Les Notes de La Fabrique

Is Remote Working Shaping the Future of Work?

Suzy Canivenc, Marie-Laure Cahier

Foreword by Gervais Pellissier

CHAIRE FIT²
FUTURS DE L'INDUSTRIE ET DU TRAVAIL
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Is Remote Working Shaping the Future of Work?

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Foreword

Since the beginning of 2020, we have been facing a situation that never occurred before. The global pandemic has turned things upside down and forced us to find new reference points. First and foremost however, the crisis has been a crisis for us as people. All of the Orange Group's teams have shown extraordinary willingness and adaptability to maintain a service to our customers at the same time as keeping fellow workers protected. This is a great source of pride for us.

It has been possible for large numbers of employees to work from home over long periods, even where they hold positions for which such an arrangement wouldn't previously have been considered appropriate. This has been achieved while ensuring the necessary support for our customer-contact teams. Before the crisis, remote working was already part of working life at Orange, so the situation was not something we were entirely unprepared for. A first agreement on remote working was implemented in 2009 and 39% of Orange's workforce in France was working remotely on a regular or occasional basis by 2019.

Covid-related constraints have meant that the collective experience of working from home has taken on an entirely new scope and nature. It has greatly sped up the adoption of new ways of working, new digital tools and new ways of leading teams (our managers and employees have shown a great capacity for innovation in maintaining links and team dynamics and in ensuring both the welfare of fellow workers and the successful pursuit of work activities and projects). We are stronger for having faced this challenge together and learned how to turn it into a positive experience.

To get ahead of the learning curve and understand lessons learned and the place of remote working in tomorrow's practices, the Orange executive committee initiated an innovative internal think tank process in July 2020. This process aimed to help us project ourselves into a future in which we hope to fully regain freedom of movement and choice. It mobilised more than 70 employees from all geographies, cultures, professions and generations of the group. It was conducted 100% remotely, thus removing all the usual boundaries to such a reflection. Similarly, consultation took place on these themes with employee representative bodies, and we also drew a lot of inspiration from the discussions and work carried out with the "Chaire Futurs de l'industrie et du travail" (Future of Industry and Work Chair) at Mines ParisTech PSL on the theme of remote working design.

This process has led us to the conclusion that, in the future, remote working will remain one of the usual modes of work at Orange and will be intrinsically part of our collective practices, our management models and, while making up varying proportions of working time, open to a greater number of types of job positions. The Orange "office" of the future will above all be a locus for relationships, teamwork and services: workplaces and spaces open to all employees, designed to support cooperative effort and nurture a sense of belonging to the company.

There will be a before and after in our relationship to the workplace: the world of 100% on-site work on the company premises seems to be over, as is the world where the same organizational structure is applied across all teams. In the future, the company will require a new level of flexibility, and this is also something that employees will ask for. We are moving towards models for which there is a different on-site/remote balance, depending on the job, but also most certainly depending on the time of life of employees, or where they are in their career path (for example, more time in the office when starting a job or when knowledge and know-how need to be passed on before retirement etc.). These new on-site/from home balances will also offer opportunities to meet our goals in favour of diversity and for an ever better integration of disabled people.

In terms of the challenges facing us, maintaining togetherness at work, social ties, calibrating each individual's working experience and mitigating the new psychosocial risks relating to these developments, are certainly among those that will require the most investment. Supporting employees and managers is essential: helping them to define new team rituals, new balances, supporting them in designing the work experience within their teams and the company as a whole.

The book you are holding in your hands is, in this sense, a remarkable tool for laying the foundations, in each company, for the process of reflection that needs to take place. In a single volume it addresses all the areas to be taken into consideration and provides useful reference points for each organisation to help it to define the path it wants to follow in drawing the contours of the future of work.

Gervais Pellissier
Orange
Executive Vice President, People & Transformation, Chairman of OBS

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Disclaimer

For this study, the authors relied heavily on the work and sessions of the 'Remote Work' group, organised by the "Chaire Futurs de l'industrie et du travail – FIT^2" (Future of Industry and Work Chair) at Mines TechParis PSL, at the request of some of its sponsors. This work was complemented by extensive documentary research.
The resulting study, as well as any errors that may remain however, are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not imply any endorsement or approval by the sponsors of the Chair or by any of the organisations mentioned.
All persons involved in the preparatory work are mentioned in the acknowledgements.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite peculiar conditions, the year 2020 has served as a laboratory for the practice of remote working on an unprecedented scale. This massive experimentation has had the merit of dispelling many preconceived ideas on home working but has also illustrated its limitations. At a time when companies are preparing for a return to work in the context of a "new normal", what lessons can we draw from the experience and what points require closer attention? What does 2020-2021 tell us about the future of work?

Rather than villages of digital nomads, with blue lagoons and infinity pools, this empirical study is mainly focused on remote working "here and now", i.e. on the democratisation (albeit partial) and eventual conditions for the extension of a mode of working that has long-since been desired by many and that has suddenly opened up for jobs and people to whom it was previously refused. In this respect, the study also offers some pointers to more radical developments, based on a few examples of forward-looking companies, mainly from the digital sector.

Historically, working from home has been viewed with suspicion both by managers and by trade unions. It has mostly been the preserve of senior managers (elitist telework) and certain "tertiarised" sectors of activity (banking and insurance, IT, scientific or intellectual professions), or it has been conceded sparingly as a "social benefit" (a perk), which did little to give it a good image. In fact, in 2019, there was still a great deal of inequality of access to remote working in France, Germany or Italy, showing a certain delay in the adoption of this practice compared to other OECD countries (Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, USA, UK), even though such comparisons can be subject to numerous statistical biases. The practice of working from home has however been increasing steadily since the beginning of the 2000s, in response to a persistent demand

> "According to the French national statistical office, INSEE, 58% of executives and middle-ranking positions worked from home during the first lockdown compared to 20% of those in non-managerial roles and 2% of manual workers."

from employees in certain groups, particularly young people, women, and employees of large companies. The pandemic suddenly forced categories of the population who had never had access to remote working to work from home and thus contributed to a substantial change in perceptions. Remote working is however still unequally distributed: according to the French national statistical office, INSEE, 58% of executives and middle-ranking positions worked from home during the first lockdown compared to 20% of those in non-managerial roles and 2% of manual workers.

In the first quarter of 2021, two thirds of CEOs gave their seal of approval to home working, although with marked differences between big company bosses (and Tech employers) and SMEs. About 50% of HR managers are following their lead and making home working a permanent option. On the employee side, satisfaction levels have dropped, but remain high (around 75%), with notable differences depending on age, socio-professional category, and location. The length of the pandemic, restrictions on social activities, the periods of social isolation and the incessant changes in rules and instructions all no doubt contribute, more than just remote working itself, to the weariness expressed by some people, particularly younger employees at the beginning of their careers who are often poorly housed in big cities and eager for social interaction. Managers, a category initially reluctant to work from home, say they didn't receive much support from their superiors during the ordeal and 25% of them are reluctant to make such a situation permanent, although they recognise some benefits.

In fact, the ILO, Eurofound and the OECD all predict that by the end of the pandemic period, remote working will have increased in comparison to previous practices, giving us a hybrid form combining on-site and remote work. A consensus among managers, HR directors, non-managerial employees and even academic researchers seems to have been established at around 2 to 3 days of remote work per week, with the exact proportions being set by each company depending on its sector of activity, strategy, company culture and other constraints, as well as employee aspirations. Around this new and evolving "social norm", certain "ecological niches" are likely to develop, with more traditional operations on one hand and avant-garde companies going "full remote" (some digital companies as GitLab or DOIST for instance) on the other.

From the point of view of both employers and employees, the expected benefits of remote working remain broadly the same as they were before 2020-2021: greater flexibility, lower real estate costs, and attractiveness of the employer brand for employers; better time balance, less stress and commute time and greater independence for employees. Large-scale experimentation with remote working seems to have revealed new opportunities for employers

however (increased productivity, speeding up of digitalisation, potential for hiring a more qualified or cheaper workforce, reduction of carbon footprint), while, on their side, employees have discovered some of the negative aspects of home working that had not been understood before (inadequate work space at home, isolation, overworking, erosion of social time, increase in health and safety problems, remote surveillance, additional costs). In fact, both the negative and positive aspects of remote working have been pushed to the extremes during the pandemic. It has often been at a rate of 100% and taken place in an anxiety-inducing and constrained context. We must therefore be cautious about the lessons learned, both positive and negative, from a remote working context that was forced on us rather than one that was chosen and whose deployment could be controlled.

“Both the negative and positive aspects of remote working have been pushed to the extremes during the pandemic.”

Many issues related to remote working are still being debated after the 2020 experience. What is, for instance, its true impact on productivity? The effect seems positive, but this could be due to overworking on the part of employees. What are the effects on innovation and the creativity of teams? Results appear mixed. What is the lasting impact on the environment? Encouraging despite possible rebound effects. What are the consequences on companies’ salary policies and the job market? Downward pressure on wages cannot be excluded over the long term. What is the impact on social cohesion and inequalities? The contradictory arguments put forward on these questions are presented in this study.

At a time when negotiations on new remote working agreements are underway in many organisations, it is important to focus on deployment conditions that are beneficial to all, which was not the case during the 2020-2021 experiment. Such conditions are now better understood. They are at once organisational (negotiation with employee representative bodies, remote working included in company plans, trust between people), material (furniture and computer equipment, good Internet connection, advice on ergonomics), managerial (clarity of work organisation, results-based management, professional support management) and personal to the employee (skills, professional independence, family situation, type of housing, etc.). This study successively investigates i) conditions of eligibility for remote working, which should in the future be conceived on the basis of tasks rather than jobs so as to ensure greater equity of access within the framework of a qualitative professional dialogue ii) the “multiplicity of legitimate workplaces”[1] and the respective advantages and disadvantages of the home, the reinvented office (“flexible”, “dynamic” and even “distributed”) and co-working spaces iii) working hours and the effects of synchronous or asynchronous activity and iv) the gap between the

growing sophistication of digital tools and the cultural and organisational obstacles that remain in the appropriation of new uses. Ultimately, this analysis provides answers to questions that many companies are asking themselves. Which activities should people return to the office for? How can chats around the coffee machine be reinvented remotely? What organisational or communication processes should be used to innovate and coordinate remotely?

Remote working has the great merit of putting the organisation of "real" work back at the forefront of concerns. Workforce representatives obviously have a key role to play here: whatever their previous reluctance towards remote working was, they must seize the opportunity to think deeply about the organisation of work and quality of life at work (on-site and when working from home) and bring up to speed their own communication practices with the use of digital tools.

Despite what we experienced in 2020-2021, managerial and organisational practices in companies have not deeply changed. At the very most their weaknesses or strengths have been revealed. Where management was previously control-oriented, this tended to be accentuated with home working; and where managers were already operating on the basis of trust, delegation of responsibility and independence have been reinforced. Remote working is also seen by many top managers in groups as a way to accelerate the managerial transition and the "cultural paradigm shift" they have been calling for, coupled with the digital transformation and adoption of new working methods (agility, flexibility, collaboration, logics of sharing, etc.). They have therefore seized on it as an opportunity with the potential to be instrumental in bringing about change.

"Despite what we experienced in 2020-2021, managerial and organisational practices in companies have not deeply changed. At the very most their weaknesses or strengths have been revealed."

More positively, remote working represents a unique opportunity to switch from a prescriptive form of management to results-oriented support. Above all, home working during lockdown revealed a need for better management: there is a real return to expect from investing in middle management, whether through traditional training, personal development, coaching, communities of practice or discussion spaces. It's about making management methods more flexible (with a certain amount of the necessary letting go), while at the same time restructuring and reinforcing information and organisational processes. However, trends in France are rather the opposite: management is too heavy-handed and too ambiguous, i.e. heavily focused on micro-management but poorly invested in understanding real work, in explaining what is

expected, in reducing “irritants”, in defining clear and shared operating procedures and purely and simply in team leadership. Remote working offers the opportunity to correct some of these shortcomings and to apply these lessons to traditional on-site working situations. New codes of communication and organisational methods could help us define the future of remote working and, more broadly, the future of work itself.

INTRODUCTION

2020, the Big Shift

In a year of crisis, 2020 has left us with a host of new words to designate new realities: “Covid-19” and “Coronavirus” of course, as well as “social distancing” and “the new normal”. There are also words that we already knew, but which have taken on a new dimension (for example “virus”, “vaccine” or “mask”). The same goes for “working from home” which clocks up more than 76 million hits on Google search. What has happened? Has the era of remote working begun? What does the year 2020 tell us about the future of the organisation of work and lifestyles?

This study analyses the concrete manifestations of the phenomenon. Under the pressure brought about by the public health crisis, a very significant part of employees who had not previously been given the option of working from home abruptly switched to this mode of work for either all or part of the time. The lessons learned from this unprecedented situation tell us how to prepare for a “return to normal”, in which remote working will take a different, more sophisticated, form . In most cases, it will develop into a hybrid (or sporadic) form which will present us with new challenges.

For some time, remote working will continue to be unequally distributed across sectors of activity, jobs, and people. One of the major challenges for the future will be to widen its scope and to reduce inequalities of access, for example through digitalisation and professional dialogue on tasks, so as to make it possible to work at home on activities that were not previously eligible to home working.. Like any crisis, the Coronavirus crisis has created opportunities and sped up certain processes, which lead to new forms of organisation and management and whose limitations and risks must also be assessed.

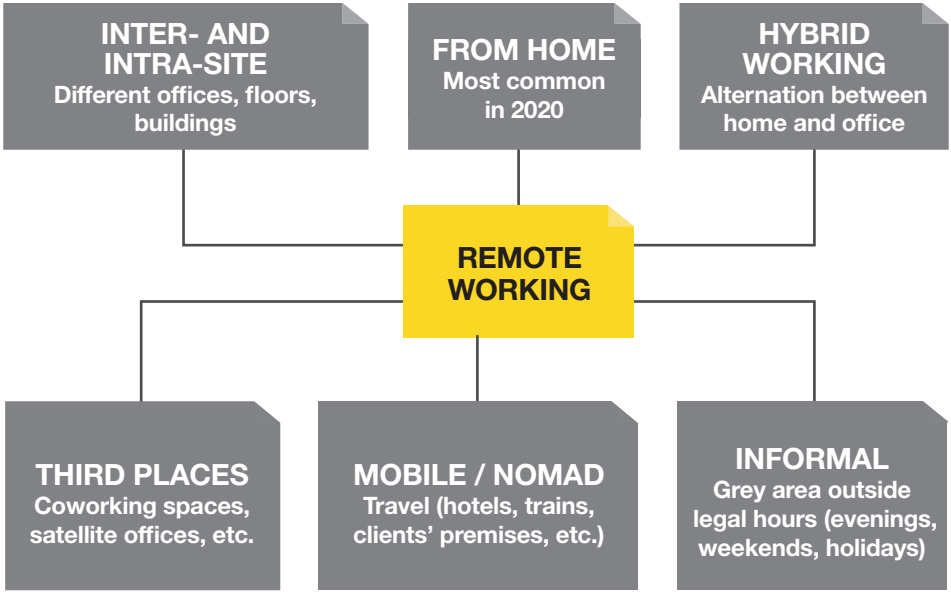
Working from home or remote working?

A preliminary semantic clarification is necessary. While the term “working from home” (or WFH) is the most commonly used, it does not, in our opinion, cover all the aspects of the phenomenon nor does it fully illustrate its complexity.

"Remote working" has multiple forms (see chart below): inter- and intra-site remote teamwork (in different offices, floors or buildings); activities performed mostly at home; alternation between work at home and work on site (known as "hybrid working"); ongoing work or one-off jobs in dedicated third places (telecentres, satellite offices, coworking or corpoworking spaces), usually closer to the worker's home; mobile remote working, which involves travel, combining various locations (worksites, hotels, client premises, transport, etc.) and informal remote working, which again takes place in various places (home, hotels, transport, client premises, etc.) but mostly outside legal working hours (evenings, weekends, vacations).

Therefore, even if we sometimes use the terms "working from home" and "remote working" interchangeably in this study, we conceptually prefer the latter as it better encompasses the blurring of time, space and status markers generated by these forms of work and is better suited for describing (even vaguely) the contours of the future of work.

Chart 1.1 - The multiple forms of remote work



These new forms of work organisation have the particularity of breaking, in whole or in part, with the three units (of time, place and action) that have long defined corporations, as well as with three fundamentals of salaried work (hierarchical relationships, group work time, located work groups). The rapid expansion of remote working is blurring the boundaries that previously defined both "normal" work and the corporation, which have, in any case, already been challenged by heterogeneous wage arrangements (short contracts, temporary work, "bossless" employment), alternative forms of work and employment (economically dependent freelancers, partners/consultants working on company premises) and the extended enterprise (suppliers, subcontractors located all over the world).

"These new forms of work organisation have the particularity of breaking, in whole or in part, with the three units (of time, place and action) that have long defined corporations."

Employers concerns

This study was born out of a request made by the sponsors[2] of the "Chaire Futurs de l'industrie et du travail – FIT²" (Futures of Industry and Work Chair) at Mines ParisTech PSL, who set up an ad hoc working group on the subject of remote working. Remote working during lockdown was carried on a large scale and in suboptimal conditions. Organisations were taken by surprise, whatever their previous appetite for or maturity in respect of it. The situation therefore calls for a reflection on how to return to work in the context of the "new normal", which is bound to emerge as profoundly different after this unprecedented experience. At the same time, the legal obligation to negotiate this new normal with employee representative bodies means that there will doubtlessly be a great deal of manoeuvring with respect to remote working, requiring human resources departments to have examined the subject from every possible angle, taking into account the risks that transpired during lockdown (physical and psychological health, isolation) as well as the opportunities it offers (new managerial relations, flexible working hours, accelerated digitalisation, reduction of workspace, etc.). In some large groups, the senior management has asked real estate departments to carry out a rapid assessment for the redesign of workspaces and workplaces, to grasp opportunities to reduce real estate costs without affecting productivity or quality of life at work – the time lag between decisions and implementation on real estate projects means that a detailed roadmap has to be drawn up. Digital transformation managers have been asked to assess how remote working and digitalisation can come together to offer the increased flexibility and agility that can be achieved when these two developments are well-combined. Obviously, managers are

among the most impacted, as remote working implies a redesign of their role itself and their managerial style. Particular attention shall be given to managerial transformation in connection with all the above questions. More broadly, the issue of remote working is something that needs to be considered alongside other strategic corporate challenges, particularly in terms of corporate responsibility (social, societal, environmental, and economic).

However, even though the programme was already quite substantial, the sponsors did not wish to confine the project remit to these short-term, situational aspects. They were all aware that remote working raises longer-term questions regarding company boundaries and the integrity of employee groups, the organisation of work, independence, responsibility, the direct and indirect participation of workers and CSR policy. It also raises political, social and societal issues (lifestyles, land use planning, urban planning, housing policies, social and wage policies, environmental policies, etc.). A link was thus clearly established by the participants into the working group between remote working and the "future of work". Indeed, some of them were already engaged in a consideration of prospective impacts on the subject.

"Remote working raises longer-term questions regarding company boundaries and the integrity of employee groups, the organisation of work, independence, responsibility, the direct and indirect participation of workers and CSR policy."

The present study is founded on working group discussions, interviews with experts and witnesses (sociologists, HRDs, managers, planners, etc.) carried out between December 2020 and March 2021, and on an extensive documentary research drawing on the large number of surveys and polls carried out during the period and on institutional reports and academic articles on related topics and across a wider time span. It is also based on previous research by the FIT[2] Chair and La Fabrique de l'industrie about changes in patterns of work[3], organisational models to promote employee independence and responsibility[4] and quality of life at work[5], and work design[6].

While this study takes remote working as a starting point, its primary objective is to provide reference points and areas for vigilance for companies that wish to reassess their working organizations in the light of the lessons of 2020-2021.

CHAPTER 1

The Adoption of Remote Working: Past, Present and Future

The multi-faceted nature of "remote working"[7] and its numerous manifestations, both nationally and internationally, makes it difficult to audit but because of the lockdowns that took place during the pandemic, 2020-2021 does nevertheless represent a pivotal date in its history. Used selectively both by employers and employees prior to Covid-19 and often managed on a case-by-case basis, workers in France and everywhere else in the world suddenly had no choice in the matter, blurring perceptions. Remote working was introduced to large sections of the population and to types of jobs that had previously been unaffected by, or even been perceived as incompatible with it and this made the last years a watershed in terms of its deployment.

Before the public health crisis

Promoted since the 1970s in developed countries, remote working was initially seen by public authorities as having the potential to influence regional planning (opening up rural areas, better distribution of the population, public infrastructure planning)[8] and attenuate some of the downsides of industrial and urban society. These arguments were only modestly received however. Twenty years on, the European Commission was supporting remote working with white or green papers, identifying it as a way of contributing to the development of the information society it was calling for. Later, working from home became part of the vision for the ecological transition but it was never examined as a central issue in itself. It was part of an overarching, more generalised analysis, "companies and individuals only being components of much larger systems"[9].

Nomads and sedentary jobs: remote work in the context of globalisation

It was really only with the extension of economic globalisation and the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) that companies

would start to see remote working as a way of increasing the mobility and fluidity of labour, while reducing costs.

On an international scale, remote working became a component of delocalisation solutions and the outsourcing of work as a new practice to help coordinate and link remote teams inside or outside companies, supported by telecommunications, IT and then digital resources: developers in Bangalore, traders in New York, call centers in Madagascar, R&D centres in Europe, factories in China, etc. In 1976, J. Nilles already defined "telework" as the substitution of telecommunications for the transportation of goods and people[10]. In this respect, remote working is not new but is a firmly established reality that has been steadily gaining ground since the 1990s. It is one of the components in the way companies present themselves as flexible, mobile and open to the world.

"In 1976, J. Nilles already defined "telework" as the substitution of telecommunications for the transportation of goods and people."

According to the distinction put forward by Pierre-Noël Giraud between nomadic and sedentary jobs in the context of international competition[11], we can say that international remote work has essentially been the domain of "nomadic" jobs (even if the people who hold these jobs never leave headquarters), i.e. creators and producers involved in the production of goods and services that can be exchanged across borders, and whose jobs are highly exposed to international competition and are fully integrated with ICTs (innovators, creators, designers, traders, developers, etc.). On the other hand, so-called "sedentary" jobs, in sectors less exposed to globalisation and often less digitised, were far less affected by international remote work. Symmetrically, nomadic jobs have also corresponded to better-paid jobs.

"Sedentary" jobs, in sectors less exposed to globalisation and often less digitised, were far less affected by international remote work.

Gradually, remote work began to change in scale and claim a place at local level ("telecommuting" or "working from home"), but it continued to be perceived by companies as the domain of executives and qualified experts, while "sedentary" employees tended to be associated with the negative aspects of working from home (need for control, isolation, lack of digital skills)

2020-2021 marked a break in this segmentation, bringing an unprecedented mass of so-called sedentary jobs into the realm of remote work.

Remote working in France

In France, before the pandemic, remote working was often something that was adopted as an optional solution by employees and employers who saw the mutual benefits it offered.

For the employer, these were mainly more flexibility, less absenteeism, the opportunity to allow employees to juggle social time more freely and thus attract and retain them, the reduction of transportation risks and lower office rental costs. However, many employers were still fearful and suspicious of the impact on productivity and the personal investment of remote workers.

For employees, remote working offered valuable savings in commute time in large cities, greater freedom in the management of social time (domestic and professional) and schedules, and the benefits of a less vertical management mode. At the time, it was mainly of interest to "younger employees, but also to older workers (55 and over), who appreciate the reductions in commute times and are less concerned about needing to show their faces at the office to qualify for possible promotion"[12].

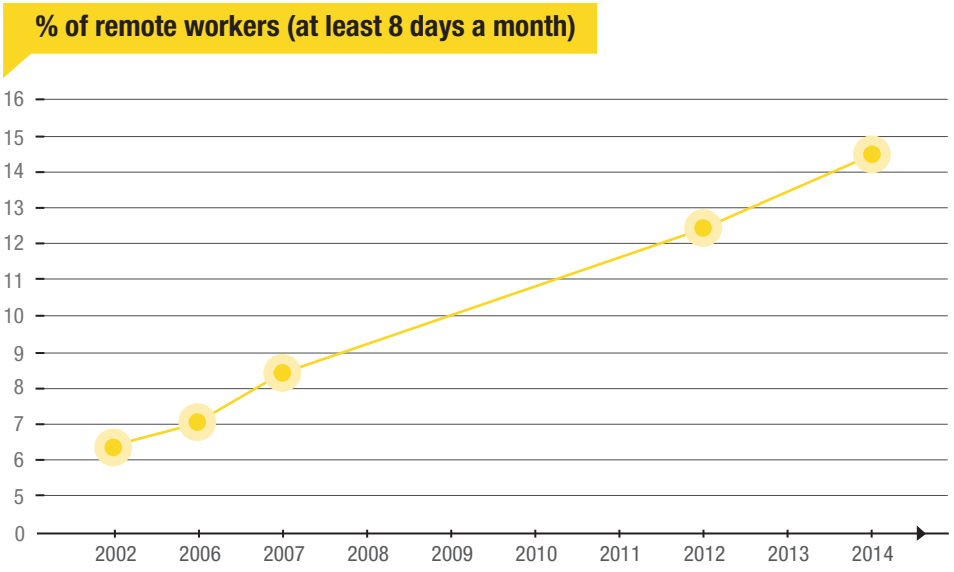
Home working is also of interest to governments, who see it as a way to address environmental issues and combat urban congestion and the costs associated with the constant renovation of busy roads.

In the 2000s, the psycho-sociologist Marie-France Kouloumdjian underlined the "experimental, one-off, isolated, piecemeal, reactive nature"[13] of many of the decisions relating to the adoption of home working and the fact that they were generally made n response to individual situations, whereas for her, remote working was related to important technological, organisational and social issues requiring overall consistency. She criticized the predominance of a "small steps approach over strategic management"[14].

However, remote working in France continued to grow, as shown in chart 1.2[15], but at the same time with a certain "French lag"[16] compared to other OECD countries. In 2017, in France, the share of remote workers was estimated to be between 3% and 15% of the working population[17], depending on whether only formal remote working was taken into account or whether occasional and informal remote working was also included. By comparison, the figure was about 30% in Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Sweden, Finland), the Netherlands and the USA[18] – the statistical consistency of these comparisons is not always perfect, due to the diversity of definitions of remote working taken into account.

At the time, several factors were put forward to explain this lag in France: a lower level of digitalisation of companies, but above all the "cultural specificity of French management styles which [saw] a possible risk of reduced personal investment and loyalty

Chart 1.2 - Share of remote workers in France from 2002 to 2014



Source: Gartner, analysis by Roland Berger and LBMG Worklabs (data from 2014), cited in Dortier, 2017.

among employees, or, from the point of view of trade unions, possible negative effects in terms of increased workload and the risk of destroying the social aspects of working life"[19]. Remote working was often seen as a "perk", especially for women, conflating it with part-time work and therefore tainting its image.

Modest but real, the movement towards remote working did indeed exist in France before the years 2019-2020, when both the big transport strike at the end of 2019 and early awareness of the pandemic from March 2020 had their effect. Gradually, time *at* work became just one of the components of working time.

"Modest but real, the movement towards remote working did indeed exist in France before the years 2019-2020, when both the big transport strike at the end of 2019 and early awareness of the pandemic from March 2020 had their effect."

During the public health crisis (up to March 2021)

During the first lockdown in France (from 17 March to 11 May 2020), the government imposed 100% home working, on a large scale, in a hurry and without any negotiation or prior preparation. At the end of March, DARES (the French national directorate for research, studies and statistics) estimated a quarter of employees were working on site, a quarter were working at home, a quarter had been put on the short time working scheme. The remaining quarter were on sick leave or taking time off for childcare, on vacation or had been forced into unemployment[20]. So about 75% of employees were at home, but not all of them were remote working. The proportion of people doing 100% remote working was particularly high in banking and insurance (45%), IT (41%) and publishing (40%) – a remote working pattern that was already in evidence prior to lockdown.

Unequal working conditions during lockdown

According to the French national statistical office, INSEE, 58% of managers and middle-ranking occupations worked remotely during the first lockdown, compared to 20% of non-managerial employees and 2% of manual workers[21]. Another survey conducted over the same period showed that 70% of those who worked remotely during lockdown were managers or in middle-ranking occupations, while 61% of on-site workers were blue-collar workers and non-managerial employees[22]. Remote working was already predominantly the domain of managers prior to lockdown (61% of remote workers in 2017) and was very elitist (mainly men with positions of responsibility and high level of education), even if it also involved low-skilled office jobs, sometimes less secure self-employed workers and subcontractors in low-cost countries.

Remote working practices during the first lockdown thus confirmed the major differences that previously existed within the French working population in this respect: those between socio-professional categories (blue collar, white collar), sectors of activity, income levels (21% of the lowest-paid remote worked compared to 53% of the highest-paid[23]) and genders (men and women).

Broader adoption was a leveller

The extension of remote working during the first lockdown did however serve as a leveller, with the proportion of upper socio-professional category workers working remotely falling from 65% in 2019 to 59% in April 2020[24]. 44% of remote workers in the first lockdown were experimenting with this form of work for the first time (first-time users) and 75% of them were experimenting with it for the first time at 100%[25]. Among these new users, a large proportion were in jobs previously considered incompatible, either partially or fully, with remote working.

Women and remote work: specific risks[28]

- 1.5 times more likely to be frequently interrupted than men.
- 1.3 times more likely to experience anxiety at work than men.
- Only 60% of women in the private sector have confidence in their professional futures, which is 15 percentage points lower than men.
- During videoconferencing, women find it more difficult to speak up and get their ideas across. They feel less effective.

This first lockdown also led to a broader adoption of remote working among women, who made up just 38% of remote workers in 2019, compared to 44% during the first lockdown. Women thus made up a higher proportion of the new first-lockdown remote workers (52%[26]). However, remote working conditions among women were far from optimal, as only a quarter of them had a dedicated and separate working space (against 41% of men)[27].

During the second lockdown (from 27 October to 15 December 2020), government instructions were much more flexible, not to say vague. However, remote work was once again widely used, with 45% of private sector employees working from home, 23% of them full-time[29].

There was a tailing-off at the beginning of 2021 however. At the end of 2020, only 31% of employees were working from home full or part-time (62% in banking/insurance, 62% in services, 23% in the health sector, 19% in the retail sector and 17% in industry)[30], forcing the government to remind the French employers of their obligation to use remote working wherever possible to contain contamination, under penalty of sanctions or public disclosure (name and shame).

While the number of remote workers has fallen since the beginning of the crisis, the number of days worked at home remains well above the pre-pandemic average: 3.6 days per week vs. 1.6 days per week at the end of 2019[32].

“While the number of remote workers has fallen since the beginning of the crisis, the number of days worked at home remains well above the pre-pandemic average: 3.6 days per week vs. 1.6 days per week at the end of 2019.”

Meanwhile in Germany[31]

According to a survey of 7,677 workers conducted by the Hans-Böckler Foundation, published on 21 April 2020, the rate of those who remote work most of the time has increased from 4% to 27%. In 2016, 9% of employees were working from home on a rotating basis (often one or two days per week) or all the time. During the pandemic many employees were thus experimenting with working from home for the first time. More than half worked at companies that did not have any rules or arrangements in place for remote working.

For many years, the biggest obstacle to working from home was the mistrust of employers and their fear of losing control. A survey conducted by the WZB (Social Science Research Centre in Berlin), during the week of 23 March to 5 April 2020, among 6,200 working people, showed that remote working was mostly the preserve of people with a university degree (20 percentage points higher than those without a university degree). This privilege was related to the type of activity and to the so-called "independent work organisation skills". Respondents in lower-wage categories and the self-employed were more often forced to stop working. In Germany, there is still resistance to the "right to work remotely", as proposed by Labour Minister Hubert Heil (SPD). Employers remain firm on the issue and have been rejecting all such proposals for years.

The decline in remote working from the end of 2020 to 2021 seems to be linked to two concomitant phenomena: strong pressure from management to return to the workplace, but also the fact that employees have become fed up with the situation, especially those who live alone in small spaces where they do not have a dedicated workspace allowing them to separate off their work from other activities. As a result, it is above all young people who have grown tired of working at home. 26% of remote workers also feel that working from home has an impact on their psychological health[33]. Many experts point to the phenomenon of psychological exhaustion, blaming home working as the main source of this. But there are other situational factors at play as well: the length of the public health crisis, the constraints associated with it (curfew and closure of all social life / entertainment sector activities) and the constant changes to government directives, which generate anxiety, uncertainty and fatigue, all contributed to this psychological exhaustion.

Towards hybrid work

The experiences of 2020-2021 seem to have profoundly altered perceptions of remote working.

HRDs. Following the first lockdown, 85% of HRDs wanted to expand remote working and 82% were considering increasing the number of positions eligible for remote working[34]. On the eve of the second lockdown, enthusiasm seems to have waned somewhat: only 50% of them then considered it desirable to make working from home permanent. There are still concerns about the impact of remote working on employee engagement and feelings of belonging.

Senior executives. In January 2021, 67% of CEOs were still in favour of remote working in their companies[35]. However, the level of their enthusiasm depends on the type of their companies. While bosses of international corporations and tech companies say that they are keen on seizing the opportunity of changing work practices in the light of the experience they have gained, bosses of SMEs are much less favourable, with 84% saying that remote working undermines team cohesion and increases the risks of isolation of employees[36]. Only 23% of SME bosses say they want to make home working permanent, compared with 80% of CEOs in large companies, mainly because of their lower level of digitalisation, but also because of an organizational structure that is less suitable for teleworking.

“Only 23% of SME bosses say they want to make home working permanent, compared with 80% of CEOs in large companies.”

Managers. Another novelty in 2021 is the divergence in perception between senior executives and managers regarding remote working. While two-thirds of senior executives are now in favour of remote working, the share of managers in favour of working from home has dropped over the last couple of years, from 55% in 2018 to 50% at the end of 2020, and nearly a quarter of them now say they are against home working. Managers are exhausted and only one-third (32%) say they have received support in implementing remote working. Despite these difficulties, they still recognise the following benefits: greater team autonomy (51%), lower absenteeism (35%) and greater employee satisfaction (33%)[37].

Non-managerial employees. Satisfaction with home working has declined among non-managerial employees but nevertheless remains high. All surveys show a high level of satisfaction with home working during lockdown, despite suboptimal conditions. However, there are differences between employee groups according to age, socio-professional category and geographical location, as highlighted by a study from the Workplace Management Chair at ESSEC Business School[38].

Differences according to age. Remote work is more popular with millennials (born between 1978 and 1994) and Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1977), 79% and 72% of whom respectively wish to work remotely. Then come Generation Zers (born after 1995) and Baby Boomers (born 1945-1964) with 68% and 67% wanting to work remotely. The lower appetite for home working among Generation Zers may be due to the fact that, as the youngest generation, they are at the very beginning of their professional careers, still live in modest housing or even under difficult conditions and aspire to a strong social connection with peers. As for the baby boomers, they are at the end of their careers, probably find it more difficult to change their work habits and are less comfortable with technological tools.

Differences according to socio-professional category. 85% of senior executives and 82% of senior managers want to continue to work remotely, compared to 67% of non-managerial employees (with an overall average of 73% of respondents).

Differences according to geographical location. 83% of all employees in the Paris region want to continue home working, compared to 70% in medium-sized cities and 64% in small towns.

It seems almost certain that the use of home working will continue to increase following the pandemic. However, the differences between employee groups suggest that the impression of a general appetite for remote working should be qualified. The findings of sociologist Alain d'Iribarne also suggest that companies should introduce demographic, geographical and socio-organisational analysis when considering remote working implementation for the future: "Companies with employees with an average age of 55 years and 30 years of work experience in Taylorian and/or post-Taylorian organisations cannot be organised in the same way as those with employees with an average age of 30 and 5 years of experience in a 'liberated' work environment."[39] So, we need to be cautious regarding solutions that are too homogeneous, centralised and inflexible, which do not account for such differences. In this sense, we shouldn't be too hasty in drawing conclusions from 2020-2021, a year that should be seen as exceptional and in which both the positive and negative aspects of working from home have been carried to the extremes by the anxiety-inducing context.

"The findings of sociologist Alain d'Iribarne suggest that companies should introduce demographic, geographical and socio-organisational analysis when considering remote working implementation for the future."

About 80% of those now working from home want to continue to do so. This feeling is more pronounced among managers (86%), women (80%) and employees of very large (80%) and service-sector companies (83%)[40]. These cross-categories are the ones that will be the most active in bringing about a new social norm in work organisation. Between 2 and 3 days of remote work per week seems to be a consensus among senior executives, employees, trade unions and even... academic researchers.

This hybrid solution seems to be what could become the new norm for work organisation. Like any norm, it will have to allow for deviations. It is likely that certain "ecological niches" will survive in the tail of the comet, with some companies maintaining "traditional" modes of organisation that will work very well. On the other hand, there will also be avant-garde organisations that go beyond the norm, up to "full remote" (100% remote working for all employees).

Back to the office: announcements criticized in the US

In the spring of 2021, many US companies seemed to take a step back on the issue of remote working. This was the case for banks and financial services companies such as JP Morgan or Goldman Sachs, but also, more surprisingly, for digital companies as well.

Apple: on 3 June 2021, Tim Cook announced the implementation of hybrid work starting in September and expected to continue until at least 2022 (he then plans to re-evaluate this "pilot" program): most employees will be asked to come into the office on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays and work from home on the other days, but others will be asked to come in 4-5 days a week. In addition to this plan, employees will also be able to ask to remote work for up to 2 weeks per year. This rigid plan was not well received by some employees: a Slack channel was launched on this issue which was then the subject of a letter signed by 80 employees. They encouraged Apple to be more flexible and ambitious in terms of home working. They point out that despite "the enormous constraints that have weighed on the company for over a year, Apple has continued to launch new products, hold events, introduce new operating systems and ultimately continue to achieve unprecedented financial results." In conclusion, the authors of the letter ask for 5 points to be discussed:

- Give teams decision-making power over remote work (as they already have over hiring)
- Organise a large and transparent survey on this topic
- Address this issue in pre-departure interviews
- Communicate a clear plan for employees with disabilities who may be affected by a hybrid organisation
- Conduct an environmental impact study on the consequences of returning to the office.

Since then, because of the Delta Variant (but maybe also because of the social unrest among work teams), Apple has declared that office reopening is now planned for October 2022.

Ubisfot: In early June, Ubisoft's HR department emailed employees, telling them that most will have to return to the office regularly, stating that "the office will remain a central pillar of the Ubisoft experience". Only a small number of employees will be able to remain entirely remote. Reactions were not long in appearing on internal forums where messages like "We spend 90% of our time sitting at our desk with headphones on. I don't see how there would be any more creativity with lots of people with headphones on in a small space." Another developer notes that "In the meantime we released Valhalla working remotely" and another developer adds "As well as 4 seasons of Rainbow Six Siege... And the beta of Roller Champion... And Hyperscape..." Some people are already thinking of "leaving for a studio that offers 100% remote work".

Amazon: as of March 2021, Amazon announced that it wants to "return to a culture centred on the desktop as a baseline". An internal memo announced a return to full-time on-site work starting this fall in the United States. However, in June, the company changed course by offering a more flexible formula to its employees whose activities do not necessarily take place on site: it will be possible to work from home 2 days a week, or even more with the agreement of your superior.

In August 2021, Amazon ultimately announced office reopening for January 2022.

International comparisons on the prospect of work hybridisation

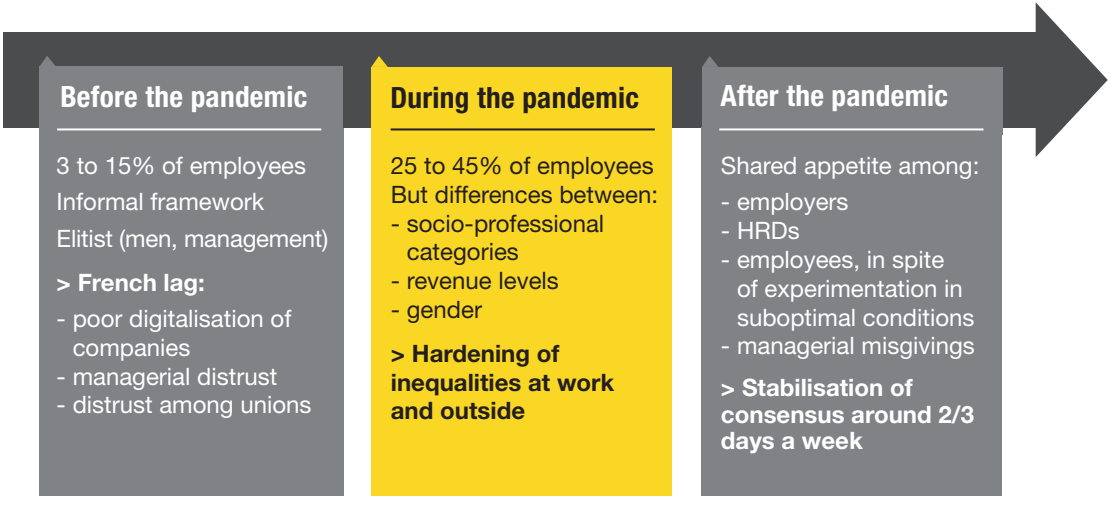
According to an ILO report[41], it is likely that the proportion of remote work will increase as a result of the experience during the pandemic, in a mixed form combining on-site and remote work. Eurofound[42] and the OECD[43] report that the experience during the public health crisis will lead to an increase in remote work.

Initial research and surveys show that a very high percentage of workers would like to work from home more frequently, even after the lifting of the social distancing measures and even though they have experienced 'from-home' in an unpleasant and suboptimal way. 70% of the employees surveyed by Eurofound in July 2020 were satisfied overall with this experience. This figure rises to 80% in Canada and only 8% of Canadians aspire to return to the office full-time. In the UK, 68% of employees want to continue working at home after lockdown.

Employers are also showing an increased interest in 'from-home': 70% of UK employers would like to develop remote working on a regular basis and 54% of them on a full-time basis. EU companies expect that in three years' time, 29% of their workforce will be working remotely and 39% of employers say they no longer care where work is done.

However, there is still a long way to go as 34% of employers surveyed in the EU still do not have a formal policy for managing hybrid working arrangements.

Remote working in France: Summary



CHAPTER 2

Risks and Opportunities of Remote Work

While the dynamics of pre-pandemic remote work (chosen optionally) were very different to those (mandated) of the pandemic, 2020 did allow us to test the advantages and disadvantages of this work mode on a large scale. This enabled a more objective analysis of its effects, helping to overcome certain beliefs (or prejudices) or, on the contrary, bring to the forefront certain realities in its regard. Above all, it demonstrated, step by step, what the conditions for "better" remote work might be, since these conditions were not gathered during the pandemic period.

The table 2.1 shows the main advantages and disadvantages mentioned by employers and employees. For both groups, the expected benefits remain more or less the same as before 2020. However, large-scale experimentation with home working also seems to have revealed new opportunities for employers[44], with 64% of HR managers seeing it as a way to increase productivity and 61% as a way to reduce their carbon footprint. They also see it as an opportunity to access a more skilled or cheaper (23%) and more flexible (11%) workforce. For employees, while the appeal remains, the experience of 100% remote working also literally brought home some of its negative effects, which had not been perceived while it was still only being practiced partially or not at all.

Some of these opportunities and risks remain more controversial than others and the data and analysis do not all point in the same direction. This chapter focuses on these areas of debate, which deserve our attention in as much as they are likely to influence future collective bargaining. The circled terms in the table correspond to topics developed in this chapter.

Does remote work increase productivity?

Does remote work have a positive impact on productivity? This question is of primary interest to businesses. In the past, senior executives have tended to see a negative correlation here, but many seem to have changed their minds as a result of the 2020 experiment. Are there elements to back-up this change in attitude?

Table 2.1 Summary table of opportunities and risks of remote work as perceived by stakeholders

	Employers
Opportunities	- Flexibility / agility - Attractiveness of the employer brand - Less absenteeism - Productivity increase - Saving real estate costs - Carbon footprint reduction - Access a better qualified or less expensive workforce
Risks	- Managerial transformation - Impact on innovation and collaboration - Feeling of belonging - Onboarding

Employees	Society
- Flexibility of working hours - Saving of transport time - Better concentration - Feeling of independence - Less distance between managerial and non-managerial staff	- Free choice society - Urban decongestion - Environmental concerns - Revitalisation of territories - Lower housing prices in city centres
- Isolation - Overwork - Fatigue and depression - Reinforcement of gender differences - Meaningless work - Risks on career promotion - Fear of being 'uberized' - Fear of downward pressure on wages	- Health risks - Rise of inequalities - Delocalisation and outsourcing - Environmental impacts of digital technology - Individualism and loss of collective meaning

The encircled terms correspond to the main topics developed in the present chapter.

Studies on the impact of home working on productivity are highly contradictory, depending on which factors they focus on. Some look at overall productivity, taking into account savings in real estate costs, energy consumption and wage effects, while others emphasise the conditionality of gains depending on how remote work is implemented. In total, these studies show a range of impacts, from 20% reductions in productivity to 30% gains, so they would seem to be rather inconclusive.

“Studies on the impact of home working on productivity are highly contradictory, depending on which factors they focus on.”

Some studies, conducted before 2020, estimated that productivity gains from remote work could range from 5 to 30%, taking into account several factors including quieter working conditions (thought to facilitate concentration): “Many studies show that remote work reduces interruptions, distractions and the time needed to recover after work, and thus improves concentration, efficiency and quality of work, as well as performance.[45]” A recent memo from the Sapiens Institute[46], citing a 2016 report by the firm Kronos, a specialist in labour relations, reports a 22% increase in productivity. These figures, however, which refer to old studies with sometimes uncertain methodologies, seem unconvincing.

Productivity gains at the cost of overwork?

In addition to improved concentration, work from home may also improve work productivity through increase in working time (overwork): the time saved in transport is largely used for professional activities; lunch breaks are shorter and other breaks during the day rarer. This increase in working time was documented during the first lockdown. An American study, conducted by researchers from Harvard and New York University[47], analysed the e-mails and shared work diaries of 3.1 million employees in the United States, Europe and the Middle East over a period of sixteen weeks, including the lockdown. It revealed that work time increased by 48.5 minutes per day, or about 4 hours per week.

“Working from home may improve productivity by increasing working time (overwork).”

Some authors attribute the intensification of working time produced by working from home to the “social exchange theory”. Before 2020, remote work was seen as a privilege in many companies inducing a feeling of “accountability” in employees which translated into increased effort to fulfill their “debt”. Negative managerial representations of home working force remote workers to develop behaviours to remain visible within their work environ-

ments and prove that they are "at their desks" and working. For example, they make a point of being responsive to emails, instant messages or phone calls, which can add to their workload. These factors may have come into play in 2020.

A 17-month study[48] (April 2019 to August 2020) on 10,000 professionals at a large Asian IT services company confirms the tendency to overwork: the number of working hours was off the chart, with total hours worked increasing by 30%, a majority of which (18%) were outside normal office hours. The originality and strength of this study lies in the objectivity of the analysis and monitoring data on which it is based. Many other studies simply ask employees about their subjective perception of their efficiency and productivity at work. The study also focused on a sector composed of highly skilled professionals whose work involves cognitive work, collaboration and innovation, where other studies have focussed on occupations with repetitive tasks (e.g. in call centres, see Bloom et al. below).

More surprisingly, despite this overwork, production remained stable. Employees thus worked more to achieve the same results: productivity would have fallen by about 20% eventually according to the authors' estimates. To explain this paradoxical phenomenon, the authors of the study point to several factors:

- Time spent in meetings (video-conferencing) increased after the home-working transition phase, suggesting a significant increase in remote coordination costs.
- As a result, the uninterrupted hours spent in deep individual concentration decreased.
- Internal (co-worker) and external (client) networking activities decreased, as did coaching and bilateral exchanges with supervisors.

These results suggest that while it was possible for companies to maintain their business activities in spite of the public health crisis, this was largely thanks to employees over-investment. The authors thus question the sustainability of this form of remote work. Their findings highlight the inflation of time spent in meetings to the detriment of individual concentration and networking activities, considered as fundamental variables of work productivity. Conversely, "working after hours and attending many meetings does not seem to contribute substantially to productivity".

"These results suggest that while it was possible for companies to maintain their business activities in spite of the public health crisis, this was largely thanks to employees over-investment. The authors thus question the sustainability of this form of remote work."

International comparisons on overwork

"Almost all national expert reports surveyed show that remote workers tend to work longer than the average employee in their respective countries.[49]" In Belgium, for example, a 2005 study found that remote workers worked an average of 44.5 hours per week compared to 42.6 hours for on-site workers. Similar results are given for Finland (2011), the Netherlands (2015), Spain (2011), Sweden (2014) and the UK (2012).

These findings were further verified during lockdowns: a survey of 1,000 workers from the UK showed that 38% of them said they were working longer hours[50]. Employees are far from being the only ones impacted however: in China, Microsoft calculated that the weekly workload of executives managing remote teams increased by 90 minutes due to individual and group virtual meetings.

Remote work conditions and productivity

In a study on home working at a Chinese travel agency (Ctrip) in 2015[51], researchers Nicholas Bloom et al. pointed out that its beneficial effects on productivity only apply when workers choose to work from home and are lost when they are obliged to do so: "At Ctrip, employees who decided to work from home were 13% more productive than their colleagues. It should be noted, however, that only half of the employees volunteered. How would the other half have performed if they had been forced to work from home, as everyone is doing right now during the COVID-19 crisis? It's hard to say.[52]"

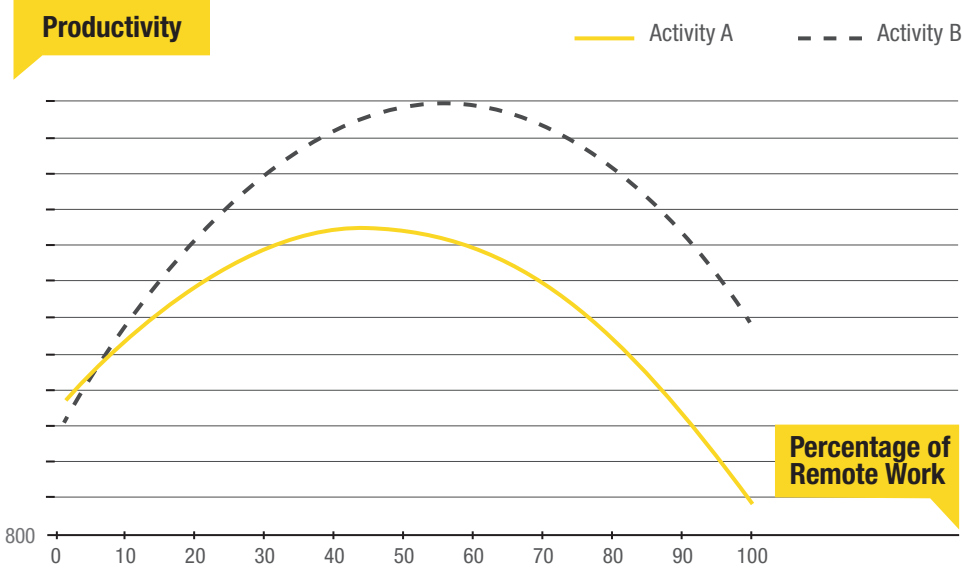
Conversely, research conducted at CNAM and corroborated by ergonomists shows a loss of productivity in the order of 20% when remote working takes place on a full-time basis, with this loss even higher where remote working is carried on under bad conditions[53]. This is due to the "overtime" required to learn tools, technical problems, digital (more emails, instant messaging, etc.) or household interruptions, losses related to the physical and mental health of employees (poor installation at home, social isolation, digital exhaustion) and losses related to the "lesser impact" of managerial instructions from a distance.

The impact of remote working on productivity is therefore thought to depend on whether workers choose it rather than having it imposed on them, as well as the conditions under which it is carried out.

Intensity of remote working and productivity

While the effects of from-home on productivity may therefore vary, agreement seems to be coalescing around the fact that in terms of productivity, optimal work is neither 100% on site nor 100% remote. Productivity decreases from a certain threshold of remote work and this varies according to sectors and professions. This is shown in the inverted U curve presented by Antoine Bergeaud and Gilbert Cette[54] and adapted from previous work by the OECD[55]. "The efficiency of workers improves at low levels of remote work intensity but decreases when remote work becomes 'excessive'. Thus, there seems to be an 'ideal zone', characterised by a certain intensity of remote work as a proportion of working time, where the efficiency of workers – and thus their productivity – is maximized, although the exact shape of the graph is likely to vary across sectors and occupations."

Chart 2.2 - Relationship between intensity of remote work and productivity: the inverted U-curve



Source : Bergeaud A., Cette G., « Télétravail : quels effets sur la productivité ? », Billet n°198, *Bloc-Notes Eco*, Banque de France, 5 January 2021.

The OECD cites the example of industries or occupations where the relationship between complex tasks and communication is so important that the optimal level of remote work is lower.

This analysis suggest that gains in productivity may be available if post-Covid remote work deployment is better controlled.

Does remote working affect innovation and creativity?

One of the fears frequently expressed by companies is that from-home will have a particularly negative effect on innovation as well as on the creative impact produced by the informal encounters that occur when people share physical spaces. Despite the myth of the solitary entrepreneur (with renowned figures such as Edison, Ford, Jobs, Zuckerberg), it is actually difficult to innovate alone. Relationships only mediated by ICT are perceived as insufficient in this respect. Are these fears justified?

Economists Nicholas Bloom and Carl Benedikt Frey[56] share these concerns and warn of a risk of innovation deceleration threatening economic growth.

For N. Bloom, his study on the Chinese travel agency showed that when workers choose to work from home there is a positive impact on productivity for repetitive tasks such as answering calls or making reservations, but a negative one for innovative creative activities. This is the most commonly-held view. However, exactly the opposite view is held by E. G. Dutcher[57], who highlights the negative effects of remote work on productivity for routine tasks, but its positive effects when it comes to carrying out a task requiring some form of creativity, creativity being seen as flourishing mainly in quiet and solitude.

The OECD, for its part, makes the point that things are not clear-cut. Silicon Valley-type "clusters" in France "seem to provide a clear indication that sharing the same physical space is essential for innovation"[58]. Other work however indicates that as information sharing between remote workers becomes more widespread, "the more intensive use of remote work could become part of a larger reorganisation process, potentially conducive to efficiency gains made possible by the digital transformation."

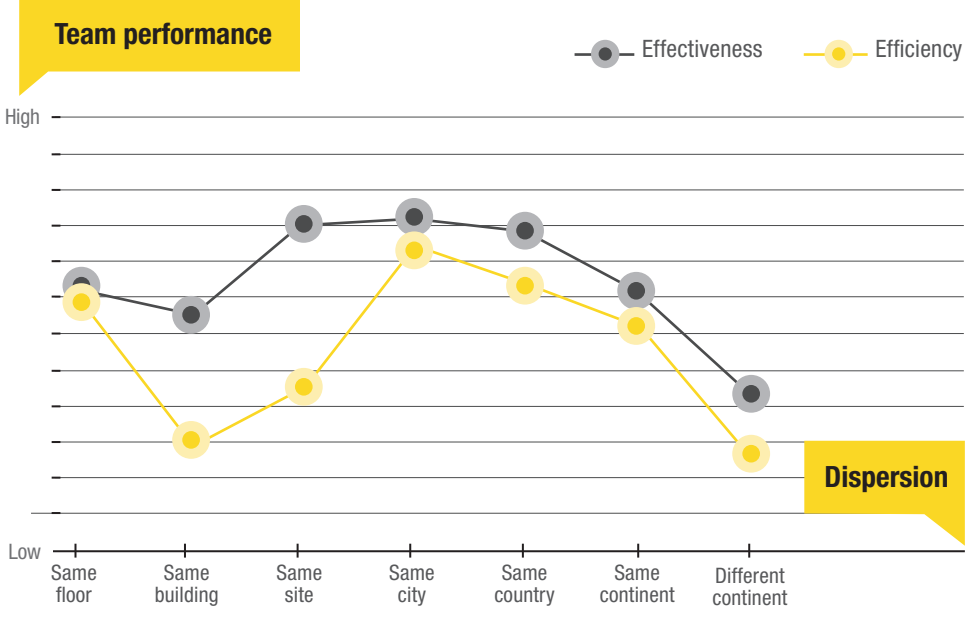
This second view is also held by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). According to the CIPD, it is not so much the workplace that poses a problem in terms of collective innovation as the team processes that have to be designed to facilitate coordination and communication between their members. It cites a global study of 80 software development teams in 28 labs around the world[59]. Teams that introduced such processes consistently outperformed other teams, whether they were collocated or working remotely. The study points out, on the one hand, that dispersion can be very diverse in nature and that on-site distance (between floors) can have more negative effects on a team's

effectiveness and efficiency than geographical distance (see Chart 2.3). On the other hand, dispersed teams have positive effects on innovation, bringing together a diversity of expertise and creating cultural heterogeneity that can multiply perspectives (while lowering costs). To take advantage of this diversity, however, a specific

> "According to the CIPD, it is not so much the workplace that poses a problem in terms of collective innovation as the team processes that have to be designed to facilitate coordination and communication between their members."

Chart 2.3 - Work team performance according to location

How to read: Teams located in the same building on different floors perform less well in terms of effectiveness (quality of the result in relation to the objective set – grey curve) and above all efficiency (quality of the result in relation to the resources invested – yellow curve) than teams dispersed over a city/country/continent because they underestimate the obstacles to communication and neglect collaborative processes due to physical proximity between individuals.



Source: Siedbrat F., Hoegl M., Ernst H., "How to manage virutal team?", *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 1rst July 2009.

management style needs to be adopted: optimising task-related processes (balanced distribution of tasks, coordination, mutual support, formal communication), while supporting socio-emotional factors (team cohesion, identification and informal communication). The testimony of a Grenoble-based executive producer from Ubisoft, who was interviewed for this study and who manages teams of 800 people spread over all the continents for the development of new video games, has the same thrust[60].

Thus, collaboration does not only take place through collocation. It needs to be thought out, formalised and explained. As the CIPD concludes, "innovation depends on good relationships and good knowledge sharing. Employers might do better to focus on these rather than on where people work".

Finally, it is worth noting that 25% of managers in France felt that creativity had increased since their team started working remotely at the end of 2020, and 54% of remote workers said they felt they had a greater capacity for innovation when working at home[61]. This makes the picture even more confusing!

In the end, the impact of remote working on innovation and creativity remains one of the most important and controversial issues, and one that the 2020 experience has not settled. Before resigning ourselves to the fact that remote teams cannot be creative, it would seem important to try out new things – in terms of methods, management styles and digital tools (see also Chapters 4 and 5).

What impacts on quality of life at work and psycho-social risks?

In terms of quality of life at work and the rise of psycho-social risks, the suboptimal conditions under which workers worked from home during lockdown do not allow us to draw lasting and general lessons. However, they do help to draw attention to aspects of working from home that can have a negative impact on quality of life at work, in the event that new and now entirely conceivable circumstances (new health crisis, but also general strikes, pollution peaks, extreme weather conditions, civil unrest) once again bring about the need for remote working on a large scale. They also highlight areas that need attention for the establishment of high-quality conditions for remote work.

Among the negative effects of continuous remote working on quality of life at work, employees are particularly concerned about the following.

- **The intensification of work time and workload mentioned earlier** (see above Productivity). This is often coupled with shorter and fewer breaks and less physical activity, as working from home encourages a high level of sedentary beha-

viour. Working from home can thus result in overwork (workaholism) at the expense of the remote worker's personal and social activities (taking care of oneself, resting, practicing leisure activities or going out). This can lead to symptoms of fatigue, anxiety and even burnout. This phenomenon has affected both non-managerial and managerial employees who worked from home in 2020.

- **Social isolation** is a factor in the perception of work-related stress and can be related to the fear of missing out on professional opportunities.
- **Lack of information provided by supervisors** (job objectives, evaluation criteria) and lack of equipment and digital training. This was particularly glaring during the first lockdown which took place without any preparation.
- **Difficulties in being heard and / or consideration** of the difficulties encountered. A lesser sense of belonging and less identification with the organisation.

For all these reasons, remote working is often associated with the development of psycho-social risks, which were greatly intensified with forced working from home during the public health crisis, whilst the pandemic itself provoked a great deal of anxiety. Apart from psychosocial risks, the ILO states that working from home also increases physical health risks: musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), eye strain, obesity, heart disease, etc.[62]

“Apart from psychosocial risks, the ILO states that working from home also increases physical health risks: musculoskeletal disorders (MSD), eye strain, obesity, heart disease, etc.”

MSD is obviously related to the ergonomics of workstations, which was clearly lacking in 2020 due to the lack of preparation for the transition to from-home. Studies show only 50% of remote workers had good workstations at home, with 21% admitting to working from their dining tables, 12% from their sofas and 4% from their beds[63].

Physical problems, then, become increasingly common with from-home: eye strain, back pain, headaches, stiff neck. Osteopaths and physiotherapists are seeing a huge increase in consultations. A sedentary lifestyle is also an issue: an ONAPS (French National Observatory of Physical activity and the Sedentary Lifestyle) survey shows that during the 1st lockdown, 25% of adults increased time spent sitting and 41% increased screen time. Physical activity also decreased significantly, with the cessation of all sorts of daily journeys and the closure of gyms. This will potentially have disastrous effects further down the line, since a sedentary lifestyle doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity[64].

International comparisons on quality of life at work for home working during lockdown

The findings are similar in other countries around the world.

An anonymous survey of tech professionals in North America[65] showed that 73% of them said they were exhausted at the end of April, 12 points higher than in February. For 20.5%, this exhaustion was due to higher workload.

A London Business School survey of 3,000 people during the 1st lockdown[66] found that the biggest concern for home workers was a lack of social interaction (cited by 46% of respondents). 62% of respondents in a global survey of 11,000 workers in 24 countries said working from home was socially isolating. According to the same survey, 50% feared that working from home would reduce opportunities for promotion. This fear is both confirmed and put into perspective by another study of 405 American remote workers: promotion opportunities are most restricted when working from home full-time.

In terms of negative physical impacts, the findings are just as worrying as in France: eye strain (41% of remote workers, the same as in France), headaches (39%, 8 points more than in France), back pain (37%, 2 points less) and neck stiffness (30%, 8 points more). Fifty-two percent of them said that their home workstation is the cause of more pain than the office one (2% more than in France) and 71% have had to equip themselves without material or financial assistance from their companies (6% up on France)[67].

It would therefore appear urgent to integrate the specific risks related to remote working in company occupational risk-assessments but the regulations remain unclear. While European Directive 90/270/EEC obliges employers to conduct regular risk assessments for office workers and for permanent home workers, the guidelines concerning temporary home workers are less clear.

However, if we isolate the risk factors that are mainly related to 100% remote working itself, then the benefits of remote work in terms of quality of life at work are clearly perceived by the employees, as long as companies take some precautions.

The reduction of micro-interruptions by colleagues and managers reduces the perception of work-related stress. This suggests that managers should be careful not to require remote workers to respond in real time to digital or telephone requests.

Flexibility in working hours means employees feel more in control of both their time and their working methods. This presupposes that Trusted Work Schedules (TWS) exist, which goes hand-in-hand with a results-oriented type of supervision (see Chapter 4). The OECD observes that TWS can be seen as a prerequisite for home working. "The company gives up control over the working time of its employees and evaluates their performance solely on the basis of their output. As a result, companies that use TWS are more likely to adopt home working.[68]" As long as from-home remains the choice of the worker and is intermittent (or hybrid), it is likely to "increase feelings of independence, motivation at work, organisational involvement and job satisfaction"[69]. All these factors have an impact on quality of life at work and result in a lower rate of absenteeism, a lower level of intention to leave and a lower turnover rate. However, these beneficial effects presuppose that material, organisational and personal conditions are met (see Chapter 3).

"Flexibility in working hours means employees feel more in control of both their time and their working methods."

Accommodating or destructuring social time?

This is the argument most often put forward in favour of remote work: that it allows better accommodation of people's social time, thanks to the time saved in transport, greater flexibility and greater self-control, allowing people to better organise their multiple roles and activities (professional, family, friends, leisure). Isn't there a risk however of seeing the destructuring of social time and work absorbing all of life's time?

The ability to compartmentalise the professional sphere from the private sphere at home and to establish clear spatial and psychological boundaries for each is not innate. These are practices that take place gradually and take time. Freelancers and other self-employed people are very much aware of the problem, working in cafés (when open!) or booking a place in a co-working space, not so much to escape isolation as to separate off the different parts of their lives.

Work done at home tends to overflow into other activities, with a risk of overwork that ends up absorbing all life's time. Remote workers "express difficulties in containing work and stopping themselves from being invaded by it"[70]. This results in misunderstandings, tensions or conflicts with family and friends, as well as an increase in stress

in the private sphere, both from the remote worker's point of view and that of the people around them. The first lockdown thus highlighted the unfavourable situation of women, who are still responsible for most domestic tasks which cause a high cognitive load. The lockdown increased childcare and home-schooling responsibilities. This may partly explain the significant increase in separations and divorces in 2020, especially those initiated by women. Difficulties in coping with the demands of work and family and in responding to the demands of family and friends mean that home-based workers report feeling a great deal of pressure and often sacrifice the time they would like to spend on rest, leisure or going out – an issue that was exacerbated in 2020-2021 by the scarcity of entertainment opportunities during the pandemic.

> "Work done at home tends to overflow into other activities, with a risk of overwork that ends up absorbing all life's time. Remote workers "express difficulties in containing work and stopping themselves from being invaded by it".

Testimonies from managers, and more particularly female managers, confirm this point. Emily, for example, says how much she misses moments of transition or times when she can decompress, for example the "just for me" time spent in the car with her music. Currently, as soon as she closes the door to her home office, she goes to the kitchen where hungry little mouths are waiting.

Finding solutions to these problems requires the development of new behaviours, rules and personal rituals, which also need to be negotiated with family or people around, leading to the sharing of tasks and consideration of the rhythms of the day. Having a room at home reserved for work – "a room of one's own" as Virginia Woolf said – with a door that closes, is obviously an advantage. At the end of the day, one closes the door to one's "office" and leaves work behind.

Because many workers, especially executives, are also generally "addicted" to their digital devices, there are more and more applications to help them discipline themselves and develop a more rational use of these devices. These applications can range from simply measuring the time spent on the Internet, one's mailbox or social networks (to increase awareness) to blocking devices when the time counter set by the user is reached. By using this type of application, managers can set an example on how to introduce the right to disconnect.

The intrusion of professional life into the private sphere also manifests itself through the use of videoconferencing, an open window on the home and personal image of each individual. This explains the use of wallpapers or cameras that are turned-off. Video conferencing can indeed become an indicator of inequality if employers oblige

employees to turn the camera on – a legally questionable practice with regard to both the GDPR and labour law. However, on the positive side, the intrusion of videoconferencing into the private sphere during lockdown also made employees realise that their local managers often lived like them and shared similar problems: no dedicated office, small children who wave at the camera, pets, etc. This mirror effect helped break down barriers and create closeness and bonds, which help create a climate of trust for the future.

Companies can obviously help in separating off social time or, on the contrary, create conditions that are counterproductive. Respect for the right to disconnect and tolerance to asynchronous response times (see Chapter 5) are positive as are the organisation of meetings and discussions during normal working hours and during periods set aside in advance for such activities, one-to-one (or bilateral) discussion time between managers and non-managerial employees to explore issues other than just work, ergonomic and health advice guides for home working (take breaks, eat well, get up and stretch regularly, go outside, drink

International comparisons on work-life balance

This ambivalence is also found in other countries. A study conducted in Germany in 2013 showed that 79% of the 505 employees surveyed considered that working from home helped them to reconcile work and family life, while at the same time 55% regretted an excessive overlap between these two spheres.[72]

A Belgian study from 2005 presents more optimistic results: 56% of remote workers felt that working from home had a positive impact on work-life balance, 34% no impact and 11% a negative impact. Positive net effects on work-life balance are also reported in the Netherlands (2009), Italy (2013) and Hungary (2016).[73]

The ILO report also notes an overlap in social time, which has both negative (increased workload and stress, particularly for parents and even more so for single-parent families) and positive (shorter commute time, part of which is devoted to the family, less stress related to commuting, time flexibility) effects. Regardless of how it is experienced at this level, the massive, forced home working experienced during the public health crisis "has shattered the idea that paid work and personal life are two totally separate aspects, as well as the myth of the 'model worker' who is, and should always be, available for his or her professional obligations".[74]

water, etc). Part of this effort to regulate work also depends on the employee's ability to self-manage his or her work activity, to set goals, structure the working day, prioritise tasks, manage time, etc. This implies having reached a certain level of independence at one's work activity. The sociologist Jean-Luc Metzger points out that, in so doing, the burden of supervision is now entirely transferred to home workers and their families, with families constituting "the main safeguard against overwork"[71]. In essence, he highlights "the existence of a void in regulating between the professional and private spheres, a void that companies create by shifting responsibility for learning to regulate onto individuals, after having made it invisible".

"Part of this effort to regulate work also depends on the employee's ability to self-manage his or her work activity, to set goals, structure the working day, prioritise tasks, manage time, etc. This implies having reached a certain level of independence at one's work activity."

When all these concerns are taken into account, remote work can then have positive impacts in terms of the work/life balance and mutual enrichment of both work and non-work.

How does remote working affect social relationships?

Remote working is thought to have an exclusively negative impact on social interaction. When people are working from home they are said to have less frequent, fewer and lower quality exchanges and discussions with colleagues and superiors than when they are on site. But is this really true?

During lockdown what workers mainly missed were the informal, spontaneous interactions that cause distraction and which, while sometimes perceived as disruptive, are also experienced as entertaining and a source of human warmth. This also reflects the feelings of loneliness and professional isolation which can accompany remote working and lead to a more generalised withdrawal. Working from home would thus seem to be more suitable for those who have an established social life or who enjoy solitude.

In the context of remote working companies play a less important role in the construction of social relationships, and work activity is no longer punctuated by rituals that take place in specific meeting places (coffee machine, corridors, canteen). Remote working therefore brings about psychological as well as physical separation, which can lead to a lesser sense of corporate belonging and to a loss of meaning that is harmful in terms of motivation and performance.

For all these reasons, a majority of employees believe that working on site is necessary, above all for social life (55%). A study conducted by Opinion Way reveals that 40% of French workers see social relationships as a source of happiness at work[75], particularly 18-24 year-olds who state it as their main source of happiness at work. For philosopher Charles Pépin, "this study clearly confirms that happiness does not so much lie *within* us as *between* us: nothing makes us happier than high-quality relationships, and even high-quality daily relationships. Our social connections are not added to our primary identity to make us happy; they are the basic material of our happiness."

> "Happiness does not so much lie within us as between us: nothing makes us happier than high-quality relationships, and even high-quality daily relationships."

With remote work, these social ties are mediated through digital tools, which represents a major but not necessarily insurmountable challenge. Surveys and studies show that social ties have been maintained in the extreme circumstances of lockdown and therefore there is no reason why they cannot be maintained where remote working takes place in a more organised and standardised way.

Paradoxically, it seems that temporal and geographical distance might encourage the development of a form of proximity, as if it were a question of compensating for one with the other. This observation is shared by the manager of a team of consultants based in Montreal: "I manage employees in Paris who I feel much closer to than other employees who are, like me, in Montreal. There are even colleagues I work with in the same building, who I see on a regular basis who I feel more remote from than employees who are abroad. The fact that we are on two different continents does not prevent me from feeling that there is very little distance between us. Because we are close, it becomes easy to communicate, to work as a team, exchange information, help each other, etc. I feel that, if a problem comes up, I'll be able to see it quickly and intervene effectively. Much more so than with certain on-site colleagues."[76]

For Martin Richer, who has conducted several studies on remote working for French think tank Terra Nova and who was interviewed by our working group[77], the idea that it is impossible to build social links remotely is a sweeping judgment. It seems quite feasible to explore the very fertile field of digital social interaction. Obviously, this requires the use of appropriate technologies (the offering was enriched under lockdown) and the introduction of routines and processes that provide the opportunity for down time, social time and chat between employees (web cafés, web

snacks, Zoom pizza events, web afterwork drinks, ice-breakers). Digital social interaction (see also Chapter 5) could therefore become part of our new habits, as long as it is not exclusive and is mixed with physically shared times.

A positive impact on the environment?

Remote working is often praised for its potential to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and pollutants as a result of lessening commuting for work. ADEME (the French agency for the environment and energy management) estimates that remote working reduces the environmental impacts associated with home-office commuting and travel by about 30%[78]. This gain is estimated to result in a 58% reduction in fine-particle emissions, bringing about a notable improvement in air quality.

In reality, the ecological benefits are likely to be more nuanced. ADEME points out the risks of a rebound effect for several reasons: if employees only need to go to work two or three times a week, they may be encouraged to live further away from their workplaces, which would then increase journeys. There could also be an increase in energy consumption at places of residence (electricity, heating).

Remote working also leads to an increase in digital pollution (responsible for 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions), especially with bandwidth-consuming video conferencing, and the increased production of digital devices, which leads to increased energy and resource consumption, as well as electronic waste production, a criterion that companies often fail to take into account when measuring their carbon footprint. Companies will need to be thorough and go into sufficient detail when claiming a positive environmental impact for remote work in their CSR reports or extra-financial performance statements. Correct evaluation of the green impact of working from home is not an easy exercise and from-home should not just become another tool for greenwashing.

> “Correct evaluation of the green impact of working from home is not an easy exercise.”

Downward pressure on wages?

This is not yet a proven risk, at least in France. However, there are signs that remote work will have an impact on the labour market.

The first signs have come from the United States. In May 2020, when Facebook announced that it wanted to pioneer remote

working, it also said that salaries might be adjusted based on location. If you move to Montana and have a fifth of your previous expenses, is it fair to pay you the same as if you lived in San Francisco? GitLab, a U.S. "full remote" company (all employees remote work 100% on several continents), has settled on a salary scale that can be re-evaluated according to changes in location of residence.

Remote working could also have a negative impact on salary increases because of the still entrenched view among some managers that from-home is a "favour" that the company grants to employees. For example, we have heard statements such as: "Now that we have given them from-home, they're not going to ask us for pay rises as well." However, while remote work should be a voluntary choice both on the part of the company and the employee, it is not a favour for which employees should be indebted, especially since, as we have shown, it generates direct and indirect benefits for the company (lower real estate costs, lower absenteeism, lower staff turnover, wider access to talents, attractiveness of the employer brand). Trade unions will certainly be alert to this during future negotiations.

Wage moderation could also result from another mechanism: companies that offer good home-working conditions might attract new staff with lower starting salaries than would normally be the case (especially if, in addition to from-home, they offer other measures that improve the work-life balance, such as flexible working hours), as workers are willing to forego higher wages in exchange for these benefits. In their study "Valuing Alternative Work Arrangements" (2017)[79], Amanda Pallais and Alexandre Mas sought to estimate this effect from an experimental study conducted during a call-centre recruitment exercise in the United States. They concluded that the average candidate would be willing to accept a 10% pay cut in order to work from home. However, this comparative advantage is expected to diminish as more companies expand the scope of their home-working arrangements.

That said, there are also direct costs to the company, such as hardware, new software and applications, enhanced cyber security, and, where applicable, lump-sum payments for certain costs related to the employee's accommodation (Internet connection, heating, electricity). These costs may push companies to negotiate compensation. While companies will probably obtain a significant quid pro quo in the long run through the reduction of office space (though this will not happen overnight), their immediate interest is to take the opportunity presented by from-home to negotiate trade-offs in terms of work organisation – such as, for example, increased availability for customers – rather than to try to influence wage moderation.

Some also believe that remote work encourages a results-oriented approach to work.

Following this hypothesis, employment contracts are likely to be progressively emptied of their substance in favour of service-provision style agreements. This may increase the use of subcontracting, thereby reducing social protection and the total cost of work, as individuals are encouraged to become entrepreneurs or self-employed and to take on the economic risks of their professional activity. This trend was already modestly underway and also corresponds to the preferences of some individuals. Will remote work accelerate it?

Finally, as an extension of the above, we also hear that remote work may favour lower labour costs as it gives access to a larger pool of workers, which could increase the supply of skills, especially from countries where labour costs are lower (delocalisation of work). If a company is going to use a remote employee, then why not an Indian one? This perspective produces dystopian visions of the general uberisation of the labour market and a generalised relocation to emerging countries. Yet such practices have neither waited for nor needed the extension of "local" remote working in order to come about. Developers in Romania, call centres in Madagascar, computer maintenance technicians in India, etc. all already exist. The globalisation of value chains and the extension of international subcontracting, made possible by remote collaborative work tools, have been developing for the last 40 years and the fact that people work remotely will have little effect on the phenomenon. If there is a dystopia, it has been underway for a long time, and the extension of local remote work will do little to change it.

> "Remote work may favour lower labour costs as it gives access to a larger pool of workers, especially from countries where labour costs are lower (delocalisation of work)."

A study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) published on 13 January 2020[80], which focuses on the effects of home-based work around the world, does however call for caution. In high-income countries, home-based work consists mainly of remote working (salaried or economically dependent self-employment) and is therefore included among the three forms of home-based work studied in the report. It indicates that a wage "penalty" is observed for home-based work in almost all countries, even for the most skilled occupations. Home-based workers earn 13 percent less than non-home-based workers in the United Kingdom, 22 percent less in the United States, 25 percent less in South Africa and about 50 percent less in Mexico, Argentina and India. These aggregate averages reflect very different realities, depending on whether home-based workers "weave rattan in Indonesia, make shea butter in Ghana, insert keywords into digital photos in Egypt, sew masks in Uruguay, or remote work in France." The study does, however, have the merit of pointing out

that home-workers who are remote or isolated from their organisations may find it difficult to assert their social rights and risk being forgotten at the time of wage claims.

Finally, on a macro-economic level, some emphasise the increase in income inequality through the links between remote work, productivity and sectors employing many skilled workers[81]. If we assume that productivity increases with remote work (in our opinion, this assumption does not seem to be reliably documented at present, see above) and that, at the same time, remote work continues above all to be the domain of skilled and highly-skilled employees, an increasing number of whom are working from home, then income differentials could widen even further between industries employing many skilled workers (whose productivity and wages are likely to increase as a result of remote working), and industries employing few skilled workers (personal services, local services) whose productivity and hence incomes are unlikely to be boosted by from-home. These forecasts are based on many assumptions, but if they are borne out, from-home could turn out to be a bad bargain in terms of society's overall balance.

Nomads or monads?[82]

When we look into the future, remote working gives rise to both idyllic and dystopian visions: on the one hand, an embellished conception of the digital nomad life, on the other, fears of almost pre-revolutionary social conflicts or of the atomisation of society.

The 2020 experience has put the focus back on the future of work from a nomadic perspective. But let's not fool ourselves! Home working before and after 2020 has little to do with the way digital nomads work. Working from home is still a "shift" job, even if you're a long way away from your company, as is remote working in a co-working space reserved by your company and which you go to almost every day.

Nomadism, on the other hand, consists in working from anywhere, at any time, without the company needing to know where you are, your office reduced to your laptop and your Internet connection: Thailand today, Australia tomorrow, Tel-Aviv on Thursday, Chamonix or the countryside next week. You simply follow your travel desires or the movements of the tribe you have built for yourself.

The press and Instagram have featured digital-nomad "villages" widely, with blue lagoons and infinity pools, that were supposedly formed or developed at the time of the major lockdowns. We can assume that this is mainly a desperate offensive from tourism professionals, surfing on the wave

to attract a new clientele. New words have appeared, such as workation (work+vacation) and bleisure (business+leisure). If the sociology of the digital nomads who make up these "villages" remains to be carried out, for the moment we are essentially talking about freelancers and entrepreneurs between 25 and 35 years of age as the inhabitants of such places. They work mainly in digital professions as consultants, developers, marketers, editors, graphic designers and coaches and choose this way of life for a certain period of time, in line with their age and their lack of family ties, in an original mixture of individualism and community.

Speaking from San Francisco, David Bchiri, General Manager of Fabernovel USA[83], says that, in his opinion, this is a sustainable trend, but it only concerns a very small fringe of the population: young, with valued know-how and able to bounce from one project to another. We are talking about groups such as developers, the shortfall for whom is estimated at 700,000 in the United States, or people who accept a certain level of insecurity and are motivated by a passion: sport, nature or the search for self-realization through alternative lifestyles, or a mixture of these. "One of the companies we were accelerating had to close down because it specialized in obtaining visas and these were banned almost overnight. The founding team relocated to Costa Rica, to a surfing community, and they set up their own start-up accelerator in the form of a large co-working space by the ocean. They told me that they met a community of great nomads who spend a year in one country, then a year in another, and claim above all the freedom to live where they want and to organise their time as they wish." This very "Californian" spirit is reminiscent of the practices of Patagonia (2,300 employees), a company that was "liberated" before its time (1972) and specialises in mountaineering and outdoor equipment. In that company, employees are encouraged to practice their favourite sports (mountaineering, surfing, fishing), both for their own personal balance and to get to know their customers better.

Here again, it can be said that this form of nomadism is not entirely new and has not been dependent on digital technology for its development. This has, for example, long been the structural basis of the hotel and restaurant industry, whose business model is based on the flexibility of staff according to peaks in visitor numbers; seasonal workers move from the mountains to the sea, sometimes to practice their sporting passion, as some Club Med GOs do.

Apart from these few cases, full nomadism may attract young workers for a few years, but does not seem to represent a viable organisational model from the point of view of the overwhelming majority of companies. Rather, it should be seen as a source of inspiration, taking into account the aspirations of the younger generation for more freedom in work, which could also be met by more "traditional" remote working. Sociologist Alain d'Iribarne

speaks of the "multiplication of legitimate workplaces", leading companies to new forms of spatial organisation. Facebook, which for a long time concentrated its thousands of "talents" in its Silicon Valley campus, is now planning to set up five large hubs spread across the United States, which will enable it to extend its recruitment territory. Employees will have to live within a four-hour drive of these large hubs. Dropbox has announced that it will disperse micro-offices in many American cities (see also Chapter 3 – Workspaces).

> "Full nomadism may attract young workers for a few years, but does not seem to represent a viable organisational model from the point of view of the overwhelming majority of companies."

The appetite for nomadism also depends on socio-cultural traditions. Alain d'Iribarne reminds us that social groups need stability. Moreover, the multisecular French societal model is founded on stability and is far more risk-averse than others, which invites a certain level of caution when trying to modify social norms.

Other societal issues are also raised, often from the perspective of the disadvantages of remote work in terms of an anxiety-provoking future for humanity. First of all, remote working is accused of exacerbating wealth inequalities and the divide between blue and white-collar, something that reared its head during the first lockdown. The implication is that an explosive social situation is at stake, that could reignite long and violent social conflicts in an already insecure economic context. In no respect, however, can remote work be seen as being at the root of a situation which largely pre-dates it. At most it may serve as a catalyst to reveal previous tensions.

From a darker perspective, others depict a total atomisation which not only breaks down team cohesion and the sense of corporate belonging, but more broadly leads to a deadly breakdown in values. This, then, is no longer only the risk of isolation but more broadly that of "desolation" in the sense of Hannah Arendt.

These apocalyptic visions encourage a more thoughtful approach to the deployment of from-home and to the design of the legal arsenal to help to better regulate it.

CHAPTER 3

Working Arrangements

The failings that were experienced under the extreme circumstances of 2020-2021 in fact helped show how remote working arrangements could be put into place efficiently and responsibly in the long term. The outline for such arrangements became better defined for each company as time went by and they discovered what worked and what didn't. This experimentation will be important in the negotiations for the establishment of remote working conditions over time.

With the end of the pandemic period in sight, companies may rightly find themselves hesitating between updating their existing agreements (if indeed they already have such arrangements) and thus quickly locking in new arrangements to give employees visibility and stability after a very difficult period, or, on the contrary, not concluding anything too quickly and leaving room for experimentation. While there seems to be a consensus on certain basic conditions, others depend on the sector of activity, the company culture, the company's strategic objectives, the maturity and individual aspirations of employees, the quality of company / employee dialogue, etc. Remote work does not in itself change company culture or how a company is organised, but a company's response to remote working does reveal its organisational practices, its strengths and its weaknesses. In this sense, the (partial or full) transition to from-home can make managers aware of what can or needs to be changed and thus represents an opportunity to bring about change.

Win-win remote working

Remote work quality seems to be contingent on four categories of conditions: organisational, material, managerial and personal to the employee, as summarised in the table above. They represent areas that companies and their managers need to pay attention to with a view to the sustainability of remote working

Chart 3.1 - The conditions for high quality remote working

ORGANISATIONAL CONDITIONS

- Organised in concertation with unions and part of defined company plan
- Chosen and not done under duress (double volunteering)
- Not a privilege
- Adaptation of company culture (trust, support, results)
- Secured and easy-to-use IT infrastructure

MANAGERIAL CONDITIONS

- Clear work organisation
- Results-based management
- Professional and psychological support
- Flexible working hours
- Maintenance of social relationships
- Active detection of pyscho-social risks
- Remote working support across all levels (training, documentation, discussion spaces)
- Regular assessment of the effects of remote work

MATERIAL CONDITIONS

- The worker has a good working space (a specific room given over to this) that is ergonomic and free from interruptions
- The worker has high quality IT equipment, a good Internet connection and the necessary security accesses
- Support and technical help

EMPLOYEE SKILLS

- Independence (technical, professional and time management)
- Ability to negotiate clear rules with those who you live in the same space as

Remote work generates productivity and quality of worklife if carried out under good conditions.

How remote work is handled is revelatory of how a company is organised.

Eligibility for remote work

From occupations to eligible tasks: a new perspective

For a long time, remote working does not seem to have been considered for many professions, introducing social inequality risks. During a press conference, the French Minister of Labour cited the example of a maintenance agent in the telecoms industry, stating "obviously, remote working can't be used for the post of maintenance agent". In reality, some maintenance tasks, such as customer relations, stock management or work planning can be done remotely, just as a farmer can perfectly well carry out accounting and administrative tasks, weather forecasting and supplier orders and sales activities with customers or co-operatives, etc. without being in the fields. Benoît de Saint-Aubin, Director of Quality of Life at Work and Employee Services at Orange[84], notes: "We have discovered that almost all of Orange's jobs can be done remotely, with a few exceptions such as store reception or certain technical jobs. Network supervision, for example, can be done remotely."

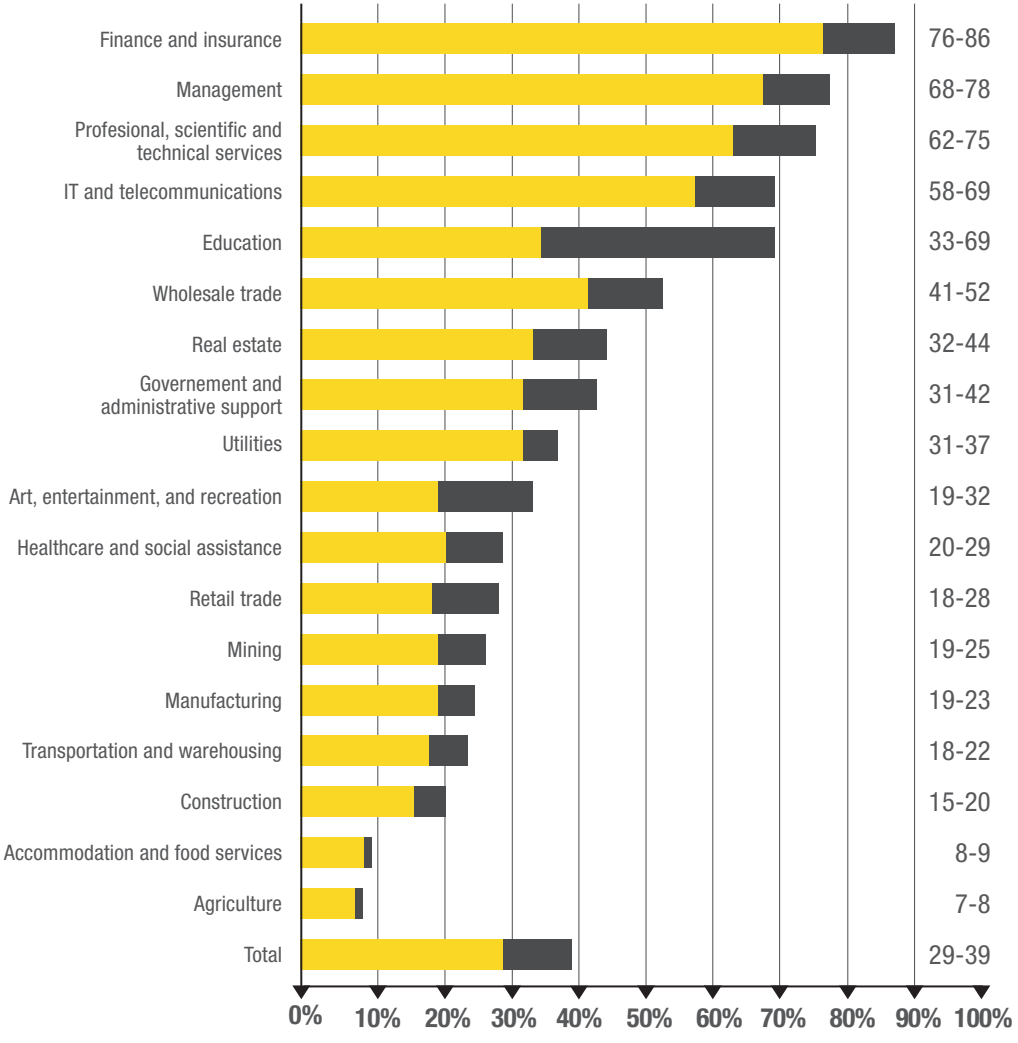
The public health crisis has therefore broken down many barriers in this area, forcing organisations to think remote working in terms of tasks rather than professions. At least partially successful experiments using remote work were carried out for many activities previously considered problematic for off-site, revealing hitherto untapped potential in areas such as distance learning, medical consultations, remote board meetings, negotiations with staff representatives, remote maintenance, and even remote artistic performances.

"The public health crisis has broken down many barriers in this area, forcing organisations to think remote working in terms of tasks rather than professions."

As a result, we can see that traditional analysis of eligibility for remote work broken down by industry and/or occupation does not have enough granularity to optimise remote work and many institutions and reports are now emphasising a task or activity-based approach.

The McKinsey Global Institute conducted a survey in 9 countries[85] (China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Spain, the UK and the US) of more than 2,000 activities in more than 800 occupations to identify those activities and occupations that have the greatest potential for remote work. The survey distinguished between activities that cannot be done remotely, such as care work, work on fixed machines or equipment and sales in stores, and those that can be done remotely (information gathering and processing, communication, writing, design). It also highlighted a third category: activities that can be done remotely but that are more effectively done on

Chart 3.2 - Percentage of work time potentially suitable for remote work, by sector (US)



Source: McKinsey Global Institute, *What's next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries*, 23 novembre 2020.

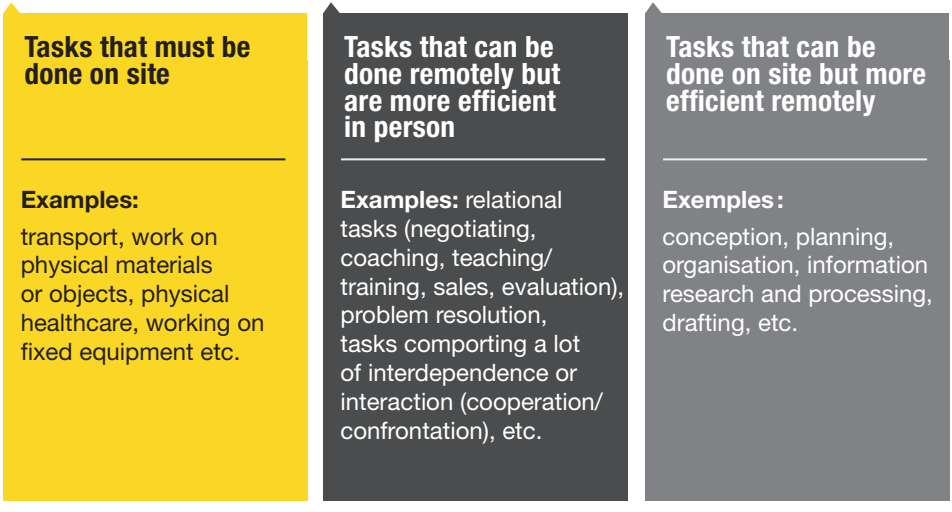
site. These include coaching, counseling, interpersonal relationships (business or professional), onboarding, negotiation, critical decisions, teaching and training, problem solving and innovation.

To assess the remote working potential of a given sector, the results were refined according to two metrics: maximum potential (including all tasks that can be done remotely) and a lower bound (excluding activities for which a clear on-site advantage exists). However, the results are not very original and conclude with an analysis that favours a few sectors with a skilled workforce, such as finance and insurance, management, business services and ICT activities.

McKinsey's analysis is therefore a little more nuanced than previous analysis, but in the end more or less replicates pre-existing findings.

On the other hand, Boostrs, a start-up specialising in skills mapping, has analysed 10,000 technical skills that make up 3,000 occupations and are divided into three categories: not suitable for remote work, partially suitable and fully suitable. While the French Ministry of Labour estimates that only 30% of jobs in France are suitable for remote work, this rises to 62% in the Boostrs study, based on the rule that a job becomes partially suitable for remote work as soon as at least 20% of the skills it requires can be done remotely.

Chart 3.3 - The task/activity approach



While the public health crisis has thus created an incentive to move from sector and occupation-based thinking to task-based thinking, this approach now needs to be developed in the field, with the aim of ensuring greater equity in access to remote work wherever possible. The three categories developed by McKinsey can help (see Chart 3.3).

These categories should be seen as dynamic, not static, because several factors can be involved in transforming tasks that were not previously considered suitable for remote work into tasks that now are: technical developments (digitalisation, automation, robotisation), the appropriation of these developments by companies and customers and an increase in employee skill levels (development of new technical, professional, managerial skills).

The level of digitalisation or automation can, in fact, cause some movement, with some tasks that were not previously considered suitable for from-home becoming so. For example, a factory with robots, digital twins of installations or automated lines, could very much let operators control and supervise certain activities remotely after a skills upgrade. When social practices come together with technological possibilities, then new tasks become eligible.

The value of professional dialogue to define eligible tasks

The next question for companies is how to define the tasks eligible for remote work and what procedure to use to do it. There is also the question of the number of remote-work working days allocated for such tasks.

This can range from complete freedom to more controlled arrangements, as the respective examples of drug company Novartis and the mutual insurance provider MAIF show.

Novartis. Since the beginning of 2021, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant has allowed almost all of its 110,000 employees worldwide to choose "where, when and how they want to work", giving them the option of on-site or from-home (third-party locations are supposed to remain an exception) and partially or fully remote. The programme, called "Choice with responsibility", is being implemented in the 97 countries where the group operates. Employees no longer have to ask their manager's permission to work from home. They can simply inform them. In France, however, the Novartis President specified that "employees will have to discuss their wishes with their team so that they can define the conditions for implementing from-home together". The Basler Zeitung has reported however that Novartis is using software to measure the time spent by employees on the phone, answering e-mails and participating in online meetings[86].

MAIF. At MAIF, the recent agreement (amendment to a previous agreement from 2017) allowing the expansion of remote work appears to be more supervised, while offering more support to employees and the work group. Remote work is restricted according to eligibility criteria related to the nature of work but also to an employee's level of competence in their position (in terms of performance levels and ability to work independently) and their competence in the digital work environment. For MAIF, then, suitability for remote work does not only depend on whether the nature of an activity lends itself to it. Insufficient capacity to work independently can also be a barrier.

Eligibility also depends on the conditions under which remote working is carried out at home (existence of a suitable space and Internet connection). The company requires employees to have a proper workspace installation with data confidentiality, especially for member calls. This assessment is made on the basis of a declaration by the employee, which the company does not check. Finally, the agreement specifies that the remote worker's level of performance must be equivalent to his or her on-site performance. In terms of determination of the number of from-home days worked per month, the employee expresses their wishes, but the final decision is made by their manager depending on the manager's assessment of the employee's capacity for independent work and the needs of their work group. Pivotal to the agreement is a minimum on-site presence of between 2 and 3 days per week, which is subject to managerial approval specific to each entity. The eligibility process includes discussion between those wishing to remote work and their managers, so that managers can remind them of the principles of from-home, evaluate the employee's capacity for independent work, ensure best practices are used and so on.

The framework put into place by MAIF is interesting, because it combines both an overall general standardised framework and granulation through reflection at team and individual level through professional dialogue, in order to determine the proportion of from-home and strike the "right" balance in terms of the group and efficiency. It invites managers to ask questions such as: How many team members can work from home before this prevents the team from functioning? What is the maximum number of individual remote working days, beyond which the team becomes disorganised, or performance is adversely affected? What team rituals should be established or maintained? What impacts does remote working have on working with other teams? What rules need to be implemented for scheduling individual remote work days? Are there times of the year, or certain days, when remote work is not desirable or possible? What rules need to be in place for changing or rescheduling remote-work days if required?

Chart 3.4 - Method to establish a professional dialogue between manager and employee about remote working tasks

Position:.....
Location:.....
Direct Manage:.....

Tasks/Activities	Work Mode	How to overcome obstacles to remote working
Task 1		
Task 2		
Task 3		
...		

Decision:
- Remote working days per week, month or quarter: .....
- Employee's wish: .....

100% on site
Possible in-person but also or more effective remotely
Possible remote but more effective on site
100% remote

Inspired by ANACT[87] and the three categories developed by McKinsey, we have drawn up a method for establishing a dialogue between employees and managers, with the support, if necessary, of the rest of the team, but also with the assistance of experts to advise on any difficulties to be resolved (ergonomists, occupational medicine, etc.)

1. List the tasks related to each position.
2. Evaluate the optimal work mode for each task:
   - 100% in-person/on-site,
   - Possible remote but more effective on site,
   - Possible in-person but also or more effective remotely.
3. Identify the possible obstacles to or difficulties with remote working (technical, professional, relational, ethical, etc.) according to the tasks, both for the company, the worker and the customer.
4. Identify the means and conditions for overcoming them (equipment, connection, training, etc.).

Working spaces

As discussed in Chapter 2, remote work opens the way to an "increased number of legitimate workplaces". This means companies are looking at spaces and associated services that can be offered to employees, both to ensure quality of life at work (on and off site), and to place employees' return to the office in a fully thought-out hybrid work context, without losing sight of the reduction in real estate costs that may result from these choices.

Three legitimate locations to work are generally considered: the employee's home, the company's premises, with related issues concerning office layout (open-plan office, desk sharing, flex offices – see box below) and third-party locations.

In Chapter 2 we went into a good deal of depth on the advantages and disadvantages of working at home, looking at the employee capacity to work independently at their workstation, type of accommodation (space, comfort, healthiness), the employee's equipment (computer equipment, Internet connection, secure access to the company's digital work environment, ergonomics of workstations), household characteristics (single, couple, children, roommates), the ability to negotiate clear rules with those with whom the space is shared and also the distribution of domestic tasks. What about other spaces?

Flex office or desk sharing?

According to various surveys, 30% of company workspaces are currently group spaces (formal or informal: meeting rooms, relaxation areas, etc.), while the remaining 70% are still dedicated to individual workspaces, whether in open-plan offices or not. Open-plan offices are still far from being

the norm, with only 34% of employees working open-plan, and 66% continuing to work in individual or shared offices (with 2 or 4 other people).

> “With the rollout of remote work, forecasts predict a reversal of the ratios, with 70% of spaces dedicated to teamwork and only 30% given over to individual workstations. Dedicated workstations will disappear and make way for the flex office or desk sharing.”

With the rollout of remote work, forecasts predict a reversal of the ratios, with 70% of spaces dedicated to teamwork and only 30% given over to individual workstations. Dedicated workstations will disappear and make way for the flex office or desk sharing.

In the flex office, all workspaces in the office building are available to everyone, and individuals are expected to choose the space that best suits their work schedule for the day.

With desk sharing, each team has a set of workstations available for a good part of the day or week and the team members rotate them according to their needs.

A third proposal is that of **“dynamic environments”** which aim to mix individual posts allocated in limited numbers for very sedentary employees, and shared posts, themselves subdivided into individual posts (for concentration) or posts for groups (meetings), allocated according to activity and time of day. This concept is currently being developed by Orange. In this so-called “dynamic environment” configuration, there are certainly fewer individual workstations than employees, but more work “positions” than employees overall if we take into account all the spaces (1.5 position according to the Orange plan). Only “ergonomic” positions qualify as “work” positions (for example, a bar stool is not considered as an ergonomic position). To maintain team anchorage, each entity is allocated a specific area known as a “neighbourhood”.

With the exception of the configuration described above, in the new models under consideration there are generally fewer individual workspaces than there are employees who may come to the office. This is because a number of them will be working from home at any given time or are involved in mobile working (salespeople or consultants). From a business perspective, a transaction exists between the take-up of remote work and these new types of office space. Alain d’Iribarne, who is also President of the Actineo Scientific Advisory Committee, an observatory for quality of life at work, says that the ratio between the number of individual workspaces and the number of workers can vary considerably: “I know of one company in which the ratio is 2.5, which is very generous, while others are much less so. Some companies have applications that allow you to reserve different workspaces in advance, either individually or collectively. Elsewhere, it is first

come, first served." Flow management becomes strategic in this type of configuration.

The issue of flow management is further complicated by the fact that today employees often have multiple affiliations within a company: they certainly belong to a team or a business group, but also to other circles, such as dedicated project teams or other professional communities. Coming back to the office to work with one's colleagues therefore entails identifying who these "useful colleagues" are. This brings us back to the idea of the difference between the organisation chart (official and prescribed relationships) and the sociogram (unofficial but real relationships). In other words, one's "prescribed" working relationships may not overlap with one's real working relationships, which increases the difficulty of organising flows so that they match working realities.

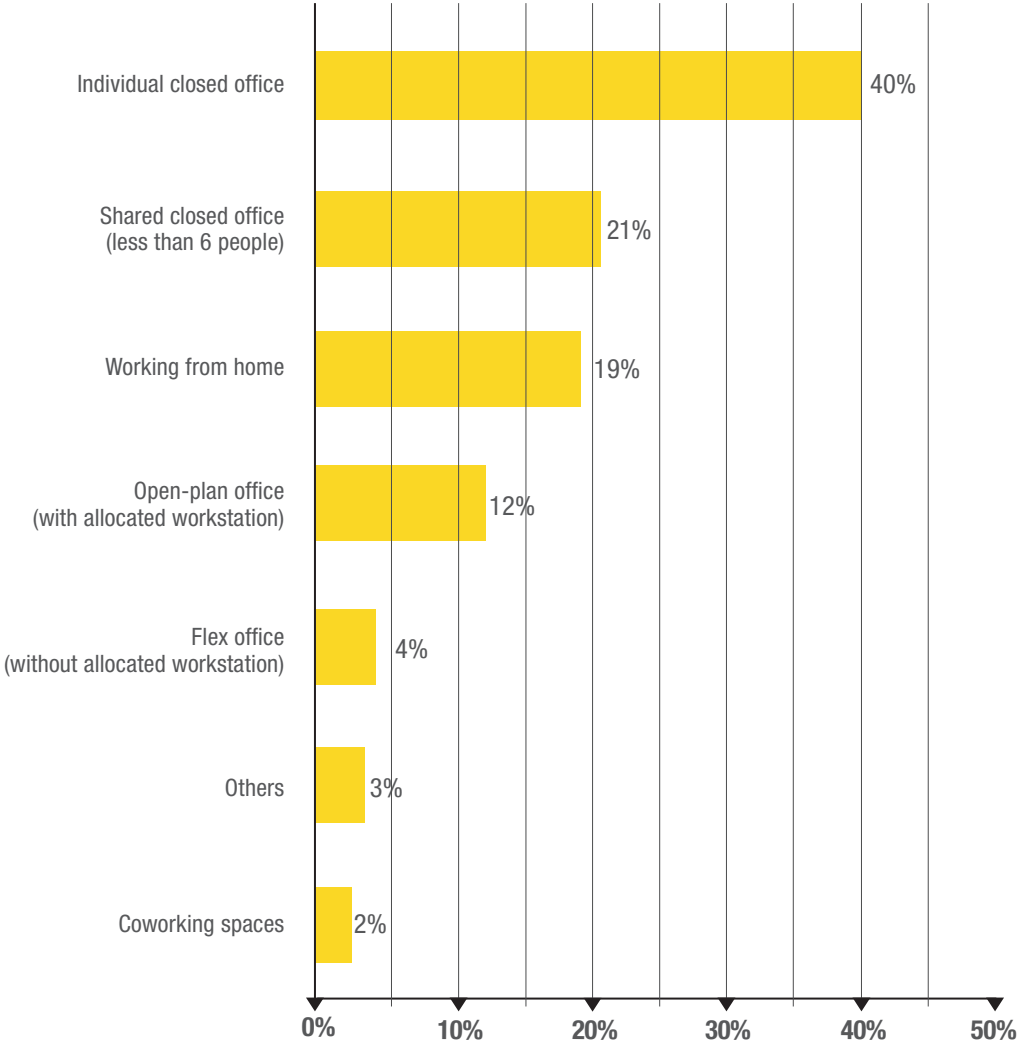
The organisation of the flex office is not without difficulties. Moreover, this development is not without risks. Studies over time show that French workers have a marked preference for stable workstations. They have never liked the open-plan concept (see box) and, in the absence of fixed and closed workstations, they prefer desk sharing to the flex office, the latter being seen as a real deterrent. According to a recent study[88], closed offices (individual and shared) are still considered as the ideal workspace by 61% of people, ahead of the open-plan office with an assigned workstation (12%). Only 4% state the flex office (without assigned workstation) as their preferred choice and only 2% co-working spaces. Working from home falls somewhere between traditional offices and other forms of flexible office.

"Studies over time show that French workers have a marked preference for stable workstations."

The evils of open-plan offices

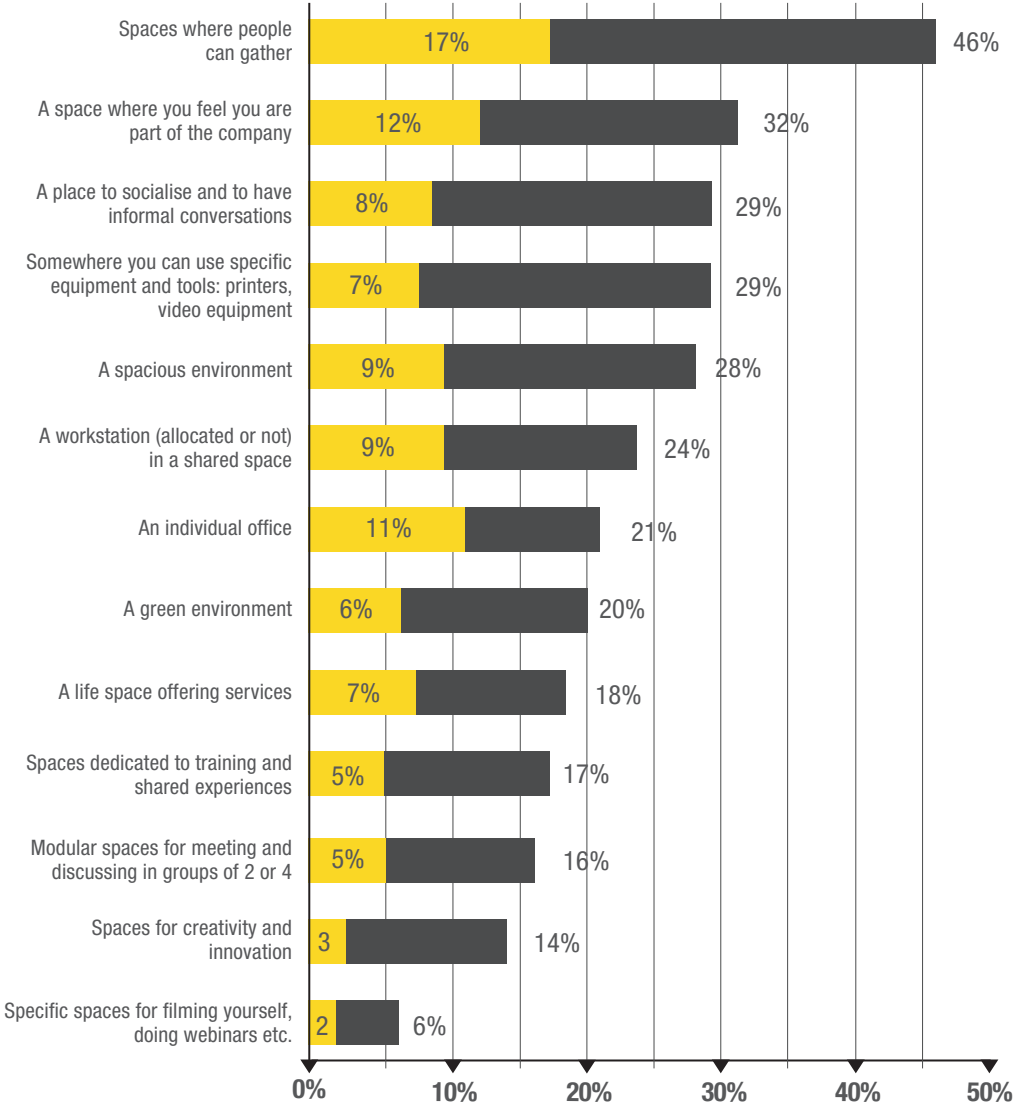
The problems of open-plan offices have long since been identified by employees (frequent interruptions, ambient noise preventing concentration, anxiety-inducing hypervisibility). A study[89] has shown that the introduction of open-plan offices reduces direct discussion and interactions by 73% and that these are replaced by a proliferation of virtual interactions (mainly email and instant messaging, which increased by 67% and 75% respectively), bringing about entirely the opposite effect from what was expected. Flex office and desk sharing also mean that employees suffer from a feeling of loss of territoriality. Desk sharing is better accepted than flex office

Chart 3.5 - Work space preferences among French workers



Source: "Mon bureau post-confinement", ESSEC Business School Workplance Management Chair study carried out online with a sample size of 2643 office workers between 7 and 20 September 2020.

Chart 3.6 - What do employees want from on-site work?



Source: Malakoff Humanis Annual Remote Work Barometer 2021, February 2021.

Why return to the office?

The office remains fundamental in the eyes of employees, above all for participation in company life (27%), nurturing friendly relationships (26%) and having a regular place to work marking a clear separation from other social times (26%). On the other hand, few see the office as somewhere for creativity (4%)[90].

This data was confirmed by the Malakoff Humanis annual remote work barometer 2021, which mentions a sense of togetherness, a sense of belonging to the company and informal exchanges as the main reasons mentioned by employees for coming back to the office. Here again, access to spaces dedicated to creativity and innovation come second to last among reasons for going to the office (see Chart 3.6)

Generally speaking, answering the question "Why return to the office?" calls for a reflection on the organisation of work and not simply the organisation of workspaces. For example, Nicolas Barrier, Director of Employee Experience at Renault[91], recounts that between the two lockdowns, some employees who were able to come back to the office commented: "I came back for one day. I went to a one-hour face-to-face meeting and, the rest of the time, I attended video conferences, which I might as well have attended from home." Back to when everyone went into the office every day, no one minded sitting in front of their screen all day, but now that people have experienced remote work, they don't really see why they should endure a one- or two-hour commute just to sit in front of their screen and attend meetings on Teams.

Why return to your usual workplace? The case of the manufacturing company, Renault

At the end of the first year, Renault conducted a survey among 6,000 employees whose jobs are considered eligible for remote work (excluding factory workers), in various countries where the group has a presence. To the question, "*In your opinion, which activities require you to return to your usual workplace?*" the most common answer was "*To work on physical objects*" (46% of respondents, and the top answer for those in engineering roles). The next most common item cited by respondents was the need to "*use certain work equipment*" (37%) such as, for example, a high-quality printer not available at home. Just after that came the need to "*spend sociable time with colleagues*" (35%, top answer for France and Romania) and then the need to "*talk with colleagues or with my manage*r" (32%).

This is a very valid question and creating informal, creative spaces in the workplace doesn't offer a convincing response.

> "Back when everyone went into the office every day, no one minded sitting in front of their screen all day, but now that people have experienced remote work, they don't really see why they should endure a one- or two-hour commute just to sit in front of their screen and attend meetings on Teams."

In relation to the expectations expressed by employees, it is worth asking ourselves whether the plans under consideration by companies are really fit for purpose and whether the virtues of spaces in terms of efficiency and performance have not been overestimated by top-management. In particular, "home-like" layouts with sofas, footstools, bar chairs and high stools without backrests, not only horrify ergonomists but it is also doubtful whether sofas, however comfortable they may be, football tables and nap rooms are enough to induce high-quality social functioning, if there has not also been thorough consideration of other parameters (such as management and work organization quality). This does not mean that these investments are not appreciated.

Renewed office design

According to some office designers, the specifications they are given seem to revolve mainly around three issues.

Meaning or identity anchoring: this is all about embodying the mission, the values and the professions of a company spatially. The office designer Korus gives the example of a family-owned industrial cleaning company whose general manager attaches great importance to the revaluation and recognition of this often-invisible profession and the people who work in it. She wanted the design of the head office to contribute to giving pride to the cleaning women (and men). In other companies, iconic objects manufactured by the company are highlighted. Reception halls, for example, or the layout will be in keeping with an architectural tradition symbolic of the company's history (e.g. Ferrero's head office in Italy organised around a *piazza*).

Spatial connection of individuals to the collective with areas for circulation also being made conducive to meetings and discussion or informal spaces where you can also work, with public squares, "agora" concepts and "tables d'hôte" meals. Spaces for disconnection from work where nature is reintroduced (gardens, terraces) are also envisaged.

The reconversion of spaces where increased remote working has freed up surface area, which can allow for the

creation of more ergonomic workstations, which are better distanced and allow for improved concentration. These spaces may also be given over to other services (concierge service, crèche, library, mini-market, sports or activity room, etc.).

Going further, one might imagine designing spaces according to the types of workers who use them. This is what Danone seems to have done at its new head office in Rueil-Malmaison. The spaces are designed according to three employee profiles: sedentary, sedentary with interactions and nomadic. Specific spaces and furniture have been designed for each profile. Employees register via a "smart office" application before coming to the office. Similarly, they reserve a time slot before eating at the company restaurant, which improves management of the flow of people and compliance with health standards.

Office design initiatives underway often call for a participatory approach where employee-ambassadors are invited to give their opinions on the design of spaces according to their needs and to serve as a communication channel with other staff to help provide information on the progress of work sites.

Large "hub" structures could however soon be overtaken by the more general rollout of remote work ("virtual first") and the creation of new, small-scale spaces that are spread geographically throughout the country, allowing for "à la carte" meetings and gatherings, as illustrated by the Dropbox project in the United States (see box). This type of concept is rooted in the "tribe" model: the company is organised in cells that combine with each other in an organic-type arrangement whereby each cell retains a start-up operation organisational structure, reducing the risks of bureaucratisation. Such an idea also finds inspiration in the observations that were made so frequently during the successive lockdowns i.e. that what we most missed were the 5 to 10 people we interact with every day in the course of our work, and perhaps also a second circle with whom we enjoy a chat at the coffee machine from time to time. The 200 or 2,000 others however have no real existence for us and do not contribute to our happiness at work in any way.

"Large "hub" structures could however soon be overtaken by the more general rollout of remote work ("virtual first") and the creation of new, small-scale spaces that are spread geographically throughout the country, allowing for "à la carte" meetings and gatherings."

Meanwhile, in Silicon Valley... The case of Dropbox

Dropbox is experimenting with a new form of work organisation that it is calling "virtual first"[92]: remote work is becoming the norm, but physical collaboration will be encouraged via collaborative spaces ("Dropbox studios") within existing premises (with long-term leases and a high concentration of employees) and other flexible spaces in other geographical areas created on demand. These spaces will be specifically designed for collaboration and community building and not used for individual work.

The company's premises are therefore expected to be more geographically distributed but also scalable so that each person can choose a studio according to their geographical location and the changing needs of their team. This new form of work organisation should maximise each worker's choices in terms of residence and workplace as well as furthering choice in terms of recruitment and balancing flexibility and human connection.

Third places

The third place, a concept first identified by Professor Ray Oldenburg[93], refers to spaces at the crossroads of private and professional spaces. In a company setting, these spaces are meant to be complementary to the company's office spaces and domestic spaces.

Third places dedicated to work activities can take several forms: telecentres (or remote working centres), neighbourhood or local offices, business hotels, business centres, satellite offices, incubators, co-working spaces, etc.

These spaces provide rooms (private or shared workstations, meeting, and seminar rooms) and equipment (high-speed Internet access, photocopiers, printers, video projectors, telephony, office supplies, etc.) that can be rented (by the half-day, day, week, month, year).

They offer a permanent or occasional workplace for freelancers, entrepreneurs, employees living nearby whose company is far away, or for nomadic workers who can thus put themselves in closer geographical proximity to their clients or places of work.

Third places offer several advantages compared to home-based remote work: optimal working conditions and above all a less isolating experience, while establishing clearer barriers between professional and private life. In addition, they encourage local authorities to regenerate areas that are a long way from large urban centres and enable companies to benefit from flexible and more moderate rental charges. The creation of

third places has therefore been supported by public authorities.

They also have disadvantages for employees however, which include some of those specific both to on-site work (concentration issues depending on the intensity of activities within the third place, less gains in transport time and time flexibility compared to home, depending on the location and opening hours of the third place) and working from home (no direct contact with team members and manager, risk of unsecured connection).

These new workspaces have been undergoing rapid development over recent years, with self-employed, entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs or employees of start-ups. Companies have also started contributing to the phenomenon by developing their own co-working spaces (corpoworking) or by looking into using other premises belonging to the company in "third-place" mode, closer to the homes of certain employees. While some large companies are considering corpoworking or third-party locations, others have rejected the idea out of hand: work is either at home or in the office. These companies do not want to incur the additional costs for third-party locations, especially if agreements with employees provide for a compensation allowance for the costs incurred by working from home. That said, where employee agreements do not specify how remote work compensation is to be used, then the employee may be free to use it as he or she sees fit (including reserving a space in a third-place location).

Remote working times

Remote working frequency

The frequency of remote working can be very variable: from 10% to 100% of working time, based on a fixed number of days per week or according to more flexible weekly, monthly or even half-yearly packages.

For example, the remote working agreement at the InVivo group includes a multitude of formulas: 3 fixed days per week; remote work 1 week in 2; 2 weeks in 4; alternation between 1 week of 3 days of remote work and 1 week of 2 days of remote work, etc.

While the formulas can be diverse, they generally meet the consensus that seems to have emerged early in 2021: working remotely 100% of the time is not optimal (OECD, 2020). Being 100% on site or 100% remote means missing out on the advantages of the combination of the two modes. After many years of on-site, then forced experimentation with from-home in 2020, the objective now is to find the right balance. It's up to each company to set the balance it finds most suitable and avoid going too far and then having to backtrack.

Chart 3.7 – Two remote worker profiles

Separators

- Fixed working hours similar to office hours
- Strict separation between work time / out of work time

> **Need a period of adaptation to negotiate clear rules with the people they live with**

Integrators

- Flexible working hours
- Overlapping with social time and atypical working hours

> **Better able to fit social time around work time but risk never disconnecting**

Two profiles of workers

Remote working, especially from home, offers a great deal of time flexibility which is not without its risks: it allows workers who don't have children to work whenever they want and those that do to work around family obligations. Remote working thus increases the number of atypical and "marginal" working hours: evenings, nights, weekends, etc.

Two distinct profiles of worker have been identified here: the "separators", who give themselves fixed schedules modelled on office hours in order to clearly separate professional and other activities (this cannot be done without negotiating with the people they live with and this takes time to implement); and the "integrators" who overlap roles and social times and are happy to work atypical schedules in order to be able to devote themselves to other family or personal activities during the day. As Jean-François Dortier points out: "For these people, remote working offers freedom... and the risk of never unplugging"[94].

CHAPTER 4

Management and the Challenges of Remote Working

According to all the experts we have interviewed or whose studies we have read, as well as the many companies we have questioned, the adaptation of managerial practices is key to the future of remote work.

Managerial styles were, however, already being acutely challenged prior to the Covid crisis. The issue is linked to ongoing digital transformations, the spread of so-called agile methods, the flattening of managerial hierarchies, the shortening of decision-making loops, and a focus on getting employees to take more initiative in driving projects forward. Until now, however, change in managerial practices has been very cautious. Many companies were previously discreetly turning a blind eye to a number of practices that, while in use, contrasted with the "official" discourse. In the biggest companies, some units were used as labs where experimentation in new styles could take place, while others remained very traditionally managed. The sudden transition to remote work on such a large scale and without the opportunity to lay the groundwork beforehand put everyone up against the wall, with two results: a) offering the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the managerial practices that were actually being used, with remote working playing a revelatory role highlighting trends either of management by means of hierarchical control or management whereby employees are asked to take more initiative and work independently; b) speeding up certain changes that were previously in embryonic form in organisations.

Hierarchical management as an obstacle to remote work

As we mentioned in Chapter 1, the slow pre-2020 take-up of remote work in France compared to other countries, was attributed to two factors: the fact that companies were not digitalizing as rapidly and, more importantly, management styles that were in many ways incompatible with the autonomy inherent to this new form of work organisation. Authors such as Michel Walrave and many others emphasise the importance of this second factor and of corporate

culture in general: "The obstacles to the introduction of remote work are not so much technological as they are organisational. Management style and methods are what is holding things up far more than the absence of the right tools"[95]. This observation is widely shared among French employees for whom French management is 'too conservative' and not adapted to remote working. But, as we saw in Chapter 1, with the example of Germany, this is not only specific to France.

Arnaud Scaillerez and Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay[96] point the reluctance from middle managers and a lack of knowledge of remote working practices by managers: on the one hand, they fear losing control over subordinates who are working remotely and, on the other, they fear that employees do not give as much of themselves to their work as when on site. According to these two authors, the French national culture seems to have a strong influence in this area. "The assumption is that you can only manage your team well when you're in close physical proximity to it", feeding a culture of 'presenteeism' as well as a certain 'macho' vision of work, according to which staying at home is the prerogative of housewives".

The reason why management style is such an obstacle to the wider adoption of remote work is that managers occupy a strategic position and are a key component in its implementation. Remote work forces them to adopt new management methods and move away from "command and control". Remote working requires the ability to delegate and adopt decentralised management. It forces managers to question the preconceived cultural attitude of thinking "if I don't see you working, it must mean you're not working". If such assumptions can't be overcome, it won't be possible to implement remote work.

"Remote working requires the ability to delegate and adopt decentralised management. It forces managers to question the preconceived cultural attitude "if I don't see you working, it must mean you're not working".

The convergence of new ways of working, managerial change and remote work

From the point of view of many companies engaged in the digital transformation of their processes and operating modes, old management styles are neither considered to be well-adapted to the flexibility and agility required by economic change (the VUCA world) nor to employee appetite for more independence. Changes must therefore be made to support 4.0 transformations, which are based on speed, capacity

New ways of working

- Focus on experimental approaches rather than planning.
- Base your analysis on facts/data rather than on opinions or preconceived ideas.
- Test without fear of failure, as failure of a hypothesis contributes to learning (commonly referred to as "right to error" or "test and learn").
- Observe usage to create customer value.
- Empower and give responsibility rather than control (subsidiarity rather than hierarchy).
- Collaborate rather than protect one's own turf

These considerations directly echo the four principles of the Agile Manifesto.

for initiative, adaptability, shared access to information, transversality and collaboration. To keep pace with such transformations, companies must move away from vertical management modes founded in authority and hierarchy to a transversal management mode which taps into employee motivation and support. Traditional management, centred on processes (planning, budgets, recruitment, evaluation, etc.), will have to move towards leadership focused on the company vision, the sharing of this vision with teams, motivation and the shared desire to face new challenges. Prior to the recent challenges thrown up by remote work, a desire already existed in these companies for a convergence between the transition to digital culture, the take-up of new ways of working (see box) and managerial transformation[97].

Very opportunely, in this scenario, digital technology becomes a "Trojan horse" for the changes management wishes to implement. Researcher Grégory Jémine[98] gives the example of an insurance company where the digital approach has been mobilised to respond to a desire to "modernise" the organisation and optimise the workplace. Five years before the expiry of leases for certain buildings, senior management began to link the relocation project to a broader strategic issue, which became the New Way of Working (NWoW) project. This was structured around three axes: Bricks (physical facilities and office buildings), Bytes (technical and digital environments) and Behaviour (support in adopting flexible forms of work, which embodies the "culture change" formulated at a strategic level). Since Jémine's article dates from 2017, the issue of remote working is not directly

addressed, but his analysis helps us discern very clearly the links between all the dimensions of this organisational reconfiguration: increase in employee independence, via new flexible work practices (including remote work) made possible by digital technology and the change in managerial style, designed to increase motivation at work, while being beneficial to the company (which has to move, is looking to reduce space used and wants to implement a "cultural change" to increase agility).

In some companies, however, remote working can also be seen as disrupting well-constructed mechanics that have been put into place. A manager at Renault, for example, expresses their concerns as follows: "We have initiated major transformational change to give initiative back to teams and build stronger groups. Given that a decision has been made to retain two or three days of remote work a week, we are worried about the impacts on teamwork between people who will regularly be working at some distance from each other for long periods."

Will remote work serve as a catalyst for the adoption and broader take-up of new ways of working, or on the contrary will it end up representing an obstacle to their implementation?

Un-management or better-management?

Managerial transformation can be thought about in two ways: un-management or, rather, reinforced support for the development of managers' skills.

Un-management refers to organisational models that aim to considerably reduce, or even eliminate, the place and role of middle management: this can range from the "*entreprise opale*" (see Laloux[99], companies based on responsiveness, encouragement of employees to be themselves in a professional setting and the passing on of as much initiative and independence as possible to employees) to the Getz and Carney's "liberated company"[100]. Liberated companies are often too easily equated with this "un-management". While Thierry Weil and Anne-Sophie Dubey[101] highlight a tendency to reduce managerial layers in these new organisational designs, they nevertheless recognise that modes of coordination are still required, even if they must have neither the taste, nor the colour of traditional management styles. This often translates into changes in job titles of managers – team leaders, servant leaders, organisers, captains, coaches – and the introduction of multi-layered organisational models (such as holacracy with its "roles" and "circles", or the Spotify model with its "squads", "tribes", "chapters" and "guilds").

In contrast to this trend, the pandemic period revealed a need for "better management" rather than less. Google had already shown the way a few years beforehand, moving from a discourse on the rejection of management to a very pragmatic approach focused on psychological safety[102] of employees and the role of managers in this[103]. Some even go as far as advocating "more management", without this translating into "more control": "the leader of a virtual team does not do anything different from a more traditional leader, he just does it with more intensity: increased advance planning with respect to work to be done, increased structuring of responsibilities, more formalisation in the distribution of tasks, more progress assessment and evaluation, more communication, more encouragement, more recognition, etc.[104]"

Remote onboarding

- Give attention to pre-boarding by sending out a welcome booklet (with organisation chart, an organization book and directory of key contacts), a detailed schedule for the first week with compulsory connection times, practical information (e.g.: login information, technical department contacts) and equipment (computer, headset). From the start: ensure that the employee has a properly installed workstation and that attention is given to their working environment (comfort, functioning of equipment, ergonomics of the workstation, possible problems)
- Designate a tutor/sponsor/reference person for each new recruit
- Organise a video conference to introduce the company and the main team members. Plan times for meeting with team members (one-to-one, virtual group games, virtual coffee breaks / afterwork drinks) to get to know each other and create links. This can also be an opportunity to discuss "unspoken" rules (e.g. dynamics within departments, interaction with superiors)
- Carry out regular follow-up sessions and ensure availability and give opportunity for new recruits to express their thoughts: set up regular check-ins at the beginning and end of the day to listen to how they feel and give them feedback
- Gradually introduce the main projects underway by giving a clear vision of project organisation (members involved, distribution of tasks, coordination rituals)
- Explain the main digital tools used and how they are used in the team (observation through screen sharing, tutorials, FAQs).

These practices will have a useful retroactive effect on the integration of new recruits, something which is often neglected.

In addition, certain practices need to be rethought when done remotely, particularly HR processes and communication (see Chapter 5 for this second point)

Major European-wide statistical surveys such as those carried out by Eurofound show that management quality is one of the main drivers of sustainable corporate performance and that the presence of local managers helps to improve working conditions. There is therefore a real return to be expected from investing in middle management, whether through traditional training, personal development, coaching, discussion forums or practice communities. It has often been the case that managers have not been included in discussions on work practices, which instead have been reserved for their supervisors and HR managers. Managers are also on the front line when it comes to organisational inconsistencies. Generally speaking, they felt a lack of support during the 2020 crisis.

Managing by trust

For remote work to be efficient, managers need to develop a relationship based on trust with subordinates, as opposed to the mistrust that was generally displayed towards them before 2020 with respect to their ability to work independently. This climate of mistrust was further reinforced by the attitude of unions, who saw remote work as a way for employers to increase workloads and break up work collectives.

The fact that everyone's hand was forced by the public health crisis and remote work became generalised seems to have been salvatory in this respect, since "76% of managers think that remote working during lockdown strengthened mutual trust between them and their colleagues[105]" and, at the same time, a majority of non-managerial employees say that the experience has helped increase their trust in their managers. The working environment under lockdown accelerated the move away from command-and-control towards a management style based on trust and delegation of responsibility. This seems to have become a priority for HRDs, who rank individual initiative and transparency as the first and second most important characteristics of new ways of working in post-crisis companies[106].

> "76% of managers think that remote working during lockdown strengthened mutual trust between them and their colleagues."

Other observers are more nuanced in their analysis. For example, Benoît Saint-Aubin at Orange says: "Mandatory remote work has highlighted two schools of management, one based on trust and the other based on control. Managers who were used to trusting their subordinates managed the transition to remote work without too much difficulty. Those who relied more on control reacted in two different ways. Some understood the need to give their employees

more autonomy. Others found it difficult to take the plunge and, on the contrary, further tightened controls... Fortunately, this last group are few in number (less than 10% of all managers). Others were completely overwhelmed by the situation and became unreachable. All in all, we sensed that managers, who have a fundamental role to play in organisational change, felt a great need for support."

> "Mandatory remote work has highlighted two schools of management, one based on trust and the other based on control."

No miraculous change, then, but an opportunity to be seized to reinforce best practices and change less successful ones. Employee expectations in this area remain high: a large majority would like to see profound changes in the way their company functions, with more collaborative and participative work, more flexibility in the management of working hours and above all management based on trust. And remote work is not necessarily an obstacle to its development. While many believe that trust requires physical contact, research shows that it can be built at a distance through regular interactions (see Chapter 5 on remote communication).

To conclude, let us recall some of the components of management by trust: clear framework and coherent rules, capacity for active listening, empathy, goodwill, organised discussion spaces, coaching, rituals and routines, recognition, and feedback. As Orange manager Bruno Haubtbout, explains: "When everyone had to start working from home overnight, there weren't any technical problems, because all the tools were available. However, from an organisational point of view, I was very concerned about the need for personal interaction. I therefore increased the number of team meetings and individual discussions, to the point where my employees pointed out that they were almost receiving more information than they would normally. During the second lockdown, I took a step back from the need to maintain contact at all costs, but I retained the principle of calling each team member individually once a week, outside of our work-related discussions, to check on them, find out how they were coping with working remotely, and detect hints regarding possible difficulties.[107]"

Managing by results

Remote working also necessitates the development of new systems for assessing and evaluating performance at work. These systems can no longer be based on task-based management via employee presenteeism. Rather it is becoming necessary first and foremost to assess results. All of this is hardly new, as management by objectives, which is very much part of British and US company culture, dates back to the work of Peter Drucker in the 1950s[108].

A form of control therefore persists, but it no longer applies to the way in which work activities are carried out, this becoming the responsibility of the remote worker or team, with, of course, managerial and company support (providing the necessary resources). Control thus only comes into play afterwards and only concerns what comes out from employees' activity.

As Eric, a telecoms company team leader, explains: "It's very important to define the expectations we have for each individual and for the team as a whole very early on. You must be as explicit as possible and, ideally, quantify clearly what has to be delivered. What I do is, I draw up a grid with all this information. I send the grid to all the team members by email. They can then react. Adjustments are made if necessary and the grid is sent again. This exercise allows everyone to get a clear idea of what's going on in the team, who is doing what, when the deliverables are expected and so on. Many people then organise their work according to this grid. I would also add that this grid contributes enormously to each member's accountability. By providing an overview, everyone feels more involved in what other team members are doing. If one member of the team doesn't keep to their commitments, it's easy to see who is responsible. Usually, when that happens, I don't even have to intervene. The

Meanwhile, in Silicon Valley... OKRs

OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) are a variation of management by objectives, implemented in the 1970s by Andy Grove, then CEO of Intel. Later, John Doerr[110], one of the main investors of Google, impressed by a conference given by Grove on the OKR method, introduced it to Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who implemented this process at Google. Page and Brin still attribute a large proportion of their success to this method. From then on, OKRs spread like wildfire in Californian tech companies.

OKRs favour a better focus on work, better transparency, and better alignment of teams with strategy. They are defined by levels: for the company, by team and individually. Evaluation of their achievement is carried out continuously. Each employee has a weekly one-hour meeting with his or her manager, which, by the way, limits the number of employees a manager can manage and therefore keeps the teams small. In addition to this individual meeting, there's also a weekly group meeting. This is a steering tool that helps in checking that projects are progressing, as well as being a tool for the continual adjustment of objectives in line with unforeseen events.

Management by OKRs, which makes control of time working obsolete, is considered to have enabled Californian tech companies to adapt rapidly to remote working.

other team members take care of it pretty quickly. [...] Indirectly the grid serves as a good way to make sure work moves forward.[109]"

Although this technique has existed for a long time, it still requires the development of several important managerial skills: adequate assessment of workload, the setting of detailed, ambitious and realistic quantitative and qualitative objectives (known as SMART objectives: standing for specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-bound – with a deadline), letting the employee work (no micro-management), monitoring the results with the regularity initially announced according to clear indicators that have been set in advance, understood and accepted and providing regular, constructive and stimulating feedback.

Nevertheless, this new management framework has its limits, since there's a risk of omitting certain important aspects of work performance, such as personal commitment and interpersonal skills, which are essential in remote work. Moreover, "when managers focus exclusively on results, they assess workers mainly in the short term (...) without worrying about their long-term career development"[111]. The 'result' is nothing other than a numerical indication of a general objective to be achieved. Focus can be placed solely on a technical or financial indicator to demonstrate artificially that the results comply with commitments. A judgment based on short-term results can, for example, lead to reactions that are counterproductive for the organisation, such as refusing to satisfy a customer complaint (which may require the customer to be reimbursed or incur costs) rather than building loyalty through a gesture of goodwill. This risks reducing work activity down to the individual employee's short term ability to provide a standardised product. The pressure to do so can be at the expense of the pleasure taken in doing one's work, which is also a factor in results.

> "Management by trust and management by objectives are the two keys to the successful transformation of remote management practices, and of management practices in general."

In summary, management by trust and management by objectives are the two keys to the successful transformation of remote management practices, and of management practices in general. They correspond to two types of support: firstly work-related support aimed at helping the employee to achieve work objectives and secondly psychological and emotional support relating to behaviours founded in relational and emotional intelligence (openness, empathy, receptivity, respect, recognition and... trust)[112]. Remote managers therefore need to develop "supervisory skills founded in relationship styles that are both 'cold' (formulating objectives, defining rules, etc.) and 'warm' (listening to the team, providing moral support, paying attention to the development of employees, etc.)"[113].

Meanwhile, in Silicon Valley... Towards a Head of Remote Work

GitLab is a fully remote company that currently has 1,300 employees, all of whom work remotely all the time. This allows GitLab to source an unlimited pool of talent, from all over the world, without geographical constraints. In Silicon Valley, engineers generally don't stay with the same company for more than 18 months, and the main driver for career advancement is changing employers. This means there are only two ways to retain employees: either offer them extremely generous compensation and benefits packages or offer them a completely different work model. GitLab takes this second approach and only aims to attract people who have made a personal choice to work remotely and are able to fully embrace this way of working.

To manage this particular organisational model, the company has created the position of Head of Remote Work. Darren Murph, who holds this position, underlines the fact that organising a fully remote company requires a lot of effort and resources. Two of his staff members are involved in all hiring that takes place to make sure that the profiles of new employees are fit for remote. He also facilitates staying-in-touch rituals and provides regular training on how to work remotely while staying connected with others. In particular, he places a great deal of importance on fully asynchronous communication, with clear and accessible written documentation for all work processes (see also Chapter 5).

This new managerial posture is well summarised in the following statement from Roger, a manager in a training company: "If I had to mention one thing that has changed since I've been managing remote workers, I'd say it's how I see my status as a manager. When I was managing staff who were located in the same office as me, in the same working space, I was often told that I had to keep a certain distance from my employees in order to maintain my status as their hierarchical superior to ensure my decisions were well-accepted. I could never do that now! I actually have to do the opposite. To make it work, I have to create closeness, and that means I, too, have to be more open so employees know who they're dealing with".[114]

Autonomy and control are complementary

As we can see, remote working is at a crossroads between autonomy and control, which can lead to challenging situations that can be difficult for both employees and managers. Control and autonomy are usually considered as antinomic concepts in organi-

sational theory, one linked to classical Taylorist theories, the other coming out of the Human Relations school. The two concepts can however be seen as complementary and implementing them simultaneously is proving to be essential to the effectiveness of relationships in remote working situations.

Potentially, autonomy and control can be pushed to their extremes through remote work. Some factors lead to less control (delegation of time management, management by objectives) and others reinforce it (increasing use of ICT, formalisation of tasks, individual evaluation). In fact, "a paradox exists whereby the more freedom employees are given, the more they are also controlled, through information and communication technologies[115]".

During lockdown for example, one of the most common Internet queries (up 1,705%) was "how do I monitor employees who are working from home?" and, according to a recent survey in France, 45% of employers "remote monitor" their employees in a variety of ways: monitoring computer activity (time tracking, browser history, mouse movements, recording keystrokes), verifying presence (monitoring log-in times, frequent audio conversations, instant messaging chats, multiple video conferences) and monitoring the workspace via webcam or screenshots[116]. A majority of employees who are monitored remotely wish they weren't and point to the negative effects of this conservative managerial practice: a source of stress that "undermines trust". Opinions are divided on the subject, however, since 41% of the respondents also believe that this remote monitoring increases managerial awareness of work done, meaning overtime is counted, facilitates error detection, defuses conflict situations and reduces states of de-motivation and even psycho-social risks.

The ILO report nevertheless strongly advises against the use of these monitoring tools and software, which are considered intrusive, harmful to the establishment of a relationship of trust and questionable in ethical terms. In any case, it stresses that these tools should not "replace results-based management methods, nor exempt the employer from specifying exactly which tasks workers must perform, expected results and the deadlines to be met". In short, digital monitoring tools are seen as a sign of management failure.

Going back to the workplace: what's in it for managers?

After 100% on-site work and full-time remote working due to Covid-19, now comes the era of "hybrid work", a term on everyone's lips at the start of summer 2021 but whose substance is still rather vague. While a consensus has been established at around 2 to 3 days of remote work per week, it remains to be seen who will come in, when and, in particular, to do what. There's a high risk of disappointment if you have to drive for 30 minutes to sit in an open plan office and put your

headphones on in order to cut yourself off from the ambient noise (see Chapter 1, Ubisoft case), or even worse, to attend an online meeting: "I was super excited to come back in but what a disappointment. I went around the departments, and there were a few people around expressing ultra-optimistic or ultra-pessimistic attitudes. I looked around in vain for my colleagues and my manager and ended up receiving notice of a remote meeting by email. At that point I asked myself: Why did I bother to come?"[117]

> "Going back in 'together' is a critical event and, like a family reunion, preparation is vital."

For David Autissier[118], a researcher specialising in the transformation of organisations and management, "going back in 'together' is a critical event and, like a family reunion, preparation is vital". Managers are obviously on the front line and must "learn to organize, manage and lead effective formats for face-to-face group work, collective intelligence workshops and synchronization and alignment meetings". Once again, there's a delicate balance to be found in bringing meaning, quality of lifework and performance together, and its success depends on support given to managers in this change in attitude and practices.

David Autissier particularly encourages managers to script team time during the 'day in'and identifies 4 sequences depending on whether they take place in a group or in very small groups and in a formal or informal way.

These 4 sequences follow one another in order (as indicated by the black arrows on the opposite diagram):

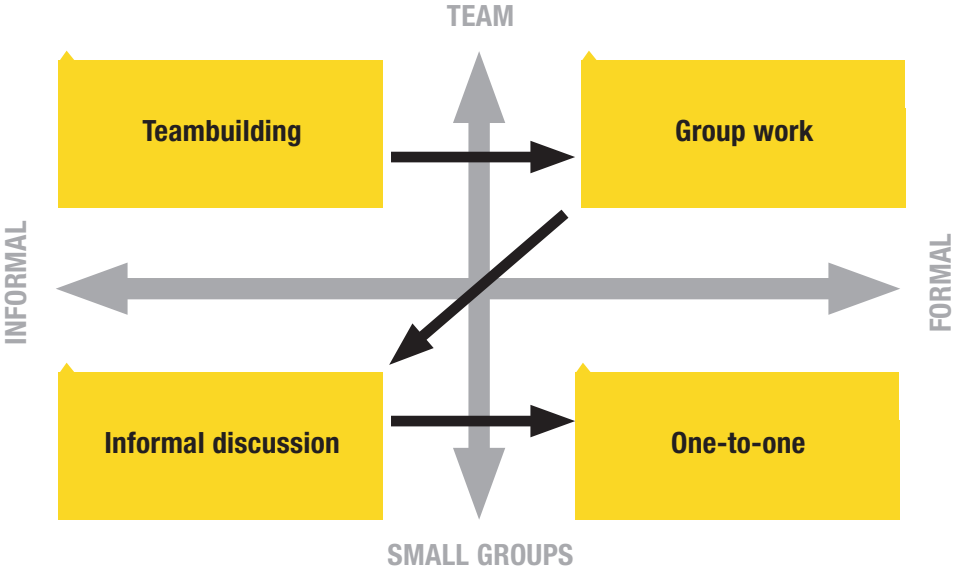
- Teambuilding exercises to recreate relationships and involvement (ice-breakers, identification of pain points, continuous improvement of work practices)
- Group work: work organisation (who does what, how, when and with what).
- Free and informal discussion to foster solidarity and togetherness.
- Face-to-face, to coordinate group work in an ad hoc manner.

The author recommends weekly, bi-monthly, monthly or quarterly sequences. Regularity is indeed important so that these rituals become a guarantee of transparency and predictability to foster trust between managers and employees.

***

In the end, mandatory home working as practiced during the public health crisis seems to have had the effect of highlighting existing managerial practices more than overturning them, whether for companies

Chart 4.1 - Day in: Scripting face-to-face meetings when back into office



Source: Autissier, David. "Day In: The necessary scripting of face-to-face days in companies". *Forbes*, May 12, 2021, https://www.forbes.fr/management/day-in-la-necessaire-scenarisation-des-jours-en-presentiel-dans-les-entreprises/

practicing a vertical management style based on "command-and-control" or those who applied or aspired to a style more based on trust and employee autonomy. As a result, the ways in which from-home is implemented can vary greatly from one company to another, from situations where the remote worker has total autonomy and is judged solely on results – like a freelancer – to situations comporting intense supervision made possible by ICTs.

The most difficult challenge companies are facing is no doubt how to support managers who are dealing with this set of changes. Both local managers and managers of managers are finding the situation demanding and asking for help: 1 in 3 managers admit to having difficulties in adapting their management style to remote working.

CHAPTER 5

Digital Tools and Remote Communication

Digital tools are what make remote work possible. However, the use we make of them, individually and collectively, remains quite limited. Behaviours don't necessarily develop at the same rate as the work environment. In most cases, organisations are happy to simply go on reproducing pre-existing organisational and communication processes with these tools. The functionalities of the tools are constantly being enriched but cultural habits hold us back and building new collective usage norms takes time. How can these new norms be put into place and what prior skills need to be developed to do so?

The delicate art of remote togetherness

How to replace coffee machine conversations?

While digital tools are fundamental in reducing the physical separation inherent to remote working, they don't seem to be able to prevent the feeling of psychological separation that anyone who works remotely seems to experience. These tools therefore seem unlikely to entirely replace the "face-to-face discussions that are essential for managing certain work activities and for maintaining or developing affinity and close relationships (especially with colleagues)"[119]. Relationships established within the framework of remote working remain mainly formal for the time being.

According to one study, 70% of the information brought to the attention of employees comes through unplanned and informal exchanges. Information not provided through official communication channels circulates in the corridors in one way or another. These informal exchanges also offer a freer, less restrictive, or more reassuring communication context for those who are reluctant to speak in meetings. They also provide interruptions that diversify the workday and break the routine and are the source of a form of comfort that only human contact can provide. This format for exchange is often favoured, both by superiors and peers, as a way of showing reco-

gnition to workers who are committed and to work well done. These spontaneous chats also enables the exchange of information, thoughts and knowledge in an impromptu manner, including with people whose roles don't necessarily match up with the information shared. These informal discussions build the "strength of weak ties" as highlighted by Mark Granovetter[120] and help break down organisational barriers between distinct units.

How can hallway and coffee machine conversations be replaced when colleagues work from home[121]? Indeed, are they even replaceable? Is the hope of recreating both a sense of togetherness and mutual support, spontaneity, and social rituals, futile in a purely virtual world?

Numerous studies show that it is not so much physical distance that matters as psychological distance[122]. Since the beginning of the 1970s, we have seen "a questioning of classical conceptions of social groups as necessarily implying co-presence and spatial proximity between members[123]" in favour of a "socio-cognitive" one. A feeling of togetherness can indeed develop at a distance if the identity and communication processes are sufficiently solid. "Employees interviewed specify that daily presence in a team does not determine the quality of interactions. Lack of time or focus on work tasks does not always allow for informal and personal information exchange. Remote interactions using ICTS allow us to filter the content of exchanges (exchange of photographs, use of instant messaging to share opinions, etc.)". As Marc, a team leader in a multimedia company, reports: "In my opinion, it's very important to use technologies such as forums and blogs to foster discussion and establish social relationships. For example, at our company, we use electronic messaging to facilitate work. However, I know that it's mostly used by my employees for personal communication and sharing jokes. But I don't mind. On the contrary, it helps them get to know each other better, and that's a great thing for work productivity. In the end, it creates cohesion and a better team spirit, and everyone wins![124]" David Bchiri, Director of Fabernovel USA and based in Silicon Valley, says about Tandem, a company that provides virtual meeting and collaboration spaces: "Unlike Zoom, meetings are not by appointment. The user chooses one of the virtual rooms (an office, the cafeteria, etc.) and meetings happen randomly as other people arrive in the same room, according to the principle of serendipity, which is one of the charms of office life. This software is starting to find its market, especially in creative-related jobs."

> "Numerous studies show that it is not so much physical distance that matters as psychological distance."

However, another research is more nuanced. "While psychological proximity can compensate for geographical distance, physical proximity and the frequentation of

a common territory are still powerful drivers to build social ties. However, once it has been established, this bond can then be maintained through virtual exchange.[125]" Psychological separation is therefore less acute among people who are already used to working or communicating with each other and who share cognitive, educational and social similarities.

The main pitfalls are thought to be the over-formalisation of informal exchanges, which obviously deprives them of much of their charm. On the contrary, a respectful feeling of togetherness is established on the basis of attention, not necessarily long but dense and sincere, based on listening, intelligence and ethos. The challenge is not so much to replace coffee machine conversations as to create the right conditions for respectful and authentic exchanges that recreate lost emotional togetherness.

Lost in Zoom: limitations and opportunities of video conferencing

Emotional and psychological distance is not the only problem however. The mere presence of the body plays an essential role in interpersonal communication, a good part of which works through gestures, eye contact, facial expressions and so on, all of which help us to interpret the message or the reaction of the person we're talking to. Video conferencing tools, which were very widely adopted in 2020 for their ease of use, do not seem to be of much help here, since 67% of remote workers say they have difficulty reading body language in online meetings[126]. Our attention gets dispersed across a mosaic of faces. Faces close-up are also said to activate our sympathetic nervous system in relation to the fight or flight response, according to cyberpsychology professor Andrew Franklin[127]. Furthermore, staring at the gallery of faces rather than the camera creates a sense of generalised "gaze avoidance", which again gives an impression of defensiveness or inattentiveness. Research also shows that "video is more appropriate for transmitting images of the work itself than images of participants"[128], the focus on faces representing a risk of distraction leading to lessened efficiency. Adding vocal messages, texts, and possibly drawings, however, helps us reproduce the richness of direct communication.

In addition to the various technical problems related to a bad connection (dysfunctional link, screen freeze, sudden disconnection), which is the cause of high levels of technostress for 83% of remote workers[129], the latency and reaction time in turning on the microphone kill the spontaneity of communication. This is because while silences create a natural rhythm in face-to-face conversations, they generate anxiety and discomfort during remote communication.

Lastly, seeing one's own face on screen is disturbing for many people. This reflection of ourselves forces awareness of our own behaviour, including and perhaps especially when we speak, exerting cognitive overload coupled with a form of social

pressure that proves exhausting. Remote workers find that video conferencing makes them more anxious than phone calls and face-to-face. These tools make it necessary to be more concentrated and attentive to decipher new communication codes that we have not yet mastered, thus generating a form of fatigue that is unique to them[130].

There are signs of change, however, showing that digital tools can, despite or because of their limitations, positively modify certain work practices. The poor quality of meetings, for example, has long since been a common complaint in many organisations. The shortcomings inherent to video conferencing have sped up efforts towards creating better quality meetings: shorter meetings, better framed by an agenda sent in advance, with a limited number of points to be dealt with, better preparation from participants (no one wanting to spend too much time on the activity) and documented at the end by a record of decisions made. These best practices will also have a positive impact on in-person meetings.

However, there are a few drawbacks, which are inherent to remote meetings. When working remotely, the need for coordination leads to even more meetings than when on site. People are more reluctant not to participate in order to maintain visibility in their professional environment and to glean information, even if they know that their presence is not directly useful. Sources of distraction and multi-tasking are even more of an obstacle than in-person, since people can turn off their camera without embarrassment.

“When working remotely, the need for coordination leads to even more meetings than when on site.”

Video conferencing also changes public speaking. Someone who is very comfortable in person may lose their bearings on video. Movements and gestures may no longer be visible. His gaze doesn’t meet anyone else. His voice may lose its impact and his own image may disturb him, not to mention that his timing needs to be reviewed. Being “on television” every day is not natural for us all. What used to be a realm reserved for senior management or spokespersons is becoming a daily exercise for many. However, tolerance of bad video speaking gradually tails off and it is becoming vital to develop the skill. Much is to be gained for companies by training their management in this new exercise, which is set to become even more complex because of the hybrid mode of meetings whereby some will attend remotely and others in person. However, it has also been noted that some shy people or those less comfortable speaking in person are taking advantage of the chat mode in video conferencing to express themselves more than they did previously.

Mastering video conferencing: example from an account from an executive producer at Ubisoft[131]

"Every 2, 4 or 6 weeks, I speak live to the 700 or 800 people who are working on the project at any given time. To make this as close to a live performance as possible, I stand in front of the camera and have lots of members of my team participate. Before Covid, people watched these videos standing up, in rooms at the company's different sites. Since Covid hit, they've watched from home. This doesn't make much difference though. These presentations are very interactive. Anyone can ask questions and I answer them live.

This kind of exercise requires a perfect command of the communication tool. You have to take the time to get your hands dirty, to really get to know the tool you're using and find out exactly what you can and want to do with the options you have. For example, you need to decide in advance whether people will be able to express themselves anonymously or not, how to react if someone asks a question that is biased or even contrary to company policy, etc. Just as every great boss must, at some point in their career, learn to express themselves on a TV set by mastering makeup and body language, so too, if you have to manage teams remotely, you need to know the tool you're using inside and out and be able to pause the video, restart it, throw someone out, etc."

What if asynchronous communication was the real springboard to productivity?

Whereassynchronouscommunicationtakes place in real time (conversations are live and instantaneous), asynchronous communication takes place off-line. It consists in sending a message without waiting for an immediate response.

The development and improvement of regular mail over time gradually allowed more and more interactions, both professional and private, to be carried out asynchronously. Today, they have become daily with the digital successor to postal: e-mail. Exchanges by e-mail may even represent a large proportion of working time: employees have, in some surveys, been reported to spend as much as 80% of their working day communicating with colleagues by e-mail[132]. This figure was corroborated in a survey conducted in 2016 among 400 American executives who stated that they spent 6 hours a day on their inbox, or more than 30 hours a week[133]. These

Chart 5.1 - Asynchronous communication could be the key to remote productivity

Modes of synchronous communication

- Face-to-face (in person)
- Telephone
- Audio and video conferencing
- Chat
- Etc.

Modes of asynchronous communication

- Postal mail
- Email
- Texting
- Forums, blogs, wikis, file-sharing platforms
- Project management and coordination tools
- Etc.

asynchronous communications are very extensive, even between people who are co-located (same floor, even same open plan office). Asynchronous communication tools include postal mail, email, texting, forums, blogs, wikis, document sharing platforms, and project management and coordination tools. There is a proliferation of ever-more-sophisticated tools that enable asynchronous communication. However, it should be noted that some asynchronous tools can be used in a quasi-synchronous way depending on response times: these can be very short for emails or text messages among hyper-connected people. A Yahoo Labs study conducted in 2015 revealed that the average response time for emails was only 2 minutes.[134]

Despite this however, synchronous communication is still considered to be the "normal" mode of communication in business. Most often it takes the form of face-to-face meetings (appointments and physical meetings) but it can also be mediated using technical tools such as the telephone, chat rooms and audio and video conferencing, the use of which rocketed in 2020.

It's important to take a step back to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of these two practices and understand how each of them impacts work activities differently.

Chart 5.2 - Overview of the advantages and disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous communication

	Synchronous communication	Asynchronous communication
Advantages	- Rapidity / instantaneous - Enriched communication (vocal + visual + context) - Interactions - Crisis situations - Complex or delicate situations (confidential discussions)	- Teams spread around entire planet - High quality of messages thanks to reflection time - Assimilation, memorisation - Feeling of autonomy - Marries well with social time - Higher levels of concentration leading to greater productivity - Help in the structuring of organisational processes via the planning of exchanges
Disadvantages	- Responses too rapid, lack of reflection - Stress generated by in-person interaction - Constant interruptions (low concentration levels)	- Latency between exchanges (risks of misunderstandings) - Risk of over-connection (constant self-interruptions)

Speed is the main advantage of synchronous communications based on instantaneous exchange. However, they can be inefficient, and their speed may come at the expense of quality. The persons you are talking to may be pushed to answer immediately, not always taking the time to think deeply about their answer, especially since they are often busy with other tasks and concerns. Furthermore, some people tend to lose their nerve when faced with a demand for an immediate response or when placed in the spotlight (as in a video). For example, DOIST founder and CEO Amir Salihefendic (see box) sees synchronous communication as "leading to lower quality discussions and suboptimal solutions. When you have to respond immediately, you don't have time to think deeply about the key issues or respond in depth.[135]"

Synchronous communications also offer an undeniable richness. In addition to words, the speaker can benefit from a more subtle level of understanding through the voice (intonation, rate and pitch) and body (posture, gestures, facial expressions). These aspects can also come through in video conferencing but they are attenuated or distorted and therefore more difficult to decipher (see "Lost in Zoom" above). Phone calls and audio conferences mean vocal subtleties are retained without the body language, while chat represents the most scaled-down form of synchronous communication.

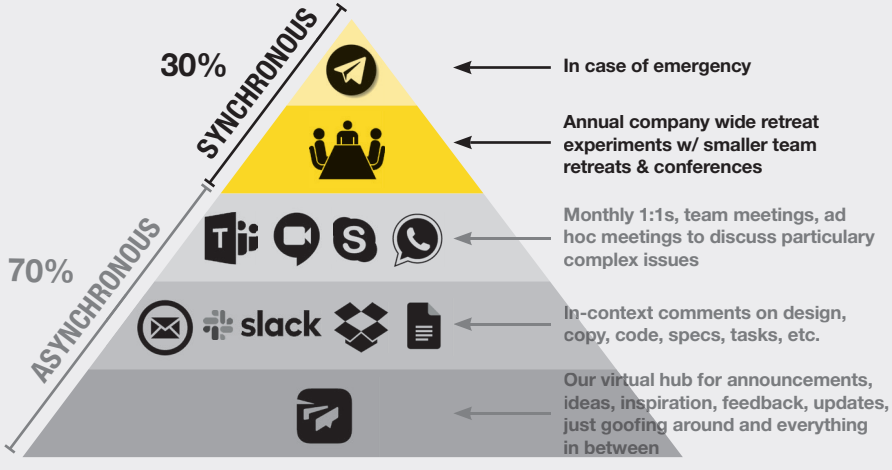
In addition to this degressive richness of communication depending on the tools used, synchronous communication comprises the major pitfall of constant interruptions. A famous study on interruptions at work[136] revealed that employees try to compensate for the time lost by these interruptions by trying to work faster, which leads to increased stress, frustration and wasted time and effort. Synchronous communication has a negative impact on tasks that require concentration, which in turn affects quality of work. Working from home is one way of experiencing the greater satisfaction of a quiet, uninterrupted work environment.

Asynchronous communication also has its dark side. At first glance, async may seem counterproductive. It is still easier to go and see your manager or colleague directly if you want to get information or collaborate. A slow asynchronous response may seem insurmountable to some, especially since it may be perceived as representing a lack of commitment (procrastination) or rudeness (indifference, even contempt). Some requests also require a quick response which, in the context of asynchronous communication, can lead to a form of over-connection, which is also harmful to quality of work and mental health. Asynchronous communication tools such as e-mail or texting are then transformed into quasi-synchronous communication tools, since workers are constantly checking their inboxes. The difference is that these

DOIST and asynchronous communication

DOIST[137], a fully remote company since its creation, mainly uses asynchronous communication. It represents 70% of its internal communication (via its Twist tool but also Github and Paper). The remaining 30% is synchronous and 25% of this is done remotely (via Zoom, Appear.in or Google Meet) and only 5% through physical meetings (including annual retreats that allow for informal exchange and strengthen team cohesion as well as a practice whereby the company finances plane tickets encouraging new recruits to spend a week with a team member).

CEO and founder Amir Salihefendic says, "Remote working is the future, but I believe that asynchronous communication is an even more important factor in team productivity, whether they are remote working or not." It is also a key component of the DOIST employer brand: "In our opinion, asynchronous culture is one of the main reasons why most of the employees Doist has hired in the last 5 years are still loyal to the company. Our retention rate is over 90% – much higher than the tech industry as a whole. For example, even a company like Google – with its legendary campuses packed with perks ranging from free meals to free haircuts – doesn't exceed 1.1 years. The freedom to work anywhere, anytime far outweighs those kinds of interesting, even fun, but ultimately secondary benefits, and it costs our company zero dollars."



practices are partly out of choice and not undergone. However, they are no less harmful when they represent a form of pathological cyberaddiction.

Asynchronous communication does also have many advantages, though. First of all, it makes it possible to work remotely on a global scale, removing the spatial (geographical location) and temporal (time zones) constraints which employees, suppliers, subcontractors and customers may be subject to (provided that a certain response time is tolerated).

Unlike synchronous communication, asynchronous also gives the sender time to formulate a higher quality message (thoughtful, coherent, exhaustive, brief), while helping the receiver to assimilate the information transmitted.

Asynchronous communication is also more respectful of each person's time constraints and need for deep concentration and can thus increase the employee's sense of autonomy, as Amir Salihefendic testifies: "In an asynchronous environment, there are no defined working hours. Employees have almost total control over how they structure their workday based on their lifestyle, biological rhythms and responsibilities (such as childcare!). Some Doisters work nights because it's more convenient for them. I spend an hour with my son every morning, and no one in my asynchronous organisation notices." Asynchronous promotes high quality work in cognitive tasks such as coding, writing, designing, strategizing and problem solving: "Employees no longer have to be on the lookout for new messages, so they can schedule uninterrupted time for work that adds value to your organisation. When they're done, they can then process their messages in batches, 1-3 times a day, rather than switching back and forth between work and messages, and messages and meetings."

"Asynchronous communication is more respectful of each person's time constraints and need for deep concentration and can thus increase the employee's sense of autonomy."

Finally, asynchronous communication encourages the structuring of organisational processes, as Amir Salihefendic again explains: "When last-minute requests, ASAP, etc., are not an option, careful planning is essential. Everyone learns to plan their workloads and collaborations very carefully and allows time for their colleagues to read and respond to their requests. Collaborations are less stressful, and the work is ultimately of higher quality."

However, asynchronous communication cannot totally supplant synchronous communication, which is still necessary in certain cases, such as when dealing with a crisis situation requiring immediate attention, maintaining informal relationships and group cohesion, dealing with a complex and ambiguous situation with many unknown elements or points of strict confidentiality,

providing constructive feedback (especially when it is negative), taking the 'pulse' of one's team and watching out for signs of psycho-social risks. Outside of these specific situations, synchronous communication is not always justified.

In fact, we can see that there is some confusion in the way synchronous and asynchronous media are used. Many young (and not so young) people talk synchronously by text and e-mail (asynchronous media) which they prefer to the telephone (synchronous media). On the other hand, synchronous media are used in a planned mode (telephone appointments for example) and people at work are less and less tolerant of unexpected telephone calls, all the more so if they know little or nothing about the people calling them.

The proportion of synchronous and asynchronous communication, as well as the regularity of each, depends above all on the needs of employees, as this team leader explains: "It's very difficult to know the best time to have a face-to-face meeting. It's often a matter of feeling. There are no hard and fast rules. My experience is that you have to be careful and sensitive to your employees' needs. (...) If I feel that I'm starting to lose them or if I start to feel that they're drifting away, I immediately take steps to call a face-to-face team meeting. Often, I realise this during a conference call. I sense that the dynamic has changed and that people seem less interested, less engaged.[138]"

As Amir Salihefendic points out, "The shift from synchronous to asynchronous communication doesn't happen overnight. It requires a profound change in the organisation's tools, processes, habits and culture."

Digital tools and knowledge capitalisation

Digital tools for collaboration and sharing also open up the possibility of an unprecedented capitalisation of information and knowledge with the prospect of creating an organization more open to learning.

These tools can, among other things, give all employees access to a document base, which has multiple advantages for both remote and in-person work. These include making asynchronous work more fluid, reducing micro-interruptions caused by repetitive questions, avoiding wasting time and energy repeating the same pieces of information, facilitating the integration of new recruits (on-boarding) and being inclusive of all employees and all viewpoints.

The idea of better documenting all company processes in the context of remote working has both detractors and advocates. The detractors believe that it wastes time and that this documentation is always outdated and difficult to find. Advocates, like the company GitLab (see box), believe that it is essential to develop a culture of written documentation in the context of remote work. We note, for example, that at Renault,

Meanwhile, in Silicon Valley... GitLab[139] and the culture of documentation

Gitlab, a business software development company that operates in "full remote", recommends documenting everything (including company culture) in accessible and regularly updated "manuals". With this model, companies can use digital tools to develop a real culture of writing, which encourages employee self-responsibility and the on-boarding of new recruits.

Taking this to its logical conclusion, GitLab even recommends that meetings be optional. In fact, in a well-understood documentation culture, employees can participate asynchronously upstream, since there is a clear agenda that everyone contributes to building (participative agenda), and then access the decisions made downstream thanks to the documented minutes. It is then up to the employees to arbitrate autonomously between the meetings they consider essential and the rest.

in a survey conducted at the end of the first lockdown on 6,000 employees in several countries where the group has a presence, "access to information" was ranked first of "the most important elements needed for good, efficient remote work".

"While written documentation may seem to waste time in the short term, it saves time in the long term and fosters a culture of empowerment through participation and self-learning, which consists of actively seeking information rather than passively relying on colleagues or superiors."

While written documentation may seem to waste time in the short term, it saves time in the long term and fosters a culture of empowerment through participation (since everyone contributes to it) and self-learning, which consists of actively seeking information rather than passively relying on colleagues or superiors. "We see the novice becoming more active in interaction, triggering more feedback, seeking to inform or be evaluated more systematically. In short, even if they are not necessarily effective from a performance standpoint, their work is enriched.[140]"

Management has a key role to play in the development of these new practices. To encourage them, it must set aside time for this task, set an example by participating in

it and give recognition to those who take part. Above all however, it must formalise a clear, unified, and structured methodology to make the aggregated information accessible and readable.

The challenge here is to prevent the sort of informational chaos that disrupts the company's organisational memory and results in the opposite of the desired effect. A new profession/role may be introduced to manage such a system: that of "document manager", who is responsible for structuring this mass of information to enable easy navigation and intelligent participation. This is another of those new roles, with an overlap with GitLab's Head of Remote Work (see p.92), one of whose responsibilities is to ensure that documentation exists and is accessible.

Management must also take steps to help workers develop new communication skills to ensure that written documents are both precise and concise as, for example, Jeff Bezos designed the "press release" at Amazon, a technique to communicate any new idea. Unlike oral communication, written communication doesn't benefit from the non-verbal contextual environment that helps give meaning to information provided. One of the keys, then, to written communication is to know how to resituate the context of information, while remaining brief.

Digital workplace

There seems to be a strong demand for digital tools among French employees. According to a study by Opinion Way for Microsoft France[141] (to be interpreted with caution), 68% of them express the wish that these tools be further developed in their sector of activity and 57% believe that there are few or not enough tools. Working people aged 18 to 24 are the most in demand for digital tools (77%), but even among working people aged 50 and over, demand remains strong (61%). At Orange, in a survey of 63,000 employees in the summer of 2020, 60% of respondents asked for "more innovative, efficient, integrated digital tools". However, usage is not developing at the same rate. A new conception of digital tools in companies could help to move usage forward, with the emergence of so-called "Digital Workplace" solutions.

Great promises but little development in digital practices

According to a survey by Lecko in 2021[142], messaging remains the preferred remote working tool (66%), ahead of video conferencing (47%) and external instant messaging (WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.). Internal collaborative spaces within the company (document spaces, team messaging, corporate social networks) rank fourth (32% of respondents) and their use remains stable, whereas we might have imagined that we

The e-mail police: example from an executive producer at Ubisoft[145]

"I spend a lot of time on data management, especially e-mail traffic. Up to a certain point, no one seemed to care about it. A person who was going on vacation would send an e-mail to a hundred people. Someone who wanted to change a line of code would ask 120 engineers where the line was. The avalanche of mails was so great that everyone went into 'self-defence' mode and almost no one read their e-mails anymore. Even sorting them and moving them to trash could take an hour or two a day.

So I decided to set up a "mail police". It is now forbidden to post a message on a mailing list if you're not sure that it is of interest to all its members. To be sure, you must systematically ask the owner of the list, i.e. the manager of the team in question, for prior authorisation. For example, if I am looking for the location of line of code 27B, instead of bothering the thirty members of a team, I start by asking the manager, with three possible scenarios: he knows the answer and gives it to me; he doesn't know it but knows who I can ask; he doesn't know who I can ask and, in this case only, I am allowed to send my message to the whole list. This measure, which may seem anecdotal, has two major advantages. It drastically reduces the volume of spam and it encourages managers to remain managers, which means, among other things, ensuring that their teams communicate properly and work efficiently."

would see an increase here. E-mail thus remains "the backbone of organisational communication"[143], because it favours asynchronous communication, which is less intrusive for employees (see above).

If email remains the dominant tool for professional collaboration, why look elsewhere? The answer seems obvious in view of other surveys and polls that highlight the information overload caused by e-mail: "The loss of time due to the use of e-mail (cluttering of inboxes, useless e-mails, spam) is reported to cost the employer up to $10,000 per employee per year.[144]"

The concentration on usage of e-mail can be explained by the fact that the fragmentation of activity between multiple applications creates counterproductive effects: 69% of employees say they spend up to 1 hour a day juggling between different applications, the equivalent of 32 days a year; 68% can navigate between a dozen applications in 1 hour and 31% say that this leads them to lose their train of thought[146].

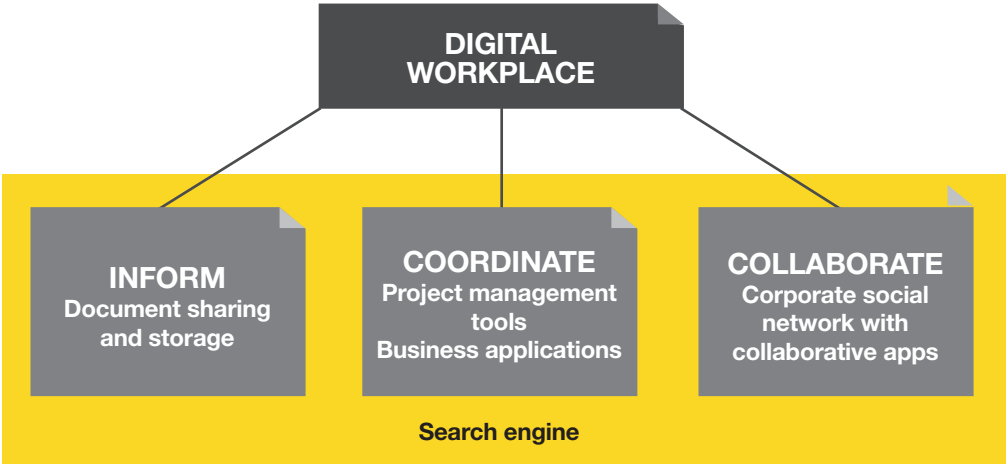
> "69% of employees say they spend up to 1 hour a day juggling between different applications."

A digital ecosystem of tools

A solution has now arisen to prevent the pitfalls of working by e-mail and bouncing between tools: the digital workplace. In theory, a digital workplace is a digital work environment that allows an individual to access all the information and contacts he needs to work. It is a platform interconnecting a multitude of tools that facilitate information, coordination, and collaboration, both for productive and user-friendly purposes.

Where a corporate portal only gives access to different tools without them necessarily being interconnected, a digital workplace integrates and combines elements for storing and sharing documents (working documents, procedures, monitoring tools, organisation chart, directory, training catalogue, webinars and e-learning tools, etc.) within a single coherent ecosystem: management tools, project management tools and business applications (calendars and schedules, Gantt, Kanban, mindmap, brainstorming tools, budgets, dashboards, ERP, HR systems, CRM, accounting software, etc.), a corporate social network enriched with collaborative applications that encourage interaction and collaborative work with colleagues, superiors and other departments, both formally and informally (wall for posts, chat, forums, group function, video and audio conferencing tool, ideas box and co-creativity platforms / communities of practice, polling tools, etc.) and a search engine for browsing the various documents stored, regardless of the media used (text, sound, image).

Chart 5.3 - A digital workplace: what for?



On paper, the digital workplace offers multiple advantages. It helps federate the informational and application diversity of an organisation on a common work platform, where currently collaborative tools and data are fragmented. Beyond organisational efficiency, this integration can also bring financial gains by reducing the number of licenses contracted. It also helps store the organisational memory and group all knowledge in a single space while facilitating and fluidifying information search. Such a platform also facilitates a structured and spontaneous approach to knowledge capitalisation and transfer. Finally, it breaks down organisational barriers (e.g. between teams / departments) thanks to a transversal distribution of information, supports the introduction of more agile and collaborative work methods, promotes team cohesion and a sense of belonging in spite of taking place in a remote environment, facilitates the integration of new recruits remotely and helps foster informal interpersonal relations (serious and fun games / competitions, random creation of discussion subgroups according to availability). In short, it is presented as a miracle solution, capable of solving all the problems associated with remote work.

The limitations of the digital workplace

Although the idea is fast gaining traction, platform developers still lack overall maturity: collaborative tools are constantly being developed and enriched, but for the moment they are not integrated into a unified space connecting them together. Thus, even though Microsoft's Office 365 (soon to be complemented by Viva, which is presented as a complete continuum enabling the creation of the digital workplace) and Gsuite (now Google Workplace) allow for great advances and proposals abound, the fully integrated digital workplace does not yet exist as a packaged solution.

> "The fully integrated digital workplace does not yet exist as a packaged solution."

To preserve the necessarily changing aspect of these tools in terms of technologies and uses, one solution might be not to package a ready-made solution but to develop a "marketplace" integrating a multitude of applications that can be enriched according to new proposals from developers according to identified organisational and user needs, while maintaining an ergonomic interface thanks to a clear architecture. The Jalios platform is experimenting with an in-between approach, offering a base of tools to which other competing tools (such as those from Microsoft or Google) can be added[147].

But the limitations don't only come from developers. A study conducted by The Oxford Group[148] reveals that companies are struggling to adapt to a digital work

environment, first and foremost because senior managers lack digital skills. While 96% of respondents said it was the responsibility of senior managers to drive the adoption of new technologies, only a third of these managers feel well-enough prepared to lead these transformations. However, 81% of workers think it's important for members of senior management to recognize that they don't have to hold top-level digital expertise. First and foremost, senior management needs to lead by example, acquiring new skills and more importantly creating the conditions for a culture of continuous, incremental learning.

This goal still seems far away. A 2017 European Commission[149] study found that at that time, 88% of organizations had not taken any steps to address their employees' lack of digital skills, even as more and more organizations invested in digital tools. Many companies seem to assume that making tools available is enough to ensure appropriation and optimal use, ignoring specific digital skills encompassing both technical skills and also cognitive, social and emotional skills that take a long time to acquire. Indeed, it's not only a question of operating a range of devices and applications, but also knowing how to find and share information, communicate, and collaborate in an efficient and courteous way and learn and adapt constantly to technological change, etc. Digital natives are also concerned here. Growing up with digital technologies does not automatically mean that you know how to use them adequately and efficiently in a professional context.

On paper, the digital workplace offers multiple advantages. It helps federate the informational and these issues become even more complex when we look at companies in terms of their extended ecosystems. The more integrated and secure a company's system is, the more complicated its communications with the outside world become, because suppliers, customers and service providers neither have access to the same reference tools nor the same habits in terms of use or security. This was a limitation that we were faced with during the successive lockdowns. In terms of competing video conferencing systems, were people allowed to use Zoom with external partners, when the IT department had banned it for all internal use?

Beyond digital skills, corporate culture and its impact on work organisation are once again an issue here. The full rollout of digital tools, no matter how sophisticated and integrated, necessitates the existence of agile and collaborative organisational structures. Otherwise, they will simply perpetuate existing barriers between organizational units and other dysfunctions. Indeed, "as long as they do not come hand-in-hand with new organizational models, these tools are ultimately counterproductive and help prolong or maintain interactions based on inter-knowledge and interpersonal links rather than truly transforming the ways companies function collaboratively.[150]"

CONCLUSION

At the end of this overview, remote working can be considered as a magnifying glass for some of the challenges that await companies in the years to come. These challenges are numerous and ambitious. One the one hand, the experience of mass remote working and the generalisation of certain digital tools open the way to substantial managerial changes, some of which were already desired or underway before. Still, for the time being, remote management and digital tools are often just used to reproduce the organizational and communication patterns that were specific to on-site work in the 20th century. Furthermore, there is room for backtracking and reversion to certain cautious habits, especially if the context of the economic crisis sharpens tensions.

The disruptive experience of 2020/21 has tempered idyllic and dystopian fantasies about remote working, while highlighting the continued popularity of working from home among employees – despite sub-optimal conditions – and the increasingly positive reception by HR managers and executives. The crisis has also provided a clearer picture of the practicalities of remote working on a broad scale and its positive and negative impacts on quality of life at work. Finally, this experience has provided an opportunity to challenge certain stubborn preconceived ideas: no, remote work is not incompatible with social ties, a feeling of togetherness, trust, collaboration, innovation and creativity... provided that a certain number of physical meetings and exchanges are maintained and that new practices are devised and experimented, which obviously requires time. We still need to be bold and proactive to break down the barriers – cultural rather than technical, as we have seen – that still hinder the development of practices specific to the future of work.

This period has enabled us to identify several drivers for change.

An approach focused on real work and based on employee skills and competencies, thanks to high quality professional dialogue that includes all socio-professional categories as well as employee representatives. The evaluation of workloads and their clear and fair distribution are key issues here. This necessarily requires the expertise of those in the field. Work design[151], which consists of involving employees in the definition of their workstations and activities, must become a managerial habit.

Results-based management instead of micromanagement of tasks means developing professional support instead of control to help everyone achieve their objectives within the framework of a common goal, thanks to structured processes: clear work organization, precise objectives, meaningful performance indicators, regular and stimulating feedback, effective coordination and collaboration, necessary equipment, and resources, etc.

Management based on trust (especially for the management of schedules and activities), which means that new managerial behaviours based on emotional and relational intelligence should be developed, with increased focus on psychosocial risks and the implementation of proactive and sincere listening practices (still often lacking). Women and young people seem to need priority attention in this area, but managers themselves are also among the 'fragile' categories. The right to disconnect is also an essential issue for everyone, starting with managers, who must first and foremost apply it to themselves.

Structuring and capitalizing on information, requiring a shift from an oral culture to a written culture. Digital tools have a key role to play in this area and the offer is constantly expanding. They must however be chosen according to the user experience, be supported by solid training and allow time for the appropriation and consolidation of uses.

A desire to encourage informal horizontal and vertical exchange, by offering time, opportunities, spaces, and tools for this purpose, while allowing employees to take ownership of them. Spaces likely to allow a feeling of togetherness should be encouraged in real estate and workspace projects so as to meet the expectations of employees who might now feel a form of artificiality in coming to the office without a valid reason. Nevertheless, user-friendliness of workspaces must not become a convenient substitute for a more thorough reflection on the organization of work.

Technical, material, and financial support, as well as an ambitious training policy that involves all hierarchical levels and develops organizational practices and communication skills (virtual as well as IRL).

This is about making management methods more flexible (which requires a certain amount of letting go), while at the same time reinforcing the structuring of informational and organizational processes (which must be better thought out and mastered). However, the current trend in France is rather the opposite: very present and strict management but unclear organisational and communication processes. Remote work offers the opportunity to reverse this trend and to apply its lessons to the organisation of on-site work.

But beware of the techno-illusion! This transformation will not happen through the miraculous powers sometimes attributed to digital tools: it must be the subject of a proactive policy and be reflected in behaviours and new routines. Companies therefore need to aim at major transformation, at least those that still operate on a culture of mistrust, in-person management, micro-surveillance, ambiguous instructions, and the tacit weight of hierarchical status.

“The role of management needs to be reinforced and revitalized, undergoing a major transformation from manager-prescriber to manager-coach.”

Managers are on the front line of this cultural transformation, despite certain simplistic ideas that have been in vogue over the last few years, proclaiming their demise to “liberate” companies. On the contrary, it appears that the role of management needs to be reinforced and revitalized, undergoing a major transformation from manager-prescriber to manager-coach. Beyond the pandemic and any opportunistic short-termism, the lessons of the experience of the last year include the devising of new communicational and organizational codes, in order to write the next chapter in the history of remote work and, more broadly, the future of work.

In parallel with this managerial transformation, which would seem increasingly urgent, remote working must also be looked at in relation to CSR policy. It can indeed have a positive impact on the three axes of sustainable development: social, economic, and environmental.

From a social point of view, remote work can have beneficial impacts on the quality of life and well-being of employees. As emphasized, there is nothing automatic about it. For this to happen, the company must create the conditions for “socially responsible” remote work. It must be voluntary, with properly equipped workstations, respectful of the physical and mental health of workers, hybrid (combined with some on-site work), equitable and inclusive (with the goal of reducing inequalities in access to remote work) and supportive (transition towards professional management support based on trust).

From an environmental point of view, remote work can have an impact on CO_2 emissions, air pollutants and road noise, through the reduction of home-work journeys. However, the carbon footprint of remote work is not easy to determine because of possible rebound effects on several levels (increased distance between home and work, increased digital consumption).

From an economic point of view, remote work can improve company performance. This highly depends on the quality of organizational processes in place and the level of employee satisfaction with remote working arrangements. If a company's improved performance only results from a reduction in office space, downward pressure on wages or overworking by employees, then remote working cannot be considered as contributing to the company's CSR policy.

"If a company's improved performance only results from a reduction in office space, downward pressure on salaries or overworking by employees, then remote working cannot be considered as contributing to the company's CSR policy."

Finally, **from a societal point of view**, the effects of remote working are still difficult to identify. On the one hand, it contributes to urban decongestion, rebalancing of land use and decrease in rents in city centres, while promoting a form of individual emancipation. On the other hand, remote working also contributes to the reinforcement of inequalities and the rise of an even more individualistic society.

There is still a lot to be done both for companies and employees, and the transition to a normalized and generalized hybrid work mode will undoubtedly raise new questions that should be followed with attention.

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Is Remote Working Shaping the Future of Work?

Before 2020, remote working was a limited but growing practice in many French companies. The Covid-19 crisis forced many of them to partly remove the prejudices they could still have about working at home. A new era is beginning…

This book intends to raise the question of remote working beyond the pandemic episode and what it teaches us. It outlines the future of work in the light of this unprecedented experience. Based on hearings with experts (sociologists, ergonomists, HR managers, local managers, etc.) and the review of academic studies and reports, it provides international benchmarks and points of attention for all entities that must redesign the organization of work and its balance: management, spaces, work time, digital tools, communication... The book brings to light debates that are not yet settled, such as the thorny question of eligibility for remote working and the potential inequalities of access, the expected productivity of remote working, its impact on social ties, trust, collaboration, innovation and creativity. It is indeed a hybrid work – on site and at a distance – that we need to prepare from today.

This study will be of interest to companies faced with these organizational and managerial transformations, and more particularly to HR, real estate departments, digital transformation departments, trade unionists and employee representatives, consultants, but also to all managers who are faced with these challenges on a daily basis.

Suzy Canivenc, PhD in information and communication science, is a teacher and researcher at the FIT² chair of Mines Paris PSL. She is the author of several articles in books and academic journals.

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