

How Remote Work Transforms Careers: Uncovering the Dynamics
of Informal Learning and Career Mobility

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Bibliographic note

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Abstract

Remote work is generally defined as the capacity to carry out job duties from any location outside the company's premises, using information technology. The increase in remote work, particularly prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, has presented challenges for employees' careers, given the restrictions to traditional networking, learning, and visibility opportunities. Despite the increasing focus on boundaryless careers in current career literature, there has not been a lot of attention directed towards the factors affecting the career mobility of remote workers. The current study addresses this gap by exploring the role of informal learning as it has emerged as critical for remote workers. By exploring individuals' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours, this study investigates the dynamics of informal learning and career mobility among remote workers and the interplay between the two concepts, how it occurs and why it occurs in that way. Taking a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with Portuguese employees engaged in full-time remote work. The findings suggest that remote work can affect informal learning opportunities, potentially reducing both vertical and horizontal mobility and increasing disengagement with the company. However, the participants' perspectives compared with their actual career mobility show contradictory findings that might be explained by the psychological contract theory. The current study contributes to a deeper understanding of informal learning and career mobility for remote workers, thereby paving the way for future investigations. Despite limitations associated with the participants' context, the findings hold substantial implications for remote workers, their employers, and organisations contemplating hiring remote workers.

Keywords: Remote work; Career mobility; Informal learning

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Resumo

O trabalho remoto é geralmente definido como a capacidade de realizar tarefas profissionais em qualquer local fora da empresa, através de tecnologias da informação. O aumento do trabalho remoto, particularmente motivado pela pandemia COVID-19, apresentou desafios para os trabalhadores, nomeadamente no que diz respeito às carreiras, dadas as limitações de networking tradicional, orientação e oportunidades de visibilidade. Apesar do foco crescente nas carreiras sem fronteiras, na literatura atual sobre carreiras não tem havido muita atenção dirigida à mobilidade profissional dos trabalhadores remotos e aos seus determinantes. Assim, o presente estudo visa abordar esta lacuna através da lente da aprendizagem informal, uma vez que emergiu como um desafio crítico relacionado com o trabalho remoto. Através de uma abordagem qualitativa, o investigador conduziu 21 entrevistas semiestruturadas com trabalhadores portugueses que trabalham remotamente a tempo inteiro. Os resultados sugerem que o trabalho remoto pode afetar as oportunidades de aprendizagem informal, potencialmente reduzindo tanto a mobilidade vertical quanto horizontal e poderá aumentar o desapego com a empresa. No entanto, as perspetivas dos participantes em comparação com a sua mobilidade de carreira real mostram resultados contraditórios, que podem ser explicados pela teoria do contrato psicológico. O presente estudo amplifica o conhecimento sobre a aprendizagem informal e mobilidade na carreira dos trabalhadores remotos, abrindo novas perspetivas para pesquisas futuras sobre o tema do trabalho remoto. Embora o estudo apresente limitações relacionadas ao contexto dos participantes, tem implicações substanciais para os próprios trabalhadores remotos, os seus empregadores e para as organizações que consideram a adoção do trabalho remoto.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho Remoto; Mobilidade na Carreira; Aprendizagem Informal

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Table of Contents

Bibliographic note	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Resumo	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables.....	viii
1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review.....	3
2.1. The Changing Nature of the Employment Relationship	3
2.1.1 Remote Work Phenomenon	3
2.1.2. Distinction of Remote Work from Other Similar Phenomena	6
2.1.3. Remote Work and its Effects.....	7
2.2. Career Mobility in the Context of Remote Work	8
2.2.1. Changing Work Patterns.....	9
2.2.2. Contemporary Careers and Career Mobility	9
2.3. Informal Learning in a Remote Work Context	10
2.3.1 Impact of Informal Learning on Career Mobility.....	12
3. Methodology	13
3.1. Methodological Approach	13
3.2. Data Collection.....	13
3.3. Research Participants.....	14
3.4. Data Analysis	16
4. Research Findings	17
4.1. Remote Work Experiences.....	17
4.2. Informal Learning Experiences for Remote Workers.....	19
4.3. Career Mobility for Remote Workers	22
4.3.1. Vertical Mobility.....	22
4.3.2. Horizontal Mobility	26
4.3.3. Organisational Mobility	28
4.4. Participant's Career Mobility while Working Remotely	31
4.5. Interplay between Informal Learning and Career Mobility for Remote Workers	31

5. Discussion	38
6. Conclusion.....	40
6.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research	41
6.2. Managerial Implications	42
References.....	44
Annexe	51
Annexe 1 - Increase in Remote Work Practices in Europe	51
Annexe 2 - Methodology applied in studies on remote workers and career mobility.....	52
Annexe 3 - Drivers to choose Portugal.....	53
Annexe 4 - Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Examples of Questions	54
Annexe 5 - Participant Consent Letter.....	58
Annexe 6 – Participant’s Complementary Information.....	59
Annexe 7 – Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences.....	61
Annexe 8 – Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences.....	62
Annexe 9 – Benefits of remote work and examples of participants’ citations	65
Annexe 10 – Challenges of remote work and examples of participants’ citations	69
Annexe 11 – Categories and Subcategories – 02_Informal Learning Experiences	72
Annexe 12 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.1_Vertical mobility	75
Annexe 13 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.2_Horizontal mobility	77
Annexe 14 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.3_Organisational mobility	78
Annexe 15 – Categories and Subcategories – 04_ Participants’ Career Mobility	79
Annexe 16 – Categories and Subcategories – 05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility	80

List of Tables

Table 1 - Literature review on the construct of remote work.....	5
Table 2 - Remote work and other terminology used in the literature.....	7
Table 3- Informal learning types.	11
Table 4 - Sample characteristics.	16
Table 5 - “Informal Learning Experience” category.....	19
Table 6 - “Vertical mobility” category.....	22
Table 7 - “Horizontal mobility” category.....	26
Table 8 - “Organisational mobility” category.....	28
Table 9 - “Participant’s Career Mobility” category.....	31
Table 10 - “Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility” category.....	32
Table 11 - Increase in remote work practices (Eurostat, 2023).....	51
Table 12 - The methodology applied in studies on remote workers and career mobility.....	52
Table 13 - Interview guide.....	57
Table 14 - Participant’s Complementary Information	60
Table 15 - “Remote Work Experience” category.....	61
Table 16 - Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences	64
Table 17 - Benefits of remote work and examples of participants’ citations.....	68
Table 18 - Challenges of remote work and examples of participants’ citations.	71
Table 19 - Categories and Subcategories – 02_Informal Learning Experiences.....	74
Table 20 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.1_Vertical mobility	76
Table 21 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.2_Horizontal mobility.....	77
Table 22 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.3_Organisational mobility	78
Table 23 - Categories and Subcategories – 04_ Participants’ Career Mobility	79
Table 24 - Categories and Subcategories – 05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility	80

1. Introduction

Career mobility, defined as any movement or transition (Forrier et al., 2009) between different jobs or organisations throughout an individual's career (Kondratuk et al., 2004) is a growing trend (Chudzikowski, 2012), due to the emerging needs of both companies and the workforce (Bidwell et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, there is no explanation for the complex nature of career mobility and its determining factors (Forrier et al., 2009), especially regarding non-standard work arrangements such as remote work. Exploring remote work is crucial due to its increasing prominence, notably accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chatterjee et al., 2022), with projections indicating continuing growth (Golden & Eddleston, 2020).

While remote work offers several advantages, it may come at a cost to workers in terms of career growth and professional development. The absence of physical presence results in a lack of informal interactions with coworkers and supervisors potentially impacting career movements and individuals' professional advancement (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden & Eddleston, 2020). Amidst numerous studies that have examined the intricacies of remote work, a noticeable gap exists in understanding the dynamic of informal learning and career mobility of remote workers. The introduction of remote work reshapes the interpersonal dynamics in the workplace (Bjursell et al., 2021) presenting additional challenges, such as informal learning opportunities.

Informal learning, a vital aspect of professional development (Cooper & Kurland, 2002) through interactions with superiors, colleagues, and day-to-day activities and meetings, may be more difficult for remote workers (Kurkland & Bailey, 1999). The reduced capacity for informal learning could, in turn, prevent both personal and professional growth, resulting in a barrier to professional advancement (vertical mobility). Conversely, the remote work setting may provide an opportunity for individuals to explore a broader range of functions (horizontal mobility) and work for different companies (organisational mobility), potentially facilitating a more diverse professional trajectory. This prompts the consideration of whether remote work favours a horizontal and organisational progression in an individual's career as opposed to the traditional vertical path, characterized by specialization and mastery within a specific role.

The current study analyses three types of boundaries: organisational, horizontal, and hierarchical and adopts the individual's perspective, as the “new” career landscape

(Chudzikowski, 2012) considering that individuals control their career paths (Baruch, 2000; Forrier et al., 2009; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore individuals' perceptions, experiences and behaviours. The current study aims to answer the subsequent research questions:

- (i) How do employees remotely working describe/experience informal learning?
- (ii) How do employees remotely working describe/experience career mobility?
- (iii) What is the relationship between these two concepts?

The goal of the current study is to explore what can be learned from the intersection of informal learning and career mobility among remote workers, from the viewpoints of those directly involved.

Social scientists believe that social research should have practical implications for society and contribute to the world (Bryman, 2016). By addressing these questions, the current study adds three significant contributions to the existing body of literature. Firstly, it advances the current understanding of remote workers' informal learning experiences. Secondly, it advances the current understanding of remote workers' career mobility experiences. Lastly, it extends the knowledge about informal learning as a determinant for career mobility.

This study also holds managerial implications. Skilled worker turnover incurs substantial costs for companies, representing a significant financial burden (Hill et al., 2003), so by understanding the determinants that can contribute to career mobility, companies can address these issues more effectively.

This dissertation is structured as follows. The first chapter consists of a comprehensive review of the existing literature about remote work, career mobility and informal learning. The following chapter describes the methodology used for the research and provides insights about data selection, participant profiles, data analysis and results. Finally, a discussion is presented of the findings, limitations, future research suggestions and the study's theoretical and managerial contributions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Changing Nature of the Employment Relationship

The contemporary world of work is experiencing a profound metamorphosis (Bidwell et al., 2013), driven by the emerging needs of both companies and the workforce. Traditionally, careers were characterised by hierarchical structures, long-term commitments, and single employers (Baruch, 2006). Nowadays, there is a growing shift towards flexible work arrangements, short-term employment relationships, external markets, contingent work, outsourcing, and performance-based pay work (Bidwell et al., 2013). This transformation is supported by organisational policies promoting flexibility in contract, work time and location (Bidwell et al., 2013). The adjustment in employment dynamics is influenced, at least in part, by changes in the composition of the workforce and the preferences of workers for different types of employment arrangements (Bidwell et al., 2013).

Kassinis and Stavrou (2013) define *non-standard work arrangements* as “organisational policies and practices that enable variations in the time and place of work or a divergence from traditional working days and hours” (p.1). This dynamic shift is reflected by the fact that the pursuit of a flexible working arrangement ranks among the top three motivating factors for seeking new employment (Dua et al., 2022), making employers swiftly embrace flexible work arrangements, a trend that is anticipated to endure (Golden & Eddleston, 2020).

2.1.1 Remote Work Phenomenon

In tracing the evolution of the contemporary world of work, an important transformation emerged in the 1970s, marked by the introduction of telework (Bailey & Kurland, 2002). With the widespread of online connectivity and technological advancements the term “remote work” started to replace the term “teleworking” (Park et al., 2021). According to the European Industrial Relations Dictionary, teleworking is defined as “a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work that could be performed at the employer’s premises is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.” (Eurofund, 2021). Telework is gaining popularity with various terms such as ‘remote work’, ‘telecommuting’, ‘virtual work’ or ‘work-from-home’ being used interchangeably (Park et al., 2021). The

COVID-19 pandemic caused the majority of people to start remotely working from home instead of a centralized workplace, referred to in the literature as “work from home”.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work was not a widespread practice. According to the Eurostat, the percentage of employed persons in the European Union (EU) who used to work remotely was 5% in 2017. In 2019 this percentage increased by 0.5 per cent points, in 2020 it more than doubled to 12.3% and in 2021 it reached 13.5% (Eurostat, 2022). After the pandemic, this practice continued to grow. According to the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE), the population employed working remotely in the 2nd quarter of 2023, reached 960 thousand people, which represents around 19% of employed people in Portugal (Marmé, 2023). This substantial prevalence of remote work shows the importance of studying remote workers' experiences. By exploring how remote work may influence workers' motivators and behaviours, this research aims to provide valuable insights for both remote workers and their employers.

Remote work has seen a steady increase, particularly during the pandemic (Chatterjee et al., 2022; Reichelt et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2022) representing a “major shift in the working world and in society itself” (Dua et al., 2022, p.3). Organisations are starting to acknowledge that this represents not merely a transient reaction to the pandemic but rather an enduring facet of the modern working world (Dua et al., 2022). Annexe 1 shows the increase in remote work practices in the European Union countries, from 2019 to 2022.

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of agreement on establishing a standard remote work definition (Matli, 2020). The remote work definition varies and lacks consensus among different scholars (Klaser et al. 2023), as shown in Table 1.

Definition	Publication
“Remote work is considered a special arrangement for employees of organisations, in which they are not required to travel or commute to a particular location of work, like an office, store, or warehouse. With the help of advanced ICT and developed digital technology, employees can work from any location at any time.” (p.1502).	Chatterjee et al. (2022)
“Defined as the employee’s carrying out of his/her work from home or from a place outside the workplace via technological communication tools, within the scope of the work organisation.” (p.4).	Uru et al. (2022)
“Remote working refers to the ability of employees to work outside the company, usually at home, in a coworking area, in parks, or any other place from which they connect with the legacy systems of the organisation, coordinate with colleagues, and perform tasks (flexibility in space).” (p.3).	Klaser et al. (2023)

Definition	Publication
“Remote working is a work practice that allows professionals to work beyond the conventional organisational confines of space and time.” (p.223).	Sun et al. (2023)
Defined as an “alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in a primary or central workplace, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organisation” (p.1525).	Gajendran and Harrison (2007)
Defined as “a work practice that involves members of an organisation substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace—typically principally from home—using technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks.” (p.44).	Allen et al. (2015)

Table 1 - Literature review on the construct of remote work

As shown in Table 1, the common element of this phenomenon is flexibility. Some definition considers space flexibility (e.g., Klaser et al., 2023), others consider space and time flexibility (e.g., Sun et al., 2023), while others consider space, time, and contract flexibility (e.g., Matli., 2020; Chatterjee et al., 2022). Clarifying the concept is essential to understand the semantic distinctions in flexibility regarding time, space, and contract. Remote work traditionally considers only workplace flexibility and not time flexibility. The current study considers both time and place flexibility due to the prevalent interchangeability of these terms in the realm of management (Chatterjee et al., 2022).

Remote work manifests in diverse contractual forms (Klaser et al., 2023), such as permanent employment (Wang et al., 2018), self-employment, and freelancing arrangements (Fraser & Gold, 2001). The definition adopted in this study considers remote work as (1) a full-time job carried outside of the traditional workplace, distanced from supervisors and colleagues (2) through information technologies, and (3) for an employer. Despite the variety of definitions in the literature, these two first characteristics stand out as the most universally accepted and prevailing features of remote work (Aleem et al., 2023).

There are limitations to the type of job that can be conducted outside the convectional workplace (Baruch, 2000). Because white-collar professionals (i.e. non-manual workers) represent the principal group that engages in remote work (Matli, 2020), in this study, we consider only white-collar employees, with a permanent, full-time, employment contract. The lack of a solid theoretical foundation in defining remote workers emphasizes the importance of this study in addressing that gap.

2.1.2. Distinction of Remote Work from Other Similar Phenomena

Considering the literature review on the remote work phenomenon and the aim of understanding this concept, Table 2 delineates the differentiation between remote work and other similar phenomena.

Term used	Definition	Differences to remote work
Alternative work arrangements	This term encompasses freelancers, on-call workers, remote work, part-time arrangements, project-based tasks (Klaser et al., 2023), and individuals under enduring contractual commitments with time and place flexibility. It encapsulates a spectrum ranging from highly skilled professionals to low-wage workers (Spreitzer et al., 2017).	A broader category that encompasses remote workers, but also other varieties of work arrangements.
Hybrid work	“Integrated working practice that is composed of traditional and remote working practices, partly—for 2–3 days—onsite and partly—the other days—working from home or somewhere else interchangeably.” (Uru et al., 2022, p.4).	Standard workers with flexible location and occasionally time flexibility. Nonetheless, they differ from remote workers, because employees work off-site some days of the work week and not all the time (Kaiser et al., 2022).
Work-from-home	“Work-from-home refers to working remotely from the worker’s own home often located within commuting distance.” (Park et al., 2021, p.224).	In contrast with the work-from-home arrangement concept, the remote worker concept considers that workers have the flexibility to work from any location, not limited to their own homes.
Remote e-work	Defined as “work being completed anywhere and at any time regardless of location and to the widening use of technology to aid flexible working practices.” (Grant et al., 2013, p.529).	The focus of remote work is more on reducing the need for physical commuting while e-work emphasises more on the flexibility of the location (Grant et al., 2013).
Virtual team	“Virtual teams are first and foremost, teams [...] that they rely on technology to communicate” (Gilson et al., 2021, p.1) through “spatial, temporal, and organisational boundaries”, (Zheng et al., 2024, p.1).	All virtual teams work remotely, however not all remote workers are part of a virtual team.
Working on-call	Form of contractual labour characterised by an irregular schedule, but with mandatory	Remote work emphasises location independence, whereas on-call work involves irregular schedules

Term used	Definition	Differences to remote work
	availability during on-call periods (Spreitzer et al., 2017).	and mandatory availability during specific periods.
Gig Work	Represents a form of contractual labour characterised by short-term connections with clients. The work is conducted entirely in a virtual setting (Spreitzer et al., 2017).	While both may engage in virtual work, remote workers maintain ongoing relationships with employers, while gig workers engage in short-term, project-based work with clients.

Table 2 - Remote work and other terminology used in the literature.

Alternative work arrangements encompass diverse contractual arrangements deviating from the conventional full-time, on-site, permanent employment. Remote work, a subset within this category, allows for time and place flexibility, differing from traditional on-site roles. The descriptions of remote work are usually vague and broad. The main distinctions between remote workers and other types of work arrangements are the contractual forms. Hybrid work combines aspects of remote and on-site work, with employees alternating between working outside and inside the companies' premises (Uru et al., 2022). In contrast, 'e-workers' prioritize location flexibility, leveraging technology to perform tasks remotely without the need for physical commuting (Grant et al., 2013). Similarly, virtual teams rely on technology for communication across spatial and organisational boundaries (Zheng et al., 2024), while on-call work involves irregular schedules and mandatory availability during specific periods, however, it often involves physical presence (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Lastly, gig work entails short-term connections with clients in a virtual setting (Spreitzer et al., 2017). Each arrangement presents distinct characteristics and contractual nuances, shaping the dynamics of modern employment (Chudzikowski, 2012).

2.1.3. Remote Work and its Effects

While exploring the evolution of remote work, it is important to recognize its dual nature, as a “double edge-sword” (Wang et al., 2020, p.610). On the one hand, it increases motivation (Uru et al., 2022), autonomy (Kurkland & Bailey, 1999), control (Dua et al., 2022), flexibility (Chatterjee et al., 2022) job satisfaction (Baruch, 2000; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), efficiency and productivity (Adekoya et al., 2022), while reducing stress (Baruch, 2000), the interference by colleagues (Kouki, 2023), work-family conflicts (Gajendran &

Harrison, 2007) and allowing saving costs with commuting travel (Kouki, 2023). On the other hand, it also creates some challenges such as blurring the boundaries between personal and professional life, reducing interaction with colleagues (Allen et al., 2015; Golden, 2006), and increasing isolation (Kurkland & Bailey, 1999), loneliness, social exclusion (Baruch, 2000), health problems (Allen et al., 2015; Kaiser et al., 2022), and working hours (Baruch, 2000).

As a result, the introduction of these innovative flexible work arrangements is expected to reshape the interpersonal dynamics in the workplace (Bjursell et al., 2021). The absence of face-to-face interaction in remote work creates a gap in interpersonal relationships (Baruch, 2000). Gestures, body language, and other important components of communication are more difficult in this context, consequently leading to a noticeable reduction of emotional connection. In Baruch's (2000) words, “the feeling element is missing” (p.45).

In the new context of work relations and careers, it is important to look back at the psychological contracts employees develop with their employing organisations. The psychological contract encompasses the employees' expectations and perceived mutual obligations between the employee and the employer (Rousseau', 1989). Employees have been offered more opportunities to work remotely as an incentive (Adekoya et al., 2022). Similarly, social exchange theory (Blau & Kahn, 2013) suggests that employees are likely to feel a sense of obligation to give back or reciprocate when they believe that the organisation they work for has provided them with benefits (de Vries et al., 2019).

Hence, the various positive and negative effects highlight how crucial it is to see remote work as a unique environment, separate from traditional on-site work, and underline the importance of studying remote work and its distinct dynamics.

2.2. Career Mobility in the Context of Remote Work

As remote work is expected to continue being widespread, there is a growing focus on assessing its advantages and obstacles, including careers (Kouki, 2023).

Some studies show contradictory findings about the impact of remote work on career. While some of them confirm that remote work increases turnover rate compared to on-site workers (e.g., Kaiser et al. 2022), and jeopardises career progression (e.g., Cooper &

Kurland, 2002; Golden & Eddleston, 2020), other studies highlight the positive impact of remote work on careers (e.g., Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

2.2.1. Changing Work Patterns

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary work, the profound metamorphosis described earlier extends its influence into the realm of careers. A career is defined as a distinctive journey encompassing individuals' work-related experience, both within and beyond organisations, throughout their lives (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) being characterized nowadays by higher levels of internal and external mobility (Kondratuk et al., 2004).

Traditionally, careers were characterized by hierarchical structures, long-term commitments, and single-employer (Baruch, 2006). The new world of work led to fragmented careers, due to the frequent career shifts (Chudzikowski, 2012), with individuals prioritizing skill development (Ng et al., 2007), continuous learning (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) and maintaining a work-life balance (Coenen & Kok, 2014). As a result, employment relationships evolved to become increasingly result-oriented (Hill et al., 2003), and more focused on short-term commitments (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021).

2.2.2. Contemporary Careers and Career Mobility

As new structures of career patterns are emerging (Chudzikowski, 2012) terms such as protean (Hall, 2004) and boundaryless (Arthur, 1994) careers are increasingly used in the contemporary career world. While a protean career is characterized by a transference of control of the career from the organisation to the individual (Hall, 2004), the boundaryless career encompasses job changes across industries and organisations (Arthur, 1994). Both models are closely related to a high level of career mobility (Chudzikowski, 2012).

Career mobility is a growing trend (Chudzikowski, 2012) characterised by any movement or transition (Forrier et al., 2009) between different jobs or organisations throughout an individual's career (Kondratuk et al., 2004). Similarly, Chudzikowski (2012) define career transition as the sequence of job positions undertaken by individuals throughout their lifetime. Career mobility involves transitions between career positions (Forrier et al., 2009). As a result, the concepts of career mobility and career transitions are interconnected and are being used interchangeably.

Career mobility encompasses various dimensions, given its multifaceted nature that allows for diverse interpretations (Ng et al., 2007). Career transitions come in various forms (e.g., shifts between jobs, occupations, organisations or a mixture of them), including changes in direction (lateral, downward, upward) and types (e.g., transitions between professional and personal life domains such as retirement), (e.g., Chudzikowski, 2012; Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007). Hence, in this dissertation, career mobility is studied through the same logic as Chudzikowski (2012), considering that career transitions can have three different forms: vertical, horizontal, and organisational transitions. In the same organisational context, vertical transitions encompass both promotions and demotions while horizontal transitions involve changes in functions or departments at the same hierarchical level (Ng et al., 2007). Moreover, organisational transitions encompass transitions between different companies or industries that do not necessarily involve changes in the hierarchical level (Ng et al., 2007; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

2.3. Informal Learning in a Remote Work Context

According to Kurkland and Bailey (1999), informal learning is “learning that takes place by the water cooler, over lunch or in the hallways” (p.59), i.e., that occurs spontaneously, and it can be both intentional and unintentional, as shown by Table 3. Informal learning diverges from formal education by occurring organically in real-life situations, driven by personal interests rather than structured instruction (Eraut, 2004).

Due to the ambiguity of the definition, in the current study, we consider the informal learning definition presented by Cerasoli et al. (2018): “Informal learning behaviours are noncurricular and they are highly experiential; they occur in the workplace outside of formal learning contexts, via observing, asking questions, practice, and so forth.” (p.204).

Type of Learning	Intentional or Unintentional	Definition	Author
Incidental Learning	Unintentional	It is defined as “Learning that is unintentional, a byproduct of another activity.” (p.88).	Marsick et al. (1999)
Informal Learning	Both	It is defined as “implicit, unintended, opportunistic and unstructured learning” (p.250).	Eraut (2004)

Type of Learning	Intentional or Unintentional	Definition	Author
Informal Fiel-base Leaning	Intentional	Defined as “engaging in intentional self-directed behaviours aimed at learning new, work-oriented, and organisationally valued content outside of a formal learning program.”(p.16).	Wolfson et al. (2018)

Table 3- Informal learning types.

Unlike scheduled meetings, informal learning is not arranged, but it remains an integral and vital aspect of an employee's growth and development (Kirkland & Bailey, 1999), being considered 70 to 90% of the total learning (Cerasoli et al., 2018), and occasionally referred to as “in place career development” (Bjursell et al., 2021, p.5).

Looking further into this issue, it becomes important to acknowledge the transformations that occur as a result of the extensive implementation of remote work. These changes in work arrangement significantly impact the dynamics of social interactions (Kirkland & Bailey, 1999). While remote work offers flexibility, it also presents challenges when it comes to sustaining effective communication and collaboration among colleagues (Allen et al., 2015). Hence, embracing an “out of sight, out of mind” mindset can be harmful to remote workers (Park et al., 2021, p.225). Face-to-face contact is important to build mutual trust, and keeping a minimum level of in-person interaction becomes vital to reducing the influence of remote work on the quality of shared knowledge (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

In the realm of remote work, interactions are scheduled and more formal, contrasting with the more spontaneous and informal interactions typically found in a traditional workplace setting (Bjursell et al., 2021). The practice of remote work tends to prompt employees to predominantly depend on their already existent connections and hinder informal collaboration across the organisation (Yang et al., 2022). There is a tendency among employees to allocate more time engaging with “strong ties” while reducing interaction with “weak ties”, despite these being the ones that are more inclined to offer new information (Yang et al., 2022, p.43). Additionally, as specified by media richness theory, communication media differ in their capability to handle in-depth information, being face-to-face communication the best channel to process in-depth information (Lengel, 1984).

Not being physically present at the companies' premises may impact workplace relationships and diminish opportunities (Bjursell et al., 2021) such as spontaneous learning (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Kirkland & Bailey, 1999), affecting teamwork cooperation (Yang et al., 2022), creative process (Kaiser et al., 2022), knowledge sharing (Coenen & Kok, 2014),

and limiting opportunities to demonstrate outstanding skills (Raišienė et al., 2020). As a result, it may impact individuals' careers (e.g., Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden & Eddleston, 2020).

2.3.1 Impact of Informal Learning on Career Mobility

While remote work offers several advantages, it may come at a cost to workers in terms of career growth and professional development. The absence of physical presence results in a lack of informal interactions with coworkers and supervisors potentially impacting career movements. In a study conducted by Nurmi and Hinds (2020), the authors found that a decrease in communication between colleagues was associated with an increase in turnover intentions. Their findings highlight the critical role that communication plays in shaping employees' commitment to an organisation.

Relational cohesion theory elucidates how connections and relationships between members inside an organisation can foster organisational commitment (Thye et al., 2014). Given that physical proximity significantly influences the creation of these relationships, according to Wang et al. (2020) the remote work context may contribute to workers feeling more disconnected from the company and consequently contribute to an increase in their career mobility. However, there are mixed findings, with other studies showing increased organisational commitment and decreased turnover intentions (e.g., de Vries et al., 2019; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

In sum, informal learning is vital for employee growth, but remote work might disrupt these interactions, affecting communication, knowledge sharing, and career development. While remote work offers benefits like increased flexibility and autonomy, it also poses challenges such as reduced informal collaboration, and weaker workplace relationships that often lead to higher turnover intentions. As remote work continues to transform employment relationships, there is an increased need for further research to understand its long-term impacts on workplace dynamics, employee learning and career movements. Additionally, exploring strategies to support informal learning and career mobility in remote work environments is essential to address the new contemporary career patterns. This study aims to fill some of these gaps, providing new insights into these critical aspects of remote work.

3. Methodology

3.1. Methodological Approach

The dynamics of remote work, informal learning and career mobility intersect in complex ways, influenced by several factors. Hence, a qualitative approach was used to understand the beliefs and feelings that impact how participants behave while working remotely which can be challenging to uncover with quantitative methods, as pointed out by Bryman (2016). As such, engaging participants from various industries, and not just a specific one, holds promise in unravelling a greater variety of experiences and perspectives surrounding remote work, informal learning, and career mobility. This methodological approach allows for gathering the authentic and personal perspectives of individuals, offering a deeper understanding of the subject studied (Tracy, 2013). By exploring individuals' perceptions, experiences, and behaviours, this research aims to understand the dynamics of informal learning and career mobility among remote workers. It explores the interplay between these concepts, seeking to understand how and why it occurs in such a manner.

Related studies on remote workers and career mobility, employed both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, as shown in Annexe 2.

The current study employs an interpretative phenomenology research design to explore the dynamics of remote workers' career mobility and informal learning, identifying themes and patterns. Interpretative phenomenology uses an integrated approach that looks closely at people's personal experiences and how they see and feel about those experiences, aiming to better understand this phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). This epistemological approach was chosen because it allows an exploration of the individual's interpretations of their experiences and how that interpretation drives their decisions (Lopez & Willis, 2004), such as career mobility decisions.

3.2. Data Collection

This study employed 21 in-depth semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with Portuguese employees working remotely. The drivers for the selection of Portuguese remote workers are outlined in Annexe 3. The interview guide, as outlined in Annexe 4, encompasses both closed and open-ended questions. Nevertheless, in alignment with the semi-structured format, whenever relevant, supplementary questions were based on participants' answers.

The interview started with an introduction by the researcher, outlining the purpose of the study and ensuring voluntary participation, along with getting permission to audio-record the interview and keeping participants anonymous. The initial questions collected information about the interviewees' age, years of experience remote working, education level and current job. The following questions covered all relevant aspects of this research. The interview questions were primarily designed to explore the participants' career mobility experiences and aspirations, and how informal learning may interplay with mobility choices.

Initiating the participant selection process, the recruitment started by leveraging an initial network of contacts. Subsequently, a snowball sampling method was applied, where initial respondents were asked to recommend additional individuals who fulfilled the study's criteria. Additionally, to avoid sampling bias and ensure a diverse pool of participants, different remote workers, found searching on social networks such as LinkedIn, were contacted. The researcher approached remote workers by email to ask if they were available to take part in this study. Before each interview, all participants were asked to read a consent form and confirm agreement with the use of data collected for academic purposes. The consent form is included in Annexe 5.

The interview was first tested with 3 remote workers, leading to subsequent refinements and improvements of the questions. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese between February and March of 2024 and were conducted online, by the author, and recorded with the previous permission of the respondents. Each interview had a duration ranging from 30 to 50 minutes, totalling 149 pages of transcripts.

3.3. Research Participants

The participants for the study follow specific criteria: (a) being a remote worker; (b) working remotely voluntarily; (c) working full time; (d) having a permanent employment contract; (e) working in one company (single-employer status); (f) being a white-collar worker; (g) having Portuguese nationality and (h) agreeing to participate voluntarily in the study. The study focuses on full-time remote workers, as the experiences of individuals engaging in telecommuting for a limited number of hours (hybrid workers) are notably different from those who predominantly work remotely (Allen et al., 2015). Additionally, the nationality of workers may have a big impact due to cultural differences, which consequently influences career behaviours (e.g., Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018).

The demographic characteristics of the 21 final participants for the research are shown in Table 4. The participants were aged between 27 and 41 years old, and 52% of them were men. All participants hold Portuguese nationality and were born and raised in Portugal. Educational attainment among participants was diverse, with the majority (71%) holding master's degrees. Regarding remote work experience, 19% of participants have been working remotely for more than four years, while the majority (81%) have four years of remote work experience or less, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, 24% of participants work at start-ups, and nearly half of the total participants (48%) work primarily on individual tasks. A significant portion (62%) of participants is employed in companies where not all employees work remotely on a full-time basis. Notably, 71% of participants work for international companies, primarily from North America (43%), with German, Maltese, Irish, and Swedish companies each representing 5% of the sample. In contrast, 29% are employed by Portuguese companies. Annexe 6 provides more information about companies' characteristics and the type of work done by each participant. To ensure the anonymity of participants, they are identified in the research study using the term "Participant" followed by a sequential number corresponding to the order of the interview done by the author.

Participants	Age	Gender	Education level	Function	Remote work experience (years)
Participant 1	36-40	Male	Postgraduate	Data scientist	3
Participant 2	31-35	Female	Master's degree	Brand partnerships manager	5
Participant 3	26-30	Female	Master's degree	Data scientist	1
Participant 4	26-30	Female	Master's degree	AI engineer	2
Participant 5	36-40	Female	Master's degree	Product manager	3
Participant 6	26-30	Male	Master's degree	Software developer	5
Participant 7	31-35	Male	Master's degree	Business intelligence specialist	3
Participant 8	36-40	Male	Master's degree	Product manager	3
Participant 9	31-35	Female	PhD	Financial planning and analysis manager	3
Participant 10	31-35	Female	Master's degree	Business analyst	1
Participant 11	31-35	Female	Bachelor's degree	Customer success manager	2
Participant 12	26-30	Male	Postgraduate	Finance business partner	3
Participant 13	31-35	Male	PhD	Design engineer	1
Participant 14	26-30	Male	Master's degree	AI engineer	4

Participants	Age	Gender	Education level	Function	Remote work experience (years)
Participant 15	31-35	Female	Bachelor's degree	Engineer	6
Participant 16	31-35	Female	Master's degree	Financial analyst	3
Participant 17	41-45	Male	Master's degree	Data scientist	4
Participant 18	31-35	Male	Master's degree	Data engineer	4
Participant 19	31-35	Male	Bachelor's degree	Commercial manager	4
Participant 20	31-35	Female	Master's degree	Business manager	9
Participant 21	31-35	Male	Master's degree	Delivery manager	2

Table 4 - Sample characteristics.

3.4. Data Analysis

The current study uses thematic content analysis, to identify, examine, and present patterns or themes evident within the collected data following the procedures of Braun and Clarke (2006). The approach involved transcribing interview recordings and subsequently coding the information. The initial step included a careful review of the transcripts and familiarisation with the data thoroughly examining each interview and documenting initial thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, a systematic organisation of the data was undertaken by creating codes and categories (Bryman, 2016), to identify the main themes within the data. The coding process adopted both deductive and inductive approaches. The inductive approach allows new patterns and categories to emerge naturally from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following this, all codes were systematically examined, and relevant quotes congruent with the identified themes were extracted. This methodical process enhanced the depth and coherence of the thematic analysis, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research findings. After completing the initial level of codification, the process advanced to a second stage of coding where patterns and broad categories were identified. This enabled the connection of the themes identified in the first stage of codification. Transcripts were imported into NVivo 14 software (QSR), where the categorisation was developed, providing a structured and reliable analysis. More information about coding structure is detailed in Annexes 8 to 16.

4. Research Findings

Five major themes emerged from the analysis: 01_Remote Work Experiences; 02_Informal Learning Experiences; 03_Career Mobility; 04_Participant's Career Mobility and lastly, 05_Interplay between Informal Learning and Career Mobility.

4.1. Remote Work Experiences

In exploring the initial reasons that prompted participants to start remote work, a variety of motivations emerged. A significant proportion of participants cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the catalyst for their introduction to remote work, as illustrated by Participant 14: *"During the pandemic, it was my first contact with remote work."* Beyond that reason, some participants admitted that the culture of the company emerged as a motivation to start working remotely, which led interviewees to seek companies with a culture conducive to their values and preferences. Additionally, participants highlighted the pursuit of work-life balance as a key motivator for transitioning to remote work, intertwined with a desire for increased freedom. This encompassed the aspiration to have control over their schedule, pursue personal hobbies, and enjoy quality time with family and pets. Other motivations included the desire for new challenges, dissatisfaction with employment at that time, the existence of better job opportunities and financial benefits related to working remotely.

Following an initial transition to remote work, respondents opted to continue working remotely, primarily due to the improved work-life balance. They mentioned the ability to pursue hobbies, avoid long commutes, and manage their own time between family and work. Remaining with their current employer, which had shifted to fully remote arrangements, and the possibility of having better opportunities also emerged from the data as a motivator to continue working remotely. Participant 11 observed: *"I started to understand that there were many more opportunities, much better opportunities, due to remote work."* Additionally, participants highlighted their successful adjustment to remote work and the possibility of fulfilling family responsibilities. Participant 18 expressed this, saying: *"Recently, it's the fact that I can be with my daughter and experience her childhood in a different way that perhaps other parents can't."*

An interesting observation that emerged was the unanimous preference among all 21 respondents to continue with remote work arrangements or change to a hybrid model in future jobs. Not a single participant expressed a desire to work exclusively on-site. Participant

8 expressed that working remotely has monetary value: *“For me, [...], either they pay me to go to the office, or I will always accept a slightly lower offer to work remotely. Because it brings a very high quality of life, it is as simple as that.”*. Additionally, some participants revealed having declined job opportunities solely because they were hybrid and not fully remote. Participant 12 stated: *“I can say that at this point I have already turned down job offers, [...] when they said 'this situation is hybrid', I won't even go for 100% office, 'it's hybrid, I'm not interested', I've said this to several companies that approached me, even from important companies here in Porto. I have no interest in hybrid, my path will be remote.”*. However, some participants recognised the importance of interpersonal connections that can only be developed through in-person interactions. Consequently, they expressed openness to considering hybrid job opportunities in the future. Participant 18 expressed this idea stating: *“I see myself in a more hybrid environment. In a job closer to home. Because of the contact with people, building relationships. We are human, and always being closed up here isn't good, I miss that.”*.

Participants were also questioned about the circumstances that might lead them to leave remote work and return to work on-site. Many cited the need for personal interaction as a primary factor, as expressed by Participant 4 *“I've been thinking a lot about this because I really like what I'm doing right now, and I appreciate what home office brings me in terms of benefits and having more time, but there are days when I feel sad for not being with my colleagues and not having the work environment I had before.”*. Other participants mentioned assuming leadership roles and managing teams as a reason to start working on-site, as Participant 9 expressed: *“Maybe in 15 years I'll be old, and I want to be more relaxed, and it's more about managing people, and then a more in-person job, with more people to manage, more corporate.”*. Additionally, some highlighted financial problems and the lack of alternative options as potential motivators to return to on-site work, as Participant 11 noted: *“For me, the only chance of me going back to working in an office is having no other option. Needing money and needing to work.”*. Childcare responsibilities were also a factor, with Participant 6 considering the challenges of remote work with children at home: *“In 5 years, I imagine myself already with children, and working remotely perhaps will bring new challenges. Having a child running around the house screaming.”*. Furthermore, the desire for international experiences, better job offers, or career shifts were mentioned as potential reasons for transitioning back to on-site jobs.

Participants were also asked about the benefits of remote work. According to the interviewees, the primary advantages of remote work, include better work-life balance, reductions in time spent in traffic or public transport, access to more and better professional opportunities, increased efficiency and productivity, more learning opportunities, fewer

interruptions, decreased expenses, higher salary, exposure to diverse cultures, increased transparency in the work environment and better family organisation. Additional benefits and participant citations are detailed in Annexe 9.

Similarly, participants highlighted some disadvantages related to remote work, such as diminished connection with colleagues and supervisors, increased difficulty in communication, learning challenges, feelings of isolation, difficulty in maintaining company culture remotely, decreased visibility and networking opportunities, heightened fatigue, increased workload, challenges in remote brainstorming and dealing with different cultures and time zones. Additional challenges and examples of participant citations are elaborated in Annexe 10. It's noteworthy to mention that the benefits were cited more frequently than the disadvantages, with 159 references of advantages compared to 123 references of disadvantages. This can suggest that respondents may perceive remote work as predominantly beneficial, emphasizing its advantages over potential drawbacks. Table 15, shown in Annexe 7, presents the main category “01_Remote Work Experiences” grouped into subcategories.

4.2. Informal Learning Experiences for Remote Workers

According to Bjursell et al. (2021) and Cerasoli et al. (2018), informal learning primarily occurs through spontaneous interactions between workers and supervisors, playing a significant role in on-the-job learning. Hence, remote work disrupts this natural flow of communication, because it relies especially on scheduled meetings. This, in turn, reduces the opportunities for spontaneous knowledge exchange, consequently presenting challenges for informal learning. Therefore, informal learning for remote workers often centres around addressing spontaneous questions. This led to the decision to explore informal learning through spontaneous communication. Tables 5 delineate each theme in the main category “02_Informal Learning Experiences”.

02_Informal Learning Experiences		
Spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions	More difficult	Schedule meetings
		Message disregard
		Time zone
	Easier	Efficiency
		Less Confrontations

Table 5 - “Informal Learning Experience” category

In remote work, the spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions between workers and supervisors become less organic, as Participant 3 pointed out: *“You can't just go up to the person and talk, [...], things don't happen naturally.”* Remote work requires scheduling formal meetings, which can lead to delays in getting answers. Similarly, dealing with different time zones can further extend communication timelines, making interactions less spontaneous. Moreover, when colleagues or supervisors disregard messages, it can lead to prolonged decision-making and slower progress in work tasks.

Schedule meetings: Participants expressed frustration about how remote work affects the spontaneity of communication. They noted that working on-site makes it easier to quickly solve issues through informal conversations in hallways or over desks, while remote work requires scheduling formal meetings, which can lead to delays in getting answers. Online, arranging a meeting involves coordinating schedules and waiting for availability, whereas working on-site allows conversations to happen more spontaneously, as expressed by Participant 6: *“Being in the office helps to solve a lot of things in the corridors, a quick conversation [...] Online, you have to schedule a meeting, you have to talk to the person and see if they're available.”* Similarly, Participant 5 pointed out that remote work often results in a denser schedule, making it difficult to address complex issues promptly: *“In remote work, [...] normally, the schedule is denser, if it's a more complex issue, what will happen is they will respond 'sorry, you need to schedule a meeting' or 'I can only do it in two days' or 'I can only do it in a week.'”* Instead of receiving immediate responses, employees may have to wait days or even weeks to schedule a meeting. This reliance on scheduled meetings and the resulting delays in communication undermine the flexibility and agility typically associated with remote work arrangements.

Message disregard: Participants also observed that when working remotely, questions sent through information technologies are frequently ignored, creating a barrier to effective communication. Participant 18 noted: *“If I were in the office, I'd go to the person and talk, I might even bother them more often. Online, it's not like that. If the person is focused on their work, it may be the case that the person ignores, or says 'Oh, I'll respond later, or tomorrow'.”* Other participants also admitted to experiencing being ignored multiple times, Participant 8 affirmed: *“Online, it's easy for the person to ignore. I've worked with engineers who were very good at ignoring people.”*

Time zone: Participants noted that dealing with coworkers and supervisors in different time zones poses some challenges for communication in remote work settings, resulting in delays in work progress and decision-making. Participant 15 shared her experience, stating: *“There was a time when I worked with someone in a completely opposite time zone,*

in Australia, and so if there was something that wasn't explained well, some question I had, we could spend 3 days on it. Because I would send a question, the person would respond, the next day I would come back, and I had another question on top of that, two days had already passed.". Participant 3 mentions the need to work independently while waiting for the answers of coworkers and supervisors, which needs adaptation in remote work: *"It's much harder to talk to people naturally, you have to schedule meetings [...], so sometimes you have to be a bit on your own and come up with things to work on so that you can then talk to other people."* This adaptive behaviour may involve developing individual work and making decisions by themselves, due to communication barriers, which may harm creativity and collaboration. Working in isolation and making decisions individually may limit opportunities for spontaneous idea generation or collaborative problem-solving, often catalysts for innovation and productivity in traditional work environments. Additionally, it can be counter-productive, as it affects workflow efficiency, as expressed by Participant 10: *"In remote mode, you need to wait and then you end up doing another task, you forget about that issue, and then you won't even ask anymore."*

Nevertheless, certain participants perceived this delay in communication as beneficial, citing the decrease in interruptions: *"In a remote environment, I can decide when people will interrupt me or not. Because the questions are there, but if I'm doing something I don't want to be interrupted, the person already expects me won't respond instantly."* (P15). This can lead to more effective priority management in remote work compared to on-site, as expressed by Participant 5: *"If you ask me a question and I feel it's important, I will schedule it and deal with it. If I feel it's not, I will delegate or postpone it because it's not my priority right now."*

In contrast, other participants believe that remote work simplifies spontaneous communication and the raise of questions due to increased efficiency and a reduced sense of confrontation.

Efficiency: Participants find that remote work streamlines the process of spontaneous communication and raises questions because it enhances efficiency. Participants emphasised the importance of tools like Slack in facilitating remote collaboration. Slack's ability to create dedicated channels for various topics ensures that information is organised and accessible to everyone in the organisation. Hence, they can quickly reach out to colleagues or supervisors for clarification or assistance, as expressed by Participant 11: *"For example, if you have a problem with your computer, you go to a channel with designated people to help you with that issue, and everyone goes to that channel. So, I don't have to find a specific number. [...] I can write in a channel where 150 people are to respond to me."* The use of Slack channels may be more

efficient than traditional approaches involving video calls or interrupting multiple individuals with the same question.

Less Confrontations: When remote working, employees can ask questions without the pressure of face-to-face confrontations. This reduced pressure may foster a more comfortable environment for asking complex questions, as expressed by Participant 9: *“I even think that remote is more conducive to asking questions because you don't have that confrontation per se. [...] So, since there isn't that type of confrontation, people ask more questions and more difficult ones.”*

It's noteworthy to say that all participants who find spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions easier while working remotely rely on Slack as a primary collaborative tool to interact with colleagues and supervisors.

Despite its possible advantages, some interviewees also shared that they have seen their capabilities of communication decrease since starting working remotely, as expressed by Participant 18: *“I have noticed that my social skills aren't what they used to be.”*. Hence, according to Peiperl and Baruch (1997), this type of work can create an “Autistic Society”, people who “become unaccustomed to dealing with others except in purely transactional ways” (p.13).

4.3. Career Mobility for Remote Workers

4.3.1. Vertical Mobility

Within the “03.1_Vertical mobility” category, participants discussed the challenges, facilitators and the inexistence of effects of remote work on vertical mobility compared to being physically present at a company's premises. Table 6 provides an overview of the themes within this category.

03.1_Vertical mobility	
Vertical mobility challenges	Visibility
	Interpersonal relations
	Reliability and trust
	Learning
	Cultural context
Vertical mobility facilitators	Increased productivity
No effect of remote work on vertical mobility	Results focused
	Decision centre proximity

Table 6 - “Vertical mobility” category

Participants expressed concerns regarding the stigma surrounding remote workers, and their lack of visibility, such as difficulties in developing interpersonal relationships, the critical role of trust, the importance of learning, and the impact of cultural context. These challenges pose significant barriers to vertical career progression in organisations, particularly in remote work contexts.

Visibility: Participants in the study expressed a perception of stigma surrounding remote workers and their visibility in the organisations. Participant 14 has the perception that remote workers are seen as disconnected from their teams, lacking a physical presence, and potentially developing self-protective behaviour: *“Someone who works remotely will always be seen as someone who is not physically there, who doesn't want to be present in the teams, who wants to protect themselves a bit more.”*. However, cultural factors, particularly in Portuguese companies were identified by some participants as contributing to the belief that physical presence in the workplace is essential to take advantage of career advancement opportunities. Participant 12 expressed that idea: *“I think this idea of being seen, and that visibility, is very much a Portuguese mentality, a very Portuguese way of seeing things.”*. Interestingly, participants working in an organisation where only a portion of the workforce works remotely expressed more concerns about the negative implications for vertical mobility due to lack of visibility. The preference for fully remote companies emerged as a response to the perceived limitations imposed by the stigma against remote workers, as expressed by Participant 20: *“When it's a 100% remote company, we all start, or we're all on the same level.”*.

Interpersonal relations: Remote work presents challenges for developing interpersonal relationships between workers and supervisors, potentially impacting vertical career growth. Participant 19 expressed that despite efforts to communicate effectively, the absence of face-to-face interaction hinders the establishment of meaningful connections. In his own words: *“No matter how much we talk, the impact is not the same. In a work context, it is more difficult to create a relationship with someone at a distance.”*. Moreover, Participant 19 emphasised that factors beyond professional competence, such as personal rapport, influence opportunities for advancement. However, the social distancing inherent to remote work complicates the development of these crucial connections. As Participant 19 clarified, *“The creation of this bonding, this social connection, becomes more difficult. And by becoming more difficult, it may not open as many doors, or not give as many opportunities to someone a little distant.”*. Similarly, participants in organisations in which only a portion of employees work remotely expressed

more apprehension about the negative impacts of vertical mobility due to decreased interpersonal connections.

Reliability and Trust: In addition to challenges related to interpersonal relations, participants highlighted the critical role of trust in vertical career progression, particularly emphasizing the advantages of physical presence in building trust-based relationships. Participant 17 underscored the human tendency to value individuals with whom a stronger connection exists, often developed in face-to-face interactions. The interviewee expressed: *“The connection with others is much greater in person, the trust is greater because people know me much better and know my values.”*. These deeper connections create an environment where individuals are perceived beyond their roles as mere task-doers, facilitating vertical growth. Similarly, participant 21 emphasized the significance of trust in decision-making processes. He noted that despite efforts to promote a remote-first and flexible work policy, the trust built through physical proximity often outweighs virtual interactions: *“If I trust this person sitting next to me, that person I've seen three times and 40 times on camera is more easily disregarded.”*. This bias towards individuals with whom closer working relationships are developed highlights the challenge of establishing trust, while remotely working, and its potential impact on career advancement opportunities. It is worth noting that all participants who emphasized the significance of trust in vertical growth are male individuals mainly working in teams.

Learning: Participants also emphasized the importance of learning as a significant challenge for remote workers seeking to advance hierarchically in the organisation. According to Participant 18: *“I know that if I had contact with people in the business, my work would be better because I would know what I am doing and why I am doing it.”*. This perspective highlights the importance of active engagement and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors for continuous learning. Without interpersonal interaction and access to contextual information, remote workers may face difficulties in understanding the intricacies of their tasks and the broader organisational objectives. As a result, their ability to contribute effectively and progress vertically in the company may be compromised. This theme will be developed further in chapter 4.4.

Cultural Context: Culture was cited as an additional factor impacting vertical growth, attributed to the increased exposure to diverse cultures through remote work, with different approaches regarding work practices and attitudes towards vertical mobility, as expressed by Participant 19: *“If I go to Germany, I'll necessarily adapt to their habits, their way of working, their*

schedules. But if I stay here in Portugal and work remotely for Germany, they maintain their habits and I maintain mine. And that can sometimes have some influence on the work.”.

Moreover, alongside the challenges, some participants also perceived remote work as a facilitator of vertical mobility, attributing it to the increased productivity experienced while working remotely.

Increased productivity: Working remotely has been shown to enhance productivity, as evidenced by both participants' insights and existing literature, and can potentially boost opportunities for vertical career mobility. According to Participant 4: *“It helps because the person ends up being more productive.”*, which can, consequently, increase the possibility of progression.

Furthermore, some participants viewed vertical mobility in remote and on-site work as equivalent, attributing this perception to a results-focused approach and the distance from decision-making centres.

Results focussed: Participants emphasized a results-focused approach to vertical mobility, asserting that whether working remotely or on-site, the key determinant is the quality of the work produced. Participant 12 expressed it stating: *“At the moment, my promotions and my progression depend strictly on delivering quality work because that's what people remember at the end of the day.”*. It is worth noticing that, except for one participant, all others who considered results as the primordial factor for hierarchical mobility are engaged in individual work roles.

However, Participant 6 suggests that in remote work, there is a need for proactivity to demonstrate and show what workers are doing, as there is often a lack of awareness about individual work by the supervisors: *“Your boss believes that you are working, but doesn't see you working. He doesn't go for lunch with you and ask ‘How is this topic?’ and doesn't know the topics you are in control of. And I feel that impacts a bit [...]. I'm not saying you should walk around with a flag saying ‘I did this’, but in an honest and humble way, to say ‘Hey, I really did this’ and be able to show it.”*.

Decision centre proximity: Participants highlighted the significance of proximity to decision-making centres as a crucial factor influencing vertical mobility in organisations, regardless of whether individuals work remotely or on-site. Even working at the company's premises, the physical distance from key decision-makers can impact opportunities for promotion, as expressed by Participant 21: *“Jumping levels usually happens at the coffee break, in that meeting where your boss happened to be a bit flustered, and ‘look, come here and explain this’ in those more informal moments, in which you can have more direct contact with someone two or three levels above your position, and that happens much more easily in a physical environment.”*.

Additionally, Participant 9 emphasized the importance not only of proximity to decision-making centres but also the crucial role of managers in advocating for their team members, pushing for promotions, and facilitating career advancement opportunities. This suggests that managers play a critical role in mitigating the impact of physical distance from decision-makers: *“I think it has to do with the distance your position is from the decision-makers. And the ability of the manager himself to advocate for them. [...] If that team is somewhat far from the CEO level, it will never progress unless it has a manager who supports them defends them and pushes for pay raises and career progressions. Because if these managers don't do that, there will hardly be any results in that direction.”*.

In summary, while remote work can increase productivity, it also presents challenges such as the need for proactive communication and interaction. Therefore, proactive engagement and effective leadership may help bridge the gap and enable vertical mobility.

4.3.2. Horizontal Mobility

In the “03.2_Horizontal mobility” category, participants discussed both the challenges and facilitators of horizontal mobility for remote workers, contrasting them with the experiences of being physically present at the company's premises. Table 7 offers insights into the key themes explored in this category.

03.2_Horizontal mobility	
Horizontal mobility challenges	Limited visibility across departments
	Focus on individual tasks
Horizontal mobility facilitators	Interdepartmental communication
	Non-requirement to change location

Table 7 - “Horizontal mobility” category

Participants highlighted the challenges of horizontal mobility, citing limited visibility across departments and a focus on individual tasks as contributing factors.

Limited visibility across departments: Remote work can present challenges in developing connections across departments, as it often limits interactions between employees and those outside their team or sphere of work. Consequently, there may be a lack of visibility among managers of different departments, potentially leading to a lack of interest in or understanding of the work undertaken by other teams. These spontaneous interactions in an office setting - like bumping into someone in the hallway or talking over

lunch - often lead to a better understanding of what everyone does and can create new career interests, as expressed by Participant 21: *“If I’m in an office not directly working with this area, but I have lunch with people from other areas, I bump into them in the corridor, or I overhear a discussion they’re having in the coffee break, [...] in the office, having contact with other departments of the company, I understand better, I know the other people who are there and if I want to see myself in that area or not.”*. As a result, remote workers may not be aware of the projects and initiatives underway in other teams, potentially overlooking opportunities where their skills could be valuable. Moreover, the absence of personal connections with managers in different departments may limit remote workers' ability to receive recognition for their capabilities, as expressed by Participant 6: *“If you think, in a remote company, there’s no sharing, internal mobility becomes limited because none of the other bosses will recognise that person.”*.

Focus on individual tasks: Working remotely often leads to a significant focus on individual tasks due to limited interaction with co-workers and supervisors. Participant 21 noted: *“When you work remotely, you’re 90% focused on what you’re doing. You’re focused on growing vertically, so looking outside, to other areas is more complicated. A very drastic change is much more difficult because you don’t touch those people, easily pass months where you don’t leave your home place.”*. This focus on individual tasks can make it challenging to connect with other areas or teams in the organisation, with a negative impact on horizontal mobility.

In contrast, some participants considered that remote work makes it easier for horizontal mobility due to an increase in interdepartmental communication and the absence of a need to relocate when transitioning between functions.

Interdepartmental communication: Increased interdepartmental communication while working remotely, serves as a key facilitator for horizontal mobility in organisations. In contrast to traditional on-site work, where physical barriers often discourage communication between departments located on different floors or in separate locations, remote work can foster more frequent interactions between teams and departments. Participant 8 noted: *“Since everyone participates in meetings, I am more open to interactions with colleagues from other departments. If we were all in the same physical location, and each department was on a different floor, I probably wouldn’t have access to any other departments. So, in that aspect, it becomes easier.”*. However, Participant 8's view might stem from his experience in a small enterprise, where interdepartmental interactions are easier compared to larger companies where organising meetings involving different departments is more challenging.

Non-requirement to change location: Remote work arrangements can facilitate horizontal mobility by simplifying the transition between functions, as they eliminate the logistic challenges associated with physical relocation: “*Remote work helps because you don't have to change anything. You leave one team and fit into another. And it's easy, in the sense that you will have to learn that role, but there is no logistic change. If it's physical, there are other constraints.*” (P9).

In summary, it can be inferred that while remote work presents challenges to horizontal mobility, it also offers opportunities through increased interdepartmental communication and simplified transitions between roles. Organisations should focus on leveraging these facilitators while addressing challenges such as limited visibility across departments to maximise the potential for horizontal mobility in remote work environments, as expressed by Participant 18: “*There has to be an initiative on the part of leadership to make those kinds of interactions in which, for example. 'today we're going to do a show-and-tell about this department' that remotely in the company where I am, happens very infrequently. And then if I'm curious to learn more about other departments I can't just do it in a social context, [...], I feel like I'm bothering the person more in this remote situation than if we were in the office, having a coffee and I asked 'Hey, what are you working on?' but remotely it involves the person going to Slack, sending a message, scheduling a meeting and then talking. It's more annoying.*”.

4.3.3. Organisational Mobility

The “03.3_Organisational mobility” category addresses the factors influencing remote workers' perceptions of how remote work both discourages and encourages organisational mobility. Table 8 outlines these categories and their corresponding number of units of analysis.

03.3_Organisational mobility	
Organisational mobility incentive	A higher range of opportunities
	Disengagement with the company
	Agenda flexibility
	Absence of relocation requirements
Organisational mobility discouragement	Restricted opportunities
	Networking challenges

Table 8 - “Organisational mobility” category

Participants perceived remote work as fostering organisational mobility due to the perceived broader range of remote work opportunities, disengagement with the company,

enhanced flexibility in managing their schedules, and the absence of relocation.

A higher range of opportunities: Participants consider that the broader range of remote worker opportunities acts as a catalyst for organisational mobility: *“Searching for remote positions opens up the market because you're no longer constrained by geography [...] it's a market that, if I were working only for a Portuguese company, I wouldn't have. That only adds value.”* (P8). Increased mobility allows individuals to explore more opportunities, especially in a global market where they are exposed to a wider range of options. The Internet facilitates to find and apply for job opportunities globally (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). However, for companies, this may lead to higher turnover rates and increased competition, which can present a challenge for Portuguese companies due to their inability to compete with global companies, as expressed by Participant 21: *“Portuguese companies nowadays can't compete with other companies.”*.

Disengagement with the company: Interviewees expressed a lower engagement with the companies they have been working with remotely compared to the ones they worked on site, which can lead to more organisational mobility: *“I'm in a company with a noble objective, which is selling health equipment for people to do tests at home. I think it's a good mission, but do I feel like I'm contributing? That I'm actively engaged with the company's mission? Perhaps not as much as before.”* (P18).

In the absence of robust onboarding procedures, individuals may experience a sense of disconnection and isolation, as expressed by Participant 17: *“Unless the company has a very strict onboarding policy, and usually they don't, the person comes in and learns, but the person feels much less connected to the company when there's no initial follow-up.”*. This lack of initial follow-up and integration diminishes the sense of belonging and can potentially lead to lower retention and employee engagement. To mitigate this risk, organisations must prioritize onboarding processes that foster connections, demonstrate values, and encourage integration among employees and departments. Hence, by prioritizing these measures, companies can cultivate a stronger sense of belonging, leading to higher retention and engagement levels *“Humans need to feel integrated, feel they belong to something. And remotely there's that risk, of the person feeling they don't belong, and of course, the person's connection to the company is much weaker, and retention is much lower, engagement is lower and everyone loses.”* (P17). However, Participant 20 emphasized the importance of the company's active role in ensuring employee retention, regardless of whether they work remotely or on-site, stating that even when employees work on-site, the absence of alignment with the company's vision, the establishment of interpersonal relations, and efforts to make people feel integrated and valued can lead to disengagement: *“I think that people working remotely, if there isn't this concern, working with people, aligning them with the vision, giving*

them feedback, ensuring they build personal relationships, I think it makes people change more easily. This is because we're assuming that all these things happen in the physical world. Which isn't always true?" (P20).

It is interesting to notice that, out of the 6 participants who work for a Portuguese company, 5 of them considered that there is an incentive for organisational mobility due to disengagement with the company. These findings may suggest that Portuguese companies should invest more in remote worker integration and retention.

Agenda flexibility: Participants consider having higher flexibility in planning their schedules as a catalyst for organisational mobility. They perceived increased schedule flexibility as a facilitator for mobility because it allows job searches and meetings with other employers without being monitored or detected: *"I can have a meeting with whoever I want. That is, either with a client or with a potential employer, without anyone knowing."* (P19).

Absence of relocation requirements: Remote work may facilitate organisational mobility since individuals are not limited by geographical constraints when considering other job opportunities, as expressed by Participant 18: *"But when it comes to changing jobs, I think it's easier, there's not as much relationship, not as much attachment to colleagues, to the organisation. It's the same office, the same equipment."* (P18).

Conversely, participants suggest that remote work could discourage organisational mobility due to perceived limitations in opportunities, alongside networking challenges.

Restricted opportunities: Participants expressed reluctance to switch companies due to limited fully remote opportunities. Participants expressed concerns about the difficulty of finding another company that offers similar benefits and the flexibility of being entirely remote, as the current company. As Participant 9 noted, there is a perception that many companies are transitioning either to full on-site work or to a rigid hybrid model: *"Companies are moving much more, either to full presence or to a rigid hybrid regime, in the sense that you are forced to go to the office two or three times a week."* This trend may hinder remote workers from organisation mobility, as they value the flexibility and autonomy the current company provides.

Networking challenges: Another reason that can hinder organisational mobility for remote workers is the challenges to build and maintain professional relationships, to create networks that could facilitate career growth and opportunities for advancement. This networking is easily done in person, as expressed by Participant 5: *"As their career progresses, people often change companies, often thanks to past professional contacts. So, this networking creation, for me, is more efficient and effective when done in person."* However, participant 5's perspective may be

influenced by her experience working for a Portuguese company, which could shape her outlook on the importance of networking for career mobility.

It's worth noting that, most participants who believe remote work discourages organisational mobility are engaged in functions with individual tasks.

4.4. Participant's Career Mobility while Working Remotely

The category “04_Participant's Career Mobility” encompasses registration units associated with participants' career changes while working remotely, as shown in Table 9.

			Sources
04_Participant's Career Mobility			21
Career changes and remote work	Vertical mobility		10
	Responsibility and salary		2
	Horizontal mobility		4
	Experienced organisational mobility while working remotely	Never	18
		Once	1
		Twice	1

Table 9 - “Participant's Career Mobility” category

The subcategory “Career changes and remote work” refers to participants' career changes while working remotely. Out of the 21 respondents, 10 reported having experienced vertical mobility while working remotely. Furthermore, the majority of participants indicated that they had not changed organisations since transitioning to remote work. In summary, these findings indicate organisational commitment and retention among participants, as the majority remained with their current employers after transitioning to remote work.

Additionally, the presence of vertical mobility among a significant number of participants implies opportunities for career growth in their current organisations. However, these findings do not align with the feelings expressed by the majority of participants regarding company disengagement and the ease of organisational mobility.

4.5. Interplay between Informal Learning and Career Mobility for Remote Workers

The “05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility” category addresses the factors influencing remote workers' perceptions of informal learning and its interplay with vertical, horizontal and organisational mobility. Table 10 outlines these subcategories.

05_Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility		
Interplay of Informal learning and career mobility	Challenges	Isolation
		Difficult communication
		Career stage
		Productivity
	Advantages	Better documentation

Table 10 - "Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility" category

Participants shared their perspectives on the importance of informal learning in shaping their career mobility. Participants indicated that career mobility might be hindered by reduced informal learning opportunities when working remotely due to challenges such as isolation, difficulties in communication, career stage and reduced productivity.

Isolation: Isolation caused by remote working poses challenges to learning, as highlighted by some participants. Participant 1 emphasized that proximity to experienced colleagues facilitates learning: *"For example, if I were with my colleagues [...], maybe I would go there and say, 'Hey, show me how you do this part,' and then I would have more information, small details."* Similarly, Participant 9 pointed out that physical presence encourages spontaneous learning opportunities, such as observing and asking colleagues about their work processes, which are less accessible remotely: *"Here I only talk to the people I need to talk to [...]. Because anything unrelated to my work, it's very difficult to interact with other people. Whereas in a physical setting, you see people around, and even if they don't work directly with you, you see people every day, and you start talking to them and you almost get to know the whole dimension of the company, which doesn't happen remotely."* Remote work limits exposure to diverse perspectives and knowledge in the organisation, also expressed by Participant 13: *"In the office, I can interact with people with much more experience, and I can learn things that I'm never exposed to remotely."* Hence, this may cause difficulties in vertical and horizontal mobility, more disengagement with the company and consequently, higher organisational mobility. However, some participants believe that being isolated from colleagues and supervisors, and not sharing the same physical workspace can enhance focus on the tasks and, consequently, increase productivity: *"What I feel when I'm in the office is that my priorities and the priorities from me to the company are easily distracted by others' priorities. It's easy to get distracted by 'Hey, look at this,' 'Hey, look at that', and although it's important to know what the company does in other contexts, in excess, you end up being blocked [...] and you miss what you had to do that day."* (P21).

The isolation experienced while working remotely can have dual effects on an individual's career mobility. On the one hand, it may increase focus and productivity, which

consequently can make individuals better positioned to meet performance expectations, thereby creating more opportunities for vertical mobility. On the other hand, this isolation can also bring new challenges to hierarchical and horizontal mobility, due to the lack of interpersonal relationships between workers and different departments. Spontaneous interactions create opportunities for knowledge sharing, developing interpersonal relationships, and possibly the creation of networks. However, when working remotely, such opportunities may be limited, hindering employees' ability to develop new insights, create their networks, and ultimately move vertically and horizontally. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual tasks can potentially create disengagement from the company and consequently contribute to increased organisational mobility.

Difficult Communication: Communication challenges, especially arising from language differences and the absence of non-verbal signals, such as body language, pose some obstacles for remote workers. Participants highlighted the communication problems particularly when collaborating with colleagues who speak different languages. In face-to-face interactions, people rely on body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal signals to convey meaning. In virtual meetings, these cues are frequently less discernible, as expressed by Participant 4: *“Sometimes my colleagues are envisioning one thing and I’m envisioning another because of the language. I try to express myself in one way, but they interpret it differently, [...]. In virtual meetings, these cues are frequently less discernible. Virtually, you only see the person speaking in a small box, and sometimes it’s not as clear.”*. Hence, asynchronous communication introduces complexities that can create misunderstandings between colleagues and supervisors, as noted by Participant 8: *“Remote work requires asynchronous communication, which is much more complicated than the communication we are having now because it increases ambiguity, increases misunderstandings associated with simple things.”*. Some participants also argued that remote work poses challenges for brainstorming due to technological limitations. Participant 9 highlighted this difficulty: *“If we were all together, we would debate the issues. In a meeting, it’s very difficult to debate because if more than one or two people are discussing, no one understands each other.”*. This obstacle makes the debate of ideas in virtual meetings almost impossible. Hence, this limitation may have implications for creativity, idea sharing, and consequently, innovation in the company. Participant 17 expressed his concern: *“But what matters most to me with the company is that there are spontaneous moments of creativity and discussion, [...]. In a remote environment, how do you do that? I don’t know.”*.

These difficulties in communication, and consequently a decrease in informal learning may affect vertical mobility because they may affect how remote workers are

perceived in terms of their performance, potentially impacting their performance evaluations, visibility and consequently recognition. In terms of horizontal mobility, it can affect remote workers by limiting their exposure to cross-functional projects and creating challenges in developing relationships with colleagues, which are important for horizontal mobility. Additionally, remote workers who struggle to communicate with colleagues and supervisors effectively, feel isolated and lack informal interaction, may disconnect themselves from the company culture, leading to disengagement, dissatisfaction and increased turnover and organisational mobility.

Career stage: One factor that can impact learning when working remotely and consequently impact career mobility, is the career stage. For more junior members who need more guidance, remote work can lead to hesitation in seeking help, which is often easier in a physical setting: *“I have examples of these situations where people are trying to overcome a challenge, and usually more junior members, the fact that they're working remotely typically makes them hesitant to ask for help.”* (P7). For individuals beginning their careers, prioritizing on-site work and maintaining a physical presence may be important. This isn't solely to establish visibility and networking (although some participants considered it extremely important, especially in the Portuguese cultural context) but also because physical presence offers informal learning opportunities, particularly important for junior members who are not yet experts in their field. Conversely, for more senior members with extensive experience from previous contexts, the absence of such informal learning may not have a significant impact. Thus, working remotely can potentially offer more advantages for them. Participant 13, a junior member of the company expressed his viewpoint about the impact of informal learning on vertical mobility: *“If you're someone like me, who is still at an early stage of the career, I would say yes, your learning is being hindered. If we're talking about someone with 15 years of experience, it probably won't have as much impact on them, they've already been exposed to so much, [...], although they're always learning, of course, but then the impact will be less, obviously.”*. Interestingly, Participants at a higher stage in their careers in the company found informal learning less impactful to vertical movements, as expressed by one participant: *“In terms of learning, maybe at this point in my career, that's not relevant. Because most of what I learn is on the internet, or I even get that information from experts in the field.”* (P7). Additionally, the career stage may also impact movements between functions and organisations. For senior members with more experience and expertise, movements between functions and organisations may be more feasible because these individuals potentially have established networks and may have a wealth of knowledge accumulated over years of experience, which

can facilitate transitions and mitigate the impact of remote work on informal learning. Participant 8 expresses uncertainty regarding junior members starting working remotely, due to lack of experience: *“There are colleagues that I see are not prepared to work remotely, either because they're not at the right maturity level, or because they don't have enough experience [...]. I don't know if I would gain, or if you would gain, starting remotely.”*. This uncertainty results from the acknowledgement that remote work imposes learning limitations, and potentially, career mobility impacts. These insights show the complex dynamics between career stage and experience level determining the interplay between remote work and informal learning.

Productivity: Participants raised important points about the impact of remote work on productivity. Some noted that certain issues are more efficiently addressed in person, potentially affecting work productivity and career progression, as expressed by Participant 14: *“There are some issues that are much more easily clarified in person.”*. Conversely, the absence of informal learning may prevent salary increases rather than hinder hierarchical mobility. This is because, presumably, such learning enhances individuals' productivity, performance, and self-development. As Participant 5 mentioned: *“Obviously, people who work in environments that involve interacting with more individuals and participating in more meetings or different projects tend to have more opportunities than someone who, for example, attends few meetings and is rarely involved in projects. That's where I believe that informal learning helps individuals to develop themselves.”*. This development may potentially lead to a higher salary level compared to someone who hasn't achieved as much. Participant 5 further expressed her point by stating, *“Indirect learning [...], can make more difference in terms of salary than in hierarchical advancement.”*.

Conversely, other participants suggested that remote work could increase vertical mobility through more informal learning opportunities. They noted that remote work environments often encourage better documentation practices, that can lead to easier access to information and more efficient knowledge acquisition, potentially fostering greater opportunities for hierarchical movements.

Better documentation: Documenting processes, practices, and knowledge can be a good solution for addressing the lack of informal learning and communication in remote work. In companies with just remote workers, there is an additional effort to have more organised and transparent systems where information is documented and available to everyone in the organisation. As Participant 11 pointed out: *“I consider that the structure of a remote company works better. Because people are not present in the same space, it requires a lot of dedication to create processes and make information available to people [...]. The information is more structured and*

accessible to the entire organisation, and not just a document that is stored in the marketing team's office." This focuses on documentation, conducts knowledge sharing and enhances informal learning opportunities for employees. Additionally, the accessibility of information benefits not only the individuals directly involved in a conversation but also facilitates informal learning for everyone in the organisation. As Participant 20 highlighted, *"It even helps the fact that we document things and that it's accessible at any time. The truth is, when that happens, when there's that dynamic of two people learning from each other, usually nothing gets recorded about it, so it doesn't help others learn."* However, companies that don't have exclusively remote workers may not prioritize documentation as strongly, potentially leading to gaps in knowledge sharing and informal learning opportunities for those working remotely. Improving documentation practices can offer a clearer picture of employees' work, potentially boosting their chances for vertical mobility. Additionally, exposing workers to projects from different departments, can spark their curiosity about horizontal career opportunities. Ultimately, this can foster stronger connections with the company and colleagues, reducing the likelihood of remote workers seeking new opportunities elsewhere.

Indeed, while the accessibility of documented information in a remote environment can be beneficial, Participant 15 pointed out a potential downside: the overwhelming volume of accessible information. As she mentioned, *"In a remote environment everything is accessible. This can also be a problem because a person has to learn to filter information because there is a lot of accessible stuff, that I'm not interested in knowing, so I won't go and read."* Additionally, there are other limitations of documentation that reflect aspects of the company culture. While certain information and processes can be documented, cultural norms, social behaviours, and interpersonal dynamics are more difficult to capture in written form. These elements of culture are learned through observation, imitation, and social interaction, rather than through formal documentation, as Participant 8 highlights: *"I believe that the social part is what fails the most [...], because it has those parts of learning, knowing how to be, knowing how to behave, and knowing how to do. There are things that you only know by imitating others, right, and seeing others doing [...]. It's not a document somewhere that will tell you how to behave in a certain situation, or the attitude you should have when facing a challenge."* According to Eraut, cultural knowledge can be considered a form of informal learning, as it is acquired through participation in social interactions. This type of learning often happens without explicit instruction and is deeply embedded in the social fabric of everyday life. In professional contexts, cultural knowledge remains unrecorded, sparking discourse on the feasibility of its textual representation (Eraut, 2004).

During the interviews, a viewpoint shared by one participant highlighted the potential for remote workers, particularly those who become disengaged with the company, to be replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the near future. He highlighted how engineers, often seen as the ones working remotely, have begun demanding higher salaries while refusing on-site attendance. The Participant considered that if they remain disconnected from the company's reality and project immersion, they could be replaced by AI, as it becomes more advanced and cost-effective: *“For example, engineers, who are currently the quintessential class for remote work, have been demanding very high salaries and insisting on not going to the office. But the truth is, if they don't want to come to the office, and with AI growing as it is, I might not need them tomorrow. If they don't want to understand the reality of the company and be more immersed in the project, between having a computer working for me or having a person who is like a computer working for me, maybe it's cheaper to have a computer.”* (P21). This perspective was complemented by Participant 12, who expressed the importance of maintaining a connection with the company's reality. This connection ensures remote workers are perceived as valuable employees, capable of adding genuine value to the company beyond mere data processing tasks, typically associated with back-office roles: *“Never lose that contact with reality, is very important. Otherwise, you'll always be seen as a back-office person who only serves to process data and never to add value to reality.”*

Out of the 21 individuals surveyed, 4 of them strongly consider that informal learning is higher in remote work settings compared to on-site work. Interestingly, all 4 individuals have experienced hierarchical promotions since transitioning to remote work.

In conclusion, working remotely requires additional effort from leadership and governance to facilitate informal learning. Because learning opportunities do not occur as naturally, they require proactive initiatives from leaders to foster interactions among team members: *“I would say there needs to be an additional effort from governance and the teams to ensure that these moments happen.”* (P21). This suggests that leadership plays a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to informal learning in remote work, where employees feel encouraged and supported in exchanging ideas and seeking guidance, which is essential for hierarchical mobility: *“There isn't that learning because there has to be an initiative on the part of leadership to make those kinds of interactions.”* (P18).

5. Discussion

In the context of the increasing use of remote work arrangements and changes in the world of work (Dua et al., 2022), this study explores the experiences of participants working remotely, with a particular focus on informal learning and its possible link with career mobility. Specifically, the primary objective of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of how participants perceive the influence of remote work on their access to informal learning opportunities, and subsequently, how and why this might affect their career mobility choices. The results shed light on how remote work affects informal communication and learning. In particular, the results of the current study show that the adoption of remote work is responsible for a decrease in real-time communication and an increase in synchronous communication. This consequently poses challenges for organisations and employees to handle complex information, as suggested by media richness theory (Yang et al., 2022). The findings suggest that the changes noted in remote workers' collaboration and communication behaviours may influence productivity and, potentially, creativity and innovation, as described by (Kaiser et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).

The results of the study also suggest a complex interplay of challenges and facilitators that influence their ability to progress vertically, horizontally, and organisationally. Firstly, the findings on vertical mobility suggest that remote workers may face limited opportunities for vertical mobility compared to their on-site workers. Additionally, the results highlight the significance of visibility, a factor echoed in the research of Gazit et al. (2021). According to these authors, establishing relationships with managers, crucial for career development presents a big challenge for virtual employees. However, it is important to note that employees engaging in frequent interactions and diverse projects may have more tendency to have an increased number of opportunities for indirect learning, potentially increasing the performance and consequently the results of the work done, leading to potential salary increases. This suggests that salary growth may be more influenced by continuous access to information and improved performance than hierarchical advancement, as suggested by Golden and Eddleston (2020). These authors also find that remote workers experience a slower rate of salary growth when compared to non-remote workers but they don't differ in terms of promotion opportunities. Although this is contrary to the majority of participants expressed in the interviews, this aligns with the findings related to actual participants' vertical career mobility movements.

Secondly, the majority of participants expressed a sense of disengagement with the company while working remotely. Participants viewed remote work as a facilitator, rather than a barrier to organisational mobility. However, despite participants indicating that remote work could lead to disengagement and potentially make changing companies easier, the findings of actual career participants' career movements show a low rate of organisational movements. Additionally, despite being aware of the potential disadvantages, participants consistently demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with their current remote jobs. They attributed this satisfaction to the enhanced quality of life and improved work-life balance that remote work affords. This paradoxical observation seems in line with the psychological contract theory. Remote workers may show greater organisational commitment as a way of reciprocating for the increased job flexibility and other benefits received by working remotely (de Vries et al., 2019). The psychological contract encompasses the employees' expectations and perceived mutual obligations between the employee and the employer (Rousseau, 1989). Similarly, the social exchange theory (Blau & Kahn, 2013) implies that employees are likely to feel a sense of obligation to give back or reciprocate when they believe that the organisation they work for has provided them with benefits (de Vries et al., 2019). Hence, the central point is that remote workers may show greater organisational commitment as a way of reciprocating for the increased job flexibility and other benefits received from remote work (Adekoya et al., 2022), which can impact their career transitions. Participant 1 expressed the idea of reciprocity: *"They also bet on me, and that's why I always end up deciding to stay where I am."*

These observations are in line with the contradictory evidence reported in the literature (e.g., de Vries et al., 2019; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Nurmi & Hinds, 2020), related to organisational mobility. It is important to note that, findings that seem not in line with the literature might be explained by the Portuguese cultural context. Being a society that leans towards collectivism, the Portuguese hold their personal and professional relationships in high regard, attaching significant value to them (Robalo et al., 2015). Hence, the choices individuals make for their careers are influenced by cultural norms and personal actions, impacting career decisions and career movements differently (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). For instance, in a more individualistic society, individuals might prioritise career advancement opportunities and higher salaries over job stability or loyalty to a company. In contrast, Portuguese professionals may prefer to stay with a single employer for longer due to strong relational ties and the value placed upon workplace trust.

6. Conclusion

Academics in the domains of vocational and organisational psychology, entrepreneurship, human resources and international management have shown a growing interest in how individuals manage career transitions throughout their professional lives (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). While remote work is becoming an increasingly popular work arrangement in Portugal and around the world, not much is known about the career movements of remote workers. Taking the remote workers' perspectives, this study contributes to a better understanding of the consequences of remote work on informal learning and career mobility.

The results of 21 interviews suggest that remote work affects informal learning and may consequently affect the remote worker's career mobility choices. The insights derived from the current study advance knowledge about informal learning and career mobility for remote workers. Previous research is limited and focused on remote work advantages and challenges and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several theoretical contributions can also be drawn from this study. The current study first contributes to remote work, informal learning and career literature, suggesting that the interplay between informal learning and career choices of remote workers may be connected with career stages. In more detail, this study suggests that in addition to recognizing the importance of informal learning in the workplace, it is crucial to consider how this impacts career mobility, especially for more junior members of the company. As noted by Marsick et al. (1999), it is essential for organisations not to leave informal learning to chance but to implement strategies to facilitate it. While agreeing with Kaiser et al. (2022) that informal interactions may be more important for new employers, the findings suggest that the actual experience may be even more impactful. If the new employee is experienced in the field the lack of informal learning may not have so much impact on his/her career movements. In this regard, senior members, having spent the majority of their careers in traditional on-site workplaces, may have already established networks, accumulated extensive experience, and developed coping mechanisms that mitigate the impact of remote work on their learning and career advancement. Conversely, junior members who are starting their careers remotely may miss out on important informal learning opportunities and face challenges in building relationships. These early experiences can have long-term impacts on

their career trajectories, potentially influencing their professional development and mobility in the future.

Secondly, the research contributes to the remote work and career literature, suggesting that remote workers face greater difficulties in horizontal mobility due to the isolation inherent in remote work. This isolation can pose challenges to interdepartmental visibility and communication, limiting opportunities for exposure to projects and initiatives beyond one's immediate scope of work.

Thirdly, there is a big difference between what the interviews expressed and their past mobility movements. Although the majority consider more difficulties in vertical mobility, about half of them had already moved vertically. Similarly, although the majority also expressed an increased disengagement with the company, the big majority had never changed company since started working remotely. Overall, this suggests that despite the challenges of career progress while working off-site, remote workers have been able to navigate them successfully.

6.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Although the study examines informal learning and career mobility for remote workers, it has some limitations. Firstly, despite the considerable number of interviews, it was not possible to explore in detail the influence of contextual factors, such as the effects of the nationality of the company participants work for, the nature of their work, the scale of the company, the career stage level of the participant's role, age differences and gender differences. The wide range of contextual factors identified require further exploration in future research. In addition to the flexibility stigma linked to remote work (Golden & Eddleston, 2020), women also suffer from gender-based stereotypes (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). Gender-based stereotypes and flexibility stigma may disproportionately affect women, requiring further exploration of gender differences in remote work experiences and the interplay with informal learning and career choices. Also, the data gathered in Portugal could potentially raise questions about its applicability to other contexts. Cultural factors can significantly influence career decisions and movements, highlighting the need for cross-cultural comparisons in future research. Additionally, future studies may investigate the differences between companies that operate solely remotely and those with a blend of remote and on-site workers.

Moreover, the research focuses on individuals who choose to continue working remotely, neglecting those who may have stopped for some reason. Future research should explore these cases to capture a more comprehensive analysis of remote work dynamics on informal learning and career mobility. Furthermore, longitudinal studies that track the career trajectories of remote workers over time can provide insights into emerging trends and identify best practices for remote work policies and procedures.

Another limitation refers to the concept of informal learning, which is a difficult concept to analyse, precisely because of its tacit nature (Eraut, 2004). Informal learning is challenging to research as it often goes unnoticed, leaving respondents unaware of it (Eraut, 2004). Future studies should consider the adoption of other methodologies to capture informal learning processes more effectively.

Lastly, in addition to examining the perspective of remote workers, future research could explore the viewpoint of employers and organisations regarding the termination of remote workers. Such research would provide valuable insights into the dynamics of remote work from the employer's standpoint and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of remote work arrangements. Hence, as remote work continues to grow, researching its long-term effects remains vital.

6.2. Managerial Implications

Employee turnover among highly skilled professionals represents a significant financial burden for companies (Hill et al., 2003). Understanding the motivations and preferences of remote workers can inform strategies for talent retention, workforce management, and organisational culture development.

The results of this research provide valuable guidance for human resource management initiatives and leadership strategies to support remote workers. Specifically, organisations should assess whether they are providing remote workers with the necessary tools and communication channels for effective interaction, and guarantee that they are engaged with the company. Additionally, managers should be concerned with the remote workers' alignment with the company's vision, providing them feedback, and ensuring they have the opportunity to build personal relationships. Based on the findings, leaders and supervisors may address informal learning challenges by leveraging communication tools like Slack to facilitate spontaneous interactions and promote a culture of responsiveness among

remote teams. Moreover, it is crucial to consider incorporating non-work activities to foster a sense of camaraderie among team members. This initiative not only helps overcome the challenge of anonymity but also creates a deeper connection between colleagues.

Additionally, efforts to mitigate the impact of time zone differences and cultivate inclusive communication practices can enhance the accessibility of informal learning opportunities for remote workers. Moreover, by recognising remote work's efficiency benefits, organisations can optimize virtual collaboration platforms and cultivate a positive remote work culture. Engaged remote workers emphasised higher documentation, the recording of conference calls and the transcript of all the information shared between colleagues and with the supervisors. Increased transparency within the organisation facilitates remote work ensuring consistent communication and enhances employee engagement.

In addition, leaders and supervisors can take measures to address the challenges and leverage the facilitators of career mobility for remote workers. By understanding the factors influencing remote workers' career mobility decisions, organisations can mitigate the turnover risk and create a loyal and engaged remote workforce. Organisations should prioritise initiatives to enhance remote workers' visibility, foster interpersonal relationships, promote trust-building, facilitate cross-functional collaboration, and provide comprehensive onboarding and integration processes for remote employees. Additionally, results-focused performance evaluations can help mitigate biases against remote workers and promote an environment that favours vertical career mobility.

In conclusion, the results showed that managing a company with remote workers demands significant efforts from managers. Remote work communication requires more focus, attention, and structure, as it is often less organic and fluid compared to on-site work. It calls for a comprehensive collaboration system across the company and substantial coordination in teams and throughout the organization. Managers and teams need to put in extra efforts to establish and implement strategies that ensure effective and continuous communication and learning, as well as employee engagement and feelings of belonging. By embracing these insights and implementing targeted strategies, leaders and supervisors can create a supportive environment that increases remote workers' engagement and retention and provides them with better career opportunities.

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Annexe

Annexe 1 - Increase in Remote Work Practices in Europe

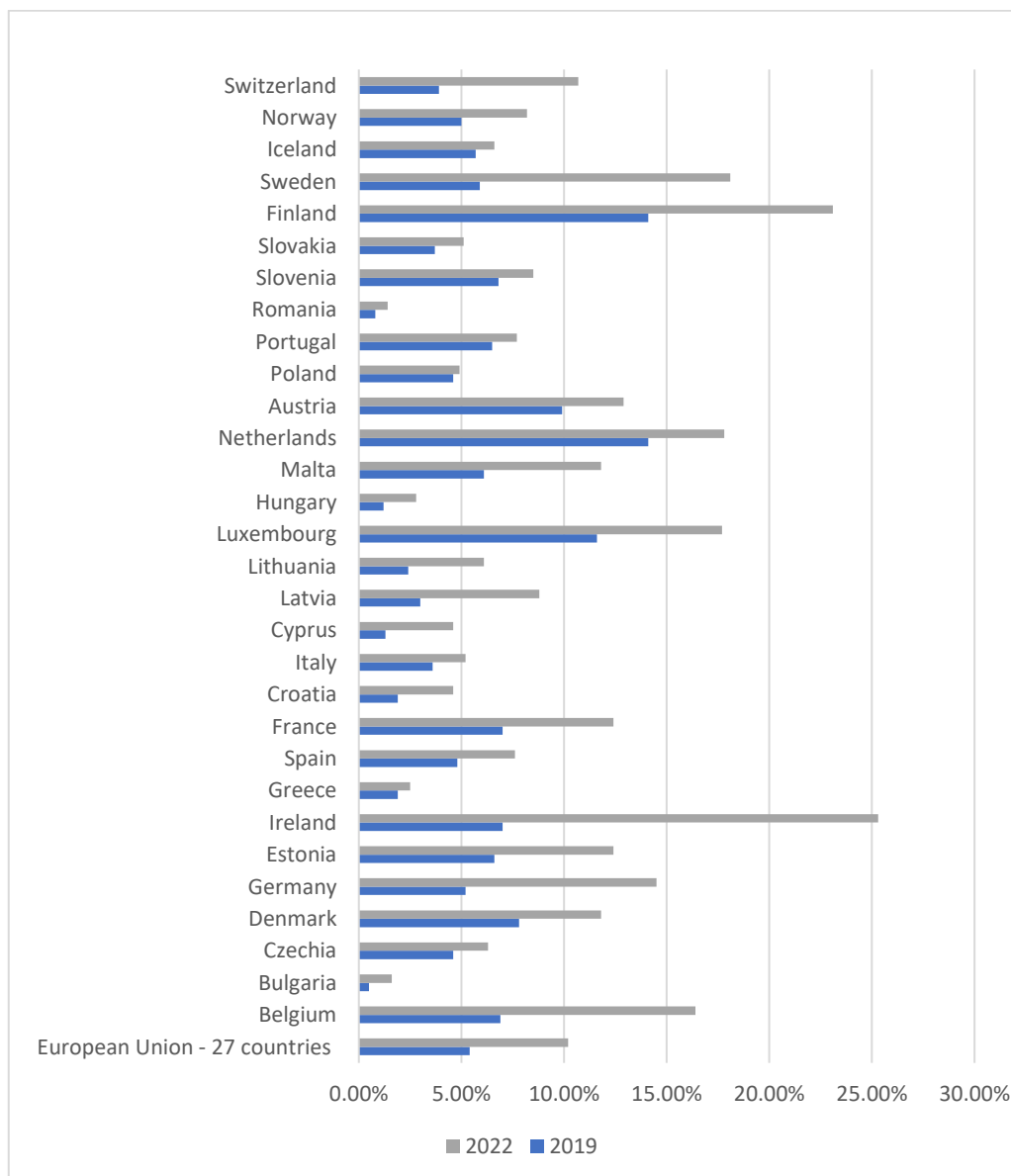


Table 11 - Increase in remote work practices (Eurostat, 2023).

Annexe 2 - Methodology applied in studies on remote workers and career mobility

Study	Method	Sector
Adekoya et al. (2022)	Thirty-one in-depth interviews were conducted to learn more about the factors that enhance remote work effectiveness post-COVID-19, employing an interpretivist perspective .	Multiple industries
Chatterjee et al. (2022)	The study investigated how remote work flexibility influences organisational performance, employing statistical analysis through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. Analysis of 307 respondents using purposive and convenience sampling methods to ensure insight from individuals knowledgeable about remote work dynamics.	Technology services industry
Coenen and Kok (2014)	The paper analyses remote work's impact on new product development, highlighting knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and balancing physical and virtual interactions. A case study method was used. The study used in-depth, face-to-face interviews, with project team members.	Multiple industries
Tran et al. (2021)	The study explores the dynamics of career mobility towards self-employment, using an interpretative phenomenology as the research approach. Through in-depth interviews with 35 participants (13 females, 22 males), lasting 45-90 minutes, it identifies factors shaping pathways to self-employment.	Service industry
Golden and Eddleston (2020)	The study used a qualitative methodology to examine the impact of telecommuting on objective career success, considering factors such as promotions and salary growth. Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test hypotheses.	Multiple industries

Table 12 - The methodology applied in studies on remote workers and career mobility.

Annexe 3 - Drivers to choose Portugal

Portugal was selected as the focal point of this study for various reasons. According to data from the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE), the number of employed individuals working remotely in the 2nd quarter of 2023 reached 960 thousand, constituting approximately 19% of the total employed population in Portugal (Marmé, 2023). This substantial prevalence of remote work shows the significance of studying its impacts on individuals in the Portuguese context and subsequently extending these findings to broader cultural and contextual settings. By exploring how remote work influences people's motivations and behaviours, this research aims to provide valuable insights for Portuguese companies seeking to adapt and navigate new challenges in increasingly remote-oriented work arrangements.

Moreover, Portugal stands out for its proactive approach towards formalizing remote work as a legal entitlement. Policymakers have introduced legislative measures, such as proposed amendments to the Portuguese Labour Code (Law 166-A), aimed at mandating that employers accept requests for remote work and provide valid justifications for any refusals. This legislative framework reflects Portugal's commitment to promoting flexibility and work-life balance in the modern workplace, further underscoring the relevance of studying remote work dynamics in Portugal.

Additionally, Portugal's societal orientation towards collectivism is a defining characteristic that shapes the attitudes and behaviours of its inhabitants. The Portuguese hold their personal and professional relationships in high regard, attaching significant value to them (Robalo et al., 2015). This cultural trait holds implications for how remote work is perceived, highlighting the need to consider cultural nuances when examining the impact of remote work on individuals, their career mobility and consequently in Portuguese organisation

Annexe 4 - Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Examples of Questions

Parts of the interview	Subsidiary Research Questions	Section of Interview	Example of Questions to Participants
Start of the interview		Introduce myself	
		Introduce the aim of the study	
		Ensure voluntary participation and obtain consent for audio recording.	
	What are the demographic characteristics of Portuguese remote workers?	Respondents Demographics	Personal questions about respondents' life: Could you introduce yourself? How old are you? What is your education level? What is your gender? For how many companies do you work?
Development of the interview	What is the motivation to work remotely?	General Questions	Tell me about your experience remotely working. Tell me about the advantages and the biggest challenges. Please describe what you meant by ...
		Section 1 (Remote Work)	Why did you choose to work remotely? What were the main motivations? If applicable: Why did you decided to continue remote working after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Parts of the interview	Subsidiary Research Questions	Section of Interview	Example of Questions to Participants
	How do remote workers describe/experience informal learning?	Section 2 (Informal Learning)	Do you work mainly individually or as part of a team? How important is interaction with other team members to perform those tasks? How do you interact with your colleagues and supervisors? Do you help each other? What have you learned from the other team members? To what extent do you feel that remote work makes learning from colleagues and supervisors more difficult? Do you have strategies or resources that you found the most effective to promote informal learning in a remote work context? Can you give me examples? Why? If applicable: Has your relationship with colleagues, and supervisors, changed since you started working remotely? How?
	How do remote workers describe/experience career mobility?	Section 3 (Career mobility)	What jobs and positions have you taken so far? Change company or position recently: What made you change? Progressed with the same company: What were the key factors in your career advancement? Do you believe that remote work will affect your career progression? Why? Have you experienced any changes in your career path or advancement since transitioning to remote work? Do you think remote work makes it easier for you to transition to a different company? Why?

Parts of the interview	Subsidiary Research Questions	Section of Interview	Example of Questions to Participants
	What kind of relationship exists between these two concepts?	Section 4 (Informal learning and career mobility)	Have you been promoted since transitioning to remote work? Have you changed roles or responsibilities? If so, what prompted the change? Do remote workers in your company frequently change roles or responsibilities? Do remote employees in your company experience significant hierarchical growth opportunities? Do remote workers at your company frequently leave the company? In your opinion what is the importance of learning with supervisors and colleagues in your career progression? Do you believe that informal learning (learning with colleagues and supervisors) is important to growth hierarchically in the company? Why? / In what way? Can you share specific instances where Informal learning contributed to your career mobility while working remotely? Do you think the lack of informal learning affects your willingness/motivation/desire to change company or change to other functions? Why?

Parts of the interview	Subsidiary Research Questions	Section of Interview	Example of Questions to Participants
End of the interview		Conclusion	Are there other things, besides learning with colleagues and supervisors, that could impact career mobility? Why?
			Where do you imagine yourself in 5 years? Same company? Other company? Working remotely? Other function? Why?
			Show appreciation for the interviewee's time and expertise. Ask for recommendations from participants for remote workers they might know who align with the study's criteria.

Table 13 - Interview guide

Annexe 5 - Participant Consent Letter

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research project conducted by Ana Martins, a master student in management at the School of Economics and Management of the University of Porto.

The research has the aim to study the impact of informal learning on career mobility in a remote work environment.

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in an online interview, lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview will be via Google Meets, Zoom or Microsoft Teams and the audio will be recorded. The interview time will be scheduled at your convenience.

During the interview, you will be asked questions such as:

- Why did you choose to work remotely?
- What are the biggest challenges of working remotely?
- To what extent do you feel that remote work makes learning from colleagues and supervisors more difficult?

To protect your identity, a pseudonym will be assigned instead of your name.

Authorization: I have carefully read the information provided about the study. I willingly agree to participate in this research study, and I understand that the audio of the interview will be recorded.

Date: _____

Signature: _____

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Ana Carolina Martins at up201906904@edu.fep.up.pt.

Annexe 6 – Participant’s Complementary Information

Participant's ID	Age	Gender	Education level	Function	Remote work experience (years)	Company nationality	Type of company	Everyone works remotely?	Type of work
P1	36-40	M	Post Graduation	Data Scientist	3	Portuguese	Start-up	Yes	Individual work
P2	31-35	F	Master Degree	Brand Partnership Manager	5	American (USA)	Start-up	Yes	Individual work
P3	26-30	F	Master Degree	Data Scientist	1	Portuguese	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Individual work
P4	26-30	F	Master Degree	AI engineer	2	American (USA)	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Individual work
P5	36-40	F	Master Degree	Product Manager	3	Portuguese	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Teamwork
P6	26-30	M	Master Degree	Software Developer	5	German	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Teamwork
P7	31-35	M	Master Degree	Business Intelligence Specialist	3	American (USA)	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Individual work
P8	36-40	M	Master Degree	Product Manager	3	Irish	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Teamwork
P9	31-35	F	PhD	Financial Planning and Analysis Manager	3	Maltese	Start-up	Yes	Individual work
P10	31-35	F	Master Degree	Business analyst	1	German	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Teamwork
P11	31-35	F	Bachelor Degree	Customer Success Manager	2	American (USA)	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	Yes	Teamwork

Participant's ID	Age	Gender	Education level	Function	Remote work experience (years)	Company nationality	Type of company	Everyone works remotely?	Type of work
P12	26-30	M	Post Graduation	Finance Business Partner	3	American (USA)	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Individual work
P13	31-35	M	Master Degree	Design Engineer	1	American (USA)	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Individual work
P14	26-30	M	Master Degree	AI engineer	4	American (USA)	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Teamwork
P15	31-35	F	Bachelor Degree	Engineer	6	American (USA)	Start-up	Yes	Teamwork
P16	31-35	F	Master Degree	Financial Analyst	3	American (USA)	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Individual work
P17	41-45	M	Master Degree	Data Scientist	4	Portuguese	Start-up	Yes	Teamwork
P18	31-35	M	Master Degree	Data Engineer	4	Portuguese	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	Yes	Individual work
P19	31-35	M	Bachelor Degree	Commercial Manager	4	German	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Teamwork
P20	31-35	F	Master Degree	Business Manager	9	Portuguese	Not a start-up (SME)	No	Teamwork
P21	31-35	M	Master Degree	Delivery Manager	2	Swedish	Not a start-up (Large enterprise)	No	Teamwork

Notes. P-Participant; M-Male; F- Female SME- Small and medium-sized enterprises

Table 14 - Participant's Complementary Information

Annexe 7 – Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences

		Sources	References
01_Remote Work Experiences		21	
Initial Reason	COVID-19 pandemic	6	
	Company's Culture	5	
	Work-life balance	4	
	New challenge	2	
	Dissatisfaction with current job	2	
	Better job opportunities	2	
Subsequent reason	Work-life balance	8	
	The decision to stay in the same company	7	
	Better opportunities	3	
	Good adaptation	2	
	Family responsibilities	2	
Future moves	One hundred per cent remote	15	
	Hybrid	6	
Leave remote work	Necessity for personal contact	4	
	Responsibility for a team	3	
	Absence of alternative options	2	
	Childcare responsibilities	1	
	International experience	1	
	Better job offers	1	
	Change function	1	
Benefits		21	159
Challenges		19	123

Table 15 - "Remote Work Experience" category

Annexe 8 – Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences

Categories and Subcategories	
01_Remote Work Experiences	
Initial Reason Refers to the motivation that led participants to the first decision to start working remotely/be a remote worker.	COVID-19 pandemic Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Company's culture Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to the culture of the company.
	Work-life balance Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to work-life balance.
	New challenge Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to the necessity for a new challenge.
	Dissatisfaction with current job Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to dissatisfaction with their current job.
	Better job opportunities Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to start working remotely due to better opportunities outside the areas where they live and beyond the distance they are willing to commute for work.
Subsequent reason Refers to the reason that led participants to continue working remotely/being a remote worker.	Work-life balance Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to continue working remotely due to work-life balance.
	Decision to stay in the same company Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to continue working remotely due to the decision to stay working in the same company.

Categories and Subcategories	
	Better opportunities Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to continue working remotely due to better opportunities if remotely working.
	Good adaptation Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to continue working remotely due to good adaptation to remote work.
	Family responsibilities Encompasses registration units associated with participants' motivation to continue working remotely due to family responsibilities.
Future moves Refers to participant's future professional decisions.	One hundred per cent remote Encompasses registration units associated with participants' plans to move to continue working 100% remotely.
	Hybrid Encompasses registration units associated with participants' plans to move to start working hybrid.
Leave Remote Work Refers to the motivation that would lead participants to stop working remotely/be a remote worker.	Necessity for personal contact Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the necessity for personal contact.
	Responsibility for a team Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the need to be responsible for a team.
	Absence of alternative options Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the absence of alternative options.
	Childcare responsibilities Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the decision to have kids.

Categories and Subcategories	
	International experience Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the need to have an international experience.
	Better job offers Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to better job offers.
	Change function Encompasses registration units about participants' motivation to cease remote work due to the goal do another type of job.
Benefits Refers to the main benefits of remote work.	
Challenges Refers to the main challenges of remote work.	

Table 16 - Categories and Subcategories – 01_RemoteWork Experiences

Annexe 9 – Benefits of remote work and examples of participants' citations

Benefits	Examples of Citations
Work-life balance	“I've always worked on computer-related tasks... I mean, I've never had a job that required me to be physically present, so it was foolish the time I spent commuting. One of the things that bothered me was having to take vacations to visit my parents, [...] when I could perfectly just grab my computer and work from there.”. - P2 “It greatly facilitates incorporating healthier habits into life, such as preparing a better meal, engaging in more sports, a hobby, or volunteering.”. - P5 “t also helps me maintain contact with my dog, with my home, I can do other hobbies, I can go to the gym at lunchtime, there are a lot of things I can do that I couldn't do when I worked at the office.”. - P9
Reduction in time spent on traffic or public transport	“Assuming that the majority of people have a commute time, traffic, between home and work, this adds up over a week. Even if it's just a half-hour commute, that's an hour per day. At the end of a week, that's already 7 hours... and 7 hours is a workday, so not having this commute time helps.”. - P5 “I happen to be living closer to the office now, but before, it would take me at least an hour in the morning and another hour in the evening, 2 hours per day that I spent commuting. These are 2 hours per day that I gained, every day.”. - P12
Access to more and better opportunities	“It creates many job opportunities that I wouldn't have access to, as simple as that. It has created more opportunities for those who are not in big urban centres.”. - P8 “I was contacted for two positions, one in the Netherlands, another in the UK, remote, with no requirement for relocation. And that's what arises, this exposure to various roles. We are not limited to our area of residence, we are available to work throughout the country, and all of Europe and even other countries, which are starting to see a great benefit in this.”. - P12
Increased efficiency and productivity	“The person ends up being more productive, I think you can work very well at home.”. - P4 “The focus on work is much greater, because in the office, even if you don't want to, someone comes to ask you

Benefits	Examples of Citations
	something, and you can't concentrate. At home, you can. You have a specific task to finish, you just put Slack on offline mode, and no one bothers you. And you finish [...].” - P9
More learning opportunities	“Online ends up being a bit easier because I have everything written down, and having everything written down afterwards has advantages.” - P8 “Access to information, and the availability of information for learning, is much greater, it works much better.” - P11 “And the fact that almost all of us are remote means that we have more notes about what we are doing, and with more notes, people can consult them at any time and can learn that way, instead of having to meet with a person to learn together.” - P20
Fewer interruptions	“In the office, there were exactly that, many distractions. Since we were there, anyone could come and interrupt, ask a question... which is not necessarily bad, some of those topics are important, and they need to be addressed immediately... but sometimes not!” - P5 “When I worked in the office, there were many times when I was interrupted when I was pressed for time on something I really needed to finish. In a remote environment, I can already decide when people will interrupt me or not.” - P15 “And what I often felt when working in person, in an open space, even if I had headphones on and was busy, someone would always come and interrupt, 'look, can you give me a hand here', there were countless interruptions.” - P20
More organized work environment	“When I left my job, and I had to pass on the knowledge I had to the only person who worked in sales, newly hired, it was much easier because basically, he asked me 'what happened here on this day?' and everything was described on Slack.” - P2 “The way companies are run in a remote company is that everything is asynchronous, meetings are recorded, there are schedules for everything, a lot of documentation, and I started to realize that things work much better in a remote company.” - P11
Decreased expenses	“When I found myself working from home, I saw my quality of life improving, saving money, time, headaches, and being close to my family.” - P8

Benefits	Examples of Citations
	“Financially, it's also more advantageous to work remotely.” - P21
Higher salary	“The offer I received was much more appealing, especially working from home.”. – P10 “I have other friends who work remotely, who truthfully would never earn what they are earning if they work in Portugal.”.– P20
Exposure to diverse cultures	“And different cultures and perspectives also help to think a little outside the box, it helps to connect with your users because usually in a TECH company, users are also from all over the world and we can also get a perspective from those cultures.”. - P9 “I can work with very talented people, who live in other countries, with different cultures, different education, which probably would be very difficult to know if it weren't for a professional environment like this.” - P15
More transparent work environment	“And since people joined the company, they already know that we have a remote culture and all questions should be posted on Slack, even those spontaneous questions. Even if it's something between us, and even if you want to ask me, if it's in the context of a project, I'll put it in the project channel for everyone to see.” - P20
Improved family organisation	“Even the timing of my life was very critical, that is, my daughter was born two years ago, just the possibility of being at home while she was a newborn was something... an experience that now in retrospect I think, 'if I were working outside, I would miss a lot'.I wouldn't see my daughter growing up.”. - P8
Increased comfort	“Firstly, I really like having my own space, and working with music whenever I feel like it, I'm not worried about bothering anyone, or if I got up 30 times.”. - P20
Stronger connections with colleagues and supervisors	“Exactly because of that, in remote work, as everyone is afraid of not having relationships and not building bonds, we force ourselves to be together. For example, in my previous job, if I needed an evaluation from my manager, I would struggle to see him for 15 minutes, to present him the issue or whatever it was, and ask for an evaluation. It was very difficult. Not here! Here, we have a lot of one-on-one culture; I have biweekly meetings of 2 hours with my direct boss, and I guarantee you that the previous boss didn't give me 2 hours a week.”. - P5 “Perhaps in my previous office, what would I do? I had one or two people whom I considered closer among my peers, who I thought understood me better, and I would always go to them. In remote work, most of the time, we're all in the same meetings or in the same channel, in this case, Slack.” - P5

Benefits	Examples of Citations
Visibility	“Remote work also greatly favours [...] introverted people, who end up, in an office environment where there's that atmosphere of showing off and being seen, introverted people will lose out a bit whereas, in remote work, we're all on the same level, and introverted people will showcase their work just as it is.”. - P2
No need for reallocation	“If we're talking about remote work for companies outside the country, there are several advantages because there are people who may not want to leave the country, which is my case.”. - P19
No forced socialization	“It bothers me that my social life is dictated by my work. Being with people in my real life whom I didn't choose to be with, I believe everyone has the right to choose the people they want to be with daily. When I'm stuck in the office for 9 hours and forced to have lunch with my colleagues... that, for me, is forced socialization... and it's something I don't want in my life.”. - P2

Table 17 - Benefits of remote work and examples of participants' citations

Annexe 10 – Challenges of remote work and examples of participants' citations

Challenges	Examples of Citations
Less connection with colleagues and supervisors	“For example, remote people can establish relationships, but unfortunately, most of the time, conversations will be about work. Probably going out for lunch together, a coffee break would generate other personal conversations, which creates a level of personal relationship that doesn't happen in the remote environment.”. – P5 “These days, I don't have a great relationship with my colleagues, it's superficial.”. – P10 “In negative terms, the work is a bit more inhumane, there's a loss of relationships between workers, between teams.”. – P21
Increased difficulty in communication	“Even sometimes virtually, sharing the screen and saying 'look here' is a bit difficult sometimes, 'no, it's not this line, it's this one'.”. – P1 “When leading a team, I feel that influence and communication may not be at 100%, and that ends up requiring a bit more monitoring. In other words, a meeting that could have been an hour in person might need an hour and fifteen minutes or an hour and a half.”. – P14
Learning challenges	“There are also things that I miss. For example since I entered a new area, data science, maybe if I had someone experienced next to me, I would learn some things more quickly.”. – P1 “Being in the office, I can interact with people with much more experience than me, and you can learn things that you're never exposed to remotely.”. – P13
Isolation	“That silence, it feels like there's an invisible barrier, and it's very quiet, despite having many emails and people calling me, it feels like we're just in our own world.”. – P4 “Challenges, without a doubt, include the issue of socializing. I really enjoy socializing, but what I really miss is, for example, if my wife has to go somewhere and I'm left alone... I hate it... or when it's a day without meetings... I hate it. Because I'm left with no one to talk to, and I feel a bit isolated. I've noticed that my social skills aren't what they used to be.”. – P18

Challenges	Examples of Citations
Meetings to address minor queries	“Being in the office helps to solve a lot of things in the corridors, a quick conversation [...]. Online, you have to schedule a meeting, you have to talk to the person and see if they're available.” – P6
Company culture	“I think sometimes it's more challenging to create the company culture because culture is heavily based on trust, and to build trust, you need contact with people. And in a remote environment, you have to somewhat force that contact with the people you work with.” – P15
Less visibility/networking	“As your career progresses, people change companies, etc., often thanks to past professional contacts. So this networking creation, for me, is more efficient and effective when done in person, not to diminish that it can also be replaced, but it's stronger. So these bonds of connectivity and recognition, I think, can be more shaken in a remote setting.” – P5
Heightened fatigue	“There are weeks when I have 30-something hours of meetings and that's tiring. If you were in the office, it's impossible to have 30 hours of meetings, even more so in Portugal where people have big lunches and like to talk in the hallways. In Portugal, this doesn't happen, and it's not normal to have 30 hours of meetings per week. But it happens because people look at the calendar, 'Oh, he's free,' they schedule an hour, and then it piles up. There are afternoons with meetings from 2 pm to 5:30/6 pm, and that exhausts.” – P8
Increased workload	“I end up working more because I'm at home and I start to get distracted.”. - P4 “It was very difficult for me to discipline myself in the number of hours I worked. I felt like I worked many more hours per day than when I was in the office. And that's one of the challenges: How does a person find the balance of time and when they should stop working.”. - P15
Different cultures and time zones	“You have the whole world at your fingertips, and we all work together and manage to have that talent, the truth is, you have many more cultures, and that also comes with different challenges because they're different cultures, different people, whom we're not necessarily accustomed to working with, and that also comes with its difficulties. Having different time zones also comes with its difficulties. I worked with a 8 to 9-hour difference. There's a very big adaptation.”. – P9 “For example, in my previous company, there was an issue because the Asian culture doesn't like the image much, so it was a struggle when we had meetings with the other party to see people. In Portugal, this issue doesn't exist as much, even in all of Europe, people turn on their cameras, even if everyone is in casual attire, that doesn't matter. And that helps you feel closer to people.”. – P9

Challenges	Examples of Citations
Brainstorming is challenging	“In a meeting, it's very difficult to debate because if there are more than one or two people discussing, nobody understands each other, right, the meeting noise isn't suited for this... you can't have a brainstorm, an exchange of ideas, it's much more complicated.”. – P19
More disruptive	“And in a remote environment, it actually ends up being more disruptive because we have the notification noise every 5 seconds in the chat. It ends up being more disruptive than spending a continuous 5 seconds listening to the person's question and responding and it's done.”. - P17
Lower engagement	“Remotely there's that risk, of a person feeling like they don't belong, and of course, the person's connection to the company is much less, and retention is much lower, engagement is lower and everyone loses.”. – P17
Less efficiency	“As we always have to keep an eye on the chat, we're constantly being interrupted, so our brains are always shifting focus and then our efficiency is worse.” – P17
Fewer opportunities inside the company	“The main disadvantage is the social distancing, which can later influence how you relate to your coworkers and how the company perceives who you are and, perhaps sometimes it can also create some distance in terms of growth opportunities.”. – P19
Decision-making takes longer	“There was a time when I worked with someone in a completely opposite time zone, in Australia, and so if there was something that wasn't explained well, some question I had, we could spend 3 days on it. Because I would send a question, the person would respond, the next day I would come back, and I had another question on top of that, two days had already passed.”. – P15

Table 18 - Challenges of remote work and examples of participants' citations.

Annexe 11 – Categories and Subcategories – 02_Informal Learning Experiences

Categories and subcategories	
02_Informal Learning Experiences	
Frequency of meeting Refers to participants' frequency of meetings with colleagues and supervisors while working remotely.	Once a week Encompasses registration units associated with participants' frequency of meeting with colleagues and/or supervisors once a week.
	Daily Encompasses registration units associated with participants' frequency of meeting with colleagues and/or supervisors daily.
	Monthly Encompasses registration units associated with participants' frequency of meeting with colleagues and/or supervisors monthly.
	Twice a week Encompasses registration units associated with participants' frequency of meeting with colleagues and/or supervisors twice a week.
	Once in two weeks Encompasses registration units associated with participants' frequency of meeting with colleagues and/or supervisors once in two weeks.
Regular communication Refers to participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors.	Microsoft Teams Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Microsoft Teams.
	Slack Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Slack.
	Google Meets Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Google Meets.

Categories and subcategories	
	Zoom Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Zoom.
	Notion Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Notion.
	Discord Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating with colleagues and supervisors through Discord.
Spontaneous communication Refers to participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors.	Video call Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through video calls.
	Message Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through messages.
	Channel Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through channels.
	E-mail Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through e-mail.
	Phone call Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through phone calls.
	Artificial Intelligence Encompasses registration units associated with participants' ways of communicating spontaneous questions with colleagues and supervisors through artificial intelligence.

Categories and subcategories		
Spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions Refers to participants' difficulty or easiness in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors.	More difficult	Schedule a meeting Encompasses registration units associated with participants' difficulty in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors because it takes more time.
		Message disregard Encompasses registration units associated with participants' difficulty in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors because of the message's ignorance.
		Time zone Encompasses registration units associated with participants' difficulty in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors because of the differences in time zones.
	Easier	Efficiency Encompasses registration units associated with participants' easiness in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors because it is more efficient.
		Less Confrontations Encompasses registration units associated with participants' easiness in spontaneous communication and the opportunity to raise questions with colleagues and supervisors because it is less confronting.

Table 19 - Categories and Subcategories – 02_Informal Learning Experiences

Annexe 12 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.1_Vertical mobility

03.1_Vertical mobility	
Vertical mobility challenges Refers to participants' vertical mobility challenges in a remote job.	Visibility Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility challenges arising from limited visibility in a remote job.
	Interpersonal relations Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility challenges arising from limited interpersonal relations in a remote job.
	Reliability and trust Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility challenges arising from limited reliability in a remote job.
	Learning Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility challenges arising from learning challenges that can impact the work done in a remote job.
	Cultural context Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility challenges arising from different cultures that can impact the work done in a remote job.
Vertical mobility facilitators Refers to participants' vertical mobility facilitators in a remote job.	Increased productivity Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical mobility facilitators resulting from enhanced productivity in a remote job.
No effect of remote work on mobility	Results focused Encompasses registration units linked to participants demonstrating no disparity in vertical mobility attributable to remote work due to results focused approach.

03.1_Vertical mobility	
Refers to participants demonstrating no disparity in vertical mobility attributable to remote work.	Decision centre proximity Encompasses registration units linked to participants demonstrating no disparity in vertical mobility attributable to remote work due to the distance to decision centre proximity.

Table 20 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.1_Vertical mobility

Annexe 13 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.2_Horizontal mobility

03.2_Horizontal mobility	
Horizontal mobility challenges Refers to participants' horizontal mobility challenges in a remote job.	Limited visibility across departments Encompasses registration units associated with participants' horizontal mobility challenges arising from limited visibility across departments in a remote job.
	Focus on individual tasks Encompasses registration units associated with participants' horizontal mobility challenges arising from focusing on personal tasks only in a remote job.
Horizontal mobility facilitators Refers to participants' horizontal mobility facilitators in a remote job.	Interdepartmental communication Encompasses registration units associated with participants' horizontal mobility facilitators resulting from the increase of interdepartmental communication in a remote job.
	Non-requirement to change location Encompasses registration units associated with participants' horizontal mobility facilitators because of the non-requirement to change locations in a remote work job.
Horizontal mobility neutrality Refers to participants demonstrating no disparity in horizontal mobility attributable to remote work.	

Table 21 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.2_Horizontal mobility

Annexe 14 – Categories and Subcategories – 03.3_Organisational mobility

03.3_Organisational mobility	
Organisational mobility discouragement Refers to participants' organisational mobility discouragement in a remote job.	Restricted opportunities Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility discouragement in a remote job due to restricted opportunities.
	Networking challenges Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility discouragement in a remote job due to networking challenges.
Organisational mobility incentive Refers to participants' organisational mobility incentives in a remote job.	A higher range of opportunities Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility incentive in a remote job due to the access to a higher range of opportunities.
	Disengagement with the company Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility incentive in a remote job due to the disengagement with the company.
	Agenda flexibility Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility incentive in a remote job due to agenda flexibility.
	Absence of relocation requirements Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility incentive in a remote job due to the absence of relocation requirements.

Table 22 - Categories and Subcategories – 03.3_Organisational mobility

Annexe 15 – Categories and Subcategories – 04_ Participants' Career Mobility

04_ Participants' Career Mobility		
Career changes and remote work Refers to participants' career changes while working remotely.	Vertical mobility Encompasses registration units associated with participants' vertical career changes while working remotely.	
	Responsibility and salary Encompasses registration units associated with participants' responsibility and salary changes while working remotely.	
	Horizontal mobility Encompasses registration units associated with participants' horizontal career changes while working remotely.	
	Experienced organisational mobility while working remotely Encompasses registration units associated with participants' organisational mobility while working remotely.	Never Encompasses registration units associated with participants who never had an organisational change since working remotely.
		Once Encompasses registration units associated with participants who had one organisational change since working remotely.
		Twice Encompasses registration units associated with participants who had two organisational changes since working remotely.

Table 23 - Categories and Subcategories – 04_ Participants' Career Mobility

Annexe 16 – Categories and Subcategories – 05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility

05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility		
Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility Refers to the interplay between informal learning experiences and its interplay with career mobility choices.	Advantages	Better documentation Encompasses registration units associated with participants' higher informal learning while working remotely because of the better documentation.
	Challenges	Isolation Encompasses registration units associated with participants' lower informal learning while working remotely because of the isolation and focus only on their tasks.
		Difficult Communication Encompasses registration units associated with participants' lower informal learning while working remotely because of the difficulty in communication.
		Career stage Encompasses registration units associated with participants' lower informal learning while working remotely because of their career stage.
		Productivity Encompasses registration units associated with participants' lower informal learning while working remotely because of the lower productivity.

Table 24 - Categories and Subcategories – 05_ Informal Learning Experiences and Career Mobility