

Challenges and Opportunities of Team Virtuality: a focus on Group Dynamics and Work-Life Balance in the Consulting Sector - The Deloitte's case.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, remote work has gone from being an exception to a daily reality for millions of people (Nwankpa & Rouman, 2024). While this shift has introduced new possibilities, it has also raised important questions about how employees perceive their virtual work experience, especially in contexts like consulting. Consulting represents a valuable context for this kind of research because of its fast-paced and high-pressure environment. Professionals working in consulting are often required to manage tight deadlines and to adapt quickly to client needs. Inside such a demanding environment, employees' well-being becomes a crucial factor: high-intensity work, combined with remote or hybrid settings, makes it essential to explore how individuals manage their psychological and emotional balance. One of the most relevant but underexplored issues in current literature in organization studies is how people manage the relationship between their well-being and their performance, concerning the expectations placed on them.

This thesis was developed starting from a simple but meaningful research question: "How do employees perceive well-being and performance in a context of remote work?". The goal of this study is to look beyond a quantitative approach, exploring how employees experience this balance in their everyday lives. While existing research has often focused on productivity (Klonek & Parker, 2021) or mental health (Hill et al., 2022) as separate topics, this study brings them together, analysing the perception of people living in highly demanding context such as those of consulting: this is the literature gap which I aim to address with this work.

The core idea is to conduct a research project observing and analysing the context where I conducted my curricular internship at Deloitte. It allowed me to interact directly with employees who have direct experience daily. I have realized this research using a qualitative approach, specifically applying the "Gioia Method" (Gioia et al., 2013).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The evolution of Remote Working and Virtual Teams

Remote working practices coupled with virtual team solutions have undergone significant transformation since the early days when telecommuting technology offered increased work flexibility. The practices of remote work existed mainly within technology consulting and education sectors which could carry out knowledge-based tasks outside traditional office environments prior to the pandemic. New organizational patterns have emerged due to Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) which enable professionals from different locations to work together through Computer-Mediated Communication Systems (CMCS) such as email and video conferencing and instant messaging (He, 2017). The benefits of virtual collaboration included increased efficiency and cost reductions but negatively affected non-verbal communication abilities and trust development among employees while exposing digital knowledge differences between workers (Brighi & Szymanski, 2023). Virtual team performance depended on members achieving streamlined communication standards and building trust-based relationships and developing leadership competencies which overcome virtual barriers. Work models started their transition toward substantial changes during the pre-pandemic period and this historical period created the essential framework for wider workplace changes that the pandemic crisis later accelerated.

2.1.1 Pre Pandemic Virtual Work practices

Virtual work practices experienced gradual transformation between early pandemic times due to technological developments and economic needs and changing employee demands. The practice of remote work along with telecommuting existed through multiple decades but industries implemented them differently to obtain agility and lower expenses and recruit employees globally. The knowledge sector such as consulting along with technology and education industries adopted telecommuting extensively because digital communication tools made distant interactive work possible (Nwankpa & Rouman, 2024).

Telecommuting practices emerged during the late 20th century because employees gained work flexibility through the advancements of personal computers and Internet access combined with communication software tools. Multiple IT and professional service multinational companies initiated remote work policies during the early 2000s with dual purposes of satisfying employees and minimizing operational expenses (Zheng et al., 2024). The organizations took advantage of digital tools to create virtual workspaces which allowed them to cut down on their need for physical offices while preserving productivity.

Telecommuting adoption became prevalent because knowledge work required employees to produce results independently from being physically present at the office. Research studies showed software developers along with analysts and consultants who had proper technological equipment could achieve high productivity when monitored remotely (Purvanova & Kenda, 2022). The implementation of virtual teams by organizations became necessary to achieve cross-border collaboration and minimize travel fees while expanding their candidate pool (Kane et al., 2015).

The pioneer industries holding the first position in remote collaboration adoption include technology consulting as well as education. The consulting industry maintained digital collaboration tools for years to oversee multiple projects across different client sites. Consulting firms managed to fulfill operational continuity by using cloud systems and secure platforms which increased billable hours but encountered obstacles in supporting client engagement and business culture (Diss & Großer, 2019). Remote work became common in the software development segment of technology since some companies transitioned to complete remote operation before 2020. Software project management tools combined with distributed development teams and asynchronous communication technology allowed such companies to function smoothly across multiple time zones (Großer & Baumöl, 2017). The education and research sectors have adopted online learning platforms and cloud-based databases through universities and research institutions to conduct global collaborative interdisciplinary studies without having to operate from the same location (Yamada, 2023).

The pre-pandemic version of virtual work delivered many benefits though it brought a set of implementation difficulties to employers. Organizations encountered multiple digital

infrastructure and communication and cybersecurity problems during the pandemic. The establishment of trust together with team cohesion proved more challenging when employees worked virtually primarily because people in certain industries valued traditional face-to-face interactions (Robert & You, 2018). Project goal alignment between virtual teams presented itself as a common challenge that produced at variable performance outputs (Gibbs et al., 2017). Work-life balance presented a major challenge since workers struggled to separate their occupational responsibilities from their personal lives which resulted in additional workload and burnout symptoms (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Corporations maintained traditional office-built corporate cultures because of which full remote employees struggled to integrate effectively.

Virtual work practices followed an upward trend before the pandemic especially among industries that could implement digital collaboration. The growth of telecommuting and remote collaboration existed due to modern technology development alongside cost-savings benefits and employee choices for flexibility. The widespread implementation of virtual work stayed limited because of structural deficiencies coupled with organizational traditions and worries for worker physical and mental health. The pre-COVID workplace trends formed the basis through which remote work accelerated its growth during the pandemic thus revealing both advantages and challenges of virtual teams.

2.1.2 Post-Pandemic Hybrid Work Models

Organizations quickly implemented remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic which produced fundamental changes in their operational work methods. The original emergency-based fully remote setup has transformed into long-term hybrid work models that organizations implement for sustainable practice. Such dual work models unite office-based and remote work in order to achieve work flexibility with strong requirements for physical interaction. The post-pandemic period introduced hybrid work as a conventional operational standard that affects almost every modern workplace.

Different advantages exist within the hybrid work model structure. Remote work productivity improves for employees because they experience less workplace interferences and gain more independence (Lund et al., 2021). Although this transition presents various difficulties in its path. The pandemic introduced a major problem of

diminished workplace relationships among workers who began their professional careers during the pandemic because they lacked chances to meet colleagues in person. Organizational relationships have declined because of this development (Winter, 2020). Organizations work to combat these issues through virtual social initiatives yet employees still participate minimally because of work demands according to He (2017).

Hybrid work models would be impossible without technological support. The business world depends on cloud computing and AI-driven collaboration tools with improved cybersecurity tools to enable the smooth transition between remote work and in-person work (Holloway, 2024). Employees who utilize digital tools encounter several drawbacks which include digital fatigue while needing regular training to maintain their collaborative platform proficiency as per Robinson (2015). Workers who find technology difficult to master will perform poorly which leads to covert team power distributions when skilled technology users gain excessive authority.

Organizations now convert their physical infrastructure to create flexible working environments as a solution to current workplace challenges. New workplace facilities like co-working spaces and satellite offices demonstrate a developing workforce structure which grants employees freedom to select office spaces according to their requirements (Lund et al., 2021). Organizations now design corporate strategies that build inclusive workplaces by scheduling regular meetings at work along with team events.

The hybrid work model of the post-pandemic era creates situations that lead to both positive and negative aspects. The model improves employee choice and balance between work and personal life yet organizations must actively solve problems regarding social unity and digital competence and resource fairness within their operations. Researchers need to study how hybrid work arrangements affect permanent organizational success and employee satisfaction in ongoing workplace transitions (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023).

2.2 Enviromental Sustainability and Remote Working

Remote working adoption has generated intense debate about its sustainability effects on the environment. Organizations implemented remote and hybrid work models to reduce

expenses for better sustainability achievement. The reduction of office-related commuting activities under smart working practices results in major decreases in transportation-related emissions because employees no longer spend daily commutes to their workplace (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). The decline in professional business travel mainly affecting consulting clients has decreased the amount of carbon emissions produced by expert interactions (Arifin et al., 2022). Home energy consumption rose simultaneously with decreased office energy usage since employees began using their personal heating systems and electricity to create workplaces at home. The new sustainability challenge arises from dispersed energy consumption which might erase some environmental improvement from reduced office operations (El Baroudi et al., 2023). Elevated energy needs for data storage facilities with cloud computing services in data centers now demand considerable amounts of power and cooling (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). The transition to optimized virtual work approaches requires business organizations to adopt sustainable practices that include embracing green IT technologies with energy saving policies and proper management of electronic waste. Companies that actively handle these environmental factors will achieve maximum sustainability from their smart working initiatives while preventing unplanned ecological effects.

2.2.1 Positive Enviromental Impacts

Through smart working people actively promote environmental sustainability through their minimized need to commute and conduct business travels. Remote and hybrid work models adopted by consulting organizations have resulted in substantial reductions of both pollution and energy usage as well as office waste production because employees now work from alternate locations.

The main environmentally positive aspect of smart working involves reduced carbon emissions because staff no longer needs to commute between home and workplace. Office work environments currently force staff to commute daily with the consequence of using petroleum-based transportation methods. Remote work reduces greenhouse gas emissions

through lower fuel consumption and reduced vehicle congestion according to Gomes et al. (2024). Organizations using virtual teams recorded reduced environmental effects during project management due to their employees not needing to commute physically which generated increased sustainability performance.

Smart working produced a major decline in business travel in consulting firms which used to conduct client meetings training and inter-organizational collaborations face-to-face. Businesses have adopted digital video conference systems and cloud-sharing tools which have substituted traditional business travel levels both nationally and internationally. Virtual meetings combined with online collaboration now function as sustainable alternatives because they decrease monetary expenses and planet-eating costs of traveling (Tao et al., 2021). Hence, research supports the notion that project management methods which implement digital solutions help reduce corporate travel emissions.

Lower office occupancy brings about decreased energy usage in corporate building facilities. Traditional office spaces need large amounts of energy supply for lighting systems combined with heating and cooling systems together with information technology infrastructure. Remote work adoption has caused organizations to reduce their physical offices and this movement cuts down their energy consumption. The energy consumption patterns have been noticeably altered in cities where substantial office buildings used to consume lethargically high levels of power. The adoption of sustainable remote work approaches by businesses resulted in reduced operational energy expenses and advanced workplace environmental efficiency according to El Baroudi et al (2023).

Smart working plays a significant role in waste reduction because of its nature. A standard office environment generates significant amounts of junk paper waste and used plastics as well as discards multiple outdated electronic items. Members of the workforce who use digital documentation together with virtual workspaces demonstrate substantial reductions in both paper-based activities and their associated material requirements. Digital workplace transformation creates efficiency improvements through studies on corporate environmental sustainability which also facilitates circular economy practices by minimizing resource extraction and waste generation (Tao et al., 2021). Smart working produces positive environmental impacts although it cannot eliminate all green issues.

The reduction of corporate energy usage through remote work practices leads to higher electricity demands across individual residences at the same time

2.2.2 Potential Environmental Challenges

The practice of remote working generates support due to its contribution to environmental benefits as people drive less and waste less energy in offices but this approach leads to various sustainability issues. The environmental consequences stem from rising home energy usage and digital infrastructure consumption and cloud computing dependence thus requiring proper environmental assessments.

Remote work has become a major cause of increased energy usage within individual premises. The controlled energy management systems used in centralized offices fail to match the efficiency of home office heating and electricity and cooling equipment run by individual employees. The consumption of household heating systems increases greatly when employees work from home during cold climatic conditions (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). Dominant weather conditions in warmer climates drive people to increase their air conditioning use thus multiplying their electricity consumption. The environmental advantages from reduced commuting emissions get counterbalanced by increased household energy requirements for maintaining comfort conditions according to Ashik et al (2023). Companies and government entities must implement policies that urge people to use energy-saving devices and smart technology and renewable energy systems to reduce the environmental costs of home-based work.

The expanding use of cloud computing with digital infrastructure stands as a major hurdle to virtual collaboration because it is essential for its operation. Workers performing their jobs remotely depend on cloud-based programs along with video meeting and defensive cybersecurity solutions that require data facilities which need substantial electrical power supply. Data centers generate substantial carbon emissions because they need significant energy for processing and cooling operations when they lack renewable energy power sources (Gomes et al., 2024). The sustainability of cloud computing depends on the management practices of both companies and service providers who use energy to maintain their digital resources. Scientists such as Gomes et al., (2024) demonstrates a compelling need to develop green information technology solutions using renewable

energy for data centers and power-saving computer devices for managing environmental expenses from digitization expansion.

Smart working sustainability would risk loss if organizations fail to establish measures for controlling the secret carbon impact stemming from digital support infrastructure. The improper disposal of company electronics including laptops and smartphones creates a sustainable concern because unrecycled devices contain harmful materials which threaten ecosystem integrity (Gomes et al., 2024). Remote work infrastructure research demonstrates the requirement for sustainable e-waste management through corporate approaches such as device renewal programs and recycling initiatives and product life extension practices (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). Organizations need proactive policies to protect environmental advantages of remote work because excessive electronic consumption and disposal may counteract these benefits. Virtual work models require sustainability practices to be built into their operational framework. A successful program to assist in energy reduction alongside efficient e-waste management and responsible digital resource management must be implemented.

2.2.3 Optimized Cloud-based Systems and Digital Infrastructure in Virtual Work Models

Optimized cloud-based systems and digital infrastructures play a pivotal role in enabling seamless remote work environments. Cloud computing centralizes data storage and processing, reducing the reliance on physical office setups and allowing consulting professionals to collaborate efficiently across global locations (Silvius, 2017). However, the increased dependency on digital communication platforms and real-time project management tools has heightened cognitive fatigue and digital burnout among remote consultants (Liu et al., 2021). The challenge lies in designing virtual work models that maximize efficiency without overburdening employees with continuous connectivity demands.

Workplace policies play a crucial role in fostering a balance between consultant well-being and performance. Organizations should develop frameworks that encourage responsible digital engagement, such as implementing structured work schedules, promoting the right to disconnect, and integrating mental health support programs (El

Baroudi et al., 2023). Additionally, providing ergonomic home-office setups, financial support for technology upgrades, and clear workload management protocols can help mitigate stress and improve overall work engagement. Programs that reward employees for adopting best remote work practices, such as taking digital detox breaks and optimizing screen time, have shown positive effects on reducing fatigue while maintaining professional efficiency.

Stakeholder involvement and knowledge-sharing mechanisms contribute significantly to balancing performance and well-being in virtual consulting work. Research suggests that inclusive decision-making fosters shared responsibilities in maintaining work quality and employee satisfaction, thus improving the overall effectiveness of remote consulting operations (Gomes et al., 2024). Virtual training on work-life integration, stress management, and cognitive load optimization can further enhance professionals' ability to navigate the complexities of remote work. Encouraging knowledge exchange through collaborative innovation networks not only boosts consulting efficiency but also provides avenues for peer support, reducing feelings of isolation and digital exhaustion.

Despite its advantages, remote consulting work presents inherent challenges that must be addressed to optimize both performance and well-being. The absence of structured office environments often leads to extended working hours, increased self-management demands, and difficulties in setting clear boundaries between work and personal life (Levin, 2022). Moreover, consultants working from home may lack access to essential resources, such as energy-efficient office equipment and high-speed internet, which can impact productivity. A well-integrated approach is necessary to evaluate the trade-offs between reducing commute-related fatigue and managing the intensified digital workload (Lund et al., 2021). Organizations must recognize that professional effectiveness and employee health are interconnected, requiring thoughtful strategies that support consultant engagement, motivation, and sustainable career growth within virtual work models.

2.3 Employee Well-Being in Virtual Teams

Virtual team employee well-being stands as a vital research subject since organizations adopt remote and hybrid work systems. The changes to essential work aspects from virtual work arrangements produce varied effects on employee psychological well-being (Hill et al., 2022). Remote work flexibility permits better work-life balance but it also brings unclear separation of professional and personal life which creates potential situations of overwork and burnout (Bentley et al., 2016). Social isolation brought about by virtual team interactions degrades both psychological well-being and job satisfaction according to Collins et al. (2016). Virtual work environments let workers stay away from toxic professional relationships which subsequently diminishes their stress levels at work. Research reveals that work well-being results in virtual environments depend on three key conditions such as employee differences combined with team dynamics and support systems from the organization (Bentley et al., 2016). Organizations should implement corporate well-being programs along with digital socialization approaches to handle these factors thus reducing negative impacts while improving virtual team member engagement.

2.3.1 Work-Life Balance in the Virtual Era

Virtual work has dramatically changed the way employees manage work-life balance which simultaneously brings both positive and negative effects to this practice. Remote work systems together with virtual teams have created substantial changes in the way people manage their life balance between work commitments and personal responsibilities (Gilson et al., 2021). Telecommuting along with flexible work arrangements give workers better autonomy yet simultaneously mix professional and personal spheres that create elevated work-family problems and burnout conditions (Levin, 2022).

Virtual work systems enable employees to design their work schedules according to personal needs which include child care and home duties (Kabir et al., 2025). Research demonstrates that people who believe their work and personal lives remain separated demonstrate improved mental well-being together with reduced stress levels according to Levin (2022). Flexibility in virtual work leads to an endless work pressure that causes

employees to extend their work hours while increasing their stress levels (Bentley et al., 2016). Research confirms that work flexibility creates both positive aspects in work-life balance while simultaneously generating negative effects which have been thoroughly explored within scholarly publications.

Workplace and residential space integration creates difficulty for employees to establish distinct limits between work and personal life. According to Gilson et al., (2021) working professionals experience invasion of personal time by their duties because they must stay available always and manage excessive information flow. Remote work often leads employees to face problems disconnecting from professional duties according to Eddleston & Mulki et al. (2017) which produces higher work-family conflict and shorter personal downtime. Absence of physical barriers between work and personal life creates worse psychological distress for workers whose task separation becomes more challenging (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2024). People under intense workloads combined with regular virtual meetings show increased stress due to the continuous blending between their professional and personal spheres according to Levin (2022).

In virtual workspaces technology serves as both a positive and negative influence toward achieving work-life equilibrium. Smooth collaboration between teams through digital communication tools generates an urgent response expectation which dissolves work-life boundaries (Torro et al., 2022). The asynchronous communication advantages in global virtual teams produce an adverse effect where employees extend their work beyond standard hours to connect with time-differing colleagues thus increasing burnout risk (Bentley et al., 2016).

Employees have implemented different approaches to manage these job-related challenges. Work hours and assigned work areas combined with specific scheduling work methods function as effective solutions to address work-life integration challenges (Gareis et al., 2006). Organizational policies have been established by businesses to prevent employees from using digital tools during time off along with promoting worker wellness (Levin, 2022). Employees and employers must continuously modify their approaches to balance work and personal life because achieving the perfect equilibrium remains difficult due to changing work requirements.

2.3.2 Mental and Social Well-Being in Virtual Teams

The transition to virtual teams significantly affected work-related mental and social welfare of employees although it brought both favorable aspects and complexities. The advantages of flexible work arrangements in virtual settings come with negative psychological consequences which include social detachment along with digital exhaustion and reduced ability to sustain cohesive teams (Hill et al., 2024). Understanding how virtual work affects mental health remains vital because its dual mental stresses require sufficient strategies to minimize the adverse consequences.

The main drawback of working on virtual teams consists of social isolation because research shows this cut down leads to diminished employee satisfaction together with elevated mental health problems (Bentley et al., 2016). Virtual work environments prevent employees from making serendipitous personal meetings to develop team spirit and mutual support (Hill et al., 2024). Virtual teams experience difficulties establishing social connections compared to traditional offices which hinder employees from developing naturally based rapport thus producing detachment and loneliness according to Klonck et al. (2022). The need to overcome this problem is most severe in work environments where both teamwork and strong interpersonal relations play important roles like consulting and project management.

The substantial amount of digital information in virtual teams presents itself as a major stress factor. Moderate use of video conferencing and other communication technologies by staff results in cognitive exhaustion that negatively impacts their well-being (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). The need for permanent online accessibility creates a perpetual workplace connection that merges professional and personal existence leading to heightened work-related stress according to Hill et al. (2024). Similarly, Lee et al. (2021) confirmed the connection between prolonged technology usage and virtual communications with direct research findings about "Zoom fatigue" mental exhaustion. Virtual communication's absence of nonverbal cues leads to misunderstandings and conflicts which damage employees' psychological state.

Virtual teams provide workers with psychological gains because they support better work-life balance integration and greater autonomy. Employees achieve better work satisfaction and lower stress through schedule control enabled by remote work systems

according to Levin (2022). Remote work gives employees control over their workspace and reduces travel-related stress thus linking to increases in employee well-being (Gareis et al., 2006). The work-life boundary development abilities of employees determine the extent to which they can experience these benefits. Remote work without proper strategies creates risks of prolonged work periods that could result in professional burnout rendering its health benefits useless (Klonek et al., 2022).

Virtual workers gain better psychological protection through the essential presence of social support networks. Research shows that both high organizational support and cohesive teamwork create substantial reduction of employee stress and isolation (Bentley et al., 2016). Employers should enact virtual team activities combined with structured interaction methods and mental health support to support their remote workers' total well-being. A support-oriented virtual work culture built by organizations results in an enduring yet efficient remote work setting.

2.3.3 The impact of Pandemics and Economic Downturns in Shaping Employee Well-Being

Working remotely became the leading consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic which forced the fundamental transformation of workplace arrangements. The workplace transition brought employees increased flexibility and autonomy yet created many stressors which resulted in prolonged negative effects on their well-being (Hill et al., 2022). Remote work during the pandemic period became known for its three core elements which included merging personal and work hours as well as the increasing burden of electronic platform usage along with growing feelings of social solitude (Grobelny, 2023). Work practice evolution in a rapid manner produced significant questions regarding how major international events influence psychological and emotional and social aspects of well-being among remote teams.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an exceptional rise of digital communication when organizations moved from in-person meetings to virtual sessions. Hill et al. (2022) established that boosted dependence on digital tools increased mental workload while generating emotional aging in workers. Staff members experienced "Zoom fatigue" which describes their mental exhaustion caused by long video meetings that damaged their

workplace satisfaction according to Parkkonen and Loukola (2022). Research reveals that workers conducting numerous virtual meetings without proper break times will likely develop burnout symptoms (Grobelny, 2023). Industries which needed regular interpersonal work such as education and consulting suffered from weak team relationships because physical collaboration decreased (Wattanatinnachot, 2022). Digital platforms helped remote teamwork advance but this progress came with a negative impact on existing team unity which requires businesses to find balanced communication systems.

The current economic downturn makes situations worse for remote employees as it strengthens job risks and deepens their financial worries. Research indicates that remote workers face the problem of being considered invisible during times of economic instability due to their absence from direct observation which leads to increased job security and advancement doubts (Grobelny, 2023). Staff members working in fields requiring high visibility suffer intense worry about successful career development and advancement opportunities because of their diminished apparent presence. Remote work environments increase psychological strain for employees through stress caused by unclear job security while economic crises produce simultaneous financial and psychological burden.

The challenges from pandemic and recession events have simultaneously produced beneficial changes in workplace well-being strategies. Since the pandemic many companies have adopted hybrid work models which reflects their growing awareness about accommodating workplace mental health (Grobelny, 2023). Core digital detox initiatives together with expected offline time boundaries and digital therapy services as part of workplace policy made employees experience better work engagement and cut down their burnout rates (Parker et al., 2020). Microsoft and Google together with other large corporations show a shift in organizational priorities with their introduction of employee well-being initiatives such as limited meeting hours and mental health days for their staff members.

Such organizations achieve better protection of employee moral through leadership support alongside peer networks and proper workload management according to Grobelny (2023). During times of uncertainty organizations must implement three key

interventions such as asynchronous communication, counseling services and digital socialization programs which enhance employee well-being (Parker et al., 2020). The implemented stress-reduction strategies enable employees to handle crisis-associated stress better while establishing lasting methods for digital team success and engagement.

2.3.4 Strategies to enhance Well-Being in Virtual Teams

Growing virtual work practices lead organizations to implement various strategies which improve employee well-being in virtual teams. Remote work psychological challenges receive mitigation from these strategies alongside social connection reinforcement and work-life balance improvements according to literature (Hill et al., 2022).

Teamwork structure along with defined communication protocols serves as essential elements for building relationships in dispersed environments where spontaneous contact and social ties would normally exist but may cause separation and team disintegration (Hill et al., 2022). A combination of trust-building activities with scheduled face-to-face encounters promotes significant growth of trust bonds between virtual team co-workers and the implementation of communication protocols which assist with distance coordination challenges and digital information management (Hill et al., 2022).

The blurred boundaries between personal and professional life in remote work contribute to work-life conflict and burnout (Hill et al., 2022). Effective boundary management strategies include setting clear work schedules and using segmentation tactics, such as switching off notifications outside of working hours. Organizations that promote flexible work policies, such as fixed home office days, help employees maintain a sustainable work-life balance. Empirical studies indicate that workers who implement boundary control measures experience lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction.

Supportive leadership is a key factor in enhancing well-being in virtual teams, influencing both morale and productivity. Leaders who provide regular feedback, clarify role expectations, and recognize employee achievements create an environment of psychological safety (Hill et al., 2022). Furthermore, organizations investing in well-being programs, such as virtual wellness sessions and online mental health support, help

mitigate the negative effects of remote work. Research by Meyer et al. (2024) shows that employees who perceive strong organizational support experience lower emotional exhaustion and higher engagement.

Organizations adopt various initiatives as virtual work practices increase because they seek to enhance team member welfare in virtual teams. These strategies enable psychological support of remote work employees while simultaneously strengthening social engagement and work-life harmony as supported by scientific studies (Hill et al., 2022).

Teamwork structure combined with defined communication protocols represents necessary components for building relationships among remote teams who normally rely on spontaneous contact through social ties but risk team disintegration through separation (Hill et al., 2022). Virtual team member trust grows significantly through regular onsite meetings and trust-building activities as proven by research (Hill et al., 2022). Organizations must create communication systems that combine real-time along with asynchronous methods to manage cross-time zone operations and digital information systems (Hill et al., 2022).

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2.4 Performance and Productivity in Remote Working Models

Employee productivity experienced major changes because of smart working adoption while virtual collaboration functions as a primary factor for remote team success. Research shows virtual teams optimize performance through digital platforms and delayed communication methods which enhance workflow efficiency while permitting staff to choose their working place especially within consulting and technology industries (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). The advantages of efficient work and deep work through virtual collaboration systems come with added coordination complexities which emerge from absent natural conversations requiring planned communication platforms to avoid decision-making bottlenecks (Kanse et al., 2023). Workplace dependency on digital tools produces both positive outcomes and negative effects from AI automation while also generating work-related stress and digital exhaustion that affects long-term productivity because employees spend more time with technology (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020; Klonek & Parker, 2021). Smart working models demonstrate strategic benefits through digital leadership that builds trust combined with structured workflows, which ensure continued high-level team performance (Kanse et al., 2023). The successful implementation of smart working strategies demands organizations to manage technology benefits against employee wellness needs through integrated work environment design that delivers sustainable virtual team performance.

2.4.1 Productivity and Virtual Collaboration

Knowledge-intensive sectors experience extensive changes in productivity together with virtual collaboration performance because of the smart working transformation. Virtual teams that are designed properly lead to performance gains through increased flexibility while obtaining expertise from anywhere in the world and lowering operational expenses (Klonek & Parker, 2021). Virtual collaboration enhances productivity because teams optimize their work procedures while using delayed communication tools and save travel time which helps employees dedicate their efforts to essential tasks (Gareis et al., 2006).

The major benefit of virtual collaboration lets businesses work past the limitation of geographical location. Virtual collaboration helps businesses extract diverse capabilities from wide-ranging candidates who exist beyond their immediate location. Organizations

utilize cross-time-zone collaboration to achieve continuous workflow through a method called "follow-the-sun" that enables team-to-team work transitions across different regions for 24-hour operation (Yu et al., 2016). The successful implementation depends on constant coordination efforts while requiring advanced digital infrastructure because time differences and communication issues might arise (Kane et al., 2015).

The smart working model greatly depends on asynchronous communication for powering its productivity achievements. Employees who use email and project management software and digital workspaces through smart working environments can work at their own comfort level thus allowing deep work productivity with less distraction than an office environment (Bentley et al., 2016). Productivity enhances through structured asynchronous procedures because workers can produce superior work outcomes by processing complex assignments with reduced urgency (Hoozeboom & Wilderom, 2020). When this communication approach minimizes unnecessary meetings together with interruptions it might result in delayed decision-making processes and separate sections unless an organization handles it properly (Hu et al., 2022).

Virtual teamwork receives an enhancement from digital collaboration tools that include AI-driven project management systems and cloud computing and virtual reality meeting spaces. Organizations benefit from these tools since they boost visibility alongside offering up-to-the-second progress monitoring and enabling dispersed teams to exchange knowledge (Klonek & Parker, 2021). Studies demonstrate that intelligent technology implementation in strategic ways helps organizations maintain collective vision while improving operational connection which results in higher employee dedication and outcome success (Kanse et al., 2024). These tools prove effective when employees demonstrate digital literacy along with organizations that promote continuous training initiatives for cybersecurity (McGrath 2020).

Virtual teamwork faces major coordination problems because members struggle to coordinate without face-to-face meetings and spontaneous teamwork interactions. Ford et al., (2017) establish that teams working virtually need specific initiatives for creating both unity and trust among members. Virtual environments limit staff bonding as well as casual information exchange which, research shows, leads to more effective innovations and problem resolution (Chou & Hsu, 2018). Organizations need to adopt methodical

teamwork activities while developing digital work dynamics promoting routine social interactions to overcome these issues.

Virtual collaboration exerts crucial effects on employee mental and physical wellness. Working in constant digital availability results in digital fatigue and elevated work pressure because of diminished separation between work and personal life thus negatively affecting sustained performance (Klonek & Parker, 2021). Virtual collaboration strategies need to combine communication protocols with workload management while providing psychological support to achieve effective outcomes (Hill et al., 2024).

2.4.2 Challenges Affecting Performance in Virtual Teams

Virtual teams provide numerous advantages whereby organizations gain access to worldwide talent and achieve flexible work arrangements (Klonek & Parker, 2021). There are multiple benefits from utilizing virtual teams but they introduce difficulties which might deteriorate performance together with team collaboration. Virtual teams face three major challenges regarding coordination efforts and extensive use of technical tools and leadership and trust-related issues that lead to productivity reductions (Kanse et al., 2024).

Virtual teams face a crucial management obstacle when it comes to handling linked work assignments that need regular comprehensive communication (Kanse et al., 2023). The lack of physical proximity between virtual team members results in structured communication becoming essential to coordinate between team members who cannot interact spontaneously. Task complexity meeting its high level of virtuality places greater pressure on performance as it increases misunderstandings but emphasizes effective communication for maintaining productivity (Marlow et al., 2017). Projects which need time-zone spanning real-time collaboration will have efficiency problems when task dependencies are misaligned (Großer, 2019).

Digital tools use presents new obstacles for the work environment. The technology that delivers connectivity triggers digital exhaustion while removing human connection signals and reduces message depth according to Babapour et al., (2021). The absence of instant feedback and bodily expressions in computer communication hinders the development of relationship-building trust between team members. Virtual teams often

develop more perceived distance between members thus weakening their cohesion together with productivity according to Eisenberg & Mattarelli (2017).

Virtual team leadership faces various challenges that interfere with effective circumstances. Dispersed teams struggle with traditional hierarchical leadership because both informal contact and supervisory control decrease in such contexts (Brown et al., 2021). Successful virtual leadership happens when leaders both enable their teams and inspire full communication channels and adopt flexible decision processes (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Virtual team leaders must address the problem of sustaining motivation and team engagement since remote work leads workers to disconnect from their goals (Glikson et al., 2019).

Trust represents an essential matter in virtual teams. Trust building in virtual teams requires longer effort and shows lower stability since nonverbal cues do not exist (Hacker et al., 2019). Leaders together with team members need to build trust by maintaining transparent practices and ethical accountability and dependable communication channels (Yue et al., 2019). Virtual teams function better when they implement structured communication systems and cultural training programs and team activities to improve coordination and trust standards.

2.4.3 Technology as a Double-Edged Sword

Technology enables remote work approaches while bringing performance-related issues which negatively affect both team member health and virtual team results. Businesses embraced cyber infrastructure with AI and digital collaboration platforms and cloud resources for remote work while they need to check the benefits and drawbacks of technological interventions on performance together with communication and sustainability in these work environments.

Technological applications within virtual teams present the important capability to make processes more productive while managing workflows more efficiently. The use of AI-based project management platforms frees employees from time-consuming administrative work because they automate standard processes so team members can

work on more valuable activities (Klonek & Parker, 2021). The real-time collaboration across geographical borders happens through Microsoft Teams and additional digital communication tools including Slack and Zoom (Kanse et al., 2023). The tools enable teams to share their knowledge and store information centrally that virtual teams can find from any location thus helping them create better coordination and make smarter decisions (Klonek et al., 2022). Smart working strategies promote environmental sustainability because they minimize travel expenses while reducing commutation which results in decreased carbon footprints thus establishing alignment between corporate practices and global sustainability targets.

An excessive dependency on technology creates various operational difficulties that primarily affect digital exhaustion as well as blurs employees' work-life separation. Employers use virtual communication tools to transform workspaces into perpetual availability zones which blur work-life separation according to Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020). Constant notifications along with email messages and video conference demands develop cognitive stress that causes employees to feel less satisfied with their jobs while their productivity decreases. Remote work environments experience digital fatigue because employees face exhaustion caused by excessive screen time and virtual communication dependence according to Kanse et al. (2023).

Technology rarely provides added value to communication because in certain situations it actually causes difficulties in obtaining effective collaboration between individuals. According to Media Richness Theory virtual communications lack both nonverbal signals and contextual elements that occur naturally when people meet face to face which results in challenges in reading emotional tone and intent and reading emotional tone and intent (Hornung, 2015). Decision-making situations that require clear communication become prone to trust-related problems because team members struggle to understand each other during virtual interactions (Klonek et al., 2021). Virtual team coordination suffers additional complications when teams rely on asynchronous communication tools such as email and cloud-based document collaboration per Kanse et al. (2023).

Smart working models face an urgent cybersecurity risk as one of their main challenges. The movement of operational systems to cloud-based environments creates organizations which become at greater risk for cyber attacks as well as data breaches and unauthorized

access attempts. The consulting sector highlights this issue because virtual team members need to maintain tight security measures for handling confidential client data (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). Security protocols such as multi-factor authentication and encryption create user complexity which employees face during daily work but it leads to performance problems and dissatisfaction at times. Using digital monitoring tools for employees raises privacy-related ethical issues because of their rising adoption. Tracking employee productivity through software monitoring devices results in employee surveillance programs that reduce trust and create workplace surveillance while diminishing employee autonomy according to Kanse et al. (2024). Excessive monitoring through smart working models creates stress that decreases employee satisfaction even though it was designed to increase productivity according to research findings.

Organizations need to establish methods which protect employee well-being while maximising technical advantages. The establishment of "right to disconnect" frameworks allows employees to establish work-related communication barriers during after-hours which decreases their digital fatigue (Klonek et al., 2022). Supplying comprehensive digital literacy instruction builds employee competence in operating virtual tools better and thus improves their overall user experience and reduces mental strain. Organizations need to adopt hybrid communication systems which unite video conferences with arranged documentation and team check-ins to avoid prolonged meetings and build organizational clarity (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Company operations benefit from AI-driven solutions because such tools cut down extra digital interactions to enhance communication flow. The implementation of smart filtering systems uses technology to detect important communications while blocking unneeded interruptions thus keeping staff on track with essential work responsibilities (Kanse et al., 2024). Organizations must understand that digital tools operate differently when it comes to various business demands because technology continues to advance. Different workplace strategies require careful integration of digital tools because their efficiency benefits should not jeopardize employee welfare. Organizations that identify and deal with virtual collaboration's built-in trade-offs will establish workspaces which maximize technology benefits for enduring success alongside employee engagement creation and increased trust and mental health support.

2.5 Literature Gap and Research Contribution

Widespread research on remote work has so far failed to uncover the relationship between worker well-being and performance specifically regarding personal perceptions about this trade-off. Remote work studies have analyzed its effects on productivity (Klonek & Parker, 2021) and psychological well-being (Hill et al., 2022) but these aspects remain separate in isolated research. Literature lacks a comprehensive framework for understanding employee subjective experiences of managing well-being versus work performance in professional settings. In relation to this, it is important to spotlight how do employees perceive this effect on their own skin, also to help firms to customize their models on people's needs. That is the main objective of my thesis, summarized by the research question I want to propose: "How do employees perceive the trade-off between well-being and performance in remote work?". The operation models of remote work tend to concentrate on efficiency and output but fail to incorporate psychological and emotional consequences from continuous digital interactions (Levin, 2022). A variety of productivity enhancers including AI project management tools and asynchronous communication programs transformed work environments (Kanse et al., 2024) yet they produce both digital fatigue as well as mental exhaustion among workers. This research adds value to current academic knowledge through its investigation of employee perspectives about this theme. The key is to Find a balance between well-being and performance in relation to remote work.

The realization of a productive and healthy remote work policies demands an organization's understanding of these work dynamics.

This research highlights why integration of well-being aspects should be included during performance evaluation assessments for remote work staff. It produces results which organizations can apply to create performance strategies that value how employees personally interpret their work experiences. It also expands remote work research by developing a comprehensive analysis of human-oriented factors that determine employee satisfaction and maintain long-term work performance. The study utilizes qualitative methods to explore employee understanding of well-being-performance conflicts.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Setting

In the next chapters, I intend to conduct a qualitative analysis of all the themes outlined in the literature review, which led to the research question I have defined: “How do employees perceive the trade-off between well-being and performance in remote work?”.

For this purpose, I decided to use Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, where I conducted my internship, as a reference context for my research.

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu is one of the most important professional services- firms, specialized in consulting, audit, tax and legal services, risk advisory and financial advisory. With PWC, EY and KPMG it is part of the Big Four group of consulting¹.

Deloitte works every day under this motto: “Together at Deloitte, our purpose is to make an impact that matters”². The firm emphasizes values such as equity, sustainability and integrity. It also actively promotes well-being and inclusion as core pillars of its corporate identity.

Specifically, I have conducted my study at Deloitte Italia, at the Rome office³, where I am currently working as an intern. Deloitte Italy has different branches within itself, each one performing functions ranging from audit to financial consultancy. I am working in the Consulting branch and specifically I work in an area that deals with Strategy⁴: this is where I collected the sample for my interviews, thanks to the collaboration of my Team, the people with whom I interact the most during my work and everyday life.

¹ Big Four refers to the four major global giants of accounting and business consultancy: Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Ernst & Young (EY) and KPMG.

² <https://www.deloitte.com>

³ In Rome, Deloitte’s Office is located in Via Veneto 89

⁴ We help the client to transform their Business model or moreover to reinvent their organization

3.2 Data Collection

I have collected my data realizing face - to - face interviews inside my office with nine different candidates from the same business branch where I work: the employees with whom I interact the most daily. I did not choose my colleagues randomly for the interviews: I chose between different candidates, based on the roles they have inside the firm, to have a different and wider range of perspectives and answers. In order to enhance the richness and the depth of the findings, I have included interviews with both senior professionals and newly hired employees.

I have recorded the interviews at the office and then I have written down the records “ad verbatim” and obtained 31 pages.

I have realized semi-structured interviews, with eight questions each to give the person interviewed a “track” to follow, even though, as a semi structured interview, the questions were specifically designed to allow them to talk about their personal experiences and points of view, as well as giving specific answers.

I have divided the questions between some macro themes to facilitate a subsequent thematic analysis⁵ of the results, about the themes I have analyzed inside the literature review. The themes I chose are:

- Well-Being
- Work life balance
- Performance
- Team’s Dynamics.

3.3 Data Analysis

To analyse my data, I have followed a grounded approach based on the Gioia Method (Gioia et al., 2013), which is an inductive approach designed to develop theory grounded in empirical data (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). This methodology is particularly appropriate for exploring complex phenomena that remain underdeveloped in the existing literature and helps to analyze qualitative data in a more structured way.

⁵ Which will be the object of the next subchapter

Therefore, by following this approach, I have started from defining the Aggregates and the 2nd Order themes I was going to use inside my final data structure. I had already started this process during the creation of the script made for the interviews and submitted to the employees: in fact, I have divided the questions into four macro themes, in turn composed of two questions linked to two different sub-themes on purpose, to facilitate this kind of thematic analysis.

After that, I have continued analyzing the transcription of my interviews, which, as I told before, were recorded and then transcribed. From each interview analyzed, I have tried to spotlight the most important quotes (those became my 1st order concepts), highlighting them with different colours about the sub-theme to which they were connected. Each colour was referred to a different sub-theme, in fact at the same time I was giving a specific “code” to each colour (those codes became my 2nd order).

I have grouped the quotes that belonged to the same sub-theme together and made each sub-theme converge into each aggregate: as said before I had already defined my aggregates, dividing the interview’s questions between some macro-themes (Well being, Work life balance, Performance, Team dynamics and a final question to analyze Deloitte’s employees point of view), so this part was the quickest. It was not hard to identify the second order themes also, because I intentionally made these themes emerge from the questions. The Aggregates and the emerging 2nd Order Themes were selected after an analysis and a comparison with the existing literature to assess their novelty and relevance. You can look at the final Data Structure at the end of this chapter (Figure 1).

1st Order Concepts

- "The fact that you have to work in the office anyway increases the stress a little bit because you're always being watched." (Interviewee 1)
- "You are a little less exposed to stressful situations." (Interviewee 6)
- "Then maybe stress is always there but I feel like I can manage it better from home." (Interviewee 7)
- "There have been periods when I am very stressed even at home. In fact at home I am more tied perhaps to staying fixed, to working." (Interviewee 9)
- "Holding important meetings remotely is easier from a stress point of view than holding them in person". (Interviewee 3)
- "In my opinion it has improved because I am very emotional and also very anxious". (Interviewee 4)

2nd Order Themes

Psychological stress management

Motivation and personal satisfaction

Aggregates

Well being

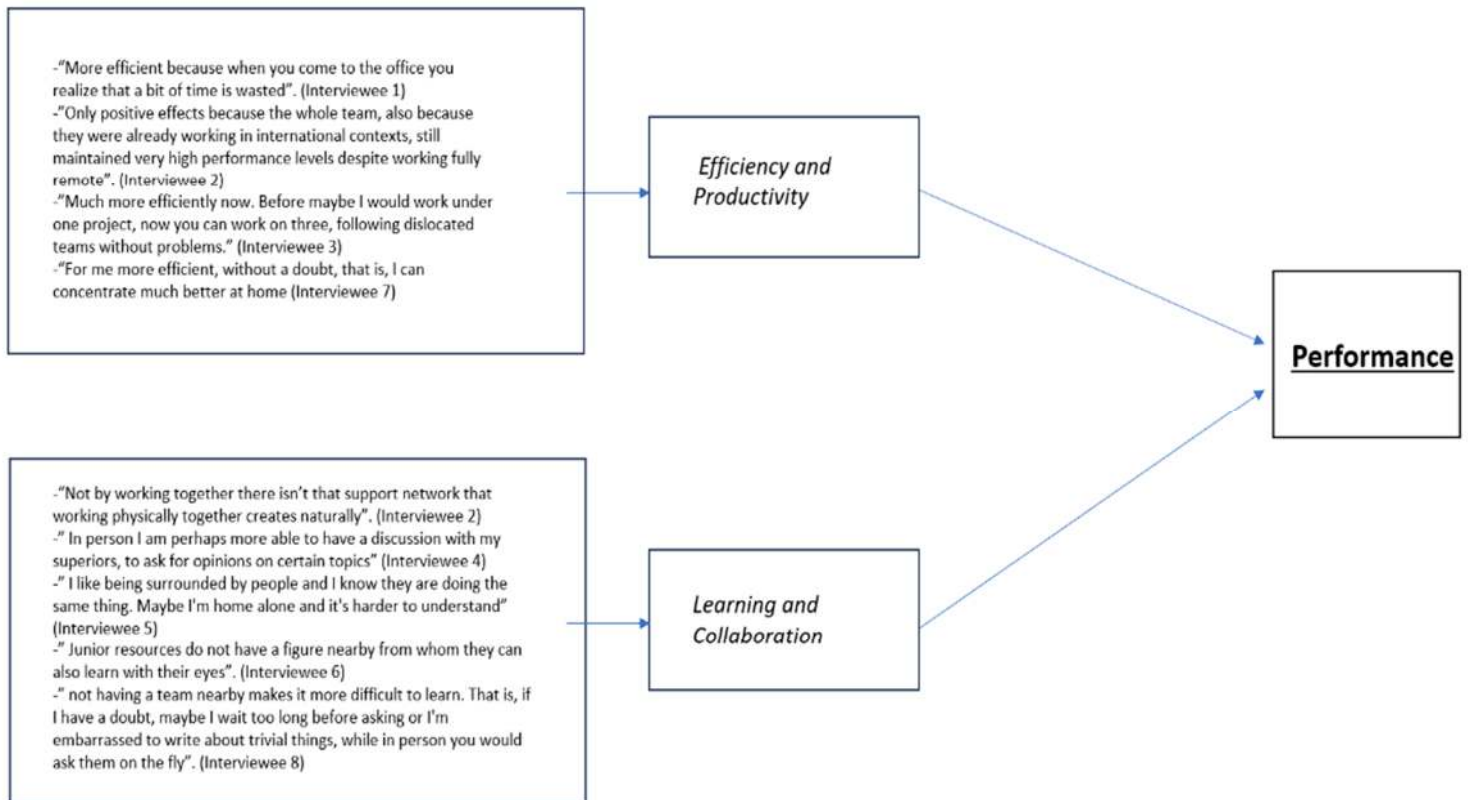
-“Yesterday I’ve finished at 8 p.m and I didn’t even notice that dinner was ready. The day was over.” (Interviewee 1)
 -“it’s true that especially at the beginning, especially during the lockdown, you lose a bit of perception of time, so you find that maybe it’s 07:30 and you’re still there. Connected” (Interviewee 2)
 -“All of this is perhaps something subjective, because it depends on your manager, on your superiors, how much they are, as I was telling you before, how respectful they are of this balance of yours.” (Interviewee 4)
 -“I’ve always thought that also for the future of my working career I wanted to try to keep the two things separate. Why? I don’t want to take the work home” (Interviewee 5)
 -“Those boundaries no longer exist. Because you work where it also depends on whether someone lives in a small environment, you work where you eat, you work where you sleep.” (Interviewee 6)

*Dissolution of
borders between
work and private life*

-“If you live an hour away from work, it means that you will arrive at 9 anyway, so if you live alone and have to cook, it means that you will not be on the sofa or in bed before 10:30 anyway.” (Interviewee 1)
 -“It gave me a lot of personal flexibility with things too. Because before we always worked from the client, often even clients who were far away. So it impacted my rhythm of just sleep for example” (Interviewee 2)
 -“I did it from Sardinia and it’s really cool, it’s a great thing”. (Interviewee 3)
 -Let’s say one has more time when working from home to also take care of one’s own interests, which can also be trivially during the lunch break, watching something on TV or reading a book to unwind.” (Interviewee 4)
 -“I travel two hours a day, that is, it takes up a lot of my time if I have to come every day.” (Interviewee 9)

*Time and flexibility:
enhancing private life*

Work life balance



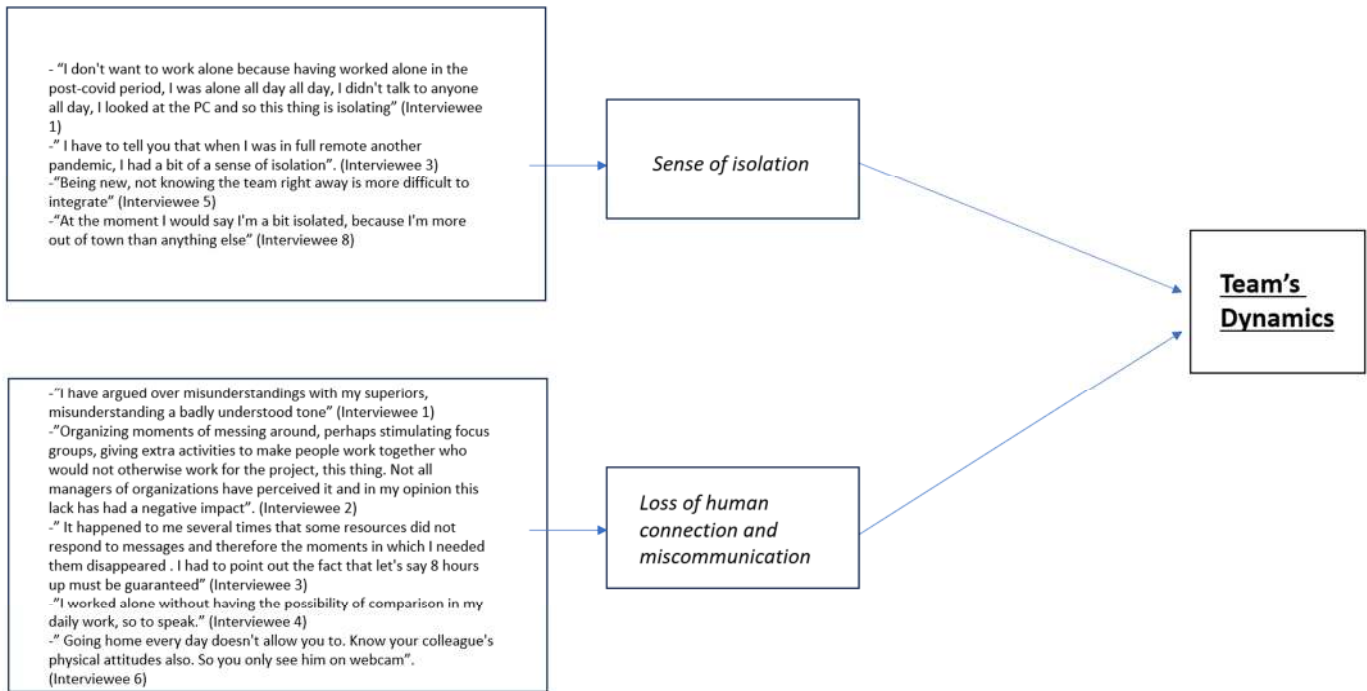


Figure 1 – Data structure.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 “The Well Being”

From the very beginning, it was clear that remote work had a deep impact on how participants felt, not only in terms of stress and anxiety, but also concerning motivation, satisfaction, and the overall rhythm of their working lives. Over time, two main themes took shape inside this Aggregate, my 2nd order themes: one focused on how people manage psychological stress, and the other one is connected to their personal motivation and sense of satisfaction in a remote setting. These two aspects, though connected, reflect very different experiences and reveal how diverse and subjective the impact of remote working can be.

Starting from the first one, the “Psychological stress management”, I can say that some participants described remote work as a relief, especially from the small, constant tensions of being physically in the office. For example, Interviewee 6, a Senior consultant with several years of experience (4 to 5 years in this sector), shared that: “you are a little less exposed to stressful situations” (Interviewee 6). Similarly, Interviewee 4, a junior intern at the beginning of their career, said about stress management: “In my opinion, it has improved because I am very emotional and also very anxious” (Interviewee 4). It was striking to hear how people at completely different stages of their consulting careers, from highly experienced employees to freshers, both found comfort in being away from the office. In this sense, remote work seems to create a buffer: a quieter, more controllable space where people can catch their breath. Interviewee 1, also a Senior consultant, added another layer to this view, noting: “The fact that you have to work in the office anyway increases the stress a little bit because you’re always being watched” (Interviewee 1). This idea of being constantly visible or under pressure in person was mentioned many times, suggesting that physical presence can carry a hidden emotional weight.

Not everyone experienced working from home as entirely stress-free. Interviewee 9, a consultant with around three years of experience, reflected on how home can bring its challenges: “There have been periods when I am very stressed even at home. In fact, at home I am more tied, perhaps, staying stuck, only working.”(Interviewee 9). This comment reveals a very human truth: when the boundary between work and life blurs, stress does not disappear, it just shifts. For some, home becomes a space where it’s harder

to stop, harder to disconnect, but we will deal with this theme in the next subchapters. Others shared more situational insights. Interviewee 3, another Senior consultant, explained that: “Holding important meetings remotely is easier from a stress point of view than holding them in person” (Interviewee 3) and Interviewee 7, a young intern, acknowledged:

“Then maybe stress is always there but I feel like I can manage it better from home” (Interviewee 7).

These remarks suggest that while remote work doesn’t erase pressure, it can soften it, making it easier to handle for some, especially when dealing with high-stakes tasks.

The second sub-themes I have defined concerning the Well Being are: “Motivation and Personal satisfaction”. When the conversation shifted to motivation and personal fulfillment, things became more complex and more divided. One of the most telling comments came from Interviewee 2, the highest ranked person interviewed (a Partner: an employee with 10 or plus years of experience, higher ranked than Managers and Senior Managers inside the firm), who described remote work as “a double-edged sword” (Interviewee 2). He appreciated the flexibility and the company’s attention to well-being, but also admitted: “Always working alone, far from other people, even from my team that excites me can become demotivating” (Interviewee 2). It was a reminder that even those at the top still crave human connection and feed off the energy of the team. The complexity of staying motivated came up several times, especially among junior employees. Interviewee 8, an intern, said honestly: “Motivation sometimes struggles to rise, I mean, I prefer to be with others, to see colleagues at the office, it helps me to get more motivated” (Interviewee 8). Interviewee 6, though more senior, echoed a similar feeling: “At work you’re with your colleagues. Let’s say you could be more relaxed spending time with them instead of at home, you are more sedentary staying alone” (Interviewee 6).

In both cases, the office is not just a place where to work, it is also a source of energy, rhythm, and interaction. Finally, Interviewee 9 touched on the deeper meaning behind job satisfaction: “In terms of satisfaction, perhaps, because the office is a place of personal relationships” (Interviewee 9)

This quote beautifully summarizes something that many participants highlighted: satisfaction doesn’t come only from output or efficiency, but also from informal

connections, like the chats over a cup of coffee, the shared frustrations of the everyday presence of a team.

Taken together, these reflections show just how multidimensional well-being is. Remote work can provide comfort and calm, especially for those who feel pressure in traditional settings but it can also create distance, demotivation, and even a sense of emptiness when human connection fades.

Different roles bring different perspectives: interns and younger staff often miss social energy and guidance, while senior staff appreciate flexibility but are aware of the emotional toll that isolation can take. Well-being, in the end, is not just about being away from stress it's also about being close to what makes work feel meaningful. You can observe the data structure connected to this aggregate in Figure 3.

1st Order Concepts

2nd Order Themes

Aggregates

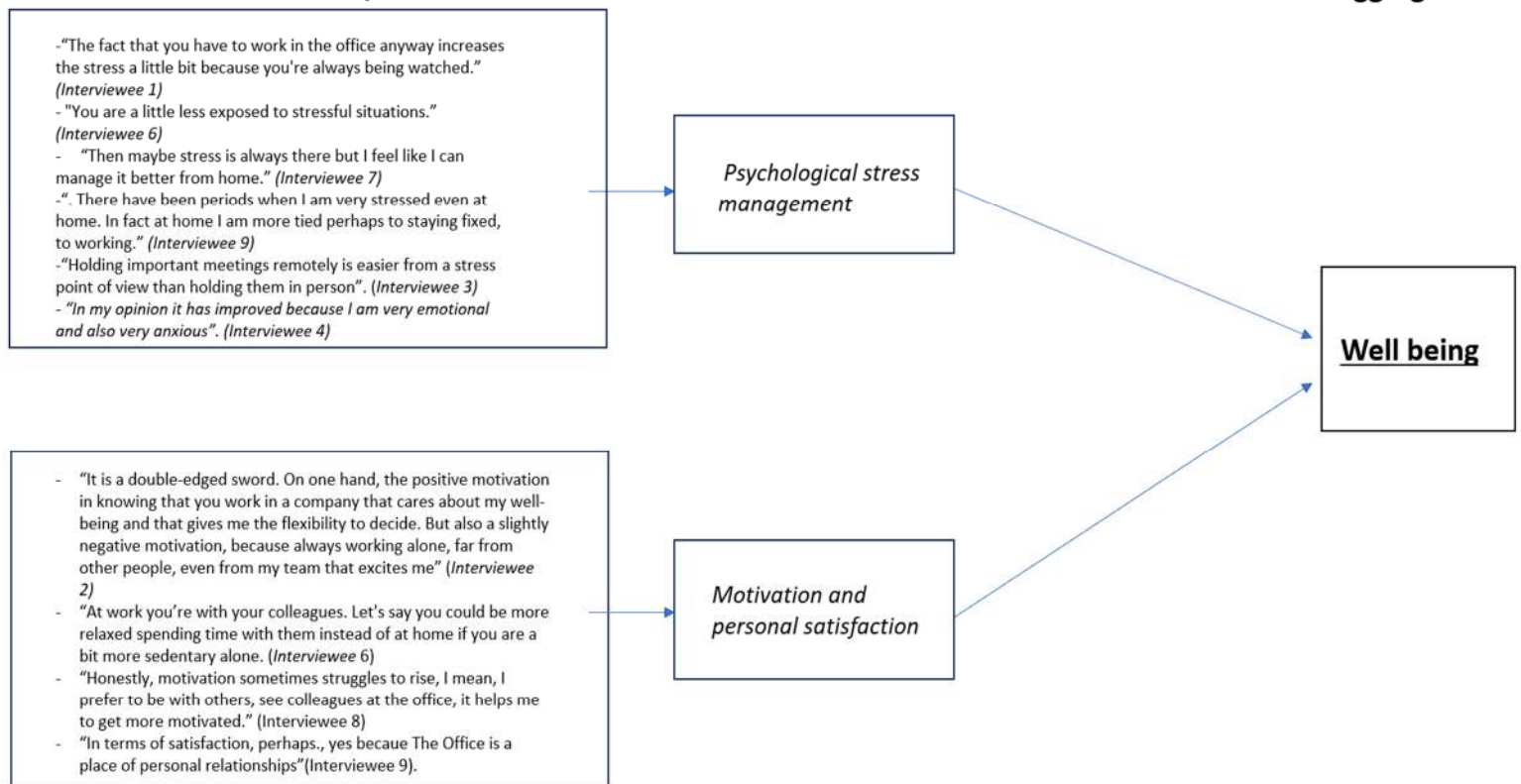


Figure 3 – the Well Being

4.2 “The Work Life Balance”

This theme touched not just how time is spent, but also how blurred the line has become between work and personal life. The two main concepts that emerged within this dimension are: the “dissolution of boundaries between professional and private life”, and “how time and flexibility can enhance personal life”. These themes are often in tension, revealing both promises and paradoxes of remote working. Starting from the first one, the “dissolution of borders between work and private life”, we can say that for several participants remote working made it harder to maintain a clear separation between professional and personal time. What once may have been a firm line has, in many cases, faded, often to the point of disappearing completely.

Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, shared a simple but crucial anecdote: “Yesterday I finished at 8 p.m. and I didn’t even notice that dinner was ready. The day was over” (Interviewee 1).

This kind of time distortion was echoed by Interviewee 2, a partner with many years of experience, who said: “Especially at the beginning, especially during the lockdown, you lose a bit of perception of time, so you find that maybe it’s 07:30 p.m. and you’re still there. Connected” (Interviewee 2).

Even interns and junior staff expressed concerns about the fading line between private life and work. Interviewee 4, an intern, reflected on how the experience varies depending on company culture and individual managers, saying: “It depends on how respectful they are of this balance of yours.” (Interviewee 4). Meanwhile, Interviewee 5, an analyst with one year of experience, made a clear personal statement: “I’ve always thought that also for the future of my working career I wanted to try to keep the two things separate. Why? I don’t want to take the work home.” (Interviewee 5). Perhaps the most vivid description came from Interviewee 6, another Senior consultant, who said: “Those boundaries no longer exist. Because it also depends on whether someone lives in a small environment, you work where you eat, you work where you sleep.” (Interviewee 6). This quote encapsulates a broader discomfort: when your workplace and your private space become the same, the psychological consequences can be significant.

The other 2nd order themes analyzed inside this Aggregate are: “Time and Flexibility: enhancing private life”. As well as the other themes, especially those facing long

commutes or more structured personal routines, remote work brought clear advantages in terms of time saved and personal freedom. Interviewee 1 again pointed out how, for someone living alone, the difference is real: “If you live an hour away from work, it means that you will arrive at 9 p.m. anyway [...] you will not be on the sofa or in bed before 10:30 anyway” (Interviewee 1). Similarly, Interviewee 9, a consultant with three years of experience, was straightforward: “I travel two hours a day, that is, it takes up a lot of my time if I have to come every day” (Interviewee 9). Interviewee 2, the Partner, also appreciated how remote working reshaped daily rhythms, saying: “It gave me a lot of personal flexibility with things too. Because before we always worked from the client, even clients who were far away. It impacted my rhythm of just sleep, for example.” (Interviewee 2). This is very interesting, since it comes from a Partner’s quote, suggesting that the value of time is felt strongly even at the top levels of the hierarchy. Several interns and junior professionals also pointed to the new opportunities for using breaks more freely. Interviewee 4 noted: “Let’s say one has more time working from home to also take care of one’s interests, which can also be done during the lunch break, watching something on TV or reading a book to unwind.” (Interviewee 4). And Interviewee 3, a senior consultant, added a more playful angle: “I did it from Sardinia and it’s really cool, it’s a great thing.” (Interviewee 3).

In short, the work-life balance dimension reflects both the cost and the potential of remote working. The conditions that improve personal time management can, for some, result in an emotional detachment from one's private space. Senior professionals often struggle with the dissolution of boundaries between work and personal life, while junior staff seem to value time recovery and small everyday freedoms. Whether remote work improves or worsens work life balance largely depends on how individuals negotiate their space, routines, and the meanings they assign to this separation.

You can observe the data structure connected to this aggregate in Figure 4.

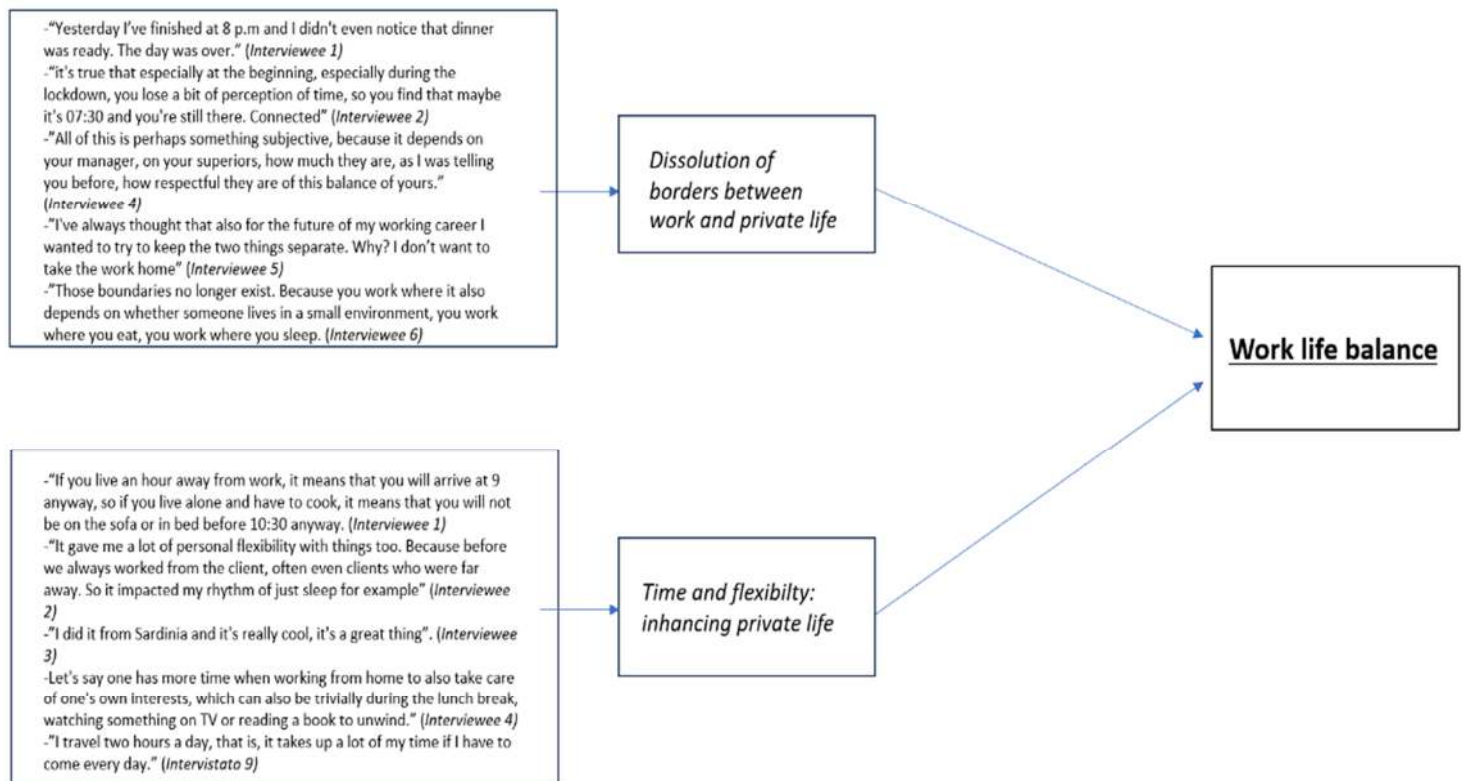


Figure 4 – the Work Life Balance

4.3 “The Performance”

The analysis of this macro theme shows one of the most intriguing contrast in the research: while many participants described a boost in their productivity and efficiency while working remotely, others, particularly younger team members, pointed out how difficult it is to sustain a strong performance without direct interactions, shared physical spaces, and informal moments which can enhance the learning process that naturally happens in the office. This tension gave rise to two second-order themes: “Efficiency and Productivity” and “Learning and Collaboration”.

The first one, “Efficiency and Productivity”, showed me that several participants highlighted that remote work, when well organized, allowed them to get a bigger amount

of work done with fewer distractions. Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, defined himself: “More efficient because when you come to the office you realize that a bit of time is wasted” (Interviewee 1). This sentiment was echoed by Interviewee 3, also a Senior consultant, who said that he feels: “Much more efficient now. Before maybe I would work on one project, now you can work on three, following dislocated teams without problems” (Interviewee 3). Even the highest-ranked employee in the study, Interviewee 2 (a Partner), was clear in stating that he felt: “only positive effects were observed, because the whole team, also because they were already working in international contexts, still maintained very high-performance levels despite working fully remote” (Interviewee 2). This perspective gives weight to the idea that high performance is possible at all levels (even across fully remote) when habits and communication practices are already in place. On the junior side, Interviewee 7, an intern, expressed a similar view from his personal perception: “For me, more efficient, without doubt, I can focus much better at home” (Interviewee 7). Her statement reflects how even early-career employees may find calm and focus in remote work, a signal that productivity is not only a question of experience, but also of environment and personality.

The other 2nd order theme I’ve introduced inside this aggregate is “Learning and Collaboration”. However, while efficiency was generally praised, collaboration and learning were often described as the “missing piece” in the remote setup. Several participants emphasized how the absence of physical proximity makes learning slower, more awkward, or simply less natural. Interviewee 2 (the Partner) framed it this way: “By not working together, there is not that kind of network which working physically together creates naturally” (Interviewee 2). This theme was picked up by Interviewee 4, a junior intern, who said: “In person I am perhaps more able to have a discussion with my superiors, to ask for opinions on certain topics” (Interviewee 4). For someone just starting, these interactions are often the key of learning and they are harder to be replicated online. Interviewee 5, an analyst, shared a similar concern: “I like being surrounded by people and I know they are doing the same thing. Maybe I’m home alone and it’s harder to understand” (Interviewee 5). Here, what is missing is not just feedbacks, but the subtle group dynamics which help people feel aligned and motivated.

Interviewee 6, a Senior consultant, pointed out another important detail: “Junior resources do not have a figure nearby from whom they can also learn with their eyes” (Interviewee

6). This highlights the value of informal, observational learning something nearly impossible to reproduce in a virtual setting. Finally, Interviewee 8, a young intern, put it very clearly: “Not having a team nearby makes it more difficult to learn. If I have a doubt I wait too long before asking or I’m embarrassed to write about trivial things, while in person you would ask them immediately” (Interviewee 8). Her comment captures a key issue for many junior professionals: the loss of immediacy, spontaneity, and the ability to “learn by asking” without hesitation. Junior figures are the ones who suffer the most from this.

Altogether, the findings on performance reflect a duality: remote work can boost productivity and give people space to focus, especially for those who are more autonomous and more used to manage complexity, but it may also isolate new employees and make collaboration slower and less effective. Employees of a higher level of seniority were more likely to report stability or improvement in their performance. Meanwhile, those at the beginning of their careers often struggled to match the same performance due to the absence of in-person mentoring and shared learning spaces. You can observe the data structure connected to this aggregate in Figure 5.

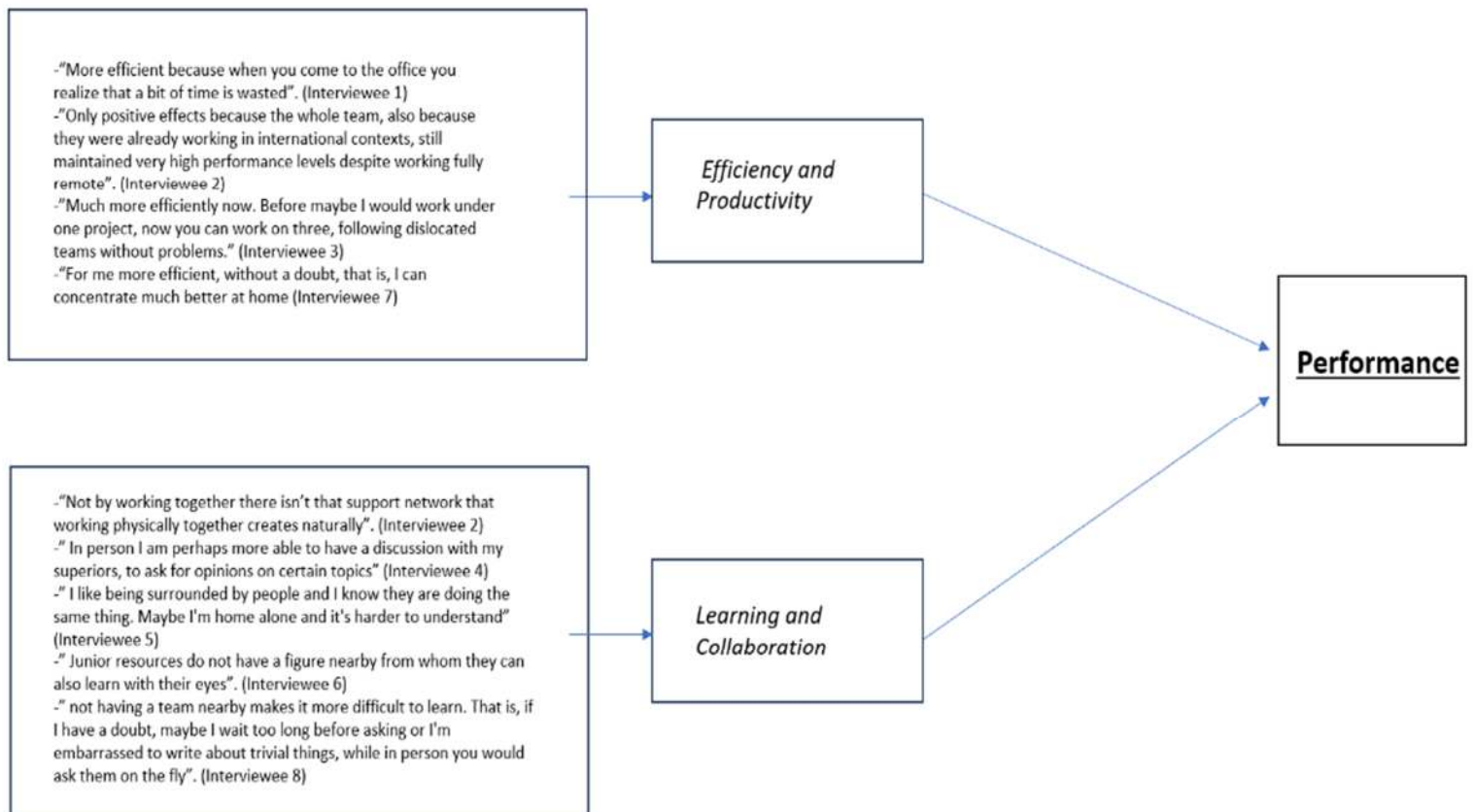


Figure 5 – The “Performance”

4.4 “The Team Dynamics”

What emerged from the interviews is a shared sense of distance, not only physical, but relational. Across all levels of seniority, participants spoke about a weakening of spontaneous interactions, understanding, and also of small but powerful routines that define how teams function. Concerning the questions I have realized, two second-order themes emerged: the “Sense of Isolation” and the “Loss of Human Connection and Miscommunication”. Starting from the “Sense of Isolation”, I can say that many interviewees described moments where remote work left them emotionally or socially

detached. Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, shared a personal memory: “I don’t want to work alone because working alone in the post-Covid period, I was staying alone all day, all day, I wasn’t talking to anyone. I was looking at my laptop all day and this thing is isolating.” (Interviewee 1). Even for experienced professionals, the lack of interaction can become heavy over time, not just in terms of work: it affects the mood and the sense of identity. Interviewee 3, also a Senior consultant, has recalled a similar period: “I have to tell you that when I was in full remote another pandemic, I had a sense of isolation” (Interviewee 3). For younger employees, the experience is even more delicate. Interviewee 5, an analyst, explained: “Being new, not knowing the team right away is more difficult to integrate” (Interviewee 5). And Interviewee 8, a junior intern, added: “At the moment I would say I’m a bit isolated, because I’m more out of town than anything else.” (Interviewee 8). These quotes reflect how geography, seniority, and onboarding timing can shape how included or excluded someone can feel.

The other second order themes I have analyzed inside this aggregate are: the “Loss of Human Connection and the Miscommunication”. Alongside emotional dimension, several participants described specific communication breakdowns and relational gaps. Interviewee 1 recalled: “I have argued over misunderstandings with my superiors, misunderstanding a badly understood tone”(Interviewee 1). This quote highlights how virtual communication frequently lacks emotional context.: it’s hard to feel and understand truly, for example, the voice tone or the body language of your interlocutor. Interviewee 2, a Partner, gave a broader reflection on the lack of spontaneous engagement: “Organizing moments of messing around,stimulating focus groups, giving extra activities to make people work together who would not otherwise work for the project, this thing is missing. Not all managers have perceived it and, in my opinion, this lack had a negative impact.” (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 3 noted a concrete consequence: “It happened to me, several times, that some resources did not respond to messages and, when I needed them, disappeared. I had to point out the fact that, let’s say, 8 hours up must be guaranteed” (Interviewee 3). Meanwhile, Interviewee 4, a young intern, expressed the difficulty of having no one to compare herself with: “I worked alone without having the chance of comparison in my daily work” (Interviewee 4). Interviewee 6, a Senior consultant, captured the subtle but important difference between presence and

absence: “Going home every day doesn’t allow you to know your colleague’s physical attitudes also. You only see him on webcam” (Interviewee 6).

This perfectly illustrates how remote work reduces human interactions to a presence that is seen but not always felt. Taken together, these insights paint a clear picture: while remote work offers flexibility and autonomy, it risks undermining the fundamental elements of teamwork in our daily lives. For younger employees, this can lead to isolation and difficulties in finding their place. For seniors, it means less control over team spirit and cohesion. Across all levels, what’s missing is not the ability to collaborate but the richness of a shared presence, of laughter, small talk, gestures, and of the intangible glue that turns coworkers into a team.

You can observe the data structure connected to this aggregate in Figure 6.

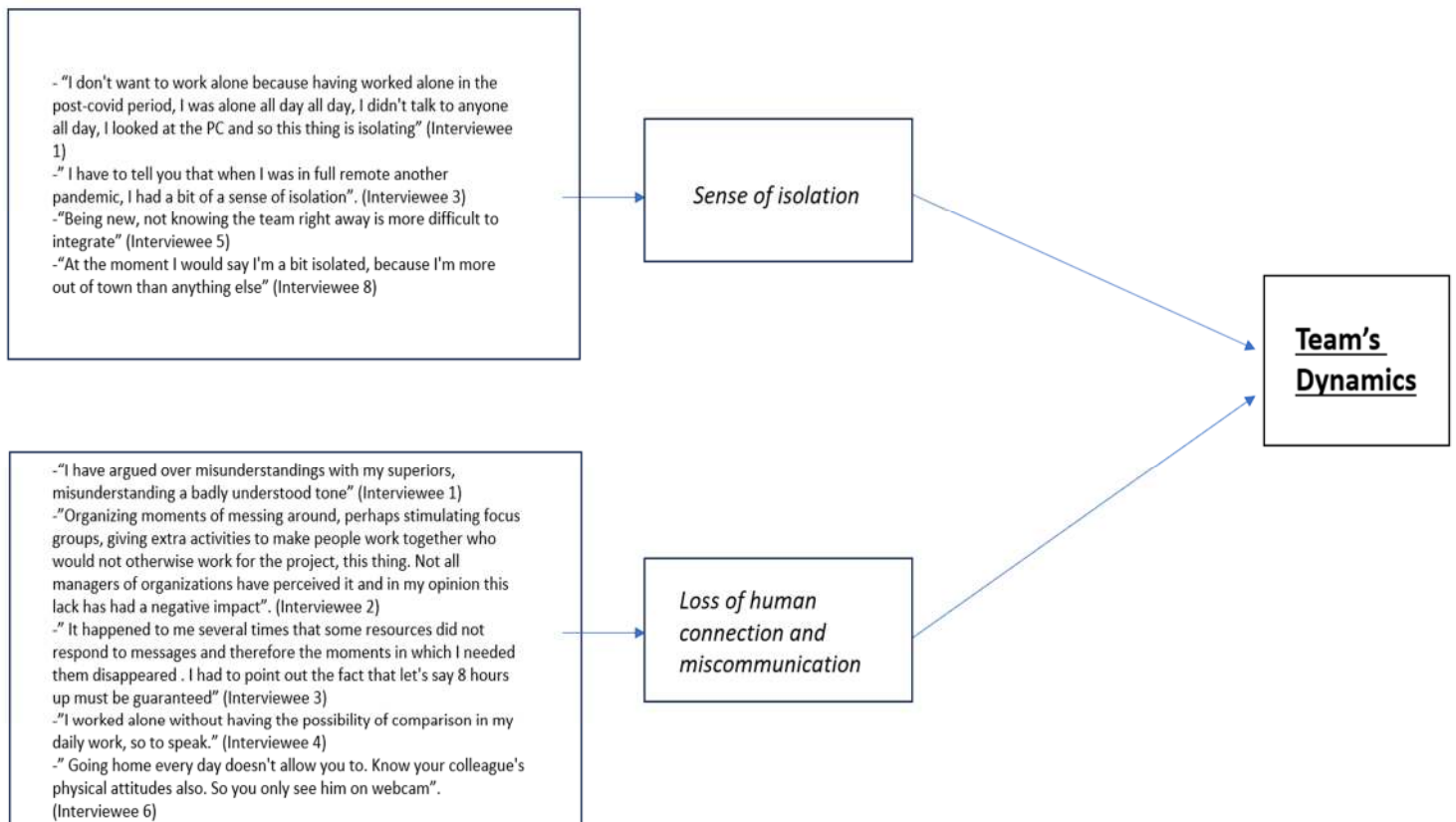


Figure 6 – the Team's Dynamics

4.5 Final question: Deloitte's case

At the end of every interview, I have decided to go beyond the Data structure connected to the Gioia method and other schemes, to have a point of view of the employees, without veil, asking: "What initiatives should Deloitte implement to enhance the remote work experience, ensuring productivity and well-being? Do you think they were effective or ineffective? Why and how?".

It was an open, personal question. This question gave people the freedom to say what they thought without filters.

One of the clearest messages across all roles was the value of flexibility. Everyone, from interns to partners, agreed that Deloitte's approach to hybrid work is on the right path.

The Partner (Interviewee 2) praised the freedom which managers have to decide how to

organize their teams. He noted, also, that too much freedom can also create distance, suggesting that having at least “one or two fixed days together” (Interviewee 2) might help teams feel more connected. A similar view came from Interviewee 9, a mid-level consultant, who described the company’s strategy as “definitely effective” and appreciated having the choice: “Flexibility is a real pro that not all companies offer. The future is hybrid” (Interviewee 9).

Many young employees also spoke about the difficulties of starting their career in a flexible world. Several of them, especially interns and recent hires, brought up the fact that being new and working in remote world is a tough combo. Interviewee 8, for example, suggested that having a few fixed in-office days early on could help them to settle in: “It makes you feel more supported... then maybe after a month you can be more independent.”(Interviewee 8).

Interviewee 5, an analyst, said she would have preferred being in the office “five days a week at the beginning”(Interviewee 5), just to feel less alone and more included.

This concern was extended beyond junior roles. Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, also reflected on how important it is for new hired to have in-person guidance: “Those who started after Covid are used to work fully remote, and that’s a problem, even if I understand where it comes from” (Interviewee 1). He wasn’t criticizing the model itself, but reminding us that remote work isn’t always intuitive, especially for someone who has just entered the world of consulting.

Beyond structure and onboarding, some suggestions focused more on the human side of teamwork. Interviewee 7 imagined simple and informal moments to connect: “even just a space to have a talk, not just about work” (Interviewee 7). Interviewee 3 went even further and proposed a way to protect well-being, automatically switching off laptops and phones at a certain time, to avoid burnout and late-night stress.

Looking at all these reflections together, what stands out is a shared desire for balance. Not just between working and resting, but between freedom and structure, autonomy and belonging.

Most of the people I spoke with weren’t rejecting remote work at all, they valued it, but they also wanted to preserve the things that make working together feel them more “human”. A bit of presence, a bit of routine, a space where to breathe, and someone to

talk to. In the end, their suggestions weren't radical, but real. And maybe that's what makes them so relevant.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1 Research Question and Gap

The research question I am addressing in this project is: “How do employees perceive well-being and performance in a context of remote work?”. Through qualitative interviews and a grounded analysis, using the Gioia Method, this study found that employees do not only tend to not perceive well-being and performance as opposing forces, but as interdependent dimensions: their ability to perform is linked to their emotional stability, team relationships and flexibility. According to the literature, Remote work systems together with virtual teams have created substantial changes in the way people manage their life balance between work commitments and personal responsibilities (Gilson et al., 2021). The main drawback of working on virtual teams consists of social isolation because research shows this cut down leads to diminished employee satisfaction together with elevated mental health problems (Bentley et al., 2016). The need to overcome this problem is most severe in work environments where both teamwork and strong interpersonal relations play important roles like consulting and project management. Dealing with the theme of performance and productivity, the literature says that Telecommuting along with flexible work arrangements gives workers better autonomy yet simultaneously mixes professional and personal spheres that create elevated work-family problems and burnout conditions (Levin, 2022). Knowledge-intensive sectors experience extensive changes in productivity together with virtual collaboration performance because of the smart working transformation. Virtual collaboration enhances productivity because teams optimize their work procedures while using delayed communication tools and save travel time which helps employees dedicate their efforts to essential tasks (Gareis et al., 2006). This thesis was developed in response to a specific gap identified in the literature: the absence of an integrated analysis of employees’ Well Being and Performance inside remote work environments. What is missing is an analysis that highlights these two macro-themes simultaneously, leveraging the perceptions of employees, which is precisely the aim of my thesis: it starts directly from the words of the employees to then dig into the contrast between these two themes and then analyse this relation. As reviewed in Chapter 2.5, previous research tended to focus either on productivity (Klonek & Parker, 2021) or psychological well-being (Hill

et al., 2022) as separate areas of investigation: this project aims to explore the interplay between these two themes from the employee's point of view.

The data reveals a more complex relationship: factors such as emotional stability, team cohesion, open dialogue, informal social interactions, the ability to disconnect from work and psychological safety, emerge as essential conditions for maintaining long-term productivity. As illustrated in the finding section, different perceptions related to well-being and performance coexist and influence one another, highlighting the interdependent nature of these elements. In the next paragraphs I will show these aspects more thoroughly.

5.2 Discussions

The first aggregate dimension I have analyzed is the Well-Being. It is connected to how employees perceive and manage their mental and emotional health in a remote work setting. The analysis of the interviews highlighted two main second-order themes: “Psychological Stress Management” and “Motivation and Personal Satisfaction”.

In the first case, several interviewees reported a greater ability to manage stress while working remotely, often because of being in a more controlled and familiar environment. For example, Interviewee 7, an Intern, said that stress is always there, but he can manage it better from home. Similarly, Interviewee 3 explained that holding important meetings remotely is easier from a stress point of view than having them in person. These quotes are connected to the idea that virtual environments may reduce external pressures typically experienced in physical office situations.

These perspectives resonate with what Hill et al. (2022) describe in their analysis, where they spotlight that the workplace transition brought employees both flexibility and autonomy, but, at the same time, created many stressors that negatively affected their well-being. This duality was clearly expressed by Interviewee 9, for example, who admitted there were periods where he felt very stressed, even from home. This kind of

quote reveals that stress does not disappear, it relocates when boundaries between personal and professional life are blurred.

The second theme (“Motivation and Personal Satisfaction”) was more complex to analyze. Some interviewees reported higher motivation, especially when supported by welcoming teams. For example, this was the case of Interviewee 7 who noted that his motivation, paradoxically, increased, because he found a welcoming team, even if distant, that makes him feel like doing well and growing in this context. However, others, especially Senior and experienced staff, described an emotional detachment due to prolonged isolation. Interviewee 2, a Partner with over 10 years of experience, said that working alone, far from other people and from his team that excites him, can become demotivating.

This aligns with Hill et al. (2022), who noted that virtual team interactions worsen both psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of a “supportive leadership” in increasing moral and productivity: this point was frequently raised by interns, who described motivation as a kind of resource which is connected to both the team’s behaviour and to the quality of their onboarding process.

Well-being under remote conditions appears multifaceted and role-sensitive. Interns and junior employees are vulnerable to loneliness and demotivation, while more experienced professionals acknowledge the trade off between autonomy and emotional disconnection. These dynamics confirm Bentley et al. (2016) findings. They confirm that wellbeing in virtual work environments depends on three key conditions such as: the differences between the employees combined with the team dynamics and the support systems from the organization.

The second aggregate that emerged from the data structure is “Work-Life Balance”. It deals with how employees handle the boundaries between personal and professional life in remote settings. The interviews highlighted two second order themes: “The Dissolution of Boundaries between work and private life” and “Time and Flexibility: enhancing private life”. These dimensions often present both advantages and drawbacks, particularly across different seniority levels.

A central concern among interviewees was the blurring of lines between work and private life. Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, noted, for example, that one day he finished working at 8 p.m. and didn't even notice that dinner was ready and the day was over. Similarly, Interviewee 2, a Partner with over ten years of experience, explained that especially during the lockdown, you can lose perception of time: he found herself still connected at 7:30 p.m., without realizing it.

This emotional clutter between private and professional life creates a form of fatigue, which may not be expressed in hours worked, but rather in the difficulty of mentally switching off.

These reflections are strongly linked to what Gilson et al. (2021) describe, when they say that working professionals experience the invasion of personal time by their tasks because they must stay available always. Likewise, Eddleston & Mulki (2017) report that remote work often leads employees to face problems disconnecting from professional duties, which produces higher work-family conflict.

On the other hand, many participants emphasized how remote work enhances personal life through saved commuting time and greater flexibility. For example, Interviewee 1 pointed out that if you live an hour away from work, you'll be home by 9 p.m. anyway and you won't be on the sofa or in bed before 10:30 p.m. These insights align with the literature: Levin (2022) wrote that virtual work systems enable employees to design their work schedules according to personal needs. However, he also warned that flexibility can lead to endless work pressure, extended hours and increased stress.

Some junior employees appreciated using small pockets of time for themselves. Interviewee 4 noted that you have more time to take care of your interests, like reading a book during your break. Meanwhile, Interviewee 3, a Senior consultant, added that he had the opportunity to work from Sardinia. These quotes show how remote work's effects depend on how individuals negotiate space, autonomy, and expectations, both personally and organizationally. As Bentley et al. (2016) noted, remote work flexibility permits better work-life balance, but also creates an unclear separation of professional and personal life.

The third aggregate that emerged during the analysis is "Performance", which explores how remote work is connected to the ability to meet goals and deliver results. The

interviews reflect two second-order themes: the first one is connected to “Efficiency and Productivity” and the second one is connected to “Learning and Collaboration”. These insights reveal how remote work environments can both enhance productivity and, at the same time, introduce new challenges.

Many interviewees highlighted how remote work has improved their productivity by reducing distractions. Interviewee 7, an intern, said that he is more efficient at home because he can focus without office distractions. He added that at home, he can get everything done faster and meet deadlines more easily. At the same time, Interviewee 3, a Senior consultant, explained that now he is feeling much more efficient than before. Now he can handle three projects at once and collaborate with teams in different locations. As stated by Nakrošienė et al. (2019), Remote work allows professionals to eliminate commuting and noise distractions, enhancing task completion and perceived efficiency. Interviewee 9, a Consultant, offered a more thoughtful perspective, adding that efficiency depends on what you define as performance. According to him, performance is just one small part of what leads to success: relationships, character, and attitude are often more important in career progression. This quote reflects what Brighi & Szymanski (2023) noted: performance in virtual environments is no longer just output based, it includes interpersonal and cultural integration.

At the same time, several interviewees highlighted how remote work can make learning and collaboration harder, especially for junior staff. Interviewee 5, an analyst, expressed that

it is harder to be noticed when you're remote. If you want to grow, sometimes you need to be seen, especially by managers. These dynamics can lead to a sense of invisibility within hybrid organizations, especially inside environments where casuals and informal interactions often influence who gets noticed, trusted or even promoted. Hickman & Robison (2020) observed that employees who only work from home, receive less spontaneous feedback and slower recognition from leadership.

The final aggregate explored in this research is Team Dynamics, which made it possible to highlight how remote work has transformed interpersonal relationships and

collaboration within teams. Two second order themes emerged from the analysis: the “Sense of Isolation” and the “Loss of Human Connection and Miscommunication”.

A key theme, especially among junior employees, was the perceived emotional and professional isolation caused by working in a remote environment. Interviewee 5, an Analyst, noted that being new, not knowing the team right away, makes the integration process more difficult. Also, among more experienced employees, the lack of informal interaction was seen as a problem. Interviewee 1, a Senior consultant, explained that staying alone all day and not talking to anyone, just looking at his laptop all day long, was isolating.

These experiences reflect the challenges highlighted by Ford et al. (2017), who emphasize that virtual teams require specific structures to foster connection and trust, otherwise the risk of social disconnection increases. Without efforts to maintain a “human” connection, team members may gradually feel excluded from informal moments that play a critical role in cohesion, team identity and shared learning.

Beyond the emotional impact, many participants mentioned communication issues. For example, Interviewee 4 added that he worked alone without having the possibility of comparison in his daily work. Meanwhile, Interviewee 1 added that he argued over misunderstandings with his superiors: misunderstanding a badly understood tone. These observations reflect the concerns raised by Eisenberg & Mattarelli (2017), who state that remote work reduces shared presence, making it difficult to build the type of informal cohesion that sustains high-performing teams. Interviewee 2, a Partner, also pointed out how the lack of structured initiatives to build informal bonds has impacted collaboration. He also added that not all managers have perceived it and this has a negative impact.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The main intuition that led me to identify the gap I have been working with inside this research is the lack of integrated studies examining how employees perceive the trade-off between well-being and performance. While previous research has often treated these two aspects separately, focusing either on productivity (Klonek & Parker, 2021) or on psychological well-being outcomes (Hill et al., 2022), this study adopts a qualitative and

human centered approach that brings both dimensions together through employees' experiences.

The second order themes analyzed inside each Aggregate are influenced by contextual factors such as career stage, leadership behaviors and team cohesion. This approach allowed me to focus directly on human perception.

The findings suggest that the idea of a strict trade-off between performance and well-being, also highlighted by the research question I have realized, is overly simplistic. Instead, the findings lead to more complex and dynamic relationships: emotional stability, team cohesion, confrontation, convivial moments, detachment from work and psychological safety emerge as fundamental conditions for sustained productivity.

This perspective challenges management models that are only focused on the final output and proposes a more holistic view of performance, focusing on human dynamics.

The research also offers practical contributions for organizations and managers analysing hybrid work environments, in particular, digging inside this sector: consulting.

First of all, the analysis highlights the need to acknowledge how differently remote work is experienced across different levels of seniority. This research underlines the importance of onboarding process for junior employees, who often face higher risks of emotional detachment and lack of support in the beginning of their career: face to face interactions, confrontation and supervision from higher ranked employees are crucial for learning and growing inside an healthy enviroment, most of at an early stage of their career. The situation is different for more experienced employees who are more mature and have a lot of years of experience. Therefore, the junior figures, more than the others, at the beginning need to be "accompanied" and cannot be immersed immediately in a virtual reality.

Moreover, informal moments of exchange like coffee chats, spontaneous conversations, emerge as critical tools for building strong relationships, maintaining trust, transmitting corporate culture and creating a more cohesive environment, to make employees feel at ease, as if they were in a real family. This, of course, will also have a positive impact on their mood and performance and can't be guaranteed by a total "virtuality" of the team. Relational leadership plays a key role in sustaining team cohesion: highest ranked figures

must act as connectors, fostering informal communication and ensuring meaningful interaction with remote employees.

Furthermore, organizations are encouraged to implement structured disconnection practices to help employees protect personal boundaries and reduce digital fatigue. Equally important is the need to integrate well-being indicators into performance evaluations: long-term productivity relies not only on efficiency, but also on employees' psychological conditions. Dealing with this theme we can say that Deloitte is already well underway. As it was also underlined by the Partner, the number of emails sent after a certain working time is reported negatively. This specific KPI is connected to the emails sent after 6 p.m., to avoid this dissolution of the boundaries that we talked about previously.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This research presents a set of limitations that need to be reported in order to objectively evaluate and, possibly, resume or improve this project in the future.

Starting from the Methodological Limitations, the study is based on a relatively small sample of nine employees, all part of the same organization and same team, Deloitte (Technology and Transformation). Moreover, the research is all set and located in a single city: Rome, Italy. The findings don't reflect the experiences of employees in other sectors, regions or corporate cultures.

Furthermore, the use of semi structured - qualitative interviews implicates the data are strongly characterized by participants' personal perspectives. These perspectives may be influenced by current mood, memories or cognitive bias.

The interviews were also conducted in a post-pandemic period, during which remote work practices are still evolving. This context may have influenced employees' perceptions in ways that are temporary or transitional. As hybrid models stabilize or change further, employee experiences may also shift.

Future research could expand this work in several ways. Dealing with a larger sample across multiple organizations would allow for comparisons between industries and

cultures, helping validate whether the trade off identified here is consistent or context dependent.

Moreover, quantitative studies could also complement this qualitative work by testing relationships between specific variables (like perceived support, digital fatigue, and productivity outcomes) across broader populations.

6. CONCLUSION

To end this research, I would like to say that, thanks to the different dialogues I had the opportunity to realize with the employees, I have understood that the topic of remote work is very delicate and brings with it several interconnected aspects. Nowadays, it is deeply rooted in our work routine but its consequences and its aspects on people still have to be properly analyzed. This research allowed me to dig deeper into this very important and underestimated theme, thanks to a direct comparison with employees with different experiences. Many aspects and sub-themes fit together and influence each other behind the world of remote work, which cannot be reduced only to well-being and performance. At the end of this research path, one message stands out clearly: well-being and performance are not opposite dimensions but they influence each other deeply. When people feel supported, safe, and connected, even in a remote context, they are more likely to work better and experience greater engagement.

The interviews showed how different roles and personalities experience remote work in different ways. Junior staff often need more structure and informal interaction to feel integrated, above all in the first stages of their career, while more senior employees value flexibility but are also aware of the risks of isolation. Across all experiences, however, one common theme emerged: people need more than just tasks to complete, they need space to relate, reflect and feel part of something. Team spirit, family feeling and belonging are themes that remain vital for the well-being of a person, even though there is an increasing tendency to isolate oneself and at the same time to concentrate only on the output.

This thesis doesn't aim to give universal answers, but rather to offer a starting point for reflection. It suggests that to build sustainable work models, especially in hybrid settings, organizations must go beyond performance metrics and start listening more carefully to the people behind the roles.

Hopefully, this work can serve as a small step in that direction.

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Appendix

The script of the interview is the following:

- Well-being:

1) How has remote work redefined your concept of workplace well-being?

2) Do you think remote work has improved or compromised your ability to manage stress, motivation, and professional satisfaction? Why? And how?

- Work-life Balance:

3) In your opinion, what factors determine an effective work-life balance in remote work?

Do you think these factors are the same for everyone, or do they vary based depending on role and responsibilities within an organization?

4) Do you think that remote work has contributed to greater autonomy or a dissolution of boundaries between work and private life? In case, how did you manage to find a balance between personal and professional spheres?

Performance:

5) Has remote work made you more efficient or has introduced new challenges in achieving your goals?

Team Dynamics:

6) How has the role of leadership and team management changed with remote work? What have been the biggest challenges or conflicts you have faced in relation to this “virtual distance”?

7) Do you feel that the “virtual nature” of the team has affected your sense of belonging or contributed to create a feeling of isolation?

- Final Question for Deloitte:

8) What initiatives should Deloitte implement to enhance the remote work experience, ensuring productivity and well-being? Do you think they were effective or ineffective? Why and how?