Chapter 8
Remote Work Policies

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ABSTRACT

Remote work is a well-known concept that experienced an enormous upswing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated massive digitization processes as well as the changed attitudes, desires, and motivations of employees for new work concepts and their unwillingness to return to the office. The discussion about the changed work design is diverse and often revolves around the topics of trust and control. Affected are changing leadership concepts, effects on teamwork, engagement of the employees, and organizational culture, as well as issues such as greater participation and inclusion of diverse workers and new human resource policies. The authors will explore the question of how remote work policies must be designed to do justice to the principles of personnel and organizational policy. Based on our study, they demonstrate that remote work brings many advantages to the organization on an individual, team, and organizational level. However, they identified the "dark side" of remote work, especially for women with care responsibilities, as a negative impact on their professional activities.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of technology and the changing dynamics of the workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic have given rise to a new era of work – remote work. Enabled by digital connectivity, remote work has revolutionized the way organizations operate, providing flexibility and autonomy for employees (Adams-Prassl, 2022; Allen et al., 2015; Cullen et al., 2014; Daniels et al., 2001). Flexible working arrangements have become increasingly popular as employees seek a better work-life balance and greater control over their schedules. Remote work offers the freedom to work from any location, be it home, a co-working space, or even while traveling. This newfound flexibility has allowed organizations to tap into a global talent pool, accessing skilled individuals regardless of their geographical location. It has also led to higher employee satisfaction and increased productivity, as workers enjoy the elimination of long commutes and the ability to structure their workday to suit their individual needs (Arunprasad et al., 2022; Bresnahan, 2022; Brodeur et al., 2021).

While remote work offers numerous advantages, such as increased productivity and improved work-life balance, it also presents a downside. Shirmohammadi and colleagues (2022) found four areas where expectations linked to remote work contrast with reality: (1) flextime vs. work intensity, (2) flexplace vs. space limitation, (3) technologically feasible work arrangement vs. technostress and isolation, and (4) family-friendly work arrangement vs. housework and care intensity. The fourth point, which is the focus of this chapter, has been widely discussed and addresses the advantages of a better compatibility of different areas of life in connection with a gender-specific assumption of additional care tasks (Allen et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2013; Eby et al., 2005).

Research has shown that far more women than men say that balancing work and family life is difficult, as is advancing their career (Sundaresan, 2014). Working remotely is seen by women with care responsibilities as a possibility to find balance between their work life and their family duties (Hyland et al., 2005). At the same time, organizations also see remote work as an opportunity to achieve more integration and inclusion in work for women (Hermann et al., 2022; Ibarra et al., 2020). However, research shows, that working remotely does not offer them the promised work life balance that is usually associated with remote work. It has its difficulties and ambivalences (Allen et al., 2020). In fact, remote work may end up working against them reinforce patterns that reduce gender equity (Sullivan, 2012). The image of the "ideal worker" (Acker, 1990), who is available all the time, is intensified by flexible working hours and especially women with care responsibilities will often not live up to this image and the associated expectations. At the same time, remote work, used as a tool by companies to reconcile different spheres of life, may reinforce traditional gender roles at work and in the home (Lott & Abendroth, 2020; Peters & Blomme, 2019; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Blair-Loy, 2001). The new hybrid workplace could turn some women into "second-class employees" (Beheshti, 2022) due to the above-mentioned dangers. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on working mothers especially and increased this phenomenon (Beheshti, 2022; Barroso & Horowitz, 2021). Because of caring and domestic responsibilities, more working mothers cut back their hours, left the workforce, and lost their job. Beheshti (2022) argues that these changes, taken all together, reverse decades of progress made by working women. In the USA, women have lost 2.4 million jobs since February of 2020, and female participation in the workforce was 2022 where it was in the 1980s. The negative impact of COVID-19 is heterogeneous across occupations and skill levels and must always be considered in context (Adam-Prassl et al., 2022; Broduer et al., 2021; Kikuchi et al., 2021; Brussevich et al., 2020).

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