ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 6 - number 194 Wednesday 16 march 2022

End of the state of emergency: what will be left of smart working?

The end of the Covid emergency brings new rules for those who work from home. From April 1, individual agreements required.

Smart working growth during the pandemic

In a previous article we looked at the **numbers of smart working in 2020**. In 2021 the trend has not changed: more than seven million people (almost one third of the Italian workforce) have taken advantage of working from home.

Surely the development of smart working is mainly due to the health emergency, but past the pandemic it is highly unlikely that it will fall within the numbers of 2019. According to a survey by Inapp (National Institute for Public Policy Analysis), 46% of Italian employees would like to continue the experience of agile work at least once a week, at the time when we return to a situation of normality.

On the other hand, Istat data in hand, in 2020, despite the virus, the **productivity of Italians increased by 1.3%**.
White-collar groups are the most favorable to maintaining a share of agile work as a matter of **well-being**, balancing work and life times.
Businesses also see an opportunity for cost containment: having fewer people in the office means energy savings (a factor not to be underestimated in this period of sharply rising gas prices with uncertain future prospects given the international situation), savings on maintenance, less spacious rooms, lower rents and a greater green footprint (reducing the use of cars for home-work journeys).

The future of agile working after the emergency

And here's the bottom line. Two years after the outbreak of the pandemic, Mario Draghi announced the end of the state of emergency set for March 31, 2022, with no extensions.

The return to normality will also concern work: in fact, the possibility of starting the so-called simplified smart working, necessary during the lockdown and in the immediate post-lockdown period to avoid "crowding" of workplaces, will expire.

From April 1, in the absence of extraordinary conditions, the regulatory reference to follow is Law 81 of 2017, which provides for an individual agreement between the worker and the company to define the smart working relationship (read also The world of smart working: the legislation).

The agreement is fundamental for the sharing between employee and employer of all the rules, so that there is awareness and sharing on how the remote performance should take place.

The hope of the social partners is to encourage in all companies (not only in multinationals) the insertion of a new hybrid formula that does not envisage only in-person work (as in the pre-covid period) or only remote work (like the home-working that characterized the most acute phase of covid). The government therefore evaluates the work-hybrid hypothesis, "a remodulation, as the continuation of only the remote performance would lose the sense of belonging that only personal interactions in the company can achieve" so as to "continue with an efficient productivity by reducing the cost of labor, and, at the same time, get to reconcile, for the worker, interests of a different nature from those merely working".
The alternation between work in the company and work from home can undoubtedly favour the relationship between employer and employee: the more an employee is at ease and involved in company dynamics, the more productive he or she is.
Moreover, the stable adoption of smart working can be a lever to attract new talent to the company and motivate employees by increasing their satisfaction. This inevitably translates into greater loyalty and lower turnover.

In addition, it is intended to promote company and category synergies on agile working. In order to encourage corporate bargaining, the social partners hope to introduce incentives for companies that enter into agile work agreements with the trade union from the perspective of equal opportunities and environmental and social sustainability.

In the PA (Public Administration) this transition is the present: individual agreements on smart working are already being made, despite the fact that the state of emergency is still in force.

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