

# Work-life balance during the Covid-19 pandemic. The case of full remote employees in an IT company

Ștefan MAROȘAN\*

**Abstract.** This paper examines work-life balance, but more specifically work-from-home policies and how they help to create a balance, or imbalance, when individuals turn to these policies. The research question and the objectives of this research were constructed in such a way that we can focus both on the aspects of the professional life of the respondents and on their private life before work at home and after it starts. This document is a qualitative research applying a series of 10 interviews to people working in an IT company in Cluj-Napoca (Romania); these people working from home either since the beginning of the health crisis or joining this company in 2020.

**Keywords.** COVID-19 pandemic, working from home, work-life balance, IT company, comparative media study

## Introduction

IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT, THAT HAS CHANGED MANY ASPECTS of our social life, work also has a lot to "suffer". Certainly, nowadays we no longer relate to work in a classical way, but rather we see, feel, and understand work in a completely different way, due to the different global influences that have emerged through the development of new communication technologies. In Romania, until recently, the work was done as much as possible at the headquarters of the company for which the workers were employed, but due to the health crisis that broke out in early 2020, a very rapid change was needed in this regard, hence more and more companies were forced to send their employees home and later to ask them to work from home, using their own devices and Internet connection. Information technology, in this sense, has been essential for these companies that have relocated their activities to their employees at

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\* Ștefan MAROȘAN, MA, Strategic Human Resources Management, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (Romania). Email: [stefan123ro@gmail.com](mailto:stefan123ro@gmail.com).

home to be able to survive. Mail correspondence, zoom and skype conferences, activity organizers through Google, online recruitment and online trainings are just some of the examples we can find in this context. All these online-performed processes were dependent on the existence of information technology.

This paper has chosen to examine the work-life balance, but more specifically work-from-home policies and how they help to create a balance, or an imbalance, when individuals resort to these policies. This article assumes that work-from-home policies can have beneficial effects on individuals, but when these policies are applied compulsorily for people employed in certain companies, these policies can affect the work-life balance.

The structure of this study is as follows: the first chapter tried to set out a series of definitions from the literature of the central concepts studied, namely work-life balance and work at home, then it provided a string of information on the role technology in telework processes will conclude this first chapter by presenting research on the chosen topic. The work continues with a series of methodological aspects: the present research is a qualitative one, and a number of 10 interviews were applied, followed by an analysis of these interviews in order to formulate answers to the research question and to the objectives of the research. The last part of the paper contains the research results; a main part containing the interpretation of the interviews, followed by some final remarks.

Regarding the research question and the objectives of this research, they were constructed in such a way that we can focus both on the aspects of the professional life of the respondents and on their private life before work at home and after it starts. The research question to which this article seeks an answer is: "How does work at home change the balance between work and private life?"; and the objectives of this research are structured in two directions: the first two objectives aim at identifying the factors that lead to creating a work-life balance through work at home and identifying the factors that lead to creating an imbalance between work and privacy through work at home.

The following objectives are oriented towards family life, namely to identify the positive and negative effects of working at home on married life and to identify the advantages and disadvantages of the elements related to raising children and changes resulting from work at home of one parent (in case families with children).

In order to obtain as concrete answers as possible to the research question and the objectives set, this article is based on a qualitative research by applying 10 interviews to people working in an IT company in Cluj-Napoca (Romania); these people working from home either since the beginning of the health crisis or joining this company in 2020.

## Theoretical aspects

This first chapter presents three quite important elements when discussing work from home and the work-life balance. Thus, this first chapter begins with a series of theoretical elements regarding the concepts of work-life balance and work at home; then a series of information on the use of technology in telecommuting processes are presented; the chapter concludes with a string of studies on work at home and the effects it has on people employed in this type of work.

### *Work-life balance: working from home*

Work and personal life are two essential aspects for any individual in contemporary society. In our personal life we have the opportunity to attend certain courses, to be part of various social groups and finally to start a family; on the other hand, work is a social binder, a formal organized environment in which individuals interact with each other and through a collective effort come to achieve the purpose and objective of the organization of which they are part.

Of course, when we spend about eight hours a day at work, the time we have left to devote to our personal lives is limited. In this way, both individuals and organizations must find a series of solutions to create a balance between work and private life, to avoid reaching situations of imbalance between the two elements of human life.

Numerous definitions of the concepts of work at home and work-life balance are presented in the literature.

Regarding the concept of work-life balance, we can see a categorization of these definitions into two broad categories: on the one hand in the first category there are definitions and theories explaining the work-life balance by reference to role and conflict between roles (Marks and MacDermin 1996; Clark 2000; Kalliath and Brough 2008; Grzywacz and Carlson 2007); on the other hand, the second category tries to explain the work-life balance by reference to the social, family and organizational environment in which the individual works and the role of the environment in relation to the other elements (Abendroth and Dulk 2011; Kirton and Greene 2010; Kelliher et al. 2018).

The importance of the roles played by individuals is theoretically one of the main ways to define the concept of work-life balance. In this sense, Marks and MacDermin (1996) discuss the concept of work-life balance as a complex process in which individuals need to focus all their attention in order to successfully cope with all the roles they have. At the same time, they focus on how individuals, in order to succeed in completing each role they hold, often resort to prioritizing roles for better management of the various situations that arise.

Marks and MacDermin (1996) also highlight two completely different ways in which individuals relate to the roles they hold: positive commitment to the roles they hold, in which individuals are fully involved in the roles they hold; and negative engagement in held roles, in which individuals are disinterested in how they relate to their roles. Kalliath and Brough (2008) depict work-life balance in a manner similar to that described by Marks and MacDermin. Kalliath and Brough (2008) argue that in order to achieve balance, individuals must invest equal effort in all the roles they play.

Another theorist who defines the concept of work-life balance in relation to roles is Clark (2000). He argues that as long as role conflict does not arise, work-life balance is achieved, so all individuals need to do is avoid role conflict and focus on how they can successfully fulfil all their roles

Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) claim that work-life balance involves "accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains." In this context, individuals need to be aware of the importance of the role they play in the various social settings in which they work (work and private life).

The social, organizational, legislative environment in which individuals act is another essential element when it comes to work-life balance because depending on the various influences that individuals feel from the outside environment, they manage, or not, to reach successfully work-life balance. Abendroth and Dulk (2011) argue that work-life balance can only be achieved when individuals receive support from those around them when they need it; thus, the balance is achieved when co-workers offer their help in the successful accomplishment of work tasks, and family and friends offer support in different moments of personal life. Another important element in creating the work-life balance is the involvement of the state through various social policies to help create this balance through: paid childcare, statutory leave or flexible work schedule.

Kirton and Greene (2010) define work-life balance as rather an obligation on companies to introduce a series of policies that facilitate the creation of balance outside the workplace; elements that encourage the idea of parenting and the responsibility of caring for dependents.

At the same time, there are certain definitions of the concept of work-life balance that place different emphasis on how this balance can be achieved. Kelliher et al (2018) argue that in order to achieve a real balance individuals need to make certain sacrifices, usually at work, to restrict certain aspects of professional life in order to have more time for privacy.

Regarding the concept of work at home, in the specialized literature there are a myriad of definitions of this concept. Baruch and Nicholson (1997) define work at home as the activity undertaken by an employee who carries out all or

at least a large part of the work at home, physically separated from the employer's place. At the same time, Van Sell and Jacobs (1994) argue that teleworkers are those employees of a company who use computer and telecommunications technology to work at home or in a place other than the organizational space.

Olson and Prims (1984) argue that the term telework refers to the replacement of telecommunications technology for physical travel to a central workplace, it is usually assumed that the person works from home. There is also a structuring in several categories of home workers, these being: home workers after working hours, home workers as self-employed, casual home workers and home workers for full-time employers (Olson and Prims, 1984). Thus, it is worth mentioning that this research focuses only on one category, namely home workers as a full-time employee.

Pearce (2009) believes that telework is a system that allows employees of a company to perform certain official tasks related to work from home or another alternative location that pleases the employee. In this sense, Bosch-Sijtsema and Sivunen (2013) argue that the concept of telecommuting involves employees of a company working for the same company regardless of geographical barriers but using information technology they contribute to achieve the common goal of an organization.

In defining the concept of telework, Tworoger et al. (2013) emphasize the idea of virtual teams. Telework involves a geographically dispersed work arrangement that is usually short-lived in which a company's employees use communications technology to work, so face-to-face interaction is lacking.

Other studies focus on the impact that working from home has on the quality of life. Shamir and Salomon (1985), following their research, concluded that working from home can only be beneficial in certain cases, for example people with a certain degree of disability who travel poorly and work in decentralized spaces, shared spaces can be much more useful for employees and for improving the quality of their work. Work from home does not always have the effects expected and desired by the employee, and sometimes by the employer.

In this context, it is useful to mention that working from home can involve both activities in which the use of technology is necessary and activities in which it is not necessary. For example, we can consider artists who create handmade products.

This paper is focused only on those activities in which information technology is needed in the work at home process. This study takes into account the case of Romania where the pandemic with Covid-19 imposed the first lockdown in March 2020, having a sudden impact on the activity of the companies and public and private institutions.

In Romania, there is a favourable legislative framework present through the Labour Code ([Law no. 53/2003](#)) and other legislative acts that favour the achievement of the balance between personal life and work. In this sense, we can talk about the provisions set out in the Labour Code in the following chapters: Chapter VIII, regarding the “Individual part-time work contract”, Chapter XI, regarding the “Work at home”, but also provisions set out in Art. 116, regarding the unequal work program and Art. 118, regarding the individualized work programs. It would be necessary to take a more analytical look at some of these legislative provisions. For example, working from home can be something that helps some employees to take care of children or dependents, but at the same time, we can also think about whether a person will do this work at home, for a long time, it will no longer be able to distinguish between professional and private life, so that an imbalance can be created between these elements.

According to the legal provisions of LAW No. 81/2018 of March 30, 2018, the concept of telework implies a “form of work organization through which the employee, regularly and voluntarily, fulfils his attributions specific to the position, occupation or trade he holds, in another place than the organized workplace by the employer, at least one day a month, using information and communication technology”.

### *The role of technology in telecommuting processes*

In recent decades, information technology has blurred the boundaries between organizations and individuals working in these organizations, so the mere presence of individuals in a formal organizational environment is not the only way to highlight belonging to that organizational context, individuals forming and entering in contact with other co-workers and through information technology ([Bouwman et al. 2005](#)). At the same time, a new type of organization was formed, namely the virtual organization which is an independent organization in time, place and physical circumstances and is based entirely on the use of information technology in work processes. Between the activities undertaken by individuals and virtual organizations, a myriad of networks, communities, and project groups are formed that operate largely online and offline ([Bouwman et al. 2005](#)).

Regarding the topic of this study, Dutton et al. (2005) present in the paper coordinated by them a series of elements on how work has changed over time, as a result of the implications of the technological component. Specifically, it presents a global perspective on the implications of information technology at work and on increasing work performance. The changes began in the early twentieth century by transforming production using technology, and the first and most relevant example of this is Henry Ford (the inventor of the conveyor belt), who created mass

production. It also discusses how the introduction of technology in people's work makes their businesses more profitable and introduces the concept of "digital economy" as a new type of economy, one that started in the IT sector and spread rapidly in all other sectors of activity. However, all these new discoveries for the business environment do not come at no cost, it also shows how this digital age is accompanied by "spam, viruses and worms", which are based on terrorism in the intangible world. Therefore, any element of novelty meant to make our work easier also comes with its drawbacks.

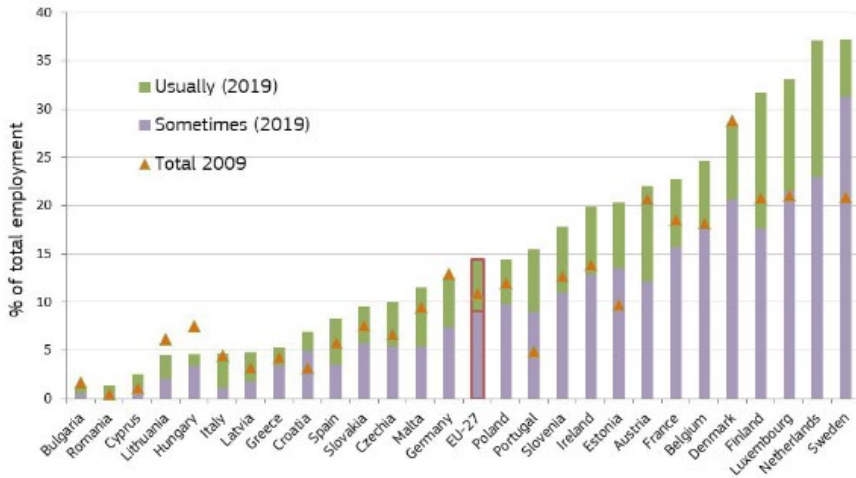
According to Eurofound (2015) data for 2015, of the total active population of the European Union, only 6% used communication technology to work from home. A series of studies provided by Eurostat (2020) show that in 2019, out of the total population of the 27 states included in the analysis, 14.3% of them work from home. However, the situation for each state is different. For example, in the top of this ranking are the Netherlands with 39.9% working from home, Sweden with 34.7%, and Finland with 31.7%. At the bottom of the ranking were Cyprus with 2.5%, Romania with 1.4% and Bulgaria with 1.1%. As can be seen from the data above, the use of communications technology in the work at home has gained ground in the last 5 years, thus reaching 6% of the active population in the European Union in 2015 who used information technology to work at home, in 2020 of the total active population in the EU reached a percentage of 14.3% people working from home and using ICT.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, Eurostat (2020) conducted a series of longitudinal research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on labour processes. In terms of work from home, in the period June-July 2020 in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Spain, Portugal the percentage of those who worked from home exceeded 50-55%. At that time, Romania registered a total of 30.8% of employees who carried out their professional activity at home. The study was repeated between February and March 2021 and the results show that Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Finland still have percentages of 50% and more for people working from home. In the case of Romania, in February-March 2021 the percentage of people working from home decreased, reaching 27.1% which shows a decrease in the percentage of people working from home compared to June-July of the previous year.

Therefore, considering the above-mentioned data in the period 2019-2020, the percentage of people working from home in the states of the European Union has exploded. Of course, this sharp growth was largely influenced by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reading the Romania's data, in 2019 the percentage of people working from home was 1.4% and in 2020 this percentage increased to 30.8% and experiencing a slight decrease in early 2021, thus reaching 27.1% .

Milasi et al. (2020) presents in his paper a number of issues regarding the work at home process among the countries of the European Union.

**Figure 1:** Work at home in EU countries



Milasi, S., González-Vázquez, I., & Fernández-Macías, E. Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: Where We Were, Where We Head to; Science for Policy Briefs; European Commission: 2020.

In the Figure 1, it can be seen to what extent the European Union states used work at home in 2019. It is observed how countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Finland, and Denmark occupy the leading places in this top, with over 30% of the total employed population working from home. On the other hand, at the bottom of the ranking are Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus, and Lithuania, countries where the percentage of employed people working from home does not exceed 5%.

In particular, the use of technology in work at home processes also has a number of advantages and disadvantages. Harpaz (2002) highlights several advantages and disadvantages of telework at the individual, organizational and societal levels. At the individual level, the advantages of teleworking depend on the degree of autonomy of the individual from work, he has control of his activities to a greater extent than in a formal organizational environment; flexibility of hours worked, the individual can decide when to work and how many hours to complete their activities; saving the time spent commuting to work; flexibility in the supervisory tasks of dependent family members. Regarding the disadvantages of working from home, it should mention: the lack of a sense of belonging to the work group; the feeling of isolation from the professional environment; no separation between the professional and the personal sphere; excessive availability syndrome.



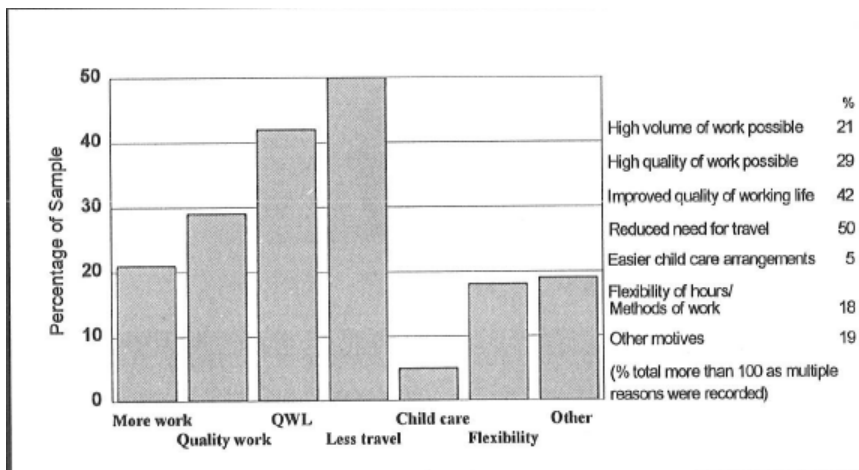
At the organizational level, there are also a number of advantages of teleworking: increased productivity due to a higher degree of autonomy, reduced absenteeism and delays at work; savings in direct costs; creating a positive organizational image. The disadvantages of teleworking in an organizational way are related to the cost involved in the transition to teleworking; changes in working method; investments in training and new methods of supervision.

At the level of society, the advantages are also present: reduction of environmental damage by reducing congestion in overcrowded urban areas; teleworking offers solutions for the population with special needs, so people with mobility difficulties can work from their own home; savings in infrastructure and energy. The major disadvantage from the societal perspective of telework is related to the idea of forming a separate company, so each individual who works for a long time from home creates a barrier between him and the organization (Harpaz, 2002).

### Research on work at home

Within the specialized literature there are a string of studies that emphasize the advantages and disadvantages of the work at home process. Baruch and Nicholson (1997) present several elements regarding the reasons why employees prefer work from home:

Figure 2: Reasons for working at home



Source: Baruch, Y., & Nicholson, N. (1997). Home, sweet work: Requirements for effective home working. *Journal of general management*, 23(2), 15-30.

As can be seen in Figure 2, most respondents prefer to work from home since they no longer have to travel the route from home to work every day and vice versa. There is also an improvement in the quality of work, followed by the fact that they can work more from home. It is worth noticing the lowest percentage on the Figure 2, regarding childcare. Thus, families with children do not decide to work from home for a better supervision of childcare, but only for reasons related to the quality of work and the possibility of not traveling daily from home to work.

Fonor and Roloff (2010) argue in their research that work at home should not be thought of and seen as a way of social isolation, but rather should be perceived as a filter that allows the employee to avoid stress in the office and thus focus more on the tasks of the position. Therefore, working from home can give the employee the opportunity to avoid those stressful or fun situations at work, so there could be an increased satisfaction after teleworking.

Another research undertaken by Bloom and Berinato (2014) focuses on the idea of increasing productivity for certain jobs. In this case, the two authors studied a transport company, Ctrip, which decided to offer call centre employees the opportunity to work from home. The research results showed that employees who started working from home made 13.5% more calls than from the office, thus concluding that the decision to resort to teleworking was a beneficial one for the company and for employees in its call centre department.

A recent study conducted in 2020 by the market research agency Wisemetry Research highlighted several little-known elements regarding the way in which Romanian employees relate to their work from home. 37% of respondents say that since they work from home they work more, 35% of respondents say they work as much from home as from the office, and 28% of respondents say they work more at the office than at home. Regarding respondents who say that they work more at home than they did in the office, 47% say that the tasks are more numerous and all need to be solved, 42% of respondents say they want to prove to the employer that they can work just as efficiently and from home, 38% prefer to continue with a work pace as fast as the office, and 30% believe that they work more from home due to interruptions from family members or household chores, so they need to recover from these periods of interruptions that consume time related to work. Other reasons cited by respondents include cumbersome communication, technical problems, fear of repercussions on non-compliance and fear of losing a job (Wisemetry 2020).

Several recent studies have shown that the homework of IT workers brings them more satisfaction, but even companies can take advantage of it to reduce the cost of maintaining office space. Moreover, there are countries such as Germany where it has been suggested that a legislative framework be created

to stimulate work from home (Alpar & Osterbrink 2020). According to surveys conducted by Global Workplace Analytics (2020), 73% of employees surveyed say they are very efficient working from home, 70% say they are as efficient as before when working in the office, but are more satisfied with physical collaboration. Regarding the management component, 70% of managers are satisfied with the performance of employees but consider that management skills and remote collaboration need to be improved (Global Workplace Analytics 2020).

## Research question, research objectives and methodology

This chapter will present the research question and the research objectives, after which the methodological approach was guided and how the sample has been built.

### *Research question and research objectives*

The basis of this survey will be the following research question: "How does work at home change the work-life balance?". After conducting the interviews this study will highlight how work at home has or does not have a direct effect on the work-life balance, what are the factors that influence this relationship and what are the aspects that need to be considered when it is about work-life balance.

The objectives of the research are structured in two directions: the first two objectives aim at identifying the factors that lead to creating a work-life balance through work from home and identifying the factors that lead to creating an imbalance between work and privacy through work from home.

The following objectives are oriented towards family life, namely identifying the positive and negative effects of working at home within the couple's life and identifying the advantages and disadvantages of the elements related to raising children and changes resulting from work at home of one parent (in the case of families with children).

The proposed objectives are to describe the situation in which family life and professional life can coexist in a well-defined environment, namely one's own home. The first two objectives are focused on understanding professional life in relation to personal life, pursuing advantages and disadvantages felt by the respondent following the decision to work through telework. The next two goals, oriented towards family life, are focused on identifying the interferences felt in family life and how married life and the growth of children can change due to the decision of one parent to work from home.

## *Description of the organizational environment*

The present research focused on a company that deals with the creation and maintenance of IT programs for several European countries. The company operates in Cluj-Napoca since 2015 and currently has a number of 57 employees, occupying various positions: billing operators, programmers, IT specialists, but also management positions: department directors and managers.

Before entering the lockdown, in March 2020, the activity within the company was carried out exclusively at its headquarters, as there were no situations in which employees had the opportunity to work from home. The employees' activity took place in open-space offices, and the management team had separate offices. The office building in which they operated has a conference room and a special space for lunch breaks. The work schedule was between 09:00 and 17:00. The presence of employees at work was recorded with the help of attendance cards in a software based on which it was possible to count the number of hours worked by each employee during a month.

As regards the specific requirements of each job, they remained unchanged with the changes following the switch to teleworking. Therefore, once the work from home started, the employees continued to work on the same projects as before the state of emergency. For this purpose, the company facilitated the access of employees to work equipment (laptop, telephone, printer, consumables) depending on the specifics of each job. Even if the requirements remained the same, what changed was the working conditions.

As a result, despite the facilities obtained for the continuation of work activities, the new work regime required the arrangement of a space for carrying out the professional activity in one's own home. This had an impact on the living space, which in many cases had to be shared with other family members who were either working or learning from home.

Attendance control was replaced, in these circumstances, by the appointment of supervisors who had the duty to manage the activity of groups to which they were subordinated. The employees were grouped in teams of 5-6 people each, and the task of the supervisors involved tracing the daily activities for each member of these groups. At the end of the work schedule, each employee was required to report to the supervisor the results obtained during that work day.

## *Sampling and method of data collection*

This article is based on 10 interviews, 5 with women (W) and 5 with men (M). At the same time, out of these 10 people, 2 men who have a child and 2 women who have a child. Therefore, the sample consists of 2 women who have

a child, 3 women who do not have a child, 2 men who have a child, 3 men who do not have a child.

The present survey is a descriptive one, aiming to obtain information on how work at home can bring changes on the work-life balance and on the professional life of the interviewees and what are these changes that the interviewees feel.

Due to the pandemic social restrictions, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews, hence all interviews were conducted using the Zoom Meeting platform and took place over a period of nine days, the duration of the interviews being between 30 and 55 minutes. It is a disadvantage that the interviews were conducted online and not face-to-face because if they could have been conducted at home with the respondents it could have been noticed the family context in which they live and if the work at home is perceived by them as a "invader" of the personal space through the presence of various tools used in carrying out this work (laptop, printer, files, documents, etc.).

The subjects chosen to take part in this survey started working at home at least 6 months before the start of the survey, so that they could more easily report the differences between office work and home work; and at the same time, their relationship to the way in which family life has undergone some changes since they started working from home.

At the same time, we chose to carry out this investigation the case of full-remote employees since they carry out their professional activity strictly from their own home, so they no longer have any contact with the physical environment of the organization in which they carried out their activity. In this context, their home has automatically become an office, so the barriers between personal and professional life are blurred precisely because the subjects no longer have an office at the company where they work and work only for the home.

The research tool used in data collection is the semi-structured interview guide, using this form to allow us to find out additional information about the subjects' lifestyles, how they relate to their work and their family life. The interview guide used in conducting this research consists of 20 open-ended questions, which are built under two interview topics: work and personal life. The topic of the job interview includes 11 questions with an emphasis on how the interviewees got to work at home, how they relate to this type of work and how it is carried out in relation to colleagues and supervisors. In the second topic of the interview, personal life, there are 9 questions focusing on how the family and couple relationship has changed following the decision of a family member to use telework and to what extent their private life has changed as a result of this decision.

The main advantage of using the semi-structured interview is a better understanding of the topics approached but also a reporting of the interviewees to

these topics through the lens of guiding the discussions and deepening them in order to obtain the necessary information. For example, people with dependent children have told in detail how there have been changes in their relationship with children since they started working from home and children taking online courses.

The unit of analysis in the survey is the individual. The survey intended to get some information about the changes that have taken place at the individual level following the decision to work from home; to find out how the interviewees related to work and family life in a different way when they were carrying out their professional activity at the company's headquarters. This survey tried to include in the sample people with different hierarchical positions, so in this respect managers or department directors, but also people employed in executive positions were interviewed. All these criteria help us to understand whether the work-life balance relationship is influenced to some extent by the respondent's position in the organization in which he works.

## Research results

The following chapter intends to make the interpretation of the interviews; then to present a series of limitations of the present research; and last but not least, to offer a final part dedicated to the conclusions of this study.

Following these interviews, the survey emphasises to understand how the interviewees relate to work-related and privacy issues following the decision to work from home. At the same time, an eye was on the way in which the couple's life has changed following this decision, mentioning that all the participants in the survey were married. Another key aspect of the interviews was understanding how, for people with children, working from home was a major change in their care.

### *Work-related perceptions*

For the first topic of the interview guide, namely work, there are several answers to help us understand how the interviewees perceive this process of work at home.

Regarding the reasons why the interviewees opted for work at home, they reported almost unanimously that this way of working was largely collective, so it was not an element related to the will of employees:

"In the case of our company, it was something like that ... mandatory, for the pandemic. I have been working from home since the

beginning of the pandemic and have remained so ever since; I can't say that I had a choice ... basically I have nothing to object to ". (M, 38, billing operator)

However, there was also a situation in which the interviewee reported that the decision to work from home belonged entirely to him:

"I was hired by this company at the beginning of August 2020, at that time the pandemic issue had calmed down a bit; I had the online interview and then I was asked if I want to work from home or from the office. I said I wanted it from home. Now you can work from the office with a maximum presence of 50% of the staff ". (F. 29, IT specialist)

As we have seen in the two situations described above, depending on when people joined this company, the decision to work from home is and remains the choice. Employees have the opportunity to choose where to work from August 2020, even if at the beginning of the health crisis telework was a collective decision of the company to send home all employees.

Regarding the changes generally felt by the interviewees after starting work at home, we could observe two major directions of manifestation of the changes. Some people mentioned that the changes felt were good:

"For me, the whole working-from-home thing scared me at first, but then I realized that I actually save about an hour and a half on the shuttle ... so I think that overall I had something to gain" (W, 34, specialist IT)

However, there were also people who could not easily adapt to a new style of work, as can be seen in the case below:

"I was sceptical about working from home from the beginning. I'm still sceptical, I don't think that work and family should be mixed in any way ... sometimes I'm disturbed by children or my wife, sometimes noises are heard from neighbours ..." (M, 41, network specialist)

As can be noticed in the lines above, the changes felt by the interviewees were manifested in two ways: on the one hand we have changes for the better, as in the case of the lady who no longer has to commute until work, and on the other hand we had persons who actually could not focus on the work they have to do due to the fact that they were bothered by certain family members or even neighbours.

The interviewees declared that there were certain things that have changed for the better since they started working from home from the perspective of professional life:

"I work for a smaller department. I didn't have the best super-performing software or equipment. Look, since this work from home, the company has been forced to invest money in software and equipment close to the latest generation to make our department as efficient as possible, so that we can carry out our work as required by our employees. So all the employees received new laptops with new software installed ... similar to what we used before, and that seems like a very good change for the better." (W, 26, PR specialist)

Moreover, another person related that:

"After we started working from home, we started to be more punctual and respect our deadlines, to respond very quickly to emails ... and I think that helped a lot. At first, that's what I was afraid of: the fact that we won't be punctual, and many colleagues will have the same attitude as at the office, to postpone things, but it seems that all the bad for the good in my case..." (M, 28, billing operator)

As we can see in the cases presented above, there are situations in which work from home has brought improvements in the way of working in the case of the company, from serious investments in equipment and software to greater employee accountability. All these elements were positively perceived by the interviewed people.

On the other hand, there are people who have pointed out a less pleasant side of working from home and who have had less pleasant experiences in this regard. In this position were two people aged 30 and 34, respectively, occupants of positions of call-centre operators:

"What I can say is clear: the network we work in was very crowded, I was disconnected from it about every ten minutes, and that's dead time ... it takes about 15 seconds to reconnect ... this thing with the network it took about 3 months ... until it was resolved I was full of stress. The problem is that while I'm on a call it's awkward to interrupt and then have to resonate with that person and apologize and all the formalities ..." (M, 30, call-centre operator)

A similar problem was reported by another interviewee who works for the same company:

"... at our call centre, the calls are recorded, and you receive feedback for them ... I had a problem with these recordings: they were not saved, and I had some problems with my supervisor ... if I was at the office it could be solved very quickly, but from home, where



I use a mobile phone, things are more different and sometimes difficult.” (W, 34, call-centre operator)

Consequently, we can see quite easily that some people have encountered specific problems with working from home, inconveniences that in the long run can cause serious problems, even job loss, even if the person who works from home is not to blame.

Regarding the reporting of work-from-home compared to office work, the employees unanimously pointed out that they are experiencing some quite significant changes:

“... we can't compare work from home with work from the office ... it's clear that you go there to work and that's it. When you are at home, it is clear that you feel other pressures on you: from the family, children who were also at home and sometimes needed my help, my husband went to work, he being a driver, I was left alone at home, where I also had to take care of my professional tasks ... but also my children.” (W, 34, call centre operator)

For the most part, the responses of the people regarding this office-home comparison focus on these small elements that come into play at home, whether we are talking about children who need help with lessons or the fact that you have to feed an animal or do cleaning or washing clothes. The interviewees stated that they felt distracted by all these elements, which became factors of stress and discomfort in working from home.

A singular element in the interviews was represented by an interviewee who reported that work in a formal organizational space and work at home are two elements that affected her in the long run:

“... I was happy at first to work from home and to have this experience, however after a few months I realized that not everything is as pink as it seems and even if I no longer have to commute to work and back home, however, I felt that I no longer belonged to the place ... that is, I felt excluded from certain aspects of the work. We at the office, until we started working from home, we used to do social evenings once a month, we all met at a restaurant and socialized differently ... but since we started working from home this has not happened. happened, I really feel isolated ... (W, 34, call centre operator)

As can be seen in the last paragraph above, the feeling of isolation is present to some extent. Thus, the interviewee declared that she feels the need to socialize with colleagues at work, and due to the pandemic and work at home this socialization, which usually happens during breaks or at various outings in

the city, can no longer be realize. As a result of this change, the person in question experienced a sense of alienation from the organizational environment in which they work.

As we highlighted in the paragraphs above, the decision to work from home was largely a collective decision, one meant to protect the lives of employees and those close to them. Certainly, after some time since the pandemic broke out and after the companies took certain sanitary measures in order to protect their employees, the latter had the opportunity to choose if they want to continue working from home or want to go back to office to some extent.

A topic discussed in interviews with these ten people aroused great interest in some. This topic focuses on the idea of communicating with colleagues and supervisors now vs. at the office. Some interviewees reported that since they started working from home, communication has raised major problems in the departments where they work:

"... in our department there was something unimaginable with communication, I sent urgent emails and received a reply on the second or even third day ... in certain situations, and if I had a contact number, I ended up calling the person to ask her to check what I sent her, because on the job I work on everything goes hand in hand ... I can't continue working if I haven't received approval from the managers that it's ok good. It was a very big meeting at the beginning of the year and the emphasis was on this punctuality in online communication ... so as not to be left behind with certain projects, of course ..." (M, 45, IT specialist)

Such problems related to poor communication management due to the lack of punctuality of some colleagues were found in most of the interviews conducted in this survey, but, as it could be seen in the paragraphs above, there were also situations in which, on the contrary, following the decision to work from home, the employees became very punctual and very serious about the communication process:

"I see communication much better now than it was when I was in the office, at least in terms of work and the emails that we have to solve quickly, as I said before, my colleagues have taken a lot of responsibility lately ... so in terms of communication I am much happier now than I was and how I communicated when I was in the office." (M, 28, billing operator)

Consequently, regarding the process of communication in the work process, two directions could be noticed in the answers of the respondents: on the one hand, those who consider communication a problem at the moment, in work from home. For these people it was much easier to be face to face with the

interlocutor and receive instant feedback, than to wait for an answer to an email; and on the other hand, there were cases, such as the last one presented, in other departments where the interviewees consider that working from home has made their co-workers very responsible, the latter becoming very punctual in terms of the communication process.

Regarding the conflict situations that arose at work since the interviewees started working from home, some people related that there were no such situations, but there were also 3 people who confessed certain conflict situations maintained due to work at home:

"I had some heated discussions on the phone with my manager. He accused me of actually disconnecting from the network because I didn't feel like working ... I told him that X and Y had the same problem as me and he didn't believe me. There was some tension between us for about two weeks, then it was confirmed from the technical department that, in fact, the platform is the problem and that's why I was disconnected ... he apologized, so ... out of moral obligation more. But still there were two weeks when he didn't call me at all to see how things were going, which he normally did somewhere in two or three days. (M, 30, call centre operator)

At the same time, conflict situations arose in another case due to a technical problem:

"I had a bad argument with a team leader from us who checks the calls. She insinuated that I did something with some calls ... which is very false. She said that I was not serious and that he would tell my boss about the incident with the calls that were not registered ... and she did that: she sent a report email to my boss, and she called me and I talked humanely with her. She understood and eventually those calls were recovered. To this day, I don't even talk to that team leader. She holds it high and loud that she is right, even if it has been proven that she is not right ..." (W, 34, call-centre operator)

As it can be seen in the two paragraphs above, conflicts occurred due to work processes or operations that were not performed properly, but for objective reasons to employees. Following more serious investigations, it was established that these problems and misunderstandings really took place without the fault of the employees.

On the other hand, certain conflicts at work have arisen due to improper relationships between some co-workers:

"I had that problem with answering emails. It was certainly a conflict: certain work tasks do not allow them to be postponed

indefinitely; then I passed on the problem I had. In the end it was solved ...” (M, 45, IT specialist)

Therefore, certain conflicts that may arise in working from home may be caused by certain technological problems that are not related to the employee, but it may also occur due to colleagues who are not very concerned about the work they do. Thus, the latter put some of their colleagues in difficulty.

Regarding the possibility of returning to work from the office, the interviewees stated that, since the summer of 2020, the company in which they work offers this possibility to physically return to work, but the number of employees physically present at the same time at the company's headquarters may not exceed 50% of the total staff:

“The decision was made within the company to be able to go to the office physically, and it is not mandatory to go daily, you can go 2 days to the office and 3 days home, or how you organize your program. Yeah ... you have to put yourself on a list at least a week before there is a record of the number of people who are present at the office ... so as not to exceed the number, respectively the percentage of 50%.” (W, 29, IT specialist)

The interviewees told me that despite the lifting of restrictions during the lockdown that allow the resumption of work in offices, they are reluctant to give up telework altogether. The reasons for this attitude are based on a fear of not meeting the virus and thus becoming a danger to their family members.

The last question addressed to the subjects in the first topic of the interview is focused on the work-life balance policies present at the level of the companies in which they operate. According to the participants in this survey, the company they work for supports such policies and is involved in achieving this work-life balance. Among these policies listed by the interviewees there are: short work schedule for Friday; additional days off; child raising premiums for children under 7 years of age.

As it is mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there were ten interviews attempting to capture different social profiles in them. Thus, the survey addressed both with people occupying executive positions: billing operators, programmers, IT specialists, call-centre operators, but also management positions: department directors and managers within a company based in Cluj-Napoca that deals with the production and maintenance of IT services.

Regarding the differences observed between the occupants of these different hierarchical positions, it could be observed an interesting aspect: people occupying executive positions and without managerial responsibilities do not encounter difficulties in creating a balance between work and private life, so the

idea of disruptive factors entering from one sphere to another is not as present as in the case of people who holds managerial or management positions.

"... at 09:00 everyone starts work, and at 17:00 we finished, we receive the daily report and that's it ... very rarely did I receive a call from work after this time, it's usually related with some misunderstandings about the daily report ... otherwise we are not bothered by anything else. " (M, 30, call centre operator)

The people holding a leadership position agreed that work often does not stop at 5pm as it should in a formal organizational space and as it does with people working under supervision. Often, people in managerial positions have to perform tasks that go beyond their work schedule.

"When we have an important project then we managers have to make sure that we collect all the data from the people in our team and it is clear that we have to check them in detail ... this can sometimes require us about two or even three overtime per day, for a maximum of two weeks [...] for this work we are paid extra, it is not unpaid work ... " (W, 40, manager)

According to managers, the work over the normal schedule is one that is often remunerated, they have reported that these events are quite exceptional, so they do not happen every day, only in periods when they have certain projects to complete.

### *Privacy-related perceptions*

In the second topic of the interview, namely private life, the survey tried to obtain from the interviewees a series of information to help better understand how their personal life has changed after the decision of one of the family members to work from home.

Regarding the work from home, the interviewees stated that there have been several changes in the way this work is done from home:

"... you realize that now it's not that classic separation, you work until 5 and then you come home to clean or cook. I often wash clothes while I'm <at work> ... or I quickly make soup before my husband arrives from work. It is clear that sometimes I wake up that instead of doing my job reports, I start working from home ..." (W, 34, IT specialist).

As can be seen in the excerpt presented above, the interviewee reports that she no longer feels such a drastic delimitation between office-work and work from home, so she often finds herself doing chores around the house

instead of taking care of work tasks. Regarding the way the household chores are distributed, the people related that a change in the way these chores are distributed can be seen in this case as well:

“Since I work from home, I mostly take care of household chores, more than usual, I admit; my wife doesn't work from home, she's a pharmacist, so she has to be at work almost every day, she also works shifts ... and since I've been working from home, I've been more involved in household chores.” (M, 38, billing operator)

We noticed that in the case of the interviewees who work from home and their partners work normally, there is a change in the distribution of household chores. Thus, people who work from home now deal more with household chores than before, being in these cases helpful to their life partners. Regarding the desire for change on the part of the interviewees on the way the tasks are distributed, we noticed that there is no such desire to redistribute domestic work, they say that as long as they spend more time at home, it is normal they take care of household chores more than their partners who do not work from home. If both partners work from home, they must share the same workspace. In many cases, in order to facilitate optimal working conditions, but also to solve household chores, the partners agreed on a division of time to cover all daily tasks.

Regarding the issue of childcare, the people who have children reported that the responsibilities related to children remained largely divided equally in the couple, even if one parent works from home and the other parent doesn't work from home. However, people who work from home are more inclined to take more care of the child / children, so they automatically spend more time with them.

„... since I work from home, I spend more time with the little one, he now goes to physical school, but when he had online classes it is clear that I left the door open to his room to hear if he needs help or something ... and then after school to help him with homework and eat, then let's get out of the house a little ...” (W, 40, manager)

At the same time, we noticed a change in behaviour regarding the men who take care of the children:

„... I take care of the little ones more ... especially when they have online classes, and my wife is at work. I'm not good at cooking, but if there's something urgent I order food for the little ones; it is an additional responsibility certainly in the idea that before I started working from home I didn't have much time to take care of the little ones [...] we also do homework together, I help them with various ...” (M, 45, IT specialist).

Therefore, we have noticed a change in the way in which the interviewees who have children in care now relate from the time they work from home to the duties related to children. Thus, people who spend more time at home, people who work from home, tend to spend more time with children, especially in situations where children go to school online.

Regarding the couple's relationship, only one of the interviewees related that since he started working from home, the monotony of the couple has intervened, thus this couple ended up turning to a therapist to solve these problems:

"... I came to a point a few months after I started working from home where I had become very irascible, and nothing suited me. Mihai (husband) was very nice and always understood me. The idea is that it was a busy period at work immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency, everyone was upside down ... and these events loaded me too ... [...] I could not get out of at home, for fear of the virus, and then I spent almost four months alone in the house ... my husband was shopping ... [...] I went to a couples therapist, I did a few sessions online ... he helped me to I understand certain changes that happened to me, that's how we ended up saving our marriage ... otherwise I think we wouldn't have resisted." (W, 34, IT specialist)

As can be seen in the paragraph above, the interviewee encountered some serious problems in the couple as a result of the decision to work from home. The problems occurred because of a strong emotional load on the part of the professional, where she encountered certain difficulties as a result of declaring a state of emergency.

Regarding the ways of recreation, it can be noticed a predominance of ways of recreation at home or in very small circles:

"... you realize that until recently I used to go out with the kids to the mall, to the playgrounds, to various parties for children with pets, now that with this madness we can't do much of this ... we live in home, we look at the drawings together, we cook, we also went to the grandparents when we could ..." (M, 41, network specialist)

Thus, the interviewees relates that the recreational activities they participate in have changed a lot due to the various restrictions in place and also due to the fear of not getting sick; they are more recently resorting to home recreation methods.

The decision to work from home was one that, from the point of view of the interviewees, brought some changes in terms of work-life balance. Some

people have confessed that this decision to work from home has allowed them to spend more time with their children and take better care of their education:

"At least it was beneficial for me to start working from home, I managed to spend more time with Patrik (son) and I even felt that I am a better mother and that I am more involved in his education. He's still small and probably doesn't realize it, but I really did with him what he should have done in kindergarten ... I coloured, I read him stories ... and that in addition to the fact that I had work to do service." (W, 34, call centre operator)

From a different point of view, some people pointed out that working from home was not an element that would give them security in terms of achieving work-life balance.

"... it doesn't seem to me that I managed to balance work and private life, plus the fact that I was locked in the house for so long [...] I felt weird and I'm still not 100% used to the idea, I wake up at 7:30 and at 9:00 I start work, that is, I get out of bed and go to the office, in the same room; then I work until 17:00 and then I stay at home ... it's something too monotonous that goes beyond what I can understand ... this doesn't suit me, but I have no choice, to be honest ..." (M, 28, billing operator).

Therefore, in the interviews in this survey emphasised two directions of manifestation of the balance / imbalance between work and private life: on the one hand, there were people who confessed that the decision to work from home was a very beneficial one for the fact that in this way they were able to take more care of the dependent people; on the other hand, there were also people, such as the one in the last passage who claims that the decision to work from home was one that did not strike a balance between work and private life, but on the contrary, she feels compelled to work and live in the same place.

As for the changes in well-being since the interviewees started working from home, they related that they enjoy the long time spent with the family, they are satisfied that they no longer have to commute to work, and some of them reported feeling safer working from home. Thus, they cannot pose a danger to themselves or other family members from a medical point of view.

"I am just relieved that I don't have to commute every day. Traffic to work can be a misfortune in the morning. Especially since we moved to Floresti, it was more difficult with the shuttle, we drove and took the children to school in Cluj." (W, 34, IT specialist)

On the other hand, there are certain inconveniences regarding work from home and its implications in personal life. To a large extent, these



inconveniences are related to those elements of personal life that distract individuals and thus rob them of the time that should have been allocated to professional tasks: from childcare to various household chores. All of this can negatively affect the way individuals work from home.

"I was sceptical about working from home from the beginning, I am still sceptical. I don't think work and family should be mixed up in any way. I am sometimes disturbed by children or my wife, sometimes I hear noises from neighbours ..." (M, 41, network specialist)

In view of the different conceptualizations offered at the beginning of this paper, we can reach the following conclusions. According to Marks and MacDermid (1996); Clark (2000); Kalliath and Brough (2008); Grzywacz and Carlson (2007), the balance between work and private life can be achieved when individuals successfully fulfil all the roles they hold, thus preventing the emergence of role conflicts. Most of the interviewees pose the problem this way: in terms of their obligation to deal with all the roles they hold, to "break into several pieces" in order to be able to cope with all these roles. Obviously, not always this uniform observance of different roles can be achieved, so individuals who fail to divide their time properly end up feeling overloaded and thus the role conflict occurs:

"... what I dislike is that I don't have that clear work-home delimitation ... [...] I wake up at 7:30 and at 8:00 I start work, that is, I get out of bed and go to work office, in the same room; then I work until 4:30 pm and then I stay at home." (M, 28, billing operator)

On the other hand, according to Abendroth and Dulk (2011); Kirton and Greene (2010); Kelliher et al. (2018), the process of balancing work with private life through work at home must be achieved largely by reference to the environment (social, organizational, family) in which individuals act. Thus, the attempt to balance work and personal life must be achieved through a collective effort; it is not only necessary that individuals want this, so that they can successfully achieve all their social roles.

Regarding the idea of work-life imbalance, elements of professional life can be encountered combined with elements of private life such as phone calls after work or the need to answer emails after work, which can be an inconvenience for some people. These tasks that come after the end of the work schedule are perceived as disruptive and can have a negative impact on work-life balance, especially when individuals want to spend time with their life partner or children.

"... since I accepted the position of manager, I knew that I would have additional responsibilities. I assumed that. [...] I see it as a job beyond the work schedule. Sometimes I dislike this non-stop work schedule, which means being available to the company at any time.

At other times, I accept the idea that I hold a key position in the company and my idea or advice is needed even after the actual working time is over, in certain decisions that cannot be postponed until the next day." (M, 45, IT specialist)

Therefore, this idea of working overtime is a common one in the case of the people interviewed in this survey, the latter reporting that certain decisions cannot be postponed, so even if certain phone calls or emails have to be resolved after the program, it is an "Inconvenience that comes with the position occupied".

## Final remarks

This paper provided a series of theoretical information on the concept of work at home and work-life balance. Thus, the article presented a string of definitions and studies that address the research topic. In the applied part of this research, this research caught the way in which work at home as well as the work-life balance policy is carried out in ten interviews with people who work from home since a period of time older than six months.

The whole methodological approach was aimed at obtaining an answer to the research question of this paper: "How does work at home change the balance between work and private life?". Thus, after conducting these interviews, this study can highlight an answer to this question: Work at home, as felt by the respondents, produces various effects in terms of the balance of work and life. private. Certainly, the relationship to work and to the elements related to privacy is not a classic one, as it would be when the two aspects of an individual's life take place in different environments, but the directions of manifestation of change are focused on two categories: on the one hand, working from home has a positive effect on work-life balance through the ability of the salaried employee to work and take care of household chores and dependent children at the same time; and on the other hand, we can say that working from home produces negative effects on the work of the individual through the various ways in which he can be distracted from the work he has to do for the company for which he is employed and focuses his attention on other elements; which are not necessarily related to professional life.

Thus, working from home is perceived by some people as beneficial in creating a balance between work and private life, precisely through this freedom that employees have over their time. As long as they manage to successfully fulfil their duties in professional life, they also have the opportunity to do various chores around the house, things that in a traditional work regime (at the company's office) would not be possible.

Paradoxically, for some people this very freedom they have is a problematic one, precisely because the latter cannot concentrate in two different directions at the same time, although they are also distracted by other things when they work for the home. Another drawback when it comes to working from home is related to monotony and the fact that people who work from home end up becoming tired after a while due to lack of movement to and from work. At the same time, some interviewees agreed that performing all tasks in a very limited space can bring an overload over time both physically and mentally.

In terms of married and family life, the participants in this survey are largely of the opinion that working from home has not brought significant changes in married life, but people with dependent children have stated that since they have begun to work from home time spent with the little ones and the support he provides to help them with their school-related tasks has obviously increased.

Depending on the hierarchical position occupied by the interviewees, the idea of balance, but more precisely imbalance, occurs more often. Thus, those people who occupy higher hierarchical positions often find themselves in a position that forces them to work even after the end of the work schedule, which does not happen in a formal organizational space.

Therefore, following this research, the main result of this survey is that working from home, as shown by the interviews, is a beneficial policy for achieving work-life balance. It should also be mentioned that in the case of the present research, work at home was an organizational policy not at all voluntary, but on the contrary, obligatory.

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