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BEYOND THE OFFICE: PROFILES AND EXPERIENCES OF REMOTE WORK PROFESSIONALS

Abstract:

The modern workforce is undergoing a significant transformation driven by the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work models. This study investigates the preferences, experiences, and impacts of remote work on engagement and relationships with colleagues among professionals. Drawing on a quantitative methodology, data were collected through an online questionnaire survey from 211 participants between January and March 2024. The findings reveal a strong preference for remote work, particularly among younger generations, highlighting a growing desire for autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance. While a substantial proportion of participants reported positive impacts of remote work on relationships with colleagues and engagement, challenges such as communication difficulties and feelings of isolation were also identified. Sociodemographic factors, including age, nationality, and current work model, were found to influence preferences for remote work and perceptions of engagement. The study underscores the importance of proactive measures to address challenges and foster a supportive remote work culture, emphasizing the need for communication, collaboration, and employee well-being initiatives. Overall, remote and hybrid work models offer undeniable advantages, but organizations must prioritize strategies to optimize their implementation and ensure the sustained engagement of their workforce in a rapidly evolving work landscape.

Keywords:

New working models, Remote work, Hybrid work, Engagement, Professionals' profile, Work relationships

JEL Classification: C12, J23, J29

1. Introduction[1]

Work has always been part of the human experience, adapting over time to the needs and opportunities that arise. Today, we find ourselves in an era where technologies have reached an unprecedented level of development. In this context, we are witnessing a crucial alliance between Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the labor market. This union has led to a profound transformation in the nature of work, giving rise to new forms of employment and work. At the epicenter of these changes are hybrid and remote work. The implementation of these working arrangements has taken on particular prominence, with numerous companies adopting such working models. Remote work is gaining popularity in companies and is being adopted as a strategy to attract and retain talent (Cristina, 2021).

The rise of these two forms of work, remote and hybrid, has profoundly changed organizational dynamics. This innovative context not only reshapes the way organizations operate, but also directly impacts critical dimensions such as engagement and teams' relationships, determining new contours for the interaction between employees and their organizations (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Thus, this study aimed to explore the intricate interplay between these emerging work paradigms and critical dimensions such as impacts on relationships with colleagues and engagement, within the framework of organizational dynamics and socio-demographic factors.

2. Theorethical framework

2.1. The rise of new working models

The growing volatility in the job market has led to significant adaptations by organizations, with many fully embracing remote work while others prefer to adopt a hybrid work model. Hybrid work combines remote work with conventional office work, meaning it is performed both remotely and on-site at the organization's premises. Remote work can be applied by companies on a full-time or part-time basis (Carrasco-Garrido et al., 2023). Part-time remote work, or hybrid work, means employees can choose to work from home on some days of the week and be physically present in the office on others as mobile workers (Silva, 2021).

The terminology of remote work represents the work carried out from a location other than the organization's physical facilities while the employee remains connected to the company's computer systems through modern information and telecommunications technologies (Aguilera et al., 2016). Remote work is an inherent reality of today's working life (Lippe & Lippényi, 2019).

The hybrid work model represents an innovative approach that seeks to integrate the best aspects of office environments and remote work. This model aims to optimize employees' workweek by distinguishing activities more suitable for in-person settings, such as meetings and training, to be held on office days, and more individual tasks, such as reading and programming, on remote workdays (Bloom et al., 2022).

In a time where digital transformation becomes a primary focus for organizations, the adoption of a hybrid work model emerges as a viable solution that reconciles individuals' desire to continue with remote work while ensuring no financial loss for the organization or negative impacts on workforce productivity and motivation (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021).

2.1 Advantages and Challenges of the new working models

Remote work and hybrid work models come with their own set of advantages and challenges for both employers and employees.

Concerning benefits, it can be highlighted, firstly, the possibility of costs saving (Silva, 2021), due to the fact that remote work eliminates the need for commuting, reducing transportation costs for employees and lowering overhead costs for employers. With this, comes another benefit: a reduced environmental impact (Bloom et al., 2022), as remote work reduces the carbon footprint associated with commuting and office operations, contributing to environmental sustainability.

Another benefit is the prospect of increased productivity (Bloom et al., 2022), once there are fewer distractions in a remote work environment and workers can personalize their working space with the settings that suits their needs better. Further, it can be identified an improved Work-Life Balance among remote and hybrid workers (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Mainly, these working models allow employees to better balance their work and personal lives, leading to higher job satisfaction and reduced burnout.

Regarding the companies, remote work enables employers to hire talent from anywhere in the world, increasing diversity and access to specialized skills (Kranc, 2023).

When it comes to identify the advantages of these working models, it is important to stand out that hybrid work combines the benefits of remote work with the returns of in-person teamwork. First, there is the increased flexibility, where employees have the opportunity to choose when and where they work, allowing them to tailor their schedules to their individual preferences and needs (Blomm et al., 2022). Additionally, hybrid work allows employees to benefit from social interaction and collaboration in the office while still enjoying the flexibility and autonomy of remote work (Kranc, 2023).

On the other hand, and despite its benefits, these working models also present several challenges. Primarily, remote work can hinder communication and collaboration among team members, leading to misunderstandings and decreased teamwork (Gosnell, 2020). Besides, and nonetheless work-life balance was pointed as an advantage, remote work blurs the boundary between work and personal life, making it difficult for employees to disconnect and leading to potential burnout (Grzegorczyk et al., 2021). Also, there is a greater chance for these workers to experience isolation and loneliness, once they don't develop social interactions at the office environment (Sahut & Lissillour, 2023). In terms of technical issues, remote work relies heavily on technology, and technical issues such as internet outages and software glitches can disrupt productivity (Tavares et al., 2020).

Concerning hybrid work, it also presents its own set of challenges. On the perspective of the companies, hybrid work requires employers to navigate the complexities of managing a workforce that is split between remote and in-person work, including scheduling, communication, and collaboration (Gosnell, 2020). Consequently, issues regarding equitable treatment can arise: if not implemented fairly, some employees can feel disadvantaged compared to their remote or in-office

counterparts (Sahut & Lissillour, 2023), creating feelings of resentment and inequality among teams. This leads to additional challenges concerning the Organizational Culture, since it is more challenging to maintain a strong company culture and sense of belonging among employees, particularly if remote workers feel disconnected from the organization (Tavares et al., 2020). Finally, hybrid work requires robust infrastructure and technology to support seamless communication and collaboration between remote and in-office workers, which can be costly and complex to implement (Blomm et al., 2022).

In conclusion, remote work and hybrid work models offer organizations and employees increased flexibility, autonomy, and access to talent, while also present challenges related to communication, collaboration, and work-life balance. While remote work allows employees to work from anywhere, hybrid work combines the benefits of remote and in-person work.

However, both remote work and hybrid work require careful planning and implementation to ensure success, including robust infrastructure, clear communication channels, and equitable treatment of all employees. By addressing these challenges, organizations can harness the benefits of remote and hybrid work models to create a more flexible, inclusive, and productive workforce.

3. Methodology

In this study, a quantitative methodological approach was adopted. Considering the obvious opportunities associated with the topic, a fundamental question emerged to guide the research: which professionals choose or are able to perform their jobs remotely and are this new working models impacting teams' bonds and employees' engagement?

That said, the following four research hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis1: The preference for remote work prevails over face-to-face work.

Hypothesis 2: Remote work has a positive impact on relationships with colleagues.

Hypothesis 3: Remote work has a positive impact on Engagement.

Hypothesis 4: The preference for remote work and the perceived impacts on relationships with colleagues and Engagement, differs between diverse sociodemographic profiles.

The data collection method used was a questionnaire survey, published online and spread among communities of remote workers. A total of 211 responses were collected between January and March 2024.

4. Analysis and discussion of results

4.1 Sociodemographic Profile

Regarding the characterization of professionals who engage in this work models (either remote or hybrid), we were able to analyze their sociodemographic profile in terms of gender, age, education, nationality, current working model and previous experience with hybrid or remote work.

In terms of gender, the sample is divided into 120 females and 91 males, which reveals a female predominance (56.9%). The age distribution shows a higher concentration of responses in the generation of Millennials (ages between 28 and 43), representing 59.7% of all participants, followed by Z Generation (under 23 age group) with 32.2%. These categories together comprise

91.9% of all respondents, highlighting the predominance of young participants in this work models. The X Generation (over 44 age group) accounted 8.1%, showing a progressive decline in participation as age progresses.

In terms of level of education, there is a significant predominance of individuals with higher education degres. Of the 211 participants, the majority have a Bachelor's degree or less (47.9%), followed by a Master's degree (37.9%), and finally a PhD (9.0%). This distribution reinforces the hypothesis that teleworkers have high levels of academic qualification.

With regard to nationality, the overwhelming majority are Portuguese participants (80.6%). This indicates that most participants are from the country where the study was carried out. The presence of other nationalities (such as German, Brazilian, Spanish, French and English) is reasonably minor compared to the Portuguese participants, representing 19.4% of the total sample. This diversity of nationalities reflects an international sample, although on a smaller scale compared to the Portuguese participants.

Finally, concerning the current working model, around 63% of respondents were working remotely, while 18.5% were in hybrid model and another 18.5% in face-to-face work. In terms of experience with remote work, the vast majority of participants (93.3%) have experience with remote work. This suggests widespread familiarity and adoption of this type of work among respondents, where only 6.7% of participants said they had no experience with remote work.

4.2. Preference for remote work

In order to test Hypothesis 1 (H1), we assessed employees' inclination towards the remote working model over conventional face-to-face work. Results show that the majority of participants (80.7%) expressed a preference for the remote working model. This indicates a clear inclination among workers in favor of remote working, possibly driven by the benefits they perceive. On the other hand, around 19.3% of participants indicated a preference for the face-to-face working model. These results suggest a variety of individual preferences in relation to the work environment, highlighting the importance of offering flexible options to respond to employees' needs and preferences.

Based on the data extracted, it is possible to confirm H1 – "Preference for remote work prevails over face-to-face work".

In order to deepen the previous results and to test Hypothesis 4 (H4), the impacts of the sociodemographic profile were assessed. Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests were respectively used to determine whether there are significant differences between participants' preference for remote work in terms of gender, age, education, nationality, current working model and previous experience with hybrid or remote work.

Results show that there are statistically significant differences on the variables of age, nationality and the current work model (p-value < 0.005), when it comes to choose the working model.

The Generation of Millennials showed both a greater propensity to work remotely (61.6%) and face-to-face (60.5%). Z Generation has a clearer tendence to work remotely (34.0%). On the X Generation the opposite happens – these participants prefer face-to-face work environments (18.4%). This data indicates a clear preference among younger workers for the flexible working model, possibly due to the appreciation of autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance, some of the

advantages of this working model (Blomm et al., 2022; Grzegorczyk et al., 2021; Kranc, 2023). On the other hand, as the age rises, there is a gradual reduction in the preference for remote working.

Regarding the preference differences related to the nationality, we can see clear opposite results: while Portuguese participants navigate more evenly when choosing remote or face-to-face work, other nationalities undoubtedly prefer working remotely (24.5%). These nationalities include German, Brazilian, Spanish, French and English participants.

Finally, the current working model differences shows interesting results: the majority of participants who prefer remote work are currently working in that way (78%), followed by hybrid workers (18.2%). On the other hand, those who prefer face-to-face work are mostly workers who presently work in an office (52.6%).

Table 1 – Impacts of sociodemographic profile on remote work preference

	Preference for remote work		Mann-Whitney$^{\alpha}$ or Kruskal-Wallis$^{\beta}$ Test (p-value)
	Remote Work (n=159)	Face-to-Face Work (n=38)	
Gender			
Female	61.0%	50.0%	4365.5$^{\alpha}$
Male	39.0%	50.0%	(0.217)
Age			
Z Generation (<23)	34.0%	21.1%	10.1$^{\beta}$
Millennials (28-43)	61.6%	60.5%	(0.007)***
X Generation (>44)	4.4%	18.4%	
Education			
Bachelor's Degree or less	51.6%	60.5%	4559.5$^{\alpha}$
Master's Degree of PhD	48.4%	39.5%	(0.321)
Nationality			
Portuguese	75.5%	97.4%	2478.5$^{\alpha}$
Other	24.5%	2.6%	(0.003)***
Current Work Model			
Remote Work	78.0%	23.7%	68.9$^{\beta}$
Hybrid Work	18.2%	23.7%	(0.001)***
Face-to-face	3.8%	52.6%	
Experience with remote work			
Yes	99.4%	100.0%	79.0$^{\alpha}$
No	0.6%	0.0%	(0.625)

Source: Own elaboration

4.3. Remote Work impacts on the relationship with colleagues

Hypothesis 2 (H2) states that remote working has a positive effect on relationships with colleagues. The aim is to explore the depth and quality of interactions between colleagues in non-traditional working environments, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of remote working on interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Results show that remote working has had a significant impact on relations between colleagues. Around 40.1% of participants reported that remote working had a positive influence, while 32.0% noted a negative impact. These results suggest a division of opinion regarding the effects of

remote working on social and professional interactions between coworkers. In addition, 27.9% of participants stated that remote working had no significant impact on relationships with colleagues. This variety of responses highlights the complexity of individual experiences with remote work and underscores the importance of adopting strategies that promote collaboration and engagement between colleagues, regardless of the workplace.

H2 seems to be partially confirmed, as there is a slight division of opinions among the participants, where, in fact, a significant portion of the respondents felt an improvement in relations with colleagues which suggests that remote working has, in general, had a positive effect.

To address H4, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests were again respectively used to assess participants' differences on the perceived impact of remote work in the relationships between colleagues. Results show that there are no statistically significant differences between the sociodemographic groups regarding this variable.

Table 2 – Impacts of sociodemographic profile on the relationship with colleagues

	Has working remotely affected your relationships with colleagues?			Mann-Whitney$^{\alpha}$ or Kruskal-Wallis$^{\beta}$ Test (p-value)
	Yes, positively (n=79)	Yes, negatively (n=63)	No (n=55)	
Gender				
Female	66.2%	50.8%	58.2%	4183.0$^{\alpha}$
Male	33.8%	49.2%	41.8%	(0.252)
Age				
Z Generation (<23)	29.9%	36.5%	27.3%	
Millennials (28-43)	64.9%	49.2%	70.9%	0.18$^{\beta}$
X Generation (>44)	5.2%	14.3%	1.8%	(0.916)
Education				
Bachelor's Degree or less	59.7%	46.0%	50.9%	4303.0$^{\alpha}$
Master's Degree of PhD	40.3%	54.0%	49.1%	(0.239)
Nationality				
Portuguese	77.9%	92.1%	67.3%	2788.0$^{\alpha}$
Other	22.1%	7.9%	32.7%	(0.297)
Current Work Model				
Remote Work	79.7%	44.4%	78.2%	
Hybrid Work	10.4%	31.7%	18.2%	2.7$^{\beta}$
Face-to-face	11.7%	23.8%	3.6%	(0.258)
Experience with remote work				
Yes	98.7%	100.0%	100.0%	38.0$^{\alpha}$
No	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	(0.264)

Source: Own elaboration

Notes: $^{\alpha}$ Mann-Whitney Test; $^{\beta}$ Kruskal-Wallis Test; *Significance level of $p \leq 0.1$; ** Significance level of $p \leq 0.05$; *** Significance level of $p \leq 0.01$

4.4. Remote Work impacts on Engagement

To address Hypothesis 3 (H3), the perception of whether working remotely had influence on Engagement was analyzed. It was possible to see that the majority of respondents expressed a positive view of remote working in terms of their commitment (70.6%). However, around 14.2% of

participants reported a negative perception and approximately 15.2% of participants pointed out that remote working had no influence on their engagement.

Finally, to evaluate H4, Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests were again respectively used to evaluate participants' differences on the perceived impact of remote work in their engagement.

Results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the perception of engagement between men and women in relation to the influence of remote working (p-value=0.026). Through the analysis of the positive impact of remote working on engagement, the majority of participants (70.6%) felt a positive impact. Breaking down the differences between genders, 89 out of 116 women (76.7% of women, 45.2% of the total) experienced a positive impact. From the point of view of the male side, 50 out of 81 men (61.7% of men, 25.4% of the total) experienced a positive impact. That said, it is possible to see that a significantly higher percentage of women than men reported a positive impact of remote working on Engagement, suggesting that women may find more benefits or have a more positive experience with remote working in terms of Engagement at work. These results are reinforced by the distribution of perceived negative impacts on engagement, where de male gender prevails (53.6.%). In sum, there are notable gender differences in the perceived impact of remote working on Engagement, with women more often reporting a positive impact and men slightly more often reporting negative impacts or no impact at all.

Concerning the age, difference are also statistically significant (p-value=0.015). Analyzing the results, it is possible to conclude that those who perceive positive impacts of remote work on engagement are mostly Millennials (65.5%). On the other side, although the main percentage of those who perceive negative impacts are Millennials (53.6%) - which can be explained by the fact that they represent 59.7% of the sample, it stands out X Generation with 21.4% of negative responses. These results show a tendency for younger participants to experience better impacts of remote work on engagement, and older generations to perceive more negative outcomes – which is concordant with the previous results where these participants prefer face-to-face work, rather than remote working, maybe due to these apparent negative effects.

Regarding education differences, which are also statistically significant (p-value=0.046), we can see the majority of participants who report both positive and negative impacts of remote working on engagement have a Bachelor's Degree or less (56.8% and 53.6%, respectively). On the other hand, the over majority of participants who report no impacts of remote work on engagement, have a Master's Degree of PhD (66.7%).

Lastly, differences on the groups of current working model reveals to be statistically significant (p-value=0.001), showing that those who report positive impacts on engagement are mostly in current remote working (77.7%). On the opposite side, participants who perceive negative impacts on engagement, are, in majority, on the face-to-face working models (53.6%).

Table 3 – **Impacts of sociodemographic profile on engagement**

	Do you feel that working remotely has had an impact on engagement?			Mann-Whitney$^\alpha$ or Kruskal-Wallis$^\beta$ Test (p-value)
	Yes, positive (n=139)	Yes, negative (n=28)	No (n=30)	
Gender				
Female	64.0%	46.4%	46.7%	3994.5$^\alpha$
Male	36.0%	53.6%	53.3%	(0.026)**
Age				

Z Generation (<23)	30.9%	25.0%	43.4%	8.5^β
Millennials (28-43)	65.5%	53.6%	46.7%	
X Generation (>44)	3.6%	21.4%	10.0%	(0.015)**
Education				
Bachelor's Degree or less	56.8%	53.6%	33.3%	4197.5^α
Master's Degree of PhD	43.2%	46.4%	66.7%	(0.046)**
Nationality				
Portuguese	76.3%	100.0%	80.0%	2625.0^α
Other	23.7%	0.0%	20.0%	(0.074)*
Current Work Model				
Remote Work	77.7%	14.3%	66.7%	17.9^β
Hybrid Work	15.1%	32.1%	26.7%	
Face-to-face	7.2%	53.6%	6.7%	(0.001)***
Experience with remote work				
Yes	99.3%	100.0%	96.7%	140.5^α
No	0.7%	0.0%	3.3%	(0.397)

Source: Own elaboration

Notes: α Mann-Whitney Test; β Kruskal-Wallis Test; *Significance level of $p \le 0.1$; ** Significance level of $p \le 0.05$; *** Significance level of $p \le 0.01$

5. Conclusion

The evolution of working models, particularly the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work, has ushered in a new era of flexibility and adaptation in the modern workforce. Our findings underscore the significant preference for remote work among participants, reflecting a growing desire for autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance. This preference aligns with the broader trend toward digital transformation and reflects the changing expectations of today's workforce. Notably, younger generations, including Millennials and Z Generation, exhibited a particularly strong inclination toward remote work, highlighting the importance of catering to diverse generational preferences within the workforce.

Furthermore, this study revealed nuanced impacts of remote work on interpersonal relationships and engagement. While a substantial portion of participants reported positive effects on relationships with colleagues and engagement, there were also notable challenges identified. Those who report a positive impact may have experienced improvements in virtual communication, increased collaboration or a more flexible working environment. From another perspective, participants who reported a negative impact may have faced challenges related to a lack of face-to-face interaction, communication difficulties or feelings of isolation (Alexandria, 2022; Popovici & Popovici, 2020). These key concerns underscore the need for proactive measures to address these challenges and foster a supportive remote work culture.

Against this backdrop, remote and hybrid work models offer undeniable advantages, including increased flexibility, access to diverse talent pools, and potential cost savings. Hybrid work, in particular, represents an innovative approach that integrates the best aspects of remote and in-person work, offering employees the benefits of both worlds.

Organizations must prioritize communication, collaboration, and employee well-being to cultivate a positive remote work culture and ensure the sustained engagement of their workforce. This entails leveraging technological tools to facilitate seamless communication and collaboration,

implementing flexible policies that accommodate diverse needs, and providing support mechanisms to mitigate feelings of isolation and maintain work-life balance.

Finally, some limitations of this study must be pointed out for future research consideration. First of all, there is the sample representativeness: while the study collected responses from 211 participants, the sample may not fully represent the diversity of professionals engaged in remote or hybrid work models. The predominance of Portuguese participants (80.6%) suggests a potential bias towards individuals from a specific cultural and professional background, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a more diverse global workforce. Also, there is the methodological design where we perform a cross-sectional study, collecting data at a single point in time between January and March 2024. This approach limits the ability to establish causal relationships between remote work models and outcomes such as engagement and relationships with colleagues. Longitudinal studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors evolve over time. Lastly, while the study examined the impact of sociodemographic factors on remote work, other variables such as job role, industry sector, and organizational culture were not explored. These factors could influence individual experiences with remote work and should be considered in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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