Exploring essential HR practices promoting remote employees' work well-being during pandemic

Due to corona pandemic, remote work has increased drasticly and organisations develop and implement their HR policies and practices in this changed situation. In order to promote remote employees' performance and productivity in sustainable way, novel understanding what are essential HR practices that promote remote employees' well-being is needed.

In general, it has been suggested that HR practices that promote well-being can be categorized under five dimensions (Guest 2017). First, *providing engaging work* refers e.g. to jobs that promote autonomy and challenge. Second, *positive social and physical environment* includes, for example, practices promoting health and safety as a priority and employment security. Third category is a *voice*, linked e.g. to extensive two-way (vertical) communication in organization and employee surveys. Next, *investing in employees* involve practices that are related to recruitment and selection, and training and development and career support. Last category is *organisational support* including participative/supportive management and developmental performance management. The literature focusing on telework have shown that e.g. autonomy in work and suitable job design, sufficient resources for adoption of telework, supportive management culture, organizational climate of trust and effective formal and informal communication, are needed in order to support remote working.

The aim of this study is to explore how different types of HR practices are related on remote employees' work well-being. In particular, we study job autonomy as an indicator of *providing engaging work, positive social and physical environment* is reflected by employment (in)security, horizontal interaction intensity (communication with colleagues) and organizational practices for remote office ergonomics and suitable facilities and attention paid on well-being (e-HRWB). *Voice* is studied through intensity of vertical communication (communication with supervisor) and remote work policies in organization. *Investing in remote employees* is focusing on questions if the skills needed in remote work are part of recruitment and selection and if training and development is available for remote work context (e-HRInv). *Organisational support* is
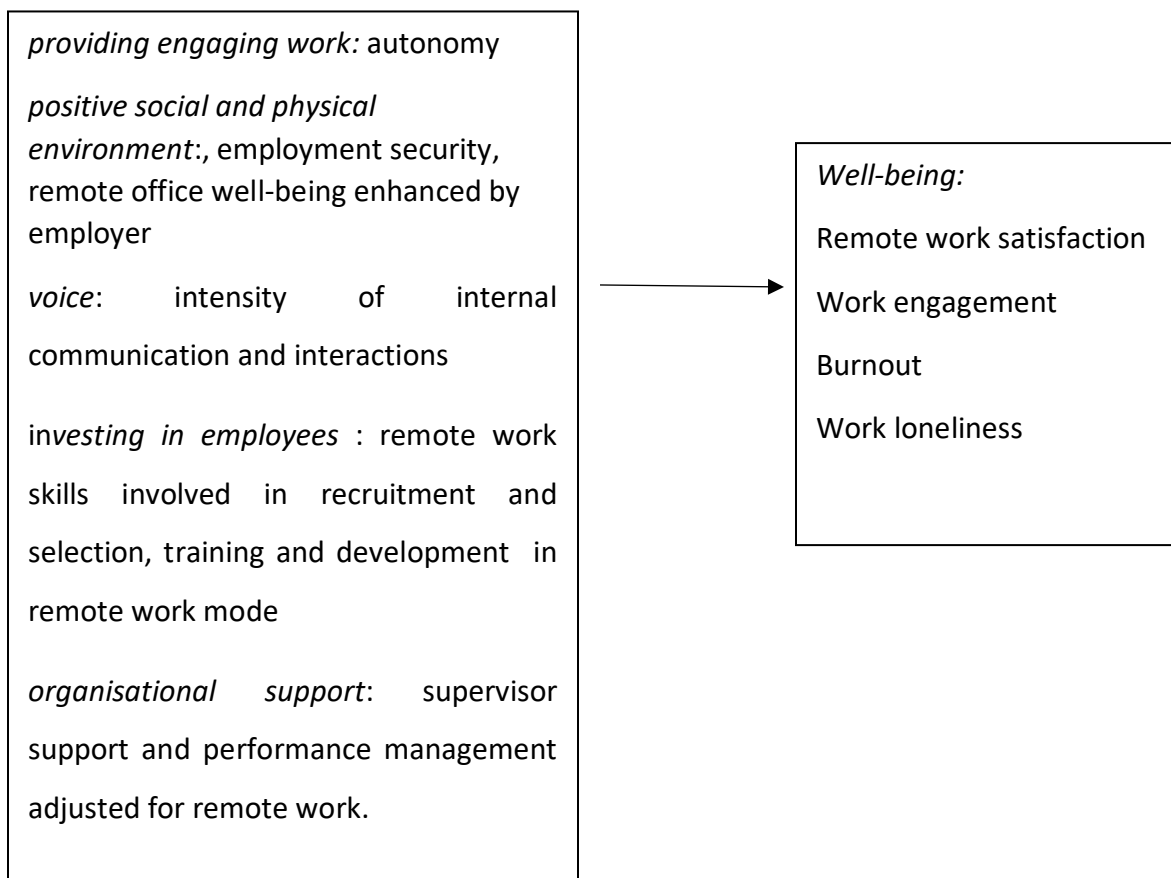
investigated through supervisor support and e-HRPM scale (including items about goal-setting, work assessment and rewards in remote work context). This study sheds light on work well-being from two different perspectives; first, satisfaction with remote work as a context specific variable, and second, work engagement as a general indicator of experiences at work.

The survey data (n=1029) for this study is collected from employees in one large multinational corporation in Finland in December 2020 after nine months of intensive remote work due to COVID-19 pandemic. A linear regression model was used separately for both models. Age, gender, having a partner and/or children and general stress related to COVID-19 pandemic were controlled for.

The results of the study show that satisfaction with remote work was in high level (mean 4.3 Sd 0.79, scale 1-5) and work engagement was in a good level too (mean 4.8, Sd 1.44 scale 1-7). For satisfaction with remote work, our model explained 11.2 % of its variance. Statistically significant relationships for satisfaction with remote work was found with job autonomy (β = .09; p=.008), e-HRWB (β = .08; p=.034) and e-HRPM (β = .14; p=.000), and from control variables, COVID-19 stress (β = -.25; p=.000). Statistically significant relationships for work engagement (19.1% of the variance explained by the model) with job autonomy (β = .18; p=.000), job (in)security (β = -.06; p=.04), communication intensity with colleagues (β = .12; p=.001), e-HRInv (β = .09; p=.01), supervisor support (β = .13; p=.000) and e-HRPM (β = .15; p=.000). From control variable age (β = .17; p=.000) and COVID-19 stress (β = -.09; p=.003) were significantly related on work engagement.

In conclusion, our model explained better the work engagement than the satisfaction with remote work. It is possible that for remote work satisfaction, contextual factors e.g., having space for remote office at home or time saved from work commuting play also important role in addition to HR practices. Different types of practices were also related to different types of well-being. However, for both types of work well-being, performance management played an essential role and therefore, goal-setting, regular assessment of work performance and acknowledging remote context in rewarding seem to be beneficial for remote employees' well-being. Second, job autonomy was also important for both types of well-being. In the light of this

finding, remote employees' management might be challenging as the questions of what is the optimal balance between performance management practices (e.g. goal-setting and assessment of work performance) and job autonomy may not be the easiest one to respond as in some extend, they can be seen as opposing elements of work. Overall, multiple HR practices seem to be needed, as different types of practices play different roles depending on what is the approach on work well-being.

| *providing engaging work:* autonomy

positive social and physical environment:, employment security, remote office well-being enhanced by employer

voice: intensity of internal communication and interactions

in*vesting in employees* : remote work skills involved in recruitment and selection, training and development in remote work mode

organisational support: supervisor support and performance management adjusted for remote work. | → | *Well-being:*

Remote work satisfaction

Work engagement

Burnout

Work loneliness |

Controls: age, gender, partnership, children, covid stress

References

Guest, D. E. (2017). Human resource management and employee well-being: Towards a new analytic framework. *Human Resource Management Journal, 27*(1), 22-38.