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THE EFFECTS OF REMOTE WORK ON THE WELL-BEING OF
YOUNG WORKERS

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Abstract

Remote working is a working model increasingly adopted in today's business world. Remote working offers employees flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance. They can reduce the time spent in traffic and manage their work more efficiently. As the mutual gains perspective suggests, these affect a worker's well-being, which creates benefits for the employers. Moreover, remote working arrangements are providing other benefits for employers. However, there are some challenges to working remotely. Important elements such as communication and collaboration can be more difficult between teams that are not physically together. Even so, when correctly managed, remote work can increase employee satisfaction, work efficiency and flexibility and support work-life balance.

This study evaluated the effects of remote working on the well-being of young workers. Millennials were the focus of this study among young workers since they comprise the biggest generational group in the current workforce. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with seven people ranging between 25 to 34 years old.

Based on the interviews conducted and the cross-reference with the literature, remote work presents benefits such as flexibility, efficiency, reduced stress, and the disappearance of geographic restrictions; and some challenges namely distractions at home, blurring of the boundaries between work and private life, lack of appropriate feedback, overtime, communication and collaboration difficulties, suitable working spaces, and social isolation. Despite all this, interviewees still expressed great satisfaction with working from home. Remote workers express preference towards a hybrid system that would be on their own terms, meaning they would want to choose when to go and how often. It is found that experienced remote workers have developed ways to cope with the challenges of remote work, promising to resolve the issues, nonetheless, the solutions stay on an individual level, highlighting the requirement of the companies to explore more comprehensive solutions.

Keywords: Remote Work, Well-Being, Young Workers, Work-Life Balance, Mutual Gains Perspective, Job Satisfaction, Millennials

Resumo

Remote work é um modelo de trabalho cada vez mais adotado no mundo empresarial. O *Remote work* oferece aos trabalhadores flexibilidade, autonomia e equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional. Estes afetam o bem-estar dos trabalhadores e criam benefícios para os patrões, como sugere a *mutual gains perspective*. Além disso, os acordos de trabalho remoto proporcionam outros benefícios aos patrões. No entanto, existem alguns desafios em trabalhar remotamente, como a comunicação e a colaboração podem ser mais difíceis entre equipas que não estão fisicamente juntas. Apesar disso, quando gerido corretamente, o trabalho remoto pode aumentar a satisfação dos funcionários, a eficiência e a flexibilidade do trabalho e apoiar o equilíbrio entre vida pessoal e profissional.

Este estudo avaliou os efeitos do trabalho remoto no bem-estar dos jovens trabalhadores. A geração *Millennials* foi o foco deste estudo, uma vez que constituem o maior grupo geracional na força de trabalho atual. Foram realizadas entrevistas com sete pessoas com idades entre 25 e 34 anos.

Com base nas entrevistas realizadas e na sua relação com a literatura, o *remote work* apresenta benefícios como flexibilidade, eficiência, redução do *stress*, a solução para as restrições geográficas; e também desafios, nomeadamente distrações em casa, balanço trabalho e vida privada, falta de feedback adequado, horas extraordinárias, dificuldades de comunicação e colaboração, espaços de trabalho adequados e isolamento social.

Apesar destes, os entrevistados ainda manifestaram grande satisfação em trabalhar a partir de casa. Os trabalhadores remotos expressam preferência por um sistema híbrido que seja feito em seus próprios termos, o que significa que eles gostariam de escolher quando ir e com que frequência. Os trabalhadores remotos experientes desenvolveram formas de lidar com os desafios do trabalho remoto, prometendo resolver os desafios encontrados, no entanto, as soluções permanecem a nível individual, evidenciando a necessidade das empresas explorarem soluções mais abrangentes.

Keywords: *Remote Work*, Bem-Estar, Jovens Trabalhadores, Equilíbrio Trabalho Vida, *Mutual Gains Perspective*, Satisfação no Trabalho, *Millennials*

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Table 1. Characteristics of Participants

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1. Introduction

There are several reasons why the theme of “The Effects of Remote Work on the Well-Being of Young Workers” has been chosen. It first emerged from my own knowledge and the experience of my community. I work remotely as part of a virtual team with team members from all around the world. Also, I am part of the expat community in Porto and close to people with similar work experience and age groups. These points feed both my interest and my knowledge of the research area.

Furthermore, I plan to continue and grow with the same company after graduation. The company I work for employs many young adults, and I am in a position where I get to manage dozens of workers as part of my daily work duties. In my team, I am observing a difference between the younger and more experienced workers in how they perceive their work and their expectations and needs. By gaining such expertise in this area, I could contribute to the management practices of my company and bring a closer look on well-being, with a focus on young workers. New frameworks and implications could help tackle such differences in my work life.

Millennials' assumed preferred work type was remote work due to their technologically advanced position compared to the older generations (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). However, recent studies show more of the negative sides of remote work on the well-being of young workers (Beño et al., 2021), leading many of them to leave their companies quite frequently. According to the research of Nicholas and Guzman (2009), there are “generational differences that can impact attracting, retaining, managing and motivating a diverse workforce” (p. 9). Therefore, a better understanding of the young remote workers' views on these issues is an important step toward improving the current management practices.

This study is focused on the impacts of remote work on the well-being of young workers, including the positive and negative effects of such working arrangements. The theoretical developments on generational differences and the mutual gains perspective for both employees and employers will support the study. The empirical research will focus on young remote workers' views and experiences.

The main question of the research is, "What is the impact of remote work on the well-being of young employees?" However, since multiple themes are being considered in

the study, it is also necessary to specify the sub-questions. Accordingly, the sub-questions of the research are listed as follows:

1. What are the effects of remote work on young employees?
2. What is the impact of remote work on the work-life balance of young employees?
3. What are the effects of remote work on the performance of young employees?
4. What are the effects of remote work on the motivation of young employees?
5. What are the effects of remote work on the job satisfaction of young employees?

Remote work is a particular work arrangement requiring different approaches from the traditional management systems. Platts et al. (2022) mention the importance of acknowledging the differences between the management of teams in physical and virtual workplaces and the need to adapt new approaches for different working arrangements.

According to the mutual gains perspective, well-being is critical for employees and employers. The research from Ferrara et al. (2022) shows both positive and negative effects of remote work on employees' well-being before the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of research on today's reality opens the way for further research on the impact of remote work in the post-pandemic environment and how managers could reshape the organisational environment.

Research on remote work's effects on well-being started recently (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the related control measures brought immediate changes into people's lives, and the pandemic conditions have been a major element in the rising awareness of the importance of work-life balance (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022). Most papers in the literature focus on the differences in employees' well-being before and during the pandemic restrictions, like the paper of Pataki-Bittó and Kun (2022). Further research on remote workers' well-being can help managers recreate the workplaces in post-pandemic times with improved professional practices and policies (Parry et al., 2022). This study contributes to literature since most studies focus on comparing prior to and during the pandemic conditions.

Even though there are several studies on younger workers and their distinctive features on remote work and well-being, some gaps remain in the literature. The alignment of well-being and the long-term interests of corporations reflect the relevance of employee well-being in management and considers the specific features of younger workers. The importance of this group of workers comes from the fact that people at an early career stage have been the most adversely affected in recent years.

This study contributes to filling this gap, and the young workers with a different reality than the previous generations could be studied closely.

The research consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part of the study. In the second chapter, the conceptual framework is presented. It starts by discussing the concepts of remote work. Its definition and effects were evaluated and explained with the topics of work-life balance and performance. Then, the subject of well-being is discussed. Its definition, relation to remote work, mutual gains perspective and job satisfaction are explained here. The second chapter was completed after discussing generational differences and young workers.

The third chapter constitutes the methodology of the research. First, the research model is explained. Then, the sampling and data collection process is included. After the method, the fourth chapter presents the findings and discussion. In the last chapter, the study is completed by presenting the conclusion and implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Remote Work

2.1.1 The Concepts of Remote Work

Telecommuting was one of the first descriptions of remote working arrangements (Charalampous et al., 2019). Jack Nilles, the author who first coined the term telecommuting, is considered by researchers as the father of the term (Madsen, 2001). Nilles (1975) described Telecommuting as a way of avoiding making long commutes to a central office and working in offices close to but commonly not in employees' homes with the help of telecommuting networks. Teleworking and telecommuting are the two terms most frequently found in the literature in those early years (Madsen, 2001). The term telecommuting has been widely used in the US, along with the term teleworking, to describe all forms of work done away from a head office but still connected to it (Charalampous et al., 2019). On the European continent, the most popular term was teleworking (Madsen, 2001).

Bailey and Kurland (2002) define telework as “an early form of virtual work” (p. 2). Teleworkers worked outside the office long before laptops, mobile phones, and other wireless devices turned hotels and airport lounges into workplaces (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). The advancement of technology forced managers to reconsider how they assess performance and manage staff as the work environment was redefined regarding how and where work could be done (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). Following these technological developments, Kirk and Belovics (2006) defined e-workers as “full-time, home-based telecommuters who work and communicate primarily through electronic mediums such as the Internet, corporate intranets, and electronic mail with very little face-to-face interaction with the main office location or staff” (p. 1).

Despite the most typical form of remote work being home-based teleworking, there has been an increase in the number of people who work in multiple places in recent years (Charalampous et al., 2019). According to the definitions that emerged in the 2010s, employees could work from any place at any time, with the help of advanced technology to support flexible working arrangements (C. S. Grant et al., 2013).

Nowadays, people work elsewhere besides home (Charalampous et al., 2019). Bellmann and Hübler (2020) define the concept of remote work as “Working from home, also called remote work (RW), telecommuting, teleworking, homework, home office, mobile

work, outwork and the flexible workplace, is a work arrangement, in which employees do not commute to their workplace in the company” (2020, p. 1). Likewise in their paper, Charalampous et al. (2019) include “work being completed anywhere and at any time regardless of location and to the widening use of technology to aid flexible working practices” (p.1).

Throughout history, different terms and definitions have been used to refer to this work arrangement. The most used were telecommuting, teleworking, e-working and, in recent years, remote working. After the literature review, “remote work” has been chosen as an umbrella term for this study since it is the most recent and inclusive form.

2.1.2 Effects of Remote Work

Even though remote work arrangements became more popular and widespread during the Covid-19 pandemic, recent research indicates that this type of work arrangement, or flexible forms of work in a more general sense, will still be highly significant for the future job scene (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). The main motivation of employees who prefer remote work is mentioned in the studies as better concentration, more engaging work, and personal decision-making on time management (Pataki-Bitto et al., 2022).

Remote work also appeals to workers because it gives them more autonomy and responsibility, however the stress that comes with it may affect family relationships (Lewis & Cooper, 1995). Companies have seen remote work to offer flexibility to employees and have been considering it as part of their well-being policies, whilst in return, companies are expected to reduce costs and improve productivity (C. S. Grant et al., 2013).

Remote work is already a well-established concept in many organisations, whereas the remote work studies before the pandemic have been challenged regarding the effect of remote work on employees' quality of work life, showing both positive and negative effects on matters such as well-being and productivity (Straus et al., 2022).

On the one hand, the literature suggests several positive effects of remote work, and the main ones can be listed as workers' increased level of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and a reduced feeling of emotional exhaustion (Charalampous et al., 2019). The advantages of remote work centres on increased autonomy, decreased role conflict, and reduced work pressure (Olsen et al., 2023). Some studies also indicate a link between remote work and productivity, quality, and life satisfaction, making remote work arrangements rather popular (Pataki-Bitto et al., 2022). Gillet et al. (2020) suggest that remote work helps

employees gain more autonomy and flexibility when attaining their work activities. Because of the flexibility and autonomy that remote work offers employees, it is believed that remote work may reduce stress and burnout, as well as fatigue and improve work-life balance, thereby increasing employees' job satisfaction and ultimately increasing job performance (Ferrara et al., 2022).

On the other hand, Gillet et al. (2020) mention that remote workers struggle more with work-life balance regarding family than onsite workers. According to the literature, remote workers are more likely to work longer hours and more likely to imbalance their personal and professional lives, which results in higher levels of stress and anxiety (Song et al., 2019). Interference between work and family stands out as the main challenge of remote work (Gillet et al., 2020). This is related to interruptions and distractions from family members, which decreases work effectiveness (Gillet et al., 2020). Other than that, because of remote work, employees may suffer from work isolation which can result in a decrease in employees' sense of belonging to the company due to the lack of social support from colleagues bringing the risk of stress and anxiety problems (Ferrara et al., 2022).

Overall, the literature on remote work shows mixed results about how this type of arrangement might affect organizational processes, employee productivity, and well-being (Ferrara et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Work-Life Balance

The study shows that not only being granted to work remotely but the ability to manage the balance between work and life itself is the main influence of the higher level of perceived positive well-being (Ferrara et al., 2022). Remote work arrangement affects productivity, well-being, and work-life balance, which are all highly relevant topics for workers, managers, and companies (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). These three areas overlap and interrelate to some degree, where productivity can be impacted in positive and negative ways by well-being and work-life conflict (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). Remote work that increases workers' autonomy and choice is commonly found helpful to workers' well-being and work-life balance (Platts et al., 2022). Also, remote work affects how workers perceive themselves and their jobs, how they view their work-life balance, and its effects on their physical and mental health (Ferrara et al., 2022).

Remote work can facilitate a win-win situation for workers and companies (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). For companies, remote work can contribute to a higher level of worker

productivity and to retain skilled workers (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). For the workers, remote work provides a better work-life balance, increasing job satisfaction and commitment to the company (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

A better work-life balance is frequently mentioned as the most significant benefit of home offices, though it is still debatable whether this result can be generalised to all employees (Bellmann et al., 2020). The study suggests that remote work has been beneficial for people who need to consider their family arrangements, for family members with care needs or for people who want to cut down on their commute time so they can spend more time doing other activities (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). Some workers perceive normal working hours as restrictive, and remote work provides a release from those limitations (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). Flexible work allows employees to spare more time for their personal lives, especially for their family and loved ones (Charalampous et al., 2022).

Work-life balance stands as one of the main advantages of remote work (Ferrara et al., 2022). Nevertheless, remote work should be considered for more than just its enablement of work-life balance (C. S. Grant et al., 2013). Remote work arrangements generally allow better employee independence, better working time management and greater autonomy (Platts et al., 2022). However, remote work also may cause a higher level of work-life conflict due to the disruptions of home life, thus resulting in more likeliness of stress (Platts et al., 2022).

Another negative aspect of remote work is it enables workers to continue working later in the evening (Charalampous et al., 2022), which can have both positive and negative impacts. Longer working hours due to remote work impacts workers' well-being since it results in poorer work-life balance or compromises the time that could be spared for leisure activities, house duties, friends, and family (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). Research shows that remote work affects employees' personal lives, making it harder to switch off from work and impossible to unwind from work at the end of the day (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). This contributes to working at unusual hours, and the always-on culture creates the expectation of being reachable outside of normal working hours, resulting in work-life conflict and making it harder to maintain distance from work (Charalampous et al., 2022).

The current studies about the role of remote work on work-life balance show mixed results (Ferrara et al., 2022). Also, the literature on remote work and worker well-being is still at an early stage (Charalampous et al., 2019). Further research indicates that remote workers may often experience guilt, overwork to compensate for the flexibility they gain from the

remote work arrangement and, as a result, develop a negative view towards remote work since their work activity intensifies (Charalampous et al., 2019).

2.1.4 Performance

In the literature, there is little evidence against the improved productivity of remote workers (Schifano et al., 2021). Remote work is correlated with better job performance, a greater sense of autonomy, increased productivity, better work-life balance, reduced stress, and higher levels of employee satisfaction (Song & Gao, 2020). The popularity of remote work arrangements comes from the literature on the effects of such work arrangements on productivity (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). The connection between remote work and productivity indicates that remote work can increase productivity, partly because workers typically work longer hours when they work from home (Charalampous et al., 2022).

The perceived performance of remote workers is higher due to the connection between remote work and productivity with the mediation of life satisfaction (Ferrara et al., 2022). Enhanced productivity can be achieved when it is accompanied by work-life balance, summarised as when the work is close but not too close (George et al., 2021). Thus, higher life satisfaction contributes to higher productivity (Ferrara et al., 2022).

According to the literature, factors like autonomy, communication with colleagues, and management support help remote workers achieve successful outcomes (Olsen et al., 2023). Supportive colleagues, specifically, are found to play an important role in positive changes regarding productivity and stress (George et al., 2021). Remote work is often correlated with lower-quality relationships with colleagues, and the most employees think that working this way affects their interactions with managers and colleagues (Olsen et al., 2023). It is observed that when the work was moved to homes during the pandemic, workers with supportive coworkers lost the positive impact of their colleagues on their productivity (George et al., 2021). This shows the need for companies to invest in creating similar conditions to the office environment for their remote workers (George et al., 2021).

The literature review conducted by De Vincenzi et al. (2022) indicates that remote work does not necessarily bring positive or negative results yet rather that the outcomes depend on individual and work factors. Similarly, the productivity of remote workers is undeniably linked to the nature of the work task (Charalampous et al., 2022).

2.2 Well-Being

2.2.1 Well-Being Definition

From a historical standpoint, one of the main goals throughout the early 20th century was to maximise worker performance because, during the era of industrial capitalism, worker performance was the biggest concern, and research at the time was focused on finding ways to increase employee productivity (Taris et al., 2015). Well-being did not receive much attention until 1930s Hawthorne studies which examined the effects of working conditions on worker productivity and human motivation (Taris et al., 2015). Emotional well-being and job satisfaction were important factors for work performance (Taris et al., 2015).

Well-being was defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1946 as the form of entire physical, mental, and social well-being (Guest et al., 2017). After the WHO definition, the first mention of employee well-being in Human Resource Management (HRM) literature was in 1984 by Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills and Walton; their study suggests that when designing an HRM system, well-being consequences should be considered in the long-term (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Despite all these early concerns on the topic, employee well-being was not the focus of the HRM field, and scholars were mainly focused on HRM and performance (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020).

In recent years, studies on employee well-being started to gain increasing attention in the literature, with several studies showing that higher levels of employee well-being correlate with higher levels of worker effectiveness and performance, which also serves long-term company interests (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022). What can be found in the literature as a consensus on this topic is that well-being is a multidimensional concept with a dynamic form that changes over time (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022).

The concept of well-being has an elastic nature meaning different things to different people (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). In a wider sense, Waddell and Burton (2006) define well-being as “the subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one’s quality of life” (p. 15), and adding that well-being includes “physical, material, social, emotional (‘happiness’), and development & activity dimensions” (p. 15). In a narrower sense, well-being is limited to the psychological dimension, as reflected in job satisfaction (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020) and the level of purpose of fulfilment for each worker (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022). Similarly, A. M. Grant et al. (2007) define well-being as “the overall quality of an employee's experience and functioning at work” (p. 2).

Work must be perceived as fulfilling for well-being, and positive emotions must be triggered more frequently in workers than negative ones (Vakkayil et al., 2017). Other influential factors in the literature are the physical environment's role and stress (Pataki-Bittó & Kun, 2022). In parallel to this, it is argued that HRM may have contradictory effects on employee well-being because, on the one hand, it may provide an increase in commitment, satisfaction, and trust, while on the other hand, it may increase stress levels (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Waddell and Burton (2006) highlight that to promote well-being, the job and workplace must have characteristics such as job security, personal fulfilment, fair pay, autonomy, and job satisfaction.

2.2.2 Well-Being and Remote Work

Technological advancements continue to impact workplace well-being (Guest, 2017). Growing numbers of people are working from home due to the expansion of high-speed internet, however the literature is divided on how this practice affects employees' well-being (Song & Gao, 2020). More research is needed on the impact of remote work on specific well-being dimensions (Charalampous et al., 2021). While some changes are advantageous, enabling routine tasks to be automated, providing remote work options, and enhancing information access, others pose risks to employee well-being (Guest, 2017).

The literature overlooks the threats of remote work to psychosomatic well-being (Charalampous et al., 2021). Platts et al. (2022) portray dimensions of work-related well-being as affective, cognitive, social, professional, and psychosomatic well-being. A multidimensional approach to well-being enables the adaptation of a pluralist perspective, moving further the investigation of well-being as a one-dimensional phenomenon (such as life satisfaction), which has been claimed to be important when capturing the conceptual complexity of well-being (Charalampous et al., 2021). These concepts, which are individual-focused, are crucial for employers who must make sure that gains are not made at the expense of subpar employee health outcomes (Platts et al., 2022).

Working from home as a type of remote work has been found to have public health benefits and contribute to greater productivity (Schifano et al., 2021). Also, remote workers demonstrate higher positive well-being and happiness than their colleagues who work from physical offices (Ferrara et al., 2022). Although many studies have backed the idea that working from home leads to positive health outcomes like decreased stress, burnout, and

fatigue, as well as increased overall happiness and quality of life, other studies have found negative effects on general psychological well-being and work-life balance (Platts et al., 2022).

2.2.3 Mutual Gains Perspective

There is an ongoing debate regarding the impact of HRM systems on well-being, and two theoretical viewpoints emerged (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020), which are the mutual gains and conflicting outcomes perspectives (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018).

On the one hand, the mutual gains perspective argues that HRM systems and well-being benefit employers and employees (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Ogbonnaya and Messersmith (2018) mention that “the mutual gains perspective stipulates shared benefits for both the organisation and employees” (p. 3).

On the other hand, the conflicting outcomes perspective argues that HRM systems are intended to contribute to organisational performance, and the concern for the workers’ well-being is seen as a cost and, therefore, detrimental to that performance (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). Ogbonnaya and Messersmith (2018) mention that “the conflicting outcomes (or critical) perspective portrays HRM systems as a strategy for imposing greater work demands on employees, with little or no benefit to their well-being” (p. 4). According to the conflicting outcomes perspective, HRM has either null or even a negative effect on employee well-being (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2020), bears an exploitative nature towards employees, and improved organisational performance is attained at the expense of decreased employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2012).

It is important to recognise that organisations are unlikely to promote employee well-being solely based on ethics when developing an HRM strategy (Guest, 2017). Hence, it is essential to consider the interests of employees and employers while adopting a pluralist perspective, which can be achieved by adopting a mutual gains perspective (Guest, 2017). Therefore, this study will use the mutual gains perspective to explain the significance of well-being in HRM systems and its importance for employees and employers.

The mutual gains perspective is common in the management literature (Valizade et al., 2016). This perspective reflects shared benefits for interdependent parties with different interests (Valizade et al., 2016). The main assumption of the mutual gains perspective is that HRM systems create for all sides a win-win deal where positive employee attitudes are crucial to achieving performance improvement (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2018). Mutual gains

function based on the parties working on the highlighted areas of shared interests and committing to achieving the highest possible joint returns (Valizade et al., 2016).

According to Ogbonnaya and Messersmith (2018), when “a managerial strategy that applies throughout the workplace, HRM systems provide the necessary operational control for employees to maximise their skills and perform their jobs in ways that are consistent with organisational goals” (p. 3). This can be linked with the social exchange theory (SET) developed by Blau in 1964, a widely used theory for explaining the positive effects of HRM on employee well-being (Van De Voorde et al., 2012). Social exchange entails actions that depend on others' rewarding responses, which eventually lead to transactions and relationships that are mutually beneficial (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). According to the theory, progressive HR practices have significant positive symbolic effects on employees at work alongside material benefits (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). As a result, employees are expected to reciprocate this positive treatment of the organisation by working harder and more diligently and engaging in various forms of citizenship behaviour, directly enhancing individual and organisational performance (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019).

2.2.4 Job Satisfaction

Employee well-being is often limited to a single factor, which is job satisfaction (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020). The term job satisfaction refers to the emotions that come from a worker's perception of how much their needs are met by their job, and it relates to the worker's emotional state concerning how much they enjoy their role at work (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023). Job satisfaction definition is based on the employees' subjective assessments of their working environments (A. M. Grant et al., 2007).

Previous studies suggest that in addition to having an emotional component, job satisfaction also has a cognitive component; it is important to employees how they view and feel about their jobs (Charalampous et al., 2019). Job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two different things because satisfaction is accomplished based on motivating factors, but a lack of those factors causes dissatisfaction (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023). Preventative factors of dissatisfaction can resolve job satisfaction, while they cannot affect job satisfaction itself (Dorta-Afonso et al., 2023).

There is strong evidence in the literature for a positive association between remote work and job satisfaction, and job satisfaction has been the most studied construct, with studies discussing a mainly positive influence of remote work (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Due to the flexibility and autonomy remote work grants the employees, several assumptions are linked to it (Ferreira et al., 2021). It is generally believed that remote work may reduce stress and burnout, as well as work fatigue and work-home conflict, thereby increasing employees' work engagement, job satisfaction and performance (Ferreira et al., 2021).

Flexibility regarding the time and place of employees' work has been shown to increase employees' levels of commitment, loyalty, and job satisfaction (Charalampous et al., 2022). Additionally, those who work remotely report high levels of job satisfaction, which may be attributed to the flexibility of their working schedules in contrast to more strict office hours and the elimination of commute time (C. S. Grant et al., 2013).

Guest (2017) suggests a link between job satisfaction and productivity. Also, Charalampous et al. (2021) mention that remote work improves performance and job satisfaction because of higher autonomy and increased personal control perceptions (Charalampous et al., 2021). According to the literature on job satisfaction, employees' satisfaction with remote work has also emerged as strongly correlated with productivity (De Vincenzi et al., 2022).

Remote work can contribute to a higher level of worker productivity, which benefits the companies and employees since remote work provides a better work-life balance, thus increasing job satisfaction and commitment to the company (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Researchers consider social support to be lowered for remote workers, though it is also noted that when organisations support these remote workers, they feel less socially isolated, hence increasing job satisfaction (Charalampous et al., 2019).

Autonomy mediates the relationship between remote work and job satisfaction (Charalampous et al., 2019). In line with social exchange theory, it is mentioned that remote workers are more devoted to the company, more enthusiastic about their work, and show higher levels of job satisfaction because of the perception of the company's positive treatment (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

Additionally, remote workers report significantly higher levels of job satisfaction, which suggests that while remote working may harm work-life balance, it may have positive effects on employees' commitment to their employers, their enthusiasm for their work, and their level of job satisfaction (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). In exchange for these advantages, remote workers appear willing to work longer hours, consistent with the social exchange theory (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

2.3 Generational Differences and Young Workers

2.3.1 Definitions

Nguyen (2022) defines a generation as “a cohort that experiences similar historical events at similar ages, shares important life experiences, and thus may possess similar attitudes and values in work and life” (p. 4). Similarly, Nicholas and Guzman (2009) define generation as “people who grew up with similar environmental conditions, such as political events, economic situations and technological changes will have related outlooks” (p. 2).

According to the generational theory, people can be divided into distinct groups called generations that have varying beliefs and values (Nguyen, 2022). Because they significantly impact generational groups' attitudes, values, beliefs, and expectations, shared experiences help distinguish one generation from another (Becton et al., 2014). Each generation is argued to be affected by expansive forces such as parents, peers, the media, significant economic and social events, and popular culture that help them develop shared value systems that set them apart from individuals who grew up in different eras (Nguyen, 2022). Groups of generations portray people grown with distinct technologies and lifestyles (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009).

In the literature, the different generations are usually separated into age groups of approximately 20 years, though it might vary in exact years and naming (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and to a lesser extent Generation Z are the four generations that comprise most of the modern workforce (Nguyen, 2022). Although the labels and periods those labels cover vary, literature vastly conceptualises the three generations, namely Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, due to their dominance in the workforce (Becton et al., 2014). The relationship between age, period, and generation makes it difficult to isolate the effect of a single variable, such as generation, which makes examining generational differences challenging (Nguyen, 2022). This distinct nature of the generations affects people's attitudes, resulting in challenges for the managers who lead teams with diverse age groups (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009).

In the younger generations, the values and expectations are different compared to older generations (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Therefore, organisations must hire, reward, and manage these employees differently (Becton et al., 2014). Becton et al. (2014) mention that failing to acknowledge differences can result in detrimental organisational outcomes such as “intergenerational workplace conflict, misunderstanding and miscommunication,

poor working relationships, reduced employee productivity, poor employee well-being, lower innovation, and fewer organisational citizenship behaviours” (p. 1).

Workers’ jobs and company commitment benefit the companies since it is associated with productivity and lower employee churn (Valizade et al., 2016). Organisations can gain more from learning how to effectively increase workers’ commitment from different generations than reducing turnover (Nguyen, 2022). Employees who stay with a company because they enjoy their jobs can contribute more to their organisations than those who stay out of a sense of duty or are concerned about the high costs of leaving a company (Nguyen, 2022). As a result, researchers, managers, and HRM experts are interested in determining how to manage and collaborate with people of different generations (Becton et al., 2014). Studies show that remote work might be an option to attract, motivate and retain young workers (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Without the contribution of empirical studies, accepting widespread generational stereotypes can harm research and practice (Becton et al., 2014).

This study will focus on young workers already in the labour market, that is, people under 35 whom the literature designates as Millennials.

2.3.2 Millennials

The workplace is evolving due to the retirement of many Baby Boomers, and organisations are encountering an increase in younger workers, many of whom were born after 1980 (also known as GenY, Millennials, nGen, or GenMe) (Twenge, 2010). There is no established cutoff date for inclusion in the Millennial generation, which typically begins with birth years between 1980 and 1983 (Becton et al., 2014).

Nowadays, hiring, maintaining, and motivating young workers is perceived as one of the most prominent challenges of professional life (Twenge, 2010). Millennials are regarded as the first high-tech generation, that grew up in the times of personal computers, mobile phones, and widespread ATMs (Becton et al., 2014). The Millennials grew up and were shaped by the age of internet connectivity (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009).

It is necessary and crucial to research Millennials’ attitudes compared to earlier generations to further understand generational differences and develop effective employee retention strategies for the workforce (Nguyen, 2022). Studies show both the positive and negative characteristics of Millennials, and they are expected to have a substantial role since

they now represent the largest generation in the workforce, surpassing the Baby Boomers (Camp et al., 2022).

Millennials are seen as more high maintenance yet also the most productive workforce compared to older generations (Twenge, 2010). Numerous scholars propose specific strategies to adapt to the distinctive characteristics of Millennials to attract and retain them (Nguyen, 2022). It is mentioned that when generational differences are not acknowledged, job satisfaction and productivity may decrease (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Similarly, Twenge (2010) mentions that Millennials are more inclined to value their time off work and, in contrast, are less willing to value work for their company's interest. This author also emphasises that they might need more flexibility, paid time off, or other perks for leisure to remain with the company.

The literature mentions common stereotypes of different generations and their diverse positions on several topics. The prevalent opinion is that Millennials value practices such as support of work-life balance, financial rewards, and meaningful work more than older generations; consequently, if those conditions are provided, they may exhibit a higher commitment to their jobs and companies in return (Nguyen, 2022). If the organisations do not provide those conditions, the lack of commitment may ultimately have an impact on Millennials' retention, which then harms organisational success, even though personal values are essential for professional success (Camp et al., 2022).

According to Twenge (2010), Millennials are not always eager to quit their jobs and exhibit high job satisfaction, and they want job stability just as much as older generations did. Many workers from older generations entered the workforce at a time when the standard career management strategy was to join an organisation, put in hard work, show loyalty to the company, and be rewarded with job security (Becton et al., 2014). However, Millennials entered the workforce during a time when offshoring, downsizing, and layoffs were more prevalent; thus, employee loyalty and commitment were frequently not consistently rewarded with job security, and Millennials' career paths are more likely to involve multiple companies throughout their career (Becton et al., 2014). Since they tend to switch jobs much more frequently than older generations, Millennials may be less committed to their organisations than previous generations (Camp et al., 2022). Millennials are expected to leave their jobs when a better opportunity is found, consider other jobs when the current company does not satisfy their job-related expectations and do not perceive job security as a crucial element in their career (Becton et al., 2014).

2.3.3 Generational Differences and Remote Work

Organisations started adopting remote work as Millennials entered the workforce with strong technological skills (Camp et al., 2022). However, these steps were still small, compared to recent years, because with the pandemic, where paid work has been done changed drastically (Fan & Moen, 2021). The pandemic accelerated this already existing small yet growing trend, and it is unlikely that organisations will fully return to the traditional office setting in today's post-pandemic times (Camp et al., 2022). The main reasons behind the organisations' tendency to keep remote work among their contract options are reduced overhead costs, thrived employee productivity and improved employee job satisfaction (Camp et al., 2022). Besides the benefit to the organisations, the literature also highlights the possible benefit of remote work to employees, which can be accomplished if companies curate the fabric of the digital company rather than micromanaging the performance of workers to enable more productive and engaged online-first working in the post-pandemic workplace (Bryant, 2021).

Before the pandemic, few employees worked from home, and even fewer were completely remote, despite being hailed as the future of work (Fan & Moen, 2021). Companies will not only experience higher short-term productivity if they switch from inherited organisational structures to online-first working but will also be prepared for the future with better-adapted organisations and more suitable for tomorrow's digital, networked business (Bryant, 2021).

Millennials have adjusted to environmental change particularly well and have adopted the flexibility of this shift-like work (Camp et al., 2022). It is noted that remote work may have different effects on employees depending on their career stage, job tasks and roles (Olsen et al., 2023). Remote work arrangements affect young workers' attributes; while positive attributes such as technological competence and autonomy are enhanced, limiting characteristics such as lack of commitment and desire for work-life balance might be affected negatively (Camp et al., 2022). Additionally, it might directly affect the development of competencies, namely knowledge development, problem-solving, and productivity (Camp et al., 2022). Organizations can implement strategies to mitigate the potential drawbacks of remote work, including effective team building, transparent communication, and valuable mentorship (Camp et al., 2022). According to generational theory, each generation tends to have different values and preferences, which can impact how they view their jobs (Nguyen, 2022). According to Camp et al. (2022), Millennials are less committed than earlier

generations to their organisations, and this is likely to worsen as companies transition to a culture of working remotely and relying on technology for communications. Research suggests that organisations should create training programs to improve interpersonal communication skills, as studies indicate that frequent social interactions with remote workers are important for fostering greater contact with coworkers and managers (Camp et al., 2022).

2.3.4 Young Workers and Well-Being

A variety of factors, such as sociodemographic factors, namely age, gender, and job level, and job-specific factors, namely job demands, job control, job satisfaction, and support from coworkers and supervisors, influence experiences of work-related stress and have an impact on employee well-being (Parry et al., 2022). Young workers especially experience more challenges working from home and find it harder to work from home than their older colleagues (Beño et al., 2021). This can be explained by the unsuitable workplace at home since younger workers still live with their parents, share apartments with housemates, or have young families (Beño et al., 2021).

Older workers have higher levels of job satisfaction and lower work-related stress (Parry et al., 2022). Similarly, some stereotypes can be seen related to young workers, working overtime and stress. However, working overtime, despite being perceived as a source of stress, does not always result in health problems because it also may show work motivation, especially for young employees who are at an early stage of their careers and eager to prove their worth and abilities (Olsen et al., 2023). Job resources foster job engagement and act as a stress buffer, which may prevent young workers from burnout (Olsen et al., 2023).

Younger workers who started working remotely early on in their careers were found to have additional work-related stress (Parry et al., 2022). The reason behind this type of stress still needs to be uncovered, however the loss of experiential learning from colleagues in physical workplaces might bring additional stress (Parry et al., 2022). Younger employees can benefit greatly from mentoring relationships, which are crucial for their learning and development, and it is less likely to occur when working remotely (Camp et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that young remote workers are more exposed to risk elements and fewer protective elements due to their working arrangements, their age and the stage of their careers (Parry et al., 2022). With their goal-oriented mindset, Millennials thrive on feedback; thus, it is important to provide regular feedback on performance (Camp et al.,

2022). Mentors serve as an informal source of feedback that offers more developmental than evaluative feedback and may therefore be better able to support Millennials' professional development (Camp et al., 2022).

If remote work conditions allow the employees to achieve flexibility in managing their own time for work and home responsibilities, it can be a way to improve work-life balance (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Such a balance can lead the employees to preserve their well-being and remain effective workers (Nicholas & Guzman, 2009). Managers are responsible for their employees' well-being, productivity, and progress (Beño et al., 2021); thus, the topic of well-being is a significant component of management practices.

To summarize, it can be said that remote work and well-being themes overlap and interrelate, resulting in both positive and negative effects on employees on the topics of job satisfaction, work-life balance, flexibility, autonomy, social isolation, productivity, and many others. Due to the generational differences and work and personal life conditions of young workers, Millennials are being affected by these positive and negative effects differently compared to their older and more experienced colleagues.

It is important to study remote work because as research indicates, this type of work arrangement will continue to be highly significant for the future job scene in the post-pandemic business world (De Vincenzi et al., 2022). A better work-life balance, flexibility and greater autonomy are frequently mentioned as the most significant benefits of remote work, though it is still debatable whether this result can be generalised to all employees (Bellmann et al., 2020). It may depend on the role, seniority, and company of the employee. The findings of this study and further analysis of these topics via interviews may help in understanding how young workers perceive and experience these debated topics. Social isolation problems, feedback culture in remote work, and distractions during working from home are other topics that arose from the literature review, though the extent of the research on these subjects is limited, and the findings from the interviews with young workers may help to work on how to resolve or minimize these issues.

Overall, the literature on remote work shows mixed results about the effects of this type of arrangement (Ferrara et al., 2022). In addition, the workplace is evolving due to the retirement of many Baby Boomers, and Millennials are expected to have a substantial role since they now represent the largest generation in the workforce (Twenge, 2010; Camp et al., 2022). Thus, it is important to reflect and echo the experience and perception of these young workers on the topics that relate to remote work and well-being.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Model

Phenomenology (interpretive research methodology) has been followed as the framework in this research work. The phenomenological research model is a qualitative research approach used to understand the experiences of individuals. Developed by Edmund Husserl, this model focuses on the experiences of the participants to understand a phenomenon or a topic in depth (Abebrese, 2014). Researchers use data collection methods such as open-ended interviews, diaries or focus groups to explore participants' personal experiences (Abebrese, 2014). The phenomenological research model aims to provide a comprehensive understanding that offers insights into the world of individuals by freely focusing on the participants' experiences.

3.2 Primary Data Collection and Sampling

3.2.1. Interview Sampling

In-depth semi-structured interviews as primary data collection were the most suitable method for this research. Hence, they are selected as the source of data. Seven in-depth semi-structured interviews are conducted, and the sample comprises young workers under 35 (Millennials). These young workers work mainly remotely and have experience working in an office, thus making a meaningful comparison between both working arrangements. Due to the geographically dispersed nature of the interviewees and the availabilities of the respondents, three of the interviews were conducted in person, and the other four were virtually done via video calls. All seven participants were known in person by the interviewer, and all the interviews were conducted in English to allow direct and uninterpreted contributions to the dissertation, which is also in English. The interview time ranged from 40 minutes to an hour, with an average of 48 minutes.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Family	Nationality	Residence	Education	Job Position	Remote Experience	Whole Career
1	29	Male	Married	Portuguese	Portugal	Master	Head of Operations	4	4
2	30	Female	Single	Macedonian	N. Macedonia	Bachelor	Team Coach	4	8
3	32	Female	Partnered	Finnish	Portugal	Master	Document Review Lawyer	2	5
4	27	Female	Partnered	Turkish	Turkey	Master	Team Leader	4	5
5	25	Male	Single	Portuguese	Portugal	Bachelor	Customer Support Agent	2	5
6	32	Female	Single	Macedonian	N. Macedonia	Bachelor	Team Coach	3	7
7	34	Female	Single	German	Portugal	Master	Strategy and Development Manager	3	7

Table 1 presents the interviewees' demographic characteristics. The interviewees' ages range from 25 to 34. All the interviewees have at least a bachelor's degree, and some of them also have master's degrees.

Nationality-wise, interviewees are diverse, from five different countries: Portugal (2), Finland (1), Germany (1), North Macedonia (2) and Turkey (1). As for the country of residence, four interviewees live in Portugal, and all of them are in Porto. The other residence countries are North Macedonia, with 2 and 1 interviewee residing in Turkey.

The working experience of interviewees within their current company ranges from 2 to 4 years. Throughout their career, interviewees have worked between 4 to 8 years, with an average of close to 6 years. The interviewee with the shortest career (4 years) has two current jobs; one performed remotely and the other from the office. All the other interviewees are only working remotely. Four works with freelance contracts; one has project-based arrangements, and the other 3 have long-term freelance arrangements with continuous positions and tasks. The other three interviewees are full-time employees of their companies with direct contracts.

Five interviewees have management and operations roles, working in geographically dispersed teams with people from different nationalities. One interviewee is a lawyer and works on lawsuit projects as a document review lawyer on project-based contracts. Another interviewee with an engineering degree works in customer support, enjoys the human contact of their role and is seeking a managerial position in the future.

Only one of the interviewees is married and lives with his spouse, and only one has a young child and lives with her partner. Another interviewee lives with her partner as well. One interviewee lives alone. All the others live with their parents, and two also have at least one grandparent alongside their parents.

Most interviewees still need a separate, dedicated room they use as a home office. Only Interviewee 7, who lives alone, has dedicated space. Interviewee 4 partially has a dedicated room since she lives with her partner, who spends a significant part of the year away; when she is not alone, they need to share the working spaces in the house, often leaving them to work from their bedroom. The other five interviewees primarily work from their bedrooms and occasionally share common living spaces with their family members.

3.2.2. Interview Structure and Design

As shown in Appendix 1, the interview protocol included a preliminary part with the introduction of the interviewee and a clarification of the study topics. Before starting the interviews, the interviewees' consent for the interview and voice record were asked, also informing that the interview would be used exclusively in the context of the dissertation.

Furthermore, the interview included 27 questions with three main blocks. The first part, with six questions, focused on characteristics and demographic information. The second and third parts, with 21 questions, were related to the participants' experience of working remotely. Questions were designed to explore the Millennials' perception, experience, and view of remote work arrangements in close relation to their well-being. Questions of the second part were focused on the topics related to remote work's effects, performance, and work-life balance, whereas the third part was focused on employee well-being and job satisfaction.

3.3 Analysis Method

The qualitative method is the most suitable for this study because it aims to understand perceptions and feelings, not numbers. This study is qualitative because it examines phenomena, perceptions, people, and their actions; thus, it has been conducted with a qualitative methodology.

Qualitative research is research in which qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used, and the analysis is carried out at the end of a qualitative process by obtaining realistic data in a natural environment (Davies et al., 2018). In qualitative research, the research problem is handled within the framework of an interdisciplinary, holistic approach and in this way, an event, phenomenon, or situation is examined in its natural environment, where the meanings people ascribe to them are interpreted (Davies et al., 2018). Considering that qualitative research is carried out to reveal the effects of lived events and situations on people, the importance of the data collection process being carried out in a conversational atmosphere is understood more clearly (Davies et al., 2018). Thus, qualitative research is the most suitable to the nature of this study.

4. Findings and Discussion

After the definition and the reasoning of the methodology, this chapter will present the findings and discussions based on the literature and the participants' responses. It is structured in line with the research questions and themes explored in the literature review. The themes covered in the following chapter are the effects of remote work, work-life balance, performance, well-being, motivation, and the differences between remote and hybrid work. Sub-sections of these themes are also included below. The findings of the interviews will be used to understand how young workers perceive and experience debated topics of the literature and help to develop conclusions and future implications.

4.1 Effects of Remote Work

4.1.1 Meetings

Answers show that remote work indeed has more meetings than office work. This is explained by Interviewee 4 as follows:

“If I were in my company's office in Germany, I would have lunch with my colleagues or have a coffee break, and I could communicate with my coworkers easily. But now, for example, even for a chitchat or when a new person is onboarded to the team, you always must book a meeting. Remote work requires more meetings because if I were in the office, I could have casually made those connections or communicated easily without setting a meeting with my coworkers.”

Interviewees state that even though there are more meetings on remote work than office, they do not perceive it as excessive. They suggest that remote work does not bring an inflated number of meetings. Regarding the intensity of meetings, Interviewee 2 mentions:

“During the pandemic, I did notice a change in the number of meetings, but the rush of meetings has come down. When people are not communicating enough in real life, they are eager to hold meetings and be present and talk about something. Because meetings are not required every time during work, sometimes you can handle everything only by e-mail or a message, and you do not have to spend a couple of hours on a Zoom call to discuss it in a meeting. That meeting crash started during the pandemic, which has a deeper psychological meaning because people are not physically connected. But the rush has ended, and we only have a few meetings during a week now.”

This suggests that the conditions of the pandemic affected the number of meetings, but also organisations, managers and employees learned how to work remotely. Interviewees shared that now they are considering whether the meeting they plan to set is necessary and

could be communicated via a different channel. Also, managers only require relevant people to attend the meetings, eliminating unnecessary meetings for others. All of these new considerations contribute to increasing the efficiency of remote work arrangements.

4.1.2 Onboarding Process

Overall, interviewees side closer to physical onboarding due to more accessible communication with colleagues and greater possibility of informal contacts. It should be noted that it may depend on the work definition, but in general, answers show a closer stance to the advantage of onboarding in the office. In line with this, Interviewee 3 said:

“I think in the beginning, it is vital to be at the office. You can ask for help as much as you need. But then, you can work from anywhere when you already know the tasks. Having someone holding your hand through it (the process) at the beginning is just better. But I had Zoom calls when I needed to set up my laptop for my remote work, and they would share their screen on the call. IT was walking me as if someone were behind me, watching me doing everything.”

Interviewee 6 highlighted another drawback of remote onboarding and the general learning process at remote work:

“Sometimes people behind the computer might be away or not answer, so you cannot find them and will wait much longer to get an answer for your situation. But otherwise, when you are in the office, you can find people who can help; maybe they cannot directly help you with your question or problem, but they can still get the help via directing you to the right people, but remotely it is impossible to do that, at least not in the beginning.”

On the contrary, Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 7 mention that it can be more advantageous when the onboarding is made remotely. It can be linked to the possible assumption mentioned by the other interviewees that lack of personal contact makes it harder for remote work. Nevertheless, the experiences of the two interviewees suggest that when the companies or their managers are aware of the drawbacks of remote onboarding, they put extra effort into improving the onboarding process, thus resulting in better standardised and efficient processes.

4.1.3 Overtime

Working from home blurred the boundary between work and personal life, which resulted in the tendency to work odd hours or overtime for some of the interviewees. The

responses on working overtime vary; some of the interviewees stated they always do overtime, some have done it in the past, and others never did overtime.

The always-on culture was the most mentioned negative element of remote work related to overtime. Being always on contributes to working overtime and being connected with flexibility. Some interviewees accept this trade-off between being more flexible vs. occasionally working overtime and being mostly available to work. Still, most of them have a negative point of view regarding overtime. About overtime, Interviewee 3 said:

“I work a lot more overtime at home. I do not think I would work this much if I were at the office; I would not be able to do that to stay in the office physically in the same spot because, at home, I can change rooms. I can sometimes be on the bed, on the sofa and work the same. But sitting down for 12 hours, I could not be doing that. And it is easier to do overtime since you are home; it is super convenient, and I make more money.”

This shows one of the motivational drivers behind overtime, namely, making extra money. Another critical point is convenience since working overtime at home is much easier and effortless compared to office standards. Interviewee 4, who constantly did overtime in the past, stated:

“When you work at an office, you can leave the work behind when you return home. But I was a perfectionist since I was a child, and I fell for this mistake I would make when my rivals were doing overtime. I would work 10 hours a day during the weekends even though I did not get paid for that overtime, but then I realised how much that was hurting me. Also, I have realised, for example, it was not bringing me any more value because of the corporate nature; the more you give, the more it accepts, and then it will treat it like it is normal. So, I have learned from my mistakes, and now I do not do any overtime.”

Another factor related to work stress is long working hours, which affects the employee's work-life balance; however, if the employee can control their working schedule with greater flexibility regarding their work tasks, it can help reduce work stress (Parry et al., 2022). The experience shared by Interviewee 4 and other interviewees shows the importance of work-life balance. Interviewees mentioned some of the practices they developed to overcome these drawbacks. These are: blocking their calendar after working hours; informing colleagues that they do not work beyond the working hours; neither checking nor responding to messages and e-mails in the evening and at weekends; and communicating in advance about how much work can be done within the set deadline so they do not have to work overtime to compensate.

4.1.4 Local Job Markets

Interviewee 1, who has a position at a company working in a niche area, said he does not have the possibility of finding a similar job in his country. His remote work matches his area of interest, where he contributes uniquely to his company due to his extensive knowledge. He also added that he is more motivated towards his job due to the nature of his position. Similarly, Interviewee 3 has a job she cannot find in her residence country since her work is related to her native language and she lives abroad. Thus, leaving her to work remotely was the only option.

Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 6 highlighted the benefit of remote work, allowing them to work for an international company since they are from a small country with limited job opportunities. For Interviewee 2, another essential aspect of her remote work was mentioned as the mentality:

“The difference between working in an office in my city and working remotely for a foreign company is the mentality and perspective. I used to work at a public office in a small town where everyone knows everything, or they think they know everything about you. But in my current company, people do not care about your background or your family, and they are seeing your true self.”

Interviewee 4, who lives in Turkey, shared that for the job position and area she is interested in, she is most likely required to relocate, perhaps not to a different country though internally to a bigger city. Interviewee 4 continued by adding:

“Remote work can allow people to work in a broader sense, for more companies from home. Also, I think it benefits employees and employers because we can hire people no matter where they live. You do not have to provide a relocation package, or you do not have to eliminate people just because of where they want to live. And the same for those who want the job, they do not have to move to another city or country. I do not want to say big words, but I would never move to Istanbul for a job. So, if these firms want to hire good people, they should be open to hiring them from anywhere and not forcing them to move to a certain location.”

Besides the previously mentioned topics, Interviewee 7 discussed a different point about compensation conditions and shared that she gained much more significant financial benefits with her remote work. Her company has a work-from-anywhere policy while still paying their employees the German salary standards. This is a valid point for most of the other interviewees as well.

4.1.5 Remote Work as a Long-Term Career Aspect

The literature shows employees' preference for having the contract of choice, with the possibility of office, remote or hybrid working arrangements (Guest, 2017). Nonetheless, the numbers show that most employers do not provide such a flexibility or choice (Guest, 2017). All the answers align in this matter where all interviewees' short and mid-term career plans show a preference towards remote work. Some specifically mentioned that they do not intend to return to working only from the office, yet all respondents are open to or would like to work in a hybrid mode. Interviewee 1 on this topic said:

“No, I do not see myself doing that. I would like to have a hybrid situation. I also do not see myself working from the office all my life. I would like to go to the office for a few days and stay at home for a few days to have more flexibility.”

Similarly, Interviewee 7 stated:

“For the time being, I want to continue working remotely. So far, I have no reason to return to the office. When considering a job change, remote work possibility is one of the main requirements.”

Other interviewees also expressed matching opinions towards their future work arrangements, pointing out that if it were to be hybrid, it would need to be on their terms, with flexible contract options. Interviewee 3 stated that if her company and managers improved the social aspect of the work environment, it would increase the feeling of belonging and commitment to the company, resulting in satisfaction with working remotely. In such conditions, she does not see any problem continuing her remote work.

4.2 Work-Life Balance

4.2.1 Remote Work Effects on Daily and Personal Life

On the effect of remote work on personal life, all the interviewees expressed positive opinions, primarily due to the flexibility that comes with it. Being able to arrange their schedule flexibly, employees manage to do their work between personal activities or vice versa, giving more freedom on what they do at what time of the day. Interviewee 7 mentioned that flexibility also depends on the company policy. All interviewees except Interviewee 5 stated that their company provides such flexibility on their schedule, but this cannot be considered a general norm of all remote work arrangements. Interviewee 5, who works in customer service, must work on a strict schedule but still mentions greater flexibility than working from an office regarding breaks and house activities such as cleaning, laundry,

cooking or exercises. Other than that, Interviewee 1 stated remote work could improve employees' social lives and said:

“When you work at home, I think it is easier to get out of the house and do something at the end of the day. While it is the opposite for somebody doing office work because you are outside all day, you come to the house and want to stay there. You have been outside all day, so you want to enjoy your time at your home. But if you are at home and enjoying your time there all day, then it is easier to go out. So, your social life can be better because of that.”

This point of view goes against the general assumption of remote work, where people expect little time or energy to do activities outside their homes. Another positive effect of remote work on employees' personal lives, in line with flexibility, is the ability to work from anywhere. On this matter, Interviewee 4 shared:

“I live far from my family, so it (remote work) affects me positively because I can just see them more often; I can simply take my work with me. Like anybody else in my country, I have 21 days of vacation a year, and I want to spend half of them travelling and the other half working on my studies. And then I could not go to my hometown to see my family. But thanks to my remote work, I can visit my family easily and continue working while I am with them. So, I can travel and work, which I like.”

This type of flexibility is especially crucial for Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 7, who live away from their family and usually or always live alone.

4.2.2 Flexibility

Work-life balance can be enhanced by providing employees with flexible working arrangements, including remote work options that increase employee autonomy and choice (Platts et al., 2022). All the interviewees except Interviewee 5 mentioned changes in their work schedules, primarily linked to flexibility. Overall, all stated flexibility in scheduling their working hours if they were present at the meetings and delivered tasks within the deadlines. Related to this, Interviewee 1 said the only downside is not having a routine, sometimes making it harder to find the right balance between work and life.

Some said it is still an ongoing process, and they are trying to find a work-life balance. Awareness and time management skills can be developed, which helps with work-life balance. Interviewee 4 shared:

“When you work remotely, you oversee your time management without a supervisor. Sometimes I start to work 2 hours late, and then I can finish it two hours late that day, so I can still get things done as I wish.”

Similarly, with even more flexibility, Interviewee 6 said:

“You can take a break whenever you want. If you have a headache, you rest. If something happens to you, you take some time away from work, and then you just do your hours the rest of the day or even the next day, anytime you can find. And it is perfect because when you work remotely, you can take a break any time you want; you can simply be your own boss. Your schedule maker, vacation giver and everything. So, this is an excellent advantage because when you work in an office, you know exactly what time you can take a vacation, and you must always arrange it with your colleagues.”

Interviewee 3, who has a baby, shared that remote work benefits her since she can care for her baby and work during the day, giving a much more significant advantage than the office. Also, if she were to work in an office, she would need to commute, whereas with the time she saves, she can have more time for herself. Another advantage she shared was working later in the evening after her baby sleeps, though she stated that it also depends on the company policies.

In contrast, even though she expressed a certain level of flexibility compared to working in an office, Interviewee 4 shared a basic framework of working hours expected by the company for their employees to comply with. Interviewee 4 further explained:

“There are still certain working hours I must stick to. I cannot just say I work better at night and have a completely different time when I work compared to the rest of the team. I should be available during certain hours. And then also I need to ensure that I am available for the scheduled meetings. So, I think the rule in my job is that you just join the meetings, but if you cannot attend them because you have an appointment, you just need to let your manager know. So, for example, if I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow morning, I can go there, and since I will miss the morning meeting, I can let my manager know about it, and it is all good. If I do not have any meetings, that is OK; I can stop working and do the work later. I can start working late, and I can end my work late. It brings flexibility, but not in a complete sense.”

This shows the flexibility benefit of remote work compared to working in an office. Remote workers can schedule their meetings and deliver their tasks in a way that enables them to take breaks easily and focus on their personal lives when they need to.

4.3 Performance

4.3.1 Professional Communication

All the interviewees except for Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 7 agree on the different nature of communication due to remote work, mainly highlighting the adverse effects. The interviewees' general solution to these effects is video calls, in which they state that camera-on video calls stimulate somewhat a similar effect to the communication they would have in an office environment. On the one hand, Interviewee 5 mentions:

“Sometimes, I turn my camera on to show myself and interact more with others in meetings. But most of our colleagues do not have cameras, so the interactions only stay with the voice. I believe it differs from the office experience, where you can express yourself differently and approach the person more closely. You can directly contact your colleagues and talk face-to-face in the office. While working from home, you are just there working.”

Interviewee 4, a team leader, highlights the similar effect video calls create on office communications yet mentions another problem of virtual meetings:

“When you work remotely, you think twice before setting a meeting. Zoom calls are like physical meetings at the office, but before a meeting, you usually try to write things in chat first instead of scheduling a meeting to avoid having too many meetings.”

On the other hand, Interviewee 1 favours his remote work over his office job, which he works in both simultaneously. However, his preference is related to the managers and organisational practices and the nature of the tasks in the two different jobs. On this matter, Interviewee 1 said:

“In my position at my office work, my boss needs to communicate more with me, but she communicates with me rarely. I have more negative feelings about my office work because there is no exchange of ideas or change in my tasks. What I do is always the same.

My remote work communication is generally good, especially with my manager; we talk regularly. Thanks to the excellent communication with my manager at my remote work, we always get the priorities straight, like you understand the most urgent and the least urgent tasks. Having video calls is very useful because sometimes when you just read a text from somebody, you do not get the importance of a matter. But you will likely find the right way to pass the message when the communication is done through multiple channels.”

Interviewee 7 has the most neutral point of view regarding communication with colleagues. She stated:

“Professional communication is remarkably similar if we have a meeting context and if that happens in the office or virtually. Yes, coffee chats, non-scheduled exchanges, and stuff, which you have more in an office than in remote arrangements. But on remote work, we communicate asynchronously through Slack, which creates a similar effect; it compensates somehow.”

Considering all the answers on communication at remote work, there are some challenges both at professional and personal levels, however employees can compensate with technological tools to overcome them. Slack is mainly referred to as an excellent channel for building personal, non-work-related communication and passing daily and regular messages to colleagues. Zoom is mainly referred to as an excellent channel to stimulate the feeling of face-to-face communication, as well as for passing important messages to colleagues regarding professional communication.

4.3.2 Efficiency

Overall, all interviewees agree that their remote work arrangement is more efficient than the office experience. This has a direct effect on employee performance and results in a benefit for the employer. Interviewees also note that this effect may relate to their tasks. Interviewee 1 suggests that even though remote work is more efficient, hybrid working could be even more efficient. This is supported by the reality that employees may feel more comfortable working from home some days, and on other days they may feel better working from the office.

Other points mentioned by the interviewees are not needing to get physically ready for work, as Interviewee 3 said (*“I do not need to shower and get ready; check my shoes and clothes”*), not commuting to the office, and organising her work according to her schedule. She stated that remote work allows her to work any time she wants during the day, sometimes even accomplishing her tasks outside regular working hours. On the personal space and arrangements related to work, Interviewee 4 mentioned:

“Remote work is more efficient; I can create my environment. Other than that, I have a calendar I manage, and I have my focus time on this calendar. Focus time means that no one should bother me at that time. And then, I do not check, for example, my messages during that time; I do not check anything; I just focus on my work, and there are no distractions. Also, at home, at the same time, I can isolate myself from everything and focus on the things I want to get done. So that is what makes my remote work more efficient.”

Other than that, Interviewee 7 adds that efficiency can depend on the company's framework:

“That depends very much on the organisation; in my previous company, where I worked remotely, I was still required to be online from 9:00 to 6:00 daily. And now, I have a more flexible schedule in my new company. I can set my working hours myself, 7:00 or 10:00 in the morning, it is up to me, and nobody cares when I start. I must just be around for my meetings, so this rhythm allows me to work efficiently because I can choose when I am the most productive. So, it is not only remote work but also remote work plus the flexibility a company gives you.”

This response suggests that employees could benefit more from flexibility in working hours. Remote work provides flexibility in where work is done, likewise it can also allow flexibility in how the job is done.

4.3.3 Knowledge-Sharing with Colleagues

The answers mainly concentrate on creating a similar environment to physical contact, with the note depending on the company policy and management initiative. Some of the interviewees have shown satisfactory experience when it comes to learning from colleagues and sharing best practices. Communication tools such as Zoom and Slack can create a working environment like the office experience. Managers should work on initiating experience sharing via the mentioned channels. Interviewee 4 shared that writing a message or talking on a virtual call can function like office processes. Her experience indicates:

“Even if we are remote, we can still contact each other. Recently, we had a new manager, and they could reach out to me about any question directly via chat, but when things were not as easy to describe in the chat message, we would jump into a meeting. Other than that, I am managing a team which requires making cold calling, and then another product heard about it, and they wanted to meet with me to learn about the best practices. So, remote work is not preventing experience sharing, and people can still learn from each other.”

Another point that companies neglect is collecting and storing the information and practices their workers produce. Often, every team develop their own best practices and accumulate knowledge. Still, when the communication between the teams is insufficient, that knowledge cannot be transferred to other teams, thus creating a loss of opportunity to grow as a whole company synchronised manner. To overcome this problem, there are some tools that companies can use. One of those tools is Confluence, which is further explained by Interviewee 7 on how her company utilises this tool as follows:

“At my company, there was a need for a solution regarding knowledge sharing, so we implemented an internal wiki; we use Confluence, where every team now documents knowledge, processes, etc., which is super important. Because before it was not there, much of the knowledge got lost, and I also think many teams did just work in their silos. So, for example, in internal knowledge systems, to share knowledge in sessions or meetings, you must be proactive about it that you schedule a dedicated session for that. But this initiative is very team dependent. Sometimes it happens, sometimes not so much. But with Confluence, we managed to overcome these problems.”

However, it is important to acknowledge that these solutions can work depending on the job itself and how much the employee needs help from their coworkers while completing their tasks. Remote work can bring many challenges in jobs that require a high level of reliance on colleagues' expertise and experience.

4.3.4 Distractions

Remote workers struggle more with work-life balance regarding family than onsite workers (Gillet et al., 2020). Since all interviewees except for Interviewee 7 live with partners or parents, family members are the primary distraction source mentioned, in line with the literature. The concept of remote work is still relatively new to many people, making it harder for remote workers to create an efficient working environment. Most interviewees need help to create suitable and ideal working spaces at home, struggling with having a dedicated room as an office. Interviewee 2 especially mentions the generational difference in how people perceive work done remotely:

“I live with my parents and grandmother, so someone will always come to my room and ask for something. I think the reason is that they are not familiar with remote work. Because my parents are 60 years old and my grandmother is 80, especially my grandmother has no idea what I am doing in front of the computer all the time. I try to explain, but she thinks I can stop doing my job anytime. My parents do understand this better, I will say, but still, at the same time, they think that I can take a break whenever I want, and it is not the case. Older generations still have different opinions, and we (Millennials) are not on the same page; there is a generational difference.”

Similarly, Interviewee 1 also expressed that his parents see office jobs as real jobs and what he does remotely as a side activity. Due to the generational differences, he said people give more importance to office jobs and take it more seriously. He also added that people struggle to understand when they cannot see what you do.

In their statements, even though interviewees expressed feelings of underestimation of their work due to working from home, Interviewee 5 stated:

“I guess initially, my mother and grandmother were not used to having someone working from home. They were making a lot of noise and distracting me, and I would need to ask them to be quiet. But it was like that mainly at the beginning because the people at home were not used to it initially, but eventually, they understood that they had someone working at home. So, they are more careful and quieter now.”

Mobile phones, specifically social media and TV are listed after family members as a source of distraction when working from home. Employees find it much easier just to switch on their phones since they are away from their colleagues or managers, and nobody is watching them. As a solution, Interviewee 4 mentioned that she removed social media applications from her phone, so she checks her phone less often.

People can concentrate more on their work tasks by filtering interruptions and avoiding office politics (Charalampous et al., 2022). All the answers show office distractions and how remote work eliminates those conditions. The primary source of distraction in an office setting is described as colleagues. Interviewees expressed how they would take several breaks from working and go for lunch or coffee outside. These things usually happen not by their initiative but as suggestions from colleagues. There are other distractions caused by colleagues, such as noise, which may happen due to them performing their tasks or from doing outside-of-work activities in the office.

Interviewee 6 suggested co-working spaces as an alternative to working from home, but on the contrary, Interviewee 7 disagreed due to the similar environment to working from the office. Interviewee 7 stated:

“Having many people around when I work makes concentrating more difficult. I live alone, so I can focus on what I do, which is helpful. I thought, for example, of going to a co-working space, and I tried that out for some time, but it works best just to work alone in my place. And that is where I am the most efficient.”

This shows that the solution depends on the individual and remote workers should be provided with greater flexibility of choice when it comes to where they work from.

4.4 Well-Being

4.4.1 Work Stress

All the interviewees stated that there is a stress factor at their work, as any job would have, however compared to their office experience, the overall outcome of the answers shows more positive results towards remote working arrangements. Interviewees who expressed work stress mentioned that it mostly comes from tasks, and working remotely does not necessarily influence their stress levels. The perk of not being required to get ready and commute every morning, as stated in efficiency, also came up on the stress topic.

Interviewees would like a closer connection with their colleagues, but not too close. Several answers have shown that being able to distance themselves from the office environment, especially other people's problems about their personal lives, office politics and gossip, lowers stress and improves well-being. Similarly, this ability allows them to keep a distance when they have personal problems and distance themselves from conflicts with colleagues.

Interviewees expressed that they had felt more pressure working in the office, which brings more stress. It is due to the presence of managers and colleagues around them, creating pressure regarding their behaviours. Interviewee 4 further develops on work life and stress:

"I can say that the office is the most stressful because, for example, when you are in the bathroom, people can even judge how much time you spend. And another thing is, if you are having a tough time, you must still look at the people's faces and smile; your emotions cannot just come out, so you must always control your emotions and appearance. So, it is more stressful to work in an office. But when you work remotely, you do not have to worry if you are in a bad mood. For example, I am having my period, and I am having a lot of pain. When it happens, I can just wear anything comfortable and put hot water compress, and then I do not have to worry about my pain or stress. Other than that, I do not have to be in control of my emotions. If I feel bad, I just offer to end the virtual conversation. If I am in a meeting and want to cry, I just go cry for 5-10 minutes, and then I do not have to worry about it. Also, when you have some conflicts or a tough time with someone at work, with one click, you can isolate yourself from that environment and then think about reflecting on that situation and act more reasonably, which is why working in the office is more stressful."

This answer helps explaining what the literature suggests where a small drop in anxiety is found for people who switch to remote work from office work (Schifano et al., 2021).

One of the negative sides of remote work, which influences stress, is mentioned as feedback. With their goal-oriented mindset, Millennials thrive on feedback; thus, it is important to provide regular feedback on performance (Camp et al., 2022). Interviewee 3 said that feedback regarding her work is better translated in the office. She also said:

When you do not have this connection with your manager, you are not reassured that you are doing the correct thing. So, you are left feeling that you are doing well or not so much if you are doing everything incorrectly. If you speak more often with the manager, they will say, "Hey, you are doing an excellent job!". But working alone at home makes you feel more insecure about your work quality."

The other interviewees also mentioned this point about feedback and stress. It shows the importance of feedback culture on remote work, suggesting that managers should invest more in designing structured forms of feedback sharing. Even though there is feedback on remote work, it is communicated often via e-mail or message, which feels like many employees need more assurance. Interviewee 3 mentions that when companies are too focused on efficiency, they often overlook topics like feedback and need to invest more time on sharing, assuring feedback via a Zoom call to make it more genuine and individual.

4.4.2 Relationship with Colleagues

Remote work may bring several drawbacks, such as fewer ways to create natural work interactions, distractions, and social isolation, and these effects may lead to employees' productivity decreasing (Beňo et al., 2021). The social aspect, specifically the relationships with colleagues, is the interviewees' first and most prominent aspect regarding the negative effects of remote work. Almost all see it mainly as a negative thing, but interviewees like Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 4 highlight some of the negative sides of working from the office as well. Interviewee 4 noted:

"I think you can get more affiliated with your coworkers in the office because, in the end, you are face-to-face there. You spend time in the same office for 8 hours. Ultimately, you might end up in a toxic environment, which was my experience in my last job. Of course, when you work in the office, it can bring good friendships as well. However, remote work prevents having a toxic work environment, gossip, et cetera., which is also highly important for me."

Responses suggest it is possible to create in-person-like experiences via virtual meetings, and it can still make a casual environment to know their colleagues better and achieve bonding. However, interviewees also see those meetings as extra work, thinking they could be doing their actual job at that time, and feel like they lose time. If not for work,

people also prefer using that time spent on extra meetings for their rest from work instead. Interviewee 7 commented:

“At my remote work, we meet within our wider team once a week, like a team get-together. And I joined that once. Because for me, I am also busy at my job, and then I have stuff to do. I prefer to catch up with my tasks during that time and finish my work on time. But for me, spending 30 minutes on a virtual call with my colleagues feels like a waste of time.”

Coupled with this point of view, Interviewee 5 discussed the difficulties related to communicating with colleagues:

“When you work from home, it is always up to you; if you want to maintain a good relationship, you must be proactive. You must go after them and maintain that relationship because if you do not do it, they will not do it for you.”

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 mentioned the transactional nature of remote work communication. Their daily contact at work is almost always solely related to their tasks, needing a more personal relationship side. Interviewee 3 further explained:

“With these projects that I have been doing, I do not know about my colleagues. I only spoke with two colleagues during my last project, for example. Since we are paid hourly for these projects, and I have a certain number of documents to review per hour on average, I feel I am always on the clock. If I chat with some colleagues, I get the feeling that I am not working and must always be working. You feel like you need to compensate for lost or wasted time and do more work to catch up. But you do not feel the same pressure in an office job where you are paid monthly with a fixed contract.”

While answers of the interviewees concentrate on the office environment enabling personal relationships, Interviewee 1, who is the only respondent with recent experience in both office and remote working environments, noted that even in the office, conversations may usually stay shallow and work-centred, colleagues mostly talking about the job or their managers. Even though all the interviewees who work only remotely stated that if they were working in an office, they would have after-work activities with their colleagues, Interviewee 1's experience shows the opposite with little to no after-work activities.

4.5 Job Satisfaction

4.5.1 Motivation

The responses showed that remote work does not necessarily affect interviewees' motivation, while the job position and tasks have a more prominent role. Several interviewees

shared tasks being more attractive compared to their office job experience, room for growing further, and freedom of getting involved and developing new projects as the primary motivation for their jobs. The interviewees who had public job experience in the past were the most critical about their office experience due to repetitive tasks and limitations to growth. The response of Interviewee 2, coupled with other answers, shows that not only going to the office or working from home but also the job and company policies play a more significant role in employee motivation. From a different aspect, Interviewee 4 shared how remote work can play a role in the job selection process:

“When we look at the motivation theory, factors are not affected much by working remotely or from the office. But I believe that remote work is one of the motivators, at least, to say yes to a job. The work itself can be a source of motivation. When looking for a job, seeing the possibility of remote work can motivate me.”

Interviewees also stated that the ability to arrange their working schedule allows them to work more concentrated in the morning so that they can leave more free time for later in the day. They see this flexibility as a way of saving time and balancing their work and personal lives. This was mentioned as one of the motivational drivers behind choosing a job that allows them to work remotely. Interviewee 7 shared:

“I work more efficiently to have as much personal time as possible. The mix of flexible working hours plus remote work allows me to do so. I save so much time through this.”

Some of the interviewees mentioned money as the motivator towards remote work. They stated that working remotely lifts the country boundaries and allows them to work from anywhere for any company, allowing them to find better-paying jobs. Especially Interviewee 3, the only interviewee who works on project-based contracts, shared that the projects she takes on pay higher than her local work market salaries, plus she does not have to work continuously, allowing her to rest in between projects.

4.5.2 Remote vs. Hybrid Working Arrangements

Remote work can present various negative aspects for employees, including long working hours and social isolation. All the interviewees overwhelmingly sided with the remote work option over working at an office. The main reasons behind this were flexibility, time saved from the daily commute, productivity, and some other points to a lesser extent. About their remote work setting, Interviewee 3 said:

“I just love that when I wake up, I can start working immediately. I can already start working, so I like it. I do not need to shower and get ready; check my shoes and clothes. Everything is ready.”

Nevertheless, all interviewees also mentioned that they would rather have a hybrid system than remote work, primarily due to social isolation. Interviewee 5 said:

“I would prefer a hybrid system, that is for sure, because I like to connect with my colleagues; it is a particularly good thing to do. It is also a mentally healthier thing because working from home isolates you. Even though I live with my family, since I spend most of the day working through the computer, it sometimes gets very isolating.”

Similarly, Interviewee 2 commented that sometimes she feels like a robot since she works remotely due to the communication through computers and contacts mainly being focused on job tasks and work experiences. Other than that, regarding the isolating result of remote work, Interviewee 6 shared that not hearing human voices for most of the working hours make it inhumane.

Literature suggests that remote work is more beneficial when it is a flexible work arrangement, where face-to-face interactions are maintained and flexibility is still provided (Charalampous et al., 2019). The interviewees’ experience shows that the current hybrid work arrangements offered by most of the companies do not provide sufficient flexibility. Despite the mentioned negative sides of remote work, interviewees aligned on overall satisfaction towards remote work and stated they would prefer a hybrid system if it would be on their terms, meaning they would want to choose when to go and how often. Interviewee 7 explained this preference:

“A hybrid model would be excellent, but on my terms. I would want to avoid having rules again like some companies are implementing these days (e.g., three days office, two days remote). Whenever I go to Berlin, I enjoy going to my company’s office, but I like that it is on my terms.”

In addition, even though all the answers show a preference towards hybrid, two interviewees expressed willingness to go to the office only once a week if they would have a hybrid working option. Hence, answers may show a desire towards hybrid working arrangements however in the current job market, there is only a limited number of such offers that could match their expected working arrangement.

5. Conclusions

Remote work has become a popular working model, especially among young workers. This model offers employees more flexibility and work-life balance, yet it also has certain negative effects. This study aimed to assess the impact of remote work on the well-being of young employees. Based on the interviews conducted, it has been identified that remote work presents some challenges. Nevertheless, interviewees still expressed great satisfaction with working from home. Compared to the distraction of family members vs. colleagues at the office, office conditions are perceived as more significant, and considering all the other perceived benefits of remote work, interviewees prefer working from home over the office. Analysis shows hybrid working as the most ideal option, however the offerings of the job market are not there yet, with most of the options requiring a certain number of days being worked from the office, lacking the desired flexibility. The current remote workers express preference towards a hybrid system that would be on their own terms, meaning they would want to choose when to go and how often.

The literature mentions flexibility as the most important benefit of remote work and the analysis of this study which is focused on young workers aligns with this common acknowledgement. It is identified as the most important point in attracting and retaining employees, and it acts as an important variant in employees' decision-making when it comes to job selection. Findings show that the reasons behind this are schedule flexibility, as it allows employees to accomplish a better work-life balance. The analysis suggests that employees could benefit more from flexibility in working hours as well. Remote work provides flexibility in where work is done, likewise it can allow flexibility in the other aspects of how a job is done. On an interesting note, the interview answers also showed that against the general assumption about remote work, where people are expected to have little time or energy to do activities outside their homes, remote workers are more open to doing outside activities since they spend most of their day working at home.

Another positive effect of remote work is efficiency. Remote work arrangements are found to be much more efficient since the employees do not need to get physically ready for work or commute to the office, and they can organise their work according to their schedule. Another point of efficiency regards the job itself where remote work is described as better arranged compared to office settings, which in return profits the employers as well.

Another important element of well-being is stress. Remote work is assumed to have a negative effect on the workers' stress, but on the contrary, the interviewees showed that

remote work can also bring a positive contribution to their well-being with lowered stress levels. According to the findings, employees would like a closer connection with their colleagues, but not too close. Being able to distance themselves from the office environment, especially other people's problems about their personal lives, office politics and gossip, lowers stress and improves the well-being of remote workers. Besides that, they felt more pressure working in the office, which brings more stress. It is due to the presence of managers and colleagues around them, which creates pressure regarding their behaviours.

Another important positive effect of remote work is the disappearance of geographic restrictions for employees. The pressure of residing in a certain city for work reasons is currently lower. Young workers can search for job opportunities in a wider geography and choose a lifestyle according to their preferences. Remote work lifts the country boundaries and allows employees to work from anywhere for any company, allowing them to find better-paying jobs. Being able to work from anywhere is especially crucial for employees who live away from their families. Remote work allows them to continue working while visiting their family and loved ones or simply travelling for leisure.

When it comes to the negative effects, distractions at home are mentioned in the literature as one of the biggest challenges of remote work arrangements. On the contrary, young remote workers who took part in the interviews expressed improvement in their house conditions which was perceived as one of the biggest challenges of remote work. Results show that the distractions due to the family members are declining, with family members starting to understand remote work concepts better. This finding is promising for the future of remote working arrangements which shows that in time this type of distractions can be overcome. This has been widely missed in the literature since most of the literature comes from pre-pandemic and pandemic times and the current reality of remote work is different. Social media is mentioned as the second biggest source of distraction. It is an issue that can be seen among office workers as well, however the results show that it becomes much easier to switch to social media apps while doing remote work due to the absence of colleagues and managers. Results also show that remote workers are working on ways to limit the influence of social media distractions, though no clear practice has been found and it is limited to individual efforts. This is an area that requires more discussions among remote workers in the form of experience-sharing and perhaps the employees could host workshops.

Another negative effect of remote working is the blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. Young workers who work from home may have to better balance

working and resting hours as they move their work into their home living spaces. While this increases the importance of time management skills, it can also strain employees' ability to cope with work stress. Employees may have difficulty separating their work and personal lives and may struggle to balance their work needs with their private lives. Results show that although some of the young workers manage to limit the negative effects of this, it still stays on a personal level rather than a general practice for remote workers. It highlights the importance of managers working towards diminishing this effect. Companies should develop policies and guidelines to help employees achieve work-life balance. Measures such as flexible working hours, leave policies, and stress management programs will help employees balance their work and private lives harmoniously.

One of the negative sides of remote work, which influences stress, is mentioned as feedback. Feedback regarding employees' work is found better translated in the office. It shows the importance of feedback culture on remote work, suggesting that managers should invest more in designing structured forms of feedback sharing. Even though there is feedback on remote work, it is stated to be communicated often via e-mail or message, and most employees need more assurance. Results show that when companies are too focused on efficiency, they often overlook topics such as feedback and need to invest more time in sharing, assuring feedback via a Zoom call to make it more genuine and individual.

The always-on culture was one of the most mentioned negative effects of remote work, which comes from the constant state of working overtime. Being always on contributes to working overtime and being connected with flexibility. Some remote workers showed acceptance towards the trade-off between being more flexible vs. occasionally working overtime. Nevertheless, most of them have a negative point of view regarding overtime. Another critical point is convenience since working overtime at home is much easier and effortless compared to office standards. Employees with longer remote work experience mentioned ways to cope with the overtime expectations of their employers, which is a good start towards resolving the issue, but still, the solution stays at the individual level and companies appear to be reluctant to address the problem. Perhaps, a solution should come from a higher third party, such as governmental policies. Laws on the developments on how work is done follow behind the reality of the current job market.

Remote work can likewise lead to communication and collaboration difficulties due to the lack of face-to-face and direct interaction. There may be difficulties in sharing information, collaborative projects, and problem-solving processes among team members.

Companies must provide the appropriate infrastructure for effective communication and collaboration. Digital communication tools should increase team members' interaction through collaboration platforms and regular meetings for tracking projects. Also, tools such as Confluence should be used to collect and document the best practices produced by separate teams. This could help in creating company-wide solutions towards the problems.

Connected to the same problem of living conditions of young remote workers, it is also mentioned that they struggle with creating suitable working spaces in their homes. Most of the young workers are renting a room in co-living spaces or living with their parents. They are also struggling if they have a young family, or they live in small spaces. This brings the necessity of companies stepping in, providing assistance and solutions such as co-working spaces. It should be noted that co-working may not be the perfect solution for all remote workers, yet it remains an option and further research on the challenges of remote workers' living situations is needed.

However, the other highest mentioned negative effect of remote work on young workers, which is the risk of social isolation is still prominent. Young employees who work from home rather than in an office setting may have less opportunity to interact with their colleagues and managers. This can reduce opportunities for employees to connect and collaborate with colleagues. In addition, remote work can present some challenges for young workers to expand their professional networks and develop mentoring relationships. Even though some of the results suggest there can be ways to lower this effect via technological tools, it is still found ineffective and nowhere near the office setting. This highlights the need to create alternative solutions regarding the social isolation side of remote work and it can be taken as a part of research for the future.

It is important to maintain social ties in the remote working environment. Companies should encourage employees to connect and strengthen relationships with colleagues through regular virtual events, online training, and other social interaction opportunities. Effectively managing remote work can improve employee performance, increase job satisfaction and engagement, and provide a competitive advantage for companies. The challenging part of virtual events is the impression of some of the remote workers. It can often be perceived as extra work, unnecessary or waste of time that they could be using for their regular job tasks. Results show an employee tendency towards using the same time for their private lives. Solutions to how to resolve such challenges can be studied further.

Despite the findings and conclusions of this study, some limitations can be highlighted. Due to the nature of the theme of well-being, physical well-being topic arose during the interviews. Although it is an important aspect of well-being, it was not part of this study. Another topic which was not included in this study is communication tools in remote work. It was asked to the interviewees to create the bases for the upcoming, study-related questions, though it was not taken into this research. Being required to physically sit all day while working on remote work is another topic that came up during the interviews, though it was also not included in this research due to its physical nature. Finally, one remote-working mother took part in the interviews and mentioned specific points of being a remote worker as a mother, however this was not covered deeply by this study, it is only mentioned among the most disadvantaged remote worker groups.

Based on the unresolved negative effects of remote work on young workers' well-being, further research can focus on 3 main directions. The first avenue of research can be the living conditions of young remote workers, there is an alternative solution of co-working spaces, though it is not enough as an answer since it does not fit every remote worker. The second avenue of research can be social isolation. In this research, social isolation of young remote workers due to the less opportunity for interaction with their colleagues, was included but not fully explored. The technological tools in use in the current business world are promising, however they do not resolve the problem completely. The third and last avenue of research can be the negative effect of virtual meetings. Although such meetings are found to be a good alternative to the meetings held in physical environments, workers are found to sometimes prefer less of it. It is mentioned to be extra work and in general not preferred by remote workers when the purpose of the virtual meetings is maintaining the social ties of the employees.

Remote work has various effects on young workers and their well-being. While it offers advantages in terms of flexibility, it can also bring the risk of social isolation and the difficulties of work-life balance. Companies need to consider the needs and motivation of young employees when implementing the remote working model to provide an effective working environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview

Preliminary Part

Introduction of the interviewer

Hello, thank you for coming for the interview today. First, I will start by introducing myself. My name is Necati; I am a master's degree student in Management at FEP, University of Porto. I am at the dissertation stage of my studies and must conduct a series of interviews.

Clarification about the study

Now, I will continue by giving you information about my research.

My work is focused on the impacts of remote work on the well-being of young workers, including the positive and negative effects of such working arrangements. Generational differences and the mutual gains perspective, which benefit both employees and employers, will support my work. This study focuses on the views and experiences of young remote workers. There are several studies on younger workers and their distinctive features on remote work and well-being; some gaps remain in the literature. The study shows that people who are at an early career stage have been, in general, most adversely affected in recent years. The work will contribute to filling this gap and the young workers with a different reality than previous generations.

Asking for consent for the interview and voice record

Before we start, I need your consent about the interview and voice records, do you consent?

The interview purpose

This interview will be used exclusively in the context of the dissertation.

Personal information of the interviewee

1. Please give me some information about yourself, such as your name, age, educational background, nationality and where you live.
2. How many years have you worked with your current company?
3. Furthermore, for how many years have you been working, as in your whole career?
4. Please share your current position and a brief description of your role.
5. Moreover, lastly, please tell me about your family and living conditions.

Further questions in detail

Productivity

1. What tools do you use to communicate professionally in your remote work? (Are there any other tools you would like to mention?)
2. Is professional communication different when you compare remote work to office work?
3. Which type of work is better arranged, remote work or office?
4. Did you notice any changes in the number of meetings on remote work?
5. Do you perceive your remote work as more efficient than your office work experience? Or is the office setting more efficient?
6. Considering the onboarding to your new job, which type of job was better to learn at the beginning, remote work, or office?
7. How is the experience-sharing with your colleagues and boss? Does remote work affect it?
8. What are the distraction sources when you work remotely, and what are/were the sources when you work in an office?
9. Do you work more overtime on remote work than on your office work?
10. How does remote work affect your daily and personal life?
11. Is your work more stressful since you work from home?
12. Did you notice any changes in your work schedule due to remote work?

Social Effect, Job Satisfaction

13. How is the relationship between you and your colleagues compared to office work experience?
14. How is the current private communication during work between your colleagues and you?
15. Do you like working from home, and if you do so, what are the reasons?
16. Do you have a separate room at home for you to work?
17. Has your work motivation changed since starting a remote job? What are the motivational drivers behind it? How different is it compared to an office job?
18. Can you flexibly arrange your working hours and your free time?
19. Would you like to work in an office environment sometimes?
20. Would you prefer a hybrid working system?

21. Could you find a similar job in your city or country if you wish to have the same job in an office setting?
22. Do you see yourself working remotely for the rest of your career?