
Remote Work and its Consequences for the Employee in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of this article is to present the results of preliminary research on the perception of remote work and its consequences for employees in Poland during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study tried to show that the limitations and social distance resulting from the pandemic changed office work into remote work.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research was conducted with the use of the CAWI technique, i.e., a survey method, consisting of 1022 respondents. The study was carried out in the spring of 2021, when the Minister of Health in Poland called on employers to use remote work as widely as possible. The sample selection was random.

Findings: The results show how the form of work has changed in times of constraints and distance, which indicates the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on employee behavior.

Practical Implications: The obtained research results may provide hints for further actions and changes in the labor market after the Covid-19 period. Before the coronavirus pandemic, remote work was a privilege, in the age of the pandemic it became a necessity, and in the future, it may be one of the benefits for employees who will want. Research shows that there will be employees who will prefer to work in a hybrid system, combining remote work from home and the possibility of going to the office. It is also necessary to reconsider the benefits and risks of remote work from both the enterprise and employees.

Originality/Value: The presented results complement the extensive research conducted in the world on the impact of the Covid-19 on remote work. The study was aimed at filling the research gap in Poland.

Keywords: Remote work, work from home, Covid-19 pandemic.

JEL Classification: M2, J54.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

In the past, working at home was associated with a privilege for only few, artists, writers, or scientists, who could afford this luxury while conceptually working on their new work. Meanwhile, ordinary workers crowded into public transport, or, at best, they were stuck in traffic jams in the car, rushing to workplaces. However, when the Internet appeared, it was the possibility of working from home, or rather, more and more often, remote work in different places and times. Working at home has also started to refer to some IT professionals, journalists, architects and designers, and members of project teams working in a task-oriented manner.

With the development of telecommunications technologies, the opportunity to work from home, even occasionally, was gradually gained by more and more employees of corporations from various industries. Still, this type of work was more of a reward or distinction for the chosen ones than a standard. According to Dewicka and Trziszka (2018), only a few years ago remote work in the US accounted for over 20% of the labor market, and in the European Union this form of work organization was used by over 15% of economic entities. However, in Poland it was not yet a common form of work and covered about 3% of the market. According to a study by Kantar TNS and Remote-how (2018), only every third company allowed employees to do so in Poland.

In 2020, the modern world has faced an unprecedented challenge (according to Szczepański (2020), a "black swan" type of event): the newly diagnosed SARS-CoV-2 virus (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus) and a new disease caused by it, called Covid -19 (CoronaVirus Disease 2019). This disease, which causes acute respiratory failure spreading rapidly in humans, has upset the work order we used to do. Social distancing measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 have forced many people to work from home. In 2020 - according to Eurostat (2021) - already 12.3% of employed people of working age in the European Union worked from home. Poland, with the result of 8.9%, ranks 15th among the 27 EU countries, slightly below the EU average.

According to a survey conducted in the spring of 2020 by the Lewiatan Confederation (2020), remote work was implemented in Poland in 88% of the surveyed companies. In turn, the research of the Devire recruitment company (2020) shows that 67% of enterprises that have not used remote work so far have chosen this form. The mass of remote work, and often the need for its implementation meant that more and more talk about its consequences for employees.

2. Literature Research

The understanding of remote work (Nilles *et al.*, 1976) or telework (Kraemer, 1981) is changing in the same way as the changes around the discussed phenomenon are dynamic, as it becomes wider and wider and concerns newer and newer aspects. In the past, teleworking could be called any job for which an employee needed a telephone. Later, the concept was broader, i.e., work performed for the benefit of the employer or client, mainly in a place other than the traditional workplace, using information technology (Olson, 1987). The author of the concept of remote work, Nilles (1998), points to the

elimination of the need for work-related travel and its replacement with IT technologies as the essence of remote work, in accordance with the principle, „telecommunications” is substituted for „commuting”.

Remote work can be treated as a special case of flexible work, out of four dimensions of its flexibility: time, durability of the relationship, location, and the form of the contract between the employee and the employer (Carnoy, 2002). It mainly concerns the flexibility of the place because remote work is primarily work carried out outside the employer's seat (at the employee's place of residence or elsewhere), and sometimes also the flexibility of working time, because the effects of work are important, and not the way of performing work and managing your own time (Dale, 2021).

According to Rocha *et al.* (2019) remote work is an innovative, flexible form of employment that has great potential both from the perspective of employees and employers.

Table 1. *Consequences of remote work for an employee*

Positive consequences	Negative consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of reconciling work and personal (family) life, spending more time with loved ones. • Greater commitment to work and motivation to work, faster and more efficient performance of duties. • No need to commute to work every day (saving time, money, environmental protection). • Greater flexibility in planning your own activities, adjusting them to the individual rhythm of the day and the way you work. • Greater efficiency and productivity. • Greater job and life satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to independently plan and organize the day (feeling of being constantly at work, giving up breaks, working on weekends) • Limited social contacts (feeling of isolation, loneliness and alienation). • Limited access to company resources. • Technical difficulties. • Deprecating remote work as 'sitting at home'. • Physical and mental exhaustion.

Source: Based on Jeran, 2016, Felstead, Henseke, 2017, Angelucci et al., 2020, Clancy, 2020.

3. Research Methodology

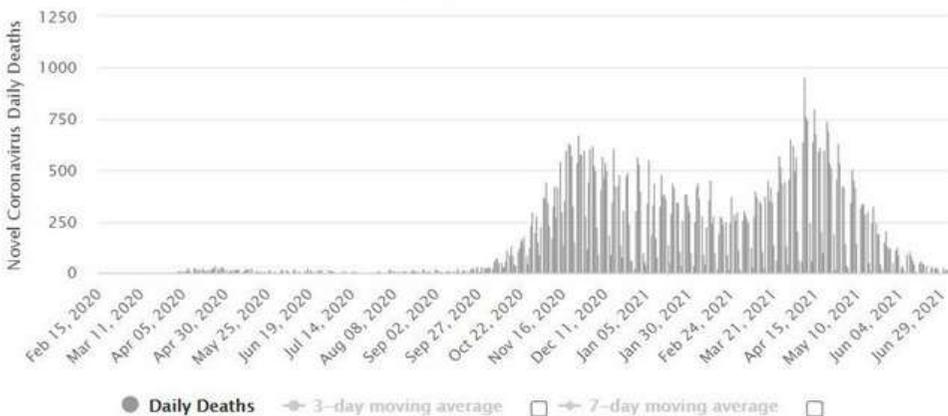
The aim of the research was to show a picture of the changes that have occurred over the last year because of the Covid-19 in connection with the transition to remote work and the consequences of these actions for employees. On its basis, an analysis of the impact of remote work on efficiency, satisfaction and perception of the work phenomenon was carried out. The research was conducted using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method among employees of Polish enterprises (1022 people) in April and May 2021. The choice of time to conduct the research was not accidental.

The first information about the new disease appeared in December 2019, when a group of patients with severe pneumonia was detected in China in Wuhan, Hubei province. On March 11, 2020, the WHO (World Health Organization) announced that the new disease had taken the form of a pandemic (Duszyński *et al.*, 2020, Hamouche, 2020).

In Poland, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus infection was found on March 4, 2020, in a hospital in Zielona Góra (western Poland), where a 66-year-old man who came by coach from Germany was diagnosed (gov.pl/web/koronawirus, 20.08.2021). In the period from March 14 to 20, 2020, an epidemic emergency was in force in Poland (the first restrictions were introduced on March 10), and from March 20, 2020, in accordance with the regulation of the Minister of Health, the state of epidemic and the related imposition and lifting of restrictions are in force in Poland (gov.pl/web/koronawirus, 20.08.2021). The summer of 2020 was characterized by the easing of restrictions and their reintroduction in the fall of 2020 (Werner-Lewandowska *et al.*, 2021).

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the world, slower or faster, the number of new cases of SARS-CoV-2 infection continues to rise. There is already talk of three waves of infection. By August 21, 2021, there were 211,620,539 cases of infection worldwide, of which 4,429,426 people died and 189,367,573 recovered (in Poland, respectively, 2,886,513 cases of infection, of which 75,316 people died, and 2,656,018 people recovered) (worldometers.info/coronavirus, 21.08.2021).

Figure 1. The course of the coronavirus in Poland (worldometers.info/coronavirus, 21.08.2021)



Source: Own study.

However, when the history of the coronavirus in Poland is followed, it is impossible to find three waves. The onset of the pandemic (spring 2020) was very mild, with the first outbreak of infections only at the turn of October and November 2020. Another increase in the incidence took place in late April and early May 2021 years (worldometers.info/coronavirus, 07.07.2021).

This is also confirmed by the data on deaths from November 2020 and April 2021: during this period, more than 700 deaths were recorded daily from coronavirus alone. (stat.gov.pl, 20.08.2021). Looking at the chart above, in fact in Poland there were two waves of infections, but to standardize the terminology with the rest of the world, it is customary to speak of three waves.

At a press conference on March 17, 2021, the Minister of Health, Dr. Adam Niedzielski, appealed to employers in Poland to switch to remote work, if possible. He pointed out that it is very important to limit mobility and, consequently, virus transmission, therefore it is necessary to return to remote work to the maximum extent. (gov.pl/web/koronawirus, 17.03.2021).

The study involved women (60.49%) and men (39.51%), with vocational (3.30%), secondary (33.00%) and higher (63.80%) education, in the age bracket of professional activity (18-65 years old). The most numerous age group were people in the range of 18-30 (47.10%), then in the range of 31-40 years (24.70%), and then in the range of 41-50 years (23.00%), 51-60 years (4.90%), and in the age group over 60, no one completed the questionnaire.

4. Results of Preliminary Studies

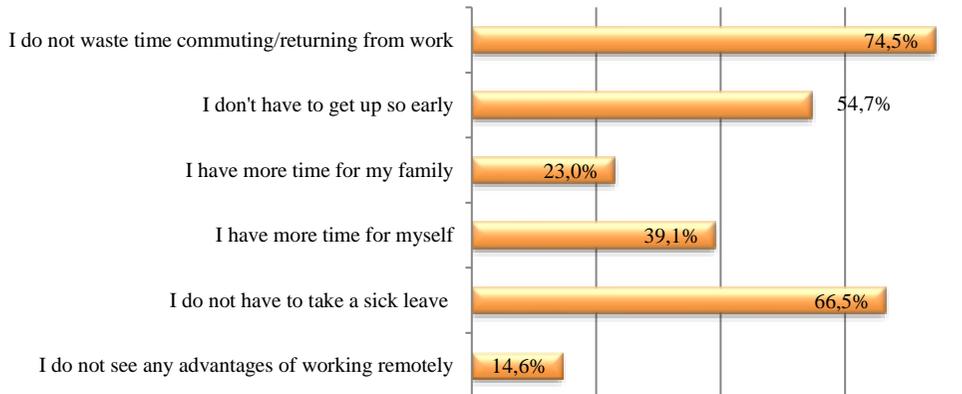
The first part of the research concerned remote work and the changing perception of it in the time of the Covid-19. Only 8.20% of the respondents answered the question whether the respondents had performed remote work before March 2020. The remaining part (91.80%) did not work remotely before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which seems to be true, as this form of performing duties was not very popular among employees or employers.

The first question concerned the perception of remote work as a source of benefits and advantages for the employee. It was a multiple-choice question with six variants of answer:

- I do not waste time commuting / returning from work,
- I don't have to get up so early,
- I have more time for my family,
- I have more time for myself,
- in the event of a minor health disorder, I do not have to take a sick leave and can work remotely,
- I do not see any advantages of working remotely.

Research results show that employees generally see the advantages of working remotely. As many as 74.50% of respondents consider saving time on commuting and returning from work to be an advantage, 54.70% indicated that they do not have to get up so early, for 66.50% of respondents it is important that in the event of slight health problems, they do not have to take sick leave and they can work remotely from home, 39.10% of respondents noticed that thanks to remote work they have more time for themselves, and 23.00% more time for their family. The last group of 14.60% are people who do not see the advantages of working remotely.

Figure 2. Advantages of remote work in the opinion of the surveyed employees (N = 1022)



Source: Own study.

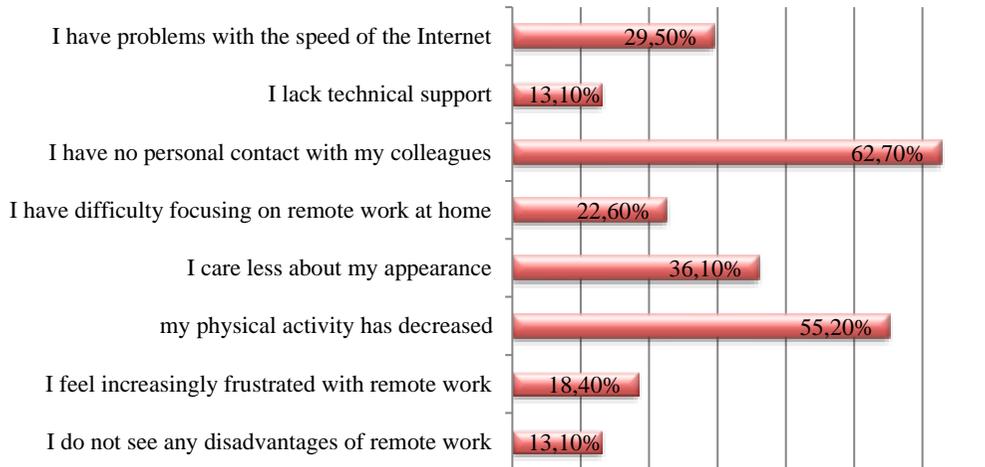
The second question concerned the perception of remote work as a source of disadvantages for the employee. It was also a multiple-choice question with eight variants of answer:

- I have problems with the speed of the Internet,
- I lack technical support,
- I have no personal contact with my colleagues,
- I have difficulty focusing on remote work at home,
- I care less about my appearance,
- my physical activity has decreased,
- I feel increasingly frustrated with remote work,
- I do not see any disadvantages of remote work.

The conducted research shows that the most frequently chosen answer was the lack of personal contacts with colleagues (62.70%). Even 55.20% of respondents noticed that their physical activity decreased, and 36.10% of employees care less about their appearance (whoever sees me here, I do not have such a need). Another 29.50% of respondents indicated problems related to the speed of the Internet, and 13.10% indicated the lack of technical support in case of problems. There were 18.40% of people perceiving remote work as a source of increasing frustration. The last group of 13.10% are people who do not see any disadvantages of remote work.

So, the next question becomes natural: would employees continue to work remotely after the threats caused by the pandemic have ceased? Here, responded relatively uniformly distributed, with an indication of "no" (a difference of 6%). A slightly larger group of respondents (46.20%) do not want to work remotely after the end of the threat caused by the pandemic, and a smaller group (39.20%) declare the will to work remotely after the end of the pandemic.

Figure 3. Disadvantages of remote work in the opinion of the surveyed employees (N = 1022)



Source: Own study.

The remaining 14.60% are now undecided as to how they want to work. Such a result is not surprising, considering the disadvantages of remote work previously indicated by employees, which the respondents probably experienced.

However, this kind of work also has advantages, which in this case are less important than the disadvantages and that is why a group of people not wanting to work remotely after a pandemic is so large. One should ask why since this form brings many benefits for both the employee and the entrepreneur. For the employee, it is important to save the time that is needed to get to the company's seat. Thanks to this solution, the employee gains more time for family and friends, and the organization builds its positive image as a good employer caring for its employees.

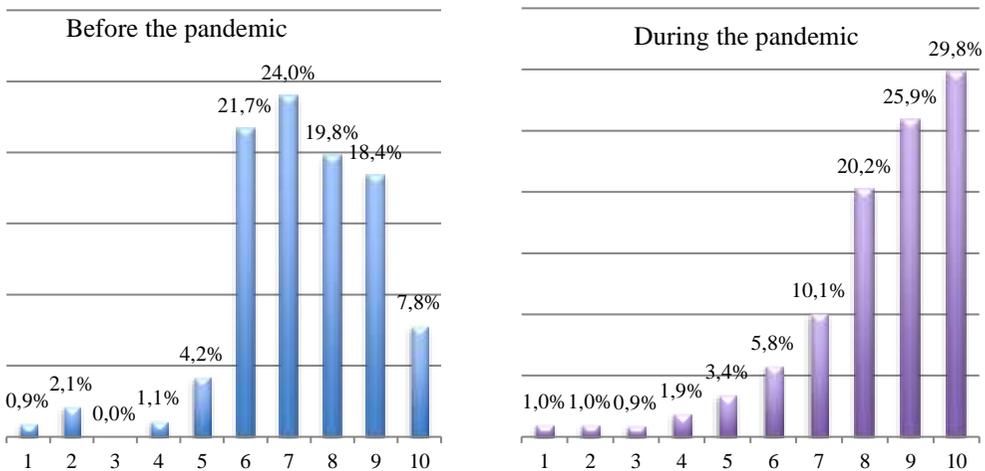
Another question sheds a different light on the answers, where apart from working remotely and working in the office, another variant of the answer has been added, namely the hybrid model (the possibility of working remotely and going to the office). According to the respondents, the most attractive form of work after the pandemic is the hybrid model - such an answer was indicated by 57.6% of the respondents. The same group of employees who want to continue working remotely (37.50%) remained. Only 4.9% of respondents indicated working in the office.

The second part of the research concerned remote work and its consequences for the employee in the Covid-19 era. A question was asked about the change in working time in connection with working at home. Most of the respondents (62.30%) replied that this dimension had not changed significantly. Only in the case of 32.80% of employees, the working time changed, and so for 18.00% it increased, and for 14.80% of the respondents it decreased. The value of 4.20% are the answers "difficult to define".

Another question concerned the level of satisfaction, depending on whether the work is performed remotely or in a traditional way. The respondents answered by marking the appropriate value on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 meant the maximum level of satisfaction, while 1 indicated a complete lack of it. In the first variant of the question, relating to the situation before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the transition to remote work, only 7.80% of respondents selected the highest possible answer (10/10).

The three most frequently indicated values, in which: 7/10 (24.00% of respondents), 6/10 (21.70%) and 8/10 (19.80%). In the case of the second variant of the question, relating to the current situation, the answer most often chosen among the respondents was the highest value (10/10) - the maximum level of job satisfaction was indicated in this case by 29.80% of the respondents. The next two most frequent answers, in which: 9/10 (25.90% of the respondents) and 8/10 (20.20%).

Figure 4. Assessment of job satisfaction in the opinion of the surveyed employees (N = 1022)



Source: Own study.

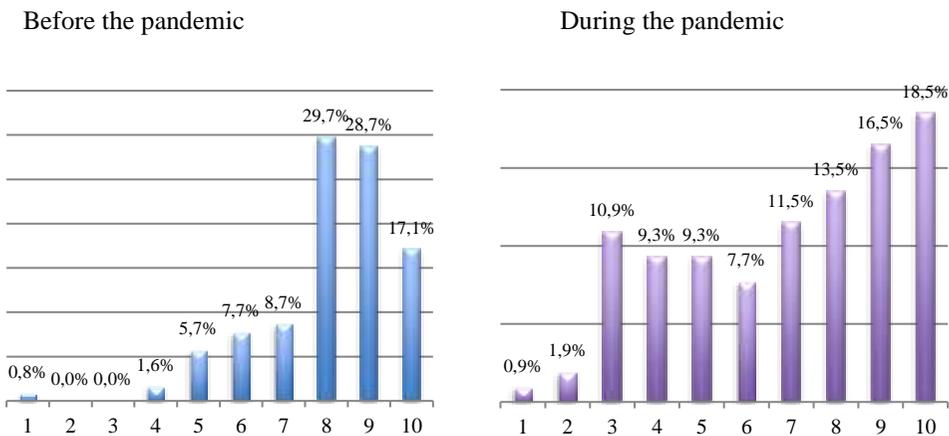
The research also showed that the weighted average of job satisfaction has increased: before the Covid-19 pandemic it was 7.31, and after the pandemic started and remote work, it is 8.29.

It is worth noting in this case that in both cases the total value of the first five answers does not exceed 10% (exact values are 8.30% and 8.20%), which may indicate generally high job satisfaction among employees. However, what is more important in this case - research shows that the transition to remote work contributed to an increase in job satisfaction among respondents. Currently, the respondents most often indicated the highest possible value (10/10), and the three highest values in this case constitute over three-fourths of all answers (exactly 75.90%).

The next question was about the impact of remote work on the ability to reconcile work and personal life aspects. The respondents answered by marking the appropriate value on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant that the respondents were not able to distinguish between both spheres of life, while 10 meant their complete separation. In the question relating to the pre-pandemic situation, 91.90% of respondents indicated the percentage of people indicating coping with the division of life into work and private life (answers with values between 6 and 10), while the same range of values in the current situation was indicated by 67.70% of the respondents.

By comparing the two charts, it can be observed that after switching to remote work, the number of people who indicate difficulties in separating the spheres of professional and private life increased.

Figure 5. Assessment of the ability to reconcile professional duties and personal life in the opinion of the surveyed employees (N = 1022)



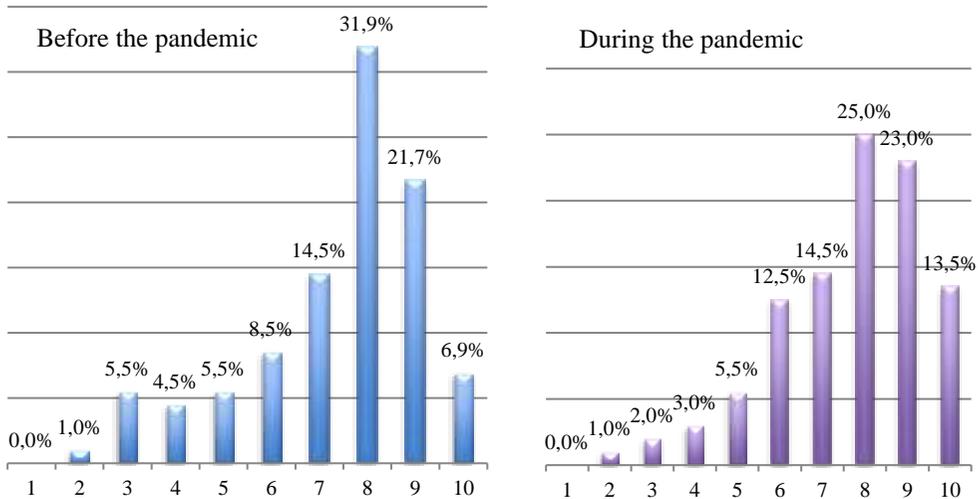
Source: Own study.

Research has also shown that the weighted average for work-life balance skills has dropped significantly: before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was 8.10, and after the outbreak of the pandemic and switching to remote work, it is only 6.89.

The next question concerned the level of focus on work that the employee feels, depending on whether the work is performed remotely or in the office. The respondents answered by marking values between 1 and 10, where 1 meant no ability to concentrate, while 10 was tantamount to total concentration while working.

The three most frequently indicated values by the respondents in the case of working in the office are respectively 8 (31.90%), 9 (21.70%) and 7 (14.50%). In the case of the variant of the question relating to remote work, the three most frequent answers were 8 (25.00%), 9 (23.00%) and 7 (14.50%).

Figure 6. Assessment of the level of concentration while working in the office and remotely in the opinion of the surveyed employees (N = 1022)



Source: Own study.

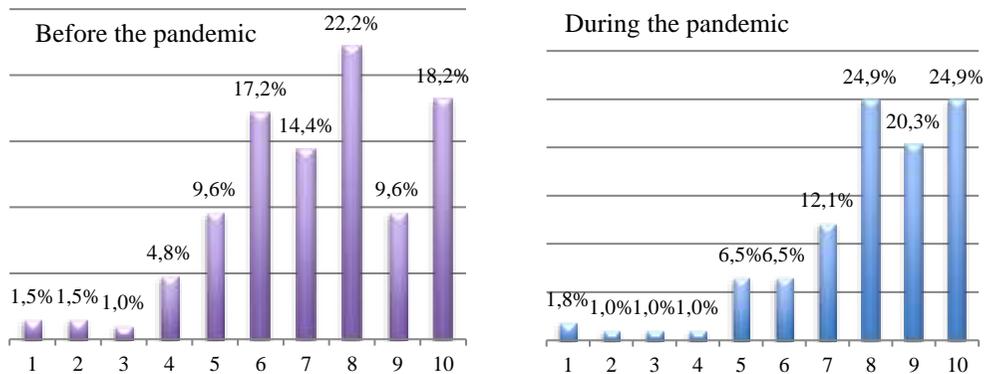
Analyzing the above results, it seems safe to say that the transition to the form of remote work does not adversely affect the employees' sense of concentration - moreover, it is worth noting that in the case of remote work, the percentage of employees who indicated the highest possible answer more than doubled, which suggests that that remote work has a positive effect on the ability to focus on the tasks performed. The research also showed that the weighted average response for the focus level did not change significantly: for work in the office, it was 7.72, and after switching to remote work it is 7.66.

The next question was about the sense of belonging to a team, depending on whether the respondents work remotely or in a traditional way. The respondents answered by choosing a value on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 meant no sense of belonging to the team, while 10 was tantamount to a sense of strong belonging. In the pre-pandemic question, the three most common answers were 10 (24.90%), 8 (24.90%) and 9 (20.30%), respectively. In turn, in the second question, the most frequently chosen values were 8 (22.20%), 10 (18.20%) and 6 (17.20%).

The obtained results allow us to assume that the transition of employees to the form of remote work did not significantly affect their sense of belonging to the team, which in both cases can be described as high, because regardless of the situation, the vast majority of employees marked the answer in the range between 7 and 10.

The research also showed that the weighted average response for team membership did not change significantly: for office work it was 7.98, and after switching to remote work it is 7.25.

Figure 7. Assessment of the sense of belonging to a team while working in the office and remotely in the opinion of the surveyed employees ($N = 1022$)



Source: Own study.

5. Conclusions

It is already visible today that the time of Covid-19 influenced the frequency of remote work in organizations. The conducted research showed that employers, but above all employees, noticed numerous benefits of this form of work, such as saving time for commuting to work, the possibility of reconciling professional and personal duties, and more time for themselves or their loved ones. The greatest threat to remote work was indicated by the lack of contacts with co-workers and a decrease in physical activity or taking care of one's appearance.

According to the surveyed employees, job satisfaction increased. Working remotely, you did not have to leave home, commute to work, you could work sitting in your own comfortable armchair and even in bed. But not everyone has the conditions for working at home: a workplace (table, desk, separate room) and the equipment of this position (equipment, technical conditions, high speed Internet connection). The employer shows cost savings (costs for premises, energy, heating), but these costs are now borne by the employee (cost of internet connection, electricity, etc.). An important aspect is also the limitation of interpersonal contacts (belonging to a team), which are largely shaped in the workplace.

Research has shown that in the case of working from home, the ability to reconcile work and home responsibilities has decreased. Most of the parents declared difficulties in working remotely due to the need to take care of children who also stayed at home and studied remotely. The boundary between work and personal life was blurred and the feeling of being constantly at work deepened. It was also a problem to focus on carrying out tasks through many distractions (cooking dinner, doing the laundry, cleaning, etc.).

Before Covid-19, remote work was a privilege for a few employees. In the era of a pandemic, it has become a necessity. What will it be in the future? It is difficult to predict, because both the work itself and the entire environment change very

dynamically. In the future, remote work may be one of the benefits for employees who will want - as research shows - to work in a hybrid system, combining remote work at home and the possibility of visiting the office.

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