THE PANDEMIC PREPARES A CHANGING JOB, A NEW RISK ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has speeded up the changes in work organization already in place due to technological evolution, resulting in a strong acceleration towards other types of work organization: smartworking. In 2019, in Italy, the percentage of people who worked from home was 4.8, among the lowest in Europe, in April 2020 more than a third of workers in the European Union had started working from home and Italy that started from the rear was one of the most involved countries. Remote work, albeit over short periods of application, has shown advantages on several levels by increasing the opportunities for reconciliation of the life-work spheres especially for people with disabilities or with assistance responsibilities, significant reductions in production costs for Employers and the environment would also seem to benefit over the long term with the hypothesized lowering of emissions due to the reduction of travel and the redevelopment of extra-urban areas. But on the other side of the scale in such a short time of "application" we can already find the shift to workers of connection and equipment costs and the lengthening of the working day, the fragmentation of the workforce and the isolation from the organizational and social security of the worker.
The remodeling of work observed during the health emergency has shifted attention to risks attributable to the psychosocial sphere; this is where the D.L. once again it is called upon to intervene to safeguard the state of health of workers understood by the WHO as a state of complete psychophysical well-being through a new organization of work that brings the production costs back to the D.L. and that takes into account the need to create frequent moments of confrontation between workers to avoid isolation and encourage aggregation. The taking root of this new form of work will have obvious repercussions both in the workplace on the management of the activity and on the organization of spaces and in the living environments where the times and purposes of travel change in search of a new balance between life. and I work.

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■ INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which spread from the first months of 2020, although affecting a purely health aspect of people's lives, has contributed to speeding up changes in the organization of work that have already been in place for years due to technological evolution , causing a strong acceleration towards other organizational types of work including smart working. When we talk about smart working we think of one of the consequences of the virus, such as surgical masks and social distancing, but in reality it is a new organizational structure based on giving people back flex - bility and autonomy in the choice of spaces, times and the tools to be used in exchange for greater responsibility for achieving corporate objectives.

The state of the art
Smart working is defined as a subordinate employment relationship, characterized by the absence of time or space constraints and an organization by objectives, established through an agreement between employee and employer. It is a modality that helps the worker to reconcile the times of life and work and, at the same time, favor the growth of his productivity.
In 2019, in Italy, the percentage of people working from home was 4.8, among the lowest in Europe. Our country was far from the leading Sweden with a percentage of workers equal to 37.8%, but also from European countries such as France 23.1% and Spain 4.8%, or structurally similar such as Germany 12.3%.

In April 2020, in full emergency, more than a third (37%) of EU workers appeared to have started working from home and Italy that started from the rear was one of the most participatory countries; smart working workers in March 2020 were over 6.6 million and it is expected that after the pandemic the number will stabilize at 5.3 million.

Advantages and disadvantages
Remote work, albeit over short periods of application, has shown enormous economic and social benefits at various levels.
For workers, this new work organization increases the opportunities for reconciliation in the life-work spheres especially for people with disabilities or with assistance responsibilities and it has been estimated that even a single day a week of remote working can save an average of 40 hours. per year of travel.
For the employer, the application of a well-structured smart working tool can lead to an increase in productivity equal to about 15% per worker, which amounts to 13.7 billion euros in benefits at national level as the workers feel more empowered with an improvement in performance and results and an increase in motivation and satisfaction with their work. Furthermore, by reorganizing the spaces, the company will be able to save on costs related to light, heating, air conditioning, cleaning and consumables to an extent directly proportional to the percentage of Smart working.
The environment would also seem to benefit in the

long term with a hypothesized lowering of emissions equal to 135 kg of CO_2 per year thanks to the reduction of travel and the redevelopment of extra-urban areas.

But on the other hand, in such a short time of "application" we can already find many disadvantages with repercussions also on the health of the workers:

- shifting of connection costs, equipment and adaptation of the premises to the workers to be used for work;
- lengthening of the working day due to the lack of a clear boundary between work and home which can lead people to work too many hours without the right breaks (overworking), with the risk that they will not be able to return to "normal" ways of working. In fact, it is likely that workers who return to the workplace after a period of isolation have concerns that can cause stress and psychological distress.
- fragmentation of the workforce and isolation from the organizational and social aspect of the worker as the links between workers can become less close, and the possibility of sharing and insertion into the corporate culture is less. Communication becomes ineffective and slower with difficultie in planning activities, defining priorities and updating workers in real time

Risk and prevention measures

The organizational model of smart working, with which we have been called to confront in this emergency situation, is a model to which the pandemic has only given an acceleration and with which the world of work has to deal with for the present and for the future, especially in relation to the new risk assessment and prevention strategies.

From the first considerations, a difficulty has already been found in the objective assessment of the structural risks to which the worker could be exposed as the employer cannot be aware of all the situations in which the agile worker decides to carry out the own business. In order to be able to manage this aspect without transferring the responsibility for the suitability of the workplace to the worker by means of self-certification in which he is obliged to certify the possession of requisites that he probably does not possess, it could be decided to "contract" the space / premises for the execution of the activity made in compliance with the health and safety aspects by the Employer with the supply of necessary equipment and furnishings and a periodic verification also through digital tools to verify the permanence of the requirements.

Alongside structural risks, however, psychosocial risks that are often treated as a secondary issue require even more attention in this organizational typology of work because it is difficult to objectively talk about issues related to the emotional sphere. Although smart working requires extensive use of digitization, this should not imply estrangement, the isolation of the agile worker who is particularly exposed to hyper-connection, overworking, technological dependence, absence of recovery times, isolation and unclear identification of boundaries between working and non-working spaces and times. These aspects are partially offset by the autonomy in time management. If we try to apply the work-related stress risk assessment according to the INAIL methodology to the organizational typology of smart working, the following can be assumed.

The preliminary stress assessment consists in the detection of objective and verifiable indicators belonging to three categories represented by sentinel events, context factors and content factors.

Sentinel events are alarm bells on dysfunctions and inconsistencies in the organization of work. Remote work would certainly reduce the values relating to accident rates and absence due to illness.

In the content indicators, remote work could have a positive effect on the items relating to the work environment and equipment, working hours and shifts since they would fall within the new organizational autonomy of the worker as well as for the context aspects of work relating to the home-work interface and work / life balance. But some aspects relating to organizational function and culture, work control and interpersonal relationships would certainly have a negative evaluation.

There are no "concrete" prevention measures for psychosocial risks, but it becomes necessary for the employer to intervene with a rational organization of the work model adopted and to help make workers aware of and participate in this new organization of work. Once again the key tool is represented by communication / information and training on the new organizational structure aimed at indicating clearly and unambiguously the objectives to be achieved and the times to be able to do so, study and rational distribution of workloads and in order to avoid the isolation of workers periodic calls or videoconferences where the achievement of the objectives are monitored to contain the levels of stress and avoid the isolation of the worker by encouraging discussion.

Final considerations

The remodeling of work observed during the health emergency has shifted attention to risks attributable to the psychosocial sphere; this is where the D.L. once again it is called to intervene to safeguard the state of health of workers understood by the WHO as a state of complete psychophysical well-being through a new organization of work that brings the production costs back to the DL and takes into account the need to create frequent moments of confrontation between workers to avoid isolation and encourage aggregation. The taking root of this new form of work will have obvious repercussions both in the workplace on the management of the activity and on the organization of spaces and in the living environments where the times and purposes of travel change in search of a new balance between life. and work-life balance work.

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