



Remote Working: A Missed Opportunity

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Remote work – which in Italy is called ‘smart’ working – will be governed by the same rules which were in force before the pandemic (ADAPT’s Italian-language guidelines about their implementation can be found [here](#)). Consequently, some reflections are in order in relation to the new application of this form of employment, especially in a moment in which the discussions on the reduction of working time might lead one to assume that remote work has brought about no real advancement in terms of working time management.

If work was supposed to be ‘smart’ thanks to a new type of organisation – i.e., moving away from time and space constraints which have always characterised salaried work – then companies failed to implement this work arrangement. In this respect, a mere change of the workplace – from the office to one’s home – has taken place, without real organisational changes, e.g., workers’ increased autonomy and flexibility; accordingly, the rationale for using remote work in the past – i.e., to reduce infections – has been seen as being on an equal footing with that for which companies are using it now, i.e., to reduce costs.

In both cases, although in different respects, pursuing the objectives referred to above is a risk which affects workers. When remote work is governed by the same organisational mechanisms (especially in terms of time and space constraints) as work performed at the office, this state of affairs might cause alienation which, in turn, produces increased levels of social isolation. This phenomenon has been widely observed over the past two years, producing psychological risks among workers, and a reduction of job performance affecting companies.

If the organisation and control of remote work is the same as that of on-site work, then the costs of coordination mechanisms – which would be minimum in traditional forms of work – will increase, with workers feeling constantly monitored and employers struggling to avoid downtime. The lack of flexibility that remote work should ensure also clashes with the assumption that working from home rhymes with higher levels of work-life balance (this aspect became apparent when schools were closed during the pandemic).

Evidently, this is not to deny the fact that to many people, remote work has been a useful tool in spite of these shortcomings, especially to those who used to spend a lot of time commuting or to those who had their autonomy and flexibility increased, as compared to working on-site.

Yet the objective of rethinking work, in order for it to become more project-based and less related to working time is far from being achieved. The pandemic was not the best time to initiate such a radical change, but it helped to show how issues concerning logistics and infrastructure were mere excuses. The next few months could be critical in terms of logistics and organisation, and the hope is that the new emergency will not thwart the opportunity once again.