



**SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"
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ABSTRACT

of the dissertation work

**MANAGEMENT OF PEOPLE AND TEAMS
IN REMOTE WORK
(IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT)**

For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field
3.7. Administration and Management

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1. General Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of 179 pages, of which 149 pages are the main text, including the Introduction, Chapter One, Chapter Two, Chapter Three, and Conclusion, 15 pages of Appendices, and 15 pages of References. The sources used amount to 180, of which 15 are in Bulgarian. The dissertation contains 32 tables and 31 figures.

The author of the dissertation, a full-time PhD student in the Department of Business Administration at the Faculty of Economics of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", has conducted both qualitative and quantitative research, participated with reports in two scientific forums in the country, and published three articles.

1.1. Relevance of the Research

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about drastic changes in the way organizations work and operate. Nearly 80% of people in Europe who worked in an office before 2020 worked from home for a certain period after the pandemic began (compared to only 20% who worked from home before that) (*Ferreira et al., 2020*).

Since 2022, some companies have been trying to bring employees back to the offices in a hybrid work model (e.g., 2-3 days working in the office). However, having experienced the benefits of remote work (and in some cases having already moved out of big cities), some employees are strongly resisting this company policy. At the same time, another part of the people, having experienced negative effects (e.g., insufficient opportunity to interact with colleagues; difficulties working from home for various reasons), welcomed the decision to return to the office. The preferences largely depend on various factors - age, education, marital status; presence of children in the family; sector; nature of the work; type of employment, etc. (*Arntz, Ben Yahmed & Berlingieri, 2020; Barbour, Menon & Mannering, 2021; Kramer & Kramer, 2020; Olson, 1983; Zhang et al., 2020*).

With the passing of the pandemic, working entirely in the office remains part of the "old normal" (*Lodovici, 2021*). It is more likely that the hybrid work model, a combination of working from home and working in the office, will continue. If forced to return to the office, 64% of employees would leave their jobs (*Richardson & Antonello, 2022*). The question regarding the "new normal" is not whether it is possible to work remotely; the question is to find the optimal work model that will be satisfying for both companies and employees.

1.2. Degree of Research on the Problem

A literature review of the research conducted so far has shown that remote work can have distinct advantages and disadvantages for employees and organizations. Among the advantages are: lower costs (for building rent, transportation, parking, food); access to more talent; lower turnover and fewer employee absences; greater flexibility and autonomy; higher levels of job satisfaction. The challenges for organizations are related to team spirit and collaboration; onboarding new associates; maintaining organizational culture; reduced creativity and innovation. The disadvantages for employees include feelings of isolation, health problems, and reduced opportunities for career development.

Some data and effects are interpreted differently in the reviewed studies. According to some studies, employee productivity increases when working from home; according to others, it decreases. Possible benefits for employees include improved work-life balance and reduced stress levels. However, if time is not managed properly and personal boundaries are problematic, remote work can negatively affect them.

It should be noted that a large part of the studies related to remote work were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (in the period 2020-2021). At that time, this way of working was widely introduced, and there is insufficient data on its effects on employees. This, however, leads to problems when comparing with previous studies, when remote work was not imposed by external circumstances (employees had the choice of where to work from). The presence of young children in the family, who were at home due to the closure of schools and kindergartens, the lack of a separate space for greater concentration on work, insufficiently good internet connection, lack of convenient workplaces at home, stress from the overall situation, etc., likely influenced the responses of the surveyed individuals during that specific period.

Today, there is a trend towards using the hybrid (mixed) work model, which combines office work with the option of remote work (from 1 to 4 days a week). This allows employees to take advantage of the flexibility of this model. At the same time, organizations manage to maintain team spirit and culture through in-person meetings.

It would be useful for research to continue in the current situation—without the force majeure circumstances imposing work from home. The goal is to empirically determine the impact of remote work on factors for which there are currently conflicting data (e.g., productivity and work-life balance). Based on systematic current data and taking into account certain trends, the preferred

work models for employees and organizations should be substantiated. Certainly, the factors based on which these models are tailored to the needs of specific organizations should also be considered.

1.3. Main Purpose of the Research

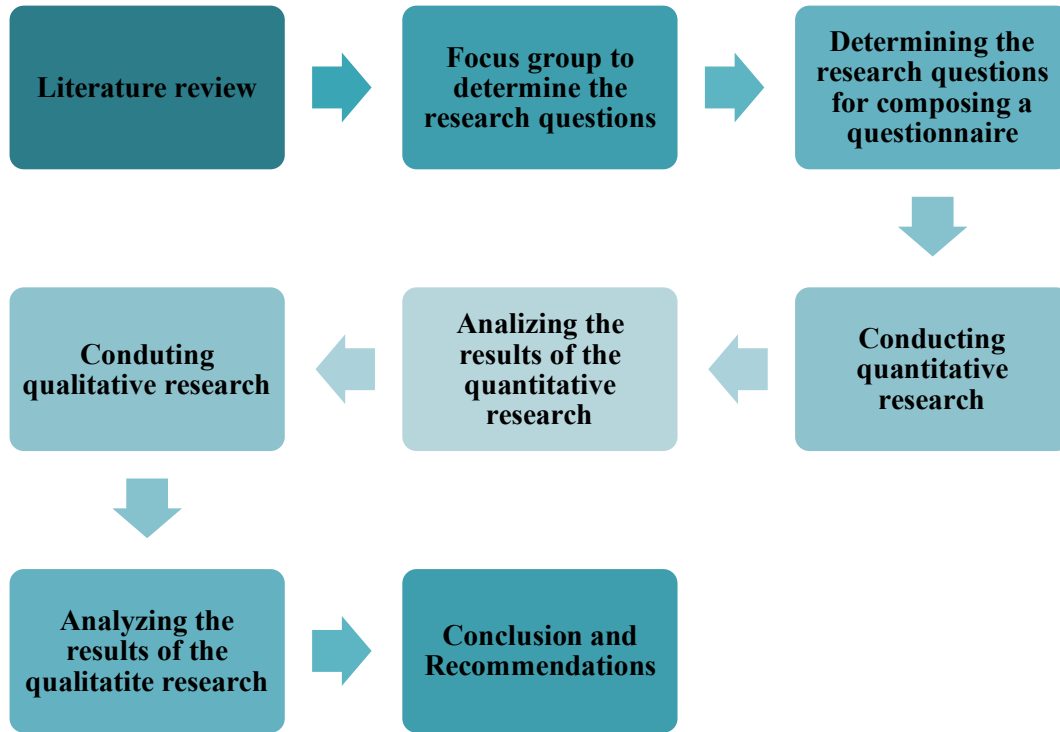
The dissertation aims to investigate the impact of remote work on employee performance, their work-life balance, flexibility, and degree of autonomy. Additionally, the research focuses on employees' preferences regarding specific work models and the reasons behind these preferences. The final stage of the research involves exploring employers' perspectives on the effects of remote work for greater objectivity. From a practical perspective, the results obtained will provide information that will help organizations in making decisions regarding their remote work policies for their employees. They should consider the advantages and disadvantages of this work model when formulating the relevant strategies.

1.4. Research Objectives (Tasks)

1. From a *retrospective* perspective, to study the research conducted so far concerning remote work. To identify the main areas for which there is insufficient or contradictory data.
2. From a *theoretical* perspective, to review the definitions of remote work, comparing it with other terms that are used as synonyms or related concepts.
3. From a *methodological* perspective, to evaluate and compare the methods used to study the effects of remote work to determine the most appropriate for the present study.
4. From an *empirical* perspective, to conduct research to test the hypotheses and interpret the results.
5. Based on the results obtained, to make *conclusions and recommendations* that will be useful for organizations in deciding which work model to choose for their employees.

1.5. Research Logic

Figure 1: Research logic



1.6. Object and Subject of the Study

The object of this dissertation's research includes individuals from various sectors in Bulgaria, most of whom have had the opportunity to work remotely. The survey involved 814 respondents, of which incomplete responses were excluded, and 560 survey forms were analyzed. The research also focuses on organizations where employees have the opportunity to work from home. Their representatives, in the face of Human Resources Managers, were interviewed and shared the companies' perspectives on different work models.

The subject of the research is remote work, its effects, advantages, and disadvantages for employees and organizations. For the purposes of this dissertation, the hybrid work model, which includes the possibility of working from home for 1 to 4 days a week, and the remote work model, defined as performing job duties for more than 4 days a week outside the office, will be distinguished.

1.7. Research Questions

The study encompasses eight research questions that can be divided into two groups. The first group is related to remote work and its effects on four factors – performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy. These questions are illustrated in Figure 2: Research Model. The second

group includes the next four questions, which concern preferences and policies regarding work models (from both employees and organizations).

Group 1:

Research Question 1: Does remote work affect employee *performance*, and in what way?

Research Question 2: Does remote work affect employees' *work-life balance*, and in what way?

Research Question 3: Does remote work affect employees' *flexibility*, and in what way?

Research Question 4: Does remote work affect employees' *autonomy*, and in what way?

Group 2:

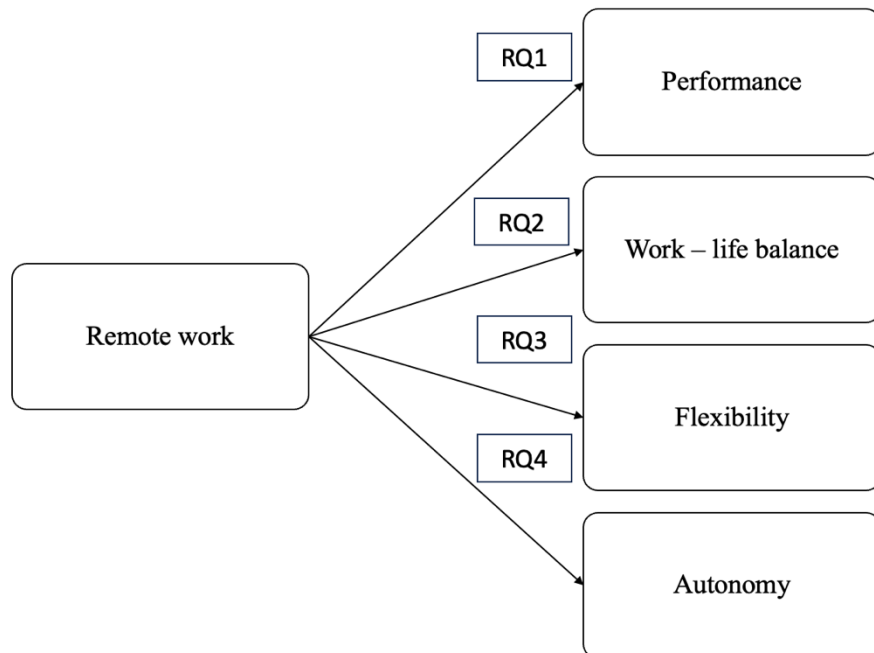
Research Question 5: What is the preferred work model for employees?

Research Question 6: Does the preferred work model match the actual one (the individual work practice)?

Research Question 7: What are the reasons for employees' preferences for a particular work model?

Research Question 8: What is the employers' perspective on the policies and effects of remote work?

Figure 2: Research Model



1.8. Research Methods

To define the concepts of "remote work" and "hybrid work," the methods of **theoretical analysis and scientific synthesis** of existing theoretical and empirical research are used.

In the empirical part, the survey method is employed in the form of **focus groups, interviews, and direct surveys**. A focus group with 9 participants from the scientific and business communities was organized on December 15, 2021, to narrow the focus of the research. After defining the objectives, a questionnaire was developed for the survey. A pilot study was conducted in January 2023 with 9 participants. Their feedback was taken into account in formulating the final version of the questionnaire. The official survey was conducted from February 1, 2023, to March 2, 2023, via the online platform LimeSurvey. The survey was distributed through social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn. The questionnaire consisted of 49 indicators and 8 demographic questions. From October to December 2023, 7 interviews and 1 focus group with 4 participants, mainly representatives of Human Resources from organizations that allow their employees to work remotely, were conducted.

1.9. Limitations of the research

1. The studied individuals are *exclusively* from Bulgaria – this sets a specific national and cultural context.
2. *Productivity* is assessed based on the self-evaluation of the studied individuals. There are no indicators provided to control this self-evaluation.
3. The empirical data were collected over the span of one month – in this sense, they rather outline a *snapshot* of the situation. The state of the *labor market* in the IT sector at the specific moment also impacts the results. The picture might be different if the empirical data were collected during another period (under a different labor market situation).
4. The fields of "Information and Communication Technologies" and "Finance/Insurance" are *most strongly represented* in the sample of studied individuals. If better representativeness of the data for other areas is required, their presence should be strengthened.
5. Factors that are important in determining company policies regarding remote work remain outside the scope of the study. These include, for example, the impact of remote work on organizational culture, employee engagement, team effectiveness, etc.

2. Contents of the Dissertation Work

The dissertation is developed in three main chapters. The first chapter includes a presentation of the theoretical-methodological analysis related to remote work. The second chapter contains the methodology and methods of the research. The third chapter presents the results of the quantitative

and qualitative research, with an analysis based on which practical applications and recommendations are derived. The dissertation ends with a conclusion.

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3. Summary of the Dissertation work

3.1. Introduction

The introduction of the dissertation work includes information about the relevance of the problem, the extent of its research so far, the main goal, tasks and logic of the research, object and subject, research questions, methods, and limitations of the research.

3.2. Chapter One: Theoretical-Methodological Analysis of Remote Work

3.2.1. Remote Work – Essence and Definitions

The dissertation presents various definitions related to remote work, and the specifics in distinguishing this work model according to place or time. From the given definitions, it follows that there is no single, universally accepted concept for remote work. There are overlaps between

the concepts of *remote work*, *telework*, *working from home*, and *hybrid work*. The absence of clear boundaries between the concepts complicates the comparison of research in this field.

3.2.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work

The aim of this chapter is to present both sides of remote work – the positive and the negative – for employers and employees. Based on research so far, interpretations of the results of remote work are not unequivocal. There are contradictory data and assessments regarding employee productivity, work-life balance, effects on stress, etc. Table 1 summarizes the highlighted advantages and disadvantages for organizations and employees associated with remote work.

Table 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work for Organizations and Employees

	Advantages	Disadvantages
For the organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - higher productivity of the employees (<i>Aslan et al., 2022; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Bloom, 2014; CIPD, 2021; Chmeis & Zeine, 2024; Collins, 2005; Deloitte, 2023; Ferreira et al., 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Microsoft, 2022; Lari, 2012; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Tori et al.</i>); - lower expenses (<i>Masaldzhiyska, 2020; Global Workplace Analytics, 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020; Lodovici, 2021</i>); - access to more talents (<i>Ferreira et al., 2020; Kuzior et al., 2022; Lodovici, 2021</i>); - lower turnover and fewer employee absences (<i>Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Ferreira et al., 2020; Lodovici, 2021</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lower productivity of the employees (<i>CIPD, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2021; Microsoft, 2022; Morikawa, 2020</i>); - maintaining team spirit and cooperation (<i>Collins, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2020; Lodovici, 2021; Miller et al., 2021; Morganson et al., 2010; Murphy, 2021; PwC, 2021; Šmite et al., 2023</i>); - more difficult onboarding of new employees (<i>Microsoft, 2022</i>); - maintaining organizational culture (<i>Remote work: the CEO perspective, 2020</i>); - decreased creativity and innovation (<i>Remote work: the CEO perspective, 2020</i>).

	Advantages	Disadvantages
For the employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better work – life balance (<i>Ammons & Markham, 2004; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; CIPD, 2021; Chmeis & Zeine, 2024; Deloitte, 2023; Ferreira et al, 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Lodovici, 2021; Saura et al., 2022</i>); - lower expenses (for transportation, parking, food) (<i>Deloitte, 2023; Global Workplace Analytics, 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020</i>); - increased flexibility and autonomy (<i>Kicheva ,2020; Deloitte, 2023; Eurofound and ILO, 2017;Eurofound, 2020a; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Giménez-Nadal et al., 2018); Harpaz, 2002; Kłopotek, 2017;Tremblay & Genin, 2007</i>); - lower stress levels (<i>Deloitte, 2020; Moretti et al., 2020</i>); - higher levels of work satisfactions (<i>Bellmann & Hübler, 2020; Collins, 2005; Eurofound and ILO, 2017;Erro-Garcés et al, 2022; Felstead & Henseke, 2017;Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Golden & Veiga, 2005; Morganson et al., 2010; Richardson & Antonello, 2022; Tori et al.</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of clear boundaries between work and personal life (<i>Antonova & Ivanova, 2022;Allen & Shockley, 2007; Eurofound, 2020a; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Kłopotek, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020</i>); - higher stress levels (<i>Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Bregenzner & Jienez, 2021; Eurofound,2020a; Lodovici, 2021; Rohwer et al., 2020; Salanova et al., 2013; Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021; Soumya, 2021</i>); - a feeling of isolations (<i>Deloitte, 2023;Eurofound and the ILO, 2017; Kłopotek, 2017; Mulki et al, 2009; Oleniuch, 2021</i>); - health problems (<i>Davis et al., 2019; Eurofound, 2020a; Moretti et al., 2020</i>); - decreased opportunities for career development (<i>Collins, 2005; Deloitte, 2023; Gálvez et al., 2020; Grzegorzcyk et al.,2021;Maruyama and Tietze, 2012; Nakrošiene et al., 2019</i>).

Further in the same section, the results of studies related to the advantages and disadvantages of this work model for organizations, employees, and society are presented in greater detail.

3.2.3. Studied Conceptual Indicators

3.2.3.1. Performance

Performance is determined by the quality and quantity of work performed as part of employees' assigned responsibilities and directly influences the financial and non-financial results of the company (*Susanto et al, 2022*). In the current work, the concepts of performance, productivity, and employee efficiency are used as synonyms because they are often used interchangeably in the literature.

The new forms of work that have emerged depend less on employees being present in the employer's office for a certain period each day and more on flexibility regarding location, task distribution, and management by objectives (*Eurofound, 2020a*).

There are conflicting data on whether productivity increases or decreases when working from home (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Bloom, 2014; CIPD, 2021; Collins, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Microsoft, 2022; Lari, 2012; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Speedman, 2020; Tori et al.; CIPD, 2021; Gibbs et al., 2021; Microsoft, 2022; Morikawa, 2020; Rožman et al., 2021*).

Some studies (based on measurements that exclude subjective evaluation) prove that productivity increases significantly with remote work (*Bloom, 2014; Collins, 2005; Gibbs et al., 2021*). Other studies rely on employees' self-assessment (*Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Microsoft, 2022*). A third group of studies relies on managers' evaluations of their employees' performance (*Ferreira et al., 2020; Microsoft, 2022; CIPD, 2021*). A fourth group of studies uses meta-analysis (*Gajendran & Harrison, 2007*). Possible reasons for higher productivity include fewer distractions, more time spent working, and stronger motivation. At the same time, if there are small children in the family (and no designated workspace), concentrating attention becomes difficult and this can negatively affect work performance.

3.2.3.2. Work-Life Balance

The work-life relationship consists of two main areas, each with its own boundaries: work can intrude into family life (e.g., a parent who has to work late and misses their child's performance),

and family can interfere with work (e.g., a sick child requiring a parent's attention during the workday) (*Duxbury, Higgins, & Mills, 1992; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Morganson et al., 2010*).

There are still different results reported regarding the impact of remote work on work-life balance for employees. Some studies show that there is a positive correlation between the two (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; CIPD, 2021; Ferreira et al, 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Lodovici, 2021; Saura et al., 2022*). According to other studies, remote work, on the contrary, increases the risk of imbalance between them (*Eurofound, 2020a; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020*), as boundaries become blurred.

Remote work can contribute to an improved work-life balance through: reduced travel time (*CIPD, 2021; Ford et al., 2021; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Lodovici, 2021; Kicheva, 2020*); for employees with family obligations if they work remotely from time to time but not constantly, as the latter increases the risk of conflicts between the two spheres (*Eurofound, 2020a; Shokey & Allen, 2007*); supportive behavior of the manager, which can even affect employee job satisfaction and performance (*Susanto et al., 2022; De Valdenebro Campo et al., 2021*); the presence of a separate workspace (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Crosbie & Moore, 2004*), as well as good discipline and motivation for work (*Ammons & Markham, 2004*).

Negative consequences for this balance are observed when there is: inability to disconnect from work and the feeling that they need to be constantly available to managers and colleagues (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Ford et al., 2021*); the presence of small children in the family and the lack of a physically separate space (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Ford et al., 2021*); more frequent work from home, which may contribute to the intrusion of family into work but reduce the intrusion of work into family (*Golden et al., 2006*); women, who are at greater risk of higher levels of stress and tension due to the demands they place on themselves (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Gálvez et al., 2020*), despite women being more likely to work from home (*Zhang et al., 2020*), as well as women with children up to 13 years old (*Arntz, Ben Yahmed & Berlingieri, 2020*).

3.2.3.3. Flexibility

Flexibility can refer to two dimensions - the time and place of work (*Shockley & Allen, 2007*). ICT (Information and Communication Technology) contributes to the development of new work organizations by allowing greater flexibility in terms of where and when we work (*Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harpaz, 2002; Tremblay & Genin, 2007*). These forms of organization rely less on regular schedules and more on flexible task distribution. This shift is accompanied by the understanding that work is more project-oriented, fragmented, and dependent on performance. This type of work is not necessarily tied to standard working hours but requires employees to be available, meet deadlines, and achieve specific goals set by employers or clients (*Eurofound, 2020a*).

From the studies conducted so far, it can be concluded that flexibility regarding the time and place of work leads to greater employee engagement and satisfaction, better work-life balance, and improved performance. At the same time, employees may experience negative effects, such as more frequent interruptions and blurred boundaries between professional and personal life. Nevertheless, the majority of them would like to have the opportunity for such flexibility (*Richardson & Antonello, 2022*).

3.2.3.4. Autonomy

According to *Eurofound (2020a)* “Autonomy at work refers to a worker’s ability to determine aspects of their work (such as the order of tasks, speed and working methods), have a say in their choice of colleagues and take a break when they so desire”¹

From the presented studies, it can be concluded that autonomy has positive effects (on employee performance, work-life balance, job satisfaction, and stress reduction), with research confirming that there is a link between remote work and increased autonomy. At the same time, if there is a lack of time management skills, the presence of small children at home, self-imposed excessively high goals, or too frequent work from home, this asset can turn into a liability for employees. This contradiction provides grounds to explore the relationship between remote work and autonomy – whether it increases or decreases with more frequent work from home.

3.3. Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Methods

¹ Eurofound (2020a) Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age, New forms of employment series, *Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg*, p.14

To define the concepts of remote work and hybrid work, **theoretical analysis and scientific synthesis of the theoretical and empirical studies** conducted so far are used. In the empirical part, the survey method is used in the form of **focus groups, direct surveys, and interviews**. The results of the focus group conducted to narrow the focus are presented, the questionnaire used in the quantitative study, as well as the results of the factor analysis.

Factor Analysis

Before the actual analysis, the statements investigating the 5 factors were subjected to exploratory factor analysis to reduce the number of initial variables and to form factor groups. The requirements for this type of factors (random nature of the data, more than 300 survey responses, mutually correlating variables, KMO test values above 0.5, significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, determinant different from zero (Yong & Pearce, 2013)), have been met in the present study.

The factors were extracted based on eigenvalues, and the Varimax method was used for rotation. In the rotated solution, factor loadings with small coefficients having an absolute value below 0.4 were ignored. As a result, five factors were formed, with the data dispersion showing a cumulative value equal to 72.6% (> 50%), and the first factor not accounting for more than 50% of the total dispersion (26%), which indicates that there is no risk of common method bias (Jordan & Troth, 2020).

A review of the rotated component matrix (Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix (Factor Analysis)) shows a very good distribution of the factor groups, with all indicators having factor loadings above 0.5. The eigenvalues of the four factors are > 1 (Kaiser, 1960). The high values of Cronbach's Alphas (above 0.7 for four of the factors and close to 0.7 for one of them) confirm their reliability (Hair et al., 2010; Taber, 2018).

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix (Factor analysis)

Items	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what level are you satisfied/dissatisfied with how well your work life and your personal life fit together.	,895				

To what level are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the way you divide your time between work and personal life.	,889
To what level are you satisfied/dissatisfied with the way you divide your attention between work and home.	,888
To what level are you satisfied/dissatisfied with your ability to balance between the needs of your job with those of your personal or family life.	,873
To what level are you satisfied/dissatisfied the opportunity you have to perform your job well and yet be able to perform home	,802
When I work in the office, my work environment allows me to do high-quality work.	,911
When I work in the office, my work environment allows me to complete my work in a timely and effective manner.	,895
When I work in the office, my work environment allows me to meet the expectations of my supervisor in performing my job.	,875
When I work in the office, my work environment allows me to complete tasks in a satisfactory manner.	,874
When I work in the office, my work environment allows me to improve my overall work performance.	,803
When I work remotely, my work environment allows me to do high-quality work.	,901
When I work remotely, my work environment allows me to complete my work in a timely and effective manner.	,890
When I work remotely, my work environment allows me to complete tasks in a satisfactory manner.	,872
When I work remotely, my work environment allows me to improve my overall work performance.	,818

When I work remotely, my work environment allows me to meet the expectations of my supervisor in performing my job.						,814
I decide how to do my job.						,815
I decide what the task order in my work would be.						,772
I coordinate my own work with those of my colleagues.						,764
I make the important decisions about my job.						,740
I decide with what work pace to perform my job.						,720
I have the freedom to vary my work schedule						,767
I have the freedom to work wherever is best for me – either at home or at the office.						,747
I have the possibility to perform personal tasks during the standard working hours.						,728
Eigenvalues	6,0	3,9	3,0	2,5	1,3	
% of Variance	26,0	16,9	13,2	10,7	5,8	
Total Variance Explained (%)			72,6			
Cronbach's alpha	,939	,920	,928	,838	,698	

3.4. Chapter Three: Analysis of the Results. Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the empirical study are presented, which includes several methods – an online survey, interviews, and a focus group.

3.4.1. Description of the Respondents

The survey included 813 respondents, of whom 544 completed the questionnaires fully. For statistical processing, 560 questionnaires were considered, as some respondents skipped the optional demographic questions. The respondents were exclusively from Bulgaria. A summary of the respondents' characteristics reveals that they primarily work in the "Information and Communication Technologies" sector (67%, n=373) and "Finance/Insurance" (11%, n=62); have a relatively even distribution regarding work experience; hold a bachelor's or master's degree (nearly 85%, n=474); most do not have managerial roles (68%, n=381); the majority are married or cohabiting (69%, n=389); more than half do not have children under 18 (53%, n=298), but 45%

(n=248) have at least one child; almost half (46%, n=257) are aged 31 to 40 years, and the gender distribution is relatively even (53%, n=296, are women, and 45%, n=255, are men).

To address Research Questions 1-4: "Does remote work affect employees' performance/work-life balance/flexibility/autonomy and in what way?", two types of analyses were used – correlation and dispersion analyses, due to the presence of a qualitative factor and a quantitative result.

3.4.2. Performance

3.4.2.1. Remote work performance

The relationship between the three groups of work models and performance in remote work is shown in *Figure 3: Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)*.

Figure 3: Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups).

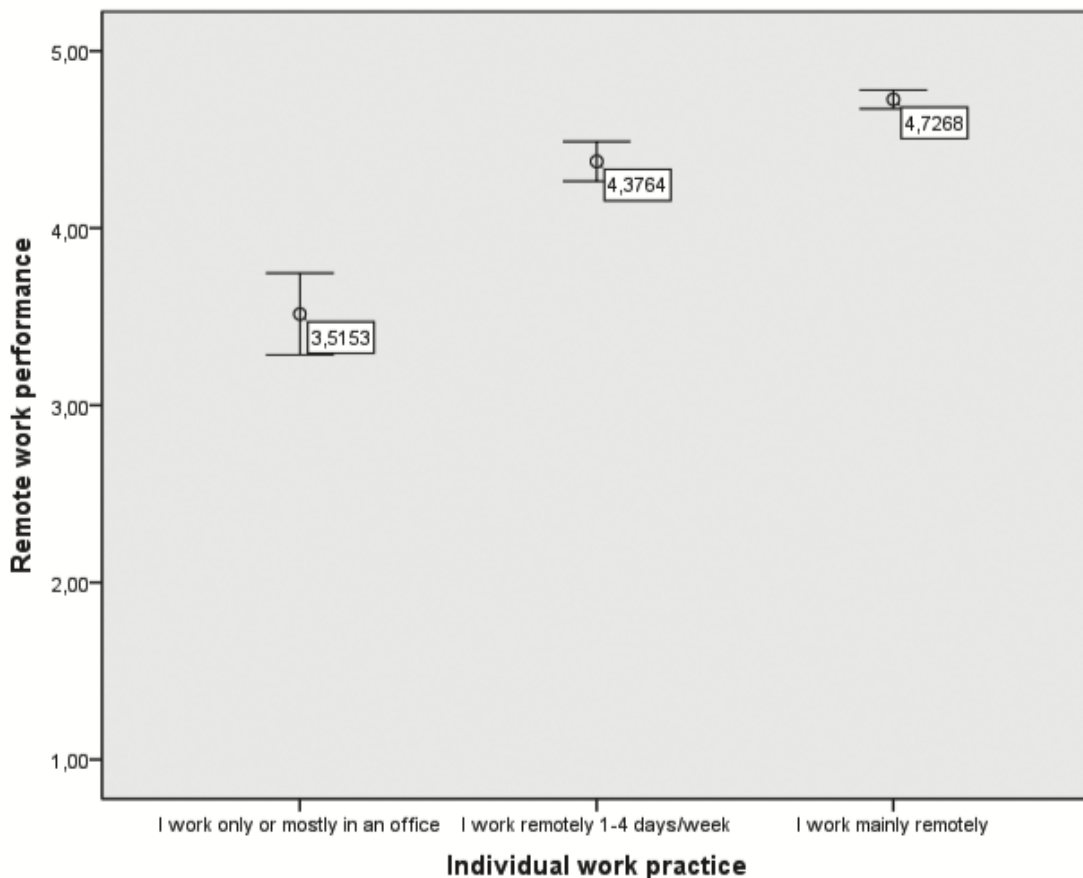


Table 3: ANOVA - Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	97,832	2	48,916	108,838	,000

Within Groups	243,146	541	,449		
Total	340,978	543			

We can conclude that the applied model is adequate, as $\text{Sig.}F = 0.000 < 0.05$ (*Table 3: ANOVA - Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)*). Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a relationship between the work model and employee productivity, and due to the change in means, we can conclude that the relationship is direct.

The coefficient of determination, Eta square, is equal to 0.297, meaning that 30% of the variance in remote work performance can be explained by the work model factor.

The multiple comparisons showed that there are statistically significant differences between all respondent groups according to the work model, as evident from *Table 4: Multiple comparisons - Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)*.

Table 4: Multiple comparisons - Remote work performance and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups).

Tamhane						
(I) How often do you work remotely:	(J) How often do you work remotely:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
I work only or mostly in an office	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	-,861*	,129	,000	-1,174	-,549
	I work mainly remotely	-1,212*	,119	,000	-1,501	-,922
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	I work only or mostly in an office	,861*	,129	,000	,549	1,174
	I work mainly remotely	-,350*	,063	,000	-,501	-,200
I work mainly remotely	I work only or mostly in an office	1,212*	,119	,000	,922	1,501
	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	,350*	,063	,000	,200	,501

*Mean Difference is significance when $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$

3.4.2.2. Performance in an office

Dispersion analysis showed an opposite relationship when it comes to working from the office. The relationship is depicted in *Figure 4: Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)*. People who work more frequently remotely have rated their office performance lower compared to those who predominantly work from there.

Figure 4: Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)

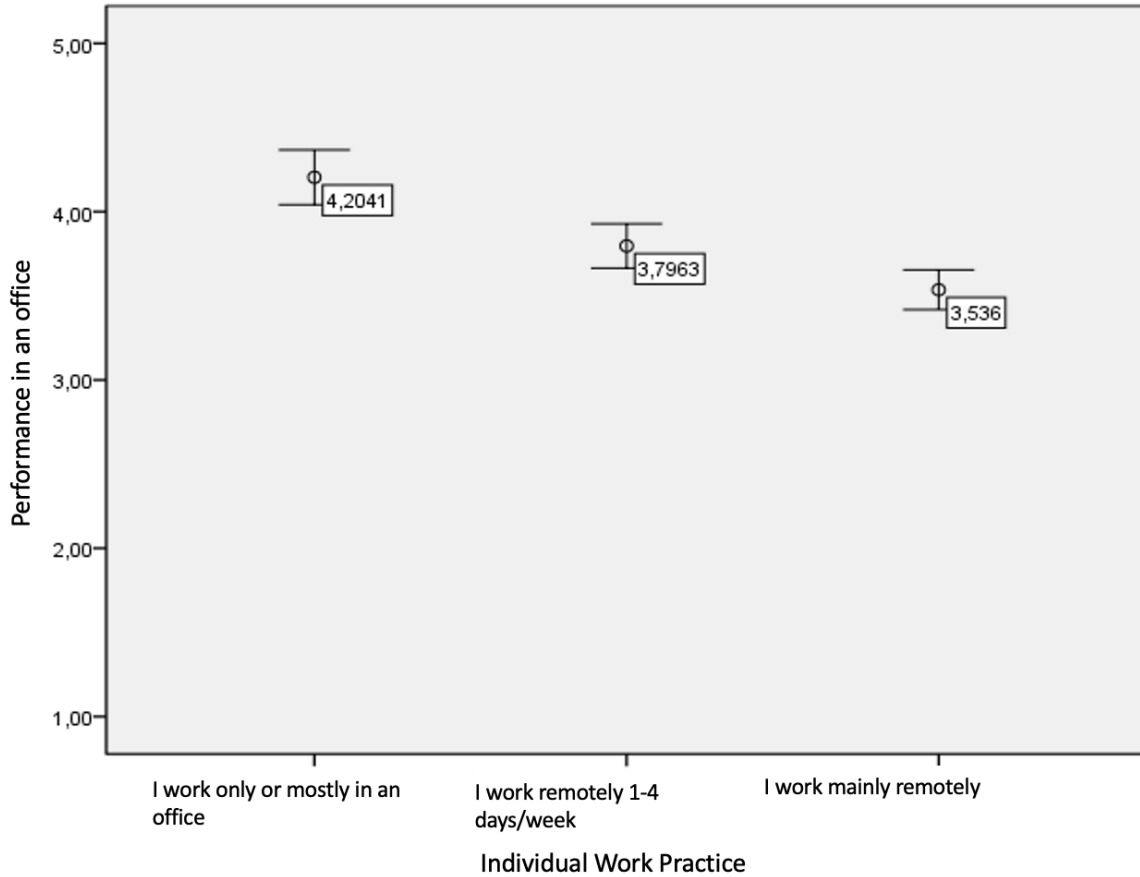


Table 5: ANOVA - Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	33,809	2	16,905	18,644	,000
Within groups	505,047	557	,907		
Total	538,857	559			

From Table 5: ANOVA - Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model) (3 groups) it is seen that the applied model is adequate, as Sig.F= 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a relationship between the work model and the productivity of employees working from the office, and due to the change in the means, we can conclude that the relationship is inverse - i.e., the more frequently they work remotely, the lower they rate their office productivity

Table 6: Multiple comparisons - Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model)

Tamhane

(I) How often do you work remotely:	(J) How often do you work remotely:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
I work only or mostly in an office	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	,40780*	,10586	,000	,1530	,6626
	I work mainly remotely	,66812*	,10189	,000	,4229	,9134
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	I work only or mostly in an office	-,40780*	,10586	,000	-,6626	-,1530
	I work mainly remotely	,26032*	,08981	,012	,0450	,4757
I work mainly remotely	I work only or mostly in an office	-,66812*	,10189	,000	-,9134	-,4229
	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	-,26032*	,08981	,012	-,4757	-,0450

*Mean Difference is significance when Sig.<0.05

The multiple comparisons revealed statistically significant differences between all respondent groups based on their work model, as shown in *Table 6: Multiple comparisons - Performance in an office and individual work practice (work model)*. Based on these results, it can be concluded that remote work has a positive effect on employees' performance. It is also suggested that these conclusions may not be valid for people who prefer to work from the office, as they experience difficulties when working from home, some of which are discussed in the following lines.

A comparative analysis between performance in the office and performance when working from home was conducted (*Table 7: Comparative Analysis Between Remote Work Performance and Performance in an Office*). It was found that the average performance scores for remote work (mean = 4.47) are higher compared to those for office work (mean = 3.73). These results indicate that employees not only maintain but also increase their productivity when working from home. However, it should be noted that the results are based on employees' self-assessment, which is one of the limitations of the study.

Table 7: Comparative Analysis Between Remote Work Performance and Performance in an Office

		Remote work performance	Performance in an office
N	Number of answers	544	560
	Missing answers	16	0

Mean	4,47	3,73
Stand. Deviation from Mean	,04	,04
Median	5,00	4,00
Standart Deviation	,84	1,02
Minimum	1,00	1,00
Maximum	5,00	5,00

Correlation Analysis

The method of correlation analysis was used for the verification and analysis of the results. Spearman's coefficient was used as the correlation coefficient. The null hypothesis (H0) assumes that there is no relationship between remote work and remote performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy, where the coefficient would be equal to 0. The alternative hypothesis (H1) would prove a relationship between them, with the coefficient being different from 0.

A statistically significant relationship was found for all indicators ($p < 0.05$). The results are shown in *Table 8: Correlation analysis between remote work and remote performance, performance in an office, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy.*

Table 8: Correlation analysis between remote work and remote performance, performance in an office, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy

Spearman Correlation					
Remote work and...	Value	N of Valid Cases	Asymp. Std. Errora	Approx. Tb	Approx. Sig.
Remote work performance	,462	544	,038	12,112	,000
Performance in an office	-,247	560	,040	-6,025	,000
Work – life balance	,390	560	,037	9,993	,000
Flexibility	,341	560	,041	8,555	,000
Autonomy	,144	560	,043	3,444	,001

According to *Shopova's (2018)* scale for evaluating structural changes and differences, all relationships exhibit significant structural changes/differences (between 0.30 and 0.50) except for autonomy (0.144), which falls into the group of weak relationships (between 0.07 and 0.15). The indicator of performance in an office was also included, mainly for the purpose of comparing the mean values between it and remote work performance. Its values (-0.247) are the only ones with a negative sign, indicating an opposite relationship, one that leads to moderate structural changes/differences (between 0.15 and 0.30).

Based on the empirical data and the analyses conducted, it can be concluded that employees who work more frequently from a distance rate their performance when working from home higher. Therefore, **the answer to the first research question is that there is a statistically significant positive moderate relationship between remote work and employee productivity/performance.** These results are consistent with the conclusions of numerous studies (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Bloom, 2014; CIPD 2021; Collins, 2005; Ferreira et al., 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Microsoft, 2022; Lari, 2012; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Speedman, 2020; Tori et al.*).

Among the probable reasons for higher productivity are the ability to focus better and fewer distractions (*Bloom, 2014; CIPD, 2021; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2008; Tremblay & Genin, 2007*), and the presence of suitable working conditions at home (*Nakrošiene et al., 2019*), such as a separate workspace, a comfortable chair, and good internet connection.

Employees who work primarily or entirely from the office rate their performance at home significantly lower. It is possible that they lack suitable working conditions at home (*CIPD, 2021; Morikawa, 2020*); they may find it harder to motivate themselves and are more easily distracted (especially if they have young children) (*Gibbs et al., 2021*); and because work is combined with household chores (*Gibbs et al., 2021*). If people who have a choice work from home only to care for a sick child, for example, their performance might significantly decline during this period due to the need for more frequent interruptions or less time available for work.

In section "3.6.2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work" of the dissertation, it is described that there is a statistically significant moderate relationship between the preferred work model and the actual work model (with coefficients Cramer's $V=0.56$ and Spearman= 0.67 , $p < 0.05$). This suggests that employees may have chosen the office work model because they do not feel productive when working from home. Conversely, the same could be true for remote workers – they have chosen to work remotely because they rate their performance higher when working from home.

3.4.3. Work-Life Balance

The analysis of variance showed a direct relationship between remote work and work-life balance, as seen in *Figure 5: Work-life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)* from the changes in the mean values of the 3 respondent groups according to the work

model. People who work predominantly remotely gave the highest ratings compared to the other groups.

Figure 5: Work-life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)

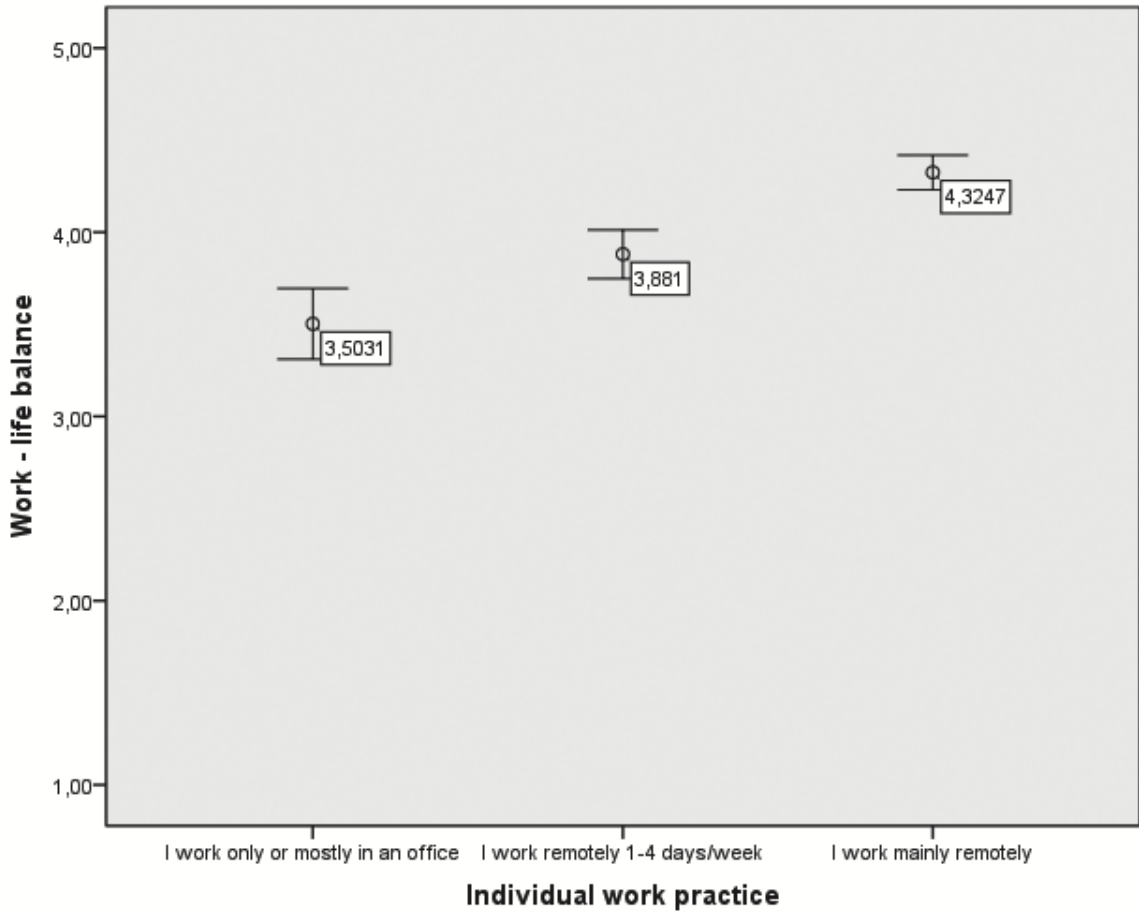


Table 9: ANOVA – Work – life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	56,297	2	28,148	38,129	,000
Within groups	411,198	557	,738		
Total	467,494	559			

From Table 9: Multiple comparisons – Work – life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups) it is seen that the applied model is adequate, as Sig.F= 0.000 < 0.05. The test for homogeneity of variances showed Sig.F= 0.100 > 0.05, therefore Tukey's coefficient was used

for multiple comparisons (Post hoc tests) (*Table 10: Multiple comparisons – Work – life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)*).

Table 10: Multiple comparisons – Work – life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)

Tukey HSD

(I) How often do you work remotely:	(J) How often do you work remotely:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
I work only or mostly in an office	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	-,37789*	,11018	,002	-,6368	-,1190
	I work mainly remotely	-,82157*	,10036	,000	-1,0574	-,5857
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	I work only or mostly in an office	,37789*	,11018	,002	,1190	,6368
	I work mainly remotely	-,44369*	,08361	,000	-,6402	-,2472
I work mainly remotely	I work only or mostly in an office	,82157*	,10036	,000	,5857	1,0574
	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	,44369*	,08361	,000	,2472	,6402

*Mean Difference is significance when Sig.<0.05

Test of Homogeneity of Subgroups – work-life balance

Tukey HSDa,b

How often do you work remotely:	N	Subgroup for $\alpha = 0.05$		
		1	2	3
I work only or mostly in an office	97	3,5031		
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	163		3,8810	
I work mainly remotely	300			4,3247
Sig.		1,000	1,000	1,000

As shown in *Table 10: Multiple comparisons – Work – life balance and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)* this division reveals statistically significant differences among all respondent groups according to the work model.

As a result of the correlation and variance analysis **for Research Question 2, it can be inferred that remote work has a positive effect on employees' work-life balance, with the relationship being weak to moderate.** These findings are consistent with the conclusions of previous studies (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; CIPD, 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Lasfargue & Fauconnier, 2015a; Lodovici, 2021; Saura et al., 2022*). One of the leading reasons is likely the reduced commuting time (*CIPD,*

2021; Ford et al., 2021; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Lodovici, 2021; Kicheva, 2020). This aligns with the opinion of 93% (n=508) of the respondents (*Appendix 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work – All Respondents*). The saved time can be invested in personal commitments, such as spending time with family and loved ones, engaging in hobbies, or even allowing for more rest or exercise, which is also confirmed by 78% (n=423) of the surveyed individuals (*Appendix 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work – All Respondents*). Additionally, carrying out household chores becomes much easier when working from home (e.g., during lunch breaks).

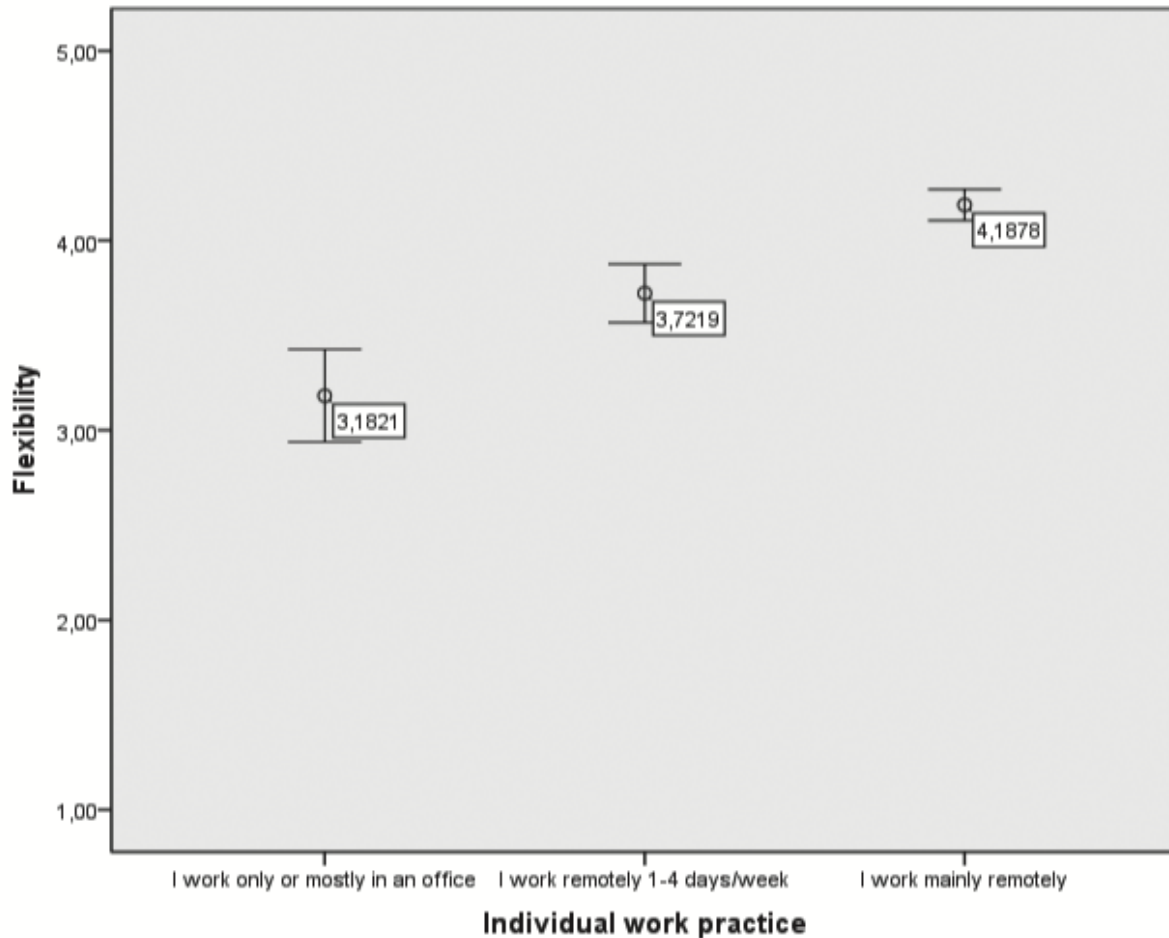
Remote work can blur the boundaries between professional and personal life, disrupting this balance. The feeling of always being on the job and needing to respond immediately to work emails or messages can lead to mental exhaustion and encroachment of work into personal life (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Ford et al., 2021*). This feeling is reported by 39% of the respondents (n=213) (*in Appendix 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work – All Respondents*). Key prerequisites for successfully separating the two spheres include having a dedicated workspace (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Crosbie & Moore, 2004*) and maintaining good discipline and motivation for work (*Ammons & Markham, 2004*).

Twenty-five percent (n=136) of the respondents lack suitable work amenities, such as a comfortable office chair, and 32% (n=177) do not have their own dedicated workspace (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Ford et al., 2021*). Problems with motivation are experienced by 22% (n=122) of the respondents, and issues with self-discipline affect 24% (n=128) (*in Appendix 4: Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work – All Respondents*).

3.4.4. Flexibility

The results of the comparison between the three groups regarding flexibility are presented on *Figure 6: Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)*.

Figure 6: Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)



From *Table 11: ANOVA – Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model)(3 groups)* it is seen that the applied model is adequate, as $\text{Sig.F} = 0.000 < 0.05$. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is a relationship between the work model and the flexibility of employees, and due to the change in the means, we can conclude that the relationship is direct.

Table 11: ANOVA – Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model)(3 groups)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Sqaure	F	Sig.
Between groups	79,732	2	39,866	48,811	,000
Within Groups	454,930	557	,817		
Total	534,662	559			

The test for homogeneity showed a difference in variances ($\text{Sig.F} = 0.000 < 0.05$), therefore Tamhane's coefficient was used for multiple comparisons (Post hoc tests). In this case, statistically

significant differences between the three groups are also observed, as depicted in *Table 12: Multiple comparisons – Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model)(3 groups)*.

Table 12: Multiple comparisons – Flexibility and Individual Work Practice (Work Model)(3 groups)

Tamhane

(I) How often do you work remotely:		(J) How often do you work remotely:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
I work only or mostly in an office	I work remotely 1-4 days/week		-,53975*	,14560	,001	-,8908	-,1887
	I work mainly remotely		-1,00565*	,12990	,000	-1,3203	-,6910
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	I work only or mostly in an office		,53975*	,14560	,001	,1887	,8908
	I work mainly remotely		-,46590*	,08811	,000	-,6777	-,2541
I work mainly remotely	I work only or mostly in an office		1,00565*	,12990	,000	,6910	1,3203
	I work remotely 1-4 days/week		,46590*	,08811	,000	,2541	,6777

* Mean Difference is statistically significant when Sig.<0.05

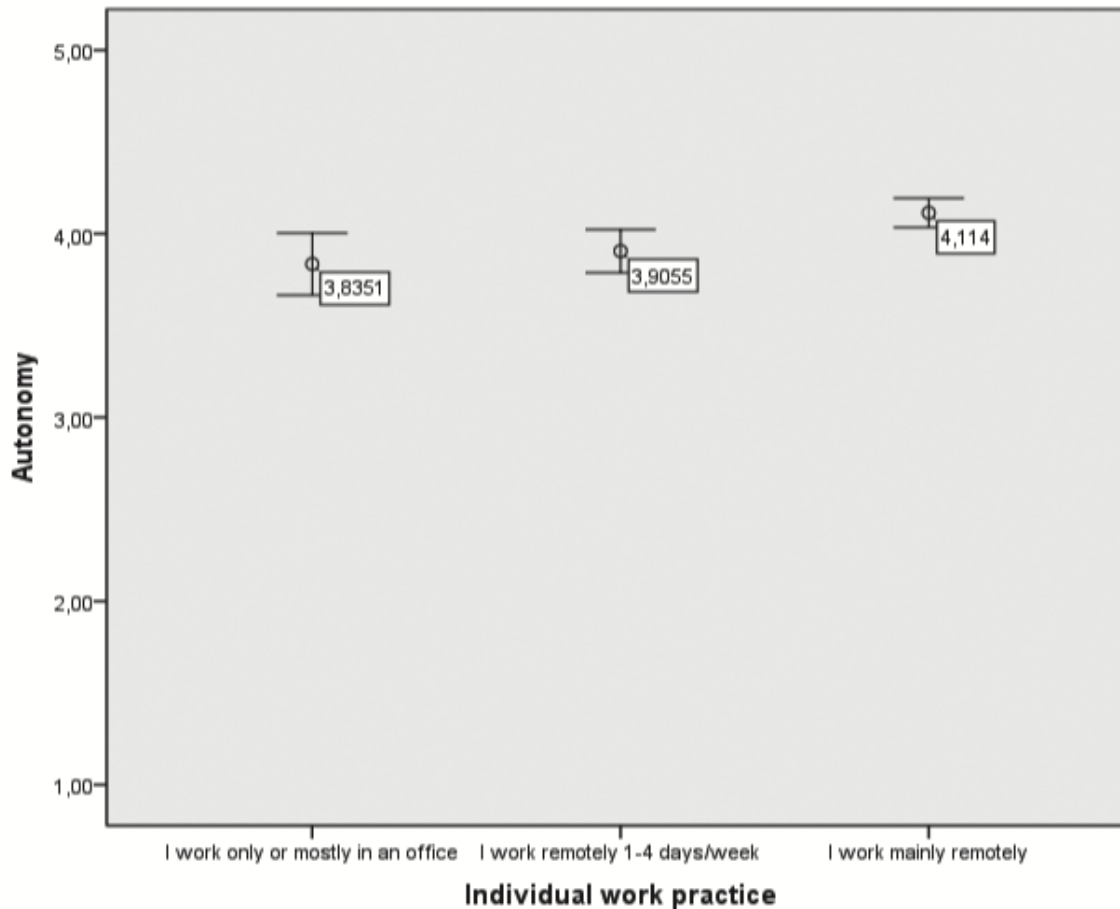
As a result of the correlation and dispersion analysis for **Research Question 3**, it can be **inferred that remote work has a positive effect on employees' flexibility, with a statistically significant weak to moderate positive correlation observed**. These results align with previous studies that suggest ICT provides greater flexibility regarding the location and time of work (*Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Harpaz, 2002; Tremblay & Genin, 2007*).

Several likely reasons for these results, some of which are corroborated by other studies, include the ability to independently plan one's day (*Ford et al., 2021*); the ease of performing activities that require physical presence at home at specific times, such as receiving deliveries, doing household chores, and engaging in physical exercise (*Ford et al., 2021*); the possibility of setting a work schedule different from the standard one (e.g., starting later and finishing later in the day) or making up for lost time if one has a personal commitment during the workday; and the ability to work from home instead of taking sick leave if one is feeling unwell or needs to care for a small child.

3.4.5. Autonomy

The results of the ANOVA for the autonomy factor are shown in *Figure 7: Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)*. The means of the 3 groups differ, increasing with the greater frequency of remote work.

Figure 7: Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)



From *Table 13: ANOVA - Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)* it is evident that the applied model is adequate since $\text{Sig.F} = 0.001 < 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the work model and employees' autonomy. Furthermore, due to the change in the means, we can conclude that the relationship is positive.

Table 13: ANOVA - Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)

	Sum of squares	df	Average square	F	Sig.
Between groups	7,979	2	3,989	7,200	,001
In groups	308,647	557	,554		
Total	316,626	559			

The test for homogeneity of variances showed Sig.F= 0.106 > 0.05, therefore Tukey's coefficient was used for multiple comparisons (Post hoc tests) (*Table 14: Multiple Comparisons – Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)*)

Table 14: Multiple Comparisons – Autonomy and Individual Work Practice (Work Model) (3 groups)

Tukey HSD

(I) How often do you work remotely:	(J) How often do you work remotely:	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
I work only or mostly in an office	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	-,07047	,09546	,741	-,2948	,1539
	I work mainly remotely	-,278958*	,08695	,004	-,4833	-,0746
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	I work only or mostly in an office	,07047	,09546	,741	-,1539	,2948
	I work mainly remotely	-,20848	,07243	,012	-,3787	-,0383
I work mainly remotely	I work only or mostly in an office	,27895*	,08695	,004	,0746	,4833
	I work remotely 1-4 days/week	,20848	,07243	,012	,0383	,3787

* Mean Difference is statistically significant when Sig.<0.05

Tukey HSDa,b

Work Model	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
I work only or mostly in an office	97	3,8351	
I work remotely 1-4 days/week	163	3,9055	
I work mainly remotely	300		4,1140
Sig.		,688	1,000

In light of the analysis, statistically significant differences were found only between the group "I work mainly remotely" and the other two groups. No such differences were observed between "I work only or mostly in an office" and "I work remotely 1-4 days/week."

As a result of the correlation and dispersion analysis for **Research Question 4**, it can be **inferred that remote work has a positive effect on employees' autonomy, but the relationship**

is very weak. These findings are consistent with previous studies (*Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; George et al., 2022; Eurofound, 2020a*).

Despite the assumptions that people working remotely should be more independent in making certain decisions about their work (such as the pace, order of tasks, and coordination with colleagues), the results showed a very weak correlation, which approaches accepting the null hypothesis. It is likely that the factor of autonomy depends more on other factors, such as the role in the company or the level of experience in a specific position. According to sociodemographic characteristics, there are weak but statistically significant differences in the responses of managers (Cramer's $V = 0.194$, Spearman = 0.193, $p < 0.05$), who more frequently indicated that they make important decisions about their work independently.

At the same time, it can be assumed that employees are sufficiently empowered to make these decisions independently, as most of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements constituting this factor. A large portion of the respondents are from the "Information and Communication Technologies" sector (67%, $n=373$), which typically features less hierarchical organizational structures. This may also support the assumption that there is an organizational culture in these companies that fosters greater employee autonomy.

The size of the organizations, which is not addressed in this study, would also likely be a factor influencing the responses. Generally, the larger the organization, the weaker the results might be regarding autonomy.

3.4.6. Preferred Work Model by Employees. Advantages and Disadvantages of Remote Work.

The last part of the questionnaire consists of 22 statements – 12 negative and 10 positive – related to remote work, translated and adapted from *Oleniuch (2021)*. The aim is to clarify the reasons why employees prefer one work model over another, as well as to obtain additional information and possible explanations of the results regarding the relationship between remote work and performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy.

The results are divided according to 3 groups of respondents – those who indicated they prefer to work "mainly or entirely remotely" ($n=312$, 57%), those who prefer to work "balanced – both from the office and remotely" ($n=178$, 33%), and those who prefer to work "mainly or entirely in an office" ($n=54$, 10%).

Table 15: Advantages and disadvantages of remote work for people who prefer to work mainly or entirely in an office

Item		Prefer work in an office (n= 54)		
N	When working remotely...	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree
1	employees cannot maintain and develop their social contacts.	15%	5%	80%
3	obstacles in the interaction between team members occur	17%	5%	78%
6	people feel isolated and lonely	11%	13%	76%
11	there are problems with self-discipline and focused task completion	17%	9%	74%
15	people save time.	15%	11%	74%
8	employees do not have a separate working space.	15%	15%	70%
10	the ability to motivate oneself for work drops down.	19%	11%	70%
2	technical problems occur (such as lack of laptop, printer, Internet, etc.).	19%	16%	65%
4	there is a feeling of being constantly at work.	22%	15%	63%
9	lack some work facilities – such as a comfortable chair.	30%	7%	63%
16	the expenses are lower(for example, for commuting, parking, food).	22%	19%	59%
14	people can spend more time with friends and family.	28%	16%	56%
17	your line manager has less control over you.	31%	15%	54%
12	there is a lack of meaning in work.	33%	15%	52%
13	people more easily adapt their working tasks to their own needs.	7%	41%	52%
7	some of the expenses increase – for example, for heating and Internet.	33%	28%	39%
5	it is more difficult to plan your time and tasks independently.	35%	28%	37%
18	you can concentrate better (because of the quiet environment and the lack of interruptions).	46%	24%	30%
22	stress levels are lower.	46%	28%	26%
19	people become more creative.	41%	39%	20%
20	people are more devoted to their work.	57%	26%	17%
21	work satisfaction increases.	54%	35%	11%

As is evident from the results presented in *Table 15: Advantages and disadvantages of remote work for people who prefer to work mainly or entirely in an office*, among the leading reasons employees prefer to work mainly or entirely from the office (n=54) are: they cannot maintain and develop their social contacts (80%); there are difficulties in interaction between team members (78%) (*Chmeis & Zeine, 2024; Deloitte, 2023; Ford et al., 2021; Lodovici, 2021; Miller et al., 2021; Morikawa, 2020*); people feel isolated and lonely (76%) (*Deloitte, 2023; Eurofound and the ILO, 2017; Mulki et al., 2009; Oleniuch, 2021*); problems with self-discipline and purposeful pursuit of tasks arise (74%); employees no longer have their separate workspaces (70%) (*Baruch & Nicholson, 1997; Morikawa, 2020*); the ability to motivate oneself for work weakens (70%) (*Ford et al., 2021*); technical problems arise – such as lack of a laptop, printer, internet, etc. (65%) (*CIPD, 2021; Morikawa, 2020; Tabor-Blazewicz, 2022*); the feeling of being constantly at work (63%) (*Baruch and Nicholson, 1997; Deloitte, 2023; Ford et al., 2021; Oleniuch, 2021; Rohwer et al., 2020*); lack of conveniences for work – such as a comfortable office chair, etc. (63%) (*Moretti et al., 2020*).

People who prefer to work mainly or entirely remotely (n=312) do not report such difficulties (*Table 16: Advantages and disadvantages of remote work for people who prefer to work mainly or entirely remotely*). According to them, remote work: saves time (98%) (*CIPD, 2021; Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Ford et al., 2021; Grant, Wallace & Spurgeon, 2013; Lodovici, 2021; Kicheva, 2020*); allows for better concentration (due to a quieter environment and fewer interruptions) (95%) (*Bloom, 2014; CIPD, 2021; Deloitte, 2023; Martinez-Sanchez et al., 2008; Tremblay & Genin, 2007*); reduces expenses (e.g., for transport, parking, food) (93%) (*Deloitte, 2023; Ferreira et al., 2020; Global Workplace Analytics, 2021*); enables spending more time with loved ones (87%) (*Deloitte, 2023; Ford et al., 2021*); lowers stress levels (77%); makes it easier to adapt work tasks to personal needs (71%); increases creativity (66%); enhances job satisfaction (66%) (*Bellmann and Hübler, 2021; Collins, 2005; Erro-Garcés et al., 2022; Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Morganson et al., 2010; Richardson and Antonello, 2022; Tori et al.*). Most of them do not experience difficulties in planning time and tasks independently (87%) and find a sense of meaning in their work (87%). Additionally, they have work conveniences – such as a comfortable office chair and more (84%), their ability to motivate themselves for work does not weaken (85%) (*Ammons & Markham, 2004; Chmeis & Zeine, 2024*), and they do not

have problems with self-discipline and focused task completion (82%) (Ammons & Markham, 2004; Olson 1983).

Table 16: Advantages and disadvantages of remote work for people who prefer to work mainly or entirely remotely

		Prefer remote work (n=312)		
N	When working remotely...	Disagree	Neither agree, not disagree	Agree
15	people save time.	0%	2%	98%
18	you can concentrate better (because of the quiet environment and the lack of interruptions).	1%	4%	95%
16	the expenses are lower(for example, for commuting, parking, food).	3%	4%	93%
14	people can spend more time with friends and family.	7%	6%	87%
22	stress levels are lower.	7%	16%	77%
13	people more easily adapt their working tasks to their own needs.	9%	20%	71%
19	people become more creative.	3%	31%	66%
21	work satisfaction increases.	3%	31%	66%
20	people are more devoted to their work.	5%	37%	58%
7	some of the expenses increase - for example, for heating and Internet.	50%	17%	33%
1	employees cannot maintain and develop their social contacts.	56%	18%	26%
4	there is a feeling of being constantly at work.	60%	15%	25%
17	your line manager has less control over you.	57%	23%	20%
8	employees do not have a separate working space.	65%	17%	18%
6	people feel isolated and lonely.	71%	18%	11%
3	obstacles in the interaction between team members occur.	74%	16%	10%
9	lack some work facilities - such as a comfortable chair.	84%	7%	9%
11	there are problems with self-discipline and focused task completion.	82%	9%	9%
10	the ability to motivate oneself for work drops down.	85%	7%	8%
2	technical problems occur (such as lack of laptop, printer, Internet, etc.).	72%	20%	8%
12	there is a lack of meaning in work.	87%	7%	6%

5	it is more difficult to plan your time and tasks independently.	87%	9%	4%
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The results may lead to the conclusion that psychological and social needs are of enormous importance for choosing a work model (office, hybrid, remote). If people do not have the necessary conditions for remote work (separate workspace, comfortable chair, technical equipment), they would prefer to work from an office. Those who prefer working from home not only do not encounter such problems but also find many advantages in this work model – such as more time for their loved ones, lower expenses, better concentration, and lower stress levels.

The responses of individuals who prefer the hybrid work model are balanced between the other two groups. They experience the advantages and disadvantages of this work model to a moderate extent while maintaining a connection with the office environment.

The results are valid for all groups regardless of age, gender, or marital status. No statistically significant differences were found among respondents based on sociodemographic characteristics. Only between managers and employees without managerial functions was a weak but statistically significant difference found in responses to some questions (with Cramer's V coefficient between 0.203-0.258, Spearman between 0.170-0.251, $p < 0.05$). Managers more often indicated agreement with statements that when working remotely, "employees cannot maintain and develop their social contacts", " technical problems occur (such as lack of laptop, printer, Internet, etc.)," "obstacles in the interaction between team members occur", "employees do not have a separate working space", and "there is a feeling of being constantly at work." Additionally, they do not believe that working from home saves time and increases job satisfaction to the same extent as other respondents. Managers likely have a more critical view of remote work, due to their observations of its effects on their teams. Their responses may reveal a broader perspective on remote work, which includes not only their personal experience but also their role in managing remote teams. This is likely why they more often indicated a preference for a balanced work model from home and office (Cramer's V - 0.245, Spearman - 0.238, $p < 0.05$) instead of entirely or predominantly remote, and indeed work more often from the office. (Cramer's V - 0.204, Spearman - 0.188, $p < 0.05$), working remotely up to 2 days/week.

3.4.7. Remote Work – The Employers' Perspective

Different approaches are observed for determining policies regarding the work model after the pandemic, with most companies offering a hybrid model that includes mandatory office visits at

least a few days a week, or trying to voluntarily attract their employees with various initiatives. This change also leads to adaptations in office spaces, emphasizing social activities. Employees react differently to these changes, with their preferences depending on personal characteristics and professional requirements.

The information from the qualitative research largely confirmed the conclusions drawn from the quantitative research, as well as the literature review. Managers' opinions on productivity are contradictory, with a decline observed after an initial increase during the pandemic. It was confirmed that employees' performance can improve due to better focus in a home environment, but it was added that productivity mostly depends on the individual's personal responsibility. The balance between work and personal life improves, especially for employees with children, but the impact of the family situation can vary. It is better in remote work mainly because of the reduced travel time and the ability to combine with personal commitments. Flexibility in work time and location also differs, and autonomy is subject to conflicting views.

In the area of team management in a remote work environment, emphasis should be placed on information security, maintaining team spirit, and communication. Initiatives such as online meetings and social activities are applied, but international teams (mostly) face difficulties in manager accessibility. Bulgarian legislation also poses a challenge, requiring companies to ensure safe working conditions in remote work. Introducing new employees and maintaining social dynamics become more difficult, with organizing team-building events cited as a positive method for improving team atmosphere in a hybrid work model.

3.4.8. Summary of Chapter Three

Regarding the research questions, the analysis results are as follows:

Research Question 1: Does remote work affect employees' *performance* and in what way? – There is a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between remote work and employees' productivity/performance.

Research Question 2: Does remote work affect employees' *work-life* balance and in what way? – Remote work has a positive effect on employees' work-life balance, with a weak to moderate relationship.

Research Question 3: Does remote work affect employees' *flexibility* and in what way? – Remote work has a positive effect on employees' flexibility, with a statistically significant weak to moderate relationship.

Research Question 4: Does remote work affect employees' *autonomy* and in what way? – Remote work has a positive effect on employees' autonomy, but the relationship is very weak.

Research Question 5: What is the *preferred work model* of employees? – 57% (n=312) of the respondents would like to work mainly (29%, n=161) or entirely remotely (28%, n=151), 33% (n=178) prefer a balanced model (both office and remote), and only 10% (n=54) indicated they prefer to work mainly (8%, n=42) or entirely from the office (2%, n=12).

Research Question 6: Does the preferred work model *match the actual work model*? – There is a high correspondence between employees' preferences and their actual work location – this is valid for 49% (n=42) of those working in the office, 64% (n=103) of those working hybrid, and 85% (n=254) of those working remotely. However, 51% (n=43) of office workers would like more flexibility regarding remote work, as well as 32% (n=52) of those working hybrid.

Research Question 7: What are the *reasons for employees' preferences* for a particular work model? – There are various motives and benefits for employees who prefer to work primarily in the office or remotely. The main reasons for preferring office work include difficulties in interacting with colleagues, lack of social contacts, feelings of isolation, and decreased motivation. On the other hand, those who prefer remote work note that they save time, achieve better concentration, have lower costs, and greater job satisfaction. Managers express a more critical view of remote work due to their observations of teams and the potential negative impacts on productivity. Regardless of sociodemographic characteristics, all groups respond differently to questions about the advantages and disadvantages of different work models. In conclusion, psychological and social needs play a key role in the choice of work model, and the presence of suitable conditions and amenities is crucial for successful remote work.

Research Question 8: What is the *perspective of employers* regarding the policies and effects of remote work? – The post-pandemic situation has led to various approaches in formulating work policies, with most companies offering a hybrid model. This model typically includes mandatory office visits at least a few days a week or companies striving to attract their employees with different initiatives. This transition also leads to the adaptation of office spaces, emphasizing the

support of social activities. Employees' reactions to these changes are diverse, with their preferences depending on individual characteristics and professional requirements.

The results from the qualitative research strongly support the conclusions highlighted within the quantitative research and literature review. Managers' views on productivity are expressed in contradictory opinions, noting a decrease after an initial increase during the pandemic period. It was confirmed that employees' performance could improve due to better focus in a home environment. It was added that personal responsibility plays a key role in productivity. The balance between professional and personal life improves, especially for employees with children, although the influence of the family environment can vary. Remote work contributes to this balance, mainly due to reduced travel time and the ability to combine with personal commitments. Flexibility in work time and location evokes different feedback, and views on autonomy vary.

3.4.9. Discussion

The digital workplace presents new challenges for professionals engaged in human resource management. The transition to remote work requires providing employees with the necessary technical equipment and training for using online communication tools. Despite this, technical problems remain a challenge for a significant portion of remote workers, especially those who prefer office work.

For human resource management professionals, it is essential to develop digital skills among employees, particularly among older ones who have more difficulty with new technologies. Insufficient digital skills can lead to stereotyping and hindered communication between different generations of workers. Managers also need to commit to developing their digital skills and updating job descriptions to support effective management of remote teams.

Besides professional skills, personal qualities such as self-discipline, organization, and focus are crucial for successful remote work. The lack of these qualities can be a reason why some employees prefer office work. Nevertheless, developing a competency model for remote work is the responsibility of human resources specialists.

Remote work can create unequal opportunities for career development, especially for women who try to balance family obligations with work. It is important for organizations to consider the issue of monitoring and controlling employees when working from home, carefully balancing the need to track productivity and maintaining trust between employer and employee.

New forms of training, especially online courses, are essential for employee development. However, they have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is important to ensure the effectiveness and return on investment in training.

Organizations should also provide time management training to help employees differentiate work from personal life and fully recover from work tasks.

The new forms of work also require new forms of leadership, related to successfully building trust, skillfully using synchronous and asynchronous communication tools, as well as various leadership styles.

3.5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed the remote work model on a large scale for the first time in history. There were considerable difficulties for employees, such as disrupted work-life balance, increased stress levels, and decreased performance due to the lack of a separate workspace and the need to combine work with childcare.

Whether working from home will remain a model largely depends not only on the personal preferences of employees but also on how well they can maintain their productivity in a home environment, whether they achieve the same or even better efficiency and concentration as in the office. Companies are interested not only in the well-being and satisfaction of employees but primarily in the results achieved.

The research proved that people can be **productive** both from the office and remotely. The establishment of a moderate positive correlation between remote work and performance can be explained by better concentration when working from home, the presence of suitable conditions at home, and lower stress. However, the lack of motivation, insufficient self-discipline, difficulties in team interaction, and lack of conditions for working from home are among the reasons why office workers prefer to continue working from there. According to some representatives of organizations, the greatest factor for good performance is the personal responsibility of employees, regardless of whether they work from home or the office.

Regarding **the work-life balance**, almost unanimously (according to 93% of the respondents), it is shared that remote work can save time that can be used for close ones, and this is one of the explanations for the positive, albeit weak, correlation between remote work and this effect. The inability to detach from work and the feeling that they need to be constantly available to managers and colleagues, the lack of conveniences for work and a separate workspace are among the factors

why some respondents would prefer to work primarily or entirely from the office, which could negatively impact this balance.

The research also found a weak to moderate correlation between remote work and the **flexibility** of employees regarding the choice of time and place from which to work. Among the likely reasons for greater flexibility in remote work are: the ability to plan one's own time, the easier execution of activities that require physical presence at home, the possibility of working outside standard working hours, and working from home instead of taking sick leave if necessary. According to companies, the greatest difficulty lies in managing teams that work remotely and with flexible hours – synchronizing work and effective communication are serious challenges in such an environment. Both employees and employers agree that after the pandemic, there is greater freedom in choosing the time and place of work.

The weakest correlation was found between **autonomy** and remote work. Working from home can provide greater autonomy for employees, which can contribute to better time and task management. At the same time, isolation and communication difficulties can be challenges for them. This shows us that it is important to pay attention to how communication and interaction among remote employees can be improved to ensure their successful work and satisfaction.

Employee autonomy is related to managerial control and the various degrees to which managers are willing to allow their employees to be more independent. There are conflicting opinions on the matter—some managers believe that employees should be empowered and not closely monitored to work more effectively, while others think that control and guarantees of results are essential. There are ideas that attention management is more important than time management, but it is also noted that people will find ways to slack off, whether they work from the office or from home. Ultimately, it is important to achieve a balance between employee autonomy and managerial control for optimal work efficiency.

There are various reasons and advantages for employees who prefer to work primarily from the office or remotely. Among the most common reasons people choose office work are: difficulties in interacting with colleagues; lack of social contacts; feelings of isolation and decreased motivation. Those who prefer remote work mention saving time, better concentration, lower expenses, and greater job satisfaction. Managers have a more critical view of remote work due to their observations of teams and the possible negative consequences on productivity. Different groups respond differently to questions about the advantages and disadvantages of different work

models, with no statistically significant difference based on sociodemographic characteristics. It can be concluded that psychological and social needs play an important role in the choice of work model, with the presence of appropriate conditions and conveniences being essential for successful remote work.

These effects of remote work are likely part of the reasons why the majority of respondents continue to have the option to work remotely. At the time of the study (February 2023), companies in the IT sector were experiencing a greater shortage of staff, putting employers in a weaker position compared to candidates who had more choices for career changes. Therefore, the "entirely remote" work model was more common, which is confirmed by the survey results (54% of respondents work almost entirely remotely). From mid-2023, a cooling in the IT sector has been observed, allowing organizations to take advantage of the situation and force their employees to return to the offices. The author's observations are that IT sector employees are now more flexible and willing to attend the office. Exceptions are people who have moved outside the big cities. Thus, we can conclude that people are quite adaptable to the rapidly changing environment, but also that if the study were repeated in the current reality, the picture might be different. This raises the question of subsequent studies.

The results of the survey aimed to assist organizations in choosing the most suitable work model for their employees. In terms of practical conclusions, the data show the desire of employees in Bulgaria, mainly from the IT and finance sectors, to continue having the opportunity to work remotely. The recommendations that can be made based on the received responses are that it is best to give employees the choice of where to work from, while ensuring the conditions for working from home in advance. For some people, isolation and distractions in the home environment would determine their preference for working in the office and better productivity there, while for others, the advantages of the remote model would even be a factor in choosing or changing an employer.

According to *Grzegorzyc et al. (2021)*, the hybrid work model poses the following challenges for organizations (the so-called BBBB challenges – bricks, bytes, behaviour, blueprint), related to the organization of people who work from the office and those who work remotely: place, tools, culture, and distribution of tasks, roles, and people. The concept of office spaces is changing, as they now need to be flexible enough, with enough space for meetings, training, and conversations without disturbing other colleagues. Offices are turning into "work ecosystems" (*Molla, 2020*),

where people go to learn, socialize, and collaborate. Therefore, companies are investing in more welcoming dining and coffee areas, where employees can have more informal communication. Regarding the tools they use, the question arises about the choice of storage location for data and information, information security, as well as suitable work applications. The culture needs to shift from monitoring and control to trust-based leadership.

The question of choosing a work model for a company's employees certainly includes many factors that need to be considered. On the one hand, team development can be crucial (*BCG, 2021*). For example, for a newly formed team, it would be advisable to have more frequent in-person meetings to facilitate faster familiarization and training of members, more active communication, easier collaboration, and building trust. Managers of teams in the banking sector shared that knowing the team in person before the pandemic greatly helped them transition more smoothly to a fully online environment when it became necessary in 2020.

Individual preferences of employees are another important factor. If taken into account, this can lead to greater satisfaction, higher productivity, and greater loyalty to the company (*BCG, 2021*).

The nature of the work is also essential. Even within a single company, different groups of employees and teams may have different needs. Some companies introduce so-called "quiet rooms," where conducting work-related conversations is not allowed, and specific places are designated for that. Even in open office spaces, "call booths" are installed, which are soundproof and allow for conversations to take place without disturbing the peace and focus of other colleagues.

Flexibility and trust play a key role in an environment where everyone has the opportunity to succeed. Progress in flexibility regarding workplaces is already noticeable, even though some organizations are again calling for employees to return to the office. In the future, leaders should focus on the design and practices of the work itself and allow these aspects to determine the blend of on-site and virtual work. Organizations need to be careful and focused in their hybrid work strategies, striving to eliminate employees' concerns about potential negative impacts of this work mode. This requires thorough discussion about which work should be done, how, and when it is important for people to be together in person – whether for job execution or for maintaining the social and cultural benefits of personal interactions. Transparent communication of hybrid work strategies and pre-informing about expectations are essential to provide employees with both flexibility and predictability in the work environment. Employers should consider ways to

facilitate access to these options while simultaneously providing opportunities for career advancement, training and development, and undertaking interesting and challenging tasks for all employees. Such a decision should also consider other factors, such as maintaining team spirit and organizational culture, the effectiveness of training new employees, and attachment to the company – effects that would be the subject of other studies related to remote work.

4. Scientific Contributions – Self-assessment

- Based on an in-depth review to clarify the effects of remote work on employees, organizations, and society, the advantages and disadvantages of this work model have been identified and systematized.
- A model and toolkit for the research have been substantiated—their feasibility has been proven based on conducted empirical research and subsequent statistical and heuristic verification. The results obtained are reliable and represent new knowledge in accordance with the answers to the formulated research questions. The results obtained provide a basis for justifying subsequent research projects.
- Based on the results of the review and the conducted research, conclusions have been drawn regarding the effects of remote work on employees and organizations. From these conclusions, recommendations have been derived for choosing a work model and addressing challenges in a remote environment. The results and recommendations are useful for a wide range of stakeholders.
- The results of the dissertation contribute to the substantiation and enrichment of management approaches related to leading people in remote work.

5. Publications by the Author Related to the Dissertation Work

Publications

1. Pehlivanska, R. (2024). Remote, hybrid, or office work - the choice and the reasons for it for employees in Bulgaria, *European Review of Service Economics and Management, Revue européenne d'économie et management des services*, 16 (2), *Services dynamic in the Central and Eastern European Countries*, p.55-90, DOI : 10.48611/isbn.978-2-406-17009-9.p.0055
2. Пехливанска, Р. (2023). Дистанционната работа - предимства и недостатъци за организациите и служителите, *Годишник на Софийския Университет, Св. Климент*

Охридски “, Стопански факултет, т. 23, 199 – 218 [Pehlivanska, R. (2023). Remote work - advantages and disadvantages for organizations and employees. *Annual Journal of Sofia University „St.Kliment Ohridski” ,Faculty of Economics and Business Administration*, 23, 199 – 218] (in Bulgarian)

3. Пехливанска, Р. (2023). Представяне и баланс между работа и личен живот при работа от разстояние, от офис и хибридно, *Сборник доклади на Националната школа за докторанти и млади изследователи в социалните науки*, ISSN 2683-0868 (Online) Том 4, , 181 – 188, <https://iphs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/VOLUME-4-SHKOLA-FINAL.pdf> [Pehlivanska, R. (2023). Performance and Work-life Balance When Working Remotely, at The Office, and in a Hybrid Working Model. *Proceedings of the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in Social Sciences*, ISSN 2683-0868 (Online), Vol. 4, 181-188. Retrieved from: <https://iphs.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/VOLUME-4-SHKOLA-FINAL.pdf>] (in Bulgarian)

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