more autonomy and self-responsibility, and the results will be seen in the future.

None of the organisation had a specific plan for the career development of remote workers, as this was perceived as a way to discriminate remote workers, and hence they underscored the importance of equal treatment of both categories (remote and in-office).

Portugal

The flexibility of time and place can be a motivating factor for workers. It can help reduce absenteeism, increase resilience and allow for the reorganisation of work processes, making it easier to complete some tasks. It was also pointed out that the time and money saved on travelling and the ability to provide oneself with a more comfortable work environment increased the well-being of workers. Furthermore, organisations can recruit talent from around the world, enabling them to expand and internationalise. Using the right technological tools, work can be more effective and communication can be faster, enabling more meetings to be held with more teams/employees. Accordingly, new HR practices and policies are emerging.

However, some disadvantages were pointed out, namely issues associated with culture, loss of identity and disconnection from the organisation. Remote working increases loneliness and psychosocial risks by decreasing emotional connections, interactions and socialisation with colleagues, sustaining the state in which employees do not know each other. The available forms of communication also contribute to these problems as they are distance-based and provide less possibility for interaction. This may also result in a sense of inequality and less control over the work process. Thus, there should be greater emphasis on making team management and leadership more effective. Legislation has not kept up with this evolution, however, and hence there is a lack of legal frameworks for both RW and hybrid models and their associated problems.

These data strengthen literature that has noted the numerous advantages and disadvantages of RW, leading also to the acceptance of P2. Hence, the empirical evidence is also in line with what is discussed in the theoretical approaches presented above.

What kind of challenges has RW design posed to HRM?

Since 2022 and the easing of quarantine restrictions and the Covid-19 threat, the world of work has changed, bringing new challenges for HRM and pushing this management area to critically reflect on its role in organisations. New policies and new practices are being claimed as necessary, questioning the ability of HRM to provide an effective solution to the new problems brought by the new RW and hybrid work designs.

In Italy, the maintenance of RW after Covid-19 has been carried by employees more than by employers. Several laws have protected the right of employees to have the opportunity to work remotely, and both public and private companies have implemented different modes of work in respect of these laws. However, companies are still coping with the problems brought by this change and HR strategies seem inadequate to solve them. In particular, the choice to not differentiate HR development policies for RW or hybrid work seems to be a choice to not create inequalities through differentiated treatment, and to not make RW/Hybrid work employee feel stigmatised in comparison to their colleagues. The path seems easier for those companies that started out fully remote, or for companies (the minority in this case) where RW is also seen as an opportunity for the company.

In Portugal's case, the HR challenges arising from the new RW design were several. Because of autonomy, flexibility and self-management, many challenges will be posed to HRM, such as career management, recruitment, talent attraction and selection, performance evaluation, training, teamwork, information systems and knowledge management, among others. There is no going back from this new form of work organisation; new practices will have to be thought out and implemented, taking into account several factors: (1) management of different work schedules and workplaces, taking into account the asynchronies generated; (2) leadership and team management in different workplaces; (3) finding more effective forms of communication between people who are far apart, fostering proximity and the relationship between them; (4) working on culture and creating new strategies to foster a sense of belonging to the organisation; (5) updating technological tools that facilitate the two ways of working, as well as the information and knowledge management for organisations; (6) implementing new legislation adapted to the new labour dynamics resulting from RW and hybrid regimes; (7) identifying and resolving the new problems of workers' well-being (physical and psychological); (8) identifying and resolving the new problems associated with the balance between professional and personal life; and, (9) identifying new (and more) possibilities of internationalisation of HR and challenges associated with workforce diversity.

The results of this topic illustrate some of the practical problems that organisations and their human resource managers have been struggling with, which confirms P4, and reinforces the theory underlying this assumption.

4. Findings Discussion

Based on empirical evidence, it was possible to obtain two definitions: one for remote work and one for the hybrid model of work design. These definitions corroborate the latest literature. In parallel, the dimension of the advantages and disadvantages of RW in the post-pandemic scenario was also updated with the presented cases. The trends and prospects of RW were also raised by previous findings, matching the arguments in the current literature. Finally, some implications for HRM in these new configurations of work design were also raised by the two cases, which are reflected in the emerging research of this scientific area. Table 3 summarises the empirical evidence of reported cases and outlines some state-of-the-art theoretical evidence from the literature.

Table 3: Propositions State (P), and Empirical vs. Theoretical Evidences of RW from Covid-19 pandemic Scenario

Proposition state (P.)/Empirical Evidences	Theoretical Evidences
<p>P1. Accepted</p> <p><i>Remote Work: Definition and application</i></p> <p>Portugal:</p> <p>It is linked to autonomy, flexibility, self-management and the use of information and communication technologies. Less control of work process. Possibility of employees to choose the place and the time/days to work. New concept of hybrid work design: Fulfilling objectives and goals and work deadlines, therefore the location and time is indifferent.</p> <p>Italy:</p> <p>It is linked to flexibility in choosing time and location, where IT is an essential issue, both as equipment and competences. It is intended mainly as a benefit for the worker than it is for the organisation.</p>	<p>Strategy of making work and labour relations more flexible (Piteira, 2020).</p> <p>The possibility of employees working remotely with the use of IT devices and office equipment “outside the employer’s workplace...” (Wontorczyk and Roźnowski, 2022).</p> <p>Mode frequently used in crisis scenarios (Sapo and Spinks, 2002; Contreras, 2020).</p>
<p>P2. Accepted</p> <p><i>Organisational (Dis)advantages of RW</i></p> <p>Portugal and Italy:</p> <p>Advantages: employee motivation; effectiveness in resource management (less office expenses and logistics, more working time efficiency, etc.); ease in organising tasks and work, wider recruitment; less absenteeism; better quality of work-life/more comfortable work environment.</p> <p>Disadvantages: organisational disengagement; loss of cultural identity; employee isolation; problems with teamwork and leadership; communication barriers; lack of control over work processes.</p>	<p>Advantages: greater organisational and productive flexibility; reduced costs.</p> <p>For HRM: easier recruitment and outsourcing; greater retention and stability of qualified staff.</p> <p>Disadvantages: high initial investment in equipment, weakening the organisational culture; loss of control over work processes.</p> <p>(Greer and Payne, 2014; Dyczkowski, 2012).</p>
<p>P3. Accepted</p> <p><i>Trends of RW</i></p> <p>Portugal and Italy:</p> <p>Mixed model between RW and face-to-face, such as the trend</p>	<p>Remote work can guarantee a win-win</p>

Proposition state (P.)/Empirical Evidences	Theoretical Evidences
<p>is a hybrid work design. The hybrid scheme (some days at home and others in the company), for the functions that can be carried out remotely, is the prevailing one.</p> <p>In Italy, mainly triggered by employee requests and company concession. Italian law is supporting it as a worker's right. Different situation appears for companies initiated as a fully-remote organisations.</p>	<p>situation for employers and employees (Popovici and Popovici, 2020).</p> <p>RW future will to help drive economic growth, in a post-Covid-19 world, with the help of new public policies (Gupta, 2020).</p>
<p>P4. Accepted</p> <p><i>RW and HRM/Organisational Challenges</i></p> <p>Portugal:</p> <p>HRM policies have to be conceived in this new work scheme. Issues such as new logistics and equipment, hard/soft skills and new competencies, as well as behavioural and social factors are emerging. International HRM will be an emerging strength area of organisations with the challenge of managing workforce diversity. In parallel, the adjustment of the legal framework to this new reality, producing new legal norms/laws.</p> <p>Italy: The legal framework seems not to create large problems for Italian companies, the HR managers asks for a new model to apply where the risks of isolation and the loss of organisational identity can be reduced.</p>	<p>Flexible working preferences, smart working practices (Adekoya et al., 2022).</p> <p>New strategies to leadership, people's physical and mental recovery in the post-pandemic (Sharma, 2022).</p> <p>Changes on the labour market, workplace, and organisational practices, as well as on the strategies related to the ways in which these challenges (Tursunbayeva et al., Di Lauro and Antonelli, 2022).</p> <p>Highlighting the technology orientation, leadership, HRM practices, external processes and organisational culture (Arunprasad et al., 2022; Tursunbayeva et al., Di Lauro and Antonelli, 2022).</p>

In sum, and regarding the research question *What is the role of remote work resulting from the emergent changes of the 2019 pandemic scenario in Portuguese and Italian organisations?*, RW played a critical role. It was a way to save organisations, workers and the economy. As the literature has discussed, RW had only been used in occasional crisis and disaster situations, such as earthquakes and floods. However, with the global health crisis inflicted by Covid-19, the relevance and timeliness of RW as a work-design model has been tested once again. Unlike past disastrous events where organisations returned to normal, this time the working landscape has changed and has drawn into question the most rigid and traditional models of full-time and face-to-face in-office work. As demonstrated in these cases, organisations are gradually adopting mixed-working systems with RW and the hybrid model.

In turn, organisational dynamics and HRM need to adapt to these new realities. The oldest models are becoming obsolete and incapable of dealing with the new problems faced by people in their work context. The main challenges are not only logistical issues and those due to new technological equipment and solutions, but also those of managing teams and people at a distance, the performance of tasks and the sharing of both information and knowledge, as well as behavioural problems related to communication and personal relationships. The practices of attraction, recruitment and selection, the definition of competencies and performance assessment, career management, and training, among others, will have to be thought over and reviewed.

5. Conclusion

The qualitative analysis herein has presented the opportunity to collect data in depth and to understand how the changes due to the lockdown have been disruptive for many types of organisations: public or private, manufacturing or service, small or large, Italian or Portuguese. A common sentiment among these organisations is captured in the idea that “we cannot go back”. The world of HRM has changed and organisations are now operating with the awareness that this change brings risks and new needs to HR policies and practices.

Because of the small sample, the results cannot be easily generalised. Specifically for companies that started as fully remote, the situation can be seen as less problematic. Moreover, the present research has explored only the HR managers point of view. Employees’ perceptions need to be explored with additional research. Also,

the present study considered only two countries, and it is possible that other countries reacted differently. We have seen, comparing Italy and Portugal, that Italian law seems to be perceived by HR as more effective in promoting RW. While there is more awareness about the importance of work-life balance for young generations, there are still doubts about how to effectively manage people in a hybrid mode. HR managers see these challenges as a big opportunity, though do not yet feel prepared to manage it. A conjunction of scientific research and application is also requested by companies. The implication of RW after the Covid-19 pandemic can be categorized into three areas: practical (for management and organisations); theoretical (new inputs on HR practices, remote working and change management); and methodological (reinforcing the importance of case studies and practice-based theory in a comparative analysis of the Portuguese and Italian contexts).

In theoretical terms, the considerable literature developed in this field has filled most major knowledge gaps. The data reinforced some of these theoretical assumptions by underlining their relevance and timeliness. In methodological terms, qualitative studies are less preferred within the scientific community than studies with large samples and aimed at making generalisations. However, the present study provides knowledge of concrete practical experiences, oriented towards gaining a greater depth of understanding of a recent impactful issue by taking a comprehensive perspective. The case study is thus reaffirmed as a method of inquiry for its importance in building knowledge based on practice and bringing possible new insights not yet discovered in the literature. Two European cases have been presented, allowing for comparisons and providing practical implications of the study. Since the global pandemic (2020-2022), there has been a lack of knowledge regarding the role of RW and how organizations are managing it. Providing that knowledge is one of the major contributions of this work, which is done by highlighting concrete strategies (and respective problems/anxieties) of organisations from two European countries. These contributions will be useful for several societal agents and professionals (researchers/academia; organisations/managers/HR professionals; economic agents and policy makers).

However, further studies would be desirable in order to investigate more cases (more countries and organisations), make more complex comparisons, and develop an updated body of knowledge. Therefore, quantitative studies and the formulation of new dimensions of the problem are welcome.

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