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Postgraduate Dissertation

“Switching strategies from Onsite to Remote Work Models:

The case of Technology Sector companies”

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Patras, Greece, June 2021

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The case of Technology Sector companies”

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Ariadni, who has been really patient throughout my studies and compromised having less free time with her mother, so that I can achieve my target.

Abstract

Remote work is a new trend in companies specializing in modern business environments within the technology sector. Technology evolution is the only way to support this trend, however there are still companies belonging in the Greek IT sector that do not feel confident on switching from onsite to remote work model, and they only took this mandatory action due to Covid-19 global lockdown, where they had to implement a new strategy that would support remote work.

This study focuses on identifying the best strategy for businesses to switch from the traditional, onsite working model to the remote one; explaining how the business can be managed remotely; maintaining employee engagement and connectivity with remote employees. It is meant to present the main differences between onsite and remote work; the pros and cons of remote work; and the strategies to be followed to implement a successful remote work strategy.

As it is vital for businesses nowadays to be flexible and support long-term remote work capabilities, the focus should stay on building more productive and more engaged remote teams.

The creation of a clear remote work policy; the creation of bonding moments within the team; the use of collaboration tools; the elimination of employees' micro-management; and employees' performance measurement are some of the processes/streams that have been examined.

Finally, to support this study, a survey run to answer to the main question of whether the Technology Sector companies in Greece have switched from Onsite to Remote work models, during Covid-19 pandemic crisis and if this switch to remote work was a temporary endeavor, or came here to stay.

Keywords

Remote Work, Traditional Onsite Work, Remote Work Strategy

«Στρατηγικές εναλλαγής από δια ζώσης μοντέλα εργασίας σε τηλεργασία: Η περίπτωση εταιρειών στον τομέα της Τεχνολογίας»

Βασιλική Χρυσομύτη

Περίληψη

Η τηλεργασία είναι μια νέα τάση που ακολουθείται από εταιρείες που δραστηριοποιούνται σε σύγχρονα επιχειρηματικά περιβάλλοντα στον τομέα της τεχνολογίας. Η εξέλιξη της τεχνολογίας είναι ο μόνος τρόπος για να υποστηριχθεί αυτή η τάση, ωστόσο υπάρχουν ακόμα εταιρείες που ανήκουν στον ελληνικό τομέα πληροφορικής που δεν αισθάνονται ασφαλείς αναφορικά με τη μετάβαση από το δια ζώσης στο μοντέλο απομακρυσμένης εργασίας, παρόλο που ακολούθησαν αυτή την υποχρέωση, λόγω της παγκόσμιας απαγόρευσης κυκλοφορίας εξαιτίας του Covid-19, όπου έπρεπε να εφαρμόσουν τη νέα στρατηγική απομακρυσμένης εργασίας.

Η συγκεκριμένη μελέτη επικεντρώνεται στον εντοπισμό της καλύτερης στρατηγικής για τις επιχειρήσεις που επιθυμούν να στραφούν από το παραδοσιακό, δια ζώσης μοντέλο εργασίας στο απομακρυσμένο: - εξηγώντας πώς μπορεί να πραγματοποιείται η διαχείριση της επιχείρησης από απόσταση - διατηρώντας την αφοσίωση των εργαζομένων, καθώς και την επαφή με τους υπαλλήλους που δουλεύουν απομακρυσμένα. Σκοπεύει να παρουσιάσει τις κύριες διαφορές ανάμεσα στη δια ζώσης και την τηλεργασία, τα πλεονεκτήματα και τα μειονεκτήματα της απομακρυσμένης εργασίας, και τις στρατηγικές που πρέπει να ακολουθηθούν για την εφαρμογή μιας επιτυχημένης στρατηγικής απομακρυσμένης εργασίας.

Καθώς, το να είναι ευέλικτες και να υποστηρίζουν μακροπρόθεσμες δυνατότητες απομακρυσμένης εργασίας, είναι θέμα ζωτικής σημασίας για τις επιχειρήσεις στις μέρες μας, η εστίαση πρέπει να παραμείνει στην δημιουργία πιο παραγωγικών και πιο αφοσιωμένων απομακρυσμένων ομάδων.

Η δημιουργία μιας σαφούς πολιτικής τηλεργασίας, η συνεργασία μέσα στην ομάδα, η χρήση εργαλείων επικοινωνίας, η εξάλειψη της μικρο-διαχείρισης των εργαζομένων, καθώς και η σωστή μέτρηση της απόδοσης των εργαζομένων είναι μερικές από τις ενέργειες που μελετώνται.

Τέλος, διεξήχθη μια έρευνα, για να υποστηρίξει αυτήν τη μελέτη, με στόχο να απαντήσει στο κύριο ερώτημα, εάν δηλαδή οι εταιρείες του Τεχνολογικού Τομέα στην Ελλάδα έχουν αλλάξει από δια ζώσης μοντέλα, σε μοντέλα τηλεργασίας, κατά τη διάρκεια της πανδημικής κρίσης του Covid-19, και αν αυτή η μετάβαση σε απομακρυσμένη εργασία ήταν μια προσωρινή προσπάθεια, ή ήρθε εδώ για να μείνει.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

Απομακρυσμένη Εργασία, Τηλεργασία, Παραδοσιακή δια ζώσης Εργασία, Στρατηγική Απομακρυσμένης Εργασίας

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1. Introduction

Along with technology evolution, companies and employees have evolved during the past decades. Therefore, working in an Information Technology organization nowadays, does not necessarily mean what it used to mean in the past. Internet use, fast transfer speeds, Wi-Fi, laptops and smartphones use, new applications invention are only just a few of the reasons that have transformed the IT work to what we know today.

Even in today's technology world though, using all the applicable laws regarding employment, there are differences on the approach each organization follows and the policies it setups for its employees regarding work conditions. Therefore, at the moment in the technology sector, we have companies supporting traditional onsite work, others that follow a remote work approach and some that are setting up a hybrid working model, with just a few days working from home and the rest from the office.

The recent pandemic crisis of Covid-19 forced many organizations to switch from onsite work to a remote model at a fast-forward mode, if they wanted to stay in business. In Greece, most of the IT companies had the technology in place to be able to make this switch at no time. Others that were not 100% ready, requested their IT departments to proceed with a sense of urgency to all required actions in order to make it feasible for all employees to continue working from home, as if they were in the office. In order for someone to become a mobile employee and be as productive (or even better) as he was when he was located in the office, technology means are necessary. However, even before the pandemic crisis, most technology companies had the tools and the platforms required to ease communications between employees and their clients. When the switch to remote work became a necessity, in order for people to keep social distancing, due to Covid-19, this became the only way for companies to maintain business continuity and avoid losing revenue. Even banks that are really sensitive regarding data access outside their company premises and company Intranet, had to take the security measurements and be able to continue their business online.

The scope of the below dissertation is to present the two main working models (onsite vs remote work), explain the pros and cons of remote work and make a comparison between the two different working statuses.

Undeniably working onsite is not a status that will be replaced by remote work. Traditional onsite work supports the in-person communication and the ability of getting immediate responses and quicker resolution on issues that might arise. In addition, it gives to employees from different teams and levels the opportunity to be located in the same meeting room, brainstorm, discuss face-to-face and decide upon a common, well-structured approach. The way offices have been set up, is allowing people to get inspired, motivated and happy, enables easy communication and good collaboration between fellow employees, leading them to increase their productivity.

On the other hand, working remotely follows a different working style and a different mentality. Employees' stress levels are rising due to commuting time and the open space offices do not give them the space to concentrate on their tasks. Multiple breaks within the day and various distractions by fellow colleagues are adding up to their frustration and stress and decrease their productivity. So, the main concept behind remote work is the ability of an employee to execute all his tasks and surpass his goals irrelevant to his actual location, even in the case when remote work allowance is accepted by the company on urgent situations (i.e. in the work from home mode).

Of course, remote work has its pros and cons, as well, and these are presented and analyzed inside this report. Some of the main advantages pointed out are that the remote work option gives the employees autonomy, allows them to remain concentrated on their tasks, and helps them reduce commuting time and costs; while at the same time removes the geographical barriers for talent acquisition by the companies, allows the extension of company's operational hours, and lowers the company's operational costs in regard to less office space requirement. The disadvantages that come with remote work though are that employees might feel isolated after a long remote working period; there is the risk of losing the work-life balance; they "miss" socializing and networking activities; collaboration is more challenging in remote teams; and of course when it comes to people management and their connection to their manager and the company, it is harder to keep a team connected and build mutual trust between managers and their subordinates. Last but not least, we should always keep in mind that remote work is not suitable for all positions.

The second part of the dissertation was to check whether the Technology Sector companies in Greece have switched from Onsite to Remote work models in the past year, due to the

pandemic crisis. Therefore, a survey was built and shared with people working on IT companies in Greece. The survey examined various aspects like: whether the employee's position within the company affected his opinion on remote work; whether the working hours have been affected following the switch to remote working model; if mobile employees still feel connected to their company and their managers; what employees in IT sector feel as the greatest advantage and disadvantage regarding remote work; if their companies were prepared from a technology aspect to support remote work; and finally how satisfied the employees are feeling regarding the actions taken by their companies during the pandemic crisis lockdown.

The next section focuses on the main reasons a company decides to make the switch from onsite to remote work. The most important ones besides the pandemic crisis that led to a mandatory lockdown, are cost-efficiency; ability to choose from a greater pool of talent; creation of diversity teams; not to lose its advantage by its competitors; and of course follow the trend of the era, as remote work is the "new normal".

Moving on to the dissertation, the implementation of a successful remote working strategy was discussed. Organizations need to train their leaders to operate in virtual coordination mode, by establishing goals, monitoring progress, driving information sharing, and sustaining connections amongst remotely working team members. The aim is to keep each employee's productivity high. All the strategies that need to be implemented to ensure success (i.e. communications, productivity and continuity, collaboration, performance management, maintaining company's culture, management of remote work-life balance) are also presented and discussed thoroughly.

Finally, the dissertation closes, with the main conclusions presented and next day predictions discussed.

2. Traditional Onsite Work vs Remote Work Presentation

2.1 Office work through the Centuries

Living in the 21st century, where everything is evolving and technology has undertaken a huge role in everyday life, it is inevitable that companies and especially the ones belonging in the Information Technology sector will not be affected. Therefore, when it comes to office work, many things are different in comparison to what office work meant in the past.

Even though, there is evidence that the initial origination of offices, as spaces where official work was conducted, was originated in Ancient Rome (K2 Space, 2021), the form of the "modern" offices as we know it today, started during the 18th century, when the two of the first dedicated office buildings in Great Britain were constructed. The first one was, in 1726, the "Old Admiralty Office" that was built in London in order to handle all the paperwork generated by the Royal Navy - meeting spaces were included in the building as well, and then about three years later, in 1729, the second office in London, "East India House", acted as East India Trading company's headquarters. (Mansson H., 2021)

The layout of office buildings started changing during the 20th century. In 1906, "Larkin Administration Building" was opened in New York, as an open plan factory with a few walls, where the workers were sitting at endless rows of desks and managers in surrounding offices looking in. This office building did not allow natural light and ventilation and the result was that the workers were cut off from the outside world, fact that was leading them to depression. This layout though was not followed in Europe, where in the 1960s "Bürolandschaft" office landscaping was developed. This approach provided better and healthier working conditions for the employees; and allowed easier interaction between teams as the employees were now sitting in more organic patterns, where specific furniture along with plants were loosely dividing areas. However, since some workers needed more privacy, during the same era, we also had the introduction of the "Action Office", with flexible, semi-enclosed workspaces that allowed office spaces to be personalized and frequently modified to suit both company's and workers' needs. In 1980s though, when the economic growth created a swell in the number of middle managers, the most common office layout being used was the "Cube Farm", that was created by the use of cheap and effective modular walls leading to a sea of cubicles. (Bird M., 2020)

In our era though, since technology evolution (use of laptops, mobile phones, Wi-Fi) has made workers more mobile, open floor plan has become the most popular office layout, allowing workers to break out of the isolation of cubicles, and interact/collaborate more freely in the workplace. (Bird M., 2020)

2.2 Traditional Onsite Work

The term "Traditional onsite work" or "Traditional office environment" refers to the case where the employee's working space is located inside the company premises. The offices layout can either be open, commonly known as "open-space work environment" with shared technology like printers, where individuals might have a designated sitting area / desk or follow a shared desk policy, and they are allowed to move around their working area, network and collaborate with fellow employees; or it could be divided into cubicles and specific, designated offices for individuals. (Peek S., 2021)

However, most of the companies nowadays prefer following a hybrid approach when setting up their offices' layout, where upper management professionals have their own, private office space to work, and the rest of the employees work in an open-space area. This approach encourages the communication and cooperation between fellow employees, and even when these resources work in different company departments, they can still interact with each other. Being able to communicate without the mandatory use of conference calls, emails and chatting tools, leads to immediate responses to questions and quicker resolution of issues arising. In parallel, the use of meeting rooms gives the opportunity to individuals to discuss with each other face-to-face and follow a common, well-structured approach.

A great example of a big IT company that has created an alternative to what we know, working environment is Google. Google has decided to use creativity inside the office environment, by increasing the worktivity areas. Such areas are located within the office and they are especially designed for socializing, playing, exercising and eating. The aim is to keep workers happier and healthier than they would be at home and encourage them to stay longer hours at work premises, by increasing their productivity as well. Having technology used in any part of the workplace and especially within creative spaces and

leisure areas allows employees to brainstorm and work even when they are not sitting in a specific pre-defined desk.

In general, office structure nowadays serves the need of hosting a large amount of people in the same working area, enabling easy communication and collaboration as well, while work-psychology research has set the basics in order to get the best out of each employee. But, as the requirements and the needs are constantly changing, along with technology evolution, the bet that companies around the globe need to win is the creation of spaces where people feel inspired, motivated and happy, so that they employees can increase their productivity and remain happy and healthy. (Mansson H., 2021)

2.3 Remote Work

Technology evolution and its proper use in an office environment leads to the increase of mobile employees. Therefore, it has now become normal to see employees working while travelling (from trains, airplanes, hotels, airports, etc.), in coffee shops, or even from their own homes. Staff is no longer allocated to a specific desk at the office, but instead has to pick up an available space to work from when in the office.

By the term "Working remotely" people refer to the condition, working style, which allows professionals to work outside the company premises, thus outside the traditional office environment. (Remote Year, 2021) However, in everyday life, this term is usually replaced poorly by the term "Work from home", even though they are two somehow different conditions.

Remote work is a benefit provided by many companies to its employees and refers to the ability the employees are given to deliver their services via creating their own work environment outside the company's premises. Each professional needs to have specific abilities, very good time management skills, communication skills that are above average, as well as the proper technical resources to support his role remotely. (Aten J., 2019) The main concept behind "Remote Work" is that work does not need to take place in a specific workplace, in order to be executed successfully. So, instead of commuting to the office on

a daily basis, employees can execute their tasks and surpass their goals wherever they please. (Remote Year, 2021)

On the other hand, working from home is just a temporary condition applicable in cases, such as when an emergency situation occurs, that does not allow the employee to go to his office, or in cases that the professional does not have face-to-face meetings and needs to work without any interruptions from his fellow co-workers. Therefore, when someone occasionally works from home, he does not necessarily need to have a pre-defined working space at home, as basically he only must use his laptop and his mobile phone to perform his daily tasks. In addition, both the structure and the framework of his office within the company premises remain intact, while his co-workers located in the office adjust their work accordingly given his absence. (Aten J., 2019)

Therefore, remote work extends beyond the confines of the employee's living space. Having technology and resources constraints in the past, it was really challenging for someone to work remotely. Tools that are currently being used for communication and collaboration, like MS Teams, Skype, Slack, Zoom, etc. have helped bridging that technology gap, enabling more people to work remotely and collaborate on the go. (Wrike, 2021)

3. Pros and Cons of Remote Work

By the term “working remotely” we mean the change of the central work location from the traditional office based workspace, to a personal office in an alternative location that is often located in the employee’s home. There are companies around the world that fully support “remote workplaces” and others that had to follow this approach because of some extraordinary conditions, like the recent crisis in the year 2020, where Covid-19 pandemic brought out the need for social distancing, and in parallel, the setup of flexible working conditions and policies.

Of course, “remote work” approach cannot be followed by all companies and all job roles. However, in this research we will focus on the applicability of remote work in the IT sector companies that have the means (i.e. technology, mentality) to support such an approach in almost all of their employees’ roles.

As every condition, “Remote Work” has both advantages and disadvantages. In the below two sections, some of the most important pros and cons will be presented and analyzed.

3.1 Remote work – Advantages

Working remotely can have some great benefits for both the employees and the company itself. For starters, the employees’ pay, and benefits usually does not change when switching from office to remote work. Furthermore, the employees themselves are completely responsible on customizing their working setup and space. Such autonomy that is definitely higher than the one provided in an office space and has the less office interruptions by fellow colleagues during working time, can lead to an increase on employees’ productivity. Especially for the companies, remote work approach removes the geographical barriers, and now the companies can choose talent without worrying about the individual’s location. This can also assist on hiring individuals with disabilities. Moreover, the company can extend its operational hours when following a flexi-time schedule for its employees, and in addition the operational costs can be lowered by using less office space and less parking spots.

Perhaps one of the most important benefits, is that "Remote Work" is a great way for the employee to reduce commuting time and costs, which also leads to the reduction of the carbon footprint of individuals and benefits the environment. (Kashyap V., 2020) Unfortunately, nowadays, commuting is a pain point, especially for individuals that have to live and work in an urban environment. It can take lots of time, energy and money for someone to commute during rush hours, and this is one of the reasons that may lead to daily stress. As it is widely known, in big cities like Athens, most employees, regardless age and gender, prefer to travel to work alone, using their personal vehicles, impacting the environment as well. So, by working remotely, we can reduce significantly our carbon footprint and help the environment recover for human intervention. (Janza N., 2020)

Of course, there are people claiming that working from home might be saving them energy and time, as in this case commuting is not required, but on the other hand this approach comes with an extra living cost, because being at home all day long leads to higher bills for electricity, heating, etc. They also add that the companies supporting remote work conditions save on expenses like office and parking space availability and travel cost reimbursements. So, to overcome this displeasure, some employers support their employees by paying part of monthly expenses like Internet use, electricity and water supply. The important thing to keep though in our mind, is that working remotely can lead to savings on money, energy and time used daily for commuting, while additionally it is a great way to protect the environment by allowing it to breathe.

Another advantage of remote work is that it may lead to higher employees' productivity. Being based in your personal home office means that you are also avoiding unimportant and unplanned meetings, distractions from co-workers and many breaks throughout the work hours. Moreover, in some cases, a flexible working time-schedule can be followed, which is allowing employees to choose their start and ending work times, the time that they can have their breaks within the day, as long as this is between the limits that have been set by each company's management. Subsequently, this means that some employees might have the flexibility on choosing their own working time-plan, which undeniably can increase someone's productivity. Even the ability of choosing and setting your workspace the way it suits you best, can keep both your energy and productivity levels high. (Lucanus A., 2021)

On the other hand, in cases where there are many distractions within the home-office environment, i.e. young children or elderly care, pets, personal activities that need to take place during the work-day, etc., the employee's productivity might fall, and it would be preferable for such individuals to take some time-management courses in order to be able to reach to higher productivity levels and if this is not feasible, then maybe continue working from office is the only option.

During the pandemic Covid-19 crisis, there were lots of companies, especially the ones belonging to the IT sector, that switched to remote work many of the professional roles that did not require physical presence in the company premises. This approach tends to become the "new normal" in the IT market, as lots of employees when looking for changing jobs, are definitely considering what flexi-time and flexi-space policies exist as part of a modern workplace. This is an advantage for the companies as well, as "remote work" approach enables companies on hiring great talents from around the world, without the need of relocating them and their families, thus ignoring completely geographical limits. So, upon decision of flexible working conditions by companies' management and offering great working environment and conditions, the companies are able to look for talent everywhere, regardless where these talents live, and additionally candidate employees can easily consider working outside their country's boards, without affecting the family living conditions.

3.2 Remote work – Disadvantages

Besides its great advantages, working remotely can lead to some disadvantages that need to be considered before taking decisions. To start with, remote work is not suitable for all positions, i.e. when specialized equipment is required, therefore a company needs to be careful when deciding to switch to remote work, and check prior to the switch which roles can be switched, or what would be required, i.e. technology, equipment, etc., for some roles in order to switch them from onsite to remote work. In addition, everyone should have in mind that such a decision will eventually lead to less networking opportunities for the employees, and that peer-to-peer connections, team building activities and people management will be harder to achieve. Depending on the individuals, in some cases it will be difficult to supervise all employees and evaluate them, because there will be employees

not as productive as the company would like them to be, while others may feel overlooked or isolated. Moreover, projects' coordination and meeting scheduling can be challenging, especially when employees have a flexi-time work schedule or are working in different time zones (forming virtual teams).

In order for a company to switch from traditional onsite to remote working conditions, there are some adjustments that need to take place in the company's IT infrastructure and in the employees' mentality, so that it will be feasible for someone to work remotely and keep the same productivity. There are companies that have decided to support financially the employees working remotely, because home heat and electric bills might be increased. Additionally, the employees' need to be trained and learn how communication can be supported online and how collaboration and meetings can run effectively, by using online platforms. Resistance on the new regime is inevitable and transition is not an easy task to run, however new competences can enable individuals and companies, to progress if they are planned properly and the transition is smooth.

Furthermore, during remote work conditions, managers and team leaders are being challenged to lead properly a remote team and promote teamwork as well. In this case, leaders should not take under consideration the amount of time the employees work, but measure the results the employees are bringing instead. As mentioned above, it is crucial for leaders to promote teamwork. All the remote employees need to feel they belong to a team, and their connectivity with the company and its management needs to remain strong. Leaders have to understand that the lack of control they might feel due to the fact that their team is not co-located, has to be replaced by mutual trust between themselves and their subordinates. Undoubtedly, the approach to be followed is not easy and it depends on the team members as well, but in order to have a team that brings results, team spirit is the basic ingredient. (Kashyap V., 2020) Remote leadership is so challenging that it can quicker point out, the differences between good and poor leaders, therefore time and effort from the leaders should be invested in order to build strong leadership and interpersonal skills, which will be beneficial to them and their employees.

One more drawback that does not differentiate between leaders and employees, is the fact that the humans that are working in strict remote conditions for an indefinite period of time, often have the feeling of isolation. People evolve while being social, therefore without any

human interaction, they might be led to depression and/or low productivity. It is very important for a company to support its employees psychologically and take specific precautions, so that employees won't feel isolated in a remote work environment. This could be accomplished by combining remote work conditions with one day or two per week working in the office premises, or by giving instructions to employees to use web cameras when they are communicating online, in order not to lose personal contact. Virtual informal work gatherings, apart from the daily scheduled official meetings, should be placed, as well as team building events should be organized, so that team members can feel close to their teammates.

Another "trap" when working remotely has to do with the distractions during work-from-home. Of course, an employee, when located to the office, can have lots of distractions during his workday, either from fellow employees, or from ad-hoc meetings, or even because he takes lots of breaks within the day. However, the distractions in a work-from-home environment are not the same and in addition sometimes they are not easy to handle. For example, during the pandemic crisis, the whole family had to be located at home, due to governmental moving restrictions, in a household there were one or two adults working remotely, and at the same time there were kids in the house that required adult attention or were attending online classes, elderly people that needed care, pets that needed attention, etc. Being a productive remote worker has as a pre-requisite the existence of a remote working space without such distractions. (Cote A., 2020)

Additionally, people need to be careful with their time-work limits. It is important for a remote worker to achieve the right balance between business and personal life. It is not ideal, to have the laptop on all the time, outside work time-schedule, because this does not give any space to family relationships, and individuals that are workaholics unfortunately "lose" their family, themselves and in the long run their productivity also declines. On the other hand, working from home, does not mean being multi-tasking i.e. working and spending time with your family at the same time. Not being 100% focused on what you do during the work hours leads to higher level of stress and anxiety. The ideal approach would be to have focus on work while working and on self and family when the workday is over. Work-life balance leads to great employees and happy individuals, therefore this personal need should not be skipped or underestimated.

4. Present Research Results on employees’ view regarding Remote Work

4.1 Main Objective of the research

The main objective of this dissertation was to answer the below question:

“Have the Technology Sector companies in Greece switched from Onsite to Remote work models?”

In order to examine the above objective though, the below questions had to be answered as well:

- Does the employee’s position (i.e. being part of upper management) and his family status (single/married, number of children, etc.) affect his opinion/willingness to adapt or stay on remote work status?
- Have the working hours been affected (increased or decreased) following the switch to remote working model?
- Do employees feel connected to their manager / team or more stressed when working remotely?
- What are the main advantages and disadvantages of remote work according to the employees?
- Have the companies added new technology means in order to support remote work?
- Are the employees satisfied with the decisions/actions taken by their company during the pandemic crisis?

4.2 Research methodology explanation and use

As different researchers or educators may use different criteria to classify research types, it is not straight-forward how many types of research exist.(Kumar R., 1996) Since, we had to investigate based on the objective stated above, as well as on the way the information was sought, the approach followed in this dissertation was the Quantitative one, with “Survey / Questionnaire” as research methodology.

Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data that can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations. (Bhandari P., 2021) Basically, it is the type of research that is explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods like statistics. (Creswell J.W., 1994) In general, this type of research is the opposite of qualitative research, which involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, like text, video, or audio. (Bhandari P., 2021)

As already mentioned above, one of the types / methodologies of Quantitative research is the Survey research, which uses scientific sampling and questionnaire design to measure the characteristics of the population with statistical precision. It seeks to provide answers to specific questions, so that the researcher can then gather these answers, make the required comparisons between different groups, and at the end expand the results of the statistical sample used, to the entire population, along with a degree of certainty.

Being objective is a very critical pre-requisite for a researcher in regard to quantitative analysis. In addition, researcher's personal opinion and behavior are not allowed, as they can affect the results and make the research results useless. Furthermore, the sample being used in the study has to be representative and taken of a wider population/group.

4.3 High-Level Survey presentation

The survey/questionnaire that was used to support this research, regarding whether or not the technology sector companies in Greece have switched their work models from onsite to remote work or not, was anonymous and composed of 20 questions, including demographic ones.

It was an online survey, mainly a multiple-choice questionnaire that was sent to the participants via email and was conducted via surveymonkey.com website. The survey was shared to employees working on IT companies in Greece, amongst which IBM, Accenture, Vodafone, Qualco, Velti, SIA, Unisystems, Deloitte, PWC, etc. Out of a sample of 192 questionnaires answered, 170 were valid and had all the requested questions answered, therefore the final sample size has been set to 170.

In the entry / introductory screen the participants were informed about the scope of the survey, its anonymity, what was expected by them, the total number of questions that had to be answered and the average duration that someone would need to go through the whole questionnaire that was approximately 4-5 minutes in total. Then there was an acknowledgement question, where the participants had to confirm that they had read and understood the introductory section, and that they were above 18 years old. Following each participant's agreement on the above, the rest of the questions were unlocked (20 in total).

The survey was split in four main sections.

The first section was the demographic one, composed of three questions in total, one regarding the participants gender – with possible answers: "Female", "Male" and "Other"; a second one regarding their age – with possible answers: "<30", "31-50", "51-60", and "61+"; and a third one regarding the participants' highest educational level – with possible answers: "High School", "Technological Educational Institution or other similar degree", "Bachelor's degree", "Master's degree", and "Doctoral' s degree".

The majority of the participants, about 84%, fell in the age group of "31-50" years old, with about 59% being males and, 40% being females, while about half of them (52%) hold a Master's degree, a quarter of them (26%) hold a Bachelor's degree and only an 18% holds a Technological Educational Institution or other similar degree:

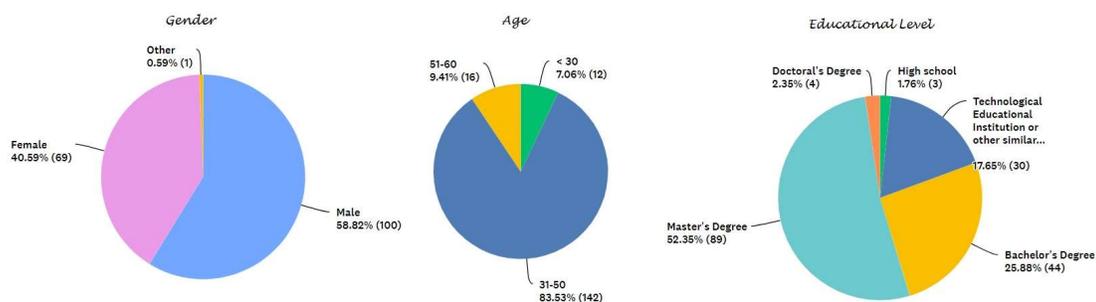


Figure 1 - Participants' Demographics

The second section was composed of questions regarding the working status. There were questions referring to the employee's working status prior to Covid-19 pandemic crisis, during the lockdown and also their desire regarding their future working status following

the pandemic crisis, thus whether they wish to return on everyday onsite working conditions, or if they wish to keep the benefit of remote work. In addition, the survey examined whether there was an increase in the working hours following the switch from onsite to remote work, how connected the remote employees felt to their manager and their team members, and finally if working remotely added more stress to their daily life, or not.

Then, the third section was meant to check what survey participants think the main advantages and disadvantages of working remotely are, while the forth and final section gathered information on whether the companies belonging in the Greek IT sector had to switch to new technology means in order to support remote work, and how satisfied the employees are with the decisions and actions their companies took to support them during pandemic crisis.

4.4 Analysis of Survey responds and conclusions

In order to be able to respond to the main objective of the research, if the IT companies in Greece have switched from Onsite to Remote work models, due to recent pandemic crisis of Covid-19, the first step was to check at what percentage the IT companies allowed remote work prior to the pandemic crisis. According to the below graph, only 10% of the participants in the survey had the option, prior to pandemic crisis, to decide whether they wanted to work remotely or not, while 44.71% were not allowed to work remotely, not even in emergency / unexpected situations. So, it is obvious that many IT companies in Greece did not support remote work prior to pandemic crisis and the national lockdown:

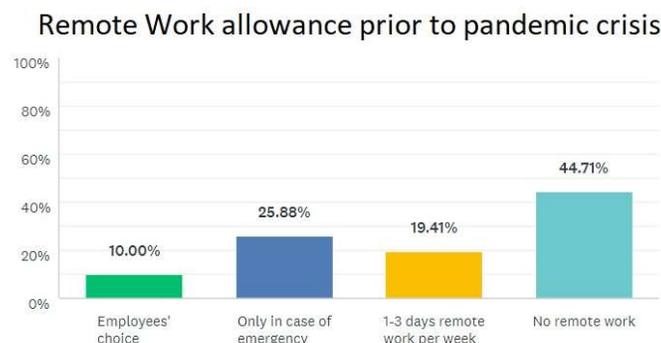


Figure 2 - Remote work prior to pandemic

However, following the pandemic crisis (early 2020), 48.24% of the employees have reverted to remote working conditions on a daily basis; the percentage of companies leaving the choice to the employee has been doubled from 10% to 20.59%; and in addition the percentage of those who work 1-3 days per week from home, has risen from 19.41% to 25.29%:

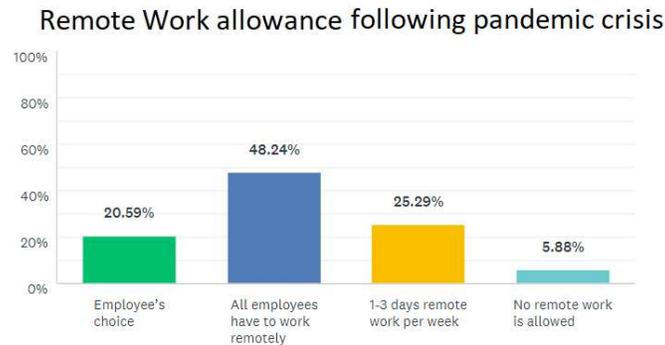


Figure 3 - Remote work following pandemic

We have to note at this point that about 72.22% of the employees that participated in this research are still working onsite as they did prior to the pandemic, while 62.26% are allowed to work remotely a few days per week, and only a 34.21% is currently working remotely, even though they were not allowed to do so prior to the pandemic. The following figure displays the “prior to pandemic crisis working status” situation in x axis, while the vertical bars display the “current working status” percentage:

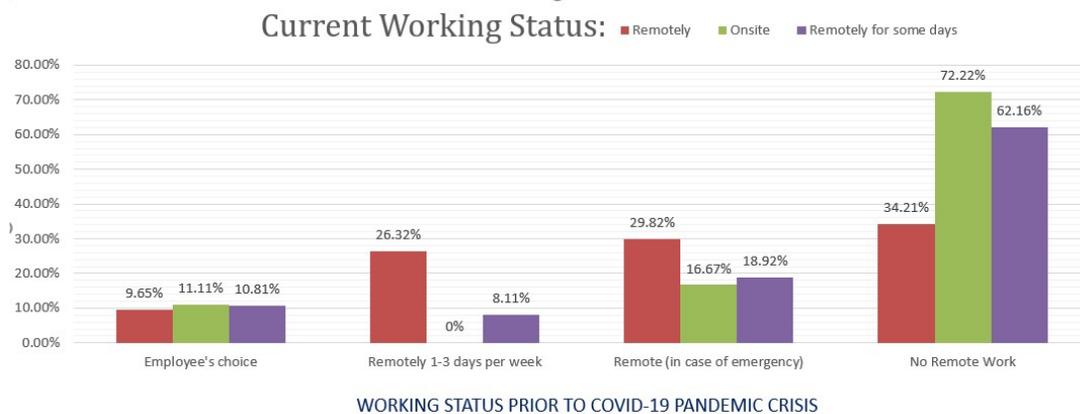


Figure 4 - Present Vs Past pandemic working status

Then, another one of the main sub-objectives that had to be answered via the research, was whether the employee’s position (i.e. if he belongs in upper management or not) affects the way he feels about remote work, not only for himself, but for the employees that report to him as well. Via the survey we had to measure the willingness of the employee, based on his position within the company, to return to work onsite on a daily basis, following the pandemic crisis.

The below two graphs show the difference in opinion between the different levels of the employees regarding their willingness to return to onsite work and their option to work a few days per week remotely:

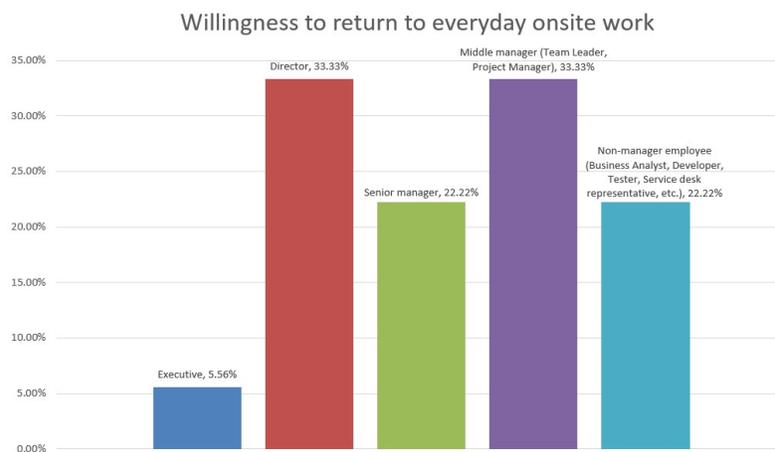


Figure 5 - Willingness to return to onsite work

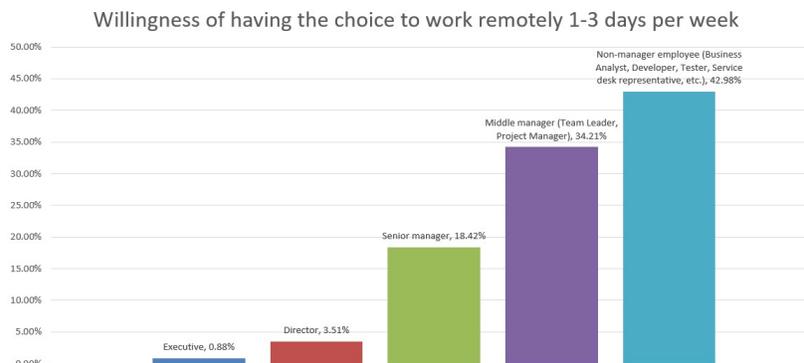


Figure 6 - Willingness to keep part of remote work

From the above two graphs, it is obvious that about 61.11% of upper management (Executives, Directors and Senior Managers) wish to return onsite on a daily basis, while only 21.93% of upper management professionals wishes to have the choice of working remotely a few days per week. In mid-management levels (Team Leaders, Project Managers) the opinions are split, while for non-manager employees, only 22.22% wants to return to onsite only work, while 43% wants to be in a hybrid model (a few days onsite and a few days remotely).

Subsequently, leaving out of the equation the employee's position within the company, and checking overall how the participants of the survey feel about returning to onsite work, following the pandemic crisis, we see that only 10.59% is in favor of that approach, while 20% wants to work remotely on a daily basis, and the majority of 67.06% wants to have the choice to work a few days per week remotely and the rest from the office.

The above is also visible in the below graph:

Desired Working Status - following Covid-19 pandemic crisis

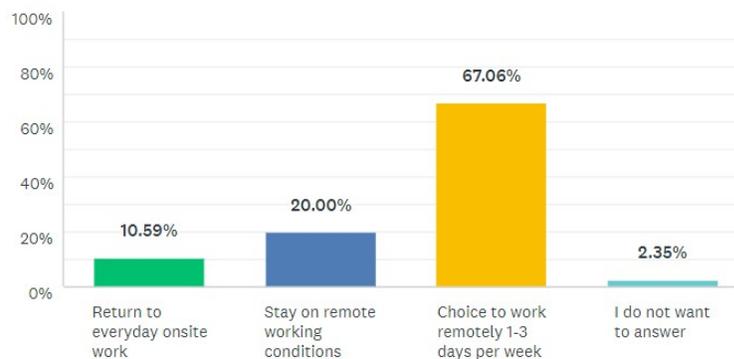


Figure 7 - Desired working status

At this stage, we took a deeper look on selected data from the survey, to see whether the survey participants' family status (single / married, number of children) could affect their response to the same question. The idea was to check if "common home distractions" were affecting his decision. Apparently, there was no deviation in the above results considering these specific parameters, therefore we can conclude that family status would not affect their preference regarding onsite and remote work models.

Moving on, another important aspect to be discussed, was whether remote work has affected the number of working hours for the employees compared to the situation before the pandemic crisis. In the below Figure, we can see that even though the majority of the survey participants (about 78.24%) has to work 40-45 hours per week based on their contract, about 15% exceeded the 45 hours limit prior to the pandemic, and this percentage was doubled, reached 30%, during the pandemic lockdown where remote work was forced by governmental laws:

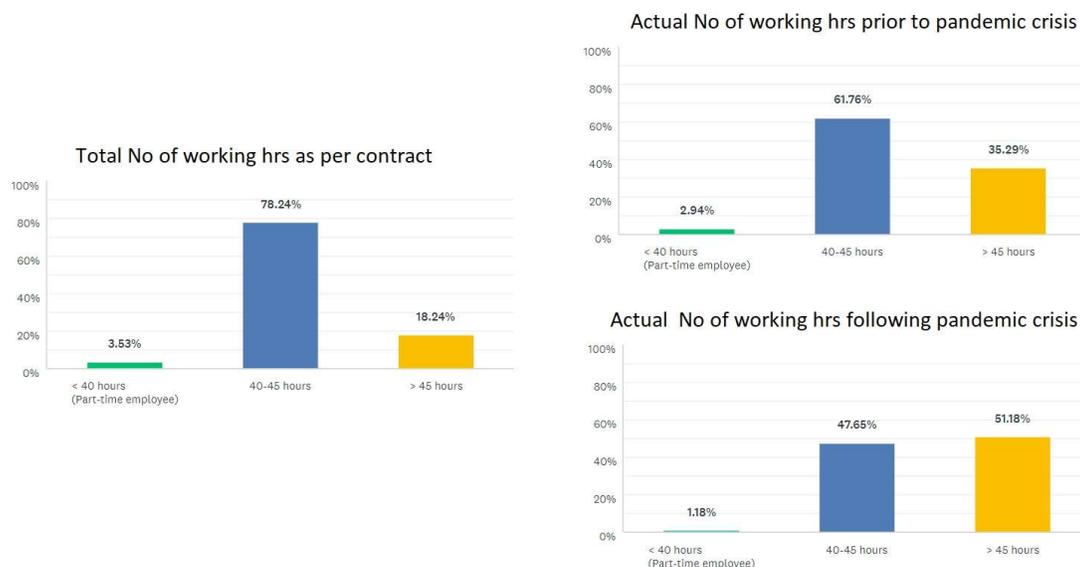


Figure 8 - Actual No of working hrs

Based on the above, it is safe to say that either there was an increase to the workload that cannot be measured by this survey, or the employees were pushed to work more hours, since there was no governmental supervision regarding the maximum number of working hours in Greece during the lockdown.

Another aspect of remote work that needed to be checked within this section, was whether the employees feel connected to their manager and their team when working remotely. The outcome was really positive, as only 7.65% of the participants was feeling cut off the team. The majority of people asked, about 50.59%, confirmed that they have daily or weekly

interaction with their managers and their team members, and about 39.41% either participate on pre-booked weekly / bi-weekly meetings or even ad-hoc sessions when this is required:

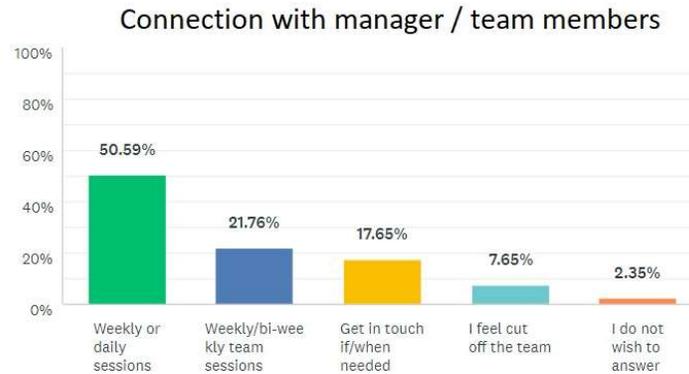


Figure 9 - Connection with manager / team members

Moreover, in the question if the employees feel more stressed / tired when working onsite or remotely, we cannot decide using data from the specific survey, as about 42% feels more stressed when working online, while 47% of the participants feels more stressed when working onsite:



Figure 10 - Stress following a workday

Therefore, it looks safe to assume that “work stress” is not a parameter affected by the working condition of the employee (remote or onsite work).

Moving on to our analysis, on the third section of the survey, we had to check what survey participants think the main advantages and disadvantages of remote work are. Most of the

advantages included in the provided list of choices within the question, have already been discussed in Section 3.1. It is however confirmed by the survey participants that each person has a different perspective on what he considers as a main advantage. The majority of the responders replied that the fact that there is no commuting time; that there is flexibility in working hours; and that remote work gives the ability to employees to work from other locations (i.e. abroad, home village, etc.) are the most important benefits for someone when working remotely. Some of the responders also added in “Other” section, that safety is the greatest benefit of all, and that remote work was the only way everyone would stay safe during the pandemic crisis.

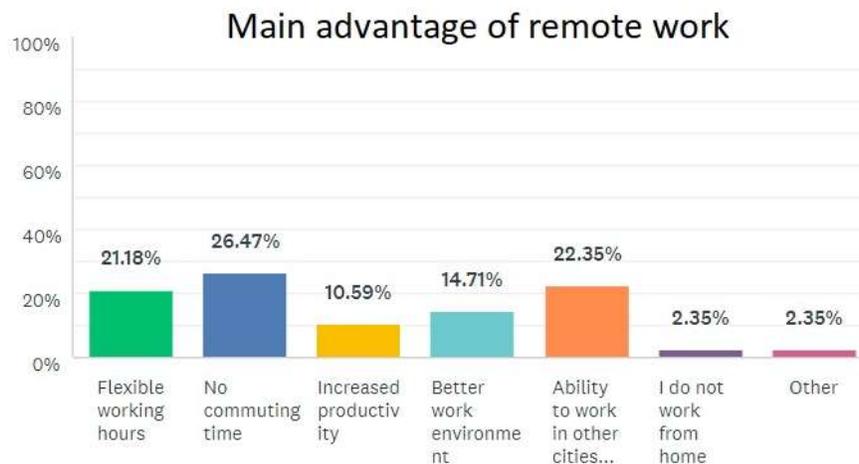


Figure 11 - Remote work pros

In the same section, there was also a question regarding the main disadvantages of remote work. As “working remotely” was not a common condition for most of the employees working in the Greek Technology sector up until early 2020, one of the survey sub-objectives was to see the participants’ opinion regarding the disadvantages, if any, of remote work.

The outcome was that about 35% of the employees felt that they end up working more hours when being remotely than they should, and this is the reason that no work-life balance exists; about 24% claimed that there are distractions at home, i.e. childcare that do not allow them to work undisturbed; about 29% felt that they were not really connected to their colleagues;

while about 8% was split in two, with half of them responding they “miss” the socializing part when they are not working onsite, and the other half that there isn’t anything that bothers them when working remotely and they find no disadvantage whatsoever.

The survey results on this question are also shown in the below Figure:

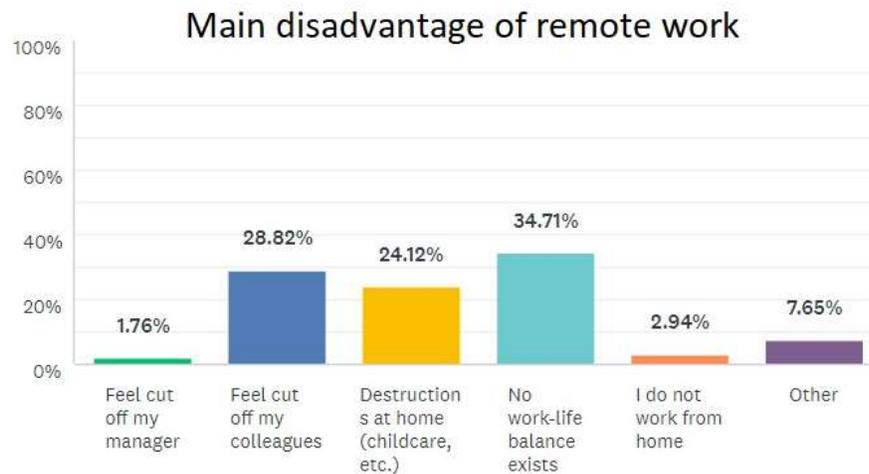


Figure 12 - Remote work cons

In the final section of the survey, we had to gather input from the responders on whether their companies had to switch to new technology means in order to support remote work, and how satisfied they feel with the decisions and actions their companies took to support them during pandemic crisis.

In the question where the participants had to respond whether their company has added or switched to new technology means in order to support remote work (i.e. Soft Phones, Chatting and Remote meeting applications, etc.), it looks like 38.24% responded that such means were already in place, as they are used even on onsite work conditions, and the majority of the responders, about 59%, responded that during the first lockdown when the pandemic crisis forced people to remote work, their companies added new technology means in order to make employees’ work more efficient:

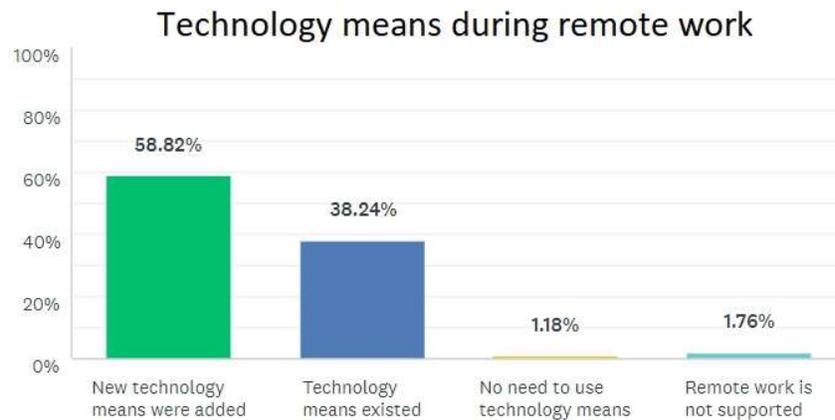


Figure 13 - Technology means existence

In the final question regarding employees' satisfaction on their companies' actions during the pandemic, the majority of the participants that answered the survey, about 72.35%, felt completely satisfied with the decisions and actions their companies took; and 21.18% feels somewhat satisfied.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that most of the IT companies in Greece have taken measures that were in favor of their employees and their employees' health, during the pandemic crisis. The below graph displays the participants' input on this question:

Satisfaction with company regarding decisions and actions during pandemic crisis

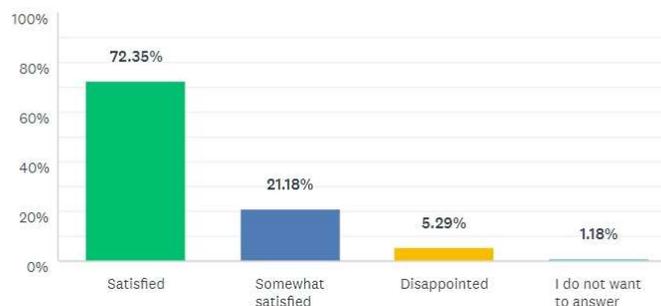


Figure 14 - Satisfaction on company actions

5. Reasons that lead companies to Remote Work Model

The recent Covid-19 pandemic crisis has undoubtedly accelerated the rise of remote work. Initially there were companies that were paralyzed by Covid-19, while others made the switch to remote work immediately, as they were prepared on continuing their services even on remote conditions. Following 2020 crisis, most IT companies have added remote work option in their Disaster Continuity processes.

Apart from the mandatory work from home condition, due to a pandemic crisis though, there are other reasons as well, that make companies around the globe to switch to remote work where feasible. First of all, it is a cost-efficient method, as companies can save money from employees working from home on a permanent basis. Secondly, when a company chooses onsite work, its employees need to be located on a logical distance from the company's offices, or at least in the same city or its suburbs, so that daily transportation to the office is easy. However, choosing remote employees allows the companies to hire talents located anywhere in the world and does not limit the company choices on talent hiring.

Furthermore, since many companies are hiring remote employees nowadays, if a company decides not to follow this approach at all, it takes the risk of losing its most talented people to its competitors. Taking under consideration that the cost of "living" is rising in urban environments, it forces people to live further outside cities. This unfortunately is increasing commuting time though. People that need to drive about 1 – 1 ½ hours to work in the morning and then 1 – 1 ½ hours in the evening to get back home, find for sure the idea of remote work, even on a part-time basis, more attractive. If employees do not even have the option and flexibility to remote work, in order to "gain" from commuting time, they might reconsider offers by competitors even for a lower paycheck. Remote work option can keep company's retention rate low. In addition, companies accepting remote work are able to build more diverse teams. Whether company's offices are great or not, it really depends on what people think as great, and this depends upon employees' age, orientation, gender, etc., however remote work is great for everyone. Moreover, offices have a lot of distractions and sometimes it is impossible for workers to perform deep focused work in open floor offices. Remote work, on the other hand, gives the employee the space and the isolation he needs to perform his tasks undistracted and be more productive. Especially in the world of technology, there are many cases where engineers are demanding working from home some

days, when they want to focus on specific project deliveries, leading us to the conclusion that sometimes people are forced to commute to the office, even though the existing environment in the office makes it tough for them to do their job properly. Considering remote work as a top perk for specific roles within the company and not for everyone, is only the first step towards this direction. Other company departments might see the benefits and try to follow, while others will not even try it. At the end though, having remote work as the "new normal" will make more employees requesting this option and will eventually force companies to update their policies and give this benefit to all their resources.

At this point we need to state once more that the backbone supporting remote work is technology. Without the advances on the technology sector, such a discussion would never take place. High Internet speeds available to all, various IT applications that support communication and collaboration not only amongst company employees, but with existing or potential clients as well, along with many other online applications that are here to support many IT roles, support companies when being on a remote working status and also "push" them towards accepting remote work as their future status.

In addition, as already announced by the biggest IT companies around the world, the dominant future workplace will be remote. Smaller companies will follow, even though some are still looking for ways to support permanent remote work schemas, and unfortunately Greece is one of the countries where small IT companies still resist, as they do not "trust" their employees on working remotely, but instead they are looking forward to the reinstatement of full onsite work. The future workplace though, even in Greece, will most probably be based on a Hybrid model, with a couple days of remote work per week and the rest onsite. Companies that will not follow either the full-remote or the hybrid model, will soon become economically uncompetitive. Hybrid work model leads to lower demand of desk space and also a reduced need for the use of expensive offices. It is a case of first-mover advantage, with the companies that are adapting remote work fast, even on a part-time basis, to lead the race, and get all the benefits, while their competitors become less competitive with every passing day.

6. Implementation of a successful remote work strategy

While some years ago it was not easy for someone to convince his manager and his company to work remotely, things seem to have changed during the past year in a fast-forward mode, mainly due to the global pandemic.

Therefore, even there was only a 9.6% that was working remotely in Europe in 2017, in 2020 the percentage of British workers only that were working remotely soared to 46.6%. (Kenjo, 2021)

For most IT companies, it was a smooth transition from onsite to remote work, because it was supported by fast Internet, Video and Audio conference calls and smartphones technology. (Kenjo, 2021) However, it still remains very crucial for every company to implement a successful working from home strategy.

Following the analysis that has taken place in the previous chapters, it is quite obvious that in order to support remote work, organizations need leaders that are able to operate in virtual coordination mode, by establishing goals, monitoring progress, driving information sharing, and sustaining connections amongst remotely working team members. However, complex tasks like: collaboration, which besides content collaboration and coordination, also includes building trust, strong relationships and a shared understanding; innovation that requires brainstorming, shared learning and knowledge integration; acculturation that requires mutual understanding and building of a shared identity that both come following extended periods of face-to-face connection; and dedication, thus having the sense of belonging to a team, feeling like a part of a community and having a shared sense of purpose, remain a huge challenge to be accomplished in a virtual working world. (Hooijberg R. & Watkins M., 2021)

Since the highest goal remains productivity, two of the most important principles that can ensure that remote work is also productive work are place and time. It is really important to transform "work from home" to a source of energy, while enabling synchronized time as the basis of coordination as well. (Gratton L., 2021)

Regarding the "place" principle, in order to transform "work from home" to a source of energy for the employees, home office setup is playing a key role. Some companies are

supporting their employees financially in order to setup a unique space in their homes with a large computer screen and a good chair. The trick is for remote employees to feel like they are actually at work during working time and to not feel isolated at home. Dressing in work clothes and getting ready as if they are leaving the house, along with the use of technology that is ensuring the maintenance of boundaries between "on" and "off" time, proper lunch breaks and "leaving" the office when working day is over, are all important aspects of having a productive day when working remotely. Furthermore, within the working day, it is vital for a company to have virtual performance management processes in place that include regular team check-ins, one-to-one discussions, and monthly reporting to management. (Gratton L., 2021)

Secondly, regarding the "time" principle, undoubtedly even if some tasks are better fulfilled when employees work alone, staying away of distractions and focusing on specific activities, there are some other tasks that require coordination in real time, especially on projects with in-the-moment dialogue and feedback. Since remote workers are not located in the same place at the same time, technology means need to be used to enable the design of synchronized time that is place-agnostic and can still create opportunities for real-time virtual interactions. (Gratton L., 2021)

According to Covid-19 Pulse of HR survey that was conducted by CultureX, Josh Bersin and Waggle between 19th and 29th of April 2020, with over 350 HR leaders and other employees participating, the most meaningful actions, aggregated under six broad categories, that the participants' organizations had taken to support their transition to remote working during Covid-19 crisis (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021).

These categories (also shown in the Figure that follows) are:

1. Communicate frequently and well – at 47%
2. Provide technology for remote work – at 45 %
3. Provide emotional and social support – at 29%
4. Maintain productivity and engagement – at 24%
5. Promote work-life balance – at 18 %
6. Ensure well-being – at 15%

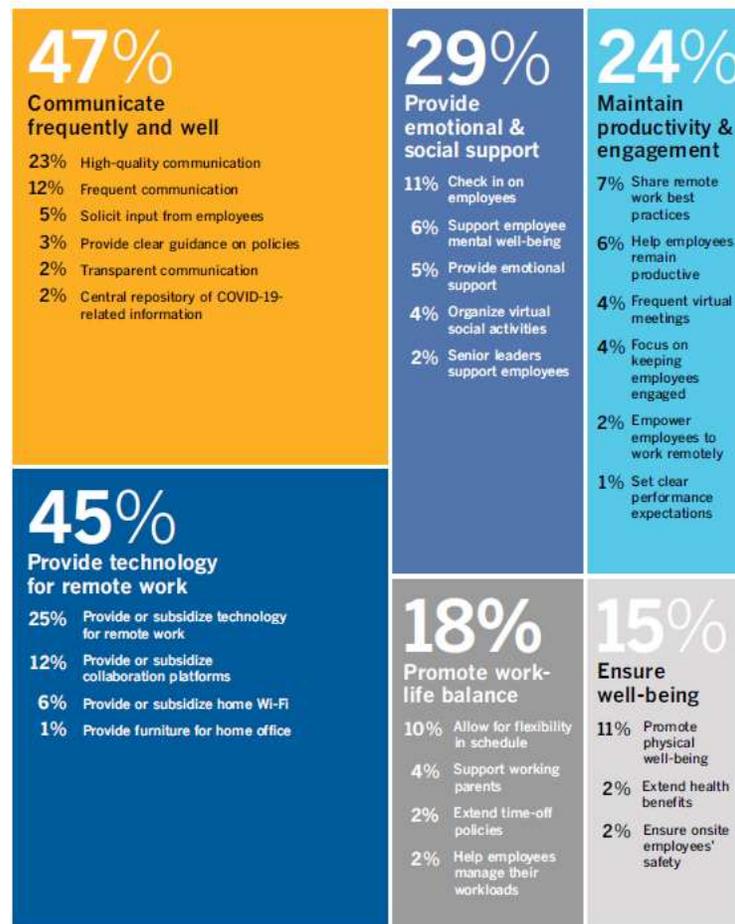


Figure 15 - Meaningful actions to support remote work ¹

6.1 Strategy regarding communications

Perhaps the most vital challenge when implementing a remote work strategy for a company is to create a clear communications strategy that will be composed by a clear communications plan. As transition to remote work can make employees feel disconnected, in order for organizations' leaders to manage more effectively a distributed team, they have to maintain frequent, transparent, consistent communication, and a two-way dialogue.

Frequent updates from the CEO, accessible to all employees in real time and webinars, are more effective than emails. In addition, leaders explaining their decisions and clarifying the

¹ (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021) - Source: The COVID-19 Pulse of HR survey was conducted by CultureX, Josh Bersin, and Waggl between April 19 and April 29, 2020.

rationale behind their choices, even on Covid-19 financial impact to the company, are appreciated by their teams, as they promote total transparency in communication regarding business impact, decision making, board feedback, and leadership mindset. Moreover, the use of tools like anonymous weekly pulse surveys, or virtual town halls where employees can express their concerns and pose questions keep the transparency and are highly appreciated. Furthermore, messages from different parts of the organization (HR, Finance, Legal, Operations), should be consistent and no conflicting, and distributed equally within all different levels of employees. Finally, the use of centralized information hubs on issues related to remote work processes and Covid-19, clear guidelines on HR policies (sick leave, time off, expected work hours), along with virtual training sessions on topics like managing virtual teams and leading online meetings; archived video messages from leaders; and remote-work success stories from colleagues can be used for a smooth transition to remote work. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

Creating a clear remote work policy is a vital part of the communications strategy. It is really important for the remote work model to be defined properly. The expected behavior of the employees needs to be clearly stated, so that misunderstandings can be eliminated. Within the policy, questions about the way remote teams will be informed in case of an emergency, rules to be followed in both formal and informal communications, common timings to contact other team members in case they are working in different time zones, etc. need to be clearly stated. Lacking a clear remote work policy, remote employees will not be fully aware of what is expected by them when working from home. The companies have to decide if remote work is an alternative of onsite work that can be used in case of emergencies, like Covid-19 pandemic crisis, or if it is going to remain as a perk for all or some employees. Therefore, within the policy, it needs to be clearly stated which employees are allowed to remote work (depending on their role), how often this is allowed, as well as the company's preferred communication strategies. (Nordli B., 2020)

Effective communication is mandatory for all work-related tasks and goals, but besides that it is the "glue" that keeps the team connected and the employees' morale high. It must be clearly communicated to all employees what it is expected from them on every single day. This is mainly the leader's responsibility, as responsibilities, expectations and deadlines should be clearly outlined at all cases, and it should be followed as a rule on every employee-

manager relationship irrelevant to whether the employee is working onsite or on a remote basis. In addition to the above, employees who hold the manager role within a company have to ensure that all their team members complete their tasks on time and with quality, and not just focus on quantitative time tracking, which usually takes place via various tools. Furthermore, regarding productivity measurement, various task management tools can be used that would be accessible to all team members.

In order to ensure proper communication, especially in Remote working conditions, there are some steps that have to be followed. There needs to be a communication plan in place, highlighting common frequently asked questions, technical and digital resources and list of contacts. These need to be shared by the management team to their employees, so that everyone knows what to expect and who he needs to be addressed in case of a challenging situation.

Moreover, working routines need to be established for all employees, so that they are all aware of how, how often and under which circumstances they can connect to their manager. Goals and timelines, as well as measurable outcomes should be clearly stated and explained properly to all resources. Additionally, important tasks should be stated explicitly, so that everyone is aware. For example, all the employees should know what the working hours / days are; the timeframes other resources within the company are available; expected response times on emails and other enquiries; company processes related to communication; and who should report to whom, and via which reporting channels. (Kenjo, 2021) In order for all these to be supported, there are various tools on the market that each company can choose from based on its needs.

6.2 Strategy regarding productivity and continuity

As already mentioned in the previous section, goals' setting and awareness by parties involved is an important aspect. Goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART objectives). Only in that case, managers and their teams have the opportunity to agree on the results they are working towards. In the market, there are various tools that can be used for goals' progress tracking, and when all employees are aware of

these tools and well trained, they can use them properly and they have the chance to measure their progress against their goals. This is a clever way to keep everyone organized on their tasks whether these are short- or long-term targets. Measuring the outcome and not the activity itself allows the organizations to understand if a remote employee is productive or not, and in cases where the work is delivered on time and on quality, there is no reason for the management to interfere with the specifics of each employee's activity, by putting restrictions that will eventually affect employee's psychology negatively.

Unfortunately, remote work does not allow managers to visit physically their employees' desks, update them on important aspects regarding their goals; and at the same time employees cannot just walk in their manager's office to discuss next actions or even an urgent issue that has occurred. Therefore, this interaction between the manager and the employee, along with the observation the manager needs to have on each one of his employees have to be adjusted on the new working model. The best approach is to have all the goals clearly defined and documented, accessible to all, and make sure that they are monitored at short time intervals and revised if needed.

In order for companies to maintain business continuity and for employees to maintain their productivity, it is really important that the company provides to its employees everything they need, so that they can support remote work. For example, the employees need to take home any physical materials they might need taking under consideration privacy and confidentiality requirements; the IT company department needs to provide availability of files and any kind of documentation in digital locations; and the company should use task management tools in order to track employees' productivity. (Kenjo, 2021) Investing in technology means (software tools and hardware equipment) allows employees to perform at their best. Especially on remote employees' cases these means are pre-requisites to get the job done.

Employees' productivity is also an outcome of their physical and mental health, therefore, it is important for a company to support its employees on that subject as well, if it wants them to remain productive. Due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, and the accelerated switch to remote work, there were companies that sponsored Covid-19 tests, masks, and flu vaccines in order to protect the physical health of their employees. It is however important to maintain the mental wellness of the employees as well, to help them combat social

isolation. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021) According to various studies, happy employees are also motivated and subsequently productive employees. Creating a work environment where people are happy and performing high, is not only mandate for onsite work. Even on remote assignments, employees need to like the environment they are working at, and this has mainly to do with the way managers treat their employees and the collaboration between team members.

One of the most effective steps to battle isolation is regular check-ins by managers to check how their team members are doing not only professionally, but personally as well. Social activities that can be performed virtually, such as lunch and coffee breaks, online exercise classes and happy hours are a fine way to facilitate social bonding, but they cannot substitute for leaders personally touching base with their teams. Various corporate initiatives designed to help employees manage stress and maintain mental well-being are valued by remote employees. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

Various researches have shown that remote work has boosted employees' productivity, especially on stand-alone tasks that require minimal coordination with colleagues, however this remains challenging when collaboration with other teams needs to take place. This needs to be acknowledged by leaders who should inform their employees that they understand the complication of the situation and that they are there to support them whenever needed. On the other hand, when it comes to the employee's performance evaluation, researches have shown that it is more likely for an onsite employee to be promoted, in comparison to a remote working one, and this is the main reason that company's reorganization is not easily accepted by remote employees. Since remote work option is here to stay, companies need to rethink performance evaluations to ensure that they are not penalizing productive employees just because they are not located on company premises. Frequently planned short meetings help the employees remain focused and boosts their performance. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

6.3 Strategy regarding collaboration

Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Inc. corporation, was against the idea of someone working from home, even though his company created technology that supported remote work. According to Jobs "Creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions. You run into someone, you ask what they're doing, you say 'Wow,' and soon you're cooking up all sorts of ideas.". It is a fact that when everyone is working from home, they get disconnected from their teams, however when Jobs stated the above, work from home was very much different from what work from home is nowadays. (Geoffrey J., 2020) If a company wants to thrive with ideas though, in a remote working world, it becomes a prerequisite to set up clear remote work strategies and at the same time keep the element of spontaneous speak and creativity going. (Kenjo, 2021)

In order to succeed in the above, companies have to prepare their remote workforce for collaboration. The use of dynamic tools by management team and the frequent use of virtual video calls between the team members can still boost team's morale, i.e. pre-booking of casually interaction sessions with colleagues for setting up virtual coffee breaks, keeps the team members connected. Via the establishment of a proper communications plan, as it was analyzed previously, team members are aware of the tools and the way they that can be used for communication, either internal or even with their clients. Moreover, chat and virtual meetings software tools make collaboration easier, especially when visual collaboration platforms are also in place. (Kenjo, 2021)

Inevitably, people collaborate better when they trust each other. Building trust however, between people who have never met in person is not an easy task, even though it comes naturally when people are located in the same office several hours per day. This is one of the main reasons why teams need to have often virtual non-work-related bonding moments, that could become face-to-face "get together" meetings on a semi-annual basis. Such events keep teams connected and allow them to build stronger relationships, while at the same time they help them understand organization's culture and keeps them connected to their company.

6.4 Strategy regarding performance management

Increasing employee's productivity is a result of employees' satisfaction. So, for a company to attract more talents and to strengthen its brand name, it needs first to create more attractive conditions for its employees. So, the challenge at a remote work condition, is for a company to measure first and then increase employee engagement. A way to do so is the use of anonymous employee surveys that are able to reveal the gap between employees' expectations and experience. It is part of the company's obligations to develop the appropriate tools to measure the output coming from the employees. Via this approach, participants can freely give their feedback about their company, and also provide their vision of a good workplace. If the discrepancy between expectations and experience is big, then unquestionably the dissatisfaction will be higher as well. The use of specific Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) like Net Promoter Score (NPS) can reveal to the company the employees' satisfaction, as this KPI indicates how likely employees would recommend their employer to friends and acquaintances. If NPS KPI is combined with staff turnover KPI, the outcome will be a good starting point for a company to understand if further actions need to be taken in order to improve employees' satisfaction and as a result afterwards increase their productivity. (Kenjo, 2021)

Employees' productivity is another important aspect that needs to be measured at least on a yearly basis. Each company needs to have a process in place to set employee goals and measure their performance on these goals. Reviews need to take place throughout the year, and both the manager and the employee need to be aligned, while the final review can only be performed once a year. Especially when working with remote teams it is crucial to have transparency in the evaluation methods and frequent feedback, so that employees will keep their motivation and will also have adequate time to improve themselves where needed.

Additionally, it is the company's obligation to ensure that its employees feel secure; they are rewarded according to their performance; and that their salary is in line with industry standards. Apart from that, employees that are high performers should be rewarded for their exceptional performance throughout the year, so that they will keep up the good work, and set an example for the rest of the employees as well. This is irrelevant to the working status of the employee (onsite or remote) and it is another way of increasing employees' satisfaction. (Kenjo, 2021)

Finally, for loyal and satisfied employees, regular team-building activities are required, even on remote conditions, and of course every company has to provide opportunities for further training to its employees, so that they can initially evolve within their role, and then perhaps to another role within the company. (Kenjo, 2021) This is another way to keep resources fulfilled and reduce the retention rate of the organization.

6.5 Strategy regarding the maintenance of company's culture

Another important strategy has to do with the maintenance of company's culture, even during remote work conditions. This one is indeed really challenging, as it is difficult to maintain the sense of belonging to a team, the loyalty to a company and uphold certain values, when the team is not located in one place and they can only meet up virtually.

Actions like the creation of a specific MS Teams / Slack channel for employees to share their thoughts and connect socially, just if they were located in the office; or ensuring that new employees will get connected smoothly - during and after the onboarding process - are encouraging newcomers and create a stronger bond between team members. Furthermore, another smart idea is hosting get-together-virtual sessions that are not work related, so that team members can discuss with their colleagues about various subjects and get closer to each other.

It is mostly the HR's and the managers' role to think out of the box. Virtual celebrations held for "cutting New Year's pie" can be properly prepared by Human Resources department, with gifts sent to the employees prior to the event and then holding an online event for everyone to celebrate. Other ideas might include online yoga and wellness classes, virtual cooking seminars, online song competitions with surprises for the first three winners, etc. All it needs is creativity and willingness to bring the virtual teams close.

In addition to the above, companies need to keep publishing their strategic priorities in order to be successful in the future. Strategic priorities like: products' and services' improvement; accelerated innovation; efficient operations; talent development; and digital transformation execution, have to remain in place at all times. Crisis like Covid-19 pandemic should not

distract leaders from their priorities, and strategic objectives that were set prior to the pandemic should maintain their importance. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

Companies need to figure out how to build and sustain a healthy corporate culture when their resources are working remotely, as when they were working onsite. Remote work has provided opportunities on accelerating progress on strategic priorities, such as learning opportunities and building the employees' skills during the quarantine. Furthermore, the sudden shift to remote work made companies rethink their existing processes and accelerate their digital transformation. Remote work is opening the way to more opportunities, such as practices on the management of the transition to a more distributed workforce. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

6.6 Strategy regarding the management of remote work-life balance

One of the biggest challenges of remote work is the maintenance of work-life balance. Working from home saves time due to no commuting and in addition allows employees to adjust their schedules and spend more time with their families, but on the other hand a significant number of employees feel they must be available on a 24x7 basis and work more hours daily, therefore there is no specific boundary set between personal and professional lives. This is one of the reasons that according to research, remote workers log more hours in comparison to their onsite counterparts. Especially during quarantine time, when remote work was mandatory and schools were closed, the distinction between personal and professional life was even harder. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

Many companies have been following approaches to help their remote employees overcome this obstacle. There are cases where companies are allowing their employees to adjust their working schedules within the day in order to accommodate their personal obligations and better organize themselves. Additionally, there is encouragement by companies' management on: taking time off during the day to allow for taking care of kids, or whenever needed; setting the expectations regarding productivity (i.e. have the work done within the course of a day, instead of 9.00-17.00); and request employees to stop work at a designated log-off time to maintain work-life balance. (Sull D., Sull C. & Bersin J., 2021)

7. Conclusion

Living in a digital era, work conditions could not remain to the status they were a few years ago. Digital transformation is a required step for all companies, and especially the ones belonging in the IT sector, if they want to stay in business. The recent pandemic crisis of Covid-19 accelerated this transformation for companies that had not been digitally transformed yet, however most of the IT companies in Greece were already somehow prepared. Remote work might be a new condition for most companies and their employees; however, it was something that could be technologically supported. What changed was basically the way companies feel about remote work, and the lockdown forced them to rethink remote work as an alternative to onsite work, in order to keep their business running.

In the mid-2021, after about one and half years when it all started, and remote work was almost imposed to most of the employees working in the technology sector, companies are aware that routine tasks, which involve transactions and coordination can take place 100% virtually, while work that requires true team collaboration and innovation is still best done face to face. Therefore, the vision of a post-pandemic future of teamwork will probably be a combination of virtual coordination and in-person collaboration, a hybrid working model. Of course, even hybrid work models require a fundamental change in the team leaders skills and training of managers and employees in order to succeed. (Hooijberg R. & Watkins M., 2021)

Switching from onsite to remote work was not probably in the strategic roadmap of many IT organizations in Greece prior to Covid-19 lockdown. It is something that was added afterwards and by checking the results, it proved to be a successful movement. Employees' productivity remained at high levels, or even increased in some cases, company costs dropped, and overall, the transition showed in real-life example that projects can be delivered on time and on quality, and tasks can be completed, regardless of the employees' physical location.

As already presented in the previous chapters, there might be various reasons behind each company's choice on whether or not all or some of its employees will work remotely. Of course, there are also cases where the employees have personal reasons to prefer remote

work (i.e. flexible workplan, childcare, elimination of commuting time, work while travelling).

Some of the main advantages of having remote working teams include: company's ability to hire the best talent, without considering relocation options and costs; less company expenses, due to less office space requirement; increased productivity of remote employees, due to less distractions; company's operational hours expansion; significant reduction on carbon footprint, since less transportation is required; and greater flexibility on working timeframe for the employees.

However, there are some cons to be considered when setting up remote teams, like: it cannot apply to all roles; IT technology equipment and tools are required to support remote work; no networking for employees, therefore brainstorming and collaboration are challenging; remote teams management and coordination required trained leaders; setup of clear goals is mandatory; and employees performance management should include regular check-ins and one-to-one discussions. During the first lockdown in Greece, early 2020, it is true that many people were in favor of the idea of remote work, soon enough though, they started feeling cut off and isolated. The balance between their professional and personal lives was lost and their morale was not in good shape. Before reaching this point, however, it is the organization's responsibility to take all the necessary actions and setup the proper strategy to avoid such cases.

The implementation of a successful remote work strategy requires time and effort and will probably be adjusted more than once during its implementation, in order to fit properly to the organization culture and needs. Within this strategy implementation, a company should not underestimate the importance of having technology tools, for video conferencing, file sharing, chatting, etc. available to support remote teams' work, as well as the need of specific methods to be used, to bring remote teams closer, simulating onsite work life, and help people bonding.

Remote work is undeniably going to change the way businesses are running, and will soon become a strategic necessity for organizations, especially the ones operating in the technology sector. Hiring the best talent for a specific position, will give the company an

advantage over its competitors. Remote work is not just a trend of the digital era, it will grow, it will be evolved and adjusted to each company's needs.

However, considering all the above stated, the future of work will probably not be 100% remote. It is really unlikely that companies will completely give up their office space, no matter what the cost is, as this will remain an investment, and mainly because company HQs is part of its brand name. One more aspect to be taken under consideration when it comes to remote work, are the extra expenses when working from home. Higher utility bills, the need for high-speed Internet and mobile phones usage, will not be covered, in most cases, by the company for all its employees, and employees are not always willing to cover such a cost in order to remain to remote work condition. (Griffis H., 2021)

Therefore, as mentioned above, it is more likely to have a hybrid working model in the future, combining both onsite and remote work. Mandatory remote work, due to the pandemic crisis, presented remote work as an alternative to the onsite work option, and increased companies' flexibility on that matter.

Infrastructures and technology required in remote work are already in place and can be used by organizations in the future. However, technology is not enough by itself for a company to switch to remote work. This shift in work culture will be mostly driven by Millennials and Generation Z. These young people are ambitious and adventurous, they have been using the technology in every aspect of their life, they want to simultaneously work and travel, and additionally they hold the digital and technological skills that are required in modern workplaces. Living in an always-connected world, there are many remote work opportunities around the world that can cover the needs of these digital nomads, and this does not only apply to companies belonging to the technology sector only. Even "old" industries like energy, construction and logistics are following a digital transformation nowadays, and they are creating digital roles, to evolve and stay competitive. Therefore, to adapt quickly, organizations need to be able and give the new generation what they want: flexibility and independence; allow them to work from anywhere; and promotion of work-life balance. (Swigunski M., 2020)

As remote work implies flexibility, and flexibility implies trust, it is inevitable that both companies and the employees came victorious following the Covid-19 lockdown. The basis for moving on to a most-promising future has already been set, and this will give more freedom and flexibility to employees, while in parallel smart companies will measure performance by looking into the results, and not counting the exact hours someone stays in the office. (Griffis H., 2021) For companies, especially the ones belonging in the Technology sector, there is an opportunity in place to fashion the hybrid virtual model the best way that suits each company and its culture. The goal is the creation of a new shared culture for all employees that will embrace trust, will promote stability and flexibility values, and will be irrelevant to whether the employees are working onsite, remotely, or in a combination of both basic models. (Alexander A., De Smet A. & Mysore M., 2020)

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Appendix A: "Survey Questionnaire"

Switching strategies from Onsite to Remote Work Models: The case of Technology Sector companies --- Survey

Q1 Do you agree that you are more than 18 years old; you have read and understood the information above; and that you voluntarily participate in this survey?

- Yes
- No

Q2 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Q3 What is your age?

- <30
- 31-50
- 51-60
- 61+

Q4 How many adults live in your home (including yourself)?

- 1 – only myself
- 2
- 3
- 4+

Q5 How many children (not adults) are living in your home?

- I do not have any children
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

Q6 What is your highest educational level?

- High School
- Technological Educational Institution or other similar degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral's Degree

Q7 What is your current (latest) work level?

- Executive
- Director
- Senior manager
- Middle manager (Team Leader, Project Manager)
- Non-manager employee (Business Analyst, Developer, Tester, Service desk representative, etc.)

Q8 What is the organization structure of the company you are working at?

- Project-based organization
- Product-based organization
- Services-based organization

Q9 Total number of working hours per week (as per your contract):

- < 40 hours (Part-time employee)
- 40-45 hours
- > 45 hours

Q10 Actual total number of working hours per week, prior to Covid-19 pandemic crisis:

- < 40 hours (Part-time employee)
- 40-45 hours
- > 45 hours

Q11 Actual total number of working hours per week, following Covid-19 pandemic crisis:

- < 40 hours (Part-time employee)
- 40-45 hours
- > 45 hours

Q12 Are you currently working onsite or remotely?

- Onsite
- Remotely
- Being onsite a few days per week, or every second week
- I do not work at the moment

Q13 Prior to Covid-19 pandemic crisis, did your company support remote work?

- Employees' choice
- Only in case of emergency
- 1-3 days remote work per week
- No remote work

Q14 Following Covid-19 pandemic crisis (early 2020), does your company support remote work?

- Employee's choice
- All employees have to work remotely
- 1-3 days remote work per week
- No remote work is allowed

Q15 Has your company switched to new technology means in order to support remote work (Soft Phones, Chatting and Remote meeting applications, etc.)?

- New technology means were added
- Technology means existed
- No need to use technology means
- Remote work is not supported

Q16 Working remotely, do you feel connected to your manager and your team (in case you are a team leader)?

- Weekly or daily sessions
- Weekly/bi-weekly team sessions
- Get in touch if/when needed
- I feel cut off the team
- I do not wish to answer

Q17 Which one of the below is the greatest advantage of remote work?

- Flexible working hours
- No commuting time

- Increased productivity
- Better work environment
- Ability to work in other cities, countries, etc.
- I do not work from home
- Other

Q18 What bothers you most when working from home?

- Feel cut off my manager
- Feel cut off my colleagues
- Destructions at home (childcare, etc.)
- No work-life balance exists
- I do not work from home
- Other

Q19 When do you feel more tired / stressed following a workday?

- Working remotely
- Working onsite
- I do not feel tired / stressed following a workday

Q20 Following Covid-19 pandemic crisis, what are your expectations regarding working conditions?

- Return to everyday onsite work
- Stay on remote working conditions
- Choice to work remotely 1-3 days per week
- I do not want to answer

Q21 Are you satisfied with your company's decisions and actions regarding Covid-19 pandemic crisis?

- Satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Disappointed
- I do not want to answer

Data and Graphs regarding the responses to all the above questions can be found in the attached .pdf file:



Survey_Data_VChryso
myti.pdf

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