The Lasting Impact of COVID-19 on the Workplace: Organisational Approaches to Labour Market Entrants.

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Governments worldwide implemented strict public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamentally altering work organisation. Paid work became more flexible in time and space through online, remote, and hybrid practices, with many employees working from home for a part of their work week (Anjum et al., 2022; Hamouche, 2023). The impact of these changes on society and employee well-being remains largely unknown. For labour market entrants, these transitions may have lasting effects. Pandemic-era experiences may heighten their vulnerability to mental, social, and physical health issues during their transition from education to employment. New entrants have indeed been profoundly impacted by the Covid-19 Pandemic during their studies, which has affected their education, finances, relationships and well-being (Böhlich et al., 2022; Levine et al., 2024; McKee-Ryan, 2021). They may enter the workforce with a different set of expectations and concerns. Research highlights that this generation tends to value flexibility, work-life balance as well as opportunities for personal and professional development (Acheampong, 2021; Lalić et al., 2020; Vieira et al., 2024). This challenges organisations to adapt their HR practices and policies to provide opportunities that meet the expectations of these young professionals. In this context, this study examines the extent to which organisations – particularly managers and HR practitioners – have adapted their practices to address the challenges they face regarding the professional integration of new labour market entrants as well as to foster the engagement and retention of these younger employees.

Within this research several avenues are explored: the (potentially) accelerated organisational changes in post-pandemic work environments (e.g., hybrid working conditions); shifts in HR practices for onboarding new employees (e.g., emerging interpersonal dynamics in virtual teams); and the evolving work and career expectations of recent and upcoming labour market entrants.

This study assesses changes in work organisation and HR practices, considering new entrants well-being, school-to-work transitions, and early career trajectories. These insights are critical, as these shifts not only impact individual well-being but also long-term organisational performance, particularly in light of the increasing political and scientific focus on sustainable career paths. However, despite this focus, research on labour market entrants remains scarce, even though they are likely to be most affected by reduced in-person interaction and non-standard work structures in post-pandemic environments. More specifically, few studies examine how organisational practices have evolved with the arrival of a new generation in the post-pandemic workplace.

The research conducts fifteen in-depth case studies across diverse organisational contexts, aiming to achieve three key objectives: (1) identifying challenges and opportunities in recruiting, selecting, and onboarding labour market entrants post-COVID-19; (2) identifying work organisation, HR practices, and infrastructural changes (e.g., satellite offices) implemented in post-covid organisations; and (3) assessing the impact of these changes on entrants' well-being and evaluating how new entrants experience their first job.

Fieldwork follows a consistent qualitative methodology for each case study, triangulating evidence through: semi-structured interviews with HR directors, recruiters, managers, team leaders, union representatives, and young employees (5–10 interviews per case, depending on organisation size and data saturation), alongside an analysis of company-specific HR documentation, including recruitment, selection, and onboarding processes.

Each case undergoes in-depth qualitative analysis, cross-referencing interviewees' contextualised perspectives. A subsequent transversal analysis identifies both similarities and differences in findings across sectors, company sizes, recruitment profiles, and hiring frequencies.

Data collection and interviews began in late 2024 and are ongoing. Preliminary findings, based on the analysis of five completed case studies, will be shared during the presentation. We will also outline the theoretical background and the methodology used. Additionally, we will discuss the next steps, including further data collection, analysis, and the refinement of key insights for practical application.

This research aims to provide critical insights for organisations, HR professionals, and policymakers navigating the evolving post-pandemic work environment. By examining how recruitment, onboarding, and work organisation have shifted, the study offers evidence-based guidance on fostering sustainable career paths for labour market entrants. The findings can help organisations adapt HR strategies to enhance employee integration, well-being, and long-term retention. Moreover, understanding how

young professionals experience these transitions enables the development of targeted support mechanisms, ultimately improving both individual career outcomes and organisational performance.
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