



Home-office implementation: challenges and changes in people management

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Home-office implementation: challenges and changes in people management

Abstract

Purpose: This paper investigates how organisations responded to the home office imposition during the recent global health crisis and its impacts on people management, detailing the organisational factors crucial for effective home-office implementation.

Methodology: We used an exploratory design based on a multiple case study with four companies from two contrasting sectors (Manufacturing and Information Technology (IT)). We interviewed a total of 12 managers, including one HR manager (HRms) and two team managers from each company. We also conducted an online questionnaire with open questions, reaching out to 128 home-office workers from the four participating companies. This diverse group consisted of 67 workers from the IT sector and 61 workers from the manufacturing sector. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, we opted for a qualitative approach to examine the data.

Findings: Findings enabled detail of the *organisational factor* of the Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) extended Baruch and Nicholson's (1997) model into people management issues: organisational culture, team management, and human resources management (HRM) practices, as well as the technological support. The results also revealed that people management benefits from the successful home-office implementation, which boosted the digitalisation of human resources (HR) processes.

Originality: Considering the lessons learned from the home-office imposition, this research provides original insights into the field by exploring the roles of supervisors and HR managers, in non-health organisations, with different previous remote work experiences, in a recent global disruptive moment, based on a rich qualitative approach.

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3 The paper offers concrete guidelines for companies that intend to implement remote work
4 management programs and contributes to deepen the knowledge of home-office
5 experience, offering a model focusing on managers' roles (HRms and TMs) and HRM
6 practices.
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14 **KEYWORDS:** HR management, home-office, remote work, manufacturing sector,
15 information technology sector, HRM practices.
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24 INTRODUCTION

25
26 As it is widely known, the recent global disruptive moment faced by companies due to
27 the COVID-19 pandemic, forced a quick adoption of remote work settings, which was
28 unprecedented (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; AL-Abrow *et al.*, 2021; Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-
29 Garcés, 2020; Biron *et al.*, 2021; Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Jeske, 2022; Mehta, 2022;
30 Newman *et al.*, 2023; Pataki-Bittó and Kun, 2022; World Health Organization, 2020).
31 Globally, organisations had to quickly adapt to work-from-home, in some cases, for the
32 first time, which brought several challenges to the implementation and management of
33 remote workers. Thus, the Human Resources Managers' (HRms) role was particularly
34 relevant and challenging within the lockdown context because they had to take the lead
35 in balancing individual and organisational interests required by remote work (Errichiello
36 and Pianese, 2016; Pataki-Bittó and Kun, 2022). HRms are also responsible for defining
37 and implementing strategic actions for remote work, positively affecting organisations'
38 productivity and employee satisfaction (Donnelly and Johns, 2021). Team Managers
39 (TMs) are responsible for motivating their teams to achieve maximum performance
40 (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Park, 2014) as well as establishing organisational norms for working
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3 remotely (Jeske, 2022). Within the pandemic context, while struggling to adapt to the new
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5 setting, they also had to provide support to implement remote work in their teams
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8 (Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Newman *et al.*, 2023; Park and Cho, 2020). Thus, the people
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10 management topics were crucial for the home-office implementation, both from HRms'
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12 and TMs' perspectives.
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15 Given the expected trend towards remote work adoption, the abrupt change to home-
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17 office due to the pandemic and the widespread inexperience of Portuguese organisations
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19 is an opportunity to study how to do it effectively from the people management
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21 perspective. Recent studies address the HRM changes (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2021; Newman
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23 *et al.*, 2023) and HRM challenges (Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Dirani *et al.*, 2020; Kokubun *et al.*,
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25 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic. To our knowledge, none of
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27 the studies has explicitly focused on the HRM challenges and practices aiming to increase
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29 the organisation's capabilities when implementing home-office. Additionally, when
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31 analysing home-office literature during COVID-19 period, studies addressing the people
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33 management issues from the strategic perspective (the HRms) were not found. From the
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35 operational perspective (namely TMs), literature highlight that managers were more
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37 challenged than employees were (AL-Abrow *et al.*, 2021; Kirchner *et al.*, 2021), thus
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39 encouraging new studies addressing organisational support to reduce the challenging of
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41 managing people at distance conditions (Abbas *et al.*, 2022). Previous studies stated the
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43 factors that would enable remote work adoption in organisations (e.g., Baruch and
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45 Nicholson, 1997; Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). However, we are unaware
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47 that people management issues - considering HRms and TMs views - were explicitly
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49 addressed. This research focusing on the people management issues related to the
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51 successful implementation of home-office aims to contribute to remote work literature by
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53 complementing Baruch and Nicholson (1997) extended framework by Belzunegui-Eraso
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3 and Erro-Garcés (2020). The framework includes five dimensions, which do not address
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5 people management issues. Filling this gap, we aim to deepen the organisational factors
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7 dimension that enable effective remote work adoption by systematising the related
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9 scattered people management issues in the literature. Thus, based on challenges and
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11 changes data from first-time users and experienced remote work adopters, we aim to
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13 contribute to advancing research on the post-pandemic needed TMs' role and the HRms
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15 support role for remote work implementation. Our research considers different
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17 stakeholders' perspectives: two types of managers and home-office workers, reinforcing
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19 the remote work literature.
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25 Therefore, our study explores how organisations responded to the imposition of home-
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27 office and its impacts on people management. Specifically, the present study intends to:
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29 (1) characterise the organisations' experience with remote work; (2) identify the main
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31 challenges in managing people working from home, based on managers (TMs and HRms)
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33 and on home-office employees' experiences; (3) identify HRM practices that emerged to
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35 address the home-office imposition in the context of an abrupt change, in concrete the
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37 one that was triggered by the first wave period of COVID 19 lockdown.
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41 This research is original for several reasons: (i) it has a specific focus. This study focuses
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43 on the role of supervisors and HRM practices in non-health organisations, which has been
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45 more explored in previous research (Newman et al., 2023), adding a renewed dimension
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47 to the understanding of how contrasting sectors adopted remote work arrangements. (ii)
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49 it considers a multiple stakeholders' perspectives. The study offers a comprehensive
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51 understanding of the home-office experience from multiple angels (team managers with
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53 supervision functions, HR managers, home-office workers), which is relatively rare and
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55 enriches the findings. (iii) the novelty brought by our findings. This research underlines
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57 the importance of customised HRM practices and a humanized leadership (*versus* control-
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oriented leadership). As it is known, remote work is no stranger to less positive experiences, and our study focused on the role of team managers and HRM practices that might mitigate these negative experiences. (iv) the contributions for practitioners. Remote and hybrid work arrangements are increasing and this study gives valuable insights to ensure home-office workers' quality of life, through specific HRM practices. Finally, (v) the timelessness of the findings. Starting from a specific moment in time characterized by the abrupt and forced adoption of home-office, this research offers insights that can help organisations to improve current remote work programs (present), but also organisations that want to start the adoption of this work model arrangement (future).

To sum up, the study contributes to deepen the understanding of home-office dynamics and provides a model proposal to optimize people management practices (managers' roles and HRM practices) when implementing remote work. These contributions are relevant considering the richness of data, based on two contrasting sectors, with different previous remote work experiences.

The following section presents the existing literature on the remote work concept, people management challenges, and HRM practices. Section three outlines the methodological approach, followed by the main findings, and the final section addresses the discussion and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Remote work and the home-office

Since 1975, when Jack Nilles introduced the concepts "telecommuting" and "telework", other similar words such as *virtual work*, *agile work*, *flexible work*, *distance work* or *working from home*, *e-working*, and *remote work* have emerged in the literature (e.g.,

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2
3 Biron *et al.*, 2021; Pataki-Bittó and Kun, 2022; Santana and Cobo, 2020). These terms
4
5 refer to performing work duties using distance communication technologies in flexible
6
7 workplaces – *remote work*, including remote work at home – *home-office* (Donnelly and
8
9 Johns, 2021; Vyas and Butakhieo, 2020). This study adopts the specific concepts of
10
11 *remote work* and *home-office* in the specified definitions.
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15 The *home-office* modality, although adopted involuntarily, became the dominant
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17 modality of work after March 2020, when the pandemic was declared (Jeske, 2022; World
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19 Health Organization, 2020). In Portugal, this type of work became mandatory in cases
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21 where the functions were compatible with remote work and when the worker had the
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23 necessary conditions for such. In the present study, the concept of home-office refers to
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25 home-based remote work as a temporary and alternative working arrangement in the
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27 context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
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33 ***Challenges in managing remote workers***

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36 Some companies already had prior experience in remote work. Still, the majority had to
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38 make urgent organisational arrangements to implement it for the first time. Under normal
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40 and stable conditions, research shows no consensus concerning remote work's benefits
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42 and drawbacks (Biron *et al.*, 2021; Park and Cho, 2020; Santana and Cobo, 2020). The
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44 COVID-19 pandemic provides a new context for understanding the numerous issues
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46 businesses that implement remote working at scale, typically for the first time, have in
47
48 managing remote workers. Remote work was considered even more challenging for
49
50 managers than employees (Kirchner *et al.*, 2021).
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54 After COVID-19, academia produced extensive research on remote work and home-
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56 office. However, the literature review since 2020 provided few straightforward models to
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58 help organisations to implement remote work. Studies included: systematic literature
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3 reviews (e.g., Athanasiadou and Theriou, 2021), recommendations to organisations (e.g.,
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5 Baumann and Marcum, 2023), frameworks for people management, recontextualising
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7 remote work and HRM in different contexts (Balamurugan and Priyanka, 2023; Donnelly
8
9 and Johns, 2021; Zahari *et al.*, 2024). Still, as far as we know, the studies aimed at
10
11 providing models for implementation of remote work are scarce.
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15 Our starting point were previous studies, empirically validated, that identified five factors
16
17 that support remote work, namely home-office, to make it effective (Baruch and
18
19 Nicholson, 1997; Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). Baruch and Nicholson
20
21 (1997) proposed a pre COVID-19 pandemic framework. Home-office workers were
22
23 asked to identify what they valued for supporting effective remote work, and four factors
24
25 were identified (i) the individual (personality; situation), (ii) home and family interface,
26
27 (iii) the job (nature; technology), and (iv) the organisation (strategy; culture). Later,
28
29 Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) complemented this framework, using a
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31 companies' database that introduced remote work to face the pandemic, introducing one
32
33 more factor: (v) the context.
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38 The first factor is related to the individual and refers to personal characteristics and needs
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40 that successfully enable such work type: motivation, self-discipline, digital competencies
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42 (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997). These characteristics are requirements for engagement
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44 due to the absence of supervision at home (Balamurugan and Priyanka, 2023; Zahari *et*
45
46 *al.*, 2024). Individual differences, such as personality, play a role in better adapting to or
47
48 even desiring remote working. Extroverted and people with low self-discipline will
49
50 probably not be as much oriented to home-office. Considering the distance work, digital
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52 savviness is a required competence, which translates as more than having digital
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54 competences, means continuous adaptation and motivation for working digitally,
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3 learning, and looking for new digital tools and continuous digital improvement (Baruch
4
5 and Nicholson, 1997).

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8 The second factor concerns the home/work interface. Considering the number of people
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10 in the family (spouse, number and age of children), this factor can either encourage or
11
12 hinder the home-office adoption depending on the perspective: allows flexibility or
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14 distracts, or even felt as a home-intrusion (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997). That is why
15
16 ensuring fair and compliant work schedules (Baumann and Marcum, 2023), enabling the
17
18 family's commitment to the home-office work arrangement, is also required (Zahari *et*
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20 *al.*, 2024). The facilities available at home are also an important issue, enabling
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22 concentration or, on the other hand if there is not an appropriate space, focusing can be
23
24 difficult and interfere with the home-living of the other family members (Baruch and
25
26 Nicholson, 1997; Mohd Ariffin and Rami, 2022).

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29 The third factor regards the nature of job and the technology supporting the role
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31 performance. The continual technological advancements have been facilitating the
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33 availability of technological infrastructures (widespread internet band), equipment, and
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35 the growing adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) spreading
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37 into numerous professional roles, facilitating the expansion of remote work, namely
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39 among “white-collar” workers and knowledge-oriented sectors (Belzunegui-Eraso and
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41 Erro-Garcés, 2020). Jobs that can be performed autonomously with high levels of self-
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43 management and trust or easily controlled based on the output are the best for this type
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45 of work modality (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997). Remote work implementation also
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47 requires the right technology (hardware, software) and strategies in place (integrating
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49 technology into work processes, network requirements VPN, cloud-based services, and
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51 security measures), which can be challenging (Balamurugan and Priyanka, 2023; Zahari
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53 *et al.*, 2024).

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3 The fourth factor is related to the organisation. It includes the organisational culture
4 regarding remote/home-office work, namely the willingness to allow this type of work
5 modality. It is both a top management decision and a supervisor's acceptance, as well as
6 a positive and realistic (versus glamourised) peers' perspective. It also requires
7 appropriate supporting systems, namely employees' measurable outputs (Baruch and
8 Nicholson, 1997). Organisations are realizing the importance of this flexible option and
9 are making internal work arrangements to fit it to attract different employee talent targets
10 (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020). Top management should also acknowledge
11 the TMs' role in implementing remote work and ensure fair HRM practices, such as
12 approval and evaluation of remote workers, recognition of individual workers, and align
13 remote work practices with other diversity, equity and inclusion efforts (Baumann and
14 Marcum, 2023).

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31 The fifth factor contributing to the success of remote/home-office modality, added by
32 Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020), includes the environment, safety, and
33 legislation issues, which we designated as contextual factors. Environmental concerns
34 have been a key aspect of telework literature since the 1970s, aiming to minimize the
35 ecological impact of economic activity, namely by reducing travel to workplaces. For
36 safety reasons, in times of crises, such as 9/11 or the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to
37 work from home is referred as vital for an organisation's survival as it enables the
38 workforce to remain productive during the restoration of public services and
39 infrastructure. Legislation has been considered an important issue in facilitating remote
40 work adoption in the post-COVID era, specific regulations in all countries have become
41 more supportive of remote work, even if they are different across European countries.

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Following Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés's (2020) path of extending the model, we
propose to extend the model not by adding an additional factor but by deepening the

organisational factor that does not include crucial organisational topics, such as the people management related issues. Indeed, the literature shows the importance of TMs (e.g., Park and Cho, 2020) and the HRM role (e.g., Dirani *et al.*, 2020) in implementing such modality effectively. However, we consider that, in the presented model, the role of these two actors is underdeveloped.

The widespread implementation of home-office due to the COVID-19 outbreak allows for researching the challenges and critical issues in managing people and fine-grain what is essential for successful home-office adoption. We approach these issues by bringing to light the challenges and changes faced by TMs and HRMs in junior companies regarding remote work implementation.

Challenges for team managers

Remote working brings significant challenges to TMs (Errichiello and Pianese, 2016; Jeske, 2022; Park and Cho, 2020; Santana and Cobo, 2020; Yu *et al.*, 2019). Technological knowledge and e-leadership competencies are required to work remotely successfully, for both TMs and their subordinates (Avolio *et al.*, 2014; Silva-C. *et al.*, 2019), which became challenging for TMs and their employees with the sudden transition from in-office to at-home work. Remote team management is complex since TMs spend less time doing work that can be accomplished only at the office and more time supervising (Park and Cho, 2020). However, remote workers have more autonomy and flexibility from where, when, and how to work; this freedom of action requires TMs to pay more attention to monitoring work and communication to mitigate the risk of isolation, errors and conflicts motivated by the lack of feedback from the subordinates (Mehta, 2022; Park and Cho, 2020).

Challenges and changes in HRM practices

Even if there is still no specific framework of the people management issues to address home-office implementation, we present the most relevant issues studied that relate to people management and home-office. The home-office widespread experience brought significant communication challenges, as well as the use of new software and asynchronous communication to face social distancing (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2021; Jeske, 2022). HRms needed to define a plan for keeping communication updated, transparent, and frequent. Both upwards and downward communication is essential for employees' stability and mental well-being (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). The concern for employee's well-being plays a significant role in HRM function, which was also recognised as one of the significant changes brought by working from home (Dirani *et al.*, 2020; Gonçalves *et al.*, 2021), namely work-life balance issues (Andrade and Petiz Lousã, 2021; Jeske, 2022; Kokubun *et al.*, 2022; Pataki-Bittó and Kun, 2022). Technology had a central role in enabling business during the pandemic. E-HRM has become more relevant to how organisations function (Dirani *et al.*, 2020). HRms recognised that HRM practices such as recruitment and selection, onboarding, internal communications, and training and development had undergone significant changes due to the need to use technology (Gonçalves *et al.*, 2021). Previous to the pandemic, and due to the trend toward greater work agility based on technology (e.g., Park and Cho, 2020), former studies identified challenges in maintaining the organisational culture due to a lack of continuous socialisation and retaining valuable talent because of the lack of contact could reduce employee loyalty (Illegems and Verbeke, 2004; Mehta, 2022).

People management issues for remote work implementation

We propose a model focused on the people management issues for remote work implementation based on (1) the largely recognised critical role of the HRM function in the transition to home-office worldwide and on the people management practices mentioned in the literature (e.g., Dirani *et al.*, 2020; Gonçalves *et al.*, 2021; Jeske, 2022), and (2) on Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) and Baruch and Nicholson (1997) models (Figure 1).

Our proposal includes three prominent people management topics: organisational culture, HRM practices, and Team management, and a crucial organisational issue for remote work implementation: technological support.

(Insert Figure1 here)

METHOD

Considering different employee groups' perspectives - HRms, TMs and employees, the main research goals were to (1) characterise the organisations' experience with remote work; (2) identify the main challenges in managing people working from home, based on managers (TMs and HRms) and on home-office employees experiences; (3) identify HRM practices that emerged to address the home-office imposition during a specific disruptive moment.

Based on an exploratory approach, we used multiple case studies to pursue these goals, investigating four companies in two different economic sectors - manufacturing and IT (Yin, 2018), and implementing a qualitative-intensive methodological design (Ragin and Amoroso, 2019). This methodological approach requires an in-depth study of various aspects of a limited number of cases, investigating the complexity of the relationships

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2
3 between the investigated topics (Ragin and Amoroso, 2019): home-office and people
4 management (organisational culture, team management and HRM practices). We
5 inductively developed a comprehensive understanding of home-office throughout the
6 research process (Creswell, 2009). A constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm was
7 followed considering that relevance was given to the participants' views of the situation
8 being studied.
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19 *Participants*

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21 Considering the sampling strategy, we used a convenience sample once the companies
22 were identified from the researchers' network. Two criteria were privileged to select the
23 case studies for analysing the home-office implementation experience: (i) companies
24 involved in the home-office during the first mandatory lockdown imposed by the
25 Portuguese Government and (ii) companies from contrasting activity sectors. Therefore,
26 two companies in the IT sector and two in the manufacturing industry located on
27 Portugal's northern coast were selected. In each company, we interviewed the HRMs and
28 two TMs, totalising 12 managers (Table I). Regarding the home-office employees (staff
29 without management positions), 128 workers from the four companies participated in the
30 study: 67 from the IT sector and 61 from the manufacturing sector. These were
31 predominantly male (59.4%), with an average age of 33.9 years (SD = 9.90). About half
32 home-office participants (50.8%) had remote work experience before the mandatory
33 lockdown, lived with other people (94.5%), did not have dependent family members
34 (60.9%), and were the only ones working remotely in their household (60.2%).
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(Insert Table I here)

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected considering three main organisational key-actors: interviews with HRMs and TMs and a brief questionnaire to employees. We performed online interviews with the HRMs and with two TMs using specific semi-structured scripts to increase confidence when comparing data across participants and companies (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). The aim was to gather in-depth data about the general aspects of each company's imposed home-office experience from different employee groups and to highlight differences and similarities between the two sectors (IT and manufacturing) and ownership (national and international). In this way, data triangulation was used, considering different data sources and methods, in order to gather relevant data for the current study (Patton, 1999).

The companies were contacted by email with the project's information, explaining the objectives and the extent of their participation. We ensured anonymity and the confidentiality of individual responses. In each company, the HRMs indicated which managers to interview and disseminated the online questionnaire to the employees in home-office.

The interview guide to the HRMs included the interviewee's sociodemographic characterisation, followed by three sets of questions: how remote work was previously used; changes in the work organisation due to the imposed home-office modality, and the impact of this modality on the HRM function (see Appendix 1). The TMs' interview guide also included sociodemographic questions about the interviewee and the team. There were also questions about how remote work was previously organised and another set of questions about how remote work was adopted and implemented, asking about, for example, difficulties in implementation (see Appendix 2). The interview scripts were previously validated in a pilot test, and no modifications were introduced. After obtaining

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2
3 informed consent, the (HR and Team) managers' interviews were recorded using the
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5 Zoom platform between July and September. The average interview lasted 60 minutes
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7 (ranging from 30 minutes to 90 minutes), and two researchers fully transcribed all
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9 interviews.
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12 To collect data from (general) employees who worked at home during the lockdown, we
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14 used an online questionnaire (Google Forms) disseminated by each company's HRMs.
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16 The questionnaire included open-ended questions aimed at capturing home-office
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18 employees' experiences, including both positive and negative impacts, during the
19
20 COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were encouraged to respond freely, without pre-
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22 defined choices, regarding their home-office experiences. This procedure was important
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24 since: (1) employees are the key organisational actor experiencing home-office, so
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26 understanding their perspectives is crucial for effective remote work implementation and
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28 management; (2) employees offer valuable insights into the challenges, benefits, and
29
30 specific needs of home-office; (3) gathering data from employees allows a more
31
32 comprehensive understanding of how home-office impacts productivity, well-being, and
33
34 job satisfaction. Closed questions were included to provide a general characterization of
35
36 the home-office employees. The core aim of the questionnaire was to give voice to this
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38 organisational key actor - the employee - and enrich our home-office analysis (see
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40 Appendix 3).
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47 Considering data analysis, we privileged the inductive thematic analysis, coding the data
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49 without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic
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51 preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis was data-driven and the
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53 matrix of codes and themes resulted from the contributions of the study participants
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55 (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
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3 Transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006),
4 highlighting, and coding the relevant extracts. The initial codes were grouped into broader
5 categories to represent organisational concepts or phenomena. Themes and subthemes
6 have been refined, revised and organised coherently into categories according to the
7 relationship between the codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The organisational themes
8 resulted from the categories identified from the individual data, reflecting common trends
9 and patterns observed at different organisation levels and areas. Data extracts (interviews
10 and questionnaire's open questions) were compared between and across participants in
11 order to help to identify the relevant themes. To ensure reliability and validity of the data
12 obtained, categories and citations were evaluated separately by two researchers (analysts'
13 triangulation) (Patton, 1999).
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28 We used SPSS v. 27.0 to perform the descriptive analyses (mean, standard
29 deviation and frequencies) to characterize the home-office employees.
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35 FINDINGS

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37 In this section, we describe the companies' home-office experiences, the main challenges
38 of managing people working from home and the HRM practices that emerged to address
39 the home-office imposition.
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45 *Remote work and home-office experiences*

46 Before the lockdown, remote work was adopted in different ways by the four participating
47 companies (Table II). Beta Company (an IT firm) had a 90% level of usage, and Delta
48 Company (a manufacturing firm) had no usage before the first imposed lockdown.
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54 During the first lockdown, Portuguese law, to guarantee health and safety conditions,
55 forced companies to implement home-office whenever the nature of the jobs allowed it.
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3 As expected, in manufacturing companies, some essential functions and employees had
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5 to continue their work on the premises to support or ensure the production in progress.
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8 On-site presence required restructuring the teams to ensure physical distancing between
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10 employees. In IT companies Alpha and Beta, all functions were maintained in home-
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12 office, except those requiring physical intervention to prepare equipment for new
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14 employees or clients.
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17 After the first lockdown, the home-office modality remained in the four participating
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19 companies at different levels, adopting a safety policy in response to imposed
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21 Government measures. Beta's case (IT firm) experienced this imposed home-office with
22
23 some sadness because the office facilities are very compelling. After the imposed home-
24
25 office experience, all companies, except for Delta (manufacturing), will continue the
26
27 home-office modality to improve work-life balance, which is congruent with employees'
28
29 perspectives. The nature of the work is cited as the reason for not implementing home-
30
31 office.
32
33

34
35 Results suggest that the home-office experience gathers a positive consensus, which
36
37 motivates future adherence, as illustrated by the following quotations: "there is a lot of
38
39 flexibility in this type of work. At the present time, I have the perception that people feel
40
41 good working from home" (A1, Alpha TM); "The tranquillity with which I was able to
42
43 work... I was able to do a lot of the bureaucratic work that was behind, paperwork, and so
44
45 on... I was calmer and more focused at home" (D7, Delta TM).
46
47

48
49 Most employees identified personal and professional benefits and 84,4% stated preferring
50
51 to work remotely, at least partially (hybrid model), in the future.
52
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56 (Insert Table II here)
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Challenges in managing people working in home-office

There is a consensus among the participants (HRms, TMs, and employees) that team management in this context varied, depending on the type of work carried out by each team and its size. There is no single, more effective method. The main challenges identified are (i) Onboarding, organisational culture, and engagement; (ii) Communication; (iii) Work-life balance; (iv) Supervision and team management (Table III).

(Insert Table III here)

Organisational culture, engagement, and onboarding

All participating companies highlighted the challenge of maintaining the socio-emotional link between people in home-offices, their teams, and the organisation as a whole.

Furthermore, both international companies (Beta and Gamma) reported difficulties in the integration of newcomers during the lockdown and in promoting teamwork and cooperation. The in-person integration in a team is “more favourable to capture the new employee’s commitment and interest” (B4, Beta TM). Moreover, despite the effort, the experience of the new employee will not be the same as it would be in person, just as the feeling of “team spirit and integration, on the part of those who join the team again is not the same either” (G11, Gamma HRm).

One of the major challenge mentioned by the employees of all the participating companies was the feeling of lack of work socialization and social relations with team-mates (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta employees). Manufacturing sector companies had more difficulty adapting to home-office, as "physical distance was an aspect that penalized and negatively impacted the organisation's culture. It impacted to the point where we had people who

1
2
3 were upset because the boss didn't call them. Which wouldn't happen if they were
4 physically present." (RH-D12). The IT sector fostered informal, collaborative work
5 environments with fun and relaxed workspaces, encouraging people to be engaged in the
6 company, in the home-office environment: "We had to be more creative in the way we
7 got together with the teams, because we were like a family and we were together every
8 day for lunch and snacks" (A2, Alpha TM). "Maintaining the culture and maintaining the
9 connection with people" was one of our great challenges" (RH-B10).

10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 *Communication*

23
24 The home-office experience brought about less, and more difficult communication
25 situations in the four companies studied. The need for people to exchange information
26 (both formally and informally) within the team increased the "number of scheduled
27 meetings and also the number of interruptions on the computer itself [pop-ups] (...)
28 causing more distractions" (G6, Gamma TM), which translated into fatigue because
29 people had a day full of meetings. Also, informal communications with colleagues in
30 other teams were affected because people "hardly saw the colleagues they get along with"
31 (A30, Alpha employee). In IT companies, "working as a team in creative processes (e.g.,
32 brainstorming) is also a complex challenge in home-office" (B4, Beta TM). Both
33 international companies (Beta and Gamma) said they were most affected by technical
34 communication problems. Different technological resources of home-office workers
35 (Internet access and speed, equipment speed.) seem to harm the quality and flow of team
36 communication. To minimise this problem, companies usually opted to hold
37 videoconference meetings using audio only, causing another additional communication
38 problem: "the lack of face-to-face interaction and non-verbal communication" (G5,
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Gamma TM). This difficulty also caused a delay “of some processes because it becomes less fluid” (G6, Gamma TM).

Work-life balance

National companies highlight the challenges related to work-life balance. In these companies, being at a home-office makes it difficult for the employee to disconnect from work: “I felt I was always available, online for work” (A17, Alpha employees), “the number of working hours beyond those stipulated; (...) there is a tendency to spend more time working” (A18, A20, A31, Alpha employees). Consensually recognized as challenge by most participants, the conflict between work and family tends to increase when employees have small children at home during the working period, as occurred during the first lockdown (March-May 2020).

Feelings of isolation and demotivation were identified as cross-cutting challenges for participating companies. TMs felt very challenging to deal with the high-stress levels, especially among those “who live alone or have families with emotional issues” (G11, Gamma HRm). People missed being in the presence of others “simply, regardless of the objectivity of the outcome of this interaction” (G6, Gamma TM), as this facilitated the expression of emotional states and provided moments of companionship, for example, during coffee breaks.

Supervision and team management

Managers from the manufacturing sector in Delta felt a need for face-to-face control of their team. As Delta’s HRm highlighted, there was resistance from some managers who still have a “physically present” culture. “It was necessary to change paradigms in how people’s productivity is generated, which forced HRm to work more with the managers

1
2
3 who faced these problems posed by home-office” (D12, Delta HRm). Managing teams
4
5 with flexible schedules is not easy for managers and impacts negatively on the
6
7 organisation of work: “longer email responses, difficulty getting reactivity, some
8
9 information delayed because there is more time flexibility” (D9, Delta employee). At
10
11 Beta, supervisors struggled with team activities such as “pair programming, once (...)
12
13 there was no direct monitoring of the work and immediate feedback to minimize and
14
15 correct any problems” (B4, Beta TM). Due to its larger size, Gamma has more
16
17 heterogeneous professional profiles, which poses additional challenges for team
18
19 managers, due to: “different employees’ profiles, in terms of autonomy, initiative (...),
20
21 which makes remote team management difficult” (G5, Gamma TM). The lack of
22
23 digitalisation of procedures and organisational processes was a challenge, specifically at
24
25 Delta: “It was difficult to access some information that was in the company, on paper
26
27 (...), and initially there was no VPN connection” (D7, Delta TM).

28
29 Results show that challenges in managing people working in home-office required the
30
31 need to make changes in the daily management of work teams, namely “Set limits,
32
33 introduce the duty to disconnect (D7, Delta TM); “in terms of work, I think it was very
34
35 important to have mutual trust (D8, Delta TM).”

36
37 It was also clear that people management issues required more digitalisation and the
38
39 introduction of tools to facilitate the digital communication between TMs and home-
40
41 office workers: “we used an open-source software program internally. Each team has a
42
43 dedicated channel. There are teams connected all day long, to communicate, to discuss or
44
45 solve any problem. Other teams reinforced the team meetings, the periodicity...” (A1,
46
47 Alpha TM).
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Changes in HRM practices

When forced to engage in full-time home-office, the companies struggled to ensure the needed performance and employees' well-being through their HR departments and managers. HR listened to people, collected data that guided decision-making, developed programs to address emerging challenges, facilitated the communication channels, and adapted processes to a more digital context.

Thus, HRms played a fundamental role, seeking to develop new practices agilely, to adjust the organisation and the workforce to the changes and business requirements while maintaining humanity (Table IV).

(Insert Table IV here)

Recruitment and selection

Most companies performed the recruitment and selection processes online, relying solely on online interviews. Some companies did online interviews before the pandemic, but only for some positions. The generalised use was difficult for manufacturing companies, especially for positions such as shop-floor workers. So, there was a need to "turn to the help of partners, such as the state employment agencies, because people did not have a computer, smartphone or technological knowledge" (D12, Delta HRm).

Onboarding

Only companies in the IT sector adopted remote onboarding, including the "process of sending computers" (B10, Beta HRm) to employees' homes and the technical follow-up.

Training and development

During the lockdown, all companies conducted training online, representing a significant change in this process. The training solutions worked well in manufacturing companies and revealed the advantage of “saving on trainers’ travel” (G11, Gamma HRm), easy scheduling and logistics. Delta provided free training while some employees were in layoff. The IT companies, already used to distance training, used it for soft skills and internal specialized training usually done in person.

Job and work design

All companies had to plan and reorganise their work because of COVID-19. Thus, they implemented contingency plans, as indicated by law, and specific responses were adjusted to the needs of each company. Both companies in the IT sector (Alpha and Beta), where there was management-driven planning before the lockdown which included “testing the technological infrastructure” (A2, Alpha TM), facilitated the transition to working from home from a technological perspective. Their HR departments prepared “an internal document with the new procedures for operating at the facilities” (B10, Beta HRm); “rotating shifts, and leisure spaces in case employees needed to go to the office” (A2, Alfa HRm). HR departments also tried to keep employees informed of all the procedures to give them more security.

Furthermore, previous remote work experience allowed some previous practices to be implemented, namely at the technical and team coordination level. Manufacturing companies, in contrast, reorganised the teamwork “in person and working from home” (D12, Delta HRm), “establishing an occupation limit at the office” (G11, gamma HRm).

Initially, both manufacturing companies placed their employees in home-office during

1
2
3 the lockdown, allowing only the strictly indispensable in-person duties. After, they began
4
5 to return to work using team rotations gradually.
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10 *Communication*

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12 Communication went digital and old practices were kept using new channels: “we started
13
14 to adopt more digital information. The internal communications are now completely
15
16 digital” (B10, Beta HRm). In the manufacturing sector, newsletters and frequent digital
17
18 written communication from the HRms were essential and reassuring. Maintaining the
19
20 employees connected and engaged with the company – the organisational culture - , was
21
22 another challenge. Informal weekly activities were carried out using different
23
24 communication channels (e.g., Google Meet, Facebook) to share relaxing and fun
25
26 moments. In the IT sector (Alpha and Beta), they were already used to online
27
28 communication and management, as most teams used scrum boards. They implemented
29
30 *Channel Meet* to enable all managers to be online with their teams and have informal
31
32 interactions. The employees from the manufacturing sector were the ones who most felt
33
34 the negative impact of home-office regarding communication. The HRms and TMs also
35
36 felt this and decided to keep the daily and weekly meetings, but remotely. Those formal
37
38 meetings were not only meant to guide and organise work but also served as support to
39
40 minimise “anxiety and doubt about what would happen with the firm: if it would close
41
42 down or not, if it would or not be laying-off people” (G11, Gamma HRm). The emotional
43
44 link with the team was a critical topic from the start. Beta developed activities and games
45
46 using the digital communication channels (“Miss You Fun” program). The manufacturing
47
48 sector’s HRms encouraged managers to have regular informal meetings (virtual coffee),
49
50 in addition to formal meetings, to maintain practices and traditions, such as “active
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3 pauses, stretching exercises” and, they tried to identify annual initiatives (Christmas
4
5 dinner) that could be carried out differently within the pandemic context.
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10 *Performance management and appraisal*

11
12 Gamma was the only company that remained active in the performance management
13
14 process. This international company used remote platforms to evaluate and give feedback
15
16 on employees’ performance, as confirmed by the HRm: “even performance evaluation
17
18 took place, but it was necessary to hold these meetings using distance platforms” (G11,
19
20 Gamma HRm).
21
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26 *Compensations and benefits*

27
28 Companies collected information through questionnaires to understand individual needs
29
30 and the effect of organisational action. IT sector companies established virtual one-to-one
31
32 moments with their managers, HRms, and employees. All companies supported their
33
34 employees logistically: with technological equipment, purchasing laptops if necessary
35
36 (Delta), lending extra monitors, helping to improve internet connection (Gamma), or even
37
38 with office equipment (Alpha and Beta). Additionally, Beta provided financial
39
40 compensation (400 euros) to support employees’ home expenses. Other measures
41
42 extended to the employees’ family members to deal with problems at a personal level
43
44 (isolation, time management) and family level (reconciliation of personal and
45
46 professional life, exhaustion, financial problems) caused by the pandemic and based on
47
48 the internal needs identified by their “Employee Assistance Program”. Alpha created a
49
50 fund to support employees whose spouses had lost income. The manufacturing companies
51
52 provided psychological support by video or telephone (free of charge) (Gamma) and
53
54 access to health insurance (Delta).
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Administrative procedures

Some administrative processes have been adopted to conform to a more digital and remote strategy. Manufacturing companies have implemented systems to register working hours (login, logout and breaks). At Beta, the admission process had already been remotely done the two previous years, and all documentation and contract signatures were done digitally. Due to legal impositions, all companies implemented remote work agreements with their employees from the 1st of June 2020. In the interview, the HRm of Gamma, whose employees left the company during the lockdown, mentioned: “you lose that emotional connection to colleagues or TMs... and that facilitates the decision to leave the company when other opportunities arise...” (G11, Gamma HRm).

DISCUSSION

Disruptive moments demand many challenges for societies and businesses worldwide. Recently, the lockdown due to the global health crisis triggered companies in different ways, namely by imposing non-traditional work models, such as the generalisation of home-office. Considering the Portuguese context, in 2019, before COVID-19, only a small percentage of workers (6.5%) used to work from home (Eurostat, 2022). Overall, the findings indicate that environmental (legal and safety) factors were at the foundation of home-office emergence during the pandemic, as Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) propose.

As our research focuses on people management, the results gave us more evidence that enables us to extend and deepen the model from Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020), namely the organisational factor. Thus, we focus on people management issues

1
2
3 to understand how businesses carry on and make the home-office implementation
4
5 effective (Figure 2).
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7
8 Our research on people management topics, which are a crucial part of the organisational
9
10 factors for successful home-office adoption, shows that we should focus on organisational
11
12 culture, Team management and HRM practices, being consistent with the previous
13
14 literature (e.g., Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Jeske,
15
16 2022; Newman *et al.*, 2023).
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21 (Insert Figure 2 here)
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26 Even if organisational culture is already mentioned in the original model, the results from
27
28 our research detail the issues culture related enabling a better understanding of the
29
30 implications. The organisations studied are characterised by a predominantly “physically
31
32 present” *organisational culture*. Companies in the manufacturing sector maintained a
33
34 physical presence, not only in the jobs that demand it but also in other situations, due to
35
36 the mainstream idea that associates remote work with lower productivity (Aguilera *et al.*,
37
38 2016; Kazekami, 2020; Silva-C. *et al.*, 2019). Findings reveal that the companies with
39
40 higher digital competencies (IT sector) made a quicker and smoother shift to remote work
41
42 (Abbad *et al.*, 2019; Boell *et al.*, 2016; Errichiello and Pianese, 2016; Park and Cho, 2020;
43
44 Yu *et al.*, 2019). Results suggest that the home-office experience gathers a positive
45
46 consensus, even in the manufacturing sector. These companies recognised that, even
47
48 while facing challenges, remote work did not affect the team’s performance, which is
49
50 consistent with the work carried out by Dirani *et al.* (2020). Most employees identified
51
52 personal and professional benefits (Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Newman *et al.*, 2023);
53
54 thus, they prefer to in the future, work remotely, at least partially (hybrid model).
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3 Regarding the future adoption of remote work, IT companies will maintain a flexible and
4
5 informal remote work policy, and manufacturing companies are willing to accept and
6
7 formalise their remote work policy. Still, even admitting an increase in remote work, IT
8
9 companies do not want to be “fully remote companies” because presence is much valued
10
11 by all (managers and employees). The organisational culture may also play an important
12
13 role in ensuring employee *engagement*. The HRms perspective is coherent with the
14
15 literature: it recognises the adverse effects of exclusively remote communication, such as
16
17 fewer social interactions, thus promoting feelings of isolation or forgetfulness (Brandão
18
19 and Ramos, 2023; Jeske, 2022; Mehta, 2022; Park and Cho, 2020) and a less humanised
20
21 work experience (Donnelly and Johns, 2021). Consequently, the four case studies stressed
22
23 the need to keep frequent contact in a humanised way. The upward communication and
24
25 derived support to address employees' targeted needs enabled a better home-office
26
27 experience (Newman *et al.*, 2023). Initiatives such as leisure activities and social support
28
29 also reported in the literature, used digital communication platforms to break down
30
31 barriers in internal communication with managers and CEOs, with a positive impact on
32
33 remote workers' engagement and work satisfaction (Errichiello and Pianese, 2016;
34
35 Newman *et al.*, 2023; Park and Cho, 2020). Digital channels enable regular and
36
37 trustworthy communications, the foundation for mental stability and employees' well-
38
39 being (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Dirani *et al.*,
40
41 2020). Thus, questioning, listening and addressing the needs of stakeholders is the agile
42
43 way to manage people (Jeske, 2022; McMackin and Heffernan, 2020; Newman *et al.*,
44
45 2023) and to foster organisational culture.

46
47 One of the main challenges in managing people working from home is *communication*
48
49 issues, which make sharing information difficult, both within and between teams, to
50
51 ensure the team's performance and, thus, make remote work effective (Abbas *et al.*, 2022;
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1
2
3 Mehta, 2022; Park and Cho, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of digitalisation of the processes
4
5 in manufacturing companies has intensified this situation. Communication is an
6
7 organisational issue that promotes and maintains the company's culture and is also
8
9 required for effective *teams' management*.

10
11
12 Another challenge was the *supervision and team management* of inexperienced
13
14 employees with low autonomy and initiative levels making it harder for the TM to manage
15
16 and reach the team's goals. These different challenges in people management highlight
17
18 the importance of TMs adopting a flexible attitude towards their employees while
19
20 adjusting to new situations (Abbas *et al.*, 2022; Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Dirani *et al.*, 2020;
21
22 Newman *et al.*, 2023).

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24
25
26 *HRM practices* need to be reinvented with a digital state of mind to enable effective
27
28 remote work. Restructuring begins with primary administrative procedures, recruitment
29
30 and selection, onboarding, training and development, job and work design,
31
32 communication, performance management and appraisal, compensation, and benefits.
33
34 Furthermore, there are challenges to each practice that need to be addressed. This
35
36 disruptive moment showed that the world of work must be reviewed because flexibility
37
38 can compromise communication (Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Brandão and Ramos, 2023). In
39
40 addition, the technological equipment and infrastructures must be fully adapted to provide
41
42 adequate support for the role performance, which may bring additional costs (equipment,
43
44 qualified personnel, software fees, among others) and require digital competencies to be
45
46 able to use it suitably.

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51 The companies acknowledge the need to consider remote work in their future *HRM*
52
53 *practices* since the worldwide home-office experience made people aware that work is
54
55 possible elsewhere, not just in the office (Brandão and Ramos, 2023; Pataki-Bittó and
56
57 Kun, 2022).

1
2
3 *Work-life balance* is another central HR practice regarding people managing in home-
4 office. This was more demanding for employees with younger children, which is also
5 highlighted in the work-family conflict literature (Abbad *et al.*, 2019; AL-Abrow *et al.*,
6 2021; Errichiello and Pianese, 2016; Kokubun *et al.*, 2022; Pataki-Bittó and Kun, 2022).
7
8 Figure 2 presents the detailed model of the main factors that support the implementation
9 of home-office.
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17 The COVID-19 outbreak is a stark example of disruptive change requiring rapid
18 adjustment by the HRM function to be flexible, responsive (Azizi *et al.*, 2021; Biron *et*
19 *al.*, 2021; Newman *et al.*, 2023) and agile (McMackin and Heffernan, 2020).
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24 With an in-depth empirical analysis of the role of TMs, we contribute to the enrichment
25 of research on the changes that may occur in their role in a post-pandemic context.
26
27 Additionally, we highlight the support role that HRms assume to facilitate the interaction
28 between organisational needs and those of the employees (Brandão and Ramos, 2023;
29 Newman *et al.*, 2023).
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40 CONCLUSIONS

41
42 This study explores the home-office experience imposed by a recent disruptive moment,
43 such as the 2020 global health crisis, considering four Portuguese organisations from two
44 contrasting economic sectors (IT and manufacturing). We aimed to characterise the
45 organisations' experiences with remote work, identify the main challenges in managing
46 people working from home, focusing on the TMs and HRms experiences, and thus,
47 identify HRM practices that emerged to address the home-office imposition in this period
48 of time.
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2
3 The participating companies could respond to their businesses' needs agilely, and the
4
5 HRM departments and people management activities had a crucial role in their success.

6
7
8 This enabled companies and their employees to feel the benefits and limitations of remote
9
10 work, which may change the work organisation forever.

11
12 Challenges faced during the first shockwave allowed the identification of what is critical
13
14 in home-office (and infer to remote work) regarding the organisational factors and the
15
16 people management role: previous culture on remote work, team management
17
18 (communication and supervision), and HRM function (communication, organisational
19
20 culture and engagement, HRM practices).

21 22 23 24 25 26 ***Theoretical contributions***

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29
30 This research enabled different theoretical contributions. Based on original empirical data
31
32 gathered during the Covid-19 pandemic disruptive moment, and considering non-health
33
34 organisations, with different previous remote work experiences, this research contributes
35
36 to deepen the knowledge of home-office experience, offering a model focusing on
37
38 managers' roles (HRMs and TMs) and HRM practices, bringing concrete implications to
39
40 theory in this domain. This study adds to the literature on remote work by extending and
41
42 detailing the organisational factor in the remote work effectiveness framework (Baruch
43
44 and Nicholson, 1997; Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020), deepening the central
45
46 role of people management, considering the managers' perspectives (TMs and HRMs).
47
48
49 The original model was pre-COVID pandemic, pioneering the general contour of the
50
51 framework identifying required factors for successful home-office implementation
52
53 (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997). The subsequent model (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-
54
55 Garcés, 2020) argues the existence of strategic planning to deal with remote work, namely
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2
3 as corporate contingency plans in emergency situations, but also as a more generalized
4
5 work arrangement after the COVID-19 experience.
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8 Our proposal offers insights into recontextualising remote work from a labour process to
9
10 a humanised approach, highlighting the HRM function - leadership (Donnelly and Johns,
11
12 2021). The home-office experiences gathered in this research reveal that the traditional
13
14 managers' role of control needs to be replaced by a support role, orientated to the
15
16 promotion of autonomy at work (versus micromanagement) and to the support of
17
18 communication between colleagues to ensure effective performance (Straus et al., 2023).
19
20 Additionally, this research suggests that the combination of different working models
21
22 (presential, hybrid and full remote) is predominating in the current labour era,
23
24 independently of the economic sector, therefore forcing the need to rethink alternative
25
26 models of attraction, development and retention of talent, which should consider temporal
27
28 and spatial flexibility for the development of work. It is important to refocus talent
29
30 management models based on self-efficacy skills (Straus et al., 2023), which have shown
31
32 to be relevant for dealing with organisational change management processes (Newman et
33
34 al., 2023).
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40 This research, in line with studies such as of Azizi *et al.* (2021), contributed to the
41
42 knowledge of home-office experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic in non-health
43
44 organisations, highlighting the role played by supervisors (HRms and TMs) and HRM
45
46 practices in this process of managing workers under a hybrid or remote regime, favouring
47
48 a qualitative approach, based on a multiple case study with four companies and
49
50 considering different stakeholders' perspectives (interviewing 12 HRms and TMs and
51
52 surveying 128 home-office workers).
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56 In summary, while previous studies have suggested that times of change can impact
57
58 negatively employee wellbeing and productivity (Newman et al., 2023; Straus et al.,
59
60

2023), our research has shown that these negative effects can be mitigated through the implementation of customised HRM practices and more humanized leadership. This includes providing greater social support, autonomy at work and access to resources that help to adapt home-office spaces to work requirements. By doing so, we can improve the quality of life of home-office employees and reduce work-family conflict, which is a common issue among those who work from home (Emre and De Spiegeleare, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020).

Managerial implications

Based on the approach of Baruch and Nicholson (1997), the present study does not neglect the individual perspective (home-office employees), however it privileges an organisational perspective (from key actors responsible for management: HRMs and TMs' perspectives), offering concrete guidelines for companies that intend to implement remote work management programs, whether part-time or full-time, preventing possible adverse effects, namely in terms of productivity, turnover and organisational commitment.

Additionally, this research provides clues about the need for changes in HRM practices - specifically, in recruitment and selection, onboarding, training and development, job and work design, communication, performance management and appraisal, compensation and benefits, administrative procedures -, increasingly flexible and adapted to existing work regimes in organisations of the future. For example, in terms of communication, the upward communication and derived support to address employees' targeted needs enabled a better home-office experience. Initiatives such as leisure and social support activities based on digital communication platforms, also reported in the literature, allowed to break

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2
3 down barriers in internal communication with managers and CEOs, with a positive impact
4
5 on remote workers' engagement and work satisfaction (Errichiello and Pianese, 2016;
6
7 Park and Cho, 2020).

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9
10 The employees' and TMs' positive experience drew the attention of top and HR managers
11
12 to the relevance of adopting remote work programs, even in previously resistant
13
14 companies, thus opening their way to more digitalised workplaces. Cost reduction is one
15
16 of the traditional reasons for remote work adoption. However, the pandemic home-office
17
18 experience revealed how valuable work flexibility could be for busy lives or for adopting
19
20 different lifestyles (e.g., living further away from cities).
21
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23
24 Other managerial implications emerged from this research, namely the need to make
25
26 changes in the daily management of work teams, highlighting the importance of a more
27
28 strategic role in promoting employee engagement. More flexible work organisation
29
30 formats or promoting a new culture centred on work quality and trust can be used to carry
31
32 out such actions. Likewise, it emphasizes the importance of team managers' role to plan
33
34 teamwork better when performed at home (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020) and
35
36 manage people remotely. This study also highlights the need for customised remote work
37
38 practices (e.g., compensation and benefits, communication, job and work design). These
39
40 practices should adapt to the different needs of people and organisations and foster better
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42 work-life balance, the company's strategic position, and the technical and human aspects
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44 required.
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49 Moreover, this study contributes to the knowledge of the home-office experience during
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51 the COVID-19 pandemic in two contrasting sectors, that raise distinct challenges for
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53 HRM function in a remote work context (Newman *et al.*, 2023), while also contributing
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55 to the knowledge of how organisations responded to the imposition of home-office and
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57 its impacts on people management outside the health sector.
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To sum up, in the context of remote work, people management issues require more organisational digitalization, namely digital HRM practices, employee support and monitorization, e-leadership preparation, and team managers' coaching and support.

Limitations and directions for future research

Although data collection was based on different stakeholders (team, HR managers, and employees) and with a reasonable number of participants, the study would have benefited from theoretical saturation as the criteria for the number of participants. Data from the early stages of the pandemic is one of the study's best features. However, a longitudinal approach extended to other economic sectors and countries would capture similar or different approaches of interest to academia and businesses.

Key learnings

Understanding how organisations responded to the imposition of home-office and its impacts on people management enable to highlight the following key learnings:

- (1) Despite the challenges, the employees' and Team Managers' positive experience demonstrated the relevance of adopting remote work programs, even in previously resistant companies.
- (2) The remote work effectiveness framework (Baruch and Nicholson, 1997; Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020) should also consider the central role of people management in the organisational factor: organisational culture, team management issues, and HRM practices.
- (3) Considering the Team Managers' crucial role in remote work, these professionals need to develop digital managing people competencies.

(4) The imposed home-office enhanced the digitalisation of HR practices, thus opening the way to more digitalised workplaces.

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Table I. Characterization of the firms and of the participants

	Activity sector	Firm size	International ownership	Participants' code	Organisational role	Number of responses
ALPHA	Information Technology (IT)	70	No	A1	Team manager (Incidents Management)	1
				A2	Team manager (Infrastructures Projects)	1
				A9	HR Manager	1
				E 1-22	Employees (staff not holding management positions) working from home	22
BETA	Information Technology (IT)	360	Yes	B3-Beta	Team manager (Senior Manager of Marketing, Communications and External Affairs)	1
				B4-Beta	Team manager (Risk management)	1
				B10-Beta	Senior HR Business Partner	1
				E 23- 67	Employees (staff not holding management positions) working from home	45
GAMMA	Manufacturing	700	Yes	G5-Gamma	Team manager (Utility Engineering)	1
				G6-Gamma	Team manager (Operations Director of one of the production lines)	1
				G11-Gamma	Human Resources Manager	1
				E 68 - 81	Employees (staff not holding management positions) working from home	47
DELTA	Manufacturing	400	No	D7-Delta	Team manager (Safety and Health)	1
				D8-Delta	Team manager (IT)	1
				D12-Delta	General HR Director	1
				E 82 - 128	Employees (staff not holding management positions) working from home	14

Table II. Firms remote work and home-office utilisation overview

	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
BEFORE (remote work)				
Level of utilisation *	5%	90%	40%	0%
Reasons:				
- Work-life balance / flexibility to employees	•	•	•	
- Talent attraction		•		
DURING (home-office)				
Level of utilisation:				
- Near 100%	•	•		
- Just the necessary people to ensure the production			•	•
Reasons:				
- Government's demands	•	•	•	•
- Function's nature (support functions)			•	•
AFTER (home-office)				
Level of utilisation	66%	95%	50%	5%
Reasons:				
- <i>Home-first</i> policy		•		
- Function's nature	•	•	•	•
- To offer the feeling of safety to employees	•	•	•	•
- To provide improved work-life balance	•	•	•	

*(% of employees had already benefited from remote work at least once)

Table III. Employees and managers' views about the imposed home-office challenges

Challenges	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Onboarding, organisational culture and engagement				
Integration of new employees		•	•	
To create and maintain the socio-emotional link between team members	•	•	•	•
Less teamwork and cooperation		•	•	
Communication				
Less agility in communication with the team		•	•	
Less communicative efficiency in creative processes (e.g. in brainstorming processes)	•	•		
Lack of sharing information about daily day routines	•	•	•	•
Less and harder communication intra and inter teams	•	•	•	•
Technical difficulties in communicating (failures in internet connection)		•	•	•
Work-life balance				
Difficulty to disconnect from work	•			•
More working hours	•			•
Conflict between work and family (particularly among workers with children)	•			•
Isolation and demotivation feelings	•	•	•	•
Supervision and team management				
Team management control based on "being physically present"				•
Difficulties in supervision in some team activities		•		
Difficulties in managing heterogeneous employees' profiles (namely, in terms of autonomy, initiative, and proactivity)			•	
More difficulties in organising work and managing teams with flexible schedules				•
Lack of digitalisation of procedures and organisational processes				•

Table IV. HRM practices to deal with imposed home-office

HRM practices	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Recruitment and selection				
Virtual Job interviews	•	•	•	•
Using partners to recruit operators			•	
Onboarding				
Tech equipment sent home (instead of delivered at the office)		•		
Remote Onboarding	•	•		
Training and development				
On-Distance training only	•	•	•	•
Online training:				
-never considered before			•	•
-never considered before in inhouse and soft skills training	•	•		
Engage in free online training available during the lockdown				•
Engage in planned and certified online training			•	•
Cost reduction (trainers/trainees transportation)			•	•
Job and work design				
Remote-work/home-office	•	•	•	•
Flexible schedule	•	•		
Hybrid job designs	•	•	•	•
Internal contingency plans in compliance with legal requirements	•	•	•	•
Reorganisation at the home-office (definition of working hours and roles)			•	•
Communication				
Daily meetings by each online team	•		•	•
Monthly meetings with all teams are now online	•		•	•
Internal, formal, fully digital communication and information	•	•		

Table IV - HRM practices to deal with imposed home-office (continuation)

HRM practices	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Performance management and appraisal				
Meetings using remote platforms			•	
Compensations and benefits				
Ensuring internet connection (supply and improvement of solutions)			•	•
Supply of technological equipment (computer, printer)	•	•	•	•
Supply of office supplies to employees (desks, chairs)			•	•
Extra financial support salary (EUR 400 for water and electricity costs)		•		
Strengthening internal marketing on health insurance				•
Employees Assistance	•	•	•	
Employees' families Assistance	•	•		
Administrative procedures				
Change in the timings of HRM cases (due to reorganisation of processes)	•			
Legal procedures arising from home-office agreements	•	•	•	•
Implementation of a system for recording employees' entry, exit and breaks through remote platforms			•	•
Exit interviews			•	

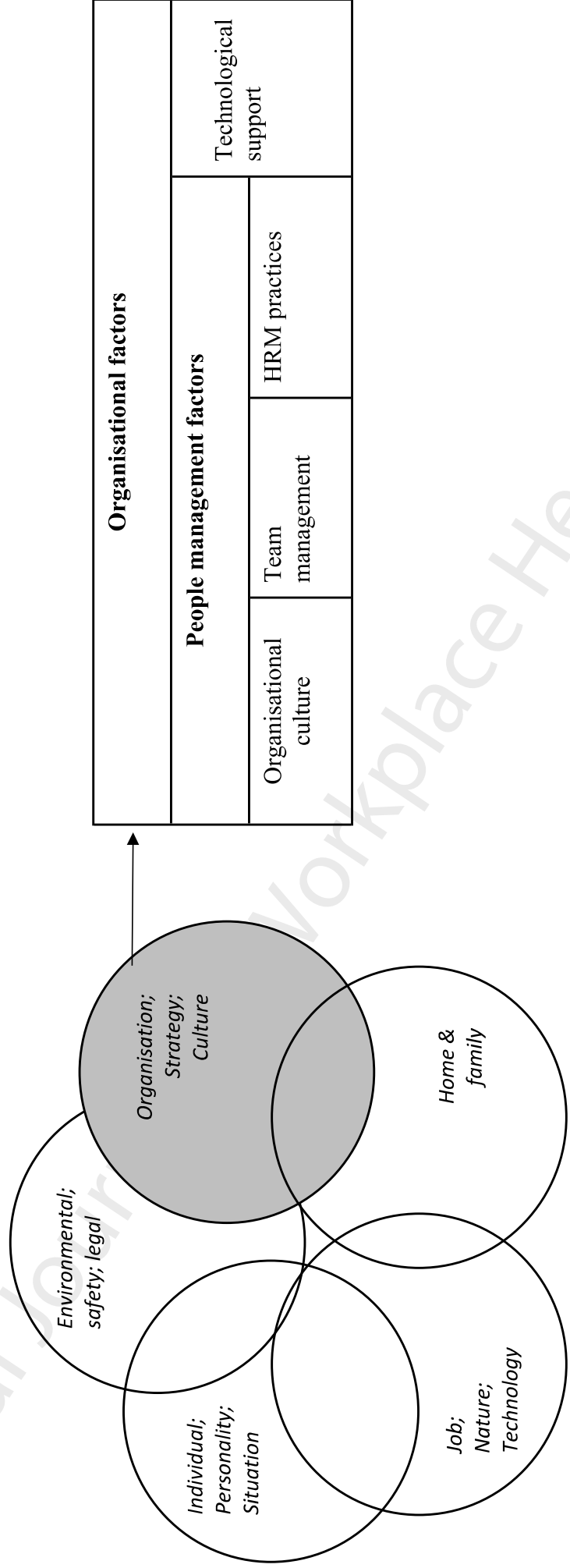


Figure 1. People management model for home-office implementation

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Baruch & Nicholson (1997) and Belzunequi-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) models

Organisational factors			
People management factors			Technological support
Organisational culture	Team management	HRM practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisational engagement - Remote work culture and experience - Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervision - Communication - Onboarding, organisational culture and engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment and selection - Training and development - Onboarding - Job and work design - Communication - Performance management and appraisal - Compensation and benefits - Administrative procedures - Work-life balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hardware - Software - Assistance

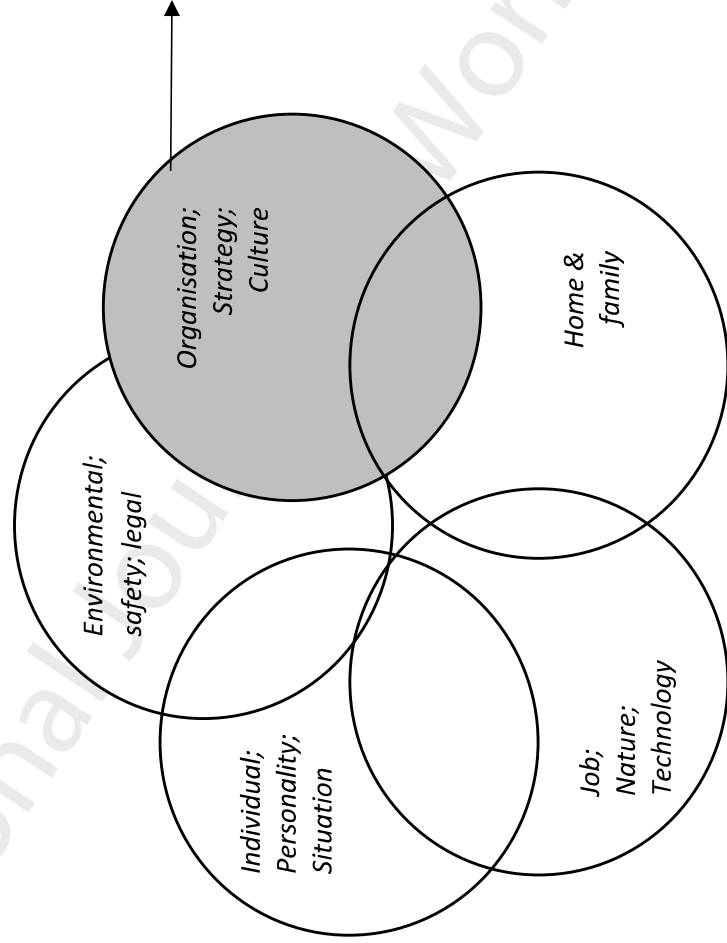


Figure 2. Detailed people management model for home-office implementation

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Baruch & Nicholson (1997) and Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) models

Appendix 1 - Interview Script | Team Managers (TM)

Interviewee characteristics

Education:

Position:

Length of Service:

Age:

Team characteristics

Identification of department/managed team:

N. of team members:

Predominant training/expertise of the people in your team:

Average age:

Average length of service of the people in your team:

A. Remote Work as Resource

- How was Remote Work used **before** mandatory lockdown? Was remote work a resource before the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic? Why? For whom? What percentage of employees were working remotely? For which roles was remote work used?
- How was it used **throughout** mandatory lockdown? What percentage/number of people in your team were working remotely? Which roles/tasks were performed remotely? Why? (legal imperative, medical reasons, employee was given this option, management decision) For how long?
- How was it used **after** mandatory lockdown? What percentage/number of people in your team continued to work remotely? Which roles/tasks are still performed remotely? Why? (legal imperative, medical reasons, employee was given this option, management decision) For how long?

B. Future Use

- Do you intend to keep using remote work? Why? (if so, for which roles, for how long)
- Under which conditions will you resort to remote work (on a permanent basis or alternating remote and on site work?)
- Do you intend to formally develop remote work as an organizing procedure? (with an internal regulation, used as strategy to attract future employees)

C. Adaptation/Perception

- What are the top 3 positive aspects, if any were found, derived from the implementation of Remote Work?
- And what are the top 3 negative aspects?
- When implementing home office to your role and your team, what difficulties did you experience?
- What challenges did you come across?
- What strategies did your company develop to address any found specific challenges?
- And what other difficulties did team members experience?
- What measures did the company adopt to facilitate Remote Work implementation?
- Do you understand Remote Work to be an alternative or a necessity? Why?
- Do you believe your perception is shared by the management? (are there constraints within the company? A HR director may find some positives in Remote Work, while the management, who was the power to decide, may not...)

Appendix 2 - Interview Script | Human Resource Managers (HRM)

Interviewee characteristics

Education:

Length of Service:

Age:

A. Remote Work as Resource

- How was Remote Work used **before** mandatory lockdown? Was remote work a resource before the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic? Why? For whom? What percentage of employees were working remotely? For which roles was remote work used?
- How was it used **throughout** mandatory lockdown? What percentage/number of people in your team were working remotely? Which roles/tasks were performed remotely? Why? (legal imperative, medical reasons, employee was given this option, management decision) For how long?
- How was it used **after** mandatory lockdown? What percentage/number of people in your team continued to work remotely? Which roles/tasks are still performed remotely? Why? (legal imperative, medical reasons, employee was given this option, management decision) For how long?

B. Future Use

- Do you intend to keep using remote work? Why? (if so, for which roles, for how long)
- Under which conditions will you resort to remote work (on a permanent basis or alternating remote and on site work?)
- Do you intend to formally develop remote work as an organizing procedure? (with an internal regulation, used as strategy to attract future employees)
- What strategies did your company develop to address any found specific challenges?

C. Remote Work Impacts upon HRM

- What impact did remote work have upon the ongoing HRM processes at the company (a few helpful examples: Compensation and Benefits; Workstation design; Training and Development; Recruitment and Employee Selection; Innovative Recruitment Practices; Equality and Diversity in employment opportunities; Performance Management and Assessment; Promotions / Progression; Rota Management, Employee Retention and Termination)
- What impact did remote work have upon Leadership and Team Management?
- What positive impact did remote work have throughout mandatory lockdown?
- And what negative impact did remote work have throughout mandatory lockdown? What measures did the company take to mitigate negative impact?
- What was the role of HR in diagnosing/seeking a mitigation response for negative impacts?
- How did you prevent/develop future preventive measures for negative impacts?
- When it comes to remote work, how do you assess yourself when performing your role at the company?

Appendix 3 | Employee Survey (online)

The purpose of this survey is to collect your opinion with regard to your remote work experience throughout the mandatory confinement period. There are no right or wrong answers. We are asking for a genuine report of your views and experience. We want to highlight that all survey data will remain anonymous and confidential, and it serves academic purposes only. Filling in this survey will require 5 minutes of your time. Thank you for your cooperation!

Group A | General opinion on Remote Work

1. Please identify the **3 most positive aspects** of your remote work experience:

N. 1: _____

N. 2: _____

N. 3: _____

2. Please identify the **3 most negative aspects** of your remote work experience:

N. 1: _____

N. 2: _____

N. 3: _____

Group B | General characterization

1. Sex:
2. Age:
3. Number of dependant children:
4. How many people do you share your household with?
 - 4.1. How many people in your household are performing remote work?
5. Department/work field/section:
6. Current percentage of remote work (0-100%):
7. In the future, would you like to:
 1. Perform remote work
 2. Perform on site work
 3. Perform hybrid work (remote + on site)